

## ***Garden Cities - Why Not?***

Launch of Paper.1 in the *Garden City Perspectives* series

Presentation remarks from Dr Susan Parham and Mr Keith Boyfield, the paper co-authors at the International Garden Cities Institute, Thursday July 14th 2016

Dr Parham began by welcoming the Chair of Trustees, Founding Partners, guests and all the Letchworth and University of Hertfordshire colleagues who have kindly come along this evening to help us celebrate the Institute's first substantial publication. Dr Parham thanked colleagues Sara Gaines, David Ames and Josh Tidy for all their help in offering editorial comment and in the process of getting the paper designed and printed in time for the launch.

It's very pleasing to see so many of you here - interested in the future of Garden Cities - and in planning, designing (and finding good ways of paying for) new places - and perhaps reconfiguring existing areas that don't work well anymore along Garden City sympathetic lines. We are very grateful that you've taken the time to be part of this evening's event.

I hope it is not presumptuous to suggest that like all of us here this evening I share a sense that Garden City principles are an incredibly valuable addition to our armoury of techniques for making and managing highly liveable places. That is something we all know we need to focus attention on, not least to deal with the growing shortage of places for people to live.

So, to the paper, *Garden Cities - Why Not?*

The paper is the first in a new series of in-depth policy and research papers we are launching here at the International Garden Cities Institute. These will explore all kinds of Garden City related topics and themes from a wide range of critical perspectives.

The intention is to avoid insisting that a particular view or stance is the only way to think about Garden Cities (and the broader field of planned settlements within which they sit). Instead we want to open up ideas to critique and challenge - including questioning our own assumptions.

I think it's particularly important that the research side of the Institute nurtures discussion and debate about what Garden Cities' past and present might tell us about best ways forward in the future. That analysis should be informed by real scholarship so that we can make as informed as possible choices, based on the best evidence we can get.

For this first Perspectives paper, *Garden Cities - Why Not?* I have worked with my esteemed colleague and Institute founding partner Keith Boyfield who has, as you may know, an illustrious career as a policy analyst. Together we have produced this first 'Perspectives' paper. I know Keith is going to speak in a moment about a number of aspects we highlight in the paper so I don't want to take up too much more time.

I do just want to note a couple of things in the paper that I think are particularly important. Coming from a design and planning background, and most recently as an urban sociologist, it seems to me clear that we can't keep building dormitory suburbs and expect people to like it. Instead we need to do better at place making. It's heartening therefore, as we say in the paper, that there's been a renaissance in the idea of the Garden City. At the same time it looks as if there is quite a bit of muddled thinking about what a Garden City is.

Developments *badged* as 'Garden Cities' are in the works, with more to follow, but to make them live up to the Garden City 'promise' we really need to be producing 'whole' places where people can live and work happily - as the Garden Cities of Letchworth and Welwyn have done over about a hundred years. In a related way we might also need to understand more about how we can 'retrofit' some existing places that don't work very well, using Garden City type principles to make them better.

In our paper we point out that this isn't nostalgia - it's very much about '21st century urbanism' (and thanks need to be made at this point to my colleagues Anthony Downs, Gavin Murray and Pablo Fernandez who

worked with me on exploring this conceptually in a recent commended Wolfson Prize entry about building new Garden Cities). We point to some practical examples of places being developed around the country - some of them being undertaken by founding partners - that show what can be done to make great new places to live which are in tune with these principles.

We argue that the Garden City 'brand', if you like, hasn't been tainted and this should help make new Garden Cities more acceptable to communities than perhaps other kinds of developments would be. But we need to make sure what's proposed really does conform to or is at least in sympathy with Garden City principles - spatial, economic, value capturing, governance related - and then to work with people *before* new places are planned and developed to make sure they want this to happen.

In the paper we make some points about ways of engaging with people 'early and often' and sorting out some pressing planning issues that I think are really relevant and I hope you will find them compelling.

