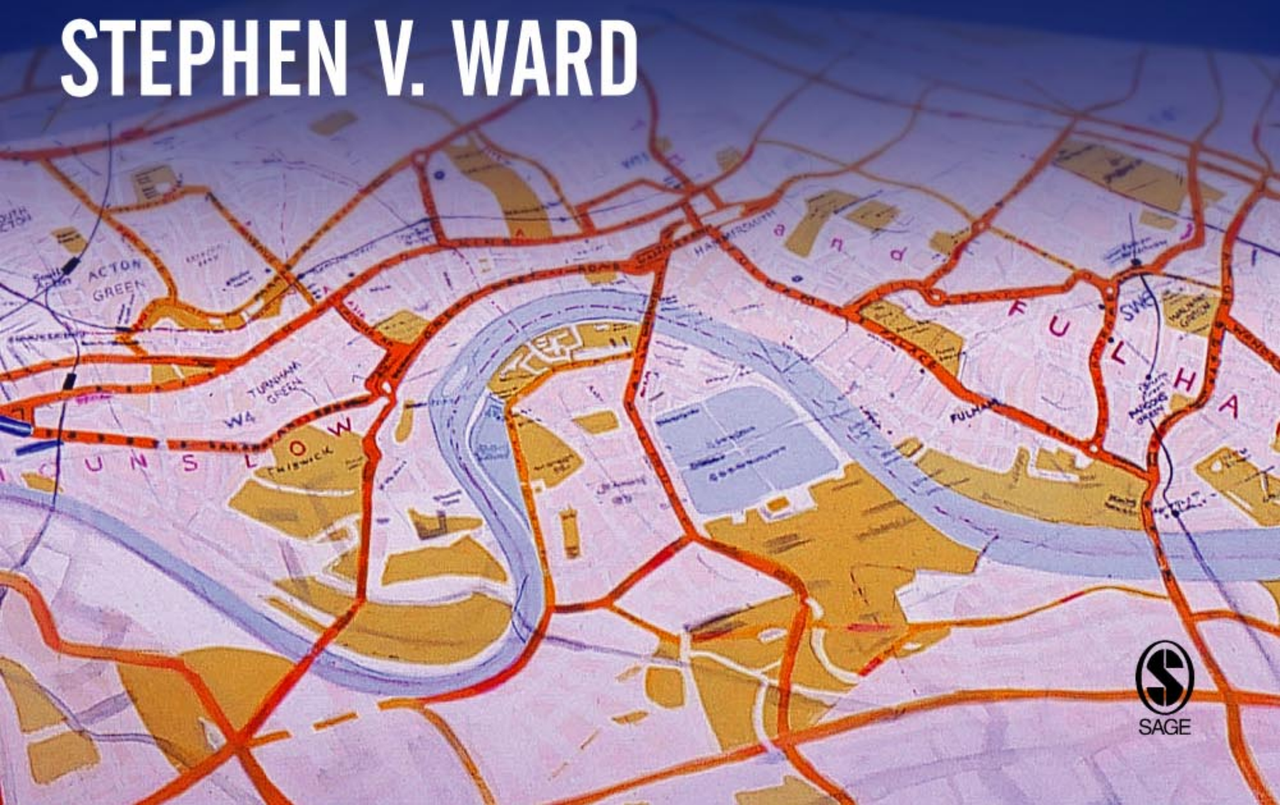
SECOND EDITION

PLANNING AND URBAN CHANGE

STEPHEN V. WARD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PLANNING AND URBAN CHANGE

Second Edition

Stephen V. Ward

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To the memory of my mother and father

The Author

Stephen V. Ward is Professor of Planning History at Oxford Brookes University and edits the international planning history journal *Planning Perspectives*. He has lectured and published widely on historical subjects related to planning. His other books include *The Geography of Interwar Britain: The State and Uneven Development* (1988), *The Garden City: Past, Present and Future* (edited, 1992), *Selling Places: The Marketing and Promotion of Towns and Cities 1850–2000* (1998) and *Planning the Twentieth-Century City: The Advanced Capitalist World* (2002). From 1996 to 2002 he was President of the International Planning History Society.

Contents

Preface ix
Picture Credits x

1. **Planning and Urban Change** 1

The central themes of the book 2
The structure of the book 7

2. **Ideas and the Beginnings of Policy, 1890–1914** 9

The nineteenth-century city 9
The origins of town planning ideas 17
The beginnings of statutory town planning 27
Overview 34

3. **Widening Conceptions and Policy Shifts, 1914–39** 36

Town extension planning and mass suburbanization 37
New models for managing urban growth 47
Origins of planned redevelopment 55
Origins of balanced regional development 64
Towards a comprehensive approach 70

4. **A New Orthodoxy of Planning, 1939–52** 74

War and the emergence of a mass consensus for planning 74
Formulating the post-war planning agenda, 1940–42 79
Partial implementation of the planning agenda, 1943–45 84
Creating the new orthodoxy, 1945–47 92
Completing the new orthodoxy and the first retreats, 1947–52 103
Overview 106

5. **Adjustments and New Agendas: I. The Changing Planning System, 1952–74** 107

Politics, the 'affluent society' and planning 107
The changing physical planning system 112
Overview 129

6. Adjustments and New Agendas: II. Strategic Policies, 1952–74 130

Planning and redevelopment 130
Planned containment 148
Regional balance 154
Planned decentralization 161
Overview 170

7. Remaking Planning: I. The Changing System, 1974–90 171

The making of a new political economy 171
The changing physical planning system 177
Overview 199

8. Remaking Planning: II. Specific Policies, 1974–90 201

Regenerating the urban cores 201
Accepting regional imbalance? 218
Decentralization after the New Towns 221
Planned containment 226
Overview 230

9. A New Consensus? Planning since 1990 231

The post-Thatcher era 232
Changing the planning system 235
Specific planning policies 242
Overview 268

10. Planning Impacts since 1945 and the Future 269

Spatial impacts of planning 269
Economic and social impacts 280
The future 285

Bibliography 288
Websites 307
Index 308

Preface

This book is a product of many years studying planning in Britain and its role in changing cities. It began as a student interest when I was fortunate enough to study under Tony Sutcliffe and the late Gordon Cherry. Gordon played a particularly important role by employing me as his research assistant on the Royal Town Planning Institute History Project in 1971–73. Thereafter it became my main teaching interest at South Bank Polytechnic (to 1979) and Oxford Brookes University. The International Planning History Society and, more recently, my editorship of *Planning Perspectives* have brought me into contact with many others interested in the development of planning. All this forms an essential underpinning for this book which brings together the labours of many scholars, commentators and practitioners. It was a genuine pleasure to write the first edition some ten years ago and I have been delighted that it has proved its worth with students, teachers and researchers. I hope that this second edition will be as useful.

Inevitably many debts are incurred in such a project. First I must record my thanks to my colleagues at Oxford, especially Sue Brownill, Tim Marshall and Martin Elson, who contributed by lending or giving me material, by advising on sources, by giving insights from their own research, practice or teaching and, not least, by their informative conversation. Dennis Hardy and John and Margaret Gold kindly lent me pictures used in their own publications. Rob Woodward has prepared most of the illustrations for this book. The staff at Paul Chapman (for the first edition) and Sage, particularly Marianne Lagrange, Robert Rojek and David Mainwaring, have been helpful, efficient and encouraging.

Yet, as always, the main debts are personal ones. My own much-loved family, Maggie, Tom, Rosamund and Alice, bore a disproportionate part of the burden of the original writing. I thank them again for their tolerance of all the distracted holidays, weekends and evenings. The updating for this second edition has been, I hope, a little better for them. In various combinations, they have shared in the new research through enjoyable short stays in several British cities (or, by their locational decisions in higher education, allowing me to combine fatherly transport duties with field research). My dear wife Maggie has been involved in almost all of these trips, including those to some of the least uplifting of Britain's late twentieth-century creations.

In the longer term I also owe a huge debt to my parents, who did so much to encourage my early interests. My father died while the first edition was being written, my still grieving mother the year after it was published. In a way that few readers can possibly appreciate, the brief words of dedication that authors write at the beginning of works such as this are more emotionally charged than all the many thousands that follow. I understand this from my mother's reaction to the original dedication of the first edition to her and the memory of my father. Now neither of them will see the words with which I dedicate this second edition but again, by this simple means, I remember their love.

Stephen V. Ward,
Oxford

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1

Planning and Urban Change

Town planning, by its nature, is essentially concerned with shaping the future. This does not mean, however, that town planners are able to ignore the past. In an older urbanized country such as Britain they have, fairly obviously, to work with physical structures and urban arrangements inherited from the past. What is less obvious though is that the concerns and ideologies of the town planners themselves are also products of the past. Planners carry with them professional assumptions about the need to regulate and order urban space and about the ways in which they should do this. They also work within a planning system that embodies past political assumptions about the institutional location, purpose and instruments of planning policy. And, not least, they have to live with the consequences of past planning decisions, expressed within the fabric of towns and cities.

