NEW TOWN URBANITY

THEORY AND PRACTICE
IN HOUSING DESIGN AT HARLOW

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Submitted to the Glasgow School of Art

in fulfilment of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The Mackintosh School of Architecture

MAY 2014

DECLARATION

I, Christine Hui Lan Manley declare that the enclosed submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, consisting of a textual thesis, meets the regulations stated in the Glasgow School of Art Handbook for Supervised Postgraduate Research (2010) for the mode of submission selected and approved by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee.

I declare that this submission is my own work, and has not been submitted for any other academic award.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how the concept of 'urbanity' was defined, developed and applied to the design of housing in British post-war New Towns. A number of modernist architects, particularly Sir Frederick Gibberd, considered 'urbanity' to be a visual town-like quality. Such concepts were part of a wider movement to reconsider the aesthetic dimension of town planning; ideas developed through architectural discourse during the 1940s and 50s, responding to (and sometimes contradicting) the earlier modernist principles of the 1930s, which emphasised the social and functional aspects of architecture and planning.

Reacting to the low-density suburban developments of the inter-war period, Gibberd developed his own ideas about urbanity. Gibberd was a member of the avant-garde Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS Group); however, developing such aesthetic notions went against the principles of mainstream modernism. Nevertheless, the 1946 New Towns Act provided the ideal opportunity for Gibberd to test his visual planning theories, since after the War, he was selected to plan Harlow New Town. He served the New Town from conception to completion, maintaining his ambition to create a sense of urbanity throughout. Much of the housing has remained unchanged since construction and a number of areas have been studied to reveal the application of urbanity elements over the period of study (1947-1967).

By examining Gibberd's personal notes and sketches, as well as the discourse evident in architectural publications, Part 1 of the study aims to establish what 'urbanity' meant to Gibberd and other modernist architects during the 1940s and 50s. Through archive research, Part 2 investigates the ways in which Gibberd together with the Harlow Development Corporation (HDC) attempted to apply elements of urbanity to housing design at Harlow. The low densities prescribed by the *Housing Manuals* at first proved restrictive to Gibberd and the HDC, and

changing ideas about housing types, home ownership and 'social balance' also had an impact on the shape of Harlow.

This thesis highlights Gibberd's key role in the development and implementation of principles of visual town planning throughout the 1940s and 50s. However, where other modernist architects reaffirmed their commitment to social aspects of planning, Gibberd's emphasis on aesthetics has led to the omission of Gibberd's work at Harlow from conventional narratives of modern architecture and planning. This study challenges this idea by arguing that the theory and practice of 'urbanity' formed an alternative, additional strand of modernist thinking about town planning.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Architectural Association
ABN	*The Architect and Building News*
AD	*Architectural Design*
AJ	*The Architects' Journal*
AR	*The Architectural Review*
CAD	Computer-aided design
CIAM	*Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*
ECC	Essex County Council
ERDC	Epping Rural District Council
ERO	Essex Record Office
HDC	Harlow Development Corporation
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
HUDC	Harlow Urban District Council
JRIBA	*Journal of the Royal Institute of Architects* (1893-1964)
MARS	Modern Architectural Research (Group)
MH	Ministry of Health
MHLG	Ministry of Housing and Local Government
MTCP	Ministry of Town and Country Planning
NTDC	New Town Development Corporations
NCSS	National Council of Social Service
RFAC	Royal Fine Art Commission
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
RIBAJ	*RIBA Journal* (1965-)
TNA	The National Archives
SDC	Stevenage Development Corporation

INTRODUCTION

During the 1940s and 50s in Britain, a number of architects began investigating and promoting ideas about the visual aspects of town planning. These ideas appeared to conflict with the earlier architectural principles which developed during the 1930s, where crucially, form and appearance were to come second to social and functional requirements. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, advances in building materials and technology had opened up new possibilities – possibilities which were embraced by leading avant-garde architects across Europe, as they advocated a break from tradition in order to keep pace with a modernising society. The overcrowded unsanitary conditions of the nineteenth-century industrial cities prompted debates about residential density and the appropriate form future towns and cities should take, to provide better living conditions for the people. The general consensus among this European architectural vanguard of the inter-war years[1] was that architecture should be placed back into the social plane, becoming 'solely dedicated to the service of the human being,'[2] in contrast to the architecture of the previous century which was considered by modernists as merely an 'academic exercise in applied ornament.'[3] After the Second World War, architectural discourse in Britain turned to the challenges of city reconstruction and the urgent need for mass housing provision. With Labour in power, the New Towns Act was passed in 1946, enabling the creation of entirely new settlements as part of the post-war house building effort. The New Towns programme was described in 1953 as 'the greatest social experiment of our age.'[4] Those committed to the values of the 'new architecture' believed the New Towns were the ideal opportunity to test the modernist social planning ideas of the inter-war years.

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[1] In this study, the term 'inter-war years' refers to the years between the end of the First World War in 1918 and the beginning of the Second World War in 1939. The term 'post-war years' will be used to refer to the period following the end of the Second World War (1945 onwards).

[2] Le Corbusier, *The Athens Charter,* trans. by Anthony Eardley (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973), p. 6.

[3] J. M. Richards, *Modern Architecture,* 8th edn (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1959), p. 9.

[4] 'Citizenship', *Harlow Citizen*, 8 May 1953, p. 4.

The architects elected to design the New Towns employed the new ideas of the earlier period, which aimed to put the prospective residents and their use of the town at the heart of design. However, during the post-war years in Britain, alongside the implementation of the earlier modernist ideas, a strand of discourse that dealt principally with the visual aspects of town planning continued to develop. During the years leading up to and following the end of the Second World War a small group of modernist architects, planners and critics had examined the visual aspects of British cities and old market towns, to consider how a visual town-like quality might be created in future developments. The architects and writers who explored such visual planning ideas considered themselves to be modernist, that is to say, they promoted the prevailing modern architectural principles about social betterment, technical innovation and rational planning. Furthermore, most were also affiliated to the Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS), founded in 1933 as the British branch of the European avant-garde group, the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM). These were elite groups and those considered insufficiently committed to modernism were ruthlessly excluded.[5] Architect planner to Harlow New Town, Sir Frederick Gibberd, was a member of the MARS Group and was therefore considered by his contemporaries to be a modern architect. However, he also played a key role in the development of ideas about visual planning, which potentially conflicted with mainstream modernist thinking.

Gibberd's development of these two apparently conflicting ideas – a key theme which will be examined throughout the study – can perhaps be attributed to the period in which Gibberd received his architectural training. His architectural education began in 1925 when he was articled to Crouch Butler and Savage (a Birmingham-based practice which specialised in Gothic Revival Designs), while studying part-time at the Birmingham School of Architecture.[6] During the early 1900s, the Birmingham School was renowned for its strong Arts and Crafts vision, under the influence of Arts and Crafts architect William Bidlake.[7] The Arts and

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[5] John R Gold, *The Experience of Modernism: Modern architects and the future city 1928-1953* (London: E & FN Spon, 1997), p. 111.

[6] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, 1908-35 Diary, Diary note January, September 1925.

[7] Mark Crinson and Jules Lubbock, *Architecture: Art or Profession? Three Hundred Years of Architectural Education in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 79.

Crafts Movement had begun in Britain during the mid-nineteenth century; rejecting industrial mass production techniques, the Movement sought a return to the tradition of craftsmanship, as well as advocating social reform by the total design of everything for maximum beauty. However, by 1925, *Beaux-Arts* methods had been introduced to the School by the newly appointed head George Drysdale, who was trained at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* in Paris.[8] The *Beaux-Arts* teaching methods emphasised the importance of the principles of classical architecture, which, as will be discussed later, generated a negative reaction from those who would lead the Modern Movement in architecture. Towards the end of his studies, Gibberd had in fact become interested in modern architecture and in particular, the work of Le Corbusier.[9] Having been exposed to these three contrasting schools of thought, Gibberd is the ideal candidate for the study of the relationship between visual planning ideas and architectural modernism.

Part 1 of the thesis examines the modernist architectural discourse of the inter-war period to uncover the ideas which preceded as well as prompted the visual planning discourse of the 1940s. Gibberd and other modernist architects reacted to the unplanned low-density two-storey suburban development of the previous decades, believing that future developments should be planned to a high-density, incorporating modernist social planning principles. This was in opposition to the low-rise low-density 'Garden City' planning concept. The debates about residential density would have a significant impact on the development of the New Towns; this will be a central theme examined throughout the thesis.

In addition to high-density compact development, however, Gibberd believed that Britain should endeavour to build towns with visual town-like qualities, or what Gibberd termed a 'sense of urbanity'. His ideas developed as part of a wider discourse on the visual aspects of towns, led by the prominent monthly journal *The Architectural Review (AR)* during the 1940 and 50s. The editors of the *AR* – chiefly assistant editor Gordon Cullen – examined existing towns, highlighting features they considered to contribute to the urban landscape, or what they named, 'Townscape'.

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[8] Andy Foster, Birmingham: Pevsner Architectural Guides (Yale University Press, Newhaven and London, 2005), p. 26.

[9] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, 1908-35 Diary, Diary note September 1928.

Townscape became a regular feature in the journal; the aim was to re-educate readers on ways of seeing and thinking about the urban environment. A number of key articles in the *AR* which span from the early 1940s to the early 1950s provide evidence of the editors' ideas on visual town planning. This includes several articles which preceded the initial 'Townscape' article of 1949, on the subjects of 'Picturesque Planning' and 'Exterior Furnishing' for example. Gibberd's interpretation of 'urbanity' can also be understood by examining journal articles written by Gibberd during this period. However, the main body of material which reveals Gibberd's ideas about visual town planning can be found at the Gibberd Garden Archive in Harlow. The archive holds a large amount of unpublished material, including Gibberd's personal diaries, which have provided a crucial insight into Gibberd's thoughts on town planning. This evidence is examined in depth in Part 1 of the thesis to better understand what 'urbanity' meant to Gibberd and other modernist architects during this period. It is evident that 'urbanity' existed as a town planning objective in the immediate post-war years; however, recent literature has yet to explore the development of the concept, its defining features, and what 'urbanity' meant to the architects and planners who conceived and developed the idea.

In contrast to notions of urbanity – which were primarily concerned with the visual aspects of spaces in towns – the earlier modernist planning principles focused on the function and use of a town as a means of organising urban plans on a large scale. The leading organisation of modernist architects, CIAM, held a series of meetings between 1928 and 1959 hoping to formulate a contemporary program of architecture and to advocate modern architecture.[10] The MARS Group was formed as the British division of CIAM in 1933 and was represented for the first time at the fourth CIAM congress in that same year. The key city planning concepts of creating separate zones for working and living, as well as the idea of 'neighbourhood units' were discussed during the CIAM congresses, and by the 1930s, such ideas were widely used in British planning.[11] The ideas about 'urbanity' contrasted with the large-scale

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[10] Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 10.

[11] Eric Mumford, *Defining Urban Design: CIAM Architects and the formation of a Discipline 1937-69* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 34.

well-defined modernist planning principles, with functionality and the user central to design. Part 1 of the thesis argues that the concept of urbanity dealt only with the visual aspects of the urban environment as opposed to the social aspects normally considered in mainstream modernism. Part 2 of the study examines how the concept of urbanity was applied to the design of housing – in particular, housing in the New Towns. After showing that the concept itself centred on aesthetics, the thesis argues that the desire to implement visual elements of urbanity in housing design took precedence over satisfying the residents' needs and preferences, which again, negated the MARS and CIAM doctrine of centring architectural design and city planning around the user. Such visual planning conflicted with modernist social ideas, since its focus was ostensibly upon improving the appearance of the town rather than the improvement of society. However, this thesis challenges these perceived tensions between urbanity and modernism. A careful study of Gibberd's visual planning reveals that behind the aesthetic approach was a belief that the art of town planning could benefit the community as a whole. With this, I will show how artistic visual town planning – which tends to be excluded from narratives of modern architecture and planning – can be understood as an alternative strand of modernist thinking about town planning. Furthermore, the concept of urbanity as a town planning principle of the post-war era and the ways in which it was applied to design have yet to be examined in depth. This study seeks to establish the defining features of urbanity as a visual planning principle and to reveal how the creation of urbanity was complex. It will also be argued that Gibberd was pioneering in his formation of urbanity elements which could be applied to the design of post-war New Town housing.

THE NEW TOWNS

The post-war New Towns were the ideal opportunity to test modernist social planning principles; however, they also offered a chance to test the implementation of the new ideas of visual planning. Following the Second World War, many urban areas had suffered severe bomb-damage; towns and cities needed to be rebuilt and large numbers of houses were urgently required. There had already been much deliberation over reconstruction plans during the War. In response to the unplanned suburban sprawl of the inter-war period, Patrick Abercrombie proposed a Green Belt

around London in the Greater London Plan, to prevent further sprawl. Overspill industry and population, he proposed, would be relocated to new towns positioned 20-30 miles away from London.[12]

In the immediate post-war years, fourteen New Towns were designated in Britain between 1946 and 1950, eight of which were located around London. New Towns designated during this period are known as the first generation New Towns, or Mark I New Towns. Harlow is included in this group of towns. Recent literature often draws attention to the *AR's* 1953 attack on the New Towns concluding, as Nicholas Bullock has done, that the architectural qualities of the New Town programme were 'as anodyne as the very same suburban developments that had been attacked so roundly by the leading campaigners of the New Towns movement before the war.'[13] The early parts of these towns were characterised by low density two-storey development; this thesis will show how government publications and recommendations, which were influenced by the Garden City concept, conflicted with elements of urbanity, and therefore impacted upon the attempts to create urban environments in the New Towns. Throughout the study, the term 'New Town' refers specifically to towns designated under the 1946 and 1965 New Town Acts.

Following the fourteen first generation towns, the second generation New Towns were designated between 1961 and 1964. These towns aimed to provide new regional growth points and their initial target populations were much greater than the previous New Towns. The third generation towns were larger still, designated between 1967 and 1970, they were intended to stimulate new industry and growth outside the existing conurbations. Apart from Milton Keynes, the third generation New Towns were to provide expansion and renewal to existing large towns.[14] Cumbernauld New Town in Scotland is considered a standalone New Town, designated in 1955. For many, it signifies a break from the perceived low density of the first generation New Towns. John Gold has recently argued that at Cumbernauld, the designers abandoned the loose neighbourhood planning of the earlier New

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[12] Patrick Abercrombie, *Greater London Plan* (London: HMSO, 1944).
[13] Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 136.
[14] The New Towns Association, *The New Towns* ([n.p.]: [n. pub.], 1981), p. 1.

Towns in favour of compactness and cohesion.[15] Miles Glendinning has also argued that the Cumbernauld plan was a reaction against the low-density layouts of the earlier New Towns – which he argues took inspiration from the prevailing Garden City paradigm as a response to the evils of the dense laissez-faire industrial city.[16] Glendinning suggests that by the 1950s, there was a revolt against such ideas and a subsequent move toward notions of high-density 'urbanity.'[17] By tracing the development and origins of the concept of urbanity, as well as the implementation of the concept to the design of the earlier New Towns, this study challenges this view, to show how architects attempted to apply ideas of urbanity prior to the designation of Cumbernauld in 1955.

Harlow New Town provides the ideal case study to examine this early implementation of ideas of urbanity to design. Harlow was designated in March 1947 and was the fourth Mark I New Town to be designated (following Stevenage, Crawley and Hemel Hempstead). Frederick Gibberd was selected as architect planner to design the overall master plan since he was one of only a few with planning experience at this time. Furthermore, he was the only architect planner to serve a New Town from conception to completion, retaining a coherent vision throughout. More crucially, however, Gibberd developed his own ideas about urbanity, and from the outset he was determined to create a town with a sense of urbanity at Harlow. However, Gibberd was also a member of the MARS Group as well as an influential modernist architect during the inter-war period; ideas about urbanity appear to conflict with modernist values. To understand how 'urbanity' might fit into a modernist framework, it is first necessary to examine the broader discourse of modern architecture, to show how the new architectural ideas related to social aspects, in contrast to the visual ideas about urbanity and Townscape.

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[15] John R Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern architects and urban transformation, 1954-1972* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), p. 146.

[16] Miles Glendinning, 'Cluster Homes: Planning and Housing in Cumbernauld New Town', in *Housing the Twentieth Century Nation,* ed. by Elain Harwood and Alan Powers (London: Twentieth Century Society, 2008), pp. 133-146 (p. 133).

[17] Ibid.

MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Many recent publications have traced the history and development of modern architecture – the 'new architecture' which arose as a response to the cultural, technical and social developments in the Western world. Modernism in architecture was part of a wider Modern Movement across the arts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Kenneth Frampton has taken 1836 as his starting point for his critical analysis of modern architecture.[18] On the other hand, John Gold has recently argued that it is difficult to identify when modernism emerged; instead, Gold suggests that in Western and Central Europe, modernism achieved critical mass during the first three decades of the twentieth century.[19] It is common for narratives of this period of modernism to begin with the 'International Style' of the 1930s, jumping next to the 'New Brutalism' of the 1950s. The New Brutalism was an architectural concept promoted by *AR* editor Reyner Banham in 1955, where building structures were exhibited and materials were used 'as found'. Many publications on post-war modern architecture tend to focus on the work of architects Alison and Peter Smithson, 'the most obstinate protagonists' of Brutalist architecture.[20] Despite initially being members of the MARS Group, the Smithsons were against the International Style, or the 'white modern', and developed what was later named The New Brutalism as an alternative. Donald Leslie Johnson and Donald Langmead have implied that instead of a response to the International Style, the Brutalist architecture of the Smithsons was a reaction against 'Britain's conservatism: the "correct" but amorphous and dull architecture' which was 'epitomized in the work of Frederick Gibberd.'[21] Johnson and Langmead also suggest that the Smithsons' architecture was a reaction against New Town policy, which was based on the 'obsolescent' ideas of Howard. New Town policy followed Howard's principle of creating entirely new settlements, but it also endorsed modernist planning principles developed among CIAM and MARS Group members. Gibberd's work at Harlow New Town, although not Brutalist, was influenced by the

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[18] Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007).

[19] Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, p. 14.

[20] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: The Architectural Press, 1966), p. 10.

[21] Donald Leslie Johnson and Donald Langmead, *Makers of 20th Century Architecture: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), p. 313.

'New Empiricism', a notion also promoted by the *AR,* which preceded ideas of the New Brutalism. Bullock has recently described Gibberd's Harlow plan as a combination of CIAM's neighbourhood planning ideals, the new developments in road design, as well as the values of the Picturesque and the New Empiricism as advocated by the *AR.*[22] In this sense, the New Towns, which Gold has observed are 'unfamiliar territory'[23] to histories of modern architecture, and in particular, Gibberd's work at Harlow, could be considered modernist. That is to say, that Gibberd embraced and endorsed the modernist ideas generated by the architectural vanguard of that era.

Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Rejean Legault have argued that the conventional history of modern architecture often describes an International Style created by the early (inter-war) generation of modernist architects which eventually 'bled out' and collapsed as it was taken over by post-modernism.[24] Whether it was the New Brutalism or the Post-modern style which reacted to and attempted to replace the modern International Style, there remains a period which is often missed out from conventional narratives. This period, spanning between the second half of 1940s and early 50s has more recently come under discussion, for example, in historical studies of the *AR's* Townscape campaign. In fact, Aitchison argues that for this reason, Townscape is of great interest, as it stands at the junction between modernism and post-modernism.[25] Despite this, urbanity, as a strand of the discourse on Townscape, has yet to be examined in depth.

Prior to examining the development of the concept of urbanity, it is essential to look at the preceding and influential modernist ideas about architecture and city planning, to understand how urbanity can be situated within the context of modernism. For a starting point, this study takes a similar view to Gold in *The Experience of Modernism* and Leonardo Benevolo in *History of Modern Architecture.* Like Gold,

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[22] Bullock, *Building the Post-War World,* p. 132.

[23] Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, p. 16.

[24] Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Rejean Legault, 'Introduction: Critical Themes of Postwar Modernism', in *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture,* ed. by Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Rejean Legault (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), p. 11.

[25] Mathew Aitchison, 'Townscape: scope, scale and extent', *The Journal of Architecture,* 17 (2012), 621-642 (p. 639).

Benevelo argues it is impossible to pinpoint the exact origins of the Modern Movement in architecture, but suggests 1927, when a common attitude between individuals and groups became apparent.[26] Gold takes 1928, the year CIAM was formed. Alan Powers takes a similar view, suggesting 1930, as this year saw the beginning of a period of instability and a rise in unemployment which promoted discussion for a completely new start in Britain, after the promises of reconstruction in 1918 had 'turned sour.'[27] Throughout the thesis, the term 'modernist' is used to describe an individual, group or entity which embraced the modernity of this era, for example 'modernist architect' or 'modernist planning principles'. The word 'modernity' as Hilde Heynen has described, is the condition of living imposed upon individuals by the socio-economic process of modernisation.[28] The experience of modernity, Heynen states, involves a rupture with tradition. There are a variety of effects of this 'rupture' – some of which are reflected in 'modernism', which Heynen describes as the body of artistic and intellectual ideas and movements that deal with the process of modernisation.[29] Christopher Crouch has also shown that modernists wished to break with past traditions in order to set a cultural agenda for the future; the agenda of modernism being cultural and social emancipation.[30] Crouch argues that in terms of modernism in the visual arts, it was during the late Victorian period that a social agenda for art opened up. At the same time, Sally Everett explains that around the mid-nineteenth century modern artists began to create works of art which avoided social comment. These artists, who called themselves Formalists or Modernists, were concerned solely with producing pleasing arrangements of visual elements. These elements – or 'forms of art' – comprised lines, shapes, textures and colours.[31] Such an emphasis on aesthetics in Formalism during the Modern Movement in art points to the idea that architects concerned with purely visual elements of architecture and town planning could also be considered modernist. This idea is explored later in the thesis; I will place

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[26] Leonardo Benevolo, *History of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 412.

[27] Alan Powers, *Modern: The Modern Movement in Britain* (London: Merrell, 2005), p. 18.

[28] Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 3.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Christopher Crouch, *Modernism in Art, Design and Architecture* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), p. 8.

[31] *Art Theory and Criticism: An Anthology of Formalist, Avant-Garde, Contextualist and Post-Modernist Thought,* ed. by Sally Everett (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1991), p. x.

Gibberd and his notions of urbanity within this context, in an attempt to better understand the complexity of Gibberd's modernism.

A 'rupture with tradition' describes one of the key principles of modernist thought about the new architecture, which is often referred to in recent literature. Eric Mumford states that the main impetus for the creation of a coalition of avant-garde groups from across Europe came from the rejection of Le Corbusier's League of Nations competition entry in 1927. The reason for rejection, Mumford argues, was that the design did not comply with the officially favoured *Beaux-Arts* style.[32] However, Goldhagen argues that a definition of the 'new architecture' cannot be founded on style.[33] Regardless of modernist architects' views on style, or social or political inclination, Goldhagen argues that modernist architects shared the same cultural attitude: that tradition must be rejected as the foundation for a new architectural vocabulary. In addition to this, (and most crucial to this thesis) Goldhagen states that all modernist architects shared the conviction that it was their duty to employ the skills of their profession to facilitate social betterment.[34] This was another key objective set out at La Sarraz in 1928, when CIAM was officially formed. The aim was to put architecture back in its "real" plane – the economic and social plane.[35] This was in terms of both architecture as well as town planning, as Mumford shows: in 1930, CIAM formally expanded their focus to urbanism when Le Corbusier called for a doctrine of urbanism, with the hope of linking architecture and town planning with social evolution.[36]

Mumford and Gold have provided detailed accounts of the formation of CIAM, with Gold providing a comprehensive account of the works of the MARS Group. Both Gold and Mumford highlight the subjects and discussions of each of the ten CIAM congresses which took place from 1928 – 1956. The third CIAM congress held in Brussels in 1930, centred on rational site planning and looked at the functional

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[32] Mumford, *Defining Urban Design*, p. 2.

[33] Sarah Williams Goldhagen, 'Coda: Reconceptualizing the Modern', in *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture,* ed. by Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Rejean Legault (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), p. 303.

[34] Ibid., p. 304.

[35] Colin St John Wilson, *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture, The Uncompleted Project* (London: Academy Group Ltd, 1995), p. 21.

[36] Mumford, *Defining Urban Design*, p. 4.

housing schemes built by municipal governments across continental Europe.[37] Mumford reveals that the discussion at CIAM 3 was based around the question of high-rise versus low-rise housing. The debates of high-rise versus low-rise, or the flat versus the house, were part of an ongoing discussion about residential density, which began at the turn of the century and continued throughout the twentieth-century, having an impact upon housing developments during the period of study. On the one hand were the Garden City advocates who promoted low-rise low-density housing, and on the other, the modernist architects who promoted high-rise high-density housing. Those campaigning for low density saw the 'evils' of the Industrial city and believed houses spread apart at low densities would provide sunlight and fresh air to all, thus providing better living conditions. Modernist architects, on the other hand, dissatisfied with the appearance of the low-density housing of the suburbs built during the inter-war period, promoted high-density. 'High buildings set far apart from one another' was Le Corbusier's answer to overcome the 'bleak ugliness' of the suburbs while at the same time, providing open spaces for 'diversions, strolls, and games during leisure hours.'[38] Gibberd was influenced by the urban ideas of Le Corbusier and he too advocated high-density building: initially he believed this could achieve a sense of urbanity. Debates around residential density continued throughout the period of study; the changes in architectural ideas, as well as changing attitudes to density which coincided with changes in government, had an impact on the creation of urbanity at Harlow. These are themes which will be considered in detail throughout the thesis.

To summarise, drawing from recent publications, European modernist architects believed that a new architecture should be developed to suit the modernising society. The ideas were developed in the main through the MARS and CIAM groups whose members believed that breaking from tradition and embracing new technologies could go some way to create modern architecture. Most crucial to the study is the shared belief which existed among modernist architects that their architectural skills could be used to facilitate social betterment. Gold has examined this idea in detail and has identified three sociological characteristics which describe how modernist

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[37] Mumford, *Defining Urban Design*, p. 4.
[38] Le Corbusier, *The Athens Charter*, p. 61.

architects believed the new architecture would benefit society. These include social equality, the new sociability, and community.[39] Where before, social inequality in the traditional townscape was expressed spatially, the Modern Movement reconceptualised space using an egalitarian approach. Minimum space standards set out in the *Housing Manuals* meant the less wealthy could live in spaces as large as those who were perhaps more wealthy. The 'new sociability', a term given by Gold, describes the hopes of modernist architects that functional design and labour-saving devices could have a positive impact on lifestyle. The newly freed up time could be spent playing sports or strolling in the open spaces, spaces which were to be provided in accordance with the *Housing Manual*. Finally, the third social aspect considered was that of community. Adrian Forty has also considered conceptions of society in his recent study *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*. Forty argues that within modernist architectural discourse, the two most recurring ideas in relation to society were notions of community, and the dichotomy between public and private space.[40] The New Town plans adopted neighbourhood planning as an approach to creating the ideal residential environments for the creation of new communities. In this sense, the planning of the early New Towns could be considered as modernist. At Harlow, Gibberd fully embraced these modernist ideas, combining them with his own ideas of urbanity. In fact, Gibberd used the idea of neighbourhood planning as a means to create a greater sense of urbanity at Harlow.

DISCOURSE

Andrew Higgott has recently emphasised the significance of publications in uncovering and understanding twentieth-century architectural discourse. Where ideas developed through conversations, which by their nature are unrecorded, journal articles, books and political publications provide the evidence of such ideas. Higgott presents an architectural history through the study of discourse alone, or rather, through a series of discourses placed in sequence. He begins with the discovery of modernism in 1930s Britain as exemplified by editor J. M. Richards in

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[39] Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, p. 205.

[40] Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), p. 105.

the *AR*. A discourse of reconstruction follows, which consists of widely ranging discussions on social progress and ideas of city reconstruction. The human factor of community and the concept of the neighbourhood unit, according to Higgott, underlies both the 1942 MARS Plan for London and the 1943 Abercrombie County of London Plan. This embedding of architectural and planning practices into the social and political realm, Higgott argues, led to the 'forgetting of art.'[41] This theme will be examined in more detail in Part 1 of the thesis, to understand how and why the desire to reintroduce an artistic element to town planning arose, and how this related to mainstream modernist concepts of the time.

From the rational plans of the 1940s, rather than looking at the visual planning discourse, Higgott examines the work of the Smithsons and the campaigns of the *AR*. He shows that in the 1950s there was a shift to site-specific planning and a re-evaluation of place and material in the architectural discourse of the post-war years. The *AR's* Townscape campaign and the 'Functional Tradition' – a campaign launched by the *AR* in 1950 – advocated a return to aesthetics and town planning as an art form. However, Higgott concludes by stating that the *AR* campaigns had little effect on the development of towns and cities, ending with a quote from architectural historian Joseph Rykwert asserting the *AR*'s 'failure to register an influence on the bulk of current architecture.'[42] This highlights the importance of examining the development of Gibberd's ideas about urbanity, as influenced by the *AR*, since Gibberd's master planning at Harlow serves as an example of Townscape's influence on town planning practice as well as theory.

Elizabeth Darling has also examined the discourse of architectural modernism in the inter-war years, showing the production of what she terms 'narratives of modernity.'[43] She argues that modernist reformers used these narratives to persuade politicians that modernism was the correct means to re-form the post-war nation in Britain. Bullock has also examined the architectural discourse of the post-war years. In particular, he focuses on the first decade following the end of the Second World War to show, as both Gold and Darling have done, how modern architecture became

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[41] Higgott, p. 82.
[42] Ibid., p. 109.
[43] Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity before reconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2007).

established in Britain. By studying the 'architectural elite', leading journals of the time (including the *AR*), as well as MARS and CIAM activities, Bullock demonstrates the autonomy of the architectural debate.[44] These recent publications have shown how modernist architectural ideas became mainstream, winning widespread acceptance across Britain, becoming the chosen form of architecture among the Local Authorities and Development Corporations responsible for much of the new building which took place after the War. This highlights the significant role discourse played in the development and establishment of modern architectural ideas in Britain. In Part 1 of this study, the thesis will take a similar approach to Higgott and others; examining the discourse on visual planning to understand the history and development of the concept of urbanity. Unlike Higgott, however, I will argue that through Gibberd – whose ideas of urbanity were influenced by the *AR* – visual planning concepts of the 1940s and 50s had a significant impact on town developments. Chapter 1 focuses on the need to develop such a concept, while Chapter 2 examines and establishes the defining features of urbanity, to better understand the relationship between urbanity and mainstream modernist thought.

MODERN ARCHITECTURE: DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE

Part 2 of the study examines how the elements of urbanity were applied by Gibberd and the Harlow Development Corporation (HDC) to the design of housing at Harlow. Recent publications which have looked at the development of modernist architectural discourse have subsequently looked at the application of modernist principles to architectural design. For example, in *The Practice of Modernism* Gold shows how the newly-formed architectural ideas were applied to design, particularly in relation to inner city areas. Although modernist architects welcomed the idea of New Towns, believing that large-scale urban projects could solve the social problems following the War, the first generation New Towns are excluded from Gold's review of examples of modern architecture and planning in Britain. Gold demonstrates how modernist architects considered the layout, design and aesthetics of these early New Towns to be direct descendants from the Garden Cities.[45] The

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[44] Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[45] Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, p. 3.

new town idea owed much to Howard's earlier conception, however, as Chapter 1 shows, modernist architects and planners were opposed to the Garden City ideal. Several of the architect planners who were to design New Towns shared this same view, including Gibberd. Part 1 of the study demonstrates how Gibberd's ambitions to create a sense of urbanity at Harlow were essentially a reaction against the low-density Garden Cities and suburbs of the inter-war period. Therefore, the discourse on visual planning, as well as modernist architectural discourse, was in tension with Garden City principles. Those who promoted visual planning ideas of urbanity sought the creation of urban environments in opposition to Garden City supporters, who advocated the amalgamation of town and country and low-density development. While exploring Gibberd's implementation of urbanity in Part 2 of the study, I will show how the Ministries responsible for housing favoured Garden City-type planning; therefore, urbanity was also potentially in tension with government guidelines. Furthermore, I will question both the current as well as the historical exclusion of first generation New Towns as examples of modernist planning.

Recent publications have argued that alternative strands of modern architecture existed, which ran parallel with the more well-known mainstream modernism. Stephen Kite, writing about the contested architectural visions of 1950s London in *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond* argues that Le Corbusier's rationalism was not the only current 'cutting-edge trend.'[46] At this time, the housing of the London County Council's (LCC) architectural department, was drawing considerable attention from the architectural press and was attracting many highly skilled younger architects. Kite uses the LCC's renowned Roehampton housing estate as a case study to highlight two differing styles of modernism, which he terms 'hard' and 'soft'. The estate was divided into two, to be designed by two separate design teams within the LCC. John Partridge was an architect in the team to design the west portion of the scheme and has recently described the architectural debate which took place in the LCC housing department. He explains that the department became 'polarised into two opposing

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[46] Stephen Kite, 'Softs and Hards: Colin St. John Wilson and the Contested Visions of 1950s London' in *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond,* ed. by Mark Crinson and Claire Zimmerman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 57.

philosophies.'[47] Those designing 'Alton West' took inspiration from the work of Le Corbusier, while those designing the opposing 'Alton East' scheme looked to the socially advanced Scandinavian housing, calling themselves the 'New Humanists.'[48] This division of modernist architecture into 'soft' and 'hard' was a reflection of the division which initially began to emerge in architectural discourse. The 'New Humanism', or the 'New Empiricism' was a visual theme developed by the *AR*.

THE DISCOURSE ON VISUAL PLANNING

It is common for architectural histories of mid-twentieth century architecture to focus on the 'New Brutalism' rather than the 'New Empiricism', which was promoted by the *AR* only a few years earlier. In comparison to the focus on materials and structure in the New Brutalism, the 'New Empiricism' took inspiration from Scandinavian architecture and aimed to use Picturesque principles to 'humanise' the aesthetics of the earlier International Style. This was an attempt to make modern architecture more visually appealing to the people. The psychological impact of the Second World War coupled with the demise of the British Empire also prompted a renewed interest in English culture and identity in literature and the arts. This was also reflected in the *AR*'s visual planning campaigns, which sought to establish an English version of modern architecture. David Matless has recently examined the idea of Englishness and argues that during the 1920s and 30s, a movement towards planning and preservation of the landscape sought to define Englishness as orderly and modern; by the post-war period the 'planner-preservationist' Englishness of the earlier period had reached a position of cultural and political power.[49] When Labour came to power in 1945 with ambitions to create a welfare system, rather like the one which existed in Sweden, Mumford has recently suggested that the use of a 'Swedish style', or the New Empiricism, was seen as a logical architectural expression.'[50] Furthermore, Harriet Atkinson has also argued that architectural ideas associated with the Picturesque became a credible architectural route for those engaged in reconstruction debates; those involved in post-war building and

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[47] John Partridge, 'Roehampton Housing', in *Housing the Twentieth Century Nation,* ed. by Elain Harwood and Alan Powers (London: Twentieth Century Society, 2008), p. 116.
[48] Ibid.
[49] David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1998), p. 15.
[50] Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, p. 167.

reconstruction believed that improving the appearance of Britain following the Blitz, would have a positive impact on national morale.[51] These social, cultural and political changes would facilitate the implementaion of elements of visual planning in the design of post-war housing, as the thesis will later reveal.

The *AR*'s promotion of the 'New Empiricism', Picturesque planning, and the idea of an English modern architecture can be understood as part of a wider campaign to address the aesthetic side of architecture and planning. The 'Townscape' campaign incorporated many of these earlier ideas, and was one among many other *AR* visual planning campaigns. Also concerning the visual aspects of towns were the 'outrage' and 'counter-attack against subtopia' special issues, but alongside these, ran parallel features which explored and advocated certain building styles and architectural design principles. These campaigns were responding to the shifting ideas in the wider British architectural discourse, but were also influenced by visual planning ideas developed by other modernist architects and planners. Thomas Sharp played a key role in the development of Townscape ideas; his contributions to modern townscape have been reviewed recently in a special issue of *Planning Perspectives*.[52] Erdem Erten considers Townscape as a movement akin to other planning movements, such as the Garden City Movement, supported by its association. He concludes that Townscape should not be considered a movement as such, but as urban design pedagogy, which according to Erten, does not make it any less powerful.[53] It was a way of teaching people how to visualise the urban environment, how to perceive it, and how to make new interventions. Gold has recently described the *AR*'s Townscape approach as a campaign to realign modernism with Picturesque ideas in order to counteract the 'emotional boredom' brought about by the aesthetics of the earlier modern architecture.[54]

John Pendlebury has recently reviewed Sharp's key texts and argues these works were an important contribution to planning debate and practice. However,

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[51] Harriet Atkinson, *The Festival of Britain: A Land and Its People* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), p. 66.

[52] *Planning Perspectives,* 24 (2009)

[53] Erdem Erten, 'Thomas Sharp's collaboration with H. de C. Hastings: the formulations of townscape as urban design pedagogy', *Planning Perspectives,* 24 (2009) 29-49.

[54] Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, p. 270.

Pendlebury argues that Sharp's ideas were distinct from the two dominant paradigms of the time: the Garden City movement and the 'Corbusian' modernism.[55] Sharp's core ideas were set out in the early publication of *Town and Countryside,* where he strongly criticised Howard's Garden City concept and suggested that the correct response to the problem of overcrowding in Victorian cities should be an aim to improve, not abandon them. His main concern with the Garden City Movement was the influence it had on planning standards of the time, for example, the prevalent density of '12 houses to the acre' which became the model density for government recommendations after the War. Chapter 1 will examine the debates around residential density which began in the 1930s and continued throughout the development of the New Towns. Furthermore, the notion that there might be a 'middle ground' between the dominant city planning paradigms is investigated in the thesis in relation to ideas of urbanity.

It is clear that Thomas Sharp played a key role in the 1930s and 1940s in the development of an alternative approach to planning, as Pendlebury has shown. In addition, as Erten shows, Sharp as a practising planner, contributed greatly to the conception of Townscape as design pedagogy. However, despite Sharp's numerous plans and publications, the implementation of his theories to design was extremely limited. Sharp was in fact the initial master planner of Crawley New Town, (like Harlow, a first generation New Town), but he resigned his position following a characteristic falling-out.[56] Peter Larkham has also recently reviewed Sharp's town planning work of the immediate post-war period, arguing that although Sharp's town plan for Chichester was well received locally and nationally, it was not implemented due to conflicts with West Sussex County Council.[57] The 1947 Planning Act had elevated County Councils to the new status of Planning Authority, which as this thesis will later demonstrate, caused tensions and power struggles between the various parties involved in the planning process. Such tensions between groups led to the compromise of architectural and town planning design principles, which in turn, has led to the omission of such plans from histories of post-war planning.

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[55] John Pendlebury, 'The Urbanism of Thomas Sharp', *Planning Perspectives,* 24 (2009) 3-27 (p. 3).
[56] Pendlebury, 'The Urbanism of Thomas Sharp', p. 15.
[57] Peter Larkham, 'Thomas Sharp and the post-war replanning of Chichester: conflict, confusion and delay', *Planning Perspectives,* 24 (2009), 51-75 (p. 51).

Recent research is now beginning to address this by examining the wider influence of key planners, rather than focusing on familiar case studies such as London and Plymouth, or on the works of more prolific planners such as Abercrombie.[58]

This thesis will reveal how Gibberd's town planning work at Harlow was also compromised by such administrative processes, thus contributing to the recent research on post-war planning. Furthermore, Townscape and the related post-war campaigns of the *AR* have recently attracted the interest of writers and scholars on an international scale. Townscape is considered to be a recognised town-planning idiom, developed through architectural discourse and established as pedagogy in the 1950s.[59] In my view 'urbanity' was the development of common Townscape themes and their adaption to elements suitable for use in design – or, the practice of Townscape. The application of such ideas to the design of town plans and housing has yet to be studied and could contribute to this ongoing and developing historical discourse on Townscape.

URBANITY

Throughout the twentieth century to recent times, the word 'urbanity' has had a number of different meanings. Traditionally, urbanity describes social characteristics – an urbane quality, courteousness and good manners. More recently, the word has been used as a synonym for urban culture in sociology; where sociologists have been examining what it is that makes a city, economically, socially and politically.[60] The word urbanity has also been used to describe the daily life in the city and the social contacts within the boundaries of the city.[61] These evolved definitions of urbanity, however, are very different to the type of urbanity fostered by Gibberd and the editors of the *AR* during the 1940s and 50s. Adrian Forty in his recent study of

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[58] *The Blitz and its Legacy: Wartime Deconstruction to Post-War Reconstruction,* ed. by Mark Clapson and Peter J. Larkham (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), Peter J. Larkham and John Pendlebury, 'Reconstruction planning and the small town in early post-war Britain', *Planning Perspectives,* 23 (2008), 291-321.

[59] Erten, 'Thomas Sharp's collaboration with H. de C. Hastings', p. 32.

[60] Anton C. Zijderveld, *A Theory of Urbanity: The Economic and Civic Culture of Cities* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998)

[61] Christian Ruby, '(Promised) Scenes of Urbanity', in *The Urban Moment: Cosmopolitan Essays on the late 20th Century City,* ed. by Robert A. Beauregard and Sophie Body-Gendrot (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1999), pp. 241-248 (p. 241).

modern architecture argues that the word 'urbanity' was used during this period as an attempt to find a description for architecture's social qualities. He examines two examples of the use of the word, first, arguing that in the 1950s influential sociologist and historian Lewis Mumford used the word to describe the realisation of a 'civilized collective urban life.'[62] Secondly, Forty refers to CIAM member Serge Chermayeff and Christopher Alexander's use of the word in their 1963 publication *Community and Privacy*.[63] Forty argues that to Chermayeff and Alexander, 'urbanity' was the result of the merging of social and physical aspects of the city.[64] The thesis argues, however, that to Gibberd and the editors of the *AR*, 'urbanity' was a purely aesthetic principle.

Recent publications which look at modern housing and the New Towns have referred to a similar idea of urbanity, often observing what is considered to be a lack of urbanity in the first generation New Towns.[65] The majority of publications which look at the New Towns during this period draw attention to the *AR*'s 1953 attack, where the editors announced the 'failure of the New Towns' as a result of their perceived lack of urbanity.[66] Referring specifically to 'urbanity', Colin Ward has more recently stated that the most widespread criticism of the New Towns was the 'loss of the quality of urbanity associated with the street.'[67] Bullock also refers to urbanity when comparing the first housing group in Harlow, designed by Gibberd and Partners, to Gibberd's earlier housing scheme of 1946 at Somerford Grove in Hackney. Bullock suggests that the 'containment and urbanity' at Somerford Grove are absent from Mark Hall Moors, and the two-storey houses create no greater sense of urbanity than the typical suburbs of the time.[68] Bullock and Ward's recent observations of urbanity (or rather, the lack of it) in New Town housing points towards the idea that during the 1940s and 50s, urbanity was concerned more with aesthetics than social issues. However, neither specifies exactly what or how a visual

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[62] Forty, p. 112.

[63] Serge Chermayeff and Christopher Alexander, *Community and Privacy: Toward a New Architecture of Humanism* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1963).

[64] Forty, p. 114.

[65] Bullock, *Building the Post-War World,* p. 131. and Gold, *The Practice of Modernism,* p. 3.

[66] J. M. Richards, 'Failure of the New Towns', *The Architectural Review,* 114 (1953), 28-32.

[67] Colin Ward, *New Town, Home Town: The Lessons of Experience* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1993), p. 136.

[68] Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, p. 134.

quality of urbanity might be created. Furthermore, the perceived lack of urban quality in the early New Towns has led to their association with the Garden City Movement rather than the Modern Movement. This thesis aims to challenge this common belief by examining the conception and development of urbanity during the 1940s and 50s, as well as the implementation of urbanity at Harlow New Town, in order to understand how Harlow might fit into a modernist framework.

THESIS STRUCTURE

The thesis is divided into two parts. Part 1, entitled 'Theory', will examine the discourse of visual planning to demonstrate how urbanity can be understood as a modernist principle. Chapter 1 shows how the discussions which prompted the desire to create such a design principle as urbanity took place within modernist circles. Chapter 2 investigates the formation of the concept, demonstrating how urbanity was linked to a strand of discourse which sought to 'soften' the aesthetics of the earlier modernism whilst retaining the core social values of the earlier period. At this point, it becomes apparent that Gibberd took an unusual stance among his modernist contemporaries, since Gibberd emphasised aesthetics without social comment. Part 2 of study examines Gibberd's implementation of urbanity elements at Harlow, showing how aesthetics took precedence over sociological recommendations. However, a closer inspection reveals that behind Gibberd's apparent aesthetic agenda was a concern for the community as a whole. Archive material provides a substantial amount of evidence. The HDC files at the Essex Record Office clearly document Gibberd's ambition to create urbanity at Harlow, as well as his attempts to create urbanity. The National Archive provides material which contributes to the understanding of planning policies which impacted upon the creation of urbanity at Harlow, since it holds all files relating to the Ministries responsible for housing during the period of study. The British Newspaper Library has also been a key source of information, as newspapers give an insight into the views of the residents and their response to their surrounding urban environment, thus demonstrating the impact of the implementation of urbanity on the people.

