

**INSIGHT**  
**DECEMBER 2019**

# How does your garden grow?

A stock take on planning for the  
Government's Garden Communities  
programme



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# Executive summary



Large-scale new developments have a long-established role in helping to meet housing needs, and have at times received formal Government support. The latest iteration – Garden Communities – was launched in 2014, and the programme now includes 49 projects extending across all regions of England.

Lichfields has reviewed all 49 projects to help establish an evidence baseline for the programme. We find it is currently set to provide 403,000 homes, up to 182 new primary schools and 56 secondary schools, and 600 or more hectares of employment land - supporting 1.3m additional jobs over its construction period to 2050. Areas with Garden Communities have been allocated an estimated £1.35bn of Housing Infrastructure Funding (HIF) spend, around 40% of the total so far.

Based on an indicative trajectory using industry benchmarks, we conclude the programme is unlikely to be delivering homes at scale until after the next electoral cycle, but by the 2030s could be delivering up to 16,000 dwellings per annum based on typical build rates, and potentially more where government support enables it.

However, none of this is certain. Garden Communities status is not a 'golden ticket' to securing planning permission (or indeed Government funding). Only a third have a permission and or an allocation in an adopted plan. Another third, are in emerging plans and a full 30% are yet to achieve formal planning status. This means two thirds still need to establish the principle of development and are therefore subject to ongoing levels of planning risk. Such risks have already resulted in delays to some schemes, often due to unanswered questions over whether they are deliverable. The onus is on promoters and local authorities to assemble the evidence-base necessary to pass the key NPPF test of soundness.

We find that many Local Plans rely heavily on Garden Communities, where they are allocated, to sustain their housing requirements over the next fifteen years. As such, any delays risk significantly undermining the plan-led system, and could open the door to speculative applications on unallocated sites. This highlights the importance of authorities being confident over deliverability when writing their plans.

We draw four conclusions on how to measure the success of the programme:

1. Large-scale development projects can take a long time to begin delivering. By its very nature, the Garden Communities programme would not be expected to reach critical mass of delivery until the 2030s. It is only at this point that one can draw firm conclusions about its efficacy in bringing forward new homes.
2. The programme plays a dual role: firstly, the Garden Community designation helps Councils and developers, as Government endorses the promotion of strategic sites through the plan-making process, while simultaneously - via planning inspectors - playing a role in scrutinising the acceptability of such projects. Secondly, it supports implementation and delivery of large extant permissions where the principle has been established, through funding and 'soft' measures such as advice and brokerage.
3. There is no readily-available body of evidence to help understand the nature of the programme, its scale, what success will look like, and what metrics one should use to measure its progress, effectiveness and additionality. We have plugged this gap with some of the core facts and figures in this report, which can hopefully provide a baseline for future evaluation. But there remains little basis at present to make any comparative assessment of the quality of places that will be created and to what extent they adopt the "key qualities" identified in the Government Prospectus;
4. The programme is heterogenous in terms of the types of development that it supports. Whilst the Government Prospectus did provide some criteria for appraising bids (including with reference to Garden City Principles), the context, location and forms of development emerging through the programme do not appear to follow a particular template. This diversity reflects that the proposals are locally-led, and may not itself be undesirable – but it does raise questions of expectation – is there a sufficiently clear understanding of what a 'Garden Community' is intended to represent?

# Key figures

49

designated Garden Communities

403,000

homes proposed within designated Garden Communities programme, accommodating up to a million residents

£87 bn

is the economic impact of the programme, supporting 1.3m jobs

600 hectares

of employment land provision identified on 31 projects; grossed up to the programme, could accommodate 350,000 jobs

189,000

homes are allocated in post-NPPF 2012 adopted and emerging Local Plans (45%), while 81,000 have outline planning permission and 14,000 have been completed

182

primary schools and 56 secondary schools (up to)

47%

of Garden Communities (23 of 49) had existing allocations or permissions at the time of designation

30%

is the average proportion of adopted and emerging Local Plan housing requirements met by Garden Community allocations in those local authority areas; in one area it is as high as 67%

10-16,000

homes per annum from 2025 until 2050, c.4,000 homes per annum up to 2024

35%

of Garden Community homes are in standalone new settlements, the rest being in settlements linked to existing towns (32%), and urban extensions (33%)

8%

of Garden Community homes are within 800m of a rail station, a third of homes were within 2km

# 01 Introduction

The idea of large-scale new settlements has a long history in Britain, with philanthropically-motivated new communities preceding the 1946 New Towns Act, and the 'Eco Towns' programme of the 2000s. The latest iteration - "Garden Communities" - was introduced in December 2014 by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG, then DCLG). Cumulatively, the 49 Garden Communities now identified in England propose around 403,000 new homes and could accommodate up to a million residents. They comprise 33 garden villages of between 1,500 and 10,000 homes, 15 garden towns of over 10,000 homes each, and one garden city of over 15,000 homes at Ebbsfleet, the latter overseen by an Urban Development Corporation as its local planning authority<sup>1</sup>.

Under the programme, these projects are led by Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) and the private sector working together, with government providing "a tailored package of Government support that includes resource funding, expert delivery advice from Homes England and cross-government brokerage to resolve barriers to delivery."<sup>2</sup>

Up to 3.3m new homes need to be identified in local plans over the next five years<sup>3</sup> so these projects – and future new settlement proposals – are likely to be a continuing feature of the planning landscape. The NPPF 2019 places a new emphasis on larger scale development, stating that "the supply of a large numbers of new homes can often be best achieved through planning for larger scale development, such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages and towns". However, it also notes the long timescales implicit, requiring a 'realistic assessment' of these "given the lead-in times for large scale sites", as well as the need for "the delivery of large-scale developments... to extend beyond an individual plan period". It is therefore helpful to understand how the Garden Communities – as signature projects benefitting from Government support – are progressing, particularly if that model of development is to be replicated more widely in the next generation of local plans.

In this report we look at all 49 of the Government's designated Garden Communities to give a planning-focused overview of the programme; the progress and characteristics of each Garden Community project; its relationship with housing demand and supply in the local area; and how the current crop of Garden Communities will be delivered in relation to the Local Plan process. This can provide the baseline for an objective review of the performance of the programme as it is implemented over coming decades.



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<sup>1</sup> The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation was established in legislation under The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (Area and Constitution) Order 2015, and decides planning applications, provides pre-application advice and carries out planning enforcement in its area, but does not have plan-making powers.

<sup>2</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/734145/Garden\\_Communities\\_Prospectus.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/734145/Garden_Communities_Prospectus.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Based on applying the Standard Method and a 15-year minimum plan period, having taken into account the scale of housing allocations in current adopted Local Plans and their review timescales. Adopting the 300,000 per annum ambition, up to 9m homes could be required by 2050. In that context, the 403,000 identified in current Garden Communities are small scale.

Figure 1: Tree chart showing Garden Community projects by size



Note: Project details are based on a review of various data sources and may be subject to change.

Source: Lichfields analysis



# O2

## What are Garden Communities?

49

designated Garden Communities totalling 403,000 homes

33

Garden Villages of 1,500 to 9,999 homes

15

Garden Towns of 10,000 to 43,000 homes

1

Garden City of 15,000 homes

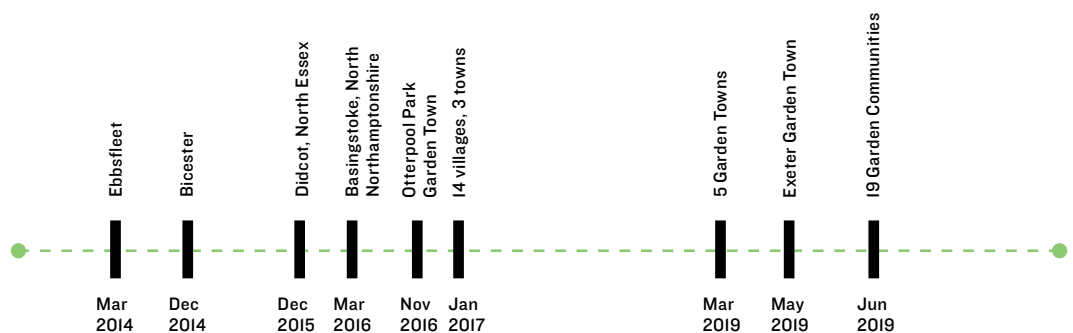
We do not intend to delve into the history of the term 'Garden Community' in any great detail, but it is helpful to have some context for the current programme.

Between 1946 and 1970, 22 New Towns were designated, many of which delivered upwards of 25,000 homes each up to 1991, when the programme closed<sup>4</sup>. Since the New Town programme, the conception of new and expanded towns has tended to be privately-led; Cramlington in Northumberland was a housebuilder-led New Town, supported by the county council and underpinned by state planning powers. South Woodham Ferrers in Essex was similarly supported by the use of Comprehensive Development Area (CDA) powers. In the 1980s, a number of house builders combined as Consortium Developments Ltd to launch a privately-initiated (and controversial) programme of up to 15 'new country towns' across the wider South East, each of around 5,000 dwellings; none were built<sup>5</sup>. A 1992 review of New Settlements

by the then Department of Environment<sup>6</sup> identified 120 proposed schemes in various stages of progression, most of them speculative and all privately-promoted.

