



Growing Villages Differently



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Publication and research funded by William Sutton
Prize from **Clarion Housing Group**

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**VeloCity is a
strategic vision
that solves some
of the most critical
issues facing the
countryside today,
delivered by a
team of industry
experts.**

Foreword

As a country, we are moving into a decade where many big infrastructure and housing projects are being delivered. It will be design that defines the legacy they leave behind.

We must make sure that our housing and infrastructure adds to the life of our cities and countryside, that it is fit for purpose, designed for the needs of all, is not wasteful of the world's resources and most importantly stands the test of time. Our built environment has to work more efficiently than ever before, both in terms of uses and the resources. The pressures of climate change means sustainability is no longer an add-on, but the starting point for any discussion about how, where and what we build.

When it comes to housing, under-provision combined with unprecedented population growth means that supply is low, but need is growing. In the race to deliver such high numbers of houses, our focus must be on quality as well as quantity. Above all, we must never forget that houses are homes, homes make a community, and communities make a place.

It was this belief that led the National Infrastructure Commission to launch the international placemaking competition. The plethora of designs submitted demonstrated that there is no shortage of creative, commercially-led ideas on how we can accommodate housing and employment growth in a way that enhances quality of life, supports positive social outcomes and respects both the environment and the interests of our people. The winning scheme by VeloCity focused on the very real issues facing our rural communities. It develops a vision of sustainable growth that is sympathetic to its environment, innovative and forward thinking. A thoughtful and pragmatic response filled with humanity and the high quality of design our countryside deserves. This project shows the importance of connecting joined up strategic thinking with the people and places on the ground.

I very much hope that this vision is the beginning of a cultural change; an acceptance of the need to deliver for the future generations in a way that respects our past.

Professor Sadie Morgan

Commissioner, National Infrastructure Commission

VeloCity is
people over cars
creating new
movement networks



VeloCity is
compact not sprawl
keeping the special
character of our
villages



VeloCity is
opportunity over
decline unlocking
land for new places
to live and work



VeloCity is
connected not
isolated linking
villages with shared
resources, to
benefit everyone



VeloCity is
resilient not
fragile promoting
sustainable
environments,
health and well-
being



Come join the revolution!



Initially I was shocked by the Velocity proposal. The team's explanation made me realise that we couldn't go on as we were. So, I lobbied for new planning legislation to make it happen.

We developed a clear plan and statutory powers to implement the phased development of the villages. The local community decided which plots should be developed first, which views to protect and which roads to restrict.



The community invited a small group of local building companies to help deliver the plan. A long-term work stream helped us develop local supplier relationships. A factory supplies off site manufacturing so we can build quickly and to a high quality.



We helped set up the Community Interest Company to run our local water recycling and energy generation.



The big farming project encouraged small businesses to locate in the big back garden and provided assistance to develop my goats cheese business using the local farmers milk. My cheese is now very popular.



The village plan identified fields that are part of my estate. I was happy to release agricultural land because of the increase in value. As part of the designation a proportion of the profits pay for community infrastructure.

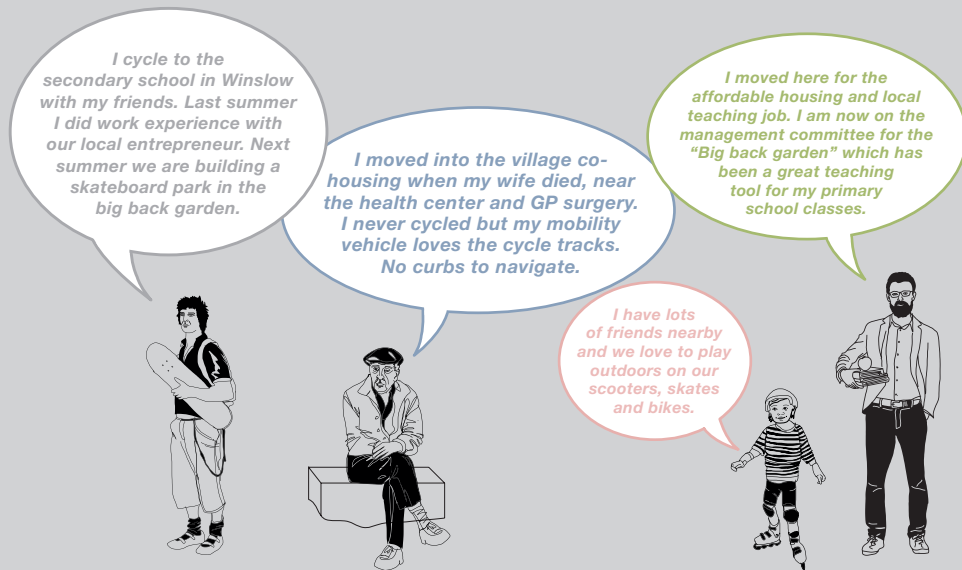


I benefit from selling produce locally and have started a campsite for the increasing number of tourists on cycling holidays. I have diversified my farm and I now produce a wider variety of crops.



