

Laura Vaughan - Urban Renewal Needs More Than 'Garden City' Stamp To Take Root

newgeography.com. July, 2014. Every few years the ideals of Ebenezer Howard's garden city utopia are resurrected in an attempt by the UK government to create new communities, and address the country's housing crisis. Sometimes this takes the form of new towns or eco-towns, and sometimes proposals for an actual garden city are put forward - as in the last budget.

Rather than just rolling out this romantic terminology, we should take a closer look at garden city ideals and how they can be adopted to make the proposed Ebbsfleet development a success.

Several years ago my colleague Michael Edwards presciently forecast the current problems in the Thames Gateway where Ebbsfleet falls, with a dominance of private development that does little to provide for local employment and walkable communities.

He outlined the need to return to funding principles similar to the garden city model, where development trusts retain freeholds on the land. This model, based on investment in infrastructure and services, is a fundamental principle that shifts from short-term returns to a long-term relationship created between the collective or public landowner and local inhabitants.

Lessons From History

Despite the fact that the garden city was a highly influential model throughout the first half of the 20th century, ultimately leading to the establishment of some key settlements in the UK, US and elsewhere in the world, it has had few genuine successes. After World War II, similar utopian dreams of creating model communities, with decent housing surrounding a well-designed centre, met with the reality. British reformer William Beveridge famously summed them up for having "no gardens, few roads, no shops and a sea of mud".

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