Part 1

THE ORIGINS

Any attempt to shape the future of housing must be based upon an understanding of how we have got where we are today. Our attitudes towards new development are shaped by perceptions of what has and has not worked in the past and the cultural baggage which has become associated with the home and its place in towns and cities. In the first part of this book we therefore seek to chart the way that social and economic trends along with Utopian theories and urban reformers have shaped the pattern of housing and the attitudes of developers and residents that we have today.

'If we would lay a new foundation for urban life, we must understand the historic nature of the city'

Lewis Mumford - The City in History , Secker and Warburg 1961

Chapter 1
The flight from the city

Why is it that in Britain and America there is such a deep enmity towards the city? Why is it that continental cities are celebrated whilst most British and US cities are reviled and even feared? If it is true that without cities we have no civilisation, what does our attitude towards our cities tell us about the state of our society? If we are to reinvent the city it is important to understand the reasons for the Anglo-American city's fall from grace and the domination of UK urban values by American rather than European approaches.

The golden age of cities
There was a time when the builders of cities were glorified. Cities were the centres of civilisation and the places where the arts, government and commerce thrived. The design of cities was a noble pursuit attracting leading creative minds, from Vitruvius to Michelangelo, Baron Haussmann to John Nash. The building of great cities was the concern of kings, from Pope Sixtus V's desire to remodel Rome as the capital of Christendom, Peter the Great's commissioning of St. Petersburg as his capital and Napoleon III's redevelopment of Paris as a city of boulevards and squares. It was in the cities of Mesopotamia and the Nile Valley that civilisation first flowered. It was in the cities of the Greek and Roman empires that European civilisation was shaped and in the cities of northern Italy where it was rediscovered through the renaissance. Cities have always been centres for religion, trade and culture lie at the foundation of modern society. Whilst academics may argue about which came first, whether cities gave birth to civilisation or whether civilisation necessitated the building of cities[1], the two are inextricably linked.

It is these cities which predate the industrial revolution and the motorcar which retain their appeal and have given rise to the urban qualities that we still prize today and on which much urban design thinking is founded. Perhaps the most enduring image of this pre-industrial city is the Italian hill town of Siena which has been endlessly analysed and plundered for inspiration. Indeed it is argued[2] that the Commission for the European Union's ideas for the 'compact city'[3] are based more upon the unattainable ideal of the Italian hill town than the rather messier urban realities of most European cities today.

The medieval city was typically small, mixed-use, and based upon travel by foot. At the height of its powers the city state of Florence had a population of just 50 000 which is little bigger than Barnsley or Basingstoke. Yet Florence was one of the largest cities of the renaissance and was almost twice the size of cities like Vienna, Prague and Barcelona[4]. The medieval city was also dense, covering a fraction of the land area of a modern town of similar size. This compactness of built form created the tight urban

streets and crowded buildings that we enjoy in historic towns such as Chester and York. The density was partly the result of city walls which restrained growth. But as Hoskins[5] has shown, even unwalled towns and cities with no constraints on growth were remarkably dense. It has been suggested[6] that this density resulted from the needs of travel by foot which undoubtedly played a role in the compactness of great cities like London. It may also have been that compact development was driven by a need to conserve the surrounding agricultural land on which the city relied for its food. These arguments have all been explored at length but they do not hold the whole answer. Most pre-industrial cities were built at far greater densities than can be explained by physical constraints, the needs of travel by foot or the protection of agricultural land. There were other forces at play which go to the heart of the nature of cities and our inability to recapture their character today.

Why is it that the most remote farmhouse is built so that it abuts directly onto the only road for miles? Why is it that remote settlements surrounded by acres of seemingly unused land are built so that their houses almost fall over each other? It seems that historically there was something deep within the human consciousness which sought companionship and security. It may be that this dates back to the earliest encampments clustered around the communal campfire. Is it too far-fetched to imagine the tents becoming permanent shelters and the camp fire becoming the town square? Once the unseen dangers of the surrounding wilderness had been overcome the pattern of human settlement had been established.

However the need for human contact does not entirely explain the density of early settlements. Whilst fear of the wilderness may have been the initial motive this would soon have been combined with economic and political forces. It is likely that, in those early encampments, the tents nearest the fire would have been occupied by the chief and the most important members of the community. Here they would be close to

The ideal compact city? Siena is the archetypal compact city. Despite the fact that it was built entirely without the aid of planners and urban designers it has been mined for inspiration by generations of urban professionals

the warmth of the fire and to the focus of community life and decision making. The lower status members of the community would have been relegated to the outskirts of the camp, vulnerable to attack and cut off from the seat of power and status. Since humans have always aspired to improve themselves, it is reasonable to assume that the citizens of those early encampments would have aspired to be near the camp fire, both for the benefits that it would bring but also as a symbol of their status and position.

It is not hard to imagine this process transferred to the earliest cities. As Robert Fishman has described in Bourgeois Utopia[7], the dynamic of the pre-industrial city meant that the centre of the town was the place to be. The richer you were, and the more status and power you had, the nearer to the centre you sought to live and work. The elite of the town, the merchants, nobles, church men and administrators would jostle for the best locations at the centre of town, much as the prime retailers like Marks & Spencer do in modern shopping centres. Just as in a shopping centre, this demand for the best location would have

increased land values so that central areas also became the most expensive and the most profitable. The density of the pre-industrial city is the result of this demand for central sites. The competition for land meant that every available site would be developed to its maximum potential so that buildings became higher and more closely packed. Remember that in these early cities the merchants generally lived over their business, as indeed did many of their employees, so that pressures were intense. An extreme example of this can be seen in the 2 000 year old high-rise buildings in the Yemen.

In these ancient towns there was a gradation in social status as one moved away from the centre. The poorest people and the dirty or marginal uses were pushed to the edge of the town, often outside the protection of the city walls. Indeed the term 'suburb' was originally coined as a disparaging expression meaning literally 'less than urban'. However a dominant force within these cities was a desire to move closer to the centre of town and thus the centre of power and commerce. The poorest denizen of the suburb would covet the neighbourhoods

The UK compact city?
Fine historic environments are not only to be found in Italy. Many UK market towns like Calne in Wiltshire have equally attractive and popular environments

The shatter zone:
A figure ground plan of Barnsley in Yorkshire today. This clearly shows the structure of a dense medieval town surround-ed by a zone of ill-defined space which separates it from the surrounding residential development. This space has been described by Llewelyn-Davies as a 'shatter zone' where consider-able capacity exists for new development

within the city walls. The artisans within the walls would covet the middle class areas nearer the centre and the middle classes would aspire to a location on or near the town square. What is more, this would happen in towns where one could walk from the centre to open countryside in less than twenty minutes.

In Manchester there is still a sign on a building on the southern edge of the city centre which proclaims the 'Boundary of the Township of Manchester'. Beyond this is the Gaythorne area, an old industrial quarter which is part of an arc of old industry which encircles much of the city centre. Such industrial areas can be found in many modern cities and can clearly be seen on the figure ground plan of Barnsley (above). They mark the line of the original poor suburbs and now lie sandwiched between the town centre and the inner city and yet have a quite different character. Indeed these are areas which have always been impoverished and have often been swept aside as the line of least resist-ance for ring roads.

This is not to say that early suburban trends did not exist. As early as Elizabethan times there was concern about merchants moving out to the country, no doubt aping the landed gentry. However this was often based on single houses well beyond the poor suburbs and the houses tended to be used as weekend retreats. This is similar to the 'dacha' tradition still common in many eastern Euro-pean countries. In some cases these weekend retreats would be transformed over time into the main family residence with the merchant commuting into town for business. This trend however remained relatively insignificant until the advent of the industrial revolution.

The industrial city
This picture of growth in the pre-industrial city is a mirror image of modern Anglo-American settlements. Fishman has described the way that the industrial revolution placed such intense pressures on the traditional city that it reversed the polarity of settlements. In the modern Anglo-American city, status is measured not by how close to the centre you live, but by the distance that you can put between yourself and the perceived squalor of urban life. In the modern Anglo-American city (we will turn to the continental experience in a short while) the pressure for development is not in the centre but at the periphery. This has been the case with housing development for many years but it is now true of all manner of activity. Town centre shopping has declined as we switch our allegiance to the suburban supermarket or out-of-town shopping centre. The newspaper industry has largely abandoned Fleet Street for Docklands. Staff in central office districts have been decanted to peripheral business parks and urban cinemas have succumbed in the face of the multiplex.

Many reasons have been put forward for this dispersal of activity. It has been at-tributed to increasing mobility, initially due to commuter railways but more recently and more potently to the private car. It has been put down to changing retail and business needs which

cannot be accommodated in congested urban areas, to the workings of the land market, and to demographic change. All have played their part; however at its heart this trend of 'counterurbanization' is driven by the same forces which drove urbanisation in the early cities, it is just that today these forces are working in the opposite direction.

Fishman suggests that perhaps the first true suburb was Clapham in London where the Evangelicals, led by Wilberforce, sought to protect their families from the evil influence of the city in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Clapham was a development of the earlier 'dacha' trend but was conceived from the outset as a suburb around Clapham Com-

mon intended to provide the main family residence for its occupants. It represents an important step in the separation of home and family from work and commerce. As such it was an influential model for Victorian family life which was to take such a hold later in the century, exemplified in satires such as Diary of a Nobody by the Grossmiths, with its focus on the trivia of maintaining a household rather than the delights of urban living.

The next step in Fishman's history of the suburb took place in Manchester. This is significant, because whereas the Evangelicals were escaping from the traditional city, in Manchester the traditional city was being swamped by the industrial revolution and something

quite different was happening. Before the industrial revolution the form of Manchester was similar to many medieval towns, as can be seen from Green's map of the city (above) published in 1794 . The dense form of pre-industrial Manchester was the result of the same forces of concentration which shaped the Italian hill town. For the early years of Manchester's industrialisation it maintained this traditional model of growth with densities increasing towards the centre and the most affluent merchants living in areas like Moseley Street, Fountain Street, King Street and St. Anne's Square in the very heart of the city. However the cotton mills which came to dominate the city required large work-forces, and economic opportunity attracted rural migrants in vast numbers. As H. G. Wells said, this process turned cities like Manchester into 'great surging oceans' of humanity.

The conditions in the early industrial cities have been well documented elsewhere. Our concern here is the catalytic effect that the industrial revolution had on the British city. The phenomenal growth of population and industry in cities like Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and Sheffield stretched the capacity of the traditional city beyond breaking point. The industrial city came to be seen not as the chalice of civilisation but as the receptacle for all

that is wrong with society. In the words of one commentator, 'Civilisation works its miracles, and civilised man is turned back almost into a savage'. Cities had limited sanitation, were over-crowded, dangerous and characterised by pollution, crime and congestion. In 1841 the average life expectancy in Manchester was just 24 years and thousands, from all classes, were killed in the great cholera epidemics of 1832, 1848 and 1866[8]. In the other great textile town, Bradford, conditions were, if anything, worse with life expectancies of 19 years and an environment described by one German visitor as 'like being lodged in no other place than with the devil incarnate'. These images of the industrial city have coloured our perception of the city ever since. The potent image of the dark, dangerous city described by Dickens and Conan Doyle along with the paintings of L. S. Lowry have created a stereotypical image of the city which has outlasted the conditions it portrayed.

The great escape

Even as the industrial city boomed an exodus was beginning. The first escapees may have been the London Evangelicals but in Manchester it was Samuel Brookes, a wealthy banker who first broke ranks, moving from his Moseley Street address and leapfrogging the poor suburbs to establish the city's first suburb on sixty acres of agricultural land three miles or so south of the city. He called the area Whalley Range after his home town in Lancashire. He laid out streets, built a college and a church, as well as a fine house for himself and his family. The remainder of the area was then marked out as plots for the development of substantial residences. There is in Manchester some dispute about whether Whalley Range was the first suburb, with some claiming that the much grander Victoria Park was built a few years earlier. However it is clear that both were being planned at around the same time and represented the start of an important trend. The great escape had begun. Throughout the country in areas like Manningham in Bradford, Edgbaston in Birmingham,

Remnants of the early suburbs: Many inner city areas are characterised by large villas dating from the mid-nineteenth century when the areas were developed as early suburbs. Designed for large households with servants, many have been converted to bedsits or institutional uses
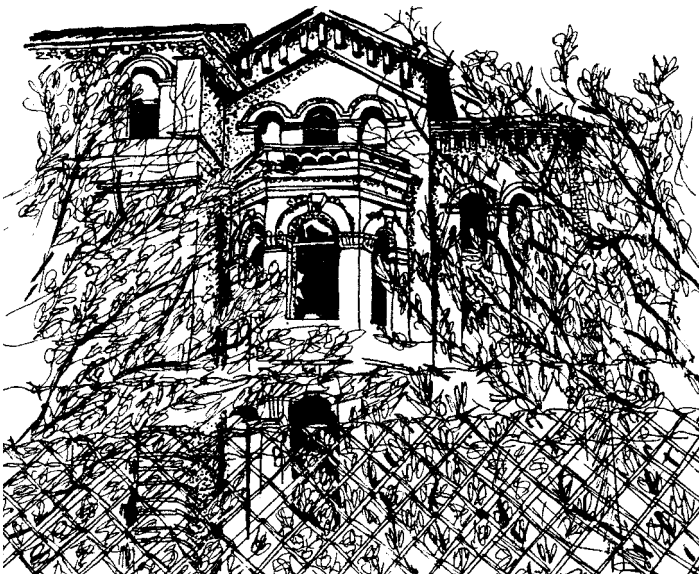
Sefton in Liverpool or Stoke Newington and Islington to the north of London the merchants and factory owners were setting up residence away from the smoke and the teeming masses of the overcrowded city. These early suburbs provided the foundations for many of the attitudes which have shaped towns and cities ever since.

The first is the idea that the city is bad and the countryside is good so that people who can should move as far away as possible from the city. For Samuel Brooks, dependent upon the horse for transport, this distance may not have been great, but there was open countryside between Whalley Range and the city (a low boggy area known as Moss Side). With modern transport the quest to escape the city can strike deeper and deeper into the countryside until it penetrates the most isolated rural areas.

The second view is that high density is bad and low density is good so that people should not only distance themselves from the city but also from each other. As Muthesius[9] has described, this led many of the early suburbs to be surrounded by high walls and protected by toll gates. It also meant that houses were set within landscaped grounds with high walls and curving driveways to hide the house from the street and neighbours. Echoes of these elements of early suburbia can still be seen in the modern suburb.
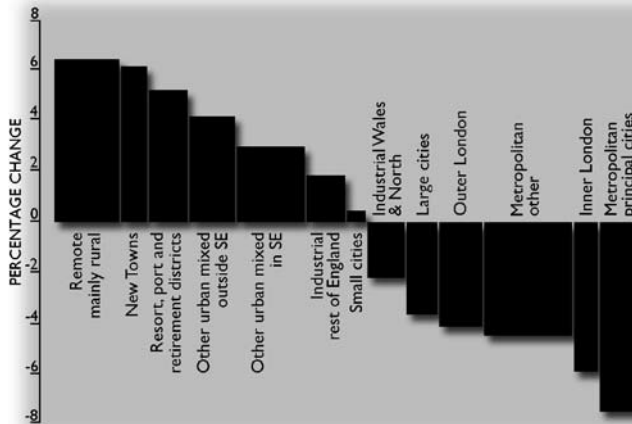
The third trend has been the separation of home and work and the birth of the commuter as first seen in Clapham. This commuting was initially by horse-drawn carriage but subsequently, with the development of buses, trams and railways, travel became possible to ever more distant suburbs and urban dispersal became possible, if not inevitable. The difficulty and expense of commuting protected the early suburbs from the 'lower classes' even when they were very close to the centre of the town. However as public transport developed these suburbs became vulnerable and the middle classes were forced to move further away from the town to protect their tranquillity.

The fourth and possibly the most significant trend was a reversal in the polarity of cities. The richer and more successful people started to measure their status not by how close they lived to the town square but by the distance that they could put between themselves and the centre. In the twentieth century the suburban flight of the merchants was followed by the middle classes as public transport networks were established, and eventually even by the working classes as they were decanted from the urban 'slums' to overspill estates and new towns. Whether this migration was by choice or by coercion the reason was the same – the city is bad for you. The result was that the city's role as a home for a cross section of society was undermined and urban populations became dominated by those groups least able to escape. The predominant residential aspiration of British people became the leafy suburb. Negative perceptions of the city were thus reinforced as the problems of the urban poor came to be seen as one and the same as the problems of the city.

This desire of people to escape the city is well documented by market research[10]. Survey after survey has shown that for the majority of people the countryside is their desired place of residence and that urban areas are places from which they desire to escape. The main reasons were that towns were dirty, noisy, stressful and over-crowded. This again illustrates an interesting interplay of perceptions and reality. Census information shows that the central parts of most cities have been losing population for years and in relative terms are anything but overcrowded, yet in people's minds they clearly still appear that way. Many people who desire to live in the country end up in the suburbs. It is a matter of speculation whether they see the suburb as an option of second choice or whether suburban life is really able to offer the rural benefits which they desire.

The effects of these attitudes can be seen in the population distribution in England as charted by census data[11]. This shows a consistent movement of population since 1945 from London and other metropolitan areas to smaller
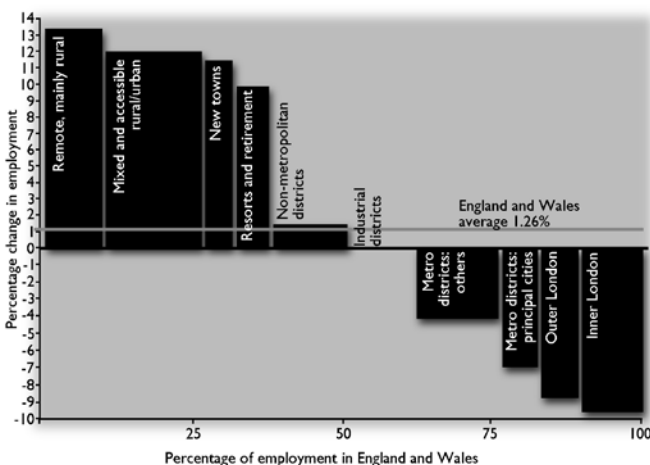
In the second half of the twentieth century the exodus of people has been followed by an exodus of investment and jobs. The city always thrived on the need for proximity between people and activities. Indeed the growth of the early suburbs, based as they were on public transport, tended to reinforce town and city centres which remained the points of greatest accessibility. If you lived on a suburban railway line then you had little choice but to go into the centre for employment, shopping and other services. However with the growth in the private car this was no longer the case. As society has become more mobile and advances have been made in electronic communications, city locations have become seen as a hindrance rather than a necessity for commercial activity. Industry and warehousing were the first to leave to the new industrial estates and distribution parks. Offices followed to business parks, and retail activities to out-of-town shopping centres. Bustling cities became conurbations with sprawling commercial and residential suburbs surrounding a small city centre.

urban areas and rural districts. Indeed the largest gains have been in the 'remote largely rural' category. This suggests, as Peter Hall predicted, that the trend is more than suburbanisation but rather the counterurbanization of settlement patterns in Britain.

It is true that in the last decade this trend has slowed. Research for London Transport[12] has shown that between 1981 and 1991 inner London gained 77000 people and suggests that this trend will accelerate in the future. Other metropolitan areas may still have been losing population in the 1980s (a fall of 100000 people or 2.8% of their population) but the rate of decline was slowing. Indeed government household predictions foresee a modest increase in the population (and a greater increase in household numbers) in most UK urban areas.

Research undertaken as part of URBED's Vital and Viable Town Centres report for the UK government[13] charted the loss of employment in cities. Manufacturing employment has declined generally, but to a much greater extent in cities. Factories have closed or relocated and major inward investors such as Japanese car plants will only consider out-of-town sites. However cities have also been losing jobs in the service sector where the main beneficiaries have been small towns and rural areas. The same is true of retail development as work by Hillier Parker as part of the same research illustrated. In the development boom of 1987–90, 66% of all new retail floor space was out-of-town of which 51% was in retail parks. Even committed town centre retailers like Marks & Spencer started to build out-of-town stores and the development of major out-of-town centres like Meadowhall in Sheffield posed a major threat to traditional town centres. It is estimated, for example that Sheffield City Centre lost 30% of its trade to Meadowhall

and that many shops only remained because they were tied into leases. Similar trends can be seen in entertainment and leisure. Whilst cinema audiences are growing this is largely due to multi-screen out-of-town centres as urban cinemas continue to decline. Even pub and restaurant chains are tending to direct their new investment to out-of-town sites.

The inner city

Another consequence of dispersal and suburban growth has been inner city decline. As the suburbs have grown, large areas of our cities have been deserted by the middle classes, businesses and investors. These areas have become characterised by poverty, dereliction and a range of social problems. This has given rise to the classic form of the Anglo-American city with an embattled centre surrounded by decline and an outer ring of prosperous suburbs. Perhaps the most extreme example of this is Washington DC in the United States where the centre dominated by government buildings is surrounded by some of the worst deprivation in the country. Over the last 30 or so years the tendency has been for the inner city to expand at the expense of the city centre fringes and inner suburbs.

The recognition of these problems in Britain dates from the mid 1970s and in particular the Labour government's 1976 Inner City Act. A Fabian pamphlet in 1975, co-authored by Nicholas Falk[14], brought together available evidence to show that the problems of multiple deprivation could not be solved without widening economic opportunities in areas which had lost their traditional role. Since that time, a great deal has been written about problems of the inner city and a range of reasons have been put forward to explain the problem. This has given rise to an alphabet soup of initiatives to address the problem, particularly following the riots of the early 1980s. Work has been done to provide training, promote small businesses, tackle housing and environmental problems and improve access. However these initiatives have tended to address the symptoms of the problem rather than the root causes. As a result

they have had little impact and in some cases have made the problem worse. As research for the Department of the Environment by Brian Robson[15] has illustrated, despite all of the effort and expenditure on the inner city the numbers of unemployed and the indicators of deprivation and other social problems remain largely the same today as they were before all of the initiatives were started.

This is not, on the whole, because initiatives have failed. Many have been very successful in creating jobs, giving people skills, improving the environment and housing conditions and addressing social problems. But the result has been to empower certain people within the inner city to do what people with such power have been doing for a hundred years, namely to move out to the suburbs. Take the example of a major local employer in a deprived inner city area in one of Britain's larger cities. The company was given permission to expand onto council-owned land on the condition that the jobs created went to local people. This they did, but two years later a survey of the workforce showed that virtually none lived locally. To some this cast doubt on the reliability of local people or the commitment of the employer. However the reality was that the local employees had used their new-found earning power to move to a less stigmatised area, perhaps to buy a home, certainly to send their children to better schools. In another case the headteacher of an inner city school commented on the fact that an increasing number of Afro-Caribbean pupils were doing very well academically. The reason she suggested was that they saw education as a ticket out of the area. It could even be suggested that initiatives to improve access by building new roads in the inner city have conspired with this process. Far from improving access for businesses coming into the area they have made it easier for local people to live elsewhere and commute to local jobs.

A society where most of the people living in cities are those without the capacity to escape will always be a divided society. While this remains the case there will never be

a solution to the inner city problem or to social exclusion no matter how much money is thrown at it. What is more, whilst the problem remains unsolved the real and perceived problems of the inner city will cast a shadow over attempts to revitalise cities. Yet the only real hope for the inner cities is the reversal of the forces of dispersal by creating attractive neighbourhoods where people will want to stay when they find work and which will persuade others to return to the city.

