



Delivering sustainable transport  
for housing developments:

# Fixing a failing planning and transport system



# Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Foreword.....	4
Executive summary.....	5
Introduction.....	6
The story so far.....	6
1) The UK Government must provide robust and integrated policy.....	7
2) Skills and experience.....	8
3) Location, location, location!.....	9
4) Planning authorities should refuse developments that do not prioritise sustainable transport.....	10
5) Ensure delivery through effective use of Government funding.....	11
About CIHT.....	12

# Acknowledgements

The Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation (CIHT) would like to acknowledge that the contents of the report are the collaborative efforts of those that extend beyond the authors listed. As such, we would like to thank all CIHT, Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and Transport Planning Society (TPS) members as well as staff who contributed.

## Authors

**Kyle Fairbairn**  
Policy Advisor – Planning Transport, CIHT

## Contributors

**Jon Parker CTPP**  
FCIHT, MTPS, CIHT Council member, Director of Transport Planning ITP, and Director of Advisory Group (Mobility and Infrastructure) RHDHV UK; Visiting Research Fellow at University of West of England: Centre for Transport and Society

**Lynda Addison OBE FCIHT MTPS FRSA**  
TPS lead on the integration of planning and transport, former Chair of the CIHT Sustainable Transport Panel, Design Council Expert and member of National Highways Design Review Panel

**Phil Jones CEng FCIHT FICE FIHE AoU**  
PJA Group Chairman, Member of the former CIHT Urban Design Panel, Design Council Expert

**Jon Sandford CEng**  
MCIHT, MRTPI

**Harry Steele**  
Infrastructure Specialist, RTPI

**Andrew Hugill**  
Director of Policy and Technical Affairs, CIHT

**Daniel Isichei**  
Director of Communications, CIHT

**Justin Ward**  
Head of Policy and Technical Practice, CIHT

## Key Consultees

CIHT membership  
TPS membership  
RTPI membership

CIHT and the authors and contributors who produced this document have endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of its contents. However, the advice and recommendations given should always be received by the reader “in light of the facts” of their specialist circumstances and specialist advice obtained as necessary.

Any references to legislation discussed within this document should be considered in the light of current and any future legislation. No liability for negligence or otherwise in relation to this document and its contents can be accepted by CIHT, the members of the steering group, its servants or agents, or the managing editors or contributors.

## Foreword



This paper is the result of very close collaboration between CIHT, TPS, and RTPI, and is founded on an in-depth survey of the membership of all three bodies, all of whom are deeply involved in the planning and delivery of sustainable transport for housing developments. The urgent “Call for Action” merits serious attention given the five barriers to success identified and elaborated by the 700+ professionals contributing to the findings.

Previous published advice, notably *Better Planning, Better Transport, Better Places*<sup>1</sup> offered practical advice addressing the integration of new development and transport. However, this new report identifies problem areas that are inhibiting delivery of sustainable developments and simply adding to the pressing challenge of climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

We would like to express our thanks to all those people who have supported this research and development of the proposed actions, in particular the members of the working group and the consultees.

We look forward to an early reaction to the proposed actions and our combined professional bodies stand ready to elaborate the necessary urgency to relevant Government Departments and Local Authority groups. While the legislative references relate to UK Government, the survey scope and feedback indicates the recommendations apply equally, in principle, to all parts of the UK.



**Neil Johnstone**  
President, CIHT (2022–23)

---

<sup>1</sup> CIHT Better Planning, Better Transport, Better Places (2019)

# Executive summary

Housing developments are still dominated by cars, meaning that little thought is given to sustainable transport provision. Not only does this have serious effects for the health of our planet, but it also severely impacts the health of our people.

The integration of planning and transport is key to helping achieve healthier, more sustainable development that promotes economic growth, levels up the country, and provides for people, not cars.

