

Brewing Communities

How we can create new towns that foster successful pubs, high-streets and flourishing neighbourhoods

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CREATE
streets


THE VOICE OF BREWERS & PUBS

Forewords



The King's Arms. The White Horse. The Plough. The Ship Inn. The Rifleman. The Boar's Head. The Rovers Return. North or south. Medieval or modern. Working-class or genteel. Nothing, no single place nor person nor institution, echoes through British history as joyfully as the pub. 'There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man,' said Samuel Johnson, 'by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern.' Chaucer's pilgrims, at The Tabard en route for Canterbury, agreed. So did the Battle of Britain pilots 'knocking back the pints' and 'rubbing shoulders with the locals' at the White Hart at Brasted after a day's patrolling and dogfighting. The local boozer is centre stage in

Eastenders or Coronation Street as it was for Falstaff and Prince Hal.

If our streets were a home then our local pub would be its hearth, the place where we warm ourselves and where we meet and talk, relax and revive. But our pubs are troubled. Over a quarter have closed. This matters. If we desire neighbourhoods where we can come together then we should cherish our existing pubs, manage our streets and squares so that pubs can thrive and create new places which weave us together and don't spin us apart.

The good news is that we know how. The evidence on where people like to be and why is ever clearer. Let's lift the bar and create places in which pubs can thrive and people can prosper. This report shows how.

Nicholas Boys Smith MBE

Founder and Chairman, Create Streets



For centuries, pubs have been right at the heart of community life across Britain. They have always provided a place for social interaction- a home away from home- while contributing significantly to the local economy.

But, in recent years, the landscape of our towns and communities has changed dramatically. The accelerated decline of traditional high streets, leading to the closure of many beloved pubs, has left a void in the communal lives of many of us and in the Exchequer's pocket.

The beer and pub sector generates approximately £34.3 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) every year as well as providing over one million jobs. The social and economic benefits pubs potentially offer to the

development of new towns and the expansion of existing ones is clear; pubs are an essential part of the new Government's vision for one and a half million new homes.

Few things encapsulate the essence of British culture as profoundly as a good pub in an attractive setting. Whether it's a cozy village inn, a grand Victorian market town pub, or a suburban carvery, pubs have long been the heart of our social gatherings fostering a sense of identity and combatting adult loneliness. They are more than just places to enjoy a pint; they are hubs of everyday life, supporting local jobs, local community groups and nurturing a sense of belonging.

This report shows how people suffer when town planning is badly thought out and the focus is on housing targets, rather than what it should always be – the people who live there.

I hope this report serves as a call to action for policymakers, developers, and communities alike to prioritise the creation of vibrant, connected spaces where people can come together. Pubs are key economic and social infrastructure. By championing the role of pubs in these developments, we can ensure that the communities of tomorrow are not just places to live and work but also places to belong.

Emma McClarkin OBE
Chief Executive, BBPA

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Why new towns need great places and great pubs

Few things define “the best of British,” that quintessential British experience, as well as a good pub in an attractive place. It might be a wood-panelled inn on a village green, a mirror-laden Victorian Gin Palace in a city square or an inter-war ‘carvery’ in the suburbs, but all are places that have been, are and (hopefully) will continue to be the beating heart of where we gather with friends, family and neighbours to celebrate, console, chat, drink, eat and spend our days.

Sadly, both pubs and town centres have suffered in recent decades, with numerous closures due to significant social and fiscal, technological and regulatory changes which have transformed the way in which we shop, eat, drink and come together. Between 2000 and 2019, the UK lost 22 per cent of its pubs,¹ while national high street retail vacancies have hit 14.5 per cent, one of the highest levels ever recorded.²

This has had an important effect on the nature of our communal and neighbourly life. Quite simply, we have fewer communal places and less space in which to come together. Unsurprisingly, this is helping



create a ‘loneliness epidemic’ with a steady decline in face-to-face interactions and fewer neighbourly gatherings beyond our collective front doors. According to the Campaign to End Loneliness, 50 per cent of adults (25.99 million people) reported feeling lonely occasionally, sometimes, often or always.³