The study of discourse on visual planning in part one of the thesis enabled the singling out of several elements which Gibberd believed could contribute to a sense of urbanity. I categorise these elements as:

- High density
- Visual variety
- A sense of enclosure
- A sense of unity

These themes form the chapters of Part 2, entitled 'Practice', where I examine Gibberd's attempt to create urbanity at Harlow by the implementation of each urbanity element to the design of housing. The chapters are placed in chronological order, beginning with Chapter 3, which looks at the attempts to build high-density housing. The chapter begins with an account of the density recommendations established by the government during the wartime years; these, in turn, had a significant impact on the 1947 master plan, as well as the development of high-density housing and urbanity at Mark Hall North, the first neighbourhood to be built at Harlow. Chapter 4 examines the element of visual variety, again beginning with an overview of government guidelines which had an impact on the creation of urbanity. The first attempts to create visual variety began at Mark Hall North in the early 1950s, with ideas continuing to develop throughout the period of study. Chapter 5 looks next at the idea of enclosure and the visual effects of compact development. By the mid 1950s, the *AR* had launched their 'Outrage' campaign, arguing against the spread of 'Subtopia'. These articles were highly influential, changing the views of those within the Ministry responsible for housing. Furthermore, a change in government brought a change in attitude towards residential densities. A higher permitted density at Harlow enabled the application of the additional urbanity element of enclosure, particularly at 'The Hornbeams and Rivermill', which was constructed in 1956-61. Finally, Chapter 6 examines the element of unity. A changing society began to have an effect on the shape of housing in the New Towns. At Harlow, Gibberd and the HDC were faced with the challenges of creating urbanity with a new demand for low-density houses for sale. To attract buyers, the HDC built detached and semi-detached houses, which in turn, had a negative impact on the unity of the facade – which Gibberd argued could be

created by building terraces. The chapter also examines the visual and social effects of the 'open fronts policy', which was applied by Gibberd and the HDC in an attempt to create a visually unified town. Although the chapters are in a chronological order, they examine the continuing development of each urbanity element throughout the period of study (1947-67). This date range has been selected for Part 2 of the study as it begins with the designation of Harlow and ends at a time when architects, planners and critics reflected upon the early New Town developments, thinking ahead to future developments in the later New Towns. While focusing on Harlow, each chapter also looks at examples of housing in other first generation New Towns, to explore how Gibberd's work at Harlow fits into a wider context.

Housing is the key building type examined throughout the study, as Gold has argued, housing had a greater impact on post-war urban development in comparison with other building types.[69] Since much of the housing in Harlow and the New Towns remains largely unchanged since construction, the housing itself will also contribute to the body of evidence for examination. My study of housing in Harlow coupled with my study of architectural discourse, archive and newspaper research shows that the implementation, as well as the theory of urbanity, placed emphasis on visual over social aspects. However, I will argue that rather than conflicting with modernist values, these visual planning notions formed an additional strand of modernist thinking about town planning. Part 1 shows how urbanity was part of a wider discourse on visual planning, which was situated within the modernist framework – despite an emphasis on aesthetics, the majority of architects involved considered visual planning to be explicitly modernist. The thesis focuses in particular on Gibberd's interpretation of urbanity, since Gibberd played a central part in the development not only of the concept, but also in the practice of urbanity.

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[69] Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, p. 14.

PART ONE: THEORY
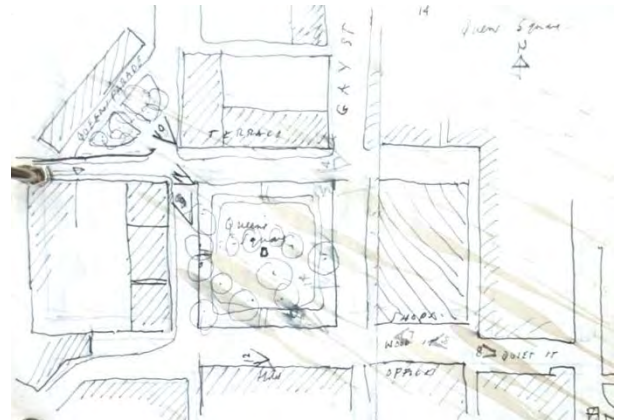
PART 1: THEORY

In Part 1 of this study, I will examine the development of ideas about visual planning and 'urbanity' – a visual town-like quality. The discourse on visual planning began in the 1940s, when a number of modernist architects reacted to the housing developments of the inter-war period. Much of their criticism was from an aesthetic point of view, which seemed to conflict with modernist values – where function and use were to take precedence over form and appearance. The tensions between modernist architectural discourse and the discourse of visual planning are evident in two book reviews given by Frederick Gibberd in the *Architects' Journal (AJ)* in October 1942. Gibberd praised *Britain Rebuilt* stating that author Eric de Maré had a clear understanding of architecture, which was explained in the 'now familiar [...] terms of sociology, new materials, new methods, standardization, mass-production, pre-fabrication, fitness for purpose, and so on.'[1] Gibberd's summation of architecture in these terms seems appropriate, as he was considered by his contemporaries to be a modern architect. Gibberd's comments in his review of *Sixty Years of Planning* by the Bournville Village Trust were also aligned with mainstream modernist thinking on city planning, since he rejected the Garden City ideal as many other modernists did. He argued that the book, filled with pictures of cottages, housing estates and garden suburbs, was 'propaganda for popular consumption' on the Garden City Movement. It contained the 'inevitable' comparative photos of 'good' and 'bad' housing which Gibberd described as follows:

> the bad being of course slum courts, the "good" in this case being the detached and semi-detached "cottages" one finds in this form of development. There is little architecture and no sense of urbanity; that is excepting in a preliminary historical review where two pictures of Georgian terraces effectively damn all that follows.[2]

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[1] Frederick Gibberd, 'More Reconstruction', *AJ*, 95 (1942), p. 255.

[2] Ibid.

This demonstrates that Gibberd's views were progressive, as his use of the phrase 'a sense of urbanity' was an early – perhaps even the first – use of such a term in the architectural journals. It would not be until the early 1950s that 'urbanity' would become more widely used. I will argue in Chapter 2 that with Gibberd's use of the word 'urbanity' to encompass a number of ideas about the town and its appearance came a more cohesive design concept of visual town planning. Furthermore, where such ideas today are perhaps regarded as opposed to mainstream modernism, I will argue that Gibberd's development of principles of urbanity formed a unique strand of discourse from a modernist standpoint. Rather than simply reviewing and analysing existing urban environments as his contemporaries did, Gibberd developed ideas which could be implemented in the design of housing, in an attempt to create a visual sense of urbanity. Part 1 of the thesis will argue that modernism ostensibly opposed aesthetic motivation; Chapter 1 will begin to reveal how some modernist architects continued to show concern for the aesthetic aspects of architecture and planning.

1 THE NEED FOR URBANITY

In this chapter I will examine the architectural discourse and criticism of inter-war housing developments to show how a small number of modernist architects began to promote ideas which were unique to the two opposing urban planning paradigms of the time. Although such ideas were not embraced by an all-encompassing theory, they were the beginnings of what would later become a more cohesive notion of urbanity following the Second World War. Firstly, the architectural discourse which provided the impetus for the formation of the concept of urbanity will be examined. I will argue that modernist architects, although criticising the housing developments of the inter-war years on aesthetic grounds, increasingly looked for social reasons to support their aesthetic preferences, in a manner more fitting to modernism. The chapter begins with an investigation of the criticism aimed at the suburbs, to show how modernist architects considered low residential density and a lack of planning as key problems. The slum clearances of the 1930s accelerated discussions about density and housing types, and by the time of the Second World War, modernist architects began developing large-scale city reconstruction plans, taking on board the discussions of the previous few decades. Reacting to the low-density garden-city type planning, modernist architects produced plans which endorsed high-density blocks placed in open space, and were regional in scale. Examining the criticism of the suburbs and the initial city planning ideas put forward by the MARS Group will provide a clearer understanding of the mainstream modernist thought with its social agenda, which provided the backdrop for the development of urbanity.

1.1 THE LACK OF PLANNING

1.1.1 The Inter-War Suburbs

Recent publications have examined the development and criticism of the British inter-war suburbs, showing how the suburbs were attacked from both the sociological angle as well as from an aesthetic point of view. Arthur Middleton

Edwards describes the three types of suburban development in Britain: municipal suburbia provided and designed by Local Authorities; speculative suburbia built by the speculative builder; and finally, 'individualistic suburbia'. The latter describes suburbs which comprised a mixture of the five standard house types as shown in *Illustrated Carpenter and Builder* built upon empty plots purchased by individuals.[3] London's inter-war municipal suburban housing schemes received the majority of the sociological criticism, as both Meryl Aldridge and Alan Jackson demonstrate.[4] The Becontree and Dagenham estate developed by the London County Council (LCC) in the 1920s was subject to a social study by Terence Young in 1934 and the Watling estate, also by the LCC, was examined by Ruth Durant in 1939. Young's study highlighted the lack of effective transport links and social provision, blaming the weakness of planning legislation and local government structure. Durant concluded that the LCC suburban housing estates heightened the loneliness of urban people; like Young, she also noted the lack of amenities and recommended the provision of more community buildings.[5] Aldridge summarises the problem by stating that the organisation and power to coordinate the provision of transport, education, welfare, health, shopping or recreational facilities simply did not exist.[6] There was also no attempt to attract local industries to these new housing areas, thus contributing further to the transport problems, as well as depriving the suburbs of a variety of building types. Furthermore, the housing tended to consist only of two-storey development, and as Edwards suggests, municipal suburbia's dull appearance was its most obvious fault.[7]

Modernist architects believed that the lack of planning and social provision in the suburbs led to 'dreary' environments, therefore giving grounds to criticise heavily the aesthetic nature of the housing. Typically, they criticised the suburbs as a whole, on aesthetic grounds, without necessarily making distinctions between the various

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[3] Arthur Middleton Edwards, *The Design of Suburbia; a critical study in environmental history* (London: Pembridge Press, 1981), p. 135.

[4] Meryl Aldridge, *The British New Towns: A Programme without Policy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 13. and Alan Jackson, *Semi-Detached London* (London: Wild Swan Publications, 1991), p. 132.

[5] Ibid., p. 15.

[6] Ibid., p. 13.

[7] Edwards, *The Design of Suburbia*, p. 110.

types of suburbia. There were a few exceptions – namely Gibberd, who in his 1938 publication *The Architecture of England from Norman Times to the Present Day* explained that the eighteenth-century tradition of grouping houses together within open spaces had been lost in speculative suburbia. Instead, the private builder built small individual dwellings, creating what he called a 'tooth and gap' effect.[8] Gibberd also accused the speculative builder of building in the 'imitation Tudor cottage style' where the houses with imitation half timbering were 'decorated rather than designed', thus going against the grain of modernist thought relating to ornamentation.[9] More recently, Edwards has explained that for the houses to have been saleable and therefore profitable to the private builder, speculative houses had to be emphatically middle-class, yet cheap to build.[10] Since houses built with State assistance were, as Gibberd described them, 'simple rectangular brick boxes,'[11] the application of any style from the past would be emphatically different from the council housing of municipal suburbia. For Gibberd, a supporter of modernist architecture, it would seem that the speculative housing which parodied past styles would be problematical. However, referring later to the LCC 'out-county'[12] estates, Gibberd praised the ideals of the tightly built towns of Cheltenham, Lewes and Saffron Walden, claiming that 'anathema were the giant LCC out-county estates of two-storey cottages.'[13] This suggests that the style and decoration of building were not the key issues for Gibberd, since these old English towns comprise a mixture of decorated buildings. Already more important to Gibberd were the layout of buildings and the spaces formed between them.

A number of other modernist architects also criticised the suburban developments of the inter-war years. In 1942 Ralph Tubbs published *Living in Cities.* The book was aimed at the layman and intended to dispel common misconceptions of modern

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[8] Frederick Gibberd, *The Architecture of England from Norman Times to the Present Day* (Surrey: The Architectural Press, 1938), p. 42.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Edwards, p. 127.

[11] Gibberd, *The Architecture of England,* p. 42.

[12] So great was the need for housing that the LCC purchased land outside the County boundaries to build municipal estates which came to be known as 'Out-County estates'.

[13] Frederick Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town* (Stevenage: Publications For Companies, 1980), p. 105.

architecture, thus promoting it as a way forward in relation to reconstruction after the War. Tubbs expressed his aversion to the suburbs, advocating the reconstruction of city centres as opposed to the continued 'suffocating expansion' of suburban housing.[14] He accused rows of semi-detached and detached houses of destroying the unity of the street, and of lacking the quality of a town or of the country.[15] Like Gibberd, Tubbs looked to the past, praising the architecture and planning of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, arguing that the 'dignified terraces' of this period contributed to the layout of Britain's finest cities.[16] Tubbs believed that when cities were reconstructed after the War, they should be 'proud of being cities and not ashamed like the compromising "garden cities."'[17]
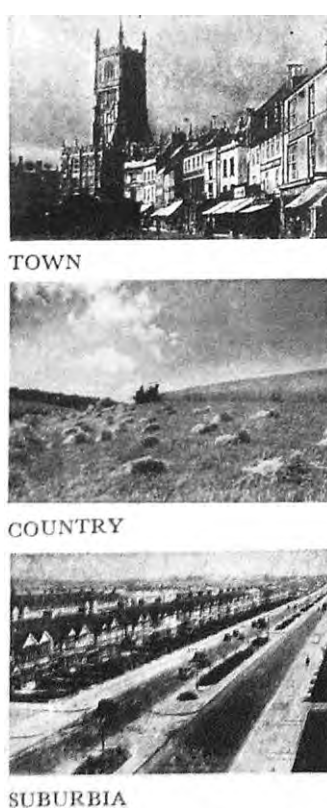
Fig.1.1. Town or country, not universal suburbia (Tubbs, *Living in Cities,* 1942)

Modernist architects like Tubbs believed the Garden City concept of merging town and country had greatly influenced the inter-war suburban developments. Tubbs argued, however, that after the War, urban centres should be rebuilt as towns and kept separate from the countryside, as opposed to the continued spread of a 'universal suburbia' (fig.1.1). Representing the three types of environment with photographs, his image for town development showed a curving main street in an old English town. The buildings which line the street are of three storeys and form a continuous facade with a varied roofline. This image of the English town would play a significant role in the development of visual planning ideas as well as Gibberd's formulation of the concept of urbanity. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

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[14] Ralph Tubbs, *Living in Cities* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1942), p. 30.
[15] Ibid., p. 37.
[16] Ibid., p. 14.
[17] Ibid., p. 34.

Influencing both Gibberd and Tubbs, Thomas Sharp, perhaps providing the most vehement comments, began his critique of the suburbs in the early 1930s. Sharp believed the suburban ideal had a destructive impact on the beauty of both town and countryside. He was most clear about this in his 1932 publication *Town and Countryside: Some aspects of urban and rural development.* Sharp explained that the Victorian era had left a legacy of 'sordid and ugly towns' and he cursed the 'blind callousness' of the men who had created them. Of these sordid and ugly towns, Sharp observed – 'we creep out of them into the country – which we, in our turn, destroy with an equal blindness.'[18] He explained:

> Two diametrically opposed, dramatically contrasting, inevitable types of beauty are being displaced by one drab, revolting neutrality. Rural influences neutralize the town. Urban influences neutralize the country... The strong, masculine virility of the town; the softer beauty, the richness, the fruitfulness of that mother of men, the countryside, will be debased into one sterile, hermaphroditic beastliness.[19]

The destruction of beauty in both town and country was Sharp's fundamental concern with the advances of suburban development, a topic he took further in his next polemical text, *English Panorama.* He described the English suburbs as 'vague, wasteful, formless, incoherent,' sprawling drearily over the counties. The formula – 'one plus one plus one ad infinitum' resulted in 'the covering of the greatest possible space with the least positive aesthetic result.'[20] In his 1940 publication *Town Planning,* Sharp argued that in the twentieth century, there was no longer the possibility of beauty in the town. However, he advocated that in an attempt to retain some beauty, the 'sharp dramatic contrast' between town and country should be maintained, instead of 'driving great wedges of Suburbia between them.'[21]

Looking at the criticism of the inter-war suburbs from modernist architects Gibberd, Tubbs and Sharp, it appears that much of the criticism was from an aesthetic point of

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[18] Thomas Sharp, *Town and Countryside: Some aspects of urban and rural development* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 3.
[19] Ibid., p. 11.
[20] Thomas Sharp, *English Panorama* (London: Dent, 1936), p. 86.
[21] Thomas Sharp, *Town Planning* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1940), p. 55.

view. This seems to conflict with the CIAM doctrine, which called for social aspects of architecture to come before aesthetics. An explanation for this could be the influence of the earlier modernist ideas from Continental Europe. Elizabeth Darling argues that certain preconditions which helped generate modernism, for example, progressive clients, existed initially only in Continental Europe.[22] As a result, aspects of European modernism were 'imported'; the imported modernism bringing with it strong political connotations. In relation to the importation of modernism, Anthony Jackson refers to an article in the *AR* by modernist architect Berthold Lubetkin in 1932, to show how such imported ideas about the new architecture might have exceeded the English concern for sociology:

> Soviet architects feel no animosity towards theories (as do their colleagues in capitalist countries), because their ambition is not simply to build architecturally, but to build socialistically as well.[23]

Lubetkin participated in a number of revolutionary groups after the Russian Revolution and was associated with leading figures of the Constructivist movement.[24] During the late 1920s, Lubetkin became dissatisfied with the *Beaux-Arts* traditions whilst studying and practising in Paris, so moved to England in 1930 with the hope of finding a more flexible society, a society which might be more open to the social ideas of modernism. However, as Jackson argues, instead of finding tolerance, Lubetkin found indifference. He wrote, '...in England the price which has to be paid in fighting for each innovation represents an enormous amount of energy. Each step on the road to progress is a struggle against conservatism and prejudice.'[25] Jackson shows that in the early 1930s, after architect Howard Robertson had attended the Congress in Brussels, he informed CIAM that there was

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[22] Darling, *Re-forming Britain*, p. 2.

[23] Berthold Lubetkin 'Architectural Thought Since the Revolution', *AR,* 71 (1932) p. 201. in *The Politics of Architecture A History of Modern Architecture in Britain* (London: The Architectural Press, 1970), p. 44.

[24] John Allen, 'Lubetkin, Berthold Romanovich (1901–1990)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2007) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40675> [accessed 4 January 2013] (para. 2 of 13)

[25] Berthold Lubetkin, 'Modern Architecture in England', *American Architect and Architecture*, 90 (1937) in Anthony Jackson, 'The Politics of Architecture: English Architecture 1929-1951', *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 24 (1965), 97-107 (p. 103).

no interest in the Modern Movement in England.[26] By the mid 1930s, however, Jackson argues that the destruction of democratic institutions by the far-right National Socialists in Germany 'frightened the liberal intellectual into abandoning the slow process of social reform for the direct political methods of Socialism.'[27] At the same time, the MARS Group saw that the principles of English socialism were in accordance with modern architecture.[28] Bill Risebero also argues that to most architects in the west, modern architecture became associated with socialism, and equally, those who saw hope in socialism believed modern architecture was the way forward.[29]

In light of the influence of socialism on modernist architectural thinking, the criticism of the suburbs can be considered within a political context. For example, Sharp was strongly opposed to the individualistic nature of semi-detached and detached suburban developments. He argued that the 'semi-detached houses in a sham-rural street in a wilderness of semi-detached houses in a sham-rural street are indeed more than a chaos of romantic individualism in themselves: they are the physical expression of the prime social evil of the age.'[30] He claimed that the two units in which man's mass association had always been so clearly symbolised and illustrated – the street and the town – were absent from the suburbs, resulting in supreme individualism.[31] The suburbs were the product of liberal capitalism. Private developers built the semi-detached houses, decorating them with mock Tudor boards to give the appearance of middle-class homes, in order to make profit rather than to benefit the community as a whole. In fact, Sharp argued that community did not exist in the suburbs. He argued that citizens did not exist in suburban developments either, only the inhabitants of individual units.[32] These views suggest that Sharp's

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[26] Anthony Jackson, English Architecture 1929-1951', *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 24 (1965), 97-107 (p. 101).

[27] Anthony Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture A History of Modern Architecture in Britain* (London: The Architectural Press, 1970), p. 66.

[28] Jackson, 'The Politics of Architecture', p. 103.

[29] Bill Risebero, *Modern Architecture and Design: An Alternative History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), p. 172.

[30] Sharp, *English Panorama*, p. 87.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., p. 88.

criticism of suburban housing was politically motivated; he advocated left-wing communitarianism over right-wing individualism.

Other modernist architects also considered the idea of community in the suburbs, adding social elements of criticism to strengthen, or perhaps to justify their aesthetic criticism. In relation to the social problems which had been highlighted by Durant and Young a few years earlier, Tubbs suggested that the 'disillusioned citizens' who tried to escape from the 'wretched towns' to suburbia did so in vain, as according to Tubbs, 'the community life of the town, the friendliness of the market and the comfort of surrounding buildings are all missing; time, money and energy are wasted in wearisome travelling; and each new suburban house pushes the country further away.'[33] CIAM member José Luis Sert (who later became the president of CIAM) also referred to the poorly connected suburbs in his 1942 publication *Can Our Cities Survive?* Sert claimed that the problems of the city had been complicated by the rapid and uncontrolled development of the suburbs. He suggested that travelling within, as well as in and out of the city, could have been simplified significantly had the suburbs been built in accordance with a comprehensive plan. The provision of recreational facilities and the separation of industry could also have been applied had the suburbs been planned.[34] Gibberd also noted that the small houses of municipal suburbia 'cover acres of land, making vast districts that have neither the advantages of communal town life nor the amenities of the country.'[35] Later, he again made reference to the LCC out-county estates, describing them as 'socially undesirable.'[36] Sharp, drawing from sociological research, also observed the increased distance between town and suburb, and therefore, the consequent increase in journey time and distance imposed upon the suburban dweller when travelling to work. This, claimed Sharp, was how 'Town-Country displays its failure from a sociological as well as from an aesthetic view.'[37]

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[33] Tubbs, p. 30.
[34] José Luis Sert, *Can Our Cities Survive? An ABC of urban problems, their analysis, their solutions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Printing Office, 1942), p. 54.
[35] Gibberd, *The Architecture of England*, p. 43.
[36] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 43.
[37] Sharp, *English Panorama*, p. 86.

However, having argued that modernist architects criticised the suburbs predominantly on aesthetic grounds, only adding sociological elements to support their aesthetic arguments, it must be noted that the sociological criticism of the suburbs also included aesthetic criticism. In the 1934 Becontree and Dagenham Report, Terence Young observed the visual uniformity created by the small houses which lined the long straight roads in the estate. He argued that despite the attempts made by the LCC to introduce visual variety, the houses along the roads were 'depressingly uniform.'[38] Such wording suggests that Young considered the visual uniformity of the housing to have a negative effect on the residents' emotional wellbeing. For Young, uniformity was undesirable both aesthetically as well as socially. It is possible that modernist architects were influenced by such aesthetic criticism from sociological reports of the time. Consequently, when modernist architects criticised the visual monotony of the inter-war suburban housing, they may have had the wellbeing of the residents in mind. With this, it could be argued that a predominantly visual approach to thinking about housing and town design was not without sociological consideration; therefore such a visual approach was not necessarily in tension with MARS and CIAM principles, which called for social needs to be placed above aesthetic design.

Modernist architect and CIAM member Le Corbusier attacked the suburbs from an alternative angle, arguing that they followed no comprehensive plan, and had no connection to the city. According to Le Corbusier in 1943, the suburbs or "bastard boroughs" constituted one of the 'greatest evils of the century,' where 'all the dregs of society' were dumped.[39] He did not have a great deal of criticism relating to aesthetics like Gibberd, or any comments on the lack social provision like Sert or Tubbs. However, Le Corbusier's attack on the suburbs was just as vehement, perhaps even more so, than Sharp's. He stated that the suburbs were a 'kind of scum churning against the walls of the city'[40] and their 'bleak ugliness is a reproach to the

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[38] Terence Young, *Becontree and Dagenham: A Report made for the Pilgrim Trust* (London: Becontree Social Survey Committee, 1934), p. 100.

[39] Le Corbusier, *The Athens Charter*, trans. by Anthony Eardley (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973), p. 60.

[40] Le Corbusier, *The Athens Charter*, p. 61.

city it surrounds.'[41] Whether the criticism was based on aesthetic judgement, or concern for social welfare, both sociologists and modernist architects believed that it was the lack of planning control over the built environment which led to what they considered unsatisfactory suburban housing estates. In *Living in Cities,* Tubbs advocated the establishment of a Central Planning Authority in order to set out the framework for a national plan. The notion of planning was also inextricably bound to socialism, as Jackson argues, 'the architect was a planner and the planner was a socialist.'[42]

In addition to the lack of planning control and power, a further link can be found between the social and aesthetic strands of criticism, that is, the low residential density of the suburban developments. Paul Oliver refers to a BBC radio debate broadcast in 1935, where Geoffrey Boumphrey proclaimed that 'the mad building of suburbs must stop – before it strangles the towns themselves.'[43] Despite opposing Boumphrey's modernist views and supporting suburban development during the debate, John Cadbury acknowledged that the low-density layout of housing in the suburbs meant that all distances were magnified, and therefore, the amenities dispersed.[44] Later, in the 1950s, Gibberd was to reflect upon the low densities of 'the usual pre-war semi-detached development' suggesting, along the same lines as Tubbs and Sharp, that the development was 'sub-urban, neither town nor country.'[45]

Both Le Corbusier and Thomas Sharp blamed the earlier Garden City concept for the expansive low-density suburban developments of the inter-war period. Sharp argued that the idea of building Garden Cities 'fired the public imagination.' After living in tree-less, grass-less 'sordid' towns, now the people wanted 'gardens of their own, back and front, with a space between their home and the next.'[46] The semi-

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[41] Le Corbusier, *The Athens Charter*, p. 61.

[42] Jackson, 'The Politics of Architecture', p. 103.

[43] Paul Oliver, *Built to meet needs: cultural issues in vernacular architecture* (Oxford: Elsevier Ltd, 2006) p. 334.

[44] Ian Davis, 'One of the Greatest Evils...Dunroamin and the Modern Movement', in *Dunroamin: The Suburban Semi and its Enemies,* ed. by Paul Oliver, Ian Davis and Ian Bentley (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1981), pp. 27-53 (p. 43).

[45] Frederick Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', in *Design in Town and Village* by The Ministry of Housing and Local Government (London: HMSO, 1953), pp. 20-70 (p. 23).

[46] Sharp, *Town and Countryside*, p. 6.

detached house, as later observed by the Ministry of Health, 'has been, and will probably continue to be, generally preferred by tenants.'[47] The suburban house was the dwelling of choice for most people. Mike Hepworth has recently argued that it was the image of the Victorian ideal home which shaped this aspiration. Hepworth highlights several elements of the 'ideal home' which developed in response to the Victorian view of the home as a private sphere within the public realm. For the upper and middle classes, the home became a private place to deal with the realities of illness and death; Hepworth argues that as a result of this, the 'constructed facade' became an important physical feature, acting as a barrier between the public realm and the private individual family 'home within'.[48] In addition, Hepworth shows that the idea of house and garden, particularly the image of the English country cottage, significantly influenced the vision of the ideal home in Victorian domestic culture.[49] This was due to a reaction to the perceived ugliness of the industrial city and the idea that the beauty of the past could still be found in the idyllic rural village. Standish Meacham has recently argued that social reformers of the late Victorian period concerned with living conditions in congested urban areas, also looked back to the rural English life of the past, promoting this ideal as a model for future development.[50] Meacham argues that such late Victorian attitudes were embedded in a vision of 'Englishness' which had extracted elements of the past which responded to present need, creating an Englishness with a 'seductive power' which shaped the character of pre-war housing.[51] This Victorian ideal of the individual private family house separated from public life, coupled with the poor living conditions of industrial cities, helped establish an image of the ideal house and garden, remained popular well into the twentieth century. Speculative developers, seduced by the notion of Englishness, adopted the semi-detached house with a garden for private housing schemes, responding to the aspirations of the

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[47] Ministry of Health and Ministry of Works, *Housing Manual 1944* (London: HMSO, 1944), p. 15.

[48] Mike Hepworth, 'Privacy, Security and Respectability: The Ideal Victorian Home', in *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture*, ed. by Barbara Miller Lane (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 150-155 (p. 150).

[49] Mike Hepworth, 'Privacy, Security and Respectability: The Ideal Victorian Home', in *Ideal Homes? Social Change and the Experience of the Home*, ed. by Tony Chapman and Jenny Hockey (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 17-29 (p. 26).

[50] Standish Meacham, *Regaining Paradise: Englishness and the Early Garden City Movement* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 5.

[51] Ibid., p. 70.

middle classes. In fact, during the first few decades of the twentieth century, speculative builders played a significant role in spreading the suburban ideal further by exhibiting show homes at the annual Ideal Home Exhibition as well as through advertising campaigns.[52]

At the turn of the century, housing reformers believed that municipal housing for the working classes should follow a similar form. The model industrial villages of Bournville, New Earswick and Port Sunlight set the precedent, providing family houses with gardens for factory workers.[53] Jeremy Whitehand and Christine Carr have shown that following the 1919 'Tudor Walters Report', the family house and garden became the standard dwelling type built by local authorities and speculative builders alike.[54] Raymond Unwin, a Socialist and one of the most influential town planners of the early twentieth century, was the only architect on the Tudor Walters Committee, advocating the semi-detached house and garden as the type of housing local authorities should construct in their municipal housing schemes. Unwin was greatly influenced by William Morris, and as a result, saw his task as an architect to create more 'aesthetically honest' environments which could encourage citizens to lead happy worthwhile lives.[55] As Abigail Beach and Nick Tiratsoo have recently shown, Unwin believed the role of the architect was to create physical environments which answered to the needs and aspirations of a community.[56] This was essentially the same objective modernist architects were aiming for later in the 1930s. However, despite the suburban house and garden being the ideal home of choice for many, Thomas Sharp argued that community life simply did not exist in these types of environments.

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[52] J. W. R. Whitehand and C. M. H. Carr, *Twentieth-Century Suburbs: A Morphological Approach* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 16.

[53] Alison Ravetz and Richard Turkington, *The Place of Home: English Domestic Environments, 1914-2000* (Oxon, New York: Taylor & Francis, 1995), p. 19.

[54] Whitehand and Carr, p. 15.
In 1917 a Local Government Board was established as a committee under the Chair of Sir John Tudor Walters. It was formed to provide recommendations for new housing to be built following the First World War.

[55] Meacham, p. 70.

[56] Abigail Beach and Nick Tiratsoo, 'The Planners and the Public', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Volume III 1840-1950*, ed. by Martin Daunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 525-550 (p. 528).

Ian Davis has recently argued that it is possible the main reason behind modernist architects' hostility was that the suburbs continued to expand remorselessly, largely without their professional input.[57] An *RIBA Journal* article in 1936 supports this idea, since it referred to architects and speculative builders as having regarded one another with mutual contempt.[58] Low-density semi-detached houses were the peoples' home of choice, but it is possible that the new ideas in architecture and planning, coupled with the near exclusion of architects from suburban development during the inter-war period, led modernist architects to feel it was necessary to assert their professional role. To some extent, the problem of suburban housing may have been polemically created; that is to say, modernist architects took a sociological or aesthetic standpoint to argue that the suburbs were lacking in some way, as part of an effort to distinguish themselves and their profession from the speculative builder.

Furthermore, it is possible that the architectural criticism of the suburbs was influenced by, or indeed part of, a larger body of literature which targeted the suburbs and their inhabitants. In his study of prejudice among the literary intelligentsia between 1880 and 1939, John Carey argues that many writers of this period – well-educated and comfortably-off – grew up in green middle-class suburbs. As speculative suburbia with its burgeoning lower-middle class population began to expand during the interwar period, it engulfed and 'spoiled' these middle-class suburbs, thus leaving lasting memories of the 'ruining of childhood paradises' – a common theme which would emerge in later writing.[59] In addition, Carey argues that those intellectuals who viewed the suburbs and their residents with disdain, often did so as a result of intellectual snobbery. Whitehand and Carr have also recently supported this idea; they argue that the white-collar workers and clerks who moved in and 'spoiled' suburbia were viewed by the intellectual elite as less educated and incapable of appreciating 'high culture', thus increasing their dislike of suburbia.[60]

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[57] Davis, p. 50.

[58] 'The Architect and Housing by the Speculative Builder', *JRIBA*, 44 (1936), 299-302 (p. 299).

[59] John Carey, *The Intellectual and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992, p. 47.

[60] Whitehand and Carr, p. 16.

As an architectural solution to the perceived problem of the low-density 'horizontal garden-city' Le Corbusier proposed the high-rise, high-density 'vertical garden-city', where instead of small houses sprawling over the countryside, people would be housed in tall blocks surrounded by parkland.[61] On the other hand, the Garden City advocates, concerned with the poor conditions of the overcrowded inner city areas, were against the idea of high-density housing. They advocated low-density houses with gardens, although not for private gain like the speculative builder. Howard proposed that Garden Cities, while initially being developed along capitalist lines with respect to land purchase and development, would ultimately become the property of the elected local government. Housing rents accrued would be used to benefit the community at large, and as Helen Meller has recently described, Howard hoped the Garden City model could help secure social justice.[62] Mark Swenarton has argued that the Garden City concept was politically ambiguous; it could therefore appeal to both socialists and capitalists alike.[63] While the modernists' criticism of private suburban development can be viewed as a socialist reaction against liberal capitalism, their disapproval of the Garden City ideal is more complex. The density debate, which influenced the development of urbanity, began at the turn of the century with opposition to the Garden City model. The two contrasting city planning paradigms – high-rise high-density on one hand, and low-rise, low-density on the other – formed the basis of the debate.

1.1.2   The Density Debate

In *Garden Cities of To-morrow,* Howard did not make any precise recommendations for residential density in the Garden Cities, although a population of 30,000 was advised.[64] Helen Meller, in *Towns, Plans and Society in Modern Britain* explains that Howard's primary concern was social reform, as opposed to urban design issues.[65] This meant that Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, the architects chosen to

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[61] Le Corbusier, *Concerning Town Planning*, trans. by Clive Entwistle (London: The Architectural Press, 1947), p. 68.
[62] Helen Meller, *Towns, Plans and Society in Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 38.
[63] Mark Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1981), p. 6.
[64] Howard, p. 18.
[65] Meller, p. 37.

design the first Garden City at Letchworth, were able to 'overwhelm' the Garden City movement with their own preference for low-density housing and the aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts Movement.[66] Unwin argued convincingly for low-density housing in his 1912 publication *Nothing gained by Overcrowding*, which he wrote in order to persuade local authorities to adopt Howard's Garden City principle. Unwin suggested that units and suburbs of the Garden City could be detached from one another and allocated subsidiary centres within existing towns.[67]
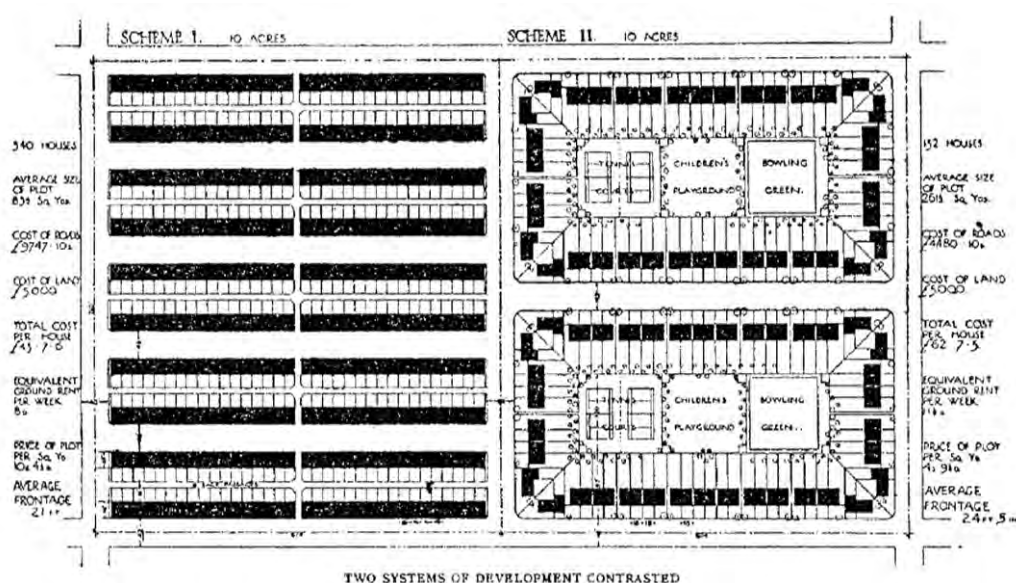
Fig.1.2. Unwin's 'two systems of development contrasted'
(Unwin, *Nothing Gained by Overcrowding!* 1912)

Fig.1.2 shows a comparative diagram taken from Unwin's book demonstrating the contrast between two hypothetical 10 acre plots, one developed as terraces along a grid system of roads at high density, the other, Unwin's low-density theoretical housing scheme laid out on Garden City principles. 'Scheme I' Unwin explained, represented the conditions as they existed in many large towns at that time, where

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[66] Stanley Buder, *Visionaries and Planners: The Garden City Movement and the Modern Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 84. The Arts and Crafts Movement had begun in Britain during the mid-nineteenth century; rejecting industrial mass production techniques, the movement sought a return to the tradition of craftsmanship.

[67] Raymond Unwin, *Nothing Gained by Overcrowding! How the Garden City type of development may benefit both owner and occupier* (Westminster: King, 1912), p. 2.

'by-laws' were in force.[68] It showed the maximum number of dwellings possible across the 10 acre site according to by-laws (42ft wide roads and 9ft wide back passages), and assuming each dwelling occupied 16 feet of frontage (the width of the dwelling adjoining the street edge). The density is 340 dwellings over 10 acres, or, in the typical unit used at this time, 34 dwellings per acre. The second scheme is less than half that density, 152 dwellings in total on 10 acres – 15.2 dwellings per acre. The houses have front and back gardens, and are grouped around communal open spaces to the rear. By minimising the area of roads, while maximising the area of gardens, Unwin argued that housing would not only look better, but it would also save the local authority money. At the same time, it would save tenants money while providing a pleasant healthy living environment in which to live. Although Unwin's 'Scheme II' included semi-detached houses, his rationale for adopting this low-density housing type was markedly different to the private developers' motivations.

Unwin argued that roads were the most expensive form in which open land could be developed. Scheme I has a large area of road surface per house, with roads at the front and to the rear. Furthermore, Unwin argued that with so many junctions, road frontage was simply wasted – i.e., no house could be developed on the section of road which adjoins another road, but road surface, maintenance and drainage costs would still exist for these sections. From an economic point of view, Unwin's calculations demonstrated that the developer could make considerable savings in road construction costs if building Scheme II. While the cost per house was more expensive, Unwin argued that residents would be getting better value for money – more open space in the form of gardens and communal space, as opposed to open space in the form of roadways. During the later stages of the development of urbanity in the 1950s, the width of roads and road frontages would be studied carefully by Gibberd and the HDC, in an attempt to save money as Unwin had done, while at the same time, attempting to create a sense of urbanity. This will be discussed later in Part 2 of the thesis.

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[68] John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815 – 1985* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 92.
Local by-laws came into existence in Britain in the 1860s, serving as building guidelines to Local Authorities, recommending street widths and construction, drainage, and adequate space around buildings.

However, as influential and convincing as Unwin's publication was, others were quick to criticise this low-density Garden City idea at the time. In 1913, Arthur Trystan Edwards, whose later architectural criticism would greatly influence Sharp, stated in the *Town Planning Review* journal: 'It has neither the crowded interest of the town nor the quiet charm of the country. It gives us the advantages neither of solitude nor of society.'[69] These thoughts were later echoed by the modernist architects' criticisms in the 1930s. Edwards's comments could sometimes be as vehement as the later criticism, including: '...we are compromising with Satan;'[70] and, 'these towns do not symbolise the glory of our race, but are hideous monuments of failure.'[71] Edwards later became interested in the aesthetics of the urban environment and went on to write a number of books, including *Good and Bad Manners in Architecture, An essay on the Social Aspects of Civic Design*, in which he began to question what it is that makes a building urban. The title suggests that Edwards had taken a sociological approach when considering aspects of 'Civic Design'; however, he used the word 'social' to compare the visual relationship between buildings to the manners of people. To Edwards, buildings should maintain a social hierarchy and convey good manners towards each other in order to create 'urbanity.' His ideas of urbanity and Civic Design were pioneering at this time, and his work would greatly influence Sharp's ideas of urbanity and townscape. However, Gontran Goulden has recently argued that although Edwards was an original thinker, the seriousness and force of argument in Edwards's work were 'belied by a sprightly, journalistic style.' Furthermore, at the dawn of the reception of modernism in Britain, Goulden suggests that Edwards was writing too late to influence the new generation of architects.[72] Edwards did not associate himself with any modernist architectural groups, however; he studied Civic Design at the Liverpool School of Architecture (1911–13) where he was influenced by the

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[69] A. Trystan Edwards, 'A Criticism of the Garden City Movement', *Town Planning Review*, 3 (1913), 150-157 (p. 155).

[70] Ibid., p. 151.

[71] Ibid., p. 150.

[72] Gontran Goulden, 'Edwards, (Arthur) Trystan (1884–1973)', rev. by Andrew Saint, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31062> [accessed 3 December 2012] (para. 3 of 6)

school's antagonism towards the low-density rural image promoted by the Garden City Movement.[73]

It comes as little surprise then, that Edwards's 1913 article which condemned the Garden City ideal was published in the *Town Planning Review*, the journal of the Department of Civic Design in the University of Liverpool. The school was established in 1909, since despite the earlier planning work of Parker and Unwin at Letchworth in 1904, prior to 1909, a 'town planning profession' did not exist in Britain. The beginnings of the formation of the planning profession in conjunction with the opposition to the Garden City idea would lead to a further, contrasting, city planning paradigm. The establishment of the school in 1909 was an important milestone in the development of a 'town planning profession' which had not previously existed, but the planning ideology preferred at the school became the contrasting and opposing city planning paradigm to the Garden City idea. The first two professors at the school were Stanley Adshead and Patrick Abercrombie, Abercrombie later becoming the planner of the 1944 Greater London Plan. Martin Hawtree in his study of the emergence of town planning as a profession shows that at the School, through Abercrombie, who took over the position of chair in 1914, the Department began to assert town planning as a subject in its own right.[74] Abercrombie explained in the School's journal that 'sociology, and from an artistic standpoint [...] the studied conception of a beautiful city as a whole' were subjects for analysis and consideration for those who contributed to the creation of a 'Town Plan.'[75] The idea that towns and cities should be comprehensively planned would later be taken up by the MARS Group Town Planning Committee; the notion that sociology should inform the plan was ideal for those following a modernist doctrine.

Mark Swenarton has more recently argued that the influence of the 'City Beautiful' attitude to town planning, which was concerned with both social reform and the beautification of cities, was greatly reinforced by the establishment of the

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[73] Goulden, (para. 2 of 6)

[74] Martin Hawtree, 'The Emergence of the Town Planning Profession', in *British Town Planning: The Formative Years*, ed. by Anthony Sutcliffe (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1981), pp. 64-104 (p. 96).

[75] The Editors, 'Town planning and the architect', *Town Planning Review*, 2 (1912), p. 169.

Department of Civic Design.'[76] Running parallel to the Garden City Movement in Britain, at the turn of the century the City Beautiful Movement was developing in the United States. Inspired by the city planning concepts taught at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, City Beautiful elements comprised axial boulevards, wide streets and grand plazas, and classical buildings enclosing space.[77] This type of city planning became the opposing paradigm to the Garden City model, as Swenarton argues – there were two opposing schools of thought on the aesthetics of town planning at this time.[78] On one hand was the Picturesque approach to housing layout, with protagonists such as Unwin who looked to the earlier works of Camillo Sitte for inspiration. Sitte had written *City Planning According to Artistic Principles* in 1889, where he treated town planning in terms of the creation of a series of enclosed spaces and carefully composed 'street pictures.'[79] On the other hand, rejecting the Picturesque Garden City type planning, was the town planning teaching influenced by the American City Beautiful Movement and the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*.

Despite the rejection of the *Beaux-Arts* classically-oriented architecture forming the basis of the Modern Movement in architecture, paradoxically, it was the latter city planning model which influenced the modernist planners of the 1920s and 30s. Gold shows that early modernist architectural thoughts on future modern city planning began with Tony Garnier and his colleague at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, Auguste Perret. Perret (cousin of Le Corbusier) created the idea of *la ville-tour* (the city of towers); his key concept was that of combining verticality with effective systems of movement.[80] Referring to a journal article of 1922, since Perret's designs did not survive, Gold describes Perret's idea of 100 cruciform skyscrapers along a 15-mile avenue proposed for the outer boulevards of Paris. The towers were to be linked by walkways at a high level to permit pedestrian movement and each tower would house 3000.[81] Perret's concepts greatly influenced the work of Le Corbusier, who proposed his *Ville Contemporaine,* 'Contemporary City for Three Million', which

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[76] Swenarton, p. 17.
[77] Jon Lang, *Urban Design: The American Experience* (New York: John Wiley, 1994), p. 45.
[78] Swenarton, p.16.
[79] Camillo Sitte, *City Planning According to Artistic Principles*, trans. by George R. Collins and Christiane Crasemann Collins (London: Phaidon Press, 1965), p. 32.
[80] Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, p. 39.
[81] Ibid.

was exhibited in Paris in 1922.[82] Although radically different from any housing which existed at the time, such ideas were aimed at improving the lifestyle of the people. Building vertically would not only save land, but would mean open space and light would be available and accessible to all. In essence, these were the same goals as Howard's Garden City concept; the key difference between the two opposing ideas however, was the type and appearance of the urban form proposed. The high-density high-rise large scale city plans of Perret and Le Corbusier (fig.1.4) and the monumental axial *Beaux-Arts* style planning would later influence the MARS Group members when they devised their reconstruction plans for London. In opposition to this, the Garden City advocates would continue to campaign for low-density garden city style planning (fig.1.3).

