

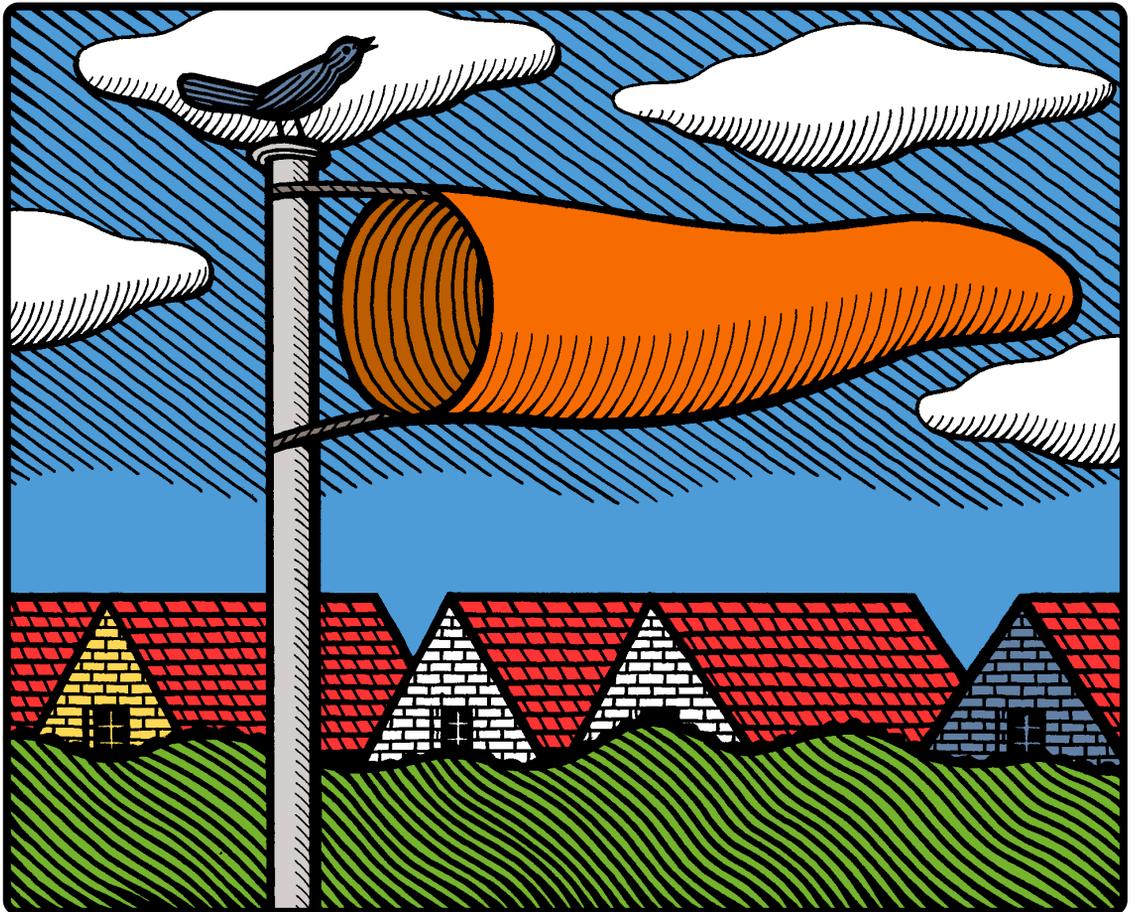


tcpa

**Town & Country Planning  
Tomorrow Series Paper 12**

# heathrow garden city

**Graeme Bell**



Supported by the Lady Margaret Paterson Osborn Trust

# Foreword

Graeme Bell's new contribution to the Town & Country Planning Tomorrow Series is nothing if not topical. As the Association celebrates the recent recognition of Garden City principles in planning policy, and as impassioned debate continues to rage about the proposal to replace Heathrow with a new hub airport in the Thames Estuary – a debate launched in this same series six years ago<sup>i</sup> – he has married the two issues. His paper makes no comment on the location of any new airport hub, but his proposal to create a Garden City on the site of Heathrow to help meet London's urgent housing need is an idea so audacious that it deserves to rank in the planning history texts.

The Garden City pioneers were thought hopelessly utopian, but within five years of the publication of Ebenezer Howard's great work *To-morrow*, Letchworth was launched. The fact is that if an alternative location for a hub airport becomes policy – and the inexorable growth of air traffic makes it inevitable, once policy-makers get a hold on reality – then the future use of Heathrow becomes a subject for national debate. Graeme Bell should be congratulated on being one step ahead of the game.

## Professor Sir Peter Hall

President, TCPA

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<sup>i</sup> Tony Hall and Peter Hall: *Heathrow – A Retirement Plan*. Town & Country Planning Tomorrow Series Paper 3. TCPA, 2006. Published in *Town & Country Planning*, 2006, Vol. 75, Jun.

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Professor Sir Peter Hall, Kate Henderson, Dr Hugh Ellis, Martin Simmons, John Deegan and David Lock for their comments and encouragement, and to Nick Matthews, Editor of the TCPA Journal, for knocking my rough text into shape. Mike Glen and colleagues at landscape architects Glen Kemp turned my sketch into a masterplan, and the Lady Margaret Paterson Osborn Trust has helped fund the printing. Finally, this paper is dedicated to the memory of David Hall, Director of the TCPA 1967-95. He submitted an outline planning application on behalf of the TCPA to Rochford District Council in 1981 for a new London airport on Maplin Sands. This is unfinished business.

## Graeme Bell

Town & Country Planning Tomorrow Series Paper 12

### Heathrow Garden City

By Graeme Bell

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The Town and Country Planning Association produces the Tomorrow Series in order to promote debate and encourage innovative thought. Views expressed in Tomorrow Series Papers are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the TCPA.