We risk forgetting the ingredients for making thriving and attractive new places in which people want to relax and spend time. This is bad news for creating successful new pubs with thriving new communities. And it is bad news for creating healthy and happy places in which people are more likely to

flourish, bond and know their neighbours.⁴ Pubs and venues that struggle tend to be in worse locations, within poorly linked or designed places, which fewer people can or want to visit. Several studies confirm that areas of greater connectivity and centrality enjoy higher footfall and popularity.⁵ As the Successful Pubs and Inns professional guide plainly states: ‘badly located pubs usually trade badly.’⁶

“Having a sense of place is crucial, without it pubs don’t work.” **Pub operator**

The new government has created a New Towns Task Force with the mission of delivering hundreds of thousands of new homes by 2050 that are ‘well-connected, well-designed, sustainable and attractive places where people want to live.’⁷ More widely, the government has set itself the target of building one and a half million new homes over the next five years.⁸

This is a challenge both of quantity and quality: quantity because all attempts at ‘garden towns’, ‘eco-villages’, ‘millennium communities’ and so forth over the last generation have largely failed to deliver; and quality because too few new places are as

successful as older places. That is certainly the view of the British public. Only two per cent trust developers to create new places that will not detract from existing places.⁹ And although 62 per cent of the public support new housing in principle, time after time neighbourhoods are good at finding reasons to oppose it right here right now ‘in practice.’¹⁰ Our support for new housing is platonic.





We need to relearn the art of making attractive, popular high streets, village greens and public realm for residents to be good neighbours, where pubs and shops can play their important practical and emotional part.

“The location of a pub is absolutely vital to its success and lifespan.” **Pub operator**

This note outlines why we now need great pubs in great places, to buttress future communities in new towns and neighbourhoods – and how to do it based on over a decade of Create Streets’s research into what makes for thriving places.



Great locations can be a key factor in a pub’s pulling power



Pubs remain a focal point for communal life in the UK



Attractive, well-placed new pubs can play a key role in new towns’ success

A short history of pubs at the centre of our communities

No element of national culture has been as constant in British history as the inn or pub with its roaring fire, good ale, roast beef and (these days, doubtless mock) Tudor panelling. Medieval inns were local affairs with the publican brewing his own ale, but Elizabethan taverns underwent a service revolution in their comfort and a supply revolution in their frequency.



This was celebrated in fiction by Shakespeare's archetypal Falstaff whose boisterous love of The Boar's Head Inn, and her landlady, Mistress Quickly, has echoed down the ages. It was celebrated in reality by the Jacobean traveller, Fynes Moryson, who observed: 'The World affords not such Innes as England hath.' By the late sixteenth century there may have been over 15,000 English alehouses, taverns and inns.¹¹ The Beerhouse Act 1830 liberalised the regulation of brewing and beer-selling, leading to more growth. By 1870 Britain had 115,000 pubs and taverns: one pub for every 274 people.¹²

'The world affords not such Innes as England hath.'

Fynes Moryson

Although inns played an important role as a hostelry for travellers, most pubs were local. They had to be, given the high cost and slow speed to travel. All began to change in Victorian Britain. First railways and the conglomerating brewing industry led to a shift from locally owned 'free houses' to so-



The Bricklayers Arms: a typical 19th Century city pub and former 'tied house'

called 'tied houses.'¹³ Secondly, during the twentieth century pubs grew from their city, small town and village heartlands into the rapidly expanding suburbs and along the fast-sprouting highways and bypasses.

More pubs were built in the UK between 1945-1985 than any other time in British history, as the nation created new towns and large-scale housing estates. However, for the first time pubs were created away from village or town centres or busy transport routes, tucked away instead in new low-density residential areas.

The last 40 years have not been so easy. Since at least the 1980s the number of pubs has been falling due to pressures from increased costs (such as rising energy bills and business rates) changing regulation (such as the 2007 smoking ban) competition from alcohol sold in supermarkets and, argue some, drink-driving rules and cultural change following the 1967 Road Safety Act, which impacted rural pub attendance in particular.¹⁴

Pubs in new towns, distended suburbia and post-war estates have been particularly vulnerable to closure owing to their location in lower footfall areas, competing against places with more passing trade such as multiplexes and tourist friendly historic centres, or natural beauty spots (often boosted online by social media).¹⁵



