JOHN MADGE

The New Towns Program In Britain

After a series of well publicized growing pains, the British new towns program has come of age. The towns have been successful administratively, socially, and financially. Despite opportunities for design innovation, however, the residential areas are generally undistinguished in appearance; town centers, on the other hand, utilize many features of shopping-center design in well-conceived clusters of civic activity. Recent plans have experimented with high density, compact development—an approach likely to have greater influence in the future. Preparations for another wave of new towns are now under way, backed by widespread political support.

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The Background

MANY AMERICAN PLANNERS still base their ideas about the British new towns on what was taking place ten to fifteen years ago. One can hardly blame them for this, for the massive and mainly successful new towns program has been miserably neglected by research workers and writers. It is a fantastic fact that not a single British planner has written a full-scale book on the subject.[1] Students of the subject are consequently still compelled to hark back to Harold Orlans' account of the earliest testing days in Stevenage, which was based on "research conducted over an eighteen-month period from October 1948,"[2] and on Lloyd Rodwin's broader and solider review[3] which nevertheless reflects impressions that now date back ten years.

In a journal such as this it is only necessary to recapitulate briefly the background facts against which the new towns program may be judged. The British, like many other people, have a classically ambivalent attitude toward urban life. While the more mobile families flock toward the big cities in order to share in their social and economic benefits, the very same families are impelled both by choice and by economic necessity to find homes in the outer suburban rings that surround the cities. Those who bemoan the anti-urbanism of the British have gathered together a chain of suppositions and motives: the snobbish desire of the rising lower middle classes to imitate their social superiors, the landed gentry; the concurrent desire of the ruling classes to tame the radicalism of the urban population by suburbanizing them. Whatever the root causes, the results are clear. Almost all the nineteenth century reformers in Britain from Robert Owen to Ebenezer Howard were convinced that the dark miseries of the industrial poor could be relieved only by a fresh start in an environment that broke away from the excessive size, density, and centralization of the city.

Howard is regarded as the founder of the garden-city idea, and it is true that his little book launched the campaign for garden cities which could weld the irresistible attractions of the town to the health and beauty of a country-based environment. But Howard's proposals succeeded—to the extent that the first experiments did succeed—because there existed a group of liberal-minded innovators who were ideologically in tune with his proposals. The launching of Letchworth in 1903 by a private company was a somewhat off-beat speculation that took over forty years to become financially secure. Welwyn Garden City, started in 1920, was located much closer to London and may

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[1] The nearest approach to a full evaluation is Dr. J. H. Nicholson's useful little book, *New Communities in Britain* (London: National Council of Social Service, 1961).

[2] Harold Orlans, *Stevenage: A Sociological Study of a New Town* (London: Routledge, 1952).

[3] Lloyd Rodwin, *The British New Towns Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

well have survived its early financial difficulties owing to this fact, which made it a feasible dormitory city for middle-class London commuters.

None of these moves was enough to win general recognition for the garden city thesis. But the idea proved remarkably persistent, and not only in England. Experiments in the United States in the 1930's sustained and even spread a belief in the viability of new towns. When, therefore, the British Government set up a Royal Commission in 1937, under the chairmanship of Sir Montagu Barlow, to look into the whole question of industrial location, and invited the Commission to examine the disadvantages arising from the concentration of industry in large cities, it was almost a foregone conclusion that the report should point to the contribution garden cities and satellite towns could make to the dispersal of population.

Almost at once, World War II intervened and all immediate plans for planned redistribution of the population of Britain had to be shelved. But as the war drew to a close, a ferment of "new frontier" proposals began to emerge and among these was the urge to introduce comprehensive land planning throughout the country. The Labour Party's victory in 1945 was followed by a vigorous legislative program; included in the first year's list was the New Towns Act, 1946, which for the first time empowered the government to take the initiative in the framing and execution of plans for a batch of new towns. The procedure involved the setting up of a public corporation for each designated new town, and in the first three years eight new towns were designated in the London area alone. Most of these were projected for the primary purpose of taking the overspill from London, but in certain cases an important subsidiary aim was to revitalize or to remodel an existing center of population. Basildon, for example, was built in an area which already contained 25,000 inhabitants in a desperately unplanned low-density speculative muddle; Hemel Hempstead was an ancient borough that was believed to require a transfusion; the somewhat sluggishly developing garden city of Welwyn was linked with the neighboring aircraft town of Hatfield.

