

Grow your own Garden City: How we Doubled the Size of Uxcester (and what we Learnt)

David Rudlin

Synopsis

In 2014 we won the Wolfson Economics prize for our essay on garden cities. In fact our essay suggested that rather than build free-standing garden cities, we should be expanding existing towns and cities. To illustrate this we showed how we might double the size of the fictional city of Uxcester. In this paper we summarise these proposals, however its main focus is the debate that has taken place since we won the prize and some of the conclusions that we have drawn from these discussions.

Our key conclusion is that the planning system in the UK is dysfunctional. Many of the people working within the system accept this fact but see no prospect of it changing. The reaction to our garden city proposals has often been supportive of our ideas but dismissive of the prospects of it ever happening. The recent changes to the planning system have not helped, but the problems go back much further. Many of these problems are concerned with what Ebenezer Howard called the “unearned increment”—the increase in the value of land that results from development. This value uplift has increased to such an extent that it is distorting the whole system and is the main difference between our planning system and the much more successful housing and planning systems elsewhere in northern Europe.

A further issue in the UK is the balance between greenfield and brownfield development. At URBED we strongly support the brownfield-first approach and believe that nationally 60 per cent of new homes should be accommodated within existing urban areas. However, we also need to plan for the remaining 40 per cent and the most sensible, sustainable place for this greenfield housing to be built is within the green belt. At present this is the last place to be considered because of the strength of green belt policy. In this paper we explore two case studies to show how green belt and brownfield development can be accommodated. In Oxford we show how we might extend a city that has very little urban capacity into its green belt while creating sustainable places and linking the development to the city centre with new tram routes. In Sheffield we show how we might maximise the housing capacity of existing urban areas before looking at greenfield sites.

Both case studies suggest the need for a new, more positive, form of planning in the UK. One that is less conflicted and driven by land value but rather based on a wider discussion of the type of towns and cities that we want to create. To do this we need to find a politically acceptable way of reinventing regional planning because sustainable planning simply can't be done on the scale of the district. We also need a mechanism to allow for the comprehensive planning of large-scale development. This is all within our grasp, or would be if so many people didn't regard it as so hopelessly idealistic!

Introduction

One of the consequences of winning the Wolfson Economic Prize last year is that I have ended up speaking at a lot of conferences. I have spoken at conferences of planning officers and councillors, I have spoken to audiences of house builders, housing associations, heritage groups, voluntary and campaigning organisations, planning consultants and architects, and now I'm talking to this planning law conference. These are all separate events as you rarely get a conference where these different groups mix, but they

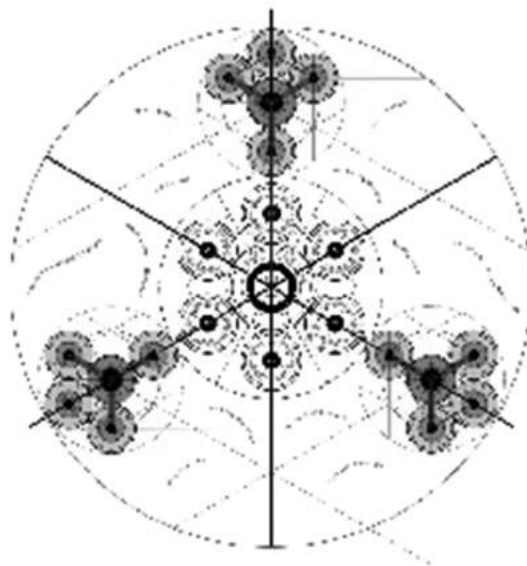
are all talking about the same issues: how to increase our housing supply; where we should be building new homes; and what to do about the green belt. In doing this many of them are talking about Garden Cities because it is a term that everyone (including the general public) seems to like. It is, therefore, a good shorthand for talking about the politically-sensitive subject of building on green fields. However, the conclusion that I have come to, having been to all of these conferences, is that the planning system in the UK makes very little sense at the present time.

I am a naive in this respect of course, I am a planner but my career has focussed on master planning, or “proper planning” as we master planners like to call it. After winning the prize my company URBED has been invited to bid for a number of Garden City masterplans. As part of the bidding process we are often asked about our experience of taking schemes through the appeal process. We have none of course because we have not had a scheme refused. We have spent 15 years masterplanning large complex mixed-use schemes across the country and, while planning authorities have often been a pain and acted unreasonably, the idea that the scheme would be refused is inconceivable. When we say that masterplanning is “proper planning” we mean that it is the sort of planning that Abercrombie used to do, or Thomas Sharpe, Barry Parker, Raymond Unwin, or Ebenezer Howard for that matter. Their approach to planning was to think positively about the future of a site, a neighbourhood, or even an entire town or city. They developed visions, drew plans and engaged in debate. The objective was to create a good place that worked efficiently and could be developed viably. I believe that we need to return the UK planning system to this notion of “proper planning” which is what I want to talk about in this paper.

