

PROCEEDINGS

BOSSOM LECTURES ON PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE CITY

I. Urban development and urban policy: where have we come from?

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Department of the Environment 1985–92, in the Chair*

THE CHAIRMAN: Lord Bossom who died in 1965 set up a fund to endow three lectures in architecture and building. The theme of this year's lectures is 'Planning the future city'. It was not politically correct in the 1980s to refer to planning but I think we probably can now. I have an uneasy feeling that it may be too politically correct in a few years time and we'll be looking for something else.

Tonight's lecture is supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and we're very grateful for their support. They recently set up an inquiry into planning for housing under Dame Rachel Waterhouse. It is not a new issue but it is one of growing importance and members of that inquiry will be looking for advice and help from outside experts.

Oscar Wilde once said, after listening to a not very kind introduction to himself, that he could bear the truth about himself but he much preferred flattery. The trouble with Peter Hall is that anything I say is the truth but it sounds like flattery. His entry in *Who's Who* runs to 27 lines, Mrs Thatcher's to 11. He has numerous academic qualifications and honours. He is a prolific author and one of our most distinguished urban planners, both in theory and practice. I'm very glad for us in this country that he has just given up his Directorship of the Institute of Urban and Regional Development in the University of California and now holds the Chair of Planning, University College London. He was also Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for the Environment, 1991–92.

What I have to talk about is the history of ideas and how their light waxes and wanes over years and decades, filtered (as they must be) through the prisms of politics. I want specifically to ask how the belief in planning first came to win broad political acceptance in this country some 50 years ago, and how it has maintained that position, with some fairly important shifts in fortune, ever since. And that perhaps gives one important game away, at the start: in the last decade planning in Britain has been widely reported to be on the point of expiring, but just as with Mark Twain, the reports have been greatly exaggerated.

But, before we come to that episode, we need to start at the beginning. And where is the beginning? It might be in the era of the great mid-Victorian blue books, which first put urban public health on the public

agenda. It might be just over one hundred years ago, the time of unparalleled public agitation and public disturbance, when the question of public housing first loomed large. It almost certainly might be 1898, the year of first publication of Ebenezer Howard's classic text on garden cities; or in 1909, the year the first Planning Act was passed by Parliament. But anyone who looks at the history will know that, in greater or smaller measure, these were all false starts. The 1909 Act, fortified by other legislation after the First World War, helped launch a major public housing programme and it enabled progressive authorities to embark on the first tentative town planning schemes, but it did not prevent a wave of concern about the lack of effective planning in the 1920s and 1930s. Howard was a far from utopian figure who believed that the

only good ideas were those carried into practice, yet when he died exactly 30 years after his book he had managed to start only two fairly modest experiments in garden city building.

No: the right place to start the history, surely, is some time in the mid 1930s. For it was that period in which we find, for the first time, a clear momentum in favour of creating a new and effective system of town and country planning. The key date is December 1937, when Neville Chamberlain appointed the Royal Commission on the Geographical Distribution of the Industrial Population under the chairmanship of Sir Anderson Montague-Barlow. Historians endlessly debate the role of individuals, and one could certainly make a strong case that this story would have been different without Chamberlain. Whatever his other and later sins, he was a lifelong tireless campaigner for planning and for the Garden City principle. It was no accident, surely, that one of his first acts as Prime Minister should have been to create the Commission from whose report the rest of the story flows.

Yet one can argue the contrary, that Chamberlain like any good politician was merely responding to the *Zeitgeist*. The fact was that in these years, there was gathering together an irresistible alliance of forces in favour of planning; I am not sure whether it was a holy or unholy alliance, and perhaps it was a mixture of the two. On the one side there were the left-liberal intellectuals in the Fabian tradition, so strongly represented in the Town and Country Planning Association, and above all by F. J. Osborn. On the other, there were the conservative rural interests who cared about the preservation of the traditional qualities of rural society and the rural landscape, represented (then as now; you see the force of tradition) by the CPRE. (In those days, significantly, the initials stood for the Preservation of rural England.)

But running through both, there was very interestingly another strain, which I can only call anti-populist. To get its flavour, you need to read a volume of essays by various self-styled leaders of thought and opinion, assembled by Clough Williams-Ellis in 1938, called *Beauty and the Beast*. The most evocative is by C. E. M. Joad, who a little later became a wartime media figure as a member of the BBC Brains Trust. It is an extraordinary tirade, the burden of which is that the lower middle class and the working class were effectively wrecking England by living in nasty houses and besporting themselves in nasty resorts, both of



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which they reached along nasty new arterial roads. And, if you think that extreme, I urge you to read one of George Orwell's least known novels, of 1939: *Coming up for Air*, in which the lower middle-class hero revisits his ancestral country town and finds it turned into an outer London suburb. Not very Orwellian, you might say. But remember that Orwell was himself impeccably a member of the traditional governing upper middle class, who was as distressed as any of that class by the developments around London at that time. As, doubtless, all of us would have been if we had taken any interest in the matter. Betjeman's tirade, *Come, friendly Bombs, and fall on Slough*, may strike us as almost unbelievable now. But that was a very general feeling at the time.

What we have to conclude is that everybody who counted, meaning everybody who wrote letters to *The Times* or served as local councillors or JPs, was appalled. There was a left-of-centre answer which was garden

cities, and a right-of-centre answer which was green belts, but they could make common cause. And they did.

