



## The Phoenix Future Programme

FOURTH WORKSHOP – WEDNESDAY 11TH SEPTEMBER 2024

**Creating Connected Communities**



**Building a sustainable tomorrow.**

# Workshop context

The Phoenix Futures Programme aims to offer insights into how we build the communities of the future, currently being considered within the context of emerging local plans in Huntingdonshire District and Peterborough City Councils, designed to shape our region through to 2040 and beyond.

In light of aspirations for 'good' growth; the commitment to high quality design codes and legal obligations to achieve net zero communities by 2035; our Programme asks – what will the communities and enterprises of the future look like?

The fourth Phoenix Futures workshop, took place in Huntingdon on the 11th of September 2024. The workshop was titled **“Creating Connected Communities** – how can we harness technology alongside social capital to build the future transport and social networks required to allow communities to thrive.”

The workshop examined the theme of **transport and emerging technologies** and whether they can help address many of the challenges about transport, in particular, that had been articulated by the young people's panel at our third workshop. The second theme focused on **Community Connectivity**, through the views of our older and younger generations, their expectations from the new communities of the future and how we can overcome intergenerational barriers.

## Event Speakers

The workshop was shaped by three presentations, and two panel speakers representing the older and younger communities.

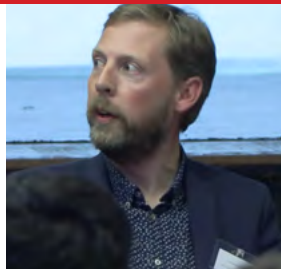
### PRESENTATIONS



■ **Dr Nik Johnson**  
[Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough](#)



■ **Matthew Stevens and Darran Kitchener**  
[Milestone Transport Planning Ltd](#)



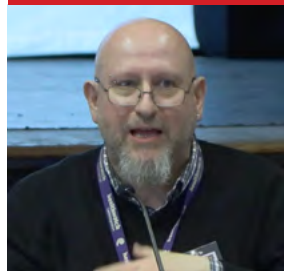
■ **Matthew Morgan**  
[Director of the Quality of Life Foundation](#)

### YOUNG PEOPLES REPRESENTATIVE

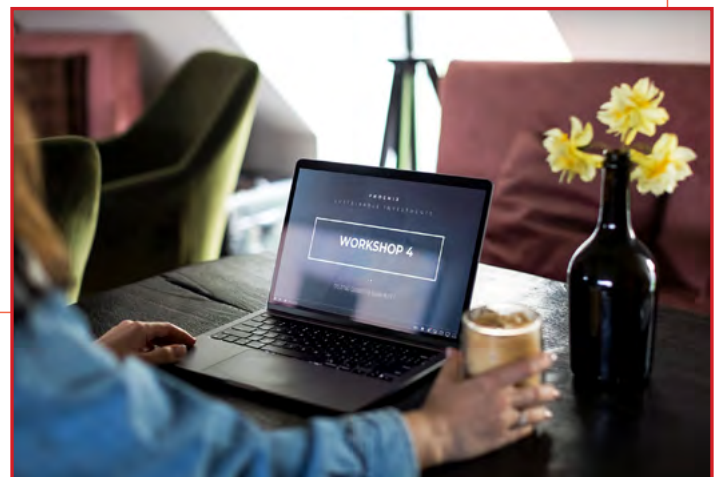


■ **Eva Woods**  
[Former Youth MP for Peterborough](#)

### OLDER PERSONS REPRESENTATIVE



■ **Graham Lewis**  
[Partnership Development Manager at Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough](#)



[View the whole Workshop on YouTube](#)

# Introduction

**Chairman of Phoenix Sustainable Investments, Karl Hick opened the event with a video introduction:**

“During these workshops I have learned about the importance of listening to younger people so we can create communities that are fit for the needs of future generations.”

“It’s a passion of mine to look at how we make a community stay healthy and bring things like sport and diet to the forefront of society.”

Karl shared his personal journey of having a knee replacement operation in December 2023, despite multiple diagnoses of it being too damaged to repair. Karl recently returned from running the 8k cross country in the World Masters and was part of the UK Team that achieved a silver medal. Karl also finished fourth in the Gothenburg 5,000m event.