As a political economist by first training I'm all too aware that money is critical in all this and I know Keith will be talking about this among other things, so I want to hand over to him before coming back to you at the end of his remarks for a brief wrap up and some suggestions about next steps to explore *Garden Cities - Why Not?*

So, over to you Keith.

Mr Boyfield began his remarks as follows:

We are currently living through turbulent times – never in my lifetime have we witnessed leadership contests at the same time for both the Government and Her Majesty's Opposition. Britain is now set to leave the EU, watched nervously by the foreign exchange markets. However, it is also worth emphasising that within living memory, it has never been cheaper for Her Majesty's Government to borrow money for much needed infrastructure investment.

Our study, *Garden Cities – Why Not?* addresses one of Britain's key problems that requires a lasting solution, namely the shortage of homes to accommodate our spiralling population. It is now estimated by the Office for National Statistics that Britain's population will reach 70 million by 2027, leaving aside whatever our new Prime Minister opts to do about curbing immigration flows.

Where are we all going to live? Hopefully not in the street, the fate of an alarming number of people, including young children, I saw with my own eyes in Paris last week.

Britain must build more housing. Last year, only 136,000 homes were completed in England. But 250,000 new homes a year are required if the Government is to meet its ambitious target of one million new homes by 2020.

The good news to report is that there is a growing realisation that something must be done to tackle our housing shortage. There is a convergence of interests focusing on the creation of new communities and neighbourhoods. While never easy to resist Nimbyism, survey evidence from the British Social Attitudes Survey confirms that the general public is increasingly prepared to accept more house building. What's more, investors are ready and willing to finance new development. Some big names, such as Legal & General, have already funded schemes in places such as Salford, Bristol and Walthamstow in the capital while Hermes, BT's pension manager, is financing the ambitious redevelopment of King's Cross in London. Meanwhile, local authorities across the country are considering ambitious new developments; and those which are not, will be encouraged to do so through the Government's requirement to identify an annual figure for new homes in their Local Plans. If they fail to do so by the Spring of next year, central government has warned them that it will intervene and make alternative arrangements for the drafting of these Local Plans.

Establishing how many new homes should be built under the Local Plan should serve as a **catalyst** for the creation of new communities. However, the mechanism for delivering these new dwellings has yet to be fully developed. This is a challenge but also a major new opportunity.

In the past, local authorities have tended to resist large new settlements since they generate a host of new demands on scarce local resources, including planning teams. However, in the last year central

government has awarded greater powers and a larger share of resources to cities, such as Manchester and Sheffield. The Northern Powerhouse initiative is revitalising local government in these areas and encouraging them to consider more ambitious schemes. It is significant, for example, that the Combined Greater Manchester Authority is currently reviewing its housing requirements as well as its greenbelt boundaries – the first such review in 30 years – as part of its Spatial Framework.

Here, let me cite a startling fact. I was surprised to discover that while the total amount of land designated as greenbelt has increased by 127 per cent since 1979, no new towns have been built since Milton Keynes was launched, over half a century ago.

This is the background and the opportunity to the challenge Susan Parham and I delve into in the first of these Garden City Perspectives, appropriately entitled *Garden Cities: Why Not?* We point out that we have not managed to build any real Garden Cities since Letchworth and Welwyn Garden Cities were established over a century ago. While some new developments - badged as Garden Cities and Garden Towns - are in the pipeline, the crucial question to pose is do they deliver the key elements that conform to and bolster the brand?

Furthermore, how many might be constructed given that the Policy Exchange think tank has called for 30 new towns to be built between now and 2035? We will be lucky to see several built in the next decade. And, to be successful, these communities need to be built in accessible locations where people can find employment and, crucially, where they want to live.

This means decent infrastructural support with physical, social and recreational amenities. In other words, somewhere people need to be; somewhere which is appealing to live.

