

Building on brownfield with the community's consent

How do you build hundreds of homes in a town where residents just delivered a resounding thumbs down to new urban extensions on the greenbelt? This was the question faced by the Town Council who engaged the Create Streets and O'Neill Homer teams to answer these questions in Chesham last year.

The strategy in a nutshell: design from the bottom up not top down. Yes, the homes were, and still are, desperately needed, but the community was clear that these new homes shouldn't be drive-to boxes dumped off a country road. They should instead be an organic growth of the town itself, homes that are sustainably situated where residents can walk, wheel or cycle to the tube, high street, or local schools.

This approach requires new developments to be good neighbours by creating new pieces of the town that are looked on favourably. Understanding what popular design will be means involving residents from the outset.

Neighbourhood Development Orders established

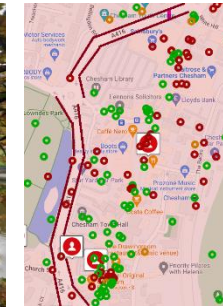
With public trust in developers at a lowly 2% the traditional developer-led approach was a no-go.¹ Instead, building on the Neighbourhood Plan's desire to develop on sustainable brownfield locations, a bottom-up Neighbourhood Development Order (NDO) process was established, led by the Town Council and supported by Locality. This order would grant planning permission across all sites for developments that strictly adhered to a code of different house types and site designs. By removing the planning risk and leaving developers with a clear recipe book to follow the aim was to incentivise leading small and medium-sized developers to build within the town.

Paragraphs 127, 129 and 132 of the NPPF demand that developments 'reflect local aspirations'. Our answer to this, following the logic of the Localism Act 2011 was to "bring the democracy forward" and co-create house types and a design code hand-in-hand with the community and Neighbourhood Plan from the outset. No surprises: budgets were tight and embarking on eighteen individual co-designed sites across four Neighbourhood Development Orders also whilst resolving environmental and highways issues required an efficient approach.

Engagement and Co Design

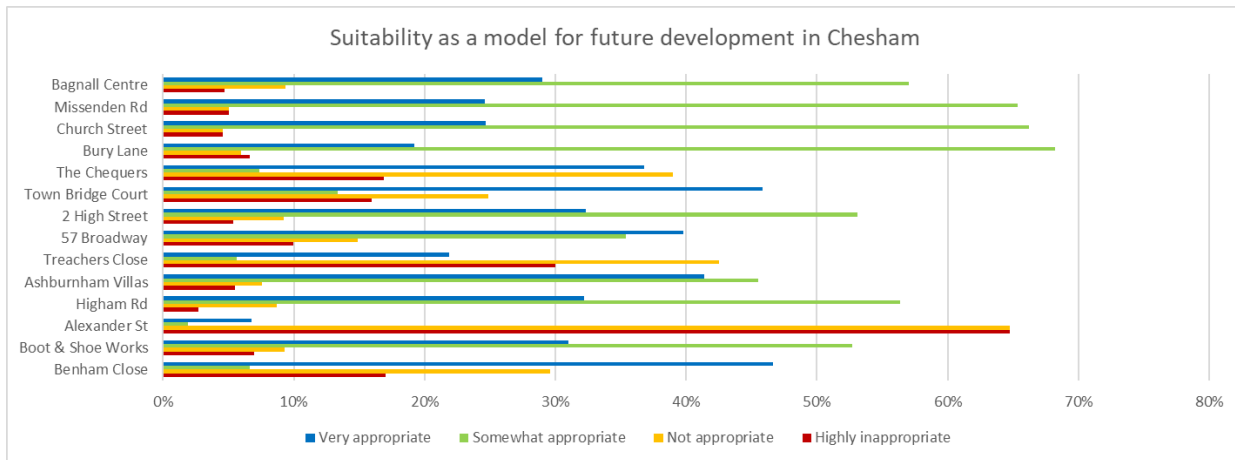
At Create Streets we believe in 'Wide' and 'Deep' engagement. 'Deep' for those who want to attend town hall, drop in or join a one-to-one zoom call. 'Wide' to give those with busy lives their say, from the comfort of their home, during the ad break or on the train to work.

¹ <https://www.grosvenor.com/property/property-uk/community-success/building-trust#:~:text=When%20it%20comes%20to%20planning,behind%20this%20lack%20of%20trust.>

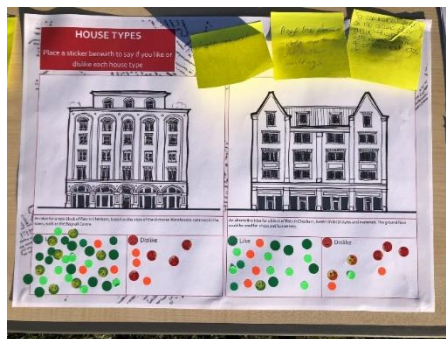


For wide engagement we used [Create Communities](#), our in-house online platform and received **2,822 individual online comments** responding public realm questions and their preference of a cross section of existing buildings within the town.

A ranking of the building typologies across the town left us with clear brief for house type designs.



Aware that not everyone wants to engage through a screen, we embraced in-person engagement. We ran multiple events where we 'come to the people' by joining local festivals to run co-design activities. We also ran drop in days over a week for residents living nearby proposed new developments to help us shape what they might look like.



Where traditional housebuilders see problems, community builders see opportunities. And this is an opportunity that the Town Council have seized on. As the Chesham Neighbourhood Development Order takes its next step to reality, we have only one question. Where next?

