

Madinat Khalifa New Town

Building climate-responsive neighbourhoods for Bahrain's future



Why this matters

This case matters because housing delivery is not only about numbers. In a hot, land-constrained and rapidly urbanising context, the form of development affects household costs, public health, infrastructure efficiency, social inclusion and climate resilience.

The urban pressure

Bahrain needed to respond to a growing shortage of affordable, high-quality housing while managing population growth, limited land and climate vulnerability. Without a different model, housing shortages, overcrowding and unsustainable urban expansion could have worsened social inequality, increased pressure on infrastructure and left families waiting longer for homes in less resilient neighbourhoods.

The partnership response

The partnership was led through close collaboration between The King's Foundation and Bahrain's Ministry of Housing, supported by a project core group involving multiple ministries and public bodies. The King's Foundation led the vision and masterplan through an Enquiry by Design process, introducing participatory planning workshops and supporting knowledge exchange. In parallel, work with the Prime Minister's Office through the Sustainable Urbanism and Development Programme helped build wider institutional capacity.

What the project did

The project developed a sustainable new town masterplan and supported early-stage neighbourhood delivery. It created walkable, mixed-use communities connected by shaded pedestrian routes, with housing integrated with local centres, public spaces and essential services. The approach also proposed climate-responsive planning, water-sensitive landscaping and energy-efficient development as a model for Bahrain and the Gulf.

Interventions and outcomes

- Developed a masterplan for more than 4,800 social and private housing units by 2030.
- Delivered demonstration housing assigned to people on the social housing waiting list.
- Began construction of the first mixed-use neighbourhood local centre.
- Integrated shaded pedestrian routes, green networks and climate-responsive orientation to improve thermal comfort.
- Used Enquiry by Design to align ministries, communities and delivery partners around a shared urban vision.
- Supported national capacity-building through the Sustainable Urbanism and Development Programme.

What made it work

The project paired a clear climate-responsive masterplan with early built demonstrations, making sustainable urbanism visible and credible. Cross-government collaboration, long-term knowledge exchange and the Enquiry by Design process helped align housing, transport, social infrastructure and environmental objectives.

Challenges and lessons

The move from masterplanning to full multi-phase delivery has taken longer than expected. Later phases and mixed-use components have advanced more slowly, reflecting the complexity of large-scale inter-ministerial delivery and the time required for institutions to adapt to new approaches.

Relevance to other cities

Relevant to cities and governments facing housing shortages, hot-climate urban growth, car dependency and pressure on limited land. The model offers transferable principles for climate-responsive, mixed-use and socially inclusive new communities.

Follow-up opportunity

This case could support further exchange on affordable housing, hot-climate urbanism, new towns, participatory masterplanning, public-sector capacity-building and long-term stewardship.

For more information visit: kings-foundation.org



Partnerships to deliver prosperous urban futures

Part of the UK's contribution to the thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum, this case study highlights how cities are responding to challenges through practical, place-based collaboration. It reflects a shared commitment to learning, collaboration and building partnerships for the future of cities.