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**POSTWAR RECONSTRUCTION AND THE
QUESTIONS OF POPULAR HOUSING
PROVISION, 1939-1951**

- The debates and implementation of policy, with particular
reference to Coventry and Portsmouth -

(in two volumes)

Volume I

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Submitted in fulfilment of the degree
of PhD in Social History at the
University of Warwick

Centre for the Study of Social History
University of Warwick

June 1993

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am deeply indebted to Dr Nick Tiratsoo, who has been my chief supervisor. He managed to keep me at it and made it possible for me to complete this thesis. I would also like to thank Dr Tony Mason and Dr Barbara Weinberger for their assistance and encouragement.

I am truly grateful to Mrs Ros Lucas, who not only grappled with my handwriting but also typed and retyped, with patience, to produce this excellent final copy. The staff of many libraries and archives have given me much valuable help, most notably those at the University of Warwick Library, the Coventry City Record Office and the Portsmouth City Records Office. Of the colleagues, past and present, at the Centre for the Study of Social History, I am particularly grateful to Junichi Hasegawa and Peter Thompson for their help during the course of this research.

Finally, I would like to thank Natsuko and Kinya Tsubaki for the unfailing encouragement and support they have given me over the years.

Tatsuya Tsubaki

Abstract

The existing historiography has done much to highlight the significance of the 1940s in the evolution of social policy in Great Britain. This thesis is an attempt to assess whether there was a new departure in popular housing provision in this period. It deals with the housing debate during the Second World War and examines its impact on the implementation of housing policy under the 1945 Labour Government. It explores the views of housing experts and politicians, as well as those of the public on various aspects of housing during the war and considers how they were reflected in the formulation of postwar housing policy. It also looks at the ways in which the policy was implemented at local level between 1945 and 1951. A central aim of this thesis is to examine the role and influence of architects and planners both in the process of moulding policy and in the actual practice of providing houses. This thesis will argue that despite the impact of the war which opened up fresh possibilities for applying new ideas in popular housing provision, the influence of these experts were very much circumscribed by the difficult economic circumstances of the late 1940s and by the existence of conservative, anti-planning forces in society.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AASTA	Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants
ABT	Association of Building Technicians
AMC	Association of Municipal Corporations
APRR	Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction
ATO	Architects' and Technicians' Organisation
CHAC	Central Housing Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Health
CIAM	Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPRE	Council for the Preservation of Rural England
LCC	London County Council
MARS	Modern Architectural Research Group
NEC	National Executive Committee of the Labour Party
NCSS	National Council of Social Service
NFBTE	National Federation of Building Trades Employers
NFBTO	National Federation of Building Trades Operatives
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
TCPA	Town and Country Planning Association
TPI	Town Planning Institute

INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with the debates about, and implementation of, policy in the field of popular housing provision in the periods immediately before and after the Second World War. These years represented a crucial phase in the evolution of the social services, including local authority housing provision, and paved the way for the implementation of extensive social reform. The impact of the Beveridge proposals (for cradle-to-grave social security, a free health service and full employment) has been the main focus of the social policy literature dealing with the period,¹ but it was also William Beveridge himself who named squalor as one of the five giants to be slain and acknowledged the importance of housing and town planning as an element of comprehensive social policy.² In the main, this thesis explores the views and design solutions proffered by housing experts (architects and town planners), with particular reference to the idea of flats as homes. It also examines how these ideas intersected with public opinion and the housing programmes of political parties during the war, and considers whether they had any influence on the actual practice of providing houses as it developed in the postwar period.

Several studies have looked at various aspects of popular housing provision in the period under review here. As Alison Ravetz has pointed out, central to the housing debates of the interwar period and the war years was the so-called houses versus flats controversy:

throughout the 1930s and 40s there was a heated controversy about the relative merits of flats and cottages. This was the more spirited because it was an extension of the old debate about tenements for the poor and the possibility, or desirability, of urbanizing the working classes. Dressed up as the modern, labour-saving flat, the new council tenements of the 1930s did gain a lot of support from housing reformers and women's organizations, but eventually the general consensus was that flats were unsuitable for the English (if not British) way of life.³

In her earlier, seminal work on local authority flats in the 1930s, Ravetz likewise viewed them as a direct outgrowth of the tenement tradition in England, made more acceptable by the provision of modern facilities and greater privacy. These flats were essentially seen as a similar response to a set of economical and social constraints as had operated in the past: the need to achieve high density on a limited piece of expensive land for those tenants who, by nature of their work and social activities and because of poverty, had to live in the central areas of towns. She also contended that some housing experts' interest in continental flats was more ideological than real but that it nevertheless produced 'a conscious reorientation towards flats' in English local authority housing, which found some official recognition in the 1940s.⁴ Ravetz, in her postwar history of town planning, also provided an excellent overview of wartime

discussions among architects and town planners but unfortunately she hardly mentioned housing.⁵

In contrast to the judgement given by Ravetz, recent assessments of the housing debate in this period have argued for an altogether more positive consensus on flats. Thus Nicholas Bullock states quite definitely that:

During the 1940s the case for the flat was not made ... by architects determined to realise some fragment of an 'ideal Corbusian Ville Radieuse', but by sociologists and planners concerned to avoid the most obvious failings of inter-war housing. Far from being seen as the threat to family life, or the challenge to the fabric of society, as it is now so often portrayed, the flat, combined with mixed development and the neighbourhood unit, was officially championed as the way to better housing for families of all types, and the means of securing and reinforcing the sense of communities within our cities.⁶

Ruth Owens gives a rather more measured, qualified appraisal of the debate on the role of flats in postwar housing. Like Bullock, she shows how, during the war, the architectural argument for visual variety and contrast and a growing concern to achieve socially-balanced residential communities had combined to give rise to the idea of mixed development (i.e. provision of varied dwelling types including houses and flats) which would cater for a broad range of the population, both in terms of household size and age and social class. It was the idea of mixed development, in

Owen's view, which allowed architects, town planners and politicians to justify the introduction of high flats in local authority housing. At the time of the debate high flats were thought to be necessary to achieve high density in urban areas but were also known to be unpopular and, on their own, more expensive to build than houses.⁷

As far as actual studies of postwar housing are concerned, a number of fairly distinct but overlapping strands can be identified for the purpose of this thesis.⁸ Firstly, a predominant concern in the existing historiography has been the formulation of housing policy at the centre and the ways in which Whitehall dealt with the housing problem. General historical studies of this type (which deal with or touch upon the postwar period) include those by David Donnison and Clare Ungerson, John Short and A.E. Holmans, which have all provided detailed accounts of the vicissitudes in housing policy over the years.⁹ Martin Daunton has sought to unravel a complex web of social, economic and political factors affecting successive policies which has produced major changes in the tenurial system in the last 70 years.¹⁰ John Burnett has written a more socially-orientated survey, covering over a century and a half, and focusing on changes in housing conditions and the evolution of mass housing.¹¹ J.A. Chenier, on the other hand, has looked in detail at the formulation of housing policy under the 1945 Labour Government.¹²

Secondly, there are local studies and case studies which mainly relate the experience of local authority housing provision in particular localities. Chris Bacon has

concentrated on so-called deck access housing and examines the chequered history of the prime example of this type, the Park Hill estate at Sheffield.¹³ Anthony Sutcliffe and Roger Smith, in their volume on the history of Birmingham, have discussed housing in the city, in both its architectural and town planning aspects.¹⁴ Miles Horsey and Stefan Muthesius consider local authority housing in postwar Norwich.¹⁵

Thirdly, there are works of a primarily architectural nature such as that by E.R. Scoffham which looks at the development of housing design in the postwar period.¹⁶ Likewise R.S. Haynes, N.J. Sampson and N.M. Day all concentrate on architects' ideas, particularly in relation to housing schemes undertaken by the London County Council in the early 1950s.¹⁷ Brian Finnimore examines the development of industrialised building methods in the postwar period as they were applied to popular housing provision.¹⁸ Furthermore, several studies have picked up the story where Ravetz left off and seek to explain the reasons for the great increase in the use of high flats by local authorities during the 1960s.¹⁹

In one way or another, the significance of the Second World War in setting a new standard in postwar housing is acknowledged in all of these studies but none deals in detail with developments in popular housing provision prior to 1950, the war years and the immediate period of reconstruction which followed. The existing housing literature has also tended to discuss housing design, policy and provision in a vacuum without due consideration of the

wider context existing at the time. In this connection, several recent works in urban history and politics have adopted a more integrated approach to the study of popular housing provision. Essentially this approach has involved detailed examination of the local dimension in the evolution of social policy, where the focus is on the inter-relationship of economy, society and politics in a particular locality and the relationships between central and local government. Thus, for earlier periods, Sue Goss, John Marriott and Michael Savage have all demonstrated how social issues such as housing, health care and relief of poverty became crucial elements of local politics and how local Labour Parties and other working-class organisations seized upon them to make their claim on local government.²⁰ Robert Ryder, Robert Finnigan and Madge Dresser (all contributors to the volume on interwar council housing edited by Daunton) have looked at the process by which local authorities responded to directives from the centre and decided upon the scale of their housebuilding programme.²¹ Nick Tiratsoo has closely examined the fate of reconstruction planning in Coventry and Hull after the Second World War and has shown, among other things, the importance of interactions between the local authorities and central government.²²

This thesis, drawing on the various approaches identified in the existing historiography, attempts to apply them to the study of housing in the 1940s and examines this historical juncture in detail. In particular, it takes its cue from the integrated approach to housing and seeks to

place questions of popular housing provision in the period under review within the wider social and political context. Moreover, the rather contrasting judgements passed by commentators on the central housing debate of the period also calls for reassessment.

Thus, the first aim of this thesis is to trace the housing debate from the 1930s through to the Second World War. It seeks to identify the protagonists and to examine their arguments closely and will try to assess the outcome at the end of the war. Ostensibly about the choice of ideal dwelling types, the debate also touched upon wider issues such as the purpose of town planning, the nature of housing settlements and the idea of community. On the whole, the debate remained very much on a theoretical level before the war, confined to architects, town planners and housing reformers. It was the destruction of major cities in the war which gave these experts an opportunity to present a wider audience with their various ideas on housing, as extensive popular housing provision after the war became a practical necessity. Plans for people's homes undoubtedly occupied a prominent place in the physical rebuilding of the country. Hence the houses versus flats debate of the 1930s took on a new urgency and, throughout the war, the shape of postwar housing was a major topic of concern among the public. A very important dimension, one which has perhaps not been sufficiently considered, is the part played by popular opinion in the wartime discussion of housing. For what was probably the first time in the history of popular housing provision, experts and interested bodies tried to

find out the views of ordinary people, so that their needs and desires might be reflected in the plans for postwar housing. This thesis will explore the nature of this popular opinion on housing in detail and also look at the responses from the professionals to see how their views intersected with those of the public.

The official plans for the design of postwar housing prepared during the war certainly reflected growing agreement among architects and town planners. At the same time, however, these design solutions required an actual government policy on housing provision, to be implemented by housing authorities in each locality. The second aim of the thesis, then, is to consider wartime politics, in relation to the evolution of postwar housing policy. In view of the 1945 General Election, the thesis looks at the housing programmes of political parties, with particular reference to the Labour Party's policy making, and then examines how Labour's policy was implemented at local level during the period of reconstruction. Thus the thesis seeks to relate various aspects of housing, design, policy and provision, to the wider context of political and social history. And in doing so, a central aim is to illuminate two major themes in the general historiography of the period, namely, the consensus argument and the argument about the growing importance of professionals in British society.

The consensus argument refers to the nature of British postwar politics and has its origins in the conflicting evaluation of the wartime politics of the coalition Government. The argument also relates directly to the

period of reconstruction after the war and the ways in which the reconstruction process was viewed by various commentators. The idea of wartime consensus has been made famous by Paul Addison. He has argued that the Second World War placed on the agenda the major items of postwar welfare reform and, in contrast to the party hostilities of the 1930s, created a new middle ground upon which the political parties would henceforth compete for power. Thus there was now an emerging consensus between the Conservatives and Labour, a common approach particularly in the field of social policy. This was buttressed by a leftward shift in public opinion during the war and the Labour victory in the 1945 General Election was seen as a vindication of the process. In Addison's famous phrase, the new consensus 'fell, like a branch of ripe plums, into the lap of Mr. Attlee'. Addison's thesis of 'Attlee's consensus', modulating into the 'Butskellism' (based on the supposed consensus between the opposing Chancellors of the Exchequer, Hugh Gaitskell and R.A. Butler) of the 1950s, has played a significant role in establishing the idea of a 'postwar consensus'.²³

More recently Addison's views have been questioned and qualified by other scholars.²⁴ Kenneth Morgan, while accepting the importance of social radicalism engendered by the war, also demonstrates how, in several spheres of social policy, the 1945 Labour Government went beyond the agreed limits of coalition policies.²⁵ If anything it was the singular achievements of the Attlee administration that provided the benchmark against which the following years

were to be judged. Contrasting this with the fate of reconstruction politics after the First World War, Morgan notes: 'A far higher priority was given to social expenditure than after 1918. A prime emphasis was placed on full employment ... Britain after 1945 was a less tension-ridden, more unified society than that which emerged after the Lloyd George era after 1918, overlain as the latter was by the aura of corruption and adventurism. This time, the vision of a "land fit for heroes" ... was not wantonly forgotten or betrayed'.²⁶ Stephen Brooke likewise argues against the idea of a political consensus in his study of the Labour Party during the war. In particular, he charts the course of the Party's policy making process in such areas as education, health and social security and suggests that Labour retained a distinctive edge in its programme. He also illustrates how the Labour leaders used the wartime coalition Government to achieve at least a measure of that programme.²⁷ For both Morgan and Brooke, then, what emerged out of the crucible of war was a distinctive Labour Government, in tune with the majority of the nation, embarking on an extensive programme of social reform under difficult economic circumstances. If the term consensus has any purchase in this reading of the 1940s, it refers to a situation that was very much Labour's own creation.

Kevin Jefferys also attacks the idea of an emerging consensus in social policy during the war. He shows that there were deep-seated differences between the Conservatives and Labour over such issues as the Beveridge proposals (R.A. Butler was credited as saying that he detected among the

Conservatives 'a feeling that Beveridge is a sinister old man, who wishes to give away a great deal of other people's money') and that the Conservative dominance within the coalition Government checked any move towards more radical policies. In the event, only two major pieces of social legislation (the 1944 Education Act and the new system of family allowances) reached the statute book before the end of the war and the White Papers remained vague enough in content to allow for very different interpretations by the respective parties. Jefferys thus concludes:

The creation of the welfare state should not be seen simply as the working out of agreed wartime reforms; its introduction was ultimately dependent upon the particular aspirations and distinctive approach of Attlee's Labour administration.²⁸

Jefferys, however, does not rule out the notion of consensus altogether. In fact, in his recent, fuller account of wartime politics, he appears to endorse the idea of a 'retreat to consensus' after 1947. He argues that the Conservatives came to accept the welfare reforms in the wake of a landslide defeat while, in the emerging climate of the Cold War and being shaken by a series of economic crises, Labour began to softpedal on physical planning and embraced Keynesian demand management of the economy.²⁹

From a slightly different angle, Jose Harris has also questioned the existence of a consensus and argued that the intellectual discussions during the war failed to promote an agreed theoretical basis for extensive provision of social welfare:

The consequence was that, in spite of the profusion of ideas that surrounded its conception, the Welfare State came into being with no clearly defined perception of welfare and no coherent theory of the State. This did not affect its short-term implementation, since democratic pressures in the 1940s and '50s overwhelmingly supported extension of State welfare; but in the long term it left the Welfare State peculiarly vulnerable to changes in political and economic climate, and to attacks from more rigorous and dogmatic intellectual rivals.³⁰

More significantly, those on both the left and right of the political spectrum have accepted, explicitly or implicitly, that there was a social policy consensus at the end of the war and have reacted against it in different ways. Ralph Miliband, a left-wing critic of Labour, has long pointed to 'the congruity of views between Labour and Conservative leaders' which made for moderation, in relation to the shape of the postwar settlement, and has argued that this served the progressive cause badly. He has been particularly critical of the Labour leadership for failing to give voice to the popular radicalism engendered by the war.³¹ More recently, John Saville has also emphasised the emergence of political consensus as a constraint and argued that the history of the Labour Party since 1945 'has been a sorry tale':

The uneven, diffuse but genuine radicalism of so many of the British people at the end of the war

has been largely dissipated, and their historical conservatism in political and social attitudes have now become a good deal more pronounced.³²

Correlli Barnett, on the right, has blamed the existence of a social policy consensus at the end of the war for Britain's subsequent economic decline. Barnett argues that the war exposed the inefficiencies and backwardness of Britain's industrial economy, while it also gave rise to ideas about 'New Jerusalem', a vision of a better Britain after the war, which was assiduously preached to the public with pernicious effects by a motley collection of idealistic 'do-gooders' (of which Beveridge was a prime example). The vision had also infected important sections of the political establishment by the end of the war, so that instead of devoting all possible resources and effort to rebuilding and modernising its industry, Britain chose, wrongly in his view, to give overriding priority to social reconstruction - social welfare reforms and a commitment to a massive housebuilding programme.³³ Thus, as Barnett argues in relation to housing:

It was Britain's own free choice - the choice of governments and electorate alike - to relegate the physical re-creation of her industrial base to a very poor second place in her order of building priorities. Instead of starting with a new workshop so as to become rich enough to afford a family villa, John Bull opted for the villa straightaway.³⁴

Addison's argument for a positive social policy consensus was in part informed by Arthur Marwick's idea of the growth of 'middle opinion' in the 1930s, comprising of progressive intellectuals, pressure groups and centrist politicians. These bodies and individuals had witnessed the failure of laissez faire in the economic crisis of the interwar period and had started to argue for economic planning and extensive provision of social welfare, thereby laying the groundwork for 'the mixed economy' and all-party acceptance of 'a welfare state' which was allegedly achieved in the 1940s.³⁵ The importance of the professionals in moulding this 'middle opinion' has been suggested most recently by Harold Perkin in his major reinterpretation of English history over the past century. He sees the rise of professionals and of the professional ideal as the clue to explaining much of the social change in the England of the last one hundred years. Instead of the horizontal division of social class being the organising principle of society there has emerged a new, alternative form of social structure, based around vertical interest groups of competing professionals. This 'professional society' is defined as 'one structured around career hierarchies rather than class, one in which people find their place according to trained expertise and the service they provide rather than the possession or lack of inherited wealth or acquired capital'. Its ideal was that of 'a functional society based on expertise and the avoidance of waste, especially waste of the most valuable asset in a complex, highly specialized economy: human resources'.³⁶ Perkin argues that

'professionalisation' steadily permeated all spheres of social and economic life in the course of this century. Ever growing numbers and types of experts (including doctors, lawyers, architects, engineers, teachers, civil servants and local government officers), with specialised knowledge and skills, were being organised into vocational associations, which regarded their main function as the provision of a service rather than the making of profit. In due course, these professional groups came to be incorporated into many areas of the government policy-making process, as they increasingly defined the problems to be tackled and the range of solutions which could be contemplated. In particular, for Perkin, the growing role of professionalism and the growing influence of the professional ideal underpinned the evolution of extensive welfare in the 1930s and 1940s. According to Perkin, the role of the doctors, social workers, teachers and town planners amply illustrates 'the way in which the welfare professions contributed directly, both in policy making and in day-to-day practice, to the development of the welfare state'. And as he explains,

the welfare professions were not passive spectators of the rise of the welfare state: they were active partners whose influence on the kind, pace and structure of provision was often crucial, if not indeed decisive.³⁷

As will be seen from the above, the consensus thesis and the argument about the rise of the professionals are in some ways related. In claiming the triumph of the

professional ideal in shaping social policy, Perkin assumes the existence of an all-pervasive consensus on social welfare. Addison, on the other hand, by arguing for the emergence of a widespread elite agreement on policy goals, supports the idea of the increasing importance of non-political, professional solutions in social policy. Historians sympathetic to Labour generally stress the crucial role played by the Party in putting social reconstruction on the agenda. Meanwhile Barnett has argued that the consensus on social welfare provision was an unmitigated disaster for the long-term viability of the British economy, for which the blame must be laid on a small group of social reformers (and by implication, on the welfare professions) who, in his view, were unrepresentative and unrealistic in their visions of postwar Britain. Interestingly, Charles Webster has recently argued against attaching importance to 'the establishment of consensus as the basis for innovation in health policy' and, in particular, against claiming the emergence of consensus as the main impetus for the formation of the National Health Service. In his view, the consensual approach has involved concentration on the role of medical interest groups and the civil service and a shift of attention away from government, political parties and the wider context of social conflict. Hence Webster argues that in the existing literature the medical profession was undeservedly granted a predominant role, both in the initiation of increased government intervention in health care and in the shaping of the

National Health Service, in comparison to the creative part played by Aneurin Bevan and the labour movement.³⁸

This thesis will try to assess whether there was an emergent consensus on the issue of popular housing provision and will also examine the role and the influence of the housing professionals, mainly architects and town planners in this process. It will approach the problem by gauging the extent and nature of consensus on several different levels (i.e. the professional, the political and the popular) and in local as well as national contexts, and will look at the ways in which they intersected with each other, in order to consider, for instance, whether the ideas put forward by architects and town planners had indeed triumphed, as the argument about the rise of the professionals suggests. It is also hoped that the case studies in the later chapters will provide some concrete evidence on whether or not, in housing terms, 'New Jerusalem' had in fact been realised in the 1940s.

The thesis is divided into three parts, broadly reflecting the chronology of the period under review. The first three chapters (Chapter 1, 2 and 3) examine the origins of the wartime housing debate and its many ramifications during the 1930s. The next four chapters (Chapters 4 to 7) are devoted to the developments during the Second World War, with the chapters assessing, in turn, the housing professions, public opinion, the coalition Government and the political parties. The three following chapters, (Chapter 8, 9 and 10) are case studies of two of the blitzed towns, Portsmouth and Coventry, and look at

their respective experiences in the planning and implementation of housing policy during the period of reconstruction. Chapter 11 presents some conclusions.

Footnotes

- 1 See, for example, P. Thane Foundations of the Welfare State (1982) Ch. 7; A. Deacon and J. Bradshaw Reserved for the Poor. The Means Test in British Social Policy (Oxford 1983) Ch. 3; D. Fraser The Evolution of the British Welfare State. A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution (Second Edition, 1984) pp. 107-222.
- 2 W.H. Beveridge The Pillars of Security (1943) pp. 167-174 and passim.
- 3 A. Ravetz The Government of Space. Town Planning in Modern Society (1986) pp. 50-51.
- 4 A. Ravetz 'From Working Class Tenements to Modern Flat: local authorities and multi-storey housing between the wars', in A. Sutcliffe (ed.) Multi-Storey Living. The British Working-Class Experience (1974).
- 5 A. Ravetz Remaking Cities. Contradictions of the Recent Urban Environment (1980) Chs 1 and 2.
- 6 N. Bullock 'Plans for post-war housing in the UK: the case for mixed development and the flat' Planning Perspectives Vol. 2 No. 1 (Jan. 1987) p. 94.
- 7 G.R. Owens 'Mixed Development in Local Authority Housing in England and Wales 1945-1970' (PhD Dissertation, University College London 1987) Ch. 2.
- 8 The field is a huge one encompassing housing policy, finance (rents and subsidies), housing management, workings of the housing market, design and building, housing politics etc. For a good historical overview (covering the last hundred years), of more important

- aspects of popular housing provision, see S. Lowe and D. Hughes (eds) A New Century of Social Housing (Leicester 1991).
- 9 D. Donnison and C. Ungerson Housing Policy (Harmondsworth 1982); J.R. Short Housing in Britain. The Post-War Experience (1982); A.E. Holmans Housing Policy in Britain. A History (1987).
- 10 M.J. Daunton 'Introduction', in M.J. Daunton (ed.) Councillors and tenants: local authority housing in English cities, 1919-1939 (Leicester 1984) pp. 1-38 and idem Property-Owning Democracy? Housing in Britain (1987).
- 11 J. Burnett Social History of Housing 1815-1985 (Second Edition, 1986).
- 12 J.A. Chenier 'The Development and Implementation of Postwar Housing Policy under the Labour Government' (DPhil Dissertation, Oxford 1984).
- 13 C. Bacon Park Hill in its Social Context (Department of Town and Regional Planning, University of Sheffield, Occasional Paper 63) (Sheffield 1985) and idem The Rise and Fall of Deck Access Housing (Department of Town and Regional Planning, University of Sheffield Occasional Paper 64) (Sheffield 1986).
- 14 A. Sutcliffe and R. Smith History of Birmingham Volume III. Birmingham 1939-1970 (1974) Chs VII and XIII.
- 15 M. Horsey and S. Muthesius Provincial Mixed Development. Norwich Council Housing 1955-1973 (Norwich 1986).
- 16 E.R. Scoffham The Shape of British Housing (1984).

- 17 R.S. Haynes 'Design and Image in English Urban Housing 1945-1957. A Study of the Influence of Social Ideas and Attitudes on Architectural Design' (MPhil Dissertation, University College London 1976); N.J. Sampson 'Towards a "Human" Architecture in Britain c.1940-1957' (MSc Dissertation, University College London 1985); N.M. Day 'The Role of the Architect in Post-war State Housing. A case study of the housing work of the London County Council 1939-1956' (PhD Dissertation, University of Warwick 1988).
- 18 B. Finnimore 'The Industrialisation of Building: Building Systems and Social Housing in Postwar Britain 1942-1975' (PhD Dissertation, University College London 1986).
- 19 See E.W. Cooney 'High Flats in Local Authority Housing in England and Wales since 1945', in A. Sutcliffe (ed.) Multi-Storey Living. The British Working-Class Experience; R. McCutcheon 'Technological change and social need: the case of high-rise flats' Research Policy Vol. 4 (1975) pp. 262-289 and idem 'High Flats in Britain 1945 to 1975', in Conference of Socialist Economists Political Economy and the Housing Question (1975); P. Dunleavy The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain, 1945-1975. A Study of Corporate Power and Professional Influence in the Welfare State (Oxford 1981); A.N.F. Marmot 'How High Should They Live? The Role of Architects and Planners in the Design of High Rise Housing in England and Wales, 1945-1980' (PhD Dissertation, University of California 1984); M. Horsey

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CHAPTER 1 Architectural modernism and popular housing provision

In the 1930s, the questions of popular housing provision became a matter of considerable discussion: how to provide the majority of working class people with decent houses and better living conditions. One of the major themes in the housing debate of the decade was the issue of desirable dwelling types. Thus 'The battle of flats versus cottages is now raging in housing quarters',¹ wrote B.S. Townroe in 1936. He was a member of the Housing Committee of the London County Council (LCC) and a respected writer on the housing problem. The Prince of Wales lent his voice to the slum clearance campaign. The Times reported the Prince's keen interest in 'its solution by means of blocks of flats', being himself 'acquainted with schemes both at home and abroad where that method has been adopted'.² George Orwell was advocating flats as the solution to the problems of rehousing.³

The houses versus flats controversy seems to be a perennial topic in the history of English housing. Yet there were a number of factors which helped it come to the fore in the 1930s. A shift in government housing policy towards slum clearance and central redevelopment questioned the wisdom of providing cottages with gardens on suburban housing estates. This type of housing development - houses built to a density of twelve per acre, in informal and picturesque layout, surrounded by greenery - was identified with garden city principles and represented mainstream

thinking on housing and town planning of the day, both in public schemes and houses built by private enterprise. More importantly, however, the 1930s coincided with the slow introduction into England of modern architecture. An active minority, mainly of architects, took up its cause and made their views public in writing, through exhibitions and by their buildings. They contributed to the housing debate by criticising the existing form of residential development and called for solutions on modern lines.

This chapter will explore, in the main, some of the ideas about a new form of housing development put forward by its advocates, and look at their achievements in the 1930s. Most of these proponents of modern flats identified themselves with modern architecture as it developed in the interwar years in several other European countries. Accordingly, the first section of this chapter will give a brief account of important developments taking place in modernist thinking on housing in a number of countries in the 1920s.

In the 1920s, Germany was one of the countries where the new ideas of modern architects were most widely applied in public housing. In common with several other European countries, Germany was suffering from a severe shortage of dwellings due to the cessation of building during the First World War. The increase in marriages and the influx of refugees from eastern Europe exacerbated the situation. The country also had a legacy of high density tenement blocks from the nineteenth century to overcome. The housing programme, therefore, aimed at producing the maximum amount

of additional accommodation by developing new estates within reasonable distance of city centres at rents affordable by working class people. And this had to be done under stringent budgets. Research into economy and efficiency in building was carried out, and in several cities, notably Frankfurt and Berlin, standardisation and prefabrication were utilised to good effect to produce one of the first large-scale modern housing estates under the direction of modern architects.

Modern architects' contribution to the solution of the housing problem was based on two claims. As Siegfried Giedion put it in 1927, these were 'the change from handicraft methods of construction to industrialization, and the premonition of a new way of life'.⁴ Walter Gropius, calling for 'an architecture adapted to our world of machines, radios and fast motor cars', assumed that modern technology and new materials could be usefully applied to housing, combining 'the greatest possible standardization with the greatest possible variation of form ... to fulfill varying requirements of those to be housed'.⁵ Moreover, the machine would act as a liberating force in the lives of ordinary people. Again Gropius argued:

Modern man, who wears modern not historical dress, also requires a modern dwelling which is in harmony with himself and with the times in which he lives, and is equipped with all the modern objects in daily use ... The machine, which creates standard types, is an effective means of liberating the individual from physical labour

through mechanical aids - steam and electricity - and giving him mass produced products cheaper and better than those made by hands.⁶

Thus, with modern technology harnessed to social purpose, architects sought to create a new way of life appropriate to the machine age.

Bruno Taut was an architect involved in several of the housing estates built in Berlin. In his book published in 1924 he discussed the new type of interior planning, using ergonomically efficient plans and labour-saving equipment, which would free the housewife from household drudgery.⁷ Research into dwelling plans pointed the way to a clear separation of two groups of rooms, one for living and eating and the other for sleeping. An open and spacious living-dining room was to be the hub of a family's activity, to which was adjoined a small separate kitchen, replacing the traditional kitchen-living room.⁸ Social housing in Frankfurt was a model of efficiency and economy in design. Under a radical City Architect, Ernst May, the city developed standardised dwelling plans with built-in furniture, folding beds and the famous Frankfurter Küche, a functional kitchen unit with modern equipment so fitted to facilitate activities taking place inside the kitchen. Of course consideration of economy was a major factor in these design innovations and dwellings had to be kept minimum in size. Nonetheless, with these compact and efficient dwellings in planned residential communities containing churches, schools, shops and other communal facilities and

provided with transport into the city centre, May positively sought to create a new way of living for his residents.⁹

In matters of the layout of blocks, there was also a significant advance. The old tenement tradition was denounced. Securing fresh air, sunlight and greenery became the pre-requisite. Dwellings were to be no more than two rooms deep, running the width of the block with all the rooms having windows. Likewise research and experimentation into the layout of blocks saw the gradual evolution towards more open and spacious planning. The traditional planning followed the peripheral model, in which each block enclosing a courtyard continuously lined the main street. These peripheral blocks could be opened up at the corners or along the sides, letting in a greater amount of air and sun and avoiding some dark corner rooms. This eventually led to the opening up of both ends of blocks. Instead of having buildings on four sides of a block, a series of straight rows now ran along the streets or in preferred directions. The favoured orientation of these row blocks was to be north-south giving maximum exposure to sunlight. Moreover, to protect the dwellings from the noise and traffic of the streets and to give them greater privacy, a radically new layout emerged. A parallel row of blocks, identical in length, was arranged at a standard distance and placed at right angles to the street. It was first introduced by Otto Haesler in 1924 for one of his housing schemes and became widely adopted in the schemes built by radical architects.¹⁰ A historian of German architecture of this period has written:

Despite its novel and often bizarre appearance, the new architecture thus gained acceptance in public housing and other municipal architecture in Germany with extraordinary ease ... it was increasingly sponsored by public officials of nearly every political persuasion who approved of radical architects' economical building methods and high standards of comfort and convenience.¹¹

Similar developments were taking place in other European countries. In Holland, J.J.P. Oud, in his work on low-cost housing, designed two-storey terraced houses which were geometric in shape and white-washed with a horizontal band of windows.¹² Le Corbusier, in his Citrohan (a pun on the mass-produced Citroën car) projects, established his design concept for a standardised, mass-produced dwelling. In its essence, the design consisted of a rectangular box with a completely glazed front wall, containing a double-height living room in the front half of the box and the remaining accommodation stacked on two levels at the back.¹³ He followed this up with a scheme of 'Freehold Maisonettes', blocks of double-height flats rising up to eleven storeys. Of these maisonettes, Le Corbusier wrote:

A communal service provides for all necessities and provides the solution to the servant question (which is only just beginning and is an inevitable social fact). Modern achievement, applied to so important an enterprise, replaces human labour by the machine and by good organization, constant hot water, central-heating, refrigerators, vacuum

cleaners, pure water, etc ... Each maisonette has its own gymnasium and sports room, but on the roof there is a communal hall for sports and a 300 yard track ... There is the great covered court, on the roof of the underground garages, for tenants.

Trees and flowers all around this court, and all along the street in the gardens; in each hanging garden flowers and creepers.¹⁴

Having devised his ideal dwelling prototype, Le Corbusier went on to work out his town planning scheme 'Contemporary City of Three Million Inhabitants'. Two types of residential block were contemplated: a continuous block with set-backs of six double storeys, advancing and receding amid the parkscape; and a rectangular block of five double storeys, enclosing a vast open space. In both cases, his prototypical maisonettes, double-height and each with its own garden terrace, became the unit dwelling. On the ground floor of these housing blocks were to be placed shops, restaurants and laundry.¹⁵

Thus the proponents of the new architecture brought to bear its new principles and new methods upon the solution of popular housing provision and achieved some success, most notably in Germany. Outside the few isolated examples of high flats, the favoured type of dwelling in the 1920s was a straight row block of flats, three to five storeys high, containing units of minimum size but with efficient up-to-date amenities.

On the strength of these developments, an international organisation of modern architecture (Congrès Internationaux

d'Architecture Moderne - CIAM) was founded in 1928 to disseminate the principles of modern architecture. Several of Europe's leading modern architects took part. The declaration from its first meeting called for architecture to be put 'back in its true sphere which is economic, sociological and altogether at the service of humanity'. It also touched upon town planning, albeit in very general terms:

Town planning is the design of different settings for the development of material, emotional and spiritual life in all its manifestations, individual and collective, and it includes both town and country.¹⁶

The CIAM resolved henceforth to work towards solving the town planning problem of modern society through the medium of architecture.

The housing question dominated the early meetings. The second congress in Frankfurt (1929) discussed the problems of small, efficient dwellings for low-income families. May argued convincingly for the mass provision of small dwellings to be let at affordable rents as the way out of the housing shortage. Some advanced the filtering-up theory of providing larger units for the well-off sections so that the dwellings they vacated could be turned over to the poor. They pointed out the increased building cost per unit of small dwellings and the possibility of negative psychological effects of overtly small units on the tenants. For Gropius, it was a fundamental responsibility of the society to provide dwellings for its members. He referred

to the contemporary tendency towards smaller household sizes and defended the provision of small dwellings as answering a genuine need.¹⁷ The next congress in Brussels (1930) took up the subject of rational housing development. The discussion turned on the relative merits of using low, medium and high blocks of flats. Gropius presented his study of the relationship between plot ratios and building heights. On a given plot developed with parallel rows of flats, allowing for the equal angle of sunlight, he demonstrated that the habitable space increased with the number of storeys. Since high blocks would be placed at a distance to allow for the same amount of daylight to penetrate the lower floors, they were seen as having space-liberating potential. Thus Gropius argued that by building high flats,

Instead of the ground floor window looking on to blank walls, or into cramped and sunless courtyards, they command a clear view of the sky over the broad expanses of grass and trees which separate the blocks and serve as playgrounds for the children.¹⁸

The fourth congress in 1933 discussed the problem of the modern city and produced a set of general propositions on modern town planning called the Athens Charter. The charter decried the suburb (describing it as 'the symbol for waste', 'a kind of scum churning against the walls of the city' and 'an urbanistic folly') and set its face firmly against garden cities which were seen as 'an illusory paradise, an irrational solution'. The principle of

functional zoning was upheld and the four principal functions of town planning were spelt out: housing, work, recreation and traffic. On housing, high flats were the favoured solution and the charter went on to describe its requirements:

If it is to be filled with fresh air and sunshine inside, it must also extend outside by various community facilities. So that dwellings can be more easily supplied with common services dealing conveniently with the supply of food, education, medical attention, and the enjoyment of leisure, it will be necessary to group them in "habitation units" of adequate size.¹⁹

Through these early CIAM meetings, the idea of high flats placed in a park-like setting, equipped with communal facilities in place, came to be endorsed by leading modern architects as a desirable form of housing development. The significance of the development of modernist thinking on housing, as outlined above, lay in the fact that it influenced the emerging core of modern architects in England and set the tone of the debate on housing types in the 1930s. The first collective statement for modern architecture was to come from those who rallied around a group representing the British wing of the CIAM.

* * *

The Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS)²⁰ was set up in early 1933, at the invitation of Siegfried Giedion, the International Secretary of the CIAM, to act as 'the nucleus of a British group of architects, engineers and

town planners, whose work will be officially associated with the research programmes of the International Congresses'.²¹ The character and the aims of the MARS were described by The Architects Journal in 1934:

The Group is made up of modern architects and allied technicians who have been willing to profit by those experiments in form and function which were worked out almost simultaneously in many countries during the last quarter of a century and which have produced a modern style both rational in character and international in distribution, and to assume some of the architects social responsibilities. The Group has been formed primarily for research, which, within the terms of the task the members have set themselves, includes not only technical investigations into purely architectural matters such as planning and structure, but also includes rather deep probing into the whole structure of society.²²

Because of its vague commitment to an architecture in the service of society, its obsession with research and personal differences, the MARS was not too successful in functioning as a collective and as a group could not put across a coherent message on housing, but as its membership (it numbered 71 in 1938) shows, the group included most of the figures who represented a force calling for a change in the existing form of housing development.²³ In their capacity as MARS members or as individuals, they put forward images of modern housing. Wells Coates acted as chairman, with

Maxwell Fry as vice-chairman and F.R.S. Yorke as secretary. Its membership numbered architects as well as writers, critics and other lay members who were sympathetic to the cause of the new architecture. These included the Connell, Ward and Lucas partnership, Frederick Gibberd, Berthold Lubetkin, Joseph Emberton, John Gloag (all architects), Ove Arup, (a structural engineer), Thomas Sharp (a town planner), P. Morton Shand (an architectural critic), H de Cronin Hastings (editor of The Architectural Review), John Summerson (an architectural historian), Geoffrey Boumphrey (an engineer and writer) and Charles de Peyer (a wealthy client of Connell and Ward).²⁴

Wells Coates²⁵ laid the theoretical basis for the need to have modern housing. He was a Canadian, born in Japan, with a doctorate in engineering. He did some interior designing, planning and furnishing shops, showrooms and redecorating houses and flats, before coming to architecture. At the most general level, Wells Coates would argue for a progressive architecture in the service of society, an idealist strain shared among MARS members:

What is the essential intention of the art of architecture? Reduced to its simplest elements, architecture is the art of providing ordered shelter for a multitude of human activities. In this sense it has always been the most direct expression of the culture of an age, the least personal, the most objective, art ...

In the transitional society of today, there is no communal desire to achieve order and significance

in the arrangement and aspect of life ... Communal amenity is rarely considered. And there are always practitioners in architecture who will irresponsibly provide what men ignorantly and wrongly and anti-socially desire for their own personal ends ... architecture has to serve the purposes of the people as well as the purpose of beauty. Thus will it 'serve life' ... we are not so much concerned with the formal problems of 'style' as with an architectural solution of the social and economic problems of today ... As creative architects we are concerned with a Future which must be planned rather than a Past which must be patched up, at all costs.²⁶

Wells Coates was particularly interested in the changing nature of architecture in relation to the modern society he saw emerging. For him a modern dwelling was a function of two factors, the invention of new materials and the demands of modern living. On the one hand, he used the technological argument, claiming that new materials and new building methods justified a new type of dwelling. The mechanical devices such as 'heating, lighting, ventilating, refrigerating and sanitary processes, and the machines for vertical circulation' were to be integral parts of its construction, as were 'furniture designed into the house as part of architecture'.²⁷ He took to designing radio sets, electric fires and a range of furniture which was simple and economical. Wells Coates also experimented with prefabrication and the standardisation of units which could

be arranged in all manner of ways and allowed the maximum interchangeability. And he also stressed,

The paramount importance of building in largeish units, as the building of small detached houses will very quickly be discarded, when it is shown how economical and comfortable and convenient other methods may be.²⁸

The main justification for a modern dwelling came from the changes in people's mode of living. 'Our society is above all determined to be free',²⁹ wrote Wells Coates. He thought the home in the traditional sense of the word as a permanent place no longer applied. People moved after work, for holidays, even across frontiers, leaving the old home and family, all of which made for 'a new, exciting freedom'. This new freedom and the bustle of modern life outside the home made 'the real comfort, quiet and convenience required in our dwellings' an essential purpose of the design. He noted the trend towards smaller family units and an increase in households requiring separate dwellings. The shortage of adequate accommodation for hundreds and thousands of people and the servant problem of the upper classes were bringing the homes of the different classes more into the same category. All this pointed to smaller dwellings planned compactly and economically, with modern conveniences.³⁰ Wells Coates was particularly critical of the bric-à-brac and the general clutter characterising the conventional interior of a home, which he said, created 'a museum-type intimacy'. People were rarely aware that 'a room exists for the man, and not man for the room'.³¹ Since people were

moving around more and dwellings becoming less permanent, he believed that built-in furniture should be provided wherever possible:

Very soon it will be considered quite as fantastic to move accompanied by wardrobes, tables and beds, as it would seem today to remove the bath or the heating system, including all the pipes.³²

The form of housing development that he envisaged pointed to blocks of flats containing modern efficient dwellings, coupled with a range of communal and recreational facilities. As Wells Coates expanded on it:

Every dwelling has got to have the best lighting, heating and cooking devices, and some form of heating for the general warmth ... the day of the detached house, with obvious exceptions, is rapidly drawing to a close ... the next step in the design of dwelling units must be the block or group of dwellings with every centralised service which the sharing of costs makes economically possible: the provision of large open spaces for social, athletic and other community interests within a stones throw of one's dwelling - swimming baths, nursery schools, children's playgrounds, parks and walks - all as an essential element in the main design of the community life.

The main community blocks would be four or five stories high, and so placed as to give the principal living and sleeping rooms the best aspect - light, sun and air ...³³

The application of these ideas in actual building found partial and somewhat extreme expression in the Lawn Road Flats (1934) in Hampstead, London, built for the Isokon Company.³⁴ The building was four storeys high, built in reinforced concrete and consisted mainly of 'minimum' service flats approached by access galleries cantilevered out of the building. Each unit was provided with built-in furniture and a well equipped kitchenette. Such services as heating, hot water, cleaning, bed making and collection of refuse were included. There was a communal kitchen on the ground floor from which meals could be ordered (later replaced by a residents' club-cum-restaurant).³⁵ As J.M. Richards remarked later, Wells Coates planned the building for the new type of man who wanted to 'live light', unencumbered by possessions. And the building was a success in practice, and became a meeting ground for the architects and other refugees fleeing Nazi Germany.³⁶

In the same year as the Lawn Road Flats were completed, F.R.S. Yorke, a founder member of MARS, published a book called The Modern House. It consisted of an essay on the origin and development of new domestic architecture, followed by illustrations of modern houses (flat roofs, whitewashed surfaces with expansive glazing) from all over the world. In line with the thinking of the MARS, the new style was explained in terms of the needs and means of the modern society:

Twentieth century architecture is dictated by new methods of construction and new materials, and by

unprecedented practical requirements, a new outlook on life, a new sense of space and time.³⁷

He was aware of the fact that 'the individual architect-designed house' was a luxury or might even be undesirable in 'an age of big population' and maintained that the small house had become a mass-production problem.³⁸ The importance for the modern architect of designing a villa, he argued, lay in the fact that it afforded an opportunity for experimenting in new materials and new methods and examining what modern architecture could do to help solve the problems of housing.³⁹ In fact, a notable feature of the book was that it was prefaced by an introductory plea for flats. A reformed type of flats and controlled land development was the solution to the housing problem. He was careful to distinguish modern flats from the traditional high density tenements lacking light, air and open space:

Modern construction permits higher building, and higher building means economy in land. When a building rises to ten or twelve stories the saving is considerable, and the land that is freed becomes park-land between the building units.⁴⁰

And dwellings grouped in modern flat blocks would make arrangements such as heating, laundry, hot water supply common to all residents and thus lead to economy in planning. The way this development of flats was to look was implied by the illustrations which were a scheme of ten storey flats by Gropius ('planned in narrow blocks, single flat thickness, spaced apart so that daylight may penetrate to every room'), a diagram showing the evolution of layout

resulting in the Zeilenbau plan ('rational orientation and economical layout and structure') and a project for a residential quarter ('planned as a self-contained group with communal dining room, kindergarten, school, club, central kitchen and sports stadium').⁴¹

In 1937, Yorke produced the book The Modern Flat, in collaboration with another MARS member, Frederick Gibberd. The book was primarily one of plans and pictures. Some 50 examples of modern flats from Europe including England and America were illustrated. The accompanying text went over the same argument for flats as in the previous book. Only this time the authors were more intent on exposing the ills of existing towns as grey, dull and dirty places, with haphazard developments producing a jumble of industrial, commercial and residential buildings. In turn, the shortcomings of resulting suburban developments were pointed out, with the multiplication of small houses along the roads and eating into the countryside, the disfiguring of the landscape, and the long journey incurred to and from work, with its great waste of land and increased outlay on services. They claimed:

We are making this book because we believe that we shall want to live in a tall building in a park, with common amenities, air and a view; and that the problem of housing cannot be solved by the provision of millions of little cottages scattered over the face of the country, whether in the garden city manner, or as speculatively built stragglers.⁴²

Aesthetic judgement at times got the upper hand. Thus it was invariably the interminable rows of little houses that caused squalor in towns, as factory buildings in most cases had 'its peculiar aesthetic quality and scale'. In place of this squalor,

A few tall buildings rising up to the light and air, spaced well apart, properly served with communications, would keep the dwellings away from through traffic roads, and their noise and danger, and would house all the people whose individual villa-homes now make congested areas that stretch for miles. Open spaces for walking and recreation, with cafés and places of entertainment between the blocks would bring the open country right into the town.⁴³

Striking aerial photographs accompanied the text that showed a maze of roads and a jumble of buildings in town, untidy rows of semi-detached houses in a suburb, small houses straggling along a trunk road into the country and an example of speculative development encroaching on the countryside. To these were juxtaposed an artist's impression of a project by Gropius and E. Maxwell Fry⁴⁴ at St Leonards Hill, Windsor, showing free-standing flats in a park-like setting. The project was for 110 flats with restaurant, lounge and ballroom. Only one acre out of the 33 acre site would be built upon and the remaining 32 acres of parkland would remain untouched, its view available to everybody. The actual examples of modern flats illustrated in the book, the author argued, were to be units in a large

scale urban development, 'designed not as a means of crowding more and more people into a given area, but as a means of releasing more ground space for parks, roads and gardens'. This would only be possible 'when public authorities take over and clear large areas in existing towns, or develop new areas'.⁴⁵

E. Maxwell Fry, another founder member of the MARS, reviewing Yorke's The Modern House reiterated the point about the need to have collective dwellings to serve the people:

The small house, fulfilling still a deep want that certain happily placed sections of the community have money to gratify, provides the architect with the means of putting into practice ideas which have their final application in the service of the wider community - when the community is prepared to receive them.⁴⁶

His sustained interest in the social aspects of architecture is clear from the statement he made later in his own book:

The housing of those sections of the public which we as architects are unable to cater for as individuals is unquestionably the biggest job before us.⁴⁷

He wrote of architects' contribution to the solution of the slums. He saw the problem of rehousing as three-headed: rent, construction and land. Since rents had to be kept within the means of the tenant, the solution needed to be found in terms of construction and land. On construction he complained about the practice of dressing up flats 'in the

blind faith that the only decency is Georgian', and proposed instead 'the standardisation of units, a standardisation from within outwards' as the way to economy. The design of the flats, containing as they do small units of nearly similar size, was particularly susceptible to a process of fine standardisation and functional planning. This would result in 'minimum' bathrooms and 'minimum' kitchens, the layout of which should be studied from the housewife's' point of view. The labour cost of construction would be cut by factory production of components.⁴⁸ Moreover, in his eyes, existing flats in England had been 'built like little houses disconnected from the ground' which left a lot to be desired in their planning. Maxwell Fry admitted that in terms of size of rooms these flats provided a generous minimum, but he also pointed out their shortcomings, such as the lack of balconies for babies and children, common use of balcony access to flats, the lack of hot water provision to sinks, generally vertical and small windows, insufficient utilisation of ground floor space and the irregular disposition of the blocks.⁴⁹ Individual rights in property clearly stood in the way of land acquisition for the purpose of housing, forcing the existing slum clearance schemes to be piecemeal and wasteful. Maxwell Fry's answer was to 'plan over areas sufficiently wide to offer the services of a planned community' as 'a constructive step in the building up of a new, better and more economically managed urban community', presumably with the help of wider town planning powers.⁵⁰

Berthold Lubetkin was another important figure in the MARS group. He was a Russian emigré and had spent several years in Paris before settling down in England in 1930. He was influenced by architectural developments in Paris during the 1920s, especially the work of Le Corbusier. He also kept in touch with the architectural debates taking place within the Soviet Union and was imbued with a strong sense of social responsibility and political commitment in bringing architecture to serve the people. When he wrote, in a survey of Soviet architectural thinking, of Soviet architects' ambition as being 'not simply to build architecturally, but to build socialistically',⁵¹ it no doubt reflected his own sentiments. Lubetkin formed the firm Tecton with a number of Architectural Association graduates and together they designed, among other things, the High Point Flats in Highgate, London. Though their rentals put them in the middle-class housing category, these flats, particularly High Point I (built in 1935), with its interesting plan and some formal qualities, were a valuable contribution to modern architecture and the finest block of flats built in England in the 1930s.⁵²

In 1935, unhappy with 'the apolitical nature of the MARS and the failure of that group to clarify its purpose and determine its actions',⁵³ Lubetkin and a minority broke off to form the Architects' and Technicians' Organisation (ATO).⁵⁴ Some members of the building industry also took part. One of the aims of the ATO was to work for the adoption of a rational progressive policy on housing and town planning, to secure the rehousing of the millions of

families under the best modern standards. The ATO also allied itself with the Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants (AASTA), a white-collar union for salaried architects, and concentrated on the defence of official architects (architects in the employ of local authorities and public bodies) against the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) which catered in the main for qualified architects in private practice, the status to which many of the MARS members belonged.⁵⁵

In 1936, the ATO Housing Committee organized an exhibition on working-class housing. The accompanying pamphlet⁵⁶ was an indictment of the National Government's housing policy. Drawing on contemporary social surveys and medical research, it was demonstrated that even the rents of subsidised council housing was often beyond the means of the tenants and that bad housing conditions induced chronic ill health, malnutrition and high mortality. The Committee calculated that the official slum clearance programme lagged far behind the actual need for new dwellings. The ATO called strongly for positive intervention by the Government in the provision of housing, making it a national service. The remedies suggested included higher taxation and controlled rents. In the actual provision of new dwellings, the ATO insisted that central areas be built according to modern standards of health, comfort and convenience, and gave an idea of the kind of housing development it wanted:

Large balconies can and should be provided for all blocks of flats, where young children can sleep and play in plenty of sun and fresh air. Planted

roof terraces should be provided over the whole area of the building.

The various blocks in any housing scheme should be so laid out that all rooms receive enough air or efficient ventilation. Too often blocks of flats are built with narrow internal courts where these principles are ignored.

In refuse disposal, a system has been evolved in which refuse is evacuated through the bowl of the sink, and is destroyed in an incinerator in the basement ... There seems no reason now why every block of flats should not have an efficient heating system, whereby each room can be efficiently heated at considerable saving in cost over the system of individual heating units.

Centralised laundries, crèches, nursery schools, playgrounds, etc, should all be provided in large housing schemes, as they were in Vienna, and as they are now provided in all new housing estates in Soviet Russia.⁵⁷

At around the time of the setting up of the ATO, articles and reports featuring flats started to appear in the organ of the AASTA, The Keystone,⁵⁸ reflecting the close relationship of the two organisations. The general tone was objective rather than partisan, but with an emphasis on making out a fair case for flats. An article on housing standards, in effect, argued the advantages of flats planned in social units with shared services and amenities.⁵⁹ In another issue, the planning of old-type mansion flats was

juxtaposed to a feature on modern flats.⁶⁰ Inspired by examples of modern housing projects carried out on the continent and by the work of public institutions like the Miners' Welfare Committee which designed and built pithead head baths and other social facilities,⁶¹ the AASTA also championed the cause of those salaried architects who sought to apply their skills in remedying the social ills of bad housing and poor living conditions. It saw government involvement in popular housing provision as an important step in the direction of extending the social services which would offer greater scope for 'official architecture' (a term used to describe the architectural work of local authorities and other public bodies) in providing schools, hospitals, health centres as well as housing.⁶² One AASTA member called for architectural departments of local authorities to be extended so that 'full advantage could be taken of large-scale methods of production, of prefabrication, mass production and standardization, of modern systems of heating, refuse disposal, etc.'. ⁶³

Thomas Sharp,⁶⁴ a town planner by profession, was also drawn into the circle of the MARS,⁶⁵ by his sustained criticism of low-density housing development, characteristic of garden cities and suburbs, and by his espousal of the beauty and order of compactly-built towns. His polemic was set out in two books, Town and Countryside (1932) and English Panorama (1936). Part of the latter, describing the historical development of the English town and forming the basis of the book, had, in fact, appeared earlier as a series of articles in The Architectural Review (which became

a major mouthpiece for modern architecture in the 1930s). Sharp's main thesis was that the distinct qualities of the town and the countryside had to be re-established:

Only through the preservation of towns as towns can the countryside be saved; and only through the limitation of rurality to the country can the town be preserved.⁶⁶

Increasing through the interwar years, the destruction of the countryside by uncontrolled development became a matter of concern.⁶⁷ Sharp saw it as a creation of the 'semi-surburbia' or the 'universal suburbia' at the expense of both the town and the countryside:

From dreary towns the broad, mechanical, noisy main roads run out between ribbons of tawdry houses, disorderly refreshment shacks and vile, untidy garages ... Over great areas there is no longer any country bordering the main roads: there is only a negative semi-suburbia.⁶⁸

Sharp recalled a fine tradition of English town building in the eighteenth century, which expressed itself in a series of related streets and domestic squares in harmonious association with the unity and conformity of Georgian buildings. He argued that their form and beauty reflected the cooperation and collective basis of the urban way of life. Moreover this town building took an individual line within a democratic tradition, without any autocratic control from above, growing out of the lives and customs of the people. This tradition of architectural unity and civic design, however, had been debased in the process of

industrialisation, producing 'vast inescapable deserts of arid brick' in towns, while the first signs of suburbanisation became evident in the building of detached villas for the middle classes set in landscaped gardens. This 'open development' as Sharp described it, gained greater significance because of the Romantic Revival which emphasised the informal, natural and picturesque setting in the layout of towns. The straight road was taboo. Country villas and vernacular cottages facing onto wriggling and tortuous streets became the ideal. This was a complete antithesis of the traditional town, which had been built in close formation, with buildings fronting onto formal streets and squares. Of course, at first these picturesque suburbs were the privilege of the wealthy and the powerful, though model industrial villages at Bournville and Port Sunlight towards the end of the nineteenth century showed how the principles could be applied in favour of ordinary workmen. The sorry state of the existing town was fuelling people's desire to escape from it, and the general revulsion against it, he said, led to its ultimate destruction. Sharp saw Ebenezer Howard's Garden City as the culmination of the Romantic ideal of 'open development', obliterating the traditional concept of the town, and as such, vehemently reacted against it:

[Howard] had no interest in the town as a thing of beauty, a work of art, an expression of man's dignity and civilization ... The town reformer showed his true intention at the very beginning of his work: he was out to destroy it.⁶⁹

Howard's idea of the third alternative, 'Town-Country', having the characteristics and advantages of both town and country, was unacceptable to Sharp, who called it a hermaphrodite. To Sharp, it was essentially back to the land, nature-worship romanticism.

In Town-Country the country must prevail. In Garden City (which was, of course, the same thing) the emphasis must all be on the garden. So all the houses were country cottages set singly or in pairs along curving countrified roads diversified with hedges, trees and shrubs, herbaceous borders and green swards. Informality and romance was the keynote. In fact when all was said and done Town-Country arrived as but a popular edition of Bournemouth and the rest of the resorts of the Victorian upper-middle classes.⁷⁰

Within a few years of the publication of Howard's ideas, the first garden city was set up, and the first Town Planning Act of 1909, instead of reviving 'Civic Design' as Sharp would have liked, consolidated the garden city principle, which was, in effect, that of 'open development' - semi-detached houses, or at most four houses in a block with gardens, built to a density of twelve per acre, and set well back from the street behind deep building lines. The damaging effect of this type of development on the town and consequently upon the countryside was clear to Sharp.

Hundreds of thousands of houses have been built to this standard, and scores of thousands more to an enforced density that is still lower - ten, eight,

six, four, or even two to the acre. The result is obvious. The new suburbs and town extensions sprawl out in a sloppy diffuseness all over the countryside.⁷¹

His plea was for a return to the compact town.

We must return to Architecture. Let us again have streets of houses grouped closely together, clear in their symbolism of social order, pure, strong and independent in their material beauty. Let us again build TOWNS.⁷²

Thus, indiscriminate housing developments on garden city lines had to be checked. The way forward was in bringing back true urbanity and civic expression to the existing towns. Flats were to play an important part in Sharp's idea of urban housing. He called the blocks of neo-Georgian flats erected by the LCC 'noble essays in the true and native style of English urban architecture.'⁷³ Later, in English Panorama, he went on to say that a considerable part of the population of the future town would be housed in great new blocks of flats.

The present 'blighted' districts of our great cities, those vast areas of mean cottage streets, will, indeed, be largely occupied by groups of flats and their open spaces and public gardens
...⁷⁴

The accompanying illustrations, including projects of modern flats, indicated Sharp's receptiveness to modernist ideas in

housing, while his whole polemic against the garden city principles helped reinforce and articulate the arguments for modern flats.

How the ideas and principles outlined above could be applied to working-class housing was demonstrated by a number of actual buildings and housing projects produced by the MARS members. Maxwell Fry designed two housing schemes, both in collaboration with Elizabeth Denby, a housing reformer and sociologist, who also became a MARS member. The first of these, Sassoon House in Peckham, London, was completed in 1934 and was managed by a housing trust. It contained twenty flats in a block built in reinforced concrete, the external walls of which were painted in yellow, grey and cinnamon. Each flat had a cantilevered balcony, large enough to accommodate two small beds for sleeping out in summer, and a well-fitted kitchen providing cheap hot water to the sink and bath. Other provisions included pram sheds, clothes drying rails in the paved yard and refuse chutes. A considerable degree of standardisation went into the design and construction of these flats. The use of standard metal windows and standardised kitchen units and general attention to repetitive construction and fitting resulted in speed of erection and reduced building costs.⁷⁵ Kent House, built in 1935 for a London housing association, was designed by the Connell, Ward and Lucas partnership. Two blocks of flats, of four and five storeys, were of reinforced concrete frame construction, and externally the colour schemes - wall in pink, blue for the back of the staircase, the balconies bright red - gave the buildings a

cheerful appearance. A total of sixteen flats were arranged two flats per floor, thus eliminating the need for lengthy access balconies. Inside, the bathroom and the kitchen were logically placed near the bedrooms and the living room. Again cantilevered balconies were provided, which would take a table and chairs. Other amenities included pram sheds and clothes lines on the ground floor and a roof-top playground.⁷⁶

These two schemes illustrated the possibility of a fruitful partnership between housing reformers and modern architects, in their cause to improve and modernise working-class housing. Kent House, commissioned by the Northern Group of the St Pancras House Improvement Society, in fact, grew directly out of the collaboration between the MARS and the New Homes for Old Group at the Building Exhibition in 1934.⁷⁷ The New Homes for Old Group was founded in 1931 by a committee of London voluntary housing societies. Its main aim was to draw public attention to the problems of slums and overcrowding and the urgent need for more and better low-rented housing. To this end, the Group periodically organised exhibitions in the 1930s, to disseminate the knowledge of methods to be utilised in rehousing and raising housing standards. The Group may have taken to advocating flats more from pragmatic considerations of the constraints of rehousing conditions in London, but its displays of dwelling plans did show ideas and suggestions in common with the thinking of modern architects. Thus, the full-size model of a three bedroomed flat at the 1932 Exhibition was designed 'to provide as large a living room as possible,

containing a dining alcove', with the kitchen being planned 'on the American and Continental method to take up the minimum space in the flat, and to save all unnecessary steps for the housewife'.⁷⁸ In 1933, The New Statesman and Nation organised a number of housing study visits for its readers. The visits included housing schemes carried out by member societies of the New Houses for Old Group and these elicited some favourable response from the participants of the method of rehousing in flats.⁷⁹ The 1934 Exhibition again displayed a plan of a three bedroomed flat, extolling the advantages of a well-designed balcony, as an extension of the living room, with adequate built-in flower boxes, where the family could sit out in the sun and possibly eat, or where the baby might sleep under the mother's eye, while she worked. The Group called for amenities such as allotments, club-rooms, meeting halls and playgrounds, and insisted that these facilities for 'a happy home life and a successful community life' be incorporated in new housing schemes. The Group stated:

Vigorous agitation is still needed to ensure that the flats are to be built in urban areas and to become homes that the people can come to love.⁸⁰

In 1936, the Cement Marketing Company organised a project competition for a design of 200 working-men's flats in five storey blocks, to be built on a four acre site in reinforced concrete. It offered an opportunity for modern architects to demonstrate their ideas in large-scale projects. The winning scheme by Lubetkin and Tecton showed four rows of straight blocks running north-south, disposed

at equal distance over the site, with a communal laundry placed in a separate building. Each pair of flats was to be approached by an internal staircase and had generous-sized balconies. Open space between the blocks was landscaped and provided with tennis courts, and it was indicated in the scheme that the roofs of the blocks might be utilised as additional garden space. The other entries by MARS members (the Connell, Ward and Lucas partnership, Serge Chermayeff) also displayed similar groupings of blocks, in contrast to some other entries employing forms of courtyard layout, and provided a great measure of communal facilities.⁸¹

Kensal House, in Kensington, London, 'the latest and by far the most important contribution to the development of working-class housing in London',⁸² was completed in 1937. The scheme was carried out by the Gas Light and Coke Company as a practical demonstration of how gas could be economically used as a fuel in slum clearance schemes under the Housing Acts. It was built to Maxwell Fry's design, who participated as executant architect in a committee of architects in collaboration with Denby. The scheme consisted, in the main, of two parallel, five storey blocks of different length on the north-south axis and was built in reinforced concrete. The access to dwellings was by covered stair cases leading to a pair of flats on every floor. Each of the 68 flats had a semi-recessed balcony with a built-in flower box, a standardised, well-fitted kitchen equipped with a gas cooker and a gas heater supplying hot water to the sink, bath and washing copper. The gas-coke stove was provided in the living room mainly for heating purposes.

This was an attempt to establish the living room and working kitchen plan in modern flats, instead of the kitchen-dining room commonly provided in traditional working-class tenements. The scheme was planned as a social unit, catering for social and communal needs of the tenants. It provided adult and juvenile club-rooms, allotments and a nursery school ingeniously built around the curve of the circular pit of a demolished gas holder. The pit was filled up and made into a children's playground.⁸³ Denby called Kensal House 'the first "urban village" to be built in Britain'.⁸⁴ For Maxwell Fry, the scheme was an illustration of what he had been arguing for, the synthesis of technical and social approaches to housing:

Unless technical advance is made to contribute directly to increasing the total of human happiness, it is largely wasted.⁸⁵

The orientation of the blocks ensured maximum sunlight to each flat. The internal staircase access was preferred to the outside access balconies which '[were] un-private, draughty, barrack-like, and loved by nobody'. A type plan of the flats was devised and repeated throughout, taking advantage of standardisation and mass production of fittings. The bedrooms were made small, in order to maximise the area of the living room. Together with a 'longish' galley-like functional kitchen and a balcony, large enough to have a meal on, the architect provided a layout that would facilitate and encourage a new way of life among the tenants.⁸⁶ In its architectural language and

social intent, Kensal House represented a significant achievement of modernist thinking on housing.

This chapter has looked at some of the ideas put forward by the proponents of a new type of housing development. The ideas came mainly from architects who identified themselves with the development of modern architecture in the interwar period and were informed by modernist thinking on housing. There were differences in their approach. A somewhat vague social utopianism of Wells Coates contrasted with a strong reformist strain found in Maxwell Fry's essentially functional and logical approach or a more politically committed, collectivist solution espoused by the ATO. But underlying their varied utterance was a clear message that improvements in people's housing and the transformation of their living environment was an important task of the day and that this gave architecture a pivotal role in society. Accordingly, these modern architects attempted to offer their skills and expertise in the service of society and, in particular, to the problem of working-class housing provision. They came up with a set of fairly coherent ideas and design concepts: a self-contained residential development of modern flats, equipped with up-to-date amenities and set amid open space, complete with a range of communal facilities. The ideas found favour with certain sections of the voluntary housing movement. Then there were those who were critical of the sprawling suburbs and the ribbon development of houses along trunk roads. Some of them became modernists' allies, as in the case of Thomas Sharp, while his criticism of housing developments on

garden city lines was taken up by modern architects and reinforced their arguments for flats. There were some hopeful signs. By the middle of the 1930s, the students of schools of architecture, such as at Leeds, Liverpool and at the Architectural Association were starting to produce modern building designs.⁸⁷ The slum clearance campaign and the resulting development of central parts of towns also seemingly gave added relevance to the views of modernists. In terms of actual building, however, their achievements were limited to a few isolated examples of flats.

Footnotes

- 1 B.S. Townroe Britain Rebuilding. The Slum and Overcrowding Campaigns (1936) p. 119.
- 2 The Times (7.7.33). See also The Times (18.5.33).
- 3 G. Orwell The Road to Wigan Pier (Harmondsworth 1962, originally published 1937) p. 61.
- 4 Quoted in S. Giedion Space, Time and Architecture. The Growth of a New Tradition (5th Edition Revised and Enlarged, Cambridge Massachusetts 1967) p. 598.
Giedion was a Swiss historian of modern architecture, and became secretary of the international organisation of modern architects (CIAM).
- 5 W. Gropius 'The Theory and Organization of Bauhaus' (originally published in German, Munich 1923), in H. Bayer, W. Gropius, I. Gropius (eds) Bauhaus 1919-1928 (New York 1938) pp. 27-28.
- 6 W Gropius 'Dessau Bauhaus - principles of Bauhaus production' (originally published in German, Dessau 1926), in F. Whitford Bauhaus (1984) p. 206.
- 7 B.M. Lane Architecture and Politics in Germany 1918-1945 (1985) pp. 65-66.
- 8 R. Wiedenhoft Berlin's Housing Revolution. German Reform in the 1920s (Ann Arbor 1985) Ch. 4.
- 9 B.M. Lane Architecture and Politics in Germany 1918-1945 pp. 91-103. See also J.R. Mullin 'City Planning in Frankfurt, Germany, 1923-1932. A Study in Practical Utopianism' Journal of Urban History Vol. 4 No. 1 (Nov. 1977) pp. 3-28.

- 10 R. Wiedenhoeft Berlin's Housing Revolution pp. 119-120.
See also K. Frampton 'The evolution of housing concepts 1870-1970' Lotus (Milan) 10 (1970-1971) pp. 24-33.
- 11 B.M. Lane Architecture and Politics in Germany 1918-1945 p. 124.
- 12 W.J.R. Curtis Modern Architecture (Second Edition, Oxford 1987) pp. 168-170. See also Architectural Association J.J.P. Oud [Exhibition Catalogue] (n.d. but 1979).
- 13 'Citrohan 1 and 2', in Arts Council of Great Britain Le Corbusier. Architect of the Century [Exhibition Catalogue] (1987) pp. 208-210.
- 14 Le Corbusier Towards A New Architecture (1927 originally published in French, Paris 1923) pp. 229-230.
- 15 Le Corbusier The City of Tomorrow (Third Edition 1972, first published in 1929, originally published in French under the title Urbanisme, Paris 1924) Chs 11, 13.
- 16 Quoted in W.J.R. Curtis Modern Architecture p. 171.
- 17 R. Wiedenhoeft Berlin's Housing Revolution pp. 43-47.
- 18 W. Gropius The New Architecture and the Bauhaus (1935) pp. 101-102.
- 19 Le Corbusier The Athens Charter (New York 1973 originally published in French, Paris 1943) pp. 59-60, 65, 95-96, 102.
- 20 On the MARS and the English modern architectural scene in the 1930s, see, for example, E. Maxwell Fry 'English Architecture from the Thirties', in Architects' Year Book:8 (1957) pp. 53-56; J. Summerson 'Introduction',

- in T. Dannatt Modern Architecture in Britain (1959) pp. 11-18; A. Jackson The Politics of Architecture. A history of modern architecture in Britain (1970) pp. 22-77; L. Martin 'notes on a developing architecture' The Architectural Review Vol. 164 No. 977 (July 1978) pp. 12-16; J.M. Richards 'Style was a dirty word. Rationalism and discipline' and E. Carter 'Politics and architecture. The observer looks back' The Architectural Review Vol. 166 No. 993 (Nov. 1979) pp. 301, 324-325.
- 21 The Times (25.4.33). See also 'The "MARS" Group' The Architects' Journal (3.5.33).
- 22 'The New Homes for Old Exhibit. The MARS Contribution' The Architects' Journal (20.9.34).
- 23 L. Campbell 'The MARS Group, 1933-1939' The Royal Institute of British Architects Transactions 8 Vol. 4 No. 2 (1984-5) pp. 69-79. For example, Campbell, after tracing MARS members' contributions in presenting the image of modern housing, says that 'The architects ... seem to have been ultimately unable to substitute a collective for an individual and competitive approach to work ... Save for the Group working on the plan for London, MARS became principally a social and discussion group by the end of the decade' (ibid., p. 78). The Architects' Journal, reviewing the first MARS exhibit on housing, saw the absence of any design for buildings as 'the most notable and encouraging symptom of the right approach that characterises this exhibition of architects' work' ('The New Houses for Old Exhibit.

The MARS Contribution'). In fact as a group the MARS seems inhibited from the straight-forward expression of its stylistic preferences. The 1938 Exhibition catalogue, though aided by photographs and illustrations, could only call for 'an architecture founded upon actuality, upon the pattern of our daily life' in terms of housing (MARS Group New Architecture. An Exhibition of the Elements of Modern Architecture [Exhibition Catalogue] (1938) p. 10). A critic visiting the Exhibition complained: 'It was impossible to find a straight photograph of a building clearly displayed with some explanation of its function and planning' ('The MARS Exhibition' The Architectural Association Journal Vol. 53 No. 612 (Feb. 1938) p. 388. For membership, see list in MARS Group New Architecture p. 23.

- 24 L. Campbell 'The MARS Group, 1933-1939' p. 70.
- 25 In general, see S. Cantacuzino Wells Coates. A Monograph (1978); Obituary in The Times (20.6.58); J.M. Richards 'Wells Coates 1893-1958' The Architectural Review Vol. 124 (Dec. 1958) pp. 357-360.
- 26 Wells Coates's statement in H. Read (ed.) Unit 1 The Modern Movement in English Architecture, Painting and Sculpture (1934) p. 108 [italics in original].
- 27 Wells Coates 'Material for Architecture' The Architects' Journal (4.11.31).
- 28 Quoted in S. Cantacuzino Wells Coates p. 52.

- 29 Wells Coates 'Furniture Today - Furniture Tomorrow
Leaves from a Meta-Technical Notebook' The
Architectural Review Vol. 79 No. 428 (July 1932) p. 32.
- 30 'Modern Dwellings for Modern Needs. A discussion
between Geoffrey Boumphrey and Wells Coates' The
Listener (24.5.33).
- 31 Wells Coates 'Notes on Dwellings for Tomorrow', in
Ascot Gas Water Heaters Ltd Flats Municipal and Private
Enterprise (1938) p. 52.
- 32 Wells Coates 'Furniture Today - Furniture Tomorrow'
p. 34.
- 33 'Modern Dwellings for Modern Needs'.
- 34 See J. Pritchard View from a Long Chair. The memoirs
(1984) pp. 78-97. Isokon was a company initially set
up by Jack Pritchard, an 'entrepreneur', and his wife
with Wells Coates, to finance the building of Lawn Road
Flats. With his experience in furniture sales and
interest in modernism, Pritchard believed in 'the
application of modern functional design to houses,
flats, furniture and fittings'. In the 1930s, Isokon
commissioned furniture from renowned modern designers,
among them Marcel Breuer (see also Obituary in The
Independent (5.5.92)). One of the first people to stay
in the building was Philip Sargant Florence, an
acquaintance of Pritchard and a sociologist at the
University of Birmingham, who tried to get a block of
Isokon flats built in Birmingham in 1935. See L.
Campbell 'The good new days' The Architectural Review
Vo. 162 No. 967 (Sept. 1977) p. 183.

- 35 'Flats in Hampstead Designed by Wells Coates' The Architects' Journal (20.9.34); S. Cantacuzino Wells Coates p. 62.
- 36 J.M. Richards 'Wells Coates' p. 359.
- 37 F.R.S. Yorke The Modern House (1934) pp. 28-29.
- 38 Ibid., p. 26.
- 39 Ibid., p. 5.
- 40 Ibid., p. 3.
- 41 Ibid., pp. 1-5.
- 42 F.R.S. Yorke and F. Gibberd The Modern Flat (1937) p. 16.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 W. Gropius after fleeing Nazi Germany settled briefly in England, where he went into a partnership with E. Maxwell Fry. See A. Jackson The Politics of Architecture. A history of modern architecture in Britain (1970) pp. 58-59.
- 45 F.R.S. Yorke and F. Gibberd The Modern Flat p. 18.
- 46 E. Maxwell Fry 'The Small House of Today' The Architectural Review Vol. 76 (July 1934) p. 20.
- 47 E. Maxwell Fry Fine Building (1944) p. 7.
- 48 E. Maxwell Fry 'The Architect's Problem' The Architects' Journal (22.6.33).
- 49 E. Maxwell Fry 'London Housing. An Itinerant Survey of Typical Schemes' The Architects' Journal (17.5.34).
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 B. Lubetkin 'Architectural Thought since the Revolution' The Architectural Review Vol. 71 (May 1932) p. 201.

- 52 F.R.S. Yorke and C. Penn A Key to Modern Architecture
(1939) p. 48.
- 53 P. Coe and M. Reading Lubetkin and Tecton.
Architectural and Social Commitment (1981) p. 53.
- 54 See *ibid.*, the Chapter 'Lubetkin and the ATO - social
commitment and political action' pp. 44-67.
- 55 A. Jackson The Politics of Architecture p. 76.
- 56 Architects' and Technicians' Organisation An Exhibition
on Working Class Housing (1936).
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 58 See, for example, 'Rehousing in Tenements or Cottages?'
and 'Rehousing in Flats or Tenements some Further
Remarks' in Vol. 11 No. 5 (Oct. 1935); 'Can Flats Solve
the Housing Problem?' in Vol. 11 No. 6 (Dec. 1935);
'"Highpoint", Highgate' in Vol. 12 No. 4 (Aug. 1936).
- 59 'Housing Standards Equipment, Room, Dwelling, Group of
Blocks, Residential District Town, etc.' The Keystone
New Series Vol. 1 No. 3 (June 1937) pp. 11-14.
- 60 'Flats' and 'The Modern Flats' The Keystone New Series
Vol. 2 No. 3 (June 1938) pp. 9-17.
- 61 See C. Benton 'Miner improvements. The architects to
the Miners' Welfare Committee' The Architectural Review
Vol. 166 No. 993 (Nov. 1979) p. 305-308.
- 62 The outlook of the architectural profession was
undergoing some change in the depression of the 1930s.
The number of architectural commissions dwindled
leading to fewer openings in private practice, while
there was an increase in the employment of architects
by local authorities and other public bodies which

- helped to raise the profile of their architectural work. See J. Summerson 'Bread & Butter and Architecture' Horizon Vol. 6 No. 34 (Oct. 1942) pp. 233-243.
- 63 'Architecture as a Social Service' The Keystone New Series Vol. 1 No. 2 (Apr. 1937) p. 16.
- 64 See K. Stanfield's biographical essay of Thomas Sharp, in G.E. Cherry (ed.) Pioneers in British Planning (1981).
- 65 He was not an initial member of the MARS, but his name appears on the list in 1938.
- 66 T. Sharp Town and Countryside. Some Aspects of Urban and Rural Development (1932) p. 11.
- 67 See, for example, C. Williams-Ellis (ed.) Britain and the Beast (1937).
- 68 T. Sharp Town and Countryside p. 4.
- 69 Ibid., p. 140.
- 70 T. Sharp English Panorama (1938 Edition, 1938), p. 80.
- 71 T. Sharp Town and Countryside p. 149.
- 72 Ibid., p. 164.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 T. Sharp English Panorama p. 106.
- 75 'R.E. Sassoon House: Working Class Flats in St Mary's Road, Peckham, designed by Adams, Thompson and Fry in collaboration with Miss Denby' The Architects' Journal (29.11.34); The Times (14.12.34).
- 76 'Kent House Ferdinand Street, St Pancras, NW. Designed by Connell, Ward and Lucas' The Architects' Journal (19.12.35).

- 77 See L. Campbell 'The MARS Group 1933-1939' p. 72.
- 78 ' "New Homes for Old" Exhibition' The Architects' Journal (14.9.32).
- 79 See the issues of The New Statesman and Nation (18.3.33), (25.3.33), (1.4.33) and (8.4.33).
- 80 Housing Centre 'New Homes for Old Catalogue of the Housing Exhibition', in The Building Trades Exhibition 1934 Official Catalogue (1934) p. 401.
- 81 'Cement Marketing Company's Competition for Working-men's Flats' The Architects' Journal (21.3.35);
'Competition for Working-men's Flats: The Commended Designs' The Architects' Journal (28.3.35).
- 82 'Kensal House Ladbroke Grove' The Architect and Building News (26.3.37). See also S. Everard The History of The Gas Light and Coke Company 1812-1949 (1949) p. 352.
- 83 'Kensal House' Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 44 No. 10 (20.3.37) pp. 500-505.
- 84 E. Denby 'Kensal House, An Urban Village', in Ascot Gas Water Heaters Ltd Flats Municipal and Private Enterprise p. 61.
- 85 E. Maxwell Fry 'Kensal House', in *ibid.*, p. 56.
- 86 *Ibid.*, pp. 56-60.
- 87 A. Jackson The Politics of Architecture p. 59.

**CHAPTER 2 Government housing policy and the case for
 flats**

Having outlined the modernists' case for flats in the previous chapter, the next two chapters will attempt to assess their influence in the housing debates of the 1930s and to evaluate whether the argument for a new type of housing development involving modern flats had any effect on the actual practice of municipal housebuilding.

This chapter will suggest that there was a growing interest in flats in the field of public housing during this period. Enthusiasm here was fired in the first place by a shift in the Government's housing policy, especially that of the Conservative National Government, which appeared to emphasise the necessity for 'building upwards' in its policy for the central redevelopment of towns. Continental housing, because of its long association with flats, became a potential model for some local authorities contemplating large slum clearance and redevelopment schemes. Some took to research to find out the economic and technical possibilities of flat schemes. At the same time, the results of several social surveys were pointing to the shortcomings of the conventional form of housing development. All this was in striking contrast to the situation in the 1920s when suburban cottage estates, built twelve houses to the acre, had been taken for granted.

In the next chapter, the outcome of this widespread interest in flats will be looked at more closely, especially at the level of the local authorities, who were at the

forefront of actually planning and building municipal houses in their districts. Representative views of councillors and council officers suggest that apart from a number of large urban authorities, the majority remained wedded to the ideal of suburban estates on garden city lines, either by conviction, of fiscal conservatism or of inertia. In support of this widespread status quo was professional (e.g. architects, town planners and civil engineers) and intellectual opinion, which was generally not favourable to flats. Then there was the Town and Country Planning Association, which opposed flats but was also unhappy with the proliferation of suburban estates and espoused decentralisation and the building of satellite towns. And although there was some flat building showing certain modernist influences, on the whole, these flats were more a product of a gradual evolution of the old tenements, informed by the existing English architectural tradition.

At first sight, there is some evidence from the 1930s to suggest that the Government and some local authorities were looking to flats as a potential vehicle to augment working class housing. In the aftermath of the First World War, there was an acute shortage of houses across the board for the working class. Accordingly the main purpose of housing policy in the 1920s was to supply a sufficient number of new accommodation units in the form of small houses to let. It was decided for the first time that the state should intervene to take responsibility for providing working class housing. Under the 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act, the local authorities were made the principal

agency responsible for building houses, and subsidies were provided by the Treasury and from the rates. The acceptance of a new standard in public housing followed the recommendations of the Tudor Walters Committee, set up during the war to 'consider questions of building construction' of dwellings for the working class. The Committee's report was largely the work of Raymond Unwin, who, together with Barry Parker, had designed Rowntree's industrial village, New Earswick near York and the first garden city at Letchworth before the First World War. He had also created the Hampstead Garden Suburb. Unwin was an influential exponent of the garden city movement and the leading force behind the Government's adoption of the garden city model in its housing programme.¹

The Tudor Walters Report thus recommended a maximum of twelve houses to the acre in urban areas and suggested that 'the two-storey cottage is the type which should generally be adopted', which would be built mainly in blocks of four or in pairs (as semi-detached houses). The deep, narrow-fronted terrace house of the by-law type with back projections were to be avoided in favour of one having 'a simple rectangular form' with wider frontage, which was more economical and allowed greater amounts of air and light into the house. Recommended space standards for a three-bedroom house ranged from 767 square feet (Type I with a bath in the scullery) through 872 square feet (Type II with a separate downstairs bathroom) to 1,145 square feet (Type IIIA with a parlour and an upstairs bathroom representing 'undoubtedly the type which is desired by the majority of the artisan

class'). As far as the arrangement of rooms inside the house was concerned, the report identified a strongly-marked tendency of working-class families 'to eliminate from the living-room the dirty work and particularly the cooking of meals' and sought to cater for this by providing a scullery with copper, sink and gas cooker or cooking range. The report also warned of the danger of having a large scullery 'as many tenants would live mainly in the scullery and keep the large living-room as a parlour'. There was in fact a very widespread desire among the working class for a parlour. In view of the likely demand for higher standards of accommodation, the report suggested that a large proportion of houses should have parlours in all future schemes. At the same time, it was realised that, though desirable, the parlour was beyond the means of many of the tenants. Hence the report argued that it should not be secured 'by cutting down the desirable minimum sizes of the living-room, scullery, or other essential parts of the houses'.²

The Tudor Walters Report gave short shrift to flats, saying that no advocate appeared for 'large blocks of tenements four or five storeys high' although 'modified types of such buildings might be a necessity in the centres of areas already developed with this class of dwelling or to meet special conditions'.³ In the 1920s, the customary development by self-contained cottages was commended in all cases and this was set against the experience of 'those countries and cities which have had the misfortune to adopt the tenement system to any great extent'.⁴

Between 1919 and the early 1930s, over 1.5 million houses were built in England and Wales. Of these, two thirds were subsidised houses provided under the successive Housing Acts.⁵ The majority of them were located on 'newly developed building estates'⁶ on the outskirts of towns, built to the density of twelve to the acre. Towards the end of the 1920s, however, there was a growing realisation among housing reformers and within the Government that the existing policy was failing to cater for the less well paid members of the working class.⁷ The process of filtering up, on which some hope had been placed, was not working, and the slums in the centre of towns had been left almost untouched.⁸ Grim accounts of slum conditions were being published.⁹ In the national campaign for slum clearance and rehousing which followed flats became relevant for those searching for a solution to the housing problem.