Inner city problems are not confined to run-down housing estates. Similar forces have been at work in commercial areas, as much of URBED's urban regeneration work has demonstrated. Most cities in Britain have traditional industrial and commercial areas which have declined as companies have closed or moved out to

industrial estates. These include areas like Little Germany in Bradford, the Lace Market in Nottingham, the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham and Ancoats in Manchester. The issues here are quite different to housing estates. These industrial areas are often of significant architectural and historic importance, yet they have become anachronisms since the buildings and narrow streets which give them their character are unable to accommodate the modern needs of the industry for which they were built. Instead they have become home to a range of marginal businesses, attracted by the low rents but unable to maintain the built fabric. The importance of these areas means that their continued decline is not seen as an acceptable option. However if they are to be regenerated it is important to reverse the exodus of activity by developing new economic roles. The intrinsic quality of many industrial heritage areas is undoubtedly an asset in this process and it may be that recent improvements to the areas, like Little Germany and the Lace Market could show the way to the development of sustainable urban neighbourhoods elsewhere in the inner city.

American experience

Through these trends the modern AngloAmerican city was born. Indeed the process in the UK may not have reached its natural conclusion. One needs only look at American towns and cities to see that, if these trends continue unchecked, the city centre itself can die. Even in successful American cities like Atlanta the percentage of retail sales attracted by the city

Inner city decline does not just affect housing areas: Commercial activity has also abandoned cities, leaving historic areas like Little Germany in Bradford without the economic activity to sustain its fine built fabric. Built by German worsted merchants in the last century, the area covers just 20 acres yet contains 53 listed buildings, a third of which were vacant by the mid 1980s. These areas have often been the subject of successful regeneration initiatives such as the project managed by URBED in Little Germany. This attracted commercial activity back into the area, promoted tourism and has eventually created a residential community. Such areas have an advantage because of their attractive environment, but they hold many lessons for those seeking to regenerate other urban areas.

centre fell from 26% in 1958 to just 7% in 1972, and many US city centres retain only a residual retail role.

The dispersal of many American cities has led to town centres which are little more than historic theme parks surrounded by desolate inner cities and an outer ring of peripheral growth characterised by Joel Jarreau as 'edge cities'[16]. Indeed younger American cities like Los Angeles have developed without a clearly defined centre. Such sprawling suburban cities based on the accessibility of the private car are the natural conclusion of suburban trends which started with the Evangelicals of Clapham.

There is widespread concern about the effects of this urban sprawl in the US. In March 1995 the Bank of America in conjunction with a range of other agencies released a manifesto entitled 'Beyond Sprawl'. This listed the social and economic costs of sprawl and argued for compact and efficient growth. It was followed by a Newsweek cover story suggesting a 'sprawl-busting' strategy based on retrofitting existing suburbs and 'new urbanism'[17].

However the condemnation of sprawl in the US is not universal. To some it represents not the destruction of the city but its evolution into new forms. Felson[18] has described the concept as 'Metroreefs', coral atolls of activities linked by networks of highways. This has echoes of the garden city and its attraction is that it balances large amounts of personal space with high levels of accessibility to services and facilities dispersed from traditional congested centres. These ideas are controversial in the US where there is at least the space for such dispersed settlements. In the UK, where land is more precious and we have a greater tradition of urban settlements it is even more difficult to envisage. However if it is to be avoided we need to break the Anglo-American mould of thinking about cities which has characterised British culture for much of the twentieth century. In doing this it is useful to look to continental cities which have been shaped by very different forces and which seem to be faring much better.

Continental experience

The troubles of the typical Anglo-American city can be vividly contrasted with experience on the continent. Here the industrial revolution created the same pressures as in England. In Paris this led to suburban growth in the early 1800s which, like London, was originally based on weekend retreats. It is likely that, given time, Paris would have followed the British experience. However this was not allowed to happen because of the transformation brought about by Hausemann's plans for the city. Olsen in The City as a Work of Art[19] describes Napoleon's vision for Paris, which Hausemann was charged with implementing. Napoleon saw Paris as the capital of a great empire and wanted the physical form of the city to reflect this. Hausemann achieved this by cutting great boulevards through the cramped medieval city. These boulevards were to be bounded by buildings of at least six storeys and the only use with

Europe at night: A satellite image of Europe showing the extent of urban spread. This illustrates a sharp contrast between the land covered by Paris, Madrid and Barcelona, for example, compared to the sprawling conurbations of Britain
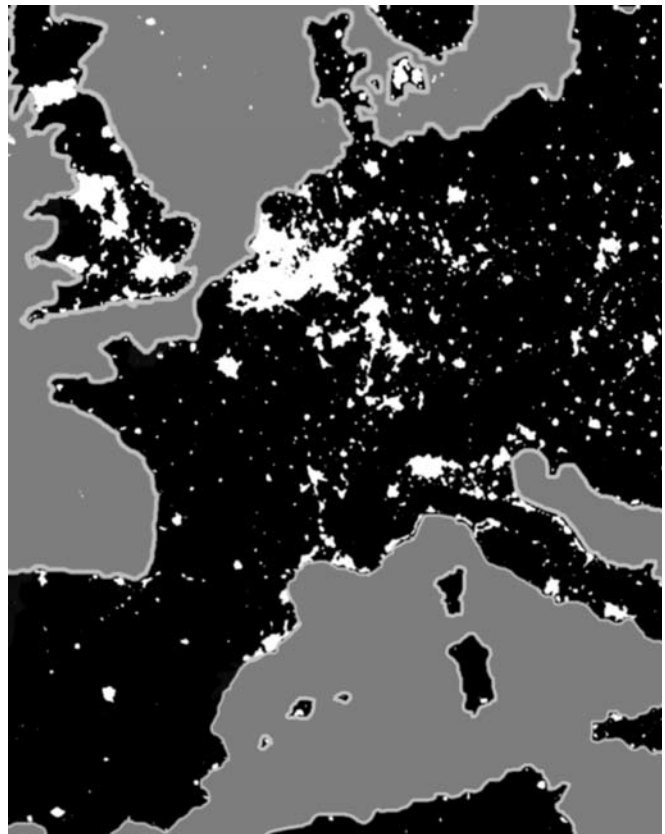
the potential to fill the volume of buildings implied by this was housing. Indeed to fund the quality of building desired this had to be middle-class housing.

Yet the development of such large amounts of middle-class housing was inconceivable if the middle classes continued to move out of the city to the suburbs. Incentives were therefore introduced through the tax system to make the new apartment blocks financially attractive and the National Bank channelled national savings into the grand projects. This had the effect of stopping middle-class suburbanisation in its tracks. Within a remarkably short period the spacious urban apartment became established as the residential aspiration of the French middle classes at a time when their English equivalents were switching their aspirations to the suburban villa.

There are lessons here for the UK government in the 1990s which is also seeking to channel housing back into cities. Napoleon's great success was not to control suburbanisation but to make urban housing more financially attractive. French middle-class aspirations have survived the intervening 150 years more or less intact. True Paris now has affluent suburbs but it is still common for well-to-do families to live in the heart of the city. It is something of a culture shock to visit a busy street in Paris full of shops and cafés. A door between the shops will give access to a staircase and caged lift or perhaps a gateway leading to a secluded courtyard. On the first and second floors there are likely to be solicitors, dentists and other small businesses. On the top floor there may be small inexpensive flats but in between will be the apartments of middle-class families. These apartments are as spacious as many English villas and many would originally have had servant's quarters. However they are still lived in today by families with children who would be considered eccentric by their English counterparts but who are still seen as quite normal in France.

In Paris the suburb has a very different connotation to the English suburb. There are affluent suburbs, particularly in satellite towns

like La Varenne St. Hilaire. However the term suburb or 'banlieu' refers to the municipal housing estates and poor working-class areas on the edge of the city. Paris's inner city problems are on its periphery and are all the more intractable and divisive because of this. It does however mean that in general terms Paris has retained the traditional pre-industrial pattern of growth, dispersal has been far less pronounced and its character as a great city is intact enabling it to adopt a strategy to become the cultural capital of a unified Europe.

Paris is significant because it provided a model for the Emperor Franz Joseph's replanning of Vienna in the second half of the nineteenth century. Together Paris and Vienna provided a model for other continental cities and indeed for those of South America. This influence extended not only to architects and planners but also to the general public and the middle classes in particular who aspired to the Parisian ideal of the urban apartment. This is not just confined to major cities. It can be seen in towns of all types and sizes on the continent including industrial towns.

In terms of urban growth the developed world can therefore be divided into two traditions: the Anglo-American model which also characterises Australia, and the French model which characterises most of Europe, Latin America and to a lesser extent Canada.

This explains why continental towns have retained their form, density and vitality to a far greater extent than British cities. One need only look at similar cities such as Marseille and Liverpool or Milan and Birmingham to see the impact of these trends. This is not to say that continental towns have all the answers. They too suffer from urban problems and in recent years have not been immune from the dispersal of people and investment. However if we in Britain are seeking to rediscover the benefits of living in the heart of towns and cities there is much that we could learn from continental models. Yet it must be understood that the differences between British and continental towns are not superficial and cannot be overcome with a few street cafés. They go to the very heart of the urban forces which shape our towns and cities. It is unlikely that we can ever put the clock back 150 years to redirect these forces. The task instead is to draw upon continental and British models to create successful British urban models which can meet the needs of the next century.

The continental model: The grand boulevards of Paris as laid out by Hausemann (far left). The Ringstrasse, Vienna (above) which was modelled on Paris. The apartment block, often containing a mix of uses, became the predominant building type in continental cities

23

An urban renaissance? Cities like Manchester and Glasgow have undergone an unprecedented revival in recent years. It would once have been inconceivable that grey, wet northern cities would develop a thriving café culture

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The urban renaissance

There have been times in the twentieth century when the city has seemed to be dying. Indeed when you visit a city like Liverpool which rattles around in the husk of a once great metropolis it is difficult to be optimistic. However the predictions of the death of the city have been greatly exaggerated. Over the last 10–15 years there has been a remarkable renaissance in many British cities. Whilst the decline of urban populations is yet to be entirely stemmed, and despite the advent of anti-urban trends such as home working, tele-shopping and computer conferencing, many British towns and cities seem to be finding new roles. The heavy industry and overcrowding which gave rise to the flight from the city no longer exist, even though they may live on in people's perceptions. Whilst there are problems of traffic pollution and urban crime it is clear that many British towns and cities could potentially provide attractive environments in which to live and work. The stage may be set for an 'urban renaissance' in Britain, a term first used in a Council of Europe Campaign and popularised in Britain through speeches by HRH The Prince of Wales.

Cities like Glasgow with its Smiles Better campaign have slowly overcome their poor image and a growing number of people are rediscovering the joys of city living. While the pronouncement of an urban renaissance in Britain may be somewhat premature, there are a number of trends which may bolster the role of towns and cities. The first is transport. Despite the fact that car-based transport has been responsible for urban depopulation, towns and cities remain important transport hubs with mainline railway stations, excellent motorway connections and, crucially, airports. They have also benefited from investment in public transport infrastructure such as the tram system in cities like Newcastle, Sheffield and Manchester.

Cities may also benefit from the growth of service industries such as financial services, and cultural or knowledge industries such as music, design and publishing. While these activities are based on modern telecom-munication, they feed off face-to-face contact, the ability to attract talented people and the activity produced by dense urban populations. It is difficult to imagine a rural stock exchange, bank or national newspaper. It is equally hard to picture a thriving fashion or music industry which was not able to feed on the street life of a large city.

Linked to this is the importance of higher education both to the life of cities and to their economies. Whilst there are universities on isolated campuses, they are currently losing out to the urban universities with the culture and night life to attract students. In attractive cities students tend to stay on after their courses finish, so contributing their skills and energy to the town and its economy. This can be seen in cities as diverse as Liverpool and Sunderland which benefit greatly from high student stay-on rates. Former art students account for the fact that Sunderland, despite its size and location, was the Arts Council City of Visual Arts and is the base for the only national magazine for artists.

The 1980s have seen the emergence of a new urban middle class providing a fresh source of demand for services. As Peter Hall has noted[20] 'the arrival of the yuppies, those suburban-born children of the emigres from the city of the 1940s and 1950s, is creating a boom in consumerled service employment and in associated construction, which may at last provide the basis for broad-based economic revival with jobs for a wide spectrum of skills and talents'. This process is particularly evident in the US in festival marketplaces like Quincey Market in Boston, and the Inner Harbour in Baltimore, and along the waterfronts of many cities which were declining until recently. Such American initiatives have exploited continental ideas about urban space. It is ironic that we in Britain have found it easier to import ideas like festival marketplaces second-hand from the US than to take them directly from our continental neighbours.

American cities have also started to recognise the economic potential of people in cities with time and money to spend, ranging

from ethnic minorities and 'grey power' to the 'pink dollar'. This is also happening in Britain with the development of leisure attractions, the promotion of China Towns and even, in Manchester, a 'Gay Village' which has become a thriving commercial district. Hall argues that recognising and promoting these new urban economies will require 'new kinds of urban planning skills, hardly now taught at all in the planning schools'. It is no longer sufficient to sit back and rely on the control of development pressures since very often those pressures no longer exist. Planning in our cities must become far more pro-active, marketing the city as a product, seeking out and exploiting opportunities and developing new forms of economic activity.

This is what is happening in many British provincial cities which also have a new confidence about them. Glasgow, Leeds, Birmingham, Newcastle and Manchester have all succeeded in reinventing themselves and transforming their image. This, in turn, has stimulated their local rivals to respond. The provincial resurgence of the late 1980s was partly fuelled by the displacement of activity from the overheated London market during the property boom and the fact that cities in the North were less affected by the slump when it came. However it has outlasted this temporary effect and there is now a new sense of political leadership and partnership in these cities as witnessed by the success of the City Pride Partnerships in Manchester and Birmingham in 1994 which seem to have achieved more than in London. There is a feeling that cities should no longer be apologetic and defensive but should promote themselves on an international stage. This is not true of all cities. Sheffield, Liverpool and Bristol were slow to recognise the potential or have been distracted by other problems. However even here there are signs of new confidence with initiatives such as Sheffield's Cultural Industries Quarter, the resurgence of the Duke Street/Bold Street area in Liverpool and Bristol's Harbourside development.

It has also been argued that with the rise of the European Union and the declining power of the nation state, cities will become more important. Cities across Europe are already developing strong cross-border links and networks as they become powerful economic forces in their own right. Medieval Europe was dominated by the City State and trading organisations such as the Hanseatic League. The same
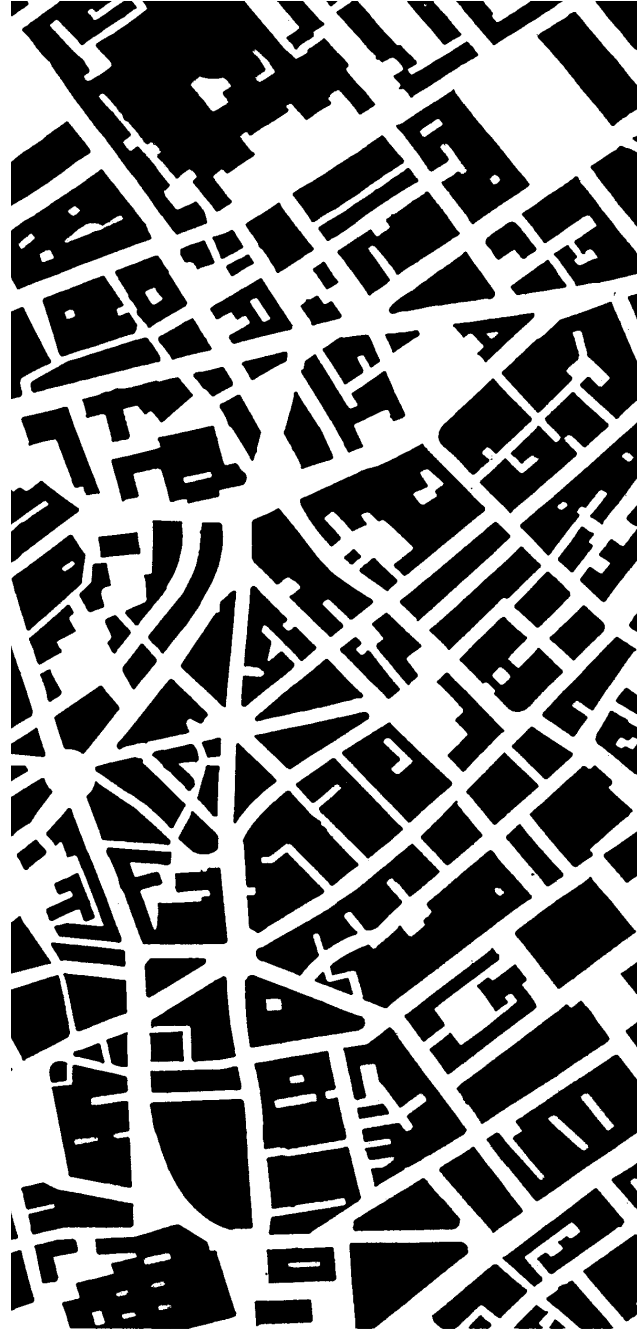
may be true in a future Europe where countries without strong cities will struggle to compete on the international stage.

We have yet to deal with London which raises very different issues. London is the only British city which would meet Jane Jacobs' criteria for a great city. It is a city of great contrasts, with pockets of deprivation as severe as anything in the north adjacent to areas of great wealth and intense demand. As with all great cities, it also draws people to itself to a far greater extent than any other British city. The population of inner London started to rise in the 1980s after years of decline, and is predicted to rise rapidly over the next twenty years, partly as a result of immigration from the European Union. Yet fifteen of the UK's twenty most deprived wards are to be found in London. It faces the problems of growth and congestion at the same time as the problems of decline and depopulation and is therefore a microcosm of the situation in the UK as a whole. Through the 1980s London experienced an unprecedented development boom and in its docklands gave birth to the 'yuppy' apartment which started to change British perceptions of the ideal home. However the recession of the late 1980s severely dented this boom and London has been held back by the lack of city-wide local government. It has been governed by a patchwork quilt of small authorities unable to muster the resources and capacity of the confident provincial city councils. However London is once again 'cool' according to Newsweek Magazine and is finding a new confidence. It is likely that, with the election of a London Mayor in the near future, London will once again lead the UK's urban renaissance.

The capacity to mobilise the skills and energies of large numbers of people is the factor which has always sustained cities. The city is like a magnifying glass, it focuses and concentrates human activity both positive and negative. It is no accident that cities house the worst excesses of crime and poverty, but the reverse side of this is that they also house the best of the arts, learning, sports and, even today, commerce. If cities did not exist we would not have great art galleries, libraries and theatres; we would not have a subculture to feed and sustain mainstream culture; we would not have a venue for great public events and a focus for regional power and even in the days of the electronic office we would lose the catalyst for economic growth. The magnifying glass works because of the concentration of people who live and work in cities. Human nature requires face-to-face interaction and it is the city, not the suburban close or the motorway service station, where the density of people exists to sustain the creativity of human contact. As Jane Jacobs argued in the Economy of Cities[21] it is only in cities that new work is added to existing activities. This, she suggests, is the engine for human and economic growth. It is this basic truth which has saved the city from extinction and which sustains and nourishes its renaissance. As more people are attracted back to the city, and despite the complaints of gentrification and colonisation, there are signs that the traditional role of the city as a marketplace is re-emerging.

Shaky as this role may seem today, further trends may emerge which reinforce the role of urban areas. It is possible that the need for more sustainable development patterns and the reduction in car use may reinforce this role in the future. The growing numbers of childless households may also place more value on the advantages that towns and cities can offer. It may be that a sea change in our attitude to the city is taking place, reversing trends which date back to the industrial revolution.

The historic structure of London:
London is the only UK city which would pass Jane Jacobs' test of a great city.

Chapter 2
Lost Utopias

In considering the form of housing for the twenty-first century it is important to understand the forces that have shaped the design of housing in previous centuries. The wider urban trends described in the last chapter help to explain the impetus behind different forms and locations of development. They do not however explain how the nineteenth century terrace evolved into the twentieth century semi-detached house or indeed the high-rise block and how this might transform into the twenty-first century home. This is what we will seek to do in this and the following two chapters. The first task is to trace the roots of the concepts of housing and its place within towns and cities which have dominated the twentieth century. In doing this we need to go back to the Utopians who shaped the twentieth century home.
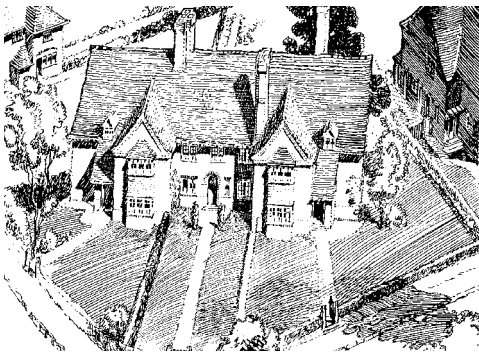
An ancestor of the garden city: Bournville Village in Birmingham developed by George Cadbury in 1879

The great shapers of the twentieth century home were the Utopian thinkers[1]. No book on the subject would be complete without Ebenezer Howard's three magnets or Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse. These and other visionaries reacted against the evils of the industrial city whilst embracing the opportunities of the industrial age. Their ideas have had a lasting effect on modern town planning. At the end of the twentieth century new visions are required which respond not so much to the technological opportunity of the modern age but to the unsustainable patterns of development that technology has produced. In doing this it is important to learn from the twentieth century visionaries and the way that they have influenced housing and urban development.

The garden city pioneers

The early visionaries were the enlightened industrial philanthropists, people like Robert Owen who developed New Lanark in 1800 to provide better conditions for his workers and to defuse political unrest. He was followed by industrialists such as Titus Salt in Bradford (Saltaire 1853), George Cadbury in Birmingham (Bournville 1879), and William Hesketh Lever in Birkenhead (Port Sunlight 1888) as well as Joseph Rowntree's development of New Earswick in York (1902). These developments combined a genuine concern for the well-being of workers, with a degree of self aggrandise-

ment, and sound commercial sense. They varied greatly in their form, structure, the degree of communal provision and common ownership that they incorporated. However together they provided many of the elements which crystallised at the turn of the century into the garden city movement.

