

**“Bogged down in housing”: Politics and Planning in
Residential Leeds, 1954-1979**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of History

December 2016

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Acknowledgements

One of the advantages of studying a long-term part-time thesis has been that I have benefitted from the input of three different supervisors. First I would like to thank Richard Whiting, who has been there for the whole process and extended his supervisory role into his retirement. In addition, Moritz Foellmer and Mark Smith both provided valuable insights before their departure from Leeds to pastures anew. Moritz and Mark's organisation of several urban history workshops at Leeds also provided a significant source of intellectual stimulation.

For her constant encouragement and interest in my work I would also like to give many thanks to Linda.

Abstract

This thesis addresses several themes relating to politics and planning processes and their effect on residential areas of post-war Leeds. As such, it examines the extent to which Leeds' political leadership and council bureaucracy were pursuing a 'modernisation project' in the post-war period, asks if policy changed from an ambitious attempt to reshape Leeds' residential environment to the aim of managing selected 'problem' areas, and questions whether popular organisations were concerned mainly with defending 'traditional' communities and ways of life, or if they had a more positive aim of achieving greater control over the built environment. In relation to this, it considers how much the council bureaucrats, local politicians and community groups were constrained by political, economic, organisational and technical issues. Ultimately, one of the central features of this thesis is how housing issues in Leeds went from a relatively consensual political approach with extensive technocratic guidance and little popular involvement, to a situation by the end of the 1970s where numerous grass-roots organisations were demanding a say in housing policy, party-political divisions were an increased feature and the council had become more exasperated at the resources, guidance and management it was receiving from central government. This is linked to concepts of 'collective consumption' and the relationships between citizens and the state, producing conclusions that suggest that an inability to achieve broader political influence over changes to the residential environment effectively encouraged a retreat to the pursuit of more individual solutions and the frustration of collective aims.

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Abbreviations

CHWP Community Housing Working Party

CPO Compulsory Purchase Order

CSHAG Cross Streets Housing Action Group

DOE Department of the Environment

GIA General Improvement Area

HAA Housing Action Area

LCC Leeds City Council

MHLG Ministry of Housing and Local Government

MoH Medical Officer of Health

PLI Public Local Inquiry

WYAS West Yorkshire Archive Service

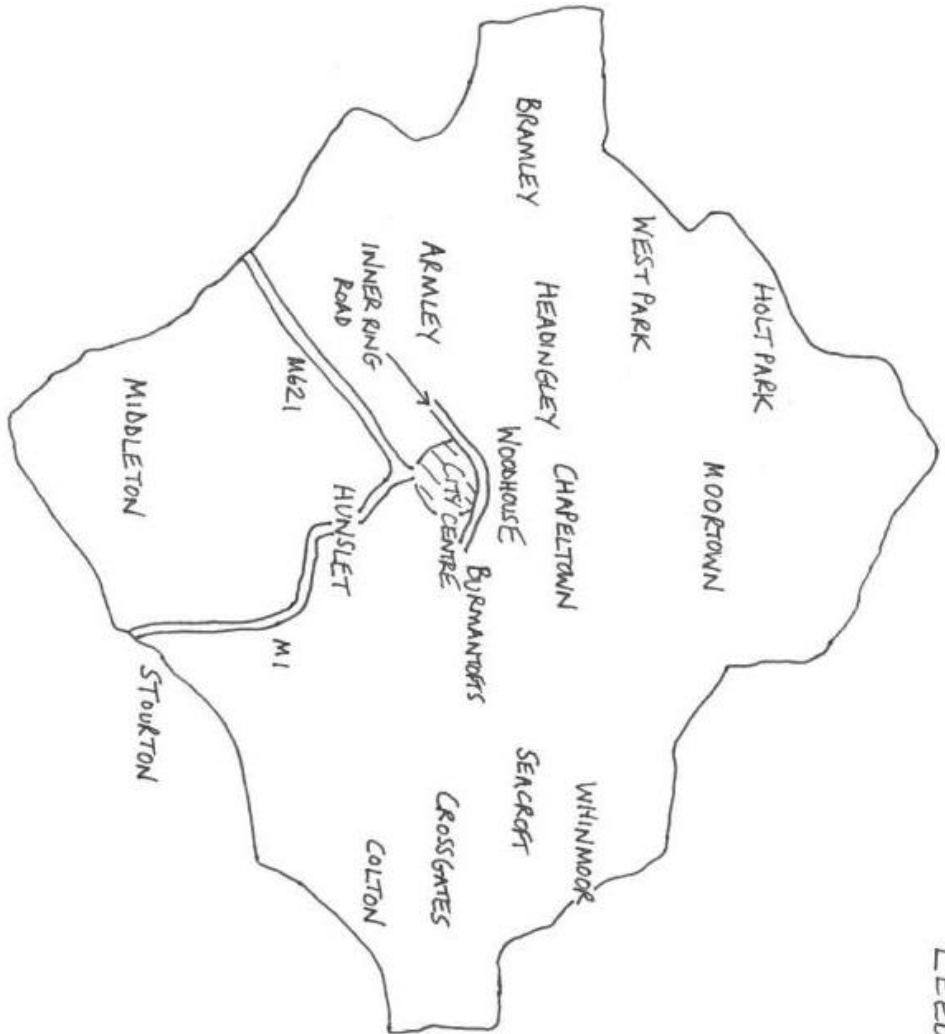
YDG Yorkshire Development Group

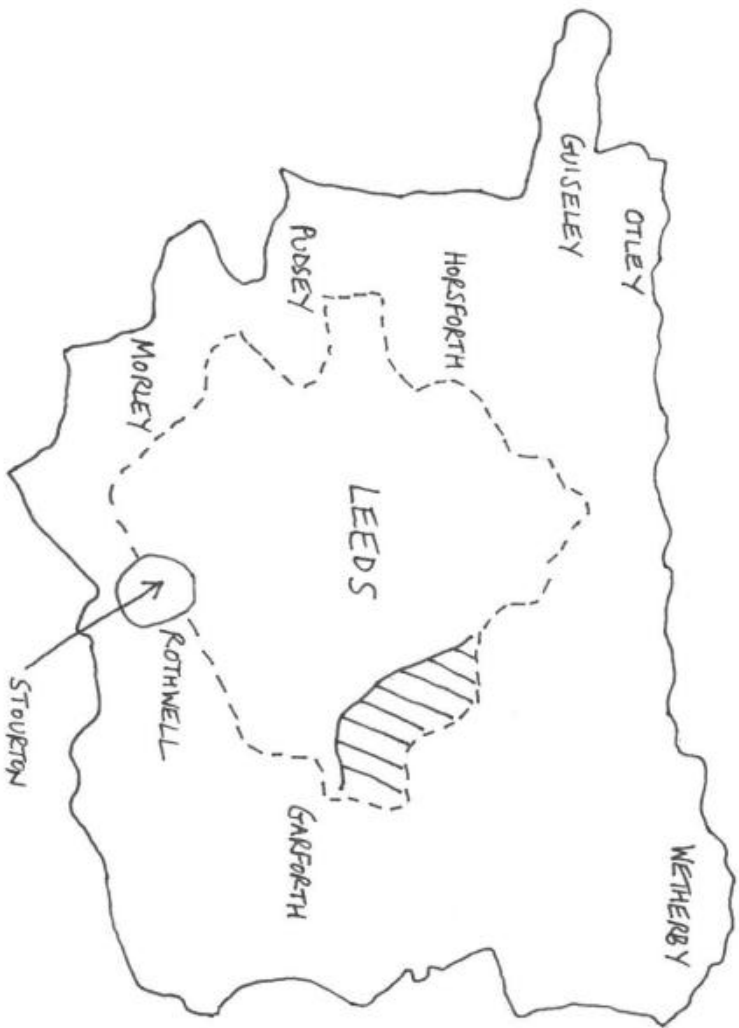
YEN Yorkshire Evening News

YEP Yorkshire Evening Post


YP Yorkshire Post

LEEDS: 1956-1974 BOUNDARIES
AND SELECTED DISTRICTS





LEEDS : CHANGING BOUNDARIES,
1954-1979.

- LEEDS COUNTY BOROUGH BOUNDARY UNTIL 1974
- LEEDS METROPOLITAN DISTRICT BOUNDARY AFTER 1974
-  WHINMOOR AREA, ACQUIRED FROM TADCASTER RDC 1956

“Bogged down in housing”: Politics and Planning in Residential Leeds, 1954-1979.

Introduction



Cambridge Road, Woodhouse, 1970s. (Leeds Library and Information Service, www.leodis.net)

In 1965, when discussing planning policy at a Development Plan meeting, one Leeds councillor declared that “(we) must not let every subject get bogged down in housing.”¹ This was a rather telling statement. For all local authorities, and especially a leading one like Leeds, housing was undoubtedly the greatest priority. In the immediate period following World War Two, amid the shortages, rationing and state direction of policy that ensued, councils were given the major role in the provision of housing. They were operating under conditions laid down by central government and the various financial and policy constraints that stemmed from this, but nevertheless, it was councils that organised the building of masses of houses and the development and redevelopment of residential areas. The role of councils was to change in the mid-1950s when many of the restrictions on private builders and landlords were lifted, but the job local authorities were given of clearing the slums and providing modern housing was a massive one, and one which was to cause some controversy later in the period.

¹ Leeds, WYAS. Sub-Town Planning and Improvements Development Review Committee 1965-69. LLD1/2/834518 (Meeting of 29/10/1965)

When examining the politics and planning of Leeds' housing in the post-war era there are a number of themes and questions that need to be investigated and which seem of the greatest importance. The first is that of civic pride and local identity. In his 2004 book on the Victorian city, *Building Jerusalem*, Tristram Hunt asked rhetorically 'After seventy years of near total decline, after decades of sustained depopulation, suburbanisation, industrial depression, cultural collapse, and political castration, could it really be that British cities are starting to revive their long-lost Victorian ethic?'² Another impression of long periods of the post-war era would be utterly at odds with that of Hunt, who may be indulging in a degree of romanticisation and focusing on rather narrow aspects of urban governance and legislative fiat. Urban economic, social and cultural elites may be less in evidence and local responsibility for gas, electric and water was lost, but cities gained the tasks of spending vast resources on housing and education, providing modern dwellings and schools, and the significant obligation to plan for the development of the entire urban area.

A quote from Anthony Clavane's *Promised Land*, a clever and entertaining intertwining of the fortunes of the city of Leeds, Leeds United football club and Leeds' Jews, suggests an alternative point of view. 'The city's changing skyline reflected its new civic pride. The back-to-backs and factories were flattened to make way for the M1, an inner ring road and brutalist buildings like the *Yorkshire Post* complex and John Poulsen's International Pool.'³ He adds that the past was seen as something to escape from, as 'From the opening of City Square in the 1890s to the great slum clearances of the early sixties, civic visionaries tried -and mostly failed- to reverse the image of a grimy, industrial mill town, the eternal Victorian city.'⁴ Clavane acknowledges later in the book that the promise of the sixties was to be disappointed, and images of 1970s Leeds have subsequently been dominated by the dismal atmosphere of Jimmy Savile, the Yorkshire Ripper and David Peace's *Red Riding* saga of novels, but this should not obscure the hopes and achievements of the city's attempts at transformation in the post-war

² Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem-The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (London, Phoenix, 2004)

³ Anthony Clavane, *Promised Land: A Northern Love Story* (London, Yellow Jersey, 2011) p.48

⁴ *Ibid*, p.35

period. Residential Leeds was an integral part of this process, and the demolition and construction of thousands of dwellings sat side-by-side with the building of motorways, schools, offices, shopping centres, university and hospitals. This could almost attain an atmosphere of religious revival, and Conservative candidates at the 1972 municipal elections were proud to hail ‘slum property being demolished at an almost unbelievable rate, and new housing rising on the barren soil.’⁵

The flowering of civic pride was firmly connected to the modernisation drive of post-war Britain and, as the above quotes from Clavane suggest, transformation of the built environment was a central part of this process. ‘Modernisation’ as a concept was thus closely connected to ‘modernism’ in architecture and planning. John Gold has said that ‘The social consensus heavily backed the principle of progress through technology and supported the idea that architecture could contribute decisively to solving pervasive urban problems. The traditional built environment could not stand in the way, because its present sorry state represented the embodiment of past failures and short-sightedness: its intractable problems positively demanded radical solutions.’⁶ Despite the growing breadth and depth of social and infrastructural provision in post-1945 Britain, there were fears of decline both locally and nationally. Governments were concerned about Britain’s economic performance compared to its major rivals, and were also acutely aware of the country’s diminishing position internationally when up against the Cold War ‘superpowers’. At a local level, cities such as Leeds felt that they needed to reinvigorate themselves economically in order to compete more effectively with regional rivals and to narrow the ‘North-South divide’ that had been widening since the 1930s. Just as Victorian industries needed to be replaced or reinvigorated, the infrastructure of Victorian cities was ripe for the same treatment. These two undertakings went hand-in-hand; as late as 1977 Leeds was delighted to say that ‘Dilapidated out-of-date dwellings and decaying industrial

⁵ Leeds Central Library, Leeds Local and General Election Leaflets etc. 1966-1972. Conservative Party leaflet, Headingley, 1972

⁶ John R. Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern Architects and Urban Transformation, 1954-1972* (London, Routledge, 2007) p.12

premises have fallen before the bulldozer and made way for up-to-date well-equipped housing projects and modern factories.’⁷

Like many other British cities, Leeds experienced a great intensive and extensive transformation in its residential environment in the post-war era. New housing areas often represented radical departures in terms of style, materials and living experience. This thesis will explore how much this process of change was promoted by the conscious introduction of a modernisation project, or if much more piecemeal and less coherent forces were at work, in terms of a set of responses to political, social and economic pressures outside the control of actors within Leeds. Concepts of modernisation were used in different ways in this period, and often with a very ideological purpose. Kefford has argued that ‘the political and cultural authority which was attached to ‘the modern’ in the post-war period meant that both state and non-state actors were keen to present their objectives in modernising terms.’⁸ Saumarez Smith also describes the desire to translate ‘images of modernity’ into reality as ‘tantamount to orthodoxy’ in the early 1960s.⁹ Thus, while piecemeal efforts to improve older housing could have been described as a form of modernisation, in actual discourse modernisation represented a much sharper break with the past. For most of the advocates of modernisation in Leeds, a planned transformation of ‘obsolete’ features of the city into an organised, harmonious social environment was essential in order to change perceptions of the city and adapt to many new socio-economic and cultural trends.

The issue is complicated further when the concept of ‘modernism’ is considered. In many cases modernism and modernisation overlapped, as both involved a critique of the past and a vision of a more rational future, but for the purposes of this thesis ‘modernism’ is treated as a style and ‘modernisation’ as a deliberate process of change. In Leeds the two were not always coupled, and the pursuit of the goals of modernisation did not always require the techniques and rhetoric that

⁷ LCC, *Leeds: The Capital of the Centre of Britain* (1977) p.11

⁸ Alistair Kefford, ‘Constructing the Affluent Citizen: State, Space and the Individual in Post-War Britain, 1945-79’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Manchester, 2015) p.26

⁹ Otto Saumarez Smith, ‘Central Government and Town Centre Redevelopment in Britain, 1959-66’ in *Historical Journal* 58:1 (2015) p.218

accompanied modernist architecture. Saumarez Smith has suggested that modernism covers ‘both planning concepts—especially decentralization, automobile-centred transport, planning blight, and slum clearance—but also architectural ones such as radical or high-rise forms, disregard for much of the existing historic fabric, a cannon of stylistic tropes, and industrialized building systems.’¹⁰ He also adds, tellingly, that most post-war building in Britain was not particularly radical, even at the high point of industrialised systems in the 1960s.¹¹ Possibly as a result of this complex relationship between ideology and practice, in his article on the early visions of Milton Keynes Ortolano deliberately avoided using the term ‘modernism’, arguing that ‘the term’s very adaptability compromises its explanatory power’.¹² For this thesis, however, engaging with modernism is essential, as the association of the term with the introduction of innovative styles and techniques was a major aspect of the arguments of those who were both in favour of and opposed to modernisation and change in the built environment in this period. The physical form of the urban environment was often to assume a much greater significance than its superficial appearance would have suggested, and attitudes to modernism played a big part in this.

The achievement of the aims of modernisation and modernism was heavily dependent on the application of expertise to the development and execution of urban policy. The post-war production of development plans took as its starting point a survey of the city and its environment, a technique that was central to the thought of pioneering urban planners such as Patrick Geddes.¹³ Planning was judged to be a largely technical activity, and relied on the assumption that professional experts would be able to identify and predict trends in socio-economic life and recommend appropriate actions to accommodate them. From the point of view of politics and popular legitimacy planning was made easier in the immediate post-1945 period by the existence of a relative consensus on the need for state intervention to regulate society and the economy, and the

¹⁰ Otto Saumarez Smith, ‘The Inner City Crisis and the End of Urban Modernism in 1970s Britain’ in *Twentieth Century British History* (2016) 27 (4) pp.578-579

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Guy Ortolano, ‘Planning the Urban Future in 1960s Britain’ in *Historical Journal* 54:2 (2011) p.506

¹³ Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: an intellectual history of urban planning and design in the twentieth century* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2002)

presumption that experts were the best people to judge how to achieve this. Nevertheless, urban planners found it difficult or impossible to forecast changes in such things as population growth, family formation or cultural expectations, and they always lacked control over the wider socio-economic context. Harrison sums this up quite well when he points out that ‘The planners were not solely to blame: they had not sufficiently allowed for unsympathetic governments and local authorities, national pressures for tax cuts, contractors’ unsanctioned cost-cutting, poor maintenance and shared welfare facilities planned but not provided.’¹⁴ Despite low levels of public interest in plans themselves, there was increasing controversy when it came to their consequences. As one of the major fields that were affected by the decisions made by professional technocrats and bureaucrats, housing came to arouse a greater deal of political activity as the post war years unravelled.

Council house construction had really begun in earnest after the end of World War One, while private rent control dated from the same era. Large-scale slum clearance first took place in the 1930s, but after World War Two housing was placed firmly within the public domain. The majority of dwellings provided were public housing, while the extension of planning regulations over the whole country meant that the construction and location of private housing estates was subject to a high degree of public control. Even owner-occupation was influenced and subsidised through Mortgage Tax Relief and via local authority mortgage schemes that made housing finance available to the less well-off. Housing as an issue was highly political in nature, accentuated by the different ways that central and local government impacted upon different tenures and types of house. As Carter has argued, ‘Government action could be defended in ethical terms as creating public benefit; but many of these ‘benefits’ conflicted with one another. There were thus extensive opportunities for those who could shape the agenda to define the public good in ways that suited them best.’¹⁵ The increased input of government and the public sector, in this uneven nature, had created a situation

¹⁴ Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom, 1951-1970* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009) p.153

¹⁵ Harold Carter, ‘From slums to slums in three generations; Housing policy and the political economy of the welfare state, 1945-2005’, *University of Oxford Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History*, No.98, May 2012

where forms of collectivism both complemented and came into conflict with private interests and individual aspiration. The politics and planning of housing and residential areas took place in this context.

The tensions in the social and political context of housing between the private and the collective was not only the case in terms of housing tenure, but also with regard to the wider living environment. There was a significant increase in the public housing stock, accompanied by a dramatic depletion in private rented accommodation, which was eroded by slum clearance and by sales of houses to sitting tenants. This brought many more people within the scope of 'collective consumption', the rents and management of their homes coming under the aegis of local authorities. This could bring great advantages when it came to the standard of the domestic and social living environment and the security of tenure, but also led to a high degree of dependence on the council. The potential for increased political control over rents, maintenance and surroundings could have been a benefit of social housing, but there were also problems when it came to making political influence tell. The structure of many local councils was very hierarchical, with leading officials and councillors doing the vast majority of decision-making. At first this seemed to be an accepted part of the process, but as many tenants and residents felt increasingly that the council was not responsive to their concerns and interests, the legitimacy of local government and democracy came under question. The issue of how conflicts of interest and outlook came to be articulated and resolved at a grassroots level was a central part of local politics for a period in the late 1960s and 1970s, but one which was never really tackled but rather taken outside the scope of local politics itself. As local authorities themselves lost financial and political power, the influence of local people and their organisations was diminished as well.

Discord between private and collective aims was not only in evidence within the relationship between the state and the individual. The increased role that Leeds City Council had acquired in the realm of planning housing provision and land use put it in a regulatory position regarding conflicts between private interests and between different groups and individuals within public housing. Many of these disputes were difficult to reconcile, as the council was often dependent on

private businesses and finance to achieve its aims, or unwilling to offend or antagonise people. These difficulties were inherent in the council's position, caught as it was between a role as an arena that reflected local politics, or as an institution that was there to stand above politics and achieve harmony. Both these roles relied on the fiction of a neutrality that was unattainable in the political, social and economic context of the time. In the area of land use and the Green Belt, Leeds often had to decide between the ambitions of builders and private developers on the one hand, and the interests and desires of owner-occupiers on the other, while the positions of different types and levels of property-owner were also evident when it came to planning and providing wider facilities in residential areas such as shopping centres or industry. Within the sector of public housing there were often issues relating to the social environment, and disputes got surprisingly heated on subjects such as the use and siting of play areas and whether areas adjoining council houses should be communal or enclosed privately. Later in the period financial restrictions meant that it was difficult to resolve problems by throwing extra money at them.

As far as literature on housing and planning is concerned, many of those can be categorised as either general social and technical histories of housing in the post-war period, works of geographical or sociological theory and case-studies, or more specific books in a social policy vein that concentrate often on subjects such as housing allocation and management. Regarding the first, both Burnett's *A Social History of Housing 1815-1985*¹⁶ and Short's *Housing in Britain: The Post-war Experience*¹⁷ have provided useful information regarding legislation relating to housing, and details of the general framework of housing policy since the war. With a non-political approach, Murie, Niner and Watson¹⁸ concentrate mainly on the powers and duties of local authorities and national government. English, Madigan and Norman¹⁹ focus on the processes of slum clearance and particularly the allocation and rehousing systems of various councils. Stephen V. Ward²⁰ and

¹⁶ John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1985* (London, Methuen, 1986)

¹⁷ John R. Short, *Housing in Britain: The Post-war Experience* (London, Methuen, 1982)

¹⁸ Alan Murie, Pat Niner and Christopher Watson, *Housing Policy and the Housing System* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1976)

¹⁹ John English, Ruth Madigan and Peter Norman, *Slum Clearance* (London, Croom Helm, 1976)

²⁰ Stephen V. Ward, *Planning and Urban Change* (London, Paul Chapman, 1994)

Helen Meller²¹ give overviews of the evolution of town planning in Britain. Meller's argument tends to overplay the ideological side of planning and its 'fall from grace' as planners overreached themselves in terms of scope and ambition²², but she does show some awareness of the political context and the inability of planning to 'resolve conflicts between private and public interests, as priorities about encouraging new economic activity changed.'²³ The place of urban policy features sporadically within general political histories of the era. Harrison's encyclopaedic volumes from the 'New Oxford History of Britain' series give at least some degree of attention to planning issues as an integral trend in post-war Britain, and show some awareness that the fortunes of urban planning were related to wider attitudes that concerned politics and the state.²⁴ Housing and planning is also noticeably neglected in many of the autobiographies and biographies of political figures, a particularly disappointing feature in the case of leading Leeds MPs like Hugh Gaitskell, Keith Joseph and Denis Healey. Richard Crossman's diaries at least provide a bit more information.²⁵ A valuable popular history of post-war British urban environments is found in John Grindrod's *Concretopia*, where he defies much of the popular legend relating to modernism by adopting a sympathetic approach to the social and cultural history of the transformation of urban Britain.²⁶

Given that consideration of urban policy and housing issues is relatively sparse in most political histories of the period, this has made primary sources more illuminating but also sometimes more difficult to locate. The information held in Leeds Central Library concerning reports of council meetings and committee work has been important, and some of the wider sources of council documentation have provided revealing information. The West Yorkshire

²¹ Helen Meller, *Towns, plans and society in modern Britain* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997)

²² *Ibid*, pp.85-95

²³ *Ibid*, p.5

²⁴ Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom, 1951-1970* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2009) and *Finding a Role?: The United Kingdom, 1970-1990* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010)

²⁵ Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Volume One. Minister of Housing 1964-66* (London, Hamilton, 1975)

²⁶ John Grindrod, *Concretopia: a journey around the rebuilding of postwar Britain* (Brecon, Old Street, 2013)

Archive Service has also been a useful source of material relating to housing matters, albeit more fragmentary in nature. For the purposes of this thesis such evidence as reports of public local inquiries into Compulsory Purchase Orders, files of officers' meetings, and planning proposals for redevelopment have been valuable. Council records are not available to a uniform breadth or standard across the whole period. Some valuable sources, such as Leeds City Council's annual committee reports, finish abruptly at a certain point, while others, such as the Department of Housing Quarterly Reports, only started in the mid-1970s. Documentation on such features as public local inquiries can be very sporadic. Nevertheless, there has been enough detailed information available to form a strong impression of the working of the council during this period. Most affairs relating to housing involved the local authority to some extent, whether it is planning permission, public health or economic development. This helps to explain the heavy focus on records stemming from the local authority. As one of the major aims of this work is to assess the motivations and inspirations of, and constraints on, local politicians and planners, it inevitably concentrates on documentation created by or through the council. This also covers sources that help to demonstrate the interaction between the politicians and officials of the council, on the one hand, and other actors on the other, including central government, business, local associations and groups, and private individuals.

Fortunately, there is also a good deal of information in Leeds Central Library and, partly, the West Yorkshire Archive Service that has been produced by, or involves, non-council actors. This enables another viewpoint and gives an insight into the broader context of housing and planning policy. Records that were created by campaign groups or local associations tend to be less thorough in nature than those that were bureaucratically produced, but the different types of language used, and the style of the documentation, can be very revealing about the particular groups in question and whether they were orientated in an intransigent position or more willing to compromise with the council and its policies. One additional advantage of extending my study to 1979 has been that it offers increased scope for using some sources that are more 'oppositional' in nature, for example the radical *Leeds Other Paper* and the publications of Leeds Civic Trust. The *Yorkshire Post* and *Yorkshire Evening Post* remained my main

sources of information for local housing issues in the mass media, and were important sources for information on local feeling before the ‘explosion’ of campaign group literature in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

On the subject of photography, Mathew Thomson has said that ‘in the interwar period and in the context of plans for a welfare state, the image came to the fore as a symbol of what was wrong about an old world and what was possible through social reform.’²⁷ He goes on to describe how photographs of children playing in the street that were used as evidence of deprived social environments later became regarded by some people as examples of how these older areas provided more freedom for children and local people. Similarly, photographs taken as part of the slum clearance procedure that were intended to document the inadequacy of older housing often came to be seen later as proof of ‘close-knit communities’ and a lost world of doorstep chats and corner-shop encounters. Many of the images used in this thesis have the same kind of multi-faceted impact. All of the images came from Leeds Central Library’s Leodis database, a collection of photographs from various sources. There are a great deal of photographs that were taken by council departments for housing and planning reasons, with the intention of documenting aged and obsolete sites and buildings, while others come from newspapers or private collections. Some are used in this thesis for merely illustrative reasons, as with the photographs of Louis Street in Chapeltown or the interior of Seacroft Civic Centre. The pictures of Quarry Hill, Ebor Gardens, back-to-backs in Harehills and the aerial shot of Seacroft Town Centre help to show the sheer scale and scope of these particular environments. The photographs that are more ambiguous are those which juxtapose the old and new, often featuring the rubble left by recent demolition. The viewer is able to project their own impressions on to the image, whether those of nostalgia for the passing world or the feeling of inevitable and/or desirable change. In photographs such as those of Woodhouse and of the construction of the Inner Ring Road there is a pervasive sense of flux which does a lot to illustrate the fortunes of the urban environment in this era.

²⁷ Mathew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-war Settlement* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013) p.45

Most literature that engages critically with issues of post-war housing and planning tends to take one of two broad approaches. The first is what could be called the ‘state versus society’ or ‘bureaucracy versus the people’ argument. This has been common to both contemporary and more recent work, and focuses on the idea that post-war planning and state intervention followed a top-down approach that gave the state apparatus, leading politicians and technical experts too much power *vis-à-vis* ordinary people. This critique has been found across the political spectrum, and found an obvious resonance with campaigning groups in the 1970s. Approaches of this kind have adopted positions that suggest that the state follows its own interests as a bureaucracy or apparatus, or works on behalf of privileged outside interests, either business and finance, or certain groups in the population that function as political clienteles, such as council tenants. Alternatively, there are those who regard the hierarchical nature of housing and planning policy as providing an opportunity for the dreams and schemes of technocratic thinkers, who could indulge their ‘utopian’ ideas with the social environment as a blank canvas for experimentation. In the case of Alice Coleman’s controversial 1980s work *Utopia on Trial*, the argument turned the architectural determinism of many modernist architects and designers on its head and produced what almost amounted to a polemic denouncing modern architecture for creating all kinds of social problems.²⁸ Often these strands were combined to provide an indictment of the post-war planning system, as in the progenitor of this approach, Jane Jacobs’ 1961 work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.²⁹ Jacobs’ argument went against the whole idea of technocratic planning in her emphasis on ‘common sense’ rather than theory, and in the advocacy of local approaches to local problems rather than the idea that there were common urban policies to deal with generic issues.

Leeds had its own exponent of this thesis in Alison Ravetz, who has written a series of books on post-war housing and who was particularly active in the 1970s writing articles about issues both nationally and in relation to Leeds, while also

²⁸ Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: vision and reality in planned housing* (London, Shipman, 1990)

²⁹ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (London, Pimlico, 2000)

giving support and advice to local tenants' groups that were opposed to council policy. Focusing on the public sector, Ravetz's *Council Housing and Culture*³⁰ is quite thorough on all aspects relating to council housing, but particularly with reference to life on estates, tenant organisation, local authority administration and estate design. She emphasizes the differences between different types of council tenant, and also council housing's 'emphasis on homes rather than the shared environment, and its constant obsession with economy.'³¹ Ravetz's pamphlet *The Housing Poor*³² is also interesting, describing as it does the plight of the less privileged members of the housing system. Her argument focuses around groups of people whom she claims are left out of the system and not provided for under the forms of tenure at the time. She states that all housing policies have focused on the concept of an 'ideal dwelling' that the 'housing poor' find unsuitable, unattainable or out of their financial reach. This approach was also taken by Norman Dennis and Jon Gower Davies in their respective studies of planning in Sunderland and Newcastle. They claim that the planning process operated in a way that discriminated against the poorer sections of the population who were forced to accept the decisions made by councils whether they liked them or not. Their criticisms of the inefficiency of the planning bureaucracy and the 'planning blight' it created are the strongest part of their arguments, but their emphasis on the 'sovereignty' of the local householder and tenant and the defence of their individual preferences, however irrational, would effectively make any planning process impossible.³³ A very critical appraisal of post-war council housing is provided in Anne Power's *Property before People*.³⁴ This focuses on the management of public sector housing, especially at an estate level, but also has serious reservations about many of the premises behind council house building in the post-war period, including the design and construction of many estates that she holds made them harder to administer and maintain, and more dysfunctional as living environments.

³⁰ Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture* (London, Routledge, 2001)

³¹ Ibid, pp. 139-140.

³² Alison Ravetz, *The Housing Poor* (London, Catholic Housing Aid Society, 1976)

³³ Norman Dennis, *People and Planning* (London, Faber 1970); Norman Dennis, *Public Participation and Planner's Blight* (London, Faber, 1971); Jon Gower Davies, *The Evangelistic Bureaucrat* (London, Tavistock Publications, 1972)

³⁴ Anne Power, *Property before People: The management of twentieth-century council housing* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1987)

One of the most recent of the expositions on a ‘state versus society’ theme is in Peter Shapely’s *The Politics of Housing*. Shapely’s argument, which focuses on the experience of Manchester, is based on the idea that the ‘traditional’ top-down pattern of urban governance and housing provision was challenged by ‘a consumer revolt against the politics and mismanagement of the council’ which meant that ‘a degree of power eventually shifted away from the centre and towards the tenants as the end user of the product.’³⁵ It is undoubtedly the case that there was a significant increase in grassroots activity and protest about housing issues in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but Shapely’s line seems somewhat exaggerated. In particular, his emphasis on ‘consumerism’ seems highly problematic. The underlying ideology of consumerism could best be taken to be focused on purchasing power, choice, and passive, individual, decision-making, factors that were limited by tenants’ lack of resources and opportunity, and rooted more in their position in society and the economy than in the behaviour of local authorities. As Cooper and Hawtin have claimed, in ‘consumerist’ ideology ‘involvement is based on the process of consumption by individuals rather than on collective choice, a basis which depoliticises community participation.’³⁶ If anything, tenant activism was based on renewed ideas of citizenship and heightened political awareness, and the increased power of ‘consumerist’ ideology actually disarmed collective organisation by the late 1970s. Shapely’s distrust of local government stretches to a dismissal of attempts to encourage citizen participation, regarding this as a means of integrating dissenting voices into the planning process and ‘controlling and, therefore, of actually diminishing the power of protestors.’³⁷ Again, there is much truth in this, but he neglects to mention the effect that participation initiatives frequently had in stimulating residents’ organisation and creating protest where there was little evidence of it before.

³⁵ Peter Shapely, *The Politics of Housing: Power, Consumers and Urban Culture* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2007) p.14

³⁶ Cooper, Charlie and Hawtin, Murray ‘Concepts of Community Involvement, Power and Democracy’ in *Housing, Community and Conflict: Understanding Resident ‘Involvement’*, edited by Charlie Cooper and Murray Hawtin (Aldershot, Ashgate, 1997), p.84

³⁷ Peter Shapely, ‘Planning, Housing and Participation in Britain, 1968-76’ in *Planning Perspectives*, Vol.1, January 2011

The problems identified by these types of analysis undoubtedly existed, but not in such a one-sided or narrow sense as you would gauge from their arguments. There is little reflection on the actual role of the state in the post-war era or the wider political aspects that affected public policy on housing. Some of these authors identify as left-wing in their emphasis on the undemocratic or counter-productive effects of state policy and planning on the lives of ordinary people, but in practice many of their arguments seem quite conservative in their denial of the ability to achieve benefits through urban change. There is a tendency to suggest that working-class people exercised control over their living environments prior to the interference of slum clearance and urban redevelopment, an assertion that seems somewhat dubious. The difficulty these views face is in their relative disregard for the effects of social and economic change on these communities relative to their emphasis on changes initiated by local authorities and planners, and the unwillingness to ask why public institutions and government at all levels were influenced to act as they did. Effectively they share too limited a conception of urban politics. As Paris and Blackaby state in their examination of urban renewal in Birmingham, analyses focusing on the inadequacies of local government 'run the risk of ignoring wider determinants of the local situation, in particular the impact of central government policies and the operations of the market.'³⁸

Other commentaries on post-war urban policy demonstrate a greater focus on the place of housing within the political and socio-economic context. These usually emphasise the limits on local authorities as agents of change, and often offer explanations in line with broader attitudes towards the role of the state and its relationship with powerful interests. In the 1970s this was frequently, but not exclusively, influenced by varieties of Marxism. A radical approach with less emphasis on bureaucratic and technocratic 'excesses' than the 'state against society' school is adopted by Merrett³⁹ and by Gibson and Langstaff.⁴⁰ They aim to demonstrate the links between policy on housing and the economic and social

³⁸Chris Paris and Bob Blackaby, *Not Much Improvement: Urban Renewal Policy in Birmingham* (London, Heinemann, 1979), p.X

³⁹ Stephen Merrett, *State Housing in Britain* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979)

⁴⁰ Michael S. Gibson and Michael J. Langstaff, *An Introduction to Urban Renewal* (London, Hutchinson, 1982)

circumstances faced by the government, which then impacted on local authorities. Both point out that the switch from slum clearance to housing improvement by central and local government took place against a backdrop of more straitened public finances and increased costs in the construction industry and in land acquisition. At the same time they argue that party policy was becoming more consensual, with owner occupation coming to be regarded by the Labour Party as the normal and desirable form of tenure, and council housing assuming a 'residual' role. A more political approach is adopted by Patrick Dunleavy in *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain, 1945-1975*.⁴¹ He is critical of the influence wielded on housing policy by building contractors and architects, and details the links they had with local councils and the 'technology-led' determinants of housing provision, but he does also admit that political pressures were instrumental in the eagerness of local authorities to grasp a 'technological short-cut' solution to their problems.⁴² Glendinning and Muthesius' *Tower Block*, an encyclopaedic look at local authority modernist housing projects, is more sympathetic towards the high-rise boom of the 1950s and 1960s.⁴³ They argue that the political ambitions of local councils and their attempts to surmount the constraints they faced were the most important factors. Many local authorities were under pressure to demolish slum housing and to replace it rapidly with large numbers of modern units. Faced also with the problem of potentially losing many residents through 'overspill' into neighbouring areas, councils decided to take the high density approach. *Tower Block's* more favourable approach to the construction of modern housing is coupled with greater scepticism about the 'new consensus' that emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s. Glendinning and Muthesius argue that 'the theory of "user flexibility" and tenant "participation" does not seem to have originated primarily with any specific group of users or tenants, but was first propagated by groups of "providers", notably designers and journalists.'⁴⁴ Thus the ideology that surrounded housing policy in the 1970s was

⁴¹ Patrick Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain, 1945-1975* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1981)

⁴² *Ibid*, pp.101-102

⁴³ Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994)

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.6

as much shaped by fashion and elitist thinking as that of the modernist period of the era before.

Some of the most helpful literature on urban policy has taken it as part of wider political analyses relating to the state and the economy. On this subject Manuel Castells was one of the most influential thinkers of the 1970s, specifically from a Marxist viewpoint.⁴⁵ He developed the concept of ‘collective consumption’ which he classed as involving ‘...in housing, socio-cultural facilities, public transport and so on, ie. the whole sector which the economists call ‘collective goods’ and which are characterised (in terms of liberal economics) by the fact that they do not meet the price of the market, that they are not governed directly by supply and demand.’⁴⁶ He argued that this sector covered functions that were necessary for the functioning of socio-economic activity and the harmony of society, but not profitable enough to be fully provided by private enterprise, and that these services had become much more important in the post-war era. As such, they had become a potential source of conflict between different social strata and between service users and the state, taking place through what Castells described as ‘urban social movements’. Against the kind of arguments advocated by people such as Ravetz and Shapely, Castells stressed that ‘we must conceive of opposition to decisions relating to urban planning as something more than “consumer-reaction”’⁴⁷, and linked them to a wider political ‘crisis’. ‘State intervention in the maintenance of essential but unprofitable public services has effectively been carried out at the cost of an inflationary and growing public debt, for the finance of these growing and indispensable public expenses could not be achieved through an imposition on capital (which refused to yield part of its profits) or, completely, through increased taxation- the eventual social struggles and political oppositions spelled out the limits of such a strengthening of state power at the expense of wage earners.’⁴⁸ Castells’ view was possibly somewhat exaggerated in its stress on the potential radicalism of oppositional groups, and perhaps slightly too deterministic in his view on the state. There was some room

⁴⁵ Manuel Castells, *City, Class and Power* (London, Macmillan, 1978)

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.18

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.93

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 175-176

for political differences within the scope of ‘collective consumption’, such as conflict over the provision of services and the extent to which different groups benefitted from urban politics. Nevertheless, his thesis provides an important background to the rise of mass public housing and state planning, and to the subsequent stresses of the 1970s.

Another approach that used the concept of ‘collective consumption’, but rejected the neo-Marxist ‘structural’ explanations of Castells, was taken by Patrick Dunleavy in *Urban Political Analysis*.⁴⁹ Focusing more specifically on urban politics within the UK, he claimed that the importance of ideology had been exaggerated, which had ‘the effect of shifting the conception of policy-making into a framework emphasising ideas, debates, strategies and techniques as determinants of policy, and underplaying the impact of organised interests and economic or political power.’⁵⁰ He argued that central government influence was relatively limited and was ‘much more effective in reducing the scale of local authority activity, in producing financial retrenchment or in eliminating initiatives or practices via the operation of the ‘ultra vires’ rule, than it is in effecting redistributive goals or securing positive policy advance.’⁵¹ Importantly, he asserted that a focus on the politics of collective consumption would ‘certainly reflect the economic, ideological and political structures which encourage or constrain state intervention, the forces determining the balance between public and private consumption modes, and the broader balance of class and sectoral forces in society as a whole.’⁵²

Further material on urban politics relating directly to housing has been provided by Harold Carter. His paper on housing policy and the political economy of the welfare state⁵³ assessed which groups in society had benefitted or lost out from state intervention in housing policy, and examined the consequences of post-war trends such as the containment of urban areas, urban renewal, subsidies to home owners and needs-based housing allocation. He concluded that ‘pursuit of the

⁴⁹ Patrick Dunleavy, *Urban Political Analysis* (London, Macmillan, 1980)

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.100

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.105

⁵² *Ibid*, p.51

⁵³ Carter, ‘From slums to slums in three generations’, No.98, May 2012

median voter and the preservation of vested interests created at earlier stages of reform have been the two great forces driving forward state involvement in the political economy of housing'.⁵⁴ In his previous work on Labour political control and housing in Sheffield and Southwark⁵⁵, Carter used a similar kind of analysis to look at how the declining fortunes of the local Labour Parties in the two areas were linked to changes in the nature of public services and social structure. He observed that several factors came together to favour Labour domination in these places: working-class society in the immediate post-war period was very cohesive, the benefits of social intervention were seen to go to established community members, and there was a relatively continuous flow of financial resources.⁵⁶ When these factors disappeared as a consequence of slum clearance and population dispersal, increased needs-based housing allocation that favoured groups such as immigrants and the socially excluded poor, and financial cuts that had uneven effects, the solid support for the Labour hierarchy was also lost. Politically, and to some extent socially, Leeds was different to Sheffield or Southwark, possessing a stronger middle-class presence and a higher degree of party alternation in office, so the consequences coincided less, but both of Carter's works show the value of an analysis that takes into account many of the more dynamic and unintended results of urban political intervention.

A recent approach that argues that urban renewal was not a utopian, naïve reconstruction project or an attempt at self-aggrandisement by a collection of bureaucrats is provided by Tim Verlaan in an article on the Netherlands.⁵⁷ He suggests that much of the urban redevelopment that was planned and executed in the post-war period was provoked by a feeling of necessity and an anxiousness to act in order to deal with issues that threatened to prove highly problematic in the future. Consequently, he asserts that '...governance practices disclose interrogations of modernity between a range of actors who frequently displayed feelings of doubt, hesitance and ambivalence about the future, leading to

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.49

⁵⁵ Harold Carter, 'The Life and Death of Old Labour: Collective Action and Social Cohesion in Sheffield and Southwark, 1945-1997' (published DPhil, University of Oxford, 2003)

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp.306-307

⁵⁷ Tim Verlaan, 'Dreading the Future: Ambivalence and Doubt in the Dutch Urban Renewal Order' in *Contemporary European History*, 24:4 (2015) pp.537-553

particular political and spatial outcomes.’⁵⁸ It is significant that he sees planners as part of a wider urban renewal ‘coalition’ with politicians, civil servants, other professionals and businessmen, though there appears to be less evidence in Leeds of his belief that politicians were the group most prone to uncertainties about the type of projects and plans that were planned and built. During the period when Leeds’ Liberals were organising campaigns aiming to resist the tide of urban redevelopment, the Conservative group that ran the council were highly enthusiastic about rejuvenating Leeds’ urban environment and showed a great deal of faith in the council ‘technocracy’. On the other hand, by the mid-1970s many of the planners were insisting on the limits to their ability to effect certain changes, and starting to manage expectations at a lower level. Much is due to context. Nonetheless, Verlaan’s article is an important reminder of the diversity of aim and opinion within local policy-makers, and shows that many decisions and plans were made due to a fear of being ‘left behind’ by wider processes of urban social, economic, cultural and technological change.

Outside of the general books relating to housing issues, the secondary sources most relevant to housing matters in Leeds are the PhD thesis on ‘Conservative Governments and the Housing Question, 1951-59’ by A.G.V. Simmonds⁵⁹, Owen Hartley’s essay in Derek Fraser’s *A History of Modern Leeds*⁶⁰, and a chapter focussing on Leeds in Langstaff and Gibson’s *An Introduction to Urban Renewal*.⁶¹ Simmonds uses Leeds as a case study, and offers a good overview of Leeds’ housing policy during the 1950s, comparing and contrasting it to encouragement and legislation from central government. The house-building programme is described in some detail, but it is less comprehensive on the issues of slum clearance, private renting and housing’s place in planning. Social change within Leeds is touched on in his conclusions, but only superficially. He gives the opinion that there was generally a consensus within Leeds council on housing matters, touches on tenants’ and residents’ points of view in the conclusion, but

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.539

⁵⁹ Alan Geoffrey Vernon Simmonds, ‘Conservative Governments and the Housing Question, 1951-59’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Leeds, 1995)

⁶⁰ Owen Hartley, ‘The Second World War and After, 1939-74’ in Derek Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1980)

⁶¹ Gibson and Langstaff, *An Introduction to Urban Renewal*

not in depth and primarily in a way that concentrates on their relationship to Conservative political ideology of the time. In Hartley's work housing occupies a small section in an essay which is a short part of a general history of Leeds, but it nonetheless provides some useful information on housing policy, including the rivalry between different sections of the council bureaucracy. Gibson and Langstaff provide a brief but interesting narrative on Leeds' post-war planning efforts, concentrating mainly on housing. Michael Langstaff himself worked within Leeds' Housing Department in the 1970s. Their argument is that Leeds did employ a distinctive approach in its outlook to urban renewal, but had constantly to battle against constraints that were political and economic in nature, and which also had their roots in the very environment that Leeds' planners and politicians were faced with. They describe Leeds' attempts at housing improvement as one example of local policy development, contending that it was a successful short-term response to massive housing obsolescence problems, but not one that could provide a lasting solution to poor housing and environmental conditions. Unfortunately, Leeds was also faced by the early 1970s with a situation where clearance and redevelopment were becoming politically and economically unfeasible, and where economic decline was affecting a lot of communities. They comment that Leeds had succeeded in providing basic amenities for its thousands of elderly homes, but that 'many of the others improved since the mid-1950s are now (1982) in need of substantial investment in reimprovement or clearance: they are often set in drab environments.'⁶²

Two recent theses have featured Leeds as case studies for quite different approaches to urban policy. David Ellis focuses on community politics in Leeds from 1960 to 1990, with a concentration on what he describes as the 'long 1970s', and addresses the impact of activist groups and whether they qualified as a 'movement' akin to the feminist, anti-racist, peace and gay rights movements of the same era.⁶³ Grass-roots organisations connected to issues around urban renewal play a major part. He argues that community action was a response to the refusal of the council to allow citizens to participate in the establishment and

⁶² Ibid, p.278

⁶³ David Ellis, 'Pavement Politics: Community Action in Leeds, c.1960-1990' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of York, 2015)

execution of urban policy as much as it was a response to material problems, significant as they often were.⁶⁴ Their campaigns, he stresses, had some success in reorienting local policy in fields like slum clearance and road-building, and had formed the outline of ‘an alternative approach to housing renewal’ by the late 1970s.⁶⁵ Ultimately, they reached their limits and failed to become a movement due to a lack of links between different groups of activists both within Leeds and nationally; the absence of a shared identity and ideology; campaigns which pulled in different directions; and an increasingly unfavourable national policy by the 1980s.⁶⁶ He is candid about many of the limitations of community groups despite his sympathy with their aims and, while his assessment of their impact on Leeds’ housing policy may be slightly exaggerated, he provides a valuable reminder of the significance of local protest movements as well as the reasons for their emergence.

Alistair Kefford's work concentrates on the nature of the local state and uses Leeds and Manchester as examples.⁶⁷ He argues that local authorities acted to remodel the spaces of the city in a way that favoured economic growth and, in particular, create in material form the ideal arena for private consumption habits. It aims to act as a corrective to post-war histories that stress a rupture between pre-1979 welfare collectivism and Thatcherite entrepreneurial urbanism, and suggests that both collective and individual behaviour was heavily influenced by a highly interventionist yet pro-capitalist state. He states that ‘the physical fabric of cities was remodelled around the needs of a re-imagined post-war subject—the affluent, mobile, consuming citizen—and public officials endorsed and facilitated a pre-eminent role for the commercial domain, and organised capital, in determining the form and function of the urban landscape.’⁶⁸ These factors did play a major role in the modernisation plans of Leeds’ politicians and bureaucrats, but Kefford’s focus on the state’s promotion of private sector activity possibly leads him to underestimate the significance of collective consumption during this period. While there were notable continuities in local

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.50

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.115

⁶⁶ Ibid, pp.245-248

⁶⁷ Kefford, ‘Constructing the Affluent Citizen’

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.14

authority approaches to economic growth and private-sector consumption throughout the post-war period and after 1979, the major shifts in the policies and attitudes of the state came in the field of public provision, where the state had started to take a less interventionist approach in the 1970s that aimed to depoliticise issues relating to collective consumption and release the pressure of public expectation.

At a slight tangent, but closely related to my approach to post-war Leeds, a book by Rosemary Wakeman on the post-1945 modernization of Toulouse⁶⁹ has been illuminating with regard to many of the similarities in approach to urban redevelopment across different cities and countries. It focuses on perceptions of change and the goals and images associated with the processes of ‘modernisation’ and is insightful in the descriptions of how modernisation encompassed different points of view, for example social reform and improvement, technical advance, capitalist economic change, and provincial identity and pride. She approaches the issue in more of a historical fashion rather than the social policy or geographical outlooks of many of the other sources. Wakeman’s definition of ‘modernization’ is ‘the widespread conviction that economic innovation and progress, that ordered, wholesome living environments, and that the judicious organization of the various social classes were the solutions to the conflicts that had plagued France for two centuries.’⁷⁰ She describes modernism as the ‘aesthetic arm of the rationalist, progressive outlook that infused French public policy and the technocratic agenda.’⁷¹

There are, obviously, notable differences between Toulouse and Leeds. The French and British states and local authorities operated in different ways, there were other political groups and currents and, significantly, Toulouse was dealing with growth whereas Leeds, in many ways, was managing decline. Nevertheless, both were important provincial cities in Western countries, and Wakeman’s method and analysis is also relevant to Leeds’ experiences. She states that ‘the

⁶⁹ Rosemary Wakeman, *Modernizing the Provincial City: Toulouse, 1945-1975* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard 1997)

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.3

⁷¹ *Ibid*

modernist landscape was clearly a social order and a strategy for political power imposed upon the city. The modernization of Toulouse became a subterranean celebration of bureaucratic power and rationality, both in terms of aesthetic design and material production. It was a mechanism for forging a new French identity around modern middle-class elites, their tastes, and their values.⁷² It has been very useful to bear these thoughts in mind when contemplating Leeds' post-war history.⁷³

Closer to home, another significant commentary on modernisation and modernism in the post-war city is provided by Simon Gunn's article on Bradford.⁷⁴ He points out that recent literature on urban Britain has tended to neglect the post-war history of the major industrial and port cities and that, as a result of this, 'it has become difficult to envisage the 'industrial city' in Britain as a twentieth-century phenomenon, so overdetermined does it seem to be by its nineteenth-century origins.'⁷⁵ His analysis of how modernism was applied in Bradford shows close similarities to Wakeman's, the emphasis being on the intended rationality and efficiency of the modern social environment and the hierarchical and technical nature of planning. As far as the demise of modernisation in Bradford is concerned, Gunn locates this in economic and industrial decline rather than popular opposition or 'planning from below', though he does add, interestingly, that the spontaneous rejuvenation of older areas of the city that took place as an effect of immigration helped to undermine many of the assumptions made in the rigid development planning of the era.⁷⁶ His ultimate conclusion was that the speed and scope of urban change provoked its own backlash, and that 'the collapse of urban modernism in cities like Bradford was not only—as so often assumed—an aesthetic reaction, powerful as this was among certain social groups. It was also the result of other, deeper lying processes, notably the settlement of new migrant communities and the effects of rapid deindustrialisation, which undermined the particular combination of

⁷² Ibid, p.7

⁷³ See the next chapter on 'The Role of Planning' for a more detailed exposition.

⁷⁴ Simon Gunn, 'The Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism: Planning Bradford, circa 1945-1970' in *Journal of British Studies*, 49:4 (October 2010)

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.850

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.866

universalism, meliorism, and technocracy that lay at the heart of urban modernism.⁷⁷ While Bradford was not identical to Leeds in stature or industrial profile, and immigration made more of an impact on Bradford's urban fabric, I find Gunn's approach very convincing. Bradford was a close neighbour of Leeds with a largely Victorian heritage, and both cities were anxious to transform their images along with their environment. Gunn looks broadly at the socio-economic context that planning operated in, and is not too harsh on the judgements of the post-war era, while acknowledging their limitations. Where his article differs more starkly from my research is that it focuses more on the city centre and on industry, with housing taking a back seat. An examination of residential Leeds could produce equally significant insights.