The first step in this direction was the Housing Act of 1930, the so-called Slum Clearance Act, introduced by the second Labour Government. This Act was specifically geared to the clearance of slums and subsidies were to be given according to the number of those displaced by clearance schemes. One of the distinctive features was a higher subsidy provision made for rehousing in urban areas where this had to be done on expensive sites in flats of more than three storeys.¹⁰ But in keeping with Labour's commitment to the public provision of working class housing, the Act was initially intended to be worked in combination with the 1924 Wheatley Act, which provided for general-need housing.¹¹ The way in which Arthur Greenwood, Minister of Health,

explained the flat subsidy showed that he was still thinking in traditional terms, putting forward the old arguments which had led to the building of tenements in the nineteenth century:

Much as I would prefer to see the population spreading out rather than rising heavenward in the dwellings, one has to face the fact that for a limited number of our people, who must live, or who passionately desire to live in the centres of very large cities, tenement provision must be made.¹²

The need of some sections of the working class, such as street traders and casual workers, to live within walking distance of their jobs had to be catered for. Housing provision on expensive, central sites required high density in block dwellings, which were known to be costly. Hence a higher subsidy was justified. In Greenwood's view, this special provision only applied to a few places, such as London and Liverpool.¹³

If anything, the Labour Party's affinity lay with the conventional type of housing development. The Party had adopted a resolution back in 1918, supporting 'the establishment of new towns ... on garden city principles', and pending the full operation of this scheme, it called for 'the provision of good self-contained houses with gardens'.¹⁴ Some Labour leaders continued to express their opposition to flats. Greenwood himself later attacked the Conservative National Government for driving people into flats.¹⁵ When pressed in Parliament, on the Second Reading

of the 1935 Housing Bill, to clarify Labour's position on flats, George Hicks responded by saying that he did not like them and he was sure none in his Party liked them. He then listed the objections to flats: the hardships suffered by many flights of stairs; the lack of space for drying clothes; the lack of privacy; and the problem of noise.¹⁶ But The Labour Party did come out against 'the building of huge dormitory cottage estates in outlying districts' in an important policy statement on housing published in 1934. Its preferred solution was 'small estates which fit in with existing building, and have the initial advantage of any social amenities already available'.¹⁷ Where there was a demand for flats, the statement noted, they should have a spacious layout, with gardens and playgrounds. But in densely-populated areas, such as London, it might be found desirable to develop self-contained units on garden city lines, with their own industries.¹⁸

The Conservative National Government, which took over in 1931, appeared to push ahead with the idea of flats in its housing policy. The Conservatives saw municipal housebuilding as a supplement to private enterprise and gave public housing only a residual role. They were clearly helped by the circumstances of the early 1930s. The financial crisis of 1931 had ushered in the economy campaign. The depression was bringing down the interest rates and the cost of building. The Conservative Government urged local authorities to take advantage of falling costs and to economise in space standards. They were told that adequate accommodation for the ordinary family with children

could be provided in a three-bedroom house of the non-parlour type with a superficial area of 760 square feet.¹⁹ Then the general need subsidy was abolished in 1933, and local authorities were told to start a five-year programme of slum clearance. The Government's new housing policy, as summarised in the Report of the Departmental Committee on Housing in 1933, was

to concentrate public effort and money on the clearance and improvement of slum conditions, and to rely in the main on competitive private enterprise to provide a supply of accommodation for the working classes - the provision by private enterprise to be supplemented, when necessary, by means of unsubsidized building by the Local Authorities.²⁰

The same report made two significant observations, which anticipated the direction of the Conservative policy on housing. It spoke of the excessive cost of tenement flats and 'the urgent need for further examination of the technical and other problems involved'.²¹ Drawing on the 1931 census figures, the report also noted the prevalence of small families in many of the large towns and thought that 'a larger proportion of the small type of dwelling should be provided in future than hitherto'. The report was of the opinion that part of the overcrowding problem, the seriousness of which was recognised, was caused by small families 'unable to obtain alternative accommodation suitable to their needs and their purse'.²² In the same year, the Association of Municipal Corporations (AMC) passed

a resolution calling for the slum clearance subsidy to be extended for the rehousing of persons 'living under overcrowded conditions', and the Government was coming round to the view that some measure had to be taken to remedy the situation. In particular, it was observed that in larger towns, the abatement of overcrowding turned on 'the provision of those houses in a particular locus, in which custom, industrial or commercial need require accommodation for the working classes'.²³ The solution was spelled out by Neville Chamberlain in the Housing Policy Committee of the Cabinet:

it was not possible to deal with the problem of the central areas by providing ordinary houses: the sites were much too expensive. It was therefore necessary to build blocks of flats. The old objections to accommodation of this kind were no longer valid because developments, particularly on the Continent had to a large extent overcome the drawbacks from which the older type of flats undoubtedly suffered. It was obvious that in future recourse would have to be had to a very large extent to the building of blocks of flats in the central areas.²⁴

The Housing Act of 1935 provided subsidies to help rehouse families living in overcrowded houses. The Act also introduced the so-called redevelopment areas. The local authorities were empowered to acquire and redevelop districts in the inner and older areas of towns, provided one third of dwellings there were unfit or overcrowded. As

the Conservative Minister, Hilton Young, explained in Parliament:

you cannot remedy overcrowding unless you are prepared to find the means for re-housing a large proportion of the dwellers in these central areas near the scene of their original home ...

It is impossible to make use of the central areas to which I have referred, where overcrowding is characteristically present, to their full extent without building to some degree upward in the form of blocks of flats.²⁵

And what was contemplated, in his words, was 'nothing less than the reconstruction ... of the bad old cores of the inner areas of our great towns'.²⁶ The Minister, mindful of the objections to flats, put forward a case for modern flats, echoing Neville Chamberlain's words in Cabinet:

I, myself, believed that prejudice to be based upon the fact that the original blocks of workers' dwellings and blocks of flats which were first constructed in the slums were thoroughly bad, badly designed, badly laid down and did not make proper provision for air and space and the amenities of life. I find, however, that wherever the good modern flat has been introduced, that prejudice breaks down. It is impossible for one who has not studied the subject to realise what enormous strides have been made in the technique of flat construction even in the course of the last 10 years. I venture to say that today the

modern well-designed flat to many families means more of a dwelling than does a small house.²⁷

The Government's plan, then, was to highlight the overcrowding problem in the centre of large towns, for which redevelopment areas provided the sites for rehousing in flats.²⁸

The upsurge of interest in flats was also evident within government departments and among a number of local authorities. As some of the other European countries had greater experience of building flats, those involved in public housing started to look to the continent for new ideas. Inside the Ministry of Health, the officials assiduously gathered information on standards of accommodation and housebuilding activities from as far afield as South Africa and the United States of America.²⁹ The Chairman of the London County Council (LCC) Housing Committee felt that 'the time had come for British local authorities to study more closely what [was] ... being done on the Continent in the building of high tenements'.³⁰ Cities such as London and Birmingham, and the Department of Health for Scotland, were among those organisations which sent over delegations to get first-hand knowledge of housing conditions on the continent.³¹

The delegations were invariably impressed by the wide range of communal facilities provided as part of estate development: public gardens; nursery and kindergarten schools; medical clinics; libraries; community rooms; and communal laundries. Although, in several cases, they found the actual accommodation provided, in terms of space

standards and sanitary facilities, to be somewhat inferior, the communal facilities were thought to 'form a very substantial addition to the real value of the accommodation provided within the walls of each individual house'.³²

Another point the delegations agreed about was the higher standard of design and finish seen on many of the estates.

As the LCC report put it:

more expense appears to have been allowed in continental housing on the internal finish and appearance of dwellings, particularly as regards flooring and walls of halls and staircases, and *the fitting-up of kitchens with labour-saving appliances*. These improvements result in a saving in maintenance costs, add considerably to the comfort and homelike appearance of the dwellings, and undoubtedly encourage the tenants to take a pride in their homes.³³

The importance of having competent architects was pointed out by the Birmingham delegation:

In the design of the buildings, many leading architects in addition to the architects of the Municipality have been entrusted with the preparation of the plans, with distinctive effect. By the adoption of this policy, an extraordinarily large amount of variety in design has been obtained, thus reducing to a minimum the risk of barrack-like monotony.³⁴

This point was echoed by the delegation from the Department of Health for Scotland, who stated that the lesson to be

learned from the continental schemes was 'how to combine artistic effects with real utility and real economy', with the consequence that 'all those engaged in housing our people must be convinced that housing design [was] ... important creative work which should be entrusted to skilled hands'.³⁵ The delegations were also impressed by 'the colourful charm and brightness of the continental schemes' and commended 'the value of a bright and colourful environment'.³⁶

On matters of actual design of flats, the delegations noted that the most common type on the Continent was a four- or five-storey block, over which height they felt lifts should be provided.³⁷ Staircase access was preferred to a common balcony because it gave greater privacy to the tenants. The reports also recommended the provision of private balconies which was a prominent feature of the continental schemes, enabling the tenants to obtain sunlight and fresh air.³⁸ In layout, the latest practice of siting a series of parallel blocks on the north-south axis (the Zeilenbau plan) was mentioned, but as an alternative, a modified form of the courtyard plan - 'a somewhat quadrangular arrangement, with the southern end of the quadrangular generally open' - was commended for adoption.³⁹ The Birmingham report showed its appreciation of modern housing estates, presumably from Frankfurt, which were amply illustrated:

Architecture generally follows the lines of modern development. It is somewhat severe in style but relieved by the fine curves of balconies or

verandahs, and the breaking of the monotony of the huge straight surface by the bringing forward of parts of the frontage of the buildings, with the use of boldly drawn horizontal lines along the whole frontage.⁴⁰

Similarly, the Scottish delegation, after commenting on the variety of architectural design seen on the continent, remarked:

The architecture generally reveals a much greater susceptibility to modern influences than does ours. The beauties of straight lines and plain surfaces are commonly used in domestic architecture instead of being confined to new shop fronts and cinemas, as they are here.⁴¹

Yet, during the 1930s in England, among the most celebrated examples of continental housing were the municipal estates of Vienna. These estates were on the itinerary of all three delegations mentioned here, and many others involved in public housing made their pilgrimage to Vienna. Most famous of all, the Karl Marx Hof, consisted of massive blocks forming a series of quadrangles and enclosing garden courtyards. They were of traditional brick construction with coloured stucco finish. The centre portion rose above the rest of the estate and was crowned by the six tower-like projections. It was accentuated by continuous lines of balconies and by four large archways. It was fortress-like in appearance and gave an impression of monumentality. The individual flats were small in size, but like many other estates built by the Viennese Corporation,

it was planned as a residential community with a comprehensive range of social facilities: kindergartens, communal laundries with bathing accommodation, a school, dental and maternity clinics, a post office and a host of shops.⁴² These Viennese estates had an added attraction for those on the left because they were built and managed by the progressive, Social Democratic administration.⁴³

The principal message of these delegations seemed to be that on the continent much more attention was being paid to the social and aesthetic aspects of housing schemes. Birmingham, with little experience of building flats, was a leading example of those local authorities which realised the implications of rehousing people in the central areas. The Birmingham delegation, upon its return, recommended the City Council to proceed with the erection of a model estate of flats up to 1,000 dwellings as part of the programme to rehouse people from the slums under the terms of the 1930 Act. The Birmingham report concluded:

our investigations have satisfied us that both adults and young children, can be housed quite satisfactorily, comfortably and happily in flat or tenement dwellings under perfectly healthy conditions, provided the necessary amenities are included within the scope of the scheme. For financial and constructional reasons, these amenities can only be justified when the colony of flats is sufficiently large. In our opinion this must be within the figure of from 500 to 1,000 dwellings.⁴⁴

As an addendum to the general recommendation for a large estate of flats, the chairman of the Estates Committee presented a minority recommendation, calling for small blocks of flats 'dispersed in convenient areas'. He felt that these would better meet the needs of those people who must live in the central areas.⁴⁵

At the same time as the knowledge of continental housing was expanding in England, some organisations were carrying out research into the technical and economic problems of building flats. The Council for Research on Housing Construction, in its report of 1934,⁴⁶ dealt extensively with the problem of rehousing people living in slums and overcrowded conditions. The report stated firmly that as the majority of people were tied to central areas by their occupation, a great deal of rehousing would have to be done in inner city areas, which would only be possible by the use of multi-storey flats. A major obstacle was the cost. The Ministry of Health returns consistently showed flats to be 30 to 50 per cent more expensive than ordinary non-parlour houses. So, with the cost of building at its lowest around 1934, houses cost £300 to build, whereas flats were between £400 and £450 (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1

The average cost of newly-built local authority dwellings,1930-1939 (England and Wales)

Year ending 31st March	Ordinary non-parlour houses £	Dwellings in buildings of 3 or or more storeys £
1930-31	342	489
1931-32	327	562
1932-33	300	509
1933-34	290	453
1934-35	294	437
1935-36	304	465
1936-37	323	492
1937-38	364	574
1938-39	370	544

(Source: Compiled from Ministry of Health Annual Reports, 1930-1939)

The main reason why flats had cost more to build than cottages of corresponding type, the report argued, was that their design and construction had not been adequately studied. And this inexperience stemmed from a persistent prejudice against flats, formed by the grim image of nineteenth century tenements:

It should be added that the British idea of a tenement has been and still is strongly coloured by the existence of quantities of old fashioned, unsatisfactory block dwellings. Most of these buildings have been converted from large single houses; others have been built as tenements, but of out-dated type; both kinds have proved a favourite breeding-ground for slum conditions. With such tenement slums as a warning example, a

prejudice against further tenement building is not unnatural.⁴⁷

The fact was that, in the Council's view, flats could make satisfactory homes, and its investigations pointed to standardisation and the updating of building bye-laws as key components in any new programme:

15 The basis of progress and cost-reduction in tenement building is to be found in the application of modern and rationalized building technique, based on the principles of standardization, mass production, large-scale operation, organized assembly to strict time-schedules, a maximum working-face and a maximum speed throughput ...

18 All bye-laws should be periodically revised, in accord with all relevant British Standard Specifications. New and improved materials and methods which have passed suitable tests should be incorporated without delay.⁴⁸

The report produced model plans and estimates of five-storey blocks and of ten-storey blocks, equipped with lifts. By using these blocks of steel frame construction, it was demonstrated that flats, having satisfactory standards of light, air and space, could be built within the terms of the 1930 Act subsidies and be let at 10s per week.⁴⁹

A departmental committee of the Ministry of Health also went into the question of the materials and methods of construction suitable for the building of flats for the working class.⁵⁰ The National Government was particularly

anxious to find out how the building cost of flats could be brought down. The committee's main task was a technical one. In response to its plea, a number of firms and individuals submitted estimates for a unit block of five-storey flats, using various new types of construction. The committee, then, taking as a standard an estimate cost for a block of normal brick construction, examined in detail the comparative costs and advantages of different building systems. The final report of the committee was somewhat inconclusive and refrained from making a definite choice. Nonetheless, it noted that, apart from traditional brick construction which held 'an established place', some other building systems had 'distinct promise', and recommended that 'several of the steel framed and reinforced framed systems' should be given 'an opportunity of tendering for actual blocks of flats'.⁵¹ The report also called for a relaxation of fire regulations under certain conditions to allow the use of new structural elements.⁵²

While increasing attention was being paid to the slums and the problem of overcrowding in the central parts of towns, there were also signs that all was not well in many of the new municipal housing estates, which had sprung up after the First World War. Social surveys and middle-class reforming opinion played a supporting role in favour of flats, by pointing out the hardship incurred by tenants rehoused on suburban estates.

The sociologist, Terence Young, in his survey of social conditions on one of the LCC's out-county estates, recorded a high rate of turnover among the tenants, which was in

striking contrast to the removal rates of other estates within the County. A large number of tenants moving into large council houses from poor neighbourhoods had to contend with higher costs of living which consisted of increased rents and rates, furniture payments and increased travelling expenses.⁵³ In Stockton on Tees, research into the health of the local population found that, among the tenants who had been transferred from slum dwellings to a self-contained municipal housing estate, the death rate increased by 46 per cent. This figure compared very unfavourably with that of a comparable population that continued to dwell in slum houses. The death rate for the latter actually went down. The investigations of the Medical Officer of Health for the town threw light on the link between the increased mortality and serious dietary deficiencies found among the tenants on the new housing estate, who incurred higher rentals and had less money available for the purchase of food.⁵⁴ From these survey results the Coles had to conclude:

the consequences of moving low-paid working-class families into better houses may be to reduce their food budgets well below what is indispensable for a healthy life, so that most of them will drift back to overcrowded slums if they get half a chance.⁵⁵

Voluntary societies, like the Charity Organisation Society, were also apprehensive about the 'compulsory removal of families' to new housing estates, as it resulted in the uprooting of people who had long associations with one place and destroyed their social and industrial ties.⁵⁶

A Liverpool survey carried out among the inhabitants in areas of poor housing appeared to confirm the view of the Charity Organisation Society. Of those families interviewed, 84 per cent said they were willing to leave their houses for better accommodation, but only 38 per cent were prepared to leave the neighbourhood altogether, and many expressed a strong attachment to the neighbourhood in which they had lived for years. The survey also found that, although the 'workman's cottage type of dwelling' was preferred by many, there was no general antipathy towards flats.⁵⁷ Likewise, there were indications that religious bodies might be disinclined towards rehousing tenants from central areas in suburbs. Of Liverpool, it was said:

we have people of two different religions and those who require denominational religion in the schools must pay for their own school buildings (not for the teaching). They have built their schools and churches and removal to the outskirts would involve building new ones.⁵⁸

The suburban housing estates themselves, too, came in for criticism, for their lack of social facilities and scope for communal life and for their depressing uniformity in layout and design. In the case of the Beacontree estate studied by Young, the LCC only provided houses, and the local authorities of the place struggled to provide public services for the huge influx of population into what was formerly fields used for market gardening. Shopping facilities remained inadequate for many years. Local employment opportunities did not keep up with the growth of

population, until the automobile industry began its operation in 1931, led by Ford's huge plant at Dagenham. Moreover, the one-class nature of the estate made it extremely difficult to raise money from the local people to start various social and religious institutions. In the end, Young questioned the virtue of concentrating a large uniform population in one area at a low density. He suggested on the one hand that an estate built at higher density, perhaps in the form of flats, might lead to a greater number and variety of shops, public service and social facilities because the higher density of population would give the necessary financial support. On the other hand, he seemed to favour smaller estates, intermixed with private middle-class housing estates or in the form of an addition to neighbouring towns so that pre-existing public services and social amenities would be available for the new area in the first place.⁵⁹ Ruth Durant, also a sociologist, studying another LCC out-county estate at Watling later in the decade, came across a similar set of problems as that described by Young. In particular, she emphasised the shortage of small accommodation units. The great majority of houses were built for working class families on good wages with a number of children living at home. Out of a total of 4,000 dwellings, only 110 were two-room flats. There was hardly any provision for young couples or old retired people. Watling, in Durant's view, catered only for certain phases of working class life and did not allow its population to settle.⁶⁰ An obvious lesson she drew was that

'Various types of dwellings should be built to accommodate families in the different stages of their existence'.⁶¹

Another important issue in the discussion of the role played by reforming opinion was that of the preservation of the countryside, which may have influenced the way people thought about the desirable type of housing development. It was estimated in 1940 that 'an area equal in size to the counties of Buckingham and Bedford combined' had been covered with brick and mortar since 1900, with good agricultural land being lost in the process.⁶² The Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) had been formed in 1926, to coordinate the efforts of various bodies, mainly concerned with protecting the rural amenities from the danger of haphazard development.

The destruction of the countryside increasingly became a serious problem in the 1930s. The decade saw a great housing boom in the private sector. A total of 2.5 million new houses were built between 1931 and 1939. Of these, 1.9 million were provided by private enterprise, which built well over 200,000 houses annually from 1934 onwards.⁶³ Encouraged by the Conservative National Government and facilitated by the expansion of building societies providing cheap mortgages to prospective home owners, private enterprise was actively engaged in suburban housebuilding. The manner in which this housing boom appeared to be devouring rural land sometimes invited vitriolic criticism. Thus, a Labour M.P. in the House of Commons called it 'the nasty rash of what masquerades as new Tudor palaces in the beautiful countryside of Southern England'.⁶⁴ The

Restriction of Ribbon Development Act of 1935 was an attempt to check the building of houses strung out along the trunk roads, which was a device often used by the private builders to avoid road making charges and the provision of services.⁶⁵ In 1937, the architect, Clough Williams-Ellis edited a book called Britain and the Beast, with contributions of essays from twenty-five individuals, writing of some particular part or aspect of the countryside. The book was admittedly a motley collection of essays, but all the participants agreed that the countryside, as a source of valuable agricultural land and a place of rural beauty, was being destroyed by uncontrolled development. C.E.M. Joad, a philosopher and social commentator, established a characteristic tone:

To thousands, nature, newly discovered, has been a will-o'-the-wisp ... building to live in a field and to look at a wood, a man discovered before a year has gone by that he is living in a row with an unhampered vision of next door's garage. Thus the towns are throwing their ever lengthening tentacles of brick and mortar over the country; round every corner pops up a perky new villa, and the green face of England's landscape comes out in an inflamed rash of angry pink. In fifty years' time there will, in southern England, be neither town nor country, but only a single dispersed suburb, sprawling unendingly from Watford to the coast.⁶⁶

The keynote of the book, as to remedies, was to press for central control and greater coordination of the efforts on the lines pursued by the CPRE. Some preservationists appeared to be exclusively concerned with the plight of the countryside, but their case was echoed in the housing debate. Certainly the modernists and other advocates of flats made much of the damage done by suburban building and ribbon development of houses and posed the alternative of central development with flats.

The move towards flats in public housing provision and debate brought out various responses in Parliament. Some politicians, particularly those from large urban constituencies, expressed their interest in flats. Often continental examples were cited as the kind of thing that they should go in for. Thus a Conservative M.P. for Newcastle upon Tyne found in 'Budapest, Berlin, Cologne and even Naples, marvellous flats with three or four rooms, bath and every convenience, and for a rent which, in their money, is equivalent to about 7s per week'.⁶⁷ A Labour M.P. from Liverpool urged his fellow members to go to the Continent and get a better vision of what could be done:

I have visited certain areas where there is light and beauty - beautiful landscapes and gardens, bathed in God's sunshine, and where you have the best housing in the world.⁶⁸

A Liberal M.P. from Bethnal Green, London, joined in the praise:

In Vienna, too, there are some of the finest examples of well-planned block dwellings. An

immense amount has been done in connection with the design, planning and construction of block dwellings. They are humanised, and are not the barrack squares that they used to be 20 or 30 years ago.⁶⁹

Another M.P., a Labour from Hammersmith, believed that blocks of flats were the only solution for the problem of overcrowding in central London, and of those flats he said:

Of course the whole point is that these modern flats must have modern amenities. That means modern lifts, central heating, and that in most cases the blocks of flats shall not occupy more than from a quarter to a third of the total land upon which they are erected.⁷⁰

Against this, there was frequent reference from all sides to the small house as the rightful place for their people. This was sometimes coupled with the wholesale denigration of flats, as in the case of a Conservative M.P. from Suffolk:

All flats are soulless and soul-devouring ... It may be all very well in Paris, Vienna or Berlin, where people are brought up in flats, but here people are accustomed to look upon a house as their home.⁷¹

A Labour M.P. from Wednesbury felt that flats were something for London, not for 'provincial people' and emphasised the point about people living in houses to themselves:

The front door and the back door are their own, and when they are in the house it is indeed their

castle. It would be a bad day if this new fashion for flats were to spread.⁷²

Whether 'this new fashion for flats' was desirable or not, it is clear that the question of flats became a major talking point in the 1930s for all those who took any interest at all in the problem of working class housing. The estates of flats at such places as Frankfurt and Vienna came to be widely known in England, at a time when the nineteenth century legacy of block dwellings was still alive in people's minds and the grim realities of sharing tenements were very much present. In these circumstances, the recent achievements in continental flats acted as a means of dispelling the negative image of flats, signifying a new departure in public housing. As such, they were readily taken up by their advocates, who saw in them the possibility of offering a new and improved way of life for the working-class people.

Footnotes

- 1 See M. Swenarton Homes Fit For Heroes. The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain (1981) especially Chs 1, 5.
- 2 Local Government Boards for England and Wales, and Scotland Report of the Committee appointed ... to consider Questions of Buildings Construction in Connection with the Provision of Dwellings for the Working Classes ... [Tudor Walters Report] Cd. 9191 (HMSO 1918) paras 58, 85-89, 98-100, 144.
- 3 Ibid., para. 84.
- 4 Ministry of Health Manual on Unfit Houses and Unhealthy Areas. Volume 1 Policy and Practice (HMSO 1919) Ch. IX - Rehousing paras 1, 3.
- 5 M. Bowley Housing and the State 1919-1944 (1945) p. 271.
- 6 Ministry of Health Annual Report 1929-30 Cmd. 3667 (HMSO 1930) p. 82.
- 7 See, for example, E.D. Simon How to Abolish Slums (1929) pp. 52-61; Ministry of Health Annual Report 1929-30 pp. 76-77, 81-82.
- 8 Up to March 1930, only some 10,650 houses had been provided to rehouse persons displaced by slum clearance. See Ministry of Health Annual Report 1930-31 Cmd. 3937 (HMSO 1931) p. 107.
- 9 See, for example, H. Barnes The Slum. Its Story and Solution (1934). In February 1932, the Daily Herald carried a series of articles by H.V. Morton on his 'tour round the slums of our great industrial cities',

- later published as a pamphlet by the Labour Party: H.V. Morton What I Saw in the Slums (1933).
- 10 M. Bowley Housing and the State 1919-1944 pp. 135-136.
- 11 Ibid., p. 140.
- 12 Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 237 (7.4.30) cols 1819-1820.
- 13 'It was futile, for example, to expect London Dockers to live in Beacontree. Broadly the tenement proposals would only apply in London and Liverpool', was the reply Greenwood gave to the Deputation from the National Federation of Building Trades Operatives, who raised their objection to the extra subsidy, which they felt 'would encourage local authorities in this unsatisfactory method of building'. See HLG 52/850 'Housing Bill - Deputation from NFBTO' (The National Federation of Building Trades Operatives) (3.4.30).
- 14 Labour Party 1918 Annual Conference Report pp. 126-127.
- 15 Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 297 (30.1.35) cols 391-392.
- 16 Ibid., (31.1.35) col. 644.
- 17 Labour Party Up with the Houses Down with the Slums (1934) pp. 6, 7.
- 18 Ibid., pp. 5, 6.
- 19 Ministry of Health Annual Report 1931-32 Cmd. 4113 (HMSO 1932) p. 97.
- 20 Ministry of Health Report of the Departmental Committee on Housing Cmd. 4397 (HMSO 1933) para. 5.
- 21 Ibid., para. 61.
- 22 Ibid., para. 97.

- 23 HLG 68/30 Notes for preliminary and informal discussion on the proposal of the Association of Municipal Corporations (n.d. but c. Dec. 1933).
- 24 CAB 27/565 Conclusions of the Meeting of the Cabinet Housing Policy Committee (13.2.34) p. 2.
- 25 Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 297 (30.1.35) cols 362, 366.
- 26 Ibid., col. 368.
- 27 Ibid., col. 366.
- 28 J.A. Yelling 'The origins of British redevelopment areas', Planning Perspectives Vol. 3 No. 3 (Sept. 1988) p. 282.
- 29 HLG 52/788 Ministry of Health Memoranda on 'Standards of Accommodation in Foreign Countries' and 'Continental Housing Comparison' (n.d. but c. 1935).
- 30 The Times (16.8.33).
- 31 Reports were published of their visits:
City of Birmingham Report of the Estates and Public Works and Town Planning Committees respectively of the Deputations visiting Germany, Czecho-Slovakia and Austria in August, 1930 [hereafter Birmingham Report] (Birmingham 1931); Department of Health for Scotland Working-Class Housing on the Continent (Edinburgh HMSO 1935); London County Council Report of the Chairman of the Housing and Public Health Committee, Mr Lewis Silkin, M.P., as the result of a visit to Continental Housing Estates in September and October 1935 [hereafter LCC Report] (1936). The places visited by these delegations were as follows: in Holland -

Rotterdam and Amsterdam; in Germany - Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig, Cologne, Frankfurt am Main and Munich; in Austria - Vienna; in Czechoslovakia - Prague; in France - Paris; and in the Scandinavian countries - Copenhagen, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Oslo.

Leeds and Liverpool also sent delegations to continental cities. See A. Ravetz 'From Working Class Tenement to Modern Flat: local authorities and multi-storey housing between the wars', in A. Sutcliffe (ed.) Multi-Storey Living. The British Working-Class Experience (1974) p. 148, Footnote 16.

32 Working-Class Housing on the Continent p. 16.

33 LCC Report pp. 29-30.

34 Birmingham Report p. 64.

35 Working-Class Housing on the Continent p. 17.

36 Ibid., pp. 19-20.

37 Birmingham Report p. 70; LCC Report p. 27.

38 LCC Report p. 28..

39 Ibid., pp. 6, 26.

40 Birmingham Report p. 66.

41 Working-Class Housing on the Continent p. 19.

42 D. Brooke 'The Karl Marx Hof, Vienna' Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 38 No. 18 (8.8.31) pp. 670-677.

43 A booklet called The New Vienna (Fourth Revised Edition, 1931), written by the President of the Vienna City Council was published by the Labour Party. It included an elaborate section on housing policy, with impressive illustrations of these estates.

- 44 Birmingham Report p. 70 [italics in original].
- 45 Ibid., p. 73.
- 46 Council for Research on Housing Construction Slum Clearance and Rehousing. The First Report (1934). The Council was chaired by the Third Earl of Dudley, a landed aristocrat with interests in the iron, steel and coal industries. Later during the Second World War, he was to chair an important committee, which looked into the design of dwellings for post-war housing. The Council also included the following local authority architects as consultant members: W.G. Davies (Sheffield); G. Topham Forrest (London County Council); L. Heywood (Manchester); and L.H. Keay (Liverpool).
- 47 Slum Clearance and Rehousing pp. 75-76.
- 48 Ibid., p. 137.
- 49 Ibid., pp. 137-138. The Council, after examining available published matter, took a weekly rent of 10s. 0d. (inclusive of rates) as the maximum an average family of four could afford and set out to provide for people in this category.
- 50 Ministry of Health Construction of Flats for the Working Classes. Interim Report of Departmental Committee (HMSO 1935) and Final Report of Departmental Committee (HMSO 1937). This Departmental Committee also included prominent local authority architects. Among them were, G. Topham Forrest (London County Council) and L.H. Keay (Liverpool).
- 51 Final Report of Departmental Committee p. 21.
- 52 Ibid., p. 31.

- 53 T. Young Beacontree and Dagenham. The Story of the Growth of a Housing Estate (1934) Chs 22, 23 and Appendix 4.
- 54 The findings were first published in 1933 in the medical journal The Lancet (4.3.33) under the title 'Removal of a Slum Population to Modern Dwellings', and later incorporated in G.C.M. McGonigle and J. Kirby Poverty and Public Health (1936) Ch. 7.
- 55 G.D.H. Cole and M.I. Cole The Condition of Britain (1937) p. 160. The Coles were fully aware that at its root the problem of poverty had to be tackled - 'If we are to remedy overcrowding we must not merely build more houses but also ensure that families which are now living under overcrowded conditions shall be able to afford the improved accommodation without substituting one form of privation for another. That, however, cannot possibly be done except by raising the real incomes of the overcrowded families' (ibid., pp. 160-161).
- 56 HLG 68/30 Notes of a deputation from the Charity Organisation Society to the Minister of Health (27.3.35).
- 57 Liverpool University Settlement Housing Problems in Liverpool. A Survey of Six Areas of Bad Housing, with special reference to the Housing Act, 1930 (Liverpool 1931) p. 29.
- 58 Comment of H. Rutherford from Liverpool in 12th International Housing and Town Planning Congress Rome 1929 Part III Report (Rome 1929) p. 67.

- 59 T. Young Beacontree and Dagenham Ch. 32 and passim.
The Labour Party's policy statement on housing Up with Houses Down with Slums (1935) incorporated all of his observations in its criticism of 'huge dormitory cottage estates' as well as his preference for small estates tacked on to existing towns.
- 60 R. Durant Watling. A Survey of Social Life on a New Housing Estate (1939) Ch. 1. Young local couples from Watling were, in any case, ineligible to apply for houses on the estate, since the London County Council, as a rule, only accepted people from the London area. Another important point which stood in the way of the estate becoming 'a real community, the traditional residence of successive families' was the limited nature of local employment. Though Watling was well placed in relation to neighbouring industries, these newly installed factories almost exclusively employed semi-skilled labour. This meant that the estate's younger generations were offered only 'blind-alley employment' and had to look further afield for new work (ibid., pp. 12-15).
- 61 Ibid., p. xii.
- 62 Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population Report Cmd. 6153 (HMSO 1940) para. 36.
- 63 M. Bowley Housing and the State 1919-1944 p. 271.
- 64 Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 297 (31.1.35) col. 577.
- 65 G.E. Cherry The Evolution of British Town Planning. A history of town planning in the United Kingdom during

- the 20th century and of the Royal Town Planning
Institute 1914-1974 (Leighton Buzzard 1974) p. 103.
- 66 C.E.M. Joad 'The People's Claim', in C. Williams-Ellis
(ed.) Britain and the Beast (1937) p. 81.
- 67 Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 297 (30.1.35) col.
443.
- 68 Ibid., 5th Series Vol. 273 (15.12.32) col. 629.
- 69 Ibid., col. 584.
- 70 Ibid., col. 445.
- 71 Ibid., 5th Series Vol. 297 (31.1.35) cols 593-594.
- 72 Ibid., (30.1.35) col. 435.

CHAPTER 3 Local authority housing and the houses versus flats controversy

From the preceding chapter, it can be seen that the Government's policy of central area redevelopment envisaged large-scale clearances of obsolete working class housing and its replacement by estates of flats on continental methods. However, the expectations were not fulfilled. The reason for this was the sustained resistance against this form of housing development on the part of local authorities and the housing professions, so that the building of flats was confined to only a few large cities.

The Association of Municipal Corporations (AMC) was one of the major organisations consulted by the Government in its preparation of the 1935 Housing Bill, in which the Government's initial intention was to restrict its subsidy to central rehousing in flats. This came up against the opposition of the AMC, which argued that 'it was by no means always necessary to rehouse centrally' and that the proposal 'amounted to an encouragement to local authorities to incur unnecessary expenditure'.¹ The AMC, in principle, was 'not favourably inclined to rebuilding on the site because of the high costs'.² The local authority representatives also feared that their effort at suburban housebuilding from the 1920s might be undermined. This was because 'tenants of suburban estates without amenities' would, in the event of large-scale central redevelopment, 'certainly try to get back into the centre of towns with shops and amusements'.³ It was felt that making the central areas more attractive to

live in would exacerbate the overcrowding problem.⁴ Of course there were those more committed to the conventional form of housing development. Alderman M.E. Mitchell, chairman of the Housing Committee of the Manchester City Council, was one of them:

I am strongly of opinion that proper and effective housing of the people, especially in Manchester, can best be achieved by the provision of a self-contained house with a garden for each family. Family life, as I understand it, can only be fully attained where each family is given a separate house in pleasing surroundings and with proper and effective control regarding the number of houses to be erected upon a given area of land.⁵

And understandably he was strongly against 'housing their people in masses one upon the other'. As chairman of the AMC, Mitchell pressed for the subsidy to be made available when rehousing was carried out in suburban cottages.⁶

The case of Birmingham illustrated the difficulty of accepting flats in a city with a long tradition of low-density, suburban building.⁷ By 1930, when the city's housing delegation visited continental cities to study flats, there was sufficient agreement on the Conservative Unionist-governed Council about the need for a large number of cheap accommodation units in the central areas. Furthermore, the city's sprawling suburbs had come in for criticism and there was a growing awareness that the reserves of building land within the boundaries would dry up. Notwithstanding, all parties were divided and a

majority was in opposition when the continental delegation's proposal to erect 'a model colony of flats' (see Chapter 2) was discussed by the City Council. In the end, the matter, together with the minority recommendation for small blocks of flats, was further referred to the Estates Committee for a detailed report as to layout and cost. Many members, both Unionist and Labour, condemned flats as 'barracks' and 'institutions', arguing that 'Birmingham people preferred single houses with their own bits of gardens'. For the majority of delegation members, as for others, who took a more realistic view of the situation in the central areas, the flats were the only 'practicable' solutions that met the needs of the people. And it was essential to build large blocks of flats so that all the necessary amenities could be provided to make them attractive and convenient.⁸ The Borough Labour Party in Birmingham contained several vociferous opponents of flats, and the majority of rank-and-file members were reported to be against them. One Labour alderman, who was on the housing delegation, was at pains to point out that the existing objection to flats was misplaced, as 'it was an objection to flats as they were known in Birmingham, which could not be compared with the flats on the Continent'.⁹

The report of the Estates Committee, however, rejected the large blocks of flats with amenities recommended by the majority of the delegation as too expensive. The minority proposal for small blocks of flats was also turned down. Instead, the Report recommended small houses and 'maisonettes' (an euphemism for two-storey cottage flats) to

be used for rehousing in the central areas. In the actual scheme put forward in the Report, the estimated cost per flat in large blocks with amenities, assuming two- and three-bedroom flats were built in equal proportion, worked out at £479. On the other hand, two- and three-bedroom dwellings in cottage flats could be constructed at an average cost of £274 and £348 per unit respectively. The cost of small houses was estimated to be £333 for two bedroom units and £340 for three bedroom units.¹⁰ The City Engineer and Surveyor later articulated the overriding considerations of the Council at the time:

from a financial point of view there is little advantage in it. The high cost of constructing flats more than counterbalances the higher cost per dwelling for land for houses. For accommodation equivalent to various types of houses and flatted cottages, flats gave little, if any, advantage as regards rents, even with the increased amount of subsidy. Especially was this so if the flats were to have amenities such as are referred to above [i.e. in the delegation's Report].¹¹

Cottage flats were clearly a compromise solution reflecting the division of opinion on the Council, but the idea of a model estate of flats was kept alive in Birmingham. Later in the decade, with 'the growing rehousing problem, persuasion from a pro-flat Minister of Health and a further shift of middle class opinion away from the suburban ideal',¹² the Council gradually came to accept flats in

principle. Also influential in this policy reorientation was the presence of the new City Engineer and Surveyor, Herbert Manzoni, whose chief ambition was to redevelop Birmingham's slums on modern lines.

Indeed, the paid officers of the local authorities, in this instance, those in charge of housing and town planning, could have a formative influence on local policies because of their competence on the subject. The professional knowledge and outlook of these local technical officials (e.g. architects, civil engineers and surveyors) were informed by the prevailing attitudes of their respective professional institutions, many of which were negative or cautious towards the idea of flats at the time. This constituted the second source of resistance against the promotion of flats.

First of all, at its root, English architecture of the interwar years remained largely eclectic and historicist in outlook, relying on past styles to dress up buildings. The oft-quoted outburst of Sir Reginald Blomfield against the new architecture epitomised the conservative attitude of the English architectural establishment:

[The new architecture] is essentially Continental in its origin and inspiration, and it claims as a merit that it is cosmopolitan. As an Englishman and proud of his country, I detest and despise cosmopolitanism.¹³

In particular, English architecture had prided itself on the achievements on the domestic front. These were the cottages and country houses designed by architects like Philip Webb,

R. Norman Shaw and C.F.A. Voysey. Unpretentious, simple but dignified in style,¹⁴ they provided the model which characterised the cottage building of model industrial villages down to garden suburbs. When the President of one of the most progressive schools of architecture spoke out in 1927, he felt that this cherished tradition was under fire from modernism:

before the war, ... the whole world was coming here to study how a house should be built and set in the landscape and - whatever our shortcomings in public buildings might have been - we at least had a style in domestic architecture of which any country might be proud.

It is this tradition which "modernism" in architecture has attacked, alleging that all existing traditions are worn out. The apostles of this new creed are therefore attempting to set up new standards which - if they are to be judged by the work actually finished on the Continent - deride every accepted canon of grouping, proportion, sense of structure, relationship of solids to voids, and the use of mouldings or ornaments of any kind.¹⁵

For many in the architectural world, the achievement of English domestic architecture, which would have been associated in their minds with the English housing tradition, was something not easily to be parted with.

Secondly, just as the 1935 Housing Bill was raising the question of the respective merits of houses and flats, the

Institution of Municipal and County engineers and the Town Planning Institute issued a joint memorandum in favour of houses. The Memorandum admitted the need for a limited provision of flats in some large cities and in certain circumstances such as where the cost of land was high, but it was 'strongly of opinion that houses are preferable to flats'. There followed a justification for this preference, based upon reasoning which was often echoed in other debates about houses and cottages at this time:

2 The strong tradition of home-life, which is a characteristic of the British people and a principal factor in social stability and contentment, is stimulated by the family occupancy of separate and self-contained dwellings, with the privacy and sense of individuality which the smaller house provides in a far greater degree than the flat.

3 A private garden, however small, is preferable to a share in a communal garden. It is a place where a man can indulge a hobby by growing flowers and vegetables (the latter helping the household budget) and where the family can enjoy fresh air and sunshine without the disturbance and noise which occurs in a communal garden.

4 It is especially desirable that a family which includes young children should have a private garden where they can play within their mother's easy reach ...

5 The long flights of stairs in blocks of flats have several drawbacks. They are dangerous to the health of expectant mothers and women carrying children ... The use of lifts would, of course, help to reduce these difficulties but they would be very costly.

6 Generally speaking, the accommodation provided by the small house is greater and more convenient than that provided by a flat. Moreover, the house is generally quieter, being free from disturbances due to the audibility between flats.

7 From the economic point of view flats have nothing to recommend them as compared with houses ... they are more costly to erect than houses containing similar accommodation.¹⁶

At the same time the Memorandum threw doubt upon the claim, often made by the advocates of flats, that 'the majority of tenants, in central areas, to be rehoused are employed in the immediate vicinity'. It felt that it was better policy for the municipalities to spend money in providing adequate and cheap transport between the outskirts and the central area than 'expending extra money on the erection of flats in the centre of the city'. It also suggested as an alternative to flats, two-storey cottage flats which, 'if properly planned, are generally as satisfactory as small houses.'¹⁷

These were, then, the considered views representing the town planning professions as regards houses and flats. Yet

some others feared the political consequences of accommodating large sections of the working class in flats. Thus, a speaker at a district meeting of the Institution of Municipal and County Engineers felt that the Government's housing policy would foster communism:

if it were the intention of the present Government to encourage and strengthen Communism, there was a likelihood of success. In those localities where flats predominated whether it be in Austria, Glasgow or the East End of London - there was to be found a spirit of Communism. Perhaps such a possibility was in the mind of the Government.¹⁸

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the most representative body of the profession, maintained an academic outlook, standing aloof from the competing styles in architecture. It included among its membership, prominent members of the Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS) and leading local authority architects alongside traditionalists and more pragmatic practitioners of the trade. However, there was little doubt that architects with modernist inclinations made up only a tiny minority. F.R.S. Yorke and Colin Penn wrote at the time of 'the oldest and most powerful body in the profession' that 'The bulk of its members, as of the profession as a whole, are academic practitioners of one form or another of revivalism, of that coarse "modernistic" style (in vogue for cinemas and by-pass factories)'.¹⁹ Raymond Unwin, an arch-advocate of housing on garden city lines, on taking up the presidency of RIBA in

1933, delivered a swingeing attack on flats in his inaugural address:

There is a great deal of talk about housing families in vast steel and concrete warehouses, and of the great economy, and increased urban benefits, whatever these may be, to follow from so doing. It may be that the modern family will like living in a few cells in a vast pile of biscuit boxes. I do not know. That has never appealed to me as an attractive idea of a home ...

If people do want to be housed in big masses in the centre of a town by all means let them be so housed; nor do I want to interfere with the fascinating game of bricks on a large scale which many of our designers are enjoying at the present time; but I do want us to be serious and careful about it ...

It costs us in London about £300 per family more for each family we house in a tenement block in the centre than for each family we house in a little cottage on the outskirts of London ... We know nothing yet of the conductivity of sound in buildings of that type, when used as dwellings. I am wondering if I lived in one of these cells how many gramophones and loud speakers I should have to hear at once...

I have been fortunate in bringing up my small family in a house where the children could run in and out of the garden ... There is education,

mental, moral and physical in contact with the earth, the weather and growing things - animal and flowers ... The difference between tenement and a home is to me not one of degree, it is one of kind. It is the difference between a home in which a family is likely to grow healthily, and a mere house to contain them.²⁰

Unwin refuted the charge that all this cottage building was eating up rural land by making the following claims:

According to the last census returns I calculate that the whole of the families in England and Wales living in houses built 10 to the acre would require 1,599 square miles. The County of Somerset contains rather more, so you could house the whole of the population of England and Wales in the County of Somerset ...

... it is remarkable that houses, each with a garden on the basis of 10 or 12 to the acre, produce far more food than on the average is produced when the land is being farmed.²¹

The RIBA, as a body, did not make any pronouncements on the question of flats, but it was clear that the allegiance of the majority of the members lay elsewhere.

Unwin was of course a prominent figure in the so-called garden city movement,²² which provided a vociferous counter lobby against flats. The movement was founded on the publication of Ebenezer Howard's book, To-morrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform in 1898. As is well known, the crux of his idea was the development of self-contained towns of

limited size (32,000 maximum population), with ample greenery and all the necessary services and industries. Food and natural resources would be provided by the agricultural estates encircling the towns. With his garden cities, Howard sought to realise the happy marriage of town life and country life, 'in which all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and delight of the country, may be secured in perfect combination'.²³ When a town reached its maximum size, satellite towns of similar character would be established at a distance. The Garden Cities Association (renamed the Garden Cities and Town-Planning Association in 1909, and from 1941 known as the Town and Country Planning Association - TCPA) was immediately founded with the express purpose of setting up garden cities. The idea was later defined in the following terms:

A Garden City is a town designed for healthy living and industry: of a size that makes possible a full measure of social life, but not larger; surrounded by a rural belt; the whole of the land in public ownership, or held in trust for the community.²⁴

Letchworth (c.1904) and Welwyn (c.1920) were the only two garden cities, in the proper sense of the term, to be established, but the idea and these examples attracted worldwide attention and had an enormous influence on modern town planning.

Unwin, who was deeply involved in the planning of Letchworth, was a pragmatist with a very strong reformist

strain. His overriding concern was to provide a desirable residential environment within the means of the ordinary family. And to realise his belief in the desirability of low-density housing, he sought economy in layout and construction of houses: cutting down on road construction by the ingenious use of cul-de-sacs and greens; and emphasising simplicity in design and standardisation of components. Both these techniques would help offset the high cost of land involved in a low-density scheme.²⁵ Unwin also took the crucial step of advocating garden (satellite) suburbs, attached to, but separated from an established city, as a more practicable way of housing development on garden city lines.²⁶

The TCPA itself remained faithful to the ideal of garden cities, and also took to the advocacy of town planning as a legitimate extension of its work. Through most of the interwar years, the Association remained a small and impecunious body with a membership hovering around the 500 mark.²⁷ Unwin chided the purists in the garden city movement for their narrow scope:

Is it not possible that our movement has exhibited, beyond the date when it was necessary, too much desire to keep the garden city movement a purist movement free from the contamination of town expansion, with the result that we have somewhat lost the influence which we should be exerting in this matter?²⁸

The movement also seems to have suffered from its image problem. So George Hicks, Secretary of the Amalgamated

Union of Building Trade Workers, raised his doubts as to the nature of the movement:

I seem to detect in this movement towards garden cities, not so much a movement of the people, as a movement of a certain class of people - a certain section of the middle class. Garden cities are becoming, as it were, a practical ideal of bourgeois villadom; a rest haven or happy valley of the higher paid strata of workers, professional workers, civil servants, and so on.²⁹

In turn, a middle class observer like Orwell, seemed to detect, rightly or wrongly, some crankish elements in the movement:

If only the sandals and the pistachio-coloured shirts could be put in a pile and burnt, and every vegetarian, teetotaler, and creeping Jesus sent home to *Welwyn Garden City* to do his yoga exercise quietly!³⁰

Nonetheless, as an active propagandist body, the TCPA tried to create a broad-based movement embracing all sections of the society and assiduously cultivated a network of support for its cause. The Association claimed the support of successive Ministers of Health and had on its Council MPs from all parties as well as eminent town planners and housing reformers of the day.³¹ The TCPA, apart from defending the integrity of garden cities, first encouraged the framework of regional planning, whose procedure could be used to find sites for future satellite towns. It also started looking to the Government for the

adoption of the garden city policy as the means of realising decentralisation, which became one of the planks of the TCPA. Its advantages were admitted to be great:

It brings the workers close to their work: it makes possible the provision of comfortable houses and gardens, with facilities for recreation; it saves countless hours in travelling from home to workshop or country house; it relieves in consequence, much of the congestion of traffic.³²

Although the TCPA failed to achieve a third garden city, it bestowed the title 'semi garden city' to Wythenshawe, a municipal satellite suburb, 'laid out on garden city principles' with some industries, built outside Manchester and designed by Barry Parker, and saw it as a part realisation of the movement's ideal.³³

The TCPA gradually extended its scope of propaganda to argue a case for national planning. By the middle of the 1930s, a broad North-South divide in economy and consequently in social conditions was becomingly increasingly clear. The regions with declining, old staple industries (coal, steel, shipbuilding, cotton) suffered high unemployment and the loss of rateable value, which deprived the local authorities of the resources to cope with the higher burden of relief and the provision of essential services. On the other hand, where, in the South and especially the Home Counties, the new industries (electrical appliances, chemical, automobile, aircraft) flourished, the local authorities found themselves unable to cater for the massive influx of industries and population, leading to a

further outward growth of towns in a haphazard manner. The primary concern of the TCPA was for the problem of uncontrolled growth of towns, but in the emerging climate of a wider debate about national policies and a national plan, this was linked to the question of the national distribution of industry and population. Thus F.J. Osborn wrote:

What we stand for in this journal is the control of the size of towns, and equally the preservation of the countryside from scattered and ribbon building, through the guidance of the location of factories and business premises under a national plan. Decentralisation of industry and population from the congested areas into smaller towns and new towns designed with all the resources of modern technique, and surrounded by a permanent country belt, would be practicable under such a plan.³⁴

The TCPA's opposition to flats stemmed, in the first instance, from its adherence to garden city principles, which the Association tried to impart to the provision of houses for the working class people:

whether new housing schemes were undertaken by private or public enterprise, we favoured open development in suburban and rural areas.³⁵

And in the circumstances of the 1930s, the TCPA took the view that the Government's encouragement of the central redevelopment of towns acted as a barrier to decentralisation:

To build up on the site of former slums huge phalansteries on the pattern of Vienna, Berlin and Leipzig ... will keep the people in our overcrowded towns and make the removal of industries to new centres impossible.³⁶

In the new statement of policy issued in 1937, the TCPA added a clause opposing flats:

7 To point out that high flats and tenements, and other developments that increase or maintain high density in congested areas, while they seem to be forced on large towns by existing conditions, accentuate rather than solve the problems of slums and transport, while providing an environment entirely unsuited to family life.³⁷

Henceforth, the TCPA's opposition to flats became an integral part of its campaign for the decentralisation of industry and population into the new towns.

Despite the existence of considerable resistance to flats among the professions and of a counter lobby in the form of the TCPA, a certain amount of flat building by local authorities did take place in the 1930s, mainly in London and Liverpool, both traditional centres of flats. Some other cities, such as Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester, also built flats for their slum clearance schemes (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Local authority dwellings (houses and flats) for which tenders or estimates were approved by the Ministry of Health, 1930-1939 (England and Wales)

Year ending at 31st March	Ordinary non-parlour houses	Tenement flats
1930-31	43,335	628
1931-32	54,066	1,593
1932-33	42,047	1,297
1933-34	38,761	870
1934-35	36,482	2,870
1935-36	61,220	4,990
1936-37	34,145	5,468
1937-38	32,615	4,851
1938-39	30,030	5,352

(Source: Ministry of Health Annual Reports, 1930-1939)

In general, these flats either took the form of neo-Georgian blocks or were in 'modernistic' style.³⁸ The neo-Georgian blocks, more common in London and Liverpool, were characterised by 'front facades with high, small-paned windows and rear elevations dominated by the access balconies and staircase turrets'. A modernistic block was one which tried to achieve something of a modern style by picking up 'some of the accidental attributes, rather than essentials that were based on a more adventurous and honest use of modern materials'.³⁹ The London County Council thus described one of its blocks (the Oaklands estate in Clapham), completed in 1936:

The external elevation exhibits the modern tendency towards a horizontal effect, which is

emphasised by the flat roof, external balconies and alternating bands of coloured brickwork. In keeping with the horizontal effect produced by these features, wide windows in steel frames have been introduced and these give a maximum amount of sunlight in the rooms.⁴⁰

In terms of housing standards achieved, many of the local authority flats built in the 1930s incorporated some of the features envisaged by the modernists in their schemes, like the staircase access, private balconies, better fittings and dust chutes. Overall dwelling sizes were increased and larger estates were equipped with communal facilities. Kennet House (Manchester), a scheme of 181 flats, contained a washhouse, community hall and playgrounds, in addition to the four shops.⁴¹ The most ambitious of all the flats schemes in the 1930s was the Quarry Hill Flats in Leeds. The scheme consisted of 938 dwellings, built on a 26 acre site within half a mile of the city centre and planned as a self-contained community. For the main block, the perimeter layout on the Viennese model was adopted on a vast scale, with a fortress-like, curving facade extending to a great length around the periphery of the site. The height varied from two to eight storeys and units of four storeys and over were provided with lifts. A novel type of water-borne refuse disposal system was installed in every dwelling, and the scheme included a communal laundry, playgrounds, ornamental gardens and shops.⁴² For its construction, the City Architect, R.A.H. Livett, opted to use a form of prefabrication called the

Mopin system, which had been developed in France. With the extensive use of pre-cast concrete slabs produced in a site factory, the system required a minimum amount of skilled labour, which the City Architect felt was in short supply, and also promised great economies in building costs, out of which Livett hoped to provide many extras on the estate. In the event, the novel construction method caused problems, especially in organising the site factory and in coordinating production with the actual erection. Consequently the contract dragged out over years, to which the construction of community buildings and grounds fell victim, and the promised savings did not materialise. Nevertheless, the cost per dwelling with the lifts and the new refuse disposal system was still not far above the national average, and this seemed to justify the use of a modern building system in economic terms.⁴³

Livett, along with L.H. Keay of Liverpool, was one of the few who took a positive stance on flats. The majority of local authority architects regarded flats as an unfortunate necessity. Livett spoke of his decision to use flats in redevelopment schemes:

We claim that in Leeds we are ahead of other cities in the standard set up for inner ring development. I fully appreciate that there is still a prejudice towards flats and that if flats are to be a success it is important that amenities, comparable with those of a cottage must be provided and the maximum amount of open space must be available. It is mainly because of the

latter that I so strongly support vertical and not horizontal development.⁴⁴

Keay was equally confident of the advantages of flats:

It is because I am confident that it is possible to replace the slums and to rehouse the overcrowded families within the districts they at present occupy by the process of redevelopment that I suggest there need be no anxiety in the minds of those who associate another housing drive by the local authorities with a further absorption of agricultural land ... The tenant is saved the cost of transport, which is really an added rent charge, and avoids the serious waste of time which travelling to and from some outlying district involves, and the community avoids additional transport difficulties in the already congested traffic roads. Light and air, and ample space for recreation, can be provided in the redevelopment area, and existing amenity buildings, services, etc, will continue in use and the duplication of those services will be avoided.⁴⁵

One might have expected some meaningful interaction to have taken place between the minority of local authority architects favourably disposed to flats and the modernists, especially since some of the local authority flats displayed modernist influences. The facts were otherwise. This was probably due in part to the fact that the architectural establishment of the day, represented by the RIBA, still regarded official architecture as somewhat disreputable,

which involved a great deal of committee work, compromise and alterations, leading to unenterprising works of architecture.⁴⁶ Frederick Gibberd, for instance, was an exponent of this point of view and continued to champion the idea of the artist-architect.⁴⁷ Maxwell Fry, on the other hand, did pay tribute to the achievements in Liverpool under Keay. He described their architecture as 'an adventure' and saw it as a fruit of the group working method, whereby the housing architect had got together a team of people who experimented with new ideas and collectively carried out the building programmes of large official bodies.⁴⁸ But The Modern Flat, an influential visual statement of modernism by F.R.S. Yorke and Gibberd, included no example of local authority flats from England. One bone of contention seemed to be the continuing use of the courtyard layout, disapproved of by the modernists, in most of the local authority schemes.⁴⁹ When the Birmingham Corporation held an open competition for working-class flats to be adopted for one of its slum clearance schemes, the winning design was a scheme employing a modified form of the courtyard layout.⁵⁰ The Architects' and Technicians' Organisation (ATO) promptly wrote in to give its opinion, and criticised, among other things, 'The provision of closed courts, with the consequent tendency towards shaded angles and the accentuation of noise from children playing in them'.⁵¹ Admittedly, it was not one of the more ambitious designs and had other undesirable features such as the balcony access, small private balconies and inadequate provision of cupboards.

However, there were indications, on the other hand, that the neo-Georgian blocks and modernistic flats were actively endorsed by influential schools of architecture, in place of a more modern solution, exemplified in this case by the choice of layout design. Thus, C.H. Reilly, the doyen of the Liverpool School of Architecture, derided the more logical German approach, in turn extolling the virtues of flats schemes in Liverpool and Manchester:

we shall soon be placing Liverpool and Manchester well before Vienna for this class of work. Admittedly these buildings are not conceived nor laid out with the mathematical precision to get the maximum sun, as if one lived by sunlight alone, that a German architect would strive for. He would place his thin blocks of flats marching across the town, one behind the other, like a regiment of gaunt grenadiers. That is not our way, nor would its regularity appeal to us, however many trees are planted in between the blocks. We have enough of that sort of repetition left over by the nineteenth-century bye-law streets. Keay's great groups, while providing an abundance of light and air, give a sense of communal life comparable to the great court of Trinity, Cambridge. That is an element, to my thinking, worth a little sacrifice of the maximum sunlight, for with it goes, in his hands, inspiring architectural shapes as well.⁵²

Indeed, Keay's own views on the implications of using reinforced concrete seemed to concur in this English approach to the planning of flats. Referring to the competition for reinforced concrete flats for the working class initiated by the Cement Marketing Company (see Chapter 1), he was reported to have said:

it seemed to him that many of the competitors missed one of the essential points about reinforced concrete. It was a material which could be made to flow in this or that direction, to help and not hinder planning; yet so many of the competitors followed traditional forms of planning, and even adopted type plans which had appeared from time to time in technical journals and in reports.⁵³

In 1934, an exhibition was held by the RIBA, in honour of Walter Gropius, who was in brief exile in England before moving on to the United States. He, of course, did much to popularise the advantages of parallel blocks. On the opening of the exhibition, the RIBA Journal had this to say:

We could well do with a smattering of the Athenian quality of appreciative curiosity, and even if it is neither desirable, nor to be expected that all England should go wildly enthusiastic about a manner of building and design which is clearly foreign to the desires of a great part of the architects and the public in this country, it is none the less our clear duty to be intelligently aware of what is going on and to do honour to such

an outstanding educationalist and architect as Walter Gropius.⁵⁴

The widely held view, then, was that modern architecture as it developed on the continent and applied to housing, to flat building, was somehow too rigid and had a cold, scientific outlook, which felt uncomfortable to English tastes. It certainly seemed unfair to equate any uniformity or regularity seen in continental schemes with the legacy of by-law housing, but in contrast with the modernist principles, the English approach appeared to lay more stress on individuality and a sense of balance in the planning of flats. F.R. Yerbury, who did much to familiarise English architects with the new developments abroad, was compelled to make a comparison, when he said that the English attitude was 'to build housing round the people rather than force the people into preconceived ideas about housing'.⁵⁵ This was precisely the practice followed in the laying out of a cottage estate, as preached by R. Unwin:

The designer must become, by the exercising of his intelligence and imagination, so conscious of the life of the people - both the family life in the dwellings, and their communal life in the estate - that he can conceive of arrangements and relations which will take the fullest advantage of all the opportunities which the site affords, to create an environment likely to promote healthy and pleasant living, active social life, and convenient working conditions.⁵⁶

As we have seen, 'The battle of flats versus cottages' itself, was fought out on a number of grounds: that of tradition and custom, on social and economic grounds. Those in favour of flats had an uphill battle on their hands, as they had to counter some of the extreme charges made against them. Thus there were implicit suggestions that flat living stunted the growth of children and produced an inferior race.⁵⁷ To which Keay would give his rhetorical retort:

is it less possible to raise an A1 community in a properly planned township of flats than in a garden city or suburb? Is there any doubt that the rising generation in the great continental cities of Europe will not be as fit physically and morally as the children of Wythenshawe and Dagenham and Norris Green?⁵⁸

Criticism of flats based on prejudice and misconception was evident among the public and the professions alike. In 1935, at the height of the debate, The Listener carried out a small sample questionnaire to find out how well informed average listeners were about current affairs. One of the questions asked them if they would like to live in a flat or a house and to state the reason. The overwhelming response was for houses and against flats. Privacy, comfort, health and one's own garden were representative reasons given for respondents' preference. These were, after all, the familiar arguments for a house. But the way in which some respondents described their preference and rejected a flat showed how much their views were coloured by the negative images of out-of-date block dwellings and shared tenements:

'... no one else to worry you by trampling on the stairs an'all'; 'Always smell of soapsuds in a flat'; 'Foul air rises up staircase in flat'; or '... there are too many restrictions in a flat'.⁵⁹

In the same year, alarmed at the apparent encouragement given to flat building in the new Housing Act, a number of architects, including Louis de Soissons and Grey Wornum, wrote a joint letter to The Times, to criticise 'the tenement, even of to-day', urging the advantages of cottage estates. Dismissing 'mere improvements in equipment', the letter alleged that such shortcomings as the lack of playgrounds and 'unbearably noisy' courtyards in flats were 'irradicable'.⁶⁰ In this instance, the MARS, in reply, argued that high flats spaced apart had precisely the advantage of preserving 'maximum portion of the site for gardens and recreation', and stressed the labour-saving possibilities of centralised services, which could only be economically provided in this form of development. On the question of noisy courtyards, it stated:

In a properly planned scheme courtyards would be naturally non-existent ... the pre-war enclosed-court principle has long since been discredited in favour of parallel blocks separated by wide open spaces.⁶¹

Sometimes, architects had to contend with and give in to local custom, which stood in the way of the rational planning of flats. A.C. Tripe (one of the architects responsible for the winning design in the Birmingham Flats Competition) was quoted as saying thus:

In the Midlands people still insisted on a coal flue in the living room, partly so that some of their refuse could be burned and partly so that the children could be sent out to collect odd pieces of wood. To avoid a smoky flue on the top floor, he had found that it was necessary to have at least 18 ft. of draw above the top fire place which affected the design of the building considerably.

Likewise, Livett, who expressed his wish to 'see 9 by 9 flue vanish altogether', installed coal fires at Quarry Hill, because 'the Yorkshire "folk" still baked their own bread and wanted coal fires for that purpose'.⁶²

On the other hand, for those who favoured cottages, the stock argument drew on the English housing tradition, of having always lived in a self-contained house with its own front door and a patch of garden. And in the course of the debate, many argued that a house and garden provided the most suitable environment for family life and hence was socially desirable. Moreover, from the viewpoint of the convenience and health of the tenant, greater privacy and individual open space in the form of a garden that this type of development afforded were important practical advantages, which could be turned against the advocates of flats. Geoffrey Boumphrey (a MARS member), who was in the forefront of popular propaganda for flats, put his side of the case in a radio debate:

the flat-dweller can have more real privacy and bigger gardens. What privacy is there in the

average cottage? You have to put a net curtain before your front windows to stop the passers-by looking in. The garden is overlooked from three sides. Ten to one the bedrooms look on to other people's back gardens. In a properly built flat no window can be overlooked at all ... The one trouble is that you cannot have your garden actually round your door. It would be a communal garden there, your own may be two or three hundred yards away; but you will have the balcony, which might be quite enough to absorb the energies of all those who are not really keen gardeners. And by the way, why do town planners assume that everyone is a keen gardener, and that every house is full of babies?⁶³

It appeared that he was making some pertinent points, not to be lost on the pro-cottage lobby. On this occasion, E.D. Simon responded with a quip about the difficulty of having a domestic row or borrowing a little money in private in a flat. He emphasised the practical advantages of having a private garden: for growing flowers and vegetables; for children's play; and for doing odd jobs around the house.⁶⁴

Simon was a respected housing reformer, with a keen interest in satellite towns. At the same time, he was well aware of the advances being made in the building of flats and was level-headed enough to see the need for some flats in his own Manchester. Notwithstanding, Simon touched upon a vital aspect in the debate when he expressed the view that,

with the comparatively restricted amount of space available when working-class flats are being built at a density of forty or fifty to the acre it must always be difficult to secure much privacy; it can never be the same thing as having one's own cottage standing in its own garden.

The position is very similar as regards noise; the trouble is that it is almost impossible to avoid noise with a large number of families living at close quarters ...⁶⁵

Interestingly, a similar point was made succinctly by an LCC architect, with regard to the planning of flats:

You are up against the innate desire of the English working man and his wife to have a place of their own, a self-contained flat, and the LCC flat designing is based upon that principle. You cannot get our folk to take advantage of any communal amenity.⁶⁶

Thus, if it was the garden that was appreciated for its many practical uses, then equally it was a form of communal living, 'of families living at close quarters', implied by flats that was an anathema to many people.

The fact remained that the majority of council houses in the 1930s were laid out on suburban estates following the garden city principles, although, by then, 'estate layout had become fossilised into large-scale geometric patterns' and houses themselves displayed 'crudely utilitarian styles'.⁶⁷ The local authority flats which were built normally formed part of slum clearance schemes in the

central parts of towns and catered, in the main, for tenants displaced from slums. There was a marked improvement in the standard of accommodation provided in these flats, but they were still seen as a somewhat inferior type of dwelling with locational compensations. The houses versus flats debate and some social survey findings did throw light on the shortcomings of the existing form of housing development. The immediate consequence of this criticism was, understandably, to seek improvements in the quality of life on existing estates. The New Estates Community Committee had been formed by the National Council of Social Service with the collaboration of a few other organisations to meet the social needs of ill-planned housing estates. The Committee encouraged the formation and growth of community associations and campaigned for the establishment of community centres on new estates.⁶⁸ Likewise, for tenants living on outlying estates, transport departments of some local authorities made special fare concessions.⁶⁹

Another significant development in the housing debate saw some housing experts starting to argue for alternatives to the dichotomy of houses and flats. Although the case for the rehousing of people in new towns had vociferous support in the form of the TCPA, this was not widely believed to be immediately practicable. And with some flat building by the local authorities in the centre of their towns, it appeared that the choice increasingly fell into one of two stereotyped categories. Elizabeth Denby expressed her apprehensions:

we have apparently nothing between 12 houses to the acre, which cannot be architecturally treated and which is impossible in the central areas of towns, and blocks of flats which have nothing to offer the people who inhabit them for their leisure hours.⁷⁰

It was felt that there was scope for some intermediate type of planning in public housing. On the one hand, people like Denby and the architect, A Trystan Edwards, attempted to revive the terrace house in its modern form. Trystan Edwards demonstrated that self-contained cottages with gardens in terraces of plain rectangular contour could be built economically at a density comparable to that of flats. He contended that this form of development met the wishes of the wage earners themselves, who were to be rehoused.⁷¹ Similarly, Denby recalled 'The rows of terrace cottages built in the Regency days, with a small garden in front and a long one behind' and argued that its popularity called for the redevelopment of central areas 'in this form for the poorer families with young children'.⁷² More importantly, however, in the light of subsequent debates, as distinguished a town planner as Patrick Abercrombie started to talk in terms of houses and flats:

as regards the buildings themselves theoretically and even practically it would be possible to rebuild cottages in the central area ... and on the other hand there is no reason why flats should not be built on the outskirts.⁷³

Elsewhere he was suggesting that there was 'room for both'. alluding to the possibility of providing different types of dwellings for different families: houses for families with children; and flats for childless couples.⁷⁴

For all their advocacy of modern flats, helped by the efforts of a few like-minded local authority architects, the modernists only held a marginal position in the debate and the actual practice of public housing. The cost factor continued to work against them. The MARS was, however, adamant about the feasibility of modern flats. It maintained that all existing flats were but 'a partial compromise with irrational development',⁷⁵ and would point to the suggestions made by the Council for Research on House Construction about 'rationalized building technique based on the principles of standardization', to bring down the building cost of flats. Hope was pinned on central redevelopment to realise a truly urban residential quarter on modernist lines. As one MARS member wrote in 1937:

We have long been given the credit for being good at cottages. Now we have begun to tackle the reconstruction of towns. It is only a beginning. But it is something to think about when those acres of miserable, petty repetition which you see from the train, begin to make you feel that England's industrial towns are beyond all redemption.⁷⁶

These remarks were to remain prophetic, until the impact of the Second World War appeared to open up fresh possibilities for applying new ideas in popular housing

provision. But in the 1930s, the majority of local authorities found the redevelopment of the central areas of their towns unattractive, not least because of the social and financial implications of building flats 'Undoubtedly flats go very much against the grain with an enormous number of people',⁷⁷ asserted one M.P. during the debate on the 1935 Housing Bill. Certainly the opponents of flats often claimed that houses and not flats met the people's wishes, but there was as yet no serious attempt to find out what the ordinary people really wanted in terms of housing. Again one had to wait until the Second World War when, for the first time, public opinion was fully brought to bear upon the question of popular housing provision. In the meantime, the partnership of Connell, Ward and Lucas was dissolved in 1939 owing to lack of sufficient work.⁷⁸ Wells Coates firmly believed that the society was in a real state of transition 'when a new architecture is not only possible, but necessary'. He also had to admit, however, that 'customs and habits of life change more slowly than conditions'.⁷⁹

Footnotes

- 1 HLG 68/30 Notes of Conference. Minister of Health and Representatives of the Housing Committee of AMC (23.3.34).
- 2 HLG 68/30 Notes of Conference. Minister of Health and Representatives of AMC (27.4.34).
- 3 Quoted in P. Garside "'Unhealthy Areas": Town planning, eugenics and the slums, 1890-1945' Planning Perspectives Vol. 3, No. 1 (Jan. 1988) p. 38.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 See The Times (26.11.34); M.E. Mitchell 'Rehousing of People in Great Britain (The City of Manchester)', in 14th International Housing and Town Planning Congress London 1935 Part 1 Papers and Reports (1935) p. 290.
- 6 See, for example, HLG 68/30 Notes of Conference, Minister of Health and Representatives of the Housing Committee of AMC (26.10.34).
- 7 This paragraph draws on A. Sutcliffe 'A Century of Flats in Birmingham 1875-1973', in A. Sutcliffe (ed.) Multi-Storey Living. The British Working-Class Experience (1974) pp. 181-206.
- 8 The Town Crier (3.4.31).
- 9 The Town Crier (17.4.31); see also The Town Crier (7.8.31).
- 10 The Town Crier (25.9.31).
- 11 H.H. Humphries 'Rehousing the People in Great Britain (The City of Birmingham)', in 14th International Housing and Town Planning Congress London 1935 Part 1 Papers and General Reports p. 265.

- 12 A. Sutcliffe 'A Century of Flats in Birmingham 1875-1973' p. 196.
- 13 R. Blomfield 'Is modern architecture on the right track?' The Listener (26.7.33).
- 14 N. Pevsner Pioneers of the Modern Movement From William Morris to Walter Gropius (1936) pp. 64-66 and passim.
- 15 G.H. Jenkins 'Modern Architecture' The Architectural Association Journal Vol. 43 No. 489 (Nov. 1927) p. 158.
- 16 'Flats and Houses for Working-Class Accommodation' Journal of the Town Planning Institute Vol. 21 No. 6 (Apr. 1935) pp. 163-164.
- 17 Ibid., p. 164.
- 18 HLG 52/830. A joint meeting of the Yorkshire and North Western Districts of the Institution of Municipal and County Engineers Typescript of the discussion (16.2.35). The association between the flat as a dwelling type and the communal way of living (as opposed to bourgeois individualism) was made in the early years of the development of Soviet architecture (A. Kopp Town and Revolution. Soviet Architecture and City Planning 1917-1935 (1970) pp. 126-155). The idea that high-density development, herding the working class into flats, would foster communitarian feelings and breed left-wing militancy probably lay behind the conservative criticism of modern architecture in Germany and the apparent emphasis on cottages and resettlement on land in housing policy under the Nazi regime (J.M. Richards An Introduction to Modern Architecture (Harmondsworth 1940) p. 74 and B.M. Lane

- Architecture and Politics in Germany 1918-1945 (1985) pp. 136-145, 205-212). In February 1934, during a brief resistance against the right-wing coup which crushed the social democratic administration in Vienna, the Viennese municipal flats, including the Karl Marx Hof, were turned into workers' fortresses and some scenes of armed clash between socialist and government forces (The Times (13.2.34) and M. Kitchen The Coming of Austrian Fascism (1980) Ch. 9). In any case, this political dimension of flats does not seem to have unduly worried those in England. None of the M.P.s raised alarm on this count during the debates on the successive Housing Bills (1930, 1933 and 1935).
- 19 F.R.S. Yorke and C. Penn A Key to Modern Architecture (1939) p. 42.
- 20 'The President's Inaugural Address' Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 40 No. 16 (8.7.33) pp. 659-660.
- 21 Ibid., p. 660.
- 22 This section on the early years of the Garden City movement is based on A. Ravetz Remaking Cities. Contradictions of the Recent Urban Environment (1980) pp. 27-30.
- 23 E. Howard Garden Cities of To-morrow (New Revised Edition, Eastbourne 1985) pp. 8-9. The book was first published in 1898 as To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform and was reprinted in 1902 as Garden Cities of To-morrow.

- 24 Quoted in 'Editorial Comments' Town and Country Planning Vol. 1 No. 1 (Nov. 1932) p. 6.
- 25 M. Swenarton Homes Fit For Heroes. The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain (1981) pp. 11-26.
- 26 M. Swenarton 'Rationality and Rationalism: The Theory and Practice of Site Planning in Modern Architecture 1905-1930' AA Files Annals of the Architectural Association School of Architecture No. 4 (July 1983) pp. 51-53.
- 27 An important source on the activities of the Town and Country Planning Association in the interwar period is D. Hardy 'A History of the Town and Country Planning Association, 1899-1946' (PhD Dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science 1988) Ch. 4, and Appendix I, for the membership figures.
- 28 R. Unwin 'Garden Cities and Regional Planning' Garden Cities & Town-Planning Vol. 22 No. 1 (Jan. 1932) p. 8.
- 29 G. Hicks 'Garden Cities and the Workers' Garden Cities & Town-Planning Vol. 18 No. 3 (Mar. 1928) p. 61.
- 30 G. Orwell The Road to Wigan Pier (Harmondsworth 1962, originally published 1937) p. 195.
- 31 See Garden Cities and Town Planning Association The 39th Annual Report (1937).
- 32 'Editorial Comments' Garden Cities & Town-Planning Vol. 19 No. 9 (Nov. 1929) p. 249.
- 33 'Editorial Comments' Garden Cities & Town-Planning Vol. 22 No. 1 (Jan. 1932) p. 2. Wythenshawe in the 1930s and how it repeated the defects of any other

- municipal housing estate can be glimpsed in, Manchester Women's History Group 'Ideology in Bricks and Mortar - Women's Housing in Manchester between the Wars' North West Labour History No. 12 (1987) pp. 35-43.
- 34 F.J. Osborn 'Planning is Possible. The Missing Link in National Policy' Town & Country Planning Vol. 5 No. 18 (Mar. 1937) p. 41.
- 35 'Editorial Comments' Town & Country Planning Vol. 2 No. 5 (Nov. 1933) p. 2.
- 36 'A Barrier to Decentralisation' Town & Country Planning Vol. 2 No. 8 (Sept. 1934) p. 153.
- 37 'Garden Cities and Town Planning Association New Statement of Policy' Town & Country Planning Vol. 5 No. 19 (June 1937) p. 110.
- 38 This section on local authority flats in the 1930s draws on A. Ravetz 'From Working Class Tenement to Modern Flat: local authorities and multi-storey housing between the wars' in A. Sutcliffe (ed.) Multi-Storey Living. The British Working-Class Experience (1974) pp. 122-150.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 137-138.
- 40 London County Council London Housing (1937) p. 98.
- 41 'Kennet House, Manchester: Designed by Leonard Heywood' The Architects' Journal (10.10.35).
- 42 'Quarry Hill Flats (Article reproduced from a booklet prepared for the opening ceremony)' West Yorkshire Society of Architecture Journal Vol. 19 No. 2 (Sept. 1959) pp. 1517.

- 43 A. Ravetz Model Estate. Planned Housing at Quarry Hill, Leeds (1974) Chs 3, 4.
- 44 R.A.H. Livett 'Housing in Leeds' Journal of the Town Planning Institute Vol. 25 No. 8 (June 1939) p. 270.
- 45 L.H. Keay 'Housing and the Redevelopment of Central Areas' Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 43 No. 2 (23.11.35) pp. 59-60.
- 46 B. Kaye The Development of the Architectural Profession in Britain. A Sociological Study (1960) pp. 165-166.
- 47 See, for example, F. Gibberd 'The Danger of Public Architecture' The Listener (17.11.49).
- 48 ' "The Work of the Salaried Architect" Mr Maxwell Fry at AASTA Public Meeting' The Keystone Vol. 12 No. 6 (Dec. 1936) pp. 112-113.
- 49 See, for example, London County Council London Housing Ch. 6; International Federation for Housing and Town Planning 14th International Housing and Town Planning Congress Visit of Delegates to Liverpool [Programme of Visits and Brochure of Information] (1935) pp. 15-18.
- L.H. Keay did contemplate the Zeilenbau layout - the planning of blocks in parallel running north and south - for one of the redevelopment schemes in Liverpool (L.H. Keay 'Housing and the Redevelopment of Central Areas' p. 61).
- 50 'Working-class Flats, Birmingham' The Builder (28.8.36). See also 'The Birmingham Flats Competition: The Winning Design by G. Grey Wornum and Anthony C. Tripe' The Architects' Journal (3.9.36).

- 51 Letter from The ATO Executive The Architects' Journal (24.9.36).
- 52 C.H. Reilly 'The Year's Work at Home' The Architects' Journal (16.1.36). See also W.G. Holford '2 The Work of the Liverpool School' Journal of the Town Planning Institute Vol. 25 No. 1 (Nov. 1938) pp. 15-20.
- 53 'Working-class Flats. A Suggested Solution of the Rehousing Problem' The Builder (5.4.35).
- 54 'Journal' Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 41 No. 3 (19.5.34) p. 668.
- 55 F.R. Yerbury 'The Study of English and Continental Working Class Housing' The Architectural Association Journal Vol. 51 No. 587 (Jan. 1936) p. 286.
- 56 'The Planning of a New Housing Estate' Social Service Review Vol. 16 No. 4 (Apr. 1935) p. 61.
- 57 See, for example, 'Life in Flats Examined "Formidable Doubts on Housing Policy" London Social Workers Report Facts' Town & Country Planning Vol. 6 No. 25 (Oct. - Dec. 1938) p. 156.
- 58 L.H. Keay 'Housing and the Redevelopment of Central Areas'.
- 59 'Does the Wireless Make You Wiser? An Enquiry Among Listeners' The Listener (17.4.35); 'Does the Wireless Make You Wiser? (Continued from last week)' The Listener (24.4.35).
- 60 The Times (6.3.35) Louis de Soissons laid out the second garden city at Letchworth. G. Grey Wornum was the architect of the RIBA headquarters building completed in 1934.

- 61 The Times (11.3.35).
- 62 R.A.H. Livett 'Housing in an Industrial City', and
Comment by A.C. Tripe The Architectural Association
Journal Vol. 53 No. 615 (May 1938) pp. 503, 504.
- 63 'Can Flats Solve the Housing Problem?' The Listener
(30.10.35).
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 E.D. Simon and J. Inman The Rebuilding of Manchester
(1935) pp. 92-93.
- 66 Comment by R. Minton Taylor, following a paper read by
G. Grey Wornum 'Modern Flats' Journal of the Royal
Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 38 No.
13 (2.5.31) p. 454.
- 67 A. Ravetz Remaking Cities. Contradictions of the
Recent Urban Environment p. 29.
- 68 See New Estates Community Committee of the National
Council of National Service New Housing Estates and
Their Social Problems (1935).
- 69 See, for example, for Manchester, R. Stuart Pilcher
'XVIII - Some City Transport Problems', in Town
Planning Institute Town and Country Planning Summer
School Sept. 3-10, 1937. Report of Proceedings (1937)
pp. 65-68.
- 70 E. Denby 'Rehousing from the Slum Dweller's Point of
View' Journal of the Royal Institute of British
Architects 3rd Series Vol. 44 No. 2 (21.11.36) p. 79.
- 71 See A. Trystan Edwards 'An Alternative to Tenements -
I, II, III, IV' The Builder (4.2.38), (11.2.38),
(18.2.38) and (25.2.38) respectively.

- 72 E. Denby 'Rehousing from the Slum Dweller's Point of View' p. 66. For her design of a staggered row of terrace houses, see 'The All-Europe House Designed by Elizabeth Denby' Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 46 No. 16 (26.6.39) pp. 813-819.
- 73 P. Abercrombie 'Slum Clearance and Planning. The Re-Modelling of Towns and Their External Growth' The Town Planning Review Vol. 16 No. 3 (June 1935) p. 203.
- 74 'Can Flats Solve the Housing Problem?' Denby also expressed a similar view. See E. Denby Europe Re-housed (1938) pp. 260-269.
- 75 The Times (11.3.35).
- 76 J. Summerson 'Creative Housing' The Listener (4.8.37).
- 77 Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 297 (30.1.35) col. 402.
- 78 A. Jackson The Politics of Architecture. A history of modern architecture in Britain (1970) p. 59.
- 79 Wells Coates 'The Conditions for an Architecture for To-day' The Architectural Association Journal Vol. 53 No. 614 (Apr. 1938) p. 449.

Chapter 4 The debate on postwar housing: architects, town planners and housing reformers

The idea of planning received a huge boost in the Second World War. In part the groundwork for this had been laid during the 1930s. Organisations like Political and Economic Planning (1931) and the 'Next Five Years' Group (1934) were formed, bringing together progressive entrepreneurs, professional people, academics, civil servants, radical Tories and centrist politicians. The New Fabian Research Bureau was also established in 1931. Through patient research and sustained propaganda, these bodies all argued for greater government intervention and planning as a way forward in wide-ranging spheres of economy and society. Specific policy recommendations included trade and industrial policy, plans for education and housing, the social services and health care.¹ Seen in this light, a case for national planning and the reconstruction of existing towns, both referred to in the previous chapters, can be said to constitute important components of 'the planning movement' of the 1930s. There is, however, little doubt as to the greater impact of the war upon this movement, which found 'its apotheosis in the conduct of the war and the plans for post-war reconstruction in almost every field from social security to new town development'.²

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the wartime discussions about the future forms of housing development. The protagonists (the architects, town planners and housing reformers, including influential

pressure groups and individuals) were, in part, informed by the debates of the 1930s. At the same time, the events of the Second World War greatly affected their outlook on housing. In particular, the early impact of the blitz, the exposure of the social ills of the past and the collective mood of the nation encouraged many of them to think in terms of providing for the community. The following account concentrates on the first few years of the war, when, in the absence of a clear Government policy on reconstruction, various ideas on post-war housing were presented and widely debated in society.

