

Where's 'Next' for London

2014 Wolfson Economics Prize Finalists James Goss and Jenni Montgomery reflect on their submission to the Garden City prize and its relevance to the Capital

With the previous edition of *Planning in London* chock full of views on the Green Belt, Garden Cities and densification of housing in the Capital, there would seem to be little obvious scope for exploring alternative opinions on the subject.

Indeed we find much to applaud in the detailed analysis presented by Prof Paul Cheshire into the relevance of the Metropolitan Green belt, viewed it would seem as a 'preservationist straight jacket' in the context of the housing crisis and affordability dilemma faced by millions (including would-be) householders across the UK today.

Dr Nicholas Falk in his practice Urbed's successfully short-listed entry to Wolfson and less directly through stating the case for metropolitan urban extensions in the last edition of *PIL* offers the fundamental view that it is 'probably impossible to create a garden city of any scale from scratch'¹ and argues for the identification of donor cities, nominated through a process of national-municipal competitions for Garden City status.

Whilst acknowledging the role that urban extensions (including those of the scale identified by Urbed) will play in meeting the delivery of new homes, our submission recognises the growth pattern of London, formed historically from a collection of villages, as the primary module for trusted, valued growth of settlement form in the UK.

The notion that (admittedly on an accelerated timescale) new places of scale, either in London or across the regions, are incapable of attracting investment from patient capital or pioneer householders due to insufficient existing community capital (built, social, economic and environmental²) seems an

unnecessarily narrow view of settlement foundation. Even in relatively recent history.

Instead we recognise that for new Garden Cities to become a successful solution to both the Capital's and the Nation's housing crisis, a toolbox of diverse growth models should be accommodated under the metaphor of the Garden City umbrella. Although this wider view may not prove popular nor the easiest route to the delivery of new homes, equally the solution is unlikely to lie in a one size fits all model.

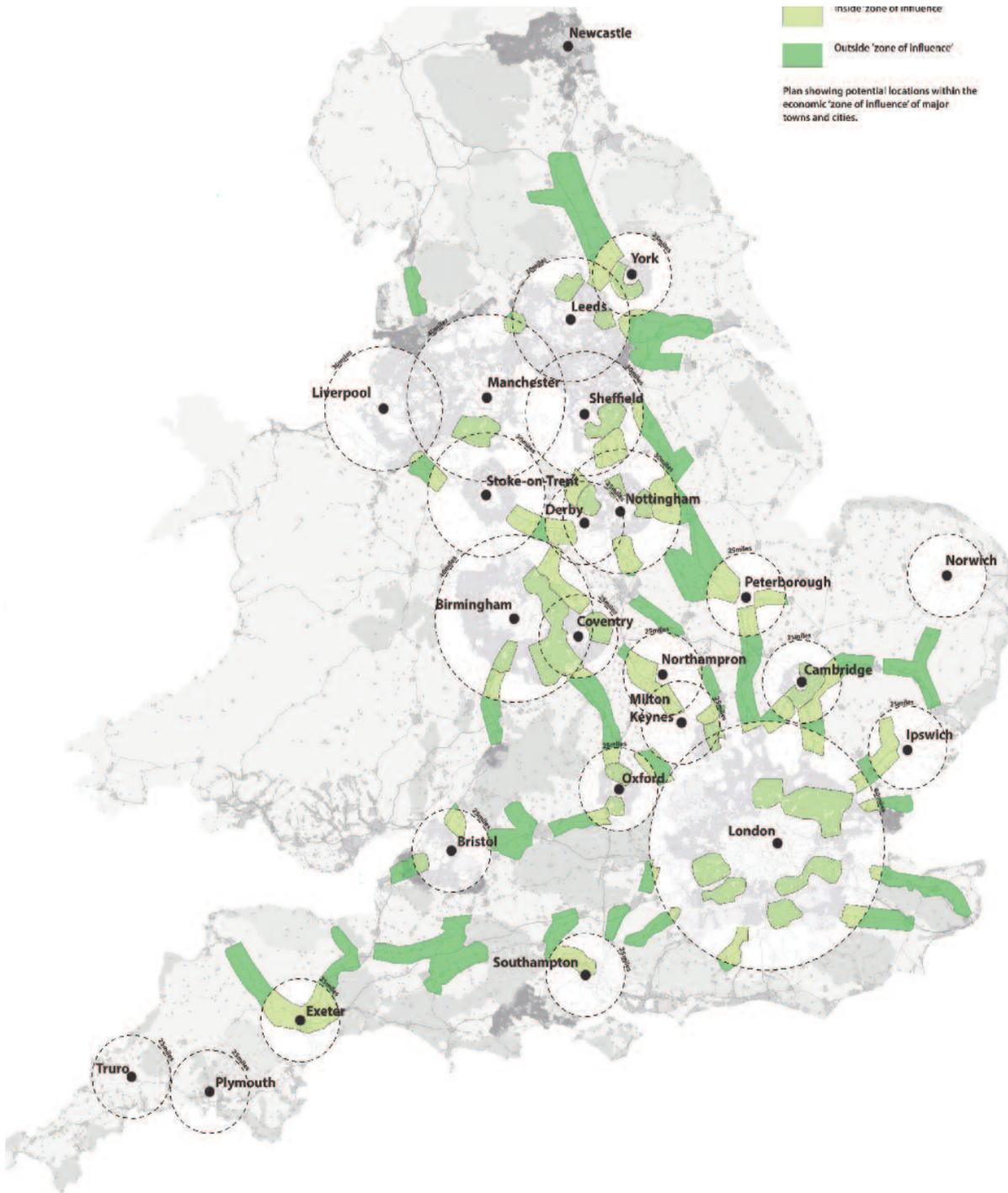
A review of current growth activity in the Greater London market suggests that there is capacity for;

