

working to secure
homes, places
and communities
where everyone can thrive



The TCPA's Strategy
January 2021 - December 2025

the TCPA's strategy, 2021-2025

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Cover photograph courtesy of Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation



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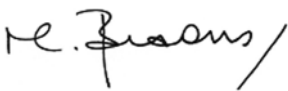
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foreword

The Town and Country Planning Association is committed to making sure that people live in homes, places and communities that enable everyone to thrive. Achieving that vision will not be easy. It will require us to support communities and influence decision-makers as they tackle environmental, social, cultural and economic challenges. But we know that, by working towards that vision, we will help to make people's lives better.

We are publishing this strategy at a time when we face much uncertainty. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been rapid and major changes to how people live, work and play. The evolution that we were seeing in remote and flexible working and in digital communication has suddenly and rapidly accelerated into a new norm for many. The full impact of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union is still to be fully understood. And it will take time for countries to recover from the economic impact of the pandemic.

We must remember, however, that even prior to the pandemic we faced health, housing and climate crises. So, despite current uncertainties, the Association is clear that we must inspire all our communities to respond to the challenges that they face and support them in grasping new opportunities.



Mary Parsons
Chair of the Trustee Board



Fiona Howie
Chief Executive

the impact of places on people's lives

The built and natural environments have profound impacts on people's health, wellbeing and life chances. This link has been known for a long time, but in a rush to build more homes the quality of new houses and neighbourhoods has not been sufficiently prioritised.

We know, for example, that substandard housing increases the likelihood of respiratory, cardiovascular and communicable diseases, as well as mortality. Poor-quality housing is associated with poor mental health, and can cause stress, depression, and anxiety. Our neighbourhoods are also crucially important to our mental and physical wellbeing. Those which discourage walking and have poor cycling infrastructure can have negative impacts on residents' mental wellbeing and can increase the risk of type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and musculoskeletal conditions.¹

We also know that there is an urgent need for places to be resilient to environmental, economic and social challenges. Climate change is the greatest challenge facing our society, and its impacts are no longer hypothetical; the population is already experiencing increased temperatures and severe weather events. Action is needed to reduce carbon emissions and enable places to adapt.

It is critically important to be aware that the climate, housing and health crises will not affect everyone to the same extent – disadvantaged communities will generally bear the brunt. Across England, children living in substandard housing face up to a 25% higher risk of severe ill-health and disability during childhood and early adulthood. They also face the prospect of lower educational attainment and greater likelihood of unemployment and poverty.² An evidence review conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation also found that lower-income and other disadvantaged groups contribute least to causing climate change but are likely to be most negatively affected by it.³

How we create neighbourhoods and manage development is, therefore, important for many reasons. And that means that land use planning is critically important. While some may suggest that the main purpose of the planning system is to allocate land for housing, it can and must do so much more than that. When done well, planning is visionary, inspirational, and transformational. But thriving places cannot be created by the statutory planning system alone.

How well we plan, design and create new places and regenerate existing ones will help or hinder work to tackle health inequalities, climate change, and the economic resilience of places. The impact of places on people's lives should not, therefore, be underestimated.

Paolo Paradiso/iStock



Notes

1 <https://tinyurl.com/vk9rucd>

2 <https://tinyurl.com/qyfoozt>

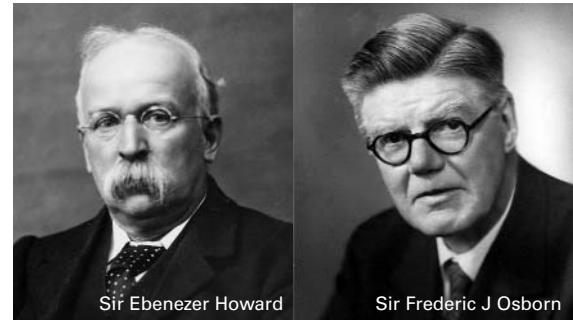
3 <https://tinyurl.com/zabjr2s>

about us and what we have achieved

Ebenezer Howard understood the profound link between the built environment and people's quality of life. He founded the Association, which was originally known as the Garden City Association, in 1899 to help take forward his belief that there was a better way of delivering high-quality and equitable environments and the homes, jobs and social connections that people needed. This vision for a different way of living led to the development of Letchworth and Welwyn Garden Cities, and his values continue to underpin the TCPA and its work.

