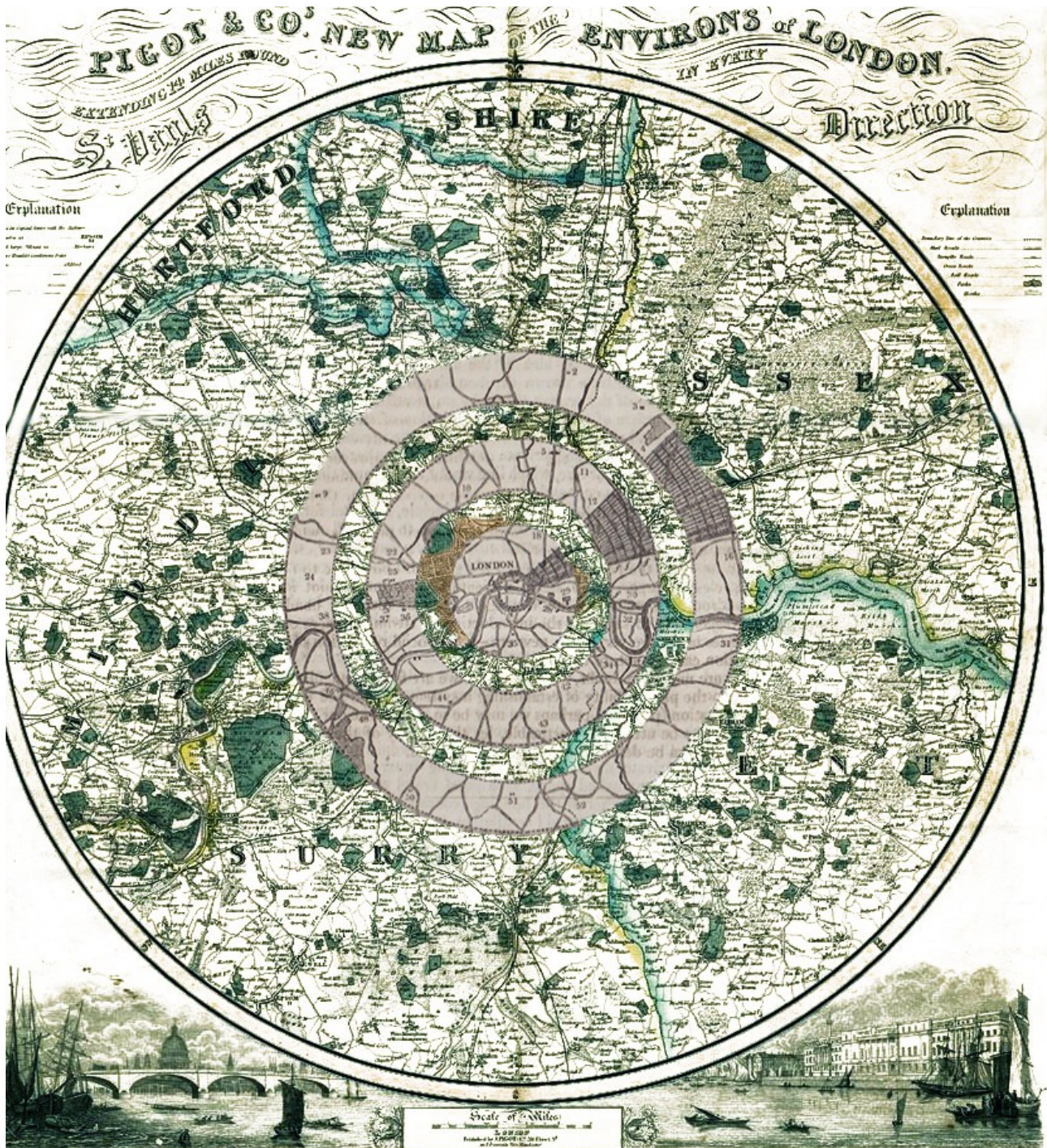


# Breathing Places for the Metropolis

## A Landscape Architecture London Plan

John Claudius Loudon 1829



The published version of John Claudius Loudon's 'Landscape and Architecture' Plan for London is in the body of his article, reproduced below. The above illustration shows Loudon's Plan superimposed on Pigot & Co's circular *New Map Environs of London* (1839). Loudon's far-sighted plan was for a 10-fold expansion of the metropolis. As shown on the plan, below, London expanded 30-fold by 2010.

