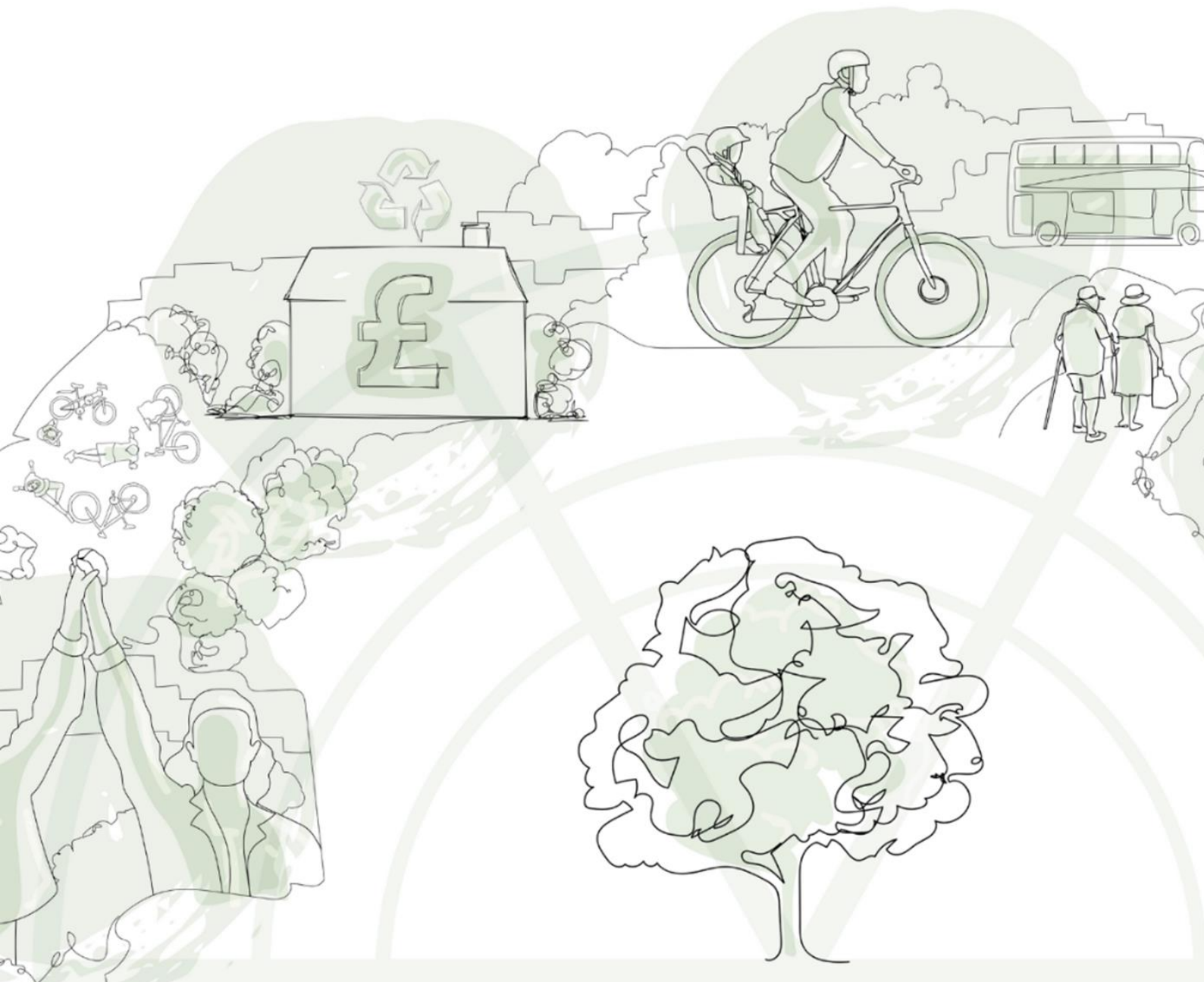




# Tomorrow 125: Rediscovering the roots of a new society

Final Report  
March 2024



**Tomorrow 125: Rediscovering the roots of a new society  
Final Report**

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**About the TCPA**

The Town & Country Planning Association (TCPA)'s vision is for homes, places and communities in which everyone can thrive. Our mission is to challenge, inspire and support people to create healthy, sustainable and resilient places that are fair for everyone. We do this by shaping policy and practice internationally, nationally, locally and through working with communities. The Informed by the Garden City Principles, the TCPA's strategic priorities are to:

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

## Housing with a heart



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## Housing with a Heart

By Eileen Gbagbo

I read something in the news about a Peckham estate  
Where a poet saw an angel drop onto the concrete pavement  
His mother's tears broke through the fog  
I'm sorry, she said. I'm sorry  
This community could not hold you  
I'm sorry this community could not catch you

On the walk home, I saw a butterfly  
Emerge from the streets; it danced  
through Little Kumasi all the way to this Garden City  
Where the leaves were bright, and  
cut through the muted tones of winter

Here each mother builds her own small world  
Here each child is tall with expectations  
Of the person they may become  
Here remains the hunger for the stillness  
That comes after a reform

Nature demands that we listen to her again  
This time, she sounds like the songs from a neighbour's garden  
She sounds like discovering a child's laughter  
She sounds like the rhythms of safety

I know what it means to move from one place to another  
I know what it means to make a home  
I know that love is a community undivided  
I know that life can be certain  
That life can be without crises, economic or otherwise.

What is better than believing  
That we are heading towards housing with a heart?  
I now have the courage to see this vision

This poem was commissioned by the TCPA in 2023 as part of the Tomorrow 125 project.

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## Introduction

In 2021 the TCPA's Tomorrow 125 project began with the aim of understanding how the Garden City idea can help the nation construct a pathway to a hopeful future based on a fairer society. Using the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ebenezer Howard's book *To-morrow a peaceful path to real reform* as a catalyst, the Association commenced a three-year project exploring the background and practical application of the Garden City idea today. The project allowed us to better understand the thoughts of the Garden City pioneers, confront the myths and misuse of the idea over time, and understand better how the Garden City idea fits within the wider ecosystem of organisations and activities in the pursuit of social and environmental justice.