It is 100 years since the garden city idea was developed by Ebenezer Howard in his book Tomorrow: A peaceful path to real reform in 1898[2], republished in 1902 as Garden Cities of Tomorrow. Howard recognised that the city had many advantages: social opportunity, employment, well-lit streets and 'palatial edifices'. However there were also many disadvantages such as the 'closing out of nature… the isolation of crowds… foul air and murky skies… slums and gin palaces'. He also saw the countryside as having a balance of advantages and disadvantages and proposed the garden city as a means of combining the advantages of both town and


Above - **The three magnets:** Developed by Ebenezer Howard a century ago the diagram has taken on almost iconic status

Below - **The Social City:** A network of garden cities providing a frame-work of development encompassing both urban and rural uses
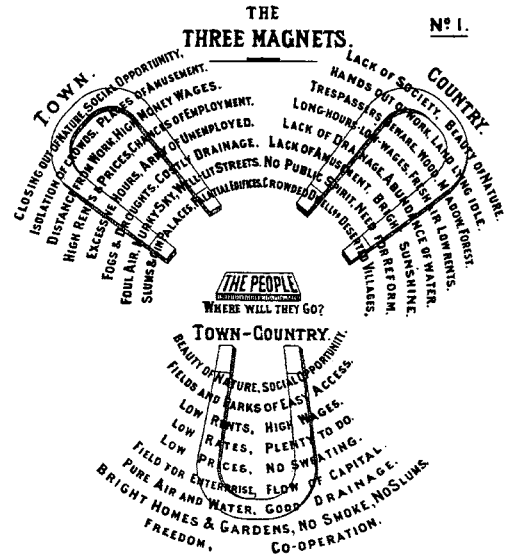
country without the disadvantages. This equation was illustrated with a picture of three magnets which has since featured in virtually every book written on town and country planning. Howard's vision was to reform the organisation of towns, the pattern of settlements and indeed the wider organisation of society. He advocated new towns with a population of 32 000 on 6 000 acres with the majority of land used for agriculture. These towns were to be part of a network of garden cities across the countryside which Howard called the 'Social City'. This abolished the distinction between town and country since agricultural and urban uses were incorporated within a common framework. Land was to be owned co-operatively with everyone paying rents to service debt and to generate a surplus to cover services, health care and pensions.

The form of the garden city was illustrated in a series of diagrams which are almost as famous as Howard's magnets. The garden city was to be organised in concentric rings around a central park surrounded by a covered glass arcade containing shops
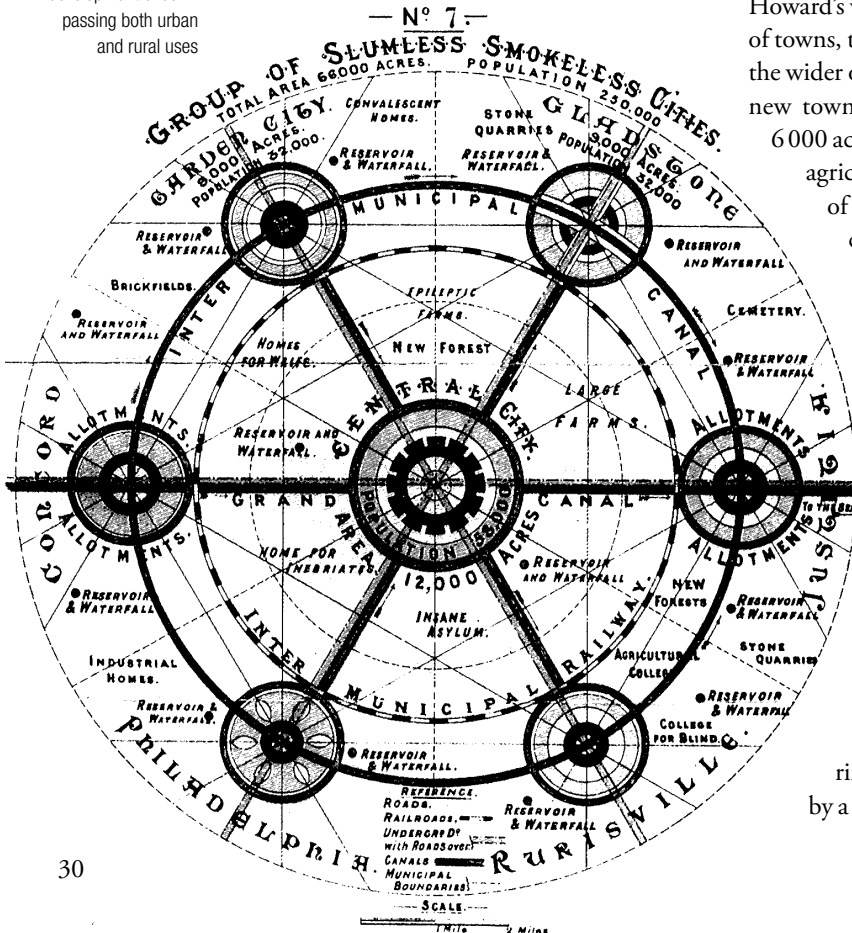
The suburban environment: The hedges and trees of Hampstead Garden Suburb still represent, to many people, the ideal suburban environment

and services. Beyond this were rings of housing separated from the outer ring of industry by a grand avenue. Many of these features find echoes in modern towns, the covered glassroofed shopping centres, the treelined avenues and the zoning of uses. Howard sought to build his utopia with the formation of the Garden City Pioneer Company in July 1902. The first true garden cities were Letchworth designed by Parker and Unwin in 1903, and then in 1919 Welwyn Garden City designed by Louis De Soissons.

The garden city movement gave birth to the British new town movement and still lies at the heart of the philosophy of the Town and Country Planning Association which Howard helped to start. However our interest here is in the wider influence that the garden city has had on housing development. Here it is not so much the concept of the garden city but the designs for the first developments which have had a lasting effect. The most influential designers at the time were Louis de Soissons who designed Welwyn Garden City and Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin who designed New Earswick, Letchworth and Hampstead Garden Suburb,

the latter with Sir Edwin Lutyens. Through these schemes they developed the form of the garden city which was subsequiently to have such an influence on twentieth century suburban planning. Raymond Unwin described his philosophy in two influential books, The Art of Building a Home and Town Planning in Practice[3]. His vision was of wide frontaged semi-detached houses and short terraces at densities of twelve units to the acre in a landscaped setting with plenty of vistas – influenced by Sitte's street pictures. Another important influence was the revival of organic vernacular and Gothic forms through the arts and crafts movement and particularly the work of John Ruskin and William Morris. Parker and Unwin believed that the disposition of housing should be guided by the topography of the site rather than street patterns. This led to the use of 'closes' of houses set away from the road. In New Earswick these were initially served by footpaths. However with the growth in car use these closes evolved into cul-de-sacs which were first seen in Letchworth and Hampstead Garden Suburb. Hampstead which, due to Lutyens' influence, is more formal than the other garden cities,

is probably the finest example of Parker and Unwin's work. However Victorian by-laws, designed to prevent the unwholesome yards which had characterised London slums, specified the development of wide through roads. The narrow roads, closes and cul-de-sacs of Hampstead therefore required a special Act of Parliament to make them possible. Concerns about traffic congestion led to a stipulation that housing densities be reduced to eight houses to the acre. Unwin argued that, with the growing number of cars, closes and cul-de-sacs would create a quiet residential environment as well as reducing the land area devoted to roads. However his main concern was to avoid the housing layout being dictated by the road network which, he felt, led to monotonous grids and ribbon development. The closes and cul-de-sac therefore allowed far greater variety of form which in Unwin's hands led to a streetscape of enduring quality. However as with many visionaries the concepts

The first cul-de-sac?
Louis de Soissons' designs for Welwyn Garden City (below) one of the first to make extensive use of the cul-de-sac (above)

have not fared so well on the drawing boards of less talented designers where the results are more often clutter and confusion.

Some of the most enthusiastic exponents of the ideas of the garden city movement were the newly created council housing departments in the years after the First World War. One of the most influential departments was the Greater London Council which undertook developments such as the Old Oak Estate in Hammersmith. Another very influential development was Wythenshawe, developed by Manchester City Council on the outskirts of the city in 1930. This was designed by Barry Parker and has been described by Peter Hall[4] as the third garden city. However, unlike the other garden cities, Wythenshawe has remained a predominantly poor working-class area. It is tempting to look at somewhere like Letchworth or Hampstead Garden Suburb which remain popular and to believe that our problems would be less if only all housing were built like this. Yet Wythenshawe is almost identical in design and, as recent work by URBED[5] has shown, the social and economic problems of parts of Wythenshawe, such as Benchill, are as bad and in some cases worse than Manchester's most notorious inner city areas. How much this is due to the physical design of the area is unclear, but the isolation of the area from the city which is compounded by the disorientating nature of the street layout undoubtedly plays its part. There is a lesson here for those who would argue that the wholesale replacement of high-rise estates with suburban housing will solve the problems of the inner city.

Parker's designs for Wythenshawe incorporated two further ideas which were to have a lasting influence. The first was the concept of the neighbourhood unit served by local facilities and surrounded by arterial roads. The second was the parkway, an arterial road set within parkland which ran between these neighbourhoods. Princess Parkway, the southern part of which is now the M56 motorway, remains a major arterial route out of Manchester and the concept of setting the road within a linear park can be seen not just in
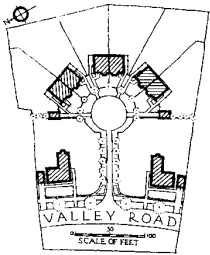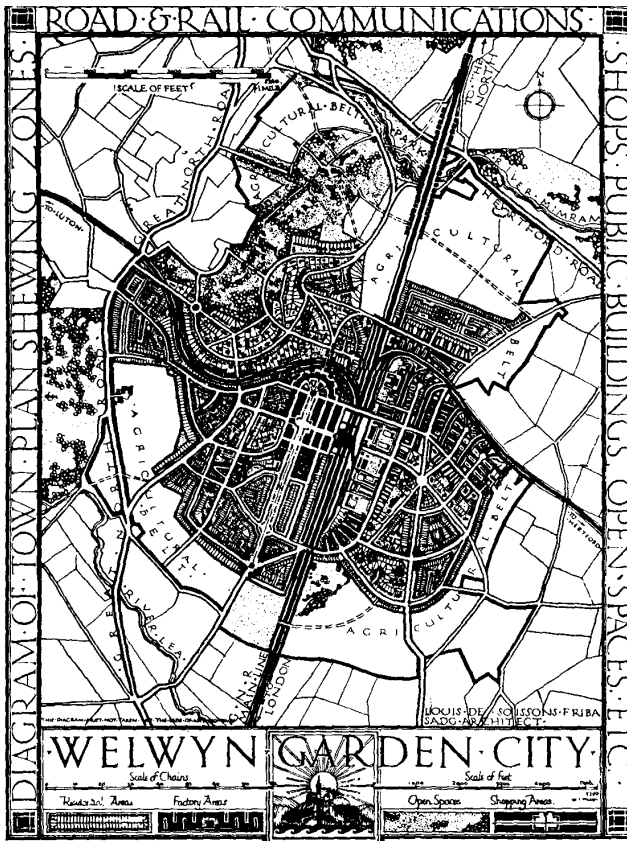
Wythenshawe but also in the much later development of Hulme, of which we will hear more later. The concept of the neighbourhood unit and the parkway were subsequently to coincide with the ideas of the modernist movement as we will see in the next chapter.

As with all visionaries Howard's ideas and the designs of Parker, Unwin and Louis de Soissons have suffered in less enlightened hands. Forgotten are the ideas for social reform and the organisation of uses and settlements. Lost is the respect for topography and the understanding of how housing can be arranged in a landscaped setting. In superficial terms the modern suburban housing estate owes much to the early garden city designs but rarely have they achieved the same level of quality and character.

The housing designs which emerged from the garden city movement have also become firmly embedded in the public consciousness. The suburban ideal has become an almost universal aspiration of UK households. It has exerted a powerful influence on municipal housing, alongside the modernist movement, and has become the stock-in-trade of private housebuilders who, for much of the century, have built little else. Ebenezer Howard would, no doubt, shudder to be called the father of the modern suburb but this is perhaps his greatest legacy.

The modernist reformers

The garden city pioneers were not the only utopians to influence the twentieth century home and town planning. Another group of visionaries were equally concerned to sweep away the worst excesses of urban squalor but sought to do this, not by turning to the countryside for inspiration, but to art and science. The modernist movement sought to bring order and logic to the confusion and muddle of the city. Tony Garnier and Le Corbusier in France

The Cité Industrielle: One of Tony Garnier's original illustrations
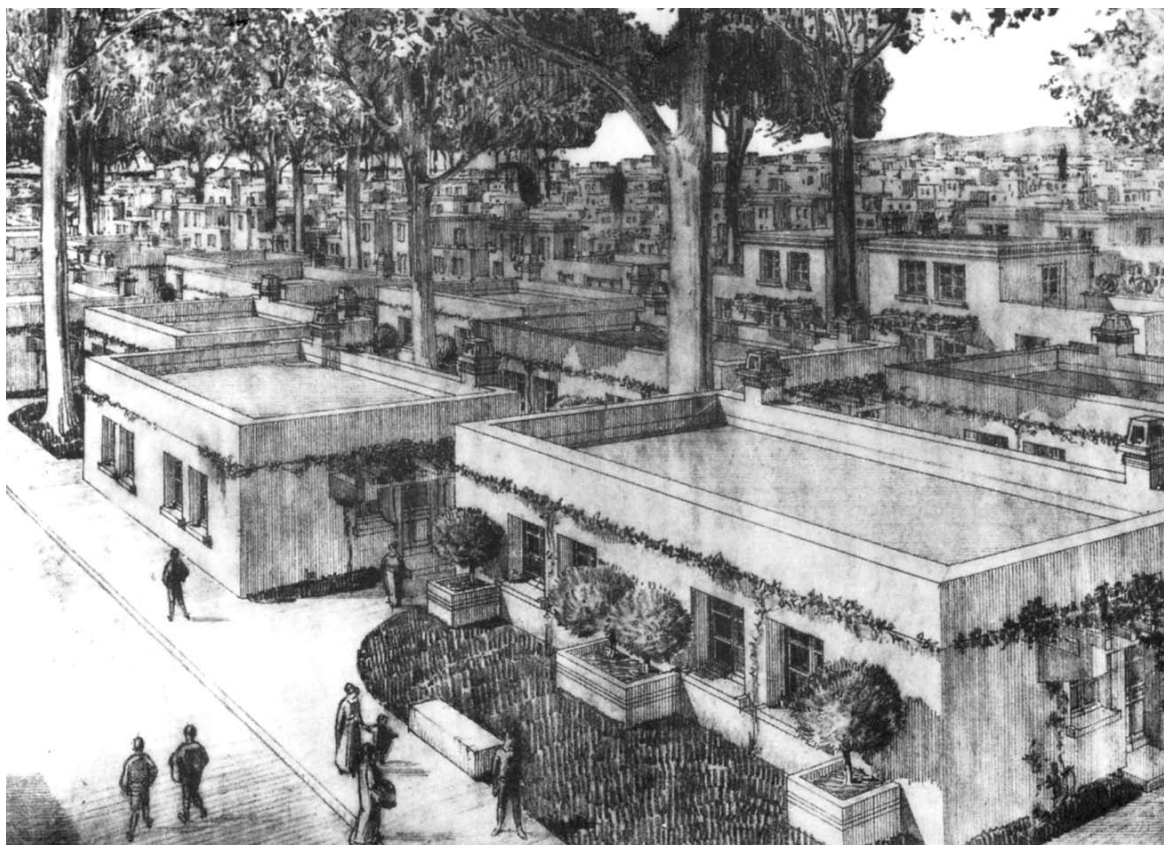
and the Bauhaus in Germany were some of the leading exponents of these ideas and like Ebenezer Howard their aim was no less than to reinvent the city.

Tony Garnier first produced his plan for the ideal industrial town in 1904 just as Howard started to develop Letchworth. Garnier's ideas were published as Une Cité Industrielle [6] in 1917. He envisaged a town of segregated uses with a residential zone, a train station quarter and an industrial zone. The town was to promote social justice through common ownership and, so widespread would social harmony be, Garnier saw no need for the town to include a police station, courts or churches. In an echo of the issues which will concern us in the twenty-first century, the town was to be energy self-sufficient. Development was sited in relation to the sun and wind and would draw all of its energy from a hydro-electric dam. Residential quarters were to be laid out in east-west blocks allowing all housing to face south. Narrow streets were not to have trees, with wider streets only being allowed trees on the southern side to avoid shading. This is one of the first attempts at passive solar design although at the time the motivation was the health-giving properties of sunlight rather than energy efficiency.

Garnier's Cité Industrielle was never built although echoes of some of his ideas can be seen in the Tony Garnier Estate in Lyon, not least because in recent years a series of enormous murals of Garnier's drawings have been created on the gable ends of the blocks[7]. The architectural style of Garnier's buildings is remarkably contemporary and more accessible than the later proposals of Le Corbusier largely because they are human in scale. His high-density residential quarters are similar to the urban development of the 1990s described later in this book. However in other respects Garnier's legacy is more damaging to the modern city. He was one of the first to develop the idea of zoning uses as well as the modernist concept of buildings as objects within a landscape rather than the 'walls of urban streets'. Garnier's other legacy is his influence on Le Corbusier and it is through Le Corbusier that the ideas were largely transferred to Britain and America.

Le Corbusier, born in 1887 as Charles Edouard Jeanneret, published his utopian vision in two books The City of Tomorrow in 1922 and La Ville Radieuse in 1933[8]. Whilst these were a development of Garnier's ideas they were less of a reaction to the problems of the industrial city and more of a response to the opportunities of the industrial age. Le Corbusier's vision was based on mechanisation and new technology. It exploited the potential of the car and aeroplane, as well as the new building technologies which allowed for highrise building and mass production. However the influence of the machine went deeper still into Le Corbusier's vision. He believed that, just as science was ordering nature, so it could order the city. His city is rational, efficient and ordered. Its plan can be read as a diagram of its functions but it makes few if any concessions to the complexity of urban life.

Le Corbusier's aims in developing La Ville Radieuse are similar to those of Howard and to many subsequent planners in the twentieth century. He sought to decongest the centre of cities, increase mobility and increase the amount of parks and open space. However he differed in one important respect. Unlike the garden city builders and most of modern planning, he wanted to increase urban densities to around 1 200 inhabitants to the acre, almost ten times

The city in landscape: Le Corbusier's vision of blocks built on stilts so as not to interrupt the flow of the landscape
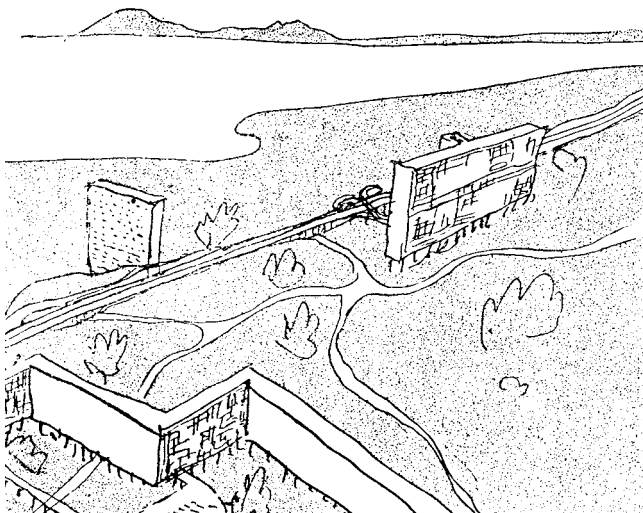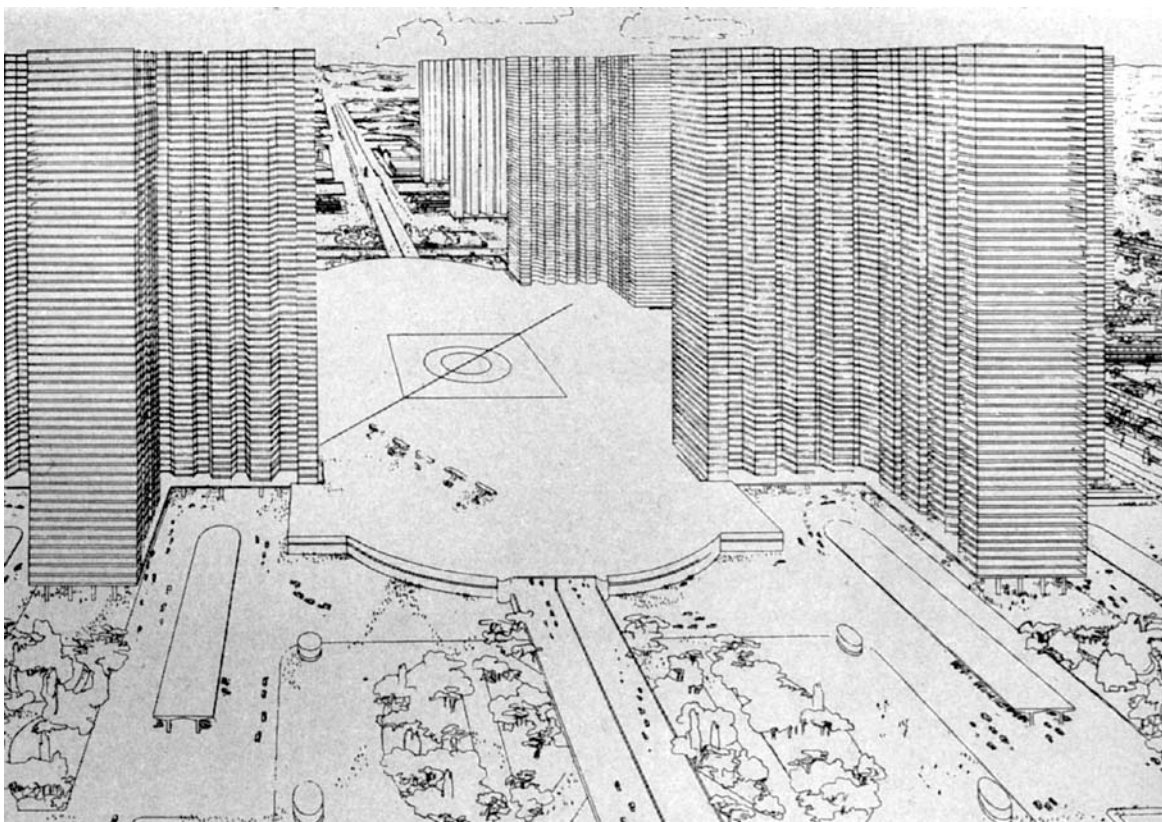
the average density of Paris at the time. The over-crowding of cities was seen at the time as one of the main problems requiring reform and much of modern planning has sought to address this by reducing densities. Le Corbusier however saw higher densities as a prerequisite for mechanised production so that, far from reducing densities, he proposed technological solutions to overcome the problems that this creates. This he achieved by building upwards and proposing high-rise blocks accommodating not just housing but all of the services required for modern life: schools, shops, services and employment. This liberated 95% of the land area within the large urban blocks that he proposed for open space and parks.

Le Corbusier has been credited, or condemned, as the father of the high-rise blocks. Again, like all visionaries, this is largely due to the way in which his ideas have been interpreted by lesser architects. The schemes that he completed, most notably Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles, remain successful. But the influence of his ideas is equally significant in terms of the organisation of cities which, with the exception of Chandigarh in the Punjab, were never built. He condemned the traditional street thus: 'The corridor street should be tolerated no longer, for it poisons the houses that border it'. Such streets were seen as incapable of accommodating the swift movement of goods in the quantities required for industrial production. These sentiments reflected the thinking of Barry Parker in Wythenshawe and, as we will see, subsequent planners like Abercrombie with his concern to eliminate muddle. La Ville Radieuse was therefore the first city plan to include a hierarchy of roads. Subterranean routes were to be created for heavy traffic linked to a network of loading bays. Ground level streets would then be used for getting around the city and, above this, free flowing highways, the precursors of modern motorways, would cater for longer journeys.

