

## **GARDEN CITIES, GARDEN SUBURBS AND URBAN EXTENSIONS**

### **Comments by the Highbury group on housing delivery on issues raised in the TCPA Report: *Creating Garden Cities and Garden Suburbs Today***

#### **Summary**

The purpose of this paper is to set out the views of the group on the issues raised in the TCPA's report and to consider the preconditions necessary to deliver new large scale sustainable developments within the current context. This paper is also intended to inform government thinking on the issue in terms of the commitment by ministers to issue guidance on locally planned large scale developments. The starting point of the group is the need to consider alternative development options rather than to focus on a single model such as that of the garden city or garden suburb. It is important to recognise that governance, funding and legislation are fundamentally different than applied either in the period of garden cities development or in the post second war period, which generated the new towns programme. This paper sets out the group's views on some key issues in the TCPA report, which we consider needed to be developed more fully based on a realistic assessment of the current context.

These are:

- a) The location and form of new developments:
- b) Viability and finance
- c) The community's role in masterplanning and planning decisions
- d) Governance and community
- e) Urban Design

The key conclusions are:

- 1) That urban extensions and new settlements with proximate connections to existing towns and cities are more likely to achieve sustainable communities and housing growth than new stand alone garden cities. They are more likely to have access to employment opportunities and to existing transport and social infrastructure. As the Government is not in a position to direct the location of new employment provision, residential communities should be developed where there is good public transport access to existing employment opportunities, in areas which are economically strong and which are likely to see employment growth in the future.
- 2) That in order to make effective use of land and to make developments economically viable, it will be necessary to provide a range of housing types and tenures. This will involve low and medium rise flats, maisonettes and terraced houses as well as detached and semidetached houses. This will produce higher average densities than the 12 per acre assumption (equivalent to 30 per hectare) in Raymond Unwin's interpretation of the garden cities model. Ranges of 50-120 dwellings per hectare may be more appropriate.
- 3) A tenure balance is critical. It is important to avoid a predominance of up market homes, and new settlements need to include a mix of social rented homes, shared ownership homes, sub-market intermediate rented homes, and homes for open market purchase. The tenure balance needs to have regard to both ensuring a long term socially sustainable communities, and the

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housing need and demand in the area, normally a sub-region rather than a single district, from which a new settlement is likely to draw its new residents. Development is for the long term and plan-led rather than being a consequence solely of investment decisions made by developers at a specific point in time and a specific housing market context.

4) Acquisition of land by a public sector body or trust at close to pre-existing use value (including agricultural land value) is critical if a range of housing products, including affordable homes are to be provided. This may require changes to existing principles of valuation for compulsory purchase. The benefit of any appreciation in value from a change of use to residential must accrue to the public sector or development trust to support the provision of transport, social and green infrastructure, there also need to be mechanisms in place to ensure that while properties and individuals within a new development may change between tenures, that the overall supply of different types of affordable housing provision is maintained in the longer term.

5) Scheme design needs to be based on the principle of minimising distinctions between tenure.

6) Some form of public sector investment in both housing and infrastructure provision will be necessary if we are to deliver new settlements which are to be economically, environment and socially sustainable. This should ne seen as investment in future generations.

7) Infrastructure funds should be established for major new settlements which combine public and private investment, including funds raised through bond issues.

8) There is no reason for having a specific set of standards applicable to 'ecotowns' or 'garden cities' or 'garden suburbs' which do not apply to other forms of significant new residential led development.

## 1. Introduction

The last twelve months has seen a revival of the idea of garden cities, first promoted by Ebenezer Howard in his classic work *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to real reform*. Originally published in 1898, republished as *Garden Cities of To-morrow* in 1902.

In July 2011, the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) published a report '*Re-imagining garden cities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*'. In April 2012, the TCPA republished Raymond Unwin's '*Nothing Gained from Overcrowding*' as "a centenary celebration", launched at an event at the House of Commons and then followed this up in May 2012 with the report of an expert group, re-examining the principles of Ebenezer's Howards garden city model in '*Creating garden cities and suburbs today*'.