Loudon was surely right that a plan for the possible expansion of the city should have been formulated in the early nineteenth century. The advances which have taken place in architecture and



transportation since that date could not have been planned. But the need for a long-term perspective on the conservation of landscape was as clear in 1829 as it is today.

J C Loudon was a farmer's son. He studied agriculture at Edinburgh University and was apprenticed to a landscape planner who worked on the layout of farmland. Moving to London and setting up his own practice, Loudon worked on the design of 'landscape gardens'. When an injury limited this activity, Loudon turned to writing. He launched the world's first magazines and encyclopaedias devoted of architecture and gardens. These two interests attracted him to the term Landscape Architecture, launched by a fellow-Scot in 1828, and it might have been a better name than 'Breathing Places' for Loudon's 1829 plan for a planned integration of architecture, transport and landscape for the anticipated future growth of London. The term 'landscape architecture' was adopted by Olmsted and Vaux's winning entry for the Central Park Competition of 1858. Like Loudon, Olmsted planned for the integration of architecture and landscape.

Had Loudon lacked the modesty which so becomes a scholar, he might have described his 1829 as the 'grand fundamental work' of London open space planning. For this it was. The five main principles are as follows, with my comments in square brackets. The central ring is approximately the extent of the metropolis in 1829. The original of Loudon's Breathing Places diagram is in its correct place in the below transcription of his article.

1. Governments have a duty to plan for how the metropolis can expand 'with perfect safety to the inhabitants, in respect to the supply of provisions, water, and fresh air, and to the removal of filth of every description'. [*Comment* This obligation is accepted by all modern governments. In London, the first sewers were laid by the Romans and the principle of universal sewage disposal and water supply was adopted in the second half of the nineteenth century].
2. Our plan is to surround London 'as it already exists' with a zone of open country. [*Comment*. Loudon's recommendation pre-dates Ebenezer Howard's green belt proposal by 1898 years – and was more sophisticated in many ways]
3. London could be extended by alternate rings of buildings, with half mile zones of country or gardens, 'till one of the zones touched the sea'. [*Comment*. Approaching the bicentenary of Loudon's 1829 plan, London has already covered more land than was covered by his plan. Will London continue to expand until it touches the sea? We cannot know – but a contingency plan for this eventuality should be prepared.]
4. The use of perfect circles, as on the plan, is not necessary or desirable. Irregular lines, responding to the existing landscape, would be much more beautiful as well as economical. [*Comment*. This qualification illustrates Loudon's belief in one of the fundamental principles of landscape architecture: every design should take account of the Genius of the Place]
5. The streets would be radial or circumferential, as should the public transport. Pipes beneath the streets would carry water, gas, sewage and hot air (for district heating). Sewage would be used as manure in the country rings instead of being discharged into rivers. [*Comment*. This is a far-sighted proposal. ]
6. The country rings would contain parks, gardens, lakes and places for 'harmless amusement'. [*Comment*. Ebenezer Howard recommend comparable uses in his green belt proposal. The ideas have been realised, in golf courses, country parks, country hotels and gardens open to the public. To a degree they form part of the UK's green belt policy as set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 - Green Belts - PPG 2.

Tom Turner  
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Greenwich





Plan showing the approximate extent of London in 2010, superimposed on Pigot & Co's circular *New Map Environs of London* 1839. It demonstrates how right was to call for the government to prepare a landscape-based plan for London's growth.

