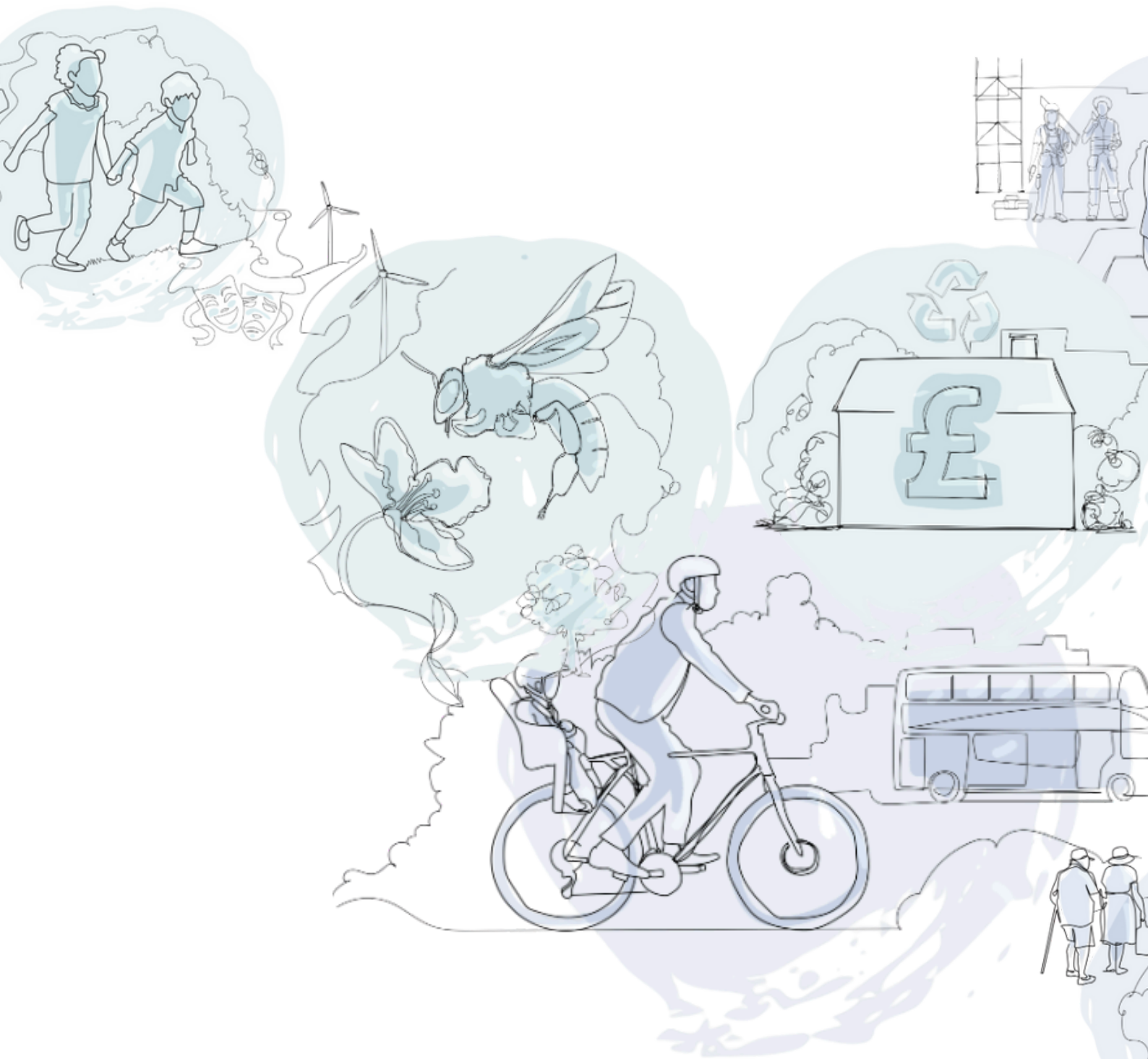

Working to secure homes, places and communities where everyone can thrive

The TCPA's strategy: January 2026 – December 2030



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Cover illustrations

Elements of the Garden City Principles, the TCPA's framework for the delivery of high-quality places (illustrations by Social Communications)

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1 Foreword

Ebenezer Howard, who founded what is today the Town and Country Planning Association in 1899, was known to be a ‘practical idealist’. In light of the challenges faced in relation to housing, climate, nature and health, there is a need to be ambitious and visionary, but also solutions focused. That powerful combination will continue to drive the work of the Association throughout the lifespan of this strategy and beyond.

