



The Wolfson Prize

Under the barren rule of the NPPF, spatial planning and any ambition to design a sense of place have virtually ceased to exist. The Wolfson prize for options for a new garden city is, as a result, the most exciting project in town and country planning in a long while.

Designing a city from scratch is clearly a joy. Whether new cities are deliverable is largely a political matter. It is also a question of convincing existing communities of the merits of a new city – perhaps an impossible task. People also need to be persuaded to invest, not just landowners and developers, but the residents who will move into the city.

A number of the Wolfson bids play close attention to financial and community investment. The URBED bid makes good use of land by proposing urban extensions (the Uxcester proposal is worth reading). Wei Yang makes a case for brownfield development, before ruining its argument by arguing green belt and local conservation sites should be up for grabs. Shelter is the only entrant to name a specific site for a new city – the Hoo Peninsular.

Whether a new garden city is built or not, it is probable the ideas incorporated into the entries to the Wolfson Prize will feed into developers' plans for some time to come. That will surely be better than the often lacklustre planning proposals that we currently see day to day?

The Shortlist

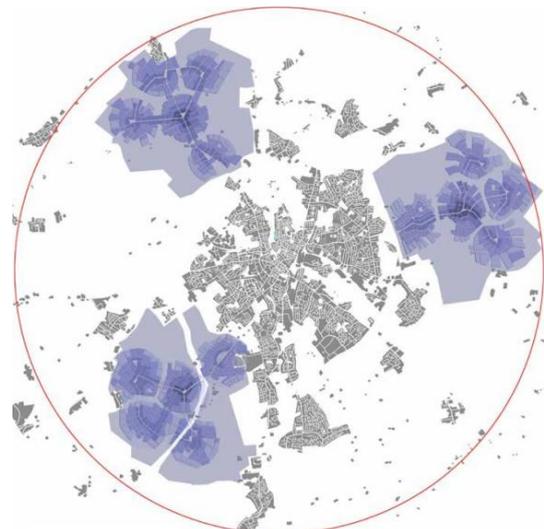
Five proposals have been shortlisted from 279 entries for the £250,000 Wolfson Economics Prize 2014. The competition is seeking ideas to deliver a new garden city which is visionary, economically viable and popular. The five proposals shortlisted have until 11 August to submit further details [B](#) [B](#) [A](#) [J](#) [P](#) [I](#) [B](#) [G](#) [C](#) [C](#) [C](#). Mayfield Market Town in Sussex failed to make the shortlist [C](#).

Barton Willmore put forward a ten-point plan:

We envisage a city that is beautiful due to its relationship with nature, the rhythm, proportion and scale of its buildings and spaces... We want to create a city that celebrates its gritty bits as well as its beauty and recognises the need for both.

The bid argues for a cross-party consensus on a National Spatial Plan that identifies garden city locations. Garden City Mayors, heading up Garden City Commissions, will be champions and find specific locations for development. The best locations will be within the economic zone of major cities. Planning permission will be awarded through the national infrastructure regime or by using local development orders.

URBED calls for the doubling in size of an existing town or city to accommodate an eventual population of 400,000 (slightly smaller than Bristol). It is the only shortlisted proposal to say that a new city can't be built from scratch. The bid is illustrated in some detail around a fictional town called Uxcester. One option explored is to add three urban extensions of 50,000 people within a 10km radius of existing centre. The extensions are configured as triangles with the point touching the edge of the settlement. The concept is that for every hectare of development another will be given back to the city as accessible public space, forests, lakes, country parks, etc. Each of the satellite extensions would be served by a tram or rapid transit bus.



Uxcester

URBED calls for an incremental and flexible approach to planning the extensions:

Planning a new town is like designing a sand dune, no matter how skilled we are it somehow feels wrong...

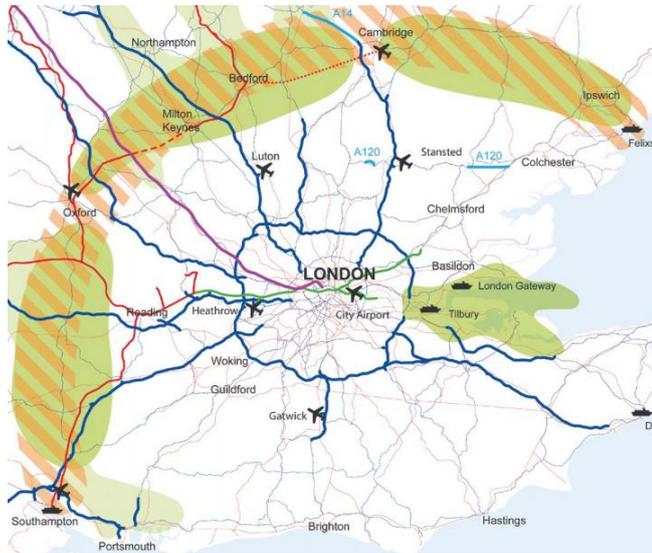
Environmental and sustainability standards should be embedded in planning from the outset and enshrined in a Sustainability Charter that sets these targets in perpetuity. URBED is considering whether to apply its Uxcester model to a real place in its second stage submission [C](#).

