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The Propaganda of the Built Environment

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FREDERIC OSBORN MEMORIAL LECTURE

The Propaganda of the Built Environment

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*Delivered to the Society on Wednesday 27 February 1991
with David Hall, Director, Town and Country Planning Association,
in the Chair*

THE CHAIRMAN: Lord Rippon of Hexham, President of the Town and Country Planning Association, who was to preside over the fourth Sir Frederic Osborn Memorial Lecture, has been required to open a debate on local government in the House of Lords and I have taken his place. I knew Sir Frederic Osborn, or FJO as most of us called him, for the last twelve years of his life, from the time he was Chairman of the Council of the Town and Country Planning Association when I first joined it. In attending this memorial lecture we are honouring a very great man. He was great in many different senses: in his influence on government over a very long time, in helping in a very significant way to establish the British planning system after the war which is essentially much the same to this day, and above all in persuading government to set up the New Towns programme through the 1946 New Towns Act. But he was also great in his gift of getting people to listen to him, even people who didn't agree with him. He could swing them round with his charm and very often his wit, but his technique, he once told me, was this: 'It doesn't matter how often you go on saying the same thing over and over again. What you must be sure to do is to use different words each time.' He had a very long relationship with the TCPA, over sixty years, and he was very proud of having held every major office in the Association from Secretary to Director, to the Chairman of the Executive Committee, Chairman of the Council, Chairman of the

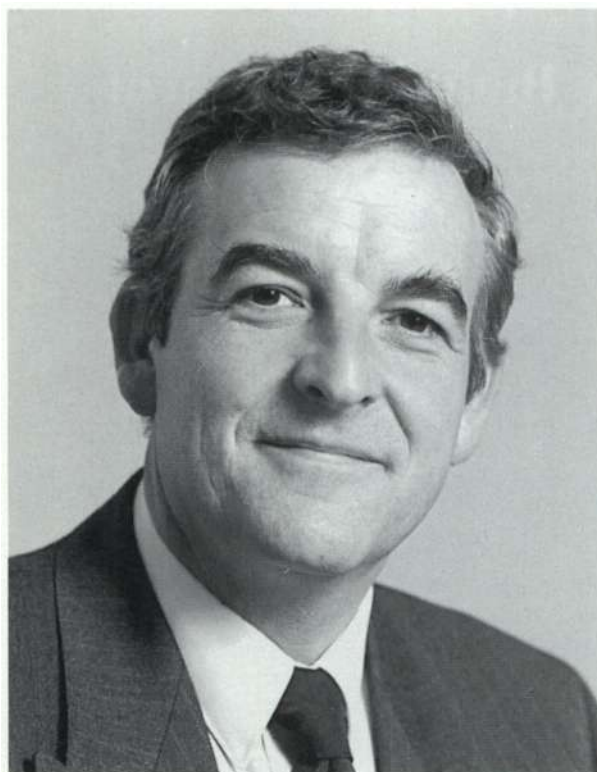
Editorial Board, Vice-President and President. We still try now in the TCPA to apply his independent approach and intellectual rigour to planning issues of the day. The TCPA is very grateful to the RSA for jointly arranging this event with us. Previous lecturers have been Professor Peter Self, Dr Tony Gibson and Professor Peter Hall. We particularly welcome today FJO's son and daughter, Dr Tom Osborn and Margaret Fenton.

I first knew David Lock when he came to the TCPA as our first Planning Aid Officer in January 1973. For five years he swept through the organisation full of ideas and energy. He next moved to Milton Keynes Development Corporation where he held several posts, before joining Conran Roche, the Planning and Architectural Consultants. With enormous courage and continuing energy he then set up his own practice, two or three years ago, as a consultant in town planning, urban design and development, including urban regeneration, looking at new settlement schemes throughout the UK and currently in Germany and Australia. His company is jointly commissioned by the Department of the Environment with the University of Reading to research into alternative forms of urbanisation, including privately financed new settlements. He is also visiting Professor of Town Planning at Birmingham Polytechnic, Chairman of the environmental education charity City Discovery in Milton Keynes, his home town, and one of our two Vice-Chairmen in the TCPA.

My purpose in this Frederic Osborn Memorial Lecture is to explore the way in which the idea of Garden Cities provoked opposition; the way in which the propaganda campaigns on either side developed; and how the issues involved bear upon us in the United Kingdom

today. I hope to illustrate the way in which the same arguments appear to recur in the propaganda down the years, and to demonstrate that the gap between the protagonists is closing.

The late Sir Frederic Osborn (FJO) was a formidable



Professor David Lock

propagandist. I was fortunate to become acquainted with him in his last few years, giving him some assistance in updating his main publication on new towns (Osborn and Whittick, *New Towns: their origins, achievements and progress*, Leonard Hill, 1977). His consistency and persistence, and his propagandist techniques impressed me. More than that, however, was the fact that his yardstick was his own experience of life. Colin Ward described the man (*Town and Country Planning*, February/March 1979) in these terms:

In his reverence for the aspirations of ordinary people, and his mistrust for the theory-based opinions of people who were just clever, FJO was most certainly the quintessential common man . . . take heart from the experience of this inconspicuous man who succeeded in manipulating politicians of all parties, civil servants and capitalists, to harness them to ordinary people's hopes for an ampler life.