In 2007, the Government committed to building ten new 'Eco Towns', and a new Planning Policy Statement was published in 2009 to guide their development. However, just four sites were eventually approved, after significant local opposition at consultation stage<sup>7</sup>. Initially, only one of these designations, Northstowe in Cambridge, was carried forward by the Coalition Government, but Northstowe does not form part of the current Garden Communities programme. More recently, both the 'eco-town' at North West Bicester in Oxfordshire and the St Austell and Clay Country Ecotown in Cornwall have been rolled forward into a Garden Town and Garden Village, respectively. Arguably, the new town at Ebbsfleet is also an extension of policy from that time.

Figure 2: Timeline of Garden Community designations



Source: Lichfields analysis

<sup>4</sup> NIC (2017), Planning and Delivery Analysis

<sup>5</sup> The Foxley Wood proposal was considered at a public inquiry and initially supported by then-Secretary of State the Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP, before being refused by his successor Chris Patten MP in 1990

<sup>6</sup> DoE (1992) Alternative Development Patterns: New Settlements, HMSO

<sup>7</sup> <https://theecologist.org/2012/apr/02/what-has-happened-uks-eco-towns>



# 03 The Current Garden Communities Programme

The current crop of Garden Communities are located throughout the country, with at least one Garden Community in each English region<sup>8</sup>, designated by government for funding and support. The term has broadened to define quite different major projects, from 'the first modern garden city', Ebbsfleet, with 15,000 homes, designated in 2014; to a series of extensions to the existing town of Basingstoke.

In 2017, seven interrelated projects at varying stages in the planning process were designated as a single Garden Community in Northamptonshire, some urban extensions, some functionally linked to existing settlements, and some freestanding. The most recent round of announcements in June 2019 added a further 19 Garden Communities, which share few characteristics save for their scale;

with proposals for between 1,500 and 9,999 in Garden Villages, and Garden Towns as large as 43,000 homes (spread across multiple sites in North Essex); and their broad placemaking ambitions.

This heterogeneity suggests that the designation reflects the scale and ambition of delivery, rather than urban form, self-containment, or other morphological and urban design issues traditionally referred to as Garden City principles.

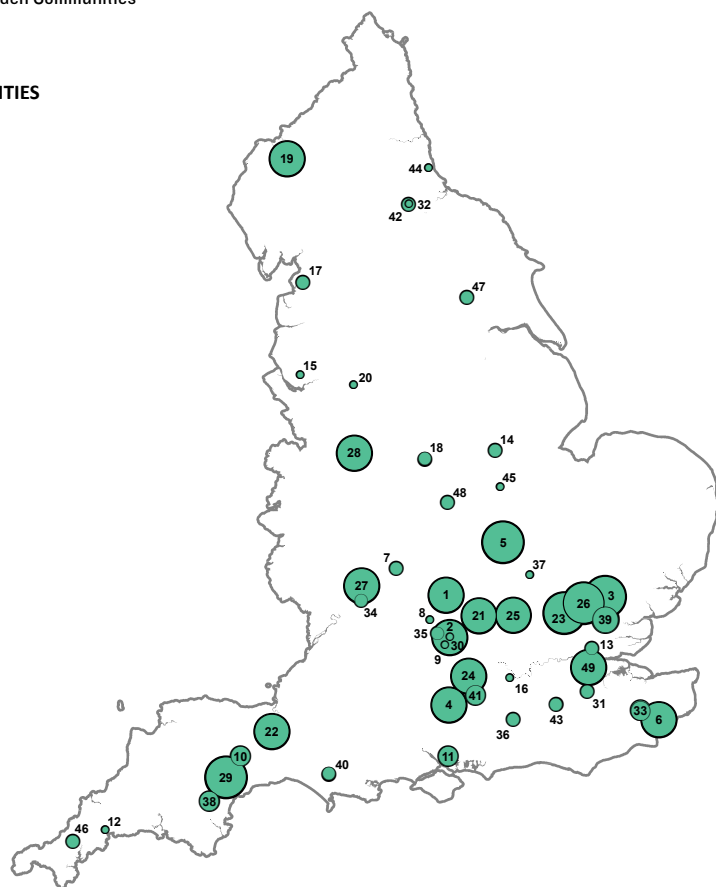
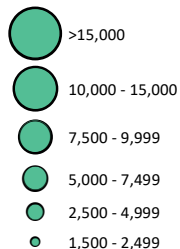
The nomenclature presents some issues in that the larger Garden Villages of 4,000-5,000 homes would be - on most measures - comparable in size to existing settlements that are comparable referred to as towns.

1. Bicester
2. Didcot
3. North Essex
4. Basingstoke
5. North Northamptonshire
6. Otterpool Park
7. Long Marston
8. Eylesham
9. Deenethorpe
10. Culm
11. Welborne
12. West Carclaze
13. Dunton Hills
14. Spitalgate Heath
15. Halsnead
16. Longcross
17. Bailrigg
18. Infinity
19. St Cuthberts
20. Handforth
21. Aylesbury
22. Taunton
23. Harlow & Gilston
24. Grazeley
25. Hemel
26. Uttlesford
27. Tewkesbury Ashchurch
28. Meecebrook
29. Exeter
30. Berinsfield
31. Borough Green
32. Burtree
33. Chilmington
34. Cyber Central
35. Dalton Barracks
36. Dunsfold Park
37. Biggleswade
38. Newton Abbot
39. North East Chelmsford
40. North Dorchester
41. Shapely Hill
42. Skerningham
43. South Godstone
44. South Seaham
45. St George's Barracks
46. Threemilestone
47. West of Elvington
48. Whetstone Pastures
49. Ebbsfleet

Figure 3: Map of 49 Garden Communities

## GARDEN COMMUNITIES

Total number of units



Source: Lichfields analysis

<sup>8</sup> English region as defined by the former Government Office Regions

# 04 Planning Progress

20%

of garden communities homes have at least outline planning permission

30%

of garden communities homes have no planning status

Given the heterogeneity of the projects, it is unsurprising that Garden Communities progress through the planning process at differing rates and on variable pathways. As described in the 2016 prospectus: “There is no single model for the garden villages we expect to support...[they] may, for example, be on land currently allocated for housing or currently outside the Local Plan”<sup>9</sup>.

Garden communities are necessarily long-term projects often spanning time periods longer than the 15-20 years typically covered by local plans or land supply strategies. When the Government announces a Garden Community at an early stage of the scheme, the project must still go through the formal planning process, usually comprising an allocation in the Local Plan, the granting of outline and then detailed planning permission/reserved matters.

Our research finds that around half of the homes in Garden Communities currently have some planning status, either as adopted or emerging allocations, or outline permissions (see Figure 4). A number of

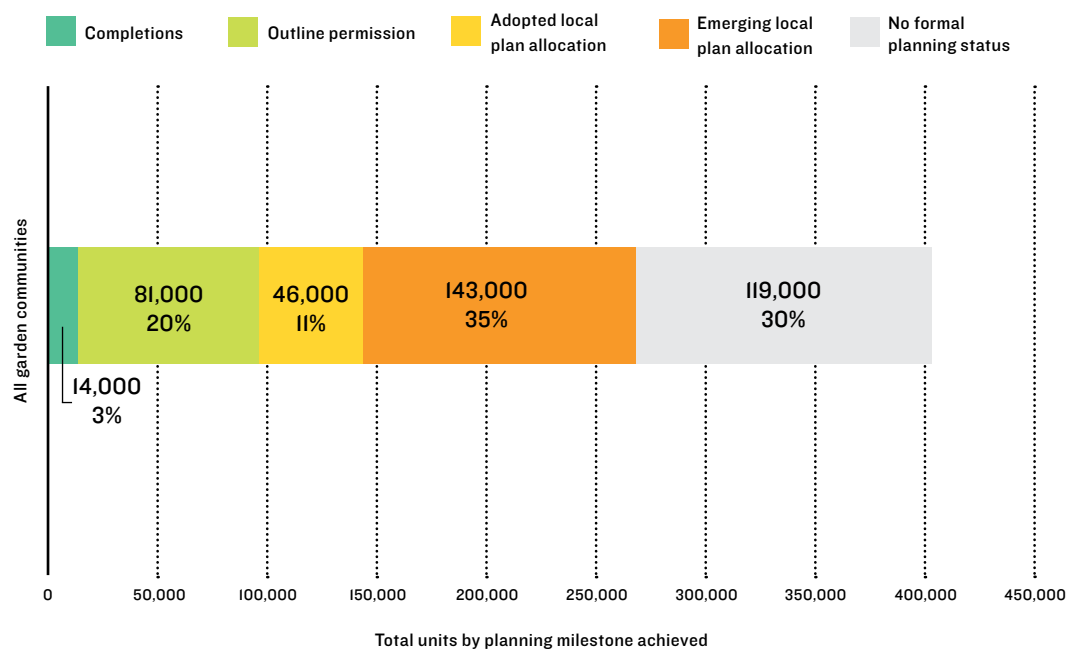
Garden Communities have already delivered completions. However this leaves around a third of homes have no formal planning status at all. Two thirds are therefore subject to ongoing levels of planning risk.

