



# The Phoenix Future Programme

FIRST WORKSHOP – HUNTINGDON

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**Building a sustainable tomorrow.**

# The workshop process

Phoenix Sustainable Investments has organised two workshops to explore different aspects of how we plan for the jobs and communities of the future.

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The workshops provide a platform for collaborative discussions on the commitments, principles, and behaviours needed to meet our aspirations for sustainable development. Additionally, they aim to identify the mechanisms and policy approaches required to shape the opportunities presented by the prospective new Local Plans across Huntingdonshire and Peterborough.

The first workshop took place in Huntingdon on May 30th 2023 titled **“The Future of Communities, Housing, and the Environment”**. The workshop examined themes such as planning for the communities of the future, evolving housing design and masterplanning to align with changing societal trends and the net zero agenda. It also looked at sustainable use of natural resources, and creating healthy and inclusive communities that address issues such as an ageing population and public health.

The speakers and panel members were:

- **Lord Matthew Taylor**
- **Julie Farrow**, Chief Executive, [Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations](#)
- **Max Farrell**, Founder & CEO, [LDN Collective](#)
- **Jas Bhalla**, [Jas Bhalla Architects](#)
- **Luke Butcher**, [BBA Architects](#)
- **Matt Jackson**, [BCN Wildlife Trusts](#)
- **Daniel Johns**, [Water Resources East](#)
- **Natasha Reid**, [Matter-Space-Soul](#)
- **Liane Hartley**, [MEND](#)
- **Trevor Gibson**, [PECT](#)



 **YouTube** [View the whole Workshop on YouTube](#)

# Setting the scene

## An Introduction from Lord Matthew Taylor

Lord Matthew Taylor is the architect of the modern Garden Communities programme and also led his 2006 planning review for the Labour Government's Living, Working Countryside initiative.

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In his introductory speech, he outlined why we need to plan for new communities, pointing out that the population boom of the Baby Boomer generation had resulted in a significant rise in the population with people living longer, and that generation also creating a second baby boom in the 1990s. This has led to increased pressure on the availability of housing, as retirees are both living longer and choosing to stay in their own homes for longer periods instead of moving into retirement homes, and their grown-up children struggling to afford a home.

Factors such as family breakups, more people living singly by choice, and immigration have all further exacerbated the housing shortage. Meanwhile, adding endless housing estates to existing communities has caused resistance to home building as it causes congestion and stretched public services, whilst ruining the setting of historic settlements

The **Garden Community** programme seeks to address these challenges with new communities that provide not just homes but all the facilities needed for day to day living and employment close to the home.

**“The focus now needs to shift from simply constructing housing estates to building cohesive communities. It is crucial to prioritise the availability of green spaces, convenient nearby services within walking distance, and avoidance of isolation from peers. Additionally, ensuring the affordability of heating and cooling homes is essential.”**

**Lord Matthew Taylor**



Lord Matthew Taylor

The concept of a sustainable community revolves around providing for day-to-day activities within the community itself, rather than relying on commuting to other areas. The goal is to create a self-contained community like a traditional market town that provides all necessary amenities and services for day to day living. A successful example of this approach is the Duchy community of Nansledan in Cornwall, which has been developed as a community on the edge of Newquay since 2015 functioning as a distinct, well serviced community.

On the panel discussion that followed **Julie Farrow**, said:

**“In order to combat loneliness and foster a sense of community, it is crucial to have homes that adapt as we age – a true ‘home for life.’ This includes convertibility for wheelchair use and a supportive network of neighbours.”**

**Julie Farrow, Chief Executive, Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations**

She also emphasised the importance of space, continuing: “It’s about providing places where people can be together and communicate (whether indoors or outdoors). Defining these spaces for communities is essential.” According to Lord Taylor, surveys indicate that only 1% of people prefer living in flats; there is a strong desire for gardens and green spaces.

Julie highlighted the inadequate conditions of the Oxmoor estate in Huntingdon, where even ambulances faced difficulties accessing the area. The issue of where key workers will live, considering affordability and location, also needs attention she said.

Julie continued: “If you aren’t transparent with communities, they won’t support you or help you provide solutions. Honesty is so important and will pay off in the long term.”



Julie Farrow

# Housing and Masterplanning

In the first panel discussion, **Max Farrell**, Founder & CEO of LDN Collective, highlighted the success of the North West Bicester Eco-town, which prioritises a minimum of 40% green space, 30% affordable housing, and highly sustainable homes.

However, he said there is a lack of understanding when it comes to social sustainability. The concept of a “15-minute community,” where everything is within a 15-minute walk or bike ride, is crucial.

Homes should cater to different life stages and income levels, and new settlements should be designed in collaboration with local authorities and developers.

In discussion, **Jas Bhalla**, of Jas Bhalla Architects emphasised the importance of compact development typologies, retrofitting existing heritage assets for new community uses, and creating biodiversity highways to ensure new places encourage walkability and active travel.

He added that the affordability crisis, climate collapse, covid recovery, and energy crises have created new scope for alternative, progressive forms of higher density suburbia capable of performing to higher standards than existing housebuilder models.