In our study we deal with **some key questions about the viability and prospects for building a new wave of Garden Cities** and then **ask how such a programme can be delivered?** In this context, we argue that we could adopt the principles of Pink Planning - the name "Pink Planning" deriving from a deregulatory initiative, originally promoted in Detroit, Michigan - a city that has suffered more than most in terms of urban decay - but whose central core is now reviving. **Pink Zones** have now been implemented in cities such as Phoenix, Arizona, which lighten red tape and create more place-based standards that incentivise the preservation of existing buildings through what is termed a 'retrofit', illustrated by the street retrofit design for a mile long section of the city's Grand Avenue.

What distinguishes Pink Zones is that they are designed to work from the existing community upwards - not from the top down, as with the New Towns built in the 1940s to the 1960s. Pink Zones could provide a useful channel to sidestep the labyrinthine complexity of planning controls that have done so much to push up house prices in this country. As the eminent lawyer Daniel Greenberg and I detail in our recent study – *A Convergence of Interests* – they can bypass many planning regulations and improve design standards by employing a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) as the delivery mechanism.

Pink Zones would gain policy clearance from central government through a permission to apply, thereby encouraging investment in development schemes and offering an element of confidence to potential funders. As I summarised in an article for *The Yorkshire Post* the distinctive aspects of our recommended Pink Planning approach are threefold:

- firstly, incentives are offered for community cooperation, thereby reducing adversarial conflict;
- secondly, our approach rewards cooperative development with a streamlined procedure; and
- thirdly, it expands the range of developer's contributions and involvement beyond infrastructure, to include employment growth and other factors that supply residents' wider needs and make the developed communities good places to live and work.

Today, with all sorts of different viewpoints in an unusually close alignment, this convergence of interests is a remarkable chance to develop new places to live and work. Garden Cities are not the only kinds of settlements that can make a contribution, but we believe that making use of time-tested Garden City principles will help meet living requirements in the 21st century, whether economic, social or environmental.

You will see that we come to **six broad conclusions** in this study.

1. **Funding is crucial** – and it will inevitably involve both public and private sources of finance. Government has a role to play in providing the infrastructure framework. In this context, it is worth emphasising that Sajid Javid, the newly appointed Secretary of State Communities & Local Government (DCLG), argued only this week that this is a good time for government to invest in public infrastructure since gilt rates are so low. In Tuesday's *Daily Telegraph* he observed, "With negative long-term real UK gilt yields, borrowing has never been cheaper, so we should create a Growing Britain Fund worth up to £100 billion to fund infrastructure programmes alongside the private sector." Clearly, the more adept government is in using the instruments at its disposal – including the tax system, planning, governance capacity, infrastructure support and the release of surplus land where appropriate – the better. In our study we recommend that the newly established **National Infrastructure Commission**, charged with addressing national challenges, could support and promote Garden Cities as a key vehicle to help meet housing need.
2. **The private sector also** has a pivotal role to play. I am encouraged by the strong interest from financial institutions such as Legal & General and M&G who are now actively investing in new residential housing, notably private rental accommodation. There is considerable scope to do more in terms of involving long term sources of capital, sometimes dubbed 'patient capital'. In our study we also point to real examples of placemaking from Wales, to Cornwall and Aberdeenshire where private landowners have been at the forefront of creating new communities sympathetic to Garden City principles. What is more, they show that enlightened landowners and developers can get on with the job of building new urban extensions, towns and villages characterised by their quality and liveability. Furthermore, there is plenty of opportunity for developing variations on the Garden City model, depending on circumstances. Cities, towns, villages and reconfigured suburbs could all be part of the mix. Garden Cities can be created not just on Green Belt and Brownfield sites but also on existing areas of urban sprawl that cry out for a 'retrofit' transformation – a vision close to the heart of Sir Simon Jenkins.
3. Our study does not avoid discussing the controversial issue of our **Green Belt**, undoubtedly the most iconic and memorable aspect of post war British Planning. In practice, the Green Belt – well over double its previous size 36 years ago - is already being reviewed as local authorities draw up Local Plans setting out their strategies to meet future housing need. This is long overdue. There is a growing clamour to see radical change, not least from campaigning bodies such as the housing charity, Shelter. We argue that it is high time to produce a well evidenced, considered national review which sets out why we have a Green Belt, how it is developed, what it encompasses now, and asks what do we want from it?
4. I managed to persuade Dr Parham that the ideas we encapsulated in our ongoing **Pink Planning** series, commissioned by the Centre for Policy Studies, should be actively considered with respect to their implementation. In this context, as I argued earlier, the obligation on local authorities to establish how many new homes should be built under the Local Plan will serve as a catalyst for the creation of new neighbourhoods and communities. The Pink Planning model provides a toolkit for going forward but other people may have different approaches. We should welcome positive contributions to the national debate. Pink zones incorporating a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) as the delivery mechanism, provides the means to deliver ambitious new communities of between 500 to up to 25,000 individual homes. Yet the onus is on a coalition of stakeholders, including sources of institutional capital, to initiate schemes. Against this background I am busy seeking to bring these parties together up and down the country to deliver new communities.
5. We observe in our paper that **process elements** are important to the delivery of Garden Cities. By process we mean a value capture model and a decentralised governance and management structure, which was first exemplified here in Letchworth. Looking ahead, we

