



Futureproof New Towns

Invitation to Tender

February 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1. The RTPI

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) champions the power of planning to create sustainable, prosperous places and vibrant communities. We have over 27,000 members in the private, public, academic, and voluntary sectors. Using our expertise and research we bring evidence and thought leadership to shape planning policies and thinking, putting the profession at the heart of society's big debates. We set the standards of planning education and professional behaviour that give our members, wherever they work in the world, a unique ability to meet complex economic, social environmental and cultural challenges.

The RTPI is:

- A membership organisation and a Chartered Institute responsible for maintaining professional standards and accrediting world class planning courses nationally and internationally;
- A charity whose constitutional purpose is *to advance the science and art of planning (including town and country and spatial planning) for the benefit of the public*; and
- A learned society.

To this end, the RTPI promotes research into planning practice, theory, policy development and education. The RTPI's strategic research agenda in the UK aims to:

- Promote the funding and dissemination of research and project activity that informs and evaluates planning policy and practice;
- Promote awareness and engagement of planning practitioners in planning research at local, national and international scales;
- Encourage interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral research and dialogue; and
- Support research in planning education and lifelong learning.

1.2. Background to the project

The post-war new towns had a transformative impact on Britain. They revolutionised living standards, and represent possibly the most ambitious development programme ever undertaken in the country. The programme created the places that more than 2.8 million people today call home.

Britain's new towns have not always had such a positive perception in the public imagination. Visitors and commentators often perceive the new towns as 'frozen in time' at some point between the end of World War Two and the 1970s. This observation is not just aesthetic: many of the new towns' designs and plans 'baked in' then-current assumptions about the future – about transport, industry, urban form, culture, retail, housing, the environment, etc. These assumptions have not always stood the test of time and may have limited communities' ability to meet their needs today and in the future.

We need to avoid making the same mistakes when planning new towns. They must be ambitious and based on strong, community-led visions. But they must also be planned to evolve, grow incrementally, adapt, and be resilient to shocks. To flourish, they will need to combine a necessary idealism (including a conviction about their future growth), with indeterminacy, to allow space for uncertainty about future change, whether social, economic or environmental.

It is instructive that the British new town widely seen as the most successful – Milton Keynes – was explicitly planned with flexibility in mind. The architect-planning practice which drew up the original Plan for Milton Keynes, Llewelyn-Davies and Partners, was acclaimed for bringing modernism to hospital design. Milton Keynes was therefore planned like a modern hospital expanded to the scale of a city – around a wide, decentralised, extensible grid layout. This grid became a kind of public commitment to the future, or a platform, or set of rules, within which development would take place.

1.3. Research focus

1.3.1. Key themes

This research will look at how policymakers can ‘futureproof’ the next generation of British new towns against uncertainty, and to ensure that communities are able to leave their mark on the places they live.

It will do this by analysing case studies of new town planning around the world which, because of their initial designs, plans, governance, finance and investment approach, community development approach, marketing or otherwise, have faced and adapted to changing circumstances. It will also explore cases of failure to adapt where clear lessons can be learnt.

Changing circumstances may be due to long-term shifts in lifestyles and needs, for example in the kinds of homes people want to live in, the way they travel, or the ways in which they spend their leisure time. Sometimes they may be due to exogenous or environmental changes. For example, sudden shocks like natural disasters and longer-term shifts like increases in the frequency of extreme weather due to climate change.

In each case study, the research will examine what planning and design decisions, whether purposefully made or incidental, enabled a particular new town to adapt or evolve to meet a particular challenge or change, or to fail to do so.

The lessons learned will be particularly applicable to the planning of new towns in Britain, but also valuable for international planning practice.

Overall, we want to learn from a combination of international case studies how new towns can be designed so that:

- **They provide a framework in which new communities can grow from the bottom-up and actively shape the places in which they live; and**
- **They can effectively and flexibly respond to as-yet unforeseen changes, challenges, and needs.**

We aim to influence future UK government policy with these findings, particularly regarding new towns agenda in England.