There was, however, yet another, fourth strain. That was the voice of the depressed industrial regions of the north, Wales and Scotland. It was of course powerfully represented by the Labour Party and by the Trades Union Congress, but the plight of these places impinged very much on the conscience of the southern middle class, even in those days when there were about 2,000 television sets in the whole world, all of them in London. There were images, caught by the brilliant photo-journalists of that time, which haunted everyone: images of gaunt men standing idle against a background of smoke-blackened slums and worn-out industry. Contrasted with the gleaming new factories along the Western Avenue and the North Circular Road, pouring out the cornucopia of consumer goods – the high-technology industries of their day – they raised the obvious question: why the urban sprawl in the one place, the dereliction in the other?

There were other, more subtle strains in this alliance: people like Dudley Stamp, for instance, who stressed the loss of the best agricultural land. It would soon prove a very potent emotive argument, as the U-Boats sank the food convoys and Britain found itself digging for victory. And finally, of course, it was the war that clinched the matter. Maybe, even though Barlow reported in 1940, no government would have acted in peacetime. But the twin challenges of Blitz and Blight, to quote the popular title of that first post-Barlow planning act of 1944, simply proved irresistible. Once the tide turned at El Alamein, postwar reconstruction became the number one topic. Beveridge's freedoms were redefined to include the right to a decent urban environment. By that time, of course, the radical left-of-centre wing had gained the upper hand. But it is impossible to look at the wartime literature, especially the popularisation of planning like Thomas Sharp's Pelican or the paperback version of the Abercrombie London plan, without appreciating how complete and satisfying was the vision. Rebuilt cities and new towns would help guarantee the preservation of the traditional countryside and traditional values. What would be curbed was the vulgar exuberance of the lower middle class, including lower middle class speculative builders. (It is important to stress, perhaps, that the great majority of all the new housing for sale between the wars was built by small builders of no great pretension.)

This was an historic trade-off to which almost everyone, whether *Times* or *Manchester Guardian* or *New Statesman* reader, could subscribe. Even Frank Pick, whose tube railways had helped create the sprawl, was by now warmly in favour of stopping it, mainly because his lines could not be extended much further anyway.

What had happened, perhaps rare in history, was a kind of national mobilisation in favour of an idea to which all could subscribe. To get the full force of it, I think that you have to talk about the formative influences through which a whole generation passed. This generation, men between 20 and 40 in the theatres of war, women of the same age managing the home front, were a generation seared: by their memories of the failed promises after the First World War, above all by the impact of the great depression, and by what they saw as the despoliation and destruction of an entire English heritage in the Home Counties. It was a very powerful emotional cocktail, and it helped elect the Labour Government of 1945.

It is an academic point, perhaps, as to how much of the vision would have become reality without that government. There were powerful Tory reformers on the other side, and some might well have achieved key ministerial positions. Whether there would have been the will to confront Treasury inhibitions, at a time of unprecedented national economic crisis, is another matter. In any case, it is an academic question. The Attlee government, as Peter Hennessy's magnificent recent book shows, was really a quite extraordinary undertaking: as many observers have pointed out, for reforming zeal only the Thatcher governments of the 1980s can be compared with it. It did almost everything the reformers were calling for, and it did it in an extraordinary hurry. It nationalised the historic right of the landowner, previously thought inseparable from the title of ownership, to develop land. It even, after due compensation, deprived these owners of any profit whatsoever from development. It passed legislation that would eventually build nearly 30 new towns. It created national parks, though there its nerve failed it and it failed to adopt the radical American model, whereby the state itself owned the land. It did all this while nationalising every industry in sight, giving away India and creating the National Health Service. And, by the way, fighting a series of economic crises of truly gargantuan proportions, in which we could barely feed ourselves or keep ourselves from freezing to death.

Whether you like the result or hate it or find it a mixture, as I suppose many of us do, it is truly awe-inspiring. What is interesting about it, in the planning field as in so much else, is how much of it has survived. The essence of the system, created in that historic 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, is here still today: the nationalisation of development rights and their transference to the care of the local planning authorities, the establishment on that basis of a system in which the planners had virtually absolute discretion untrammelled by legal challenge (though that has just changed rather fundamentally – a point to which I'll return at the end). And still surviving, too, are the physical results of that system: the containment of the great cities and conurbations, the clear distinction between town and country, the preservation of more than four-fifths of the countryside in an essentially rural state, the movement of millions of people from the big urban areas to smaller towns.

There is a reason, I believe, for that survival, and this is a point I promise to return to, even perhaps to the point of tedium. It is that planning had, and still has, an extremely powerful political constituency. Julian Le Grand and David Winter have noticed that the really persistently successful pieces of social policy are those that satisfy two conditions: they benefit the middle classes, and they are predominantly supplied by middle class professionals. They give the examples of education and the National Health Service; planning, which they don't mention, certainly falls square into this category. There is, however, another reason, which is that like all really great pieces of legislation this one was capable of being fine-tuned to accommodate to different economic, social and political circumstances. The truly remarkable fact is this, that the 1947 planning system was conceived within the framework of a wartime command economy, within which markets had been in effect virtually abolished; yet it proved adaptable to the revived market economy from the 1950s onwards, and to a great variety of other changed circumstances, including the radical changes of the 1980s. But also the system proved adaptable in another, related way: it was conceived on the basis of a very static view of the world, in which, after an initial period of radical readjustment, everything was supposed to return to some kind of steady state, in which all the elements – demographic, social, economic – were supposed to change with glacial slowness, subject of course to overall top-down central control.