This is currently not being achieved. To gain a better insight, this research paper details five key areas for action taken from the views of over 700 practitioners surveyed from Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT), Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), and Transport Planning Society (TPS) – 87% of which agreed that

**“there are problems with the current planning system with regard to delivering sustainable development and securing more sustainable transport use”.**

These five areas are a call to action for the UK Government, local authorities, developers, and stakeholders including associated professional institutions:

## Government

The UK Government must provide robust and integrated policy that can deliver sustainable developments judged on the outcomes it achieves (more people choosing to walk, wheel, cycle and use public transport).

## Skills and experience

Professional institutions across engineering, transport infrastructure, planning, and the built environment have a duty to enable professionals to utilise their skills and experience to create sustainable developments effectively, and to develop as professionals.

## Location

Government needs to make sure that the location of developments enables accessibility to public transport and active travel networks as a priority, as well as easy access to local services through these sustainable modes.<sup>2</sup>

## Local planning

Authorities should prioritise development that caters for sustainable transport as a natural first choice. We must see a move away from car-centric development and towards creating quality places that promote growth.

## Funding

All stakeholders should ensure delivery through effective use of Government funding – sustainable transport modes must be the first choice of travel in new developments.

Through combining anticipated policies on economic growth, net zero, and levelling up with the five actions proposed here, CIHT believes this will bring about positive change for sustainable development. Ultimately, this will reduce the traffic-inducing nature of developments, and the associated costs of the infrastructure to deliver these, making it quicker and easier to deliver new housing.

By making sustainable transport a natural first choice in developments we will get more people active, improve health outcomes, and reduce pressure (and therefore expenditure) on the NHS.

<sup>2</sup> This can be described as the 20-minute neighbourhood concept, something that the Scottish Government has laid out its intention to utilise in the yet-to-be-released Fourth National Planning Framework.

## Introduction

The need to improve the integration of planning and transport is certainly not a new issue, but numerous attempts to encourage their incorporation have seen limited progress.

The UK needs developments that embed sustainable transport from the outset, not for it to be an afterthought. As this paper will show, planning and transport policy is not delivering the sustainable developments needed, something that we can ill afford if the UK really wants to take action on the climate crisis. Therefore, the UK Government, CIHT, and other professional institutions have a duty to support our

members and, in collaboration with our partners, we believe we can deliver real and long-lasting change across our sector and society.

*In this publication, sustainable development refers to those developments that prioritise sustainable transport modes such as walking, wheeling, cycling, and public transport.*

*The principles included in this publication are relevant across the UK, including devolved nations, but the specific policy framework discussed here applies to England only.*

## The story so far...

The planning and transport infrastructure system in England has, for some time now, repeatedly failed to deliver sustainable development. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is the premier planning document in England, setting out the planning framework for the preparation of local and neighbourhood plans, and aiding decisions on planning applications.<sup>3</sup>

As set out in the policy framework, the purpose and ultimate objective of the planning system is to:

**“contribute to the achievement of sustainable development”<sup>4</sup>**

The NPPF summarises sustainable development, “at a very high level”, as being:

**“meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”<sup>5</sup>**

The NPPF paints an attractive picture of the planning

system in England, one that champions sustainable outcomes and puts people and their priorities first.

### Is it working?

Unfortunately, this is not what we are currently seeing in practice.

Where attempts at sustainable development have been made, there has been poor delivery. This has resulted in a large body of evidence of unsatisfactory development,<sup>6,7</sup> ultimately painting a picture of a broken planning system. Therefore, bar a handful of developments, the NPPF has failed in its duty to achieve sustainable development and produce new homes where residents can easily use sustainable transport as a natural first choice.

Several policy initiatives by Government and publications by CIHT<sup>8</sup> and other institutions have attempted to address the problem of poor integration of planning and transport. Despite this, there is a disconnect between the aspiration of Government policy and guidance and the practice of professionals, and there has certainly been no “silver bullet” solution that has consistently worked.

