

NON-PLAN: AN EXPERIMENT IN FREEDOM

Town-and-country planning has today become an unquestioned shibboleth.

Yet few of its procedures or value judgments have any sound basis, except delay.

Why not have the courage, where practical, to let people shape their own environment?

"A dispute has arisen about a booklet, *Dorset Building in Rural Areas*, just issued by Dorset County Council, and aspiring to be a guide to good design for people building houses in the countryside—our Architectural Correspondent writes. Most of the examples that it illustrates and recommends as models are utterly commonplace, the sort of house to be found in almost any speculative builder's suburban estate. This view is shared by the Wilts and Dorset Society of Architects, which, through its president, Mr Peter Wakefield, has asked for the publication to be withdrawn"—*The Times*, December 1968.

This news item illustrates the kind of tangle we have got ourselves into. Somehow, everything must be watched; nothing must be allowed simply to "happen." No house can be allowed to be commonplace in the way that things just are commonplace: each project must be weighed, and planned, and approved, and only then built, and only after that discovered to be commonplace after all. Somehow, somewhere, someone was using the wrong year's model.

Once, Rasmussen, in *London: the Unique City*, (first published 1934), thought it worth printing a picture of the entirely commonplace domestic architecture built along Parkway, Camden Town, in the early 19th century. It was architecture that worked; it provided what the inhabitants wanted from it. Now there'd be trouble if you tried to knock it down (though the London motorway box will skirt it close). But at least the preservationists didn't get in at ground level, as they do today, in order to try and make sure—before the event—that something that will eventually be worth preserving is built.

The whole concept of planning (the town-and-country kind at least) has gone cockeyed. What we have today represents a whole cumulation of good intentions. And what those good intentions are worth, we have almost no way of knowing. To say it has been with us for so long, physical planning has been remarkably unmonitored; ditto architecture itself. As Melvin Webber has pointed out: planning is the only branch of knowledge purporting to be some kind of science which regards a plan as being fulfilled when it is merely completed; there's seldom any sort of check on whether the plan actually does what it was meant to do, and whether, if it does something different, this is for the better or for the worse.

The result is that planning tends to lurch from one fashion to another, with sudden revulsions setting in after equally sudden acceptances. One good recent example, of course, was the fashion for high flats—which had been dying for some time before Ronan Point gave it a tombstone. This fashion had been inaugurated with bizarre talk of creating "vertical streets" which would somehow, it was implied, recreate the togetherness of Bethnal Green Road on Saturday morning in (presumably) the lift shaft—this being the only equivalent communication channel in the structure.

Not that one can be too swiftly mocking. We may yet find that for some future twist of social or technological development, tall flats are just the thing. This happened with another fashion—that for the garden city, as promulgated by Patrick Geddes, Ebenezer Howard and Raymond Unwin. It's worth remembering that the garden in this theory was there specifically to grow food in: the acreage was carefully measured out with this fodder ratio in mind. The houses in (say) Welwyn Garden City or Hampstead Garden Suburb were, also scattered thinly because of the width of space allotted (for reasons of health) to the loop and sweep of roads.

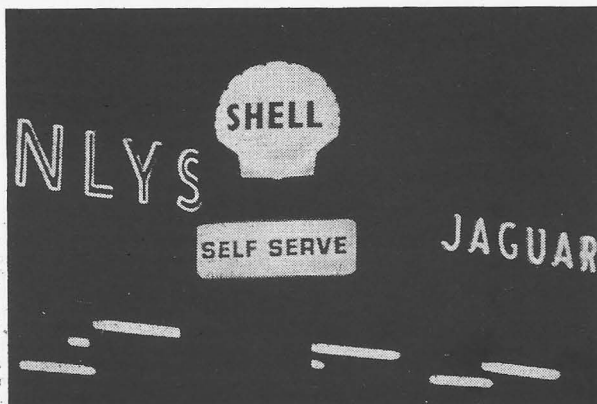
Welwyn Garden City and Hampstead Garden Suburb were therefore built—and then duly mocked for dull doctrinarism. The layout made public transport almost impossible; the tin and the frozen pack rapidly outdated the vegetable patch. But then the spread of car ownership outdated the mockery: those roads lived to find a justification; the space around the house could absorb a garage without too much trouble; and the garden (as, even, in many inner-London conversions of Georgian houses) became an unexceptionable outdoor room, and meeting space for children, away from the lethal pressed steel and rubber hurtling around the streets.

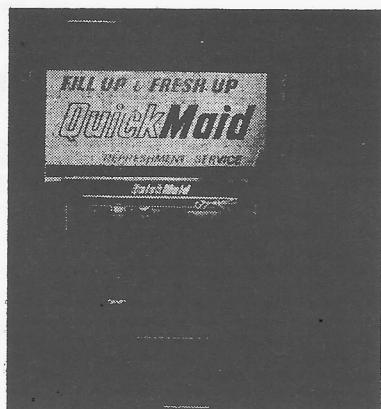
Now it's nice that a plan should turn out to have reasons for succeeding which the planner himself did not foresee. At every stage in the history of planning, we have cause to be grateful for these quirks of time. It's doubtful if John Nash saw how well his Regent's Park would serve as an arty but fairly democratic pause on the north edge of inner London—just right for football and swings and non-copulating pandas and Sunday-promenading Central Europeans; inhabited not by Regency aristos but by film people, lumps of London University and HM government, the American ambassador and high-class tarts. And did Scott foresee how his St Pancras Hotel, superbly planned to fit in with departing trams and arriving horse-carriages, would survive being a much-mocked office block so successfully that it can now be argued for as a natural home for a sports centre or a transport museum or Birkbeck College?

