

NEWS

Home

UK

World

Business

Culture

Politics

Health

Tech

InDepth

BBC Verify

Climate

England

Local News

Cambridgeshire

More

Northstowe: The broken-promise new town built 'with no heart'

12 July 2023



More than 1,200 homes are now occupied in Northstowe - but there is no still no shop or GP surgery

Ben Schofield
Political correspondent, BBC East

The new town of Northstowe will be the UK's biggest since the development of Milton Keynes in the 1960s. But six years after the first people moved in, it still does not have a single shop, café or GP surgery. But one councillor says residents should "manage expectations".

Drive east on the old A14 towards Cambridge and a broken billboard looms into view, promising "New Homes, New Community".

The new town of Northstowe was supposed to be an eco-community, built to help ease the housing crisis in one of the least affordable parts of the country.

"They delivered on the first part – there are new homes," homeowner Pamela Nally said.

"I think the community is something that is under development."



Northstowe has delivered new homes but many residents are not happy with the lack of community facilities

Northstowe will eventually see 10,000 new homes, housing around 26,000 people. The first "pioneer" residents moved in during April 2017.

Paperwork lodged by the developer with South Cambridgeshire District Council said a "community centre building will be provided" before the 900th home was occupied.

A sports pavilion, it added, "will be completed" before someone moved into the 500th home.

But more than 1,200 homes are now occupied, with no shops or community facilities, beyond three schools.

The master developer for the first phase – L&Q Estates – said it had "met our goals and planning obligations" and sold land for a local centre to the district council in March 2021.

'It's like a home without a kitchen'



Pamela Nally, who moved to Northstowe in 2021, says the lack of facilities is "really frustrating"

"To me, there's no heart to Northstowe," she said.

"It's like building a home without a kitchen. A kitchen is a heart of a house. A shop and a café and that local area is the heart of a town."

Ms Nally said she was attracted to Northstowe "on the promise that it would be a very up and coming town with amenities available quite shortly after I moved in".

She expected those facilities would arrive within "a six-to-12-month period".

"Clearly that has not been the case," she said. The lack of facilities is, she added, "really frustrating".



This is how the centre of Northstowe was envisaged in 2019

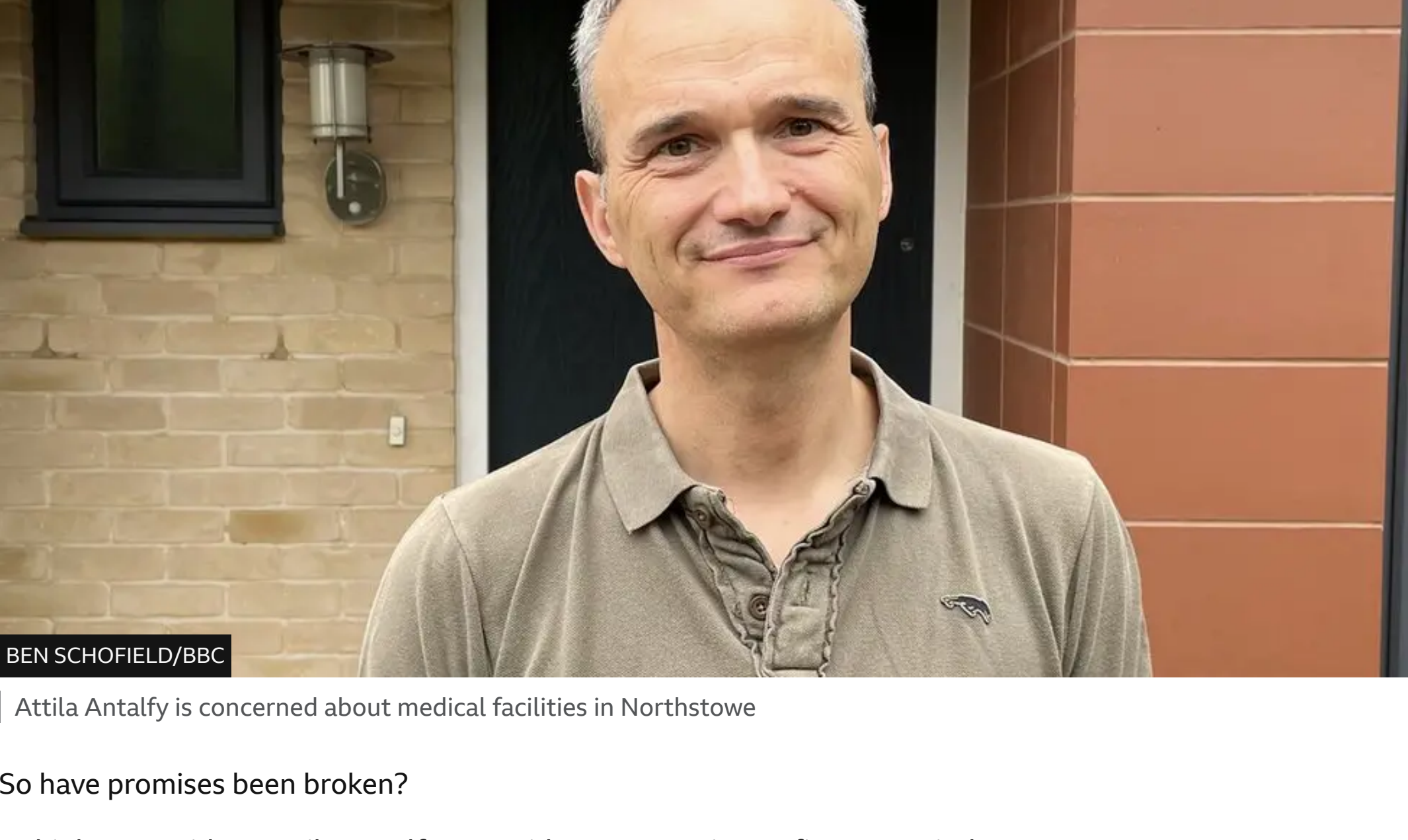
She is not alone. Results of a survey by Cambridgeshire County Council published earlier this year found high levels of dissatisfaction among residents.