Nobody now denies that these new towns got off to a slow start. For the first few years, the corporations were bogged down in a sticky mass of administrative preparation and paper planning. In the designated areas that had not previously had any considerable population, the difficulty was where to start. The lack of houses meant a shortage of accommodation for the labor force, and there was typically an inadequate provision of electricity, water, and sewerage. In the areas which were already populated, these difficulties were replaced by the opposition of entrenched inhabitants who objected to the invasion of their retreats by hordes of undesirable Londoners. For reasons of national finance, money was persistently short, and intermittently was choked off entirely. To ensure equal shares for all, new towns were granted no prior claim on scarce labor or materials. It was during this period that the new towns were chronicled by Orlans and by Rodwin, and it is only since this period that the significant turning point took place. The rest of the present article is devoted to a discussion of these past ten years.

New Towns Progress to 31st March, 1961 (*Source: Ministry of Housing and Local Government*)

Town	Date of designation as a new town	Population		New houses and flats		New industries	
		At designation	At 31st March, 1961	Completed	Under construction	No. of firms	No. employed by new firms
Basildon	4th Jan 1949	25,000	53,700	9,717	1,721	60	8,897
Bracknell	17th June 1949	5,000	20,400	4,346	482	25	5,048
Crawley	9th Jan 1947	10,000	54,000	12,283	174	76	11,455
Harlow	25th Mar 1947	4,500	53,500	13,660	1,250	84	11,309
Hatfield	20th May 1948	8,500	20,500	2,912	428	16	663
Hemel Hempstead	4th Feb 1947	21,000	54,800	9,805	1,349	46	7,642
Stevenage	11th Nov 1946	7,000	42,400	10,019	892	35	10,960
Welwyn Garden City	20th May 1948	18,500	35,000	4,447	644	31	4,363
Corby	1st Apr 1950	15,700	36,000	3,794	680	16	1,909
Cwmbran	4th Nov 1949	12,000	30,000	4,560	366	1	73
Newton Aycliffe	19th Apr 1947	60	12,000	3,632	341	—	—
Peterlee	10th Mar 1948	200	13,800	3,670	322	4	1,052
Cumbernauld	9th Dec 1955	3,500	5,000	854	480	1	1,425
East Kilbride	6th May 1947	2,500	32,000	8,237	834	35	6,625
Glenrothes	30th June 1948	1,150	12,800	3,026	331	6	540

The Economics of New Towns

If certain conditions are fulfilled, new towns have distinct economic advantages over possible alternative forms of development. The basic reason is that housing development in buildings of two (or at most of four) floors in height is much cheaper, under British conditions, than the building of higher apartment buildings. The cheapest form of housing is suburban development, as this obviates the need to make new provision for neighborhood amenities and minimizes capital expenditure on new industrial and commercial development. If it is permitted, suburban development has the greatest economic appeal. In Britain today, however, there are some safeguards against suburban sprawl, the most effective of which is the greenbelt policy. In spite of its shortcomings, this policy has put a brake on suburbanization around London and one or two major cities. It has been more effective in restraining public housing authorities than the private sector (even since 1957, 44 per cent of all new housing in Britain has been built for public authorities) but it has undoubtedly increased the economic desirability of a home in a new town.

In the short run, on the other hand, the new town corporation is required to find very considerable sums of money which will not yield any substantial return. The necessary network of roads, sewers, and public utilities may not pay their way for at least twenty years. Because of this heavy capital commitment, corporations are tempted to leave to private enterprise as much as possible of the commercial and industrial development, and in order to attract private developers they may offer extremely favorable terms. In contrast with this, the corporations have undertaken almost all the housing development, which in any case involves substantially more than one-half the total capital expenditure. Particularly in the early stages of a new town, incoming families are predominantly dependent on subsidized housing; but the demand from existing tenants for houses for sale is now rising, and it may be expected that the load of public subsidy for housing in the new towns will decline from now on.

Meanwhile, those corporations that have been the most enterprising in promoting the building of rental factories, offices, and stores are now beginning to reap very substantial benefits from their policies. It was found that companies which were reluctant to reserve a patch of open field as a site for their new factory were much more interested if they were given a chance to rent a standard factory already erected. In the few cases where the corporations were allowed to pursue this form of enterprise it paid off handsomely, and gave a healthy start to the industrial development as a whole. After they had established themselves, many of these companies moved on to their own custom-built factory on the same industrial estate; the process could then be repeated with a new tenant installed in the standard factory. In addition to the promotional value, this policy provided a useful income to the corporation.

In the case of commercial development, it is almost essential for the corporation to provide the buildings for the neighborhood shopping centers. If they do not, the incoming neighborhood residents will lack these elementary amenities. In the case of the town centers, policy has varied, but it can be said as a general rule that those corporations that have found the capital for their town center stores, offices, and civic buildings have made a very profitable investment which will very shortly be showing over-all profits that can be allocated to such non-commercial uses as swimming pools and sports fields.

