

# Liveable Places

The Fundamentals of Successful Placemaking



# Foreword

Places impact on the quality of people's lives. Whether a park, a building, a town or city, people and communities thrive when the spaces in which they live, work, move and play are designed and managed in a way that best meets their needs.

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Since our inception as a land reclamation specialist in the Netherlands in the 1800's - quite literally creating new places - everything we do is about improving quality of life.

As such, we wanted to examine what successful placemaking means by interrogating its key tenets, opportunities and barriers. Bringing together a range of thinkers, leaders and practitioners whose views have contributed to this report, we hope to shift the dialogue and lay the foundations for a new approach that puts social value at the very heart of the equation.

## Why is place important?

By 2050, an additional 2.5 billion people - two-thirds of the world's population - are expected to live in urban areas. We need 300,000 more homes a year just in the UK, yet only 195,000 are being built. The position is acute, with housing charity Shelter estimating that up to 320,000 people do not have a home. Meanwhile increasing urbanisation is putting more pressure on ageing infrastructure, we need to tackle deprivation and respond to the demands of climate change; all of which is impacting on how we design and build homes and places.

The current approach to placemaking is not meeting the challenge. How do we create places that we can be proud of and which make a difference to people's lives? How do we unlock funding and implement governance to sustain places where people thrive?

We need to look beyond the purely functional. The most successful places and communities are those that inspire. They provide safe spaces with room to grow. They connect us - physically, economically, socially - to our wider environment. Effective planning and delivery, from providing homes and jobs, to creating interconnected communities and supporting social cohesion, involves long term planning that understands and integrates multiple strands of activity.

It calls for a new way of thinking, designing and creating place, where benefits are maximised across the public and private sectors. Instead of focusing purely on development profit and land value, we need to start layering in social value and the impact on people's lives.

This is about an approach where the benefits of effective placemaking can be realised by all. It means engaging with people at every stage of the process to understand what will make a place succeed and then managing and measuring to make sure that it happens. Creating happy, healthy, integrated and thriving new communities depends on collaboration.

This report identifies five crucial fundamentals or ingredients for successful placemaking. Let us know what you think and how together we can deliver placemaking that benefits communities long into the future.



**Mark Cowlard**

UK and Ireland Chief Executive Officer  
| Arcadis



# A multi-layered focus on place

Across Britain there is evidence of myriad different developments. Historical settlements from Roman towns and Domesday Book villages, to Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian squares and terraces. From mill and market towns to pre- and post-War council estates, 60s and 70s town centres, housing association programmes, garden cities and swathes of private sector-built homes.

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This has shaped the country, determining the essence of areas and the communities that live in them. As each settlement has been established and built upon, we see placemaking in action. Yet not all has been successful.

The idea of placemaking is resonant today, not least because the country must build thousands of new homes to address the housing crisis. It means establishing new places, and expanding and renewing others, from inner cities to suburban settlements and rural communities.

Urban regeneration is not just about city centre renewal; we also need to remember the UK's 'forgotten places'. Areas like Stoke, Grimsby or Burnley, which often sit outside major regional centres but are crying out for investment to help them level-up and connect with their metropolitan neighbours.

Solving the housing crisis cannot simply be about building new homes. It is about how they are delivered, where they are located, their sustainability, the infrastructure, local services and how these elements cohere to support successful, thriving communities and places.

## Key drivers for placemaking

**National ambitions** - the Government has a clear priority to build more homes and infrastructure and has agreed high local housing targets with many areas. The recently elected government has a mandate to press forward with this.

**Regional ambitions** - regional mayors and combined authorities have powers to bring forward goals for new housing, infrastructure and development. Placemaking will have a renewed focus, particularly in areas where mayoral elections will be held this May - London, Tees Valley, Greater Manchester, Greater Liverpool, West Midlands and Bristol. This covers a combined population of 18 million.

**Local ambitions** - many local councils have ambitious house building and regeneration plans and are returning to building homes themselves - setting up new housing development vehicles and showing new leadership, such as Norwich Council's Goldsmith's scheme, which won the 2019 Stirling Prize for Architecture.

## Spatial, transport and economic plans

- new plans and strategies offer mechanisms to bring forward development. These include spatial plans such as the new London Plan and Greater Manchester's Spatial Framework, as well as potential strategies for projects like the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and strategies in place for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. New regional and city transport plans have been agreed with new sub-national transport bodies to take forward, more than 40 local industrial strategies are being developed across England, and key bodies have been established, such as the National Infrastructure Commission to improve infrastructure delivery.

**Carbon and environmental goals** - the national commitment to achieving zero carbon by 2050 (at the latest) and the regional government and local authorities setting earlier targets will fundamentally shape how homes are built and places function, including in terms of energy, transport, nature and public space.

**Place prominence** - there is a renewed attention on placemaking from different bodies and organisations, including the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, High Streets Task Force and the setting up by the Welsh Government of the Co-operative and Mutual Commission to support models of development.

**Private sector innovation** - innovations are providing new tools and methods for placemaking, ranging from modular building and digital engagement to new funding and financing models.



