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Peripheral Housing Estates in Britain

In Britain, peripheral authorities (municipal) housing estates now present a serious problem but unlike inner city areas they have received limited attention from local and central government. Peripheral estates are large areas of local authority housing isolated from employment, shopping and entertainment, built during a 30 year period following the second world war (1939-45).

While it is normal that Politicians and local government officials live at the periphery of the city, this is usually in comfortable low-density private housing suburbs. The peripheral local authority estates get neglected more than central areas because they are not such high profile. These estates are often located away from main commuter journey-to-work routes and are therefore not immediately visible to those, including politicians and local government officials, traveling to work in the city centers. This situation is similar to the position of working class slum areas in the 19th century which were segregated from the commercial areas of the city and by passed by the middle class.

The Post-War Situation

In 1945, at the end of the war, Britain was faced with a massive housing shortage. About 475,000 houses had been destroyed or made permanently uninhabitable during hostilities. For example, in a city such as Hull with a housing stock of 95,000 units in 1939 only 5,000 houses escaped any damage. In addition, there were still urgent problems in relation to overcrowding and slum clearance. The 1951 census revealed that 45 percent were without one. That represented some 4,850,000 households in England and Wales.

To add to this, there had been an increase in the number of households during the war with over 2 million marriages. Set against this background the need to create new housing was at crisis level, and thus the construction of local authority housing was marked by its scale and speed. During the period 1946-57 about 2 million local authority houses and flats were built in Britain.

The post-war period provided both the impetus and the opportunity for experimenting with non-traditional methods of mass house building. There were shortage of major materials, bricks, timber and steel affecting the building of houses and flats. In addition, all site labour was scarce, particularly skilled bricklayers (since the 18th century, brick had been the major traditional method for housing construction in England). However, the local authorities regarded nearly all non-traditional houses as inferior, and although some systems met with more success than others, local authorities were prepared to use non-traditional housing only in cases of real necessity. Many non-traditional houses were regarded as less attractive, and although many different types and materials were initially experimented with, the predominance (and economics) was for concrete systems. Local authorities preferred concrete houses, and nearly three times as many were built compared to other systems. They were regarded as preferable in appearance and also taking maintenance expectations into account, as low-cost. Frame houses with sheet cladding were especially unpopular, with fears about maintenance costs a major concern. However, the very objective of non-traditional houses and flats, which were intended to economise in scarce resources and site labour (which in part they achieved), created the image that

Housing Housing estates Suburbs Great Britain

In Britain, the peripheral Local Authority housing estates, built during the 30 years 1945-1975, now present serious problems. The introduction of non-traditional methods, together with cheap and hasty use of conventional building without craft skills, (rat-trad) resulted in a wide range of long-term construction problems.

Peripheral estates often lack community facilities and have a higher proportion of children, teenagers and lone parent families, while elderly poor are now presenting additional problems. Poverty has increased on outer estates during the 1980's, and a high percentage of residents on such estates now feel unsafe from crime. Partnerships in which public and private sectors operate together with the lokal community offer a model for regeneration of peripheral estates. There have been isolated examples of successful community based approaches to these problem estates but community estate action requires co-operation from range of departments in a local authority, especially housing departments, and residents need to be involved at all stages of regeneration.

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Primestna stanovanjska naselja v Britaniji

Stanovanja Stanovanjska naselja Predmestja Velika Britanija

V Veliki Britaniji predstavljajo danes primestna občinska stanovanjska območja, zgrajena v obdobju 1945-1975. velik problem.

Družabništvo javnega in privatnega sektorja z lokalno upravo se kaže kot dober primer postopka obnove primestnih območij. Trenutno obstajajo posamezni primeri uspešnega delovanja t.i. pristopa "lokalne skupnosti" pri reševanju problematike teh območij. Revitalizacija primestnih sosesk zahteva dobro sodelovanje občinskih služb, predvsem stanovanjskega oddelka. V vseh fazah obnove pa je pomembno zagotoviti aktivno sodelovanje stanovalcev.

they were cheap and poor quality. It was disappointment on costs that led to general disappointment with non-traditional methods.

The largely unforeseen problems associated with the experiment in non-traditional construction have only become apparent in recent years. The problems, however, have been compounded by the fact that during the 1980s local authorities have had insufficient resources to tackle these problems. In turn the estates that have become unpopular and difficult to let, are increasingly fulfilling a residual housing role for those with no choice of housing.