The latest budgets of the new towns corporations show a rapid year-by-year increase in the profitability of these public enterprises. Taking the twelve new towns in England and Wales, the over-all surplus for the last published year (to March 31, 1961) was £444,000, compared with the surplus of £96,000 in the previous year. There is no reason to doubt that next year's figures will show a further improvement, and that the accumulated deficiency on sewerage and other capital works will be wiped out before very long.

The Social Situation in the New Towns

Among the chief officers of the majority of new towns, there is one individual who is responsible for social development. It is his function not only to be available at all times to help sort out the problems of newcomers and of individual families, and to assist in the formation of new social clubs, but also to keep his ear to the ground so that his corporation is aware in good time of the currents of thought and feeling in the town. The authorities thus know far more about what is going on in the new towns than is customary in the case of towns administered on more orthodox lines.

It is of course well known to social scientists on both sides of the Atlantic that the transition from an old established neighborhood to a new project can be very unsettling, and that neurosis and certain social behavior disorders, such as delinquency, are liable to occur. The evidence so far has been gathered mainly on large suburban projects, and it has not disclosed whether any difference in this known pattern of maladjustment would be found in the case of new towns. A very detailed inquiry has in fact been conducted in one new town, and the preliminary accounts are

very encouraging; it is believed that the incidence of neurosis may be no higher in the new town than in the population as a whole, and that the incidence of psychosis is definitely below the national average.

When one considers the abnormal stresses to which new town families are at first subjected, these results, if substantiated, are surprising. Families are bound to suffer loneliness through separation from their old circle of relatives and neighbors; the social amenities in the new town are at first almost inevitably meager; there is a feeling of rootlessness in a half-completed physical environment; the families themselves are almost certainly passing through a period of financial stress. All these difficulties are now predictable, and one can even prophesy that they may fall still more heavily on the new town family than on the corresponding family that moves to a suburban housing development. As has been mentioned, the members of the team led by the social development officer do what they can. The main cause for regret is that, for several reasons, their efforts can only be palliative. A new town development corporation in its early days normally operates under conditions of financial stringency, so that it is restricted in the number and quality of social amenities that can be provided. Another problem is that lack of traffic deters bus operators from building up adequate services for linking neighborhoods to each other and to town centers. And, many families moving into new homes in a fresh environment are induced to enter into credit agreements for the purchase of various items of home equipment, but no special funds are available to help such families tide over their temporary financial difficulties.

Further, it has always been regarded as administratively impossible—if not undesirable—to attempt to move neighborhoods *en bloc* so that families moving into new homes can hope to remain within reach of their relatives and former neighbors. Authorities appear to reject the policy of block transfers by invoking the melting-pot theory, asserting that the newcomers will be helped to adapt to living requirements of a changed social stratum if they are given a fresh start with a new set of neighbors. This is surely a policy of throwing them in at the deep end.

There was great surprise when last year's Annual Report of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government—the Ministry responsible for new towns—commented:

> The malady known as "new town blues" has been greatly exaggerated in some press articles but it undoubtedly exists. Social workers and doctors have long recognized it as one of the difficulties in building up a new community and it is one which perhaps only time can overcome.[4]

The protagonists of the new towns were disgusted at this statement, guarded though it is. Uncommitted critics felt that the remark was overly complacent, because it did not appear to accept the widespread belief that the Ministry could have done more to relieve the social tensions of migration into the new towns. They also felt that the remark had come too late: it is commonly believed that the blackest period of new town life is now over; that the lack of animation that characterized the town centers in their early days is at last being defeated, partly because the commercial interests are moving in. Dance halls, bowling alleys, skating rinks, indoor swimming pools, sports centers are at last opened or building. Other new facilities are being provided, such as a "workshop with space, equipment, and instruction for young people who wish to repair or service motor-cycles, scooters, wireless and TV sets, or to make boats, canoes, or models in timber,"[5] which operates not as a club but on a casual fee-paying basis. As one commentator states, "There should soon be no lack of things to do in the town."

Architecture and Planning in the New Towns

The development corporations for the new towns possess a number of advantages over the corresponding authority of an existing or an extended town. Prominent among these are the advantage of a substantially unrestricted site for development, the advantage of a fresh institution that has not collected to itself the brakes on change that slow down the reconstruction of an old town, and the advantage of a professional staff that is not only larger than in a corresponding old town but is also likely to attract men and women who are more adventurous and imaginative than their old town colleagues.

In opposition to these assets, certain other factors must be taken into account. These include the generally defensive attitude that the new town authorities were at first forced to take up, the fact that substantial control was maintained by the central government, and the fact that the British attitude to the home has been extremely conservative.

