

economic efficiency nothing more complicated is required than the recognition that the land is the common birth-right of all mankind—and the collection of the rent of land for the community is by far the best economic way of acknowledging it.

R.C.G.

A Planner Hits Out



A letter by JOHN KELSEY in the *Journal of the Town Planning Institute*

I HAVE BEEN so immersed in planning and its daily running that it is only recently I have stepped back and had a look at the results, and find that I don't like where it's going.

Planning is becoming inhuman. The one-time art and craft of town building and countryside management is being reduced to that sterile science of the economics of land use. The goals in planning seem to be designed to satisfy overspill targets, ever-sinking cost ceilings, time limits, minimum land acquisition boundaries and a host of political expediences, with populations worked out to .3 of a head and areas to .17 of an acre.

The tools we use for this soulless job are a set of pre-conceived figures of population density, plot ratios, and various items of provision calculated on a per head basis, and formulae of all descriptions which we believe, if multiplied by today's situation, will give us the picture in five, ten, fifteen (you name it) years' time. The fact that we can change patterns of the future by action taken today seems to be denied, if not forgotten. Design is reduced to a road width, a plot depth, a recommended Ministry standard or "the module," whatever it may happen to be at the time. And as a sop, to ourselves as much as anyone, plans are said to be Buchananised and/or landscaped.

The so-called human sciences seem to come in somewhere, but of course they don't carry much weight; after all, there's not much return on capital from contentment is there? Who will calculate the value to Britain's economy of a sunlit view at breakfast time, a seat on the train to work, 45 decibels instead of 75 . . . ? Recommendations, intended only as guiding lights to the designer, have changed into blinkers restricting his vision and emasculating his art.

Town planning, and development plan and control in particular, appears to be based on conditions surveyed today and documented yesterday. Thus the highest objectives it can hope for from such a base can be but those generated by reaction. They must, of necessity, always be one jump behind tomorrow. What is needed is an attitude of mind that is in fact one jump *ahead* of tomorrow—enjoying the prospect and anticipating its

advent. And so, instead of using its negative powers of restriction to repulse "non-U" or "contemporary trends," town planning could be a creative and pioneering voice beckoning and calling—offering carrots and sweetsies, bribing the investor of today to play ball.

What is needed, I suggest, is a picture of the future: a strong framework, clearly stated, into which all the various aspects of our life could fit—give or take a bit. And furthermore, I suggest, computer planning, with its disciples, system, trend and economy, will not give us this picture. The picture can be likened to the meal that owes its piquancy solely to the chef and that little *je ne sais quoi* in its preparation. The mere ingredients, though measured, weighed and prepared are not enough. Oh for the return of the brilliant guess, the imaginative hunch, that flash that turns the commonplace into a work of art!

We planners have become gutless. We are afraid to fight the administration, to stand and say "This will be fine and beautiful—because I say so." No, we must back it up with fact and figure, and anything that cannot be so justified is left out. To be subjective, to feel something to be sound, gives cause for mirth. Mistakes, quite naturally, are bound to be made, but we are scared to take the consequence, to carry the can, and be thought a fool. And so, in defence, we play at planning, with our endless researches, surveys and analyses, and diagrams of theoretical urban forms. We digest and redigest yesterday's facts and the very vapours of this pointless process cloud the vision.

Let us have some professional pride. Let us have sufficient conviction and confidence in ourselves to stand up for what we feel to be right (proven or not) and to insert into our plans those peculiar and light-hearted items of nonsense, chaos and extravagance that made our pre-planning towns both exciting and exasperating; those very same items, in fact, that contemporary planning techniques knowingly eliminate.

PUERILE PLANNING

THE problem of the ever-growing city can be tackled only by examining the fundamental causes of city growth and not by placing some sort of girdle round it in the forlorn hope that it might be permanently contained.

To ignore this is to produce land planning strategy at its most puerile, the futility of which is further emphasised by the contradiction it raises. First, no 'wall' has ever yet contained a city, for there has always been some sort of permanent overflow. Secondly, if peripheral restraint is employed, one may ask for what purpose.

The only distinction in this country between town and countryside is one of density of occupation—a sliding scale of people and uses that decreases outwards from the city to a point where it begins to increase owing to the influence of an adjoining town. Therefore, what is the purpose of a 'wall'?"

—"Pragma," in the
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