

## ADELAIDE: THE GARDEN CITY ON STEROIDS

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### ABSTRACT

*Adelaide is the original garden city. Uniquely in the world its metropolitan area extends around the original settlement at a uniform low density and retains its central parkland belt. Whilst Colonel Light's original design for the square mile of Adelaide was an inspiration for Howard's garden city, over 150 years later the wider city is a massively inflated version of the garden city measuring 90 kilometres from north to south and home to 1.3 million people. It has long since outgrown the walkable, population constrained model of its founding fathers. For a century Adelaide has represented the egalitarian Australian dream of a single family home on a quarter acre block for all, irrespective of income or class. But rising house prices and the imperatives of urban sustainability now demand that the city consolidates its density, restricts further outward sprawl and shifts towards linear, public transit oriented development. A new metropolitan planning strategy presages a significant change to the urban form. However, there is significant resistance to urban consolidation particularly in the historic eastern suburbs. Many Adelaide residents perceive a threat to the garden city lifestyle in the new planning strategy. The paper addresses the implications of the planned changes and questions whether quality of life in Adelaide will be improved as a result of the new strategy. In the context of its gradual development as a spatially extensive low density garden city the 2010 Planning Strategy for Greater Adelaide is assessed. The strengths and weaknesses of the twentieth century development of Adelaide are examined against the ideas set out in the new strategy. The key questions addressed include whether it is time for a twenty first century revamp of its founding principles and whether Adelaide can and should attempt to retain its garden city heritage. Crucially, is it physically possible to redraw the map and reinvent the garden city as the sustainable city? The paper concludes that Howard's social city concept remains a valid model for a revised metropolitan planning strategy.*

### ADELAIDE AS THE GARDEN CITY

South Australia holds the distinction of being the only state which does not have a history blighted by the practice of transportation of convicts from Britain. It was settled in 1836 mainly by English Christian non-conformists as a conscious social experiment (Hutchings, 2007). As such it has developed a distinctive social character, a curious mix of radical and conservative and jealously guards its reputation as a deliberately planned city, a civilised place which seeks to maintain its founding standards and does not readily buy into the frenetic develop at all costs mentality of the larger Australian state capitals.

Adelaide is the original garden city. Bunker (2007) suggests that Colonel Light's original design for the square mile of Adelaide probably owes its inspiration to the ideas of TJ Maslen's 1830 *The Friend of Australia*. Its distinctive parkland belt certainly appears in that publication and Bunker further cites Matthew Davenport Hill, brother of Rowland Hill, the secretary to the Board of Colonisation Commissioners as recommending the idea of parklands as providers of both beauty and health. Whatever its origins the distinctive square mile grid of the city, surrounded on all sides by extensive parklands has become an icon of South Australia. As the city grew this basic layout has remained intact and the grid based suburban expansion of the twentieth century mirrors the rectilinear urban core. Ebenezer Howard is cited as pointing to Adelaide as an exemplar for the development of the Social City concept, where urban expansion is achieved by leap frogging over parklands (Rockey, 1983). Entering the twentieth century the designation in 1917 of the Mitcham garden suburb later named Colonel Light Gardens, some 8 kilometres south of the city re-emphasised the influence of the garden city movement as did the designation of the much larger new town of Elizabeth 27 kilometres north of the city in 1949. Beyond the square mile of the original foundation Greater Adelaide developed as the epitome of suburbia. Hutchings (2007: 41) notes that "a key feature put forward for the colony and its capital was that its town-country mix afforded a decent alternative to the slums of the old world". In the years between settlement and the start of the twentieth

century small villages such as Unley, Mitcham, Hindmarsh and Prospect developed across the Adelaide plain. As the villages closer to the city began to coalesce, Charles Reade, appointed Adelaide's first Town Planner in 1918, presented a plan which included an outer belt of parklands some 10 kilometres distance from the CBD completely encircling the city, brushing the coast at West Beach and the foothills of the Mount Lofty ranges in the east. Hutchings (2007: 72) notes "*this second parklands ring.... obviously reflects the Social City's core and satellites that have become so familiar in town planning lore. Howard used Colonel Light's plan for Adelaide to illustrate this idea. Thus Light, influenced Howard who influenced Reade, who in turn was building upon Light's original work*".