Historical approaches to post-war urban change on the lines of Wakeman and Gunn are relatively rare. As has been mentioned previously, much of the secondary sources come from the stances of sociology, social policy, geography and political science. This thesis is unambiguously one that takes the form of urban political history. The issue of 'community', for example, is an important one in urban history at this time, but this thesis tends not to get too bogged down in the sociological aspects of it, focusing instead on the effect that concepts of community had on political positions and disputes. The emphasis is on the institutions and figures that made decisions relating to the built environment of Leeds, the actions of other organisations such as political parties, tenant groups and the like, and the political, social, ideological and economic context that actors faced and had to operate within. This often involves an emphasis on the more bureaucratic and hierarchical features of political life in Leeds, but this does not reflect a personal tendency to favour a 'top-down' style of history, merely the desire to focus on the motives and actions of those in positions of responsibility. Indeed, one of the themes running through this thesis is that these people and organisations were heavily influenced and constrained by the wider environment they faced.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.869

This politically orientated approach enables the issue of agency to come more to the fore. Often individual bureaucrats, politicians and even community activists are taken to be typical of their particular roles, without enough attention being paid to their idiosyncrasies. The same goes for political parties and pressure groups, which exhibited widely differing behaviours according to their particular backgrounds and the people that they represented. An important factor is the relationship between political actors, on an individual and collective level, with many of the concepts and issues that arose during the post-war period. Along with 'community' there are other words that became very popular in political discourse, including 'modernisation' and 'participation'. These concepts did not go uncontested, and their use was often evidence of a particular outlook to urban change in Leeds. For those looking back at the era, it is also useful to compare the rhetoric with the kind of political activity that took place and the ends that were achieved. By the 1970s there was an increasing amount of attention given to concepts like 'community' and 'participation', and it is interesting to gauge whether this was merely lip service to disguise other priorities and aims.

One of the more significant issues is the link between local politics and the wider socio-economic change that was affecting cities like Leeds. Political actors at all levels and of all kinds were confronted with and responding to certain challenges. For politicians it was the need to satisfy their particular constituencies while also taking into account their personal concepts of the needs and interests of the city as a whole. Bureaucrats also had this idea of the broader city in mind, along with the duty of fulfilling statutory and professional responsibilities. Community activists often had more limited objectives, but covering a much wider range of issues. They might regard themselves as protecting their particular community or area against unwanted change, or alternatively trying to secure change that they felt was long overdue and would benefit local people. The environment they faced provided both opportunities and constraints. Over the whole period more resources were devoted to investing in and developing the built environment than ever before, but this injection of money also created expectations that were hard to sustain when the finances ran dry, or led to conditions that other people found unsettling and confusing. The demands of responding to economic change that many politicians and administrators found irresistible also provided something of

a strain, and elicited different responses from sections of the public. At certain points it is hard to tell just who is controlling or influencing urban political processes, something that is difficult to reconcile with the collective nature of urban life, the shared experiences of many citizens, and the fact that so much more activity was falling under the onus of democratically elected local political authorities.

The post-war period was marked by the tension between the collectivism that was engendered by the creation of institutions of mass state provision and intervention; the continued existence of a capitalist society with private property ownership and profit-making; and the nature of a liberal democracy that was very 'top-down' orientated and dependent on bureaucratic procedures. The increased role of the state and its acceptance of the responsibility not just to provide welfare directly, but to act as a 'harmoniser' of conflicting interests, undoubtedly provided a focus for collective political action. Problems arose over how this political activism and popular concern over urban change could be related to formal politics, and how popular demands could be reconciled with the framework of technocratic planning and the broader economic context. There is a definite sense by the mid-1970s that these problems had both overwhelmed the established processes of urban planning and governance, yet also effectively blunted the 'collectivist' thrust of local activism and popular political involvement. An enhanced focus on individual aspiration and more narrow conceptions of personal or group interests were apparent when it came to such things as council house sales, attitudes to public space or resisting development that might offend against the established social hierarchy.

This thesis focuses on Leeds for various reasons. Some are personal. As a part-time student it was very helpful to be able to concentrate on sources that could be accessed locally. Coming to live in Leeds as an undergraduate student and then to reside permanently has encouraged me to become inquisitive as to how the city has developed in the form it has. Hearing from older local people about buildings such as Quarry Hill and Leek Street Flats was a catalyst for further research, and features such as Leeds' extensive tracts of back-to-back housing are practically unique in British urban life. Much historical writing about Leeds has concentrated

more on its Georgian and Victorian rise to prominence.⁷⁸ The impact of the post-war era is also worthy of investigation. More broadly, Leeds provides an excellent example of post-war urban history, both for its similarities and differences from other British cities. Slum clearance, multi-storey building, Green Belts, traffic problems and economic restructuring were all common issues that Leeds approached in its own way. The city had the fortune to escape relatively unscathed from Second World War bombing and the immediate need for reconstruction that entailed, but also ‘missed out’ on the opportunities that large-scale bomb-sites presented for reimagining the city. Leeds was also burdened with the unusual problem of dealing with tens of thousands of back-to-back houses in a period when they were initially seen as hopelessly outdated. All of these factors make Leeds a suitably significant place to study.

Given the relatively extensive coverage of the immediate post-war period and the consensual nature of formal party politics, particularly at local level, this thesis has 1954 as its starting point. This particular year marks the resumption of slum clearance programmes, but the mid-1950s also saw the commencement of the transformation of inner city housing and the rise of multi-storey building. These trends continued until the late 1960s when the impetus was checked for financial reasons and because the technical and social justifications for multi-storey building started to be heavily questioned. By the 1970s the housing system hits a period of uncertainty as new building slowed, councils experimented more with improvement and renovation of property, and social problems mounted that impacted on the administration and management of housing as well as demonstrated the need to approach housing issues in their full social context. 1979 is traditionally seen as a watershed in British politics and, despite some continuities in housing and urban policy with the ‘years of decline’ in the 1970s, the Thatcher governments also marked the end of an era with the arrival of the compulsory ‘right to buy’ in public housing, further heavy public spending cuts, and a more relaxed attitude to planning. Issues relating to management of the

⁷⁸ Maurice Beresford, *East End, West End: The Face of Leeds During Urbanisation, 1684-1842* (Leeds, Thoresby Society, 1988); Stephen Burt and Kevin Grady, *An Illustrated History of Leeds* (Derby, Breedon, 2002); Derek Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1980)

housing stock or housing finance are not dealt with in any great detail, except where they impacted on decision-making or elicited a political response that affected the built environment in a significant way. Thus rent issues and changes in national policy like the 1972 Housing Finance Act are not featured.

To begin with, the specific housing concerns of Leeds are placed in their context in two chapters which look at the issues surrounding planning in the post-war period and provide some background information on the city of Leeds. The interlinked issues of slum clearance and housing improvement are then explored. At first they had a reciprocal relationship, but in time they were often taken to be dramatically opposed to each other. The subject is a major one, and is tackled in two chapters, before and after 1970. Leeds saw extensive slum clearance from the late 1950s, and it will be interesting to further explore the assessment of 'unfit' housing, especially in view of the fact that many 'unfit' dwellings that escaped the bulldozer were judged to be more than capable of improvement and even 'gentrification' less than twenty years later. Many of the inner-city areas suffered from 'planning blight' and the inhabitants often lived in a situation of constant uncertainty. Their reaction to this was to be of increasing importance. Leeds was relatively 'ahead of its time' in approaching the issue of housing improvement, but it was also a contentious policy within the bureaucratic and political spheres of the council.

The construction of public housing and the experiences of those living in it are then treated in two chapters that approach the topic before and after 1968. The first half takes in the 'boom' housebuilding period of the 1950s and 1960s, and the rise of multi-storey construction. The latter section looks at the council's response to the demise of high-rise, the problems managing modern housing, and the declining fortunes of certain public housing developments such as Hunslet Grange flats, along with the response of tenants.

This is followed by an examination of the city's approach to residential land-use planning. This includes the often controversial nature of the Green Belt and proposed developments on or adjoining it, and also takes in political disputes over land disposal and allocations of land for public or private housing. This was

significant in areas in the north of the city, and also in Whinmoor and Colton which were considered by the council to be natural areas for expansion.

Non-residential functions such as road-building, industry and shopping are also linked to the themes above. Leeds quite proudly declared itself 'Motorway City of the Seventies' for a time, and the Inner Ring Road, M1 and M621 caused major upheaval to certain parts of Leeds. Other traditional residential areas were to see a change of emphasis as they were demolished and replaced by industry or business, while shopping and social facilities were an important part of the living environment. As issues of zoning and segregation of land uses were integral to planning in the modern city they will be given close consideration.

The conclusion will bring these various themes together and assess how the issues of housing and planning in residential Leeds were influenced by the process of 'modernisation'. In many ways it could be said that there was a kind of 'arrested modernisation' in many British cities as the plans and hopes of the 1950s and 1960s were only partially completed before the backlash of the 1970s. The different political and ideological approaches towards modernisation are also interesting, taking bureaucratic and corporate forms, sometimes involving radical social transformations, and also provoking radical and conservative reactions from various groups within the local population. Housing is one of the most basic social needs, and how it is acquired, allocated, constructed and disposed of should form an important part of any history of Leeds in a time of rapid social change that included economic affluence, industrial restructuring and decline, extensive programmes of social provision, alterations in family structure, unparalleled social mobility, and the swift growth of mass motor transport.

Chapter One: The Role of Planning, 1945-1979

The nature and role of planning in the post-war transformation of Britain's cities is a subject that has tended to assume something of a popular consensus since the 1970s, when a violent change of opinion took place about the value of much of the urban change that had taken place in the preceding two decades. The mood had been captured in the works and endeavours of John Betjeman and various local and national societies for the preservation of Victorian Britain, but it also found a very practical form in many of the local struggles that affected cities in the 1970s over issues regarding slum clearance, the management of council-owned housing, and the redevelopment of declining city districts. 'Planning' was an all-purpose target for some of this criticism, and often with a rather wide and subjective focus on what 'planning' represented in practice. A quote from Alison Ravetz in 1980 helps to demonstrate this. She said that post-war planning 'was based on strong government, special executive and managerial classes, the centralisation of industry, and the dispersal of work, family life, education and all other activities among the separate parts of the city.'¹ She added that, 'it was the ruling out of evolutionary patterns, rather than its alleged bias to physical forms, that was the hallmark of the post-war style of planning.'² Some of this is undoubtedly an accurate description of some of the processes that affected post-war Britain, but such issues as strong government, industrial policy, work and social life were far from under the control of town and country planners. As far as her second point was concerned, the major buttress of the post-war planning regime was the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act which, along with the creation of Green Belts, actually gave much of development planning a very conservative style and made change in some facets of planning a rather tardy process.

One of the main problems with many approaches to 'planning' is that they do relatively little to define what 'planning' is and who 'planners' were. My own view is that planning was essentially a tool, used by public authorities to provide expertise on many of the problems that affected post-war cities. Both planners

¹ Alison Ravetz, *Remaking Cities* (London, Croom Helm, 1980) p.56

² *Ibid.*

and councils were thus subject to swings in political leaning, economic boom and bust, social trends, and intellectual fashion. At times, the context that planners operated in gave them opportunities to dream about a future in line with their personal and professional preferences, but these moments were quite fleeting. For all the expansion of their career prospects in this period, it must have been a frustrating time as well.

Management of cities had become an increasing problem during the nineteenth century. The rapid growth in urban populations led to difficulties involving issues such as transport, housing and health. Local authorities rationalised their functions and bureaucracies in order to deal with these on a day-to-day basis, but the roots of planning lay in the need to transform the city to adapt to the effects of urbanisation and change. The planning profession, from its onset, had to try and forecast the needs of the city of the future and anticipate many of the trends that would affect it. At first this was more wide ranging in theory than in practice, as planners in the pre-Second World War era were often involved primarily in problem-solving affecting narrowly-defined areas such as traffic management, public spaces and the layout of new greenfield local-authority housing estates. The Second World War itself was to put planners in a position where their thought could range across the whole city.

Land-use planning had evolved in the twentieth century influenced by the utopian ideas of Ebenezer Howard and the Garden City experiments at Letchworth and Welwyn, US 'zoning' schemes and the early plans of local authorities. World War Two and the intensive planning of the war economy were to give a much greater boost to proposals for the planning and control of land. The wartime Barlow Report on the distribution of the industrial population, the Scott Report on the utilisation of rural land and the Uthwatt Report on compensation and betterment all made recommendations on the subject, but firm proposals for legislation came from the post-war Labour government, significantly with the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. This created a framework for effective planning controls and post-war redevelopment, and declared that each planning authority had to prepare a development plan for its whole area, based on a thorough survey and analysis, as well as giving planning authorities the discretion

to refuse or impose conditions on detailed aspects of all development proposals, subject to appeal.³ The legislation also involved state acquisition of development rights on all land and a 100% tax on rises in land value caused by development, and though these latter conditions were subsequently relaxed by the Conservative government, the remainder of the act provided the basis for post-war planning orthodoxy. This provided greater influence and freedom for private developers than the more 'statist' system of the late 1940s, but nonetheless involved restrictions based on development control and the establishment of Green Belts where differing conceptions of property rights clashed.⁴ Short has argued that the effects of this were to be a smaller supply of land for development and an associated increase in land prices, which 'has been passed on to consumers by builders in the form of more expensive housing or in the form of higher-density, poorer-quality housing.'⁵ McKay and Cox recognised this, but pointed out a relative absence of conflict over land-use policy, partly as the technical aspects of the planning process were left to professional experts, but also because there was a consensus on values such as urban containment and rural protection.⁶ Indeed, what overt conflict took place over planning issues tended to focus around a defence of these values.

As part of the post-war Town and Country Planning legislation local planning authorities were obliged to produce Development Plans that involved forecasts of future needs and the zoning of the city according to the desired use of particular pieces of land. This involved strict requirements for planning permission for any changes in land use, and the major intention and effect of this legislation has been described as 'the containment of the physical spread of urban areas over the countryside.'⁷ Suburbanisation had proceeded very quickly in the inter-war period and large council estates and private speculative building had engulfed the old rural and industrial satellite villages of Leeds, requiring a string of extensions to the city boundaries. After World War Two these trends continued, as the

³ Ward, *Planning and Urban Change*, pp. 106-110

⁴ *Ibid*, p.116

⁵ Short, *Housing in Britain: The Post-War Experience*, p.77

⁶ David H. McKay, and Andrew W. Cox, *The Politics of Urban Change*, (London, Croom Helm, 1979) pp.61-62

⁷ Michael J. Croft, 'Urban form and structure' in *Urban Planning Problems*, edited by Gordon Cherry (London, L. Hill, 1974) p.24

country needed to make up for the wartime postponement of housebuilding, provide dwellings for an increasing population, and rehouse many of the inhabitants of the overcrowded slum districts.

The 1947 planning system came to be criticised for its rigidity and tendency to lapse into ‘dull, regulatory, local authority bureaucracy.’⁸ By the late 1960s it was judged to be in need of revision, and the Town and Country Planning Act of 1968, with the creation of broader ‘structure plans’ and detailed ‘local plans’, coupled with the Skeffington Committee’s report *People and Planning*, were intended to inject some flexibility and popular involvement in the system. These changes had little practical effect when it came to decision-making, but did help to create a broader input for public opinion into planning issues and proposals. In the 1970s this led to some difficulties, with planning, which ‘has preferred to be apolitical, standing aloof as paternalist or technocratic’⁹, struggling to adjust to the changed circumstances. Indeed, it could be argued that the incompleteness of the institutional ‘settlement’ created in the late 1960s and early 1970s influenced the increased politicisation of the planning system while diminishing the ability of planners, local authorities and the public to control their local environments. There were frequent cases, the Skeffington Report and the 1974 government circular on ‘Gradual Renewal’ being two examples, where central government issued policy proclamations with very little guidance or support given on how these aspirations should be put into practice.

So far I have lapsed into using the word ‘planners’ without providing an adequate definition. In the early years of ‘planning’, the people who were involved in the acts of problem-solving and forecasting changes in the urban fabric were largely city engineers, who would have the ability to manage projects that would improve and extend the infrastructure of cities. In the inter-war period they would often be joined by local-authority architects departments, who designed the plethora of public buildings of various types, and crucially the housing that councils increasingly supplied. Town and country planning as a profession in the

⁸ Gordon Cherry, *The Politics of Town Planning*, (Longman, Harlow, 1982) p.47

⁹ *Ibid*, p.123

UK dates from the establishment of the Royal Town Planning Institute in 1914, but town planners in local authorities were still in their infancy at the outbreak of the Second World War, and were often uncertain of their position in the established 'hierarchy' of planning.¹⁰ The role of town planners was largely that of spatial planning, which seemed to those from an engineering background to be more aesthetic than scientific, and the 'scientific' basis of many planning decisions was to come under scrutiny in later years. Nevertheless, the need for reconstruction of British cities after the destruction and the neglect of the war years was to give spatial planning a boost, though it particularly benefitted from the development plan system instituted through the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. The early development plans were often relatively brief and produced, like Leeds', mainly by the City Engineer, but the process of revision that took place in the 1960s saw a much deeper analysis. By the early 1970s, after corporate reorganisation, Leeds' planners included a Chief Planning Officer, City Development Officer and City Architect.

The development plan system did give planners an extensive input into the future of the built environment of the city, but there were many other local politicians and bureaucrats who took part in and influenced the planning process. As has been argued in relation to Cardiff, development planning in the initial post-1947 period was mainly a response to issues, but it required political and business input to establish a 'planning doctrine' 'in the sense of a plan or vision that developed a coherent spatial form and urban design for a town or city as a long-term goal, achievable in stages, by means that were discussed and intended to achieve a particular type of place.'¹¹ This was especially important for cities that were trying to change their image and engage in reconstructing the local economy. The council leader and the councillors who filled important positions, such as chairing the Housing and the Town Planning and Improvements committees, played an important part in setting council policy. In mid-1960s Leeds the Housing Chairman, Karl Cohen, was able to obtain a reduction in the demolition rate

¹⁰ Alan Lewis, 'Planning through Conflict: Competing Approaches in the Preparation of Sheffield's Post-War Reconstruction Plan', *Planning Perspectives* 23 (Jan 2013)

¹¹ Simon Coop and Huw Thomas, 'Planning Doctrine as an element in Planning History: The Case of Cardiff', *Planning Perspectives* 22 (April 2007)

against the wishes of the City Engineer and City Architect, and also other councillors. Similarly, statements in the late 1950s from the experienced City Architect R.A.H. Livett about the possibility of siting tower blocks in parts of the city's main parks were quickly repudiated by the Town Planning and Improvements chair. When political imperatives coincided with planning ambitions, planners were held with greater esteem and allowed to indulge themselves. In Leeds this was the case in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the Conservative administration sought to accelerate the process of 'modernisation' and promote the city as a regional centre. Unfortunately for the planners, these initiatives were to run out of impetus when finances ran short and public opposition began to grow.

Other council bureaucrats were also important in decision-making. The Housing Director frequently came into conflict with the planning officers, as he judged that his desire to efficiently manage the council's housing stock was often at odds with planning officials' views on the appropriate types of housing for future needs. The Medical Officer of Health and the Public Health Inspector, on the other hand, often sided with the planners when it came to the necessity of redevelopment in order to create healthy environments. The 'production' and 'design' factions within the bureaucracy could also be divided. Birmingham's first City Architect, A.G. Sheppard Fidler, often felt marginalised by the powerful and esteemed City Engineer, Herbert Manzoni, and eventually resigned after a falling out with the council leader Harry Watton over what he regarded as unacceptable interference.¹² More widely, the influence of grassroots politics did come to bear on the decisions made by the local authority. While it was a negligible factor up until the late 1960s, local campaign groups blossomed in the 1970s and, at the very least, posed a nuisance factor for planners. Where the concerns of local activists and demands for broader participation impinged on the world of the councillors, then there could be some real pressure placed on the planning process. These issues certainly helped to create a much more defensive approach on the part of planners in the 1970s.

¹² Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, pp. 166-168 and 247-251.

Local authorities were the major force transforming the city in the 1945-1979 era, building masses of houses, schools and roads, but their powers and finances were crucially granted by central government, which also insisted on supervising many of the plans and decisions made at local level. Financial arrangements were Whitehall's main way of ensuring that local authorities followed the broad outlines of government policy. Subsidy scales for housing had a great effect on the styles and types of dwelling built by councils. The subsidies provided for in 1956 and 1967 basically marked the start and finish of the multi-storey 'boom', no matter how enthusiastic architects and planners were about that type of housing. Even during this period the Ministry of Housing and Local Government insisted on having input into the smallest features of some schemes, where it felt that financial savings could be made or national policy implemented better. The straitened allowances provided for local government spending in the 1970s both dented the ambitions of local authority planners and made it more difficult to gain public approval for their proposals. National planning policy could also conflict with local. Green belts had been a favourite of many planners, but their encouragement by central government made the job of local authority planners in allocating scarce land within the city much more difficult. In certain areas there could be a major divergence between national or regional planning and the plans and objective of local authorities. Glasgow saw a significant struggle in the post-war era between planners from the Scottish Office who identified a need for 'overspill' of overcrowded Glaswegians into new and extended towns in the wider region, and local politicians and officers who wanted to preserve the city's population, finances and integrity by pursuing a 'high-rise' housing solution.¹³

The resolution of urban problems caused by economic, social and technological factors was effectively the *raison d'être* of planners, but in a period of rapid change the tasks thrown up were not easy to resolve. Housing was a prime example, compounded by the war and the 'baby boom' that followed, but the issue of transport was one that really taxed planners in this era. Planners and local politicians were acutely aware that the rise of the motor car had not been accompanied by as rapid a change in urban environments to accommodate it.

¹³ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, pp.168-172 and 220-239.

Road-building to relieve the increasing traffic congestion was seen as inevitable, but planners were also keen to try and control vehicle use through pedestrian schemes and planning estates around public transport.¹⁴ Enough was achieved in Leeds for the city to hail itself ‘Motorway City of the Seventies’, but plans for a fully developed network of major roads across the city were to be dashed due to lack of finances in the 1970s. This helped to illustrate both the relative impotence of planning to achieve its objectives, and the effects of this lack of power in blighting many residential areas that had been earmarked for road projects.

‘Planning blight’ was essentially a symptom of the inability of plans and forecasts to correspond with the realities of politics and economics or, alternatively, the failure of the latter to put plans into practice. Some of this is due to the nature of town planning as a discipline. Planners did aim to provide rational, disinterested solutions to urban problems, and a more considered approach that would use technology to the benefit of society. This could be of great benefit in an age where public spending on social programmes had increased and the welfare of the general population was a higher priority than previously. Planning did not operate in a vacuum, however. Planners themselves were usually from middle-class, educated backgrounds and held many of the assumptions of that milieu. Well intentioned attempts to provide higher standards of housing and a more pleasant social environment were accompanied by a difficulty to understand why some people were wary of change or fearful of the upheaval that redevelopment might bring. It is this lack of empathy rather than any real desire for popular decision-making that provoked the push for ‘participation’ in the late 1960s. Planners had also to operate in a fundamentally unequal society, where resources were often scarce or narrowly allocated. Trying to initiate a plan for society’s benefit in such an environment inevitably meant that certain objectives would be unrealised, or that priorities would have to be set, such as that for speed over quality in the provision of housing. Where planning came into contact with basically capitalist fields, such as in the provision of retail facilities or industrial premises, it was to find frustration and a lack of control over outcomes. Intellectually, planners were

¹⁴ Simon Gunn, ‘The Buchanan Report, Environment and the Problem of Traffic in 1960s Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History* 22, 4 (2011)

open to trends and fashions, both in an aesthetic sense and in terms of the application of ever-changing technology. Given that the built environment often takes a long time to be altered, this susceptibility to trends could be problematic, and often led to over- and under-estimates of the amount of change that might occur in a certain field.

One of the major themes in the literature is the idea that planning possessed a lot of autonomy in decision-making, but was essentially hubristic in not appreciating the limits to its ability to realise its ambitions. This view took a classical conservative interpretation in Elie Kedourie's essay 'The Crossman Confessions'.¹⁵ He describes 'arbitrariness' as 'synonymous with planning', and states that '...arbitrary decisions are no doubt taken out of benevolence, out of a desire to do good. But it does not follow that they will do good or in the end satisfy the powerful benevolent urges of those who seek to take them.'¹⁶ His argument hinges on the limits to knowledge that prevent plans from coming to fruition, and is essentially a criticism of 'over-government', which in his opinion is a futile, but nevertheless harmful, exercise in wishful thinking.¹⁷ The work of Norman Dennis is in many ways a more in-depth exposition of Kedourie's arguments.¹⁸ He states that the bureaucracy in Sunderland 'planned as if the future were not uncertain and ignored the limits set by its inability either to predict influences which had not yet disclosed themselves or to control the conditions necessary for the fulfilment of their schemes.'¹⁹ The weakness of these kinds of argument is in their seemingly unwitting construction of a contradiction between the overweening ambitions and patrician disregard of a powerful planning bureaucracy, and its inability to translate the powerful position it found itself in to the achievement of its aims. In essence, there is little awareness of the wider role of planning in society and in the post-war state, and thus it seems in the work of Kedourie, Dennis, Ravetz et al, to be an independent, almost

¹⁵ Elie Kedourie, 'The Crossman Confessions' in *The Crossman Confessions and Other Essays* (London, Mansell, 1984)

¹⁶ Ibid, p.8

¹⁷ Ibid, p.13

¹⁸ Dennis, *Public Participation and Planner's Blight*

¹⁹ Ibid, pp.243-244

parasitic, 'estate' within the wider government and bureaucratic apparatus, but one which seemed to appear without cause or necessary function.

In opposition to those stressing the pernicious nature of planning's autonomy are arguments that stress the limits of the very role of planners and not just their inability to achieve their aims. They make much more of an attempt to locate planning in the wider decision-making process and analyse its role within urban politics as a whole. Castells effectively shares the opinion of Kedourie and Dennis that planning has a 'weak technical function', but asserts that its increased significance in the 1960s and 1970s was due to a broader social function within the processes of urban change, describing the role of a planner as 'much more that of an intermediary than that of a technician.'²⁰ He adds that '(the planner) uses the prestige of neutrality and technical competence to present himself as a professional and "scientist" above conflict, and as such is in a comfortable position to arbitrate between the various social partners.'²¹ I feel he minimises the technical role of planning, but this argument does at least try to explain why planning plays an important part in urban governance despite the frustration or incompleteness of many of its technical schemes. In a related argument Tim Verlaan points out that historians have focused too heavily on the role of planners, '...dismissing the political interaction between the different stakeholders and the public at large.'²² He stresses that 'urban renewal coalitions' consisted of politicians, civil servants, businessmen and other professional experts, rather than just planners, and that these coalitions were not static but '...were subject to socio-economic change, financial restraint, changing resonances of expert discourses and the alleged public good, which contributed to the doubtful mindsets of elected representatives in particular.'²³ Verlaan also provides an important reminder that urban planning processes were influenced as much if not more by a fear of not responding adequately to social, economic and cultural change than they were by visions of a 'brave new world'.

²⁰ Castells, *City, Class and Power* pp.84-85

²¹ Ibid.

²² Verlaan, 'Dreading the Future', p.538

²³ Ibid, p.539

For cities to adapt to the pace of socio-economic development in the post-war era it was inevitable that expertise would need to be applied in the field of planning the spatial and physical forms of the urban environment. This was essential in providing a framework for the city to develop in and guidance as to what changes would be necessary in the future, so planners were a vital part of the process of modernisation. As professional people, planners had their own assumptions as to how a future society should look, but operated in a context where social and economic issues dictated certain paths, and where political and bureaucratic conflicts outside their control affected the course that plans would take and what type of change was actually realised. That planning was sometimes divorced from the feelings and experiences of sections of the public was not the fault of planners as much as that of political processes that were unable to involve the wider population in the planning process, and the difficulty of controlling private property interests and capitalist economic changes. In certain parts of the post-war period the context was favourable and planners were able to achieve the kind of changes they desired. By the 1970s they had reached the point of reacting to events and lacking the faith that the urban environment could be moulded in the sort of rational, far-seeing ways that the profession hoped for in its more optimistic moments.

Chapter Two: Leeds—Post War Context



Lincoln Field Grove, Burmantofts, 1958. The photograph of these houses was taken as part of the evidence for the Compulsory Purchase Order that led to their demolition. (WYAS, Leeds, LC/ENG/CP/Box 40/36)

Policy might be of national origin, and intellectual and technological fashion even take on international influences, but planning was still heavily dependent on what went on at the city level. Within the framework of legislation local councils played a major part in the decision-making process, and were to be affected by the local context. Leeds had various political, social, economic and physical idiosyncrasies that shaped the development of its residential areas. These included such things as the behaviour of local political parties, the extent of the city boundaries, the existence of a massive proportion of back-to-back housing compared to other cities, and the history of mining in the south and east of the city, where fear of subsidence created difficulties with construction. This chapter intends to describe some of the factors that provided the background to the transformation of Leeds' residential environment.

In the post-war era Leeds was one of the major provincial cities of Britain. It had been a county borough since 1889, and the 1951 census gave it a population of 505,219. Like other local authorities Leeds saw a shuffling of its functions after the Second World War. Some responsibilities were shifted to the national level or on to new public corporations, the major ones being health, gas and electricity, but existing functions like education and housing were to be transformed as central government gave councils the job of extending public provision to unprecedented levels. Significantly, the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act made Leeds a planning authority, giving it the responsibility of developing a plan for land use across its whole area, and imposing development control according to the lines of the plan. These changes were to give Leeds a major role in the future of its built environment in the post-war years.

In terms of party politics in the period 1954-1979, there was at first a period of stability, then from 1967 shifts occurred largely in response to national trends. Labour had regained control of the council in 1953 and remained the majority party until 1967, when the Conservatives gained control. Conservative dominance was established in 1968, when boundary changes brought the entire council up for election, and the national trend was reflected in a landslide victory. The 1970s saw a Labour majority in 1972 followed by no overall control in the new Leeds Metropolitan District Council from 1974 to 1976, after which the Conservatives were once again able to form a majority administration. The impact of these results was not usually particularly momentous, though the 1967 and 1968 elections were more significant. The Conservatives used their 1967 victory as an opportunity to reshape council procedure, the beginning of a concerted 'modernisation' programme, while the 1968 vote saw the election of the first Liberal councillors since the war. The reinvigoration of the Liberals was accompanied by populist attacks on the 'establishment' parties and an emphasis on community politics, which arguably contributed to an increased focus on local issues and a decrease in the legitimacy of the council amongst many citizens.

The administration of housing policy generally tended not to involve a great deal of upheaval. Housing Chairman was one of the prize political appointments, and usually went to a leading figure in the Labour or Conservative parties. The

longest serving and most high profile Housing chair was Karl Cohen, who held the position from 1956 to 1967. First elected as a Labour councillor in 1945, he represented Armley Ward from 1952 to 1968, then Burmantofts from 1970 to his sudden death in 1973 while occupying the role of Planning Chairman. He was a solicitor and for a time headed the Housing Committee of the Association of Municipal Corporations, which contributed towards him being awarded a knighthood in 1968. Richard Crossman, the Minister for Housing and Local Government from 1964 to 1966, described Cohen as a ‘dominant personality controlling Leeds housing’ and said that he ran the housing chairmanship ‘very much as his personal possession.’¹ His Conservative successor was Irwin Bellow, chairman of Bellow Machine Company, who was first elected in 1965 and occupied the Housing Chair from 1967 to 1972. He followed this by becoming leader of the Leeds MDC in 1975, his reputation for frugal spending catching the eye of his national party and winning him a life peerage and promotion to the Thatcher government in 1979 as Minister for Local Government. Bellow was briefly followed as council leader by Peter Sparling, another solicitor who served as Housing Chair from 1975 to 1979.

The biographies of these figures demonstrate their stature and that of their role, which was of some significance at a local, and sometimes a national, level. This impression is magnified when the two leaders of the council from 1958 to 1975 are included. Albert King, who occupied the position from 1958 to 1967, and again from 1972 to 1975, was knighted in 1975, while Frank Marshall, the council leader from 1967 to 1972, was knighted in 1971. He left his position as Conservative group leader in 1973 to become chairman of the Maplin Development Corporation which had the job of building London’s third airport, and received a life peerage in 1980. These examples provide some credence to Hartley’s statement that party politics in Leeds was not ideological or interest-based, but ‘provided a framework for individuals to practise their skills and fulfil their ambitions.’² More bluntly, and with a distinct touch of metropolitan snobbery, a London City Council architect who moved to work in Leeds in the

¹ Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Volume One* p.127, January 13th 1965

² Owen Hartley, ‘The Second World War and After, 1939-74’ in *A History of Modern Leeds*, edited by Derek Fraser (Manchester, 1980), p.438

late 1950s described the leading councillors as ‘blustering, coarse heavy men who were extremely ambitious—60% proof personal ambition, to get knighthoods or hold the Mayor’s mace!’³

Continuity at political level was mirrored within the council administration. In the immediate post-war period the dominant figure in housing policy was the City Architect, R.A.H. Livett. He arrived in Leeds as Housing Director in 1934 and, after establishing his reputation by designing the modernist Quarry Hill Flats in the late 1930s, was made the first City Architect in 1946. He had a reputation for favouring flats, and his obituary said ‘he constantly urged the need to build higher’.⁴ After Livett’s death in 1959 he was replaced by J.R. Sheridan-Shedden, another man known for the design of flats. He left to become Birmingham City Architect in 1964, and on his death in 1966 the Yorkshire Evening Post commented that he was ‘renowned for his happy knack of securing co-ordination so as to get big jobs done.’⁵ This suggested that management and administration were held to be as significant to the role as architectural skills in this period. Diplomacy and assertiveness were also important traits, as the bureaucracy was by no means unified during this period. Housing and Planning involved the input of figures ranging from the City Architect and City Engineer, who were responsible for the more technical aspects of policy, through the Town Clerk, as the chief legal officer, and the more administrative role of the Director of Housing, to the profession of Medical Officer of Health, in charge of the sanitary aspects of the urban environment. The legal and professional imperatives of these positions often led to conflicts in the internal politics of the council.

The role of the leading council bureaucrats was very important, as their technical expertise was judged to be vital in making as well as implementing policy, and theirs were full-time positions as opposed to the part-time councillors. Their influence was greater in certain fields and at certain times. Housing was a more popular issue than most others, and one that impacted more on the councillors’ relationship with their constituents. This meant that there was more political input

³ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p.166

⁴ *YEP*, 21/09/1959

⁵ *YEP*, 20/05/1966

when it came to policy and setting priorities and, as one of the major political figures, the Housing Chairman held more power *vis-à-vis* the leading council officials. In planning the situation was different. Hartley argues that there was little party and councillor interest in the subject, and that ‘major proposals were made and implemented without arousing more than the faintest political interest.’⁶ The longer term focus of planning probably contributed towards its public disregard, along with the fact that implementation took place on a piecemeal basis and often involved a great deal of revision. Planning did receive more public attention after the creation of the Leeds Metropolitan District in 1974 and the drawing up of local plans for districts such as Hunslet and Stourton, in response to the promptings of the Town and Country Planning Act of 1968. Nevertheless, public participation was never seriously attempted in the field of planning to the extent that it was in housing.

The biggest shift in the relationship between the elected and bureaucratic sides of the council took place when the Conservative administration embarked upon a ‘corporate’ style restructuring process in 1967. The main reforms involved a decrease in the number of committees from 26 to 11, reduction in the frequency of council meetings from 12 a year to 7 with a six-weekly cycle of committee meetings, and increased delegation of certain powers and duties of the council to committees, sub-committees and chief officers. These changes were intended to improve efficiency and speed of decision-making within the council, and Council Leader Frank Marshall argued that ‘high powered’ chief officers were paid ‘to boss their own departments, because their own departments are administrative and executive. It is easy to make the policy. The officers and their departments execute the policy.’⁷ He claimed that the proposals had been made before the publication of the Maud Report on Local Government, but that they corresponded with its findings. Labour responded by saying that the previous arrangements had worked well for them, and that the Conservatives were passing Council responsibility over to the bureaucracy, but they kept the system when they regained control in 1972. Coupled with the concentration of major policy in a

⁶ Hartley; ‘The Second World War and After’, p. 454

⁷ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports* (July 1967), p.52

new Finance and Planning Committee, the new structure did represent a centralisation of authority in a smaller group of senior councillors and officials and, contrary to Marshall's stated aspirations, heavily involved the 'high powered' officers in the creation as well as the implementation of policy. The streamlining was also intended to be an integral part of the modernisation process that would create 'The Motorway City of the Seventies'.

After the 1974 local government reorganisation Leeds became a Metropolitan District Council under the West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council. Leeds retained control over housing, but planning functions were split between the two authorities, with 'strategic' planning decisions emanating from County Hall in Wakefield. Responsibility for trunk roads was also taken from Leeds. The 'corporate' transformation of the council bureaucracy was continued, though the streamlining process did not particularly impact on residential Leeds, which was affected by the processes of at least four committees, and the input of bureaucrats including the Director of Housing, Director of Architecture and Landscape, Director of Public Works, Director of Planning, Chief Environmental Health Officer, Director of Administration and the Director of Estates and Development. Despite losing some of its status, Leeds did see a significant increase in its boundaries, which raised the population of the local authority from 500,000 to approximately 700,000. The social and political background of the district stayed roughly the same, with the prosperous commuter and country areas added on the Northern boundary balanced by the mining villages of the South and East, and the old industrial boroughs of Morley and Pudsey. These latter areas were the ones that received more attention with regard to their housing. The evidence suggests that these administrative changes did little to alter the trends in housing and planning within Leeds, with the general financial situation having more of an impact at this stage.

Informal political action on local issues was relatively limited within Leeds at the start of this period. Associations representing groups of private householders were occasionally active in attempting to resist the incursion of new housing⁸, but

⁸ *YP*, 24/09/1955 and 01/03/1956; *YEP*, 05/07/1956 and 11/07/1956

there is little evidence of tenant organisation within slum areas, and tenants' associations on public housing estates tended to stick to social activities. In the later 1960s more local groups were formed to campaign on issues relating to housing, a trend that mushroomed through the 1970s. Most of these groups were narrow in aim and intended to resist clearance proposals or road schemes. There were also organisations that sought to encourage the council into improving local environments that suffered from design or construction flaws. In some areas, such as Chapeltown and Woodhouse, community associations were established that were wider in scope and demanded to be involved in local decision-making on a range of residential issues. They were brought into consultation with the council, but had quite a rocky relationship with council bureaucrats and occasionally their local councillors.⁹ The Leeds Civic Trust was founded in 1965 as a non-partisan body, campaigning on issues affecting the social and physical environment. They were drawn into a more political function in the 1970s, raising matters related to older housing and helping to co-ordinate and give support to local organisations that were campaigning against urban renewal.¹⁰ The council's connections with these community groups tended to wax and wane. They could gain valuable information about feeling within areas of Leeds, but were often unwilling or unable to give serious consideration to their demands.

Mass immigration was to be one of the major features of the post-war era to impact on urban Britain, and Leeds was no exception. Groups of Poles, Ukrainians, Indians, Pakistanis and West Indians all made the city their home in the post-war era. The main area to receive immigrants was Chapeltown, formerly a middle-class residential district which had also seen many Jewish immigrants reside there in the earlier years of the twentieth century. Chapeltown was to become quite significant in regard to Leeds' housing on account of the fact that it was the area that first saw the conversion and improvement of older housing take place under local authority auspices.¹¹ As a result of this history and its current

⁹ See Leeds, WYAS, WYL5041/41/10 'Participation' in Chapeltown, Woodhouse Housing Action Group, *Which Way Woodhouse?* (May 1976), Leeds City Council, *Gradual Renewal and its Application to Woodhouse* (June 1978), and Leeds City Council, *Gradual Renewal and its Application to Woodhouse: Report of the Directors of Administration, Architecture and Landscape, Environmental Health, and Housing and Planning* (19th December 1978).

¹⁰ See the group's newsletter, Leeds Civic Trust, *Outlook*

¹¹ See the chapter on 'Clearance and Improvement' for further details.

population mix, Chapeltown was the focus of a 1970 study commissioned by the Institute of Race Relations.¹²

The author, Christopher Duke, described Leeds as a model housing authority ‘in many ways’, ‘where the acceptance and integration of coloured newcomers could be effected with minimal discomfort.’¹³ He saw the conversion schemes in Chapeltown in terms of the preservation of potentially good housing that was threatened with decay, rather than as a reaction to the spread of the immigrant population within the area.¹⁴ His study, which focused on particular areas bordering Leopold Street and Roundhay Road, was described as ‘an example of clearance in a cosmopolitan area by an unusually good housing authority’, and found no evidence of blatant racial discrimination such as that unearthed in other cities.¹⁵ Indeed, the major issue seemed to surround the ethics of allowing too great a concentration of coloured tenants in Chapeltown as against trying to direct them against their will to other areas of the city in order to avoid ‘ghettoisation’.¹⁶ Leeds, ‘unlike Birmingham’, is held to be a city that ‘was and is not generally defined as a city with a “colour problem”, despite its estimated coloured population of 12,000 in 1967.’¹⁷

It seems that racial issues played relatively little role in the transformation of residential Leeds. Shortly after Duke’s study Chapeltown became the focus of some vigorous local campaigns, but while many revolved around housing, this was not linked directly with racial concerns. Max Farrar, subsequently a sociologist but then a committed local activist, has identified two phases of local community action, based around his own experiences of the Chapeltown Community Association. He describes an earlier period from 1971 to 1973 focused on reform of local social and environmental grievances, of which housing was one of the main issues, and a spell from 1973 to 1975 which had more of a libertarian socialist orientation, which sought alliances with black

¹² Christopher Duke, *Colour and Rehousing: A Study of Redevelopment in Leeds* (London, Institute of Race Relations, 1970)

¹³ Ibid, p.13

¹⁴ Ibid, p.12

¹⁵ Ibid, p.71

¹⁶ Ibid, pp.72-76

¹⁷ Ibid, p.12

radical groups, and which was more confrontational in nature.¹⁸ Both strands of community action saw themselves as multi-racial, but were predominantly white in composition with some staunch black participants. Issues relating to race and identity did achieve a great deal of significance in Chapeltown during the 1970s, notably regarding relationships with the police, but local campaigning on housing and planning issues tended to adopt a radical approach that had relatively little to do with racial discrimination.¹⁹

One of the most important factors that should not be overlooked is the weight of history. Leeds had a reputation as a Victorian city at a time when this was considered to be a major disadvantage in terms of aesthetics and infrastructure. Central to this was the predominance of a certain type of housing, the back-to-back. These dwellings had evolved in Leeds in response to the form and pattern of landownership, but construction of them achieved such momentum that, even after they were officially banned in 1909, as the legislation did not apply to streets approved before the Act, back-to-backs continued to be built until 1937.²⁰ The standards of back-to-backs differed according to when they were built, but they were generally seen as an obsolete form of housing well before the 1930s. Tackling the unusually poor nature of much of Leeds' housing had been something of a crusade for the first Housing Chairman in Leeds, the Labour councillor Revd Charles Jenkinson. Appointed in 1933, he was instrumental in cataloguing slums that were judged to be in dire need of replacement on what became known as the 'Red Ruin' map. These houses had only partly been dealt with before the Second World War, and provided the basis of Leeds' slum clearance efforts well into the 1960s. Jenkinson and R.A.H. Livett also provided Leeds with impetus for the future in their planning of Quarry Hill Flats, built in the late 1930s as one of the first large comprehensive redevelopment schemes in British inner cities, and a prototype for much of what was to come.

¹⁸ Max Farrar, *The struggle for 'community' in a British multi-ethnic inner-city area: paradise in the making* (Lampeter, Edwin Mellen, 2002) pp.183-189

¹⁹ For references to some of Chapeltown's campaigns on housing and planning issues, see the chapter on 'Housing Construction and Production (Part Two)'.

²⁰ Maurice Beresford, 'The Back-to-back House in Leeds, 1787-1937' in *Time and Place* (London, 1984) p.369

Since the Industrial Revolution Leeds had been one of the leading provincial cities in Britain, and this provided it with rivals both with regard to economic competition and civic pride. In the post-war period Leeds was to compare its performance frequently with other cities when it came to demolition and building rates, and it was important just how eye-catching and pioneering the latest public housing schemes were. Karl Cohen was to state proudly in December 1962 that Leeds had demolished more slum property than any other housing authority in the country, bar London.²¹ Later comparisons were less concerned with cities like Sheffield, Manchester or Liverpool, and showed an increasing concern for the widening 'North-South divide'. When reappraising Leeds' housing situation in the early 1970s, council officials judged it 'vital to raise housing standards in inner Leeds until the point is reached that they do not offer markedly inferior conditions to the high growth areas of the Midlands and South.'²² In an age of innovation in methods, technique and style, Leeds was to find it crucial to establish an image as a progressive city that was casting off its past. This modernisation of image was to find its first practical application in the resumption of the slum clearance process.

²¹ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports* (December 1962), p.98

²² LCC, *Older Housing in Leeds: An Assessment of Redevelopment Potential and Priorities. Volume 2- Formulation of Strategies* (January 1972), p.14

Chapter Three: Clearance and Improvement, 1954-1970



Back to Backs, Harehills, 1953. A layout typical of many areas of Leeds. (Leeds Library and Information Service, www.leodis.net)

To sum up post-war housing policy in the most straightforward way, it could be said that the major issues involved how to deal with the current aging housing stock while rapidly expanding the supply of modern dwellings in the increasing numbers required. On closer inspection, though, the complexity becomes evident. Given finite amounts of money, resources and labour, the two priorities had to be balanced, but expectations of what housing policy should aspire to achieve were constantly rising. In the mid-1950s the overwhelming problem of the existing housing stock was deemed to be a public health one, making sure that housing was fit to live in. The input of planners, architects and politicians broadened conceptions further, and older housing often came to be considered both incompatible with modern standards of living, and inappropriate as a general

environment for healthy, efficient social life. Cities like Leeds were in a position where they were legally and morally obliged to eliminate slum housing conditions, politically and professionally inclined to seek a modern, rationally-planned built environment, but often financially and administratively unsuited to carrying these objectives out in a straightforward manner acceptable to the whole community. Indeed, the nature of the slum clearance drive was to lead to differences over the very concept of modernisation, with division between those who wanted the worst excesses removed but essentially a ‘renovation’ of the old Leeds, and those who felt a clean slate was necessary to reap the benefits of modern life. Dealing with older housing in Leeds was a task that was to involve adjustments in response to legal, financial, environmental, social and political constraints, but nonetheless one that saw much progress made and many interesting expedients used.

Systematic clearance of slum housing for public health reasons first started in the Victorian era, but did not achieve a great deal of momentum until the inter-war period. Accompanied by legislation that defined conditions such as ‘unfitness’ and overcrowding, codified procedures for compulsory purchase, and introduced subsidies for rehousing, a slum clearance ‘boom’ occurred in the 1930s, culminating in 1939 with the demolition of almost 90,000 houses across England and Wales.¹ Leeds cleared 3098 of its slum dwellings in 1939, a figure that was never to be reached in any single year of the post-1945 period.² This ‘boom’ was interrupted by the Second World War, when a more crude form of slum clearance from the air caused shortages of housing and a more pressing need for attention to be given to short-term repair. By March 1954, with construction of new housing progressing quickly, the government felt able to encourage local authorities to recommence their slum clearance programmes. At this stage there was a consensus of opinion that demolition and redevelopment was the best way of dealing with the problem of substandard housing. This acceptance was to come into question by the 1960s, when it appeared that clearance was unable to keep pace with the constant upward trend in the number of houses considered to be

¹ English, Madigan and Norman, *Slum Clearance*, pp.10-25

² Leeds City Council, *Annual Reports of Committees*, 1940-41

unfit.³ This revelation led to more interest in the improvement of unfit housing, a phenomenon which had been given a legislative basis and a system of grants in 1949, but which had been considered merely as a kind of palliative ‘patching’ by councils. Leeds, however, was a pioneer in the renovation of older housing, and the uneasy relationship between clearance and improvement was established in the city well before it had become a concern for central government.

There were several issues concerning slum clearance and housing improvement that were always present but never quite resolved during this period. Clearance was undoubtedly the most thorough and effective way of transforming housing conditions in a city. What made it so advantageous in this way also meant that it was a highly disruptive and difficult to understand process for many people living in these areas. As English, Madigan and Norman have stated, ‘Slum clearance puts the ordinary citizen in a position of extreme dependence relative to his local authority. In carrying out a clearance scheme a council decides not only that people are to leave their homes but where and in what conditions they are to be rehoused.’⁴ The procedures involved and the legislative framework that had to be followed encouraged the bureaucratisation of slum clearance, which councils judged to be necessary for reasons of efficiency and legal standing, but which left residents feeling themselves to be caught in a very impersonal process with little access to information about their position. Tenants were not legally required to be informed of most stages of the slum clearance process, and had no legal right to object to a compulsory purchase order. This situation was one that created both feelings of powerlessness but also of resentment, and this second emotion was to ultimately lead to political action. One of the other major controversies affecting demolition was the issue of compulsory purchase and compensation. The earlier phases of slum clearance had mostly affected private landlords, who were in decline during the post-war era in the face of rent control and a lack of wider political sympathy. As demolition progressed, however, compulsory purchase orders took in more owner-occupied housing, much of which had been purchased from landlords in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite the extension of more generous

³ English, Madigan and Norman, *Slum Clearance*, p.38

⁴ *Ibid*, pp.9-10

compensation terms to owner-occupiers by the late 1960s, there was some discontent among them as the compensation received was frequently still too low to enable them to buy another house, and they were forced to seek council rehousing. Both owner-occupiers and tenants displaced by slum clearance were often daunted by the increased cost of council rents compared to what they had been used to paying.⁵

As far as improvement was concerned, the problems that were confronted essentially involved the difficulty in targeting renovation on the most appropriate housing, and the need to ensure that improvement took place comprehensively on an area basis, rather than wasting resources on individual houses when the condition of others left streets continuing to deteriorate. Leeds dealt with area improvement of houses very well, but found it more difficult to extend their expertise to environmental improvement when this became fashionable in the later 1960s. This was partly due to the unusual nature of Leeds' housing stock, but also because of the conflict between ideas of improvement as a temporary expedient or as a more enduring solution to the problems of 'twilight areas'.

Slum clearance in Leeds remained fairly limited until 1933, when Leeds' Labour Council decided to embark on an ambitious project of clearance. Led by the influential Housing Chairman, Charles Jenkinson, the council produced a map which coloured houses red that were judged ripe for demolition. Wide areas were shaded and it became known as the 'Red Ruin' map. The most notable district to be cleared in the 1930s was Quarry Hill to the east of the city centre, and it was to see the building of the landmark Quarry Hill Flats development in the later years of the decade.⁶ The outbreak of war put an end to the clearance programme, and housing policy directly after the war had concentrated on providing houses on greenfield sites. It was judged by the government that enough houses had been provided in the early 1950s, and ample resources were available, to allow slum

⁵ Ibid, pp. 60-70 and Murie, Niner and Watson, *Housing Policy and the Housing System* pp. 232-250

⁶ Michael Meadowcroft, 'The Years of Political Transition, 1914-1939' in Fraser (ed.) *A History of Modern Leeds*; Gibson and Langstaff, *An Introduction to Urban Renewal*, Chapter Eight 'Leeds Leads'

clearance to begin again by 1954.⁷ Housing subsidies were adjusted accordingly so that public housing was encouraged to replace slum property, with other types of housing intended to be provided by private developers. With its 'Red Ruin' programme only partially dealt with before World War Two, Leeds was in a good position to adapt to the new policy. The situation was quite urgent, as the houses condemned in the early 1930s had suffered another twenty years of deterioration, while older housing in general had become more dilapidated owing to lack of manpower and materials, which had been prioritised by the house building programme.⁸

The task of clearing the mass of substandard housing was a massive one which would take years to achieve. As such, it was realised after the war that some form of rehabilitation would be needed to make older housing fit to live in for the short to medium term. In 1949 a Housing Act introduced the concept of an improvement grant that could provide landlords and owner-occupiers with fifty percent of the cost of building work. Landlords were subsequently allowed to make a small increase in rent for an improved property.⁹ In the immediate term this incentive wasn't enough and take-up rates were low. One of the main problems was that landlords and occupiers were reluctant to spend money on individual houses if other houses in the vicinity were unimproved and therefore their own property would not increase greatly in value. As a result, it was considered that some sort of area improvement might need to take place whereby the status and standards of housing in a certain locality could be improved on a wider basis. Leeds was to be one of the pioneers of this kind of approach.