All this is by way of arguing that to understand town planning properly, it is essential to understand how it has developed. This is not to say that planners or indeed society should drive into the future with eyes fixed exclusively on the rear-view mirror. Quite obviously this would be a recipe for disaster, although the analogy aptly reminds us that failing to look behind can also produce disaster, however exhilarating it may be in the short term. Nor is it to say what many planners certainly thought in more pessimistic moments during Thatcherite assaults on their activities, that the past was the only thing they had to look forward to. Clearly, it is always important to appreciate that town planning as a tradition of thought, policy and action has a breadth, depth and diversity that may not be immediately apparent in the way it is practised today. But however much we might yearn for the Utopian socialism of the early days or the political backing for the strong and socially concerned planning system created in the 1940s, we must also understand the reasons why they were superseded.

The case for the explicitly historical approach of this book is, then, to enable a rounded understanding of town planning as a continuing tradition of thought, policy and action. Other books share this broad historical approach, among them Ashworth (1954), Cherry (1972, 1974b, 1988, 1996), Hague (1984), Hall (2002a, 2002b), Lawless and Brown (1986), Meller (1997), Ravetz (1980, 1986) and Taylor (1998). All inevitably interpret the story in their own way, stressing different aspects and offering different explanations. The reader should certainly refer to these and the other works referenced in the succeeding chapters of this book to gain a fuller understanding. But the present work itself provides a solid grounding for those training to be town planners or otherwise interested in planning in the early twenty-first century to understand the development of town planning ideas and policies since the late nineteenth century and assess their impacts on urban change. We examine where town planning ideas actually came from, who originated them and why. We also consider how and why governments saw fit to incorporate at least some of the ideas of the town planning movement into state policies, and assess something of their impacts on the processes of actual urban change. Ideas, policies and impacts are in fact the three continuing themes that run through this book. It is therefore important to establish from the outset what we understand these terms to mean, and briefly rehearse some of the main arguments that we will develop in detail in the following chapters.

THE CENTRAL THEMES OF THE BOOK

Ideas

The genesis of town planning ideas

Before it was anything else, town planning was a series of radical reformist ideas about changing and improving the city which began to take shape from about 1890. The basis of these ideas lay in land reform and, increasingly, housing reform, although with other important dimensions in the enhancement of community and the protection of amenity. The actual term 'town planning' was coined, almost certainly, in 1905, to give these ideas a distinct identity and coherence. They were advanced further mainly by the relatively small number of reformers and professionals who rallied behind the new flag of the town planning movement. A few key organizations, most notably the Garden City and Town Planning Association, the National Housing and Town Planning Council and the Town Planning Institute, played central roles in this.

Early conceptual innovation in planning

As the reformist ideas of this new movement were given physical expression in pioneering ventures such as garden cities and suburbs, it acquired a more specifically physical and professional focus. A new professional, design-based repertoire of ideas was assembled, incorporating wider strategic concepts of city extension or comprehensively decentralized 'social cities' and detailed ideas of zoning, site layout, etc. Within a few decades many important new ideas were developed and incorporated within this intellectual tradition of town planning. A strategic model for planned metropolitan decentralization and containment was moulded out of the more radical notions of the social city. Ideas for urban redevelopment were reinvigorated as the functionalist theories of the modern movement in architecture were extended to entire cities. Before the late 1930s, however, there was usually little immediate prospect of most of these ideas being implemented on a sizeable scale. In fact what was most striking about the process of intellectual innovation over this period was the extent to which it was independent of the rather limited operations of planning policies in practice.

Later conceptual innovation in planning

All this began to change significantly as town planning ideas were comprehensively incorporated into official town planning policies from the 1940s. The essential focus of planning activity now became, as never before, the officially ordered planning system rather than the independent planning movement. Increasingly, and especially after 1960, innovations in planning thought arose more from within the policy process, rather than from the wider town planning movement. The tradition of autonomous intellectual thought and conceptual innovation that had characterized the earlier years now began to atrophy. The wider town planning movement became more concerned with refining and celebrating the contemporary successes of town planning policies (such as the New Towns), rather than with developing new radical models that looked beyond present concerns.

Thus as events and government actions moved very sharply against the established policy conventions of planning in the 1970s and especially the 1980s, the town planning movement found itself without the autonomous intellectual tradition that would have allowed it to develop alternatives in the manner of earlier generations. Certainly new environmentalist ideas emerged during these years, but not from the town planning movement. Despite welcome attempts to incorporate such ideas within town planning thought, there is no doubt that this new environmental radicalism has to some extent outflanked the older established town planning tradition. As we will show, one of the main reasons for this lies within our other central concerns with planning policies and impacts.

Policies

What are planning policies?

Put very simply, town planning ideas become policies at the point at which they are incorporated by government into officially endorsed courses of action. The manner of this incorporation varies, depending on the importance of the original idea. Some policies were so fundamental to town planning that they were written directly into the planning system by central government. For example, elements of land market reform were integral to the whole practice of town planning and became intrinsic policies, embodied in the various compensation and betterment provisions of the Acts. Others, however, represent conscious applications of the planning system to pursue particular ends, for example by encouraging town extension rather than containment, or rehabilitation rather than redevelopment, etc. Such conscious policies may also reflect the various scales of planning ideas, with strategic policies such as metropolitan decentralization or containment, and more detailed policies, for example zoning or pedestrianization. The adoption of these conscious policies is inevitably a rather more discretionary process, involving more local decisions.

Town planning policies and party politics

Ideas may have political implications but, while they remain just ideas, this dimension remains fairly passive. Policies, by contrast, are actively political and the course of policy-making in planning cannot therefore be understood without reference to a wider political frame. In this connection it is immediately important to recognize that town planning ideas have generally found a more sympathetic political home within the Liberal and Labour parties. By its nature, town planning as a political project has involved greater state control over private activity, particularly in the use and exploitation of land. Its general political trajectory has been based historically on the assertion of public interest concerns and reduction of the role of private interests in the urban development process. It is therefore readily understandable that first Liberal and later Labour administrations should have set the pace in town planning policy-making over this century.

Conservative governments have generally pursued a more cautious line, usually diminishing earlier Liberal or Labour planning policy initiatives in favour of private development interests. This has been particularly evident in the intrinsic policies on land values that are embodied in planning legislation, on which there was a long history of party political disagreement. Generally, Conservatives have wanted to see a bigger proportion of land value increases arising from development remaining with private landowners and developers, while the Liberals and Labour have favoured stronger taxation or public landownership. Recently though, the approaches of the two main parties have converged, seeking betterment through locally negotiated planning agreements or obligations.

Moreover, in other aspects of planning, party political disagreements have always been less significant. Conservative sympathy for private developers has been tempered by their sensitivity to other important political interests, notably the protection of residential owner-occupiers and other established interests, such as farming. In practice this has encouraged a high degree of political consensus over many planning matters, especially in the 1940–74 period. Elements of this approach have even survived as the traditional post-war consensus on many aspects of state policy broke down in the late 1970s and 1980s. In practice the traditional Conservative desire for planning policies that restricted development 'in their backyards' has probably outweighed the 1979–90 Thatcherite Conservative portrayal of it as a drag on the 'enterprise culture', especially in urban fringe areas. Since 1990 there has been even greater continuity. The planning policies of both Conservative and 'New' Labour have given developers a much more central role than they ever had from the 1940s to the 1970s.

Officialdom and policies

Another important element in the continuity of planning policies has been the largely hidden politics of civil servants, defending their established departmental interests. In an activity like planning, which has only rarely been a national party political issue of the first order and which raises issues of great technical complexity, civil servants and professional experts have had key roles in forming policies. Ultimately they can be overridden by determined ministers, but we will find only a few clear-cut instances where this has definitely happened. By contrast, officials have certainly limited the impact of potentially far-reaching planning reforms on some occasions, most notably in 1964–65. Their local equivalents, the municipal town planners, also helped shape the course of policies in their own areas.

Ideas and policies

All of this serves to remind us that the policy dimension introduces many considerations that may have precious little to do with town planning ideas in the purest sense. One of the most important points to understand about the relationship between ideas and policies is that the state generally adopted town planning for rather different reasons from those which motivated the town planning movement to invent it. The recognition of this point can sometimes be difficult because the advocates of town planning were generally clever enough to present their case in a way that did more than merely preach to the converted. In the pre-1914 period, for example, they addressed their arguments to the concerns of the political elite to defend British imperial and economic dominance and domestic social stability, not themes which were central to the garden city or co-partnership housing ideas.

