

**The next steps**

What new housing and planning powers will mayoral strategic authorities have?

**Institutional capital – the key to regen**

Economic reality often hampers council projects – but there is a solution

**Defence creates opportunity**

The sector needs to seize the moment presented by increased defence spending

# New towns report delayed amid fears over rising costs

**EXCLUSIVE by Heather Jameson**

The final report of the New Towns Taskforce has been delayed as part of the Government's attempts at a refresh.

The report was due to be published at an event on 8 September – just days after the reshuffle sparked by deputy prime minister Angela Rayner's resignation.

However, *The MJ* understands ministers are wrangling over timings, as the new team gets to grips with their new briefs.

Housing minister Matthew Pennycook is understood to be arguing for a later launch date, while No10 is keen to release the report during Labour Party conference in a bid to show the

Government is making key progress on the major issues facing the country.

Further speculation suggests ministers are keen to hold publication of the report until the Government collates its response, a move that could delay the report until the Budget or even December.

Once source told *The MJ*: 'Even people on the Taskforce are not clear what is going on.'

As the housing crisis worsens, the lack of action from the Government is creating uncertainty for investors, while the volatile political landscape is exacerbating uncertainty.

The source said: 'I am very fearful that momentum is being lost. It is all becoming a bit considered and careful, but that is not delivering any housing.'

'There is a real danger that the excitement and enthusiasm from investors has got lost in the fog of how weak the market is now.'

The final report is expected to reveal the location of a dozen new town sites, with a mixture of new conurbations, extensions to cities and progressing existing programmes.

It is also expected to make significant recommendations about future capital and infrastructure investments in the UK.

However, fears have been raised that the Treasury have become increasingly involved as the potential cost of the new towns mooted continues to rise due to land values, the need to deliver 40% social housing and the remedial work needed on some of the sites.

According to reports in May, projections for the cost of building the new towns by WPI Strategies were estimated at £48bn – a figure the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government branded as 'extremely speculative'.

A second regeneration source told *The MJ* several sites could struggle to get off the ground without significant public sector investment.

The New Towns Taskforce was set up in September 2024, chaired by Sir Michael Lyons. It was tasked with recommending sites for the next generation of new towns – both new sites and expanding existing conurbations – with settlements of at least 10,000 homes. ■

## Reed makes 1.5m homes commitment

The new housing secretary Steve Reed has insisted the Government is 'absolutely committed' to getting 1.5 million homes built in England by 2029.

Former environment secretary Steve Reed replaced Angela Rayner at the helm of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government after her resignation.

Reed said he would come up with an 'acceleration package' that would get planning applications approved more quickly and 'spades in the ground', threatening sanctions on developers that failed to build 'at pace and at scale'.

He added: 'We are doubling down on our plans to unleash one of the biggest eras of building in our country's history and we are backing the builders all the way.'

'Through major planning reform and investment, we will break down the barriers to development and build the 1.5 million homes this country needs.'



Steve Reed visits a development in Houghton Regis in one of his first appearances in his new Government role

# The next steps



London-style Mayoral Development Corporations – such as the London Legacy Development Corporation which was responsible for the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park – are being rolled out across the country as an example of the potential impact of the Devolution Bill

‘A new dawn of regional power’ is how Angela Rayner hailed the Government’s Devolution Bill when it was published in early July.

That was of course before the now former deputy prime minister’s resignation, less than three months later, which has robbed devolution of its most prominent advocate within the Cabinet.

However the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, to give the legislation its full title, passed its first Parliamentary hurdle before Rayner’s dramatic fall from grace.

The Bill, if it becomes law, gives strategic authorities wide-ranging new housing and planning powers on a par with those exercised by the Mayor of London.

The powers won’t be immediately available on a widespread basis because they will be limited to those authorities that succeed in passing a spatial development strategy. The idea is that the new powers will help mayors to implement these strategic plans for their areas.

So what are the new powers being handed to the mayoral strategic authorities and how could they spur efforts to boost housebuilding and regeneration?