My smart village app for local deliveries and bus connections has really taken off. The digital connections here are awesome and I now collaborate with six friends in the technology shed in the village.





I cycle to the secondary school in Winslow with my friends. Last summer I did work experience with our local entrepreneur. Next summer we are building a skateboard park in the big back garden.

I moved into the village co-housing when my wife died, near the health center and GP surgery. I never cycled but my mobility vehicle loves the cycle tracks. No curbs to navigate.

I moved here for the affordable housing and local teaching job. I am now on the management committee for the "Big back garden" which has been a great teaching tool for my primary school classes.

I have lots of friends nearby and we love to play outdoors on our scooters, skates and bikes.

Many villages are quintessentially picturesque but traditional community life is dying and up until now not much thinking or research has been spent on ways to deal with this.

We have spoken widely about our VeloCity vision to government, local authorities, communities and landowners and we know there is an appetite for change.

With the gradual reduction of car use we see the opportunity to re-invigorate community life and think about how we can do new development and housing in villages differently.

Climate and biodiversity emergency

We are living beyond the earth's carrying capacity with devastating loss of precious habitats and climate change impacts. In the UK alone, 58% of all species have declined dramatically in the last 70 years and we have lost 97% of our wildflower meadows as a result of urbanisation and more intensive agricultural practices (Wildlife Trust). We also see the social consequences of economic growth through concentration of wealth in cities, growing inequality, social exclusion and the breakdown of social networks.

There are significant associated health impacts with estimated cost of heat related mortality £150million by 2050. In the UK, nearly one in three children leave primary school overweight (Cancer Research UK) and for the first time since the second world war, growth in life expectancy has stalled (Office for National Statistics). And of course, mental health issues are on the increase. Food is purchased shrink wrapped with no thought as to the impact on soils and ecosystems in the hinterland.

VeloCity is a direct response to the need to think differently about how we create new homes and places to work in the context of this destruction of the earth's ecosystems.

We are not alone.

Extinction Rebellion, Greta Thunberg, David Attenborough, Friends of the Earth and many more are all calling for a radical shift in behaviour over climate change.

As a result of the overwhelming evidence of the impacts of climate emergency on the health and wellbeing of people and our planet, the UK government has pledged to meet net zero carbon emissions target by 2050. Over 60% of local authorities have declared a Climate Emergency with many seeking to achieve this target by 2030. Professional bodies representing architects, engineers and landscape designers have also declared with hundreds of practices signing up to the pledge to take action.

The world population continues to rise, and in the UK alone it is projected to increase by 9.7 million over the next 25 years with more than one in 12 of the population projected to be aged 80 or over by mid-2039 (Office for National Statistics).

With the countryside making up 85% of the UK land area but only 18% of the population living there, the pressure to build new homes in rural areas is increasing. If we are to do so, legislation needs to change and design codes need to ensure development takes a restorative and regenerative approach working with community stakeholders.

Romanticism, land reforms, political change

Historically British villages evoke romantic images of the countryside – perceived as a rural idyll, an escape to nature away from the pollution and disease of urban life. But the countryside has also been a backdrop to conflict and political uprisings – class divide, land rights, economic depression and two world wars – and in this context we have seen philanthropists, industrialists, idealists, radicals and revolutionaries all experiment with better ways of living in the countryside with utopian visions ranging from new model villages to farm colonies to current-day garden villages.

Whilst these more radical approaches look at ways to populate and live differently in the countryside, none have touched on VeloCity’s specific proposal for densification of existing settlements. Most were about creating new villages and communities. However, these models bring forward useful insights and particularly demonstrate how radical aspirations have led to fundamental land reforms and changes to government legislation.

Early examples of such radical visions were the ‘model villages’ of the 18C English Landscape movement where wealthy landowners employed the likes of Capability Brown and William Kent to design estates with villages for workers, deliberately built out of sight to preserve the picturesque view. In the 19C, model villages were built by philanthropic industrialists to provide workers housing in the countryside. These included Saltaire, Port Sunlight and Bourneville which led the way in re-thinking communities, social housing and an escape from the industrial urban squalor.

These villages often echoed William Morris’s romantic, socialist values that **“nature and the landscape are fundamental to people’s wellbeing and in lifting their spirits and contributing to psychological equilibrium”**.