The TCPA is extremely grateful to the Lady Margaret Paterson Osborn Trust for supporting the publication of this Tomorrow Series Paper.

## Prologue

*So, the closure of Heathrow Airport has been announced! After intense behind-the-scenes, last-ditch lobbying by the industry, government has finally called time on the airport that grew like topsy on the market gardens of Middlesex. Government knows that in satisfying one lobby it must brace itself for battles yet to come. Everyone wants to fly, but no-one wants the planes near them! And a question mark hangs over the site of the 'old' airport at Heathrow. Is there a plan? There is – just read on...*

# 1

## Summary of recommendations

This paper proposes a re-invention of the pioneering Garden City concept on the Heathrow Airport site. Heathrow occupies a strategic situation in the Outer London suburbs adjoining the Green Belt and is ideally situated for such a proposal. Heathrow Garden City will provide homes, employment and a full range of facilities and services served by good public transport, all set in an attractive landscape. It will be designed to be beautiful, environmentally sustainable, socially successful, financially sound and democratically delivered and governed. The overriding aim is to secure a good quality of life for all who live and work there. A key issue will be supporting the local economy through the transition.

The TCPA publication *Re-imagining Garden Cities for the 21st Century*<sup>1</sup> lays out the principles that underpin this proposal. It sets out in comprehensive detail how a Garden City can be designed, financed, developed and managed in a low-carbon, sustainable way fit for the 21st century. This template has been used as the basis for the Heathrow Garden City proposal, and what follows is an elaboration of design principles bespoke to the particular circumstances of the site. Of course, full technical assessments on everything from traffic to retail, housing needs to new towns would be part of any development plan.

Key features of the proposed Heathrow Garden City are:

- **Homes for over 30,000 people, within four Garden Suburbs, each of about 2,000 homes (about 5,000 people each initially), and two Urban Villages of about 3,000 homes each (about 10,000 people in total).** At least 10% of

the plots in the suburbs (800 plots) would be available for 'self-build'.

- **Employment for over 80,000 people on site, some of which will be in retained existing jobs.** In addition there will be tens of thousands of temporary jobs created in the construction phase of the Garden City.
- **The redevelopment of Terminals 1, 2 and 3 as part of a prestige mixed-use commercial development, comprising landmark buildings of the highest architectural, engineering and landscape design.** Heathrow Garden City centre could be a West London counterpoint to Canary Wharf.
- **A retail park, including a large outdoor market in the area of the existing Terminal 4 building, served by the A30 and also by the Terminal 4 London Underground station.**
- **A business park at the eastern end of the site adjoining Hatton Underground station, with road access off both the A4 and the A30.** The park may incorporate some of the existing industrial buildings as going concerns.
- **A further or higher education campus, incorporating an Engineering Centre of Excellence.** This will utilise the iconic Terminal 5 building and be served by the Terminal 5 station.
- **Impressive infrastructure.** The road and public transport system serving the airport (and shortly to be joined by Crossrail) will offer unrivalled logistics for people living and working here.
- **400 hectares of landscaping (more than the twice the size of Regent's Park) and 35 hectares of open water (more than three times the size of the Serpentine lake in Hyde Park), including over 1 million trees and several million shrubs.** These are hallmarks of a Garden City and Garden Suburb environment.
- **The Heathrow brand.** It is a global brand that can be exploited for commercial purposes.

1 *Re-imagining Garden Cities: Benefits and Lessons in Bringing Forward Comprehensively Planned New Communities.* TCPA, Jul. 2011. [www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/reimagining\\_garden\\_cities\\_final.pdf](http://www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/reimagining_garden_cities_final.pdf)

## 2

### The site in its setting, and existing planning policy

Heathrow is situated immediately to the east of the M25 and to the west of London. With Green Belt and the Berkshire countryside to the west and urban development of estates or villages surrounding most of the other three sides, it is, in planning terms, a brownfield, edge-of-city employment site with commercial, manufacturing and service industries clustered around its function as an airport.

The site is surrounded by major roads, including the A30 and the A4. Connections to junctions 14 and 15 on the M25 motorway and junction 4 on the M4 offer excellent access onto the motorway network which runs close alongside. The site is served by four rail stations – three on the London Underground and two served by the Heathrow Express and (shortly) by Crossrail.

The site is large and flat, with no natural landmarks and no vegetation other than grass between and around the runways. Wildlife and flora at Heathrow appear to be limited – it is an airport, after all! But some watercourses bound the site to the south, west and east, and these attract birds, invertebrates and small mammals. There are open

views into the site from the surrounding roads (at present restricted by security screens and buildings), but views out are largely limited by development.

Heathrow is in the ownership of BAA,<sup>2</sup> which is part of FGP Topco Ltd, an international consortium led by the Spanish infrastructure specialists Ferrovial. For the purposes of this proposal land at the margins of the airport in other ownerships is included: the principal area of mixed ownership is the village of Longford in the north west corner of the site.

Over many years, businesses have been established around the airport to serve its many needs. Hotels and car parks, catering, engineering, logistics and many other companies employ thousands of people connected directly with Heathrow operations. In addition, thousands more in the local economy depend indirectly on the airport.

The airport is entirely within the London Borough of Hillingdon (although the London Borough of Hounslow and Spelthorne Borough Council adjoin the site to the south). Heathrow is shown within both the London Plan and the Draft Core Strategy of the London Borough of Hillingdon Local Development Framework, naturally enough, as an airport. The Hillingdon Draft Core Strategy<sup>3</sup> highlights a number of concerns regarding jobs, housing need, transport improvements and other

2 See the BAA website at [www.baa.com](http://www.baa.com)

3 *A Vision for 2026*. Local Development Framework Pre-Submission Draft Core Strategy. London Borough of Hillingdon, Feb. 2011. [www.hillingdon.gov.uk/media/pdf/e/n/SD1-Core\\_Strategy\\_Pre-Submission\\_\\_February\\_2011.pdf](http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/media/pdf/e/n/SD1-Core_Strategy_Pre-Submission__February_2011.pdf)



**Above**

Three-storey housing overlooking an attractively landscaped area on the former Hatfield aerodrome is a modern interpretation of the Garden City ideal

issues. The Draft Core Strategy estimates that around 9,000 residents work at Heathrow (about 1 in 15). It also estimates that nearly 88% of the airport workforce live outside the borough and around 68% travel to work by car.