The TCPA was born out of the Garden City movement – it was originally called the Garden Cities Association, and the suite of documents recently published seek to promote those values for today's new settlements.

The Government, no doubt in response to lobbying by the TCPA included in the final version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in March 2012 at paragraph 52 stated that "The supply of new homes can sometimes best be achieved through planning for large scale development, such as new settlements or extensions to existing villages and towns that follow the principles of Garden Cities" In the same paragraph, local planning authorities are asked to consider "whether it is appropriate to establish Green Belt around or adjoining any such new development".

The Government had previously included it its 2011 Housing Strategy – *Laying the Foundations* , under the section on 'Locally planned large scale development', a statement about the powerful opportunity and benefits that large scale comprehensively planned new communities, offer in helping to tackle the housing and employment crisis without actually mentioning Garden Cities, but instead citing that " the best examples of these have been a great British contribution to international thinking on planning", and that "the Government will shortly set out proposals to build on this".

The housing minister, Grant Shapps, in an article for the Guardian in September last year following the first of the TCPA's reports on Garden Cities, explained his position:

"As housing minister, I want to harness some of this creative force and see it applied to help solve the chronic housing shortage we will face over the next 10-20 years. I think there is real potential to provide some of this new housing in garden cities if we get the two most important elements right: private investment and community ownership".

Somewhat significantly, Shapps also wrote of '*stripping away the state control that imposed new towns on communities and not relying on government, not spending public money*'.

Is the TCPA's promotion of Garden cities, and the Government's re-adoption of the concept merely a nostalgic, 'centenary celebration', or are there truly new ideas and innovations within the Garden City movement that we should be adopting today to generate large scale, aspirational settlements that meet the hopes and needs of our time?

The Government has not as yet however specified any new parameters or design standards that might define what they mean by 'Garden City'. Moreover, as demonstrated above. Ministers have made clear that they do not envisage any additional funding being available from central government for such initiatives.

This paper summarises the current policy context for Garden Cities, it briefly captures the essentials of what the TCPA have undertaken so far and then draws on the Highbury group's own research and the experience of its members in planning for large scale new communities to identify further important elements in the debate. The paper is also intended to inform the guidance on locally planned large scale development being prepared by CLG.

## **2. Reinventing Garden Cities – the current policy context**

The Government has abolished national and regional housing targets. With the lapsing of Regional spatial strategies, London is the only region which still has housing targets based on a consistent analysis of housing development capacity. Moreover the government has in effect withdrawn explicit support for growth areas, and growth points. Residential growth, including new settlements within the four designated ecotowns, will now only proceed if supported by the local Planning authority and local residents. The recent Government reforms as set out in the Localism Act have 3 main components as they impact on plans for major new settlements:

- \* Financial incentives to areas supporting growth through the New Homes Bonus paid by central government to local authorities for each housing completion, the ability of a local planning authority to introduce community infrastructure levy ( including an unspecified neighbourhood component) and the prospect, subject to legislation and regulations of retaining business rate income relating to employment growth

- \* Planning reform, which in addition to removing the regional planning tier, simplifies national planning guidance, introduces a duty on local planning authorities to cooperate on strategic matters, and introduces the option for neighbourhood groups to initiate neighbourhood plans

- \* Seeks to make available surplus public sector land for up to 100,000 homes by 2015. Some of this land will be on sites that could generate new communities of over 5,000 homes.

In addition, the Government has significantly reduced the national funding available for 'affordable homes', with no funding to be available for social rented homes, with the majority of funding to be made available for 'affordable' rented homes at up to 80% market rent with limited security of tenure.

