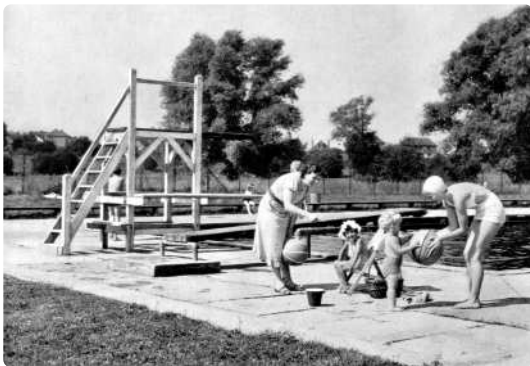


Town & Country Planning Tomorrow Series Paper 14

Health and Garden Cities

By Norman Macfadyen

A re-publication of the Garden Cities and Town Planning
Association pamphlet on the health benefits of Garden Cities



Supported by the Lady Margaret Paterson Osborn Trust

Foreword

The latest contribution to the Town & Country Planning Tomorrow Series is not a new paper, but the re-publication of Norman Macfadyen's *Health and Garden Cities*, the first of a 'New Series' of pamphlets published by the TCPA (at the time, operating under the name Garden Cities and Town Planning Association), issued in 1938.

Over 70 years on, the pamphlet is still of critical relevance today as the Government embarks on both a reform of public health and a new generation of Garden Cities and Suburbs. It highlights how Garden City planning made a significant contribution to improving the quality of life of ordinary people, providing an unparalleled improvement on what had come before. The Garden City pioneers understood that planning was not just focused on bricks and mortar; it was about creating the conditions for people to live differently, addressing social isolation and founded on a co-operative ethos.

We know that improved planning and better housing provision have long been understood as pre-conditions for enhancing the health of individuals and the communities in which they live. It is time we put the public health agenda back at the heart of planning; and the creation of new Garden Cities and Suburbs provides the perfect opportunity to do this.

Lee Shostak
Chair, TCPA

Acknowledgements

The TCPA gratefully acknowledges the support of the Lady Margaret Paterson Osborn Trust in the publication of this Tomorrow Series Paper.

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March 2013

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Cover pictures of Welwyn Garden City (left-hand side images) and Letchworth Garden City (right-hand side) taken from the first publication of *Health and Garden Cities* - 'A Garden City is surrounded by a green belt of country'

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Printed by RAP Spiderweb Ltd, Oldham OL9 7LY

Introduction

Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation. www.letchworth.com



Above

Broadway Gardens, Letchworth Garden City

The re-publication of Norman Macfadyen's pamphlet from 1938 is the latest milestone in the TCPA's campaign to re-make the case for a new generation of Garden Cities and Suburbs as part of the solution to the chronic shortage of housing in England. The paper highlights the health benefits of Garden Cities, and makes the bold claim that at the time of original publication 'our Garden City conditions [were] the healthiest known in this country'.

This Tomorrow Series Paper is also part of the resurgence of interest in one of the most successful stories in Britain's social and architectural history, the Garden City movement.¹ With interest from the Prime Minister,² the Deputy Prime Minister³ and the Planning Minister,⁴ Garden Cities and Suburbs are well on their way to making a welcome come-back.

Over the last century Garden City ideals have proven to be outstandingly durable. Places like Letchworth and Welwyn Garden Cities and Hampstead Garden Suburb have stood the test of time and remain highly desirable as places in which to live today. The Garden Cities are not only beautiful places, but they offer high-quality lifestyles

that promote wellbeing; a wide range of employment opportunities and cultural services; a complete mix of housing, including social and affordable housing; walkable neighbourhoods, tree-lined streets and high-quality design; vibrant parks; and opportunities for residents to grow their own food – while also promoting access to nature and opportunities for biodiversity. In short, they provide all the essential ingredients of a healthy community.

Planning and public health

The planning system has its roots in the public health movement. Improved planning and better housing have long been identified as essential for improving the health of communities, reducing health inequalities and cutting costs for the taxpayer.

As Macfadyen's paper highlights, having easy access to high-quality parks and gardens improves mental health and levels of physical activity. Although many of the diseases quoted in the paper are no longer as common in the UK today as they were 70 years ago, the country is plagued by new

diseases such as obesity – rates of which have tripled in the UK since the 1980s.⁵ It does, however, remain the case that very often people living in the most deprived parts of England have less access to green space. In general they also experience the worst air quality, and are more likely to suffer from cardiorespiratory diseases. We need to start to put public health back at the heart of planning, with better co-operation between planners and public health staff aimed at identifying these kinds of local health needs – and at finding ways to tackle them. The creation of 21st-century Garden Cities and Suburbs may well be one such way.