I make no excuse for considering Garden Cities, and the new towns that they spawned. As FJO stated so unequivocally:

. . . the realities of the new towns movement is one of the most encouraging manifestations of our age. In a period when automatic and irrational forces are driving mankind close to its self-annihilation, the new towns are a victory for the rational, the human, the disciplined, and the purposeful: a proof that sound ideas are not condemned by massive human folly or institutional inertia to remain inoperative. (Osborn and Whittick *op. cit.*)

PROPAGANDA AND THE FIRST GARDEN CITY

The story of the early Garden City movement is relatively well known, and it is sufficient on this occasion to record only that the movement began with the formation of the Garden Cities Association in 1899, following publication of Ebenezer Howard's book *Tomorrow*. The Association formed a company to acquire a site for a demonstration Garden City, and work began in Letchworth in 1903.

The essence of the Garden City idea

FJO summarises Howard's conception of a Garden City as follows:

Four fundamental principles governed Howard's concept . . . limitation of numbers and area, growth by colonisation, variety and sufficiency of opportunities and social advantages, and control of the land in the public interest. Out of this a new kind of city would emerge, in a balanced, many-sided inter-related organic unity. Good urban design would relieve the citizen of the need for travelling long distances to obtain access either to economic opportunities or to the recreations and relaxations of the countryside. The identifying symbol of this new kind of city was not the private garden or the public park, but the permanent green belt that surrounded the urban area and defined its limits of settlement. (Osborn and Whittick *op. cit.*)

This was only the beginning of the idea. FJO continues:

Howard did not suppose that a single garden city, or even a scattering of such cities, would be able to handle [the problem of urban growth]. He called, rather, for the creation of a regional unit that would

bring into a single organised system at least 10 cities with a total population of 300,000, bound together by a rapid transportation system that would unify the cities and make them operate, for any purpose that involved all of them, as a single unit.

In fact the Garden City idea has profound and radical intentions. A 'manifesto' of the Garden Cities Association of 1902 put it like this (quoted by C. B. Purdom, *The Building of Satellite Towns*, J. M. Dent, 1948, p. 52):

The garden city is not merely an aesthetic idea to provide gardens, nor to force better habits on the people. It is an attempt to secure justice for the people by constitutional means, by diverting the increment of value attached to the land into the pockets of those that create that value. It is an experiment of the first magnitude in effective social reform.

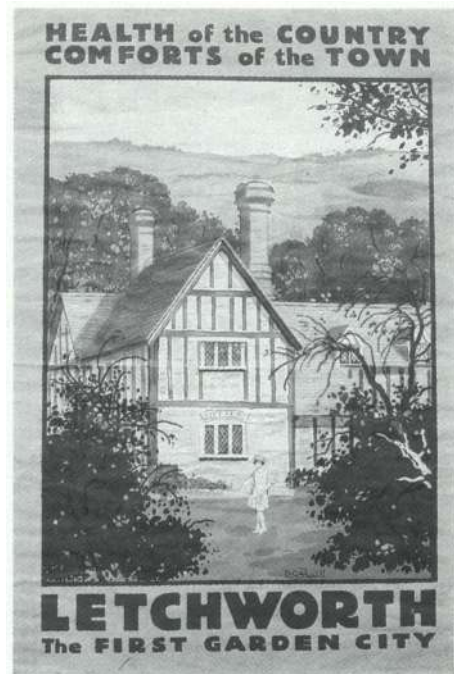
That land purchased at agricultural value would gain value by the establishment of a town upon it was something that people could understand, and that the increased value should be used for public purposes was a proposition that appealed to the sense of fairness in the average man; it violated no political or economic principles, and had no opponents. (My emphasis.)

It appears to be true that there were few critics of the argument for capturing land value at the time.

Letchworth: the propaganda of the developers

Getting the experimental city of Letchworth into existence involved the commissioning of a master plan, which was the main tool, initially, for conveying the intentions of the scheme. Both advocates and critics of the Garden City idea came to treat the architecture and design of the prototype at Letchworth as the main message. Unfortunately the physical appearance of Letchworth never reached a very high standard. This is excused by the fact that the company developing Letchworth found early expenditure in creating the infrastructure of the town very expensive, and was forced to release land for development as quickly as possible to create some income. The standards imposed on developers and housebuilders and incoming individuals necessarily suffered.

The development company was First Garden City Limited, formed in September 1903. We immediately have a two pronged campaign: the proselytising at the national and international level by the Garden Cities



Courtesy: Dr Mervyn Miller

Garden City propaganda c.1925 for a wholesome tomorrow

Association, through its conferences, journal and network through the political and City Establishment; secondly, through their own development company trying to build a demonstration project and seeking to ensure people invested in it to make it a success. Growth was slow and difficult. The company had no money with which to build speculatively itself, and was therefore seriously undercapitalised. Although dividends were limited, they did not rise to their limit of 5 per cent until 1923, and it was not until 1946 that sufficient surpluses had been accumulated to pay off the arrears in dividends. An outstanding marketing success was the Cheap Cottages Exhibition of 1905, in which prototype housing was erected and attracted large crowds to Letchworth for the first time. The key reasons given for moving to Letchworth consistently showed the value placed by families on health and the availability of good housing and jobs, and by companies on the availability of land and premises with space to grow.