## Mayoral Development Corporations

One of the major moves in the Devolution Bill is to open the door for the establishment of Mayoral Development Corporations (MDCs) across England.

Existing legislation allows the London mayor to set up MDCs, which have their own planning powers. Outside of the capital though, mayors can only establish MDCs if they receive the go ahead from the secretary of state. Now though, the Government is proposing that all strategic authority mayors should have powers to set up MDCs, effectively streamlining the process for establishing such bodies.

As well as making it easier to establish MDCs, the Bill makes it easier for mayors to issue a Mayoral Development Order (MDO), which can be used to grant pre-emptive

With the English Devolution Bill gaining momentum, **David Blackman** assesses what new housing and planning powers are likely to be given to mayoral strategic authorities – and how this will impact regeneration and housebuilding going forwards

planning permission for development before an application has even been submitted.

This means strategic authorities just have to secure consent from the secretary of state to grant an MDO and won’t have to get the go ahead from the relevant local planning authority as well.

These measures are being introduced alongside steps in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill that allow MDCs to be set up to tackle the development of large greenfield sites, like new towns, as well as the regeneration of brownfield land that they have until now been limited to.

Mike Kiely, former Croydon LBC chief planner, argues that increasing the roll out of MDCs is a good idea because they have proved an ‘ideal tool’ for redeveloping ‘very large sites’, like derelict industrial plants.

They are a particularly useful mechanism for handling developments, which have an impact on more than one local authority, he adds.

Setting up an MDC with its own development management powers to determine planning applications could also relieve some of the workload pressure on planners at existing councils, says Catriona Riddell, strategic planning specialist at the Planning Officers Society (POS).

## Community Infrastructure Levy

Alongside allowing all strategic authorities to establish MDCs, the Devolution Bill also gives mayors powers to establish their own mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

The levy would have to be approved by a majority of the strategic authority’s constituent councils, which will still be able to set their own local CILs.

CILs set by mayors will be necessary to deliver the kind of large-scale infrastructure required to underpin major new development, Riddell says.

This is because contributions from individual council CILs are ‘meaningless’ in the context of the sums needed to deliver strategic-scale infrastructure, she says.

As an example, the new reservoirs needed to meet the demands of new development for water may not be viable without the top up developer contributions from a mayoral CIL, Riddell says: ‘We’ve got to have some strategic scale developer contribution, otherwise we’re not going to be able to deliver the infrastructure.’

‘This (mayoral CIL) could be a game changer.’

Nic Thomas, director of planning at Wiltshire Council, agrees that giving mayoral authorities CIL powers could help to deliver infrastructure that has ramifications across individual borough boundaries.

There will need to be ‘careful thought’ though about the impact upon the viability of development from having more than one layer of CIL, which is already additional to other contributions developers pay through section 106 agreements, says Bainbridge: ‘If you then add an additional layer, it needs clarity that the additional CIL provisions will be very clearly related to what the proposed development is.’

Otherwise, given the potential scale of combined authorities in rural areas, he says a CIL contribution levied on a development may be used to pay for infrastructure provision in an unrelated area.

And Kiely wonders where the mayor’s CIL top slice will come from in those parts of the country where land values are low.

This could detract from the amount of CIL that can be used locally, says Thomas: ‘We’ve got viability issues across the board and there’s obviously only so much money in the pot.’

## Call in powers

Another area where elected mayors look set to receive London-style powers is over strategically important planning applications.

The Devolution Bill gives all mayors powers to direct the refusal of planning applications of strategic importance, the thresholds of which are due to be defined in regulations. In addition, they will have powers to call in such applications for their own determination.

Kiely, who is now chair of the POS board, identifies ‘two circumstances’ where these call in powers are needed. The first is where a development has ‘very clear strategic importance’, particularly where an application straddles borough boundaries. The second is where the strategic authority sees local planners going down the ‘wrong direction’, such as in response to grassroots pressures.