The London Borough of Hounslow Draft Core Strategy<sup>4</sup> estimates that 20% of employment in the borough is dependent on the airport supply chain. Policies are directed towards maintaining the position of Heathrow as the UK's leading international airport, improving public transport links and increasing local job opportunities. The Heathrow Opportunity Area (700 hectares, which includes land in Hounslow) is shown in the Draft Core Strategy as an area for additional jobs and homes 'in support of operations at Heathrow'.

National aviation policy places Heathrow as the principal airport for the UK and the South East, although in 2011 the Government ruled out an expansion to include a third runway. The Government has very recently announced a

consultation on national aviation policy, which might include an option for a new London airport.

Heathrow brings enormous benefits to London in general and to the local economy in particular. As well as being a strategic hub in the nation's transport infrastructure, the UK's premiere airport is a huge economic driver. But for too long the environmental costs of Heathrow have been externalised, and the surrounding community pays a heavy price for the greater good – see the 'Cost or benefit?' box below.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the *opportunity* of the Heathrow site to help meet London's (and Londoners') need for jobs and housing in an environmentally sustainable development. Continuing to use a large area of the finite land within the M25 for one of the world's busiest airports is an inefficient, environmentally unsustainable use of that land. Other major cities have grasped the nettle and built new airports; why should London and the UK persist with such a sub-optimal solution?

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4 *Core Strategy. Preferred Strategy.* Local Development Framework Draft Core Strategy. London Borough of Hounslow, Jul. 2011. [www.hounslow.gov.uk/core\\_strategy\\_jul11.pdf](http://www.hounslow.gov.uk/core_strategy_jul11.pdf)

## Cost or benefit?

The Hillingdon Local Development Framework Pre-Submission Draft Core Strategy (February 2011)\* states:

*'The southern two-thirds of the borough is designated an Air Quality Management Area. This is due to high levels of nitrogen dioxide above recognised national and European Union levels associated with the major road network in the borough and the operation of Heathrow Airport.*

*'In addition to contributing to poor levels of local air quality, the operation of Heathrow Airport has further significant impacts on local residents in the south of the borough and adjoining areas including traffic congestion, crowded public transport and noise levels.'*

The Hounslow Local Development Framework Preferred Core Strategy (July 2011)\*\* states:

*'268,000 people are significantly affected by noise from Heathrow Airport (which means they experience noise above 57 decibels for 16 hours per day)... Aircraft noise associated with Heathrow Airport is... a significant issue in the borough – impacting on many aspects of life in Hounslow affecting people of all ages in schools, public buildings, homes and parks and open spaces.'*

The inappropriateness in planning terms of the current site, where people's homes are juxtaposed with noisy and smelly (and potentially dangerous) aircraft, is clear. Flight operations and passenger numbers have grown incrementally over many decades, well beyond the point that many would consider acceptable within an urban environment. The airport is running at virtually full capacity both airside and landside, with little or no margin for comfort. The response from Heathrow's supporters is to advocate both building a third runway and allowing planes to land and take off concurrently on both main runways. This would take the environmental blight at Heathrow to an even greater level and, in the longer term, would probably still not be sufficient to cope with demand.

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\* *A Vision for 2026.* Local Development Framework Pre-Submission Draft Core Strategy. London Borough of Hillingdon, Feb. 2011. [www.hillingdon.gov.uk/media/pdf/e/n/SD1\\_-\\_Core\\_Strategy\\_Pre-Submission\\_February\\_2011.pdf](http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/media/pdf/e/n/SD1_-_Core_Strategy_Pre-Submission_February_2011.pdf)

\*\* *Core Strategy. Preferred Strategy.* Local Development Framework Draft Core Strategy. London Borough of Hounslow, Jul. 2011. [www.hounslow.gov.uk/core\\_strategy\\_jul11.pdf](http://www.hounslow.gov.uk/core_strategy_jul11.pdf)

# 3

## Why a Garden City at Heathrow?

Heathrow is on the edge of suburban London, where it meets the Green Belt. In Ebenezer Howard's terms it is a perfect place for 'a marriage of town and country'.<sup>5</sup> And London is no stranger to Garden Suburbs, with the much sought after Brentham and Hampstead Garden Suburbs a few miles away and the original Garden Cities of Welwyn and Letchworth fairly close by.

It is also desirable to set the bar high from the outset. If Heathrow closes, this will be a unique opportunity for any planning authority, landowner, developer or local community. Garden City developments have proved to provide good financial returns while also contributing to the wider community and environmental good. If and when closure is announced, it would be right that the local