### **What's in a word?**

*“How should we describe the work we do creating or changing areas? A participant laid down this challenge at one of our evidence sessions. It is a fair point - terms have baggage.”*

*“Regeneration has been the go-to for a while, but has its critics; the sharper end being that it simply means gentrification and airbrushing out existing communities. Meanwhile, ‘placemaking’ has entered the lexicon and ostensibly appears less pejorative, yet few outside the industry use the term. What else is there?*

- City making?
- Master planning?
- Development?

*These don't feel completely right either. So, we're sticking with placemaking, but with an ear to the ground for potential new terms. We'd be interested to hear your suggestions.”*

**Peter Hogg**

UK Cities Director | Arcadis

# The five fundamentals of place



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We have identified five fundamental areas that are essential for shaping successful places. Alongside these sit ten key recommendations to bring these fundamentals to life.

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### Community

01. Put people first - Placemaking must be with, not to, people. Communities need an ongoing role and stake in shaping a place. Ensuring people are integral means engaging all parts of the community in a variety of ways.
02. Champion 'community consent commitments' - Trust is earned. Effective processes need to be put in place, for example: consent mechanisms such as estate ballots, community contracts, 'place juries' and 'community place audits', citizen assemblies, cultural and outreach programmes and having resident representative bodies as full partners.

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### Funding & Delivery

03. Agree long-term resourcing - Effective placemaking is best served through sufficient ongoing resourcing, aligning funding and programmes for long-term outcomes, all underpinned by an evidence base.
04. Build expertise and capacity - Public and private sector need to invest in drawing up strategies and alignment for long term plans, local connectivity, and developing and investing in the capabilities and capacity to achieve this. Changes to the planning system and to funding and tax arrangements would help to maximise benefits and share value.

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### Design & Public Realm

05. Secure place 'net gain' - A central goal of placemaking must be that better places are brought forward compared to those that currently exist. Addressing and responding to the needs of the community to create well connected, safe, mixed-use environments with strong public transport links where people want to live, work and enjoy.
06. Enable co-produced purposeful places - Fund good design and public realm, unite people and purpose through stewardship and the appointment of design champions, and with environmental responsibility at the core.

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### Collaboration

07. Create mechanisms to collaborate - Placemaking must be a collaborative effort involving landowners, developers, delivery partners, investors, housing providers, transport bodies, community groups, public service providers, voluntary sector, planners, architects and national, regional and local leadership. Collaboration should be ambitious, involving both public and private sectors as well as the community to unlock expertise, funding and shared goals.
08. Create strong governance - Underpin collaboration with effective governance to embed the role of community voice and cement democratic input. Governance should underpin the allocation of risk, reward and shared outcomes, as well as enable political alignment, particularly with the growing devolved arrangements bringing new bodies and remits.

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### Sustainability

09. Deliver net zero - The urgency of climate change means any development must be part of the solution to meeting net zero carbon.
  10. Build to last - Placemaking must be sustainable in every sense - physical, social and economic. Sustainability must encompass construction and maintenance; use of utilities; transport integration; economic and social viability; adaptiveness; community responsiveness; community wealth building and local assets and services.
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# 01 Community

This is the most critical area of placemaking. Putting the community at the centre can take many forms, but most importantly it should be involved from the outset, and with an ongoing role and stake in shaping a place so it addresses community needs and ambitions. Community engagement is not just a box-ticking exercise; it is integral to placemaking.

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**The community is not a single entity. There can be multiple communities, with people from different backgrounds and with different histories, needs and aims. In turn, not everyone engages in the same way.**

While no single engagement model provides the answer, effective mechanisms are those that build trust. These can be termed 'consent commitments'. The traditional consultation approach, with materials available online or through the letterbox and supported by drop-in sessions, is not always sufficient. More expansive and engaging methods are needed.

One option would be to ballot residents before estate regeneration begins. This not only brings consent, but helps crystallise outcomes and benefits from the outset. Community contracts - laying out what will happen and how - are another example.