But there can be little doubt that it was these (and other) wider concerns which propelled the Liberal government towards the first town planning legislation in 1909 rather than the radical reformism and Utopian socialism of many of the inventors of town planning's central ideas. Similarly, external events like the 1930s' Depression and both world wars, especially the Second World War, had a dramatic effect on the sympathy of governments for planning ideas that were of rather older origin. Whereas ideas can and frequently do have a purity of purpose, policy-making has been inherently opportunistic.

The lack of congruence between conceptual innovation and policy-making was also reflected in the partial way in which town planning ideas were incorporated in policies. The wider social reformism that animated early planning ideas was quickly narrowed down to environmental policies. The co-operative and voluntarist tradition was soon subordinated to a more government-oriented approach as, for example, co-operatively developed garden suburbs gave way to municipal satellite towns and garden cities to New Towns. Yet such policy-driven changes could also add a creative dynamic as older ideas were adapted to meet new circumstances. This was particularly noticeable in the post-war period as the distinction between ideas and policies became increasingly blurred. By the 1960s, for example, the metropolitan, decentralist garden city/New Town idea was being merged with French growth-pole theory to become a model for regional growth. But these various kinds of slippage between ideas and policies were minor compared to that which occurred when policies were actually implemented.

Impacts

Assessing impacts

Whether town planners like it or not, society essentially evaluates the success or failure of planning by its impacts rather than the intentions embodied in policies, still less in the underlying ideas. Social and political reactions to the perceived impacts of planning policies have helped trigger important changes of direction, for example against town extension policies in the late 1930s and 1940s or against comprehensive inner-city housing redevelopment in the 1970s. It is, however, arguable that much of what was being criticized did not actually result from planning policies, but represented particular modes of implementing planning policies over which planners had little control.

There is, in fact, a major problem in assessing what the impacts of planning have actually been. Planning policies supplement and attempt to order existing processes of urban change, but do not normally replace them. This means that we can never be exactly certain as to what would have happened without planning. Inevitably, therefore, planning impact studies, however well researched, ultimately rest on a degree of intelligent ‘counterfactual’ guesswork and can never be proven in a completely satisfactory way. As we have suggested though, the need to evaluate planning outcomes is too important to be ignored on grounds of methodological purity.

Impacts, policies and ideas

What we are arguing here is that what are termed the impacts of planning have actually been produced by a much wider and more diverse set of forces than those which have shaped our other two concerns. Both ideas and policies were certainly directed at wider issues, but their characteristics were actively shaped within rather narrower social and political milieux. Thus ideas essentially arose out of the particular social and intellectual setting of a few creative individuals and organizations. Policies were broadly the result of an interaction of these planning ideas with political and institutional processes, but in ways that still reflected the particular concerns and approaches of the policy-makers. Planning impacts, in contrast, arise from the interaction of these ideas and policies with an altogether wider range of economic and social forces, many of them entirely outside the planner’s control. Despite commonly held assumptions about their power to shape cities, town planners have actually had rather limited powers over most of the twentieth century.

Planning and twentieth-century urban change

Developing this point further, we must immediately note a considerable variation over time in the conscious ability of planners to shape the pattern of urban change. Planning was a significant though somewhat marginal influence before 1939. Then, as wartime brought a state-dominated economy, marginalizing private landed and development interests, town planning briefly became a major force in the 1940s. But when this interventionism gave way, during the 1950s, to the mixed economy, where an active state was retained but within what was now an unequivocally capitalist, market-led economy, town planning also assumed a less directive role in urban change. Increasingly, until the 1970s, town planning sought to harness rather than dominate private interests in development. Decisive change occurred in the 1980s as town planning intentions were more firmly subordinated to a market-dominated process of urban change. The 1990s saw political aspirations to redress the balance in favour of the planner and these have gone a little further in the new century. So far, though, the effects have not been great.

Planning and the market

The net effect of all this fluctuation is that planning has only once, in the 1940s, been in a sufficiently strong position actively to shape urban change fairly independently of land market considerations. Yet this was a period when relatively little urban development took place, compared to what went before and what came after. Most urban development has occurred when town planning was able to exert at best an important minor, at worst a marginal, influence on the process of change. The implementation of plans has relied on actions that have been beyond the planner's control. They have been dependent on investment (and disinvestment) decisions by private developers and land users. Such decisions have been motivated, first, by considerations of profit and only, at best, secondly by the intentions of town planners.

This has been true even of such state-dominated exercises in planning as the early New Towns, where the Development Corporation set up by central government for each town was planner, landowner and developer. Despite such apparent omnipotence, success remained contingent on decisions by employers to locate there. Nor was inner- and central-city planned redevelopment able to transcend the considerations of the market, despite an almost equally powerful array of planning powers. Still less could planning actively shape urban change where it was merely providing blueprints or guidelines for change but remained entirely reliant on private development for their fulfilment. Nor was it just the economic considerations of the market that deflected the outcomes of planning from the original intentions.

Town planning and other state intervention

Another point of great significance is that town planning has never had complete control over other aspects of government intervention in relation to urban change. Town planners actually have very little direct formal influence over road-building decisions and have often had surprisingly little real control over public-sector housing, despite a historically close association between the two functions. More generally there is no automatic assurance that publicly owned land will be managed in ways that are any more consistent with town planning objectives than are those of private landowners. Especially in recent years, municipal estates departments have often needed to look to maximize financial returns on surplus lands and commercial properties, producing outcomes that differ little from those of the market. And town planning influence over the decisions of major public utilities (even when these were under state ownership), health authorities or nationalized industries, etc., has been very limited. All of this introduces other dimensions into plan implementation that the planner has less influence over than might at first appear. At best town planners will be engaged in a continual process of negotiation with other arms of state intervention, attempting to mould their actions into something consistent with planning intentions.

Planning and social change

Finally we should note that planning impacts also bear the imprint of important social changes that have proved notoriously difficult to predict, let alone consciously incorporate into planning intentions. Since they began making use of population forecasts in the 1930s, town planners have, fairly consistently, had to work with faulty projections. Future population size was underestimated in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, then overestimated in the 1960s. And even as the accuracy of overall population size forecasts began to improve in the 1970s, serious mistakes were made in predictions of household size. Such flawed demographic data reverberated throughout town planning, most notably in a very marked failure to allocate sufficient housing land in the post-1945 period.

In turn, faulty population projections were paralleled in weak forecasting of other critical social and economic indicators. Thus predictions of car ownership were also seriously flawed. The net result of these not very well foreseen social changes was that planning outcomes could sometimes diverge markedly from the intentions embodied in major planning policies. For example, metropolitan containment and decentralization policies took on a somewhat different character as greater affluence and mobility allowed far more spontaneously dispersed patterns of living and working than those envisaged in the early post-1945 plans. In the 1940s, planners envisaged highly planned outer metropolitan areas dominated by publicly rented housing in relatively self-contained New and Expanded Towns. What happened was a much less planned 'outer city' peopled by car-commuting owner-occupiers. And, as we will see, it is not difficult to think of other examples where unforeseen social changes have deflected policy impacts from policy intentions.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This interplay of ideas, policies and impacts is then our central theme, present in every chapter. The book's detailed structure is largely chronological, however, tracing the development of town planning over approximately the last hundred years. In the next chapter we examine the origins of town planning ideas and policies in the formative pre-1914 years, when the term 'town planning' itself came into being. Chapter 3 looks at the widening of planning ideas during the period between the outbreak of the two world wars. It also assesses the impacts of the first wave of planning policies, encouraging town extension, and considers how planning policies shifted to reflect something of the widening agenda for planning action in the 1930s. Chapter 4 is largely focused on the policy changes of the 1940s, when the circumstances of war created the political momentum for decisive action on the town planning agenda that had been rehearsed between the wars.

The next two chapters look at the years of post-war affluence, from the early 1950s to the early 1970s. Chapter 5 traces the development of the planning system over this important period of consensus mixed-economy planning, highlighting both intrinsic policies and new ideas. Chapter 6 complements this by examining conceptual and policy developments in relation to the four main strategic planning concerns with redevelopment, containment, regional balance and decentralization. This pattern is repeated in Chapters 7 and 8, covering the years between 1974 and 1990, when the previous political consensus over planning matters was substantially undermined. Thus Chapter 7 explores the broader pattern of change in planning thinking and policies, while Chapter 8 addresses the specifics of particular policy initiatives. Chapter 9, new to this second edition, examines the post-Thatcher years. It traces the emergence of a new consensus held together by wide political agreement over the need to make towns and cities more competitive and sustainable. Finally, Chapter 10 considers the overall impacts of post-1945 planning and draws together the main conclusions of the whole book. We begin, however, at the other end of this historical process of urban change, considering how and why the notion of town planning came to be invented and adopted as public policy.

