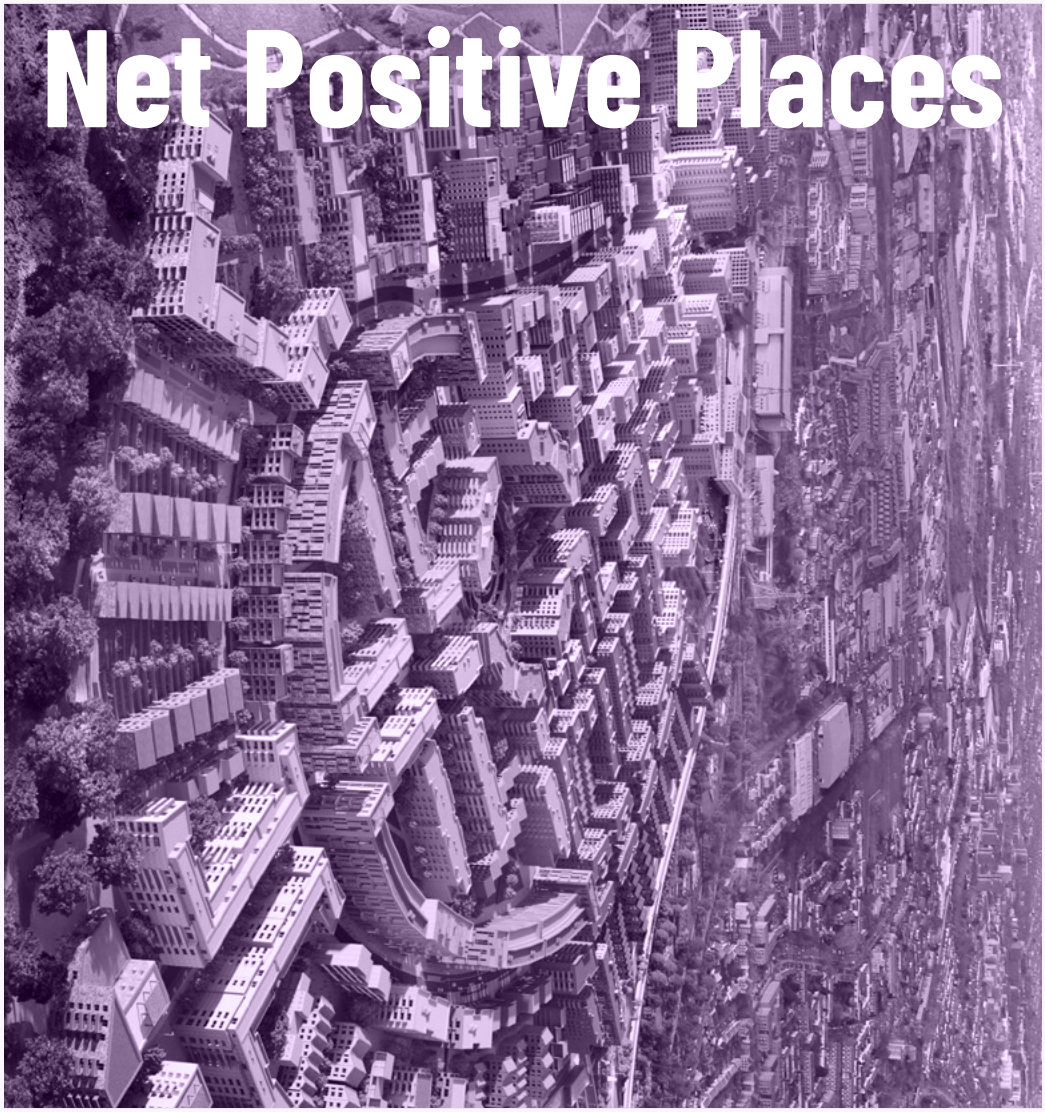
A Vision for Change:

Net Positive Places



Hilson Moran
part of the Tyréns Group

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1.

Introduction

At Hilson Moran, we believe that Net Positive Places (NPP) represent a new frontier in sustainable development - moving beyond mitigation to regeneration.

These are places designed not only to minimise harm but to actively generate environmental, social and economic benefit.

By embedding the principles of NPP into planning, design and stewardship, we can deliver people and planet-positive outcomes that unlock tangible commercial benefits.

