Manuscript version: Author’s Accepted Manuscript
The version presented in WRAP is the author’s accepted manuscript and may differ from the published version or, Version of Record.

Persistent WRAP URL:
http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/167418

How to cite:
Please refer to published version for the most recent bibliographic citation information. If a published version is known of, the repository item page linked to above, will contain details on accessing it.

Copyright and reuse:
The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work of researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions.

This article is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives (CC BY NC ND) and may be reused according to the conditions of the license. For more details see: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/.

Publisher’s statement:
Please refer to the repository item page, publisher’s statement section, for further information.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk.
In 1966 Minister of Housing and Local Government Richard Crossman wrote in his diary about a visit to Stoke-on-Trent:

As I was driving through I suddenly felt ‘Here is this huge, ghastly combination of five towns – what sense is there in talking about urban renewal here? Other towns have a shape, a centre, some place where renewal can start, perhaps a university. But if one spent billions on this ghastly collection of slag heaps, pools of water, old potteries, deserted coal mines, there would be nothing to show for the money.’ There is nothing in Stoke except the worst of the industrial revolution, and the nicest of people…¹

Stoke-on-Trent had more derelict land than any other County Borough in the country, mostly caused by coal mining or marl extraction, and covering 1,800 acres, or 7.9% of the land area of city.² The city council worried that the level of dereliction presented an ‘image of ugliness, backwardness and lack of enterprise’, and blamed the city’s dramatic population loss, (14,245 people left in the period 1966-1971), largely on the poor physical environment.³ Although Stoke-on-Trent was an epicentre for the issue of derelict land, it was a topic with national reach, and one that was increasingly understood as a visual manifestation of issues at the centre of Britain’s economic travails. At the heart of the question of derelict land was the long shadow of the industrial revolution and of the obsolescence of its infrastructures; as a report by the landscape architecture firm Land Use Consultants put it, ‘Our cities and towns are full of the relics of the age of steam and the waste products these bygone technologies produced. Abandoned sites once used by public utilities, and ghostly tracks of derelict railway lines combine with the spoil heaps of exhausted industry lay waste at the heart of

³ *Land Reclamation, City of Stoke on Trent* (no date, 1974/5?), p. 10.
many cities. Derelict land was therefore a symbolically charged and highly visible manifestation of the struggles that the British economy had had in following through cross-party promises of modernising the economy; it was what remained when the sun had set on Britain’s twilight industries. As Lord Robens put it, the most conspicuous areas of dereliction were concentrated in ‘regions of the country which have been crippled by the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution.’

Although Crossman was deeply pessimistic about the ability of places like Stoke-on-Trent to be transformed, 1966 was the year that a profoundly optimistic set of ideas about the potentials of derelict land to be renewed gained widespread traction. The sheer quantity of planning documents, books, technical manuals, and government directives that emerged from the late-1960s and into the 1970s envisioning the widespread reclamation of derelict land were so plentiful that landscape architect Brenda Colvin feared that the ‘repetition and rereading of what we already know tend towards their neglect.’ They are nevertheless a fascinating source for an historian of modern Britain, as through them we see historical actors imaginatively grappling with an attempt to transform areas of Britain in a way that cuts across issues ranging from deindustrialisation, to planning, landscape, environmentalism, industrial heritage, and leisure. Derelict land might be turned towards agricultural uses, forestry, new industry, or housing, but this article focuses on a significant number of plans reimagining derelict land as spaces of leisure and recreation. Recreation uses were often necessitated by the fact that, especially in the case of coal mining, the areas remained unstable and therefore unsuitable for new housing or industrial uses. Nevertheless the

---

4 Land Use Consultants, *Low Cost Urban Improvements, Preliminary Draft* (1975), Consulted in the Land Use Consultants archive, which I understand will be transferred to MERL at the University of Reading.

5 The National Archives (Hereafter TNA), COAL 74/1309, Lord Robens talk to Civic Trust 1970 conference.

The conjuncture of the two issues of dereliction and leisure in these plans is highly suggestive of how elites imagined the future in this period.\(^7\)

Derelict landscapes have recently been chronicled by a swarm of urban poets, wasteland flaneurs, and psychogeographers.\(^8\) Such accounts treat derelict land only as SLOAP (Spaces Left Over After Planning), whilst I want to understand them as the location of planning effort. My approach is emphatically that of an historian rather than a physical geographer or an ecologist, in that its primary focus is on the people and processes that go into forming and conceptualising a landscape.\(^9\) The article intervenes in the historiographies of planning, of Britain in the 1970s, and in the meaning of landscape. This article focuses on the public and private agencies that conceived of reclamation work in plans, including local authorities and new town development corporations, the Civic Trust and the Coal Board, as well as planners and landscape architects. Plans are a useful source for what they can tell us about physical change of the environment, but in line with a recent trend in planning history, they are primarily used here for what they tell us about the aspirations and fears of a culture.\(^10\) Recent work in planning history has also stressed that, in contradistinction to Jane Jacobs’s influential account, planning practice evolved throughout the post-war period – and this article describes a discrete moment in the evolution of British planning practice.\(^11\)

\(^7\) In this plans for derelict land parallel those for leisure centres in the same period, see Otto Saumarez Smith, ‘The Lost World of the British Leisure Centre’, *History Workshop Journal*, 88 (2019), pp.180-203.

\(^8\) Michael Symmons Roberts and Paul Farley, *Edgelands, Journeys into England’s True Wilderness* (London, 2012) is indicative of this large literature.


Specifically this article reveals the transformative planning ambition of the profession of landscape architects to reshape society through landscape reclamation. The plans created by landscape architects are part of an historical moment in which the tools of social democratic planning developed during the post-war period were harnessed to deal with newly emerging problems of deindustrialisation, leisure, and ecology.

Historians have shown how since at least the seventeenth century ‘Landscape’, understood as both physical places and their representation across a range of media, was commonly perceived as a highly visible bellwether of social and economic change, invested with a range of symbolic meanings. Landscape has been shown to have been an agent of historical change and not merely a background. The improvement of wasteland especially was informed by deeply held cultural attitudes. Landscape studies have provided rich insights into conceptual issues from the Reformation to English national identity. This article applies the approaches of landscape history to the more recent past. Jim Tomlinson has made an argument for deindustrialisation as a metanarrative for post-war British history. The issue of derelict land helps us get beyond seeing the process of deindustrialisation in abstracted or purely economic terms, but as an event which inscribed itself on landscapes and physical spaces – whilst also intersecting with other social and economic changes.

Derelict land was a visual manifestation of the titanic shifts happening to Britain’s economy and society, but what is intriguing is that these areas were simultaneously

---


conceived as sites of tremendous potential for the creation of a new type of society. In ‘combining planning for leisure with the salvation of derelict land’,\textsuperscript{15} many plans from the mid-1960s and into the 1970s merge two contrasting imaginaries through which people conceived of social change in Britain. On the one hand derelict land was all too obviously a symbol of relative decline and the widespread obsolescence of a sclerotic economy; but the plans for these areas, through their optimism and ambition, speak of another set of problems through which people understood the changes happening to society and the economy, powered by unprecedented increases in incomes, leisure time, personal mobility, and better education. The subject therefore cuts to the heart of Britain’s janus-faced experience of change in this period. These plans can be seen as part of a moment where the planning mechanisms of the post-war period, and the meliorist or even utopian belief in their transformative potential that underlay them, were not abandoned, but were applied to newly emerging intersecting problems of deindustrialisation, leisure, and ecology. These plans for derelict land are therefore an example of what Guy Ortolano has recently described as an evolving and dynamic welfare state in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{16} They can be conceived, perhaps, as a physical correlative to the rediscovery of poverty in this period, a rediscovery of landscape poverty if you will. Like the rediscovery of poverty the reclamation of derelict land was an attempt to shift the focus of the welfare state to areas or constituencies that were felt to have been ‘left behind’ in the move towards general affluence.\textsuperscript{17} Both movements see the welfare state expanding its purview during the 1970s.

