

“How lucky we are to live here.”

Life-long resident, Philip Davies, is the Planning & Development Director for London and South-East England at English Heritage. He is responsible for overseeing change to all aspects of the historic environment from the government estate and the occupied royal palaces to archaeology, urban regeneration and new architecture in historic areas. He tells us how living in the Suburb has influenced his life and work.



People are nurtured by the environment in which they live. And I was no exception.

Until the age of seven I lived in Neale Close where I spent many a happy hour playing with my friends in the Close, or amongst the horses and cows in the fields of Park Farm, which backed onto our garden. Sadly these were developed shortly after we moved away to Oakwood Road in 1957, where my father still lives.

As a child I loved exploring the hidden hedge-lined alleys, twittens, allotments and secret backland gardens which criss-cross the Suburb, and of which, I suspect, many residents are still unaware. The harmonious townscape of the Suburb made a lasting impression upon me from a very early age. The subtle expression of visual order—hierarchy, proportion, form, massing, scale, materials and the relationship of the parts to the whole – all permeated my subconscious. From early on I realised that this was a very special place.

Perversely, this rigorous sense of order triggered a fascination for its antithesis – the spontaneity and chaos of the inner city – the very qualities which gave birth to the Garden Suburb movement in the first place; and which also I loved to explore. I was immensely

fortunate to have roamed London's East End, the Docks and the City before so much was swept away.

My career was born out of the rhetoric between these two extremes.

In my year out, before going up to Cambridge, I worked in the Planning Department at Camden Council at a time when comprehensive redevelopment was the norm. Appalled at what was happening to London, I vowed to do whatever I could to save London's historic places from oblivion.

After Cambridge, I realised I was not alone and joined the GLC Historic Buildings Division. This was the heroic age of conservation working alongside such charismatic figures as Sir John Betjeman, Sir John Summerson and Sir Hugh Casson, with a close-knit band of colleagues committed to a more

progressive vision of the future based on respect for the past and contextual architecture. Individuals could, and did, make a real difference. We were seen as dangerously radical. Early victories included Covent Garden, Bloomsbury and Spitalfields, but throughout it was the Garden Suburb with its perfect balance between architecture and nature that inspired me.

Today, many of the great conservation battles have been won. People care passionately about the places where they live as much as individual buildings. Routinely factories, warehouses, tenements and old buildings, which once would have been swept away, are being adapted and converted by developers who, at last, have realised that history sells, and that recycling the

embodied energy they contain is crucial to combating climate change. Heritage works. Sustainability and conservation are simply two sides of the same coin.

Today the Garden Suburb has much to teach us about place-making and community well-being at a time when it is sorely needed. We struggle to create sustainable communities in places like the Thames Gateway whilst our grandfathers effortlessly created new places from scratch.

Where is the vision? Where is the Henrietta Barnett of the 21st century? We have lost the art of town planning where once we led the world.

Today is there a single architect who can design a successful place from nothing? Is there a single architect who can design a street?

But there are other lessons to be learned from the Garden Suburb – about managing change. At English Heritage I have just launched our Conservation Areas at Risk initiative to ascertain for the first time ever the state of the nation's conservation areas; which areas are under pressure, which have declined, which have improved, and why.

Hampstead Garden Suburb is a national exemplar of best practice of how to manage change successfully due in no small part to rigorous planning controls, the ability of the Trust to maintain freehold control and the unflagging commitment of local residents. But continuing vigilance is essential. Massive land values have generated intense pressures to develop large garden plots, which it is vital that the Trust

resists if we are all to continue to enjoy the qualities which make the Garden Suburb unique. All residents need to understand and appreciate that the quality of the environment in which they live is a direct result of the enlightened stewardship of our predecessors and that, sometimes individual self-interest must be subordinated to the greater good. An holistic approach is essential. Traffic calming measures and signs need to be designed and knitted seamlessly into the wider townscape. Everything matters – from original door and window joinery to traffic signs, verges and paving to emerging designs for Henrietta Barnett School and the Central Square.

Some of the greatest challenges lie on the periphery – in Temple Fortune and Golders Green, where the remarkable unity of the elegant Edwardian and neo-Georgian terraces, many of which are listed, is being eroded rapidly by misguided unauthorised interventions, in particular, crude PVCu windows. Barnet Council asserts that it is strongly committed to suburban regeneration. If it is really serious then it needs to take direct action now to reverse this cycle of decline, or face much more expensive options in the future.

Hampstead Garden Suburb was built to a vision based on social and spiritual ideals which are valid today as they were 100 years ago. If other London suburbs strived a little more to emulate its achievements, then London would be a much better place.

We must never forget how lucky we are to live here.

Philip Davies's latest book "London – The Lost City", haunting images from English Heritage's photographic archive, will be published in June 2009 by Atlantic Publishing.

Point, v. to finish or repair the joints of (brickwork, masonry, etc.) with mortar or cement. Sp. in **Hampstead Garden Suburb** - only to be undertaken with the and after unbiased advice.

Is there any point in repointing?

Very often the answer is – probably not. Surveyors automatically suggest it, builders love to charge you for it, but the fact is most Suburb houses are built with fine handmade bricks, well laid by craftsmen. The mortar, usually made with lime is there to keep the bricks apart – not to stick them together.

Pointing may be needed on chimney stacks, exposed corners or water damaged walls. Lime mortar should be used.

It is flexible, moves with the house and if it cracks, will seal itself again, looking just right.

Any alterations to houses on the Suburb must be approved by the Trust and Barnet. Pointing needs Trust consent and we are happy to give impartial advice, free.



(Unpointed wall) Soft lime mortar weathers naturally, doesn't damage the bricks and has an open texture that allows them to dry out after the rain.



(Badly pointed wall) Modern cement is stronger and rigid, cannot be removed without damaging the bricks and causes frost damage



(Unpointed wall) Soft mortar encourages drying out, enhances the beauty of the bricks and makes them less liable to damage when a wet wall freezes

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