

SUSTAINABLE SUBURBIA – WHERE DO PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE ?

Chairman: Jonathan Glancey

Panel: Richard MacCormac, Tim Williams, David Balcombe, Yolande Barnes, Angela Brady, Dominic Papa

This is the 10th year of Architecture Week and 10th year of Homes and Property magazine and hopefully as all of you are Homes and Property readers you will know how important homes and architecture are to the magazine, and how encouraging we are to architects, designers and urban planners who look for ways to make really exciting homes that people want to live in.

Making places isn't obviously just to do with homes, but to do with roads, infrastructure, hospitals and schools, and making those really desirable places to live. With the pressure on housing, on population increase and on places like the Thames Gateway this is becoming much more urgent to solve in a way that everybody likes.

Tonight to debate that we are fortunate to have six speakers, which is a complex and nice issue, and I'll introduce them very briefly. There will be an opportunity for you to ask questions of the speakers.

From my immediate left, this is Yolande Barnes, she's the director and head of research at Savills and she has a particular interest in density and in development in housing. Next to Yolande is Angela Brady of Brady Mallalieu Architects and she is a director there. They specialise in new build, in eco building and in finding intelligent answers to housing problems. In the middle is Jonathan Glancey, famous and well known to all of you as architecture and design critic and editor at the Guardian and a founder of Blueprint magazine, and he'll be chair for the evening. Next to him is David Balcombe who is head of the built environment branch at Essex County Council and his team produce urban masterplans and regeneration strategies. Second from the end is Dominic Papa, a partner in S333 Architects and Urbanists. They work in difficult situations world wide, having started in the Netherlands, and finally at the end, and certainly not least, Sir Richard MacCormac, the chairman of MJP, a former president of RIBA, a trustee of the Soane Museum and head of the architecture section at the Royal Academy. So, I'll hand over to Jonathan who'll chair the debate.

Jonathan Glancey : Sorry that you're ensconced on a very nice day like this in this Soviet Gulag type space, deep underground. There are trap doors under your seats. Any one who disagrees with me I'll pull the trap door and you'll disappear.

But try and cope with the heat and ghastliness of this building, for a second. I'd like to tell you that the last week I've been working in Sicily - without a map - and I had to drive to two meetings, one was in a town called Trapani on the north west coast of Sicily and the other was Marsala on the south west coast, where they make the wonderful Marsala wines. And I thought this is just fine, I can just drive bravissimo from one to the other with no problem, without a map, and I soon found though that as I got towards Trapani from Palermo that the vision in my mind of this gorgeous, beautiful fishing town with its wonderful recognizable baroque monuments, and everything a pure delight, its squares, its fountains, wasn't there at all - all I found, trying to get into it was left, right, left, right, hideous apartment blocks all exactly the same, laid out on a grid that went on and on and on.

So, slightly uncharacteristically I was late for my meeting, and slightly embarrassed that I couldn't read a city as someone that knows and loves cities and architecture quite well. But, it was suburbia that did for me, as it were. So having got through this meeting I then had to power down this little motorway at staggering speed to get to Marsala, and when I got there I found a little grid of apartment blocks that went on and on, and I turned right, and left, and right, and left with absolutely no idea where I was. And Marsala is distinguished by its wonderful wineries, its beautiful baroque churches, by the windmills on the coast where the salt is made, and any normal human being, one would have thought, would be able to read this city, but I couldn't.

And when I got home it made me dive for this little book, which I'm sure you all know, and if you don't, I wish you did, called *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino written in 1973 which raises the very issues I experienced last week and I would like us – I hope – to talk about this evening.

What on earth are we doing with building all these suburbs, and can they ever be sustainable? Calvino in this little book talks about endless little cities, and one of them he visits – he visits lots – his narrator is Marco Polo and he's gone up to talk to Kubla Kahn about all the great cities in this great Mongolian Empire, and he says this - he's trying to entertain the Kahn who's bored by talk of all the great cities in his empire, possibly because they all look the same: 'if, on arriving at Trudi, I had not read the city's name written in big letters I would have thought that I was landing at the same airport from which I had taken off. The suburbs they drove me through were no different from the others, with the same little greenish and yellowish houses, following the same signs we swung around the same flowerbeds in the same squares, the downtown streets displayed goods, packages, signs that were not changed at all. This was the first time I'd come to Trudi, but I already knew the hotel where I happened to be lodged, I had already heard and spoken my dialogues with the buyers and sellers of hardware, I had ended other days identically, looking through the same goblets at the same swaying navels. Why come to Trudi? I asked myself, and I already wanted to leave. "You can resume your flight whenever you like", they said to me, "but you will arrive at another Trudi absolutely the same detail by detail. The world is covered by a sole Trudi which does not begin, and does not end, only the name of the airport changes."

So today, ladies and gentleman, as I'm sure you know, we're building some glorious new suburbs all around Britain. They're known as 'sustainable communities', not suburbs, and they have 24 hr cappuccino, vibrant lifestyles and are very exciting. They all look exactly the same and are all dreadful, I think, but then my view is probably different from yours and the architects.

But what I'd like to examine today is the serious point of view that we're building this great suburban mass of houses and places everywhere. It's inescapable and whatever you think, whatever your beliefs are, whether you love the countryside or cities or you're a suburban fan, Britain is becoming one big Trudi, or suburb, as it were. I think it's awful, other people disagree, but let's dig into it. Is it possible to make beautiful suburbs? Is it possible, they used to be there for the rich people, can we do it for everybody on low incomes? Can we create special places where we can all live and be proud of? It's hard to know. But I'd like the panel here, who are experts, to give a little two minute talk each on their particular take on what might be a sustainable suburb, how we might develop mass housing.

I'd like to start.... Ah Tim Williams is here, magically appeared, the man who's got an extraordinary job and an amazing one, he has to deal with what will happen to the great Olympic Games in 2012, what will happen to their physical architectural planning, housing, social legacy. That's a hell of a thing to do. Let's start with Tim, because he really does have a huge challenge. Tim, can you create, from that great Olympic Games that's coming up, something truly worthwhile and sustainable?

Tim Williams : I think it's unfair to start with me when I've just arrived! Two things, prior to this fantastic job I was advising the ODPM, as it was then, on housing and urban regeneration, advising David Milliband, and I felt a bit like somebody said about the Irish Question, that just when the English thought they'd sorted the Irish Question, the Irish changed the question. Because there was a reshuffle, and I'm now working on the Olympic legacy for Tower Hamlets. But there is a kind of terrible fact, which is a challenge to us all about what's happening in the Lower Lea, which is that 90% of the new housing development of the Lower Lea is one and two-bedroomed flats, simple as that, and at this point in time there is no place for family life in the Lower Lea, as it were, on the basis of that model.