Frederic J Osborn, another important figure in the Association's history, embraced Howard's cause of 'improving the conditions under which most people live, work and play... through the building of Garden Cities and New Towns', and he worked at the heart of a campaign that saw the British New Towns movement emerge from the ideal of the Garden City.

Today, we are a charity that works across the UK but also learns from international best practice. We strive to draw on the practical idealism of our founders and continue to recognise the huge potential that the planning system has as a powerful tool to transform places and people's lives. But we also recognise that the 'art and science' of planning, and our work, goes way beyond the formal planning system and recognises the multi-dimensional nature of place-making. As this strategy highlights, our work is a mixture of campaigning, publishing research, acting as a critical friend, providing training, influencing policy- and decision-makers and enabling action. Thousands of people engage with the workshops, conferences, webinars and seminars we run each year. And we seek to work at both the national and local levels.



Sir Ebenezer Howard

Sir Frederic J Osborn



Networking at a TCPA event

It can take time to see the impact of our interventions, but our recent successes include:

- Securing changes in national planning policy to reinsert the term 'social housing' and amend policy on viability – these changes will be critical in securing more genuinely affordable housing.
- Holding six training workshops, after which 84% of the 180 councillors and officers that attended reported that they had gained greater awareness of possible approaches to securing more affordable homes.
- Leading the Green Infrastructure Partnership's work to secure improvements to Planning Practice Guidance on green infrastructure, which should help secure more and better green infrastructure policies in local plans. Once put in place, that green infrastructure will provide multiple economic, social and environmental benefits.
- Holding over 50 workshops across England, Wales and Northern Ireland since 2012, to support local authorities in their efforts to reunite planning and health, with the aim of tackling health inequalities.
- Providing three training events for local authorities in London that demonstrated how planning can create more socially just communities. Feedback showed that 92% of participants had gained a better understanding of how planning policy can promote inclusion and equality.
- Securing changes to government regulations that will require homes delivered via permitted development rights to have windows and meet minimum space standards.

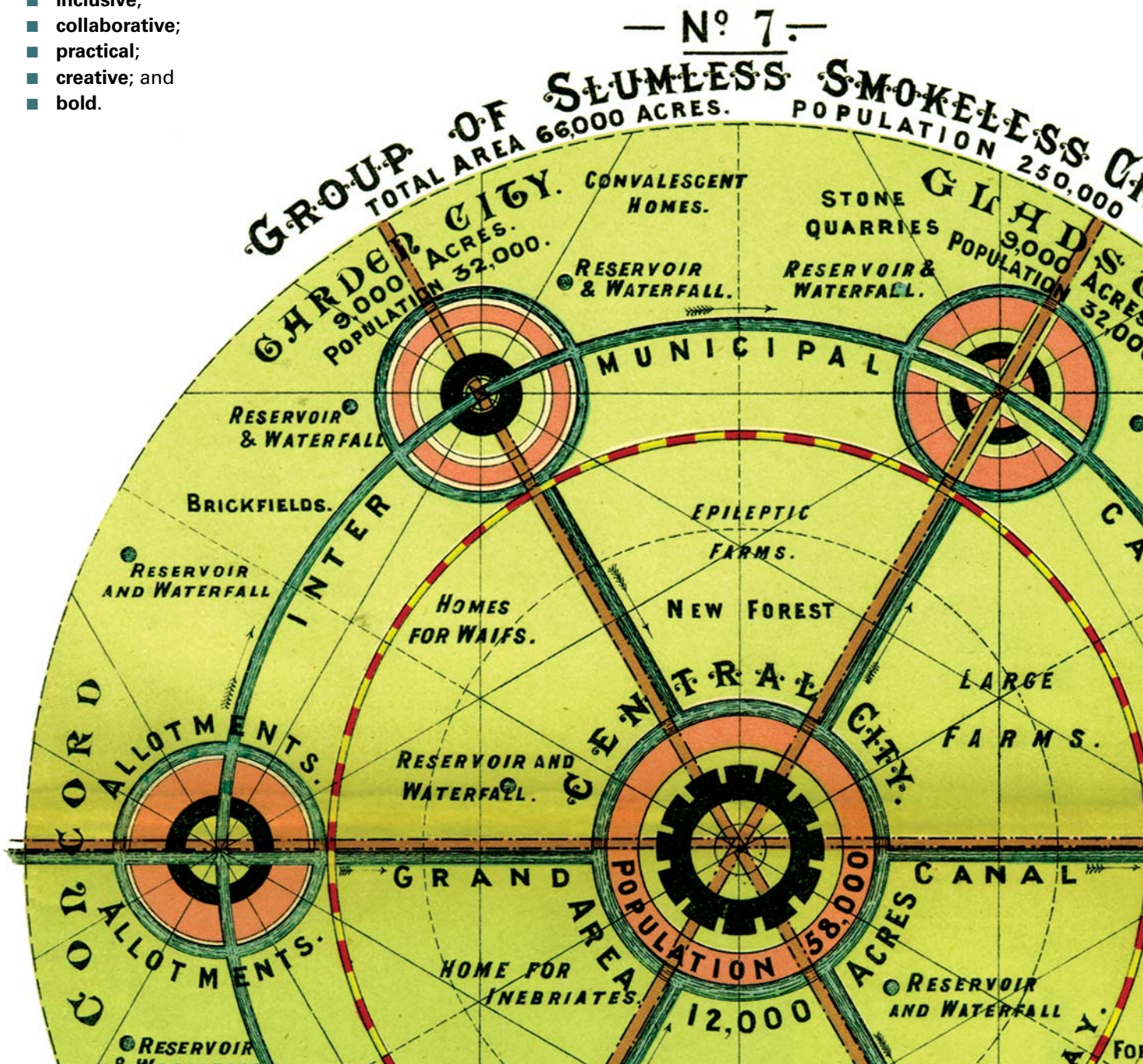
our vision and mission – what we stand for