Government reforms reuniting health and planning

Despite its roots, over recent decades planning as a discipline has had little formal contact with public health. Different workplace cultures, professional languages and reporting regimes have helped to exacerbate this divide. However, the Government hopes this is about to change through widespread reforms to both the planning and health sectors, including a new public health responsibility for local authorities and a requirement on planners to work with public health organisations.

There are three reforms that set out new responsibilities for local authorities on public health:

- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – the overarching guidance for local authorities when drawing up plans and assessing development proposals – requires planners to promote healthy communities, use evidence to assess health and wellbeing needs, and work with public health leaders and organisations (and clear recognition of the ‘principles of Garden Cities’ in the NPPF provides a further foundation for examination of the application of Garden City principles, which include health and wellbeing).
- The Health and Social Care Act 2012 transfers the responsibility for public health to upper-tier local authorities from April 2013. It also requires the creation of Health and Wellbeing Boards to bring together key commissioners from the local NHS and local government to strategically plan local health and social care services.
- The Localism Act 2011 gives more power to communities, including the possibility of drawing up a Neighbourhood Plan. The Act also introduces a raft of other changes that have implications for improving health, including shifts in the way that affordable housing is provided and managed.

These reforms strengthen the argument for recognising and valuing the influence that planning, housing and other environmental functions have on improving health and wellbeing and on reducing health inequalities. Now that local authorities find themselves at the forefront of public health, they

should grasp this agenda and reconnect planning and health to improve the wellbeing of both people and places. When it comes to planning new settlements, Garden Cities provide a blueprint of how to incorporate public health planning from the start.

Health lessons from Garden Cities

As Macfadyen’s paper highlights, the country’s two Garden Cities – Letchworth and Welwyn – and Wythenshawe adjacent to Manchester are examples of good practice and innovation. Macfadyen provides statistics on the health benefits of Garden Cities and highlights why the development model leads to a better quality of life:

‘It makes for health, it limits the size of the town, it provides small holdings, allotments, playing fields, and walks for those who want them, and binds the people of the town into a unity. This unity gives an added interest to life and provides for a healthy social life, not an irritating one, because the planning ensures that every family shall have its separate and distinct house and garden, but a life which tends to a higher standard.’

Although written over 70 years ago, Macfadyen’s paper serves to demonstrate that the radical ideals of the Garden City movement remain highly relevant in the 21st century, providing a crucial foundation for high-quality inclusive places and the creation of new jobs and truly sustainable, healthy lifestyles.

If the Government’s reforms of planning, and its ambition for a new generation of Garden Cities and Suburbs, are to be successfully implemented then clearly health and wellbeing must be at the heart of this agenda.

Notes

- 1 *Creating Garden Cities and Suburbs Today. Policies, Practices, Partnerships and Model Approaches – A Report of the Garden Cities and Suburbs Expert Group.* TCPA, May 2012. www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/Creating_Garden_Cities_and_Suburbs_Today.pdf
- 2 D. Cameron: ‘PM speech on infrastructure.’ Delivered to the Institution of Civil Engineers. Prime Minister’s Office, 19 Mar. 2012. www.number10.gov.uk/news/pm-speech-on-infrastructure/
- 3 N. Clegg: ‘Deputy Prime Minister’s speech to National House-building Council.’ Cabinet Office, 22 Nov. 2012. www.dpm.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/deputy-prime-minister-s-speech-national-house-building-council
- 4 N. Boles: ‘Town and Country Planning Association conference speech’. Department for Communities and Local Government, 29 Nov. 2012. www.gov.uk/government/speeches/town-and-country-planning-association-conference-speech
- 5 A. Ross: ‘Obesity: the role of planning’. *Planning*, 31 Oct. 2011. www.planningresource.co.uk/Design/article/1101546/obesity-role-planning/

Health and Garden Cities

By Norman Macfadyen



Left

'To see a miserable, under-nourished child brought down from the 'depressed areas' turn into a healthy, energetic child under Letchworth conditions is an argument which cannot be refuted'

We are all today eager to improve the health of the people, and are not content with the state in which the mass of the population live. It is true that a fortunate minority are growing up fine, strong, and athletic men and women, but it is also true that, in spite of all the immense work done under the National Health Insurance Schemes and by Health Authorities, the volume of disease does not diminish, though the character of it may change. It has been said that probably one-third of disease is due to 'nervous' causes of one kind or another.