In the late 19C increasing agricultural depression and class divisions sparked land reforms which saw the government bring forward progressive policy change using slogans like *‘Three acres and a cow’* to launch new statutory rights to a smallholding for families to live off the land and be self-sufficient. This initiated the first of several Farm Colonies which were further developed in the 1920s, with many run by charities and religious organisations such as the Salvation Army Home Colony in Hadleigh Essex – communal enterprises aspiring to a shared circular economy.

Another notable visionary housing model in Britain was Ebenezer Howard's Garden City Movement which aimed to bring the best of the countryside to urban living, with Letchworth commenced 1920, being the first new town following these principles.

Whilst these were essentially suburban models, the movement has influenced more recent rural models such as Poundbury in Dorset owned by Duchy Estate (one of our case studies in this report) and Dartington Hall, Devon, another privately owned country estate. The latter explored progressive rural reconstruction models which in 1920's which are still being evolved with experimental no-dig farming methods and new rural housing typologies to this day. Examples include co-living rural housing typologies by architects Ash Sakula, who are championing the Collective Custom Build initiative to promote community engagement.

All these models demonstrate that visionary thinking can bring about radical changes in the countryside. But today land comes with more of a premium and if we are to tackle our housing crisis and protect the earth's resources then building new towns and villages in the open countryside cannot be the only way.

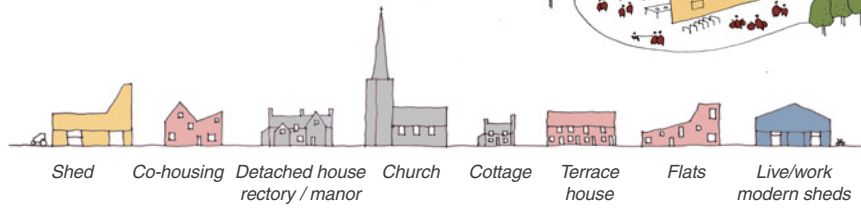
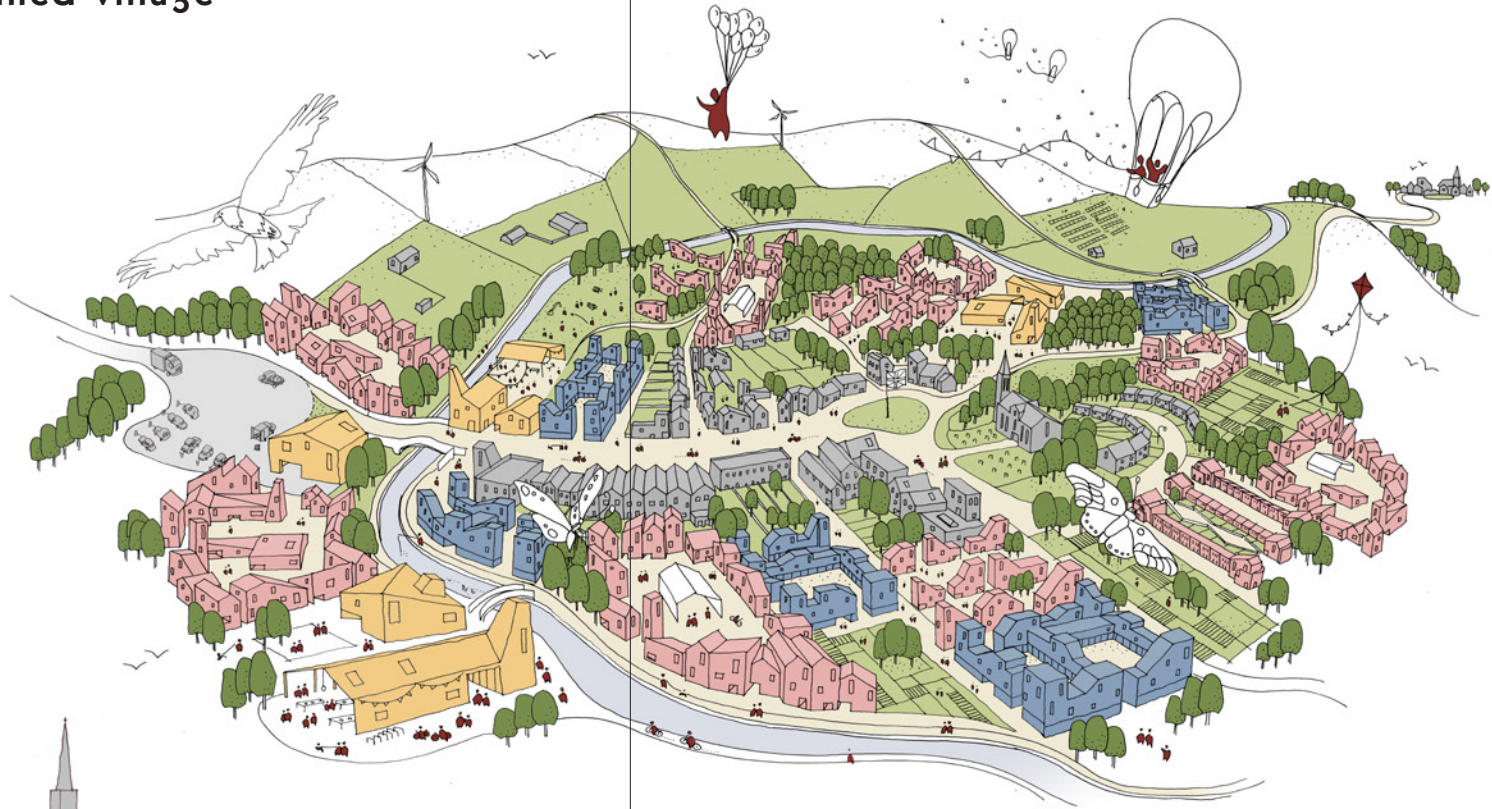
VeloCity proposes a more holistic strategy that proposes growth in existing villages, reinvigorating them with new movement networks less reliant on the car, which unlocks land for new homes and work places. By building more densely within villages, not outside, we can protect the wider countryside and create healthier and more socially cohesive villages whilst retaining their quintessentially picturesque qualities.