<sup>3</sup> National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), (p. 5, 2021)

<sup>4</sup> National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), (p. 5, 2021)

<sup>5</sup> National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), (p. 5, 2021)

<sup>6</sup> Transport for New Homes (2018)

<sup>7</sup> Transport for New Homes (2022)

<sup>8</sup> CIHT Better Planning, Better Transport, Better Places (2019)

### How do we take this forward?

To add to the current evidence base, and advocate for change, CIHT, RTPI, and TPS collaborated to develop a survey to gain an insight into where problems lie. This was a landmark survey for CIHT, with over 700 respondents from a mix of professions. 60% of the respondents described themselves as planners, with the other 40% being transport planners, urban designers, engineers, and project managers. The strong appetite for change is apparent across the various built-environment professions, with 76% of the respondents having RTPI membership.

While the statistics demonstrate the depth and breadth of individuals who responded to the survey, the pivotal part of the survey was the rate of free text responses – of which there were over 3,500.

### Five key actions

The rate of response to the survey and the content it contained signalled a strong appetite from practitioners for change in the way in which we deliver sustainable development. This section details five key actions identified in the survey data and serves as a call to action to the UK Government, local authorities, and professional institutions in the engineering, transport infrastructure, planning and the built-environment sector.

#### 1) The UK Government must provide robust and integrated policy

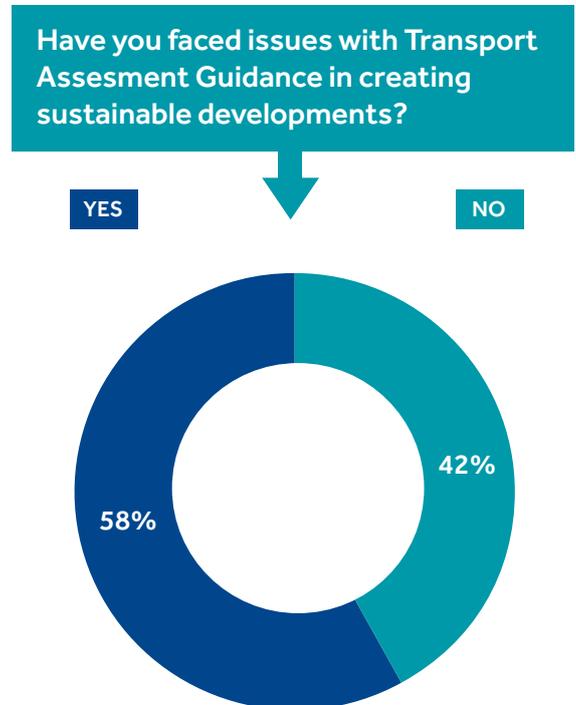
There is a clear indication that policy is the pitfall in delivering sustainable developments. Many responses to the survey were critical of the NPPF paragraph 111, which states:

**“Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.”<sup>9</sup>**

CIHT has stated that the NPPF must change to reflect explicitly within its policies the need for carbon reduction.<sup>10</sup> Paragraph 111 in the NPPF currently undermines that requirement, in that only “severe” impacts are accepted as criteria for refusal of planning permission.<sup>11</sup>

**“The wording of paragraph 111 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a significant barrier to achieving sustainable transport for developments. This only allows planning applications to be refused if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety or a severe residual cumulative impact on the road network. There must be a means to incorporate refusal of applications which aren’t sufficiently served by non-car modes of transport added to paragraph 111.”**

- Survey respondent 65



<sup>9</sup> National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), (p. 32, 2021)

<sup>10</sup> CIHT Response to Planning for the Future: White Paper 2020, (2020)

<sup>11</sup> National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), (2021)

Our research has shown that integrated policy is key in linking planning with mobility, and ultimately delivering sustainable development. The UK Government must introduce a requirement for there to be a net gain in sustainable transport opportunities into its policy.