The Highbury group's response to the NPPF and to the Laying the Foundations strategy are set

out in separate papers:

[http://www.westminster.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/139907/Highbury-Group-on-Housing-Delivery-Statement-on-NPPF-4-5-12.pdf](http://www.westminster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/139907/Highbury-Group-on-Housing-Delivery-Statement-on-NPPF-4-5-12.pdf)

[http://www.westminster.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/138752/Highbury\\_Gp\\_Response\\_to\\_housing-strategy-FINAL.pdf](http://www.westminster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/138752/Highbury_Gp_Response_to_housing-strategy-FINAL.pdf)

### 3. The historic key principles of Garden Cities -

- The towns would be self-governed, managed by the citizens who had an economic interest in them, and financed by ground rents. The land on which they were to be built was to be owned by a group of trustees and leased to the citizens.
- Well planned buildings and ordered green spaces between, with housing, employment and leisure within easy walking distance.
- Mechanisms to fund their long term growth - Howard saw that development partners had to have a return on investment, but he was able to set this at a fixed rate. Residents bought leasehold from the Land Trust and the rents paid for a wide range of community services facilities and infrastructure.
- Large scale – up to 30,000 people  
There was an assumed limitation of the amount of building in relation to the area of open space. For example Raymond Unwin proposed that no more than 1/6 of any site should be covered by the buildings..." This guideline was used in the area allocations for Welwyn, and has been handed down to the New Towns  
Limitation on the expansion by a 'greenbelt' surrounding the development to avoid any sprawl
- A stand alone new settlement or a town extension - the principle of compound settlements is important. Howard saw a federated group of towns intimately connected with one general centre as forming a constituent part of the Garden City movement because.
- An innovative view on land value and density

### 4. But what is meant by Garden Cities today? And what might they look like?

The Government has not yet stated what it defines as Garden Cities, though it plans to issue a prospectus on "locally supported large scale development" in the summer of this year. In the absence of any guidance, the TCPA were encouraged by the Government to form a working group, the "Garden City and Suburbs Expert Group" to show how the Garden City approach can be reinvented for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and they recently published their report 'Creating Garden Cities and Suburbs today'

([http://www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/Creating\\_Garden\\_Cities\\_and\\_Suburbs\\_Today.pdf](http://www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/Creating_Garden_Cities_and_Suburbs_Today.pdf) )

They established the following headings to summarise their findings:

- Vision / leadership
- Land assembly / land value
- Investment in infrastructure - balance risk and reward
- Planning ahead
- Skills, coordination and delivery

Throughout, the report highlights how engaging the local community from the beginning through to a local stewardship concept for the longer term, aligns with the current thinking around the localism bill and planning policy and provides benefits at all levels.

However, whilst applauding the renewed interest in housing delivery by the Government and the TCPA's work on rekindling our great heritage in the design of high quality new communities, we feel there are further aspects to the debate which need exploring. These will be considered under the following headings: Location and form of new developments; Viability and financing; Governance and community; Community and planning; Urban design.

## **5. Issues which require further study**

### **a) Location and form of new developments**

One of the critical issues not considered adequately in either of the recent TCPA reports is that of the location and form of new developments. While it is significant that the latest report refers in its title to 'garden suburbs' as well as to 'garden cities', neither report is explicit about the preconditions which should be met in terms of development location. The Minister in referring to 'locally planned large scale development' has not been specific about preconditions, though there is an implication that part of the reason for the failure or at least limited progress of the ecotowns programme is attributable to the top-down approach adopted for site selection.

The Garden Cities concept is often counterposed with the compact city concept. It is useful however to examine the advantages and disadvantages of different forms of settlement. Recent reports tend to focus on the role of garden cities and/or garden suburbs on providing a significant number of new homes to meet unmet housing demand reports may refer to the rate of household growth overall shortage of homes, or the rate of house-price inflation but generally do not quantify the proportion which could or should be provided in different forms of settlement. It is important not to get too theological about replicating the form of Letchworth or Welwyn Garden City or for that matter Hampstead Garden suburb and there are in fact a range of questions as to whether 100 years after the initiation of Letchworth, the form can be replicated or should be replicated in the very different economic, social and environmental context in which we now find ourselves. It is important to focus on current realities, however ideal previous forms of settlement may now seem. This is not an exercise in historical reminiscence undertaken with the aid of anecdote and rose tinted spectacles. In fact such a utopian perspective not contextualised in the present, has the risk of propositions being rejected as undeliverable. The best approach to the debate is therefore to set out what are the fundamental preconditions for the delivery of new settlements examine. These have been set out in previous Highbury group papers as follows:

- \* Identification of land suitable for development in terms of being in an appropriate location, with mechanisms to ensure that the land is brought forward for development
- \* A regulatory regime and code of standards which ensures that the homes built are appropriate to meet the requirements of the intended occupiers
- \* New developments should only be built in locations where there is access to employment opportunities, transport and social infrastructure and open space. And where there is a mechanism in place to ensure their delivery
- \* A funding regime, either in terms of capital or revenue subsidy, which ensures that Homes are affordable by the households for whom they are intended
- \* A mechanism for ensuring resources in terms of land, development capacity and construction materials, are used efficiently. This can include density controls, licensing of development and/or occupation and financial controls including taxation measures which dis-incentivise underuse of land and residential property.

It is also important to stress that in applying these principles to a specific development, it is important to stress the importance of ensuring that the location and form of a development should support a wide range of types of housing provision in terms of household type and household income and should be inclusive not exclusive. It is critical that the form of development should be predicated on meeting a range of housing needs rather than being focused on a sector of the market.

These factors therefore have a critical impact on identifying suitable locations for development as

well as the built form of development. While the early garden cities were intended to be substantially self contained, it is perhaps no longer realistic to assume that a large new development can achieve a substantive degree of self containment in terms of limiting relationship to other communities through provision on site of all employment opportunities for the resident population together with all the commercial, retail and social infrastructure required. In including relatively isolated sites for significant residential development (such as disused airfields or surplus army barracks), with no existing employment opportunities or public transport networks the original eco-towns programme did not necessarily ensure that the developments would be self sufficient and in fact would have created a dependence on the use of private transport for access not just to employment opportunities but also to social infrastructure.

It is therefore critical that in proposing approaches to new large scale developments, that a certain form of development is not necessarily assumed and that a range of locational options are investigated in terms of assessing potential social, economic and environmental outcomes. In this context, while the criteria originally set in PPS1 ecotowns supplement that new developments should be a minimum of 5,000 homes AND be proximate to a higher order centre where there is a clear capacity for public transport links AND proximate to existing and planned employment opportunities is important, it should be recognised that these criteria can be met through urban extensions or development of major urban brownfield sites as well as through garden city developments. These criteria recognise that the idea of a self contained garden city is of little relevance given the inability of government at any level to guarantee employment provision in a specific location, though it should be recognised that an active policy of directing or subsidising employment provision to specific locations is a policy operated in the past which could be reconsidered. From recent work on the current Eco-town project by groups including PRP, we know town extensions are fundamentally more viable than stand alone projects because of the shared infrastructure they can benefit from.

At a more detailed level, the worksheets published by the TCPA for the original ecotowns programme, which include for example targets to ensure the provision of mixed and balanced communities, could be revisited and updated to be relevant to a range of development options. <http://www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/sustainability-worksheets.html>

There is no reason for having a specific set of standards applicable to 'ecotowns' or 'garden cities' or 'garden suburbs' which do not apply to other forms of significant new residential led development.

## **b) Viability and Finance**

The planning and implementation of such large scale development requires time (up to 5 to 10 years) and significant upfront funding. The Housing Minister, Grant Shapps is confident that the financial incentive of the new homes bonus will be sufficient to encourage support at LA level, and that the availability of public land brought into joint venture partnerships, will draw in private finance. He has also been clear that no additional subsidy will be available for new development. The Government's view is that creative financial models where borrowing on future value of land uplift or against the New Homes Bonus will leverage development capital. They also talk about 'joined up thinking' within the ministries or a one stop shop to better synchronise long term planning of central government infrastructure funds and planned new development areas. Another view in industry is that in reality access to low cost borrowing through Government is likely to be one of the essential ingredients to underpin the very high infrastructure costs.