The **TCPA's vision** is for homes, places and communities in which everyone can thrive.

Our mission is to challenge, inspire and support people to create healthy, sustainable and resilient places that are fair for everyone.

To achieve our vision and mission, the TCPA will need to operate in a certain way. We will be guided by **our values**, which are that we are:

- **inclusive;**
- **collaborative;**
- **practical;**
- **creative;** and
- **bold.**



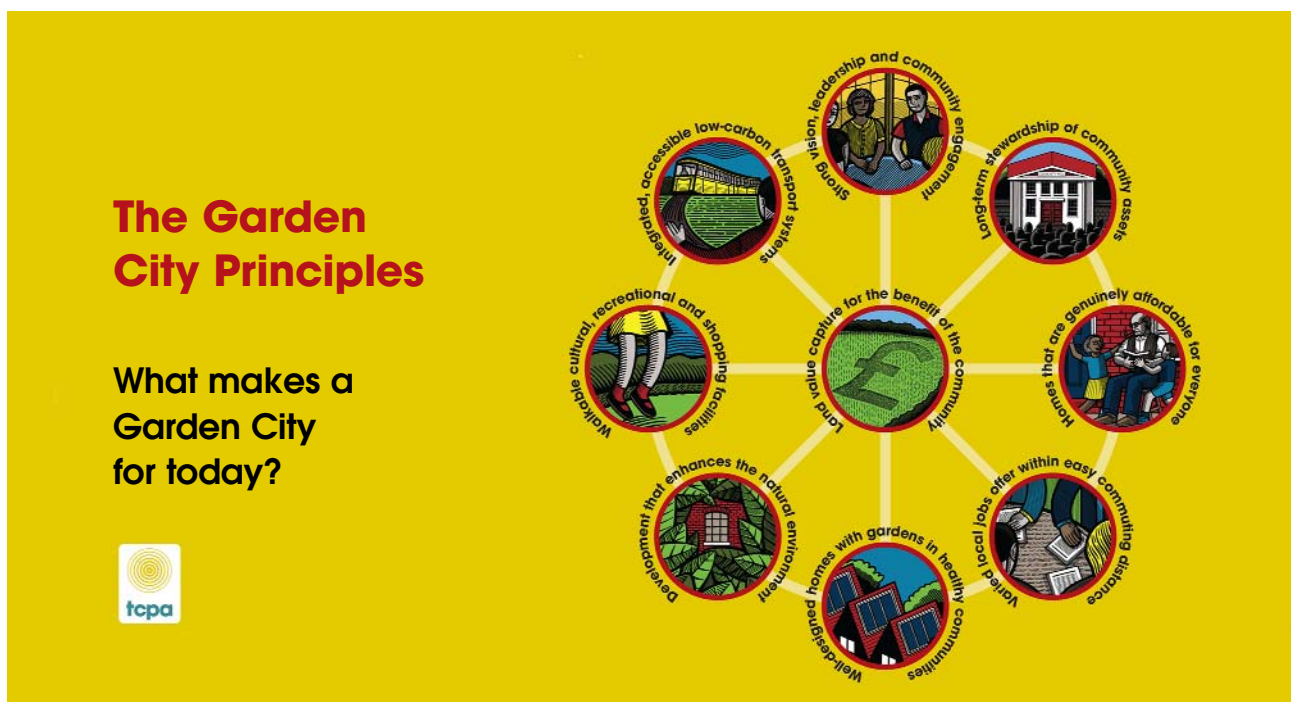
our strategic priorities and what success looks like