The NPPF has the objective “contribute to the achievement of sustainable development”. Survey respondents indicated that the wording of the NPPF is too weak and allows for exploitation. As noted above, paragraph 111 of the NPPF says that there are only grounds for permission refusal if there are severe impacts on the surrounding highway network. It is this car-centric wording that allows for unsustainable development, meaning that sustainable transport is poorly catered for and often seen as an “add-on”. CIHT believes there needs to be tougher, more robust language in the NPPF that prevents misinterpretation, strengthens the requirement for sustainable transport in developments, and puts an end to car-led development.

Local Transport Plans (LTPs) are not mentioned in the current NPPF. CIHT believes this must be changed to reflect the weighting that LTPs will have in delivering national transport objectives in England – including transport decarbonisation. The need for clearer integration of LTPs with Local Plans was highlighted by survey respondents. Doing so would allow development to have more of a sustainable transport focus and, as such, create sustainable development. Integrating planning and transport in this way would mean that new developments could be in suitable locations for access to services and provision of sustainable transport, and not car dependent. The amendments listed above provide examples of the need for planning and transport policy to be robust and integrated in this area; providing this will be critical. Not only will it enable sustainable development, but the cost of not achieving net zero will be far greater than a more robust and integrated NPPF and wider planning reforms.

## 2) Skills and experience

There is a wealth of knowledge and experience in the planning and transport infrastructure sectors. CIHT has a strategic priority to “promote learning” (providing members with the skills, training, and qualifications to be the workforce that our society, the environment, and the economy need). However, when practitioners were asked if they had sufficient skills to deliver sustainable transport in developments, only 43% of those surveyed in this research indicated that they think the sector has sufficient skills to achieve this. Many of the responses indicated that the skills of practitioners are impeded by lack of resource in the public sector, an embedded car culture, and a general lack of political will. To deliver sustainable developments, professional institutions must provide the frameworks that allow our professionals to flourish as well as providing better training when needed. One respondent to the survey wrote:

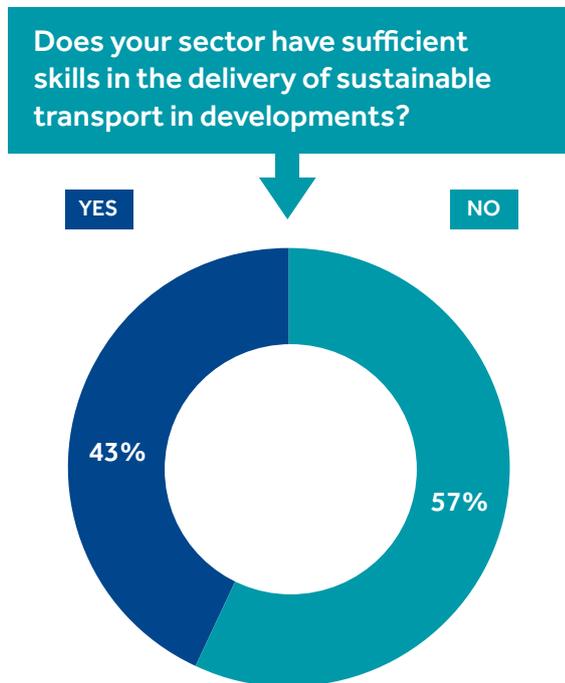
**“We have many people with a huge amount of knowledge, but we need constant access to latest good practice and delivered examples to learn from. We also need the time/space to be creative and innovative, but rarely have it.”**

- Survey respondent 689

CIHT has been at the forefront of skills development in the highways, transport infrastructure, and services sector and is supporting the continued training of our professionals through the CIHT Learn platform.<sup>13</sup> This digital learning platform is designed to help professionals progress their highways and transport infrastructure career by delivering the insights they need. There will be a need for competent highway engineers, transport planners, bridge engineers, lighting practitioners, and other professionals to maintain our current transport sector.<sup>14</sup> We cannot assume that there will be a sufficient number of engineers, designers, and material specialists in the future unless the sector focuses on that; this strategy is one means by which this can be undertaken.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ciht.org.uk/ciht-learn-1/>

<sup>14</sup> CIHT response to the Transport Labour Market & Skills consultation (2022)



CIHT and the other professional institutions in the sector must collaborate to make sure that we educate our political colleagues too. We need those in National and Local Government to understand the importance of sustainable transport in developments; if not, we will not succeed. CIHT must work to make sure that it influences the future by working with its members, stakeholders, and decision-makers to demonstrate the value of efficient and effective sustainable transport in developments.