How We Doubled the Size of Uxcester

It was in this spirit that we approached the Wolfson Economics Prize which asked the question; how can we solve the housing crisis by building garden cities that are visionary, popular, and viable. Most of the entries concentrated on building new garden cities in the countryside in the spirit of Ebenezer Howard and the New Towns Programme. By contrast we came to the conclusion that it was neither sensible or practical to build free-standing garden cities and argued that we should instead be extending existing places. We did this because the world has changed since the days of the new towns. These were built mostly with council housing at a time when labour markets were self-contained and when there was huge public subsidy available. Today’s economy is much more interconnected and based on knowledge industries. Successful towns are those that can attract the best people which is why cities have once more become the drivers of our economy. This is why we should be serious about the “city” element of the Garden City concept. To quote our essay; “rather than growing a Garden City as a fragile sapling that will take decades to mature, we should graft it onto the strong rootstock of an exiting place”. Somewhere that already has a university, mainline railway station, a strong town centre and full set of facilities; somewhere like Uxcester.

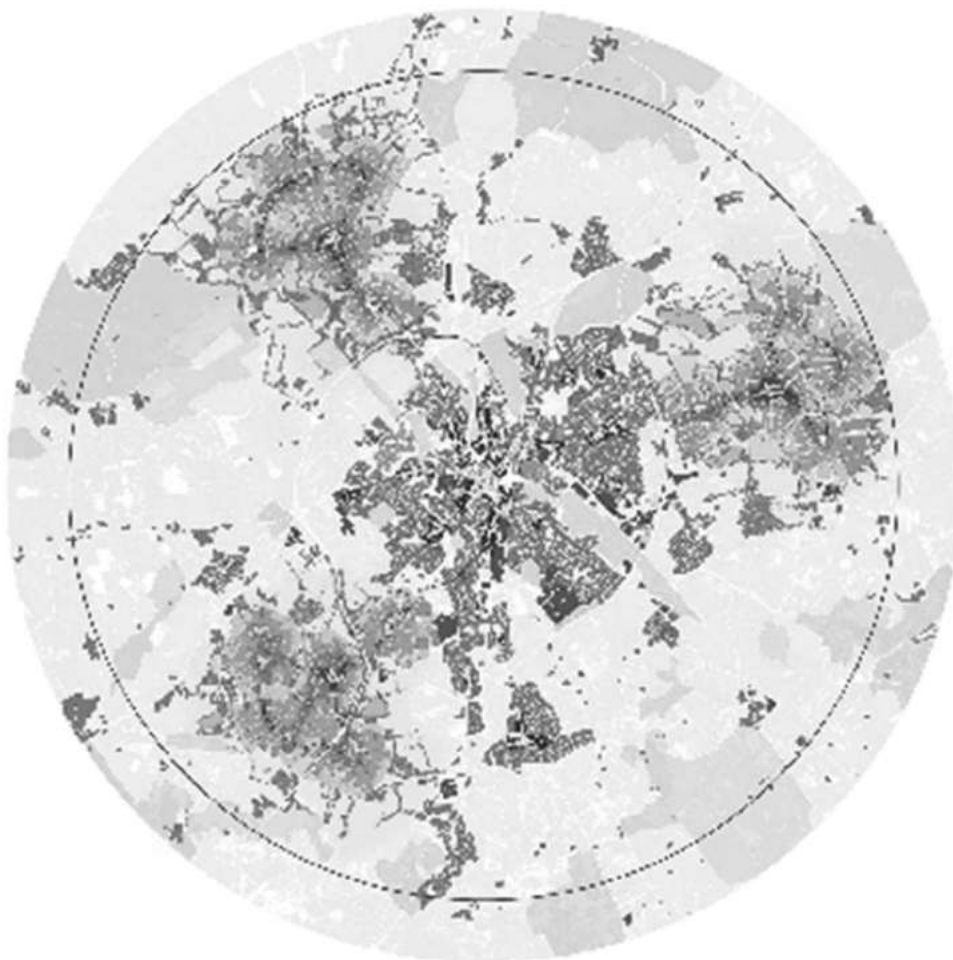
Uxcester doesn’t exist of course, it is an amalgam of a number of towns with populations of around 200,000 (although the plan is based on York). Like York and indeed Oxford, Uxcester is currently growing at around 1 per cent per year which involves building just under 1,000 homes. This is causing great difficulties since the town has little urban capacity, its administrative boundaries are tightly drawn with all the easy sites having been allocated some time ago so that the town is pushing up against its green belt. The response, as in many towns, is to undertake a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (“SHLAA”), exploring the incremental release of slivers of green belt, the growth of the surrounding towns and villages and the release a couple of large sites beyond the green belt. It is a process based on minimising impact rather than the positive planning of the town and the result is that development dribbles out on unsustainable sites. Meanwhile landowners and their consultants are busy challenging the process to promote their own sites.



Our Wolfson proposals were based on, what we called, the Snowflake Plan. This shows three urban extensions each made up of five neighbourhoods. Each neighbourhood has a 800m diameter and would include 4–6,000 homes.

Our solution was to suggest that Uxcester should grow not by 1 per cent but by around 2.5 per cent a year, thereby doubling in size over 30 years through a process of positive planning. Rather than nibbling around the edges of the green belt we suggested that we should instead take three confident bites to build garden city extensions of around 25,000 homes. These would be large enough to fund a tram system for the entire city, to cover the costs of infrastructure and to create 3,000ha of country park. Furthermore they would remove the need to expand every town and village, thereby relieving pressure and potentially opposition elsewhere in the county.