The critics of Letchworth

The arguments against the garden cities, and the

government sponsored new towns that were to follow, seem to be grouped under three main headings. First, the land savers, stimulated by the publication of Sir Dudley Stamp's *Land Utilisation Survey*, which initially laid the case for avoiding building on the very small area of the highest quality of the land (6.8 per cent in England and Wales), but went on to propose an embargo on all 'good agricultural land' (some 44.2 per cent). The *Survey* sought to cause alarm at the rate at which agricultural land was being consumed by urbanisation. They were joined by pressure groups such as the National Farmers Union, who published frightening figures of the quantity of food that could no longer be produced. Curiously, while the data suggested criticism might be made of the rate of urbanisation in all its forms, the garden cities and (later) the new towns were particularly singled out for attack, rather than suburban expansion. FJO writes of this:

It is unfortunate . . . that new towns have drawn more fire from countryside defenders than the secular urban sprawl, although new towns are really much more 'compact' than the run of suburbs. No doubt this is because the outward creep of suburbs has been adventitious and often absorbs land already depreciated in 'amenity' by its nearness to previous developments, whereas new towns are seen as deliberate, even wanton, incursions on land of unspoiled rural character. They are feared as the storm troops of the urban invasion. (Osborn and Whittick *op. cit.*, p. 77.)

The urbanists

Second were the urbanists. We learn from Stanley Buder (in *Visionaries and Planners: the Garden City Movement and the Modern Community*, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 108) that the first full exposition of the argument came in 1913 from Trystan Edwards ('A Hundred New Towns', *Ex-Serviceman* J47485) who 'attacked garden-city-type planning as anti-urban . . . it created semi-rural communities lacking the necessary population density and architectural mass for city living, while also devoid of the simplicity and beauty of the old English village'. According to Buder, 'Edwards's analysis meant that the desirability of low-density site planning had to be recognised as relying on a set of social and aesthetic values open to challenge and debate, not a self-evident truth. Garden-city-type planning continued to have its champions, but no one

argued any longer that it be accepted as town-planning dictum'.

The propaganda by urbanists against the garden cities in the 1920s and 1930s secured its most articulate champion in *The Architectural Review* after 1935 when H. de Cronin Hastings became its editor and J. M. Richards his deputy. It seems it was a return to the terrace house that was to be the answer, as though these were missing from Letchworth. As Lionel Esher puts it:

urbanity and good manners were the cry, in increasingly distraught tones, though both expressions (characteristically Georgian in connotation) were irredeemably middle-class and meant nothing to the people concerned (i.e. council engineers and architects). Thomas Sharp, correctly pointing to Kennington as his urbane exemplar, spoiled his case by naughtily picking on Welwyn as his suburban bestiary: those ill starred words 'Garden City' were to raise the hackles of generations of metropolitan critics. (*A Broken Wave: the rebuilding of Britain*, p. 28.)

Political resistance

On the matter of political resistances, there are two considerations to be borne in mind. First is the 'odium', as FJO puts it (*op. cit.*), arising from the bother that breaks out in a locality where a garden city or new town is created, which for Conservatives brings the 'fear of a change of balance of voting strength in the rural counties'. Second, and a concern for Labour Party members in urban centres, is the fear of the 'effect on their majorities of outward migration', together with the fear of loss of grant and rateable income by the loss of people and firms.

THE HIGH RISE CONTROVERSY: THE ARGUMENT WIDENS

FJO had led the campaign which succeeded in persuading the government to build new towns as one way of meeting the needs of the moment, but as the scale of housing need became more evident, the pressures for high density reconstruction of London and the other great cities became inexorable. From the early 1940s until the late 1950s, FJO used the *Town and Country Planning Association's Journal*, of which he was Editor, as an instrument for propaganda against high rise redevelopment of the cities. He tended to present methodical, rather complex technical arguments, often

based on authoritative guesstimates, to further his personal objectives. A reduction in average family size, particularly working class households, from around 5 at the end of the nineteenth century to around 3.5 by 1950 brought into question the relevance of the traditional dwellings per acre density formula and the dispersed suburban form which had resulted. Rooms, or people, per acre began to look like a more fitting alternative standard.

The housing areas proposed to be zoned at 200, 136 and 100 persons an acre are too extensive. At 200 an acre, housing must be wholly in multi-storey flats. At 136 an acre, at least five-sixths must be in flats. At 100 an acre two-thirds must be in flats. (These figures assume that, on average, houses with gardens can be built at eighteen an acre, a very high density for a family population of mixed classes, and that flats can be built at 50 an acre – also very high as an average. . . . It seems inconceivable that for all time that proportion of Londoners (about two million) could be contentedly retained in these zones, in view of the evidence of the preference for the family house in opinion surveys, and the dynamic evidence of the suburban movement since 1900. . . . People will not consent to live at excessive density in one part of London to preserve glorious surroundings for people in another part. ('Criticism of the London Plan,' *Town and Country Planning*, 1953.)

In 1953, a continuing national housing shortage precipitated Macmillan's 'bonfire of controls' – he was then Minister for Housing and Planning – allowing the government to achieve for the first time their 300,000 dwellings per year commitment, generally in low rise, system-built estates tacked on to the edge of existing conurbations. This partially relieved housing pressures in the inner cities, allowing widespread slum clearance programmes to clear the ground and make way for comprehensive redevelopment with a vengeance.

The use of state money to encourage a city to build multi-storey flats where family houses would be as cheap or cheaper is so extreme a folly as to verge on lunacy or criminality. Grants for housing and other purposes that enable an over-centralised city to maintain instead of reducing its business floorspace on rebuilding are just a means of cultivating or fertilising congestion. ('Exodus: and the Cloud,' *Town and Country Planning*, 1954.)