Rural development and VeloCity vision

To build within villages means overcoming some serious constraints to development in the countryside and specifically to village growth. The VeloCity concept of village clustering and higher density housing has the potential to unlock land for new development but in order to implement this, planning must be turned on its head.

Currently national and local planning policy makes it difficult to build in the countryside with the current protection of heritage and environmentally sensitive locations that preserves villages in aspic.

VeloCity - imagined village



Furthermore, the planning criteria for the allocation of potential sites for new housing in rural areas¹ is based on a village having good existing services and transport links, which means many smaller villages are deemed unsuitable for new housing and consequentially remain unsustainable. This approach leaves villages with a lack of diversity in housing and an increasingly ageing and isolated population, leading to mental health and social issues.

With people in villages more reliant on cars, there has been a loss of services (shops, pubs, schools, etc) and employment opportunities, further detracting families and young people from moving into rural areas.

A study by the Observer and the Commission for Rural Communities² identified scores of small communities in decline and in so doing confirmed that:

“Across the country; 95 per cent of village halls are struggling to stay open, 27 village pubs are closing a week, 800 village shops are shutting each year, 400 garages and filling stations are closing each year, 100+ churches of all denominations are closing each year, seven rural schools are shutting annually and 90 cottage hospitals are under threat.”

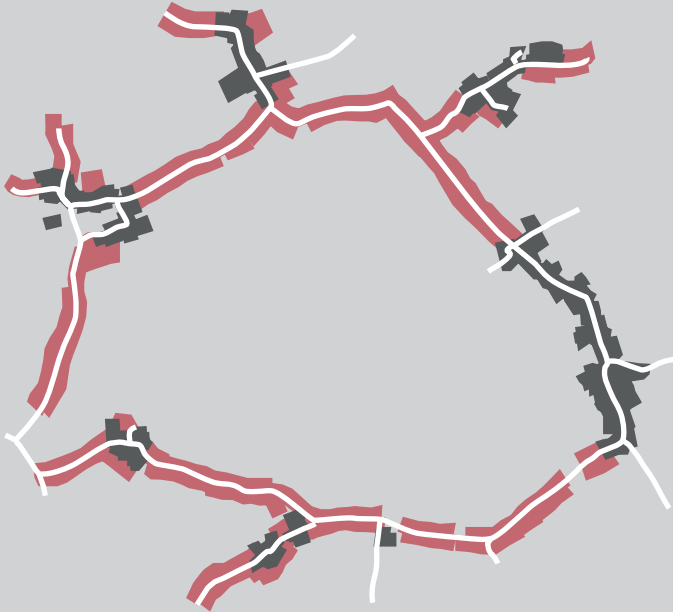
Who owns the land poses further challenges to the large scale legislative changes needed to develop rural areas differently. Today over 30% of land is still owned by wealthy landowners, ‘aristocracy and gentry’³ and how this land is managed has a huge impact on the affordability of housing, the way we grow our food and how much space we set aside for nature. VeloCity aims to rethink the way we distribute land and to promote a more sharing economy.