The unfortunate result of these considerations is that the residential neighborhoods of the new towns show very few signs of the amount of fresh and original thought that might have been available to distinguish them from the ordinary dreary semi-detached housing that has suburbanized so much of Britain. A limited number of experimental forms of housing

[4] *Report of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1960.* (London: HMSO, 1961) p. 96.

[5] *Report of the New Towns Corporation, 1961.* (London: HMSO, 1962) p. 422.

development have taken place, but in the housing areas of the new towns the typical effect is of dull, dispersed uniformity.

There are no outstanding differences in housing needs between the population of new town and the population of a residential suburb. Compared with a public housing project in the suburbs, a new town neighborhood tends to contain more middle-class families, and the typical age of families is certainly no greater and their size no less. Garage provision is now normally on the basis of one car per family, which is the same as that for any middle-class project. The inadequate standard of provision for the automobile in earlier sections of new towns is reflected in a quite serious parking problem in many of the local roads.

In view of the leading part played by housing in any urban development, the uninspired character of the domestic architecture tends to depress the appearance of the new towns as a whole. At the same time, the near-completion of several of the first batch of new towns is leading to a substantial last-stage concentration on the town centers. When the plans have been fully executed there will be no through traffic traversing the central areas. Apart, therefore, from short rush-hour periods when workers are arriving at and leaving the industrial areas, there is no prospect of heavy road use within the towns except in and around the town centers. In terms of traffic, the town centers present some interesting problems of vehicle-pedestrian segregation, parking, goods delivery and collection, and the problems created when the users of halls and entertainment buildings all arrive and leave at about the same time.

A number of well-conceived solutions to this problem have now been completed. The attractive, if traditional, square at Harlow now has well over 100 stores which draw shoppers from a wide region outside the town, and the first large department store is being constructed. Crawley is another new town which has a flourishing regional shopping center. Perhaps the best known of the new town centers is that at Stevenage. The first phase included over 100 stores; other public and commercial facilities are now opening, so that there is some animation in the evenings, and a substantial second phase of building is beginning. Technically, this comprises a quite sophisticated

HARLOW

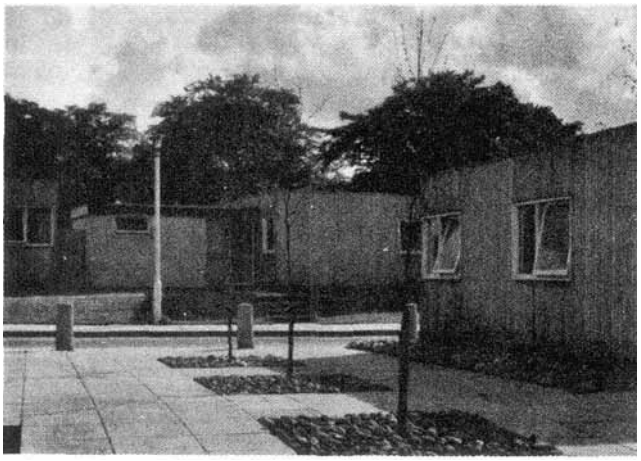
Bush Fair Neighborhood Center

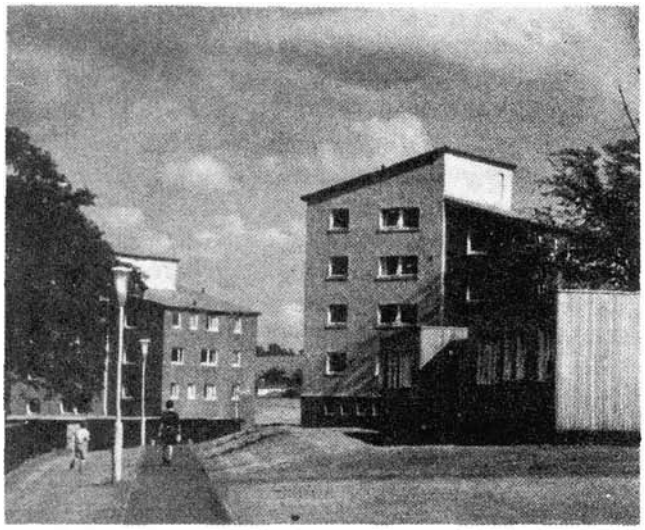
Residences are combined with shops and offices in this center, designed to serve 20,000 people. On the left, the ground floor is given over to shops, the next floors are two-story maisonettes, and on the top floor are "bed-sitting room" (efficiency) apartments. Offices occupy the first and second floors on the right. In the center, the block of shops is topped by maisonettes, each with its own roof garden.

Compact housing along a main footpath

CUMBERNAULD

Single-story timber bungalows and four-story maisonette blocks





version of the shopping center pattern that is by now familiar in the United States and elsewhere. It is distinguishable from American versions through the fact that it is literally at what will be the center of the completed new town of Stevenage; it is at the point of convergence of the bus service (a much more important feature in Britain than in the U.S.), and in various ways it is acquiring more of the civic character of an urban center than is the case with most comparable American developments. It is also felt to achieve a better reconciliation of the conflicting demands of driver and walker than in most American examples.