An unexpected 'baby boom' registered dramatically in the 1961 census and long-term population forecasts consequently rose from around 53 million to 66 million. While this led to more new towns, in the older cities, despite his propaganda FJO lost the argument. Mass housing projects at high densities, usually located inconveniently in relation to places of work, shops and social facilities, and as the years went by increasingly displacing livable and adaptable suburban streets, appeared in great volume.

URBANITY REVIVES

The thrust of the propaganda was that old towns and cities had character, intimacy, twists and turns, and artful composition, a mix of land uses and activities and a superior quality of civic life and culture. From this viewpoint, the garden cities and subsequent new towns were arid deserts of dull suburban uniformity. So confident did the advocates of urbanity become, that the leading propagandists went so far as to beard their enemy in his lair: the idea of an imaginary new town called *Civilia* was launched by the Architectural Press in 1971. It was written by H. de Cronin Hastings under the pseudonym of Ivor de Wolfe, and took some quarries near Nuneaton as the imaginary site for an imaginary new town. An intoxicating series of photomontage images of the most desirable city were produced. Through stream-of-consciousness prose, which is really difficult to follow, Ivor de Wolfe somehow manages to accuse Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes (of all people – he of the Scots renaissance through his *Evergreen* magazine) of advocating a city region that would be uniform and repressive of differences between people and places ('to commandeer the regions for new suburban offensives known ironically as "sectors of growth"'), and of cursing the advocates of decentralisation with the creation of the peripheral high density mass public housing projects that they had actually fought against so long and so hard:

'Wherever dispersal has landed (the citizen) he remains frustrated, as none know better than the housing departments of our big cities – starting with Birmingham, whose fathers are still deluged by prayers from the rehoused of Chelmsley Wood (and other concentration camps) to be taken back to the centre no matter how high the rise'.

National planning policy was dedicated, he believed,



Courtesy: The Architectural Press

Civilia: the architects propagandise the image of an imaginary dense and exciting city on derelict land, 1971

'to creating sprawl designed to cover not square miles as in the past, but counties, nay regions . . . on the principle that Los Angeles is after all the best urban model for a motorised civilisation to follow so long as the insertion of rural buffers can be made to alleviate its status to that of a Geddesian city-region or better, because bigger Doxiadian Ecumenopolis'.

This was a new and wider canvas from which to spread the argument for high density compact cities, and an Olympian height from which to offer the imagery of ultimate urbanity. The illustrations in *Civilia* represented a large body of professional opinion at the time of publication and, save the architectural

style and detailing, it would I am sure appeal to a large audience today for its neatness, compactness, intensity, allusion to urban buzz, and for its creative use of derelict land. FJO writes (Osborn and Whittick *op. cit.* p. 112) that those

' . . . who have always opposed mass housing in flats as socially deplorable, were in the 1950s and 1960s derided by avant-garde architects as hide-bound old fogies . . . in *Confessions of a Criminal* (Delos Symposium, 1971) the eminent Greek architect Dr Constantine Doxiades wrote 'we are committing architectural crimes . . . high rise buildings work against Nature by spoiling the landscape; against man, especially children; against Society . . . "death to the Dinosaurs". The criminal buildings are going to die some day. But it will take time. Humanity will suffer in the meantime . . . Our duty is not to wait patiently for their death, but to fight for their extermination.'

As FJO wrote this section of his book, the demolition of some of the worst high-rise excesses had already begun. But while high rise mass housing may finally have been discredited, housing at high densities keeps creeping back on the agenda.

THE ARGUMENTS BEGIN TO INTERTWINE:
LAND UTILISATION, ARCHITECTURE,
AND URBANITY

The successor to Sir Dudley Stamp and the *Land Utilisation Survey*, is Professor Alice Coleman. Shouldering the mantle of the land savers, she has gone on to develop missionary zeal on architecture and urbanity. Professor Coleman sees the story so far like this (*Utopia on Trial: vision and reality in planned housing*, Hilary Shipman, 1990):

[Ebenezer Howard] lived in London and disliked it so much that he believed everyone should be transferred to small new towns of under 30,000 people, with garden-like layouts and easy access to the countryside. So perfect did he consider his vision to be that he precluded any changes made by the residents – a degree of authoritarianism which prompted Jane Jacobs to comment in her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), that garden cities would be very nice for docile people who never had any plans of their own.

Professor Coleman then makes another leap, which combines Howard with Le Corbusier to form one giant demon with which she can wrestle:

Le Corbusier approved of the garden image but not the low density that went with it. His Radiant City, introduced in 1923, would retain high densities by piling dwellings up in 24-storey blocks of flats (apartment buildings), which would allow 95 per cent of the site to be devoted to landscaping. He believed that the sharing of building and grounds would promote a strong community and social life.

Her third leap is to note that:

So it came about that the main model for [rebuilding inner urban areas] was not the successful house with a garden but the tenement block with its disastrous record in places such as the Gorbals, the most notorious slum in Glasgow.