In an urban context, like London or Manchester, strategic decisions will have implications across the whole of the city or the greater conurbation, says Steve Bambrick, corporate director, planning, growth and sustainability at Buckinghamshire Council.

‘You can see where those linkages lie.’

However, like with the CIL (above) this becomes a ‘much more tenuous argument’ across the bigger geographies that may result from different counties being yoked together into single strategic authorities, he says.

Similar concerns apply in Wiltshire, which is part of a mooted Wessex strategic authority also covering Dorset and Somerset, says Thomas: ‘You don’t have that many proposals that are of that significance in terms of the scale and strategic importance.’

The exceptions in this more rural context are large strategic infrastructure projects, like big road schemes

or potentially ‘sensitive and complex’ renewable energy proposals, he says.

But the new powers will fuel concerns too that planning decision-making powers are being further taken away from the local level.

## ‘A worry is that the Government might use devolution to offload a lot of stuff onto these regional authorities’

However the Greater London Authority (GLA) hasn’t generally interfered too much with local planning processes over the quarter of a century it has had such call in powers, says Kiely: ‘It’s important that they (mayors) use those powers, not sparingly but wisely and don’t throw their weight around.’

And when and if the new powers are introduced, there will still be a key constitutional distinction with how they currently work in London, says Riddell.

The GLA is independent of the councils that it covers unlike the strategic authorities in the rest of England where the constituent authorities have a say in decisions, she says: ‘If one of the mayors wants to call in a strategic application, they’re calling in an application from one of their partners on the strategic authority.’

‘It is a slightly different set up in terms of who has the powers and the implications for local authorities within the strategic authority.’

‘It feels like a different dynamic to what happens in London.’

## Homes England

The Bill also gives powers to strip national agency Homes England and councils of their existing housing and land functions by handing them over to strategic authorities.

The only part of England to enjoy such powers now is

London where the capital’s mayor has had control over the social housing grants dished out by Homes England and its several predecessor bodies since the GLA’s establishment 25 years ago.

However developers may be worried that this proposed extension of devolution will lead to inconsistency around how such grants to housing associations are awarded, says Savills’ Bainbridge: ‘Whether one agrees or disagrees with it (Homes England), you’ve got or should have national oversight and consistency of approach.’

Riddell is concerned meanwhile that devolution of housing and land functions may lead to strategic authorities becoming overburdened, like she suggests has happened at the GLA.

‘A worry is that the Government might use devolution to offload a lot of stuff onto these regional authorities,’ she says, noting how the London mayor has too much individual responsibility around housing, infrastructure and planning.

‘You’ve got to make sure that the powers and the responsibilities that these strategic authorities have are the right level.’

‘They’re not going to be massive organisations. The GLA has grown into a massive organisation but it’s almost got too big and it’s got too much to do and therefore it’s not able to work effectively. My one concern is that they (strategic authorities) may end up doing too much.’

Rather than hand over Homes England’s cash and powers to the still fledgling tier of strategic authorities, Bambrick reckons it would be better to give existing devolution initiatives more time to develop.

Buckinghamshire Council is currently putting the finishing touches to a Level Two devolution deal, which could see it secure CPO powers currently vested with Homes England, he says: ‘We’d very much like to see the level two deals given a chance to flourish before we take further steps.’

‘Before we take further potential steps which may or may not be effective, we’d like to see those working or given an opportunity to work.’ ■

# The power shift

**Chrissy Galerakis takes a look at how local leaders can drive large scale impact**

The balance of power in England is shifting. With new devolution deals being agreed, we are seeing more combined authorities emerging and local leaders are taking on greater responsibility for delivering on some of the most complex challenges of our time – from levelling up to achieving net zero.

This transition reflects two simple truths. Firstly, many of the issues we face are inherently place-based. Decarbonising housing, regenerating neighbourhoods, reforming transport – none of these can be solved by Whitehall alone. Second, they require coordination at a scale larger than a single local authority, but with the local legitimacy and responsiveness that only devolved governance can bring.