Nor is it just the cities and towns that have benefited. How many further-education departments can be duly grateful for minor Georgian country houses, or their Victorian imitators—so apt for giving courses in? How many angling clubs can thank the canal-builders for where they spend their peaceful Sundays? How many Highlands-addicted tourists, even, depend for the solitude they love on those harsh men who preferred the glens clear of people and who planned them out of the Highlands and into Canada or Australia?

Yet it's hard to see where, in this, the credit can go to the planner. That last example—which pushes the concept of planning altogether too far—is justified as rubbing in the coerciveness of it. Most planning is aristocratic or oligarchic in method even today—revealing in this its historical origins. The

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most rigorously planned cities—like Haussman's and Napoleon III's Paris have nearly always been the least democratic.

The way that Haussman rebuilt Paris gladdens the tourist; it was not such a help, though, for the poor through whose homes the demolition gangs went to create those avenues and squares. Similarly, the urban renewal programmes of the American cities gladdened the real estate men; they did not help the Negroes and poor whites who were uprooted with little to compensate them. In Britain, public housing programmes gladden the housing committees and the respectable working class; they don't help the poorest, the most fissile or the most drifting families.

The point is to realise how little planning and the accompanying architecture have changed. The whole ethos is doctrinaire; and if something good emerges, it remains a bit of a bonus. Not to be expected but nice if you can get it—like totalling enough Green Shield stamps to get a Mini. At the moment, most planners in Britain are on a tautness jag: Camden's neatly interlocked squares, or Southwark's high-density juggernauts, or Cumbernauld's and the Elephant's sculptural shopping centres.

Some of these look pleasant enough now—and some don't. But the fact is that, so far as one can judge, taut arrangements last much better when plenty of money can be spent on their upkeep (Oxbridge colleges, Chelsea squares) than when it isn't (remember all those Improved Industrial Dwellings put up in the late 19th century by Mr Peabody and others?)

So it's at least plausible that some other doctrine than the current one would be right for everyday housing and building. It would be pleasant if "doctrine" were precisely what it wasn't.

But how are we to know? Planning is being subjected to increasing scepticism. The Town and Country Planning Act, 1968, tidies up some of the abuses (especially some of those which caused delay in granting permissions); and the Skeffington committee is currently trying to decide how people might be given more say ("participation," in the jargon) in planning. The New City plan for Milton Keynes tries to shy away completely from planning. At universities, research is being done. The one thing that is not being done is the harshest test, the most valuable experiment, of all. What would happen if there were no plan? What would people prefer to do, if their choice were untrammelled? Would matters be any better, or any worse, or much the same? (Might planning turn out to be rather like Eysenck's view of psychoanalysis: an activity which, insofar as it gets credit, gets it for benefits that would happen anyway—minds can cure themselves; maybe people can plan themselves?) But even if matters ended up

much the same, in terms of durable successes or disastrous failures, the overall pattern would be sure to be different: the look of the experiment would be sure to differ from what we have now.

This is what we're now proposing: a precise and carefully observed experiment in non-planning. It's hardly an experiment one could carry out over the entire country. Some knots—like London—are, by now, far too Gordian for that. Nor are we suggesting (here) that other than physical planning should be shelved.

The right approach is to take the plunge into heterogeneity: to seize on a few appropriate zones of the country, which are subject to a characteristic range of pressures, and use them as launchpads for Non-Plan. At the least, one would find out what people want; at the most, one might discover the hidden style of mid-20th century Britain.

It's "hidden" for the same reason that caused any good social democrat to shudder at the anarchic suggestion of the previous paragraph. Town planning is always in thrall to some outmoded rule-of-thumb; as a profession, in fact, planners tend to read the *Telegraph* and the *Express*, rather than the *Guardian* or *The Times*. Take a specific example: the filling station.

"Watch the little filling-station," Frank Lloyd Wright said. "It is the agent of decentralisation." Like all focuses of transport, the filling-station could be a notable cause of change. Self-service automats, dispensing food and other goods, could spring up around the forecourt; maybe small post offices, too; telephone kiosks; holiday-gear shops; eateries (not restaurants) of all this quite apart from the standard BP Viscostatic/ice cream/map and guidebook shop. (Thus, at Cumbernauld New Town, it's already clear that only the most repressive controls can stop the two conveniently sited filling stations from replacing the inconveniently centred town centre as shopping focus.)

Well, you can watch as long as you like in Britain, but you will see small sign of this happening. It's hard enough to get planning permission to put up a filling station in the first place. (There's still a feeling—dating probably from the hoo-ha which broke out when the Set Britain Free Tories decided to replace pool petrol in the 1950s by commercial brands—that it's very easy to have "too many" filling stations.) To have anything else on the forecourt is almost impossible. Only in the motorway service areas (themselves damply overplanned) is there anything like this; and here the unfortunately not unique combination of incompetence and non-spontaneity kills the whole thing.