It is critical that new residential development, whether in the form of garden cities or garden suburbs, urban extensions or infill development provide mixed and balanced communities which are sustainable in social as well as environmental and economic terms. This means that they need

to include homes which are affordable by lower and middle income households as well as households able to afford to buy homes on the open market. We have a concern that within some current major developments, the range of homes under construction is focused on homes towards the upper end of the market. It is also important that we use the identified development capacity to meet the needs of a range of household types. One of the objectives of new development should be to seek to reduce unmet housing need, and this relates to the needs of households who are unlikely ever to be able to access market housing, as well as the needs of marginal home-owners.

Any tenure model has to respond to the significant affordability gap we now have between those that already have (house-) equity and those that do not. Those without equity will find it increasingly difficult to purchase a home. There is a widely supported case for re establishing a strong social and private rental sector. This should include dwellings of all sizes, for which there is effective demand, and should include houses as well as flats and maisonettes. There also needs to be flexibility for households and properties to switch between tenures. Any development brief needs to be based on an analysis of both housing need and effective housing demand, but needs to be flexible in terms of allowing response to changing need and demand. This is especially the case for schemes that will take five or more years to be built out.

There is a case for broadening the access to development, ie encouraging the occupier-developer - Serviced plots for self build or co-housing groups have been demonstrated to deliver up to 20% savings on the delivery of housing (eg Springhill Stroud). but how will agents value this, or is it down to the LA to require it in the development brief or local plan? - We have had discussions in some LA's about counting such alternative housing models towards affordable housing quotas.

As we shift pre conceptions and allow a more flexible approach to tenure, we may begin to loosen further knots in our delivery of housing - we suffer from extremely low build out rates, based around sales rates - the impact of which is twofold:

1. It increases the cost of development through prolonged 'prelims' and site financing
2. It prevents higher volumes of delivery and restricts choice.

It will in many cases not be possible to finance an appropriate proportion of affordable homes, including social rented homes at target rents, solely from the profits of market led development. Clearly the availability of land either at nil cost or at agricultural land value, will assist the provision of affordable homes. It is important to ensure that appropriate land is brought forward for development at low cost. The availability of land at low cost was one of the fundamental reasons for the early garden city development to be viable. Local authorities need to be able to acquire land at close to agricultural or other existing use value, and compulsory purchase powers need to be amended to facilitate this. Nevertheless, even with subsidised land, in many locations, some form of direct public subsidy to development costs will be required if a full range of housing provision is to be achieved..

It is also important to stress that the 'appropriate proportion' and form of affordable housing should be determined primarily by the evidence of need for housing in a specified location, and not solely by the development economics of a scheme at a certain point in time. In this context, the reference to 'willing landowner', 'willing developer' and competitive returns' in the NPPF are unhelpful. The Highbury group has set out its position on viability and target setting in a separate paper:

[http://www.westminster.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/138753/VIABILITY-APPRAISAL-OF-LOCAL-PLAN.pdf](http://www.westminster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/138753/VIABILITY-APPRAISAL-OF-LOCAL-PLAN.pdf)

A mechanism for funding the provision of social infrastructure is critical to the success of any new residential community. One of Ebenezer Howard's fundamental principles was the trustification of assets so that the appreciation in value could be recycled to provide social infrastructure and other benefits for the community as a whole. One option is for the local authority or a specially established publicly accountable body to take an equity in any new development (irrespective of whether the development was on land originally in public or private ownership. The option of establishing a local infrastructure fund could be considered, which would enable infrastructure to be funded by a combination of public sector, institutional, private and individual investment as



proposed in the Highbury group paper – A Local Solution (2008)

[http://www.westminster.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/78064/A-local-solution-July-2009.pdf](http://www.westminster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/78064/A-local-solution-July-2009.pdf)

### **c) The community's role in masterplanning and planning decisions**

The Government and the TCPA reports stress the importance of community involvement in planning. In fact the government has stated that new settlements should be locally planned and should only proceed with the support of local residents. In our view it is a mistake of central government to consider that the issue of the nature and level of residential and employment growth to be a matter that is left to the existing residents to determine.