For the newest combined authorities, there is much to learn from the trailblazers who came before them. Some combined authorities have been operating for more than a decade, including the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and these have shown how devolved powers can be used to deliver meaningful change – from large-scale regeneration schemes to innovative low-carbon programmes.

Equans is partnered with both WMCA and GMCA on multiple projects and we truly believe the point of difference in terms of their success has been an upfront commitment and plan for outcomes. Central Government, and particularly HM Treasury, increasingly expects clear evidence that local programmes deliver measurable outcomes. That means going beyond counting outputs to capturing the full breadth of social, economic, and environmental impact of investments.

A key example of this innovation in practice is the Net Zero Neighbourhoods (NZN) Logic



Model, developed by Equans for the WMCA. Recognising the need for a stronger and coordinated evidence base across its Local Net Zero Accelerator (LNZA) program, this model provides a framework to connect local interventions – such as retrofitting homes, installing active travel infrastructure, or creating new green spaces – with outcomes that matter to communities and government alike.

It maps a clear chain from outputs (eg retrofit measures installed) to immediate outcomes (eg

warmer homes, reduced emissions, improved wellbeing) to intermediate outcomes (eg lower fuel poverty, better air quality and reduced NHS demand). And finally to impacts at regional and national level, such as carbon reduction and inclusive growth.

**The UK's path to net zero depends on bridging the gap between national ambition and local delivery. Combined authorities are the critical link in that chain.**

It helps those that commission and deliver projects understand how their activities link to broader goals, supporting more comprehensive and outcome based design and investment from the beginning. It also ensures that imbedded into projects is the collection of data to ensure that we are monitoring progress towards those goals.

By standardising indicators across projects, this logic model approach allows combined authorities to present a consistent and credible story of impact across investments and projects. It helps make the case for continued investment by the Treasury, while also ensuring that community-centred design remains at the centre.

The UK's path to net zero depends on bridging the gap between national ambition

and local delivery. Combined authorities are the critical link in that chain. They are large enough to coordinate across housing, transport, energy, and skills; yet rooted enough in place to design solutions that reflect the realities of local communities.

The NZN Logic Model illustrates how this can be achieved. It demonstrates that investment in place-based decarbonisation doesn't just cut carbon – it creates healthier homes, greener neighbourhoods, safer streets, and more resilient economies.

At Equans, we are proud to have supported WMCA, GMCA, and others in developing frameworks like the NZN Logic Model. We see this as more than a technical exercise: it is about building the evidence base that will unlock long-term finance and give combined authorities the confidence to scale up their ambitions.

As new combined authorities are established, the opportunity is to learn from the pioneers and adopt proven models that show what works. If they do, the case for devolved power will only strengthen and the rewards will be felt not just locally, but nationally.

The power is shifting. The question now is how quickly we can harness it to deliver the outcomes communities need and Treasury demands. ■

**Chrissy Galerakis is head of social value strategy at Equans UK & Ireland**



The proposed Stevenage Station Gateway area

## Institutional capital – the key to regen

There is no lack of vision when it comes to local authority regeneration projects but they are often stymied by economic reality. **Tom Roberts** suggests the answer is institutional capital

There is no shortage of vision for regeneration across the UK. From town centre renewal to unlocking new neighbourhoods, local authorities have clear priorities shaped by the needs of their communities and the ambitions of national policy. However, in many places, that vision remains unrealised. This challenge is not a lack of intent. Instead, economic pressures can delay delivery, particularly in areas where investment is most urgently needed.

Traditional development models tend to favour locations offering lower risk and stronger financial return. In contrast, where land values are modest, infrastructure is incomplete and viability uncertain, the market alone is rarely able to deliver the scale of intervention required.

Many towns and neighbourhoods with significant potential are therefore overlooked. These are also the places where regeneration can have the greatest social and economic impact, yet where access to capital, appetite for risk and delivery capacity are often most limited.

Institutional capital, structured through long-term partnerships, can help address this challenge.