From a population of around 140,000 in 1900, Adelaide grew to 382,000 in the first postwar census in 1947. By this time the limits of Reade's unrealised outer parklands ring had been reached. Public transport rendered most suburbs accessible within 20 minutes of the central core. The consolidated urban area, roughly triangular in shape, measured some 20 kilometres from its base in the north to its apex in the south. Though a vastly inflated version of Howard's garden ideal city both spatially and in population, it was still capable of functioning along garden city lines. Local service centres provided for immediate needs and the journey from side to side or suburb to city, though achieved by locomotive means rather than on foot, was achievable in under an hour. Living conditions were generally good with a uniform low density of dwellings with ample public and private open space. The new city of Elizabeth was a separate entity, designed along garden city lines as a self sufficient community, which drew inspiration from the British New Towns and was clearly envisaged as a satellite after Howard's Social City model. So for the 120 years following its foundation Adelaide maintained key attributes of the garden city, accessibility, decent housing standards exemplified by low density and ample open space, social opportunity, and decent economic opportunities.

From the late 1950s onwards the interpretation of Adelaide as the garden city in anything but the form of its housing layouts begins to stretch credibility. Private car ownership was rising to the point where it facilitated commuting to work across the metropolitan area. Half the resident workforce of Elizabeth which by the early 1960s had a population of over 40,000 travelled to jobs elsewhere in metropolitan Adelaide (Forster & McCaskill, 2007: 87). As the suburban reach extended to north and south, Elizabeth became amalgamated into the greater metropolitan area and the existing train and tram network failed to serve many of the new dormitory suburbs. The new metropolitan plan of 1962, the first attempt since Charles Reade's 1917 review, took a bold approach to addressing this trend. The new plan recognised the inevitability of Adelaide developing into the linear city of today, stretching from Gawler in the north to Aldinga in the south. At the same time it noted the predilection of Adelaide residents for low density detached dwellings (Town Planning Committee: South Australia, 1962: 125). Thus it put forward the concept of grouping new development into self-contained metropolitan districts of 80-150,000 population each with its own district centre and industrial area. These would be separated from each other by buffer strips of open land. Thus the plan sought to channel the future growth of the city, which by now had far outstripped the garden city ideal, into de facto satellite towns and reconfigure the sprawling metropolis as the social city. (Town Planning Committee: South Australia, 1962:131) Over the last 50 years these centres have consolidated but mainly as retail service centres. The global trend towards large enclosed shopping malls, generously provided with free car parking is evident in the design of all the major Adelaide regional centres at Marion, Noarlunga, Modbury, Elizabeth and West Lakes. Employment on a large scale has not followed the planned development of regional centres and the concentration of industry in Playford and Port Adelaide in the north and Lonsdale in the south, plus a widely dispersed scatter of small employment zones, means commuting is largely car based. Whilst some of the buffer strips remain visible most have been eroded or completely disappeared, swallowed by suburban housing. Despite a further strategic plan in the early 1990s which attempted to reinforce this 1960s vision for the greater metropolitan area as a hierarchy of regional centres, it has failed to materialise as intended (Bunker & Hutchings, 1996).

In 2010 Adelaide represents the garden city on steroids. It is a vast sprawl of low density dwellings which provides at the household level a form of housing which represents the garden city ideal. But the accessibility of former years is now only possible through the private motor vehicle. The CBD attracts around 30% of its daily

commuters by public transport, mainly because of its central location as a destination for all train lines and many bus services. But this represents 70% of all public transport commuters in the city. Public transport usage to all other employment destinations is 5% or less (Department of Transport & Urban Planning, 2004). The median daily commute by Adelaide workers is around 7.5k whilst by public transport the median commute is 11.4 k. Services are for the most part only conveniently accessed by car and as the retail drawing power of the city and designated regional centres has consolidated, smaller centres, especially the local centres within residential areas struggle to compete and face closure.