The organisation of a national war effort depended on the running of an efficient war economy, and so forms of economic planning - 'the fixing of import quotas and the allocations of raw materials to industry, the rationing of consumer goods, the compulsory shrinking ('concentration') of less essential industries and the direction of man- and woman-power'³ - were introduced, bringing government control and direction into many aspects of people's lives. The transformation of circumstances was no less spectacular in the case of housing and town planning. In fact, architects, town planners and all those involved in these fields were to find themselves at the forefront of propaganda for planning and reconstruction. There were a number of related reasons for this. Firstly, the widespread devastation wrought by the enemy air raids made inevitable an extensive physical reconstruction of towns and transformed 'Rebuilding Britain' from 'a socially desirable

but somewhat visionary and vague ideal into a matter of practical and definite necessity'.⁴

The destruction of numerous houses certainly provided the most striking impact of the war for many people. Concentrated within a period of about nine months from September 1940, the first great series of civilian bombing raids shattered the urban fabric of the country in many places. Worst hit were the chief industrial centres and the commercial and naval ports, as well as London. Thus the first major raid on a provincial town destroyed Coventry's city centre, gutted its medieval cathedral and made almost one-third of the city's houses inhabitable. By the end of April 1941, most of Plymouth's 38,000 houses were in some way damaged. Of these, 8 per cent were totally destroyed and a further 16 per cent were rendered uninhabitable for at least two years. Merseyside suffered a series of big raids towards the end of the period. 120,000 houses were damaged in Liverpool alone. In Birkenhead, out of a total of about 34,000 dwellings, over 25,000 were damaged. In Hull, which also suffered from the flying bombs later in the war, only 6,000 of the 93,000 houses were said to have escaped bomb damage. London came under intensive attack throughout the period. The East End suffered most. As early as November 1940, about 40 per cent of the houses in Stepney had been damaged or destroyed. At the end of June 1941, there were about 1.4 million people homeless in London. Further air raids and attacks by flying bombs and rockets during 1944 added considerably to the housing damage, most significantly in London⁵ (see Table 4.1). In total, it was estimated at

the end of the war that about 200,000 units had been entirely destroyed and a further 250,000 made uninhabitable.⁶

Table 4.1

Bomb damage to houses: government figures on some worst hit areas

Locality	Houses destroyed or damaged beyond repair		
	Dec.1943	May 1945	% of 1938 inhabited dwellings (May 1945)
Plymouth	3,593	3,754	9
Exeter	1,700	1,700	9
Southampton	4,136	4,167	9
County of London	47,314	66,073	8
Coventry	4,185	4,185	7
Portsmouth	4,393	4,736	6
Hull	4,184	4,354	5
Merseyside	10,542	10,899	4
Salford	1,934	1,936	4
Bristol	2,909	2,909	3
Swansea	1,124	1,124	3

(Source: CAB 87/11 War Cabinet Reconstruction Committee Subcommittee on Control of Post-War Building 'The Post-War Problems of the War Damage Commission Note by the Secretaries' (20.12.43); HLG 71/915 G.H. Daniel 'Special Committee to Study Special Needs for Post-war Building in Particular Areas' (23.4.45) and 'Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Special Needs of Particular Areas in Relation to the Post-War Building Programme' (23.5.45) Appendix 1.)

The second reason for the prominence of reconstruction debates at this time was the widespread desire to get some

good out of the war. Queen Elizabeth, seeing her people's suffering, misery and courage in the air raids wrote in October 1940 that they deserved a better world.⁷ A better world, however, was not just compensation for the war. More significantly, the retreat from Dunkirk, the threat of enemy invasion and particularly the universal suffering in the Blitz were all instrumental in bringing the country together.

In Oxford, the squalor and sordidness found at an evacuee depot coping with a large influx from London drove Vera Brittain, a dedicated pacifist and middle-class observer, to write:

What remains to be done is harder and cannot be achieved in a day, nor a month, nor a year; it is nothing less than the elimination of those too long tolerated differences of standards which evacuation schemes have revealed throughout the country. The apple cores and the soiled newspapers will not disappear until the West End really knows and cares how the East End lives.⁸

Ritchie Calder, a left-wing journalist, was more forthright about the claims of ordinary people. Taking up the simple remark of a docker, he spoke of a "'We-are-all-in-it-together" democracy':

The ordinary people of London, of Coventry, of Birmingham, of Merseyside, of Bristol, of Southampton, and of South Wales and of any other part of Britain on which the Nazis let loose their fury, will endure suffering, and face the bombs

with courage, but they will not endure neglect, or discrimination, or the snobbery which slams billet doors in their faces, or official incompetence which adds to their miseries, or the class obtuseness of the 'Bread? Why can't they eat cake? description'.⁹

The extensive civilian bombing and the suffering associated with it at once exposed the social divisions in society. Yet the same events were also instrumental in forging a sense of cohesion among the population. The majority of people generally approved of the austerity measures such as food rationing, as they accorded with the popular demand for equality of sacrifice and ensured fair shares for everyone. Existing social inequalities conjured up visions of the tremendous problems of mass unemployment, malnutrition, slum housing and overcrowding of the interwar years, which people wished to see crushed for good. Though people were still vague about the future, Mass-Observation found in March 1941 that the social changes they expected to be brought about by the war were 'largely those making for less social discrimination, less private ownership of essential services, better mutual understanding and more equality of opportunity'.¹⁰ William Beveridge gave voice to these views:

Today there is no such prospect of contentment in going back, because the times before the Second World War were not good. The British people have learned by experience that after this war they must go forward to something new, not back to the

old. As sensible people, they realize that one goes forward better if one has looked ahead and has made plans for the journey.¹¹

The Liberal Publisher, Edward Hulton's Picture Post also caught this popular mood with its feature 'A Plan for Britain' published in January 1941, at the height of the enemy bombing campaign. Maxwell Fry and Elizabeth Denby were among the contributors. The Foreword referred to what had happened after the last war and urged people to do their thinking now and to be better prepared:

Our plan for a new Britain is not something outside the war, or something after the war. It is an essential part of our war aims. It is, indeed, our most positive war aim. The new Britain is the country we are fighting for.¹²

There was also a more instrumental dimension to the promotion of reconstruction debates, which stemmed from Government objectives. The national mobilisation for the war depended on civilian morale and 'morale determined the need to take account of the blue prints for the future'.¹³ Sir John Reith, the first Minister of Works and Buildings and a prime mover of positive planning in the early stages of the war, told Parliament that 'the idea of a planned reconstruction is an incentive to and encouragement of war effort, and in fact a high and worthy war purpose itself'.¹⁴ Housing and town planning, thus, came to occupy a special place in the wartime debates for a planned reconstruction.

Planning propaganda, once given impetus, flourished and kept the issues of town planning and reconstruction in the

limelight throughout the war. Various blue prints of post-war Britain were presented in popular books¹⁵ and exhibitions.¹⁶ Well-publicised and elaborately worked-out plans for a number of individual towns were produced.¹⁷ A yearbook of planning and reconstruction, a compendium of up-to-date information on important aspects of the subject, was set up. Its third (1944-45) edition could list some 260 bodies as 'Organisations Interested in Planning and Reconstruction', ranging in scope from the National Federation of Demolition Contractors to the Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland.¹⁸ Political and Economic Planning (PEP), for instance, reported a very high level of activity during the war, with nine groups 'more or less in regular session' and subscriptions to its broadsheet, Planning, increased four-fold to more than 2,000 between 1942 and 1944.¹⁹ Architects and town planners typically showed great optimism and enthusiasm for reconstruction. For many the Blitz provided an unique opportunity to tackle long-standing problems of the slums and the haphazard development of towns. Max Lock, an eminent figure in the town planning circle whose survey work in Hull, Middlesbrough and Portsmouth is justly esteemed, experienced it as an artistic liberation:

Hitler at least has brought us to our senses. We, the British public, have suddenly seen our cities as they are! After experiencing the shock of familiar buildings disembowelled before our eyes - like an all too real Surrealism - we find the cleared and cleaned up spaces a relief. In them

we have hope for the future, opportunities to be taken or lost. These open spaces begin to ventilate the congestion of our cities and may be also of our imagination.²⁰

The confidence shown by the town planners and architects was further underlined by the early advances made by the Government in the official planning process. The Royal Commission on the Distribution of Industrial Population (The Barlow Commission) published its findings²¹ in January 1940. The Commission had been appointed back in 1937 to look into the national problem of the geographical distribution of the industrial population - the continued drift to London and the Home Counties and the industrial decline in the North and South Wales - and to report on remedial measures. The report recommended the setting up of a central planning authority to plan, in principle, for the decentralisation of industry and population from congested urban areas and the redevelopment of these areas. Garden cities, satellite towns and trading estates were to make a useful contribution to this process.²² Renewed importance was given to the subject of town planning when the enemy air raids intensified in the autumn of 1940 and many buildings were destroyed. The coalition Government established the Ministry of Works and Buildings with Sir John Reith, the energetic founder of the BBC, as its head. He was personally charged with considering problems of the physical reconstruction of town and country after the war. In February 1941, he secured an announcement from the Government that a National Planning Authority would be

created to develop a National Planning Policy. Reith gathered round him a like-minded group of enthusiastic town planners and civil servants and set in train a number of important initiatives including the appointment of a consultative panel of experts on reconstruction and the preparation of a post-war plan for London.²³ His exhortation to 'plan boldly and comprehensively'²⁴ became an article of faith among representatives of the blitzed towns and did much to foster progressive thinking on town planning.

With so many houses either completely destroyed or damaged, ideas about post-war housing inevitably became a major focus of the reconstruction debates. Of central concern to the town planners, architects and housing reformers once more was whether houses or flats made better homes for the people. The discussion was linked to the wider issues of town and country planning and increasingly revolved round the question of residential density. The main protagonists of the 'houses versus flats' debate from the 1930s were again prominent: the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) and the modern architects. There was some agreement between the two camps, and indeed amongst all those taking part, in their outlook on town planning. They all reacted against 'unplanned industrial urbanism' and subscribed in some way to the 'clean sweep' philosophy of planning, of starting from scratch to build a new Britain.²⁵ Maxwell Fry's contribution to the Picture Post feature 'A Plan for Britain' exemplified this approach. Entitled 'The New Britain Must Be Planned', he gave a

characteristic account of a planned rebuilding after the war. It was accompanied by bird's-eye views contrasting the haphazard development of a typical urban area with the same area reorganised under a coherent plan. In the modernist city of the future, roads were straight and wide, various types of buildings zoned and grouped together, and modern flats, neatly arranged and standing in a park, occupied pride of place.²⁶ Appearing in a popular weekly, the article provided the people with a forceful image of reconstruction, whether or not they approved of the suggestions put forward in it.

Meanwhile, it was the TCPA, with its ardent propaganda for national planning, which took centre stage. The Association, which was still lamenting widespread indifference to town planning at the outset of the war,²⁷ experienced a surge in its membership during the war. Although figures were not published, one subsequent estimate traced a four-fold increase to more than 2,000 members in 1945.²⁸ The publication of the Barlow Report accepting decentralisation in principle appeared to strengthen its position. The TCPA organised a number of conferences during the war, which dealt with various aspects of planning and reconstruction.²⁹ These conferences attracted prominent figures in town planning and representatives from local authorities and acted as a forum for town planning. The TCPA also published a pamphlet series entitled 'Rebuilding Britain'.³⁰ Although drawing mainly on the talents broadly sympathetic to the Association's views, the authors of these pamphlets gave informed opinion on a wide range of topics

concerning town planning and reconstruction. The TCPA's case for planning was set out in the National Planning Basis adopted by the Council of the Association in January 1941. It urged the Government to accept a number of measures: a Ministry of National Planning to guide new industrial undertakings and population into carefully planned new towns and other existing small towns; the adoption of green belts to limit the growth of towns and to protect good agricultural land and places of special landscape beauty; and the use of better design and layout of buildings and roads.³¹ In principle, the National Planning Basis was general enough to be accepted by a number of professional bodies including the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).³² However, this broad agreement on the need to plan on a national scale was matched by the vigour with which both the TCPA and the modernists argued their respective visions of post-war housing.

The TCPA never flagged in its conviction that houses and gardens were the right type of housing for the overwhelming majority of the population and wanted to realise this even in relation to existing towns. F.J. Osborn, its vociferous spokesman, expounded the Association's views at its first major wartime conference in March 1941.³³ He conceded that great towns could not be wished out of existence. Mindful also of the preservationist lobby, he was careful to stress the need for a balanced approach that preserved the great bulk of agricultural land and yet thinned out high density areas and congested cities. Osborn argued that, in the wake of bomb

damage, the central development of towns should be carried out at the same time as the development of new towns elsewhere in the same region, taking account of the national policy for the distribution of industry and population. Above all decentralisation was about reducing the residential density of the existing towns to 'make them really good permanent human habitations for the majority of our people, who must continue to live by urban industry'.³⁴ Osborn made clear what he meant by 'good permanent human habitations':

Underlying our whole policy is our conception of the way of life in which our people should live. The family house and garden is the national standard, and efficient manufacturing industry is a national necessity.³⁵

Osborn's statement on this occasion was met with a sharp retort from H. Manzoni, the City Engineer and Surveyor of Birmingham:

The wish for an individual cottage and a garden to cultivate is not innate in every human being, otherwise such cities as Stockholm would be altogether different or would be condemned as the worst towns in Europe instead of being praised as examples to be emulated.

From his own experience of building over 100,000 of these modern '12 to the acres', Manzoni reported that a large number of their residents did 'not want to cultivate a garden, although they all, or nearly all, have an instinctive love of a garden and much prefer to live near

one'.³⁶ The debate spilled over into the discussion when the Labour chairman of the Glasgow City Council Housing Committee and an important figure of the TCPA in Scotland, Jean Mann, made an anti-flat speech, in which she claimed that in a survey done on a Glasgow suburban estate, the overwhelming majority preferred to stay rather than to return to tenements near their workplace.³⁷ From the opposite camp, Lewis Silkin, a member of the London County Council (LCC), a Labour M.P. and future Minister of Town and Country Planning ('the man who probably knew more about housing and town planning than anyone else in the Labour Movement'³⁸), argued that flats could be homes and that this depended on the kind of flats and whether they were near the working places of the families:

In the experience of the L.C.C. 95 per cent of people preferred to live in flats, providing they were near their work, and only 5 per cent wanted houses.³⁹

So the battle line was drawn particularly in the minds of the TCPA members and supporters. Their campaign against flats intensified as their pro-cottage stand became increasingly entrenched. The essential conditions for a happy and contented family life, the TCPA said, were reasonable privacy, adequate space and the successful use of leisure hours. And here the significance of the private garden came in. As had always been claimed, the garden served many functions, 'for the cultivation of flowers, fruit and vegetables, as a place in the sun and air for the baby in its perambulator, as a playground for younger

children, as an outdoor room for meals in the summer, as a "turning-out" space, and, with a shed, as a place for engaging in many hobbies by both children and adults'.⁴⁰ In the TCPA view, cottages at 12 houses per acre and 'the open-town form of development' afforded the people gardens and thus satisfied their aspirations. In contrast, the TCPA believed, flats built at 40 per acre giving a population density of about 144 persons per acre provided no benefits: no private gardens and insufficient privacy and independence, due to neighbours living too close to each other, and inadequate sound insulation.⁴¹ This latter problem of building sound-proof flats (in its view) still defied solution. The TCPA felt that the appeal of labour-saving devices such as well-equipped kitchens, constant hot water supply and central heating, which ought to belong equally to houses, was unfairly associated in the public mind with flats, but even this failed to tip the balance in favour of flats. Thus, Elizabeth Glen McAllister, a stalwart of the TCPA could claim that 'over eighty per cent of the people of this country prefer a house and garden, even when the kitchen of the house is badly planned and badly equipped, to a flat with a labour saving kitchen and gadgets'.⁴² Similarly, Osborn's unguarded remark said much about his and the TCPA's fundamental dislike of flats (and of Germany):

If Hitler destroys Coventry and Birmingham and they are rebuilt in this way (i.e. Zeilenbau - parallel blocks of flats), Germany may be said to

have won the war, whatever ultimately happens to Hitler.⁴³

At the other end of the spectrum, as seen from Maxwell Fry's article in Picture Post, with large-scale rebuilding imminent after the war, the modern architects, particularly those associated with the Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS)⁴⁴ put major emphasis on the redevelopment of existing towns. The main aim was to make them pleasant and healthy places to live in. These towns should be controlled in size and planned for work and for recreation, full of sunlight, air and greenery. Ralph Tubbs, a MARS member, suggested that there might have to be some deliberate 'Re-destruction' preceding reconstruction:

The folly of the last century must go, the chaos, the slums and the dirt; so also, the crimes of our own century, the mock-Tudor suburbs, the ribbon development and the imitation Classic.⁴⁵

The 'clean sweep' philosophy of planning found one of its most extreme expressions in 'A Master Plan for London', prepared by the Town Planning Committee of the MARS. It was a modified form of the linear city layout, concentrating on communication patterns designed to provide rapid transport throughout London. The plan consisted of a main artery, a broad rectangular band extending east-west, on each side of which were eight parallel secondary routes running north-south, and this structure was superimposed upon the existing site of London. Industry, administration and cultural and shopping centres were to be located along the central artery. The plan divided London into sixteen separate

districts. Each of them was, in fact, a linear town about two miles wide and eight miles long, holding 600,000 inhabitants and arranged along a secondary traffic artery running north-south.⁴⁶ Taken as a whole, the MARS plan, if executed, would have meant a radical reorganisation of London, wiping out every feature that made the city recognisable. On this occasion, even The Architects' Journal (an affiliated publication of The Architectural Review and a supporter of modern architecture) felt that the linear principle was rather overworked and argued that the majority of Londoners 'do not want to be left without landmarks in an "ideal" town'.⁴⁷ That the plan was published was an illustration of optimism and enthusiasm for reconstruction among the architects.

On a more practical level, the modernists were again seen to be promoting flats as a major vehicle of post-war housing. An ardent advocate of the Zeilenbau was found in the person of Geoffrey Boumphrey. In fact his book Town and Country Tomorrow (1940) read like a resumé of anti-suburban polemic and of the main arguments advanced in the 1930s for modern flats and the idea of compact towns. He talked about the wastefulness and cost of suburban life: the hours spent in journeys to and from work and the traffic congestion at morning and evening rush hours; the pressure of heavy fares on incomes and the higher cost of living; and the dearth of social facilities and the difficulty of getting the community going, especially on one-class council estates. The spoliation of the countryside and good agricultural land by suburban development was criticised. Moreover, the

outward movement of population was deplored, in part, as it offended the urban vision of the modernists:

Certainly the towns suffer a grave loss from the absence, except in working hours, of many of their best citizens, whose whole-hearted co-operation and enthusiasm are badly needed if the standard of civic pride is ever to approach the level it held throughout mediaeval England and until late in the eighteenth century.⁴⁸

The main proposal of the book was to house the people in widely spaced, parallel blocks of flats, ten-storeys high, and with lifts. They were chosen 'for the good reasons that they preserve more of the land unbuilt on than do lower blocks, thus allowing greater compactness of population with no loss of open space per head, and also that with them the intervals between the blocks became large enough to give all the privacy needed'.⁴⁹ The space round the blocks would become communally kept gardens and allotments would be provided for keen gardeners. Boumphrey did not go into the details of internal planning but emphasised the virtues of devices like central heating and the water-borne refuse disposal system and the fact that the area within the dwellings to be kept clean was made smaller by the elimination and reduction in circulation space (stairs, landings and passages), all of which made flats much easier to run than individual houses. He maintained that in large developments, such communal facilities as laundries, drying rooms, crèches, and kindergartens could be provided at negligible cost. On his calculations, the

theoretical layout of flats to a 20-acre unit site yielded a net density of 42 flats (or 168 persons assuming the figure of 4 persons per dwelling) per acre. From this Boumphrey made allowance for open space and allotment provision and arrived at his ideal density of 22 flats (or 88 persons) per acre. He then drew on Ernest Simon's replanning proposals for Manchester of 1935, to show how they could be improved. Simon had proposed replacing the central slums with four-storey flats and moving half the former inhabitants to Wythenshawe and other new housing areas. Boumphrey demonstrated instead that, by adopting a higher density of 113 persons per acre, his ten storey flats schemes could rehouse the majority of the residents on the site so that they would 'live a full urban life', enjoying the improved standards of privacy, sunlight and fresh air with ample space for public gardens and playgrounds.⁵⁰

While arguing their case, the modernists never hid their distaste for the garden city movement. Boumphrey, although accepting Ebenezer Howard's original idea of the desirability for the limited size of towns and of dwellings being close to places of work, thought that the garden city ideology was built upon the fundamental idea that 'the existing towns are irremediably bad, that life in them must necessarily be lived at an inferior level to that possible in the country or in the nearest compromise possible - the garden city'. The consequence of this was 'the growth of a feeling of scorn for the old towns and a corresponding weakening of our determination to make them better', which, Boumphrey argued, heavily implicated the movement in the

proliferation of suburbs and the destruction of the countryside.⁵¹ Thomas Sharp reiterated a modernist tenet in his thinly disguised attack on the alleged garden city idyll:

I think we have got to avoid the sloppy romanticism that has ruined our building for years past. A people like ourselves who can make lovely things like our motor-cars and aeroplanes should be able to build good towns if we stop being falsely romantic.⁵²

Ernö Goldfinger, a Hungarian emigré architect and a prominent MARS member, criticised the garden city movement as advocating 'a hybrid form of urbo-rural agglomeration' and gave his somewhat heavy-handed verdict:

Instead of solving the question of rural and urban over-crowding in insanitary lodgings, a universal panacea was found in advocating the limitation of dwellings per acre. In an industrial community in full development, the arresting of which would mean decay and death, self-imposed limitations to industrial development were suggested, which would, of course, suit admirably monopolistic vested interests. There is an underlying defeatism in all this.⁵³

It appeared, then, that the 'houses versus flats' debate during the war displayed a similar polarisation of views to that of the 1930s. Both the garden city followers and the modernists provided the nuclei of support for their respective causes, and well-rehearsed arguments were

employed to further them. Yet there were two significant developments in current thinking about the forms of post-war housing. They were in a sense related in that both concerned the place of flats in future housing schemes. On the one hand, intellectual and professional opinion became much more favourable to the idea of flats as people's homes. On the other hand, out of the whole discussion about desirable types of housing development there emerged a synthesis that emphasised the need to build a community, in which different types of dwellings including flats were to be provided.

As far as intellectual and professional opinion was concerned the modernist argument was now winning more support, particularly among the preservationist lobby, and also starting to carry more weight within the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). In contrast to the 1930s, the argument for the preservation of the countryside carried a more articulate message, relating the issue to the question of urban areas. The wartime necessity to reduce food imports highlighted the importance of the agricultural value of the land and gave added urgency to the views of the preservationists. The Report of the Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas (The Scott Report) was surprisingly forthright in its analysis. It noted that, when compared with continental standards, the population density of most English towns was low and that 'Our cities and towns are conspicuous because of the monotonous succession of streets of mean houses, many now deteriorated into slums, which are associated with the industrial

revolution'. The Report went on to assess the effects of the rebuilding of war-damaged cities on the countryside. It argued that the thousands of people living in cities had become accustomed to flats:

During recent years there has been a growth in the number of flats provided for the working classes. It is possible that, at least in many places, this may continue. Construction, if along these lines, will result in an increased density of population and still make available open spaces, wider streets, playgrounds, areas for allotment gardens and light and air round dwellings. Should this occur, then the question of lateral spread becomes a less urgent one.⁵⁴

C.E.M. Joad, writing from the point of view of the country, confronted the flat critics with his 'Unrepentant Advocacy of Flats'. He extolled the virtues of the Viennese estates of flats and recommended that 'instead of living in sprawling dormitory suburbs men and women should in future consent to bunch and live in flats'.⁵⁵ All this seemed to confirm Osborn's fears of the preservationist lobby becoming 'a movement to seal up the urban population into sanitary and aesthetically-designed poultry-batteries'.⁵⁶

Moreover, the preservationist viewpoint was often put forward in tandem with the urbanist vision implicit in the modernist argument: the idea of the compact town; architectural unity; and social and cultural facilities maintained by a certain concentration of the population. Tubbs showed how endless rows of individual or semi-detached

houses, however well planned, tended to be both irritating and monotonous, destroying the unity of the street.⁵⁷ In the view of the sociologist, Marianne Walter, 'A certain concentration of population is not only necessary for cultural life, but the sine qua non for the institution and the progress of those public services which improve the health and vigour of civilised nations'.⁵⁸ The novelist and popular broadcaster, J.B. Priestley, had identified the new post-war England of 'miles of semi-detached bungalows' as democratic and modern in the 1930s.⁵⁹ Now he was expounding a new urban vision of Britain after the present war. He reminded his fellow citizens that 'we are a nation of towns-people and not of country-people':

The British Council and similar bodies who send out illustrated booklets and films about England will persist in showing the England of thatched cottages; but how many people live in thatched cottages in this country?⁶⁰

Priestley spoke fondly of Bristol and Norwich, the towns he liked the best from his English Journey (1934). These towns were pre-Industrial Revolution in origin, with 'their own theatres, their own painters, and even their own publishing houses and their own literary circles'. The industrial city, he maintained, was 'a factory with a dormitory around it' and he objected to garden cities and suburbs, which lacked any suggestions of a true urban community:

if everyone lived in garden cities half the country would be taken up, and be neither garden

nor city. Compactness meant that people would have to live in flats.⁶¹

The University of Bristol Reconstruction Research Group, in a study of interwar council estates in Bristol, arrived at a similar conclusion:

The provision of flats would add to the overall density of population without increasing spacial overcrowding. Moreover, flat development provides a useful focus for the grouping of shops and other amenities, such as cinemas and pubs; space can be spared for these amenities from the ground saved through building flats instead of houses.⁶²

Furthermore, the RIBA, as a central professional organisation in matters of architecture and building, assumed an active role in the discussions for reconstruction, and within the Institute, both the established modernists and a younger generation reared in the teachings of modern architecture were beginning to make their presence felt.⁶³ The RIBA had set up its Reconstruction Committee in early 1941 to 'consider and formulate the policy of the R.I.B.A. and Allied Societies on the subject of post-war reconstruction and planning in its widest aspects'. Alongside the revered figures of Professor C.H. Reilly and Sir Giles Gilbert Scott on the Committee were several members of the MARS including Captain E. Maxwell Fry, Godfrey Samuel, John Summerson, Ralph Tubbs and F.R.S. Yorke.⁶⁴ The RIBA Reconstruction Committee mounted its own exhibition on reconstruction and post-war planning, while a Housing Group was set up to look into the questions

of post-war housing. The 'Rebuilding Britain' Exhibition, purporting to give the public an opportunity to inform itself, identified the broad human needs to be met in post-war Britain as 'good conditions in our homes and places of work, convenient transport between them, and good accommodation for education, for health services, and for our leisure occupations and entertainment'. The scope of the Exhibition was admittedly wide and general, but the focus was on the existing cities and towns, in which 'Before the war eight out of every ten people in Britain lived'. The aim of town planning was 'to find a way of bringing decent living conditions back into these places'.⁶⁵ The work of the pioneers of modern town planning from Ebenezer Howard, through Tony Garnier ('Cité Industrielle') to Le Corbusier was traced and the general principles to be adopted in a governing plan of individual towns were set out, which clearly showed the Committee's (and ultimately RIBA's) appreciation of the idea of functional zoning, elucidated by modern architects in the 1930s:

Briefly they are these: a clear separation between different parts of the town which have different functions; a clear separation between different kinds of traffic ... easy access to the surrounding country, and a green belt unspoiled by suburban ribbon developments; ... where it is appropriate, the use of skyscrapers - providing they are combined with fine open spaces around and between them at their feet.⁶⁶

There was also an instance of specific MARS influence where London was taken as an example to indicate a way of approaching the problem. To illustrate the form that a governing plan might take, a linear city almost identical to 'A MARS Master Plan for London' was reproduced at the Exhibition, complete with its diagrams.⁶⁷

On the questions of housing itself, the RIBA produced a very clear message on its approval of flats. In the evidence submitted to the Design of Dwellings Sub-Committee, set up by the wartime coalition Government to study the design, layout and planning of post-war housing, the RIBA recommended:

That flat development be regarded as a means of providing completely satisfactory accommodation, and as a means of setting free areas of ground for recreation, and not for crowding more people on the site than is possible by any other method, and that fuller use of communal services and facilities be made, including hot water, heating, lifts and the provision of recreation rooms.⁶⁸

Meanwhile the Housing Group of the RIBA also contained modernist figures, including Frederick Gibberd, Elizabeth Denby and Jane Drew (who became Maxwell Fry's partner). The group's comprehensive report, Housing (1944), firmly established flats as an essential dwelling type for post-war housing.⁶⁹ Just as flats were being established as a desirable dwelling type in the eyes of the architects, there was also a revival of interest in terrace houses, which had come to be associated in many people's minds with monotonous

rows of by-law housing and slums. The modern architects, in particular, became their advocates⁷⁰ and this was echoed in the RIBA'S statements on post-war housing:

A close grouping of dwellings in terrace formation, in streets, squares and crescents may ... not only allow of more effective provision of communal facilities in the form of greens, gardens and open spaces, but may also be conducive to the creation of a stronger civic pride than can a scattered form of development.

It was argued that blocks of modern terrace houses, if organised in short streets, would avoid monotony and be economical in land use, while they provided improved possibilities in street design and architectural unity. The RIBA believed that they would be welcomed by an urban population.⁷¹ This advocacy of terrace houses, as well as the approval of flats, was also a reflection on the architects' desire to retain an urban atmosphere, particularly in the towns which were heavily bombed and where large-scale reconstruction was envisaged.

In comparison with the RIBA and its activities, the Town Planning Institute (TPI) increasingly distanced itself from the planning propaganda of the day. It made no statements on the running debate about the forms of post-war housing, preferring to regard itself as a professional institution that possessed an independent technical knowledge on matters of town planning. When the TCPA asked the Institute to endorse its National Planning Basis, the governing Council of the TPI resolved that 'it does not feel

that it would be appropriate for them to join with non-professional bodies in putting forward statements of a general kind'.⁷² Similarly, the TPI failed to give evidence to the Design of Dwellings Sub-Committee.⁷³ One paper was read at an Institute's meeting in 1943 which did address the question of the replanning of central residential areas. H.T. Hough, City Engineer and Surveyor of Liverpool, considered the choice between redeveloping a built-up area and creating a new suburb or satellite town. He argued that the requirements of a built-up area were much less and that, with so many services available, it was 'more practicable to re-develop derelict central areas economically' since 'this will achieve our object of reducing the spread of the town into the country'. And if the same number of people were to be rehoused in a redevelopment area, 'a large number of flats must be included in the new accommodation'. Hough envisaged a residential development almost wholly consisting of parallel blocks of flats, five storeys in height⁷⁴ - to be expected from an officer of a city with long traditions of flat building. However the general tone of the discussion following the paper was nonetheless decidedly lacklustre, although the flats proposal did not find much favour with the participants.⁷⁵

Finally, a large section of the architectural community during the war took an increasing interest in the achievements of Swedish architecture, particularly in the field of housing which prominently featured flats. This orientation was very much evident in the work of J.M. Richards, a leading architectural historian and MARS member,

who became editor of The Architectural Review. In an influential little book, An Introduction to Modern Architecture (1940), Richards set a new agenda for modern architecture. The next stage in its development, he argued, would be

towards its humanisation, chiefly through the greater use of natural materials, such as wood and stone, and materials such as brick which mellow with time, and through the evolution of well-tried shapes and textures that have more character than the frigid forms of geometry. This new emphasis on human as well as mechanical qualities is not a retreat from the ideals of modern architecture. The ideal has always been a human one, and it is natural that the widening of its scope (which is an outcome, really, of maturity) should come after the general establishment of its rather revolutionary principles.⁷⁶

And in the same book, Richards singled out Sweden for praise:

Sweden especially, with her instinct for using materials well and her serious sense of social values, has set an example to all Europe of the way modern architecture can solve such different problems as the housing of industrial workers and the mass production of elegant household furniture.⁷⁷

Sweden remained neutral in the war, which allowed the building activity to continue, albeit under severe

constraints imposed by restrictions on raw material imports. Still, a number of English architects⁷⁸ who braved difficult wartime conditions to get first-hand knowledge of Swedish architecture were greeted with buildings variously described as light, simple, practical, dignified or clean. They were examples of 'architecture dedicated to the everyday use of the common citizen, yet subtle and discerning in their self-effacement'.⁷⁹ Notable characteristics of Swedish housing in this period, as described by a later critic, were a far-sighted programme of municipal land acquisition (which enabled the integrated policy of planning and housing to be carried out on a large-scale basis), and the overwhelming predominance of dwellings in flats with a high level of provision of labour-saving devices and communal facilities.⁸⁰ Illustrations of these flats, of simple but noble structures rising above the birch and fir trees, or of neat clusters almost nestling in the woodlands laced with water, adorned the pages of the architectural press.⁸¹ Architecturally, its recourse to local materials such as timber, brick and stone and its use of pitched roofs, both in part enforced by wartime necessity,⁸² were some of the features that were visible in Swedish housing schemes. And these features were seen as part of 'a reaction against the all too schematic architecture of the 1930's'. Sven Backström, one of the most able among the younger Swedish architects of the day, explained in a revealing passage how the objective, functional buildings of the thirties, supposedly reflecting the modern mode of life, were found wanting in Sweden:

It was then that people gradually began to discover that the "new objectivity" was not always so objective, and the houses did not always function as well as had been expected. The big windows, for example, were all too effective as heat-conductors, and people found it difficult to accustom themselves to the heat or cold behind them. They also felt the lack of many of the aesthetic values and the little contributions to cosiness that we humans are so dependent upon, and that our architectural and domestic tradition had nevertheless developed. It was difficult to settle down in the new houses because the "new" human beings were not so different from the old ones.

Yet Backström also maintained that houses should of course function properly and be rational in design. But at the same time we want to re-introduce the valuable and living elements in architecture that existed before 1930, and we want to add to this our own personal contribution.⁸³

Thus Swedish modern architecture was seen as fruitfully broadening and improving the modernist principles of the interwar years. In particular, its achievements in housing displayed an admirable union of essentially modern structures with local materials and traditional forms, which endeared it to outside observers.⁸⁴

Moreover, an equally important appeal of Swedish housing was its strong social outlook. Under a social

democratic administration Sweden was pursuing its programme of social welfare at the time.⁸⁵ In housing, vigorous co-operative housing societies, encouraged by government, formed the core of the building movement in providing decent accommodation and improving housing standards for its people.⁸⁶ William Holford, Professor of Civic Design at the University of Liverpool, who had just become adviser to the newly created Ministry of Town and Country Planning, was one of those enthused by this social ideal. He spoke of 'the social value of standardized democratic housing, grouped by the architect and site-planner into visible communities' and referred to the democratic nature of housing provision in Sweden, pointing out that the tenant membership of a Stockholm housing society included all strata of the society. Furthermore, these housing societies also provided communal facilities on estates and catered for various aspects of residents' lives. All this, Holford felt, provided a valuable lesson for his country:

Having an all-round social function, these various housing corporations - co-operatives and others - have levelled out the difference between a subsidized and an unsubsidized dwelling, and have removed a cause of snobbery which is still active in this country ...⁸⁷

The first wartime development, then, was the winning round of greater intellectual and professional support for the modernist argument in favour of flats and high density developments. The second significant point in the housing debates concerned the increasing importance attached to the

idea of community by those involved in planning and reconstruction. Thus, while mutual enmity and disagreements about the types of housing development remained undimmed, there was some attempt to relate the issue of dwelling types to the wider question of future residential communities. The architects and town planners of modernist inclinations were more eager to exploit this possibility partly because it gave them an opportunity to legitimise the use of flats in housing schemes consisting of different types of dwellings. Thomas Sharp expressed the idea in a polemical tone:

It is dictatorial, unimaginative and intolerant of people who regard themselves as housing reformers to attempt to restrict the range of habitation to the family-house-cum-private garden type which for some reason or other they regard as the one and only proper Englishman's castle (as it would be equally dictatorial and intolerant of the opposite kind of enthusiast to attempt to make everybody live in flats).⁸⁸

And, as Tubbs put it with matter-of-factness:

Different people have different requirements, according to age, whether single or married or with children. Some can live most happily in flats, some in houses.⁸⁹

Moreover, this 'desirable admixture of housing' had, according to Sharp, architectural, visual qualities:

It will incidentally be gaining the opportunity of being far more architecturally successful, far

more visually exciting, than our low-scaled earth-crouching cottagey towns of to-day can ever be.⁹⁰

In fact, even Osborn was confiding to Patrick Abercrombie, a distinguished town planner and a very important member of the TCPA, early in 1941, that 'The demand for flats, maisonettes, and one-family houses could be adjusted to local needs and preferences without the dice being loaded in favour of any of the methods'.⁹¹ He went further, conceding that a small number of 'high flats' might be necessary, and actually came round to an argument similar to Sharp's but from the opposite perspective:

Lastly flats. ... you can go up any number of storeys for non-family dwellings. ... I have had in mind that in many development units there will be a small proportion of high flats, giving scope for variety in treatment. This will release a small portion of the building area per acre, which could be used either as general open space or to ease out the garden-space for the family-houses in the group, and avoid the monotony that such a high density would tend to.⁹²

It is true that housing reformers like Ernest Simon had also been suggesting in the 1930s that flats might be acceptable to single people or elderly couples.⁹³ But increasingly the town planners and architects during the war realised that more variety was needed in the types and sizes of dwellings than had hitherto been provided in local authority housing schemes. In technical terms this was underpinned by some work done on the future composition of

the population. The Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction (APRR),⁹⁴ in an influential work, drew up a picture of the 1950 population, classified by different types of households, in an attempt to ascertain its housing needs. It was revealed that families with no small children and single households made up two-thirds of the projected population, while the remainder consisted of families with children under the age of fourteen. In terms of dwelling types, this meant, as the APRR suggested, that

families with a young child, or families which might expect one, such as newly married couples, should be offered a house and garden. For such people, therefore, the "Flat v. House" argument does not really apply,

whereas, the remaining families and presumably the single households 'could very well occupy flat dwellings'.⁹⁵ More importantly, however, this call for diversity in housing provision fitted in with the growing opinion within the town planning circle that stressed the need to plan for the community. An avowed object of the APRR's exercise was to demonstrate the importance of having 'balanced' communities that represented within each locality a typical cross-section of the population. The term community was left undefined but those attracted to the image that it conjured up in the early 1940s were essentially responding to two kinds of stimuli: the adverse criticism of the interwar housing schemes; and the impact of the war.

Firstly, there was the work of the sociologists and voluntary organisations from the 1930s. They had already

identified the physical and social defects of the interwar municipal housing estates (see Chapter 2). The National Council of Social Service (NCSS), which had been instrumental in promoting the idea of community centres in the 1930s, began its report (1943) on post-war housing by recording their defects. These were, namely, the one-class nature of the estates, the lack of variety in the accommodation provided and the absence or paucity of social facilities and other familiar institutions such as shops, street markets, libraries, public houses and cinemas. Furthermore, because many of these estates were built on the outskirts of towns, their residents had long journeys to and from work.⁹⁶ All this tended to make them mere dormitories, lacking any community life of their own. The University of Bristol Reconstruction Research Group put it more bluntly: 'The lack of community life in estates results from the three deficiencies ... i.e. geographical isolation, class isolation and the law controlling density'.⁹⁷ Moreover, these views were widely held during the war. Soon after the bombs started falling over the British Isles in late 1940, Political and Economic Planning was writing in a memorandum about

how we have gone wrong in permitting the building of innumerable erections which never were and never can be in any full sense the home of a modern family and in allowing ribbon development and housing estates dependent on everyday activities so remote that they could never become communities.⁹⁸

Priestley felt that because they had 'no communal life at all', these housing estates, municipal or private, bred political apathy.⁹⁹

Later in the war, the sociologist, Kate Liepmann, in her study of the daily journey to work and its implications for town planning, referred to the lack of 'common consciousness' and the need to instil it:

the rapidity with which big modern dormitories spring into being calls for the making of deliberate effort to inspire a common consciousness immediately upon the opening of the new housing estate ... It is a difficult task now to introduce common consciousness into the existing housing estates after the opportunities of the early formative years have been missed and indifference towards the community allowed to take root. In future, it can be counted upon, the mistakes will not be repeated.¹⁰⁰

The idea of community, on the other hand, appeared to be in accord with the mood of the day. The events of the war were thought to have brought about a greater sense of cohesion among the people. The NCSS spoke of how people belonging to different economic levels came together 'through association not only in the fighting Forces, but still more on a neighbourhood basis in the civil defence services'.¹⁰¹ The town planners took this as a hopeful sign. A passage in the Manchester reconstruction plan exemplified their thinking:

This feeling of participation in a great national effort has brought with it a new sense of union and partnership. People have become more friendly, more interested in their neighbours, more fully aware of their social resources and responsibilities ... The question is now being asked whether peace will bring a reversion to the old order: whether comradeship and sociability will give place to selfishness and apathy.¹⁰²

Thus, there was a general determination to avoid the mistakes of the past and, encouraged by wartime developments, to plan for community development in the future:

*In all cases, we believe that housing should incorporate facilities that will provide the population with the opportunities for enjoying a sense of belonging to and being responsible for their community and their surroundings.*¹⁰³

This general statement by the RIBA stood for several bodies expressing similar interest in community planning which included, among others, the TCPA, the Housing Centre and the West Midland Group on Post-War Reconstruction and Planning.¹⁰⁴

How to foster these communities and achieve the desirable qualities lacking from the existing estates was a matter of some discussion. Holford was found musing over 'the way in which London is composed of separate villages', while L.H. Keay, City Architect of Liverpool, suggested that

local government wards were the extended developments of former villages:

I should like the wards to be modern villages, self-contained and bounded by these wide parkways. By doing that you are improving your traffic lines, you are giving direct access to the country, and at the same time you are making it possible to create a real community centre in each of your sectors.¹⁰⁵

The MARS Group, also employing the analogy of a traditional community, nevertheless emphasised the role played by schools as a focus for community:

In the Middle Ages, life centred only around the church and the market, and this is why the towns of that time were so satisfactory ... Life to-day is not so simple, and focuses about many things ... but in fact life would be very limited if such purely commercial elements as shopping centres and railway stations were to become the acknowledged centres of any domestic unit. For this reason, the educational structure has been taken as the primary unit-forming constituent.¹⁰⁶

The need to mark physical boundaries of these communities was argued by many organisations, among them the West Midland Group on Post-War Reconstruction and Planning:

In view of the fact that main traffic roads passing through housing estates have been proved to destroy that sense of unity which is essential to every "neighbourhood", such roads should be

planned to pass between adjoining areas and not to bisect them. Dwellings should not be planned to abut on the main traffic arteries.¹⁰⁷

No universal standard for the area size of these proposed communities was laid down but it was generally agreed that they should each be small enough for the residents to reach any part of the neighbourhood on foot. There was some variation in the size of population advanced. The NCSS recommended that

All development of housing policy should be based on the "neighbourhood unit", regarded as a community with a maximum of about 2,000 dwellings, and thus comprising between 7,000 and 10,000 persons ...¹⁰⁸

The RIBA admitted that the size of communities would vary but also suggested the figure of 5,000, relating to the provision of educational facilities:

About five thousand people can support a junior and senior school that are educationally about the right size, neither too small nor too big, so let us suggest that five of our residential units should make up a neighbourhood ...¹⁰⁹

Naturally those arguing for community development all stressed that each unit needed a range of communal, social facilities, including shops, a community centre, a clinic, a nursery school, an elementary school, places of worship, a branch library, playing fields and other open spaces, and possibly a cinema and public houses.

On the social side of the requirements, the over-riding aim was to avoid the one-class estates and to achieve social balance in each community. PEP thought that account must be taken of 'the varying needs and rhythm of life of different age-groups in the population' and advocated the building of a settled community:

Homes of many different types and sizes should be provided and families should be encouraged to move from one home to another as their needs and circumstances change with the passing of time.¹¹⁰

Balanced communities also required the mixing of people from different classes, as Manzoni and Sharp pointed out in this exchange:

Manzoni: It's a social problem, of course, to get people to mix together ... We musn't have one set of tennis courts priced at one-and-sixpence an hour and another set priced at sixpence an hour: we must have one fixed price for all sections of the community.

... when we are building our residential areas we must endeavour to build not only different patterns of houses but also different sizes of houses, so that different types of people will live together rather than in separate sections of the town.

Sharp: You have the example of the Scandinavian countries, especially Sweden, where you have big

blocks of luxury flats actually next door to working men's flats. It worked there, why not here?¹¹¹

The NCSS accordingly argued for powers to be given to local authorities and 'semi-public corporations' to build these 'houses of different types, sizes and rents.'¹¹² As regards the actual design and layout of these residential areas, upon which the realisation of social balance largely rested, the RIBA emphasised the need to consider 'a mixed development of houses and flats' and called for

a far greater number and variety of house types, securing a mixture in a well-designed architectural grouping of single-two-and three-storey houses and flat development.¹¹³

Tubbs, who was part of the RIBA's reconstruction machinery, was more forthcoming in his personal capacity:

The solution is surely terraces around open quadrangles of lawns and trees, punctuated with high blocks of flats. How pleasant to walk from one quadrangle to another, to enjoy the sense of seclusion and the peace of the inner courts, with a skyline ever changing with the silhouettes of towering flats.¹¹⁴

In the course of the debate on community requirements, the term 'neighbourhood units' came to be frequently used to describe the whole set up of community planning. The discussion on neighbourhood units in Britain had begun in the 1930s¹¹⁵ but it was in the war that the idea was eagerly debated by the bodies and individuals concerned with

reconstruction¹¹⁶ and developed into a set of principles with a strong social emphasis to guide any future housing scheme, whether it be the reconstruction of an existing housing area or the planning of a new housing development. The whole idea was neatly summarised by B.A. Le Mare, an architect, who was taking part in a comprehensive survey of blitzed Hull, under the direction of Lock:

Certain contemporary planners recommend that large housing schemes should be composed of several self-contained units known as neighbourhood units. A neighbourhood unit should contain about 1,000 houses or four to five thousand people, should have its own shopping centre, churches, schools for infants, juniors and seniors; a community centre; creches where housewives may leave their children in the care of trained personnel; laundries; and, in fact, all the services that a modern self-contained community should have in order that each individual will be able to live a complete and happy life. This neighbourhood unit may be built in many different ways but preferably as a mixture of houses and flats.

By building flats more ground will be released for such purposes as playing fields, allotments, public gardens, and parks; flats must be well designed with adequate balconies and are probably best when constructed as 8-10 storey blocks with lifts. Houses will always be required for large families, the aged and infirm, and in

Hull will probably prove to be more popular for the majority. The proportion of flats to houses should be decided by a synthesis of opinion based firstly on the desires of the people who are to live in them, and secondly the recommendations of the experts who are to plan them.¹¹⁷

The neighbourhood unit principle, in conjunction with the mixed provision of houses and flats, received widespread attention, when the official reconstruction plan of London, incorporating these ideas, appeared in 1943. The County of London Plan was produced in response to a request made by Lord Reith in early 1941 to 'prepare a provisional plan of redevelopment for the County of London ... based on present facts' but 'sufficiently flexible to enable any necessary adjustments to be made as the war proceeds'.¹¹⁸ A number of credentials made the plan justly famous. London was the national and 'imperial' capital, the home of nearly ten million people. It also bore the brunt of the blitz. The County of London Plan was prepared by J.H. Forshaw,¹¹⁹ Architect to the LCC, and Patrick Abercrombie¹²⁰ (who acted as consultant). They were both seen as leading figures in the field of architecture and town planning. The plan, in fact, was one of the first comprehensive proposals to be published on a blitzed city. As such, the effect of the work was not to be limited to London alone, the plan being seen as providing 'a comprehensive strategical plan of operations applicable in greater or less degree to every urban community.'¹²¹

The broad aim of the plan was 'to include the best of existing London, to enhance its strongly-marked character, and to respect its structure and spheres of activities, but at the same time, and drastically if need be, to remedy its defects'. These defects comprised 'traffic congestion, depressed housing, inadequacy and maldistribution of open space, and finally the jumble of houses and industry which showed itself in a general tendency towards "indeterminate zoning"'.¹²² Fundamentally, the authors saw London as a living and organic structure, consisting of a collection of communities fused together, but each with a strong local loyalty. The basic idea of the plan, then, was to safeguard and in some cases to recreate these communities. To make them 'separate and definite entities', the main traffic routes were planned to follow their physical boundaries, while the open spaces, apart from the normally provided playgrounds, were designed to act as a natural cut-off between the communities. Each community, in turn, would be 'divided into smaller neighbourhood units of between 6,000 and 10,000 persons related to the elementary school and the area it serves'. These neighbourhood units would be provided with their own local shops, neighbourhood centres and other social facilities.¹²³ The authors, in an authoritative statement, put the neighbourhood unit principle firmly within the framework of reconstruction planning:

It is believed that the best results in reconstruction will be achieved if the neighbourhood unit is taken as the minimum unit

for redevelopment as a whole, complete with its school system and community buildings. The system of building individual housing blocks, unrelated to any general plan should be avoided.¹²⁴

Other important ideas put forward in the plan included its suggestion for decentralising a proportion of the population (a figure put at 500,000 out of the total population of 4 million for the County), in order to provide better living conditions for those remaining in the County, its recommendation for the elimination of through traffic from the residential areas, coupled with a road system designed to secure the free flow of through traffic and its proposal to achieve a balanced distribution of all forms of open space and to co-ordinate them into a closely-linked park system (with the aim of providing 4 acres of public open space per 1,000 of the population). More specific proposals concerned the creation of traffic-free precincts, particularly for the centre of government and the university centre and a major scheme to revive the south bank of the Thames with office blocks, flats and a new cultural centre set amid landscaped gardens.¹²⁵

Above all, however, housing claimed priority. The principle of density zoning advanced in conjunction with its housing proposals, in fact formed the most notable feature of the plan. In rehousing on urban and central sites, the authors stressed the need to strike a balance between 'the number of people to be rehoused, the type and size of the dwellings, the amount of open space to be provided for recreation and amenity, and the degree of decentralisation'.

In particular they were anxious to arrest the recent tendency of larger families and the newly-married to migrate to outer districts through the lack of suitable accommodation in more central areas, as this deprived the London communities of 'vigorous and promising young citizens'. The authors were also well aware of the public demand for houses and the argument that flats might prove popular with single people and childless couples. All these considerations led them to argue that rehousing should be done 'in terms of a mixed lay-out of houses and flats'.¹²⁶ In the past, most housing experts tended to distinguish between houses and flats and accordingly ascribed different standards of housing density to each of them without taking account of the varying size of families (which in part accounted for the perpetuation of the house-flat divide). The plan, instead, proposed three concentric density zones, based on population density, of 100, 136 and 200 persons per acre for the County of London. On the authors' calculations, the fifteen central boroughs rebuilt at the intermediate density of 136 persons per acre would accommodate 61 per cent of the pre-war population. Only in the 200 density zone, in the very heart of London, would there be only flats, the majority of which would be 7 to 10 storeys in height. The proportions of houses and flats at 100 and 136 persons per acre would admittedly vary 'according to local conditions and requirements'. But by actually applying these density figures to a site to be developed as a neighbourhood unit, and drawing on the breakdown of the population by the size of various households, the authors

worked out that with the 100 density, up to 55 per cent could be in houses and 45 per cent in flats, while the corresponding figures for the 136 density were 33 and 67 per cent.¹²⁷ This 'mixture of low-density housing and high density flats' could combine a number of dwelling types. Houses in the form of terraces were considered to be the most suitable type for central areas along with narrow-fronted three storey houses and maisonettes ('containing two-storey house accommodation superimposed so as to produce a four storey block'). For flat development, the authors suggested 'the use of two-, three- and four storey types without lifts and that where they exceed four storeys in height, lifts should be provided'. A certain number of high blocks up to ten storeys might be included at carefully selected points, freeing more ground space, which could be used for 'communal gardens, allotments, children's playgrounds, tennis courts, flower beds and communal buildings such as nursery schools and social centres'.¹²⁸ Thus, the authors successfully side-tracked the vexed question of 'houses versus flats' and established a formula for mixed development.

The County of London Plan, though only provisional, was generally acclaimed as a realistic and realisable plan for reconstructing and remodelling London, incorporating a range of current ideas in planning.¹²⁹ The Times sang its praises:

This plan is a far-sighted but essentially practical attempt to introduce balanced considerations of communal well-being into

London's future development; its approach is varied; it does not seek the impossible. It is an attempt at comprehensive long-term redevelopment conditioned by a careful and realistic acceptance of all the valuable or inevitable features of London's present way of life.¹³⁰

For The Architects' Journal the plan was 'a magnificent treatise, a text book on planning, and a key to the solution of the most difficult problem in the country.'¹³¹ The MARS Group, which sought the impossible in its own plan for London, was equally generous in its praise. It welcomed the plan as 'the first adequate and comprehensive plan for the County and one of the first plans to be sponsored by an official body, in which modern planning principles are applied to an established social organism.'¹³² The RIBA also expressed its approval, describing the plan as 'a milestone marking a definite step forward not only in the planning of London but in the art and science of Town Planning generally'. The RIBA was in general agreement with most of the proposals put forward in the plan and even suggested a higher population density for a skilfully planned area of flats.¹³³

The response was very much more muted in the case of the TPI. It chose not to comment on the density zoning principle, which was made much of by the modernists, and dwelt on the need for decentralisation and for co-ordinating the planning of the City and the County of London.¹³⁴ In fact, the comparatively high density standards proposed in the plan did cause a stir within town planning circles. A

reviewer in The Town Planning Review (which was started at the Department of Civic Design, University of Liverpool and of which Abercrombie was founder editor) felt that the figure of 136 persons had been chosen as a compromise, 'having possibly some chance of acceptance, between the views of the not-so-wise advocates of high density on one hand, and of low-density housing on the other'.¹³⁵ Silkin, who was chairman of the LCC Town Planning Committee at the time, held out the figure of '80 per cent to 85 per cent' as a more likely proportion of flats at 136 persons per acre.¹³⁶ Inevitably it was Osborn and the TCPA, who raised their voice against the high density and high proportion of flats. For Osborn the plan was 'a profound disappointment', particularly so since it bore the name of Abercrombie, who was a long-standing member of the TCPA and who had just become one of its vice-presidents. But he looked elsewhere to lay the blame for the failure:

The LCC is led by middle-class Labour Councillors right out of touch with popular opinion but very close to the transport and public service interests, and terrified of a drop in rateable value or of a loss of their slum electorate.

Hence, in Osborn's view, the plan talked of 'decentralisation' and 'plans to slow up the process as much as possible'.¹³⁷ Against this, Silkin, being no respecter of the garden city tradition, was credited with saying that 'Welwyn Garden City was really a dormitory town that was started for the middle classes'.¹³⁸ The TCPA conducted a vigorous campaign against the plan, sending a critical

memorandum to the organisations interested in planning, including the LCC, the London boroughs and the appropriate government departments, and urged them to withhold their approval. In its place the memorandum called for a more drastic decentralisation, of 1.5 million people, together with the industries, 'to towns outside London's country belt'. This would permit good living conditions, 'including family houses for at least 80 per cent of the families remaining in the County'.¹³⁹ The campaign again brought up the 'houses versus flats' controversy, which many in town planning and architecture wished to see dead. Reginald Rowe, chairman of the Housing Centre, rebuked Osborn for raising the subject of flats ('To resurrect this controversy now is in effect to draw a red herring across a trail'), when the main question was to get the London boroughs to cooperate in adopting the general principles of the plan.¹⁴⁰ The sociologist, Alexander Block, estimating London's housing needs from the Census in the light of the County of London Plan, demonstrated the existence of a growing number of small households and how many of them had been forced to share dwellings through lack of suitable accommodation. These findings led him to reject the claim of the TCPA that 80 per cent of London families should be provided with houses and gardens as having 'little foundation in actual population facts'.¹⁴¹ Rather perplexed by Osborn's intransigence, The Economist counselled caution in his crusade for town planning:

If he allows his campaign against flats to be merged into a campaign against the London County

Plan he will have done both London and the cause of planning, which he has deeply at heart, a grave disservice.¹⁴²

To all the criticism levelled against him and the TCPA, Osborn increasingly responded with an appeal to public opinion:

The "claim" of the TCPA was not based on these obvious Census figures, which tell us only what dwellings people have, but on practical experience of what people want, supported by the extensive house-to-house enquiries made in the last few years. About 9 of 10 London households tell us they want houses with gardens.¹⁴³

As seen from the foregoing account, then, there was growing agreement among the architects and town planners about the kind of housing development envisaged for the postwar society. The neighbourhood units were an attempt to overcome the serious shortcomings of interwar housing estates and, in the light of wartime developments, particular emphasis was placed on creating balanced residential communities in which all the sections of society were represented. As Holford put it:

The movement is away from quantitative towards qualitative housing; from houses as such, to grouping of houses; from estates to communities.

The war has made every one of us aware of the relation between the dwellings and the warden's post, the basic grouping of a community of perhaps

200 souls. The housewife is more conscious of the shopping centre, the parent of the distance to schools.¹⁴⁴

Whether houses or flats should be provided in these residential communities was still a subject of intense controversy and brought out some heated response, in particular, from the TCPA. But here too, the increasingly dominant view was that both houses and flats would be needed to cater for a variety of households, who were to make up these communities. The County of London Plan took up these ideas in its proposals for the reconstruction of London and in doing so offered an influential model of post-war housing development, especially for those other towns and cities which had suffered the blitz.

Footnotes

- 1 J. Stevenson 'Planners' moon? The Second World War and the planning movement', in H.L. Smith (ed.) War and social change. British society in the Second World War (Manchester 1986) pp. 63-66
- 2 Ibid., p. 67
- 3 P. Addison The Road to 1945. British Politics and the Second World War (Quartet Books Edition, 1977) p. 70.
- 4 J.B. Cullingworth Town and Country Planning in England and Wales (Completely Revised Third Edition, 1970) p. 31.
- 5 T. Harrison, Living Through the Blitz (Penguin Edition, Harmondsworth 1978) pp. 219, 263 and passim.; A. Calder The People's War. Britain 1939-45 (1969) p. 203; R.M. Titmuss Problems of Social Policy (HMSO 1950) pp. 295, 301; C.H. Kohan Works and Buildings (HMSO 1952) pp. 222-225; Bombers Over Merseyside (Liverpool 1943).
- 6 Housing (Presented by The Minister of Reconstruction to Parliament) Cmd. 6609 (HMSO 1945) p. 2.
- 7 Quoted in A. Calder The People's War p. 524.
- 8 V. Brittain England's Hour. An Autobiography 1939-1941 (1981, first published 1941) p. 170.
- 9 R. Calder The Lesson of London (1941) p. 125.
- 10 Mass-Observation Bulletin 'Post-War Expectations'. (Mar. 1941).
- 11 W.H. Beveridge The Pillars of Security (1943) p. 13.
- 12 Picture Post (4.1.41) [*italics in original*].
- 13 J. Stevenson 'Planners' moon? The Second War and the planning movement' p. 67.

- 14 Hansard (Lords) 5th Series Vol. 118 (26.2.41) col. 514.
- 15 There was a continuous stream of literature on numerous aspects of town planning and physical reconstruction, which, by the end of the war, amounted to a massive number of publications devoted to these subjects. See F.J. Osborn (ed.) Planning and Reconstruction 1946 (1946) Section 12 for a bibliography.
- 16 For example, 'Living in Cities' (1941-42) was a travelling exhibition designed by Ralph Tubbs for the 1940 Council and the British Institute of Adult Education, and was circulated by the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts. Tubbs was a member of the Reconstruction Committee of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and a member of the Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS). The 1940 Council (later renamed the 1941 Committee) was an informal pressure group with a strongly progressive strain and included a miscellany of personalities across the political spectrum and professionals. Among them were Elizabeth Denby, Ritchie Calder and Richard Titmuss (P. Addison The Road to 1945 pp. 188-189). For the exhibition, see R. Tubbs Living in Cities (Harmondsworth 1942).
- 'Rebuilding Britain' (1943) was organised by the RIBA Reconstruction Committee and held at the National Gallery. See Royal Institute of British Architects Rebuilding Britain (1943).
- 17 See, for example, J.H. Forshaw and P. Abercrombie County of London Plan (1943); J. Paton Watson and P.

- Abercrombie A Plan for Plymouth (Plymouth 1943); P. Abercrombie Greater London Plan 1944 (1945); R. Nicholas City of Manchester Plan (Norwich and London 1945); Sheffield Town Planning Committee Sheffield Replanned (Sheffield 1945); T. Sharp Exeter Phoenix A Plan for Rebuilding (1946).
- 18 F.J. Osborn (ed.) Planning and Reconstruction 1944-45 (1944) pp. 367-372.
- 19 Planning No. 215 (14.12.43); M. Young 'The Second World War', in J. Pinder (ed.) Fifty Years of Political & Economic Planning. Looking Forward 1931-1981 (1981) p. 94.
- 20 Max Lock in Hull Regional Survey Civic Diagnosis. A Blitzed City Analysed [A Guide to the Interim Exhibition] (n.d. but c. 1943).
- 21 Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population Report Cmd. 6153 (HMSO 1940).
- 22 J.B. Cullingworth Town and Country Planning in England and Wales pp. 27-30.
- 23 P. Addison The Road of 1945 pp. 176-177.
- 24 See, for example, The Times (18.7.41). Reith advised the Plymouth City Council to go ahead, planning boldly and comprehensively, to 'go on with good planning and bank on getting financial help' (HLG 79/990 City of Plymouth Minutes of the Special Works Committee Special Meeting (4.7.41)). J.H. Forshaw, Architect to the London County Council would refer to 'the support in Government circles for a "plan boldly" policy' as some kind of a manna. See material in Greater London Record

Office [hereafter GLRO] LCC/AR/TP/1/54 'Provisional Plan of re-development for the County of London - General Papers 1941-42'.

- 25 A. Ravetz Remaking Cities. Contradictions of the Recent Urban Environment (1980) pp. 19-24.
- 26 Picture Post (4.1.41).
- 27 Garden Cities and Town Planning Association The 41st Annual Report (1939).
- 28 D. Hardy 'A History of the Town and Country Planning Association, 1899-1946' (PhD Dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science 1988) Appendix I.
- 29 The Reports of these conferences were published as follows:
- F.E. Towndrow (ed.) Replanning Britain (1941); H. B. Newbold (ed.) Industry and Rural Life (1942);
- D. Tyerman (ed.) Way and Means of Rebuilding (1944); S. Baron (ed.) Country Towns in the Future England (1944);
- B. Bliss (ed.) The New Planning: Re-development and Relocation (1945).
- 30 See, for example, F.J. Osborn Overture to Planning (1941); C. Williams-Ellis Plan for Living. The Architect's Part (1942); A. Whittick Civic Design and the Home (1943).
- 31 Town and Country Planning Association The 42nd Annual Report (1940).
- 32 'The Planning Situation' Town & Country Planning Vol. 10 No. 38 (Summer 1942) pp. 39-40.

- 33 F.J. Osborn's statement in F.E. Towndrow (ed.)
Replanning Britain pp. 84-90.
- 34 Ibid., p. 85.
- 35 Ibid., p. 90.
- 36 Ibid., p. 92 [italics in original].
- 37 Ibid., pp. 108-109.
- 38 M. Foot, Obituary 'Lewis Silkin: Socialist and town
planner' in Tribune (19.5.72).
At the LCC, Silkin was successively chairman of the
Housing and Public Health and the Town Planning
Committees, responsible for the LCC's rehousing
campaign of the 1930s. He was also closely associated
with the preparation of the County of London Plan, an
influential replanning proposal for postwar London.
See Obituary in The Times (12.5.72).
- 39 F.E. Towndrow (ed.) Replanning Britain, pp. 109-110.
- 40 HLG 37/63 Central Housing Advisory Committee Sub-
Committee on the Design of Dwellings 'Analysis of
Evidence Section 3 Flat Plans' (P.D. 16) (Jan. 1943) p.
1.
- 41 Ibid., pp. 1-2.
- 42 E.G. McAllister Houses and Towns After the War (1944)
p. 21.
- 43 GLRO LCC/AR/TP/1/56 Letter entitled 'Densities' F.J.
Osborn - P. Abercrombie (n.d. but c. Feb./Mar. 1941).
A somewhat moderate version of the same remark appeared
in, F.J. Osborn 'Heil Zeilenbau!' Town & Country
Planning Vol. 9 No. 33 (Spring 1941), p. 29.

- 44 The MARS Group counted a membership of 95 by the end of the war. See 'MARS Annual Report' The Architects' Journal (29.3.45).
- 45 R. Tubbs Living in Cities (Harmondsworth 1942), p. 33. The book was written as a sequel to the exhibition 'Living in Cities'. Tubbs also wrote a short piece for the Forces, containing the gist of his arguments. See R. Tubbs 'Shall We Rebuild Without a Plan?' Current Affairs No. 27 (26.9.42).
- 46 A. Korn and F.J. Samuely 'A Master Plan for London Based on Research carried out by the Town Planning Committee of the M.A.R.S. Group' The Architectural Review Vol. 91 No. 546 (June 1942) pp. 143-150.
- 47 'MARS Plan for London' The Architects' Journal (9.7.42).
- 48 G. Boumphrey Town and Country Tomorrow (1940) p. 28.
- 49 Ibid., p. 99.
- 50 Ibid., Part II, esp. pp. 98-123.
- 51 Ibid., pp. 43-44.
- 52 T. Sharp's comment in 'Making Plans. What Listeners Want to Know' The Listener (9.4.42).
- 53 E. Goldfinger 'The Garden City Movement' Keystone (Jan. 1942) p. 16.
- 54 Ministry of Works and Planning Report of the Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas Cmd. 6378 (HMSO 1942) para. 202.
- 55 C.E.M. Joad The Untutored Townsman's Invasion of the Country (1946) pp. 187-191.

- 56 GLRO LCC/AR/TP/1/56 Letter entitled 'Densities' F.J. Osborn - P. Abercrombie.
- 57 R. Tubbs Living in Cities p. 37.
- 58 M. Walter 'The Housing Estate: A Warning' The Contemporary Review No. 953 (May 1945) p. 289 [italics in original].
- 59 J.B. Priestley English Journey (Collected Edition 1949, originally published 1934) pp. 401-403.
- 60 J.B. Priestley 'Urban Britain after the War' The Architectural Association Journal Vol. 59 No. 676 (June-July 1943) p. 8.
- 61 Ibid., p. 10.
- 62 R. Jevons and J. Madge Housing Estates. A Study of Bristol Corporation Policy and Practice between the Wars (Bristol 1946) p. 92.
- 63 A. Jackson The Politics of Architecture. A history of modern architecture in Britain (1970) p. 161.
- 64 'R.I.B.A. Reconstruction Committee' The Architects' Journal (10.4.41).
- 65 Royal Institute of British Architects Rebuilding Britain pp. 12-15.
- 66 Ibid., p. 26.
- 67 Ibid., pp. 38-42.
- 68 'Evidence submitted by the R.I.B.A. to the Sub-Committee on Design of Dwellings of the Central Housing Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Health' Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 49 No. 2 (Oct. 1942) p. 213.

- 69 Royal Institute of British Architects Housing (1944)
pp. 21-23, 35-37.
- 70 See, for example, T. Sharp Town Planning (Harmondsworth
1940) pp. 91-108.
- 71 'Evidence Submitted by the R.I.B.A. ...' p. 209. See
also T. Sharp Town Planning pp. 100-105; Royal
Institute of British Architects Housing p. 21.
- 72 Quoted in G.E. Cherry The Evolution of British Town
Planning. A history of town planning in the United
Kingdom during the 20th century and of the Royal Town
Planning Institute 1914-1974 (Leighton Buzzard 1974) p.
135.
- 73 See HLG 37/63 'Evidence submitted to the Sub-Committee
on the Design of Dwellings' (P.D. 9) (n.d.).
- 74 H.T. Hough 'The Re-planning of Central Residential
Areas in Towns' Journal of the Town Planning Institute
Vol. 29 No. 3 (Mar.-Apr. 1943) pp. 115-120.
- 75 Ibid., pp. 122-125.
- 76 J.M. Richards An Introduction to Modern Architecture
(Harmondsworth 1940) pp. 52-53 [italics in original].
- 77 Ibid., p. 79.
- 78 See the special Swedish number of The Architectural
Review Vol. 94 No. 561 (Sept. 1943); F.R. Yerbury 'A
Visit to Sweden in Wartime' The Architectural
Association Journal Vol. 59 No. 682 (Jan. 1944) pp. 48-
52 and idem 'Experiments in Housing. Some suggestions
from Sweden' The Listener (7.9.44).

- 79 See W. Holford 'The Swedish Scene. An English Architect in Wartime Sweden' The Architectural Review Vol. 94 No. 561 (Sept. 1943) pp. 60-79.
- 80 G.E. Kidder Smith Sweden Builds. Its Modern Architecture and Land Policy Background, Development and Contribution (1950) p. 62.
- 81 See, for example, the special Swedish number of The Architectural Review; 'Flats. Examples of well-designed blocks of flats in Sweden' Architectural Design and Construction Vol. 14, No. 3 (Mar. 1944) pp. 52-55; the flats in Stockholm illustrated in The Architects' Journal (23.3.44) and (29.6.44) respectively. Furthermore, Royal Institute of British Architects Housing, carried a photograph of flats at Gärdet, Stockholm, on its back cover.
- 82 G.E. Kidder Smith Sweden Builds p 19.
- 83 S. Backström 'A Swede Looks at Sweden' The Architectural Review Vol. 94 No. 561 (Sept. 1943) p. 80.
- 84 See B. Hultén 'Recent Swedish Architecture', in Architects' Year Book: 2 (1947) pp. 79-89. Lionel Brett (Lord Esher) later characterised it as 'half-modern, half-vernacular'. See L. Esher A Broken Wave. The Rebuilding of England 1940-1980 (Harmondsworth 1983) p. 104.
- 85 See, for example, M. Cole and C. Smith (eds) Democratic Sweden, a volume of studies prepared by the New Fabian Research Bureau (1938).

- 86 See Swedish Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society's Architects' Office (ed.) The Architects' Office. Part 2 Housing 1925-1949 (Stockholm 1949) *passim*.
- 87 W. Holford 'The Swedish Scene. An English Architect in Wartime Sweden' pp. 69-70.
- 88 T. Sharp Town Planning p. 77.
- 89 R. Tubbs Living in Cities p. 37.
- 90 T. Sharp Town Planning p. 78.
- 91 GLRO LCC/AR/TP/1/56 Letter entitled 'London Plan (General)' F.J. Osborn - P. Abercrombie (17.2.41).
- 92 GLRO LCC/AR/TP/1/56 Letter entitled 'London Plan (Densities)' F.J. Osborn - P. Abercrombie (n.d. but c. Feb./Mar. 1941).
- 93 E.D. Simon and J. Inman The Rebuilding of Manchester (1935) p. 96.
- 94 The Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction was an independent group of people of many professions. Its object was 'to serve as a centre for research, to advise and suggest but not to control, to correlate experience but not to compete with institutions or organisations operating in any specific fields of activity'. See Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction Broadsheet 0 (June 1940).
- 95 Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction Broadsheet 3 (n.d. but c. 1941). The Association's population figures were based on a number of studies, among them the work of the sociologist, D.V. Glass, published in 1940. Its essence can be glimpsed in D. V. Glass 'Population', in I.R.M. McCallum (ed.)

- Physical Planning. The ground work of a new technique
(n.d. but c. 1945).
- 96 The Community Centres and Associations Survey Group of
the National Council of Social Service The Size and
Social Structure of a Town. A Report (1943) pp. 2-4.
The privately built estates were thought to have fared
no better. The NCSS held that social features of these
estates, in many respects, resembled those created by
local authorities (ibid.).
- 97 R. Jevons and J. Madge Housing Estates p. 92.
- 98 HLG 71/755 Political and Economic Planning
'Reconstruction: The Pattern of Life' (8.11.40).
- 99 J.B. Priestley 'Urban Britain after the War' p. 9.
- 100 K.T. Liepmann The Journey to Work. Its Significance
for Industrial and Community Life (1944) pp. 73-74.
- 101 The Size and Social Structure of a Town. A Report p.
5.
- 102 R. Nicholas City of Manchester Plan p. 133.
- 103 'Evidence submitted by the R.I.B.A. ...' p. 207.
- 104 See Town and Country Planning Association Houses, Towns
and Countryside (Revised Edition, 1943) p. 25; HLG
37/63 Sub-Committee on the Design of Dwellings
'Analysis of Evidence Section V Layout' (P.D. 29)
(n.d.) pp. 16-19. See also Association for Planning
and Regional Reconstruction Housing Digest (1946) pp.
39-43.
- 105 'Making Plans. The Reconstruction of the Old town' The
Listener (11.12.41).

- 106 'A Master Plan for London Based on Research carried out by the Town Planning Committee of the M.A.R.S. Group' p. 145.
- 107 HLG 37/63 Sub-Committee on the Design of Dwellings 'Analysis of Evidence Section V Layout' p. 16.
- 108 The Size and Social Structure of a Town. A Report p. 8.
- 109 Royal Institute of British Architects Rebuilding Britain pp. 30-32. In the RIBA's proposals, the smallest unit was a residential unit of about 1,000 people, which could support a small nursery school, a few small shops for everyday needs, and a café and a pub.
- 110 HLG 71/755 Political and Economic Planning 'Reconstruction: The Pattern of Life'.
- 111 'Making Plans. Building a New Town' The Listener (18.12.41).
- 112 The Size and Social Structure of a Town. A Report p. 9.
- 113 'Evidence Submitted by the R.I.B.A. ...' p. 209.
- 114 R. Tubbs Living in Cities p. 37.
- 115 See E.C. Kaufmann 'Neighbourhood Units as New Elements of Town Planning' Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 44 No. 4 (19.12.36) pp. 165-175; W. Russell Tyler 'The Neighbourhood Unit Principle in Town Planning' The Town Planning Review Vol. 18 No. 3 (July 1939) pp. 174-186.
- 116 The idea was endorsed by influential planning literature of the period. See, for example, L. Mumford

- The Culture of Cities (New York 1938) pp. 465-479; José Luis Sert Can Our Cities Survive? an ABC of urban problems, their analysis, their solution (1944) pp. 68-72.
- 117 B.A. Le Mare 'Planning for the Community' The Guild of Building Review (Hull) No. 17 (1941-42) p. 14.
- 118 HLG 79/360 Letter J.C.W. Reith - The Chairman of the London County Council (7.3.41).
- 119 J.H. Forshaw was described as a distinguished example of the socially responsible official architect of the period. A former student of C.H. Reilly and Patrick Abercrombie at University of Liverpool, he had been Chief Architect to the Miners' Welfare Committee for thirteen years, being responsible for carrying out extensive building programmes for pithead baths and other recreational facilities throughout the coalfields, before moving to the LCC. In 1945, Forshaw became Chief Architect and Housing Consultant to the Ministry of Health. See his profile in The Architects' Journal (29.11.45); Obituary in The Times (19.9.73).
- 120 Patrick Abercrombie was arguably the most distinguished town planner of the day, earning him the title of 'the modern Wren' (Scotsman (25.3.57)). He was successively, Professor of Civic Design, University of Liverpool, and Professor of Town planning at University College, London. Having authored development and planning schemes for several cities and regions before the war, Abercrombie was also called upon during the war to prepare reconstruction plans for Plymouth and

- Hull, both of which were heavily bombed in the war. See Obituary in The Times (25.3.57); G. Dix 'Patrick Abercrombie 1879-1957', in G. E. Cherry (ed.) Pioneers in British Planning (1981) pp. 103-130. The Plans for Plymouth and Hull were also published: J. Paton Watson and P. Abercrombie A Plan for Plymouth; E. Lutyens and P. Abercrombie A Plan for the City of Kingston upon Hull (London and Hull 1945).
- 121 W.R. Davidge 'The County of London Plan, 1943', in F. J. Osborn (ed.) Planning and Reconstruction 1944-45 p. 68.
- 122 J.H. Forshaw and P. Abercrombie County of London Plan paras 8-9. Research for the Plan was carried out by members of the staff of the Architect's Department, which included Arthur Ling, future City Architect of Coventry.
- 123 Ibid., paras 25, 97, 105.
- 124 Ibid., para. 106.
- 125 Ibid., see, inter alia, paras 23, 31, 75, 120, 140-51, 197-199, 554-561, 564 and Ch. 4.
- 126 Ibid., paras 297-300.
- 127 Ibid., paras 306-308 and Appendix III Housing.
- 128 Ibid., paras 301-302.
- 129 A number of summaries were published of the plan. See, for example, Association of Building Technicians Your London Has A Plan (n.d. but c. 1943); E.J. Carter and E. Goldfinger County of London Plan Explained (Harmondsworth 1945).
- 130 Leader in The Times (10.7.43).

- 131 'County of London Plan' The Architects' Journal
(15.7.43).
- 132 Letter from the MARS Group The Architects' Journal
(20.7.44).
- 133 GLRO LCC CL/TP/1/40 RIBA Memorandum 'County of London
Plan 1943' (n.d.)
- 134 GLRO LCC CL/TP/1/40 Town Planning Institute Comments
'County of London Plan 1943' (24.12.43).
- 135 'Book Review: The County of London Plan' The Town
Planning Review Vol. 19 No. 1 (Autumn 1943) pp. 38-41.
- 136 The Times (13.7.43).
- 137 M.R. Hughes (ed.) The Letters of Lewis Mumford and
Frederic J. Osborn. A transatlantic dialogue 1938-70
(Bath 1970) pp. 39-40.
- 138 F.E. Towndrow (ed.) Replanning Britain p. 110.
- 139 'County of London Plan. A Statement by the Executive
of the Town & Country Planning Association' Town &
Country Planning Vol. 11 No. 43 (Autumn 1943) pp. 119-
120. A copy of this memorandum with a covering note
sent to the Ministry of Town and Country Planning
survives in HLG 79/360.
- 140 Letter to the Editor The Times (28.10.43).
- 141 A. Block 'London Housing Needs' The Architects' Journal
(9.11.44).
- 142 The Economist (30.10.43).
- 143 Letter from F.J. Osborn The Architects' Journal
(30.11.44).

- 144 W. Holford 'Town and Country' Journal of the Royal
Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 50 No.
6 (Apr. 1943) pp. 137-138.

Chapter 5 Popular opinion on housing: wartime housing surveys

As outlined in the previous chapter, ideas about the forms of postwar housing development were mainly put forward and discussed by experts and interested bodies in housing. However, this is not to say that the housing debates took place in some kind of vacuum. On the contrary, probably for the first time in the history of popular housing provision in this country, the views of ordinary people were extensively sought on numerous aspects of housing, from the types of kitchen fitments to the desirability of various neighbourhood facilities. During the war public opinion played a significant, if somewhat ambiguous, role in the movement for postwar reconstruction. The coalition Government, after its early indecision and fitful progress in matters of postwar planning, experienced a rude awakening when the Beveridge Report received huge popular support on its publication, though the general public appeared to remain divided and uncertain about the precise nature of many of the reconstruction proposals. However, the evidence suggests that they held strong, if contradicting, views on the question of postwar housing. This chapter will explore, in the main, the nature of this popular opinion on housing, as expressed in several surveys carried out during the war and examine how it intersected or otherwise with the ideas and plans advocated by architects and town planners.

For more than two years after taking charge of the country in May 1940, the coalition Government directed much

of its efforts to the affairs of military and war production. The gravity of the military situation appeared to rule out any concerted government action on postwar reconstruction. To be sure, there existed a Cabinet Committee on Reconstruction Problems from the beginning of 1941, chaired first by Arthur Greenwood (Minister without Portfolio), a veteran Labour figure whose career was in decline, and then by another Labour M.P., Sir William Jowitt. The Committee mapped out an ambitious programme of work and eminent outside experts including William Beveridge, R.H. Tawney and the Nuffield College Social Survey under G.D.H. Cole were brought in to help with several enquiries. Some government departments also began to work on reconstruction questions covering demobilisation, economic resettlement, land-use planning, social policy and international trade. But, ultimately having no power to take major decisions, the Reconstruction Committee found it increasingly difficult to coordinate various initiatives on reconstruction. This lack of overall direction in Whitehall suggested a low priority for postwar planning in the early years of the war.¹ Further, political differences within the coalition Government also contributed to its lukewarm approach towards reconstruction matters. At the head of the Government was Winston Churchill, who in the words of Hugh Dalton was known to be 'allergic to post-war policy'. Churchill believed that any talk of the future would divert attention from the urgent business of winning the war and would stir up political controversy. This was a view shared by his close associates, such as Lord Beaverbrook, among a

Conservative leadership which contained few progressive reformers. Significantly the important government departments in relation to postwar social reform tended to be dominated by Conservative Ministers.² The Labour Party saw its participation in government as an essential contribution to national unity and its representatives under the party leader, Clement Attlee, assumed a number of key positions in the Coalition. However, behind the facade of common ground and cooperation, the Labour leadership was also determined that 'the war should serve as a vehicle for the realization of the socialist programme of central economic planning, public ownership, and social reform'.³

The coalition Government's initial work on housing and town planning reflected both the urgencies of the war and its reluctance to take on postwar reconstruction. In the early days of the war the Ministry of Health was necessarily preoccupied with the immediate tasks at hand. Local authorities were asked to suspend their housing programme and to reduce capital expenditure to a minimum level. The problem of finding accommodation for the evacuated population and those made homeless in the blitz greatly exercised the departmental officials, as did the execution of temporary repairs to houses damaged in the air raids in the face of increasing difficulties in securing scarce materials and labour. Furthermore, as war production forged ahead the question of accommodating the transferred war workers in various parts of the country loomed large. The Ministry of Health, in conjunction with the other departments concerned, was involved in the operation of

arranging lodgings and billets, the requisitioning of empty premises and the provision of hostels.⁴

Nevertheless, some senior officials within the Ministry did make an early start on the question of postwar housing in 1941. At first only a modest immediate programme was contemplated involving the repair and rebuilding of council houses damaged in the war and the resumption of outstanding slum clearance schemes. It appeared that the officials were thinking very much in terms of the immediate prewar experience in housing whereby, in the main, private enterprise was counted upon to provide the bulk of the nation's homes. It was noted that 'building by public authorities on a wide scale to meet general needs' would be open to objection, as the aim of housing policy was 'the revival of building as a self-supporting industry'.⁵ At the same time, no doubt mindful of the enthusiasm for reconstruction generated particularly among the architectural and town planning community and in some government quarters, one official suggested that it might be desirable 'to make it clear that post-war housing is receiving serious consideration by the Ministry of Health'.⁶

The Ministry acted on this suggestion the following year. In March 1942 the Central Housing Advisory Committee⁷ resumed its meetings and through its newly appointed sub-committees, began to review various aspects of postwar housing. Among the sub-committees was one chaired by Lord Dudley to consider the design and planning of houses and flats to be built after the war (the Sub-Committee on Design of Dwellings), while another, under the chairmanship of Sir

Felix Pole, examined the part to be played by private enterprise in postwar housing.⁸ At the same time the Ministry considered the short-term problem of accommodation for returning evacuees and demobilised persons as well as the shape of long-term housing policy.⁹ It was estimated that between 3 and 4 million new dwellings (including 930,000 units to cover the replacement of war damage, outstanding slum clearance schemes and wartime marriages, another 400,000 to accommodate the postwar increase in the number of families, and a further 1.5 to 2.5 million units to provide for the demolition of obsolescent houses) would be required in England and Wales during the first postwar decade. An enhanced role was envisaged for local authorities, with the extension of government subsidies, to encompass 'the provision of houses to meet the general needs of the lower paid wage earners'.¹⁰ Despite these departmental initiatives the discussions on the actual form of postwar housing made little headway before 1943. The interdepartmental Committee on Post-War Internal Economic Problems (a body set up under the aegis of the Cabinet Reconstruction Committee to coordinate postwar domestic planning), which discussed the Ministry's plans at the time, could only conclude that a successful building programme depended on a number of factors, including the continuation of controls over building work, the future distribution of the industrial population, the resurgence of private enterprise and a substantial reduction in building costs.¹¹

In contrast, the arcane but controversial problem of town and country planning received a good deal of political

attention in the early years of the war, due in no small measure to Sir John Reith's energetic advocacy at the Ministry of Works and Buildings. The Barlow Report (January 1940) had already pointed to a more comprehensive approach to town planning. The coalition Government initially accepted, in principle, to set up a central authority to plan for the redevelopment of congested urban areas and for the decentralisation of industrial population. In fact many people including Reith saw town planning as a key issue, a cornerstone in the whole endeavour of postwar reconstruction.¹² As Reith told the House of Lords, everything was being done so that the

edifice may be broad and fair and splendid, a memorial ... to endurance and monstrous trial.