From the point of view of the planners, slum clearance provided a clean slate for the projects of the future. Clearance of individual properties or small groups had occurred frequently, but from 1954 demolition was normally to be the prelude to large-scale redevelopment. Most of the time the sites were intended to be used for building more modern housing, but they could also be cleared for public open

⁷ Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, pp. 95-97; Short, *Housing in Britain: The Post-war Experience*, pp. 48-51

⁸ Gibson and Langstaff, *An Introduction to Urban Renewal*

⁹ English, Madigan and Norman, *Slum Clearance*, pp.22-24

space, commercial or industrial development, or to allow for road projects. When representing properties for slum clearance the main consideration was that the Medical Officer of Health needed to find the house unfit for human habitation. The Housing (Repairs and Rents) Act of 1954 laid out a new standard definition of unfitness, which stated that a house was to be deemed unfit if it was judged not reasonably suitable for occupation due to defects in one or more conditions. These included repair, stability, freedom from damp, natural lighting, ventilation, water supply, drainage and sanitary conditions, and facilities for preparation and cooking of food and for disposal of waste water. This last condition was taken out in 1969, but internal arrangement was added.¹⁰ The Medical Officer of Health was to decide whether properties fell into these categories, and much more often than not he was backed at a Public Local Inquiry. Nonetheless, given the legal niceties involved and the procedures that needed to be followed, a shortage of skilled technical and legal staff could often slow the process of clearance.¹¹ Where the council was able to make a good case, procedurally the application of the legislation was quite smooth, but given that the judgements made were quite subjective, they were to become more controversial at a political level. This situation would become especially acute as general housing standards and expectations increased, and planners came to see themselves as arbiters of the acceptability of types of housing.

When areas were earmarked for clearance, the council acquired two types of property. 'Pink' properties were those regarded as unfit, and the owners received compensation only for the site value, with an additional allowance if the property was judged to be 'well-maintained'. 'Grey' properties were those that, while not ripe for demolition due to their physical failings, needed to be knocked down on practical grounds to enable a convenient site to be created for future development. The council was obliged to pay full market value for these properties. Practically all Compulsory Purchase Orders were to see objections on the grounds of fitness, as many owners were eager to gain 'grey' status and a higher level of compensation. There was also the same desire to see unfit

¹⁰ English, Madigan and Norman, *Slum Clearance*, p.46

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.27

properties marked down as ‘well-maintained’, a status which could see a payment granted to either owner or tenant, depending on who was judged to have created this condition.¹² The council were often willing to accept this if it meant a smoother passage for the CPO. Apportioning properties was not a straightforward job, and the council was warned at quite an early stage by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government that they were ‘concerned at the amount of ‘grey’ property included in Leeds’ compulsory purchase orders and they asked that the City Council should limit ‘grey’ properties to those which they can say with reasonable certainty are required for the redevelopment of the ‘pink’ property within a reasonable period and take care to prove the need for them at any inquiries.’¹³

The vision of the planners and their assumptions were evident in many of the responses that they gave to objections that arose from CPOs. It was clear that the goal was to clear sites in a way that was to make redevelopment as easy as possible, and it was hoped to avoid having to retain any infrastructure that might act as an obstacle to reconstruction. At the public inquiry into the Camp Road CPO of 1958 the Chief Assistant Surveyor answered objections to the demolition of a group of shops by stating that ‘its exclusion from the order would mean that an area of future Open Space for the neighbourhood would not be available to the public and that shops would be left in a position detached from residential development.’ Another frequent claim was that the retention of certain properties would lead to the ‘sterilisation’ of land, which in this case ‘would result in the deletion of some 60 flats from the proposed development.’ Aesthetics were also a major feature of the planners’ desire to start from a blank page. One objection was countered by saying that ‘it would be an isolated building of low standard among modern redevelopment. Its acquisition is held to be reasonably necessary for proper redevelopment and provision of amenity.’¹⁴

¹² Ibid, pp. 55-70

¹³ Leeds, WYAS, Redevelopment and Housing, LLD1/2/817233, (Memo from MHLG, 25/06/1956)

¹⁴ Leeds, WYAS, Little London (Camp Road) Compulsory Purchase Order 1958 Public Local Inquiry 10/02/1959 LLD1/2/831060. (Account of Leeds’ Chief Assistant Surveyor)

Keeping up with the requirements of 'modern' society also played a part in the plans for clearance in the Lovell Park and Little London area. Leeds' Chief Assistant Planning Officer declared that the area needed to be developed to deal 'with the conditions of bad layout and obsolete development. The most satisfactory way of dealing with conditions in this area is to bring the land into single ownership.'¹⁵ There was also further evidence of the planners' desire to reshape the Lovell Park/North Street area and change its function somewhat. Some local businesses had objected to the proposals and were concerned about the lack of provision for small industrial and retail concerns in the plans for the locality. The Chief Assistant Surveyor was adamant, however, that 'the existence of central area type shopping and industrial and warehouse premises on an outward traffic route from the city centre, may have been a desirable feature in the late Victorian and Edwardian years, before the motorcar and self-propelled traffic grew to the proportions that are with us today....North Street will in the future become a one-way traffic road for outward bound vehicles and therefore shops along its fringe would be an undesirable feature'¹⁶. Again, 'modernity' was the motivation, or at least the defence, for the comprehensive redevelopment of the area.

These examples might give the impression that planners were very powerful and enjoyed great freedom to shape the environment. In reality they did face a lot of constraints. This could be seen in the plans for Little London, when central government had a great deal of input into proceedings. One of the major reasons for this was the type of procedure that the council decided to use. The Minister in Whitehall ultimately had to approve all Compulsory Purchase Orders before they could be acted on, but in the vast majority of cases this was basically a rubber stamp action. This applied when housing was acquired under the 1936 Housing Act, but if the land was to be taken into council ownership as a Comprehensive Development Area under the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, 'planning and redevelopment become subject to a greater degree of control by the MHLG

¹⁵ Leeds, WYAS, Lovell Park and Little London CPO 1965 Public Local Inquiry 10/05/1966 LLD1/2/835375

¹⁶ Ibid.

than is the case under the Housing Acts.’¹⁷ The advantage to declaring a Comprehensive Development Area was that it made it much easier to acquire properties, particularly as there were a lot of ‘grey’ houses which, in the Medical Officer of Health’s words, ‘are not in a sufficiently bad condition to require immediate demolition...and many of these houses would normally be retained for several years’¹⁸. The council’s wish for a more manageable site and a smoother clearance process did mean that they were faced with a number of frustrating meetings with officials from the Ministry, who suggested greater provision of public open space and playing fields, and more private garages.¹⁹

The planning community was occasionally prone to disagreements and disputes, whether over procedural matters or in a more professional sense. In the Bagby Fields Compulsory Purchase Order there were a number of ‘grey’ properties that were to be used as public open space in the redevelopment of the area. The owners objected to this and wanted to know what changes they could make in order to preserve their properties. The planners were quite agreeable to this suggestion, but the Medical Officer of Health was disappointed that his recommendation for clearance had not been backed up in the case of this site ‘in a fringe area which is physically capable of detachment from the main area, and when the case on the grounds of unfitness is not the strongest in the whole area...the site is a very poor one. The streets slope steeply and to the north and they are overshadowed by the tall bulk of a busy factory on the south east side of Devon Road.’²⁰ The interesting thing was that he admitted that the legislation made no mention of the unsuitability of the site or the proximity to industry, but he thought that these were matters that should be considered. In the majority of cases the opinion of the Environmental Health department was a sufficient recommendation for a clearance order to be successful, but, as this case demonstrated, this depended on a position of unity from the planning professions.

¹⁷ Leeds, WYAS, Redevelopment in the Camp Road Area. LLD1/2/817225. (Meeting of officers, 03/09/1958)

¹⁸ Ibid, (Meeting of 29/06/1954)

¹⁹ Ibid, (Meeting of 14/09/1959)

²⁰ Leeds, WYAS, Bagby Fields Public Local Inquiry 27/07/1971. LLD1/2/840826

One of the practical problems with slum clearance was that there was quite an extended process between the actual representation of houses by the Medical Officer of Health, the compulsory purchase of the properties by the council, the demolition of the buildings, and the redevelopment of the site. The existence of blighted areas, derelict property, piles of rubble and unused waste ground was to be the source of a number of complaints from councillors and the public. After the clearance of part of the Woodhouse Cliff/Delph Lane area the council received complaints that the site of Delph Terrace was being used as a rubbish dump.²¹ There were some good reasons why these unfortunate situations arose. In response to a question from a councillor wanting assurance from the chairman of the Housing Committee that he would concentrate on clearing one area at a time and not deal with too many areas at once, he replied ‘there is the odd person in the block who will not move until a special house is provided. Should we, then, penalise the rest of the people living there?’²²

In fairness, these problems had been taken seriously by the council officers from quite an early stage. In July 1960 it was agreed that a detailed plan should be drawn up before the beginning of redevelopment.²³ A year later the Deputy Town Clerk commented that tenants should not be rehoused from clearance areas until the Compulsory Purchase Order had been confirmed. This was supported by the Works Department and Housing Department as it would be better financially and lessen the consequences of having empty houses in an area.²⁴ Nevertheless, the side-effects of the slum clearance programme were to remain, and by the end of the 1960s were to be the subject of greater political pressure within the council.

In March 1969 the Liberals put forward a motion in council to ‘try and ensure that areas are not demolished a long time before redevelopment, and that the council enables rehousing to take place before areas become derelict.’ Alderman Bellow, responding for the Conservatives, admitted that the process could be

²¹ Leeds, WYAS, Woodhouse Cliff/Delph Lane CPO 1961. LLD1/2/815933 (Meeting of officers, July 1965)

²² Leeds City Council, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, October 1962, p.57.

²³ Leeds, WYAS, Redevelopment and Housing 1956-64. LLD1/2/817233. (Meeting of officers, 21/07/1960)

²⁴ *Ibid*, (06/04/1961)

delayed, but he claimed this was due to the fact that tenants in clearance areas were given a choice over where they wanted to go, and were not arbitrarily rehoused at the council's convenience.²⁵ Issues relating to the dangerous or unsightly condition of clearance sites and long delays between buildings being vacated and demolished were also to be raised in October 1969 and April and July 1971. Again, the bureaucracy did look to deal with these problems, and in August 1971 a Working Party was set up 'to co-ordinate and plan more systematically the clearance of properties prior to redevelopment and to avoid as far as possible large numbers of empty dwellings remaining uncleared for long periods of time.'²⁶ They produced a report that proposed changes in procedures that would create manageable clearance areas which could be dealt with programmatically, but seemed to remain unconvinced that the troubles around the clearance process could be properly dealt with. The City Architect's Department said that shortage of labour was a problem, and emphasised 'that a pool of empty properties awaiting demolition is essential to maintain a steady workload.' It was also added that 'it is the persistent refusers and the selectors of accommodation in short supply who delay the completion of rehousing' and as a result, 'it is normally only practicable to demolish houses block by block and therefore if one or two houses in every street remain tenanted demolition cannot take place.'²⁷ It is likely that there was some scapegoating in these statements, but there were undoubtedly unavoidable problems connected with slum clearance which could at best be ameliorated rather than eliminated. This was to be an inevitable part of the clearance experience that many areas were to seek to avoid in the future by opposing compulsory purchase and redevelopment altogether.

In the more immediate term, objections to clearance of a more fundamental nature were seldom expressed. Landlords often opposed Compulsory Purchase Orders on the grounds that their properties were fit for purpose, but there was rarely any opposition to the principle of slum clearance or its application to wider areas. An objector to demolition in Woodhouse argued that 'the Council wishes

²⁵ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, March 1969, pp. 17-18.

²⁶ Leeds, WYAS, Demolitions and Clearance Redevelopment Working Group. LLD1/2/842663 (Meeting of 23/08/1971)

²⁷ *Ibid.*

to use its powers as overlords of the citizens of Leeds and to be the sole landlord of the City’, but also more soberly added that ‘the Council cannot offer properties to rent at anything like the cheap rents which the tenants enjoy, and it must also be pointed out that the Corporation properties, in the main, are scattered in outlying districts which causes the tenants considerable travel problems.’²⁸ This second point was one that was infrequently articulated at public inquiries, largely due to the fact that the procedure tended to focus on property-owners rather than tenants. Nonetheless, at this particular time those kinds of complaint found no organised outlet. Within the press the momentum of slum clearance was welcomed, even slightly criticised for being too slow. In 1958 a *Yorkshire*



Castleton Terrace, Armley, 1964. (West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, LC/ENG/CP/Box 1/28)

Evening News editorial welcomed the Housing Committee’s proposal to up the clearance rate by about forty per cent and argued that ‘there are houses in Leeds whose continued existence would be a scandal were it not for the brake in housebuilding caused by economic factors.’²⁹ In January 1960 the *Yorkshire Post*

²⁸ Leeds WYAS, Woodhouse Public Local Inquiry 27/09/1960. LLD1/2/831066

²⁹ *YEN*, 17/04/1958.

reported that 848 properties had been involved in one clearance inquiry, the biggest since the war, but there had been few objectors.³⁰

In 1963 a survey of people living in 914 houses in clearance areas within Leeds was published.³¹ Two-thirds of these houses were built before 1866, only eight per cent of the 914 were owner-occupied, sixty-three per cent had only cold water supplied, and seventy-one per cent had neither an inside lavatory or a bath. When asked if they were in favour of moving, eighty-two per cent replied in the affirmative, the most important reasons concerning dissatisfaction with the house and district. A lot of antagonism towards landlords was also commented on, mostly due to a reluctance to make repairs. Of those that were opposed, the converse was true and satisfaction with the dwelling and the area was the main reason given. Wilkinson and Sigsworth describe most of the latter residents as ‘elderly people averse to leaving a particular district, or people who had made considerable improvements to their houses, or both.’³² They compared the Leeds results to a similar survey in Liverpool that stated that thirty-six per cent did not want to move, and concluded that one reason might be that people in Liverpool were often rehoused in ‘overspill’ estates, while Leeds usually housed people within the city boundary.

The results of this survey suggest that demolition at that stage was still focused on old, demonstrably unfit housing, and that the prevailing opinion among residents was that they wanted better housing and environmental conditions. In his 1970 study *Colour and Rehousing* Christopher Duke stated that ‘what has been lost deserves few tears, and much now intended for demolition will probably be mourned, if at all, only by romantics who do not live there.’³³ Nevertheless, the feelings of those opposed to moving were to assume a greater prominence in years to come. The ‘injustice’ of uprooting elderly people was to become something of a cause celebre, and as more houses were improved by their owners there was seen to be less justification for them to be erased. A telling

³⁰ YP, 13/01/1960.

³¹ R.K. Wilkinson and E.M. Sigsworth, ‘A Survey of Slum Clearance Areas in Leeds’, *Yorkshire Bulletin of Social and Economic Research*, Vol. 15, No.1, May 1963.

³² Ibid.

³³ Duke, *Colour and Rehousing*, p.13

comment from Wilkinson and Sigsworth was that there were concerns about a lack of communication regarding the clearance process, another issue that was to become more significant in later years.

With an unusually large proportion of back-to-back housing in its stock, Leeds faced a problem when it came to post-war housing policy. These houses could not all be cleared immediately, and in many cases the problem was that they were relatively new houses that were not unfit from the point of view of dilapidation or physical condition, but that they were too small by modern standards and lacked sanitary facilities. As such, they were often prohibitively expensive for landlords and poorer owner-occupiers to improve. Also, like many major cities, Leeds had areas that had once been high-class environments with large villas and stately town-houses, but which had been vacated in the middle-class 'flight to the suburbs'. These houses were now often derelict or rented out to a number of tenants, a situation that became known as 'multi-occupation'. As these properties had not been designed for the use of multiple families, they were overcrowded and lacking in kitchen and bathroom facilities, but fundamentally still well-built houses.

In dealing with these houses Leeds was really engaging in conversion rather than improvement. Plans to use compulsory purchase to convert these properties had been made in 1951, but were shelved when the Conservatives took control of the council later that year. When Labour became majority party again in 1953 they proposed an Improvement Area for Louis Street in Chapeltown. The council would buy the houses and convert them to self-contained flats with modern facilities. Unfortunately, the process was to prove a slow one. Acquiring the properties took time, as did the progress of the quite specialised building work required. These troubles led to a switch in policy by 1957. Research had been carried out by the Environmental Health Officer on ventilation in back-to-back houses in Leeds, with regard to the possibilities of improvement. After seeing this research the MHLG approved the idea of grants for back-to-backs and acknowledged that the ubiquity of this type of housing created a special problem

for Leeds.³⁴ As a result, procedures for area improvement were devised. ‘The council made the first moves and were willing to purchase, or even to purchase compulsorily, if the owner was unable or unwilling to act. But their primary intention was to encourage primary improvements.’³⁵ The emphasis of improvement was now to be on back-to-backs, starting with the Hill Street and Lincoln Road area of Burmantofts. This was also intended to be a voluntary scheme with grants as a sufficient incentive, ‘but the response of landlords and owners was cautious so that, finally, 151 of the 174 suitable houses were purchased by the Corporation.’³⁶

This compulsory purchase aspect was to be one of the more controversial issues surrounding the conversion and improvement schemes, along with the time taken for the work and the means of carrying it out. In May 1956 Councillor Lyons



Louis Street, Chapeltown, 06/06/1950 (Leeds Library and Information Service, www.leodis.net)

³⁴ Leeds, Medical Officer for Health, *Report on the Health and Sanitary Administration of the City for the Year 1955*, p.129

³⁵ S. Pepper, *Housing Improvement: Goals and Strategy* (London, 1971) pp. 69-70

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.70

complained that the council should stop acquiring conversion properties ‘because the corporation is at the moment not able to handle them.’³⁷ Leeds’ method of housing improvement did cause some distinct ideological differences within the council. In July 1956 Karl Cohen defended the policy in strong terms, stating that large houses ‘instead of being looked after by their owners, instead of being repaired, are being let off room by room, basement by basement, as much rent extracted from that property, and nothing or hardly anything put back into it.’³⁸ He justified compulsory purchase by adding that he believed ‘that we are the better arbitrators of how such property should be used than is, apparently, private enterprise.’³⁹ This drew a complaint from the Tory Alderman Walker, who was disappointed by Cohen’s ‘attack’ on private landlords and claimed that they were restricted by rent controls.⁴⁰

The other major ideological issue was that the council’s improvements were carried out by direct labour. In May 1957 Alderman Hargrave complained about the estimated cost of improving houses in the Hill Street/Lincoln Road area and stated that the work should be put out to tender rather than carried out by the Works Department.⁴¹ Councillor Matthews responded with a strident defence of the direct labour section and stated that it was Labour Party policy to build up the Works Department so that it could carry out all the work needed by the Corporation.⁴² A month later Councillor Lyons claimed that improvement work should be competitively tendered for, but Councillor Happold replied from the more pragmatic point of view that ‘...this improvement work on these old houses is very difficult indeed; there are all sorts of odd, very difficult jobs to be done, and I think that is the reason why private builders have not found it attractive.’⁴³

³⁷ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, May 1956, p.26

³⁸ *Ibid*, July 1956, p.12

³⁹ *Ibid*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.14

⁴¹ *Ibid*, May 1957, p.29

⁴² *Ibid*, p.30

⁴³ *Ibid*, June 1957, pp.39-43

Eventually, by the mid-1960s the 'Leeds Method' was a fully functioning process, described by one commentator as 'highly efficient'⁴⁴. The objects of the area improvement policy were to secure greater use of improvement grants for suitable properties, to 'avoid a piecemeal peppering of improved houses while leaving adjoining houses dilapidated and unimproved, and ...to obtain the complete improvement of sizable areas or groups of adjacent houses which are sufficiently well built and have the capacity which justifies the operation.'⁴⁵ The Public Health Department would put one area each month forward for improvement and completions were made at a steady rate. The high rate of compulsory purchase orders that were required in the first Improvement Grant Areas had declined dramatically, something that was put down to personal interviewing of the owners by public health inspectors, while ordinary applications for improvement grants had increased dramatically from landlords rather than just owner-occupiers, a factor that was attributed to the success of the area improvement procedure.⁴⁶ By the late 1960s the Department was quite self-congratulatory and stated that the scheme's smooth running was down to the fact that 'owners and agents in Leeds now fully appreciate the advantages of comprehensive improvement.'⁴⁷

Ultimately, the major constraints on the planning process were to be political. Planners were working within a framework dictated by central government, both in terms of the legislation they were working to and the financial situation they were operating in. At a local level they had the advantage of technical expertise and procedural experience, but were still obliged to face the desires and concerns of elected local politicians, other council departments and, increasingly, the organised opposition of local communities. While possessing a substantial degree of leeway when it came to executing policy, the priorities and aims of policy were often influenced by councillors, in particular those on the Housing Committee. At other times, though, councillors were left impotent against the

⁴⁴ Pepper, *Housing Improvement: Goals and Strategy* p.93

⁴⁵ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1963/64* p.13

⁴⁶ Leeds, Medical Officer of Health, *Report on the Health of the City for the year 1962* pp.141-142

⁴⁷ Leeds, Medical Officer of Health, *Report on the Health of the City for the year 1968* p.63

bureaucratic and technical practices of the council departments, often backed by the leading council members and committee chairmen.

Political attitudes to slum clearance were fairly consensual at first, as it was generally accepted that there were a substantial number of houses that needed to be demolished, especially given that there had been a fifteen year period of deterioration since the start of World War Two. In Leeds itself there were still the remaining areas of the 'Red Ruin' map to tackle, and these were to receive the initial attention. The priorities and progress of the clearance process were largely left to the council officers to decide. Councillor Happold gave a typical statement of the attitude of the time when she said, 'the timing of our slum clearance programme depends on the priority that the Medical Officer of Health gives to the clearance of unfit houses, and is not determined by the use to which the land is to be put.'⁴⁸ As we have seen, this was slightly misleading, as Leeds was to be relatively free when it came to knocking down houses in order to give an easier base for future development. But nonetheless, these matters were usually left to the experts.

The problems that tended to be raised at a political level were of a technical nature, or were simply general debates on the numbers of houses demolished and those built in their place. In January 1957 Karl Cohen, the new head of the Housing Committee, had to admit that clearance had had to be slowed down because the council was unable to build sufficient homes to rehouse slum dwellers. He raised the alternatives of improvement, which he termed 'patching', or 'first aid', defined as essential maintenance of houses with only a few years life.⁴⁹ Either way, it seemed that these would be temporary solutions. 'Improvement, therefore, was regarded as a palliative: the removal of improved houses was simply deferred for some fifteen to twenty years and no real future was seen for the old brick terraces and back-to-backs of the city.'⁵⁰ This was to be an accurate statement of the outlook of the Public Health and Planning

⁴⁸ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, October 1955, p.29.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, January 1957, p.21.

⁵⁰ A. Ravetz, 'Housing for the Poor' in *New Society* 10/04/1975.

sections of the bureaucracy, but was to cease to be a matter of political consensus in years to come.

For the meantime, the political and bureaucratic sections of the council executive were to be united behind the programme of slum clearance. In a discussion on the issue of demolishing 'fit' houses in order to make way for future housing development, Cohen declared that 'sometimes you have to use surgery in order to make the body politic healthy, and I am afraid that in this case we have also to do it.'⁵¹ By December 1962 Cohen was proudly declaring that Leeds had demolished more slum properties since 1945 than any other authority outside London. He used this to soften the news that the council had been unable to keep the building rate up with the rate of clearance representations. This was put down to labour shortages.⁵² A year later the Deputy Town Clerk 'reminded officers that the Chairman of the Housing Committee had recently expressed the hope that all the areas which were on the original 'Red Ruin' map prepared in 1933 would be dealt with this year.'⁵³ In hindsight it was to appear that Cohen's ambition here was to get the worst slums cleared so he could focus on other issues, and he was to make this clear in discussions on the Development Plan review in 1965.

Cohen took issue with a number of the review's assumptions relating to housing matters, but the most relevant disagreement was his refusal to accept the necessity for the demolition of all houses which were 100 years old by the year 2000.⁵⁴ He rejected an accelerated programme of demolition, and 'thought the time must come when they could say that they were seeing the end of the slum clearance programme.'⁵⁵ In this he was backed by the Director of Housing, who declared that 'improvable back-to-back houses are very popular. In his view demolition and rebuilding of this type would be going against the wishes of the people.'⁵⁶ The 'planning' officers of the council were to disagree, as did some

⁵¹ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, November 1960, p.65.

⁵² *Ibid*, December 1962, p.99.

⁵³ Leeds, WYAS, Redevelopment and Housing, 1956-64. LLD1/2/817233 (Meeting of officers, 07/11/1963)

⁵⁴ Leeds, WYAS, Sub-Town Planning and Improvements, Development Plan Review Committee 1965-69. LLD1/2/834518 (Minutes of meeting, 02/11/1965)

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 07/12/1965.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 21/12/1965.

other councillors. The City Engineer 'explained how back-to-back houses, obsolescent areas, lack of play space, insufficient space for schools, no open views and obsolete standards of layout contributed to make areas ripe for renewal.'⁵⁷ Councillor Klineberg expressed the point of view that improvement grants would not preserve property forever, and Councillor Happold, who lived in an 'improved' house, was of the opinion that they were outmoded and difficult to live in. The argument had moved on from 'fitness' to 'obsolescence', and from the house to the wider environment, as the City Engineer demonstrated when he stated that he 'thought that dwellings with no external amenity of any sort were a social ill.'⁵⁸ The controversy seemed to hinge mainly on issues of past versus present rather than any specific political or ideological grounds, and in particular on ideas of progress of the most immediate kind. Cohen, certainly, had quite dramatically lost faith in the modernist approach to reshaping the urban environment, coming to favour more conservative methods that involved less upheaval.

In 1966 the committee managed to agree that a clearance target of 2300 a year should be adopted until 1971, when it would drop to 1800.⁵⁹ By 1967 the long-serving Cohen's position as head of the Housing Committee came to an end with Labour's catastrophic defeat at the council elections. With its new Conservative leadership the council continued the clearance programme without any decisive shift in direction, but the debate of 1965/66 was a sign of things to come. From this period on, the issue of 'slums' was to become a lot more politicised as the definitions of 'viability', 'fitness' and 'obsolescence' came under question from councillors, residents and, importantly, central government. For Leeds these problems were to be increased by the fact that its previously successful improvement programme was beginning to collapse.

By the late 1960s the issue of improvement had come under close central government consideration. In 1968 the White Paper 'Old Houses into New Homes' was published, in preparation for the Housing Act of 1969 that created

⁵⁷ Ibid, 07/12/1965.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 21/12/1965.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 03/08/1966.

the idea of ‘General Improvement Areas’ and allowed for more generous improvement grants. As a pioneer of this type of approach Leeds might be thought to have had a head start, but the opposite proved to be the case. By 1971 there had been a reduction in completions of ordinary improvement grant work, and area improvement had ceased altogether. The Public Health Department tried to put a brave face on, putting the change down to the fact that a ‘very vigorous improvement grant programme with considerable pressure on owners to participate had been maintained for at least the previous fifteen years’, and that area improvement had already covered most of the eligible areas of the city.⁶⁰ One of the main problems was that the compulsory purchase sanction that had backed Leeds’ area improvement policy had been removed by the council in June 1968.⁶¹ This was justified as taking into account the terms of the recent White Paper, but coming so closely after the Conservatives’ decisive victory at the council elections was almost certainly a political decision to get rid of a tactic that the Tories had always opposed, initially out of a defence of property interests, but increasingly due to an unwillingness to spend money preserving ‘obsolete’ housing. Again, the Public Health Department played down the significance of this change, claiming that area improvement was beginning to run its course anyway due to the previous success of the policy and stating that ‘large tracts of well built houses, lacking modern amenities, and having a clear future anticipated life sufficient to justify extensive investment of this sort are far rarer than they were at the inception of the area improvement policy’.⁶² They also pointed out, however, that ‘for its impetus it depended on the willingness of the local authority to acquire and improve whenever any owner did not desire to improve, or was not able himself to effect improvement’.⁶³ Thus it was still made clear that the department regarded compulsion as an essential part of an effective improvement strategy. In this case it seemed like a combination of national policy and local politics had frustrated one of Leeds’ more effective housing processes.

⁶⁰ Leeds, Medical Officer of Health, *Report on the Health of the City for the year 1970* p.70

⁶¹ Leeds City Council, *Council Proceedings May 1968- April 1969: Housing and Property Management Committee 6/6/68* p.10

⁶² Leeds, Medical Officer of Health, *Report on the Health of the City for the year 1970* pp. 70-71

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Improvement was certainly a policy where Leeds had developed its own individual approach and agenda. Other cities had a completely different trajectory when it came to rehabilitation of older housing, with political reactions that reflected this. In Birmingham, Labour councillors feared that the effects of the 1968 White Paper meant that ‘a “second-best” solution was being forced upon the areas which they had expected would be cleared’, while Conservatives united around improvement as a cheaper option than previous policies.⁶⁴ These contrasts are perhaps due to the nature of Leeds’ older housing stock, with the much higher proportion of back-to-back housing necessitating a varying approach, but also because Leeds’ Conservatives felt that their aims to modernise the city required a more ‘ruthless’ attitude towards its housing.

The issues discussed in Leeds’ halls of power reflected those at a national level. When slum clearance had resumed in 1954, the assumption was that there was a backlog of unfit housing to be dealt with incrementally, but that within a relatively short period the ‘slum problem’ would be solved. By the early 1960s this belief was looking less valid. Clearance rates remained lower than they were just before the Second World War, and were inevitably linked to the progress of housebuilding in order that displaced slum dwellers could find somewhere to move to. Meanwhile, older housing that was not yet considered to be unfit was continuing to deteriorate to the extent that it was feared it would soon fall into slum condition. This process was also accelerating due to a lack of repairs and improvement stemming from such factors as underinvestment, rent control and uncertainty as to future housing policy. As Merrett has said, ‘if this was taking place on a substantial scale the clearance target might have to be raised annually for an indefinitely long time period’ and clearance could become ‘a treadmill’.⁶⁵ Given the political consensus on the need for modernisation and higher standards, central government searched for a solution to the problem of what had become known as ‘twilight areas’. The Wilson government created the Denington Committee to investigate the situation and consider definitions of standards of housing fitness, which marked a shift from public health requirements towards

⁶⁴ Paris and Blackaby, *Not Much Improvement*, p.75

⁶⁵ Merrett, *State Housing in Britain*, p.139

social considerations and concentration on the wider environment.⁶⁶ Yelling has argued that the Denington recommendations served ‘greatly to widen the scope of planned government intervention in housing’⁶⁷, but the committee decided that it was too difficult to impose a range of standards as a comprehensive national strategy. In the end, and facing financial difficulties, the government came down on the side of improvement, eventually passing the 1969 Housing Act that created General Improvement Areas in an attempt to encourage private investment into areas that were judged capable of transformation. The problem for Leeds was that it had been well ahead of other authorities in the promotion of housing improvement, and there were politicians and officials who believed that most of the ‘improvable’ areas within Leeds had already been dealt with. As such, Leeds parted company with Westminster and Whitehall and took different steps to tackle obsolescence and solve the housing problem, as will become clear in the next chapter. In doing so, it was in many ways taking an approach which tried to combine efficiency with paternalism. By this stage, however, this kind of outlook was becoming more incongruous in a political and economic environment that was much less favourable than it had been before. Even the most well-intentioned managerialism would have found it difficult in a situation where both public opinion and public finances were to slow the pace of modernisation.

⁶⁶ Jim Yelling, ‘The Development of Residential Urban Renewal Policies in England: Planning for Modernisation in the 1960s’ in *Planning Perspectives*, Issue 1, 1999, p.4

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.10

Chapter Four: Rehabilitation or Redevelopment? 1971-1979



Marian Terrace, Woodhouse, 15/07/1975. By this stage the spread of tower blocks had stopped and sights like this were becoming more rare. (Leeds Library and Information Service, www.leodis.net)

Despite the stalling of Leeds' own improvement programme by the start of the 1970s, the shift in government policy represented by the 1969 Housing Act led to a reappraisal of the council's attitude to older housing. After the discussions over the Development Plan Review the annual slum clearance rate had been scaled down, but the rapid drop in the progress of improvement, coupled with the new popularity in Whitehall of the idea of improvement, meant that this was now open to change. The new approach to Leeds' 'slums' was to be stillborn, for reasons that were essentially financial, but which also involved an unprecedented politicisation of housing policy at a local level and a sapping of the legitimacy of the council among sections of the population. The impact of this policy failure was to mark Leeds' attitude to comprehensive redevelopment and the rehabilitation of houses for the rest of the decade. Bureaucratically the procedures remained similar, but the nature of intervention changed in scale and tone, in response to a squeeze on funding and an increased awareness by local politicians of community unrest. A greater emphasis was placed on consulting local people,

but this was not embraced wholeheartedly by councillors or bureaucrats, and popular involvement in issues involving older housing was never given an institutional or political basis. Ultimately, the 1970s saw a major shift in assumptions regarding the need to modernise and transform the standards of housing and the general environment of older residential areas in Leeds.

1970 was to see a thorough appraisal of housing policy on the part of Leeds' council bureaucracy. The council was obliged to survey its housing as part of the 1969 Housing Act, and took the opportunity to explore the topic of housing renewal as a prelude to developing a fresh strategy. The survey, carried out in April 1970, looked at the pre-1907 stock from the point of view of housing and of planning. Two approaches to the issue of housing obsolescence were contemplated, the 'traditional approach' which assessed age, structural condition, internal amenities and environmental quality, and a 'socio-economic approach' that would assess the housing stock against expectations of the population's future aspirations and economic capabilities. This 'socio-economic' consideration was rejected as it was found too difficult to give it a scientific, methodological basis.¹ The factors that were ultimately used by the Planning and Health Departments to survey housing obsolescence were such features as the proportion of back-to-backs in an area, front-to-front distance between houses, front garden/forecourt space, net residential density, distance to shops and distance from major traffic routes. In addition, the Health Department assessed structural condition, household arrangements such as internal WCs, and overcrowding, while the Planning Department looked at existing intentions on property and environmental improvement, conservation areas and low density areas. Some factors, such as rateable value, social stability, distance to schools, bus services or telephone, and incidence of private rented accommodation, were discarded as they were judged to be either too difficult or time-consuming to ascertain, or were generally in the process of improvement.² The Planning and Property Department concluded from the results that 'because of the likelihood that the least defective areas revealed by the survey are likely to be redeveloped in any case, it seems

¹ J.Rawling and R.Normington, *Older Housing in Leeds: An Assessment of Redevelopment Potential and Priorities Volume 1* (Leeds City Council, October 1971) p.27

² *Ibid*, pp.30-32

appropriate to regard the whole of the pre-1907 housing stock, covered by the Planning Survey, as redevelopment potential.’³

In response to the survey a Housing Conference was arranged, with a range of leading officials from across the bureaucracy taking part. The most controversial questions involved the establishment of a new clearance rate and attempts to assess the level of housing standards that would be judged acceptable in the future. The most determined advocate of a high clearance rate was the Town Clerk, K.H. Potts. He argued that the only satisfactory way of dealing with obsolescence was by demolition, stated that it was difficult to resume an increased clearance rate after it had been reduced, and urged that ‘the existing, dated image of Leeds needs to be improved if we are to move forward.’⁴ Mr Wyatt, of the Environmental Health Department, felt that the rate at which housing was falling unfit would fall, and that buildings were not always deficient due to structural condition. He was backed by the City Engineer, C.G. Thirlwall, who said that some people were happy with improved back-to-back accommodation at cheaper rents, that it was essentially a subjective opinion whether older housing should still be standing by the end of the century, and that with private building stagnant, the municipal building rate would have to be much higher if the clearance programme was increased. Opinion was generally quite polarised on the issue of an appropriate demolition rate, though a few wanted to recommend sticking to a rate of 1800 a year.⁵ In hindsight, one of the more significant facets of the conference was the debate over the discrepancies in figures relating to dwellings represented or confirmed for demolition, those awaiting demolition and those already cleared, and the number of clearance families on the waiting list. This suggests a less than ‘scientific’ basis for establishing a new strategy. In addition, there was also a great deal of uncertainty as to government policy, perhaps understandable in the wake of a general election, but still not a great basis on which to build a new policy.

³ Leeds, WYAS, Leeds Housing Policy 1970. LLD1/2/841494 ‘Housing Redevelopment Potential’ (June 1970)

⁴ Ibid, ‘Housing Conference, Tues 30th June 1970’

⁵ Ibid.

Following the conference a Working Party of council officials was set up with two sub-groups, one to discuss priority groups for clearance and the other to consider the role of house and environmental improvement.⁶ The main factors affecting the scale of the clearance rate were judged to be ‘scale of obsolescence’, scale of replacement building, land resources, future housing demand, ministry advice, avoiding regional disparities in housing conditions and labour and administrative resources.⁷ By November 1970 the City Development Officer, R. Normington, was able to confirm that the redevelopment potential was judged to be 32,000 dwellings⁸, and though the Housing Director Syd Benson questioned the idea that as standards changed the demand for small improved houses would ‘be translated into a desire for something better’⁹, the consensus was that this figure was about right.

This comprehensive assessment of Leeds’ housing stock was to feed into the policy recommendation document that was published in October 1971.¹⁰ In this they were to accept that a different set of priorities had been established in the fifteen years since slum clearance was resumed in the mid-1950s, but argued that this meant that redevelopment proposals needed to be based on an alternative approach. Indeed, they were very quick to point out that ‘...it would be a grave mistake to base a housing philosophy on the unsound premise that slum clearance, let alone clearance for environmental reasons, is virtually at an end in Leeds...’¹¹ They argued that a plan was essential in order to avoid uncertainty hanging over a large number of properties, and would actually reduce the incidence of planning blight as a result. They came up with nearly 43,000 dwellings which might be candidates for redevelopment between 1971 and 1991, which after taking away houses that were already in the clearance ‘process’ and those which featured on the previous 1961 plans, left just over 29,000 houses for consideration.

⁶ Ibid, ‘Housing Working Party, Meeting 24/07/70’

⁷ Ibid, ‘Memorandum on considerations affecting the scale of the clearance rate’, (August 1970)

⁸ Ibid, ‘Memorandum from City Development Officer to the Town Clerk, 18/11/1970’

⁹ Ibid, ‘Memorandum from Housing Director to Town Clerk’ (November 1970)

¹⁰ J.Rawling and R.Normington, *Older Housing in Leeds*

¹¹ Ibid, p.2

In deciding how to deal with this section of the housing stock another set of considerations was adopted. Firstly, it was argued that demographics would provide a basis to redevelop in the 1970s as there was anticipated to be a dip in housing demand. That would have meant that clearance and rebuilding would be less constrained by scarce building resources.¹² Rising expectations in society and demands for higher standards of housing were commented on, but, as mentioned above, it was pointed out that it was difficult to estimate demands of this kind because acquiring data was difficult and factors such as technological growth, owner-occupation, economic climate and government policy were very unpredictable.¹³ It was thought that a high clearance rate would help improvement proposals as ‘effort would be directed exclusively to a superior type of property with a longer life and yielding a more economic return’¹⁴ An important issue was the image and atmosphere of the city, since ‘much of Leeds has a drab and deprived environment inherited from the 19th century in which row upon row of closely packed housing, often ill-sited, is a major element...the earlier these outdated and unsightly conditions are removed the earlier will Leeds become a more attractive and efficient city in which to live and work.’¹⁵ This was significant partly due to the growing North-South divide that led to investment and people draining from the Leeds area. ‘It is vital to raise housing standards in inner Leeds until the point is reached that they do not offer markedly inferior conditions to the high growth areas of the Midlands and South.’¹⁶ Some of the problems of large-scale clearance were also considered, and it was judged that it would be a mistake to plan too high a clearance rate that would lead to physical disruption of communities and infrastructure, along with unbalancing housing tenure and reducing the availability of cheap privately rented housing. It was also recognised that there was a need to conserve housing of character and historical significance.¹⁷

¹² J.S.Kenyon and R.Normington; *Older Housing in Leeds: An Assessment of Redevelopment Potential and Priorities. Volume 2: Formulation of Strategies* (Leeds City Council, January 1972) p.1

¹³ Ibid, p.3

¹⁴ Ibid, p.12

¹⁵ Ibid, p.14

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp.15-16

Various redevelopment programmes were considered, but ‘Strategy D’ was favoured. This proposed upping the clearance rate to 2300 per annum for the period 1971-77, a lower rate of 1700 per year between 1977 and 1987, and leaving the rate for 1987-91 for determination nearer the time. There were multiple reasons given for backing this strategy. The momentum of the present clearance rate could be continued, with expected reductions in housing demand providing an opportunity to replace existing stock. It represented a determined attack on the backlog of demonstrably obsolete housing, leaving some better quality improvement area housing unaffected and therefore providing some older, cheaper options. In addition, it anticipated pressure on housing resources after 1978, and recognised the need to conserve some housing for environmental and historic reasons.¹⁸ It was regarded as a flexible approach ‘preserving options in both building rate and improvement policy, and making a concentrated onslaught on obsolescence while avoiding undue disruption of communities.’¹⁹

This new redevelopment programme did seem to take into account many of the lessons of previous slum clearance policy, and, unlike some of the previous planning agendas, actually disregarded the impulse to base future plans on abstract considerations of future expectations and rising affluence. There was at least some attempt to give the approach an objective basis in the survey of housing stock, but there was still much in the report to provide a great deal of controversy in the future. The recommendation of Strategy ‘D’ represented in some ways the temporary ascendancy of the planning side of the bureaucracy, but this position was not to last. For some sections of the council and the populace, helping Leeds ‘to assume its full regional role as a modern, dynamic and efficient centre’²⁰ was not as straightforward a process as the planners envisaged.

Within formal politics, the main articulators of the anti-clearance mood were the Liberal Party. Campaigning on the basis of local issues was all part of the ‘Community Politics’ strategy they had adopted in the late 1960s. They had been unrepresented on Leeds City Council for many years, but won seats in traditional

¹⁸ Ibid, pp.29-33

¹⁹ Ibid, pp.19-20

²⁰ Ibid, p.16

Labour areas such as Armley and Hunslet at the 1967 and 1968 municipal elections, assisted by the strong anti-government national trend. Housing was to be an area where they placed a great deal of emphasis, looking to work closely with any groups who were discontented with council policy. They strongly supported the policy of compulsory improvement where landlords were unable or unwilling, but were also sympathetic to landlords at other times. Councillor Meadowcroft voiced his opposition to government plans to restrict ‘full market value’ compensation to owner-occupiers, arguing that receiving only the site value for their properties would not encourage landlords to keep them in good condition.²¹

After Strategy ‘D’ was adopted by the council in December 1971, the Liberal campaign against redevelopment was to push its opposition even further. Its policy was based on a rather unusual mixture in ideological terms. Their leading spokesman, Michael Meadowcroft, argued that ‘the key thing is that we must not destroy the communities that exist. In so many things that we thought in the past to be progress, it has turned out not to be the progress we imagined.’²² Councillor Austick was to argue that ‘we should accept that an Englishman, whatever his station in life, has the right to choose his own castle, or his own back-to-back if he wishes’²³. These were very conservative statements, and went totally against the grain of slum clearance policies since the First World War. Their position tended to represent an almost unconditional preference for conservation of older housing. When Councillor Austick commented that ‘the Tories in their self-contained “Wigton Towers” and “Alwoodley Heights” presume that people want to be moved out of their old way of life into the drab and characterless jungles of the Hunslet Granges or the Middletons’²⁴ he came close to some form of reactionary inverse snobbery. These sentiments were part of a changing definition in the use of the concept of ‘community’. From the idea of a group of people who shared a particular area or space it had become part of a rather anti-modern discourse. As Glendinning and Muthesius have commented; ‘that which already

²¹ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, July 1968, pp.31-35

²² LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, March 1972, p.447

²³ *Ibid*, p.452

²⁴ *Ibid*.

existed was almost automatically good. “Community” became completely redefined: it was applied to a group of people who were settled in an environment completely familiar to them.’²⁵

From the Liberals’ point of view, they were voicing the concerns of the public, and helping to resist the machinations of an impersonal bureaucracy which openly disregarded the wishes of local communities. Their political adversaries were united, however, in seeing Liberal tactics as populist and an opportunist means of acquiring a political base in older areas of the city. Councillor Gould, the Housing spokesman for the Labour Party then in opposition, proposed an amendment in which he criticised the Liberals for ‘the raising of unfounded fears, consternation and misery in people’s minds for nothing but short-term political advantage.’²⁶ The Conservative Council Leader, Alderman Frank Marshall, spoke even more strongly, adding ‘great personal anxiety has been caused to many people and many families by the needlessly irresponsible way—and I can only say it has been from purely political motives—which certain councillors in this chamber have presented partial information on the Council’s proposed housing re-development programme to the public.’²⁷ The Liberals were a fairly negligible presence in the council chamber in terms of numbers, but these accusations, and the unity between Labour and Tories, were evidence that their influence in the city was growing and that they represented a challenge to the future plans and the established housing policies of the council.

With their strong rhetoric and abrasive style of campaigning the Liberals gave the impression that they were battling against a monolithic bureaucratic and political machine. This was far from the truth, as slum clearance policy was already softening by the time Labour regained control of the council in 1972.

Emboldened by this, and by the establishment of a ‘powerbase’ in the Castleton and West Hunslet wards, if anything Liberal policy became even more anti-clearance. The promise of better consultation with communities and their councillors was used as a stick with which to beat the council’s clearance

²⁵ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block* p.309

²⁶ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, March 1972, p.434

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.460

decisions. In September 1972 Councillor Meadowcroft questioned the need for properties in Armley to be listed for slum clearance and declared that the promised consultation had not materialised.²⁸ The arguments used to battle the idea of demolition were broadening. In November 1973 Meadowcroft seized on the council's problems maintaining a high house building rate against manpower and materials shortages to argue for improvement rather than clearance.²⁹ His colleague Councillor Greenfield followed this up later by appealing to the spirit of economy. He said 'if the Tories were really interested in keeping down the rates, then surely the first thing to cut down is the rate of clearance, so that we can cut down and do not have to borrow money to rebuild it, and if the Labour Party are really not interested in helping the money-lenders, they likewise should be thinking of getting down the clearance programme.'³⁰

Against this, there was still a core of politicians that remained strongly in favour of redevelopment. They were in both Labour and Tory ranks, but it was the Conservatives who seemed to be most solid in defending slum clearance and the Strategy 'D' policy. They aspired to fully establish Leeds as the modern centre of Yorkshire and, with reference to the extensive road-building projects that had been executed or planned, promoted the city as 'Motorway City of the Seventies'. Local election candidates boasted of 'slum property being demolished at an almost unbelievable rate, and new houses rising on the barren soil'³¹ and 'a mammoth attack on slums and decay'³². They also appeared more supportive of the council officials, frequently defending planning decisions against criticism in the council chamber. In a ward meeting Labour's Councillor Moynihan bemoaned the fact that 'all department officials under the Tories have complete control over the city'.³³ On the subject of deciding which houses were unfit, Alderman Bellow declared that 'I think we really have no alternative but to be guided by what the Chief Public Health Inspector and his colleagues tell us as

²⁸ Ibid, September 1972, p.189

²⁹ Ibid, November 1973, p.132

³⁰ Ibid, May 1974, p. 83

³¹ Leeds Central Library, Leeds Local and General Election Leaflets, etc. 1966-1972. Conservative Party leaflet, Headingley, 1972

³² Ibid, Conservative Party (1971)

³³ Leeds, WYAS, File of Correspondence and Papers, North-West Leeds Labour Party 1969-71. WYL853/220 (13/07/1971)

regards that point.³⁴ In the Strategy 'D' debate Councillor Redmond, then in charge of the Planning Committee, said that his aim was to 'improve the standard of housing and make people be able to afford to live in that better standard of housing by extending the rebate scheme. Surely this is far better than lowering our standards purely to keep people in cheap housing.'³⁵ Support was given for long-term planning of demolition on the grounds that aging housing would become steadily more obsolete over time. Councillor Sparling responded to Liberal arguments by sarcastically claiming that 'they go on as though the desirable properties were those with toilets up the street.'³⁶ More seriously, in response to Labour's decision to stop long-term housing renewal planning past 1982, he stated that 'there are thousands of outworn houses in Leeds, and there are thousands more which will become outworn and obsolete over the next ten to twenty years, and surely no one can seriously suggest that any of the houses which were in the 1982/86 period, and many others which are only slightly better, should still be standing in twenty years' time.'³⁷

These councillors were very concerned with the improvement of housing standards, but it is clear that they had a belief in the benign nature of the bureaucracy and the 'experts'' ability to manage housing renewal. The curious thing about the Conservative slum clearance policy is that it showed a disregard for small property-owners and landlords, established supporters of the party. This attitude can possibly be explained partly by the change of structure in the economy and in housing away from small business and rented accommodation towards owner occupation and a greater concentration in commerce and retail. Politically speaking, it has also been suggested that the Conservatives wanted to concentrate on clearance and local authority rehousing for the poorer sections of the population while leaving the rest of the housing stock to the market.³⁸

³⁴ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, October 1970, p.141

³⁵ *Ibid*, March 1972, p.457

³⁶ *Ibid*, September 1972, p.196

³⁷ *Ibid*, July 1973, p.45

³⁸ Jim Yelling, 'The Incidence of Slum Clearance in England and Wales 1955-1985' *Urban History*, 27, 2 (2000), p.250

Within the Labour ranks there were still a number of politicians that were strongly in favour of redevelopment. The most vocal supporter of wholehearted continuation of clearance was Councillor Prichard, who became deputy chairman of the Housing Committee after May 1972. Just before the local elections of 1972 he warned that ‘if the Liberal campaign on redevelopment succeeds Leeds will be one vast depressing slum.’³⁹ He also defended the council officials in response to attacks from Councillor Meadowcroft⁴⁰, and he pointed out later that consultation was a two-way process and that the officials had a right to have their views heard and discussed as much as campaigning groups did- an unusual twist.⁴¹ After Labour’s victory in May 1972 he was one of the voices within the new administration that backed council intervention.⁴² In the same vein, Councillor Jeffrey (Labour) declared that ‘...it would be a tragedy if sentiment and false associations between old housing and ‘the old ways’ were to stop Leeds from continuing as the leading city in Britain for courageous new development and the energetic removal of slums and potential slums.’⁴³

Nonetheless, there were trends in the local Labour Party that had a different view, and the attitude of councillors to council policies on redevelopment was often based on whether they had faith in top-down planning and application of expertise, but also on conditions at the local level. This meant that some Labour and Conservative members were sceptical of clearance policy, at least in their areas, if they had witnessed some of the extremes of planning blight and residents’ unrest. Councillor Beevers, from Labour, raised the issue of a petition from Holbeck residents in 1970 asking to be excluded from a Compulsory Purchase Order, focussing in particular on demolition and subsequent large areas of wasteland in an area which wanted more homes. He was backed by Karl Cohen, who criticised the demolition of houses which were not ‘unsound’ and added that ‘planners and architects are far too prone to wish for open spaces to develop, instead of using the ingenuity they might have and develop round

³⁹ *Leeds Weekly Citizen*, 17/03/1972

⁴⁰ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, September 1972, p.193

⁴¹ *Ibid*, July 1973, p.57

⁴² *Ibid*, November 1973, p.132

⁴³ *Leeds Weekly Citizen*, 09/06/1972

existing properties.’⁴⁴ In July 1971 Councillor Haughton brought up the long delays involved in the clearance process, stating that one clearance order made in East Hunslet was still waiting for a public inquiry after two years.⁴⁵ A few months later a Labour Councillor was opposing clearance in Burmantofts on the grounds of social upheaval.⁴⁶ The most radical example of anti-clearance sentiment came from Labour’s Councillor Sedler, who represented the marginal Labour-Liberal Castleton ward. He claimed about Strategy ‘D’ that ‘...the criteria in the report are, I quote, “image, mobility of labour, haphazard and unplanned attraction of investment.” It is thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Big Business; it carries its stamp throughout. The motivation is a rapid turnover of labour, not the needs of the people. The old communities are to be broken up.’⁴⁷ On the Conservative side, there was some criticism of planners’ intentions at Cottage Road in Far Headingley, particularly their dislike of ‘untidy crooked streets, antique inconvenient plumbing (and) higgledy-piggledy houses.’⁴⁸

This latter example was a relatively rare case of potential slum clearance in a typical Conservative-supporting area, and this was no doubt one reason why they were a bit more cavalier when it came to some of the side-effects of redevelopment policy. Labour had no such luxury. Generally, Labour politicians wanted to see the removal of slum housing and the development of poorer areas, but individual councillors, as we have seen, were concerned about local clearance problems, and by the early 1970s they were looking over their shoulders nervously at the Liberals, who had supplanted Labour in some core working-class communities within Leeds. As a result of this Labour housing policy was very cautious. In 1971 Councillor Gould, Labour Housing Spokesman and later Housing Chairman, had declared that he thought the existing clearance rate was too low, and that clearance processes should be speeded up.⁴⁹ However, when the issue of Strategy ‘D’ came up he criticised it as an ‘administrators’ report’, lacking ‘the social awareness that we as councillors should bring to bear on the

⁴⁴ Ibid, October 1970, p.140. This represented a drastic change from his opinions of the early 1960s, as quoted in the previous chapter.