People’s perception is an issue too. For many, the British village still evokes a romanticism which has endured to present day popular representations such as Radio 4’s *The Archers* and the ‘best kept village’ competitions. However, such examples of popular culture also acknowledge the pressing issues facing our villages and people’s growing concerns of how to tackle them. BBC1’s *Countryfile* regularly gives exposure to the social, employment and health issues facing rural communities and *The Archers* have seen the villagers fighting to save their local shop and farmers introducing experimental, sustainable farming methods such as mob grazing.

These are signs that the tide is turning, and people are looking at ways to do things differently that once seemed unthinkable.

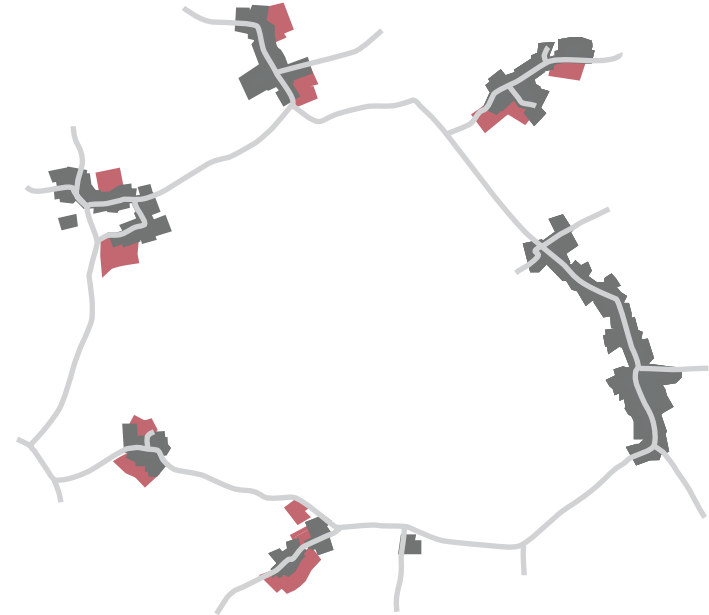
If nothing changes, the sprawl continues...

3600 new homes
= 25 homes per hectare



VeloCity villages

3600 new homes
=100 homes per hectare



For the VeloCity concept to gain support of the local communities the potential benefits must be communicated well, and people must feel they have a proper stake in future development of their places.

The Localism Act of 2011 goes some way to giving people a greater say on local decisions and where housing should be built in their communities. Work undertaken by Hana Loftus of Public Practice, in her paper *Growing Villages*, explores the frustrations and rewards Localism offers to village's communities in the South Cam district. Interestingly it has found that people are not against development in their villages per se and that many people recognise villages need more housing to renew and sustain village life. From this research it seems what is important to them is a more collaborative process and its aesthetic quality. This is perhaps what was missed in the recent BBC2 programme, *The New Builds are Coming*, where the planner and developer are pitted against the local community with their plans to build 500 new homes on the edge of their Oxfordshire village. Here, what was on offer by the developer, was suburban style housing bolted on to one side of the village with no regard to integration with existing community. What was missing was any dialogue or appreciation that there could be alternative and better ways of doing this.

Instead of these stagnated and out-dated attitudes to rural development, it is possible that if we can make changes to planning and transport structures, create better quality housing, shift negative perceptions and take advantage of modern-day technological advancements, we will then be able to realise the VeloCity vision. As such, far from being parochial backwaters, rural areas can be laboratories of innovation.

Why promote densification in villages?

A village brings different characteristics to that of a town – compactness, walkability and immediate access to surrounding countryside. However, current village development does not respect this and ad-hoc, low density sprawl with suburban housing typology boosted by the car boom of the 1960s and 1970s is still happening, eating up too much land and destroying our natural environment.

Our research has found that there are not many examples of good or successful new developments within villages. Either we see very small-scale developments of up to nine or 10 detached houses on infill sites within the village or larger scale

developments outside the village, following a road and forming hard edges with the existing community and surrounding countryside. The latter form of development mimics approaches to town and suburban housing developments which we have found is at odds with the character of a village.

Historically, villages were linked by bridleways and footpaths, but these have become underused and overgrown because of the increasing reliance on the car providing easy access to facilities in nearby bigger towns. VeloCity proposes to reinstate these routes as cycling and walking networks to form village clusters that can provide a sufficiently sized population that can support shared services and infrastructures without the need of a car.

The reduction of car use means we can plan streets differently and release more land with which to build more densely.

Opportunities for new housing typologies can explore shared resources at the micro scale – shared guest rooms, meeting spaces and gardens, providing a type of housing that might suit younger or older people living on their own. Marmalade Lane, a recent scheme by the developer Town on the outskirts of Cambridge is a good example of this – introducing a co-housing governance model with shared community facilities.

