

Following the articles in the first issue by Graeme Shankland and David Gregory Jones we present a pictorial survey of

The Crisis in Town Planning

The English are town birds through and through to-day, as the inevitable result of their complete industrialisation. Yet they do not know how to build a city, how to think of one, or how to live in one. And this is because we have frustrated that instinct of community which would make us unite in pride and dignity in the bigger gesture of the citizen, not the cottager. The great city means beauty, dignity and a certain splendour. This is the side of the Englishman that has been thwarted and shockingly betrayed . . .

D. H. Lawrence

The city as one finds it in history is the point of maximum concentration for the power and culture of a community. It is the place where the diffused rays of many separate beams of life fall into focus, with gains in both social effectiveness and significance. The city is the form and symbol of an integrated social relationship; it is the seat of the temple, the market, the hall of justice, the academy of learning. Here in the city the goods of civilisation are multiplied and manifolded; here is where human experience is transformed into viable signs, symbols, patterns of conduct, systems of order. Here is where the issues of civilisation are focused; here too ritual passes on occasion into the active drama of a fully differentiated and self-conscious society. . . .

Lewis Mumford

The city, as it exists in this country to-day is dirty, dangerous, expensive, restricted and unhealthy. No other community structure can replace it. Since the war there has been no examination of the city in terms of people and environment. Many have denied that a problem exists.

A few architects and planners are aware of the chaos not as an OUTRAGE, but as an urgent human problem of living as opposed to existing together. These few are servants of the community. They exist to perform functions required by that society. They alone cannot alter that society. They can put forward ideas, propose plans, but take no positive overall action. The great barriers of finance and land tenure remain to dominate communications, densities, space, even architectural form, within our society. Consequently, no balance can be achieved, no comprehensive plan effected, only sickly palliatives like the new towns are politically possible. This control by finance is negative, abstract and selfish, it benefits none but the minority, and results in unbalanced development within the existing patterns, perpetuating those things of proven inefficiency of the past.





Two post-war London office blocks (left in London Bridge Street by John Lacey and (right) in Theobalds Road by Major A. A. Ash. One may be good, one may bad. Diversity of character is not in itself a fault. The tragedy lies in the fact that each represents the deplorable extension of piecemeal re-development.



The stark ugliness of suburban sprawl at Patcham (left) combines neither the amenity of the city, nor the health of the country. It will never develop into the former and gradually move farther from the latter. Whether the land will produce more food as back gardens, or as farming land, is irrelevant to the obvious moral argument that this is misuse of land. It is ill planned, of deadly monotony and although cheap to build now will cost us our life blood in the future. At eye level these castles for Englishmen at Bletchinton (right) float eloquently in their turgid sea of black asphalt.

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Communications are now a problem insoluble to those charged to deal with them. The pedestrian is constantly harassed by noise, fumes and risk of death, and even if these facts were not enough reason for radical change there remains the purely economic argument of industrial efficiency. The flow of traffic stops; the flow of new cars increases; the motorist is shackled with impossible restrictions, yet the cry for increased productivity gets louder, ending in the complete frustration of every desire and every force.



With large areas totally destroyed, many cities after the war presented a splendid chance for comprehensive re-planning. Many planners accepted the challenge and by far the most successful result has been the re-development of the centre of Coventry. It must however be emphasised that this is the core of the town and as such was analysed into functions excluding industry and housing. It is perhaps unfortunate that the finished form does not reflect the dynamic qualities of the plan. The result, however, is still remarkable, since it was achieved in spite of long and organised opposition.



Vallingby is a new form of city planning. It is an entirely new suburb of Stockholm, but has been considered as a self-contained unit with a living centre of shops, theatre, cinema, library and medical centre, surrounded by high density flats and lower density terrace houses. Right in the centre of the town is the rail link to central Stockholm 25 minutes away. It is self-contained, yet remains part of the metropolis.



One of the most exciting of the post-war experiments has been the rebuilding of Rotterdam. It is not surprising to find that prior to the bombardment the city council already owned 70% of all the land within the city boundary and before 1946 had taken over all the blitzed areas. Consequently planning could become really three-dimensional—the buildings fit the sites, relate well to each other and to their communications. The whole is a model of variety within uniformity, designed by many groups of architects accepting and inspired by a common discipline.

(Right) the Lijnbaan shopping precinct.
(Left) Rotterdam after the clearance of the blitzed areas.



The Rotterdam re-development shows excellent overall co-ordination of buildings and communications, the latter, including many under-pass cross-overs similar to that shown on the right, this is no mean engineering feat in a country where the water level below ground is rarely less than 1 foot deep. The United States, often in a pioneering role, has attacked its traffic problems with vigour and efficiency and this bold uncompromising policy has resulted in functional forms of great sculptural beauty, such as this cross-over in Los Angeles, California (left), which is, of course, unfinished. Although superb in themselves, they are solutions to traffic problems only and present another form of lopsided development. A ruthless attack upon only one of the problems usually tends to aggravate those that remain.



Every city possesses, well within its present boundaries, areas which, like that now occupied by (left) the L.C.C. Alton Estate at Roehampton (100 persons to the acre) were formerly, or still are, wasted by the presence of crumbling, decaying and totally uneconomic Victorian mansions, each standing in its large and often well-planted grounds. These areas can provide the space for mixed development of flats and houses, allowing a relatively high density, yet preserving the essential openness of the site. Family housing of a slightly lower density (80 to the acre) can also be compactly planned and still have spaciousness, as has been proved by the elegant housing by Architect Eric Lyons at Ham Common (bottom left), a rare example of speculative building which shows a healthy awareness of sound land use and twentieth century form.



If the areas for urban re-development are large enough the planners and architects can design complete townships, perhaps as extensions to existing villages (as at Roehampton) each having their own industry, shops, schools and all the ancillary facilities necessary to make them reasonably self-sufficient. Yet these towns within the city can remain an essential part of that city, provided of course communications with the city centre are fast and efficient. All too frequently, these areas are too small and the plans are frustrated. Finance and land tenure are again proved to be the main obstacles to comprehensive re-development.

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