

A photograph of a family of four smiling and huddled together. On the left is a young boy with brown hair wearing a white button-down shirt with a small ice cream cone pattern. Next to him is an older woman with short grey hair and sunglasses, smiling. To her right is an older man with grey hair and glasses, also smiling. On the far right is another young boy with brown hair wearing a black t-shirt. The photo is partially overlaid by a large white circle at the bottom and a yellow curved line.

SHAPING PLACES

Defining and developing our approach
to wider community benefit

August 2024

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1. Who we are

Greatwell Homes is a Northamptonshire-based housing association providing around 5,200 homes for affordable and social rent, shared ownership, rent-to-buy and market rent, as well as homes with support for those who need it.

Our vision is to help create great communities where people live well. We work with customers and partners to shape places that people are proud to call home.

We promise to provide affordable homes and effective services that work for customers, through clear strategies, impactful partnerships, great culture and efficient business practices.

2. What is placeshaping?

The term 'placeshaping' derives from the [2007 inquiry](#) commissioned by Tony Blair's Labour government to look into the 'form, function and funding' of local government in England. Led by Sir Michael Lyons, the review suggested that local authorities should act as the voice of the whole community as an 'agent of place'.

The Lyons Inquiry defined placeshaping as:

'The creative use of powers and influence to promote the general wellbeing of a community and its citizens'.

The last Conservative government drew on, placeshaping principles to conceive its 'levelling up' plans. To connect financial and physical assets (such as infrastructure, funding and housing) with social and human strengths. Although the Labour government elected in 2024 has dropped the term, plans to target funding and other state support to rejuvenate cities, towns and neighbourhoods remain central to public policy.

The idea of merging physical, state and human resources to create better economic, physical and social community outcomes has broad cross-party consensus, so can be expected to endure as governments and priorities change.

We believe that placeshaping is a critically important part of the modern social housing agenda. Greatwell Homes is a member of the national [PlaceShapers](#) network of more than a hundred community-focused housing providers which share this view.

3. Live Greatwell

Our 2022-25 corporate plan, Live Greatwell, includes an objective to 'Explore best practice in placeshaping and define our approach'. While we are not a local authority, we're determined to play a part in placeshaping to achieve better community outcomes.

Like many housing associations, Greatwell Homes delivers more than just 'bricks and mortar'. So we've sought to identify and promote the work that we do to help sustain high-quality neighbourhoods and demonstrate how we can report on these objectively. It's easy to claim to be a placeshaper in name, but the questions we've asked ourselves are:

- How good at it are we?
- How could we attract inward investment to raise the profile of social housing providers as key agents in boosting the nation's wellbeing?



4. The local context for placeshaping

Since there is no universally agreed definition of ‘place’, our first challenge was to define what we mean by this word. For an organisation serving a mix of urban, rural and semi-urban communities with diverse populations this is not straightforward.

Communities can be defined in a physical sense (for example, a village, postcode or housing estate) or in government terms as a [Lower Layer Super Output Area](#). But places are also shaped informally or culturally by the people who live there. Population groups like an Eastern European community or Caribbean community are not defined by geographical location, but by networks of people who support each other across physical boundaries.

A traditional view of Greatwell Homes’ ‘places’ would probably focus on established estates. More than half of our homes in Northamptonshire (56%) are concentrated in three former council-owned neighbourhoods (Hemmingwell, Queensway and Kingsway), built as part of post-war [London overspill](#) policies to encourage people to move out of the capital. We also have significant numbers of homes in Wellingborough town centre, plus smaller clusters of properties in rural locations.

Based on this profile, we’ve decided to report an overall picture of placeshaping for North Northamptonshire, which we hope is helpful for local authority partners. While it’s helpful to take a more localised view of placeshaping activity in some areas, it can be difficult to collect complete and statistically reliable data at an estate or neighbourhood level.