And yet there's no doubt that the popular arts of our time (ie, those that everyone thinks he has a valid opinion on) are car design and advertising; and these are doubly symbolised by such charac-



teristic forecourt figures as the Esso tiger or the BP little man. The great recent soap-opera films have been Jacques Demy's *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (hero: a filling-station owner) and Claude Lelouch's *Un Homme et Une Femme* (hero: a racing car driver). If you drive down the French Rhone valley motorway—not so planned as ours—one of the most memorable sights is a Total petrol station, writing the letters T-O-T-A-L huge across the valley, with a flutter of flags underneath. Stay in Moscow, and you end up yearning to see a Esso sign.

Ask yourself why it is that almost the only time you ever see flags on any *unofficial* occasion—ie, not at an ordained festival or other jamboree, and not on a public building—is on filling-stations or else on the rear windows of cars.

Now the purpose of this is not to write a kind of Elegy in a Country Filling-Station. The purpose is to ask: why don't we dare trust the choices that would evolve if we let them? It's permissible to ask—after the dreariness of much public rebuilding, and after the Ronan Point disaster—what exactly should we sacrifice to fashion?

Here we take a look at three zones where one

might make the experiment of succumbing to the pressures, and seeing where it led: the east midlands, "Lawrence country"; the area round Northampton, "Constable country"; and the Solent, "Montagu country." There are, obviously, other candidates. Anyone can fill in his own sacred cows or *bêtes noires*. (Imagine, for example, dividing the Lake District so that Coniston and Windermere could satisfy all those M6-borne hordes by becoming a Non-Plan zone: it might help protect the Wastwaters that are worth preserving.) The main thing is that the experiment should be tried—and tried quickly. Even the first waves of information would be valuable; if the experiments ran for five years, ten years, twenty years, more and more of use would emerge. Legally it would not be too difficult to get up. It only requires the will to do it—and the desire to know instead of impose.

Of course, any experiment of this sort will have a tendency to endure. The megaliths are still with us; so is Versailles; so is Paddington station; so is Harlow New Town. Non-Plan would leave an aftermath at least as interesting as these. But what counts here, for once, is now.

Non-Plan

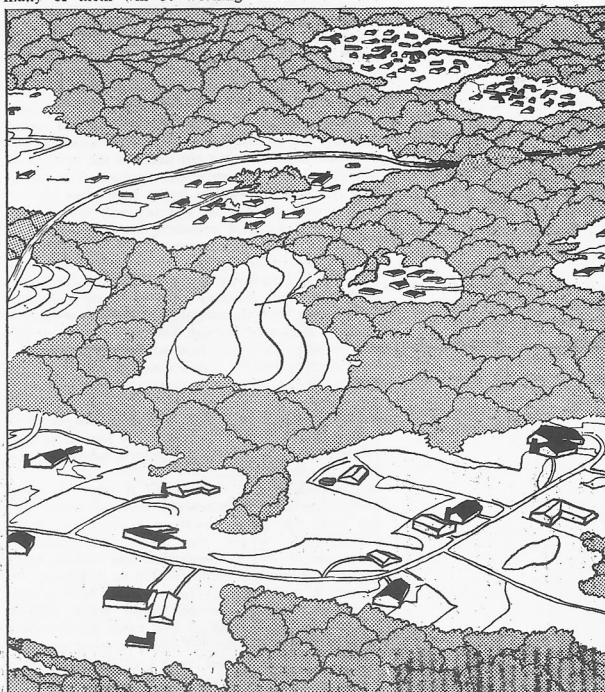
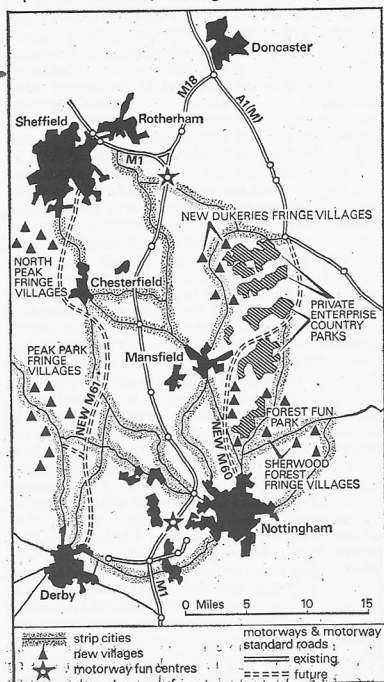
LAWRENCE COUNTRY

The east midlands are perfect for Non-Plan. Stretching from Nottingham and Derby northwards through Mansfield up to Chesterfield, the Nottingham-Derby industrial zone has a population of close on 1½ million. By the year 2000, it is expected to have 2½ million: the same as the west midlands conurbation today. Just to the north of this zone (and, by an administrative accident, in another planning region), is Greater Sheffield with over three quarters of a million more people.

This is an anomaly in England: a big, fast-growing industrial area with a lot of people on the ground but with no Birmingham-type conurbation. The east midlands regional economic planning council, in its report back in 1966, was frightened that by the end

of the century a conurbation was what they might have. It was unnecessarily afraid. The west midlands conurbation around Birmingham, which was the example that frightened them, was a product of the public transport era—first the tram, then the bus bound the towns together. The three quarters of a million extra people expected in the east midland industrial zone in the next 30 years will mostly have cars, and their tastes in housing will be quite different from those that shaped the Black Country.