## Gardeners Magazine Vol 5 1829, pp 686-690

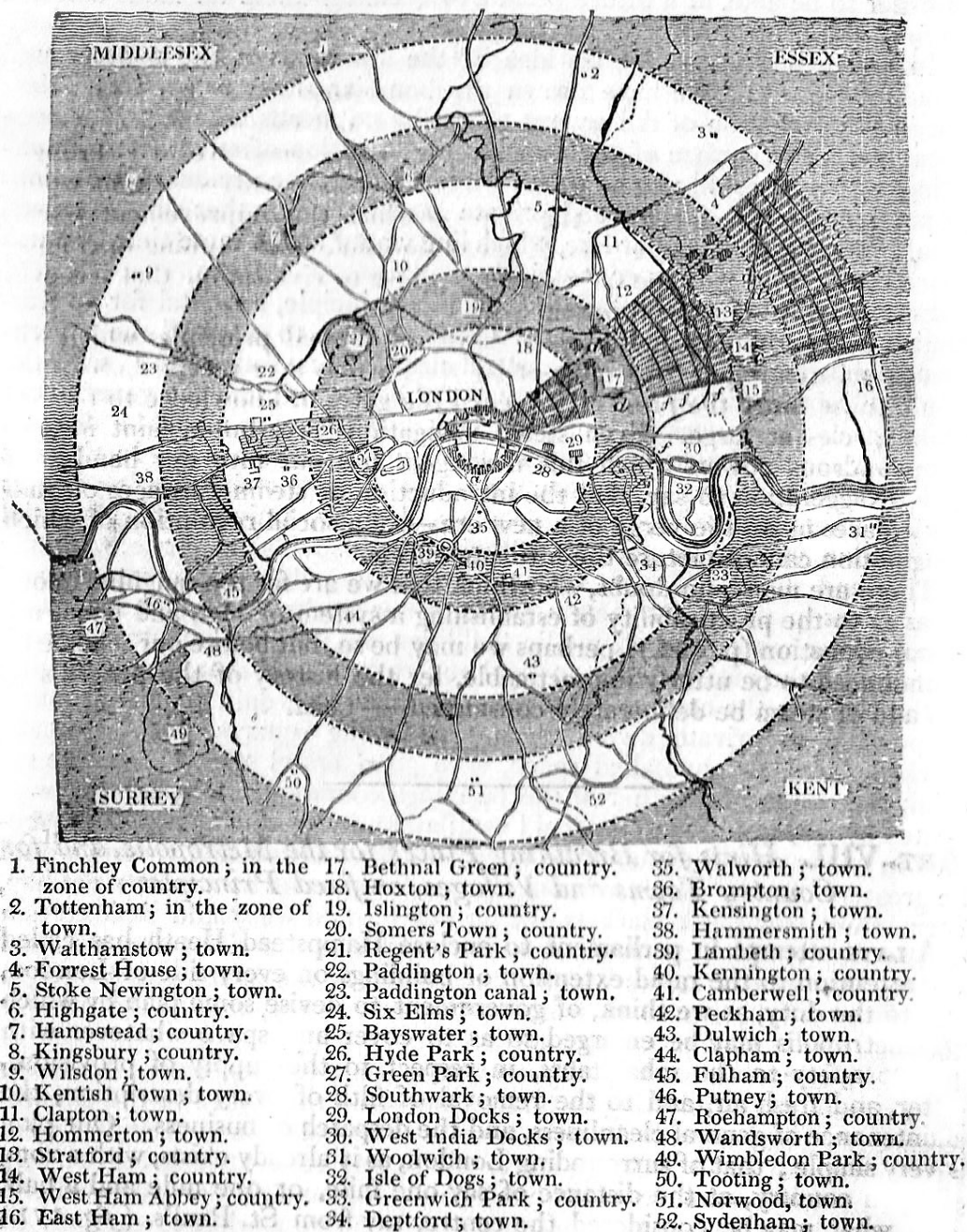
*Art. VIII. Hints for Breathing Places for the Metropolis, and for Country Towns and Villages, on fixed Principles*

A late attempt in parliament to enclose Hampstead Heath has called our attention to the rapid extension of buildings on every side of London, and to the duty, as we think, of government to devise some plan by which the metropolis may be enlarged so as to cover any space whatever with perfect safety to the inhabitants, in respect to the supply of provisions, water, and fresh air, and to the removal of filth of every description, the maintenance of general cleanliness, and the despatch of business. Our plan is very simple; that of surrounding London, as it already exists, with a zone of