This is not as confused as it may sound. The criticism is that the Garden Cities and the new towns have been authoritarian, and places with 'garden-like layouts' in which changes made by the residents are precluded, and are therefore bad. Second, that Le Corbusier's concept of the Radiant City with its apartment towers is also authoritarian and bad. The confusion comes in the attempt to close the circle with the assertion that the way forward should lie in rebuilding the cities with the 'successful house with a garden', as this was indeed one of the main propositions of Howard, but not that of Le Corbusier (until the last years of his life, when he espoused organic agrarian communes, but I sense Professor Coleman is unaware of that closing episode of his life). Thus, with Howard allegedly wanting to destroy cities in order to force us into little Garden Cities, and Le Corbusier wanting to destroy cities by forcing us into apartment towers, Professor Coleman can speak in one breath of 'Radiant City/Garden City dogma'. For her, the two are equally guilty of 'environmental determinism'. Please note how the arguments become intertwined in this analysis, and how an inherited prejudice against the Garden City idea is misrepresented as part of the lobby for high rise, high density, redevelopment of the old cities.

SUSTAINABILITY: CONVERGING ARGUMENTS

Today, the concern that we have all embraced with great enthusiasm is that of sustainability. It is a concept

in which my colleagues – in the Town and Country Planning Association, and in my consultancy practice, and in planning school – and I find a synthesis of the great issues that we wish to tackle.

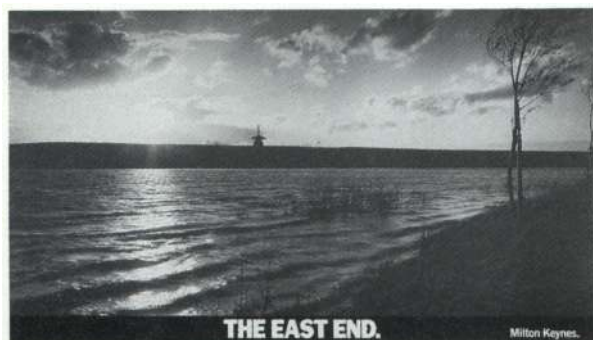
The concept of sustainability

The principle of sustainable development, or sustainability was developed by the World Commission on Environment and Development, in its 1987 report (known as the *Brundtland Report*). The principle is that: 'The use of resources and the environment should not reduce the potential of these resources for succeeding generations'.

The principle has been taken up by the Commission of the European Communities in their June 1990 *Green Paper on the Urban Environment* (COM(90) 218). The main target of the Commission turns out to be what they call the 'periphery', and what we might know as the suburbs. Here they find: '... the paucity of public life, the paucity of culture, the visual monotony, the time wasted in commuting.' By contrast, what they call 'the city' (which appears to be the central core) exhibits: 'density and variety; the efficient, time- and energy-saving combination of social and economic functions, the chance to restore the rich architecture inherited from the past ... Cities are projects for a new style of life and work ... the city is synonymous with proximity, providing the multiple contacts and activities that make it an information hub and creative centre ... the city also concentrates employment opportunities ... the city's cultural role depends on density, proximity and choice. ...'

With this perspective on urban Europe, it is predictable that the Commission build the conclusion that 'the city' must be made more attractive and wholesome by a series of environmental programmes that will reduce noise, air pollution, and the use of hazardous materials; reduce the volume and effects of traffic; and reduce and recycle waste materials. With all of these recommendations one can have no quarrel whatsoever. What troubles me are two aspects of the analysis of the form of urban Europe: the misrepresentation of what the Commission calls 'the periphery', and the implications of the phrase 'density'.

Turning first to 'the periphery', the Commission sees here the 'massive public housing schemes on the edges ... often involving high-rise blocks of flats ... far from urban facilities, poorly served by public transport ... [with an] absence of economic activities and



Courtesy: Milton Keynes Development Corporation

The East End of Milton Keynes: New Town propaganda to counter the rise of Docklands, 1984

opportunities . . . high unemployment and [restricted] mobility and opportunities for their inhabitants'. What the Commission does not see are the urban villages and suburban neighbourhoods of medium and lower density family housing with gardens, intimately interwoven with the economy and culture of the city core to which many of the residents will look for their work, entertainment, civic activity and cultural life. In short, the Commission is blind to the merits of the suburbs, to their role as an integral part of the urban system, and to the increasing importance of suburban centres as the focus of secondary and tertiary employment, particularly in the fast growing service and high technology sectors.

The Commission, despite its hand-wringing sensitivity to the pockets of deprivation in the peripheral mass housing projects to which it refers, is consumed with the comfortable middle class concept of city that is now fashionable: by city they mean, explicitly, the core. The new love affair between the city and the rich and highly mobile, exhilarates at the 'renaissance' of the city, which in practical terms makes them places, so far as I can see, which are speciality shopping centres, themed eating and drinking emporiums; privatised streets supervised by private police forces; easily digested cotton wool packages of pre-wrapped culture in small portions; no homeless, no beggars, no dope and no violence.

In the intimate and attractive central cores to which the Commission would have us all enticed, to what 'density' do they allude? No explanation is offered. Clearly we require variety in urban form. Higher densities that yield flats are tolerable for some house-

holds – those without children, or those with a second home in the country, for example – but lower densities that yield gardens are essential for family living. Density is a matter that should be more fully discussed, and its implications properly understood. Density was discussed in the Greater London Development Plan in the early 1970s and only resolved insofar as guidelines were set. These standards have been ignored through most of the 1980s, as rising land values, and yet another resurgence of the land savers' plea to use spare urban land rather than countryside, spurred town cramming. Aside from its obsession with a romantic vision of the city core, the European Commission's Green Paper attacks 'functionalism', which it describes as 'a system of town planning based on rigid compartmentalisation and location of activities on the basis of function' (which, incidentally and curiously, it says, is 'a theory of town planning set out in the 1940s and . . . found in the earlier British Garden Cities Movement. . .')

