

How good could it be?

A guide to building better places

**What the Garden Cities can teach us
about finding a better way to live**



Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for anyone with an interest in making where they live a better place. It's designed to help you to think about how good your neighbourhood could be, and about ways you can get involved in things like planning to help make your ideas a reality. It's not detailed or technical but includes plenty of useful contacts offering more information.



Building a better life

We all want a good quality of life for ourselves, our friends and families, and our communities. There are many positive aspects to community life, but we all know of things that could be made better. Part of making that happen is about making sure our communities have decent homes, plenty of green space, good transport, and access to things like cinemas, pubs and sports pitches. This leaflet provides a taste of how we might get more of the things that make life worth living.

The good... and the bad and ugly?

The best way to start making places better is to look at what's around you: decide what you like – and also what doesn't work. Every place has green spaces that might be used better, or roads that are hard to cross, but too often people just accept this as normal. A lot of people are also worried by new housing and development – partly because they feel they have no control over it; but partly because it's often rather ugly. It can also bring new pressures on vital things like roads, schools and health services that may already be overstretched.

Does change have to happen?

Change isn't always easy to accept, but in some places there is real pressure for things like new homes. Census figures show that as a nation we need around 240,000 new homes a year to meet the needs of our growing population. This doesn't affect everywhere in same way, but it does mean that we have to answer the question about where our children are going to live. Homes aren't the only challenge: we also need to deal with climate change, tackle unemployment by providing more local jobs, and help people to lead healthier lifestyles.

Why should I bother getting involved in these big issues?

Because these bigger issues will impact on your community. You can either let change happen to you, or you can play an active role in shaping what happens to try to make your neighbourhood a better place. Having a strong vision of what you want for the future of your area gives you a stronger voice in shaping what happens.

What has this got to do with Garden Cities?



The Garden City ideals were shaped by people who believed that there could be a better, more sustainable and more co-operative way of living. The big achievement of the Garden City movement was to turn idealism into real progress (find out more at www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/garden-cities.html). Development at Letchworth and Welwyn Garden Cities and at Hampstead Garden Suburb showed it is possible to build attractive places which encourage a better way of living for everyone. They also used new, practical ways of both paying for this progress and giving the community a financial share in the place where they live.

The Garden City ideals are more relevant now than ever. We often hear about what can't be done; this leaflet is about what *can* be done and about the possibility of a better future.

Does this have to be about cities?

No, it doesn't. Attractive, thriving new places based on Garden City principles can be built in all sorts of sizes, from a small neighbourhood to a town or city. The principles are about finding a better way to live.

OK, so what are you actually suggesting?

The Garden City principles set out in the poster on the reverse side of this leaflet are a simple list of ways that places can either be improved or built from new. In each case they are the result of over a hundred years of people thinking about the future and how they want to live. They are intended to spark people's imagination about the future – not to suggest that 'one size fits all'. There is lots more background detail to look at and people to talk



to if you want more information about the principles or the Garden City movement in general – see the list of information sources in this leaflet, and the even longer list at www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/gc-community-guide.html

This seems very ambitious, and I'm very busy!

People don't have much time, but we're not saying you have to do all of this now or all at once. Maybe it's just about starting a debate in your community, or maybe it's about picking one issue, like green space and gardens, that you want get started with. There's more than one way to get a better life, and Garden City principles are just one pathway that people made a reality.

How can I make these ideas real?

No-one is pretending that getting better places is easy; and setbacks are always possible. The most important lesson is that change for the better is possible. It's happening in all sorts of places. All the ideas talked about here are tried and tested. There are lots of things you can do to make things happen where you live.

Does this mean I have to know about planning?

No, it doesn't. Planning can seem technical, but it's just about what goes where. It's one way to take a strong vision for your community and start to make it real. Perhaps a developer is proposing new housing, or you are writing a neighbourhood plan? Maybe your council is writing a 'local plan' for the whole area? All these things provide a real opportunity to get involved and share and shape ideas.

How will it be paid for?

There is no single source of money to help turn the Garden City principles into reality on the ground. Some of things will be paid for by straightforward public and private investment, but it's useful to know about two sources of cash that can make the principles real. The first is that when land is given planning permission it massively increases in value. That profit usually goes to private landowners and developers. Normally, local communities get a little bit of the profit too, through planning



agreements that pay for things like schools and roads.

But there is another way. For example, in Letchworth Garden City the land remained in community ownership. The profits and rents from its development still fund around £4 million of investment in the community every year. It can be done!

Energy is another key example. At the moment the large energy companies reap the profits of selling you energy, but all over Europe communities are running their own energy companies, which limit price rises and put profits back into the local economy.



Can communities really own their own assets?

