

## **NATIONAL CONFERENCE TO HIGHLIGHT WHY GREENSPACE MUST NOT BE FORGOTTEN IN GOVERNMENT'S NEW HOUSING DRIVE**

A national charity is bringing together academics, developers and policymakers for a two-day conference to ensure the need for green space isn't overlooked in the Government's drive for new housing.

The Gardens Trust has a statutory responsibility to protect and conserve the England's heritage of designed landscapes and has Eden Project founder Sir Tim Smit as a vice-president

The conference - New Town Landscapes: Learning from the Past, Shaping the Future – will be held at MK Gallery in Milton Keynes on September 23 and 24 and will focus on how lessons from the past can meaningfully shape future planning, design, governance, and community life.

It will bring together experts with direct experience to explore how the histories of New Towns can inform their futures.

Speakers at the conference will include representatives from the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), the Landscape Institute and Historic Environment Scotland.

Gardens Trust Chair John Watkins said: "New Towns represent some of the most ambitious urban experiments of the 20th and 21st centuries. As many face renewal, adaptation, or reimagining, there is an urgent need to reflect on their origins, lived experiences, and long-term trajectories.

"This event will place historical insight at the centre of forward-looking debate. As the government forges ahead building more new towns for the 21st century, the Gardens Trust is eager to ensure these are a sustainable development with good access to high quality green space, so communities in new towns can enjoy a high quality of life.

“We are keen to use our knowledge to support best practice for the future to ensure the value of existing historic parks and gardens is not only recognised but are successfully incorporated into new developments, as well as ensuring new green spaces are created.

“The conference will be both a scholarly forum and a space for professional and intergenerational exchange, encouraging dialogue between research, practice, and lived experience.”

The Gardens Trust is actively seeking collaboration with professional and academic partners, including professional bodies, universities and research centres for the event and is pleased to be partnering with FOLAR (Friends of Landscape Architects) and the Landscape Foundation.

With its remit of protecting and celebrating heritage landscapes, the Gardens Trust is well aware of the national need for more housing, but also very conscious of the impacts of previous housing booms.

For example, in the Victorian era housing to accommodate the people who had come to cities and towns to work in factories or mills was left to commercial developers who, without adequate legislation and in a rush to optimize profit, built densely without adequate greenspace.

As a result, many of the towns and cities became dirty, over-crowded polluted places with unhealthy populations living in squalor and leading to social unrest.

In the housing boom of post-war Britain, enlightened planners and architects created developments, such as New Towns, that commenced with a framework of greenspace, of parks and parkways, and incorporated gardens.

A famous example is Milton Keynes with its grid system of parkways and Campbell Park, one of the largest public parks, which shows how the various community and individual residents' needs could be fulfilled through high quality design.

John Watkins added: “The Gardens Trust is determined to ensure the government's major housebuilding programme fully recognises the need for careful infrastructure planning, plentiful

well-designed public and private green space and a focus on fostering nature recovery including in urban areas.”

The Gardens Trust, founded in 1966 as the Garden History Society, is the only national charity with a statutory responsibility to protect and conserve the country’s heritage of designed landscapes.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government is currently considering the results of its consultation on removing several statutory consultees, including the Trust, from the planning process.

The Trust says the proposals to remove cultural and social expertise from inputting into the planning system, aimed at speeding up the approval process, are putting England’s green “crown jewels” at risk. The sites, many of which are on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England, include the gardens at Chelsea Royal Hospital, the venue for the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

The Gardens Trust argues designed landscapes are at the heart of our towns and countryside, adding the unique qualities underpinning community pride and local value. Without professional input and expertise in the planning system, local authorities will be ill-equipped to give full and proper consideration to new planning proposals to the serious detriment of society.

The Trust represents and supports 35 local volunteer County Garden Trusts (CGTs) in England and the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust.

For further information on the Gardens Trust and information on how to join its campaign to conserve and protect England’s Registered Parks and Gardens go to [www.thegardenstrust.org](http://www.thegardenstrust.org)

For further information on the conference go to <https://thegardenstrust.org/gt-events/>

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