The Ville Radieuse: Le Courbusier's ordered and rational urban Utopia, dominated by technology as witnessed by the pride of place given to the airport

The streets would be straight and junctions spaced at 400 yards to reduce congestion. This distance determined the scale of urban blocks. However there is little mention of the pedestrian in Le Corbusier's writing and it is clear that the scale of his proposals is based around the needs of the car rather than travel by foot.

The influence of these ideas on post war commercial and residential development hardly needs spelling out. The vertical separation of uses and movement, with underground loading, elevated motorways and housing on streets in the sky, can be seen throughout the country and has blighted town centres and residential estates alike. The dominance of the motor car at the expense of the pedestrian who is relegated to the subway or elevated walkway, the use of mechanised production, and the infamous high-rise estates which in 1980 were estimated to house 1 in 4 UK households[9], can all be traced back in part at least to Le Corbusier. It is tempting to think that Le Corbusier's ideas are dead. However they are still being taught with reverence in many planning schools, appealing as they do to the planner's wish for control and order. His highway engineering ideas, transmuted as we will see through various reports and government guidance, still influence modern practice.
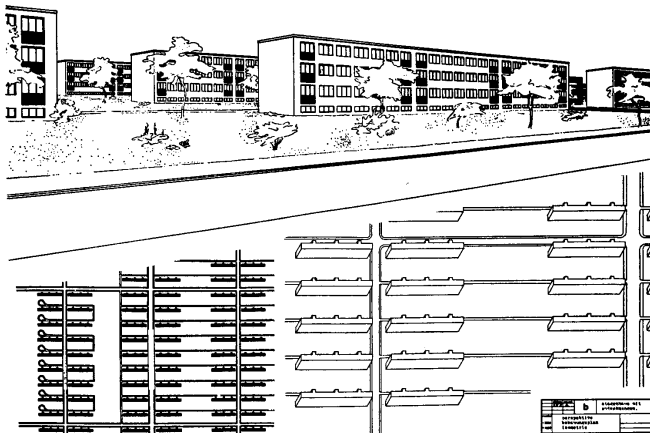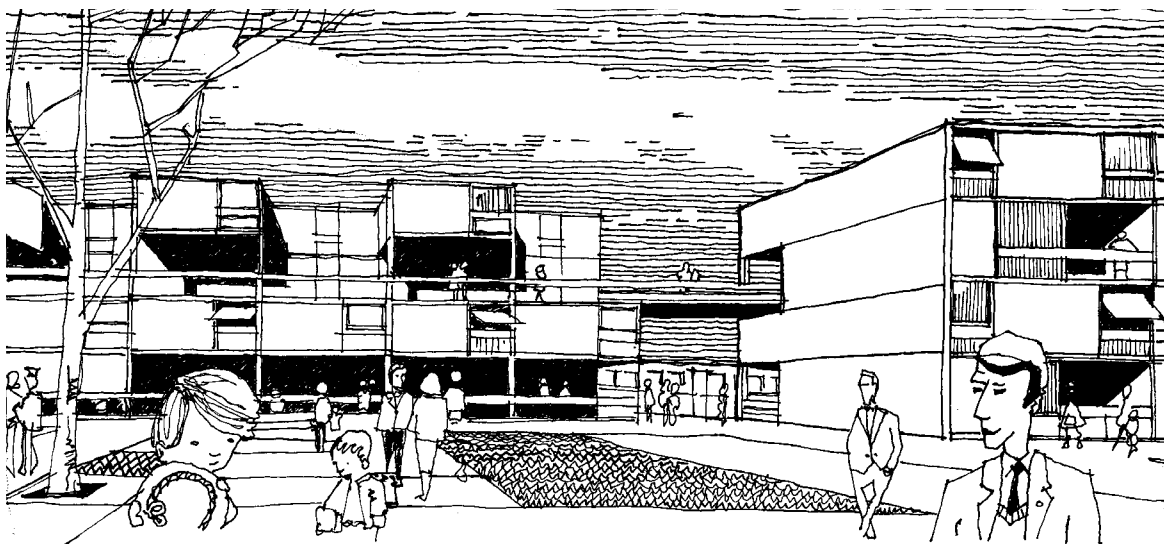
A further influence on housing design came from the Bauhaus in Germany. Here housing design was approached with the same systematic, functional discipline that the Bauhaus sought to apply to all elements of design. While

this was on a much smaller scale than Garnier and Le Corbusier it shared a design philosophy focused on industrial production. The Bauhaus was concerned with art, product design and architecture rather than the planning of cities. However the ideas for residential design developed by the Bauhaus were to have a profound influence on the modernist movement. The experimental Haus am Horn built for the Bauhaus Exhibition in 1923 was intended as a showcase for modern household products and attracted considerable interest. It reflected the rejection by the Bauhaus of the arts and crafts philosophy that had dominated its earlier years and the embracing of technology to create a Wohnmaschine or living machine. The house was of steel frame and concrete construction and its design reflected this – form followed function. It was simple, sparse, and logical, perfectly matched to its function if not to the more traditional notions of home. As Walter Gropius, the director of the Bauhaus, said: 'To build means to shape the activities of human life. The organism of a house derives from the activities which take place within it... The shape of a building is not there for its own sake'[10]. There were plans to develop a Bauhaus housing estate. While these were dropped, work was done by Ludwig Hilberseimer at the Bauhaus on the design of estates where he advocated mixing high-rise and single-storey dwellings. This, he said, means that... 'a development would not only become freer but also achieve a spatial arrangement which results directly from the requirements and which... does not have to rely on decorative trimmings for its urban design'[11].

Paradise lost

The work of Garnier, Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus must be seen in the context of the emerging modernist movement. Just as Howard, Parker and Unwin drew upon the arts and crafts movement, the modernists interpreted the ideas emerging from painters like Mondrian and applied them to the development of housing and the organisation of cities. Both movements held a strong appeal to planners and architects in Britain. Opportunities to implement these ideas were created by the

The Bauhaus model: Ideas for a multi-storey housing settlement developed by Ludwig Hilberseimer at the Bauhaus around 1930

housing shortages and need for reconstruction after the two world wars which led to huge building programmes. After the First World War it was the garden city which held sway. But the modernists came to the fore in the 1920s and 30s and it was they who most swayed the hearts and minds of planners and architects after the Second World War. The modernists did not however supplant the ideas of the garden city pioneers and the two approaches have existed side by side for much of the century. Whilst the modernist school came to dominate planning in cities, the garden city movement's influence has thrived in the new town, the overspill estate and the suburb. What is more when it comes to the organisation of towns and cities, as we will see in the next chapter, the ideas of the two movements are very similar and have been mutually reinforcing.

As we approach the end of the century it is clear that the influence of the modernists is rapidly waning. The failure of many of the redevelopment schemes of the 1950s, 60s and early 70s is now apparent and there are few people who would hold up Le Corbusier as a model for future urban development. However with the fall of modernists we are left with only the garden city as a tried and tested philosophy for the design of cities. Whilst this may be appropriate for new settlements and suburbs it is of less value when considering the redevelopment and repopulation of urban areas. This leaves us with a void for those seeking solutions to our towns and cities and points up a pressing need for new urban models.

In seeking to develop such models we can learn a great deal from the twentieth century visionaries. They have shown that through published work, a small number of demonstration projects and, no doubt, a great deal of luck, it is possible to profoundly alter the course of housing development and town planning, if not always in the way that was originally envisaged. It may well be that as young professions, housing and planning in the twentieth century have been particularly susceptible to new ideas. The vision-aries described in this chapter provided an ideological and philosophical base for these professions at a time when they needed to establish their identities. The same may be more difficult in the future. However the fact that so many local councils have jumped on the urban village band waggon suggests that new visions have not entirely lost their potency or their capacity for misinter-pretation. The effective twenty-first century Utopians must understand the way in which their ideas are translated into practice by the planning and housing professions. It is this that we seek to do in the next two chapters.
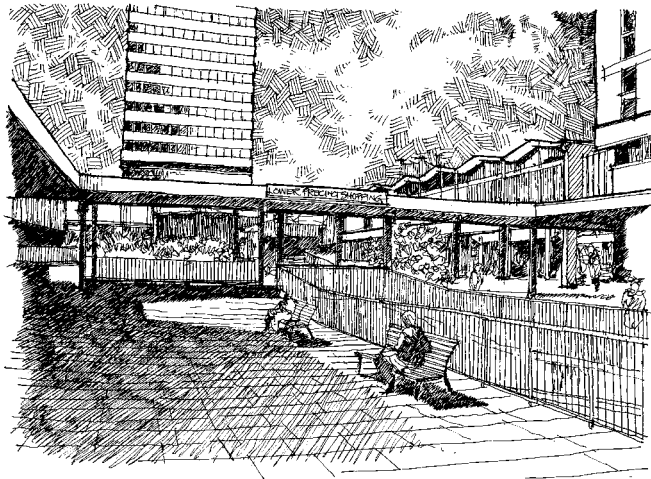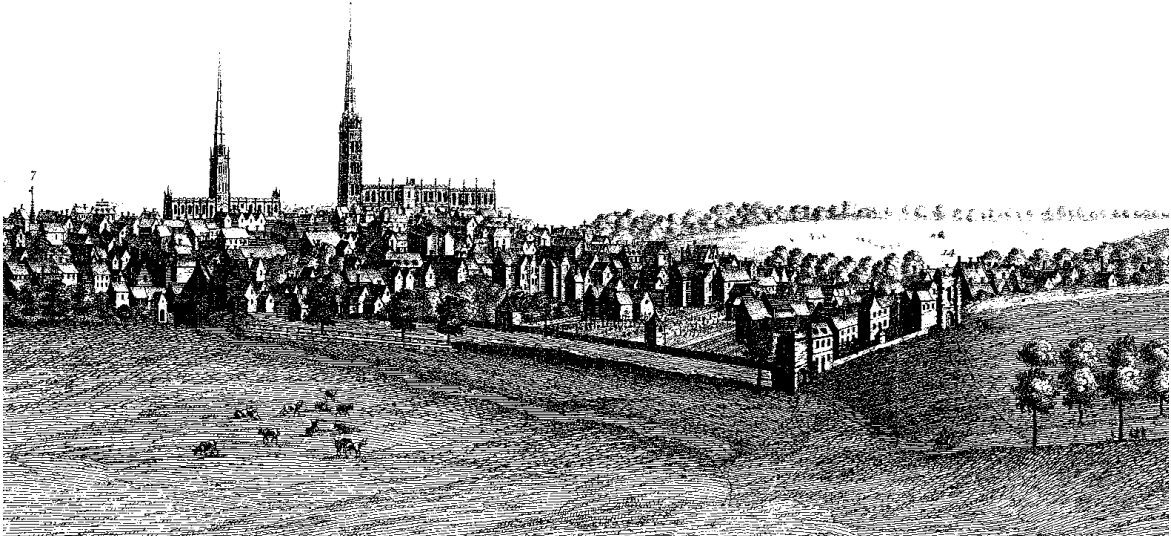
Chapter 3
The taming of the city

The industrial revolution left a legacy of fear and mistrust towards the city in the minds of many people. This in turn fuelled the flight to the suburbs in both Britain and America. At the same time the Utopian visionaries in the early part of the century were busy developing alternatives to the city. In some cases, such as Le Corbusier, they were advocating the wholesale redevelopment of existing towns. Most however confined themselves to new settlements, blank canvases on which towns and cities could be reinvented free of the constraints of history. The planners and other urban professionals who took up these ideas did not have such freedom. They sought to apply Utopian ideas to the great task of reforming existing settlements and eliminating what in their eyes was the muddle and confusion of urban life. With the need for reconstruction and the introduction of the modern town planning system after the Second World War they were given the opportunity to put these ideas into practice. The context set by the Utopians in the early part of the century was largely anti-urban and this was reflected in the attitudes of postwar planners. It was not that they wanted to do away with the city, they sought instead to make it more efficient, equitable and healthy, in short to tame and control it. They undoubtedly saw themselves as the saviours of towns and cities but in reality they ended up destroying what they sought to protect. In this chapter we describe the nature of and justification for this destruction.

The ideas of the urban visionaries were transmitted into practice through a variety of routes. It is tempting to suggest that the garden city predominated in the interwar years but after the Second World War its influence was largely confined to new towns with the architectural modernists coming to the fore in urban areas. However the situation is more complex. In developing the intellectual foundation of modern town planning and postwar social housing practitioners drew heavily on both the garden city and modernist traditions. Whilst in terms of physical form the two traditions would seem to be poles apart, in terms of their underlying principles there were in fact many similarities. Both thought in terms of neighbourhood units, promoted the benefits of open space and sought to reorganise settlements to accommodate the motor car. Indeed to many, Le Corbusier's ideas were an application of garden city ideals to high-density urban living.

One of the most important organisations responsible for bringing these ideas together and applying them to the planning of cities was the Congrès International de l' Architecture Moderne (CIAM). Formed in 1928 and including people like Walter Gropius of the Bauhaus, this group was responsible for popularising and making practical the ideas of the visionaries. Through the Charter of Athens in 1933[1] CIAM created the other great foundation of modern planning to counterbalance Howard's

Peaceful path to real reform. The Charter of Athens developed Le Corbusier's ideas into a set of practical principles which could be applied to the problems of overcrowding and congestion which characterised the modern city.

An insight into the thinking of CIAM can be found in the report of the 1952 CIAM conference on the Heart of the City[2] which took place in England. The conference proceedings are full of statements such as: 'The study of past and present urban shapes, urban ecological process, and urban health will give material for the urbanist's vision'. The conference stressed diversity, and encouraged humanitarian cities where spon-

taneity flourishes, the 'individual is king (and the pedestrian is his own master'. The influences cited by the conference were also promising with references to the very Italian piazzas admired by many of today's urban designers. Yet the developments which the conference used to illustrate these ideas were the recently completed pedestrian precincts of Coventry and Stevenage. The City Architect of Coventry told the delegates that their plans represented 'the first time that a central area (had been) analysed in terms of its main uses and a plan drawn up which retained only those necessary to its correct functioning; both industry and housing were excluded'. Indeed, despite Coventry's problems, many of the positive aspects of the modernist vision can still be seen in the city. However in other areas the high ideals of CIAM and the visionaries from which they drew their inspiration turned into the soulless pedestrian precincts and the ghettoised high-rise council estates which have since so blighted our towns and cities. It is paradoxical that Coventry, one of Britain's greatest medieval cities, should have been so readily sacrificed whereas in Germany cities like Nuremberg have been painstakingly rebuilt on traditional lines. The reason for this lies in a number of principles developed by CIAM which became the foundations, some would say the dogma, on which modern planning was based.

Comprehensive redevelopment

One of CIAM's concerns between the wars was slum clearance because of the clear correlation between poor housing and ill health. CIAM believed that slum areas could not be improved since the building form was fundamentally flawed. They therefore advocated that areas of poor housing should be swept away to be replaced with modern blocks positioned to receive the sun and surrounded by open space. Whilst they were against overcrowding they viewed low densities as uneconomic. It was therefore logical to follow Le Corbusier's lead by advocating high-rise blocks. These were to be built in a landscape setting leaving no place for traditional streets. In this way CIAM was to establish a blue print which was to guide much of the slum clearance work in America and Britain. This contrasts sharply with the war-damaged sections of West German cities despite the German origins of many modernist ideas. German towns and cities were rebuilt with 4-5 storey blocks on traditional streets which accommodated rather than separated traffic and pedestrians. Germany and many other parts of Europe have therefore retained the vitality of their urban areas and modernist development, where it has taken place, is confined to the periphery of the town. The attitudes of postwar planners in Britain have therefore reinforced the historic differences between British and European towns.
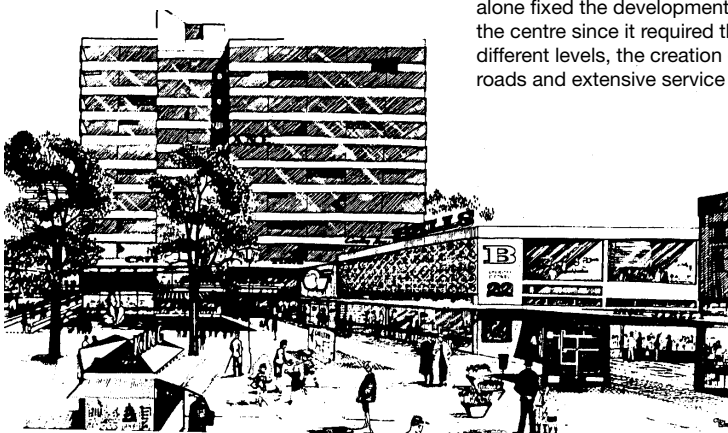
BRACKNELL NEW TOWN

In 1950 Bracknell was a small town of 5 000 people spread out along a traditional high street with eight pubs, a cattle market, shops, a cinema and a garage. In 1944 Abercrombie's Plan for London identified the need to decentralise population to a series of new and expanded towns around the capital including Bracknell. These were to become the Mark One New Towns included in the 1949 New Towns Act.
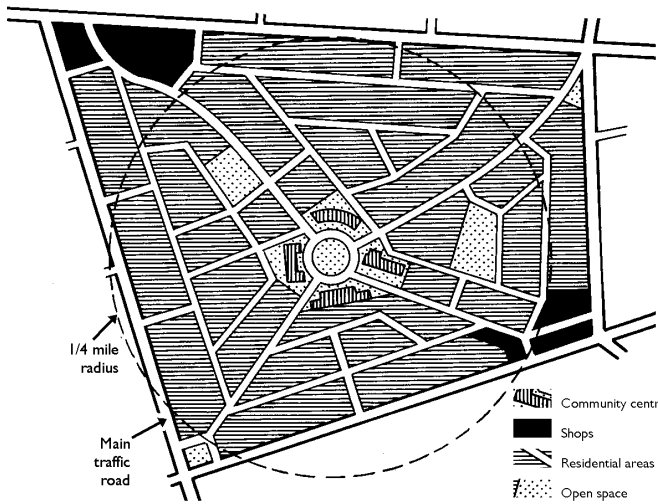
Bracknell was originally designated as a new town with a population of up to 25 000 and plans were develo-ped for a modest expansion to the town retaining the high street. How-ever in 1961 the planned population was increased to 60 000. By then the philosophy of town building had changed radically and traffic was seen as much more of a problem. A series of principles were established for the new development, many of which are similar to those that would be put forward today. The vision was of a lively mixed-use centre to be achieved within an urban structure which was more logical and functional than traditional towns. The key element to this was traffic management and the new town plan stated: 'The needs of motor traffic in the Town Centre are quite different from those of pedestrians, whatever their purpose, each should be provided for separately. Cars and delivery vehicles should have a direct service approach to every building and from whatever direction the town centre is approached car parking should be obvious and adequate. Access for pedestrians from car parks and other approaches to the centre should be direct, safe and of constant interest'. This requirement alone fixed the development form of the centre since it required the use of different levels, the creation of two ring roads and extensive service yards.

The remnants of the original high street
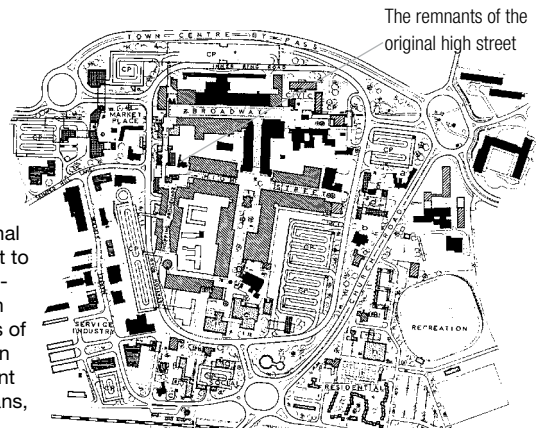
Despite the aim of creating a mixed-use centre, the form of the new town has made this difficult to achieve. There are few restaurants and cafés, fewer pubs than there were on the original high street, and most of the leisure development has been concentrated in a leisure centre on the edge of the centre. In creating a functional centre, the planners over-looked many of the fundamentals which make a town work. The town would have worked well when its population had little option but to use the centre for shopping and other services. However a more mobile population with greater choice is turning its back on Bracknell as some-where to shop. It lacks the range of uses envisaged in the original plan and does not even provide shopping for the town's population let alone a wider catchment.

Community centre
Shops
Residential areas
Open space

1/4 mile radius

Main traffic road

The neighbourhood unit: Conceived by Clarence Perry for the New York Plan in the 1920s, the neighbourhood unit is delineated by major routes with community facilities in the centre. However Perry posi-tioned shops at the junctions of the major routes whereas in the UK shops were placed in the centre of the neighbourhood and so were deprived of passing trade

The neighbourhood unit

CIAM also took on board the concept of the neighbourhood unit. As we have seen this played a role in Howard's ideas and was a central part of Barry Parker's proposals for Wythenshawe. It had also been central to Clarence Perry's plan for New York[3] in the 1920s which advocated neighbourhoods of 5 000 people based on the catchment of a primary school with major roads consigned to the edge of each neighbourhood. CIAM developed the neighbourhood unit into the idea of super blocks, each served by a range of local facilities – schools, shops, doctors – and with an allotted area of open space. These blocks were accessible only to the residents. There was however a crucial difference between this and Perry's ideas. Perry placed shopping areas at the junctions of the major roads dividing the neighbourhood units but re-tained their character as traditional streets. CIAM, by contrast, advocated small district centres at the heart of the neighbourhood keeping the major peripheral roads free of frontage development to ensure the free flow of traffic. This was a direct application of the parkway concept which Parker used in Wythenshawe. Industrial, shopping and commercial areas were similarly to be zoned into blocks to create industrial estates, shopping centres and commercial districts. These zones were to be separated by swathes of open space within which would run a fast and efficient transport system of roads and motorways.

The free flow of traffic

The great insight of Le Corbusier and the other great visionary not mentioned so far, Frank Lloyd Wright, was to foresee the growth of car use. They saw the car as a liberating force to be accommodated in towns and cities. If this meant that the whole city had to be redesigned then so be it, an attitude which characterised the approach of most postwar planning until recently. The streets which lay at the heart of traditional urban areas played the dual role of a transport artery and a focus for the surrounding community. They were, as a result, lined with shops and services and bustling with the sort of activity and diversity prized by writers like Jane Jacobs and the visitors to historic towns. However to the tidy mind of the modern plan-ner this 'solified chaos' in the words of Lewis Mumford[4] was inefficient and was choking the commercial lifeblood of cities and undermining the quality of life of urban communities. Plan-ners and highway engineers therefore sought to reform the system of roads in cities drawing inspiration from Le Corbusier's and Wright's freeways and Parker's parkways. These ideas were developed by H. Alker Tripp, an assist-ant commissioner in the Metropolitan Police responsible for traffic. In a book entitled Town Planning and Traffic[5], which was to influence Abercombie's plan for London, he advocated that the streets of London should be divided into arterial routes, subarterial routes and local roads. The higher order routes were to be segre-gated from the highway system, free of frontage development, with widely spaced junctions to reduce congestion.