While there clearly needs to be widespread agreement if a plan for a major new settlement is to proceed relatively smoothly the recent experience of the new town programme demonstrates that this is not easily achieved and that the idea set out in the TCPA report that a common vision will be shared by all parties may be somewhat overoptimistic. While some of the ecotowns met difficulties because they were seen as brought forward by external parties, primarily developer interests, it should be recognised that any proposal for new development is likely to meet a degree of local opposition. It is however important to ensure that new developments are brought forward on sites which can deliver sustainable communities (in economic, environmental and social terms) rather than just on sites where there is least active opposition. It may be that extensions to existing communities, whether they be on the urban fringe or adjacent to existing communities, may raise greater challenges from local residents than proposals for stand alone settlements in areas with little or no existing development, though the latter may still generate opposition from people who see all undeveloped sites as sacrosanct.

Clearly any development proposition has to be clear about the benefit to any existing residents. Certainty over timing of social and transport infrastructure is essential to reassure existing residents that existing provision will not be put under pressure by the demands of new residents. A mechanism by which value appreciation can be used to support new infrastructure, a critical component of both garden cities and new town programmes, is essential if such assurances are to be provided. Visions on their own are insufficient.

A masterplan needs to be flexible enough to respond to changing market demand and housing requirements, but nevertheless needs to establish a clear framework for development phases with significant variations requiring new rounds of consultation and new planning applications. It is essential that the planning authority maintains control over design quality throughout programme delivery. However any design code should not be over-prescriptive and should not obstruct either deliverability or variety. It is important to ensure that design matters are not determined solely by a small group of 'experts' or by a group of residents who are not representative of the wider group of occupiers or potential occupiers. However it is also important that minimum standards and design requirements are not overridden to meet more aesthetic judgements.

The planning of new settlements must be fully integrated and comprehensive and incorporate the provision of transport, social infrastructure such as schools, health and leisure facilities and utilities, sustainable energy supply, while not disregarding the critical importance of providing employment opportunities within a neighbourhood.

### **d) Governance and Community**

The original Garden Cities concept was predicated on an assumption of resident involvement of the continued governance of a new settlement. Clearly where new residents are not identified at the initial planning stage, community engagement in the planning of a new settlement will be limited. This makes it all the more important for residents to be involved in the longer term development of a new settlement. It was after all the notion of a pioneering spirit which was so critical in the development of the garden cities and the early new town. New communities are of



course represented through the normal democratic process of local government. Should a trust or joint venture company be established, representation of resident occupiers would be appropriate, but it is important to ensure such representation is truly representative in terms of the full range of residents in terms of types of household, tenure, employment status, gender and ethnicity. Where board membership is numerically limited, wider reporting structures are essential. The establishment of neighbourhood groups, or even formal statutory structures may be appropriate. Any such structures should recognise the role of business and independent interests as well as geographically structured resident representation.

### **e) Urban Design**

We talk of sustainable communities - they are meant to be leafy pleasant neighbourhoods, more accessible (in terms of affordability and inclusive in terms of demographics), energy efficient and pedestrian friendly. They should also encourage social interaction and healthier lifestyles. The needs today seem to have parallels to those of Ebenezer Howard's time. Though our demographics have changed (more single households, more retired couples and increasing numbers of dependent older people), the ratio of land value to income has changed and the demands of climate change and adaptation measures have become integral to the design brief. Evidently the cost of land and the demands on land are not the same. Nowhere can we afford to build to the densities set out by Unwin for the Garden Cities. The initial proposed density of Welwyn was 25 dwellings per hectare at a maximum, with an average density of no more than 12 dwellings per hectare overall. Land values and housing needs today are pushing us to design at anything between 35 and 130 dwellings per hectare, or more critically 150-350 habitable rooms per hectare, in suburban locations. The image of detached houses with gardens presented in much garden city material (including on the cover of the new TCPA report) is rarely going to be deliverable, at least not for a wide range of tenures and income groups. Moreover there is a responsibility for ensuring effective use of land, whether it be Greenfield or brownfield.