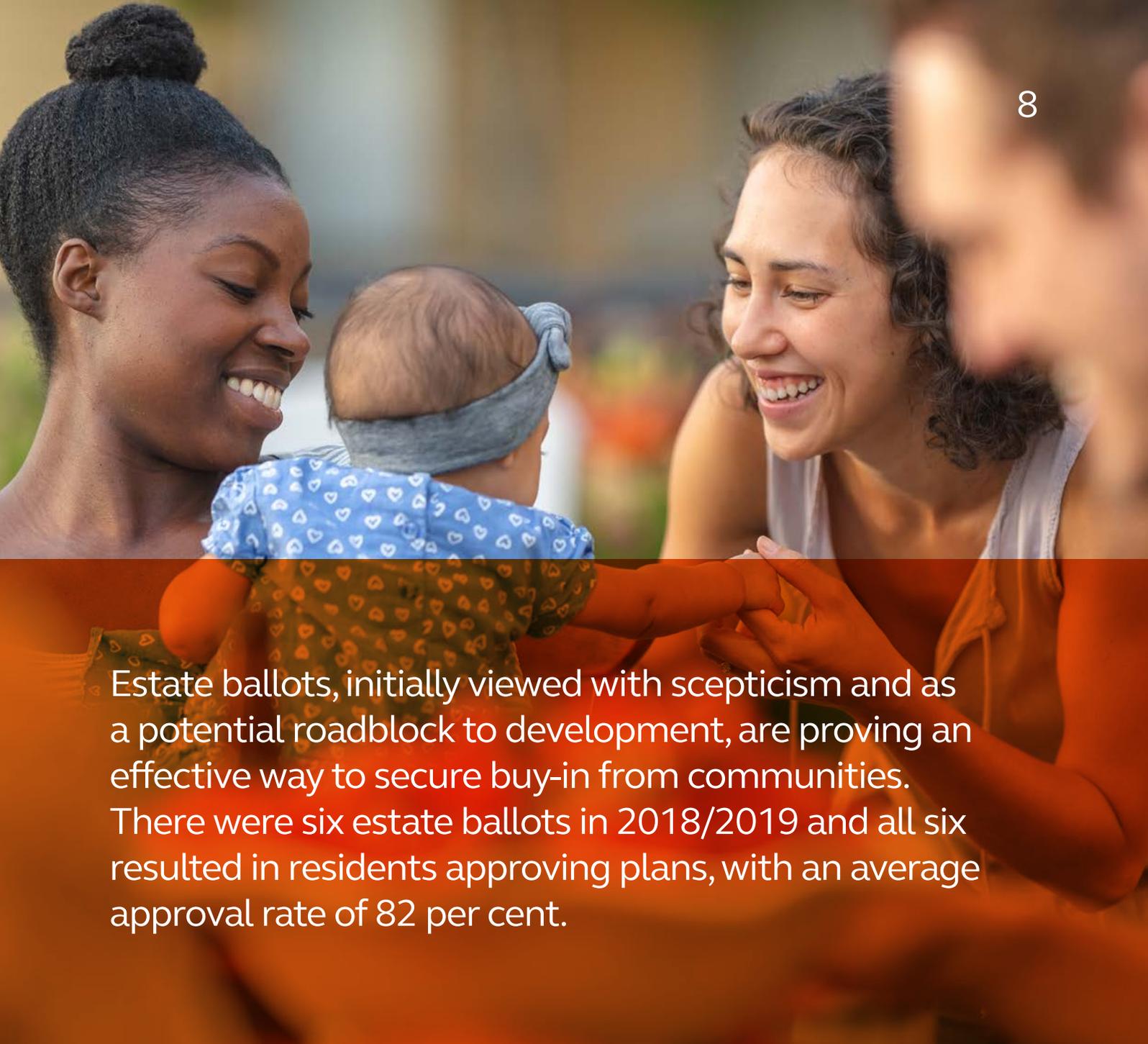
There are additional challenges when placemaking is not tied to a single area. Greater Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority has been exploring taking engagement out to existing resident groups and networks. Citizen assemblies and deliberative consultations offer another option. Equally, creating a 'jury for placemaking' - selecting people randomly to be involved in decisions - can help counter the 'same voices' concern. At Woodberry Down, in the London Borough of Hackney, north London, developer Berkeley, and the Notting Hill Genesis

housing association are part of a partnership with a representative residents' body called the Woodberry Down Community Organisation (WDCO), which has a formal role agreeing and shaping plans, including designs. The community voice has been planned from the start and will be prominent throughout the programme.

People need to trust the process and feel part of it, but this can be hard when talking about long term plans where the benefits of engagement are not immediately clear. Instead, we need to start talking about short term goals and offer genuine input into the smaller, more readily deliverable aspects of a masterplan.

**“With complex projects, even communicating to people with industry expertise can be difficult sometimes. Long timescales can make it hard for people to think about change too. If you try talking to people about projects ending in the 2040s, you'll find they quickly switch off, which is why it's important we talk about benefits and decisions in the shorter term.”**

Kat Hanna |  
Lendlease's Masterplan Strategist for Euston



Estate ballots, initially viewed with scepticism and as a potential roadblock to development, are proving an effective way to secure buy-in from communities. There were six estate ballots in 2018/2019 and all six resulted in residents approving plans, with an average approval rate of 82 per cent.

Cultural and community events support integration, enabling ongoing conversations and fostering shared endeavour. A 'place story' can act similarly.

The Thames Estuary Growth programme is a series of different initiatives and projects across different areas, linked by the Thames and its history to connect programmes and people. One of the recommendations of the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission was to build on the success of the existing Thames Festival and the Port of London Authority's Thames Vision to create a programme of festivals, events and activities to celebrate the Thames, its creative and cultural industries and to attract investment and visitors.

Demonstrating success and celebrating the community are also elements of a broader case for curation and stewardship of place, which can be led through the public or private sector, or another body such as a university.

Most placemaking does not begin in isolation - there are existing histories, cultures, connections, assets and people. 'Community place audits' - physical and social - agreed with the community to determine what there is to preserve and harness, help bring trust that existing communities are not airbrushed away. In turn a community evidence base, drawing on health or social and economic indices, for example, can provide important building blocks for scheme rationale.



## Our Project: Perry Barr Regeneration Challenge

Perry Barr in north Birmingham has long needed investment, but the prospect of the 2022 Commonwealth Games has proved to be an important catalyst.

The Athletes Village is due to be located in Perry Barr, and the level of planned investment in housing, transport, public realm and community facilities will not only drive wider regeneration, but also create a long-lasting legacy after the Games.