The one part of the 1947 prescription that failed to survive, of course, was the draconian financial provisions. One can conclude, at this distance of time, that the entire idea of abolishing the market in land and property was an amazing pipedream, only conceivable in those strange days when a surviving war siege economy was harnessed to an almost Stalinist ideal of national planning. And that is very hard for anyone to find credible today. We should perhaps make the effort, remembering the background of that generation. If you were a typical earnest, *Manchester Guardian* reading left liberal of 1947, it might just have seemed logical that for ever into the future, the housing needs of the great majority of the population should be met by building council estates. (It certainly seemed so to Aneurin Bevan, who archetypally fell into that category, and who happened to be Minister of Health in charge of housing; housing and planning didn't come together until the very end of the Attlee years.) Remember that this vast majority then lived in privately rented housing which ranged from the acceptable to the execrable. And remember that hardly anyone could remember what a property developer looked like, and would almost certainly not like him much if they could.

Yet, with this one exception, the system adapted without too much trouble to the great postwar boom of the 1950s, and to all the booms and busts thereafter. Why should this be? Perhaps in truth there were town planning systems, one hiding within the other, like Russian dolls. One could be stripped and thrown away; the other could remain inviolate. The 1950s give a good instance: Macmillan as Housing Minister set the builders free to build their 300,000 houses a year, regional planning was down-played almost out of existence, the new towns programme was effectively stopped (though, after a titanic battle, the existing new towns were allowed to proceed), yet the green belt policy was implemented and enforced; the result, coming in the middle and late 1950s was the first series of epic battles between cities and surrounding shire counties over the urban containment policies. The worst battles, predictably, occurred where big cities tried to invade the posher parts of the neighbouring shire counties: northern Hertfordshire, Berkshire, Worcestershire, North Cheshire. Most battles the cities lost, though there were some consolation prizes on offer. But these battles essentially concerned official overspill schemes for public housing, using the mech-

anisms of either the 1946 New Towns Act or the 1952 Town Development Act, drafted by a Labour government but enacted under a Conservative one.

Finally, the land and property markets were reborn, with Macmillan acting as midwife; and inevitably, since there was no other place to go, this meant new suburban communities of spec-built, owner-occupied houses beyond the green belts. It was a pattern that would persist over the next 40 years. Planning adapted itself to the market, sometimes with a certain amount of ill grace: instead of the 1947 concept of positive planning, where most of the initiative lay with the planning system, now that system became responsive to initiatives coming from the private sector: the developer proposed, the planner (or, in the event of a refusal and appeal, the inspector and the minister) disposed. This is the transactive system of planning that has prevailed ever since that time.

What was happening quite simply, was that a Conservative government was taking those elements of the system that suited its philosophy and was emphasising those, while downplaying the other bits: a pattern that continued thereafter. But, notice, it was not just a matter of ideology. We should remember Harold Macmillan's aphorism, recently quoted by John Major: when asked what drove government policies, he replied 'Events, dear boy, events'. The main event that drove government at the end of the 1950s was demographic: the unexpected baby boom, that began in 1955 and lasted almost precisely ten years. By the early 1960s, it was producing an unprecedented national population growth of some 700,000 per annum: a Bristol a year, as the phrase went. It proved to be an event that politicians of any stripe ignored at their peril, because the babies belonged to Conservative as well as Labour parents, and, even more worrisome, to floating mums and dads. As said, there was effectively nowhere else for those mums and dads and kids to go but out of the cities. That is why, beginning in the 1950s and progressing in the next three decades, we have seen the ever-expanding rings of growth around the conurbations, exploding as they expanded into separate growth zones that became more and more independent, both functionally and physically, from their urban parents.

That is why, also, the Conservative governments of the early 1960s were driven against their ideological judgement to embark both on a further new town programme, but also upon an elaborate series of

regional studies and strategies and strategic plans. The Wilson Labour government continued in this tradition, with only the smallest hiccup: indeed it soon powerfully reinforced it, through the creation of the Regional Planning Councils and Boards. Some will quote this as evidence for the Butskellite bipartisan politics of the time. I think that more accurately, it was a reflection of the fact that politicians of both parties were reacting to events.

One can say, though, that the reaction was a little more subtle than that. The Wilson election campaign of 1964, as no one who was around at the time would ever forget, was based on the image of a planned high-technology Britain. Much of the imagery came from France, already seen then as the model of a successful planned economy. Interestingly enough, of course, it was a planned economy under a right-wing government which had recently delivered a massive snub to Britain by excluding it from the European Community. Whatever the strange antecedents, the result was that for the first and last time in Britain, the attempt was made to harness physical planning to the wagon of economic planning, or, to change a tortured metaphor, to make town and country planning the handmaiden of national economic planning. The point of articulation would be regional plans, which were to have two faces: on the one, the regional expression of the national plan; on the other, regional frameworks for physical planning. In the very same year as the government set up the regional councils and boards and charged them with the preparation of regional plans, the Planning Advisory Group produced its historic recommendations in favour of a hierarchy of structure and local plans, which were embodied in the 1968 Planning Act. At the same time, the Redcliffe Maud Commission was just finalising its recommendations for the reorganisation of English local government on city regional lines: a structure to which the new hierarchy of plans was ideally suited. Ironically just as that was happening, the regional planning system was effectively just starting to be dismembered in the wake of the 1966-67 National Plan fiasco.