Building more densely in villages also brings opportunities to re-use and reinvigorate their existing buildings and infrastructure. This means lower capital costs than a new build development as installation of new utilities and high-speed data networks can run under the upgraded cycle and footpath network. Rural locations are ideally suited for local energy generation sensitively integrated within the landscape with opportunities for community ownership. In doing so villages become more sustainable environments offering new employment opportunities.

Furthermore, if we can concentrate development within villages, then the undeveloped open countryside between villages is protected and can be used as a resource for enhancing ecology, food production and providing shared amenity space for the village communities. VeloCity refers to this resource as the Big Back Garden.

The findings from our research indicate that people perceive density quite differently to the numerical measurement. It is a little bit like Paris and New York, which both have the same numerical density but people's perception of them is quite different. Similarly, people see places as attractive and desirable to live despite having a numerically high density. For example, the village of Dent in Yorkshire attracts a large number of tourists

not just for the beauty of the Yorkshire Dales countryside but also for the village itself which is perceived as highly picturesque and featured on postcards and tourist information.

There are large scale issues which require a wholesale mind shift.

It is not just about changes in people's perception but also changes in the current delivery and economics of our housing market, and fundamental changes to planning policy – reviewing where you can or cannot build new homes in the countryside and unlock land previously considered undevelopable.

At the small scale it is about understanding what true placemaking in villages is. Villages are not towns and cues should be drawn from topography and historic evolution not suburban typologies. Local distinctiveness is not just about applying local materials to pattern book designs, it is about massing, layout and grouping. It is also about understanding the social and economic issues effecting community life – the critical mass needed to support everyday services and applying a collective, sharing principle to abolish 'not in my back yard' mentality and recognise the advantage working together as a cluster of villages.

In simple terms it is about integrating with what is already there and tapping into the sense of place.

¹ *Village classification in accordance with The Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) process*

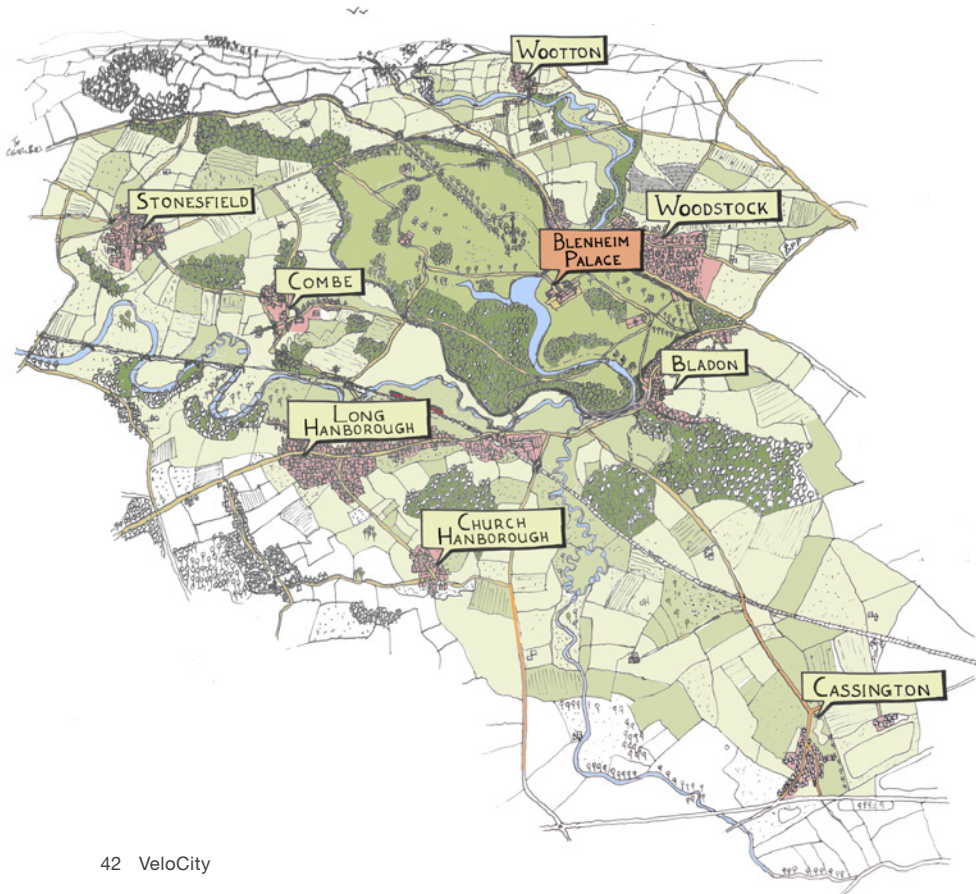
² <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/sep/14/ruralaffairs.britishidentity>

³ *Guy Shrubsole author of Who owns England? How we Lost our Green and Pleasant Land, and How to Take it Back*



Making it happen: Applying VeloCity vision to a real place

Blenheim Estate: VeloCity Living Lab



Our ultimate ambition has been to find a client and a place where we could pilot and develop our vision.