By the 1960s the emphasis had changed from exploiting the potential of the car to coping with the challenges of congestion. The landmark report Traffic in Towns by a group chaired by Sir Colin Buchanan in 1963[6] stared into the abyss that we still face today: 'The po-tential increase in the number of vehicles is so great that unless something is done conditions are bound to become extremely serious within a comparatively short period of years. Either the utility of vehicles in towns will decline rapidly or

the pleasantness and safety of surroundings will deteriorate catastrophically – in all probability both will happen together'. The report goes on to say that these problems concern the form and organisation of urban areas which will become the 'supreme social problem of the future'. To be fair to Buchanan, the arguments in the report are more sophisticated than their subsequent application would suggest. He suggested that in planning for future roads both the economic costs and the environmental costs should be taken into account. If the environmental costs were considered by the community to be unacceptable then traffic restraint rather than road building should be pursued. He therefore put forward maximal and minimal traffic solutions, although it was the maximal solutions which received most interest and which have had the lasting effect. Buchanan has therefore come to

be associated with the network of motorways with grade separated junctions and pedestrian walkways and subways which were so close to the heart of the planners and highway engineers in the 1960s and 70s. While there is now an acceptance of the negative effects of these ideas, the damage has been done. Resources have been wasted, communities divided and isolated and town centres cut off from their hinterland by ring roads which have become the modern equivalent of city walls. Principles such as a hierarchy of distributor routes with frontage development only allowed on minor streets were enshrined in the government's Design Bulletin 32 – Residential Roads and Footpaths[7]. This has been a major influence on highway engineers and remains in force. Design guidance developed by Alan Baxter Associates (1998)[8] is intended to promote a more flexible

The high street: Traditional streets such as the Stratford Road in Birmingham serve the dual function of a major traffic route and a community focus. Many of these routes have been transformed into free-flowing traffic arteries free of frontage development and devoid of urban character. However recent improvements to the Stratford Road show how traffic flow can be maintained while retaining vitality. This has been done by creating a single lane of traffic in each direction uninterrupted by parking or turning lanes. This has allowed pavements to actually be widened while traffic flow has been eased.
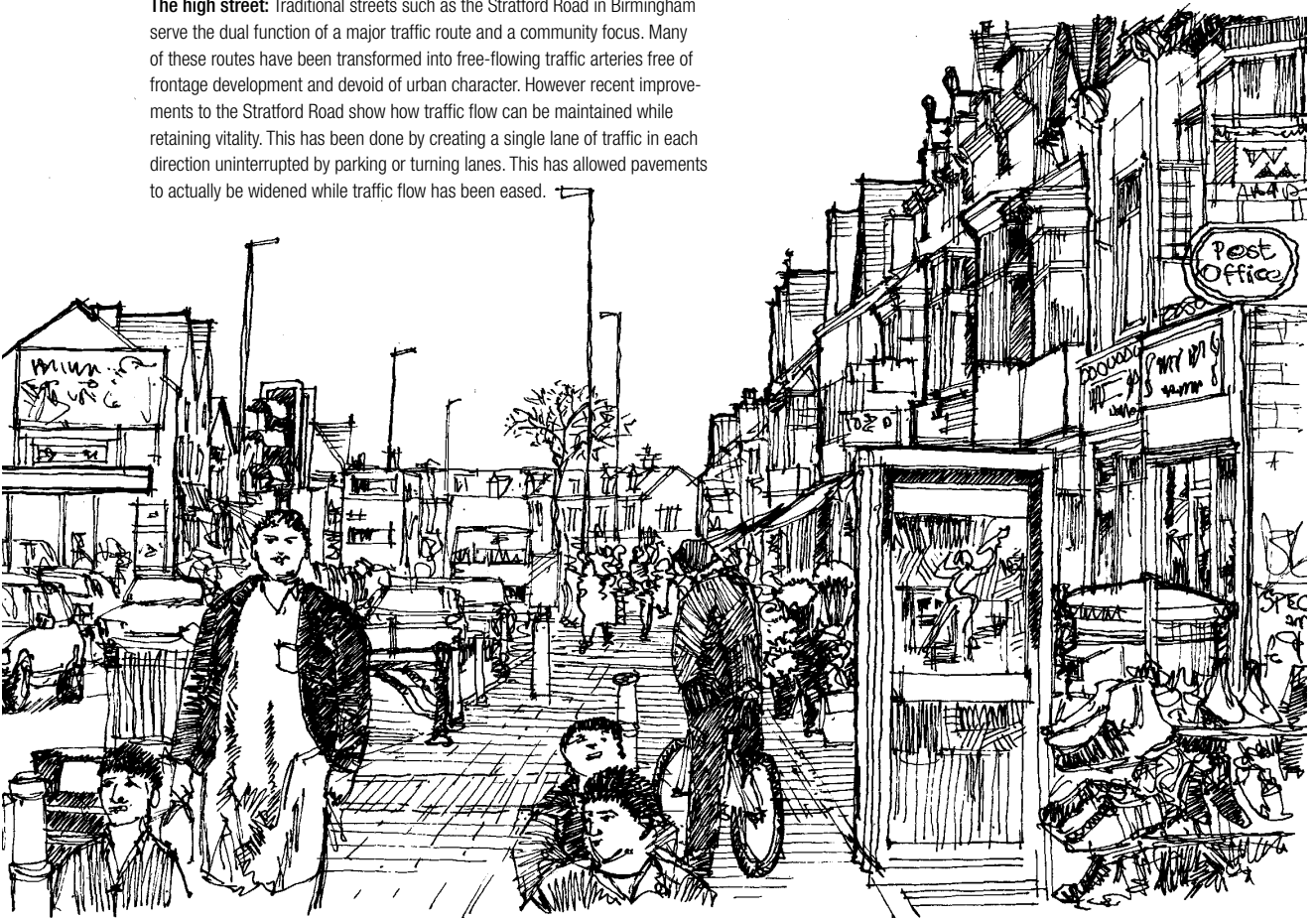
interpretation of the guidelines. However we are still allowing the car to dominate urban development and to undermine the qualities which make urban living attractive.

The benefits of open space

Underlying much of modern planning is the idea that open space is a good thing. One of the problems with the overcrowded industrial town was that people had little or no public or private open space. The by-law terraces may have been a great improvement on the earlier urban slums but they made little or no provision for recreation or indeed greenery of any kind. It was this which gave impetus to the development of Victorian parks which provided a valuable oasis of open space in areas where trees were rare, play areas unheard of and many people did not even have access to a back yard. However such was the belief in the quality of life-enhancing aspects of open space, that Le Corbusier's assertion that 95% of the land area should be given over to open space was accepted by many planners. Great deserts of grassland with lollipop trees and the occasional forlorn playground have therefore come to dominate many parts of our cities. Even in the 1970s and 80s large parts of the London Borough of Southwark were blighted by Abercrombie's vision of new parks and riverside walkways in pursuit of which the council continued to buy up and clear large areas of housing and workshops.

The development of buildings in a landscape is common to the garden city and modernist movements. In the garden city, however, most of the land was in gardens. The open space was therefore largely 'privatised' so that it was used and maintained by the residents. In the modernist vision, by contrast, open space was communal and part of the public domain. Some of it may have been used as playgrounds or sports pitches but most lacked any function other than providing a buffer to traffic noise and a 'pleasant' outlook to residents. However someone living on the tenth floor of a tower block has little use for the formless grassland in which the block is set. The reality was therefore that much of this space was unused, dangerous and a burden on public authorities responsible for maintenance.

Yet planners still insist on lavishing their plans with great swathes of open space while architects designate 'landscaping' with no discernible function or generator of activity. Indeed local plans today still often treat open space as a land use in its own right regardless of function or usefulness. They fail to recognise why the open space is spurned by ungrateful residents, has not created value and has harmed the vitality of surrounding areas. This can be seen with many areas of open space such as Burgess Park in Southwark or Mile End Park in Tower Hamlets. Far from being great assets for the community these have quickly come to be seen as problems, little used by local people and with a reputation for crime.

The curse of overcrowding

One of the issues to have sowed most confusion in postwar planning is the issue of density. This is linked to the issue of open space but has more commonly been driven by concern about overcrowding, something which had been recognised as the curse of working-class areas since Victorian times. Overcrowding has been linked to ill-health, poverty and crime and was one of the main targets of slum clearance programmes. However the issue of overcrowding – the number of people per room – has consistently been confused with the issue of density – the number of dwellings or people per acre. High-density areas need not be overcrowded and conversely it is quite possible to have a low-density area in which overcrowding is a problem if houses are overoccupied. The visionaries discussed in the previous chapter sought to reduce overcrowding; however, with the exception of Le Corbusier, they failed to recognise this point and their objective became the reduction of densities.

The concern to lower densities can perhaps be traced back to Raymond Unwin's book, Nothing gained by overcrowding published in 1912[9]. This argued that if sufficient

The density myth: It is often believed that the problem of many of the redevelopments undertaken in the 1960s was that densities were too high. However as these plans of Hulme illustrate, this was far from the case. The plan on the left is from the 1930s when the area was built to 150 dwellings/hectare. The plan below is the redevelopment of the 1960s and was built at only 37 dwellings to the hectare (15 dwellings to the acre) which is the density proposed by Ebenezer Howard for the garden city. The problem is that the high-rise nature of the redevelopment made it feel very dense as illustrated on the following page.

open space was provided the savings in land area to be gained from higher densities were marginal and out-weighed by the benefits of lower density development. He suggested an ideal density of twelve houses to the acre, a target which became the norm for garden city development even though it was lower than the fifteen homes to the acre suggested by Ebenezer Howard. This target was also adopted by the influential Tudor-Walters report of 1918[10] and became the standard density of most interwar development in both the public and private sectors.
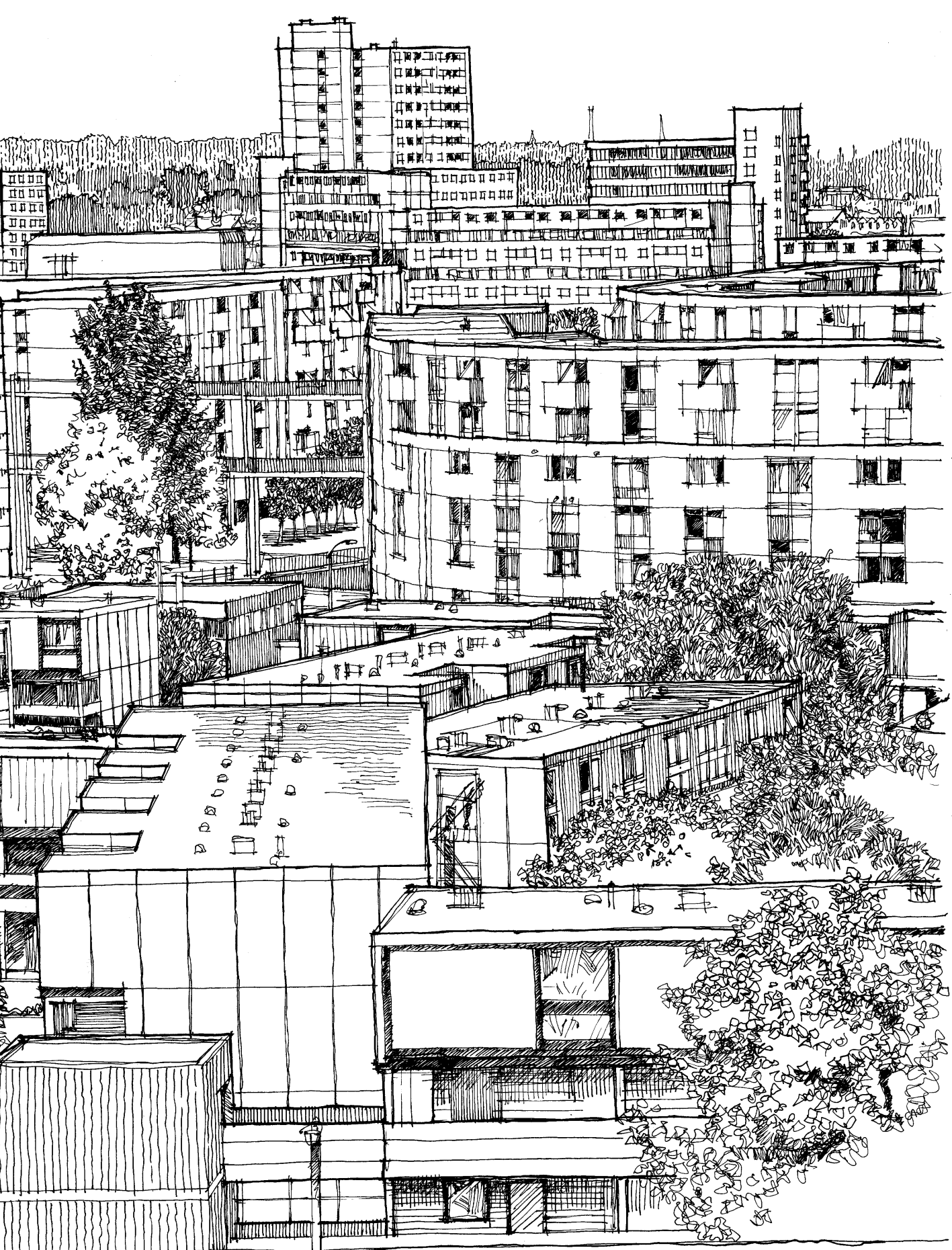
In the more recent past the prejudice against density was reinforced by research on rats by Calhoun published as the Behavioural Sink in 1962[11]. Indeed this research was quoted in questions by members of the House of Commons Environment Select Committee in 1998 as part of their enquiry into housing! Calhoun showed that if a rat colony becomes too large its social structure breaks down. This was equated to the problems in high-density housing areas. However subsequent work has shown that social breakdown is a result of the size of the colony not its density and the situation is not improved by making the enclosure larger. Yet problems are avoided if the colony is fenced off into smaller enclosures even if densities are not reduced.

With the redevelopment of tightly packed urban areas after the Second World War it was felt that the garden city density targets were unrealistic even with the decanting of a large part of the population to overspill estates. The emphasis therefore switched to ac-

commodating higher densities whilst avoiding the problems of overcrowding. Following Le Corbusier's lead this was achieved by building upwards to allow for generous amounts of open space. There was also a trend in the 1970s to develop high-density low-rise estates based around a warren of alleyways.

However even at these higher densities these new developments were built at substantially lower densities than the terraced areas that the new development replaced. Indeed, as Alice Coleman[12] has pointed out, the scale of high-rise estates gives the impression of high densities, an impression often shared by residents who feel that the area is overcrowded. Yet in terms of the number of houses to the acre, these estates were often built to relatively low densities. They therefore achieved the worst of both worlds – the impression of high density without any of the benefits. The Hulme area in Manchester, for example, was once home to 130 000 people not to mention countless small factories, pubs, shops and public buildings. The redevelopment of the 1960s swept this away to create 5 000 flats in six deck-access estates housing around 12 000 people. Similarly the Five Estates in Peckham were developed at a fraction of the density that had once existed in the area. This however was achieved by building at relatively high densities on part of the site and using the rest to create Burgess Park which, as we have seen, became a vast and poorly-used area of open space. It also resulted in many of the local shops on Rye Lane which was once known as the 'Golden Mile' closing for lack of trade. Yet consultants' reports continued to suggest that one of the area's problems was the fact that it was too dense. The Five Estates are currently the subject of a massive redevelopment programme which is likely to further reduce densities. Yet such is the hold that the benefits of lower densities and open space have on professionals and politicians that no one would dare suggest the obvious solution of building on part of the park to reduce its scale, increase numbers of potential users and provide passive surveillance and boost the local economy.

Jane Jacobs reports a conversation that she had with a planner about the West End in Boston[13] in the 1960s. The planner was ashamed to admit that an area with 275 dwellings to the acre still existed in the city and indicated that, when resources allowed, it would be redeveloped. However he also admitted that the area scored well on indices such as delinquency, disease and infant mortality and even confessed that he enjoyed the street life of the area. The West End may have been unique and there were certainly many dense working-class areas where disease, poverty and crime were severe problems. The point however is that the blanket use of density as an indicator of such problems is rarely justified.

Unlike many of the orthodoxies of modern planning the concern with densities is as strong today as it ever was. Despite the continued depopulation of our cities, increasing homelessness and lack of housing sites in many areas, there is still a drive to reduce urban densities. As many high-rise estates are redeveloped densities are being further reduced at huge public expense in a forlorn attempt to overcome the areas' problems. In reality the loss of density in the original redevelopment was one of the causes of the problems. The challenge now is to increase densities rather than to exacerbate these problems with further reductions.

Postwar plan making

These various influences came together in the rash of town and city plans developed after the Second World War. The most influential was the plan for the postwar reconstruction of London developed by Patrick Abercombie with J. H. Forshaw, the chief architect for London County Council, produced in 1944[14] and published as a Penguin special edited by Arno Goldfinger. This plan brought together many of the ideas described in this chapter. London's arterial routes were to become parkways through landscaped strips, bounding inward-looking neighbourhoods arranged around pedestrianised shopping precincts. Much of the development was to be new with the Victorian housing

Planned and organic towns: Figure ground plans of Devizes (above right) and Yate (above left). The towns are roughly the same size and the plans are ap-prox-imately the same scale. They show a stark contrast between a dense traditional town and one developed in the 1950s applying the principles of postwar planning

areas which survived the blitz being cleared to create modern, zoned areas of development.

Even at a time of postwar reconstruction, the structure of London's local government, financial constraints and the complexity of the city largely defeated the planners so that Abercrombie's plan was only partly realised. This was not the case in the provincial cities, in small towns due for expansion and of course in the rash of new towns planned after the war. The plans which emerged for these towns took a lead from Abercrombie and what is more strong provincial councils were far more able to put them into

practice. The 1949 plan for Manchester[15] conceded to the retention of only a handful of city centre buildings. Even Waterhouse's town hall was to be demolished! The radial routes were to be replanned as parkways, the results of which can be seen along Oldham Road and Rochdale Road to the North of the city. Even greater 'progress' was made in places like Birmingham, Coventry and Stevenage, and even quite small towns like Yate to the north of Bristol or Hemel Hempstead to the north of London. Here existing centres were razed or new towns built to create comprehensively planned centres surrounded by a wilderness of ring roads and parking.

The lost urban vision
The effect of these policies on the vitality and life of cities is best summed up by Jane Jacobs in her tirade in the introduction to the Death and Life of Great American Cities. She summarises the ideas which are taken for granted

in orthodox planning thus: 'The street is bad as an environment for humans; houses should be turned away from it and faced inward, towards sheltered greens. Frequent streets are wasteful, of advantage only to real estate speculators who measure value by the front foot. The basic unit of city design is not the street but the block, and more particularly the superblock. Commerce should be segregated from residences and greens. A neighbourhood's demand for goods should be calculated "scientifically", and this much and no more commercial space allocated. The presence of many other people is, at best, a necessary evil and good city planning must aim for at least an illusion of isolation and suburban privacy.'

It is hard to better this and the eloquence of Jacobs' argument for the importance of cities. The visionaries and their followers described in this and the previous chapter made the mistake of thinking that towns, cities and the human society that they accommodate are like machines, that they can be described entirely in terms of uses, functions, movement and systems. True such concepts have an analytical value in describing existing settlement patterns. They are however fatally flawed as tools for future planning. First of all towns and cities exist in all of their complex glory. Ordering this complexity requires resources far beyond that which was available even in the building boom after the war. Simplistic Utopias applied to existing urban areas are therefore bound to be compromised and undermined. Thus compromised they are unlikely to work as envisaged and are destined to fail.

However even when there is not the complexity of an existing town to deal with, the applica-tion of Utopian visions to a new town is fraught with difficulties. It is almost impossible for a master planner to conceive, on paper, a town which works as well as a traditional town, which is the result of centuries of evolution. This is not unlike the attempts in robotics to replicate the complexity of the human body. Artificial towns, like robots, may be more efficient and many businesses and residents may find this attractive, but they lack the diversity, vitality and character of their older cousins. Also as Jacobs said in the conclusion to the Economy of Cities[16]: '…bureaucratised, simplified cities, so dear to present-day city planners and urban designers, and familiar also to readers of science fiction and Utopian proposals, run counter to the processes of city growth and economic development. Conformity and monotony, even when they are embellished with a froth of novelty, are not attributes of developing and economically vigorous cities'. This is why town planning at its best is essentially an art rather than a science and why successful urban development is organic rather than mechanistic.

Of course artificial towns can still

Milton Keynes:
An illustrative section of the masterplan for Milton Keynes showing the supergrid of major routes which are free of frontage development and the neighbourhood developments within the grid. The city is perhaps the purest expression of much of the philosophy of post-war planning

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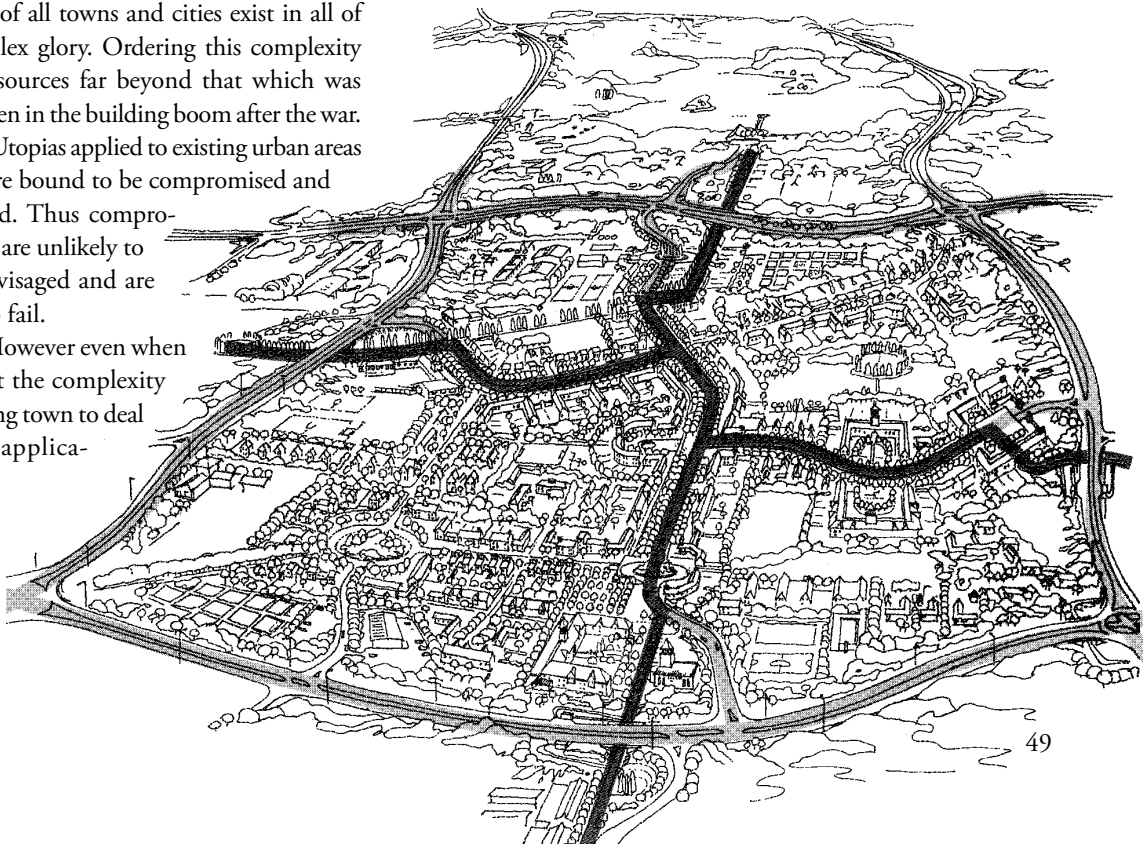
The suburban conspiracy: Modern planning policies would no longer allow the creation of historic urban areas such as Bradford upon Avon (above). Instead a suburban conspiracy is overtaking our cities in which inappropriate housing turns its back on to the streets to which they should be giving life as in Moss Side, Manchester (below right)

basic needs for food and shelter they yearn for higher things such as human contact, cultural expression, community, hustle and bustle, and a sense of continuity. People do not miss these things until they are deprived of them, a loss which may be mani-fested as 'new town blues' or the alienation of people on peripheral estates. Older towns may be less efficient but they undoubtedly meet these human needs more effectively than many modern settlements and the evidence can be seen in the values placed on property.