2

Ideas and the Beginnings of Policy, 1890–1914

The last decade of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth centuries were the critical formative period for town planning thought and policy in Britain and other major urban industrial countries (Ward, 2002a). It was during this period that the specific reform movements which created the body of thought that informed modern town planning came to prominence. And it was during these years that the very term 'town planning' itself was coined, as an umbrella term to encompass the activities of separate, in some ways rather divergent, reform movements. A recognizable and self-conscious town planning movement appeared and began to foster town planning ideas in model schemes of various kinds. It also became a pressure group, lobbying politicians to incorporate these ideas into formal government policies.

In 1909 the first British town planning legislation was passed – the Housing, Town Planning Etc. Act. It was this modest measure which defined what soon became the dominant location of town planning activity, within the framework of local government. This was the first step in shifting planning away from the realm of philanthropic and co-operative social reform to the realm of state policy. In the same year too town planning education was begun, a key stage in the professionalization of the new activity of planning that accompanied the transition from idealism to policy. A few years later, in 1914, the body that ultimately grew into the professional body and qualifying association for planning, the Town Planning Institute, was itself formed.

In this chapter we examine and analyse how and why this new activity of town planning appeared. The distinction, introduced in the last chapter, between ideas and policies is developed in this explanation. In particular we will contrast the often radical origins of the ideas that made up town planning thought, based in many cases on Utopian socialist and co-operative traditions, with the more conservative conceptions of reform that led to their incorporation into policies. Both, however, were essentially reactions to the late nineteenth-century city.

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY CITY

The urban condition

The extent of urban growth

During the nineteenth century, Britain had become an overwhelmingly urban society (Dyos and Wolff, 1973; Carter and Lewis, 1990). Although the rate of urbanization was less rapid than that which has affected many other countries in the twentieth century, we should be under no illusions as to its significance. There has been nothing comparable anywhere in Britain in our lifetime. In 1801 the urban population of England and Wales had been

3 million, just over one-third of the whole population. By 1901 the figure was nearly 25.1 million or 77 per cent of the total. This growth was integral to the economic transformation of Britain from an agricultural to an industrial economy. Whereas towns and cities had formerly fulfilled essentially trading and mercantile functions, they now became central to the new, more concentrated, mode of capital accumulation. The growing urban populations supplied the labour that was essential to the functioning of this new, more intense mode of economic activity.

Before industrialization, only London, with a population of roughly 575,000 in 1700, would have been regarded as a large city by modern standards. The second largest city in England and Wales, Norwich, had only 29,000. A century later, in 1801, London had risen to 865,000 (almost 10 per cent of the total). A new pattern of regional cities was now emerging, headed by Liverpool and Manchester with 78,000 and 70,000 respectively. London remained the only really large city, however, outweighing all the other urban centres put together. Another century later this had changed. London had continued to grow in absolute and relative importance, now with a population of nearly 6.6 million. However, the five major provincial urban concentrations of south-east Lancashire, Merseyside, west midlands, west Yorkshire and Tyneside now together contained 6.8 million. Clydeside added another 1.5 million and there were smaller concentrations in south Wales, the east midlands, south Yorkshire and elsewhere. By 1891 over half the population lived in towns of over 20,000 population.

Urban spatial structure

The economic and demographic changes associated with urban growth had also remodelled the spatial structure of cities (Johnson and Pooley, 1982; Waller, 2000). By the late nineteenth century, and before the appearance of town planning, there were already recognizable zones within cities that were highly specialized in particular activities (Carter and Lewis, 1990). Central office and shopping districts had emerged. Beyond them, typically, were mixed areas of industry and tightly built working-class housing, usually built in the earlier part of the century. In the midlands and much of the north these were typically built in back-to-back form. In Scotland and a few English towns, multi-storey tenements were usual. Further from the centre these very high-density areas gave way to more recently built, less packed and more ordered housing, often close to, but less intermingled with, industry. There were also distinct middle-class residential areas. Finally, in the urban-fringe areas, there were large areas of more completely residential development, varying from upper-working-class terraces, to the rather grander detached villas of the better off. By the end of the century the rapid growth of these suburbs, catering for a widening lower middle class, was becoming one of the most striking aspects of urban change.

Urban spatial dynamics

Overall this new pattern had arisen relatively spontaneously, reflecting the demands of a changing economy and society (Dennis, 1984; Waller, 2000). These changing demands were mainly expressed through an increasingly dynamic urban land market, which began to allocate space for particular activities using the price mechanism. Another closely related and directly formative influence on the structure of the nineteenth-century city was the increasingly sophisticated urban transport system. By the early twentieth century this included railways, electric tramways and first horse and then motor buses. These, especially the first two, were

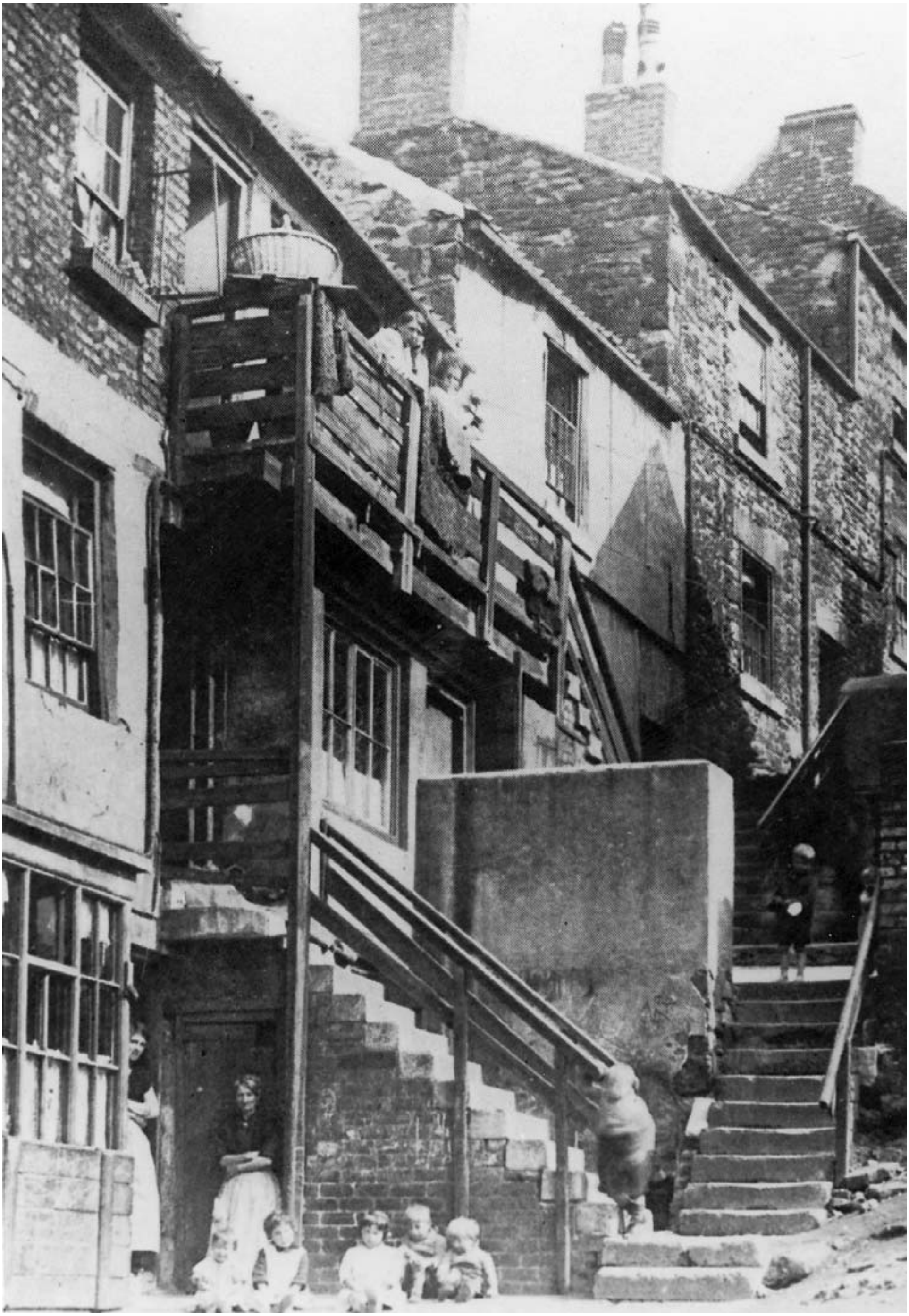

Figure 2.1 By the late nineteenth century all large urban areas had densely packed slum areas close to their centres. This photograph, of Gateshead, shows one basic type of slum, the tenement, where many families lived under one roof. Further south, tiny individual houses, often of back-to-back construction, were typical.

of critical importance in the growth of the new middle-class residential suburbs, allowing them the increasing separation from the typical places of employment on which their inhabitants depended, the offices and shops of the central area.