Such places attract investment, boost land value and footfall, and nurture innovation and collaboration. The result is a virtuous circle - where liveability, sustainability and economic growth reinforce one another to deliver net positive placemaking.

Recognising the urgency and complexity of this transition, Hilson Moran convened a cross-sector roundtable at our Living Lab in London.

The session brought together leading voices from across development, planning, design, policy and academia to examine how the industry can collectively redefine the conditions for delivering Net Positive Places.

Roundtable guests included:

1) **Jason Horner**, Director, Hilson Moran - Roundtable Chair
2) **Alastair Atkinson**, Head of Infrastructure Planning
3) **Chris Brown**, Managing Director, Climatise
4) **Charlie Dugdale**, Ondare
5) **Max Farrell**, Founder and CEO, LDN Collective
6) **Penny Halliday**, Director of Meridian Water, Enfield Council
7) **Nathan Jenkinson**, Account Director, Environment Bank
8) **Andrew Matthews**, Founding Director, Proctor & Matthews Architects
9) **Maysa Phares**, Senior Associate, Studio Egret West
10) **Robert Reeds**, Planning Director, Lambeth Smith Hampton
11) **Fiona Ross**, Environmental Legal Director, Pinsent Masons
12) **Marie-Louise Schembri**, Sustainability Director, Hilson Moran
13) **Bob Tong**, Director of Infrastructure, Lendlease

This Handbook distils those insights - capturing both the challenges and the opportunities - while articulating Hilson Moran's own strategic position on what it will take to design, plan and steward a truly regenerative built environment.

"The path to Net Positive is not linear, it requires new forms of collaboration, new measures of value and a rethinking of what success looks like."

2.

The Challenge: Redefining Net Positive Places

2.1.
Introduction

The climate crisis has exposed the limits of our current development model - many cities are unhealthier, less resilient and often disconnected from nature. Hilson Moran believes that the response must be systemic, uniting design, policy and behaviour to create places that work for both people and planet.

At our Net Positive Places Roundtable, leading figures from across the built environment called for a move towards vision-led planning - designing for the future we want, not merely extrapolating from the past. Participants emphasised that many of today's challenges - policy complexity, infrastructure strain and financial uncertainty - are interlinked and demand coordinated, innovative solutions.

Models such as doughnut economics and the 20-minute neighbourhood offer useful frameworks for balancing social well-being with environmental limits. For Hilson Moran, this means designing inclusive, landscape-led neighbourhoods where stewardship and shared space replace siloed, single-use development.

2.2.
New Builds versus Alternative Solutions

Hilson Moran advocates for a balanced strategy between retrofitting what we have and building only what we need. Regeneration and reuse are key to achieving net positive outcomes, but the housing crisis also demands targeted new development that connects people to opportunity, nature and one another.

Roundtable guests Andrew Matthews (Proctor & Matthews Architects) and Penny Halliday (Enfield Council) emphasised the need to shift from placemaking to place-keeping. Retrofitting offers significant gains in health and carbon reduction, yet financial and technical barriers remain - from fragmented ownership to viability gaps.

Hilson Moran's position is clear: every intervention, new or existing, should enhance human well-being and environmental performance. The goal is not necessarily more buildings - but better, healthier, more connected ones

"Urban renewal must focus as much on place-keeping as place-making."

2.3.
Policy, Regulation & Process Challenges

The regulatory framework intended to enable sustainable development too often hinders it. Hilson Moran believes reform must focus on clarity, consistency and collaboration.

The roundtable highlighted widespread frustration with a system seen as risk-heavy, slow and unreactive. Bob Tong (Lendlease) and Fiona Ross (Pinsent Masons) shared examples of how changing fire and energy standards have led to repeated redesigns, inflated costs and lost time.

The industry calls for a streamlined, outcomes-based planning process that rewards sustainability and creativity. Greater environmental literacy among policymakers, and a stronger mandate for consultants to challenge the status quo, would accelerate the shift from compliance to value creation - and from greenfield expansion to brownfield regeneration.

2.4.
Collaboration & Stakeholder Engagement

Every successful regeneration begins with a shared vision. Hilson Moran believes that collaboration from the earliest stages is the single most powerful enabler of Net Positive Places.