My real challenge on the basis of this discussion, to us, is I think we do know the elements of a sustainable community by which I mean somewhere we'd all like to live, frankly, but we're finding it hellishly difficult to put the elements together. I don't think it's an intellectual challenge, I think we know what we'd like to see, but how do you assemble these elements? I've got a couple of worries and a couple of positive views which might help.

The worries are that I've never seen such an industry as the private sector housing industry in this country. The word primitive does not sum it up, and their business model is antipathetic to building decent places. They can all build decent projects if they want to win prizes, but they don't in terms of their regular daily work. We have to understand exactly why they say the shortage of land – and it is true to say that people will buy shit in this country, because they have to – and I do think we have to address the business fundamentals, what will incentivise the private sector house builders, and indeed will they ever deliver for us? Because I've come to be quite radical about this, and I think we need an alternative model of delivering housing in this country that does not rely, frankly, on the volume house builder. So there's my big worry – we haven't got deliverers of our sustainable communities or our sustainable suburbia.

I think the second thing is we talk a lot about whether the public sector's got the skills to deliver all this stuff, and I think there's still a huge issue surrounding that, but myself I've come to the conclusion that we cannot just have a command, centrally driven, numbers oriented system from the top. As our main public sector driver we need a lot more devolution to local government and local communities to over time develop the capacity to deliver these things.

I'd like to end this initial bit by saying that I quite like this idea of sustainable suburbia because just as I fell I was actually going to appoint, of all people, Peter Hall, to do a survey and investigation – and Richard [MacCormac] was going to help us – into suburbia because it strikes me that suburbia is the most despised notion in literature, but actually the place that we all want to live, and actually this dissonance between what we think we want to build and where we actually want to live is one of the great hidden bad faiths of the world of architecture, it seems to me.

JG : Gee. That's a nice strong start from Tim. Did you use the word 'shit'?

TW : I did yes, it's a technical term of art, which needs to be revived actually!

JG Interestingly, a year before last the PM of Great Britain, a man known as – I need to refer to my notes, I think it might have changed – yes, Tony Blair, and another man who's slightly disappeared off the map, John Prescott, flew by helicopter, as politicians do, to visit the Thames Gateway. And I was quite amused – this extraordinary amorphous piece of land - they decided to take a helicopter to land near Barking, by mistake I think, to look at a development on the other side of the river which is right by a sewage station at Thamesmead and luckily that day, as far as I'm concerned, the wind was blowing in the right direction – in other words a way the wind doesn't normally blow in London, it was blowing east to west and blowing the smell of methane over the royal party. And it's important to know that in this great quest to build cheap housing we often land ordinary people with low incomes truly in the shit, and I'm not sure what the PM or Prescott think about it.

Anyway, Yolande Barnes, next, is an expert and researcher with Savills, who are very important of course in terms of property and knowing about the way our landscape is in terms of its houses and buildings. She's been researching this and she advises developers and house builders on what they actually might do, and that's interesting, and Yolande's in the thick of the research.

Yolande Barnes : Thank you. Well I actually think that the correct technical term here is 'crap', not 'shit', and I apologise for having put one of my slides up here and had you looking at it for the last couple of minutes. I think it's a good example of what we're actually doing at the moment, and what happens out of some of those house building models. I've actually spent the last three years trying to advise some of the primitives on how to build real places and I want to show a little bit about what we've seen.

I think that the key thing about the business model which is highlighted here, is that it's all about short-term finance and short-term business model, and it's also very heavily homogenized, that is, it's all about either

commercial buildings, all retail, all offices or all housing. And the response to that, one could say over the last 10 years, has been urban renaissance.

Next slide. The result of this so called urban renaissance – the way the business model has responded to all those targets and so forth, is that as you can see here a dramatic decline in detached dwellings, those family homes Tim talked about. We never built that much semi-detached and terraced, and this huge, huge increase in the number flats which I think is probably in and of itself unsustainable, certainly in the way in which they've been built. That's been the response to targets, unfortunately. So the model that we've adopted has been very urban, not sub-urban. So the big challenge for the next 10-20 years will be to build good suburbia.

My next slide just starts to illustrate our approach to building places, and what we've noticed is actually the market is a very good indicator of what people want, and what they want and where the highest value and biggest demand at the moment is traditional towns. This is an example of one.

What is it about traditional towns? You have lots of green space – those green blobs – different size houses scattered all over the place, the management of them very important, and also huge numbers of businesses – note they are not in a business park on the edge of town, they're scattered all sorts of businesses right through this particular sample town, with retail clusters, neighbourhood centres and so forth, right through the town. So, clearly, building suburbia, or good suburban places, is about getting a whole series of things right, not just the housing.

Finally, here's a thought to conjure with, intensify this, why are we talking about the unsustainability of housing, when we've been building business parks, big shed-like buildings, big boxes, very land hungry. There's massive opportunity here to wrap those buildings, put housing above, around them, put some shops in. Isn't that called a high street?

JG : When you travel the length and breadth of Britain's A roads, as good as any way of looking at Britain, you'll find business park next to call centre next to distribution depot stretching on for tedious infinity, and every so often a big executive housing estate, and then somehow an old town which has been 'heritaged' up saying how wonderful it is with lots of brown signs. Heartbreaking, they're going to all join up sooner than later. But Yolande's just told us people are going to want to live – I think I'm right – in traditional towns- which is interesting for a debate about suburbia. Next up, Angela Brady is an architect and she's dealt with many of these issues both in historic areas and looking at modern housing and we would like her take on it.

Angela Brady : Thank you Jonathan. I think we need to aspire to create more geographically centred and compacted communities in towns and in cities, with low-carbon interlinks. If we choose to live in suburbia it needn't be crowded, but low energy thinking must be at the centre of design principles for transport, movement, freedom, expression and health. Local economies can assist local communities. Before oil, cities and towns were connected by trains and a few roads. With oil, came the imbedded need to travel which is still locked into our lifestyle. After oil, we need to learn from the past and plan sustainable, resourceful places for people to work and play in. We need to look at intensifying our towns and cities and cut car dependency.

We need to provide local resources, locally. We need to get to know our neighbour. We need to share living resources for a sustainable environment, like they do in Denmark. Co-housing is one popular and achievable way as in the bofaellesskaber ['living communities'] in Denmark which is now spreading throughout North America and there's now one in Bristol. It's where people share resources and they live in local communities and try and live as sustainably as they can. They are a fantastic contemporary approach to housing ourselves. So, we think this would be the most humane way, because you can't just build endless housing estates, suburban sprawl, there's no future in it and I think it's absolutely the wrong thing to do.

JG : Well, that's telling it how it is. Just outside Ely I went the other week to see a new development called Cathedral View which I'm sure you must have all taken notice of, a wonderful new housing estate by Bellway and another of those housing companies – Barretts – and it's two miles of housing which indeed, I think about 10% has a cathedral view of Ely and a housing estate two miles by about half a mile is slightly bigger, to say the least, than the city it's meant to serve.