Golding Homes says a garden city should accommodate 30,000 to 40,000 people, about the size of Letchworth. Delivery should be led by Garden City Development Corporations and planning should be under the New Towns Act or the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project route. Golding uses as an exemplar its proposal for a 5,000-home satellite **garden suburb** near Maidstone.



Potential garden suburb site near Maidstone

Wei Yang & Partners argue in a strategic bid that the best location for new garden cities is in a “golden arc of opportunity” stretching from Portsmouth to Oxford and to Cambridge and Felixstowe, with the best opportunities lying between Oxford and Cambridge.



The “arc of opportunity” (striped)

Wei Yang & Partners say the government should publish a New Garden Cities Strategy with a 30-year timescale identifying broad areas of search for suitable locations. They say there is no reason why new garden cities or suburbs can’t be built on derelict, damaged and despoiled land. Former airfields, defence sites and decommissioned major infrastructure sites could also be used but would need more investment in transport infrastructure.

Areas of high nature conservation value should be avoided but planning policy designations should not necessarily be taken as inviolate. Sensitive review of designations (including green belt, local countryside protection policies, low grade nature conservation policies, etc.) allows judgements to be made about the merits of development versus preservation.

Shelter is the only shortlisted bidder to name a specific site – the Hoo Peninsula, Medway, Kent.

Although it is only theoretical, we believe that a new garden city in Medway has the potential to offer the existing community genuinely affordable homes for their children, as well as new schools, parks, jobs, transport links and more to benefit the whole area.

The garden city would begin with Stoke Harbour, a settlement of up to 48,000 people, which would initiate a larger cluster of settlements totalling 150,000 people – about the size of Oxford. A new train line to Gravesend would connect with HS1. Shelter proposes massive private investment for the provision of high quality homes, jobs, services and infrastructure. The delivery model prioritises speed and volume, and aims to acquire land at low cost and transfer valuable assets to a Community Trust. Local people would be offered shares in the city. A third of homes would be available for social rent. Others would be purchased through shared ownership schemes. Houseboats and self-build dwellings would be encouraged.



Shelter’s proposal for the Hoo Peninsular

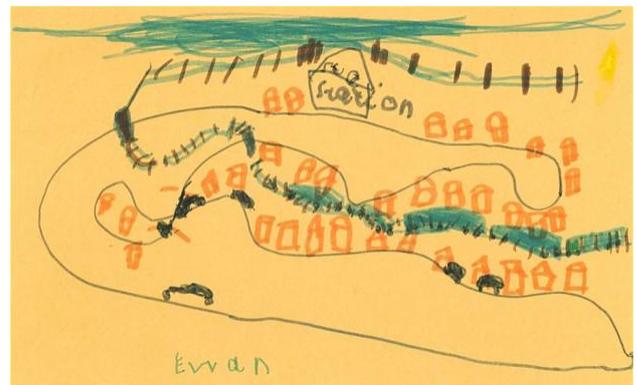
Opinion

Public support. A poll run by the Wolfson Prize found that three-quarters (74%) of Britons think garden cities are a good way of solving the housing crisis. Asked whether garden cities would protect more countryside from development than alternatives, 68% agreed, only 14% disagreed. Simon Wolfson, founder of the Wolfson Economics Prize, said: “It is particularly interesting that older generations, more than others, support the building of new homes with gardens. Naturally, they aspire for their children and grandchildren to live in the quality of homes they themselves have enjoyed” [AJ](#) [X](#).

Reaction

CPRE said the shortlisted schemes overlooked the main housing challenges. Shaun Spiers said: “At present the Government’s planning approach, which too often involves imposing large developments on local communities through planning appeals, is not working. Garden cities may be part of the solution to our housing crisis, but only if they are locally supported, help regenerate our existing cities and provide significant amounts of genuinely affordable housing” [CPRE](#).

Planner David Locke said that for new garden cities to secure permission, they would either have to be a “rebranding of something already in a local plan” or a proposal that would “have to go through the next local plan cycle.” He warned the current plans risk repeating the mistakes of Labour’s eco town project, of which only three are being built. Locke’s own submission to the Prize was not shortlisted [P](#).