## Local Plan process

We have reviewed the planning status of the Garden Communities projects, including any allocations in place in adopted and emerging Local Plans, as well as any outline permissions, in the context of the total capacity (i.e. number of homes) put forward by Government<sup>10</sup>.

In some cases, we could not match existing allocations with Government’s estimated housing capacity of Garden Communities. Indeed, we found that at least 55,000 homes, or 18% of the government’s headline housing figure, are on sites which already have an allocation, but which would involve delivery beyond those initial allocations or beyond the Local Plan period in question. However the Government’s figures appear to be guidelines rather than maximum delivery figures.

Figure 4: Planning status of Garden Communities homes



Source: Lichfields analysis

<sup>9</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/733047/Locally-led\\_garden\\_villages\\_\\_towns\\_and\\_cities\\_archived.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733047/Locally-led_garden_villages__towns_and_cities_archived.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cash-boost-to-help-build-200000-homes-in-new-garden-towns>

We found that local authorities containing Garden Communities were no more likely to have an adopted local plan than the average. 23% of homes within the programme are located in LPAs which have not submitted any Local Plan under the NPPF, identical to the rate for all LPAs across the country<sup>11</sup>. We found no correlation in the age of an adopted local plan and the date of Garden Community designation, and one third of homes in the Garden Communities programme are in LPAs which have only recently submitted a local plan and which remains at examination (albeit that at the time of Garden Communities designation, plan submission may not have yet occurred).

Where the Garden Community project was allocated in a Local Plan, its proportionate contribution to the total housing requirement of that plan varied significantly (see Figure 5). We estimate that in the 24 area with Garden Community allocations in adopted plans, allocations made up on average 30% of the total housing requirement within that plan,

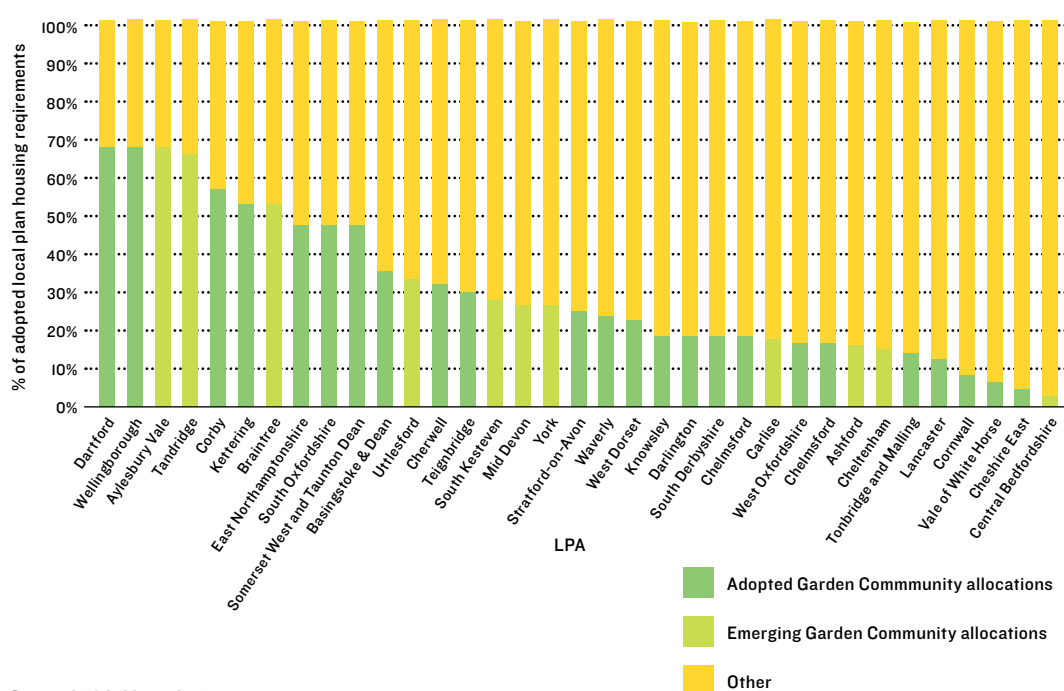
but this proportion is up to two thirds in some local authority areas, where the ability to sustain a five-year housing land supply will be overwhelmingly dependent on successful implementation of the Garden Village. A similar proportion of homes were allocated in emerging local plans, but there was some overlap in these groups, because some Garden Communities appeared to include both sites allocated in adopted plans, as well as new sites in emerging plans. In some cases, the emerging plan comprised a Plan review, for example in Fareham and Cherwell, with additional sites in emerging plans. In some cases, the emerging plan comprised a Plan review, for example in Fareham and Cherwell, with additional sites and/or capacity being identified in the Garden Community to meet new levels of housing need.



There is no single model for the garden villages we expect to support...[they] may, for example, be on land currently allocated for housing or currently outside the Local Plan.

**MHCLG, Garden Communities Prospectus 2016**

Figure 5: Proportion of Local Plan requirement accounted for by Garden Communities (adopted and emerging)



Source: Lichfields analysis

<sup>11</sup> As at November, 2019.

## Planning tools for delivery

Around half of Garden Communities (23/49, accounting for 52% of homes) already had some adopted allocations or outline permissions at the time when they were designated by Government. This suggests that in some cases, the designations are existing projects that have been 'badged' as Garden Communities and/or their place within the programme is intended to signal support for their delivery rather than to establish the principle of development.

Equally, the Government designated Shapley Heath Garden Community less than four months after an Inspector requested that Hart District Council remove the surrounding Winchfield Green area of search (including the Shapley Heath site) from its Local Plan<sup>12</sup>, albeit with an early review recommended to reconsider the matter<sup>13</sup>. This suggests the Government is not shy in endorsing schemes and seeking to help establish the principle of development in locations where the case for development is demonstrably not yet proven.

A number of the LPAs containing a designated Garden Community are in the process of preparing joint plans (both new style Joint Strategic Plans, and joint Local Plans), clearly in part due to the need to coordinate the delivery of these new communities, which in some instances are proposed on cross boundary sites or to meet cross boundary needs. Braintree, Colchester and Tendring in Essex submitted a shared Local Plan in 2017 which remains at examination pending further technical work requested by the Inspector on deliverability of its three new Garden Communities. In 2016, Corby, East Northamptonshire, Kettering and Wellingborough adopted a Joint Core Strategy which contains seven new settlements and

urban extensions. Other areas such as Greater Exeter and South West Herts are in the early stages of preparing new Joint Strategic Plans, which will see proposals for Garden Communities in those areas. Joint plans are therefore a key mechanism being used to deliver Garden Communities.

Looking beyond site allocations or broad locations identified in local plans, and outline planning applications, there is no single pathway for how the planning system supports delivery of Garden Communities. Differing local circumstances, including local plan progress, are likely to have an impact on the planning tool used to provide the necessary detailed framework to shape implementation. Indeed, many Garden Communities are being delivered without specific statutory planning mechanisms, such as Area Action Plans, in place.

Guidance from Homes England<sup>14</sup> suggests four planning tools or mechanisms that can be used to help deliver Garden Communities. They aim to balance the interests of a wide range of stakeholders to provide differing levels of certainty and to resolve showstopping issues such as infrastructure provision and timing. They benefit from a flexibility that also reflects differing local plan contexts. While some authorities use these mechanisms to resolve delivery issues, other Garden Communities may be delivered without them, and all the mechanisms can be used for other new long-term and large-scale projects not designated by Government as part of the current programme. Table 1 summarises the four tools and their take up across the 49 projects so far.