Fig.1.3. Housing in Welwyn Garden City (illustrated *in 1944 Greater London Plan*)
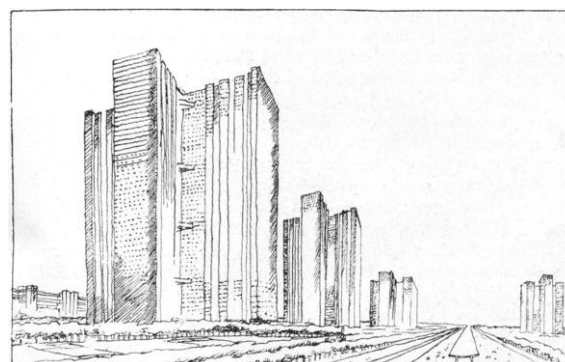
Fig.1.4. *La Ville-Tour*, city of towers (Le Corbusier, *Vers une Architecture,* 1923)

During the 1930s, with the two key opposing paradigms for future city development in place, the debate about residential density gained momentum in response to the 'slum clearance' programmes. By this time it was established that the overcrowded unsanitary conditions of inner city areas could be linked directly to poor health. Slum clearance programmes had begun much earlier in fact, with the Public Health Act of 1875 and the Cross Acts of 1875 and 1880.[83] The inter-war years, however, saw the re-emergence of poverty with industrial decline; public health and poor housing deteriorated further correspondingly. Central Government was forced to take measures, thus introducing the 1930 Housing Act, giving Local Authorities the

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[82] Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, p. 41.
[83] Meller, p. 21.

power to designate and clear slum housing areas, and to provide new housing for those displaced.[84]

In 1936, sociologist and housing consultant Elizabeth Denby presented a paper to the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) entitled 'Re-housing from the Slum-Dweller's point of view.'[85] Three decades had passed since Howard's Garden City idea and at this time there were a number of Garden City type developments across the country. Direct comparisons could now be made between these new environments and the conditions of the old inner city areas. Referring to her comparative study of living conditions in Wythenshawe Garden City (outside Manchester), and Manchester city itself, Denby presented statistics which supported the idea that the Garden City environments were better for the health of children. The survey showed that boys raised in inner city areas compared to boys raised in the Garden City grew taller and were slimmer, showing 'real health.'[86] Denby presented further statistics, to show how local councils were packing houses too tightly together. Within the open space of an already overcrowded working-class district built in 1926 at 25 dwellings per acre, a further 985 dwellings were constructed in 1934, thus, according to Denby, creating a density of 330 persons to the acre.[87] It is interesting to note how Denby switched from the unit of measurement of 'dwellings' per acre, to 'persons' per acre, emphasising the jump in density as much as possible. Arguing against high density further, Denby referred to more survey results which showed that people living in high-density flatted council estates found a 'lack of privacy, noise, inconvenience, a 'barrack' atmosphere' and expense.'[88] Denby's case against high density was not ostensibly from an aesthetic point of view, but from a modernist point of view aiming for social betterment.

Also arguing against high density, but from a planning point of view, the *Town and Country Planning* journal tirelessly expressed and promoted the views of the Garden

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[84] Jill Stewart, *Environmental Health and Housing* (London: Spon Press, 2001), p. 16.
[85] Elizabeth Denby, 'Rehousing from the Slum-Dweller's point of view', *RIBA Journal*, 44 (1936), 61-79.
[86] Denby, 'Rehousing', p. 61.
[87] Ibid., p. 64.
[88] Ibid., p. 61.

City advocates. The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) was in fact the Garden City Association founded by Howard in 1899, the name having been updated in 1941.[89] Although not a modernist group, the TCPA campaigned to achieve a 'rational and humane' system of town and country planning.[90] The most vocal member of the TCPA was Chairman Frederic Osborn. In the 1940s, Osborn published a number of articles in the journal relating to residential density and the social science of town planning. In the Winter 1941/42 issue appeared Osborn's *Reflections on Density;* the opening paragraph stating the '...excessive herding-together of people is a notorious defect of the older areas of cities. How to cure it is one of the cardinal problems of planning.'[91] Osborn explained that for 'one-family' municipal houses, the Housing Acts to date prescribed a maximum of 12 dwellings per acre in urban areas and 8 in rural areas. For flats, however, there was no statutory limit; on the contrary, subsidies were in fact graded to favour higher densities where pressure for land was greater.[92] Osborn believed that the low density of 12 dwellings per acre, should be adopted as a maximum density for all new housing developments – including inner city areas, where before, the Ministry of Health had the power to 'relax' such limits. He found most of the criticisms of the 12-per-acre standard 'unrealistic and unimpressive', believing that density had no bearing on the provision of amenities, as the modernist architects had put forward. Osborn stated that some 'working people' had criticised the standard as being too 'mean and crowded' and as not providing enough garden space.[93] He suggested that in any town, there should be a considerable proportion of houses at a lower density than 12 dwellings per acre.

The recommendation of 12 dwellings per acre was set out in the 1918 Tudor Walters Report and Housing Manual of 1919, and as Edwards in *The Design of Suburbia* observes, the characteristics of municipal suburbia so greatly criticised by modernist

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[89] Dennis Hardy, '1899-1999 The TCPA's first hundred years, and the next...', *Town and Country Planning Association* (1999) <http://www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/18991999.pdf > [accessed 03 December 2012] (p. 4.)

[90] Ibid.

[91] F. J. Osborn, 'Reflections on Density', *Town and Country Planning*, 9 (1941/42), 121-126, 146 (p. 121).

[92] Ibid., p. 123.

[93] Ibid., p. 124.

architects were defined by the Tudor Walters Report.[94] Significantly, Unwin, who had turned the Garden City Movement towards his own preference for low-density Arts and Crafts style houses, was an influential member of the Committee.[95] The images and recommendations in the subsequent 1919 *Manual on the Preparation of State-aided Housing Schemes* (fig.1.5 and fig.1.6) reflect the substantial influence Unwin had on municipal housing guidelines, and consequently upon the houses which followed. This low-density recommendation of 12 dwellings per acre would persist until the 1950s, not only having an impact upon the initial parts of the New Towns, but also leading to further developments in the density debate.
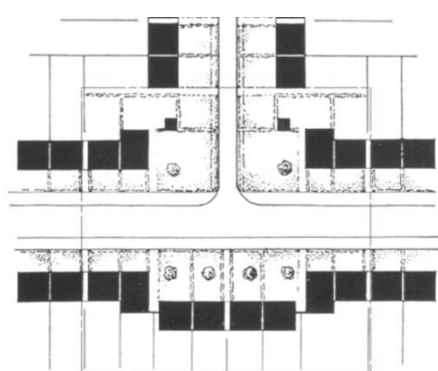
| Fig.1.5. Plan extract showing 12 to the acre (1919 Housing Manual) | Fig.1.6. Arts and Crafts style housing (1919 Housing Manual) |

Elizabeth Denby, having argued against very high densities, also disagreed with the '12 dwellings per acre' low density recommendation, noting the common social complaints found in such environments, such as 'isolation, loneliness, boredom, expense.'[96] During her presentation to the RIBA in 1936, Denby expressed her view that the town dwellers' choice between a 'flat at fifty and a cottage at twelve to the acre' was a choice between two 'impractical and unnecessary extremes.'[97] Instead, Denby advocated rows of terraced cottages at 35-40 dwellings per acre, each with a front and rear garden. In comparison to the Garden Cities and suburbs, this was a relatively high density to propose. Denby was not alone in campaigning for high-density terraced houses, as Darling notes, Arthur Trystan Edwards was also

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[94] Edwards, p. 103.
[95] Burnett, p. 223.
[96] Denby, 'Rehousing', p. 61.
[97] Ibid., p. 66.

publically advocating such housing at this time.[98] Unlike the extremely high-density modernist schemes of Le Corbusier, Denby was proposing a more traditional housing typology, that of house and garden which her own research had shown was the preferred type.

There was a great deal of negative comment following Denby's presentation, mostly from Lewis Silkin, who had recently become a member of the LCC Housing Committee and would later take on the role of Minister of Town and Country Planning following the Second World War. Silkin's 'rough calculations' proved that Denby's proposed 40 dwellings to the acre was not possible, and that 12 houses to the acre was more appropriate, certainly no more than 18 dwellings per acre. Archibald Scott, Chief Architect to the Ministry of Health, echoed Silkin's thoughts, arguing that Denby's proposal of cottages at 40 to the acre was not practical and that such high proposed densities was 'going too far.'[99] Silkin's reluctance to accept higher densities would later have an impact on Harlow New Town, as in September 1946 as Minister of Town and Country Planning, he invited Gibberd to design an 'unofficial plan'. Officially, it was the job of the Development Corporation to design the Master Plan, but the Harlow Development Corporation (HDC) was not formed until 16th May 1947.[100] It is likely that Silkin would have attempted to enforce his ideas of low density upon the unofficial plan. Furthermore, later in 1949, Silkin's opposition to high density and 'flats in the countryside' would cause great conflict between the Ministry and the HDC, with the HDC campaigning to build an eight storey block of flats. This will be discussed in depth in Chapter 4.

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[98] Elizabeth Darling, ''The star in the profession she invented for herself' A brief biography of Elizabeth Denby, housing consultant', *Planning Perspectives*, 20 (2005), 271-300 (p. 289).

[99] Denby, 'Rehousing', (Vote of Thanks and Discussion), p. 77.

[100] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 16.
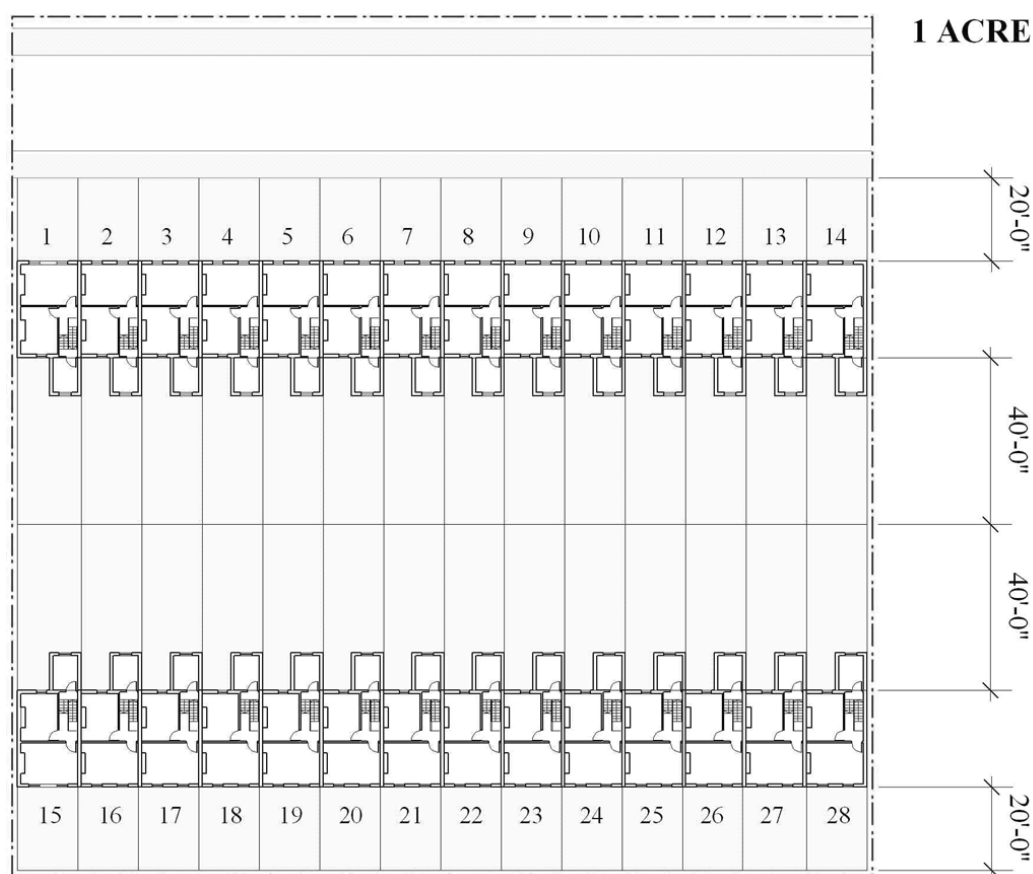
Fig.1.7. Testing Denby's proposals – CAD drawing of terraced houses spread over an acre

Denby's proposal for high-density terraced houses can be tested using CAD (fig.1.7). The house plans are based on a typical Victorian terraced house with a 5 metre frontage (approximately 16ft), with front gardens of 20ft and back gardens of 40ft, as proposed by Denby. Spread over one acre, only 28 dwellings per acre are feasible with this dwelling type. This is not to discredit Denby's proposals, but to highlight the complexity of the density debate. Today it is easier to test densities with computer aided design packages, but during conversation, it is difficult to visualise exactly the type of environment created in relation to density figures and differing house types. Two years after her talk at the RIBA, Denby published *The All-Europe House,* where she continued to campaign for terraced housing development - this time proposing a realistic 20 dwellings per acre. Taking a similar line to Sharp, Denby argued that 'for some quite extraordinary reason, we seem to have forgotten the beauty of a closely planned urban development in England.' Reiterating her earlier argument, Denby went on to say: 'I think we have gone to

two extremes; we have apparently nothing between 12 houses to the acre, which cannot be architecturally treated, and which is impossible in the centre of towns, and the blocks of flats which have nothing to offer the people who inhabit them for their leisure hours.'[101] Here it appears Denby is beginning to consider the aesthetic possibilities in relation to density, where before, her arguments were based solely on social surveys. Denby's 'All-Europe House' comprised a terrace of individual houses which were angled slightly in relation to an orthogonal plot pattern to provide a small alcove for privacy at the rear, as well as to provide a 'pleasantly urban and humane street' (fig.1.8).[102] Denby's engagement with left-wing politics coupled with her interest in sociology led her to take a profoundly sociological approach to housing design, thus in accordance with modernist principles. However, in her proposals for the All-Europe House, there was an indication that she was beginning to consider the visual aspects of the street. This supports the argument that although those following modernist principles sought to put social aspects above all else, aesthetic elements also informed their design agenda.
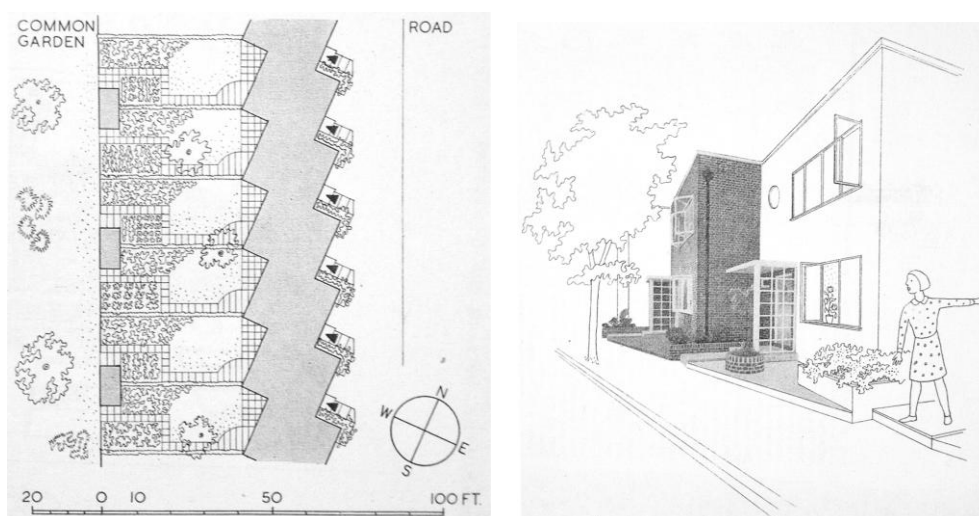
Fig.1.8. Denby's 'All-Europe House' plan and street view *JRIBA* (1939)

Recent literature has yet to acknowledge that with Denby's proposals came a unique modernist standpoint within the previously rigid density debate. She was concerned with providing for the needs of the people, as mainstream modernism required,

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[101] The Editors, 'The All-Europe House', *JRIBA*, 46 (1939), 813-819 (p. 814).
[102] 'The All-Europe House', p. 814.

while at the same time, striving for a beautiful, closely planned, English form of town development. This was crucial to the later development of townscape and urbanity, as it provided a break from the unrealistic grandiose schemes of the hard-line modernist architects as well as from the low-density monotonous suburban developments. Thomas Sharp in his 1940 publication *Town Planning* also began to advocate a similar middle ground in relation to density. Firstly, Sharp raised the issue of measurement, stating that 'dwellings per acre' was an irrational measure of density, as family size varied; therefore, with dwellings per acre, population density could not be controlled. In relation to a maximum population density, Sharp claimed it was too difficult to say, but suggested it might be 150 or 200 persons per acre, compared to the 50 persons or less allowed in the Garden Cities, or the other extreme – 400 inhabitants per acre in Le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse* scheme.[103] To compare these figures with Denby's proposals, the average family size of the time (3.6) can be multiplied by Denby's 35-40 dwellings per acre to give 126-144 persons per acre. Likewise, Sharp and Le Corbusier's proposed densities can be divided by the same figure to give 41.6 - 55.5 dwellings and 111.1 dwellings per acre respectively. This shows that Denby's and Sharp's density proposals were similar, and although not as high as Le Corbusier's suggestion, the density was considerably higher than the 12 dwellings per acre (or 43.2 persons per acre) recommended by the *1919 Housing Manual*.

This method is not particularly an accurate one, as Osborn highlighted in his 1941 paper. When the 12 dwellings per acre standard was established earlier in the century, the average family size was five people – the equivalent of 60 persons per acre. The average family size at the time of Osborn's article was 3.6 and may well have been as low as 3.4 in city centres.[104] Residential density and its measurement remained subjects of discussion in the architectural field throughout the period of study, the changing ideas over time having an impact on the type and arrangement of housing. In light of the criticism of the low-density Garden Cities and suburbs, and as a supporter of high-density modern building, Gibberd initially believed that building compactly at high densities would create a town-like environment, thus

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[103] Sharp, *Town Planning*, p. 84.
[104] Osborn, 'Reflections on Density', p. 124.

countering the suburban developments which were neither town nor country. As Osborn pointed out, the average family size of the modernising society had changed considerably, meaning the 1918 recommendations were out-of-date. Where the 3-bedroomed house had been the most common type of dwelling required, changes in family structure and lifestyle opened up new opportunities for a variety of house types.

1.1.3   Mixed Development and the Flat versus House argument

Parallel to the debate about residential density, therefore, was the flat versus house argument. These debates continued throughout the development of Harlow New Town, having an impact on the creation of urbanity. Generally, the Garden City advocates, responding to the preferences of the people, promoted houses with gardens at low densities, whereas the hard-line modernist architects who envisaged cities of towers favoured the implementation of flats at high densities. In 1937, Fredrick Gibberd together with F. R. S. Yorke, published *The Modern Flat,* promoting the idea of flats as a solution to the suburban sprawl. Like Denby, they looked to existing examples of flats on the continent, but also included one or two of Gibberd's own schemes. The purpose of the book was to show people that modern high rise flats could provide a valid housing solution. They expressed a view that they would like to live in a 'tall building in a park, with common amenities, air, and a view' and condemned the 'millions of little cottages scattered over the face of the country, whether in the garden city manner, or as speculatively built stragglers.'[105] In addition to this, Gibberd and Yorke also condemned the municipal flats which had been built in and around London; their main criticism was that there had been no comprehensive plan where dwellings were considered as units of a whole town. Much like the earlier work of Le Corbusier, Gibberd and Yorke believed that tall slab blocks with shared amenities should be placed in open spaces. They demonstrated their concept by showing a drawing by Walter Gropius and E. Maxwell Fry (fig.1.9).

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[105] F. R. S. Yorke and Frederick Gibberd, *The Modern Flat* (London: The Architectural Press, 1937), p. 16.
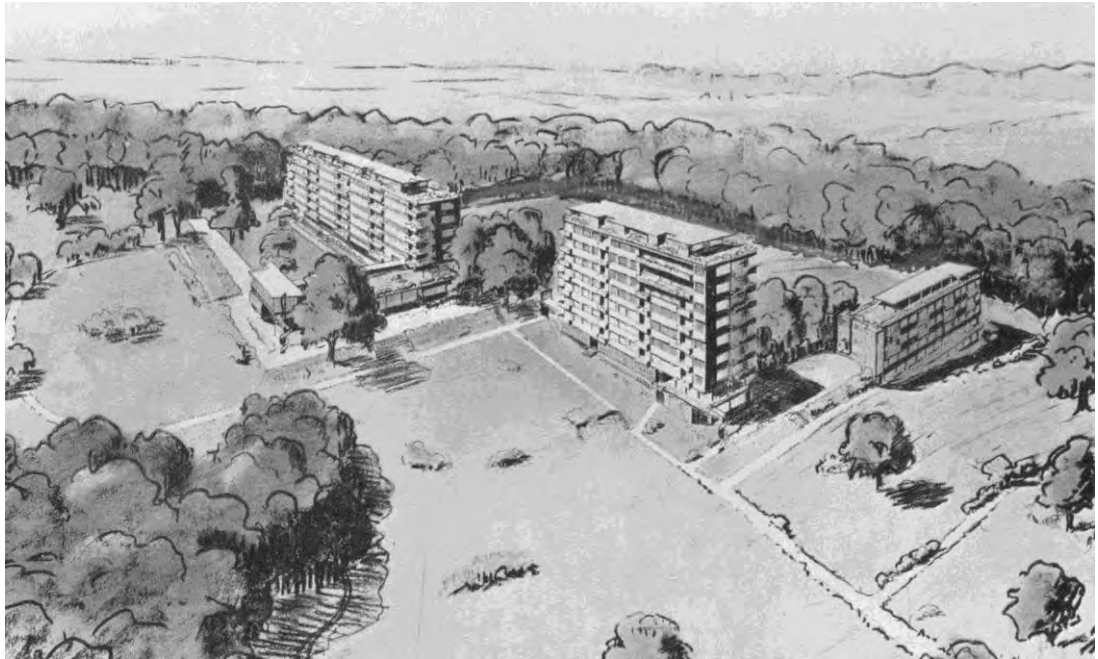
Fig.1.9. Scheme for St Leonards Hill by Gropius and Fry, illustrated in *The Modern Flat*

The scheme depicted shows 110 flats in two large high-rise slab blocks with a third smaller block built on one acre, positioned in 33 acres of open parkland. Gibberd and Yorke observed the changes in family size and structure in the modernising society; they saw that professional single people had not been considered during the development of semi-detached family homes, and believed these people could be housed in such flatted accommodation as proposed by Gropius and Fry. Gibberd and Yorke were not concerned that houses with gardens had not been provided in this scheme, since they observed that the large family had become uncommon. They also stated that for the 'luckiest of the very poor' state and trust-aided houses were available and for the very rich, 'luxury flats' had been provided by the speculator. The vast numbers of people on a 'moderate' income had not been provided for; Gibberd and Yorke believed that the type of flats envisaged by Gropius and Fry could be the solution.

Denby, on the other hand, as a result of her engagement with far-left politics, had a growing concern for fulfilling the needs of the working class people.[106] This had led to Denby's proposals for terraced houses at a relatively high density. The open

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[106] Darling, 'The star in the profession', p. 287.

development encouraged by building regulations, as described by Edwards who also advocated terraces, expressed a 'suburban snobbishness alien to the sociable temperament of the wage-earners.'[107] However, where Edwards and the Hundred New Towns Association[108] proposed decentralisation and the establishment of new towns of terraced houses ranging from 30 to 100 to the acre, Denby strongly believed existing towns and cities should be improved and redeveloped. Although she was opposed to the barrack-like inner city flat developments at 50 to the acre, correspondence between Denby and Edwards in the *JRIBA* shows that she was not adverse to schemes with a mixture of houses and flats – or 'mixed development'. She suggested that in central areas, slum-dwellers could be re-housed in cottages with small gardens if they so wished, while other families such as 'the childless, the old and the unmarried could be housed in flats with common services and adjacent playing and garden space.'[109] Like Gibberd and Yorke, Denby observed the changing family structures of a modern society. Darling argues that Denby's proposals for mixed development were the first of its kind in England, showing that Denby was at the forefront of new ways of thinking about housing.[110]

The new interest in sociology was far-reaching by the wartime years. Denby's social surveys became a small part among many other enquiries. For example, the social research organisation Mass Observation was founded in 1937, recruiting observers and volunteer writers to document the everyday lives of ordinary people in Britain.[111] In 1941, Mass Observation began a survey on housing which was published as *People's Homes* in 1943. Bullock has examined the findings of the survey and argues that it could claim to have been the most comprehensive assessment of current preferences. Around 1100 interviews were conducted in a far-reaching range of households to show that only 5 percent would prefer to live in a

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[107] A. Trystan Edwards, 'Correspondence: The Hundred New Towns Association', *JRIBA*, 44 (1936), p. 150.

[108] The Hundred New Towns Association was formed in 1933-4 and enjoyed a modest following. Gontran Goulden, (para. 4 of 6)

[109] Elizabeth Denby, 'Correspondence: The Hundred New Towns Association', *JRIBA*, 44 (1936), p. 150.

[110] Darling, 'The star in the profession', p. 287.

[111] 'A Brief History', *Mass Observation* <http://www.massobs.org.uk/a_brief_history.htm> [accessed 18 January 2013] (para. 1 of 4)

flat.[112] This percentage was later used as the basis for arguments which took place between Gibberd, the HDC and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. Gibberd advocated the use of flats to increase density as well as to create visual variety, arguing that since 5 percent of people preferred flats, there was a definite need to include flats at Harlow. The Ministry was reluctant to provide flats since the 'fierce dislike of flats' had been noted by Mass Observation, with only 5 percent preferring flats. Like the density debate, the flat versus house argument continued throughout the development of the New Towns. These ongoing discussions about density, flats and houses, would shape the development of the New Towns, having a profound effect on the implementation of principles of urbanity.

1.2   NEW PLANNING CONCEPTS

By 1940, town planning, particularly in relation to London, had become the subject of study for many expert committees. Events such as the *Living in Cities* exhibition fostered the public enthusiasm for reconstruction.[113] Now that the role of the town planner had been justified and established, some members of the MARS Group began to consider large-scale city reconstruction plans. Their plans would draw upon the developments and discussions of the previous decades, considering the prevention of suburban sprawl, whilst advocating high-rise high-density large-scale social city planning.

1.2.1   The MARS Group Town Planning Committee

In 1936 the Town Planning Committee of the MARS Group was formed. Serving actively on the Committee were architect members E. Maxwell Fry, Godfrey Samuel, William Tatton Brown, Arthur Ling, Christopher Tunnard and Arthur Korn as Chairman. A sub-committee led by F. J. Samuely was also formed to deal with the issues of transport and economics.[114] The Town Planning Committee believed that the 'question of concentration versus deconcentration' could only be answered

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[112] Nicholas Bullock, 'Plans for post-war housing in the UK: the case for mixed development and the flat', *Planning Perspectives*, 2 (1987) 71-98 (p. 77).

[113] Arthur Korn and Felix J. Samuely, 'A Master Plan for London', *AR*, 91 (1942), 143-150 (p. 143).

[114] Korn and Samuely, 'A Master Plan for London', p. 143.

by national planning.[115] Their town planning work was based on methodical analysis, which they hoped would counteract the uncontrolled suburban developments. However, despite the aesthetic criticism some of their fellow MARS Group members had directed towards the suburbs, the Committee was only concerned with large-scale planning, mostly in plan form, as opposed to considering street or housing layouts. The new group continued to analyse London and its city problems, concluding by 1942 that the three basic forces which affect town planning could be defined as 'social, geographical and economic.' Of these three factors, they highlighted that the town was 'primarily a social phenomenon.'[116]

Although the MARS Plan for London was officially published in 1942, recent scholarship has indicated that the layout was in fact based on an earlier plan of 1938. This is important and relevant to the thesis as it demonstrates that the ideas behind the plan were a product of inter-war discussions rather than of wartime reconstruction debates.[117] The key principles of the plan also reflect this; for example, great importance was placed on efficient planning in terms of transport and industry. Of equal importance was the provision of amenities. Howard's idea of a green belt was rejected, as the Committee believed that in Britain, where large towns at low densities were prevalent, the green belt would lose its value – since those in the town centres would be so far from the green belt. In order to make open space available to all, the plan proposed that the green belt should be reshaped into the form of strips, which could reach into the heart of the city. To deal with the vast scale of the city, and embracing the idea of community, the plan also adopted the neighbourhood planning concept. The idea of the neighbourhood unit had originated in America in the 1920s through the work of planner Clarence Perry. By the 1930s, the concept, as advocated by influential sociologist and writer Lewis Mumford in *Culture of Cities*, was being widely used in British planning.[118] The 1942 MARS Plan included the neighbourhood unit within its proposed hierarchy of units. The smallest unit was the 'residential unit', which would house approximately 1050

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[115] Korn and Samuely, 'A Master Plan for London', p. 143.

[116] Ibid.

[117] John R Gold, ''A Very Serious Responsibility'? The MARS Group, Internationality and Relations with CIAM, 1933-39', *Architectural History*, 56 (2013), 249-275 (p. 265).

[118] Mumford, *Defining Urban Design*, p. 34.

people and would include a nursery school and a street of everyday shops. The 'neighbourhood unit' would comprise six residential units, and the larger 'borough unit' (fig.1.12), would be made up of four to eight residential units. The 'district unit' (fig.1.11) would comprise twelve borough units and finally 'the city' would be formed when fourteen district units came together, resulting in the overall Master Plan (fig.1.10).
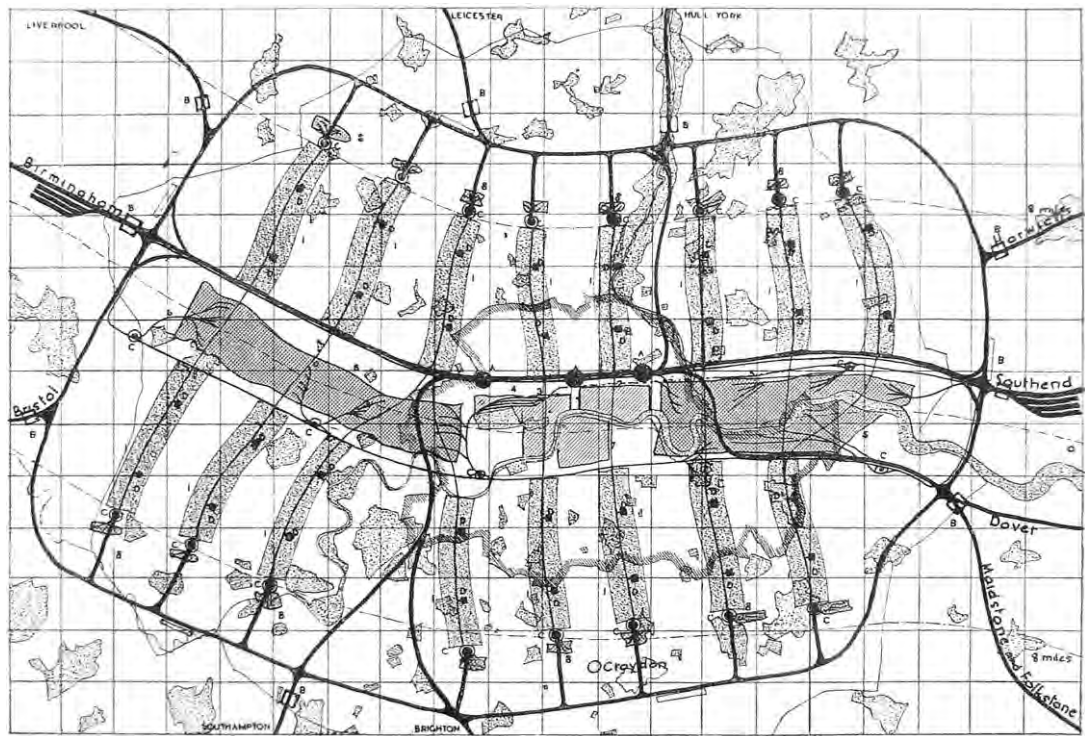
Fig.1.10. The MARS Plan for London as featured in the *AR*, 1942

Fig.1.12. The 'Borough Unit'
(*AR,* Jun. 1942)

Fig.1.11. The 'District Unit'
(*AR,* Jun. 1942)

Although the 1942 *AR* article describing the plan stated that housing had been an integral part of the overall layout, there were no details of housing designs. The borough unit diagram (fig.1.12) indicates that the authors of the plan perhaps leaned toward the high-density high-rise notion for housing, rather than the low-density garden-city planning, thus aligned with earlier modernist proposals from Le Corbusier, Gropius and Fry. Elizabeth Darling has recently shown that Denby served on the Executive Committee of the MARS Group between 1936 and 1938 and contributed to the MARS Plan for London.[119] Since Denby had promoted her idea of the All-Europe House – a small, human-scale terraced house based on extensive sociological research – around the same time, it was unusual that the MARS Plan should adopt such a contrasting housing type. Recent research has revealed, however, that although the Master Plan for London was attributed to the MARS Group Town Planning Committee, it was essentially created by only two

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[119] Darling, 'The star in the profession', p. 284.

members of the MARS Group – Arthur Korn and Arthur Ling.[120] Furthermore, Gold has shown that although Korn fully advocated flats as the sole housing type in the plan, Ling initially had other ideas. While at the Bartlett School studying for a Town Planning Diploma, Ling established the hierarchy of 'social units' adopted in the later MARS Plan; however, he proposed a mixed development of flats as well as houses with gardens to suit the 'human needs of the people.'[121] In the *AR*, Korn (and Samuely) explained the reason for the omission of detailed housing design in the MARS Plan, arguing that:

> "Housing" means, primarily, the grouping of people in units and is a social question. The word also refers, of course, to research into the needs and design of dwellings. These aspects have been dealt with in many publications, and there is much scope for research. They are omitted here as they are a detail and not a primary consideration.[122]

Despite having argued that town planning was chiefly a 'social problem', this quote shows that paradoxically, housing – although a 'social question' – was not considered in the 1942 Plan. Perhaps Korn had taken a more large-scale approach when considering social factors in design, including comprehensive planning and the organisation of housing into neighbourhood units, thus ensuring residents would be provided with all the social amenities they might require. Ling, on the other hand, recognised the need for houses with gardens to suit people's needs. This supports the idea that although modernist architects were united in their desire to create buildings which could facilitate social betterment, there were a variety of opinions in how this could be achieved. Furthermore, although the MARS Plan was attributed to the MARS Group Town Planning Committee, it should by no means be interpreted as a consensus view among MARS Group members, as Gold has recently drawn attention to the plurality within the group. [123]

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[120] John Gold, ''A Very Serious Responsibility'? The MARS Group, Internationality and Relations with CIAM, 1933-39', *Architectural History*, 56 (2013), 249-275 (p. 265)

[121] Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, p. 153.

[122] Korn and Samuely, 'A Master Plan for London', p. 145.

[123] Gold, ''A Very Serious Responsibility'?', pp. 249-275.

A comparison of the MARS Plan for London with the earlier work of Denby further highlights the varied interpretations of the meaning of 'social' in modern architecture and planning. Modernist architects were united in their ambition to create housing and urban environments to facilitate social betterment, but this chapter has indicated that there was a variety of different ideas about how this could be achieved. In light of the criticism of the suburban housing of the inter-war period, Denby considered the preferences of the people and generated housing designs in accordance with her survey results. The MARS Group Town Planning Committee opted for large-scale social organisation, while conversely, modernists like Gibberd and Sharp believed that an improvement in the appearance of towns and housing could benefit society on some level. In each case, these varied approaches can be understood within the framework of modernism.

1.3   CONCLUSION

This chapter has also shown that modernist architects criticised the inter-war suburban developments from an aesthetic point of view, while at times adding sociological arguments to reiterate their commitment to modernism. They argued that the fundamental problem was a lack of comprehensive planning; the uncontrolled suburban sprawl of this period, combined with the overcrowded unhealthy environments of the industrial cities, prompted modernist architects to put forward proposals for alternative forms of urban development. Both the criticism and city planning ideas put forward by the modernist architects, as Elizabeth Darling shows, had a profound influence on post-war planning policies. Her study of the architectural discourse of the inter-war period shows the production of 'narratives of modernity.'[124] Darling argues that modernist reformers used such narratives to persuade politicians that modernism was the correct means to re-form the post-war nation in Britain. The modernist plans comprised large-scale social organisation and comprehensive planning, taking a 'scientific' approach. Andrew Higgott has recently argued that the embedding of architectural and planning practices into the

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[124] Darling, *Re-forming Britain*, p. 4.

social and political realm, subsequently led to the 'forgetting of art.'[125] As early as the 1930s, in fact, Thomas Sharp had observed that the artistic element had disappeared from modernist town planning. In his 1932 publication *Town and Countryside,* Sharp quoted Arthur Trystan Edwards who had argued that 'the *Art* of Civic Design [had] been killed by the *Science* of Town Planning.'[126] So great was the focus upon 'social' planning in the 1930s and 40s, the earlier ideas of Camillo Sitte and Raymond Unwin, for example, who considered town planning an art, were overshadowed and neglected. It is from this position that modernist architects like Gibberd and Sharp began to reconsider the visual composition of the 'street picture' in the town, combining these ideas with the earlier social planning principles. The need to develop such a concept of 'urbanity' arose ultimately as a result of modernist architects' disapproval of the appearance of the suburbs, combined with the lack of artistic planning in the modernist scientific schemes devised as a solution to the problem. Although modernist architects looked for social or political arguments to support their criticism of the suburbs, ultimately, the most common complaint was based on their aesthetic preferences. As a result of this, ideas of urbanity would predominantly be concerned with aesthetics.

The following chapter examines the development of the concept, while continuing to examine how urbanity might fit into a modernist framework, despite its emphasis on aesthetics over sociology.

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[125] Higgott, *Mediating Modernism*, p. 82.
[126] Thomas Sharp, *Town and Countryside*, p. 220.

2 DEFINING URBANITY

In the 1940s, a strand of architectural discourse developed which sought to reintroduce an artistic element to urban planning. Gibberd began to investigate English towns and cities from an aesthetic point of view, considering which elements might contribute to the visual urban quality. In this chapter, I will argue that these early studies formed the foundations of Gibberd's ideas about what he later termed 'urbanity' – a visual town-like quality. Similar ideas about the art of visual planning were also developed, particularly by the editors of the *AR,* who reacted against the scientific rational large-scale planning by modernist architects. The *AR* played a key role in the development of these ideas, influencing Gibberd as well as other MARS and CIAM members.

2.1 THE *ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW*

In July 1941, the editor of the monthly journal *The Architectural Review (AR)*, J. M. Richards, published a special issue dedicated to the topic of reconstruction. Richards, who was an early member of the MARS Group, agreed with the general consensus among modernist architects who had also reviewed the uncontrolled spread of housing – that future housing must be planned in a socialist manner, with legislative powers put in place to enable the provision of land and finance, to build better homes for the people. He observed that the most significant difference between reconstruction talk between the two wars was the new emphasis on 'territorial planning,' and by 1941 the need for a 'scientific plan' was fully stated.[1]

In an article entitled *Towards a Replanning Policy*, Richards examined the idea of 'regionalism', which he described as one of the basic concepts typical of modern planning theory, where taking a large-scale view could help achieve efficiency and coordination in the modern world.[2] Richards believed that setting out large-scale

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[1] 'What happened Last Time', *AR*, 90 (1941), 3-5 (p. 3).
[2] J. M. Richards, 'Towards a Replanning Policy', *AR*, 90 (1941), 38-40 (p. 38).

regional plans which took a holistic approach to both town and country, just as the MARS Group Town Planning Committee had been doing since their establishment in 1936, was a step closer to achieving a positive planning solution. However, Richards believed that the modern city – or in Lewis Mumford's terms, the 'Metropolis' – had no place in the regional plan. Metropolitan culture, a product of the Modern Movement in architecture, was international in nature and had no national limits. In response to this, Richards called for a revival of a vernacular approach to architecture, to complement the modernist urbanism of the metropolis. A vernacular approach should facilitate, Richards believed, an expression of differences in places, climate, local customs and traditions, in short, an expression of regional differentiation. After criticising the buildings of Le Corbusier, since they 'detached themselves from the soil' aiming for 'impersonal abstraction', Richards referenced the work of C. F. A. Voysey, who had designed a number of houses at the turn of the century in the Arts and Crafts style. Richards also called for a 'visible expression of regional culture', which he believed historically had arisen from an 'anglicization of a Renaissance vernacular', examples of which could be seen in the ubiquitous domestic architecture of English country towns.[3] It has been well established in recent literature that the *AR* was the 'mouthpiece of British modernism.'[4] It was therefore unusual for MARS Group member J. M. Richards to use an Arts and Crafts example as a precedent for modern planning. Furthermore, while modernist architects were committed to functional design over aesthetics, such emphasis on the visual aspects of towns was also straying from the principles of mainstream modernism. This strengthens the idea that there was a wide range of different ideas within the modernist discourse relating to architecture and planning. Such visual planning notions as the *AR*'s later 'Townscape' campaign are generally considered to be the opposite of modernism; however, Macarthur and Aitchison argue that to editors Hastings, Pevsner and Cullen, Townscape was explicitly modernist.[5] My study of the *AR*'s visual planning ideas will support this argument,

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[3] Richards, 'Towards a Replanning Policy', p. 39.

[4] Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, p. 87.

[5] John Macarthur and Mathew Aitchison, 'Pevsner's Townscape', in *Visual Planning and the Picturesque*, ed. by Mathew Aitchison (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010) pp. 1-43 (p. 14).

as I will show how the editors discussed such artistic town planning concepts from a modernist standpoint.

2.1.1   Englishness and the art of making urban landscape

From the mid-1940s onwards, the *AR* continued to campaign for a return to town planning as an art, rather than a social science, although they were careful to reaffirm their commitment to the new architecture throughout. Nicholas Bullock has examined some of the alternatives to the international qualities of the modernist architecture of the 1930s. He argues that from 1943 onwards, the American idea of regionalism attracted attention in Britain.[6] J. M. Richards had already promoted the idea of differential regional qualities in 1941, but by 1944, the *AR* began to consider what the English identity of modernism might be. Bullock suggests that in Britain, the first deviation from the functional International Style canon of the 1930s was the *AR's* treatment of Swedish architecture in the 1943 article 'Swedish Peace in War.'[7] The article was written by William Holford, who as an early MARS Group member and leader of the reconstruction group under Lord Reith at the Ministry of Works in 1941 was highly influential.[8] During the War, Sweden maintained a neutral position and so, was able to continue building and developing their own regional modern architecture, taking a vernacular approach as well as designing buildings which were sympathetic to the landscape; in light of the task of reconstruction for Britain, it was an ideal precedent. Furthermore, Swedish housing was deemed to be the most progressive in Europe in terms of its social organisation, thus in accord with CIAM's doctrine. Perhaps less in accordance with the earlier modernist principles, however, Holford observed that the Swedes had created architecture with careful selection and refinement of materials, construction and setting, achieving a 'high degree of success as decoration.'[9] American architect and photographer G. E. Kidder Smith contributed to the article with a series of photographs, with the editors also

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[6] Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, p. 31.

[7] Ibid., p. 32.

[8] Mervyn Miller, 'Holford, William Graham, Baron Holford (1907–1975)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31245> [accessed 8 January 2013] (para. 7 of 13)

[9] William Holford, 'The Swedish Scene: An English Architect in Wartime Sweden', *AR*, 94 (1943), 60-79 (p. 60).

commenting on the aesthetics of Swedish housing. They noted that the 'flats and small terrace houses are grouped in varied composition. The hilly country and the many old trees help considerably in the building up of a convincing unity.'[10] Bullock argues that this early interest in Swedish architecture shows the increasing impatience felt in Britain towards the old modernist commitments of the 1930s, and demonstrated *AR*'s determination to address the aesthetic aspects of architecture.[11]

After the War, the *AR* continued to promote the virtues of Swedish architecture, for which they had now given the name 'The New Empiricism.' Writing for the *AR,* photographer Eric de Maré summarised the concept by explaining that it was a 'reaction against a too rigid formalism.' It was felt that the buildings of Sweden were designed for people as opposed to following the 'cold logic of theory.'[12] However, they argued that there had been no strong reaction to the principles upon which functionalism was founded. Therefore, instead of abandoning the earlier modernist ideas altogether, they proposed that functionalism be 'humanised' on the aesthetic side, and that the rationalism of the earlier period be pursued on the technical side. Humanising the aesthetic expression of functionalism, according to the editors, was open to many interpretations. The Swedes had attempted to be more objective than the functionalists by bringing the science of psychology into the picture.[13] The *AR* referred to the Town Hall and hotel designed by Sune Lindstrom (completed in 1940), as an example. The architect, they explained, had 'deliberately sought atmosphere as well as function' and had not been afraid to use traditional materials.[14] Perhaps concerned they might have deviated too far from the CIAM doctrine, the editors reiterated:

> While welcoming the progressive humanization of the modern movement wherever it occurs, one ought perhaps to sound a warning note. The philosophy for which the

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[10] The Editors, 'The Swedish Scene', *AR*, 94 (1943), 87-88 (p. 88).