Roundtable participants identified that fragmented, 'siloed' working still dominates the industry. Max Farrell (LDN Collective) and Marie-Louise Schembri (Hilson Moran) argued that project teams must act as federators and facilitators, uniting diverse expertise behind a single purpose.

The vision for Meridian Water, led by Enfield Council, exemplifies this shift - transforming contaminated industrial land into a thriving, community-focused neighbourhood. By embedding collaboration and co-creation into the vision stage, stakeholders can deliver enduring value that goes far beyond physical construction.

2.5.
Financial Constraints

Funding remains one of the greatest barriers to Net Positive delivery. Hilson Moran believes that financial models must evolve to recognise the long-term returns of sustainability - not just short-term cost.

At the roundtable, Chris Brown (Climatise) and Charlie Dugdale (Ondare) highlighted how traditional metrics fail to capture health, resilience and social value. Meanwhile, constrained public finances and rising retrofit costs are limiting regeneration, with infrastructure expenses often exceeding land value.

Hilson Moran supports innovative public–private partnerships, new funding mechanisms and better alignment between planning and investment cycles. Unlocking sustainable development means not only building differently, but financing differently.

"The transition to Net Positive will require new forms of value - social, environmental and financial."

2.6.
Environmental & Carbon Considerations

Net Positive Places must go beyond net zero - moving from minimising harm to creating regenerative outcomes.

Carbon remains a critical measure, but focusing on it alone risks overlooking biodiversity, water and social value. True sustainability balances these interdependent factors to generate resilience across the whole system.

Hilson Moran advocates for strategic investment in green energy infrastructure, low-carbon construction and data-driven design that measures multiple forms of value. This shift requires thinking beyond site boundaries and aligning economic activity with environmental renewal - a defining principle of Net Positive Places.

"Creating truly Net Positive Places requires a fundamental rethink of how cities are designed, delivered and lived in."

3.

Costs, Value & Return on Investment

3.1.
The Deliverability of Net Zero and Net Positive Developments

Delivering Net Positive Places demands more than a checklist approach to carbon - it requires a redefinition of value itself. At Hilson Moran, we believe that truly sustainable development can only succeed if environmental, economic and social returns are considered in balance. The roundtable discussion underscored this tension: while ambition is high, the industry continues to wrestle with how to make net-zero and net-positive goals financially deliverable in practice.

"Decarbonising the grid is a logical first step, but we can't rely on it alone," noted Jason Horner, Director at Hilson Moran. Embodied carbon - locked into materials, transport and construction remains the most significant and least visible challenge. The group agreed that while operational carbon has made progress through efficiency and electrification over the years, embodied carbon must take centre stage. Materials such as brick and concrete, for example, can only become part of a credible net-zero strategy if their production methods are transformed through greener fuels and carbon-capture processes.

As Marie-Louise Schembri, Sustainability Director at Hilson Moran, observed, "Offsetting can't be a substitute for genuine carbon reduction." The term net zero is often used as a marketing shorthand, yet it can obscure more than it reveals- particularly when based on unverified or non-transparent offsetting schemes. Participants likened some offset models to a "carbon bribe", reflecting a growing unease that the language of sustainability risks outpacing its substance.

"Net positive should represent real, measurable benefit-not just offsetting elsewhere."

3.2.
The UK Net Zero Carbon Building Standard

The UK Net Zero Carbon Building Standard (UKNZC) was widely discussed as an important but incomplete step forward. As Bob Tong, Director of Infrastructure at Lendlease, highlighted, voluntary frameworks - no matter how well-intentioned - struggle to drive mass adoption without consistent regulation, simpler metrics and commercial incentives. The current landscape, while well-meaning, is too complex, fragmented and cost-prohibitive for many developers.

Hilson Moran's position is clear: we need clarity, consistency and credibility in how value is measured and communicated. Simplified carbon accounting, focused on the most material impacts - such as embodied emissions in structure and façade - will help unlock investment confidence and accelerate uptake. Only when sustainability frameworks align with commercial logic will the sector be able to deliver places that are truly net positive, for people, planet and profit alike.

"Embodied carbon must now take centre stage. Focusing only on operations risks solving the wrong problem."

4.

Urban Design & Density

4.1.
Density Challenges

At Hilson Moran, we see urban density as both a design tool and a measure of resilience. When approached intelligently, density can improve environmental performance, enhance liveability and unlock long-term financial value. Yet it remains one of the most contested issues in planning - caught between policy ambition, market preference and public perception.