## THE 2010 PLAN

In his Forward to the consultation draft of the 2010 Plan for Greater Adelaide the State Premier Mike Rann notes that “the vision and foresight that Colonel William Light brought to his design for Adelaide- Australia’s first planned city - remains a defining feature of our capital” (Government of South Australia, 2010: vi). It is a measure of the high regard in which Adelaide’s first surveyor general is still held by its current citizens that Rann should choose to reassure them with such anodyne comment. But is it really possible to compare the vision of a small colonial settlement of the 1830s with the 2010 strategy for metropolitan Adelaide? The 2010 plan for Greater Adelaide, which sets a development strategy for the next 30 years to 2040 is a significant departure from all of its predecessors and clearly represents planning on a scale and complexity not capable of being envisaged by Light. To begin, its spatial extent is considerably greater than the previous Planning Strategy for Metropolitan Adelaide (Government of South Australia, 2005). The enhanced coverage of the new plan, which takes in the Fleurieu peninsula to the south, extends north into the Barossa valley and east to include the Adelaide hills region. The context for the plan is one of high projected growth. Population is forecast to grow by 560,000 over 30 years representing a 40% increase on the current metropolitan population of 1.3 million with a projected requirement for 258,000 new dwellings over the plan period. Inevitably much of this increase will be achieved through inward migration, driven by the projected economic success of the state especially in the mining, ICT and defence sectors as well as food and wine industries. The plan sets out its key objectives in terms of three broad aims namely Liveability, Competitiveness and Sustainability & Climate Change Resilience. Each of these is broadly defined as in Table 1 below.

Table 1: The Objectives of the Plan for Greater Adelaide

Liveability	Competitiveness	Sustainability & Climate Change Resilience
Spending less time in cars and having more leisure time	Attract jobs & investment	Re-engineer urban growth towards sustainability & climate change resilience
Vibrant arts, culture and sporting life	Keep people in South Australia	Massively improve water & energy efficiency
Affordable housing and living costs	Welcomes international & interstate migrants	Preserve natural environment
Urban form and design which represents best elements of past & present	Excellent education facilities	Maximise competitive advantage in renewable and clean energy

Source: Government of South Australia (2010) p56

Flowing from the Plan objectives set out above are 12 principles which seek to underpin the new urban form, respond to challenges and opportunities and achieve the three interlocking objectives. These are set out below:

1. A compact and carbon efficient city
2. Housing diversity and choice
3. Accessibility
4. Transit focused & connected city
5. World class design and vibrancy
6. Social inclusion and fairness
7. Heritage and character
8. A healthy and safe city

9. Affordable living
10. Economic growth and competitiveness
11. Climate change resilience
12. Environmental protection

Each of these principles is supported and promoted by a range of detailed policies which are designed to provide clear guidance for land use at local and regional levels. The plan states that Greater Adelaide will have “*a new, modern and efficient urban form*” but immediately follows this statement with the somewhat conflicting observation that “*the vast majority of the existing built form will remain unchanged*” (Government of South Australia, 2010:60). In practical terms this latter comment is probably correct given the inertia inherent in all urban systems. Over the next thirty years the majority of the built form of Adelaide is likely to remain much as it is today. A good deal of retrofit of existing buildings will be needed to achieve a number of the principles set out above (notably 8, 9 & 11) But it is at this point that we begin to observe the inherent tension in the plan emerging. This is a plan which seeks to radically alter the form, layout and lifestyle of the Australian city, which perhaps most clearly represents the national dream of freedom space and prosperity. The vast majority of residential areas in Adelaide range between 5 and 15 dwellings per hectare (dph) net, producing a characteristic suburban landscape. International wide comparison of residential density on a city wide basis consistently show that Australian cities rank in the lowest quartile (Demographia, 2008) with Adelaide as the classic example. The Plan itself recognises Adelaide’s relative low density when set in an international context, noting that currently average gross density is in the range 8 -11 dph. Future policy sets a standard for new transit oriented developments at 25-35 gross which is designed to “*take Greater Adelaide closer to the international standard for sustainable densities, which is 35 dph*” (Government of South Australia, 2010:65). The culture of Adelaide , perhaps more than any other major Australian city can be argued to be suburban. The plan’s intentions to focus 70% of new development on infill with much of this located on upgraded public transit r corridors in order to create a transit connected city appears to threaten both the established primacy of the private family car, the availability of large suburban blocks and the apparent equality of housing provision, where to the untutored eye, it is difficult to distinguish between areas of wealth and deprivation on the basis of housing and space standards.