Urban problems

The immense scale of urban growth and change had not been problem free. Although there had been an abundance of private capital to fuel economic transformation, the vast increase of urban population associated with this created major social problems (Sutcliffe, 1982). There was a prevailing political faith in *laissez-faire* over much of the nineteenth century, allowing market processes to reign supreme over most aspects of economic and social life. Unregulated private enterprise proved quite unable, however, to create or maintain the social investment and services that were the essential cornerstone of the city as an efficient productive unit. The nineteenth-century city was accordingly dogged by serious and recurrent problems of disease and ill-health. Outside London, building took place for much of the century without effective controls over materials or minimum standards. Most cheaper houses were poorly designed and built. Drainage and sanitary provision were usually poor and often abysmal, relying on rural practices of cess pits or earth closets. Water supplies were often inadequate and drawn from tainted sources.

By the last decades of the century the severity of the public-health question was diminishing in significance as governmental action gradually tackled these problems. Other urban matters which private initiative had also failed to address satisfactorily now assumed greater prominence. Education and the creation or ownership of new urban infrastructures of gas, electricity and public transport became more pressing. These were all issues which had tremendous potential for the overall effectiveness of the city as a productive unit. The issue of the inadequacy of low-cost housing supply, which was to be closely tied to the emergence of town planning, also began to figure increasingly as an urban problem from the 1880s.

Municipal intervention

The Victorian local government system

The main response to urban problems came from the various agencies of local government (Finer, 1950). Urban local government was largely in the hands of the boroughs, established for the main urban centres under the Municipal Corporations Act 1835. Within their areas they increasingly controlled most aspects of local government, although the pattern outside was much more chaotic. It was greatly simplified by the creation of the county councils and county boroughs (in effect a new name for many of the municipal corporations) in 1888 and the urban and rural district councils six years later. Although separate, single-purpose local bodies survived for education (until 1902) and poor relief (until 1929), these reforms created an enduring framework of comprehensive local government that survived until the 1972 reforms. It was a system which contained unitary authorities, the county boroughs, which undertook the full range of local government functions in the larger urban centres (outside London). Outside the county boroughs a two-tier system was created, with an upper tier of county councils and a lower tier of municipal boroughs, urban and rural districts. A slightly different two-tier system also operated in London, with a very powerful London County Council (LCC) and a lower tier of metropolitan boroughs. The Scottish system exhibited some important differences but for the bigger cities at least it was broadly similar to that in England and Wales.

Local government and urban reform

Much of the initiative in addressing urban problems came from the local level (Briggs, 1968; Fraser, 1979, 1982). Local autonomy was not absolute, however. Although many cities aspired to become 'city states' with local sovereignty, central government provided an overall enabling framework and exerted supervisory control. But it was local authorities that made most of the running. Frequent use was made of local legislation, locally promoted parliamentary Acts which gave specific powers to the sponsoring authority. Liverpool, for example, had taken pioneering steps in public health in the 1840s, while Birmingham launched a major drive towards municipal ownership of public utilities in the 1870s under the radical mayoralty of Joseph Chamberlain (Hennock, 1973). By the early twentieth century the LCC and Glasgow were establishing a supremacy in municipal tramways.

The political bases of such municipal innovation varied, but it was usual to find progressive local big business and professional interests dominating the most innovative councils. Councils dominated by small business or property interests were usually more cautious in their policies. Reflecting the still narrow electoral franchise, Labour was not yet an important political force, although it was beginning to have some influence in London by the 1890s. It was this which fuelled contemporary discussion about 'municipal socialism', describing the increasing municipalization of the social capital of cities that had become well established by 1900. In fact though, this process would have been much better described as municipal capitalism.

Reformist motivations

How then can we explain the reformism of the urban elites? In the formal sense they increasingly sought to legitimate their policies by reference to the concept of the public interest. This was an important legal abstraction resting on a notion of the whole community and supposedly transcending the narrow interests of powerful individuals or social classes. Yet, as town planners found when they subsequently inherited the concept in the twentieth century, it is a very malleable and imprecise construct, capable of widely varying interpretation.

For the urban elites of the nineteenth century, it certainly rested on some degree of altruism, often inspired by religion. Many of the leading business figures, in the industrial cities at least, were active members of non-conformist churches such as Unitarians, Congregationalists or Quakers. This predisposed them to look for ways of doing God's work on earth (rather than viewing urban social problems solely in terms of personal morality). But there can be no doubt that the progressive policy agenda, the 'municipal socialism', of Victorian cities reflected a good deal that was in the general interests of industrial capital during this period. Disease and ill-health damaged industrial productivity (and did not always respect social class: elite residential areas, such as Edgbaston in Birmingham or Victoria Park in Manchester, were not entirely insulated from the rest of the city). Nor did the manufacturers approve of the high cost or inefficiency of utilities that characterized the private supply of water, gas or electricity. It all added either directly to production costs or indirectly to wage costs. Similarly, cheap and efficient public transport reduced wage costs and gave employers access to a wider labour market.

The other side of this was that all these services were run to earn profits that could be used to keep local taxes down. There was no sense in which labour was being subsidized by the taxes of the better off, which true municipal socialism would have implied. It was noticeable that the business elites that ran urban government in the late nineteenth century were much harder-faced when it came to functions like poor relief, which involved transfer payments to the poor, funded from local taxation. Such attitudes also coloured their whole approach to the mounting problem of housing.

The politics of the housing problem

The issue of housing had assumed political prominence during the 1880s, when popular and labour unrest had prompted the appointment of a Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, reporting in 1885 (Jones, 1971). Generally, real incomes were rising in the later decades of the century, allowing the lower middle classes and a widening section of the working classes, particularly skilled workers in regular waged employment, to secure better housing through market mechanisms. The problem was that the position of a large section of the working class remained insecure. This was because many jobs (particularly the less skilled) were subject to cyclical fluctuations (e.g. shipbuilding) or were inherently irregular or organized on a casual basis (e.g. dock work) or simply remained very low paid. Moreover, all the big cities contained huge numbers of underemployed people, many attempting to eke out an existence as street traders.

The main working-class response was to create trade unions and other increasingly political movements to protect their interests. The middle and upper classes were, however, very reluctant to countenance wholesale change in the distribution of income. Housing therefore became a more acceptable arena for political action. On the one hand it represented a key part of working-class quality of life, which gave it a real saliency in emergent Labour politics. On the other, it was an area where the urban business elites were prepared to make some concessions, particularly since the private landlords (who provided the bulk of working-class housing at this time) were increasingly being marginalized politically. Moreover, other municipal reformist initiatives had already begun to impinge directly on housing, giving it a tangible reality as an urban and municipal issue.

Housing and municipal action

By 1890 public health and street improvement (at this time meaning clearance) initiatives were actively reducing the supply of very cheap housing (Ashworth, 1954). Major schemes of central area rebuilding (such as the creation of Corporation Street in Birmingham) typically involved municipal acquisition and demolition of slum housing, usually replacing it with new streets, shops and offices. There were powers to close particularly unfit housing (e.g. cellar dwellings) in many cities, or even control overcrowding. The introduction of better water supplies, water-borne sewerage and other improvements into older housing also had the effect of pushing up rents. More importantly there were increasing controls on new building, in effect preventing additions to the stock of very cheap housing. London had had some controls since the Great Fire in 1666, but from the 1840s the new industrial towns and cities also began to regulate building, initially by local Acts. This regulation became general following the Public Health Act 1875. Most cities banned the very cheap and high-density back-to-back building. Virtually every late nineteenth-century English and Welsh city was now acquiring whole districts of grid-iron street layouts with long rows of narrow-fronted ‘by-law’ houses (Muthesius, 1982; Daunton, 1983). The tenement tradition of Scotland and Tyneside was also more tightly regulated.

In addition, their new powers to create and manage the urban infrastructure were giving municipalities a more positive role in housing development. Most important was the growth of tramways, especially as electricity was adopted from the mid-1890s. The cheapness of the electric trams, in contrast to the higher costs of horse buses and, with some exceptions, railways, offered a tremendous prospect for the dispersal of the tightly packed inner districts, widening social access to suburban living. This was to be a key factor in Edwardian thinking about the housing problem during the first decade of the twentieth century.

The origins of municipal housing

By this stage municipalities themselves had begun to provide housing directly, although on a very modest scale (Wohl, 1974). It was legally possible to build council housing from 1851 but, although municipal lodging houses were built in a few towns, only Liverpool built family accommodation – St Martin's Cottages (actually a tenement block) in 1869. A few more authorities took action in the 1870s and 1880s using a growing volume of legislation. Usually such initiatives involved the erection of a limited amount of replacement dwellings for central clearance schemes. There was still, however, a strong tendency to prefer private philanthropic initiatives wherever possible (Tarn, 1973). In London especially, it was still usual in the 1880s for bodies like the Peabody Trust or the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company to erect tenement blocks on sites provided by the Metropolitan Board of Works (the precursor of the LCC). These bodies operated on the principle of '5 per cent philanthropy', offering only limited profits of 5 per cent or less and relying on the great and the good of Victorian society to put up the funding.