**Luke Butcher**, co-founder and Director of Butcher Bayley Architects, highlighted three key points for improvement to ensure sustainable transformation:

- Firstly, he explained that the current planning and delivery process takes too long, resulting in houses designed with outdated principles. He said that to future-proof our homes, we need a system that aligns with society's pace of change, so that quality and value can be preserved.
- He continued by indicating that building developers must prioritise sustainability in communities by fostering relationships with existing communities. This should extend to working with local businesses, from design through to construction.



Max Farrell, Jas Bhalla and Luke Butcher.

His final point focused on how proximity matters, and how there needs to be a cultural shift in transportation and technology so that we can create communities where everything is within reach.

The discussion touched on what the future of car usage looks like, with the younger generation expecting to share cars. Clear visibility of public transport is preferred over car parking spaces, and home offices are favoured over commuting.



# Environment

In the second panel discussion, Matt Jackson of BCN Wildlife Trusts, discussed the case of Camborne, in Cambridgeshire, where biodiversity enhancements had been planned from the start, leading to significant increases in wildlife. But the town's planning for its community had fallen short of its potential.

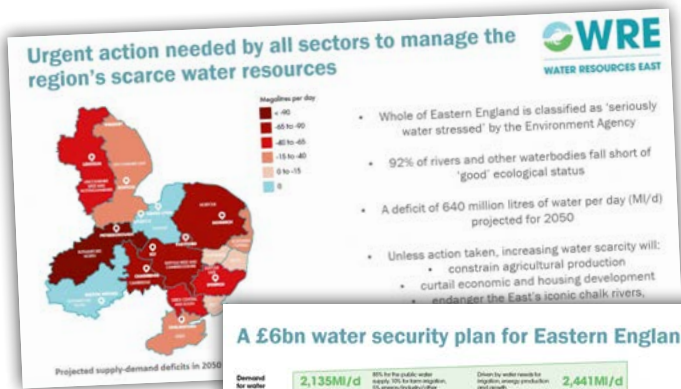
**Daniel Johns**, from Water Resources East, emphasised the need for better housing design that minimises water displacement and maximises water capture for reuse. Healthy water is crucial for ecological wellbeing, and sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) play a role in achieving this.

The East of England, known as the bread basket of England for its food production, faces challenges due to its dry climate, which is expected to worsen with rising temperatures. This will impact food production.

Matt stressed the importance of recognising that the most significant gains come from addressing the most significant damage.

## 1.5cm per year – the rate at which peat is being lost in the Fens.

Offshoring food production or placing excessive stress on the countryside should be avoided. Currently, less than 3% of land in the East is designated as important for wildlife, emphasising the need to prioritise the landscape as the primary infrastructure.



Daniel Johns and Matt Jackson.





# Communities

## Creating Healthy and Sustainable Solutions

In the final panel discussion of this workshop, Natasha Reid from Matter-Space-Soul advocated an “inside out” approach to placemaking, recognising the importance of considering how places impact people.

She is the author of the Place Quality Framework, an innovative design and planning approach, method and tool which creates a requirement for developments to demonstrate the benefits to people’s health, wellbeing and quality of life through the planning process.

This framework and new benchmarks are being adopted in Brent Council’s planning guidance and showcases forward-thinking ways of approaching people-led development.

**Liane Hartley**, through her organisation MEND, explained the need to repair and improve the social quality of places that have been eroded over time. She emphasised that places are fundamentally social networks, and many developers often overlook the experiences and needs of the people who will inhabit those spaces. By addressing the social aspects of placemaking, Liane aimed to create more inclusive and vibrant communities.

**Trevor Gibson**, from Peterborough Environment City Trust, backed up the importance of sustainability within development and communities drawing on his experience with PECT. He emphasised the need for a holistic view, explaining that “buildings aren’t what make communities” and that “our physical, social and environmental connections are critical if we are to succeed in achieving a step-change.”

Trevor also talked about the “Inherent power of networks – connecting new and old communities by building linkages and mechanisms for co-creating future solutions.”



Natasha Reid,  
Liane Hartley  
and Trevor Gibson.



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## Closing

Chairman of Phoenix Sustainable Investments, Karl Hick closed the event, by summarising his reflections:

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“I’ve been in the industry for 33 years, having developed at least 7,000 houses and learning a lot along the way, not least about the fundamentals of viability.

“Over the years, I’ve tried nearly every technology available, with involvement in modular housing, smart homes, retro-fit homes, elevating and elevated houses, biofuels, solar, water, wind and waste technologies.

“It’s encouraging to see society’s expectations shift towards embracing these technologies and I intend to remain at the cutting edge as much as possible.

“I’ve heard some great ideas in this room today, and yet I believe it’s important to remember that we can’t change everything all at once. Viability still has to be our number one priority; but, I’m optimistic about our collective will to incorporate meaningful sustainability into the communities of the future.”

**Karl Hick, Chairman of Phoenix Sustainable Investments**



Karl Hick



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