Engaging the local community has been an important part of fostering support and generating excitement. As the lead design and engineering consultancy for the regeneration scheme, Arcadis has been working with Ahead Partnership, which connects employers with education, public and private sector partners, to help drive this forward and support social and economic change.

Funded by corporate sponsor the Millennium Point Trust, 44 students from Great Barr Academy spent a day being coached and mentored by Arcadis as they worked on a real-life brief focused on the Perry Barr regeneration area.

Taking on the roles of engineers, planners and developers, it gave the students a unique insight into the world of masterplanning, engineering, transport planning and other areas of the industry. They were also able to experiment with Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality software to understand how these emerging technologies are being used to help shape their future community.

Working with young people through skills-based volunteering and local education engagement is essential to help raise the profile of STEM qualifications and career opportunities around the UK. Students were able to not only learn about different career paths, like apprenticeships, but most importantly had the opportunity to contribute a valuable perspective on plans for their local area.



# 02 Funding & Delivery

The provision of sufficient and ongoing resources is integral to placemaking, but needs to be supported by an evidence base, a long-term plan and capacity to deliver.

Manchester is one of the most successful examples of urban regeneration over the last decade. The Manchester Independent Economic Review 2009 and the recently updated Independent Prosperity Review 2019 have provided the data and verification to guide the case for funding, investment and strategic direction.

It has been the foundation for Manchester's engagement with HM Treasury and has meant regeneration and placemaking has not been guided by political whims, but a strong evidence base.

This evidence base is grounded in a long-term approach, with a ten-year Manchester Strategic Plan, transport plan, spatial framework and industrial strategy, all supported by an economic appraisal. Similarly, there is a strong evidence base underpinning the development of the rail plan for Transport for the North, which covers Manchester and the combined authority area.

Ongoing stewardship and curation of place can help to cement this long-term approach, simultaneously speaking to quality and purpose. Meanwhile, the community also needs to be involved, ensuring ongoing responsibility for any development after it has been built.

So how can long term, strategic approaches and evidence-based delivery be accelerated and supported?

An interim report from the Building Better Beautiful Commission calls for a review of legal and tax regimes, with measures that better support a long-term stewardship model of land and infrastructure investment.

Yet there is a further systemic issue that needs to be resolved. As governments withdraw from funding certain areas of infrastructure – like schools and community facilities – too much burden is placed on development. The trade-off can lead to a decline in quality and affordability.

UK short-termism and centralisation of power and funding, as well as the fragmentation of funding streams, are further barriers. The strength of Transport for the North's 30-year plan contrasts starkly with central government's shorter-term allocations of funding.

While there is always a cost associated with effective placemaking, a poor approach can result in far higher costs in terms of social failure, negative health impacts, entrenching disadvantage, and high crime levels. Instead, good placemaking should bring a net cost saving – increasing social value and generating economic activity. In developing a long-term plan, there needs to be an alignment of funding streams to address this.

**“As anchor institutions we have a great opportunity to hardwire social value into placemaking; setting out tangible commitments to local wealth building.”**

Amy Harhoff | Director of Regeneration and Growth at Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council



We need closer alignment of housing and infrastructure; connecting desirable places is key to unlocking value. Across the north, there is a property price premium of 0.16% for every additional 10,000 jobs that are readily accessible by rail. This increases to 3.61% for every additional 10,000 jobs within reach by walking. (Source: Transport for the North).

We also need more incentives to encourage private sector investment. Community involvement tends to bring consent, so long term plans with community buy-in can significantly increase investor and developer confidence, enabling a programme to move forward.

The system is undermined by costs that do not directly support placemaking. Local authorities seeking government funding face rigid and costly bidding and compliance programmes, which often do not reflect local circumstances. Equally, there are costs for the private sector through bidding and tendering – all of which has little impact on place.

A clearer pipeline and clarity of demands, outcomes and roles will help to overcome this challenge, and underpins the case for strong governance and collaboration.

We need to create an environment that can bring together financing, funding, resourcing, land assembly and technical expertise. A local authority with a long-term vision and plan, coupled with a private investor, can create scale and bring long-term income streams.

We need to reassess funding and processes. This includes government ceding responsibility, devolving funding and enabling local authorities to mix funding and plan appropriately and holistically to bring greater value from investment. Funding should be focused on a whole programme and not project based, which in turn will foster long-term stewardship.



## Our Project: The Arcadis Urban Planning Platform

Manchester residents enjoy a vibrant nightlife, booming creative industry, globally successful sporting teams and renowned cultural venues. But they aren't guaranteed affordable housing. Like many parts of the UK, demand outstrips supply and prices are soaring.

To alleviate the problem, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) must deliver over 10,000 new homes each year for the next 20 years. But it's not as simple as building more houses. GMCA need the right type of housing, on the right land, in the right areas, with the right infrastructure and investment from the right developers.

The existing process to marry these demands is complex, time-consuming and involves multiple teams, data sets and approvals.

Our solution was to develop a digital platform to support urban planning by connecting planners, landowners, developers and investors. This disruptive new technology includes a land-use evaluation model to underpin all planning activity, with an analytics element focusing on investment options and monetising social value. It means that Greater Manchester's ten district planning authorities can make evidence-based decisions according to data.

This is particularly relevant when it comes to integrating transport and other infrastructure. Creating a collaborative digital environment to rapidly assess multiple development opportunities and create value for investors can help to validate urban regeneration, speed up the planning process and significantly lower costs.