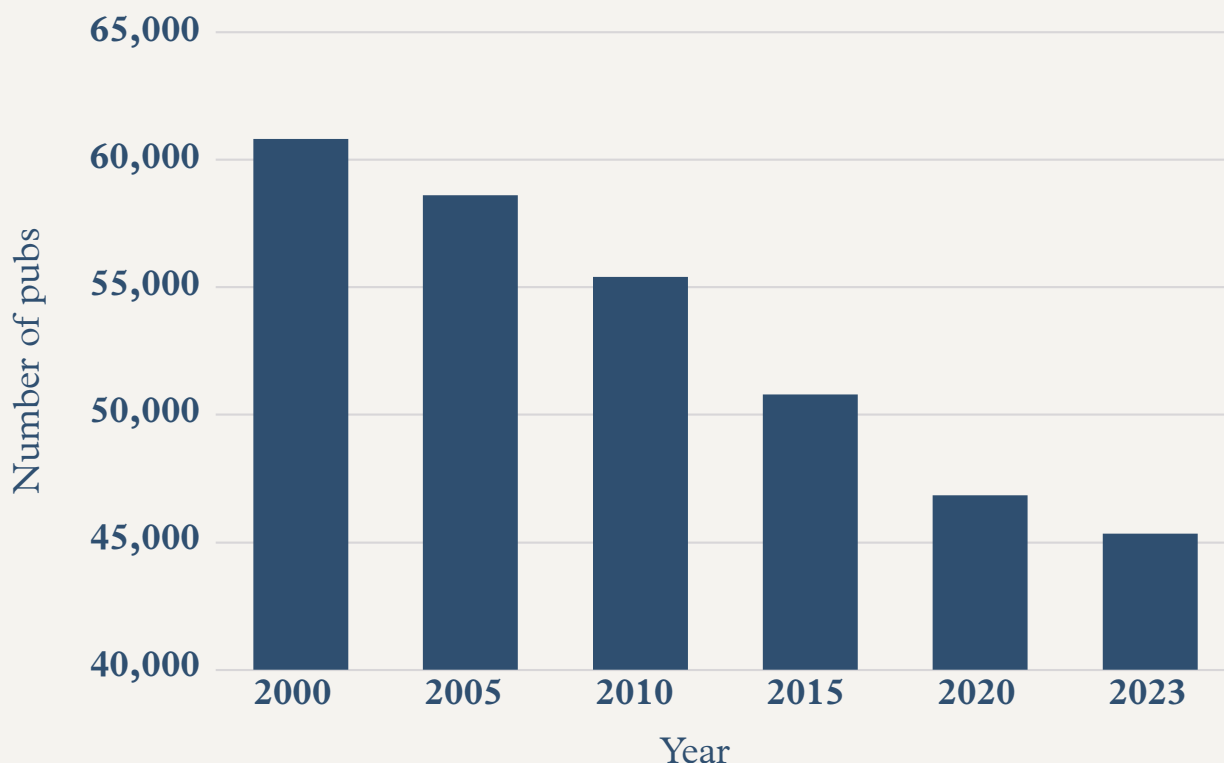
20th century pub design had to adapt to the boom in car travel and mass road building

The good news is that people do still want, even need, to leave the home to eat, to meet, to drink and to socialise: more than half the population still go for an evening out at least once a week.¹⁶ People proudly and clearly still want their local pubs to survive and thrive: two in three consumers say that pubs, restaurants and coffee shops play an important role in their local community. 74 per cent of adults visit a pub once a month. 82 per cent say that pubs play a vital role in local communities. People are pro-pub.

‘Two in three consumers say the hospitality sector plays an important role in their local community.’¹⁷

As the post-war planners recognised, where we create new places, high streets and pubs, corner shops and cafes really matter for tying

Number of British pubs 2000-2023¹⁸



a new community together. But what types of places find it easiest to support thriving high streets and village greens replete with shops and pubs? How should new places be designed to bring us together, not pull us apart?

With a new wave of new towns coming, how should they be formed and forged to help pubs and shops flourish, be resilient and adaptable, as a key component of British social life?

“What you are up against nowadays is that you can walk into the Trafford Centre with your wife, have a nice drink and go to the pictures. So you have to make it more attractive so people want to come.”

Estate pub owner in Manchester

82%

of the public say that
pubs play a vital role in
local communities

72%

of adults
visit the
pub once a
week



Case Study

Dirty Duck, Stratford-upon-Avon: scenic, central and popular.