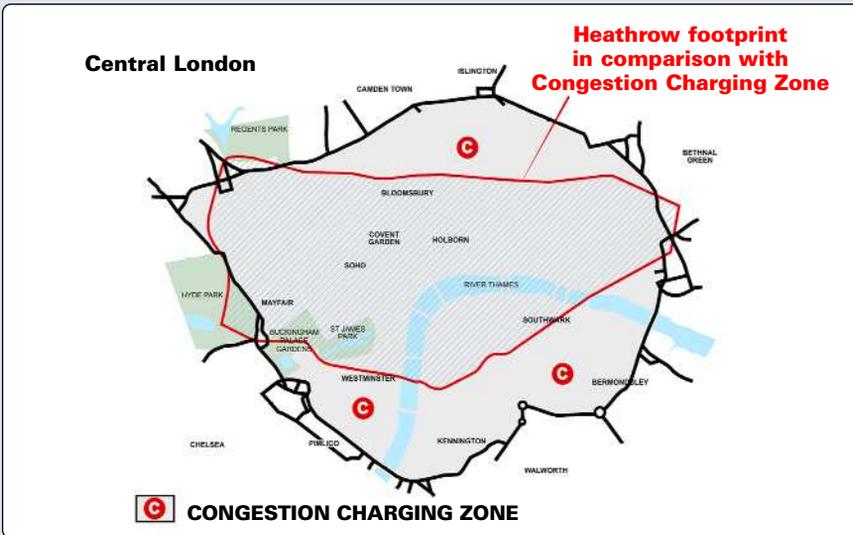
authority commence a consultation with all the many community and interest groups. Some have come together to campaign *against* the operations at Heathrow, and they could be embraced in a proactive debate *for* the 'after-life'. Such a pioneering and inclusive approach is at the heart of Howard's vision, and a Garden City at Heathrow would be the better for the active involvement of all these stakeholders.

The London Plan<sup>6</sup> sets a new target of over 13,000 affordable housing completions every year, a very challenging figure. The Green Belt is under pressure, and established communities are saying they are 'full up'. Here is a safety valve which offers the opportunity to accept a large strategic allocation for housing and also maintain employment in a comprehensively and attractively planned initiative. The new office and commercial centre can act as a counterpoint to Docklands and the Thames Gateway and offer a site where landmark buildings are welcomed.

5 Ebenezer Howard: *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. Swan Sonnenschein, 1898

6 *The London Plan*. Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London. Mayor of London. Greater London Authority, Jul. 2011. [www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/The%20London%20Plan%202011.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/The%20London%20Plan%202011.pdf); and *The Revised London Housing Strategy for Consultation with the Public*. Mayor of London. Greater London Authority, Dec. 2011. [www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/London%20Housing%20Strategy%20Dec11\\_0.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/London%20Housing%20Strategy%20Dec11_0.pdf)

### The scale of the opportunity



Heathrow Airport covers over 12 square kilometres – nearly 5 square miles. It is twice the size of the 2012 Olympic Park, and 2,500 football pitches could be fitted into the Heathrow boundary. The Canary Wharf development in London Docklands would fit on the footprint of Terminals 1, 2 and 3. Perhaps the most telling comparator is the airport footprint relative to the size of London's Congestion Charging Zone, shown in the diagram above. Heathrow may be bursting at the seams as an international airport, with virtually no spare capacity and a sub-optimal range of facilities that have been patched and extended, but as a development site for a whole host of urban uses it is massive, and could become the biggest redevelopment site in Europe.

# 4

## The design principles

This Garden City does not seek to maximise the developable area for buildings. It would be perfectly possible to build wall-to-wall housing, but that would create a huge housing estate with no heart and no places for people to work. Equally, it would be possible to build wall-to-wall commercial development of offices and sheds and a large retail park – a Lakeside of the west. But demand for such a huge commercial development is unlikely to exist in the short term, and any enormous retail scheme would be bound to affect the viability of local centres. Rather, the provision of housing and commercial uses is deliberately pitched at a more modest level, with generous space standards and quality finishes.

Not only does this put down a marker for future schemes, but, as with Letchworth and Welwyn, the standards provide the space to retro-fit future land uses which cannot be foreseen. The more modest approach should also ease the pressure on surrounding roads.

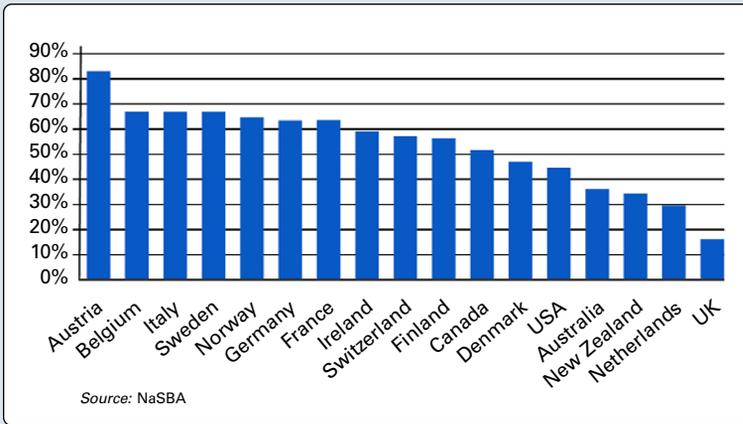
## Housing

Housing is the major land user in the new Garden City. Four Garden Suburbs will, between them, provide over 8,000 dwellings. The two Urban Villages immediately to the east of the Garden City centre will provide a further 6,000 homes, creating a gradient of densities higher in the east closer to London and lower as the scheme moves towards the open countryside.

The Garden Suburbs will be built at an average density of 40 homes per hectare, with higher densities around the suburban centres and around the margins that face the city centre and the broadwaters – the four major axial stretches of water; see the plan on pages 8 and 9.

The emphasis will be on low-rise housing with gardens. There is a particular demand for larger homes for extended families in the Hillingdon and Hounslow areas, and these properties will inevitably take up more land. It could be that cellars or semi-basements could be provided to provide greater efficiency in the use of land. Smaller homes are also needed for older people, together with sheltered housing, and these should be distributed around the suburbs.