Download the free Zappar app from your app store and scan the Zapcode to hear more from Arcadis' Jon Moore about helping to shape place in Manchester.



# 03 Design & public realm

Successful developments have a strong commitment to design and public realm, both of which are fundamental to the improvement of place.

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**“People have a right to live in a place of beauty, in homes which are well designed and sustainable. If you want to invest or develop in our region, that is what you need to deliver.”**

Deborah Cadman OBE |  
Chief Executive of the West Midlands  
Combined Authority

The Government is introducing the idea of ‘environmental net gain’ for new developments, focusing on increasing biodiversity and natural capital. To embed good design, this concept should go even further, with a set of goals targeted at achieving ‘place net gain’.

Good design and public realm means mixed and integrated development, with access to green space and nature to bring environmental, health and social benefits. It is about a public realm that supports positive physical health, mental health and well-being, including walking, cycling and public transport options.

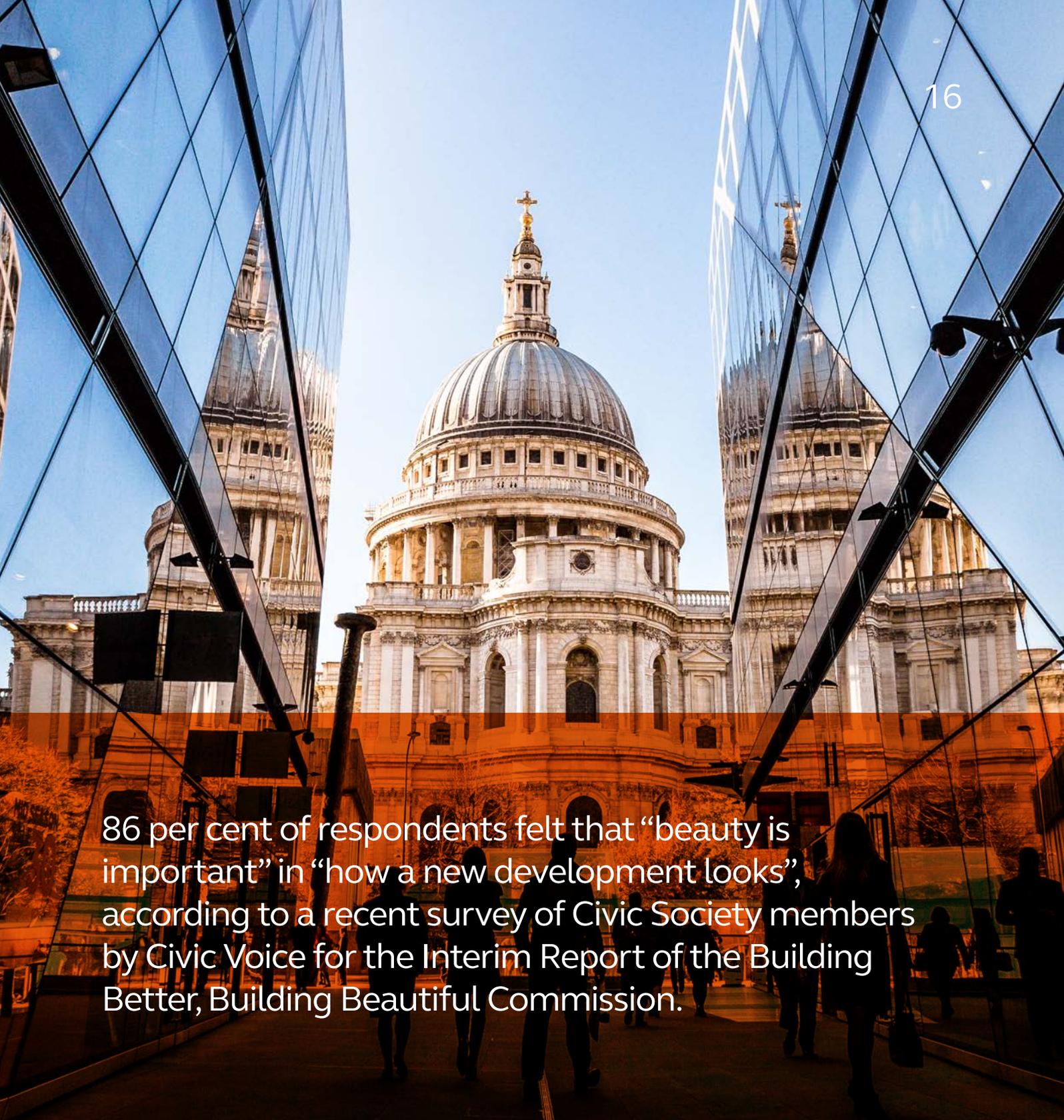
People should be at the centre of design and involved in co-producing places. In particular, development must be adaptive to current and future needs, designing not just for how people live now, but how they want to live in future. Canary Wharf in London, for example, has been retrofitted to create more useable, interactive and people-focused public spaces as the area has changed.

These spaces also need to be social, with amenities for people to meet, cultural and sports facilities, places of worship and spots to relax such as coffee shops, pubs and eating places. These can often be the linchpin and social centre of communities.