<sup>12</sup> The Inspector's interim findings on the Hart Local Plan (February 2019) found in respect of the new settlement that: "it cannot be determined that it represents the most appropriate long-term growth strategy [and] there is little evidence to demonstrate that a site can actually be delivered in terms of infrastructure, viability and landownership within the identified AoS [Area of Search]"

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.hart.gov.uk/garden-community>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/garden-communities/planning-policy>

Table 1: Planning tools being used to deliver Garden Communities

Statutory Planning Tools (plans require sustainability appraisals)	
<p><b>DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS:</b></p> <p>e.g. Ebbsfleet (Urban Development Corporation)</p>	<p><b>ALLOCATION-SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT (including an area action plan):</b></p> <p>e.g. Bailrigg, Chilmington, North East Chelmsford, St Cuthberts, Threemilestone.</p>
<p>A New Town Development Corporation can take on certain roles of a local planning authority. For example, making a local plan and investing in infrastructure or land assembly that unlocks development.</p> <p>It requires a new arm's length body, to be created by parliament under the New Towns Act 1981.</p> <p>No New Town Development Corporations have been formed in relation to Garden Communities to date. But in October 2019, the Government consulted on potential reforms to the Development Corporation regime to help locally led development corporations to support the delivery of Garden Communities .</p> <p>Ebbsfleet is being delivered through an Urban Development Corporation, (established through Local Government and Land Act 1980). It did not require the full powers described above, as outline permission for the Garden City had already been granted.</p>	<p>These allocation-specific development plan documents (DPDs), in effect, supersede or supplement a local plan. They can help where schemes cross local plan boundaries, or to resolve otherwise 'showstopping' issues such as infrastructure delivery or Green Belt release. Additionally, they can be used to focus broad locations of search into specific sites.</p> <p>DPDs are prepared by LPAs and provide a higher level of certainty as they can establish the principal of development. They are subject to the same sustainability appraisals and examinations as local plans.</p> <p>Seven Garden Communities have Area Action Plans in place or being prepared. No Garden Communities appear to be using other DPDs.</p>
Non- Statutory Planning Tools (do not require sustainability appraisals)	
<p><b>SITE-SPECIFIC SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENTS (SPDS):</b></p> <p>e.g. Culm, Dalton, Handforth, Long Marston, Welborne</p>	<p><b>OTHER NON-STATUTORY MECHANISMS:</b></p> <p>e.g. Infinity, Welborne, Shapley Heath</p>
<p>Produced by LPAs, SPDs provide guidance for the development management process rather than establishing the principal of development in a specific location.</p> <p>They are typically focused on design and placemaking and are highly flexible.</p> <p>They can establish detailed guidelines as to the design and layout, but in future some of this may be covered by local iterations of the new National Model Design Code.</p> <p>At least 13 Garden Communities are supported by an SPD, one of which followed an Area Action Plan.</p>	<p>Alongside SPDs, there are several other non-statutory planning documents often prepared by LPAs with the private sector to set the principles and provide guidance for the delivery of a Garden Community.</p> <p>These are typically flexible and can vary in their scale and specificity.</p> <p>We found eight examples of Garden communities using SPDs. These include masterplans, development briefs, or vision documents which set out the future of an area outside of the Local Plan process and provide a platform for public and private sector collaboration and public consultation.</p>

Source: Lichfields analysis

<sup>15</sup> MHCLG, Development Corporation Reform Technical consultation, October 2019

**14,000**

homes completed  
so far as part of the  
programme

**81,000**

homes have outline  
permission.

## Planning Permissions

Many Garden Communities include proposals which were progressing before their inclusion within the Programme. In some, planning permission for a portion of the scheme (and in some cases construction) had begun prior to designation as a Garden Community.

Approximately 81,000 homes in Garden Communities currently have at least outline planning permission (excluding completions). At the time of writing, a further 18,000 homes have submitted outline applications, not yet determined, bringing the total to 100,000 homes, or one quarter of the Garden Communities programme total already in the pipeline.

However, not all Garden Communities have sailed through planning: in addition to the problems experienced at Shapley Heath with the Hart Local Plan and the North Essex Garden Communities, in Bicester Garden Town, an application for 300 homes at the Gavray Drive site was refused by Cherwell District Council, and dismissed, in spite of a Local Plan allocation, due to the proposal not meeting a site-specific Local Plan policy requiring green infrastructure provision on site<sup>16</sup>.

## Completions

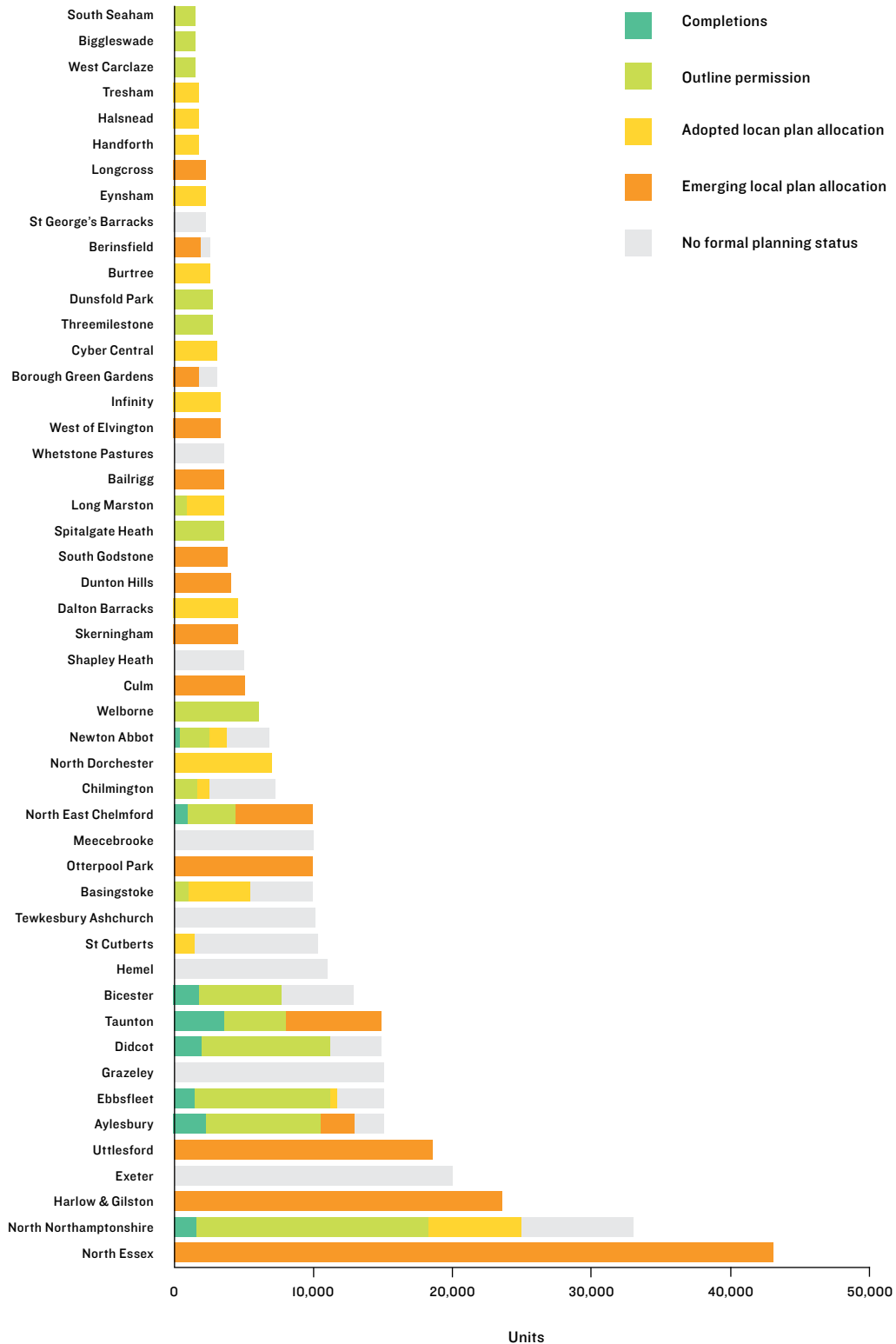
Garden Communities have already delivered approximately 14,000 completions up to April 2019, with the vast majority of these within Garden Towns as opposed to Garden Villages.

Where Garden Communities have already begun to deliver, they have typically comprised extensions to existing settlements. Bicester, Aylesbury and Didcot alone make up around 14% of homes already completed in Garden Communities.

These towns are progressing a number of smaller sites on their outer perimeters, which in Bicester range from 300 homes, to 6,000 at Kingsmere; in Aylesbury from 1,000 homes to 3,254 (3,254 allocated, 3,111 with outline permission, and 1,776 completed as of April 2019); and in Didcot from 1,700 to 4,254 (800 allocated in the adopted Local Plan, 4,254 with outline permission). North Northamptonshire and Taunton also had significant numbers of completions at major sites such as Priors Hall, adjacent to Corby; and Monkton Heathfield on the edge of Taunton, while Ebbsfleet is now delivering at pace.