The Dirty Duck is blessed with both scenic views of the Avon River, and a prime location in the centre of Shakespeare's hometown Stratford-upon-Avon. The pub is nestled alongside attractive historic buildings, and has a good-sized outdoor seating area, which is notable for its

gnarled old Mulberry tree. Nearby are the many attractions of Stratford-upon-Avon, such as The Swan theatre or The Dell outdoor theatre, helping boost footfall throughout the year and forming a community around Stratford-upon-Avon's thespian heritage.



Case Study

The Ox Row Inn, Salisbury: a busy pub at the heart of town life.

The Ox Row Inn is one of Salisbury's most consistently successful pubs, open since the 16th century. It has several locational and place advantages: on a bustling market square, surrounded by a

rich architectural variety with generous outdoor seating on two sides . It was voted Fullers Pub of the Year in 2023, having made record profits in 2022. In the city centre, it has no parking.



THE
SEVEN STARS
KINGSBRIDGE

BIRRA MORETTI
L'AUTENTICA
RICETTA DAL 1859

FEVER-TREE

BIRRA MORETTI
L'AUTENTICA



What makes a great place for a great pub?

Fortunately, we now have much evidence of what makes for a thriving neighbourhood and why people prefer some places to others in order to gather, socialise and spend time.

At the social enterprise Create Streets, we have been researching and writing about this important subject for over a decade, so we are able to set out with a high level of confidence the types of principles that will tend to encourage successful neighbourhood centres and good ‘pub hubs’. This is good news for choosing how and where we design new pubs and the streets and squares around them.

Of course, not every pub is the same or has the same needs. A city-centre, post-work boozier has different requirements than a genteel suburban gastropub. They have different needs and different clients. But there are common principles, universal ingredients that create the kinds of place where people like to go and which it is easy and natural to reach.

So how should we design public places in new towns so that pubs and shops can put down roots? Here are ten critical ingredients for good ‘pub hubs’.¹⁹

‘My favourite public house, The Moon Under Water, is only two minutes from a bus stop.’ George Orwell

Not all great pub hubs will enjoy all of these equally, but they will tend to have more of them than less fortunately situated pubs. They are the fundamental ingredients for creating places which people want to visit and will enjoy spending time.

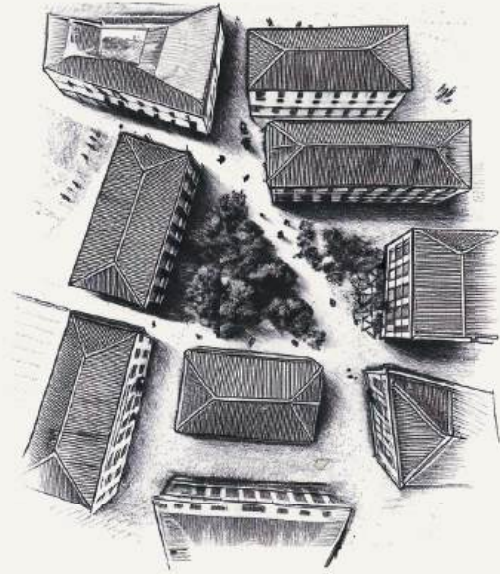
They are ideal foundations for a successful new pub or high street at the heart of community life. Pubs and high streets that lack these place qualities will be more likely to struggle.

Get the big moves right:



1. Create new places with tighter and well-connected real middles.

The new centre should physically be at the heart of a new neighbourhood, in the middle, on the way from A to B, where routes cross, buses arrive and bicycles can be parked. Around the centre, streets and buildings should get closer and 'tighter' with surrounding residential streets naturally disgorging into the 'middle'. In one study, highly walkable areas generated 80 per cent more retail sales than equivalents rated as having 'fair walkability'.²⁰



2. Create real high streets, village greens and town squares not plazas.

Don't create 'fake' plazas. Create the types of place that people actually recognise and like to use: high streets that run through a neighbourhood's heart; village greens and town squares where streets converge. Public squares can have restorative, positive mental health effects for residents, with one study revealing 30 minutes spent in a public square decreased stress levels, improved cognitive performance and boosted participants' happiness.²¹



3. Create homes round the corner in places which jumble up living, working and mingling.

Unlike zoned and bifurcated business districts, or retail parks, successful local centres need to mix uses, to help them stay busy throughout the day and to 'build in' resilience in the years to come. Over the years successful places 'toggle' naturally between certain types of shop, restaurant and commercial activity with a rich admixture of homes round the corner. People enjoy this too: a Create Streets study revealed 'richness of land uses' influenced the perceived 'scenic-ness' of a street or square 60 per cent more than the average of other urban elements studied.²³