Key	Use	Area (ha)	Yield
	New Housing	2300	69,500 homes
	Commercial	260	17M sqm
	Retail/leisure	40	100,000 sqm
	Community	400	



Our proposals for Uxcester were in fact based on York. The outer circle is 10km from the centre and the plan shows how the three extensions would be built each with a tram line to the city centre.

This was our Uxcester proposition. We showed that it would require the purchase of 6,000ha of land (half of which would become open space) which accounted for less than 10 per cent of the green belt. Much of our essay was devoted to describing how this would be done through local authorities bidding to be given the powers to establish Garden City Foundations that would have the powers to CPO land at existing use value plus compensation. The Foundations, which would also have planning powers, would service the land, provide the infrastructure, and then sell off plots to developers and individuals. A major part of our essay related to what we called “open-source” planning allowing plot-based self- and custom-build housing and small-scale builders to participate alongside the volume housebuilders (but that is not my subject today). We assumed that the land would be bought in at £200,000/ha and that the serviced plots would be sold at £2.3M/ha which was the average UK residential land value at the time and represented £50–90,000/plot. The difference between these figures (what Ebenezer Howard called the unearned increment) amounted to around £4.5 Billion to spend on infrastructure and social housing.



This plan shows one of the sub-neighborhoods containing 5,000 homes. Each of the Garden City extensions would be made up of five of these neighborhoods.

Why the Planning System Makes No Sense

So, what have I learned from touting the Uxcester model around all of these conferences? Generally the feedback has been very positive and there is a real frustration across the industry at the impossibility of the sort of positive planning that Uxcester represents. So, while many people agree with the ideas, most also say that it is, of course, totally impossible. Indeed I have spoken to very few people who think that the current planning system makes any sense at all. Not all would admit to this of course since they earn very good fees as a result of the absurdity of the system.

On the one hand there are planning authorities who are desperately trying to prepare plans that will survive the Examination In Public (something that only half of the UK's planning authorities have managed). Their plans are supported by reams of evidence, collected with no particular purpose other than as a shield to fend off the inevitable challenges that will be directed at them as part of the planning process. On the other hand there is the planning industry by which I mean land agents, developers, planning consultants, lawyers, barristers (many of who are in this conference), who make a living trying to unlock land from the planning system by looking for weaknesses that can get the plan thrown out and allow their clients to promote their sites. Both sides regards the other with suspicion and misunderstanding.

Then there are the politicians who at the local level don't really understand the system, but do know that their constituents are against new housing. It has never been clear to me why politicians tend to support new employment because the jobs will be for "their" people, but resist new housing that they assume will go to outsiders. At the national level we have abolished regional planning leaving no mechanism to plan for our housing need other than the requirement to provide a five-year housing supply and a duty to cooperate. A city like Oxford with a desperate housing need but with tightly-drawn boundaries to four neighbouring authorities of different political complexions therefore has no way of addressing its need. Every politician, be they from the left or the right, believes that talking about the green belt is political suicide so that there is no meaningful political debate about this issue other than exhortations that they will build more homes. One might almost think that the politics of housing is not about increasing supply but about avoiding blame. By devolving power to the local level, national government absolves itself of blame. By making the planning system dysfunctional and allowing housing consents to leak out through the appeal process, both national and local politicians can say they voted against development. Meanwhile we massively under-provide the housing that we need, even in strong markets, and the housing that does gets built is effectively unplanned.

The Unearned Increment

The problems with the planning system have been put down to recent changes such as the abolition of regional planning but the reality is that they go much deeper. My colleague and fellow author Nicholas Falk has spent years leading study tours to Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavia to study planning and housing development. It is clear that there exists a huge gulf between the effectiveness of planning and the quality of housing in these countries compared to the UK. This is not, on the whole, because we have worse planners, architects or other professionals in the UK but because the systems mitigates against good planning.

At the heart of this is the value of land. In the UK the average price of agricultural land is £15–20,000/ha whereas the average cost of fully serviced land with consent for housing is £2.3-2.5M/ha. This differential is what drives the industry of planners, consultants and, yes lawyers because there is far more money to be made from securing a planning consent than there is from building good quality homes and neighbourhoods. The systems vary but in northern Europe the value of land allocated for housing is pegged at its agricultural value plus compensation for the land owner. The balance of the value generated by the scheme is therefore available to spend on infrastructure such as trams and schools, green spaces and the quality of the homes. In the UK the value generated by the development residualises in the land. Because of this much of the talent and energy in the UK planning system is directed at unlocking this value, whereas in northern Europe talent and energy is directed into creating a good scheme because that is where the money is made (just like our urban masterplans).