Anyway, good stuff of course, and one of the people that has to deal right in the thick of this, with every single government body going, and these are breeding and proliferating at a rate you can't believe now, they're out there copulating in the streets, new quangos emerging as you're sitting here, all on big salaries that you're paying for through your tax – one man who has to deal with this and try to make some sense of it seriously, and who works in an area which is seeing some of the hardest, fastest development anywhere in Britain at the moment, or anywhere in Europe, which of course is Essex, is David Balcombe. He's head of the built environment branch at Essex County Council, and I admire him for doing what he does, which is to sit at the middle of all this – not just sitting there – he's very active indeed, I'd love him to tell us how on earth he copes and what he's trying to do.

David Balcombe : I think people are completely wrong here. I think house builders are wonderful. I think they do exactly what the public want, and that's build a product which is sold, usually off plan, for very high prices and they're very successful and make a lot of money, and I think they're great. The trouble is they don't build things which are good for us. They don't build sustainably. They don't build to a sense which reinforces our identity, they build with no sense of quality. So what we are doing every day of our lives, I think, is trying to put pressure on them to see the world in a different way. I think part of the problem is that local authorities – and I think Tim mentioned this – is they don't have the skills. And that's absolutely right. And that's why they get away with it, because local authorities don't have a sense of what these issues mean, let alone have a vision for it, or a policy or a plan or a champion for them, they don't even understand what those issues mean. So is it any wonder that we get the same old crap trotted out every time? No it's not, because they're building to the market.

What we've done in Essex, our research has revealed that we don't really understand why development should harm the environment. We don't understand why development should harm nature, and we don't understand why developments should not be built in the context in which it's situated. How many times do we walk passed a development and think whoa, what's that? And it's that kind of shock that's giving urban development, and even suburban development, a bad name. It's the lack of vision in those issues which is leaving the market wide open for abuse from those people that only look at the bottom line.

So what we're doing in Essex and you can make a note – we're producing design guidance to try and bring forward a better understanding of these issues – putting the elements together, and you can find this at www.the-edi.co.uk - a new way at looking how to bring about more high quality development and buildings in context in Essex. And it should have a certain resonance in other parts of the region as well, I hope. But I think that my greatest hope is that everyone recognizes what I've said to be the case. Because unless people wake up and realize we've got to start building as if we're in the 1960s and start predicting what life will be like in the next 50 years, we stand no chance at all. When we launched the edi, this design initiative at the GLA in Nov 2004 Jonathan Porritt said to the minister who was there, 'unless every single home in the uk from now on reaches an eco-home excellence rating we will miss our emissions target by an absolute mile'. And since then, how many local authorities have got policies in their local plans in the ldfs which says this is a requirement. How often does the government say, we see this as being important aspiration for us all? It doesn't. So I think it's up to us to start challenging that lack of aspiration and vision commanding attention on these issues and to start showing some real leadership on them, unless we do I don't think anyone else will do it for us.

JG : David's problem, and his opportunity, is that he lives and works in a part of the country which if you look at a map of it looks blank and empty, and if you're a politician looking for housing numbers and volume, or a house builder, it looks very tempting to say that Essex can just have houses plonked down on top of it. If you look at the A-Z of Greater London you see these great spaces that look empty, you expect great notices on them saying 'Here by monsters!' But they're marshes, where birds live. Who cares about them, or about voles, when we need housing volume? Interesting thought that development now is about plonking as many houses as you can, to reach certain numbers. Forget the animals, nature and any form of sustainability. Even though we know we should, we're not doing it.

Dominic Papa is an architect in S333 Architects. He has experience particularly in Holland and commissions across the world at looking at new houses and his practice has designed some of the most intelligent new suburban houses, or town houses, in parts of the country in Holland in particular that have tried very hard to create what we might describe sustainable new towns, sustainable suburbia. A difficult challenge, and is it possible to translate that here, Dominic?

Dominic Papa : The suburb is the most successful model in planning in the history of the 20th century, and we should remember that. 80% of Europeans live in suburbia and it's the thing that new Europeans aspire to when they try to assimilate themselves within old Europe - with slight ethnic adjustments. And it's produced across Europe a sort of range of different cultures from cheerful modernists in the Netherlands, to the eco-baroque in Germany to the heritage brick-boxers in the UK.

But you have to remember that originally people were accepting the fewer urban facilities for, let's say, a greener environment. And what we find now is that suburbia has become neither a semi-urban nor traditional suburban. So it's no longer an effective term. I still find for me, who's spent the last 12 years in the Netherlands, you don't actually use the term itself. There's much more nuance and differentiated kind of environments that need to be recognized and dealt with and thought about.

I think this opposition between town and country is selling us short about this idea of context and how you respond to context I think is actually coming out of this problem we have - that it's either this or that - and I think there are other environments, whether it's the inner peripheries, that are much more complex. I think our assumptions about public life and private life are also stopping us from dealing with these complexities. So what we end up with is a kind of car-bound mobility pattern, asphalt gardens, interior and exterior minimalisation, assumptions about public life and ruthless rationalization.

I think - and this is one of my main criticisms about the £60,000 house, that it was isolated to the actual development plot. And what happens in the Netherlands is a much wider, more regional, metropolitan understanding of differentiation of our environment over a wider area. We have to zoom out and think about how these environments connect into a network of streets and environments at a larger scale. This is what we're thinking about - extensions to villages, to towns, need to actually negotiate and consolidate themselves with things that already exist, rather than these isolated... I mean even in Poundbury you can still see the A road zipping past, it's still an isolated ghetto that's connected by an umbilical chord, and we need to look at it at a larger scale. What as architects and urbanists can we bring to this discussion?

JG : There's no railway station at Poundbury, no tram, must be only horse and carts there, which would be appropriate. Of course, you have to drive, and the car parking there is hell already, and I hope we can bring down the GLA to bring down their draconian parking measures and sort them out, and get Poundbury to be green in the next few years.

Richard MacCormac is an architect of immense experience and many years ago he designed housing in Milton Keynes which, of course, was the last of the new towns in Britain, the post-war new towns, and it was very much based around the free movement of the car - nevertheless it has lots of trees with I don't know how many millions planted in the last 30 years, a very brave enterprise, but a curious place nevertheless. Richard,

thinking back on that, with some of the greatest experience of what these 'average' people might want. A car? Nice place to live? School down the road? How can you have it all? Decent architecture, proper urban planning, intelligence, imagination, all mixed up with these very basic modern human desires which we are all – even architects – prey to? Richard.