### Self-build and custom homes



#### Proportion of homes delivered by self-build, by country

Source: Figure 4, in *Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England*. Department for Communities and Local Government, Nov. 2011. [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/housingstrategy2011](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/housingstrategy2011)

At only 1 in 20 of all homes built, the UK has one of the lowest levels of self-build and custom-build home construction of any country in Europe (see the graph above) – 5% compared with about 60% in Germany and in France.\* The Garden Suburbs should be a place where individuals and small builders can buy building plots.\*\* The Government’s Housing Strategy suggests that half of all those surveyed would consider self-build, either built in company as part of a sweat equity group or commissioned as a bespoke design from a builder. **At least 10% of the homes in the Garden Suburbs should be plots for sale to self-builders.**

\* *Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England*. Department for Communities and Local Government, Nov. 2011. paras 67-73. [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/)

\*\* The TCPA itself has a track record in initiating and supporting such schemes – at the Lightmoor community at Telford, for example



# Heathrow Garden City Masterplan

Presentation by **GLENKEMP**  
LANDSCAPE ■ PLANNING  
EIA ■ ECOLOGY

Above

Heathrow Garden City



## Low-impact, low-carbon, lifetime homes and buildings

Building in energy conservation from the outset by good design and construction – including factory-built prefabricated sections where quality assurance can be guaranteed – can be a very cost-effective way of both cutting utility bills and helping save the planet. However, the market is still weak when it comes to paying for such measures, and lenders are very conservative in their views about what they are prepared to fund. The Building Regulations are driving up standards over time, and this is to be welcomed.

The 10% of homes which can be self-built is likely to significantly increase the green element of design, as it is very likely that homeowner-builders will embrace cost-effective measures.

Combined heat and power and vacuum waste collection should also be explored as options for the Garden City. The development is large enough to warrant them, and they could be installed from the outset. The aim should be to create homes and offices that do not cost the Earth to run. Homes should also be built so that they can be extended easily, stylishly and in a neighbourly fashion as families grow. This requires no more than a few standard designs for alterations. Too often, homeowners spoil the appearance of their homes and ultimately the street scene with poor extensions – not purposely, but because they receive poor advice.

The Urban Villages will be built at an average net density of 60 homes to the hectare, but the overall size of the Villages will be similar to the Garden Suburbs, with generous open space and landscaping to compensate for the lack of private gardens, and all upper-level apartments will be provided with balconies.

The aim is to cater for demand from single people and couples wanting to live close to the employment areas and public transport nodes. The design will reflect a more urban genre as the development blends into the built-up areas to the east of Heathrow.

Social housing, whether it be equity share or for rent, is in heavy demand, and a target of 50% would make for a balanced community. A feature of Garden Cities is the blind distribution of tenure mix in housing: private and social housing should be indistinguishable. A mix of housing sizes in every street is also desirable to encourage the creation of mixed communities.

The design of all new housing will be in accordance with templates drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the landowners, developers and other interested parties. These will give guidance on codes for sustainable homes, scale, massing and materials.

It is anticipated that each of Heathrow's Garden Suburbs and the two Urban Villages will seek to have a different identity, achieved through layout, design, materials and landscaping, in addition to a different range of facilities in the neighbourhood centres.

## Employment

By far and away the most critical element of the redevelopment is the maintenance and enhancement of jobs and employment opportunities at Heathrow. Nearly 80,000 people work at Heathrow, and 170,000 more are employed in services such as hotels, car rentals, catering and immigration just off-site.<sup>7</sup> A loss of this level of economic activity overnight would create serious damage to the local economy.

Thankfully, there is time to plan the transition – and the depths of a recession may be just the best time to do it sensibly! A new London airport could take at least seven years to pass through the planning process (it should be remembered that Terminal 5 alone took ten years!). The construction period could easily be another seven years on top of that.<sup>8</sup> So, a timeframe of, say, 15 years can be used to project-plan the jobs switch.

Most if not all of the airport jobs would move with the flights to another airport, so the jobs would not be lost to the wider economy, but they may not be filled by the same people. Others, like car rentals, will move with the planes. Some companies such as caterers will consider the logistics of remaining where they are and transporting goods to a new airport. Hotels and conference facilities will be needed to service the commercial centre to be built at Heathrow, and the issue there, as with the wider job position, will be the interim period between shut-down and the new commercial centre opening. Major training and re-training programmes will be

<sup>7</sup> See *A Vision for 2026*. Local Development Framework Pre-Submission Draft Core Strategy. London Borough of Hillingdon, Feb. 2011. [www.hillingdon.gov.uk/media/pdf/e/n/SD1-\\_Core\\_Strategy\\_Pre-Submission\\_February\\_2011.pdf](http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/media/pdf/e/n/SD1-_Core_Strategy_Pre-Submission_February_2011.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> The new airport for Hong Kong, which is built on an island, took six years to build – and this is generally recognised as fast!

**‘West London and the area to the west of London represent the most prosperous single sub-area in the whole UK, with a plethora of advanced service and high-technology jobs which would remain; there should be no problem in generating new local jobs to replace those lost by relocation’**

From Tony Hall and Peter Hall: *Heathrow – A Retirement Plan*. Town & Country Planning Tomorrow Series Paper 3. TCPA, 2006. Published in *Town & Country Planning*, 2006, Vol. 85, Jun.



needed in addition to specific property and business advice.

In all this activity a major factor which will assist is the business ethic and entrepreneurial flair of many who live in this part of West London. Entrepreneurs will not simply sit idly by waiting for the airport to close, but will be looking for the opportunities that the decision presents. The emphasis can therefore be on assisting the resilience of local communities to the change.

In any new configuration there should be as many jobs on and off site as there are now, but this zero-sum outcome will only emerge after some years of adjustment. This is the cost that will have to be met if the benefit of a more appropriate, beneficial and attractive use of this strategic suburban site is to be achieved.

The main employment at the Garden City will come from:<sup>9</sup>

- Heathrow city centre, which will offer a large prestige office complex, with shops and restaurants located in atriums at ground level alongside leisure and civic uses such as a central library and community foyer. There is more than enough room to build 800,000 square metres of floorspace, which would support 50,000 jobs in offices and retail.<sup>10</sup> Heathrow Airport employs many on low wages and few on big salaries; the new Heathrow office complex should help to

#### Above

Modern offices in an attractive landscape setting in an edge-of-town location at Hatfield Business Park

reverse this situation. Many would argue that Hillingdon and Hounslow’s employment profile will be the better for it.