An important reason for that was top-level Whitehall infighting: the Department of Economic Affairs found itself sandwiched between two powerful enemies, the Treasury and the old Ministry of Housing and Local Government. Maybe, if the National Plan had survived, it would all have been different and the new system would have survived as a permanent element of

British life, as it has of French. As someone who was already playing a role at that time, I have doubts: the problem was that the role of the regional planning apparatus was too weakly and ambiguously defined. The planning councils essentially played two roles: they were designed as pressure groups for the less advantaged regions, which suited Labour ideology as well as Labour political calculations, but in the more affluent areas they were from the beginning far more physical than economic entities, however hard they may have tried to achieve the latter. So they inevitably ran foul of the statutory planning authorities and their associations, like the predecessors of SERPLAN in the South East; and in the 1970s they were allowed to wax and wane, being brought back on stage when it suited someone's book in government, before Michael Heseltine dealt them a death blow soon after May 1979.

I have dwelt on the planning councils because they did survive for 14 years, and because their history does provide some important lessons, both negative and positive, for our thinking about the future. During the 1980s, it became fashionable to dismiss the history entirely, on the ground that strategic planning was an outmoded concept of the 1960s, as a memorable White Paper put it nearly a decade ago. Now we can see that the need for the strategic approach has not indeed disappeared, indeed is ironically as strong as ever, but it is being done without any equivalent of the regional councils. What has disappeared in the process is any belief in the regionalisation of national economic planning; indeed, as I shall try to show in a few minutes, the regional issue has very much faded from the agenda, to be replaced by other problem geographies. Regional strategic planning is seen as a primarily physical planning activity, albeit with strong economic objectives of helping to achieve economic advance. Perhaps, indeed, stripped of the mystique, that is all it ever was.

The early and mid-1960s were years of boom, of course. In that respect, they compare only with the late 1980s. Even the images had a certain similarity: Swinging London and the King's Road then, Yuppies and Docklands a quarter-century later. And it all fits perfectly the notion of a 25-year urban construction cycle, if you happen to enjoy that kind of theory. What is interesting about the comparison is as always the similarities and the differences. The overwhelming perceived problem in the early 1960s, just as in the late 1980s, was the overheating of London and the south

east, and all the problems, which the media licked almost into a state of mass hysteria – gridlocked streets, overloaded commuter trains and tubes, escalating house prices, the colonisation of new areas (the West End in the 60s, the City fringe and Docklands in the 80s) by mammoth office developments. Both eras even had their own phallic symbol: Centrepoint and Canary Wharf, which ended up in very much the same unlet state. There were the same policy responses: clearing the arteries (then called Clearways, later Red Routes), new tube lines. And there were proposals in both eras for major new developments outside London, to relieve the pressure: the Mark Two new towns of the 1960s and Michael Heseltine's East Thames Corridor in the 1990s. (Though, since I don't want to give hostages to fortune, I'd better underline the fact that East Thames hasn't yet been incorporated into government policy to the same degree as the new towns were then.) The important difference was that in the 1960s Harold Wilson and George Brown tried to license office building, while in the 1980s Margaret Thatcher and her successive ministers did no such thing. Whether there was any real difference in outcome I would doubt.

There was however yet another similarity. The end of the 1960s brought with it a quite sudden sea-change in attitudes among the cognoscenti: large-scale clearance and comprehensive redevelopment, until then seen as the standard solution, was suddenly execrated; in particular, high-density high-rise solutions, which successive governments had supported with praise and money, were abandoned. The irony was that the solutions themselves were very often a response to the pressure for instant renewal accompanied by the lure of government subsidies that might disappear. The media, which likes to talk themes and people up before it talks them down, were in large measure responsible for the suddenness of the reversal; they were helped of course by spectacular television events like the collapse of Ronan Point in 1968. Just as important was the fact that some schemes, like the London motorways, began to impinge on the comfortable lives of the middle classes.

No one can doubt that this was one of the great fundamental changes in British postwar planning history, dramatically illustrated by the London Labour Party's U-turn on the motorways (it was a Labour GLC that proposed them in 1965, a Labour GLC that abandoned them in 1973) or by the abandonment of the scheme to rebuild Covent Garden. But, to put the record right, it was not a parochial London matter or

even a British one; it was part of a change that was flashing across the western world, associated with the revolt of the young and the beginnings of community action. The effect, which had been massively underlined a little earlier by the historic Club of Rome report, was to turn much of 1960s planning on its head: small was now beautiful, sparse was now good, and planning was too important to be left to the planners.

The interesting parallel was again with the 1980s. For here too we saw a revolt, this time led by no less a personage than the Prince of Wales, against the prevailing orthodoxy. Indeed, some of the very examples against which he railed were drawn from that previous overheated era. And the response was very much the same: it was to try to rediscover a smaller scale of development and a link with traditional styles and values; it was also, at least in earlier manifestations, linked with a renewed plea for community involvement in design. The most interesting parallel of all is however this: that in both, planning was identified as the evil *deus ex machina* though the real attack was on architectural style. Indeed, in essence it was an attack on what could be called big architecture generally, and it is surely no accident that in both decades it came in an era of architectural mega-schemes.