⁴⁵ Ibid, July 1971, p.75

⁴⁶ Ibid, December 1971, pp.239-240

⁴⁷ Ibid, March 1972, p.439

⁴⁸ Ibid, July 1973, p.54

⁴⁹ Ibid, July 1971, p.77

matter.’ Also, the new magic words ‘public participation and consultation’ were used, Labour wanting to show that it listened to the concerns of working-class voters.⁵⁰ At the same time, to demonstrate their underlying responsibility as a potential governing party, Labour attacked the ‘scaremongering’ of the Liberals. Councillor Atha summed up Labour’s attitude fairly well in the same debate when he said ‘people have every right to say where they want to live, but equally we, as a community and a country, say we expect people to live at a certain standard.’ Nevertheless, he offered the assurance that Labour ‘shall only develop our plans after the fullest participation of the people affected.’⁵¹

On regaining control of the council in May 1972, Gould announced that Strategy ‘D’ would not be binding on the incoming administration, and was proud to confirm that certain areas had been deleted from the clearance programme after consultation with local councillors. He added that this would require a bigger improvement policy.⁵² By September 1972 he was able to state that Strategy ‘D’ no longer existed, and in the following year he gave his reasons for this, being ‘increasingly convinced that it was becoming intolerable, the further into the future one attempts to predict the necessity for clearance due to either physical or social conditions.’ He admitted that ‘the current climate of public opinion is against clearance.’⁵³ Despite this, there was no complete U-turn and a significant demolition rate was to continue. Gould was to stick by many of the clearance area representations that were made, and was especially robust against the arguments of the Liberals. He was keen to give a retort to their complaints about the wisdom of demolishing houses in the face of a slowing house-building rate by pointing out that they had overlooked the existence of ‘re-lets’, where council houses were vacated and could be allocated to new tenants. ‘Last year in West Leeds there were some 753 re-lets available, which far outweighed the number of demolitions that are going to take place during the next two years in West Leeds.’⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ibid, March 1972, pp. 434-435

⁵¹ Ibid, p.454

⁵² Ibid, p.106

⁵³ Ibid, July 1973, p.48

⁵⁴ Ibid, May 1974, p.86

The fact that the leading councillors and council officials were placed so much on the defensive is testament to the shift in emphasis that public discontent had caused, from issues about the condition of individual houses or collections of houses, to the future of the ‘community’. A prime example of this in the Woodhouse area was at the local inquiry for the Jubilee Road Compulsory Purchase Order, which took place in June 1972. Rather than individual property-owners putting their case, Woodhouse Community Association and representatives from Leeds University and Polytechnic argued for the future of the whole area. The Woodhouse Community Association was represented by a local clergyman, Rev. Simpson, who pleaded for a policy of improvement coupled with a slowly phased redevelopment, so that houses would be occupied for as much time as possible and only a minimum of people would be forced to move.⁵⁵ One of the main concerns was for the future viability of the area, as he raised the issue of small businesses and their inability to afford council rents, and declared that ‘grass verges are salutary, but whole fields of grass as appear on the plans depriving the future Woodhouse of population potential are not necessary.’⁵⁶ The universities, on their part, stressed problems that were likely to arise with student accommodation, and the President of Leeds Polytechnic Union said that ‘...any redevelopment must take into account dwellings for students and other single people. Unfortunately, experience has shown that the type of house built is too small to allow tenants.’⁵⁷

On the council’s side, the Deputy Chief Public Health Inspector stated that the age, condition and arrangement of houses in the Jubilee Road area had prevented them from being considered for area improvement. The Inspector at the inquiry agreed that they were incapable of improvement due to ‘serious defects’, most notably the ‘dangerously steep and winding stairs’ and ‘the absence of any private space attached to the houses which compels children to play in the streets.’⁵⁸ In this instance the paternalism of the bureaucracy received some backing. Despite its recent commitment to local consultation, the local Labour

⁵⁵ Leeds, West Yorkshire Archive Service Woodhouse (Jubilee Road) Clearance Areas CPO 1971. Public Local Inquiry 12/06/1972. LLD1/2/840882

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

newspaper criticised the opposition to clearance at Jubilee Road, claiming that ‘the Vicar picked one of the worst cases that can now be found in Leeds for his case against the Leeds City Council.’⁵⁹ Nevertheless, this did recognise that there were better causes to champion, and the Rev. Simpson had already led a deputation to the council in March 1972 opposing proposals for clearing the Hartley Improvement Area of Woodhouse. He complained that ‘some of these properties were stated by Council only six months ago to have a useful life until the late eighties’, argued that there was already much cleared land that could be used for immediate building, plus that with easy access to Woodhouse Ridge and Woodhouse Moor, the area needed no more than a minimum of public open space.⁶⁰ As with the Liberal members of the council, the representatives of local residents’ associations were also very uncompromising in their desire to preserve areas as intact as possible. By the early 1970s almost every council proposal for redevelopment was meeting with some opposition, and deputations opposing clearance were a monthly feature at council meetings.

The purely oppositional attitude within the community was beginning to change during the early 1970s, as groups began to develop an agenda of their own, often in connection with the Leeds Civic Trust or various sociologists, architects and journalists who had concerns with urban renewal issues. These agendas were closely linked with proposals for housing and environmental improvement, and one of their most interesting features was their relationship with various legislation and guidelines emanating from central government. The Housing Acts and government circulars of this period were intended to give direction and inspiration to local authorities, but were used by tenants and residents groups, and by opposition political parties, as a tool with which to provide alternatives to Council redevelopment proposals. Proposals for clearance in areas such as Burley, Woodhouse and Armley were countered by local groups who advocated that the housing should be treated according to the latest government policy, which was often rather vague when it came to guidelines for its application.

⁵⁹ *Leeds Weekly Citizen*, 13/10/1972

⁶⁰ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, March 1972, p.397

Leeds' leading councillors and officials often found themselves on the back foot when confronted with conflicting judgements of such concepts as Housing Action Areas, Gradual Renewal and Community Participation. Interpretation of legislation and central government policy was a major source of politicisation in the mid to late 1970s, and, unlike the climate of the 1950s and 1960s, local politicians and the bureaucracy were to find it much more difficult to implement their own redevelopment schemes against increasingly well-informed and organised local groups.

As previously described, Leeds was relatively ahead of its time in terms of improvement programmes, and national government did not show a great deal of interest in housing rehabilitation and environmental improvement on an area basis until the Deeplish project in Rochdale, commenced in 1966. From the point of view of Whitehall, the ambitious slum clearance schemes embarked upon in the 1960s were starting to outstrip the ability to fund and construct replacement housing, 'so increasing pressure on the existing stock and generating ever growing zones of vacant land awaiting redevelopment.'⁶¹ This was coupled with the growing movement of opinion towards renovation of older housing that was judged by some to have a much longer life than that envisaged by many planners. These factors influenced government policy as reflected in the 1968 White Paper 'Old Houses into New Homes', and the 1969 Housing Act that followed it. This act introduced General Improvement Areas (GIAs), which were to comprise sound houses with a potentially long life, most of which would be owner-occupied. The act was to rely largely on voluntary action and allowed local authorities to spend up to £100 per dwelling on environmental improvements. As we have seen previously, Leeds' improvement programme actually went down in the period after 1969, and with Strategy 'D' the council even showed its intention of upping the clearance rate, contrary to national policy.

GIAs were relatively limited in scope and, despite a burst in private improvement nationally from 1971 to 1973, spurred by increased subsidies, improvement had largely missed the lower quality pockets of housing, particularly in the private

⁶¹ Chris Couch, *Urban Renewal- Theory and Practice* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1990) p.36

rented sector. This meant that there were a lot of unimproved dwellings that were increasingly unlikely to be cleared and therefore continuing to decay.⁶² This was a cause for concern to Leeds' Housing Director Syd Benson, who raised the issue with the Town Clerk and urged that the emphasis of improvement should switch to the shorter term and relieve hardship for people who were living in older housing that did not feature in the immediate clearance programme.⁶³ This issue was also brought up when Paul Channon, Under-Secretary at the new Department of the Environment, visited Leeds in October 1970.⁶⁴ Reflecting an increasing degree of party consensus on urban renewal at national level, a Conservative White Paper of 1973 was mostly incorporated into the Labour government's Housing Act of 1974. This act brought in the concept of Housing Action Areas (HAAs), which were intended to focus attention on areas where housing 'stress' and the need for improvement was greatest. In these areas high rates of renovation grants were to be paid, compulsory powers to improve were available, though there was more limited assistance with environmental work than in GIAs. Coupled with this councils also had the power to introduce 'Priority Neighbourhoods' which needed to have a common boundary with an HAA or GIA and were to be areas that would be considered for HAA or possibly GIA treatment in future.

Leeds' approach to environmental improvement had little of the initiative that was demonstrated in its earlier programme for rehabilitating back-to-back housing. A prime example of its difficulties came at Burley Lodge Road. This area had been adopted by the council in 1967 as part of an experiment carried out in conjunction with the Department of Housing and Local Government, which aimed to discover the effects of a limited amount of environmental investment in an improvement area. The cost of the programme was minimal, about £6 per house compared with over £100 per house in other cities, and basically put into effect a traffic management scheme which involved a small pedestrian 'precinct' and the placing of bollards to create cul-de-sacs, the planting of some trees and

⁶² Gibson and Langstaff, *An Introduction to Urban Renewal* pp.95-96

⁶³ Leeds, WYAS, Leeds Housing Policy 1970. LLD1/2/841494 'Memo from Housing Director to Town Clerk (K.H.Potts)' (November 1970)

⁶⁴ Ibid, 'Visit of Paul Channon MP, Monday 19th October 1970'

the placing of a few benches.⁶⁵ The traffic management scheme proved unpopular with residents, and so little changed in the area that the council abruptly cancelled the improvement scheme in November 1972. They declared that the area would be divided in half, with the southern area that comprised better quality through-terrace housing receiving the focus of improvement efforts, while the northern half would be cleared.⁶⁶ This decision met with protests from residents and shopkeepers, some of whom had only just acquired or improved their properties.⁶⁷ The haste of the decision was defended by Labour Deputy Housing Chairman Jack Prichard, who said that a quick decision would avoid further hardship in the area, though Labour Councillor Amy Donohoe, who represented Burley, blamed the failure of the scheme on the unwillingness to compulsorily improve housing, and urged that this policy be reinstated.⁶⁸ The Belle Vue and Burley Community Association, created after encouragement from the council in 1967, took a determined stance against the council's decision. After the Housing Chairman Kevin Gould had attended a public meeting of residents on 16th November, a decision was made to postpone clearance until at least the 1982-86 period.⁶⁹ The Community Association and Leeds Civic Trust decided to commission expert help to fight the council's proposals, and approached Tom Hancock, an architect and planner with Peterborough New Town. Along with Robert McKie from the Institute of Planning Studies and an architect, James Hook, he produced a survey and report into the area. They started by saying that they could not accept the division of the area which they felt was 'one community'.⁷⁰ This echoed what a council report had itself said before the improvement scheme was commenced, namely that 'there is a strong social identity within this area, having been established as a stable residential area for a considerable time'.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Hancock, McKie and Hook, *Neighbourhood Study: Burley Lodge Road, Leeds* (March 1973), p.3

⁶⁶ *YEP*, 07/11/1972.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports* (November 1972), pp.261-265.

⁶⁹ LCC, *Council Proceedings* (1973), p.97

⁷⁰ Hancock, McKie and Hook, *Neighbourhood Study*, p.2

⁷¹ Leeds, WYAS, Burley Lodge Road Environmental Improvement. LLD1/2/823541 (Council Joint Officers' report, 1967-68)

The survey claimed that they were unable to ascertain any significant differences between the houses in the north and south of the area, that the standard of the three-quarters of properties that had been improved was consistently good, and that the structural condition of unimproved houses was also good.⁷² They admitted that the unimproved dwellings were statutorily unfit because of their internal arrangement, but believed that this should not matter. Indeed, they asserted that one of the main issues relating to the area was the gap between ‘the official standards of fitness and the different standards of Burley Lodge.’⁷³ The council’s decision to relieve the northern part of the area for only fourteen years was held to have blighted the district, and it was forecast that this would infiltrate the southern section, which would ‘find its decaying northern half an appalling neighbour.’⁷⁴ They concluded by arguing that the Burley Lodge Road district should be declared a General Improvement Area, which could ‘ensure continuing investment in the area and meet the expressed preferences of the population.’⁷⁵ As part of this strategy they said that owner-occupation should be encouraged, and the council should use its status as landlord of 43% of the houses to ‘influence the status of the area through its selection of new tenants.’⁷⁶ This latter tactic was to avoid ‘more affluent non-family households in furnished accommodation’ who could affect the area by pricing out other potential residents, a factor which did tend to be one of the features of General Improvement Areas elsewhere.

The council did finally give General Improvement Area status to the Burley Lodge Road area, but it was to be three years later, and was only to consist of the southern half.⁷⁷ The northern half was now not to be cleared before 1990, but this did not satisfy Labour and Liberal councillors, who stuck to the idea that the area should be treated as one. Arguments within the council were over the nature of GIA treatment. Labour’s shadow housing chair, George Mudie, argued that the northern section met the qualifications for GIA status, namely that they were

⁷² Hancock, McKie and Hook, *Neighbourhood Study*, p.15

⁷³ *Ibid*, p.10

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.6

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.23

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.16

⁷⁷ LCC, *Council Proceedings*, Housing Committee 29/06/1976, p.44

sound houses, a stable community and not a 'stress area'.⁷⁸ Housing Chairman Peter Sparling responded by saying that the two halves of the area were fundamentally different, and the Environmental Health department believed that it was 'completely unrealistic' to expect houses in the northern part to have the necessary thirty years life expectancy for a GIA declaration, something that the Department of the Environment had confirmed informally.⁷⁹ In 1972 Alison Ravetz claimed that 'the people of Burley Lodge are now, like many other Leeds citizens, victims of the rolling clearance programme, by which the whole housing stock of this city is to be renewed over and over again, for all foreseeable time to come.'⁸⁰ In reality the situation was not quite as stark, and more complicated in nature. The Burley Lodge Road 'affair' showed that improvement could be marked by the same kind of uncertainty and differences of opinion that affected the clearance drive. It also suggested that the gap was increasing between the council's attempts to implement policy based on professional standards and legal norms, and the feelings of those opposed to the council's decisions, who claimed they had the backing of the community. Indeed, it was the identification of 'stable communities' and 'sound houses' that was becoming very difficult. The refusal of grassroots organisations to accept the council's interpretation of the law was making political consensus impossible, but not reaching its logical conclusion of questioning the legitimacy of the local state altogether.

While slum clearance in Leeds had been scaled down by 1974, it was still a favoured option for Leeds' planners. The national economic problems that affected local government finance, coupled with central government legislation, meant that Leeds would have to engage with the problems of restructuring the clearance programme while incorporating newer features like GIAs and HAAs into their housing strategy. They were confronted, therefore, with decisions that needed to be made on interpreting and implementing the Housing Act, and choosing which areas to focus attention on first. As a result, 1975 saw a comprehensive clarification of the council's housing policy. In April 1975 the Housing Services Committee approved a 'medium' rate of clearance up to 1981,

⁷⁸ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, November 1976, p.458

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.460

⁸⁰ *YEP*, 08/12/1972.

and this had involved a re-examination by the departments of Environmental Health, Planning, and Housing of all houses in the Housing Renewal Programme. Some houses were removed from the clearance programme and recommended for improvement. Tellingly, it was stated that ‘such dwellings were included in the HRP in anticipation of raised standards of statutory unfitness which have not materialised.’⁸¹ Linked with the release of these houses was the recommendation of programmes of HAA declarations in the immediate and medium terms. It was also suggested that a detailed year-by-year clearance programme be formulated that would involve consultation with local councillors and community groups and, as a result of the increased deliberations and wider improvement programme, the need for increased staff resources was emphasised.⁸²

Later in 1975 the Housing Working Party reported back with two documents, one on Area Improvement, and another on Clearance and Local Rehousing. On improvement it was suggested that four HAAs and four GIAs were to be initiated each year, but only the first two years of the programme should be publicised, ‘because of the need to gain experience, the retention of flexibility, possible blighting effects, and uncertainty about resources given the present economic climate.’⁸³ The decision-making process was largely governed by the principle that priority should be given to houses lacking amenities, such as inside toilets, bathrooms and central heating. Areas in disrepair or suffering from poor environmental conditions were discounted and the Committee warned that if they ‘wish to give higher priority to these factors then any areas so chosen may be at the expense of areas where a proportion of households lack basic amenities.’⁸⁴ The main determinant of whether an area became a HAA or GIA was to be where the percentage of privately rented households exceeded 40%. The report admitted that, as a result, there was an obvious overlap between the bottom of the HAA list and the top of the GIA list, but that it was difficult to place a dividing line between the two.⁸⁵ Other criteria to differentiate ‘competing’ areas included

⁸¹ LCC, *Clearance and Improvement Programmes: Report of the Housing Working Party* (April 1975)

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ LCC, *Area Improvement Programme: Report of the Housing Working Party* (November 1975) p.2

⁸⁴ Ibid, pp.9-10

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.10

where social ‘stress’ was known to exist, where urgent action was judged to be necessary to arrest rapid decline, and areas that adjoined clearance areas.⁸⁶ The whole document seemed quite frank about the difficulty of establishing objective criteria for apportioning improvement areas according to HAA and GIA standards, and hastened to add, again, that ‘the “pool” of areas for examination has not been derived from an up to date comprehensive and systematic survey of housing stock and social conditions in the MD (Metropolitan District) due to lack of staff resources.’⁸⁷ In a sense, the report seemed to have been written with an eye on both Whitehall and the local community, emphasising as it did the lack of resources and the need to make harsh decisions between different areas.

The linked report on Clearance and Local Rehousing represented an intention to co-ordinate clearance and building programmes in an attempt to minimise the dispersal of cleared households, it being recognised that the disruption of social life was one of the factors that caused most discontent in areas represented for demolition.⁸⁸ The novelty of the proposals was that clearance plans, the building programme and potential housing land were to be considered by ‘Key Localities’. These ‘Key Localities’ were to be drawn up ‘on the basis of local knowledge of communities or groups of communities within each of which it was assumed residents would wish to be rehoused if they wanted to stay local.’⁸⁹ The problem with this was that the council’s assumptions did not always prove to be local enough for certain groups of residents. Despite, or even because of, their attempts to adjust to changes in national policy, economic circumstances, and popular concerns, these reports created many contentious issues. It was interesting that clearance and improvement continued to be discussed separately rather than as parts of a unified renewal process. One of the main problems the council was to face was that the relative inexactness of the decision-making process and definitions used opened up the issue of renewal to political action, because it appeared that the technical ‘expertise’ applied was so uncertain. In places like Burley Lodge Road and the ‘Ebors’ area of Hyde Park, where a deputation to the

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.11

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.8

⁸⁸ LCC, *Clearance Programme and Local Rehousing: Report of the Housing Working Party* (November 1975)

⁸⁹ Ibid

council protested that an ‘arbitrary’ decision had been made to relieve only half of the area from clearance⁹⁰, residents seemed genuinely puzzled as to the criteria the council had used to make their decisions.

Suffice to say, the Environmental Health Department was not too pleased with the framework it was obliged to operate in. Its head, E.C.Lewis, declared in 1976 that the switch in policy away from clearance towards Housing Action Areas meant that ‘the problems of effecting rehabilitation of what are grossly unfit houses in areas mainly occupied by low income families in a climate of rapidly declining public funds are proving almost insoluble.’⁹¹ Lewis’ successor, J. Garforth, followed this in the following year by warning that ‘in a city of more than a quarter of a million houses, the present rate of 500 houses per year clearance can only serve to build up a backlog of trouble for future generations.’⁹² He added that ‘...the bureaucratic machinery for declaring Housing Action Areas is so cumbersome that in itself it acts as a deterrent to an increase in the rate of declaration.’⁹³ The ‘sanitary’ side of the council thus found itself in the situation where neither clearance nor improvement was really possible to the level it considered necessary. From a choice of urban renewal options the council bureaucracy was left with scrambling around to do as much as was financially, legally and administratively possible in the circumstances, and with little chance of actually being able to set an agenda or take an initiative. This was not a happy position to be in when the political environment was becoming less friendly.

‘Key Localities’ were one of the first features of the council’s new policies to come under attack. Rev. Simpson from Woodhouse Community Association criticised the concept as ‘this lie’ when leading a delegation to the council chamber.⁹⁴ In more temperate language, the Community Housing Working Party described the ‘key locality’ as too large an area, and argued that the new dwellings that were intended to rehouse residents were inappropriate for the

⁹⁰ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, June 1975, pp.35-36

⁹¹ LCC, *Annual Report of the Director of Environmental Health for 1976*, p.30

⁹² LCC, *Annual Report of the Director of Environmental Health for 1977*, p.39

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, November 1975, p.352

families affected.⁹⁵ One of the major factors that agitated local community and residents' groups about the council's stance was that they just could not see the difference between areas that had been reprieved from clearance, areas that were to become HAAs, and adjoining streets that were still in the demolition programme. In this confusion many were eager to use the legislation and the signals coming from central government in order to advocate alternatives. Woodhouse Housing Action Group appealed to the council in May 1976 to declare one of the clearance areas an HAA while making the others a priority neighbourhood, stating that it 'would lead to the removal immediately of the effects of blight and lead to the gradual improvement of the whole area.'⁹⁶ In another area suffering badly from planning blight, the Cross Streets Housing Action Group carried out a survey of local residents and even went as far as to ask the Public Health Advisory Service to assess the housing conditions in the area. The PHAS found that the houses were statutorily unfit from the point of view of bad internal arrangement and inadequate ventilation, and the majority also in respect of sanitary conveniences and inadequate natural lighting to attic rooms. However, they did state that the houses were found to be in a fair state of repair with no evidence of instability. The CSHAG argued that the addition of internal amenities and extra ventilation would rectify these problems, and said that they disagreed that steep, winding staircases and front doors that opened directly onto the street rendered a house unfit for human habitation. They claimed that the clearance process had already caused enough stress in the area, and appealed to the council to make a section of the area an HAA, with adjoining areas as a Priority Neighbourhood. As an extra boost to their arguments they commissioned an architect to produce a report stating how the area could eventually become a GIA.⁹⁷ The CSHAG was to be less than happy with the lack of reception their report received from the council, and a delegation told a council meeting that 'what we find particularly galling is that after spending so much time and effort producing a competent technical report recommending a Housing

⁹⁵ Community Housing Working Party (henceforth CHWP), *Gradual Renewal in Leeds* (March 1976) p.6

⁹⁶ Woodhouse Housing Action Group, *Which Way Woodhouse?* (May 1976) p.8

⁹⁷ Cross Streets Housing Action Group, *Cross Streets Residents' Report* (1976)

Action Area, and doing this in accordance with DOE Circular 14/75, that no-one concerned with council housing has bothered to reply to us.’⁹⁸

Cross Streets Housing Action Group had been formed with the specific aim of opposing redevelopment in the Fitzarthur Street clearance area in Armley. The clearance process here was to demonstrate many of the changes in public perceptions and community action that had occurred in the previous ten years. Many of the arguments made were typical of the period. Leeds’ Senior Housing Inspector, S.R. Sneddon, said that ‘the structure of the houses in the area showed signs of decay and disrepair and because of their age and condition were not considered suitable for general upgrading.’⁹⁹ On the other side, a surveyor giving evidence on behalf of landlords in the area said that they had been improved eight years ago and passed for a life of at least fifteen years¹⁰⁰, while Leslie Webb, a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects, claimed that the houses in the CPO could have been put into good repair for just a few hundred pounds.¹⁰¹ Local councillor Michael Meadowcroft argued that ‘the Cross Streets area could not be divorced from the adjoining streets, and it was feared that morale would be so depressed after the clearance that the council would have the excuse it sought to clear the whole area.’¹⁰² Residents and the CSHAG extolled the virtues of the local communities and facilities and stated that they did not want to be uprooted.¹⁰³

These familiar claims and counter-claims were less momentous than the overall impact of the inquiry. The CSHAG had managed to successfully campaign to have the public local inquiry concerning the Fitzarthur Street area moved to West Leeds Working Men’s Club rather than the traditional venue of the Leeds Civic Hall, a significant sign of the amount of pressure they were able to exert.¹⁰⁴ This was not the only important feature of this particular inquiry. Leading councillors George Mudie, Labour Shadow Housing Chair, and Michael Meadowcroft, the

⁹⁸ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports* (June 1976) p.34

⁹⁹ YEP, 10/05/1977

¹⁰⁰ YEP, 11/05/1977

¹⁰¹ YEP, 18/05/1977

¹⁰² YEP, 12/05/1977

¹⁰³ YEP, 17/05/1977

¹⁰⁴ YEP, 10/05/1977

local Liberal leader, both gave evidence against the CPO.¹⁰⁵ Due to local feeling, the inspector held an informal meeting at Hall Lane Community Centre to allow residents who were unable to attend the inquiry to put their point of view.¹⁰⁶ Altogether, the Fitzarthur Street Public Local Inquiry lasted six days with 186 objections.¹⁰⁷

Despite this opposition, the inspector's report backed the council with minor alterations and was approved by Minister for the Environment Peter Shore in March 1978, but the whole episode was something of a watershed. Responding to a complaint from local Liberal councillor Chris Greenfield, who said that the delay in approval had blighted the area a second time, Shore's deputy Ernest Armstrong replied that the 'order was most unusual in the weight of objections and the length of the inquiry. It takes a great deal of time to write, type, check and consider.'¹⁰⁸ The Fitzarthur Street CPO procedure had demonstrated that the legal process of slum clearance could be transformed into an effective arena for conflict and something akin to political theatre. Leeds' Housing Department commented that 'it is hoped that it will not be necessary to go to such lengths at every future clearance inquiry since this would leave no time to implement the existing programme when one considers the staff resources available.'¹⁰⁹

The mention of 'DOE Circular 14/75' by the Cross Streets Housing Action Group reflects an interesting slant on government policy, and one that was to be very popular with local campaigning groups. This circular outlined the possibility of 'Gradual Renewal', which approached the issue of substandard housing 'carefully-not by attacking whole areas one at a time, but evenly, in all areas, over a period of decades. This would prolong the useful life of houses which would otherwise have been cut short by blight.'¹¹⁰ Though Gradual Renewal had already been mentioned in the council chamber in 1975¹¹¹, the first detailed advocacy of it within the community came in the Community Housing Working

¹⁰⁵ *YEP*, 12/05/1977

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *YEP*, 15/05/1978

¹⁰⁸ *YEP*, 15/05/1978

¹⁰⁹ LCC, *Department of Housing: Quarterly Reports*, 30/06/1977

¹¹⁰ CHWP, *Gradual Renewal in Leeds* p.12

¹¹¹ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, (June 1975) pp 45-46

Party's report *Gradual Renewal in Leeds*. The Community Housing Working Party was a collaboration of several community groups, including the Woodhouse Housing Action Group and Cross Streets Housing Action Group, and financially assisted by the Leeds Civic Trust. They shared a common opposition to slum clearance and enthusiastically embraced the concept of Gradual Renewal. This provided an alternative to the council's recent reports which, they argued, were not in sympathy with the ideas of recent government circulars. The phased redevelopment that the council intended to implement was forecast by the CHWP to cause increased disruption and planning blight over a longer term, and they claimed that any hold-ups in the programme would cause drastic changes in its implementation, something that was almost inevitable given public expenditure cuts, labour and materials shortages.¹¹² Thus the report combined many of the established criticisms of demolition with a remedy that appeared to take account of the political and economic circumstances that the council were facing.

One claim that *Gradual Renewal in Leeds* had made was that local authorities had not adjusted organisationally from redevelopment to rehabilitation.¹¹³ In Leeds' case they were right. The Housing Services Committee did respond to the CHWP report in November 1976 by resolving that the whole of the proposed Woodhouse clearance area should be assessed as an experiment into the feasibility of Gradual Renewal, and that residents and community groups should be consulted as part of this process. The Woodhouse clearance area was cited in 1962 for demolition in the 1972/76 programme, but was assigned as an improvement area in 1966 until the City Engineer refused to give the area the necessary 15 years life. Nonetheless, improvement grants were made available until 1972, when the houses were reviewed and placed in the 1977/81 clearance period. In 1974 the area was phased for demolition in 1976/77.¹¹⁴ This uncertainty and confusion was one reason why Woodhouse was thought to be a good prospect for the exercise.

¹¹² CHWP, *Gradual Renewal in Leeds* pp. 6-7

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p.10

¹¹⁴ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, December 1976, p.546

In the end, suspicion was raised that the council's decision was a delaying tactic to avoid difficult decisions, as it was to be June 1978 by the time a report was presented to committee, and this was before any public consultation had taken place.¹¹⁵ The report did give the council officials an opportunity to give their interpretation of the concept of Gradual Renewal, which they acknowledged had been introduced into government policy in 1975, 'though little practical guidance on its application to large areas of older housing has emerged since.'¹¹⁶ Gradual Renewal was described as 'a mixture of courses of action potentially ranging from clearance and redevelopment, upgrading of existing houses through to 'conversions' of back-to-backs into through houses.' Tellingly, it was suggested 'for application in industrial cities like Leeds, that there are minimum practicable areas applicable to each option which would seem to preclude the very detailed application of gradual renewal though a 'coarser grained' approach seems feasible.'¹¹⁷ It was suggested that the council's current side-by-side operation of clearance and improvement programmes effectively constituted a form of Gradual Renewal, though it was recognised that the 'specific form of gradual renewal that is required to be investigated is one where the scale of change is small and the pace slow and over a much longer period than the current timespan of the Clearance Programme.'¹¹⁸ The CHWP's claim was at least partly acknowledged when the council stated that case studies of Gradual Renewal demonstrated 'the need for co-ordinated management of widespread change on a continuous basis which is quite unlike the area-programmed, departmentally-based approach to renewal currently operated.'¹¹⁹

As advice for the forthcoming public consultation, the report suggested that the council should put forward a series of reservations which included limits imposed by central government, inability to assure which residents would need to be rehoused, that the inclusion of many Type II back-to-backs in the improvement programme would be at the expense of better housing in other areas, and basically that converting back-to-backs into through houses was so expensive that

¹¹⁵ LCC, *Gradual Renewal and its Application to Woodhouse* (June 1978)

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.i

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.3

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.4

it would only be considered in the face of overwhelming evidence. The six options given for the future of the three areas of Woodhouse included phased demolition and rebuilding; improvement as an HAA or GIA; retaining all the houses with only minor repairs and provision of amenities; varieties of partial demolition; and Gradual Renewal—described as complex and small scale combinations of all the options.¹²⁰

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the results of the consultation and survey were rather inconclusive and pleased nobody. Only 38% of residents responded to the survey, one group of (largely tenanted) streets came out strongly in favour of clearance, areas with more owner-occupiers were less keen, while landlords as a group strongly supported retention.¹²¹ These results aligned closely with the assessments of local feeling that were reported back from public meetings. These included the fact that landlord opposition was described as unsurprising as they would not receive market value compensation, that tenants were eager to be rehoused locally, and owner-occupiers were largely satisfied with their own personal conditions but alarmed by the deterioration of the area.¹²² The Woodhouse Housing Action Group were concerned about the amount of time it had taken to prepare *Gradual Renewal and its Application to Woodhouse*, thought that the council had misread the concept of Gradual Renewal, and felt that the council's consultation leaflet was confusing for residents and unfairly weighted in favour of rebuilding.¹²³ Following on from the public meetings the council also held a meeting involving departmental representatives, a local councillor, and members of various local groups including Leeds Civic Trust, the CHWP, Woodhouse Community Association, Woodhouse Landlords and Owners Association and the Small Shopkeepers Action Group. This meeting also saw most groups advocate gradual renewal methods based around the 'key elements of no planned 'life', small-scale action, and full resident participation.'¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.22

¹²¹ Leeds Central Library; *Gradual Renewal and its Application to Woodhouse* (19/12/1978) pp. 3-4, in *Housing Action Areas 1975-78*

¹²² Ibid, p.1

¹²³ Ibid, pp.16-17

¹²⁴ Ibid, p.19

In the end the officials recommended that the area of the ‘Gantons’ that had overwhelmingly welcomed rebuilding should be represented for clearance, along with the ‘Hawes’ that had been identified as suffering from ground instability. Residents from both areas were to be offered local rehousing. For the rest of the areas where the evidence was less clear, a rethink and a detailed costing of options was suggested. The Housing Chairman, Councillor Sparling, said that ‘the preparation of this report follows the most extensive public consultation ever undertaken in a proposed clearance area and it has inevitably caused considerable delay in making decisions about the future of the area. There are differing views as to whether this delay has been worthwhile or not.’¹²⁵

This ‘experiment’ demonstrated many of the problems with urban renewal during this period. The idea of consultation and participation had proved to be another factor adding to confusion and conflict rather than any real extension of democracy. For one thing, the council was in control of the process and felt obliged to frame the questions and make warnings of the potential consequences of residents’ choices. In some ways this was an attempt to guide the results of the exercise on lines that were amenable to the council’s way of thinking, but the council officials themselves were also acutely conscious of the limitations they faced in terms of finance and resources. The final inconclusive results of the survey exercise did give them more scope to make their own recommendations. Slow progress with the preparations and process of consultation was undoubtedly the major failing of the exercise, and in many ways could have been said to have made blight and local conditions worse. Liberals suspected a conspiracy and a deliberate delaying process so that residents would eventually come round to the idea of demolition, but a Labour councillor for Woodhouse declared ‘quite categorically, and it is the view of my colleagues, that the worst thing that happened to Woodhouse was this survey. It deliberately put back any action by something like three years.’¹²⁶ He added that he believed the ‘proper machinery’ for renewal was to leave the decision-making to the Environmental Health

¹²⁵ YEP, 21/12/1978.

¹²⁶ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, (January 1979) p.28

Officers, 'people who know', rather than Liberal councillors and 'some of those people who are the pressure groups of Woodhouse.'¹²⁷

This point of view had become more unfashionable through the 1970s, but it did bring to the fore this issue of how representative some local groups were. The survey results in the area of the 'Gantons' had shown that many private tenants were only too willing to be rehoused, but their opinions were not reflected in community group politics. Many councillors saw themselves as more in tune with local conditions than community groups, who were often thought to be out of touch with practicalities and advocating the views of a small section of the residents.

On the other hand, it did seem that Gradual Renewal had not received full consideration during this period. The various groups that advocated Gradual Renewal felt that Leeds council had misinterpreted the concept to its own advantage, and had not put the issue to local residents in a fair manner. Council officials were clearly dubious about the practicality of small-scale action spread over the whole city, and their concerns were threefold: the lack of staff experience in dealing with that kind of work; generally depleted staff and labour resources; and the lack of guidance from central government.¹²⁸ This last point was definitely a cause for grievance. Whitehall had publicised the idea of Gradual Renewal in its 14/75 circular with the idea that it was a desirable policy for local authorities, but these councils had also to work on implementing the 1974 Housing Act with its emphasis on intensively improving small areas that faced the worst conditions. In a period of rapidly deteriorating financial assistance from the centre, councils were bound to find it difficult to set priorities, a situation that left them open to discontent from below.

Within the council the trends that were set during and after the 'Strategy D' affair tended to reinforce themselves throughout the remainder of the 1970s. The major factor that led to controversy was the continuation of clearance against the

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ *Gradual Renewal and its Application to Woodhouse*, p.22

background of declining public and private housebuilding and a rising council house waiting list. Liberal arguments consistently focused on opposition to clearance, but these arguments were still given at least some consideration until Labour lost control of the council in 1975. The problem was that local politicians shared the frustrations of much of the bureaucracy when it came to implementing policy. Responding to a question from a Liberal councillor asking what action he intended to take on a recent survey that showed residents in an area of Hunslet wanted to remain in their present houses, Housing Chair Councillor Gould (Labour) said that it was a 'good survey' and options would be considered with regard to financial and staff resources and government conditions on improvements.¹²⁹ The emphasis on resources echoed what he had said a few months earlier on similar issues.¹³⁰ Gould also showed an early interest in Gradual Renewal, admitting that it 'might seem to herald a new understanding of the complexities of urban renewal that we have never understood before.'¹³¹ He added that Gradual Renewal should not necessarily mean a reduction of clearance, but the refinement of renewal action and a means of achieving more community involvement and local rehousing. A more radical stance was taken by Gould's successor as Labour housing spokesman, Councillor Mudie, who declared that 'it is accepted that the areas are smaller than they were in the past but they are still areas; they are still circling areas and they are still clearing them, and the whole basis of the area seems to be that there is a certain type of house and that type of house, regardless of whether it is owner-occupied, regardless of whether the people want to stay in that house, is demolished.'¹³² He outlined his preference that the Environmental Health Officers should continue to propose properties before they went into a clearance programme.¹³³ Later that year Mudie stated that there were at least two parties in the council opposed to wholesale area clearance¹³⁴ and he later said that 'we want an objective look at individual properties so that the poor individual who has got a grant, who is buying his house, who is pouring his investments into that house, does not suddenly find that

¹²⁹ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, January 1975, p.389

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, June 1974, p.127

¹³¹ *Ibid*, June 1975, p.45

¹³² *Ibid*, February 1977, p.568

¹³³ *Ibid*, pp.571-572

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, October 1977, p.196

he is told by some bureaucrat that his house is not fit to live in.’¹³⁵ This was very close to the line that the Liberals had been advocating for years, but despite the apparent *rapprochement* between ‘official’ Labour and Liberal opinions on redevelopment policy, there was still a close rivalry within the council.

Liberal opposition to clearance seemed to increase in momentum rather than show signs of satisfaction that the demolition rate was slowing down. They embraced the idea of Gradual Renewal at its most conservative interpretation, though Councillor Meadowcroft, one of the more ‘reasoned’ Liberals, conceded that ‘looking at the City as a whole, the number cleared each year could conceivably be greater than we are presently clearing and so it is not numbers, it is the style of the policy we are talking about.’¹³⁶ Other Liberal councillors were more uncompromising, arguing against setting any clearance targets¹³⁷ while, on the subject of council-acquired properties, Councillor Clay went as far as to claim that the Conservatives were ‘buying up these houses and deliberately letting them rot, all in order to justify their lunatic clearance programme.’¹³⁸ In certain areas the established conflict with Labour councillors continued, particularly where these Labour members were in favour of clearance. Councillor Millett (Labour) claimed that ‘some of the people in my ward are suffering from the results of the dogmatism of the Liberal Party’ and accused them of letting their obsession with community politics blind them to unfit housing.¹³⁹ In his ward the East End Park Residents for New Homes Association sent a deputation to the council pleading to be rehoused, another sign that the swing away from clearance was not universally popular.¹⁴⁰ Another sign of Labour-Liberal rivalry came in October 1978, when councillors ignored the Conservative administration to have an argument about the whole nature of post-war housing policy and which side had more effectively opposed ‘Strategy D’ and recent clearance proposals.¹⁴¹ Liberal attacks on council renewal policy showed increased emphasis on comparing their own ideas to traditional Tory values, and contrasting this to the modernising

¹³⁵ Ibid, October 1978, p39

¹³⁶ Ibid, October 1978, p.34

¹³⁷ Ibid, November 1975, p.385

¹³⁸ Ibid, October 1978, p.29

¹³⁹ Ibid, January 1979, pp.25-26

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, December 1978, pp.1-3

¹⁴¹ Ibid, October 1978, pp.33-37

agenda of the Conservative controlled council. Councillor Greenfield argued that clearance discouraged thrift by reducing the proportion of owner occupiers and reduced choice by removing private renting as a form of tenure,¹⁴² a position that was backed up by Councillor Meadowcroft who stated that the policy ‘undermines thrift, it discourages prudence, it breaks up communities and is inimical to stability.’¹⁴³

Ironically, the most extreme example of this kind of argument came from Labour’s Councillor Driver, who declared that ‘the Tory plan to demolish is certainly not in keeping with declared Conservative aims of supporting the individual against the corporate state that they profess so much to hate. What is more, this Tory action is simply uneconomic on the Conservatives’ own market terms.’¹⁴⁴ This was quite a significant statement, as it reflected the fact that the Conservatives in Leeds were still employing a technocratic approach to urban renewal even on the eve of the Thatcher government. With Councillor Sparling as Housing Chairman, the Conservatives still looked to favour clearance as the most desirable solution to older housing in Leeds, albeit constrained by financial pressure and government shifts towards improvement—in November 1976 he declared that it was an ‘absolute tragedy’ that the clearance programme was having to be cut back.¹⁴⁵ He felt that the problem with reducing redevelopment and promoting improvement was that ‘you are just pushing the problem further and further into the distance, with the result that sooner or later you are going to come to the point when there are more and more properties to be dealt with at once.’¹⁴⁶ Sparling himself was very consistent both in his determination to attack unfit housing and his faith in the council officials’ ability to manage change. He showed typical contempt for Liberal arguments when he stated that Councillor Greenfield’s ‘idea of progress is to perpetuate slum housing conditions.’¹⁴⁷ The policy of local rehousing on the basis of ‘key localities’ was defended, as was the more selective method of allocating clearance areas. Where the limits of the

¹⁴² Ibid, January 1976, p.479

¹⁴³ Ibid, June 1976, p110

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, April 1979, pp.39-40

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, November 1976, p.405

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, December 1976, p.550

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, June 1975, p.388

Conservative ‘statist’ approach could be detected was in their attitude to ‘municipalisation’. When Councillor Mudie attacked the local policy of not using the loan allocation the council was entitled to in order to buy up vacant properties for council ownership, Sparling countered by referring to the government’s mortgage loan scheme that had been suspended, saying ‘there appears to be money for municipalisation but it is rather different when it is a question of enabling people to own their own houses.’¹⁴⁸ Thus some ideological differences were still apparent. Nevertheless, Conservative policy at local level still appeared to follow the line of bureaucratically-directed clearance of ‘slum’ housing combined with the building of council housing for those unable to enter the housing market. There was little encouragement for private landlords, nor for owners who occupied the poorest and cheapest houses. Sparling’s faith in public officials seemed to be a lot more secure than that of his party’s national leadership. When replying to a Liberal councillor who declared that he could not differentiate a local clearance area from an HAA, he suggested that he should get ‘Mr Garforth, a very highly respected official of this Council, to take him round and he will show him the difference in no time at all.’¹⁴⁹ In this particular period the Conservative outlook on urban renewal in Leeds seemed to follow what might be called a corporate paternalist line, their traditional commitments to inequality not yet implying a rejection of the functions of the state to implement necessary change.

Urban renewal in Leeds had become a very different process politically during the 1970s, even though the institutional forms had stayed pretty much the same. The differences lay in the changing context that Leeds’ political and bureaucratic leadership had to operate in. The main factor was the deteriorating economic situation and the reduction of funds from the centre. This meant that ambitious programmes such as ‘Strategy D’ had become impossible to finance, and throughout the 1970s the money available from the exchequer steadily reduced, with a corresponding reduction in Leeds’ clearance programme. Where money was allocated to local authorities it tended to be targeted to programmes that

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, June 1976, p.140

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, April 1979, p.42

focused on the worst-affected areas, in the form of Housing Action Areas. Unfortunately, in a situation of limited finances, there were only certain locales that were able to receive this status, and with no real system for prioritising areas, confusion often occurred. Leeds was not alone in its dilemmas. As Paris and Blackaby point out, urban renewal policy in Birmingham was also dominated in this period by issues relating to the 'life' of older houses and the classification and official designation of areas.¹⁵⁰ Leeds was also to suffer from inconsistent national policy in the form of recommendations from central government. Gradual Renewal and other forms of improvement were encouraged, but instructions and information on how to implement them tended to be vague, and with a shortage of staff experience and time the council was reluctant to devote too much attention to experimenting with them. The council bureaucracy also found it difficult to adjust an organisation used to operating wide, area-based slum clearance schemes to the new government trend for encouraging micro-management of smaller, selected environments. At the same time the Conservative administration that 'ruled' Leeds in the late 1970s still retained a commitment to the state-directed transformation of 'slum' housing areas. As a result, council programmes generally operated on scaled down versions of previous processes, and the fewer sections of Leeds that were affected by redevelopment or improvement, the more questions arose from those groups who demanded attention or wanted to be left alone.

The reduction in size and scope of demolition and improvement operations, and the seemingly more haphazard and subjective decision-making processes, gave great impetus to community groups and party-political opposition to council policy. The more that the Housing Committee or official working parties removed areas from the clearance programme, or included them in HAAs, the more local organisations were encouraged to press their demands. This reached the stage where the council, and particularly the 'expert' officials, struggled for legitimacy, and was forced to justify at length almost every decision it made that related to urban renewal. This also had its effects on local party politics, as the electoral competition between Labour and the emerging Liberals led to Labour

¹⁵⁰ Paris and Blackaby, *Not Much Improvement*, pp.92-93

softening its attitude on slum clearance and placing more emphasis on demonstrating that it was listening to the people. Unfortunately, participation and consultation were to be quite vague concepts and, as it was difficult to give participation any real structure, informal consultation was employed more often. This was much quicker than more thorough attempts at residents' involvement, though its democratic nature was often dubious. By the end of the 1970s the whole political, ideological, financial and legal context was working against the development of urban renewal programmes, though the organisational structure of the local authority was still struggling to adjust to that situation. In the end, given that opposition to urban renewal seemed more active than discontent related to declining standards, political expediency suggested that the most effective way was simply to accept that the council should do less and decrease the expectation on it to provide results. This response effectively involved a drastic scaling down of the interventionism that had marked post-war urban policy and of which slum clearance was one of the most intensive strategies. While discontent and community action remained at a relatively high level compared with the 1950s and 1960s, shorn of their major target and many of their most pressing grievances, they became more inchoate. The state, both locally and nationally, found itself with something of a breathing space but had left many of the collective causes it embraced in the post-war period to the play of large and small private interests in a less ordered capitalist environment.

Chapter Five: Housing: Construction and Production, 1954-1968



York Road and Ebor Gardens Estate, 1963. (Leeds Library and Information Service, www.leodis.net)

In the realm of housebuilding, 1954 is less of a rigid dividing line than it is for slum clearance and housing improvement. Nevertheless, the early 1950s does mark the beginning of a shift in the aims and methods of construction in response to the great political significance of housing in this period. Central government was determined to respond to popular pressures to increase building rates, but it was local authorities who had to provide the bulk of these houses. Even allowing for the relaxation of post-war controls on materials, labour and finance, there were still significant constraints on councils' ability to increase construction,

particularly after the resumption of slum clearance and the need to compensate for the loss of demolished property by carrying out inner-city redevelopment. It could be argued that it was the necessity of dealing with the housing shortage while simultaneously carrying out a renewal of aged residential districts that led to the adoption of modern styles and methods of building. As Dunleavy has claimed, pursuing high-rise projects and using systems-building offered a 'technological short-cut' solution to the problems of local authorities.¹ For a relatively short period in the late 1950s and early 1960s these 'solutions' contributed to an extensive reshaping of much of Leeds' residential environment, and a brief glimpse of novel modern ways of living.

Simmonds has argued that 'Leeds' housing programme in the 1950s unfolded purely as a product of a political-cum-administrative vision, which was carried through with relatively little public debate or discussion....this may help to explain why Leeds produced distinctive forms of housing at odds with most people's preferences.'² This seems unfair and slightly misleading when hindsight is taken away. There was little effort made to ascertain public opinion on housing, and there are occasions where disapproval was expressed concerning the form and style of modern dwellings, though seldom on any organised level. Yet the primary political imperative of the housing programme in the 1950s was the production and provision of increasing numbers of houses in order to reduce overcrowding and rehouse those living in slum conditions. No real precedent existed for mechanisms that could assess the desires of the users of public services, with or without their active involvement. There are many instances documented where people were extremely happy with their new living environments, particularly such features as indoor toilets, bathrooms, central heating and modern kitchens, and most of the new housing constructed in Leeds during the 1950s was traditional in style, and semi-detached with gardens. In resorting to bureaucratic decision-making processes and high-rise flats for some of its housing programme Leeds was not unique, and formed part of a trend with

¹ Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain*, pp.101-102

² Simmonds, 'Conservative Governments and the Housing Question', pp.173-174

other provincial cities such as Birmingham, Sheffield and Liverpool.³ Nevertheless, it is worth considering why Leeds' housing programme unfolded in the way it did, particularly as the overwhelming majority of multi-storey blocks in the city were constructed in a ten-year period starting in 1956, and modern methods of building occupied an increasing part of construction projects.

After the end of the wartime hiatus on housebuilding, things continued to a great extent as they had done pre-war, minus the significant levels of private-sector construction of the 1930s. All aspects of economic life were still subject to many of the controls that had applied during the war, in order that the country could adjust to the peacetime economy and fulfil the social objectives of the post-war Labour government while avoiding disorder and waste. The minister responsible for housing, Aneurin Bevan, believed strongly in the provision of high-quality council housing as the great priority for the resources devoted to his department. As a result, a strict system of licences was imposed on private building, but local authorities were also subject to shortages of such vital inputs as steel, timber and labour. These tight restrictions were loosened as the economy recovered, but central government was still to exert extensive influence over local authority housing policy through legislation, manipulation of finance through changing subsidies, housing allocations, cost controls for individual schemes, and design specifications or standards. Councils were often to find Whitehall as much of an unpredictable factor as the uncertainties associated with acquiring materials, obtaining labour or facing extreme weather conditions.

Within Leeds the post-war situation did lead to some experimentation with prefabrication and non-traditional materials, but construction was largely of the cottage-type dwellings familiar from the inter-war years, semi-detached or in small terraces, with gardens, and massed on suburban sites that the council had acquired before the war, such as Belle Isle, Beckett Park and Ireland Wood. Building contracts were also carried out by a range of small, local firms, as many

³ Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain*; Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*; Carter, *The Life and Death of Old Labour*; Jones, Phil; "The Suburban High Flat in the Post-war Reconstruction of Birmingham, 1945-1971" in *Urban History* 32, 2 (2005), pp. 311-326. On Liverpool, see Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block* p.163

as 18 in 1950-51.⁴ Modest increases in output were achieved, but the council was already planning for the future. Land scarcity was to be the initial spur to the consideration of developing cleared inner city sites, which were also held to have the additional advantages of prior provision of streets and sewers, easy walking distances to employment, and breaking up congested industrial development.⁵ Multi-storey flats were contemplated, along with ‘modern’ terrace houses and three-storey flats, of which new designs had been approved. The City Architect was also preparing an updated scheme at Marsh Lane, near the city centre, which had been suspended at the outbreak of war.⁶

Increasing building rates and obtaining a continuous flow of completed dwellings was the council’s main aim during the 1950s. As such, they were receptive to almost any means of achieving this and breaking some of the barriers that frustrated their objectives, such as finance, resources and even weather. The number of building firms awarded contracts to build municipal housing declined markedly through the 1950s, even as the number of dwellings constructed increased. By 1962 this had fallen to six companies plus the direct labour of the Works Department. This seems to have been caused at least in part by conscious decisions made by the council. In 1955 the City Architect urged that more large areas of land needed to be acquired ‘with a view to encouraging big contractors to come in and be assured of continuity of work’.⁷ Five years later the sporadic construction on small pockets of land in Swinnow was bemoaned, as it was held that ‘this sort of development results in the letting of a series of comparatively small contracts which are more difficult to administer.’⁸ This bureaucratic desire for easier procedures in construction was to have a particular effect in redevelopment areas, where it often led to ‘fit’ dwellings being demolished to provide more ‘suitable’ areas for rebuilding.⁹ Control over the process of construction was much sought after by the council, and a major reason why they preferred to consolidate large contracts in the hands of ‘reliable’ builders. In

⁴ LCC, *Reports of Committees, 1950-51*.