Richard MacCormac : I want to pick up the Milton Keynes narrative. I gave a talk at the Thames Gateway conference some months ago and in the various studies that we've been doing – the reason I'm here is that we've been looking at suburbia as a subject in the office for the last 18mths or more – and I illustrated a Milton Keynes kind of car suburb that runs on infinite fuel and so on, car-based, and compared it with a little segment of Milton Keynes which is actually a late 19thc railway suburb called Wolverton, where a distinction is that the Milton Keynes suburban housing has densities of around 25-30 houses to the hectare, intrinsically in each estate, but the overall settlement has densities much lower than that – I guess about 7 houses to the hectare. What was really interesting about Wolverton was that any segment of it has a density of about 50 houses+ to the hectare, but the whole settlement of about 10,000 houses, something like that, has the same density. And that's very interesting, and something I want to discuss later.

What was amusing was that someone came up to me after I'd given this contribution and said 'I used to live in one of those car-suburb houses, and if I wanted a bottle of milk I had to get into my car and drive and get it. Now I just walk round the corner and I can get a bottle of wine and a newspaper, and I meet my friends in the local shop.'

The thing that's been interesting me, is whether there's a kind of suburbia – and in some ways a new kind of suburbia – which fulfils certain aspirations that I think are very fundamental, house, private garden, perhaps shared area for children, somewhere you can put a car for the time being, and that that can be reconciled with certain collective goods which are access to public transport within a few minutes walk, to schools, health provision, libraries, small hospital, shopping and so on, and even, one begins to wonder, whether, and this is speculating a bit further having just come back from Italy, whether there might be a local agricultural economy – whether you can get these collective goodies and the private amenity that people still want.

What we've concluded provisionally is that densities of around 50 dwellings to the hectare in settlements of 5,000 dwellings + will actually achieve this combination of collective and private good.

JG : Richard, thanks very much. Interesting that Richard mentions Wolverton. One of the key things about Wolverton is that historically, and until moderately recently, people lived in houses there that were very close together but they had somewhere to work – they worked mostly at the Wolverton Works which built railway locomotives and then railway carriages including the carriages which the Queen still travels in and Prince Charles as he pontificates on the state of the landscape, and they were built at Wolverton, and that area was a community in the true old-fashioned sense in that people when they woke up in the morning nearly all knew what they were doing, they mostly worked at Wolverton Works.

Today, of course that has changed, and I'd love to come back to Essex because it's somewhere I know very well, and to think about what people are doing there now in new housing that's being built. And I walk, and cycle and drive around this area a lot, I shouldn't drive of course, and I find that the new housing, particularly as you go out to Barking, Dagenham, Rainham is being built nastily and cheaply, despite all the government jargon that says it's wonderful, and it's lived in nearly exclusively by first generation immigrants, being paid peanuts, of course, to come and clean our lavatories and offices and to make things nice for us. And that's maybe how the world is and first generation becomes second, and third and then they become big stars and multi millionaires and live in Totterage, and that's hopefully what might be – but it's not quite true of course. It's a horrible way to welcome people into Britain, bring them into cheap nasty areas, without jobs – and that's my key point – without real jobs. They aren't invited to come and live in Essex into these new 'sustainable communities' as they're called by governments, to work at the equivalent of Wolverton Works, they're invited

to come and earn £5 an hour cleaning lavatories and offices of places like the Guardian and the RIBA. Not so good really. There's something missing in the equation. And I just thought, before bringing you all in, because this really is a hot topic what you build and how you might live, I'd like to go back to Tim, because he's got this huge opportunity and huge problem, as Mrs Thatcher might say, of what do you do with the Olympic Legacy, all these people coming in to live in east London, absolutely low-paid people, just the kind of scum of humanity as the workings of economy sees it, some of them will succeed and some of them won't. What the hell do you do to make those people into real jobs, as at Wolverton? What the hell happens, and it isn't just houses.

TW : The conversation is a bit confused between the very important elements of a successful community and a civilized life, and a conversation about a specific part of that, called suburbia.

I'd quite like to have those two conversations tonight, but they are separate, it seems to me. One is a specific concept of living, which is basically a challenge to the bad dream from which architecture refuses to wake, which is its love of the city. Architecture seems to be about the city, it seems to me, rather than about where people want to live, and I thought it was interesting, Richard's concept about sustainable suburbia, with a density of 50, at the moment in the Lower Lea we're building places with densities of about 150 and whereas I do believe that density is the basis of community, in a very paradoxical way that the English particularly find difficult to understand, with their love of rural ex-urbia, really, in fact, I grew up in a mining village in South Wales, density is the basis of proper community, and indeed public transport, so there's a debate about density.

But the question you asked about the opportunity for the Olympics is kind of interesting. I think I would say that we mustn't be Utopian. What is happening in East London is an evolutionary and a revolutionary process that will take decades to work through, and it'll be bad and rubbish in places in the beginning, but at least there's development going on and we'll replace it with something better.

The second thing about the Olympics itself – 11,000 units of housing – that terrible phrase – will be created, and it's the biggest challenge we've ever faced in urban regeneration and development. Can we actually turn that massive economic opportunity and that timetable, into something that actually is a showcase for the principles that we would all wish tonight.

Now, there's a lot of brains going into it and there's a lot of commitment going into it. But I come back to my first problem, which is who are we getting to build all this? And also, on what basis will we get them to do so, which is my last point – and I've talked to Richard about this before. If you look at some of the great examples of urban design, and indeed of suburbia, there was an element in the business model which we're not talking about at this point in time – and that is that they were long term investors, people who for example had a lease hold approach to a large piece of land they effectively masterplanned, and they owned over a long period of time, so they cared what happened to a place next to somewhere they were building.

What we have on our hands at the moment is that short-term business model, where the return has to be delivered very quickly and therefore the business model prefers detached and semi-detached houses traditionally, because that's where you get money back quickest. And it only prefers flats now because the business model has changed because buy to let has taken away the risk of building flats.

So, I think there's a market fundamental here which is preventing quality, sustainable development. And the Olympics must be used, I think, as an example where we use public land to actually dictate not just the quality but the business model that we as a state wish to work with.

JG : Gee. 'Dictate'. Yolande, can you talk about how private business responds to that? Private business and house building will say that it's set up to build certain homes and a certain price to make a certain profit... and they're not old landowners of the 18thc way, nor are they altruistic like the London County Council of 100

years ago who built extremely high quality housing for poor, working people. What do they think, and they can't be forced, can they?

YB : I think you'll find that this idea of all developers being short term isn't actually accurate. The big sites, the brownfield sites that are in single land ownership – in North Kent for example - are being developed over at least a 20 year business plan. I'm working on three this week, where the issue is about how you own and manage and actually create a place over a period of decades rather than years, and I think that's an essential component. And there is perhaps an issue still with financing over that term. The other issue might be leaseholding form, the fact that the leasehold model doesn't actually exist any more, I think there are all sorts of interesting opportunities about the role of shared ownership, for example, and affordable housing, in that sort of retained ownership model, so that your on-going management in development of a place actually reaps rewards, and increases land value and so forth.