### 3) Location, location, location!

Too many developments are currently being built with little consideration of location. The current planning system means that sites for development that are not reliant on the car can be overlooked.

CIHT has indicated that a decide and provide (vision and validate) approach should be used. In other words, decide that the vision is around sustainable development and therefore providing the opportunity to incorporate sustainable transport as part of the development becomes the guiding principle behind location choice.

A brownfield site refers to land that has previously been developed but is now derelict or abandoned. These sites are typically associated with being more sustainable as they are usually located in urban areas, meaning that they can have easier access to sustainable transport such as active travel or public transport.

A greenfield site refers to any land that has not been previously developed and is generally located in out-of-town rural areas. Greenfield sites might be seen as more attractive as they do not have the same associated clean-up costs as brownfield sites and often have fewer planning and design constraints than brownfield sites.

Land availability can often dictate the location of development, but the embedded car culture in the UK means that developers are often swayed towards greenfield sites. Not only this, but outdated transport planning techniques currently used, such as “predict and provide”, favour greenfield sites through the prioritisation of the car since it is often easier to provide the additional road building that this approach demands.

**“The integration of planning and transport will result in reducing the need to travel unsustainably and encourage more sustainable transport choices. Location is key.”**

- Survey respondent 434

The location of a new development has a significant impact on the ability of the planning system to deliver sustainable development. While the NPPF guides the Local Plan development process to make sure that sustainable development can be achieved, we are not seeing this in practice. Too often developments are located on inadequate sites that cannot be easily accessed and are far from local amenities,<sup>17</sup> ultimately promoting car dependency. One idea could be to adopt the concept in the Scottish Government’s Fourth National Planning Framework position statement of “20-minute neighbourhoods”. These are places that are designed so residents can meet their day-to-day needs within a 20-minute walk of their home, through access to safe walking and cycling routes, or by public transport.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> RTP1: The Location of Development (2021)

<sup>18</sup> A Plan for Resilient Communities - Fourth National Planning Framework: position statement

We must see the UK Government providing the policy to empower local authorities to have greater control of site selection, allowing sites to be selected for development that facilitate the vision set out in the Local Plan.

It is crucial that development be in the right place at the Local Plan stage, as this will enable development to be directed to the most appropriate sites. The location for development must also consider its accessibility by active travel and public transport and the critical role this plays in creating quality places for people, not cars. In addition, the Local Plan and the LTP need to work as partner documents, not standalone ones, to make sure that location for development is sustainable-transport led.

By getting the policy in place that makes sure that development can be in the right location, sustainable development can be delivered. Sustainable transport – active travel and public transport – will deliver meaningful carbon reduction, level up the country through regeneration that provides quality of life, and enable the delivery of high-density housing to allow the

UK Government to hit its housing targets and promote the growth of the economy.