Participants in our Net Positive Places roundtable agreed that the right level of density can dramatically reduce carbon intensity and improve access to services. Increasing from low to medium or high-density development can reduce embodied carbon by as much as 32%, while supporting 20-minute neighbourhoods that promote health, connectivity and local identity. “Density and transport are interchangeable,” noted one contributor. “You can’t have one without the other if you’re serious about cutting carbon.”

However, density must be human-scaled and contextually sensitive. As Andrew Matthews, Founding Director of Proctor & Matthews Architects, observed, "Too often we see density done to people, not with them." The roundtable stressed that compact, walkable places does not have to mean high-rise living. Examples from the Netherlands and Scandinavia demonstrate that mid-rise, high-density developments can achieve both liveability and biodiversity, supporting vibrant communities at eye level rather than skyline scale.

At the same time, the panel acknowledged that density only works when it aligns with market and cultural expectations. Many buyers still aspire to private gardens and parking and without viable alternatives, high-density schemes risk alienating residents or eroding profitability. As Penny Halliday of Enfield Council noted, "If we're going to change people's preferences, we need to change what's possible-not just what's permitted."

Hilson Moran believes achieving optimal density is not about maximising units per hectare but optimising outcomes per hectare. By reframing density as an enabler of sustainable growth - supported by smart transport, efficient infrastructure and high-quality mixed-use design - we can create places that deliver both social and economic returns.

> *"High density doesn't mean high rise-it means high quality, shared value and long-term resilience."*

4.2.
Low/Free-Car Neighbourhoods

Reducing car dependency is central to delivering Net Positive Places. Electrification alone cannot solve the challenge - land use, accessibility and behaviour must all evolve. As the roundtable discussed, car ownership is already declining, and this generational shift provides an opportunity to reclaim space for people and nature.

Cities like London demonstrate that shared mobility, public transport and micro-mobility can meaningfully reduce emissions and enhance quality of life. Yet this model depends on density thresholds - shared mobility only functions where critical mass exists. "Below a certain density," noted Bob Tong of Lendlease, "shared mobility collapses. The business model just doesn't work."

Participants highlighted the need to integrate transport policy with industrial strategy. Jobs and homes must be planned together, ensuring residents can work and live locally. Otherwise, car dependency simply shifts rather than shrinks. Alastair Atkinson emphasised that "Place-based economic growth must be part of the transport conversation - it's not just about vehicles, it's about value."

The health and social benefits of car-free living are clear, but implementation must balance freedom with practicality. Where alternatives are limited, restrictions on car use can create social inequity. Hilson Moran advocates for gradual transition-enabling choice, improving connectivity and designing streets that invite people to walk, cycle and connect.

4.3.
Designing for the Future

Designing for the future means creating adaptable, people-centred housing typologies that reflect modern life while anticipating tomorrow's challenges. At the roundtable, Marie-Louise Schembri highlighted how "21st-century living requires both flexibility and foresight-spaces that evolve with families, not constrain them."

Developers must move beyond outdated patterns of low-density sprawl to models that combine higher density, biodiversity gain and community infrastructure.

True innovation lies in shifting the focus from the hardware of roads, plots and buildings to the software: the social fabric, behaviour and trust that make communities thrive. Embedding community engagement and education early in the development process is vital to normalising new patterns of living and mobility.

Hilson Moran's vision is to integrate density, mobility and adaptability into a single framework for sustainable urban living. By planning for people first, and cars last, we can redefine value-not in square metres or parking bays, but in wellbeing, opportunity and climate resilience.

> *"Future-ready design is about adaptability-not austerity. The best schemes grow with their communities."*

5.

Creating Environmental Value Beyond Zero

5.1.
Designing Places That Give Back

At Hilson Moran, we believe that net zero is no longer enough. The future of place-making lies in net positive environments - urban systems that actively restore ecological health, regenerate natural processes and create tangible benefits for people and the planet.

During the Net Positive Places roundtable, industry leaders agreed that decarbonisation must work hand-in-hand with biodiversity, water management and public health. As Marie-Louise Schembri observed, “Carbon is one measure of impact- but regeneration is the true measure of success.”

This integrated approach transforms environmental management from a compliance exercise into a design philosophy. When combined with urban cooling, sustainable drainage and biodiversity corridors, these interventions form a virtuous circle of co-benefits.