From here the Commission builds a series of arguments about future urban policy:

Concretely, this leads to three convergent orientations:

- avoid strict zoning in favour of mixed uses of urban space, favouring in particular housing in inner city areas;
- defend the architectural heritage against the uniform banality of the international style, respecting rather than imitating the old;
- avoid escaping the problems of the city by extending its periphery: solve its problems within existing boundaries.

The need to avoid the expansion of the periphery is an objective that we can welcome, but its corollary – that we can 'solve its problems within existing boundaries' is dangerous and impossible nonsense. There simply isn't room. As the TCPA has put it in criticising this plank of the Commission's analysis: 'In the South East of Britain, to quote what may be an extreme example, there is a general consensus on the need to build some 570,000 more houses before the turn of the century. Whilst some of this housing can be accommodated within existing built-up areas, there are clear limits to the potential for this'.

The Commission's urban analysis carries the implication that higher density cities are more sustainable cities. This proposition is not yet tested, and certainly not yet proved. While there must be energy savings in

personal transportation if one is able to live in close proximity to work, shopping and leisure facilities, the provision of these facilities in a dense urban fabric imposes additional environment costs which are easy to overlook: the environmental impact of transporting goods and raw materials into the urban area; the energy consumption of dense urban fabric in managing its heating and cooling systems; the quantity and quality of waste produced in urban concentrations, and the environmental and energy costs of collecting it for treatment or central recycling. We simply do not yet know, from the standpoint of a concern for sustainability, what urban forms and structures are the most superior. In the absence of detailed research, any assertion that the environmental impact of a Garden City is considerably less than that of a dense urban centre, is not proved either. What discomfiture it would cause to the re-born love affair of the intelligentsia with the city if I was right, and they were wrong! Sustainability, which could be today's stalking horse for town cramming, would have to be discarded, and another excuse for concentrating human beings would have to be found.

Two points linger from a perusal of the Green Paper: first, that even at that level of government there are people still irritated enough by the Garden City idea, in 1990, to want to take a poke at it; second, that there is no quarrel between the real Garden City idea and the direction the Commission wish to take us in, provided the muddle about density in the city is clarified, and the consequences of sustainability on urban form are approached with an open mind.

The Friends of the Earth

The case for dense cities is also developed by the Friends of the Earth in their recent book *Reviving the City: towards sustainable urban development* (Dr Tim Elkin and Duncan McLaren with Mayer Hillman, 1991, FoE and Policy Studies Institute). They tell us that: 'Previous efforts to tackle the environmental problems of cities have concentrated on the superficial environment; treeplanting; landscaping and the provision of open space.' I am surprised to see this organisation talking of such matters as being superficial, but they explain: 'While these can be valuable to urban residents, they do not address the fundamental problems and cannot alone produce sustainable development. The Garden Cities movement is another response based on a similarly deterministic analysis and is also ineffectual. The

opportunity costs of garden cities are in fact "lost" improvements to existing cities. Also garden cities have rarely, if ever, drawn a socially balanced population, thus leaving the large cities with increasing social problems and a lower tax base on which to fund action.'

The authors proceed to describe the impact of urban systems on the environment and ecology, referring to flows of energy and resources one way into the city (reviving Clough Williams Ellis' 1930s image of the city as an octopus), the concentrations of waste materials, the effects on hydrology of the urban area, climatic consequences and more. Nevertheless, they conclude that 'the maintenance of high "urban" densities of population alongside integrated land use' can bring a form to the city that is within 'sustainability constraints', and provide 'the spacial interaction that makes cities desirable'. For larger cities, they suggest high densities and mixed land use by themselves will be inadequate, and they argue for 'dense nodal development' in suburban areas, a form that they tell us the Danes call 'decentralised concentration'.

What do these people mean by 'high density'? Here are some surprises. They believe:

Overall, housing densities in town and cities ought to be at a level equivalent to the typical three and four storey urban street: a level at which it is still possible to provide each dwelling with its own front door on to a public street, and to provide gardens for all family dwellings . . . [these can lead to] high quality housing at densities 50 per cent greater than those typical of new urban housing.

So, once again, we see a prescription for the future of urban areas that cannot resist thrusting a barb at the Garden City idea, from authors who – if they did but realise it – have no quarrel at all with that idea.

CONCLUSION

I have not found in the Garden City idea the authoritarianism, functionalism, or the antithesis of urbanity that others have found. There appears to me to be nothing in the idea that determines anything absolute about urban design. It is, primarily, an idea about land reform and the way in which urban growth might be managed that in today's terms, might be the most sustainable. Second, I am forced to accept that while building prototypical Garden Cities adequately

demonstrated much of the strength of the Garden City idea, their physical form was taken by many as being their message. Third, I remain bemused at the antagonisms the physical form came to provoke, and at the durability of those antagonisms. Antagonism arises when individuals or groups feel threatened: who has been – and who is – threatened by the Garden Cities? We have identified those who wish to protect the countryside, either for its own sake or for their own exclusive benefit. We have identified those who wish to retain the power of the old cities, because of the political power base that concentrated human beings provide. We have identified the urbanists, who wish to see places that are intimate, crowded, lively and sociable. Last, we have identified the greens, who assert that dense cities are more sustainable than other forms of urban development.