<sup>16</sup> Appeal Reference: APP/C3105/W/17/3189611. In dismissing the proposals, the Inspector observed that "Bicester's status as the UK's first Garden Town, and the Eco Town development to the northwest of Bicester, were drawn to my attention by the appellants and by those opposing the appeal proposal, each in support of their case. Neither designation is determinative, but both appear to be allied to the aim of Bicester I3, namely securing sustainable development on sustainable sites by balancing housing delivery with (among other things) environmental enhancements. The appeal proposal does not achieve this." (DL61)

Figure 6: Status of Garden Community projects and homes



Source: Lichfields analysis

Figure 7: Map of Garden Communities by Status

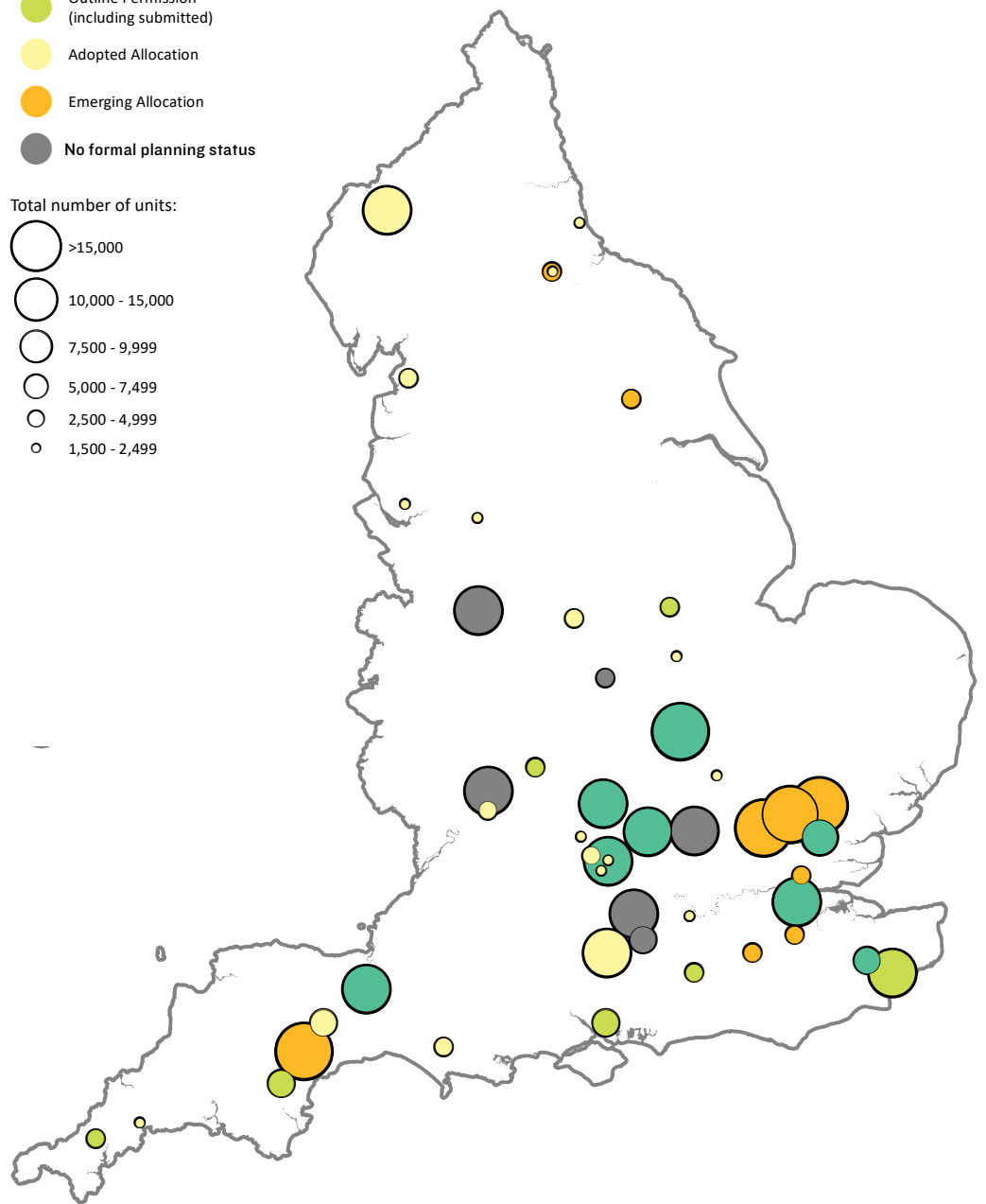
**GARDEN COMMUNITIES**

Status Milestone:

- Construction
- Outline Permission (including submitted)
- Adopted Allocation
- Emerging Allocation
- No formal planning status

Total number of units:

- >15,000
- 10,000 - 15,000
- 7,500 - 9,999
- 5,000 - 7,499
- 2,500 - 4,999
- 1,500 - 2,499



Source: Lichfields analysis



## Delivery trajectory

To understand the trajectory of housing delivery from Garden Communities, we have applied average build rates and lead in times by size of site from our Start to Finish 2 publication<sup>17</sup> to create a national Garden Communities trajectory (Figure 8). This indicative delivery timeline accounts for the stage at which individual sites and schemes within the programme have already reached, including any completions and outline permissions that have occurred, but does not account for potential variations in build out rates over time on individual sites (e.g. ramping up of delivery in the early years once full permission has been granted). We have not assembled this with a view to presenting a position on the trajectories of individual projects for the purposes of assessing individual plans; it is an attempt to estimate the trajectory of the overall programme.

Our modelling suggests the Garden Communities programme will take until at least 2050 to build out fully before consideration of any unforeseen delays or specific measures to accelerate build-out. Based on our assumptions<sup>18</sup>, the programme will deliver only around 21,000 homes over the next

five years, before significantly increasing for the period from 2025 and ramping up to a peak rate of delivery of around 16,000 per annum after 2030 continuing until about 2044 before tapering (to 13,000 dwellings per annum) by the late 2040s

Caution is required, as there can be substantial variation in build out rates, both in terms of individual sites, as well as for sites over their lifespan of delivery. For example, our Start to Finish 2 research found that peak delivery could be up to 75% higher than average delivery across all years. Exogenous factors such as market conditions, planning policy changes and changes to financing are all likely to play a part in this, and of course one of the aims of the Government support that Garden Communities can attract is to help increase the pace of their delivery. However, the indicative timeline usefully shows how long it might take the Garden Village programme to achieve its housing output goals if average build rates were applied. We can conclude that Garden Communities will deliver a significant number of homes, but the more significant impact will not be seen until well after the next national electoral cycle.

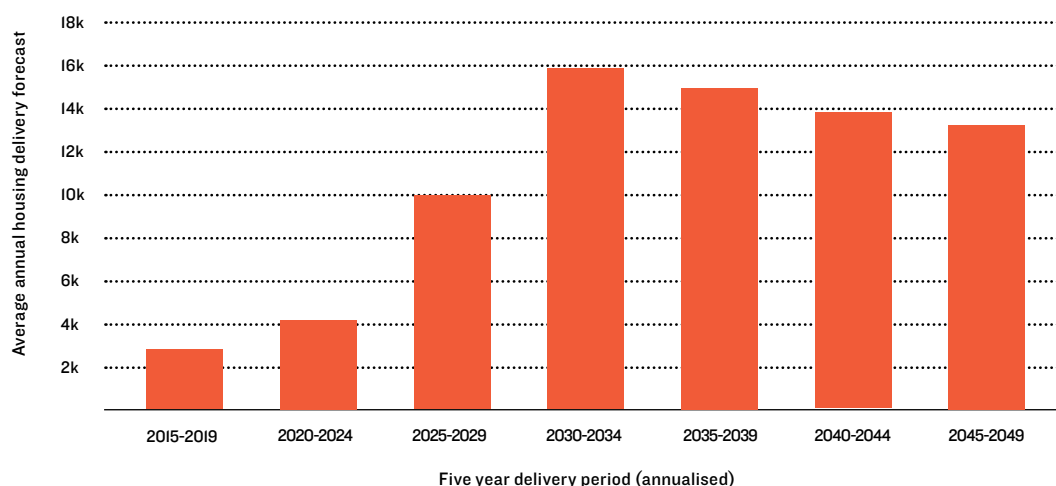
**10-16,000**

homes per annum  
 from 2025 until  
 2050

**c.4,000**

homes per annum  
 up to 2024

Figure 8: Projected annual delivery trajectory of Garden Communities Programme, 2014-2049



Source: Lichfields analysis

<sup>17</sup> Updated analysis from Lichfields, Start to Finish 2 (publication forthcoming)

<sup>18</sup> We have used typical lead in times and planning periods based on Start to Finish 2, suggesting that the majority of Garden Community Sites which have no permissions yet will take 7-8 years (depending on their size) to begin delivering, and those with outline permission will take 2-3 years (again dependent on size) to do so. Sites already under construction or with reserved matters granted are assumed to build out from 2020.

# 05 The Local Context

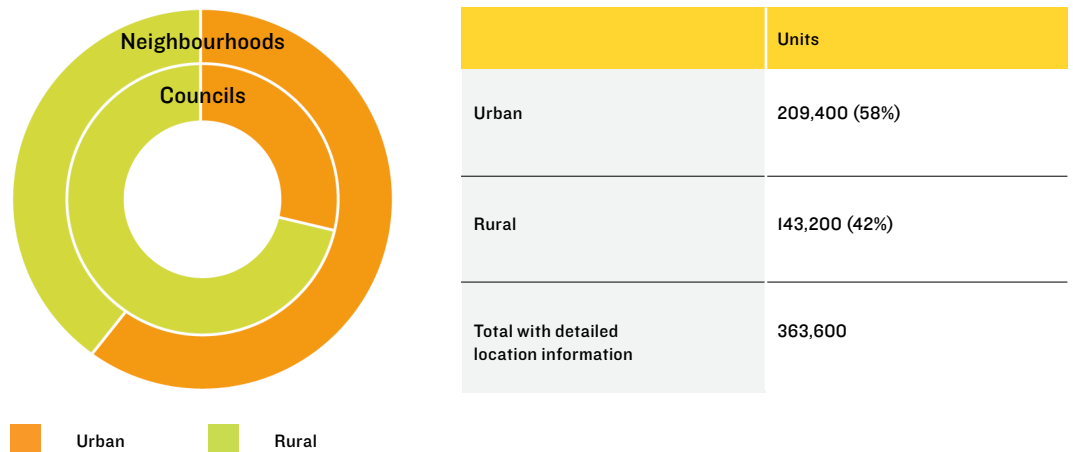
## Location characteristics

We have analysed the characteristics of the areas in which Garden Community projects have been put forward, using the most granular level of location information available.