Achieving our vision of homes, places and communities where everyone can thrive is not easy. But there are exciting opportunities ahead. Not least the government’s emphasis on new large-scale development. The Association will work to harness such opportunities, while also recognising the importance of regenerating existing places, and engaging local communities in work to shape a better future.

Planning has the potential to be visionary and transformational. As this strategy sets out, a democratic planning system is critically important to people’s mental and physical health and to securing our future prosperity. But so too are decisions outside of formal planning processes that influence places and communities. We will work to influence decision-makers at all levels, and to support communities, to improve people’s lives and the environment we all depend upon.



Andrew Pritchard
Chair of the Trustee Board

2 The impact of places on people's lives and the sustainability of our future

The built and natural environment have profound impacts on people's health, wellbeing and life chances. The built environment also has important impacts on our environment. And that means that a democratic planning system is critically important. While some may suggest the main focus of the planning is to allocate land for housing, it can and must do much more than that. When done well, planning is visionary, inspirational and transformational. But creating thriving places cannot be achieved by the statutory planning system alone – much of what makes a difference to local people happens outside of that system.

The link between housing and planning and people's health was foundational to the creation of planning as we know it. In a rush to build more housing, however, the quality of new homes and neighbourhoods has not been sufficiently prioritised. There is a housing crisis. But there are also health, climate and nature crises. High quality place making, for both new and existing communities, has the potential to help tackle all of these challenges. It also has the potential to make them worse.

Too often, development is being pitted against nature. Or people are arguing that interventions in response to climate change are getting in the way of growth. Development versus the environment is a false dichotomy. The work of the Association highlights that nature can be at the heart of development, and low carbon homes can be positive for the economy, environment and residents.

How well we plan, design and create new places and regenerate existing ones will help or hinder work to tackle health inequalities, climate change and economic resilience of places. So too will how places are managed and maintained over time. The impact of places on people's lives means that the work of the TCPA is more relevant than ever.



3 About us and what we have achieved

The Town and Country Planning Association is intertwined with the Garden City movement and the incredible legacy of the post-war New Towns programme, which today provide homes for over 2.8million people.

The founder of the Association, Ebenezer Howard understood the profound link between the built environment and people's quality of life. He set up what was originally called the Garden City Association in 1899, to help take forward his belief that there was a better way of delivering high quality and equitable environments and the homes, jobs and social connections people need. This vision for a different way of living led to the development of Letchworth and Welwyn Garden Cities and his values continue to underpin the TCPA and its work.

Frederic J Osborn is another key figure in the Association's history. Embracing Howard's cause of 'improving the conditions under which most people live, work and play... through the building of Garden Cities and New Towns', Osborn worked at the heart of the campaign that turned Garden Cities into the British New Towns movement.

Today we are a charity that works across the UK but also draws on international best practice. We strive to draw on the practical idealism of our founders and continue to recognise the incredible potential of the planning system as a powerful tool to transform places and people's lives. But we also recognise that the 'art and science' of planning, and our work, goes way beyond the formal planning system and recognises the multi-dimensional nature of place-making, including the important role of local communities.

As this strategy sets out, our work includes a mixture of campaigning, research, acting as a critical friend, training, influencing and enabling. Thousands of people engage with the workshops, conferences, webinars and seminars we run each year. And we work at the national, regional, local and community levels.



Peebles (Steve Talas)

It can take time to see the impact of our interventions, but our recent successes in influencing national policy include:

- Influencing the government to recognise the importance of new, large-scale communities in tackling the housing crisis. This was reflected in the establishment of a New Towns Taskforce and the initial response from the government in autumn 2025 to the Taskforce's report that reflected the Association's belief in the importance of high-quality place-making, public sector led Development Corporations and long term stewardship.
- Securing changes to government regulations that will require homes delivered via permitted development rights to have windows and meet minimum space standards.
- The reintroduction of strategic spatial planning through national legislation that makes explicit reference to people's health, health inequalities, sustainable development, and climate change.
- Securing changes to the Right to Buy in England, that should result in fewer homes for social rent being lost of the system and improving its availability to those in need.