These 'nervous' diseases include not only organic disease of the nervous system itself, but all that mass of disease which reveals no trace to the microscope but is, all the same, the beginning of real suffering. Disharmonies of the mind and spirit may begin very subtly, and if not promptly arrested, may lead to real organic maladies or conditions which breed misery and trouble not only to the person afflicted, but to all who come into contact with them.

They are often the result of an unhealthy environment and a growing tension of life itself, which tends to increase in the complicated civilization of today.

It has been recently calculated that £100 million a year is spent in this country in fighting disease and promoting health. This is a stupendous sum and should promote thought and action to see if we can get better results for our expenditure.

It may be that we take too limited a view of the nature of health. Hippocrates said: 'In order to cure the human body, it is necessary to have a knowledge of the whole of things.' This may be an

ideal difficult to work to, but surely the thought should make us pause and consider whether our present tendency to specialise is not carrying us too far. The specialist knows 'more and more about less and less' and we get quite lost, and acquire a materialistic outlook on things. We cannot see the woods for the trees; we forget the human personality in contemplating an atom of his framework. Sectionalism is not enough. It is profoundly important for us today to work through this phase quickly and restore a balance of thought and action. This is really what Science is groping towards, but when we are dealing with life no time should be lost in applying knowledge to action.

Science is really asking us to lift up our eyes to boundless horizons, and yet we try to force people to exist in restrained channels, we narrow down their lives and stifle any exuberance of vitality which shows itself. Health is a balance, and this balance is needed in the physical, physiological, psychological, and spiritual life.

A healthy physical frame has an exquisite balance of anatomical structure, which every athlete tries to train to perfection. The functions of our body are maintained by a marvellous physiological balance in which the organs of the body support and supplement one another in good health. To maintain this harmonious working of the body and to restore it when disarranged is the function of the healing profession, and here is a vast field opening up for new work. We know that man through his nervous system is intimately influenced by the outside world. His organs of sensation, the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, skin, etc., are infinitely susceptible to

outside influences. These influences immediately convey messages to the brain and nervous system and react upon the balance of his powers. Nor are these influences always conscious; they may act quite independently of the conscious mind. It is really impossible to consider man apart from his environment. Apart from the external visible world, what of the invisible? What of the action of mind upon mind?

This essay is not an attempt to start any new theories, but simply to draw attention to facts, and the fact that a vivid personality can impress his mind upon multitudes of people so as to affect them for good or evil is very obvious today. What is not so startling but is of great importance is that a thought conveyed from any one person to another may have definite mental and physical effects. Surely then, the result of this may be profound. A discontented mind may produce many other disastrous results, and a personality which can convey those intangible spiritual realities, such as courage, goodness, virtue, truth, to other people is of incalculable value. Then, our first scientific duty is to eliminate sources of irritation and misery in our surroundings, and see to it that the whole environment is conducive to comfort, health, hope and happiness. Unconscious education may be as important as conscious.

A gracious inspiring personality is rooted in a balance of healthy forces. The atmosphere in which it is brought up and lives should be such that from the beginning of life, the harmonious working of its powers should be cultivated. The atmosphere should breathe hope and encouragement in every direction.

An infant's environment is largely that of its mother, its father, its brothers and sisters, its home, the surroundings of its home, its food, fresh air and sunlight, free play, and contact with natural life. These elementary essentials should all be of the best obtainable. Much can be written about any one of these elements, but they are only mentioned here to show what a big subject that of health is.

The factors that influence the development of the mentality of the child, put shortly, are:

- The heredity of the child, which will include the social inheritance which it has become heir to.
- The environment of the child, which will include the physical surroundings into which it has been born.

It is no part of this essay to discuss the strictly defined question of personal heredity. It is a vastly important question, but one about which we are not ready to lay down rules, except in extreme cases. It does not strictly concern us here because we do not yet know the limits which improved environment will effect. We do know, however, that there are

limits and that a proper social order will recognise the limitations of the individual and that to exceed those limitations may be cruelty and a defiance of Nature's laws.

We shall not say much about social heredity except to observe that it is more possible to change this. We have seen that an improved social life can work wonders on the individual, and only note here that while the individual may have a great effect upon society, the opposite is also true, and the society in which he lives has a great effect upon the unit who is one element making up that society. Today there is much talk of the 'mass mind' and 'mass emotion', and of the supreme importance of the State. An equally important case can be made out for the supreme importance of the individual, and it is a fact that those who are brought into closest touch with the mighty forces of Nature on land or on the sea often are the great personalities, the most level headed, the most tolerant, the most patient, and the healthiest minded sections of our population.