I think it's far too simplistic to say that actually the business model mitigates or militates in favour of houses instead of flats. The primary thing that's driven flat development is that there has been a market which was previously drastically under provided for, and we've pretty much caught up and in some places built pretty much all the flats the market can take in some areas, but also this move from greenfield to brownfield land. The easiest way to alleviate brownfield land is to cap it with concrete and then build apartments on it, and one of the hugest challenges over the next few decades will be building family houses with some kind of open space, whether it be communal or individual, where people might be able to grow fruit trees without poisoning themselves, for example, and that's the challenge, and some of the most difficult brownfield sites are the ones that remain.

There are all sorts of technical financial industry issues, which have caused this move towards flats, and I think we've just got to move away from it. And I'd like to say one more thing about density, which is that what we're ignoring here whenever we talk about densities is what I call Gross Densities.

The highest density urban area in Britain is the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in London. The density there in terms of households per hectare is 69. The average across the country is about 9 or 10, and the reason for this is because real places, where people live, aren't just about houses. It's about a whole host of other things. And even in some of the most deprived and dreary suburbs that we've studied, you'd be amazed at planners out there just how many unofficial uses of garages, front rooms, and studies and so forth, there are going on out there. Most people work in very small businesses, it's not all about big sheds or zoned places, and I think what we've got to do is create places whether they be suburban, urban or whatever, where people can carry out those ranges of human functions.

JG : Tim mentioned the dread words 'housing units'. Always a shocking thing for non-professional people to listen to for the first time, it's such a weird term, 'unit'. Richard, you mentioned earlier about farming, and let's pick that up. The opposite of 'units' would clearly be this idea of sustainability being, in a description that might make sense to all of us, as somewhere people really want to live. Clearly they don't just want to live in a unit but in something more. What do you do in the middle of all this that can possibly make that happen.

DB : What's guiding our thinking in Essex is really this idea about reinventing the virtues of the sustainable neighbourhood, and it's one aspect, one building block of urbanity which I think we've forgotten about, or ignored, the fact that most of our towns and cities have that structure in place already. And we've done a lot in planning to try to break that down a bit and actually not recognize the value of the connections that Dominic mentioned.

Those connections are absolutely vital to achieve a robust urban form that is the very engine of the rich mix of activity and uses that we all want. Central to all we're doing is let's go back and let's re-celebrate the virtues, if

you like, of the mixed use, mixed tenure community, and encourage more mixture within those places which are accessible to public transport, to jobs, to all the things in urban life that we enjoy.

One of the interesting by-products of our thinking is around how do we actually make those communities sustainable in terms of not just what I've just talked about, but in terms of things like low energy. Energy is very current as an issue. No reason at all why those communities couldn't be plumbed for district heating. And if they're close to an area of agricultural land, no reason why agricultural land couldn't be a place to grow bio crops to fuel the heating system. There are lots of interesting things that can come out of – stepping away from perhaps the individual unit itself and looking at the needs of the neighbourhood as a whole.

JG : Richard could you give us a picture of what a place like that might be?

RM : I'm not sure that I can give a picture. But sticking with something that came up earlier- I think Yolande came up with a concern about distinctions about net and gross densities, and I really want to say something about that.

Actually, there's a fundamental confusion here that's rather important to try and understand. It's not difficult to make housing groups that have high densities and still have gardens and decent private plots and somewhere for the car. Where it all gets much more difficult is where the highway engineer is king. And actually our settlements, over the last 50 years the pattern of them and their character is to do with road engineering, more than it is to do with any other single design discipline. And if we don't reform our road engineering, nothing that we're talking about is going to get anywhere at all.

Traditional settlements, towns, that sustain their density right across the whole settlement, do so because there aren't distributor roads and local roads and huge radii, curbs, sight lines, blah blah blah. Once the road engineer gets going the sort of gross densities that can be achieved are a fraction of the densities you can achieve with housing layouts. And this carries with it a whole implication about the sort of future that we're all looking for. Because the car is a capsule that cuts you off from everybody else and it is possible to imagine a way of living in new settlements which has the characteristics of what a lot of us like about existing towns, but it's only possible if we reform highway engineering.

JG : Dominic, is that experience different in the Netherlands. Is the road engineer king there in the new developments?

DP : It's funny because there is a town that as an experiment has taken out all the signage, all the traffic lights, all the speed bumps, cycle paths, all the differentiation between pathways and roads, took them all out. And it's interesting what happened. There were very few deaths, and people started to negotiate each other and were more responsive to each other. And it's been very successful. And it's actually happening elsewhere in Northern Europe, in Scandinavian towns like Bergen in Norway, which we're looking at in terms of a masterplan. It's called 'Shared Space' and it's a concept of public/private space where everyone moves around in this undifferentiated space, and is rather wonderful actually. You're not convinced are you?!

JG : No, I am, I'm not sure we could do it in this particular country though!

RM : It's like that in Rome, actually. Once you get off the main roads the motorist, as I understand it, has complete responsibility for safety and that's why you can walk along these narrow streets with no pavement and cars trundle up behind you and hoot and you go to one side, and there's no definition of vehicular and non-vehicular space in the side streets of Rome. It does work.

DP : To respond to Tim's earlier comment. Again, I'm going to be doing my Dutch thing tonight, I suppose, this idea of always moving between apartment or house, is it your little box on the 18th floor, or is it your lovely large house with the verdant garden? Again, that kind of opposition is problematic. I think it's funny, someone rang me up about branding and said 'how can we move design up the ladder?' At the top is location, the next one is size. It doesn't matter – you can have two houses exactly the same size, but if one has five bedrooms people want to live there more than the three bedroom. Although your five bedrooms will be the size of a rabbit hutch, they'll go for the five bedrooms. And I think we are not actually trying to think about – going back to the infrastructure thing – how our units can actually support and offer solutions to that environment of the infrastructure as well. There are opportunities to look at something with much more nuance – you can offer urban qualities within suburban typologies, a more dynamic and responsive kind of architecture.

JG : Angela, can you?

AB : Do you think that they'd do it here in England? Northern Europe it's fantastic, because they're much more neighbourly whereas here the Englishman's home is his castle. They want to have their own detached house, even if only by one foot, and somewhere to park their car on their ground, even if they have to live in a suburban housing only site, they will do that. I was most surprised when I was in Milton Keynes on a two day study last month, the suburban housing outside of Milton Keynes is the worst I've ever seen in the last 20 years. It's absolutely awful. Whereas Milton Keynes itself can actually work, if it intensifies the land that's within the main square, the main masterplan, the intensification would be much more sustainable than people driving out to their own house on their own plot and I think that intensification is by far the way that we should all be moving.

JG : Let's bring you in out there because there's horrible them and us in this Soviet Gulag room here. Come in and join in now.

Audience member: Milton Keynes has cropped up more than once tonight and I'm interested in the panel's response to the fact that the mother of all battles is about to break out in Milton Keynes because of the proposals to intensify the town. How do we get people outside of this room, and outside of the centre of this city, to learn to love high density living?