Hilson Moran advocates for a single, interdisciplinary approach - bringing together infrastructure, environment and transport planning to design ecosystems that are resilient by design, not by retrofit. The concept of regenerative design emerged strongly from the discussion as both a philosophy and a goal: a way of designing that leaves the environment better than it was found.

“Carbon is one measure of impact - but regeneration is the true measure of success.”

5.2.
The Role of Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is reshaping how the built environment engages with nature. It ensures development moves forward without diminishing ecological value, but its success depends on implementation quality rather than intent.

Roundtable participants agreed that effective BNG is about balance- meeting human needs on-site while restoring nature at scale off-site. “We can’t just sprinkle meadows between parking bays and call it biodiversity,” remarked Nathan Jenkinson, Environment Bank. Poor management, such as mowing meadow habitats or siting green areas without ecological purpose, risks undermining the principle entirely.

Hilson Moran’s view is that BNG should evolve beyond mitigation towards ecological regeneration- integrating natural systems into design from the outset. Well-designed BNG enhances wellbeing, improves climate resilience and becomes part of a measurable, long-term value proposition for investors and communities alike.

“Biodiversity Net Gain isn’t a bolt-on-it’s the living infrastructure of future cities.”

5.3.
The Importance of Green Energy

True sustainability cannot be achieved project by project - it must be systemic. The roundtable highlighted a critical tension: how to reconcile growth with the limits of the carbon budget. While high-performing buildings are essential, focusing solely on individual project standards risks what Chris Brown, Managing Director of Climatise, called "blinkered carbon thinking" - meeting targets locally while missing the wider consumption impact.

Hilson Moran supports a place-based approach to energy: where an analysis of the wider site and its context is used to propose systems that draw on local potential - whether heat from data centres, district networks, or community-led solar. Case studies from Nottingham and London demonstrate the opportunity for creative, distributed solutions that strengthen grid resilience and deliver local benefit.

However, regional grid capacity remains a limiting factor, for example areas such as West London are already constrained, blocking housing delivery. Overcoming this will require integrated planning across infrastructure and land use, aligning development with the roll-out of green energy networks.

> *"Sustainability only works when it's affordable, equitable and easy to adopt."*

5.4.
Barriers to Scaling Sustainability

Despite innovation, the challenge lies in scaling up. Politics, cost and fragmented governance continue to stall district energy systems and shared infrastructure. Participants stressed that sustainability must be affordable to be adoptable: "If green infrastructure raises bills, it won't scale. It has to make financial sense for residents."

The panel agreed on simplifying the path to adoption through adaptive, place-specific policy rather than one-size-fits-all frameworks. Different typologies require tailored approaches, calibrated by local density, market conditions and resource availability.

The roundtable also highlighted the urgent need for public education and clarity. Misconceptions - such as that heat pumps don't work in older homes or EVs rely solely on fossil fuel electricity - continue to hinder progress. A "single source of truth" for sustainable technologies could accelerate understanding and uptake.

Finally, smarter integration - aggregating renewable supply, demand and storage - can help reduce upfront capital costs while embedding the built environment as a participant in the energy system, not just a consumer.

Hilson Moran's strategic vision is for net positive environments to function as living systems: connected, regenerative and equitable. The future city must work like nature-self-renewing, balanced, and generous in what it gives back.

6.

Social Net Gain & Stewardship

6.1.
Social Value of Development

Infrastructure should do more than meet environmental targets - it should enhance social value and wellbeing. The discussion emphasised the importance of balancing social and environmental goals, ensuring that new developments contribute positively to the lives of people as well as to the planet.

Social Net Gain can therefore be viewed as equally significant as achieving planetary limits, prompting a fundamental question: beyond reducing carbon, what are we doing for society?

Integrating social value into developments - alongside considerations of environmental performance and planetary boundaries - is essential for truly sustainable places. Yet, there remains a degree of scepticism about whether the real estate sector is addressing this challenge effectively.

Crucially, social value extends beyond the red line boundary of a site. Developers must consider how their projects contribute to surrounding neighbourhoods - through employment, amenities or community infrastructure that delivers benefits both within and beyond the site itself.