- Modest scale urban extensions as Garden Suburbs e.g. within Guildford Borough (since the 2011 Census part of Greater London) where currently three proposals for Garden Suburbs/settlements are identified within the evidence base/Green Belt review study supporting the emerging Local Plan.
- Transit-orientated, post-rationalised Garden Cities such as those identified in the Thames Gateway.
- Revitalised peripheral London New Towns such as Bracknell (also now part of Greater London), struggling to find an appropriate identity for a 21st Century New Town and with public sector land ownership and sufficient provision of open spaces to assume a retrofitted Garden City character thus absorbing greater growth than currently proving feasible.

However the examples given above still fall short of the scale required of a true garden city and an altogether more radical approach may be required to deliver growth in the quan-

ROAD MAP TO DELIVERY





tum needed to make a meaningful contribution to genuinely affordable homes set in the context of the 42,000 – 69,000 homes required per annum over the next 10 years by the Further Amendments to the London Plan (FALP).

Shelter's shortlisted submission to the Wolfson prize³ identifies a further extension to the Crossrail route in the east, on the Hoo Peninsula, towards the Isle of Grain. This polycentric string of settlements proposed to accommodate 150,000 people, is roughly equidistant from Central London with Reading to the west. In light of the recent Crossrail extension announcement bringing it to Reading, this places a growth focus on these two poles of the UK's second largest infrastructure project.

These locations begin to meet the criteria we set out in our

submission, to determine opportunity areas for national growth based on empirical data separate from the political landscape, and which could achieve deliverability by becoming part of a National Spatial Plan for the country as a whole so that we are truly 'all in this together'.

Data in support of factors such as proximity to economic drivers, alignment with strategic transport corridors, low level environmental constraints and/or housing/economic regeneration need already exists. The suggestion that both places are linked to either planned or future Crossrail stations places them squarely within the footprint of Greater London by the time of the next Census in 2021.

However as can be seen from the emerging commentary ensuing from Shelter's declaration of a site, the decision to >>>

identify a location needs to both maximise opportunities for scale above and beyond anything seen in the UK for over a generation as well as ensure that local voices are instrumental in defining the place. Lessons from a recent visioning workshop involving members of the community, local businesses and academics in Reading for example, revealed the potential appetite for growth of this pan-urban centre to approach 1m population within the next 35 years¹.

Where there is ambition for growth in towns like these, activity needs to be fostered to capture supportive spirit and thirst for engagement.

Scaleability and certainty are the over-riding factors that will determine new Garden Cities for both the Capital and the UK. Infighting over the form of growth and the appropriateness of developing the Green Belt create distractions from the over-riding issue that unless growth is tackled at scale the housing crisis threatens to overwhelm all, save for the very wealthy.