⁵ LCC, *Reports of Committees, 1949-50*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1954-55*

⁸ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1959-60*

⁹ See chapter on ‘Clearance or Improvement’.

1958-59 Leeds completed only 1678 council houses, a source of embarrassment when it was considered that they had successfully lobbied the MHLG for an increase in their quota from 1600 to 1800. Karl Cohen commented ironically that ‘the (Housing) Committee has no desire to apportion blame in this other than to emphasise that all contracts were in the hands of private builders, and for some reason or other they have not been able to deliver the goods.’¹⁰

Construction was often heavily affected by outside factors such as shortages of labour and materials, and also by the weather. Materials shortages had been of importance in the immediate post-war period and led to strict national controls, but they could impact on building projects into the 1950s. Leeds’ plans for inner city flats at Saxton Gardens (formerly Marsh Lane) were affected by a lack of steel, both in the preliminary stages¹¹ and in the midst of construction during 1955.¹² This type of difficulty was one of the reasons why multi-storey construction was limited until the later 1950s, though in the latter case it did not stop the housing committee’s plans to commence flats in the following years.¹³ Even as late as 1960, a shortage of bricks and bricklayers led the council to let an extra contract for ‘new traditional’ dwellings on the Cow Close and Swinnow estates, making use of pre-fabricated materials.¹⁴ In 1961 slower building rates were put down to shortages of labour on building sites as well as a lack of professional staff,¹⁵ and the issue of a shortage of trained architects to supervise building was also raised in 1964.¹⁶ The notoriously cold winter of 1962/63 practically halted building for three months. This latter issue provoked the council into looking more closely into ‘industrialised’ building methods which it believed might not be as easily affected by weather or labour problems.¹⁷ Connected to the issue of housebuilding rates was the use of multi-storey flats. High-rise developments on cleared inner-city sites had been contemplated in 1949/50, apparently due to limited land availability¹⁸, but were slow in coming to

¹⁰ *YEN*, 01/04/1959

¹¹ *LCC, Annual Reports of Committees, 1952-53*

¹² *LCC, Annual Reports of Committees, 1955-56*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *LCC, Annual Reports of Committees, 1959-60*

¹⁵ *LCC, Annual Reports of Committees, 1961-62*

¹⁶ *LCC, Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, August 1964, p.183

¹⁷ *LCC, Annual Reports of Committees, 1962-63*

¹⁸ *LCC, Annual Reports of Committees, 1949-50*

fruition. As we have seen, this was partly due to a lack of essential material such as steel, but it was also admitted that ‘in a scheme of this nature a considerable amount of preliminary work is necessary as it introduces many problems of a special character which must be considered and agreed before the detail (sic) planning can proceed.’¹⁹ The commencement of the council’s large-scale Ebor Gardens scheme was also delayed, though this was due to the abandonment of a ‘district’ heating and hot water scheme in favour of electric floor heating to all dwellings.²⁰ In the late 1950s lower rates of construction were explained by the switch in emphasis towards high-rise flats, which ‘undoubtedly take longer in the early stages’²¹, while the main reasons for increased payments to contractors were described as the large labour force and ‘the considerable amount of work in the construction of multi-storey flats which is a more expensive form of development.’²² At this stage, therefore, speed was not a major factor in the decision to build higher. In the next few years, however, as priority was increasingly given both to production of housing units and maximising use of land, it became important to seek ways of building more rapidly. By the early 1960s new designs were proposed taking high-rise well above ten storeys, and indeed twenty-three storey blocks were envisaged,²³ but this was another area that provided a catalyst for the adoption of systems-built housing.

Leeds had pre-war experience with the use of building systems in the construction of Quarry Hill Flats at the end of the 1930s, a project that was closely linked to the vision of Housing Committee Chairman Charles Jenkinson and Housing Director R.A.H. Livett. Jenkinson died in 1949, but Livett was made Leeds’ first City Architect in 1945, and exercised major influence in all municipal building projects. Quarry Hill Flats was a development of the pre-war era, but is worth consideration here both for significant and symbolic reasons. As a modernist edifice that was created with a great deal of idealistic intent but which ultimately proved flawed and had a short life, it fits into the more critical assessments of post-war housing and public architecture. In this way, its

¹⁹ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1952-53*

²⁰ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1957-58*

²¹ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1958-59*

²² LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1959-60*

²³ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1960/61*

demolition between 1975 and 1978 could be seen to be emblematic of the failure of urban modernisation. On a more concrete level, it exists as an experiment of large-scale public housing as a living environment, and provides some of the first evidence of how tenants experienced life in modern flats. It was in this spirit that Alison Ravetz carried out the research that was ultimately to become *Model Estate*, in effect the definitive history of the estate.²⁴ This is the main reason why this thesis does not delve too deeply into the history of Quarry Hill Flats, but also why it cannot be ignored. Of the major features of Quarry Hill Flats, the most relevant are the nature of construction and its impact on the history of the complex and its residents. As Ravetz points out, Quarry Hill Flats was ‘the only large local authority estate of the interwar period to be built unconventionally’.²⁵



Quarry Hill Flats, July 1951. (Leeds Library and Information Service, www.leodis.net)

The method of construction employed was the French Mopin system, which involved the assembly of prefabricated units around a steel frame. Leeds’

²⁴ Alison Ravetz, *Model Estate: Planned Housing at Quarry Hill, Leeds* (London, Croom Helm, 1974)

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.53

Housing Director R.A.H. Livett chose the system both because he doubted that the bricks and bricklayers would be available for such a huge scheme, and because he hoped that savings in building costs could go on providing more modern fittings for the flats. This decision to use system-building was very much an experiment in the conditions of the time, and there were to be significant effects in the immediate and the longer term.

Ravetz has asserted that ‘the details of design and fittings made these the most advanced dwellings that had then been built for working class populations’²⁶, and ‘it was the fullest and most complete expression of all the social, architectural and technical ideas that were then current in model housing.’²⁷ This sense that the flats were pioneering and unique was one of the main reasons why there was a strong attachment to them among Leeds’ politicians and administrators, and also much of the local population. On the other hand, the experimental nature of Quarry Hill Flats created significant problems. Difficulties between the system’s designer Eugene Mopin, Housing Director Livett and builder Tarran over the contract and methods of building all delayed the completion of the flats. The short-term cost of construction was roughly as expected, but there were to be added costs in terms of maintenance compared with ‘traditional’ pre-war council houses. Most importantly, there turned out to be serious structural problems that required a massive rehabilitation programme. Ravetz stated that ‘the evidence suggests that the Quarry Hill construction suffered first from being a foreign importation that was adapted to a different design and in different working conditions from its place of origin; and second from an imperfect understanding of innovating techniques.’²⁸ Sadly, these lessons were largely ignored when it came to system-building in the post-war period.

After problems emerged with the exterior cladding of the flats during the 1950s, the council commissioned a report from a firm of consultants that showed some serious defects in the cladding of the building, as well as some faults in construction and workmanship. As such, the council faced the decision whether

²⁶ Ibid, p.65

²⁷ Ibid, p.66

²⁸ Ibid, p.85

to immediately demolish the complex, to carry out remedial work that would extend the life of the flats for about ten years, or to permanently rectify the problems. Demolition was rejected as it would have required the rehousing of 938 families and caused a knock-on effect on the waiting list for the rest of the city, while a permanent repair was rejected as it would have cost almost as much as a complete demolition and rebuilding. Council leader, Alderman King, claimed that the ten-year repair option would give ‘an opportunity for proper organised rehousing to take place at the appropriate time, without having to rely on panic measures.’²⁹ This decision in effect set the course for the ultimate demise of the flats, though its fate was faced with some reluctance. The Conservative leader, Alderman Hargrave, gave a sense of the esteem in which Quarry Hill was held when he said that he felt that not enough consideration had been paid to a complete reconstruction of the flats.³⁰

Although contractual and organisational problems occurred during the construction of Quarry Hill Flats, the structural issues didn’t come to prominence until the late 1950s, so had little impact on decision-making before that time, or even after. The various difficulties with materials, labour and the weather ultimately outweighed the potential downsides of systems-building, and there was a constant rise in the consideration and use of ‘modern’ methods and materials through the 1950s into the mid-1960s. From the late 1940s this usually took the form of ‘new traditional’ houses and flats which used prefabricated materials, but in established designs and styles. This seems to have been a genuine attempt to respond to shortages of materials and skilled building labour rather than a more radical approach to housing provision. When traditional materials became more freely available, the City Architect declared that they would look to increase the amount of houses built in familiar construction methods,³¹ though they still fell back on ‘new traditional’ dwellings when there was a shortage of bricks and/or bricklayers.³² Some of the council’s 10-storey flat blocks, built in the late 1950s, had been constructed by Reema, who set up a factory at Seacroft producing pre-

²⁹ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, August 1961, p.38

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.39

³¹ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1954-55*

³² LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1959-60*

fabricated units³³, but it wasn't until the early 1960s that fully 'industrialised' building schemes assumed a much higher place on the agenda. This was partly provoked by the poor weather of 1962/63 and shortages of labour caused by an increase in central office and retail developments, but there was also an element of party-political competition over building rates, the Conservative housing spokesman criticising 'the absence of a spirit and purpose sufficiently purposeful to explore and put to the earliest use the experience of others in the use of modern building techniques.'³⁴ Karl Cohen stated that the housing committee was 'seriously contemplating calling on the resources of those who can build by industrialised methods', by which he meant that as much of the dwelling as possible was manufactured, processed, and put together in factory conditions, with work at the site reduced to a bare minimum.³⁵ Nonetheless, he described the committee as 'treading cautiously down this path'³⁶, an attitude that probably contributed to Cohen receiving another rebuke from the Conservative spokesman, Councillor Lyons, in the following year.³⁷

High-rise flats were the most obvious manifestation of modernity in the residential environment of post-war Leeds, and became symbolic of the housing of the era, but the application of modern styles and standards was evident in most types of dwelling built in this period. As with the construction of tower blocks, there were practical, aesthetic and 'consumerist' reasons for the provision of amenities and the application of technology to new housing. In the 1950s emphasis was placed more on facilities placed in flat blocks and mostly provided on a communal basis, like refuse disposal, district heating, laundry facilities and clothes drying rooms. By the early 1960s more attention was given to supplying modern 'needs' within individual dwellings and responding to trends that were being pioneered in private housing. Leeds' Housing Committee made a number of suggestions for an Association of Municipal Authorities meeting in January 1960, including the introduction of new forms of heating, provision for kitchen

³³ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1958-59*

³⁴ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, February 1963, p.134

³⁵ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1962-63*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, May 1964, p.198

appliances, quiet areas for children, and better soundproofing and insulation.³⁸ The council was well-placed to respond to the Parker Morris Committee of 1961, with its recommendations for space standards in public housing.³⁹

Prototype houses were built that demonstrated how Leeds aimed to conform to Parker Morris standards. It was also stressed that in these new designs twenty-one electric power points were provided in a four-bedroom house, and added that ‘it could be said that yesterday’s luxury has become today’s necessity, and what is perhaps regarded as unnecessary and luxurious today will undoubtedly be regarded as the norm tomorrow.’⁴⁰ Central heating was another facility given much attention, and ‘to make the best use of the house the main rooms and working areas, and the bedrooms as well if possible, need to be heated.’⁴¹ The council was very pleased with the publicity and attention given to the ‘L64’ prototype houses, which it claimed were ‘generally acclaimed not only by architectural and housing experts, but by the ordinary man and woman in the house.’⁴² Buoyed by this, the Housing Committee announced that it was considering showers and pedestal sinks in the bathrooms, double glazing, and whole house heating. They acknowledged that ‘a limiting factor will be costs but the Committee is in little doubt but that in 10 to 15 years’ time these type of “luxuries” will be household norms.’⁴³ The council was thus keen to demonstrate its commitment to modern interior facilities, evidence that conforming to the higher standards of the era was a priority, but also possibly that it was thought important to compete with the private sector and prove that council provision was a lot more than second-class.

Leeds also embraced modern styles in design and planning when it came to the layout of new estates, including such things as playgrounds, open space, shops and separation of pedestrians and traffic. Whinmoor was to be the focus of one of the most thorough schemes for arranging estates to adapt to the rise of the

³⁸ *YEP*, 21/01/1960

³⁹ Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*

⁴⁰ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1963-64*

⁴¹ City of Leeds Housing Committee, *64 Housing* (Leeds, May 1964)

⁴² LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1964-65*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

motorcar. In a form of the 'Radburn' system first developed in the US in the 1930s, most of the houses were to be served by cul de sacs at the rear, containing garages and parking spaces. This would allow houses 'to face on to pedestrian ways which will link the various parts of the scheme and provide ways to schools and shops free from traffic.'⁴⁴ There were concerns that previous developments at Seacroft had involved too low a density, leaving areas of 'rough open space'. As a result, in the Whinmoor schemes more attention was paid to 'siting buildings, open spaces and communications in such a way as to create conditions where a sense of community may develop.'⁴⁵ The execution of the plans for out-of-town estates such as these was not always conducive to community-building though. One woman wrote to the *Yorkshire Evening Post* complaining that 'after six years wait for a shop, the first thing we get built is a public house. I like living in Seacroft, but as for amenities, things ARE as bad as they seem.' The newspaper added that it had received several similar letters.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it seems that people were generally fairly patient when moving into these new environments, possibly due to the improvement in the housing conditions, and complaints like this are relatively sparing and unorganised at this time.

Leeds' new multi-storey flats contained many of the new interior features such as central heating, hot water and rubbish chutes, but were also highly in favour for their environmental impact. The housing committee believed that 'introducing these blocks will greatly assist in the architectural grouping and relieve the monotony of two storey development.'⁴⁷ When opening the Seacroft Gate flats in November 1959, Leeds East MP Denis Healey declared that 'Seacroft Gate would for the first time make a really worthy gateway to the great city of Leeds. In the past the visual physical aspect had given visitors little clue as to its real greatness.'⁴⁸ Opening ceremonies and the commemorative booklets that accompanied them demonstrate the level of civic pride that was taken from the construction of Leeds' high-rise blocks. These booklets usually gave a potted history of Leeds Council's housing achievements, along with plans and artists

⁴⁴ *YEP*, 20/07/1961

⁴⁵ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1962-63*

⁴⁶ *YEP*, 11/08/1961

⁴⁷ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1955-56*

⁴⁸ *YEP*, 09/11/1959.

impressions of the building in question. Other Leeds MPs such as Hugh Gaitskell, Alice Bacon and Keith Joseph also officially opened flats, along with other dignitaries such as senior civil servants and high-flying councillors. Protocol was important on such occasions, and prior to the opening ceremony for Kirkstall Hill flats in March 1965 there was an argument between the Housing and Town Clerk's Departments about who should send out the invitations.⁴⁹

The period between 1959 and 1962 saw the peak of the council's enthusiasm for high rise development, but also a sense that they were pursuing an 'avant-garde' strategy which many people were unconvinced about. There were some cases where the public showed scepticism about the benefits of high flats. Some clearance tenants in Burmantofts objected to the council's offer of rehousing in Saxton Gardens, and there was opposition to paying higher rents 'for an outlook such as the flats have got', and concerns about the safety of children falling from balconies.⁵⁰ Even in statements acclaiming the success of the new flats there were often references to convincing the populace of these benefits, and in his opening speech for the Seacroft Gate flats Healey referred to 'a certain amount of old-fashioned prejudice against novelty in design'.⁵¹ This might almost have been a response to a letter written to the Yorkshire Evening News asking 'why the monstrosities now being constructed at the "gateway" to Leeds—namely Seacroft'!⁵² Responding to the death of City Architect R.A.H. Livett in 1959, Cohen said 'I do not doubt that many today are a bit dubious as to the propriety of venturing into multi-storey building, but I am equally convinced that in 20 years' time the citizens of Leeds will have cause to bless the person who first put the idea forward.'⁵³ There were some uncertainties among Leeds' political class about high-rise flats, though with the recognition that they had some practical benefits. Leeds' Lord Mayor, Alderman Mary Pearce (Labour) publicly described multi-storey council flats in Moortown as 'a blot on the landscape', but added that 'I realise that as costs have to be cut to the quick it isn't always possible to

⁴⁹ Leeds, WYAS, Opening of Seacroft Gate and Other Flats. LLD1/2/817120

⁵⁰ *YEP*, 14/11/1958

⁵¹ *YEP*, 09/11/1959.

⁵² *YEP*, 23/02/1959

⁵³ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, October 1959, p.54

improve these types of buildings.’⁵⁴ The local press was quite sympathetic to the impact of high-rise flats in the central areas, but a Yorkshire Evening News editorial in 1959 declared that ‘we have never become reconciled aesthetically to the location of some of the new 10-storey flats, particularly those at Seacroft.’⁵⁵ They did, however, acknowledge that they did not ‘wish to oppose the substantial arguments in favour of flat-building as the best way of using limited ground space in a congested city like Leeds.’⁵⁶ In the build up to the 1959 municipal elections, the local Conservative leader, Alderman Hargrave, stated that he approved of tall flats in the centre of city, where land values were high and there were advantages of access to work, but was less certain about suburban high rise. He claimed, quite prophetically, that prospective tenants were showing that they were more ‘choosy’, and that ‘as every point block costs well over a million pounds and a 16-storey one will be nearer two million pounds, should we proceed full speed ahead or wait to see the reaction of the public?’⁵⁷

Full speed might not have been reached yet, but a great deal of momentum had been built up. Public opinion was not uniformly opposed to multi-storey living, and Leeds’ Housing Director said in 1961 that the top four floors of flats were the most popular.⁵⁸ Given that flats were one of the main symbols of mass collective housing, it might seem slightly strange that privacy was regarded as one of their advantages, but new tenants at Seacroft Gate were said to be looking forward to getting away from ground-level noise in 1959.⁵⁹ In the same year the Housing Committee declared itself satisfied that high-rise flats were proving attractive to the tenants⁶⁰, and in 1961 stated that, in spite of some inevitable difficulties with such a large programme, its decision to pursue multi-storey development was a wise one.⁶¹ Nonetheless, these statements give the impression that the committee was also trying to convince itself on the issue, and the keenness shown towards tower blocks in this period was more likely due to the increased priority given to

⁵⁴ *YEP*, 24/10/1958

⁵⁵ *YEN*, 16/12/1959

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *YEP*, 05/05/1959

⁵⁸ *YEP*, 26/09/1961

⁵⁹ *YEP*, 09/11/1959

⁶⁰ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1958-59*

⁶¹ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1960-61*

production of housing units and maximising use of land. Cohen regretted that the history of mining in Belle Isle meant that they were unable to erect multi-storey flats there, adding that ‘bungalows, though very nice, are indeed a great waste of ground which we can ill-afford.’⁶² As late as June 1964 he told councillors that, ‘whilst nobody can contemplate a whole series of multi-storey flats and nothing else, our advisers, the City Architect and the City Engineer, will have to tell us how best to utilise the land so as to provide the biggest density possible.’⁶³

This advocacy of high-rise building did prove to be a relatively short-lived one, Cohen himself later becoming an opponent of further multi-storey development, and contradicting his erstwhile advisers. By 1965 the ‘necessity’ of high rise building had obviously become more questionable, as the Housing Committee described itself as ‘very conscious of the fact that it might be reaching the optimum as far as this type of dwelling is concerned....it must be recognised that “consumer preference” might be a determining factor in what the Committee should erect rather than mere theories of zoning and densities.’⁶⁴ Cohen was to privately voice these concerns more vociferously in meetings of the Development Review sub-committee. When questioning the need for greater housing densities he argued that ‘they would have to build a type of accommodation to get these densities which was becoming unacceptable.’⁶⁵ In these discussions he was to come into conflict with the City Architect, E.W. Stanley, who claimed that with mixed development involving multi-storey flats, four-storey maisonettes and three-storey flats, high-densities were easily achievable. Stanley was backed by his deputy, who added that high-densities would not mean lower standards and lower environmental values. Cohen accepted that people liked multi-storey flats once they lived in them, but stated that three storey flats at Moortown were only accepted if there was nowhere else to go, and it was not now housing committee policy to build at three-storeys. He also said that when there was a surplus of housing no-one would want multi-storey flats or maisonettes.⁶⁶ This was backed

⁶² LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, June 1961, p.20

⁶³ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, June 1964, p.32

⁶⁴ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1964-65*

⁶⁵ Leeds, WYAS, Sub-Town Planning and Improvements Development Review Committee, 1965-69. LLD1/2/834518 29/10/1965

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 02/11/1965.

by the Director of Housing, who said that two-storey flats that had been built to increase densities were now unpopular, in spite of extremely cheap rents.⁶⁷ As in the case of slum clearance, the planners tended to think towards the future and to guess what would be desirable in years to come, whereas the Housing Chairman and Housing Director felt that they needed to make a stand on what was acceptable at the time.

There were multi-storey blocks built in Leeds until the early 1970s, but this is largely a reflection of the long timescales involved in planning, as they were certainly out of favour by the time that the changed subsidy scales of 1967 and the Ronan Point disaster in 1968 hastened the end of the national high-rise programme. In June 1968 Councillor Merritt (Labour), representing inner-city Little London and Woodhouse, argued that Leeds had enough tall blocks, and that practical problems with lifts, vandalism and abuse of common facilities were combined with ‘psycho-social’ characteristics, with ‘the novelty of the view replaced in time by a feeling of loneliness, and remoteness, and isolation.’⁶⁸ New Housing Chair, Irwin Bellow, responded that ‘we will not build one more multi-storey block than is absolutely necessary to enable us to maintain our programme and to comply with the density and Ministry cost yardstick requirements.’⁶⁹ The lack of enthusiasm for high-rise development was noticeable, especially when compared with just a few years earlier, even if it was asserted that some practical benefit could still be achieved. It is possible that, with housing demand less great, the advantages of tower blocks and flats in terms of density and production were diminished, and their novelty as modern living environments was wearing off.

Importantly, central government was also weakening in its keenness for high-rise building, despite the heavy emphasis of the late 1960s on increasing the production of housing. The main reason for this change seems to be financial. Commenting on the council’s layout for stage D of the Whinmoor estate, the MHLG stated in January 1967 that the overall density for the estate was appropriate, but questioned the need for ‘more costly’ point blocks, advising that

⁶⁷ Ibid, 21/12/1965.

⁶⁸ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, July 1968, p.10

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.16

three-storey flats would be as effective in achieving high densities while ‘reducing costs and giving a larger proportion of flat-dwellers easier access to the ground.’⁷⁰ Leeds’ Town Clerk responded that the council felt that it would be difficult to let three-storey blocks, an issue that had already been raised within various committees. Approval for the scheme was delayed until after August 1968. The City Architect blamed this on the lack of leeway given to ‘transitional’ schemes which were not intended to comply with the MHLG’s new housing ‘cost yardstick’,⁷¹ a problem that was also faced with the second stage of the council’s Hunslet Grange development.⁷² In the case of Whinmoor, the MHLG Regional Officer suggested that, as ‘it would be desirable to avoid a situation in which a comprehensive layout could be made acceptable by deleting individual elements, I am accordingly to suggest that the better course would be to revise the layout...’⁷³

In this period Leeds had been ploughing ahead with the concept of collaborating with other local authorities to streamline housing production and make housebuilding more efficient. The result was the creation of the Yorkshire Development Group in 1962, a consortium initially involving Leeds, Sheffield and Hull, but later incorporating Nottingham and associate members in Chesterfield and Scunthorpe. It involved co-operation within the levels of elected politicians, officials, and architectural staff, and its first efforts were the ‘general specification and standardisation of materials and the components that go into the average house built by the three authorities.’⁷⁴ The consortium employed an architect and ‘development team’, who were to produce designs within the specifications of the local authorities. It was hoped that this type of work would give ‘time for greater than normal rationalisation and refinement in design, and therefore the discovery of more economical solutions’, and ‘application of the solutions to a large programme makes possible added economies at every phase of design, organisation, manufacture and creation.’⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Leeds, WYAS, Whinmoor Housing Estate- Stage D. LLD1/2/833144

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, August 1967, p.167

⁷³ Leeds, WYAS, Whinmoor Housing Estate- Stage D. LLD1/2/833144

⁷⁴ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1962-63*

⁷⁵ Leeds, WYAS, Yorkshire Development Group: Minutes of City Architects’ Meetings. LLD1/2/834312 (Meeting of 19/06/1967)

Bulk purchase and standardisation of materials was an important part of the consortium's role, and each council acted as 'sponsoring authority' for a certain type of internal fitting, for example Hull took ironmongery and doors, Sheffield bathrooms and Leeds kitchen fittings. Specifications were laid down as to the materials that should be ordered and used, and lists of approved suppliers were circulated.⁷⁶ This system did not avoid disagreements over tenders and contractors for certain types of work,⁷⁷ and a report in 1967 stated that there was a need for a reduction in the variety of Bulk Purchase items, and a more restrictive list of joinery manufacturers.⁷⁸ Later that year, however, when confronted with the need to change over to metric measurements, it was decided that the Bulk Purchase system had 'served its useful life', and in future purchase of components should be made individually by each city. It was still stressed that the discipline imposed by the standardisation and rationalisation of fittings should be continued, but it was also accepted that 'there appeared now to be no financial advantage in the current Bulk Purchase System with the exception of kitchen fittings.'⁷⁹ Ultimately this seems like an admission that the painstaking co-ordination involved in the standardisation process had not reaped the expected rewards, and the unsteady relationships between authorities on Bulk Purchase were judged unlikely to have survived the new 'challenge' of metricisation.

Of course, the group's main objective was the use of standardisation in design and procurement to produce new types of industrialised housing. The first houses completed under YDG specifications were the low rise 'L64' dwellings exhibited at Whinmoor.⁸⁰ As well as the provision of modern interior facilities and the incorporation of Parker Morris standards, the design offered a great deal of flexibility for the provision of dwellings. The plan was that the designs could be adapted to various forms of estate layout and could be built in terraces using 'rationalised' traditional methods or system construction.⁸¹ The flagship design

⁷⁶ Leeds, WYAS, Yorkshire Development Group: Meetings 1966-68 (Working Party). LLD1/2/834611 (Meeting of 27/01/1966)

⁷⁷ Ibid, 24/06/1966

⁷⁸ Ibid, 06/02/1967

⁷⁹ Ibid, 30/11/1967

⁸⁰ City of Leeds Housing Committee, *64 Housing*

⁸¹ Ibid.

was for medium rise developments involving ‘a series of elements suitable for building dwellings in stacks of up to eight storeys. It was thought that such a method could obtain maximum benefits from industrialisation and that a number of firms which specialised in this field could be asked eventually to submit quotations.’⁸² This design was known as YDG Mark I and the chosen contractor was Shepherd of York. This development featured standards above those of the Parker Morris Committee of 1961, including 3.5%-5% more floor space on average, double glazing, bedroom cupboards, private balconies, drying cupboards and heated bedrooms. It was pointed out that ‘although certain of these items are an integral part of the design they represent user bonus to the tenant which can be reflected in the rental assessment.’⁸³ These flats therefore were to incorporate some of the most modern features and styles, and be regarded as most desirable to prospective tenants. The first application of this design was to be at Hunslet Green in Leeds, where the deck-access blocks were to be erected on the Leek Street clearance site.

From the medium-rise structures of YDG Mark I the consortium moved on to discussions of other dwelling types. Their ‘brief’ was quite revealing, and showed much of the assumptions of the planning and design professions at this time. They admitted that tenant preference ‘had increasingly to be taken into account’—perhaps a confession that it had not been adequately considered in the past—and acknowledged that deck access without lifts was unpopular, as were narrow, high-rise point blocks except in selected positions. Dwellings should be low-rise, medium density, ‘two, three and possibly four storeys’. The rise of automobile use should be tailored for by the provision of 100% garaging and 25% visitor parking. Previously garages had only been provided for a sixth to a quarter of dwellings. They assumed that cars would be parked at ground level, as garages under buildings had the disadvantage of requiring to be built from the beginning, while multi-storey garages had difficulties of high cost and inaccessibility. Interestingly, multi-storey garages had originally been included in

⁸² LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1963-64*

⁸³ Leeds, WYAS, YDG: Minutes of City Architects’ Meetings. LLD1/2/834312 (Meeting of 19/06/1967)

the 1963 layout for Leeds' Whinmoor B development.⁸⁴ It was argued that public open space should be provided in a 'hierarchy', from hard spaces near front doors, through spaces with equipment at focal points, organised playgrounds further away, to playing fields. Parker Morris standards were to be accepted as a minimum and maximum, as the 'cost yardstick made it unlikely that a higher standard could be achieved at present.'

Most new public housing was expected to be for slum clearance rather than waiting list tenants, so there was anticipated to be a larger proportion of small households. Whole house heating was aimed for, but electric underfloor heating was deemed technically problematic, while warm air systems 'restricted planning.' In terms of private open space, privacy was judged more important than size, but the concern was that fencing could be expensive. The most detailed prescriptions were devoted to internal layout, where it was considered best to provide a separate sitting room and a dining kitchen, that a large sitting room was better than a separate dining room and smaller sitting room, and 'a dining hall could be acceptable as long as a door separated the kitchen from the stairs.' The criteria by which these decisions were made were somewhat mysterious, as was the importance they attached to certain features. There was clearly some attempt to anticipate popular opinion on many themes of the living environment, recognition of some of the financial and physical constraints, and rejection of some of the previous fashions, including high rise flats and electric underfloor heating. Nevertheless, there are still clear signs that this remained a design-led process with decidedly paternalistic aspects.⁸⁵ Indeed, when comparing the YDG with other 'consortia' in Scotland and the Midlands, Glendinning and Muthesius have claimed that while the stated motives of consortia were 'the creation of "big packages of demand"...their underlying intention was to propagate architectural control of modern building.'⁸⁶

⁸⁴ LCC, *Annual Reports of Committees, 1963-64*

⁸⁵ Leeds, WYAS, YDG: Meetings 1966-68 (Working Party) LLD1/2/834611 (Meeting of 11/04/1967)

⁸⁶ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block* pp.189-190

This period demonstrates the influence that changing subsidy scales had on public housing development. The 1961 system had helped fuel the construction of increasingly high-rise flats, granting as it did an extra subsidy of £ 1.15.0 for each storey above the sixth level. The Housing Subsidies Act of 1967 intended to bring costs under greater control. It repealed the subsidy for floors above six, and asserted central government control of building plans by taking away subsidies for all schemes that exceeded a 'cost yardstick' and the denial of loan sanction to projects where the cost would exceed 10% of the yardstick. Addressing the conference of the National Housing and Town Planning Council in June 1967, Leeds' Deputy Town Clerk K.H. Potts said that this would restrict the construction of high-rise flats to 'exceptional circumstances' and necessitate special consultation with the Ministry for authorities that wished to maintain continuity in their building programmes. He added that local authorities should be capable of adapting to the changed regime, albeit devoting more time to quantity surveying and layout planning, but that 'whether the machinery will result in the creation of the best environment for dwellings which will require to stand for sixty or more years will remain to be seen.'⁸⁷

This helps to illustrate the impact that central government had on local authority housing programmes. As well as setting the subsidy rates for local authority housebuilding, the MHLG also exercised a general supervisory role. They issued general circulars and advice on construction, but also consulted with councils on the progress of planning proposals. Usually this was in an advisory sense, but it could get to the stage where it was made clear that the advice was expected to be followed. Correspondence and meetings between local and national officials, and occasionally politicians, could lead to substantial revision of building schemes or delay commencement or completion, something which occurred frequently during the 1967-68 period as the housing subsidy scales changed. Between 1954 and 1968 there was relative continuity in political control at Westminster, with only one change of government, but in terms of housing policy local authorities were obliged to stay on their toes and respond to numerous carrots and sticks

⁸⁷ Leeds, WYAS, Housing Subsidies 1967. LLD1/2/840667

emanating from Whitehall, while maintaining as much continuity in their own housing plans as possible.

Local authority bureaucrats played an important part in setting housing policy, in the initiation of housebuilding projects, and in the day-to-day administration and co-ordination of construction schemes. The influence of the City Architect could be quite decisive, and it was frequently the design professions that set the lead when it came to setting the style and type of dwelling that was built. Leeds' City Architect, R.A.H.Livett, had made his name by designing the pre-war flat complex at Quarry Hill, and his preference for flat-building was important when it came to the redevelopment projects of the 1950s. Some of his utterances did demonstrate the occasionally two-faced nature of bureaucratic approaches in this era, and that the design and planning profession's pursuit of modernism was not quite as single-minded as has sometimes been suggested. In 1956 Livett became involved in a clash at the National Housing and Planning Council with Konrad Smigielski, then head of the Town Planning Department of Leeds College of Art and later Chief Planning Officer in Leicester. Responding to Smigielski's assertion that Leeds could rehouse the whole of its population without needing to extend its boundaries, Livett stated 'I do not like flats. I have learnt my lesson. I feel the Englishman knows what he wants, and you have to look at the speculative builder for the lead in that. He builds semi-detached houses because he knows what the people want.'⁸⁸ Whether he was adopting this position for the purposes of that particular argument, or if he was announcing a preference that he felt circumstances made impossible in practice, Livett's renunciation of flats had no discernible impact. In 1957 he gave the opinion that there was a future for private enterprise in the development of high flats, and wondered whether gardens were going to be in such demand as in the past.⁸⁹ Not long before his death in September 1959 Livett promised 'taller and better buildings near the centre of Leeds', and hailed the thirty tall blocks of flats currently under construction.⁹⁰ Some of his statements verged on the eccentric. He suggested at the Institute of Housing that parts of large parks on the perimeters of cities might

⁸⁸ *YP*, 27/10/1956

⁸⁹ *YP*, 20/05/1957

⁹⁰ *YEP*, 20/02/1959

be used for building, as transport developments were making it easier for the public to spend leisure further afield.⁹¹ This brought a swift criticism from Leeds' Town Planning Chairman, Alderman O'Donnell (Labour), who assured people that this would not happen at Leeds' Roundhay Park or Temple Newsam.⁹² Most oddly, Livett declared that he opposed the drying of clothes on flat balconies as 'perhaps more harm has been done in the development of flats by allowing this than by anything else.'⁹³ Nevertheless, his stamp on Leeds' construction strategy continued after his death in late 1959.

There were some divisions within local authority administration. The Housing Manager was obviously concerned with the amount of new housing that was built, but was also perturbed if certain types of dwelling were difficult to let, as often proved the case with some flats. The conversion of Karl Cohen to a position that almost represented opposition to flat-building of any height was very significant in this regard, and did represent something of an alliance with the administrators rather than the planners. In connection with high flats, there is a definite sense that politicians lacked the same level of enthusiasm for their benefits as the planners showed. Apart from a short period of tower block 'euphoria' in the early 1960s, their desirability for councillors seems to have been closely connected to fears over land shortage and the favourable subsidy scales of the era.

Local politicians did face a range of constraints on their decision-making, as Dunleavy suggests. Financial regulations and restrictions, a lack of technical knowledge, shortage of land, and the pressure of the increasing housing waiting list all affected the establishment of housing policy. In Leeds, however, the politicians that ran the Housing Committee enjoyed high status and influence, and there was a great deal of stability. The chairmen of the Housing Committee usually had quite a long stay in office, Karl Cohen (Labour) from 1957 to 1967, Irwin Bellow (Conservative) from 1967 to 1972, and Peter Sparling (Conservative) from 1975 to 1979. For much of the period there was consensus

⁹¹ *YEN*, 18/05/1957

⁹² *YEP*, 20/05/1957

⁹³ *YEP*, 18/05/1957

over the need to prioritise housing production, build high rise flats and use modern construction technology, and at times in the early 1960s Cohen came under fire from the Conservatives for not pursuing system building wholeheartedly enough. Leeds, and Cohen, played a major role in the creation of the Yorkshire Development Group, a consortium of local authorities who aimed to standardise housing design in an attempt to utilise system building in the most effective way possible. The actual design and building of houses was not discussed often in council, and there was little outright opposition to high-rise building within 'formal' politics until the late 1960s.

The construction industry itself played an important part in local authority building, but also quite a controversial one. Dunleavy argues that their aggressive marketing was a vital factor in the adoption of industrialised building, as was the fact that they enjoyed a favourable position in the negotiation of contracts due to the nationwide rush to build more houses in the 1960s. While the construction boom in commercial building was occurring in the early 1960s there was greater leverage for builders when it came to public housing contracts, but it has been argued that 'contractors succeeded not because they bullied or bribed weak councils into adopting policies against their best interests, but because they gave politically strong councils what they required: high blocks, built reliably, quickly and in large numbers.'⁹⁴ In Leeds' case it appears that the initiative was often taken by the council to establish close relationships with the bigger firms, in the hope that this would provide continuous building processes and economies of scale that would speed up production. System-building was also promoted by the council as a means of achieving their own objectives, and it was hoped that the Yorkshire Development Group would be a way of utilising systems while maintaining some control over their use.

In terms of the response of tenants and residents, there is relatively little record of their opinions about the housing and the environments that were provided in this period. What impressions we get are usually obtained indirectly through the experience of housing managers who found it more or less difficult to let certain

⁹⁴ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block* p.192

types of housing, and councillors who had received individual complaints. There certainly seemed to be more problems with flats, and interestingly low-rise flats rather than multi-storey blocks, and the housing committee had started to respond to these concerns by the late 1960s. Groups organised round housing concerns are virtually non-existent though, a factor that certainly helped to keep housing design and provision within a firmly paternalistic mould.

The modern style and technology involved in mass public housing was a major factor in the policies adopted by local authorities and how councils, architects and building firms tried to sell the radical changes to the public. The use of the word 'modern' is ubiquitous in this era, whether in discussing style, layout, materials, or interior design and fittings. Both bureaucrats and politicians took pride in their ability to provide council housing with many of the latest facilities and features, and while this undoubtedly came partly in response to popular preference, there was also a great deal of the planners' own discretion used in deciding the perceived needs of the tenant, something that was displayed more blatantly when it came to such themes as the layout of estates. Leeds also used 'modernisation' in a way that made a virtue out of necessity, particularly with high-rise flats and system-building. The rapid eclipse of multi-storey building after 1967 was evidence that not all facets of 'modernity' were judged essential to the reshaping of Leeds' residential environment, but the modernisation programme rolled on well into the 1970s, despite coming up against even more constraints than before.

Chapter Six: Housing: Construction and Production, 1969-1979



Pottery Vale, Leek Street Flats (Hunslet Grange), 1973. (Leeds Library and Information Service, www.leodis.net)

While there is much evidence of public involvement and political action in relation to the issue of slum clearance throughout the 1970s, as far as housing provision is concerned the picture is more mixed. There were views expressed about the appearance of housing and preferences articulated about the type of interior facilities provided, but seldom were these opinions of political significance, partly because they tended to lack organisation and focus, but also because there was no real mechanism for them to be debated. Where campaigns existed they were generally concerned with ‘failing’ houses or estates, the outstanding example being Hunslet Grange. As with environmental issues in general, there was more effort paid to involving the public in decisions relating to housing than had existed earlier in the post-war period. Housing Consultative Committees were created to serve tenants administered from each of Leeds’ decentralised housing offices, and a system known as ‘pre-allocation’ aimed to smooth the way from cleared slums to the modern housing that replaced them,

giving people some input into the conditions of their new housing environments.¹ It is possible that the spread of popular campaigns relating to the provision of housing was retarded by the expertise needed in the construction process, and the complicated financial system involving subsidies and much interference from Whitehall. Nevertheless, as in the preceding period, the preferences of individual residents did ultimately have an impact on council decision-makers and administrators. Various remarks through the 1970s on the popularity of different estates and types of dwelling culminated in Leeds' North-West Housing Office commenting that 'the clamour, and there is no other way to describe it, to move away from maisonettes and multi-storey flats continues to grow.'²

In many ways the 1970s was not a promising period for the increase of public participation in the processes of housing provision. Local authorities found themselves in a sharply deteriorating financial situation. Apart from slowing down construction rates and increasing housing waiting lists, lack of funds had a major impact on the maintenance of public housing and on projects that aimed to involve tenants in housing issues. These problems were aggravated by the need for councils to carry out repairs on faulty post-war housing that was in many cases no more than a few years old. In combination, these issues did much to reduce the credibility of Leeds City Council, and many of the bureaucratic processes involved in the construction and administration of housing came under great strain in this era. The confidence that many local politicians, planners and bureaucrats had in the process and vision that sought to bring modern standards and rationally ordered living environments to Leeds was heavily eroded by the mid-1970s, and had seemingly been replaced by attempts to patch up some increasingly testing problem areas.

For council policy-makers the 1967 changes to housing subsidies and the introduction of the housing cost yardstick were to prove a major challenge. They had many problems adjusting existing projects to fit the new rules, but devising future plans and adapting schemes that were in the pipeline was also tricky. To

¹ Leeds City Council, *Department of Housing: Quarterly Reports (1974-79)*

² *Ibid.*, 30/06/1979

meet the stipulations of the new system a new balance was required between the types of dwellings built, the density of development, and the layout of the scheme, and there was the always unwelcome threat of interference from central government where proposals infringed upon the rules. In this new situation there was some disagreement within officialdom about where compromises needed to be made. The Housing Department had managed previously to ally with former Housing Chairman Karl Cohen and force a change in emphasis away from flats of all kinds, and saw itself obliged to defend this position. The Director of Housing reminded his fellow officials of the preferences made by prospective tenants, and pointed out that anything other than a house was viewed ‘to put it mildly, with the greatest reserve.’³ He stated that the only successful three or four storey developments were those that were built in desirable parts of the city, and added that the MHLG officials had suggested to him that they were baffled that Leeds appeared to be the only place where flats were unpopular.⁴

From the point of view of the design professions, however, the use of medium-rise flats was very sensible. In his plans for the Hunslet Hall estate the City Architect proposed a combination of high density and low rise development ‘consistent with the planning principle of location of high density areas adjacent to shopping facilities.’⁵ These high density dwellings were to be deck-access flats, which would be in keeping with the ‘scale of the motorway’ in the northern area of the site, and in line with ‘the nature of the contours on Algeria Street’.⁶ Use of deck access blocks, medium-rise flats with public ‘decks’ at each level providing access to the dwellings, was also planned for a development at Cottingley, and this time the City Engineer pointed out the desirability for high density in order ‘to make the best use of the public transport to be provided for the estate.’⁷ The Director of Housing declared himself unhappy about the proposal to build deck access blocks until it was known how acceptable the same format was at Leek Street, and was also unwilling to accept deck access forms at

³ Leeds, WYAS, Housing Types, Densities and the Housing Cost Yardstick. LLD1/2/833149 (Memo from Director Of Housing, 25/09/1967)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid (Report of City Architect, 31/10/1967)

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid (Meeting of Officers on Housing Types and Densities, 13/11/1967)

Hunslet Hall. As a result, it was agreed that the City Architect would alter the layout of the Cottingley scheme to try and balance the arguments on housing types and on density.⁸ The new layout involved two 25-storey blocks, judged slightly more acceptable to tenants than medium-rise flats, but this change aroused the puzzlement of the MHLG regional office, who suggested dropping the scheme density ‘in view of earlier information that there are some 1300 dwellings in tall blocks still to be built which are not being proceeded with at the moment because of lack of demand.’⁹ These contradictions did not help in the planning of housing at this period. The Ministry still wanted a high rate of housing provision, just cheaper than before, the City Architect and City Engineer aimed to comply with planning orthodoxy and professional standards, while the Director of Housing demanded housing that his clients found acceptable to live in. The Town Clerk set out some of these frustrations late in 1967, complaining that it was ‘becoming increasingly difficult to obtain fixed price tenders within the yardstick unless the schemes are designed to a minimum level of environment on easy sites’ and argued that if they acknowledged ‘consumer choice’ and ruled out three to four storey dwellings, ‘this effectively rules out development at a range of densities from approximately 75 to 120 (persons per acre) as the MHLG do not consider that multi-storey dwellings should be provided at these densities.’¹⁰ Cities responded to this situation in different ways. The scepticism of some politicians and officers in Leeds about medium-rise flats impeded the use of deck-access projects, while this type of housing played a major part in Manchester’s belated public-housing drive in the late 1960s and 1970s. Birmingham, a heavy user of tall point blocks, curtailed its housing programme dramatically.¹¹

Through the 1970s it was still clear that there was a well-developed prioritisation by tenants of some areas over others, and this was because of the advantages of the locale as well as those of the type of residence available. Lincoln Green, an area of many tower blocks and maisonettes, was still popular as late as 1975,

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid (Letter from MHLG Regional Office, 08/12/1967)

¹⁰ Ibid (Letter from the Town Clerk to the Secretary of the Association of Municipal Corporations, 15/12/1967)

¹¹ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block* p.313

mainly due to its proximity to the city centre.¹² The proposed Stoney Rock Lane development also received a lot of interest before clearance of the area had even taken place.¹³ Housing officers were surprised that much of the demand for Stoney Rock Lane houses came from tenants wishing to transfer from the adjacent Lincoln Green and Ebor Gardens estates, 'no doubt seeking more modern or up-to-date dwellings.'¹⁴ Gipton, however, suffered diminishing demand, a factor that was attributed to its many pre-war houses and declining reputation.¹⁵ There was always something of a complex relationship between location and the modernity of housing when it came to popularity. In 1975 Leeds' Housing Director Norman Kellett had produced a report which said that it was 'obvious people were more anxious to be housed near the Leeds Inner Ring Road than towards the outlying areas.'¹⁶ Less than a year earlier, however, Housing Committee Chairman Kevin Gould had claimed of the Long Causeway scheme in Adel that 'I think we would be able to fill the places there five times over.'¹⁷ Given that Adel was a long way from the centre of Leeds and quite remote, the attraction must have been the lure of living in new dwellings among some of the most expensive suburban private housing in the city. Within some sought-after areas there was evidence that tenants had become more selective, and on Moortown Estate this was put down to the existence of a number of 1950s houses that retained their original features, such as back-to-back ranges and deep glazed sinks with wooden draining boards. It was commented that 'tenants who obviously expect more modern amenities are beginning to look askance at fittings of this kind.'¹⁸

By the end of the 1970s there were numerous comments on the popularity of various areas and types of housing, which came to have an increasing effect on the Housing Department. All-electric houses in Belle Isle were unpopular due to high electricity costs, and some people were accepting tenancies in one part of Belle Isle then requesting transfers to other areas of the estate. The South Leeds

¹² LCC, *Department of Housing: Quarterly Reports* 31/03/1975

¹³ *Ibid*, 30/09/1977

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 30/06/1978

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 30/09/1978

¹⁶ *YEP*, 09/06/1975

¹⁷ *YEP*, 11/09/1974

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 31/03/1976

Housing Office attributed this phenomenon to 'low environmental standards'.¹⁹ At a time when many local Housing Consultative Committee meetings were poorly attended or cancelled, this suggests that tenants generally eschewed co-operating directly with the housing authorities, and preferred to pursue their individual needs by exploiting whatever advantages they could find in the procedures of the housing bureaucracy. The council faced increasing problems with its management of maisonettes, both in re-letting and with the standards maintained by tenants, even in the previously popular Lincoln Green area.²⁰ When defective roofs were discovered in three-bedroom flats in Middleton, it was argued that the unpopularity of that type of dwelling could mean that demolition and redevelopment was more sensible than repair.²¹ By June 1979 the North West Leeds area office was bemoaning the 'unsettling effect' that new traditionally-built terraced and semi-detached houses were having on high-rise and maisonette tenants, especially when they were built in close proximity to each other.²² At this point Leeds was in the relatively novel situation of having a housing waiting list was high and growing, but many estates and types of dwelling that were becoming so unpopular that they could not be filled. This could well be interpreted as evidence that the kind of paternalistic approach that might have satisfied needs in the immediate post-war period was becoming redundant in the face of a citizenry less willing to accept expert judgment or bureaucratic procedures.

There had never been much opportunity for popular influence on the aesthetic aspects of public housing, and style was left to architects to decide, with some input from the leading council politicians. Multi-storey flats were the most symbolic example of the modern style of housing provided, but despite their demise many of the techniques and materials used in constructing council housing stayed the same. There are some signs that attitudes to the type of housing provided were at least being expressed more openly. Chapeltown, with

¹⁹ Ibid, 31/12/1977 and 31/03/1978

²⁰ Ibid, 30/09/1978

²¹ Ibid, 31/03/1979

²² Ibid, 30/06/1979

its more politically militant local associations, saw some criticism of new housing. The housing provided in Chapeltown was more of a traditional style, with small infill schemes rather than the mass inner-city and suburban projects in other parts of Leeds. Tenants at Leopold Street in 1974 were pleased with their new homes, but disappointed that the gardens had not been grassed, and that the rents were higher. A Cowper Street resident complained about the condensation in her new house, while others said that the houses were noisy or not big enough. Tellingly, references were also made to ‘cracking up’ of houses and flats in Seacroft and Hunslet, demonstrating that the reputation of council housing had been tarnished, and that people were much more sceptical about the homes that were being provided.²³ In meetings with council officials to discuss the Chapeltown Local Plan, the Residents’ Liaison Committee commented that the new housing looked awful, with a narrow frontage, and questioned why Victorian terraced houses had been knocked down and replaced by ‘those Wimpey houses going up in the Woodhouse area.’²⁴

More revealing were the council’s responses to the residents’ concerns. In 1974 when the Residents’ Liaison Committee expressed their exasperation at the lack of consultation about the sort of housing being built, the council officials adopted a very defensive posture. They claimed that the requirement for central government approval meant that they were told to build certain things because they were more economic, and that they preferred to build semi-detached houses ‘but there is not enough money for this.’²⁵ It was stressed that local residents could see the sort of house types that were going to be built, but the officials cautioned them that ‘you must accept guidance from us on what is practicable to be built.’²⁶ They also claimed that they preferred to build traditionally with bricks and mortar, but there was not the labour available to produce sufficient numbers. Thus it was judged necessary to resort to ‘systems’ building. It was admitted that the ‘type of building is such that before it is finished it looks horrible, but they

²³ Leeds, WYAS, ‘Participation’ in Chapeltown. WYL5041/41/10 (*Chapeltown News* report of Chapeltown Community Association AGM, May 1974)

²⁴ *Ibid* (Minutes of meeting between LCC officials and Chapeltown Residents’ Liaison Committee, 20/06/1974)

²⁵ *Ibid*.

²⁶ *Ibid*.

look better when completed.’²⁷ This type of grudging defence of council construction policy shows just how much confidence had ebbed in the local authority’s ability to transform residential environments for the better. Numbers and finance had always been important, but there had previously been a sense that the housing provided was a great improvement for residents. Here it seemed that paternalism had merely diminished into preparing a culture of low expectation.

One of the problems that the council did face was that popular perceptions of public housing were mixed, and occasionally based on misleading impressions. One piece of evidence from the late 1970s helps to demonstrate this. A local community association in Hunslet interviewed a sample of residents of the Woodhouse Hill clearance area, generally unimproved back-to-backs, and also the new Rocheford Estate, pedestrianised with short terraces of houses and flats, completed in 1976.²⁸ In Woodhouse Hill the residents were almost exactly split between those who wanted to stay in their homes, and those who wished to be rehoused. 62% of interviewees saw higher rent payments as being the major disadvantage of council housing, but, while many were honest enough to admit that they lacked the direct experience to comment on whether new housing provided ‘value for money’, they were overwhelmingly adamant that central heating was not good value for money. The interviewers pointed out that this stance was probably due to recent media coverage of high fuel bills, particularly at nearby Hunslet Grange. Woodhouse Hill residents also disliked the cramped feel of the new estate, lack of access, vandalism and the neglect of common areas. The survey did also show that those who liked the new estate gave the reason that it allowed for privacy, while those who disapproved mentioned the lack of privacy. Differing perceptions such as this made the job of the council as a mass housing provider even more difficult.