4. Create new homes at 'gentle density' to nourish high streets neighbourhood centres.

Building homes and amenities that are sprawled far apart means fewer people and fewer homes near local centres, shops and leisure spots. This kills passing trade and obliges car journeys for daily activities. Building at 'gentle density', of 50 to 75 homes per hectare means that more can and do walk to the shops and the local pub. A new study on pub location revealed that our local pub (defined as within 1km of where we live) remains our number one pub to visit.²²

‘The most important thing is good quality and interesting design. If everything becomes very boring and repetitive, no one is interested.’ **Pub operator**



**Make it easy
to move about:**



5. Make it safe and fun to walk and cycle.

This makes it easier for more people to visit more often. You may still need good parking but don't sacrifice other ways of getting about or the quality of the town square or village green itself. Put people first, not cars. On average, retail sales increase by 30 per cent following projects that improve pedestrian, cycling or public transport access to shops.²⁴



6. Create public transport choices.

Similarly, places which are easy to reach by public transport can attract more visitors. In London, shoppers who use public transport spend an average of 40 per cent more at local shops than those who drive.²⁵

Get the detail right:



7. Interweave streets and squares with greenery and street trees.

People provably prefer streets and squares with trees and greenery in them. It is the urban wonder drug.²⁶ The best way to maximise the wellbeing and prosperity effect is to spread the greenery around 'little and often'. People will pay 9 to 12 per cent more on goods and services in areas with more street trees and greenery.²⁷



8. Create streets that people like to be in.

People want to visit and spend more time in places they find scenic, attractive and pleasant. The good news is that it is easy to predict what most people like. Greenery, places to sit, well-designed street furniture such as lights and bollards, with pleasant, varied buildings all make for the kind of public realm where people want to socialise.²⁸ One study by CABE (Commission for the Built Environment) found that well-designed streets added 5 per cent to residential prices and retail rents, showing the premium good design commands.²⁹



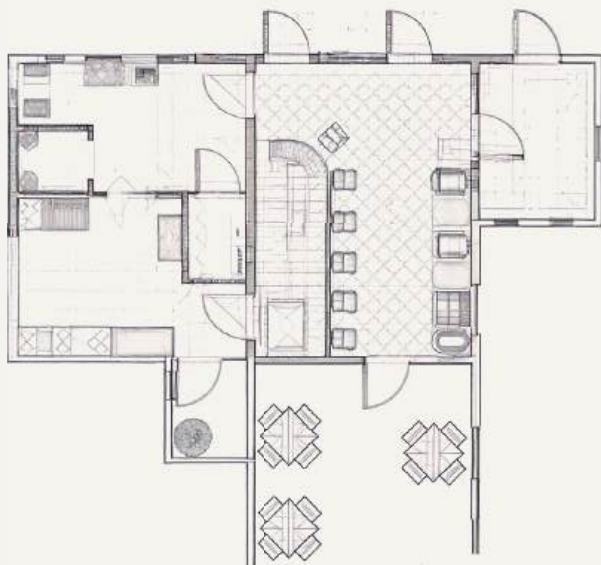
9. Create buildings that people find attractive.

Most people want to spend less time in places which are dreary, dull and faceless. A Danish study found that 25 per cent of pedestrians stop to look at interesting facades compared to 1 per cent at dull and sterile facades.³⁰ It is also easy to predict the types of building most people prefer: something that feels 'of here' with texture, ornament, coherent complexity and human scale is more popular with most people most of the time, not large, bulky buildings with long blank walls.³¹ Indeed, interesting buildings have been proven to promote a more active communal life, with another study showing seven times as much activity and time spent in front of interesting facades, compared to dull facades.³²



10. Create flexible buildings that could be used as pubs.

We need to be town-builders not just housebuilders. Many large new developments only have new homes in them with, at best, a potential convenience store off the nearby roundabout. Even if it really is hard to create a pub on the first day of a new settlement, at the very least create buildings which by their specific location, use class and visual prominence could become local pubs, coffee shops or convenience stores. Create buildings with higher ceilings, open plans, easy ventilation, delivery and service spaces.



And what not to do...