Unless we can re interpret our prevalent housing types and find solutions for parking, refuse and bike storage, as well as for provision of quality private outdoor space, at these densities, very different spatial characters emerge from those of the original Garden Cities.

The desire of many if not most households to own a family house, preferably standing on its own plot, or semi detached is still a significant driver for the typical housetype model of today for suburban areas or new settlements beyond the inner city. However, mid-terrace houses are more cost effective to build and more energy efficient, yet we are told by developers and housebuilders that they are the most difficult to sell.

Also due to their robust construction and clarity of structure (separation of load bearing and non loadbearing walls) they have proved to be adaptable over generations to suit changing housing needs. Many are now a genuine mix of dwellings / office space / hotels etc. Also, multifamily housing (maisonettes and apartments), or terraced, three storey or more town houses have proven to be desirable family accommodation if located in the right place. All of these result in more efficient footprints, and if developed at similar densities to the typical models, could lead to more generous, well managed, public open space between buildings.

The original Garden city principle allowed for certain areas of land to be allocated to co-housing groups. There is much debate currently around self build models, housing co operatives and building groups of owner occupiers. the theory is that broadening the access to development, ie offering more, smaller, serviced plots to a range of 2<sup>nd</sup> tier delivery partners will increase the volume of housing delivery by providing alternative routes to an affordable housing market. In future times, rather than one national housebuilder developing say 800 homes, you might find eight development partners developing plots of 100 homes each. This brings choice and diversity.

The element of consumer choice we hope would also drive the demand for more low energy housing. We should also consider the possibility for a private rental model for affordable family housing where managed, shared amenity helps keep the overall appearance and usability of the open space as a valuable communal asset and a central plant room provides easily serviced, zero carbon heating system.

Vehicle tracking plans, refuse collection strategies, and parking solutions can very often drive a spatial layout. But where possible a hierarchy of streets and paths should allow for safe pedestrian and cycle routes.

Some of the common design themes which have emerged through work on the Eco town initiatives may have parallels with the Garden City initiative and are worth flagging up:

1. A serious challenge for the design teams is the requirement for the provision of workspace within the new development (the quantum is usually one workspace per dwelling) which was integral to the Eco-town brief. This is important for the concept of mixed use communities. Some of this is met by allocating land to commercial use, but as viability often prevents full quota being met in this way, the remainder has been addressed through the provision of home working - not a 'home office' space in the current sense, but a space which could be adapted to have its own entrance or at the least separated from the living areas.

Although adaptable housing is often cited as an aspiration, the impact this has on housetypes and plot layout is more profound than currently recognised and simply labelling space within current conventional house plans (similar to the home office approach) is not possible.

2. Whilst orientation of the housetypes on the plot to benefit from solar access is sometimes part of the plan layout, it is certainly not an essential. However, solar access to unshaded roof space is critical if a Photovoltaic strategy is needed to meet renewable energy commitments. This is difficult to rectify post planning.

3. During the brief formulation stage, the agents advise on the housing mix and density and developers tend to drive the choice of housetypes and yet both these sectors base their market intelligence on research from sales of the previous years in similar locations. This approach is low risk but leaves little or no room for innovation as no market evidence exists for what has not yet been built!

4. The level of co-ordination required within a more integrated design team to meet the Eco-town standards embedded in the PPS1 supplement is not currently typical for the industry and presents a serious challenge to procurement patterns.

5. The Garden City concept of fixed land value helped address the question as to how do planners or primary development partners retain control of the design quality without setting prescriptive design codes which stifle innovation, variety and choice? is. The Joint Venture partners of landowner and developer would offer parcels of land to second tier developers at fixed prices with the preferred partners winning the opportunity to develop based on concept and quality of design. The option on development rights would stay with the land owner until detail design by the developer was complete and approved.