The discussion highlighted a key issue for social value, particularly relevant to the private sector. This is a quantified approach - translating social spend into monetary terms to meet corporate social responsibility (CSR) reporting obligations. While this creates measurable outputs, it risks leading to social washing or social offsetting: initiatives such as one-off fundraising or STEM workshops that are used to "tick boxes" rather than deliver long-term, meaningful outcomes.

This mirrors the same issues seen with carbon offsetting and greenwashing - activities that create the appearance of responsibility without generating real social value. True Social Net Gain must move beyond compliance-driven metrics toward initiatives that have depth, authenticity and longevity.

6.2.
Challenges and Strategies for Measuring Social Impact

Measuring social value remains one of the most complex aspects of sustainable development. Participants agreed on the need for clear KPIs and transparent methodologies that define what "social value" actually means in practice.

For example, when using targets such as local labour, the term local itself must be defined and contextualised - as its meaning can vary significantly between communities. Social value metrics should aim for tangible, place-specific outcomes, rather than broad or generic commitments.

Although embedding social value may introduce additional cost, participants noted that it should be viewed as an investment in quality, legacy and resilience - not just a compliance exercise.

Currently, there are no hard policy requirements for social value in planning, and many local authorities have avoided adopting it as a formal metric due to the difficulty of quantification. As a result, developers can be reluctant to submit social value benefit statements, fearing they could be easily challenged or misunderstood.

Two key dimensions of social value were identified:

1) Inherent social value within the development - such as access to open space, schools, healthcare and other essential services that improve daily life.
2) Social value generated through construction - achieved by embedding KPIs within contracts and ensuring contractors deliver measurable benefits to local communities.

The group noted that much of the social value currently realised occurs during construction, but greater emphasis is needed on ensuring this value extends beyond project completion and becomes embedded in the long-term life of the community.

6.3.
Focus on Community Building and Cohesion

To achieve meaningful Social Net Gain, the industry must shift its focus from the hardware of developments - the physical infrastructure - to the software of community relationships. Strong, cohesive communities are built through trust, engagement and participation.

Successful developments increasingly employ community organisers or place facilitators early in the process to help nurture relationships, coordinate local engagement, and ensure that the evolving place meets the social needs of its residents.

Government metrics already exist for social cohesion, social impact, and wellbeing - and integrating these into development evaluation could provide a more consistent way to assess social net gain.

However, the persistence of social washing - performative actions that deliver little real benefit - remains a major challenge. The sector must evolve toward more authentic, long-term social value frameworks, underpinned by KPIs that demonstrate measurable and lasting benefits for local communities.

> *"Strong, cohesive communities are built through trust, engagement and participation"*

6.4.
Stewardship as the Foundation of Net Positive Places

Local authorities are frequently perceived as the cause of delay, yet there are emerging examples of progressive, place-led leadership. The Meridian Water project in Enfield illustrates this well: when private market interest faltered, the council stepped in as master developer - not merely to deliver housing, but to regenerate contaminated industrial land and create a sustainable, inclusive community. This proactive approach demonstrates the power of public stewardship when driven by long-term vision rather than short-term gain.

The Meridian Water model highlights a wider truth: stewardship is as much about ambition as it is about accountability. By taking ownership of long-term outcomes - from social cohesion to biodiversity and carbon reduction - public and private actors alike can reshape the development process into one that genuinely serves people and planet.

At the heart of effective stewardship lies authentic community engagement. Developments that succeed over time are those built with communities, not just for them. Long-term landowners and developers who invest in the social health of their neighbourhoods - through education, skills, employment and cultural programming - create shared value that endures beyond the construction phase.

7.

Place-Based Planning

7.1
Planning Beyond Boundaries

There is a growing recognition that urban planning must evolve beyond site-by-site problem-solving toward a more strategic, place-based approach. Traditional planning systems often operate within narrow boundaries, with each application addressing an isolated set of sustainability, transport and energy requirements. Yet the challenges we face - from decarbonisation to water management - are interconnected and systemic.

Town planners today are expected to navigate an increasingly complex landscape, balancing dozens of technical considerations including renewable energy integration, carbon sequestration, biodiversity and sustainable transport. However, there remains a significant skills gap across the sector. Many professionals - including planning officers and councillors - lack the technical understanding needed to assess the true environmental and social implications of development proposals. This knowledge gap risks slowing progress toward net zero and undermining well-intentioned policy ambitions.