[11] Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, p. 36.

[12] Eric de Maré, 'The New Empiricism: The Antecedents and origins of Sweden's Latest Style', *AR*, 103 (1948), 9-22 (p. 9).

[13] The Editors, 'The New Empiricism, Sweden's Latest Style', *AR*, 101 (1947), 199-204 (p. 199). The Editors at this time were J. M. Richards, Nikolaus Pevsner, Osbert Lancaster and H. de C. Hastings, with Gordon Cullen as Assistant Art Editor.

[14] Ibid.

modern movement stands is as valid now, and as essential to the healthy growth of the new architecture, as it ever was.[15]

In essence, although there was a renewed emphasis on aesthetics, in the minds of the *AR* editors, this remained from a modernist standpoint.

Throughout the 1940s, while still supporting the cause of the new architecture, the *AR* advocated not only a more visual approach to planning, but a distinctly English form of planning. Erdem Erten has studied the editorial policies of the *AR* to show how between 1947 and 1971, the editors hoped their reinterpretations of British romanticism could influence post-war reconstruction. Through a number of campaigns which began with the rival of the Picturesque theory in the 1940s and culminated in 'Townscape' – the most influential of their campaigns – Erten highlights the plurality of modernist narratives which he argues 'competed to have the greatest influence over architectural discourse.'[16] The *AR's* interest in the eighteenth-century English aesthetic ideal of the Picturesque gathered pace by the early 1940s with a number of articles which examined the history of Picturesque theory. Editor Nikolaus Pevsner championed Picturesque landscaping as one of the 'greatest aesthetic achievements of England' and 'the greatest contribution to European architecture.'[17] Landscape architect H. F. Clark contributed in an earlier issue, explaining the Picturesque approach of the latter end of the eighteenth-century was a fully-developed aesthetic theory which could be described as a visual fine art.[18] The *AR,* since being inspired by Sweden's own version of modern architecture, was keen to promote an English style of modern architecture. In the January 1944 edition, the *AR* proclaimed that: 'In *Picturesque Theory,* evolved on this island early in the eighteenth century and imitated all over Europe round about 1800, a quite unmistakable national point of view asserted itself.'[19] This, it seemed to the *AR,*

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[15] de Maré, 'The New Empiricism', p. 10.

[16] Erdem Erten, 'Shaping "The Second Half Century": The Architectural Review 1947-1971' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2004), p. 21.

[17] Nikolaus Pevsner, 'The Genesis of the Picturesque', *AR*, 96 (1944), 139-146 (p. 139).

[18] H. F. Clark, 'Lord Burlington's Bijou, or Sharawaggi at Chiswick', *AR*, 95 (1944), 125-129 (p. 125).

[19] The Editor, 'Exterior Furnishing or Sharawaggi: The Art of Making Urban Landscape', *AR,* 95 (1944), 2-8 (p. 3). Erten reveals that the article was by H. de C. Hastings (J. M. Richards was not on the editorial board at this time) Erten, p. 35.

could be the answer to the twentieth-century quest for a national identity in modern architecture. The article, entitled 'Exterior Furnishing or Sharawaggi: the art of making urban landscape' was clear: 'what we really need to do now [...] is to resurrect the true theory of the Picturesque and apply a point of view already existing to a field in which it has not been consciously applied before: *the city*.'[20]

AR editor H. de C. Hastings argued that within planning theory at that time, there were essentially tensions between three groups: 'the garden city people, the Bauhausians, and the County Councils.'[21] He argued that 'Sharawaggi', or the art of making urban landscape, could resolve such tensions since it could be sympathetic to all three groups, as the concept lent itself well to compromise. He argued that 'compromise' was the 'English form of synthesis' and in 'Exterior Furnishing', there was room for the old and the new, and for both tradition and innovation. The following year, the *AR* continued to discuss ideas of Englishness in relation to planning, arguing that the modern planner must learn that planning was not architecture, rather, it was:

> an art of compromise ("the English form of synthesis") by which apparently incompatible purposes and apparently incongruous forms, and hopelessly antipathetic people, come up for reconciliation on the various planes including the one we are dealing with here, the visual plane.[22]

By regarding the subject of urban planning as an art of compromise, the *AR* believed it would be possible overcome the tensions which existed in planning theory during the early 1940s. Furthermore, by combining ideas from the past, such as Picturesque principles, with modern planning solutions, the *AR* editors believed it was possible to create an English version of modern architecture. It is interesting that Hastings should use the term 'Bauhausians' to represent the modernist line of thought on city planning. Gropius, who set up the Bauhaus School in 1919, also believed modern architecture should be more than utilitarian – it should be an art which tended to the needs of people's cultural aspirations. The idea that artistic or visual aspects of

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[20] 'Exterior Furnishing or Sharawaggi', p. 3.
[21] Ibid., p. 6.
[22] The Editor, 'The English Planning Tradition in the City', *AR*, 97 (1945), 165-176 (p. 175).

planning could improve the cultural lives of society would become a major theme in both the *AR*'s visual planning campaigns, as well as Gibberd's work at Harlow. The latter will be discussed in Part 2 of the study.

Developing the idea of an artistic, specifically English form of modern architecture and planning, Hastings had proposed that the English theory of the Picturesque could be applied to the city. How, then, did the *AR* propose the eighteenth-century landscape theory could be applied to the twentieth-century modern urban landscape? Firstly, in 1944 Pevsner summarised Uvedale Price's *Essays on the Picturesque* (1796-1810), explaining that Price had made the connection between Picturesque landscape characteristics and qualities of architecture which might also be described as picturesque.[23] From Price's essays, Pevsner extracted paragraphs and words such as, 'roughness' 'irritation' 'piquant' 'variety' and 'intricacy' and loosely indicated how Price's principles might be applied to the problem of urban design. Later, in a paper presented at the RIBA in 1947, Pevsner was less ambiguous about how such elements could be applied to architectural design. From this paper, it is possible to deduce a number of points which would later be carried forward to the culminating Townscape campaign, and would also become intrinsic to Gibberd's interpretation of 'urbanity.' Pevsner summarised his understanding of the final set of criteria derived from Price's essays as 'variation, irregularity, intricacy, piquancy, [and] roughness.'[24] Quoting again from Price, Pevsner stated 'a number of common houses become picturesque because they are built of various heights in various directions, and because those variations are sudden and irregular.'[25] The principles formulated in the eighteenth century – principles of variety, of intricacy, of the connection of a building with nature, of advance and recess, swelling and sinking, and contrasts in texture – should not only be applied to the individual building, but also to the problem of connecting buildings; that is, the problem of planning.[26]

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[23] Nikolaus Pevsner, 'Price on Picturesque Planning', *AR*, 95 (1944), 47-50 (p. 47).
[24] Nikolaus Pevsner, 'The Picturesque in Architecture', *RIBAJ*, 55 (1947), 55-61 (p. 56).
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., p. 58.

There were mixed feelings following Pevsner's lecture. MARS group member John Summerson commented: 'what Dr Pevsner this evening has described as picturesque architecture is simply architecture.'[27] RIBA President Sir Lancelot Keay gave his vote of thanks but questioned: 'whether we should go away and talk about picturesqueness in architecture I am not sure...'[28] The 'soft' New Empiricist, or 'New Humanist' approach to design had led to a schism within the MARS Group. Eric Mumford has recently shown how at the eighth CIAM Congress in 1951, the younger generation of post-war architects were opposed to the older generation, who favoured the New Empiricism. The New Town housing and planning work discussed at the Hoddesdon meeting were not respected by the younger architects.[29] The Smithsons clarified the position of the younger generation later in *AD* in 1955, where they criticised the New Towns as being 'mothered by the Garden City Movement'. For them, the Garden City Movement and therefore the New Towns, had achieved their form by 'discovering the aesthetic means to achieving a social programme.'[30] The tension between the groups was also evident at the earlier CIAM Congress at Bridgwater in 1947, where Gibberd presented his Harlow plan. In 1948, CIAM Secretary Sigfried Giedion thanked the MARS Group for raising the question of the current aesthetic problems, but added: 'I confess this was not done without the resistance of a large part of the Congress which believed that we would lose our foothold the moment we entered the sphere of the emotions.'[31] Mumford shows that by 1947, it was *AR* editor and MARS member J. M. Richards who shifted the direction of MARS Group concerns away from the pre-war CIAM ideals toward his own interests in the aesthetic appeal of modern architecture to the 'Common Man.'[32] This highlights the significant influence the *AR* had over the architectural elite, with its campaign to reconsider the visual qualities of modern architecture. Furthermore, as Erten explains, Richards believed the 'Common Man' – or the 'layman' with no architectural training – had a predominantly visual relationship with his

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[27] Pevsner, 'The Picturesque in Architecture', p. 58.

[28] Ibid., p. 60.

[29] Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, p. 217.

[30] Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The Built World: Urban Reidentification', *Architectural Design,* 25 (1955), 185-188 (p. 185).

[31] S. Giedion, 'Art and Architecture, Professor S. Giedion's Lecture to the MARS Group', *The Builder*, 175 (1948), 276-277 (p. 276).

[32] Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, p. 168.

surroundings. Modern architecture, while answering utilitarian needs, had neglected the people's emotional needs.[33] Richards believed that to win the support of the common man, modern architecture needed to be 'humanized', by using natural materials and by re-admitting regional qualities as he had advocated in *Towards a Replanning Policy* in 1941.

While Richards's efforts to humanise modern architecture prompted questioning from the younger generation, Pevsner was careful to reiterate his commitment to the modernist values of architecture during his talk at the RIBA. He claimed that the implementation of picturesque principles to contemporary design was neither a 'whim nor a romantic escape back to the 18th century but a sound policy, and the hard rather than the soft way of dealing with the contemporary problems of architecture and planning.'[34] This is an interesting comment since recent reviews of modern architecture show that the Picturesque-inspired architecture of the 1950s was later mocked and labelled as 'soft', in opposition to the 'hard' Corbusian-influenced architecture.[35]

Erdem Erten has drawn parallels between the two differing design approaches of 'soft' and 'hard' to that of political orientation. Referring to the Alton Estate by the LCC in Roehampton, where the split between the 'softs' and the 'hards' became most visible, Erten argues that the first phase 'Alton East' was realised by the architects in the London County Council who were more sympathetic to a socialist agenda.[36] Alton East (built 1952-55) comprises a mixture of eleven-storey Swedish inspired 'point blocks', and a combination of four- and two-storey terraces sited among the landscape and mature trees. The second, later phase, Alton West (built 1955-59) also has a mixture of point blocks and lower terraces, but most notably it

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[33] Erten, 'Shaping "The Second Half Century"', p. 223.
[34] Pevsner, 'The Picturesque in Architecture', p. 58.
[35] For example: Stephen Kite, 'Softs and Hards: Colin St. John Wilson and the Contested Visions of 1950s London', in *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond,* ed. by Mark Crinson & Claire Zimmerman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), John Partridge, 'Roehampton Housing', in *Housing the Twentieth Century Nation,* ed. by Elain Harwood, & Alan Powers (London: Twentieth Century Society, 2008) and Colin St John Wilson, *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture, The Uncompleted Project* (London: Academy Group Ltd, 1995)
[36] Erten, 'Shaping "The Second Half Century"', p. 220.

includes a staggered row of five eleven-storey Corbusian inspired slab blocks.[37] Erten suggests that the team responsible for this later phase saw themselves as more liberal.[38] Mumford argues that most architects who leaned toward the political Left preferred the Swedish type of architecture as it was seen as a middle ground between Stalinist socialist realism and the "tougher" kinds of modernism.[39] Certainly political influences had an impact upon the development of the two channels of modernist architecture, however, Glendinning and Muthesius argue that there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that in the 1940s and 50s most architects saw themselves as social reformers. Therefore, in their study of the architectural solutions to social problems of this era, they deem party-political affiliation as unimportant.[40] This line of argument seems more fitting to Gibberd's role at Harlow; his early work has become associated with the 'soft' modernism, despite Gibberd claiming to have no political affiliation.[41] Rather than adopting a Corbusian 'hard' approach, Gibberd opted for a Picturesque-inspired approach, as he felt this was right for the people.[42] Such an approach could be considered a form of 'libertarian paternalism', which Mark White has recently described as an ambition to help people make better choices, or rather, to 'nudge' them into making the 'right' choice.'[43]

This 'libertarian paternalism' will become a significant theme in Part 2 of the thesis, as Gibberd attempted to create a sense of urbanity on the basis of Picturesque principles, sometimes in tension with people's preferences. Particularly in Chapter 6, it will become evident that there was potentially a conflict between what people at Harlow preferred and what Gibberd believed people's preferences ought to be. Significantly, Erten has argued that such paternalism also existed within the *AR*

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[37] Point blocks, (favoured by the Swedes) are multi-storey blocks with flats organised around a single central circulation core. Slab blocks on the other hand, are multi-storey blocks with any number of vertical circulation cores with flats accessed via corridors (or later "streets in the air")

[38] Erten, 'Shaping "The Second Half Century"', p. 220.

[39] Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, p. 167.

[40] Glendinning and Muthesius, p. 110.

[41] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, Bibliography File, *The Architectural Review* Questionnaire Reply by Frederick Gibberd, December 1972, p. 6.

[42] John Graham (former partner of Frederick Gibberd & Partners – Harlow Office), interviewed by author, 25 May 2012.

[43] Mark D. White, *The Manipulation of Choice: Ethics and Libertarian Paternalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. xiii.

policies. Erten refers to a study by Julia Stapleton of the relationship between cultural identity and politics. Stapleton's study reveals a tradition of 'positive engagement with nationhood' which began with the sense of national responsibility felt by Victorian intellectuals – who believed such an engagement could have a positive impact nationally and culturally – lasted well into the twentieth century.[44] Erten has drawn parallels between this 'liberal paternalism' in British culture and the policies and motives of the *AR* editors. He argues that the editors believed that scholarship should not be reserved for the elite, but should be disseminated 'down the ladder of social class.'[45] Such liberal paternalism and quest for Englishness promoted by conservative intellectuals during the early 1940s and 50s in Britain were not limited to the conservative liberals. Erten shows that after the War, intellectuals from the emerging New Left also questioned cultural particularity as a means for socialist programs of cultural development.[46] In this context, the *AR* editors announced their new post war policy; over the next decade they hoped to 're-educate the eye.'[47] This re-education was for the eyes of both the architect and the layman: for the modernist architect, it was a message that politics and sociology had been given their due and ultimately, architecture should be considered again as an art; for the layman, it could show the possibilities of architecture, showing the appropriate solutions for the people.

2.1.2 Townscape

The *AR* continued to promote the idea of cultural continuity and visual re-education of the eye; in 1949, they published their most influential and well-known article 'Townscape.' This was the combination of Englishness and Picturesque principles highlighted by Pevsner, the ideas from Richards to 'humanise' the built environment, as well as the 'Exterior Furnishing' ideas advocated by Hastings. Hastings (under the pseudonym I. de Wolfe) was the author of the essay; the full title was 'Townscape: A Plea for an English Visual Philosophy founded on the true

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[44] Julia Stapleton, Political Intellectuals and Public Identities in Britain since 1850 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 2.
[45] Erten, 'Shaping "The Second Half Century"', p. 169.
[46] Ibid., p. 170.
[47] J. M. Richards and others, 'The Second Half Century', *AR*, 101 (1947), 21-26 (p. 25).

rock of Sir Uvedale Price.' The title demonstrates that Hastings was advocating a distinctly English visual town planning concept based on Price's Picturesque theory, as both Hastings and Pevsner proposed earlier. The merging of the words 'Town' and 'Landscape' is also suggestive of Richards's idea to humanise modern architecture and planning by integrating buildings and landscape. In the 'Townscape' article, Hastings referred to the split between the modernist architects which had become evident at the 1947 CIAM Congress. Perhaps aware that the New Empiricism might fall into the 'soft' category deemed insufficiently modernist by the younger generation, Hastings argued that 'Townscape' was to be not one or the other, but a new, third movement which might be called 'English or Radical.'[48] Aitchison has recently argued that in the 1949 Townscape article, Hastings confuses the original argument set out in 'Exterior Furnishing' by discussing at length the theory of liberalism.[49] Indeed, Hastings himself explains that while he attempted to relate Picturesque Theory with its political background, the reader might have felt as though he was writing about democracy and liberalism rather than town planning and landscape.[50] Perhaps the success and accessibility of the Townscape campaign rests on the essay of images by Gordon Cullen. The 'Townscape Casebook' comprised a mixture of photographs and sketches by Cullen to demonstrate examples of 'civic design' as precedents. This, according to Hastings, was the only way a 'true radical' could set out to establish visual planning precedents, and the only way an English visual tradition could be reborn.[51] Figs 2.1 – 2.4 show a selection of photographs from the Casebook which illustrate Picturesque principles Pevsner had put forward during his talk at the RIBA, as well as the notion of exterior furnishing put forward by Hastings. Fig.2.5 and fig.2.6, however, show new elements of 'enclosure' and 'floorscape' which place emphasis on the importance of the space between buildings in Townscape.

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[48] I. de Wolfe, 'Townscape: A Plea for an English Visual Philosophy founded on the true rock of Sir Uvedale Price', *AR*, 106 (1949), 354-362 (p.362).
[49] Macarthur and Aitchison, p. 15.
[50] I. de Wolfe, 'Townscape', p.362.
[51] Ibid.

Exterior Furnishing & Picturesque principles illustrated in the 'Townscape Casebook'

Fig.2.1.

Fig.2.2.
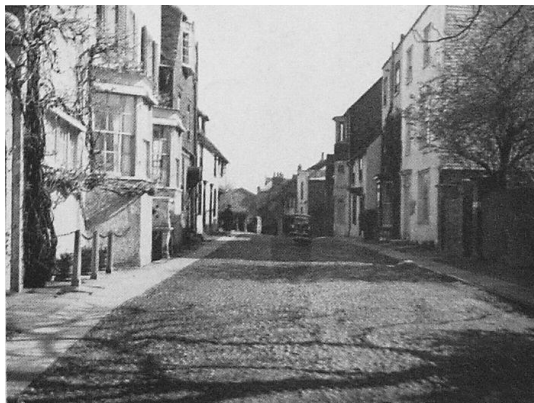
Fig.2.3.

Fig.2.4.

Fig.2.1.   Intricacy: 'the elusive quality proper to a rich diversity of function'[52]

Fig.2.2.   Undulation: 'has a particularly strong grip of space due to its variation'[53]

Fig.2.3.   Projection and Recession: 'It gives scale and humanity'[54]

Fig.2.4.   Trees: placed as if 'arranging a fern in one's living-room'[55]

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[52] Gordon Cullen, 'Townscape Casebook', *The Architectural Review,* 106 (1949), 363-374 (p.369).
[53] Ibid., p.367.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., p.368.

New elements presented in the 'Townscape Casebook' (*AR,* Dec. 1949)

Fig.2.5.   Fig.2.6.

Fig.2.5.   Enclosure: 'one of the most fundamental aspects of Civic Design'[56]

Fig.2.6.   Floorscape: 'The space between buildings is just as important in the total view
        as the buildings'[57]

Many of the examples of 'Civic Design' in the Casebook show scenes of English
Georgian housing, or old English market towns, thus supporting the *AR*'s campaign
for 'Englishness' and picturesque planning. The images also show traditional
materials and building techniques, and buildings which are sympathetic to the
landscape. Therefore, it could be argued that these images selected by the *AR*
represented methods which could be adopted in future modern plans, to 'humanise'
the built environment, as an attempt to engage with the 'common man' where
International Style architecture had failed to do so. The emphasis on the importance
of spaces between buildings, however, appears to be an additional element to the
AR's preceding array of ideas developed from the early 1940s onwards. It is possible
that the editors were influenced by Camillo Sitte, who wrote 'City Building
According to Artistic Principles' in 1889. The book was translated into English and
published in 1945 as *The Art of Building Cities: City building according to its
artistic fundamentals*, where Sitte stressed the importance of enclosure in the design
of civic spaces.[58] The term 'Civic Design' in the early part of the twentieth century

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[56] Cullen, p.365.
[57] Ibid., p.371.
[58] Camillo Sitte, *City Planning According to Artistic Principles,* trans. by George R. Collins and
    Christiane Crasemann Collins (London: Phaidon Press, 1965), pp. 32-38.

evoked visions of 'great vistas, striking axial effects, regularity, lavishness, monumentality' as Thomas Sharp explained.[59] This was the type of city planning taught at the Liverpool School of Civic Design, influenced by the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* and the American City Beautiful Movement. However, during the 1940s as the *AR* began to criticise the monumental planning demonstrated by the hard modernists in favour of a softer humanised approach, so too did the meaning of Civic Design change. Rather than the European grand vistas, the 'new' Civic Design was scaled down to a more human street scale. Thomas Sharp and Frederick Gibberd in particular, developed the idea of Civic Design, changing its meaning. Furthermore, Sharp had also generated his own ideas specific to the notions of Townscape and Civic Design in the earlier publication *Oxford Re-planned* in 1948. There has been recent speculation as to who was responsible for the idea and for coining the term 'Townscape.' As John Pendlebury shows, Hastings visited Sharp in Oxford while Sharp was working on his Oxford project.[60] In the *AR* 'Townscape' essay, published a year after Sharp's *Oxford Re-planned*, Hastings claimed ownership of the idea by stating that town planning as a visual art was 'termed by Thomas Sharp as Civic Design and by the REVIEW, I think, Townscape.'[61] This highlights two key points. Firstly, there was more than one term given to the idea of town planning as a visual art. Secondly, those developing such ideas were aware of, and influenced by, others developing similar ideas. Furthermore, although such ideas about visual planning deviated from the mainstream modernist principles relating to architecture and planning, the key figures involved still considered themselves to belong to the modern movement. Richards and Hastings from the *AR* were members of the MARS Group, as was Thomas Sharp.

2.2   THE EARLY IDEAS OF GIBBERD AND SHARP

Aside from the notion of Townscape publicised by the editors of the *AR,* other significant figures involved in the development of visual planning concepts from a modernist standpoint, were architect planners Thomas Sharp and Frederick Gibberd.

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[59] Thomas Sharp, 'Civic Design', *The Architectural Association Journal,* 58 (1942), 38-40 (p. 38).
[60] John Pendlebury, 'The Urbanism of Thomas Sharp', *Planning Perspectives*, 24 (2009), 3-27 (p. 12).
[61] I. de Wolfe, 'Townscape', p.362.

Recent publications have highlighted Sharp's key role in the conception of Townscape.[62] However, Gibberd's role in the development of what he called 'urbanity' is less well known. In my view, Gibberd's work is an example of Townscape in practice. The next section will unravel some of the overlapping themes of visual town planning to form a more cohesive idea of what 'urbanity' meant to Gibberd, and others, at the time.

2.2.1 Civic Design

As Hastings argued in the 1949 Townscape article, Thomas Sharp had named his version of visual town planning 'Civic Design', while the *AR* had coined the term 'Townscape'. However, Sharp explained in *Oxford Re-planned* that 'Townscape' had always been in practice, although unlike his interpretation, those who had previously considered the visual aspects of towns regarded the urban scene as only a series of stills. He used the analogy of 'art practised by the eighteenth-century Improver of land', perhaps an acknowledgment of the *AR*'s Picturesque revival*,* and explained that 'we, after all, are Improvers of cities.'[63] In the Tailpiece, he showed examples of elements of the urban scene such as trees, colour and texture, and intricacy – again overlapping with some of *AR*'s themes. He argued that in the modern world, Townscape must be regarded as mobile – the 'capacity for forming fresh and stimulating combinations becomes nearly infinite [...] one begins to get an idea for the possibilities of the art of Civic Design.'[64] Perhaps for Sharp, 'Civic Design' took a more holistic approach to civic spaces, the idea being about moving through different spaces, creating a variety of visual experiences for the user.

Sharp had promoted his ideas of Civic Design a number of years prior to *Oxford Re-planned*. In 1942, he presented a paper exclusively on the subject at a general meeting of the Architectural Association (AA). In relation to the monumentality of Civic Design, seen in Paris for example, Sharp argued that in England the town was seen as a home, not a monument. Reiterating some of his earlier ideas from *English*

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[62] Erdem Erten, 'Thomas Sharp's collaboration with H. de C. Hastings: the formulations of townscape as urban design pedagogy', *Planning Perspectives*, 24 (2009) 29-49.

[63] Thomas Sharp, *Oxford Re-planned* (London: Architectural Press, 1948), p. 36.

[64] Ibid., p. 34.

Panorama, Sharp argued that Civic Design, instead of placing architectural emphasis on the individual building or home, should focus upon the collective home, namely, the street.[65] As in *Town and Countryside,* in 'Civic Design' Sharp showed his opposition to individualism in favour of a more collective approach to town design. He argued for a return to 'street architecture' and advocated a 'more *intimate* planning' which he believed was 'nearer to the true English tradition.'[66] The English planning of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Sharp observed, valued a cooperative architectural expression of citizenship rather than the 'creation of architectural scenery for the glorification of some dictator.'[67] This English form of planning could perhaps be more suitable to a democratic society. Sharp's campaign for a revival of an English tradition of planning seen in the eighteenth-century provincial town overlapped with *AR'*s drive to regain an English identity in modern architecture. Sharp believed that the inter-war debates about density, which responded to the congested British towns, had resulted in open development. Placing substantial importance on the quality of 'intimacy', Sharp explained:

> There is a great deal to be said for maintaining a sense of compactness, of enclosure and intimacy in a town [...] enough to maintain a sense of snugness, of comfort, of sociability.[68]

Sharp also called for an occasional contrast to this 'subtle sense of enclosure' by way of occasional spaciousness; a combination of concentration and openness Sharp argued, would lead to 'delight and beauty' in the town. Thus, Sharp's formula for a 'good town' was as follows:

> The neighbourhoods, the community units, compact: and between them spacious areas of lawns and trees, some running out wedge-wise into the open country, others ranging ring-wise across the town.[69]

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[65] Sharp, 'Civic Design', p. 38.
[66] Ibid., p. 40.
[67] Ibid., p. 38.
[68] Ibid., p. 40.
[69] Ibid.

This quote is of great significance to this study; in Chapter 3 I will discuss Gibberd's master plan for Harlow New Town, thus revealing Sharp's direct influence upon Gibberd's planning. Since Gibberd became Principal of the AA in January 1942, it is likely he was present at Sharp's talk on Civic Design. This is a clear indication of how similar ideas about visual planning overlapped and influenced one another during the 1940s. For example, Thomas Sharp interpreted Civic Design to be a 'mobile' version of English Townscape. Gibberd on the other hand, in relation to his ambitions to create a town-like quality at Harlow in 1947, explained that Civic Design was 'the art of arranging buildings, or groups of buildings, to each other and to the landscape.'[70] Unlike Sharp's version, Gibberd placed emphasis upon the 'art' of Civic Design and the relation of buildings to each other and the landscape. Where comparisons can be drawn between Sharp's thinking and the Englishness advocated by the *AR,* Gibberd's interpretation of Civic Design has more in common with the *AR'*s Picturesque principles.

Gibberd's personal diaries indicate that he too, was interested in the traditional qualities of old English country towns. In 1945, Gibberd carried out a number of studies at the small English market town of Saffron Walden (figs 2.7 – 2.10), a town he would later praise for its tightly-built environment. Over four pages, Gibberd examined the various colours and textures of the buildings (figs 2.7 and 2.8), as well as the impact of trees in the street scene (fig.2.9) and the range of elements in front of a house in Radwinter, near Saffron Walden (fig.10). The studies comprise a mixture of photographs and annotated sketches. In my view, they illustrate Gibberd's early thoughts on Civic Design, which, influenced by the *AR*, show a consideration of Picturesque principles of variety in texture and colour as well as the furnishing of the street scene with trees.

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[70] Frederick Gibberd, 'Harlow New Town', *The Architect and Building News*, 192 (1947), 245-258 (p. 246).

Gibberd's 1945 Saffron Walden studies (Diary 1944-46, Gibberd Garden Archive)

Fig.2.7. Texture

Fig.2.8. Colour

Fig.2.9. Trees

Fig.2.10. Frontage treatment

Gibberd's examination of texture at Saffron Walden in 1945 may have been a continuation of ideas from an earlier study of wall textures. A note in Gibberd's diary reveals that Richards had commissioned him to write an article on the subject of 'texture' in 1940. On 7 March, Gibberd and Richards met for lunch, with the aim of finalising the article for the *AR*.[71] On 14 March Gibberd's diary entry shows that he had been making further notes for the 'Texture' article after his lunch with Richards, using his own photographs, as well as some additional ones which had been taken by Richards.[72] This early collaboration could explain some of the evident overlaps between Gibberd's ideas about Civic Design and the AR's early Townscape ideas. For example, in 1941, Richards had reacted against the large-scale regional planning qualities exemplified by the MARS Group Town Planning Committee's proposals, campaigning for a vernacular approach to design. He hoped this could obtain differential regional qualities in towns and cities and cited the domestic architecture of English country towns as a precedent.[73] In Gibberd's opening paragraph to his 1940 article 'Wall Textures – A Local Study', Gibberd demonstrates a similar outlook in relation to the modern movement, as well as a desire to reconsider the visual effects of traditional, local materials:

> A generation or so ago the traditional building crafts were a common subject of architectural study. But a revolution intervened and we found ourselves ignoring the craftsmanship aspect of traditional building as part of the action of turning our backs on the stylistic pedantry into which tradition has become debased. But the modern revolution has now done its job in the sense that it has reoriented architecture towards its essentials. It has enabled us once more to look at traditional things, such as the various effects that are obtained with local materials [...] for their own sake. [74]

This suggests that at heart, Gibberd was not entirely convinced by the rejection of tradition, as CIAM's doctrine called for. It appears that Gibberd believed that if one were to keep in mind the fundamentals of architecture in accordance with

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[71] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, 1940-43 Personal Diary, 7 March 1940.
[72] Ibid., 14 March 1940.
[73] Richards, 'Towards a Replanning Policy', p. 39.
[74] Frederick Gibberd, 'Wall Textures, A Local Study by Frederick Gibberd', *AR*, 88 (1940), 9-14 (p. 9).

modernism, it might be acceptable to look again to traditional examples, to examine the purely visual effects of materials and textures. Gibberd proceeded to examine various examples of wall finishes in the local vernacular at the small town of Lewes in East Sussex, and suggested that such examples only highlighted how far contemporary architecture, 'whether modern or "traditional"' had to go still before it could claim 'the same range and variety.'[75] Of the examples shown, Gibberd focused mostly on the varying uses of flint, but also examined brick, slate, tiles, stone and wood.

The evidence shows that Gibberd was examining the visual qualities of traditional materials, which at the time, would have been regarded as going against the earlier modernist principles. It could be argued, however, that since the materials were exposed, Gibberd was examining 'honest' materials in terms of their structural or functional potential. The idea that materials should be used 'as found' became one of the core principles of the later modernist New Brutalist movement. Furthermore, Gibberd's belief that traditional precedents could be considered from a modernist standpoint was ahead of mainstream modernist discourse of the time. Later in 1951, as Mumford has recently shown, a number of CIAM members began to focus on historical centres at the eighth congress at Hoddesdon, where the theme was 'The Heart of the City'.[76] In addition to this, the modernist ideas of 'New Monumentality' advocated an expansion of modernist vocabulary by linking the past with the future. It seemed that after the War, it became acceptable among modernist circles to look again to the past as a precedent for future architecture and urban planning. Although Gibberd's declaration in 1940 that 'traditional things' could once more be considered in contemporary design may have gone against the conventional modernist line of thinking at the time, it could be argued that Gibberd was at the forefront of modernist architectural thought.

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[75] Gibberd, 'Wall Textures', p. 9.
[76] Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, p. 215.
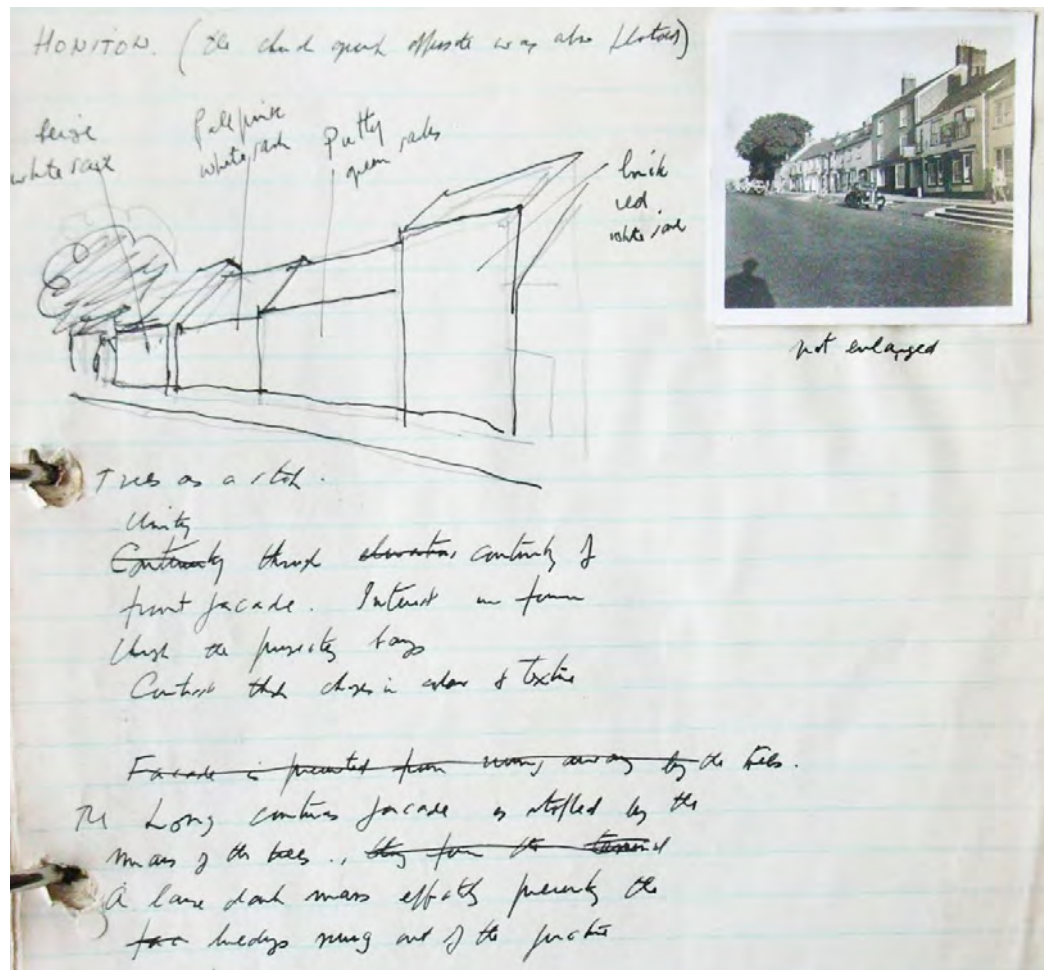
Figure 2.11 Gibberd's Honiton Study, 1945 (Diary 1944-46, Gibberd Garden Archive)

Gibberd's interest in texture and variety continued to develop throughout the first few years of the 1940s, and by 1945, he began to examine the overall effect of varying colour and texture. In his study of a street in the Devonshire market town of Honiton (fig.2.11), Gibberd described the implications of some of the elements he observed. Beneath his sketch of a street facade comprising buildings of varying heights, Gibberd had noted that there was 'unity through continuity of front facade' and 'contrast through changes in colour and texture.'[77] The ideas of variation and contrast through different textures are comparable to the Picturesque principles Pevsner had advocated in the *AR* earlier, from 1944 onwards. This again highlights the overlapping nature of visual town planning themes which developed in the

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[77] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, 1940-43 Personal Diary.

1940s. It also indicates Gibberd's early concern for 'Civic Design', or the overall visual appearance of the street scene.

By the early 1950s, however, Gibberd began to focus on the 'Detail in Civic Design', delivering a paper of that title to the Town Planning Institute in 1951. Gibberd continued to apply the term to the design of the 'urban scene', but in relation to the 'details', parallels can be drawn between Gibberd's speech and the *AR* initiative for exterior furnishing and urban planning as an art. When the urban scene, Gibberd explained, was 'cluttered up with innumerable badly designed objects, we get a general impression of untidiness and squalor.'[78] Gibberd advocated that details of Civic Design, such as lampposts, should be carefully designed, and each detail should be considered in relation to other objects in the urban scene, as well as in relation to the urban spatial composition. These, however, were not new ideas. Gordon Cullen in his 1949 'Townscape Casebook' had commented on what he termed 'street furniture'. Fig.2.13 shows a photograph from the Casebook which was accompanied by Cullen's commentary explaining that: 'the photograph shows the bad effect of crowding together pieces of street furniture which in themselves are good.'[79]
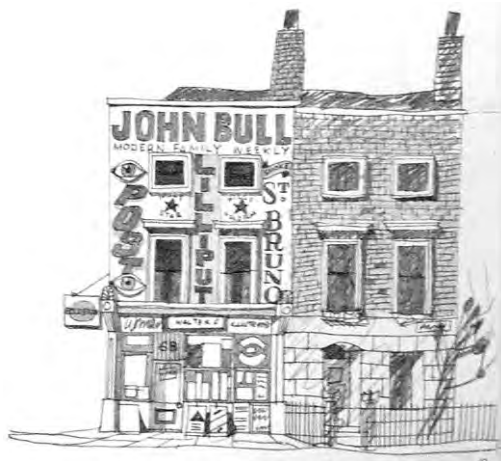
Fig.2.12. 'Publicity'
(Townscape Casebook, *AR*, Dec. 1949)
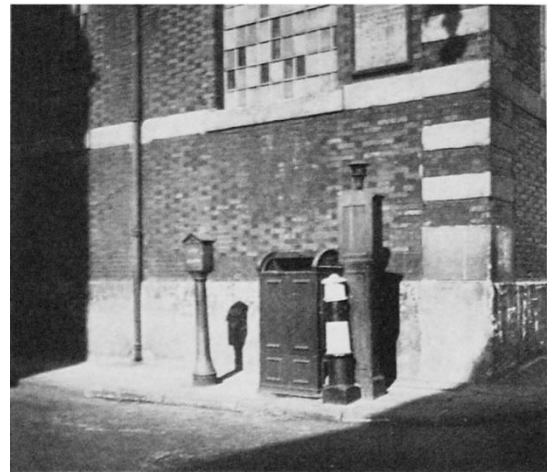
Fig.2.13. 'Street Furniture'
(Townscape Casebook, *AR*, Dec. 1949)

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[78] Frederick Gibberd, 'Detail in Civic Design', *AJ*, 133 (1951), 304-306 (p. 304).
[79] Cullen, p.371.

There were many other overlapping themes between Gibberd's Civic Design paper and the Townscape Casebook. For example, Gibberd advocated visual variety in Civic Design, referring to architectural details such as 'a projecting porch, or a bay window.'[80] This is a similar idea to the 'projection and recession' (fig.2.3) of Cullen's Townscape Casebook, as well as to Pevsner's 'variety' in Picturesque planning. Gibberd also spoke of the dangers of advertising control, claiming that much had already been said about the 'evils of advertising on buildings', but believing that shop keepers should be permitted to advertise, since this could add character and avoid creating a 'dull and dreary scene.'[81] Cullen had also referred to 'publicity' in his Casebook two years earlier, suggesting that such advertising on buildings could create a desirable effect on the busy shopping street (fig.2.12). Again, influenced by the *AR,* Gibberd spoke of 'quality of surface', suggesting that the details of 'texture, pattern and colour of the walls, floors and furnishings' of urban spaces could provide 'variety by sudden contrast.'[82] Referring to *Oxford Replanned*, Gibberd argued that Sharp had demonstrated the importance of the relationship in scale between the wall and flooring materials in the urban scene. Since traffic was now being taken out of many town squares, Gibberd believed that there would soon be a 'revival of the aesthetic expression of the floor plane.'[83] With this, Gibberd argued, there would be the chance to obtain an 'intimacy' in design between the wall and the floor planes. This demonstrates firstly, Thomas Sharp's influence on Gibberd on matters of Civic Design. Secondly, it shows another element similar to those presented in Cullen's Casebook, that of 'Floorscape' (fig.2.6). However, where Cullen had hinted at the functional performance of the Floorscape, reaffirming a commitment to earlier modernist principles – much in the same way Pevsner and Hastings had done previously – Gibberd spoke freely about the purely aesthetic nature of Civic Design, without including any commentary on social or functional aspects. This puts Gibberd in a unique position in the development of visual planning principles, since his contemporaries at the *AR* were always careful to restate their commitment to the new architecture whilst advocating

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[80] Gibberd, 'Detail in Civic Design', p. 306.
[81] Ibid., p. 305.
[82] Ibid., p. 306.
[83] Ibid.

visual planning; Gibberd on the other hand, deliberately took a purely aesthetic stance in the matter.

Furthermore, the difficulty in overcoming the absence of Civic Design, Gibberd believed, was 'that the choice of object is so often left to people with no developed aesthetic sensibility.'[84] This was a contradiction to the earlier ideas promoted by Richards, where the layman, having a predominantly visual relationship with his environment, had an innate understanding of beauty. Gibberd on the other hand, advocated that the 'trained artist' – i.e., the architect, who like himself, had 'an initial five years' training in aesthetics' – should hold a key position in the design of the total urban scene.[85] This was a further contradiction, since the old English market towns Gibberd had admired, had developed over time with a variety of contributors. Gibberd's ideas about the role of the architect can be better understood, however, if placed in the context of the architects' need to reassert his professional role after his exclusion from a large portion of inter-war developments. In relation to an aesthetic control over the urban scene, Gibberd referred to MARS Group member Godfrey Samuel's term 'family relationship', which Gibberd explained was a general character which resulted from the street scene and the objects in it having been designed under one direction. As in Edwards's 'Social Aspects of Civic Design,'[86] it might be assumed that such wording – 'family relationship' – referred to the people and their use of the town. In both cases, however, such terms are used only as an analogy for the aesthetic aspects of towns.

The drive to reconsider architecture and town planning as an art was strengthened by the work of the Royal Fine Art Commission (RFAC). The RFAC was appointed in May 1924 to:

> [..] inquire into such questions of public amenity or of artistic importance as may be referred to them from time to time by any of our Departments of State, and to report thereon to such Department; and furthermore, to give advice on similar questions

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[84] Gibberd, 'Detail in Civic Design', p. 305.

[85] Ibid.

[86] A. Trystan Edwards, *Good and Bad Manners in Architecture, An essay on the Social Aspects of Civic Design,* 2nd edn (London: John Tiranti, 1944)

when so required by public or quasi-public bodies, where it appears to the said Commission that their assistance would be advantageous.[87]

In 1952, the RFAC included nineteen Commissioners; of the nineteen, thirteen were either Associates or Fellows of the RIBA, and three of those (including Gibberd) were Members of the Town Planning Institute. The existence of the Commission has contextual relevance to this study, since the annual meetings were a place for Commissioners to discuss and share ideas specifically about the artistic nature of the built environment. Furthermore, Commissioners were able to influence Governmental Departments with their contemporary ideas about the urban scene. Gibberd became a Commissioner in 1950, and significantly, by 1952 other Commissioners included MARS Group members William Holford, John Summerson, Godfrey Samuel, J. M. Richards (editor of the *AR*), and Lionel Brett (architect planner to Hatfield New Town), as well as Louis de Soissons (architect planner of Welwyn Garden City). It is likely that this is how such terms as 'street furniture' became commonplace in the architectural field by the early 1950s.

However, this is not to suggest that Gibberd's ideas were unoriginal. Sketches I have discovered in Gibberd's personal diaries would suggest the opposite, in fact. Gibberd's 1944-6 diary contains sketches of street furniture elements (although Gibberd had not yet labelled them as such at this time). During a visit to the small English seaside town of Budleigh Salterton, Gibberd observed and sketched a stone wall which separated a sloping garden from the road, and a post which formed part of a railing – items he would later call 'details of Civic Design'(fig.2.14).