“It is important that we look at community cohesion from the very start of any major developments. Both Peterborough and Huntingdon are in the process of reviewing their local plans so hosting discussions about housing and then addressing commercial, energy, environmental and social issues is exactly what we need to do.”



Karl Hick

# Why Connectivity Matters

## ■ Keynote address by Mayor Dr Nik Johnson

Dr Nik Johnson, a British Labour Co-op politician, has served as the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough since 2021. Having trained as a doctor at St George's Hospital Medical School, where he qualified in 1993, Dr Johnson has worked as a paediatrician at Hinchingbrooke Hospital since 2007.



Dr Nik Johnson

Dr Johnson highlighted the ongoing frustrations caused by poor connectivity and emphasised the importance of strategic planning for improvements. He said he views local buses as the future of public transport, particularly due to their effectiveness in the area.

He also shared his ambitious vision for expanding the bus network, noting that demand-responsive transport (DRT) is successfully serving rural communities. The recent inclusion of three additional rural areas into the DRT network has proven effective in linking previously isolated communities.

“Off the back of deregulation and years of service decline, we have to do something fundamental. It is under the banner of being a Metro Mayor and being outside a fast-growing city in an urban centre, our challenge is the rural geography. Are rural areas the right place to talk about the new running of bus services?”

Dr Johnson also addressed the need for East-West Rail to increase both the frequency and capacity of trains between North and South Cambridge, which is crucial for enhancing connectivity.

In addition, he discussed the pressing need for a safer road network. He highlighted the **‘Vision Zero Partnership,’** which is committed to delivering safer roads for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and preventing all road deaths.

He added that, “Digital connectivity really does matter. To not be digitally connected or digitally literate can be a thing that holds any of us in society back.”

Dr Johnson also reflected on the guiding principles that shaped his campaign before becoming Mayor: the **“3 C’s” of Compassion, Cooperation, and Community.** He believes that starting with compassion allows people to see the genuine care behind initiatives, such as improving transport. This, in turn, fosters cooperation, as people become more willing to help and support the vision. With cooperation comes the ability to build stronger communities. He concluded by introducing a “fourth C” of Connectivity, which ties everything together.

# Future Mobility and how this is applied in a rural environment

Matthew Stevens and Darran Kitchener of Milestone Transport Planning Ltd presented on the future of mobility through process, innovation, and review, and how this can be embraced within rural communities to maximise connectivity for people of all ages.

“Through implementing CARS - Connected, Accessible, Reliable, and Safe transportation - this is our definition of what future mobility is,” they stated.

## Autonomous mobility in action

Matthew and Darran highlighted that the future of mobility is increasingly autonomous, with several examples already in operation:

- The London-based Docklands Light Railway (DLR) carries 92 million passengers per year along its 24-mile track, operating without a driver.
- Heathrow Airport's fully automated shuttle system runs every 10 seconds and transports over 400,000 passengers daily.
- Demand-Responsive Transport (DRT) in West Huntingdonshire now serves over 30,000 passengers annually, with over 10,000 users engaging via an app.
- Mobility hubs are emerging, linking transportation options directly with users' phones.
- The introduction of e-scooters and e-bikes is fundamental to the revolution of mobility and how people navigate cities and towns.

Despite the progress, the implementation of new mobility solutions faces several challenges, particularly regulatory barriers that slow innovation. Public perception of safety in autonomous vehicles and the cost of rolling out new programs are also significant hurdles.

Most people today are familiar with Level 3 autonomy in their cars, which includes lane assist and cruise control. However, in the UK, advancements to Level 4 - full autonomy where the car can drive itself but still requires a driver - are restricted. The ultimate goal is Level 5 autonomy, where there is no steering wheel. BMW is currently trialling such vehicles, aiming for production from 2035 onwards.

“People will not use any of these new solutions if they perceive them as being unsafe.”

## Demographic shifts in rural areas

Another major consideration is the demographic shift in rural areas, where populations are aging while growth among younger residents is stagnating or declining. **The propensity to use cars in rural regions stands at 76%, compared to just 52% in urban areas**, according to the latest National Travel Survey. Furthermore, 40% more miles are walked or cycled in urban areas than in rural ones.

“There's huge scope in rural areas to have self-sustaining communities where you build the energy infrastructure immediately adjacent to where people live and work.”