All the new towns so far discussed belong to the first phase of development. As we have seen, since the first rush we have had until very recently almost no new schemes. It is fortunate, therefore, that one of the few later new towns should have boldly seized the lessons offered by the experiences of the first wave. Cumbernauld, which was designated in 1955 as a town to receive overspill population from Glasgow, is now beginning to take shape. It will be quite unlike any previous British new town. To a greater or lesser extent, every other new town has echoed what are believed to be the suburban aspirations of the British family. Cumbernauld, on the other hand, reverts to the quite different concept of a small, dense area of maximum urbanity placed on a hill in the countryside outside Glasgow. This has led to the evolution of a novel series of patio house-types which win privacy by the device of looking inward toward a small enclosed court, while the town center is a particularly elaborate exercise in multi-level design with a succession of layers, starting at the bottom with an underground garage, following with a road system for vehicles, then pedestrian ways and shops, then offices, and topped off with apartments.

Cumbernauld has led to much controversy. Those whose ideal is the garden city remain suspicious, critical of its density and of the high cost of development. But as an idea, this new town has caught the imagination of planners and architects as no previous new town has succeeded in doing, and it can be predicted that the principles evolved at Cumbernauld will not easily be extinguished.

The Special Case of Hook

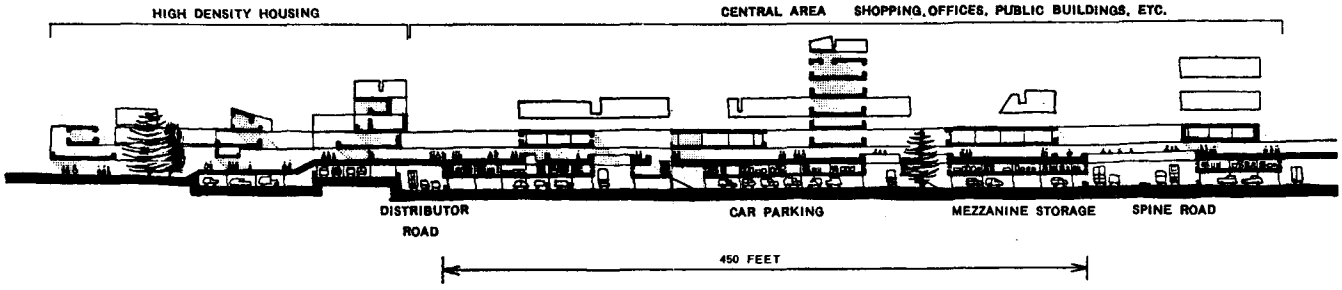
We now come to the sad history of Hook, the new town that never was. The story begins with a decision made by the London County Council to build a new town, within about sixty miles of London, which would grow to an ultimate population of 100,000. A research and development unit was set up, comprising an integrated team of planners, architects, a landscape architect, a civil engineer, a quantity surveyor, economists, and administrative staff. This team was charged with the task of designing a town that would embody four main principles: it should be coherent and urban in character; it should be planned to absorb at least one car per household; it should be distinct from the surrounding countryside and yet be complementary to it; every effort should be made to achieve population balance in relation to age groups, family structure, and employment.

The first task was to find a suitable site. The number of possible sites within the stated radius of London is now limited. When allowance has been made for areas of landscape or holiday value, areas of good or medium agricultural land, or areas that are difficult to serve with water supplies or sewerage, only one part of Hampshire, southwest of London, remained for consideration. The search had taken two years, and after some further sieving, a site adjoining the existing small town of Hook was at last chosen.

The subsequent survey was notable for a careful demographic study which took account not only of the probable population structure of the immigrant families, but also of the way in which the age and generation structure would vary as time went on. One conclusion from this study was that a very special effort should be made to attract older and retired people in order to avoid the common experience of new towns which have an excessive concentration of young married couples, with consequent peaks in the demand first for school places and then for beginners' jobs.

Meanwhile, a master plan was being worked out. As at Cumbernauld, the directive called for a highly urbanized solution. In the case of Hook, the relatively large size of the proposed town favored the use of a linear town center, so that no residential zone would be more than ten minutes drive from some part of the center. Of the initial population, some two-thirds (60,000 people) would live in the central area at net densities of up to 100 persons per acre. Everyone would readily be able to walk into the town center

HOOK. *Ground level bus stops with ramp, escalator, and elevator to pedestrian deck*



HOOK. *Section showing organization of levels*

Hook illustrations from *The Planning of a New Town*, courtesy of the London County Council.

along footpaths which cross over or under all through-roads and converge onto a great pedestrian deck giving access to all the central commercial and public buildings. There would also be a network of bicycle paths, although this was planned on a limited scale for use by children. A local bus service would have its terminus under the central area's pedestrian deck and would feed all residential and industrial areas as well as the railroad station. With this arrangement the modern, and much criticized, tradition of planning by neighborhoods would have been rendered unnecessary.