The majority of Garden Communities (35 of 49) were located in rural authorities (according to DEFRA classifications, see Figure 9).<sup>19</sup> Within these authorities however, they are typically located in urban neighbourhoods (Lower Super Output Areas), which accounted for 58% of homes.

To understand the context for delivering Garden Communities, we also analysed the political control of the 59 Local Authorities with Garden Community projects in them (see Figure 10).<sup>20</sup> Areas where Garden Communities are proposed are disproportionately under Conservative control, 48% of LPAs with Garden Communities compared with 38% controlled nationally. The relatively high share of homes in Garden Communities located in councils under no overall control (34%) is also higher than councils nationally (25% of councils). This reflects in part the location of garden communities outside of larger cities.

Figure 9: Rural urban classification of LSOAs containing Garden Communities homes



Source: Lichfields analysis

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rural-urban-classification>

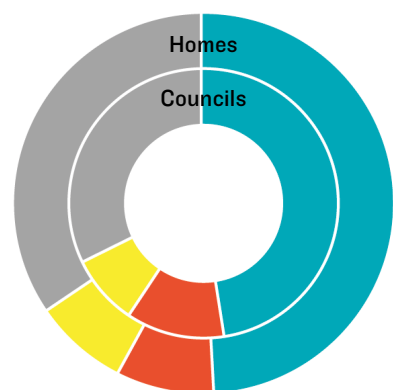
<sup>20</sup> In cross-boundary proposals, we have counted both authorities for this analysis.

Finally we considered the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score and affordability ratio of designated Garden Communities. The majority of Garden Communities (43 of 49) were located in the 50% least deprived local authorities in the country using the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Only Ebbsfleet Garden City is located in a local authority that is in the 20% most deprived authorities in the country. There was no clear pattern between affordability ratio and the number of Garden

Communities or number of homes when we compared areas above and below the national median affordability ratio.

This suggests that, as locally led vehicles for housing delivery, there is no link nationally between affordability and where Garden Community are designated.

Figure 10: Political make up of Garden Communities authorities



	Councils	Share of Units <sup>21</sup>
Conservative	28	196,000 (48%)
Labour	7	33,000 (8%)
Lib Dem	5	32,000 (8%)
No overall control/other*	19	137,000 (34%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>403,000</b>

Source: Lichfields analysis

<sup>21</sup> Units that have been proposed for the North Northamptonshire Garden Community have not been fully allocated to a specific site, therefore share of homes do not sum to overall total.

## **Self containment**

Garden Communities are typically characterised as ‘new settlements’; however, for some of the schemes in the programme this definition is not clear cut. Some Garden Communities rely on existing services of a neighbouring settlement either as ‘linked’ new settlements, or indeed can be considered as ‘urban extensions’ rather than self-contained communities or ‘standalone settlements’.

A qualitative assessment (see Figure 11), based on location and design information available on the Garden Community projects shows 22 of 49 garden communities are standalone settlements not functionally linked or directly adjacent to existing settlements, eight were major new settlements clearly linked to nearby towns, and the remaining 19 were urban extensions, on the edge of existing towns and cities such as Basingstoke, Bicester, Taunton and Wellingborough. The standalone projects accounted for approximately one third of homes in the programme (35%), the linked new settlements another third (32%), and the urban extensions the final third (33%). On average, the largest of these were the linked new settlements, around 16,000 homes each, while standalone settlements and urban extensions were on average around 6,300 and 7,000 homes respectively.

However, in some cases, Garden Communities that we classed as new settlements by virtue

of their scale and independence were adjacent to existing towns but divided by a major motorway or other piece of infrastructure, for example Welborne Garden Village is separated from Fareham by the M27. Similarly, many standalone settlements encompassed existing small villages, as in the case of Harlow and Gilston Garden Town. The Garden Town proposals over 10,000 homes appeared in some instances to include housing figures from completions, windfalls and other sources which we have not assessed as being self-contained settlements.

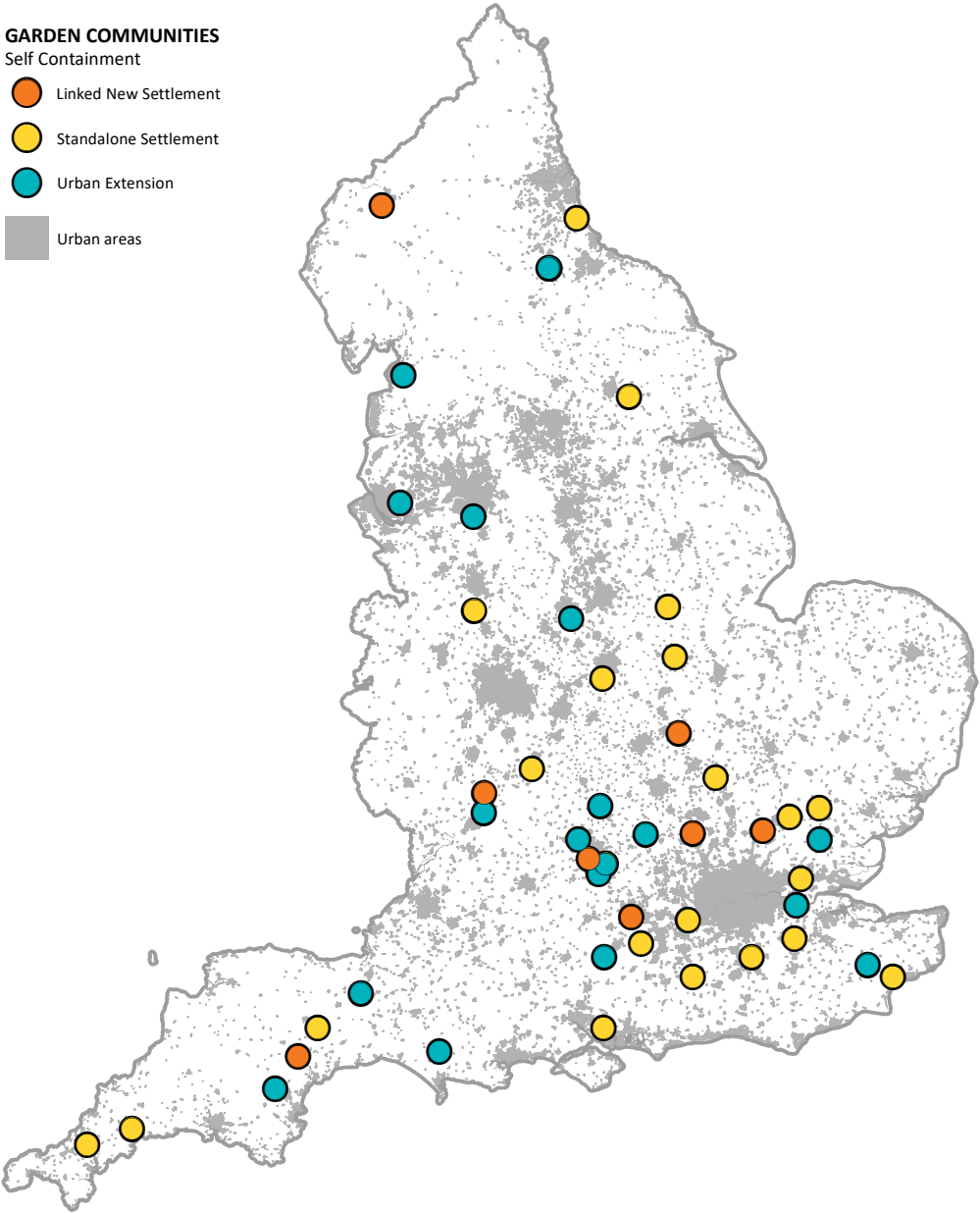
To further understand Garden Communities’ connections with existing settlements, we also reviewed the average distance (as the crow flies) of individual sites to an existing railway station. To do this we assessed the centre point(s) of sites where detailed information has been published. Only 8% of Garden Community homes were within 800m of a station (10-minute walk) by this measure, a third of homes were less than 2km, and around three quarters of homes were within 5km of a railway station. This suggests that Garden Communities are in relatively well-connected strategic locations, albeit they are not typically ‘transit-oriented’ development based on walking to existing rail connections. There will perhaps be more opportunities for rail-based garden community proposals<sup>22</sup> in future given the latent potential of many such locations and the provisions of NPPF paras 102, 103 and 138.