The site is cleared, the foundations are laid, and it will not be grass that grows upon them.¹³

By securing the best use of land in the national interest, town planning was thought to provide the necessary physical framework within which such national policies of industry, agriculture and transport were to be fitted. At the very least there was an urgent need to repair the damage caused by the blitz but this very prospect of rebuilding blitzed areas threw up the contentious issue of land values. As in the past, there was every likelihood of rebuilding schemes being held up by difficulties of compensating landowners. Moreover the fears of speculation in blitzed land brought back the long-standing problem of collecting betterment (i.e. increases in land value derived from services such as

roads, water and drainage, provided by the community) unjustly accruing to private owners of land.¹⁴

Accordingly Reith appointed two committees to examine the whole question of land use and property values in the hope of getting a lasting settlement.¹⁵ Of the two, the Uthwatt Committee dealt with the vexed problems of compensation and betterment and therefore had wider repercussions on the town planning and housing debates. The Interim Report of this Committee (June 1941) urged the Government to define 'reconstruction areas', comprising areas of war devastation and semi derelict, slum districts in towns, so that building could be stopped while overall plans for their development were worked out. It also suggested that the March 1939 values of land should be taken as the 'ceiling' value for local authorities acquiring or controlling land in those areas and repeated the call for a central planning authority to be set up at once. The Final Report of the Uthwatt Committee (September 1942) sought a permanent form of controlling the nation's land resources and to establish a fair and practicable method of compensation. The Report rejected outright nationalisation as politically controversial, expensive and difficult to administer. Instead it put forward a two-fold solution. For the countryside and land outside built-up areas all rights to develop the land were to be taken into public ownership on payment of fair compensation. The owners would still retain their land but on a leasehold basis and only be allowed to build and develop after obtaining permission from the Central Planning Authority. For towns and built-up

areas the Report recommended that all land be brought under the planning control of local authorities and that they be encouraged to acquire more and more land within the area with wider and simpler powers of compulsory purchase. On the other hand, privately-owned land within and around the built-up areas would be subject to a periodic levy on increases in annual site value, thus taking profit out of land speculation.¹⁶ In Whitehall, lengthy discussions - and disagreements - ensued and continued throughout 1942, particularly surrounding various aspects of the Uthwatt proposals, with little tangible results to be seen in terms of government decisions on town planning.¹⁷ In the meantime Labour peers and backbench M.P.s expressed support for the proposals,¹⁸ while the Conservatives' disaffection with Reith led to his dismissal from office in early 1942. He was replaced by one of Churchill's close associates, Lord Portal, who pursued a policy of 'masterly procrastination' at the Ministry of Works and Planning¹⁹ until the new Ministry of Town and Country Planning was established in 1943 under W.S. Morrison.²⁰

From 1943, when the military situation improved, reconstruction and postwar planning emerged as the central focus of wartime politics. The publication of the Beveridge Report, coming on the heels of an allied victory in North Africa at the end of 1942, proved to be a major turning point. As is well known, Beveridge called for a comprehensive system of social security based on a subsistence minimum benefit, accompanied by a new national health service and by full employment. All the leading

newspapers summarised the Report (containing 300 closely printed pages), which, together with its abridged version, sold 625,000 copies in one year. Within weeks of its publication a Gallup poll found that 95 per cent of those interviewed had some knowledge of the Report and 88 per cent thought that the proposals should be adopted.

Interestingly, a majority of the 'Upper Income' and the 'Employers' groups were also in favour of adoption although they believed they had little to gain from the proposals.²¹ This instant popular success of the Report obliged the coalition Government to accept the proposals in principle but in the process also created a major parliamentary revolt in February 1943, when a total of 121 M.P.s, mostly from the Labour Party, voted against the Government and called for a swift introduction of legislation.²² The following month Churchill took time off from his military duties to make a rare broadcast on reconstruction. He spoke of his four-year plan covering 'five or six large measures of a practical character'. These included 'national compulsory insurance for all classes for all purposes from the cradle to the grave' (though there was no mention of Beveridge), the prevention of unemployment, continued aid for farmers, the extension of the health services and much housebuilding. These measures were to be put before the electorate after the war either by a coalition of the three parties or by a 'National Government' of 'the best men in all parties'.²³ In the same month the Ministry of Health issued a circular calling on all local authorities to select suitable sites and prepare a first year's housing programme, so that a

swift start could be made once the conditions allowed the resumption of housebuilding. The authorities which did not already possess the sites were accordingly authorised to buy them either out of their funds or by raising the necessary loans with the Ministry's sanction. With as yet no legislation in place to control the property values, it was hoped that the authorities would be able to buy the land by agreement at a price not above the 1939 value, but where necessary the Ministry would consider applications for compulsory purchase orders.²⁴

With the improvement in military fortunes, therefore, came the realisation for the Government that reconstruction matters needed to be addressed more seriously. The popular enthusiasm for the Beveridge Report was seen as an important indication of the way in which the British people had begun to look beyond the war in search of a worthy peace. Indeed there is some evidence to suggest that the popular mood in the war, as hinted in the previous chapter, became more conducive to a range of reform measures involving greater government intervention. Churchill's early intention of postponing discussions on reconstruction was never popular and was thought to be detrimental to the war effort in terms of morale.²⁵ By 1942 there was a discernible leftward shift in public opinion. The Home Intelligence Division of the Ministry of Information was recording a strong revulsion against 'vested interests' among the population and a widespread belief that things were going to be different after the war.²⁶ There was talk of a 'Home grown socialism', which in the words of one Regional Intelligence

Officer, 'does not owe allegiance to any particular party but expresses a resentment of the system which has given so much power to so few people'.²⁷ However, according to a poll carried out by Mass-Observation in the spring of 1942, the Conservatives were already well behind Labour when it came to people's voting intentions.²⁸ Moreover, a Ministry of Information report of the same year on 'Public Feeling on Post-War Reconstruction' suggested that this progressive tendency in popular opinion was being projected onto the postwar world. If the majority were still relatively unconcerned about the future, the report found a 'thinking minority' among the more reflective members of all classes with informed opinion, consisting of 5 to 20 per cent of the population, which foresaw the postwar changes in terms of full employment, a reasonable minimum standard of living, decent houses for all and equal opportunities in education.²⁹

Yet, at the same time as some people were becoming clearer about what they wanted done, there were indications that a gap was developing, in that people's hopes, some of which remained rather unfocussed, were growing faster than their expectations of the social changes to be achieved. People recalled what had happened to the 'land fit for heroes' after the last war.³⁰ Mass-Observation found in 1941 that although many people associated reconstruction and planning with physical rebuilding of towns they were unsure about the exact nature of the task. When asked about their views on government policy on reconstruction one respondent replied: 'To make a better England. How they intend to do

it, no one knows'.³¹ A year later it was noted that 'Rehousing and town planning are widely expected and hoped for, though not quite so much to the front of people's minds as during the blitz period'.³² It was difficult for them to picture how the process of change would work, and in the absence of a clear-cut lead on postwar planning from the Government, a certain amount of cynicism and disillusionment crept into people's minds. All this led them to base 'their expectations of postwar conditions on the past' and to anticipate 'many compromises and half measures'.³³

Furthermore, a Mass-Observation report from 1942 spoke plaintively of 'the unamenability of this country to change'. A middle-aged woman was overheard saying:

It seems to me that the postwar world is going to be like the pastwar world - no reforms can be carried out owing to difficulties, lack of money etc.

And this conservatism of feeling was 'spontaneously brought up in all sorts of connexions by all sorts of people', not usually dubbed with any political label and 'thought of more as a national characteristic'.³⁴ Accordingly the postwar world as people visualised it was to be

a very different place, compounded largely of 1939 values and the economics of the 1920s, leavened with a hangover from the superficial equalitarianisms and makeshift controls of war.³⁵

To quote one detailed example of the popular mood, there was indeed a strong sense of 'betrayal' and confusion among the public after the parliamentary debate and the

Labour revolt on the Beveridge Report.³⁶ But a year later in 1944 the Ministry of Information found less mention of the Beveridge proposals among people, who, in any case, were 'very hazy as to its provisions'. Although the public as a whole appeared to be still strongly in favour of the proposals, the majority were convinced that it would be 'either shelved, mutilated or whittled away'. It was often referred to as 'the carrot in front of the donkey to keep us going during the war'. Significantly, the near universal praise which had greeted the Beveridge Report was now also being eroded. Some middle and upper class people registered their objection towards 'having to foot the bill to provide for those who are too idle to provide for themselves'.³⁷ Likewise, another Ministry of Information report on the White Paper setting out the principles of a National Health Service (the assumption 'B' of the Beveridge Report) found the general public ill-informed, showing little interest in the proposals. And again, among middle class people there was 'dislike of the idea of sharing waiting-rooms with the poor'.³⁸

Even in the field of physical rebuilding which was most readily associated in people's minds with reconstruction, the 'clean sweep' style of replanning, when actually applied to blitzed cities, could initially be a baffling experience for local representatives, let alone the ordinary citizens. In late 1944 the rebuilding plan worked out by Patrick Abercrombie was unveiled to the Hull City Council by his assistant:

"What happens to George-st., Waterworks-st., and Carr-lane, all of which are within the area of the centre of the city?" asked Coun. Palmer. "You state that King Edward-st. is being retained in its former character as a shopping street."

Mr. Plumstead replied: "Only partly. Ultimately the main portion of it is actually to go. Carr-lane is actually in the shopping centre, and goes too. Waterworks-street also. Paragon-square is to be re-modelled. George-st. is retained in the first period, but it ultimately goes too.

No doubt the fears of financial implications greatly exercised the minds of more conservative elements of the Council. But still there can be detected from the above exchange a genuine bewilderment among the city councillors, who felt that 'Prof. Abercrombie had re-planned the city without sentimental knowledge of it'.³⁹

Thus a mixture of anxiety, cynicism, conservative thinking and even indifference appeared as much to characterise the general popular outlook on the future as a more progressive, positive view articulated by the 'thinking' minority. Most probably many people remained uncertain about the wider implications of town planning or the complicated nature of social policy proposals. Giving his own assessment of the popular mood regarding postwar reconstruction in 1943, G.D.H. Cole wrote thus:

Even if they have in them the spark of idealism, and are ready to play their parts in making the world a better place than it used to be, they are

still apt to keep their private and their public aspirations in separate compartments, so as to speak to you one minute about the new world they hope to see, and the next about how nice it will be to get back to their old jobs and their old homes, or to something as like them as can be managed.⁴⁰

However, there were also certain subjects which greatly concerned ordinary people during the war. The question of postwar housing was certainly one of them and undoubtedly it counted among what Cole described as 'their private aspirations'. According to Mass-Observation polls taken in 1942 and 1943, education reform figured prominently among the more informed, so-called National Panel of Voluntary Observers and greater interest in social services was also evident in 1943, due to the publication of the Beveridge Report and the ensuing debates. But beside jobs and employment, ordinary people's hopes for the future centred above all on housing⁴¹ (see Table 5.1). In another set of polls asking people to list things to be put right after the war, men in the Forces generally displayed keener interest in postwar matters than did the civilians. But among the civilians women mentioned housing more than twice as often as any other subject, while for men it was also one of the chief subjects mentioned⁴² (see Table 5.2). In a Gallup poll of December 1943, 51 per cent of people thought that employment and demobilisation would be the most urgent problem after the war. Housing came second, with 23 per cent mentioning it as most urgent.⁴³ An indication of where

Table 5.1

Subjects of hope for postwar changes
(percentage of total mentioning)

<u>Subject</u>	Panel <u>Jan.1941</u>	Panel <u>Sept.1942</u>	Street sample <u>Sept.1942</u>	Street sample <u>Apr.1943</u>
	%	%	%	%
Education	16	23	9	9
State Control	8	13	4	9
Social Services	8	11	10	18
Housing	14	9	20	15
Less inequality	6	9	11	2
Jobs for all	9	9	11	10
Higher standard of living	11	6	7	13
Socialism	10	7	5	11
Income levelling	3	7	4	4
International	2	1	3	3
Miscellaneous	12	5	16	7
	—	—	—	—
	100	100	100	100

Notes: (i) Panel - A large number of individuals, claimed to be some 1,500, throughout the country, volunteered to answer directives sent out monthly by Mass Observation, making up the National Panel of Mass Observers. Thus the Panel consisted to a large extent of 'thinking' people.

(ii) Street Sample - This recorded the results of random interviews undertaken in a number of localities, both urban and rural, throughout Britain, and thus contained a more representative cross-section of the population. Unfortunately there was no mention of the sizes of this sample.

(Source: Mass-Observation Bulletin 'Post-War Hopes'
(Oct.1943))

Table 5.2

Things to be put right after the war
(percentage mentioning)

<u>Subject</u>	The Forces (all Army Men) <u>Apr. 1942</u>	Street sample <u>June 1942</u>	
		Male	Female
Employment, Wages	39	34	16
Education	37	5	19
Housing	27	25	43
International	27	2	-
Economic affairs	21	5	-
Social Services	20	7	5
Distribution	17	-	5
Equalitarianism	11	9	14
Military measures	8	-	-
Parliamentary			
Representation	7	2	-
Agriculture	6	2	-
Religion	6	2	-
Socialism	6	2	-
Trade Unions	4	-	-
Various	13	9	8

(Source: Adapted from Mass-Observation, File Report No. 1366 'Post-War Questionnaire (Fabian Society Public Opinion Survey) (31.7.42))

the popular interest in housing lay was given earlier in the war, when Picture Post's special feature on 'A Plan for Britain' had aroused discussion among its readers and brought a stream of letters. Among them a gasfitter's wife wrote in to say:

Your flats would never be home to me. You can clear away whole towns of ugly old houses in one sweep but you cannot change human nature so quickly.⁴⁴

An analysis of the 1139 letters received revealed that town planning (including housing) was the most often mentioned topic and that the 'houses versus flats' controversy, taken

up by the majority who dealt with the topic, resulted in 'a signal defeat for the flats'.⁴⁵

While architects and town planners were actively engaged in debates about which types of houses to build after the war and where and how best to provide social facilities in the community, several voluntary organisations set about exploring this popular interest in housing in depth and ascertaining what sort of houses people wanted. The state of public opinion was to add another important dimension to the housing debates during the war. In the words of Tom Harrisson, Director of Mass-Observation, the aim of investigating popular opinion on various issues of reconstruction was,

to prevent some of the shrill grinding of axes which is already a prominent feature of this part of the reconstruction field, by presenting some concrete evidence on which housing experts, architects and town and country planners can base their plans for post-war reconstruction.⁴⁶

The Government also clearly acknowledged the strength of popular feeling on this matter and was aware of the need to offer blue prints for the future to sustain civilian morale. Thus the Sub-Committee on Design of Dwellings (appointed under the Ministry of Health Central Housing Advisory Committee), by taking evidence from outside bodies interested in housing, also encouraged investigations into people's needs and wishes. This pursuit of public opinion was further underpinned by the idea of democratic planning, which was an important element in the wartime promotion of

town planning. In F.J. Osborn's words, Britain, as 'a trustee of democratic tradition', had to counter the ruthless and single-minded planning of the totalitarian states by planning for a country that catered for individual tastes and aims.⁴⁷ It was widely recognised that ordinary people ought to have a proper say in matters of town planning and housing, not least because they would be directly affected in their daily lives by the decisions and actions of the experts. The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) welcomed the 'active, well informed interest of the private citizen' in working out plans in each locality.⁴⁸

However, contrary to these statements public consultation remained an awkward issue for town planners, who were already being seen as remote figures engaged in some abstruse exercise beyond the scope of the general public. A Mass Observer, attending the first wartime conference of the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), felt that 'People talked about the redistribution of population as glibly as if they were proposing to deal out a pack of cards, without ever giving thought to the innumerable human problems involved'.⁴⁹ There was a telling example of what town planning might have meant even for someone prepared to visit the RIBA Exhibition:

A Scottish soldier halted by me in front of a screen labelled "Development of Town Planning" in the Rebuilding Britain Exhibition. He gazed for some moments in a baffled way, then said to the

world at large "Like the worrks of a watch!" and desolately walked out.⁵⁰

Perhaps here was a case for doubting the effectiveness of experts' efforts in cultivating popular support for their planning ideas and schemes, for it was precisely popular support and approval which architects and town planners sought from the public.⁵¹

The modernists were understandably more circumspect about the value of public opinion. Perhaps the most extreme view was aired in a sharp exchange The Architects' Journal had with Tom Harrisson of Mass-Observation. The result of studying contemporary planning literature had convinced him, Harrisson wrote in 1941, 'that many planners have got themselves almost into a private world, from which they have unconsciously excluded much evidence about the only thing with which they are really concerned, the common human need'. In Harrisson's view, what was lacking in this regard was fundamental research into 'exactly what sort of communities make people happy, and which sort of homes people do want'. 'The planner must of course be a leader. He must mould and educate needs, iron out illogical resistances', Harrisson also said, 'But to do this he must know what is in the public mind'.⁵² These comments promptly drew a hostile response, in which Harrisson was mocked as a 'representative of the multitude, eager to demonstrate the fragility of our ideas'. The Architects' Journal upheld the primary position of architects and town planners in advancing hypotheses and in moulding and leading the public needs:

The question on which planners join issue with him is not whether human happiness is important - the whole object of planning is to secure it - but whether the best means of securing it is to give to people what they say they want. Mass observation left to itself has no method of distinguishing between public opinion and public prejudice.

And it went as far as to argue that the usefulness of projects like Mass-Observation was 'limited by inherent difficulties which are much more fundamental - by the ignorance and irrationality of the masses'.⁵³ In a rejoinder, Harrisson explained that what he wanted was for 'planning to extend its front now, to include a more sympathetic approach to the real problems of people' and stated: 'We can only get effective planning if the prejudices of the people are taken into account'.⁵⁴

In general, however, the modernists took up a more amenable position than that espoused by The Architects' Journal. They equally condemned the imposition of planning from above but never thought of relinquishing their claim to expertise on the matter. Thus Max Lock argued that the right method of approach would be from within, the democratic way, which required 'the full cooperation of all civic interests under expert guidance to evolve a replanned city that bears a natural appropriateness and dignity'.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, despite differences in emphasis, all involved in town planning and housing were agreed that people's needs and wishes had to be taken into account particularly in the

design and planning of postwar houses. The first Minister of Town and Country Planning, W.S. Morrison, spoke of the importance of consulting ordinary people in the drawing up of plans and of taking their needs as a starting point for reconstruction.⁵⁶ Sir Stafford Cripps, Leader of the House of Commons at the time, opened a housing exhibition entitled 'Homes to Live In', arranged by Elizabeth Denby and Noel Carrington, with the following words:

It is not an exhibition for the experts; it is for the common men and women to see, to judge, to criticise and to discuss and so to form an opinion which will demand a decent standard of housing, of schools and of amenities in our post-war reconstruction.

This exhibition is, at it were, an integral part of our democratic machinery.⁵⁷

Thus, alongside all the efforts of experts to win popular support for their respective planning ideas, many opinion surveys were being carried out and observation made throughout the war to find out what the public and, in particular, working-class people wanted in terms of housing. The scope of these surveys varied greatly. Some were done locally to assess the needs and wishes of the people in specific districts, while others purported to gauge popular opinion on housing nationally. But reflecting the heated arguments among architects and town planners, many of the surveys asked the people, among other things, whether they wanted to live in houses or flats (see Appendix I for

extracts from miscellaneous wartime housing surveys on this issue).

To quote the results of some representative surveys carried out during the war on the question of ideal housing types, a Gallup poll of November 1941 found that, of those asked the question 'If you were free to choose would you rather live in a house or a flat?', 71 per cent chose a house and 19 per cent a flat. Bourneville Village Trust, in a housing survey of Birmingham done immediately before the war, interviewed a total of 7,161 householders (1 in 35 of working-class houses in the city). Of these, 96.6 per cent lived in self-contained houses, 2.2 per cent in houses divided into tenements, and a mere 1.1 per cent already lived in self-contained flats. In the Central Ward 33.3 per cent of the families already possessed gardens, while the figure in the Middle Ring was 77 per cent and the Outer Ring 95.7 per cent. Of all those who had gardens, 96.3 per cent appreciated them, and of those who had no gardens, 78.1 per cent said that they wanted one. In total, 6,491 (92.4 per cent) of the 7,023 persons interviewed on this question expressed their liking for gardens. Among the 36 per cent of the whole sample who said that they wanted to leave their present quarters, very few people expressed a desire to move into a flat. This, the Trust said, showed 'plainly that Birmingham is not at all flat-minded'.⁵⁸ An enquiry, carried out by the Society of Women Housing Managers in 1943, dealt mainly with tenants living in local authority housing. A total of 2,077 tenants were selected as a sample to give a fair cross-section of different income groups and

different types of family. On the questions of houses or flats, they were given three alternatives (a modern flat, a modern terrace house or a house on the outskirts) to choose from. Of 'tenants on cottage estates in the provinces', very few chose flats (3 per cent) and an overwhelming majority plumped for a suburban house. With 'tenants on cottage estates in Outer London', the figure for flats was again only 3 per cent. Again a large majority (72 per cent) chose a house on the outskirts. The reasons given for this choice were that it was 'cleaner, quieter and healthier'. For 'the London tenant', mostly already living in blocks of flats, a modern terrace house was the most popular choice (42 per cent), followed by a house on the outskirts (37 per cent) and a flat (21 per cent). The chief reason for choosing a terrace house was the garden but 'nearness to work' was also an important factor. The tenants who chose a flat listed 'nearness to work' and 'town amenities' as their reasons, with 'labour-saving' relatively unimportant.⁵⁹

Arnold Whittick, an architectural critic, gave lectures to the Forces, on such subjects as rehousing after the war and the advantages of the one-family house and flat. Considering that the Forces gave a typical sample of the younger adult members of the community, he took votes at these lectures to find out their preferences. The results from 20 typical lectures showed that out of almost 1,800 servicemen and women only 58 (3.2 per cent) chose flats. A similar exercise was carried out to discover preferences between a terrace house and a semi-detached house, with an overwhelming vote for the latter. Whittick concluded that

'the average man does not want the terrace house nor the flat, but the detached or semi-detached house ... To give it to them should be one of the objectives of post-war policy'.⁶⁰ B.S. Townroe, a member of the Central Housing Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Health, who wrote the 'Building the Post-war Homes' issue of Current Affairs, came to a similar conclusion after much lecturing to the Forces and gauging of their opinion on the question: 'Always, the number in favour of flats is not more than 5 per cent as against 95 per cent in favour of open development'.⁶¹ The Women's Advisory Housing Council also confirmed this strong preference for a house in its widely distributed questionnaire. The survey of some 3,000 lower-income housewives living in various localities from large towns to villages found that 70.6 per cent of the sample preferred a house, 21.2 per cent a bungalow, and only 5.7 per cent chose a flat. As the Council commented, 'the tremendous vote for a house reminds us that the English woman's house is still her castle, and that it will be for many generations before she becomes a communal-living enthusiast'.⁶² The Scottish Housing Advisory Committee, appointed during the war by the Department of Health for Scotland to look into the design and planning of post-war housing, conducted a survey involving 15,634 men and women serving in the Forces and in various industrial organisations. In spite of the fact that the tenement flat had come to be regarded as a predominantly traditional type of housing in Scotland, only a small minority of those asked preferred blocks of flats. The remaining large majority opted for variations of cottage

type houses (i.e. bungalows, detached, semi-detached and terrace houses). An overwhelming majority, 97 per cent in the Forces and 95 per cent in industry, also expressed desire for a private garden.⁶³

Arguably the most intensive study of popular opinion on housing during the war was undertaken by Mass-Observation. Since its inception in 1937 early efforts to study the attitudes and behaviour of ordinary people had led Mass-Observation to notice that 'the interest in oneself and one's own home has predominated far and away, over international and general political concerns'.⁶⁴ As a result Mass-Observation became involved in housing research and a start was made in this direction before the war by surveys of popular attitudes to rehousing in parts of London, which were due for demolition. The investigations already revealed an array of opinions held by the residents about their present homes, neighbourhoods and communities and, how these might be at odds with the official assumptions behind slum clearance programmes that these people invariably wanted better homes of the kind provided for them.⁶⁵ After the outbreak of the Second World War, as thoughts turned towards postwar planning and reconstruction, Mass-Observation was increasingly aware of a similar kind of gap developing between planning experts (architects and town planners) and the general public. Hence Harrison's repeated exhortations to planners, to 'learn as well as teach'.⁶⁶ Social organisations such as Mass-Observation existed, in his view,

only as a humble check on the ideals and intentions of the planners ... But such checks are nevertheless essential, lest the planners get too far away from this subject, too engrossed in the formal matters, the acreages and plastics and chimneypieces.⁶⁷

Particularly with a massive housing shortage and a large housebuilding programme in prospect after the war, Mass-Observation felt that it had a role to play in bringing people's views to bear upon 'the ideals and intentions of the planners'. Thus, these wartime circumstances clearly influenced its decision to undertake a housing survey, the largest of its kind, which involved extensive interviewing in several parts of the country under difficult conditions. In carrying out the survey Mass-Observation could also draw and expand on its earlier work in the field of popular housing attitudes.

The report of the Mass-Observation survey, An Enquiry into People's Homes (1943), recorded the results of an investigation into working-class attitudes to housing, carried out between August 1941 and April 1942, in eleven different places in London, the south of England and the Midlands. A total of 1,100 detailed interviews were obtained. Mass-Observation never claimed it to be a national cross-section of opinion, but an attempt was made to look at a range of experiences recorded by working-class people living in various types of houses and to make comparisons between them. Thus, of the places surveyed, Smethwick in Birmingham (the middle of a large industrial

city), Fulham (formerly a prosperous West London borough), Ilford (an East London suburb), Portsmouth (a naval base and dockyard) and Worcester (a small cathedral town) represented the 'Old Houses' sample, consisting of modest-sized terrace houses and their more elaborate version divided into tenements. Then, Bournville (an industrial garden suburb) and Letchworth (the first Garden City), as creations of the garden city movement and early housing reform, made up the 'Garden Cities' sample. Three London County Council (LCC) estates, Beacontree, Roehampton and Watling, were chosen as examples of the 'Housing Estates', typical of local authority housing in the form of houses and gardens. Two estates of flats in Fulham and Kentish Town made up the 'Flats' sample, representing a more recent example of working-class housing, especially in the centre of large cities (see Table 5.3). The aim of the enquiry was to throw light on the reasons why the people lived in their present houses and districts, and to find out what, if any, changes they would like to see in their houses and in their neighbourhoods, probing their wishes about houses to be built after the war. In particular, the enquiry tried to avoid the pitfalls of using extensive questionnaires with leading questions, which were thought likely artificially to raise the demand for whatever features were in question, whether swimming pools or play centres. As was stated in the introduction to the report, 'We are concerned, primarily, with the points spontaneously raised by housewives (the main home builders)'.

Table 5.3

Categories and ages of housing	Places (pseudonyms used in People's Homes)	Types of houses and description of districts	(1) No. of interviews (Total 1,100)	(2)				(3) % of children under 14	(4) % liked their houses	(5) % liked their kitchens	(6) % had gardens	(7) % would like to have a garden	(8)			(9) % liked the neighbourhood	(10) % owned their homes	(11) % would like to own	(12) % would prefer a flat	(13) % would prefer a bungalow	(14) % would prefer a house
				middle class	Class make- skilled working class up of the	unskilled sample working class (%)	% with bathroom						% with bath in scullery % with no bath	% with bath in scullery % with no bath							
Old Houses	Birmingham-Smethwick (Midtown)	Two-storey terraces, with backyards of varying size, in a neighbourhood intermingled with factories	100	-	14	86	53	67	58	73	93	3	1	96	63	0	7	3	6	na	
	London-Fulham (Metrotown)	Two-storey Victorian terrace houses with basements, mostly let in flats or rooms	100	5	52	43	29	66	58	65	79	47	1	52	65	5	18	13	13	64	
	London-Ilford (Subtown)	A typical late Victorian and Edwardian respectable artisan suburbs of terrace houses, with small front garden	100	-	89	11	50	72	57	100	-	-	60	26	14	48	42	46	1	21	70
	Portsmouth (Seatown)	Basic two-storey terraces, in rows plus with the pavement	100	-	8	92	35	55	61	100	-	-	-	-	100	62	10	28	6	25	na
	Worcester (Churchtown)	A mixture of terraces built in rows and in courtyards, old and dilapidated with communal gardens and sanitary arrangements	40	-	13	87	59	48	40	50	93	-	-	100	53	5	20	7	8	73	
Garden Cities	Bourneville (Modelville)	Mostly semi-detached or in blocks of four with generous size gardens - a well laid-out garden suburb with plenty of open greenery space	100	5	77	18	31	85	66	100	-	79	18	2	89	23	30	2	14		
	Letchworth (Gardenville)	The first true Garden City - semi-detached or in blocks of four with gardens, back and front	100	6	57	37	60	70	47	100	-	68	26	6	77	2	38	0	16	na	
London County Council Housing Estates	Beacontree (Oak Estate)	The largest LCC Estate with a population of over 100,000 - various sizes of houses and flats built in straight blocks or in cul-de-sacs	100	1	48	51	68	85	53	100	-	99	1	-	63	0	14	4	16	56	
Council Housing Estates	Roehampton (Elm Estate)	A medium sized estate - houses in short blocks with a few semi-detached with a greater proportion of large houses than at other two LCC estates	100	1	70	29	50	86	61	100	-	100	-	-	96	0	29	2	14	na	
	Watling (Ash Estate)	The fourth largest LCC estate with a more rural atmosphere than at Beacontree - types and design of houses similar to Beacontree and Roehampton	100	-	46	54	54	70	35	100	-	100	-	-	71	0	18	3	18	69	
Flats	London-Fulham (Metroflats)	Consist of 369 units in seven five-storey blocks with balcony access - belonging to Fulham Borough Council and built c.1932	100	-	41	59	61	74	67	0	88	100	-	-	59	0	26	22	4	64	
	London-Kentish Town (Newflats)	Consist of 119 units in five four-storey blocks with staircases, individual balconies - built by a Housing Association and opened in 1938	60	-	44	56	57	84	90	0	66	87	13	-	78	0	17	32	60		

Notes: i) Includes shared bathrooms
 ii) na - Figure not available from the text
 iii) columns 12, 13 and 14 do not add up to 100

(Source: Mass-Observation An Enquiry into People's Homes (1943) passim.)

An immense amount of information was collected, analysed and made into this report of some 230 pages, containing a mass of verbatim quotes from actual householders and housewives interviewed. 'The area of 100% agreement is very small indeed', said the report and expressed the spirit in which it was compiled:

The range of personal wants is immense - but happily the elasticity of true democratic planning can offer an almost infinite variety, and so satisfy the healthy, contradictory categories of human need and hope and hate.

The flats versus houses controversy, 'which wracks and psychologically confuses current planning', was dismissed in the same spirit as 'fundamentally absurd'. 'Flats are for some, Welwyn for others', just as 'Some love linoleum on the floor, others loathe it'.⁶⁸

Indeed, the subject was a complex and extremely intricate one, but certain main points emerged about popular attitudes and aspirations in housing, many of which were highlighted in several other surveys conducted during the war. These included the levels of general satisfaction which the people expressed with their present house or flat, and how this was influenced in particular by their wants and criticisms or otherwise of the kitchen and the bathrooms, the preferred arrangement of rooms inside the house, the importance of possessing a garden, and a strong desire for privacy set against less interest shown in neighbourhoods. And all these factors played a significant role when the

people came to discuss and visualise the houses they would like to live in after the war.

Firstly, most people were 'broadly satisfied' with their houses. Of the sample investigated, three quarters liked, and only one person in seven entirely disliked, their house or flat. Satisfaction was highest on the London County Council (LCC) Housing Estates (80 per cent) and lowest in the Old Houses (62 per cent). The highest figure was recorded at Roehampton (86 per cent), with Beacontree and Bournville coming second (85 per cent) while a recent estate of flats built by a housing association was not far behind (84 per cent). At the other end of the scale, the houses in Worcester ('the only large block of real slum property studied in the survey') registered the lowest satisfaction with the residents (48 per cent). The age of the house was an important factor in liking or disliking it. On the whole the houses built after 1918 were more liked than those pre-dating 1900. This was clearly related to the grounds the people gave for liking their houses. The most frequent general reason given was that the house was 'convenient' ('It's convenient. Everything's close at hand' was how one put it), which a quarter of the whole sample mentioned. Closely allied to convenience was the term 'labour-saving'. The people living in the Flats were most satisfied with their accommodation on these two counts, followed by those on the Housing Estates and in the Garden Cities, thus showing, according to the report, that 'whatever other features of flat life people might object to they did find the flats convenient and labour-saving to

run'. On the other hand, there was great emphasis on the difficulty of cleaning older houses. The main saving of labour was thus envisaged in connection with cleaning the house and cooking, as some typical calls for more labour-saving houses suggested. 'More labour-saving. No grates to clean and that. Tiles to avoid so much cleaning', said one resident of the Housing Estate. 'I advocate all electric and I would like the interior decorations of material that will wash down', said another. The people who said that they liked their houses 'compared with their previous ones' were mainly found on the Housing Estates and in the Flats, where the tenants had been moved from slum property.

'Comfort' was another general reason mainly given by the people living in the older types of housing. The Old Houses had more space in terms of room size and high ceilings and this was apparently why the people thought them more comfortable.

It was found in the course of the enquiry that a convenient kitchen was a key factor in the people's satisfaction with a home. Of the whole sample, 82 per cent of those who liked their kitchens liked their houses, whereas only 43 per cent of those who disliked their kitchens liked their houses. The areas where the kitchens were most liked included both the estates of flats in Kentish Town (90 per cent) and Fulham (67 per cent) and Bournville (66 per cent). The kitchenette in a Kentish Town flat was described as 'fitted with electric cookers, sinks with two draining boards, gas coppers and a row of built-in cupboards, including larder and broom-cupboard' and seemed

'to have been very carefully planned, and contained everything a housewife is likely to need'. The only complaint about a kitchen of this type came from a few who would have liked it a little larger in size. In the whole survey there was much less satisfaction with kitchens than with houses (56 per cent definitely liked their kitchens compared with 72 per cent liking their homes), giving great scope for improvements. One very common complaint was the small size of the kitchen. Nearly one person in three suggested that kitchens should be larger in postwar homes. Those who lived in houses with small kitchens designed for cooking only (mainly the new Housing Estates and Flats) and who wanted to eat in their kitchens, naturally demanded a larger kitchen to enable them to do this. 'You can't call it a kitchen. It's a scullery. It wants to be bigger, so as you could have a meal in it, and more convenient', said a housewife at Watling. And as the report commented: 'The modern kitchenette is a small room, a "rotten little place" to quote one Metroflats woman. The room in which most of the work of the house is done has in fact become the small room in the house'. Most people in the sample cooked by gas. A few people who only had a coal range said that they would like a gas cooker. Rather more people, with gas cookers, asked for electric ones. Often the phrase 'all-electric' was used. There was some vigorous denunciation of the old-fashioned ranges, as in Letchworth: 'Well, I think they ought to be electric. They're cleaner. And the houses should have open fires in, not these dirty old ranges, because that's what they have along here, those old kitchen

ranges. They ought to have them all pulled out'. Features found in many other, especially older kitchens, and much disliked were open shelves and a lack of closed cupboards, and small sinks (described by a Letchworth resident as 'mean little pot sinks') with tiny or no draining boards.

Kitchens with three or more doors leading into them (as found at Watling) tended to be cold and draughty. Having the coal cellar by the kitchen was also resented, as it made everything dirty when the coalman came. There were frequent complaints that the kitchen or scullery lacked adequate light to work by. In one instance it had to do with bad design: 'There's no back door to the scullery, and it's so dark. I have to have the electric light on all the time' (a housewife in a Fulham house). Another woman in Letchworth stressed the importance of the correct placing of lights: 'The electric light is in the wrong place, so you're always standing in your own light'.

Baths, bathrooms and lavatories also figured prominently in the people's housing wants and criticisms. The possession of a bathroom was a significant factor in the liking or disliking of a house: 80 per cent of those with bathrooms liked their houses, against only 61 per cent of those without bathrooms. In the survey, the majority of houses had baths (72 per cent) and the great majority of those with baths had separate bathrooms. Having no bath at all was a problem of the Old Houses and here the overwhelming majority (85 per cent) stated that they wanted bathrooms or there ought to be one in the houses to be built after the war. Some typical remarks included 'It's not

modern, no bathroom', or as one housewife in Portsmouth said, 'It's the thing you need with all these children, a bath. It's terrible for me on Saturday nights'. Against this there was this assertion by a 65 year old Portsmouth man, who wanted more public baths: 'A bathroom isn't necessary for the working man'. Baths in bedrooms were found in a small number of houses at both Ilford and Bournville, and were disliked. The places with any appreciable proportion of baths in the scullery or kitchen-scullery were Ilford and Letchworth (26 per cent each), Bournville (18 per cent) and the Kentish Town flats. This arrangement was also very much disliked, and a great many spontaneously said that they wanted them removed. As one Ilford resident explained:

I don't like the bath in the scullery. It's always boarded up with boxes and vegetables, so if my husband comes home tired and wants a bath, I have to clear it and heat the copper. It's an hour by the time it's ready.

Among those with separate bathrooms, downstairs bathrooms were disliked, particularly in Letchworth and Bournville. Furthermore, one of the main grumbles in connection with baths was at having to light the gas copper every time any considerable amount of water was required, either for baths or some other purpose. According to a housewife at Beacontree, 'The copper makes a mess, and I don't like the pumping system. It takes two hours to get a bath ready'. Consequently there was a strong demand for an efficient hot water system. There was also a considerable

demand for a bathroom fitted with washbasins. As one woman at Watling explained, 'There's no hand-basin in the bathroom. When my boys were living here, they had to shave at the sink in the scullery'. In the majority of working-class houses, the only sink found in the house was situated in the scullery, so that the family had to wash and shave there. This was strongly disliked by most. Lavatories were another source of criticism. In the few places in the survey (all in the Old Houses) where w.c.s had to be shared, this arrangement was strongly disliked. A good many people also objected to having to go outside to the lavatory, the cold in winter often being given as a reason. But the chief grievance was the lavatory-bathroom combination (extensively done in the post-1918 houses). This was voiced chiefly at Beacontree and Watling (15 per cent complained in both places) and the Kentish Town flats (10 per cent), and many asked that these two should be separated. Most people wanted a separate lavatory to be either upstairs, or downstairs, but not next to the front door, near the larder or opposite the living room. The main reason for wanting the water-closet upstairs was in the case of illness or emergency in the night. Many housewives who said that they would like two lavatories often gave their children as reason.

The second significant point highlighted by the investigation concerned a great demand on the part of many residents for a separate room for eating, as well as a sitting room (a parlour) 'for best'.⁶⁹ The survey initially identified two contradictory tendencies. Firstly, those who

had kitchen-living rooms (i.e. who cooked and ate in their kitchens) wanted separate sculleries or back kitchens into which to expel the sink, the copper and also the gas cooker. This demand came mainly from those in the Old Houses and Garden Cities. A Fulham householder asked for 'nice little kitchens, and sculleries separate to do all the rough work in, to save lumbering the kitchen'. A Bournville resident put it more bluntly: 'I don't like having the sink where we eat'. The basis for the desire for a separate scullery was found in the dislike of people who had two living rooms (a best room and a kitchen-living room) for eating in the same place where they cook and wash up. On the other hand, there was a strong demand, already referred to, among the residents with kitchenettes or separate sculleries to have them enlarged into a kitchen-living room. 'Is the wheel turning full circle?', wondered the report. In fact it was found that the desire for a kitchen-living room came overwhelmingly from those living in non-parlour type houses found on the Housing Estates and Flats. In effect what they wanted was not to go back to the old kitchen-living room arrangements but to have an extra living room. Seen in this light the question of which room to eat in and the desire for a larger scullery (or a kitchenette) was all part of the old controversy about the parlour and non-parlour type houses. The unsatisfactory situation and the aspiration of working-class people was expressed by a housewife at Watling:

I'd like an extra room. We can't have meals in the scullery, so the boys have to have them in the

sitting-room, and that's not right. We should have a living room and a sitting-room, even if we are poor people.

The people wanted a parlour or a sitting room for various reasons: to keep the good furniture in, to 'keep the front room near the mark'; a desire for greater space, 'so you're not all squashed in together'; to receive visitors ('It's a bit awkward having no front room to keep nice for when people call'); or for quiet relaxation ('It's not right, the men have been working hard all day, they want a bit of quiet in the evening'). In all, 21 per cent of the Housing Estates' residents asked for an extra living room for best occasions, as did 18 per cent of those living in the Garden Cities. The common practice among the housing authorities including the LCC in the interwar period was to build less and less parlour type houses for reasons of economy. This, in the verdict of the report, was a case where 'a local authority flouts the housing mores of the people it is catering for, and deprives them of a room they think they ought to have'. There were a few among the sample who already had a parlour and said that they did not want it: 'In this class of house there's a lot of wasted room. The front room, how often do you use it?' (an elderly man in Portsmouth). The size of the best room was also a frequent source of complaint. According to a housewife at Roehampton, 'The front room isn't big enough. It's too small to make it look nice'. Thus a parlour, when provided, was often felt to be so small as to be almost useless.

Thirdly, possession of a garden was a particularly important focus in the whole set up of housing. A housewife who had lived in an inner London flat before moving to Roehampton went as far as to say, 'We came here to have a garden. We prefer a little house and not so convenient to a very convenient house and no garden'. Two thirds of the houses in the survey possessed gardens. The other third were either without or had just a very tiny yard. The areas in which all the houses had gardens included Ilford, Portsmouth, the Garden Cities (with a sizeable percentage of houses having comparatively large gardens) and the Housing Estates. The great majority of these people appreciated their gardens. 'Most decidedly, it's my hobby', said a resident with a large garden in Bournville. For another resident who kept her garden well, 'It's a nice recreation, and it's nice to sit out in the garden when you've been working if you don't feel like going out'. The other areas (Smethwick, Fulham and Worcester) had varying proportions of houses with gardens. The two estates of flats studied had no individual gardens. In these areas there was a strong demand for a garden. Among the residents in Worcester 93 per cent wanted a garden, in Smethwick 84 per cent, in Fulham 79 per cent, in the Fulham flats 88 per cent, but only 68 per cent in the Kentish Town flats wanted one. The latter, somewhat low, figure, according to the report, was due to the fact that the Kentish Town flats had flower beds between the blocks and were within a few hundred yards of a large open space. The majority of people with gardens took pride in them and kept them well, and this was particularly

true in the Garden Cities where only 9 per cent of neglected gardens were found. According to the Mass Observation team's own assessment, in the whole survey, 52 per cent of the gardens were well kept, 30 per cent were reasonably tidy, while 18 per cent of them were neglected. The report then tried to find out how the gardens, real and imaginary, were being put to use. A sample of people in North London who had no gardens were asked what they would do if they had one. Their answers were in the following order of importance: growing vegetables; growing flowers; 'growing things'; keeping chickens; relaxation; children to play in; 'nothing'; drying washing; dog kennel; keeping rabbits; and keeping pigs. The pro-garden feeling on the part of those without gardens was also evident in the main sample. 'It occupies your mind', said a woman in a flat, while an elderly man in Fulham wanted 'A small front garden and a back garden big enough to grow stuff in'. A woman in Worcester asked for 'somewhere nice to lie out in fine weather'. In fact, the list of actual uses to which the garden owners in a North London sample put their gardens ran as follows: growing vegetables; drying washing; growing flowers; and 'nothing'. The urge to grow things was clearly a very deep-seated one. At the same time the mundane function of drying washing was more prominent, while other actual garden uses such as 'children to play in' and 'relaxation' were further down the list. The report also painted a more prosaic picture of what the people actually used the garden for, when it observed that 'the chickens gave way to dustbins, the flower beds to sandpits for the

children, the vegetable beds to an Anderson shelter, and the pleasure for reclining in on Sunday afternoon to a wilderness of junk'. A few people who did not want a garden, either did not have the time or said that they were too old to work it. Others were satisfied with an allotment, which was an attitude particularly found in the Kentish Town flats.

Fourthly, another very important, but often overlooked aspect, particularly in thinking about popular housing provision, was the strength of feeling in favour of privacy in the home. The desire for privacy, for keeping oneself to oneself, and to be 'all on our own like' appeared to be one of the central themes in the interviews. There was an almost constant refrain about how the people indicated their wish for a separate house 'on their own'. A Roehampton housewife, who used to live in a flat, said, 'It's self-contained. You can please yourself when you do your washing and all that'. But a housewife in a Kentish Town flat could also claim, 'You're on your own, your dirt's your own'. Another housewife at Watling liked her house 'very much indeed. It's got a front door and a back. You can go inside and it's nobody's business'. What the majority wanted was a self-contained flat or house with its own front door but without having to share its conveniences with any other family. The particular importance attached to having a separate front door was evident on the Housing Estates, where 28 per cent of those with common porches objected to them. Having a garden that is overlooked was also strongly deprecated, as a resident of Watling complained: 'Yes, I do

think they should make the houses more kind of private. It's so open, just these thin little bits of stick for fences, and often nothing at all'. Equally strong protests were made where people could be overlooked either inside the house or sitting on a balcony: 'Everyone should have privacy. We've got a balcony, but the lady next door can see into it. It's not very private' (a housewife in a Kentish Town flat). The most serious threat to privacy came when two or more families lived in the same house. This, according to the report, was rather different from taking in a lodger, since a lodger could always be given notice, while it was almost impossible to remove a fellow tenant. In Fulham, where the great majority of houses in the sample were tenement houses usually inhabited by two or three families, a housewife in a ground floor flat had this to say: 'I don't like tenement houses, but I do like my flat. The only trouble is you're at the mercy of anyone who moves in above'. Landladies in these tenements were also a source of annoyance. 'You're always having landladies poking about minding your business', said one. The complaint about neighbours' noise came mainly from those living in the two estates of flats. Here several residents (13 per cent in the Fulham flats and 8 per cent in the Kentish Town flats) either grumbled about noisy neighbours or suggested that new flats to be built after the war should be made more soundproof. The grumble often turned on the noisiness of children. 'There's a lot of nuisance with the children playing outside and aiming balls at the windows', complained an elderly woman in a Kentish Town flat. More generally, as

a housewife in a Fulham flat pointed out, 'It's noisy, you never get any peace. The neighbours are such a mixed class. I like my old place better for that'. The report saw all this protest as an indirect attack on the part of the residents against having to live in blocks of flats at all: 'The noises "get on people's nerves" precisely because their "nerves" are already somewhat edgy from having to live in unaccustomed proximity to their neighbours'.

The question of neighbourhood provided another important dimension in popular attitudes towards housing. There was a strong correlation between liking the house and liking the neighbourhood, but the enquiry also found a general lack of interest among the sample in neighbourhood matters. The areas with a high percentage of people liking the neighbourhood included Roehampton (96 per cent), Bournville (89 per cent), the Kentish Town flats (78 per cent) and Letchworth (77 per cent), while a sizeable number of people disliked their neighbourhoods in Worcester, the Fulham flats, Smethwick and at Watling. The main factors affecting the people's like and dislike of the neighbourhood were the situation, the shops and the neighbours. The situation was by far the most important reason for liking the neighbourhood in Bournville, where 57 per cent referred to it, at Roehampton (48 per cent), in Letchworth (38 per cent) and in the Kentish Town flats (32 per cent). The residents in these areas commonly used phrases like 'nice and open' and 'It's just like the country' to describe their satisfaction. In the more central areas (such as in Smethwick, Ilford or Fulham) where some people gave the

situation for liking the neighbourhood they stressed the convenience of a central position for shopping and getting to work. In the case of an Ilford resident the two requirements were combined to make the neighbourhood a satisfactory one: 'It is near the shops and Children's Welfare Centre, and near the country and the town'. On the other hand, those who disliked the neighbourhood because of the situation were concerned rather with the site of the individual house than with the qualities of the neighbourhood. There were also a small core of people who liked living in the town and regretted having moved out to a Housing Estate. As a housewife at Beacontree eloquently put it:

It has no atmosphere. It has never grown up, if you know what I mean. In a town that has grown up naturally you ran into a church, or a shop or two, just where you don't expect them. Here you know just what you are going to find for miles and miles; all the same, you get lost half the time ... Not like Exeter or Cheltenham. You feel when you walk into them that you are in a real place.

Good shopping facilities ranked as the second most important specific reason for liking the neighbourhood. In the central areas investigated in the survey, 16 per cent praised and only 2 per cent complained of the shopping facilities, while those in the more suburban districts called for more 'round the corner' type shops. Complaints about bad shopping facilities were heard particularly at Roehampton, Beacontree and in Bournville.

The character of neighbours was another important index of neighbourhood satisfaction. The areas where the residents liked their neighbours most of all were Worcester and Smethwick, both old established areas, and Bournville, while dislike of neighbours was highest in Ilford and Letchworth, at Beacontree and Watling. There was also less satisfaction in Fulham and among the flat dwellers where the neighbours were forced to live in close proximity. The ways in which the people in the sample described their neighbours revealed the familiar existence of social distinction within the working class and also highlighted the desire of many to live among their own types of people. Thus in Ilford one woman could characterise the neighbours as 'sociable and helpful', while another found them 'an unsociable crowd - pride, piano and poverty describes them'. In Fulham a housewife liked her neighbours because 'They are all working-class people here', implying that they were respectable and of the same social class as the speaker. Another woman at Watling was indignant that the Council did not separate the different kinds of people: 'Our next-door neighbours are common and use very bad language. The rough people should be put together'. On the other hand, a housewife at Roehampton did not 'like some of the upstart people around'. Moreover, in keeping with the strong desire for privacy, the people generally liked neighbours who minded their own business or kept themselves to themselves. 'Nosey people' and scandal-mongers were very much disliked. Taken together, the report observed:

People liked sociable, but not inquisitive, neighbours of the same "class" as themselves. This last point was one of the sorest in the whole social set-up, and there were two sharply contrasted viewpoints. Some people considered that their neighbours belonged to a lower social grade than themselves and so were dragging the neighbourhood down; while others disliked what they alleged to be the "snobbishness" of their neighbours.

Other aspects of the neighbourhood such as social and cultural facilities elicited little comment from the people interviewed. The report found that interest in the community as a whole was almost completely lacking among the housewives met with. When they were questioned about the neighbourhood 'less than one person in a hundred mentioned any form of activity that involved co-operation with their fellow citizens'. There were community centres in only two of the areas surveyed, at Watling and Beacontree. And in both places the report found 'the phenomenon of the small band of enthusiasts running the centre, with a penumbra of less keen members'. Of the other communal institutions investigated in the survey, pub facilities were found to be adequate in nearly all the areas, with the exception of Watling, Letchworth and Bournville, which lacked pubs altogether. But Watling and Letchworth both had a number of pubs nearby, and in the case of Bournville several women mentioned the lack of pubs as one of the things they liked about the neighbourhood. At Beacontree there were

practically no pubs up to 1928 and their place was taken largely by the working men's clubs. However when the pub facilities improved and other places for entertainment began to increase, the membership of the clubs fell. On the whole the people showed no strong preference for any kind of entertainment except the cinema. Some people who grumbled about the neighbourhood mentioned the lack of entertainment facilities, notably the absence of a cinema nearby and it being closed on Sundays. But at Watling the problem was the overcrowding of the neighbouring cinemas. Here most residents did not seem to mind if the cinema was some distance away, 'as many liked to make an expedition of going to the cinema, and the travelling was all part of the adventure'. Open spaces, allotments and parks, where provided, as in the case mainly of the Housing Estates and Garden Cities, were much appreciated. But the report also found on the Housing Estates that on Sundays and in the evenings, 'the streets rather than the parks were full of people taking the air, and more children were observed to play in the streets than in the park'. Some of those who lived in central and built-up districts suggested introducing more gardens and open spaces to improve the area. On this whole question of the neighbourhood, the report concluded that 'The housewife's view ... was thus bounded by its physical characteristics, its shops, its mass entertainments - notably the cinema - and the neighbours'.

The report also examined the attitudes towards owning and renting. The only areas with any appreciable proportion of owned houses were Ilford (42 per cent) and Bournville (23

per cent). The majority of working-class people rented. In the whole sample more people (24 per cent) expressed a preference for owning their own houses than those (7 per cent) who actually did so, and of all those who wanted to own, only 28 per cent actually did so. Thus there was a considerable margin of unfulfilled desire to own. This desire was strong in the Garden Cities, at Roehampton and in the Kentish Town flats (both places with high satisfaction among the residents) and in Portsmouth. A large number of people rented their homes because they never had enough money or opportunity to buy them. As a housewife in a Kentish Town flat put it, 'Own it if you had the money, but not under a building society. It's all right to put the money down, but not to be in debt for the rest of your life'. Another frequent remark was that they were too old to be able to pay off the instalments in their lifetime. 'It would be nice to have your own', said one at Watling, 'if we were starting out again, just married.' Allied to this, quite a number of them regretted having never bought their home, with all the money they had paid out in rent: 'We must have bought this house several times over by now', (a Fulham resident, living there over 20 years, paying rent). The report found that the houses owned were, in general, better equipped and better cared for than those that were rented. As a Bournville housewife put it, 'We wouldn't have made all these improvements if we didn't own the house'. On the other hand, a fairly large number of people were deterred from owning by the feeling of being tied to a house or a district. Mobility and freedom

appeared to be important factors for those who preferred to rent. 'Rent. There's not so much responsibility. You can always move if you don't get on with your neighbours', stated a housewife at Watling, while another at Beacontree also plumped for rent: 'You can please yourself then. I don't want to book a house for life. Circumstances may alter'. Some wanted to be free to retreat to the country or seaside, after retiring from work, as in the case of a Roehampton resident: 'I should like to pay for my house by rent, but on the other hand, when I'm retired I should like to leave and get a nice place by the seaside'. A few people were afraid of the expenses, such as repairs, incurred when a house was owned: 'You've always got your hand in your pocket if you own a house' (a woman at Watling). There was also some suspicion of small houses built by private enterprise that they might be found to be jerry-built. As a man at Roehampton argued, 'I would rent, definitely. I wouldn't own because you want so much capital to plan your own house, and make sure you haven't got bricks mixed with sand'.

Finally, the report dealt with 'the dream houses of the future', the kind of houses the working-class people wished to see built after the war. This was the ideal house of a 40 year old housewife, with her husband in the Army and two children, living in a first-floor tenement:

I should like a house with a kitchen-dining-room - you know, one room where you eat and cook, and a scullery. And a sitting-room, not too big. Three bedrooms and a bathroom, and two lavatories, one

upstairs in the bathroom, and one downstairs. I'd like large windows, very light and airy, and of course, a garden ... I would like a coal fire in the sitting-room, with a nice brick fireplace, and gas or electric in the kitchen.

A young working-class woman of 25, planning to get married, presented this picture of an ideal home:

I want a flat in one of the really new buildings, with not more than six or eight families in each block, and a flat roof - a roof garden. To start with I want something quite small - just one very large room for a living room - really large because I shall have a lot of furniture and I don't like a room crowded. Just a small, medium-size kitchen, just large enough to do the work in, and have breakfast sometimes. I like large windows everywhere, especially over the sink. The bathroom and lavatory must be separate ...

Constant hot water for the whole block. Gas fire in the bedrooms, coal fire in the sitting-room.

The ideal home as described by the people could thus vary much in size and shape. Yet when they were asked to choose freely between the types of house they wanted to live in, '79 % of the whole sample wanted to live in a small house or bungalow and 8% wanted to live in a flat'. Among the three groups of houses (the Old Houses, Garden Cities and Housing Estates) there was very little variation in the figures, with over four fifths of residents wanting a small house or a bungalow. The highest figure was recorded among residents

of the Garden Cities (88 per cent), showing them to be confirmed pro-cottagers. Those who preferred small houses sometimes specified that the house must be modern, but a few wanted old and solidly-built houses. Some people remarked especially in favour of small modern houses or council houses, and the desire for labour-saving devices was stressed. An Ilford housewife wanted 'A little modern house - bright and easy to keep clean', while a young woman in a Fulham flat would like 'a little house on an estate with a garden'. Most of the pro-bungalow opinion was expressed by older people who were attracted to this type of housing because of the absence of any stairs. Very few people in all the areas where they lived in separate houses chose a flat, with the exception of tenement dwellers in Fulham who were less averse to living in flats (13 per cent chose flats). Most of the pro-flat replies came from the estates of flats, in Fulham and Kentish Town, where 22 per cent and 23 per cent of the people respectively chose to live in a flat. This was still a minority preference, for three-fifths of the sample in these flats said they would prefer a small house. As a Fulham housewife put it, 'My husband does a lot of work at home. It's nice to have the whole house - I hate flats. It's terrible to have children in flats!'. In the survey it was found that women, people under the age of 40, people without children and people without gardens were more in favour of living in flats than the other categories. In the words of the report, therefore, 'flats are not the sort of dwelling most people want to live in all their lives, but are suitable for young couples for a period after

marriage and before children start to arrive, and again when the family has grown up and left home; they are also suitable for single people'.

The idea of a dream home was also closely associated in many people's minds with the district in which the house was situated. The people in the sample were asked what district they would like to live in if they had the choice. The following table gave the variations in district preferences between the four main groups of housing surveyed:

At present living in:	Percentage of people who would like to live in:				
	Town %	Suburb %	Garden City %	Country %	Unspecified %
Old Houses	36 (27)	27	1	13	23
Flats	44 (33)	22	0	14	20
Garden Cities	3	11	49 (46)	22	15
Housing Estates	6	67 (50)	1	14	12

(The figures in brackets showed the proportion of 'Here' answers incorporated in appropriate columns according to the types of districts)

Almost a fourth of the whole sample said that they would like to go on living where they were. This, in the report's view, suggested 'the innate conservatism of the British working-class'. A Fulham woman did not want to move because she had a grave waiting for her in the local cemetery. Few people already living in central areas of towns wanted to

move to other districts, but the suburbs attracted both people living in the Old Houses and Flats, who wanted to go 'a bit further out'. The residents of the Garden Cities, on the other hand, were very much against the suburbs while a desire to live in a garden city was confined almost exclusively to themselves. Feeling in favour of living in the country was fairly steady among the whole sample, but was markedly strong in the Garden Cities. Many people simply liked the idea of living in the country. A few wanted to move to the country, in order to get a larger garden to keep chickens, grow vegetables and fruits. On the other hand, some people could not stand the country and a few thought Letchworth the depth of the country. A housewife, who lived in Letchworth for the sake of her invalid husband, said her heart was still in London: 'I like the broader life, even though it means dirt and noise and bustle. I like people too busy with their own lives to be curious about other people's'. Some residents of the Housing Estates considered themselves to be living in the country and disliked the rural atmosphere. 'The "dream home" of the majority', the report concluded, was, still the small modern suburban house, preferably possessing all modern conveniences, such as a labour-saving kitchen, hot and cold water laid on to a sink in the scullery, and a bathroom with a separate lavatory. Small but light windows, built-in cupboards, coal fires for warming, electric points in most rooms ... This "dream home" should have a garden, and should be situated

both near the open country and near the town, so that while good shopping and recreational facilities are available and the wage-earner's workplace is near at hand, fresh air and open country are within easy reach of the home. Well-designed flats are and would be appreciated, but the great mass of people as yet hanker after "a house of their own".

An Enquiry into People's Homes was generally well received by the press. On the whole, the reviews (e.g. The Times and Daily Herald (26.3.43), Glasgow Herald (6.4.43), The Municipal Journal (9.4.43), The New Statesman and Nation (15.5.43), Tribune (28.5.43), The Listener (8.7.43)) summarised its main findings and commended the effort of Mass-Observation. Criticisms of existing houses and improvements asked for were noted, as well as the level of general satisfaction with the present houses which the people in the survey expressed. Inevitably many of the reviews picked out the theme of popular preference for houses and gardens. Some used the report as a stick to beat and berate architects and town planners for being out of touch with popular opinion. Hugh Pilcher, Town and Country Planning Correspondent for the Daily Herald, urged all town planners and architects to read the report 'because it fills in all the people's wants and prejudices, fears and hopes which are lacking in the blue-prints of the theoretician'.⁷⁰ The Glasgow Herald was more specific and commented that 'Probably the most striking opinion recorded is the very widespread dislike of flats and the emergence of a "dream

home" that is very unlike the huge blocks that many planners visualise as the homes of the future'.⁷¹ Harry Roberts, writing in The New Statesman and Nation, thought that the investigation would administer a shock to many town planners, who had 'a penchant for blocks of flats, as the neatest and most convenient method of housing hygienically the bulk of working families as well as a considerable section of the "black-coated" class'.⁷²

The reception of the report in the technical press was mixed. For the reviewer in the Journal of the Royal Institute of British Institute, it was 'a mine of information, a Clients' Charter', which showed the working-class people to be as knowledgeable a critic of housing as wealthier clients. Moreover the report was a pointer of great value because 'Arrangement of space within the house, choice of equipment and how it is used, irrational preferences, illogical dislikes and all the rest of it are described with a directness, a vividness which carry conviction'.⁷³ The TCPA understandably dwelt on the unpopularity of flats and viewed it as another instance in the mounting evidence against flats, which the housing authorities would be ill-advised to ignore. The TCPA was, however, rather muted in its praise of the report, pointing out the smallness of the sample and wondering whether it presented anything new to intelligent observers.⁷⁴ The Architect and Building News also thought that the report did not contain much information that was new and was rather dismissive about the limited size of the sample. But it did draw attention to some points of criticism, which came out

of the report, about the layout and equipment of the existing houses.⁷⁵ The Architects' Journal chose to print a series of short extracts illustrating a few crucial points raised in the report (on the satisfaction and criticism of the kitchen, the popular demand for a parlour and the dream houses of the majority), without comments.⁷⁶ The Architectural Review carried a review article on the report by Philip Sargant Florence, an eminent social scientist closely involved in the field of town planning and postwar reconstruction. Recounting the main findings of the survey, he particularly highlighted some of the elementary aspects of decent housing, which were found to be wanting in many existing working-class houses, such as the reasonable supply of hot water and the provision of ample cupboard space. The enquiry was useful in covering a very wide field but, in Sargant Florence's view, suffered from 'a too diffuse arrangement of material', containing a mass of conflicting evidence, and, in the end, no clear conclusions. Hence his call to the experts: 'Architects and planners must give the lead and the target must be placed higher than the inarticulate yearnings of the average working-class housewife, if the same ill-defined sense of dissatisfaction is not to be perpetuated'.⁷⁷

An Enquiry into People's Homes was an exhaustive document with a mass of evidence, often contradictory, on numerous aspects of housing. What the report did was to dispel the view, which organisations like Mass-Observation thought they detected in architects and town planners, that ordinary working-class people were by nature incapable of

suggesting any improvements in housing or imagining a better sort of life than the ones they were used to. The people wanted greater separation of functions and space inside their homes as well as their own garden. Labour-saving devices were very much appreciated and asked for when absent. A very strong desire for privacy was also evident. On the other hand, there were clearly conflicting demands on the part of these people, who were, in any case, fairly satisfied with what they had and would put up with much inconvenience in favour of something that was familiar,⁷⁸ and whose outlook on housing did not extend much beyond the routines of daily life. As the report said, 'Their wants are difficult - but happily for the planners they will make the best of a bad lot or a good little'.⁷⁹ Probably, lack of interest in neighbourhood facilities, apart from the shops and the cinema, was to be expected from a sample heavily biased towards housewives. The general low level of participation among ordinary people in many forms of associational activities in the community, in any case, disappointed those like Harrison and Political and Economic Planning, who were trying to promote active, participatory democracy in this period. The difficult circumstances of the early years of the war might have affected these activities. But several surveys undertaken during the 1940s identified women, and particularly young married women as a prominent group of non-joiners. In the case of a survey carried out at Watling, many women gave heavy domestic duties as their reason for not joining a society.⁸⁰

Taken together, of the existing types of working-class housing investigated, suburban cottage estates of the kind built by the LCC offered the residents most satisfaction, confounding the earlier criticism of some sociologists. Significantly, the Garden Cities sample, Bournville and Letchworth, did not always come out well in the survey. As the report suggested, because both Bournville and Letchworth were developed before the LCC housing estates or the estates of flats, their houses and equipment were older and this gave rise to more grievance. Moreover, the report found their residents to be more conscious of house improvements and accordingly more critical about many features in their houses. However, it was also evident that the idea of living in the Garden Cities never appealed to the majority of those interviewed in the survey. Probably the muted response of the TCPA towards People's Homes reflected the fact that the Garden Cities (and Letchworth, in particular) in the survey were not always seen in a favourable light. Harrisson had this to say about Letchworth:

Mr. Osborn and his associates insist that Letchworth and Welwyn are the models. I have tried at various times in my life to adjust to every sort of community from cannibal to Clevedon. For nearly two years now my family have been living in Letchworth and I have been spending weekends and many evenings there, so that we might learn for ourselves what sort of Utopia this was. For myself I can only say that in none of the places in which I have lived have I found less

feeling of community, more individual loneliness. Life in the first garden city is symbolised by the absence of a single public house. And that is symbolic of the whole planners way, even if it is an extreme case. Planners decided that Letchworth should not have a pub in the first place, and so you cannot get a drink or the friendliness of drinking.⁸¹

To be sure, he was here criticising 'the perfect moral tone' which he found in all planning, but perhaps those arguing for garden cities had a peculiar problem of relating their idea of good housing development to the needs and aspirations of working-class people.

The response given to People's Homes in the professional press suggested that architects and town planners still harboured some reservations about accepting the popular verdict on housing. In the main they were prepared to take on board some of the ideas expressed in the form of people's needs and wants in the survey. But at the same time, pointing to the conflicting nature of evidence coming from the public, they sought to establish their primacy in the overall direction of housing and town planning. As one architect put it:

I believe that the only valuable result to be gained from discussions with the public are data about their needs, but that the ways of improving our designs and lay-outs, fittings and equipment should be left to the experts. Only they can fully realise all the factors connected with the

large-scale production of houses needed after the war.⁸²

On the question of houses versus flats, which particularly concerned modern architects, the verdict did appear fairly decisive in favour of small houses and gardens and this point was readily endorsed by the general press in the case of People's Homes. At the same time, the Mass-Observation survey did record a high level of satisfaction among the tenants of its Flat sample. Likewise in various wartime surveys, against the express preference among the working-class people for a house, there was also some evidence suggesting that flats built to high standards would make decent homes and be appreciated by them.

A tenant survey of Kensal House, a small development of modern flats chiefly designed by Maxwell Fry, with Elizabeth Denby as housing consultant (see Chapter 1), for instance, found in 1942 that most of the residents (61 out of 68) were well satisfied with the accommodation. Many recalled the nightmare of living in tenements with no bath and the lavatory shared with several families, or of living in two rooms, one of which was the kitchen as well as a bedroom for the children. Though some hoped one day to have a small house, the majority of the tenants enjoyed the conveniences provided at Kensal House, such as the water heater at the sink, their own bathroom, the coke grate, the draining boards in the kitchen, the sun balcony and their own wash copper. The sun balcony was one of the most successful features of the scheme. It was a 'lung' and, in summer, it was the centre of the tenants' lives, almost compensating

for the lack of a garden. As the survey noted, "'We thought this heaven", said one of them, and she expressed the feelings of the majority'.⁸³ In Leeds, where a large scheme of flats (the Quarry Hill estate) had just been completed, it appeared that 62 per cent of the corporation tenants preferred a central flat to a house on the outskirts.⁸⁴ The Society of Women Housing Managers noticed how the tenants living in estates of flats were being strongly influenced by the layout of their estates. In this respect the most popular estates of flats were 'those which gave the greatest feeling of space and sunshine, and which provided some greenery for the eye' (the very features which the modernists had long advocated introducing into their schemes). Thus 'Whenever a site faced a garden, park or open ground, or even a wide railway line with all its other disadvantages, it was popular'.⁸⁵ Despite an overwhelming antipathy towards flats, Townroe also found, among the members of the Services, a stronger desire to return to urban life than to live in 'garden cities or garden villages'. A great majority (not less than 97 per cent), according to him,

state vehemently they wish to return to Bermondsey, or Battersea, to the back streets of Leeds, or Birmingham, or Glasgow ... They ... wish to have a home conveniently accessible to the public house, which has been the family club ... and especially they like to have several cinemas near at hand so that they can select the pictures of their choice.⁸⁶

Furthermore, the findings of the Scottish Housing Advisory Committee indicated a greater scope for the development of flats to meet the needs of certain types of households. Of those questioned in the Forces, 67 per cent thought that blocks of flats would be suitable for single people as against 2 per cent, who preferred two-storey houses for them. Similarly, 29 per cent of the workers in industry were of the view that families without children could be accommodated in blocks of flats.⁸⁷

It seems probable, then, that well-designed flats of the type long advocated by modern architects, conveniently situated in terms of work and recreation, would make a decent home, particularly for those living in urban areas. The evidence would also suggest that well laid-out public space around the buildings and the judicious siting of blocks went a long way to compensate for lack of private gardens. Thus popular opinion on the houses versus flats debate and, for that matter, on other aspects of housing, was never monolithic and was less clear-cut than some people tried to make it out to be. Probably the following remarks from the Kensal House survey best summed up people's individual wants, home feelings and their aspirations in housing:

The widespread desire for a kitchen big enough to eat in and to hold an easy chair; the wish to have a "best" room; a hankering after the coal range or roomy wash house of the old tenement days, do not necessarily indicate reaction or an inability to "rise". They may be a sign of a fundamental

common sense, of a grasp of essentials which is perhaps inarticulate but strong because based on experience.

"Folks like us", said one tenant tartly, "want to be comfortable. They don't want to be grand."⁸⁸

And in this sense there was less of a gap between what working-class people hoped to achieve in housing and the plans that were being drawn up by experts to provide for these hopes. In fact it could also be said that the idea of mixed development of houses and flats, which emerged from wartime discussions among architects and town planners, was in some measure a fair reflection of public opinion on this contentious issue.

Footnotes

- 1 P. Addison The Road to 1945. British Politics and the Second World War (Quartet Books Edition 1977) p. 167; J.B. Cullingworth Environmental Planning 1939-1969. Vol. 1 Reconstruction and Land Use Planning 1939-1947 (HMSO 1975) pp. 5-22.
- 2 K. Jefferys 'British Politics and Social Policy During the Second World War' The Historical Journal Vol. 30 No. 1 (1987) pp. 124-126.
For example, Ernest Brown and Henry Willink held the Ministry of Health for most part of the war, while Lord Portal and W.S. Morrison were successively in charge of town planning, and the crucial Treasury post went first to Kingsley Wood and then to Sir John Anderson - a conservative ex-civil servant.
- 3 S. Brooke 'The Labour Party and the Second World War', in A. Gorst, L. Johnman and W. Scott Lucas (eds) Contemporary British History 1931-1961. Politics and the limits of policy (1991) pp. 2-5.
Clement Attlee was successively Lord Privy Seal, Secretary of Dominions and Lord President, while he also assumed the title of Deputy Prime Minister from February 1942. Ernest Bevin, at the time the General Secretary of the largest trade union, was appointed Minister of Labour and National Service. Hugh Dalton was first given the Ministry of Economic Warfare and then the Board of Trade. Herbert Morrison was Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security after a brief spell as Minister of Supply.

- 4 Ministry of Health Summary Report for the period from 1st April, 1939 to 31st March, 1941 Cmd. 6340 (HMSO 1942) pp. 13-15, 30-42 and idem Summary Report for the period from 1st April, 1941 to 31st March, 1942 Cmd. 6394 (HMSO 1942) pp. 21-24.
- 5 HLG 101/316 W.H. Collins et al. 'Post War Housing' (16.6.41) and J.C. Wrigley 'Post-War Housing Note' (n.d. but c. 1941) p. 2.
- 6 HLG 101/316 H. Symon 'Post-War Housing Report' (n.d. but c. 1941) p. 3.
- 7 The Central Housing Advisory Committee was a consultative Body, set up in 1935, under the chairmanship of the Minister of Health, to advise the Minister on questions concerning housing administration. Its members were drawn from local authorities, housing professions and the building industry, representing wide practical experience in all aspects of the working-class housing.
- 8 Ministry of Health Summary Report for the year ended 31st March, 1943 Cmd. 6468 (HMSO 1943) p. 38. See also The Times (21.3.42) and (1.8.42).
Sir Felix Pole was chairman of Associated Electrical Industries at the time. He had formerly served on the Rural Housing Committee of the Ministry of Health. The private enterprise sub-committee which he chaired included among its members, Sir Harold Bellman, who became the first chairman of Abbey National Building Society in 1943.

- 9 HLG 68/86 S.F.S. Hearder 'Post-War Reconstruction'
(26.3.42).
- 10 HLG 101/383 'Long-Term Housing Policy' (Sept. 1942).
- 11 J.B. Cullingworth Environmental Planning 1939-1969 pp.
42-43.
- 12 See, for example, Sir John Reith's speeches reported in
The Times (27.2.42) and (25.9.41).
- 13 Hansard (Lords) 5th Series Vol. 119 (17.7.41) col. 879.
- 14 Town and Country Planning 1943-1951. Progress Report by
the Minister of Local Government and Planning on the
Work of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning Cmd.
8204 (HMSO 1951) pp. 3-5.
- 15 The Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas was
chaired by Lord Justice Scott and published its Report
(Cmd. 6378, HMSO 1942). A number of recommendations
included: the improvement of rural housing by such
means as the provision of electricity, gas and water
supplies in all areas; the provision of better schools
and wider opportunities for social life in villages;
the protection of agricultural land; and the provision
of national parks and countryside access. The Expert
Committee on Compensation and Betterment was chaired by
Justice Uthwatt and produced two reports, the Imperim
Report (Cmd. 6291, HMSO 1941) and the Final Report
(Cmd. 6386, HMSO 1942).
- 16 Summarised in F. Stephenson and P. Pool A Plan for Town
and Country (1944) pp. 38-40.
- 17 See J.B. Cullingworth Environmental Planning 1939-1969
pp. 60-81.

- 18 See, for example, Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 377 (28.1.42) col. 714 and (29.1.42) cols 916-917; Lord Latham's motion calling for the implementation of Uthwatt proposals (Hansard (Lords) 5th Series Vol. 125 (18.11.42) cols 87-98).
- 19 In February 1942 the town and country planning functions, formerly with the Ministry of Health, were transferred to the Ministry of Works and Buildings which then became the Ministry of Works and Planning.
- 20 P. Addison The Road to 1945 pp. 177-178.
- 21 British Institute of Public Opinion The Beveridge Report and the Public (n.d. but 1943); A. Marwick Britain in the Century of Total War. War, Peace and Social Change 1900-1967 (Harmondsworth 1970) pp. 310-312.
- 22 See P. Addison The Road to 1945 pp. 219-225; K. Jefferys 'British Politics and Social Policy During the Second World War' pp. 129-131.
- 23 A. Calder The People's War. Britain 1939-1945 (1969) p. 534.
- 24 Ministry of Health Summary Report for the year ended 31st March, 1943 p. 38.
- 25 INF 1/292 Home Intelligence Weekly Report (24.11.41).
- 26 INF 1/292 Home Intelligence Weekly Report (11.2.42) and (11.3.42).
- 27 INF 1/292 Home Intelligence Weekly Report (18.2.42).
- 28 T. Harrisson 'Who'll Win?' The Political Quarterly Vol. 15 No. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1944) p. 27.
- 29 P. Addison The Road to 1945 pp. 215-216.

- 30 INF 1/292 Home Intelligence Weekly Report (8.12.42).
- 31 Mass-Observation, File Report No. 913 'Reconstruction Problems' (14.10.41) p. 4.
- 32 Mass-Observation Bulletin 'Postwar' (Nov. 1942).
- 33 Ibid., p. 1.
- 34 Mass-Observation, File Report No. 1364 'Reconstruction: people's moods: hopes and expectations' (30.7.42) pp. 13-15.
- 35 Ibid., p. 1.
- 36 INF 1/292 Home Intelligence Weekly Report (11.3.43).
- 37 INF 1/293 Home Intelligence Special Report 'The Present State of Feeling on the Subject of the Beveridge Report and the Government's forthcoming Proposals on Social Security' (21.4.44). See also INF 1/293 Home Intelligence Special Report 'Public Feeling about the Beveridge Proposals' (31.5.44).
- 38 INF 1/293 Home Intelligence Special Report 'Public Reaction to the White Paper on a National Health Service An interim report' (14.3.44).
- 39 Hull and Yorkshire Times (11.11.44).
- 40 G.D.H. Cole et al. Plan for Britain. A Collection of Essays prepared for the Fabian Society (1943) pp 1-2.
- 41 Mass-Observation Bulletin 'Post-War Hopes' (Oct. 1943); Mass-Observation, File Report No. 1451-2 'Report on Reconstruction' (16.10.42).
- 42 Mass-Observation, File Report No. 1221 'Forces Public Opinion Survey' (22.4.42); File Report No. 1366 'Post-War Questionnaire (Fabian Society Public Opinion Survey)' (31.7.42).

- 43 G.H. Gallup (ed.) The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls. Great Britain 1937-1975 (New York 1976) p. 85.
- 44 Picture Post (18.1.41).
- 45 Mass-Observation, File Report No. 699 'Analysis. "Picture Post Plan for Britain" Letters' (15.5.41) p. 12.
- 46 T. Harrisson 'Houses or Flats? Mass-Observation's Facts' Town & Country Planning Vol. 9 No. 36 (Winter 1941-142) p. 117.
- 47 F.J. Osborn 'Replanning Britain' Town & Country Planning Vol. 8 No. 32 (Dec. 1940) pp. 65-66.
- 48 Royal Institute of British Architects Rebuilding Britain (1943) p. 65 [italics in original].
- 49 Mass-Observation Archive, Topic Collection Reconstruction Box 1 File M 'Report on a Conference on Practical Problems of National Planning, organised by the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association at Oxford, March 28-30' pp. 2-3.
- 50 Editorial 'A Layman's View' The Architect and Building News (5.3.43).
- 51 A. Ravetz Remaking Cities. Contradictions of the Recent Urban Development (1980) pp. 38-40.
- 52 T. Harrisson 'Human Planning' The New Statesman and Nation (27.9.41) [italics in original].
- 53 'Public Opinion or Public Prejudice?' The Architects' Journal (16.10.41) [italics in original].
- 54 Letter from Tom Harrisson The Architects' Journal (30.10.41) [italics in original].

- 55 Max Lock 'Editorial' The Guild of Building Review
(Hull) No. 17 (1941-42) p. 3.
- 56 The Times (28.5.43).
- 57 Stafford Cripps in 'Houses To Live In' Official Architect Vol. 5 No. 6 (June 1942) p. 280.
- 58 Bournville Village Trust When We Build Again. A Study based on Research into Conditions of Living and Working in Birmingham (1941) pp. 55-56, 83-85, 91-94.
- 59 Society of Women Housing Managers Memorandum drawn up at the request of the Sub-Committee of the Central Housing Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Health on the Design of Dwellings (1943) pp. 7-8.
- 60 A. Whittick Civic Design and the Home (1943) p. 17.
- 61 B.S. Townroe 'What Do The Services Think?'
Architectural Design & Construction Vol. 12 No. 10
(Oct. 1942) p. 202.
- 62 HLG 37/64 Report from the Women's Advisory Housing Council on Women's Needs in Future Housing (n.d. but c. 1943) p. 3.

The Women's Advisory Housing Council was formed in 1937 as a coordinating body through which women's organisations and societies could present the viewpoints of women on housing to the Minister of Health. At the time of the survey some thirty bodies were affiliated to it, including the Catholic Social Guild, the Church Army Housing, the Electrical Association for Women, the Conservative and Unionist Women's Advisory Committee, and the Women's Liberal Federation.

- 63 Scottish Housing Advisory Committee Planning Our New Homes (Edinburgh HMSO 1944) pp. 12, xix, xxix.
- 64 C. Madge and T. Harrisson Britain by Mass-Observation (Harmondsworth 1939) p. 217.
- 65 Mass-Observation Archive, Topic Collection Housing Box 1 File D. 'O.S.A. Report Section 2 Preliminary Analysis of Brief Investigation of Certain Elements in Re-housing in the Borough of Stepney' (n.d.) File O 'Fulham Housing Survey 1939 Report'; Mass Observation, File Report No. 861 'Housing and Reconstruction: attitudes collected in 1939 and 1941 in London' (4.9.41). See also C. Madge and T. Harrisson Britain by Mass-Observation Ch. 8 'Castles in the Air?'.
66 Mass-Observation, File Report No. 873 'Report on Propaganda for Town Planning (Report of Talk given by T.H. at Housing Centre, London' (18.3.42) p. 5.
- 67 Letter from T. Harrisson The Architects' Journal (30.10.41).
- 68 Mass-Observation, An Enquiry into People's Homes (1943) pp. 3-4, 226 [italics in original]. The following section summarises its more important findings. All the quotations are from the above report [italics in original].
- 69 Some of the houses visited in the survey already had the arrangement whereby a scullery or a back kitchen (or in some cases wash houses) for cooking and washing purposes was provided, in addition to an everyday living room and a parlour. Increasingly from the last quarter of the 19th century speculative housing built

- in the form of by-law terraces catered for this separation of functions. The introduction of gas-cookers into working-class homes aided the process. Prior to this it had long been the custom of working-class families to use the kitchen as dining room and sitting room. The kitchen was the main room with a coal range where people cooked, ate and did most of the living in the house. See S. Muthesius The English Terraced House (1982) p. 48 and passim.
- 70 Daily Herald (26.3.43).
- 71 Glasgow Herald (6.4.43).
- 72 The New Statesman and Nation (15.5.43) [italics in original].
- 73 Book Review 'People's Homes by Mass-Observation' Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 50 No. 10 (Aug. 1943) p. 238.
- 74 Review of An Enquiry into People's Homes, in Town & Country Planning Vol. 11 No. 41 (Spring 1943) p. 40.
- 75 '"People's Homes"' The Architect and Building News (9.4.43).
- 76 The Architects' Journal (1.4.43), (8.4.43), (15.4.43) and (22.4.43).
- 77 P. Sargant Florence 'People's tastes in houses' The Architectural Review Vol. 94 No. 563 (Nov. 1943) pp. 142-144.
- 78 As the Society of Women Housing Managers noted in its report: 'Certainly the tenants themselves were strongly influenced by their experience: of two alternatives, they tended to choose the familiar one. As far as the

unfamiliar went, tenants on the whole were more adept at visualising the practical function than the general aspect ... Another factor which made tenants suspicious of the unfamiliar was a healthy scepticism as to whether the thing would work, and this was particularly noticeable with lifts, central heating and constant hot water' (Society of Women Housing Managers Memorandum ... on the Design of Dwellings p. 6).

- 79 Mass-Observation An Enquiry into People's Homes p. 226.
- 80 See the issues of Planning No. 263 (21.3.47) and No. 270 (15.8.47).
- 81 Mass-Observation, File Report No. 873 'Human Planning 1st draft' (15.9.41) p. 9.
- 82 J. Konrad 'The Home of Tomorrow' The Guild of Building Review (Hull) No. 18 (1942-43) p. 19.
- 83 HLG 37/64 'Kensal House Report submitted to A.E. Sylvester, Managing Director, Gas, Light and Coke Company, Kensington Office' (21.12.42) pp. 1-4.
- 84 'Flats or Houses' The Architect and Building News (3.12.43).
- 85 Society of Women Housing Managers Memorandum ... on the Design of Dwellings pp. 14-15.
- 86 B.S. Townroe 'What Do The Services Think' p. 202.
- 87 Scottish Housing Advisory Committee Planning Our New Homes p. xx.
- 88 HLG 37/64 'Kensal House Report' p. 13.

**POSTWAR RECONSTRUCTION AND THE
QUESTIONS OF POPULAR HOUSING
PROVISION, 1939-1951**

- The debates and implementation of policy, with particular
reference to Coventry and Portsmouth -

(in two volumes)

Volume II

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of PhD in Social History at the
University of Warwick

Centre for the Study of Social History
University of Warwick

June 1993

Chapter 6 The coalition Government and postwar housing

This chapter will try to chart the course of the wartime coalition Government, particularly in the latter years of the war, in relation to the evolution of postwar housing policy. On several aspects of housing policy, from the questions of design and standards to the choice of agencies for housebuilding, there were restraining influences at work within the Conservative-dominated coalition Government, checking any move towards more radical policies. And despite efforts made by the main coalition partners to arrive at some agreement, the wartime Government was ultimately unable, because of ideological differences, to proceed very far even with its short-term housing programme.

The coalition Government's approach to the question of postwar housing was two-fold. An advisory committee of the Ministry of Health was entrusted with the task of examining the design and standards of houses to be built after the war, while in the latter stages of the war the Government itself came under increasing pressure to formulate a policy on postwar housing and had to grapple with the problems of the actual set-up for initiating, controlling and carrying out a housing programme.

The Sub-Committee on the Design of Dwellings was appointed in April 1942, under the aegis of the Central Housing Advisory Committee (CHAC) of the Ministry of Health. Its membership (20 in total) reflected a wide range of interests in housing. The chairman was Lord Dudley, who had long-standing personal interest in housing, having been a

member of the CHAC since its inception. He had also chaired the influential Council for Research on Housing Construction, whose report did much to place multi-storey flats in the picture of the housing debates in the 1930s. Four architects on the Sub-Committee were Louis de Soissons, L.H. Keay, Jocelyn Adburgham (Architect to the Fulham Housing Association) and Judith Ledebøer, who was the first woman to join the Housing Architects Staff of the Ministry of Health and who acted as secretary to the Sub-Committee. The building industry was represented by George Burt (director of John Mowlem & Co.),¹ Richard Coppock (general secretary to the National Federation of Building Trades Operatives - NFBTO), and Harold Bellman from the building societies. In addition to two women architects on the Sub-Committee, the women's and housewives' point of view was represented by six female members:² Megan Lloyd George M.P.; Lady Sanderson (chairman of the Women's Housing Advisory Council); Cecily Cook (general secretary to the Women's Co-operative Guild of England and Wales and vice-chairman of the Standing Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisation); M.M. Dollar (vice-president of the Women's Housing Advisory Council); E. Gooch (wife of E.G. Gooch, president of the National Union of Agricultural Labourers); and M.E. Haworth. Two members (A.E. Monks and Seymour Williams) were chosen for their particular interest in rural housing. Alderman M.E. Mitchell (Manchester City Council) and J. Greenwood Wilson (Medical Officer of Health, City of Cardiff) represented local authority involvement in housing. J.A.F. Watson, the remaining member of the Sub-Committee,

was a chartered surveyor by profession and for many years justice of the peace in London, who took particular interest in the problem of juvenile delinquency.