The project has left the Association with a renewed sense of urgency and confidence in the role of the Garden City idea in addressing modern challenges and a new way of organising the way we create and nurture our homes and communities. Most importantly, it has enabled us to apply these ideas in real places in the spirit of practical idealism.

## About this report

This report provides a summary of activities and outputs from the Tomorrow 125 project. It forms part of a suite of outputs which is available on the TCPA's website.<sup>1</sup> It is a companion to the interim report, *Tomorrow 125: A Practical Path to a Hopeful Future. Interim Report*, which was produced in 2021. This report does not, therefore, seek to repeat the contents of previous reports and outputs.<sup>2</sup>

This report is designed to enable anyone interested in the project and its ideas to understand:

- The key outputs and conclusions of the Tomorrow 125 project
- The implications of these conclusions for the work of the TCPA
- Opportunities and next steps for the ideas and concepts explored through the project

The report is divided into the following sections:

1. **Introduction** – provides a brief overview of the project objectives, activities and outputs
2. **Rediscovering the Garden City idea** – summarises the wider implication and significance of the idea
3. **Myths and realities** - outlines learning from the second strand of the project, perceptions of the Garden City idea in policy and practice
4. **A new development model** – provides an overview of the framework for action revealed by Tomorrow125 and what this means in real places
5. **From practical hope to practical action** Sets out the key conclusions of the project and what the TCPA will do to take the ideas forward

## Project background

The Tomorrow 125 project began with the same assumption that Howard applied when he wrote *To-morrow* - that the way we organise society now does not support healthy and fulfilling lives for most people most of the time. For this reason, changing the way we live now could have

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<sup>1</sup> See Area of Work: Tomorrow 125 at <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/areas-of-work/garden-cities-and-new-towns/tomorrow-125/>

<sup>2</sup> The interim report can be accessed at <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Tomorrow-125-Interim-Report-phone-friendly.pdf>

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obvious and desirable benefits. But this positive case for change runs in parallel with the grave challenges which confront our society. Some of these challenges Howard would have recognised easily: poverty and economic inequality; poor physical and mental health; poor housing conditions; an economy failing to meet the basic human needs of many; and technology making some people's occupations redundant. But our present is defined by other pressing problems – from racial inequality and the climate crisis to a broken housing delivery model.

As a result, the question of how human beings can live together in peace and in harmony with the planet upon which they depend is the political question of our time. Hundreds of reports are produced by think tanks, foundations and charities which describe the problems we face and some of the solutions, but it is significant that in many cases, identifying problems has not translated to substantial practical change on the ground.

The TCPA has campaigned for 125 years to address the challenges facing society and the environment informed by the Garden City idea. While there are clear moments of significant influence, from the TCPA and the wider built and natural environment sector, successive Governments have failed to fully commit to the changes needed to address core challenges – from the housing crisis to the climate emergency.

The Garden City idea is extremely ambitious. It sets out guiding principles about how society could operate, founded on progressive assumptions about human values and played out in the physical, social and economic relations of existing and new communities.

The TCPA's campaigns to promote the Garden City idea through the use of the Garden City Principles have had a demonstrable impact on improving the outcomes of some places. However, association with the Garden City idea is too often used to mask poor quality development and nowhere has successfully adopted a holistic approach. This is understandable given our current development model, but what can we do about it?

As *To-morrow*, and subsequently the TCPA, reaches its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the need for positive change is more apparent than ever. And the TCPA wants to contribute to this change.

For the TCPA, no one has answered the question of how we can construct a hopeful future as compellingly or as effectively as Howard's practical vision set out in *To-morrow*. What we wanted to know was, does anyone agree with us? And if not, is there another, better concept we are unaware of. With time running out we needed to test whether the detail and mechanics of these ideas still worked and, if not, be clear about what needs to be done to update them.

In the spirit of Howard's *To-morrow*, Tomorrow 125 aimed to bring together the latest thinking and practical solutions and create a holistic but practical framework to apply the Garden City idea to new and renewed towns and cities.

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## Project Approach

The Tomorrow 125 project consisted of a programme of collaborative projects, events and interventions exploring the Garden City idea, culminating in the development of a roadmap of practical actions, disseminated in 2023, the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of To-morrow.

The project took a collaborative approach. The TCPA acted as a curator of ideas, inviting contributions from other organisations and individuals, from which a practical framework was distilled. We sought to disrupt the current acceptance of bringing forward mediocre places which have poor outcomes for people just because we lack political will and have a development model which favours profit. Avoiding the approach of a commission or endless panel debates, the project was aligned with the TCPA's arts strategy and used a range of tools, events and interventions to engage a wide audience. The project was based around the following themes:

1. Designing for social justice (equality) including health and climate justice (reducing carbon)
2. Democracy and governance - who has power and what is the role of local people?
3. A new economy – exploring a mutualised/social/foundational economy to support themes one and two

The project was divided into three distinct stages:

### 1. Stage 1: Igniting the conversation (2021)

The first year of the project sought to start a public conversation about a hopeful future. The first stage set the scene, parameters and collaboration around the three themes to bring together the scope of ideas in these areas. Key activities and outputs in 2021 included:

**Establishing a project Sounding Board.** Members of the sounding board acted as 'critical friends' throughout the project and included:

- Kate Henderson
- David Lock CBE
- Kelvin MacDonald FAcSS FRTPI CIHCM FRSA
- Pamela Warhurst CBE

**Publishing a new project website:** <https://www.tomorrow125.org.uk/>

**Reviewing *To-morrow*, and the work of the key thinkers who shaped Howard's approach and of those who tried to implement his ideas over the last 120 years, in order to inform a Provocation Paper.**<sup>3</sup>

**Undertaking an online survey to gather initial thoughts about the Garden City idea.**<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> H Ellis and K Lock: The Garden City: Saviour or Dead End? Background Paper. TCPA, Sept. 2021. [https://www.tomorrow125.org.uk/downloads/T125\\_Background\\_Paper\\_V1.pdf](https://www.tomorrow125.org.uk/downloads/T125_Background_Paper_V1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The survey and findings are outlined in the Interim Report and on the Tomorrow 125 website at: <https://www.tomorrow125.org.uk/zones/school-university>



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**Collaborating with new partners to understand wider conversations about place, equality, and sustainable development.** Key partnerships at this stage included CENTRIS, Incredible Edible, COMPASS, and the New Economics Foundation, and Social Life.