- The business park will be for office and commercial uses, again built to a high standard with quality landscaping and comprising 500,000 square metres of floorspace which will support another 25,000 jobs.<sup>11</sup>
- The retail park will comprise 100,000 square metres of floorspace and will support over 3,500 jobs.
- The education campus, including the Engineering Centre of Excellence, will create another 1,500 jobs.
- With the installation of high-speed broadband into all Garden City housing, residents will have the potential to become self-employed in their own homes. Some should be built as live-work dwellings.
- In addition, there will be thousands of new jobs created as soon as construction work commences on site, and many more will be indirectly supported by the huge investment pumping into the area.<sup>12</sup>

9 All these job estimates are based on the Table of Employment Densities, in *Employment Densities Guide*. Second Edition. Drivers Jonas Deloitte, for the Office of Project and Programme Advice and Training, and the Homes and Communities Agency, 2010. [www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/download-doc/6155/10397](http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/download-doc/6155/10397)

10 For comparison, Canary Wharf occupies 1.3 million square metres and supports 90,000 jobs. Terminal 2 is currently being re-developed, and the possibility of retaining some of this building should be considered. Terminals 1 and 3 are some 50 years old and showing their age

11 For comparison, Stockley Park supports 65,000 jobs

12 For comparison, the Olympic Park employed 46,000 in construction jobs for four years

## Supporting the western economy – an Olympic challenge?

When it comes to Heathrow, it's the economy stupid! Apart from the jobs directly and indirectly associated with the flying operations, a huge cluster of businesses, many of them UK or European headquarters of foreign companies, are based in the Thames Valley corridor close to Heathrow. Closing the airport should not be the prelude to these companies moving abroad. A one-stop shop needs to be established (it is likely that a number of agencies already exist that need to come together and be beefed-up) to map the companies at risk, establish contact, identify their needs and hand-hold them through the turbulence of change.

It's not rocket science and it's done frequently after a company has announced that it is closing. At that point a task force comes together to assist redundant employees back into work. A **Heathrow Task Force** needs to operate on a more strategic and upstream level, intervening from the outset to work with businesses to ensure that they survive and prosper. Very recent experience can be drawn from the Olympics, where such an approach helped to smooth the path for businesses, allowing them to continue to trade while relocating. Time will not be so tight at Heathrow, but complacency would be a mistake.

## Retail

Some say that airports are nothing more than shopping malls with planes outside. That's an exaggeration, but at Heathrow there are 5,000 jobs in retail.<sup>13</sup> Some of the space is let to high street chains and some to niche branded outlets, and it is hoped that some will want to re-establish in the new city centre close to the prestige office accommodation. The retail offer should not seek to erode the viability and vitality of surrounding centres such as Uxbridge or Hounslow. With the large office complex comes the opportunity to cater for those wishing to eat out, offering everything from a food court to fine dining. The possibilities of roof-top restaurants should be explored in the commercial complex, taking advantage of views both to the east over London and to the west over the Berkshire countryside.

Retail in the Hillingdon and Hounslow areas appears relatively buoyant, with far fewer voids than in high streets in many towns. Food and fashion shops appear to be trading successfully from nearly every available unit. However, with the growing trend to internet purchasing and 'click and collect', highlighted in the Portas Review,<sup>14</sup> it seems prudent to expect limited demand for comparison shopping floorspace in the city centre.

A large indoor and outdoor market will be created in the retail park, seeking to combine the attractions of Petticoat Lane and Borough Market. The intention will be to gain a wide reputation for an offer that is different and bespoke to the Garden City. Provision will be made for some of the floorspace in the city centre to be dedicated to small units on short-term

lets, to complement the retail park with boutiques and specialist shops and restaurants.

Each Garden Suburb will have a small parade of shops, including a 'shop around the corner' that will serve the local neighbourhood.

## Transportation, including pedestrian and cycle networks

From international airport to low-carbon Garden City is a big step. Usefully, there is a good public transport system upon which to build.<sup>15</sup> There are four train stations and a hub bus interchange within the airport area, providing good networks nationally, into London and into the surrounding districts. With the opening of Crossrail in around 2020, it will be possible to commute west-east from Heathrow to Central London in less than 30 minutes.

The Garden City will seek to integrate these services with a frequent 'hoppa' bus running on a circuit connecting all the housing areas with the stations and the commercial areas. No home will be more than a 5 minute walk from a bus stop and no bus journey more than 10 minutes from a station – in most cases it will be half that time.

The airport is already a major generator of traffic journeys, particularly in peak hours, with considerable peak-hour congestion occurring at the airport exit onto the A4 and beyond. Some upgrades to the surrounding primary road network may be necessary to deal with this. To reduce the impact of traffic through and around the Garden City, cut-and-cover tunnels will be created for main east-west and

13 See the BAA website at [www.baa.com](http://www.baa.com)

14 Mary Portas: *The Portas Review: An Independent Review into the Future of Our High Streets*. Dec. 2011.

[www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/business-sectors/docs/p/11-1434-portas-review-future-of-high-streets](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/business-sectors/docs/p/11-1434-portas-review-future-of-high-streets)

15 BAA estimates that over 180,000 passengers arrive and depart at Heathrow on an average day

## Slums of the future?

Provision for residential car parking has been reduced in recent years with the introduction of maximum parking standards in England. This can cause problems when many households have more than one car, and a significant proportion have two vehicles or more. Reducing car use, especially for commuting and the school run, is a good thing (and a car club for the Garden City is a 'no-brainer'), but that should not be confused with car ownership, which will probably continue to be popular. Homes are so small – the UK has smallest homes of any European country\* – that garages are almost always used for white goods, bicycles and storage rather than for garaging cars. Some critics have said we are in danger of building slums of the future. Decent-size homes should be a norm, and realistic off-street parking standards will therefore be adopted in the Garden City to ensure that streets do not become choked with parked vehicles at evenings and weekends. All this will come at a cost which will need to be factored into valuations for the site.