Tenants in the modern Rochefords, the first scheme in Leeds to be ‘pre-allocated’, had also been split fifty-fifty as to whether they had wanted to be rehoused, but 72% were now pleased that they had been rehoused. This

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Leeds Central Library, *Housing Times: December 1977* (Leeds Community Press) LQPHUN363

satisfaction was tempered by a qualification regarding rent levels and the fear of them rising in the near future. In contrast to the Woodhouse Hill residents, 80% of Rocheford tenants described the central heating as good value for money, and most felt their fuel bills to be about the same as they were in their previous back-to-backs. This could well be because the Rochefords were equipped with gas boilers and radiators, unlike the electric ducted-air systems found at Hunslet Grange. Where problems were described, they were mainly due to design. Some tenants disliked having their living rooms adjoining the garden, as it was felt to be dirtier and less practical. The close proximity of houses and lack of privacy was disapproved of, as were the public gardens, which were not properly maintained. Pedestrianisation led to 'wind traps' where rubbish accumulated, and the lack of play spaces led to young people congregating outside houses. In general, the interviewees said that people were pleased with their house itself, but not the layout of the whole estate, while allowing that generalising from their findings might be difficult as satisfaction in the Rochefords might have been due to the pre-allocation scheme, and evaluating the scheme after a year might be too short a time. They also warned that 'by the nature of their layout a continued good environment on estates similar to the Rochefords necessitates a commitment by the council to regular expenditure to provide good maintenance of garden areas, path cleaning, etc.'²⁹

Pre-allocation in Hunslet, assigning clearance tenants a specific house in the building layout before construction had started, proved to be a minor success for the council, and tenants in the Rochefords publicly praised the new scheme, particularly the ending of uncertainty and the ability to mentally take possession of a house and watch it being constructed.³⁰ With the pre-allocation system residents were involved not only in the allocation of new homes, but also with the colour of outside doors, the types of internal finish, kitchen work surfaces, and fencing.³¹ At the Sussex Avenue scheme in Hunslet there was a slight problem with demand for certain types of house, but this proved to be dealt with

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *YEP*, 14/11/1977

³¹ *YEP*, 30/03/1976

satisfactorily.³² The popularity of pre-allocation with the public was shown when residents in Woodhouse Hill Street clearance area formed a group to press for pre-allocation.³³ Where the difficulty lay was in the council's capacity to provide pre-allocation as an option. Even after the success of the early schemes, the Housing Department declared that they could not be applied universally, and instead should be 'tailored to meet particular situations where there is a strong and long established community with a local desire for its retention in a new environment.'³⁴ In South Leeds four schemes were progressing simultaneously, and it was felt that 'it would be an advantage in future to restrict such schemes to one per area to ensure they are given the individual attention they deserve.'³⁵ At the Royal Road pre-allocation scheme there were also problems due to delays in completion by the contractor, and the Housing Office felt that in future schemes should be carried out under the council's Architect's Department rather than using independent architects, 'because this arrangement tends to be somewhat cumbersome and can lead to problems of communication.'³⁶ As with the concept of Gradual Renewal, pre-allocation offered a more sensitive approach and greater public involvement, but its success was hampered by the inability to fit it into established bureaucratic procedures, and the extra financial and organisational resources required at a time of increasing restrictions.

At Holt Park there was an interesting project that typified in many ways the changing attitudes to planning in the 1970s. A new 'village' was planned on the outskirts of Leeds that would incorporate council housing, a private estate, an area run by a housing association, and community facilities at its centre, which were intended to be used by both schools and the wider community. The council hailed the plan as a 'complete physical framework for the development of a community within the boundaries of a major city.'³⁷ The roots of Holt Park lay in the desire to develop the area residentially by both Norman Ashton builders, who had acquired an option to purchase the land in 1959, and Leeds City Council,

³² LCC, *Department of Housing: Quarterly Reports*, 31/03/1978

³³ *Ibid*, 31/12/1978

³⁴ *Ibid*, 31/03/1977

³⁵ *Ibid*

³⁶ *Ibid*, 31/03/1978

³⁷ LCC, *Living at Holt Park Village* (1970)

who had indicated their own interest in the land. In 1964 an agreement was made for shared development of the area.³⁸ Such an arrangement, sharing land with private developers while seeking to provide an integrated development, was quite unusual, but helps to demonstrate a microcosm of the kind of attitudes that planners held with regard to the wider city. As such, Holt Park was critiqued in an article by Alison Ravetz in 1979.³⁹ She pointed out that the three housing types were ‘sharply distinguished from one another by their building forms and that they are segregated to such an extent that the council and the ‘spec’ estates are each entered by their own approach roads.’⁴⁰ 760 council houses were included at Holt Park, and were described by Ravetz as instantly recognisable as such. The layout followed the popular plan of the 1970s by which houses were organised in semi-detached form or as short rows shaped into culs-de sac leading to garage courts, and linked by a maze of pedestrian pathways.

One of the leading features of the council sector was a district heating scheme. Unlike Hunslet Grange, ducted air central heating and hot water was supplied by a central gas-fired boiler plant. Through dispensing with individual appliances and separate flues this arrangement was believed to contribute ‘to improving the cleanliness of the atmosphere which is essential towards retaining the rural character of the area.’⁴¹ Unfortunately the system did suffer problems. In 1976, after just two years, work took place to reduce heat losses within dwellings, but caused complaints about noise and vibration within the heating system, which led to a further ‘rebalancing exercise’.⁴² This was followed in 1978 by work on defective underground mains serving the district heating scheme.⁴³ Ravetz also commented on these difficulties, adding that ‘the very deep dissatisfaction with the system here must be seen as part of the mounting problem of heating on council estates, where fuel or appliances are too expensive or not sufficiently subject to the users’ control.’⁴⁴

³⁸ LCC, *Holt Park Village* (June 1970)

³⁹ Alison Ravetz, ‘Building Study: Holt Park Village’, in *Architect’s Journal*, 30/05/1979, pp. 1113-1129

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp.1119-1120

⁴¹ LCC, *Department of Housing: Quarterly Reports*, 30/06/1974.

⁴² LCC, *Department of Housing: Quarterly Reports*, 31/12/1976.

⁴³ LCC, *Department of Housing: Quarterly Reports*, 30/06/1978.

⁴⁴ Ravetz, ‘Building Study: Holt Park Village’, 30/05/1979, p.1122

Ravetz commented that the private housing at Holt Park was generally smaller in area than the council homes, and no less monotonous in style. This lack of exclusive physical features was ‘compensated’ by heightened privacy and different patterns of access and roads that contributed to maintaining a distinct appearance.⁴⁵ These differences were jealously guarded by the developers, who had negotiated the council away from the original permission that had involved building in ‘Radburn’ style with full pedestrian segregation, in favour of a ‘semi-segregated’ estate which involved large parts of the layout taking a ‘traditional’ format.⁴⁶ When the Holt Park proposals were included in the Development Plan Review, proposed densities for the private development were 15 dwellings per acre, compared with 20 per acre for the council sector. By 1970, however, the expectation for private development had been lowered to 10 per acre.⁴⁷ The stark divisions between the different areas of Holt Park that were criticised by Ravetz, had been programmed into the development before commencement, rather than as a result of subsequent events. Residents in the nearby leafy suburb of Adel had not lodged a formal objection to the amendment to the Development Plan, but their ‘serious concerns’ about the proposals were taken into account by the council, who agreed that through traffic should be discouraged from and to Adel via Holt Park, that Holt Lane should retain a ‘country road character’, and that ‘public facilities should be adequate to serve the new development and act as a supplement to existing areas.’⁴⁸ It could well be argued that the common facilities provided were of real benefit to the council and housing association tenants at Holt Park, but the very existence of this social housing in the area had involved the council making some major concessions to the private builder and wealthier local residents.

Leek Street Flats, the first phase of the Yorkshire Development Group’s flagship Hunslet Grange complex, was officially opened by Leeds’ Lord Mayor on 27th March 1968. It was a deck access scheme, similar to Sheffield’s Park Hill ‘Streets

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp.1123-1124

⁴⁶ LCC, *Holt Park Village*

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

in the Sky’, and was the first of the YDG’s Mark I housing schemes to be completed. The initial block consisted of 440 flats ranging from five to seven storeys high, with a shop and a pub, and the concept was outlined fully in the brochure that was produced for the opening ceremony.⁴⁹ The system built nature of the project was outlined, and described the ‘dwelling’ as a ‘component’ ‘capable of being built up into a wide variety of environments, yet is itself built up of standard factory-made units.’⁵⁰ This was held to give flexibility due to the integration of a range of different dwelling sizes within one development. The decks were protected from the weather and were ‘a natural meeting place for young and old alike’, while the project offered high densities without building ‘high’.⁵¹ Other benefits offered were internal space five per cent above the standards recommended by the Parker Morris Committee of 1961, automatic warm air heating units, double glazing, sound insulation, and finishes that had ‘been chosen with a view both to freedom from maintenance and for their visual appearance and quality.’⁵² The blocks were grouped around public open space, with roads kept to the perimeter and pedestrian ways linking the flats to the proposed Hunslet District Centre.

Design, amenities and layout of Hunslet Grange were all in accordance with the prevailing trends of the era, all provided by a radical new type of construction. Unfortunately, within a relatively short time the complex found itself with few friends. Early problems that were encountered were mainly due to the wider environment, and Hunslet Councillor Haughton (Labour) outlined the untidy surroundings and lack of services such as shops and play facilities at a council meeting in April 1971.⁵³ Housing Chairman Irwin Bellow (Conservative) washed his hands of the issue, pointing out that the layout was done ‘long before we came to power.’⁵⁴ The first signs of the major problems that were to plague Hunslet Grange were raised in May 1974 by local Liberal Councillor Pedder, who described the flats as ‘an effigy of imperial tyranny’, referred to the structural

⁴⁹ Yorkshire Development Group, *Leek Street Development Hunslet* (27/03/1968)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, April 1971, pp.391-392

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.392

deterioration of the complex and questioned whether damp was caused solely by condensation.⁵⁵ Councillor Gould (Labour), Bellow's replacement as Housing Chair, replied by saying that 'Hunslet Grange is not a development I am proud of', stating that ordinary high-rise flats were better, but pointed out measures the council had taken such as painting, deck-lighting and play areas as evidence of improvement.⁵⁶ These exchanges set a trend for discussions of Hunslet Grange's problems. Local people and Liberal councillors heavily criticised the aesthetic, structural and social problems of the flats, while council politicians put up little defence of the original design and concept of the complex, sought to justify their position in terms of remedial works they had performed, and attacked what they claimed were the more hyperbolic claims of Hunslet Grange's opponents.

A 'part-remedial' programme was carried out at Hunslet Grange in 1974, with the intention of combating condensation by improving insulation and ventilation,⁵⁷ but events really came to a head in 1976. At this time there was a concerted effort from a group of tenants and the local Liberal Party to have issues at the flats resolved. Hunslet Liberal councillors Dennis Pedder and Michael Taylor sent a letter to the Housing Director threatening legal action unless problems of damp, draughts and condensation were dealt with,⁵⁸ and Ivan Lester, a Liberal council candidate, appealed to the Chief Health Officer to force the housing committee to improve conditions at Hunslet Grange.⁵⁹ This was followed by the publication of a report by the Hunslet Grange Heating Action Group, formed in February 1976, outlining their grievances.⁶⁰ In this they claimed to be the victims of a building experiment that left them suffering 'deplorable' living conditions as a result of the development's structural inadequacies, and focused on high electricity bills, ineffective central heating, lack of repairs, damp and draughts. They also criticised the council for not fully accepting the depth of the problems or consulting the people who actually lived in the flats, and asserted that 'the failure of the recently completed damp remedial programme shows the folly of carrying

⁵⁵ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, May 1974, pp.77-78

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp.79-80

⁵⁷ LCC, *Department of Housing: Quarterly Reports*, 30/06/1974

⁵⁸ *YEP*, 02/04/1976

⁵⁹ *YEP*, 28/04/1976

⁶⁰ Hunslet Grange Heating Action Group, *Hunslet Grange: An Experiment and its Victims* (May 1976)

out a programme of works without thoroughly investigating the problem and without attempting to implement a total solution.’⁶¹ The report did also cover other aspects of the flats, including the depressing grey concrete design, isolated young families on the complex’s upper floors, and the neglect of the flats’ surroundings.⁶² The HGHAG resented the fact that, as well as having to experience the ‘inadequacies’ of the estate, they were having to pay for them in the form of high electricity bills.⁶³ The group resisted the call to have the flats demolished, but bemoaned the unwillingness of council officials and the Housing Chairman to discuss the failings, and demanded that there be a full analysis of the structure of the flats and an evaluation of possible solutions.⁶⁴ These moves formed the preliminaries to a war of words between the council leadership and bureaucracy on one side, and the campaigners and opposition on the other.

After the publication of the HGHAG report, the Labour housing spokesman George Mudie called on the Housing Committee to appoint private consultants to investigate the problems faced by tenants, but this was opposed by Housing Chairman Peter Sparling who said ‘he could see no point in employing outside consultants when we have competent officers of our own.’⁶⁵ A string of people did come to produce reports of the flats, including independent experts who were not allowed to speak in front of the Housing Committee, and the West Yorkshire County Council Assistant Fire Officer and the Chief Structural Engineer, who discovered faults that posed a fire risk, but ‘no risk of a Ronan Point-type explosion.’⁶⁶ The Yorkshire Evening Post editorialised that ‘by delaying a full and frank reply to these now serious charges the council is increasing the tension.’⁶⁷ Rhetoric rose to new heights in autumn 1976, with the local Liberal councillors demanding compensation be paid to tenants of Hunslet Grange, and Councillor Taylor even going as far as to say that ‘one of the things that seems to be missed so very often is the social implications of this Gestapo-type building

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid, p.1

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.4

⁶⁵ *YEP*, 27/05/1976

⁶⁶ *YEP*, 30/06/1976

⁶⁷ *YEP*, 29/06/1976

with Gestapo-type conditions under which people have to live'.⁶⁸ The language of Liberal councillors such as Pedder and Taylor undoubtedly revealed a view that regarded the tenants as the helpless victims of an all-powerful council, though the council's inability to deal with the problems belied this in practice. Eventually the Housing Committee accepted a report from the West Yorkshire County Structural Engineer that stated that the flats were stable and not subject to collapse, and made its own recommendations that use of LPG and paraffin heaters by residents be banned due to fire risks, and that a new programme of remedial works be commenced. The committee also accepted Councillor Mudie's suggestion of a public display at the flats to show 'that we have nothing to hide.'⁶⁹

This period in the history of Hunslet Grange provides ample evidence for Ellis' assertion that 'community action was driven as much by the refusal of the council to allow organised groups of tenants to actively participate in research and the formulation and implementation of policy as it was by material problems.'⁷⁰ Given that the council now seemed to have closed ranks to present the acceptable face of Hunslet Grange, but that many concerns remained unresolved, the controversy continued. With the high electricity costs such a major grievance, the prohibition of the alternative heating sources some tenants had used was unlikely to calm residents. The quality of remedial work at the flats was raised by a Labour councillor in the Technical Services Committee⁷¹ and by Liberal Councillor Lester at a council meeting in February 1977.⁷² The situation almost descended into farce when the HGHAG claimed that a piece of concrete lying near the flats had fallen from the structure, and Councillor Sparling retorted by stating that tests had proved it was not from the flats, and that reports had shown that materials used on the complex were 'well in excess of the requirements of the present code of building practice.'⁷³ Councillor Sparling also expressed the opinion that condensation problems were due to tenant usage and that work on

⁶⁸ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, October 1976, p.331

⁶⁹ YEP, 12/12/1976

⁷⁰ Ellis, 'Pavement Politics', p.50. The section on Hunslet Grange provides an indispensable account of the complex's history, particularly from the point of view of the tenants' groups.

⁷¹ YEP, 10/01/1977

⁷² LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, February 1977, p.578

⁷³ YEP, 11/02/1977

electrical installations would make an enormous difference.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, problems continued. In December 1977 tenants complained about water running down walls and from ceilings following heavy rain, an issue that was discovered to be due to asphalt cracking around a drainage system.⁷⁵ Reports of rain penetration recurred in the following years⁷⁶ and with all these issues, the adverse media coverage of the flats, and the decision of the Housing Department to exclude families with children from the deck flats, there was a large increase in the vacancy rate.⁷⁷

Councillor Lester had offered his opinion that the flats should be demolished ‘sooner rather than later’, back in February 1977,⁷⁸ and this continued to be a Liberal theme. Despite this, the tenants themselves were divided on the issue of demolition, and when a deputation from Hunslet Grange Tenants’ Association visited a council meeting in January 1979 to argue for reduced rents to compensate for their heating, condensation and social problems, their spokesman pointed out ‘that there were many tenants who are happy with the flats and, despite the problems, would like to stay there.’⁷⁹ As Ellis has pointed out, most tenants were quite apathetic, and the flats’ problems led to a high turnover of tenants and an unstable population, which made organising tough.⁸⁰ The Housing Department themselves had complained on a number of occasions that remedial work had been held up by the obstruction posed by tenants who would not allow access to their flats because they were not experiencing problems directly.⁸¹ This was where the council’s position was difficult. The flats were relatively modern, housed a large number of people, and had been a flagship project of its time. As the HGHA had pointed out, piecemeal rectification of problems at such a large, interconnected complex was virtually impossible, but leading councillors and officials were understandably unwilling to condemn such a development, both on grounds of credibility and financial and procedural practicality. Where

⁷⁴ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, February 1977, p.584

⁷⁵ LCC, *Department of Housing: Quarterly Reports*, 31/12/1977

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 30/09/1978 and 31/03/1979

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 30/06/1978

⁷⁸ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, February 1977, p.579

⁷⁹ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, January 1979, pp.8-11

⁸⁰ Ellis, ‘Pavement Politics’, p.55

⁸¹ LCC, *Department of Housing: Quarterly Reports*, 31/03/1975, 30/06/1977, 30/09/1977.

representatives of the council did make matters worse was in their defensiveness and inability to take residents' concerns seriously, which only served to add to suspicion. The vestiges of paternalism were still there, in terms of the repetition that experts knew better than the tenants themselves, and the idea that problems such as condensation could easily be rectified if the tenants did things 'properly'. As the tenant campaigns and media coverage demonstrated, though, there was an increasing lack of credibility in the belief that the council could be trusted.

Instances in Chapeltown and Hunslet do show that the council was struggling to cope with a slippage in its reputation, caused mostly by failings in existing post-war housing and the way these were conceived by local people. Apart from the actual appearance of houses and estates, which people could see for themselves, the way problems had been filtered by the local media, extended by rumour, and incompetently dealt with by many council politicians and bureaucrats, meant that trust was decreasing in the council's competence in housing provision. This was not a good time for this image to take root. Finance had always affected housing policy in terms of subsidies and loan sanction, but in the mid-1970s public spending cuts led to wide restrictions in local authority expenditure. Thus the council lacked the ability to keep high standards of cleanliness and maintenance in public areas, a problem that was exacerbated by the design and layout of many council estates. As the Hunslet survey pointed out, 'without this the benefits of the new houses are lessened and there is a real danger that tenants who initially felt happy with the estate become demoralised.'⁸² The Housing Department admitted that grassed areas were poorly maintained, and 'grass and weeds are left to grow in profusion along pedestrian ways and drying areas etc.'⁸³ In the Raynville estate at Bramley, the Tenants' Association organised a sponsored clean-up to deal with untidiness,⁸⁴ but the danger was that a slippage in standards from the council led to a drop in cleanliness from the public. Coupled with increases in vandalism recorded by the Housing Department at this period, especially towards garage blocks, attitudes were changing towards the layout of estates. At the new Long Causeway estate in leafy Adel, individual tenants

⁸² Leeds Central Library, *Housing Times: December 1977*

⁸³ LCC, *Department of Housing: Quarterly Report, 30/09/1977*

⁸⁴ *Ibid*

requested to erect fencing round the open grassed areas, and the local Housing Manager commented on ‘a general dislike of open plan estates; people now preferring to have their own garden, usually of not too large proportions.’⁸⁵ At Meanwood in 1974 tenants demanded their garden fences back after they had been removed as part of an ‘experiment’, only to be told that it could not be done immediately due to financial restrictions.⁸⁶ The popularity of planned houses at Stourton was held to confirm ‘the view that most people prefer semi-detached dwellings of traditional design with private garden areas.’⁸⁷

The issues with maintenance and cleanliness had been aggravated by the necessity to spend large sums of money on repairing faults to post-war council housing. In 1976 it was announced that repair work would cost more than £6.5 million in the next five years, and 3300 houses and 29 tower blocks built after 1960 were discovered to have defects. 1427 of the houses involved were at Whinmoor, all of which were under ten years old, and the main work was replacing timber weatherboards with brick to prevent damp.⁸⁸ With money short, the council sought to recoup some of its losses by claiming that the National Building Agency, created by the government in 1965 to compare and examine new building methods, had given poor advice. Peter Sparling claimed that the ‘general introduction of industrialised systems followed Government pressure in 1965, including a Ministry circular urging their use.’⁸⁹ It was undoubtedly true that central government had pushed forward the cause of industrialised building and recommended the use of some poor quality systems. The problem for Leeds’ claims was that the council had hardly been reluctant about the use of industrialised systems and had indeed been instrumental in setting up the Yorkshire Development Group to plan and develop industrialised building as early as 1962. Also, the 29 defective tower blocks in the programme were all built between 1958 and 1966, before the National Building Agency could have had any influence. This unseemly bickering about who was to blame for these problems merely underlines the crisis of public housing in this period. This was

⁸⁵ Ibid, 30/06/1978

⁸⁶ *YEP*, 17/07/1974

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ *YEP*, 12/03/1976

⁸⁹ Ibid.

also reflected in the Housing Committee's decision in September 1977 to allow private contractors to compete with the City Architect's Department in designing council houses, as 'councillors from all three parties had told the Housing Committee that they did not believe that Leeds was getting value for money with its council housing.'⁹⁰ This provides more evidence of the breakdown in confidence between the various components of the public housing system, and was compounded by the fact that representatives from the City Architect's Department were reprimanded in the following January for not carrying out Housing Committee instructions on this matter.⁹¹ Despite all the unfavourable publicity and undoubted problems with some types of dwelling, the declining image of public housing was often belied by reality in this era. In 1974 it was announced that new council houses were to be fitted with heating, ventilation and insulation systems which would bring standards above those of the Parker-Morris Report. The increased cost was to be £40 per house, though proposals to fit double-glazing were rejected on grounds of expense.⁹² Later that year the council bought 50 new houses in Morley because builders could not sell them privately. Kevin Gould added that the homes did not have as high a level of heating, ventilation and storage standards as council houses, but did admit that the houses looked better from the outside.⁹³ This demonstrated one of the problems that bedevilled public housing at this time. Even when it was of high standard, council housing was stigmatised by appearance and, in a period of financial strain, exciting design and architecture often had to be sacrificed to meet the basic requirements.

The history of Leeds' housing in the 1970s was also marked by the final demise of Quarry Hill Flats. Unlike Hunslet Grange, the structural problems at Quarry Hill had been dealt with fairly effectively in the early 1960s, even if the work was only intended to be a temporary expedient. While the remedial work took place the opportunity was taken to improve some of the communal areas of the complex, and as late as 1972 the Director of Housing, S.I. Benson, said that the

⁹⁰ *YEP*, 08/09/1977

⁹¹ *YEP*, 31/01/1978

⁹² *YEP*, 10/07/1974

⁹³ *YEP*, 06/08/1974

council was considering the question of improving them internally.⁹⁴

Nevertheless, the future of Quarry Hill was to be limited, though the coup-de-grace came at least partly due to the road proposals that were affecting that part of Leeds at the time. In November 1973 Housing Chairman Kevin Gould announced that demolition of Quarry Hill Flats and transfer of the tenants would be phased over five years. He said the decision had been taken because the 938 flats all lacked modern interiors, that the refuse disposal system had difficulties, and because the planned North-East Urban Motorway would require the clearance of a section of the flats anyway. He added that ‘would we not question that they equal the civilised living accommodation that we would expect for our people today?’⁹⁵

Some of the tenants of the flats might have questioned Gould’s assertion, as Alison Ravetz had discovered in her research that ‘scarcely any tenants criticised the flats themselves’, and because ‘originally they were far in advance of their time there was still a feeling of modernity about them.’⁹⁶ Despite this, Ravetz has suggested that the difficulties with and ultimate demise of the flats was down to their nature as a fully planned environment designed, constructed and administered on a grand scale. She stated that ‘the model dwellings are all of one time, structure and style. Conceived as a unity, they seem to demand to be renewed or removed as a unity, and in the latter case the dispersal of population and redevelopment must begin all over again.’⁹⁷ Thus the nature of environments such as Quarry Hill Flats made the resolution of problems much more difficult than they would have been in estates that developed in a more piecemeal fashion over a longer period and in the form of discrete dwellings. These facets of Quarry Hill were to be repeated in many cases during the post-war era, as modern styles and techniques were rushed into action. It was highly symbolic of some of the features of this era that, as the last touches were applied to the demolition of

⁹⁴ YEP, 05/10/1972

⁹⁵ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports* (November 1973), p.111

⁹⁶ YP, 09/06/1971

⁹⁷ Ravetz, *Model Estate*, p.208

Quarry Hill Flats in 1978, Hunslet Grange Flats were approaching their final crisis.

The changing nature of housing and land use policy was displayed in discussions over the future use of the Quarry Hill site. One of the benefits of the flats complex had been its close proximity to the amenities of the city centre and Michael Meadowcroft, while giving his opinion that ‘modern concepts’ were against the size and vastness of a scheme like Quarry Hill Flats and that the



Quarry Hill Flats, June 1967. This shows the flats after the remedial work of the early 1960s. (Leeds Library and Information Service, www.leodis.net)

council had not invested enough resources to make it workable, expressed his preference in 1973 that the site should be developed for residential and communal rather than commercial use.⁹⁸ Nearly four years later he attacked the lack of thought over future use of the site and described it as ‘an ideal site for mixed housing development.’⁹⁹ He was backed by Labour’s Councillor King, who described the current proposals to use it as a temporary car park as a waste of public funds.¹⁰⁰ Council leader Irwin Bellow criticised Labour in turn for not considering the site when they made the decision to demolish the flats, added that he felt the site was only practical if developed as high-rise, and that ‘we as a party are set against building high rise accommodation as such.’¹⁰¹ Meadowcroft responded in January 1978 by stating that, on the Quarry Hill site, ‘it is certainly not true that you cannot have some kind of multi-storey development for professional people, for young, single people, for young married couples, and this is being done successfully not just by local authorities but by private developers as well.’¹⁰² There were several ironies in this little episode. Acquiring land for housing had been a difficult task for councils in the post-war era, Leeds included. Here there was a large tract of council-owned land that had been in residential use, but that the present council refused to utilise for housing. Even allowing for the trends away from living in city centres, the decision seemed a strange ‘volte-face’. Secondly, the leading figure in the party that had done so much to preserve ‘old’ residential Leeds from the bulldozers, and had a distinctly conservative attitude to redevelopment, was embracing the stereotypical symbol of the modernist built environment, as well as showing a prescient anticipation of twenty-first century Leeds. The late 1970s was definitely a transitional time in the politics of the residential built environment.

After 1967 the environment in which local authorities operated their housing policy became much more difficult. Financial restrictions led to much greater scrutiny from central government, but no relaxation in the expectations placed

⁹⁸ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports* November 1973, pp.109-110

⁹⁹ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports* June 1977, p.39

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p.42

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.44

¹⁰² LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports* January 1978, p.381

upon local councils. Tenants were reacting to their experience of public housing in ways that defied the objectives of many planners and politicians, and frustrated the smooth running of the usual administrative procedures. One of the problems was that planning 'orthodoxy' took quite a long time to adjust to these more adverse circumstances. It took a while for Leeds to realise that the changes in the context of housing policy had limited the power of the City Architect and City Engineer to reshape the city according to their professional assumptions. Gradually more influence was focused on the management of existing housing and the participation of Leeds' council housing department in the formulation of proposals for new construction. This continued a trend that had been developing in Leeds since the early 1960s, but while the attitude of the Housing Department was based on self-interest in easing its difficulties with housing allocation, it was farsighted in that it anticipated many of the issues that were to arise with council housing. In stopping the use of further deck-access blocks in areas such as Cottingley and Hunslet Hall the Housing Department at least prevented some of the difficulties with multi-storey and flats developments it faced in other estates. Where the department was limited was that it too had ingrained procedures that were not always easy to adapt, and it was also heavily dependent on resources to carry out its tasks effectively. Even where successful policies had evolved, such as pre-allocation, they were unable to be rolled out across the city.

The accumulation of many dwellings which were unpopular, environments that were either poorly designed or needed constant maintenance, and housing that required large sums of money spent to make it fit for habitation, made the job a very difficult one for the council's political and bureaucratic leadership in the 1970s, and one that was increased in scale by the decreasing funds they had to deal with it. Yet what made matters worse was the fact that the response of the council was in many ways to seek to defend its position and stick to the tried-and-tested ways, rather than to adapt to the changing circumstances. When it suited, as in Chapeltown, the council was willing to admit that its power was limited, but where it felt that its role and expertise were coming under challenge, as at Hunslet Grange, the response was one of denial and doing as much as possible to belittle the tenants capacity to influence their surroundings. The irony was that this did much to diminish the council's credibility and encouraged the public to

act in less direct ways. Ultimately, a more individual approach by tenants and residents towards securing desirable houses and living environments might have worked for some and certainly succeeded in motivating the council bureaucracy to question its policy. At the same time, however, the problems of providing appropriate housing and estates for those without the resources to enter the private market were collective ones, and the inability to find a way of dealing with these issues politically undoubtedly led to a deterioration in the reputation of council housing and a worsening in the living conditions of many people.

Chapter Seven: Residential Land: Acquisition, Designation and Disposal

Given the extensive need for land that was inherent in mass housing provision, it was inevitable that land-use planning would play an important part in the development of residential Leeds. It provides an excellent example of how the post-war system gave a substantial degree of authority to the local planning bureaucracy, while also hemming them in with interference and supervision from Whitehall, and involved an increasing reluctance to challenge important interests. As land was relatively scarce in or near cities, there were competing demands for its acquisition and use. Development Plans were intended to provide a strict framework within which to contain and reconcile these demands, but the long-term nature of planning and the relative fallibility of forecasting future socio-economic trends meant that implementation of the plan could also lead to conflict.¹ Quite a lot of this conflict effectively took place behind closed doors and was the product of rivalries within the bureaucracy, state and local agencies. Central government had recognised a need for extensive planning controls to make sure that scarce land was used in the most efficient manner, but while housing was a high priority, agricultural land was also a vital source of food, and planning orthodoxy held that the ‘sprawl’ of large cities into the surrounding countryside was an irrational social evil.² Builders and property developers were to frequently bemoan the ‘hoarding’ of land by Leeds’ council, while Labour councillors in their turn often criticised the ‘anti-social’ tendencies of land speculation and the limited provision within private residential developments for the poor, the old or the disabled.

The production of development plans depended on technocratic estimates of future need and, allied to the relative inflexibility of the plan, this limited the scope for public participation. When the wider community did become involved in land-use planning issues it tended to be very late in the day, when action was imminent and the chances of successful intervention were reduced. These factors

¹ Michael J. Croft, ‘Urban Form and Structure’ in Gordon Cherry (ed.) *Urban Planning Problems* (L. Hill, London, 1974) pp.23-24

² Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p.155

also affected party politics, though there was to be some dispute on the amount of stress that was to be put on public and private land-use, Conservatives seeking a greater role for private enterprise and Labour arguing that, given the relative lack of availability of land, a significant amount should remain in local authority ownership in order to avoid the market squeezing out those in need.

The philosophy behind the land-use planning system rarely came under question during this period, but while the 'rules' of the system were observed, there was enough certainty for the establishment of entrenched interests, and a degree of space for the articulation of conflict. The issue of land availability, designation and disposal was one in which the local authority had less initiative, and not as much of an active role, as it possessed in relation to slum clearance or housebuilding. As a consequence of this, the council often played more of a balancing role, reconciling different interests and trying to ensure that land use complied with legislation and government policy. While the council still held an interest in the acquisition of land for its housing programmes, there was more scope for other groups to assert themselves. Most significant among these groups were to be private property interests that often had conflicting aims. Developers and builders sought access to desirable suburban and greenfield sites, while homeowners and some rural landowners sought to protect themselves against both a drop in the value of their homes and what they regarded as a threat to their local environment. While developers and builders tended to possess greater economic leverage, the position of homeowners received a political boost through the establishment of Green Belts and the relatively conservative nature of the development plan system. This tendency towards the status quo worked against developers on a case-by-case basis, but ironically also benefitted them collectively at times by raising the value of land. By the 1970s the interests of private property had strengthened vis-à-vis the local authority as the economic situation deteriorated, the price of land increased, and the demands for council building subsided.³

³ Short, *Housing in Britain: The Post-war Experience* p.77; McKay and Scott, *The Politics of Urban Change* p.129; Dunleavy, *Urban Political Analysis*, pp.91-94

Leeds had been very quick to respond to the Scott Report on land utilisation in rural areas, published in 1942, and outlined its own Green Belt in 1944, but for large cities with pressing needs for the housing of growing populations, some expansion was needed. This was acknowledged in Leeds' first Development Plan of 1951 which announced the intention to negotiate with the West Riding County Council to house Leeds' 'overspill' population in land at Barwick-in-Elmet and at Rothwell.⁴ This policy was in line with planning orthodoxy of the time and associated with influential figures such as Patrick Abercrombie and Frederic Osborn. Osborn was strongly against the spread of cities, criticising the lack of private living-space along with 'the increasing burden of suburban journeys, the cutting-off of millions of townspeople from access to the countryside, and the disintegration of local community life.'⁵ At this time there was an uneasy debate between 'Garden City' advocates of low density development and Modernists who believed in high-rise and inner city concentration. Both sides believed that the restriction of urban boundaries was essential for aesthetic and practical reasons, to protect the countryside and prevent 'ugly' urban sprawl and ribbon development, but as there was an equally strong belief on the part of 'anti-urban' planners and civil servants that high population densities in cities should be avoided where possible, the necessity arose for housing excess urban populations in 'satellite towns'. Glendinning and Muthesius have argued that Osborn believed 'existing municipalities were archaic irrelevancies whose potential opposition to reform should simply be disregarded; and that the assumed universal preference for cottages over flats could be used to justify the enforced displacement of large segments of the urban population.'⁶ There was the potential for a great deal of conflict on this issue between planners (particularly at a national or regional level) and politicians.

In a report of 1954 the need for 'overspill' to accommodate an estimated 34,755 people by 1971 was reiterated, but now the favoured area for this was land at Whinmoor belonging to Tadcaster Rural District, within the West Riding

⁴ City and County Borough of Leeds, *Town and Country Planning Act 1947: Development Plan-Written Statement* (March 1951) p.3

⁵ F.J. Osborn, *Green-Belt Cities*, (London, Faber, 1946) p.13

⁶ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block* p.158

planning authority. Leeds City Council had already made a provisional agreement with the West Riding County Council to accommodate overspill on Tadcaster land, and other desirable features of this area included the fact that development could be carried out without major drainage works, and it provided a natural extension to the Seacroft estate.⁷ To develop this land Leeds needed to gain planning permission from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, which was not necessarily a straightforward task given the aims of the post-war planning settlement and the opposition of property holders and landed interests. The plans were opposed at a public inquiry by the Wellington Hill Residents' Association, Colonel Lane Fox of Bramham Park, who was a large local landowner, and representatives for the National Farmers' Union. The residents called on the judgement of an estate agent who estimated that there would be a total loss of £150,000 in the value of private houses in the Wellington Hill area, while Colonel Lane Fox was opposed to 'urban sprawl' and the erosion of the Green Belt. A Mr Chapman 'suggested that there was a need for a reinvestigation of all the building land in Leeds to see what density it would carry and until that investigation was made it was not right to take land outside the city.'⁸ The Minister effectively came to a compromise and, while disallowing a third of the area that the council had sought planning permission for, he was satisfied that the rest of the land was needed to 'avoid the risk of slowing down the housing programme when sites at present earmarked had all been used.'⁹ Some agricultural land had been preserved, and the judgement was relatively well accepted by the objectors, the chair of Wellington Hill Residents Association saying that 'we have at least preserved the rural amenities of Wellington Hill to some degree.'¹⁰ Later in 1956 the council recognised that the Minister for Housing and Local Government 'supports the Green Belt provision in the City as a whole and that he would be unlikely to favour the use of any extensive areas of the Green Belt for housing.'¹¹ This example of the planning process at Whinmoor helps to illustrate many of the factors that faced the council when trying to make

⁷ Leeds, WYAS, Reports on Housing Improvement 1956-65. LLD1/2/817352 (Report on 'Land for Housing', (1954))

⁸ *YP*, 24/09/1955

⁹ *YP*, 01/03/1956

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Leeds, WYAS, Reports on Housing Improvement 1956-65. LLD1/2/817352 'Review of Land for Housing', 14/12/1956.

best use of land for residential purposes. At this time they were usually able to make a good case when it came to applying for permission to develop, but there were a range of property interests against them, and Green Belts and legislation that discriminated against development on the fringe of the city.

Issues relating to building plans and planning permission in suburban Leeds were to show the council aiming at two conflicting objectives. With land scarce there was a need to take advantage of favourable sites, but the council also wanted to preserve areas of the Green Belt and public open space within the city. These issues often put the council in a situation where interest groups dragged it into different positions, and where it could be taken to task for hypocrisy and self-interest. Property interests were directly opposed in many instances, with homeowners reacting badly to the ambitions of developers and builders. In the majority of instances the council would uphold the Green Belt and satisfy the demands of homeowners, but when the council sought to instigate its own building programmes in the suburbs it was to incite the worst fears of those in private housing. A prime example of this came at West Park.

In 1956 a local inquiry had to be held due to the council's intention to build an estate on land at Butcher Hill which had been originally zoned as a 'playing area'. 150 residents attended a meeting to organise their opposition to this at the inquiry.¹² They were backed by a valuer, J.F. Lewis, who described the proposals as 'catastrophic' and told the inquiry that 'West Park has been developed carefully for 40 years to ensure that only the best type of residences were put up...Houses at the west end, if the estate is built, will depreciate by at least 25 per cent.'¹³ Some contributions and claims were even more hyperbolic than this. Leeds' Chief Assistant Planning Officer, William Sleight, agreed that the area was a desirable residential district, but was forced to add, rather surreally, that 'it was a matter of opinion whether fried fish and chip shops would spoil a neighbourhood.'¹⁴ The last word was effectively to go to the Deputy Town Clerk, J.R. Haslegrave. He said that, although the land had been zoned as public open

¹² *YEP*, 05/07/1956

¹³ *YEP*, 11/07/1956

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

space, there was a pressing need for residential land and the area could be developed in conjunction with adjoining land that had been earmarked for public housing.¹⁵

In the same year, another inquiry was held after an appeal from a landowner at Bramhope who wanted to build houses on a site which had once been zoned for housing, but which was now in the Green Belt. He argued that it was poor quality agricultural land, that the MHLG wanted Leeds to use its land more intensively for housing, and that the development plan was not sacrosanct. In this instance residents who argued that the proposals would lower the value of their houses were on the same side as Haslegrave, who claimed that it represented a serious encroachment on the Green Belt.¹⁶ Leeds' planning bureaucracy was to take a relatively strict line on the status of the Green Belt, possibly reflecting planning orthodoxy on the undesirability of urban growth and a need to pre-empt the desires of Whitehall, reflected in the Minister Duncan Sandys' circular 42/55 on Green Belts in 1955.¹⁷ The seriousness paid to this was perhaps demonstrated when the council was praised by the Leeds and Lower Dales branch of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England for its use of 'varied and subdued' colours on its housing estates that adjoined the Green Belt, an issue for which private developers received criticism.¹⁸ When it came to development, the council showed its determination by refusing permission to proposals at Shadwell and Bramley that wanted to build on the Green Belt. Both had their appeals rejected. At Shadwell the developer claimed that the land possessed 'no aesthetic qualities' and was ideal for building¹⁹, while at Bramley the builder, Cline and Sons, said that the land had only been included in the Green Belt in the previous year, that it represented 'reasonable infilling' between two existing sets of houses, and that there was a considerable demand for the type of bungalow they proposed to erect. The council responded by acknowledging the area's 'rather mixed character', but

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *YP*, 15/11/1956

¹⁷ Ward, *Planning and Urban Change*, p163

¹⁸ *YP*, 07/12/1957

¹⁹ *YEP*, 17/06/1958

asserted that they had to do their best ‘to preserve the fields which lay between existing housing developments.’²⁰

Given that the general context of land scarcity was combined with the extra constraint of the Green Belt and the competition of public housebuilding schemes, it was inevitable that there would be some tension between the council and private developers. In 1960 Leeds and District Property Owners’ and Ratepayers’ Association voiced their concern about the amount of land that was used for public housing, fearing that there would be no suitable land available for private builders.²¹ In that year the Manor House estate in Moortown was sold at auction, at 960 acres the last large undeveloped site in Leeds zoned for private building.²² A few years later estate agents claimed that the council was not developing land that it had cleared quickly enough, and that there were parts of the Green Belt that could be developed without detriment.²³ The issue of cleared land was raised when the Lands Tribunal heard a complaint from two landowners about the level of compensation they would receive for compulsorily-purchased land in the Camp Road area, a chartered surveyor arguing on their behalf that the compensation paid in clearance areas was lower than that prior to World War Two. Leeds’ counsel stated that the land was heavily blighted and there was no evidence of private demand to develop the land residentially.²⁴ The District Valuer, D.G. Ford, confirmed that ‘it was common knowledge that builders did not like to build on cleared sites.’²⁵ Karl Cohen enlarged upon this in a letter he wrote to the Yorkshire Evening Post in 1967 in response to suggestions that the council was ‘hogging’ building land. He claimed that he had invited private builders to redevelop slum-clearance land and had assured them of long leases, but had not received a single enquiry. He added that the council normally built to a higher density than private builders and that many corporation estates had been built on land that had ‘remained fallow for many years’ and had thus apparently

²⁰ *YEP*, 18/11/1959

²¹ *YP*, 27/02/1960

²² *YEP*, 01/09/1960

²³ *YEP*, 15/08/1963

²⁴ *YEP*, 23/10/1963

²⁵ *YEP*, 24/10/1963

not been attractive for private building.²⁶ This attitude did mean that the pressure was increased on areas of suburban land which private developers looked on more desirably. Sand Moor Golf Club in leafy Alwoodley planned to sell off four holes and its clubhouse for building if the council agreed to re-designate the land.²⁷ This plan was rejected until the main drainage facilities were improved, but the council agreed to rezone the land for residential purposes in the forthcoming development plan review, against the opposition of local residents, the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and the neighbouring golf clubs at Moortown and Moor Allerton.²⁸

Acquiring more land for residential needs and utilising it more intensively were aims that were generally accepted by Leeds' politicians and administrators. How land in the city was to be developed was a different matter, and one that showed clear evidence of the traditional party political differences. In July 1963 there was a debate within the council chamber over the status of land adjoining the Green Belt at Adel.²⁹ The council had refused permission for private multi-storey flats on the grounds that it should remain as public open space, as part of the land was zoned as such. The landowner objected to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and won his appeal, after which the council compulsorily purchased the land but allowed the landowner to lease back some of the land for seven years at a negligible rent. The council then announced its intention to build on the site. This affair roused the anger of Conservative councillors. Councillor Marshall attacked the council for its about-face on the designation of the land, criticised the cost of its acquisition and questioned the previous decisions to deny private development of the site.³⁰ Alderman Hargrave generalised from this case to add that 'it would seem that there is a stultification of most, if not all, of the available land in this city for the purpose of private development', and he stated that it should be borne in mind that 'where private development can legitimately and properly take place, by the approval either of this Council or of the Minister, then

²⁶ Leeds, WYAS, Councillor Cohen: Press Statements and Notes, 1959-67. LLD1/2/834129 (Letter to YEP, 27/04/1967)

²⁷ YEP, 23/08/1963

²⁸ YEP, 04/12/1963

²⁹ Leeds City Council, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, July 1963, pp. 40-47

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.45

no charge falls upon the Corporation in consequence of that permission being given or of that development taking place.’³¹ The argument that the local authority would save money by allowing freer rein to private enterprise to acquire and develop land was to be made frequently by Conservative councillors. Karl Cohen defended the council’s actions by insinuating that the financial argument was not the whole story and that Conservatives were ‘more concerned with how dare we go to Adel, and how dare we go to Shadwell, and build! What impudence it is on our part to put ordinary working-class homes in those very delectable parts of the city!’³² On a more practical level he argued that it was the Minister’s decision that the site should be residential, and that even if the council had wanted to preserve it as open space they would have been required to pay a higher price for ‘residential’ land even if they did nothing with it.³³

These difficulties with the availability of land were to impact upon the council’s housebuilding programme. In 1958 the Housing Committee declared that ‘apart from the land recently included in the city boundary, there are no more large areas available for development. For this reason the present construction policy reveals a definite trend towards multi-storey dwellings in ‘point’ or ‘slab’ blocks and the redevelopment of the central cleared areas.’³⁴ Two years later they declared that any sites proposed for development would need to be thoroughly investigated because it was presumed that any vacant land within the city must have some kind of ‘disability’ or another good reason why it was not already built upon.³⁵ In 1960 the committee proposed an increase in housing densities in response to land shortages, and declared that they were also considering an approach to private builders to construct at higher densities.³⁶ By the early 1960s the limited sources of available land were continuing to try the council, and Labour’s Housing Committee Chairman Karl Cohen in particular. In June 1964 he said that ‘whilst nobody can contemplate a whole series of multi-storey flats and nothing else, our advisers, the City Architect and City Engineer, will have to

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, p.46

³³ Ibid, pp.46-47

³⁴ LCC, *Reports of Committees, 1957-58*, Housing Committee. The land recently included within the city’s boundaries was at Whinmoor.

³⁵ LCC, *Reports of Committees, 1959-60*. Housing Committee.

³⁶ *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 24th March 1960

tell us how best we can utilise the land so as to provide the biggest density possible.³⁷ This problem was felt particularly acutely by Cohen at this time as he was having doubts about the desirability of further high-rise housing. At the discussions of the Sub-Town Planning and Improvements Committee on the Development Plan Review, he asked ‘if they had been too rigid with the Green Belt, was it to continue or were they to consider with the West Riding a new Green Belt?’³⁸ He added that he wanted a more fluid Green Belt to enable building to go on at a lesser density, and later stated that the amount of open space allocated in the Development plan was far greater than that of any other town. This was despite his recognition that it would be a struggle to persuade the Ministry as to the need for an extension of Leeds’ boundaries. The rest of the committee, who shared the arguments of the City Architect and City Engineer that high density development could be desirable, accepted that the Green Belt should remain much the same.³⁹

As a result of these types of discussion and the general acceptance of the principles of the post-1947 settlement, Leeds’ Development Plan Review involved few radical departures in the field of land use. Population had risen slightly rather than declined as expected during the 1949-1961 period⁴⁰, and residential development had increased by 2289 acres, ‘a considerably higher rate than the expected increase of 34% for the total plan period from 1949-71’⁴¹ As a result, it was stated that ‘the Corporation have established higher residential densities than those advocated in the original Written Analysis in order to obtain maximum use of urban land, an increasingly scarce resource.’⁴² To cope with the unexpected rise in population, the council had allocated 2537 acres of vacant land for housing, of which 1690 acres were owned, or likely to be purchased, by the council. The major poles of residential development were to be Holt Park, Whinmoor and Colton.⁴³ At the time much of this new development was

³⁷ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, June 1964, p.32

³⁸ Leeds, WYAS, Sub-Town Planning and Improvements Development Review Committee, 1965-69. LLD1/2/834518. (Minutes of meeting, 29/10/1965)

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ City of Leeds, *First Review of City Development Plan: Written Analysis* (1968) p.12

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.6

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.45

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.44

anticipated to be council-led, with few large-scale private developments envisaged.

Many of the arguments relating to land-use planning in Leeds surfaced in the objections to the Development Plan Review and the public inquiry that followed in 1969. Most of the objections focused on the revisions that had been made to Leeds' Green Belt, and covered both general arguments and specific objections to the Green Belt provisions in certain areas of Leeds. Developers and builders attacked the restrictive nature of the revisions, in particular the 'extreme shortage of land for development within the city' and the fact that most of the land that had been allocated was earmarked for council housing and very little remained for private housing.⁴⁴ They also contended that the Green Belt was too tightly defined and that there were parcels of land that were surrounded or closely connected to existing built up areas that made no real contribution to the Green Belt.⁴⁵ One particular objection against Green Belt provision adjoining the eastern boundary of Leeds at Whinmoor used the argument that this area 'must be considered the natural future area for expansion of the city' and added that the land was very close to the new Seacroft District Centre 'and there is considerable doubt if the centre can become a viable economic proposition without the addition of extensive residential areas to the east not now allocated in the Review Plan.'⁴⁶ In this case the objection was denied, but the inspector did decide that a smaller piece of land at Wortley should be removed from the Green Belt as it did not appear as part of the open country.⁴⁷ This illustrates both the determination of planners to maintain the Green Belt as much as possible, but also that their hold on the decisions of where and when to extend the boundaries of the city were coming under question from some frustrated business interests.

The most significant issue decided at the inquiry was the West Riding County Council's objection to Leeds' decision to allocate residential land at Colton. The West Riding's case was based on a potential blurring of urban boundaries

⁴⁴ City of Leeds, *Development Plan-First Quinquennial Review: Report of a Public Local Inquiry into Objections and Representations* (1969) p.8

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.14

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.10

between Leeds and the settlements of Garforth and Swillington, the need to protect the house and grounds of Temple Newsam, the attractiveness of the existing Colton village, but most interestingly, that Leeds' estimate of its 1981 population was excessive and that the West Riding had left land around villages to the north and east of Leeds unallocated 'specifically to cater for people who wish to move out of the city to the villages.'⁴⁸ Leeds was unlikely to find the loss of residents to outlying villages to be a desirable state of affairs, but argued that the Colton area would provide a 'cohesive and logical addition to Leeds' where 4500 dwellings could be built in an attractive residential environment 'within reasonable proximity of the City Centre.'⁴⁹ The inspector dismissed the objection and agreed that 'Colton is the logical area for any extension of the city.'⁵⁰ He also approved the general orientation of the Green Belt, despite concluding that Leeds' population forecasts 'may well err slightly on the high side'.⁵¹ Both Leeds and the West Riding based their estimates on population figures and previous trends that had been set down by the Registrar-General, but there were significant differences in their future expectations. In establishing his own 'independent' forecast, the inspector basically split the difference between the disputed numbers.⁵² This dispute over population demonstrates one of the most obvious difficulties of the planning process. Despite the technical knowledge involved in plan preparation, there were no accurate methods of anticipating population growth and the consequent demands for land. The post-war increase in birth rate had already upset forecasts for growth in Leeds' first Development Plan, and other factors such as local economic growth, house prices and family structure could all affect demand for land and accommodation. In addition to this, it could also be argued that political decisions on issues such as the Green Belt affected the provision of land and housing in ways that rendered claims about rational and 'scientific' planning untenable.

Arguments within the council about the most desirable way of developing land were to become more frequent after the Conservatives won control of the council

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp.17-19

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp.19-21

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp.21-23

⁵¹ Ibid, p.8

⁵² Ibid, pp.21-23

in the late 1960s. When Alderman King (Labour) raised the issue of the sale of council-owned land in July 1968, the new Conservative Housing Chair, Alderman Bellow, responded by saying that ‘I submit that the time has come to end this worshipping at the shrine of municipal ownership. The hogging of land is a restrictive factor in the development of this City, and I know how the Socialists would cry out if building was being stultified and the hogging was been done by the private sector.’⁵³ The Conservatives put forward the point of view that the council could not possibly develop in the short term all the vacant land in the city, and the best way of ensuring that building was to take place was to let private enterprise do this at its own expense. In reply to Labour protests that scarce land needed to be dealt with carefully, Alderman Bellow stated that if the council held down the supply of land, then the private sector could not build the thousands of houses called for in the City Development Plan, and that on certain of the sites that had been put up for sale ‘only one single house, or at most two houses, are to be built. It is just not sensible or practicable that we, as an authority, should build individual dwellings....So what is the alternative—to go on letting these small sites stand idle and derelict forever?’⁵⁴ The direct financial gain to the council that land sales offered was also given as a justification.⁵⁵ Conservative release of council land was also backed up by business fears of land shortages, and it was reported that the building trade forecast, with no pun intended, that house prices could go ‘through the roof’.⁵⁶ The council’s own report into land availability had been very pessimistic and had recommended that ‘certain areas of council-owned land allocated for public housing should be made available for private building.’⁵⁷ Conservative inclinations toward private enterprise were important here, but there was also a determination from the Conservative council leaders Frank Marshall and Irwin Bellow to demonstrate ‘businesslike’ administration and financial stringency was a central part of this. As such, allowing publicly owned land to stand disused was inefficient, especially when it could be a source of revenue to the local authority.

