

Garden Suburb Planning Principles

Garden Suburb town planning principles were those desired characteristics of suburban residential communities of the early 1900's. In 1921, Sydney based architect and planner John Sulman, summarised the concept in the following way:

“The term garden suburb, or garden city, is constantly used in reference to Town Planning... Just what the term connotes is, however, somewhat difficult to define... The special characteristics which differentiate them from the ordinary town or suburb are the allocation of special quarters or sites for each kind of building, the absence of congestion of dwellings and their better arrangement, the ample provision of parks, playgrounds, and open spaces, the planting with trees and grass of part of the road not required for traffic, and the provision of greater opportunities for social intercourse.”

Charles Reade incorporated these elements in his 1917 plan for the “Model” Garden Suburb at what we now know as Colonel Light Gardens.

The following key features were identified by Dr Robert Freestone in his 1989 book *Model Communities*:

Park-like environment

In 1913, a writer declared that “the first principle of a garden suburb is that there shall be no jarring note” with trees, shrubs, lawns and public gardens to merge into a park-like environment.

A distinct community with its own identity

A Garden Suburb was to be largely self-contained with a range of facilities. In Colonel Light Gardens, there are churches, shops, parks, playgrounds, aged care facilities and schools. The picture theatre and police station have now closed. Charles Reade's original plan for the suburb also included a fire brigade, public institute, hostel, town hall and swimming baths.

An abundance of well distributed open space

The open spaces in Colonel Light Gardens range from Mortlock Park, Reade Park, Ludgate and Oxford Circuses and the Kent Road reserve to the internal and street garden reserves.

Internal reserves provided as local community recreation areas

Internal reserves were provided at the rear of the smaller residential building blocks to allow for the local community to share in community open space. Playgrounds and tennis courts were developed on these reserves in the early years of Colonel Light Gardens.

Strict land use zoning for housing and commercial areas.

The 1921 Sales Brochure for Colonel Light Gardens assured prospective land purchasers that “special attention is directed to the fact that no buildings for business or manufacturing purposes will be permitted except in the business sector specially designed for that purpose”.

Reade proposed that the non-residential facilities be located in special areas of the suburb. There were recreation areas, two shopping centres, an administration centre and the chief aesthetic feature the central square to include two churches, a recreational institute and formal gardens.

Roads designed according to their planned level of use.

In 1913, Garden Suburb planners were advised that “the width and character of the roads should depend entirely upon the use to be made of them”. In the 1918 paper on the design of Colonel Light Gardens it was explained that the design incorporated “a radial network of streets, designed to direct and concentrate the flow of through traffic along the routes specially constructed for their use, and away from residential streets, where lighter and more economical construction providing amenity as well as utility is proposed”.

Street corners rounded for improved traffic visibility.

The 1921 sales brochure explained that “in order to minimise traffic dangers, road junctions and crossings have been treated so as to afford drivers the clearest possible view”.

Housing designed for private detached homes for single families with ample front, side and rear yards.

In a report in 1915, Reade recommended that the principle of one family one house should be maintained. This was followed in Colonel Light Gardens.

Strict controls applied to ensure a harmonious streetscape where all buildings were to blend together and services (electricity, gas, sewerage etc) were located in the rear laneways.

Suggested Further Reading

Garnaut, Christine *Colonel Light Gardens: model garden suburb*, Crossing Press, Sydney 1999.

Christine Garnaut, Of Passion, Publicity, and Planning in *Australian Planner*. Vol 32 No. 2. 1995.

Freestone, Robert *Model Communities - The Garden City Movement in Australia.*, Nelson. 1989.