The project appeared, at least to the general public, to be developing well, when it was suddenly announced that London County Council had found it impossible to reach agreement with Hampshire County Council (the authority within whose boundaries the site of the proposed new town was located) and that the whole project had consequently been abandoned. There was consternation among planners at the collapse of this promising venture.

The only concrete product of the massive preparation is the book published by the London County

Council late in 1961 with the title "The Planning of a New Town."[6] The book is an account of the studies and proposals that had been completed by the research and development team at the time of its disbandment. A number of informative meetings have subsequently been addressed by members of the team. It is only fair to add that these proceedings have conveyed a slightly illusory impression of finality to the plan, many details of which would doubtless have been further refined in the process of execution. Even some of the principles have received telling criticism, mainly on the grounds that these medieval city densities are no longer appropriate. The work done in preparation for Hook, however, is likely to have a profound effect on the thinking that will underlie the fresh wave of new towns now germinating.

Recent Government Action

There are increasing signs that the government's declared policy of proceeding to this second wave of new towns is beginning to take shape, and is even being treated as a matter of urgency.

In October 1961, the Minister of Housing and Local Government made an order designating some 4,000 acres of land at Skelmersdale in Lancashire as the site of a new town. Skelmersdale is near Liverpool, and the new town is intended to relieve the grave overspill problem on Merseyside. The decision to go ahead with the long-standing plan to develop this site was probably precipitated by a quite independent decision by the President of the Board of Trade to encourage two large automobile firms to build new factories in the vicinity of Liverpool. This is a good example of the imperfect coordination between government departments, but it is well recognized that the housing problem of Liverpool is one of the most intractable of any in Great Britain, and the designation of at least one new town in the Liverpool area has been debated for some time.

Another interesting development has taken place at North Killingworth in Northumberland, where the County Council has taken the first steps in a comprehensive plan to redevelop a large area north of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Under a compulsory purchase order approved by the Minister of Housing and Local Government, the Council has acquired a complete site for a small town of 17,000 people. Later it proposes to build a larger new town at Cramlington, a few miles farther north of Newcastle. These projects are particularly interesting, because they constitute the first approved example of a new town being sponsored by a county authority rather than by a specially constituted new town corporation.

Another significant development is the designation of a fourth New Town in Scotland. This is the first new town planned from the beginning to rehabilitate a decayed industrial area.

Meanwhile, plans for a new town of the orthodox "overspill" type in the Birmingham area have recently been announced. For three years, the Birmingham City Council struggled to obtain consent to build an extension of the city near Wythall, just south of the existing conurbations in an area which had already been included in the draft plan for a greenbelt. After three inquiries, the Minister finally turned down this proposal in February 1962, and he has since confirmed the designation of a full-scale New Town at Dawley, west of the city. By this time, Birmingham's land hunger is acute, and the Minister has promised to treat the setting up of the new town as a matter of extreme urgency, to be dealt with more speedily than any similar project in the past.

The other important change relating to new towns is the imminent completion of the work of the original development corporations. The Government decided in 1961 that the time had come to set up a new body, to be known as the Commission for the New Towns, which would act as the controlling body for all new towns as their original development was completed. The powers of this new body are more limited than those of the corporations, even though the new set-up does not complete the transfer of functions of the completed new towns to a normal local authority. So far, the Commission for the New Towns has taken over jurisdiction of Crawley and Hemel Hempstead. The population of each of these towns is now over 55,000 and their further growth to 75,000 and 80,000 respectively will depend on natural increase rather than on planned migration.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that the attempt continues to supplement the new towns program by the promotion of expansion schemes under the Town Development Act of 1952. This Act facilitates the planned transfer of families from congested cities

[6] London County Council, *The Planning of a New Town*. (London: London County Council, 1961).

to existing towns which may be 60 miles or more away; the administration of each town remains entirely in the hands of the receiving authority. As a result of the decision not to proceed with the London County Council new town at Hook, Hampshire County Council suggested a considerable expansion of three other towns in the County, giving a total overspill population of up to 90,000 people. Altogether, the London County Council now has firm agreements with receiving towns for the building of 50,000 houses. Other congested cities are also pushing ahead with their plans under this Act. For administrative and other reasons, many people doubt whether this type of town expansion will ever make a major contribution to the overspill problem, but it would not be fair to discount its value to the authorities of large cities, and particularly to the otherwise frustrated London County Council.