Stay Local, Go Far

PlaceShapers' 2022 publication [Stay Local, Go Far](#) is a guide to how housing associations can support levelling up. It suggests four themes to focus operations and enable communities to thrive and flourish:



Physical regeneration

Improving housing and physical infrastructure



Economic regeneration

Improving employment opportunities



Democratic regeneration

Improving community involvement and empowerment



Social regeneration

Improving civic activity and pride

We took these four categories to look closely at what we already do, what we've committed to do in the Live Greatwell corporate plan, and what other ideas and best practice could help us achieve these different kinds of regeneration. We also considered the wider regulatory and political landscape (for example, the 2023 [Tenant Satisfaction Measures](#) and [Social Housing \(Regulation\) Act](#) – including the proposed '[Awaab's Law](#)' measures to improve responses to hazards and disrepair.

From this, we produced a 'longlist' of potential placeshaping activities to consult with customers – a mix of what we have to do and what we'd like to do.



5. Hearing the voice of customers

To hear how customers want us to develop placeshaping, we followed our existing co-creation approach. We sent an email survey to more than 300 involved customers, asking them to rank the four categories of regeneration in priority order.

The results were:

Category	% of customers who ranked this top
Physical regeneration (including repairs, building safety and anti-social behaviour)	70%
Economic regeneration	16%
Social regeneration	9%
Democratic regeneration	5%

We also asked customers to prioritise the measures and initiatives they liked best. Heads of service and operational managers used this feedback to compile a final list of 16 activities to boost Greatwell Homes' placeshaping impact. Managers then suggested metrics to indicate success against each priority as shown below.

Theme	Activity	Metric
Physical	Complying with the revised Decent Homes Standard	% of homes meeting the Decent Homes Standard
Physical	Embedding a refreshed repairs and maintenance service offer	% of customers satisfied with their last repair*
		% of customers who've received a repair in the last 12 months who say that they're satisfied with the overall repairs service**
Physical	% of homes rated at Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) level C or above	% of EPC ratings up to date through inspections or modelling existing data
		Annual investment programmes delivered to improve energy efficiency
Physical	Repurposing/upgrading garage sites and wider environmental improvements	Number of improvements delivered

*Key performance indicator based on surveys completed by customers who've recently had a repair done at their home

** Measured by survey for [Tenant Satisfaction Measure TP02](#)

Theme	Activity	Metric
Physical	Managing crime, anti-social behaviour and enviro-crime (for example, flytipping, graffiti and dumped vehicles)	% of respondents who report that they're satisfied with their landlord's approach to handling anti-social behaviour***
		% of flytipping reports responded to within target time
		Number of anti-social behaviour cases per 1,000 homes****
		Satisfaction that we make a positive contribution to neighbourhoods*****
Economic	Apprenticeships	Evidence of apprentices securing permanent roles with Greatwell Homes and/or achieving recognised qualifications
Economic	Employing prisoners on licence (with HM Prison Five Wells)	Number of vacant roles taken up by prisoners on licence
Economic	Providing money and benefits advice	% satisfaction with the support and advice we provide
Economic	Providing employment and work experience opportunities to customers and other local people	Number of local people employed on service contracts we procure
		Evidence of apprentices securing permanent roles at Greatwell Homes and/or achieving recognised qualifications
Social	Continuing grant support to fund projects linked to local/customer priorities	Number of projects funded
Social	Holding estate action days and walkabouts	Number of estate events completed
Social	Working with young people to have an active voice in their neighbourhoods	Number of young people recruited to take part in community projects
Social	Building links with other agencies to deliver community partnerships	Two community initiatives created and supported each year
Democratic	Using participatory budgeting for environmental improvements	Number of improvements delivered
Democratic	Exploring voluntary and paid opportunities for customers (for example, to work as community mediators)	Number of local people employed on service contracts we procure
Democratic	Continuing to be accredited for customer involvement by TPAS	Reaccreditation achieved

Ten of the 16 measures (62.5%) were prioritised by customers, with the remaining six (37.5%) suggested by staff from the initial longlist and accepted by customers. There is a clear sense of harmony between customers and staff about what's most important in shaping vibrant places. Agreed top priorities include complying with the Decent Homes Standard, satisfaction with repairs, responding effectively to crime and anti-social behaviour, and ensuring that customers have access to support when they need it.

Linked to the subjective issues around defining 'place' and 'placeshaping', there were though some differences in views between customers and staff. Customers tended to interpret placeshaping as being rooted in the way we deliver core business (for example, completing repairs, tackling anti-social behaviour or offering money and benefits advice). But staff focused more on extra services and imaginative projects to benefit community (for example, local employment, engagement and skills).