The **Annex** provides some loose illustrative examples of the kind of themes we are interested in.

1.3.2. Achieving impact

The interim research report will be published in July. This is when the UK Government’s England-focussed New Towns Task Force is expected to publish a report identifying sites for new towns.

Our ambition is for the interim report and UK-focused main report to influence the discussion around governance arrangements and development plans for sites identified by the New Towns Task Force, and to advance good practice beyond that point.

Using the same case studies, the research will also draw insights for international practice, and these will be published separately, to coincide with COP30. This will be the final output of the commissioned work and will be branded ‘Planning is Global 4.’

This table illustrates the impact we hope to achieve with the research in different domains:

Domain	Impact
Research	Build understanding of how different new town designs and plans shape long-term outcomes. Inspire more academic research on this theme and topic both in the UK and international context.
Policy	Influence the approach decision makers take to the design of new towns so that they become successful communities as well as places to live. Demonstrate value of effective planning to meeting the UK government’s policy objectives.
The profession	Reduce reputational risk to planning and the profession of a potential new towns programme being a failure, from both public and government perspective. Produce best practice materials for longer-term training of planners working in a key policy area.
The Institute	Place the RTPI and its members at the centre of the domestic and international debates around new towns. Create unique key message for the RTPI on the issue of new towns, which distinguishes it from other organisations operating in the space and which have not been widely articulated in the public domain. Areas of relative novelty in this

	<p>study area include a) the issue of ensuring flexibility and adaptability in the design of new towns, and b) the international focus of this work.</p> <p>Develop and strengthen the RTPI's international links and contribute to the research strategy in the process.</p>
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1.3.3. Key audiences

Primary Audience: UK-based planners, civil servants, and other decision makers involved in the planning and design of new towns in England.

Secondary Audience: The planning research community (UK and international.)

Additional Audiences: Planners working internationally, other international stakeholders (including UN-Habitat.)

2. Tender information

2.1. Budget

This project will be funded up to a maximum of **£35,000 (to include all disbursements and including VAT)**, with the intention that this be paid in three instalments according to agreed project milestones (i.e. on signing of the contract, delivery of the draft report and delivery of the final report to an acceptable quality standard).

The tendering and research management process is being managed by London-based RTPI officers, and the funding of the research has been approved by the Institute's Policy, Practice and Research Committee as part of the 2025 Research strategy extension.

2.2. Eligibility

Tenders are invited from RTPI accredited planning schools, other university-based research teams/departments, planning consultancies and other appropriate organisations and individuals, particularly those which can demonstrate expertise in planning, design and public policy.

Collaborative proposals which include organisations and/or individuals that have a mixture of expertise in British new towns, public policy, planning practice and international new towns, are particularly welcome.

2.3. Expected outputs

Output	Description	Publication date
1. General interim report	<p>A short (five to six pages) report designed to influence the debate around the publication of the New Towns Task Force’s report.</p> <p>This will largely draw on initial case studies and background research.</p>	July 2025
2. General main report	<p>Accessible report for an England/UK audience, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction/background • Literature review • Cross-cutting findings • Recommendations for policy makers and planners <p>This will ‘wrap around’ and draw from a set of freestanding case studies - <i>see below</i>.</p> <p>Will be published in HTML form on webpage and in PDF form, with each chapter and case study being separately available for download.</p> <p>We expect a final report of roughly 50 to 100 pages including all relevant appendices.</p> <p>We expect a minimum of 2 strong images (photographs, plans, concept drawings or otherwise) to be secured per case study, along with associated copyright permissions.</p>	July 2025 (to coincide with expected publication of New Towns Task Force locations.
3. Rolling output of case studies	<p>Possible rolling publication of descriptive self-contained case studies, to inform wider discourse and the New Towns Task Force’s work.</p> <p>These will accompany both the internationally-focused and England-focused reports.</p> <p><i>See below for more details on case study selection.</i></p>	Ongoing between March and May 2025.
4. Additional internationally-focused report	<p>A briefing paper that accompanies and draws out lessons from self-contained case studies (see above) for wider international audience.</p>	November 2025 (to coincide