The problems currently facing non-traditional housing tend to be typical. The low level of insulation together ineffective and inflexible heating systems result in severe dampness and condensation. The inability of the houses to retain heat results in high fuel bills when using the original heating installations which adds to the poverty of the residents. Residents complain of the difficulty of keeping their homes warm, and often resort to using cheaper forms of heating such as free-standing paraffin stoves which can not only be dangerous but add greatly to the condensation problem. The effects of dampness and mould growth have a direct bearing on the health of residents.

Concrete systems from the 1950s and 60s are now developing signs of corrosion to the concrete reinforcement and sulphate attack to ground floor slabs. Much of the housing of this period have metal framed windows which, especially when poorly maintained, are draught and increase heat loss. The internal layout of the flats is poor and they require kitchen and bathroom modernization. Soundproofing between dwellings is also of low standard in flats and is a widespread problem. Improved security in individual flats is also required. Communal areas in blocks of flats are generally mistreated and neglected.

It is however not just non traditional housing that present problems. In

the 1950s the Conservative Government planned to build in quantity, 300,000 houses per year. Local authorities were simultaneously encouraged in Government housing circulars to be economical. The result was that traditionally constructed houses were built cheaply and in haste. The appalling cost in terms of rapid deterioration of cheap local authority housing is now apparent. Much of this poor quality housing is concentrated in the peripheral estates.

Problems of Peripheral Estates

It is not uncommon for residents living on peripheral estates to have the feeling of isolation and that they are living on a "forgotten estate". Bus services can be poor and expensive adding to the sense of isolation. There is generally a high level of dissatisfaction amongst residents, with the appearance of the estates, when open space and landscape are poorly maintained and the condition of roads and pavements are equally poor. There is criticism of the level of street cleaning and rubbish collection. All these issues conspire to make a depressing and neglected environment.

The level of car ownership in the peripheral estates can be higher than in the inner city estates, even where income levels are similar, since they are essential for mobility and access. The estates, however, were not designed for the level of present day car ownership and therefore cannot accommodate the number of cars. This creates problems of insufficient car parking, nuisance from parked cars, car repairs being carried out in the street and speeding traffic. Where an estate is located between major roads, traffic travelling through the estate, using it as a "rat run", causes serious problems. Many of the crimes on such estates are car related.

There tends to be a high percentage of children, teenagers and single parents on peripheral estates. The lack of facilities for teenagers is the gre-

atest concern. Often there is concern to keep teenagers off the streets and out of trouble. Teenagers gathering on the streets with nothing to do has a considerable impact on residents, through fear of crime and concern for personal safety. The lack of provision for teenagers together with unemployment, bad housing and deprivation have all been contributing factors that have led to outbreaks of violence on a number of peripheral estates in Britain, such as Blackbird Leys estate in Oxford, the Ely estate in Cardiff and the Hatcliffe estate in Bristol.

Shopping Facilities

Inner city estates have access to all city centre shopping, which usually includes cheap market shopping for weekly needs. The peripheral estates were generated by housing need which resulted in them being "mere housing estates" lacking community facilities, and although shopping malls or parades were sometimes added to them at a fairly early stage of development, most facilities have remained inadequate.

Those living on outer estates have to travel considerable distances to city centre shops and even where there is a local supermarket, it may be so expensive as to make it unsuitable for families on low incomes. They will normally have to travel to shopping centres which are based in traditional villages which, as the city has expanded over time, have become part of the fabric of the city.

Often, however, bus routes will run on radial patterns, developed from travel-to-work patterns as people travelled into the city centre for employment, and these may not be conducive to easy access to newer peripheral shopping centres.

Low car ownership can add to these problems, and car ownership becomes even lower where unemployment increases, lone-parent families predominate and where the elderly poor are a growing proportion

of the population. Mothers who have to rely on public transport have the additional problem of getting on and off busses, for example, with push chairs and children. In order to avoid this they may walk long distances, thereby adding to the time which it takes to carry out daily shopping and other needs.

Outer estates can have a population roughly that of a small town. Extreme examples of this are in Glasgow Drumchapel, Castlemilk and Easter house but they are inevitably without the basic resources, services and cultural facilities that one would normally expect to see in such an urban centre.