Participants questioned whether the current, highly localised focus of planning is fit for purpose. A more regional or even national approach to energy, infrastructure and sustainability could enable a more coherent, joined-up transition to low-carbon urbanism.

The continued reliance on fossil fuels remains a structural barrier to progress. Alongside policy reform, a massive public education effort will be needed to change behaviours, shift perceptions and demystify sustainable technologies such as heat pumps, electric vehicles and decentralised energy systems.

Despite these challenges, there is a clear and growing appetite for urban regeneration and new homes, particularly in major cities such as London and Birmingham. However, financial viability and regulatory complexity continue to present significant hurdles, delaying progress on the kind of large-scale, net-positive regeneration that cities urgently need.

"Planning for the future means thinking beyond the red line."

7.2.
Solutions and the Future of Sustainable Urban Planning

The transition to fully electrified transport and energy systems represents a key milestone on the path to net zero.

Innovative concepts such as net-zero neighbourhoods were discussed as part of the solution, where communities are designed to capture and reuse energy from underutilised sources like underground heat. These localised energy networks could significantly reduce reliance on carbon-intensive systems.

Another promising strategy is the Energy Area Action Plan (EAAP) model, which is a collaborative framework where local authorities, developers and the private sector work together to deliver low-carbon energy systems at a sub-regional scale. By balancing supply and demand, reducing energy and solid waste and leveraging smart controls and technology, EAAPs can help bridge the gap between policy ambition and practical delivery.

This place-based and partnership-led approach represents a critical evolution in planning: one that aligns to local regeneration with national decarbonisation goals, while also improving social and economic resilience.

"Energy planning must be local, collective and smart."

7.3
Social and Environmental Balance

Throughout the discussion, participants emphasised that true sustainability is inseparable from social value. Urban regeneration must not only minimise environmental impact but also actively improve quality of life - creating inclusive, healthy and connected communities.

A successful place-based planning approach must therefore balance social and environmental outcomes. Developments should deliver both measurable carbon reductions and tangible community benefits - from access to green space and public transport to affordable housing and social infrastructure.

At the same time, the concept of planetary boundaries must inform planning decisions, ensuring that urban growth does not exceed environmental limits. The consensus among participants was clear: while the ambition for sustainable urbanism is strong, the pace of real change remains too slow. There is growing scepticism about whether the real estate and planning sectors can deliver the necessary transformation in time to meet global climate and social goals.

To bridge this gap, the future of planning must be more holistic, data-informed and place-led, where carbon, nature, infrastructure and community are integrated into a single vision for resilient, regenerative cities.

"Place-based planning must balance people, planet and prosperity."

8.

Charting the Path Forward: Challenges and Opportunities

8.1.
Unlocking Systemic Change

Delivering Net Positive Places demands more than carbon-conscious design - it requires systemic change in how we plan, finance and steward our built environment. The roundtable discussions underscored that sustainable urban regeneration cannot be achieved through siloed interventions. Instead, success lies in integrating design excellence, behavioural change and governance reform - supported by clear policy, meaningful social value and long-term stewardship.

The roundtable revealed that demographic and behavioural shifts - from living preferences to mobility patterns - are fundamentally reshaping the conditions for sustainable growth. Developers, policymakers and planners must now navigate the delicate balance between density, liveability, and environmental impact, while addressing the financial and behavioural barriers that slow progress.

By learning from international exemplars and coupling innovation with education, cities can achieve both environmental and social resilience - creating places that thrive within planetary limits while enriching community life.

"Design and stewardship must work hand in hand - sustainability isn't a checklist, it's a legacy."

8.2.
Challenges Ahead

In summary, the participants identified several persistent challenges that must be addressed to accelerate the transition toward Net Positive Places:

Regulatory and Policy Gaps

Existing planning frameworks and environmental regulations often lack the coherence or ambition required to deliver integrated, net positive outcomes. Loopholes and exceptions undermine consistency - calling for a refreshed, more aligned policy landscape.

Interdisciplinary Silos

Truly sustainable outcomes depend on collaboration across planning, engineering, design, and policy. Breaking down organisational barriers and embedding sustainability early in decision-making is vital.

Evolving Regulations and Costs

Frequent regulatory changes can burden developers with uncertainty and escalating costs. The sector must find more adaptive mechanisms to balance compliance, innovation, and commercial viability.