	<p>It will replace the introduction, cross-cutting findings found in the England-focused report and ‘wrap-around’ the case studies.</p>	<p>with COP 30).</p>
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2.4. Methodology & case study specification

2.4.1 Overall approach

Potential suppliers should justify their proposed methodology as part of their tender documents, explaining its merit and suitability. We expect the case study choice criteria to be clear and logical and focussed primarily on the elements relating to the research question as stated above – how planning, design, governance and other arrangements influence the adaptability of new towns to new challenges and communities’ needs (see above and Annex).

We encourage creative and unorthodox interpretations of this brief, and welcome attempts to build on the planning theory literature by applying well-established theoretical lenses (for example, systems theory or various theories of urban governance) to the practice and policy of delivering new towns.

2.4.2 Case study selection

The research needs to draw on international (non-UK) case studies. These will ideally be from a variety of countries, with different social, geographical, economic and environmental contexts, unless there is a particularly strong reason for them not be.

The case studies selected may explore a variety of themes relating to flexibility/adaptability, or they may show different approaches to one particular element of flexibility/adaptability (see annex). In any case the key criteria for the themes covered in each case study should be:

- a) their significance to the research topic; and
- b) how succinctly they illustrate to policy makers (and a wider audience) key themes related to this element of the debate around new towns.

We do not require proposals to specify and identify case studies, but we do expect, as a minimum, bids to set out a robust, logical and realistic approach to the case study selection process and a convincing timeline (see below.)

We suggest focussing on 3-8 case studies, to enable strong, relevant and detailed analysis within each. We expect bids to specify the number of case studies.

We are primarily expecting case studies to focus on lessons learnt from past practice in new towns that are well established. But there is potential scope for one or more particularly relevant case studies of present day and emerging practice to feature, if particularly relevant and experimental (e.g. with regards to new technologically assisted approaches to governance arrangements).

2.5. Project Timescales

This research is time sensitive and we will expect a fast pace of delivery – we have accelerated the research programme in order for it to coincide with the work of the government’s New Towns Task Force.¹

The following milestones are proposed throughout 2025 (all dates below are Mondays and refer to 23:59 UK time that day, unless specified otherwise):

1. **3 February** – opening of competitive tender;
2. **10 February** – deadline for questions;
3. **12 February (Wednesday 17:00)** – responses to questions published;
4. **24 February** – closing of competitive tender;
5. **3 March** – notification of shortlist;
6. **10 to 14 March** – interviews of shortlisted bidders;
7. **17 March** – deadline for notification of successful bidder.
8. **24 March** – inception meeting;
9. **July** – delivery of interim England-focussed publication and possible speaking engagements;
10. **September** – delivery of UK-focussed report and supplementary outputs.
11. **November** – internationally-focussed publication for COP30. End of work programme.

The precise timescale for the project work will be determined in collaboration with the selected research team during the inception meeting.

2.6. Project governance

As well as being part of the RTPI’s Research Strategy, this programme of work will deliver Planning is Global 4,² overseen by the Institute’s International Committee.

The project will be managed by Dr David Mountain, Research Manager, with international expertise and advice from Beatrice Crabb, International Manager.

Oversight on the project will rest with Dr Daniel Slade, Head of Practice and Research, who will also provide feedback and input.

3. Bidding process

3.1. Bidding

Organisations/project teams should submit a tender document that includes:

¹ Please note that the research is independent of government activity – it is being commissioned to support the consolidation of new town expertise as a priority of the RTPI’s own work.

² See Planning is Global 3 [here](#).