Present Thinking and Future Action on New Towns

The fact that new towns have proved a success—administratively, socially, and now financially—is underlined by the almost universal support now being given to the campaign for more of them. Virtually every recent policy statement by a political body has asked for more, sometimes linking this suggestion with the demand that they should be bigger and better.

In June 1961, the Labour Party issued its policy statement, *Signposts for the Sixties*,[7] and followed this up later in the year with another document, *Towns for Our Times*.[8] Their attitude is summarized in an extract from the former statement:

> If we are not to build on the greenbelts or to allow the unchecked sprawl beyond them . . . the only solution is the building of more New Towns, together with the expansion of existing smaller ones through 'overspill' arrangements.

A similar policy was expressed in September 1961 by *Socialist Commentary*, the monthly organ of a left-wing pressure group[9]:

> Within the London sphere of influence, the clear need is for the designation of more New Towns. The older and larger New Towns around London have been a striking financial success. . . . At least half of [the population moving out of inner London] should be accommodated in further New Towns. These should be built up to eighty miles from central London. There should be between ten and a dozen towns, of some hundred thousand population or more, some of them sited and designed as new regional centres. . . .
>
> North and west of the Solent–Wash line, a greater variety of development is called for. To deal with the overspill problems of the major provincial conurbations, New Towns of the traditional size (fifty to a hundred thousand people) will be necessary. Greater Manchester, Merseyside and the West Midlands will certainly need more than one apiece.

Enthusiasm for new towns is by no means solely a Labour Party phenomenon. One of the earliest bodies to support bigger and better new towns was the Bow Group, an association of young Conservatives, who in a pamphlet, *Let our Cities Live*,[10] published in December 1960, advocated the establishment under government auspices of two New Cities, each planned for an ultimate population of at least 300,000 to 400,000 inhabitants and located at a distance of about 100 miles from London. The Group thought that these would be large enough to be truly independent.

A similar theme was taken up by the authoritative Conservative Political Centre in a general policy statement, *Change and Challenge*,[11] published in February 1962. This report looks at the various methods available to deal with the overspill problem, and stresses the numerical importance of the free enterprise method of natural emigration, which has probably contributed at least one-half of the total migration out of the London conurbation. It continues:

> On the other hand . . . the New Towns created by Development Corporations have undoubtedly been a success. . . . Taken as a whole the New Towns have been a financial success and will pay their way. The skilled resources of the Development Corporations and their more direct powers of planning and land acquisition make for avoidance of delays. We are sufficiently impressed with the advantages of the Development Corporation method to wish to see it applied further, and on a larger scale. . . . for new developments, for town expansions . . . and even for redeveloping selected areas within towns, where requested.

Similar sentiments have been voiced by professional and other non-political bodies, and it would be difficult to find an organization of any weight that had declared itself against the extension of the new towns policy. The main impression from recent literature is the feeling that the official and political organs are a little backward in their technical appreciation of the planning problem and its possible solutions. One point that is increasingly stressed is that, although the aesthetics of physical planning demand a fairly clear-cut definition of the individual city and of its boundaries, the independent city is today an economic myth