The economic and social upheavals occurring during the 1970s were conceived by most people not through economic data, but because they were highly visible in landscapes

\textsuperscript{15} Richard Crossman Speech, Hansard 25 March 1965
\textsuperscript{16} Guy Ortolano, \textit{Thatcher’s Progress} (Cambridge, 2019)
and particular places. Grounding a history of deindustrialisation in particular places helps us to intimately link these late-twentieth century processes with a much longer environmental history of the industrial revolution – as will be seen in case studies of places freighted with industrial history and heritage such as Stoke-on-Trent or the Ironbridge Gorge. These particular places support an extended chronology of deindustrialisation; dereliction had a long and accretive history in these places. What was new from the late 1960s was not the existence of derelict land as dereliction had been growing for decades. What was new was the desire to conceive of totally new uses and roles for these areas. By focusing on this neglected, but key aspect of deindustrialisation, this article might be expected to contribute to narratives of decline and crisis that have until recently structured our accounts of Britain in the 1970s. The article does not deny the devastating impact of deindustrialisation, instead its core revelation is to show that the developmental state was flexible, responsive, ambitious, and above all optimistic, in its tackling of these new challenges. The article is therefore a response to Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton, and Pat Thane’s call for alternative readings of the 1970s, showing how a sense of crisis during the period was conducive to new ideas and approaches.

Landscape Architects and the Potential of Derelict Land

The ability to reclaim derelict land wasn’t new in the mid-1960s. A history of reclamation might stretch back to the removal of a devastated iron works as part of Humphrey Repton’s landscape at Attingham Park in Shropshire in the 18th century. Landscapes of dereliction, especially in the North of England, had gained an important

---

symbolic role in arguments for modernisation in the interwar period. But government, certainly central government, had rarely become involved. A 1964 Civic Trust booklet outlines the range of schemes that had been carried out since the Second World War, detailing projects which turned derelict land to agricultural use, playing fields, golf courses, or forestry, but their overwhelming narrative was one of ‘inertia’. The Lower Swansea Valley Study of 1967 similarly gives an indicative history of inertia over a derelict area, stretching back to the nineteenth century, where it was described how ‘the size of the area, the vast quantities of its debris, its physical fragmentation, its multiple ownership, all contributed to a feeling that the cost of the physical redevelopment of the area was, in the circumstances, beyond the resources of the County Borough. Government help was looked for and, as we have seen, was not forthcoming.

The major legislation which provided funds for local authorities to tackle derelict land was the 1966 Local Government Act which would give local authorities a 50% grant for the reclamation or improvement of ‘derelict, neglected or unsightly land.’ It was widely understood as a response to that year’s Aberfan tragedy, although a recognition that the need for such legislation had been growing within central government for some time. A larger grant for places that counted as ‘development areas’ could be made under the 1966 Industrial Development Act. The amount available was increased to 75% in 1970, and to 100% in 1975. Apparently no other country had a comparable system of legislation or grant aid for the reclamation of past dereliction, although the approach to the issue in the Ruhr Valley,

\[\text{21} \text{ Derelict Land: A study of industrial dereliction and how it may be redeemed (London, 1964)}\]
\[\text{22} \text{ The Lower Swansea Valley Project (Swansea, 1967). Both University College Swansea and the University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne had large interdisciplinary projects on the issue of derelict land in 1960s.}\]
\[\text{23} \text{ An earlier Government announcement was New Life for Dead Land (1963)}\]
\[\text{24} \text{ AT/48/26, ‘Historical Background, February 1970’ gives a history of Government grants.}\]
including its system of leisure parks, was widely cited as being in advance of what had been achieved in Britain.\textsuperscript{25}

Central to calls for rehabilitating derelict land were the increasingly confident profession of landscape architects. The late-1960s saw architecture losing its dominance as the leading profession in planning. Controversies over slum clearance and industrialised building materials did much to delegitimise the architectural profession.\textsuperscript{26} Other disciplines, including economics, computing, management, sociology, or even futurology, jostled for dominance.\textsuperscript{27} The issue of derelict land was a key area over which landscape architects asserted their transformative ambition. In a few decades this profession had gone from designing gardens for the wealthy, to a profession that had ambitions to transform the entire environment, and through it the social and economic life of Britain. Their plans for derelict land were not just about improving the attractiveness or amenity value of areas, but about shifting Britain’s economic geography by making rundown areas viable.\textsuperscript{28} Such arguments were made with expressive and rhetorical force by a generation of wonderfully articulate propagandists for the profession, including Nan Fairbrother, Sylvia Crowe, Geoffrey Jellicoe, Cliff Tandy, and Brenda Colvin – all of whom combined professional practice, with public writing which stressed the transformative potential of landscape architecture for society as a whole.

\textsuperscript{25} Tandy, \textit{Landscapes of Industry}, p. 288. AT/48/26, talk by Dr Luger Wierling to the Civic Trust.
\textsuperscript{26} Malcolm MacEwan, \textit{Crisis in Architecture} (London, 1974) sums up the mood by the mid-1970s.
\textsuperscript{28} For the growing importance of amenity, over economic considerations when approaching the landscapes of natural parks in this period, see Matthew Kelly, \textit{Quartz and Feldspar: Dartmoor} (London, 2015), pp.193-350.
whole, notably through the exploitation of the transformation of derelict land.²⁹ It is notable that it was a profession which gave scope to women practitioners.³⁰

Landscape architects had been given extra clout through recently developed technologies, such as earth moving equipment of often staggering scale, allowing them to create shelter belts, artificial lakes, and complex land forms; they made use of the Vermeer Tree Spade which could pick up and deposit a whole tree from the roots; as well as an increasing sophisticated knowledge of what plants could grow on waste, ‘methods of making soil, and hydromatic seeding of difficult areas.’³¹ Many of these machines and techniques had emerged as a by-product of technologies that had been developed during the Second World War.³² As the Civic Trust argued, ‘the outlook has been transformed by the conjunction of two technical revolutions – in the mechanics of muck-shifting and tree-moving and in the science of soil-making. We can now bring to bear a battery of machines whose power, versatility and sheer number were inconceivable before the war; we can establish grass and trees in raw unweathered rock, devoid of vegetable soil, and we can transplant mature trees cheaply.’³³ Cliff Tandy wrote even more excitedly about new technologies, deploying a common trope relating the task ahead to an 18th century history of landscape transformation: ‘The great masters of landscape design, such as Capability Brown, would undoubtedly have warmed to the challenges of modern technologies and modern ways of life. They would have

³⁰ Luca Csepely-Knorr is currently working on this topic, leading the AHRC funded project ‘Women of the Welfare Landscape’.
³³ Civic Trust, Derelict Land (1964)
welcomed the immensely greater opportunities arising from modern machines for moving earth or transplanting trees and the immensely greater range of exact knowledge and professional skills now available to teams engaged in designing landscapes. Brenda Colvin stressed ‘the enormous potential which lies in the use of waste as a means of creating beauty in fine new landscape forms, with all the resulting long-term economy that would bring about.’ She ‘advocated the use of waste material to recreate new landscapes of hills and interesting sculptural land forms instead of always trying to bury it.’