Much of the legacy of twentieth century visionaries is therefore negative and over the last twenty years or so has increasingly been recognised as such, particularly in the case of the modernists. Some may argue that this is because many of the ideas have been 'bastardised' by lesser architects and planners to justify development which the visionaries and early planners would have ab-horred. However a philosophy which has destroyed the life of large parts of our cities must be questioned in terms of its conception rather than just its implementation. In the twenty-first century as in the 1990s we will continue to struggle with the momentous task of reforming our cities. We are however increasingly dealing not with the exhausted fabric of the Victorian city but with the legacy of twentieth century mistakes. Yet can we be sure that we are not repeating the same mistakes? It is true that we have over-

work. It is instructive to be asked, as we were[17], to advise on the revitalisation of the centre of a new town like Milton Keynes, which incorporates many of the principles of modern town planning. Milton Keynes remains the fastestgrowing city in the UK and is based upon a 'supergrid' of streets bounding neighbourhood units with a town centre based around boulevards and a covered shopping centre. It is generally popular with residents even if they do sometimes yearn for areas like Covent Garden where people can be seen throughout the day. However most recognise that the town is convenient and meets their every need. Milton Keynes remains probably the best example in Britain of the sort of urban environment envisaged by post war planners. However for every Milton Keynes there are countless examples of areas where the application of this conventional wisdom has created not popular environments, but alienating places devoid of identity, character and life. Once people have satisfied their

thrown many of the most damaging dogmas of the twentieth century. The question is, have we done this only to replace them with an equally inappropriate dogma, which we have called the suburban conspiracy?

The suburban conspiracy

It is clear that enmity towards the city is shared by many of those involved with the planning and development of housing and urban areas. In an effort to sanitise and tame the city we have managed to throw out the baby with the bath water and destroyed what we sought to preserve. The underlying ethos of most professions and investors concerned with the urban environment has been, and largely still is, anti-urban. Indeed all of the urban professions (with the exception of urban design) have been brought into existence to tame the city and to regulate human activities. There is no Anglo-American equivalent of the European 'urbaniste'.

Many of these negative attitudes live on in the minutiae of urban policy today. The planning system which seeks to protect housing and other development from noise and traffic, ends up making houses turn their backs on the very streets to which they should relate. Rather than creating a sense of enclosure and streets which are attractive places to be, buildings are set back behind a landscape buffer and streets become little more than desolate traffic routes. Privacy distances, parking standards,

building lines, fear of 'over development', the zoning of uses and landscaping requirements all remain central parts of planning ideology. Similarly highway engineering is based upon the eradication of congestion and the reduction of accidents. Who can argue against a policy which saves the lives of children, even if it does make life miserable for pedestrians who are isolated on pavements dominated by traffic noise, pedestrian bridges and underpasses? Road hierarchies (with limited access from distributor roads), parking requirements, turning heads, visibility splays, curb radii and opposition to crossroads make it impossible to recreate today many of the historic urban environments that we so prize. Such are the constraints imposed by modern highway engineers that it is no longer possible to build the medieval streets of York, the Georgian crescents of Bath or even the early twentieth century developments like Hampstead Garden Suburb.

So whilst many of the tenets of twentieth century planning theory may appear to have been discredited the tenacity of their hold over the urban professions should not be underestimated. Indeed with the fall from grace of the modernists it is possible to argue that our towns and cities today are threatened by a suburban conspiracy. The conspirators include planners, highway engineers, investors, and, as we will see in the next chapter, the housebuilding industry and residents who have bought into the suburban ideal. The extent to which the current urban professions are equipped to create places which can stand the test of time is therefore open to question.

New planning disasters

There is perhaps another lesson that we can learn from the twentieth century attempts to tame the city. In this chapter we have questioned the philosophy of twentieth century planning but it may also be that there is something inherently flawed with the idea of imposing a conventional land-use plan on the complexity of urban life. The best and most enduring of places seem to have grown organically over time
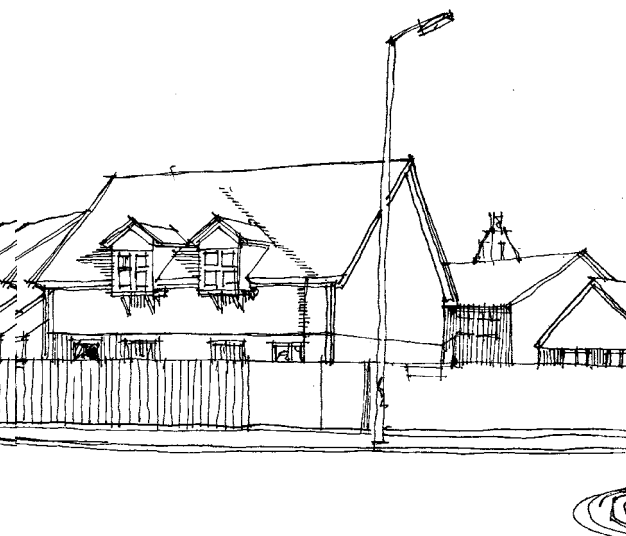
within a planning framework rather than to have sprung from the inspired hand of a single master planner. Yet in Britain we have been obsessed with grandiose end-state plans. The town centres and housing estates conceived on the drawing boards of the 1960s looked fine on the architect's blue prints. But these bore little relation to the situation on the ground within a few short years. This is a lesson that we have not learned. Architects are once more producing plans for the redevelopment of housing estates to sweep away the mistakes of the past. Is there any more chance that they will get it right this time or is the very process of conceiving a neighbourhood on paper and building it over a few short years a recipe for failure?

However the people with the real power to undertake comprehensive development at the end of the twentieth century are not weak under-funded councils but private developers. Far from being able to impose its will on the city the modern planning system struggles to control a market in which sprawling supermarkets, out-of-town shopping centres and business parks

bring the greatest profits. Canary Wharf may have been the product of the over-inflated market of the 1980s but in conception and planning it bears many similarities to the comprehensive devel-opments of the 1960s and 70s. The same is true of Meadowhall in Sheffield, the Metro Centre in Gateshead and numerous retail, lei-sure and business parks that leach the life from towns and cities. These developments also seek to tame the city by recreating it in safe, comfortable, sanitised environments. They attract car-borne customers and create large profits for the financial institutions which fund them. Is the logical conclusion of twentieth century urban trends for Britain to follow the shopping mall culture of the United States? If unchecked there is little hope for our towns and cities, for environmental sustainability or for the ability of communities to respond to future needs.

Is this the future city?
The shopping developments of the 1980s and 90s based upon American models such as this are creating new sanitised environments to tame the rough edges of the city
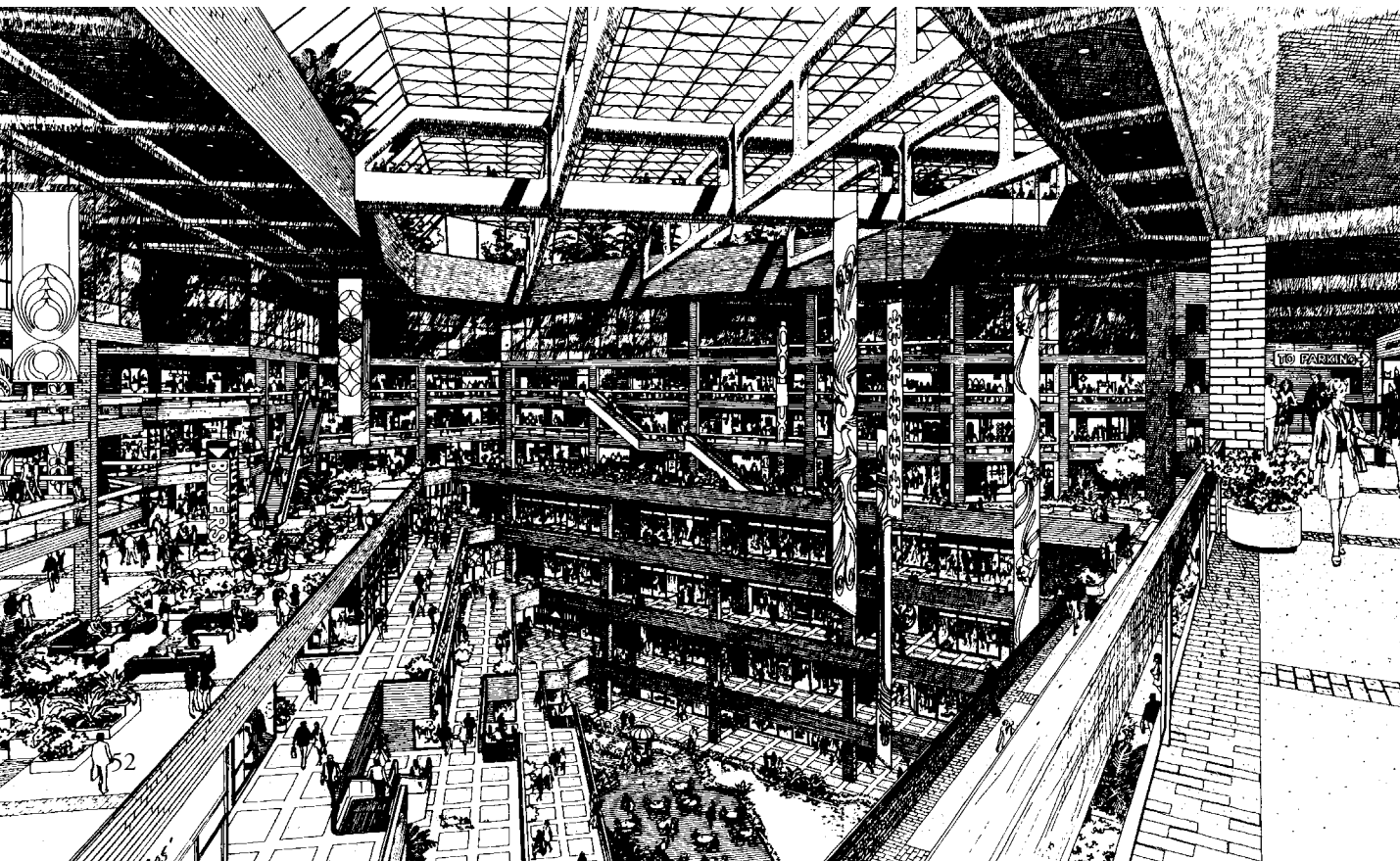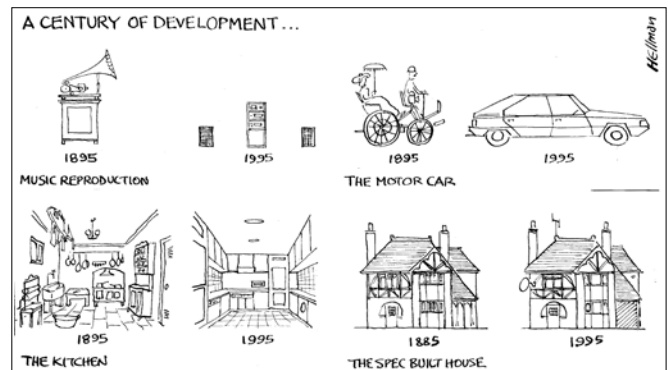
Chapter 4

The shaping of the English home

How have the forces of urban decentralisation, Utopian thinking and town planning shaped the sort of housing that we have built over the last 200 years? As we approach the end of the millennium the predominant type of housing being built in Britain appears, at least, to have changed little since the great suburban boom of the 1920s. In terms of its form, structure, and internal layout the new home of the 1990s could be compared to a Model T Ford. It is tempting to believe that this type of low density, detached and semi-detached development is somehow a natural or even an inevitable part of British life which is unlikely to change in the future. However the history of housing over the last two centuries illustrates that major design changes can take place over relatively short periods of time, prompted by social and economic trends, legislative change and the influence of reformers. It seems reasonable to suggest that such trends will continue to have an influence on the housing of the future. In this chapter we therefore seek to chart the development of housing through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The nineteenth century home

The traditional image of the nineteenth century home is of drab uniform rows of terraced housing in the shadow of 'dark satanic mills'. Such housing is associated with the subjugation and exploitation of the working classes by the unfet-tered growth of capitalism after the industrial revolution, and the concentration of most of Britain's population in metropolitan centres. This image has been fuelled by the accounts of the nineteenth century reformers such as Peter Gaskell's Manufacturing Population of England (1833)[1] which states: 'The housing of great numbers of the labouring community in the manufacturing districts present many of the traces of a savage life. Filthy, unfurnished, deprived of all the accessories to decency or comfort, they are indeed but too truly an index of the vicious and depraved lives of their inmates.'

The true picture is however somewhat more complicated than this. As John Burnett[2] has pointed out, such accounts describe the worst housing of the time as if it were the average. In actual fact as Freidrich Engels wrote in 1844; 'Houses of three or four rooms and a

A CENTURY OF DEVELOPMENT...

1895 — MUSIC REPRODUCTION   1995

THE MOTOR CAR — 1895   1995

1895 — THE KITCHEN   1995

THE SPEC BUILT HOUSE. — 1885   1995

kitchen form throughout England, some parts of London excepted, the general dwellings of the working class'[3]. The worst housing conditions were largely confined to overcrowded cellars, lodging houses and older tenements graphically described in books such as Jack London's Edge of the Abyss. The back-to-back terrace, so universally condemned from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, was in fact relatively desirable since it was self-contained and afforded a degree of privacy to a family.
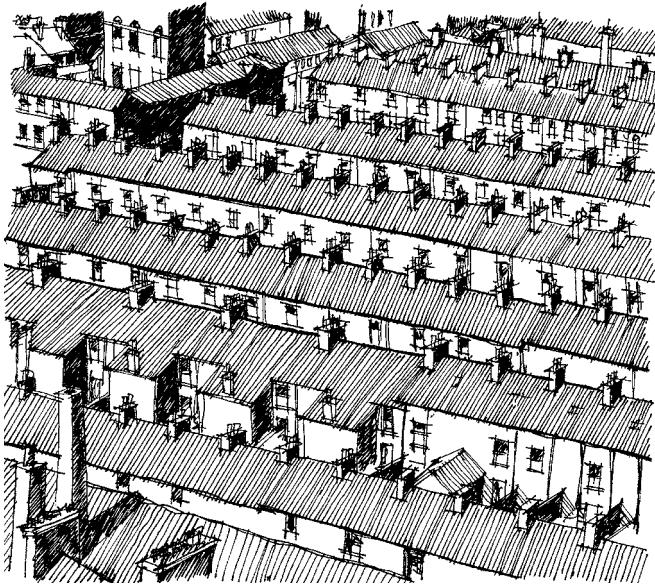
The development of the 'through' terrace represented even greater progress. This allowed for a back yard with an individual privy which could be cleared by night soil men from the back alley. The greater size of dwellings enabled the separation of living, cooking and sleeping activities as well as meeting those great concerns of reformers for ventilation and day light. Most importantly the terrace started to change the nature of urban life. The early residents of the industrial city, out of necessity if not choice, had lived a very communal life, sharing space, sanitation, and services. This life had taken place in back courts largely hidden from the rest of the city. The Victorians viewed this communal life as a breeding ground for vice, dirt and disease and sought to counter this by promoting the nuclear rather than the extended family. The through terrace allowed the separation of private family life from the public life of the street. The lace curtained parlour and the polished front step created an impenetrable barrier for all but invited guests. This also marked the beginning of the separation of the sexes in which women became housewives responsible for the respectability of the home whilst men went out to work. The through terrace can therefore be seen as the birth place of a number of trends, the natural result of which was the suburbia of the 1900s.

By the second half of the nineteenth century the through terrace had become the norm. This was spurred not so much by changes in the housing market but by public health reforms, in particular the by-laws which were introduced locally from 1840 onwards and nationally in 1877. By-law terraces have been widely condemned for their monotony of row upon row of treeless streets with little or no open space. Builders may have built to the lowest standards allowable but these standards were considerably higher than those of earlier decades. By-law terraces were more sanitary, less dense, more airy and light, and internally they were better built, with larger windows, higher ceilings and improved materials. In terms of layout the effect was to create the familiar gridiron layout with regularly spaced streets and occasional cross streets. This however was far more open and easy to understand and police than the warren of yards and back courts of the early part of the century. Whilst large areas of bylaw terracing were demolished in the slum clearance programmes of the twentieth century, the areas which have survived have generally fared well. Indeed many areas have out-survived the twentieth century redevelopment schemes which were meant to replace them. The passage of time has often seen them develop into desirable areas that have become 'gentrified' by owner-occupation.

Middle-class suburbs

Another equally significant trend in the middle of the nineteenth century was the emergence of the middle-class suburbs. Censuses of the time show that perhaps three million out of a population of eighteen million could be considered as middle-class. As we saw from Chapter 1, whilst this class was the product of the wealth generated by the industrial revolution it was also repelled by the conditions that it created, and sought to construct a way of life which was insulated from the 'evils' of the industrial city. This life centred around Christian values,

Middle-class housing: The housing of the middle classes was also terraced and high-density although on a much grander scale
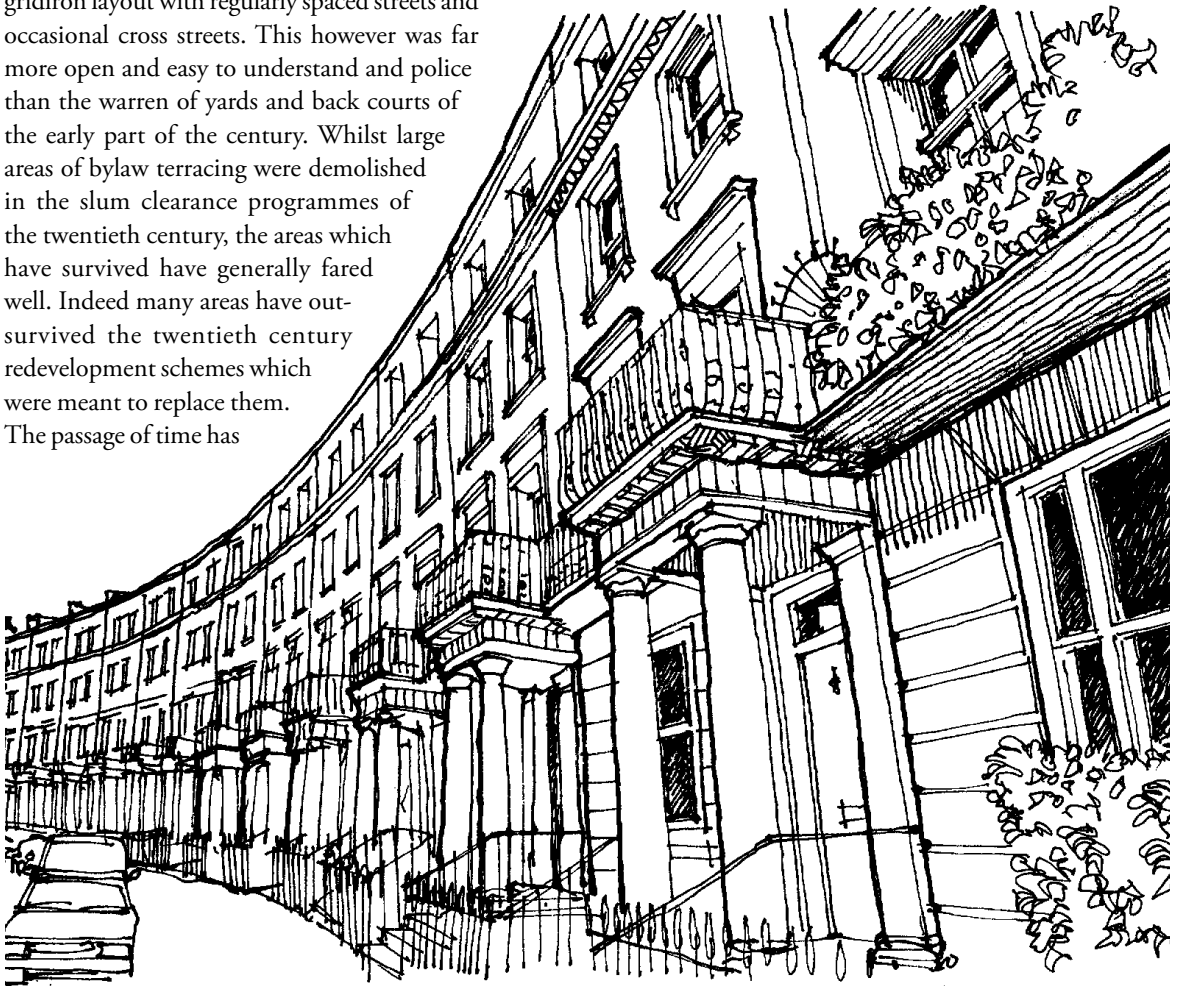
polite behaviour, privacy, order, and taste. These were the sentiments of Mr. Bulstrode in Middlemarch and a far cry from the urban lifestyle of Charles Dicken's characters. The symbol of this way of life was the middle-class home or villa.

As Stefan Muthesius[4] has described, for much of the nineteenth century these middle-class aspirations were achieved in terraced housing. This housing was grander, in some cases far grander, that the homes of the working classes but the form was essentially the same. Indeed Muthesius has described how the frontage width of even the grandest terraces was not vastly greater than its more modest cousins.

Larger houses were built upwards, sometimes to six storeys, and plots became deeper with coach houses and servants' quarters facing onto the rear alley. Terraces of such houses were made to look like palaces particularly in areas like Grosvenor Square in London and Bath with classical columns and central pediments. Often these urban houses served as second homes for families 'up for the season' who also had country houses from which they derived their status and sense of identity.

In the early part of the nineteenth century these middle-class terraces became so popular that they were favoured over the detached villa. However as the century progressed

Middle-class housing in London

The development of middle-class housing in London is illustrated by looking at four estates as chronicled by Olsen[6], in Primrose Hill, Dyos[7], in Camberwell, Gillian Tyndall[8] in Kentish Town and most recently Linda Clarke[9] in Somers Town. The precarious nature of residential development at the time meant that Primrose Hill and Camberwell remained 'desirable' while, Somers Town became a slum.

These areas were developed speculatively with four-storey housing. A plan would be commissioned by the owner showing the roads, the class of houses to be erected together with amenities such as churches, shops and public houses. This was controlled through the London Building Act of 1774 which divided houses into four 'rates', and stipulated their height in relation to the width of roads as well as the details of their construction. Thus the Eton Estate, which owned Primrose Hill, limited the number of

mews, because it knew these frequently degenerated into slums, and sought a balance between the 'higher class' houses along Regent's Park Road and the 'lower class' behind them.