The presentation covered several challenges that rural areas face in advancing mobility solutions:

- Barriers and gaps in existing infrastructure
- Narrow rural lanes with high vehicle speeds
- Infrequent and expensive public transport connections
- Limited cycle routes
- Intermittent phone signals and poor Wi-Fi coverage

In rural communities, cars remain the easiest way to avoid isolation, but this issue needs to be addressed, especially with employment opportunities like farming readily available.

“What we need to overcome is the barrier of social and economic isolation and ensure that all members of the community, from young people to the elderly, have access to basic services by a choice of transport.”

Ultimately, the goal is to deliver “cost-effective, quick, and reliable transport solutions in rural areas.” Matthew and Darran believe that integrating new options into existing networks and maintaining flexibility in the solutions considered will be the key to achieving success.

# Highlights from the community panel Q&A

Richard Astle from Athene Communications, asked the Community Panel:

**“What does my village look like in 20 years’ time?**

**It is already congested with traffic, and what should I realistically expect?”**

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**Darren Kitchener** of Milestone Transport responded by stressing the importance of educating people, encouraging alternative routes, shifting travel times and addressing perceptions of safety. He acknowledged that while there is no single solution, incremental improvements can make a significant difference.

**“There isn't traffic - you are the traffic!”**

Darren Kitchener, highlighting the shared responsibility in addressing congestion.

**Dr Nik Johnson** added to the conversation with the word “Care.” He asked, “how much are we caring about our environment?” Dr Johnson shared an example from The Netherlands, stressing that solutions need to be inclusive, for example not everyone can ride a bike and there are limitations of a one-size-fits-all approach. Rather than focusing on solving individual problems, we should be asking how to solve societal issues.

**Graham Lewis** from Healthwatch Peterborough provided the perspective of older adults, explaining that Healthwatch acts as a “critical friend” to the system, gathering feedback from the public. While Healthwatch advocates for buses, Graham Lewis suggested improvements such as more user-friendly features like working timetables, real-time information at bus stops, and simplified bus pass systems, similar to London’s Oyster card.

Representing young people, **Eva Woods** highlighted the importance of a connected, efficient system that provides freedom and independence. With the innovations discussed so far, there is scope for a connected system, allowing an easy and independent existence within the transport system. Eva recognises there is a need to invest in innovative transport systems that allow freedom and mobility and the ease of use without the requirement to own a car.

Audience questions extended the discussion. One participant observed, **“Walkability is getting worse, and a study in Cambridge found that congestion is partly driven by the healthcare system.”** A representative from Inspire Education Group raised the question, **“How can we make transport financially accessible to the youth?”**

The panels responses to these questions included:

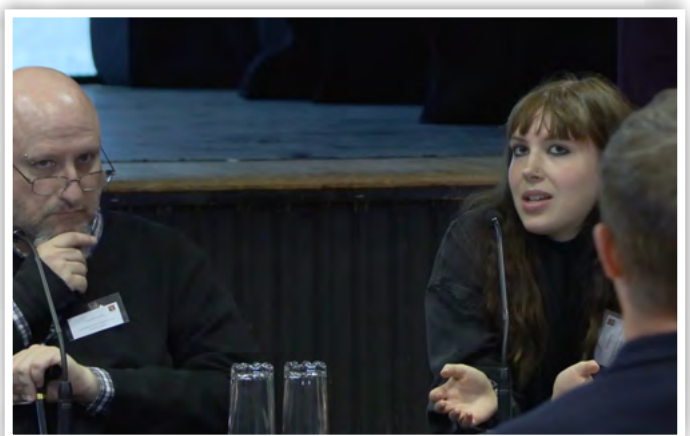
**Matthew Stevens** shared that when looking at developments the goal is to ensure the community hub is walkable to the local centre. Priority is given to creating the best cycling and walking routes, taking into account factors such as topography and directness, with road infrastructure being adapted to fit around these routes.

**Dr Nik Johnson** responded that new routes have been introduced to the local area that was lobbied by the local community and the introduction of the Tiger Card for Under 25s offers bus fares for just £1 making it a more affordable method of transport.

**Eva Woods** added that young people and older adults are often grouped together as a collective, it’s crucial to recognise the diverse challenges within that group. For example, young women in Peterborough would not consider walkability due to safety concerns.