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[87] The Royal Fine Art Commission, *Eighth Report of the Royal Fine Art Commission 1946-47* (London: HMSO, 1949), p. 3. The RFAC became The Commission for Architecture in the Built Environment (CABE) in 1999, and more recently, CABE merged with the Design Council in 2011.
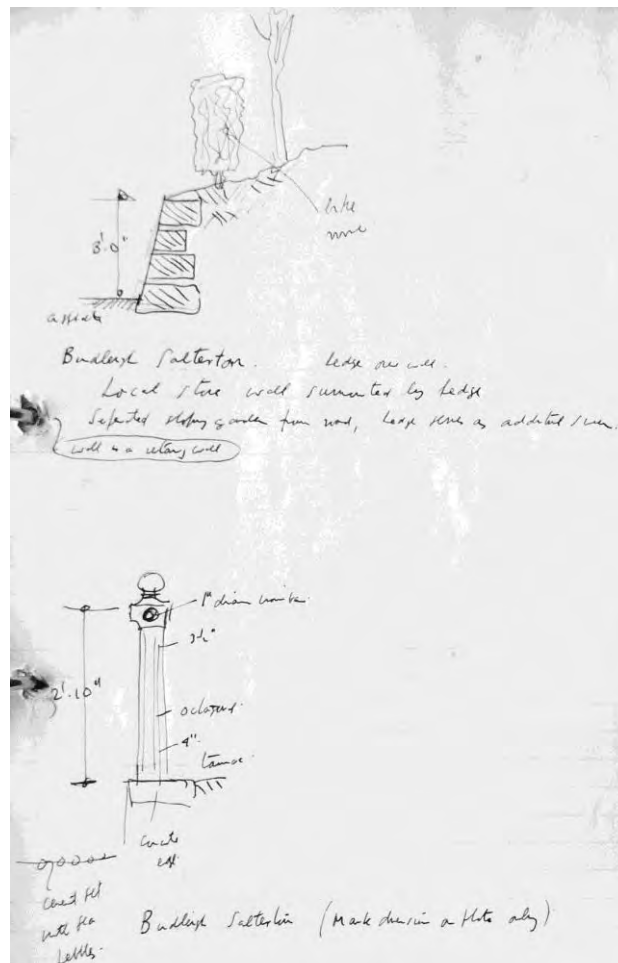
Fig.2.14. Gibberd's 1945 Budleigh Salterton studies

(Diary 1944-46, Gibberd Garden Archive)

Gibberd had noted under his sketch of the cast iron post and railing that it was a 'subtle and effective solution' with 'elegant parts.' The design and siting of the posts were functional as they provided 'physical protection', but the subtlety of design and position meant there was 'no visual obstruction' to the overall scene.[88] This demonstrates that Gibberd's initial idea of a holistic approach to the design of the street scene was progressive; it would not be until the early 1950s when such discussions would appear in the architectural journals, and not until Ian Nairn's *AR* 'Outrage' campaign in 1955 when the idea of 'freedom of clutter'[89] would become popularised. Nairn edited two special editions of the journal, in which he coined the term 'subtopia.' A continuation and development of *AR*'s Townscape campaign, Nairn argued that distinctions between town and country, country and suburb, and

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[88] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, 1940-43 Personal Diary.
[89] Ian Nairn, 'A Visual ABC', *AR*, 120 (1956), 355-360 (p. 358).

suburb and wild, had been lost. In my view, parallels can be drawn between Nairn's argument and Sharp's earlier thoughts portrayed in *Town and Countryside*. Nairn argued that 'urbanity' should be returned to the town, and 'rurality' to the country.[90] He used illustrations to demonstrate how through a series of steps, including the 'removal of clutter', this could be achieved (fig.2.15).
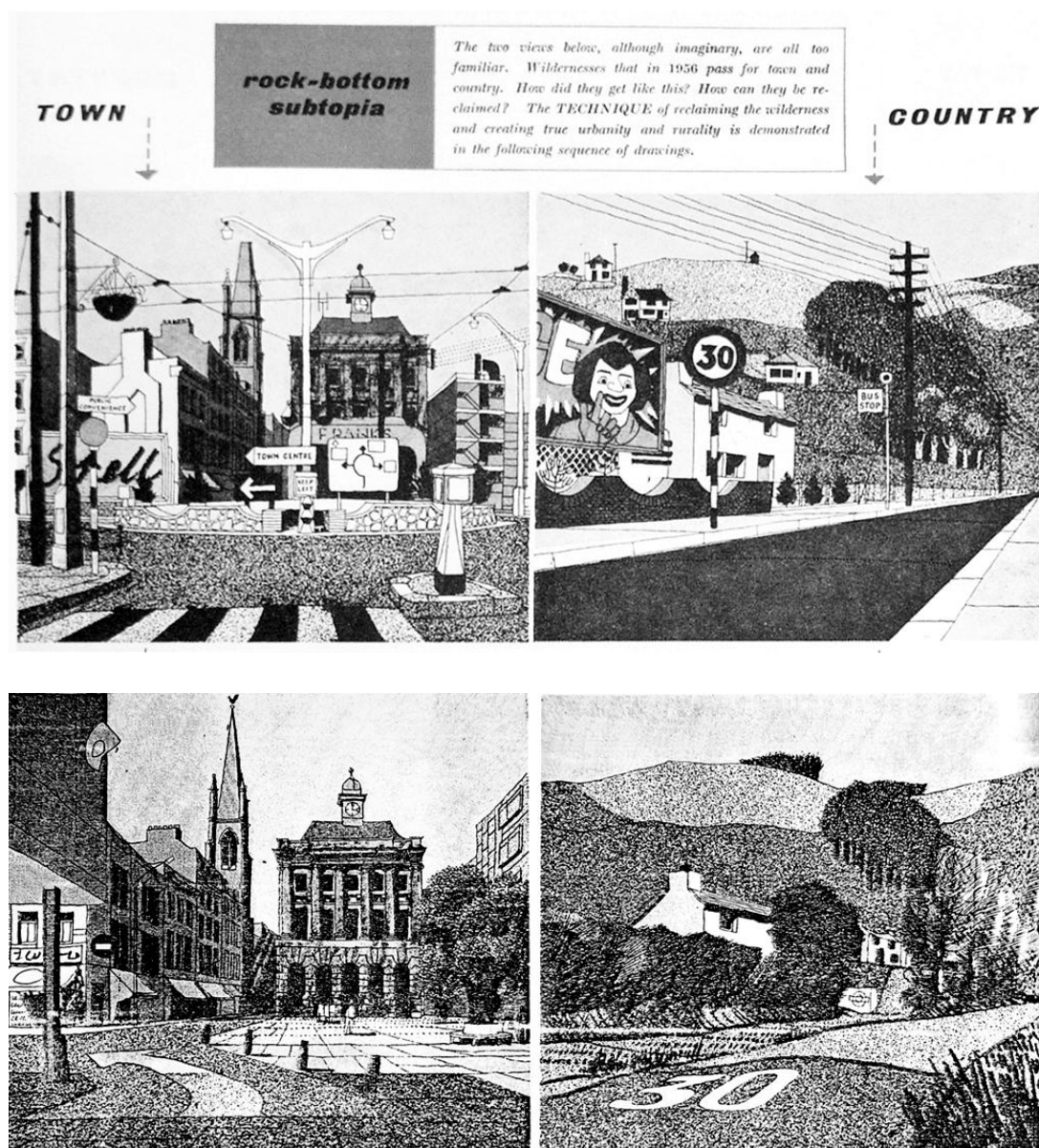
Fig.2.15. Extracts from Nairn's step by step guide to rescue two scenes from Subtopia
(*AR*, Jun. 1956)

Thomas Sharp had not referred to any notions of the appropriate use of 'street furniture' in such environments, but his core argument was that the characteristics of

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[90] Nairn, 'A Visual ABC', p. 359.

town and country should be maintained and should be kept clearly separate from one another. Chapter 1 has shown that Sharp's belief was that suburbia was the undesirable merging of town and country. In *Town and Countryside,* Sharp argued that since we were 'an urban people', 'urbanity' should be created to reflect the dignity, power and culture of man. The beauty and 'rusticity' of the countryside should be preserved, and a 'new and a different beauty' be created in towns 'that will be worthy of us.'[91] Sharp referenced Edwards's *Good and Bad Manners in Architecture* for an 'admirable philosophical consideration of architectural urbanity'.[92] Edwards had taken the literal meaning of 'urbanity' – a noun to describe the refined characteristics of townsmen – and applied it in a whimsical manner to architecture and the relation of buildings to one another. Sharp on the other hand argued that the 'little dwellings crouching separately under trees on either side of a great space', would not reflect the achievements of man. A 'worthy symbol of civilization' could only be achieved through the 'pure medium of the town', which only 'sheer, triumphant, unadulterated urbanity' could give.[93] Sharp used the word 'urbanity' to argue his case against the Garden Cities and suburban developments, in favour of town development to suit the urban society. He did not use the word to describe the visual aspects of the town, as Gibberd would do later in 1946. Instead, Sharp used the term 'town-medium' to describe the visual qualities of the town. He stated that 'continuous and close building' was an 'aesthetic necessity for the true expression of the town-medium.'[94] The early development of Sharp's interpretation of Townscape is also evident in the chapter. A town, Sharp put forward, should be considered as a series of 'architectural compositions, of streets, squares, circuses [...] each of which is a composed unity, a complete picture in itself.'[95] Sharp also suggested that the 'creation of a varying succession of street-pictures is one of the highest functions of Civic Design.'[96]

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[91] Thomas Sharp, *Town and Countryside: Some aspects of urban and rural development* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 162.
[92] Sharp, *Town and Countryside*, p. 163.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Sharp, *Town and Countryside,* p. 162.
[96] Ibid., p. 163.
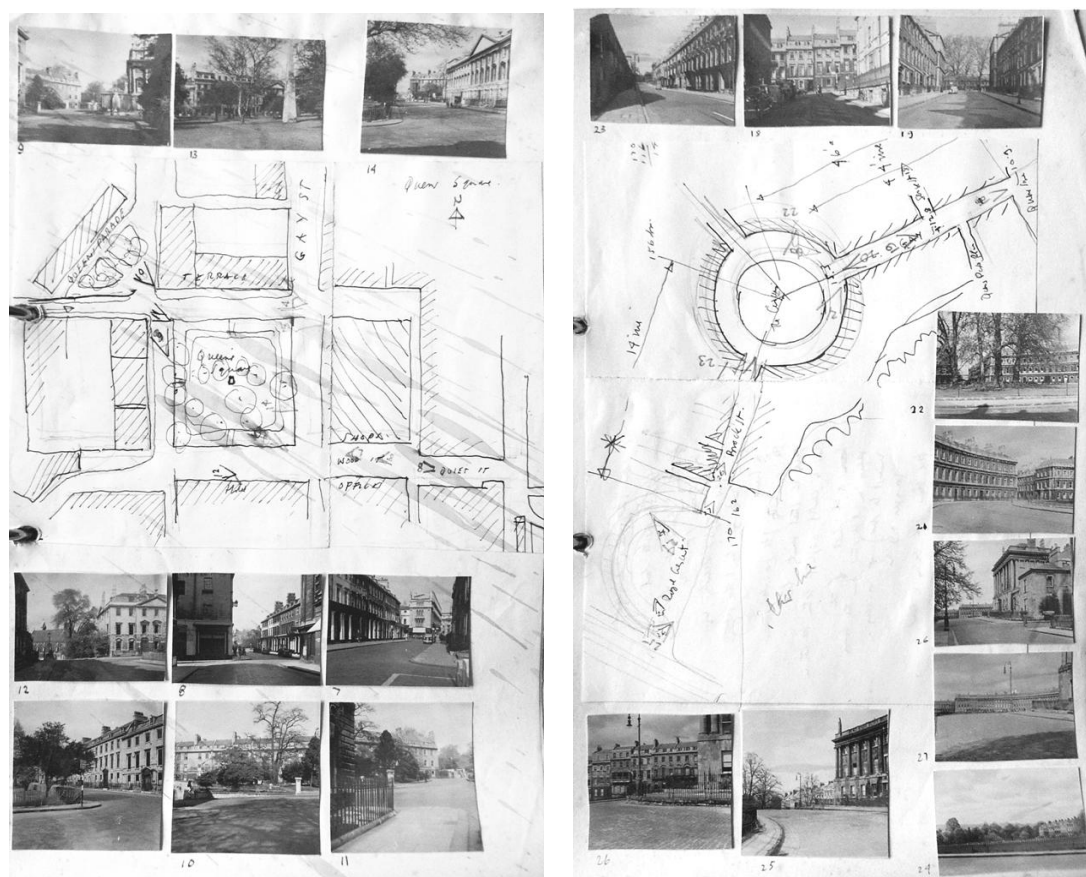
Fig.2.16. Gibberd's 1945 Bath Studies (Diary 1944-46, Gibberd Garden Archive)

In addition to examining the smaller details of English market towns, Gibberd also studied the visual and formal aspects of the Georgian city planning at Bath. In these studies (fig.2.16), Gibberd represented the urban areas in plan form, indicating the solid buildings and the open street spaces. A series of photographs are mounted around the sketch plans, the positions the photographs were taken are marked on the plan. This demonstrates that Gibberd was examining the variety of 'street pictures' created by various built forms in plan. The sequence of images and points marked on the plan is also suggestive of Sharp's notion of a 'mobile' Townscape. Gibberd's use of Bath as a precedent was perhaps an influence from Thomas Sharp, since Sharp had made a direct link between Bath and his own notion of 'urbanity', suggesting that 'urbanity had expressed itself in the building of the new Edinburgh, in Bath, in the corners of Buxton.'[97] It is interesting that Sharp should refer to two examples of Georgian urban planning as well as to a small Derbyshire market town

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[97] Thomas Sharp, *Town and Countryside*, p. 5.

as examples of urbanity. Gibberd had yet to label his urban studies with the term 'urbanity', but the fact that he was examining both Georgian examples in addition to small English towns suggests that he was influenced by Sharp's idea of urbanity. In my view, these early sketches mark the origin of Gibberd's interpretations and development of elements of urbanity.

Gibberd would later include his plans and photographs of Bath in his 1953 publication of *Town Design.* Nicholas Bullock has recently argued that *Town Design* demonstrates how principles of the Picturesque and New Empiricism could relate to older traditions of town planning.[98] In fact, Bullock argues that the book is essentially a 1950s 'restatement' of the type of town design exemplified by the Austrian Architect Camillo Sitte in *Town Planning According to Artistic Principles.* Sitte stressed the importance of the relationship between buildings and spaces, and promoted the idea of the enclosed public square by showing a variety of Italian plazas. He also referred to plazas as 'rooms' which could be furnished – the enclosed character of the space being the main requirement of both a room and a plaza.[99] He also argued that 'the ideal street must form a completely enclosed unit,'[100] and emphasised the need for variety in the appearance of streets.[101] When Gibberd and the *AR* had advocated a return to town planning as an art, Sitte's work would provide the ideal precedent. In fact there is evidence in Gibberd's personal diaries which confirms the influence of Sitte on Gibberd's thinking about urban spaces.

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[98] Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, p. 132.
[99] Sitte, p. 32.
[100] Ibid., p. 32.
[101] Ibid., p. 64.
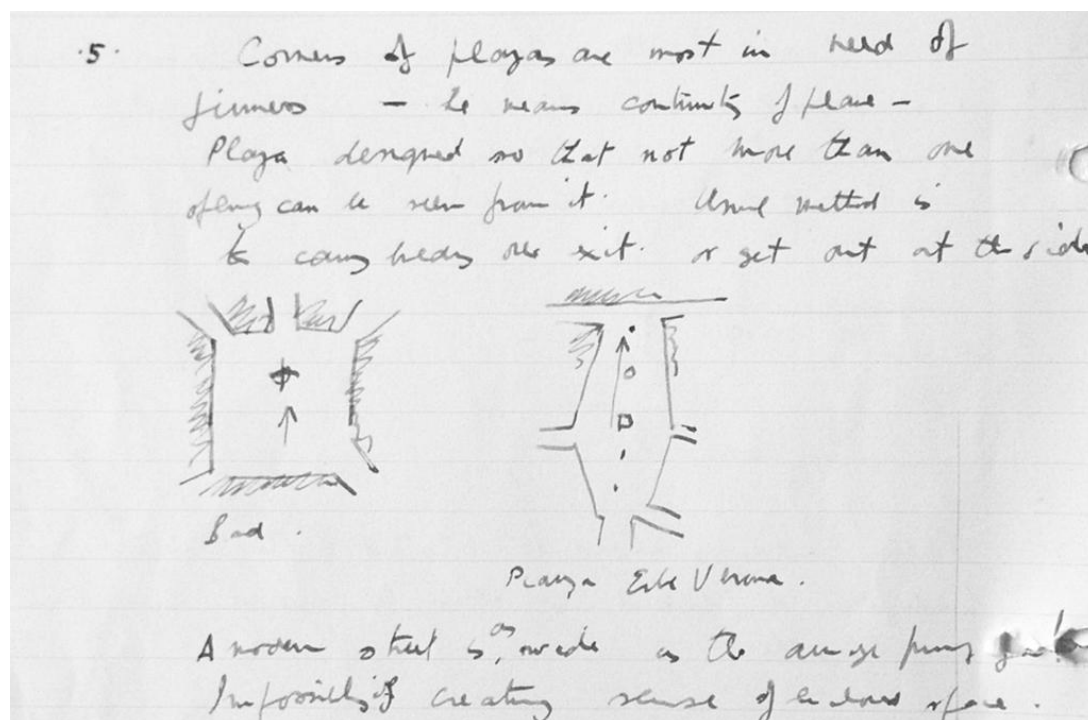
Fig.2.17. Gibberd's notes on Camillo Sitte and 'The Plaza', 1943
(Diary 1940-43, Gibberd Garden Archive)

Fig.2.17 shows an extract from Gibberd's notes on Camillo Sitte – a 'Symposium of his theories on Plazas' from 'An Architect's Notes and Reflections upon Artistic City Planning.' Gibberd's sketch showed two examples of enclosed plazas – one labelled 'Plaza Etre Verona', the other labelled simply as 'bad.' He noted Sitte had favoured the 'continuity of place'; Plaza Etre was a good example since the exits were set out to the side, so not more than one exit could be seen. For Gibberd, the width of modern streets posed a problem when trying to create a sense of enclosed space.[102] Chapter 5 in Part 2 of the thesis examines the various methods Gibberd developed and employed at Harlow in order to create a sense of enclosure, which he believed could contribute to a sense of urbanity.

Sitte's work had also influenced the early town of planners of Britain. In 1909, Raymond Unwin published *Town Planning in Practice,* where he observed the earlier traditions of town building, noting the 'elements of beauty had produced

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[102] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, 1940-43 Personal Diary, Gibberd's notes on a 'Symposium of his [Sitte's] theories on Plazas' from 'An Architect's Notes and Reflections upon Artistic City Planning', 1943.

picturesque street pictures.'[103] Like Sitte, Unwin was concerned with the visual aspects of the spaces formed by varying building formations. He also applied ideas of the Picturesque to town planning, stating 'the harmony, the unity which binds the buildings together and welds the whole into a picture is so much the important consideration that should take precedence.'[104] Unwin applied such visual town planning notions at Hampstead Garden Suburb, which he designed in 1907 with Barry Parker and Edwin Lutyens.
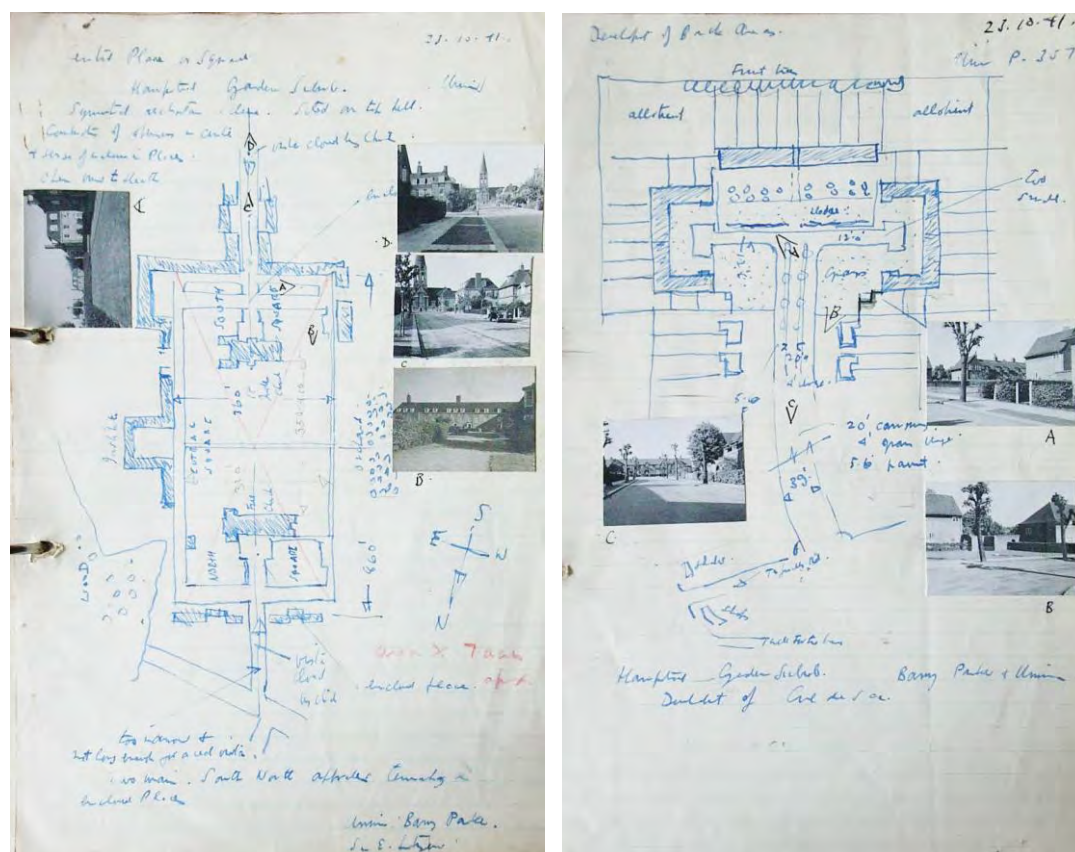
Fig.2.18. Gibberd's Hampstead Garden Suburb studies, 23 October 1941
(Diary 1940-43, Gibberd Garden Archive)

In 1941, Gibberd analysed the visual composition of streets and spaces at Hampstead Garden Suburb, with particular reference to the element of enclosure (fig.2.18). Despite the low-density Garden City type planning at Hampstead, which modernist architects were greatly opposed to, Gibberd believed the scheme was worthy of examination. The image on the left shows Gibberd's sketch plan of the

[103] Raymond Unwin, *Town Planning in Practice* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1909), p. 12.
[104] Ibid., p. 363.

Central Square which was designed by Edwin Lutyens. Using a similar technique to his Bath studies, the plan is accompanied by photographs which describe the 'street-pictures' viewed from various points in plan. Unlike the Bath studies however, Gibberd was more critical in his Hampstead Garden Suburb studies. Referring to the road at the most northerly point of the plan, Gibberd's note reads: 'too narrow and not long enough for a closed vista.'[105] His analysis was developed further for the 1953 publication of *Town Design*. Although the Central Square was described as 'more architectural in character and more rigidly set out than the other areas', Gibberd argued that the spaces were 'far too large and open for the buildings surrounding them.'[106] He also claimed: 'it is true that Hampstead tends to be over lush in its vegetation, and true that most of it lacks the urbanity and scale of Georgian development.'[107] This confirms that during Gibberd's later urban studies, he viewed Bath as an exemplar of urbanity. It also shows that by the early 1950s, the word 'urbanity' had become more widely used, since the term was published in 1953 without any accompanying definition. Furthermore, that Gibberd now labelled Bath as a place with urbanity strengthens the idea that although Gibberd did not use the word during his earlier studies, it was a 'sense of urbanity' which was under investigation.

The right-hand sketch (fig.2.18) shows Gibberd's analysis of a cul-de-sac at Hampstead Garden Suburb, designed by Parker and Unwin. On the sketch, Gibberd had noted the various floor finishes on the area of enclosed space. To the right of the cul-de-sac, Gibberd's note reads 'too small'. Such observations preceded the Townscape Casebook by six years, but it is clear that Gibberd was investigating 'a sense of enclosure' and 'floorscape' as elements of urbanity, even though he had not applied such terms. As with his Central Square study, the Hampstead cul-de-sac analysis is included and elaborated upon in *Town Design*. Here Gibberd argued that the approach road (shown as view 'C' in the original 1941 study), was 'rather dull, there being little sense of enclosure' and that the spaces were 'not very well

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[105] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, 1940-43 Personal Diary, 23 October 1941.
[106] Frederick Gibberd, *Town Design,* 1st edn (London: The Architectural Press, 1953), p. 279.
[107] Ibid., p. 278.

defined.'[108] Fig.2.20 shows an alternative close in Hampstead, which Gibberd suggested was 'altogether more successful', since the 'built-up corners and continuous walls of the 'U' give the space definition, and the walls are in proportion with the floor.[109]

Figures 2.19-2.22 Hampstead Garden Suburb examples (Gibberd, *Town Design*, 1953)
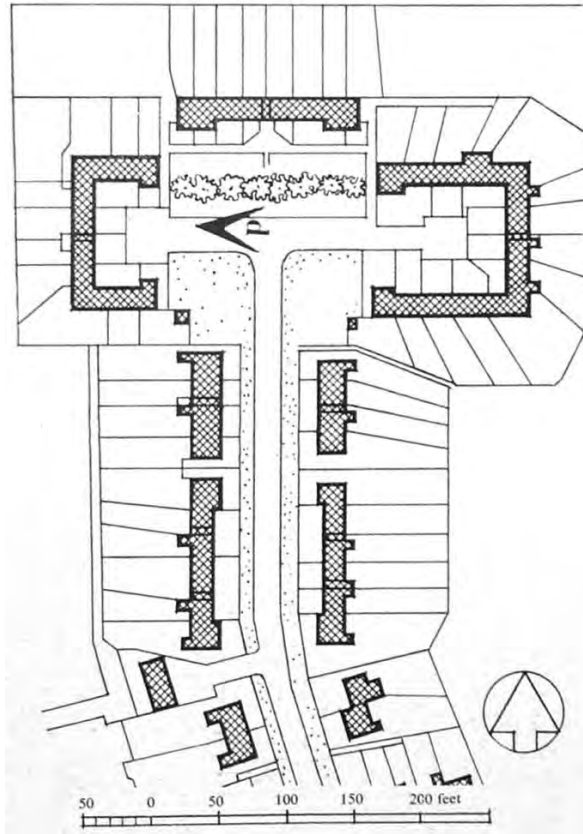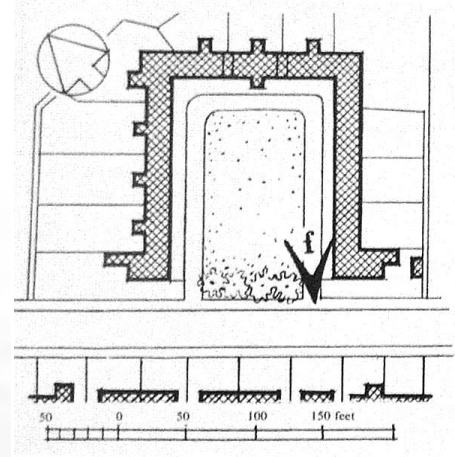
Fig.2.19. Asmuns Place   Fig.2.20. Hampstead Way

Fig.2.21. View 'd'   Fig.2.22. View 'f'

Figs 2.21 and 2.22 show the photographs used to demostrate views 'd' and 'f', highlighting the contrasting spatial qualities achieved by the two different plan

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[108] Gibberd, *Town Design*, p. 280.
[109] Ibid.

forms. Parallels can be drawn between Gibberd's descriptions of view 'f' and the Plaza analysis of Camillo Sitte, which Gibberd had been previously studied (fig.2.16). Although Sitte's analyses were of large-scale European Renaissance public spaces, Gibberd applied a similar line of thought to small-scale English domestic examples.

Fig.2.23 'Corner treatment'   Fig.2.24 'Enclosure with screen wall'

(Gibberd, *Town Design,* 1953)   (Diary 1952, Gibberd Garden Archive)

Also in relation to a sense of enclosure at Hampstead Garden Suburb, in *Town Design* Gibberd observed what he called 'corner treatment'[110] (fig.2.23). At the corner of a road junction, a house with a small back garden had been designed and positioned to hide the view of the adjacent back gardens. This would later become a technique employed by Gibberd at Hornbeams and Rivermill in Harlow in the late 1950s, in an attempt to create a more intimate and enclosed space than the earlier schemes at Harlow. The idea that the spaces in front of the house were public and should be distinguished and kept separate from the private back gardens also became a key concept for Gibberd while Harlow developed. Gibberd's study of spaces at the small town of Northwich, Northern England (fig.2.24), in his 1952 personal diary, shows what Gibberd labelled as 'enclosure with screen wall.'[111] The stone wall is used in this instance to enclose the public street, whilst simultaneously screening the private back gardens from view. The importance of the separation of front and back gardens is also evident in Gibberd's 1941 Hampstead Studies, where 'view A' of the close off Hampstead Way (fig.2.18) shows a wall and planting to screen the back

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[110] Gibberd, *Town Design*, p. 280.
[111] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, 1952 Personal Diary.

gardens from view. These ideas would later be implemented at Harlow, as will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

Gibberd's early studies reveal his interest in the aesthetic aspects of both the English country town and the Classical Georgian city, despite his allegiance to the MARS Group. During the first few years of the 1940s, Gibberd was able to continue developing such visual town planning ideas, since he had been ineligible for military service during the War, due to the earlier removal of a defective kidney.[112] He drew upon the inter-war debates about the growth of the uncontrolled monotonous suburbs, advocating visual variety, and continued to look at existing examples of British town and city planning for inspiration. After the War, when Gibberd was selected by Lewis Silkin to draw up a plan for Harlow New Town, Gibberd's thoughts about town design seem to have crystallised. He was able to draw together ideas of Picturesque planning and Civic Design, while at the same time considering the earlier debates on density and suburban development. Gibberd was determined to create a town at Harlow, as opposed to a Garden City, and for the first time expressed his desire to create a 'sense of urbanity.' Civic Design, in Gibberd's mind, was 'the art of arranging buildings, or groups of buildings, to each other and to the landscape.'[113] He also stated that in Civic Design, the primary concern lay with the 'spaces between buildings.'[114] Taking this interpretation of Civic Design a step further, Gibberd believed that the 'quality of urbanity' could arise from 'the nature of buildings – Architecture, and the relationship of buildings to each other – Civic Design.'[115]

2.2.2 Gibberd's Urbanity

In the Harlow master plan document, extracts of which were printed in *The Architect and Building News (ABN)*, Gibberd was clear about his intentions to create a sense of urbanity at Harlow. Moreover, perhaps for the first time, Gibberd attempted to

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[112] Text developed in collaboration with Patricia, Lady Gibberd, *Sir Frederick Gibberd and His Garden* (Harlow: The Gibberd Garden Trust, 2004), p. 22.
[113] Frederick Gibberd, 'Harlow New Town', *The Architect and Building News,* 192 (1947), 245-258 (p. 246).
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.

define 'urbanity' in a concise way, drawing upon the findings of his earlier exploratory studies. The editors of the *ABN* assisted in clarifying the idea, by breaking up Gibberd's original text with the insertion of additional subheadings. Where Gibberd had discussed the problems of building a New Town, urbanity, and landscape under the heading 'The Problem', the *ABN* had divided this text into three parts, singling out Gibberd's discussion of urbanity under the heading 'The Problem of Urbanity'. It could be argued that this move gave the subject of urbanity the attention it required to become a cohesive theory in its own right. However, it was Gibberd's eight paragraphs of text which brought together many of the elements which he and his contemporaries had observed previously. He began by stating that while 'disposing the parts of the town' it was important to retain the 'most characteristic feature of any great town, that of urbanity.'[116] He followed by explaining that urbanity was 'the urban quality which one senses in such towns as Edinburgh, Bath, Oxford and Florence.'[117] Pevsner had also referred to Bath in the same year during his talk on 'The Picturesque in Architecture', explaining that at Bath, there was uniformity in each 'motive', but each motive had been connected by plan as opposed to by accident, thus achieving in Pevsner's mind, a 'picturesque plan.'[118] Gibberd's reference to urbanity at Edinburgh could have perhaps been influenced by Sharp's 'Urbanity or Rusticity?' in *Town and Country Planning*. Here Sharp referred to Edinburgh as the 'city, containing as it does one of the finest examples of large-scale civic design in the British Isles.'[119] These examples clearly indicate the overlapping precedents, as well as the overlapping themes of urbanity, picturesque planning and civic design. Gibberd's decisive use of the term 'urbanity', in my view, drew together many of these visual planning elements which Gibberd and his contemporaries had been investigating throughout the 1940s, creating a cohesive concept which could be applied to design.

Furthermore, Gibberd's Harlow master plan marked the transition from theorizing about urbanity, to the practice of urbanity. In Gibberd's text, he asked, 'how is the

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[116] Gibberd, 'Harlow New Town', p. 246.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Pevsner, 'The Picturesque in Architecture', p. 56.
[119] Sharp, *Town and Countryside*, p. 160.

urban quality to be achieved?' He suggested that firstly, urbanity could not be achieved by 'regarding town planning as the preparation of a map showing different coloured areas for different purposes.'[120] He argued that in two dimensional planning on paper, one must always be thinking in three dimensions. Since buildings have height, the spaces formed between them must be considered as volumes. To explain this in simpler terms, Gibberd drew upon the earlier criticism of suburban development, arguing that the 'average housing estate' was:

> dull and lacking the qualities of Urbanity, because buildings of a similar size are equally spaced along roads of similar width. There is no sense of enclosure at all, only two broken street frontages divided by a street.[121]

If these conditions resulted in the lack of urbanity, then it could be argued that the reverse could create a sense of urbanity. This would mean buildings of varying size, irregularly spaced, or with no spaces at all with a continuous street frontage, a variety of road widths and a sense of enclosure. Continuity of street facade and a sense of enclosure, as seen in the Georgian city as well as in the English country town, Gibberd believed could create a greater feeling of urbanity, which had been missing from suburban developments. Variety and irregularity, elements of 'picturesque planning', could counter the dull appearance of the average housing estates. Gibberd also argued in the text of the master plan document that very large areas of building had the potential to become dull if they lacked contrast with nature. The integration of buildings with landscape, just as the Swedish picturesque examples published by the *AR* had demonstrated*,* was an important issue to Gibberd as he planned Harlow, upon which he elaborated in March the following year, in an article entitled 'Landscaping the New Town', published in the *AR*. Here, he referred to Harlow New Town as a 'work of art', and therefore, it must contain the qualities of both unity and variety. Gibberd believed there would be obvious unity, since the town was planned and would be built as a whole, in a relatively short space of time. However, there was a danger such a unity could produce a 'uniform dullness'; if a new town were to become 'alive visually' Gibberd argued, 'it must attain the

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[120] Gibberd, 'Harlow New Town', p. 246.
[121] Ibid.

qualities in which variety of contrast, rhythm, and surprise resides.'[122] Such picturesque elements were observed by Gibberd in his earlier Saffron Walden studies, and Pevsner too had included these in his 1947 lecture. The key for Gibberd was to obtain a subtle balance between unity and variety, and variety at Harlow Gibberd believed could be achieved through the 'juxtaposition of building groups with the landscape.'[123]

Referring to the Garden City concept, however, Gibberd claimed that should a town for 60,000 like Harlow be designed on Howard's principles and to 'normal' standards of density, (perhaps referring to the '12 dwellings per acre' principle), it would cover a large area of land, thus inviting monotony. If an urban character was to be achieved, Gibberd argued that 'housing groups must be to a comparatively high density – over 30 persons per acre – and they must be compactly planned.'[124] These references show that Gibberd felt the need to devise a notion of urbanity to counter the housing developments of the inter-war period, which had been heavily criticised by modernist architects. During the War, however, several modernist architects, including Gibberd, had turned to traditional English precedents for inspiration, focusing upon the visual aspects of town streets and spaces. Gibberd was unique in this group, as although he was affiliated to the MARS Group, he spoke openly about the purely aesthetic aspects of towns, without sociological or functional arguments to support his ideas. This chapter has shown the many overlapping themes which arose during the 1940s in relation to town planning as an art. From this, it is possible to deduce a set of urbanity elements which Gibberd would carry forward to his town planning work at Harlow.

2.3 CONCLUSION

Firstly, as the quote above describes, Gibberd believed urbanity could be created by building compactly at high densities. Chapter 3 examines the ways in which Gibberd, initially restricted by the low density recommendations in the *Housing*

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[122] Frederick Gibberd 'Landscaping the New Town', *AR*, 103 (1948), 85-90 (p. 85).
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.

Manuals, attempted to design housing as compactly as possible. Secondly, the picturesque element of variety was a key aspect in the war-time discourse on visual planning. Pevsner suggested this could be created by houses being built in various heights in various directions, with the variations being sudden and irregular.[125] Chapter 4 examines the idea of 'Mixed Development' at Harlow, where the inclusion of flats was used to obtain high densities as well as to create visual variety. The idea of mixed development was also a complex social issue; this will also be discussed in Chapter 4.

The element of enclosure was also an important factor which emerged from the visual town planning discourse of the 1940s. After the *AR*'s 1953 criticism of the New Towns, (which is reviewed in Chapter 3), Gibberd and the HDC would strive to create a greater sense of enclosure to strengthen the feeling of urbanity at Harlow. These attempts are analysed in Chapter 5. Finally, the notion of 'unity' and the ways in which Gibberd attempted to create a unified town at Harlow is evaluated in Chapter 6.

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[125] Pevsner, 'The Picturesque in Architecture', p. 56.

PART TWO: PRACTICE

HDC General Manager Ben Hyde Harvey, HDC Chairman Sir Richard Costain
and Architect Planner to the HDC Frederick Gibberd, *Harlow Citizen*, 5 April 1963

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PART 2: PRACTICE

Part 1 of the thesis has shown how the desire to develop the visual planning concept of 'urbanity' arose from modernist architects' reactions to the unplanned, low-density suburban housing developments of the inter-war years. Their opposition can be viewed as a combination of three factors. Firstly, 'imported modernism', which became accepted by the British avant-garde became increasingly linked to a socialist agenda, thus modernist architects, particularly Thomas Sharp, were opposed to the individualistic nature of the suburbs. Secondly, the majority of inter-war housing had been built by local authorities or speculative builders, with the exclusion of architects; the profession was left to reassert the role of the architect, particularly in relation to post-war reconstruction. Finally, and most crucially, modernist architects were displeased with the appearance of the vast housing estates; the monotony they were opposed to was a result of the repetitive two-storey housing. The lack of amenities contributed to the monotony and also gave rise to sociological criticism, which modernist architects included in their own critique, reaffirming their commitment to the modernist ideals of social improvement. Chapters 1 and 2 have highlighted the range of architectural discourse on housing and town planning throughout the 1930s and 40s. The key topics debated throughout these periods were residential density and housing type, firstly in relation to re-housing following the slum clearances of the 1930s, and secondly, in relation to post-war reconstruction. During this period, MARS and CIAM developed new city planning paradigms and by the end of the Second World War, these principles would become widely accepted by modernist architects and government officials alike.

However, parallel to the discourse on city reconstruction during the wartime years, a number of modernist architects – namely Gibberd and the editors of the *AR,* reacted to such large-scale planning and began to reconsider visual aspects of town planning, believing that the sociological plans of the MARS Group had led to a "forgetting of art." Gibberd believed that by building compactly at high densities, he could create a 'sense of urbanity', in an attempt to counter the 'dull' appearance of

the unplanned suburbs. He also believed the inclusion of blocks of flats could create higher densities, as well as creating a picturesque visual variety. The integration of buildings and landscape, Gibberd believed, could create contrast, also contributing to visual variety. When Gibberd was selected by Minister of Town and Country Planning, Lewis Silkin, to design a master plan for Harlow New Town, these were key elements he hoped could be applied during the initial stages of planning. Essentially, Gibberd saw town planning as an art, believing that the architect as a 'trained artist', educated in aesthetics, should hold a key position in the design of the urban scene as a whole. The post-war New Town building programme provided the ideal opportunity for Gibberd to test such ideas on a large scale, across an entire town which would be built effectively from scratch. Part 1 has established a set of elements which Gibberd believed would contribute to the creation of urbanity, namely: high density, visual variety, a sense of enclosure, and an overall unity. Part 2 of the study will examine the ways in which Gibberd, together with the HDC, attempted to apply such elements at Harlow New Town.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine how Gibberd and the HDC endeavoured to implement notions of high density and mixed development in housing design at Harlow, in an attempt to obtain a sense of urbanity through visual variety and compact building. Initially restricted by low prescribed residential densities, Gibberd and the HDC began to manipulate density figures and campaigned for higher densities to create urbanity at Harlow. The year 1953 marks a watershed in relation to the density debate about New Towns. This was the year the *AR* launched its attack, announcing the 'failure of the new towns' and the 'failure of the new densities.' By this time, however, the Ministry was gradually coming to accept the arguments for higher density; the *AR*'s articles, while condemning the low densities in the New Towns to date, confirmed this desire. With a change in government from Labour to Conservative rule, the restrictions on density loosened; this facilitated the creation of urbanity. Chapters 5 and 6 will look at how Gibberd and the HDC applied two further elements of urbanity at Harlow – the elements of enclosure and unity. First, this chapter will examine Gibberd's attempt to apply high density planning to Harlow New Town, in order to create a sense of urbanity.

3 DENSITY

The subject of residential density was a key topic of architectural discourse throughout the inter-war and wartime periods, firstly in relation to re-housing following the slum clearances of the 1930s, and secondly, in relation to post-war reconstruction. Rejecting the low-density Garden City paradigm, Gibberd and other modernist architects believed that an urban character should be created in new post-war housing developments, rather than a suburban environment. In Gibberd's mind, this 'sense of urbanity' could be achieved by building at comparatively high densities and compact planning.[1] The need for large-scale regional planning had been promoted by the *AR* and the MARS Group, and at the end of the Second World War a policy of national planning was considered essential to tackle the tasks of reconstruction. The changes to Britain's political climate and national morale after the War would facilitate such policies.

Chapter 1 has shown that during the inter-war period, modernist planning concepts were linked to socialism; socialists like Thomas Sharp objected to the laissez-faire individualistic suburban housing developments, while Elizabeth Denby campaigned for better houses for the working classes. Recent literature has shown that during the War the nation began to swing toward the Left and after the War, came a feeling of euphoria across the country. Conservative leader Winston Churchill, who had led the wartime Coalition of Conservative, Labour and Liberal ministers, was 'feted as a war hero.'[2] Despite this, it was Labour who won the 1945 election. This national leftward swing was evident in the Mass Observation studies which indicated that by 1943, more people described themselves as 'anti-Conservative' than as 'anti-Labour.'[3] Clement Atlee came into power in 1945 after a landslide victory, with an

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[1] Gibberd, 'Landscaping the New Town', p. 85.

[2] Michael Hill, *The Welfare State in Britain, A Political History since 1945* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1993), p. 22.

[3] Alan Sked and Chris Cook, *Post-War Britain: A Political History, New Edition 1945-1992* (London: Penguin Books Ltd), p. 17.

'authority never before possessed by a socialist prime minister.'[4] In a study of Socialism in Britain, Keith Laybourn argues that this landslide victory 'paved the way for the introduction of the modern welfare state and a specific and restricted programme of nationalisation.'[5] This included the nationalisation of the right to develop land, which was crucial to the development of the New Towns.

3.1   THE NEW TOWNS

The idea of building completely new settlements to re-house city dwellers while inner city areas were rebuilt at lower densities was not a new one. The concept had developed during the 1930s with the Garden Cities of Letchworth and Welwyn providing precedents. Recent publications have highlighted that Churchill and the Conservative Party showed little interest in comprehensive planning and reconstruction during the War.[6] However, exhibitions such as Ralph Tubbs's *Living in Cities* had brought the subject to the attention of the public; furthermore, with the onset of the Blitz, the public interest in planning and reconstruction increased considerably. In response to this, the government was compelled to take on board the earlier recommendations of the 'Barlow Report'[7] appointing former Director General to the BBC John Reith as Minister of the newly formed Ministry of Works and Buildings to examine post-war reconstruction.[8]

It is necessary to look briefly at the coalition government's wartime developments on planning matters, since after the War, these ideas were readily adopted by those initially responsible for the New Towns. The 1940 Barlow Report advocated urban containment as well as the planned decentralisation of population and industry. It also recommended the formation of a central planning authority and further examination of land use problems.[9] In 1943, Minister of Works Lord Reith commissioned J. H. Forshaw and Patrick Abercrombie to prepare a plan for the

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[4] Sked and Cook, p. 23.
[5] Laybourn, p. 145.
[6] Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, p. 11. and Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture*, p. 164.
[7] The Report of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population (London: HMSO, 1940).
[8] Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, p. 11.
[9] Frank Schaffer, *The New Town Story* (London: Paladin, 1972), p. 27.

County of London.[10] The Greater London Plan compiled by Abercrombie and an appointed team of fifteen followed in 1944.[11] Abercrombie was a member of the MARS Group, and like his contemporaries, he was opposed to the unplanned sprawling suburban developments of the earlier period. In his report, he combined modernist thinking with ideas which had developed in preceding government reports, advocating the prevention of further growth to London and proposing the decentralisation of industry and population and complementary movements of population. As in the earlier County of London Plan, the 1944 report stressed the need for an improvement in living conditions, which could be achieved by improving the facilities for recreation and the provision of more open spaces.[12] The Greater London Plan would provide the basis for the development of the New Towns.

