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# Will Alsop: the idea of the 'Garden City' denies reality

31 October, 2014 | By William Alsop



The Garden City as a concept is a contradiction to the modern social condition, says Will Alsop

In the 60's and 70's architecture did not attract a lot of media attention. Occasional items in The Observer by Stephen Gardiner, but by and large we were left alone until Prince Charles made his Carbruncle speech against the extension to the National Gallery. Suddenly architecture became newsworthy and the national press had writers in the wings. I say 'writers' because this was also the time when the terms 'Journalist' / 'Critic' / 'Historian' became mixed up. So called 'experts' proliferated and what was formally an informal discussion within the world of architecture, became a subject of debate, resulting in so called 'experts' creating polarization and ultimately dictating ideas of taste, and worst of all 'good practice'. The idea of what our architecture should be was not useful but very silly.

I believe that internal debate is useful and external opinion is not. This is not to exclude the public in debates about a particular project, but is a cry for a good discourse between those that 'do' as opposed to those that are 'paid to think'.

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The idea of the idea when applied to architecture is as ridiculous as having an idea about a painting. Some artists know what a

painting looks like before they start. It is a feeling, or prescribed notion, that leads the poor soul to painting the image of a work. The same is true of some architecture. The child's image of a house, has nothing to do with a house. They have absorbed this idea from elsewhere.

The term 'Garden City' is an idea about a town without substance. It has a warm feeling attached to it that denies a hidden reality. Ebbfleet is actually a dormitory town. One of the ideas of the Garden City is the notion of 'the self-contained community' surrounded by green belt. One of the problems with a community is the fact that it becomes resistant to change, which ultimately results in a group of people that find uncertainty a difficult reality to cope with.

Increasingly, uncertainty is a contemporary condition which leads me to the conclusion that the Garden City as a concept is a contradiction to the modern social condition, unless the idea is to create compliance and conformity within our nation. This certainty suits multi-national companies and corporates, educators and government.

Revolution, naughtiness and creativity is quashed by the creation of a dormitory town that is condemned to commute.

New towns that condemn occupants to the idea of a life which might be unhealthy is wrong and I think the solution lies elsewhere. i.e. life in town, lower land prices, and saving the countryside.



Ebenezer Howard's second Garden City - Welwyn

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