see a new wave of Garden Cities as a welcome opportunity to explore the use of financing, governance, building and management instruments (notably Community Land Trusts). This helps with community engagement and support; and, in the longer term, ensures that such communities are better places to live.

6. The groundswell of interest in Garden Cities should act as a boost for the creation of new communities based on their key principles. In the past, people have been saddled with relatively low quality, fairly standard offerings. Indeed, there has been a lack of aspiration in far too much of the housing which has been built in the last half century. This is reflected in a survey conducted by Ipsos MORI last year which found that 67 per cent of respondents would not consider buying a new house; they prefer second-hand. When it comes to new-build, people want something different.

In this context, the message to communicate is that a broad spectrum of stakeholders all have a positive role to play in the renaissance of Garden Cities. So this is a timely opportunity to create a new constellation of attractive communities to house Britain's population. Unless action is taken soon we will face an unsustainable situation where younger people, especially, will find it difficult to find anywhere reasonable to rent, let alone buy'. Britain needs to get building again and, in this regard, the Garden City model provides a proven path to pursue.

I am now going to hand over to Dr Susan Parham who will make some concluding remarks.

Dr Parham then made the following final comments:

So, as Keith has said, we've identified a lot of barriers but I think we have also focused a fair bit of attention on finding ways to deal with those, picking up positive opportunities - funding related, about place design, about infrastructure, planning, regenerating regions, consulting properly with people, a plug for the value capture model, and Garden City community led governance structures, related to making Garden Cities smart cities too.

It might feel like quite a chunky read, but to some extent my feeling is that we have only scratched the surface in this paper. Of course I would say that as a research academic, but it would be fantastic if we could do some further more in-depth study about a range of aspects we've touched on here, and that in turn could help improve our practice as a new round of Garden Cities takes shape.

If you would be interested in writing or co-writing a paper please do speak to me about that. We really welcome suggestions and want to develop a broad range of papers from different perspectives.

And, I'm also very much open to suggestion about funding possibilities to underpin further work that Keith, I and others could do to explore aspects we started to consider in this paper - please do have a chat with me over drinks tonight or get in touch with me after this event if you'd like to discuss that.

As a former Australian Prime Minister once said, 'Life wasn't meant to be easy'. But in relation to Garden Cities, Keith and I concluded that while it might be quite tough to deal with barriers to developing really good ones today, there are so many positive possibilities for the future we really should be working as hard as we can on doing this well.

- The views of authors in the Garden City Perspectives series are solely their own and do not represent the official policy position of either the IGCI or its partner organisations.