A feature of landscape architects’ approach to derelict land was that it was not just something to be completely erased. Derelict land was being reconceived as both inherently beautiful, and a site of potential. As early as 1936 W.H. Auden, referring to recently abandoned mines at Rookhope, County Durham, had written that ‘Tramlines and slagheaps, pieces of machinery, That was, and still is, my ideal scenery.’ Many aspects of the Victorian city and its legacies were being re-examined from the mid-1960s, reinforced by the cross-cultural rejection of architectural modernism. The ecology movement bolstered a growing tendency of seeing the beauty and rich wildlife environments that could often be found in derelict areas, further confirming them as spaces of potential, especially for new leisure uses. Richard Mabey’s *The Unofficial Countryside* is perhaps the most lyrical account of searching for birds and flora amongst sewage works, gravel pits, and rubbish dumps. Bird watchers had long appreciated the ecological diversity of gravel pits. The surprise discovery in 1954 by primary school children of a great variety of orchids in an old waste tip

---

34 Cliff Tandy, *Landscape of Industry* (London, 1975)
37 Indicative is Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London, 1963), which gives a more sympathetic account of industrial Victorian cities than provided by earlier commentators such as Lewis Mumford.
39 As described in the novel Kenneth Allsop, *Adventure lit their star* (London, 1949)
in Bolton had paved the way for a host of studies of the plant communities of industrial wastelands. The discovery that the much loved landscape of the Norfolk Broads were the inadvertent result of Medieval peat extraction suggested how scarred landscapes could imperceptibly be transformed into areas of beauty and leisure over time, a natural process which the landscape architect could artificially speed up.

The architectural journalist Ian Nairn went further than most, and received some criticism, for suggesting that many pit-heaps should be preserved as ‘industrial relics’ and ‘splendid pieces of landscape’, but landscape architects nevertheless agreed that a new use should look for possibilities inherent in the existing qualities and potentials of derelict landscapes, rather than merely flattening them. An appreciation of the complex ecologies of derelict landscapes led landscape architects to work with the grain of areas they increasingly described in romantic terms: Sylvia Crowe for example wrote beautifully of the ‘vast complex of worked out chalk pits’ along the Thames estuary:

Within them is revealed a new landscape of white chalk cliff and peacock blue pool, of stunted Birch and cascades of wild Clematis and Valerian. At present they are deserted except for occasional children playing with the old rubbish which has found its way into the pools, and their landscape potential is one to be glimpsed here and there. But they and hundreds of areas like them are waiting to be transformed into the recreational landscape of the future.

A development plan for the Rhondda Valley by Building Design Partnership was candid about the surprise the planners had had in finding beauty and potential in an area they had no prior experience of:

We find it hard to imagine a planning commission more charged with potential. Potential for discovering a new role for the mining valleys, as well as potential for failing to understand

---

41 Land Use Consultants, *Opencast Coal, A tool for landscape renewal* (1967); David Matless, *In the Nature of Landscape: Cultural Geography of the Norfolk Broads* (2014)
43 Sylvia Crowe, *Tomorrow’s Landscape* (London, 1956)
their spirit or for proposing a solution which is inimical to the physical form and social character of these vital communities. Prior to the summer of 1967, few of our team had visited South Wales, let alone been into the Rhondda Valleys. We were prepared for a landscape defaced with the black accretion of a century’s thoughtless industry. We expected ample evidence of a grim industry that is no longer the lifeblood of the community.... Our first approach from the Heads of the Valleys road took place in bright sunshine, and as we looked into Rhondda Fawr it would be difficult to imagine a more rural scene.... From that distance we looked in vain for the ugliness for which we had been prepared. No tip gear rising from the grey knots of buildings below us, nor black cones of slag menacing their life as in the tragedy of Aberfan... we are dealing with an environment which is physically beautiful and full of possibilities.44

Central to what Building Design Partnership described as the ‘magnificent opportunity’ that many saw in purportedly derelict landscapes, was the idea that areas such as the Rhondda Valley might be transformed into spaces of leisure, recreation, and tourism. BDP therefore argued that their plan should attempt to harness ‘the recreation potential of the land, not only to benefit local inhabitants but also as part of a unified scheme for displaying and developing the natural beauty and industrial history of the valleys.’ Such ideas were responding to fears and hopes such as those set out in the ‘Countryside in 1970’ conferences (in 1963, 1965, and 1970), and in the 1966 Government White Paper Leisure and the Countryside.45 It was understood that focusing leisure on previously derelict areas would help keep pressure off the countryside.46 Michael Dower’s 1965 article ‘Fourth Wave: the Challenge of Leisure’ was widely cited amongst planning circles for arguing that Leisure needed to be a key ingredient of future plans:

Three great waves have broken across the face of Britain since 1800. First, the sudden growth of dark industrial towns. Second, the thrusting movement along far-flung railways. Third, the sprawl of car-based suburbs. Now we see, under the guise of a modest word, the surge of a fourth wave which could be more powerful than all others. The modest word is leisure...
Leisure must be given equal weight with housing, schools, factories, hospitals, in the fight for space: nay more, it must be built into all these things.47

It was therefore envisioned that the leisure pursuits demanded by this emerging society would come to inhabit the spaces left behind by the decaying industrial infrastructure of Victorian Britain, whilst also providing amenities to bring new constituencies to depressed areas:

Canals, after their workaday past, can be turned into waterways for cruising, canoeing and angling; their towpaths into routes for walking and nature study; their warehouses into museums, hostels and field-study centres. Disused railways can become private steam railways, bridlepaths or cycle-tracks. Disused gravel pits can become water-sport centres or be landscaped as the setting for waterside restaurants. Open-cast coal workings can be sculpted to form lakes, stadia and artificial ski-slopes. Disused engine houses, maltings and dock warehouses can become arts centres, opera-houses and studios.48

Worked out quarries were seen as having particularly ‘great potential as future open spaces for recreation, as they have good road access, usually some measure of wind shelter, and services such as water and electricity.’49 Especially when they were near urban areas, they provided an ideal venue for ‘rallies, or gymkhanas, pop festivals or circuses, rock climbing or botanizing.’50 The many railway lines that had become disused following the Beeching cuts were another area of enormous potential, as they could be refashioned as greenways and linear parks.51 By 1970 there were also twenty lines that were converted or proposed for conversion to heritage steam railway use.52 Canals were one of the earliest areas where an

---

50 Ibid.
52 Ibid, p. 19-22
envisioned new recreational use combined with an emerging appreciation of the heritage value of industrial archeology.53

The approach to the issue of industrial dereliction after 1966 was underlined by optimistic predictions about its potentials for a new society oriented more towards leisure rather than production. Plans envisioned transforming derelict landscapes to give opportunities for leisure pursuits, but in a way that was attentive to preserving something of the *genius loci* of the industrial histories they would superimpose. These themes will be further explored in the next three sections, each of which takes the form of a case study: the Civic Trust and their plan for the Lea Valley; Land Use Consultants and their plan for Stoke-on-Trent; and the plans by the Development Corporation of Telford New Town. These sections will therefore help to embed the transformation derelict land in particular deindustrializing places, but will also show a variety of both state and non-governmental agencies that engaged with the issue.