New Towns All-Party Parliamentary Group inaugural meeting (TCPA)

Examples of the impact of our work with local authorities and communities include:

- In **South Tees**, we supported the appointment of a planning for health specialist who is directly influencing the emerging Local Plan for Middlesbrough. The Plan will guide development in the town until 2041 and therefore influence the health and wellbeing of the current and future population - currently around 144,000 people.
- Working to promote and embed the Healthy Homes principles at the local level. The principles are referenced explicated in the **Liverpool Housing Strategy 2025-2030** and **Lewes District Council's Housing Delivery Programme 2024 – 2028**. As the latter states, the programme will 'directly contribute to the needs of residents and those on the Housing Waiting List'.
- In **Lowestoft**, we supported a community group that is grappling with how the planning system can help provide a basis for community led climate resilience projects. The community faces unprecedented risks from flooding along with significant social exclusion and housing pressures. The work supported the community to participate more effectively in neighbourhood and local plans and to lobby parliamentarians and ministers on the need for changes to the metrics for how flood defence investment is allocated.

'The work of the TCPA is what inspired colleagues and I to take a much more ambitious approach to creating high quality, thriving new communities. Having been on TCPA study tours and as part of the New Communities Group, I concluded that there has to be a better approach than the planning by appeal we were seeing. I, of course, haven't done it alone! But this ambition is now reflected in the approach being taken at Langarth Garden Village, where the Council has acquired land, undertaken the masterplan and is now directly delivering infrastructure and new homes.'

Senior member of staff at Cornwall Council about the importance of the Association's work

4 What we stand for

The TCPA's vision is of homes, places and communities where everyone can thrive.

Our mission is to challenge, inspire and support people to create healthy, sustainable and resilient places that are fair for everyone.

To achieve our vision and mission we will be guided by our values, of being:

Inclusive

Collaborative

Practical

Creative

Bold



Hyde Park (Ellen Kerbey)

5 Our strategic priorities and what success looks like

The approach of the Garden City pioneers, who founded the Association, enabled the creation of beautifully designed and sustainable places for everyone. An important element of the model to achieve that was through reinvesting the wealth generated by development for the benefit of the whole community, as well as retaining ownership of community assets for the good of the community. Achieving social justice was, and remains, the driving ambition of the Garden City movement. The Garden City Principles are the practical articulation of this approach. Informed by them, the TCPA's strategic priorities are to work to:

Secure social justice by empowering people to participate in decisions that shape the future of places.

Create prosperous, inclusive and healthy new and renewed places with good quality, affordable homes for all.

Create nature rich and environmentally sustainable places that are resilient to climate change and will improve over time.

In addition to our outward facing strategic priorities, we also have several internal priorities to enable the TCPA to achieve its desired impact.



How we will achieve our priorities

Strategic priority 1 - Secure social justice by empowering people to participate in decisions that shape the future of places.

The TCPA is clear that involving people in shaping their local area improves the quality of new development and regeneration schemes. The purpose of planning and place-making should be to secure better outcomes for both people and the environment. To understand what constitutes better outcomes for people, planning needs to be democratic and fair. It cannot be a process that is done to people or communities.

This is particularly important as the Westminster government drives forward local government reform, which will result in fewer but larger local authorities, and the recreation of strategic planning. How communities are involved and represented within these structures, so they feel able to engage in decision making, will be important.

In recent years, there has been a continued emphasis on speeding up the planning system to deliver consents quickly. The Association believes the emphasis needs to shift back to the quality of outcomes, delivery of homes not just consents, and the transformational nature of planning. Planning needs to be rebuilt so that it has social justice and people embedded in it. And this also need to link to the rights of children.

Our work to achieve this priority will, therefore, include:

- Campaigning for the retention of democratic rights in all of the UK's planning systems.
- Working at the national and local levels to make planning more accessible, especially for those who are known to be less likely to engage with the process.
- Working with partners to rebuild both belief in, and the ability of, planning to be transformational. This will include working with planners, community groups and developers to promote good practice and tools for genuine co-creation, seek to secure culture change and promote the real benefits of meaningful community engagement.
- Seeking to tackle inequalities including through promoting the role of planning in tackling poverty and social exclusion and by working to embed equality and inclusion in plan making.

What success looks like

By the end of 2030 we will:

- have retained and enhanced democratic rights and accountability in all UK planning systems;
- be able to demonstrate we are providing more advice directly to community groups or individuals. This may be through written guidance, training or access to specific resources including toolkits; and
- be able to show that the English planning system is better equipped to create, and being used to secure, a socially just world.



Planning Aid for London

Strategic priority 2 - Create prosperous, inclusive and healthy new and renewed places with good quality, affordable homes for all.

The planning of new homes must sit within the context of place-making so the emphasis is on creating and renewing holistic communities. The government's commitment to a new generation of new towns presents an exciting opportunity to work to influence the creation of large scale, sustainable new communities that reflect the Garden City Principles and the learning from the post-war New Towns. But this must be in addition to regenerating existing places.