Yes, they can! One way is through a Community Land Trust, which is a commonly accepted way for a community to own and manage land. There are many other forms of stewardship for other community assets like energy. If anyone says this is impossible, ask them why Germany has more than 650 energy co-operatives which provide energy to local people at low cost. Or point them to the work of the Brighton Energy Co-op, which shows how this is already being done in the UK.

What are your top tips for getting started?

Talk is good: Find out what is going on by talking to existing community groups and to the local council. Perhaps there is already a neighbourhood planning process or a local land trust?

- **Try to include as many people as possible:** Getting a consensus about what a community wants can be like herding cats, but it's vital to try to reach out to as many different people as possible – and particularly to those who don't always get a voice, like children or ethnic minorities.
- **Get organised:** To fundraise and own assets, you need to set up a community organisation. There are many models of well run community organisations to choose from, and key contacts on the list of information sources in this leaflet will help you work out which is right for you and how to get started.
- **Don't take no for answer:** A lot of people will tell you that positive change would be nice but is just not possible. The truth is that it *is* possible; and we have nothing to lose by aiming high.

How good could it be?

The true value of Garden Cities

Garden Cities are places where ...

- the community is in control - people have a direct say in planning their future
- the community owns development land and local facilities and gets income from the profits of development and from providing things like energy
- we build beautiful and affordable housing in neighbourhoods imaginatively designed so that the kids can walk to school and buying a pint of milk means just popping round the corner
- we encourage an exciting nightlife and offer opportunities for people to get involved in the arts and sport
- we encourage mixed and diverse communities for people from all backgrounds
- we can grow our own food, either at home or in a community garden, farm or allotment
- we create fantastic green spaces for people and wildlife
- we create local jobs to reduce the need to travel long distances to work
- we provide plenty of opportunities for safe walking and cycling, supported by convenient public transport



Who should I talk to about...

...Garden City principles?

- **The TCPA** has campaigned for the Garden City approach to development for more than a century. Publications on Garden City principles and the benefits and practicalities of their application can be found at www.tcpa.org.uk/
- **Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation** Learn from the world's first Garden City www.letchworth.com/heritage-foundation
- **Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust** Learn from the Garden City that became a New Town www.welwyn-garden-heritage.org/

...help with planning?

- **Planning Aid** Independent planning advice for those unable to pay professional fees www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-aid/
- **Department for Communities and Local Government** Guidance and information on planning policies and programmes www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government
- **Planning Advisory Service** Advice for local authorities on planning issues www.pas.gov.uk/
- **ATLAS** Advice on planning for large-scale development www.atlasplanning.com/

...help with design?

- **Design Council Cibe** Source of advice on architecture and design www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/cibe/
- **The Glass-House Community Led Design** National charity on design and regeneration and empowering communities www.theglasshouse.org.uk/

...setting up a community organisation?

- **Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens** National community farms/gardens charity www.farmgarden.org.uk/

- **National Community Land Trust Network** National body for Community Land Trusts www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/home
- **Co-operative Enterprise Hub** Support for new and prospective community co-operatives www.co-operative.coop/enterprise-hub/
- **The Land Trust** Independent body managing green spaces for and with local communities www.thelandtrust.org.uk/
- **Civic Voice** National charity for the civic movement in England www.civicvoice.org.uk/
- **Locality** Network for community-led organisations www.locality.org.uk/

...help with funding and investment?

- **GOV.UK** Postcode-based tool for finding funding in your area www.gov.uk/apply-funding-community-project
- **The Princes Trust** List of community project funds www.princes-trust.org.uk/communitycash
- **The Ethical Property Foundation** Independent property advice for charities and community and not-for-profit groups www.ethicalproperty.org.uk/
- **Groundwork** National organisation with a network of local trusts working with local authorities and community groups www.groundwork.org.uk/
- See also **Locality, National Community Land Trust Network** (above)

...technical help on things like energy, transport and play space?

- **National Self Build Association** Resources and advice on building your own home www.nasba.org.uk/
- **Energy Saving Trust** Advice on lowering carbon emissions in your community www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/Communities
- **Sustrans** Advice and resources on sustainable travel www.sustrans.org.uk/
- **Sport England** Advice on the design and maintenance of sports facilities www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/tools-guidance/



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The TCPA

The Town and Country Planning Association is an independent charity that works to improve the art and science of town and country planning. The TCPA puts social justice and the environment at the heart of the policy debate and inspires government, industry and campaigners to take a fresh perspective on major issues, including planning policy, housing, regeneration and climate change. The TCPA's objectives are to:

- Secure a decent, well designed home for everyone, in a human-scale environment combining the best features of town and country.
- Empower people and communities to influence decisions that affect them.
- Improve the planning system in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

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