	HA	Rate	Total (£M)
Total land acquired	6,000	£200,000	1,160
...allocated as open space	3,000		
...allocated for development	3,000		
Infrastructure costs			4,115
Affordable Housing Budget			423
Financing costs			293
TOTAL		TOTAL Cost	5,989
Foundation Receipts			
Housing plot sales	2,300	£2.34M	5,421
Commercial development	260	£1.5M	390
Retail development	40	£1.0M	40
CIL Share		50%	423
		TOTAL Receipts	6,273
		Balance	284

Figures are rounded so may not total exactly as shown

This is the key table from our Wolfson submission showing the broad way that the finances would work. It was developed by the housing finance expert Pete Redman

Having sunk such large sums into the land, the UK system must limit what it spends on the housing. What is more when the local authority comes calling for s.106 of CIL contributions to pay for the infrastructure, the developer will argue that it will make the scheme unviable. The answer to this is: “Well of course it will if you paid such a stupid sum for the land!” Meanwhile the system is funded by the tax payer, as we have to pick up the tab for the schools, public transport and other infrastructure that the developer can’t afford. This wasn’t the way it was supposed to be. In the late 1940s the planning system was based on the nationalisation of development land rights. (someone from the TCPA told me recently that they had been explaining this to a government minister who refused to believe that such a socialist policy could still be in place.) The state paid compensation at the time to land owners for the removal of their development rights. In theory at least, the uplift in value that comes from development (Howard’s “Unearned Increment”) is a state asset that we are giving away every time planning consent is granted and asking for very little in return. The original planning system included provision for a “betterment” tax for the state to claw back this value. We never managed to make the system work: at one point betterment was set at 90 per cent and development ground to a halt. Eventually we gave up on the system and left it to general taxation. In its place we got s.106 agreements and more recently CIL, neither of which capture sufficient value to cover infrastructure costs and which have not affected the value of land.

Pretty much all of the 272 submissions for the Wolfson Prize suggested mechanisms for land value capture. It is widely accepted that this is essential if we are to fix our planning system, while also being politically impossible. Before the 2015 election Sir Michael Lyons undertook a review of housing and planning policy for the Labour Party. This was to have been launched at the autumn conference but there was a delay because, so we understand, the shadow cabinet saw his proposals for land value capture as politically impossible and asked for them to be removed. As I have said our essay proposed Garden City Foundations with CPO and planning powers to assemble the land at existing use value plus compensation. You may think our proposals are hopelessly naive and unrealistic, but this is how we built all of our new towns and indeed how the Olympic Delivery Authority assembled the land for the 2012 Games. People cite the 1974 case in Milton Keynes that determined that compensation had to include hope value reflecting what the land could have been used for had the new town not been designated. This might make it difficult

to CPO land that is already allocated for housing, or has a good prospect of being allocated. However, there is a huge amount of land around our towns and cities that is regarded as having no development value because it is in the green belt which is where our proposals would apply.

Where Should We Build?

Which brings us to the issue of the green belt. The expansion of cities was in the past limited by accessibility since people needed to live within walking distance of their place of work. The advent of mass public transport in the inter-war years allowed development to spread outwards along roads and around suburban railway stations. Much of this took place on land bought at not much more than agricultural value and there was no planning system to be negotiated raising early concerns about sprawl.

The first Green Belt was designated around Sheffield as part of Abercrombie's plan for the city in 1938. The same year an act of Parliament was passed to create the London Green Belt and since then green belts have been designated around all of the main English conurbations as well as York, Oxford, Cambridge and Cheltenham. This has been very effective at stopping the outward expansion of cities (although it is worth noting that sprawl has also been checked in places like Norwich that has no Green Belt). Green belts became part of a national policy to control the growth of cities which also included slum clearance and the new town programme.

This worked pretty well through the 1950s to the 1970s, a period in which the State played a major role in the provision of new housing. The graph below featured in many of the Wolfson submissions because it illustrates dramatically how the end of council house building is the main reason why we don't build enough homes. The 1980s saw the rise of the volume housebuilders and renewed concerns about sprawl. Large suburban developments like Bradley Stoke in Bristol were caught up in the negative equity recession of the early 1990s when it became known as "Sadly Broke". However, throughout this period green-belt policy held firm leading to a process of counter-urbanisation as housebuilding leapfrogged the green belt. During this period the large cities lost substantial amounts of population to this outward migration leading to urban decline but also problems of congestion as people tried to drive from their distant housing estate to their jobs in the city. The response to this was initially for jobs and retailing to disperse to out-of-town business parks and shopping centres. It could be said that during this period the green belt was no longer preventing sprawl, but rather distorting the way that sprawl took place by pushing development even further away from cities.

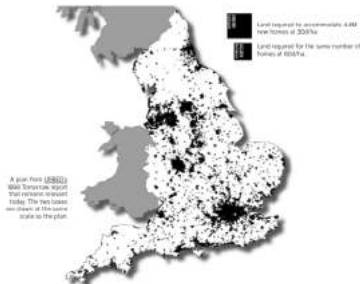


For much of URBED’s history most of our research and writing has been directed towards promoting the urban renaissance. This is summarised in our 2009 book Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood from which this diagram is taken; an attempt to reverse the polarity of Ebenezer Howard’s magnets.

Had this process been left unchecked we could have ended up with the situation found in Detroit today where massive urban sprawl and central urban collapse exist in the same city. However, in the mid 1990s the conservative government under the Secretary of State, John Selwyn Gummer, started to introduce policies to encourage housing to return to urban areas. As part of this a target was introduced requiring 60 per cent of housing to be built on brownfield land within urban areas. This was picked up by the Labour Government and at the end of the 1990s the Urban Task Force and a range of pro-urban policies changed the dynamic of urban Britain. Since that time all of the large cities in the UK have grown (Manchester grew by 19 per cent between 2001 and 2011). This was a result in a boom in urban apartments as housebuilders turned their attentions from suburban housing to urban sites and new players like Urban Splash emerged. The level of housing built on brownfield land peaked at 81 per cent in 2008 but despite the strong housing market the number of homes built remained below 200,000 a year (where as our projected need is around 240,000 homes a year). Greenfield housing development pretty much came to a halt and the housing that would have been built on green field didn’t transfer to brown fields. It just didn’t get built at all.