**Exploring the relevance of the Garden City idea through the TCPA's practical project work in communities.** This included work with communities in Peterlee, Hull and Belfast.

- **Promoting the project at internal and external events and through informal interviews with interested organisations and individuals, to encourage engagement in the survey and provide input to the Interim Report.** This included discussions with the New Economics Foundation and Social Life.

### **Producing a series of videos on aspects of the Garden City idea.<sup>5</sup>**

Through our activities in 2021, we identified four high-level themes which provided a framework for steps to be taken in stage two:

- **Theme one:** The need to re-invigorate the Garden City as a framework for social transformation. The pursuit of this has informed the themes below.
- **Theme two:** Refreshing and enriching the foundational principles of the Garden City idea.
- **Theme three:** The importance of offering communities practical pathways to a hopeful future.
- **Theme four:** Rebuilding the Garden City 'brand' as a mainstream part of the civil society debate on progressive futures.

## **2. Stage 2: Testing and refining the ideas (2022-2023)**

The second stage of the project sought to develop work around the four themes identified in stage one. Activities for stage two were based on three focused areas of work:

1. **Strengthening and testing the three foundational principles of the Garden City idea through strategic partnerships.** This strand of work sought to engage other organisations who are thought leaders on issues related to the three foundational principles, draw in their expertise, test and refine our own thinking, and begin to build a coalition of support. Key activities and outputs included:
  - **Meeting with key organisations to test the ideas** and their thoughts on the foundation principles. This included: COMPASS, Incredible Edible, New Economics Foundation, The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES), Community Land Scotland and representatives from the private sector in relation to planning and development.

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<sup>5</sup> These are available on the TCPA website at: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/collection/tomorrow-125-films/>

- **Holding ‘expert’ roundtables on each of the foundational principles** to engage other experts including members of the TCPA’s Board of Trustees and Policy Council and using this information to update our description of the three foundational principles and outline models to apply them in practice.
- 2. Working with projects and places:** To help ensure the practical relevance of the Tomorrow 125 foundational principles, this workstream explored how these principles apply to the real-life challenges and processes of creating and regenerating places. Key activities included:
- **Peterlee:** Working with Peterlee Town Council, East Durham College, and other local stakeholders to explore the principles of the Garden City idea and how these could be applied to the development of a strategy for the future of Peterlee New Town. This included holding a workshop with college students and a musician, and a session on climate resilience and redesigning the town centre. The student’s outputs were shared at a Town Councillors meeting on the same day.
  - **Belfast:** The TCPA has been working with Take Back the City and partners in West Belfast who are seeking to develop a former industrial site into a non-sectarian, community-led new community. Work at this stage included visiting the site in August 2022 and running workshops on the Garden City Principles and how to embed them in proposals for the site.<sup>6</sup>
  - **Incredible Edible:** The TCPA ran an online workshop and informal interviews with members of the Incredible Edible network and explored whether the foundational principles could help with the further development of the network.
- 3. Understanding and rebuilding the Garden City ‘brand’:** Stage one identified the challenge of people’s divergent perceptions of the Garden City idea. This workstream sought to further interrogate perceptions of the Garden City term and idea in theory and practice. Key activities and outputs included:
- Using performances of Land of Promise combined with a workshop to share learning about the Garden City idea and gather understanding about perceptions in theory and practice. Promotion of these events on social media was tailored to assist in the rebuilding of the Garden City ‘brand’.<sup>7</sup> Events were held in:
    - Glastonbury Festival of Performing Arts, Somerset – Sunday 25 June 2022<sup>8</sup>
    - Conway Hall, London - 19 October 2022<sup>9</sup>
    - Hostry Festival, Norwich – 2 November 2022<sup>10</sup>
  - Publishing a myth-busting pamphlet<sup>11</sup> on Garden City Principles and accompanying animation to explain perceptions and myths.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Take Back the City: <https://www.takebackthecity.ie/>

<sup>7</sup> The programme for the Land Promise performances can be viewed at: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Land-of-Promise-Hostry-Festival-Programme.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> The relevant programme for the Glastonbury Festival of Performing Arts is available at: <https://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/line-up/line-up-2022/>

<sup>9</sup> Land of Promise; rediscovering the roots of a new society at Conway Hall: <https://www.conwayhall.org.uk/whats-on/event/land-of-promise-rediscovering-the-roots-of-a-new-society/>

<sup>10</sup> Land of Promise; rediscovering the roots of a new society at The Hostry Festival: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/event/land-of-promise-rediscovering-the-roots-of-a-new-society-at-hostry-festival-norwich/>

<sup>11</sup> *Garden City Myth-Buster*. TCPA, 2023. Available at <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/resources/garden-city-myth-buster/>

<sup>12</sup> *Myth-Buster Animation*. TCPA, 2023. Available at <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/resources/myth-buster-animation/>

- Publishing project update blogs (2022)<sup>13</sup> and (2023)<sup>14</sup>
- In 2023, the TCPA also commissioned a new graphical way to present the Garden City Principles.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Stage 3: Creating the final statement and promoting the ideas (2022-2024)

Stage three of the project had four key objectives:

- To galvanise support for the renewed Garden City idea with a view to influencing long-term change
- To provide support and resources to begin to implement these ideas in real places at the community level
- To provide an evidence base for the project to underpin ongoing work
- To mark the anniversary of *Tomorrow* and celebrate Howard's original work

These incorporated the ongoing and evolving tasks of refining the principles and rebuilding the Garden City brand. Testing the coherence and viability of the Garden City framework was vital and an ongoing process. These objectives were explored through three workstreams:

1. **A campaign for the renewed Garden City development model:** This workstream focused on articulating the Garden City framework in an accessible way and building a coalition of support for the approach. Key activities and outputs included:
  - a. **Creating campaign resources** including a provocation on what the new Garden City framework is. *Building the Future* was published in May 2023.<sup>16</sup>
  - b. **Online roundtable meetings** with planners, landowners, developers and third sector organisations to test the provocation, build support for it, and support its refinement.
  - c. **Promoting the provocation and ideas at external events** including the RTPI new communities conference, Letchworth Garden City – 6 June 2023<sup>17</sup> and the Eco City World Summit, London – 8 June 2023.<sup>18</sup> TCPA staff also spoke about the project at a number of events for students, planning lawyers, and practitioners.
  - d. **The Bournville Symposium**, Bournville - on 13 July 2023 (see **Box 1**)<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Back to the Future*. TCPA Bog by Ellis, H. January 13, 2022: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/back-to-the-future/>

<sup>14</sup> *Garden Cities – separating truth from myth*. Lock, K. 2023: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/garden-cities-separating-truth-from-myth/>

<sup>15</sup> The TCPA Garden City Principles can be viewed at: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/garden-city-principles/>

<sup>16</sup> *Building the Future. A Provocation Paper*. TCPA, May 2023: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/resources/building-the-future/>

<sup>17</sup> Further details of the conference can be found at: <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/events/2023/june/new-settlements-conference/>

<sup>18</sup> Further details of the summit can be found at: <https://www.ecocity-summit.com/>

<sup>19</sup> The programme and final agenda for the symposium can be viewed at: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/resources/bournville-125-symposium-programme/>

**Box 1: The Bournville Symposium**

On 13 July 2023 the TCPA curated a day of creative thought and practical action on the Garden City idea. The event was held in Bournville to link back to the history of the Garden City movement. In 1901, the Garden Cities Association (later the Town and Country Planning Association) held a conference aiming to make the Garden City vision a reality. In the spirit of this event, the TCPA, along with our project partners invited communities, charitable trusts and foundations, thought leaders and urbanists to Bournville to understand how to realise this vision today. This meant exploring whether we could agree on the basic building blocks of flourishing lives and then working to see what this meant in the context of real places.

This included hosting a ‘Utopia Café’, where facilitated conversations on the Foundational Principles of the Garden City idea were held, using the examples of the renewal of an existing New Town and the creation of a new Garden City as practical context. We heard perspectives from community organisers, politicians and campaigners. The day provided a rare opportunity to gather together in person and think creatively about the future. The programme for the day is available on the TCPA website.



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## 2. Demonstrating the practical value of the approach:

This workstream focused on showing what the Garden City framework means in practice, to demonstrate how the ideas work when applied to a specific place or development context and provide practical support and advice at the community level. Key outputs included:

- Producing ‘*Peterlee – a place to...bee*’ a prospectus for the future of Peterlee New Town based on the Garden City development framework<sup>20</sup>. This followed further workshops with Peterlee Town Council, Durham Council and other local stakeholders, including owners of Peterlee Town Centre and the Further Education College. It was the culmination of over 8 years work in the town, seeking to provide a tool to leverage in funding and change at the local level.
- In Belfast, the TCPA worked closely with Take Back the City and local partners on the framework for the masterplan for the new community. This included working with the team to integrate Garden City Principles into the masterplan and took part in judging a design competition. The TCPA has also been providing planning and advocacy support for the project.<sup>21</sup>
- Holding a webinar for the TCPA New Communities Group on what these ideas mean for the creation of new communities today. The session outlined the contents of ‘Our shared future’ and discussed the barriers and opportunities to implementing Garden City Principles through local strategic growth. The webinar was held on 5 December 2023.

## 3. Embedding the renewed Garden City development model in policy and practice:

This workstream focused on putting the Garden City idea at the heart of the political and professional debate about the future. The General Election, which is expected to be held in 2024, provided an opportune moment for the project. This workstream complemented the TCPA’s ongoing work with all political parties on what the first 100 days of a new Government might mean for housing, planning, the environment and social justice.

The Tomorrow 125 project also helped us rediscover the roots of the planning discipline. In doing so there emerged a clear need to restore and revive these ideas in planning and beyond to make the Garden City framework a reality. To achieve such a reality, the framework also needs to be applied in meaningful partnership with communities. This workstream sought to promote a revitalised objective for planners and related disciplines to make this happen. This was undertaken in two key workstreams:

### a. Influencing current parliamentarians and the future Government

The TCPA promoted the ideas in Tomorrow 125 in its talks with current and shadow Government officials. In January 2024 we published a White Paper for Homes and Communities, *Our shared future, which* provides a practical overview of the steps

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<sup>20</sup> *Peterlee: The Place to...Bee*. TCPA, 2023: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/resources/peterlee-the-place-to-bee/>

<sup>21</sup> The current masterplan for the site, including the 6 principles, is available at: <https://www.takebackthecity.ie/competition/masterplan>

Government needs to take to address the housing crisis. This wove key messages from the project and Foundational Principles, into a strategy based in political reality and sector evidence.<sup>22</sup> The White Paper was discussed at a webinar with the TCPA’s New Communities Group in December 2023, ahead of its publication in January 2024.

**b. Embedding the model with future planners**

A key aim of the third year of this project was to reinvigorate people’s passion for planning. We worked with planning schools to inspire a new generation of planners and built environment professionals to take forward the Garden City idea. This meant holding workshops with students at The University of Hertfordshire, Sheffield University, and University College London to explore the Foundational principles and what the Garden City framework means for planning.

**End of project event:** In January 2024 the TCPA held an end of project event to bring together many of those involved in Tomorrow 125 and the work of our project partners. It provided the opportunity to reflect on the learning from the project so far, discuss where we are going next, and how we might work together to make change happen. It also provided an opportunity to showcase some of the exciting community action we encountered over the past couple of years. The event included music from the Land of Promise performances and the first live performance of a poem commissioned as part of the event, *Housing with a Heart*, by Eileen Gbagbo.