**Leisure, dereliction, and the Civic Trust**

The Civic Trust was a charity set up by Conservative MP Duncan Sandys in 1957 with the aim of improving the quality of urban life.54 They were an important organization arguing that issues of both derelict land,55 and planning for leisure56 should become objects of major government intervention. These interests were merged in the Civic Trust’s plan for a Lea Valley regional park, which was advertised as an ‘essay in the use of neglected land for

---

56 Civic Trust [Michael Dower], *Fourth Wave: the Challenge of Leisure* (1965)
recreation and leisure’. As far back as 1943 the Forshaw-Abercrombie County Plan suggested that this area in East London, which had been home to a diverse range of industries, gravel pits, distilleries, and munition factories, should be freed of industry and turned into a continuous open-space, but in the early 1960s much of it remained ‘damp and derelict, unheeded and ill kempt’. From 1963 the Civic Trust worked with the architect planner Leslie Lane and local authorities to imagine how the area might be transformed into ‘London’s Playground’. Based on American trends, they predicted that demand for outdoor leisure would treble by the year 2000. They noted that the main achievement of the post-war period for leisure planning had been the conservation of beautiful countryside (in which incidentally Dower’s parents had had a central role, through the creation of National Parks), but now the most pressing need was to find spaces for leisure provision in and near cities – in part to alleviate a countryside which couldn’t cope with the heavy usage put upon it by an increasingly mobile population. Because the process of ‘carving out new open spaces within these cities is long and agonising’, the existence of ‘thousands of desolate, neglected, forgotten acres’ within their boundaries was a huge opportunity.

The report suggested taking inspiration from eighteenth-century exemplars, including Bath, Vauxhall and Ranleigh pleasure gardens, and the Brighton Pavilion. It proposed sixteen interlinked areas, with a dazzling array of new uses including ‘a great urban park, of Hyde Park scale’, with playing fields, and a promenade ‘capturing the spirit of the sea-front or that created temporarily on the South Bank in 1951’; a new ‘Riverside Pleasure Garden’ rivalling the ‘Tivoli Gardens at Copenhagen’; an ‘Ice Palace, with skating rink and artificial ski slope’; a children’s farm; a rose garden; boating ponds and yachting lakes; an aquarium; an ‘architectural maze’; a sculpture park; a bird sanctuary; a golf range; picnic spots, riverside

57 Civic Trust, A Lea Valley Regional Park: an essay in the use of neglected land for recreation and leisure (London, 1964)
pubs, cafes, and restaurants. All of this was to be linked by ‘silent, useful and amusing’ forms of transport such as electric trolleys, light electric railways, travellators, or a monorail. The Lea Valley was also to be the location of Cedric Price and Joan Littlewood’s famous Fun Palace Project (it is perhaps notable that Price was also intensely interested in derelict land in these years through his Thinkbelt Potteries scheme.58) Throughout the report there is an acceptance of the need to work with the potentials implicit in derelict land, to create a new kind of urban landscape:

There is no pretence that the southern Valley is a strip of remote countryside. It will be a playground for Londoners against the background of London. This background – power stations, gas works, factories, railways, houses and flats – must be accepted and acknowledged in the landscape theme. Some of the industrial instillations have their own beauty… Each of the bewildering number of recreational and leisure activities will have its own form of expression in landscape terms. The rich green of golf courses; the colourful sails of the dinghies; the flat stretches of playing fields; the walks; the rides on horseback – all will need to be set off, one against the other, and interspersed with parkland and busier areas where crowds will gather.

As with many of the more utopian of 1960s visionary plans, the Civic Trust struggled to suggest how all this would be financed under existing legislation, recommending that perhaps it required development corporation powers, or else the kind of public-private partnerships found in city centre redevelopment.59 The Civic Trust’s report nevertheless led to the establishment of the Lea Valley Regional Park Authority in 1967 following an Act of Parliament.60 The Civic Trust helped combine two disparate issues, leisure and dereliction, in their campaigns for improving the quality of urban life in Britain. But they struggled to realise their plans. The next two sections will explore two regions where these issues were taken up, but where the organisations involved had the clout to actually carry out their plans.

---

60 For a full history see Tony Travers, *From Wasteland to Playground, Lee Valley Regional Park at 50* (London, 2017)
Stoke-on-Trent and Land Use Consultants

When the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner visited Stoke-on-Trent for the last volume of the *Buildings of England* series he described ‘an urban tragedy’. He was particularly struck by the setting of the euphoniously named Etruria Hall of 1770, which had been the home of the celebrated eighteenth century potter Josiah Wedgwood. He found it forlorn amongst the ruins of the Shelton Iron and Steel Works, with the gigantic Hanley Deep Pit slag heap looming behind: ‘From his house Wedgewood could look across landscape to the canal, inspired by him, and the works, built by him. Now that view is all desolation.’\(^{61}\)

The industry that produced delicate Wedgewood pots had been based on deposits of coal as much as it was on deposits of clay, with the six towns that make up the Potteries region following a thin seam of coal measures.\(^{62}\) Pottery is so important for the area’s self-identity that coal mining and steel are often forgotten. The combination of these industries had produced an exceptionally dispersed urban form, and a uniquely intense legacy of industrial dereliction.

It was not surprising then that the City of Stoke-on-Trent was one of the authorities to take advantage of the 1966 legislation to tackle their derelict land, making use of a 50% grant from Central Government (increased in 1970 to 75%). In 1967 the City established a Joint Working Party, working with the National Coal Board and their landscape architects Land Use Consultants. The plans for Stoke were directed by the firm Land Use Consultants, with the landscape architect Cliff Tandy directing. Land Use Consultants had been set up as Britain’s first multi-disciplinary environmental consultancy in 1966 by the pioneering

---

\(^{61}\) Nikolaus Pevsner, *Staffordshire* (London, 1974)

\(^{62}\) Diane Barker, *Potworks: Industrial Architecture of the Staffordshire Potteries* (London, 1991). The fine clay for porcelain mostly came from Cornwall, where mining created its own dereliction in the form of china clay pits, especially around St Austell. For every ton of clay needed by Josiah Wedgewood, he needed ten tons of coal.
environmentalist Max Nicholson, who remained its chairman. They had been involved with planning for derelict land after being initially hired by the Coal Board following the Aberfan disaster in 1966. At Aberfan itself the firm advised the entire removal of the tips, after residents rejected an earlier scheme suggesting they be stabilised and landscaped. Land Use Consultants did a large number of plans for the Coal Board. By 1970 the Coal Board were estimating that there would be 10,000 acres of ‘new’ derelict land arising from pit closures over the next 15 years. These plans attempted to diversify the Coal Board’s activities in light of the projected ‘run down of the coal mining industry’. The Coal Board’s interest in reclamation can therefore be seen as part of the ‘moral economy’ arguments being made during the contraction of the industry in the period – attempting to offset closures with initiatives intended to stimulate new employment opportunities. Their plans for reclamation were therefore about envisioning a new economic life, through a new environment, for areas that had been dominated by a now declining industry; as was recognised by Duncan Sandys in 1970: ‘The greatest dereliction occurs in areas where long-established traditional industries are declining. Coal is, of course, the outstanding example. In such districts, the restoration of the landscape is essential, not simply to give the place a more pleasing appearance, but to attract new industry to replace the old.’ Land Use Consultants plans included suggesting former mining areas be returned to agricultural use, made into ‘industrial parks’, or even ‘Motorway Hotel’ sites. Their most striking proposals involved changing areas to new leisure activities. It was hoped that new leisure would encourage new prosperity through bringing to

64 Proposals for the Aberfan site, second report (1968)
65 AT/48/26
66 68.1
68 Duncan Sandys opening address quoted in Reclamation of Derelict Land, Report of a Civic Trust Conference Stoke-on-Trent, April 1970
an area new industries and new constituencies. The plan for Stoke-on-Trent was the most ambitious and most extensively realised.