Our priorities draw on our heritage. The TCPA was founded by the originators of the Garden City movement, who sought to transform the way that places are created for the common good. This approach enabled the practical achievement of beautifully designed and sustainable places for everyone, secured by reinvesting the wealth generated by development for the benefit of the whole community. Achieving social justice was, and remains, the driving ambition of the Garden City movement. The Garden City Principles are the practical articulation of this philosophy of place.

Informed by the Garden City Principles, the TCPA's strategic priorities are to:

- **Work to secure a good home for everyone in inclusive, resilient and prosperous communities, which support people to live healthier lives.**
- **Empower people to have real influence over decisions about their environments and to secure social justice within and between communities.**
- **Support new and transform existing places to be adaptable to current and future challenges including the climate crisis.**

In addition to our outward-facing strategic priorities we also have a number of internal priorities, to enable the TCPA to achieve its desired impact.



strategic priority 1

Strategic Priority 1

Work to secure a good home for everyone in inclusive, resilient and prosperous communities which support people to live healthier lives

There is a need for more homes, but they must be homes that meet people's needs, in the right place and of a decent quality. Tackling the housing crisis is much more than simply a numbers game, and the provision of genuinely affordable homes must be prioritised. But there is a need for much greater ambition beyond that aim alone. The planning of new homes must sit within the context of place-making, so that job creation and the delivery of local services, including health and education facilities, are properly considered rather than being an afterthought.

We are also very aware that the nation faced a health crisis even before the COVID-19 pandemic. *Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On* shows that life expectancy in England has stalled for the first time in over a century, and for our nation's poorest women it has actually fallen.⁴ In Scotland, life expectancy is poor and has not improved since 2012.⁵ The environment in which people live has profound impacts on their health and wellbeing, and this needs to be better understood and integrated into decision-making, at local and national levels.

Our work to achieve this priority will therefore include:

- Securing changes to policy and legislation that will prevent new homes being built that undermine people's health, safety, and life chances. This will be achieved by leading a campaign in England and Wales for a Healthy Homes Act.
- Campaigning to secure the policy changes and resources that are necessary to deliver genuinely affordable housing which meets people's needs.
- Working with public and private sector partners involved in enabling large-scale new developments to deliver the homes that people need, in thriving communities. This will involve us acting as a trusted but critical friend to maximise the quality of these new places.
- Seeking to reduce health inequalities by continuing our work to reunite planning and health. This will include bringing influence to bear at the local level so health priorities are reflected in planning, and working at the national level to secure a planning framework that can strategically locate development in the most sustainable locations, therefore reducing car dependency.



Notes

4 <https://tinyurl.com/r2268hx>

5 <https://tinyurl.com/yyjmmpeh>

strategic priority 1

What success looks like

By the end of 2025 we will:

- Have had a demonstrable impact on the standards that new homes have to meet – this aim will be met through changes to building regulations, legislation, or policy.
- Be able to identify improvements to large-scale developments resulting from our advice, guidance, sharing of best practice, and/or critical friend role.
- Be able to demonstrate that we have helped decision-makers, whether at the local or national level, to better understand the profound links between planning and health.

Dan Abrams



strategic priority 2

Strategic Priority 2

Empower people to have real influence over decisions about their environments and to secure social justice within and between communities

The TCPA is clear that involving people in shaping their local area improves the quality of new development and regeneration schemes. The purpose of planning and place-making should be to secure better outcomes for both people and the environment. To understand what constitutes better outcomes for people, planning needs to be democratic and fair, and have people at its heart. It cannot be a process that is 'done to' people or communities.

We also urgently need to rebuild trust between communities and planners and between communities and those leading development. If we are to achieve that, the planning system must also be sufficiently powerful to ensure that, once people have been involved in plan-making, for example, the resulting plans actually inform what happens in the local area.