As American experience shows, such people will be more mobile than previous generations. They will commute farther each day, some of them much farther. Industrial decentralisation will mean that many of them will be working outside the cities



Non-Plan

too. To use the urban economists' jargon, they will "trade-off" amenity against accessibility. For many the result will be life in far-flung suburbs, close to open countryside.

In the east midlands this is all the more likely, because the countryside is worth having, and because it is relatively more accessible than elsewhere. Lawrence in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* describes what industrialism had done to the countryside he knew, north west of Nottingham. But really, the impact of the towns is still remarkably small in the whole of this countryside. Everywhere, there are still patches of the old symbiosis of mining and the rural economy, which Lawrence himself describes poignantly in the opening pages of *Sons and Lovers*.

The biggest difference in fact has come in the last year or two. Now, the M1 rolls on only two miles from the village of Eastwood, where Lawrence grew up. It links northwards not only with Leeds but also with the Great North Road at Doncaster, thus forming the new main north-south route down the eastern side of the Pennines. From Nottingham to Sheffield by the motorway is now half an hour's drive. From Nottingham to Leicester, also half an hour. From Nottingham through to the outskirts of London, two hours. The transformation in space relationships is as great as anywhere in England; and, as is already occurring on the M1 between St Albans and Northampton, it will be accompanied, after a time lag, by a massive shift in commuting. In the whole 60-mile tract between Leicester and Sheffield, many people will find that they can live where they like. There will be colossal pressure for scattered, often small-scale growth in hundreds of villages and small towns. Non-Plan would permit this.

The biggest practical problem is preserving open space. There is really no difficulty about the ordinary local open spaces; they can be bought in the market, or from the land commission, in such amounts as

the appropriate department thinks necessary. (But only after an examination of actual needs.) The problem is the large regional or national park areas. The Peak park, west of the zone, is one case; the Dukeries, forming a series of potential country parks to the east, are another.

Land for these parks would simply be bought in the market by a state Countryside Commission because the social benefits from recreation would outweigh those from development. The commission would then recoup its expenditure (like a nationalised industry) by charging for entry to the country parks, with the aim of breaking even, "taking one year with another." American experience shows this can work. It may be necessary to buy now, while the expected benefits only justify the purchase some time in the future. This may justify a state subsidy, but it does not justify an arbitrary refusal to consider the alternative uses to which this land might possibly be put.

Non-Plan, applied to this area, would keep all the options open. No land-use pattern could be regarded as sacrosanct.

What would result? Probably a pattern which intensified the present one, but without the "planning" rigmarole. The forces of dispersion, of mobility, are already strong. But there would be certain differences. Development would be more scattered and less geometrically tidy than our present planners would like. It would be low-density—the apotheosis of exurbia. There would be more out-of-town shopping centres and drive-in cinemas, and Non-Plan would let them zoom to considerable size by the end of the century. With the aesthetic brakes off, strip development would spread along the main roads on the American model. Much of this will serve the needs of a mobile society: eating places, drinking places, petrol stations, supermarkets. It would not look like a planner's dream, but it would work.

CONSTABLE COUNTRY

Nuthampstead? Only 38 miles from London—this, among the Roskill commission's four short-list sites for a third London airport, has a not-bad chance of being finally chosen. As an alternative to Stansted it would change nothing. It doesn't matter which side of Bishop's Cleeve the airport is located: the ultimate disturbance to the Herts-Essex border country will be the same. The actual aircraft noise contours will be moved ten miles to the north west, but the airport project is not a cause, it is merely one symptom of what is trying to happen anyhow in this rare enclave of a dying way of life that has, so far, escaped pressures that are normal in the rest of London's exurbanite belt. Proclaiming a Non-Plan zone thereabouts would reveal what pressures are currently being held in check (but only just) by present planning routines. Even more than that, taking the planning lid off would produce a situation traumatic enough among the amenity lobbies to make their real motivations visible; to show how much is genuine concern for environmental and cultural values, how much merely class panic.

For the kind of population that rallies to its defence, this countryside and its villages have everything to recommend them, the perfect ecology for retired officers and gentlemen who are now something in the City.