All are agreed that the overgrowth of cities must be stopped, especially at the periphery. All are agreed that the countryside should be kept from urbanisation as far as possible. All are agreed that we should be housed well, and be able to lead full lives. All are agreed, at last, on an approach to urban design that can create places

varied in character, form and atmosphere, sustainable in an economic and social sense, and – subject to some serious research yet to be commissioned – sustainable in the sense of the *Brundtland Report*.

The irony derives from the observation that the Garden City idea destroys none of this consensus. Garden Cities provide a way of accommodating urban growth in a form that is the most protective of the countryside. They can be made in diverse physical forms, according to proven urban design principles that can create a wide range of opportunities for architects and urbanists to use their talents. They need not divert resources from urban renewal, but from other forms of undesirable urbanisation. They can release the pressure from the urban areas to enable sustainable urban renewal and greening of the city. Cities made more livable in that way, will survive and prosper, and provide a secure political power base for those that want it.

The arguments of the protagonists have become entwined, and have now converged. We should work together to make our cities more sustainable, and to make better sense of our occupation of the countryside.

DISCUSSION

JOHN STARLING (Fellow of the Society and Hampshire County Council): I was involved in the South Hampshire Structure Plan many years ago and gave a lecture to the Town and Country Planning Association on the subject in Doncaster in 1975. I'm now a County Councillor and involved in the new Structure Plan for the whole of Hampshire up to the year 2001. There has been tremendous development in Hampshire over the last twenty to thirty years, particularly in the Portsmouth/Southampton area, and we are determined to make the right decisions now. Since the start of the present exercise a developer, Eagle Star Insurance Company, has proposed building a new town of 5,000 people in Micheldever, near Winchester. We are resisting this at County Council level because under the new plan we want to limit the increase in houses in Hampshire to 66,000 over the next ten years. I am worried that the developers are jumping in before the Structure Plan is even in the public phase.

THE LECTURER: I'm aware of the current debate about the housing capacity of Hampshire which is clearly going to go on for some years. It is a perfectly legitimate feeling for a community to say, as Hampshire is doing, that it is

full up. The problem is that 570,000 houses have got to be built in the South East in the next ten years. Secondly, in considering different patterns for urban growth, it seems to me that the case is good for planning growth in the form of new communities rather than spreading it across the countryside like margarine.

DR MAYER HILLMAN (Senior Fellow, Policy Studies Institute): I would like to take issue with David Lock's criticism of the recently published Friends of the Earth/Policy Studies Institute report *Reviving the City: Towards Sustainable Urban Development*, of which I was co-author. Had he read the full report he would have recognised that for cities to be sustainable in the future they have got to be far less energy-intensive. There are two obvious means of achieving this. The first is by having higher rather than lower densities of population, the second is by reducing the need for travelling by car. Milton Keynes fails on both these counts and is a paradigm of an unsustainable form of settlement. The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change last year reported that in order to stabilise the climate of the planet, a world-wide reduction of 60 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions is needed. As many

Third World countries could not realistically reduce their emissions from their already low base, an equitable basis would require the UK to reduce its emissions by at least eighty-five per cent. We cannot continue to support the extravagant use of energy dictated by the type of low density settlements David Lock seems to be advocating.

THE LECTURER: The point I was trying to make on density was that if the density that works for energy requirements means three and four storey streets, as suggested in Mayer Hillman's book, that's an acceptable density which can be made very livable. The points in the book about sustainable cities are very powerful and should be widely disseminated. I didn't know research had been done comparing the energy efficiency of Milton Keynes with that of other places. I can't accept, in the absence of evidence, the assertion that a high density, compact city must be more energy efficient than one which is more spread out. A compact city is entirely dependent on external energy supplies and resources.

TERENCE BENDIXSON (Fellow of the Society): I happen to be the official historian of Milton Keynes at the moment and am writing a book about it. Some work has just been done comparing energy consumption at Milton Keynes with comparable cities. The conclusion is that at Milton Keynes because the traffic flows freely with vehicles moving (as far as automotive engineering is concerned) at roughly optimum speeds, and because activities are dispersed (which means that trips to work or to the shops are not long), the energy efficiency of the highways is better than in old fashioned cities.

ELIZABETH NATHANIELS (Writer/Anthropologist): One of Ebenezer Howard's main themes was that those who create the wealth on the land on which they live should then enjoy the benefits for themselves. What has happened with New Towns is that the wealth which has been created has gone to central government. Is there any thinking along the lines of creating new villages or new kibbutzim, imaginative and smallscale ways of settling in the countryside?

THE LECTURER: Elizabeth Nathaniels is right about Howard's concept that the community should benefit from land values to provide pensions, health care and education. That concept has been twisted so that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has benefitted from the land value. At the TCPA we are trying to re-establish the relationship between people's places and the way they develop. Letchworth required an Act of Parliament and it does have a special, localised relationship with its population, even if not the kind of the original days. New Ash Green has a form of residents' trust where they have

a vested interest in the public spaces. But in the 1990s my instinct is to see if we can take the speculation out of development of the countryside and reconnect people to the land value issue.

NIGEL BELL (Deputy Chairman of SPISE, Sane Planning in the South East): Do not new settlements create more problems than they solve because of additional lorry traffic and related problems during the construction phase? Once built they inject a significant number of new people into an area who further congest local roads and other infrastructure; and, where they feed a commuter rail network, create problems for passengers along the line.