So there was more than one similarity between these two boom periods. What was fundamentally different was the demography: by the 1980s the birth rate was again in long-term decline, though not nearly at the rate of its previous rise. However, there was an irony: because of the continued division into smaller households, the consequences for housing and planning policy were not that dissimilar. In both periods, despite all the emphasis on new employment generation in central or inner London, the outward population trend continued, ever farther outward: in the 1960s it had reached the belt 35–50 miles from London, by the 1980s it was anything between 50 and 100 miles away.

The 1970s were in some important respects an intermediate decade between these two great boom periods, which in many ways marked a breathing point. They were certainly more sombre years for the most part, marked first by the traumatic shock of the great energy crisis of 1973–4 and the associated struggles between government and organised unionism, and then by the descent into the major recession of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Planning policies, once again, logically took on the colour of their surroundings. The energy crisis came on top of the

Club of Rome report and a whole host of related literature, which called for frugality in the use of scarce non-renewable resources; and this had a fairly profound impact on policies, including a scaling down of the national motorways programme and a new emphasis on investment in public transport. The recession, marked also by the urban riots at the beginning of the 1980s, also drew sharp attention to the plight of the less fortunate areas. But by this time, the map of advantage and disadvantage had dramatically changed.

This change, and I would mark it as yet another of the great sea changes in planning policy, can be precisely dated at 1977–8, the years of the publication of the three major consultants' reports on the inner city problem, the appearance of the government White Paper on inner-city policy, and passage through Parliament of the Inner Urban Areas Act of 1978. As many will recall, the inner city problem was not suddenly discovered in those two years. The reverse, in fact: government had been worrying about it since the late 1960s, distinguished academics like David Donnison and David Eversley had published weighty papers on the subject, and a previous Conservative government had actually appointed the consultants before the 1974 election. What was remarkable about their reports was that they accepted, and made suddenly respectable, an argument that had previously been heard only on the Marxist left: that the inner-city problem had a set of structural economic causes, in the progressive unravelling of the economic base. And this, of course, was to be further underlined in the recession that came so soon after. It was a conclusion that no one, of whatever political complexion, could afford to ignore.

The fact was that a number of complex causes were operating simultaneously to impact on the inner cities. There was the increasingly fierce economic competition, especially after our entry into the European Community in 1973, which struck with great force on the older, less efficient inner-city factories; there were the huge technical changes in the form of containerisation of goods transport, which decimated inner-city docks and railway freight yards; there was the sharp shift from the goods-handling to the information-handling economy, with all that implied for levels of education and skill in the workforce. The immediate impacts were, predictably enough, fairly negative: by the end of the 1970s wide swathes of British inner cities were effectively derelict. As the economy came out of the recession and into the 1980s boom, equally

predictably, much of this derelict land began to be recycled to serve the more dynamic sectors of the economy, but with continuing problems of transition for the residents. The old regional problem, north versus south, was replaced by the new urban problem, inner cities (even whole cities) versus the rest. And government policy necessarily responded to the challenge, as government policy always will. Regional policy was phased out; urban policy was phased in.

It has been fashionable to stress the contrast between Labour and Conservative policies in this area, as in virtually everything else. I find this a trifle exaggerated. Both governments saw the need to make a fundamental shift: to move from a broad-based regional policy, which blanketed whole areas having very different characteristics and fortunes, to a much more finely-focused urban policy. Both saw the need to move on a number of fronts involving different policy areas and departmental responsibilities, thus difficult to co-ordinate: physical redevelopment, promotion of new enterprise, infrastructure, education and training. The main differences, as everyone knows, concerned mechanisms: Labour stressed co-operation between government and local authorities, the Conservatives stressed development corporations and enterprise zones. But dig under the surface, and there are some funny parallels: the UDCs were a device ironically borrowed from the Attlee government's new towns, and originally developed by none other than Lord Reith; the enterprise zones, however radical the original idea, ended up as fairly conventional regional incentive schemes on a spatially targeted basis. True, the incentives in the EZs were designed to lure the property developers; but that merely reflects the fact that in the new informational economy, most activities occupy speculatively-built premises. It would not be hard to think of a radical Labour government having tried both; we may yet see Clinton's Democratic administration borrow both of them for America.

The fact is that despite the boom years of the 1980s, the new map of Britain is still there: indeed, in the recent recession its lines have become even more firmly etched. The south east is no longer Britain's golden corner; its unemployment rate now stands at the national average. But this conceals the difference between London, which now suffers from unemployment above the average, and the still more affluent remainder. Similarly, there are now important differences between the big northern and midland conurba-

tions and their surrounding areas. Counties like North Yorkshire, Cumbria, Cheshire or Hereford and Worcester essentially belong to the new south; parts of London, ever since the 1970s, could be described as falling into the new north. This points to the degree of adjustment that remains to be made. Politicians will of course argue about all this. The fact is that we are witnessing a deep long-term trend, which government policies must try to modify but which is very intractable.