Places also have unique qualities and characteristics, which good placemaking should reflect. This is where the importance of curation and stewardship comes in. But it’s not just about one iconic building. More prosaic elements of design can be just as important – the location of post-boxes, for example, can be particularly relevant for older residents. Meanwhile younger generations are less likely to own a car or drive, instead using car sharing and delivery apps. This in turn changes how future spaces are designed.

Community curation is harder to achieve if the tools are weakened. Changes to allow a greater range of permitted development rights means that retail and business areas can now be easily altered to residential, which affects how areas cohere. Other rights such as infilling, meaning the rededication of open space in any urban environment to development, can impact on the environmental sustainability and character of areas. If placemaking is to be holistic, then these permitted rights need to be considered in this context.

The digital and data revolution will dramatically change how people communicate, interact and work. This needs to be considered in a design context.



86 per cent of respondents felt that “beauty is important” in “how a new development looks”, according to a recent survey of Civic Society members by Civic Voice for the Interim Report of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission.

With the development of smart cities and local authority partnerships with tech companies, we have the data to make cities more efficient than ever.

With more people now living in urban areas, we need to think about creating networked, multi-centred cities - and this is where the link between spatial and economic strategies is so important.

Light, space, energy and safety standards all help to govern building design and development.

However, metrics relating to how design supports social needs, community involvement and social interactions are less evolved. With the increasing availability of data, we have the potential to use this wealth of information to devise new metrics to determine social value, in turn making placemaking simpler and more effective.



## Our Project: Urban Eden, Edinburgh

Urban Eden is an exciting new community being developed within two miles of the centre of Edinburgh.

Once complete the area will have been transformed to offer over 200 much needed new homes, all set in urban green spaces and designed to reflect and pay tribute to the architectural heritage of Edinburgh's traditional 19th century colony style housing.

The development is part of a wider 12-acre landlocked brownfield site. Previously inaccessible, it is bounded on three sides by live and disused railway corridors. This meant working closely with Network Rail, public utilities and the local council to bring the land back into valuable use and connect the site to the local community.

A strong emphasis has been placed on public realm, landscape and connectivity, with a pedestrian connection linking the development to an adjacent retail park, and green travel options including secure cycle parking, city car club spaces and key transport links into the city centre.

Working on behalf of the management, development and regeneration company Places for People, Arcadis was engaged throughout the feasibility, development and delivery process, providing development support and cost consultancy. One of the key challenges was to work with multiple local council departments to agree a flex on technical spatial planning requirements. This allowed for a narrow street format in keeping with the traditional Edinburgh colony style housing (homes built 1850-1910 for artisans and skilled working families by philanthropic dwelling companies), which increased housing density to improve viability. This was enhanced with high quality internal features, hard and soft landscaping and the introduction of pocket parks and green walls to create a quality neighbourhood for residents.

The conversion of this abandoned brownfield site into a new neighbourhood with multiple housing tenures has earned Urban Eden the Large Housing Development of the Year accolade at the Scottish Housing Awards. The modern design of the traditional Edinburgh colonies layout has since been adopted by multiple other developments in the city.



# 04 Collaboration

Placemaking does not exist in a vacuum. It is a collaborative effort involving a wide variety of organisations.

These organisations include landowners, developers, delivery partners, investors, housing providers, transport bodies, utilities, civic and educational institutions, community groups, public service providers, the voluntary sector, planners, architects and national, regional and local leaders.

Effective placemaking must nurture collaborations between all these parties. It must deliver long-term benefit and value, and spark innovation and ideas to create unique, successful, well-designed and liveable places. Local, long-term leadership is integral to driving this vision, often across overlapping public sector remits and setting the environment for collaborations with the private sector.

**“When I became leader of the London Borough of Bexley in 2008, I quickly found that coordination with neighbouring authorities is essential. Our borough is not an island.”**

Cllr Theresa O’Neill | Leader of Bexley Council

Collaboration should be ambitious and harness collective resources, skills and ideas. It is also essential in fostering the uniqueness of a place. The National Graphene Institute and Henry Royce Institute at The University of Manchester are both examples of important and successful partnerships for place shaping in the region.

Both illustrate the extent to which civic and educational institutions, as well as industry leaders - particularly in the private sector - have a role to play in corralling expertise, aggregating rewards and supporting stewardship.

The community must form an integral part of any collaboration, avoiding the situation where a development takes shape with little reference to local people. Opportunities from major national programmes such as the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham should be a catalyst for involving the community from the outset, helping to focus investment in a way that addresses often deep-seated economic and social challenges.

**“Every conversation about placemaking starts with a definition. Everyone is a place maker. We are crafting something, and everyone should be involved in that. It is collaboration that makes places enduring, relevant and prosperous. The key to placemaking is the ‘make’: make it local, make it together, make it happen.”**

John Badman | Director at Callison RTKL

Collaboration can be stimulated and supported through effective leadership, including strong governance structures to clarify and cement roles, responsibilities and shared outcomes. This must include embedding the role of community voice.



Oxford City Council has been fully involving the community as part of a collaborative approach to its placemaking climate programme. It was the first UK local authority to create a randomly selected “citizens assembly” to help establish new carbon targets and climate mitigation strategies. The Council will commission research to help develop timescales and potential targets for carbon reductions across hard-to-combat areas such as housing and transport. These findings will then be put to the citizens assembly, who will consider additional measures and make recommendations.