At the heart of the extensive proposals achieved over the next decade was the restoration of the Hanley Deep Pit to form a hundred-acre park.

Coal mining at the Hanley Deep Pit (in operation from 1867-1961) and marl extraction for adjacent brick works produced a dramatic, lunar-like landscape with three enormous cones of black colliery shale, gaping marl holes and extensive areas of pitted and gullied mineral wastes. This oppressive landscape formed the setting for a jumble of industrial artefacts including: disused mineral lines, decaying buildings, mine shafts and heaps of rubble. The desolation of the area was heightened by the scarcity of vegetation and the abundance of household refuse and scrap metal.69

Out of this unpromising landscape they aimed to create a ‘forest park’, taking inspiration from Hampstead Heath, and Bos Park on the outskirts of Amsterdam. They moulded rather than flattened the slag heaps, and aimed for an ecologically rich ‘stretch of landscaped countryside, with the life-cycles and sounds and sights and smells of the countryside.’70 The reclamation team planted over three-quarter of a million trees by 1979.71

The ‘idea was broadly to establish a semi-natural landscape of wooded slopes, grassy glades and flowering meadows, speeding up the natural process of vegetational succession in which first grasses and mosses and later trees and shrubs, might have recolonised the site… From the start the designers were steering towards a design solution based on actual ecosystems which would bring birds, butterflies and wild flowers back to the centre of the city and provide the townsfolk with an exciting varied landscape in which to walk, study, sport and play.’72 Seating areas, bollards, and litter bins were constructed from locally available railway sleepers, and burnt red shale was used to form informal path surfaces – the materials used

69 Central Forest Park Reclamation project (1974)
71 David Knight, ‘Reclamation of Derelict Land in Stoke on Trent’, Parks and Recreation, July 1979, p. 16.
72 Central Forest Park Reclamation project (1974)
were therefore ‘local, robust and cheap.’ The design was meant to grow out of the existing potentials and uses of a site, rather than overlaying it with a new identity:

Ironically coal mining and marl extraction produced a varied topographical form which has outstanding design potential. The massive cones of colliery shale formed prominent landmarks in the townscape. Although in its original state it had served as a grim reminder of the despoliation caused during the industrial age it had, nevertheless, served an important function as an orientation point from other parts of the City. In an urban landscape characterised by an invisible network of quite distinct landmarks and high points the treatment of the tips was a crucial element in the design.\footnote{73 Central Forest Park Reclamation project (1974)}

The Forest Park was only the centrepiece of many schemes carried out throughout the city. Westport Lake (originally a huge water-filled hole, disfigured by industrial tipping and fed by a badly polluted stream) was reclaimed as a waterpark. The waterpark would provide for both the traditionally popular pastime of fishing, and the rapidly growing take up of various water sports. Linking various recreational sites throughout the city, and the countryside beyond were the various derelict mineral railways which were to be turned into a ‘greenway’, a connected system of pedestrian, horse riding and cycle trails, which would link the disparate linear town of Stoke-on-Trent together, whilst also acting as a Radburn system leading onto the back gardens of houses behind (an idea they perhaps got from Cedric Price’s Thinkbelt Potteries plan).\footnote{74 For the idea of ‘greenways’ see Michael Dower, ‘Green ways’ The Architectural Review (December, 1963), p. 387-393.} These greenways, intended to have the atmosphere of a country lane, would ‘provide safe and easy movement system through the city and out to the country, especially for the young.’ Added to these 11 miles of ‘greenway’ were proposals for 37 miles of ‘blueways’ along canals and rivers. They imagined that with an increase in pleasure crafts using the Trent and Mersey canal, Stoke might be ‘at the centre of a highly desirable cruising area’, seen in a wider recreational context of ‘youth activity centres, walkways, canoeing centres, angling facilities, waterside leisure spaces, pubs and restaurants.’\footnote{75 Land Use Consultants, Trent and Mersey Canal Survey (1973)}
A local survey had found that residents would prefer the Sneyd mound to be retained and landscaped rather than removed entirely, ‘because it already is an important and dramatic landmark in the city.’ This was an example where ‘some of the visual qualities of derelict areas aroused strong and positive responses from members of the public.’ It was also intended to preserve the Hanley Deep Colliery winding gear as a feature of the park, from which locals would be able to climb up and view the changing landscape; it would be ‘Stoke’s Eiffel Tower’, as Alderman Kenneth Wright joked. The overwhelming focus on outdoor leisure rather than new industrial or housing uses was in large part because restored land was unable to be built on for some time because of problems of settlement and compaction, although it was imagined that by replacing ‘the original industrial core of the city with open space’, it might eventually become available for building development.

Killing two birds with one stone, at Berry Hill they shifted a 200 ft high mountain made of 1.2m cubic yards of shale into a 2.25m cubic yard marl hole, making the area available for new industrial uses.

All of these schemes were to be achieved in an area suffering ‘mine subsidence, a peppering of pit shafts and the sheer bulk and dangerous gradient of many of the pit heads.’ Moulding and replanting the giant 3 million cubic yard Sneyd Tip, they had to neutralise 1000 degrees farenheit heats, as the mound was still highly combustible. Reclamation was a complex and multifaceted operation, involving a wide array of techniques and technologies, especially in a landscape as devastated as the Hanley deep pit:

The site had many of the typical problems encountered on the reclamation of colliery spoil heaps:- there were unstable slopes to regrade and landforms to reshape, pitshafts to locate and

---

76 *Land Reclamation, City of Stoke on Trent* (no date), p. 22  
78 Land Use Consultants archive  
79 ‘Stoke reclamation programme’, *Landscape Architecture*, May 1970  
treat by pressure grouting and capping, derelict buildings to demolish, bare surfaces to protect from run-off erosion, indeterminate drainage patterns to reshape; combustible coal washings to excavate and spread; and not least of course the substrate itself which largely inhibited plant growth through poor texture, lack of humus and of nutrients, extremes of pH, presence of toxic substances, and lack of, or over abundance of, water. In the main, standard techniques were used in the reclamation work. Earthworks were tackled as cut and fill operations using tractor drawn scrapers, box scrapers, graders, crawler shovels, back tractors, bulldozers, and even a dragline. After treating the pit shafts and regrading the spoil to form suitable and stable landforms, the surface was spread with a soil-forming medium and cultivated. Generally a layer of topsoil was spread on pitches to speed up the establishment of grass. Elsewhere several grades of sewage sludge were used as an alternative to improve the shale, while still other areas were seeded direct onto the bare shale.\textsuperscript{81}

Between 1968 and 1981 2,153 of Stoke’s derelict acres were reclaimed, at a cost of around £2000 per acre.\textsuperscript{82} Both the park and the lake won Civic Trust Awards. Looking through the extensive press cuttings about reclamation preserved in a file in the City Archives gives a sense of the enormous pride in these achievements, the City even conducting sold-out coach tours of the ongoing reclamation work. The Forest Park was opened by the Queen and Westport Lake by the Prime Minister Edward Heath. David Knight summed up the achievement of the landscape transformations that occurred in the city, in a way which nonetheless celebrated its industrial past:

Stoke is not, and may never be, a garden city, but it already is, and will increasingly become a landscape city. As other landscapes reflect their geology and historical usage, so the newly reclaimed landscape speaks of an unprecedented upheaval wrought by 200 years of rapid industrial expansion. The colliery spoil heaps’ contours are mellowed now and clothed in green, but even when its hillside forest matures it will remain unmistakably a work of man. The old railway network transformed into leafy walkways will forever tell the story of when steam was king. This is as it should be. It is also fitting that those who toiled in mine and factory, and their descendants, should benefit from the money that has finally returned to deal with the muck that helped to create it.\textsuperscript{83}

Of course, despite these efforts, in the long-term the city failed to significantly re-orientate its economy or even to change the image of the city. Matthew Rice has questioned the surfeit of

\textsuperscript{81} Central Forest Park Reclamation project (1974)
\textsuperscript{82} Richard Flenley, ‘Derelict Land Becomes Parkland at Stoke-on-Trent’, Parks 6.2 (1981), p. 31
\textsuperscript{83} David Knight, ‘Reclamation of derelict land in Stoke-on-Trent’, Parks and Recreation, July 1979, p. 11-20, p. 20.
useless green space in the city, and lamented more was not done to preserve the city’s unique industrial heritage.\textsuperscript{84} Improvements to landscape, however laudable, were certainly not sufficient for the task of economic regeneration and many of the more optimistic predictions about the benefits of landscape renewal read today as inadequate and naïve. Land Use Consultant’s plan for Stoke-on-Trent had opined that, ‘Hopefully by the year 1980 many of the unpleasant popular misconceptions about the potteries will be forgotten.’ The focus on environmental improvement as a response to labour market failure is a peculiar feature of the plan for Stoke and many like it, and though they undoubtedly made blighted areas pleasanter, it would be hard to argue that they succeeded in the aim of shifting the economies – or even the conceptions - of such places, as unhelpful but widespread clichés about post-industrial ‘crap towns’ show.\textsuperscript{85}

If Stoke’s attempts to realign its economic fortunes through landscape renewal must be deemed a noble failure, the way that it re-interpreted post-industrial wastelands as places of potential value was of lasting value and influence. The professionalisation of urban ecology was largely a phenomenon of the 1980s, but it arguably grew out of the story I have been describing here.\textsuperscript{86} W.G. Teagle’s 1978 \textit{The Endless Village} is widely recognised as an influential book for the birth of urban nature conservation. It surveyed the rich wildlife of Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Teagle argued that the ‘term “industrial wasteland” is derogatory, and in the popular mind it conjures up a picture of lifeless desolation. Yet ironically, these old sites often provide some of the richest wildlife habitats in the West Midlands.’\textsuperscript{87} John Thompson, the Regional Officer who had commissioned the report, had been involved in the ecological restoration in Stoke. The switch

\textsuperscript{84} Matthew Rice, \textit{The Lost City of Stoke-on-Trent} (London, 2010)
\textsuperscript{85} \url{https://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/news/stoke-on-trent-news/bad-things-people-say-stoke-1212341}
\textsuperscript{87} W.G. Teagle, \textit{The Endless Village} (Shrewsbury, 1978)
of the Nature Conservancy Council towards dealing with urban ecology was signalled by the 1978 report *Nature Conservation in Urban Areas*, which was commissioned from Land Use Consultants, and written by the landscape architect Lyndis Cole, who had also been heavily involved in the Stoke project.88

**Telford New Town**

The Ironbridge Gorge in Shropshire is one of the most beautiful places in England. Tourists visit it for its museums and industrial heritage sites, as the ‘Birthplace of the Industrial Revolution’, and as a UNESCO World Heritage site. I suspect many of them are surprised to find these historic industrial attractions embedded within such a lushly arcadian landscape, in which the River Severn carves through steep wooded hills on which dark reddish-brown brick buildings precariously perch. When John Piper and John Betjeman had visited the area for the Shell Guide to Shropshire in 1951 they found a ‘broken and forlorn’ landscape of ‘dead collieries, branch railways, tileworks and iron foundries [lying] among waste heaps now and then left bare for a common; sinister pools of black water’.89 There isn’t a hint of the satanic here now; indeed it is barely urban. Although the focus of visitors is exclusively on 18th and 19th century sights, the landscape they experience is in large part a result of a largely forgotten late-twentieth century history.

Ironbridge is one of a number of former settlements swallowed up within the sprawling new town of Telford. Telford is an odd place to visit. It is spread out, car-dependent, and has so little urban grain it makes earlier new towns like Harlow or Stevenage feel positively metropolitan. Another reason for Telford’s obscurity is that it has always been in the shadow of Milton Keynes, which it parallels in its original conception and ambition,

---

although Telford had its size and ambition clipped much more than Milton Keynes.\textsuperscript{90} Nevertheless, Telford is worthy of study, and celebration, as it shows the new town programme adapting to emerging problems and challenges of the 1970s, as well as an exceptionally complex regional context because of the area’s industrial history. Telford was the most extensive attempt in Britain to grapple with the issue of derelict land.\textsuperscript{91} The new town encompasses an area that was one of the birthplaces of the industrial revolution. Coal mining, ironworks, and ceramics all had a long history in the area, and the industrial decline of the area was a slow but long-term phenomenon, which accelerated after the Second World War.\textsuperscript{92}

Telford, intended to take overspill population from Birmingham and the West Midlands, was first designated on a smaller scale as Dawley New Town in 1963, and then in its expanded form in 1968. The 1960s plans had been written by the architect John Madin, and had architecture to the fore, with a high-rise modernist city centre. By the 1970s architecture had been abandoned as the lead discipline in the creation of the new town, with Don Fentner, the city architect, writing proudly of his low-density housing, ‘What you’ll see in Telford isn’t \textit{great} architecture, it isn’t the stuff that people fall down on their knees to but its good, warm liveable stuff that works.’\textsuperscript{93} In writing histories of post-war housing we have too often taken large-scale mass housing projects like Sheffield’s Park Hill as indicative, but this kind of proudly boring Telford approach is perhaps more indicative of the mainstream, and has much to recommend it. The city covered a spread-out area of some thirty-two square

\textsuperscript{90} In contrast to the growing literature on Milton Keynes, there is very little written on Telford, although there was a good official history written on the winding up of the Development Corporation, Maurice de Soissons, \textit{Telford: The Making of Shropshire’s New Town} (Shrewsbury, 1991)

\textsuperscript{91} Telford Draft Plan (1971)

\textsuperscript{92} Neil Cossons and Harry Sowden, \textit{Ironbridge, Landscape of Industry} (London, 1977), p. 16-17

\textsuperscript{93} Kate Wharton, ‘New Town Triumph’, \textit{The Architect} (August 1974), 27-8
miles, encompassing a series of existing towns and new neighbourhoods, ‘linked together
within a total Telford identity’. Landscape became the tool that would bind this disparate city
together, giving the town ‘unity, identity and character.’⁹⁴ Telford was unique amongst new
towns in having a Landscape Structure Plan that ranked equally with its basic development
plan. It aimed to create what the planners termed a ‘forest city’.⁹⁵