The governments of the 1980s, in this respect as in others, aimed to free the markets but in fact developed some fairly elaborate forms of central state intervention to try to ensure the fact. In another respect, interestingly, one can argue that it failed to free the markets in any significant way. This was in residential development. In the early 1980s, the political spectrum was such that the large private house builders, organised in the House Builders' Federation, had every reason to believe that the government would indeed free them to undertake large scale development. In order to do so, it would be necessary to overcome the opposition of the planning authorities in the shire counties, above all in the Home Counties. The builders, organised from 1983 as Consortium Developments, clearly thought that the government would support them both on appeal, and through introduction of simplified planning regimes.

In practice, as everyone knows, it did not work out quite like that. Time after time, Consortium Developments (and indeed other developers) found that they lost their appeals for major new communities: at Tillingham Hall, Foxley Wood, Stone Bassett and Wilburton, the list of their defeats began to sound like some latter-day retreat from Moscow. Or, to change the military metaphor, government policy began to look like the story of the Grand Old Duke of York, who marched his men up the hill and when he found that they were there, he marched them down again. And though Simplified Planning Zones did arrive, they were of course permissive, so that they came to be employed only in those places where local authorities wanted to encourage development anyway; certainly not on those precious acres of south east England.

So the new communities which never happened were just as much a central feature of British planning of the 1980s as were the urban mega-developments which did. It comes down to politics, of course. Any government, most of all any Conservative government

relying on votes from these vital south east constituencies, is finally going to care more about the Nimby (Not In My Back Yard) effect than about either ideology or the fortunes of the construction industry. And Nimbyism is just a happy media term (American, originally) for something of real and ever-increasing importance: that, in a society where most people are affluent property-owners, your real standard of life depends at least as much on decisions made through politics as those made through markets. That was as true in the 1980s as in the 1960s or 1950s (though Nimbyism – Not In My Back Yard – was born in 1969, with the Skeffington report on participation in planning).

What it meant, then as before, is that development came to be channelled beyond what can be called the Nimby frontier, which in the 1960s meant North Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire and the Soke of Peterborough, and in the 1990s may well mean east of London: logically, government will resist development where a lot of people are against it and will put it where most people (including the political people) seem happy to have it. Happily, as yet, there is always some place beyond that Nimby frontier. And equally happily, these places prove not just politically expedient but also good and right places to develop, because they are the places that have been languishing but whose time is just about to come. If you doubt that, just think about Milton Keynes in 1965 and 1992.

We are now almost at the present and into the future, which is outside my bailiwick in this lecture. So let me sum up on the key trends which I think have begun to impinge on British planning very recently, and will certainly impinge on it even more in the future. There are, I believe, four.

The first is the European dimension. We have begun to see this impinging in all kinds of ways: in the mutual recognition of qualifications, in the effect of Commission directives on matters like nature conservation and environmental review of projects, and more generally in the increasing importance of links with Europe in the development of our overall regional and sub-regional strategies. This has of course been developing for some time; but only in the last two or three years can we really begin to sense it.

The second is the environmental dimension. For the first time, a DOE policy guidance note, PPG 12, has enjoined planning authorities to include environmental policies in their plans. They are also asked to submit

proposals to environmental review. This partly reflects the influence of Brussels, of course. But even more fundamentally, it stems from the government's own White Paper *This Common Inheritance*, and the new level of environmental awareness which represents an entirely new political shift of recent years.

The third is the new plan-led system. The Planning and Compensation Act of 1991 represents perhaps the biggest change in the British planning system since the original 1947 Act. Some planners might say that in effect it has replaced that Act and given us a new planning system, though I personally would not go that far. It represents, once again, the attempt to adapt the system to the pressure of events. The key event that triggered it in the feverish late 1980s years was the constant rise in the volume of appeals, which threatened to stretch the whole apparatus of the inspectorate and inquiry system to breaking point. Doubtless, too, the European dimension played its role; for the Act takes us closer to the clearer-cut planning systems of our continental neighbours.

What it does do, essentially, is greatly to reduce if not to remove that element of sweeping administrative discretion, enshrined in those 1947 words that in deciding on development control applications, the planner could resolve the issue on the basis of what the plan said plus any other material circumstances. The planner is now stuck very much with his or her own plan, the implication being that it had better be right in the first place.

Opinions on it differ, as you must all know. Some say, are already saying, that it will destroy the flexibility which was the chief glory of the British planning system in comparison with our hidebound legalistic neighbours. Some say that it was about time that we removed planners' powers to do virtually what they liked without any need to justify it. I think that on this point we had better just wait and see. The testing time is likely to be not now, in the middle of a deep recession in the development and construction industries, but when the next construction boom comes along.

In any event, what it does spell out is that we are likely to have a more codified planing system. Regional advice from local planning authorities, and regional guidance from the DOE and their Welsh and Scottish equivalents, are likely to assume a larger role in guiding counties in preparing structure plans, or London boroughs and metropolitan districts in drawing up

their Unitary Development Plans. (I think it particularly intriguing that, a decade after strategic planning was consigned to the waste paper basket, it is back with us, stronger than at any time since the 1960s.) The structure plans are likely to play a major role in guiding local plans, which will need to demonstrate that they are in conformity. And finally, development control decisions will need to be in conformity with the plan. It will be a system that gains in clarity, even if it loses something in flexibility.