Following this we had the Credit Crunch and then the Coalition Government came to power, abolishing the 60 per cent target for brownfield development. It also abolished all of the regional mechanisms for planning housing growth. These mechanisms had taken regional population projections, converted them to housing requirements and allocated these to each planning authority. It wasn’t a perfect system but it worked. Without it we have a situation where local authorities are expected to self-assess their housing need and provide for it over five years while planning over 20 years. If they can’t do this they are to cooperate with their neighbouring authorities to take their overflow housing, but the neighbours have no obligation to do this. It is a flawed process that has undermined the workings of the planning system. It

means that housing allocations accrete field by field around every town and village, small enough to get through the system but too small to be sustainable or to contribute to infrastructure costs. Elsewhere housing policy is determined through the appeal process as developers promote sites in the face of opposition for the planning system leading to the problems that we have today.



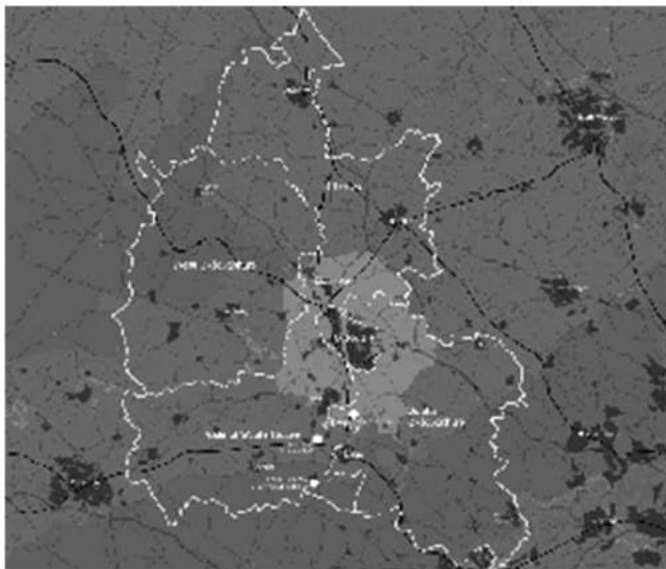
So where should we be building new housing? We need a national policy that is capable of building 250,000 homes a year and this is going to require a mix of green and brownfield sites. From URBED's perspective we probably should be building 60 per cent of new housing within urban areas. There are some in the CPRE and on the political right who argue that we could build all of our housing on brownfield land. This is, unfortunately, not possible but 60 per cent can be achieved as an average across the country and we need policies to facilitate this. However, this means that 40 per cent of housing should take place outside urban areas on green fields. We can't leave this to chance. We must plan for it as carefully as we plan for brownfield development. It is not sensible to push this beyond the green belt into locations that can only be served by car. As I have said, rather than nibbling around its edges we should be building the 40 per cent by taking a "confident bite" out of the green belt so that we can build on a scale that can create a sustainable settlement. In the final part of this paper I want to explore these two aspects of housing provision starting with a confident bite out of Oxford's green belt and then looking at the brownfield capacity of Sheffield.

Taking a Confident Bite Out of Oxford's Green Belt

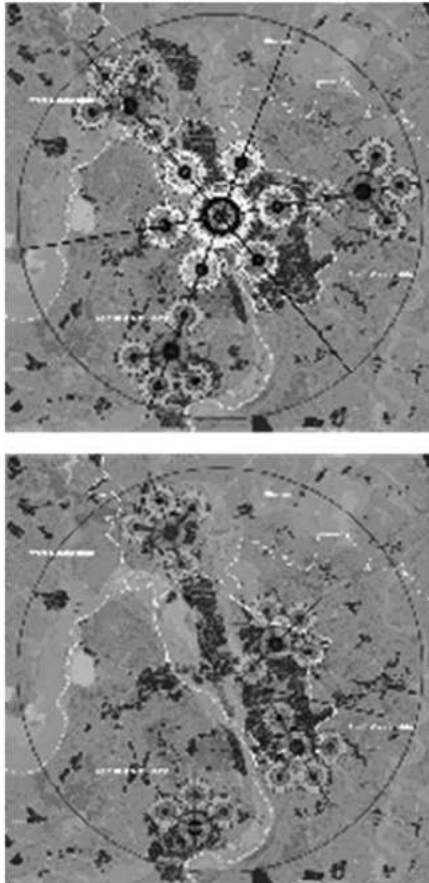
There are many towns and small cities in the UK that cannot accommodate 60 per cent of their housing growth within their urban area. We suggested 40 places like this in our essay although we have since been contacted by many other places that are facing the same issues. These are generally popular places, with populations of 60–200,000 people, strong town centres, often a university and a cathedral along with a range of cultural institutions. They are all facing pressures for growth and have limited capacity for housing within their urban area while the boundary of the district is drawn very tightly allowing little room for outward expansion. Those that have a green belt find that it is controlled by neighbouring rural authorities that are often of a different political complexion. Nowhere are these issues more intense than in Oxford.