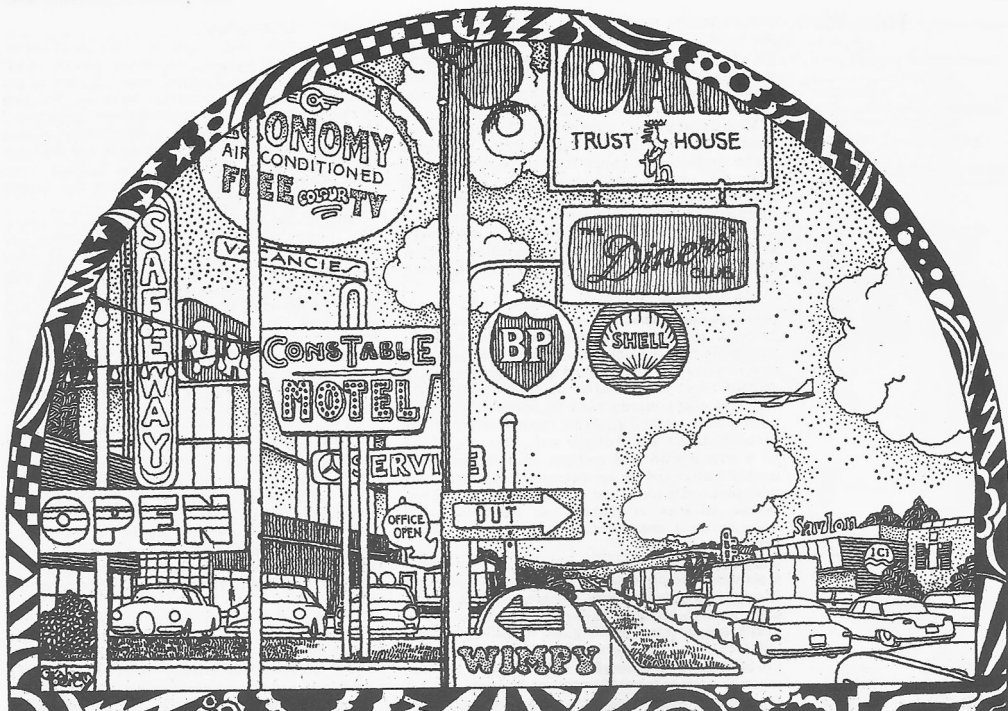
The scale of the countryside is relatively small and garden-like—the landscape does not really open out until the chalk downland rises north of the Chesham, where the main communication links—the railway to Cambridge, and the A11 trunk road to Newmarket—separate. Up to that point, the terrain is mostly gently folded, with shallow dips separating spot heights that rarely break the 400 foot contour. The tree cover is often thick enough to give the illusion that this might be some westward extension of that most sacred of English sacred scenery: "Constable country."

But this is largely illusory; most of the trees are in the belts of a few very handsome parks that more or less alternate with the half-timbered, or Georgian, villages along the A11, which has almost the air of a parkway in places. The rest of the area is fairly badly off for roads of this quality (with the possible exception of the east-west A120) but tends to exhibit instead the kind of intricate grid of minor roads that characterises the heartlands of Hertfordshire.

This close-grained and rather private terrain has long been immune to the development pressures that have transformed many other areas in London's exurbanite belt. If this area were freed of direct or implicit planning prohibitions, what semi-submerged tensions (which underlie the present malaise of insecurity here) could come to the surface and be studied?

By comparison with the other three suburban quadrants of London, the north-east quadrant is almost an underdeveloped country. Because of this, it was able to absorb a disproportionate amount of London's satellite New Town population—or, to express the matter another way, it had enough spare space for the working and lower middle classes to be shut away in separated ghettos of which the Becontree Estate was the prototype, and Harlow New Town the final solution. Until recently, the north east quadrant was buffered against developmental pressures that were "normal" in the other quadrants. Urban sprawl of earlier kinds was largely blocked by the marshes of Hackney and Wanstead, and by the inviolable common lands of Epping and Hainault forests. Later developmental pressures were also abnormal, probably because these same blockages pushed the main railway lines towards the edges of the quadrant—northwards to Cambridge, eastwards to Colchester, with anything in between typically petering out at Ongar.

This has always thrown a (probably disproportional)



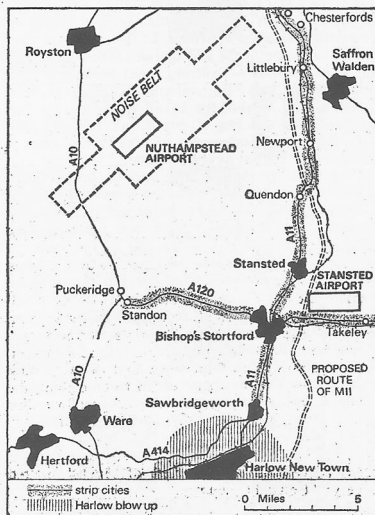
tionate) traffic load on the A11, which probably ought to have been let rip to develop as a thick local "midway", rather than being regarded, as at present, as an inefficient trunk route to remoter parts of East Anglia. The building of the M11 motorway (which an airport at Nuthampstead would certainly hasten) will lift the through-traffic load from the old A11 trunk, but will leave untouched the unacknowledged local pressures to which that road is increasingly subject in its role as a kind of diffuse, linear "downtown" for the whole area between Potter Street and the Chesterfords. These pressures are revealed not only by the eruption of more motels than their national average distribution would suggest (two at Epping, one at Harlow, others rumoured further north) but even more clearly by the constant widenings, re-alignments and general tinkering with the A11 to cope with the local traffic crossing or turning on and off it.

Of course, Harlow New Town is the major cause of hidden pressures on the whole area. Not in the way in which, for instance, Stevenage has become a focus for junkie activity in the northern home counties, but simply because the introduction of a large and unbalanced new population in any area brings with it many more demands and needs than can be accommodated by the building of homes, schools and community centres. Harlow has been parasitical on surrounding communities for entertainment, to take only one example, ever since it was founded—and Bishop's Stortford appeared to be profiting handsomely from the New Town's unsatisfied needs in its early days.