<sup>22</sup> We identified six schemes associated with a new station being built, albeit that North East Chelmsford was the only scheme where funding has been committed, and this helps deliver wider housing growth in the area alongside the Garden Community – see <https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2019/01/Beaulieu-New-Railway-Station-Business-Case.pdf>

Figure II: Map of Garden Communities by level of Self Containment

**GARDEN COMMUNITIES**  
Self Containment

- Linked New Settlement
- Standalone Settlement
- Urban Extension
- Urban areas



Source: Lichfields analysis

8

linked new settlements

22

22 standalone settlements

19

urban extensions

Up to  
**182**  
 new primary schools

Up to  
**56**  
 new secondary schools

### Educational provision

To understand the new services provided by Garden Communities, we have assessed the level of educational provision they intend to provide. We were able to find some data on educational provision for 40 of the 49 Garden Communities. Sites within Garden Communities with one primary school had on average 1,600 units, while the average size of schemes with two primary schools was (perhaps unsurprisingly) larger at 2,700 units. Sites providing one secondary school had an average size of 2,800 homes.

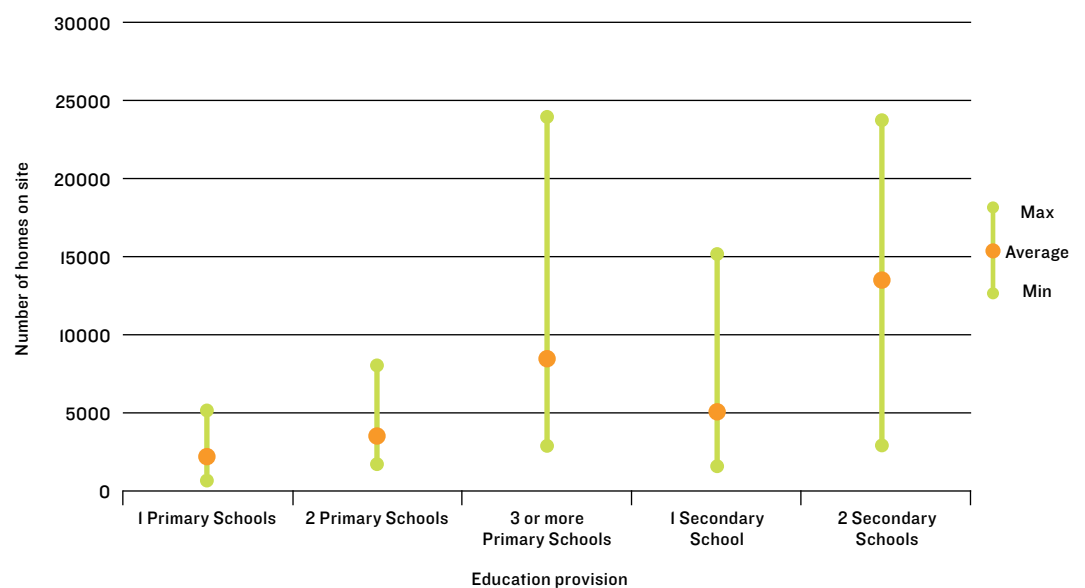
Overall, based on the 40 schemes identified, the Garden Communities programme will provide for at least 143 primary schools and 44 secondary schools. At that rate, extrapolated for the nine projects for which there is no data, this would mean approximately 182 primary schools and 56 secondary schools.

However, levels of provision between sites vary enormously, likely due to both existing provision and the use of need assessments by planners to determine education capacity requirements. We found within Garden Communities, individual sites as small as 1,500

homes that will provide a secondary school, and a site of 3,300 homes that will provide two secondary schools. But, there were also a number of examples of a site of over 2,500 homes providing no secondary school (see Figure 12). The three sites providing two secondary schools were all over 2,500 homes. It is also worth noting that in some cases, provision for secondary schools entailed only the land required, rather than full build-cost funding by the scheme.

The context of existing provision is also a guiding factor. One scheme of 2,000 homes provided a secondary school but no primary school, presumably due to existing local provision. One Infrastructure Delivery Plan we reviewed pointed to a surplus of primary school places of about 5% over its local plan period, albeit that the Garden Community located in that local authority still proposed five primary schools to meet local requirements<sup>23</sup>. Our analysis found the number of primary schools was not well correlated with the size of scheme; with other factors, such as existing local provision reflected, and a lack of available information on plans for future school delivery being notable.

Figure 12: New school provision in Garden Communities by range of homes



Source: Lichfields analysis

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/media/5353/Infrastructure-Delivery-Plan-IDP-August-2018/pdf/3.5\\_Infrastructure\\_Delivery\\_Plan\\_\(IDP\)\\_August\\_2018.pdf](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/media/5353/Infrastructure-Delivery-Plan-IDP-August-2018/pdf/3.5_Infrastructure_Delivery_Plan_(IDP)_August_2018.pdf)

## Economic impact

The Government has been explicit<sup>24</sup> that Garden Communities will create new job opportunities across a range of industries. Accordingly, we analysed the headline economic benefits of the proposed Garden Communities.

Using Lichfields' Evaluate economic impact toolkit we estimate that the total economic value of the build out of the Garden Communities including homes, schools, and employment space (although not additional infrastructure such as roads) as being in the region of £87.1bn over the lifetime of the programme.

Once built, we also estimate that around £8.2bn would go directly to the public finances each year through taxes. In addition to this we estimate Section 106 and CIL will be worth around £6bn, based on an MHCLG assumption of £15,000 per dwelling in large urban extensions<sup>25</sup> (though infrastructure costs and therefore receipts could be significantly higher for Garden Communities of more than 10,000 homes). This is in the context of an estimated 'pump priming' Housing Infrastructure Funding (HIF) spend of c.£1.35bn in authorities with Garden Communities, around 40% of the amount allocated so far, or 25% of total available funds.

Where information on proposed employment land provision was available for Garden Communities (31 of 49), the vast majority of Garden Communities did make some provision, albeit that in some cases this was relatively small (less than 5ha).

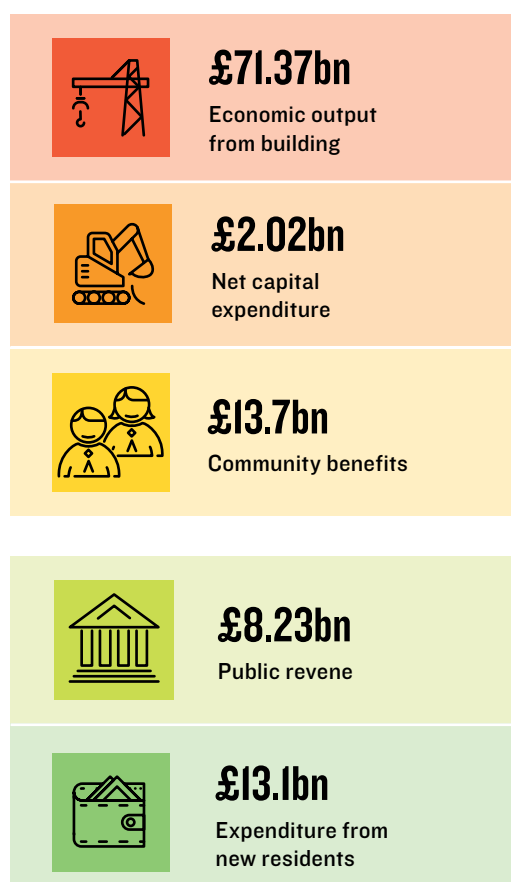
In total, we found evidence of around 600ha of employment land across 31 Garden Communities, around 20ha on average per scheme, or around 35m<sup>2</sup> of employment land (as opposed to floorspace) per dwelling. The number of jobs that could be supported will depend on the form of development that arises, but if the space was notionally split equally between offices, light industrial and warehouse space at a standard plot ratio and with assumed job densities, the 35m<sup>2</sup> per dwelling might

support just under 350,000 jobs on employment land in Garden Communities.

We also estimate the development of Garden Communities will support up to 1.3m jobs during the lifetime of the programme.

A number of Garden Communities contained very significant employment land provision, for example 40ha at Eynsham Garden Village in Oxfordshire, 32ha at Taunton Garden Town, and 23ha at Longcross Garden Village in Surrey. The examples include a mix of both Garden Towns (over 10,000 homes) and Garden Villages (under 10,000). In about a fifth of Garden Communities, the total provision was less than 5ha (albeit these were all Garden Villages under 10,000 homes).