Oxfordshire has identified a need for 100,000 homes over 20 years and the City of Oxford is feeling particular pressures. It has some scope for development within its area but nowhere near the homes that it needs. Yet it is surrounded by four rural authorities whose boundaries run along the back garden fences of the homes around the edge of the city. There are people locally who suggest that the solution is obvious, Oxford should stop growing and the growth should be "transferred" to less pressured towns in the north. However as Danny Dorling, professor of Geography at Oxford University, predicts this will mean that Oxford becomes like Santa Barbara; a town with an elite university where lecturers can't afford to live. This will affect the university's ability to attract the best staff and students threatening its elite status. What makes matters worse is that Cambridge has spent the last twenty years dealing with these issues. In

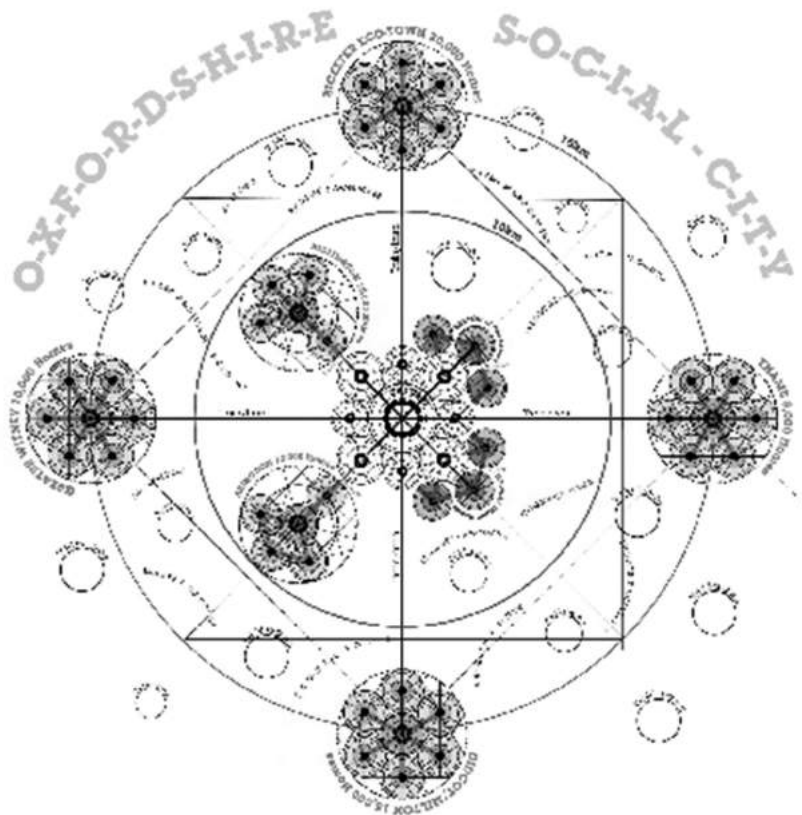
the late 1990s it explored a series of options to expand the town and has a programme to build 70,000 homes and to capture the value (fairly inefficiently) to invest in a guided bus system. As a result housing in Cambridge is cheaper and the city has 18 science parks compared to Oxford's 2.



The current strategy in Oxfordshire is to expand surrounding towns like Didcot and Bicester. There is a role for this but the problem is that Oxford has a chronic congestion problem and building beyond its green belt without public transport to get people into the centre only makes matters worse. Our Uxcester model suggests that the optimum zone for development is within 10km (or a 20 minute tram ride) of the centre of the town. In our view Oxford should be building up to 50,000 homes in this zone, half of the County total. We are aware that this is a contentious statement and will be fiercely opposed by many people in Oxford. Part of the problem is that Oxford is much more constrained than Uxcester (or York). Its flood plain is much larger and it is surrounded by hills and villages that are sensitive for reasons of heritage, ecology or landscape. We have therefore modified our Uxcester model to suggest four smaller urban extensions in Oxford's 10km zone of 10–15,000 homes. Our Oxfordshire Social City diagram shows how this could form part of a county-wide strategy.



The top plan shows the Snowflake diagram at the same scale as Oxford. The lower plan shows this amended to show four potential extensions. Each of the circles is 4–5,000 homes so that this represents around 50,000 homes in total.