### Institutional investment = urban regeneration

Institutional capital already plays a well-established role in supporting growth across housing, infrastructure, and science and innovation economies, and its relevance to urban regeneration continues to grow.

What distinguishes this form of investment is its long-term nature and capacity to remain engaged through economic cycles. It is well-suited to complex programmes that unfold over time and can deliver value in the long term, even if they face short-term macroeconomic headwinds. Increasingly, institutional investors are also guided by environmental, social

and governance (ESG) commitments, recognising that they can deploy capital, manage risk, and generate desirable returns in ways that also support environmental performance, social impact, and good governance.

However, to operate in more challenging markets, institutional capital requires a delivery framework that provides clarity, capability, and a route to long-term value. It must meet stakeholder expectations and align with responsible investment mandates. At L&G, we have long recognised this can be achieved through partnerships rooted in investment and development expertise combined with place-based insights from local leaders.

### Creating the conditions for delivery

One of the many ways we work with place-based partners is through ECF, a placemaking partnership between L&G, Homes England, and Muse. Our partnership was established to bring together three of the country's leading regeneration and investment organisations, pooling the knowledge, resources, and experience of each partner to deliver socially and economically useful local regeneration projects in collaboration with local partners and experts.

Backed by this expertise and resource, ECF's focus is on delivering regeneration in places that have faced structural barriers to investment. These are often places with reduced interest from the traditional market but clear potential to support inclusive growth.

From Salford to Canning Town and St Helens, ECF has partnered with the public sector to support regeneration in areas that previously struggled to attract investment. These projects have progressed because delivery was underpinned by partnerships that offered confidence and clarity for all

involved. In the process, this long-term approach builds local confidence, catalysing further investment from other market actors to deliver greater positive change at local and regional levels.

### Stevenage Station Gateway: a fresh approach

Stevenage Station Gateway illustrates this model in practice. The site sits at a central location and offers the potential to support new housing, employment and connectivity. Despite its importance and promise, the site presents complex challenges, including infrastructure requirements, land assembly and long-standing constraints on delivery.

ECF recently announced our work with Stevenage BC, Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Network Rail to bring forward a new masterplan for the area. The transformative proposals include up to 1,000 homes, employment space, improved public realm and better transport links. The structure of the partnership ensures that viability, infrastructure and phasing are considered together, from the outset.

This is a strategic project shaped around the town's priorities. Through the ECF partnership, institutional capital has been engaged early, helping to unlock potential that could have otherwise remained unrealised.

Our experience at Stevenage and across the wider ECF portfolio demonstrates the value of early alignment between local authority objectives and long-term capital. Delivery in complex locations requires more than funding: it depends on shared governance, consistent leadership, and frameworks that support clear decision-making.

### Regeneration that lasts

Local government continues to operate in a demanding environment, balancing resource pressures with growing expectations. Partnering with institutional investment and development experts can provide the capital, capacity, and capability to unlock urban regeneration that enhances and positively enriches communities.

At ECF, we continue to grow our partnerships with local authorities across the country to deliver for those areas with comparable market challenges. These successes demonstrate that, with the right model in place, institutional capital can make regeneration happen where it matters most. ■

**Tom Roberts is head of strategic investment at L&G and board member of ECF**

# Unlocking brownfield potential

Faced with the challenge of rising housing demand, Guildford BC is turning a former industrial site into a thriving new community, says **Ezra Wallace**. It proves how councils can unlock brownfield land while protecting the countryside.

Like many councils across the country, Guildford has faced the challenge of meeting rising housing targets while protecting our green spaces and ensuring development is sustainable and community-focused. That's why we're using a brownfield site for our latest major development scheme.

Weyside Urban Village (WUV) is a transformative regeneration scheme that will deliver 1,650 high-quality new homes, with 40% designated as affordable. This is not just a housing project, it's a bold reimagining of a complex brownfield site, located within walking distance of

Guildford town centre. It's a testament to what councils can achieve through partnership and an ambition for place. The journey began in 2019, when the site was allocated in our Local Plan. The area, previously characterised by low-

density industrial and utility uses, offered a rare opportunity to create new homes without encroaching on the green belt. But unlocking this potential required vision, investment, and a commitment to infrastructure-first development.