When we come to physical and social environment, we come to the part that can most easily be changed in the direction of health. The environment which mankind requires is the most natural one possible for the circumstances under which he lives. The crying danger is the one which will take men away from the world of Nature and let them live under purely artificial conditions. This may be taken as a statement, the neglect of which will quite certainly end in disaster. We are part of natural life and cannot do without it. The present tendency to warehouse the people in tenement dwellings in our large cities is a striking illustration of this. It is a policy of frustration, physical and mental. It is a denial of the fullness of life, of family life, and of natural life. The natural impulse of man who is compelled to live in a huge tenement is to put up barricades, in self-defence, to isolate himself from his neighbours, though that is really impossible. The birthright of every child is surely to play freely, joyously, to establish contact with nature, animals, and the land, and this is denied to him. Instead of this, repressions and fear are the first condition of living. Constant irritations begin, and unnatural conditions prevail. There is no security of family life under such conditions. The mass mind, mass emotion, the neglect of individual initiative, the unimportance of family life, are fostered under such conditions.

In saying this, one is conscious of the difficulties of the situation and of the pathetic attempts made to alleviate the lot of the workers in the great town; but a halt should be called to the expenditure of millions of money, to the exorbitant prices paid for the land, which are really only a piling up of trouble ahead. These flats dwellings solve no problem but accentuate the density of the population on the land with all its evils.

Let us return to our main problem. The problem can only be solved by a proper disposal of population and industry so that the people shall live a healthy life. A healthy and contented population is really the first concern of statesmanship in peace and in war, and it is a curious fact that while many people will give lip service to this knowledge, few people give it their undivided attention. It must be obvious that a natural environment not imposing nervous and physical strain is of the utmost importance. The inevitable strain of life can be eased by good housing conditions, good working conditions, good opportunity for the enjoyment of leisure, freedom for proper rest, with the proper opportunity for fresh food.

These essentials can be obtained by following out the proposals of the Garden City movement. This movement advocates that orderly development shall take the place of disorderly growth and this orderly development shall bring the people into touch with the land, fresh air, and sunlight. There is nothing impossible in this demand and we can confidently claim that it is a movement for economy of life, health, and money. In order to establish this fact, some vital statistics will now be given.

There are in this country two Garden Cities: Letchworth and Welwyn; a number of Garden Suburbs of which Hampstead is the best example, and one planned satellite town, Wythenshawe, adjacent to Manchester.

The essential idea of a Garden City from a health point of view, is that it is self-contained, is planned beforehand, and is a social unity, independent and surrounded by an open belt of country. It is a town which has its own factories and in which as far as possible, the people both live and work. There is no extra expense incurred in travelling to and from work; the people can have their meals at home and grow fresh food in their own gardens. The planning defines the part of the town allotted to industry, houses, roads, open spaces, and agriculture, shops, etc., and makes certain by ownership of the land, that the planning will be carried out, and the town grow into a place of beauty and dignity of life. The idea that such a place will be a blot on the landscape and will swallow up agricultural land is quite a mistake. The yield today of the land in Letchworth, for instance, in food values is probably far greater than it ever was before.

A Garden City is surrounded by an open belt of country. This is an important factor. It makes for health, it limits the size of the town, it provides small holdings, allotments, playing fields, and walks for those who want them, and binds the people of the town into a unity. This unity gives an added interest to life and provides for a healthy social life, not an irritating one, because the planning ensures that every family shall have its separate and distinct house and garden, but a life which tends to a higher

standard. If this paper points to anything, it is that this better condition of living for all will react favourably on the health of the individual. In short, our Garden City conditions are the healthiest known in this country under present conditions.

Wythenshawe is the best attempt to approximate to our principles which a great city has yet made. Manchester has a stupendous problem to face and has tackled its task in a large way, which will bring its own reward.

The vital statistics we shall consider are comparisons of general mortality, infant mortality, and of disease, including tuberculosis. We shall refer also to the birth rate. The figures are averages of the official statistics for the last five years which are available:

	<i>General mortality</i>
Letchworth	8
Welwyn	5.9
Manchester city	12.85
Manchester clearance areas	17.32
Wythenshawe	7.86
England and Wales	12

These figures speak for themselves; if expressed in terms of economics, they present a great saving of national assets. The rock bottom asset in any country is the healthy human lives in that country.