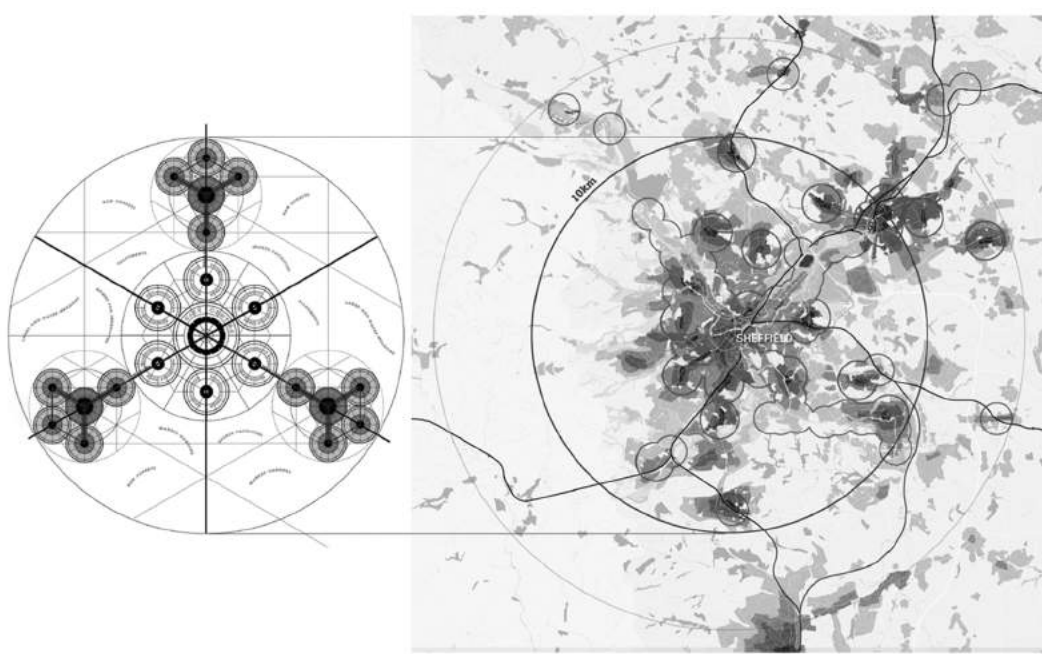
Our Social City diagram for Oxfordshire shows that the balance of the 100,000 homes required by the county would be achieved through the expansion of the surrounding towns. The aim would be to take the pressure off all of the villages.

The expansions to Oxford are suggested south of Grenoble Road, North of Barton as well as the expansion of Abingdon and Kidlington all of which are within 10km of the centre but outside Oxford City Council's administrative area. These extensions cover around 6 per cent of Oxfordshire's green belt and, as we have said, would take the pressure off many villages that are currently worried about development. In our model the development of these extensions would capture part of the value of the land to fund their infrastructure needs, to create publicly accessible open space and, crucially, to fund a tram system. We have done some rough economic modelling and while the scale of our proposals for Oxford are less than Uxcester, the value of development land is higher so that the model works. It is, however, difficult to see how anything on this scale could happen in Oxford under the current planning regime. There are discussions ongoing and it is possible that some of the surrounding authorities may allocate sites but there is no mechanism for land value capture which would be up to the land owners (although much of the land is owned by colleges so there may be opportunities).

Maximising the Potential of Sheffield

We made clear in our essay that we believed that 60 per cent of new housing nationally should go into existing urban areas. This was missed by many of our critics who accused us of abandoning our urban

credentials and advocating urban sprawl! We were, therefore, delighted to be approached by Sheffield Council last year who wanted to know how they might apply our Uxcester model to the Sheffield conurbation. The Sheffield conurbation (which includes Rotherham) is four times the size of Uxcester with a population of just over 800,000 people in 350,000 households. In Uxcester we proposed doubling the size of the city over 30 years by building 85,000 new homes (70,000 outside the urban area). In Sheffield we decided on a target of 100,000 homes over 20 years. There has been a lot of discussion about this figure with the planning authority that is working on a lower figure based on population projections and jobs targets. However, it represents a growth rate of 14 per cent per decade which is comparable to the plans for growth being developed by Manchester and Leeds. The question is where do you accommodate these homes and can you get 60% within the urban area?



This is not as easy as some brownfield advocates might think. Sheffield's SHLAA has estimated that there is only brownfield capacity for 20,000 new homes within the city. Much of the brownfield land in the region is outside the urban and within the city much of the vacant land has been developed, if only for surface parking. We therefore developed a framework for Sheffield that accommodate 100,000 homes in the following way:

Urban capacity 32,000 homes:

We assume that brownfield land is a dynamic resource that is created as quickly as it is used up. We therefore anticipate that over the 20 year plan period the current stock of brownfield land will be added to.

Urban Intensification 18,000 homes:

There are many other types of urban capacity such as the subdivision of larger homes, backland development, the intensification of low density council estates, the development of car parks etc. The main impediment to this capacity coming forward is often the planning system itself.

Remodelling 20,000 homes:

We identified two parts of Sheffield that were once busy residential neighbourhoods and now have very little housing; Neepsend and Attercliffe. They are now characterised by low density commercial use (that is nevertheless protected by planning policy). We suggest that these neighbourhoods could be remodelled as in-town Garden Cities (or Sustainable Urban Neighbourhoods).