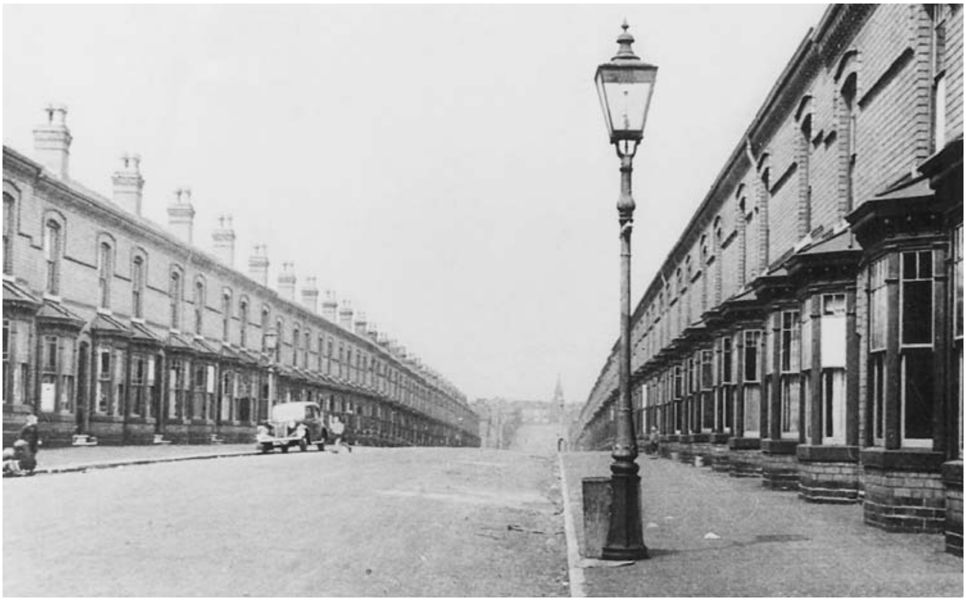

Figure 2.2 Housing built to conform to local by-laws brought marked improvements over the older slums by the last decades of the nineteenth century. The form of most such housing in England and Wales is shown in this 1930s' photograph of Birmingham. Notice the long continuous rows of narrow-fronted houses, built to make maximum use of the wide (and, for developers, expensive) by-law streets, a sharp contrast with the courts and alleys of earlier slums. The houses themselves were larger with better sanitation and small backyards or gardens, giving increased privacy to individual families.

The Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890

The extent of Victorian philanthropy fell well short of what was required, however, especially in provincial cities. The Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890 marked the beginnings of a comprehensive framework for municipal housing provision and it was certainly more extensively used than previous legislation (Yelling, 1986). Before 1890, fewer than 3,000 council houses had been built in the whole country; between 1890 and 1914 the figure was over 20,000, still an extremely small number but a marked increase. The new LCC, for example, built tenement schemes at Boundary Street in Bethnal Green, Millbank and on several suburban sites, to be discussed more fully below (Beattie, 1980). The pace of building in the already active cities of Liverpool and Glasgow quickened. In fact most cities and many smaller towns built some housing under the Act.

Political limitations on municipal housing

Yet in doing this, they quickly moved beyond the limits of their own political agenda (Merrett, 1979; Smith et al., 1986). Municipal housing was an expensive function that, unlike gas, trams or water, could not be expected to earn profits. And although private landlords were often only marginal influences on the business elites who ran most cities, the fact was that municipal housing was competing with a well-established private rental market. Rents were not intended to be subsidized from local tax revenues, but concealed and sometimes overt subsidies were usual. It was easy therefore for councils and electors to become frightened of their growing

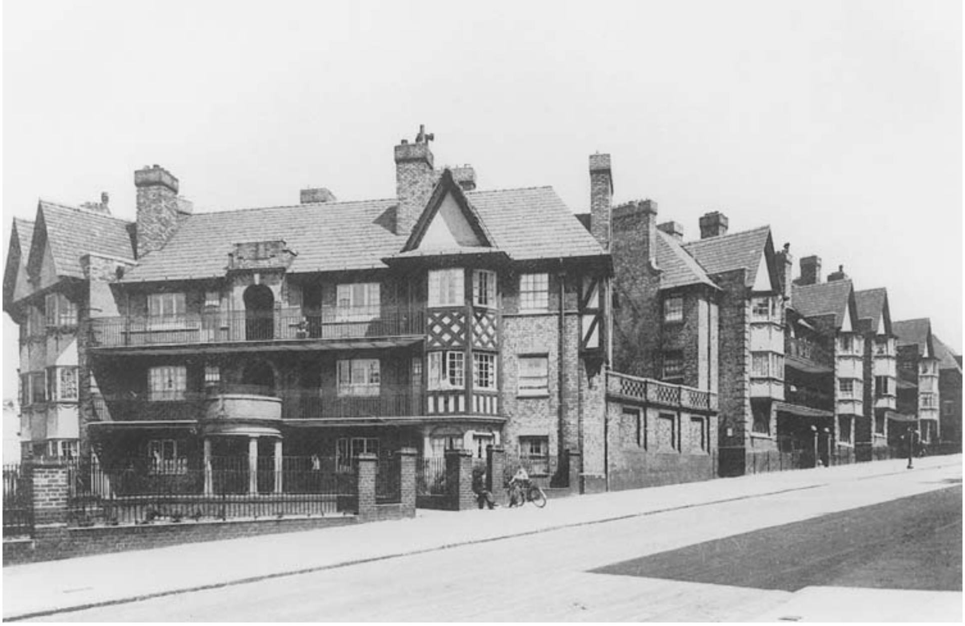

Figure 2.3 Higher standards meant higher rents that were beyond the means of most slum dwellers. The increasing need to remove the worst slums and the inadequate supply of cheap housing led many local authorities into direct housing provision in the 1890–1914 period, often using a more carefully designed form of flatted, tenement housing. This example was completed in 1914 by Liverpool, one of the main pioneers of municipal housing.

involvement in municipal housing. Despite a mounting national housing shortage in the early years of the twentieth century, there was paradoxically something of a political backlash against municipal housing during this same period, especially noticeable in London and Birmingham (Nettlefold, 1908; Gibbon and Bell, 1939). This backlash was, as we will see, a crucial element in the mounting belief in town planning as a new policy solution. First, however, we must examine the emergence of the ideas underpinning the town planning movement that appeared in the first decade of the twentieth century.

THE ORIGINS OF TOWN PLANNING IDEAS

Land reform

The land problem

One of the key reformist concerns which underpinned the early development of town planning ideas was land. To an extent that is difficult to appreciate today, many reform interests of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw land as the most critical dimension in achieving social and political change. As they saw it, there were two main aspects of the land problem (Aalen, 1992). The first arose from the parlous state of rural economy and society, consequent on the decline in agriculture, as imported wheat and refrigerated meat began to replace home produce in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Land reformers argued that the prevailing pattern of land ownership, dominated by large and increasingly absentee owners, was a major contributory factor in the failure to adapt.

Meanwhile the intensification of the operations of the urban land market provided a second focus for their concerns (LLEC, 1914). As well as a general attack on private landlords, there were specific attacks on the growth of land speculation and the related practice of ‘sweating’. These were becoming more common as transport improvements were opening up the cheaper land on the urban fringe for building. Meanwhile, however, shrewd speculators, who had contributed nothing to the costs of the improvements, were able to force up land values by buying up land around the new railway stations or tram termini, restricting its availability for development. In turn this nullified the original cheapness of the land, forcing development to occur at a much higher density than otherwise. This would also increase housing costs and thereby contribute to overcrowding and other urban ills.

‘Back to the Land’

The whole land reform movement was unified by a strong pastoral, anti-urban impulse (Gould, 1988). The idea of a countryside revived by owner-occupied smallholdings as an alternative to the concentrated cities and derelict tenant farms was a powerful one, expressed in famous slogans such as ‘Back to the Land’ or ‘Three Acres and a Cow’. But although such visions retained great potency in the Celtic periphery, above all in Ireland, Britain’s (and especially England’s) overwhelmingly urbanized character by the late nineteenth century limited the specific appeal of such a peasant-based agrarian Utopia. In a less specific sense, however, the rural imagery of this vision survived and became a powerful bequest to early town planning.