To be successful we knew that such a client would need to share our values and ambitions, would need to be in a position to take a long term view and not be swayed by short term political imperatives, be well connected and respected by the local community and partners in the areas in which they operate.

In early 2019 we met representatives from the Blenheim Estate, comprising a stately home, 2000 acres of parkland, a working farm and lands extending to eight villages on its fringes. A number of these villages are quite isolated and could benefit from greater connectivity to help grow a thriving and intrinsically linked community of the future.

At the same time these villages suffer from a number of intractable issues associated with ageing populations, high house prices, a lack of and declining levels of services, high levels of congestion and a lack of accessibility to alternative, more sustainable modes of transport.

Based on this context we have developed a strategy that takes a more joined up look at the Estate and the villages surrounding them. In so doing supports the delivery of an holistic and all-encompassing future growth strategy to ensure a thriving cluster of all eight villages.

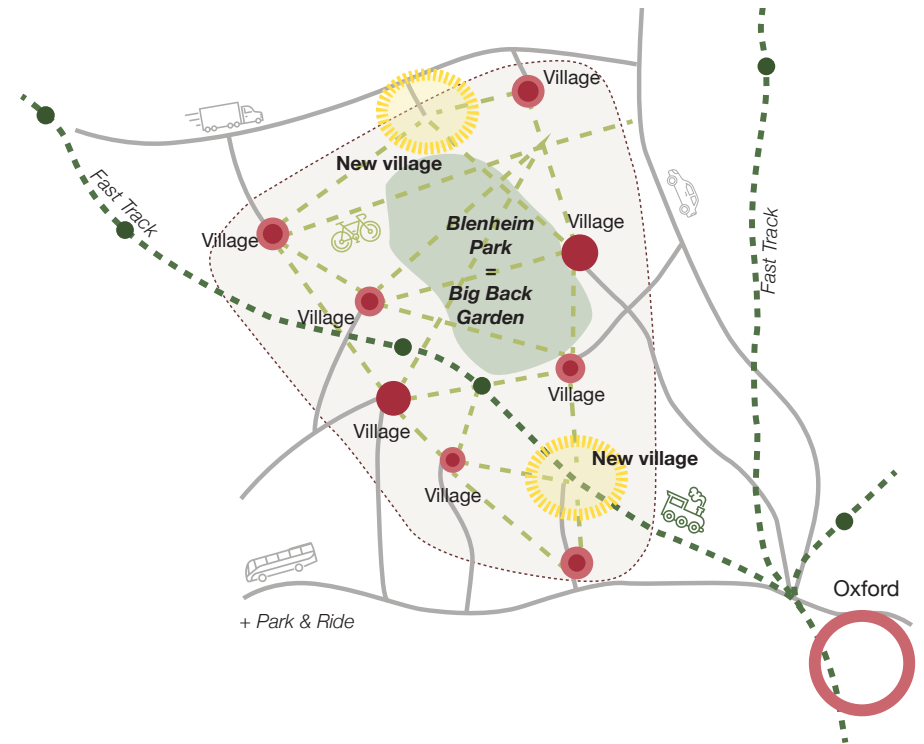
The initiative will be led and championed by Blenheim Estate as landowner, developer and long term steward of the land. Delivery will, however depend on the multiplicity of partners and the communities living and working in the area – now and in the future.

The Road Map

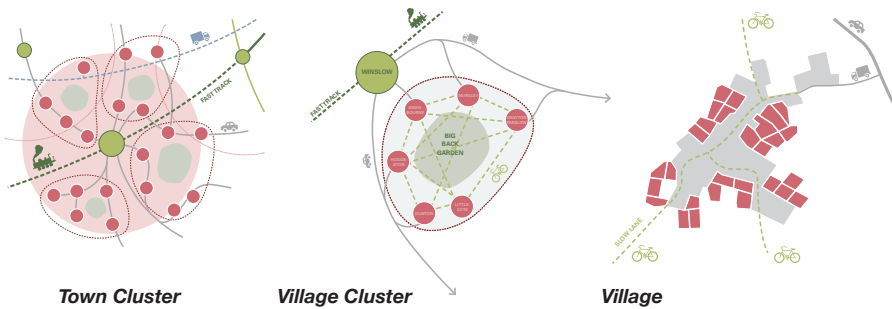
A Road Map sets out the enabling actions to deliver the spatial strategy. This embraces our 5 Velocity Principles and requires fresh-thinking and policy change to transport and movement, development and planning alongside effective community interface and engagement and new approaches to farming practice, food production and land management.