Development is not always about a single cohesive area, but takes shape across much longer ‘corridors’, in which collaboration is needed more than ever to bring forward effective placemaking. Perhaps the most important example of this will be along the HS2 route. It is not just a transport scheme, but a transformative economic and social programme, with major placemaking opportunities along the route including at Euston, Old Oak Common in West London, Curzon Street in Birmingham, Crewe, Leeds and Manchester. Each place will require significant collaboration across many partners, institutions and businesses to realise and capitalise on the huge opportunities presented by the project.

Along with strong collaboration is the need for an effective governance structure that can provide a voice to shape the local story, coordinate strategic planning and channel funding fairly across a diverse area. The evidence gathered by the Thames Estuary Growth Commission considered these challenges and opportunities as part of its 2050 vision report. It concluded that the area cannot afford to stick to ‘business as usual’ if it is to achieve its potential. With a strong governance structure in place the Thames Estuary has the potential to be transformed into one of the most economically vibrant areas in the UK with unrivalled transport links between London and the rest of the world.

## Our Project:

# Digbeth Canal Corridor Regeneration Masterplan

Arcadis has been working with Birmingham City Council and Homes England to develop an investible framework for the regeneration of Digbeth. In an area at the heart of Birmingham's Creative Quarter, a careful balance has been struck between creating value, providing new housing and development and retaining the existing character of the area.

Digbeth presents a unique stage to develop a new urban district close to the retail and commercial core of the city. However, the site is flanked by two railway viaducts and dissected by another. While the intersection of river, canal and railway, interlaced with warehouse and factory buildings, has provided a rich, multi-layered canvas, it also means a complex mix of landownerships and uses.

As lead consultant, Arcadis has worked to unite these disparate bodies, providing project and development management, regeneration masterplanning and urban design, landscape and public realm, flood risk, environment, engineering, infrastructure and transport consultancy advice.

Arcadis also helped to develop a strategy to support existing businesses and start-ups with gap funding grants and loans, advising on the potential introduction of an affordable workspace policy to encourage greater uptake by small and medium sized enterprises. The collaboration of multiple parties in the regeneration of Digbeth has the potential to significantly enhance the diversity of Birmingham as a place to live, work and enjoy.



# 05 Sustainability

Such is the imperative of the climate emergency that sustainability is not optional, but fundamental. It reshapes the nature of placemaking and its delivery.

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Schemes must be sustainable in every sense. This encompasses design and delivery, from construction methods and materials to maintenance, utility usage and how water, waste and energy can be reduced, and integration with public transport, walking and cycling.

**“We want to create a new neighbourhood and innovation district next to the University; not just plonk a science park in the city centre. What has really transformed the perception of the campus over the past decade is not just the new buildings; it’s taking cars off Oxford Road, the new retail outlets and how attractive the public realm now is.”**

Alan Ferns | Associate Vice President, University of Manchester

The opportunities and challenges are unprecedented. The Government has set an overarching goal to reach net zero by 2050, and reduce emissions from new homes by a third by 2020. But many local authorities and mayors have agreed much earlier targets. One example is in Bristol where the ‘One City Plan’, published in 2019, seeks to address the lack of an effective public transport system, which has resulted in considerable congestion and poor air quality. In turn, it charts the path to a successful, growing Bristol.

It sets out ambitious but clear goals that map out how the city can work to deliver a low-carbon mass transit system, build the 2,000 new homes a year it needs and work towards carbon neutrality by 2030, all while not leaving behind its existing communities.

The UK Green Building Council is championing that by 2030 all buildings and infrastructure should be climate resilient and maximise environmental net gains. How can we make sure all sectors of the economy are rising to the challenge?

New developments must be resilient and adaptive. Nature-based solutions – for example, tree canopies rather than air conditioning, or green roofs and channels with vegetation ponds and wetlands to manage rainwater – are a growing opportunity and reshaping how we see places. They can support climate resilience as well as improve ecosystems and the sustainability and liveability of places.

Sustainability must also be economic and social. The use of effective spatial strategies, industrial strategies and growth plans are critical tools for strategic land-use planning. However, not everything can rest with the planning system, which is slow and relatively inflexible.

Placemaking must also consider how to support changing business and lifestyle trends. According to The State of Small Business report, there are nearly 5.5 million small businesses in the UK, while zero-employee sole trader businesses have increased by 37% since 2007.



Edinburgh has an official ‘cooperative policy’ with already 17 community-led co-operatives created in this framework.

For place makers, this means factoring in and establishing collective and start-up space, as well as community and business meeting points - including coffee shops - all underpinned by high levels of digital connectivity.

Sustainable places should also be inclusive, catering for the youngest to the oldest. This involves community building, capacity building and wealth creation, as well as planning for sustainable local services at the very earliest stage. Schemes are often weaker when services, infrastructure and facilities such as schools or health centres come later in the development cycle.

This can be due to funding and delivery challenges and has been made more acute through the reduction in local authority funding. What can we do?

There is a lot of value in creating community institutions and community assets to underpin local services and community wealth building.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are one vehicle, which create a local voice and keep investment local. Many BIDs are key partners and leaders in local place curation, particularly from a business perspective.