Land taxation and land nationalization

The advance of specific land reform ideas within the more urbanized sections of British society came to depend on more specific remedies. During the 1880s two bodies were formed that propounded slightly different solutions, both of which were subsequently incorporated within town planning thinking. The English Land Restoration League (and similar Scottish body) pushed the notion of a land tax. In this they were following the ideas of the American economist and increasingly well-known lecturer and writer Henry George, advanced in his important book *Progress and Poverty,* published in 1880 (George, 1911). He argued that the unearned increases in land values that accrued from the efforts of society at large should be appropriated by the state in a single tax. The other organization was the Land Nationalisation Society (Hyder, 1913). Under the leadership of Alfred Russel Wallace, the land nationalizers looked to the gradual elimination of private land ownership. It would be replaced by state ownership, so that communally created increases in land value would automatically be in collective hands, secured as ground rent from tenants.

Both organizations disseminated their ideas with great fervour from the 1880s, sending out their respective fleets of red and yellow horse-drawn vans to spread the word. Both shared the characteristic belief that land reform alone would transform society, a notion which potentially offered a path to reform that avoided any clash between industrialist and worker. It seemed that both classes could find common cause against private landed interests. Reform was to be sought in rents, not wages. A century later it is easy to see the limitations of these ideas, but we should also recognize their huge significance for the development of town planning. They were crucial in the early years and, incorporated within a wider reformist programme, they have continued to resonate throughout twentieth-century debates on town planning policy.

Housing reform

The origins of housing reform

By about 1900, land reform ideas had also begun to have an important effect on housing reform, itself another important contributor to the emergence of town planning ideas and policy. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century there had been many important housing reform initiatives, including some we have already noted (Burnett, 1978). The 5 per cent philanthropy schemes were usually model tenement dwellings, managed in a paternalistic way that was intended to promote a new model existence on the part of tenants. Tenants were to be steered away from social evils such as drink or gambling and towards more physically hygienic and morally uplifting lifestyles. Less authoritarian methods of management to secure social improvement were developed by Octavia Hill (1883). By the 1880s her emphasis on close tenant supervision to encourage self-help in matters of household management was having an increased influence. Paternalistic management styles, often reflecting at least some of Hill's precepts, were typically incorporated into the new municipal schemes, most of which were also tenement dwellings.

Industrial philanthropy

Several enlightened employers had also been attracted into housing and community development. In common with other forms of company or tied housing, this was usually in less urbanized locations where it was otherwise difficult to retain workers. The quality of a few of these schemes made them wholly outstanding, usually reflecting something more than simple economic self-interest. In common with many of the progressive leaders of late Victorian urban government, almost all such industrial philanthropists were active members of non-conformist churches. The new community of Saltaire, for example, was developed outside Bradford by the Congregationalist mill owner Sir Titus Salt from 1854 (Reynolds, 1983). Extremely important later schemes were those at Port Sunlight, near Birkenhead, developed from 1888 by Congregationalist soap maker W. H. Lever (Hubbard and Shippobottom, 1988) and Bournville, just outside Birmingham, developed from 1894 by the Quaker cocoa manufacturer George Cadbury (BVT, 1955).

Port Sunlight and Bournville

These later schemes and their initiators contributed very directly to the emergence of town planning ideas. Environmentally they were particularly important because they exemplified a new form of working-class housing that was of much lower density than contemporary by-law estates. Bournville, for example, was developed at eight houses per acre (20 per hectare) compared to 20 (50 per hectare) or more in immediately adjoining areas. Cottage-style housing in short terraced or semi-detached form was provided with large amounts of open space and good community facilities. In practice the rents were rather high and such schemes were certainly beyond the reach of slum dwellers. Yet rent levels at the lower end overlapped those of by-law housing so that skilled workers could begin to consider living in these kinds of environment (Cadbury, 1915). For housing and land reformers the schemes illustrated what was possible when development was organized on non-speculative lines. They showed that the need for municipal housing might be avoided if the land market in the urban fringe could be regulated (as it was voluntarily by Cadbury and Lever) and some viable mechanism of low-cost housing development could be found.

Co-partnership schemes

Housing reformers thought they had found this in the co-partnership approach (Skilleter, 1993). Essentially it involved a co-operative structure, whereby the tenants collectively owned the society that undertook the development. This avoided some of the evils of land speculation and sweating, and allowed land value increases after the site had been bought to be enjoyed collectively by the members of the co-partnership societies (LLEC, 1914). The approach had been pioneered in 1888, but was little used until 1901, when Ealing Tenants' Society was formed. By this time the law had been strengthened to allow all housing agencies paying less than 5 per cent dividends to borrow most of the capital needed from the Public Works Loan Commissioners. This did not overcome all their financial problems and the continuing need for additional finance tended to give such initiatives a strong lower-middle-class/upper-working-class character. To Edwardian housing reformers, however, it seemed to offer a viable middle way between traditional philanthropy and municipal housing, an ideal way to secure low-cost, good-quality housing in the areas being opened up by the new electric tramways.

The National Housing Reform Council

By this time the whole topic of housing reform was growing in political importance. In 1900, Henry Aldridge, a Land Nationalisation Society lecturer, and William Thompson, a schoolteacher and member of Richmond Town Council in Surrey, formed the National Housing Reform Council (NHRC) (Aldridge, 1915). Initially it was a predominantly working-class organization, but it increasingly assumed a more middle-class character with

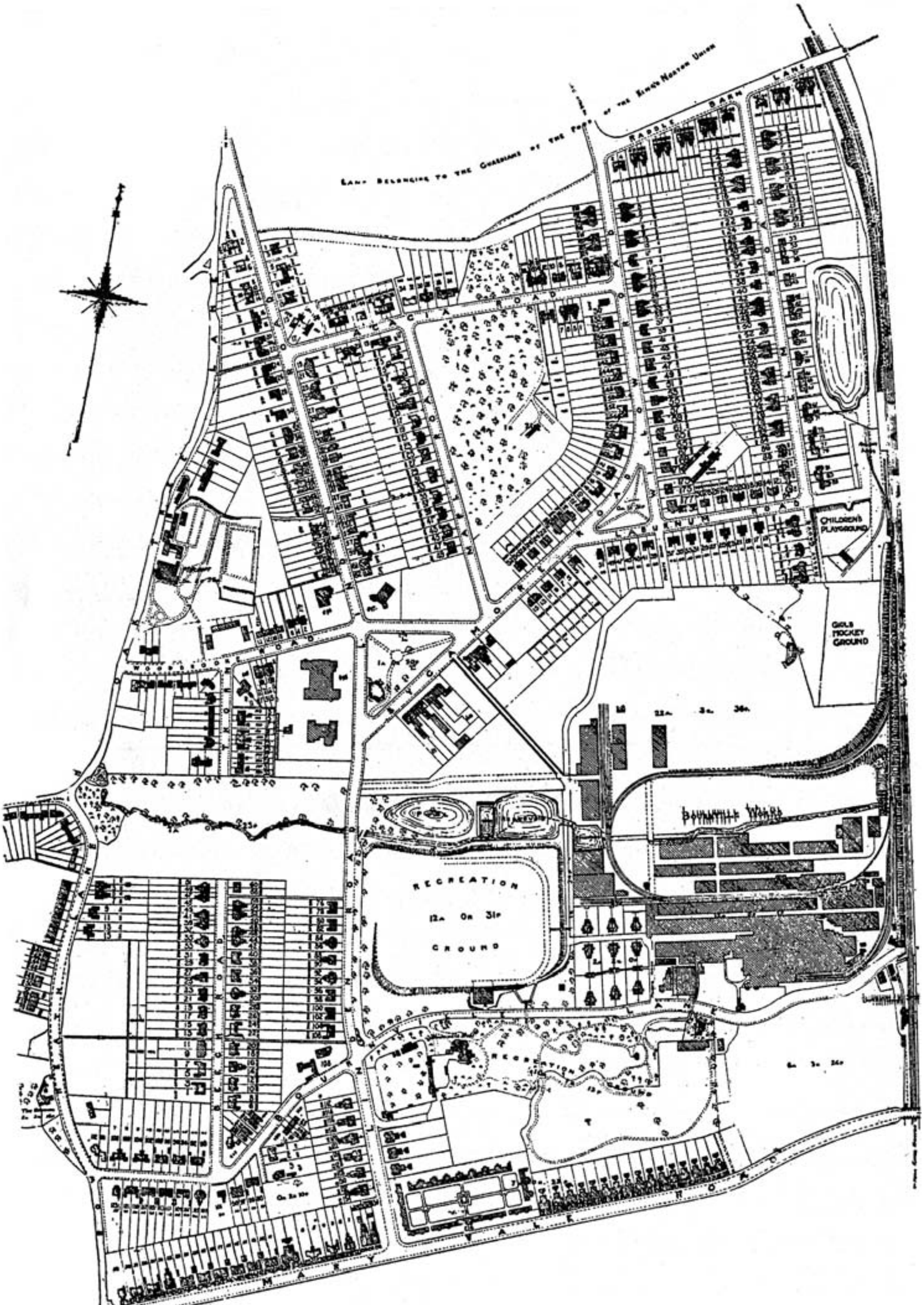
LAND BELONGING TO THE GUARDIANS OF THE POOR OF THE KING'S NORTON UNION
RADDLE BARN LANE
CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND
GIRLS HOCKEY GROUND
BOURNVILLE WORKS
RECREATION 12A 0R 31P GROUND
RECREATION GROUND
MARY VALE ROAD

Figure 2.4 Industrial philanthropists such as Cadbury and Lever developed something closer to the middle-class, rural-inspired ideal of the home as the model for working-class housing. Bournville, shown here in 1914, lay just beyond the 'middle ring' of Birmingham's by-law terraces, yet its cottage houses, large gardens and community facilities built around the Cadbury factory set new standards.

figures such as Cadbury and Lever in prominent positions. It functioned primarily as a pressure group and quickly established strong parliamentary links. Meanwhile its initial concerns to promote municipal housing and secure central assistance gave way to a more mixed approach that gave great encouragement to co-partnership development and, within a few years, town planning. Its interests in this new area were not, however, unrivalled.