As poverty has increased on outer estates throughout the 1980s, such local shopping parades that do exist have been adversely affected. Declining disposable income reduces the capacity of local shops to survive, as local property taxes and rents inevitably remain the same or increase and wages have to be found for staff. These wages are depressed before they disappear altogether as the shops are forced out of business. The decline in competition eventually allows those shops which survive to raise prices, raising the cost of living for residents or forcing them to travel to shops outside the estate for daily shopping needs. In some areas, these pressures have had a positive impact, in that they can create the needs for the establishment of community-owned shops or co-operatives.

Shopping parades on inner city estates can suffer from the same problems, but residents will have easier access to alternatives on the periphery of the estates or in the town centres. The shops on the edges of these estates, which may be located in the traditional shopping centres of the long-disappeared villages referred to above, may also benefit from passing traffic as people travel to and from work and they therefore have a better chance of survival, for example in Glasgow Barrowfield/Parkhead, and Cowcaddens/City Centre; and in Birmingham Highgate/City Centre markets.

Employment and Unemployment

Through the period of development of outer estates, employment opportunities for people who live on them were often heavily dependent on the existence and well-being of single industrial plants or a few major industries. The expansion of these estates coincided with period of growth of car ownership in the United Kingdom and the manufacture of cars to meet the new demand. As a result, many residents on the estates become dependent on the fortunes of the major industry, for example Goodyear in Drumchappel; Hillman/Chrysler in Fergustic Park; British Leyland in Northfield (Ingoldsby).

When the motor industry contracted in the 1980s, many people were thrown out of work, the residents of some peripheral estates were disproportionately affected and access to local employment for young people became blocked. Cut off from other relatively job-rich areas by the cost of transport, travel in search of work became problematic. For those with skills, this was less of a problem, since their skills made access to employment easier than it was for those without skills, and in some estates the skill levels were relatively high. For those without skills or for young people coming into the job market for the first time at the end of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s to the present time, the outer estates became like open prisons.

Inner estates are invariably in job-rich areas. The main employment problem on these estates is that the people who live on them cannot gain access to the jobs which are available, even if they have relatively high levels of skills and education e.g. Highgate, Birmingham; Glasgow Eastern Area Regeneration. If these estates are stigmatised, employers negative perception of those who live on them presents a barrier to gaining a job. Where peripheral estates are stigmatised, the isolation is compounded and the possibilities of obtaining employment further re-

duced. With employment decline in major manufacturing industries such as the automobile industry, the peripheral estates are increasingly located in areas of job scarcity, and even when people do find employment the cost of travel makes taking a job more expensive than it is for those who live close to employment; that is, at constant levels of benefit across the city, jobs need to pay more to encourage peripheral residents to take them. For any given levels of benefit and wages, therefore, work which is low paid and involves travel is also less attractive to residents of outer estates.

Crime and Security

The lack of employment for young people, along with the scarcity of leisure and recreation opportunities, help to generate other social problems in the outer estates. One of these is the fear of crime.

One should expect fear of crime and level of crime to go hand in hand. This is not necessarily the case. There is evidence that although crime levels may be higher on inner city estates, the fear of crime and concern for personal security may be higher in the outer areas.

In two studies, of an inner and an outer estate in Birmingham, both carried out by the Built Environment Development Centre, University of Central England (Ref. 1 & 2), it was clear that a higher percentage of residents on the outer estate feel unsafe living on the estate, particularly at night. On a number of indicators, the level of fear and insecurity was higher in the peripheral estate than the inner city estate where the incidence of recorded crime is twice as high. Although the figures which were available make precise comparisons difficult, it would appear that actual levels of crime on the outer estate were less than half of the Birmingham average in 1993. In addition, comparing recorded crime in the first six months of 1993 with those in 1994, which was immediately before the study was carried out, there was a decline of more than 50%. Never-

theless the studies show that, at night, over 40 % of the residents feel very unsafe on the streets of the estate and 78 % say they feel either very safe or a bit unsafe. These figures are higher than is found in inner city estate in Birmingham which have a wider reputation for crime. During the day, there is less of a problem, with 78 % saying they feel either safe or very safe coming to and from their homes.