A mutual and co-operative approach, as the Welsh Government has been championing, gives communities a stake in local assets and services. However, while co-operative models do exist, they have never been introduced systematically and at scale in placemaking.

Yet they could be useful across a wide range of areas, from housing, energy and community facilities to parks, local services and employment space. Community energy programmes are perhaps the most advanced example, with The Bein Ghrideag community owned wind farm in Scotland having run successfully since 2015. By 2018, it had contributed £1 million in profits to local projects and the economy.



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## Our Project: Otterpool Park, Kent

Otterpool Park is a proposed new garden town in East Kent, launched by the Housing Minister in 2016.

It is a long-term project spanning at least 30 years and will be pioneering the next generation of garden settlements, with the aim of truly improving quality of life for its residents. With a collaborative approach and careful masterplanning from the outset, Otterpool Park will bring value, sustainability and a high quality of life to local residents.

Arcadis is leading the development of the masterplan and planning application, which will include up to 10,000 new homes across a 770-hectare greenfield site.

The plans will totally transform the area, creating a vibrant new community just an hour's train ride from London and within a 15-minute walk of the Kent Downs; a region designated by Natural England as a 'National Character Area'.

As well as new homes, the plans for the garden town also include land for employment, shops, schools and medical centres, as well as extensive open space and access to the countryside. Respecting the surrounding communities, landscape and heritage is going to be key, and Otterpool Park is being designed with wellness and a healthy lifestyle at its heart.



# Conclusion

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The benefits of effective placemaking are numerous and diverse. If we can rise to the challenge of creating places that genuinely work, which are thriving, affordable and part of an integrated, vibrant vision, then we can genuinely reshape the nation for the better.

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**Our five fundamentals of place are part of a much bigger picture in which each category reinforces the others, as do the recommendations underpinning them.**

They are intended to support the start of any placemaking conversation, ultimately guiding a new, more inclusive approach where long term benefits can be realised, maximised and enjoyed by all.

#### **The Benefits of Effective Placemaking**

- Places can be delivered more quickly and reliably, at lower cost, with higher return and greater satisfaction.
- The public sector will see the cost of delivering public services fall and the quality of these services rise. By improving connectivity and social equality, and putting physical, social and mental health benefits at the forefront of planning, demand for many services will actually fall. We can also expect to see a positive boost to employment and overall GVA.
- Infrastructure and utilities providers will see more predictable demand. A closer match of demand and provision will in turn make it easier to secure investment.
- Investors and funders will see reduced risk and a higher quality of return.
- All partners and collaborators in the creation of place will be able to use their data and analytics effectively to improve the quality of outcomes.
- Citizens will enjoy safer, more stable communities, more personal opportunity in employment and improved life chances, better connectivity, and better social infrastructure (including health, education and amenities). Communities will be more resilient and better curated, offering more personal choice and access to services with measurably improved well-being and attainment.



# Why Arcadis?

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Greater regional devolution, major infrastructure commitments by the new Government and rapid urbanisation have seen the role of place become more important than ever in the economic, cultural and environmental make-up of the UK.

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However, with this additional growth and responsibility comes complexity. Arcadis has a long history of working with clients – from city leaders and local authorities to investors, asset owners and developers – to improve quality of life by creating spaces where people want to live, work and play, improving mobility and making best use of natural resources.

Our people help create places through sustainable urban development, creating the conditions for shaping Britain's continuing prosperity. Our work can range from improving housing and the public realm, through to designing infrastructure, transport and mobility solutions; increasingly recognising and embracing our role in securing funding and financing for the outcomes we achieve.

Well-functioning connected places are vital for creating jobs and contributing to the UK's economic strength, and our people have a comprehensive understanding of local markets, the ways in which they operate and the opportunities available to make them better places for everyone to live and do business.

Throughout our long history at the forefront of consultancy, design and engineering, we have never stopped innovating. Technological advancements are infiltrating, influencing and informing our lives at home and at work. Today, we combine data and digital analytics to support quicker, more accurate decision making, provide assurance about an asset portfolio, and certainty that investment will meet current and future needs.

**We recognise the importance of continuing to improve quality of life.**



# Methodology

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In developing this report Arcadis undertook a qualitative evidence gathering programme. We brought together more than 100 placemakers - regional political leaders and public servants, business organisations and business leaders as well as civic institutions, public agencies and voluntary bodies, all delivering or involved in placemaking.

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These leaders explored the key tenets and drivers of place, the challenges and opportunities and what constitutes success. These insights are included in the report and help form the recommendations.

Recommendations are rooted in a particular focus on major programmes coming forward, as well as large programmes that have taken place. These include major estate re-developments, the garden cities programme, infrastructure schemes like HS2, Ox-Cam Arc and Northern Powerhouse Rail, place programmes such as the Thames Estuary, and city-wide initiatives and special investment programmes like the Commonwealth Games.

We have focused on these strategic programmes because of the scale of change they bring and the potential to be exemplars. But the lessons and key ingredients for successful placemaking have applicability for programmes large and small.

The identification of five fundamentals, along with our recommendations, begins an ongoing programme that Arcadis, working with a range of partners, is seeking to develop. The goal is to strengthen the thinking, practice and delivery of successful placemaking across the UK.



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