Telford is an area of strong contrasts. On the one hand you have a modern mixture of
futuristic shopping centres, forward looking factories and multi-styled housing estates. On the
other there are the bare-bricked industrial ruins, the older villages and towns, numerous little
pockets of meadow and woodland and the much bigger areas of mature parkland and the
wilder wooded places of the Ironbridge Gorge. Telford is a jigsaw of different elements.⁹⁶

Telford embarked on the largest land reclamation programme ever conducted in
Britain. The long history of industrial exploitation and subsequent decline had left the area
‘visually, economically and socially blighted by past industrial activities’⁹⁷, containing an
ugly and dangerous hodgepodge of disused mine shafts, derelict pools, and abandoned, yet
often still combustible, colliery spoil mounds. Telford produced what they called the
‘measles map’ showing the 5230 acres of blighted industrial landscape that had to be
reclaimed. Reclamation would ‘involve the finding and making safe of 2500-3000
mineshafts (some over 1000ft deep), the draining of hundreds of acres of water logged land,
removing and re-shaping of millions of tons of colliery spoil and the filling in and stabilising
of many areas undermined by shallow mine workings or affected by landslip conditions.’⁹⁸
Alongside mining spoil was the rubbish left by other defunct industries, including ‘blast
furnace slag (from the iron smelting process), boiler and furnace ash, foundry moulding sand,

⁹⁴ Telford Development Corporation, Telford Basic Plan 1970
⁹⁵ Notes on Landscape Structure Plan Meeting, 22nd June 1977
⁹⁶ Silkin Way booklet, no date, after 1977, consulted in Wellington Library.
⁹⁷ Telford DC Sixteenth annual report for the period ended 31st March 1979
ceramic shards from the brick, tile and refractory industries alongside more usual domestic refuse.  

Much of this landscape wasn’t just ugly, but was also dangerous. Mines closed before 1872 had been left unrecorded, those closed before 1911 had rarely received any precautions to make them safe. They presented a serious public safety hazard, especially to children, and were liable to emit noxious, poisonous, or explosive fumes and gases. They also imposed major restrictions on new development through the fear of settlement, subsidence, or collapse. A huge task of the development corporation was just to ascertain where all the mines were, before the task of stabilising and reclaiming them had even begun.

The landscape plan, which was written explicitly in light of ‘the emergence of greater awareness and interest in all environmental and ecological matters’, nevertheless saw potential as well as despair in derelict sites. ‘From a natural history point of view, probably the most valuable areas today are those areas of semi-natural landscape that have largely been produced unwittingly by the extractive and manufacturing industries. With the passage of time these areas of semi-natural landscape have developed on previously derelict, disturbed and unmanaged areas, and have in certain instances become of moderate and even high scenic value. Furthermore, because of their sheer variety and scale they have become exceedingly rich in wildlife. Ecological thinking (alongside the need for economy, and minimal maintenance) was a major reason that the landscapes created would be semi-natural rather than ornamental: although ‘mown grass, standard trees and decorative planting has civilised qualities, it is of comparatively low ecological value, and in certain respects of low environmental value.’ The landscape plan aimed to create a variety of habitats – mature

---

99 Whitcut, p. 8
100 Ibid.
101 Draft Landscape Structure Plan
woodland, scrub, meadows, heathland, marsh and farmland, each of which would contain ‘its own characteristic plant and animal species’. The existence in the area of many water-filled hollows formed by subsidence, known as flashes, such as the Priorslee Flash, Trench Pool, and the Madeley Court Pools, were celebrated as ‘particularly attractive focal points for recreation and provide a valuable habitat for a wide variety of wildlife.’

According to one estimate, Telford Development Corporation planted in excess of 5 million trees, using over 150 different cultivars and species, resulting in approximately 80m² of woodland for every resident of the town. The town had its own 25 acre nursery, where at any one time ‘over 160,000 shrubs and 70,000 trees [awaited] their appointed place in the Landscape Structure Plan.’ At the centre of the town was a 450 acre park, which featured flooded clay pits transformed into ornamental lakes, and a heather and rhododendron garden on top of a 100-foot-high pit mound. The Development Corporation made use of 121 miles of disused mineral tramways, railways, and canals to make ‘wildlife corridors’, not least the 14-mile Silkin Way which runs through the town. Total expenditure on reclamation work by the Development Corporation between 1970 and 1980 was approximately £8½ million, about 3-4% of the overall cost of the total new town development budget. Telford was a highly ambitious response to healing the scars of dereliction and deindustrialisation. The Development Corporation placed landscape at the heart of a 1979 pamphlet advertising the new town to potential inhabitants, using lushly romantic language:

New landscape is being created on a scale unknown in this country since the 18th century days of Capability Brown. Telford is one of the leading exponents of the 20th century professional skills of landscape architecture. The town is being given an evolving landscape harnessing the young vigorous shapes of disturbed soils of the past and merging them with massive earth moulding, tree planting and open grassland. The eventual effect will be to create a landscape unique in major urban areas of Britain and an interesting and exciting

---

103 ‘Information for Press Release’ (no date, late-1970s), Shropshire Archive, box 478
104 ‘Landscape General A file’
106 Whitcut, p. 25
projection of urban development philosophy. Each springtime, Telford is a blaze of colour from cascades of the three million daffodils and tulips planted alongside main roads and in the new leisure areas. An outdoor leisure area is gradually emerging at the heart of Telford where once derelict pools and abandoned colliery spoil mounds are being replaced by a 450 acre town park with its amphitheatre, giant sports arena, ornamental lakes, wooded walks, rugby, hockey and tennis facilities and, eventually, an arboretum, Go-skate rink and other facilities.¹⁰⁶

The plan for Telford is part of a discrete moment in planning history, where a new hyper-decentralised, polycentric city was envisioned, bound together by roads and landscape. Milton Keynes is the most famous of these plans, but a flavour can be seen too in plans for, amongst others, Ipswich, Peterborough, or Warrington new towns. In some ways this was a reinvestment in Ebenezer Howard’s original garden city conception of a merging of town and country, but it was fuelled by a utopian futurist understanding of changes brought about by an increasingly mobile and affluent population, as well as new technologies. It was a total rejection of the value of high-density urbanity that had dominated the imagination much 1960s planning.¹⁰⁷ As Terrence Bendixson described it, ‘the finite, even walled, city portrayed in Renaissance paintings (and its Victorian mill-and-cottages successor) was being replaced by a city composed of both town and country and bound together by the telephone and the car.’¹⁰⁸ In Telford this new urban form would emerge directly out of the carcass of the industrial past. Telford healed but did not erase this industrial past, as places resonant with industrial heritage within the designation, such as Ironbridge and Coalbrookdale were restored and celebrated as an integral part of the New Town project.¹⁰⁹ Through Telford we see the conservation and ecological movements as a feature of modernism, and not in opposition to it.

¹⁰⁶ Telford Leaflet, c. 1979 consulted in Wellington library.
¹⁰⁸ Terence Bendixson, The Peterborough Effect, Reshaping a City (1992), p. 69
¹⁰⁹ Ironbridge ’75 booklet, consulted in Wellington Library. WORK/14/3072 Ironbridge Coalbrookdale and the Severn Gorge Policy Plan Report (no date, 1968?)
Telford is the key monument to the set of ideas this article has described, which envisioned deindustrialised landscapes as the basis from which might be created a new type of society. Telford is a significant and relatively rare post-industrial success story, and (in common with other so-called Mark III New Towns) remains amongst the fastest growing towns or cities in the UK. Of course landscape renewal was only a part of the large-scale infrastructural programme the Development Corporation carried out at Telford, alongside a very active campaign to attract private sector investment – but the landscape improvements were a significant part of the economic and social changes of a radically and successfully transformed region.