THE LECTURER: I am acutely aware that the local impact of new settlement schemes is controversial and painful. We don't know the answer but I postulate that it may be a question of scale. If we have to make new settlements, let's make them large enough to be proper communities, instead of trying to get developers to build little towns when really all they want to do is build houses. We are relying on the private sector to do things which are beyond their capacity.

TONY FYSON (Editor, *The Planner*): Is David Lock being a little optimistic in suggesting that ideas are emerging from all sources? The Council for Protection of Rural England (CPRE) has not been mentioned. Connections have been lost over the last couple of decades with a movement which ought, in my opinion, to be able to see the value of new settlement plans but does not usually appear to do so.

THE LECTURER: When Sir Theodore Chambers was President of the CPRE in the 1930s and when Sir Patrick Abercrombie was President of the TCPA and CPRE, the environmental lobbies were of one mind. Theodore Chambers was advocating new settlements as a way of best handling the conflict between town and country. Everything that the CPRE says and does in more recent times is consistent with that position and with what the Town and Country Planning Association is saying. Unfortunately the two organisations have become antagonistic. I don't know what is driving that particular pressure group consistently to take up an antagonistic position to something which is a natural conclusion to its own propaganda.

DAVID BARRIE (Television Producer/Director): Why do I find on going to Milton Keynes that it is such a depressing place, feel that I am being pushed around by some grand strategy? The principles of Milton Keynes are exciting, interesting and provocative but why do I avoid going there?

THE LECTURER: If we all liked Milton Keynes it would be a very full concentration of population. I am curious that you should feel that way about Milton Keynes, where there has been a guiding hand at work on the landscape, but you don't feel the same in Bath or Regent Street, which were equally contrived environments.

A MEMBER OF THE AUDIENCE: As an urban dweller, right in the heart of London, I am living in fear of redevelopment to improve transport because of the horrendous congestion and upheaval it will bring. A free market has made central London deserted and derelict.

THE LECTURER: London is going to be severely disrupted and in places torn apart to bring in the infrastructure which it should have had a long time ago. Evidently the free market has deficiencies. It's been tried for ten years but it can't fulfil many social needs. We have to put that right in the years ahead.

GEOFF STEELEY (County Planning and Estate Officer, Hertfordshire County Council): I take the view that FJO was unwittingly, and because of his pragmatism, one of the enemies of the Garden City process and that the greatest enemies of Ebenezer Howard's reforms were his closest acolytes of whom Osborn was one. Osborn did tremendous things for Ebenezer Howard and the Garden City movement. He changed the way the world perceives urban processes and social activities of urban areas but I do nevertheless think that he and Unwin did more damage to the Garden City movement than any other two people. Howard proposed that the housing areas should be three and four storey, terraced, high-block houses. It is not what they built. He proposed a distribution of land uses which was revolutionary in its perception of how industry in society would be working during the twentieth century. Osborn and Unwin did not provide it. Howard worked out how the energy and the resources used in town day by day would flow in and out of the countryside and the transportation network. None of the developers let alone Osborn followed this up. They and their advisers would not take seriously Ebenezer Howard's book about the community having its own share of land values and the way these were recycled through his rent/rate system. Howard in desperation set up a second Garden City to have a second try and the same people stopped it. With a socialist government after the war Osborn said 'We will do it through the state and through state ownership of the land'; and that has led to many, many difficulties, not least because of Treasury involvement. Ebenezer Howard didn't say that at all. He said these objects must not be owned, run and developed by the state nor must they be owned and run by the real

estate processes or the private sector. He insisted on community ownership through quite complicated land ownership systems.

I am a resident of Letchworth which is a good place to live because of the sorts of housing and layout that Unwin provided. Stevenage, down the road, is going to be recognised to be great in a few years time when the trees are more mature. All those places are good but they are not Ebenezer Howard, they are not Garden Cities. David Lock today has talked to us about the propaganda and he's rightly pointed out the way different people for different purposes exploit the system. I think we should force people to read the middle chapters of Howard's book and that would bring our minds back to Garden Cities and community-based reform, as opposed to New Towns and state based welfare.

THE LECTURER: There is an argument that when it comes to the role of the state in building Garden Cities, or New Towns as they became, Osborn and his colleagues took the movement off in a direction which was far away from where Howard had started. He was brought up in a Victorian period where private enterprise did things. He formed companies to build the Garden Cities and that was how they happened. That the concept should have been taken up by the state is one that historically people will debate. But one of Osborn's saving graces was that he was a pragmatist. You could argue that he jumped onto the passing bandwagon of the post-war socialistic excitement to find a vehicle to get New Towns built, the ends as it were justifying the means. Alternatively, and perhaps closer to the truth, looking back at the period and what he was writing and saying, you could argue that the concept of state at that period was much closer to the concept of community than it is today. It is only in the intervening forty and fifty years that the state has turned out to have a life, entity and interest of its own, often contrary to that of the community. I hope that whoever gives this lecture next time will look forward to see where we go after 1991.

THE CHAIRMAN: It appears that the controversy generated in the discussion has shown there may not be the convergence of view on these issues that our speaker has suggested. I am also surprised that we have not heard anything about the concept known as strategic planning because at the heart of trying to resolve the controversy concerning new settlements is a need for more effective strategic planning than we have at present. Likewise we need to recapture the land values and the betterment for community use at the local level. We have had an excellent lecture and I am sure that FJO himself would be thoroughly proud of David Lock.