⁵³ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, July 1968, pp.14-15

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, January 1972, p.366

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, July 1976, p.205, and January 1978, p.307

⁵⁶ *YEP*, 02/09/1977

⁵⁷ *YEP*, 03/01/1976

This was countered on Labour's side where there was a clear belief in the desirability of municipal ownership of land, both from the point of view that they did not trust private development to use scarce land 'efficiently', but also because they held that it would not provide for the varied needs of the whole community. The emphasis was on balanced development and satisfaction of social needs, a central plank of the Town Planning ideas of the 1940s and 1950s, but one that had become less influential in the 'mixed economy' as state planning came to be seen more as a way of servicing capitalist growth.⁵⁸ In 1970 Karl Cohen argued that 'you can sell this land, but they will not be building one-bedroomed bungalows for people who need them, and they will not be building the accommodation that your handicapped people need.'⁵⁹ By the mid-1970s it was feared that land sales were having a direct effect on the council housebuilding programme, and Labour questioned the Tory position that land in the hands of private developers would be built on more quickly than council-owned land that was suffering due to the fact that council housebuilding was under the influence of spending cuts.⁶⁰ Councillors continued to argue that the private sector was not catering for all needs, including those who could not obtain mortgages, and that the land sold to the private sector was not producing the building rates that the Conservative leadership had promised. Councillor Vollans (Labour) pointed to the figure that private housebuilding had 'dropped in commencement rate from 2800 in 1974/75 to an estimated total for 1978/79 of 1330. And this is from the people who were going to supply the needs of Leeds in the housing field.'⁶¹

After the Conservative achievement of a majority on the council in 1967, the sale of council housing was to be coupled with the disposal of council-owned land, with many similar arguments taking place. Leeds' Conservatives, in common with their colleagues in many other councils, had proposed the policy of council house sales going into the 1967 municipal elections, and acted quickly to enact it. After sales were halted by Labour in 1972, they were to be resumed by the Conservative minority administration, with Liberal support, in 1975. There were

⁵⁸ Ward, *Planning and Urban Change*, pp.119-122

⁵⁹ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, July 1970, p.29

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, July 1976, pp.196-198

⁶¹ *Ibid*, December 1978, p.38

to be a number of conditions placed on, and benefits offered to, those acquiring council houses, such as discounts for tenants who had been in their property for more than a certain length of time and the council being offered first refusal on buying the property back if it was to be sold on after purchase. Sales were also to be restricted to self-contained properties; flats and maisonettes were excluded, as were houses that shared large communal areas. This ‘small-print’ could also cause some controversy.

The arguments that took place around the issue of council house sales were a mixture of principle and practicality, and were employed interchangeably by both sides. Noticeably, however, the Labour position shifted significantly away from an ideological approach by the later 1970s, perhaps in awareness that they did not want to be seen as anti-owner occupier, or in favour of strict controls on tenants. In 1967 Labour’s Councillor Donohoe had complained that conditions of tenancy would not apply to people who had bought council houses, even though they would be living next door to council tenants.⁶² This provided an open goal to the Conservative Housing Chairman, Irwin Bellow. He took the opportunity to declare that ‘...let houses be painted individual colours as individuals desire. Let the doors and facades be different. Why should there have to be uniformity, which only leads to drabness.’⁶³ Given that they found themselves unable to make better arguments in favour of the principle of public housing, Labour focused heavily on the more technical flaws of the policy.

Criticisms of the policy of council house sales thus tended to collect around several areas. The first was the loss of council assets. Conservative councillors liked to point out the funds that accrued to the council from the sale of housing, but Labour claimed that there would also be financial problems. Alderman King asserted that there would be difficulties created by distortions to the ‘pooling’ of rents between older houses, where the original loans had been paid off, and newer properties which required more finance for loan payments.⁶⁴ Karl Cohen added that many of the older houses that would be sold had to be replaced by new

⁶² LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports* August 1967, p.114

⁶³ *Ibid*, p.117

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.110

houses built on more expensive sites, incurring higher charges.⁶⁵ This position also affected attitudes to the conditions placed on potential council house buyers. When a decisive election victory in 1976 allowed a majority Conservative administration to alter the buy-back clauses and make a discount of 20% available to tenants who had been in their property for three years, the Liberals declared that the discount amounted to ‘giving them away.’⁶⁶ Linked to the disposal of public assets was the loss of rental stock, an argument used by Labour councillors and residents in the Hunslet Carr area, who protested against plans to sell houses due to a fear that it would lead to a reduction in the availability of low-rent, pre-war council houses.⁶⁷ Councillor Bellow claimed that the only thing that changed was the ownership, ‘and whether the occupier is there as the owner or the tenant does not affect the housing waiting list.’⁶⁸

A sign that the issue of council house sales lacked an ideological edge came in the fact that one of the major criticisms raised by the opposition was that the policy was not a success in its own terms. Alderman King said in July 1968 that only 88 houses had actually been sold, while the 1391 enquiries that had been dealt with represented a waste of administrator’s time.⁶⁹ He followed this line up in 1970, stating that only 306 houses from a total of 60,000 had been sold since the policy was introduced. Similar questions were raised about this when council house sales resumed in the mid-1970s. Labour housing spokesman George Mudie admitted that he was not opposed to long-standing tenants buying their homes, but he did point out that in the first thirteen months since the reinstatement of the policy just 103 houses had been sold, despite Housing Chair Peter Sparling countering that there had been 3016 applications.⁷⁰ From 1975 to March 1979 2384 council house sales had been completed, though the fact that 2154 had come about with council mortgage finance suggests that the boost to the council’s income was not an immediate one.⁷¹ Nevertheless, the significance of the sale of council housing on the wider housing policy of the local authority was quite

⁶⁵ Ibid, pp.121-122

⁶⁶ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports* June 1976, pp.85-86

⁶⁷ YEP, 21/07/1967

⁶⁸ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports* August 1967, p.116

⁶⁹ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports* July 1968, p.9

⁷⁰ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, June 1976, p.89

⁷¹ LCC, *Department of Housing Quarterly Reports*, 31/03/1979

limited. The numbers involved were still relatively small, and the housing department did not remark that any problems had been caused regarding the management of its housing stock or the waiting list. There were relatively few contradictory voices against Councillor Bellow's sentiment when he boasted that '...there can surely be no finer way to do away with class barriers, than by people living alongside one another in rented and owner-occupied accommodation.'⁷² Most opposition focused on threats that the policy might cause to the interests and administration of the council as a corporate body, rather than having a basis in the articulation of principles of collectivism or social solidarity. This did nothing to assuage the feelings that were developing in many residents regarding the legitimacy of council 'paternalism'. Having said that, the problems that council house sales caused in the 1980s with the stigmatisation of public housing and its evolution into a 'residual' form of tenure for the disadvantaged and 'problem families' did not appear to be foreseen in this earlier period.

An example of Council land and development policy in the 1970s came at Colton, where many of the issues seen at Whinmoor in the 1950s were repeated, but new dividing lines appeared as well. Leeds Council had purchased land at Colton from the Temple Newsam estate with the intention of developing the land for housing. The land was originally intended to be used to rehouse 15,000 slum clearance tenants, but this was to be changed by a planning study group that considered the alternatives for development.⁷³ This provided an interesting insight on the contemporary orientation of social planning within the council. It was 'strongly suggested' that a 'balanced' social composition should be achieved at Colton through a 'mixture of tenures and house prices or rent levels and a joint contribution by the three development agencies—Corporation, private builders and voluntary housing agencies.'⁷⁴ This mix would require a reduction in the population target from 15,000 to 12,000 due to differing densities. The planners felt that it would be useful to include 'A' group (private) housing in the first phase 'in order to help attract the developers of such accommodation to

⁷² LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, August 1967, p.117

⁷³ LCC, *Colton: An Approach to Planning and Development* (1972)

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.2

Colton'.⁷⁵ This type of housing was also judged to fit in well with the environment of the neighbouring Halton Ward, and 'underlines the feasibility of providing for this group at Colton in large measure.'⁷⁶

They also considered the desirability of 'avoiding a close social mixture' and decided that the social basis of planning at Colton should be 'class heterogeneity (or social mixture) on a wide area basis but social homogeneity (or uniformity) on a local or neighbourhood basis, such an approach being reflected in housing tenure and price differences.'⁷⁷ The balance of tenure was to be 51.7 per cent owner-occupation, 15.9 per cent housing association rental, and 31.3 per cent council rented.⁷⁸ This approach was described as the 'very opposite' of social engineering and 'based on the viewpoint that though physical and social planning should to some extent reflect and allow for the prevailing structure of society and the apparent aspirations and needs of each individual group, it should also contain an element of flexibility so that it does not act as a straitjacket, restricting social mobility and change in the future.'⁷⁹ This document encapsulated the essential conservatism of planning, and its essence as a tool for enabling technical and economic change while effectively preserving the existing social hierarchy.

Despite the moderate tone of these planning proposals, when the council formally announced its plans in 1975 the Colton Preservation Society was formed by residents of the old village of Colton, and the local Conservative councillors representing Halton gave backing to their arguments. In a deputation to the council, the Colton Preservation Society argued that the plans would take out over 400 acres of valuable agricultural land, that there were significant dangers of subsidence, that the local road system was already at saturation point, and that there were significant amounts of derelict land in Leeds that should be used.⁸⁰ The local councillors basically agreed with the opinion that there was available land elsewhere. Councillor Hyde (Conservative) criticised the intention 'to

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.9

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.16

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.17

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.92

⁷⁹ Ibid, pp.40-41

⁸⁰ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, April 1975, p.519

swamp the only genuine country village left within the old City boundaries with 6000 plus council houses.’⁸¹ His colleague Councillor Dodgson suggested ‘that there are many areas of land of varying sizes which may be inconvenient from a housing and planning aspect but could well consume the demand for these 6000 dwellings.’⁸² Councillors from the Labour group, then in control, pointed out both the ‘nimbyism’ in the arguments and the fact that there had been longstanding public intentions to develop the area that had not raised any concerns in the past. Councillor Prichard pondered that ‘...it seems to me rather a curious phenomenon that every time Council development is proposed in what is considered a good residential area members of the Conservative Party opposite suddenly get concerned about the fate of those who might live there.’⁸³ He added that land at Colton had been firmly earmarked for housing from 1964, and Councillor King (Labour) elaborated by stating that there had been no objection to the council buying the land.⁸⁴ Councillor Prichard also provided the interesting observation that while the council should consult people fully on its plans, there was also a duty on people to take an interest in council developments when they were given the opportunity, and he stated that ‘if, in fact, people are going to pay no attention until the development is actually scheduled to begin, it makes a mockery of participation.’⁸⁵ This point of view could have been carried into other areas of council housing and planning policy. Land-use planning in particular was an area where popular pressures bore least on those drafting policies and the public had little input into the process as it was ongoing, but considerable outcry could be caused when proposals came to take a more concrete form. This was probably as much to do with the long-range nature of development plans and the technical side of forecasting than any deliberate attempt to pursue an elitist agenda.

Despite the opposition of the local Conservative councillors to developments at Colton, when the Conservative group resumed control of the council in 1976 it was forced to recognise the importance of the land there to future housing provision in the city. What it could do, though, was to sell sections of land at

⁸¹ Ibid, p.528

⁸² Ibid, p.530

⁸³ Ibid, p.534

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.538

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.535

Colton to the private sector, and reduce the amount of land there devoted to housing. Labour attacked these proposals, Councillor Mudie arguing ‘why spend £2.5 million on land and then decide to use only part of it for the development of housing?’⁸⁶ Councillor Miller (Labour) criticised the inconsistency in the proposals between public and private housing densities, and said that this represented a waste of residential land.⁸⁷ On the Conservative side, these new plans were heartily welcomed. The Planning Chair, Councillor Hudson, said that the site was ‘adjacent to Templenewsam (sic) and I think that to cram as many houses on that site as possible would be an absolute disaster, both environmentally and for the people concerned.’⁸⁸ Tellingly, the local councillors who had opposed Labour’s previous plans were now assuaged. Councillor Dodgson stated that ‘the last thing that I feel we want to see is a vast Corporation housing estate, the like of which we notice at Whinmoor, at Seacroft, and so on.’⁸⁹ His colleague Councillor Hyde added that East Leeds had the highest proportion of council housing in Leeds, and seemed almost disappointed that the development 80/20 in favour of private housing at Colton would only partly redress the balance.⁹⁰ These opinions represented a strong prejudice against public housing, especially close to their own areas, and were to be reflected a lot in Conservative housing policy at the end of the 1970s. By the time a firm local plan was finally drawn up, in December 1978, the land at Colton was to provide housing for only 7,000 people ‘at current densities’ that reflected the preponderance of private housing.⁹¹ Even this failed to satisfy the Colton Preservation Society, whose chairman P. Shires wanted the council to use an alternative site in the vicinity of Temple Newsam Golf Course, a proposal that was rejected by the council for environmental reasons and because of a ‘probable reduced contribution to city housing programmes.’⁹² Thus despite this willing acceptance that the era of suburban council estates was over, the planners still had some difficulty in applying their social prescriptions against certain private property interests.

⁸⁶ Ibid, July 1976, p.198

⁸⁷ Ibid, October 1976, p.345

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.351

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.347

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.349

⁹¹ LCC, *Colton Local Plan* (December 1978) p.7

⁹² Ibid, p.vi

In theory the land-use planning system created by the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 should have led to the omnipotence of planners when it came to development and utilisation of residential land. They were given the primary role in designating land usage and function through the production of development plans, and provided most of the information and forecasting necessary for the analysis that formed the basis of those plans. In the actual operation of land-use planning it proved more difficult for technocrats to control the system. The framework in which planners operated was effectively devised in Whitehall, and many decisions made in Leeds were subject to approval from, or appeal to, the Minister. This was one major factor reducing the autonomy of planners in Leeds. Through the period the planning bureaucracy also had to deal with the growing strength of private business and commercial interests. In the immediate post-war period state direction was much more prevalent, but planning controls later performed much more of a negative role. Private developers showed greater determination to stake their claim to scarce land by the later 1960s, and in a situation where funds for public housebuilding were diminishing, business aspired to a bigger role. In Leeds they were assisted by their natural allies, the Conservative Party, who sold off much council-owned land and changed the parameters of local authority proposals in favour of private development, as at Colton. Land-use planning had a major knock-on effect on public housing construction with the effects of land scarcity, Green Belts and housing density stipulations leading to certain forms of building. Dunleavy has stated that 'greater equality in housing conditions was to be achieved with inadequate funding, without any substantial diversion of land from rural to urban use, and without any significant equalization of densities across metropolitan areas'⁹³, and he linked these factors to the development of high-rise housing. In these types of issues there was a great deal of common ground between national and local planners and many suburban owner-occupiers. The efforts of some local politicians such as Karl Cohen to try and get a more even spread of housing densities across the city was to be generally unsuccessful, even when they were able to insert council housing into the suburbs.

⁹³ Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain*, pp. 101-102

Land sales were defended by the Conservatives from the point of view that they boosted council revenues, but there were wider ideological and political grounds for their support of private enterprise. The party was strongly inclined toward the growth of owner-occupation, while Conservative councillors were much happier to see more affluent homeowners in their areas rather than the expansion of council housing. In many ways Leeds' Conservatives benefitted from the post-war planning settlement. The stringent conditions placed on land use, plus the establishment of Green Belts, helped to protect the interests of their constituency of suburban residents, while the role of private enterprise in residentially zoned land could be extended when they had control of the Town Hall. Labour's position was based on the idea of planning for the wider community and using land to provide housing for those who were unable to secure it through the market. Development of local authority land for council housing both in the inner city and on the outskirts at Seacroft and Whinmoor played a leading role until the late 1960s. After this, the worsening financial situation undermined Labour policy. While they continued to oppose land sales on principled grounds and criticised the patchy rates of private housebuilding, they were unable to propose concrete alternative uses for vacant land, which might remain empty or derelict for an indeterminate period without council funds to develop it. Thus while the disposal and ownership of land was still something of a stage for dispute and negotiation, much of land-use planning remained marginal to conventional local politics.

The public proved to be even more peripheral to development planning. While development plans were passed on for consultation and open to objection before they were referred to the Ministry for approval, there was little room for the public to influence how plans were drawn up, and consultation had no real institutional role. As a result groups of residents or smaller land-owners tended to react to events as planning proposals came up, and while they were protected sometimes by Green Belts and the appeals process, they were often relatively powerless, particularly when the local authority had the backing of big business interests. The framework of land-use planning helped to replicate many of the features typical in other areas of local urban policy. While there was little popular

involvement and most of the planning process was executed by professional planners, local property interests could still be defended through the application of regulations such as the Green Belt, or safeguarded through judicious protest. Where national legislation and supervision favoured the local authority then protest from any source could be fruitless, but central government and economic constraints also provided some clear boundaries to local initiative, a feature that was to increase towards the end of the period.

Land-use was to be the field of urban politics and planning that saw the greatest level of continuity in the post-war settlement. This seems to be quite a strange statement when you compare it with the pace of change in other areas such as slum clearance, public house-building, inner-city redevelopment and road-building, all of which involved a major overhaul of the urban environment. What land-use planning did mark was the preservation of a certain equilibrium between the interests of certain groups within the system while also allowing the facilitation of certain essential social needs. The nature of the planning process was often very conservative. Such facets as a rigid development plan and Green Belts imparted quite a negative flavour to planning, while the designation of land to private concerns in house-building, retail and commercial development did not necessarily achieve the fulfilment of the local authority's vision for these areas. The conservative tendencies of the planning system, when coupled with the council's diminished financial resources, meant that many of Leeds' collective aims were frustrated. As a result, from the late 1960s there was a greater orientation towards private enterprise in land sales and allocations for house-building coupled with the encouragement of individual aspiration with the beginning of council house sales. The satisfaction of some interests was accompanied by the weakening of a broader social control over land use.

Chapter Eight: Public Facilities in Residential Leeds: Shopping, Roads and Industry.



Seacroft Town Centre, c.1967. (Leeds Library and Information Service, www.leodis.net)

Very few residential areas are composed exclusively of houses. In a city like Leeds, predominantly developed in the Victorian age, tracts of housing of various ‘classes’ were intermixed with industry of various types, numerous shops and pubs, churches and chapels and the odd park. This pattern survived largely intact into the post-1945 era, but was to be challenged by the planning and political orthodoxies of the time. The dirt and inconvenience of industry was judged to be incompatible with areas of housing, people needed improved access to recreation and open space, people and vehicles had to be segregated to provide safety and increase the speed of travel, and shops and public facilities should be concentrated together to give the benefits of convenience and ease of access. These factors heavily influenced the creation of city development plans and the zoned city maps that accompanied them.¹ Land use was to be increasingly segregated, both in dividing areas of housing from other functions such as

¹ Ravetz, *Remaking Cities*, p.122

industry and business, and also in earmarking enclaves within residential areas where retail, recreation and education were permitted. Leeds' first development plan envisaged the redevelopment of 13,192 dwellings for non-residential use, covering 691 acres and involving the transfer of 35,363 people.² In areas that were redeveloped for new housing at least some of the inhabitants could expect to remain in the district where they had lived previously, but in other places long-established settlements were to effectively be wiped from the map.

Many of the problems involved in the planning of non-residential functions into housing areas were to mirror those found in the direct provision of homes. Control over the development plan and the use of land was not necessarily paralleled by control over the political, financial, economic and social forces that had to be employed and countered when putting the transformation of urban Leeds into practice. Prospective roadbuilding projects were to prove a massive source of planning blight; shopping centres took a long time to be developed, but often struggled to fulfil their intended roles; while the complete separation of housing and industry left workers further from their places of employment and sometimes took businesses away from their best customers. As with attempts to forecast the kind of housing conditions that would be desirable or just acceptable to the public, estimates of the road network or retail environment of the future were to be very difficult to anticipate. Nevertheless, a city keen to keep up with the pace of 'modernisation' felt these decisions had to be made.

In areas of older housing one of the most noticeable features was the corner shop. Smaller retail units were ubiquitous and part of the fabric of high-density neighbourhoods. Post-war planning policy often saw the mixing of retail into residential areas as inefficient both for the businesses themselves, who were stuck in old-fashioned premises with little room for expansion, and for residents, who had to put up with the inconvenience of delivery vehicles as well as the need to traipse across their local environs to meet their consumer needs.³ As a result, a much greater degree of centralisation was introduced into the provision of shops

² City and County Borough of Leeds, *Development Plan, Written Statement* (October 1951), p.6

³ Kefford, 'Constructing the Affluent Citizen' pp.62-65

and services when new residential developments were planned. Groups of local shops were built, but most attention went into the development of local and district centres where an adequate range of shops would be found on the same site, room would be offered for larger, more modern stores, parking was provided for the increase in cars, and other functions such as libraries, cinemas and offices would share space with shops. By the 1960s it was hoped to extend these centres into older, established residential areas of the city, often affecting housing directly through the demolition of dwellings to provide a site. The reality could be more difficult though. In new estates the provision of new shops often lagged some years behind the building of new houses, causing some discomfort and much extra travel. Shops in older areas had usually developed in a more evolutionary manner, while the modern centres were built in a ‘once-and-for-all’ way, involving often speculative forecasts about local needs and shopping trends. It has been argued that ‘one result of the involvement of local government in shopping centre development generally has been the building of centres in response to the needs for a centre rather than as an opportunity to make a profit in the development process.’⁴ Greenhalgh has argued that many ‘neighbourhood’ shopping areas were built with the goal of promoting an ideal sense of community rather than with the aim of satisfying the retail needs of local people. He convincingly argues that ‘inherently spatial constructions of community and sociability in the designs for retail facilities on postwar housing estates were challenged and undermined by patterns of consumption, the strength of retail capitalism and the efficacy of individual choice.’⁵ As a result, the plans did not always co-ordinate action very well between the local authority, property developers and builders, and businesses themselves. There was often a substantial overlap and competition between different centres, while some businesses in established shopping areas understandably resented the arrival of newer shops and centres.

One of Leeds City Council’s biggest post-war projects was the development of a ‘Civic Centre’ at Seacroft. The first council housing in Seacroft had been built

⁴ John A. Dawson, *Shopping Centre Development* (Harlow, Longman, 1983) p.10

⁵ James Greenhalgh, ‘Consuming communities: the neighbourhood unit and the role of retail spaces on British housing estates, 1944–1958’ in *Urban History* 43:1 (2016) p.159

before the Second World War, but the construction of houses was accelerated in the post-war period when it became one of the main growth areas for new estates. This created a need for shopping, commercial and other public facilities to cater for the rising population. By the late 1950s lack of these facilities was leading to newspaper articles and many complaints from residents.⁶ A site for the Civic Centre had been included in the planning of the Seacroft estates but, although plans for the centre had been drawn up by 1960⁷, it was to take until 1963 for the council's chosen builder, Costains, to begin the development of the complex.⁸ Seacroft Centre was officially opened by Queen Elizabeth II on 22nd October 1965, and was hailed by the Yorkshire Post as 'the largest municipal project of its kind to be built in a city suburb in Britain...the hub of a surrounding population expected to reach 85,000 within the next few years.'⁹ Its sister newspaper was even more carried away, stating that 'thanks to a fruitful collaboration between Leeds Corporation and a group of forward-looking architects, Seacroft now wears a special air of modernism. Its heart visibly expresses a new and exhilarating age.'¹⁰ Unfortunately for the council, this level of excitement was not to be maintained for very long. The council had made the decision to leave the administration of the complex to the Housing Department, a task that was to prove difficult from the outset. The council's administrators were naturally concerned with the general viability of the centre, but this required keeping a wide range of private businesses happy, including high street and local shops, offices, cafes and even a bowling alley. As early as 8th September 1965 there were complaints from the 'Big 3' stores about the fact that the centre was not fully occupied. The council offered to give rent relief until 1st January 1966, but the big stores protested that this would only be ground rent for them and other traders rented the premises as well. When the Town Clerk pointed out that the larger shops would stand to gain from other shops being open sooner, they would not accept this and argued that smaller shops gained more from the bigger ones being open.¹¹

⁶ YEN, 02/04/1957; 20/01/1959

⁷ City of Leeds, *Development of the Seacroft Civic Centre* (August 1960) p.1

⁸ City of Leeds, *Turf-cutting Ceremony, 11.30am Wednesday 1st May 1963. To Mark the Commencement of Work on the Seacroft Civic Centre*

⁹ YP, 22/10/1965

¹⁰ YEP, 22/1//1965

¹¹ Leeds, WYAS, Seacroft Town Centre. LLD1/2/833129

This discontent did not abate, and in February 1966 Leeds Co-operative, Thrift Stores and Wiltex by Wilson wrote to the council voicing their concerns at the ‘unsatisfactory and probably deteriorating situation at the Seacroft Town Centre’. They criticised delays in the completion of construction work and pressures for the main stores to open before at least 75% of the units were ready, the fact that the scaffolding surrounding the incomplete Woolworths was deterring trade, and that access to and within the centre ‘leaves a great deal to be desired’.¹² The Seacroft Centre Traders Association also begged for an extension of the rent concession.¹³ The Director of Housing, on his part, questioned whether the traders themselves were creating bad publicity by complaining so much about the centre.¹⁴ On the council’s side, they made an attempt to achieve some positive news by trying to persuade the successful Leeds United team to come to a civic reception at the centre to coincide with the opening of some shops.



Seacroft Civic Centre, 1967. (Leeds Library and Information Service, www.leodis.net)

¹² Ibid, 22/02/1966

¹³ Ibid, 28/04/1966

¹⁴ Ibid, 28/02/1966

Unfortunately, manager Don Revie thanked them for the offer but said that the event was after the end of the season and players would be on holiday. This does provide some evidence of the level of desperation that was shrouding the centre's fortunes at this time. This appeared to have influenced the Seacroft Parish Magazine, which featured a front cover with the headline 'For God's Sake Shop at Seacroft Centre'. In this case the Seacroft shopkeepers felt the publicity was unhelpful, and the magazine's editor himself was rather scathing about the appearance of the centre, describing it as having 'all the clichés of 1963'¹⁵. These problems at Seacroft were to lead to political controversy, as the Conservative opposition on the council were quick to criticise the running of the Town Centre for both practical and ideological reasons. Leading Tories Frank Marshall and Irwin Bellow questioned the competence and expertise of council officials in dealing with retail and commercial issues, arguing that civic prudence and ratepayers' money had been placed in jeopardy. Bellow brought out more fundamental differences when he argued that 'it should be no business of ours to indulge in capital projects which are both hazardous and speculative....above all, it does not supply a facility or give a service which cannot be equally well provided by other sources.'¹⁶ The Conservative proposal was to put the responsibility for letting the centre in the hands of a specialist agent.¹⁷ Councillor Merritt (Labour) responded by saying that it would cost much more to hire private letting agents than to rely on the council's own staff, while council leader Alderman King (Labour) argued that 'whoever provided the initial shopping accommodation will be involved in a loss, but we have a responsibility to ensure that that development takes place.' Councillor Donohoe, Assistant Housing Chair, summed up the Labour position by pointing out that Seacroft was the size of towns like Dewsbury and Doncaster, and needed the appropriate facilities.¹⁸

After the Conservative victory at the 1967 local elections they were able to hire a letting agent in February 1968 to try and fill the vacancies at the Centre, though this did not achieve the effect they had hoped. The Housing Department reported

¹⁵ YP, 08/06/1966

¹⁶ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports* March 1966 p.169

¹⁷ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports* January 1967 p.105

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp.108-111

in August 1968 that the agent, Hillier, Parker, May and Rowden, had not achieved any lettings yet. Non-food trades were very reluctant to move in, and a successful Sunday Market at the Centre had been forced to end when a complaint was received and an inspector informed the council that it had been illegal.¹⁹ Taking stock of the situation, a report of officers admitted that there were too many units relative to the current population of Seacroft, but reasserted that the Centre 'was not conceived merely as a commercial venture but was intended to provide a much needed facility for the Seacroft area generally of sufficient size to cater for the future major residential expansion of the area.'²⁰ They advised against short-term measures that might damage the long-term viability of the Centre, but suggested tellingly that covering the Centre would be a major boost to its prospects, particularly as 'the development at Crossgates which can be regarded as directly competitive with Seacroft is totally enclosed.'²¹ The agents argued that roofing over the Centre was not economically justified, but also gave their opinion that no large stores were likely to move into Seacroft until the surrounding housing estates were fully developed, and that in this case, and without a reorganisation of bus routes to better serve Seacroft, it was unlikely that the letting situation would improve in the short term. They advised giving long rent-free periods to certain shops and that the floor space was too large for the present turnover of the Centre, so other non-retail uses should be considered.²² This was followed by acceptance of their failure and an offer to step down, though the Council officers had already suggested dispensing with their services.

The viability and long term prospects of Seacroft Town Centre were to come under question on a number of occasions through the 1970s. It was announced that the Centre would make a loss of £121,000 in 1975, and a Conservative member of the Planning Committee, Councillor Malcolm Davies, argued that the Centre should be 'demolished, sold or given away.'²³ When Woolworth's closed in 1977, Seacroft traders demanded changes including a new roof, adequate

¹⁹ Leeds, WYAS, Seacroft Town Centre. LLD1/2/833129

²⁰ Ibid, 06/02/1969

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, 21/02/1969

²³ YEP, 14/02/1975

heating and a lighting system to relieve the ‘gloom’.²⁴ Seacroft Traders’ Association claimed that fewer than 10% of local residents shopped at the Centre, many preferring to get the bus to Crossgates instead. Members of the public who were canvassed by the Yorkshire Evening Post blamed icy draughts, noisy children and a lack of atmosphere,²⁵ and STA Chairman Lawrence Burwell said that it was not a place where shoppers wanted to hang about, adding that ‘something would have to be done soon about the heating, the roofing, the floors and the general décor so that the shopkeepers could compete equally with neighbouring centres offering better facilities.’²⁶ Leeds had plans for upgrading the Centre, but the Director of Estates and Development said that they would take time coming about in the present financial climate.²⁷

Seacroft Town Centre thus limped its way through the 1970s, but without any sign that the malaise would be lifted. The concept of the Centre as an all-encompassing facility that simultaneously offered both necessary social functions and private enterprises operating in a competitive capitalist world was to give the Council a difficult task in achieving a balance. Constructed all at once with a relatively strict division of retail, office, social and residential accommodation, the complex was not allowed to develop organically like older town or suburban centres, and the stigma that attached to the Centre due to vacant shops and deserted precincts was to prove impossible to shake off. This meant that, even though the residential districts of Seacroft had expanded throughout the 1970s, the Centre was in no position to benefit, and Crossgates, with an established suburban centre bolstered by a modern covered shopping mall, took the custom. With its range of modern facilities in an area that was badly in need of them, Seacroft Town Centre might seem like an unlikely failure, but its problems almost represent a miniature depiction of the Council’s difficulties in planning Leeds as a whole. Attempts to provide rational, lasting and socially effective projects were often to be frustrated by events and processes outside the control of local decision-makers.

²⁴ *YEP*, 04/04/1977

²⁵ *YEP*, 12/04/1977

²⁶ *YEP*, 01/12/1977

²⁷ *YEP*, 12/04/1977

Seacroft Town Centre was a flagship project for Leeds, driven by the sheer size of Seacroft as a 'new town' within the city, but the provision of 'district centres' was to be a major facet of Leeds' planning in the post-war period. In the 1960s review of the City Development Plan, there were to be eleven district centres, nine of which were in existence, but judged to be in need of redevelopment and extension. Most of these were the heart of old villages, where 'obsolete buildings and layout impair their efficient functioning'.²⁸ Rather than the traditional spread of shops and services along existing roads, these centres were to be compact precincts where pedestrians and vehicles were segregated, car-parking provision was important, and public transport links integrated with the complexes.²⁹ Population trends moving towards the suburbs were held to have 'outpaced economic shop distribution' and suburban shopping centres would 'cater for future growth in population, purchasing power and tastes.'³⁰ Shopping was to be the main function of these centres, but social facilities were also to be included as they were judged to be 'more successful' when located near shops.

Putting these plans into practice was to be a slightly different matter than in the case of the Seacroft Centre. As most of the proposed district centres were in existing areas there was not as urgent a need for new shops and facilities. However, the acquisition of land from multiple owners was more difficult, and the Council was to act as an 'enabler', allocating sites and issuing specifications, but relying on private capital to develop the centres. The district centre programme, unlike Seacroft, was under the supervision of the Planning Committee, but the issue of shopping and social facilities was to have a major impact on areas of public and private housing in Leeds. Given the long periods of time involved with designing plans, obtaining planning permission, acquiring land and embarking on the final construction process, a great deal of 'planning blight' was created. The complications were to be most evident at Moortown.

²⁸ LCC, *First Review of City Development Plan: Written Analysis* (July 1968) p.237

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Leeds City Council announced in June 1965 that plans for shopping and neighbourhood centres in Headingley and Moortown had been prepared by the City Engineer, C.G.Thirlwall, and the City Architect, E.W.Stanley.³¹ The Moortown scheme was to serve 28,000 people in North Leeds, providing shops, a cinema, offices and a public library. Moortown householders reacted swiftly against the plans, realising that homes and businesses would be affected. Thirty-three houses would be demolished, mostly in the higher-rated bracket and under fifty years old, eleven shops and a garage.³² The Moortown Property-Owners Association mustered a deputation to hand in a petition at Civic Hall opposing the development plans³³, but there was little sign of the proposals coming to realisation in the short term and a period of uncertainty emerged.

The saga of Moortown District Centre really gained momentum in the early 1970s. A property developer had made plans to build a shopping centre on the Moortown site, but permission had been refused by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in September 1970. The developer put in a revised plan in January 1972, but Moortown residents continued to fight the proposals, declaring that ‘they are proposing a city development in a suburban area. We are objecting to the scheme as a whole and not just a few points.’³⁴ Residents were also backed by the local Conservative councillor for Talbot ward, Dr J.R.Sherwin, who considered that the scale of the development was too large for the area, the office accommodation greater than required for local needs, and the proposed library too small.³⁵ Nonetheless, the revised scheme was approved by Leeds Plans Committee, despite 482 objections.³⁶

Opposition to the Moortown scheme was based around the nature of the proposed development, which was held to be out of character with the suburban atmosphere of the area, the fact that existing facilities were judged to be adequate for local needs, and the potential increase in traffic that would ensue. The

³¹ *YEP*, 21/06/1965

³² *YEP*, 22/06/1965

³³ *YEP*, 23/07/1965

³⁴ *YEP*, 04/01/1972

³⁵ *YEP*, 07/01/1972

³⁶ *YEP*, 24/01/1972

campaign was backed by the local Conservative councillors, the Leeds Civic Trust, a newly formed 'Moortown Redevelopment Action Group', prominent local residents, including a QC,³⁷ and local Conservative MP Sir Keith Joseph.³⁸ Despite this kind of articulate and well-connected organisation, Deputy Planning Chairman Ken Woolmer (Labour) said that there was no chance of the scheme being abandoned.³⁹ The proposals were running into different kinds of problems though. The developers, Commercial Union Properties, had tried to acquire properties on the site by negotiating full-market-value purchases, but by December 1973 were still eleven houses short of possessing all the necessary land. They claimed to need to buy the remaining houses simultaneously as they could not afford to waste time or further funds, but the Council were unwilling to compulsorily purchase the houses on their behalf.⁴⁰ By July 1974 Commercial Union threatened to abandon current plans for Moortown unless the Council compulsorily purchased nine houses. Moortown Redevelopment Action Group urged councillors to reject these requests, withdraw planning permission, and remove the district centre proposal from the city's development plan.⁴¹

In November 1974 Commercial Union lost patience and placed a new application to build a supermarket on the land that they had managed to acquire on the Moortown site.⁴² These plans were rejected by the Planning Committee in January 1975, on the recommendation of the Divisional Planning Officer⁴³, and in July 1975 the Housing Committee asked the Planning Committee to re-zone the Moortown Centre site for residential use.⁴⁴ That was not to be the end of the matter. The Housing Committee, concerned about empty and dilapidated property and looking to combat the shortage of residential land, made an offer to buy houses from Commercial Union, but decided that the price asked was too high.⁴⁵ In the end Commercial Union decided to demolish four houses on the site and

³⁷ *YEP*, 31/01/1973

³⁸ *YEP*, 06/07/1973

³⁹ *YEP*, 10/03/1973

⁴⁰ *YEP*, 11/12/1973, 12/12/1973

⁴¹ *YEP*, 13/07/1974

⁴² *YEP*, 25/11/1974

⁴³ *YEP*, 28/01/1975

⁴⁴ *YEP*, 03/07/1975

⁴⁵ *YEP*, 12/08/1975, 04/12/1975

replace them with a block of flats.⁴⁶ This was effectively the abandonment of a curious adventure. Leeds Council had clearly intended the Moortown site as the area for a district centre, and it was an integral part of their city-wide plans. They consistently backed the attempt by private capital to develop the centre, even through planning and political problems. Yet after over ten years of planning blight and uncertainty, and without any formal reappraisal of policy towards district centres, the Council politicians and bureaucracy seemed to slowly give up on the idea, almost seizing on an opportunity to drop the plans. The strange thing was that it was to be financial-legal problems that were to precipitate the end of the proposal and, while the political opposition may have contributed to the Council's loss of interest, the feelings of local people had seemed to matter little for the preceding ten years.

The council continued to promote the idea of a North Leeds district centre, and was to be more successful with a site at Moor Allerton adjacent to the outer ring road. As a result of these aspirations the planning committee recommended the refusal of an application to build a supermarket, warehouse and offices in Alwoodley, judging that the development 'would result in a provision of shopping facilities in excess of those needed by residents and the plans conflicted with the city council's policy of locating such facilities in district and local centres.'⁴⁷ The final plans involved little more than a Sainsbury's supermarket with a DIY shop, gardening centre, pub and library tagged on, but seemed popular with local politicians and the public. Conservative Councillor Keith Sibbald declared that the new centre 'was the best thing to happen in Moortown since the church was built 100 years ago'⁴⁸, while the final plans received the support of over 500 letters and two petitions with over 500 names, as against only 28 objections.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *YEP*, 04/06/1976

⁴⁷ *YEP*, 19/05/1977

⁴⁸ *YEP*, 20/03/1979

⁴⁹ *YEP*, 14/08/1979

Significantly, the Moor Allerton proposals were vigorously opposed by local businesses and the Leeds Chamber of Trade. They claimed that it would cause traffic chaos; only help people with cars and be detrimental to local traders;⁵⁰ that there were already enough shops in the North Leeds area;⁵¹ and that it conflicted with the West Yorkshire Structure Plan that stated a ‘successful superstore development will need to be integrated with other shops and facilities.’⁵² Shopkeeper John Penn said that he ‘thought that a Tory-controlled council would support private shopkeepers.’⁵³ This has echoes with the approach of the local Conservatives towards private landlords and slum clearance, and provides further evidence of a shift in preference towards broader economic interests and away from smaller private ownership when there was a conflict and where public opinion was less conservative in tone. Given the rather limited scope of the ‘Moor Allerton District Centre’, there is also the feeling that the wider social aspects of the approach to district centres had slipped away to be replaced by more narrowly defined economic and cultural aims.

In most cases the district centres did actually come to fruition, though problems between the plan, private capital and realisation of the project were to be ubiquitous. In Hunslet, one of the areas of Leeds most wracked by slum clearance, a shortage of shops and facilities was to be acutely felt, particularly by residents in the newly-built Hunslet Grange flats.⁵⁴ In July 1971 proposals to build Hunslet District Centre were accepted by the Planning Committee, including a supermarket, a store, a ‘bazaar’ and nineteen shops in a covered arcade.⁵⁵ It was announced the following year that construction was expected to begin in summer 1973, and Planning Chairman, Karl Cohen, said that they were anxious that the most up-to-date and convenient shopping facilities should be provided, insisting that the centre should take the form of covered precincts.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, by June 1974 a deputation from Hunslet Action Group was asking the Council ‘...what are we to make of it when nearly all our shops have been

⁵⁰ *YEP*, 02/03/1977

⁵¹ *YEP*, 04/05/1978

⁵² *YEP*, 17/04/1979

⁵³ *YEP*, 20/03/1979

⁵⁴ *LCC, Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, April 1971, p.394

⁵⁵ *YEP*, 02/07/1971

⁵⁶ *YEP*, 08/12/1972

taken and closed, and now, in June 1974, we are told that nothing can be started at all because the development company has withdrawn?’⁵⁷ Conservative Councillor Redmond blamed the Labour government’s new development taxes for retarding the Hunslet plans, though the Labour Deputy Planning Chairman, Councillor Prichard, put it down to ‘a failure of private enterprise’.⁵⁸ These ideological arguments were to prove relatively barren, particularly as the council did not have the resources to develop the centre itself, and was forced to depend on attracting another prospective developer to provide the facility. Morrisons’ were then invited to develop a slightly scaled-down district centre.⁵⁹ Negotiating directly with the supermarket that was planning to occupy the site proved to be more successful, and a ‘booming’ Hunslet District Centre opened in August 1976.⁶⁰

Some of the proposed district centres were planned to link into the new road network that was envisaged to cut through residential Leeds. An example of this was in Harehills, where some local residents objected to the siting of the projected district centre and the clearance of property this would involve. They argued that many residents were elderly and would not get mortgages for other houses or afford council rents, that improvements grants had been given in the mid-1960s that envisaged ‘lives’ of 50 years for some properties, and that the development should be moved further south to areas of poorer housing.⁶¹ The council responded that there were no alternative options in the area ‘because of the critical requirements which would be needed to ensure the efficient functioning and economic viability of the district centre.’⁶² Added to this was the fact that the North-East Expressway was intended to pass immediately to the east of the centre, and was to link up with car parks and public open space within the complex.⁶³ The inspector agreed with the council’s policy ‘of establishing district centres with vehicular traffic-free shopping precincts and associated uses’⁶⁴,

⁵⁷ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, June 1974, p.105

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ YEP, 23/11/1974

⁶⁰ YEP, 25/09/1976

⁶¹ LCC, *City of Leeds Development Plan, First Quinquennial Review. Report of a Public Local Inquiry into Objections and Representations* (Sept/Oct 1969) p.24

⁶² Ibid, p.25

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.26

judged that alternative areas too far from the existing shops would not be viable, and claimed that the houses affected by the shopping centre would be adversely affected by the North-East Expressway anyway, so might as well be demolished. This demonstrates that there was full official backing for planning of this scope and ambition, but also that the planning machinery was willing to subject local residents to upheaval for schemes that existed only on paper. Ultimately the residents suffered just from the effects of planning blight, as neither the district centre nor the expressway ever came to fruition.

Leeds' district centre programme represented an excellent example of the city's modernisation agenda, and also demonstrated many of the problems this agenda caused and struggled to deal with. The emphasis on rationally designed shopping environments with covered precincts, ample car-parking facilities and separation of vehicles and pedestrians was designed to cater to trends that promised more convenience and comfort for consumers and the public. This was also coupled uneasily with attempts to provide social facilities and for shopping to satisfy community need. This produced some odd situations. At Bramley District Centre, developers wanted to 'retain the village atmosphere of Bramley Town Street', but this was belied somewhat by their inclusion of a 'hypermarket', three-storey office blocks and a 300 capacity car park.⁶⁵ In Moortown, the Council's desire to provide a facility that would cover the needs of a large area of North Leeds was overwhelmingly rejected by the local residents, who found the existing range of shops perfectly adequate and feared the disruption and destruction that would be caused by a large redevelopment project.

The type of district centre that was seen as necessary to provide the requisite commercial and social facilities, while being compatible with the aims of private capital, ended up creating more difficulties when it came to the planning process. Where land needed to be acquired before construction could take place there were problems negotiating land purchases and with opposition from local property-owners, as at Moortown. In areas where land had been cleared, such as Hunslet, trouble was caused by the deprivation of facilities while the site was waiting to be

⁶⁵ *YEP*, 06/01/1972

developed. Private developers both needed the project to be profitable, and the financial situation to be favourable, before they would embark upon a scheme. Hunslet was effectively to be a victim of the collapse of the 'Barber boom' in the early 1970s, making land development less desirable from a business point of view. When the situation had been favourable for private capital, competition was intensified that often led to conflict between business and planning ends, as in the issue between Crossgates and Seacroft. Political issues did also impinge on the progress of the schemes. By the mid-1970s, with shortages of housing and a dearth of land for residential development, the council were eager not to lose fit housing stock, and at Harehills Leeds Planning Committee ultimately 'decided to refuse any application which reduces the amount of residential accommodation in the area and any plan which would increase commercial use without providing adequate on-site parking.'⁶⁶ This effectively killed the prospect of a district centre in the area.

As far as shopping was concerned, the winds of change had some quite drastic effects on Leeds' residential environment, public and private, old and new. The very slow pace when it came to bringing schemes into fruition caused planning blight in many areas, while making life more difficult for residents of other areas who almost entirely lacked shopping and social facilities for quite lengthy periods. The specifications and type of development that planners and developers held to be necessary was not often the kind that residents found desirable, despite efforts to incorporate many of the latest functions and designs. The nature of district centres also lacked the kind of gradual change that many traditional shopping centres had adapted to, and was much less amenable to changes in the financial, social and economic environment. A balance between local politics, planning imperatives, big business and market forces was a very difficult one to achieve.

Stourton provides an excellent example of ideas relating to 'zoning' and the desirability of segregating 'incompatible' land uses. Stourton was a village on the southern edge of the Leeds conurbation, but which came under the responsibility

⁶⁶ *YEP*, 24/01/1976

of Rothwell Urban District Council until the 1974 local government reorganisation. It was situated in the midst of industrial development and quite close to the new M1. A report from Leeds' Director of Planning described Stourton as 'a mixture of unfit housing, relatively new housing, vacant houses, derelict industrial property, degraded land, manufacturing industry and heavily-trafficked roads.'⁶⁷ This unflattering description of the area prepared the ground for the report's recommendations—the council was to acquire Stourton's housing and clear it in preparation for forthcoming industrial development.

Council officers had already informed residents that they saw no role for residential redevelopment in Stourton, and declared that the community was already declining due to the clearance of unfit housing, the growth of traffic and the spread of industry and dereliction.⁶⁸ Most of the remaining dwellings were included in the Housing Clearance Programme, and when they were demolished there would be no replacement of shopping facilities, and the branch library would be withdrawn.⁶⁹ The report declared emphatically that 'there is little doubt that the appropriate use of all land in Stourton in the long term is for industry; it is located in an industrial area, major industrial concerns about the area, and residential development has been shown to be undesirable.'⁷⁰ After considering future options, the report advised the acquisition of all housing by the council through agreement and compulsory purchase, though no industrial development was to begin on the site until all houses had been demolished. Residents would be rehoused at the new Sussex Avenue estate in nearby Hunslet, or at Rothwell.

Naturally, some Stourton residents were unhappy at the prospect of having their village wiped out, even if it was sold as something of a 'mercy killing'. Stourton Residents' Association claimed that thousands of pounds had been spent by Rothwell UDC as recently as 1974, improving houses to provide an extra thirty years of 'life'.⁷¹ The Stourton Residents' Association also alleged that the area

⁶⁷ LCC, *Proposals for Stourton Village (Report of the Director of Planning to the Housing and Planning Committees)* (October 1976)

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.3

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.15

⁷⁰ *Ibid*

⁷¹ *YEP*, 23/02/1978

had deteriorated rapidly since its ‘takeover’ by Leeds City Council, and were backed by the local MP and the Rothwell ward councillor, who stated that they had spent a lot of time trying to persuade the planning committee to bring some residential development to the area.⁷² These arguments were complicated by the emergence of another local group, the Stourton-Idas Pre-Allocation Group. These were residents who responded to the carrot offered by the council of modern houses in nearby Sussex Avenue, and were campaigning to have the Housing Department extend the pre-allocation schemes to Stourton.⁷³ They countered the arguments of the Stourton Residents’ Association by claiming that the houses in the Idas clearance area were damp due to water seepage into cellars, snails had infested some homes, and there were no longer any facilities for children to play.⁷⁴ A reprieve for large sections of Stourton’s housing would jeopardise their chances of moving into the new houses at Hunslet. Thus there was some tension among the community, with some trying desperately to save the village and others seeking to make the most of an opportunity to benefit from the situation.

The Idas Compulsory Purchase Order was upheld by the Department for the Environment, who agreed that the houses had structural defects and that the area was ‘likely to become progressively less suitable for residential purposes.’⁷⁵ A judgement from an inquiry the following year did complicate matters when houses in Armitage Terrace were assessed as fit, even though thirty-one surrounding houses were to be knocked down. In this case the tenants were dismayed, claiming that they were damp and had been ruined through lack of repair. The council asserted that it would continue to pursue the acquisition of the houses through negotiation with the owner, proprietor of a garage that adjoined the row.⁷⁶ The demise of Stourton had proved to be a relatively slow business, even after its death sentence had been proclaimed. The village did finally seem to be doomed when local people divided so sharply between those who wanted regeneration and others who were happy to make a fresh start. The latter position was undoubtedly a response in part to the decline of the area, which does seem to

⁷² *YEP*, 01/04/1978, 14/04/1978

⁷³ *YEP*, 04/08/1977

⁷⁴ *YEP*, 23/02/1978

⁷⁵ *YEP*, 19/06/1978

⁷⁶ *YEP*, 06/08/1979

have been influenced by a policy of neglect that stretched back before 1974. The feeling amongst planners and some residents clearly appears to have been that Stourton was an ‘old-fashioned’ environment, and not worth the effort of regeneration as a community when it was more favourably situated for industry.

The Little London area was an example of another district where housing and industry were intermixed, though here, in the inner city, it was to be residential functions and road development that would take precedence. At an inquiry into a Compulsory Purchase Order at Camp Road, a factory owner objected to the idea of zoning areas on the basis of residences only, claiming that it ‘is that conception which has made much of the outskirts of Leeds a dreary waste of houses.’⁷⁷ Leeds’ representative countered by saying that the area was becoming an eyesore and that it was not desirable that new housing development should be interspersed with industry.⁷⁸ In 1961 Leeds Chamber of Commerce also objected to the council’s plans in the area because they felt the amount of land available for industrial purposes in Leeds was insufficient.⁷⁹ The council responded by stating that industry would ‘reduce the amenities of the new high density housing developments.’⁸⁰ At another later inquiry in the same area the owner of a local print works objected that businesses in the area would find it extremely difficult to find suitable accommodation at a reasonable rent, as the council had not made adequate provision for the displacement of small businesses, preferring to develop industrial estates on the outskirts of Leeds and blocks of offices in the city centre. He claimed that this caused prohibitively high rents or difficulty in recruiting employees willing to travel.⁸¹ The council’s decisions were affected by their desire to see North Street become a one-way traffic artery out of the city centre, and the continued existence of shopping, industrial and warehouse facilities was not thought to be desirable.⁸² Ironically, the slowness of bringing road plans to fruition meant that many of North Street’s shops survived through

⁷⁷ YP, 03/12/1958

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Leeds, WYAS, Camp Road/Lovell Road. LLD1/2/824719 (Letter from Leeds Chamber of Commerce, 13/06/1961)

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Leeds, WYAS, Lovell Park and Little London CPO 1965. Public Local Inquiry, 10/05/1966. LLD1/2/835375 (Letter from Horgil Press)

⁸² Ibid.

the 1970s, and when Housing Chairman Peter Sparling declared that the street was one of the worst eyesores in Leeds, he blamed West Yorkshire County Council's delay in road proposals and said that areas on the east side of North Street would be cleared and offered for light industrial units.⁸³

Leeds' policy was in line with the principles of the 1951 Development Plan, if not always the detail. Many of the areas that were to be zoned for industry contained older, 'sub-standard' back-to-back houses, which made it easier to justify their clearance. The benefits of segregation to an improved living environment was often held to be the reason behind zoning, but it was also judged as important in an industrial town to create room for expansion of existing industries and to provide space for larger units that could be more productive and efficient.⁸⁴ These attitudes also led to a disregard for many of the older, smaller businesses such as those in the Camp Road area, albeit not necessarily consciously focused on them. There was the problem here that, as with other factors, economic conditions tended to change quickly and in a way that town planners could not control or even foresee at times. In the post-war 'boom' it was assumed that Leeds would remain an industrial city, and economic changes would be more likely to require more provision for services such as offices and retail rather than hastening the process of deindustrialisation which became apparent in the 1970s. When this decline occurred it affected many of the industrial areas that had been designated by the development plan, and like many of the residential areas that had been wracked by planning blight, these environments often assumed a rather dead and deserted feel.