Pressures of this kind appear to be contained for the moment, but it will be physically impossible to contain them if Harlow grows much bigger. And, if the population target of about 100,000 is achieved, Harlow will be the largest settlement on the A11 between the Greater London boundary and Norwich, and must make dependent suburbs of all other roadside communities from Epping to the Chesterfords, including Stortford and Saffron

Walden, and the Ware/Hertford bijou mini-conurbation. And then add to this the effect of an airport, with all the attraction that scheduled flights would have for factory owners—consequently for speculative house builders. (One ought to remember, too, that there's an airport at Stansted *already*—and, though small, not all that tranquil.)

The result of these pressures would not, probably, look like the prewar ribbon development (of evil fame). The lifting of planning restrictions would not simply connect all the A11 villages into a continuous



Non-Plan

ribbon running north from Sawbridgeworth. One of the national advantages of Nuthamstead is the fact that motorised traffic from the midlands and the north can (with a little ingenuity) reach it without passing through London at all, and does not need the A11.

Most conceivable airports in the other three quadrants around London would throw their main traffic load on the radial arteries leading to them from the metropolis. However, any airport near Bishop's Stortford will shed quite a bit of that load on to roads running east-west or north-westwards—in other words, moving through the area at right angles to the line of flow apparently envisaged by London-obsessed "national" thinking of the sort responsible for the M11.

A fair amount of heavy commercial traffic already moves through Stortford on this axis which, some 15 or so miles further east, connects with Braintree and the diffused zone of miscellaneous light industries in central Essex. If local (and other) authorities can respond freely to a plan-free situation, then Bishop's Stortford could shortly have an improved east-west thoroughway, which it probably needs even more than to be disembarassed of the A11. This could also be a step towards the creation of a fan of better quality roads carrying an increasing amount of containerised traffic to the rest of England out of the new freight facilities at Tilbury or Felixstowe—and, again, without entanglement in the private traffic neuroses of London.

In other words, what might be in store under a planning-free dispensation might not be the simple "destruction" of the pretty coaching villages on the main road to Newmarket, but a much more evenly distributed process of infilling and backfilling of communities in an area of some five to ten miles around the Stortford airport complex with a general thickening in all parts as far as Dunmow or Royston. Nearest the airports one can expect a zone of motels, long-term parking (essential and inevitable with a largely motorised access) and secondary services, with primary and engineering services down towards Harlow because of its existing industrial zone. The motels, restaurants and so on for Stansted might well string out eastwards, however, along the A120, in a similar manner to the development of the "little Las Vegas" strip along Mannheim Road to serve

Chicago's O'Hare airport.

Equally well, they might not. We don't know, because we have not seen the area around an airport develop naturally in England since Croydon in the twenties. Indeed few prospects seem less welcome to our present planning establishments, undermined culturally by Stephen Spender's identification of such situations as the landscape of hysteria and deafened by the barrage of propaganda that thunders down from the anti-noise lobby. And to have this happen in what is virtually Constable country...

Actually, the close-textured, tree-grown, Constable-type country is supposed, by bodies of opinion like the *Architectural Review*, to be able to absorb practically anything that is not taller than a grown tree, and the buildings which free enterprise would put up in this planning-free situation would not be half that height. On an open site, one and two storey buildings have overwhelming commercial attractions—it is only ultra-high urban land values or the activities of determined architect-planners like Walter Bor or Sir Hugh Casson, that make multi-storey commercial development thinkable.

So this small-scale, rather private landscape might barely reveal its new commercial buildings to the eye. But this would be very bad commercial practice, since an invisible building is no advertisement, and there would certainly have to be a compensatory efflorescence of large and conspicuous advertising signs. The overall result could thus be low commercial buildings set well back from the road behind adequate parking courts, backed by tall trees and fronted by tall signs, with a soft, rolipoly countryside appearing behind.

It might be quite graceful to the eye; certainly more so than the quasi-regimented squalor of our present suburban industrial concentration camps (or trading estates), and equally more so than the featureless boredom of the increasingly large areas of East Anglia that are being flattened out for efficient exploitation by agro-industry. I don't suppose that it will appear graceful to the eyes of the present generation of Stansted nay-sayers. But it may appear differently to their successors—as a deliverance from creeping death by economic stagnation that will await the area if it remains in its present condition of stalemate between development pressures and planning prohibitions.

MONTAGU COUNTRY

A few years ago a nuclear power station was rejected for the Isle of Wight, under the doubtful slogan of preserving the nation's heritage. In fact, this Victorian island—once one of the Old Queen's favourite roosts, and J. B. Priestley's—is losing what heritage it had. In the Solent area—Portsmouth/Southampton/New Forest/Isle of Wight—the island is one of the few parts suffering any loss of population. It might gain more from an abandonment of preservation than it has so far won from its continuance.

Altogether, the Solent is a curious hodgepodge. At Fawley, for example, it has the largest oil refinery in Europe and the most publicised productivity agreements in Britain—from which pipelines and moralisation stretch out to the rest of the country. Then there is Southampton—a major port with huge capacity for expansion—already within the orbit of Greater London. To arrive at Southampton, either by boat or by plane, is to feel yourself at the edge of an incipient megalopolis which doesn't stop till it reaches Bletchley, Ipswich and Sevenoaks. Southampton doesn't just have four tides a day (which seems like an almost sinful amount of deep water), it has a university as expansionist as the rest of them and a rapidly swelling population. Fawley and Southampton, in fact, are at present the poles of growth. They generate various secondary industries: hovercraft, synthetic rubber, electricity, technical training.