TW : Build nice places. I think the central problem, apart from the fact that I do believe there's a cultural thing with the English – someone wrote about 30 years ago 'The origins of English individualism', Alan McFarlane, argued that the Englishman's desire to live in his own nuclear place was very old in the English culture and was to do with the authoritarianism of the English State. When I was at the ODPM I went to a lot of places met lots of people, a lot of communities, lots of people opposing development, and what was clear to me was that no matter how much we think it can be done properly, they don't think they've seen good stuff. And I think the answer, unfortunately, to the question - how can we persuade people to accept our values - is that we need many more exemplars; people just don't believe it, because it's not part of their every day experience. Let me say one thing about highway engineers: when, last December the ministers flipped when they read CABE's report about development in the south was 80% poor, or worse, and in the north even worse than that, and I was sent off to find out why, it turns out that actually part of the problem was the cultural struggle that we need to have with the private sector and the jihad that I feel we need is very real. However, most of the problems are to do with our friends in the highway engineers' department who believe that the answer to

every modest housing scheme is a double roundabout. So, that in itself makes people say they don't want to live there. So I think the answer is we've got to build some very good stuff that people can go and see.

DP : I think also it's not – I hate the fact that it always comes down to density, and density will resolve the problem of Milton Keynes. It is one of the few grids in the world that actually has zero intensity. Grids need to be reclaimed by designers and to be understood as a typology, that successfully – if you look at Glasgow, Melbourne, and others – the grid is a fantastic tool to create a hierarchy of different streets that have different ways to perform in actually supporting an intensity in a differentiated environment. It doesn't have to be urban, it can be something else. I think that's the problem – people assume the solution is about densification, and it's not.

Audience member: I think it's wrong to compare Milton Keynes with Melbourne and Glasgow - I've lived in Melbourne, and I know Glasgow quite well. They're totally different. I can't understand how you can suggest that Milton Keynes is anything like Melbourne.

And also another point I wanted to make – I grew up in the East End, in Stratford. I'm an architect. When I grew up in the East End it was a vibrant community and the reason why, is because industry was still there. There were still the docks, my father was a docker, I knew the docks very well. Since they closed the whole of the East End has vanished. Most East Enders have moved out into Essex.

Can I also say, on Essex, Essex is a wonderful place in this area. And part of the argument, Richard, about the highway engineers is go back to the 1970s, that argument about them was really strong and the Essex Design Guide of the 1970s put a template down for the design of estates in Essex, and it's been really successful. You can go through lots of the villages in Essex, and the area and see what suburban living should really be like. There are lots of good examples in Essex.

RM : Can I respond to that sort of back to front as it were. I think the Essex Design Guide was, and is, very important. The point I'm trying to make is that the issue we have to address is the bigger scale of what the highway engineer still controls. It's not the housing group of whatever – 200 dwellings or whatever – it's the settlement pattern of 5,000 or 10,000 dwellings which the highway engineers still controls.

Just changing the subject, and going back to the previous question about intensification and densification. I think there may be a kind of social thing here, which is quite tricky to be frank about. I live in the East End and I'm a new East Ender, a kind of middle-class elite East Ender, living in Spitalfields, where you could buy a house for a few thousands pounds in the 1970s and a few hundred in the 1960s, because everybody who lived in that part of the East End didn't want to be there. They wanted to go to Romford or wherever, or Rainham or somewhere. And actually part of our culture, part of our problem, the problem with intensification in Milton Keynes is that escaping urbanization is a kind of English cultural issue. We haven't lost the 19th century nightmare of the town, and the social status that's still assumed to go with living at high densities – density has been equated, quite wrongly in many ways, with poverty, and in the East End that association is still very strong. That's why people go out to Romford, and also why they go to Milton Keynes. They want to go there to escape. So I can see that they're pretty annoyed if they're then going to be intensified, because that changes what they perceive as their social standing.

DB : Thank you for those kind words on Essex, I think there are examples of where it has been done in Essex and the 1973 guide introduced some interesting ideas around identity and highway design. In fact, picking up Dominic's point – there is in fact a street type in Essex designated in 1973 called the shared street. The engineers were predicting, before that was allowed to be built in Essex in the early 1970s, that there'd be deaths everywhere because it was encouraging a confusion in the public realm, and recent research has

revealed that there hasn't been a single incident involving a vehicle and pedestrian in any of those areas anywhere in Essex – over the last 30 years. So, very successful.

But I think, perhaps, the reason we're getting it wrong is that we allow engineers to design roads, and we allow architects to design buildings. And I wish they'd stop doing it, to be honest. I wish they'd start designing 'places', together, collaboratively, and I think that's going to possibly be one of the things we're going to have to do in order to see change happen.

Audience member: I think we should be talking less about the cultural idiosyncrasies of Britain and more about the delivery of what we're talking about. I grew up in Stuttgart in the south of Germany, an area that is obsessed with building their own houses in suburban areas out of town, in every way exactly the same as here. One of the key things that's actually extremely different in Germany is you don't have housing and supply of housing more or less in a stranglehold of very few, very large corporations who deliver the vast majority of housing. If you look at the supply of housing over the last 30 years, the decline has been massive, especially in the public sector, vast share of housing provided by the very small number of firms. And that means that the kind of housing that is provided – to have a discussion about how that relates to where people want to live – I've just come from an event at the LSE about density and city living where Peter Hall was quoting lots of statistics about 80% of people who want to live in a bungalow - is that it's an unreal debate. The actual situation that we're in, is that there is a complete mismatch between what people desire, and the actual mechanism of the market to deliver the houses. And therefore we have to be realistic about recognizing that, and moderate the discussion and engage with people about where they might be able to live. The overwhelming experience for me is that I can't afford to live anywhere in any case. So in that case it's unreasonable to ask where I'd like to live, and in fact even when you ask people who currently have a home about what kind of home they'd like – I mean I work at CABE and the housing project research we did came up with bizarre statements about access to public transport – as if they care because they're going to be polluters anyway – I mean people have all sorts of strange views, but they don't have any importance unless you can relate them to reality of what the conditions will be, and so you have to see it in the context of what transport costs are going to be in a few years time, what are the costs going to be in supplying infrastructure locally. That will colour how people view this idea they have about where they'd like to live.

JG : It's interesting what you say. The knowledge in Britain about housing, and about how to make places to live, is actually colossal. It's also one of the richest countries in the world. You know whenever someone comes to visit you from the rest of the world they're always puzzled about why we have such gorgeous places like Kensington and Chelsea with its high density, which everyone likes living in, and then we have some of the nastiest new housing you can imagine. And yet, we're fabulously rich, and that's obviously a big political discussion.