open country, at the distance of say one mile, or one mile and a half, from what maybe considered the centre, say from St. Paul's. (Fig. 171.) This zone of country may be half a mile broad, and may contain, as the figure shows, part of Hyde Park, the Regent's Park, Islington, Bethnal Green, the Commercial Docks, Camberwell, Lambeth, and Pimlico; and it maybe succeeded by a zone of town one mile broad, containing Kensington, Bayswater, Paddington, Kentish Town, Clapton, Lime House, Deptford, Clapham, and Chelsea; and thus the metropolis may be extended in alternate mile zones of buildings, with half mile zones of country or gardens, till one of the zones touched the sea. To render the plan complete, it would be necessary to have a circle of turf and gravel in the centre of the city, around St. Paul's, half a mile in diameter. In this circle ought to be situated all the government offices, and central depots connected with the administration of the affairs of the metropolis. That being accomplished, whatever might eventually become the extent of London, or of any large town laid out on the same plan and in the same proportions, there could never be an inhabitant who would be farther than half a mile from an open airy situation, in which he was free to walk or ride, and in which he could find every mode of amusement, recreation, entertainment, and instruction.

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Supposing such a plan considered desirable, it could not be carried into execution in such a metropolis as London, unless in consequence of accident or revolution, in less time than one or two centuries; because it could never be recommended to purchase and pull down so many valuable houses as would be requisite to form the central circle of country, and the first zone of country. But were government to determine the boundaries of certain future zones, and to enact a law that no buildings now standing on the future zones of country should be repaired after a certain year, and that when such houses were no longer habitable, the owners should lie indemnified for them by the transfer of other houses of equal yearly value in another part of the metropolis, belonging to government, the transition, considering the great increase that will take place in the size of London during two centuries, and the alteration in the relative value of property in consequence of the law respecting zones, would not be felt as the slightest injustice or inconvenience. Government would be justified in adopting a plan of this sort, from its obvious reference to the public welfare; and a committee being appointed to carry the law into execution would begin by purchasing such lands as were to be sold in the outskirts of the metropolis, in order to be able, at a future period, to exchange them for lands destined to form the central circle of the first zone.

In endeavouring to give an idea of the situations of the zones round London (Fig 171), we have drawn the boundary lines as perfect circles; but in the execution of the project this is by no means necessary, nor even desirable. The surface of the ground, the direction of streets already existing, which it would not be worth while to alter, the accidental situations of public buildings, squares, and private gardens, with other circumstances, would indicate an irregular line, which line would at the same time be much more beautiful as well as economical.

Supposing a town to be founded on this principle, a capital for an Australian union for example; then we should propose to place all the government public buildings round the central circle, in one range (*a,b,c*), with the house of representatives in the centre; and between it and the government buildings as many markets, churches, and play-houses as might be deemed necessary for the inner half mile of the inner zone of town. In the first and succeeding zones of country we would place the slaughtering-houses (*d,e*), markets, churches, burial grounds, theatres, universities, parochial institutions, workhouse gardens, botanical and zoological gardens, public picture and statue galleries, national museums, public conservatories and tea-gardens (p. 251.), gasometers, public water-works, baths and swimming ponds, sewer works, and all public buildings and places whatever not connected with the national or municipal government, and therefore belonging to the circle in the centre. The zones of town we would confine as much as possible to private dwellings, not admitting squares, burial-grounds, market-places, or any naked space, save good broad streets; because we think the closeness together of the buildings containing fires, or otherwise heated by art, would materially aid ventilation, by producing a greater rarefaction of air over them, and the advantage for business and visiting would be greater. In the zones of country we would contrive to have the hay, corn, straw, and cattle markets not far apart; and we would limit certain of the streets which proceed from the centre to the circumference, and certain also of the others which run parallel to the zones, exclusively to the supply of these markets from the distant country, and to the transfer of articles from one market to another.