The Sub-Committee was initially asked 'To review the plans of dwellings recommended by the Ministry of Health and to advise in what respects improvements can be made',³ and was provided with a note suggesting ways of revising housing manuals, together with a list of main government reports and manuals issued since 1918.⁴ There was a general feeling among the members of the Sub-Committee at its first meeting, however, that these terms had been too narrowly drawn, and consequently the Sub-Committee proposed the following amended terms of reference, which the main CHAC agreed to accept:

To make recommendations as to the design, planning, layout, standards of construction and equipment of dwellings for the people throughout the country.

As the Ministry officials in attendance were at pains to point out, 'it had been thought that the Sub-Committee would find in the Manuals, which set out the existing standards of municipal housing, a convenient starting point for their investigations'.⁵ But clearly the brief the Minister and his officials had in mind for the Sub-Committee was no more than a limited one of updating aspects of the existing housing manuals, mainly in relation to houses built by local authorities.

The Sub-Committee, nonetheless, got down to its work, armed with the broadened terms of reference. In all it held

twelve meetings between April 1942 and February 1944. Evidence was taken from some 100 bodies and individuals, including local authorities, local government organisations, and professional and voluntary bodies (particularly women's organisations such as the Women's Housing Advisory Council and the Society of Women Housing Managers). Mass Observation's People's Homes also found its way into the evidence, representing the candid views of working-class tenants and householders. A number of small panels were set up within the Sub-Committee, to explore different aspects of housing design. The architect members of the Sub-Committee, in particular de Soissons and Keay, played a prominent role in the whole investigation, sifting and producing digests of the evidence, framing draft recommendations and often leading the discussion in the meetings. All four architects served on the Flat Panel which considered the design of flats. This Panel, for instance, paid a visit to the Quarry Hill estate in Leeds as part of the investigation, and was favourably impressed with the automatic passenger lifts and the water-borne system of refuse disposal which had been installed on the estate.

Meanwhile Ernest Brown, Minister of Health, made repeated reference in public to 'that very hard-working Sub-Committee of my Central Housing Advisory Committee, the Sub-Committee on Design under Lord Dudley', and emphasised the Government's commitment to improving housing standards.⁶ Behind the scenes, however, he was also responsible for throwing the Sub-Committee's deliberations into confusion. Alarmed at the wartime increase in building costs, Brown, as

chairman of the CHAC, suggested costing all the improvements in standards and equipment, which the Sub-Committee was intending to consolidate in its recommendations, and placing them in some order of priority. Lord Dudley expressed concern at the time 'lest the Sub-Committee's recommendations should be prejudiced by questions of costs',⁷ but its members also held firm, saying that 'it should be stressed in the report that the additions suggested were all regarded as essential'.⁸ Moreover, this ministerial intervention appeared to be part of a further attempt to curtail the scope of the enquiry. Greenwood Wilson, an active member of both the Sub-Committee and the CHAC, wrote thus to the Minister in the midst of this discord:

I do feel that if the recommendations of that Sub-Committee have been thought to be extravagant or ambitious, that is because the minds of the members of the Sub-Committee will have been influenced consciously or unconsciously by the relatively spacious terms of the terms of reference ... At this later stage, when our minds are turned towards the drafting of the final report, the suggestion to contract our terms of reference to the working-classes had rather a "chilling" effect.⁹

In the end, 'the spacious terms of the terms of reference' were kept and the Sub-Committee stayed its course, although its report, the Design of Dwellings¹⁰ (or the Dudley Report, after its chairman) (July 1944), also

carried a proviso confining its consideration to 'the types of permanent dwelling commonly built by local authorities'. Within its constraints, however, the report was both comprehensive and aware of the defects in interwar housing which were due for remedy. The report acknowledged the achievements of the Tudor Walters Report (1918) in setting new standards in the building of small houses after the First World War and purported to perform a similar role 'on the threshold of a further immense housing programme'. The report noted the changes of outlook and domestic habit between the wars. There was now a growing desire for decent houses and appreciation of convenient domestic arrangements and labour-saving fittings. In particular, the extension of public services (e.g. piped water, gas and electricity) had brought about changes in appliances for cooking and the choice and planning of the rooms in which it was to be done. Moreover, it was assumed that the vast number of women in wartime factories and hostels, which afforded high standards of service and equipment, would be 'intolerant of inferior conditions in their own homes'. The report also declared at the outset that in order to ensure that they should not lack architectural advice, all local authorities be required to employ trained architects for their housing schemes:

Too often in the past the most that was hoped for of a Council housing estate was that it should be "unobtrusive". We hope that in future local authorities will set out with the intention of adding positively to the beauties of the town and countryside.¹¹

The report's general recommendations centred on three aspects of house design: the types of dwellings; the standards of accommodation; and the equipment and fittings. For the present, the report recommended, local authorities should continue to concentrate on the provision of three-bedroom houses, but should have latitude to provide other types of dwellings, depending on the distribution of the size of families in each locality. Flats were open to many objections for families with children, but were less so for other persons. There was therefore need for a mixed development of family houses intermingled with blocks of flats for smaller households.¹²

The report based its standards of accommodation on the three-bedroom house and recommended that such a house contained the following: two good rooms on the ground floor, one for meals and another for other activities; a separate place for laundry and other dirty household work which should not be done in a room where meals were to be taken; and a bathroom and w.c. in separate compartments upstairs. The Sub-Committee had clearly identified the trend towards increasing separation of functions within the living quarters but also recoiled from recommending the inclusion of a parlour, preferring to prescribe the minimum total area (330 square feet) for living accommodation. Hence the report's recommendations consisted largely of various ways of arranging the ground floor space to suit modern equipment now generally provided. The report gave three alternative methods of arrangement, designed to meet three different ways of living. These were not intended to exclude other

arrangements. The first provided a living room, a dining kitchen and a separate utility room for laundry (the dining-kitchen type). The second showed a living room with a dining recess and a working kitchen for cooking and laundry (the working-kitchen type). The third, intended for those places where cooking would continue to be done on a coal range, provided a large kitchen living room, a small sitting room, with a separate scullery and utility room (in outbuildings) for laundry (the kitchen-living room type). The report contended that the minimum overall floor area necessary to give effect to their recommendations was 900 square feet, subject to slight variations according to aspect and siting. The ceiling height was retained at a level of 8 feet, in spite of suggestions to bring it down six inches.¹³

The report then suggested improvements in a whole range of household equipment and fittings including better heating arrangements, better cooking facilities and kitchen fittings, and more efficient plumbing and sanitary fittings. In particular it called for the supply of constant hot water to all fittings in every house. In the case of postwar flats, it thought, serious consideration should be given to the provision of a central supply of hot water. The following items of kitchen equipment were to be provided as a minimum: a sink; two draining boards; a work table top; a plate rack; store cupboards and dresser; a broom cupboard; and open shelving. The report further recommended the provision of built-in clothes cupboards in all bedrooms.¹⁴

On the question of costs, the Sub-Committee estimated that on the basis of the prices ruling in 1939, a three-bedroom house built according to its recommendations would have cost £467. This was an increase of $39\frac{1}{2}$ per cent on the cost of the cheaper type of prewar council house with a superficial area of 775 square feet, costing approximately £335, and $16\frac{3}{4}$ per cent on the cost of the better type with an area of 825 square feet, which cost about £400. Referring to the considerable increase in building costs since 1939, which may have amounted to as much as 100 per cent compared to the 30 per cent increase in the cost of living index, the report sounded a warning:

There may be an inevitable interval before the present inflated costs can be brought into a workable relationship with the cost of living, but we are convinced that unless this is done the Government's programme of three to four million houses will never be completed.¹⁵

The report also singled out a number of other types of dwellings (i.e. terrace houses, flats and maisonettes) for closer examination and hence for commendation. After citing the objections to the old-fashioned type of terrace houses such as the lack of privacy, the noise, the 'absence of windows on the third side of the house' (when compared to a semi-detached house), and difficulties of access to the back door, the report referred to the means of overcoming these objections by sound insulation, skilful planning for daylight and convenient access to the back door. The continued prejudice against terrace houses, the report

stated, was 'mainly because so few people have had the experience of living in a well-designed modern terrace'.¹⁶

On the design of flats, again, the common defects of many of the blocks built between the wars were recorded: dreary and barrack-like appearance and surroundings; the absence of lifts; unsatisfactory means of access; difficulties of removing refuse; cramped accommodation; inadequate laundry facilities; the absence of gardens; and the lack of communal amenities. The report discussed means of overcoming these difficulties and suggested, among other things, the installation of lifts in all blocks of flats with more than four storeys, the provision of refuse chutes and of private balconies 'where the baby can sleep in the open air and where flowers or vegetables can be grown in window boxes'. The report referred to the continuing demand for allotments 'by many people who have made gardening their hobby' and called for their provision. It also stressed the necessity of providing better communal facilities 'in the way of community centres, common rooms and other accommodation for social and educational activities of all kinds (particularly for young people)'. Furthermore, the report discussed the alternative arrangements for laundry work and came down in favour of a communal laundry, expressing the hope that 'the need for separate provision will diminish as communal laundries grow in popularity'. In the overall planning of flats, the report strongly recommended that the 'areas of rooms which we have specified for houses shall always be observed in flats'.¹⁷

Maisonettes (i.e. super-imposed two-storey dwellings) were

the other type of dwelling thought to be worthy of mention by the Sub-Committee. The report felt that the merits of 'this convenient form of development' had not sufficiently been appreciated and commended its wide use especially on central sites. The advantage of maisonettes, claimed the report, lay in the fact that access balconies to the front doors could be used on alternate floors 'without giving rise to two of the outstanding difficulties of balcony access in blocks of flats, namely, the overshadowing of the living-rooms and the exposure of bedrooms to the disturbance of traffic along the balcony'.¹⁸

Finally, attached to the report, Design of Dwellings, was a special report on the subject of housing layout, drawn up by a study group within the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. The group was chaired by Thomas Sharp, who at the time was working in the Planning Section of the Ministry, and it included William Holford among its membership.¹⁹ The Sub-Committee, in view of the close relationship between the layout of residential areas (deemed to be part of the terms of reference) and town planning, agreed to collaborate and accordingly Keay, de Soissons and Ledebor also served as members of this study group.²⁰ The group examined the evidence collected by the Sub-Committee on layout and planning of residential areas. Its report, among other things, recommended the creation of neighbourhood units,²¹ 'which will aid in every way the full development of community life and enable a proper measure of social amenities to be provided', and gave a fairly detailed description of the requirements for the neighbourhood plan.

The desirable size for a neighbourhood unit would be a population not exceeding 10,000 persons, living in an area where every house was easily accessible to the neighbourhood centre. Among the buildings proposed at the centre were 'places of worship, the branch-library, a cinema, public house, branch administrative buildings, the necessary clinics, small club buildings, and a group of shops'. Ideally a neighbourhood of 10,000 persons would also have a community centre or a youth centre. Primary schools and nursery schools should be placed near to the centre of the residential area they served, while secondary schools might be sited on the fringes of the neighbourhood. Open space was to be distributed in close relation to the dwellings, so that there would be a park pattern which also provided a system of pedestrian paths. As far as the actual layout of dwellings was concerned, the balance of evidence suggested a more flexible approach to the question of density, away from the 12 houses to the acre.²² Following the example of the influential County of London Plan, the study group adopted the principle of density zoning based on population density, ranging from 120 persons per acre in the central area of large cities to 30 persons per acre for open development in outlying districts. These neighbourhoods of various densities would allow a variety of type and size of dwellings to be provided, so that each neighbourhood was made up of several minor groups of development. Flats, for instance, might best be placed next to open space and near to the neighbourhood centre. Accommodation for single and old people would be in a similar position.²³

The Design of Dwellings was generally well received on its publication. The Times editorial noted that

The Dudley Report is notable chiefly for its more generous standards of space, for its recommendation on equipment and fittings, and for its lively appreciation of the need to design communities and not merely individual houses and to apply more flexible criteria in controlling housing densities than the rigid formula of "not more than twelve houses to the acre".²⁴

Maurice Webb, at the time political correspondent on the Daily Herald, applauded the wide-ranging consultation of views, particularly of women's organisations, that went into the making of the report: 'This evidence has helped to provide an imaginative and far-seeing report which might well be called "The Housewife's Charter"'.²⁵ The Daily Telegraph, having first enumerated the individual improvements mentioned in the report down to heated towel rails in the bathroom, then, in a different vein, highlighted the increase in building costs, its effect on the rent and repeated the warning on costs given in the report.²⁶ The New Statesman and Nation described the report 'A book of fascinating details about our future homes and their surroundings' and the accompanying study on site layout 'a most interesting and important essay in planning' but also felt that the cost considerations tended to blunt the force of the recommendations on space standards: 'the Committee, working under the shadow of the Treasury, has made a most gallant attempt to produce a practical

compromise'.²⁷ For The Economist, which found the report's recommendations, on the whole, 'attractive and sensible', the real question was 'what control there will be, beyond the exercise of persuasion, to secure that local authorities adopt the proposed standards'.²⁸

The architectural community also broadly endorsed the main recommendations of the report.²⁹ Thus the Architectural Design & Construction likewise stated that the two outstanding aspects of the report were 'the insistence on the absolute necessity of increasing floor areas' and 'the greatly improved standard and quality of equipment to be provided for the housewife'.³⁰ Some criticism was levelled at the report. On the one hand, F.J. Osborn of the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) attacked the maximum density proposed in the report (120 persons per acre) as unjustifiably high, leading to a greater proportion of dwellings being provided in flats, which, in his view, contradicted the main tenor of the report recommending the provision of three-bedroom houses for families.³¹ More significantly, however, a major thrust of the criticism was that the report did not go far enough in some of its recommendations. The report was criticised, for instance, for dismissing refrigerators as impracticable and for being somewhat tentative on the possibilities of central heating.³² There was also some feeling that the section of the report which dealt with flats was disappointing. The Architects' Journal thought that the Sub-Committee had 'a good word to say for maisonettes and, on the whole, comments fairly on the question of houses versus flats', but

the idea still persists that flats cannot be provided with garden amenity, an idea that cellular type flats of le Corbusier ought long ago to have expelled.³³

The Architect and Building News probably offered a more sober assessment. It said of the report that the method of enquiry adopted by the Sub-Committee, of consulting the preference and views of a great number of organisations and individuals had produced 'a reliable denominator at the expense of brilliant or revolutionary ideas and theories'. This course was nonetheless justified in the journal's view:

In an official report which is in effect a summing up the Dudley Committee is right to limit itself to recommendations for which chapter and verse can be cited.³⁴

The Design of Dwellings was, then, 'a summing up', at once reflecting a measure of agreement among experts on the design and layout of postwar housing and incorporating some of the features found to be wanting in the planning of existing houses. The report thus accepted the idea of mixed development of houses and flats and the principle of neighbourhood units, which were the key concepts to emerge from the professional discussion of postwar housing. Accordingly it emphasised the need to design complete communities, containing an appropriate balance of all classes and ages and providing a mixture of houses and flats of various sizes and types, rather than the building of purely residential estates for a single social class. The report also recommended greater separation of functions

within the house and called for improvements in equipment and fittings, both of which were a response to the frequent grievances aired on these counts in the housing surveys. Above all, to give effect to its recommendations, the report set a new standard in terms of space requirements by recommending a minimum overall floor area of 900 square feet for a three-bedroom dwelling.

The Design of Dwellings, for all the practical and sensible nature of its recommendations, only represented the views of an advisory committee within the Ministry of Health. The standard of the permanent houses to be built after the war was yet to be determined by the attitude of the Government to the report. The official attitude to the report, in turn, depended upon the scale of the housing programme envisaged and the extent of government assistance of the programme, since improved standards would have meant increased costs. The coalition Government was already well aware of the wartime increase in building costs, hence the pressure put upon the Dudley Sub-Committee to tone down its recommendations.³⁵ The respective roles to be played by the local authorities and private enterprise in the provision of postwar houses³⁶ was another contentious issue for the coalition Government, in view of the traditional differences that existed between Labour and the Conservatives in their approach to housing. Moreover, the extensive bomb damage in urban areas had highlighted the close relationship between housing and town planning and, in particular, the importance of securing some control over the use of land. All of these issues required governmental decisions, but political

differences within the coalition Government made it difficult to reach an agreement and any political settlement achieved remained provisional and limited in scope.

Despite several official pronouncements on postwar reconstruction, legislative progress in the sphere of housing and town planning was slow and piecemeal.³⁷ Commenting derisively on the Government's inaction, Lord Latham, a Labour peer, said in early 1944:

No fewer than nine Ministers have been concerned at one time or another, and the sum total of their collective efforts, so far as positive planning goes is nothing. Promises and declarations by Ministers are about the only thing of importance, which in these days are not rationed.³⁸

The newly-created Ministry of Town and Country Planning (supposedly in response to calls for a central planning authority), in fact, did little more than take over the former planning functions of the Ministry of Health and had no overriding powers to coordinate reconstruction planning. The Town and Country Planning (Interim Development) Act of 1943 brought all land in England and Wales under planning control and enabled local authorities to refuse new building until overall planning schemes had been worked out. But the Act was still very much a makeshift measure and did not address the questions of land acquisition and compensation costs, which continued to hamper local authorities to proceed with reconstruction.

There was a widespread feeling that no reasonable housing policy was possible until certain major decisions

had been taken about town planning. Indeed the public discussion revolved around the issues of the ownership and control of land and, above all, around the decision over the Uthwatt Report. In March 1944, a letter in The Times signed by thirteen Mayors and Lord Mayors of blitzed cities, including Coventry and Portsmouth, urged Parliament to pass without delay 'the oft-promised Bill to enable us to provide on demobilization the new cities which are needed to supply both the life blood of commerce and also home life for our citizens'.³⁹ As has been seen, the professional bodies and pressure groups, such as the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and TCPA, may have had different ideas on how the towns should be rebuilt after the war, but these bodies were generally agreed on the need to implement the Uthwatt proposals.⁴⁰ As The Architects' Journal put it, 'It is no good preparing plans for London, Birmingham, Coventry, Southampton, Hull, Nottingham, or even Little Mudlark unless you are fighting to get legislation which will enable these plans to be accomplished'.⁴¹ Against this, a strong opposition was being voiced by the landowners' organisations (some of whose eminent members sat in the Houses of Parliament as Conservative M.P.s and peers)⁴² and the building societies, who felt themselves threatened by the Uthwatt Report which they saw as a concealed measure of nationalisation. D.W. Smith, general manager of the Halifax Building Society, addressing a meeting of landowners, said that the public acquisition of development rights in land would strike 'a heavy blow, even a mortal one', at the principle and ideals of home ownership:

The State acquisition recommendation is nationalization pure and simple, camouflaged though it might be ... Far from curing the evil of inflation in urban areas or accelerate post-war house-building, the recommendation will have just the opposite effect. Private enterprise, which alone rescued this country from the chaotic housing conditions which arose after the last war, thereby probably averting a serious social upheaval, will be hampered and stultified by the dead hand of officialdom.⁴³

This considerable hostility among the landed and property-owning interests towards the Uthwatt Report was echoed by the Conservatives within the coalition Government. Florence Horsbrugh, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, for one, described the Barlow, Scott and Uthwatt Reports as 'a trinity of doubts' to a Central Council meeting of the Conservative Party.⁴⁴

In June 1944, after three years of procrastination, the coalition Government produced its proposals on town planning,⁴⁵ which fell short of the Uthwatt recommendations. These took the form of a White Paper which set out the Government's general approach to the future use and control of land and of a Bill dealing mainly with the war damaged areas. The Control of Land Use (Cmd. 6537), while accepting the principle that the use of land should be subject to control by licence, reaffirmed the existing pattern of private land ownership, thereby turning down the main components of the Uthwatt Report (i.e., the development

rights scheme for all unbuilt-on land and a periodic betterment levy in urban areas). Instead it suggested a scheme involving an 80 per cent betterment charge on the profit from development and compensation payments for those owners refused permission to develop their land. Giving a summary of the White Paper in a leading article, The Economist noted:

It lacks the simplicity of outright nationalisation of the land, which has adherents far outside the ranks of the Labour Party, and which may yet ultimately prove to be the only workable solution. But nationalisation was clearly not to be expected from a coalition Government, and if there has to be a less thoroughgoing scheme, this one has much to commend it.⁴⁶

The White Paper was, in fact, only aimed at focusing discussions of the complex issues involved, and there was no mention by the Government of any proposed legislation.

The Bill, which became the Town and Country Planning Act (1944), provided for the designation of areas which had sustained extensive war damage, and, to a lesser extent, of districts which suffered from bad layout and obsolete development (blitzed and blighted areas). Local authorities were given enhanced powers of compulsory acquisition (subject to the requirement of a public enquiry and ministerial assent), and provision was made for Treasury grants to assist them to purchase land in these areas. The price of land so acquired was to be based on the value

existing at March 1939, but this was taken as the standard as opposed to the ceiling proposed by the Uthwatt Report, with a supplementary payment of up to 30 per cent above the standard value for certain kinds of owner occupiers. Even this limited piece of legislation was hotly debated in Parliament. In fact, Hugh Dalton, a pivotal figure in the Labour strategy of remaining in office (in the Coalition) and advancing their aims of extracting as much social reform as possible, described the atmosphere within the Parliamentary Labour Party in the following terms:

Most reacted eagerly and audibly to the suggestion that they should vote against the Bill on second reading. They have an insatiable longing to be in opposition, to vote against things, to refuse responsibility, to dodge detail, to find easy safety in negatives and impotence.⁴⁷

And the introduction of the Bill called forth a following comment from the New Statesman and Nation:

The official Labour leaders are no doubt taking the familiar line that this is so much as could have been expected from a Tory-dominated coalition, and that if this were rejected there would be no opportunity of doing anything at all in the near future for the blitzed and slum areas.⁴⁸

The Labour Party actually abstained on its Second Reading. The Bill went ahead, nonetheless, but provision for the public ownership of land in blitzed and blighted areas aroused fierce opposition from the landed interests within

the Conservative Party, while local authorities, which criticised the smallness of the financial assistance, had to be placated. The basic purpose of the Bill was to facilitate the rebuilding of war-damaged areas, whose demands could no longer be shelved. It was an indication of the fact that the coalition Government could only grapple partially with the politically contentious issue of land ownership. Commenting on the Bill's rough passage through Parliament, The Economist noted: 'With the Government's policy limping so badly, it is merely ironical for local authorities to be told once more to go ahead and plan boldly'.⁴⁹

Similarly, as far as the coalition Government's plans for postwar housing were concerned, the early, expansive, projection of long-term housing needs gave way to a more limited, immediate programme of action. From the middle of 1942, the departmental estimate of 3 to 4 million houses in 10 to 12 years had been floated by Brown, the Conservative Minister of Health,⁵⁰ who also encouraged private enterprise to play a vital role in the postwar provision of houses:

Our experience in the 1930s shows that, given cheap money, plentiful supplies of labour and materials, the minimum of control, building prices which are not out of relation to the cost of living, and above all, stability of values, the contribution which private enterprise can make as regards both quality and quantity in solving the housing problem is unlimited.⁵¹

In the meantime the Government negotiated with the operatives and employers in the building industry, and published a White Paper on its provisional plans for the expansion of the building industry, depleted by the war. This would involve, on the one hand, the setting up of a special adult training scheme ('to fill the anticipated gap in the supply of skilled workers in the immediate post-war years') and the improvement of youth apprenticeship scheme, and, on the other, a move towards the elimination of casual work and the establishment of the guaranteed week for workers. It was hoped, through these methods, to build up the number of workers in the building industry in three or four years after the end of the war, to about 1,250,000 men to carry out 'a post-war construction programme designed for ten to twelve years'.⁵²

Lord Woolton (Minister of Reconstruction, appointed in November 1943), Lord Portal (Minister of Works) and Henry Willink (Minister of Health, taking over from Brown), between them, continued to rehearse the Government's intention of providing 4 million houses in 10 years and of expanding the building industry to cope with the programme.⁵³ But despite these official pronouncements on the lines of action to be taken, again, the coalition Government increasingly failed to give them practical shape. Instead, in 1944 and 1945, the Government set its mind to consolidating more limited proposals to cover the so-called 'Transition Period' immediately following the end of the war.⁵⁴ Labour members of the Coalition, while maintaining the necessity of implementing the main recommendations made

in the Barlow and Uthwatt Reports, also took the view that 'Whatever decisions are taken on other matters we shall need a housing programme'.⁵⁵ Thus, in March 1944, Willink announced the Government's short term housing programme: 100,000 permanent houses built or building by the end of the first year and a further 200,000 built or building by the end of the second year (of which 50,000 were to be built in Scotland); the conversion of war factory hostels to provide accommodation for some 24,000 families; and the provision of prefabricated temporary houses, publicly owned, until permanent houses and flats could be provided in adequate numbers. A great bulk of these houses, Willink stated, would be built by local authorities on sites - principally undeveloped, suburban sites - already selected and acquired by them. It was stated that temporary legislation would be introduced extending the scope of housing subsidies (presently restricted to houses built for slum clearance or to abate overcrowding) to houses built to meet general needs. Willink also made it clear that he was looking to other agencies, including private enterprise and building societies, to assist in the provision of houses. There was criticism of the Government, especially from the Labour benches, for failing to present a coordinated plan involving a long-term housing programme and for the lack of decision on town planning matters affecting postwar housing. But, in the ensuing debate in Parliament, it was generally agreed that the short-term programme, as it stood, was sufficiently ambitious, in view of the expected difficulties of construction in the immediate postwar period.⁵⁶

As regards the standards and design of these postwar dwellings, a Housing Manual was produced by the coalition Government, on the basis of the recommendations made by the Design of Dwellings Sub-Committee of the CHAC. The Housing Manual 1944 (published in September 1944) specifically gave guidance to local authorities on the layout, planning, construction and equipment of permanent houses to be built under the short-term housing programme, covering the first two years after the end of the war.⁵⁷ Copies of the Manual were issued to all local authorities in England and Wales. As a rule, the standards and planning ideas recommended by the Manual closely followed those proposed in the Design of Dwellings. Thus one of the unifying themes was neighbourhood planning, which aimed to provide self-contained residential areas, with variety in the size and type of dwellings and appropriate communal facilities for schooling, shopping and recreation.⁵⁸ The Manual also discussed general principles of house planning, showing the three main types of houses designed to meet different living arrangements.⁵⁹

As a notable exception to the rule, however, the Manual proposed that the floor area of a three-bedroom standard house should range between 800 and 900 square feet, instead of the minimum 900 square feet recommended by the Dudley Sub-Committee:

The plans for the average size house for 5 persons range from the minimum house of 800 sq. ft. to the full 900 sq. ft. recommended in the Report Design of Dwellings.⁶⁰

The point was picked out by the RIBA in its summary of the Manual: 'It is disturbing to find the Dudley's emphatic statement of a minimum turned by a phrase into a maximum'.⁶¹ Significantly, the Labour Party in the coalition had apparently given a qualified approval to this reduction in proposed floor area:

Anything below 900 feet for the English standard house is a pity ... But this has already been discussed; the smaller areas are an effect of immediately prospective high costs; and therefore the approval sought should be granted - on the strict understanding that these restricted standards are intended to apply only to the first 300,000 houses which are the subject of this initial programme.⁶²

In terms of dwelling types, the arguments in favour of terrace houses (i.e. economy in construction as well as in road and service works, and greater scope afforded for an orderly architectural treatment) were repeated and well illustrated by pictorial and plan examples. The Manual recommended that, on a large estate, a proportion of accommodation be provided in blocks of flats (mostly, of conventional, three-storey types without lifts), primarily for single people and childless couples. It was also pointed out that in areas where high densities were unavoidable, flats would be required even for families with children.⁶³ But instead of due emphasis being given to the idea of mixed development as in the Design of Dwellings, the focus of the Manual was very much on the ordinary three-

bedroom house, reflecting the priority of the short-term programme:

During the transitional period the most urgent need in the majority of areas will probably continue to be for the three-bedroom type of dwelling, suitable for families with children, because of the large number of young married couples with children who have been unable as a result of the war to obtain a separate home of their own.⁶⁴

Accordingly the majority of accompanying layout plans were of ordinary houses with three bedrooms for a household of five persons. The Manual, for instance, recommended as 'useful for grouping in terraces' such a house, a working-kitchen type, of 800 square feet, as well as six other plans of the same type between 814 and 897 square feet.⁶⁵

Admittedly, there was a separate study being carried out at the time on the special problems of flat construction, including the question of 'whether by any means the cost of flat construction can be brought into clear relationship with the cost of ordinary housing'.⁶⁶ This study, undertaken by the Interdepartmental Committee on House Construction within the Ministry of Works, took almost two years to complete and came to a general conclusion (albeit unofficial, since the draft report produced was never published) that high flats were still not quite feasible, primarily because of the inhibiting cost of installing lifts.⁶⁷ The Housing Manual 1944 thus was a product of the

coalition Government which increasingly concerned itself with the priorities of short-term, transitional measures.

The Government's concern, however, did not easily translate itself into a commitment on postwar housing. In the meantime, the flying bomb (V1) and then rocket (V2) attacks mainly on south-eastern England in 1944 and early 1945 further aggravated the housing shortage⁶⁸ and accentuated the pressure on the Government to legislate for the main proposals of the short-term programme. 'In planning for peace the country is still in the pre-Dunkirk period', wrote The Economist, in September 1944. In particular, it urged the Government to act on its proposals on housing:

The most urgent of Parliament's numerous tasks is to expedite legislation to solve the serious housing problem ... there is no excuse for delay in the enactment of that policy - delay that threatens to condemn a large number of people to sample peace under appalling conditions of overcrowding.⁶⁹

But within the parameters of broad agreement there were also important political differences among the coalition partners. Moreover, the Government's attempt to facilitate the programme by prefabrication and other non-traditional methods of construction did not make much headway.

The Labour Party in the Coalition particularly disliked Willink's attempt to put private enterprise on an equal footing with the local authorities in the short-term programme, which it saw as the thin end of the wedge. The

Conservative argument that, by granting subsidies to private building firms, the industry would be started up and be ready for possible later expansion, was objectionable to the Labour Party on a number of counts. First of all, it overlooked the possibilities open to the local authorities of 'controlling the cost of contracts and the prices of components and materials', and with this, the advantages which could be secured by 'standardisation and bulk purchase, properly controlled from the centre'. Secondly, speculative building meant 'sporadic and fortuitous building development'. Thirdly, the intervention of private firms and the business of subsidising them 'in this tense transition period will be an intolerable nuisance'.

Moreover, William Piercy, advising Clement Attlee on this issue, added in a memorandum written in June 1944 that

there is an element of insincerity in the arguments put forward. There will be plenty of work ... for private building firms, both on local authority contracts and on private building and repairs to put them in good fettle and the notion that they need a participation as principals in working-class housing is nonsensical.⁷⁰

A joint memorandum, written shortly afterwards by Piercy and E.M.F. Durbin, acknowledged the difficulty, 'in the current atmosphere of give and take', of opposing suggestions to give private enterprise a chance, but nevertheless firmly urged Labour Ministers to reject the proposal and did so successfully.⁷¹ The Housing (Temporary Accommodation) Act of 1944, which gave effect to the main proposal of the

short-term housing programme, extended the scope of subsidies to include new housing accommodation provided by local authorities before 1 October 1947. This general needs subsidy was to ensure that ex-servicemen and others with no separate homes of their own were included for consideration in the allocation of the new dwellings.⁷² It was only after the coalition Government had broken up and in the run-up to the 1945 General Election that Willink, as Minister of Health in the Conservative caretaker Government, could announce his intention of legislating on a scheme to make government grants in respect of small private houses built for sale or letting.⁷³

It was generally assumed that houses of traditional brick construction with timber floors and roofs would still form the mainstay of housing provision after the war. At the same time, the Government also planned to assist in the speedy construction of much needed dwellings, especially in the immediate postwar period when the shortages of both materials and labour was envisaged, by the bulk erection of prefabricated temporary units and the use of alternative methods of construction to augment the permanent housing scheme.⁷⁴

In fact the provision of temporary houses, in the form of prefabricated bungalows became a major component in the coalition Government's short-term housing programme. Although from the outset, 'prefabs', as they were popularly known, were designed as a stop-gap measure, supplementing the construction of permanent dwellings, some within the Government initially held out high expectations for them.

Winston Churchill spoke of erecting up to half a million of these 'emergency houses' in glowing terms.⁷⁵ The purpose of the temporary housing scheme, as Lord Portal explained, was 'to make a substantial contribution to the interregnum period, using as little site labour as possible'.⁷⁶ The idea of harnessing the resources of the engineering industries, who were anxious about their postwar prospects, was also stressed. Thus the Portal House, the first prototype bungalow so named after the Minister in charge, was designed in consultation with selected firms manufacturing motorcar bodies and other pressed steel products. In addition, eleven types of mainly two-bedroomed, single-storey dwellings, with an intended life of ten years, were developed for the temporary housing scheme, including one built of aluminium, sponsored by a group of aircraft manufacturers.⁷⁷ Many of these temporary houses, though small in size, were characterised by a high standard of internal fittings, such as had never before been offered to tenants of local authority housing, which included a completely prefabricated kitchen-bathroom unit (arranged back-to-back, with an electric or gas cooker, refrigerator, a drying cupboard and a hot water tank) and several built-in cupboards and wardrobes. These houses would be purchased and owned by the Government, and then made available to the local authorities, to be erected on sites acquired and developed by them. Lord Portal aimed originally at a cost price of £600 per house with his prototype, exclusive of land. Accordingly, the Housing (Temporary Accommodation) Act, passed in October 1944, authorised the Government to

spend up to £150 million for the provision of some 250,000 temporary houses.

Alongside the temporary housing scheme, the Government also tried to bring about economy and speed in the building of permanent dwellings. On the strength of its exploratory and experimental work on alternative methods of house construction during the war,⁷⁸ the Ministry of Works, in 1944, erected on its demonstration site a small number of demonstration houses, in connection with the postwar housing programme. One group of houses was built by traditional methods in brick, while the other used special methods or materials, in order to provide a measure of the relative costs between the different methods. In essence, the alternative methods of construction, as they were being developed at the time, either relied on a system of structural framework (of light metal units or reinforced concrete beams), with a variety of materials (e.g. panels of precast concrete) for both external claddings and internal linings, or retained the load-bearing walls, built with types of lightweight concrete (e.g. foamed slag or 'No-fines'), which were often cast in situ in large sections using shutterings. Several of these building components were to be manufactured in various units away from the site, to be delivered and assembled into position. With houses built of structural framework a large part of the site work on the building could be done under cover, uninterrupted by weather conditions. Combined with varying degrees of standardisation of fittings and equipment, already incorporated in conventional constructions, this was thought

to lead to efficiency and a cost reduction in the building of so-called non-traditional permanent houses.⁷⁹

Admittedly, in the case of demonstration houses erected by the Ministry of Works, the sample was a small one and the results on comparative costs proved rather inconclusive, although the houses built by alternative methods did show economies in the use of skilled building labour.⁸⁰

As a next step, the Government intended to invite local authorities such as the London County Council (LCC) to erect a trial number of non-traditional dwellings of the type demonstrated by the Ministry of Works as 'an extended test'. This would have the added advantage of contributing in a small way to the housing requirements of those local authorities. In particular the Government was keen to put forward a prototype containing four flats in a two-storey block, built of steel-frame construction with concrete claddings. Much of the material was prefabricated and the block, on assembly, apparently showed a large reduction in building man-hours over brick dwellings of the same size. But progress on the project was soon checked both because of some flaws found in the walling system of the prototype flats and by the problem of finance. Thus the LCC looked for assurance that 'any excess cost above that of an equivalent amount of normal housing would be borne by the Government' and, in any case, made it clear that substantial replanning and modification were necessary before the prototype could be erected in any numbers. The LCC also disliked the cottage flats' style of design, which was said to be 'not too popular in London'.⁸¹ Liverpool, another

authority asked to take part in the project, expressed a view probably in tune with the general attitude of local authorities towards housebuilding. As Keay (City Architect and Director of Housing) replied with regard to the attitude of the Housing Committee in Liverpool:

Despite the necessity of providing the greatest number of dwellings in the shortest possible time, the opinion of the Committee is hardening towards the erection of (a) purely temporary dwellings and (b) permanent dwellings, the latter to be built by traditional methods or such adaptation thereof as will give the dwellings the same degree of substantiality. I may say that I am doing nothing to influence the Committee against this opinion, in fact I am encouraging it because I think it is the right attitude to adopt.⁸²

The Government's focus on prefabrication and alternative methods of construction also caused a good deal of misgivings and opposition in certain quarters. The idea of prefabrication, to be sure, drew mixed responses from the architectural professions and the labour movement. The RIBA, in its memorandum on 'Prefabrication and Standardisation' (December 1943), envisaged a much larger role for prefabrication and standardisation in the postwar years than hitherto for two reasons. Firstly, the demand for postwar building would be so great that speed would become essential in coping with this demand within reasonable time. Secondly, it was felt that the lessons of war production, the value in terms of speed and economy in

the organisation of mass production of war articles, should be applied to 'arts of peace'. Accordingly the memorandum stated:

The R.I.B.A. would, therefore, welcome the assistance which prefabrication and standardisation could make towards the carrying out of the post-war building programme; subject only to the overriding condition that the fundamental principles of good architecture shall not suffer, viz., good planning and siting, good design and construction that is sound technically and economically.

In addition, to avoid the monotony of endless repetition and to enable buildings to be planned with variable aspects, the memorandum argued that 'the standardisation of prefabricated structures should consist of units of construction capable of assembly in a variety of combinations'.⁸³ Beside this considered, official view of the RIBA, there were also fears that the progress of prefabrication might make the architect redundant at the hands of the production engineer. As the vice president of RIBA confessed in 1944:

As architects they had come to the point when, whether they were traditionalists or modernists they realised that they had, up to a point, to accept prefabrication, but the doubt at the back of the minds of many was how the profession was to hold in a machine age. It could be argued that the motor car was a thing of beauty and that a house produced by similar methods could be

beautiful, but if one's house was produced as a motor car was produced, and one received it with a book of words showing the spare parts that could be bought, where was the need of the architect? That, put baldly, was the problem.⁸⁴

On the other hand, some sections of the architectural professions were more responsive to the idea of prefabrication. A positive note was struck by the modernists. Maxwell Fry was convinced that 'a rigorous policy of standardisation would encourage, rather than otherwise, the growth of a healthy architecture in Britain, and perhaps rid us of a sentimental attitude towards an art which should be essentially social and practical'.⁸⁵ The Communist-inspired Association of Building Technicians (ABT - formerly the Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants) saw the advance of prefabrications in housebuilding as a demonstration of architecture in the service of society, and welcomed it.⁸⁶ B.H. Cox, a prominent architect member of the ABT, went so far as to claim that,

Prefabrication is the manufacture of parts of buildings or complete buildings in factories. It means organising the production of homes on lines similar to the production of industrial goods, such as cars or radio sets.⁸⁷

There was no doubt a fair amount of interest in prefabrication towards the end of the war,⁸⁸ and commentators on postwar housing also often touched on the subject. E.D. Simon was favourably disposed to the

prefabrication of components and fittings inside houses, as opposed to that of 'the shell of the house' and saw the way forward in the mass production of standardised parts.⁸⁹

G.D.H. Cole, writing from the viewpoint of its impact on the building industry, was more sceptical about the effect of prefabrication:

I do not believe that cottage-building, which will constitute the biggest single item in the post-war building programme, is likely to be so altered as to dispense with the traditional skill of bricklayers, painters, carpenters, plasterers, and plumbers to more than a limited extent. I do not believe that flats are going to replace houses save in exceptional cases, or that pre-fabrication is likely to affect greatly the building of the shell of the house, except for housing of a temporary kind.⁹⁰

The idea of a temporary structure, assembled on the site from wholly prefabricated units was particularly unpopular with those in the labour movement and the building industry. Even before the scheme took shape, Lewis Silkin, a Labour Party expert on housing, was arguing against temporary housing which, he said, was just as costly as a permanent building, and whose claim to speedy construction was doubtful. Temporary housing also meant a diversion of labour and material from permanent construction, and Silkin further drew attention to the temporary dwellings erected after the First World War that were still in use.⁹¹ In a similar manner The New Statesman and Nation, seeing it as a

sabotage of local authorities' attempt to plan permanent housing, poured scorn on the scheme:

It almost looks as if, in this scheme, Mr. Willink had sought to discredit the State in the role of housing entrepreneur. But perhaps this is just what the Government wants to do.⁹²

Neither side of the building industry took too kindly to the Government's scheme. The National Federation of Building Trades Employers (NTBTE) warned that 'the recourse to any large-scale production of temporary sub-normal houses should not in the public interest be undertaken'.⁹³

Instead, the NFBTE urged that 'the housing and rehousing policy of the country should ensure that the labour and material resources of the building industry should be employed to the maximum in the production of permanent soundly constructed homes by tried methods'.⁹⁴ The NFBTO, the operatives' union, likewise, was no admirer of prefabricated temporary houses.⁹⁵ The NFBTO's opposition to prefabrication stemmed from the perceived threat it posed to the craft structure of the building operatives and in this respect the Federation was at odds with organisations like ABT which was promoting the development of new technique in building.⁹⁶ In 1944, the Annual Conference of NFBTO passed a motion warning 'the public to be wary of the many proposals now being advanced for substitutes'. The conference, 'While readily accepting real progress in building technique', reaffirmed that,

good, structurally sound, worthily built, properly equipped houses, truly fit for homes, can only be

obtained through the long-tried means and methods of the building industry.⁹⁷

As far as the temporary housing programme was concerned, however, it also appeared that the building operatives, too, were very much suspicious of the Government neglecting its commitment to permanent houses. As one delegate put it: 'The Government would be only apt to take the line of least resistance to satisfy the needs of the moment'.⁹⁸

Towards the end of 1944, it transpired, however, that because of the shortage of the main components (pressed steel and plywood) the Portal prototype bungalows had to be relinquished. Thereafter the Government was obliged to rely on a number of less highly prefabricated types, with the result that the expected benefits in cost through quantity production were not fully realised. The target for temporary houses was now being adjusted downwards to 200,000 in two years.⁹⁹ By the end of March 1945, a total of 113,761 temporary houses had been allocated to 705 local authorities in England and Wales, but of these only 69 had been completed.¹⁰⁰ The 'Portal fiasco' and slow progress on temporary housing forced the Government to reconsider its strategy and to place more emphasis on permanent houses built by alternative methods. This rethink was presided over by Duncan Sandys, another Conservative who took over from Lord Portal as Minister of Works. Rather belatedly, in March 1945, he secured an agreement from the War Cabinet Housing Committee that 'the aim should be to secure that in the emergency period as high a proportion as practicable of permanent houses were erected by new methods using the

minimum of building labour'. The idea was for the Government to take an active role in the production of permanent houses. Taking its cue from the temporary housing scheme, the Government planned to select and sponsor some designs of non-traditional permanent houses, which could be recommended to local authorities and on which production could start immediately.¹⁰¹ But the time rapidly ran out for the Government to act upon this proposal before the general election. This move to reinvigorate its programme ironically coincided with the coalition Government's final policy statement on postwar housing. The Housing White Paper (March 1945) was for the most part a recapitulation of the facts contained in various Ministers' previous statements on the short-term programme. It reaffirmed the target of 300,000 permanent houses built or being built two years after victory in Europe. The extent to which prefabrication or alternative methods of construction were expected to contribute to the target was left unspecified. There was a sober assessment of the value of temporary housing, which gave the impression of the scheme being further downgraded. Most significantly, there was still no mention of the amount of subsidy to be paid to local authorities.¹⁰² The Economist, giving a decidedly lukewarm appraisal of the Government's target as insufficient but attainable, was also compelled to add:

If the Ministers responsible are unable to satisfy the House of Commons on the missing link of the White Paper and to inspire greater confidence in their enthusiasm for the task, the situation will

justify severe criticism of the Government at the general election.¹⁰³

The same issue of The Economist observed that 'the coalition is getting more and more threadbare'. The general indication was that the coalition Government would not survive the end of the war. It saw 'the housing muddle' as one of 'the fruits of coalition in domestic affairs'. The distinctly patchwork nature of the Government's policy on housing might have been expected from its almost exclusive concern with immediate measures in the last years of the war. But even within the terms of the short-term programme the Conservatives and Labour agreed to differ on some important aspects of policy, such as the respective roles of public and private enterprise or the size or form of housing subsidies, which had to be left unsettled at the end of the war.

Footnotes

- 1 George Burt was also Chairman of the more technical Interdepartmental Committee on House Construction, which was set a task of assessing a number of alternative methods of construction that were regarded as having advanced beyond the experimental stage and making recommendations as to their suitability for development in the postwar period. See Ministry of Works House Construction. The Report of the Committee on House Construction (Post-War Building Studies No. 1) (HMSO 1944).
- 2 This strong women representations on the Sub-Committee was achieved largely through lobbying done by women's organisations. Some asked for added representation, for example, of rural interests (the National Federation of Women's Institutes) whilst others (notably the Labour body, the Standing Joint Committee of Women's Organisations) pressed for the appointment of a separate committee of women qualified to advise on the issues of postwar housing. Initially the Women's Advisory Housing Council, with the approval of the Sub-Committee and the CHAC, tried to establish an ad hoc consultative group consisting of various women's organisations, to help the Sub-Committee to sift evidence and frame recommendations. But there appeared to be some difficulties in getting the organisations to work together. It was decided, in the end, to invite two more members (Megan Lloyd George and E. Gooch) from CHAC and to co-opt three new members (Jocelyn

Adburgham, Cecily Cook and M.E. Haworth) to serve on the Sub-Committee. See HLG 36/16 Central Housing Advisory Committee Minutes No. 18 (17.7.42), Minutes No. 19 (19.10.42), and 'Women's Representation' (P.W.10) (n.d.).

3 HLG 36/16 Central Housing Advisory Committee Minutes No. 16 (20.3.42).

4 HLG 37/63 Central Housing Advisory Committee Sub-Committee on the Design and Planning of Houses and Flats. 'Office Notes on possible Revision of Housing Manuals' (P.D.3) (n.d.) and 'Ministry of Health Housing Manuals' (P.D.4) (n.d.).

5 HLG 37/62 Central Housing Advisory Committee Sub-Committee on the Design of Dwellings Minutes No. 1 (3.4.42); HLG 36/16 Central Housing Advisory Committee Minutes No. 17 (17.4.42).

6 His address to a National Conference of Local Authorities in England and Wales, held under the auspices of the National Housing and Town Planning Council, in October 1943, cited in J. Madge The Rehousing of Britain (1945) p. 44. See also his speeches reported in The Times (1.8.42) and (6.3.43).

7 HLG 37/62 Central Housing Advisory Committee Sub-Committee on the Design of Dwellings Minutes No. 8 (24.9.43).

8 Ibid., Minutes No. 9 (29.10.43).

9 HLG 37/64 Letter J. Greenwood Wilson - Ernest Brown (16.10.43).

- 10 Ministry of Health, Design of Dwellings. Report of the Design of Dwellings Sub-Committee of the Central Housing Advisory Committee (HMSO 1944).
- 11 Ibid., para. 21.
- 12 Ibid., paras 29-35.
- 13 Ibid., paras 36-43, 46-48, 50-53.
- 14 Ibid., paras 119, 124-134. The Report also considered the possibility of providing refrigerators and dish-washing machines in municipal dwellings but felt that this was not practicable at present.
- 15 Ibid., paras 145-149.
- 16 Ibid., paras 67-71. The balance of evidence submitted to the Sub-Committee appeared to be against terrace houses but it should be remembered that architects were in the forefront of the revival of terrace houses (see Chapter 4).
- 17 Ibid., paras 72, 75-78, 82-91, 93-96.
- 18 Ibid., paras 98-100.
- 19 HLG 37/65 Ministry of Health and Ministry of Town and Country Planning Joint Study Group to consider Section V of the Evidence submitted to the Sub-Committee on the Design of Dwellings Minutes and Papers (1943).
- 20 HLG 37/62 Central Housing Advisory Committee Sub-Committee on the Design of Dwellings Minutes No. 5 (31.3.43).
- 21 The idea of neighbourhood units was a key feature in Sharp's rebuilding plans for Exeter and Oxford. As he later modestly claimed, 'Perhaps the most important single conception that has developed since towns began

- to be deliberately planned is one which has grown during the last two decades - the conception of organising the town on the basis of a structure of neighbourhoods' (T. Sharp Exeter Phoenix. A Plan for Rebuilding (1946) p. 115). See also T. Sharp Oxford Replanned (1948) pp. 158-167.
- 22 HLG 37/63 Sub-Committee on the Design of Dwellings 'Analysis of Evidence. Section V Layout' (P.D. 29) (n.d.) pp. 44-52.
- 23 Site Planning and Layout in Relation to Housing. Report of a Study Group of the Ministry of Housing and Town Planning (included in Ministry of Health Design of Dwelling) passim.
- 24 The Times (17.7.44).
- 25 Daily Herald (17.7.44) Webb's article carried an illustration from the report showing the most conventional of the three alternative arrangements, the kitchen-living room type with a coal range, which struck him as being 'the most attractive'. Webb became a Labour MP in 1945 and was Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party between 1946 and 1950.
- 26 The Daily Telegraph (17.7.44).
- 27 The New Statesman and Nation (22.7.44).
- 28 The Economist (22.7.44).
- 29 Architectural and other periodicals carried summaries of the Report's recommendations. See, for example, Official Architect Vol. 7 No. 8 (Aug. 1944) pp. 373-375; Architectural Design & Construction Vol. 14 No. 8

- (Aug. 1944) pp. 192-194; The Municipal Journal (28.7.44).
- 30 Architectural Design & Construction *ibid.*, p. 172.
- 31 F.J. Osborn 'Housing Standards and Planning Policy' Town & Country Planning Vol. 12 No. 47 (Autumn 1944) p. 111.
- 32 See The Times (17.4.44); The Architect and Building News (28.7.44).
- 33 The Architects' Journal (24.8.44).
- 34 The Architect and Building News (28.7.44).
- 35 The Report once completed, an informal committee of officials from the Ministries of Health and Works, presided over by Lord Woolton (Minister of Reconstruction), decided to hold back its publication while a housing manual was being prepared for the guidance of local authorities, so that the Design of Dwellings could be published in July 1944 simultaneously with the report dealing with private enterprise housing (see below). This was done presumably in an effort to place private enterprise in the picture of postwar housing alongside local authority provision, although the Design of Dwellings was a report of a different nature, setting out the design and standards of 'dwellings for the people throughout the country'. (See material in CAB 124/446 entitled 'Post-war housing policy 1943 Dec. - 1944 Aug.'). In the event, the private enterprise report seemed to have been overshadowed by the press reception given to the Design of Dwellings.

- 36 The role of private enterprise was a subject also considered by the CHAC. The Private Enterprise Sub-Committee of the CHAC, whose report was published simultaneously with the Design of Dwellings, concluded that, in the long run, the housing needs of a large section of the community could be met without subsidy, given conditions of cheap money, plentiful supply of labour and materials, and stability of values. It also suggested participation of private enterprise in the immediate postwar housing programme, and recommended that exchequer subsidy be extended to private enterprise when it was meeting the same needs as local authorities, subject to some control of selling price or rents, and of standards. See Ministry of Health Private Enterprise Housing. Report of the Private Enterprise Sub-Committee of the Central Housing Advisory Committee (HMSO 1944) Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations.
- 37 This section on planning legislation draws on F.J. Osborn (ed.) Planning and Construction 1948 (1948) Section 2 Planning Legislation and Policy. For a more critical perspective, see, for example, Labour Research Department Land and Land Owners. A study of the social basis and immediate policies and proposals relating to land and reconstruction (1944).
- 38 Reported in Official Architect Vol. 7 No. 4 (Apr. 1944) p. 180.
- 39 The Times (13.3.44).

40 For example, the Town and Country Planning Association pressed for 'the acceptance of the Uthwatt principles, including the proposals for Development Rights, facilitated Public Acquisition of Land, and the Periodic Levy, which, taken together, go a long way to overcome the financial difficulties of planning' (The 44th Annual Report (1942) p. 4). The president of the Royal Institute of British Architects, likewise, in a letter to The Times (11.5.43), called on the Government to accept the Uthwatt Committee's land proposals.

41 The Architects' Journal (11.2.43).

42 Labour Research Department Land and Landowners pp. 20-25. The Land Union, the most powerful of these organisations, described the Uthwatt recommendations as 'destructive - destructive not only of the rights of property and freedom of enterprise, but also of the opportunity in country districts to own a newly built house' (quoted in F. Stephenson and P. Pool A Plan for Town and Country (1944) p. 41). The other important landlords' organisation was the National Federation of Property Owners, which represented over 350 affiliated associations and a very large number of property owning companies and trusts (many of whom were interested in the development and proper use of their land). The Federation thought that 'the recommendation to vest the rights of development in the State', if accepted, would have 'a shattering effect on values' (reported in The Architects' Journal (4.3.43)). Instead the Federation claimed that 'individual house ownership makes for

- stability, and is, therefore, highly desirable and should be facilitated', and argued a case for private enterprise to take part in postwar housing developments (National Federation of Property Owners Reconstruction in relation to Post-War Housing (1943) p. 3).
- 43 Reported in The Architects' Journal (23.9.43). D.W. Smith, along with Harold Bellman, was a member of the Private Enterprise Sub-Committee of the CHAC.
- 44 The Onlooker (Nov. 1943) p. 8.
- 45 For the White Paper and the Town and Country Planning Bill (1944), see also J.B. Cullingworth Environmental Planning 1939-1969. Vol. 1 Reconstruction and Land Use Planning 1939-1947 (HMSO 1975) Chs IV and VI.
- 46 The Economist (1.7.44).
- 47 B. Pimlott (ed.) The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton 1940-45 (1986) p. 764.
- 48 The New Statesman and Nation (8.7.44).
- 49 The Economist (14.10.44).
- 50 See his speeches reported in The Times (1.8.42) and (23.12.42). Independent estimates of housing needs were varied. G.D.H. Cole, for instance, estimated a total of 6,540,000 units to be built in 12 years, including 1,875,000 to eliminate overcrowding and slums, and 3.3 million for replacing obsolescent houses (G.D.H. Cole Building and Planning (1945) Ch. VI). On the other hand, Marian Bowley, who opined that 'The blitz has not been on a scale which necessitates rebuilding Britain' and that it could be 'patched up without radical alterations', only envisaged building

between three quarters of a million and one million dwellings in the first 6 years (M. Bowley Britain's Housing Shortage (1944) pp. 3-6). E.D. Simon proposed a three-stage housing programme covering 20 years, in which a total of 7.9 million dwellings would be provided, including 4 million for slum clearance and 1.5 million for obsolescence replacement (E.D. Simon Rebuilding Britain - A Twenty Year Plan (1945) Ch. XIII).

51 The Times (6.11.43).

52 Training for the Building Industry (Presented to Parliament by the Minister of Labour and National Service and the Minister of Works) Cmd. 6428 (HMSO 1943). During the war a great many building workers were recruited to the Forces or were directed to do essential war work. The total of workers being employed in the building industry at the end of the war was 387,000, compared to 1,008,000 at mid-1939. See Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 407 (25.1.45) cols 945-946 and Vol. 411 (7.6.45) cols 1041-1042.

53 See, Hansard (Lords) 5th Series Vol. 130 (8.12.43) cols 179-180 (Lord Woolton) and (8.2.44) cols 697-707 (Lord Portal); Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 395 (1.12.43) col. 372 (Henry Willink).

54 At a Cabinet meeting in October 1943, Winston Churchill issued a short note on the 'Transition Period' and called for most careful preparations and plans to be made for an orderly changeover from war to peace, to be overseen, presumably in his view, by a peacetime

Coalition. This marked an important turning point in Churchill's attitude to postwar planning, which was followed by the appointment of Lord Woolton to the newly-created post of the Minister of Reconstruction, to coordinate various proposals for reform. Henceforth much effort of the coalition Government was directed towards working out measures to be applied during the Transition, in addition to the publication of White Papers setting out the Government's more general approach to a range of postwar reforms. See B. Pimlott (ed.) The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton 1940-1945 pp. 655-657. See also Pimlott's Introduction, in *ibid.*, pp. xxxi-xxxiii.

- 55 British Library of Political and Economic Science [hereafter BLPES] William Piercy Papers 8/18 'Post-War Housing Policy' (26.7.43). William Piercy was one of the Labour Party's policy advisers during the Second World War, being personal assistant, along with E.M.F. Durbin, to the Deputy Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, between 1943 and 1945. He was formerly a lecturer in Modern History at the London School of Economics and had a successful career in business and finance.
- 56 Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 398 (15.3.44) cols 267-360. In fact, Willink later in the year, accepted the recommendation of the Private Enterprise Subcommittee of the CHAC and stated his intention of providing Exchequer subsidy for houses built by private enterprise. See Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 401 (13.7.44) cols 1887-1888.

- 57 Ministry of Health and Ministry of Works Housing Manual
1944 (HMSO 1944) p. 7.
- 58 Ibid., Ch. 1.
- 59 Ibid., Ch. III.
- 60 Ibid., p. 73.
- 61 'Housing Manual 1944' Journal of the Royal Institute of
British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 51 No. 12 (Oct.
1944) p. 314 [italics in original].
- 62 BLPES William Piercy Papers 8/18 Memorandum W. Piercy -
C.R. Attlee (2.6.44). Accordingly Willink secured the
approval of the War Cabinet Reconstruction Committee
for 'some derogation' from the space standard
recommended in the Dudley Report. See CAB 87/5 War
Cabinet Reconstruction Committee Minutes of the 32nd
Meeting (17.4.44) and the 43rd Meeting (5.6.44).
- 63 Ministry of Health and Ministry of Works Housing Manual
1944 Chs II, V.
- 64 Ibid., pp. 14-15.
- 65 Ibid., pp. 75-78.
- 66 Ibid., p. 10.
- 67 The draft report of the Committee (c. Feb. 1946) found
that, with economical planning (e.g. the designing of
kitchens and bathrooms as units to economise on
plumbing and services) and modification in floor
loadings and wall thickness (e.g. the use of filler
joist concrete floors and external walls of brick in
cavity construction), 'there need be little difference
in overall cost of building roads and sewers between
two storey houses, three storey flats and four storey

maisonettes i.e. the type of dwelling which does not require a lift, or apart from the lift in load bearing brick construction up to six storeys in height'. Indeed the provision or absence of a lift appeared to be the dominating factor in the cost of flats. The report concluded that 'in the first post-war years when cost of building may be temporarily out of harmony with the general cost of living it is therefore in our opinion very desirable that so far as Town Planning considerations permit central areas should be developed at medium rather than high densities'. The medium density was taken to be something in the region of 110 persons to the acre, which, in the report's view, could be achieved with a combination of 'low flats and maisonettes' costing not greatly more than the cost of houses giving approximately the same standard of accommodation. (HLG 94/14 'Construction of Flats for the Working Class Families. Report of An Interdepartmental Committee on House Construction First Draft Report' (n.d.)). Precisely why the report was allowed to lapse is not clear, except that the Committee felt that 'the Report laid too much stress on non-structural factors such as site planning and internal planning' and that it needed 'rewriting in simpler language' (HLG 94/8 Interdepartmental Committee on House Construction Minutes of the 23rd Meeting (20.2.46) and Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting (9.4.46)). In view of its somewhat cautious conclusions, in line with the directions taken in the

Housing Manual 1944, it was probably deemed unnecessary to make a fresh statement on flats at the time.

68 C.M. Cohan Works and Buildings (HMSO 1952) pp. 224-225.

69 The Economist (30.9.44).

70 BLPES William Piercy Papers 8/18 Memorandum W. Piercy - C.R. Attlee (2.6.44).

71 BLPES William Piercy Papers 8/18 Memorandum E.M.F.

Durbin and W. Piercy - C.R. Attlee (23.6.44). At a meeting of the War Cabinet Reconstruction Committee, when Willink's proposal was discussed, Clement Attlee (Deputy Prime Minister) and Ernest Bevin (Minister of Labour and National Service) went on record expressing their 'grave misgivings about the effect of these proposals for a subsidy in respect of private housebuilding' (CAB 87/5 War Cabinet Reconstruction Committee Minutes of the 52nd Meeting (10.7.44)). The Treasury was also apprehensive about the proposal. Sir John Anderson (Chancellor of the Exchequer) stated at an earlier meeting of the Reconstruction Committee that the Treasury was in favour of the resumption of private building as soon as possible, as this would be the most effective method of bring down costs. 'Private enterprise, however', as he went on, 'lost some of its virtues if it were subsidised and the experience after the last war suggested that it would be difficult to reduce the subsidy once it had been granted' (CAB 87/5 War Cabinet Reconstruction Committee Minutes of the 43 Meeting (5.6.44)). On the course of discussions on this proposal, see CAB 124/464 entitled 'Proposals to

provide subsidies for houses built by private enterprise'.

- 72 In view of the wartime increase in building costs, the amount of postwar subsidy was to be fixed at a later date when experience had been gained of the current levels of costs and an appropriate level of rent. The amount fixed would then be made retrospective so that local authorities could make an early start in housebuilding. See Ministry of Health Summary Report for the year ended 31st March, 1945 Cmd. 6710 (HMSO 1945) p. 34.
- 73 Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 411 (14.6.45) cols 1763-1765.
- 74 See, for example, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Works Housing Manual 1944 para. 107.
- 75 The Times (27.3.44).
- 76 Hansard (Lords) 5th Series Vol. 131 (2.5.44) cols 565-566.
- 77 This section on prefabricated temporary housing is based on R.B. White Prefabrication. A history of its development in Great Britain (HMSO 1965) pp. 136-149. See also, reports on the progress of the scheme in, The Economist (6.5.44), (5.8.44), (30.9.44) and (16.12.44).
- 78 Ministry of Works House Construction. Summary of Report and Conclusions pp. 137-139.
- 79 See, for example, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Works Housing Manual 1944 Ch. VII; J. Madge (ed.) Tomorrow's Homes. New Building Methods Structures and Materials (1946) Sections IV-VI, VIII.

- 80 R.B. White Prefabrication pp. 160-165. For example, a two-storey block of steel-frame construction with concrete claddings, containing four flats in the manner of cottage flats took only 900 man-hours to build per flat, at a cost of 16s. 3d. per square foot. A 'No-fines' concrete house of 850 square feet consumed 2190 man-hours and cost 18s. 1d. per square foot. Against this, a traditional house of 900 square feet, built to the 'Dudley' standard, consumed 2470 man-hours but cost no more than 16s. 5d. per square foot. According to White, 'all they showed was that despite a recorded reduction of over 50 per cent in building man-hours, the difference in cost per sq. ft. was marginal on the few types that were observed' (ibid., p. 165). Concerning the use of 'No-fines' concrete, the Ministry of Works noted elsewhere that 'A gang consisting of 16 shutterers and 32 concretors - this labour being unskilled - with 2½ joiners for fixing door and window-frames and laying floor and ceiling timber joists' achieved the following output per week: 'Three blocks of four dwellings were built from foundation to damp-proof course level, and four blocks, each containing two 5-room houses, from damp-proof course up to roof level' (Ministry of Works House Construction Appendix. Recommendations for the Use of No-Fines Concrete).
- 81 See material in HLG 101/459 entitled 'LCC experimental houses, 1944-45'.
- 82 HLG 101/459 Letter L.H. Keay - J.C. Wrigley (6.11.44).

- 83 'Prefabrication and Standardisation' Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 51 No. 2 (Dec. 1943) p. 26.
- 84 Comment by A.C. Bunch in 'Prefabrication. Report of an Informal Meeting at the R.I.B.A.' Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 51 No. 7 (May 1944) p. 169.
- 85 E. Maxwell Fry Fine Buildings (1944) p. 62.
- 86 The ABT, at the time, was conducting a vigorous recruiting campaign to organise architects, surveyors, engineers and technical assistants in the cause of egalitarianism and collaboration among the architectural professions, and was affiliated to the NFBTO in 1943. Its increased membership of some 3,000 in the war amounted to a quarter of the RIBA's. For the wartime activity of the ABT, see S.R. Parsons 'Communism in the Professions: The Organisation of British Communist Party among the Professional Workers, 1933-1956' (PhD Dissertation, University of Warwick, 1990) pp. 436-442; A. Jackson The Politics of Architecture. A history of modern architecture in Britain (1970) p. 161.
- 87 B.H. Cox (For the Association of Building Technicians) Prefabricated Homes (1945) p. 5.
- 88 See, for example, J. Madge The Rehousing of Britain pp. 26-28; Labour Research Department Houses for the People (1945) pp. 31-35; Homes for All. The British Broadcasting Corporation Looks at the Problem (Worcester n.d. but c. 1945) pp. 57-65. The designer

and architect, Hugh Casson, who was to be Director of Architecture for the Festival of Britain 1951, wrote his attractively illustrated Penguin booklet Homes by the million (Harmondsworth 1946), in which he related the wartime American effort in prefabrication. As well as its physical achievement of rehousing 8 million people in four years, the social, technical and administrative experience gained in building the houses was appraised. Casson drew lessons from this U.S. experience and set out three fundamental principles of modern housing for Britain to follow: the direction, coordinating effort and assistance of the Government; the reorganisation of the building industry on more modern lines, with the increased use of prefabrication and standardised sizes; and the provision of communal facilities correctly placed in relation to the houses (ibid., p. 48).

89 E.D. Simon Rebuilding Britain - A Twenty Year Plan pp. 52-63.

90 G.D.H. Cole Building and Planning p. 222.

91 Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 389 (4.5.43) cols 114-115.

92 The New Statesman and Nation (12.8.44).

93 'Prefabrication in the Building Industry. A Long History' The National Builder (June 1944) p. 219.

94 Statement by the NFBTE, cited in Council for the Preservation of Rural England War-Time Progress Report Oct. 1943-Oct. 1944 Vol. 14 No. 2 p. 13.

95 Its general secretary, R. Coppock, used the conference platform to ridicule them in 1943: 'One sort of house was to be so light that one could carry it from place to place, as a snail carries its house! We turned the tap on the material and six hours later we had to turn it off because the whole thing had gone down the sink!' (NFBTO The 26th Annual Conference Report (1943) p. 64).

96 See, for example, Coppock's speech to a housing conference organised by ABT, in which he said: 'Our scientific friends are going to any amount of trouble to examine alternative forms of building and to examine the situation from the point of view that building is no longer a capital investment, but only an ordinary commodity or consumer transaction ... Whatever may be said by mechanical genius's who try to sell houses at Harrods, apprenticeship in the industry is necessary. Craftsmanship is vital as far as our industry and nation are concerned' (Association of Building Technicians Housing Problems (1943) pp. 14-16). Commenting on the conference, ABT criticised what it saw as 'an attitude of vested interest' taken up by those in the building industry: 'There is an unmistakable tendency on the part of operative unions to resist the development of new technique because of the upsetting effect it would have on wage agreements. But the duty of the building industry, during the reconstruction period no less than now, is to the people of our country as a whole' (Editorial, in Keystone (July 1943) p. 1).

- 97 NFBTO The 27th Annual Conference Report (1944) pp. 73-82.
- 98 Ibid., p. 75.
- 99 The Economist (16.12.44).
- 100 Ministry of Health Summary Report for the year ended 31st March, 1945 p. 33. The allocations had risen to 130,234 units by the end of August 1945 (The Architect and Building News (14.9.45)). Ultimately a total of 156,667 temporary houses were allocated to local authorities throughout Britain in the years between 1945 and 1948. The total estimated cost was £215,905.000, or an average of £1,294 each, including site works (Temporary Housing Programme (Presented by the Minister of Works to Parliament) Cmd. 7304 (HMSO 1948)).
- 101 CAB 87/36 War Cabinet Housing Committee Minutes of the 7th Meeting (13.3.45).
- 102 Housing (Presented by the Minister of Reconstruction to Parliament) Cmd. 6609 (HMSO 1945).
- 103 The Economist (24.3.45).

Chapter 7 The housing programmes of political parties and the 1945 General Election

To the extent that the coalition Government's housing policy remained provisional in nature, it became essential that the main political parties each prepare a credible housing programme to be put to the electorate with the resumption of peace. The question of postwar housing assumed a vital position in the reconstruction proposals of all the political parties, as public clamour for houses intensified towards the end of the war. There was little doubt that housing was one of the issues uppermost in the mind of the electorate during the 1945 General Election. This chapter will look at the housing programmes put forward by each political party, with particular focus on the Labour Party's policy making, and try to assess the significance of the housing issue as a contributory factor in the Labour victory at the 1945 General Election. In the end, Labour's pragmatic approach to the housing problem coupled with the settlement on the question of land acquisition, contrasted sharply with the Conservative plan, which was in effect a revamped version of the coalition Government's housing policy. The predominance of public interest in housing and a Labour victory at the polls at least suggested a public endorsement of Labour's ability to tackle the housing problem. The incoming Labour Government was given a chance to redeem its pledge that 'it will proceed with a housing programme with the maximum practical speed until every family in this land has a good standard of accommodation'.¹

In the case of the Conservative Party, the Post-War Problems Central Committee was set up in July 1941, with R.A. Butler as its chairman. Initially housing was discussed by the Social Services Committee, which was dissolved in 1943. Thereafter a separate Housing Sub-Committee was appointed with the task of preparing the spadework for a possible election programme on postwar housing. In due course its terms of reference was widened, from the initial one of considering the temporary housing programme, to include long-term policy on housing and to report on both aspects of the question.² J.A.F. Watson, the chairman, was a chartered surveyor and chairman of the Southwark Juvenile Court, with personal interest in housing. Other members included Lord Balfour of Burleigh (chairman of the Kensington Housing Trust), Louis de Soissons (architect, closely associated with the garden city movement), Lord Dudley (chairman of the Sub-Committee on Design of Dwellings, of the Central Housing Advisory Committee), M.F.K. Fleming (member of the Society of Women Housing Managers), J.W. Laing (governing director of John Laing and Son Ltd, a large building firm) and H.R. Selley, M.P. (master builder and past chairman of the London County Council (LCC) Housing Committee). Harold Bellman (chairman of the Abbey National Building Society) was appointed as one of the technical advisers. Thus private enterprise interests were duly represented on the Sub-Committee, befitting the Conservative Party's record in interwar housing policy.

The interim report, Foundation for Housing, was published in March 1944. It dealt mainly with the town planning background of housing, which was preceded by a section on future housing standards. Quoting a number of survey results (including the People's Homes) showing a strong preference for houses or bungalows in support, the report stated:

For every family that requires it we desire to see a separate dwelling soundly constructed and self-contained. It should be near enough to the occupant's place of work, but within reasonable distance of the open country ... Above all, whenever possible, it should consist of a private house with a garden of its own.

Particularly the importance of having a garden ('an annexe to the house into which an expanding family can overflow') was stressed. However, the report also admitted that flats had come to stay. Although families with children would always find flats a poor substitute for a house and garden, 'For some childless couples and for single people who desire to live in the centre of the city close to their work and places of amusement, flats may be very suitable'.³ But the major part of the interim report was devoted to a general discussion on the need for a national planning policy upon which, it was argued, a successful long-term housing policy depended. The report particularly highlighted the close relationship between housing, industry and transport. Consequently the geographical distribution of industry, the coordination of transport and the control of the growth of

towns, together with the protection of agriculture, were seen as the national objectives requiring national action in town and country planning. The report endorsed the recommendation of the Barlow Commission and pressed for an effective central planning authority so that both local authorities and private enterprise might be guided into sound channels of action. As regards the questions of the control of land use and property values the report merely mentioned the Uthwatt Committee and tended to gloss over its recommendations. It did call for 'a practical solution' to the problem of compensation and betterment, for the uncertainty as to future government policy on the issue was seen to be having a detrimental effect on private land development and the housing industry.⁴

The forthright views of the Housing Sub-Committee on town planning were nonetheless remarkable for a Conservative Party document. The report, for instance, took exception to 'the persistence of a perverted conception of private ownership as implying an unchallengeable right to do as one pleased with one's own without regard to one's neighbour's interests'.⁵ These strong words were said to bear the marks of Lord Balfour of Burleigh, who stated his opinion elsewhere that not even the short-term housing programme could be properly prepared without the introduction of a positive planning policy.⁶ At the same time it has been suggested that the Tory Reform Committee (a body of young progressive Tories) became an important source of Conservative ideas in the middle years of the war.⁷ Originally formed in February 1943, 'with the object of

encouraging the Government to take constructive action on the lines of the Beveridge scheme', the Tory Reform Committee took an initiative in framing a progressive Conservative policy on various aspects of postwar reconstruction. Its statement on the use of land echoed the views expressed in Foundations for Housing:

the physical reconstruction of the country can only be effective ... when the Government is prepared to take control of development rights upon a national basis. If this is done we believe it to be possible by the full use of private and public enterprise to create an adequate supply of houses of high standard for our people within ten years of the end of the war.⁸

The Tory Reform Committee rejected a doctrinaire laissez-faire approach and embraced the need for national planning and public control in a new political and economic system, in which both private and public enterprise would have to be used. The fact that the Government's proposals on the control of land use closely corresponded to the statement of principles set out by the Tory Reform Committee could be probably taken as an instance of its influence on the Conservative thinking on social issues. Its members, which included Lord Hinchingbrooke, Peter Thorneycroft, Lady Astor and Quintin Hogg, were also conspicuous among the supporters of the limited Town and Country Planning Bill of 1944.⁹ As far as postwar housing was concerned, a motion was proposed at a Central Council meeting in October 1943, on behalf of the Essex and Middlesex Area Council, urging

the Government to declare 'a definite policy to provide finance, labour and material for the provision of 4 million houses, as a matter of utmost urgency using to the full the resources of Private Enterprise'. Significantly, after a discussion it was decided to call upon the local authorities to share in the housing provision, and the meeting passed the amended motion demanding a definite government policy 'using to the full the resources of Private Enterprise, and of the Local Authorities'.¹⁰

Towards the end of the war, however, Conservative Party policy making increasingly focussed on producing an immediate housing programme, while the arch-Conservative broadsheet, The Daily Telegraph, began to warn the public against the promise of an extensive social reform. Indeed the final report of the Conservative Housing Sub-Committee entitled A Policy for Housing in England and Wales (January 1945) was published with a probable general election very much in mind. Certainly any pretensions to discussing housing in relation to the wider problems of town planning and the control of land use were gone.¹¹

The report put forward the Conservative Party's programme for postwar housebuilding and discussed questions of building agencies, tenure and housing subsidies. As far as the types of houses were concerned, the emphasis of the interim report on houses and gardens was repeated but there were also new elements introduced into the text. In areas of high density the final report suggested reviving terrace houses with such features as central heating and hot water supply systems, and where flats had to be built it called

for greater imagination, both in layout and design:

'Wherever practicable, we favour a mixture of houses and flats in order to avoid the monotonous series of barrack-like blocks which in so many areas were typical of flat development between the wars'. The report also endorsed the standards of space and construction recommended by the Design of Dwellings Sub-Committee.¹² In the main sections a three-stage (i.e. emergency, intermediate and long-term) housing programme was proposed. In all, the report estimated a shortfall of nearly one million houses at the end of the war. The urgent task during the emergency period was to provide shelter for the entire population. For this purpose the report adopted a target figure of 750,000 houses (200,000 in traditional brickwork and the remaining 550,000 made up of temporary houses or permanent houses of non-traditional construction) to be built within two years of the end of the war. The report particularly stressed the building of non-traditional permanent houses, which were 'in every way comparable with those of traditional construction' and could be 'built more quickly and more cheaply and without call to any serious extent upon skilled building labour'. During the emergency period it was also argued that the Government should 'ration and maintain the price controls on essential materials'. After the urgent need of 750,000 houses had been satisfied, a further 250,000 would be required to remedy slums and overcrowding in the intermediate period. Thereafter a steady building programme was to follow, 'to raise the quality of housing throughout

the country and to provide for any subsequent increase in the number of families'.¹³

On the questions of agencies and subsidies, the report argued for 'the combined strength of the local authorities and private enterprise' to be employed in the provision of houses and, above all, urged private enterprise to 'make up its mind to build houses to let in far greater numbers than heretofore'.¹⁴ The need to retain general housing subsidies (the amount to vary with the cost of building) for local authorities, at least for a limited period, was pointed out, as were the measures for promoting the activities of housing associations. But probably a key proposal for the Conservatives in this regard was a lump sum subsidy, amounting to half the increase since 1939 in building costs, for any house built by private enterprise with a floor area not exceeding 1,750 square feet.¹⁵ The report said that the rents and selling prices of subsidised houses built by private enterprise should be controlled for at least five years after they were built.¹⁶ In this connection the report spoke out strongly for the need to provide every opportunity for people to own their own houses, as well as supplying a sufficient number of houses to let in all districts.¹⁷ Finally, the report, for all its proposals, carried with it a grave warning concerning the cost of the programme. Assuming an overall postwar deficiency of one million houses (750,000 units in the immediate programme and a further 250,000 required to replace slums) to be made good by local authorities and private enterprise alike with an aid of a subsidy, the report threw up a figure of 700

million pounds as the total capital cost to the community and stated:

These great sums must be forthcoming either from Government or local funds, to which all sections of the community contribute from savings over a period of years. The relation of this demand on the national resources to other capital demands must be carefully borne in mind. Therefore the urgent need for the continuance of rigid economy, both public and private, is difficult to exaggerate.¹⁸

Thus, in substance, the report's proposals mirrored the housing policy of the Conservative-dominated coalition Government. They were mainly geared to solving the housing shortage in the short run. And with a general election in view, an ambitious target of 750,000 dwellings was set (which was scaled down in the actual Conservative election manifesto to 300,000 permanent houses as proposed by the Government) and plans were made to facilitate private enterprise in housebuilding. The particular concern expressed in the report about the cost and scale of the projected housing programme echoed the position articulated by The Daily Telegraph in 1944 and 1945, when it sided with the cautious argument aired by some Conservatives that 'it would be wrong to promise the country more houses than the men and material available at the end of the hostilities could possibly produce'.¹⁹ In March 1945, the paper threw cold water on the parliamentary debate on postwar housing: 'Everyone recognises that the housing problem is extremely

urgent, but nothing is to be gained by demanding the moon or by concocting paper programmes which no human agency can possibly fulfil'.²⁰ The Conservatives' increasing reservation about the extent of government commitment on housing, in turn, intensified their calls to reinstate private enterprise as the main agency of housing provision. Commenting upon the publication of the report, The Daily Telegraph stated:

Nobody will argue that these figures are exaggerated, and if they are too modest that is all the more reason for employing every possible means of home-building without political prejudice. How can we afford to discard or to handicap private enterprise which, without subsidy, provided more than half the houses built between 1919 and 1939?²¹

The 1945 Conservative Party Annual Conference, whose keynote was struck by Winston Churchill's outburst against 'State-imposed panaceas', was held in March, in anticipation of a general election.²² The Conference adopted a housing motion calling on the Government to formulate without delay a comprehensive building programme and stated that, while recognising that Housing may need to be provided by Local Authorities subsidised by Exchequer Grants and by the Rates to meet the needs of those citizens only able to pay the lowest rent ... Private Enterprise should be encouraged to play its full part, and particularly, that every possible facility should

be made available by way of Loans (or Guarantee of Loans) to enable as many citizens as possible to purchase their own houses.²³

The Daily Telegraph, reporting on the conference proceedings, gave a succinct reminder of the Conservative thinking on housing:

Take, for example, the question of housing, which may well outweigh all other domestic Issues.

Irresponsible persons could promise any number of houses which comes into their head. Conservatives will promise only as many as the whole available resources of the building industry can provide; and that is certainly more than the Socialist programme would produce, because Conservatives will not frown upon private enterprise.²⁴

As far as postwar housing was concerned, the perceived shortage and a strong popular demand for houses had pushed the Conservative Party during the war to embrace a certain degree of government intervention (including subsidies for private builders building houses mainly for sale) and planning in its housing programme. But as the prospect of a return to normalcy gripped the ranks within the Party, its social commitment in postwar housing visibly waned and a much more prominent role was now envisaged for private enterprise in housebuilding which, in effect, meant a continuation of its policy from the 1930s.

The Labour Party similarly established its Central Committee on Reconstruction Problems in 1941, at the instigation of Harold Laski and Hugh Dalton. Emanuel

Shinwell became the chairman and Laski the secretary. A number of sub-committees were appointed under the aegis of the Central Committee to explore the broad field of postwar reconstruction.²⁵ The Labour Party, under the circumstances of the wartime Coalition, could be said to be in a unique position of being both in government and opposition. The Party policy making was to run parallel to the contributions made towards postwar planning by Labour members of the Coalition. The Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee was set up in the autumn of the same year with Silkin as its chairman.²⁶ The membership fluctuated in the course of the Sub-Committee's existence but the core members included Coppock, Osborn, Gilbert McAllister (former Secretary of the Town and Country Planning Association - TCPA), E.G. McAllister (Public Relations Officer, the TCPA), F.W. Dalley (member of the Executive of the TCPA), Rev. Charles Jenkinson (Labour member of Leeds City Council), Lady Simon (education and housing campaigner), M.E. Sutherland (Chief Woman Officer, Labour Party) and Arthur Pearson (Labour whip). Morgan Phillips, secretary of the Research Department of the Party usually sat in attendance. Thus the Sub-Committee, in the main, comprised members from the various sections of the labour movement and a large TCPA contingent.²⁷

Prominent among the problems involved in housing reconstruction, as set out by Silkin, were the replanning and reconstruction of bombed towns and, more generally, the unplanned growth of towns with its associated ills of inadequate open space, ribbon development, suburban sprawl

and the transport muddle. The question of postwar housing was viewed primarily in the context of planned rebuilding and controlled growth of urban areas. This led, in the early stages of the Sub-Committee's work, to the discussion of the machinery of town planning to be adopted and to the issues of land acquisition and compensation.²⁸ The Sub-Committee called for a National Plan, which defined land use with reference to the allocation of areas for housing, agriculture, roads and railways, and industry. To administer this Plan a central planning authority would be necessary, in the form of a Ministry of Planning which 'should have supreme control over land use for industry, agriculture and housing'.²⁹ Whilst the Labour Party remained committed to 'a policy of land nationalisation with compensation for the landowners', the Sub-Committee from the outset kept an open mind on the question. It argued that 'since complete Nationalisation may not be possible immediately the war ends alternative solutions and expedients should be considered'. At this stage (early 1942) the Uthwatt Committee had not yet been appointed. The alternatives considered by the Sub-Committee included the pooling of ownership, municipal land ownership and the acquisition of development rights.³⁰ As far as housing was concerned, the Sub-Committee decided to propose a short-term programme and a long-term policy. Such issues as the provision of communal facilities in relation to new housing and the interior planning of the house were discussed. The Sub-Committee also argued that temporary housing should be

opposed and that one-class communities should be discouraged in postwar housing schemes.³¹

By the end of 1942, probably because of the disagreements with TCPA members on the Sub-Committee on certain aspects of planning policy including the question of houses or flats, Silkin was personally preparing a draft report as a result of a request from the Central Committee (on Problems of Post-War Reconstruction).³² By this time the Uthwatt recommendations had been published, providing a bench mark against which to assess the Party's proposals on land acquisition. Silkin proposed a two-fold solution involving nationalisation of urban land and the acquisition of development rights in rural areas.³³ The draft report was brought before a Central Committee meeting where a number of controversial points including the question of land acquisition were discussed.³⁴ In the light of the Central Committee discussions the Sub-Committee agreed 'to advocate the nationalisation of rural as well as of urban land ... as the ultimate objective', while at the same time it approved of 'the recommendations in the Uthwatt Report on the acquisition of development as a temporary expedient'.³⁵ Interestingly some Central Committee members expressed views in favour of flats. As Ellen Wilkinson pointed out:

In view of the size of the population, if everybody had separate houses, it would lead to more urbanisation of the country. We should advocate well-built flats with communal services with garden or allotments for each tenant in a separate area.