But that thing about the stranglehold – it's intriguing, think about what you say when you go around them, I see a lot of these new housing estates and I'm fascinated by them, like a rabbit in the headlamps, and I have to look at them. I like talking to the people and asking them what they think of their new house, and most of them of course, will say they're very happy to be there. The reason is, of course, because they're happy to have a brand new home, just as people are happy when they have a brand new car for the first time, and who can blame them. It's great if you've got a new house, and you're saying you can't even afford one, like many, many people in London. But Yolande, that stranglehold does seem to create a very particular English, or is it British, form of housing...?

YB : This is such a huge area, I could say so much, but I think the first thing to know is that new home buyers are a very peculiar lot, they're not typical of the whole market and only, at the most, 20% of people would ever consider buying a new home. And the fact is that because only 10% of all the stock that turns over in a

year is a new home, that small market of 20% is drastically undersupplied. So what we've had is a situation where we're just not building enough houses.

One of the key things about Germany is that they build something like seven times as many new homes each year as we do, per head of population. And it's that supply side that's absolutely key here. And what we're not thinking enough about is what happens to land and land values when you have such extraordinarily constrained supply – a very constrained supply of land which enables this situation to persist. And I think what's really interesting is that some of the numbers in terms of settlements that are being built now, is actually going to change that, because suddenly, if you're building 2,000 units over a period of 5-10 years as you are in some places, suddenly you have to appeal to a good deal more than just those 20% of loonies who'll buy one of these rubbish new homes. And so you have to start thinking about what people actually really want, as opposed to the surveys of what people who have bought those homes tell you they want. And it's a very varied picture indeed. And I think we've not yet invented the house that a lot of people want. That simple detached, semi-detached, flat nomenclature will be irrelevant in 20 years time. What we're actually faced with is huge landowners who actually realize that they can devalue, by building rubbish, that they actually devalue the value of the surrounding land, and when you're a 20-year landowner with 200 hectares to build out over decades, the last thing you want to do is devalue your own land, so it's all going to become about placemaking. I'm optimistic; those are very strong market forces in favour of something that may end up looking a bit more like Germany.

TW : We are fundamentally suffering from market failure in terms of quality and placemaking in this country. Two things, one about supply and one about demand. Demand is interesting. I once went to a conference where I couldn't understand what the problem was – it was to do with quality housing, and I suddenly realized that we're all labouring under the misapprehension that English people wanted to buy quality houses. A complete myth.

However, assuming that they did, no-one would build them for them, because we seem to have a individualist culture on the one hand and a Fordist culture of supply on the other and if you look at the facts – I came back from Australia in December and I was staggered, in Australia for a population of 22 million they build the same number of houses every year as we do. A completely different set of circumstances, but it's really interesting in fact.

The second thing, is that in Britain the top 10 house builders – they've clearly set up a cartel - build 55% of the product, in Australia the top 100 companies build 38% of product. The state and the market together have squeezed out competition and product differentiation and all that kind of stuff. People are having to buy rubbish because that's what the market is producing and there doesn't seem to be a way at this time of putting market pressure on people to produce better. The role of the state in all this is not what it's been, which is to have a narrower sense of itself as setting planning conditions I think we need to create a new market in what the state can do with its own land, and planning.

I think Essex points the way, again, give me £20 if you like! The Essex Design Guide is actually very famous and the only part of the UK that was exempt from CABE strictures in Dec last year was Essex, which is still building well against that design guide of 25 years ago. I think the advantage you have in Essex is the market is there from the developers and you can shape it. There's hope there, that where we've got the demands and the skills in the public sector we can shape it better, but we're not doing a very good job nationally.

YB : I think Tim saved himself, but let's not call it 'market failure', please, because I think that actually the issue here is that there's a lack of market because land is so constrained in its supply and that's the root of a hugely distorted market.

JG : We all know we have a distorted housing market, because we're here! We're here in London, and it's a most wonderful monster, heaven and hell all mixed up, it just is a separate island in Britain and it's gobbling up the economy and also generating it as well. I'd love to go around the audience a bit – has anyone been around anywhere like a suburban development in Britain that you actually think is really good?

Audience member: I think we need to go back to the historical references that we've got. Many of our finest architects were engaged on some of the best suburban architecture in the country – look at Bedford Park, at Hampstead Garden Suburb, I'm an architect and I'm also a commercial housebuilder. We can do it, there's no difficulty whatsoever, where the difficulty lies in this profession is that housing has always been a Cinderella of the design industry. All architects want to build airports, shopping centres... if you go to the RIBA bookshop do you find books on commercial housing? You won't find one, or a critique on commercial housing. I've been hundreds of times and it's not there. It's on public housing or, one off wonky houses in Arizona. That's all there is. Until the architect, their role is reflected in their design, good quality commercial architecture, this problem will never be solved.

JG : Very interesting – it's the same in the media and in publishing – you have to fight to write about things like housing, but you can write anything you like about the latest whizzy, groovy, super iconic buildings...

Audience member again :... I also would object to the consideration that density, somehow, reduces the quality of design. You've argued amongst yourselves and you've proved quite categorically to the audience that the quality of the urban design of Kensington is excellent and there are parts of Paris where densities are enormous, and yet there's lots of very low density that's absolutely appalling. So I think that's a complete red herring. We've built developments of 375 units per hectare, which have been extremely well received and are very high quality spaces to live...

JG : Where are they?

...In Winchester. An urban situation. And we have one that's starting which is 15 houses per hectare and we've put all their parking underground, because we didn't want the car to dominate the scheme. It can be done. But the architect's got to be interested in it, and we're not interested in it. And I think that's one of the fundamental problems and I'd like to see the RIBA come in and assist this problem...

JG : You're obviously a very good fighter. When you actually do these things do you actually talk like you do...

... I address councils, committees...

JG : In that kind of very forthright way, and it works?

...yes, and I don't try these emotive tactics of saying we design for the family, because families occupy a very small percentage of the clients, the biggest percentage are singles and couples, they're the people who are buying properties, and therefore who we should be designing for.

TW : I disagree with that fundamentally, in London. I understand why you say it, but the ethnic fact of London is not only that it's increasingly diverse but that it's about families. We will be building for families again and if we don't want to build them in cities I think that's a shame....

I used to wonder why there were so many Asian families in Redbridge and not in Barking and it wasn't racism, it was that there were 4 bedroom houses in Redbridge, and none in Barking. So we're exporting our families because we were not building family housing in London.

RM : Can I just respond to that? Demographically, across the whole nation, my understanding is that 49% of family units are traditional families with children, and 51% are single or couples without children, so a slightly greater preponderance of the latter, but what's happening in cities like Manchester for example is that there's been enormous demand for central city living, consequently over a decade or so the numbers of single people, or couples in the centre has grown from a few thousand to 20-25,000 and they're housed in flats. Those young people mostly, they then have to make a decision, when they want to bring up a family, about where they go, and generally speaking what then happens is that they emigrate out of the city centre to the south-west suburbs.