All the streets of such a city we would limit to two kinds; radiating main streets communicating in direct lines from the centre to the circumference (*d c*), and concentric main streets for lateral communication (*f f*). Every alternate grand radiating street (*d e g*) and concentric street (*d d d h*), should be those alone by which cattle, hay, fuel, and similar bulky articles were brought to the markets, or conveyed from one market to another. In the radiating and concentric streets, alternating with these, the mails might be understood to depart; and in all the main streets, radiating and concentric, public conveyances, like the omnibuses in Paris, propelled by steam or otherwise, according to the improvements of the age and country, parcel carriers, letter carriers, &c, might be established for ready and economical intercommunication. Every man might thus ride from any one point in the metropolis to any other point without loss of time, and at very little expense. For instance, A living in the central circle, wishes to call on B in the second zone of town; then, by the radiating coach which passes nearest B's house, he will be set down where the radiating street

crosses the concentric street in which B lives; and when one of the concentric street coaches belonging to B's street passes, A will step into it and be set down at B's door. Supposing steam carriages running on railroads to be established in every street, or even in all the main streets, this might be done with inconceivable rapidity.

It is evident that every description of goods and provisions being brought in by the radiating market roads, might be distributed by the concentric market-roads, on public conveyances, and by the ordinary concentric roads on private conveyances, with as great ease as in the case of personal intercourse. Letters and books, also, could be so distributed with great facility and rapidity. Under every street we would have a sewer sufficiently large, and so contrived as to serve at the same time as a subway for the mains of water and gas, and we would keep it in view that hot water, hot oil, steam, or hot air, may in time be circulated by public companies for heating houses; and gas supplied not only for the purposes of lighting, but for those of cookery, and some for manufactures. The matters conveyed by the sewer we would not allow to be all wasted in a river; but here and there, in what we would call sewer works, to be placed in the country zones, we would strain the water by means of machinery, so as to gain from it almost every particle of manure held in mixture. This manure being dry from compression might be conveyed to any distance without smell or other inconvenience. The water, freed from its grosser impurities, might be raised to towers, and, by the pressure of the atmosphere, forced through pipes to tracts of country beyond the outer zone, for the purposes of irrigation.

In the country zones we should permit individuals, on proper conditions of rent and regulations, to establish all manner of rural coffee-houses, and every description of harmless amusement; and the space not occupied by these establishments, and by the public buildings before mentioned, we would lay out as park and pleasure-ground scenery, and introduce in it all the plants, trees, and shrubs which would grow in the open air, with innumerable seats, covered and uncovered, in the sun and in the shade. We would also introduce pieces of water, under certain circumstances (especially if there were no danger of it producing malaria), rocks, quarries, stones, wild places in imitation of heaths and caverns, grottoes, dells, dingles, ravines, hills, valleys, and other natural-looking scenes, with walks and roads, straight and winding, shady and open; and, to complete the whole, there should be certain bands of music to perambulate the zones, so as at certain hours to be at certain places every day in the year.

Though we have not the slightest idea that this beau ideal of a capital for an Australian or a European union will ever be carried into execution; and though we would rather see, in every country, innumerable small towns and villages, than a few overgrown capitals; yet we think, that, as there must probably always be some grand central cities in the world, some useful principles for regulating the manner in which each is increased may be deduced from the foregoing hints. The principle of having all the public or government buildings in the centre will apply in all cases, and so will that of radiating and concentric roads. Wherever a country town is likely to extend beyond a diameter of half a mile, we think a zone of breathing ground should be marked out as not to be built on, for the sake of the health of the poorer part of the inhabitants. In cases where towns and villages stretch along rivers, in very narrow vales, on the ridges of hills, or in narrow stripes along the sea coast, these zones become unnecessary, because the surface of the land is supposed to be open on one or on both sides; but in by far the greater number of cases, which are continually occurring in every country, the principle of concentric zones or breathing places will be found to present advantages which no other form or disposition of breathing places could produce. In country towns or large villages, where the greater number of the inhabitants cannot be supposed to keep horses or to support steam hackney coaches, or street conveyances of any kind, the first zone or breathing place ought not to be farther from the centre than a quarter of a mile, and the exterior zones of building should not be of greater width than half a mile, in order that the inhabitants may never have more than a quarter of a mile to walk. It is much to be regretted, we think, that in the numerous enclosure acts which have been passed during the last fifty years, provision was not made for a public green, playground, or garden, for every village in the parishes in which such enclosures took place. We hope the subject will be kept in view in future enclosure bills; and we hope, also, that the

legislature may not think it unworthy of their attention to take into consideration the subject of breathing places, on some systematic plan, calculated for the benefit of all ranks in all parts of the British metropolis.