- A project summary;
- Proposed methodology;
- Proposed outputs, demonstrating conformity (or otherwise, with rationale) with the project purpose and brief described in Section 2.3 of this document and elsewhere;
- Project team and general experience;
- Statement of experience relevant to the project, and selected projects that demonstrate relevant experience;
- Proposed approach to project management, identifying risks and mitigation strategies, and specifying how the project will be delivered on time and to a high standard;
- Total cost of the project; and
- A budget breakdown between the stages, daily rates and personnel inputs.

Further information on the extent of detail on case studies expected can be found in section 2.4.2.

Bid documents must not exceed 20 pages including all of the above information.

3.2. Evaluation criteria

Proposals will be evaluated against five criteria:

1. The extent to which the proposal aligns with framing of the key issues and challenges described in this document;
2. Quality, rigour and likely impact of the proposed methodology and analysis;
3. Experience/track record/knowledge of research and/or project delivery relevant to the project;
4. Experience of effective and impactful partnership working (i.e. with project commissioners and/or public stakeholders);
5. Value for money and added value.

3.3. Deadlines for applications

Tender applications should be submitted electronically in .docx or .pdf format to:

research@rtpi.org.uk

The deadline for applications is **23:59 (UK time) Monday 24 February 2025**.

Responses to questions received by 23:59 Monday 10 February will be published at 17:00 on Wednesday 12 February as anonymised Q&As on <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/about-the-rtpi/rtpi-tenders/>. We will not be able to respond to queries received after 10 February.

We intend to interview a shortlist of bidders during **w/c 10 March 2025** and to appoint the successful research team soon after. Interviews will be held at the RTPI London office or online.

4. Intellectual property

The RTPI will retain ownership of the work but will grant the researchers the right to publish and re-use the material submitted to RTPI and will be fully credited for their work. Respective consultancies and institutions should not apply if they will not be able to agree to this provision. They should acknowledge the support from the RTPI in any subsequent publications and activity based on the supported projects.

Any outcome from the project shall remain strictly **CONFIDENTIAL** until such time as the RTPI determines that it be released for publication.

As stated in 2.3, we expect a minimum of 2 strong images (photographs, plans, concept drawings or otherwise) to be secured per case study, along with associated copyright permissions.

5. Further information and enquiries

We welcome enquiries about this project by 23:59 Monday 10 February. Responses will be issued as anonymised Q&As on our website by 17:00 Wednesday 12 February, and sent directly to those who have asked a question or notified us of their intention to bid.

Please contact: David Mountain, Research Manager

Email: david.mountain@rtpi.org.uk Tel: [+44 \(0\)20 7929 8184](tel:+44(0)2079298184)

Annex: Illustrative examples of possible research themes

This list of potential topics is purely illustrative and intended to give a broad sense of the wide range of topics we may be interested in. It is not exhaustive.

Proposals may wish to focus on separate themes within or across case studies, or the interface between different themes.

The built and natural environments

- Reconfigurable master plans, site layouts and uses
- Transport
 - Changing transport modes and patterns
 - Preventing infrastructure acting as a barrier to communities
- Housing
 - Changing size, density and typology preferences
 - Changing tenancy preferences
 - Changing contextual locational preferences and communal preferences
- Employment
 - Changing employment types and patterns
 - Changing distribution of business size and location preferences
- Retail and commercial
 - Changes needs and uses in central areas
 - Changing spatial distribution of nodes and centres of activity (e.g. high streets, neighbourhood centres etc.)
- Planning for environmental uncertainty

Design, culture, governance and finance

- Aesthetics, urban design and architecture
 - Art, cultural production, social infrastructure
 - Enabling experimentation and creativity in urban design
- Changes in leisure time and patterns of participation in communal activities
- Governance models and communities
 - Community leadership
 - Nurturing civil society
 - Adaptability to changing cultural needs
 - Balancing place-attachment with change
- Finance and investment
 - Investment and financing frameworks to enable long-term strategic adaptability
 - Democratic long-term stewardship
 - Using of finance/funding to enable community participation