The challenge for cities, like Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool and so on, is whether they can create the sorts of environment which we've all been kind of circling around, which with public transport – taking the Manchester example – the tram system could allow the edge of city to give people 20 minute access or even less to the city centre and provide them with family accommodation at a high enough density to sustain that transport and all kinds of functions and amenities and retailing in local centres. And that's a huge challenge. I think – we've been skirting around Milton Keynes and so on and so forth, but I think the big challenge is actually to create edge of city environments that intensify the edge of the cities and are attractive in the lifestyle they offer to families.

AB : I'd like to come back to the lady who asked 'do architects not like to design houses?' Yes, we do but do you think any house builders will take us on? No they won't, because they do their pattern books, their dog box houses and they don't care about design. If they were to do good quality suburban housing the answer is the row, terraced house. It creates a community, it allows communication between people, and the best place to put it is not beside a road engineered half-way through the country 20 miles away from the nearest train point. If you want to do good sustainable, quality housing use good architects. Good design doesn't cost money – use good architects, and the reason there are no books on all the housing that you asked for is because it's so bad, such bad quality, that nobody would buy it.

Audience member: I think there are a few good examples of good suburban developments built in the last couple of years, by primitive developers and not particularly far from here. One would be New Hall Farm in Harlow and some of the work there, and the other one would be Accordia in Cambridge, and they're both built by Countryside, and they both make sensible and enlightening choices about what to do with the space in order to increase the density, so they both have innovative solutions from the point of view of the initial design of the house, so they avoid the kind of box approach that you describe, and they also don't fall back on a previous solution, they think of new ways of integrating car parking with housing, or new ways with dealing with overlooking, or with private external space.

DB : Because New Hall Farm is in Essex I'll respond to that. I've recently looked at Accordia and they're both very impressive, for very different quality schemes. I think they tick one of my boxes – I mentioned identity, sustainability and environment, and they're very good on quality, but they're lousy on sustainability. New Hall Farm is remote. You can't get there unless you get in your car. Eco efficiency does not register in Accordia or New Hall. And if you want to look for wild life in those places you'll be looking for an awfully long time. And I think Tim is absolutely right, there are just not enough good examples ticking enough boxes for people to say 'this is a fantastic place I'd like to live here'. And this is what I think sub-urbanity is about in the future. We need more models that check more boxes on the ground as good working examples. But we

can't deny that there are of course some good things happening, and you're right to mention these two, because they're good, but they could be a lot better. The next generation of schemes, and we're working closely with Countryside on that, will be even better.

Audience member: I think that the bad builders we've been talking about have been spoon fed by the government because they have never had to take responsibility for transport, water supply, or power, and I think if we're going to loosen up and give more land for building, which seems to be an opinion that's around at the moment, we must make big builders responsible for absolutely everything. That way, they will think it through much more carefully.

I belong to the Chilterns Society as well as being an architect, and I'm aware that under the Chilterns the water table has dropped 4m in the last 10 years under about 50sq miles of land. That's not funny. We're being told we've got to have another 20,000 houses in Hertfordshire, but we're not being told how we're going to give water to those people. And this is another factor which is not being taken in. Nobody's mentioned services, except roads, nobody's mentioned jobs and how do you get to them if they come from the suburbs.

JG : We certainly mentioned jobs, but one of the things that's intriguing is there's a particular number of houses that a house builder can build on a certain size of land without getting involved in the stuff you're talking about. That's right isn't it?

TW : No, I don't think there's a rule of thumb like that. But just to let you know, in the new guidance we're rolling out, new guidance that says that every single new home in Essex, 120-off thousand in the next 20 years, has got to have water recycling facilities in it. Every home has got to regenerate at least 10% of its energy requirements. The larger developments, that Yolande's involved with, have to regenerate 100% of its energy on site. So there are things that can be done to bring forward those issues in a responsible way, and it'll be up to other governments within the country to take on board these issues. And unless we deal with them head on, I think you're absolutely right to raise them, because they are central to new urbanism and the way we live our lives in the future, and unless we hit them head on we're going to miss our carbon reduction targets by an absolute mile.

Audience member: I've been interested to hear Poundbury mentioned several times. I actually grew up in Dorchester before I went to University in Sheffield, and I think it's interesting that while it's often received architectural criticism for its obvious stylistic agenda it seems to me that a colleague of mine, who's done a dissertation on it where she interviewed a lot of the people there, were all extremely satisfied. And in fact it addresses many of the things you've spoken about this evening. There were provision of jobs in the place, there are shops, public space, private gardens, there's less differentiation between roads and pavements, for example, incidentally I often cycle up there, and a lot of my friends do. And I think that whilst people dislike it for its visual impact, people absolutely love it. I don't necessarily think it's a good thing, but I think it's worth noting.

But my point, is that it's become so successful that it's actually undone itself with all of the good things – for example the people who would work in the chocolate factory there can't afford to, because it's so successful they've boosted the prices, so it's now become a middle-class, elderly resident ghetto and it's draining the life out of Dorchester.

JG : And they're starting to propose blocks of flats now too, aren't they, which are very controversial. The last question now.

Audience member Can I come in about a Span [Environments] scheme which is near our office which is in Twickenham, called Mallard Place – a combination of an architect being directly involved and having a community-based idea about developments... but the two things about Mallard Place, one is that it's going into a very loose-ish London suburb that was quite revolutionary at the time, built at 50 houses per hectare, and the great thing with it is the quality of the public realm and the fact that the way it's managed has managed to preserve it for years and years and it's got better and better. The advantage was that the residents were taking part in the maintenance and therefore had ownership and therefore a very strong sense of community and quality and an interest in maintaining the quality of the place.

The other point was the impact of technology on spatial planning in a macro sense, which we haven't touched on. There's always under the surface this tendency to want to go back. We all have this slightly idealized view of urban places and the qualities we like about them. We've got this very strong force working against this which is what technology is doing, which is essentially to take away to some extent the interactions that we used to have with one another – with neighbours and so on – technology is working against us and enables us to be connected globally, let alone locally, and its tending to mean we're not participating in the same way that we used to in these encounters.

JG : You're points are excellent and a very good time probably to pause and gather our thoughts. You can't help thinking that between us, and you multiply this across other councils and debates, practices and living rooms, people across the country, the knowledge is there, the desire is there, the interest is there and the skill is there for us to create really good places for people to live, but somehow it doesn't quite connect. But partly we live in this swashbuckling economy – one of the most ultra-capitalist in the world, very successful in many ways, and in that though we're rising on a crest of a wave and we need to argue at every possible moment about how we might live and people have to be brave in audiences, architects, committees, governments and really keep arguing about this issue. It's a vast one and it won't go away. Thanks ever so much for coming and please thank the panel, Richard MacCormac, David Balcombe, Angela Brady, Dominic Papa and Yolande Barnes. Thank you very much indeed.