## THE EXISTING CITY AND THE NEW PLAN

There can be no doubt that despite attempts of reassurance to the contrary the new plan, if strictly implemented over the next thirty years, will set in train policies and changes which will significantly affect the urban form and future growth of the greater Adelaide metropolitan area. The logic for bringing about such change rests on the imperatives of climate change and peak oil. The city is extremely resource inefficient, especially in respect of private car usage. A recent study reveals that the more distant suburbs on the urban fringe, which traditionally offer cheaper house prices are vulnerable to rising oil prices (Dodson & Sipe, 2008:32) and the Plan notes increasing strain on energy and water resources (Government of South Australia, 2010:44). The consultation stage of the plan elicited over 500 submissions from individuals, local councils and the private sector. Many of these were supportive of the need for the plan and its broad intentions, but there was significant criticism on a number of grounds. This paper confines itself to reporting the consultation process in respect of those aspects which are perceived to be relevant to Adelaide’s garden city stature and which made positive suggestions relevant to re-establishing the garden city principles which were so evident for much of Adelaide’s history. A number of representations on the plan address the projected 70/30% split between infill and suburban fringe residential development. Compared to other Australian metropolitan strategies which mostly settle on a 60/40% split (Hamnett & Kellett, 2007), this target may appear ambitious, but the observation contained in the plan that this apportionment of development is a long term goal with an early years concentration on fringe development allied to a 15 year land bank allocation is suggested by some observers as a licence for continued sprawl (City of West Torrens Council, 2010). A fundamental lack of ambition in terms of transport infrastructure links (Adelaide Hills Council, 2010), the lack of existing or proposed

links between regional centres (Tea Tree Gully Council, 2010) and a range of problems related to the intensification of transit corridors instead of nodes (City of Marion Council, 2010) are also common themes. Hutchings (2010) also notes the apparent disregard of neighbourhood planning principles resulting from the plans espousal of the concept of super schools which will increase the commuting distance for school children across the metropolitan area.

Given the diversity of opinion regarding the provisions of the new plan it is a useful exercise to attempt to evaluate the two cities, the present day Adelaide and the possible future Adelaide of the new plan. The first step in this process is to use the plan’s objectives and the results of the public consultation process on the plan’s provisions to identify likely trends and outcomes. This analysis is set out in Table 2 below.

Table 2: The two cities compared against the Plan Objectives

	Adelaide 2010	Adelaide 2040
A compact and carbon efficient city	NO	Improved
Housing diversity and choice	NO	YES
Accessibility	Predominantly by car	Improved modal choice
Transit focused & connected city	NO	Improved
World class design and vibrancy	NO	?
Social inclusion and fairness	YES	Diminished
Heritage and character	YES	?
A healthy and safe city	YES	YES
Affordable living	Moderate	?
Economic growth and competitiveness	YES	?
Climate change resilience	NO	Improved
Environmental protection	?	?

This initial analysis demonstrates that the implementation of the new plan is likely to diversify the housing stock and provide more choice. The future city may also demonstrate a trend to be more compact and carbon efficient, but given the inertia inherent in all urban systems it is unlikely to be dramatically less energy hungry than it is now. This observation is not made as an argument against pursuing this policy aim. The planned improvements to the transport infrastructure should also improve accessibility and allow greater modal choice. However the infrastructure improvements will predominantly give better access to the city centre and are likely do little to improve inter suburban journeys or fundamentally improve access to regional centres. The issues of promoting a trend towards world class design and heritage and environmental protection are positive aims of the new plan but are neither highly dependant on its fundamental principles of liveability, competitiveness and sustainability, nor are they capable of prediction. Indeed many of the consultation comments on the new plan argued that the consolidation of urban density is likely to be prejudicial to the retention of heritage. More problematic are economic growth, social inclusion and affordability. Whilst the plan can exercise some influence over these aspects they are likely to be much more powerfully affected by global economic trends, federal government policies on issues such as immigration and taxation and inter state rivalries.

