

Campaigner briefing - How building houses with people in mind rather than cars creates more homes

Introduction

This briefing is intended to equip you with arguments that are likely to be persuasive to politicians that might otherwise be uninterested or unsympathetic to pro-cycling policies.

It is based on the findings of a report called Move Free written by the think-tank and urban consultancy, Create Streets, published in March 2024. Cycling UK commissioned the report from Create Streets in order to explore how making it easy to get around towns and cities in as many ways as possible has a positive impact on our lives.

This briefing provides evidence and arguments on how putting cycling and walking at the forefront of developments helps to build more houses.

Key argument points from the Move Free report

- **Giving people the freedom to choose how they move builds more homes:** Current parking minimums significantly limit housing density and lock residents into a car-centric life. The UK's current average of only 28 dwellings per hectare is well below historical standards. Victorian and early 20th century neighbourhoods developed at densities of 50 to 75 homes per hectare and those walkable and cyclable areas are often the most desirable neighbourhoods.
- **Using greenfield land more efficiently:** By reducing parking minimums and repurposing road space we can double housing output on the same land area and curb urban sprawl. In 2022, the UK could have built 220,471 homes instead of 112,240 if developments had occurred at historic densities of 55 homes per hectare, illustrating the vast untapped potential for housing expansion.
- **Cheaper and more connected:** Reduced car ownership enabled by walkable and cyclable neighbourhoods translates to financial savings for residents, contributing to economic resilience and affordability. Walkable, cycle-friendly neighbourhoods foster community cohesion, support local economies, and promote healthier lifestyles, enhancing overall well-being and social capital.

Background

Our current planning system mandates high minimum parking requirements for new developments which perpetuates urban sprawl and limits housing density, exacerbating the UK's housing shortage. It's time to rethink this model and explore alternative strategies that prioritise efficient land use and sustainable development.

If new developments are built with cycling and active transport in mind, instead of expecting people to rely only on cars, then we can use the vast amount of space normally reserved for parking spaces to build houses instead. This *must* be done alongside proper planning for alternative transport options, including adequate public transport, cycle paths, micromobility schemes, and footpaths.

To create attractive, sustainable, and viable housing developments requires people to be given *more* choice in how they move about, not less. A development that attempts to discourage driving by reducing parking provision without providing other transport options will likely lead to dangerous obstructive parking and public backlash.

Housing density

The average density of new green-field housing in 2023 was 28 homes per hectare. The many Victorian or early 20th century streets that we have across the UK, sit at around 50 to 75 homes per hectare. These often-desirable areas of relative high-density housing support fewer cars but help to create towns and cities that put residents in walking or cycling distance of amenities.

If a housing density closer to 55 homes per hectare were the average in the UK in 2023, we would have built almost twice as many homes on the same total area of greenfield land. By building at this historic density, we would be making more efficient use of the valuable greenfield land whilst creating more attractive, cycling-friendly, and functional developments.

Minimum parking requirements for new housing developments in Worcestershire:

Number of bedrooms	Minimum number of parked cars
1	1
2-3	2
4-5	3 or 4
6+	4 or agreed case by case

To put that another way: the government has a house building goal of 300,000 net additional homes per year which it has failed to reach in every year since the target was set. In 2023 there were 112,240 homes built on greenfield land, far below the government's housing target. At 55 homes per hectare the same amount of greenfield land would have been able to support over 220,000 homes whilst creating gently dense and cyclable neighbourhoods instead of sprawling car-centric developments.

Success stories

Poundbury's evolution: Poundbury in Dorset, an exemplary mixed-use development, showcases the benefits of reduced parking minimums. By prioritising pedestrian-friendly streets and diverse transportation options, Poundbury has achieved lower car ownership rates and higher residential densities compared to conventional developments. Poundbury's average car ownership reduced from an initial estimate of 2.7 cars per household to an actual average of 1.1 to 1.3 cars, illustrating the impact of walkability and mixed-use planning.

Road Reclamation Developments:

- **Rochdale:** Reclaiming road space for housing has enabled Rochdale to add up to 400 more homes by repurposing a single turning lane from a five-lane urban motorway.
- **Aylesbury:** A proposed junction redesign in Aylesbury could accommodate 105 homes and 850m² of commercial space by replacing a vast roundabout with a more efficient layout.
- **Southend-on-Sea:** Transforming a vast elevated roundabout into a calmer street has created space for 1,760 homes, addressing housing shortages and improving community connectivity.

What you can campaign for locally

Designing places with people in mind rather than cars can unlock more space for homes and provide safe cycling and walking routes. **Ask your council or local decision makers to:**

- Challenge the norm by reducing minimum parking requirements for new developments.
- Reallocate road space and parking spaces away from car use to provide safe cycling and walking infrastructure.
- Provide alternative transport options so people can choose how they travel and not be forced to rely on a car.

If you would like to read the full Move Free report, please [click here](#)