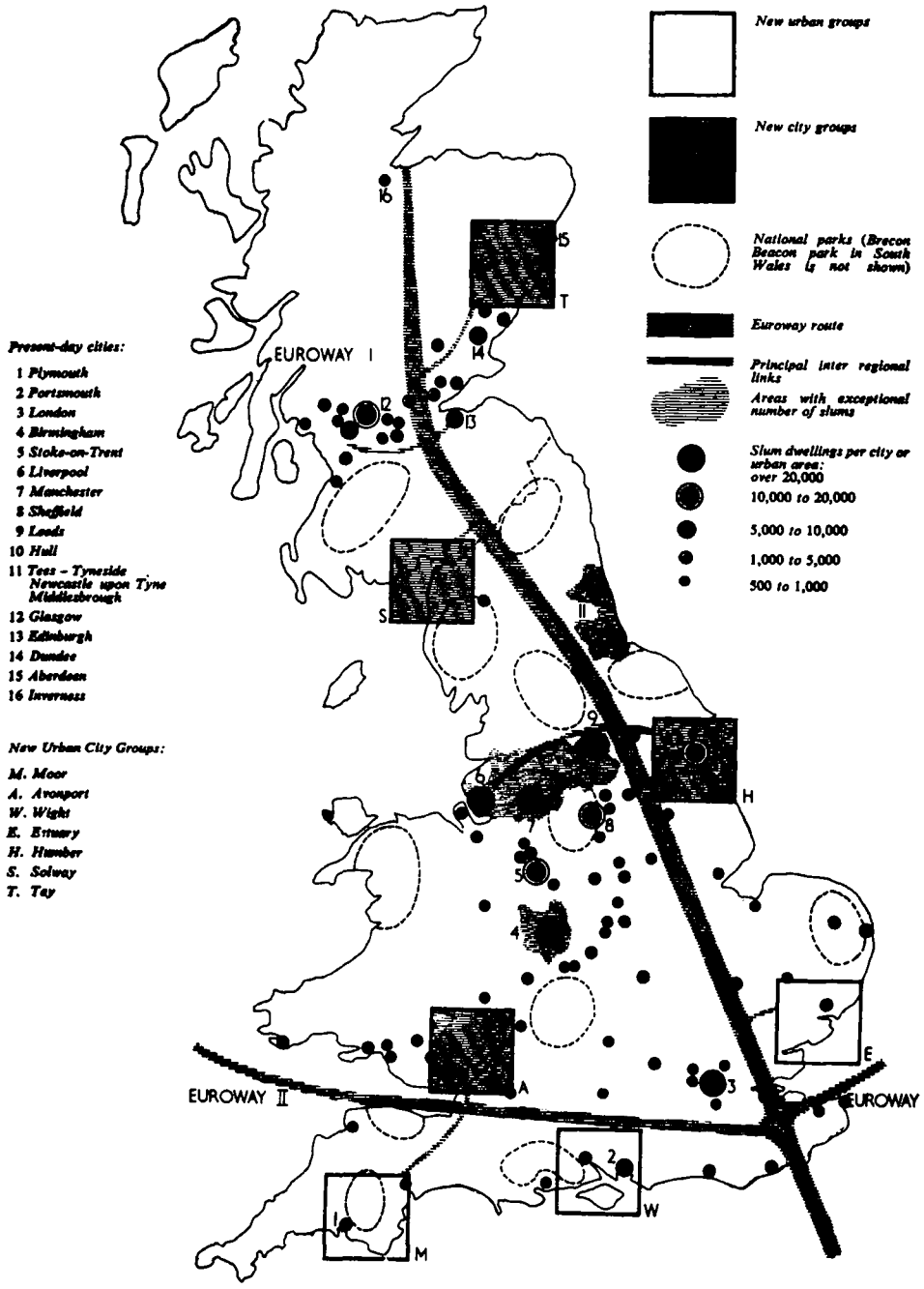
[7] Labour Party, *Signposts for the Sixties* (London: Labour Party, 1961).

[8] Labour Party, *Towns for Our Times* (London: Labour Party, 1961).

[9] "The Face of Britain," *Socialist Commentary*, (September, 1961), i–xxvi.

[10] Bow Group, *Let Our Cities Live* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1960).

[11] Conservative Political Centre, *Change and Challenge: Next Steps in Town and Country Planning* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1962).



This map shows the size of the slum clearance task as an indication of the scale of urban renewal programs for different areas, new urban and city groups, parks, new national highways, and principal interregional links.

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and is largely also a social myth. For this reason it is necessary under modern conditions to regard development as a matter of regional concern.

It is recognized today that the New Towns are in danger of becoming merely extensions of the cities from which their populations are largely drawn, and there are thus palpable advantages in selecting areas well removed from existing major conurbations for comprehensive development as new city regions. Of many schemes that have been put forward, one of the most plausible is that proposed by the architect Derrick Rigby Childs, who first argued his case in a report for the *Architects' Journal*.[12] He proposed four new city groups based on the estuaries of the Tay, the Solway, the Humber and the Avon, and also four new urban groups. None of the regions would be at a distance of less than 70–80 miles from London, or of less than about 50 miles from any large existing city, and this relative isolation was intended to enable the new city-regions to develop in an autonomous fashion.

This leaves unsettled the future of the great concentrations of population and of the massive slum areas which lie on a broad band between London and Lancashire. It is becoming abundantly clear that the larger cities, particularly in Lancashire and Yorkshire, have an almost impossible task on their hands unless some of the burden is transferred to other authorities by a planned overspill policy. Meanwhile many smaller towns in the industrial Midlands and North lack not so much the space as the resources, in money and skill, to handle the problem of slum clearance and rehousing. There is therefore a widespread feeling that the positive advantages of the administrative set-up devised for new towns should be adapted to the purposes of urban renewal and rehabilitation. Details of various schemes along these lines are being canvassed, but all recognize the practical advantages of some kind of local development authority that can combine the financial and technical advantages possessed by a large agency with the depth of local knowledge that can only be achieved by a body which has roots in its own region.

[12] D. Rigby Childs, "Chaos or Balance," *Architects' Journal*, 135 (January 17, 1962), 135–151.