There is a need for more homes, but these must be homes that meet people's needs, in the right place and of a quality that support rather than undermine people's mental and physical health and wellbeing. They should also contribute to high-quality places that provide economic, social and environmental opportunities. Tackling the housing crisis is much more than simply a numbers game and genuinely affordable homes must be prioritised.

Our work to achieve this priority will, therefore, include:

- Campaigning to secure the policy changes and resources necessary to deliver high quality, genuinely affordable housing that meets people's needs.
- Working with public and private sector partners involved in enabling large scale new developments to deliver the homes people need in thriving, prosperous communities. This will include us continuing to advocate for mechanisms to effectively secure and reinvest values generated by the planning process, and acting as a trusted but critical friend to maximise the quality of these new places.
- Seeking to reduce health inequalities by continuing our work to reunite planning and health. This will include influencing at the local level so health priorities are reflected in plan making and working at the national and strategic levels to secure a planning framework that can strategically locate development in the most sustainable locations, therefore reducing car dependency.
- Working with partners at all levels to support the regeneration of existing places including the post-war New Towns.

What success looks like

By the end of 2030 we will:

- have helped secure more social housing in existing and new communities;
- be able to identify improvements to large scale developments, including the new generation of new towns, due to our advice, guidance, sharing of best practice and/or critical friend role;
- be able to demonstrate that we have helped decision makers, whether at the local, regional or national level, better understand the profound links between planning and health and embed that into planning and place-making; and
- be able to highlight specific examples of interventions by the Association that have supported the renewal of existing places.



Hazelmead (Bridport for Bridport Cohousing CLT; Barefoot Architects)

Strategic priority 3 - Create nature rich and environmentally sustainable places that are resilient to climate change and will improve over time.

The health of our planet underpins the health of the population and the ability of people and places to thrive. The Association is clear that we must work to help tackle both the nature and climate crises for current and future generations. The re-introduction of strategic planning presents an important opportunity for tackling these issues at a greater than local level.

Nature is intrinsically important but also delivers multiple benefits. It needs to be considered within new places, supported in existing places, and then maintained in the long term.

We know that the climate crisis is interlinked with the nature crisis but also represents a wide range of challenges for people and places. Threats posed by overheating as well as flood events continue to grow and we know these damaging outcomes continue to have the most severe impacts on the most vulnerable who may well be the least able to respond.

Our work to achieve this priority will, therefore, include:

- Continuing to advocate for planning systems that better prioritise climate action. In parallel to that, we will also provide advice, guidance, resources and training about how the planning system can best be used to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- Working to promote the importance of, and embed within schemes, long term stewardship.
- Continuing to work to raise awareness of the multiple benefits of green infrastructure, while also placing an increased emphasis on the importance of supporting nature recovery, including through creating and maintaining greenspaces within urban areas.

What success looks like

By the end of 2030 we will:

- continue to be seen as a leader in the field of advocating for, and providing advice and guidance on, planning for the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change;
- be able to highlight examples of where long-term stewardship has been embedded within schemes. Ideally this will be in both new and existing places; and
- be able to show that planning systems in the UK are better able to secure nature-rich and climate resilient development. This could include work at all levels, including strategic and neighbourhood.



6 Internal priorities to support the delivery of our strategy

As a relatively small organisation, achieving our strategic priorities will require us to work in partnership, secure essential funding and continue to increase our reach and impact. During the period of this strategy there is an ambition that we will work more directly with communities as well as continuing to campaign at the national level.

Our staff team is our biggest asset and we will support them through necessary training and development. As the team continues to work flexibly, an emphasis will be placed on working to make sure we have an inclusive, supportive and productive team culture. We will also continue to reflect best practice approaches to management and governance.

We will know we have achieved important internal priorities by the end of the strategic plan if we have:

- improved our ability to monitor and communicate the impact of our work;
- demonstrably increased our project work that engages directly with communities and grassroot networks;
- implemented ways of working that support the staff team to work both flexibly and effectively together;
- a well governed organisation with a diverse and high performing Board of Trustees advised by a diverse and engaged Policy Council;
- engaged a wide range of organisations, including at both local and national levels, in our campaigns, research and training;
- secured new multi-year funding agreements that enable us to focus more on our strategic priorities; and
- internal and external communications that have supported the delivery of our strategic objectives, including our need to grow and diversify our membership.



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