Philip Noel-Baker similarly asserted that 'We should explain the very great advantages of the flat system. Better playgrounds for the children, communal laundries, etc.'.³⁶ In early 1943 Silkin drew up the final draft of the report, intended for inclusion in the Labour Party pamphlet, with the help of Morgan Phillips, who had become more actively involved in the work of the Sub-Committee, presumably to counterbalance the TCPA influence.³⁷ By this time the cleavage of opinion between the two forces appeared to be irreconcilable.³⁸ Osborn, in turn, came up with long amendments which would have had the effect of altering the character of the report. In particular Osborn emphasised the need for the decentralisation of the industrial population and for 'the building of forty or fifty entirely new towns', out of proportion with the rest of the text. He also disapproved of the lukewarm attitude towards the Uthwatt recommendations adopted in Silkin's draft report. Moreover, Osborn, in his amendments, carefully deleted references to flats in the text.³⁹ Silkin took up the matter with the Central Committee, which, after discussion, approved the draft report prepared by Silkin and recommended that the National Executive Committee (NEC), the governing body of the Party, publish the report for discussion at the forthcoming annual conference. This recommendation was unanimously carried by the NEC, and the report was duly published in time for the 1943 Annual Conference of the Labour Party.⁴⁰ Unhappy with these developments, the TCPA members of the Sub-Committee secured an undertaking from Shinwell and Laski of the Central Committee that the report

would be reviewed by the Sub-Committee in the light of the debate at the Annual Conference.⁴¹

The report, Housing and Planning after the War, outlined the short-term and long-term housing programmes and proposed high standards in the planning of the house. It also dealt with such problems as the blitzed areas, the unplanned growth of towns and the location of industry, and reviewed the Uthwatt proposals on compensation and betterment. As the report stated, 'Housing and essential services must come first' in the immediate postwar years. Thus the provision of accommodation (for families returning from evacuation, ex-servicemen and women, and newly-married couples), necessary shops, factories, hospitals and other services constituted in the short-term programme. In the long run the report proposed to build 'at least 4,000,000 houses over a period of 10 years'.⁴² The report advocated setting a high standard in the design, layout and equipment of postwar dwellings including the provision of a parlour or second living room, of constant hot water and even of such amenities as refrigerators and central heating.⁴³ 'The vexed question of flats as against cottages' was thoroughly dealt with in the report, which put forward a reasoned case for providing flats as well as single family dwellings:

In a well-planned community there is room for both types of dwellings. Older people with or without grown-up families, young couples without children, single persons, or those who by the nature of their work find it necessary to live in central areas would probably find flats more convenient.

Some housewives may be attracted to flats on account of the greater ease with which they can be run.

Above all, the report argued that local authorities 'should be free to choose between flats and single family dwellings according to suitability in each case, regardless of the cost of the land'.⁴⁴ In the planning of flats, 'the cold, inhospitable, barrack-like lay-out and appearance' should be avoided, while allotments and gardens for those tenants who desired them should be provided. The report also called for the provision of a private balcony in every flat and of lifts both for passengers and for goods in the blocks of flats over three storeys.⁴⁵

On the important question of land acquisition, the report maintained its traditional stance: 'The Labour Party remains convinced that the most satisfactory way of dealing with the question of land is by nationalisation'. The report was rather equivocal in its assessment of the Uthwatt recommendations. The proposal for the acquisition of development rights in rural areas was welcomed as going 'a long way in non-urban areas towards solving the problems so far as they hinder effective planning'. With regard to urban areas, the report felt that the periodic levy on the increase in annual site value of land failed to deal with the main obstacle to proper planning, namely, the high cost of land. Hence planning authorities were reluctant to provide much needed open spaces in central crowded areas, for fear of imposing heavy rate burdens on their ratepayers when these areas became revenue producing if built upon.

Similarly, in the past, when a local authority had had to build on expensive sites owing to the local demand for housing, it had been obliged to crowd as many dwellings as possible to reduce the land cost per dwelling, regardless of considerations of good planning. Nevertheless the report also admitted that, if well administered, the periodic levy scheme 'might be accepted as a step in the right direction'.⁴⁶ In general, housing subsidies were viewed with disfavour, and to achieve the ideal of building dwellings without the need for subsidy the report thought it essential, among other things, 'to reduce both the cost of land and of building to the lowest possible level'.⁴⁷ Hence the need to retain control over both building materials and new construction, especially in the immediate postwar period. In order to reduce building costs, the development of alternative materials and standardisation of fittings was suggested. The report also considered that some form of national control of the building industry might be necessary, so that greater efficiency and modern methods of construction would be introduced, at the same time as safeguarding wages and conditions of employment for the operatives.⁴⁸ Finally, the report stated that the location of industry was to be 'controlled in the interests of the community by means of a National Plan prepared by a Central Planning Authority under the direction of and responsible to a Minister of National Development'. There would then be a considerable measure of decentralisation of population, by building new towns as well as by enlarging and expanding existing towns.⁴⁹

At the 1943 Annual Conference, the NEC introduced a resolution, in conjunction with the report, Housing and Planning after the War. The resolution called for the continued control of building materials and their price, a planned expansion of the building industry and an improved standard of housing. It demanded that the housing programme be linked up with and form part of 'a national plan for the rebuilding and redeveloping of congested and badly-planned cities and towns and those damaged by enemy action'. In carrying out this programme of housebuilding and redevelopment such factors as the location of factories, commercial land and buildings, the provision of open space and the coordination of transport were to be taken into account. Where there was congestion of industry, decentralisation might be considered by the creation of new towns. The resolution, moreover, reaffirmed the view that 'the only means of securing courageous, imaginative, and efficient planning is by the public ownership of land'.⁵⁰ In the ensuing discussion the report was criticised for being half-hearted about public ownership of land. An amendment to the NEC resolution was tabled which declared that 'only a Socialist Government' could deal with the problem of housing and town planning. Silkin, in reply, argued that the public ownership of land was taken care of in the terms of the resolution and then reasoned with the Conference:

We have to visualise the possibility that there may not be a Socialist Government after the war, and we have still got to do all we can to provide

homes for the people, to rebuild our cities and plan in the most satisfactory way.

The amendment was defeated and the conference approved the Executive's resolution.⁵¹

During the second half of 1943, a notable change took place in the Labour Party's policy making process, with consequences for the work of the Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee. Soon after the Annual Conference in June, the NEC decided to wind up the Central Committee on Reconstruction Problems. This course of action was adopted on the recommendation of the Policy Committee (a standing committee of the Labour Party, of which Dalton was the Chairman), whose existence in the early years of the war had been rather overshadowed by the activities of the Central Committee on postwar planning.⁵² Henceforth the Policy Committee under the direction of Dalton regained its position as the central policy making body of the Labour Party.⁵³

As part of this changeover, the Policy Committee took stock of the work of various sub-committees taken over from the Central Committee. As far as the Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee was concerned, it was agreed to convene a further meeting 'in fulfilment of the pledge given' to the dissatisfied TCPA members of the Sub-Committee, to reconsider the report in the light of its reception at the annual conference. But in the meantime the Policy Committee also took matters into its own hands by suggesting that 'it would be advantageous for the Policy Committee to determine its views on the Uthwatt Report, so

that appropriate guide may be given to the sub-committee on one of the major points at issue'.⁵⁴ Dalton circulated a memorandum in September 1943, advocating the acceptance of the Uthwatt recommendations as a Party policy. Cases were instanced of reconstruction schemes in blitzed towns being held up through lack of powers to acquire the necessary land. Dalton also took care to placate those who held to land nationalisation, by adding that 'every attempt made to implement the Uthwatt recommendations would increasingly force the community to recognise that the simplest and most economical solution is the one advocated by the Party - wholesale nationalisation'.⁵⁵ As a result it was agreed at the subsequent Policy Committee meeting to accept 'as a matter of immediate urgency' the recommendations of the Uthwatt Committee which empowered local authorities to acquire the whole of reconstruction areas at prices not exceeding those of March 1939. The principle of compensation in respect of development rights was accepted, as was the principle that any undeveloped land required for development should first be purchased by the State. The Policy Committee also approved the principle that betterment conferred upon private property by communal action should be collected from the owners. It further urged the Ministry of Town and Country Planning 'as the Central Planning Authority' to press ahead with the establishment of joint planning authorities to facilitate regional planning.⁵⁶ The NEC approved the Policy Committee decisions on the Uthwatt Report 'subject to the reaffirmation of the traditional Party Policy in favour of Nationalisation'. It was also

agreed that 'steps be taken to secure press and other publicity for the proposals'.⁵⁷

Meanwhile the projected meeting of the Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee to thrash out the differences of opinion among the members came to nothing and it was finally decided that 'as the differences were fundamental in character, those who disagreed with the view of the Chairman should prepare a document for the consideration of the Policy Committee'.⁵⁸ In response to this a set of memoranda was prepared by TCPA members of the Sub-Committee, setting out their grievances and disagreements. The covering note jointly signed by Dalley, Jenkinson, Gilbert, McAllister and Osborn referred to a possible anomaly in the composition of the Sub-Committee but maintained that they had been invited to serve because of their knowledge of the subject. There was certain bitterness about the fact that the report drafted by Silkin, Housing and Planning after the War, had been accepted by the Party without consideration of the views held by 'the working majority' of the Sub-Committee. It urged the NEC to reconsider the report in the light of the differences that had arisen within the Sub-Committee.⁵⁹ As might have been expected from the substance of Osborn's amendments put to Silkin's draft report earlier in the year, the disagreements centred on the emphasis to be placed on the policy of decentralisation, the Party's attitude towards the Uthwatt Report and the desirability of building flats in postwar housing schemes. Jenkinson, in his memorandum, stressed that the decentralisation of industry and population should be 'the FOUNDATION of a sound national

policy'. Failing this there would be a further unplanned growth of towns, leading to suburban sprawl by private enterprise building and the despoliation of the countryside. Local authorities, on the other hand, would be left to deal with the unprofitable problems of the congested central areas, with no practicable solution except a resort to blocks of flats involving higher rents and rates and bigger subsidies. Dalley similarly recorded his objections to the report. It failed to emphasise 'the house garden standard' in housing, relegated to the end 'the supremely important question of decentralisation, without which the problem cannot be solved' and damned the Uthwatt Report with faint praise 'instead of treating it as an authoritative Report which, having regard to the urgency of the situation, holds the field'.⁶⁰

In reply to this criticism, Silkin put forward his case for prioritising the question of postwar housing and the manner in which it was to be solved. As he put it:

The real point of difference between us is that of the question of Flats versus Houses in large towns, the Osbornites are absolutely uncompromisingly opposed to flats. They might permit a few, but Osborn's idea is really something like 5-10%. To achieve this in the large towns will involve an enormous amount of decentralisation ... Decentralisation of industry on a large scale, so long as it is privately owned, is fraught with immense difficulties, and anyway cannot be carried out quickly ... The

Osbornites do not complain about what is in the report. There is nothing there to which they object except my luke-warmness on the Uthwatt, but they think the emphasis is wrong.

Decentralisation of industry should be stressed as the paramount factor. I think this is wrong. I think that we should be failing in our duty if we did not stress housing first ... Everybody is concerned about housing after the war. People are, I am afraid, not so much concerned with town planning and decentralisation.⁶¹

The Policy Committee, having given consideration to these conflicting views, decided at the end of 1943 to dissolve the Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee.⁶²

No further statements on housing emanated from the Labour Party for the remainder of the war, though the questions of postwar housing and town planning continued to be debated at the annual conferences in 1944 and 1945. Interestingly, the Policy Committee decision to embrace the Uthwatt proposals was barely reported, let alone publicised, in the 1944 Annual Conference Report.⁶³ At the Conference itself an elaborate resolution on housing and town planning was moved on behalf of the NEC. The resolution declared that 'the bad housing conditions and the great housing shortage constituted the most urgent and critical of our social problems'. It repeated all the demands made at the Conference the previous year but also added a significant number of new proposals in relation to housing. The resolutions criticised the Government's plans 'as totally

inadequate' and called for the allocation of a Minister of Cabinet rank with adequate powers. Housing requirements should be determined in advance so that a definite housing programme could be prepared for a number of years ahead and the permanent houses to be built would conform to the standards set out by the Dudley Sub-Committee with all modern amenities and labour-saving devices. Large-scale productions of standardised fittings and household equipment was called for, using redundant government-owned and controlled war factories. Research into suitable alternative materials for building was urged. The resolution also singled out the bombed-out families and newly married ex-servicemen and women, whose needs would be especially catered for, and demanded that 'no houses be permitted to be built for sale until at least the immediate shortage of houses to let has been made good'. Pending the nationalisation of land, the resolution called for the compulsory acquisition of land for housing purposes to be accelerated and simplified.⁶⁴ The NEC resolution was carried by the Conference, along with a number of other resolutions moved by local delegates. One such resolution moved by the Holborn Labour Party urged a party campaign to popularise well-planned, modern flats while the East Birkenhead Divisional Labour Party criticised the monotony and uniformity of existing Corporation housing estates ('all the brick boxes with lids on') and called for a more communal form of dwellings built around greens with recreational and cultural facilities after C.H. Reilly's scheme for a housing estate in Birkenhead.⁶⁵

By 1944, the Labour Party therefore had a range of proposals to deal with the postwar housing problem. Even if some of the proposals were ill-defined, the Party made known its willingness to tackle the immediate shortage and its commitment to a large-scale, long-term housing programme. Most importantly, there was clear recognition of the need to solve the issue of land acquisition, in order to carry out comprehensive schemes for the redevelopment of towns, of which planned housebuilding formed an essential part. The Labour Party did not produce a land policy of its own during the war but, in supporting the full implementation of the Uthwatt recommendations, it distinguished itself from the wartime coalition Government and from the Conservative Party which had nothing to say on the questions of land in its housing policy statement.

A large TCPA presence in the housing policy making process was probably a mixed blessing for the Labour Party. It brought to the deliberations of the Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee a good grounding in town planning matters (though, admittedly, Silkin was an expert in housing and town planning in his own right) and might have played a part in the Party adopting the Uthwatt recommendations in place of outright land nationalisation. Here again, though, Dalton's initiative in getting the Policy Committee and the NEC to agree to the recommendations might have proved crucial. The fact that no Party campaign was launched advocating the Uthwatt Report, as promised by the NEC, showed a strong undercurrent of opinion in favour of land nationalisation, both at the grassroots level and within the

Party hierarchy. Silkin himself remained loyal to the idea of public ownership of land throughout the war.⁶⁶ On the other hand, the TCPA's particular brand of planning philosophy, especially in the field of housing, was at odds with Silkin's thinking on the matter and ultimately with the more pragmatic stance, taken by the Labour Party, of providing much needed housing mainly within the existing patterns of urban development.

Labour's pragmatism also dispensed with the services of professionals on the questions of architecture and town planning. Neither architect nor town planner was to be found among the membership of the Housing and Town Planning Committee despite the existence of a more reformist outlook evident within these professions. The traditional class antipathy was probably a factor preventing collaboration. Housing and Planning after the War, in its only passage commending the role of architects in designing efficient and beautiful buildings, noted:

Greater encouragement and help are needed for the architectural profession, and entry thereto by the sons and daughters of working-class parents should be facilitated as well as assistance given at the outset of their career.⁶⁷

Thus Labour betrayed its suspicion of largely middle-class professionals. But this feeling of unease appeared to be mutual. As Thomas Sharp later remarked:

It is a saddening experience to find Socialist governing bodies so little interested in beauty, and indeed actively antagonistic to it. When

beauty is mentioned, trade unionists and local Labour councillors are apt to reach for their guns. Labour in Durham was altogether unreasoning and became quite hysterical in its demands for the erection of the power station which would have raped the finest cathedral in Britain. Oxford Labour is more concerned to keep the Nuffield works at Cowley than to secure the future of one of the half-dozen noblest cities of the world.⁶⁸

In addition to the two main political parties, the Liberal Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) also produced their respective proposals for postwar housing. Both parties committed themselves to a long-term programme of building 4 million houses in ten years. There was little difference of opinion on improved housing standards between the CPGB and the two main parties, Labour and the Conservatives, nor was there much divergence of views on the urgency of the need to reach those standards. The Liberal document, Land and Housing (no date but c.1943) mainly considered the town planning aspects of housing and the land issue. It called for a national plan to deal with the main traffic routes, the preservation of the countryside, the growth of towns, green belts and the location of industry. The Liberal report also characteristically warned against rigid planning. It urged that planning should not be too rigid in segregating industrial from residential or commercial areas, or in dividing a district into areas of large and small houses. The former led to wasteful travel and the latter to

'accentuation of our national vice of snobbery'.⁶⁹ As regards housing, the need to limit any further growth of large towns was stressed. Hence in proceeding with postwar housing, the report called for the reconstruction of existing towns with houses and flats, the building of suburbs beyond the green belt connected with the city by a rapid transport system and the creation of new towns with its own industries.⁷⁰ A distinctive feature of the Liberal report could be seen in its policy on land. It called for the adoption of the Uthwatt proposal for the immediate acquisition of development rights in all land outside built-up areas. As far as urban land was concerned, the Liberal report added a scheme for gradually basing the assessment of local government rates on the capital value of sites to the proposed periodic levy on increases in the site value. This scheme, it argued, would have the effect of reducing the economic rent of a new working-class house and make slum clearance and rebuilding a commercial proposition for the owners.⁷¹

In the case of the CPGB the emphasis was very much on public control of the whole building process and housing industry. The CPGB report, A Memorandum on Housing (1944), called for 'the State to control and organise the resources of the nation in land, finance, materials and labour for the purpose of providing homes for the people'.⁷² Legislation would be introduced to bring all land under public ownership⁷³, while it was proposed that central government should control rents, building societies and the building industry. The local authorities were visualised as playing

a predominant role, entrusted with carrying out a large part of the housing programme. Moreover, of all the parties the CPGB was most keen on the idea of harnessing the technical advances that were being refined during the war (e.g. in the speedy construction of factories, aerodromes and hostels, and in the mass production of aeroplanes) to the swift and satisfactory solution of the housing problem. The CPGB report advocated 'the maximum use of mass produced standardised parts coupled with new methods of speedy assembly on the site'. Under public control, science and the benefits of mass production used for the purpose of meeting people's needs could 'mean a higher standard of stability, warmth, hygiene and quietness, as well as incorporating refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, metal sinks, modern lighting, fittings, airing and heating facilities'.⁷⁴ As a means of achieving public control over the building process, the CPGB proposed in a further policy memorandum the establishment of joint production committees throughout the building industry, which would set targets and work to maintain high standards of construction, as well as safeguarding the wages, hours and conditions of the workers. These committees were to include technical staff in addition to the workers' representatives.⁷⁵ The CPGB report also discussed town planning and called for a limit to the further extension of large cities, the ending of ribbon development and the preservation of all existing open spaces. The focus was, however, very much on the reconstruction of existing urban areas and consequently there was no mention of new towns. The primary task was

seen to be the creation of residential communities with simultaneous provision of associated amenities in the way of shopping facilities, workplaces, transport, and social and recreational facilities.⁷⁶ One other feature of the CPGB report was its advocacy of flats. The combination of houses and flats as proposed in the County of London Plan was held up as a model for rehousing operations in large cities. It went on to argue the advantages modern flats possessed over separate houses, that they could be provided with 'lifts, central heating and hot water service, sun balconies, roof gardens, club facilities, efficient refuse disposal, together with open space, children's playing grounds and amenities free from traffic'.⁷⁷

Thus, by the beginning of 1945, all the political parties had prepared their respective proposals, with different emphases, for the solution of the housing problem. With the end of the war in Europe in May 1945, the wartime coalition Government finally broke up and a general election was called for July. Meanwhile, during 1944 and 1945 there appeared to be a renewed surge of public opinion demanding 'definite planning' for postwar reconstruction. To be sure, this upsurge was qualified by 'evergrowing' scepticism that 'it will be just like the last time; they promised us the moon and we got the depression'. However, more specifically it was said that 'A sure steady job and a decent house at a rent we can afford to pay' were the two things for which people hoped most.⁷⁸ Housing and employment vied with one another as the chief topic of concern among the general public. According to a series of polls carried out by

Gallup throughout 1944 and up to the 1945 General Election, housing actually took over from employment in August 1944, in popular estimation, as the most urgent domestic problem facing the country after the war.⁷⁹

The Ministry of Information's weekly reports on home morale from this period were full of references to widespread and often bitter complaints about the shortage of every kind of accommodation, disquiet and frustration at housing prospects after the war, and dissatisfaction with what was felt to be the Government's slowness, vagueness and even apathy in dealing with the situation. The public was particularly critical of the Government for failing to give local authorities a definite indication of forthcoming financial assistance, to enable them to start building immediately.⁸⁰ The categories of people especially hard hit and aggrieved by this housing crisis were families with children, young married couples who had 'never had a chance to live a married life under decent conditions' or who had to live with their parents, transferred war workers and returning servicemen and women. Cases were cited of people 'sleeping in Andersons' or 'living in a corner of the kitchen'.⁸¹ The prefabricated bungalow, which was taking shape during 1944, elicited a fair amount of comment from the public. These were generally unfavourable, because of its appearance (described as 'a glorified shed' or a 'tin' house) and smallness, its short life, its unsuitability for a wet northern climate, its layout (e.g. the absence of a back door or the bedrooms leading out of the other rooms) and, increasingly, of its high cost ('indicates profiteering

somewhere'). People also feared that these prefabricated houses would become permanent, and there was anxiety lest the Government was making no other provision in housing. At the same time some people approved of them.⁸² Women particularly liked the kitchen, with its labour-saving devices, and the fittings, especially the built-in wardrobes. Others felt that prefabricated houses were better than nothing or than 'the horror of sharing a house'.⁸³ People certainly expressed a good deal of interest and, thus, there was great disappointment towards the end of 1944 when it became clear that the original Portal bungalows were not forthcoming.⁸⁴ The tone of these Ministry of Information reports became progressively gloomier with talk of riots and serious unrest. The final weekly report noted at the end of 1944:

There are bitter complaints of the present shortage and high prices of accommodation, and widespread anxiety about the future ... the public is said to be growing "more and more restless on account of Government delay".⁸⁵

Gallup polls suggested that housing commanded most people's attention right up to the general election. In May 1945, 41 per cent of those asked thought that housing would be the most discussed topic in the coming general election, whereas full employment came a poor second with only 15 per cent of respondents thinking so. Further, a mere 6 per cent of them mentioned social security. Probably of more significance was another Gallup poll taken during the general election which asked respondents to name a

government (Conservative, Liberal or Labour) which they thought would better handle the housing problem. Labour was the popular choice with 42 per cent endorsements, while the figures plumping for Conservative and Liberal governments were 25 per cent and 13 per cent respectively. By the end of the general election the proportion of those who thought that housing was the most urgent domestic issue had risen to 63 per cent.⁸⁶ Mass-Observation similarly found from its survey of constituencies in London that 'The issues uppermost in people's minds were straightforward practical ones'. On the evidence of a poll taken for the survey, housing was the most important issue being discussed during the election.⁸⁷ The tenor of popular desire for a house was struck best by the remark of a young middle-class woman, married and homeless, at the 'Daily Herald' Post-War Homes Exhibition, which coincided with the general election:

They could just give me any of it, and I should think it wonderful. Honestly I liked it all. I'm so desperate for a house I'd like anything. I can't criticise or judge it at all - four walls and a roof is the height of my ambition.⁸⁸

Both the main parties in the general election placed due emphasis on housing and their respective abilities to tackle the problem. The Conservative plan⁸⁹ was an elaborate and intensified version of the coalition programme, intended to deal with the immediate shortage with specific targets set for the first two years. The extravagant target set in the Final Report of the Conservative Housing Sub-Committee had gone but, in line

with its traditional thinking, private enterprise was to be given 'the fullest encouragement to get on with the job' alongside local authorities. The Conservative Propaganda also gave people a reminder of the cost involved and, exhorting them on the need for an export drive, emphasised 'the flexibility, experience and pioneering spirit of free enterprise' as opposed to planning.⁹⁰ The Conservative policy beyond the first two years was ill-defined, as was its position on the wider issues of town planning and particularly on the question of land acquisition which affected the rebuilding of bombed areas and housing.⁹¹ Labour, on the other hand, combined its commitment to the solution of the housing problem with a modest statement of its intentions in the manifesto.⁹² In particular the need for an efficient building industry and land planning was stressed. Bulk purchases of material by government and local authorities, together with price control, was called for and the utilisation of modern methods and new materials was urged. Labour committed itself to the Uthwatt Report as a solution for 'the crippling problems of land acquisition and use', though in theory the Party also retained its commitment to land nationalisation. Housing, moreover, was to be dealt with in relation to 'good town planning - pleasant surroundings, attractive lay-out, efficient utility services, including the necessary transport facilities'.

In the election campaign itself housing again appeared to be the most important issue, with no less than 97 per cent of the Labour candidates and 94 per cent of Conservatives raising the question of housing in their

election addresses'.⁹³ But here again there were significant differences in the way the two parties treated housing in the campaign. The Conservatives, apart from their plans to court the small house buyers and to put private enterprise on its feet, were often reduced to attacking their opponents' proposals, as in the case of Ernest Bevin's remark about his plan to build four or five million houses 'in a very quick time', which attracted Tory cries of 'Shameless Vote-Cadging', or Lord Beaverbrook's assertion that too much control held up housebuilding.⁹⁴ Labour, on the whole, tried to put across its manifesto pledges to the electorate in a concerted and detailed manner, emphasising planning and organisation in the solution of the housing problems. Wilkinson spoke of the need 'to harness the technique used in the war, mass production and control over materials and prices, to the task of house production. She was also scathing about the inability of private enterprise to provide good standard housing:

If you want some practical examples of the difference between public and private enterprise in housebuilding, compare any of the local authorities' estates, with those mushroom projects whose promoters were only concerned to get the biggest profit possible.⁹⁵

Lord Latham attacked 'unfettered landlordism and the high cost of land' that stood in the way of better housing and the rebuilding of blitzed areas, and argued a case for Labour's solution to land acquisition.⁹⁶ Herbert Morrison

promised that a Labour Government would 'go ahead with great energy and vigour with the construction of houses of all types until every family in the country has a reasonable house in which to live'.⁹⁷

In the event, the Labour Party swept to power, winning 393 seats with nearly 48 per cent of the vote. The Conservative Party was reduced to 213 seats, while the Liberals returned only 12 M.P.s.⁹⁸ The extent of the shift in popular allegiance was most pronounced in those areas which suffered the devastation of the blitz, for instance, as in Plymouth and Hull, where all three seats were captured in each case by Labour.⁹⁹ One Tory candidate in Plymouth gave his view of the defeat, which might have been repeated several times over across the country:

I ascribe the change of opinion in Plymouth to the lack of housing accommodation and the overcrowding in the partially blitzed areas, which have caused a general feeling of resentment against conditions as they are today.¹⁰⁰

In fact The Municipal Journal, 'the eye and the ear of the civic services', was in no doubt about the significance of the housing issue in the outcome of the election:

There can be little doubt that one of the reasons for the defeat of Mr. Churchill's Government at the General Election was widespread dissatisfaction with their attitude to the housing question. They made the grave mistake of thinking that this priority number one problem could be tackled by old threadbare methods, whereas a new

outlook and a deeper realisation of the fundamentals of the problems were required.¹⁰¹ Nationally, the Daily Herald saw the general election as a triumph for Labour's 'bold and constructive policy for the future',¹⁰² while The Times, in a more analytical vein, noted that

the voters, who were deeply interested in real, urgent, and essentially non-party subjects such as housing of the people, seem to have visited their disappointment on the side which could be represented as taking but a perfunctory interest in the reconstruction programme.¹⁰³

Similarly, G.D.H. Cole, looking back in 1949, noted that the electors voted in 1945 'for more speed in developing the social service state, for less social inequality, and for full employment policies as a means to social security'.¹⁰⁴ Scarcely had the news of the Labour victory subsided than Sir Stafford Cripps, who was to become a major figure in the 1945 Labour Government, opened a housing exhibition with these words:

The aim we have before us is to bring into the lives of all the families in our land something of the ease and graciousness which has hitherto only been possible for a comparatively few.¹⁰⁵

To achieve this aim, Aneurin Bevan was appointed Minister of Health in charge of housing, in addition to his presiding over the establishment of the National Health Service.¹⁰⁶ Bevan accordingly enunciated the Labour Government's policy, in which a number of principles were

set out in its approach to postwar housing. Firstly, Bevan would concentrate on the building of permanent houses. His dislike of prefabricated temporary houses, which he called 'rabbit hutches', ¹⁰⁷ was well known. Soon after the election of the Labour Government local authorities were urged to have the first instalment of this permanent housing programme under construction before the autumn of 1945. The temporary housing programme, inherited from the coalition Government was to be carried out as long as it did not interfere with the rate of building permanent houses.¹⁰⁸

Secondly, the main priority of the programme would be given to local authorities, building houses to let for 'the lower income groups'.¹⁰⁹ Thus the responsibility for the provision of the vast majority of houses was firmly placed upon local authorities. This brought about widespread criticism from opponents, who saw it as a case of his doctrinaire adherence to public authorities.¹¹⁰ To which Bevan replied with a memorable phrase:

If we are to plan we have to plan with plannable instruments, and the speculative builder, by his very nature, is not a plannable instrument.¹¹¹

The Labour Government did allow private enterprise housing for sale or rent on a limited scale. The local authorities were empowered to license private houses up to a limit of £1,200 (£1,300 in London), with a floor area not exceeding 1,000 square feet. These licences were strictly for the purpose of supplementing the main programme.¹¹² Thirdly, Bevan, at a stroke, raised the standards of houses to be built under the Labour Government. In fact, in view of the

great strain on materials and labour and, therefore, of anticipated high building costs, there were calls to reduce housing standards.¹¹³ Bevan firmly set his face against such a solution, which he said was 'a coward's way out':

We are building houses for a very long time and I propose to seek a solution of high prices in some effective form of control, in proper costing of building materials and components and in scientific building organisations.¹¹⁴

He rejected the meagre space standard set out in the Housing Manual 1944 and, in a Ministry of Health circular dated 15 November 1945, laid down improved standards of accommodation for the guidance of local authorities. They were instructed to prepare plans on the basis of a floor area ranging from 900 to 950 square feet for an ordinary three-bedroom house. Bevan also specified that such a house should include a second w.c. downstairs, in addition to the upstairs w.c., which could now be combined with the bathroom to provide more space.¹¹⁵

Despite vehement calls from the opposition, Bevan resolutely refused to announce targets in public which would be 'demagogic' (though the Cabinet did adopt the immediate figure of 300,000 put out by the coalition Government for programming purposes¹¹⁶): 'I tell the House, bluntly and frankly, that I am not going to do any of that crystal gazing. We have had too many programmes. It is time we had houses'.¹¹⁷ Later in 1947, with slow progress on the housing front still troubling the Government, Bevan

expounded his housing philosophy most clearly to the Labour Party Conference:

at this moment, and for a few years to come, we are going to be judged by the number of houses that we build. In 10 years time we shall be judged by the kind of houses that we build and where we are building them, and I am not going to be panicked into doing a bad job.¹¹⁸

With regard to the financial aspect of local authority housing, Bevan introduced the Housing (Financial and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1946, which proposed a generous settlement on the question of subsidy provision.¹¹⁹ The principle of joint responsibility was maintained, but the Central Government now shouldered a greater burden since the proportions of new national subsidies to rate contributions was three to one. The subsidy period was also extended from 40 to 60 years. The new subsidies would be payable in respect of dwellings provided for general housing, as well as to houses provided for slum clearance and the relief of overcrowding. Thus a standard three-bedroom house received £16.10s. from the Exchequer and £5.10s. came from the rates. This compared with the existing subsidy of £5.10s. per house from the Exchequer and £2.15s. from the rates. The Act also provided a sliding scale of subsidies for flats on sites of high value and there would be additional subsidies where it was necessary to provide lifts. These higher subsidies were to be further available in cases of mixed development with houses and flats, thus affording much greater variety in future housing

schemes. Higher subsidies were also proposed for rural houses, to cover the low rent-paying capacity of tenants. Furthermore, the Government, recognising the need to supplement traditional methods of construction, undertook to sponsor certain types of permanent prefabricated dwellings for bulk production by local authorities. Thus an extra capital grant was paid under the Act, to reduce the cost of approved types to local authorities to approximately that of a traditional house.¹²⁰

Finally, Bevan was not only concerned with housing in terms of bricks and mortar, albeit that of very much improved standards, but also in relation to the wider issue of physical planning and community requirements. He had had experience of dealing with housing as a councillor in Tredegar in the 1920s and had also been involved in the medical welfare schemes in South Wales.¹²¹ And as his subsidy proposal in favour of schemes incorporating mixed development of houses and flats suggested, Bevan's mind was imbued with new ideals on housing, which had been developed during the war, and their potential in transforming the lives of ordinary people:

I believe that if people live in squalid and ugly surroundings, or even in unimaginative and unbeautiful surroundings, it profoundly affects their spiritual and mental character.¹²²

Soon after becoming Minister of Health, Bevan appointed J.H. Forshaw as Chief Architect and Housing Consultant to the Ministry.¹²³ In him, Bevan had a dependable, socially conscious expert on local authority housing at hand.

Bevan expressed his wish to avoid urban sprawl, because it made 'communal activities and a corporate life difficult' and resulted in 'the loss of valuable agricultural land'. He felt that 'the British people had had their attitude to flats poisoned by tenements' and advocated experimenting with high buildings in a park-like setting:

High buildings that were architecturally seemly would fit perfectly well into the rural landscape ... Better provision had to be made for the working wife. A crèche in the building, central heating, and laundries would all help; but would be difficult to provide in Garden Cities and urban sprawl.¹²⁴

Furthermore, Bevan repeatedly stressed the need to create balanced residential communities, consisting of various household types. Bevan was particularly critical of one-class estates, where, on the one hand, one had 'large numbers of businessmen with carefully rolled umbrellas, catching suburban trains, leaving little colonies where there was not a sign of work at all and going to the city, returning at night to their twilight houses', while low income groups were left 'clustered round factories and mines and workshops'.¹²⁵ Bevan condemned these respective colonies as 'castrated communities ... a wholly evil thing, from a civilised point of view'. To avoid this segregation by social class, he encouraged local authorities in their layouts 'to make provision for building some houses also for the higher income groups at higher rents'. Local authorities were thus urged to provide for all income

groups: 'The full life should see the unfolding of a multi-coloured panorama before the eyes of every citizen every day'. Moreover, provision of dwellings in various types and sizes, Bevan argued, would lead to 'varied architectural compositions' and 'variety in design'.¹²⁶ In his advocacy of egalitarian communities Bevan conjured up a comforting vision of medieval village life, which, if somewhat incongruous with modern-day living, was nevertheless evocative:

If therefore, we are to have communities appropriate to the sort of society in which we are going to live all our communities will have to be much more egalitarian. We cannot have aggregations of ostentatious living in one place and in another place colonies of envious, self-evident workers. We have to have communities where all the various income groups of the population are mixed; indeed we have to try to recapture the glory of some of the old English villages, where the small cottages of the labourers were cheek by jowl with the butcher's shop, and where the doctor could reside benignly with his patients in the same street.¹²⁷

Thus Bevan saw his mission in housing as far exceeding that of merely providing sufficient numbers of good standard houses, an awesome task in itself.¹²⁸ He never elaborated on the probable shape or detailed requirements of a residential community. There was little doubt, however, that the Labour Government had taken on board the idea, if

ill-defined, of creating real communities, out of its social provision in housing. As Silkin, Minister of Town and Country Planning, put it:

We can create physical conditions, but unless we can create a community we have merely built up a series of fortresses, where the Englishman's home is his castle, and only the milkman and the rent collector cross the drawbridge.

We don't want the Englishman's home to be his castle at all. We want a community to be created in order to get the best out of every human being. The real purpose ... is to secure the greatest measure of self-realisation out of every human being.

It is this self-realisation that we want to achieve in order that people may in the end not merely lead a happy and selfish life, but be able to give of their best to the service of the community, and I believe that that is the ultimate objective - service to the community.¹²⁹

Footnotes

- 1 Labour Party Let Us Face the Future (1945) p. 8.
- 2 Conservative Party Archives [hereafter CPA] CRD 2/28/4
Post-War Problems Central Committee Minutes of Meetings
(13.4.43), (27.7.43) and (9.11.43).
No minutes or papers of the Housing Sub-Committee
survive in the CPA.
- 3 Conservative Sub-Committee on Housing Foundation For
Housing. An Interim Report (March 1944) pp. 8-10.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 22-31.
- 5 Ibid., p. 12.
- 6 His views were expressed in a series of broadcast
discussions on postwar housing for the BBC Home Service
in early 1944. These discussions were later published
in Homes For All. The British Broadcasting Corporation
looks at the Problem (Worcester n.d. but c. 1945).
- 7 J.D. Hoffman The Conservative Party in Opposition 1945-
51(1964) pp. 40-42.
- 8 Tory Reform Committee Forward - By The Right! A
Statement (1943) pp. 1, 12.
- 9 The left was, of course, more sceptical about its
intentions. As Labour Research wrote of the Tory
Reform Committee: 'It is clear that, while remaining
true blue on all fundamental questions, their aim is to
make great play with minor reforms so as to make the
Conservative Party appear in a progressive light in
preparation for the next elections'. ('Future of Land
Control' Labour Research Vol. 33 No. 8 (Aug. 1944) p.
119).

- 10 Harvester Microfilms The Archives of the British Conservative Party Minutes of the Central Council Meeting (7.10.43).
- No Conservative Party Annual Conferences took place between 1940 and 1942 and in 1944. For the 1943 and 1945 Conferences, their reports are missing. According to the Minutes of the Executive Committee (8.7.43) reporting on the 1943 Annual Conference held in May, no resolution on postwar housing was passed.
- 11 There was, to be sure, a late attempt to set up a Planning Sub-Committee, 'to prepare a report and recommendations, to be presented to the Post-War Problems Central Committee, upon the future policy with regard to the control and use of land'. Under the chairmanship of Geoffrey Hutchinson (Barrister and a Conservative M.P.) the Planning Sub-Committee had, among others, B.S. Townroe (a renowned housing expert) and Longstreth Thompson (a distinguished figure in town planning) as its members (CPA CRD 2/28/4 Post-War Problems Central Committee Minutes of Meeting (10.10.44)). Nothing came of this Sub-Committee before the 1945 General Election.
- 12 Conservative Sub-Committee on Housing A Policy on Housing in England and Wales. A Report (1945) pp. 8-9.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 13-32.
- 14 Ibid., pp. 32-33 [*italics in original*].
- 15 This figure represented a house considerably larger than that provided for the working class. The report argued that if a subsidy was to be provided at all, it

- should be made available to all sections of society (ibid. p. 38).
- 16 Ibid., pp. 34-40.
- 17 Ibid., p. 34.
- 18 Ibid., pp. 41-42.
- 19 The Daily Telegraph (20.7.44).
- 20 The Daily Telegraph (23.3.45).
- 21 The Daily Telegraph (16.1.45).
- 22 The Onlooker (Apr. 1945) p. 5.
- 23 The Archives of the British Conservative Party Minute of the Annual Meeting of the Central Council (14/15.3.45).
- 24 The Daily Telegraph (16.3.45).
- 25 S.J. Brooke 'Labour's War: Party, Coalition and Domestic Reconstruction 1939-45' (DPhil Dissertation, Oxford 1988) pp. 86-88.
- 26 For a good overview of the evolution of the Labour Party's policy on housing and town planning during the war, see I.H. Taylor 'War and the Development of Labour's Domestic Programme, 1939-45' (PhD Dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science 1977) pp. 97-110.
- 27 The membership selection process is unclear. Apart from the four members of the Sub-Committee ostensibly representing the TCPA, Lady Simon, the wife of E.D. Simon (a Council member of the TCPA), had been closely involved in the development of Wythenshawe, a municipal satellite suburb at Manchester. C. Jenkinson, past chairman of the Housing Committee in Leeds, was also a

TCPA member and later in the war sat on the Council of the Association. Silkin later complained that the members had been appointed somewhat arbitrarily and pointed out in regard to Osborn, Dalley and the McAllisters that they had not taken any active interest in the work of the labour movement. The McAllisters, it is true, were also active in Labour Party circles. They were contributing articles to The Labour Woman and G. McAllister became a Labour M.P. in 1945. It was also the case that the Labour Party had some affinity for the TCPA's views. Herbert Morrison, for instance, was a TCPA Council member in the 1930s and an enthusiastic supporter of the green belt policy at the LCC. In any case, on the circumstances surrounding the appointment of the members to the Sub-Committee, Silkin later wrote: 'When I first came into the picture I found that a Mr. McAllister was making suggestions about membership, including one that his wife should be the Secretary. When I saw that Mr. Osborn was proposed, I had some hesitation as I knew his views were not those generally accepted by the Party. I did not at the time know that Mr. and Mrs. McAllister were both officials of the organisation of which Osborn is the Secretary, namely, the Town & Country Planning Association, or that Mr. Dalley was a prominent supporter'. (Labour Party Archives [hereafter LPA] R.D.R. 246 'Memoranda on the Report of the Housing & Town Planning Committee' The Chairman's Reply to L. Silkin (Nov. 1943).) Osborn, on the other hand, later

preferred to claim that the TCPA, because of its 'all-parties composition', was 'called upon for advice and assistance' in the working of the party reconstruction machineries. And this led, in Osborn's view, to all three parties adopting similar reconstruction programmes, including 'planned central redevelopment, dispersal, green belt, and new towns'. He went on to say: 'Influence in this direction was exerted by members in close contact with the TCPA: on the Conservative Committee by Lord Balfour of Burleigh and John A.F. Watson, on the Liberal Committee by B. Seebohm Rowntree, and on the Labour Party Committee, of which Lewis (Lord) Silkin was chairman, by the Rev. Charles Jenkinson (of Leeds), Lady Simon (of Wythenshawe), (Sir) Richard Coppock, and others' (F.J. Osborn and A. Whittick The New Towns the answer to megalopolis (1969) pp. 96-97.)

- 28 LPA Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee Minutes (1) (23.10.41).
- 29 LPA R.D.R. 14 'Memorandum on Some of the Problems of Post-War Reconstruction and Suggested Methods for their Solution' (Oct. 1941) and Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee Minutes (2) (12.11.41).
- 30 LPA R.D.R. 55 'Suggested Short-Term Programme for Housing and Town Planning in the Immediate Post-War Years' (Jan. 1942).
- 31 LPA Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee Minutes (4) (19.12.41).

- 32 LPA Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee Minutes (8) (12.11.42).
- 33 LPA R.D.R. 140 'Post-War Housing and Planning Proposed Draft for Inclusion in the Labour Party Pamphlet' (Oct. 1942).
- 34 LPA Central Committee on Reconstruction Problems Minute (14) (19/20.12.42).
- 35 LPA Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee Minutes (9) (19.1.43).
- 36 LPA Central Committee on Reconstruction Problems Verbatim Minutes of the Meeting (19/20.12.42).
- 37 LPA Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee Minutes (10) (12.2.43).
- 38 Around this time, there was a lively exchange in the correspondence column of The New Statesman and Nation on the question of houses or flats involving both Silkin and Osborn, which appeared to mirror the disagreements developing within the Sub-Committee. The New Statesman and Nation came down in favour of flats with an editorial intervention. For a summary of the debate see Appendix II.
- 39 LPA R.D.R. 193 'Post-War Housing and Planning Proposed Draft for Inclusion in the Labour Party Pamphlet' (Feb. 1943), and R.D.R. 196 'Amendments to Memorandum R.D.R. 193 (by F.J. Osborn)' (Feb. 1943).
- 40 LPA Central Committee on Reconstruction Problems Minutes (15) (11.3.43) and 'Housing and Town Planning Note' by Morgan Phillips (12.4.43).

- 41 LPA Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee Note of Consultation (10.5.43).
- 42 Labour Party Housing and Planning after the War (1943) pp. 3-4.
- 43 The section on the standards and equipment of postwar dwellings closely followed the recommendations made by the Standing Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations. See its report Post-War Homes. Design and Equipment (1943).
- 44 Labour Party Housing and Planning after the War pp. 9-10.
- 45 Ibid., p. 5.
- 46 Ibid., pp. 8-10.
- 47 Ibid., pp. 7-8.
- 48 Ibid., 3, 5-6.
- 49 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
- 50 Labour Party 1943 Annual Conference Report p. 202.
- 51 Ibid., pp. 203-205.
- 52 LPA Policy Committee Minutes (1) (21.7.43), National Executive Committee Minutes 1943-44 (2) (23.6.43) and (3) (21.7.43).
- 53 Dalton appears to have been very much involved in shifting the Party's policy-making function away from the Central Committee (and in particular from Shinwell) and back to the Policy Sub-Committee. See B. Pimlott (ed.) The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton 1940-45 (1986) pp. 619. 624.

- 54 LPA R.D.R. 228 'Report on the Reconstruction Sub-Committees' (July 1943) and Policy Committee Minutes (2) (5.8.43).
- 55 LPA Research No. 53 'Comments on Research No. 51 - Uthwatt Report' (Sept. 1943).
- 56 LPA Policy Committee Minutes (3) (21.9.43).
- 57 LPA National Executive Committee Minutes 1943-44 (5) (22.9.43).
- 58 LPA Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee Minutes (11) (15.10.43).
- 59 LPA R.D.R. 246 'Memorandum on the Report of the Housing & Town Planning Committee' (Nov. 1943) F.W. Dalley, Charles Jenkinson, G. McAllister and F.J. Osborn 'Memorandum to the Policy Committee' (12.11.43).
- 60 Ibid., Memorandum by Charles Jenkinson and Memorandum by F.W. Dalley.
- 61 Ibid., L. Silkin 'The Chairman's Reply'.
- 62 LPA Policy Committee Minutes (5) (23.11.43) and (6) (21.12.43).
- 63 Labour Party 1944 Annual Conference Report p. 26.
- 64 Ibid., pp. 118-119.
- 65 Ibid., pp. 120-126.

Reilly's plan was for the satellite dormitory town of Woodchurch, to take the overspill population from Birkenhead, when its blitzed and slum areas had been redeveloped on more generous lines. On a site covering 347 acres, there were to be 3,654 houses at 10.4 houses per acre, accommodating 14,000 people. The town or the estate would consist of a series of greens clustered

together in small groups, surrounding the central part, which was laid out in a more formal, rectangular manner. The plan included a liberal provision of social and communal facilities and it was also thought that, with houses planned closer together than in the ordinary suburban estate, district heating and the suction system of waste disposal would be feasible. As he explained in an article, setting out his planning principles: 'My suggestion, then, is that in the new suburbs about to be built in so many places groups of four to six oval greens, each green with some forty to sixty houses round it, should be laid out, like the petals of a flower about its centre, round a club-house, which would serve not only the purposes of the village inn but have, in addition, a news room, a library, a debating hall, where also theatrical performances and dances could be held, and perhaps a communal kitchen from which hot meal could be sent out in thermos containers round the greens at half the cost to the individual housewife, who would then have more time for leisure and perhaps for more babies. This club-house should be managed, like the greens, by a committee of residents'. He also spoke of adapting the secondary school building for adult education, after the example of Impington Village College with 'its club and lecture rooms, its theatre, but most important of all, its debating hall, which would act as a parliament of the whole to which individuals would graduate from the debates in the club-houses'. In this way the

estate 'should make for a more intelligent community whose members do not rely on a single newspaper for their information and for a large part of their culture'. (C.H. Reilly 'My Plan for Communities' Tribune (16.2.45)). Thus Reilly hoped to promote a greater degree of sociability and participation on the estate, fostering a sense of community and identity among its residents. Due emphasis was placed on self-government and self-improvement. He very much loathed what he called the 'isolationism' of suburban living and his plan also appeared to be an attempt at recreating traditional working-class communities, which supposedly existed in urban areas, in more salubrious surroundings: 'Somehow the friendliness of the little streets and slums of our towns has to be preserved, and any rebuilding which destroys that friendly atmosphere is wrong. God forbid that we should make the honest, kindly working men and women of our towns into self-conscious middle-class folk' (C.H. Reilly 'Plan for Norwich' Tribune (15.6.45)). Reilly, in his youth, had helped to found the Cambridge branch of the Fabian Society (see Obituary in The Times (3.2.48)) and was a fairly regular contributor to Tribune during the war. His idealistic plan with strong social and communal elements seems to have found a ready audience in some sections of the Labour Party. The actual plan for the Woodchurch Estate, promoted by the Labour group in Birkenhead, was turned down on strict party lines at a special meeting of the Birkenhead City Council in

September 1944 (reported in The Architects' Journal (9.11.44)).

After the war, some elements of the Reilly plan were tried out in Bilston, with mixed results. Apparently the tenants did not take to the communal green and petitions were presented for forecourt fences, which struck hard at the Reilly conception. See R. Thomson 'The Bilston Venture. Flower-like Estates for People in the Slums' The Municipal Journal (3.3.50).

66 See L. Silkin The Nation's Land. The Case for Nationalisation (Fabian Research Series No. 70) (Mar. 1943); his speeches at the Annual Conferences in 1944 and 1945 (Labour Party 1944 Annual Conference Report p. 121 and 1945 Annual Conference Report p. 124). But see also L. Silkin 'Housing and Planning' (The Labour Woman Vol. 33 No. 2 (Feb. 1945) p. 39) where he argued that pending land nationalisation, 'local authorities should be urged to take the fullest advantage of the powers of acquisition of land and of redevelopment they already possess, and Labour will be performing a valuable function in pressing for this whenever and wherever they have the opportunity'.

For the attitudes of some within the Labour hierarchy towards the land question, see K. Jefferys (ed.) Labour and the Wartime Coalition. From the Diary of James Chuter Ede (1987) pp. 130, 184.

Chuter Ede was a prominent middle-ranking Labour politician. He served as Parliamentary Secretary at the Board of Education from 1940 to 1945, and

subsequently became Home Secretary in Attlee's postwar governments. During the war he also served for some two years as a member of the Labour Party's Administrative Committee, established after the formation of the Coalition as a link between ministers and backbenchers.

At the 1945 Annual Conference when Labour's election manifesto Let Us Face the Future was discussed, Herbert Morrison introduced the section on land with the following words, which in effect endorsed the Uthwatt recommendations: 'Surely during this period - a period of first things first - as long as we have the power to purchase land at a fair price and expeditiously ... that is enough for the time being ... We want control of land use. We must solve the problem of compensation in town planning, without which there is going to be no town planning, and we must solve the problem of getting revenue out of betterment so far as possible to compensate the State and the tax payers for the compensation paid to landowners and other owners in respect of town and country planning regulations'.

(Labour Party 1945 Annual Conference Report p. 91.)

67 Labour Party Housing and Planning after the War p. 10.

68 T. Sharp 'Town Planners on Trial' Tribune (18.2.49).

69 Liberal Party Land and Housing. Report and Summary of the Liberal Land and Housing Sub-Committee (n.d. but c. 1943) pp. 3, 8-9.

70 Ibid., pp. 12-13.

71 Ibid., pp. 4-5, 17-18.

- 72 Communist Party A Memorandum on Housing (1944) p. 14.
- 73 But see also a further policy memorandum on housing issued by the CPGB in 1945, where there was no mention of land nationalisation. It was merely stated that land authorities 'must be given adequate powers in regard to the acquisition of the land required' (Communist Party Post-war Housing Problems. A policy Memorandum by the Housing Advisory Committee (1945) p. 15).
- 74 Communist Party A Memorandum on Housing pp. 17-20, 23-27, 30, 33-37.
- In the past, standardisation, often associated with poor quality and monotonous appearance, had met with hostility and objection both by tenants and building operatives. The CPGB report argued that this need not be the case. The unsatisfactory features arose more from 'the exploitation by big trusts and monopolies chiefly concerned with pushing a particular product or rushing up houses for speculative purposes without regard to efficiency and people's needs' (ibid., pp. 19-20).
- 75 Communist Party Post-war Housing Problems pp. 8-9.
- 76 Communist Party A Memorandum on Housing pp. 30-33.
- 77 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
- 78 INF 1/292 Home Intelligence Weekly Report (20.7.44).
- 79 See G.H. Gallup (ed.) The Gallup International Opinion Polls. Great Britain 1937-1975 (New York 1976) pp. 90, 96, 97, 105, 109, 115. The phrasing of the question in each of these polls differed slightly from one another,

but the respondents were, in effect, asked to name the most urgent domestic issue to be tackled after the war. The respective figures for housing and employment in each of the polls were:

issue	April 1944	August 1944	Sept. 1944	Feb. 1945	May 1945	July 1945
	%	%	%	%	%	%
housing	29	39	32	54	41	63
employment	43	29	12	13	15	8

- 80 See INF 1/292 Home Intelligence Weekly Report (22.6.44), (17.8.44), (14.9.44), (12.10.44) and (9.11.44).
- 81 See, INF 1/292 Home Intelligence Weekly Report (22.6.44) (20.7.44) and (12.10.44).
- 82 Asked in a Gallup poll of June 1944, whether they would prefer a temporary prefabricated house if they could get one, or would rather wait longer for a permanent house, 28 per cent of the respondents plumped for a temporary house, as opposed to 31 per cent who would wait. Another 36 per cent said that they would not move (G.H. Gallup (ed.) The Gallup International Opinion Polls. Great Britain 1937-1975 p. 91).
- 83 See INF 1/292 Home Intelligence Weekly Report (22.6.44), (17.8.44), (9.11.44) and (7.12.44).
- 84 INF 1/292 Home Intelligence Weekly Reports (14.12.44) and (21.12.44).
- 85 INF 1/292 Home Intelligence Weekly Report (29.12.44).

- 86 G.H. Gallup (ed.) The Gallup International Opinion Polls. Great Britain 1937-1975 pp. 109, 111, 115.
- 87 Mass-Observation, File Report No. 2270A 'A Report on The General Election June-July 1945' (Oct. 1945) pp. 92-93.
- 88 Mass-Observation, File Report No. 2270B 'First Report on the Post-War Homes Exhibition' (28.7.45) p. 4.
- 89 See Conservative Party Mr. Churchill's Declaration of Policy to the Electorate (1945). See also similar expositions of 'The Government's Housing Programme' in The Onlooker (June 1945) and Popular Illustrated Vol. 2 No. 1 (n.d.).
- 90 'Battling For British Homes' Popular Illustrated Vol. 2 No. 1 (n.d.) p. 6.
- 91 Commenting on the Commons housing debate just before the dissolution, which was effectively turned into party electioneering by both sides, The Economist (16.6.45) noted: 'The emphasis on short-term plans, the omission of almost any reference to planning ... and ministerial pooh-poohing of the problems of land acquisition may well be damaging to the Conservative platform'.
- 92 Labour Party Let Us Face The Future. See also Arthur Greenwood's brief statement of the Labour housing policy in the House of Commons (Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 411 (7.6.45) cols 1109-1115).
- 93 R.B. McCallum and A. Readman The British General Election of 1945 (1947) p. 96.

- 94 Ibid., pp. 137-138, 209; The Daily Telegraph (15.6.45), (19.6.45) and (20.6.45).
- 95 E. Wilkinson's election broadcast, reported in Daily Herald (15.6.45).
- 96 Daily Herald (21.6.45).
- 97 Daily Herald (26.6.45).
- 98 R.B. McCallum and A. Readman The British General Election of 1945 pp. 247-253.
- 99 Western Morning News (27.7.45). For Hull, see N. Tiratsoo 'Labour and the reconstruction of Hull, 1945-51', in N. Tiratsoo (ed.) The Attlee Years (1991) p. 126.
- 100 Western Independent (29.7.45).
101. The Municipal Journal (3.8.45).
- 102 Daily Herald (27.7.45).
- 103 The Times (27.7.45).
- 104 G.D.H. Cole 'The Dream and the Business' The Political Quarterly Vol. 20 No. 3 (July - Sept. 1949) p. 203.
- 105 Daily Herald (30.7.45).
- 106 Daily Herald (9.8.45). See, in general, J.A. Chenier 'The Development and Implementation of Postwar Housing Policy Under the Labour Government' (DPhil Dissertation, Oxford 1984) Ch. 3. For Bevan's career at the Ministry of Health in charge of housing, see J. Campbell Nye Bevan and the Mirage of British Socialism (1987) Ch. 11.
- 107 As Bevan said at a conference after becoming Minister of Health: 'Quite frankly, I do not like that temporary housing programme. If I had my way, it would never

have started, but now it has got to be finished, because it does provide shelter in the meantime' (London Trades Council and National Federation of Building Trade Operatives (London Area) London's Housing. Conference Reports (n.d. but c. 1946) p. 11).

108 See The Architect and Building News (24.8.45); The Economist (8.9.45).

109 Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 414 (17.10.45) col. 451.

110 Ibid., (17.10.45) col. 1309 (Henry Willink). See also the editorial in The Builder (26.10.45).

111 Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 420 (6.3.46) col. 451.

112 Ibid., Vol. 414 (17.10.45) col. 1224.

A ratio of one private house for every four houses built for the local authority became the adopted standard, though this ratio of 1:4 varied throughout the period under the Labour Government of 1945 to 1951 (J.A. Chenier 'The Development and Implementation of Postwar Housing Policy Under the Labour Government' p. 91 footnote 16).

113 See, for example, an editorial in The Economist (27.10.45): 'Was the Tutor Walters standard of the inter-war years so shockingly bad that it could not be tolerated for a few years more ... This will no doubt be attacked as a reactionary proposal, but it is no more reactionary than to hold that half a loaf is better than no bread. The amount of building labour available is limited and so is, or should be, the

amount of money that can be spared. Both could be spread over a large number of houses if the houses were kept smaller'.

114 Bevan's address to the Second Building Congress, organised by the Building Industries National Council, reported in The Builder (2.11.45).

115 Ministry of Health Annual Report 1945-46 Cmd. 7119 (HMSO 1947) p. 160.

A demand for a second lavatory had been identified in many of the wartime housing surveys:

'Women with families want a second w.c., with wash-basin, downstairs; some want it indoors, others outside. The most convenient arrangement would seem to be to have it in the small back entrance lobby, where it would be easy of access to the children from the garden.'

(Standing Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations Post-War Homes Design and Equipment p. 7).

'If the family is small a w.c. in the bathroom may be adequate but for all families of four or more a separate one is essential. There should always be sufficient space for a wash-hand basin together with the w.c.'

(Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction Hub of the House Part II, Cleaning (1944) p. 3, cited in Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction Housing Digest (1946)).

'Over 90 per cent. of women who voted on the question said that where there is only one water-closet and it is upstairs it should be separate from the bathroom. It is also agreed that in all houses having three bedrooms or more another W.C., containing wash-basin if possible, should be provided downstairs.'

(Daily Mail Book of Post-War Homes (1944) p. 62).

See also the summary of Mass Observation An Enquiry into People's Homes (1943) in Chapter 5.

The Design of Dwelling Sub-Committee also called for the provision of two w.c.s in larger houses. However, it did not specify that a three-bedroom house should have a second lavatory:

'In the inter-war house the bathroom was usually combined with the water closet. This arrangement takes up less space and is accordingly less costly. But there was much evidence that, especially in the case of large families, the combined arrangement is inconvenient. In our view it is permissible in dwellings with two bedrooms or less, but we recommend a separate water closet for dwellings with three bedrooms. In larger houses two water closets are necessary. One should be downstairs and contain a lavatory basin. The other should be upstairs and may be combined with the bathroom.'

(Ministry of Health Design of Dwellings para. 47).

The Housing Manual 1944 had nothing to say on this matter.

- 116 J.A. Chenier 'The Development and Implementation of Postwar Housing Policy Under the Labour Government' p. 69.
- 117 Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 414 (17.10.45) col. 1232.
- 118 Labour Party 1947 Annual Conference Report (1947) p. 192.
- 119 See J.P. Macey 'Post-War Housing Finance' Public Administration Vol. 24 (1946) pp. 165-171.
- 120 See Ministry of Health Annual Report 1945-46 Cmd. 7119 (HMSO 1947) p. 162 and idem Annual Report 1946-47 Cmd. 7441 (HMSO 1948) pp. 170-171. This capital grant towards the cost of permanent prefabricated houses was payable only in respect of houses approved before 31 December 1947. After that date all prefabricated houses were expected to compete with brick houses in terms of costs. The idea was for the Government to meet the initial costs of developing the systems.
- 121 J. Campbell Nye Bevan and the Mirage of British Socialism pp. 151-152.
- 122 Bevan's address in 'Conference on Housing Layout in Theory and Practice. Part I' Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 55 No. 9 (July 1948) p. 383.
- 123 Reported in The Architects' Journal (29.11.45).
- 124 Bevan's address in Association of Building Technicians The Technician's Part in Housing (1945) pp. 4-5.
- 125 Bevan's address in 'Conference on Housing Layout. Part 1' p. 382.

126 Hansard (Commons) 5th Series Vol. 414 (17.10.45) cols 1222-1223.

127 Bevan's address in 'Conference on Housing Layout. Part 1' p. 382.

The imagery of the English village acted as a unifying force, just as a cricket game on the village green was 'supposed to bring together the classes in a uniquely English way' (R. Holt Sports and the British. A Modern History (Oxford 1989) p. 265).

Sharp's popular exposition of the English village was published in 1946, in which he suggested that the social structure of a traditional English village was 'far more fully integrated as a community than were most towns' (T. Sharp The Anatomy of the Village (Harmondsworth 1946) p. 33).

128 Only some inferences can be drawn on the sources of influence on Bevan's housing thought. As has been mentioned, Bevan had Forshaw at his side at the Ministry of Health and seems to have absorbed the new ideas on housing, which were evolved during the war. Moreover, Bevan was closely associated with Tribune and thus would have had the opportunity to study the planning ideas of Reilly, which were being promoted by that journal.

129 L. Silkin 'Creating Communities' Social Service A Quarterly Review Vol. 21 No. 3 (Dec. 1947) p. 102.

**Chapter 8 Wartime plans for postwar housing: the case
of Portsmouth, 1939-45**

The preceding chapters have looked at the wartime developments in housing debates and, in particular, the attempts made to bring the views of ordinary people to bear upon housing. The official plans for the design of postwar housing were a fair reflection of both the expert opinion and popular aspirations. However, deep-seated political differences prevented any consensus being formed on the policy of popular housing provision and the Labour victory at the 1945 General Election was seen as an endorsement of Labour's approach to postwar housing. Having outlined the Labour Government's housing policy in the previous chapter, case studies will now be undertaken on Portsmouth and Coventry - two contrasting cities which nevertheless shared the burden of the blitz and were similarly faced with a serious housing shortage at the end of the war. The aim is to look at how the housing policy was implemented at local level and worked out in practice and also to examine the ways in which different strands identified in the housing debates impinged upon the process.

Each of the next two chapters (one on Portsmouth and the other on Coventry) tells the story of how the respective local authority of the city set about planning for postwar housing during the war (1939-1945). A third chapter then examines the records of the two cities in dealing with popular housing provision during the period between 1945 and 1951 and attempts to offer some explanations.

Portsmouth was a premier British naval port centred on the Royal Naval Dockyards. By the outbreak of the Second World War, together with the development of Southsea on its southern shore as a holiday resort, the city had become well established as an important regional centre on the south-east coast of England.¹ The total population of the city (including the Services) had been growing steadily from 185,700 at the turn of the century. In 1929 it totalled 261,400. The subsequent slump years saw some fall. In 1939 it had a population of 260,300 on a land area comprising 9,223 acres. Apart from the mainland districts of Cosham, Paulsgrove and Farlington (containing 3,100 acres), the city was on an island known as Portsea, divided from the mainland by a narrow creek. Being surrounded by the sea on three sides and hemmed in by the neighbouring local authorities to the north, Portsmouth was a compact and congested borough with little scope for lateral expansion. The Admiralty dockyards and the ancillary services provided the major source of employment in the city. By 1939, about 14,000 (excluding established staff) were employed in shipbuilding, repairs and ancillary trades at the dockyards, representing roughly 20 per cent of the insured population, while marine and other engineering firms of various sizes also worked for the Admiralty. A further 23 per cent of the insured population was engaged in the distribution trades. Hotels, boarding houses, laundries and other services also flourished, all heavily dependent on naval custom and holiday trade.

As far as housing was concerned, between 1919 and 1939, a total of 15,718 houses were built in Portsmouth, of which 2,806 were built by the local authority and 12,912 by private enterprise. Moreover, during the period 1934 and 1939, almost 10,000 houses were built by private enterprise in districts adjoining Portsmouth, suggesting an outward movement of the city's population into surrounding areas. In 1938 Portsmouth had a housing stock of 63,508 and very low rates of overcrowding in working-class homes (1.8 per cent, according to the official survey). On the other hand, on Portsea Island, the density rose to as high as 200 persons to the acre in areas of extreme congestion, 145 in adjoining districts and about 75 to 100 on the rest of the island, while more normal suburban densities, about 30 persons to the acre existed on the mainland. In politics the Conservative Party at municipal level as well as in parliamentary terms was very much the dominant force. The solid Conservative support in the city has been usually ascribed to the existence of military establishments. The association of the political right with armament work and hence with dockyard employment was a major factor. The Conservatives could also rely on the support of those in the Services and retired naval officers settling down in Portsmouth.² Meanwhile the Labour Party had effectively replaced the Liberals in the interwar years as the Conservatives' main opposition in municipal as well as parliamentary elections. The Party's platform stressed the need for greater working-class representation in the Town Hall and increase in the social services. In the 1929

General Election, Labour took second place in two of the three Portsmouth constituencies, North and South, and for the first time gained a parliamentary seat in Central. By 1939, the Party had a few bastions of support in the western wards of the city and had established a presence on the City Council.³

Because of the large naval presence in the city and of its geographical location, Portsmouth suffered heavily in the war, particularly from three major air raids which struck the city in the early part of 1941.⁴ The two main shopping centres were almost entirely wiped out and there was much devastation around the High Street, in the old part of the city, and the Guildhall (Town Hall), which was gutted by fire. Over 120 of the 850 existing industrial premises were damaged in the raids and of these 36 were totally demolished. In addition, approximately 7,000 houses were made permanently uninhabitable⁵ - 11 per cent of the total number of dwellings in the city - and 14 schools had been destroyed and 4,750 places for pupils lost. The civilian population fell from 244,000 in 1939 to 143,000 in 1943, due to evacuation, dispersal of industry, direction of women to work in other districts and service in the forces. By the end of 1943 the city had lost 11 per cent of its prewar rates revenue and the product of a penny rate was down by 24 per cent.⁶

The City Council began to consider problems of reconstruction fairly early. In February 1941, a Special Replanning Committee was set up within the Council, with the Lord Mayor (Councillor D.L. Daley) as its chairman.⁷ Lord

Reith gave a lead to the council members by urging them to plan boldly and on a large scale' on his visit to Portsmouth a month later.⁸ F.A.C. Maunder, Deputy City Architect, was entrusted with the task of preparing preliminary proposals for the rebuilding of Portsmouth.⁹ Meanwhile, in the early years of the war, a strong initiative on city reconstruction was taken by the Chamber of Commerce, which had set up its Replanning Advisory Panel in July 1941.¹⁰ A.C. Townsend, Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and a member of its Regional Reconstruction Committee, was invited by the Panel to serve as an adviser on town planning matters.¹¹

During 1941 and 1942, the panel issued a series of reports setting out broad lines of approach to be followed in the replanning of Portsmouth.¹² The keynote of these reports appeared to be the reduction of population and industry on Portsea island and their re-accommodation in areas adjoining Portsmouth, with a view to a possible large extension of city boundaries to absorb some of the surrounding districts. With regard to the housing proposals, the Panel admitted that space shortage in Central Portsmouth dictated the provision of a substantial number of flats (as the only practical method of giving workers living accommodation near to their employment) but also argued that flats in any given area could at first be limited to 20 per cent of the total, until experience had been gained to gauge the real demand. On the other hand it was pointed out that if the closely built-up wards were to be reduced to 60 persons per acre, about 50,000 persons who, before the war,

had lived on Portsea Island would have to be resettled in other districts. To preserve a green belt, at least two satellite towns ('a large town in miniature and not a mere dormitory') were advocated outside the belt, each with a population of between 15,000 and 25,000.¹³ In addition to propagating its replanning proposals, the Chamber of Commerce also sponsored such events as the 'Living in Cities' Exhibition (a travelling exhibition designed by Ralph Tubbs) held in Portsmouth in the spring of 1942,¹⁴ which gave the citizens an opportunity to appreciate the evils of haphazard development and the need for planned reconstruction.¹⁵

The Portsmouth Labour Party, the main local organisation of the left, also had its own Replanning Committee which reported on reconstruction in late 1943. Among other measures it called for municipal ownership of land, gas and water. On the subject of housing, the Committee expressed the view that 'all new housing estates should be municipally owned, and that the general principle should be to provide self-contained houses wherever possible, with flats in a few instances where absolutely necessary'.¹⁶ Further, at a conference organised by the Portsmouth Labour Party in early 1944 to review the city's problem, it was agreed that the rebuilding work 'should be carried out by direct labour' and that 'all houses when built should be fitted for electric lights and power, gas, water, and phone, and provision should be made for refrigerator, hot water and heating systems'.¹⁷

An early indication of the way the ordinary people in Portsmouth were thinking about the reconstruction of their city was given in a sample survey carried out by Mass-Observation in early 1941 during the blitz. It found that 61 per cent of those interviewed wished to remain in Portsmouth after the war, while an overwhelming majority (91.2 per cent) said that they preferred living in a house rather than a flat, the main reasons being the independence of a house and the existence of a garden. Popular expectations of replanning in Portsmouth, on the other hand, elicited different replies ('Big-scale flat building' and 'Widening of roads'), with most people thinking that the City Council, rather than private building firms would be responsible for reconstruction.¹⁸

In February 1943, a preliminary plan of the Special Replanning Committee drawn up by the Deputy City Architect was presented to the City Council. The plan provided for the extension of the naval dockyards and for the centralisation of the commercial shipping port, with provision for future extensions. Further development of Southsea as a holiday resort was proposed to counterbalance the city's economic dependence on the dockyards. A new central administrative, business and commercial area would be established in a spacious setting, with the Guildhall as the focal point of the civic centre. The possibility of establishing a recreation and cultural quarter was also under consideration. The two principal shopping centres (in the city centre and at Southsea) were to be redeveloped on prewar sites with some redesigning.

For all its individual features the basic intention of the plan, like the proposals advocated by the Chamber of Commerce, was to reduce population densities on Portsea Island, and the housing proposals of the plan were put forward with this objective in view. The plan provided for a maximum density of 70 persons to the acre in any neighbourhood district, so that the ultimate population within the city boundaries would not exceed 150,000. The neighbourhood districts (accommodating a population of 30,000 to 60,000) were to be made of a number of smaller residential neighbourhood units, based on existing divisions within the city. The idea was to maintain these social units as self-contained communities with their own schools, group of shops, churches, playgrounds and community centres. The plan argued that the dwellings should take the form of terraces, with a number of residential squares ('This building form follows the finest tradition of English architecture, is simple and economic in the use of land') and that flats should not be erected to house more than one-fifth of the population in any district. The total surplus of approximately 60,000, which resulted from the reduction in density, would be accommodated in two satellite towns in the north-eastern hinterland of Portsmouth. The one at Leigh Park (with a planned population of 30,000 to 35,000) was intended to be self-contained with its own industries, while the other would be more in the nature of a dormitory town (with a planned population of 25,000). The sketch layouts of these satellite towns situated in the

neighbouring local authorities accompanied the presentation of the preliminary plan.¹⁹

The local press welcomed the publication of the plan, congratulating the author and the Council on 'genuine signs of progress and proof of vision', but it also went on to offer a word of admonishment:

we do hope that the Council will beware of the fault that has so greatly hindered progress in the past, when fine schemes have been wrecked or spoiled by interminable discussions and attempts to reconcile irreconcilable opinions. If it is true that Portsmouth will be rebuilt by "hard work, faith and vision", - and we believe it is - we must, having the vision, get down to the work and not expend our civic energies in endless discussion.²⁰

A rather perfunctory and unfocused discussion took place in the City Council following the presentation of the preliminary plan. There was one notable intervention by a Conservative alderman, who produced his own scheme for geometrical development of the city and attacked the official plan as lacking 'courage, progress, reform'. He moved an amendment (which was lost) urging the Special Replanning Committee to consider, among other points, the advisability of reducing the maximum density to 40 persons per acre or a maximum civilian population on the Island of 100,000, and a reduction in the percentage of flats to be provided. The Deputy City Architect, in reply, asserted that 'At the outset it was considered essential that the

ideal should be one of practical realization'. The small Labour group on the Council supported the plan: 'The report was a magnificent one, and breathed vim, vigour, and vitality, and they had to supply the determination'. But the determination and enthusiasm were qualities distinctly lacking from the discussions. One Conservative councillor asked for the proposals to be considered only 'as a plan pro tem', while another called for a halt to any real operation of the plan until after the war. The vice-chairman of the Special Replanning Committee, apprehensive about the financial implications of the plan, stated that 'the replanning and rebuilding of the City would have to be a national undertaking. It was impossible for the City to bear it'. In the end the preliminary plan was approved with only one member voting against it. The financial and administrative considerations apart, however, the main tenor of the City Council's attitude on reconstruction was encapsulated in the remark of the Lord Mayor and chairman of the Replanning Committee who, upon being asked what a replanner was, replied thus:

A replanner is a person who knows a great deal about very little, goes on learning more and more about less and less until he finally knows everything about practically nothing.²¹

The strong antipathy shown by some leading members of the City Council probably reflected both their anxiety about Portsmouth's financial position and their innate conservatism on city affairs. The extent of the replanning problem facing the city was well acknowledged in Whitehall,

where an official body - the Advisory Panel of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning - had been set up to liaise with the local authorities of blitzed cities over reconstruction planning.²² The panel initially viewed the preliminary plan not unfavourably in 1943 and seemed to accept the city's need to reduce density and to decentralise some of its population.²³ But the panel was also in no doubt about the scale of the task facing Portsmouth, as its report a year later put it:

Decanting on such a scale clearly constitutes a considerable venture and can be successful from Portsmouth's point of view only if the population displaced from Portsea Island does in fact go to the areas, owned by Portsmouth, and not elsewhere (e.g. to Portsmouth's neighbour, Gosport).

Moreover, the double task of the development of satellites and the rebuilding of the devastated areas is likely to make the reconstruction programme an exceptionally lengthy one.²⁴

In July 1944, the City Council decided to establish a City Planning and Reconstruction Department, to 'enable the replanning of the City to proceed more expeditiously'. Accordingly Maunder was appointed City Planning Officer and Reconstruction Architect in charge of the department.²⁵ However his duties and responsibilities with regard to the city reconstruction project never appear to have been specified and Maunder had to present his preliminary plan to the members of the Council all over again. The Lord Mayor stressed the tentativeness of approval given to the plan,

while the City Engineer reported that owing to reduced technical staff it would not be possible to transfer any of his assistants to work full-time on planning and reconstruction work.²⁶

In the event, there was no further substantial discussion on the city reconstruction proposals until well after the end of the war. The predominantly Conservative City Council was particularly reluctant to take up the issue of redeveloping central bombed districts, where it was reported that in a small area of 30 acres (only a fraction of the reconstruction area) there were more than 500 private interests owning the land.²⁷ But if plans for rebuilding the devastated areas in the centre of the city made little headway, the City Council and its members did recognise postwar housing to be a major priority.²⁸ Accordingly a number of initiatives were taken by the City Council during the war. In early 1944, with the approval of relevant government departments, the Corporation acquired a total of 1,671 acres of land at Leigh Park (about two miles from Portsmouth's north-eastern boundaries and some eight miles from the city centre), overlapping the boundaries of Petersfield Rural District Council (RDC) and Havant and Waterloo Urban District Council (UDC), for a satellite site proposed in the preliminary plan.²⁹ This move was not well received by these two local authorities, in whose areas Leigh Park was situated, and by the Hampshire County Council, who questioned the legality of the purchase.³⁰ Havant and Waterloo UDC in particular made it known that it was strongly opposed to 'Portsmouth's extension plans so far

as they concern any suggested incorporation of part of the Urban District'. It was claimed that Portsmouth had purchased Leigh Park without surveying the land and that no concrete plan had been worked out for the site, whereas Havant and Waterloo had, for some, definite proposals for rehousing in its own district. The Lord Mayor of Portsmouth, in reply, reiterated that it was impossible for Portsmouth to replan to meet its requirements and to rehouse its inhabitants unless the rateable income from the satellite towns was under its control.³¹

In addition to the acquisition of Leigh Park, some attempt was made by the City Council to come to grips with the extent of housing shortage and to put together a postwar housing programme. In February 1944, a preliminary housing survey, being undertaken by the Medical Officer of Health, revealed that of 6,700 houses so far visited, 1,100 were totally unfit for habitation, while the remainder were either habitable or capable of repair. As a result of enemy action, it was reported, 7,000 houses had been demolished, and the immediate shortage in accommodation was estimated at about 10,000. The City Architect³² pointed out that areas of existing housing schemes would only provide 64 houses and 141 flats. The Health Committee, in conjunction with these findings, proposed that an area of 100 acres on Portsdown Hill (in the mainland portion of Portsmouth), allocated to the Mental Treatment Committee, should now be devoted to housing and, also called for the acquisition of the adjacent area on the west (which became the Paulsgrove estate) for housing purposes. This would provide for approximately

3,000 houses, of which 1,000 should be regarded as a minimum for the first year's programme.³³ The city council meeting (in April) agreed to the Health Committee's proposal to utilise the 100 acre site for housing. The acquisition of land at Paulsgrove was referred to the Town Clerk for further consideration. The same meeting also discussed the manner in which rehousing was to be carried out. There were voices calling for the use of all sites in the city to accommodate as many people as possible without going outside the city boundary where people would be miles from their work. This would have involved a large part of rehousing to be done with flats. The predominant opinion on the City Council was, however, against building a large number of flats, as they were felt to be inimical to family life.³⁴

In July of the same year, the Housing Committee again raised the alarm about 'the serious shortage of housing accommodation and the situation which will have to be faced at the end of the war'. The Committee, having considered a further report by the Medical Officer of Health and the advice from the City Architect and the City Engineer on the matter, put the overall shortage arising from the war at 17,000 houses (including 5,000 affected by the replanning proposals and another 2,000 which would become unfit in the next five years through disrepair). To this, the Committee added a figure of 15,000 houses for general needs (based on the prewar average of 1,500 erected per annum and having regard to the five war years when no building took place) and came up with a total housing requirement of 32,000 houses in the first five years after the war. This meant a

daunting task of building 6,400 houses per year by the Corporation and private enterprise.³⁵ The seriousness of the housing situation was underlined when it was revealed in November 1944, that there were already 4,000 applicants for houses on the council waiting list and that the list was growing at the rate of 250 a week.³⁶

In response to this mounting shortage, the Chairman of the Health Committee announced that they hoped to build 2,500 houses in the first year of the peace - 1,000 by the local authority and 1,500 by private enterprise.³⁷ The private builders in the city intimated to the Council that they possessed sufficient land to provide for the erection of 7,000 houses, as and when labour and materials became available.³⁸ Meanwhile the City Council's initiatives on postwar housing took a number of forms. In October 1944, the Council rather hurriedly decided to apply to the Ministry of Health for a minimum of 1,400 temporary dwellings to be erected on sites owned by the Corporation.³⁹ The problem was that many of the sites earmarked for temporary houses were still under the control of various committees of the Council and included parks and open spaces (e.g. sports fields and recreation grounds). A number of these sites were subsequently found to be unsuitable or unacceptable (the coalition Government sanctioned building on open spaces in exceptional circumstances, while the incoming Labour administration refused consent to the use of parks for temporary housing)⁴⁰ and the Council had to appropriate some of the blitzed sites not immediately required for reconstruction purposes.⁴¹ In addition,

application was made to the Ministry of Health for the completion of housing schemes comprising some 200 dwellings which were left unfinished at the outbreak of the war.⁴² But it was only in late 1945, a year after the plans had been cleared by the Ministry, that invitations to tender for this work went out.⁴³

More importantly, in early 1945, the Council decided to acquire the land at Paulsgrove on the southern slope of Portsdown Hill to be used for housing purposes,⁴⁴ and the City Planning Officer, Maunder, was entrusted to devise a layout plan for the new estate. The plan envisaged a self-contained community, complete with civic and shopping centres, schools, church and other amenities. Emphasising the break away from the grid-iron layout characterising an existing housing scheme nearby, Maunder called for a general informal and varied landscape treatment to fit in with the natural topography of the area. The estate would be made up of various classes of people and it was reported that the Special Replanning Committee had given its approval to the idea of mixed development.⁴⁵ The Council accordingly agreed to allocate part of the estate to private enterprise and decided that approximately 850 houses should be erected by private enterprise and 1,000 by the Corporation.⁴⁶ While there were complaints in the local press of too much non-essential private building work being done in the city,⁴⁷ the council meetings to discuss postwar housing usually produced a litany of lament about how badly Portsmouth suffered in the war and that the city deserved some special

consideration in relation to housing, which was a national rather than a local matter.

Portsmouth shared in the leftward swing of the nation at the General Election of July 1945.⁴⁸ Labour's victory in capturing two of the three parliamentary seats in Portsmouth helped to shift the focus back on to the local situation. The two new Labour M.P.s went about energetically exposing the lack of housing progress in the city.⁴⁹ Of the 1,400 temporary houses allocated, only 30 had been completed by the beginning of September, while as yet no start had been made on building permanent houses.⁵⁰ Julian Snow, Labour M.P. for Portsmouth Central, criticised the local builders for putting houses for sale first and the City Council for aligning itself with the builders' view. As he argued, the Labour Government's policy was to build houses that could be let at cheap rentals first:

If the local authority is hostile to that policy, then the people cannot have the houses at cheap rents. I am afraid that in Portsmouth we are getting some of that spirit of hostility.⁵¹

The local press continued to receive letters giving details of hardship suffered by people, bombed out or evacuated and still waiting for houses.⁵² Moreover, the Portsmouth Workers' Advisory Committee (comprising several social and political organisations of the left in the city) conducted a survey and identified a large number of empty houses and suitable flats above business premises. And, in view of the serious shortage of accommodation, the Advisory Committee recommended that every unoccupied house in the city should

be requisitioned.⁵³ But despite Labour's attempts on the City Council to reinforce the power of requisition, the Conservative majority showed great unwillingness to take up measures which would infringe on private interests.⁵⁴

All these discussions provided a backcloth to the approaching municipal elections in November. The Portsmouth Labour Party, buoyed up by the success at the General Election decided to contest every seat in the city. The housing problem occupied a prominent place in the campaign. The candidates were all agreed on the great need for houses. Arguing for a large-scale housing plan, Labour stressed municipal provision and stated their preference for permanent houses. It called for 'land, materials and everything necessary for the speedy erection of houses to be removed from the sphere of private profit'. Furthermore, building by direct labour was proposed as a way of preventing jerry building and the Council was urged to use its full power to requisition all empty properties in the city. The Conservatives, on the other hand, blamed red tape and shortage of labour and materials for the lack of housing progress and claimed that private enterprise could build houses if controls of necessary materials were eased and 'the strings which held them back were cut'.⁵⁵ With 48 per cent of the vote, Labour achieved significant progress, including a notable but solitary victory in the southern bastions of Conservatism in the city. Two more by-election victories followed in December so that the Labour groups on the Council now totalled 21 out of the 64 members.⁵⁶

In the remaining months of 1945, the new City Council turned its attention, first and foremost, to the housing problem, no doubt partly as a result of the strong showing by Labour at the municipal election. The new Lord Mayor told the Council that 'a more intensive effort must be put into the housing drive' and revealed that the housing waiting list had now exceeded 10,000.⁵⁷ Temporary prefabricated houses appeared to be finally rolling off the production line. The first scheme of the kind to be completed in the city, comprising of 53 bungalows, met with the residents' satisfaction. As it was described in the local press:

Stretches of turf set off the appearance of the estate, which looked spic and span, and that these bungalows, though looking drab in their "battleship" paint, had become homes, was evident from the curtains and the smoke that curled lazily upward from the chimneys.