The entry from six-year old Ewan Frearson

The Queen's Speech

Overview. A plastic bag levy, freedom for fracking companies to drill under land without permission and further changes to the planning regime feature in the programme for the final session of this coalition parliament. The government also promised to speed up planning permission procedures, “whilst protecting environmental safeguards” [P](#) [C](#) [24](#) [C](#) [C](#).

The Infrastructure Bill

A new Infrastructure Bill will “bolster investment in infrastructure and reform planning law to improve economic competitiveness” [P](#) [C](#). The bill had its first reading in the House of Lords on 5 June and its second reading is due shortly [C](#) [C](#) [C](#) [C](#).

The Highways Agency will be turned into a government owned company, as previously announced. Ralph Smyth for CPRE said: “We are deeply concerned by such a mad dash for roads reform – yet another threat to our countryside from ill-thought infrastructure plans” [C](#) [C](#).

Species Control Orders will be introduced to control invasive, non-native species that pose serious threats to biodiversity, the water environment and infrastructure.

NSIPs. Only two inspectors will now examine nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) instead of three. They will be appointed as soon as an application has been accepted. Changes to Development Consent Orders, which give permission for NSIPs to proceed, will be simplified.

Planning conditions. Many planning applications attract pre-commencement conditions. The government proposes that these will be waived if planning authorities fail to discharge them in a timely manner. Conditions often relate to development details, which arguably should have been in the original planning application. With a shortage of planning staff in many local authorities, the new rules could lead to a lack of control over details of developments, such as design, materials used, landscaping and flood mitigation [C](#). The government will consult on the details of this measure shortly.

Fracking. Subject to consultation, the bill will also support the development of gas and oil from shale, “streamlining” the underground access regime to the oil and gas [C](#) [C](#) [C](#). Once the [current consultation](#) is complete, the government will add clauses to the bill to grant underground access rights to companies extracting petroleum or geothermal energy from at least 300 metres below the surface. The consultation proposes a “public notification system”, under which shale gas firms would outline matters such as the “relevant area of underground land, coupled with details on the payment that will be made in return for the access.” The consultation closes on 24 August [P](#) [C](#). Prior to the Queen's Speech, Cuadrilla threatened to pull out of fracking in the UK if the law is not changed to allow it to drill under people's homes without their permission [T](#).

Electricity. The bill will give communities the right to buy a stake in their local renewable electricity scheme – the Community Electricity Right.

Land Registry. The bill will allow the Registry to take on statutory responsibility for the Local Land Charges register. An extension of powers will also allow it to play a wider role in the property market.

Other Proposals

Ebbsfleet. Secondary legislation will “allow for a locally supported garden city to be built in Ebbsfleet, backed by an urban development corporation.”

Plastic bag levy. A 5p charge will be levied on single-use plastic carrier bags in England from October 2015. Retailers will be expected to donate the proceeds of the charge to good causes. Small and medium-sized businesses exempt from applying the charge. The government will consider exemptions for “a genuinely biodegradable bag that meets defined criteria and can be identified and separated in waste recovery and treatment operations” after further research. Friends of the Earth said: “A plastic bag charge is simply a fig leaf to try and hide the Government's increasingly exposed and withered green credentials” [C](#).

Zero carbon homes. The Zero Carbon Homes standard will be set at Level 5, not Level 6, of the Code for Sustainable Homes. The legislation will allow developers to build to Level 4 if they offset through allowable solutions to achieve Code 5. Small housebuilders will be exempt from meeting zero carbon standards [P](#) [C](#). CPRE's Shaun Spiers, said: “It is bizarre that in the midst of a national debate about how to meet out energy needs the Government is relaxing rules so that house builders can build new homes that leak energy” [C](#) [C](#).

National Parks. The draft governance of national parks and broads bill will allow local elections to appoint some of the board members who run national parks and the broads. Local authorities will also be freed from the political balance rule if it allows them to appoint someone who represents a local ward. Parish councils will be allowed to nominate representatives who are not members of the council. The bill is unlikely to be introduced before the 2015 general election. Margaret Paren, chairman of the South Downs National Park Authority gave a cautious welcome to the proposals [BBC](#).

S106. The government has confirmed it will scale back S106 agreements on small sites, a move widely expected to reduce affordable housebuilding in rural areas (see [IH](#)).

Self-build. The government proposes a £150 million repayable fund to support up to 10,000 new service plots for custom-build homes. It will consult on how to implement a new Right to Build to give custom-builders the right to land in their local area.

Permitted development rights. The government will amend secondary legislation to “further reform change of use rules to make it easier for empty and redundant buildings to be converted into productive use, supporting brownfield regeneration and... new homes.”

The CPRE eBulletins

CPRE South East eBulletin is independently written and edited by Andy Boddington: cprenews@andyboddington.co.uk. Views expressed in the eBulletin and its editorial approach are those of its editor and not any part of CPRE.

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