It illustrates how the strategy can be built out over a 20 year plan, testing and refining the approach in the short term to enable a transition in medium to long term.

VeloCity principles applied to Blenheim Estate



VeloCity scaleability



Town Cluster

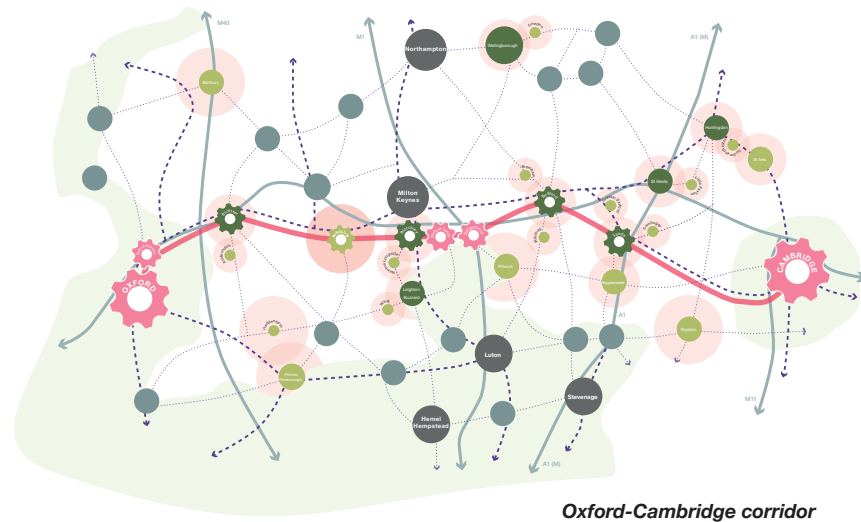
Village Cluster

Village

The emerging strategy is being evolved in consultation with the Estate and local planning representatives. In the short term we are seeking support from the Council and community and want to foster a spirit of collectivity between villages. Plans are being put in place to pilot new cycle and walking routes across the Estate linking villages more directly. Pop-up community hubs will be located along routes providing places to meet and work. New housing typologies will be developed to be low carbon and less land hungry in order to better protect the environment and countryside.

It is envisaged that this emerging strategy will when complete form the basis of a number of different strategies that can be promoted and implemented in to the Estate's Legacy plan.

The work with Blenheim is a first step. Our vision can be applied to many villages across the UK and we invite communities, landowners, councils and wider stakeholders to take forward the vision.



Oxford-Cambridge corridor

VeloCity - self-supporting village cluster



VeloCity story

VeloCity is the winning proposal for National Infrastructure Commission's placemaking ideas competition, which sought inspirational visions for the future of development within the arc encompassing Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Northampton and Oxford, one of the UK's fastest-growing and most productive regions.

VeloCity was devised by an expert team of placemakers, informing the National Infrastructure Commission's report *Partnering for Prosperity: A new deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc*, published in November 2017.

The team have spoken widely about VeloCity vision to government, local authorities, communities and landowners.

The VeloCity vision has received awards nationally and internationally, including honorary award at the *International Making Cities Livable Conference* in Ottawa, Canada (2018), *RIBA Research Fund* (2018) and the *William Sutton Prize for Excellence in Social Housing Design and Placemaking* from Clarion Housing Group (2018). These funding streams have enabled VeloCity team to develop partnerships and publish new research and findings how villages could evolve including this manifesto.

“The jury was drawn to VeloCity’s human scale approach to sensitively and incrementally accommodating new homes, alongside the team’s commitment to ensuring new settlements would be communities from the get-go. Creating effective new settlements can be challenging: the team’s flair and imagination in addressing this shows how good design can translate into liveable communities.”

Bridget Rosewell

*Commissioner and competition jury Chair,
National Infrastructure Commission*

“...wherever they go, people see the value of this different, less invasive, more connective and evolutionary approach”

Veronica Simpson

Design Curial

VeloCity team

Left to right

Sarah Featherstone *Featherstone Young*

Kay Hughes *Khaa*

Annalie Riches *Mikhail Riches*

Petra Marko *Marko & Placemakers*

Jennifer Ross *Tibbalds Planning and Urban Design*

Judith Sykes *Expedition Engineering*



Oslo Architecture Triennale 2019

This manifesto was first launched at the Oslo Architecture Triennale in September 2019. This second edition dated March 2020 incorporates additional chapter - Making it Happen.

The Oslo Architecture Triennale is one of the world's prominent arenas for dissemination and discussion of architectural and urban challenges. The exhibition overarching theme of Degrowth explores new ways of shaping our society in the age of climate emergency.





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