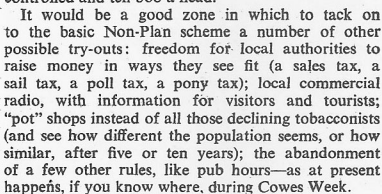
The other pole of decline apart from the Isle of

Wight (with its diminishing rail network) is Portsmouth. The highly equipped naval dockyard is being run down; skilled labour is looking for work. The ditched Buchanan plan for a Solent City is intended to arc between the Southampton and Portsmouth poles like a spark looking for a gap. It will be valuable to have the check of what Professor Buchanan expected to be able to instil here.

Besides growth and decline, the Solent has a flourishing middle area which is neither growing nor declining but simply being preserved. It has historic towns, villages and monuments—like the well-known monumental village school at Winchester; the palace, abbey and lord at Beaulieu; the New Forest itself. There's the small-boats industry. The preservationist lobby is powerful: there are assorted architectural knights at Beaulieu and at Buckler's Hard, and the yachting brotherhood at Beaulieu (again the lynchpin), Hamble and Lympington; Edward Montagu and Edmund de Rothschild (the latter, at Exbury) are showmen-gentry but they remain gentry. A consortium of landowners in the Beaulieu valley have launched a development plan.

With Non-Plan, industrial sites would be likely to spread more freely along the coast west of Southampton/Fawley. So would housing. But there would also be a spread of pleasure. It's cut out for a zone, where work-life and recreation intermingled: the Forest, the boats, the Isle of Wight. It could mark a new kind of living for Britain. Corn

Richard Weigand



**To play:
Take any
counter and
place it on the
pleasure zone
board; move
again before 12
hours are up;
after a year or
two build a new
board.**

SPONTANEITY AND SPACE

TRUMAN'S

Any advocate of Non-Plan is sure to be misrepresented; we had better repeat what we mean. Simply to demand an end to planning, all planning, would be sentimentalism; it would deny the very basis of economic life in the second half of the 20th century.

As Galbraith has reminded us, the economies of all advanced industrial countries are planned, whether they call themselves capitalist or communist. In the United States or Japan or Germany or Britain, the need to make elaborate and long-term plans is as pressing for the individual firm, as it is for the central government. But we are arguing that the word planning itself is misused; that it has also been used for the imposition of certain physical arrangements, based on value judgments or prejudices; and that it should be scrapped.

Three developments in particular makes this argument compelling. They are developments of the last 15 years; their main force has been felt in this country in the last ten. They are: the cybernetic revolution; the mass affluence revolution; and the pop/youth culture revolution.

Cybernetics is commonly described as a technological revolution; but it is much more. It has its technological basis in the computer, as the 18th century industrial revolution had in the steam engine. But just as that revolution arose out of the intellectual ferment of the age of Newton and the Royal Society, so this has gone along with a major revolution in our ways of thought.

The essence of the new situation is that we can master vastly greater amounts of information than was hitherto thought possible—information essentially about the effect of certain defined actions upon the operation of a system. The practical implications are everywhere very large, but nowhere are they greater than in the area we loosely call planning. It is true that the science of decision-making, or management, was being developed in the United States from the 1920s, a quarter century before the cybernetic revolution; and it is almost true that it was this science of management, applied to military ends in World War Two, which made the cybernetic revolution possible.

Now, the two fields—that of scientific management, and that which embraces operations research and systems analysis—are so closely related as to be in practice inseparable. But physical planning flourished in this country when the science of management was almost unknown. Thus, simple, rule-of-thumb value judgments could be made, and were held to have perpetual validity, like tablets of the law. Since the cybernetic revolution, it has become clear that such decisions are meaningless and valueless—as, indeed, ought to have become clear before. Instead, physical planning, like anything else, should consist *at most* of setting up frameworks for decision, within which as much objective information as possible can be fitted. Non-Plan would certainly provide such information. But it might do more. Even to talk of a "general framework" is difficult. Our information about future states of the system is very poor.

If the cybernetic revolution makes our traditional planning technologically and intellectually obsolete, social change reinforces this conclusion. The revolution of rising affluence (despite the current economic problems) means that a growing proportion of personal incomes will be funnelled off into ever more diverse and unpredictable outlets. Non-Plan would let them be funnelled. Galbraith (again) has shown how the modern industrial state depends on the ability to multiply wants for goods and services; certainly a large amount of prediction is involved in this. Car manufacturers have a fair idea of how many cars will be sold in 1984. Similarly with refrigerator manufacturers, colour TV set makers and purveyors of Mediterranean or Caribbean holidays.

But in detail and in combination, the effects are not easy to relate to programmes of public investment. One change, however, Non-Plan would inevitably underline: as people become richer they demand more space; and because they become at the same time more mobile, they will be more able to command it. They will want this extra space in and around their houses, around their shops, around their offices and factories, and in the places where they go for recreation. To impose rigid controls, in order to frustrate people in achieving the space standards they require, represents simply the received personal or class judgments of the people who are making the decision.

Worst of all: they are judgments about how they think *other* people—not of their acquaintance or class—should live. A remarkable number of the architects and planners who advocate togetherness, themselves live among space and green fields.