## TWENTY FIRST CENTURY MAGNETS

In the same way that Howard used his celebrated three magnets diagram to identify the strengths and weaknesses of town and country, before suggesting the possibility of a third and more attractive magnet, the next step in this analysis is to take the results of Table 2 which tabulate the relative strengths and weaknesses of two magnets and postulate the possibility of a third more effective magnet. If modern day Adelaide can be viewed as a vastly inflated version of the garden city, the garden city on steroids, containing some elements of the original form of the garden city but now lacking its functionality (magnet 1), and the Adelaide portrayed in the new plan represents a twenty first century variant on the existing city redesigned to be less car dependant and resource intensive (magnet 2), is there a an alternative which represents a better, even more attractive solution? Specifically, can the new plan retain the cherished attributes of Adelaide’s environment, namely its low density garden city type housing and heritage interest that in many citizens’ minds set it apart from most other cities in the world, whilst reviving the other key garden city characteristics of accessibility social and economic opportunity which held good for the first 120 years of the city’s existence. And can it achieve these ends whilst addressing the key twenty

first century concerns of sustainability and climate protection? In essence is it physically possible to redraw the map and reinvent the garden city as the sustainable city? The analysis of these questions (see Table 3) is best achieved using the consultation review of the plan's policies to interrogate its robustness.

Table 3: Adelaide 2040, Citizen Response and the Garden City Ideal

	Adelaide 2040	Consultation response	The Sustainable 21 <sup>st</sup> century Garden City Ideal
A compact and carbon efficient city	Improved	Concern	YES
Housing diversity and choice	YES	Positive	YES
Accessibility	Improved modal choice	Positive	YES
Transit focused & connected city	Improved	Positive	YES
World class design and vibrancy	?	?	?
Social inclusion and fairness	Diminished	Concern	YES
Heritage and character	?	Concern	?
A healthy and safe city	YES	Concern	YES
Affordable living	?	Concern	YES
Economic growth and competitiveness	?	?	YES
Climate change resilience	Improved	?	YES
Environmental protection	?	Concern	YES

An ideal city for the twenty first century which encompasses both the defining characteristics of the garden city ideal and performs in a more sustainable, less environmentally harmful and less resource intensive manner than twentieth century urban areas would likely display many of the characteristics set out in Table 3, column 1, which represents the key objectives of the new plan for Adelaide. Column 3 confirms these attributes but raises doubts about the necessity, likelihood and inclusion in this ideal of two particular objectives, namely *world class design and vibrancy* and *heritage and character*. Neither are viewed in the current analysis as key components of either the original garden city ideal or as vital to future sustainability, desirable though they may both be to future quality of urban life. Thus column 3 represents the desirable third magnet, an ideal expressed more in terms of performance than form, as befits a twenty first century analysis which seeks a vision of an ideal city. Column 2 attempts to summarise the majority view expressed by respondents to the consultation process on the new plan. This sheds doubt on the potential of the new plan to attain the ideals expressed in column 3 for a range of reasons that are worthy of further comment. For present day Adelaide to become compact and carbon efficient, both a significant overall residential density increase and a switch from everyday reliance on the private car to public transit are seen as required prerequisites. The plan's envisaged transit corridors appear insufficient in themselves to achieve change on the scale required. Many of the envisaged transit corridors remain essentially road based. Whilst these corridors may encourage a higher incidence of bus trips, they are likely to continue as major arterials for car borne commuters. The distribution of employment opportunities remains heavily skewed towards the City of Adelaide (The original square mile as set out by Colonel Light) and a small number of other local government areas such as Port Adelaide Enfield and Salisbury in the northern metropolitan area, with large numbers commuting necessarily by car between suburban local government areas because of the lack of current (and planned ) inter suburb area public transit links (Department of Transport & Urban Planning, 2004). Council areas such as Onkaparinga in the south and Tea Tree Gully in the North display a marked population to jobs imbalance with large numbers of outgoing daily commuters. Accessibility is no doubt improved in the new plan, but not sufficiently to merit the garden city characteristic claims that Adelaide could justifiably make in the 1950s before it physically outgrew its transit infrastructure. It is likely to remain car focused, albeit with an improved ridership on the upgraded tram and train network with some of this ridership resulting from higher residential densities in the transit corridors. But this density consolidation too is problematic. It is often cited in the consultation responses to the plan as an issue in terms of loss of amenity and heritage, worsening air pollution and increasing social division. That the new transit format and associated residential intensification will increase housing choice and shift the city away from a

preponderance of 3-4 bedroomed detached family homes is likely and probably to be welcomed as the demographics shift towards smaller households, but the affordability of these dwellings remains questionable, as multi storey forms increase and land values from urban consolidation escalate. So issues of social inclusion and access to housing and facilities remain a central concern for many objectors to the plan. The fundamental issue which is the subject of substantial adverse comment on the plan is the concentration on transit corridors most of which link suburbs with the city centre. Apart from the paucity of transit corridors which rely on non road based travel, the lack of inter suburban transit links implies that most public transit trips will require a journey into the CBD and then out again. Faced with this choice many commuters are likely to remain faithful to their cars.

