

A new generation of garden cities: A future inspired by the landscape

Support for a new generation of garden cities

The Government's call for new, locally-led, garden cities is welcomed by the Landscape Institute, as part of a range of measures aimed at increasing housing supply. Garden cities provide an exciting opportunity to encourage a revolution in the way we plan and deliver new communities, with truly sustainable lifestyles as the new imperative. To achieve this, the new generation of garden cities must demonstrate the very best in landscape planning and design, from the outset of their development. By adopting this landscape-led approach, change in the landscape is not to be feared, and we will make the most of our precious land resource.

Learning from the past to ensure that new garden cities are fit for the future

Founded on utopian principles and envisioned in Ebenezer Howard's influential text *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, the original Garden Cities Movement provided a response to issues of urban housing and poor health at the end of the 19th century. Garden cities of the future must similarly respond to current issues, but also need to address the challenges of sustainability and climate change, and respond to 21st century society's needs, expectations and aspirations. To meet these challenges the Landscape Institute has identified five guiding principles which we believe must be followed to ensure that new garden cities are fit for the 21st century and beyond.

The Landscape Institute's five principles for landscape-led garden cities

The Landscape Institute's support for a new generation of garden cities is conditional upon the adoption of a landscape-led approach. Regardless of their location and scale, new garden cities must set the benchmark for the development of sustainable new communities across the UK. Achieving this will require the application of the following principles:

Principle 1 – Start with the landscape

The vision for any new garden city must first and foremost be informed by an understanding of the characteristics unique to its specific location; its local landscape character. These include natural factors, such as landform, hydrology, biodiversity, geology, soils and climate, and also human influences such as historic and current land use and the perceptions of the local community. A vision and masterplan that works with, rather than against, these factors will root garden cities firmly in their landscape context and provide a strong sense of local character to which people can relate.

Principle 2 – Work within the landscape

Garden cities must respond positively to the opportunities provided by their environment. Layout, form, open spaces, architecture and choice of materials must reflect landscape context and help create a distinctive character and a sense of identity for the new communities. Designing with nature, through a green infrastructure approach, will deliver a whole host of benefits, such as reducing the risk of flooding, enabling wildlife to flourish, cleansing air and water, providing space to grow food and making new garden cities more liveable. A green infrastructure approach will also make garden cities more resilient to a changing climate and capable of mitigating and adapting to its effects.

Principle 3 – Develop a positive relationship between town and country

Setting the limits of built development from the outset will prevent future suburban sprawl; new garden cities must avoid development on the best and most versatile agricultural land in the interest of future food and farming. The surrounding rural areas must supply space for leisure activities and the secure production of local food, renewable energy and building materials, soils to capture carbon and conserve water, trees and plants to cool the air and improve air quality, and access to open countryside to allow local communities to engage with nature.

Principle 4 – Build a place worth living...for life

Garden cities must provide a 'home for life'. They must be designed to be adaptable, dynamic, exciting and beautiful places that delight residents, workers and visitors. They must be resilient in the face of changing weather patterns and flexible enough to respond to the depletion of natural resources and demographic and lifestyle changes over time. A wide diversity of compact self-contained neighbourhoods designed around urban village centres, providing a variety of energy efficient house types and tenures, will encourage individuals and families to settle and stay, building distinctive identities for local communities over time. Garden Cities must be great places to grow up in, to learn and work in, and for people to live in for the rest of their lives.

Principle 5 – Create vibrant places

Garden cities must have landscape at their heart and be teeming with wildlife. A generous and well maintained network of public realm that serves multiple purposes for meeting, relaxing, growing food and social interaction, will help build civic pride and enjoyment. Parks and outdoor facilities, as well as access to nature, will encourage healthy lifestyles and community wellbeing. Reserving land for low carbon energy production and recycling, water and flood risk management and prioritising pedestrian and cycle movement, as well as excluding cars in places, will underpin the provision of sustainable, attractive and popular places to live.

The Landscape Institute

The Landscape Institute is the royal chartered body for landscape architects. We are a professional organisation and educational charity working to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for the public benefit. We work to improve the planning, design and management of urban and rural landscapes. Through our advocacy programmes and support to our 6,000 members we champion landscape, and the landscape architecture profession, in order to inspire great places where people want to live, work and visit.