We prepared a briefing on this exercise for Greatwell Homes' Customer Assembly (the strategic customer platform for monitoring performance and delivering service improvements). Staff attended to answer questions and explain the project and process.

The Customer Assembly approved this report in October 2022, noting that it considered the consultation with customers as matching best practice. Senior managers adopted the final list of activities and metrics in November 2022, with a head of service identified as responsible for each measure.

The Greatwell Homes Board followed this up with a number of sessions to review and approve the proposed placeshaping approach, progress so far and the role of customers in agreeing the activities and metrics.



6. Measuring success

Our placeshaping approach seeks to apply some objective and measurable dimensions to a concept that is by its nature innately subjective. The initiatives prioritised by customers reflect a mix of business-as-usual activities alongside some tasks that are more akin to special projects.

This means we draw a clear distinction between measuring general business performance and placeshaping outcomes. Some placeshaping activities (such as satisfaction with repairs or tackling anti-social behaviour) will be delivered and reported on continuously, while others (for example, environmental improvements, apprenticeships and employment for ex-offenders) may fluctuate subject to external factors. It might not be possible for us to deliver some planned placeshaping priorities because of financial constraints, changed market conditions or something unforeseen like the coronavirus pandemic.

7. Reporting outcomes

The tables below report on the impact of our placeshaping activities in North Northamptonshire for the year ending 31 March 2024. They show how we've made positive progress on 14 of the 19 metrics.



Physical Regeneration

Activity	Metric	Outcome
Complying with the revised Decent Homes Standard	% of homes meeting the Decent Homes Standard	99.6%
Embedding a refreshed repairs and maintenance service offer	% of customers satisfied with their last repair *	93.2%
	% of customers who've received a repair in the last 12 months who say that they're satisfied with the overall repairs service**	77%
% of homes rated at Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) level C or above	% of EPC ratings up to date through inspections or modelling existing data	53.48%
	Annual investment programmes delivered to improve energy efficiency	0
Repurposing/upgrading garage sites and wider environmental improvements	Number of improvements delivered	0
Managing crime, anti-social behaviour and enviro-crime (for example, flytipping, graffiti and dumped vehicles)	% of respondents who report that they're satisfied with their landlord's approach to handling anti-social behaviour	58.7%
	% of flytipping reports responded to within target time	100%
	Number of anti-social behaviour cases per 1,000 homes	52.2%
	Satisfaction that we make a positive contribution to neighbourhoods	62.1%



Economic regeneration

Activity	Metric	Outcome
Apprenticeships	Evidence of apprentices securing permanent roles with Greatwell Homes and/or achieving recognised qualifications	0
Employing prisoners on licence (with HM Prison Five Wells)	Number of vacant roles taken up by prisoners on licence	1
Providing money and benefits advice	% satisfaction with the support and advice we provide	100%
Repurposing/upgrading garage sites and wider environmental improvements	Number of improvements delivered	0
Providing employment and work experience opportunities to customers and other local people	Employing local people on service contracts we procure	0
	Evidence of apprentices securing permanent roles with Greatwell Homes and/or achieving recognised qualifications	0



Social Regeneration

Activity	Metric	Outcome
Continuing grant support to fund projects linked to local/customer priorities	Number of projects funded	6
Holding estate action days and walkabouts	Number of estate events completed	6
Working with young people to have an active voice in their neighbourhoods	Number of young people recruited to take part in community projects	102
Building links with other agencies to deliver community partnerships	Two community initiatives created and supported each year	2



Democratic Regeneration

Activity	Metric	Outcome
Using participatory budgeting for environmental improvements	Number of improvements delivered	0
Exploring voluntary and paid opportunities for customers (for example, to work as community mediators)	Number of local people employed on service contracts we procure	0
Continuing to be accredited for customer involvement by TPAS	Reaccreditation achieved	Yes

There are five areas where we have yet to record any success. This was largely down to the longer-term nature of these projects. For example, with the environmental improvements we have planned, the planning process has been quite lengthy meaning that we haven't been able to deliver the schemes within the financial year 23/24 (although they are set for delivery in 24/25). Further, the process of recruiting apprentices to vacant roles takes more than 12 months (the average apprentice placement lasting between one-four years). Again, we expect success in this area in the years to come.