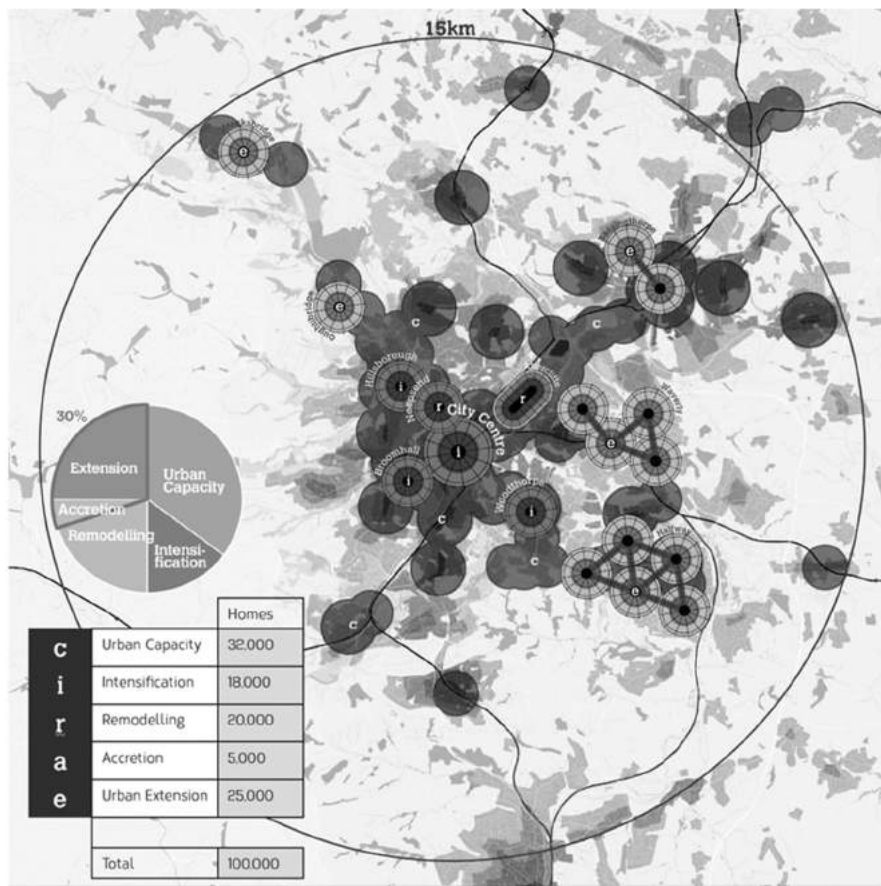
This accommodated 70,000 homes within the urban area, leaving us 30,000 homes to accommodate elsewhere. Here we suggest two possibilities:

Accretion 5,000 homes:

Allocating the next field around the edge of the settlement is not a very sustainable form of development, however, we suggested that there may be some small scope for accretion where sites are near to existing centres.

Extension 25,000 homes:

The balance was to be accommodated in urban extensions Mosborough (which was planned as an extension in the 1970s), Waverley (which is already being developed by Rotherham) and three smaller extensions at Bassingthorpe (also allocated by Rotherham), Oughtibridge and Stocksbridge.



The overall strategy showing how the city might accommodate 100,000 new homes over 20 years with 70 per cent of this within the urban area.

Sheffield could in this way pursue a growth agenda that allowed it to expand as a city, generate jobs, revive its town centre and to contribute to national housing needs. Through discussions in Sheffield there is once more an appetite for a strategy such as this. However again the planning system is in the way. Only around half of the housing capacity identified above would be accepted by an inspector as being deliverable. If Sheffield therefore adopted the 100,000 homes target it would risk challenge based on its inability to accommodate this level of growth and therefore its need to release more green fields. To avoid this the temptation is to down-play the population projections to reduce the housing requirements to match provable capacity. So far from promoting the growth of Sheffield which most people see as beneficial, the planning system is once more an impediment that needs to be circumvented.

Towards a Planning System that Does Make Sense

Our experience following our Wolfson win has caused us to explore the planning and housing delivery system in the UK and our work in Oxford and Sheffield has allowed us to suggest some solutions. We know that regional planning remains a dirty word but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that population growth and housing needs cannot be dealt with effectively at the district level. There has to be a mechanism

to coordinate these issues at a larger scale. This is happening incrementally. Greater Manchester has established a Combined Authority that is developing a single plan covering its 10 local authorities. As part of this they are projecting to deliver more than 10,000 homes a year and there is pressure in the conurbation to increase this figure. In Birmingham the responsibility has been given to the Birmingham and Solihull LEP that is coordinating a process to accommodate the conurbation's growth requirements, however there is a need to export housing growth even from this area which is causing tensions. Something similar is happening in Greater London where the GLA need to export housing to the surrounding districts, in part because they view the green belt as being off limits.

Once we have developed a system to assess and allocate housing growth we need to create a planning system that can plan this growth at the local level. This needs to include the promotion by local planning authorities of both significant extensions into the green belt as we have suggested in Oxford and large, in-town urban villages as we have suggested in Sheffield. We need to enable local authorities to coordinate this large scale development (because it will always be too big for any one developer), to assemble the land where necessary and to pool land ownerships elsewhere, to coordinate the planning process and to capture a proportion of the land value to invest in communal infrastructure. Various mechanisms have been suggested for this. In our Wolfson Essay we suggested Garden City Foundations and others have suggested revival or urban development or new town corporations. The previous Government announced a series of pilot Housing Growth Zones in March this year with access to a loan pot of £200 Million focused on brownfield land. The hope is that this can be grown into something that allows a much more concerted approach to the planning of our towns and cities. It is something that most people involved in the process agree to be necessary and it is not greatly different to what we have done in the past. It therefore is a mystery to me that when you talk about these issues the whole thing is regarded as being idealistic and unrealistic!