Of more than 350 people who responded to a question about local services, 76% said they were either "fairly" or "very dissatisfied".

When Northstowe was still a concept, South Cambridgeshire District Council drew up strategies about how it should be built.

The **Northstowe Area Action Plan**, adopted in 2007, set a goal of ensuring the "early provision of local centres to help create community spirit from the outset".

'We need a GP surgery'



Attila Antalfy is concerned about medical facilities in Northstowe

So have promises been broken?

"I think so," resident Attila Antalfy, 52, said. "We were given a five-year window when things would start taking shape here and we are beyond that."

Mr Antalfy was one of the first handful of people to move into Northstowe in April 2017.

"This town is growing and we are in desperate need for a GP surgery locally, which we were told we would have just here by The Green," he said.



L&Q Estates built a primary school, public transport system and sports facilities on the site.

Some community groups have used spaces within the schools.

In April, nine Portakabin buildings were delivered to the site and were being fitted out as a temporary community facility.

'We make our own fun'



Dan Greef says the lack of community facilities means residents have had to "make our own fun"

Dan Greef, 42, rents a three-bedroom home on the site with his wife and their two children, who are seven and four.

They moved from Cambridge in August 2022 but fear Northstowe could become "a dormitory town – there's nothing here to do apart from sleep".

He helps organise a weekly outdoor market and said the lack of facilities has prompted the community "to make our own fun".