	<i>Infant mortality</i>
Letchworth	33.6
Welwyn	25
Manchester city	71
Manchester clearance areas	120.0
Wythenshawe	60
England and Wales	62

Infant mortality figures are based on the number of infants born. These figures are the number of infants who have died per 1,000 born, so that it is an accurate figure. If the infants born in England and Wales were all born under Garden City conditions, it would not be unreasonable to hope that 20,000 infants would be saved every year, and that these infants would have every opportunity to grow into healthy happy youngsters.

	<i>Tuberculosis per 1,000 living</i>
Letchworth	0.38
Welwyn	0.574
Herts county (a very healthy county)	0.46
Wythenshawe	0.72
Manchester city	1.04
Manchester clearance areas	1.97
England and Wales	0.804

If you compare the death rate between Letchworth and Manchester you will see a great difference, but it requires some imagination to see

the real difference. Tuberculosis is a disease, often lingering in character, which brings much misery, poverty, and expense in its train. The disabling effect of it is very great and the money needed to combat the disease and alleviate its consequences to the victim is enormous. The disease is widespread and its ultimate conquest will depend largely, however treatment advances, on good food, healthy surroundings, and good social conditions of life. Tuberculosis is always ready to give the final blow to exhaustion and feebleness in any form.

Now compare some death rate figures in Manchester itself:

	<i>Measles</i>	<i>Influenza</i>	<i>Bronchitis</i>	<i>Pneumonia</i>
Clearance areas	0.35	0.41	1.56	2.21
Wythenshawe	0.05	0.25	0.11	0.61

The most significant of these figures are those of pneumonia. Pneumonia often cuts off people in the prime of life, when their value to society is greatest, and here you get a remarkable difference in its effect. Even if people in Wythenshawe get pneumonia, it seems as if their chance of survival is greatly increased.

The agent in Letchworth of a large Friendly Society has kindly given me figures which show that the days lost through illness every year are just over two per member. In neighbouring towns, they are just over four, and in the whole of England and Wales are just under four. This represents a large saving in cash benefits to these Societies.

Surely then, the incidence of disease under Letchworth conditions must be less, the virulence of disease must be less, and the chance of a fatal issue correspondingly less.

Coming now to a more cheerful subject, the birth rate, it is certain that much attention will have to be paid to this question of births in the near future. Everything in the end depends on the births in the country. A further sharp decline in the birth rate will, in our complex civilization, land this country in enormous difficulties. It is unnecessary to labour this point.

We are paying the penalty of an artificial state of society and we must reach a much simpler,

more natural, and more secure state of living. If we do not, then we shall be replaced by another civilization which does appreciate the primary values of life.

Our Garden City proposals are an attempt to embody these great principles in a manner suitable to the needs of the time, and should enlist the active co-operation of all people who love our Nation and believe in its importance to the distracted world we live in.

As regards figures, I need only say that Welwyn has for some years had a birth rate of twenty, which is more than the amount required to maintain a stationary population.

The figures dealt with are really remarkable and especially so when applied to industrial towns, because factories may easily become incubators of disease; but they merely represent the negative side of the question. The positive side, the overflowing energy and happiness which is seen in really good health cannot be put down in figures. To see a miserable, under-nourished child brought down from the 'depressed areas' turn into a healthy energetic child under our conditions is an argument which cannot be refuted. It would justify the expenditure of large sums of money, but the interesting thing is that ours is the cheapest way of performing these great deeds. It has yet to be seriously understood that health is the fundamental need of mankind. Everyone is anxious to keep his own health, but very few realise that they cannot do this as an isolated unit. The argument running through this essay will have failed if it does not make the reader see that his neighbour's health is a vital factor in his own health. It is possible for a few fortunate people, who can choose their own surroundings and their own companions, to attain a high standard of quality of life, but it is not possible for the great majority of people to do this. Real leaders of the people are the only aristocracy today, and when all is said and done, the policy of leading the people into a more wholesome, sane, and healthy way of life is the most statesmanlike policy of all.

Dr Norman Macfadyen MB, DPH (1877-1959) was one of the first householders in the new Garden City at Letchworth and was the town's first resident doctor and its first medical officer of health. He was for many years Chairman of Letchworth Urban District Council and a Director of First Garden City Ltd. He was also Chairman of the East Hertfordshire Division of the British Medical Association from 1924 to 1927. He was Chairman of the Executive Committee of the TCPA from 1929 to 1944, and in 1945 became the fourth recipient of the Association's Howard Memorial Medal.

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**Town and Country
 Planning Association**

**17 Carlton House Terrace
 London SW1Y 5AS
 t: +44 (0)20 7930 8903
 www.tcpa.org.uk**