Once approved, leases were sold to small builders so that streets developed incrementally. The builders in turn, sold the houses to small tradesmen who rented them out to provide an income before the days of pensions. The Paving Commissioners laid out the pavements and infrastructures. There was however a major difference between landowners like the Bedford Estate, who thought in terms of long-term value, and those who went in for short-term gains, as in Somers Town.

Somers Town was started in 1773 by the architect Leroux under an agreement with Lord Somers. Leroux's finance came from brick making rather than development values and the 'ring of fire' from brick making put off invest-ors. Pressure to build quickly caused standards to fall and the houses were small, or were tenements dressed up to look like Georgian houses.

By contrast on the neighbouring estate Lord Southampton's direct control meant that a generous layout was retained without 'back streets nor any of so retired a kind as to be liable on that account to be improperly occupied and to injure the reputation of the district'. The development was protected by gates and designed to 'have as few communications as possible with Somers Town'.

By 1800 Somers Town was characterised by dust hills and dung heaps and proximity to the canal encouraged industry. The tenements became overcrowded and the gardens were built upon, further increasing densities. When the estate was sold in 1802, control was further fragmented. By 1831 it was 'dingy with smoke and deprived almost entirely of gardens and fields'. With 8.4 persons per house it was not surprising that cholera broke out. Many of the houses were demolished as the railways were cut through the worst parts of the area, the remainder being replaced by public housing in the 1930s.

Why is it that such places deteriorate into slums whilst others which outwardly appear very similar succeed? The factors include shortterm profiteering from land sales, insufficient public space, air pollution, the loss of social balance, overcrowding, poor standards and neglected maintenance. The lesson is that developers need to retain control and to take a long-term view otherwise grand plans can end up as slums.
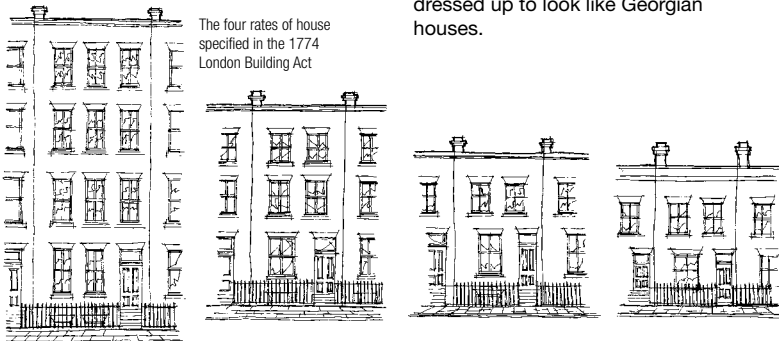
The four rates of house specified in the 1774 London Building Act
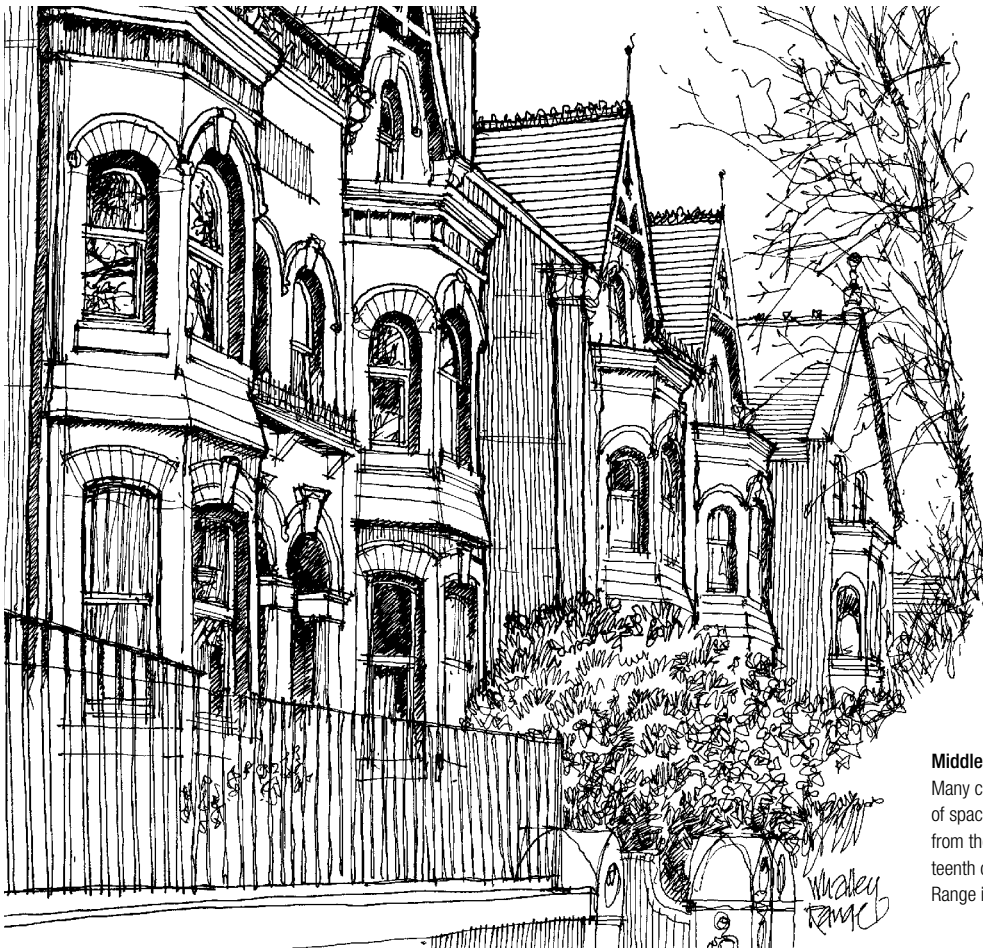
Middle-class sanctuary: Many cities retain districts of spacious housing dating from the middle of the nineteenth century like Whalley Range in Manchester

the middle-class aspirations for privacy, order and godliness found increasing expression in more suburban housing forms. Donald Olsen[5] convincingly argues that the physical form of Victorian development was a deliberate response to what were seen as immoral Georgian values. These had emphasised street life (the promenade) and public pleasures (the spa and the subscription rooms where dances were held). They were less concerned with the need to separate classes or to celebrate the family. Georgian towns like Bath or Cheltenham excelled in what we now think of as a continental way of life. Early precursors of the Victorian era like Belgravia in London and Victoria Park in Manchester represented a very different view of civic life. They erected walls and gates to protect them from 'lower-class' districts but as

time went on gates were not enough and the middle classes sought geographical separation and the outward expansion of the city gained pace. Separation from poorer neighbourhoods was however not sufficient. The Victorian family sought sanctuary from unplanned encounters with neighbours not just of different classes but also their own. The detached villa was therefore favoured surrounded by a high wall and with a sweeping drive to block views from the street. Thus the middle classes were able to recreate their own miniature version of the country estate yet remain within reach of their employment in the city.

As is so often the case the lower-middle-classes, uncertain in their newly acquired position, were all the more concerned to adopt middle-class values which is the comic value of

the Pooters in Grossmiths Dairy of a Nobody. Unable to afford a detached villa the solution was the semidetached villa complete with porch and boot scraper. Burnett cites the first example of semidetached villas in 1794 and the revolutionary idea was further developed by Nash alongside the grand terraces and detached villas of Regent's Park. However by the end of the century the semi-detached house had made the benefits of suburbia available to a much larger part of the middle class and the foundations of twentieth century housing development were being set. As Dyos and Reeder have said: 'The middle class suburb was an ecological marvel… it offered an arena for the manipulation of social distinctions to those most conscious of their possibilities and most adept in turning them into shapes on the ground; it kept the threat of rapid social change beyond the horizon of those least able to accept its negative as well as positive advantages.'[10]

The development of flats

Throughout the great boom of urban population in the nineteenth century it is remarkable that people in England and Wales remained so attached to the individual home on its own plot of land. In Scotland and on the continent the response to overcrowding had been to build upwards – possibly encouraged by a different legal system which allowed 'flying freeholds'. In England and Wales this rarely happened, with occasional exceptions such as the two storey Tyneside flat and the London mansion block often used as bachelor flats. In 1849 the Builder published an article which argued that 'the time has now arrived when the expansion and growth of this city [London] must be upwards in place of outwards – when "houses" must be reared above each other… instead of straggling miles farther and farther away from the Centre'[11]. The only developers to take up this call were the housing societies which started to emerge in London and to a lesser extent provincial cities like Leeds. The early associations such as the Society for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Classes were joined by the Peabody Trust in 1862 and the Guinness Trust in 1890. From the start these societies concentrated on building flats as demonstration projects to show that quality working-class housing could generate a return for investors. By 1870 Peabody had produced more than 5 000 flats in dense six-storey blocks, something which had never before been seen in England. The flats were accessed by wrought iron balconies around internal courts. These models were to influence the earliest council housing in London, Leeds and Manchester such as Victoria Square in Manchester (left). Were it not for the Tudor-Walters Report, such flats could have become the predominant housetype in the twentieth century with far-reaching effects on our towns and cities. A further constraint on the development of flats was lack of finance on a sufficiently large scale, unlike Paris where Napoleon III set up a national bank to fund Haussman's apartment blocks.

However despite the development of middle-class suburbs and flats the nineteenth century home remained the terraced house. In 1911 only 10% of houses were detached or semi-detached and only 3% were flats[12]. The vast majority of housing was therefore terraced and this had become as ubiquitous in the nineteenth century as the semidetached home would become in the twentieth.

Early council housing in Manchester: In the background, Victoria Square, the first flats to be built in the city. The street in the foreground was originally called Sanitary Street after the council committee which commissioned the housing. The 'S' and 'ry' have since been dropped at the request of residents so that it is now called Anita Street

The twentieth century home

As we have seen major improvements were being made to the standard of housing in the second half of the nineteenth century. The growth of middle-class housing and the intro-duction of by-laws had largely overcome the worst problems of the early industrial revolution at least for new housing. However this did little to address the legacy of substandard housing from the early nineteenth century which still dominated most industrial towns at the turn of the century. There were for example still 42 000 back-to-backs in Birmingham in 1914.

The next major development in housing was to come about at the end of the First World War when there was the prospect of a severe housing shortage as millions were 'demobbed' at a time of widespread unemploy-ment. The major housebuilding programme launched by the Lloyd George government therefore sought both to address the housing shortage and to create jobs. However in doing this the government was also keen to rethink the sort of housing that was produced. The Homes Fit for Heroes campaign turned for inspiration to the garden city movement. The vehicle for this was a committee chaired by Sir John Tudor-Walters and including Raymond Unwin which published its report Dwellings for the working classes in 1918[13]. The recommendations of the committee were incorporated in their entirety in the Local Government Board's Manual on the preparation of state-aided housing schemes published in 1919[14] which established the model for interwar housing development. This model was largely based on the work of Parker and Unwin. The houses recommended by the committee and illustrated on advisory plans were widely adopted by local authorities. The preferred housetypes were semidetached or short terraces of up to eight units. They had wide frontages and narrow plans to maximise the amount of internal daylight. In terms of layout, Tudor-Walters recommended a mixture of housetypes for different classes of tenants. Cul-de-sacs were suggested for economy and the removal of through traffic, and houses were to be at least seventy feet apart to allow the proper penetration of sunlight.

The Tudor-Walters Report was con-cerned with public housing and its far-reaching impact was due to the great boom in public housing after the First World War. Indeed council housing did not exist until the Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890 which gave local authorities the power to build housing. The 1919 Housing Act, for which the Local Government Board's manual was produced, transformed this power into a duty and the twentieth century council house was born. This heralded a great step forward in housing quality and was only made possible because the 1919 Act severed the link between the cost of housing and the rents that could be charged. The govern-

ment undertook to provide the majority of the funds whilst rents were to be set independently in line with the wartime rent controls. Quality could therefore be improved without the costs being passed on to tenants. As a result housing built in 1920 typically cost four times more than the housing of 1914. The alarm that this caused resulted in new approvals being halted in 1921. However when council house building was resumed in 1924 by the incoming Labour government the standard had been set by Tudor-Walters, and despite lower levels of subsidy and less regulation, standards remained high.

The 30 years between 1890 and 1920 therefore saw a radical change in ideas about housing. This provides a valuable lesson for those seeking to promote an equally significant change into the twenty-first century. The Utopian ideas of Ebenezer Howard were first translated, some would say compromised, into demonstration schemes such as Letchworth and Hampstead Garden Suburb. These received widespread attention in the professional press and in policy-making circles. As a result, when a major increase in housing output was planned by councils with little or no experience in housebuilding the garden city model was enthusiastically adopted, first through an official report and then through government guidance. In this way the model for working-class housing was completely transformed over a relatively short period of time.

The Tudor-Walters Report was to have an equally significant impact on private housebuilding which is another twentieth century phenomenon. In the nineteenth century virtually all housing was privately rented. The only exceptions were the upper echelons of the middle classes and the working-class building clubs (which could be seen as precursors of today's self-build co-operatives). This however changed after 1918 and, of the four million or so homes built in the interwar years, around two-thirds were for owner-occupation. There are many reasons for this, the growth of the middle classes, the provision of state subsidy in the 1923 Chamberlain Act, the opening up of cheap land through the construction of sub-urban railways and roads and the development of building societies to provide mortgages. The building societies which, like the co-operative movement, grew up in northern towns to help the working classes improve their conditions, ended up reinforcing middle-class ideals of the desirable home. This expansion in owner-occupation took place in the suburbs where the image of the Victorian villa was combined with the practicalities of Tudor-Walters to create the ubiquitous semi which was to come to dominate private housing provision.

It is however debatable whether the demand for owner-occupation created the suburb or whether the suburb made owner-occupation possible. Suburbs grew around most British industrial cities as a consequence of commuter railway lines in the latter half of the nineteenth century and electric tram lines and buses towards the end of the century. This opened up great swathes of cheap land for development. As a result house and land prices fell in relation to average incomes to an

Housing since 1945

Since the Second World War housing has been through a rollercoaster of change unprecedented in the previous 150 years. The pendulum swung first to an almost total reliance on the public sector and then to a similar reliance on the private sector. Housing became, for a period, the prime concern of architects, sociologists, academics and politicians before falling out of favour and becoming once again a largely technical and financial issue.

The situation immediately after the last war had many parallels to the aftermath of the First World War. There was, once again, a severe housing shortage due to wartime damage and a commitment, as in 1918, to improve conditions for the returning troops. In this postwar climate the Labour government swept to power and housing was seen as a central plank of the new welfare state. Indeed political parties vied over how many houses they could build. As in 1918 there was also an influential report, the Dudley report of 1944[16] which set the standard for postwar development. The Dudley Report was very much a progression and updating of Tudor-Walters. It further increased internal space standards as well as considering the layout of housing to overcome the monotony which had been seen as a problem of interwar housing. As with Tudor-Walters, the Dudley recommendations were incorporated into government manuals but were soon being undermined by economic pressures.

A further attempt to increase standards came with the Parker Morris Report[17] of 1961 which updated Dudley in line with changing social trends and was, for a time, mandatory for council housing. Since that time the trend has been to move away from prescriptive standards. The RIBA/Institute of Housing, Homes for the Future Group[18] sought to set standards in 1983 but these were purely advisory and were not taken up by government. Indeed in 1994 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation inquiry into housing standards[19] concluded that housing standards were no longer politically acceptable and published instead a consumer guide to help

The future is bright: An artist's impression of a proposed council high-rise block in Sheffield in the 1960s. It cap-tures some of the excitement and idealism that must have attract-ed the architects and councillors of the time.

all time low in the 1930s[15]. Home ownership therefore became a real option for most of the middle classes and for the upper sections of the working classes. This growth in owner-occupation is perhaps the most influential trend in the twentieth century. Whilst professionals and academics have spent their time debating housing, their ideas have been applied almost exclusively to council housing. Meanwhile private developers and their customers have been quietly working to create a much more practical and enduring Utopia in the suburbs. Unconcerned by the scorn of professionals and designers, private housing has evolved slowly in stark contrast to the grand innovations and disasters in the public sector.

residents to exercise choice more effectively.

However our concern here is not so much with housing standards but with the effect that they have had on the design and layout of housing. Here the crucial issue is the interaction between the costs imposed by compliance with the standards and the finance available to build the housing. Whereas in 1918 Tudor-Walters led to a huge increase in the cost of new housing, after the Second World War this could not happen because budgets were capped. It is estimated that Parker Morris's recommendations added 8 – 15% to the cost of a home so that within fixed budgets commensurate savings had to be found elsewhere. In order to comply with the recommendations of both Dudley and Parker Morris within their budgets, councils opted for standardisation, system-built construction, and higher densities to reduce land costs. The drive to increase internal standards is therefore at least partly to blame for the despised high-rise development of the 1960s.

Immediately after the war the concern was not so much with urban development as with overspill. Council minutes from Liverpool after the war show that the intention was to build self-contained houses with a minimum of terraces and flats of no more than three storeys[20]. This was possible because the majority of new housing and displacement from slum clearance was to be accommodated through overspill in areas like Kirby and later the new town of Skelmersdale. The most influential element of policy in the immediate postwar period was the constellation of new towns which was launched by the 1946 New Towns Act. There were initially twelve new towns with planned populations of 50 000 to accommodate overspill from London. A second round of ten larger Mark Two new towns was launched in the 1960s for populations of up to 250 000, included Milton Keynes, Cumbernauld and Warrington/Runcorn. In many respects these new towns represented the fulfilment of Howard's garden city vision, if in practice they bore little relation to the original concept. They were important because they provided great laboratories for public housing development. They attracted the best designers and planners and provided an opportunity to put into practice many of the concepts propagated by CIAM and others between the wars. Because they had a blank canvas on which to work, the new town planners could implement the ideas of neighbourhood units, pedestrian vehicle separation and open space described in the previous chapter. Through extensive coverage in the professional press they had a far-reaching impact on new housing throughout the country.

However by 1982 only two million people or 4% of the population lived in new towns[21]. The vast majority of population growth was actually accommodated through suburban expansion and the development of overspill estates. Indeed the vast new town building programme over the last fifty years has accommodated less than half of the projected growth

Municipal megalomania: Hyde Park in Sheffield is one of the most monumental examples of high-rise council housing
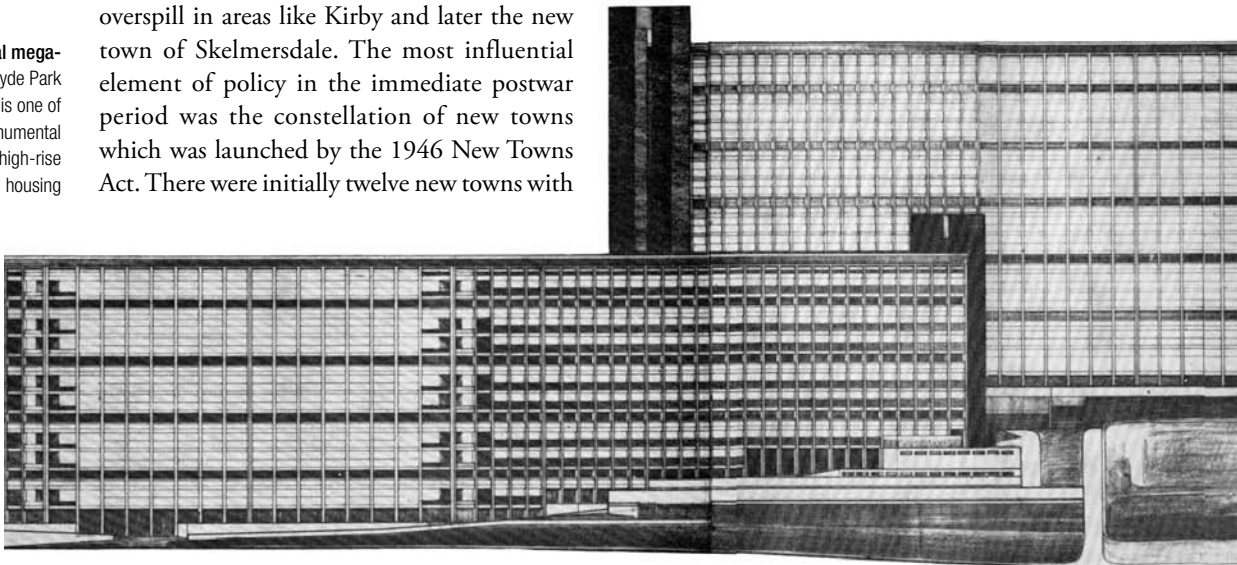
in households over the next two decades.

For the early years after the war the pressure had therefore been taken off urban areas. However in 1951 the incoming Conservative government enacted a number of measures which radically altered the situation. The new town programme was halted, save for the completion of those which had already been designated. Budgets were reduced, making it difficult to implement Dudley's recommendation and most importantly the regional offices which had previously been responsible for managing urban overspill were abolished. This, together with the introduction in 1955 of the first green belt, made it increasingly difficult for urban authorities to plan for overspill estates. Many had planned to accommodate growth through the expansion of smaller towns by agreement between urban and rural authorities. However two major inquiries about Manchester's plans to expand Knutsford and Birmingham's plans for Wythall were resolved in favour of the rural authorities. Urban authorities were therefore placed in an increasingly difficult situation. Populations were expanding and household sizes were falling yet the overspill option to deal with these

pressures was being closed off to them. The need to accommodate families displaced by the slum clearance programme which was reactivated in 1955 potentially made the problem worse. However it also offered a partial solution since it released land for new development.

So by the late 1950s pressures for higher standards and lower costs, household growth and restrictions on overspill created the conditions where Le Corbusier's ideas seemed to make perfect sense. This was reinforced by higher government subsidies for housing over six storeys so that by 1964, 55% of approved tenders were for the development of flats. At this time around 90 000 slum properties were being cleared each year, mostly to be replaced with high-rise and deck-access council housing.

Post-war council housing in Liverpool

1945–1954. The council was committed to building self-contained houses. However in the inner city land was scarce and most new housing was three-storey walk-up blocks on clearance or bomb damage sites. These blocks 'standing forlorn in a sea of tarmac open space' remain some of the least popular in the city.

1954–1960. Liverpool councillors visited America to study high-rise housing and were impressed. This combined with government subsidy and architectural fashion unleashed 'municipal megalomania'. The housing committee observed that there was 'no reason why the twenty storey mark should not be passed… as important a step in the construction of domestic dwellings as was the breaking of the sound barrier in flight'.

1960–1973. The era of comprehensive neighbourhood policy in which whole sections of the city were razed for redevelopment not only with high-rise housing but also roads, shops, schools and other facilities. During this period Liverpool was building 2 000 houses a year, most of the worst slums in the city were removed and most of today's problem estates built.

1973–1985. The council resolved not to build above five storeys and embarked on a disastrous programme of high- density low-rise development. Even-tually it was decided not to build above two storeys. The final phase of council housing in the city which, due to the politics of the city, continued after council house building elsewhere had ceased, was traditional, low-rise and semi-detached.