Traffic and roads were to prove both a major problem but also an opportunity for town planners and local authorities. The extensive increase in car ownership and usage in the post-war era meant that roads needed to be created and improved in order to relieve massive congestion, and Leeds featured as a case study in the influential Buchanan Report on traffic in urban areas, published in 1963.⁸⁵ On the

⁸³ *YEP*, 25/04/1978

⁸⁴ City and County Borough of Leeds, *Development Plan, Written Statement*

⁸⁵ *Traffic in Towns: a study of the long term problems of traffic in urban areas: reports of the Steering Group and Working Group appointed by the Minister of Transport* (London, HMSO, 1963)

other hand, mass car ownership and faster communications were central themes of modernity, and Leeds was keen to capitalise on this image by tagging itself 'Motorway City of the Seventies'. Whether new roads were seen as a difficulty to be surmounted or a chance to seize the future, attempts to deal with traffic would inevitably have a major impact on areas of housing. Roadbuilding schemes were an excellent example of the effects of planning blight and uncertainty on residential areas. They had a long period between the process of planning and construction, projected routes could be altered many times before they were finally commenced, and road schemes were very sensitive to financial trends, which led to frequent postponements and changes in format. Leeds' plans for its road network were extensive. Along with the Inner Ring Road and the extension of the M1 and M621 into the heart of the city, there were proposals for a 'North-East Urban Motorway', 'North-East Expressway', Harehills bypass and 'Halton Expressway' that would take traffic through the inner suburbs to the edge of the city. The classic embodiment of the confusion that road proposals caused was to be the saga of the Headingley bypass.

A Headingley bypass had been mooted as early as 1937. Otley Road was traditionally one of the busiest traffic arteries in the city, taking vehicles through a busy residential and subsequently student-dominated suburb, and leading to developing commuter areas in the north of Leeds. In 1937 the bypass was intended to be restricted to avoiding the relatively short stretch of Otley Road between North Lane and St. Michael's Church. This was judged to be necessary as it was felt that widening the road was essential, but its limited nature was also justified as anyone 'interested in amenities' should be 'loth to destroy' the character of the old village centre.⁸⁶ This supplies some evidence that conservation of Victorian buildings was on the agenda before the 1960s. Plans for a bypass were accordingly included in the 1951 City Development Plan in the 'second period', which was from six years after the plan approval up to 1971.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ LCC, Chief Engineer's Office, *Headingley By-Pass Road. Otley Road, Between North Lane and St. Michael's Church* (22/06/1937)

⁸⁷ City and County Borough of Leeds, *Development Plan: Written Statement*

The problems that the council faced with bypass plans in Headingley were that there was no route that would avoid a great degree of disruption to local housing, and that the plans were staunchly opposed by many educated and professional people who were only too willing to put legal and procedural channels to their full use.⁸⁸ The ‘Headingley Fly-over By-pass Opposition Committee’ was horrified by the thought of a flyover passing through the suburb,⁸⁹ even though the City Engineer insisted that the bypass would only take the form of a flyover for a short length, mostly resting on a landscaped embankment.⁹⁰ Protestors claimed that it was not a ‘by-pass’ at all, but a road passing through the middle of the suburb.⁹¹ At the 1964 Public Local Inquiry on the bypass proposals the City Engineer’s arguments were questioned and criticised by an engineering lecturer, a chartered surveyor and a traffic engineer, the last of whom had been engaged by local residents.⁹² The objections were made on the grounds that proposals had not been adequately based on traffic movements and, as expected, that they would ‘cause substantial devaluation and loss of amenity to properties flanking the road.’⁹³ The arguments were made so strongly that Leeds’ solicitor suggested that the objectors were unfairly questioning the expertise of the City Engineer.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, Leeds’ 1964 plans were refused as they were judged to fall short of the standards of the Buchanan Report and impose ‘a more severe detriment to the amenities of Headingley than was necessary.’⁹⁵ Suggestions made by inspectors, such as putting the road in a cutting, were regarded as adding massive extra costs by local planners.⁹⁶

The council declared that further plans would be drawn up, a fact that was bemoaned by a local estate agent and leading member of the Headingley Residents’ Association, Edgar Firth, who claimed that residents would be kept in suspense for years to come.⁹⁷ The issue of the bypass continued to be a cause for

⁸⁸ *YEP*, 16/04/1964

⁸⁹ *YEP*, 04/04/1963

⁹⁰ *YEN*, 18/04/1963

⁹¹ *YEP*, 09/05/1963

⁹² *YEP*, 16/04/1964

⁹³ *YEP*, 17/04/1964

⁹⁴ *Ibid*

⁹⁵ *YEP*, 13/07/1965

⁹⁶ *Ibid*

⁹⁷ *YEP*, 14/07/1965

controversy throughout the 1970s. Detailed proposals were drawn up again in 1973 for a dual carriageway bypass, this time to be sited in a cutting.⁹⁸ Edgar Firth held his own ‘counter-exhibition’ against the plans.⁹⁹ Headingley Residents’ Association were to receive support in their opposition from such organisations as the Leeds branch of the Society for Social Responsibility in Science¹⁰⁰ and even transportation studies carried out by West Yorkshire Metropolitan Council recommended that the bypass be scrapped if other traffic flow measures were successful.¹⁰¹ The fact that the new West Yorkshire authority, created in 1974, had taken over control of trunk roads meant that an extra complication was added to the situation, and plans were constantly changed and postponed in the unstable economic environment. In June 1976 a public meeting of Headingley residents heard that bypass work would not start until 1980/81 at the earliest¹⁰², while Leeds Planning Committee approved a scaled down bypass scheme the following month described by the Director of Planning as ‘more modest in scale and impact on properties and environment.’¹⁰³ Seven Residents’ Associations that were affected by the proposals formed a group called the A660 Joint Council, and delivered a petition urging greater consultation from West Yorkshire County Council.¹⁰⁴ Local Conservative Councillor Alan Pedley was more direct when he claimed that ‘full, genuine consultation’ would mean that ‘if the feelings of local people were taken fully into account, the scheme would be dropped.’¹⁰⁵ While not heeding this call, the WYCC could not ignore the increasingly poor financial situation, and after the scheme had been recategorised as low priority the HRA bemoaned the fact that empty buildings had been ‘left to rot’ due to planning blight, and urged that they be relet.¹⁰⁶

The Headingley bypass scheme demonstrates some of the contradictions and illogicality that often accompanied the planning process. It was judged by planners and political leaders as an utmost necessity and an inevitable part of

⁹⁸ *YEP*, 19/01/1973

⁹⁹ *YEP*, 07/03/1973

¹⁰⁰ *YEP*, 23/03/1974

¹⁰¹ *YEP*, 26/07/1977

¹⁰² *YEP*, 17/06/1976

¹⁰³ *YEP*, 07/07/1976

¹⁰⁴ *YEP*, 23/07/1976

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁶ *YEP*, 18/05/1978

modern life, yet was constantly postponed and revised, and had still not come to fruition more than forty years after the initial proposals had been made. The bypass was also vehemently opposed by local residents who were supposed to be some of the main beneficiaries of the scheme, and it is noticeable in the 1970s how they reacted to many of the postponements of the scheme by urging its complete cancellation in the interests of clarifying the future of the area. Their opposition was undoubtedly aided by the presence of many figures who had the education, influence and social skills to 'work the system'. The level of opposition and the middle-class roots of many figures involved in it did change attitudes of the local politicians. Conservative councillors in the 1970s were more in line with the opinions of the local population than their counterpart in 1963, Mrs Cardno, who told a protest meeting attended by 800 people that 'this by-pass is for your good.'¹⁰⁷ The struggle did at least contribute toward the postponements and revisions to the bypass plans, but it never succeeded in causing a cancellation. It was the gap between ambition and funding rather than consideration for popular feeling that was ultimately to prevent a commencement of the scheme.

Headingley by-pass was to be the most long-running affair relating to roads, and the one which elicited most popular opposition, but other proposals left their impact. In January 1968 the Yorkshire Evening Post reported on residents in Hunslet who were told that their homes were in the path of the South-Eastern Urban Motorway and would be demolished. They complained that they were not told when this would happen, and that their rents would double after they were moved.¹⁰⁸ This discontent seemed more to be based on the procedures adopted and lack of information provided by the council rather than any real opposition to the proposals. At the local inquiry of April 1968 into the South-Eastern Urban Motorway there were only two objectors.¹⁰⁹ This particular proposal represented one of the most important road schemes, the extension of the M1 into the centre of Leeds, and as such was constructed in the 1970s. Other road schemes of lesser

¹⁰⁷ *YP*, 26/09/1963

¹⁰⁸ *YEP*, 16/01/1968

¹⁰⁹ *YEP*, 18/04/1968

prominence were to fare differently, though not without causing a stir in certain areas.

A redeveloped system of major roads was an important part of Leeds' development plan in the 1960s, and by the early 1970s a number of new roads were on the drawing board. The ones that caused most problems were the North-East Urban Motorway and North-East Expressway, which were designed to take traffic round the east of the city centre and through the inner-city area of Harehills, and the Halton Expressway, which would effectively bypass York and Selby Roads. The North-East Urban Motorway was alleged to require the demolition of part of Quarry Hill Flats and the construction of an elevated section passing close to the historic Leeds Parish Church.¹¹⁰ The Leeds branch of the Conservationist Society also claimed that the new road would add to air pollution in the city and divert money from public transport.¹¹¹ In Halton an 'Anti-Expressway Action Group' had been formed to oppose the route of the road through the edge of the suburb, with some success. In October 1973 the Planning Committee decided that the current route would be 'unreasonable and unacceptable', mainly due to the amount of heavy traffic that would use the road. They recommended that a new route be substituted that passed further south.¹¹² The revised proposals still affected housing in Richmond Hill and Cross Green, and residents demanded confirmation that their houses would be demolished, claiming that there had been uncertainty 'for 12 years.'¹¹³ There was just time for protest meetings to be held before the new West Yorkshire County Council announced the abandonment of the North-East Urban Motorway and the postponement of others, including the Halton Expressway.¹¹⁴ This was due to government spending cuts however, so apart from the concession provided to Halton residents through the alteration of the route of the expressway, concern for public opinion had been relatively unimportant. This was possibly testament to the vital importance that policy-makers gave in this era to 'solving' the problem of traffic.

¹¹⁰ *YEP*, 29/01/1973

¹¹¹ *YEP*, 25/09/1973

¹¹² *YEP*, 11/10/1973

¹¹³ *YEP*, 02/05/1974

¹¹⁴ *YEP*, 25/06/1975

Following the Buchanan Report of 1963, in 1965 Leeds became involved in a joint study with the Ministry of Transport and the MHLG ‘to consider the application of integrated parking, traffic management and public transport policies within the framework of land-use planning, and to consider the design and improvement of environmental areas from which extraneous traffic could be excluded as a result of these policies.’¹¹⁵ The findings, published in 1969, were based on some policies that had already been carried out in Leeds, notably on the new Whinmoor housing estate.¹¹⁶ New residential areas were to be planned on the basis of local centres and transport termini, from which a system of pedestrian ways would radiate, separated from access roads for servicing and parking.¹¹⁷ The density of housing would be governed by proximity to these transport termini, with ‘the massing of development around public transport termini or loading points to assist in creating conditions most suitable for the use of public transport to work journeys.’¹¹⁸ This was also held to be advantageous in providing variety ‘in the grouping of buildings and the use of space and contour which can contribute a great deal to the pleasure of living in such estates.’¹¹⁹ In established residential areas it was thought that the separation of main routes from shopping areas would provide the opportunity to develop pedestrian precincts, though it was added ‘this may well have to be evolutionary in character with interim facilities for servicing.’¹²⁰ Some thought was also given to approaches towards reorganising vehicle access, parking and landscaping in improvement areas, and an experiment to assess this was created with the two Ministries at Burley Lodge Road.¹²¹

The most significant road project to be fulfilled was the Inner Ring Road. This had been included in the first Development Plan and earmarked for the ‘second

¹¹⁵ Leeds City Council, Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Planning and Transport-The Leeds Approach* (London, HMSO, 1969), Foreword.

¹¹⁶ See chapter on ‘Housing Construction and Production (Part One)’.

¹¹⁷ LCC, MOT and MHLG, *Planning and Transport-The Leeds Approach*, p.30

¹¹⁸ Leeds, WYAS, Leeds Development Plan. LLD1/2/817257 (Paper by City Engineer on Housing Densities, 22/07/1968)

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ LCC, MOT and MHLG, *Planning and Transport-The Leeds Approach*, p.33

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.36. For the results of this ‘experiment’, see the chapter on ‘Rehabilitation and Redevelopment’.

period', between 1961 and 1971.¹²² The scheme was agreed by the Town Planning and Improvements Committee in 1961,¹²³ approved by the Minister of Transport in 1963,¹²⁴ and construction began in the following year. Despite the fact that the project involved the demolition of 340 houses and 170 other properties,¹²⁵ opposition was minimal, possibly due to the fact that much was old, unfit and likely to be cleared anyway. One of the major construction feats of the Inner Ring Road was the creation of a 'precinct' bridging the road cutting and connecting the University of Leeds with the Leeds General Infirmary and the rest of the city centre. This was part of an arrangement between the council and the university authorities, and was part of the University of Leeds Development Plan formulated in 1960.¹²⁶

The university's previous plan, devised in 1927, was nearing completion by the late 1950s, and the University Senate felt that the number of students was likely to rise dramatically by the late 1960s.¹²⁷ As a result, the prestigious architects Chamberlain, Powell and Bon were invited to produce a plan that would cover this expansion. As far as the Inner Ring Road was concerned, they urged that 'if the proposed traffic route is inviolable there only remains the possibility of reducing the divisive effect of a new road while retaining its necessary function as a traffic artery'.¹²⁸ Consequently, they discussed the matter with Leeds' City Engineer and recommended that the new road should be constructed below ground so that the university and city centre could be linked. They felt that the ease of communication and the use of the ground above the underpass would cancel out the extra expense incurred, considerations that impressed the university authorities enough for them to agree to pay most of the extra cost of the tunnel.¹²⁹ The most important precondition for the development of the university was the acquisition of enough land to enable it to expand. Arrangements had already been made by the university to buy up houses in the

¹²² City and County Borough of Leeds, *Development Plan Written Statement*

¹²³ *YEP*, 29/06/1961

¹²⁴ *YEP*, 05/04/1963

¹²⁵ *YEP*, 29/10/2008

¹²⁶ University of Leeds, *University of Leeds Development Plan* (1960)

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p.3

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p.39

¹²⁹ University of Leeds, *Development Plan Review* (1963) p.153

area, and the city's first Development Plan zoned an area for university purposes, but Chamberlain, Powell and Bon declared that much would depend on the future planning of the area and 'on the rehousing by the city authorities of the occupants



Inner Ring Road construction, Woodhouse Lane, 1965. The houses in the middle distance were also soon to be bulldozed. (WYAS, Leeds, LC/ENG/376/11/no. 1)

of the obsolete houses in the area adjacent to the present University precinct.¹³⁰ This was important as they felt that more space was required than had currently been zoned for university use, and recommended that permission be sought for extensions of the zoning in the forthcoming review of the Development Plan.¹³¹ In addition, they recognised that much of the area that was likely to be represented as unfit was inadequate even for the needs of the immediate term, and

¹³⁰ University of Leeds, *University of Leeds Development Plan* (1960) p.29

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

urged that the City Council be persuaded to use its powers under the Town and Country Planning Acts to secure a wider area.¹³² The council's acquiescence in this was, therefore, a vital part in the University of Leeds' future plans, even though the proposals were overambitious and not all of the land acquired was subsequently redeveloped. Civic development was a major part of Leeds City Council's ambitions, and the loss of an established residential area was judged to be a small price to pay for progress in the educational and transportation attributes of the city.

Open space and recreational facilities were judged to be very important by the planning profession in the post-war era, and even when faced by shortages of land they were always treated as essential parts of any residential development. This was to be one of the main reasons why so many planners were keen to utilise high rise housing, as it enabled the provision of more public space on the ground than the traditional two-storey terraces or semi-detached houses with gardens. The value of public open space on one particular redevelopment site was outlined by Leeds' Assistant Chief Planner in 1970 as having a threefold use, 'for visual amenity, for playing fields, and also as a spatial buffer between the new residential development to the west and the industrial area to the east.'¹³³ The provision and use of this open space was often to prove controversial in practice. Many residents were disappointed that the incorporation of open space in redeveloped areas often led to depopulation and dispersal of people, especially when these areas were close to existing parks. Planning open space into developments also did not guarantee how that space was to be used. At times of financial shortage promised landscaping did not always take place and grassed areas often were not maintained regularly, which led to accumulation of litter and weeds. Some of the more unusual sources of trouble for housing managers were playgrounds. Many parents campaigned for the inclusion of play facilities in new estates, but other residents found them to be a nuisance, and in many different areas of the city there were to be boisterous campaigns for the resiting or removal of these playgrounds.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Leeds, WYAS, North West Road CPO 1970. LLD1/2/840813

Statements such as the one above from the Assistant Chief Planner were relatively rare. Assertions of the need for open space, and associated terms such as ‘environmental improvement’ and ‘external amenity’, were common, but their merits seem to have been considered to be self-evident. Thus areas of open space were included as standard in every layout drawn up for new developments. This was not always accepted by the inhabitants of many clearance areas. In Woodhouse the community association argued that ‘grass verges are salutary (sic), but whole fields of grass as appear on the plans depriving the future Woodhouse of population potential are not necessary.’¹³⁴ The Rev. Simpson, leading a deputation to the council, described why this was so when he pointed out that Woodhouse itself needed no more than a minimum of open space when it was bounded ‘by the greenery of Sugarwell Mount, Woodhouse Ridge, and Woodhouse Moor.’¹³⁵ The orthodoxy also did not go completely unchallenged in the higher echelons of the council and, in his attempts to get green belt restrictions relaxed, Karl Cohen remarked ‘that the amount of open space allocated in the Development Plan is far more than any other town’s’.¹³⁶ This was to be a vain pursuit of Cohen’s though. In a ‘Review of Land for Housing’ in 1956 it had been commented that the council was proud of the fact that Leeds had a greater proportion of open space than most other cities.¹³⁷

One of the more concrete benefits of increasing the amount of open space was thought to be the opportunity to provide extra play areas for children. Areas of back-to-back housing did not even have rear alleys for children to play in, and by the 1960s motor cars were proliferating. After an inquiry into a compulsory purchase order in the Woodhouse area, one of the main reasons the inspector gave for condemning the houses was ‘the absence of any private space attached to the houses which compels children to play in the streets.’¹³⁸ Play spaces, and

¹³⁴ Leeds, WYAS, Woodhouse (Jubilee Road) Clearance Areas CPO, PLI 12/06/1972. LLD1/2/840882

¹³⁵ LCC, *Agenda and Verbatim Reports*, March 1972, p.357

¹³⁶ Leeds, WYAS, Sub-Town Planning and Improvements Development Review Committee, 1965-69 LLD1/2/834518 (Minutes of meeting, 21/12/1965)

¹³⁷ Leeds WYAS, Reports on Housing Improvement 1954-65. LLD1/2/817352 (Review of Land for Housing, 14/12/1956)

¹³⁸ Leeds, WYAS, Woodhouse (Jubilee Road) Clearance Areas CPO, PLI 12/06/1972 LLD1/2/840882

often playgrounds themselves, were usually included in plans for new housing or in the environmental improvement of older areas, and where this was not the case there were frequently calls from parents for a playground to be provided. Not all residents considered playgrounds to be a benefit though. At the new Holborn Gardens development in Woodhouse three small play areas had been provided for toddlers, ‘but tenants residing in the immediate vicinity of these play areas claim continuous noise and annoyance.’¹³⁹ Demands were made for resiting the areas, and the matter went as far as discussions with local councillors and the Woodhouse Community Association.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, identical problems were occurring at the Hunslet Hall Estate. A complaint about a play area led to a survey producing a hundred per cent vote for its removal and the council was to substitute a landscaped area for it.¹⁴¹ This was followed by complaints about play areas on the Cottingley estate, and more problems at Hunslet Hall. A play area at the junction of Bismark Street and Bismark Drive was removed, but a petition was signed by 40 tenants at the other end of Bismark Drive complaining about the lack of play facilities in the area.¹⁴² In another part of the area a climbing frame was provided in a courtyard area where children could be supervised, but within two days five complaints had been received about it.¹⁴³ At times the problems seemed somewhat odd. At Whinmoor, residents were campaigning for the removal of climbing frames because older children were using them to peep into bedrooms. A spokesman for the housing department said the ‘the public demands facilities but doesn’t want them near the houses. Whatever we do is bound to be a little bit wrong.’¹⁴⁴

The council was understandably exasperated about these difficulties, and the issue could create real divisions, in particular at the Pepper Lane pre-allocation scheme in Hunslet, where the residents’ association was involved in the selection and siting of a play area that was subsequently removed, and had ‘incurred a certain amount of odium.’¹⁴⁵ The housing department had hoped that the

¹³⁹ LCC, *Department of Housing: Quarterly Reports*, 31/12/1974

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 30/06/1975

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 30/09/1975

¹⁴⁴ *YEP*, 08/08/1974

¹⁴⁵ LCC, *Department of Housing: Quarterly Reports*, 30/06/1976

residents' association would consider establishing themselves as a form of co-operative, but members had been put off by this episode and the abuse received, and seemed happier to leave controversial decisions to the council.¹⁴⁶ In some ways these instances could be regarded as evidence of residents exerting some control over their environment, but it was a very negative form of influence that impacted adversely on other inhabitants. Such a seemingly small issue creating such rancour is representative of many of the tensions of this period. Provision of children's facilities was one of the more enlightened examples of the council's paternalism, but their intentions were frustrated and the problem became a much more political one than was anticipated. The practicalities of 'collective consumption' had again come under pressure from private concerns.

Planning theory and practice after the Second World War put great emphasis on providing improved environments and facilities for residential areas, and also prioritised the segregation and reallocation of land uses that were judged to be harmful, inefficient or incompatible. These aims often created problems. One of the main difficulties was that the realisation of these ambitions required extensive redevelopment of areas of the city, with all the disruption this would cause. Coupled with this was the fact that the provision and development of roads, industry, shopping facilities and open space involved a range of groups and interests. While the local authority dominated the process of clearance and redevelopment in the field of housing, when it came to these other functions there was much more of an onus placed on business and commerce to provide finance and initiate construction, and greater co-ordination required between the development of shopping, roads and housing to ensure that the aims of the council's development plans were achieved.

This was another area in which wider political input was limited. Party politics generally left events to the planners, unless a particular issue provided a symbol for rare ideological point-scoring, as in the case of Seacroft Town Centre and its administration. Local councillors did become involved where a cause affected a

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

critical mass of their constituents, as at Moortown and Headingley, but this had at best a merely negative impact, and it is probably reasonable to say that where developments were postponed or cancelled this was largely due to financial or commercial reasons rather than as a political response. Political opposition also tended to be less clear-cut. It was more focused when the lack of a service was experienced, as at Seacroft and Hunslet before their district centres were built, and also in the immediate environs of road proposals. In fields such as open space and playground facilities attempts by planners to meet the demands of some residents elicited quite a vehement response from others. At Stourton, the attempts of one group of residents to save what they saw as their community was answered by another group who wished to seize the opportunity to improve their conditions by relocating elsewhere. Even without a top-down planning structure some of these conflicts of interest and opinion would have been difficult to reconcile. As it was, the fact that the development plan framework and the professional and ideological environment that the planners were operating in tended to be so free from political input, meant that issues could be aggravated at local level when it came to the implementation of planning decisions. As with the issues that directly affected housing provision, the response was ultimately for the local authority to pull back from a lot of its attempts to regulate the built and social environment. Once again, the state regrouped and narrowed its focus and, as a consequence, collective political action was left frustrated and lacking a firm institutional basis when confronted by forces that it was either unwilling or unable to control.

Conclusion



Pottery Vale, Leek Street Flats, 1983. (Leeds Library and Information Service, www.leodis.net)

In 1983 Leeds City Council bowed to the inevitable and demolished Leek Street Flats. Given that the ill-fated estate had survived twenty-five years fewer even than Quarry Hill Flats, it would be tempting to see it as emblematic of Leeds' post-war housing policy and as evidence of failure in the city's attempts to modernise itself. Such a view, however, would come too close to the ideological approach to urban history. Judging the transformation of Leeds' residential environment in terms of the propagation and reputation of slogans, clichés, schemes and designs would be to miss out on many of the underlying forces that both drove and constrained the whole process of change.

This thesis has looked at an essential period in the history of Leeds' post-war built environment and its main aims have been to assess the impact on urban policy of concepts of modernisation, to examine how urban change within Leeds affected the relationships between the state and the citizenry, and to consider the main constraints faced by various actors in urban politics, both in political

institutions and at an informal level. It has also aimed to link Leeds' experience with broader trends that led something of a crisis in state provision and governance by the 1970s. In doing this, the thesis has engaged with a number of arguments on these particular issues. There have been those such as Shapely¹, Ravetz², and Dennis³ who have argued wholeheartedly against post-war housing policy and planning from the opinion that it represented an elite consensus that was harmful to pre-existing urban communities and also intervened in a counter-productive way that was unable to either achieve its aims or recognise its limits. While this thesis acknowledges many of the shortcomings of planning processes, the problem with these kind of views is that they offer an excessively ideological approach and make little effort to reflect on the political roots of the state's role or the effects of wider socio-economic factors on urban change.

More nuanced critiques of the role of the state and planning, with much greater consideration of the broader political and socio-economic context, have been given by Glendinning and Muthesius⁴, Gibson and Langstaff⁵, Castells⁶, and Dunleavy⁷. These analyses tend to approach urban politics and planning from a less ideas-focused and ideological point of view, looking beyond much of the style and rhetoric to uncover the role of planning and urban policy as part of broader functions in politics and society. Where they might fall short is in minimising the role of agency to some extent, and not looking more closely at the actual role that many ideological arguments played in the urban political struggle. This thesis has aimed to extend the political focus adopted by many of these works by examining the conceptions of the city of Leeds that were held by political actors at all levels and addressing the issue of how different views of the city's image and role affected attitudes to modernisation and urban change.

¹ Shapely, *The Politics of Housing: Power, Consumers and Urban Culture*

² Ravetz, *Remaking Cities*; Ravetz, *The Housing Poor*

³ Dennis, *People and Planning*; Dennis, *Public Participation and Planner's Blight*

⁴ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*

⁵ Gibson and Langstaff, *An Introduction to Urban Renewal*

⁶ Castells, *City, Class and Power*

⁷ Dunleavy, *Urban Political Analysis*

Many of the above works are contemporary or quite dated, but two valuable sources of analysis that are recent and feature Leeds as a case study have been provided by Kefford⁸ and Ellis⁹. Both have provided excellent insights into Leeds post-war urban politics. In addition, Kefford has developed the critique of the post-war local state by concentrating on its role as a promoter of economic growth and as a catalyst to private consumption, while Ellis has given a detailed description of the fortunes of community groups during this period, tracing their rise and fall and studying their limitations and legacy. Kefford's argument that local authorities were intensively involved in promoting the transformation of their built environment in response to concerns over economic competition and the promotion of an image of modernity is a compelling one, and is well buttressed by his descriptions of the protestations of some of the people who felt that they were likely to suffer as a result. Ellis provides an excellent analysis of how many of those who were discontented with urban policy acted collectively, but ultimately how they were intrinsically too weak and insufficiently focused organisationally *vis-à-vis* the council, central government and broader economic factors to provide a political solution to many of the democratic problems associated with urban planning in this period. Both deal comprehensively with certain facets of urban politics—the state-driven restructuring of urban space in favour of private consumption and the impact of community action groups, respectively—which provide some thematic overlap with this work. This thesis, however, looks at residential spaces in Leeds with a view to broader planning and political strategies and visions, paying greater attention to policy and decision-making within the council itself and putting the behaviour of political actors at all levels in the fullest possible context. While sharing many of the misgivings of Kefford and Ellis as to the nature of urban policy, this thesis pays more attention to understanding the roots of planning behaviour and political decision-making. In addition, it has aimed to add to our knowledge of planning and politics in Leeds and urban change at a national level by examining the concept of modernisation as an example of conflicting views of the future of the city and as

⁸ Kefford, 'Constructing the Affluent Citizen'

⁹ Ellis, 'Pavement Politics'

a study of what the changing face of urban politics and planning in this period tells us about the nature of the state and its relationship with the populace.

Urban environments in the post-war era were heavily affected by the context of rapid socio-economic change and the various adjustments that needed to be made to the infrastructure of everyday life. These adjustments were quite far-reaching and more intensive than previous interventions. This was largely due to a mass politics that insisted on higher levels and standards of state provision, and to a changing economy which required a greater degree of state involvement to improve transport, commercial and industrial infrastructure, stimulate greater consumer spending, and ensure a more healthy, educated and mobile workforce. As Castells described, this context required the creation of a system of 'collective consumption', and this increase in collectivism was a noted feature of urban change in the 1950s and 1960s. The problems that were to affect urban policy in the 1970s were rooted in the incomplete nature of this collectivism and the inability of state involvement to find an effective and adequately broad political basis for its schemes.

As we have seen in Leeds, residential environments were only partly under the influence of 'collective consumption'. The drastic decline in privately rented housing was accompanied by a significant increase in owner-occupation as well as public housing, and while planners were legally obliged to regulate land use, most land remained in private hands. The non-housing aspects of residential Leeds were also significantly affected by private economic interests in such areas as construction, property development, industry and retail, and there was a clear outlook on the part of politicians, administrators and planners that the city required a strong economy, was competing with other places, and thus had to satisfy the needs of business and the 'model' consumer. This put private interests in a strong bargaining position, and it was often difficult to extend processes of collective consumption against particular private actors even when collective action might improve the broader urban economy.

This tension between collective and individual interest was also evident in political responses to urban change. Within urban politics the interests of the

collective were effectively represented through the council, which consisted of both elected and unelected actors. Given problems of accountability, low electoral turnout, professional status and procedural bureaucracy, the legitimacy of the council to speak for the public as a collective was always shaky and was to become more problematic the more the local authority intervened in urban life. Technocratic methods of local governance tended to maintain a certain distance from the population as a whole, and the connections between formal local politics and the opinions and interests of the public were often tenuous. This led to increasing suspicion and incomprehension between state and citizenry. The scale and pace of change provoked a broadening array of opposition, from those such as homeowners who were threatened by slum clearance or road proposals through to people who feared upheaval and uncertainty or wanted more control over their living conditions. Arguments for the necessity of adapting to the future were countered by those who preferred the familiarity of the past, and the desirability of continuing to modernise Leeds was a major dividing point. While this opposition to technocracy and modernisation undermined the credibility of local authority policy during the 1970s, it remained rather unfocused and was never able to provide an effective political alternative. Thus its legacy was quite negative and, at the very least, helped to provide an excuse for the rolling back of modernisation.

When the increasing political problems of 'collective consumption' were compounded by greater financial restraints, the state at national and local levels began to pull back from many of its newly acquired responsibilities. In the immediate term this led to more strife between the council and opposition groups, but as the local authority did less it also reduced expectations and provoked a more individual response from the public and from private interests. Sales of public land and council housing could satisfy the interests of some people, while even council tenants and those on the housing waiting list became more willing to pursue their private ambitions both within and outside of the council procedural machinery. The scaling back of 'collective consumption' may well have pleased many people who benefitted materially or those who felt threatened by state intervention, but it effectively acted as a substitute for political action and reduced mass influence on the state. Many of the contradictions involved in a

situation of incomplete 'collective consumption' were effectively resolved by a depoliticization of issues relating to the urban environment and a more narrow and parsimonious focus by the state on those judged most in need. This mirrored many of the wider aspects of socio-economic life in the 1970s and 1980s.

Arguments and debates both for and against modernisation and urban change did have an influence on urban policy within Leeds during this period. They represented attempts to mobilise and manipulate public and elite opinion, and also reflected the often sincere motivations and emotions of politicians, bureaucrats, campaigners and 'ordinary' members of the public. Significantly, these ideas and opinions both constituted the discourse of 'real' conflicts of interest and determinants of change, as well as cloaking much of the context of urban policy. Focusing on architecture and the physical shape of the city could bring forward concerns about the control and shape of the built environment, but also ignore many of the issues that were to affect the face of residential Leeds. Both sides of the 'modernisation' argument made their favoured types of building the embodiment of wider qualities and attributes. In response to the claims of planners and architects that modern housing and its broader environment could bring about a healthier, more content population and harmonious social relationships, 'traditionalists' made the Leeds back-to-back a veritable ideal home, 'compact, low-cost, easily run accommodation for which the demand is great'¹⁰ and perfect for a transient population as well as the ultimate symbol of a settled community.¹¹

As a result, it is important to see the attempts both to modernise and to preserve Leeds as part of broader political and social processes, and as a response within Leeds and by Leeds' political and bureaucratic institutions to adjust to wider environmental factors. These factors provided the potential and the impetus to rebuild and improve vast areas of Leeds in line with modern ideas and standards. At other times they retarded efforts at modernisation and triggered political

¹⁰ Leeds Civic Trust, *Outlook*, (May 1976, Special Housing Issue) p.4

¹¹ Community Housing Working Party, *Gradual Renewal in Leeds* (March 1976) p.7

discord. At the forefront of these factors were such things as the general financial situation, something that was largely outside the control of local political actors; rapid socio-economic change, which prompted the city to restructure in order to compete in the broader economic environment; and local politics, both in the sense of 'traditional' party rivalries and the less obvious conflicts between different territorial and social groups within the city. These features of urban policy give a more thorough perspective to the often superficial assessments of success and failure when it comes to the fortunes of a city.

There were elements of a 'modernisation project' in the immediate post-war period in the ideas and aspirations reflected in the City Development Plan and in the general concepts of Leeds' planners, but in the immediate term change was quite incremental. Approaches to slum clearance showed continuity with the pre-war era, and had the essentially sanitary aim of getting rid of unfit housing that was believed to cause ill-health, while new building was also similar to that of before 1939, with cottage-type dwellings on out-of-town estates. The initial spur to modernist development was pragmatic, as high-rise dwellings were thought to be more economical when it came to land-use and also eventually provided a quick method of construction. For the design professions they had the added advantage of incorporating modern ideas about rational internal and external layout, with the bonus for politicians and potential residents that they contained most of the 'mod-cons' that were found in newly-built private housing in this period. Thus for a period of approximately ten years there was a general consensus within the council on the benefits of modern housing estates and tower blocks, though the first cracks in this agreement came as early as 1965, with the reservations of Karl Cohen and the Housing Director in discussions about the Development Plan review.

Ironically, the incorporation of housing in what resembled a coherent modernisation process came after most of Leeds' high-rise flats had been built. By the late 1960s residential areas were an integral part of general schemes to provide new transportation links, shopping and industrial facilities that would radically upgrade Leeds. The Conservative administration of 1967 to 1972 used this process as evidence for a determined effort to sell Leeds and change its

image and appearance from that of an old-fashioned, Victorian city. In housing this took the form of going beyond looking for shortfalls in the fitness of housing to trying to anticipate the standards that would become commonplace in future and combating ‘obsolescence’. Integral to this change of emphasis was a profound awareness of socio-economic change, and explicit references to the growing ‘North-South divide’ were made to highlight the perceived need to make Leeds a more desirable place in which to live, as well as in which to invest. Elsewhere in the country the major Conservative victories in the 1967 and 1968 local elections led to a reduction in slum clearance and public housing output, often regarded as ‘socialist’, and a focus in attention on improvement.¹² Leeds’ modernisation push was a decisive reason why the local Conservative group pursued a divergent route to its counterparts.

High-rise housing and system-building became emblematic of modernisation, but their significance has been exaggerated. High-rise was a relatively short-lived phenomenon, and the pro-redevelopment ‘Strategy D’ proposal came at a time when Leeds’ last public high-rise blocks were being completed. Dunleavy, despite his misgivings about the multi-storey construction programmes, noted that ‘it was not possible to see high-rise policy as an issue involved in electoral politics.’¹³ Though there was enthusiasm from a range of people about the novelty of multi-storey flats and prefabricated dwellings in their early days, they were really symbolic of the modernisation project in the fact that they were treated as an unavoidable necessity in the circumstances of land and materials shortages and the need for speed of construction. They were abandoned when they became financially counter-productive and when waiting lists were falling, and they only became associated with the end of the modernisation process in hindsight. In emphasising the pragmatic side of systems-building, Glendinning and Muthesius have pointed out that ‘in the pre-fabricated schemes of the mid-sixties, architectural theories of mass-production were unrealised in the face of municipal demands for limitless minor variations.’¹⁴ Politically, using prefabrication was less of a ‘brave new world’ and more of a means to an end.

¹² Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block* p.313

¹³ Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain*, p.335

¹⁴ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p.216

By the mid-1970s it had become clear that the modernisation ‘project’ had lost most of its momentum, if not ground to a halt entirely. Financial cutbacks had curtailed the slum clearance and housebuilding programmes, and this meant that much greater attention had to be given to focus efforts on the areas that most needed action. This applied just as much in the field of housing improvement, where intensive administrative processes took up a great deal of time and resources, and where unfamiliar and blurred consultation and participation procedures made political consensus even more difficult. Issues involving poor construction methods and disrepair in much post-war public housing also took up resources at a time of relative shortage, and played a major part in undermining the public legitimacy of modernisation, based as it was on the principle of higher standards. Merrett sums up the era by stating that ‘we can see that what most commentators presented as a welcome switch from redevelopment to rehabilitation, from axe to scalpel, was in fact a retreat from slum clearance accompanied by a huge cut-back in new local authority building, with only a temporary surge in the scale of rehabilitation in the private and municipal sectors. The “switch” in fact constituted a remarkable withdrawal of construction resources from housing renewal.’¹⁵ Against this kind of backdrop it was unsurprising that housing policy caused political difficulties in the 1970s.

One of the important themes of this thesis is the nature of the state and the ‘local state’ and their relationship with the built and social environment, particularly in the sense of providing the background or framework for politics at the local level. As previously discussed¹⁶, there is a tendency for some commentators to focus on urban policy as the unrestrained application of ideas by a professional elite, without really giving much thought to the institutional machinery or socio-economic constraints that decision-makers operated in. The constitutional arrangements between central and local government had a major impact, in the sense that legislation and finance forced constant ‘corrections’ at the local level,

¹⁵ Merrett, *State Housing in Britain*, p.262

¹⁶ See pages 21-24 and 227-228.

but local authorities also possessed a substantial degree of leeway in the implementation of policy. Finance was probably a more significant constraint than legislation, despite being less prescriptive in theory. When the supply of money and subsidy from central government was plentiful, the options for councils were much broader, and it was easier to satisfy the needs and demands of the population. In the periods of relative dearth, the job of the local authority was more difficult. Spending helped to encourage expectation, and in the absence of funds there was inevitably a sense of frustration among sections of the population who felt neglected. The whole 'project' of participation and consultation was to be marred by the fact that it so often involved the attempt of the local administration to manage expectation and get the population to share the responsibility for difficult decisions.

This gap between the policy-makers and the population was a major feature of urban planning in this era, and one of the more complex areas was in terms of the technical and design aspect of urban renewal. The application of 'expertise' inevitably created a division in that 'ordinary' people often lacked the skills and knowledge of issues relating to urban planning, architecture and public finance. This situation essentially created an environment of paternalism, where architects, planners and bureaucrats made and executed policy according to their own ideas and conceptions. Where this involved the uncomplicated application of professional standards the process was top-down but more benign than the alternative, which was that these kind of standards and procedures were compromised by external constraints such as financial cuts and political directives. When this occurred the status of officers and professionals was often used to justify policy that was ill-conceived or short-sighted, but where the decision-makers were jealous of their own positions and unwilling to share responsibility with wider sections of the political community and the public. One particular example of this was with the system-building programme, as at Hunslet Grange, which offered something of a technological 'short-cut' that eased problems with the progress of construction but caused massive difficulties later on.

The feature that was probably of the widest political significance related to ideas of ‘collective consumption’. As Castells has outlined,¹⁷ this concept describes the growth of public services that were provided or regulated by the state in the interests of ‘reproducing’ capitalism, and basically covered functions that it was difficult or impossible to operate at a profit, but that were essential to keep the economy or society functioning efficiently. Such services as health and education were the foremost examples, but planning was also an activity that aimed to sustain the socio-economic system, producing a rational urban order. Housing policy, including as it did widespread public interventions such as slum clearance and council house construction, also involved procedures that could be described as ‘collective consumption’. The significance of ‘collective consumption’ activities for local authorities was that they brought large groups of people into a position of reliance on the local state for the provision of various social needs. This also created a politicisation of these issues as demands were made or policies resisted relating to functions that had become the responsibility of the council.

By the time of the late 1960s it might be said that the political, financial and technical resources of the council were struggling to cope with the expectations of the population and the legal and political responsibilities it had come to assume. The response was that, on the one hand, there was an attempt to rationalise the institutional and administrative processes of the council to produce greater efficiency, while on the other there was more of a willingness to involve sections of the public in the decision-making and execution of policy, in order to make them aware of the constraints and to tie them into the implementation of policy. These two responses were both followed by the local authority, but never really hand-in-hand or in any systematic way. In some sense they were quite incompatible. Striving for greater efficiency was held to require greater centralisation and an even closer reliance on technical and bureaucratic expertise, qualities that were not conducive to the encouragement of greater participation from the population. Participation inevitably involved a slower decision-making process which sought opinion and involved trying to reconcile a range of

¹⁷ Castells, *City, Class and Power*

positions, many of which were 'irrational' from a technical or bureaucratic point of view.

As the impact of the financial problems of the 1970s became clear, the contradictions thrown up by adopting an incoherent strategy of centralisation and consultation came to a head. The attempts to involve the public and community groups in policy-making were frequently thwarted by an inability to reconcile the often complex preferences these exercises threw up with the options that the council felt able to offer and the bureaucratic difficulties in translating them into practice. From the point of view of community groups, participation offered frustratingly limited decision-making opportunities, and they resented the way that the council tried to 'coach' them into adopting its preferred option or simply provided them with a *fait accompli*.¹⁸ On the council's side, they found local associations to be insufficiently realistic, but also that they were unable to tie most areas into routine consultation procedures, many people only taking an interest when major proposals were ready to be carried out. Where participation did prove successful, as in pre-allocation schemes, it was very resource-intensive and the authority was unable to stretch it over the whole city. In certain areas and campaigns it was also questionable just how representative some of the local groups were, and councillors were often jealous of their claims to be the voice of the local community.

The mid-1970s were an inauspicious period in which to try and establish public involvement in planning, as the more stringent financial regime meant that often community groups were being incorporated into managing shortages and cuts in funding and provision. Where the issue was one of trying to draw residents into the process of managing declining and money-starved services, there was little public interest. Many of the Housing Consultative Committees created in the 1970s by Leeds' Housing Department were very poorly attended, even in areas where popular discontent was quite high. Thus there was no effective institutional basis that could incorporate public participation while maintaining an 'efficient'

¹⁸ *Planning to Deceive - A Critique of Leeds Council's 'Participation Planning Exercise'* (Chapelton News Pamphlet, 25/07/1975) provides a particularly radical exposition of this point of view. See also Ellis, 'Pavement Politics', which gives many examples of this type of situation.

management of residential areas in a context of depleted finances. The result of these failing strategies was that the state, both locally and centrally, began pulling back from the provision of 'collective consumption' in an attempt to reduce the responsibilities that it had acquired, as well as from sheer financial and administrative necessity as far as local authorities were concerned. This saw attention concentrated on the areas and groups that were judged to be in 'most need'. This was a judgement that was still effectively under the control of the 'technocratic' side of the council, but which was coming under question from groups that saw themselves as the most deserving recipients or, in the case of some slum clearance areas, were questioning the need for drastic intervention. In the field of housing management there was also a trend towards individual remedies, as tenants sought to use the system to acquire or refuse certain dwellings or districts, and as tensions developed over the use and abuse of public areas such as children's playgrounds, vandalised garages and untidy green space.

The earlier years of the modernisation process were closely connected to the growth of 'collective consumption'. The virtual expropriation of many private landlords, the fruitless opposition of middle-class homeowners to the acquisition of land for public housing in their areas, proposals for roads through residential suburbs, and the local authority carrying out a shopping centre project at Seacroft all demonstrated that state intervention in the name of modernisation could often go against particular private property interests. Yet, in areas such as housing and planning, collective consumption was still limited in scope. This was evident in the policy of the Conservative administration that took control of the council from 1967 to 1972.

Enthusiastic about intervening to improve the efficiency and image of the city, the decisions of the council at this time to sell off council housing and public land nevertheless served to curtail the breadth and depth of modernisation, and reduce legitimacy for it in the wider community. By the early 1970s the council was finding it difficult to get private developers to provide planned shopping centres in Hunslet and Moortown, building rates for private housing were sluggish, and at Colton the decision to build predominantly public housing on the planned estate was reversed. In many ways, therefore, there was a shift towards the reduction of

collective expectations in favour of an intensification of individual 'responsibility', as the council gave up attempting to regulate urban processes and settled for a focus on problem areas where intervention was felt to be most necessary. Leeds' own programmes of council house and land sales provide an example of where more emphasis was to be given to the market and property interests. These types of non-intervention helped to make Leeds more 'governable', but they also seriously reduced the political space and made the satisfaction of popular demands a lot more difficult.

'Collective consumption' was to play a major part in public involvement in local politics, both in providing grievances for people to react against, or in bringing them together to campaign about issues which affected them collectively.

Examples of this included slum clearance and the struggle to get repairs carried out at Hunslet Grange Flats. Even where opposition was essentially conservative in resisting change, the response was political and involved some sort of common cause. Nevertheless, the political impact was limited by the nature of the organisations involved and their essentially circumscribed aims. One of the few cases of campaign groups uniting was the Community Housing Working Party, where a number of organisations opposed to slum clearance combined with the Leeds Civic Trust and some progressive sociologists and architects. Effectively, the arrangement involved common publicity and involvement in consultation with the council. It was moderately successful in raising the issue of gradual renewal and bringing grievances to the attention of the council, but by eschewing conventional politics and not broadening their arguments across urban issues as a whole, their impact was relatively small. The one area where campaigning on urban matters sought deliberately to provoke a wider radicalisation was in Chapeltown, but the level of mobilisation needed for that kind of politicisation was difficult to sustain, and later in the 1970s community activity in the area focused more on issues of racial identity and anti-discrimination.

It was understandable in many ways that campaign groups would seek to resist incorporation into 'ordinary' party politics, either from a distrust of the council and a desire not to be compromised or used by parties, or from the belief that they needed to be 'respectable' and above sectional or ideological interest. The

problem was that these outlooks helped to keep campaign groups in the place that the bureaucracy or political parties wanted to see them, and prevented them from mounting any real challenges to the established interests and institutions.

Ultimately the shortcomings and frustrations of community organisations paralleled or even provoked the switch towards individualised approaches to pursuing self-interest on urban matters, from such things as rejecting offers of certain types of housing and particular areas; seeking a transfer to another house or estate; actually buying council houses; through to efforts to erect fences to individually 'colonise' communal areas or to defend privacy against 'nuisances' like children's play areas. This was a trend that was often assisted by the political and bureaucratic wings of the council. Shapely's description of a rise in 'consumerism' in urban politics was correct in the sense that the council had to take increasing account of the effects of accumulated individual decisions and behaviour¹⁹, but he failed to remark on the fact that this type of 'consumerism' seriously weakened the position of community groups and collective political action, as David Ellis astutely observed.²⁰ Leeds' experience of broadening public involvement in urban policy was similar to the participation process in Birmingham commented on by Paris and Blackaby. They pointed out that it 'did very little to change the overriding influences on the council's urban renewal policy. Nor did it raise residents' consciousness to a level that would lead them to challenge these influences.'²¹

Urban policy in residential Leeds involved both a radical transformation of the built environment along with relative neglect, where change was retarded or disregarded due to a range of financial, social and political factors. The concept of modernisation is an important one in helping to understand the process of change, but should not be assessed purely on its own terms, or allowed to disguise the deeper context of urban politics. Modernisation itself can be used to describe a series of modernist technical responses to urban problems, as well as an ideologically-led approach that aspired to improve the image of the city and act as a political guide for its transformation in a more competitive environment.

¹⁹ Shapely, *The Politics of Housing*, pp.13-17

²⁰ Ellis, 'Pavement Politics', p.57

²¹ Paris and Blackaby, *Not Much Improvement*, p.155

The irony of modernisation rhetoric in Leeds was that the more concerted political efforts at modernisation came at a time when the ideological, technical and national political dominance of modernist urban intervention was coming to an end.

In the post-war era housing was one of the leading political concerns, and there was a great deal of political and popular consensus that more dwellings needed to be provided, and that the poorest quality housing needed to be eradicated. Leeds was no exception to this, though it had its own problems, such as the high proportion of back-to-back houses, and often approached these in its own way. In other respects Leeds was under the same imperatives as other cities, and did not hesitate to adopt multi-storey building, centralisation of large contracts with 'reliable' builders, and the use of prefabricated building systems. These were all responses to the issues thrown up by political demands and processes of urban change. Rightly or wrongly, these particular modernist strategies and techniques were justified as necessary and unavoidable by the council, and it has to be acknowledged that this was largely accepted at the time by the elected local politicians, the media and the Leeds public. While the institutional processes were heavily paternalist and there was evidence of some inchoate discontent, there was little sign of organised opposition to urban policy until the start of the 1970s.

This stirring of opinion was in many ways a response to a crisis that had already erupted. By the end of the 1960s high-rise building had become discredited and prohibitively expensive, significant figures within Leeds' politico-bureaucratic elite such as Karl Cohen and Housing Director Syd Benson were questioning the wisdom of high slum clearance rates and the popularity of much modern housing, and financial restrictions were eroding the basis of the ambitious programmes of construction and redevelopment that had marked much of the previous two decades. The response of the council, and in particular the Conservative political administration of the time, might appear strange in hindsight, but was influenced by the flavour of the time. Much of the intervention in Leeds' urban environment was motivated by the feeling that it was a long overdue opportunity to tackle some ingrained problems with obsolete housing, aging infrastructure, significant

traffic congestion and out-of-date industry. Leeds' policy-makers were conscious of the socio-economic trends of the era, which in their eyes made competing with other cities, particularly in the South and Midlands, a vital task. Apart from the actual physical improvements this was held to require, an even more important objective was to boost the image of Leeds in order to impress potential investors and keep hold of aspirational and skilled Leodensians. The architects of the strategy of the 'Motorway City of the Seventies' saw the continued existence of its aging back-to-backs as something of an embarrassment and an affront to modern standards.

This renewed physical and ideological transformation of the city was to involve the centralisation of policy and executive functions within the council and the increased application of managerial expertise. The new emphasis on consultation and participation was actually intended to reinforce this corporate shift by providing information on grass-roots opinions and issues, and by incorporating local organisations into the managerial outlook, as Cockburn described in Lambeth.²² In Leeds these hopes were to be sorely disappointed. In a period of increasing financial cut-backs, it was to be very difficult to continue to implement urban policy that required expensive, drastic changes to social life at the same time as trying to hold down costs and to gain the willing support of wide sections of the local population. Community and campaign groups were unsurprisingly disappointed at the expectation that their participation should be closely guided by the council bureaucracy, and that many options seemed to be 'off the table'. The impact of these groups was to be boosted by the active support of a revitalised local Liberal Party, who both gave them a voice in the council chamber and tried to encourage discontent for electoral gain, and the involvement of academics and professionals who had reacted quite violently against the previous modernist intellectual consensus of the post-war period. In many ways the flowering of community opposition was a symptom of pre-existing problems, and the single-issue, often very localised nature of groups helped to reduce their impact and the ability to resolve and recognise some very deep-lying causes.

²² Cynthia Cockburn, *The Local State* (London, Pluto Press, 1977)

In this volatile and unfavourable atmosphere the ambitious modernisation plans of Leeds' council were to be frustrated. Managerialism was reduced in many cases to the encouragement of lower expectations and the achievement of at least a minimum of their most urgent objectives. Planning policy became more long-term and vaguely aspirational in nature as its political and financial basis got more unsettled. This did little to improve its relevance to the public, and legitimacy possibly dropped even further as planning objectives were to be constantly disappointed. In the circumstances of the era some of the local Conservative policies were to prove counter-productive. The encouragement of council house sales, the sale of council-owned land and the reduction of public housebuilding in the suburbs all helped to cause division between sections of the public in a context where council house construction was decreasing and where the increased stock of private landholding did not lead to a corresponding rise in the rate of private building. Despite the significant improvements to Leeds' residential environment—including thousands of modern houses, the renovation of the vast majority of the remaining older dwellings, and the provision of new social facilities to enhance housing areas—the political roots of urban policy had proved inadequate. In a situation where public money was increasingly scarce, where there were much higher standards and expectations, but where people still found control over their environment to be frustratingly elusive, discontent had increased significantly. The inability to find collective solutions to the problems of residential Leeds was leading to a situation where people turned to increased individual approaches to housing issues, leading to more competition and further division within the local population. A new Leeds had been created by the end of the 1970s but, for all the initiatives of the community groups of the previous fifteen years, it was a city that seemed to be decreasingly influenced by the collective vision of its inhabitants.

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