Our work to achieve this priority will therefore include:

- Campaigning for the retention of democratic rights in all of the UK's planning systems.
- Working at the national and local levels to make planning more accessible, in particular for those who are known to be less likely to engage with the process. This undertaking includes, but is not limited to, our work with Planning Aid for London.
- Working with partners to begin to rebuild trust in planning. Action here will include our work on planning as civic art, and more generally will include working with planners, community groups and developers to promote good practice and tools for genuine co-creation, seeking to secure culture change and promoting the real benefits of meaningful community engagement.
- Seeking to tackle inequalities, through, for example, promoting the role of planning in tackling poverty and its potential to embed equality and inclusion in plan-making.



strategic priority 2

What success looks like

By the end of 2025 we will:

- Have ensured the retention of democratic rights and accountability in all of the UK's planning systems.
- Be able to demonstrate that we are providing more advice directly to community groups or individuals – this may be through written guidance, training or access to specific resources, including toolkits.
- Be able to show that rebuilding levels of trust in planning is a priority for key partners in the public, private and third sectors.



strategic priority 3

Strategic Priority 3

Support new and transform existing places to be adaptable to current and future challenges, including the climate crisis

New and existing places, whether urban or rural, need to be fit for the future – even though we are currently facing high levels of uncertainty about what the future will hold. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant changes to how we live, work, and play. We also need to meet the needs of an ageing population, urgently address the challenges of climate change, and evolve in response to the ongoing digital revolution. If places are to support thriving communities, they will need to be resilient and adaptable.

If we want places to be sustainable and adaptable to the challenges that we face – including climate change, the impacts of COVID-19, and the need for a new vision for our high streets – the Garden City Principles should be applied to the creation of new communities and the regeneration of existing places. We need to re-engage people in that debate, make sure that the Garden City Principles are fit for the 21st century, and be clear about how they apply to the regeneration of existing places.

Our work to achieve this priority will therefore include:

- Celebrating the 125th anniversary of the publication of *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* in 2023, including through drawing on the Garden City movement's moral philosophy of place to consider the practical solutions needed if we are to develop a new way of living that meets the many challenges that we face today.
- Continuing to provide advice, guidance, resources and training on how the planning system can and should be used to tackle climate change – including ongoing work to raise awareness of the multiple benefits of green infrastructure.
- Providing clarity on the importance and relevance of the Garden City Principles to transforming existing places in order to meet the many challenges that they face.

Benjamin Elliott on Unsplash



strategic priority 3

What success looks like

By the end of 2025 we will:

- Have used the 125th anniversary of the publication of *To-morrow* to involve a wide range of people and partners in a debate about a new and better way of living – this debate will also have informed the TCPA's work to help places and communities to evolve, harness new opportunities, and thrive.
- Continue to be seen as a leader in the field of providing advice and guidance on planning and climate change.
- Be able to demonstrate that people have a better understanding of the relevance of the Garden City Principles to existing places and regeneration schemes.

Matthew Roberts



internal priorities to support delivery of our strategy

As a relatively small organisation, achieving our strategic priorities will require us to work in partnership, secure essential funding, and continue to increase our reach and impact. To achieve this, we will draw on our experience during the COVID-19 pandemic – which forced us to work virtually and remotely – and better incorporate the positive elements of that into our ways of working and into our projects.

We have an ambition to work more directly with communities during the period of this strategy, as well as to continue to campaign at the national level. Our staff team is our biggest asset, and we will support them through necessary training and development. This may include – but may not be limited to – enabling our staff team to be better placed to work more directly with communities. We will also continue to reflect best-practice approaches to management and governance.

The Association is also mindful of the term remaining on its current lease at Carlton House Terrace in London and of the shift in ways of working resulting from the pandemic. To support the long-term future of the Association, decisions will need to be made during the lifetime of this strategy about future ways of operating and the need for – and location of – the organisation’s office.

We will know that we have achieved important internal priorities by the end of the strategic plan if we have:

- Improved our ability to monitor and communicate the impact of our work.
- Demonstrably increased the amount of our project work that engages directly with communities and grassroots networks.
- Secured a well governed organisation with a diverse and high-performing Board of Trustees, advised by a diverse and engaged Policy Council – this will include having considered how we can draw on the expertise of different parts of our membership, including our younger and student members.
- Grown and diversified our membership.
- Engaged a wide range of organisations, including bodies at both local and national levels, in our campaigns, research, and training.
- Secured new multi-year funding agreements that enable us to focus more on our strategic priorities.
- Operated with internal and external communications that have supported the delivery of our strategic objectives, including the need to grow and diversify our membership.
- Agreed an approach to our current office lease and on a strategy for how the Association will operate in the future in terms of office space.





tcpa

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