

Tomorrow 125

A practical path to a hopeful future

Building the Future

1 Introduction

There is an urgent need to find new ways to live together in which everyone has the opportunity to have a flourishing and creative life. This ambition for the good life has been swamped by an avalanche of negativity which argues that positive change is impossible and unaffordable and that communities are incapable of driving their own positive future. The truth is very different. The prospect is not just that we can live life free from insecurity and ill health. It's the hope of a life where we can all fully realise our human potential. That life is technically possible now. We just need the good will to make it happen.

Change is desirable to improve everyone's quality of life. But change is also a necessity if we are to survive the cost of living and climate crisis. For those on low incomes life is increasingly lived on the edge of hunger and insecurity. For most in the middle, it's about long hours and declining incomes. Hope, that sense that a decent life is possible for us and future generations, is in very short supply.

But the problems we face in terms of poverty, poor housing, poor health, and a lack of opportunity, don't have to define us. The UK is a rich nation, but it lacks vision and organisation. It doesn't have to be like this. We don't have to be bystanders at our own decline. We can reach out for the future and shape it for our collective welfare.

This hope is not imaginary. It is rooted in the concrete examples of communities already coming together to offer practical solutions to hunger, housing and climate change. These individuals and organisations are the glue trying to hold our society together and their achievements are remarkable given how little support they receive.

Our confidence is also rooted in the knowledge that we have done this before. 125 years ago, in times as least as tough as they are now, a vision gripped the country of 'the good life' which combined the best of urban living with the best of what the natural world provides. The Garden City was a social movement which offered a practical manual of how 'the good life' could be delivered in real places, for ordinary people, at a human scale, based on cooperative principles. Based upon the learning from the Garden Cities, and the powerful work of our partner organisations we have distilled a proposition that puts people and planet first, to enable the good life.

2 A vision for flourishing lives

To build a society which enables flourishing lives for everyone so that all our basic physical needs are met and where the other diverse needs of human beings, the things that make life worth living, are enabled. Our aim is to create a framework for development which enables people now and, in the future, to flourish regardless of their income. In simple terms this means everyone having access to a decent home, nature and a healthy environment, lifelong education, meaningful work, healthy food, art and culture, and a connection to their community. It means having a meaningful say over how our communities develop. The objective of this development model is to provide the foundation of the good life; not as a single imposed vision but as a collection of diverse lives supported and enriched by the fabric of cooperative and caring community.

3 The three foundations for flourishing lives

- 1) Flourishing lives depend entirely on the restoration of nature and the long-term sustainability of the planet. There are two aspects to our dependency. First, we are connected to and dependent upon the resources that nature provides. Destroying nature means destroying ourselves. Second, nature is fundamental to promoting positive human thriving in terms of mental and physical health and wellbeing. It is one of the core ingredients of 'the good life'.
- 2) Flourishing lives depend on meaningful and vibrant democracy. This requires a shift of power between the state and the citizen so that the local community has the power to shape the decisions which directly impact on their future. This in turn implies a new role for the national and local state in nurturing and enabling community activity as well as robust individual citizens' rights to protect the interests of minorities and minimum legal safeguards to ensure results of decision-making support human flourishing.
- 3) Achieving flourishing lives requires an evolution of our economy so the foundations of the good life (everything from housing to energy to childcare) are organised not to extract but to share wealth more effectively so that that the economy meets the basic needs of everyone in a more equal way. To do this, the organisation of these foundational parts of our economy need to be based on a mutualised approach that generates social value. This means a shift to a variety of social enterprise approaches which all have in common the ability to share wealth with the communities that they serve rather than extract it solely for private gain. Private enterprise would continue to play a major role in this mixed economy within a framework which ensures its activities support the wellbeing of people and the planet.

Applying this simple framework prompts some uncomfortable questions about the way we have chosen to organise our society. Does the current system care about you, your community and your environment? Does it give you a meaningful voice in decision making? Does it provide sufficient resource for you and your community to survive and thrive? The vision also directs our efforts to the actions necessary to secure human flourishing. It helps us see how everything from housing cooperatives and local food systems to community energy and citizens assemblies might fit into a wide pattern of change. The development model we are offering is useful for the renewal of existing communities and the creation of new ones by offering a broad framework that can be tailored to local needs. It requires a new culture in the way we think about

development and the skills we need to enable and support change. Perhaps the biggest is learning to trust communities to set their own development path and to ensure they have the capacity and resources to navigate change effectively.

The vision we are offering is not a design blueprint to control people's lives. It's an idea based on kindness and cooperation, building a framework that enables the individual to live a rewarding and meaningful life. At a time when many lives are defined by loneliness it seeks to pay attention to our collective life together and to celebrate the human connections which make life worth living. There is nothing new in this broad proposition. It is a shared agenda that builds on many strands of work from a wide variety of organisations and traditions. If there is anything distinctive about the Garden City vision it is the emphasis on how ideas can be practically useful in real places, right now. Above all the Garden City represents a tradition of reaching for a better future. We may not always succeed but that reaching has always been the driver for change. And if there was ever a time when we need the prospect of practical hope for our future it is here and now.

4 What next?

Our next steps include:

- Demonstrating the practical value of the approach in different development contexts.
- Exploring the tools to embed a renewed Garden City development model in policy and practice.

5 Tell us what you think!

As a partnership of organisations, we believe this is a useful approach, but we might be wrong. If there is a better idea out there let's make sure we find it. But in doing so, we should bear in mind that many people and places have run out of time. We need to offer practical and hopeful alternatives now if we want to avoid the extremism which despair always breeds. Above all we hope that from whatever background or places you come, whatever organisation you represent you will work with to us to find that vital collective vision that is our last and best hope of a peaceful and prosperous future.

6 Contact

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