Many more were in the pipeline.⁵⁸ On the other hand, the problem of building permanent houses, both by the local authority and private enterprise, proved to be more intractable. It was estimated that the average building workforce in the city, which totalled over 7,000 in 1939, had now declined to about half that size.⁵⁹ According to city builders, this, combined with the lack of materials, was the reason why houses were not yet being built.⁶⁰ But in the case of private housebuilding it also became clear that the cost limit of £1,200 per house was deterring builders from applying for licences, with the result that,

by the end of November, only two out of the national total of 16,000 licences had been granted in Portsmouth.⁶¹

In the meantime, the City Council had come round to formulating a local authority-led housing programme⁶² and, in taking this course, the Council was assisted by the Government's proposals to sponsor certain types of permanent prefabricated houses which made smaller demands on skilled labour than traditional houses and were economical in some of the materials in short supply.⁶³ In response to a Ministry of Health circular requesting information from local authorities on their likely requirements, the Health Committee considered that the maximum number of these permanent prefabricated houses should be provided in the city, having regard both to the large waiting list for council accommodation and the perceived shortage of building labour. On the question of sites, it became clear that owing to the difficulty of securing adequate drainage and sewage disposal facilities Leigh Park could not be used for two years. In the end it was agreed tentatively to proceed with the provision of 2,700 of these non-traditional houses over the next three years mainly at Paulsgrove and at a later stage at Leigh Park.⁶⁴

Further, as the first instalment of this programme the Health Committee, in December 1945, decided upon the construction of 260 permanent prefabricated houses of the three bedroom type at Paulsgrove without delay.⁶⁵ But all told, at the end of 1945, only 98 prefabricated bungalows had been completed and merely 10 permanent houses were under

construction. As the City Architect commented regarding the housing position in the city:

Speaking generally, provisions for housing during 1945 have been largely of a preparatory nature for the 1946 programme, and the ground work for the development of Paulsgrove has been fully dealt with.⁶⁶

Footnotes

- 1 The prewar character of Portsmouth and statistical information are drawn from the following sources: HLG 71/914 Note J.C. Wrigley - L. Neal (re: housing problems in seven blitzed towns) (6.11.44) and 'Blitzed Cities - Statistics of Overcrowding and Slum Clearance' (19.1.45); HLG 79/586 'Notes on Portsmouth' (Mar. 1945); HLG 88/9 Ministry of Town and Country Planning Advisory Panel 'Notes Preliminary to a Visit to Portsmouth' (A.P.C.C. 15) (17.7.43); City of Portsmouth Yearbook 1946-47 ; A.F. Shannon 'The City of Portsmouth. Its development plan and reconstruction reviewed' The Municipal Journal (1.7.55); H. Mason 'II. Twentieth Century Economy', in B. Stapleton and J.H. Thomas (eds) The Portsmouth Region (Gloucester 1989) pp. 167-178.
- 2 See G.J. Ashworth Portsmouth's Political Patterns 1885-1945 (Portsmouth 1976) passim.
- 3 See Portsmouth City Records Office (hereafter PCRO) Collections 1470 A/10/10 G.J. Ashworth 'Electoral Origins of Portsmouth Labour Party 1885-1945' (n.d.) p. 5.

After the 1938 municipal elections, the City Council, consisting of 16 Aldermen and 48 Councillors, was constituted as follows:- 41 Conservatives, 9 Liberals, 7 Labour, and 6 Independents (The Evening News) [hereafter EN] (2.11.38). The resilience of the Liberal vote is normally explained by the tradition of nonconformity and the temperance movement associated

- with it. See W. Donald Cooper Methodism in Portsmouth 1750-1932 (Portsmouth 1973).
- 4 T. Harrisson Living Through the Blitz (Penguin Edition, Harmondsworth 1978) pp. 178-199; HLG 79/586 Ministry of Production 'Air Raid Damage to Industrial Premises in Portsmouth' (27.9.45); HLG 88/9 Ministry of Town and Country Planning Advisory Panel 'Notes Preliminary to a Visit to Portsmouth' (A.P.C.C. 15 Parts B & C) (n.d. but c. July 1943); The Hampshire Telegraph [hereafter HT] (14.6.46) and (4.7.52).
- 5 The official figure for totally destroyed houses circulating within government departments was around 5,000, but as a report by the Medical Officer of Health into the conditions of the dwellings in Portsmouth later indicated, a great number of dwellings had to be demolished as a result of enemy action, bringing up the total of dwellings destroyed in the war to approximately 7,000. See Portsmouth City Council Health Committee [hereafter HC] (28.6.44).
- 6 HLG 88/9 'Report of Advisory Panel on Redevelopment of City Centres' (2.8.44). Appendix 1A Statistical Comparison of the Finances of the Seven Cities. See also an article later written by the City Treasurer for the special feature on Portsmouth: A.R. Thompson 'The challenge of reconstruction' The Municipal Journal (1.7.55).
- 7 Portsmouth City Council Special Replanning Committee [hereafter SRC] (19.2.41). The recommendation was

approved by the Portsmouth City Council [hereafter PCC]
(8.4.41).

8 EN (21.3.41).

9 After qualifying with distinction from the School of
Architecture, Durham University in 1933, F.A.C.
Maunder continued to lecture in architecture and added
to his academic success by winning the prestigious Rome
scholarship. He was described by a former fellow
student as 'the chap who won everything'. After two
years at the Rome school, he was appointed Deputy City
Architect of Portsmouth in 1936 and went on to become
City Planning Officer and Reconstruction Architect from
1944. In 1946 Maunder left Portsmouth and was
appointed County Architect of Buckinghamshire. See
Biographical File on F.A.C. Maunder, in the British
Architectural Library, Royal Institute of British
Architects.

10 EN (2.7.41) The panel did not have any formal links
with the replanning machinery of the City Council,
though two city councillors, as members of the Chamber
of Commerce, served on the panel.

11 PCRO Collections 874A/1/3/1 Port of Portsmouth Chamber
of Commerce Sub-Committee Minutes Replanning Advisory
Panel (15.8.41) (26.8.41) and (9.9.41).

12 The Panel's First Report (October 1941) put forward the
following seven principles: (1) planning over a wider
area than the city; (2) the whole living requirements
(work, houses and recreation) to be considered: (3)
high densities on Portsea Island to be reduced, leading

- to a considerable 'overspill' to be accommodated in the adjoining countryside; (4) the 'overspill' to be planned so as not to be wasteful of agriculture and amenity; (5) there was to be some dispersal of industry to avoid uneconomic travel; (6) the key considerations in a plan for Portsmouth to include the historic associations of Old Portsmouth, the planning of a civic centre, the Southsea Front and the Service Establishments; (7) financial reforms to be required with regard to the incidence of rates, site values and ownership of development rights (EN (22.10.41) (23.10.41), (24.10.41), (25.10.41) and (27.10.41)).
- 13 Port of Portsmouth (Incorporated) Chamber of Commerce Fifth Report of Replanning Panel Housing and Re-housing (Portsmouth 1942).
- 14 PCRO Collections 874A/1/3/1 Port of Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce Replanning Advisory Panel (9.1.42), (17.2.42) and (20.2.42).
- 15 EN (30.4.42) and (11.5.42). The Exhibition ran for ten days and was visited by about 2.500 people - a respectable figure in view of the massive drain on civilian population in the wake of the air raids.
- 16 EN (6.9.43) and (7.9.43).
- 17 EN (28.2.44).
- 18 Mass-Observation, File Report No. 606 'Summary of General Report on Portsmouth January-March 1941' (Mar. 1941).
- 19 See, EN (22.2.43), (23.2.43) and (26.2.43) for the exposition of the plan.

- 20 EN (24.2.43).
- 21 EN (24.2.43) and (17.3.43) - the quote comes from the latter.
- 22 On the Advisory Panel, see J. Hasegawa 'The Replanning of the Blitzed City Centre in Britain: A comparative study of Bristol, Coventry and Southampton 1941-1950' (PhD Dissertation, University of Warwick 1989) pp. 29-34.
- 23 HLG 88/9 Ministry of Town and Country Planning Advisory Panel. Minutes No. 6 (10/11.8.43) pp. 1-4, 7-8.
- 24 HLG 88/9 'Report of Advisory Panel on Redevelopment of City Centres' (2.8.44) p. 34.
- 25 SRC (22.6.44); PCC (11.7.44).
- 26 EN (12.7.44).
- 27 EN (11.7.44).
- 28 See, EN (19.4.43), (13.10.43) and (28.2.44).
- 29 Portsmouth City Council Finance and General Purposes Committee [hereafter FGPC] (3.2.44); PCC (8.2.44).
- 30 EN (16.5.44).
- 31 EN (27.10.44). Subsequently, in 1945, Portsmouth agreed to release part of the land it acquired at Leigh Park to the Havant and Waterloo UDC for its housing schemes.
- 32 Adrien J. Sharp (LRIBA), City Architect, was in charge of the Corporation's housing schemes in general, except those schemes in relation to postwar reconstruction, for which Maunder was supposedly responsible.
- 33 HC (22.3.44).
- 34 EN (13.4.44).

- 35 HC (28.6.44); PCC (11.7.44).
- 36 EN (22.11.44).
- 37 EN (6.10.44).
- 38 HC (27.12.44).
- 39 HC (27.9.44); PCC (10.10.44).
- 40 HC (27.6.45); Portsmouth City Council Sub-Health
(Housing) Committee [hereafter S-H(H)C] (26.9.45).
- 41 HC (25.4.45).
- 42 EN (13.9.44).
- 43 HT (12.10.45).
- 44 FGPC (8.2.45); PCC (27.2.45).
- 45 EN (16.3.45). In the ensuing council discussions on
the plan of the estate attention was drawn to a
suggestion made by a Conservative member of the Health
Committee that 'no house to be erected on the Estate
should be termed "a Council House" and that particular
attention be paid architecturally to the elevation,
making it as attractive as possible' (S-H(H)C
(28.6.45)).
- 46 HC (27.6.45); PCC (10.7.45).
- 47 See, for example, EN (20.10.44) and (13.11.44).
- 48 HT (27.7.45). All three parliamentary seats swung an
unprecedented 20 per cent to Labour, enough to win both
North and Central, and coming within 3,000 votes, the
closest ever, to capturing South (comprising more
affluent, Conservative-dominated wards). See PCRO
Collections 1470A/10/10 G.J. Ashworth 'Electoral
Origins of Portsmouth Labour Party 1885-1945'.
- 49 See, for example, EN (20.8.45).

- 50 HT (14.9.45).
- 51 EN (29.9.45). The building employers and the Health Committee of the City Council rebutted the charge of non-cooperation. As the Health Committee argued, the reasons why Portsmouth had not started to build its first permanent house were the lack of technical staff; and shortage of labour and materials. See EN (4.10.45) and (1.11.45).
- 52 EN (5.10.45).
- 53 EN (6.10.45).
- 54 HT (26.10.45).
- 55 See, EN (24.9.45), (23.10.45), (24.10.45), (27.10.45), (29.10.45), (30.10.45) and (31.10.45).
- 56 EN (2.11.45) and (14.12.45).
- 57 HT (16.11.45).
- 58 HT (9.11.45).9
- 59 HLG 79/586 'Notes on Portsmouth' (Mar. 1945) Appendix A.
- 60 See, for example, EN (26.11.45).
- 61 EN (6.12.45) and (22.12.45).
- 62 EN (12.12.45).
- 63 Ministry of Health, Annual Report 1945-46 Cmd. 7119 (HMSO 1947) pp. 161-162.
- 64 S-H(H)C (27.11.45). In view of the serious housing problem, the full Health Committee, sitting with co-opted members from this Sub-Committee, dealt with all housing matters from December 1945.
- 65 EN (22.12.45).

66 PCRO Collections CCRV/1/17 City of Portsmouth Health Report (Abridged War-Time Edition) for the Year 1945
pp. XVII-XVIII.

**Chapter 9 Wartime plans for postwar housing: the case
of Coventry, 1939-45**

Coventry was a twentieth-century industrial city of medieval origin.¹ Its emergence as a modern industrial community began in the second half of the last century with the manufacture of sewing machines and bicycles, following the decline of silk weaving and watchmaking. Industrial development was greatly accelerated from the turn of the century after the arrival of motor car production in the city. Other major industries to take root in this century included general engineering, artificial textiles, electrical appliances and aircraft. The development of these new industries helped to swell the city's population from 69,978 in 1901 to 128,159 in 1921 and to 220,000 in 1939. The city itself expanded considerably in the interwar years (through two boundary extensions in 1928 and 1931), taking its total area from 4,147 acres in 1927 to 19,167 acres in 1939. Much of the population increase in the 1930s (accounting for over 42,000 out of the total of 51,000 between 1931 and 1939) was due to high migration into the city,² attracted by the rapidly expanding motor and engineering industry and the post-1936 growth of armament production. In 1939, as much as 38 per cent (approximately 41,800 in number) of Coventry's insured population was engaged in the production of motor vehicles and aircraft, while a further 14 per cent was employed in general and electrical engineering and 8.7 per cent in the textile

industry, of which Courtaulds alone employed over 6,000 people (mainly women) in the manufacture of rayon.

Thus, by 1939, Coventry was a thriving manufacturing centre in the Midlands, dominated by the motor industry and its high-earning skilled labour force - as one city official later put it, 'if a Coventry man can't buy a car he makes one'.³ However, this prosperity also resulted in some haphazard development as physical and architectural improvements in the city failed to keep up with the industrial expansion. Within the central, older parts of the city, the medieval town centre with its narrow, twisting street patterns essentially remained unaltered through the interwar years. With a very high rate of private car ownership,⁴ this led to heavy traffic congestion in the centre, while there was a general clutter of factories, shops and slum dwellings, all intermixed, standing cheek by jowl with historical buildings. One Coventry architect proffered his view of the heart of the city centre: 'Broadgate today is a good example of unplanned development - there are buildings at one end fighting in an architectural sense, buildings at the other end'.⁵ The high land values obtaining in the central area were a major obstacle to the provision of much-needed open spaces or cultural facilities (such as a civic hall, a museum or an art gallery, none of which the city possessed).

There was also much extensive development in the suburbs following the expansion of city boundaries. A total of 34,110 houses were built in Coventry between 1919 and 1939 - 4,593 by the local authority and 29,517 by private

enterprise. In particular, the rapid population growth and the city's general prosperity led to the building of almost 21,000 houses between 1932 and 1938, and of these more than 18,000 were for owner occupation. The building societies in the city were reporting brisk business at the time and especially high demand was evident for 'the moderate-sized houses'.⁶ Much of this housebuilding took place on the fringes or as ribbon development and consequently these new estates, private and municipal, lacked coherence and social facilities.⁷ In 1938 Coventry had a total of 61,580 inhabited dwellings, with low rates of overcrowding (estimated at 1.9 per cent) among its working class. During the 1930s some attempt was made (both by the City Council and interested bodies) to address the particular problem of the congested and constricting central area but as yet there were few tangible results.⁸

Inadequacies of the city's social and physical environment was due in part to the local political situations. In municipal politics, the Tory-Liberal Coalition had ruled Coventry for the most of the interwar period, intent on keeping down the rates and hence public spending and showing increasing inability to meet the needs of the expanding city. Labour, on the other hand, gradually made up ground, projecting itself as the party of planning and welfare reform but also emphasising efficient resource allocation within the principle of a stabilised rate.⁹ In the event, Labour gained control of the City Council for the first time in 1937 and consolidated its position a year later.¹⁰ In 1938, the new Labour Council set up a Policy

Advisory Committee to initiate and coordinate its programme. It trod lightly on the matter of local rates and, as a first step, opted for a modest 6d. rise to finance a five-year plan of capital works involving expenditure on education, land acquisition to secure open spaces and street improvements.¹¹ The work on the Canley estate (the largest corporation housing venture to date), which had been dogged by planning problems and financial retrenchment, also finally got underway.¹² Most importantly, the City Council, having decided to take architectural work out of the hands of the City Engineer and to set up an Architectural Department, appointed D.E.E. Gibson to the new post of City Architect.¹³

Gibson was probably the first modern architect to achieve a public position of significance. It was certainly apparent that he had been greatly influenced by major European developments in modern architecture. He could visualise the setting up of a new type of training centre modelled on the Bauhaus (which would be 'a combination of technical school, architectural school and town planning department'), while Le Corbusier's The City of Tomorrow ostensibly provided the main theoretical source and inspiration for the replanning of Coventry's city centre.¹⁴ Despite the failure to develop a prefabricated system of house production in his own city,¹⁵ Gibson was always alive to the potential offered by new technology and prefabrication. It was his belief that the standardisation of detail and proportion inherent in prefabrication might create effects in the same way as Georgian buildings

achieved their elegance and harmony through good standardised designs and bulk production.¹⁶ Moreover, in Gibson's mind, this pursuit of new technology was inextricably linked to the social ideals of architecture, of improving the lives of ordinary people by provision of a healthy and beautiful environment.¹⁷ And to achieve these ideals, he asserted that the body of highly trained architects and planners must be given wide powers to control architecture and physical developments alike on the local and national scale.¹⁸

Gibson peopled his newly-created department with like-minded progressive architects.¹⁹ In the early days of the Second World War, they were primarily occupied with supplying urgent housing needs caused by a large influx of munition workers manning the shadow factories and their families. In view of the shortage of labour and materials (primarily timber) it was decided to take advantage of partially developed sites, mainly at Canley and to build a modern type of two-storey terrace houses, using reinforced concrete for stairs, first floors and roofs.²⁰ Permission was given by the Ministry of Health to proceed with the building of 2,000 such houses during the war but after 400 had been built the work was stopped owing to war conditions.²¹ From 1942 the housing of war workers depended largely on 14 hostels (each accommodating 500 people) provided in and around Coventry by the National Service Hostels Corporation.²² Besides tending to the problem of wartime accommodation, the City Architect's Department (though without authority for planning, as this still rested

solely with the City Engineer's Department) kept the issue of city centre redevelopment alive in 1939 and 1940 by informing the City Council and citizens of the benefit of good architecture and town planning through exhibitions and a series of lectures.²³

As a centre of armament production Coventry became one of the first provincial cities to suffer heavy damage in the air raids.²⁴ After the first major raid in November 1940, it was estimated that approximately 50,000 out of 70,000 properties had been damaged citywide. The most serious destruction was concentrated at the 'core', where 90 per cent of the central shopping and business area was thought to have been 'irreparably damaged'. The medieval cathedral of St Michael, one of the landmarks of Coventry, was completely gutted, except for the tower and spire. The city was hard hit by further raids in April 1941. Much factory space was destroyed as were many of the dwellings in and around the central area and in the neighbourhood of shadow factories. It was later estimated that a total of 50,479 houses had been damaged in some way and that of these 4,185 had been completely destroyed (amounting to 7 per cent of all inhabited dwellings in 1938). The city also lost 5 schools and 4000 places for pupils. As a result of the bombing the rates revenue was reduced by 17 per cent and the population which had increased to 252,000 in August 1940 had dropped to 200,000 by 1943.²⁵

The destruction that took place greatly facilitated the possibilities of redeveloping the city on much improved

lines. In the immediate aftermath Gibson set the tone in his paper given to the Royal Society of Arts:

Many citizens had despaired of the possibility of having a dignified and fitting city centre ...

Now, in a night, all this is changed. Instead of a tightly-packed mass of buildings of every description, there are many burnt-out ruins and much desolation, debris and ash; but like a forest fire the present evil may bring forth greater riches and beauty.²⁶

The Labour City Council seized on the opportunity and set up a City Redevelopment Committee in December 1940 to 'secure an orderly rebuilding of a new Coventry out of the devastation caused by the war'.²⁷ The City Architect and City Engineer were instructed, as joint City Planning Officers, to cooperate and produce a joint plan. But owing to their differences of opinion on the nature and extent of proposed redevelopment, with Gibson favouring a more drastic reshaping of the central area, they submitted two separate schemes.²⁸ In the meantime, both Gibson and the local representatives were given a great fillip for ambitious planning by Lord Reith (the first Minister of Works and Buildings), who expressed his wish that the new Coventry should be planned on a comprehensive scale and that the city would be made a 'test case' to guide official policy on physical reconstruction.²⁹ Encouraged by this development the City Council moved swiftly, in February 1941, to adopt Gibson's radical plan for central redevelopment, instead of

a more conservative proposal put forward by the City Engineer (E.H. Ford).³⁰

Gibson characterised his scheme (partly to assuage local fears about revolutionary design) as 'just sane development, taking in the best of town-planning and avoiding the mistakes of the past'.³¹ In fact he visualised a fairly comprehensive redevelopment of the central area with formal reorganisation of buildings, spaces in between and circulation, incorporating much current thinking on town planning and architecture.³² Firstly, with a view to accommodating the increased road traffic of the future, a system of radial and ring roads was proposed which would allow easy traffic flow round the city and would free the centre from undesirable heavy traffic. Secondly, the plan, by way of zoning, allocated each area according to its function (i.e. a shopping centre, a central park, the cathedral close, an entertainment zone, a civic and cultural centre, administrative and educational areas and business and commercial zones) and also proposed architectural control of elevation and building uses. All factories haphazardly sited within the central area would be moved to the vicinity of larger firms on the perimeter to form general industrial zones. A key feature of the plan was a new pedestrian shopping precinct, completely free of traffic, laid out in a series of squares, lined with two levels of arcaded shops, whose motif was taken from Chester's historical two-level shopping rows. Ample car parking would be provided adjacent to the shops. Another prominent feature of the plan, to redress the dearth of

cultural facilities in prewar Coventry, was the proposed civic centre which included a library, police offices, law courts, a civic hall, a museum, municipal offices, an adult education college, a school of art and an art gallery. To accommodate all the features proposed in a spacious setting, Gibson called for an introduction of some multi-storey buildings into the city centre, instead of the largely two- and three-storey buildings which stood before the blitz:

It is, therefore, possible to retain the same amount of accommodation in the city, but of a better type with plenty of light and air, and space for parking between the buildings. This plan gives "site for height" and avoids congestion of buildings while increasing the rateable value.³³

This height for site principle was applied to good effect in the proposals on housing, which formed an integral part of the plan. Like many others in town planning (and in line with modernist thinking), Gibson decried the suburban sprawl of interwar Coventry and identified two major factors, namely, urban blight and haphazard development in the centre and an insistence on twelve houses to the acre standard with separate gardens, as leading to this outward movement. 'Most cities', said Gibson, 'have become so ugly that people want to go out of them and live in the country, or at least get away at week-ends. We feel this is wrong. We should have cities we are proud of'.³⁴ Presented with the opportunity of replanning the central area, he proposed that the fringes of the city centre should be developed in

the form of neighbourhood units using flats as well as houses. Accordingly the plan envisaged a number of residential groups half encircling the centre, which were taken as a guide for the rest of the city. As Gibson put it:

The solution to this problem is, in my opinion, to rehouse the people in the same areas in the form of neighbourhood units, comprising groups of houses and flats, each complete with nursery school, school, community centre, and clinic, and a few essential shops.

The rehousing in taller blocks releases land for open spaces and playgrounds and gardens, with the advantage that no child needs to cross a traffic route for school or play. It also prevents the spread of cities, with its attendant destruction of valuable agricultural land, the necessity for costly sewers and roads, and the waste and cost of transport.³⁵

The ruling Labour Party on the City Council, led by George Hodgkinson and Sidney Stringer, was the main moving force behind the adoption and propagation of this pioneering scheme. The Party very much identified itself with the plan and was as determined as Gibson and his staff in the City Architect's Department to see its proposed features realised. With the adoption of his plan for the central area, Gibson now assumed prime responsibility on town planning matters, though it was also agreed that the City Engineer should continue as joint City Planning Officer

until his retirement.³⁶ Among the city officials, the Town Clerk and the City Treasurer were naturally disposed to caution,³⁷ as was the City Engineer who, while more supportive of the idea of comprehensive development, continued to preach the need for a sound plan which conformed with recognised planning technique and would be financially viable.³⁸ The lack of any detail on the financial aspects of the plan at the outset also troubled some councillors but, on the whole, it was evident in 1941 that the opinion in the city was strongly in favour of a bold scheme of redevelopment.³⁹

The City Council and Gibson kept up the propaganda for the Coventry plan, informing both local citizens and the wider world, of its significance (i.e. the first of the blitzed cities to plan for postwar days) and main features (e.g. the arcaded shopping precinct, the civic centre and neighbourhood units).⁴⁰ Meanwhile, in an effort to get the city centre proposals officially approved, the City Council engaged itself from 1942 in lengthy discussions with Whitehall, who generally took the view that the plan was too ambitious (with, for example, its novel shopping precinct scheme) and too expensive to realise (particularly, on account of the large amount of land devoted to civic use, which was not revenue producing). The local traders were also known to be against the idea of a traffic-free shopping centre.⁴¹ By 1945, despite the efforts of Whitehall (mainly through the Ministry of Town and Country Planning and its Advisory Panel) to get some of the proposals reconsidered and revised, the City Council stood firm by its plan, with

the exception of an agreement reached with the local Chamber of Commerce, to build a new road intersecting the pedestrian precinct, so bringing traffic much nearer to most of the shops.⁴²

On housing, Gibson also continued to propagate his favoured solution of the neighbourhood unit type of residential settlement, containing both flats and houses, to cater for a variety of households. He repeated his belief that 'one should keep the spread outside the city to a minimum' and advocated central redevelopment, replacing sub-standard houses and slums (some of which had been destroyed in the air raids) with his proposed neighbourhood units.⁴³ This idea of providing equally for diverse household groups was very much prominent in Gibson's mind, when he was called upon in March 1943 to give some estimate of postwar housing needs in the city. Assuming the location of industry policy did not affect Coventry, he estimated that the local population in 1950 would again reach the pre-blitz figure of about 250,000. Coventry at the time had a total of 61,112 'fit' dwellings - a total of 69,684 dwellings in March 1940, minus 3,390 slums and 4,182 destroyed by bombing. In calculating housing needs Gibson took account of the changing composition of the population and the size and number of prospective households, so that provision matched up with the varying demand. The overall aim was to eliminate overcrowding and provide separate accommodation for all households (including, for instance, young and old people who would by inclination leave the family household to set up their own). Relying upon projected national

figures, in the absence of a local survey, for the composition of households in 1950 (prepared by the Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction), he calculated that the Coventry population of 250,000 would comprise 21,625 families with children, 41,875 families without children and 42,500 single persons. On the basis of certain assumptions (about the housing requirements of different families, the level of existing housing stock and the proposed programme of slum clearance) this translated into a total housing need by 1950, of 12,345 houses with gardens, 31,719 flats and guild house (i.e. Corporation hostel) accommodation for 10,625 persons. Commenting on these figures Gibson argued:

The provision of flats is an essential need, and with the possibilities of district heating, water carriage refuse disposal, service laundries, restaurants, library, swimming baths and other recreational facilities, this form of development would offer a fuller and more attractive life than is sometimes achieved in the present system of suburban growth.⁴⁴

The Coventry Evening Telegraph applauded the City Architect's bold vision in tackling the massive task of rehousing in the city.⁴⁵ But the extent of local housing needs and the solutions envisaged also caused concern both at Whitehall and in Coventry. The Ministry of Town and Country Planning Advisory Panel, which visited Coventry in 1943, felt that the City Architect had positively overestimated the total housing needs of the city and was

somewhat alarmed at the exceptionally high number of flats proposed in the report.⁴⁶ The Ministry in general doubted the wisdom of providing various accommodation to match the precise requirements of the local population ('... it rather tends to treat human beings as units without any account being taken of the human reactions and desires') and was particularly critical of Gibson's assumption that each single person would live in a guild house or flat, citing the more conventional custom of single people living in lodgings.⁴⁷ Gibson, on the other hand, maintained that they ought not to plan on the assumption that people would continue to live in rooms (thereby making up concealed households within families) and, looking to the future, stated: 'An increase in wages or in old age pensions, would make likely this weaning of potential households from the family, which in many cases is probably desirable'.⁴⁸

Likewise in Coventry, Gibson's advocacy of flats did not find much favour with the Housing Committee of the City Council, which requested him to further report on the long-term programme 'with suggestions as to the types of accommodation to be included'.⁴⁹ Among the city officials, the Medical Officer of Health was inclined to have some experimental blocks of flats on proper sites and with plenty of open space round them, having been to Germany and Austria in the 1930s to inspect their housing schemes.⁵⁰ The City Engineer had long been a vociferous opponent of flats and so was unsympathetic to the housing proposals of the Gibson plan, as were some private architects in the city.⁵¹ On this question of flats and more generally, on some of the

new ideas promoted by the City Architect and his department, the sceptics appeared to have the support of local citizens. Thus a housing questionnaire carried out mainly among local women's organisations found that few were in favour of large blocks of flats or prefabricated houses and that the opinion was decidedly against communal grass verges in front of the houses as opposed to privately-owned front gardens. However it also found some support for flats to accommodate old people and business women.⁵²

Taking these views into account, Gibson reported again on postwar housing in early 1944.⁵³ It was calculated on the basis of local billeting survey results that the existing housing stock of 60,130 (a revised figure) would be enough to accommodate 167,657 persons, leaving 82,343 persons to be provided for in the projected population of 250,000 in 1950. Making use of the household composition figures for England and Wales and by incorporating a number of assumptions (about changes as regards age and household groups, the increase in birth rate and housing requirements of different families),⁵⁴ Gibson estimated that the following numbers of accommodation would be needed by 1950: 15,810 houses with gardens; 3,999 bungalows for old people; 9,099 service flats;⁵⁵ and 6,499 bed units in guild houses and existing hostels. The estimated total cost of this long-term programme (including land acquisition) worked out at £24.6 million. It was noticeable that the number of flats now proposed was much smaller compared to that in his first report but he also stuck to the idea of providing for all types of households in neighbourhood units. The City

Council accepted the suggestions and estimates contained in the report, as well as confirming the provisional building programme for the first postwar year, of two guild houses (304 bed-units) and 842 two- and three-bedroom houses. In view of the vast cost involved it was also suggested that 50 per cent of the postwar housing needs might be met by private enterprise and the other 50 per cent by the corporation houses.⁵⁶

The City Architect's two reports provided a clear picture of the extent of housing needs in the city. In the remaining period of the war, the City Council directed its effort to organising the housing programme and to getting the actual housebuilding started. In October 1944 it was decided to order 1,000 temporary dwellings, to form part of the overall programme of housing requirements.⁵⁷ The initial plan was to find fresh sites for these prefabricated bungalows. But the Housing Committee later decided to erect many of them on existing Corporation housing sites to obviate delay.⁵⁸ The seriousness of the housing situation was revealed in March 1945 when it was announced that the Council had already received 7,141 applications for a house, including 1,722 from those still serving in or back from the Forces.⁵⁹ Accordingly, in response to the Policy Advisory Committee's request for a review of postwar schemes and priorities, the Housing Committee resolved that 'having regard to the grave shortage of houses in Coventry, housing schemes should be accorded the highest priority'.⁶⁰ In addition to the temporary housing programme, plans were being prepared to erect 252 permanent houses at Canley, as

well as 60 houses of a permanent prefabricated type as part of an experiment carried out in conjunction with the Ministry of Health.⁶¹ As the housing plans began to take shape, it became clear that additional sites were required to fulfil the Corporation's share of 10,000 houses in the long-term programme (about a half of some 20,000 houses and bungalows proposed by the City Architect).⁶² In this the City Council was successful, particularly in acquiring a total of 1,345 acres of land on the outskirts from a well-known local charity trust.⁶³

The actual progress on the temporary housing programme was slow and disappointing from the City Council's point of view, with only two prefabricated bungalows being completed and handed over by the end of August, while it was reported in the same month that the number on the waiting list had almost doubled since March to a figure of 13,000.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, encouraged by Labour's national victory at the General Election which returned two new Labour M.P.s in the city, the Housing Committee outlined its six-month permanent housing programme in response to the request from the Ministry of Health. It was proposed to provide within this period 212 permanent houses by the local authority and 300 by private enterprise, as well as rebuilding 140 corporation-owned houses destroyed in the war. The Committee was also careful to point out that the carrying through of this programme (the first instalment of the city's housing operation) depended on the Government making available adequate building labour which had been depleted by the war.⁶⁵ In October, the City Council took advantage

of the occasion marking 'the 600th Anniversary of the granting of the Charter of Incorporation' to reaffirm the thrust of its replanning proposals. The 'Coventry of the Future' Exhibition, which was organised by the Council, featured models and plans of 'new Coventry' and was visited by 57,500 people (representing one in four of the local population), giving them the chance to see and judge for themselves the various schemes put forward by the city's planners.⁶⁶ The section on housing included both a layout plan of a model neighbourhood unit and life-size prototypes of labour-saving kitchen units. In the well-illustrated Exhibition booklet, flats were also promoted with a photograph showing Kensal House, designed by Maxwell Fry.⁶⁷

The municipal elections in November brought further gains for Labour and the Party now had a commanding position on the City Council.⁶⁸ The Coventry Evening Telegraph spoke of 'the Party's strongly developed social consciousness and fervent advocacy of social services' in the wake of the elections, while Hodgkinson, the city's Mayor in 1945, saw this as a mandate 'to go forward with all the schemes for the city's development, with additional emphasis for housing operations'.⁶⁹ In the same month, the Housing Committee initiated the first instalment of a scheme for permanent houses, which it was hoped would form part of a continuing programme of housing provision and 'be a credit to the City of Coventry and a benefit to its citizens'.⁷⁰

Footnotes

- 1 Information on the prewar character of Coventry was drawn from the following sources: HLG 71/914 Note J.C. Wrigley - L. Neal (re: housing problems ins seven blitzed towns) (6.11.44) and 'Blitzed Cities - Statistics of Overcrowding and Slum Clearance' (19.1.45); HLG 88/9 Ministry of Town and Country Planning Advisory Panel 'Notes Preliminary to a Visit to Coventry' (A.P.C.C. 9) (2.7.43) and 'Notes on Employment and Labour Conditions at Coventry' (A.P.C.C. 11) (9.7.43); A. Shenfield and P. Sargant Florence 'Labour for the War Industries: The Experience of Coventry' The Review of Economic Studies Vol. 12 (1944-45) pp. 31-49; J.B. Priestley English Journey (Collected Edition 1949, originally published 1934) pp. 68-76. More generally, see K. Richardson Twentieth-Century Coventry (Coventry 1972) passim; various contributions in B. Lancaster and T. Mason (eds) Life and Labour in a Twentieth Century City: The Experience of Coventry (Coventry 1986).
- 2 Coventry City Record Office (hereafter CCRO) Committee Papers Planning and Redevelopment Committee Report of the Planning Officer 'The Future Population of Coventry' (5.10.49) Table 1.
- 3 'Municipal and Country Engineers in Conference Reconstruction in Coventry: More Factories and Roads' The Municipal Journal (19.7.46).

- 4 Ibid. In 1938 Coventry had 68 private cars per 1,000
of the population, against the 1939 national average of
39 per 1,000.
- 5 The Midland Daily Telegraph [hereafter MDT] (12.1.39).
- 6 See, for example, The Coventry Standard [hereafter CS]
(27.2.37). See also M. Davis Every Man His Own
Landlord. A History of Coventry Building Society
(Coventry 1985) Ch. IV.
- 7 See, for example, MDT (11.10.35), (22.11.35) and
(10.3.36). These interwar suburbs were castigated
after the war as 'barren estates' (CS (4.5.46)).
- 8 See K. Richardson Twentieth-Century Coventry pp. 277-
281, for the City Council's initiatives. See also, for
example, MDT (6.12.32) and (5.3.37) for the City
Engineer's views and MDT (26.1.37) for an extensive
scheme of street improvement prepared by a city
councillor. The Coventry Civic Guild also produced
plans for a civic centre. See T. Gregory 'Coventry',
in J. Holliday (ed.) City Centre Redevelopment. A
study of British city centre planning and case studies
of five city centres (1973) pp. 87-88.
- 9 F. Carr 'Municipal Socialism: Labour's Rise to Power',
in B. Lancaster and T. Mason (eds) Life and Labour in a
Twentieth Century City pp. 174-183; G. Hodgkinson Sent
to Coventry (1970) pp. 124-131. George Hodgkinson was
an influential local Labour leader of the period.
- 10 MDT (2.11.37) and (2.11.38). After the 1938 municipal
elections, the City Council was constituted as

follows:- 36 Labour and 28 Progressives (i.e. the formal coalition of Conservatives and Liberals).

11 MDT (30.12.38) and (3.1.39).

12 CS (10.12.38).

13 MDT (14.4.38) and (25.10.38).

While at the Manchester School of Architecture, D.E.E. Gibson was a holder of an Italian travelling scholarship and also had some architectural experience in the U.S.A. After qualifying in 1932, he had a spell as the first non-Liverpool lecturer at the Liverpool School of Architecture, the only place in Britain at the time which taught architecture as part of a technical and social process. He then went to work at the Building Research Station of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research where he had a thorough grounding in every branch of materials and construction methods. Gibson was barely thirty when he became the first City Architect of Coventry in 1938. He came at a propitious point in time. The redevelopment of Coventry's city centre was in the air and the wartime destruction soon after appeared to open up real possibilities for a new type of architecture and planning. More generally, local authority architecture and organised building programmes came into their own in the huge rebuilding process after the war. The prewar perception of official architecture as something safe and dependable but dull (prevalent among architects in private practice, who were in the overwhelming majority) began to change as more

architects went into salaried service and applied their expertise to the work of public authorities. Gibson and his Department could be said to have spearheaded this change. For Gibson's profile and biographical information, see 'Official Architect. 4 Gibson of Coventry' Building Vol. 28 No. 4 (Apr. 1953) pp. 139-141; The Architects' Journal (20.1.55).

- 14 D.E.E. Gibson 'Problems of Building Reconstruction' Official Architect Vol. 3. No. 12 (Dec. 1940) p. 524; P. Johnson-Marshall 'Coventry: Test case of Planning' The Listener (17.4.58). Johnson-Marshall was senior assistant to Gibson in the early days of the City Architect's Department.
- 15 During the war, Gibson cooperated with a number of engineering and building firms and, with approval from the Housing Committee of Coventry City Council, built several experimental houses at Canley, so as 'to provide experience in connection with post-war housing programmes'. The idea was to develop a prefabricated system of its own in Coventry to produce houses quickly, in anticipation of a massive housing shortage. As he put it: 'If only bricks and mortar were going to be relied on it would be many years before there would be all the houses that were required ... I think we can produce by prefabrication a better type of house than at present exists in many parts of Coventry' (The Coventry Evening Telegraph [hereafter CET] (4.5.43). Providing the housewife with 'the as-near-perfect-as-possible "workshop"' was an essential part of these

experimental houses (CET (14.4.44)). However, Gibson was also well aware of the need for some central authority in charge of bulk ordering, if prefabrication were to succeed. In the event, Gibson failed to find producers or attract official support for his designs and, after the war, came to rely upon government-sponsored schemes and other prefabricated systems sponsored by large commercial firms. See Coventry City Council Housing Committee [hereafter HC] (11.9.41), (18.11.43), (10.2.44), (12.4.45), (29.10.45), (22.11.45) and (13.12.45); CS (11.7.42) and (6.3.43); CET(2.9.43), (15.4.44) and (30.11.44). See also HLG 71/784 for discussions between the Ministries of Health and of Works and local authority architects on permanent prefabricated housing design, and especially, Advisory Technical Council of Local Authorities' Representatives Minutes of the 2nd Meeting (11.4.45). An example of Coventry's experimental houses, of tubular steel frame construction with a central duct containing all plumbing and other services, can be found in The Builder (2.11.45); 'From Experiment to Achievement Constructional Features of the Coventry House' The Municipal Journal (9.11.45). In addition to the experiments carried out in his own city, Gibson shared, with Councillor Harry Weston (one time chairman of Coventry's Housing Committee), the membership of the Committee for the Industrial and Scientific Provision of Housing, an independent research organisation, which investigated the economic, social and technical aspects

- of prefabrication. The significance of the Committee is discussed in B. Finnimore 'The Industrialisation of Building: Building Systems and Social Housing in Postwar Britain 1942 to 1975' (PhD Dissertation, University College London 1986) pp. 168-173.
- 16 D.E.E. Gibson 'Prefabrication can help us', in Association of Building Technicians Housing Problems (1943) pp. 18-20.
- 17 D.E.E. Gibson 'Problems of Building Reconstruction' pp. 522-524.
- 18 Ibid., p. 522; D.E.E. Gibson 'The Third Dimension in Town Planning' The Architect and Building News (1.8.47).
- 19 Eleven out of a total of twenty members in the Department were members of the left-wing Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants (AASTA - later renamed the Association of Building Technicians). Gibson himself joined upon taking up his post. See R.D. Manning 'Coventry A new Official Architectural Department' Keystone (July 1939) pp. 23-24.
- 20 These houses, fronting on to a strip of common lawn (incorporating a feature of the English village), nevertheless gave a striking impression of ordered horizontality. As Gibson described the scheme, 'The design of the layouts and houses has been kept as simple as possible, the external elevations relying for the effects on good proportions and a careful use of materials' (D.E.E. Gibson 'Coventry Housing An Experiment in War-time Construction Methods' Journal of

- the Town Planning Institute Vol. 26 No. 5 (July-Aug. 1940) p. 166). The main inspiration for the scheme came from a set of similar terrace houses designed by F.R.S. Yorke in 1939. See The Architectural Review Vol. 85 No. 501 (June 1939) pp. 282-284.
- 21 CET (8.10.42); 'Coventry' The Architects' Journal (8.1.42).
- 22 K. Richardson Twentieth-Century Coventry pp. 93-94; CET (24.9.45).
- 23 For example, such eminent figures as Thomas Sharp and Clough Williams-Ellis were invited to give lectures in 1939 (K. Richardson Twentieth-Century Coventry p. 283), while approximately 5,000 people including practically all the senior school children in the city visited the aptly titled 'Coventry of Tomorrow' Exhibition in May 1940, organised by the Coventry Branch of the ASSTA. See Keystone (Nov. 1940) p. 11; CS (11.5.40); P. Johnson Marshall Rebuilding Cities (Edinburgh 1966) p. 293.
- 24 Accounts of the blitz and bomb damage can be found in, HLG 79/130 H.R. Wardill Report 'Bombed Areas - Re-development of Coventry' (21.2.41) pp. 4-10 and Appendix 8; HLG 71/915 'Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Special Needs of Particular Areas in Relation to the Post-War Building Programme' (23.5.45) Appendix 1; Coventry Corporation Development and Redevelopment in Coventry (Coventry 1959) p. 2; T. Harrison Living Through the Blitz (Penguin Edition, Harmondsworth 1978) pp. 132-144 and Appendix A.

- 25 HLG 88/9 Ministry of Town and Country Planning Advisory
Panel 'Notes Preliminary to a Visit to Coventry' p. 5.
- 26 D.E.E. Gibson 'Problem of Building Reconstruction' p.
524. These remarks were also reported in The Times
(5.12.40) and called forth a leader entitled 'Beauty
for Ashes' (7.12.40).
- 27 MDT (4.12.40).
- 28 K. Richardson Twentieth-Century Coventry pp. 286-287.
See also MDT (27.2.41). The City Engineer's aim was to
create a workable city centre without incurring too
much public expenditure by disturbing rateable values.
Thus his plan was more on the lines of extensive street
improvements, retaining much of the existing street
patterns, though he did accept the idea of a traffic-
free shopping area. That there might have been more
than just the differences on planning principles
between the two officials was hinted at by a government
inspector: 'It is feared that the undercurrent of ill-
feeling which was aroused when, I understand as a
political move, the post of City Architect was created
two years ago, has never subsided' (HLG 79/130 H.R.
Wardill Report p. 11.).
- 29 HLG 68/66 Ministry of Works and Buildings 'Deputation
to the Minister from the Redevelopment Committee of the
Corporation of the City of Coventry' (8.1.41) pp. 6-7;
MDT (9.1.41); D.E.E. Gibson, 'Some Matters Concerning
Post-war Reconstruction' The Architectural Association
Journal Vol. 56 No. 648 (Feb. 1941) p. 73.

- 30 The Coventry City Council [hereafter CCC] voted 43 to 6
in favour of adopting Gibson's plan (25.2.41).
- 31 MDT (13.1.41).
- 32 For the significance of and the influences upon the
Coventry plan, see, inter alia, P. Johnson-Marshall
Rebuilding Cities pp. 294-295; T. Gregory 'Coventry'
pp. 89-90; N. Tiratsoo Reconstruction, affluence and
Labour politics: Coventry 1945-60 (1990) pp. 10-11.
- 33 D.E.E. Gibson 'Re-development of City Centre-Coventry'
(1.2.41) p. 6 (forming part of HLG 79/130 H.R. Wardill
Report as Appendix 5). Extracts of Gibson's report can
be found in 'Replanning of Coventry' Journal of the
Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol.
48 No. 5 (17.3.41) pp. 76-77. The plan is illustrated
in The Architects' Journal (24.4.41).
- 34 MDT (28.2.41).
- 35 D.E.E. Gibson 'Re-development of City Centre-Coventry'
p. 5. See also his Statement in F.E. Towndrow (ed.)
Replanning Britain (1941) pp. 100-105.
- 36 CS (31.5.41).
- 37 See, for example, HLG 88/9 Ministry of Town and Country
Planning Advisory Panel 'Memorandum by the City
Treasurer of Coventry in Reply to the Financial
Questionnaire' (A.P.C.C. 32) (21.4.44) and 'Notes of a
meeting held at Coventry' (A.P.C.C. 38) (24.2.44).
- 38 See, for example, MDT (2.4.41); HLG 79/131 'Notes on
Conference held at the District Valuer's Office,
Coventry' (4.5.44) p. 3; E.H. Ford 'The Coventry
Tentative Planning and Re-development Proposals'

Journal of the Town Planning Institute Vol. 32 No. 4
(May-June 1946) pp. 152-157.

- 39 HLG 79/130 H.R. Wardill Report pp. 4, 12; MDT
(25.2.41).
- 40 See, for example, MDT (1.5.41); (CET) (13.3.43) and
(12.11.43).
- 41 As the Regional Planning Officer in charge of the
Coventry plan at one point put it: 'The concentration
of civic buildings to such a high degree as proposed in
the plan constitute, in my opinion, a serious threat to
the success of the plan which can perhaps best be
described as a large 'dead' area in the City shopping
centre ... On the shopping precinct, my only comment is
that it is intensely disliked by the shopping interests
who consider it revolutionary without justification.
My view is that it does not seem like Coventry, where
there is such a high proportion of working class
people, (probably 90%) most of whom seem to like the
hustle and bustle of a busy shopping street' (HLG
79/131 Letter E.H. Doubleday - B. Gillie (16.5.44)).
- 42 For the evolution of the city centre proposals of the
plan, see J. Hasegawa 'The Replanning of the Blitzed
City Centre in Britain: A comparative study of Bristol,
Coventry and Southampton 1941-1950' (PhD Dissertation,
University of Warwick 1989) pp. 65-92.
- 43 CET (30.1.43).
- 44 HLG 71/914 D.E.E. Gibson 'Report to the Housing
Committee of City of Coventry' (22.3.43) p. 6.
- 45 Leader in CET (2.4.43).

- 46 HLG 88/11 Letter A.M. Jenkins - Wright (22.7.43); HLG 71/914 'City of Coventry City Architect's Report on Housing Programme. Comments by Research Division' (29.7.43).
- 47 HLG 71/914 'Regional Planning Officer's Comments on Professor Holford's Memo on the City Architect's Housing Report' (8.9.43) and Letter E.H. Doubleday - A.M. Jenkins (11.11.43).
- 48 HLG 71/914 D.E.E. Gibson 'Report to the Housing Committee of City of Coventry' p. 3.
- 49 HC (26.3.43).
- 50 HLG 79/130 H.R. Wardill Report, Appendix 2 (ii) 'Interview with Dr. Arthur Massey, Medical Officer of Health Coventry' (11.2.41) pp. 3-4.
- 51 See, for example, MDT (5.3.37); CS (11.5.40); Comment by E.H. Ford in F.E. Towndrow (ed.) Replanning Britain (1941) pp. 106-108. For the views of local architects see HLG 79/130 H.R. Wardill Report Appendix 3 (iv) 'Interview with Representatives of the Coventry Society of Architects' (19.2.41).
- 52 CCRO Sec/CF/1/9697 'Summary of the Views Expressed by Various Organisations in Response to a Questionnaire issued by the National Council of Women' (Aug. 1945). See also, for example, Letters to the Editor in the local press, protesting against the City Architect's plan for flats, in CET (6.4.43) and (7.4.43).
- 53 CCRO Sec/CF/1/9697 D.E.E. Gibson 'Post-War Housing' (21.1.44).

- 54 Gibson assumed that all families with children would like a house and garden; that most of the married couples who have no young children would also like to have a house or bungalow and garden; and that most of the people living singly would prefer either a bungalow, flat, guildhouse or hostel (ibid., p. 4).
- 55 Gibson wrote elsewhere of the service flat: ' ... such service flats I would like to see built with a ground floor library, stocked with books from the city library, a common room, dining room; upstairs, they could have their own sitting-rooms, with kitchen range or gas stove and so on' (The Architects' Journal (7.10.43)).
- 56 HC (27.1.44); CCC (7.3.44).
- 57 HC (5.9.44) and (12.10.44); CCC (3.10.44); CET (29.9.44).
- 58 HC (16.11.44), (14.12.44) and (15.3.45); CET (15.5.45).
- 59 CET (7.3.45).
- 60 HC (15.2.45).
- 61 HC (15.3.45), (12.4.45) and (10.5.45); CET (15.5.45).
- 62 HC (14.6.45).
- 63 CET (27.7.45), (1.8.45) and (26.10.45).
- 64 CET (24.8.45) and (3.8.45).
- 65 HC (21.8.45); CET (22.8.45).
- 66 CET (8.10.45), (20.10.45) and (22.10.45).
- 67 CET (12.10.45); Coventry Corporation The Future Coventry (Coventry 1945) p. 25.

- 68 As a result of the aldermanic elections and by-election victories which ensued, Labour held 41 seats out of 64 on the Council at the end of 1945 (CET (9.11.45) and (12.12.45)).
- 69 CET (2.11.45) and (3.11.45).
- 70 CET (9.11.45).

**Chapter 10 Postwar housing provision in Portsmouth and
Coventry, 1945-51: achievements and
explanations**

As the two preceding chapters have shown, the local authorities in Portsmouth and Coventry, with divergent political aspirations, displayed different levels of preparedness in relation to postwar physical reconstruction of their respective cities. The Labour City Council in Coventry saw the blitz as a unique opportunity to plan and create what G.E. Hodgkinson called 'the welfare city',¹ of which popular housing provision formed an integral part. In Portsmouth, the Conservative City Council showed reluctance to commit itself to any far-reaching reconstruction of war damaged areas during the war and was rather unambitious in its plans for postwar housing. The first section of this chapter, in turn, looks at how the local authorities dealt with the issue of housing provision in Portsmouth and Coventry between 1945 and 1951. The second section then provides a summary of their housing records and an attempt will be made to explain the similarities and differences in the housing work of the two cities during the period.

The housing operation in Portsmouth began in earnest in the spring of 1946 with the resumption of outstanding work on the prewar schemes at Wymering (54 dwellings) and at Church Park North (136 flats in three storey blocks), which formed the first postwar contracts to be let. The 54 houses at Wymering were of the traditional brick type to match the existing adjoining houses completed back in 1938.² But it

was the permanent prefabricated house of various types which better characterised municipal housing of the early postwar period in Portsmouth. In drawing up a permanent housing programme, the unavailability of Leigh Park for immediate use forced the City Council to revise its plans for Paulsgrove. To the disappointment of the City Planning Officer (F.A.C. Maunder), his original intention of allocating substantial sites on the estate for private housebuilding, thereby securing a social mix in the local population (a form of mixed development) was increasingly questioned by councillors and other officials ('... out of step with the Minister's pronouncement that houses should be provided by local authorities in the ratio of 4 Council houses to 1 private house') and discarded in favour of a decision that the Corporation should 'build over' the whole of the estate.³ This enabled the City Council, by the middle of 1946, to build up a programme involving the erection of 1,830 permanent dwellings, of which it was reported that contracts had already been placed for 1,540. The bulk of these dwellings in the programme (1,613 in total) was planned for at Paulsgrove ('the only "sizeable land" within the City boundaries', as the Town Clerk put it at the time')⁴ and of these, no less than 1,478 were of permanent prefabricated types (i.e. 1,000 British Iron and Steel Federation houses, 278 Howard houses and 200 Easiform houses) which qualified for an extra grant from the Government towards their high costs compared to houses of traditional construction.⁵

There were signs, on the other hand, that the Conservative City Council was less than enthusiastic about setting the housing campaign in motion. Thus, the Council set its face against the creation of a direct labour organisation proposed by the Labour group which, claiming lack of cooperation on the part of local builders, saw it as a means of speeding up the building of houses.⁶ Further, the appointment of a director of housing to coordinate municipal housing policy and the preparation of a five-year housing programme, both called for by a Labour councillor, were being thwarted.⁷ Throughout 1946, the actual performance in housing provision remained disappointing. By the end of October, Portsmouth could only count a postwar total of 604 completions (511 temporary bungalows, 91 permanent dwellings and 2 private houses built under licence) which compared unfavourably with some of the other blitzed cities; Coventry had by then completed a total of 1,387 new dwellings and likewise had Hull (1,249), Plymouth (1,090) and Bristol (1,028).⁸ A Ministry of Works survey of the local housebuilding situation, in response to complaints of slow progress by the two Labour M.P.s in the city, noticed some considerable amount of unessential work being carried out in the area but found no appreciable evidence of either the shortage of materials or of labour impeding Portsmouth's housing progress,⁹ though local allegations of material shortage were continued to be expressed.¹⁰

In the meantime, Whitehall, in particular the Ministry of Town and Country Planning responsible for the redevelopment and rehabilitation of blitzed areas, became

concerned with what it saw as the increasing neglect of comprehensive planning on the part of the City Council in favour of immediate measures for the restoration of rateable value.¹¹ Over the course of 1946, the Council rejected the City Planning Officer's plans on financial grounds and substantially reduced the areas of extensive war damage it proposed to acquire for redevelopment;¹² the City Treasurer emphasised the financial burden likely to fall upon the Corporation as a result of the housing programme and the lack of adequate assistance from the Government.¹³ This action, together with the adverse decision on Paulsgrove, caused Maunder's resignation from the position of City Planning Officer,¹⁴ which was then split up into two posts (F.W. Pratt was appointed City Planning Officer and T.L. Marshall, City Planning Architect),¹⁵ leading to further delays and loss of direction in planning.

Thus the revised outline plan for the city (prepared by Pratt and finally approved by the City Council in March 1947),¹⁶ with the reduced areas of war damage reconstruction, was more modest and flexible, whose guiding principle became that of 'preserving all that could be regarded as an asset in the City - not destroying just for the sake of a scheme'.¹⁷ The plan also provided for densities of 100 and 75 persons to the acre in the built-up areas of the city (i.e. higher than that proposed in the Maunder plan). At the same time, however, the City Council produced a formidable proposal for its boundary extension, no doubt as a way out of the financial impasse. It anticipated an overspill well in excess of 100,000 from

Portsea Island to be accommodated in neighbouring districts (without much regard to the plans of other local authorities in the area), which would have increased the size of the city five-fold.¹⁸ And in advancing its extension claims, the land at Leigh Park provided an important foothold for the City Council. Hence a fresh scheme was prepared by Marshall for a 'satellite town' with an estimated population of between 20,000 and 25,000 (consisting of three neighbourhood units) and the number of dwellings between 6,000 and 7,000. It was proposed that about a third of the dwellings be erected by the Council and two-thirds by private enterprise on leased sites.¹⁹ By the end of 1946, the Health Committee had agreed on the first stage of its development, for the provision of 800 permanent prefabricated houses, using a small existing sewage plant.²⁰

The unsatisfactory planning situation in Portsmouth called for a review by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning in 1947; this suggested the need to reach an accurate assessment of the overspill and housing requirements and to agree upon the means of handling them in relation to the surrounding area.²¹ But the Hampshire County Council, the planning authority responsible for the area, raised objections to housing developments at Leigh Park and was also mindful of Portsmouth's ambitious extension proposals.²² In view of the difficulty of getting the authorities to cooperate, the Ministry, as a long-term objective, took up the idea of an outside consultant (Max Lock) to review the planning problems and prepare an outline plan for the Portsmouth district,²³ and it managed to

persuade the two planning authorities, Hampshire and Portsmouth, to agree to the appointment. Lock's remit was to advise them, inter alia, as to the future scale and character of development at Leigh Park and to suggest alternative housing sites in the area.²⁴ However, the Ministry was also well aware of the serious housing shortage in Portsmouth and the importance of sustaining the Corporation's housing programme. Therefore, on the advice of the Regional Planning Officer, it was agreed that clearance should be given for the erection of 800 permanent prefabricated houses at Leigh Park.²⁵

In the meantime, Portsmouth's housing programme gradually got into better shape, with steadily rising numbers of new completions.²⁶ During August, September and October of 1947, new units were being completed at a rate of 8 per day or almost 50 per week. By the beginning of November, the City Architect could report a total of 1,970 completions (including 92 converted Admiralty camp dwellings),²⁷ while a further 1,641 units were under construction. Out of 1,469 housing authorities in England and Wales, Portsmouth was eighth from the top of the list of completed dwellings and had completed more new dwellings than any other town or city in the six counties comprising the Southern Region. At Paulsgrove, 566 houses had been completed and 1,244 were in various stages of construction from foundations to roofs.²⁸ The City Council also went ahead with the construction of sewers and roads at Leigh Park in September 1947 with the approval of the Ministry of Health, despite the fact that the Petersfield Rural District

Council had not consented to the scheme.²⁹ Likewise, in February 1948, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning indicated its consent to the first stage development at Leigh Park comprising 800 houses.³⁰ The City Council decided that, of these, 450 would be of the traditional brick type, while the balance was made up of permanent prefabricated types (i.e. 250 Easiform houses and 100 Orlit houses), to take advantage of the capital grant which was due to expire at the end of 1947.³¹

In 1948, the scaling down of special financial assistance to blitzed cities³² and the prospect of losing out on the general grant under the new formula of the Local Government Act³³ combined to heighten the City Council's financial anxieties and led to further calls for retrenchment.³⁴ In the field of housing provision, this manifested in a number of ways. Firstly, the Health and Housing Committee raised the question of the sale of council houses (as a means of lifting the financial burden of the housing programme) with the Ministry of Health officials in early 1948, but was subsequently told that 'it would not accord with the Government policy to permit this'.³⁵ Secondly, with the Public Works Loan Board charging an increased rate of interest for loans from the beginning of the year, it was agreed by both the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Health and Housing Committee that the charge to be borne by the rates in respect of housing schemes should be limited to the statutory rate fund contributions; the provision to cover any anticipated deficit on the Housing Revenue Account was deleted³⁶ (see

Table 10.1) [Tables 10.1 to 10.12 can be found at the end of this chapter, beginning page 537]. As a result of this, the City Council decided in May 1948 that rents of corporation houses would be increased from the following month by amounts varying from 1s. 10d. a week for a one-bedroomed prewar flat to 13s. 1d. for a four-bedroomed postwar house.³⁷ The rent increase led to some vociferous protest by council tenants across the city culminating in a deputation to the City Council.³⁸ The Health and Housing Committee, in turn, agreed, where there was hardship, to consider each case on the merits to provide for rebates.³⁹

Portsmouth's progress in housing was sustained in 1948 when the Corporation provided a total of 1,363 new dwellings, which included 77 prefabricated bungalows completing the temporary housing programme comprising 1,400 such dwellings. By the end of the year a start had been made at Leigh Park; contracts had been placed for 452 houses and 350 of these were under construction.⁴⁰ However, during the following three years, the City Council's housing programme somewhat faltered and only a much smaller number of completions could be achieved each year (547, 310 and 439 new dwellings respectively for the years 1949, 1950 and 1951) (see Table 10.2). As the development at Paulsgrove (with more than 2,000 dwellings) neared completion, increasing reference was being made by councillors and officials to the shortage of suitable land affecting housing provision in the city,⁴¹ while the Leigh Park controversy was revived by the findings of the planning consultant.

These factors led to some rethinking and reshaping of the Council's housing policy.

Max Lock had already produced his preliminary report in May 1948 recommending alternative sites for 2,000 dwellings to maintain the city's housing flow until 1951, pending a final decision on Leigh Park (which, in any case, still lacked adequate drainage and sewage facilities for full development). These included some natural infilling of existing development on Portsea Island and at Paulsgrove, as well as sites in the neighbouring Portchester and Purbrook, which met with the Council's general agreement.⁴² Moreover, on Lock's instigation, the City Council accepted the offer of the Havant and Waterloo Urban District Council to build 650 dwellings in the Purbrook area to house people on Portsmouth's waiting list. This was recommended by the Health and Housing Committee on the grounds that it would relieve the rates of the amount of subsidy payable in respect of these dwellings and would leave Portsmouth free to proceed with other housing projects.⁴³

Lock's main findings and recommendations of his interim and final reports (November 1948 and May 1949), particularly in relation to the Leigh Park scheme, proved to be more contentious. In brief, Lock estimated that the ultimate population of Portsmouth should be about 196,000, leaving an overspill of 47,000 (smaller than originally foreseen by the City Council). Since Portsmouth's main industry (the naval dockyards and ancillary trades) was largely immobile, this overspill, he suggested, could be better settled by expanding a number of existing built-up areas, mainly in the

Waterlooville and Purbrook area than by the development of a virgin site at Leigh Park. Thus he recommended the abandonment of the Leigh Park project beyond the first stage development now totalling 1,000 dwellings which could conveniently form a neighbourhood tied to a small housing development at nearby Havant (with a consequent saving of £500,000 and much good agricultural land). In Lock's view Leigh Park failed to fulfil the theoretical requirements of a new town; a single settlement of the overspill (containing a large element of working-class people) carried a risk of becoming a one-class community without its supporting industry and the consequent dependence of the local labour force on Portsmouth would aggravate the journey-to-work problem.⁴⁴

The Hampshire Telegraph described the Leigh Park verdict as 'a free gift to Havant of the rateable value of the 800 houses suggested for Leigh Park' and warned of the financial consequences for Portsmouth's reconstruction schemes which would now have to be borne by the remaining population, contained largely within Portsea Island.⁴⁵ The City Council also took exception to Lock's views on Leigh Park (in particular to the charge that it would become a one-class community), arguing that it had made provisions for two-thirds of the estate to be built by private enterprise. A rather vitriolic reply given to Lock by the Chairman of the Development and Estates Committee also betrayed the Council's main source of interest in persisting with the scheme:

Leigh Park is there. We own it and in-so-far as the Council houses are concerned we have to thank him for saying that not more than 6,000 people should be put there, because that was our intention. How it develops afterwards is not a matter of concern for him, and further houses could be developed on better lines.⁴⁶

On the other hand, the City Council substantially endorsed Lock's estimates of the city's population and its overspill. Thus it was agreed in February 1950, in the interests of the financial stability of the city, to retain a maximum number of people within the present boundaries and plan for a future population of 200,000. In turn, it was decided to seek some of the housing sites on the basis of the overspill figure recommended by Lock, as well as keeping the Leigh Park option open ('the Council should reserve the right to make further representations on Leigh Park').⁴⁷ In line with this council decision to retain much of its population, the Health and Housing Committee began, from the end of 1949, to explore the possibilities of 'building up', of erecting a greater number of flats, some of which would be multi-storey high with lifts.⁴⁸ There was no significant demand among the local population for flats but the surveys carried out by Lock also highlighted the journey-to-work problem in the area and the importance of providing new housing close to the main focus of work on Portsea Island.⁴⁹ Accordingly, from the second half of 1950, the City Council proceeded with a series of compulsory purchase orders, mainly in respect of blitzed sites,⁵⁰ to be developed in

the form of flats and maisonettes, which included blocks of flats up to 8 storeys in height, in the Nelson Road and Arundel Street areas.⁵¹

Having made a start on the provision of about 1,000 dwellings on blitzed sites available for housing within the city, the City Council returned to the question of a further housing development at Leigh Park in early 1951. This time a joint report prepared by the Health and Housing Committee and the Development and Estates Committee roundly questioned Lock's recommendations; it was reported that, on investigation, some of the alternative housing sites suggested had been rejected by the neighbouring authorities on agricultural grounds, while Lock's contention that Leigh Park did not measure up to the standards of a new town was dismissed as 'purely a matter of opinion':

Meanwhile Leigh Park, with over 1,600 acres of land belonging to the Corporation, purchased expressly for the purpose of housing Portsmouth's overspill with the consent of the Minister of Planning and of the Minister of Health, free from development charge, is permitted to accommodate 1,500 houses only. It was not possible to exceed this number originally because of difficulties in connection with foul sewage and surface water drainage. Both these difficulties are being removed.⁵²

The City Council accepted the recommendation of the report in March 1951 and decided to apply for planning permission for the full-scale development of Leigh Park, taking the

total number of dwellings to be provided to 9,000.⁵³ Towards the end of the year, the Minister of Local Government and Planning gave consent to the scheme,⁵⁴ thus bringing a settlement to a major planning issue concerning popular housing provision in Portsmouth and which occupied the mind of the City Council for most of the period between 1945 and 1951.

Coventry made a good initial start in its postwar housing operation. As well as making progress with the temporary housing programme, comprising 1,000 prefabricated bungalows and with the six-month programme (agreed upon in August 1945), including the erection of 152 permanent houses and of private houses under licence, the City Council embarked on the development of its first postwar estate on a 31 acre site by Holbrook Lane in the north of the city. Begun in February 1946, early contracts for the Monks Park estate provided for three-storey blocks of flats, three-storey terrace houses with garage accommodation as part of the ground floor and old people's bungalows, in addition to ordinary two-storey dwellings.⁵⁵ In March, the Council endorsed a three-year outline programme of capital works with a projected total expenditure of £10 million, of which new housing construction accounted for £3.2 million.⁵⁶ This followed a meeting between the council representatives and Lewis Silkin, Minister of Town and Country Planning at the end of January, at which, the question of priorities was raised and 'the Corporation suggested as their programme (a) housing, (b) shops, (c) schools and (d) hospitals'.⁵⁷

Further, the Council applied to the Ministry of Health for 2,000 British Iron and Steel Federation (BISF) houses in May, to reinforce its permanent housing programme and two contractors were nominated forthwith for the erection of 506 such houses at Canley.⁵⁸ These BISF houses proved to be the only type of government-sponsored permanent prefabricated houses to be built in Coventry, as the City Council passed over considerations of other types, after the City Architect had failed to secure official support for the 'Coventry-Arcon' type which was being developed locally.⁵⁹ By July 1946, Coventry had a total of 1,098 completions since the end of the war, including 796 temporary bungalows. As far as permanent housing was concerned, the Corporation had provided 106, out of 583 dwellings for which tenders had so far been approved. In addition, licences had been issued for the erection of 1,430 private houses and of this figure 196 had already been completed.⁶⁰

Contrary to the expectations that the allocation of BISF houses would provide further impetus,⁶¹ the Corporation's housing programme ran into difficulties from the end of 1946. The Ministry of Health subsequently reduced Coventry's BISF allocations from 2,000 to 880 on the grounds that not enough sites could be made immediately ready, despite protests from the Council Housing Committee.⁶² But the real problem for the City Council was the persistent shortage of building labour which became manifest as the economic life of the city was revived after the war and its industries began to make a serious contribution to the export drive.⁶³ By the end of February

1947, Coventry had completed a postwar total of 1,601 new dwellings but had dropped from previous second to sixth place in the list of county boroughs for housing progress. Moreover, this total included 576 houses privately built, against only 144 erected by the local authority.⁶⁴ The problem of housing provision was two-fold. The local building industry failed to compete for operatives with the motor car and engineering sector offering higher rates of wages.⁶⁵ In turn, these higher wages and the general boom and expansion of manufacturing jobs attracted a steady influx of workers and their families into Coventry exacerbating the housing shortage.

Thus, on the one hand, the building and civil engineering labour force fell from a peak of 5,788 in August 1946 to 4,249 in May 1949 which represented at the time only 1.67 per cent of the local population (when the national average figure for those engaged in building and civil engineering was about 2 per cent of the total population),⁶⁶ in spite of the fact that Coventry as a blitzed city had a relatively large rebuilding programme. In addition, the situation was made worse for the City Council by the fact that many building operatives from this small pool were finding it 'more attractive to work in factory maintenance and extensions'⁶⁷ and were also leaving municipal housing contracts for private housebuilding which was allegedly more remunerative.⁶⁸ It was estimated in late 1946, for instance, that only 424 operatives were engaged on municipal houses whereas a labour force of 2,181 was required to proceed with the Corporation's housing programme in hand.⁶⁹

On the other hand, the city's population was growing at a rate of 1,000 every month in 1947⁷⁰ and by the middle of 1948, the City Architect's projected 1950 population of 250,000, on which he based his estimate of local housing requirements, had been surpassed. Pressure on housing that this increase was creating was being reflected in the waiting list figures for corporation accommodation totalling 15,000 by the beginning of 1947. Neither a re-registration of all the applicants in 1947 nor the imposition of a stricter residential qualification in 1948 helped to stem the tide of applications so that, at the end of 1948, the total figure still stood at 14,212.⁷¹

The City Council sought to tackle the situation in a number of ways. Firstly, the Housing Maintenance Department of the Corporation was expanded in 1946 to undertake housebuilding by direct labour,⁷² and in order to retain its work force the City Council later applied to the Ministries of Health and Works for approval to pay the operatives an increased rate of wages.⁷³ Secondly, in conjunction with Whitehall guidance, measures were considered to ensure that 60 per cent of the available labour in local building was used for housebuilding and the remaining 40 per cent for all other work including factory extensions in connection with the export drive.⁷⁴ Moreover, the City Council suspended the issue of private licences in early 1947 so as to focus resources on corporation housing schemes. In the early postwar years, the rate of private housebuilding continually outstripped municipal completions in Coventry and this was looked upon with particular disapproval by the Ministry of

Health, which saw it as a result of the Council's liberal licensing policy.⁷⁵ Towards the end of 1947, the City Council was also reminded by the Ministry of the imbalance between the number of units approved or under construction in Coventry and the rate of completion and was instructed to concentrate the schemes on hand before coming back for further approvals.⁷⁶ Thirdly, attempts were made to augment the local labour force in housebuilding by bringing in additional workers from elsewhere. In 1946, the Ministry of Works refused Coventry's request for one of its emergency squads of mobile building workers to be made available to the city to assist in municipal housing.⁷⁷ The question of importing labour came to a head in 1947, when it was reported that the construction of BISF houses was being held back by the lack of local labour.⁷⁸ The Ministry of Health agreed to the importation of labour to expedite progress on the contracts but refused the City Council's repeated approaches for the cost involved (i.e. payment of travelling and subsistence allowances) to be borne by the Government.⁷⁹ The Council was forced, in the end, to agree upon the terms with the contractors and guarantee the outlay of importing labour and found itself in a controversy as to the ways of defraying the extra cost.⁸⁰ The majority of Labour councillors opposed the suggestion that the cost should be balanced by an increase in the rents of corporation tenants while the local press made much of the additional burden on the ratepayers.⁸¹ Disenchanted by the episode, the City Council decided to cancel its BISF allocation beyond the 506

included in the existing contracts and to utilise the sites set aside for them for houses of traditional construction.⁸²

As the temporary housing programme ran its course, the total completions in 1947 dropped to half that of 1946. Moreover, private builders were still providing twice as many new dwellings as the Corporation (see Table 10.3). However, there were also some bright spots in the early period of postwar housing provision in Coventry. By 1947, Monks Park was shaping up into a medium-sized estate of some note - 'the best laid-out estate in the city', as one official of the City Architect's Department put it.⁸³ The estate provided for a total of 295 dwellings ranging from old people's bungalows to four-bedroom terrace houses, to cater for various types of households and the majority of these looked on to a series of squares and open greens which made up the estate. Provision was made for shops and sites were also reserved for a nursery school and a community centre to be built later.⁸⁴ From 1947, plans were also being prepared by the City Architect for the development of neighbourhood units at Bell Green and Tile Hill providing accommodation for a total of 20,000 people.⁸⁵

In 1948, an assistance from the new Exchequer grant under the Local Government Act (1948) and the transfer to the Government of certain welfare services brought Coventry a rate relief amounting to 3s. 3d. in the £. This enabled the City Council at once to budget for a rate of 17s. 0d. in the £ (a reduction of 1s. from 1947) and to make additional resources available for the council committees⁸⁶ (see Table 10.4). In the meantime, housebuilding in Coventry showed

improvement and got into better balance from the point of view of the Council as municipal completions finally outstripped private building.⁸⁷ At Canley the BISF contracts were bearing fruit, thanks to the Council's decision the previous year to import labour.⁸⁸ A further indication of housing progress was given in July with permission from the Ministry of Health to build another 1,000 dwellings in Coventry.⁸⁹

Between 1949 and 1951, the City Council began to take the large-scale development of suburban estates in hand, such as at Bell Green (with a total of 485 proposed dwellings) and likewise at Willenhall (988) and Tile Hill (453 on the southern section and 1,047 on the northern section).⁹⁰ As D.E.E. Gibson, City Architect, described in 1949, these estates were conceived as a series of neighbourhood units and on each estate it was planned to have special buildings for old people, some flats and some houses with gardens. In the same breath he questioned the efficacy of universal low-density development and contended that 'The city should go in for flats in a big way'.⁹¹ Later in the year, a joint report by Gibson and the City Treasurer, analysing the incidence of under-occupation of corporation houses and of the requirements of applicants on the waiting list, pointed to a greater demand for smaller type accommodation. The Housing Committee accordingly decided to provide a larger proportion of two-bedroom dwellings (45.5 per cent as opposed to 34 per cent in three-bedroom dwellings) for the next 5,000 units to be provided by the Corporation.⁹² Further, on the recommendation of

Gibson as City Planning Officer, the City Council agreed to raise the density of houses to 15 to the acre for the northern section of the Tile Hill neighbourhood units instead of 10 as it was normally recommended at the time by the Ministry of Health.⁹³ In 1950, the question of multi-storey flats was also discussed by the Housing Committee who requested the City Architect to pursue the issue.⁹⁴ Plans were being prepared for the erection of two blocks of eleven-storey flats at Hillfields (by the City Architect's Department) and two blocks of eight-storey flats at Bell Green (by a firm of private architects), though neither of these materialised before the first blocks of eleven-storey flats were finally erected at Tile Hill in 1955.⁹⁵ On the other hand, the Housing Committee also had plans in 1949 and 1950 to reduce the ceiling height in some proposed Corporation dwellings to 7 feet 6 inches, which was suggested by the Ministry of Health on the grounds that this would improve the architectural appearance and achieve a reduction in cost.⁹⁶ This, however, provoked a council resolution calling on the Housing Committee to ensure that no further municipal houses should be built with ceiling heights of less than 8 feet.⁹⁷ Moreover, the sale of council houses was discussed in 1950, at the instigation of the Housing Superintendent who was also suggesting this course as a means of preserving a cross section of the community within any one estate, but the idea was turned down by the Ministry.⁹⁸

Thus, there were some new directions evident in the City Council's housing plans during the period. However,

the shortage of building operatives, particularly of those working on municipal housing contracts remained a major bottleneck to rapid housing progress in Coventry,⁹⁹ while the continuing influx of workers into the city to help in the arms and export drive placed the Corporation's housing efforts under stress and actually threatened to undermine its progress (see Table 10.3). In these circumstances, the council Housing Committee began in 1949 to look again at new forms of building which employed less skilled labour than the traditional brick construction.¹⁰⁰ As a result, two firms of different prefabricated building systems were chosen for negotiated tender to build at the proposed Hipswell Highway estate. The Unity house (consisting of a composite concrete and steel frame) sponsored by Unity Structures could not give a firm price nor a delivery date and in any case failed to find a contractor.¹⁰¹ Wimpeys, on the other hand, quoted a competitive price (including the cost of importing necessary labour) for their 'No-fines' (concrete) house, which the Ministry of Health was prepared to approve, and was eventually awarded the whole contract to provide 202 dwellings on the estate in October 1949,¹⁰² marking the start of a relationship between the 'No-fines' system and Coventry's housing programme. By January 1950, the City Architect was reporting good progress on the Wimpeys contract at the Hipswell Highway estate.¹⁰³ In addition to the mass production of 'No-fines' houses, Wimpeys also succeeded in promoting blocks of three-storey flats of 'No-fines' construction in Coventry, which suited the requirements of Gibson and the Housing Committee in

their plans to provide a greater number of two-bedroom dwellings. These 'No-fines' flats were first accepted for erection at the Stonebridge Highway estate and then extensively adopted for other sites within the city (e.g. at Allesley, Quinton Park and Fletchamstead Highway).¹⁰⁴ In an effort to secure further housing progress, the Housing Committee also contracted Wimpeys to build 1,049 'No-fines' dwellings at the Tile Hill neighbourhood unit (northern section) which was ready for development. Wimpeys effectively offered a guarantee completion date and, in adapting the City Architect's plans to their 'No-fines' system, produced eight different type plans of dwellings for the estate, including those for bungalows, two- and three-bedroom houses and three-storey flats. The City Council, in turn, waived its standing order setting out tender procedures and, with advice from the Ministry of Health, also awarded Wimpeys with a tender for the whole of the site development work required at the estate.¹⁰⁵ By the end of 1951, the drop in the number of municipal completions had been arrested and the Corporation was beginning to reap the rewards of the Wimpeys contracts.

* * * * *

Between 1945 and 1951, 5,368 new dwellings were provided in Portsmouth - 4,828 by the local authority including 1,400 temporary dwellings and 540 by private enterprise. Likewise, 5,614 new dwellings were provided in Coventry - 4,085 by the local authority including 1,099

temporary dwellings and 1,529 by private enterprise (see Tables 10.2 and 10.3). In this period the Portsmouth Corporation relied more heavily on various types of permanent prefabricated houses which qualified for a special grant from the Government before 1948. In June 1948, it had a completed total of 1,334 permanent prefabricated dwellings, compared to 327 traditional dwellings. In December 1951, the corresponding figures were 2,059 as against 1,162.¹⁰⁶ In Coventry, the only permanent prefabricated type built before Wimpeys started its rolling programme was the 506 BISF houses. By the end of 1951, the Coventry Corporation had completed 1,859 traditional dwellings as against 1,050 permanent prefabricated dwellings.¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately no figures exist for the breakdown of Portsmouth Corporation dwellings by types and sizes. But the types of permanent prefabricated dwellings being built at this time in Portsmouth were all three-bedroomed and it is fair to assume that a large proportion of the traditional dwellings were also of that size. As a compact city with land constraints, Portsmouth had built some 430 flats in the 1930s for its rehousing schemes¹⁰⁸ but in the immediate postwar period under review the Corporation appears to have concentrated on providing family type houses. By March 1952, of the 3,493 new dwellings provided by the Corporation, Paulsgrove accounted for 2,067 and Leigh Park another 886, while there was some infilling on Portsea Island and further development on the mainland portion of the city.¹⁰⁹ In Coventry the emphasis was also on three-bedroom dwellings but the Corporation's postwar housing

stock in March 1952 also contained 442 one-bedroom dwellings (including 397 such bungalows mainly for old people) and 387 two-bedroom flats (see Table 10.5). Again the usual practice was to choose peripheral sites. In the early postwar years several of these were developed, each providing between 100 and 300 dwellings (except at Canley where a number of schemes were undertaken with a total of almost 1,000 dwellings) before the Corporation embarked on the development of large-scale neighbourhood units in 1949.

The quality of the permanent dwellings being built in this period in terms of space standards was equally high in both cities. Apart from the various permanent prefabricated types employed in the city, Portsmouth was building traditional three-bedroom type houses with superficial areas in excess of 1,000 square feet. A typical layout would include an entrance hall, a lounge (180 square feet) with dining recess (78 square feet) and a kitchen (123 square feet) on the ground floor and three bedrooms (141, 113 and 78 square feet respectively), a bathroom and a separate w.c., with outbuildings containing a second w.c. (Type "L" at Paulsgrove) (see Table 10.6). At Leigh Park, the first floor w.c. was combined with the bathroom in favour of economy but this did not affect the generous overall size of the houses. Similarly in Coventry, the Corporation appears to be following the 'Dudley' standard and the exhortation of Aneurin Bevan in its provision of houses. Here a most representative type plan of the early postwar period (Type A59) provided for an entrance hall, living room (176 square feet) with dining recess (91 square feet) and a kitchen (61

square feet) on the ground floor and three bedrooms (160, 118 and 74 square feet respectively) and a combined w.c. and bathroom, as well as outbuildings. There was probably a slight reduction in space standards with the introduction of the 'No-fines' system. In 1951, the Portsmouth Corporation was charging an average rent of 17s. 1d. a week for a three-bedroom house and the figure in Coventry was 19s. 2d. a week.¹¹⁰ In Portsmouth the general rent increase in 1948 was also accompanied by a system of rent pooling whereby an increased rent income from the Corporation's prewar dwellings subsidised the high cost of its postwar dwellings. Consequently there was less variation in the level of rents being charged.¹¹¹ In contrast, Coventry's rents for its postwar dwellings varied over a wide range (e.g. between 15s. a week and 25s. a week for a three-bedroom house) in 1951, due to the large number of dwellings let at below the level of economic rent.¹¹²

An important element in the neighbourhood unit thinking which emanated from the war was the idea that community centres provided a primary focus for new housing communities. Both cities built their first community centres with funds provided by the British War Relief Society of America. In Portsmouth, the Twyford Avenue Community Centre was opened in 1946 (supposedly serving the whole of Portsea Island)¹¹³ but no other centres followed, until provision was made towards the end of 1951 for the erection of one at Paulsgrove.¹¹⁴ Coventry, on the other hand, initially provided three centres at Holbrooks, Stoke Aldermoor and Bell Green.¹¹⁵ The Corporation's intention

was to 'extend community centre facilities to all parts of the City as quickly as possible',¹¹⁶ to serve established residential areas as well as new housing estates. A centre at Cheylesmore was opened in 1948 and others followed at Canley, Whitley and Whoberley, so that by the end of 1951 Coventry had seven community centres.¹¹⁷

So far as private housebuilding is concerned, Coventry's builders provided a total of 1,529 private houses in this period and the ratio of private to municipal completions (excluding the temporary prefabricated bungalows) was roughly 1 to 2. The figure in Portsmouth was 540, giving a corresponding ratio of 1 to 6 (see Tables 10.2 and 10.3). In Coventry, local builders of course clamoured for private housebuilding¹¹⁸ and protested against the suspension of licences in 1947.¹¹⁹ But the question of demand was equally important. As has been suggested, Coventry had seen a high rate of private housebuilding in the 1930s, and despite the devastations of the war the city's economic recovery was very swift. There was already a buoyant property market worth £1 million in 1946 with an 'abnormal demand for artisan houses'.¹²⁰ The rapid increase in the price of houses with vacant possession was a feature throughout the period and although 1948 saw a slight check in prices, by 1951 there was 'a further rise of prices in the smaller property market'.¹²¹ Private building licences issued by the local authority were eagerly sought, particularly after 1947 when they were more strictly controlled.¹²² When a national cutback in the housing programme was announced in 1949, the Housing Superintendent

anticipated 'a considerable jump in applications for Corporation houses if licences for private builders are cut'.¹²³ Thus there was a very strong demand for owner occupation in Coventry during the period which came from the same sort of people who applied for a council house and this was probably reflected in the City Council's rather liberal licensing policy in the early postwar years.