Conclusion

In 1982 the journalist Ian Jack went on a pilgrimage in the footsteps of George Orwell to Wigan, where Orwell had famously visited a coal mine.

We stood among the saplings in what is known as The Three Sisters Recreation Area. There was bird-song, the distant rattle of a tractor, but no sign that here generations of men had toiled underground for miserable wages so that, in Orwell’s words, ‘you and I and the editor of the Times Lit Supp, and the Nancy poets and the Archbishop of Canterbury and Comrade X, author of Marxism for Infants’ might live decently’. No winding gear, no spoil heaps, no shaft, nothing but green. ‘Never mind’, said Mr Anderson, ‘you can say you stood on the site of Orwell’s pit.’

A deeply symbolic landscape of industry had declined into an equally symbolic landscape of dereliction. But the subsequent transformation into a landscape of recreation is a largely forgotten achievement, leaving nothing but trees, flowers, and birdsong.

The plans this article has focused on are those that emerged in the decade or so after 1966 and which envision new leisure oriented uses for landscapes scarred by the

111 Maurice de Soissons, Telford: The Making of Shropshire’s New Town (Shrewsbury, 1991) details the Development Corporation’s huge programme of attracting development to the area.
112 Ian Jack, Before the Oil Ran Out: Britain, 1977-87 (London, 1988)
environmental legacies of the extractive economy, most notably coal mining. But, reflecting the different trajectories, geographies, and timescales of deindustrialisation, derelict land increasingly became an issue seen to be affecting many more places than these classic mining areas, but one that struck at the very heart of cities. The Civic Trust’s 1977 booklet *Urban Wasteland* returns to an issue they had long campaigned about, but its cover, showing a derelict wilderness in Vauxhall in view of the Houses of Parliament, illustrated its argument that the location of the problem of derelict land had shifted from the periphery of national consciousness to the centre.¹¹³ The gathering pace of deindustrialisation meant that areas of dereliction were proliferating at an alarming rate, although they covered a range of types of places. These included vacant acres where comprehensive redevelopment, slum clearance and projected road building programmes had bulldozed areas but alternative uses had failed to materialise; industries devastated by deindustrialisation or that had been relocated through policies of decentralisation; areas suffering planning blight; docks closing due to containerisation; and land owned by various public bodies such as the railways being disposed at a painfully slow rate. In Tower Hamlets, for example, between 1964 and 1977 there was a 44% fall in the area of land within the borough occupied by factories, a 25% fall in the area of land occupied by utilities; a 38% fall in the area of land occupied by residential, commercial and public buildings, and a 20% and a 37% in the area occupied by docks and railways respectively. All this resulted in an astonishing 295% increase in derelict land.¹¹⁴

The causes behind this inner city dereliction were both various, and the diagnoses also much contested.¹¹⁵ These proliferating derelict landscapes gathered a tremendous symbolic

---

¹¹⁵ The three Inner Area Studies, published in 1977, were the Government’s official pronouncement on the issue. See Alice Coleman, ‘The Death of the Inner City: Cause and Cure’, *London Journal*, 6.1 (1980), p. 3-22, for a dissenting, but ultimately hugely influential, view that the inner city crisis was the result of government planning.
resonance as a physical manifestation, as well as a cause, of a range of issues gathered under the rubric of the inner city crisis.\textsuperscript{116} As Aaron Andrews has argued derelict land was both seen as a symptom and as a cause of decline.\textsuperscript{117} Deindustrialisation was also changing the way that people understood leisure; no longer was the free time engendered by automation and mechanization a positive thing, but the focus was increasingly about levels of unemployment. Despite the huge efforts to tackle the issue of derelict land the goal was ever receding. The \textit{Derelict Land Survey} of 1982 found that there had been a total growth of 2,500 acres since 1974. This 5\% overall growth across England covered much more substantial increases in areas such as Merseyside, the West Midlands, or the North West.\textsuperscript{118} The Economic and Social Research Council summarised the situation: ‘Disinvestment, especially by manufacturing industry, has increased the stock of dereliction faster than ameliorative policies have brought land into productive use.’\textsuperscript{119}

The Thatcher government had its own ambitious plans for derelict land – from urban development corporations and enterprise zones to Garden Festivals and industrial museums, as well as a large scale expansion of the Derelict Land Grant; by 1984 an area the size of Grimsby was being reclaimed every two months.\textsuperscript{120} Whether there was something fundamentally new, or Thatcherite, about the approach is a question beyond the scope of this article, although Sam Wetherell has recently argued that Garden Festivals pioneered a fundamentally new kind of urbanism.\textsuperscript{121} Pierre Botcherby’s account of Operation

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item[118] \textit{Urban Wasteland Now} (London, 1988), p. 19
\item[120] The total amount of derelict land decreased by about 11\% between 1982 and 1988.
\end{thebibliography}
Groundwork in St Helens suggests that the main development in government sponsored renewal strategies during the 1980s was a greater emphasis on voluntary and community participation. Derelict land in inner cities was nevertheless an important area where the essentially neoliberal argument that the inner city crisis was in fact the result of Government action. It is suggestive that Alice Coleman, who would become a favoured urban thinker of Margaret Thatcher, made extensive studies of the issue of derelict land in cities, before her more well-known work on public housing. But the sheer number of government projects aimed at the issue throughout the 1980s suggests that, in common with many areas of 1980s inner city policy, there was an expansion rather than a diminution of the role of the state. The famous photograph of Thatcher striding across a desolate wasteland in the Tyneside Enterprise Zone is indicative that derelict landscapes retained a potent symbolism. The representative reuse of derelict areas of this period were not for recreational uses, but instead distribution centres and out-of-town business parks. The closing down of collieries also went from a relatively consensual project, to one that left considerable and lasting bitterness, which effected how the new landscapes of retail and business were understood, even when they provided much needed jobs:

As a child, I heard, smelt, tasted on the air even, the collieries around, and, from the top of the hill where my father, then a pit wages clerk, launched his model aeroplanes and where I first learned the difference between the small copper butterfly and the little skipper, I could look down on Cortonwood where my grandfather started work, at the age of ten, in 1887. What I see now from the same spot is the 200-hectare Cortonwood Business and Retail Park with a Next, Argos, Boots, distribution warehouses and call centre, a lakeside residential area, the Dearne Valley Parkway and behind them the graded slopes of the spoil heaps.

grassed over and planted with trees. For some reason, the sight of this ‘great development success story’ makes me frustrated and angry.\textsuperscript{126}

Feelings of despair and anger are widespread around the issue of deindustrialisation. The polarisation between different parts of the United Kingdom has grown since the 1970s, and is at the time of writing is a much publicised political issue with the Conservative party’s ‘levelling up’ agenda.\textsuperscript{127} Such areas have become increasingly politically salient, whether it is through the neologism of the ‘Red Wall’, MP Lisa Nandy’s ‘towns’, or the idea of ‘left behind Britain’. It is striking in this context to note the almost utopian optimism of an earlier period, even if it was a brief moment. The ability to envision an alternative future is something critics have argued has been lost since the 1970s.\textsuperscript{128} The future these plans predicted largely failed to emerge, but they give a more complex portrait of the how the process of deindustrialisation was understood by elites as it was happening, showing how, at least initially, these derelict areas were simultaneously conceived as landscapes of both hope and crisis.