Clockwise from top left: Land of Promise at Glastonbury Festival, June 2022; Campaigners at Take Back the City lead a seed-bombing and tour of the Mackie’s site in Belfast, August 2022; Eileen Gbagbo performs ‘Housing with a Heart’ at the end of project event, January 2024; Land of Promise at Conway Hall, London, October 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Our shared future - a TCPA White Paper for Homes and Communities. TCPA, 2024: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/resources/our-shared-future-a-tcpa-white-paper-for-homes-and-communities/>

## 2 Rediscovering the Garden City idea



## Introduction

The Tomorrow 125 project began with an ambition to reinstate the Garden City idea at the heart of the contemporary debate about the future. We set out, not to create a new version of Howard's ideas, but with perhaps the no less modest ambition to draw on them to create a contemporary practical framework for social transformation. In doing so, it has provided the TCPA with an opportunity to move into its 125<sup>th</sup> year with further clarity on the role of its foundations in informing its future.

There have been three core areas of learning from the process:

- A better understanding of the Garden City idea, its contemporary relevance and confidence in its role in social transformation and the future of the planning profession;
- Affirmation that the TCPA can play a useful role in applying these ideas in practice in places to both support people to thrive and illustrate the value of the Garden City idea;
- Hope – not only that these ideas are feasible, but that aspects of the Garden City idea are already being realised through community-led action worldwide.

## Garden Cities and planning for social transformation

Like any good story, expressions of the Garden City idea and its role in the transformation of our homes and communities, has changed over time, as it is retold by different voices and as our political, social and economic landscape has also changed. As outlined in the *Interim Report*, the TCPA's own narrative about Garden Cities over the past 125 years is no exception.

The Association's post 2011 election campaign for a new generation of Garden Cities has emphasised the importance of the holistic approach to development provided by the Garden City approach. The Garden City Principles, articulated in 2012 when referenced in national policy, have been the dominant focus of the campaign. The Principles are an ambitious set of principles for the planning, delivery and long-term stewardship of new settlements and urban renewal, articulated in a politically palatable way, to encourage traction with government at all levels. Our work on modernising the New Towns Act and efforts to influence revisions to the NPPF outlined the policy and legislative changes necessary to achieve wider benefits, but the focus has been on what can be achieved through our current delivery model.

Our wider narrative on Garden Cities, including complementary work on reconnecting art and planning, and projects such as Land of Promise, had already begun to open a door into a wider understanding and communication of the Garden City idea and its foundations. Tomorrow 125 provided the opportunity to wander through that door and explore what was inside.

Identifying and interrogating the Foundational Principles of the Garden City idea emphasised that it is about much more than a way of thinking about how we plan and deliver new communities.<sup>23</sup> It is evident that the principles of social transformation and thriving places are relevant to the wider live debate about social justice, democracy and the economy; a moral argument about how people should be treated and the structures which can both undermine and facilitate a fairer society.

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<sup>23</sup> *T125 Foundational Principles - Summary discussion papers*. TCPA, 2022: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/resources/t125-foundational-principles-summary-discussion-papers/>

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In exploring and testing these ideas with our project partners and other organisations who specialise in specific aspects of the foundational principles, it became clear that what sets the Garden City approach apart from others is the way these ideas are woven together and explored through the lens of place. As such, it allows for the ideas to be combined into a practical framework which takes these ideas from a theoretical debate to visible change in real places, something we have already been exploring through our work in Belfast and Peterlee. **Section 4** of this report outlines this framework. The extent to which this wider opportunity is recognised in the sector, politics and academia is explored further in **Section 3**.

Delving deeper into the roots of the Garden City movement and its fundamental role in the foundation of town planning also revealed the opportunity for the Garden City idea and pursuit of utopia to revive a profession in crisis, with planners as key agents of change. In an article published as part of the final year of Tomorrow 125, Hugh Ellis explored how overcoming the tension that was present in the early days of the movement can help us to refocus planning from the technocratic management of land and buildings, back to its roots in social transformation; ‘To have a useful and creative future, town planning has to re-make the relationship between its Utopian and Fabian roots – on the one side the power that a rational understanding of social conditions brings, and on the other the power of a moral philosophy of exploring the complexity of what it is to be human and then framing the ideal social conditions for human co-operation with the fullest measure of personal liberty’.<sup>24</sup>

The TCPA’s work on planning reform has always promoted a return to first principles in terms of practice. Tomorrow 125 has helped us to articulate how our utopian roots can help the future of planning practice; ‘the collapse of town planning as a creative discipline happened because we forgot a simple truth: planning is about reaching out for what ought to be, not accepting the failed conditions of the present’.<sup>25</sup> Working with planning students in the third year of the project highlighted how disconnected planning education has come from these roots. But the enthusiasm of academics and students in thinking about these ideas showed how things could be different. For the TCPA, it is now for us to explore what our role is in embedding these ideas into planning education and the profession more widely.

### **The TCPA as enabling social transformation through thriving places**

Holistic social change requires an evolution of the economy and democracy which is, of course, beyond the scope of the TCPA. However, by using the lens of place to demonstrate how these ideas can work in real places, we have a role to play in not only making the case for wider social transformation, but hopefully empowering people to make their homes and communities better in the meantime. The TCPA’s Strategy (2021-2025)<sup>26</sup> sets out the TCPA’s intention in this space. Tomorrow 125 has helped to inform how we can take these ideas forward through practical examples of community-led work, new partnerships and seeking to influence the next generation of planners. These ideas have already informed our policy outputs on new communities, with *Our Shared Future* specifying the need for community-led homes in New Towns, the role of Citizen’s Assemblies in the designation process, municipalised services, and how to improve local strategic growth. Our work with local authorities has, for some time,

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<sup>24</sup> Utopia - the wind in our sails or the ghost in the machine? *Town & Country Planning* November–December 2023 375-380 pp380

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. pp375.

<sup>26</sup> *Working to secure homes, places and communities where everyone can thrive*. TCPA, Jan. 2021. <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/strategyfinal.pdf>

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focused on supporting officers and elected members with training and guidance on policy and programmes. While this has touched on issues such as strong leadership and corporate commitments to the principles we are advocating, Tomorrow 125 has highlighted examples of local authority governance structures which can unlock wider social change, championed by organisations such as CLES. These propositions will be embedded in our activities as we seek to implement the principles outlined by this project.

### **Practical hope and the power of community-led action**

One of the most invigorating outcomes of the Tomorrow 125 project has been its legacy of practical hope. Revisiting our roots and identifying a framework for positive change is ambitious, potentially theoretical, with wider social transformation a long-term goal. In connecting with the tapestry of community-led action already making these ideas a reality we have been left confident that change is not only possible but, in some places, is already underway (**see Box 2**).