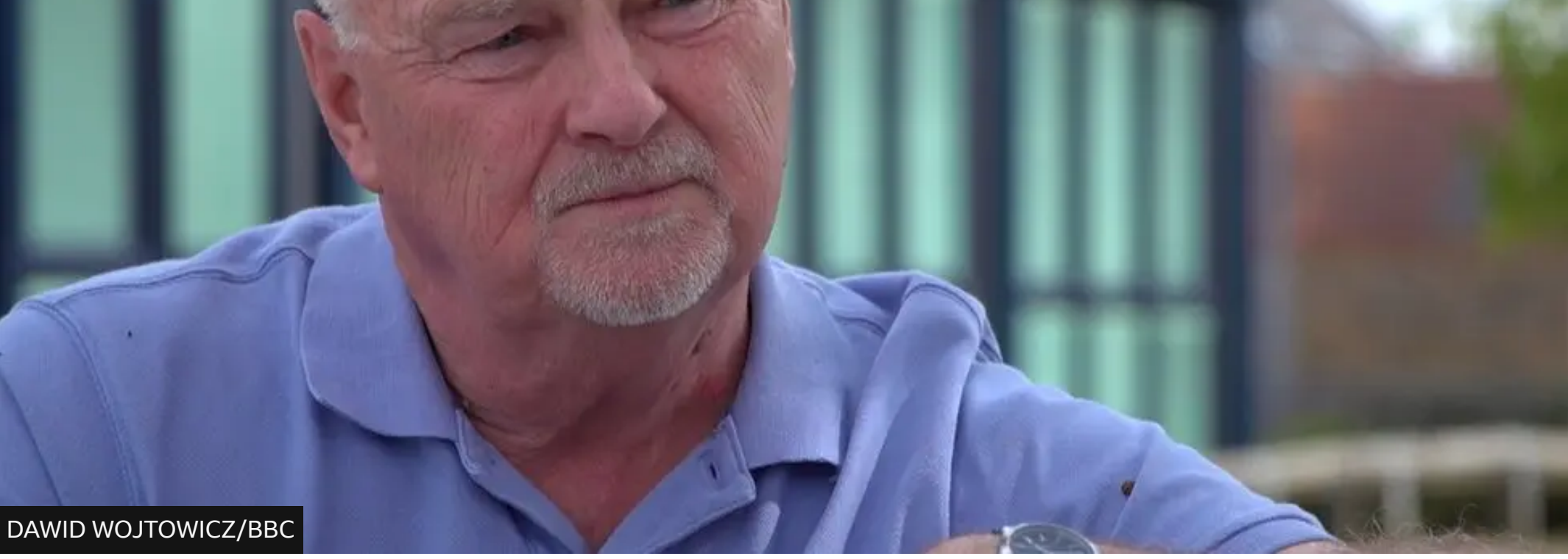
"It's not all doom and gloom – there's something wonderful that's been born here," he added.

"But I think it's about time we got the facilities that we were promised."

Bill Handley, South Cambridgeshire's lead councillor for communities, is optimistic about the new town's future.

"I'm very well aware there's been some frustration," he said.

"But the thing is we've got some really good news coming along. Things are happening in Northstowe and I'm really pleased that they are."



Councillor Bill Handley says "maybe a management of expectations" was needed by Northstowe's first residents

He said the phasing plans – such as building a community centre on the occupation of the 900th home – should not be misinterpreted.

"Phasing means the land and all the legal obligations go over at that point. That's not when the buildings will be delivered," he said.

On whether promises had been kept, he added: "Nobody knows what is said between a vendor and a purchaser of a house, what promises are made."

He said: "You would expect a conveyancing solicitor to tell people what they're likely to expect", when moving into a new town.

"I don't think people can reasonably expect everything to be there really that quickly, things take a time to be built. And when it comes to businesses like shops, there has to be the business model."

So were the pioneers of Northstowe naïve?

"I wouldn't say naïve," Councillor Handley added. "Maybe a management of expectations might have been a good way to go."

Adrian Clark, L&Q Estates' managing director, said the company understood "residents' concerns and frustrations regarding delivery" but that Northstowe "has all the necessary ingredients to become a successful community".

He added: "We have been working hard to meet residents' expectations and deliver on our commitment to the community.

"While we recognise that there have been delays to our original timescales, work on this development has unfortunately coincided with the outbreak of the pandemic, followed by unprecedented economic and political challenges worldwide, which have inevitably impacted our work."

Find BBC News: East of England on **Facebook** and **Instagram**. If you have a story suggestion email eastofenglandnews@bbc.co.uk or get in touch via **WhatsApp** on 0800 169 1830

Related topics

Cambridge

More on this story



Judicial review of 4,000 new homes granted

21 June 2022



New town to blame for empty ponds, says report

23 September 2021



Outline plans for 4,000 new homes approved

31 January 2022



Plans revealed for centre of new town

24 April 2019

Related internet links

South Cambs District Council

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external sites.

From other local news sites

Brothers jailed for spate of burglaries

Hunts Post

Police release picture of man at centre of murder investigation as three arrested

Cambridgeshire Live

Improvement notice for Fenland firm after health and safety 'breaches'

Cambridge Times

Find out more about army ancestors before WWI at talk

Fenland Citizen

Changes to planning system is focus of East Cambs councillor's column

Ely Standard

Tributes to lorry driver killed in crash on A14 near Huntingdon

Peterborough Telegraph

Information about BBC links to other news sites

BBC News Services

On your mobile

On smart speakers

Get news alerts

Contact BBC News

Best of the BBC



Dragons' Den is back with new faces and bigger stakes

iPlayer

+ Watchlist



A faceless hacker threatens to expose Finland's deepest secrets

Sounds

Subscribe



Chi is once again forced to contend with life and death

iPlayer

+ Watchlist



New clues emerge in the search for Dr Ruja Ignatova

Sounds

Subscribe