This assertion may be most clearly demonstrated where different value judgments are involved. The most remarkable manifestation so far of mass affluence—above all in Britain—has been the revolution in pop culture. This is a product of newly emergent social groups and, above all, of age groups. Among the young, it has had a remarkable effect in breaking down class barriers, and replacing these by age barriers. Though pop culture is eminently capable of commercial exploitation, it is essentially a real culture, provided by people drawn from the same groups as the customers.

Most importantly for Non-Plan, it is frenetic and immediate culture, based on the rapid obsolescence cycle. Radio One's "revived 45" is probably three months old, and on the New York art scene fashions change almost as quickly as on the King's Road. Pop culture is anti high bourgeois culture. Though it makes many statements it does not like, big statements.

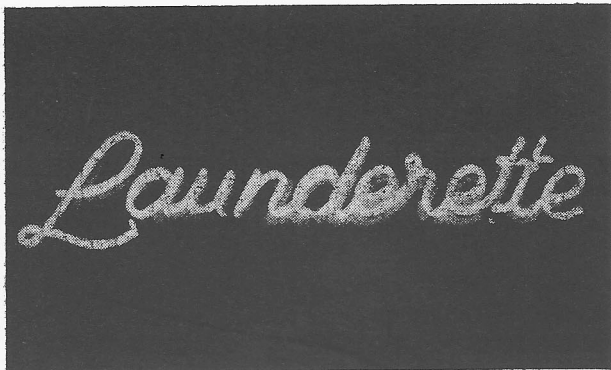
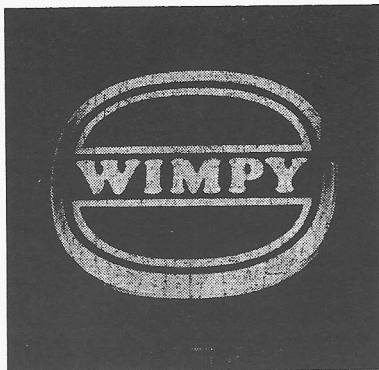
All these characteristics could not be more opposed to the traditional judgments of the physical planner—which, in essence, are the values of the old bourgeois culture. Pop culture in Britain has produced the biggest visual explosion for decades—or even, in the case of fashion, for centuries. Yet its effect on the

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British landscape has been nil, for the simple reason that the planners have suppressed it.

Three particularly ripe examples: one, the row over the psychedelic painting on the Beatles' former "Apple" boutique in Baker Street (objected to, and duly erased, because on a building of architectural merit—though the shop is next door but one to a fairly unreticent cinema); two, the rebuilt Jack Straw's Castle on Hampstead Heath, one of the few bits of pop fantasy to get past the taste censors, but only after a major row among the planners; three, the Prince of Wales pub in Fortune Green Road, north London, internally perhaps the most remarkable piece of pop design in Europe, externally a tedious piece of planner's Old English Good Taste.

The planning system, as now constituted in Britain, is not merely negative; it has positively pernicious results. The irony is that the planners themselves constantly talk—since the appearance of Jane Jacob's *Death and Life of Great American Cities*—about the need to restore spontaneity and vitality to urban life. They never seem to draw the obvious conclusion—that the monuments of our century that have spontaneity and vitality are found not in the old cities, but in the American west.

There, in the desert and the Pacific states, creations like Fremont Street in Las Vegas or Sunset Strip in Beverly Hills represent the living architecture of our age. As Tom Wolfe points out in his brilliant essay on Las Vegas, they achieve their quality by replacing buildings by signs. In Britain you only get occasional hints of how well this could work. The prime example—Piccadilly Circus at night—is apparently so successful it needs to be *preserved*. God help us. Why preserve it? Why not simply allow other effluences of fluorescence in other places? Write it in neon: NON-PLAN IS GOOD FOR YOU; I DREAMT I FOUND FREEDOM IN MY NON-PLAN BRA.

To say that Las Vegas is exciting and memorable and fine is also a value judgment. It cannot be supported by facts. But except for a few conservation areas which we wish to preserve as living museums, physical planners have no right to set their value judgment up against yours, or indeed anyone else's. If the Non-Plan experiment works really well, people should be allowed to build what they like. (Oh, and a word for the preservationists: much easier to relieve pressure on medieval town centres by letting the edges of the city sprawl, and give people chance to shop there in drive-in suburban superstores, than by brooding on inner-relief roads or whatever.)

At the very least, Non-Plan would provide accurate information to fit into a "community investment plan." The balance of costs and benefits to the individual is not the same as to the community. If there are social costs, the people who are responsible pay them. If low-density development is expensive to the community, the reaction should be to make it proportionately expensive to those who live in it; not to stop it. The notion that the planner has the right to say what is "right" is really an extraordinary hang-over from the days of collectivism in left-wing thought, which has long ago been abandoned elsewhere.

We seem so afraid of freedom. But Britain shouldn't be a Peter Pan Edwardian nursery. Let it at least move into the play school era: why should only the under-sevens be allowed their bright materials, their gay constructions, their wind-up Daleks. In that world, Marx is best known as the maker of plastic, battery-driven dump trucks. Let's become that sort of marxist.

Let's save our breath for genuine problems—like the poor who are increasingly with us. And let's Non-Plan at least some problems of planning into oblivion.



✶ \$ talks

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