Matthew Stevens and Darren Kitchener



Graham Lewis and Eva Woods

# Improving people's quality of life for the long term.

In the final presentation of this workshop, **Matthew Morgan**, Director at the **Quality-of-Life Foundation**, outlined how using a joined-up approach combining evidence-based research, consultancy and advocacy encourages good practices to improve people's quality of life and create sustainable neighbourhoods.

“Evaluation is a big missing piece in the whole development life cycle. Evaluation really is just going out and talking to people about where they live and finding out how they experience their environment, their homes, and neighbourhoods.”

QoLF has developed a framework grounded in six themes, including community control in decision-making, safety, affordability, and connectedness to nature. Matthew emphasised that community engagement is imperative to ensuring all voices are heard, especially those often overlooked. He also stressed the importance of developing stewardship plans to ensure long-term care for places after construction.

By focusing on local needs, **'Urban Rooms'** are a key element of the community strategy. These spaces are designed to facilitate dialogue between local communities, urban planners, developers, and policymakers. QoLF has produced a self-evaluation matrix as a tool to evaluate organisations' codes of practice in urban planning and development. (See below)

Examples of improved quality of life through QoLF consultancy:

- At Harlow and Gilston Garden Town, a five council-led initiative delivering growth and regeneration of 16,000 new homes over the next nine years, the QoLF involvement incorporated extensive community engagement providing socio-economic data of a baseline to inform the growth and regeneration efforts.
- Urban&Civic wished to understand residents' lived experiences to inform the management of their sites and future plans. The QoLF implemented a five-stage strategy, including a resident review across five sites and face-to-face engagement. Through their findings, Urban&Civic, have embedded quality of life into their sustainability metrics and design codes moving forward.
- Working with three developers, QoLF conducted a comprehensive investigation to evaluate the social impact of build-to-rent developments. The report highlighted that neighbourhoods improved where green spaces were provided, and shops and services were introduced.



Matthew Morgan

Be accountable	Be effective	Be transparent	Be inclusive
Be timely	Support mutual learning	Demonstrate impact	Publish feedback

## Highlights from the community panel Q&A

As part of the ongoing community discussions, three members of the Peterborough Youth Council, including Chair Aryan Nahata, were invited by Richard Astle to share their views on public transport.

A key theme that emerged was the stigma among young people regarding the use of buses. They highlighted the need for public transport to be more accessible, affordable, safer, and normalised for youth. Two young people from Cambridge Regional College, who lived in Huntingdon, also expressed concerns about safety on public transport, emphasising the connection between quality of life and poverty.

**Graham Lewis** agreed, noting that the older community also wishes to use public transport but often feels vulnerable. He pointed out that buses now have CCTV for safety, and personal technology, such as apps that track children's whereabouts, could also be used to help the elderly feel safer on public transport.

**Matthew Stevens** shared the observation that teenagers and older generations frequently face similar challenges, such as being overlooked in transport planning, which can affect how communities are embedded and stabilised over time. He further highlighted that the UK's social infrastructure has been eviscerated in the last 10 years, citing the closure of over 12,000 youth groups. Matthew emphasised that improvements to physical infrastructure, such as better safety measures, can still make a meaningful difference.

An example shared by **Eva Woods** is the Alliance Project in Peterborough, which has been effective at reducing organised crime and building community cohesion locally. Eva stressed that it is important to distinguish whether people feeling unsafe in an area is based on real threats or perceptions. She noted that arts and culture are often overlooked but can play a crucial role in helping communities feel a sense of belonging and control over their place.

**"Our hard-to-reach communities want to be heard and are willing to talk,"** said Graham Lewis. He emphasised that people are willing to engage and want to feel a sense of community through green spaces, pathways, playgrounds, and sensory gardens. "These will benefit all of our communities."

## Concluding remarks from Richard Astle, Athene Communications

"It has been a fascinating discussion to see the similarities from the different audiences regarding what matters and what makes a strong community. This reinforces the



Richard Astle

importance of workshops like this, where diverse voices are integrated, and the need to create complex solutions to deal with aspects around connectivity."

"I was particularly struck by Dr Nik Johnson's Three C's, which kept resurfacing throughout the conversations. If you start with compassion, you care about other people, then you will create cooperation. If you create cooperation, then you will create a community."



# Past workshops

All our workshops are available to view on YouTube



[Workshop 1](#)



[Workshop 2](#)



[Workshop 3](#)



[Workshop 4](#)