#### **Box 2 - Sources of hope**

Tomorrow 125 highlighted the value of community self-organisation and its important role in driving change. But, in relation to local food for example, this is often happening despite the local state and certainly outside traditional forms of democratic governance. These networks are emerging partly as a response to the failure of local democracy, but they illustrate the appetite in communities to find tangible solutions to the problems that confront them, from local food banks to community-led housing to local food growing.

The TCPA will continue to work at the community level to facilitate these processes. We will also continue to raise the profile of these examples and explore the extent to which these processes can be enabled and supported by local authorities and central government.

Ebenezer Howard began with the view that community-led action was the only way to make change happen. Frederic Osborn had moved the debate to a place which identified the state as a driving force and an enabler. Traction with the post-war New Towns programme demonstrated this opportunity. Colin Ward had advocated an anarchist approach to planning which was never accompanied by a huge policy shift but was embedded in policy and projects from Planning Aid to community-led housing. Tomorrow 125 has moved us to a position which recognises the essential role of the state to enable local action, through national structures which de-risk locally-led processes, and where national investment can unlock private funding and partnerships. It is a position which emphasises the power of local action, supported by democratic and economic structures which de-risk it. In the narrative round the role of large-scale new communities in managing the housing crisis, it is clear that community-led action alone will not build us a new town, but it will make our new towns thriving places to be.

The language of the utopian tradition had already been seeping into the TCPA's work, particularly through our performance piece *Land of Promise*. But for many people within the sector, it remains, as it did in the 1920s, a challenging proposition; one without relevance, based in fantasy, or the pursuit of the impossible. As we explore further in **Section 3**, sensitivity around language has been one of the perpetual themes of Tomorrow 125.

It is easy to understand why there might be scepticism. We are all busy, under pressure, dealing with current commitments and expectations. Most people do not have time in their daily working lives to dream about a better future. Tomorrow 125 provided an opportunity to do just that. Events such as Bournville125 provided the space for practitioners, decision-makers and community activists to share ideas about the better future and the practical steps to get there.

As such it has also reinvigorated the role of our utopian heritage in our contemporary campaigns. Our campaigns and outputs will always be grounded in evidence and pragmatism, but we will continue to seek to raise the standards and ambitions of those involved in transforming our neighbourhoods, towns and cities. We have a role to play in encouraging authorities and communities to raise their sights and ambition in a bid to move towards a healthier and socially just future.

Perhaps one of the biggest surprises about the project has been that so many people and organisations have been receptive to this. Whether that is due to the impact of the pandemic and wider global crises, or the immediate impact of the cost of living, it is hard to know. It feels, however, like many people are ready to think differently.

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### 3 Myths and realities

## Overcoming stigma about the Garden City idea



## Introduction

Reinstating the Garden City idea at the centre of the debate about how we can live better together is only possible if the idea is truly understood. The Tomorrow 125 project revealed that this requires not only clear communication to new audiences, but unpicking over a century of misunderstanding and myth which has become embedded in politics, practice and academia.

The *Interim Report* outlined the divergent views of the term Garden City, which fell broadly into the following categories: as key to our collective future; a historic curiosity; or merely hollow ‘green-washing’. The uncomfortable reality is that the Garden City idea is not well understood outside a small movement of committed individuals and that has not been helped by the adoption of the term Garden Communities to apply to a wide range of developments of varying quality. Howard’s hopeful ideas are rarely holistically applied, and despite political interest, are often invisible to the communities that need change the most.

As was the case in the 1920s, this misuse of the idea and perpetuation of myths has been a burden for the TCPA’s recent campaigns for a new generation of Garden Cities. For the TCPA, it has meant starting most conversations, presentations or publications with corrections and clarifications – a challenge for clear campaign messaging. Resources created through the Tomorrow 125 project – **a new graphic for the principles** and an **updated myth-buster and accompanying video** - have already proved useful tools to help us to promote the far more impressive and urgent reality: that the Garden City idea is one of the strongest tools we have available to enable a healthy, affordable and zero-carbon future.

We cannot claim the Tomorrow 125 project has resulted in a universal shift in perception of the term Garden City, but there have been several key areas of learning from the project in relation to addressing myths around the idea:

- **The TCPA can be clearer on its campaign messaging** in relation to the term and how it applies to wider areas of work. The right language is essential.
- **The Garden City idea remains a unique combination of proposals** and the TCPA is committed to the term. A variety of articulation of the principles are likely to be used to ensure political resonance.
- **Garden Cities will continue to go in and out of fashion politically, and that is OK.** Provided the foundations of the idea are present, this does not have to be a problem (for example, *Our Shared Future* states that New Towns must be underpinned by the Garden City Principles).
- **Whether intentionally or not, the built environment sector has embraced some of the Garden City principles.** The TCPA will continue to support those ambitiously committing to all the Principles, and must also continue to promote the holistic approach more widely.
- **There remains a continuum of opportunities to influence perceptions of the Garden City idea.** At one end are the people in the sector who will never overcome their ingrained perceptions. At the other are those – including young people and early career academics, practitioners and decision-makers - who provide an opportunity to inspire before myths are embedded.

The Tomorrow 125 project has highlighted how the TCPA's messaging on Garden Cities over time may have influenced perceptions. For example, alongside promoting the holistic approach of the Garden City Principles, in recent years the concept of land value capture has been core to our messaging. This approach was justified by the fact that it has also been one of the most challenging for the sector, with some, even enthusiastic local authorities and developers leaving it out of their own list of 'Garden [*insert 'place' term here*] Principles'. However, while this is one of the key elements that sets the Garden City approach apart from other models, it places emphasis on this point over other aspects of the idea. The Association's focus on Garden City Principles, driven by reference to the term in the National Planning Policy Framework since 2012, has facilitated traction with the idea in policy and practice (by December 2022, 24 adopted Local Plans included reference to Garden City Principles).<sup>27</sup> Conversely, the need to support authorities in maintaining support for these has perhaps restricted the Association's promotion of the wider opportunity of the Garden City idea. This project has highlighted the urgency to reiterate the core role of the Garden City idea in enabling a healthy, affordable and zero-carbon future.