We can also identify the top four locational or design pitfalls that make it hard for pubs and neighbourhood centres to flourish. What makes for failed ‘pub hubs’?

Don't design gateway urbanism. Why make life harder for customers? Putting pub hubs and shops on the fringes of a new town or development reduces the local catchment area and harms long term resilience. This may sound obvious and yet we still see shops and community centres placed by the roundabout at the ‘entrance’ to a new ‘housing estate.’ This works better in the short term and less well in the long term. According to one pub operator: *‘The old adage of stick it on the main road with an entrance off a car park, all of that is understandable for customers, but what’s key is that behind it is an interesting feature...What is happening to bring the community together around that building? Do people walk past it when they walk the dog? Can kids can play on swings? What’s making it a vibrant part of the community?’*

Don't create hubless pubs away from other local shops and attractions. Pubs and shops that are mutually isolated and apart from other daily activities have much less passing trade. People cannot ‘pop in’ while out shopping or after work or sport. Pubs should sit within hubs, alongside other local shops,

leisure and work. This will boost footfall and help create a social life in the new town: *‘Being in a prominent part of the area is great as the pub becomes a key area of town.’* said one pub operator.

‘For success, you need an area to be busy enough and easy enough to get to, but not right on a dual carriage-way or a motorway.’

Pub operator

Don't make ugly places. Unsurprisingly, pubs in seas of ugly tarmac are less popular than ones in attractive places. Pubs built in industrial areas, car parks, off motorways, are less popular and less able to become a neighbourhood hub. Out of town retail centres can obviously work but their sales per square foot are much lower. They can work for their owners if land is cheap enough but not for their places. According to another pub operator: *‘I’ve gone to a couple of sites, newbuilds*

where they take a long term view, which is to have some form of physical attraction in the area which makes it work: is it canal side? is it next to water? Is there an interesting feature within the general landscape? Is it on a green?’

Don't make ugly pubs and gardens. For most of us, pubs should also look and feel like pubs. Generic buildings that look like care homes or leisure centres fail to communicate their role as a casual community hub for socialising. They do not evoke the kind of warm atmosphere that attracts frequent custom: *‘The most important thing is good quality, interesting design – if everything becomes very boring and repetitive, no one is interested,’* said one pub operator.



Built off a roundabout, The Ironstone pub, Northampton, was demolished less than 40 years after construction.



Building new pubs off big fast roads and roundabouts on the edge of new development doesn't help build new communities and can be bad for a pub's long-term footfall.

Case Study

The Observatory, Thorpe Astley: bad design in a bad location.

The Observatory, Thorpe Astley: Built alongside the 1,500 home Thorpe Astley development in the late 1990s, The Observatory was shut for good less than thirty years later in 2024. The pub was bafflingly located within a large nearby commercial business park, cut off from locals by a series

of roundabouts and dual carriageways. While possessing an outdoor area, the pub was surrounded by a large car park, with little passing trade despite being so close to the 1,500 residences of Thorpe Astley.'



The Observatory, in red, located in the middle of a business park, despite being minutes from a large 1,500 home new development.



Case Study

The Frog, Mindenhurst: best in class today.

Located in the 1,200-home new development of Mindenhurst, Surrey, The Frog gets a lot right, setting it up to be a vital community asset well into the future. By an attractive village green, the pub is located in the middle of the development, with a bus stop opposite, and footpaths linking it to the wider site. Cycle parking racks also complement car parking space. The building itself was designed by pub specialist Mackenzie Wheeler, using a warm palette of timber and brick in a familiar pub vernacular. There is lots of outdoor seating and a welcoming interior.



The Frog, in the new development of Mindenhurst is nestled within the new development looking over a new park.