In the case of Portsmouth, initially the cost limit of £1,200 for a house built under licence was felt to be too low for private builders but even after the limit was relaxed there was no great increase in the number of private houses built. A relative low-wage economy dependent on the naval dockyards¹²⁴ would not have created a large demand for owner occupation among the local working class in this period. On the other hand, with the City Council itself promoting the Leigh Park scheme, the outward movement of Portsmouth's population appears to have continued in this period. Between 1945 and 1951, while the city struggled to regain its prewar population the neighbouring suburban districts¹²⁵ increased their population by 17 per cent from 106,446 to 124,817 and there was a higher incidence of private housebuilding in these areas - a total of 920 private as against 2,386 municipal completions.¹²⁶ A profile of the housing stocks in the two cities, which can be gleaned from the analysis of rateable property in 1951, shows that in Coventry the bulk of residential property was concentrated in the lower range (with rateable value of £20 or less), whereas in Portsmouth there was a concentration of houses in the medium range (see Table 10.7). This could be

taken as an indication that house owners in Portsmouth were already being well catered for by the city's existing housing stock. No available figures exist for the levels of owner occupation in the two cities during the period, but according to one recent estimate the 1939 figure for Portsmouth was 48.8 per cent, while for Coventry it was 37.8 per cent.¹²⁷

Assessments of the cities' housing achievements of this period give a mixed picture. In Portsmouth, there was a fair amount of criticism in 1951 that the Conservative City Council was not dealing energetically with the housing problem, as municipal completions showed signs of faltering.¹²⁸ The City Council, on its part, turned the table on the Labour Government with the suggestion that rigid control from the centre had hampered local housing progress.¹²⁹ The actual housing estates were also the object of much adverse comment. The Paulsgrove estate with a population of 10,756 in 1951 possessed only two small groups of shops apart from the houses. Its layout was described by The Architects' Journal as 'a conventional hotch-potch of prefabs, temporary and permanent, and traditional houses', with no intrinsic merit.¹³⁰ The architectural historian, Nikolaus Pevsner, wrote later of the Leigh Park estate:

It is a garden-city type layout which would have seemed quite good in the thirties. The principal roads nearly all curve; there are generous borders of grass, numerous old trees are preserved, and new ones have been planted everywhere. The

architecture nowhere calls for notice, but the grouping of house blocks is sometimes carefully done in relation to the alignment of the roads and topography. The general impression is one of extensive dreariness.¹³¹

To be sure, many of the tenants at Paulsgrove, for instance, were enthusiastic about their modern houses and gardens.¹³²

But Lock also referred to 'The tardy provision of social facilities and amenities in the post-war development of Paulsgrove'.¹³³ A similar criticism about the lack of social facilities was being raised at Leigh Park.¹³⁴

Inadequate bus services linking both the estates with the city centre were a major source of grumbling among the tenants.¹³⁵ At Paulsgrove, moreover, a large child population (with at least half of the total being under fifteen) led to problems of vandalism and juvenile delinquency.¹³⁶

In Coventry, there was general disappointment that the city was not in the van of postwar housing progress¹³⁷ and the Labour City Council was having to defend its record against the opponents' claim of slow completion rates.¹³⁸ At the same time, the Council's qualitative achievements were much noted. The Municipal Journal, in an extended coverage of the city's postwar housing work in 1953, drew attention to its high standard of design and layout, and considerable variety of the dwelling types, and commended it for study, especially to 'those in the local government service - for it is in Coventry that much of the best work since the war is being done'.¹³⁹ Coventry was certainly

more in tune with the new thinking in postwar housing and its housing schemes seemed to be more popular with the design professions. Of the housing estates built in this period, the Monks Park estate was awarded a Ministry of Health Housing Medal for good design in 1950¹⁴⁰ and was particularly praised for its imaginative layout and siting of the dwellings.¹⁴¹ The various types of dwellings that were being provided, including the novel three-storey terrace houses at Monks Park, were, on the whole, popular with the residents.¹⁴² On the other hand, there were again complaints about the shortage of shops and social facilities, about unmade roads on the estates or about the lack of car parking spaces.¹⁴³

All told, the foregoing summary shows that the outcome in the two cities, particularly in quantitative terms, was similar and that both Portsmouth and Coventry were being faced with a similar set of problems and complaints on their new estates at the end of the period. In order to explain this pattern of development in housing, it is necessary to consider a number of the following factors which may have affected the course of housebuilding in the two cities: the outlook and policies of the local authority towards postwar housing and reconstruction; the nature of local politics; problems of implementation (e.g. the capacity of the local building industry); the competence of local technical staff and their influence on policy and its realisation; and the relationship with a central government that had its own policies of priorities. The remainder of this chapter deals, in turn, with each of these factors as they impinged

upon the practice of popular housing provision in Portsmouth and Coventry between 1939 and 1951.

In Portsmouth, the Conservative City Council was never keen on the idea of collective provision to meet social needs, including popular housing, and was reluctant to take up the notion of planning, even in the aftermath of the blitz which necessitated an extensive overhaul of the city's physical environment. Consequently there was no real overall plan for postwar housing. All this no doubt reflected the innate conservatism of a well-established civic consciousness, being historically associated with the influence of the naval establishments:

Essentially, Portsmouth is a conservatively minded City. As would be expected, many naval ratings and warrant officers on their retirement spend their gratuity on buying a small house or shop. A very large number of properties is owner-occupied. The City Council is therefore keenly conscious of its duties to ratepayers, both as regards not imposing a high rateable burden and not inflicting harsh compensation terms.¹⁴⁴

Elsewhere the City Council was described as being 'dominated by people interested in building and in short-run economic advantage for the City'.¹⁴⁵ Hence a high degree of rate consciousness shown by the City Council, which pursued a policy of relatively low and stable rates (see Table 10.8) based upon a guiding principle that the restoration of rateable value at whatever cost was the prime objective. The development of Leigh Park appears very much to have been

pursued because of the Council's financial interest in the scheme. Its proposal for a boundary extension was also couched in financial terms with the fear of reduced rate income uppermost in its mind. In view of the proposed reduction of density on Portsea Island and a tendency among the higher income groups to migrate to surrounding districts, the Council was anxious to avoid a situation in which these factors, combined with the continuing dependence of its labour force on dockyard work, left Portsmouth with 'an undue proportion of the smaller type house which cannot be profitable to the Rating Authority'.¹⁴⁶ Within this framework municipal housing was a liability and this view was frequently expressed by the leading members of the City Council.¹⁴⁷ The Council Finance and General Purposes Committee always kept a tight rein over council expenditure but anxieties about the rates reached its peak after 1948, when a further financial retrenchment was instituted. As the chairman of the Committee wrote in 1949, 'Economies have had to be effected in every department of the Corporation, desirable schemes shelved, improvements postponed, and even some of our existing services may be slightly curtailed'.¹⁴⁸ Capital expenditure on housing showed a significant drop after 1948 (see Table 10.1) and major features in the revised reconstruction plan of the war damaged areas were having to be abandoned.¹⁴⁹ Cuts in housing had their effects and the Ministry of Local Government and Planning was openly critical of Portsmouth in 1951 for having fallen down on its housing allocations.¹⁵⁰

It is also true that the cause of planning and economic rehabilitation in Portsmouth was not helped by the Admiralty's proposal for dockyard extensions which was in the air for most of the period and for which provisions were being made in the reconstruction plan before the City Council was told of its curtailment in 1950.¹⁵¹ The local Chamber of Commerce, in particular, objected to reserving sites for an uncertain proposal and thought that they could be used to attract light industries into the city.¹⁵² Indeed, fears of dockyard reductions were never far away from the surface in Portsmouth¹⁵³ but again the City Council did not take the initiative of exploring the question of alternative industrial development in any systematic way. Instead the alarm was raised in 1948 by Julian Snow, a Labour M.P. for the city, who campaigned for an Industrial Development Board to be formed for the Portsmouth district. On this occasion, the city's other Labour M.P., Donald Bruce, took a more measured view of the continuing importance of the naval dockyards, rejecting the unlikely scenario of a sudden collapse, and referring to a substantial amount of industrial and commercial projects already in hand, in addition to the work of reinstating local firms destroyed in the war. His concern was rather that any expansion of the building effort in the non-housing direction could only be accomplished to the detriment of housing progress. The reluctant City Council went as far as setting up an investigating committee to examine the desirability of setting up the kind of Board Snow suggested

but, in the end, rejected the idea, as it involved additional council expenditure.¹⁵⁴

To set against this rate consciousness of the Conservative City Council, the advance of the Labour group on the Council, particularly in the early postwar years, acted as a stimulus to the municipal housing programme.¹⁵⁵ In 1946, Labour gained another seat taking its representation on the Council to a high of 22 out of 64 members.¹⁵⁶ However, this upturn in the Labour vote was far from secure in a fundamentally conservative city such as Portsmouth, particularly after the general turn of the tide against the national Labour administration and a better organisation on the part of the Portsmouth Conservatives. The Labour support rapidly collapsed after 1947 (see Table 10.9) so that by 1951 its representation had been reduced to two aldermen and one councillor.¹⁵⁷ In the latter part of this period, popular pressure in the shape of the housing waiting list figures (see Table 10.10) was probably more effective in keeping the issue of municipal housing provision at the centre of local politics.¹⁵⁸ In fact this persisting need to provide municipal housing within the framework of a rate stabilisation policy pursued by the Conservatives produced some unsatisfactory results in other spheres of council activities. Thus educational provision in the city suffered, with a general shortage of schools and much overcrowding in existing schools, many of which were themselves in need of physical improvement.¹⁵⁹ At Paulsgrove, provision of school accommodation could not keep up with the rapid housing development so that arrangements

had to be made to bus children on the estate to schools in other parts of the city.¹⁶⁰ Likewise, the City Council's practice of using surplus from the municipal transport undertaking for rate relief led to a deficit on the undertaking in 1951, with consequent increases in bus fares.¹⁶¹

There was no obvious shortage of building workers in Portsmouth during the period. The estimated number engaged in building and civil engineering in the Portsmouth area (including the borough of Gosport and the urban districts of Fareham and Havant and Waterloo) was 11,924 in 1947 - 3.4 per cent of the estimated civilian population of 346,340 in the area.¹⁶² As a Board of Trade survey noted in 1950, building labour had been attracted to the area by the prospect of building work arising from reconstruction and repair of war damage and was largely retained, due to shortage of alternative work for unskilled men in the area. In fact the survey noted a persistent tendency of unemployment among building workers in this period.¹⁶³ Portsmouth building contractors, on the other hand, were mostly small, not well organised and few were able to take on large contracts. But a more serious problem which beset the building industry in the area was the difficulty of securing adequate amounts of work both in housing and other construction, particularly in the early postwar years, when the uncertainty over the future shape of Portsmouth led to sluggish demand for building.¹⁶⁴

As far as the calibre of planning staff in Portsmouth is concerned, officials in the Ministry of Town and Country

Planning held a high opinion of F.A.C. Maunder and felt that his departure in 1946 would jeopardise progress in the city's reconstruction scheme.¹⁶⁵ His successors (F.W. Pratt and T.L. Marshall), on the other hand, were not thought to carry enough weight with the City Council, as one Ministry official put it:

... the apparent lack of co-ordination in the various units of the Corporation's planning machinery is evidenced by the frequent change of plan and intention which appears in practically every case referred to the Ministry. There is no officer of proved experience and ability on the Corporation staff to co-ordinate and give effect to a constructive planning policy.¹⁶⁶

On housing, moreover, the City Architect (A.J. Sharp) appears to have concentrated on the basic provision of houses, as the pattern of development at Paulsgrove suggested, and there was little sign of the new thinking on the issue, except at Leigh Park, where the initial plan (prepared by Marshall) had provided for a series of neighbourhood units served by a central civic and shopping centre.¹⁶⁷

As a city economically dependent on the naval dockyards with not much to offer to the export drive, the Government's aim was for the general social and economic rehabilitation of Portsmouth, in which housing claimed a priority.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, Portsmouth continued to receive special financial assistance (started under the wartime scheme to help local authorities hit by the blitz) from the Government, which

amounted to £1.27 million by 1951.¹⁶⁹ In view of the unwillingness on the part of the Conservative City Council to tackle reconstruction projects, the Government also assumed a more positive role in facilitating housing progress, as was seen in the case of the Leigh Park controversy, which essentially turned on the need to find housing sites for Portsmouth. The course of an independent planning survey was adopted, partly to satisfy the neighbouring authorities, but as one senior official in the Ministry of Town and Country Planning confided at the time:

I do not think we need be committed to the full development proposed for Leigh Park simply because Portsmouth have bought the land with consent of ourselves and of Ministry of Health. What must prejudice us is Portsmouth's urgent housing need and the work which has already been done towards preparing Leigh Park to receive their need. It is to be noted, moreover, that Hampshire have never produced any solid planning objection to the development of Leigh Park.¹⁷⁰

Meanwhile the Ministry of Health also threw its weight behind the scheme by inducing the Havant and Waterloo Urban District Council to submit a new sewage plan sufficient to serve a fully developed Leigh Park population.¹⁷¹ The planning survey served the useful purpose of ascertaining the housing requirements of Portsmouth and surrounding districts and when the possibilities of suggested alternative housing sites had been exhausted the go-ahead was duly given to the full-scale development of Leigh Park.

In the case of Coventry, the Labour City Council was uniquely placed to take advantage of the blitz to plan for an ambitious physical redevelopment of the city. There was a definite meeting of minds between a progressive Labour City Council and an energetic City Architect - as the Editor of The Coventry Evening Telegraph later put it, G.E. Hodgkinson, the most important Labour leader, and D.E.E. Gibson made 'a very good pair of visionaries with a practical bent'.¹⁷² Municipal provision of housing with its interdependent needs such as shops, schools, and social and cultural facilities formed a vital part in the city's postwar planning. During the war, Gibson undertook a detailed analysis of probably housing requirements in the city (which was characterised as 'exhaustive and scientific' by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning)¹⁷³ and its results provided the basis for the City Council's medium-term aim in housing provision. The Council was ready to commit a large proportion of its resources on housing during this period; between 1946 and 1952, capital expenditure on housing continually accounted for more than 40 per cent of the total capital expenditure and it rose to over 60 per cent in the financial year 1951-2 (see Table 10.4).

Politically, Labour's position on the City Council was not as secure as its continued majority suggested. Generally its share of the vote cast in municipal elections barely reached 50 per cent and seats had to be won to retain control of the Council (see Table 10.11). In these circumstances Labour could ill afford controversies on the Council such as that surrounding the cost of imported labour

on its housing contracts, which laid the authority open to criticisms of 'Socialist extravagance'.¹⁷⁴ The scale of the housing waiting list through the period (see Table 10.12) ensured that municipal housing provision received due priority in the Council's building programme. Thus even when the building of the shopping precinct finally got underway in 1949, the Council's line was to retain the existing labour ratio of 60 to 40 in favour of housing work.¹⁷⁵

As has been mentioned, there was a chronic shortage of building labour in Coventry and this acted as a major constraint on the City Council's housing programme before the introduction of Wimpeys 'No-fines' system in 1949. The Council also had to contend with the practice of some local builders who treated a council contract as 'a "hospital job" during slack period in other more remunerative work'.¹⁷⁶ As the Housing Superintendent later described this in an interview, 'they'd get a contract, they might not start it for several months, they'd be half way through and hop off to do some work in the factories which might pay them a bit better and then cry their eyes out they'd been losing their money on council job - their own fault of course'.¹⁷⁷ This practice led to delays in the completion of contracts and further affected the housing programme. Moreover, although Coventry had enough leeway in terms of selecting and utilising housing sites within its boundaries there were also some no-go areas for the Corporation. At Styvechale, for instance, the local ratepayers' association objected to proposed council housebuilding in the area which would

'injure the character and amenities of the neighbourhood' and would lead to 'considerable devaluation', and its appeal against compulsory acquisition of the land was upheld by the Ministry of Health.¹⁷⁸

There is little doubt about the influence that Gibson and his department exerted on the Corporation's housing programme. Their achievements were to be seen in the design and layout of the estates and the standard of the houses which were built in this period. On the other hand, Gibson had to deal with a very conservative Council Housing Committee for most of the period which expressed its firm preference for traditional brick houses. With a new chairman in 1949 the Committee's outlook changed and it was more willing to back new methods of construction.¹⁷⁹ But Gibson's wartime experience bore out the problems he faced:

... it is better in going to committees, not to take perspectives, but simple working drawings. If you take perspectives you get a lot of discussion and sometimes criticism, though we find when buildings are done, they like them. One example: being short of timber we tried to do some houses rather like F.R.S. Yorke did. I took the committee to see them; they said they were horrible, and they would not have anything to do with them. However, we still built the houses, because the Ministry could not find enough timber for pitched roofs, and they then thought they were very nice indeed.¹⁸⁰

It is also true that contrary to Gibson's wartime hopes of providing modern neighbourhood units with houses and flats in the city centre, housing development invariably took the form of low-density estates on the periphery. The City Engineer was known to be resistant to high-density developments and the Housing Committee was not amenable to new ideas. But the overriding consideration during this period was the extent of housing need to be satisfied and suburban development readily provided the means for tackling this demand. As Gibson himself admitted, 'Experience shows that more rapid progress can generally be made by building houses in large numbers on virgin sites'.¹⁸¹ Moreover, Gibson was to be disappointed by local resistance to his idea of providing mixed communities, of having council houses and private houses together in the same neighbourhood, as was evidenced at Styvechale.¹⁸²

During this period, the Government was not particularly sympathetic to Coventry's social aims and the City Council was to be frustrated over its dealings with Whitehall. The Ministry of Health refused to reimburse the cost of importing labour on the BISF contracts, and the Council's attempt to retain its building operatives by paying them above nationally agreed rates brought ministerial censure and a request for reconsideration.¹⁸³ More serious in view of the continuing housing shortage was the Whitehall decision in early 1950 to relax the 60 to 40 ratio of labour allocations, in order to divert additional workers to industrial building required for the export drive.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, throughout this postwar period, licences for

industrial building were fairly readily granted, particularly in the case of those firms engaged in the export drive, leading to diversions of resources as well as of labour away from housebuilding.¹⁸⁵ As a consequence of this, the City Council was unable to complete its housing allocations in 1949 and again in 1951.¹⁸⁶ The scale of the housing task still facing the City Council was underlined during 1951 in a remark made by the chairman of the Council Public Health Committee: 'Since 1945 the population of a town the size of Canterbury has been added to Coventry without anything like adequate accommodation'.¹⁸⁷ The Council's annual deputations to Whitehall from 1949, requesting special treatment for the city on a par with new towns met with indifferent responses.¹⁸⁸ Whitehall was well aware of the unsatisfactory situation in Coventry which was described in 1952 as 'a vast encampment of industry and population' with hopelessly inadequate social and recreational facilities, but concluded that there was nothing that could be done for Coventry 'where life no doubt is very uncomfortable - but there are worse things than a boom'.¹⁸⁹

Thus the picture that emerges is of Portsmouth, prompted by Whitehall and operating in a relatively favourable environment, choosing to concentrate on the basics in housing provision, by providing much needed new dwelling units in numbers. In Coventry, meanwhile, the priority for industrial expansion necessitated by the plight of the British economy constantly threatened to overwhelm the City Council's housing programme with its central idea

of providing for the community. To be sure, in both cases, the room for local manoeuvre was very much circumscribed by the Ministry of Health, who kept tight financial control by closely vetting local authorities' loan applications for housebuilding. The Ministry, in this period, also refused to countenance the provision of social items such as health centres (in conjunction with housing schemes) which, though desirable, were judged surplus to the essential requirements of providing new housing.¹⁹⁰ But it is, nevertheless, to the credit of the Labour Government and both the local authorities that the council houses built in this period are spacious and of a high standard.

Footnotes

- 1 The Coventry Standard [hereafter CS] (18.5.51).
- 2 The Hampshire Telegraph [hereafter HT] (8.2.46) and (15.3.46).
- 3 Portsmouth City Council Health (Housing) Committee [hereafter H(H)C] (29.1.46), (13.2.46), (20.3.46) and (17.4.46).
- 4 HT (7.6.46).
- 5 H(H)C (19.6.46); Portsmouth City Council [hereafter PCC] (9.7.46).
- 6 HT (12.4.46).
- 7 HT (12.7.46) and (26.7.46); H(H)C (17.7.46) and (4.9.46); Portsmouth City Council Health Committee (19.12.46); PCC (14.1.47).
- 8 HT (6.12.46).
- 9 The Evening News [hereafter EN] (10.5.46), (11.5.46) and (22.5.46).
- 10 See, for example, EN (24.5.46) and (25.5.46); HT (27.9.46).
- 11 An internal document of the Ministry thus described the situation developing in Portsmouth: 'The policy of recovering rateable value at whatever cost in terms of planning has no doubt contributed to the frequent changes which have been made in the City's plans during the past year. At any rate insistence on rateable values and uncertainty of plan have together resulted in a number of profoundly unsatisfactory interim development decisions. Consents have been given for the extensive repair and reconstruction of buildings in

all areas that will not be redeveloped within two years, and the Council have shown that they are unwilling, except in extreme cases to refuse consent to rebuild when refusal would mean the loss of a cost of works payment' (HLG 79/593 Note 'Minister's Meetings on 21 February with Portsmouth City Council and other Authorities in the area' (n.d. but c. Feb. 1947) p. 4). See also HLG 79/593 'Portsmouth C.B. - Reconstruction' (18.10.46); HLG 71/15 M.G. Kirk 'Portsmouth C.B. Reconstruction and Redevelopment (31.12.46) pp. 1-2.

12 HT (15.2.46), (14.6.46) and (4.10.46).

13 See HLG 71/15 City of Portsmouth Planning and Reconstruction Committee 'City Treasurer's memorandum on the financial difficulties in connection with the Planning and Reconstruction Proposals' (n.d. but c. Oct. 1946).

14 HLG 79/593 F.E.C. Shearme 'Portsmouth County Borough Note of Interview' (25.4.46).

15 F.W. Pratt was Maunder's assistant. Prior to coming to Portsmouth he was Assistant Regional Planning Officer in the East Midlands Region during the war. Before the war, he spent 17 years in the Planning Department of the London County Council (LCC).

T.L. Marshall was Assistant Architect from November 1944. For 10 years before his appointment in Portsmouth, he was employed by the LCC and during the war he was one of a small staff of specialists working on the County of London Plan. See EN (15.6.46).

- 16 EN (3.3.47); HT (7.3.47). For the revised plan, see HLG 71/15 F.W. Pratt 'Town and Country Planning Act, 1944. Designation of Area of Extensive War Damage Proposals for Redevelopment Report of the City Planning Officer' (9.1.47).
- 17 HT (3.4.47).
- 18 The boundary extension scheme involved the incorporation of Havan and Waterloo urban district and the southern portions of Petersfield and Droxford rural districts by Portsmouth and would have enlarged its area from 9,223 acres to 49,944 acres. (Portsmouth City Council Finance and General Purposes Committee [hereafter FGPC] (17.10.46)). See also HT (12.7.46), (20.9.46) and (15.11.46).
- 19 HT (6.9.46) and (14.2.47); Portsmouth City Council Planning and Reconstruction Committee (formerly the Special Replanning Committee) [hereafter PRC] (24.1.47); PCC (4.3.47).
- 20 H(H)C (20.11.46); F. Miles 'Post-War Housing in Portsmouth' The Portsmouth Quarterly Vol. 1 No. 2 (Winter 1946-47) pp. 11-12.
- 21 See HLG 79/593 'Meeting to discuss the issues arising in the redevelopment of Portsmouth' (20.1.47); J.H. Waddell 'Portsmouth' (4.2.47).
- 22 EN (26.11.46); HLG 79/593 Letter D. White - L. Silkin (1.4.47) and 'The Portsmouth Problem' (12.6.47).
- 23 The area under review was a large one of 300 square miles including besides Portsmouth, the Borough of Gosport, the urban districts of Fareham, Havant and

Waterloo and Petersfield, and the rural districts of Petersfield and Droxford.

- 24 HLG 79/593 Letter R.T. Kennedy - J.H. Waddell (25.3.47), Letter E.A. Sharp - J.H. Waddell (30.5.47), E.A. Sharp 'Portsmouth' (20.6.47) and Letter E.A. Sharp - L. Silkin (28.6.47); HT (1.8.47) and (17.10.47).
- 25 HLG 71/15 M.G. Kirk 'Portsmouth C.B. Reconstruction and Redevelopment' (31.12.46) p. 3 and 'Meeting to discuss the issues arising in the redevelopment of Portsmouth' (20.1.47) p. 3.
- 26 See HT (21.2.47) (23.5.47) and (10.10.47).
- 27 See, for example, HT (2.5.47) and (25.7.47); Portsmouth City Council Health and Housing Committee (formerly Health Committee) [hereafter H & H] (17.9.47).
- 28 A.J. Sharp 'City of Portsmouth Report on Post War Housing' (8.11.47); H & H (19.11.47).
- 29 PCC (9.9.47); HT (12.9.47).
- 30 PRC (13.2.48).
- 31 H & H (19.8.47), (24.3.48), (9.6.48) and (28.7.48); PCC (14.9.48); EN (16.9.47); HT (19.9.48).
- 32 For five of the war years the Treasury met Portsmouth's deficit after the collection of a rate of 13s. 6d. in the £. During the next two years, the special assistance amounted to £375,000 which enabled the Council to budget for a rate of 15s. 6d. in the year 1946 to 47 and of 17s. 6d. in the year 1947 to 48. See FGPC (4.4.46); HT (5.3.48).
- 33 The nationalisation of electricity undertakings, the establishment of the National Health Service and the

absorption of certain Poor Law functions by the National Assistance Board in 1948 necessitated alterations in local government administration and finance, as these services were taken out of the responsibility of local authorities. In particular, the General Exchequer (or Block) Grant was replaced by a new Exchequer Equalisation Grant under the Local Government Act (1948) which would be paid to those authorities, in whose areas the average rateable value per head of population (weighted to allow for children of school age and in rural counties for sparsity of population) fell below the average for the whole country. Portsmouth did not qualify for this new grant but, at the same time, the relief from the estimated expenditure on transferred services was more than enough to offset the loss of the old grant. See FGPC (4.12.47); R.J. Winnicott 'City Finances' City Affairs Vol. 2 No. 1 (Jan. 1950) pp. 7-9. See also E.C.R. Hadfield and J.E. MacColl British Local Government (1948) pp. 72-89.

34 See, for example, HT (28.1.1.47), (19.12.47), (23.1.48) and (6.2.48).

35 H & H (23.1.48) and (24.3.48).

36 FGPC Supplemented Report (n.d. but c. Jan. 1948); 'City Treasurer's memorandum re. Provision of Housing Rents' (15.3.48).

37 H & H Supplemental Report (n.d. but c. Apr./May 1948); PCC (11.5.48).

38 EN (31.5.48), (3.6.48) and (4.6.48).

- 39 EN (8.6.48).
- 40 See, for example, EN (19.4.48); City of Portsmouth, Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the Year 1948 p. 25.
- 41 See, for example, HT (11.11.49), (17.2.50) and (21.7.50); F. Miles 'Housing in Portsmouth' City Affairs Vol. 1 No. 1 (June 1949) p. 30. In 1950, at Paulsgrove, the land originally allocated for open spaces was reappropriated by the Health and Housing Committee to provide a further 200 dwellings on the estate. See H & H (n.d. but c. July/Aug. 1950); PCC (12.9.50).
- 42 HLG 79/590 Max Lock 'Preliminary Report on Leigh Park' (23.1.48); PRC (14.5.48); PCC (8.6.48).
- 43 H & H (17.11.48); PCC (14.12.48); HT (1.12.50).
- 44 See M. Lock et al. Outline Plan for the Portsmouth District. Final Report (Winchester 1949) passim. The interim report with its recommendation concerning the Leigh Park scheme is summarised in, HT (7.1.49).
- 45 Leader in HT (7.1.49). It went on to note thus: 'No wonder a member of the Havant Council described Mr Max Lock's report as "the best Christmas box we have ever had"'. (ibid.).
- 46 HT (2.12.49). See also HT (7.1.49) and (6.4.50).
- 47 Development and Estates Committee (formerly the Planning and Reconstruction Committee) [hereafter DE] (6.1.50); PCC (14.2.50); HT (17.2.50).
- 48 H & H (7.12.49) and (21.12.49); HT (6.1.50).

- 49 See HT (18.6.48) and (12.5.50); M. Lock et al. Outline Plan for the Portsmouth District pp. 103-104; 'Housing - and the Plan for the Portsmouth District synopsis of a talk by Max Lock' Keystone No. 6 (July - Aug. 1950).
- 50 See, for example, DE (6.10.50) and (3.11.50); PCC (14.11.50); DE (15.12.50); PCC (9.1.51); DE (4.5.51); PCC (12.6.61); DE (20.7.51); PCC (11.9.51).
- 51 See, for example, H & H (n.d. but c. Nov./Dec. 1950); PCC (12.12.50); H & H (n.d. but Jan./Feb. 1951); PC (13.2.51); H & H (n.d. but c. Apr./May 1951); PCC (8.5.51); H & H (n.d. but c. Nov. 1951); PCC (11.12.51); HT (17.2.50), (12.1.51) and (16.2.51); EN (2.5.51).
- 52 'Joint Report of Health and Housing and Development and Estates Committees re. Leigh Park-Development' (n.d. but c. Feb./Mar. 1951). There was a gradual build up in the number of dwellings permitted for the first stage development of Leigh Park so that, by June 1951, the scheme provided for a total of 1,750 dwellings (HT (29.6.51)).
- 53 PCC (13.3.51).
- 54 DE (5.10.51); HT (12.10.51). In early 1951, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning was superseded by the new Ministry of Local Government and Planning which also took over certain functions in relation to local authorities including housing formerly exercised by the Ministry of Health.
- 55 Coventry City Council Housing Committee [hereafter HC] (23.1.46), (14.2.46) and (11.7.46).

- 56 Coventry City Council Policy Advisory Committee
[hereafter PAC] (19.2.46); Coventry City Council
[hereafter CCC] (5.3.46). The projected total figure
excludes the expenditure on trading undertakings.
- 57 HLG 79/131 'Discussion on Reconstruction of Coventry
between the Minister and Representatives of the City
Council' (30.1.46) p. 3.
- 58 HC (21.3.46), (11.4.46), (7.5.46) and (16.5.46); CCC
(2.4.46).
- 59 See HC (29.10.45), (22.11.45) and (13.12.45).
- 60 CS (7.9.46).
- 61 CS (10.8.46).
- 62 HC (22.8.46), (16.1.47) and (27.2.47).
- 63 See, for example, CS (6.4.46), (4.1.47), (16.8.47),
(21.2.48) and (28.8.48). See also D.W. Thoms and T.
Donnelly 'Coventry's Industrial Economy, 1880-1980', in
B. Lancaster and T. Mason (eds) Life and Labour in a
Twentieth Century City: The Experience of Coventry
(Coventry 1986) pp. 37-40.
- 64 CS (12.4.47) and (3.5.47).
- 65 For example, one Labour councillor quoted a case of
workmen leaving a corporation housing contract because
they could get higher wages elsewhere: 'Some of them
got £6. 10s. a week for work other than building
houses. They wanted to go into the factories where
they could get more money and where they would be under
cover and not subject to the weather' (CS (7.12.46)).
- 66 PAC (5.9.50).
- 67 CS (7.9.46).

- 68 CS (7.12.46).
- 69 HC (3.10.46); CS (12.10.46).
- 70 CS (15.11.47).
- 71 HC (13.2.47); CS (18.1.47), (1.3.47), and (27.11.48);
City of Coventry Annual Report by the Medical Officer
of Health for 1948 p. 42.
- 72 HC (4.7.46); CS (27.7.46) and (3.8.46).
- 73 HC (21.11.46); CCC (7.1.47); CS (11.1.47).
- 74 HC (3.10.46).
- 75 HC (13.2.47); CS (22.2.47).
- 76 HC (11.12.47).
- 77 CS (7.9.46) and (12.10.46); HC (3.10.46).
- 78 HC (7.1.47), (13.2.47) and (13.3.47); PAC (14.1.47).
- 79 HC (7.1.47), (7.2.47), (19.6.47) and (10.7.47).
- 80 HC (26.8.47) and (11.9.47); CCC (2.9.47).
- 81 CS (6.9.47).
- 82 HC (10.7.47), (26.8.47) and (11.9.47).
- 83 CS (17.5.47).
- 84 See The Architect and Building News (31.1.47) and
(7.2.47).
- 85 CS (17.5.47), (31.5.47) and (21.2.48).
- 86 CS (24.1.48) and (7.2.48).
- 87 CS (13.3.48) and (10.4.48).
- 88 CS (17.7.48).
- 89 HC (8.7.48); CS (10.7.48).
- 90 See The Coventry Evening Telegraph [hereafter CET]
(18.2.49); CS (11.2.50) and (31.8.51); descriptions of
'Tile Hill Neighbourhood' and 'St. James' Estate,
Willenhall', in Coventry Civic Affairs Vol. 3 No. 2

(Feb. 1950) and Vol. 3 No. 3 (Mar. 1950) respectively. The proposed numbers of dwellings in each case are taken from HC (15.9.49) and (11.1.51).

91 CET (27.4.49).

92 Coventry City Record Office [hereafter CCRO] Committee Papers Housing Committee Joint Report of the City Architect and the City Treasurer (7.10.49); HC (13.10.49). The remainder were made up of old persons' dwellings (5 per cent), small flatlets (7 per cent), dwellings with four bedrooms or over (8.5 per cent) and 'other dwellings' (1 per cent).

93 Coventry City Council Planning and Redevelopment Committee [hereafter PRC] (9.11.49). The overall density for the estate at Tile Hill rose eventually to an average of 18 dwellings to the acre (CET (20.5.54)).

94 HC (1.6.50).

95 At Hillfields there was delay in acquiring the site which prevented the scheme from going ahead in its original form. See HC (13.9.51), (10.1.52), (15.1.53) and (12.3.53). At Bell Green the Housing Committee asked the architects to substitute four-storey blocks of flats for the eight-storey ones in the plan, while the Ministry of Health favoured the erection of three-storey blocks of flats (HC (9.11.50)). For the three blocks of eleven-storey flat at Tile Hill, see The Architect and Building News (17.9.53); The Municipal Journal (10.2.56).

96 HC (13.10.49); PRC (9.11.49).

- 97 PRC (12.4.50) and (13.9.50); HC (13.4.50); CCC (3.10.50); CS (6.10.50).
- 98 HC (13.7.50), (9.11.50) and (7.12.50); CS (10.8.51).
- 99 There was an annual decrease in the number of men engaged in council housebuilding from 749 in December 1947 to 598 in December 1949 (HC (8.12.49)).
- 100 HC (13.1.49).
- 101 HC (28.4.49), (5.5.49), (21.6.49) and (15.9.49).
- 102 HC (28.4.49), (24.6.49) and (20.9.49); CCC (4.10.49).
In 1948, Wimpeys had successfully tendered for the basement works for Block 'B', one of the first buildings to be started in the city centre as part of the proposed shopping precinct scheme (CS (24.12.48)).
- 103 HC (19.1.50).
- 104 HC (8.12.49), (19.1.50), (1.2.50), (12.4.50), (4.5.50) and (12.4.51). These flats are illustrated in "No-Fines" Three-Storey Flats, Coventry' The Builder (22.6.51); The Architects' Journal (1.11.51).
- 105 HC (18.7.50), (27.7.50), (1.8.50), (3.10.50), (9.11.50) and (1.12.50); CCC (3.10.50) and (5.12.50). By the end of 1951, Wimpeys already had contracts (some of which were already complete) for the provision of 1,623 'No-fines' dwellings (1,068 houses and 555 flats) in Coventry. See HC (26.4.49), (20.9.49), (7.3.50), (4.5.50), (9.11.50) and (14.6.51). Wimpeys' rolling programme in Coventry continued with large contracts at the Wood End estate, Bell Green and at Willenhall. By the end of 1957, the firm had completed over 6,000 'No-

- fines' dwellings in Coventry. See City of Coventry 6,000 No-Fines Dwellings (Coventry 1957).
- 106 H & H (30.6.48); 'City of Portsmouth Post-War Housing Progress Schedule No. 65' (29.12.51).
- 107 CCRO Committee Papers City Architectural and Planning Department 'Housing Progress to 31st December, 1951'.
- 108 See City of Portsmouth Year Book 1946-47 pp. 223-234.
- 109 See City of Portsmouth Year Book 1952-53 pp. 129-132.
- 110 See Institute of Municipal Treasurers and Accountants Housing Statistics 1950-51.
- 111 See H & H Supplemented Report (n.d. but c. Apr./May 1948).
- 112 HC (13.9.51).
- 113 HT (26.7.46); Portsmouth City Council Education Committee [hereafter EC] (25.9.47).
- 114 EC (n.d. but c. Oct./Nov. 1947); HT (5.10.51).
- 115 HC (13.7.44); CS (4.5.46).
- 116 CCRO Sec/CF/1/9371 Letter C. Barratt (Town Clerk) - W.G. Muller (1.10.47).
- 117 CS (8.5.48); City of Coventry Municipal Handbook 1952-53 p. 92.
- 118 See, for example, CS (25.1.47), (13.3.48), (12.2.49), (29.4.49) and (12.11.49).
- 119 HC (17.4.47).
- 120 CS (3.5.47).
- 121 CS (23.2.51). Another feature of the period was the sitting tenant purchase, in which landlords disposed of investment properties to tenants because rent restrictions and high cost of repairs made them an

- uneconomic proposition (CET (28.1.49)). See also M. Davis Every Man His Own Landlord. A History of Coventry Building Society (Coventry 1985) pp. 106-112.
- 122 See, for example, CS (14.8.48) and (21.8.48); CET (5.2.49).
- 123 CS (12.11.49).
- 124 J. Webb, S. Quail, P. Haskell and R. Riley The Spirit of Portsmouth. A History (Chichester 1989) p. 175.
- 125 These were the urban districts of Fareham, Havant and Waterloo and Petersfield, and the rural districts of Petersfield and Droxford.
- 126 Calculated from Registrar General's Statistical Review of England and Wales for the Year 1945; 1951 Census; Ministry of Housing and Local Government Housing Return for England and Wales 31st December 1951 Cmd. 8458 (HMSO 1952).
- 127 M. Swenarton and S. Taylor 'The Scale and Nature of the Growth of Owner-Occupation in Britain between the Wars' The Economic History Review 2nd Series Vol. 38 No. 3 (Aug. 1985) p. 387.
- 128 See, for example, EN (3.4.51), (20.4.51), (28.4.51), (5.5.51) and (9.5.51).
- 129 EN (28.4.51) and (30.4.51).
- 130 D. Rigby Childs and D.A.C.A. Boyne 'Portsmouth. A Survey' The Architects' Journal (30.10.52).
- 131 N. Pevsner and D. Lloyd Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (The Buildings of England) (Harmondsworth 1967) pp. 279-280.
- 132 HT (9.2.51).

- 133 M. Lock et al. Outline Plan for the Portsmouth District
p. 60. Lock's judgement was echoed by a local Labour
parliamentary candidate who said that 'living there was
like being housed in the Sahara desert - miles from an
oasis and without having any camel to get there' (EN
(20.4.51)).
- 134 EN (10.4.51).
- 135 HT (3.3.50); EN (25.4.51).
- 136 HT (9.2.51) and (14.3.52).
- 137 See, for example, CS (11.2.50), (9.2.51) and (4.5.51).
- 138 CET (3.5.51) and (7..5.51).
- 139 'Civic Design in Coventry' The Municipal Journal
(22.5.53) p. 1077.
- 140 The Architect and Building News (4.8.50) and (25.8.50).
- 141 G. Stephenson 'MOH Housing Medal Awards. A critical
study' The Architects' Journal (21.12.50); J.H. Forshaw
'Housing Medal Awards 1950. Their Significance for
Further Development' The Town Planning Review Vol. 22
No. 1 (Apr. 1951) p. 79.
- 142 CET (26.2.49); CS (28.3.52) and (29.10.54).
- 143 CET (27.4.51); CS (26.11.49) and (18.4.52). At Canley,
for instance, it was reported in 1951 that the estate
took on a look of a car park in the evening when all
the workers returned home from work CS (16.3.51)).
- 144 D. Rigby Childs and D.A.C.A. Boyne 'Portsmouth. A
Survey' pp. 520, 523.
- 145 HLG 79/593 Note 'Minister's Meetings on 21 February
with Portsmouth City Council and other Authorities in
the area' (n.d. but c. Feb. 1947) p. 6.

- 146 FGPC (17.10.46).
- 147 See, for example, HT (15.11.46), (12.12.47), (17.6.49) and (14.7.50).
- 148 R.J. Winnicott 'The City's Finance' City Affairs Vol. 1 No. 2 (July 1949) p. 181.
- 149 See DE (16.9.49); HT (14.10.49); D. Daley 'Planning and Reconstruction in Portsmouth' City Affairs Vol. 2 No. 2 (Feb. 1950) pp. 28-29. This singular effort at rate stabilisation actually led to an underspending of committee estimates in 1951, producing 'A RECORD balance of £168,000' (HT (16.3.51)).
- 150 HT (9.5.51).
- 151 See, for example, HT (11.1.46) and (28.4.50); HLG 71/15 'Meeting to discuss the issue arising in the redevelopment of Portsmouth' (20.1.47) p. 1.
- 152 See, for example, HT (15.3.46) and (21.11.47).
- 153 In fact, between 1945 and 1951, although there was some inevitable cutback in the number of jobs (a net decline of 2,000 from a total of 16,820 in 1945), the employment in the naval dockyards held up, sustained by the ship refit and maintenance programme and there was even some stimulation of activity towards the end as a result of rearmament. See HT (18.1.46), (5.7.46) and (21.1.49); J. Webb, S. Quail, P. Haskell and R. Riley The Spirit of Portsmouth pp. 172-173.
- 154 See HT (7.5.48), (28.5.48), (9.7.48), (30.7.48), (14.1.49) and (17.6.49); EN (27.5.48) and (11.5.49); PCC (13.7.48) and (27.7.48). Eventually, an Industrial Development Sub-Committee was set up in 1950 under the

- Council Development and Estates Committee, to promote new industrial development in the city. See DE (30.3.50); PCC (18.4.50).
- 155 One of the claims in the Labour group's policy statement running up to the 1947 municipal election was that 'the presence of a large body of Labour members has made for better administration' (HT (31.10.47)).
- 156 EN (2.11.46).
- 157 EN (11.5.51).
- 158 In 1951 the new Lord Mayor, on his election, still saw 'the achievement of his aim through the erection of more houses' (HT (25.5.51)).
- 159 See, for example, HT (27.9.46), (21.2.47) and (2.5.47).
- 160 EC (25.9.47).
- 161 See HT (2.3.51), (16.3.51), (20.4.51), (6.7.51) and (20.7.51).
- 162 BT 177/324 Southern Region Distribution of Industry Panel Survey of the Portsmouth Research Area (Nov. 1950) Ch. 2 Annexure 1 and Ch. 4 p. 8.
- 163 Ibid., Ch. 4 p. 8.
- 164 Ibid., Ch. 7 pp. 1-2.
- 165 HLG 79/593 Letter F.G. Downing - E.S. Hill (26.4.46) and Letter F.E.C. Shearme - E.S. Hill (3.5.46).
- 166 HLG 71/15 M.G. Kirk 'Portsmouth C.B. Reconstruction and Redevelopment' (31.12.46) p. 2.
- 167 See T.L. Marshall 'The Proposed Satellite Town for the City of Portsmouth' Official Architect Vol. 11 No. 1 (Jan. 1948) pp. 18-24.

- 168 BT 177/324 Southern Region Distribution of Industry
Panel Survey of the Portsmouth Research Area Ch. 8
p. 1.
- 169 FGPC (4.4.46); HT (22.2.46), (18.3.49) and (17.3.49);
EN (20.3.48).
- 170 HLG 79/593 Letter E.A. Sharp - L. Silkin (28.6.47).
- 171 HLG 71/15 M.G. Kirk 'Portsmouth C.B. Reconstruction and
Redevelopment' (31.12.46) p. 3.
- 172 CCRO Accession 980. 25/1/1 Letter J.A. Harrison - G.E.
Hodgkinson (11.1.62).
- 173 HLG 71/914 'Notes on the Housing Problems of the Seven
Cities visited by the Advisory Panel on Redevelopment
of City Centres' (n.d. but c. 1943) p. 2.
- 174 See, for example, CET (10.5.49).
- 175 CS (29.5.48), (31.7.48) and (9.10.48).
- 176 CCRO Sec/CF/1/9874 'An Analysis of the Building Labour
Problem in Coventry and an Estimate of the Capital
Works Programme for the Next 20 Years' (n.d. but c.
1950) p. 31.
- 177 Lanchester Collection of Audio Tapes on Local History
of Coventry Interview No. 50 C.H. Dodson (Coventry
University).
- 178 See CS (11.9.48), (20.11.48) and (15.1.49).
- 179 Lanchester Collection of Audio Tapes, Interview No. 50
C.H. Dodson.
- 180 'Architects to Public Authorities. Informal lecture
discussion in the series on Office Organization'
Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects
3rd Series Vol. 54 No. 9 (June 1947) p. 405.

- 181 CCRO AP/CF/1/146 Letter D.E.E. Gibson - Berry
(30.12.50).
- 182 See CET (13.1.49).
- 183 HC (25.9.47) and (20.11.47); CS (1.11.47) and
(6.12.47).
- 184 HC (16.2.50).
- 185 See N. Tiratsoo Reconstruction, affluence and Labour
politics: Coventry 1945-60 (1990) Ch. 3.
- 186 For allocations, see HC (8.7.48), (13.1.49), (1.6.50)
and (11.10.51). The actual figures were as follows:
1948 - 1,000; 1949 - 1,250; 1950 - 666; 1951 - 1,200.
- 187 The Municipal Journal (19.1.51).
- 188 See, for example, CET (2.3.49); PAC (15.3.49); HC
(13.4.50).
- 189 HLG 102/186 Letter E.A. Sharp - H. Macmillan (17.6.52).
- 190 For local discussions on the issue of setting up health
centres in Portsmouth, see T.E. Roberts 'Health Centres
for the City of Portsmouth' City Affairs Vol. 1 (Oct.
1949) pp. 168-174; Portsmouth City Council Health
Services Committee (n.d. but c. Aug./Sept. 1951); EN
(20.4.51) and (9.5.51). For similar discussions in
Coventry, see PRC (10.10.51); HC (10.10.51); Coventry
City Council Health Committee (15.10.51); CS (2.5.52).

Table 10.1
County Borough of Portsmouth: financial statistics

	1939-40	1945-46	1946-47	1947-48	1948-49	1949-50	1950-51	1951-52
1 Population (Civilian only)	244,900	179,240	204,540	212,020	216,200	240,550 (inc. Services)	233,464 (inc. Services)	244,400 (inc. Services)
2 Rateable Value (£)	1,939,859	1,679,067	1,708,072	1,849,497	1,821,240	1,837,697	1,852,926	1,863,578
3 Rates (s.d.)	11/6	13/6	15/6	17/6	19/0	19/0	19/0	19/0
4 Produce of a penny rate (£)	7,452	6,466	6,749	7,499	7,310	7,362	7,469	7,465
5 Income from rates (£)	1,040,351	1,062,559	1,271,768	1,591,636	1,688,980	1,699,576	1,724,100	1,730,699
6 Total capital expenditure (£)	nfa	nfa	nfa	3,241,964	1,782,833	1,926,814	1,861,461	2,502,956
7 Capital expenditure on housing (£)	nfa	nfa	nfa	2,037,476	1,313,406	825,499	611,169	831,360
8 Exchequer grants (£)	175,693	633,180	398,931	449,665	229,066	125,819	100,402	76,078
9 Net loan debt (£m)	6.5	5.7	6.7	10.1	11.3	12.4	13.7	15.4

Notes: (i) Figures relate to each financial year from April to following March
(ii) nfa = no figure available

(Source: City of Portsmouth Abstract of the Treasurer's Accounts, 1939-1952)

Table 10.2

Houses built in Portsmouth, 1946-1951

Year	Portsmouth Corporation		Private enterprise	Annual completions
	Permanent houses	Temporary houses		
1946	194	641	23	858
1947	652	682	123	1,457
1948	1,286	77	68	1,431
1949	547		120	667
1950	310		135	445
1951	439		71	510
1946-51	3,428	1,400	540	5,368

(Source: Ministry of Health/Ministry of Housing and Local Government Housing Return for England and Wales, 1946-1951)

Table 10.3

Houses built in Coventry, 1946-1951

Year	Coventry Corporation		Private enterprise	Annual completions
	Permanent houses	Temporary houses		
1946	128	881	492	1,501
1947	213	122	390	725
1948	863	96	103	1,062
1949	550		181	731
1950	383		284	667
1951	849		79	928
1946-51	2,986	1,099	1,529	5,614

(Source: Ministry of Health/Ministry of Housing and Local Government Housing Return for England and Wales, 1946-1951)

Table 10.4
County Borough of Coventry: financial statistics

	1939-40	1945-46	1946-47	1947-48	1948-49	1949-50	1950-51	1951-52
1 Population	220,000	221,970	232,850	242,860	250,400	254,900	256,800	258,100
2 Rateable Value (£)	1,634,883	1,577,987	1,629,430	1,704,855	1,717,897	1,800,326	1,830,488	1,866,840
3 Rates (s.d.)	13/6	15/0	16/6	18/6	17/6	17/6	20/0	22/0
4 Produce of a penny rate (£)	6,356	6,214	6,405	6,778	6,930	7,223	7,370	7,546
5 Income from rates (£)	997,586	1,081,650	1,224,153	1,439,276	1,426,768	1,448,484	1,695,250	1,876,553
6 Total capital Expenditure (£)	nfa	nfa	742,000	1,463,000	1,910,000	1,709,000	2,140,000	3,015,000
7 Capital expenditure on housing (£)	nfa	nfa	362,675	864,073	1,110,767	731,923	1,105,767	1,822,167
8 Exchequer grants (£)	149,771	187,695	197,822	201,562	307,167	255,747	235,256	205,013
9 Net loan debt (£m)	8.6	7.0	7.3	8.1	10.0	11.2	13.3	15.6

Notes: (i) Figures relate to each financial year from April to following March
(ii) nfa = no figure available

(Source: City and County Borough of Coventry Abstract of the Treasurer's Accounts, 1939-1952; Policy Advisory Committee (31.10/20.11.50) and (17.11.52))

Table 10.5

Permanent dwellings provided by the Coventry Corporation,
1946-1951: breakdown by types and sizes

1-bedroom dwelling	2-bedroom house	2-bedroom flat	3-bedroom house	3-bedroom flat	4-bedroom dwellings	Total
442	29	387	2,685	15	29	3,587

Note: Figures are for the period up to 31 March 1952.

(Source: City and County Borough of Coventry Abstract of the
Treasurer's Accounts for 1951-52)

Table 10.6

Three-bedroom permanent dwellings built in Portsmouth and Coventry, 1945-1951: selected plans and space standards

Type plans	Dates	Layout	Measurement sq. ft.	Places built
<u>Permanent prefabricated (Portsmouth, Coventry)</u>				
BISF	1946-48)	in pairs	982 (inc.outbuildings)	Paulsgrove, Canley
Howard	1946-48)	and blocks	915	Paulsgrove
Orbit	1946-48)	of 4	870	Leigh Park
<u>Traditional (Portsmouth)</u>				
Flats 3 bed type	1945		850	Church Park North
Type 'L'	1947	in pairs	1,026 (inc.outbuildings)	Paulsgrove
Type 'M'	1947	in pairs	1,024 (inc.outbuildings)	Paulsgrove
Type 'N'	1947	in blocks of 4	1,044 (inc.outbuildings)	Paulsgrove
Type 5D	1947	no info.available	1,060 (inc.outbuildings)	Leigh Park
Type 8A	1949	in blocks of 4		Leigh Park
End houses			1,024 (inc.outbuildings)	
Centre houses			1,069 (inc.outbuildings)	
<u>Traditional (Coventry)</u>				
Type A51	1945	in blocks of 4		Monks Park, Canley
Normal type			985 (inc.outbuildings)	
Entry type			1,088 (inc.outbuildings)	

Type plans	Dates	Layout	Measurement sq. ft.	Places built
Type A55	1946	in blocks of 4	1,100	Stonebridge Highway
Type A58	1946	in blocks of 4		
Normal type			997 (inc.outbuildings)	Profitt Avenue etc.
Entry type			1,109 (inc.outbuildings)	
Type A59	1949	in pairs	998 (inc.outbuildings)	various estates
Type A62	1949	in pairs	1,082 (inc.outbuildings)	Tile Hill (southern section)
Type A63	1949	in blocks of 4		
'A' Entry type			1,259 (inc.outbuildings)	Tile Hill (southern section)
'B' Normal type			1,142 (inc.outbuildings)	
<u>'No-fines' (Coventry)</u>				
Type S265A	1950	in blocks of 4	924	Tile Hill (northern section)
Type S266A	1950	in blocks of 4	990	Tile Hill (northern section)
Type S295A	1950	in blocks of 4	1,046 (inc.outbuildings)	Tile Hill (northern section)

Note: Outbuildings normally contained shed, fuel store, waste bin store and second w.c.

(Source: The Municipal Journal (7.12.45) and (29.3.46); J. Madge (ed.) Tomorrow's Houses. New Building Methods Structures and Materials (1946) pp. 237-240; The Architect and Building News (31.1.47); Portsmouth City Record Office Architects' Plans for Corporation Houses Drawings Nos 58/1 (20.10.45), 45/135 (25.6.47), 45/138 (n.d.), 135/82 (17.12.48), 135/100 (15.2.49); Coventry City Record Office Corporation Plans AP/PL/38/547/1/E/1 (16.11.45), AP/PL/38/623/B/E/1 (26.11.46), AP/PL/38/623/E/1 (18.4.47), AP/PL/39/A62.1 (1.12.49), AP/PL/39/A62.22 (1.12.49), AP/PL/39/S265A (24.8.50), AP/PL/S266A (24.8.50), AP/PL/39/S295A (23.8.50))

Table 10.7

Analysis of rateable property in Portsmouth and Coventry at 31 March 1951

	No. of assessments	Portsmouth % of total rateable value	No. of assessments	Coventry % of total rateable value
Houses assessed at £13 or less	16,010	9.3	30,948	17.9
" between £14 and £20	22,920	20.8	29,592	27.5
" " £21 and £50	19,138	27.3	8,749	12.5
" " £51 and over	1,212	4.5	465	1.9
Total	59,280	61.9	69,754	59.8
Commercial (inc. shops, hotels, restaurants, warehouses etc.)	4,591	13.9	4,324	15.6
Banks and offices	270	1.2	421	2.3
Industrial	240	0.9	538	7.8
Entertainment and recreation (inc. cinemas, theatres, sports grounds, clubs etc.)	116	2.6	159	2.3

(Source: City of Portsmouth Abstract of the Treasurer's Accounts for 1950-51; City and County Borough of Coventry Abstract of the Treasurer's Accounts for 1950-51)

Table 10.8

Comparison of rates in Portsmouth and Coventry, 1939-1951

Year	Portsmouth		Coventry		Average for all County Boroughs	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
1939-40	11	6	13	6	nfa	
1940-41	13	6	14	0	14	11
1941-42	13	6	14	0	15	2
1942-43	13	6	14	0	14	11
1943-44	13	6	14	0	14	9
1944-45	13	6	14	0	14	9
1945-46	13	6	15	0	15	5
1946-47	15	6	16	6	16	9
1947-48	17	6	18	6	18	6
1948-49	19	0	17	6	18	1
1949-50	19	0	17	6	18	4
1950-51	19	0	20	0	18	8
1951-52	19	0	22	0	20	0

Note: nfa = No figure available

(Source: Ministry of Health Rates and Rateable Values in England and Wales, 1940-1952)

Table 10.9

Municipal elections in Portsmouth: turn-outs, percentage voting Conservative and results in selected contests, 1946-1951

Year	Turn-out %	Total Votes cast	% voting Conservative	No. of seats won by Conservatives
1946	42.9	65,224	56.3	12/16
1947	57.6	85,542	62.0	15/15
1949	53.5	81,061	60.0	15/15
1951	43.5	68,475	67.5	16/16

Note: Conservatives include those who stood as Independents during the period.

(Source: Calculated from The Evening News (2.11.46), (13.5.49) and (11.5.51); The Hampshire Telegraph (7.11.47))

Table 10.10

Portsmouth: housing waiting list figures (various dates), 1945-1951

Date	No. of applicants
14.12.45 (<u>HT</u>)	11,000
11.6.47 (<u>EN</u>)	14,000
6..2.48 (<u>HT</u>)	13,000
31.12.48 (<u>HT</u>)	11,000
11.11.49 (<u>HT</u>)	10,900
15.9.50 (<u>HT</u>)	10,000
25.5.51 (<u>EN</u>)	11,500

(Source: The Hampshire Telegraph (HT) and The Evening News (EN) dates as stated)

Table 10.11

Municipal elections in Coventry: turn-outs, percentage voting Labour and results in selected contests, 1946-1951

Year	Turn-out %	Total Votes cast	% voting Labour	No. of seats won by Labour
1946	42.5	74,375	48.5	10/16
1947	54.5	103,708	45.2	9/17
1949	57.3	105,107	49.1	10/16
1951	50.1	89,398	48.8	10/16

(Source: Calculated from The Coventry Evening Telegraph (2.11.46), (3.11.47), (13.5.49) and (11.5.51))

Table 10.12

Coventry: housing waiting list figures (various dates), 1945-1951

Date	No. of applicants
17.5.45 (<u>CET</u>)	8,000
1.3.47 (<u>CS</u>)	10,776
13.3.48 (<u>CS</u>)	13,499
31.12.48	14,212
31.12.49	12,067
31.12.50	13,368
31.12.51	9,593

(Source: The Coventry Evening Telegraph (CET) and The Coventry Standard (CS) dates as stated; Annual Report by the Medical Officer of Health, 1948-1951)

Chapter 11 Conclusions

This thesis has ranged widely in its discussion of the issues surrounding popular housing provision in the 1940s. The earlier chapters have traced the origins of the wartime debate to the 1930s, when modern architects and some housing reformers began to question the current practice of providing low-density housing estates. This became intertwined with a more general criticism about suburban sprawl, which was increasingly levelled against private builders. Modernists, instead, advocated comprehensive urban redevelopment and sought to demonstrate how modern, labour-saving flats, equipped with communal facilities, could be used to create a well-planned environment in existing cities. However, they met entrenched opposition on the part of local authorities and the majority of housing professionals, while the Town and Country Planning Association (known then as the Garden Cities and Town-Planning Association) emerged as a vociferous anti-modernist lobby, with its own vision of garden cities and cottage homes.

Much of the initial impetus for architectural modernism came from the Continent, and the emerging core of modernists in the 1930s adhered fairly rigidly to the teachings of the European avant-garde. At the same time, there existed what may be characterised as the more indigenous strand of modernism (promoted, for example, by C.H. Reilly of the Liverpool School of Architecture and probably most influential among the rising generation of architects and

town planners), which, in the planning of flats, eschewed the geometry and uniformity found in some of the European examples in favour of qualities such as individuality and informal grouping of buildings. It was also Patrick Abercrombie (himself closely associated with the Liverpool School) who first spoke of the possibility of combining houses and flats in a single housing scheme for the benefit of accommodating various types of families. It is highly likely that these two strands of modernism became intermeshed in the 1940s, particularly in the field of housing design, as the architectural professions took an increasing interest in the more pragmatic approach adopted in Swedish modern housing.¹

It was the damage done to major cities and their housing stock in the Second World War which provided a unique opportunity for architects and planners to apply new ideas and influence the shape of postwar housing, as extensive popular housing provision became a practical necessity. The public showed keen interest in housing issues throughout the war. The condition of mass mobilisation and the need to sustain civilian morale made it imperative for the Government to offer blue prints for the future, which took account of people's needs and wishes in housing. These circumstances led to an extensive debate on housing design, policy and provision. Simultaneously, several surveys were carried out by experts and interested bodies to gauge public opinion on various aspects of housing. This thesis has shown how, during the war, the modernist idea of urban redevelopment, focusing on a more

compact form of housing development featuring flats, won greater support among expert and intellectual opinion, while efforts were made by the protagonists of the debate to move away from the house-flat divide and to relate the issue of dwelling types to the varying requirements of future residential communities. In fact, arguably the most significant wartime development saw architects and planners increasingly think in terms of providing for the community. The emphasis was now being firmly placed on the construction of socially-balanced residential settlements, which met the adverse criticism of prewar housing and was seen by many housing experts as a means of creating a better, more harmonious society in the future. Provision of social facilities such as shops, schools and community centres within a well-defined residential area was termed a neighbourhood unit. It was almost invariably within the context of the neighbourhood unit that the idea of mixed development was discussed. As far as popular opinion on housing was concerned, there was certainly a strong demand on the part of the public for better housing and this indicated a great scope for improvements, particularly in the internal design of houses. On the other hand, as the Mass-Observation survey amply illustrated, people's needs and aspirations in housing were diverse and varied. On the evidence of the discussions among experts and their considerable interest in these housing surveys, this thesis has suggested that there was growing agreement during the war among architects and planners regarding the design of postwar housing, which took people's wants and requirements

into account and which was incorporated into the design guidance (Design of Dwellings) drawn up by the coalition Government.

However, in the later 1940s, the design solutions (i.e. neighbourhood planning, with its mix of dwelling types and provision of social facilities) largely remained in blue print and were seldom realised in the way experts had envisaged during the war. This thesis has demonstrated how all politicians became increasingly concerned to formulate a housing policy which stressed the number of units to be built, almost to the exclusion of the wider aims of popular housing provision. Thus the Conservative dominance within the coalition Government led to a compromising of the space standards prescribed in Design of Dwellings and a failure to make much advance, even with the short-term housing programme. In these circumstances, Labour's victory at the 1945 General Election indicated public repudiation of the pusillanimity associated with the Conservative approach to postwar housing. Labour, on the surface, respected the experts' idea of creating socially-balanced communities and planned provision of housing. But as the case studies have shown, during the 1940s, these ideas only had a tenuous link with the practice of popular housing provision on the ground. Having suffered heavily in the blitz, both Portsmouth and Coventry were at the forefront of housing operations in this period. At the same time, they were cities with contrasting characteristics both in terms of economic structure and political orientation. Yet their performances in terms of housing provision were very similar

and there is evidence that their housing trajectory was rather indicative of what was happening elsewhere in the 1940s.² The high standard of individual houses built contrasted sharply with poor provision of social facilities including shops on new housing estates. Thus the realities in popular housing provision did not match the high hopes of architects and planners during the war.

Having recapitulated the main points discussed in the thesis, what of the wider themes and debates regarding the 1940s which were presented in the Introduction? A key question appears to be the general failure of the professionals concerned to influence the nature and course of popular housing provision. As has been demonstrated, there was, on the one hand, growing agreement among architects and planners about the new directions in postwar housing which can be broadly characterised as a search for social integration and urbanity³ and this was reflected in the official documents of the time regarding the design of housing. On the other hand, the professional influence was very much more limited when it came to the actual practice of providing houses.⁴ There are a number of possible explanations for the ineffectiveness of the experts in housing. The first is the precarious condition of the British economy after the war. This severely tested the ability of the Government to pursue its social goals and effectively tied the hands of architects and planners. To be sure, housing was given due priority in the national investment programmes because of the serious shortage of accommodation, particularly in the blitzed areas. In

practice, however, housebuilding suffered in the early postwar years from a continuing shortage of materials. Moreover, economic difficulties forced the Government from 1948 to curtail the scale of investment, particularly where it made no contribution to an improvement in the balance of payments, so that in 1951, for instance, manufacturing (including construction) accounted for 31 per cent of the total investment, while the figure for housing was 18 per cent.⁵ This fact alone suggests that Correlli Barnett is mistaken in his argument that industrial rehabilitation was neglected in favour of welfare provision. His assertion that 'John Bull opted for the villa straightaway' may be contrasted with the testimony of the former Housing superintendent in Coventry who described the situation in the 1940s as follows:

at the time the choice was, do you leave the family to rot, whilst you build a palace, or do you find them somewhere reasonable to live and solve what you can at the end.⁶

Secondly, it is important to examine whether there were some basic flaws in the vision of housing experts. In fact, Barnett's more damaging indictment concerns the very nature of the experts' vision, which he characterises as too idealistic and utopian and thus ultimately unsustainable. Variants of this argument, which criticise the whole set-up of collectivist provision in housing, have been popular both on the left and right of the political spectrum.⁷ It is certainly true that not all architects or planners were concerned with popular housing provision and that there was

some excess on the part of these experts, such as the much-derided MARS plan for London. But against this, for instance, it is also important to note that the wartime surveys were widely reported in the architectural press, reminding experts of an important dimension in popular housing provision. Moreover, the experts themselves sought to interest the public in the vital issues of town planning. Shorn of its more idealistic aspects, the concept of neighbourhood unit planning, with its emphasis on the provision of social facilities, was a realistic and realisable way forward in postwar housing.

Thirdly, it is important to assess how far architects and planners in this period met opposition to their ideas on housing, just as modernists in the 1930s were marginalised by the balance of conservative forces in society. During the 1940s, the pro-planning block involved, among others, a broad range of social welfare professions, the Labour Party and local Labour councils (as has been shown in the case of Coventry) while those hostile to planning included the Conservatives, local Tory councils (as has been evidenced in Portsmouth) and vested interests. The election of a Labour Government in 1945 could be seen as a triumph for planning, but in terms of the votes cast the Party's position was less secure than its majority suggested.⁸ In fact, the number of votes cast for Labour was just under 12 million whereas almost 13 million voted for opposition parties. Moreover, as this thesis has shown, people's views on housing varied considerably and their responses to other items of social policy suggested the generally fragmented nature of public

opinion. Most usually, people's desires in housing were fairly conservative in that the majority wanted a suburban house with garden.⁹ There was only a limited response to the urbanist vision expounded by some experts.

Thus, contrary to the argument about the increasing professionalisation or even about the triumph of the professional ideal in moulding the development of welfare provisions in the 1940s, the influence of housing experts was closely circumscribed by the existence of conservative, anti-planning forces in society. In turn, the fact that there was pervasive opposition to the idea of planning seriously qualifies the notion of a social policy consensus in the 1940s. Perhaps the battle was lost for architects and planners in July 1945 when the houses versus flats debate became that of 'Housing versus Planning'.¹⁰

Footnotes

- 1 By the end of the war, the Swedish model in housing appears to have been endorsed by the architectural community across the board. See, for example, E.L. Bird 'Swedish Architecture in 1946. Part I' and idem 'Swedish Architecture in 1946. Part II Architectural Work of the Swedish Co-operative Society' Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 53 No. 12 (Oct. 1946) pp. 523-529 and Vol. 54 No. 4 (29.1.47) pp. 168-176 respectively; 'The New Empiricism. Sweden's latest style' The Architectural Review Vol. 101 No. 606 (June 1947) pp. 199-204; C. Hamp 'Sweden, 1947. Where We Went and What We Saw' Keystone 8 (Oct. 1947) pp. 182-185. See also R.S. Haynes 'Design and Image in English Urban Housing 1945-1957. A Study of the Influence of Social Ideas and Attitudes in Architectural Design' (MPhil Dissertation, University College London 1976) pp. 34-54.
- 2 See, for example, H. Myles Wright 'The First Ten Years. Post-War Planning and Development in England' The Town Planning Review Vol. 26 No. 2 (July 1955) pp. 73-91; L. Esher A Broken Wave. The Rebuilding of England 1940-1980 (Harmondsworth 1983) Ch. 1; J. Campbell Nye Bevan and the Mirage of British Socialism (1987) pp. 162-164.
- 3 See, for example, J.H. Forshaw 'Housing in Britain. A Mid-Century Review, 1951' Journal of the Town Planning Institute Vol. 37 No. 10 (Sept.-Oct. 1951) pp. 230-242;

- A.W. Cleeve Barr Public Authority Housing (1958)
passim.
- 4 See, for example, 'Towards An Architecture. Post-War Housing in Britain' The Architectural Review Vol. 104 No. 622 (Oct. 1948) pp. 179-188; T. Mellor 'The Designer's Dilemma. An Interim Report on Local Authority Housing and the Architect' The Town Planning Review Vol. 20 No. 2 (July 1949) pp. 150-161; N.M. Day 'The Role of the Architect in Post-war State Housing. A case study of the housing work of the London County Council 1939-1956' (PhD Dissertation, University of Warwick 1988) pp. 325-329.
- 5 See A. Cairncross Years of Recovery. British Economic Policy 1945-51 (1985) Ch. 17.
- 6 Lanchester Collection Audio Tapes on Local History of Coventry Interview No. 50 C.H. Dodson (Coventry University).
- 7 See, for example, C. Ward Housing. An Anarchist Approach (New Edition, 1983) and idem When We Build Again. Let's have housing that works! (1985); A. Coleman Utopia on Trial. Vision and Reality in Planned Housing (1985).
- 8 See P.G. Richards 'The Labour's Victory: Election Figures' The Political Quarterly Vol. 16 No. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1945) pp. 350-351; R.B. McCallum and A. Readman The British Election of 1945 (1947) p. 250-251.
- 9 See, for example, Appendix II of this thesis; G. Browne Patterns of British Life (1950) Section 4, 5.

- 10 Editorial 'Housing versus Planning' Architectural Design & Construction Vol. 15 No. 7 (July 1945) p. 153.

Appendix I

Miscellaneous Wartime Housing Surveys re: houses versus flats

1 Gallup Poll (Nov. 1941)

If you were free to choose would you rather live in a house of a flat? (BIPO)

House 71% Flat 19% Don't know 10%

(Hadley Cantril (ed.) Public Opinion 1935-1946 (Princeton 1951))

2 Stepney Housing Survey

"In the Stepney 1 Survey an investigation was made into the attitudes of 300 families in houses scheduled for demolition

...

As many as 85% expressed preference for living in a house in a row rather than in a flat, not a few voicing the strongest objections to living in a flat, though Jews were slightly more pro-flat than Cockneys.

(Mass-Observation, File Report No. 861 'Attitudes to Rehousing and Reconstruction' (4.9.41))

3 Birmingham Survey (Sept. 1937- Aug. 1938)

1 in 35 of working-class houses visited, sample - 7161 the method of grouping - the division into three rings of wards as used in the City Medical Officer's Reports, i.e. (a) Central Wards, (b) Middle Ring, (c) Outer Ring.

" ... in the whole city little more than a third of the tenants are, on balance, anxious to leave their present quarters ...

Reasons For Moving

From those who said that they wanted to move

	Central Wards	Middle Ring	Outer Ring
	%	%	%
You wished to			
live in a flat	5.4	2.0	2.6

(Bournville Village Trust, When We Build Again (1941))

4 Liverpool Survey

An extract from a survey made recently by the Liverpool Council of Social Service from the tenants of flat development erected by the Liverpool Corporation.

"From the figures it will be seen that approximately 11% (of the tenants) were in favour of flats, whilst about 8.2% were undecided, therefore 80.6% preferred houses.

(HLG 37/63 Sub-Committee on the Design of Dwellings 'Analysis of Evidence Section 3 Flat Plans' (P.D.16) (Jan. 1943))

5 Society of Women Housing Managers - Survey

" ... questionnaires to which over 2000 replies have been received. Three alternatives were given - modern flat, modern terrace house with small garden in town, house on outskirts - and they were asked to choose which they would rather have. Taken all over the country the percentages come out:-

9% - flat

25% - modern terrace house

37% - house on outskirts

These are approximate figures. Of the people in London most of them are in flats.

(HLG 37/63 'Oral Evidence received by the Flat Panel of the Sub-Committee on the Design of Dwellings from the Society of Women Housing Estate Managers' (P.D.17) (1.2.43))

6 Kensal House Report

"After living at Kensal House for six years the tenants have had time to decide what they really think about the flats.

58 of the original 68 tenants are still in occupation.
All 68 were interviewed.

Summary

General Reaction to Flats

Accommodation better than previous	61
Not so good as previous	6
Uncertain	1

House Versus Flat

Would prefer a house	25
----------------------	----

(HLG 37/64 'Kensal House Report' (21.12.42))

7 Daily Express Housing Questionnaire

"2 Would you rather have a house and your own garden, or live in a flat and share the available open space?"

	No.	%
House	574	98
Flat	11	2
Other	1	0

(Mass-Observation, File Report No. 1960 'Daily Express Housing QQ' (22.11.43))

8 Leeds Survey

"It is noteworthy that Leeds, which possesses some of the largest and most up-to-date working-class blocks of flats in the country, shows among their occupants a preference of 62 per cent in their favour as against houses on the outskirts

...

('Flats or Houses' The Architect and Building News (3.12.43))

9 Stepney Survey

"We learn that the Vicar of Christ Church, Stepney, is exploring the M.o.H. new farm cottages, and the report suggests that this is in consequence of Stepney housewives showing an 88 per cent preference for cottages as compared with flats

('Stepney Prefers Cottages' The Architect and Building News (24.12.43))

10 The Women's Advisory Housing Council - Survey

Over 40,000 questionnaires sent out - the first 3,000 of the replies analysed.

"The figures which follow are the total replies given by women living in:-

Houses

Flats

Bungalows

Rooms in unconverted houses

Of these dwellings:

49% are older than 25 years

31.2% were built within the last 25 years

18.7% no age was mentioned

Of the above total, (the women who replied):

56.07% live in houses

30.5% did not state the type of dwelling

7.2% live in flats or maisonettes

3.4% live in rooms in unconverted houses, and

2.7% live in bungalows

No. Questions Asked

23 Which do you prefer:-

(a) A flat, (b) A house,

(c) A bungalow?

70.6% prefer a house

21.2% prefer a bungalow

5.7% prefer a flat

2.2% either a house or

bungalow

General Summary

A General Planning

(i) The only direct question asked in this respect referred to the choice of dwelling under question 23. It is significant that the preference for a house as against flats and bungalows was expressed by such an enormous majority, and this preference was frequently shown by those who had lived, or are at present living in, flats and bungalows.

Replies to question 23 therefore leave no doubt as to what is required. The tremendous vote for a house reminds us that the English woman's house is still her castle, and that it will be for many generations before she becomes a communal-living enthusiast.

(HLG 37/64 'Report from the Women's Advisory Housing Council on Women's Needs in Future Housing' (n.d. but c. 1943))

11 Younger Women's Needs in Future Housing

"In answer to the question, 'In which type of dwelling would you prefer to live?':-

a) A house, b) A flat, c) A bungalow

Number of replies: 1,436

a) 52 per cent votes

b) 14 per cent votes

c) 33 per cent votes

(Women's Advisory Housing Council 'The Younger Women's Needs in Future Housing' (1943), quoted in Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction Housing Digest (1946))

12 Forces Opinion

" ... as indication of what people want I propose to adduce the evidence forthcoming from discussions and voting following lectures that I had given to H.M. Forces on this subject.

The first question to consider is: Do people want to live in the one-family house or the flat?

Here are some results from 20 typical lectures:-

	Size of audience (approximate)	Vote for flats	Those who did not vote	Vote for one-family houses
A	150 men	3	0	remainder
B	125 men	2	0	remainder
C	60 (with 35 women)	4 women	2 women	remainder
D	50 (with 25 women)	3 women	1 woman	remainder
E	60 men	none	1	remainder
F	180 men	none	none	all
G	75 men	1	1	remainder
H	70 men	3	14	remainder
I	70 women	11	4	remainder
J	75 men	5	none	remainder
K	130 men	8	none	remainder
L	85 (with 45 women)	1 woman	3	remainder
M	60 men	none	none	all
N	60 men	8	1	remainder
O	100 men	2	1	remainder
P	95 men	none	none	all
Q	120 men	2	none	remainder
R	50 men	1	none	remainder
S	95 men	2	1	remainder
T	85 men	2	3	remainder

(Arnold Whittick Civic Design and the Home (1943))

13 People's Homes Inquiry

"When people* were asked what kind of house they would like to live in if they could choose freely:

49% said a small house or a modern small house

21% said "here"

12% said a bungalow

5% said a flat

13% made some other suggestions or had no opinion

If the "here" answers are analysed according to whether people were actually living in a house or a flat, 79% of the whole sample wanted to live in a small house or bungalow, and 8% wanted to live in a flat. Thus more people were actually living in flats (15%) than wanted to live in flats.

The following table shows the difference between the various types of housing in this respect:

Living in	Percentage wanting to live in				
	Small House	Bungalow	Flat	"Here"	Unspecified
	%	%	%	%	%
Old Houses	48	12	6	22	12
Garden Cities	49	15	1	24	11
Housing Estates	40	16	3	25	16
Flats	60	4	12	15	9

In the present survey, we find that women were more in favour of living in flats than men (5% as against 2%); that people under 40 were slightly more in favour than older people (5% as against 5%); that social class played little part in preference for flats; that people without children were very definitely more in favour of flats than people with children (11% as against 7%); and that people without gardens were more in favour of living in flats than people with gardens (20% as against 11%).

(Mass Observation An Enquiry into People's Homes (1943))

* Survey Areas (100 interviews in each unless otherwise stated)

(a) Five Old House areas

Midtown - Birmingham - Smethwick
 Churchtown - Worcester (40 interviews only)
 Seatown - Portsmouth
 Subtown - London Ilford
 Metrotown - Fulham (Mainly double houses containing more than one family)

(b) Two Garden Cities

Gardenville - Letchworth
 Modelville - Bournville

(c) Three Municipal Housing Estates in London

Oak Estate - Beacontree
 Ash Estate - Watling
 Elm Estate - Roehampton

(d) Two blocks of modern, better-styled working-class Flats

Metroflats - Fulham
 Newflats - Kentish Town (60 interviews only)

14 Hackney and Stoke Newington Survey

"Of the 332 families seen by our visitors 80 were living in separate houses, 120 were in flats and 132 in rooms (that is, in parts of tenement houses not self-contained). Of the flats 47 were owned by the Borough Council, 51 by the L.C.C., and these were all modern flats built since the last war. The remaining 22 were privately owned flats (mostly converted houses) and were older and less well-equipped. ...

When asked to say whether they would prefer (a) "a house with a small private garden" or (b) "a flat with a laid-out garden for sitting in and an allotment if desired", 92% chose the house. The figures when analysed show 98% of those now living in separate houses in favour of a house, 90.5% of those now living in tenement rooms and 89.8% of those living in flats (the great majority, over 80%, of the flats being the modern flat described above).

(Hackney and Stoke Newington Social Workers' Group What Kind of Homes? (1944))

15 Questionnaire to H.M. Forces and Industry

" ..., it is estimated that 15.634 individuals in the Services and industry contributed to the replies ...

Section A - Types of Dwelling

Question 1. Assuming your choice made no difference to your convenience as regards distance from work, shops, etc., or in the equipment and services provided, in what type of house would you prefer to live?

	In a town		In the country	
	H.M. Forces	Workers in Industry	H.M. Forces	Workers in Industry
	%	%	%	%
a) Bungalow-detached	21	29	41	42
semi-detached	11	7	8	8
terrace	3	2	3	2
b) Two-storey house-				
detached	30	13	19	11
semi-detached	12	7	7	3
terrace	2	2	1	1
c) Flatted house, i.e. flats in two-storey blocks, mostly in blocks of four house-"2 up and 2 down", each housing having separate entrance from ground level	4	6	1	4
d) Blocks of modern flats	14	15	1	2
Not answered	3	19	19	27
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Question 2. (a) If you prefer blocks of flats (d), what should be the maximum number of storeys per block without lifts?

	H.M. Forces	Workers in Industry
	%	%
Two-storey	17	33
Three-storey	62	47
Four or more-storeys	18	10
Not answered	3	10
TOTAL	100	100

Question 2. (b) If lifts are provided, what should be the maximum number of storeys per block?

	H.M. Forces	Workers in Industry
	%	%
Four storeys	7	20
Five storeys	6	7
Six storeys	33	46
Seven and eight storeys	9	17
Ten storeys	21	0
Twelve or more	20	0
Not answered	4	10
TOTAL	100	100

Question 3. Do you think that different types of houses are required to meet the needs of:

	H.M. Forces			
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
	Single People	Families without children	Families with children	Old Couples
	%	%	%	%
Bungalow	5	23	19	65
Two-storey house	2	22	60	6
Flatted house	4	6	0	2
Block of flats	67	26	1	6
Not answered	22	26	20	21
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

	Workers in Industry			
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
	Single People	Families without children	Families with children	Old Couples
	%	%	%	%
Bungalow	1	18	33	37
Two-storey house	2	6	18	6
Flatted house	4	7	6	7
Block of flats	56	29	4	12
Not answered	37	40	39	38
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

(Scottish Housing Advisory Committee, Planning Our New Homes (Edinburgh HMSO 1944))

Appendix II

The houses versus flats debate in The New Statesman and Nation

Between October and December 1942, there was a lively exchange in the correspondence column of The New Statesman and Nation on the question of houses or flats (in which some of the protagonists of the debate took part), which appears to mirror the disagreements that developed within the Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee of the Labour Party. It stemmed from an editorial in that journal criticising the Royal Academy's replanning scheme of London (prepared by its Planning Committee, under the chairmanship of Edwin Lutyens),¹ for its almost exclusive concern with the improvement of traffic facilities and the rearrangement of certain important sites, and for employing 'the obsolete principles of the Paris Ecole des Beaux Arts'. As the editorial commented, 'Indeed, Sir Edwin and his associates resemble nothing so much as Sleeping Beauties, unaware that the Edwardian period ended over thirty years ago' (24.10.42). A reader took up the editorial's assertion that 'proper account must be taken of the wishes of the population' and offered his own experience of a recent discussion of town planning in the Forces: '... it is interesting, though disappointing, to find that the

¹ See 'The Royal Academy London Plan' Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 3rd Series Vol. 49 No. 12 (Oct. 1942) pp. 216-218.

overwhelming majority of men stated their preference for semi-detached houses, rather than for flats'. Interestingly The New Statesman and Nation threw its weight behind flats with the following editorial footnote to the above letter: 'It is largely because they have had experience only of ill-constructed flats, that so many prefer houses' (7.11.42).

This sparked off an exchange of letters. Osborn promptly wrote to the journal, objecting to the editorial intervention: 'In a way it is as unanswerable, and as true, as to say that it is because people have only tasted an unpalatable species of dandelion that they prefer potatoes'. He went on to argue that however flats were constructed, there were basic needs of family life which they could never meet and referred to independent enquiries which had shown that the great majority, even in the best LCC flats, would have preferred to be in one-family houses. Osborn's answer was 'decentralisation of part of London's congested industry, business, and people, to new towns and to smaller existing towns' enabling 'the remaining Londoners to have enough space for the houses and gardens they want' (14.11.42). Arnold Whittick wrote in with the results of his survey of opinion among the Forces suggesting a great majority for the one-family house and garden (21.11.42).

Silkin, in his letter, contended that members of the Forces represented 'a specially selected class of person, i.e. the young man and, generally speaking, the young unmarried woman who would in the vast majority of cases have had no experience of living in flats' and that therefore their opinion was 'quite worthless'. For Silkin, the issue

before the planning authority was not the simple one of deciding 'in vacuo' on the relative merits of houses of flats but one of providing 'accommodation for a certain number of families in a particular area within easy distance of the work of the bread-winner'. The question was whether they would build 12 houses per acre or flats at 40 to 50, or that of allowing 12 families to live conveniently near their work to the detriment of the remaining 28 or 38. Silkin also argued that because of the high cost of land obtaining in many cases the cost of land per house would put it out of the reach of working-class families in terms of rent (28.11.42). Mass Observation offered its finding (incorporated in its report An Enquiry into People's Homes) that 'though people were on the whole satisfied with the individual design of their flat and could find little fault with it, the majority lived in flats only in default of some more satisfactory form of housing' (19.12.42), while the architect, A. Trystan Edwards, advocated 'a happy mean between these two extreme types of housing development ... the terrace of self-contained houses at a reasonably high density per acre' (5.12.42). Osborn, in a rejoinder, characterised Silkin's arguments as a statement of 'municipal difficulty', that in an overgrown and congested city one could not provide for people houses with adequate space within reasonable distance of their work, and saw the only solution in 'national guidance of location of industry, and the moving-out of some of London's work as well as of some of its people'. He also alleged that Silkin showed 'no consciousness of the proposals of the Uthwatt Report' which

addressed the problem of high land values (12.12.42). Whittick, on the other hand, incensed by Silkin's derision, contended that even the occupants of the flats in Vienna 'which are among the finest in Europe ... have indicated that they would really prefer to live in the small houses on the outskirts of Vienna'. It was realised by all town planners, Whittick insisted, that 'if we are to house people according to their needs and wishes, we must first effect a more spacious distribution of the population, which involves a more widespread dispersal of industry' (5.12.42).

In reply, Silkin picked up on Whittick's argument: 'He says that numerous occupants of flats in Vienna have indicated that they would really prefer to live in the small houses on the outskirts of Vienna. Exactly! And that is the choice which more and more the Londoner will be faced with - a flat in the centre or a house on the outskirts'. He then cast serious doubt on the decentralisation proposal: 'But while it may be possible to prevent further growth of large towns by controlling the entry of new industry, is it really practical politics forcibly to expel existing industry from these towns?' Silkin was neither enamoured with the Uthwatt recommendation. Contrary to the assertions by Whittick and Osborn that the Uthwatt Report had provided a solution on the high cost of land, he argued that 'If every single recommendation of the Uthwatt Report were adopted the value of urban land would remain largely unaffected' (19.12.42).

This exchange of views, especially that between Osborn (and Whittick) on the one hand and Silkin on the other,

seemed to closely reflect the arguments which were being ranged against each other within the Sub-Committee at the time. Moreover, the views expressed by Silkin, apart from his antipathy to the Uthwatt recommendations, were to be those of the Labour Party towards housing and town planning. Silkin's views on density could, in fact, be quite radical. Earlier in the war, as chairman of the LCC Housing and Town Planning Committee, he advocated raising densities in suburban areas and to transferring some of the overcrowded families from the East End of London to the West End.²

² See Greater London Record Office LCC/AR/TP/1/54 Note 'Redevelopment Plan' (20.11.41).

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- 3 Coventry City Record Office
- 4 Portsmouth City Records Office
- 5 Tom Harrisson Mass-Observation Archive
- 6 Other Papers

B Official Papers

C Newspapers, Periodicals and Reports

D Primary Printed Sources

- 1 Local Records
- 2 Books, Pamphlets, and Reports
- 3 Articles

E Other Published Works

- 1 Books
- 2 Articles

F Unpublished Theses

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE BIBLIOGRAPHY

AAJ	The Architectural Association Journal
AR	The Architectural Review
JRIBA	Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects
JTPI	Journal of the Town Planning Institute
T&CP	Town & Country Planning
TPR	The Town Planning Review

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