\* *Space in New Homes: What Residents Think*. Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, Aug. 2009. <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110118095356/http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/space-in-new-homes.pdf>



**Above**

An assembly hangar and control tower on the former Hatfield aerodrome is now a hotel and the largest health and raquets club in Europe

north-south routes, paralleling the broadwaters as they do along the River Seine in Paris, and with a '*périphérique*' under the city centre. Roads will emerge at strategic points to service both commercial and housing areas.

As the site adjoins the Green Belt – indeed part of the land on which Terminal 5 stands is still technically Green Belt – there is an opportunity to use this redevelopment to bring the countryside into the town. There are green routes in the area, such as the London Loop (London Outer Orbital Path) and the Colne Valley Walk, and detailed designs will ensure that residents and workers will never be further than 250 metres from a path and cycleway that will give them access to miles of car-free rights of way.

At present Heathrow is (understandably) off-limits, a large reservation surrounded by busy roads. The Garden City will be 'permeable', with public rights of

way feeding in and out of the site, to bring the benefits of the open countryside within reach of those living four miles into London's densely built-up suburbs at the eastern end of the site.

## Education, culture and sport

Each Garden Suburb will have a primary school, nursery school and crèche. The secondary schools will be clustered on a campus at the west end of the site so that a wide range of facilities can be practically and cost-effectively shared. The Engineering Centre of Excellence, which could be part of a local university or further education college, could occupy the iconic Terminal 5 building. Local youngsters could study for apprenticeships, and the Centre could be staffed in part by skilled people formerly with aircraft service companies. It could also apply knowledge transfer to small firms established in an 'incubator' setting.

Cultural and social activities are important to create successful communities. However, there should be no attempt to provide 'everything'. Surrounding districts (and the West End, which is only a short train ride away) provide theatres, and there are already multiplex cinemas close by. Each of the schools will have accommodation that can have dual-use for local groups, and in addition there will be places of worship, community centres and pubs scattered throughout the development. Open-air facilities are particularly popular for family groups and will be provided in the common areas alongside the broadwaters. A place for open-air concerts at the head of the western broadwater will allow 'Kenwood'-style concerts to be staged.

An orbital path around the Garden City will provide a 12 kilometre fun-run, and informal play areas will be located next to all the primary schools.

## Landscaping, wildlife and groundworks

The Heathrow Garden City design is heavily influenced by the TCPA GRaBS project on green and blue infrastructure.<sup>16</sup> The project highlights the importance of planting and water in urban design, for wildlife and for healthy living.

The planting will be an integral part of the urban design, using species mix and droves of plants for both visual and environmental effect. The broadwaters will give character and elegance to the Garden City. Used by wildlife and for recreation as well as for appearance, they will enable higher land values to be achieved for neighbouring developments.

The surrounding watercourses of the Colne, Crane and Longford Rivers and the Duke of Northumberland River will all be examined to see how they may contribute to the overall hydrology to ensure the water remains 'sweet'.<sup>17</sup>

Not everyone wants a garden to maintain, but most people appreciate green space which they can use for recreation. To add interest and value and to get people talking to each other, areas around the Garden Suburbs will be laid out as allotments, community gardens and orchards. There is an appetite for such amenities, both among people who have cultural links to farming and among those who seek respite from urban stress.

There is wildlife on the airport site, but birds and small mammals survive in what must be a fairly hostile environment. The Garden City will transform the wildlife capacity of Heathrow. Wildlife will quickly rehabilitate suburban back gardens, dense planting in extensive public open space and stretches of open water. The aim will be to use the Garden City as a broad corridor to allow wildlife to move between the Green Belt and the surrounding areas of Hillingdon and Hounslow. And why not designate the broadwaters and the principal areas of densely planted open space in the Garden City as Green Belt? More Green Belt can be created than lost, and *it is the quality rather than the width of open space that is important.*

The Heathrow site is riddled with services, some of which will be utilised in the redevelopment, but much will need to be removed. Extensive de-contamination of aprons and outfield will also be needed, which will be a significant cost and time factor to be included in the project planning.<sup>18</sup> The large volumes of concrete can be crushed on site to significantly reduce the amount of primary



**Above**

High-quality terraced housing at Welwyn Garden City – over 14,000 dwellings would be provided at Heathrow Garden City

### The blue runway

**A characteristic of Letchworth and Welwyn Garden Cities is the central landscaped area, with fountains, formal vistas and gardens. These public areas offer an 'image' and sense of place which are loved by local people. The broadwaters will do that for Heathrow – and why not have the western broadwater illuminated at night as a 'blue runway' to reflect and honour the past?**

aggregates needed. Any surplus arisings can be used to help form bunds and mounds to embolden the landscaping. Sustainable urban drainage systems will be used throughout.

In keeping with the Garden City design, green walls on the high-rise buildings will be introduced. Where Canary Wharf speaks of urban design, Heathrow will have a design code of 'town and country' – a Barbour jacket rather than a pinstripe suit! The Garden City will act as a carbon sink, which is an appropriate next use for a site which has been (and still is) a huge carbon generator in the London suburbs.