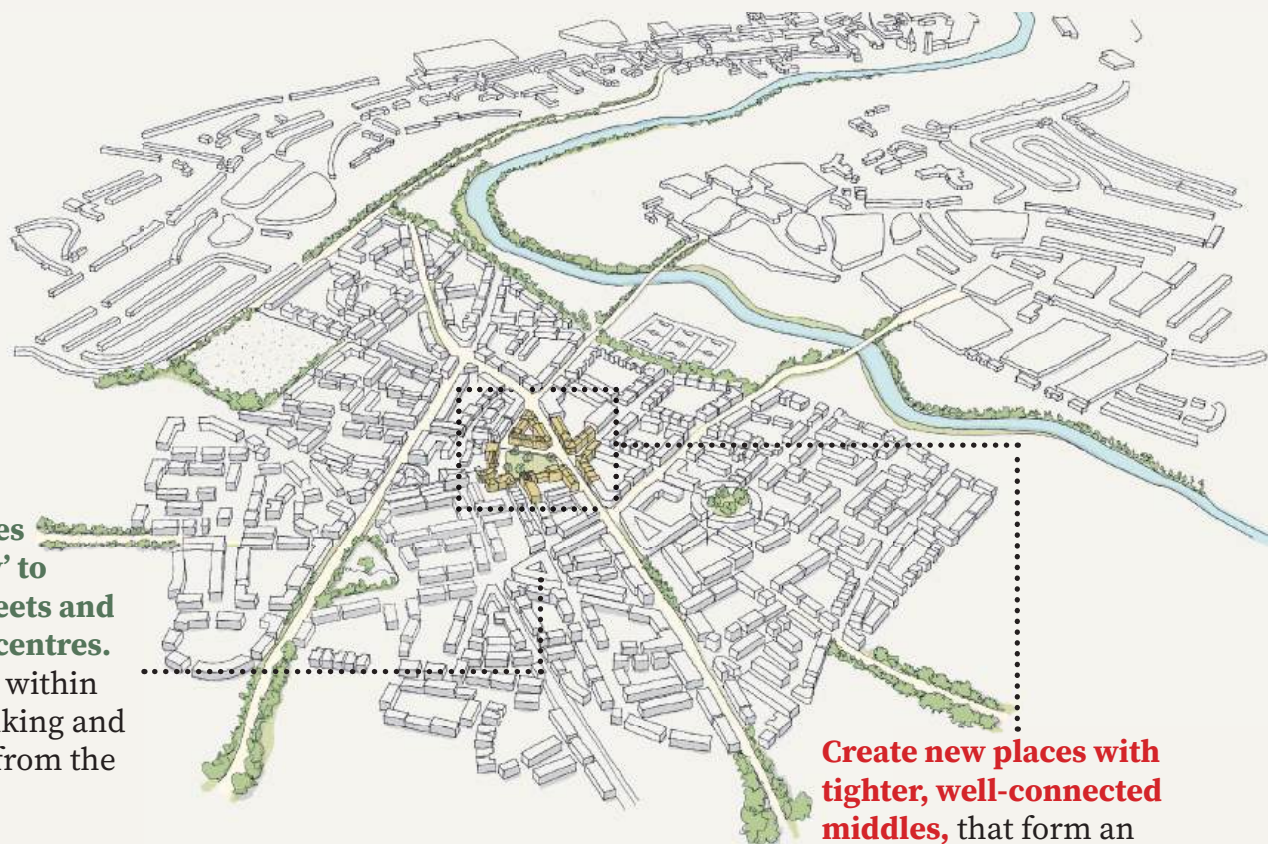
How to make pub hubs

Creating new towns that will foster new pubs, new high streets and flourishing neighbourhoods

So with everything we know about successful places and successful pubs, here is how we can bring them together to create great new places, with great new pubs, high streets and flourishing neighbourhoods.

Create new homes at 'gentle density' to nourish high streets and neighbourhood centres.

Putting residents within easy and safe walking and cycling distance from the centre.



Create new places with tighter, well-connected middles, that form an accessible heart to the new town for greater footfall.

Create homes round the corner in places which jumble up living, working and mingling.

Make it safe and fun to walk and cycle so people can easily move about without having to use a car.

Create real high streets, Village Greens and Town squares, featuring lots of different uses for different times of day and people, not empty, oversized plazas.



Create public transport choices within easy reach of the pub for people who cannot drive.

Interweave streets and squares with greenery and street trees, which provide shade, colour and beauty to streets.

Make buildings that people find attractive, that provide an attractive backdrop to watching the world go by.

Create flexible buildings that could be used as pubs. This means a pub can be opened at any time in the life of the new town or development.



Easy cycling and walking access, will give more people more ways of getting to the pub.

Create streets that people like to be in, with tactile, attractive street furniture, and not cluttered with signposts, bollards and advertising.

A Corner pub creates more frontage and outdoor public realm.

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- 32 Gehl, J. Johansen L. & Reigstad, S. (2006) *Close Encounters with buildings*, *Urban Design International*, 11, p.38

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