With so much challenge to the term Garden City, Tomorrow 125 prompted us to revisit the question of whether a different term would be better. The TCPA has considered this prospect many times. History has shown that as a 'unique combination of proposals', changing the name has always in some way de-valued it. This is partly because it has allowed certain elements to be ignored (typically the more challenging ones - such as land-value capture). Tomorrow 125 emphasised that it is the weave of the Garden City idea, and its concern with place, which makes it powerful. As such the Association remains committed to the term but will continue to use different articulations to gain traction in campaigns.

Political engagement with the Garden City idea remains firmly in the context of the creation of new settlements, focused on design standards rather than social transformation. While there remains use of the term, there is an opportunity for the TCPA to promote the Foundational Principles and opportunity for a new approach to delivery. Traction with the term Garden City continues to change. At the time of writing political party manifestos have not been published for the forthcoming General Election. Discussion on new communities, or indeed housing in general, was missing from the Prime Minister's speech at the 2023 Conservative Party conference. There was no specific mention of new communities or large-scale development. While the Garden Communities programme continues, the party's trend to de-regulate housing to increase housing numbers suggests a move away from this approach. No funding for the Garden Communities programme was evident in the 2024 Spring Budget Statement<sup>28</sup>. This trajectory suggests the term Garden City may have a limited life in the Conservative party. But with over 24 local authorities with adopted local plans referencing the principles, this may not be something that can be ignored.

Meanwhile, the Labour party's commitment to New Towns expressed since the 2023 Labour Party conference, suggests a move away from the term Garden City. But at their party conference, the Liberal Democrats committed to building ten new Garden Cities. The standards on which either of these commitments would be developed in practice is currently not clear.

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<sup>27</sup> This research was undertaken to inform the TCPA's online stewardship toolkit: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/securing-long-term-stewardship-through-the-development-plan/>

<sup>28</sup> *Spring Budget 2024*. Policy Paper. HC 560. HM Treasury, March 2024: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spring-budget-2024/spring-budget-2024-html>

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In *Our Shared Future*, the TCPA sets out how a new generation of New Towns, or Garden Cities, can only be successful if they commit to achieving the Garden City Principles through the process to provide clarity on standards and outcomes. The New Towns Act is the mechanism to achieve this.

While there are commitments from some political parties to deliver new communities, as mentioned in the previous section, the likelihood of any government adopting the wider principles in relation to a new development model and planning as reaching for better, will always face the barrier. As identified in the *Interim Report*, the view from Westminster has for a long time been that town planning in general is a barrier to growth and should be de-regulated. The TCPA will continue to campaign for the Garden City idea to be embedded in national policy, by any name.

Since the Tomorrow 125 project started sector interest in Garden City Principles has continued. This is alongside continued suspicions and assumptions elsewhere in the sector about the meaning of Garden Cities and design issues such as density. Meanwhile, interest in ‘healthy placemaking’, ‘long-term stewardship’, ‘community-led housing’ and, of course, how we build places to net zero standards, continues to gain momentum, even among Garden City sceptics.

Many of the places that committed to the Garden City Principles are now getting to the detail, particularly on issues such as long-term stewardship. As places progress and are built out, they might give other places the confidence to adopt higher standards. But the legal challenge to the West Oxfordshire Local Plan on the basis of the Salt Cross Garden Village net zero commitments, demonstrates the barriers.<sup>29</sup> This highlights the urgency to demonstrate how a new development model would work in practice. While a focus on design standards rather than social justice is likely to perpetuate, we hope the Tomorrow 125 outputs and increased awareness more generally in the sector of social value positively contribute to shifting the narrative from design standards to outcomes for people. We remain confident that there is an opportunity to continue to embed these ideas in existing places and as part of a strategy for future homes and communities.

In terms of shifting perceptions of the Garden City model and its potential, it is with early career professionals we have identified the greatest opportunity. Teaching about Garden Cities at universities is likely to continue to perpetuate myths as long as those leading or delivering the source material subscribe to those myths.

Our workshops with universities through Tomorrow 125 showed a wider understanding of the roots of the idea and interest among course leaders in promoting the wider principles and utopian foundations of the Garden City idea and town planning more widely. This project has revealed to the TCPA a means to revive the planning profession as one about practical means for a more hopeful future. The Association is already in discussions with two universities about taking some of these ideas forward.

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<sup>29</sup> *Salt Cross: A Serious error of judgement*. TCPA Blog by Ellis, H. March 2023: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/planning-inspectorate-west-oxfordshire/>

# 4 A new development model

## Building the Future





### The new Garden City development model

The Tomorrow 125 project will only have been useful if it leads, in the end, to better outcomes for people and the planet. A key aspiration of the project was to provide a practical framework for a better future, one the TCPA could drive forward through its projects and campaigns, in collaboration with other organisations.

As set out in **Section 2**, the project revealed the need for an evolution of our current development model to facilitate the creation and renewal of homes and communities to enable places where everyone can thrive.

The outcome is a development model which we believe provides a framework for the foundation of thriving places. This is not a single imposed vision, or technical diagram, but a series of tests against which places can be measured and a direction towards which we can move. Our proposition paper *Building the Future* outlined what this new development model is trying to achieve.<sup>30</sup> An extract from this is provided in **Box 3**.

This sets out the vision for thriving places, to clarify what we are aiming for. It identifies a starting point for our decision-making and planning – that flourishing lives depend entirely on the restoration of nature and the long-term sustainability of the planet. This should guide decisions we make about the creation and renewal of our homes and communities. This is complemented by two other core foundations of flourishing lives; a shift of power to enable a meaningful and vibrant democracy; and 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 the economy meets the basic needs of everyone in a more equal way. Within these Foundations, it seeks to illustrate how everything from housing cooperatives and local food systems to community energy and citizens assemblies might fit into a wide pattern of change.

As such, it begins to show how the framework can be achieved through a variety of more detailed short, medium and long-term actions involving communities, practitioners, and decision-makers. 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.