## **6. Learning from recent experience: A summary of requirements for sustainable new developments**

New settlements have long lead times. They require substantially more site assembly, infrastructure investment and plan preparation than small schemes which are more likely to be in single ownership and can be bolted onto existing settlements and infrastructure;

For a plan period of 10-20 years they clearly require a sustained period of demand for market housing

They require a sustained period of capital and revenue infrastructure investment much of it from the public sector e.g. roads and schools, health facilities; and also from infrastructure companies such as water, communications, and energy companies

They require a long term commitment to public sector investment in affordable housing given that only in boom periods can a mix of tenures and housing types be funded by cross subsidy from market housing

They require a long term strategic focus on these matters by public authorities at all levels of Government - local, regional and national level

They require sustained effective and skilled leadership by local authorities or development agencies with backing from Government for example, on codes for low carbon development and green construction

Any loss of these conditions due to economic slow down; changes in government policy, reductions in public sector funding or changes in public sector strategic leadership significantly increases risks of non-delivery, major slippage, or watering down of the central concept of sustainable development.

The viability of development in some areas will be affected by falls in demand locally for housing, especially in areas characterised by low skills and low wages, and nationally where the Growth agenda was to be driven by outmigration from the London and the South East.

It is critical to establish and maintain special delivery vehicles. In recent years, agencies such as the West Northants Development Corporation, the Milton Keynes Partnership and Cambridgeshire Horizons have had critical roles in planning and developing new settlements.

In the years since the 2008 recession, reductions in perceived or actual viability led to calls from most developers to reduce planning obligations and standard charges, thus putting the very concept of sustainable growth/communities at risk. This cannot be repeated.

Of particular importance have been pressures to reduce the percentage of affordable housing for new settlements set out in Core Strategies from 40-50% down to 20% or below. Landowners have argued that requirements for affordable housing reduce land values and developers say this gives them less value to offer in planning gain. There needs to be a mechanism to ensure that short or medium term viability problems do not detract from the overall objectives of ensuring a mixed and balanced new community. This may mean greater financial support from government in times of market volatility. Alternatively long term funding and value appreciation mechanisms could allow a longer term development to dampen the impact of short term funding difficulties.

Infrastructure investment enabling sites to be fully unlocked particularly road schemes has been put on hold by Government thus pushing back time scales for delivery irrespective of market demand.

Developer housebuilders may take a relatively conservative approach to creating a market for their homes. On smaller sites they can create their own market and set their own prices but in larger settlements, where land is parcelled out among housebuilders, they

can face competition which can reduce prices and profits. Agreements between the local planning authority or development vehicle and individual developers must specify build out rates to ensure that sites are not held back and to ensure development momentum is maintained.

Decision making systems must be simplified and delays avoided. Delays are a deterrent to developers because they add to their costs. Substantive delays can lead to schemes missing development cycles and no longer being viable. It is critical that a local planning authority or development vehicle spreads its risk. Large schemes have often been delayed by being over-dependent on a single developer, for whom development risk has become excessive. Masterplans and implementation strategies should facilitate a range of types and size of housebuilder. A group of smaller housebuilders may be able to proceed at a faster rate than a single large developer, and may also be able to produce a wider range of housing products targeted at a wider range of groups and also creating a diversity of design rather than a monolithic single style development.

Critically, it must be acknowledged that the notion of garden cities or garden suburbs or sustainable urban extensions being developed solely as private enterprises without some form of public investment and democratically accountable structures of plan-making, development implementation and long-term governance is erroneous, being both contradictory of the original principles set out by Ebenezer Howard and their successors, as well as being entirely inappropriate to the current needs of contemporary society. Plans for Garden Cities need vision but they must have regard to the current context which is, perhaps regrettably, very different from the one in which Ebenezer Howard and the early pioneers operated. There is a need to Get Real.

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