The plan proposed a constraining 'Green Belt' around London to prevent further growth; the overspill population would be relocated to eleven 'satellite towns' located 20-30 miles away from central London. Fig.3.1 shows the 'Four Rings' of the Greater London Plan: the inner urban ring, the suburban ring, the green belt ring and finally, the outer country ring. The proposed locations of Abercrombie's satellite towns are indicated, and I have also superimposed the New Towns 'as built'. The idea of satellite towns had undoubtedly been influenced by Howard's earlier Garden City concept. In fact in 1935, the Ministry of Health had appointed a committee to examine the very idea for possible future developments.[13] Like the modernist architects in the 1930s, the committee observed the 'evils' created by the outward development of towns. However, unlike the high density high rise solutions advocated by modernists, the committee proposed the adoption of Garden Cities to counter suburban growth. In *The New Town Idea,* Ray Thomas and Peter Cresswell

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[10] J. H. Forshaw and Patrick Abercrombie, *The County of London Plan* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1943)

[11] Patrick Abercrombie, *Greater London Plan* (London: HMSO, 1944)

[12] Ibid., p. 30.

[13] Ray Thomas and Peter Cresswell, *The New Town Idea* (Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1973), p. 14.

argue the new towns were advocated as an alternative to inter-war semi-detached suburbia, as well as to the overcrowded city.[14]
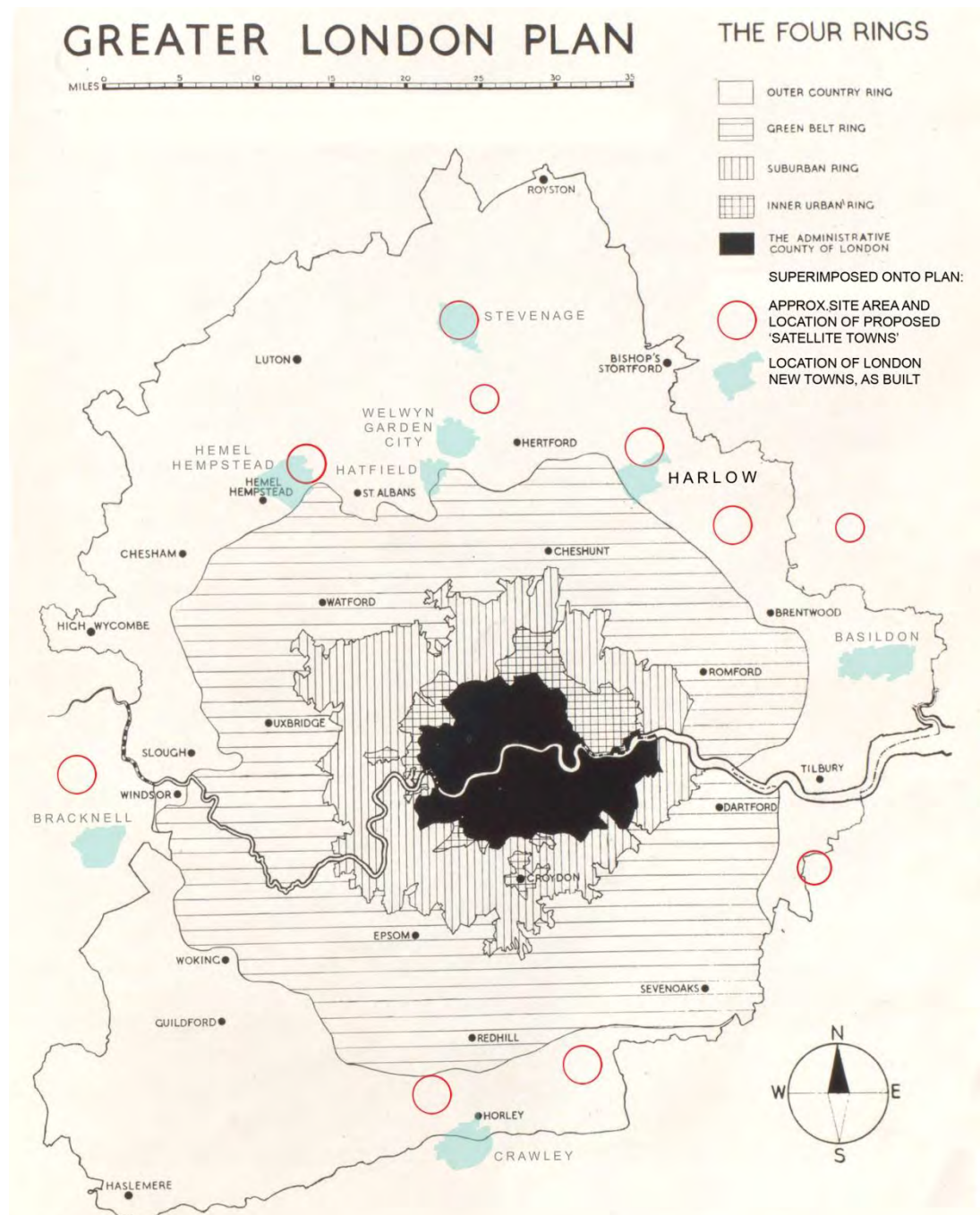
Fig.3.1. 1944 Greater London Plan showing New Town locations

The location of satellite towns within the 'Outer Country Ring' and the low densities initially imposed on the New Towns, however, would lead many to denounce the

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[14] Thomas and Cresswell, p. 14.

new towns as Garden Cities and suburbs. Such reactions will be discussed later in the chapter.

The Greater London Plan showed a variety of examples which indicated the form new housing might take in each concentric ring. For the 'Inner Urban Ring' a neighbourhood plan in West Ham, designed by Borough Architect and Planning Officer Thomas E. North, was presented (fig.3.2). The neighbourhood was designed for a population of 12,000, housed in a mixture of two- three- and four-storey houses and flats, in accordance with the MARS Group's line of thinking. The net density across the site was high, at 96 persons per acre, which was calculated based on the area of housing alone. In relation to the '12 dwellings per acre' (approximately 40 persons per acre if multiplied by the family average of 3.4) these were remarkably high densities to propose.

Fig.3.2. Proposal for a neighbourhood at West Ham (*Greater London Plan*, 1944)

A further two neighbourhoods in West Ham were analysed, and a visualisation of housing was provided by Peter Shepheard (fig.3.3), who would become architect planner to Stevenage New Town. The gross density of this scheme was 61 persons

per acre, with people housed in a mixture of ten-storey slab blocks and two-storey terraced houses. This concept of mixed development will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Fig.3.3. Terraced houses and blocks of flats at West Ham, by Peter Shepheard
(*Greater London Plan*, 1944)

John Gold has recently observed the influence of Swedish modernism on Shepheard's imagery. However, Gold argues that the variety of images used throughout the report did not commit to one school of aesthetics or the other, i.e., either the 'hard' or the 'soft' modernism.[15] In relation to the example shown for housing in a 'new satellite town' for 60,000 at Ongar in Essex (fig.3.4), Gold demonstrates how Shepheard wished to show how the town was not like those of Le Corbusier, which showed 'great blocks with these huge spaces in between.'[16] Therefore, in my view, the Ongar scheme leaned toward the softer picturesque approach to housing layout. In comparison to the West Ham scheme which comprised continuous rows of housing following a street edge, the Ongar plan was more loosely planned, with small houses scattered in clusters within curving streets

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[15] Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, p. 181.
[16] Ibid.

responding to the existing topography. However, the scheme also adopted the modernist planning principles which developed during the previous decades: the separation of functions, neighbourhoods planned around subsidiary centres, and 'Radburn planning' – where main traffic routes are separated from housing. The proposed density for the satellite towns was 30 persons per acre. Although it was established in Chapter 1 that using the family average as a multiple to convert from dwellings to people per acre is by no means an accurate conversion, it is still useful for comparative purposes. For example, 30 people divided by the family average of 3.4 will give an approximate measure of 8.8 dwellings per acre for development within the 'Outer Country Ring'. This is exceptionally low, lower in fact than the 12 dwellings per acre which modernist architects had shown great opposition to during the inter-war period. This confirms that the Ongar scheme was more reminiscent of the low-density Garden Cities and suburbs, as opposed to the avant-garde European modernism.

Fig.3.4. Proposed New Satellite Town for 60,000 at Ongar (*Greater London Plan*, 1944)

Shepheard also provided imagery for the Ongar housing scheme (fig.3.5), which contrasted significantly with the inner urban ring development image. Some flats were shown beyond the shopping centre, but the housing was mostly of two storeys,

some terraced in rows with access from footpaths, others detached or semi-detached. There were large green spaces, with the countryside in close reach. The contrasting planning typologies presented in the Greater London Plan are significant, because when post-war developments in each 'ring' began, each would conform to the densities and housing types illustrated. The high-density inner urban developments would only emphasise the lack of urban quality – or urbanity – in the outer country ring.

Fig.3.5. View of housing at Ongar by Peter Shepheard (*Greater London Plan*, 1944)

3.1.1   The New Towns Committee

The Greater London Plan provided ideal proposals which were readily adopted by the New Towns Committee upon their formation in 1945. As a result of Labour's 1945 landslide victory, Lewis Silkin (who had rejected Denby's high density proposals earlier in 1936), became the new Minster of Town and Country Planning. J. B. Cullingworth's volume on Environmental Planning and New Town policy shows that soon after taking on the new role, Silkin circulated three papers which

dealt with control of land use, satellite towns and national parks.[17] Cullingworth describes how Silkin was under pressure from the Town and Country Planning Association, but was aware that his colleagues would not give the new towns priority.[18] As a result, on 19 October 1945, together with the Secretary of State for Scotland, Silkin appointed the New Towns Committee under the chair of Lord Reith to consider:

> the general questions of the establishment, development, organisation and administration that will arise in the promotion of New Towns in the furtherance of a policy of planned decentralisation from the congested urban areas.[19]

There were fourteen members on the committee, representing a diverse range of expertise. Members included planner Dr Monica Felton, President of the RIBA and Master of the Town Planning Institute Sir Percy Thomas, and Sir Malcolm Stewart, who had set up a Trust the previous year to house ex-workers rent free at the model village of Stewartby. Crucially, however, the Committee included Garden City advocate and most vocal member of the Town and Country Planning Association, Frederic Osborn. This, Cullingworth argues, would ensure that Silkin could expect a favourable report, which would add to the pressure he was exerting on his colleagues to adopt the idea of new towns.[20] In my view, Silkin's preference for low-density development and the pressure from Garden City advocates at this early stage would later have a significant impact upon the creation of urban environments in the early parts of the New Towns. Gold has also recently argued that the direct link with Howard's idea meant that the New Towns could not have escaped from their Garden City roots.[21]

The first report of the New Towns Committee set out the scope of their work, and it is clear they had considered the inter-war discourse on uncontrolled suburban development. The new towns were to be part of a policy of planned decentralisation

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[17] J. B. Cullingworth, *Peacetime History, Environmental Planning Volume III New Towns Policy* (London: HMSO, 1979), p. 13.

[18] Ibid.

[19] New Towns Committee, *Interim Report of the New Towns Committee* (London: HMSO, 1946), p. 2.

[20] Cullingworth, p. 14.

[21] Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, p. 181.

from congested urban areas. The 'twin evils'– slums and overcrowding – of the previous century had been the result of unregulated excessive growth, during a period when the health, spiritual and social well-being of the people had been sacrificed to industrial progress.[22] The 'wisely sited and skilfully planned' new towns should be 'established and developed as self-contained and balanced communities for work and living.'[23] Great significance is placed upon these words, as the new towns were to be self-sufficient towns, the 'antithesis of the dormitory suburb.'[24] The new towns were to provide housing, as well as amenities and newly established industries. The key recommendation of the first report,[25] however, was that separate agencies be established to run each new town project. Each public corporation would be either government or local authority sponsored and members should be appointed by the Crown, as opposed to being voted in by the electorate. Cullingworth's study shows that Silkin had already decided that corporations should be set up, and believed that he should be personally responsible for the appointment of members.[26]

In relation to density, the Final Report of the New Towns Committee advised an overall density of 12 persons per acre in the built-up area of each new town, rather than opting for high densities.[27] In relation to the inter-war debate on density, twelve dwellings, rather than persons, per acre was considered low; it was regarded as the density standard adopted in the Garden City type developments to which modernist architects had been opposed. Furthermore, if the area of land recommended for the peripheral green belt (6000 acres) is added to the area recommended as a built-up area (5000 acres) for a town of 60,000 people, the resultant gross density across the town would be 5.45 dwellings, or 1.2 persons per acre. I believe that the New Towns Committee had intended to recommend a density of 12 dwellings per acre, rather than 12 persons per acre. Such an error could be explained by the timescale and the

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[22] New Towns Committee, *Interim Report of the New Towns Committee* (London: HMSO, 1946), p. 3.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] These are often referred to as the 'Reith Reports', after Chairman Lord Reith.
[26] Cullingworth, p. 15.
[27] The New Towns Committee, *Final Report of the New Towns Committee* (London: HMSO, 1946), p. 13.

pressure on Silkin. Cullingworth describes how the first two Reith Reports were 'hurried through' since firstly, Silkin was anxious to make progress with the first New Town at Stevenage, and secondly, because the New Town Bill had been brought forward by several months.[28] The Final Report was more comprehensive, although it was not complete by the time the New Towns Bill passed through Parliament. It is possible that this report was also rushed in an attempt to complete it ready for Parliament. This mistake would have marked consequences on the early developments of the first generation New Towns, and as a result, the low-density housing would later be castigated by the *AR* in a series of condemning articles in 1953.

In the Final Report, while advocating the separation of functions and the organisation of housing into residential neighbourhoods, just as the MARS Group and CIAM had proposed to counter the failures of unplanned suburbia, the New Towns Committee referred to the residential densities in the *Housing Manual 1944*. Here, the Committee stated the minimum area required in a residential neighbourhood was 48 acres per 1000 population.[29] This is an obscure reference, as it does not relate directly to the *Housing Manual,* although it can be understood by examining Appendix A of the Manual. The land requirement for a neighbourhood of 10,000 was 482 acres,[30] which the New Towns Committee had reduced by a factor of ten. The *Housing Manual* allowed 333 acres for each housing area in the neighbourhood, which would give an average net residential density of 30 persons per acre. This density example is given for 'open development', based on the densities given in Abercrombie's report. Densities are also recommended for Abercrombie's zones of 'outer ring', 'inner ring' and 'central areas'. For concentrated development in central areas, the *Manual* recommended an average net residential density of 120 persons per acre – four times the density recommended for 'open development' in the outer country ring – the location proposed for new town development. Despite the low density expressed in the *Manual,* the New Towns Committee, considering their aim to create a socially balanced population which

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[28] Cullingworth, p. 14.
[29] The New Towns Committee, *Final Report*, p. 15.
[30] Ministry of Health and Ministry of Works, *Housing Manual 1944* (London: HMSO, 1944), p. 91.

would require larger houses on larger sites, suggested that the average residential density should not exceed 25.[31] They concluded their density recommendations by suggesting that 'about 55 to 65 acres' should be allowed per 1000 persons in the 'general urban zone.'[32] This can be calculated as 18.2 to 15.4 persons per acre across the neighbourhood. To confuse matters, the Committee reverted to 'overall density' in the following paragraph, stating that by adding together the areas of land for the recommended zones of 'main centre', 'industrial zones' and 'general urban zones', the requirement would be 660 to 760 acres per 10,000 population, which corresponded to overall densities of 15 persons and 13 persons per acre. However, the Committee suggested that in a new town, the demand for recreational space may be greater than 10 acres per 1000 population, as they had previously suggested. As a result, the Committee stated:

> The overall density of the town area is likely to be nearer twelve persons an acre than 15, and in our estimate of the land requirements we have adopted the former figure in the light of present trends.[33]

An overall density of 12 persons per acre is exceptionally low. If converted to dwellings per acre using the 3.4 family average, it equates to only 3.5 dwellings per acre. The 1944 *Housing Manual* had recommended the change from density measure from dwellings per acre to the 'more satisfactory' measure of persons per acre. The Manual also advised that two standards of population density must be taken into consideration – 'gross density' and 'net residential density.'[34] Gross density was the measure of people per acre across the whole site, whereas the net residential density was the number of people per acre in the housing area only. The need for these additional measures can be viewed as a result of two things. First, planning after the War was to be national in scale and decentralisation was concerned with the movement of people. Therefore, the measure of people per acre allowed statistical planning. Second, the inter-war discourse on density had revealed the importance of open green spaces in town planning. A measure of net density

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[31] The New Towns Committee, *Final Report*, p. 15.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] MH, MW, *Housing Manual 1944*, p. 12.

would be useful to indicate the densities of the housing areas. The introduction of these new standards and a change in the measure of density from dwellings to persons could explain the confusion evident in the New Towns Committee Reports.

This is not to say, however, that the New Towns Committee had intended to recommend high densities. It is evident that the Committee's preference had leaned toward the low-density Garden City ideal for development in the 'open development' ring. In their report, the Committee stated they were particularly indebted to Mr. Arthur W. Kenyon, whom they had co-opted on to several of their most important sub-committees.[35] Kenyon had worked closely with Louis de Soissons, chief architect of Welwyn Garden City. His designs at Welwyn, had 'wavered between an Arts and Crafts idiom and the neo-Georgian'.[36] Kenyon's architectural background and experience would have contributed to the New Town Committee's inclination to the Garden City ideal for New Town Planning.

To summarise, firstly, the New Towns Committee Reports recognised the desire for decentralisation and new housing development. Drawing upon the architectural discourse of the inter-war period, these new town developments were to avoid the overcrowding of the industrial cities as well as the uncontrolled sprawl of suburban housing. However, instead of opting for the high-density high-rise city planning paradigm as a solution, which was favoured by modernist architects, the New Towns Committee favoured the low-density Garden city type ideal; many of the influential figures involved in the production of the reports had been Garden City advocates. Secondly, despite advocating low densities, the density recommendations of the Final New Towns Report were unclear. There was an apparent confusion over figures, area and measurement. This would cause difficulties initially for the architect planners who would take on the task of designing the New Town master plans.

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[35] The New Towns Committee, *Final Report*, p. 6.
[36] Finn Jenson, *Modernist Semis and Terraces in England* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), p. 51.

3.2   HARLOW NEW TOWN

Following the Reith Reports, the New Towns Act was passed in 1946, giving central government power to designate areas of land for New Town development, and to set up 'Development Corporations' responsible for each New Town project. Silkin had asked Gibberd at the beginning of October that year to prepare a plan for a new town at Harlow.[37] It was to be a preliminary plan, since the HDC was not set up until the following year after designation on 25 March 1947. Reflecting retrospectively in *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, Gibberd recalled that his initial design approach at this early stage was a functional one; the town must work smoothly and efficiently. However, he added 'we like a town to give pleasure to the eye, to be beautiful.' Therefore, Gibberd explained, the history of Harlow's design was also concerned with art as well as function.[38] Throughout the development of Harlow, Gibberd maintained the view, which he had established during the wartime years, that his role as the architect should be a predominantly artistic role.

The Final New Towns Committee Report had perhaps encouraged an artistic and picturesque approach to planning and design. In order to avoid the monotony of the suburbs, the Report recommended that the layout must consider 'functions, demand and aesthetics' and that 'variety' had to be 'reconciled with general harmony'. It was also suggested that neighbourhood groups should arise from topographical features.[39] These recommendations were clearly sympathetic to a picturesque design approach. It is possible that Silkin had been aware of Gibberd's artistic approach to architecture, which would account for Silkin's selection of Gibberd as an architect planner to one of the New Towns. Furthermore, Silkin shared the view that the creation of a beautiful town could have a positive impact on society. He believed that it would be possible to produce in the New Towns a 'new type of citizen, a

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[37] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, Personal Diary 1944-46, 2 October 1946.
[38] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 35.
[39] The New Towns Committee, *Final Report*, p. 65.

healthy, self-respecting dignified person with a sense of beauty, culture and civic pride.'[40]

Taking on board the Reith Report's recommendations, as well as the now accepted modernist large-scale planning concepts, Gibberd began his master plan preparations with the view to creating a town with a sense of urbanity, as opposed to a Garden City.[41] Chapter 2 demonstrated that Gibberd believed that if a sense of urbanity was to be achieved, housing groups must be built to a comparatively high density.[42] With the formation of the Harlow Development Corporation (HDC) in May 1947, Gibberd's appointment as architect planner was confirmed, and from the outset, the HDC supported Gibberd's ambition to create a visual town-like quality at Harlow.[43] Cullingworth has described in detail the process of selection of Corporation members. The 1946 New Towns Act had prescribed that each New Town Development Corporation should be made up of a chairman, a deputy chairman and no more than seven other members. Each member was to be appointed by the Minister after consultation with the local authorities concerned.[44] Immediately after sites had been approved by the Cabinet, letters were sent to local authorities in each area, inviting them to nominate candidates for advisory committees which could later become New Town Corporations. Cullingworth explains that in the case of the London New Towns, the nominated persons tended to be Conservative, in line with the majority party on the various councils. Meanwhile, Silkin was contacting industrialists and administrators who could fill the chairman positions.[45] Cullingworth also describes how there were many protests from local authorities once the names of members of the corporation were announced, since their nominees had not been selected. As a result of this, there was 'an undercurrent of

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[40] Lewis Silkin – House of Commons Debates, vol. 422, col. 1091, as quoted in Meryl Aldridge, *The British New Towns: A Programme without Policy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 36.

[41] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 42.

[42] Gibberd, 'Landscaping the New Town', p. 85.

[43] This will become evident later in the study. J. M. Richards recalled that 'Gibberd could be very persuasive and was adept at winning over committees' J. M. Richards, 'Gibberd, Sir Frederick Ernest (1908–1984)', rev. by Alan Cox, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31144> [accessed 9 October 2009] (para. 6 of 9)

[44] Cullingworth, p. 291.

[45] Ibid., p. 292.

resentment [...] which tended to show itself in friction between the corporation and the local authorities.'[46] This friction will become more evident later in the study, particularly in Chapter 5 in relation to the HDC's attempts to create a sense of enclosure.

Sir Ernest Gowers was invited by Silkin in 1946 initially to chair the Harlow Advisory Committee, which would later become the Harlow Development Corporation (HDC). During the War, Gowers had been responsible for civil defence in London, co-operating successfully with the London County Council[47] – attributes which had no doubt attracted Silkin to Gowers.[48] Gowers accepted the invitation on the condition that he could choose his own General Manager, selecting Eric Adams, who had been an honorary clerk to the civil defence subcommittee of the Metropolitan Boroughs' Standing Joint Committee. From the outset, the chief officers of the HDC supported Gibberd's ideas about creating a sense of urbanity at Harlow. Chapter 4 will demonstrate the great influence Gibberd had on the HDC, as well as the power of chairman Gowers in challenging Silkin's decisions, which would impact upon the creation of urbanity at Harlow.

When the HDC was established in 1947, it absorbed Gowers, Adams and Gibberd from the Advisory Committee.[49] In preparing the master plan for Harlow, perhaps due to the complexity of density recommendations in the Reith Reports, the HDC opted to use the *Housing Manual 1944* housing standards for guidance, rather than the New Towns Committee recommendations.[50] The *Housing Manual 1944* had been prepared jointly by the Ministries of Health and Works during the War. It was intended as guidance for local authorities for house construction and rebuilding after the War. In preparing the *Manual,* guidance had been sought from many

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[46] Cullingworth, p. 292.

[47] R. W. Burchfield, 'Gowers, Ernest Arthur (1880-1966)', rev. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33497> [accessed 8 April 2013] (para. 2 of 11)

[48] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 11.

[49] The first Board of the HDC comprised nine members, including the chairman. Principal Officers in 1947 included Eric Adams as General Manager, Frederick Gibberd as Architect Planner, Ben Hyde Harvey as Comptroller and Deputy General Manager, J. R. Jacques as Chief Solicitor, R. D. Relf as Chief Estates Officer, and Marjorie Green as Social Development Officer.

[50] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Corporation Meeting, 15 June 1948.

organisations, including the Town and Country Planning Association. But unlike the Reith Reports, advice was also sought from members of the MARS Group, notably from Elizabeth Denby. This could account for the higher densities prescribed in comparison to the extremely low densities suggested by the New Town Committee. However, as the Greater London Plan had envisaged, the *Housing Manual* advised a variety of densities according to location: the nearer the centre, the higher the density:

	Persons per acre
Open development	30-40
Outer ring of a town	50-60
Inner ring of a town	75
Central areas	100
Central areas in large towns	120 [51]

The New Towns were to be located beyond the 'outer ring of a town' and therefore fell into the 'open development' category; the *Manual* prescribed net residential densities of 30-40 persons per acre for this zone. The New Towns Committee had referred only to 30 people per acre, as opposed to 30-40. Furthermore, they had argued that due to a possible higher demand for open space, the New Towns should aim for net residential densities of 25 persons per acre. Since Gibberd was hoping to achieve high densities and compact development at Harlow, to create a sense of urbanity, their decision to use the *Housing Manual* for guidance rather than the Reith Report is not surprising. In fact, Gibberd argued that housing groups in the town must be 'over 30 persons per acre' and they must be 'compactly planned.'[52]

The original site for Harlow as illustrated in Abercrombie's plan was abandoned due to the desire to retain good agricultural land and prevent demolition of existing properties. The site was moved to the west of the existing Old Harlow. A definitive town boundary was not yet in place as Gibberd began planning, but the Greater London Plan had specified 6000 acres of land for a population of 60,000. If 6000 acres were to be developed evenly, this would give a gross density of 10 persons per

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[51] MH, MW, *Housing Manual 1944*, p. 14.
[52] Gibberd, 'Landscaping the New Town', p. 85.

acre. Gibberd elaborated upon this problem in his 1948 article in the *AR*. He argued that if a town of 60,000 were to be designed on Howard's principles, built at 'the normal standard of density', it would 'cover a vast area of land and would invite monotony by its very size.'[53] He added that there 'would not be sufficient contrast between areas of building and non-building inside the town.'[54] The *AR* had high hopes for the New Town of Harlow as they introduced Gibberd's article by stating:

> The article explains how the author evolved a plan which provides an alternative to the well-known extremes of the vertical garden city or the garden city dispersed at "twelve-to-the-acre."[55]

A middle ground between these two extremes was what Elizabeth Denby, Thomas Sharp and A. Trystan Edwards had been advocating throughout the inter-war period. Denby had proposed traditional terraced development at densities of 35-40 dwellings per acre in her 1936 paper to the RIBA.[56] Silkin, then a member of the LCC housing committee had opposed these densities, suggesting 12 houses to the acre as more suitable. A decade later, Silkin, with his preference for low densities, had become Minister of Town and Country planning, exerting his ideals onto the post-war New Town house building programme.

Gibberd's initial challenge at Harlow then, was to overcome the low density recommendations he faced, to avoid creating a Garden City type development, as well as to obtain a picturesque town with a sense of urbanity. Gibberd's observations of the existing topography were illustrated in the 1947 Harlow New Town Plan document. Bounded to the north by the existing railway, Gibberd marked the natural features on the approximate area of the proposed town. The official boundary was not marked on these early plans, since the precise edge was still being disputed. Existing woodland and areas of high ground were also marked on the plan, with shaded areas to indicate 'agricultural wedges', parkland and open areas which might

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[53] Gibberd, 'Landscaping the New Town', p. 85.
[54] Ibid.
[55] The Editors, Introduction to 'Landscaping the New Town', *AR*, 103 (1948), 85-90 (p. 85).
[56] Denby, 'Rehousing', pp. 61-77.

be used for schools and recreation. Two industrial zones to the north and the west were marked as well as a town centre (fig.3.6).
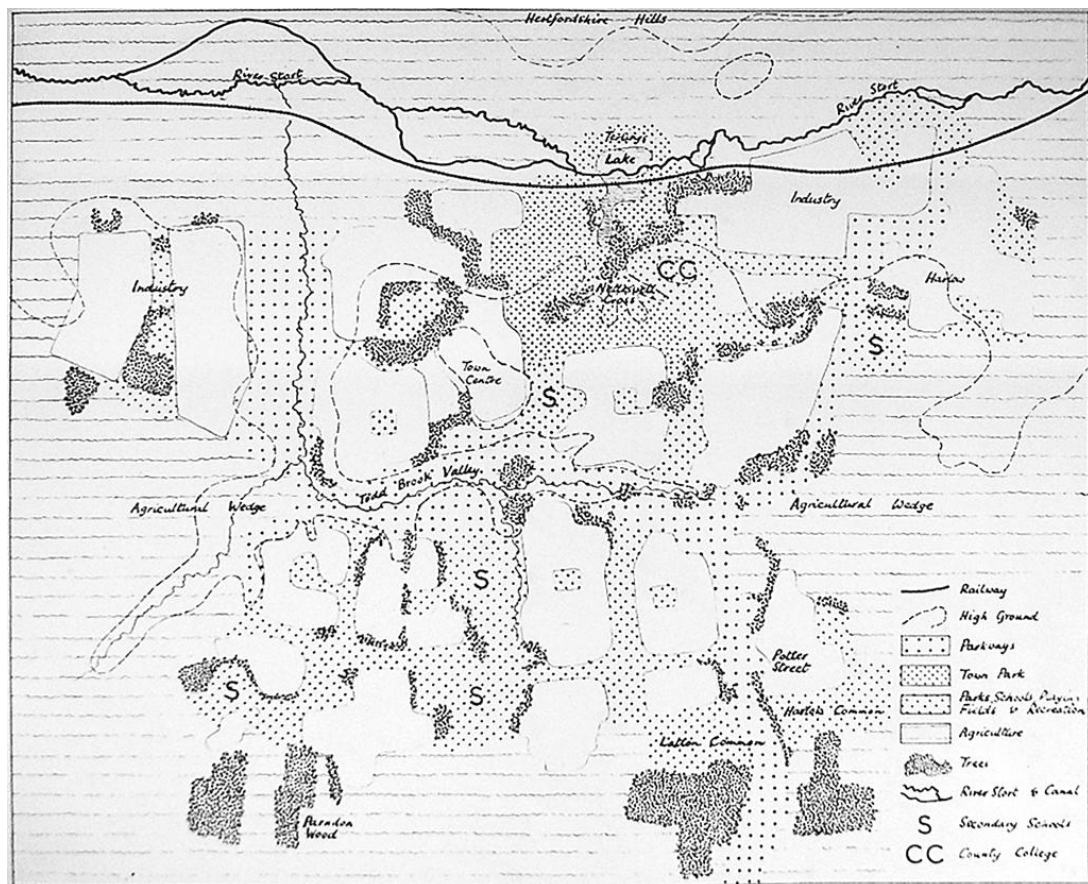
Fig.3.6. 'Landscape' from the 1947 Harlow New Town Plan

Gibberd used the areas of high ground as the basis of arranging buildings on the site; large areas of parkland would enable the urban areas to be built more compactly than if spread across the whole site. Instead of placing a green belt around the edge of the town as Howard and Abercrombie had advocated, Gibberd brought 'wedges' of landscape into the centre of the town. This idea was promoted by Sharp during his lecture to the AA on 'Civic Design' in 1942, coinciding with Gibberd's time as Principal at the school. During the lecture, Sharp had argued for compact building and a sense of enclosure, but he also called for a combination of concentration and openness, which would lead to 'delight and beauty' in the town. He suggested that neighbourhoods should be compact, but the compactness should be contrasted with 'spacious areas of lawns and trees, some running out wedge-wise into the open

country'.[57] In 'Landscaping the New Town', Gibberd explained that variety – one of the picturesque elements of planning highlighted in Chapter 2 – could be obtained 'through the juxtaposition of building groups with the landscape.'[58]
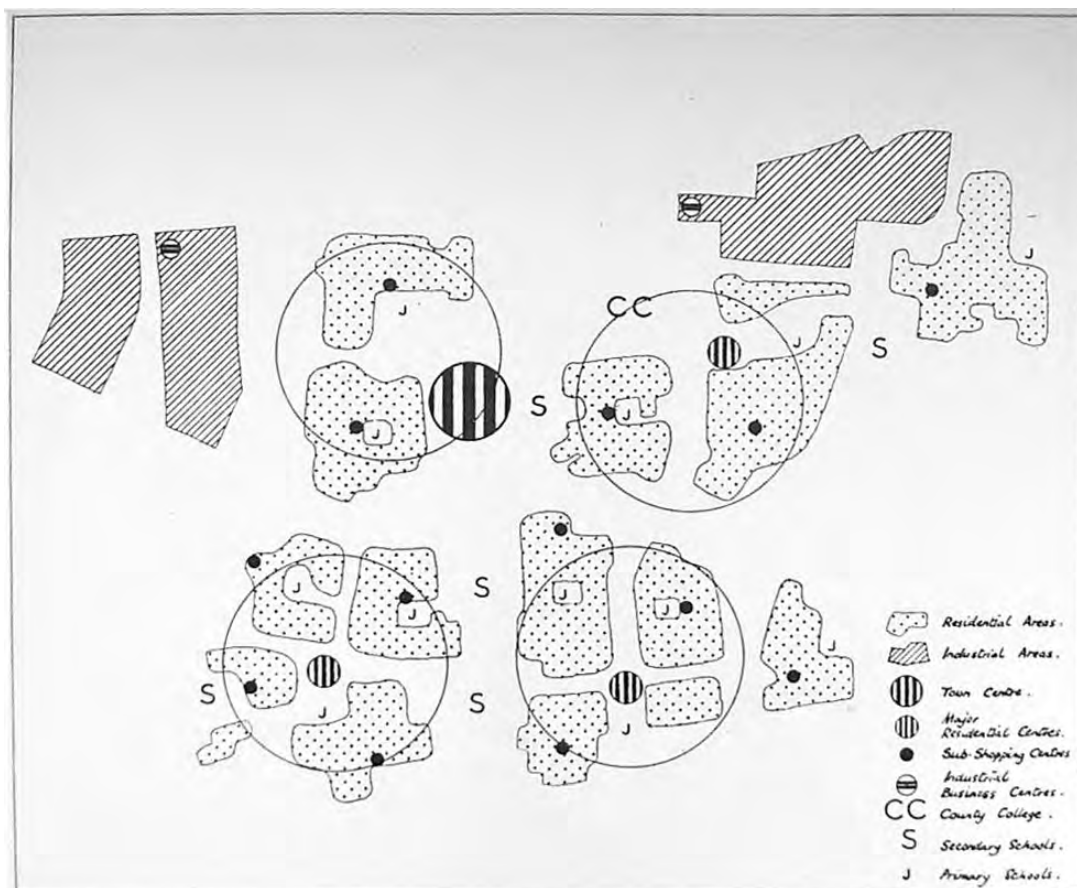
Fig.3.7. 'Residential Groupings and Schools' from the 1947 Harlow New Town Plan

Fig.3.7 shows Gibberd's proposal for residential groupings, which were indicated as blob-like shapes corresponding to the areas of high ground marked on fig.3.6. The reasons for this arrangement can be understood in three ways: first, the building groups relate to the existing natural environment; second, variety could be obtained by contrasting built up areas with open landscape. These were picturesque planning elements which Gibberd and the *AR* had developed during the wartime years. However, third, and most important to the subject of density and urbanity, the arrangement of residential areas into small compact groups within the landscape

[57] Sharp, 'Civic Design', p. 38.
[58] Gibberd, 'Landscaping the New Town', p. 85.

could attain higher densities in small areas with the possibility of creating pockets of urbanity within the town.
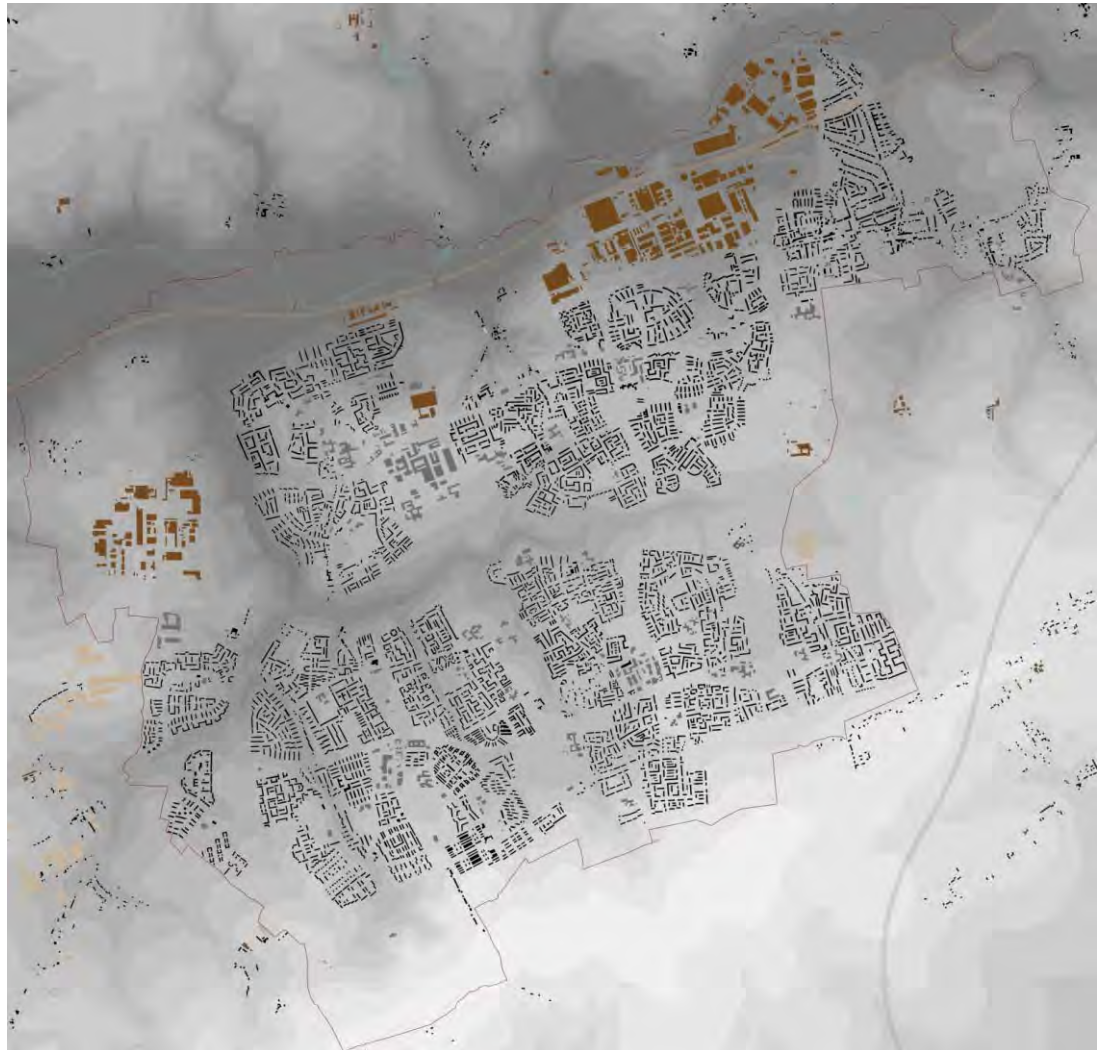
Fig.3.8. Figure-ground drawing with contour shading, based on 1980 OS Map

My figure-ground drawing based on the 1980 OS Map shows clearly how the areas of building relate to the existing topography (fig.3.8). It also shows the town boundary line, which Gibberd explained that as the land was cheap, no attempt was made to draw the boundary in as tightly as possible.[59] Large areas of land were therefore left undeveloped towards the edge, in an attempt to build housing as compactly as possible.

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[59] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 15.

Fig.3.9. Figure-ground drawing based on 1980 OS Map

Fig.3.9 is also based on the 1980 OS Map, this time open green spaces are indicated rather than contours. It clearly demonstrates how Gibberd applied the modernist planning principles which developed during the inter-war years. He created two industrial zones, one to the north and the other to the west of the town, separated from the housing groups. Gibberd also adopted the neighbourhood unit principle, which the MARS Group Town Planning Committee had advocated in their planning work during the inter-war years. The four 'neighbourhood clusters' positioned on the areas of high ground were designed around 'major centres', and schools were also provided in each cluster, which could be reached by foot. Gibberd's sensitivity to the landscape resulted in a 'softer' picturesque layout in comparison to the earlier linear cities and orthogonal neighbourhood planning of CIAM and MARS Group

work. This, combined with the low recommended densities prescribed by the *Housing Manual*, would later give rise to questions from the architectural press as well as the younger generation of modernist architects as to whether Harlow New Town could be considered within their modernist framework.

Each of the four 'neighbourhood clusters' was divided further into thirteen 'comparatively small and compact units.'[60] These units were designed with their own 'sub centres' and were to be separated by open spaces for schools and recreation – compacting the housing groups further. The residential areas of the 1947 Master Plan were planned to an average density of 38 persons per acre. This density excluded the areas provided for schools, playing fields and major centres. Gibberd and the HDC had chosen to opt for the higher end of the *Housing Manual's* 30-40 persons per acre for residential areas, instead of the New Town Committee's maximum of 25 persons per acre.

3.2.1   Mark Hall North

Before the Master Plan had been approved, Gibberd had drawn up a preliminary plan for Mark Hall North, the first neighbourhood to be designed and built in Harlow. The neighbourhood is located in 'The Stow' neighbourhood cluster, and is marked by a red dashed line on fig .3.9. To avoid monotony and to create variety, the neighbourhood was subdivided further into 'housing groups', each to be designed by a different architect. This was a policy Gibberd and the HDC maintained throughout the development of Harlow and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4. The Mark Hall North Neighbourhood was divided into fourteen housing groups, six to be designed by the HDC Design Group, three to be designed by MARS Group members Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, and the remaining four groups by Gibberd and Partners. Fig.3.10 shows the plan which was printed in the 1952 Harlow New Town Plan. Using CAD, I have scaled the plan and added the boundary of the neighbourhood, which gives a gross area of 156 acres, including all green open spaces and school grounds.

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[60] Gibberd, 'Harlow New Town', p. 248.

Fig.3.10. Mark Hall North Plan, 1952, Gross Area: 156 acres

Fig.3.11. Mark Hall North Plan, 1952, Net Residential Areas: 80 acres

Fig.3.11 shows boundary lines which contain only the housing groups, giving a net residential area of 80 acres.[61] The plan for Mark Hall North has a total of 912

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[61] The *Housing Manual* explained that the net area could be calculated as 'including the curtilage of dwellings, access roads and minor open spaces, and half the boundary roads up to a maximum of 20ft, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Works, *Housing Manual 1944* (London: HMSO, 1944), p. 12.

dwellings over a net area of 80 acres, which equates to a net residential density of 11.4 dwellings per acre, or approximately 38.7 persons per acre. The gross density on the other hand works out at 5.8 dwellings per acre, or, 19.7 persons per acre. By compacting the housing groups in this way, Gibberd achieved a low overall density to satisfy the New Towns Committee, while achieving densities of approximately 38 persons per acre in the built up areas, which complied with the higher end of the *Housing Manual's* recommendations. In an attempt to step up the densities even higher, Gibberd carefully balanced higher density housing groups in Mark Hall North with groups of lower densities, to obtain an average of approximately 12 dwellings per acre across the neighbourhood. For example, the housing group 'Broomfield' was designed by Gibberd at a net density of 9.4 dwellings per acre. This in turn, enabled groups of higher densities in the neighbourhood, for example, Gibberd designed the adjacent housing group 'The Lawn' at a density of 28.7 dwellings per acre.
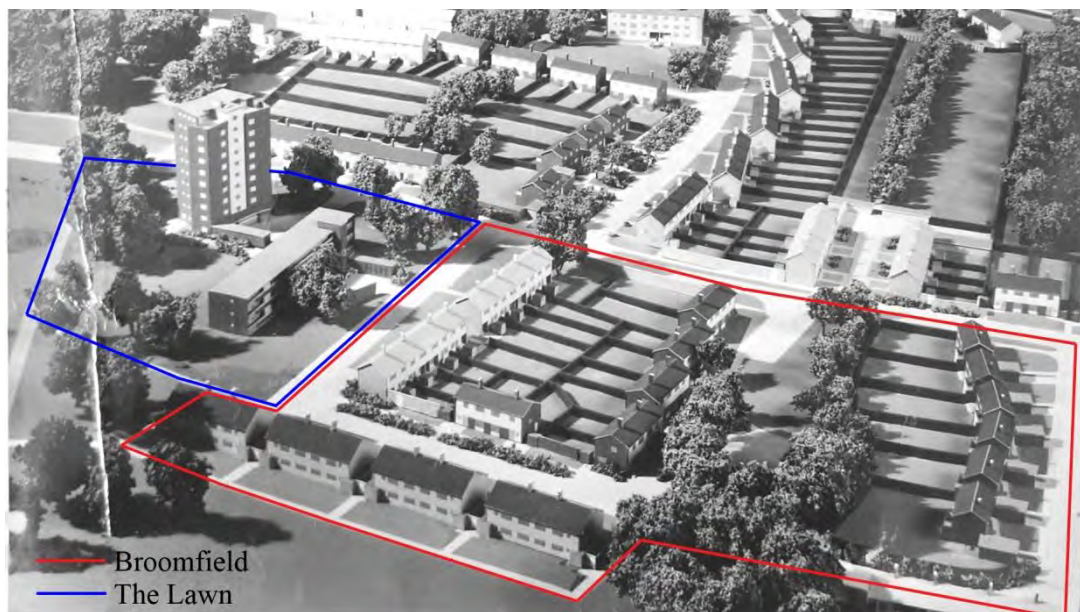
Fig.3.12. The Lawn and Broomfield
(Photograph of model from 'Harlow File – Mark Hall', Gibberd Garden Archive)

The Lawn and Broomfield are indicated in blue and red respectively on fig.3.12, a copy of a photograph of the Mark Hall North model. In Broomfield, 58 two-storey houses with large gardens were spread evenly over 6.14 acres, to create a low-density environment. In contrast, the 52 dwellings of The Lawn housing group were

arranged into a ten-storey point block and an accompanying three-storey block of flats upon only 1.812 acres. This was another technique employed by Gibberd to overcome the restrictive densities prescribed by the *Housing Manual*; in order to create areas of high density and urbanity, Gibberd had to make compromises in other parts of the neighbourhood.