<sup>16</sup> See the GRaBS project (Green and Blue Space Adaptation for Urban Areas and Eco Towns) website at [www.grabs-eu.org/](http://www.grabs-eu.org/)

<sup>17</sup> The Longford and Duke of Northumberland Rivers originally ran across the airfield site and were culverted under the runways. They were diverted off-airport in the Twin Rivers Diversion Scheme when Terminal 5 was constructed

<sup>18</sup> The nearby Stockley Park office complex was built on the site of a former tip, and the Olympics site was heavily contaminated. Both have been successfully reclaimed, turning liabilities into assets



**Above**

Cities are for living in... and airports – which are hungry land users – should be in accessible locations beyond the city limits

## 5 The development model

The original Garden Cities of Letchworth and Welwyn were developed by private companies. Shareholders investing in the companies were rewarded with dividends as the settlements grew and land values and developments appreciated in value. At over 12 square kilometres, Heathrow is a huge development site worth billions of pounds. There are economies of scale that can be applied, and a site that can be developed progressively over, say, 20 years can adapt to market conditions. But against this value must be set the considerable costs of getting the site ready and then building to a high standard – not just ‘more of the same’.

Both private companies and the post-war New Town Development Corporations had the advantage that they were able to buy, hold and sell land and were single-minded in the project management of the development. A modern example of the genre would be the Olympic Delivery Authority, which was established by Act of Parliament to deliver the lands and buildings for the Games. Later this year the Olympic site and assets will transfer to a



Development Corporation under the auspices of the London Mayor. Other models such as public-private partnerships with local authorities have the advantage of potentially reducing the democratic deficit, but can come at the price of slowing delivery. The landowner, the London Mayor and the London Borough of Hillingdon are the key players, and they should be given first opportunity to demonstrate they have the vision, skills, resources and determination to plan a redevelopment of this key site.

Local authorities often complain that their financial settlement from central government insufficiently recognises the funds needed to maintain generous landscaping and community facilities, such as those in a Garden City. In the case of Letchworth, residual assets of the original company have been incorporated into an industrial and provident society, the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation. The income from these investments provides a steady stream of resources to maintain public realm areas and other facilities, over and above that which the district council provides. This model could be used at Heathrow, with some commercial assets held in public trust and dedicated to maintain an income stream for high-quality maintenance of common areas.

## Runway Premier League

Frankfurt	4	4	Paris Charles de Gaulle
Schipol	6	2	Heathrow

If the decision is that Britain needs a world-class international hub airport, then perhaps we need four runways, as there is at Paris Charles de Gaulle, Frankfurt and many other leading airports. Anything less would be to continue the short-termism that bedevils UK infrastructure planning\* and hobble the airport with continuing constraint. There is no point in travelling at 500 mph if time is then wasted circling in stacks or waiting on-stand because of capacity constraints. If a third runway were built, how long would it be before the campaign for a fourth started? Incremental growth creates a creeping blight which arguably suits no-one. If the decision is to remain at Heathrow, this will mean the loss of some communities, a large extension of the noise footprint over built-up areas and additional pressures on the infrastructure, including the surrounding roads. There are no easy answers to the Heathrow conundrum.

\* *Strategic Thinking in Government: Without National Strategy, Can Viable Government Strategy Emerge?* HC 1625. Twenty-Fourth Report of Session 2010-12, House of Commons Public Administration Committee. The Stationery Office, Apr. 2012. [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmpubadm/1625/1625vw.pdf](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmpubadm/1625/1625vw.pdf)

## 6

### And where will the planes go?

The Government has announced that it will open a consultation on a national Aviation Strategy<sup>19</sup> including options for aviation in the South East. In 1973, the then Government resolved to develop a new airport, a deep-water harbour and a flood barrier at Maplin, only for the incoming Government in 1974 to abandon the project as a cost-cutting exercise. The TCPA supported such a proposal (and indeed submitted a planning application for a new airport in the Thames Estuary) when the Roskill Commission examined capacity in the South East in the 1980s. Nearly 40 years on, and with Heathrow bursting at the seams, now is the time for the Government to take a bold step to realise the vision of a new international hub airport for the benefit of both the UK and London.

The investment and jobs created both in the redevelopment of Heathrow and the construction of a new airport will benefit very many, not just a

few. Of course the case will need to be proved wherever the planes go, and if it is in the Thames Estuary a full environmental impact assessment will need to complement the business and environmental case. Mitigation measures to deal with sea level rise and bird protection will need to be modelled along with a host of infrastructure issues. But whatever the location, this is a challenge to which we must rise; we must not duck the issue, as we have done for decades.

And UK consultants who advise governments around the world on design, property, construction, project management and infrastructure will have a chance to demonstrate their outstanding skills on their own front doorstep. Planning is often criticised for being slow and lacking certainty, and the national planning of Heathrow is a prime example of 'stop-go' decision-making which has blighted local communities and hobbled investment. Now is the time for certainty and for Great Britain to move forward and seize this unique opportunity to both create a new international hub airport and a new Garden City at Heathrow.

19 See 'PM speech on infrastructure'. Number 10. Official Site of the British Prime Minister's Office, Mar. 2012. [www.number10.gov.uk/news/pm-speech-on-infrastructure/](http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pm-speech-on-infrastructure/)



**Graeme Bell** is a chartered surveyor and town planner with a postgraduate diploma in landscape architecture. He started work in the 1960s for the Greater London Council, the London Borough of Harrow and Washington Development Corporation. He completed his career in local government several decades later as a Chief Planning Officer in three local authorities: Lancashire, Swindon and Devon. Graeme was elected the first President of the Planning Officers Society in 1997. He was Director of the TCPA 1998-2000, Secretary of the National Planning Forum 2003-05, and Chair of Trustees of the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation (which pioneered Planning for Real) 2003-08. He was on the DTI Foresight group which examined 'Speeding up the Planning Process', for which he made a special report on Manchester Runway 2. He writes a regular column for *Planning*, is a Vice-President of the TCPA and is a Trustee of the Welwyn Garden Heritage Trust. He has lived in Welwyn Garden City since 1985.