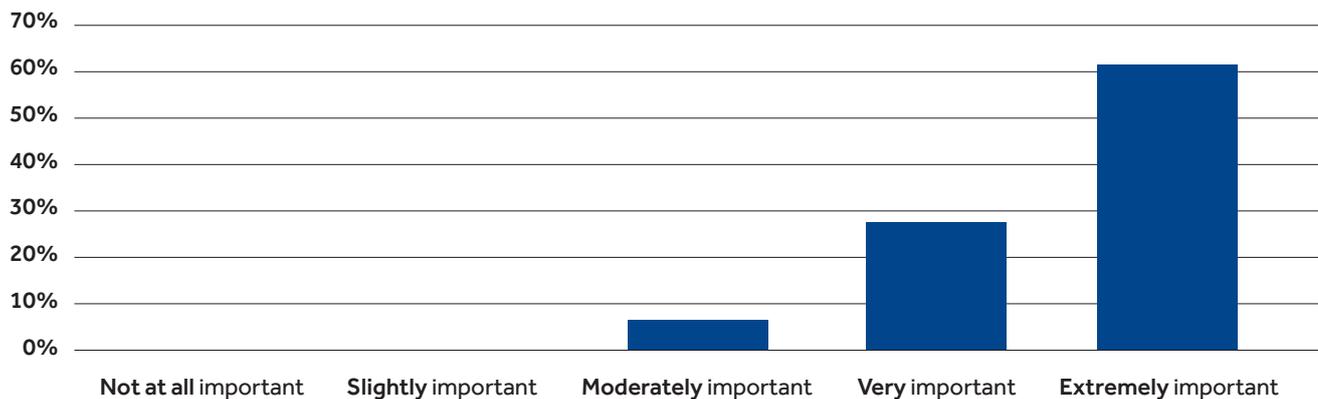
#### 4) Planning authorities should refuse developments that do not prioritise sustainable transport

There was a clear pattern from the responses that developments still promote car use and do not properly cater for sustainable transport, as has been indicated in other studies.<sup>19,20</sup> Additionally, 91% of survey respondents indicated that the integration of planning and transport is key to achieving net zero goals. This clearly highlights that if we continue to produce developments that are car-reliant and unsustainable then we will not achieve net zero.

**“Refusal of schemes that do put traffic and highways forefront of development planning. Maximum parking reductions.”**

- Survey respondent 119

### How important do you see the relationship of planning and transport in achieving net-zero carbon goals



A bottom-up approach to new development that prioritises sustainable transport and bases it on a user hierarchy must be adopted. CIHT stated in Better Planning, Better Transport, Better Places that those developments that fail to put sustainable transport provision first should be refused.<sup>21</sup> The UK Government

has a target of half of all trips in towns and cities to be walked and cycled by 2030,<sup>22</sup> and if we are to achieve this, the wording in the NPPF needs to be more robust. This will provide preventative policy that will make sure that unsustainable developments are no longer commonplace.

<sup>19</sup> Transport for New Homes (2018)

<sup>20</sup> Transport for New Homes (2022)

<sup>21</sup> CIHT Better Planning, Better Transport, Better Places (2019)

<sup>22</sup> Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking (2020)

## 5) Ensure delivery through effective use of Government funding

Adequate funding of our transport systems is critical, especially in pursuit of achieving our climate commitments as well as the growth and levelling up agendas of government. However, the delivery of sustainable transport in developments is currently undermined by the inadequacy of funding, resulting in poor delivery, something CIHT highlighted in *Improving Local Highways*.<sup>23</sup>

Many new developments are built in locations that are not sustainable and promote car dependence. This means that new developments become intertwined with the need for road-building schemes and capacity upgrades. The cost associated with road building is far greater than sustainable transport provision, not just economically, but socially and environmentally too. When asked, *“Is there sufficient funding available for implementing sustainable transport provision in new developments?”* 60% indicated that there was not enough. If there is not enough funding then we will never see sustainable transport embedded in developments.

While a small percentage (6%) of those surveyed indicated that, in some cases, there is enough funding to deliver sustainable transport in developments – such as s106 funding – this funding is often absorbed by developers for other uses and sustainable transport provision becomes unviable.

One survey respondent wrote:

**“Highway improvements are costly but are seen as essential to unlocking development. In many cases this means funding for sustainable transport – often seen as optional – is resisted.”**

- Survey respondent 27

Active travel schemes have been evidenced to produce greater economic returns than road projects.<sup>24</sup> If the UK Government is serious about levelling up and climate action, it needs to provide better, easily accessible funding that tips the balance in favour of sustainable transport being embedded in developments rather than road projects. This will not only allow the delivery of schemes to be achieved, but it will also make sure that the UK Government keeps to its policy objectives and that developers have an incentive to provide infrastructure for sustainable transport.