At Stevenage, there were also some early experiments in high-density housing. To the north of Bedwell the first neighbourhood to be built, Stony Hall was designed by modernist architects Yorke, Rosenberg and Mardall and comprised a large seven-storey slab block with four blocks of flats ranging from two to four storeys, arranged around a communal garden and play area. The seven-storey block (fig.3.13) resembled the type of dwellings Yorke had promoted with Gibberd earlier in *The Modern Flat*; it was certainly an attempt to orientate the town toward the modernist high-density high-rise paradigm. However, this type of development did not facilitate compact building to create an urban street picture. In fact, at Stony Hall the effect was quite the opposite. The 110 dwellings were spread apart on a site of approximately 6 acres which gave large open communal spaces and a residential density of 18.3 dwellings per acre (or 62.2 persons per acre). While still a relatively high density, it was in fact lower than the density of The Lawn in Harlow, due to the large open space (fig.3.14).

Fig.3.13. Seven-storey block by Yorke, Rosenberg & Mardall, (*AR*, Dec. 1952)

Fig.3.14. Stony Hall view from the west (*AR*, Dec. 1952)

A later publication by the Stevenage Development Corporation (SDC) explained that the original 1946 plan by Gordon Stephenson and Peter Shepheard stressed that

Stevenage should be an open town, with 19 acres of open space per 1000 population.[62] High density flats could help achieve this large proportion of open space. In comparison, the HDC worked to a formula of 8.5 acres of open space per 1000 people, including parks and parkways, allotments and recreational space.[63] Frederic Osborn and Arnold Whittick in their 1969 overview of the New Towns revealed that the most frequent criticism of Stevenage was that the town lacked compactness, which was accentuated by the large areas of open green space.[64] At Harlow, Gibberd grouped the housing compactly, separating it from large open spaces, to create the visual effect of compact development. At Stony Hall, on the other hand, the high density blocks necessitated, as well as facilitated, large open spaces to be an integral part of the housing layout. High density alone could not achieve a visual sense of urbanity: as Chapter 2 has shown, modernist architects developing ideas about urbanity looked for a middle ground between modernist high-density high-rise housing and low-density low-rise houses. The visual effect of compact development was the key to creating urbanity. Conversely, the SDC was of the opinion that Stony Hall had 'too urban a character' for a town surrounded by open country.[65] The large-scale modernist block at Stony Hall was considered 'too urban' in appearance perhaps because it reflected the scale of housing developments in cities rather than the scale of urbanity in English county towns.

Fig.3.15 shows the original plan for the scheme, only half of which was built following the SDC's late decision to reduce the size of the scheme.[66] The decision was perhaps a result of changes within the Development Corporation: as Andrew Saint has recently shown, modernist architects Stephenson and Shepheard intended to work for the SDC throughout the town's development, but their employer, the

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[62] Jack Balchin, *First New Town: An Autobiography of the Stevenage Development Corporation* (Stevenage: Stevenage Development Corporation, 1980), p. 69.

[63] ERO, A6306, 423, 98/16 (1), General Manager to Miss P.J Cairns (New Towns Division, MHLG), 13 June 1962.

[64] Frederic J. Osborn and Arnold Whittick, *The New Towns: The Answer to Megalopolis* (London: Leonard Hill, 1969), p. 170.

[65] Ibid., p. 173.

[66] 'Flats at Stevenage', *AR*, 112 (1952), 357-365 (p. 360).

Ministry of Town and Country Planning, refused to release them.[67] The SDC appointed Clifford Holliday instead and subsequently, the master plan was altered to specify a net density of 34.2 persons per residential acre – almost half the density of Stony Hall.[68] This was also in response to the Minister of Town and Country Planning's request that the open space allocation at Stevenage should be reduced.[69] The subsequent lowering of density would reduce open space by spreading out smaller houses with gardens, which in turn, responded to the SDC's realisation that this was the type of housing preferred by incoming tenants, who wanted to get away from communal living.[70]

Fig.3.15. Original plan for Stony Hall, Stevenage
(with reduced scheme as built highlighted in red)

This shows that Gibberd was not alone in striving for high density housing in the early neighbourhoods of the New Towns. Although the slab blocks at Stony Hall did not necessarily create a sense of urbanity, a pamphlet published by the SDC in 1954 explained that building houses close together could give the effect of a 'more urban

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[67] Andrew Saint, 'The New Towns' in *Modern Britain, The Cambridge Cultural History,* ed. by Boris Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) pp. 146-159 (p. 153).

[68] Harold Orlans, *Stevenage: A Sociological Study of a New Town* (Oxon: Routledge, 1952), p. 118.

[69] Ibid., p. 119.

[70] Stevenage Development Corporation, p. 28.
    The Stony Hall flats proved unpopular and have since been demolished and replaced recently with a mixture of two and three-storey flats and houses.

street picture similar to that seen in many English county towns.'[71] Such wording suggests that SDC shared the same ambition to create urbanity as Gibberd and the HDC.

3.3 HIGHER DENSITIES

While the SDC lowered residential densities at Stevenage, at Harlow, Gibberd and the HDC were pushing for higher densities. In fact, the HDC files at the Essex Record Office show that before construction had started at Mark Hall North, Gibberd was already considering stepping up the densities of future housing groups in Harlow. Mark Hall North had been planned at 38 persons per acre, in line with the *Housing Manual,* with construction starting in April 1950. In 1948, Social Development Officer to the HDC Marjorie Green commented in her report that 'in working up the Master Plan in conjunction with Mr. Gibberd it appears that this figure [38 persons per acre] might be increased slightly with advantage, perhaps to an average of 40 persons per acre.'[72] The following year, in a memorandum on densities, Gibberd stated 'we are endeavouring to close up open spaces and green wedges and if the nett [sic] population density is higher and the open space lower, then the Gross population density will be higher than envisaged in the Master Plan.'[73] His aim was to then contract the remaining housing areas to the south of the town.

In March 1950, the 1947 Harlow Plan received approval from the Ministry of Town and Country Planning.[74] A special HDC meeting was held in January the following year to discuss densities and layouts of housing; it was noted that 'in approving the Master Plan the Ministry of Town and Country Planning suggested that the density

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[71] Stevenage Development Corporation, *Building the New Town of Stevenage* (Stevenage: Stevenage Development Corporation, 1954), p. 22.

[72] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Extract from Corporation Minutes, 7 December 1948, (Social Development Officer's Report)

[73] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), 24 October 1949.

[74] ERO, 'Comment by R. R. Costain, C.B.E., F.I.O.B., Chairman, Harlow Development Corporation, 1950-', in *Harlow New Town A Plan Prepared for the Harlow Development Corporation,* by Frederick Gibberd, 2nd edn (Harlow: Harlow Development Corporation, 1952), p. 5. It was the first of the New Towns to receive approval.

should be increased.'[75] After four years' experience in post-war house building, the Ministry of Health was able to publish an updated *Housing Manual* in 1949, offering further advice to local authorities on the provision of housing.[76] The Manual referred to the previous edition, and stressed that 'persons per acre' was to remain the correct measure of gross density. However, instead of recommending 30-40 persons per acre net residential density as the 1944 Manual had done, the new Manual specified 30-40 persons per acre gross density in urban areas. In comparison with the Reith Report's recommended overall density of 12 persons per acre, this was quite an increase. Furthermore, in the 1949 Manual, there seemed no longer to be any restrictions on net density; 'the net density of different parts of the neighbourhood may vary provided that the net density of any part satisfies good standards of daylight, sunlight and fire hazard.'[77]

These decisions can be traced back to discussions which took place within the Housing Manual Committee in September 1947. Sir Lancelot Keay, member of the Central Housing Advisory Committee's Sub-Committee on the Design of Dwellings and President of the RIBA, had suggested that persons per acre should be the basis for density measure, while Forshaw advocated a simple 'one person per room basis together with daylighting control, to the floor space index method advocated by the study group.'[78] Taking note of such comments, the 1949 Housing Manual confused things further by introducing a new measure of net density – number of habitable rooms per acre.[79] This was an attempt to counter the inaccuracies which resulted from converting dwellings per acre to persons per acre.

The differences between density recommendations in the 1944 and 1949 Manuals could be related to the distribution of effort after the War in forming the welfare system. Chris Holmes's recent study shows that although the Labour Party manifesto stated that a new Ministry of Planning and Local Government would be

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[75] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Densities, Layouts, Design and Architecture, HDC Special Meeting, 25 January 1951.
[76] Ministry of Health, *Housing Manual 1949* (London: HMSO, 1949), p. 11.
[77] MH, *Housing Manual 1949*, p. 19.
[78] The National Archive, HLG 104/23
[79] MH, *Housing Manual 1949*, p. 19.

formed to take responsibility of housing, when Atlee came to power, he ignored this commitment. Housing was kept within the Ministry of Health, as it had been since 1919.[80] This meant that in 1945, Minister of Health Aneurin Bevan was faced with both the task of creating the NHS, as well as the responsibility of the post-war house-building programme. Holmes has noted that although Bevan had certainly been exaggerating when he said he only gave five minutes a week to housing, there is no doubt that most of his time was given to health, rather than housing.[81] This suggests that in an attempt to get post-war efforts underway, various aspects such as housing and density were not given full attention at the outset. Once planning in the New Towns had begun, it offered a chance for government Housing Advisory teams to reflect upon the earlier recommendations.

The changes to the new 1949 edition of the *Housing Manual* were clarified in a Ministry of Town and Country Planning Circular, which was issued to the HDC. The Circular explained that the number of habitable rooms per acre, or the 'net accommodation density', was the correct way to measure density.[82] Upon receipt of the Circular, Social Development Officer Marjorie Green drew attention to the fact that the Ministry of Town and Country Planning when interpreting densities applied a formula of one person per habitable room (not habitable bedroom).[83] This measure was no more accurate than the previous measure, since habitable rooms included living rooms, and using a formula of one person per room did not take into account double rooms. Gibberd responded to the Circular by querying the new occupancy rate i.e. number of persons per habitable room. He questioned whether this was an average or constant, concluding that it was a "social problem" for Miss Green.[84] Although Gibberd had implemented modernist social planning principles to the overall master plan, the HDC records demonstrate that as planning progressed in the town, Gibberd increasingly focused on the architectural and visual aspects in order to create urbanity at Harlow. The presence of a Social Development Officer in the

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[80] Chris Holmes, *A New Vision for Housing* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 20.
[81] Holmes, p. 20.
[82] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Extract from the Ministry of Town and Country Planning Circular No. 63, p. 7.
[83] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Extract from Chief Officers' notes, 12 October 1949.
[84] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), 24 October 1949.

HDC allowed Gibberd to delegate tasks relating to the social side of housing and town planning, which enabled him to concentrate on his role as artistic town planner. This will become more evident in the later chapters of the thesis; it will also become apparent that at times, Gibberd's application of urbanity elements was in tension with the HDC Social Development Officer's findings which reflected the people's preferences.

In terms of the Ministry's recommended density increase in 1950, Marjorie Green had stated from a social point of view that a slight increase would be 'advantageous'. Gibberd also welcomed the density increase, from his aesthetic standpoint, as in his mind, a higher density could create a greater sense of urbanity. During the HDC special meeting, minutes show that the Corporation had agreed that 'the layout of Mark Hall North was too open and extravagant in road frontage' and therefore, 'with the object of achieving greater urbanity and land use, coupled with more economic development, it was agreed – that future planning should proceed on the basis of securing an ultimate minimum density of 50 persons or approximately 15 dwellings to the acre over the whole area of the New Town.'[85] The Ministry also approached Crawley Development Corporation suggesting an increase in total overall target population. The contrast between the response of Crawley Development Corporation and the Harlow Development Corporation highlights Gibberd's determination to achieve higher densities and sense of urbanity, perhaps over satisfying social requirements. For example, Crawley Development Corporation believed the only way to achieve a greater population within the existing site boundary was by introducing multi-storey flats. Since they had maintained close contact with incoming tenants, they were aware that less than 2 percent wished to live in a flat. With this in mind, they informed the Minister they did not feel justified in increasing the densities of the residential areas beyond those originally proposed, and that any increase in the population must be obtained by extending the residential areas rather than increasing density.[86] Similarly, at Corby

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[85] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Densities, Layouts, Design and Architecture, HDC Special Meeting, 25 January 1951.

[86] Crawley Development Corporation, 'Report of the Crawley Development Corporation for the period ending 31st March 1951, in *Reports of the Development Corporations for the period ending 31st March 1951* (London: HMSO, 1952), p.112.

New Town in Northamptonshire, consultants William Holford and H. Myles Wright proposed an extension to the designated area rather than an increase in residential density. This was in response to the Ministry's decision in 1950 to deduct 1,050 acres from the designated area while maintaining the maximum population of 40,000.[87] The HDC on the other hand, embraced the idea and increased their target population from 60,000 to 80,000, despite the clear preference for low density housing. The revised Harlow Plan was published in 1952, confirming the increased total target population from 60,000 to 80,000. The HDC maintained the view that this could be done without changing the site boundary or the planned distribution of housing areas. Appendix I of the revised master plan indicates that the HDC was able achieve this by increasing the net residential densities of future housing groups from 38 to 50 persons per acre (or from 12 to 15 dwellings per acre).[88]

The following year, the *Harlow Citizen* in its opening edition published a story called 'As Others See Us.'[89] The *Citizen* reported that 'after recent complaints about the high density of the development of Harlow New Town it is particularly refreshing to hear the view that a feature is the low density.'[90] This was the view expressed by a party of Swedish journalists who had come over to visit Harlow. The editor did not go into detail about where the complaints had originated from; however, the files at the Essex Record Office indicate that there were tensions between the Epping Rural District Council (ERDC) and the HDC regarding the increased densities at Harlow. In particular, the Council had raised concerns over the density of development in 'Area 23' in a neighbourhood unit adjacent to Mark Hall North. The housing group had been planned by the HDC Design Group to a relatively high density of 16 dwellings per acre – higher than the 1952 master plan document specified. With this, the ERDC, concerned that tight planning had led to a significant decrease in the size of back gardens, reminded the HDC of their agreement with the Essex County Council (ECC) that future layouts would provide a

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[87] Osborn and Whittick, p. 320.

[88] Frederick Gibberd, *Harlow New Town: A Plan Prepared for the Harlow Development Corporation* (Harlow: Harlow Development Corporation, 1952), p. 27.

[89] 'As Others See Us', *Harlow Citizen,* 1 May 1953, Around the Town, p. 2.

[90] Ibid.

minimum size of 100 square yards for back gardens.[91] This is evidence of the friction between local authorities and development corporations, which Cullingworth had noted. The ERDC (later the Harlow Urban District Council, HUDC), favoured low-density development along Garden City principles; throughout the development of Harlow, the Council would argue the case for lower densities.

The density increase would facilitate the creation of urbanity at Harlow, as will be discussed later in the chapter; however, despite the ERDC's concerns over high-density development following the 1952 master plan, the Swedish journalists visiting Harlow in 1953 thought that Harlow had a very low density. The party were struck by the 'spaciousness of the open spaces in Harlow', and believed the whole appearance to be very pleasant.[92] The reason for the contrasting views between the Swedish visitors and the ERDC can be seen by looking at new town developments which were taking place in Sweden during the same period. The town of Vällingby was built between 1950 and 1956, and was located to the western edge of Stockholm city centre (rather than positioned 20-30 miles away like the London New Towns). Although the town was inspired by the British post-war New Towns, Vällingby was not a self-contained New Town in the same sense, rather, a metropolitan district of Stockholm, linked to the centre by an underground transport system.[93] The plan was designed by Sven Markelius as a series of neighbourhood units to house a total population of 24,000.[94] I have taken the plan of Vällingby from Pierre Merlin's study of *New Towns* [95] and imported it into a CAD program in order to calculate the approximate site area (fig.3.16). The red dashed line, which includes a large recreational area and woodland which remains free from building, gives an area of approximately 1555 acres. This is almost a quarter of the size of Harlow. The gross population density can be calculated as 15.4 persons per acre, which is only slightly

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[91] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Letter from HDC General Manager to Mr Sylvester-Evans at the Epping Rural District Council, 23 October 1952.

[92] 'As Others See Us', p. 2.

[93] Mats Deland, *The Social City: Middle-way Approaches to Housing and Suburban Governmentality in Southern Stockholm 1900-1945* (Stockholm: Institute of Urban History, 2001), p. 9.

[94] *Large Housing Estates: Ideas, Rise, Fall and Recovery,* ed. by Frank Wassenberg (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2013), p. 87.

[95] Pierre Merlin, *New Towns*, trans. by Margaret Sparks (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1971), p. 80.

higher than Harlow's revised gross population density of 13.3 persons per acre (80,000 divided by the total town area of 6000 acres).
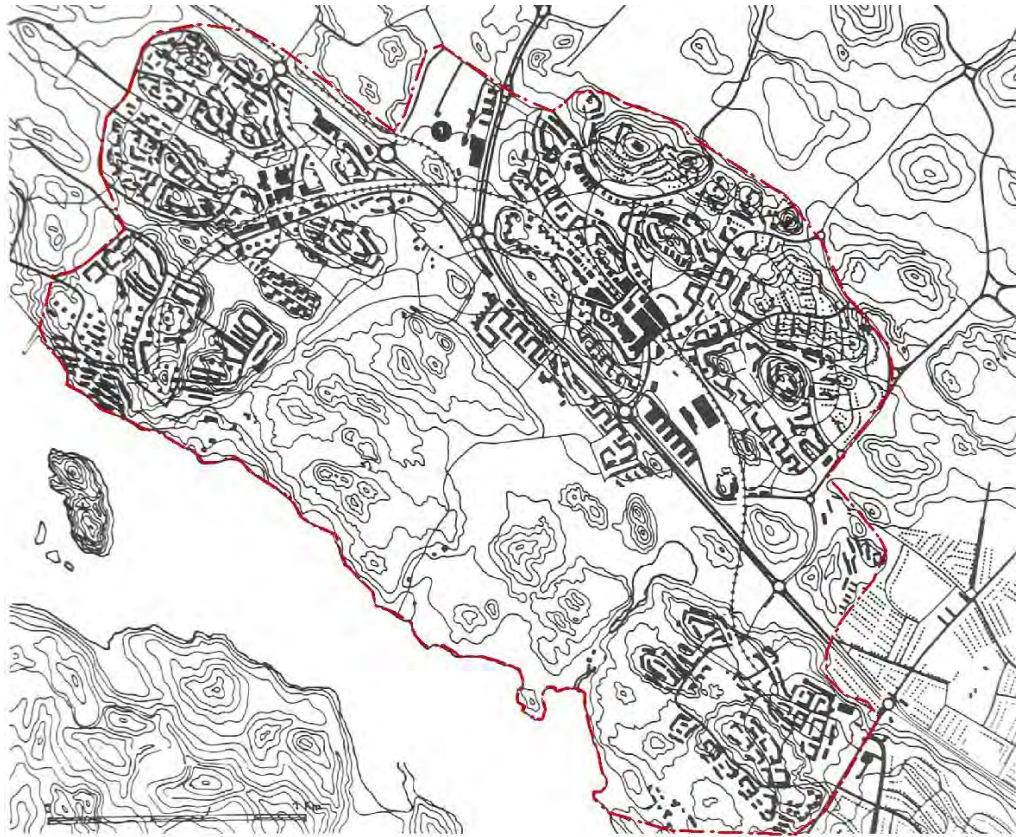
Fig.3.16. Vällingby New Town plan with approximate site boundary indicated

The neighbourhood units were strung together along the railway route into Stockholm, with the largest neighbourhood – also known as Vällingby – containing the town centre. The Swedish journalists visiting Harlow compared the housing in Vällingby to the housing in Harlow. Their impression was that at Vällingby, the houses were 'higher', in fact, 40 percent of housing was of five- and six-storeys in height.[96] Aside from The Lawn, the majority of housing in Harlow at this time was only two-storeys in height, giving the Swedish party the impression of low density. Since the gross overall densities of the two towns were not dissimilar, the visual appearance of high density was created at Vällingby by tighter grouping of the housing. Having visited Vällingby with Geoffrey Jellicoe in June 1957,[97] Gibberd would include examples of Vällingby housing in a revised edition of *Modern Flats,*

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[96] 'As Others See Us', p. 2.

[97] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, 1955-57 Personal Diary, 19 June 1957.

particularly examples of ten- and twelve-storey point blocks which were concentrated around the centre. Fig.3.17 shows a photograph of this type of housing, designed by Hjalmar Klemming, which featured in the 1961 edition of *Modern Flats*. It shows two ten-storey point blocks with two zigzagging three-storey terraces which are arranged around the rocky area of landscape.

Fig.3.17. Housing in Vällingby (Yorke & Gibberd, *Modern Flats*, 1961)

In relation to the *AR*'s earlier discussions on Swedish architecture, this photograph illustrated a humanised picturesque modern housing layout; modern architecture softened by the integration of buildings with the landscape, traditional materials, and traditional features such as pitched roofs. In relation to Gibberd's wartime urban studies, the three-storey terraces could match the urban scale of Bath and Edinburgh – cities Gibberd believed had a sense of urbanity. It could be argued that the concentration of high-density building around the central area facilitated the creation of a humanised modern housing scheme with a sense of urbanity.

In a recent study of housing policy in Stockholm, Mats Deland has argued that the high-density high-rise centre of Vallingby marked the end of the Garden City era in Stockholm.[98] Instead of continuing to spread out the built environment making use of Sweden's vast land resources (which went against market logic), Stockholm City administration decided to encourage high-rise building to increase rents accumulated

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[98] Deland, p. 9.

by the municipal treasury.[99] In the UK, when the Conservatives came to power in 1951, they too began to encourage high-density development. Harold Macmillan became the Minister of the newly formed Ministry of Housing and Local Government (which reunited Housing from the Ministry of Health with Planning from the Ministry of Town and Country Planning), promising to deliver 300,000 houses a year.[100] In his autobiography, Macmillan stated that the Conservative Party gave a 'grudging and lukewarm welcome' to the policy of New Towns. Macmillan on the other hand, viewed the New Towns as a 'valuable inheritance' and saw the towns as important in contributing to the total housing effort.[101] However, although continuing Labour's social policy of public sector house construction in the New Towns, Macmillan was determined that private enterprise should also contribute to his house building statistics.[102] The earlier 1947 Town and Country Planning Act had given the State the right to develop land; it had also specified that where planning consent increased land value, the owner must pay a 'Development Charge' to the new Central Land Board (CLB). Public agencies buying land for public services, including council housing, would only have to pay the land's 'existing use value,'[103] while land-owners – who had to pay 100 percent of the increase in land value to the CLB – essentially lost their right to develop land, along with any incentive to sell land for development. This policy was undoubtedly welcomed by modernist socialist planners like Sharp, since the Development Charge effectively put a stop to private housing developments in the years directly after the War, with Labour relying almost exclusively on the public sector for post-war planning and housing construction.[104] When the Conservatives came to power in 1951, to support land-owners as well as to boost private housing enterprise, they suspended the Development Charge. By 1954, they had abolished it completely, allowing

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[99] Deland, p. 10.

[100] Evelyn Sharp, *The Ministry of Housing and Local Government* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), p. 11. A new Ministry of Health was formed to be responsible for the new National Health Service; housing and local government affairs were in turn, reunited with planning matters in a newly formed Ministry of Local Government and Planning (later becoming the Ministry of Housing and Local Government).

[101] Harold Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 418.

[102] Sked and Cook, p. 107.

[103] 'Planning and Land Value Creation', *Town and Country Planning Association* [n.d.], <http://www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/education_planningandlandvalue.pdf> [accessed 16 August 2013] (p. 1.)

[104] Sked and Cook, p. 107.

landowners to retrieve the full increase in land value following planning consent.[105] This was part of the Conservatives' strategy to shift from public to private housing investment, in addition to encouraging owner-occupation. In line with these ambitions, the Conservatives began to encourage local authorities to build to high-densities by offering government subsidies for the construction of high-rise high-density blocks of flats in urban areas, and promoting high-density construction in a number of government design guides. This can be viewed as an attempt to reduce the footprint as well as to contain State-built housing developments, while at the same time, freeing up land for private housing development for owner-occupation.

3.3.1   Higher Densities at Harlow

The revisions to the new *Housing Manual* coupled with the change in Government facilitated Gibberd's desire to increase residential densities at Harlow. The general trend, however, among first generation New Towns seems to be a reduction in density around this time. At Stevenage, despite the early experimental high-density scheme at Stony Hall, overall residential densities were considerably lowered in 1949. This reflected the Corporation's unease over Stephenson's idea to construct high-density modern housing in a 'rural town' and the realisation that incoming tenants preferred houses with gardens.[106] Crawley Development Corporation had refused to raise their target population in 1950, arguing against a density increase. Interestingly, however, the first two neighbourhoods to be built at Crawley – West Green and Northgate – were designed to densities of 40-70 persons per acre, with high percentages of flats ranging from 15-27 percent.[107] The reason for this was due to large areas of existing housing in the neighbourhoods, the majority of which were detached houses at a very low density of 16 persons per acre. Crawley Development Corporation faced the opposite problem to the HDC; they were forced to build at higher densities in order to raise the existing low density housing to an overall density which adhered to *Housing Manual* recommendations. Unlike the SDC, they

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[105] 'Planning and Land Value Creation', p. 1.
[106] Balchin, p. 151.
[107] Crawley Development Corporation, 'Report of the Crawley Development Corporation for the period ending 31st March 1951, in *Reports of the Development Corporations for the period ending 31st March 1950* (London: HMSO, 1951), p. 56.

achieved their high densities by infilling around existing development, which contained very little open green space. The new housing consisted of two-storey semi-detached houses and short terraces, with some three-storey flats. The Corporation purposely avoided modern construction techniques, building brick houses with pitched roofs which were sympathetic to the existing pre- and inter-war houses.[108] The resulting visual effect differed little from the inter-war municipal housing estates modernist architects like Gibberd were trying to avoid in the New Towns (fig.3.18).

Fig.3.18. Housing on Deerswood Road, Crawley New Town, completed by 1951

This further highlights the complex relationship between high density and visual urbanity; high density alone did not necessarily equate to urbanity. As the following chapters will reveal, storey height as well as the arrangement of housing were also key aspects of urbanity. Having said that, the annual reports of the Crawley Development Corporation demonstrate there was no attempt to create urbanity; the high densities were endorsed only to compensate for the existing low density housing. The Corporation significantly lowered the proportion of flats in 1950 from 15 percent to 2.5 percent in later neighbourhoods and focused on providing low-density family houses with gardens to suit the wishes of the incoming tenants. At Newton Aycliffe, in addition to anxieties about attracting middle-income groups to create social balance, the Development Corporation noted the lack of demand for

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[108] Crawley Development Corporation, 'Report of the Crawley Development Corporation for the period ending 31st March 1951, in *Reports of the Development Corporations for the period ending 31st March 1950* (London: HMSO, 1951), p. 56.

flats, deciding in 1952 to construct no more flats.[109] Likewise, at Hatfield, the Development Corporation observed that the vast majority of the people moving to the town wished for a house with a garden. In a later publication in 1957, the Corporation explained that this fact had provided the basis for establishing levels of residential density as opposed to any 'architectural or planning concept held by the Corporation or its staff.'[110] In contrast, Gibberd and the HDC continued to push for higher densities and higher flat percentages, stressing in their 1950 annual report that their aim was to create an 'urban effect' at Harlow.[111] Gibberd and the HDC were unusual in pushing for higher densities, especially for visual reasons, at this turning point in ideas about density.

Following the density increase at Harlow in 1952, all future neighbourhoods were to be planned at 50 persons per acre. Since Mark Hall North was already under construction at this time, the density of this neighbourhood remained at the lower 38 persons per acre. In 1954, Nikolaus Pevsner observed the low density of Mark Hall North, noting in his Essex edition of *The Buildings of England* that the neighbourhood had a 'happy, green look' but the buildings were 'too widely spaced.'[112] However, at the Mark Hall South neighbourhood, Pevsner argued the first attempts at 'tightening up to produce a more urban environment' could be seen.[113] Mark Hall South had been planned to the new residential density of 50 persons per acre, in accordance with the revised 1952 master plan. Parts of the neighbourhood were already under construction in 1951 in fact, planned to densities of 15 dwellings per acre or more, before the 1952 master plan was published and approved. The housing group Orchard Croft for example, was designed by the HDC Design Group at a net density of 18.3 dwellings per acre with construction beginning in May 1951.

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[109] Osborn and Whittick, p. 279.

[110] Hemel Hempstead Development Corporation, *Hemel Hempstead New Town from Old* ([n.p.]: Broadwater Press, 1957), p. 4.

[111] Harlow Development Corporation, 'Report for the period ending 31st March 1950, in *Reports of the Development Corporations for the period ending 31st March 1950* (London: HMSO, 1951), p. 94.

[112] Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Essex,* 2nd edn, rev. by Enid Radcliffe (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1965), p. 227.

[113] Ibid.

Fig.3.19 shows a figure-ground drawing of 'The Stow' neighbourhood cluster which I have drawn based on the 1980 OS Map. It shows the three neighbourhoods of Mark Hall North, Mark Hall South and Netteswell. When comparing the housing groups (shown in black) of Mark Hall North with the housing in Mark Hall South and Netteswell, the 'tightening up' observed by Pevsner is evident. The open spaces of Mark Hall South and Netteswell were kept to the peripheries, rather than used to separate housing groups as at Mark Hall North.

1 Mark Hall North   2 Mark Hall South   3 Netteswell

Fig.3.19. 'The Stow' Neighbourhood Cluster

Another strategy used by Gibberd to obtain a sense of urbanity at Mark Hall South was to build housing to three storeys. There is evidence in the HDC files to show that in the early stages of development at Harlow, Gibberd was concerned with the large number of two-storey houses being constructed. In 1951, Gibberd's memorandum to the General Manager clearly expressed this concern:

I have for some time been worried and have been complaining that the density of the town is not increasing and that we build far too much two-storey development. I want to keep pressing this because I think it is a national problem as well as a New Town problem, to build an urban environment rather than a sub-urban which we are now tending to do.[114]

Gibberd believed that by building to higher densities and to more than two-storeys, visually speaking this could produce an urban environment, rather than a suburban one. In 1948 at a conference on the 'Housing Layout in Theory and Practice' at the RIBA, Gibberd argued that houses in a terrace formation would make 'far better compositions than semi-detached.' Perhaps thinking back to his wartime town studies, Gibberd praised the terraced houses of English towns and villages, and stated: 'if we desire to create a sense of urbanity, we may well increase our terrace houses to three floors, which is probably the ideal average height for town building.'[115] Furthermore, reflecting on Harlow's development in 1980, Gibberd said it was 'only by building to three- or four- storeys could we create the traditional urban form of cities like Bath, or even small towns like our neighbours, Bishop's Stortford and Saffron Walden.'[116]

The use of three-storey terraces to create a sense of urbanity is evident at Orchard Croft (highlighted in fig.3.19 with a blue dashed line – the grey buildings to the West represent The Stow neighbourhood centre). Orchard Croft was designed by the HDC Design Group under the direction of Gibberd. To achieve higher densities than at Mark Hall North, instead of placing two-storey semi-detached houses within open space, buildings were grouped together more tightly, taking more traditional forms of street and square. Gibberd later said that the scheme was closely related to The Stow centre which provided an ideal opportunity to obtain a more urban environment than previous housing. The three-storey terraces, shown in fig.3.20, are similar in scale and appearance to the three-storey blocks in the Vällingby housing

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[114] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (2), Memorandum from FG to General Manager, 23 October 1951.
[115] Frederick Gibberd, 'Three Dimensional Aspects of Housing Layout', *JRIBA*, 55 (1948), 433-442 (p. 434).
[116] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 112.

scheme. The Stow centre can be seen at the end of a street lined with two and three-storey terraces.

Fig.3.20. Orchard Croft three-storey housing relating to 'The Stow'

Fig.3.21. Orchard Croft housing on Mardyke Road, by the HDC Design Unit (1951-54)

To the southern edge of the housing group, a crescent of three-storey houses was positioned to overlook a cricket field and to create a definite urban edge which contrasts sharply to the open space (fig.3.21). This was an idea Gibberd said he had

borrowed from Fortfield Terrace in Sidmouth[117] – a Regency English seaside town Gibberd had included in his early 1940s town studies. The *AR* observed how the Orchard Croft area was a 'tightly planned square with continuous walls.'[118] This layout can again be linked to Gibberd's wartime studies where he examined the artistic planning precedents offered by Sitte. Furthermore, the shared view between the HDC and the Ministry of Town and Country Planning that residential densities should be higher than those in the 1949 *Housing Manual*, allowed the housing groups to be designed at higher densities. This enabled the creation of a greater sense of urbanity at Mark Hall South than at Mark Hall North.

3.3.2   The Failure of the New Densities

The revised master plan and subsequent tightening up of housing groups in 1952 was unfortunately too late for Harlow to escape the criticism from the *AR.* The low residential density of Mark Hall North meant that the following year, Harlow would be included in Gordon Cullen's *AR* article 'Prairie Planning' which accompanied the article 'Failure of the New Towns' by J. M. Richards. Cullen accused the New Town planners of 'prairie planning', supporting his argument with a number of photographs of sparse street scenes in Stevenage, Hemel Hempstead and Harlow. The photograph of Harlow was of a curving street in the Tanys Dell housing group, designed by Fry and Drew at a density of 13.4 dwellings per acre. Cullen argued that generally, the two-storey houses were too small to match up to the 'monumental, overpowering space.'[119] He claimed that the towns illustrated in his article were 'dead against the whole tradition of English town planning.' To contrast the 'prairie planning' in the New Towns, Cullen provided an aerial photograph (fig.3.22) and his own street sketches of Blanchland, a small village in Northumberland, which despite being 'no more than a village' had evident urban qualities.'[120] According to Cullen, urbanity was evident at Blanchland since the buildings in the village centre had been arranged to create a sense of enclosure, and there was a drama in the

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[117] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 112.
[118] The Editors, 'Harlow New Town', *AR*, 117 (1955), 311-329, p. 319.
[119] Gordon Cullen, 'Prairie Planning in the New Towns', *AR*, 114 (1953), 33-36 (p. 34).
[120] Ibid.

'progressive revealing of space.'[121] The planned revealing of spaces is comparable to the notions of street pictures, and Sharp's idea of a mobile townscape.
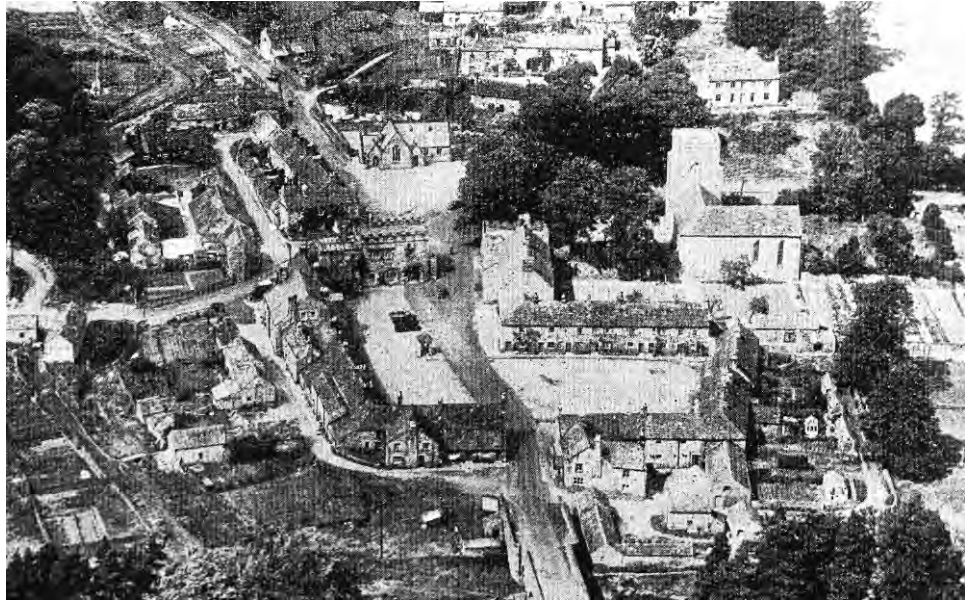
Fig.3.22. Aerial photograph showing urbanity at Blanchland (*AR*, July. 1953)

Chapter 2 of the thesis showed that a sense of enclosure was an important element in the creation of urbanity. Cullen's use of Blanchland was not original, however. Sharp had analysed the village square in relation to urbanity in *Town and Countryside* in 1932. Gibberd also used the same aerial photograph in *The Design of Residential Areas* in the Ministry of Housing and Local Government's design guide *Design in Town and Village,* also in 1953. While Cullen compared the New Towns with the urbanity in Blanchland, he failed to reference the earlier government density recommendations, which had restricted the creation of similar spatial arrangements in housing layouts in the New Towns.

J. M. Richards, on the other hand, did not blame the architect planners or development corporations for the low densities in the early parts of the New Towns. In his article which preceded Cullen's, Richards observed that architect planners had 'struggled manfully against ministerial and corporation prejudices', and blamed the Reith Committee for the low density housing, who according to Richards, clearly

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[121] Cullen, 'Prairie Planning', p. 34.

'had in its mind a picture of a scattered garden-suburb type of town.'[122] Richards criticised the New Towns on social and economic grounds, but the greatest disappointment, according to Richards, was on the architectural side. Visually speaking, he declared that it was like going back in time to when the Englishman had forgotten how to build towns, and built garden suburbs instead. He argued that the new town neighbourhoods 'lacked the urban qualities required' differing little from the pre-war garden-suburb housing estate.[123] For Gibberd, this was exactly the type of environment he was aiming to avoid, by carefully manipulating the low density figures which were recommended. During the War, like Gibberd and Sharp, Richards had advocated a return to a traditional form of town planning. He argued that the New Town neighbourhoods had none of the attributes which made up a traditional town, namely, compactness, a sense of enclosure and being composed of streets.[124] These were elements Gibberd had explored during the wartime years. The low densities imposed on Mark Hall North had made it difficult to obtain such qualities, but areas of Mark Hall South, with higher densities, came closer to achieving these attributes. As Pevsner had noted, the tightening up in Mark Hall South had produced a more urban environment. Despite Richards's condemning article, he too observed this, as a small footnote indicated that 'in parts of Hatfield and Harlow only is there some approach to a true urban feeling.'[125]

3.4 CONCLUSION

From the outset, Gibberd and the HDC struggled against the low density recommendations in an attempt to create urbanity. Initially Gibberd's ambition was to build compactly at high densities in Harlow, and in the early years, Gibberd often approached the General Manager with his concerns. By 1948, the HDC was in agreement that the density of the original Master Plan could be stepped up with advantage, since under Gibberd's influence they were endeavouring to close up gaps to create a more urban environment. Ideas about density were already beginning to

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[122] J. M. Richards, 'Failure of the New Towns', *AR*, 114 (1953), 28-32 (p. 32).
[123] Ibid., p. 31.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.

change, and by 1949, the new *Housing Manual* seemed to have loosened up on density restrictions. 1951 however, marked a significant change in ideas about density. This came with the fall of Labour from government, marking the start of a thirteen year period of Conservative rule.[126] During this period, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government welcomed the principle of high density, promoting the idea to local authorities through a series of publications such as *The Density of Residential Areas* in 1952 and *Residential Areas: Higher Densities* in 1962. Higher densities could save agricultural land, while at the same time increased densities could help meet housing targets. Already by 1952, the new Ministry had issued a pamphlet *The Density of Residential Areas*, where in the foreword, Macmillan claimed that 'close and compact development not only saves land; it is often more satisfactory than loose and open development.'[127] The 1953 *AR* attack on the New Towns confirmed what the HDC had known from the start, but it also brought the low density suburban qualities of the early parts of the New Towns to the attention of the public. Furthermore, the articles by Cullen and Richards received world-wide comment.[128] Gibberd and the architects of the HDC Design Group found the whole episode quite discouraging.[129] However, they maintained their ambition to create a sense of urbanity at Harlow, and with Conservative Government recommending higher densities, Gibberd and the HDC were able to develop other aspects of housing design to obtain urban environments at Harlow. This will be examined in detail in the following chapters.

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[126] Hill, p. 46.

[127] The Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *The Density of Residential Areas* (London: HMSO, 1952), p. ii.

[128] 'Failure of the New Densities', *AR*, 114 (1953), 355-361 (p. 355).

[129] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 112.

4 VISUAL VARIETY

Chapter 3 has demonstrated how Gibberd and the HDC devised a number of strategies to overcome the low density recommendations in the early parts of Harlow, in an attempt to create a visual urban quality – or urbanity – by building at higher densities. This included grouping houses together compactly within the open landscape, and combining higher density housing areas with lower density groups, to lower the overall average density of the area, whilst creating pockets of high density areas. In Mark Hall South and Netteswell, a greater sense of urbanity was achieved by building to three storeys and maintaining a continuous street facade. Meanwhile, in Mark Hall North, a ten-storey point block was introduced in an attempt to orientate the new town toward the modernist high-density vertical city paradigm as opposed to the low-density Garden City planning model. Gibberd and the HDC achieved a high density of 28.7 dwellings per acre at The Lawn, but there were, in fact, other reasons for constructing such a block, aside from the desire to obtain a high density. This chapter will reveal how Gibberd's motives behind advocating flats at Harlow became increasingly based on aesthetics. In particular, Gibberd hoped to achieve variety, a picturesque element he had noted during his wartime studies, which he believed could contribute to the overall sense of urbanity at Harlow.

4.1 FLAT VERSUS HOUSE

Part 1 of the study has shown the 'flat versus house' argument was closely linked to the density debate, and that discussions on both topics were widespread during the 1930s and 1940s in Britain. Furthermore, like the density debate, the flat versus house argument continued throughout the development of the New Towns, having an impact on the shape of the towns. Before the Second World War, modernist architects advocated modern flats as a solution to prevent further suburban sprawl; they also noted the changes in family size and structure and believed modern flats could provide housing suited to the modernising society. Elizabeth Denby observed

these social changes, and while proposing relatively high density houses built in a traditional terrace form, she also advocated flats for smaller families and single people, in addition to houses for families. As Glendinning and Muthesius have recently argued, such practical-empirical sociology was often supplemented by socio-political considerations.[1] During the 1930s, modernist architects and housing reformers believed that dwellings arranged into blocks of flats could facilitate good community life. Chapter 2 has shown how modernists, particularly those with a socialist outlook, were against the individualism of the suburbs, and promoted a more collective approach to housing design. Modernist architects in the former Soviet Union, who were also opposed to private speculative development, advocated new types of communal housing to counter capitalist development. They proposed large blocks which contained communal facilities in addition to dwellings, believing this new form of housing could act as 'conductors and condensers of socialist culture', transforming 'bourgeois individuals into altruistic citizens.'[2] During the inter-war period in Britain, there were also a number of experimental communal flat schemes, notably Highpoint I by Tecton. John Gold has recently shown that Highpoint I began as a communal housing scheme aiming to transform living conditions for the working classes, but ended by attracting local avant-garde as residents.[3] Other influential communal blocks in Britain followed a similar trend, attracting wealthy upper-middle class socialists as opposed to the working-classes. Despite this, many modernists believed flats within mixed development schemes could accommodate single people and small families from lower-income groups, including Denby, who had earlier commented on the people's preference for houses over flats.

Unlike the communal flats designed by his MARS Group contemporaries, Sharp saw the street as the collective element of the home as opposed to the communal spaces designed within the buildings. However, by 1940, he too began to promote the idea of including flats within mixed development schemes. In relation to the

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[1] Glendinning and Muthesius, p. 112.

[2] Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1973), p. 86.

[3] Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, p. 106.

question of flat versus house, he suggested providing a mixture of both to ensure the town would be 'properly and fully serving its function as a home.' Those, like Sharp, who promoted the idea of including modern flats within mixed development schemes may have been influenced by the experimental socialist flat schemes of the inter-war years, but for those modernists interested in the visual aspects of planning, the inclusion of flats would also have aesthetic benefits. Sharp argued that a 'desirable admixture of housing' would incidentally gain 'the opportunity of being far more architecturally successful, far more visually exciting, than our low-scaled earth-crouching cottagey towns of to-day can ever be.'[4] Gibberd also promoted the idea of mixed development and would later design one of the first schemes of this kind in London after the War. However, unlike Sharp or Denby, Gibberd's ideas of mixed development stemmed from his wartime visual town planning studies, rather than from sociological studies, or a socialist desire to move away from capitalist development. For Gibberd, the idea of mixed development was explicitly aesthetic; he believed the concept could solve the visual problems associated with the two-storey low-density housing estates of the inter-war period.

