

The International Garden Cities Institute

Academic Director's Blog

International Garden Cities Institute

November-December 2019

Hello! The weather has become more wintery since I last wrote in September-October 2019, with grey skies, bare trees, and damp conditions now more prevalent. Nonetheless here at the International Garden Cities Institute we are making use of the oncoming winter period to advance a number of (indoor!) garden city research projects and events. It has been a busy time as always.

One very important external event has been the recent UK elections. As always before a national election I reviewed each of the Parties' manifestos to see what they say about garden cities and this time it seemed that direct mentions were thin on the ground. At the same time, there were promising (if more indirect or generalised) statements about housing, regeneration, placemaking and sustainability from both the (recently returned) government and the opposition parties.

As a backdrop too, of course, there are a number of garden settlements underway in the United Kingdom. It has been interesting to see that some analysis of these – and progress generally – on new garden settlements is now emerging from both the academic and policy community. A fascinating recent news report by Laura Edgar in *The Planner*, based on research by Lichfields, [How Does Your Garden Grow? A Stock Take on Planning for the Government's Garden Communities Programme](#) argues in relation to [garden communities](#) that the timescale need to deliver new communities at scale may well mean that results will take some years to make an impact:

'The government's garden communities programme is expected to contribute more than 400,000 homes to its target to deliver 300,000 homes a year, but it could take five years before the programme has enough momentum to make a 'significant' contribution.'

Lichfields derives a number of interesting points from their research, having 'reviewed all 49 Garden Communities to establish a baseline to understand and assess the programme in the future'.

Unpacking what this delivery will mean they suggest that

'We find it is currently set to provide 403,000 homes, up to 182 new primary schools and 56 secondary schools, and 600 or more hectares of employment land - supporting 1.3m additional jobs to 2050.'

It is the areas of ambiguity in relation to housing delivery and the 'template for development' that are notable in this review and analysis. As Lichfields comment

However, there is some uncertainty, with 30% of homes yet to achieve formal planning status and two thirds still needing to establish the principle of development. Many Local Plans rely heavily on Garden Communities to sustain their housing requirements, but the

programme is unlikely to reach critical mass of delivery until the 2030s. It also plays a dual role: endorsing the promotion of strategic sites; and supporting the implementation of extant permissions, but there is no particular template for the developments it supports'

This conclusion does seem to echo a point made by Keith Boyfield and I in our Garden Cities Perspectives Paper, [Garden Cities: Why Not?](#), from 2016 where we noted that the relatively small scale of delivery at that point remained a barrier to implementation to respond to increasing housing need within a place-based approach.

Moving on to review some other International Garden City Institute activities over November-December, I was lucky enough in November have the opportunity to return to Grenoble to take part in a teaching exchange funded by the [ERASMUS+ programme](#) and hosted by garden city scholar, Dr Stéphane Sadoux, who is Director of the [Building Cultures Lab](#) at the Grenoble School of Architecture. It was, as always when travelling to Grenoble, good to be able to go by train, and be deposited in the middle of Grenoble, with just a further tram ride to reach the Lab. This was an opportunity to explore food and cities issues including in relation to garden cities past, present and future, with a highly engaged class of architecture students who are studying urbanism and planning facets of garden cities and new towns as part of their academic work this year. I had hosted some of the same student group a couple of weeks earlier when we undertook a shared field trip to look at some of the new town inheritors of garden city principles in Hertfordshire.

Also early in November, I was invited to speak to Transition Town Letchworth about the Edible Cities Network research project ('EdiCitNet' for short) which we are currently conducting in Letchworth as part of a much wider consortium of cities, NGOs and university partners. This was a great session with some excellent questions and discussion about food and garden cities – especially thinking about social and environmental sustainability aspects – and insights from the participants were incredibly useful.

Later in November the [EdiCitNet](#) 'City Team' from Letchworth was very kindly hosted on a field trip to Brighton by the fantastic Vic Borrell who runs the [Brighton and Hove Food Partnership](#) and incredibly knowledgeable Dr Katrin Bohn, expert architect and food researcher and practitioner from the University of Brighton (do check out Katrin's pioneering work with Prof Andre Viljoen on '[continuous productive urban landscapes](#)'). It was an excellent field trip in which we had the opportunity to visit community based food initiatives including a community kitchen near Brighton train station, a school orchard and food garden in a housing estate area on the edge of Brighton, a community garden in a popular local park, composting initiatives, and a community run pub and productive garden in a garden suburb, again on Brighton's fringes. We also had the chance to with Vic and Katrin to explore lessons from their experience that we will be able to pick up on in developing 'edible city solutions' in Letchworth.

Another highlight in a busy November was travelling to Dorchester to give a detailed talk about garden cities to the Dorchester Civic Society. Exploring the topic [Dorchester 2050: Garden Villages – visionary, viable and popular?](#) I discussed with a terrific audience the evolution of garden cities, and issues about garden cities today and into the future with a specific focus on how that might 'play out' in Dorchester.

In early December, the University of Hertfordshire and Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation's Knowledge Exchange PhD scholar, Ms Amélie André also gave an excellent garden cities and food focused presentation as part of the UH Urbanism Unit and Smart Mobility Research Unit seminar programme that we run each year at the University of Hertfordshire. Amélie discussed

her wealth of primary research results from mapping the food system in Letchworth and exploring possibilities for food-based initiatives in the spirit of Ebenezer Howard's food economy ideas as set out in his book, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. With beautifully illustrated and analysed material, Amélie provided a real masterclass on garden city food issues and possibilities today. It reflected why Amélie recently won the UH Life and Medical Sciences postgraduate student of the year award – a richly deserved honour given Amélie's really excellent garden cities applied research. Then, later in December I was able to work with geography students at UH to look at the development of 'ideal communities' including garden cities as part of their undergraduate course in urban social geography, planning and development.

Another presentation in December was in the form of two lectures which I delivered in London to the Sino Bridge delegation visiting from China's Shandong Provincial Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development which included senior officials from local authorities across Shandong Province. This fascinating group led by Mr Tao Yin, the Second-level Counsel was keen to know more about Revitalising Rural Areas and Better Planning and development of small towns. Responding to the delegation's study focus I first explored garden city history and contemporary practices, and then moved on to consider current strategy and policy for garden cities in the UK – all with these rural and small town research concerns in mind.

Finally, an early Christmas present was the Town and Country Planning Association's new practice guide on [Edible Garden Cities](#), now released on their website. As I helped to provide content for this guide, working with the RTPI earlier in 2019, I was very pleasing that this highly applied guide is now available for garden city planners today. Please do read through if you can – there is lots of good stuff there!

In signing off this year's final blog, I want to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I'll be in touch in early 2020 with more news from the International Garden Cities Institute.

Associate Professor Susan Parham