Proposed view of the new Riverside Walk

**Infrastructure first**  
Guildford BC is acting as the master infrastructure developer for WUV, investing £335m to de-risk the site and lay the groundwork for future development. Our communities consistently tell us that infrastructure must come hand-in-hand with new housing and we've listened.

This investment is delivering one of the first new sewage treatment works in the England in over two decades, a new waste transfer facility, a modern council depot, and extensive upgrades to power and transport infrastructure. These are the backbone of a future thriving, sustainable community.

**Making way for new homes**  
The WUV site spans 42 hectares and includes a former landfill, a Thames Water sewage treatment works, a borough council depot and a county council waste transfer station. Unlocking this land for housing has required strategic land assembly and collaboration across agencies.

Through a development agreement with Thames Water, we're enabling the construction of a new, modern sewage treatment works on the former landfill site.

Simultaneously, we're undertaking a land swap with Surrey CC to relocate the waste transfer facility to land currently owned by Guildford BC. This will free up the existing site for new employment space.

Our new council depot, already under construction, will co-locate services in a single, energy-efficient facility. Designed using a 'fabric first' approach, it will reduce carbon emissions, lower maintenance costs and support our goal of becoming a net zero borough by 2030. The inclusion of green technologies will future-proof our operations, enabling a transition to a greener fleet and evolving waste collection needs.

**Investing in transport and sustainable travel**  
Transport infrastructure is another cornerstone of the WUV scheme. We've committed more than £10.5m to a package of nine highways improvements that will support the development and ease congestion in surrounding areas.

Work is already underway to improve key access routes into the site and to enhance pedestrian safety and support sustainable travel. We'll also be including

new walking and cycling routes into the town centre.

**Creating green space for all**  
WUV isn't just about homes and infrastructure, it's about creating a place where people want to live, work, and spend time. Central to this is the creation of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) at Burpham Court Farm.

Previously inaccessible agricultural land, it's being transformed into a scenic, ecologically rich green space equivalent in size to 60 football pitches. This new SANG will protect the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, support local biodiversity, and provide recreational space for residents and visitors.

**Planning for the future**  
Delivering a scheme of this scale is a significant undertaking, especially for a non-metropolitan borough. We continue to face challenges familiar to many in the sector. These include rising borrowing costs, labour shortages, and persistent inflation driving up construction and operational expenses, together with uncertainty over sales values which mean



Aerial view of the new Guildford Borough Council depot under construction

that we have to keep the scheme under review to avoid costs falling on the local taxpayer.

Despite these headwinds, we remain focused on delivering the new housing our communities expect. Our mitigation strategy is robust, and we continue to benefit from the advice and scrutiny of Guildford BC's independent assurance panel. Their challenge has been invaluable in helping us navigate complexity and risk, and we will work closely with them in the future.

Drone footage of the site shows just

how far we've come. It's a powerful visual reminder of what's possible when councils take the lead, invest in infrastructure, and put community needs at the heart of regeneration.

WUV is more than a housing scheme, it's a blueprint for council-led development that is ambitious, sustainable, and inclusive. And it's just the beginning of what we hope to achieve in Guildford. ■

*Ezra Wallace is joint strategic director for economy, planning and place at Guildford BC*

# Smart investments proving a catalyst to a bright future

Telford & Wrekin Council is making giant strides to make the borough a better place to live, work, learn and socialise through a series of high-profile investment projects. **David Sidaway** explains

Currently, £300m is being invested into a range of new developments in Telford and Wrekin at Station Quarter in the town centre, Wellington, Oakengates and other parts of the borough as part of our Investing in Telford and Wrekin programme.

We've funded more than half of this total investment but have maximised external funding available from the West Midlands Combined Authority, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), the Towns Fund, the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and private sector to help deliver these projects.