Liverpool was left with a legacy of unpopular housing which is difficult to let and expensive to maintain. It had also created a hugely unbalanced housing stock, 86% of properties in the south of the city were flats and large parts of the city became mono-tenure council housing.
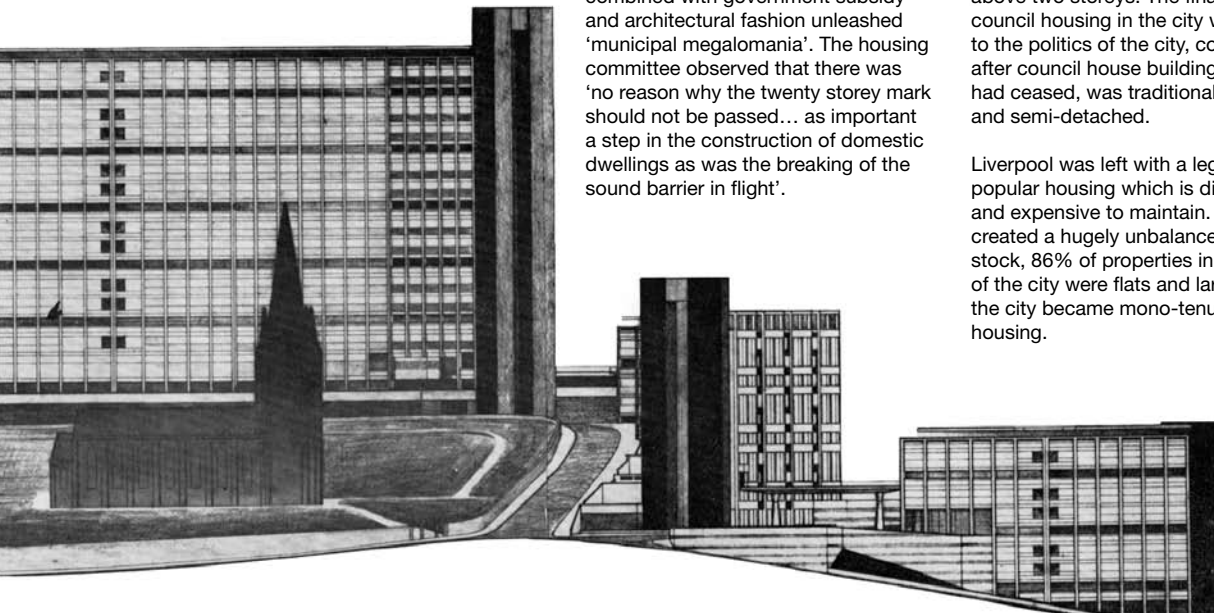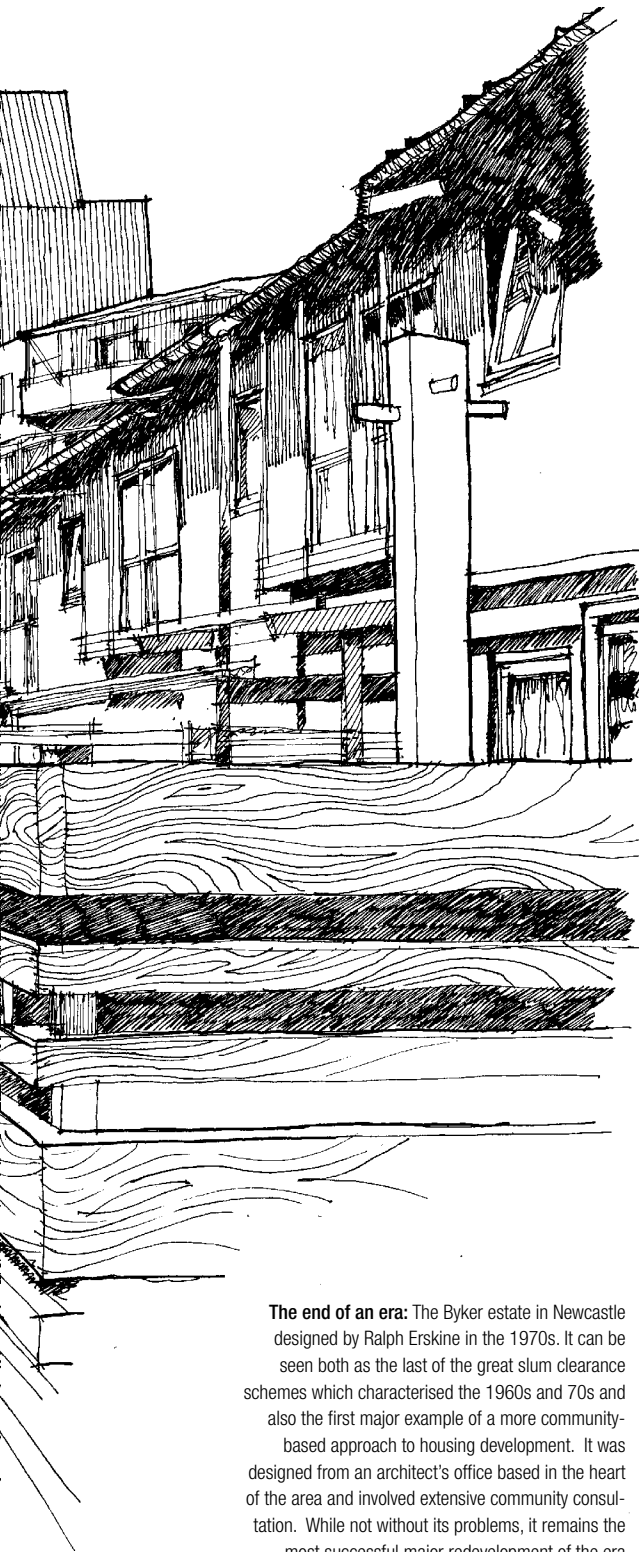
Many developments made use of continental prefabricated systems ill suited to UK site practice or weather or site conditions. This was the period when architects and planners came to the fore and were given the opportunity to apply the ideas taught in planning and architecture schools to large areas of the city. As Martin Richardson says of the London County Council in the 1960s, 'The whole of the housing division seemed like a giant nursery school whose principal objective was the happiness of the architects'[22]. Architects praised the new megaliths for their exciting contribution to urban form whilst dismissing bland petty suburbia and even suggesting that 'aesthetically pleasing' housing may be difficult to live in. Great problems were seen as requiring great solutions and the bulldozer was king. Anything other than blocks of flats was dismissed as 'noddy housing' and not proper architecture! The model of walk-up blocks, so common in European towns was largely ignored, perhaps because it was too prosaic or because people were obsessed with technological break-throughs at a time when Harold Wilson was talking about the 'White heat of technology'. Christopher Booker has summed up the effect of all this on our cities: 'We have seen one of the greatest fantasies of our time burgeon forth from the minds of a few visionaries to make a hell on earth for millions of people ... leaving only what remains of our wrecked, blighted, hideously disfigured cities behind'[23].

In theory high-rise development came to an end in 1967 with the explosion at Rowan Point in London and the ending of additional subsidy for properties over six storeys. However, in practice, the development of deck-access housing continued apace. Much of Hulme in Manchester including the infamous Crescents was not completed until the early 1970s. Indeed in Manchester the bulldozer had been particularly effective and the scale of the city's 'achievements' was used to criticise other local authorities.

However by the early 1970s the emphasis had changed to low-rise high-density

development. This was largely done through standard housetypes so that the main concern of architects became layout. This has been characterised by Bill Hillier[24] as based upon enclosure, repetition and hierarchy to invoke traditional urban courts, squares and greens. Housing would be built in small groups around courts to foster community. In many respects this was the age of social engineering as housing became the concern of social scientists as much as designers. Oscar Newman's book Defensible space: People and design in the violent city[25] published in 1972 was an important influence, as was the idea that the design of housing estates could create close communities. There was still a commitment to pedestrian/vehicle separation and the result was to create a warren of deserted walkways and blind corners. Whilst these estates have received less attention than the earlier high-rise developments the problems, particularly of crime, that they have experienced have been equally severe.

Towards the end of the 1970s it is possible to argue that council housing departments were starting to get it right. Developments by architects like Darbourne and Dark in London and Ralph Erskine's redevelopment of Byker in Newcastle illustrated the quality of what councils could achieve. They showed that innovation was not incompatible with the creation of successful areas. The key to success was often the close involvement of residents in design, something which councils had started to recognise just in time to see their house building programmes curtailed by the incoming Conservative government in 1979.

The private house building industry since 1945 has been almost entirely untouched by the changes in fashion in public housing. In Colquhoun and Fauset's review of housing design[26] only one private developer, Span, is deemed worthy of significant mention prior to the 1980s. Span developed innovative private housing, in partnership with the GLC, in the late 1960s such as New Ash Green – only to go into liquidation when the GLC failed to take up their allocation. However they were very much

The end of an era: The Byker estate in Newcastle designed by Ralph Erskine in the 1970s. It can be seen both as the last of the great slum clearance schemes which characterised the 1960s and 70s and also the first major example of a more community-based approach to housing development. It was designed from an architect's office based in the heart of the area and involved extensive community consultation. While not without its problems, it remains the most successful major redevelopment of the era

the exception. For most developers there was no need to innovate. Until 1974 mortgages were cheap, building costs were stable and demand outstripped supply. Private developers could therefore sell pretty much anything they cared to build and space standards at the lower end of the market declined markedly[27]. This meant that the differential between private housing and council housing was eroded and eventually reversed so that by the 1970s council housing was generally larger and built to a higher standard than private housing. Private developers therefore sought to differentiate their product and increase its 'kerb appeal' with ornament and suburban frills. Indeed suburban owner-occupation was as much about status as housing requirements. As a participant at a RIBA client focus group on housing[28] stated: 'People are judging a potential new home not on what's inside it, but on what it says about them'. In design terms private housing followed the continuum established between the wars with semidetached ribbon development and cul-de-sacs at ten houses to the acre.

This period was also marked by an increasing geographical separation between public and private housing. While local authorities may have been forced to build within their administrative boundaries, private developers operated under no such constraints, and in any case urban land was scarce. Private housebuilding therefore took place in the very rural districts which had been so active in opposing council overspill. It is this development that accounts for much of the urban dispersal during the period. There was little or no private housing in the inner city and metropolitan areas increasingly became a monoculture of council housing – at one point 82% of households in Tower Hamlets in London were council tenants. Thus was established the pattern of unpopular high-rise council housing in urban areas and popular low-density private housing in the suburbs and smaller towns. This was partly the result of a desire to escape the city but, as social segregation became more marked, it also became one of the reasons for dispersal. It was no longer the problems of heavy industry

and over-crowding which repelled the suburban emigrants, it was the council estates and poverty which had now come to dominate urban area. The history of the last fifty years suggests that this situation is the result of a very specific set of circumstances and by no means inevitable. It is not long ago that urban areas accommodated up-market housing and there is no reason to believe that they should not do so again in the future.

Housing since 1980

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s radical change in the housing world has subsided only to be replaced by uncertainty over funding and markets. Council house building has all but ceased and the redevelopment of council estates, 'right-to-buy' sales and stock transfers have eroded council stocks. There has been a massive promotion of home ownership yet the private sector is in no real state to play a leading role having been through a series of boom and bust cycles which has destroyed the certainty which prevailed until the mid-1970s. In the social sector housing associations are still coming to terms with their role as the primary providers of new social housing whilst their grant rates are being cut and competition to reduce capital costs has put pressure on standards.

The good times in the private sector came to an end with the slump of 1974 when high interest rates and inflation increased costs and reduced demand. Over the following decade minor recoveries were followed by further slumps. This led Tom Barron of Christian Salveson in 1983 to state: 'The housing industry has at long last accepted that it... must produce the sorts of housing that customers will want to buy and not the sorts of housing it wants to build'[29]. However if this lesson was ever really learned it was forgotten in the boom of the late 1980s. In 1988 the annual housing inflation rate exceeded 30%, out-performing virtually all other forms of investment. In the naïve belief that this would last forever, people rushed to put their money into housing and developers could once again sell virtually anything they wished to build. As a result the percentage of UK owner-occupation

rose to 66%[30] and personal sector debt, which was largely devoted to mortgages, rose from 55% of disposable income to 110%[31]. The housing market and interest rates came to have a major influence on the national economy in a way that does not happen in other European countries where rich countries like Switzerland paradoxically have very low levels of owner-occupation.

The party ended in 1988 as basic variable mortgage rates started to rise from 9.5% to 15% and double tax relief on mortgages was abolished. As a result house prices fell by 30% between 1989 and 1992 and the number of transactions fell from 2.1 million to 1.1 million[32]. Since then more than a quarter of a million homes have been repossessed and almost a million have experienced negative equity. In most parts of the UK house prices have now recovered and over the last few years there have been occasional predictions that rising incomes, low interest rates and affordability will lead to a return of the boom years[33] but house price increases have remained modest.

It is too early to say whether the slump at the end of the 1980s will have a lasting effect on the housing market and the nature of private housing. Certainly the belief that housing is a guaranteed investment which will always increase in value had been severely dented. Analysts such as John Wrigglesworth[34] have suggested that 'The typical buyer in the 1990s will be buying for 'nesting not investing'. It is likely that with job insecurity, flexible employment patterns and memories of the slump, people will be more cautious about what they buy and developers more cautious about what they build. It may even be that we follow a more European model where people buy later and buy for life rather than relying on trading up through the housing ladder.

Private sector innovation: Much of the housing innovation in the 1980s took place in the private sector in areas like London's Docklands

There is some evidence that this is happening. As Savills Residential Research have reported[35], the average first-time buyer in the mid-1990s is in their early thirties, almost ten years older than in the late 1980s. They state that the successful housebuilder of the future will find opportunities in 'unconventional product ranges' which might involve homes for letting and single person households rather than 'bulk estates for mortgage reliant families'. They conclude that 'never before has it been so important to find new markets and break new ground in housing construction'. It is clear that the certainties which have driven the housing market for almost 100 years are increasingly being called into question.

In terms of design, the period from 1980 onwards has seen a reversal in the attitudes of some private housebuilders to innovation in design. Before 1980 virtually all innovations in housing design took place in the social sector and private builders stuck to the tried and tested formula of the suburban detached and semi-detached house. It is true that throughout the 1980s and 90s the majority of private developers have continued to shun innovation. However, in stark contrast to the situation prior to 1980, most of the housing innovation which has taken place has been in the private sector in town centres and particularly dockland developments.

The 1980s and 90s have been an equally uncertain period for the social housing sector. Whilst council housing accounts for more than 87% of social housing in Britain, new council building has fallen to fewer than 1 000 units per year compared to 20–30 000 units being constructed by housing associations. The housing association movement has existed since the mid-nineteenth century but, as councils took the lead, housing associations were largely confined to specialist needs such as young people or the elderly. This all changed in the 1980s as the government encouraged housing associations to step into the void left by the ending of council building.

This was made possible by the 1988 Housing Act. Before this housing associations

BLACKBIRD LEYS – OXFORD

Blackbird Leys on the edge of Oxford is typical of the sort of social housing that caused people to question the sustainability of large social housing estates in the early 1990s. The estate is adjacent to a large council estate which was the scene of rioting a number of years ago. It covers 34 acres and, when complete, will be one of the largest housing association developments in the country with 1232 social housing units being completed between 1992 and 1998. In addition to this almost 500 private houses are being built.

The fact that the scheme is build on open land five miles from Oxford is inevitable in a city where there is very little housing land within the urban area. As a result a great deal of effort has been required from the Council and the developers to ensure that shops, facilities and services are provided.

Approximately £12 million has been invested by the Council in infrastructure including a new school, community facilities, play areas, sports facilities and extensive landscaping. However local shops and employment uses have proved more difficult. It was also difficult in the early phases to provide bus services which are still subsidised by the council. Therefore while the development of such sites is inevitable in places like Oxford the danger is that, in the early years at least, people will be isolated without access to facilities, employment or transport.
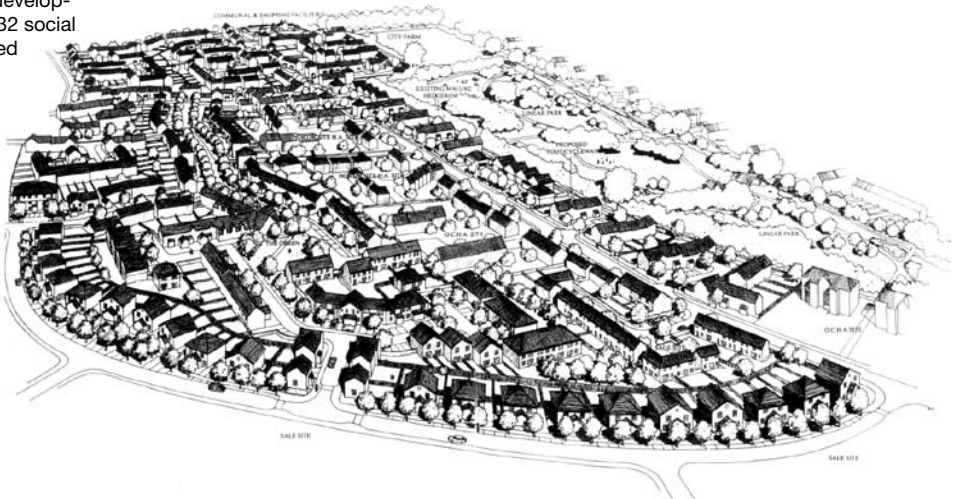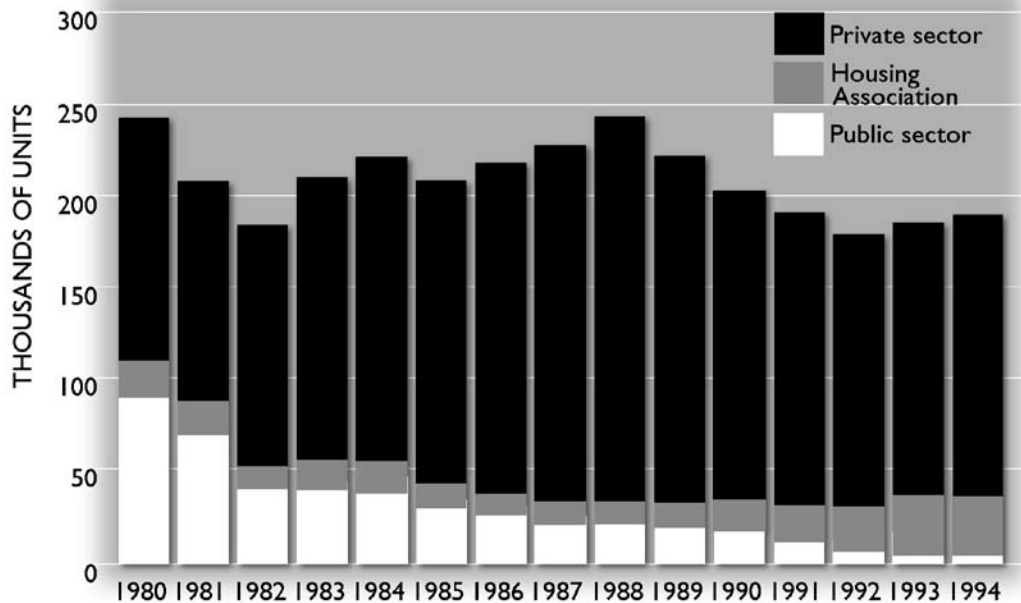
Housing Output:
Housing completions in the UK by sector, Source: JRF Housing Review 1996/97

benefited from 95% grant rates but operated under rent controls and were limited in terms of what they could build. The 1988 Act transferred development risk to associations, reduced grant rates, introduced private finance and established a system of competitive bidding for funds. The wind of market forces blew through the social housing world as it had done through many other areas of public life in the 1980s. This was accompanied by a doubling of resources for new housing from £1 billion in the late 1980s to £2 billion in the early 1990s with grant rates falling to 58% in 1994–95. The response of housing associations was at best confused and at worst politically naïve. On the one hand they embraced their new-found importance and launched huge expansion programmes. At the same time they complained bitterly about falling grant rates. However even here the response was confused as pointed out by Adrian Coles, Director General of the Council for Mortgage Lenders when he said: 'It is noticeable that each successive reduction in grant rates has been accompanied by dire threats that development will no longer be possible, accompanied by increased competition between housing associations to underbid the new grant rate'[36]. It became a matter of pride for associations to be able to announce that they had developed schemes with as little as 25% grant[37] and it was therefore hardly surprising that the government saw the potential for further grant cuts.

In the mid-1990s this building boom has ended and housing association capital funds have fallen back to their late 1980 levels. However this has, if anything, made the situation worse. Housing associations have committed themselves to business plans and staffing structures based upon developmentled expansion. Rather than cutting back on development they have responded by cutting costs to maintain volumes which has inevitably meant cutting standards. They are forging ever closer links with private builders, as a result of which what are basically private sector starter homes are being built by housing associations for families condemned by poverty and unemployment to spend much of their time at home and with little opportunity to move on.

Less social housing is being built today than at any time in the last 100 years. The

housing which is being built is therefore being prioritised for those in greatest need. New tenants of housing associations are poorer and have more children than at any time during the last hundred years due to housing allocation policies. Yet the quality of new housing is falling as illustrated by research by Valerie Karn and Linda Sheridan for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation[38]. They state that associations are becoming the 'mass providers of poor homes for poor people' and that these people are being consigned to life squashed into a starter home designed as the first rung on the housing ladder. Further concerns have been raised in research by David Page, also for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation[39]. He illustrates graphically that, in an attempt to meet urgent housing needs, housing associations are filling estates with a mix of tenants that is almost bound to create problems. As an example he points out that, whereas in the general population there is one child to every four adults, in new housing association estates there are sometimes more children than adults and this 'child density' is closely correlated with a range of social problems. Associations, to save money, are building larger schemes to inappropriate private sector designs often in isolated locations. As a result Page states: 'There is now evidence that the process of rapid decline of large social housing estates, which some had thought peculiar to council housing, can also apply to the stock of housing associations'. What is more, while council estates have often taken years to decline with some housing association estates decline is taking place in as little as four years.

Towards the twenty-first century

There is a sense in social housing of history repeating itself. Just as a seemingly unrelated range of factors in the early 1960s gave rise to high-rise council estates, so a similar conspiracy of circumstances means that we are in danger of building today the slums of tomorrow. As we approach the end of the century there is a sense of fatigue in the housing world. The principles which guided housing providers for many years have been overturned yet the problem of social housing is as intractable as ever.

Innovation has come to be seen as a dirty word since virtually every housing innovation in the last 50 years has failed. The response has been to resort to the private sector housing forms which are seen to have survived the test of time. These hark back to an idealised vision of family life dating from the golden age of interwar suburbia. A vision of 'leafy suburbia that apparently, for a great swath of the British middle class, is the ideal home'[40]. The prevalence of advertising images has firmly embedded the suburban ideal in the consciousness and aspirations of the providers and residents of both social and private housing. This is reinforced by the housing market which puts a premium on traditional designs and stifles innovation. In-adequate as they may be, the use of suburban housetypes by housing associations, portrays exactly the image that many of their tenants seek.

So engrained is the suburban ideal that it is difficult to imagine any other type of housing dominating the UK market. However the history of housing over the last two centuries shows that received wisdom can be overturned. It is not un-reasonable to consider that quite different types of housing may be built in the future, particularly given the changing planning context described in the previous chapters. But where are the alternative models for the twenty-first century? To predict what these might be it is necessary to look at the forces which shape housing and develop-ment patterns which is what we will do in Part 2 of this book.