8. Demonstrating value

Measuring and reporting placeshaping success on a purely quantitative basis feels unsatisfactory. The partners, commissioners and politicians who are often asked to provide resources might reasonably ask 'so what?' if all they receive is a list of numbers.

We're keen to demonstrate the additional value that councils and housing providers bring to residents and communities, aside from housing homeless people, fixing roofs and dealing with nuisance neighbours. Providing an effective repairs or anti-social behaviour function supports the idea of 'general wellbeing' that Sir Michael Lyons referred to back in 2007, but we need to show this in ways that are meaningful for stakeholders inside and outside of the social housing sector.

For this, we approached the [Housing Association Charitable Trust \(HACT\)](#) to calculate the [social value](#) of our placeshaping work. Social housing providers like Greatwell Homes generate social value through the services we deliver, so it's important to evaluate those services and the impact they have on individuals, communities and society. The more positive social value we can generate and identify, the greater benefit we're delivering to the communities we serve.

HACT quantify social value by combining the impact on individuals (identified through wellbeing values) alongside the impact

on government spend (assessed through [exchequer values](#)).

For example, if we support someone through an apprenticeship, a wellbeing value such as 'an improved sense of confidence' is combined with an exchequer value like 'reduced state benefit claims' to create a total measure of social value.

Using this method, HACT calculated that Greatwell Homes' Placeshaping activities in 23/24 created just over **£300,000** in social value across just five of our 19 Placeshaping activities in 12 months. This total comprises 'actual' social value and 'indicative' social value and is broken down below.

£45,359 was generated from 'actual' social value. Actual social value is where the data we were recording was an exact match against an item in the HACT social value bank. An example of this being where we looked to explore apprentice placements as part of our economic Placeshaping activity. This matched the 'apprenticeship' value on the HACT UK social value bank exactly.

The evaluation identified a further **£254,791** of indicative social value from addressing anti-social behaviour and the positive outcomes of money and benefit advice. Indicative social value was identified where the data we recorded was close to, but not an exact match to an indicator on the HACT social value bank. An example of this comes from our satisfaction with money and benefit advice where we ask customers if they were satisfied overall with the support and advice offered. The closest match

on the HACT social value bank was 'financial comfort'. So, we can see from this while we were collecting data that was broadly similar to the social value bank, it was not a direct match which means that the return in indicative social value is less robust than actual social value.

Nonetheless, we were pleased to see that we had generated over a third of a million pounds in social value.

9. Developing our approach

Our journey to define and calculate the value of the placeshaping work we do has been incredibly rewarding. We've been able to take customers' views and priorities and turn them into something that's authentically measurable and reportable. This means we can demonstrate value to both customers (better outcomes, satisfaction and community benefit) and the business (our financial bottom line and regulatory rating).

The metrics, impact and social value we report reflects the high level of agreement between customers and staff about what matters most in placeshaping, while also acknowledging the different nuances of opinion.

Drilling down to measure local placeshaping presents a challenge in seeking to collect data across multiple sets and locations. We have to balance the resource implications of doing this against the validity and usefulness of returns, especially if evidence is based on small amounts of evidence and feedback that we can't confidently rely upon.

Next steps

As we move into year two of our Placeshaping journey, we plan to use local authority boundaries to define 'places' as we believe these can easily be defined and understood by customers and partners.

We are encouraged by the HACT assessment of social value, which demonstrates positive benefits to individuals, communities and both national and local government.

Whilst the results for year one have been modest, we are confident that we can evidence greater social value by amending some of our survey questions and data collection practices to directly match indicators on the UK social value bank to ensure we collate social value metrics alongside general business performance.

We hope that our approach is something that other housing providers (whether Placeshaper members or not) can replicate and develop to support their own work in delivering wider community benefit and making the case for a thriving social housing sector.

Modern housing cannot just be about homes and services – it has to be about shaping places and lives.

10. Contact

To discuss anything in this document or find out more about Greatwell Homes' approach to placeshaping, please contact:

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Homes**

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