The fourth element is the one of which we are all most conscious: the present recession, in particular its effect on the development and construction industries. Policies will surely need to be devised to harness the unused capacity through infrastructure works, in ways that will not impact further on the Public Sector borrowing requirement. We have already seen clear evidence of that, in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement with its new rules on private involvement in infrastructure projects, and in the Edinburgh summit with its promise of European funding for key European

infrastructure links. Critics may call this closet Keynesianism. I don't think we can afford to be arguing about words at this time. The fact is that we will get a drive to build these projects at a time of unprecedented opportunity, just as we did in the 1930s. And they could represent a powerful driver of the next wave of urban development, which will surely occur as soon as the economy begins to lift.

The important point, as I said at the beginning, is that reports of planning's death have been greatly exaggerated. It is as strong now as in 1947 or almost any time since. The reason is that its political constituency has not disappeared, indeed has greatly strengthened as we care more and more about what the late Fred Hirsch called positional goods, which can be guaranteed only through it. Planning is an essential artefact of any old-developed, socially-complex, highly-urbanised and reasonably-affluent country such as this one. It will still be around to analyse, surely, when another generation of Bossom lecturers comes to dissect it around the year 2037.

DISCUSSION

JEFF ROOKER (Member of Parliament for Birmingham, Perry Bar): How do you see the next stage in urban development? The inner cities have suffered social and economic deprivation although millions of pounds have been spent there, and they are still at the same level in the pecking order. Prestige projects are often put forward as the great motivator of inner cities, where economic and social benefits are supposed to trickle down to the local community, but there doesn't seem to be much evidence that this works.

THE LECTURER: If anyone has an answer to this question, it would have been heard and received by now. It's inevitably a long-term process. We are seeing a fundamental adjustment of inner-city economics out of one era and into another. I don't think it's fanciful to describe it in the same terms as the original Industrial Revolution. We are going through an informational revolution which is at least as momentous as that one and will probably take about the same amount of time. It involves the gradual replacement of older, less competitive activities with new ones that are more competitive, and we will need education and training policies to bring the inner-city population into those new activities. This

involves two sets of policies: retraining those who have been in the old economy and, more significant and vital for the future, education policies that will bring the new generations directly into the new economy. We are by no means doing a perfect job on that at present because it is appallingly difficult to handle it in areas suffering multiple deprivation, where these effects are concentrated on the school system. That's why it will be a long job. I also believe (and this is a private view) that it will involve a very fine degree of articulation between different departments of state which operate in different ways, and which have different relations with local authorities.

MICHAEL WELBANK (President, Royal Town Planning Institute; Fellow of the Society): The 1947 Act is a very thin piece of legislation, depending on the flexibility that has been suitable for our pluralist society. We're now speeding up our pluralism, and every community group seems to have a new issue for the planning system. This means that we are tending to have a local environmental protection system rather than a planning system. There seems to be a need for an underlying theoretical basis to bring the two together. Would you care to speculate on what that might be?

THE LECTURER: I'd like to respond slightly indirectly. I had a great deal of confidence in the return to a quite articulated system of planning in which regional guidance would play a very important role. Regional guidance in the South East will, I hope, be out very soon and will be the first major fruit of the system. If we can make that an effective framework for planning at progressively finer geographical levels, then we can harness the plan-led system in such a way that it provides a clear template for progressive decisions for smaller geographical areas and, in some degree, counteract the tendencies you describe.

I think there is a real risk in advanced industrial and post-industrial countries for traditional party politics to be replaced by single-interest politics. This may be a temporary phase, and perhaps we will see the development of a new two-party system, but the single-interest tendency can lead to a dangerous situation almost like that in the old Polish parliament where anyone could say No, thus blackballing everything. There is always a tension between top-down and bottom-up planning, and it is going to be very important to create some kind of counterweight to represent the general as distinct from the particular interest.

The theoretical basis you mention is a central point. Planning schools have to think again about what could be called the ethical or philosophical basis of planning decisions. They have ducked that for the past 20 years because they were too interested in fashionable things like Marxist planning or, now, analysing post-modernity. All this is fun, but it doesn't advance us much. We haven't begun to think about, for instance, evaluation in the planning processes since the attack on cost-benefit analysis in the 1970s. I very much hope that we see a younger generation of planners taking an interest in this.

One problem is that the planning schools have been much reduced in numbers during the 1980s, and there aren't really enough people to generate this kind of activity. I hope that with the expansion of the universities we will get adequately staffed planning schools and people taking an interest in this question again. It's got to be generated academically in some way, and the academics have got to start remembering what they are there for in a professional planning school.

RODNEY BROOKE (Secretary, Association of Metropolitan Authorities, Fellow of the Society): Attempts to try to revive the planning system, not just in this country but abroad as well, don't seem to bring much benefit to the indigenous inhabitants, however successful they may be in the physical infrastructure. Would Professor Hall comment on three hypotheses as to why that might be? First, when additional funds are injected into the inner cities by a whole succession of government measures, they are accompanied by a reduction in the resources available

to the local authority, so the economic benefit is not as great as one might expect. Second, the solutions have too often been imposed on the local community rather than springing naturally from its wishes. Third, the initiatives have been based too much on infrastructure – bricks and mortar – and have not offered a comprehensive view. Until the recent City Challenge, the Department of the Environment and the Home Office have not been very effective in bringing in other departments to make a concerted attack on the problems.