There has been an understandable desire to illustrate this framework, as Howard did, with a detailed set of calculations and diagrams and plans. The reality is that the way this development model will be applied to real places will be bespoke to that development or community. As such we have sought to illustrate how the development model could work today, in specific real places through the examples of Peterlee and Belfast.

The TCPA's project to develop a *Repair Manual for England*, which follows the Tomorrow 125 project, will provide further illustration and guidance for different audiences including, we hope, communities, students, local authorities and potentially national Government in applying these ideas. The project and other steps for taking the Tomorrow 125 ideas forward is outlined in **Section 5**.

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<sup>30</sup> *Building the Future. A Provocation Paper*. TCPA, May 2023: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/resources/building-the-future/>

**Box. 3. The Garden City Development Model (Extract from ‘Building the Future’)****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.

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 planet.

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.

# 5 From practical hope to practical action

## Making it happen



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The Tomorrow 125 project has left the TCPA with feelings of both optimism and urgency for change. We are confident that the Garden City idea, and the Principles it is founded on are more relevant now, than ever.

In our 125<sup>th</sup> year we are keen to turn this practical hope into practical action. The Garden City Development Model articulated through the Tomorrow 125 project provides a foundation for this. We will continue to work with practitioners and policy makers to embed the Garden City Principles in policy and practice. But we will do so with a renewed confidence and without compromise of the importance of the holistic approach to enable a healthy and zero-carbon future.

We will address the urgency by seeking to expand our work at the community and place-based level. We have been inspired by the organisations, individuals and community groups who are also pursuing a fairer society and look forward to collaborating further. We hope further work with students and young professionals will help to embed these ideas in practice and in doing so, who knows, perhaps revitalise planning practice.

### **Embedding a new Garden City development model - Making it happen**

Recognising that evolving our economic and development model will not happen overnight, we have identified those actions we can take in the short, medium and long-term to move us towards the vision for flourishing lives in thriving places. Some of these activities were incorporated into the final year of the Tomorrow 125 project while others will be part of new projects and activities and subject to funding.

#### **Short-term actions:**

##### **Seeking to influence the next Government**

With the forthcoming General Election presenting an immediate opportunity for change, the TCPA's White Paper for homes and communities *Our Shared Future*, was published in January 2024. The paper proposes an approach to the delivery of large-scale new settlements and unlocking local strategic growth. By setting pre-conditions in relation to social housing, the use of Citizen's Assemblies, a requirement for community led housing, net-zero development and long-term stewardship, the paper embeds elements of the Garden City Development Model as an evolution of existing approaches to delivery, but within the parameters of a housing and delivery approach that is politically palatable. If a new government were to implement these approaches, the resulting development could, in theory, provide a precedent for further evolution of our current development model.

##### **Continuing our work with communities**

The TCPA is continuing to support communities in Belfast with work that seeks to redevelop the former Mackie's Site. We continue to support communities in Peterlee and in London through Planning Aid for London. We are actively seeking new projects at the community level through which we can further embed the Garden City Principles and Development Model.

##### **Garden City Repair Manual for England Part 1**

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In 2024 the TCPA secured funding for the first stage of a Garden City Repair Manual for England - a set of practical tools and guidance on how the foundational principles of the Garden City movement can be used to enable healthy lifestyles in thriving communities. Given the uncertainty posed by the General Election, the first stage of the repair manual is an online guide for communities, to be published in 2024.

### **Medium-term actions:**

#### **Garden City Repair Manual for England Parts 2-?**

Scoping for a local authority guide will start in 2024 to be published in 2025. Subject to funding, this will be followed by a guide for local authorities in 2025 and guides for different audiences to follow.

#### **Exploring opportunities with the TCPA governance and in relation to the revitalisation of planning**

Alongside continuing to promote these ideas and approaches in conversation with other organisations and at events and conferences, the team has been discussing opportunities for change with the Board and Policy Council. In particular, how to take forward the opportunity to use the utopian vision of planning as a means to revive the profession. From 2025 a new Corporate Strategy for the TCPA will be developed providing an opportunity to further embed the principles in the TCPA's objectives and activities.

#### **Demonstrating what change looks like**

Case studies shared through the repair manual will highlight opportunities, but demonstrating what change looks like through projects, partnerships and communications will continue to be a priority.

### **Long-term actions:**

#### **Building collaborative relationships with other organisations**

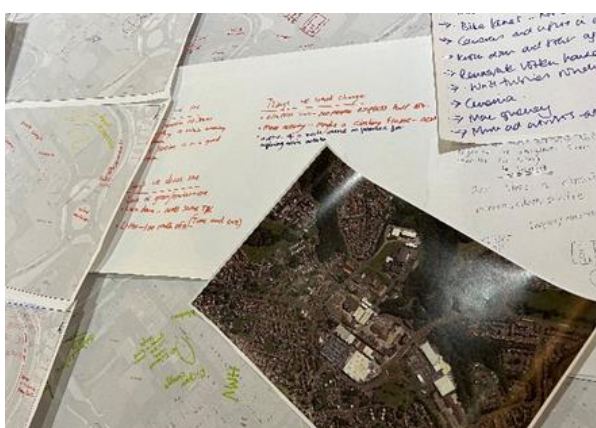
The 'two teabags to utopia' podcast (2021) highlighted that the competition for resources and profile between different organisations campaigning for change is a persistent barrier to achieving flourishing lives. Tomorrow 125 enabled us to develop relationships with like-minded organisations. Developing that into a wider coalition for change will take a long time but remains a longer-term objective.

#### **Empowering people to make change happen, themselves**

The TCPA's strategic plan identifies the opportunity for communities to be empowered to make change happen directly. We hope our repair manual, and continuing project development will assist in the process. Embedding these ideas with decision-makers is a long-term goal.

#### **Demonstrating what good looks like through the development of place**

The TCPA is continuing to talk to the development community about the opportunities of a new development model with a view to implementing these ideas in a real development. We will, optimistically, continue to explore opportunities to facilitate the development of a third Garden City.



*Practical hope in Peterlee: Image top left of the student workshop on the future of Peterlee Town Centre, October 2021. The ideas were shared with the town council and others and informed the prospectus published in December 2023.*