The residents on the estate were particularly worried about being mugged or robbed in the area. Around 38 % said they were very worried about this and a further 33 % said they were quite worried. Only 5 % said they were not at all worried. Similarly, 38 % were very worried about being physically attacked in the area and 28 % were quite worried. Only 6 % said they were not at all worried about this. National studies have shown an increase in these kinds of worries in recent years, but the figures for this estate suggest that the situation is worse than is found nationally, and, once again, these figures are worse than those found on inner city estates in Birmingham.

People are also concentrated about sexual assault. More than half of those who responded to the questionnaire said they were worried about sexual assault around the area, 31 % of whom said they were very worried. Only 13 % said they were not at all worried.

The difficult social and economic climate on these estates has also created breeding grounds for racism. With respect to racial harassment on the peripheral estate, an unexpected picture emerged. On this estate, which is 94 % white and where only 1 % classify themselves as Asian, 32 % of the population said that they were worried about racial harassment around the area. However, what can be noted is that this level of worry is twice that found on an inner city estate where the proportion of ethnic minority population is four times higher.

An exceptionally high percentage also feel unsafe in their own homes.

Almost one quarter feel very unsafe if they are in their homes alone at night and 57 % feel either very unsafe or a bit unsafe. Once again, these figures are much higher than one would expect. Burglary is a major concern, with 84 % of those who filled in the questionnaire saying that they were either very worried or quite worried about having their homes broken into and something stolen; 56 % of residents were very worried about this.

People are also worried about violent and sexual attack in their homes, around 30 % are very worried about this and a further 21 % are quite worried. The fact that around half the people on the estate have anxieties about this must be a cause for concern for public authorities.

This further emphasises the question as to why the fear of crime should be so high, something which cannot be adequately explained in this paper. However, it should be noted that the main non crime complaints which the police receive are concerned with children/youths congregating in the streets and causing general nuisance. This was a consistent feature of both the survey and the Planning for Real meetings and the threatening nature of these groups may be a contributing factor, even if no criminal activity is involved.

The police have indicated that they are having difficulty in sustaining a policing level of one officer per beat at the present time and that this will be even more difficult in the future. At the same time, there is some evidence of growing vigilantism on the estate. If police resources continue to decline, the people of the estate may wish to look at ways of developing community-based preventative patrols, without full police powers and in collaboration with the police, leading to the evolution of a community policing model. In a situation where 71 % of the residents think that the area has a bad reputation and where 72 % are dissatisfied with the effectiveness of policing, this option is at least worthy of discussion.

Health

Most large housing estates have clinics and health centres within them, but these facilities tend to be missing from the smaller estates. Where they are missing, travel for mothers with young children and the elderly is problematical. If the estates are stigmatised, doctors will be unwilling to visit at night. Even on the larger estates where there are health facilities, the distance across the estate makes visiting them problematical. The issue here is the time it takes to get to the facilities. Middle class areas in major cities are actually less likely to be provided for by the health service, but for patients with a car this does not provide difficulties. For people who depend on public transport or who travel on foot, shorter distances to facilities can constitute greater access problems than relatively long distances by car. Most planners tend to concentrate on spatial arrangements, whereas people tend to plan their activities around time schedules. The time that it takes to get to facilities is a more salient measure of access than distance, and the poor of peripheral estates are once again disadvantaged in this respect. Peripheral estates are less likely to have access to a chemist's shop, particularly the smaller ones.

Community Based Regeneration

There is a growing recognition that in order to take the range of problems facing local authority peripheral estates, a community based approach is worth attempting together with multi-agency investment. There are isolated examples of community based regeneration, particularly in Scotland. However, there are substantial difficulties in promoting community based regeneration, not least of all that local authority professionals are resistant to the idea. Within local authorities there is a need to co-ordinate the departments to meet the range of problems facing peripheral estates. Housing, departments can

play a crucial role by taking on the role of the enabler and taking responsibility for community based re-generation on individual estates. Partnership arrangements, in which the public, private and voluntary sectors operate together with the local communities offer a model for regeneration.

There is, however, amongst residents a low level of knowledge and understanding of how changes can be brought about. Residents can be seen as passive and apathetic. There is still the long and well established view held by residents that it is the local authority housing department that is responsible for housing. Also residents are not fully aware that regeneration of individual estates requires a range of departments in an authority not just the housing department. Residents need to be involved at all stages from setting up the project to the implementation of the regeneration.

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