THE LECTURER: All three of your hypotheses are worth examining. It's very difficult to reach a conclusion, especially on the first, because it would require a level of analysis that no one I know of is currently making. The reason for emphasising physical rather than other policies is that the former are easier to carry out. If you've created new buildings that house new jobs, it's clear that you've done something. What I would call the softer policies require a more subtle approach and have no single evident outcome. For instance, it may take a very long time to see the effects of educational policies. I have sympathy with all three hypotheses and it would be an important topic for research if one could isolate places that have done things differently and try to judge the results. This represents the sheer intractability of the problem in terms of policies in the social and educational field, and the extremely long timescale.

DAVID HALL (Director, Town and Country Planning Association; Fellow of the Society): It's frequently said that the weakest part of the planning system throughout the past 30 years has been the weakness of the powers and processes of implementing the development plans and actually getting action on the ground. Where do we go from here with a plan-led system? On the one hand, we have a very strong threat from government policy, which is against public expenditure and public investment to achieve basic infrastructure and wider objectives. On the other hand, we have a recession and a lack of confidence that prevent the private sector putting up any of the funds that are likely to bring about the implementation of plans. Where are we going to get the financial thrust for the development that's going to be needed between now and the end of the decade?

THE LECTURER: The problem with public expenditure isn't just a question of ideology. If a Labour Government had been returned in April 1992 you would have had the same constraints on policy, because the constraints are those that are real in terms of public expenditure and the traditional Treasury controls. I believe that the only way out of the impasse is greater private involvement in mixed projects, if we can make this work. I'm not sure that

anyone knows how this is going to work out, and I think we should take a very close look at models from abroad, France and Japan for instance, where they have been doing this for some time. It is a question of getting the private sector involved, at a time when confidence is low, in schemes in which there will be a pay-off for everyone when the economy lifts. You can call this a form of neo-Keynesianism; I think it's rather different because of the considerable degree of private involvement that's to be expected. I can't see any way out by simply deciding to remove the public expenditure limits, because the whole situation is too delicate. That's a very unsatisfactory answer, but the best I can give at this point. I should dearly like to see a research project on how they do it in other countries.

DAVID HALL: In many overseas countries the initial driving force for development may come from the public sector.

THE LECTURER: You could do it with the same amount of public-sector investment as long as it was directed into projects that ought to be attractive to private capital, given the right terms. Look at what happened in some of the more successful private industries, like British Telecom, where there has been a vast investment programme. I'm sure there will be more examples, not all in the private sector at present, and schemes which are a lot trickier. Every day we hear about the privatisation of the railways. There is a whole range of opportunities there that might be attractive to private capital in the right circumstances; some are more difficult because of the necessary subsidy element. To summarise: I think we could do it within the present constraints; it's a question of the way you couple the public and private involvement.

NEIL PARKYN (Architect and Town Planner, Colin Buchanan & Partners, Member of RSA Council): In Europe there are various communities of interest, comparable to, say, the old Hanseatic League. Is there any point in comparable places in different countries coming together to secure EC funding? You might call it a form of twinning.

THE LECTURER: There is something even more important than twinning here, in terms of the politics of European aid. We may see the development of transborder groups, such as the implicit links between places on either side of the English Channel. This obviously has relevance, in terms of Brussels politics, to money for transborder projects. The Edinburgh Summit made a good decision to

invest in these key links, the missing infrastructure basis, which could be a very real benefit to border regions. We will probably see more of this as part of a progressive shift to a Europeanisation of the politics of regions.

NICHOLAS XENAKIS (London Borough of Southwark Urban Studies Tutor for Community Education): I'm a planner who also teaches at community level. I'm very interested in your concept of a vision, and the vision becoming reality. You seem to be saying that the visionary concept has to go through periods of intense crisis before it is realised. Is there any parallel between our current situation and the New Deal in the USA or Britain in the 1930s? The whole of Europe is threatened with a crisis that the incremental solutions tried by governments over the past 10 years have not been able to prevent. Looking at the immediate future, we can see things practically coming to a halt.

THE LECTURER: You can make historical parallels, but history never repeats itself exactly. Although the current recession in the West is perhaps as serious as anything that we have faced since the Second World War, there are really no parallels with the depth of distress in the recession of 1931-4. Let us hope that continues to be the case, as I'm sure it will with signs of recovery. Nevertheless, it is true to say that any period of recession is bound to bring forth certain kinds of responses. Politicians begin to think of works programmes broadly, and of policies to produce jobs. Some countries can be more visionary than others at some times. You could argue that the United States was more visionary under Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s than we were under our governments, but if you look at the implementation of Roosevelt's vision you will see that academically it was pretty superficial. However, the depression indirectly produced the Barlow Report, which was our particular vision.

There is a great deal of chance in all these affairs but I think a political response will be coming up, in this country or elsewhere, to the problems that we see today. These things can't be produced to order. They depend partly on the vision of individuals. If John Major were to say tomorrow, 'We're going to have vision,' I don't think that would be any guarantee of worthwhile vision in the short term. But, given the present state of politics in this country and a degree of disillusion about the traditional party lines and party issues under the impact of the global forces of which we're all aware, it would be surprising if you didn't have some powerful new catalytic ideals emerging. I wouldn't like to predict when and where.