Consequently whilst our submission makes a very clear acknowledgement of the contribution that London and its hinterland, in the widest sense can make (we identify an immediate arc from Southampton to Ipswich), a scaleable model, promoting sustained growth across England into all regions, is the only likely strategy that is going to provide new housing in the required numbers and address affordability in equal measure.

Scale is key to unlocking investment capital. However this needs to be combined with certainty to ensure the market truly responds to the opportunity. In dialogue with investment house, we have established that certainty for planned growth of strategic scale, demonstrated at a political policy level and given accelerated and prioritised treatment through the use of Local Development Orders and Garden City Corporations with Development Corporation Status, will be required before meaningful dialogue around 'patient capital' can be commenced.

Thus there is an equal role for London and the country to unite in. Calling for affordable, diverse, sustainable places, seeking media coverage that far exceeds the air time and column inches gifted to those interested in preserving the status quo.

There is a role for the citizens of London in engaging with a 'National Campaign' as proposed in Step 1 of our road map for the delivery of new Garden Cities. This requires tapping in to the root causes and concerns behind the housing crisis and reaching out to those struggling to get onto the housing ladder (or move to more suitable accommodation). Our call for a campaign will aim to resonate with a diverse demographic of people and families currently housed in inappropriate homes.

Only when these voices of people hit hardest by the housing crisis are heard, is it likely that political timidity, the real impediment to resolving Britain's housing crisis, will give way to vision, courage and conviction from politicians in the form

of firm housing growth policy, through an expanded Greater London belt and a National Spatial Strategy.

Although important, belief in a need for new homes is insufficient for a National Campaign to gain traction and political progress to show real teeth. The attraction of Garden Cities lies in the identity of place and a notion of quality of life, above and beyond that provided by conventional infill and urban extensions.

Londoners and members of the London Planning Development Forum (in the widest sense) need to be able to relate to the new Garden Cities as a tangible reality. Real cities, new places, with new opportunities. This applies equally to the citizens of Manchester, Leeds, York, Peterborough, Birmingham, etc. All locations around which opportunities are identified in our initial sifting process.

However the National Campaign and National Spatial Plan are only two steps along our 10 point route-map. Our proposal goes further than addressing the scaleability, certainty and (broad) locations for Garden Cities, taking these forward into delivery. In common with the GLA and the London Borough's of Newham, Lewisham, Hackney and Tower Hamlets, we recommend locally elected Garden City Mayors working with the community, land owners, and investors to identify the specific sites and opportunities that will render a national policy a local reality.

Campaigning on a pro-growth mandate Garden City Mayors and associated Garden City Commissions would be tasked with communicating the benefits to land owners and communities alike, offering up shares in a place and 'leaving the (land) value in the deal' to ensure the longevity of social infrastructure and financial participation from residents. On an individual level it would mean homeowners (existing and new) buying (or receiving) a stake in the community in the form of Garden City shares, providing a growing and long-term fund for community and infrastructure improvements for generations to come and as the city continues to evolve.

To give a place the flexibility to grow over time as local people wish, our submission advises the renewed promotion of much under-utilised tools from existing planning legislation such as Local Development Orders (LDO's – as recently advocated by the Chancellor as a mechanism for bringing brown-field re-development forward) or amending the National Strategic Infrastructure Programme (NSIP) to allow residential development. These tools would also support custom build, and give new communities the freedom to grow organically.

For stage 2 of Wolfson, our submission needs to provide the nuts and bolts answers that move us from a string of good ideas to a practical guide to delivery. London and the 5.8 million⁵ households projected across the country by 2033 need a strategy for housing growth as a whole. ■

1 *Uxchester Garden City: Urbed 2014*

2 *Princes Foundation model?*

3 *Shelter's Wolfson Economics Prize Submission 2014; Shelter & KPMG*

4 <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/Reading-2050-Revealing-Readings-Potential-5032681>
5 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6395/1780763.pdf

James Goss is a Director of Urban Design and Masterplanning at Barton Willmore and was lead author of Barton Willmore's successfully shortlisted submission to The Wolfson Economics Prize 2014. He has 20 years of international experience in the creation of valued and diverse places ranging from brownfield regeneration in the US, Germany and the Czech republic, to the promotion of sustainable urban extensions, new market towns and potential new garden cities in the UK

ESTATE BOND MODEL