### We must do better

A critical component for change is evidence that demonstrates examples of where the implementation of sustainable transport in development is well considered. Alarming, there were few notable examples in the UK, with the majority of exemplar developments listed by respondents being international, such as in the Netherlands, Germany, and across Scandinavia.

**“If we take the current methodologies for being in part responsible for the ‘on the ground reality’ of development, they quite clearly fall short of the principles that they espouse. A greater understanding of the collective failure to deliver sustainable development is required. More work needs to be done to understand why there is such a wide gap between policy and practice. Ideally this is where future actions would be derived.”**

- Survey respondent 289

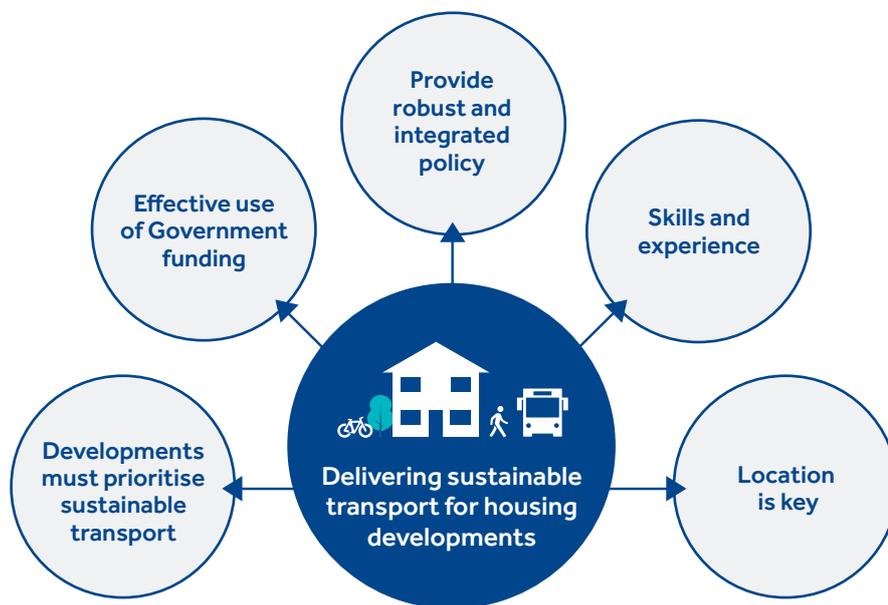
<sup>23</sup> RCIHT *Improving Local Highways* (2020)

<sup>24</sup> Sustrans (2019)

The quantity of the qualitative data coupled with the mix of professionals highlighted a clear desire that We Can Do Better. Professionals know what needs to change; the UK Government, local authorities, and professional institutions must now play their part in facilitating this through the five key actions listed here.

This research has made it clear that the current planning system in England is failing. Its core objective is to “contribute to the achievement of

sustainable development”, but we are still seeing poor developments being built in unsustainable locations and prioritising the car instead of people. If the UK Government is serious about achieving its net zero target by 2050, levelling up the country, growing the economy, and delivering on its housing targets, it must realise the importance of integrating planning and transport to enable the delivery of sustainable development. Professionals want to do better, but the first move must come from the UK Government.



## About CIHT

The Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation (CIHT) provides strategic leadership and support to help our members develop, deliver, and maintain sustainable solutions for highways, transport infrastructure, and services that:

- ✔ Address the challenges of climate change
- ✔ Support the economy
- ✔ Help address societal inequalities
- ✔ Reduce environmental degradation
- ✔ Respond to a changing world.

We bring members together to share, learn, and feel confident about addressing these challenges through the application of good practice, by embracing innovation and by acting with integrity. It is through this and the values that CIHT can demonstrate and deliver on thought leadership and shaping the highways and transportation sector for the public benefit.

Find out more at [www.ciht.org.uk](http://www.ciht.org.uk)