

Minister welcomes idea of small Garden City settlements

North East Hertfordshire MP, Sir Oliver Heald, yesterday asked Planning Minister Brandon Lewis MP if he supported the idea that Garden City principles could be used to design a range of settlements, including a small town of the sort proposed by local North Herts' MPs, instead of the NHDC Local Plan. The Minister was enthusiastic.

The text of the exchange is below.

Sir Oliver Heald: In welcoming the statement as the MP for Letchworth Garden City, the world's first, may I wish Ebbsfleet well? Does the Minister agree that the principles of garden cities—mixed tenure, a scheme of building that maintains garden city features over time, the features themselves, with allotments, space, commons, an agricultural area nearby, and separation of areas between residential, employment land and retail—can be applied not just to larger communities of 15,000 or 20,000, but to smaller communities too? In Hertfordshire we are looking at—the MPs are anyway—possibly pushing North Herts district council to go for a garden city or town that might be smaller than 10,000. Does the Minister agree that almost any size of community can be planned on garden city lines?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. and learned Friend makes a very good point. One point I have made at various recent events is that we must make sure as we move forward that we build good-quality design, not just lots and lots of housing estates. There are two reasons for that. If we want people to be more accepting of development, not only have we got to make sure that people are involved in that through local plans and neighbourhood planning, but the development they see in their area must be of good quality. That requires good-quality design not just of the properties but the overall master plan. My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right that having even small areas developed where, when possible and appropriate, there is a good mix of retail, commercial and residential, with good open space and good community areas, bringing people together, does not just deliver good-quality homes for people to live in and good-quality places for people to raise their families, but also builds good, strong, long-lasting communities, and that is something I wholeheartedly support."