Figure I3: Economic benefits of Garden Communities programme



Source: Lichfields analysis, drawing on HBF and MHCLG

**£87.1bn**

economic output over the next 30 years

**600**

hectares of employment land provision identified on 31 projects; grossed up to the programme, could accommodate 350,000 jobs

**35m<sup>2</sup>**

of industrial land per home on average

<sup>24</sup> MHCLG, Garden Communities Prospectus 2018

<sup>25</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/314066/Section\\_106\\_Planning\\_Obligations\\_in\\_England\\_2011-12\\_-\\_Report\\_of\\_study.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/314066/Section_106_Planning_Obligations_in_England_2011-12_-_Report_of_study.pdf)

# 06 Conclusions and implications

The Government's Garden Communities programme aims to deliver some 403,000 dwellings (providing homes for around a million people), which our trajectory indicatively suggests will come forward over the next 30 years to 2050, and could well provide more if further growth is planned. Alongside these homes, they are set to provide up to 182 new primary schools and 56 new secondary schools as well as 600 ha or more of employment land (accommodating up to 350,000 jobs) and supporting up to 1.3m additional jobs including 16,000 construction jobs per annum through its implementation. Beyond this, there are significant variations in terms of urban form, location and housing market context - Garden Communities do not on the face it, represent a homogenised planning product responding to a standard template - instead, the programme provides a mechanism to support locally-promoted schemes.

The scale of the programme is undoubtedly ambitious, and it has progressed further than some ill-fated predecessors - such as 'new country towns' and 'Eco Towns'. While the Garden Communities are unlikely to deliver the lion's share of their housing allocations until the mid-2020s - beyond the next election cycle - they could deliver up to 16,000 dwellings per annum by the 2030s based on current typical build rates and lead in times, making a significant contribution to meeting housing need.

But Garden Communities status is not a 'golden ticket' to securing an allocation or planning permission, and only a third have a permission and or an allocation in an adopted plan. Another third are in emerging plans, and a full 30% are yet to achieve formal planning status. This means two thirds still need to establish the principle of development and are

therefore subject to ongoing levels of planning risk. A number of proposals have experienced delay because of insufficient evidence that the schemes are well conceived or deliverable over the plan period. Promoters and local authorities need to be confident they can answer key questions, for example:

- Why is the site's inclusion in the spatial strategy for the area justified when assessed against reasonable alternatives?
- How will the project be implemented in light of relevant information about land ownership, delivery model, and infrastructure requirements?
- Is the scheme viable when taking into account the necessary infrastructure, affordable housing provision, a realistic delivery trajectory and robust cost and value assumptions?
- If external funding is required - e.g. from Government - but not yet secured, how should that uncertainty be factored into its role within the Local Plan housing trajectory?
- How does the planning policy identifying the site actually operate? What further planning tools are required to help unlock the scheme and ensure it delivers in a way that meets core policy requirements governing the quality of design and place?

Once incorporated into draft or adopted Local Plans, many areas are heavily reliant on Garden Communities to meet their housing requirements: in these local authorities, a third of their local plan targets depend on Garden Communities, but in some cases this is as high as two thirds. Any delay in the delivery of these schemes risks undermining the plan-led system in those authorities.



We draw four key conclusions in terms of how to measure the success of the Garden Communities programme:

1. Any large-scale development takes a long time to begin delivering: by its very nature, the Garden Communities programme would not be expected to reach critical mass of delivery until the 2030s. It is only at this point that we will be able to draw firm conclusions about its efficacy in bringing forward new homes at pace.
2. The programme plays a dual role: on the one hand helping to support promotion of strategic sites through the plan-making process (e.g. at Shapley Heath, where the designation promptly followed the site's rejection by the Planning Inspectorate in an emerging plan); and on the other, playing a role in the implementation and delivery of large extant permissions, as at Ebbsfleet and Bicester, and through wider support, including funding and advice/brokerage. These are different tasks. There is at one level an issue in how to interpret Government endorsement of a development project as a Garden Village whilst the Secretary of State has a parallel role – via the Planning Inspectorate – in providing independent scrutiny of the acceptability of those proposals through the statutory planning process.
3. In preparing this research, it became apparent that there is no readily-available

body of evidence to help understand the nature of the programme, its scale, what success will look like, and what metrics one should use to measure its progress, effectiveness and additionality. We have plugged this gap – to an extent – with some of the core facts and figures we have assembled, and which can hopefully provide a baseline for future evaluation. However, there remains little basis at present to make any comparative assessment of the quality of places that will be created through the programme and to what extent they adopt some of the “*key qualities*” the Government identified in its Prospectus;

4. However, it is possible to conclude that the programme is heterogenous in terms of the types of development that it supports. Whilst the Garden Communities prospectus did provide some criteria for appraising bids (including with reference to Garden City Principles), the context, location and forms of development emerging through the programme do not appear to follow a particular template. This diversity, which reflects that the proposals are locally-led, may not in itself be undesirable. However, it does raise questions of expectation – is there a sufficiently clear understanding of what a ‘Garden Community’ is intended to represent?

# Appendix 1: Data Table

Garden Community	Designation	Designation Date	Total residential units	Units allocated (adopted)	Units allocated (emerging)	Units with outline planning permission	Units completed	Units without formal planning status
North Essex	Garden Town	Dec-15	43,000		43,000			
North Northamptonshire	Garden Town	Mar-16	33,000	7,100		16,785	1,510	7,100
Harlow & Gilston	Garden Town	Jan-17	24,000		24,000			
Exeter	Garden Town	May-19	20,000					20,000
Uttlesford	Garden Town	Mar-19	18,500		18,500		0	
Aylesbury	Garden City	Dec-15	15,000		2,550	8,213	2,262	1,975
Ebbsfleet	Garden Town	Mar-14	15,000	474		9,649	1,577	3,300
Grazely	Garden Town	Jan-17	15,000					15,000
Didcot	Garden Town	Jan-17	15,000			9,251	1,883	3,866
Taunton	Garden Town	Mar-19	14,000		7,000	4,431	3,569	
Bicester	Garden Town	Dec-14	13,000			5,796	1,785	5,419
Hemel	Garden Village	Nov-16	11,000					11,000
St Cuthberts	Garden Town	Mar-19	10,325	1,450				8,875
Tewkesbury Ashchurch	Garden Town	Mar-19	10,195					10,195
Basingstoke	Garden Town	Mar-16	10,060	4,400		943	117	4,600
Otterpool Park	Garden Town	Jan-17	10,000		10,000			
Meecebrook	Garden Village	Mar-19	10,000					10,000
North East Chelmsford	Garden Village	Jun-19	9,850		5,500	3,355	995	
Chilmington Green	Garden Village	Jun-19	7,250	1,000		1,500		4,750
North Dorchester	Garden Village	Jun-19	7,000	7,000				
Newton Abbot	Garden Village	Jan-17	6,806	1,315	3,039	2,196	256	
Welborne	Garden Village	Jan-17	6,000			6,000		
Culm	Garden Village	Jun-19	5,000		5,000			
Shapley Heath	Garden Village	Jun-19	5,000					5,000
Skerningham	Garden Village	Jun-19	4,500		4,500			
Dalton Barracks	Garden Village	Jun-19	4,500	4,500				
South Godstone	Garden Village	Jun-19	4,000		4,000			
Spitalgate Heath	Garden Village	Jan-17	3,700			3,700		
Long Marston	Garden Village	Jan-17	3,500	3,500				
Dunton Hills	Garden Village	Jan-17	4,000		4,000			
Bailrigg	Garden Village	Jan-17	3,500		3,500			
Whetstone Pastures	Garden Village	Jun-19	3,500					3,500
West of Elvington	Garden Village	Jun-19	3,339		3,339			
Infinity	Garden Village	Jan-17	3,200	3,200				
Borough Green Gardens	Garden Village	Jun-19	3,000		1,720			1,280
Cyber Central	Garden Village	Jun-19	3,000	3,000				
Threemilestone	Garden Village	Jun-19	2,700					
Dunstable Park	Garden Village	Jun-19	2,600			2,700		
Burtree	Garden Village	Jun-19	2,310	2,310		2,600		
Berinsfield	Garden Village	Jun-19	2,300					700
St George's Barracks	Garden Village	Jan-17	2,215		1,600			2,215
Eynsham	Garden Village	Jun-19	2,200	2,200				
Longcross	Garden Village	Jan-17	1,718			92	108	
Handforth	Garden Village	Jan-17	1,650	1,650	1,518			
Halsnead	Garden Village	Jan-17	1,589	1,589				
West Carclaze	Garden Village	Jan-17	1,500			1,500		
Biggleswade	Garden Village	Jan-17	1,500			1,500		
South Seaham	Garden Town	Jun-19	1,500			1,500		
Tresham	Garden Town	Jun-19	1,500	1,500				

Note: Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the data in this table at the time of publication using published sources including emerging and adopted Local Plans, evidence base documents, planning applications and government press releases. However, this information is subject to change as schemes progress towards more detailed design, and site capacities are refined. At times, we were not able to reconcile differing sources of information regarding the total capacity of individual sites or schemes. In these instances we have referred to the latest information available to us. All figures should be regarded as indicative and for the purposes of considering the Garden Communities programme as a whole rather than to evaluate individual projects.

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Source: Lichfields analysis

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### Sizemix

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