Projects are at various stages of development but are all on site and set to be completed by 2027, despite the challenges of cost inflation over previous years.

We're not just delivering new build projects, we're bringing some of our borough's most historic buildings back into use to ensure they remain a central part of our heritage.

We're doing this work to ensure the borough is well equipped for the next 50 years with new homes, education facilities, social spaces and public realm improvements.

**Telford town centre**  
In Telford town centre the ambitious development of Station Quarter is a game-changer for the town.

At the heart of this development is The Quad, which

opened in September 2024 as a modern hub that represents the future of Telford and a place for education, business and innovation to thrive.

Earlier this year, work started to transform the former Addenbrooke House Council offices into a new sixth form centre for Telford College.

The new facility, opening in September 2026, means the college can relocate its A-Level provision to the heart of Telford. It will see an increase in students that access education outside of the borough and will provide a significant footfall boost to the centre with more than 2,000 students on site.

Town centre living is also a big part of the Station Quarter scheme with the creation of 189 new homes – 117 are being developed by Nuplace, Telford & Wrekin Council's wholly owned housing company, along with a further 72 Legal & General affordable homes.

A new 142-room Hampton by Hilton hotel is also being built creating new facilities in the town and up to 40 full time jobs.

This is a strategic intervention designed to shape our place – providing certainty and clarity to the investment market.

**Wellington**  
In our historic market town of Wellington a major transformation is underway with an ambitious redevelopment project which will revitalise public spaces, creating vibrant



(Above) Artist's impression of the new Hampton by Hilton hotel at Station Quarter; (right) aerial photo showing the Station Quarter development making progress

areas our residents can take pride in while attracting more visitors and boosting investment.

Public realm work improvements include widening streets, new footpaths, and improved parking options making it safer and more pedestrian friendly.

Wellington Market is also being refurbished to safeguard its future for the next 50 years after being neglected previously. The council stepped in and acquired the market as part of



place shaping leadership and is investing in the regeneration of the market.

The works will deliver improved market entrances, better accessibility, better quality stalls, with more space for traders and customers, and a permanent external covered area with a range of food and beverage outlets.

Wellington Orbit cinema is also undergoing major refurbishment, creating a cultural hub in the town centre –

further cementing the town as a destination for culture and trade.

**Oakengates**  
In Oakengates, a new Telford theatre is being created which will provide state-of-the-art theatre facilities and enhancing the visitor experience.

New facilities at the venue, set to open in 2027, include a larger main auditorium, modernised backstage facilities and a

separate studio theatre which can support community groups and smaller acts.

Oakengates Town Centre is also being regenerated to boost footfall into the town.

The 1960's shopping precinct is being transformed into a modern shopping experience for residents and visitors and shops on Limes Walk are being modernised to make them more attractive, with new homes above the shops.

The investment in this phase is more than £35m in partnership with Government funding, council funding and the private sector securing significant leverage.

**Retaining our heritage buildings**  
As well as investment into the future, we are also caring for and protecting our past with the retention of our old heritage buildings. We're restoring and regenerating them across the borough – bringing some back into permanent use and refurbishing others so they are safeguarded for years to come.

They include the redevelopment of the iconic Grade II listed Gower building in St Georges, the transformation of a former Victoria school in Ketley Bank and the refurbishment of the former YMCA building at 1 Walker Street in Wellington to create upper floor apartments and a new retail space.

Each of these projects are more than just a physical regeneration – they provide an opportunity to attract new investment, create jobs and ensure Telford remains a destination for both businesses and families. ■

*David Sidaway is chief executive of Telford and Wrekin Council*

# Defence creates opportunity

Defence spending is about to reshape the UK's economic map, says **Victoria Evans**, and local government needs to seize the opportunity this presents for regeneration.

At a NATO summit in the Netherlands in June this year, the Prime Minister confirmed that defence spending will rise to 5% of GDP by 2035, in line with other NATO members. For councils, that commitment is significant. It represents one of the largest streams of sustained public investment in the economy over the coming years.