Infrastructure Inequality

Sustainability cannot be a privilege of affluence. Less economically advantaged areas require targeted investment to deliver infrastructure that supports regeneration and equity.

Embodied Carbon

With operational carbon declining, embodied carbon has established itself as a key areas for improvement. Reducing it demands innovation in materials, methods, and procurement - without pricing out sustainable development.

8.3.
Opportunities for Change

Amid these challenges lie transformative opportunities.

Strategic Infrastructure Financing

Aligning infrastructure investment with long-term sustainability goals will unlock new pathways for low-carbon growth, enabling regeneration at scale.

Green Energy Integration

Accelerating the shift to decentralised renewable systems - and strengthening grid infrastructure - will reduce operational emissions and improve resilience.

Adoption of New Standards

Progress depends on updating planning policy and building standards to reflect modern sustainability priorities. Standards must be co-created across disciplines to avoid fragmented progress.

Policy Innovation

Incentivising circular economy models, low-carbon materials, and nature-positive development will redefine the economics of sustainability, making the green choice the easy choice.

"The most effective policy is that which empowers - giving industry the confidence to innovate without compromising on purpose."

8.4.
Looking Forward

The challenge for the decade ahead is not simply achieving 'less harm', but designing a built environment that actively restores, regenerates, and rebalances.

The success of Net Positive Places will depend on collaboration between the private and public sectors, underpinned by informed policy, innovative finance, and community trust.

Hilson Moran's commitment is to drive this transformation - advancing design intelligence, sharing knowledge, and shaping the frameworks that make sustainability not just an aspiration, but an expectation.

"We must reimagine cities as living systems - adaptable, restorative, and resilient."

9.

Shaping Net Positive Places - Together

9.1.
Net Positive Places in Action

Hilson Moran continues to pioneer the transition from sustainable design to truly regenerative, net positive places. Across the UK and beyond, our work is helping unlock the infrastructure, policy and innovation needed to achieve that vision.

From heat networks and circular water systems to active travel, biodiversity and community resilience, each project contributes to the growing evidence that net positive is not only achievable, it's already happening.

9.2.
Delivering Real-World Impact

Our experience

Barking Riverside

Developed a decarbonisation strategy for a gas-CHP-led heat network serving over 20,000 homes, identifying local low-carbon energy options, and prepared the EIA supporting plans to double residential capacity.

One Horton Heath, Eastleigh

Designed a concept for a 5th-generation, ground-source-led heat network serving 2,500 homes, incorporating a nutrient-neutrality wetland and a solar-powered community EV-charging network.

Cambridge East

Led the extension of the city's heat network and delivery of the UK's first adopted water-recycling network at Eddington, plus energy and water strategies for major growth areas, and Expert Witness support that lifted the EA development embargo.

Ebbsfleet Garden City

Prepared a strategy and techno-economic appraisal for a lake-sourced 5th-generation heat network for Ebbsfleet Central, alongside a city-wide feasibility study on water reuse and resource efficiency.

Thamesmead

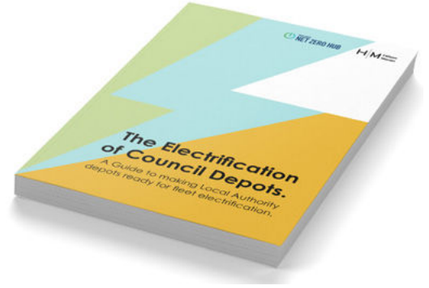
Produced an integrated infrastructure strategy and budget plan to reliably supply over 20,000 new homes with renewable heat, power and water sourced directly from a nearby energy park.

North Dorchester Garden Community

Developed an environmental protection and planning strategy for a major new community over a sensitive aquifer, including active-travel infrastructure across flood plains and river corridors.

Wychavon Garden Town

Agreed water, power and sewage infrastructure strategies for 12,000 homes in an area without treatment capacity, addressing stringent environmental limits on water quality and discharge.



Midlands Net Zero Hub

Authored A Guide to the Electrification of Local Authority Fleets, supporting regional authorities to transition to low-carbon transport and plan long-term fleet decarbonisation.

9.3.
What's Next

At Hilson Moran, we believe Net Positive Places are not a distant goal - they're a design philosophy, a planning framework and a call to action.

If you'd like to discuss how we can help you realise your own aspirations for net positive development,we'd love to talk.

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