But could the Sustainable 21<sup>st</sup> century Garden City Ideal be achieved given the current steroid fuelled situation? It was suggested above that the key attributes of the garden city are accessibility, decent housing standards exemplified by low density and ample open space, social opportunity, and decent economic opportunities. Add to these the twenty first century imperatives of sustainability and climate resilience and it could seem that the 1826 square kilometres of Adelaide housing only 1.3 million people is a poor starting point. But many of the basic building blocks and attributes are already in place. A radial network of public transit exists. Quality of life as defined by housing density and open space provision is high. Social and economic opportunity is not as even as it could be, but compared to many other cities Adelaide cannot be considered a serious problem case. Improving accessibility in a way that significantly reduces, firstly the need to travel and secondly, the attraction of travelling by car, seems to be the key to unlocking the potential offered by the existing city. But in choosing the corridor approach to solving this problem the State government may be guilty of a serious miscalculation. This approach contrasts with the previous strategy of attempting to define and reinforce regional centres within the metropolitan area. The better solution may lie more readily in Howard's social city concept. Both the 1962 and 1990 metropolitan strategies attempted to build on this strategy. Neither were wholly successful, but that is not a reason to switch tack at this point. The social city network exists in the form of the existing CBD and the designated regional centres at Noarlunga, Marion, Elizabeth, Modbury and West Lakes and there is potential for additional centres as population increases, principally at Gawler, and Mount Barker. These need to be the focus of policy which strengthens both their service attributes and particularly their employment focus. They should also be the main areas for consolidation of density and diversity of housing opportunity, including affordable housing. Crucially the metropolitan transit infrastructure network needs to be augmented to link these to each other without the necessity for a journey through the CBD. This significant but straightforward approach could re-establish the garden city qualities of Adelaide, which every public consultation on a major new strategy has shown are its citizens' prime concern, whilst adapting the city to meet the challenges of the current century. An effectively networked hierarchical system of regional centres with good quality public transit links between them would provide the basic framework. Greater emphasis on concentrating industry and employment in close proximity to these centres would reduce the need for inter suburban travel by car and in some instances allow walking and cycling to work. A renewed focus on the neighbourhood as service provider, clustering a hierarchy of smaller centres around each regional node with a modest increase in residential density resulting largely from the provision of a greater share of smaller housing units to balance the current over supply of family homes complete the strategy. The third magnet is achievable but it remains in stark contrast to both the existing city and that envisaged in the new 30 year plan for Adelaide

### CONCLUSION

As one of the primary international examples of the garden city Adelaide has developed a reputation as a good place to live. Its low density suburbs and planned structure are regarded by its citizens as its key strength. As the metropolitan area outgrew its garden city origins it has become an inflated parody of its founder's original intentions, highly reliant on the private car, inadequately serviced by public transit and profligate in its resource demands on its environment. The 2010 30 Year Plan for Greater Adelaide seeks to alter the city's structure, focussing on intensified public transit corridors with numerous transit oriented developments

along these. Further corridors of intensification are envisaged along existing arterial routes. A comparison of the existing city with the city envisaged in this plan, incorporating a critique derived from public representations made on the plan, suggests that neither offers a satisfactory future which addresses the key concerns of low density sprawl, social isolation, resource intensity and climate change adaptation. Following the garden city model of three magnets, an alternative, largely derived from the strategies of the 1962 and 1992 plans, is presented. It is argued that this model, investing resources and policy on a networked city of regional centres, following Howard's social city model, is capable of retaining the low density lifestyle so valued by many of its citizens, whilst also addressing changing demographics, reducing car dependency, improving social connections and adapting to a climate threatened future.

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