Unlike short-term regeneration pots, this spending trajectory is long-term, predictable, and a clear signal of where national Government is putting its money – and where opportunities for local growth will follow.

The current trajectory of investment, combined with developments in the defence and security sector, points towards a future that is broader, more connected to civilian industries, and more widely spread across the economy. With dual-use technologies, diversified supply chains and a growing ecosystem of supporting services, opportunities are moving into reach of those regions ready to act and shape their role.

## The opportunity

For local government, the opportunity is clear: defence and security spending can become more than a national priority – it can be a driver of local renewal.

The defence industry itself of course remains at the core of the defence landscape: shipbuilding and aerospace primes, component suppliers, the maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) services that sustain platforms, and security providers ranging from cybersecurity vendors to protective services. These will continue to drive billions into local economies.

But around this core sits a wider ecosystem – the infrastructure that connects supply chains, universities and research centres where dual-use innovation emerges, colleges training the workforce, and the financial and professional services that support complex contracts.

The 2025 Defence and Economic Growth Taskforce led by the Confederation of British Industry and Oliver Wyman highlighted that this ecosystem is where much of the multiplier effect occurs, with spill-overs into civilian technologies, local supply chains, and skills pipelines. For councils, that makes the opportunity broader than it first appears and derisks against historic challenges of dominant local employers.

The benefits are not only economic. Defence-related investment can shape local identity and build civic confidence. Cheltenham's cyber cluster shows how a town can become known for innovation. Elsewhere, regeneration projects like football stadium quarters or cultural districts demonstrate how targeted investment can galvanise communities and change how a place sees itself.

Defence-linked growth has the same potential to spark renewal and create new narratives about resilience and future opportunity.

For councils, this is not abstract. Defence spending can underpin priorities already on their desks: strengthening supply chains, supporting the green transition and embedding pride in place.

## The role of local government

So how can local government make the most of this moment?



Keir Starmer and German chancellor Friedrich Merz visit Airbus UK in the week the PM announced a rise in defence spending

The first step is to map the defence landscape locally. That means looking beyond obvious primes and identifying how wider supply chains, research activity, and service providers already link into your area. Alongside this, councils should assess constraints such as skills shortages, housing demand or infrastructure gaps.

Second, authorities should integrate this understanding into existing growth plans. This should not be treated as a separate exercise. Defence-related opportunities need to be considered alongside ambitions already in play – whether advanced manufacturing corridors, digital clusters, university partnerships or town centre renewal. The taskforce report underlines this point: the greatest economic benefits emerge when defence investment connects into wider regional strategies.

Third, councils should identify concrete opportunities. This could mean helping SMEs enter defence supply chains and supporting with understanding opportunities for exports, brokering partnerships with universities or further education colleges, or creating training pathways with employers. The priority is to ensure opportunities feed back into local growth – supporting local businesses, creating local jobs, and strengthening civic infrastructure.

Finally, local authorities should focus on the enablers – housing, transport, skills and infrastructure. These are not just challenges but opportunities. Councils need to deliver them anyway to support growth and meet community demand. Defence-related investment can tip the balance, making schemes viable that might otherwise struggle.

The housing or transport improvement that serves a defence workforce will also benefit residents, creating wider regeneration dividends.

## What next?

The signal from central government is unambiguous: defence spending is rising, and it will be one of the defining investment programmes of the decade. By the time of this article's publication, the defence industrial strategy will have been released, providing detail on how government is planning to prioritise this sector. The ball is now in the court of local government to seize the opportunity. There is no need to wait for Whitehall to knock.

Handled well, this is not just about defence. It is about embedding regeneration, building resilience and fostering pride in place. Councils that act early will put their areas at the front of the queue for investment, innovation and long-term prosperity. The question is whether local government will step forward and claim their place in this national story ■

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You can read the report summarising recommendations from the Defence and Economic Growth Taskforce by scanning this QR code