The garden city

Ebenezer Howard

The garden city idea and the movement it spawned were crucial precursors to the town planning movement in Britain. They were the source of many important planning ideas and the means by which existing reformist notions were applied to the solution of urban (and rural) problems. The originator of the idea was a lower-middle-class Londoner, Ebenezer Howard (1850–1928), who had tried, and failed at, various things during his life, including homesteading in Nebraska and being an inventor (Fishman, 1977; Beevers, 1988; Ward, 2002b). By the 1890s he was making a modest living as a parliamentary stenographer, producing verbatim shorthand accounts of meetings. More important though was his increasing immersion in the various currents of free thought and social reformism in the last decades of the century. Politically Liberal, Howard became increasingly interested in emergent socialist ideas, though very much of the voluntary and co-operative kind. In effect, he was a non-Marxist Utopian socialist, looking to achieve socialism without the need for class conflict.

From the late 1880s, Howard developed and rehearsed his ideas at great length within reformist circles and his own family, often going well beyond the boredom threshold of his listeners. One of his reformist acquaintances, the emerging playwright George Bernard Shaw, dubbed him ‘Ebenezer the Garden City Geyser’ (Beevers, 1988, p. 70). To his own family, particularly its younger members, his obsessive commitment was seen as ‘an affliction’ (ibid., p. 44). Finally, however, in 1898, Howard published a book that introduced to a wider public the ideas which had taken over his life.

This book originally appeared under the title *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, although it was reissued in 1902, with some modifications, under its better-known title, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (Howard, 1902). It outlined a Utopian socialist alternative to the evils of existing urban society, specifically the huge urban concentration of London. This vision was to take the form of a social city, a decentralized network of individual garden cities, each of 30,000 population, surrounding a larger central city of 58,000. The garden cities were to be slumless and smokeless, with good-quality housing, planned development, large amounts of open space and green belts separating one settlement from another. The key to the whole approach was to be the communal ownership of land purchased cheaply at agricultural values, so that the citizens of the garden cities would collectively benefit by the increment in land values consequent on urban development. Many other aspects of the garden city would also be owned and operated collectively, although Howard did not envisage a complete replacement of private capital.

The sources of Howard’s ideas

The novelty of Howard’s ideas lay in the fact that they were a ‘unique combination of proposals’ (Howard, 1898, p. 102). It is clear that Howard was heavily influenced by much of the Utopian thinking of the 1890s. Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888), describing

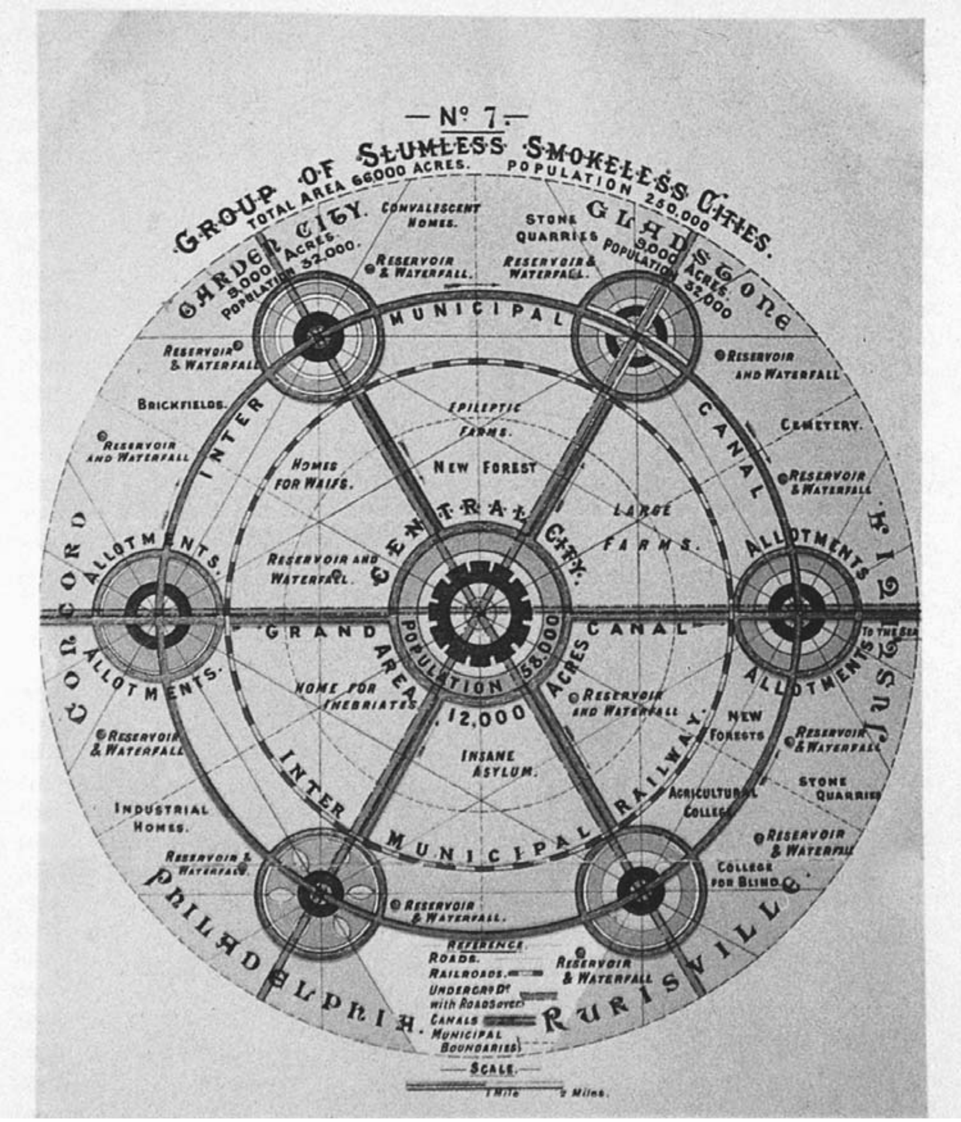
— Nº 7. —
GROUP OF SLUMLESS SMOKELESS CITIES.
TOTAL AREA 66000 ACRES.
POPULATION 250,000
GARDEN CITY.
9,000 ACRES.
POPULATION 32,000.
GLADSTONE
9,000 ACRES.
POPULATION 32,000
CONCORD
JUSTITIA
PHILADELPHIA.
RURISVILLE.
CENTRAL CITY.
AREA 12,000 ACRES
POPULATION 58,000
CONVALESCENT HOMES.
STONE QUARRIES
RESERVOIR & WATERFALL.
RESERVOIR AND WATERFALL
MUNICIPAL
INTER MUNICIPAL
CANAL
GRAND CANAL
RAILWAY.
BRICKFIELDS.
EPILEPTIC FARMS.
NEW FOREST
HOMES FOR WAIFS.
LARGE FARMS.
CEMETERY.
ALLOTMENTS.
TO THE SEA
HOME FOR INEBRIATES.
INSANE ASYLUM.
NEW FORESTS
AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE
STONE QUARRIES
INDUSTRIAL HOMES.
COLLEGE FOR BLIND.
REFERENCE.
ROADS.
RAILROADS.
UNDERGROUND with ROADS over
CANALS
MUNICIPAL BOUNDARIES
— SCALE. —
1 Mile
2 Miles.

Figure 2.5 Ebenezer Howard's book *To-morrow* (1898) articulated a vision of the urban future that addressed all the major social ills of late nineteenth-century society. The big, continuously built-up industrial city was to be replaced by a network of smaller garden cities, collectively known as the social city.