4.1.1   Social Balance

Chapter 1 has shown that the inter-war suburban housing estates were the subject of sociological criticism, as well as aesthetic criticism. Social studies during the late 1930s highlighted the lack of social provision, lack of community, and the loneliness felt by the residents in the LCC suburban housing estates. Just as the inter-war architectural discourse would be absorbed into Ministry discussions, the sociological discourse on housing was also taken up by official organisations and government study groups during the War. In 1943, the National Council of Social Service Community Centres and Associations Group published their report on *The Size and Social Structure of a Town*. The Report was concerned with future plans for post-war urban development, and like modernist architects, the Council was strongly in favour of town planning on the neighbourhood unit basis. In a 1965 study of urban sociology, Peter Mann analysed the 1943 report, showing that the Council had criticised pre-war housing estates on the basis of the segregation of social classes.

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[4] Sharp, *Town Planning*, p. 78.

Mann explained that the Council found the consequence of this segregation to be that relatively few people with 'varied experience in social leadership' were found in the municipal estates. This, they concluded, made the establishment of a community life on the estate difficult.[5] As a result, the report recommended the need for 'social balance' in the new neighbourhoods.[6] Significantly, just as sociological criticism had informed architectural discourse, during the wartime years, the architectural discourse would begin to inform sociological debates. Of the fourteen members of The Community Centres and Associations Survey Group of the NCSS, one member was an architect, and two members were town planners.[7] One of the planners was Anthony Minoprio, who would become architect planner to Crawley. But crucially, in relation to modernist architectural thinking, MARS Group member Maxwell Fry was also a member of the Survey Group. Therefore, the report stated that physical planning, if 'wisely and positively conceived' could facilitate 'social balance.'[8] It was recommended that each neighbourhood unit should contain a mixture of housing types and sizes.

During the War, the survey group observed 'the social mixing of people belonging to different income levels has taken place.'[9] They believed that after the War, this mixing should be maintained in the new housing areas, to facilitate community life. After the War, the changing views across the nation made an egalitarian society seem feasible. Not only was a Leftward swing evident, but as Alan Sked and Chris Cook argue in *Post-War Britain A Political History*, the British people themselves had changed during the War. Faced with the shared tasks and perils of War, people of different social backgrounds had lived and worked together, and had been impressed by the results of their common effort. When the War was over, as Sked and Cook argue, people believed they would share in 'common rewards', namely improved housing and social services. Such benefits were more likely to be provided

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[5] Peter H. Mann, *An Approach to Urban Sociology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 174.
[6] Ibid., p. 173.
[7] National Council of Social Service, *The Size and Social Structure of a Town: A Report by a Survey Group of the N.C.S.S* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1943)
[8] Ibid., p. 6.
[9] Ibid., p. 3.

by Labour.[10] Soon after Labour came to power in 1945, the New Towns program was launched, and the idea of 'social balance' was enshrined in the Reports of the New Towns Committee. It seemed the idea of mixed development – providing a mixture of different house types and flats – could be an answer to both the social and the aesthetic problems of the inter-war housing estates. However, as Chapter 1 has revealed, the majority of the population preferred to live in a house with a garden rather than in a flat.

As the sociological discourse was absorbed into government recommendations, the modernist discourse on density, flats and mixed development was also channelled into wartime reconstruction debates. Unlike the New Towns Committee, which had strong representation from Garden City advocates, the RIBA Reconstruction Committee formed in 1941, included a mixture of younger radical architects such as Jane Drew and Ralph Tubbs.[11] In addition to the Survey Group of the NCSS, Maxwell Fry was also a member of the RIBA Construction Committee. Similarly, the Special Study Group assembled to assist with the production of the design guide *Design of Dwellings*[12] comprised a mixture of architects and planners, some of whom supported the idea of high density flats. For example, Lancelot Keay, City Architect to Liverpool and an established authority on city-centre flats was a member of the study group.[13] Leading planner William Holford was also a member; he had travelled around Sweden studying and promoting humanised Swedish modern architecture and The New Empiricism. Thomas Sharp was also a member of the study group, so would have been able to express his anti-garden city views, as well as to promote mixed development for post-war reconstruction, in order to avoid the monotony of the inter-war suburban housing.

The Dudley Committee in their *Design of Dwellings* pamphlet stated that they were 'aware of the keen controversy of the house versus flat.' They claimed that their

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[10] Sked and Cook, p. 18.

[11] Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, p. 12.

[12] Ministry of Health, *Design of Dwellings,* (London: HMSO, 1944) This pamphlet was the result of an enquiry by the Sub-Committee (known as the Dudley Committee) set up by the Central Housing Advisory Committee in 1942, which contributed to the preparation of the 1944 *Housing Manual.*

[13] Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, p. 154.

own evidence had shown flats to be 'unpopular with large sections of the community, particularly families with children.'[14] According to their evidence, the principal reasons for the unpopularity of flats included noise, lack of privacy, the absence of a private garden, and difficulties of supervising children at play. These were identical to the reasons given by Denby at the RIBA in 1936, as she presented the results of her Wythenshawe Garden City survey in relation to the re-housing of slum-dwellers. Denby had proposed terraced houses at high densities, and later introduced the idea of mixed development to cater for all types of family in the community. It is likely that the Dudley Committee sought advice from Denby on these housing matters, since her name appears in Appendix IV, a list of individuals and organisations from whom evidence was obtained.[15] The Committee also recommended mixed development, despite noting the unpopularity of flats. Like the modernist architects who had observed the changes to family structure in the modern society, the Committee noted a considerable number of the population were childless families. Referring to Welwyn Garden City where the 'demand for flats might be expected to be very low', it had been found that approximately 10 percent of households had preferred flats. With this, and with reference to the report of the study group, it was established that there was a definite need for 'a mixed development of family houses mingled with blocks of flats for smaller households.'[16] This figure would later cause a dispute between the HDC and the Ministry of Housing, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

The findings of the study group, which was included with the Dudley report, stated 'that within the neighbourhood it is strongly recommended that a variety of dwellings should be provided'. Like the Dudley Committee, the study group claimed that a great deal of evidence had indicated that each neighbourhood should be 'socially balanced' and should be 'inhabited by families belonging to different ranges of income groups.'[17] With members like Sharp and Holford who shared an interest in the visual aspects of town planning and civic design, it was unusual that

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[14] MH, *Design of Dwellings*, p. 12.
[15] Ibid., p. 54.
[16] Ibid., p. 13.
[17] Ibid., p. 61.

the primary reason given for mixed development was a social one. However, the aesthetic problems in relation to the semi-detached developments of the inter-war period, as discussed in Chapter 1, were elaborated later in the report in a sizable section, 'architectural form'. Three anonymous expert opinions are expressed on the subject, each describing the monotony caused by the repetition of standardised semi-detached house types. The solution given in each case was to design dwellings in closer groups, 'in streets, squares and crescents.'[18] One opinion, which originated from an 'important professional body', suggested that these more traditional forms could be 'more conducive to the creation of a stronger civic pride than can a scattered form of development.'[19] These views were aligned with those of Sharp and Gibberd, which have been analysed in Chapter 2 in relation to the concept of urbanity. Furthermore, just as modernist architects added sociological criticism to strengthen their architectural critique of the suburbs in the inter-war period, it seemed members in the study group were justifying mixed development as an aesthetic solution, with sociological reasons. Informed by the Dudley Report, the *1944 Housing Manual* recognised the great difficulty in avoiding the 'monotonous repetition of identical units and the consequent lack of repose and interest' in developing estates of semi-detached two-storey houses.[20] Skilful grouping of houses and terraces was recommended to achieve variety, although when reiterating the dominant preference for houses with gardens, the *Manual* suggested that in a large community, it was likely there might be a minority who preferred to live in flats – for example, 'single persons and some childless couples or families without children.' With this, the *Manual* suggested that on large estates, a proportion of flats be included with advantage.[21]

4.1.2   Mixed Development

For modernist architects like Gibberd who had advocated the adoption of modern flats in Britain, these new recommendations for post-war housing which encouraged the inclusion of flats were welcomed. In fact, soon after the War had ended, Gibberd

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[18] MH, *Design of Dwellings*, p. 69.
[19] Ibid.
[20] MH, MW, *Housing Manual 1944*, p. 15.
[21] Ibid.

was commissioned to design a housing scheme in Hackney, East London, where he fully embraced the new concept of mixed development. Not only was this an opportunity for Gibberd to apply the new concept of mixed development to avoid the monotony seen in the earlier inter-war suburban developments, but it also gave Gibberd the chance to test the visual planning ideas he had been studying and developing during the War. In accordance with the *Housing Manual's* density recommendations for development in 'central areas', Gibberd's Somerford Grove scheme in Hackney was built to a relatively high density of approximately 100 persons per acre. The scheme provided housing for a cross section of society, with a mixture flats, two-storey terraced houses with private gardens, and a terrace of bungalows for the elderly. Architecturally, the buildings ranged from one to three storeys (fig.4.1), which the *Architectural Design and Construction (AD)* journal confirmed had given 'variety in appearance.'[22]

Fig.4.1. Somerford Grove mixed development - photograph of model
(*Architectural Design & Construction,* 1946)

The *AD,* edited by active MARS Group member Monica Pidgeon, noted that while disposing the buildings on site, Gibberd's primary objective had been to obtain a sense of urbanity, and to 'capture the charm and character of the eighteenth-century square.'[23] This strengthens the idea that for Gibberd, mixed development was chiefly an aesthetic rather than a social planning concept. The Somerford Grove scheme encapsulated elements of Gibberd's earlier wartime urbanity studies.

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[22] 'Shacklewell Road housing scheme for the Metropolitan Borough of Hackney', *Architectural Design & Construction,* 16 (1946), p. 149.
[23] Ibid.

Furthermore, the *AD's* review of Gibberd's scheme suggests that Somerford Grove was seen as a practical model of what 'urbanity' meant at the time.

Nicholas Bullock has recently argued that Gibberd achieved 'containment and urbanity' with the housing layout at Hackney. Gibberd combined traditional planning elements, such as the terrace and square, with clear modern architectural forms, such as the three-storey flat-roofed blocks. In this sense, it could be argued that Gibberd's Somerford Grove scheme was not only considered an example of urbanity in practice at the time of construction, but it also served as a model of an English version of modern architecture. It is important to note, however, that Gibberd was able to implement mixed development at a relatively high density at Somerford Grove due to the character of the site, which required a high inner city density while being constrained by existing buildings. These conditions allowed Gibberd to arrange buildings varying between one and three storeys, in compact traditional forms in an attempt to create urbanity. Since Harlow was a Greenfield site located in the 'outer country ring', it neither required a high density, nor was restricted by existing buildings. This would have an impact on the creation of urbanity at Harlow.

4.2   FLATS AT HARLOW

Following the success of the Somerford Grove scheme Gibberd fully intended to create a sense of urbanity at Harlow New Town. Although the New Towns Committee was opposed to high residential densities, they had advocated the concept of 'social balance', stressing that the New Towns must be 'self-contained and balanced communities for work and living' – the 'antithesis of the dormitory suburb.'[24] For Gibberd and the HDC, this was an opportunity to apply the principle of mixed development. The HDC readily accepted the idea of 'social balance' and as a result, Marjorie Green, who had previously worked with Sir William Beveridge researching family needs, was appointed as Social Development Officer in 1947.[25] Green argued that before any plans were drawn, it was necessary to 'establish a

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[24] New Towns Committee, *Interim Report,* p. 3.
[25] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 73.

policy in regard to the types (incomes) of family who will be expected to live there.'[26] This involved setting out percentages of subsidised and non-subsidised housing, as well as percentages of flats and houses across the town, to ensure that a balanced community could be established from the outset. Without knowing the precise mix and number of people who would come to live at Harlow, the HDC used the results of a survey of those who had shown an interest in moving to the New Towns which had been carried out in Willesden. Of the 100 interested families who took part in the survey, the majority were households of two and three people, constituting 28 percent and 27 percent of the group respectively.[27] Achieving 'social balance' as well as providing the right proportion of house types to suit the incoming tenants was important to the HDC. However, achieving visual variety and urbanity to counter the monotony found in two-storey inter-war suburban developments was equally, if not more important to Gibberd, as this chapter will reveal.

4.2.1   Flat versus House at Harlow

The HDC files at the Essex Record Office show that in 1949, of the total 1970 dwellings to be provided, the aim was to achieve a balance of 80 percent subsidised and 20 percent non-subsidised houses.[28] Overall, the HDC also set a target of providing 20 percent flats and 80 percent houses. This was a high percentage of flats to propose, since firstly, the *Design of Dwellings* pamphlet had suggested there was only a 10 percent preference for flats, and secondly, from the Willesden survey only 15 percent had expressed a preference for flats.[29] The Corporation agreed that 15 percent of the dwellings in the first neighbourhood should be 'high density flats', however, to this an extra 5 percent was added, since the Willesden survey had shown that 14 percent of the households interested in moving to the New Town were single people. The Corporation was of the opinion that this extra 5 percent of flats

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[26] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Extract from Corporation Minutes, 7 December 1948, (Social Development Officer's Report)

[27] Ibid.

[28] To raise housing standards while keeping rents low, the Ministry responsible for housing issued housing subsidies to Local Authorities and New Town Development Corporations, which was offset against rents collected from tenants.

[29] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Extract from Corporation Minutes, 7 December 1948.

could cater for this group.[30] A later survey of incoming tenants showed that only 5 percent had asked to live in flats.[31] However, the HDC attempted to maintain a 20 percent provision for flats, since they viewed the survey results as having 'limited value', believing those who took part often had 'no conception of what it means to live in a modern flat.'[32] Later, this would be reduced to 15 percent due to pressure from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

This was not the first instance where elements of social research were overlooked in favour of including a higher proportion of flats. In 1949, Green reviewed Gibberd's proposed number of one bedroom dwellings. She argued that Gibberd's figure exceeded that agreed by the Corporation and suggested the omission of all one bedroom houses.[33] Gibberd responded to the Social Development Officer's suggestion by writing to the General Manager, stating:

> I am no authority on the social problem, but I agree with all that the Social Development Officer says, excepting that if the one-bedroom houses are omitted, they should be put back in the form of flats. I say this because from my personal experience, I have found a large demand for this type of dwelling.[34]

This shows that Gibberd approached the General Manager with his own architectural opinions, hoping to overrule the sociological advice on the provision of flats. Furthermore, Gibberd saw the Social Development Officer's recommendation as an opportunity to increase the number of flats in Harlow. The arguments Gibberd presented to the General Manager (Eric Adams) for maintaining a high proportion of flats were as follows:

a) There will certainly be some people who want them
b) Flats are an economical way of providing small dwellings

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[30] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Extract from Corporation Minutes, 7 December 1948.
[31] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (2), 'Future Policy on densities, dwelling-types, layouts and architectural and aesthetic treatment' Discussion prepared by the General Manager, 22 January 1951.
[32] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Extract from Corporation Minutes, 7 December 1948.
[33] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Memo from Social Development Officer to Architect Planner, 17 August 1949.
[34] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Architect Planner to General Manager, in response to Social Development Officer, 25 August 1949.

c) Flats enable us to increase density and reduce the size of the town

d) Only by the introduction of flats can we build mixed development and thus get the variety in building height and density [35]

Gibberd elaborated in particular on his final point, believing it was the most important. He argued that since the Corporation had accepted the principle of mixed development, reducing the number of flats would be a 'retrograde step', resulting in the construction of two-storey housing estates.'[36]

Building at high densities as well as constructing flats to provide visual variety were two elements Gibberd believed could contribute to the sense of urbanity at Harlow. Chapter 3 has demonstrated how the low density recommendations of the New Towns Committee and the *Housing Manual* restricted the creation of an urban environment in parts of Mark Hall North. Pevsner had noted the low density of the neighbourhood, criticising the housing for being 'too widely spaced.'[37] Initially, Gibberd believed that by building flats, a higher density could be obtained, thus creating a greater sense of urbanity. However, at Mark Hall North, despite the overall low residential density, the neighbourhood had a large proportion of flats – 30 percent in fact. Achieving this percentage required a careful management of figures between neighbourhoods and housing groups, since just as the Minister of Town and Country Planning Lewis Silkin had opposed high densities in the New Towns, so too had he opposed the construction of 'flats in the countryside.'[38]

Initially working towards a target of 20 percent flats in Mark Hall North, Gibberd and the HDC were able to achieve 30 percent by balancing out percentages in later annual programmes. For example, to attain a high number of flats in housing 'Area 2' (Tanys Dell, shown on fig.4.2), Gibberd argued that the Stort Tower – a ten-storey 'Y'-shaped block of sixty flats – should be excluded from the 1948/49

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[35] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Architect Planner to General Manager, in response to Social Development Officer, 25 August 1949.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Essex,* 2nd edn, rev. by Enid Radcliffe (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1965), p. 227.

[38] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 22.

housing programme.[39] In fact, the Stort Tower was also excluded from the following annual programme, allowing the construction of a further seventy two flats in the 1950/51 programme, achieving a 14 percent proportion of flats, therefore balancing out the higher percentage in the previous programme. Gibberd was able to persuade the HDC to include the Stort Tower in the 1951/52 housing programme, to lower the percentage of flats in the 1950/51 programme, thus allowing the high percentage of flats in Area 2.[40]

Fig.4.2. Mark Hall North Mixed Development
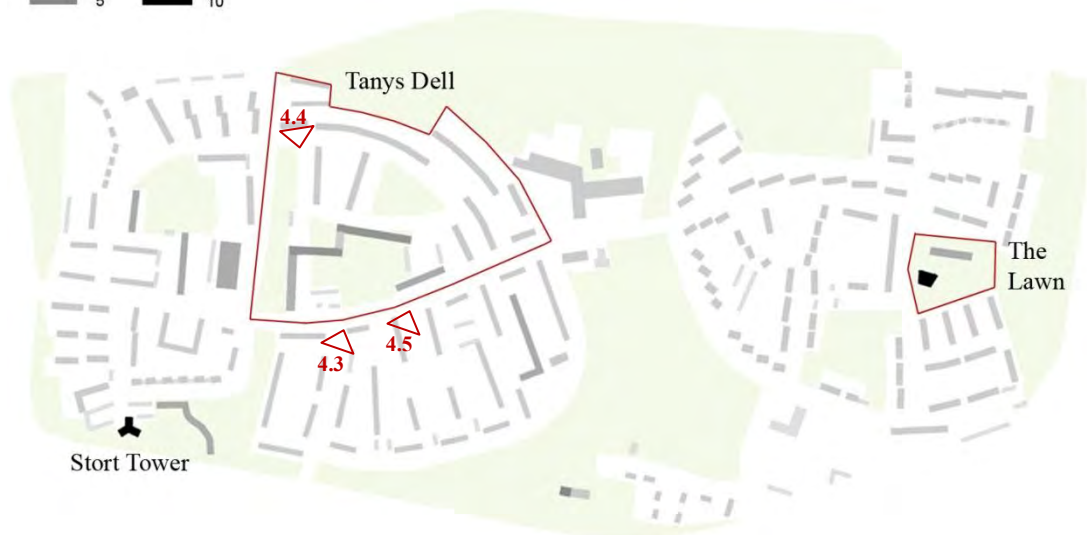
Area 2, or "Tanys Dell" was designed by Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew (shown on fig.4.2). The HDC's policy, initiated by Gibberd, was to divide each neighbourhood unit into smaller housing groups, each to be designed by a different architect to create 'individual character' and visual variety. Gibberd explained in the Master Plan document, a neighbourhood of 2000 dwellings could be 'exceedingly dull in character.'[41] He also commented on the social aspects of neighbourhoods stating that it had been argued that 'neighbourliness' could arise between families living 'in a much smaller unit than the neighbourhood normally envisaged by Town Planners.'[42]

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[39] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Architect Planner to General Manager, 16 August 1949.
[40] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Corporation Meeting, 3 September 1949.
[41] Gibberd, *Harlow New Town A Plan Prepared for the Harlow Development Corporation*, p. 18.
[42] Ibid.

Neighbourhoods broken into smaller varied housing groups, with 'mixed development' could counter the loneliness noted in the inter-war suburban houses. More importantly to Gibberd, it could also counter the visual monotony of two-storey housing developments. Therefore, in this instance, Gibberd accepted the sociological argument as it strengthened his aesthetic preferences for visual variety. He explained that housing groups of 150-500 dwellings could create both 'visual variety and a social grouping smaller in scale than the neighbourhood proper.'[43] Furthermore, the policy of allocating each housing group to a different architect allowed Gibberd to select modernist architects who shared the same views on high density and flats. The 'nominated architects' selected by Gibberd were briefed by the HDC on numbers and types of dwellings required by Gibberd.[44] Architects chosen to design housing groups in Harlow included co-author of *The Modern Flat* F. R. S. Yorke*, Norman and Dawbarn, Powell and Moya (who were students of Gibberd's at the AA), and Ralph Tubbs. In Mark Hall North, modernist architects Fry and Drew were selected to design 170 dwellings on 12.677 acres. Their plan comprised a mixture of two-storey houses, some arranged in curved terraces, and a combination of three- and four-storey flat blocks. In Gibberd's first edition of *Town Design* in 1953, he explained that the flats were arranged to be the dominant element of the layout. He described Fry and Drew's designs as 'reminiscent of the fine scale obtained in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries' citing Bath and Bloomsbury, although he added that 'from many viewpoints they appear as plastic compositions standing in space.'[45] In Gibberd's mind, the four-storey flats designed by Fry and Drew had replicated a scale similar to the buildings which had created urbanity at Bath.

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[43] Gibberd, *Harlow New Town A Plan Prepared for the Harlow Development Corporation*, p. 18.
[44] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 105.
[45] Gibberd, *Town Design*, p. 319.

Fig.4.3. Tanys Dell – four-storey block within landscaped space

However, the fact that he regarded the flats as objects within space, rather than objects enclosing space – like the Italian Plazas he had studied in the early 1940s – suggests that Gibberd considered Fry and Drew's layout of flats to be lacking a sense of urbanity (fig.4.3). In his 1948 paper *Three Dimensional Aspects of Housing Layout,* Gibberd explained that in urban developments, dwellings should dominate the urban spaces; in suburban developments, there was generally a balance between landscape and building; whereas in rural schemes, the landscape tended to dominate the scene.[46] According to Gibberd, mixed development in neighbourhood planning meant 'planning the complete area as a whole series of visual pictures with variety in each.'[47] However, stressing the importance of artistic planning, he rejected the 'scientific' solution, which comprised parallel blocks sited in the correct orientation and angle of light, which in Gibberd's mind would be 'spatially bad' since the space was not defined by the blocks.[48] This supports the idea that Gibberd believed urbanity was lacking at Tanys Dell.

The *Architects' Journal (AJ),* took a different approach when reviewing the Tanys Dell scheme, suggesting in 1952 that the long terraces of three and four storey flats had a 'scale and humanity' about them which seemed to be in proportion with the form of development in the New Town. However, author D. Rigby Childs argued

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[46] Gibberd, 'Three Dimensional Aspects of Housing Layout', p. 438.
[47] Ibid., p. 439.
[48] Ibid.

the scale was neither urban nor suburban, suggesting that it was 'delusory' to believe the scheme was urban in the sense of being metropolitan, but concluded that it was not suburban either.[49] Ultimately, the low density at Mark Hall North, made it difficult for architects to create an urban environment with their mixed development schemes, despite using blocks of three and four storeys. For example, the density of Gibberd's Somerford Grove scheme was 104 persons per acre, which facilitated the creation of urbanity; variety, an element of urbanity, was achieved by mixed development. The density at Tanys Dell in Mark Hall North was 13.4 dwellings, or approximately 44.2 persons per acre, less than half the density of the Somerford Grove scheme. This resulted in large areas of open space, which over the whole neighbourhood represented 49 percent in Mark Hall North, based on the gross and net areas shown in figs 3.10 and 3.11 in Chapter 3.

Nevertheless, a degree of variety was achieved within the housing scheme. The *AJ* argued that the one of the most distinctive features at Harlow was the variety in planning and the design of houses and flats.[50] Fig.4.4 shows an example of the two-storey housing at Tanys Dell, which is contrasted by one of the four-storey blocks. The houses also respond to the topography of the site, by stepping up the hill to create a varied roofline to the terrace. *The Architectural Times* observed that the three and four bedroom terraced houses had 'interesting variety in wall textures, colours and materials.'[51] This demonstrates that modernist architects Fry and Drew had applied visual planning elements of variety to their housing design at Tanys Dell. In relation to the flats within the scheme, however, Gibberd believed that spaces must be created by the buildings, rather than the buildings occupying the spaces; for Gibberd, the creation of urbanity was more complex than applying elements of visual variety. Firstly, high density was required in addition to variety, since Chapter 3 has revealed the density increase facilitated a greater sense of urbanity in later neighbourhoods at Harlow. Secondly, the element of enclosure was also a key aspect of urbanity.

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[49] D. Rigby Childs, 'Harlow', *AJ*, 116 (1952), 196-202 (p. 199).

[50] Ibid., p. 202.

[51] Harlow Museum Archive, copy of 'Harlow New Town' – a series of articles published in *The Architectural Times* in 1950-1, p. 56.

Fig.4.4. Tanys Dell mixed development: two-storey houses and four-storey block

Fig.4.5. Tanys Dell – three-storey block along street edge

In relation to enclosure, it could be argued that the three-storey block of the Fry and Drew scheme, which follows the line of the street (fig.4.5), achieved a greater sense of urbanity than the blocks within the open space. In fact, in addition to the density increase from 38 persons to 50 persons per acre in 1952, Gibberd and the HDC Design Group increasingly planned housing groups in more traditional layouts, such as in street and square form. Furthermore, instead of separating housing groups with large areas of open green space, individual housing groups were divided by main

roads, giving the architects an opportunity to design housing in relation to main streets. At Pittmans Field, a mixed development scheme by the HDC Design Group in the Netteswell neighbourhood, a three-storey block was positioned along Monkswick Road, a main thoroughfare through the Netteswell neighbourhood (fig.4.6). The scheme was constructed between 1953 and 1954. Compared to the four-storey block within open space at Mark Hall North, the three-storey block at Pittmans Field enclosed the space of the street, in addition to contributing to visual variety. After the 1953 criticism from the *AR,* the HDC made a greater effort to create a sense of enclosure between buildings. The element of enclosure will be examined in detail in the following chapter.

Fig.4.6. Three-storey block along the street edge at Pittmans Field
HDC Design Group (1953-54)

4.2.2   Point Blocks

Mixed development at Harlow was not restricted to combinations of two-storey housing with flat blocks of three and four storeys. Point blocks ranging from ten to fourteen storeys were also built in Harlow to achieve visual variety. The first point block in Harlow, was the ten-storey block at Mark Hall North – part of a mixed development scheme comprising the ten-storey block and a three-storey block of flats. This housing group, designed by Frederick Gibberd and Partners, has been

discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to density, where Gibberd designed the adjoining housing group to a low density to enable a high density of 28.7 dwellings per acre at The Lawn (which, multiplied by Harlow's family average of 3.3 gives a density of 94.71 persons per acre). In addition to being opposed to high densities, Minister of Town and County Planning Lewis Silkin was also against the idea of building tall flats, especially in the New Towns. While Silkin was Chairman of the Housing and Public Health Committee of the LCC, he reported on high density housing on the Continent, noting that although 'impressively designed', often light, air and space around the buildings were not adequate.'[52] He also argued that in 'normal circumstances' dwellings should not be provided of more than four storeys, since he was not 'favourably impressed' with the buildings he had seen on the Continent of a greater storey height.[53] In *Harlow: The Story of a New Town,* Gibberd reflected on his reasons for including a tall point block in Mark Hall North, recalling that there was 'a selfish reason.' Before the War, Gibberd had written *The Modern Flat* with F. R. S. Yorke and together they championed the high-rise modern flats on the Continent. Gibberd had viewed Harlow as an opportunity to build similar modern buildings in Britain. He also explained that tall point blocks were especially appealing; including them in Harlow's plan could orientate the new town towards Le Corbusier's modernist vertical city paradigm and away from the Garden City model.[54] Silkin had shown a preference for Garden City development and in addition, a recent biography by Richard Wright suggests that Silkin 'personally disliked the modernist style.'[55] The fact that Gibberd wished to include tall flats in Harlow specifically to create a modernist town as opposed to Garden City, would only contribute to Silkin's objections.

Initially, Gibberd pressed for the inclusion of flats while recommending an increase in the town's density. But crucially, Gibberd stressed that in addition to increasing

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[52] Chairman of the Housing and Public Health Committee of the Council Lewis Silkin, *Working-class Housing on the Continent and the Application of Continental Ideas to the Housing Problem in the County of London* (London: London County Council, 1935), p. 27.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 22.

[55] Richard Weight, 'Silkin, Lewis, first Baron Silkin (1889–1972)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2008) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31684> [accessed 9 January 2013] (para. 8 of 11)

density, tall flats could provide points of emphasis, which would be 'highly desirable aesthetically in that they [would] break up the monotony of two-storey development.'[56] General Manager Eric Adams at first, showed some hesitation in accepting this principle, since the construction of flats worked out to be between £100 and £150 more expensive than houses of a similar area.[57] Furthermore, Adams observed that at the time, applications from perspective tenants showed a marked preference for houses, with only 5 percent asking for flats.[58] This was significantly less than the 20 percent flat provision the HDC was working to; however, Adams justified the inclusion of flats by suggesting that the applications 'may not be representative' of the tenants' preferences, and the percentage of those seeking flats might rise when the Corporation caters for 'persons of a wider variety of occupations.'[59]Although Gibberd had convinced the HDC of the aesthetic advantages of building a point block in the first neighbourhood, he was not able at first to convince the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. Firstly, the Ministry was opposed to the cost of the block, and secondly, it was against the idea of 'flats in the countryside.'[60] This view complemented the Ministry's idea that the New Towns, located in Abercrombie's 'open countryside' ring, should be low-density garden city type developments. Since no agreement could be reached between the Ministry and the HDC, Chairman Ernest Gowers took the matter directly to the Minister, where Gibberd 'argued eloquently for the design' with Silkin eventually agreeing to the point block.[61]

Despite Gibberd's claim of aiming for a modernist Corbusian vertical city, earlier in 1948, Gibberd had criticised Le Corbusier's work as 'hopelessly out of human scale.'[62] Gibberd's design for the block of flats in Mark Hall North is clearly influenced by the Swedish New Empiricism, with its use of brick and its point block

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[56] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (2), 'Future Policy on densities, dwelling-types, layouts and architectural and aesthetic treatment' Notes for discussion prepared by the General Manager, 22 January 1951.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 22.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Gibberd, 'Three Dimensional Aspects of Housing Layout', p. 439.

form rather than a slab block. Exercising his role as aesthete within the HDC, Gibberd took a sculptural, artistic approach to the design. The scheme was published in Edward D. Mills's 1953 catalogue of *The New Architecture in Great Britain*, where architects were given the opportunity to explain their aesthetic approach to the design. Gibberd's approach had been to design the block as part of a composition with the lower three-storey block and surrounding trees, endeavouring to humanise the scale of the tall building.[63] He did this by creating small intimate spaces using screens and walls at ground floor level to contrast with the large open space around the blocks, and by incorporating the existing oak trees into the overall scene. In this sense, Gibberd was applying principles of urbanity to the immediate, smaller scale space around The Lawn. Chapter 2 has shown that the notion of 'humanising' the aesthetic expression of functionalism, using local materials and landscaping, was named 'The New Empiricism' in 1948 by the *AR*. It was part of the drive to establish an English version of modern architecture. Architect planner to Hatfield, Lionel Brett (later Lord Esher), recalled that 'impeccable modernist personalities of the thirties', for example, Fry, Spence and Gibberd, had 'switched' to The New Empiricism, since after the War, the 'psychological need was manifest.'[64] Furthermore, Esher explained that 'mixed development' became a watchword for those practising 'soft' architecture and planning.[65] In this sense mixed development, although considered 'soft' by those who favoured the New Brutalism over the New Empiricism, was still considered a modernist design principle.

The Lawn mixed development scheme at Harlow was viewed as a success by the HDC, as well as by journals such as the *AR*. After convincing the Ministry to approve the point block in Mark Hall North, the HDC planned to place further blocks at intervals throughout the town. Furthermore, the Ministry invited Gibberd to deliver a paper on 'High Flats in Medium-Sized Towns and Suburban Areas' at the 1955 RIBA Symposium on High Flats. Gibberd argued that tall blocks gave

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[63] Edward D Mills, *1946-1953: The New Architecture in Great Britain* (London: Standard Catalogue Co., 1953), p.136.

[64] Lionel Esher, *A Broken Wave: The Rebuilding of England 1940 – 1980* (London: Allen Lane Penguin Books, 1981), p. 107.

[65] Esher, p. 48.

pleasure to those who lived in them, as well as giving pleasure to those who lived within sight of them. He explained that mixed development 'enlivened' dull two-storey development, whereas tall blocks gave 'punch' to the design, and could make a dull site 'lively in appearance.'[66] At Harlow, the new plan sited blocks near neighbourhood centres, which Gibberd believed would increase the quality of urbanity. Furthermore, he believed they would act both as a visual focus as well as an element of contrast to the open landscape.[67]

Despite Gibberd's invitation to discuss high flats at the 1955 symposium, gaining Ministry approval for further blocks at Harlow was not straightforward for Gibberd and the HDC. Chapter 3 has shown that when the Conservatives came to power in 1951, they began to encourage higher residential densities. Secretary to the Minster of Housing and Local Government, Dame Evelyn Sharp recalled that as policies on standards crystallized, and as local authorities gained experience in post-war building, the Ministry began to loosen its controls.[68] Modernist architects like Gibberd had campaigned for high-rise living since the 1930s; David Kynaston has recently shown that by 1951, the views within the new Ministry of Housing had also shifted toward the idea of flats.[69] In addition to the 1952 pamphlet *The Density of Residential Areas,* in which the new Minister of Housing Harold Macmillan had stressed the importance of conserving agricultural land by building at higher densities, the Ministry also published *Living in Flats* in 1951. Kynaston reveals that the notion that high-density flats would save agricultural land came from the effective campaign by the agricultural lobby, 'headed by the National Farmers' Union.'[70] In 1953, Macmillan's Parliamentary Secretary Ernest Marples, commented on the loss of agricultural land at a Commons debate suggesting that 'the nation as a whole will become a little more flat-minded.'[71] Furthermore, Kynaston shows that these changing ideas were brought to the public's attention,

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[66] Frederick Gibberd, 'High Flats in Medium-Sized Towns and Suburban Areas', *JRIBA*, 62 (1955), 201-203 (p. 202).

[67] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 107.

[68] Evelyn Sharp, *The Ministry of Housing and Local Government* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), p. 82.

[69] David Kynaston, *Family Britain 1951-57* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 280.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., p. 281.

with newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror* publishing in 1953 that 'there is no doubt that this country must save space by building upward and that many more people will have to live in flats.'[72]

Despite this, the HDC files at the Essex Record Office show that during this period, like Silkin of the Labour Ministry, the new Ministry of Housing and Local Government was resistant to the idea of tall blocks of flats in the New Towns. In May 1953, the HDC Planning Board[73] discussed the 'irreconcilability of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government's reservation of approval to flats provision' since the Minister had repeatedly stated his favour for an increase in flatted accommodation.[74] 'Reservations' represented 10 to 15 percent of housing in each area which would be set aside for future development, with either flats or houses.[75] After successfully gaining approval to build the ten-storey block in Mark Hall North, the HDC submitted further plans in 1952 to construct an eight-storey block in Mark Hall South and a twelve-storey block in Netteswell. In 1953, an eleven-storey tower was proposed for the Hare Street neighbourhood, part of the 'Town Centre neighbourhood cluster' to the west of Netteswell in 'The Stow' cluster. Upon receipt of the latter, in relation to the provision of flats in Harlow, Minister Harold Macmillan said he 'would like the Corporation to consider most carefully whether they are not making an over provision of flats and flatted accommodation generally.'[76] The HDC responded by explaining the Board was 'perturbed' that flat provision had been criticised; they were surprised that flats were being discouraged in Harlow since local authorities were encouraged to build flats.[77] The following year, the dispute was still ongoing. The Ministry recommended the

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[72] Kynaston, p. 282.

[73] Gibberd proposed the formation of a Planning Board in 1949. The Board met monthly and comprised the Chief Officers concerned with design (Chaired by the General Manager, with Gibberd, the Chief Engineer, Executive Architect, Housing Manager, Liaison Officer and Commercial Estates Officer) The Essex Record Office, A6306, BOX 414, File 94/7, Planning Board Notes.

[74] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (2), Extract from Planning Board, 8 May 1953.

[75] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (2), Special meeting of the corporation on the 25 January 1951, Summary of Decisions, 20 February 1951.

[76] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (2), Report to the General Manager on the Ministry's reaction to flats, 26 May 1953.

[77] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (2), Letter from General Manager to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 24 June 1953.

HDC reduce its percentage of flat provision from 15 to 10 percent. In response, the HDC argued a reduction to a 10 percent provision of flats would have 'disastrous effects upon the second half of the town' and made 'abundantly clear' that 15 percent flats was the correct percentage to aim for.[78] The HDC was 'deeply disturbed' due to the absence of reasons given by the Ministry to justify the decrease. The HDC's arguments for retaining the 15 percent figure were primarily visual. Firstly, the HDC claimed that should the 10 percent value be used, then the second half of the town would be a 'gigantic housing estate.' Secondly, the proposed reduction of flats would be 'architecturally dull and dreary for the tenants.'[79] As a compromise, the HDC proposed that approval be given to plan 15 percent flats over the town as a whole, subject to five percent being reserved for development at a later stage.'[80] By 1960, in addition to the long battle with the Ministry, the HDC acknowledged that flats inevitably cost more to build than houses. However, following the completion of The Lawn six years earlier, the HDC recognised the 'great value of point blocks from an architectural and aesthetic point of view', and planned to build an additional eleven blocks sited throughout the town at 'points where they have the greatest visual effect.'[81] By 1967, nine blocks of more than ten storeys had been approved and were constructed, or under construction, at various locations throughout Harlow (fig.4.7).

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[78] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32(2) Copy of letter from HDC General Manager to 'Dobbie' at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 21 April 1954.

[79] Ibid.

[80] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (2) Corporation Minutes, 20 July 1954.

[81] ERO, A6306, 185, LO/DH/03, Liaison Officer (White) to Coates, 17 Feb 1960.

Fig.4.7. Tall blocks for point of emphasis around Harlow New Town

In his comprehensive chapter in the 1953 Ministry housing design guide on the design of residential areas, Gibberd talked about the different speeds at which the urban scene could be viewed. The increase in car ownership and subsequent developments in road layout design had been new and important influences on the appearance of the town. The main roads at Harlow were separated from residential areas, enabling what Gibberd called 'paths of comparatively rapid movement', from which a series of views could 'unfold themselves in continuous and even

sequence.'[82] In terms of the aesthetics of town design in relation to these new paths of rapid movement, Gibberd suggested that the faster the movement, the less detail was observed, therefore, 'the bolder should the scene be painted.'[83] Fig.4.8 shows the Road Pattern design taken from the 1952 master plan, to which I have indicated the approximate locations of the nine blocks of flats. In most cases, Gibberd and the HDC positioned the towers at the edge of neighbourhood clusters, or at major road intersections, to ensure they could be viewed easily by those travelling by car along the main town roads.
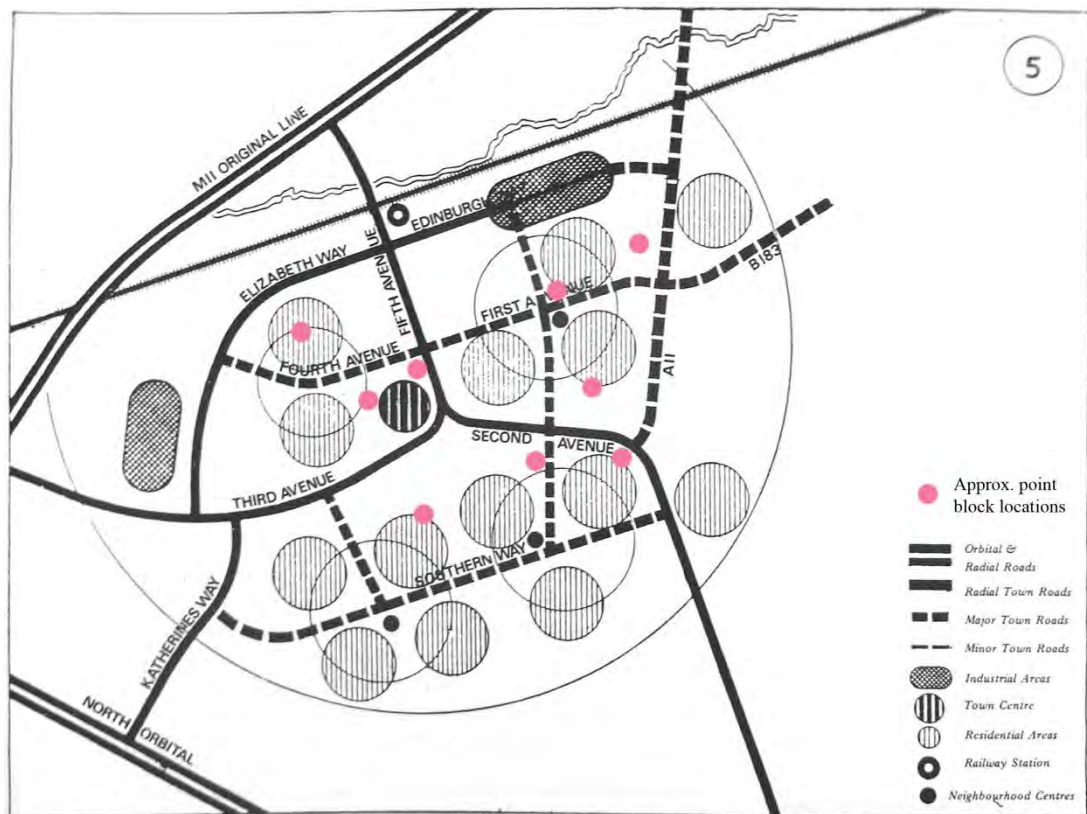
Fig.4.8. 'Road Pattern' (1952 Harlow master plan) with point block locations

In addition to including 'The Lawn' as part of the policy for mixed development, Gibberd described the visual qualities the block added in relation to fast travel along the main road adjacent to Mark Hall North:

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[82] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 30.
[83] Ibid.

Driving along this road there will be a general impression of low buildings divided up by woods and tree clumps until the silhouette is broken by the tall block which will suddenly come into view in a gap in the development and will suddenly fade away.[84]

Therefore, the placing of tall blocks throughout the town had a dual purpose in relation to visual variety. Firstly, within the neighbourhoods, for residents and pedestrians, the high-rise towers created a sharp contrast with the low two-storey development (fig.4.9 and fig.4.10). This was an attempt to create urbanity by avoiding the monotony of the earlier suburban environments. Furthermore, Gibberd argued that 'nicely designed flat blocks' could enhance the appearance of the residential area, which would not only benefit the residents of the block, but also to the residents of the surrounding houses.[85]

Fig.4.9. Moor Tower, Tye Green
HDC/Truscon Ltd, 1966-68

Fig.4.10. Pennymead Tower, Mark Hall South
Norman & Dawbarn, 1959-61

Secondly, the tall blocks were sited strategically to be viewed by those travelling by car along the main roads. For those viewing the town from their cars, these bold architectural statements provided a sharp visual contrast with the surrounding trees

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[84] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 30.
[85] ERO, A6306, 361, 32/1 (1), Notes on meeting held on 16 Feb 1953.

and landscape (fig.4.11 and fig.4.12). The blocks 'suddenly come into view' in a Picturesque manner; this idea resonated with Thomas Sharp's earlier idea that the art of Civic Design should consider Townscape as a mobile experience formed by a variety street pictures.

Fig.4.11. Stort Tower, Mark Hall North
E. C. P. Monson, 1962-64

Fig.4.12. Nicholls Tower, Brays Grove
HDC/Truscon Ltd, 1966-68

In the Netteswell and Hare Street neighbourhoods, Gibberd and the HDC also positioned two identical point blocks either side of the town centre in an attempt to 'increase the quality of urbanity' in the town.[86] Hughs Tower was constructed between 1955 and 1956; Edmunds Tower followed shortly after in 1958. In conjunction with the town centre's tall office blocks and multi-storey car parks, a considerable urban quality has been created (fig.4.13 and fig.4.14). The Ministry of Housing and Local Government acknowledged the success of Hughs Tower by including it in their 1958 pamphlet *Flats and Houses* – a further push by the Conservative government for higher residential densities.[87] Other examples given in the section 'high tower flats' included a twelve-storey tower in the Alton Estate by the LCC, as well as the fifteen-storey tower at the Golden Lane Estate by

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[86] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 107.
[87] Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Flats and Houses 1958, Design and Economy* (London: HMSO, 1958), p. 65.

Chamberlain Powell and Bon. The fact that Hughs Tower in Harlow was included among these pioneering London schemes highlights Gibberd's pioneering efforts to include such housing at Harlow New Town. After the publication of *Flats and Houses* in 1958, Hughs Tower and its location near the town centre proved to have quite an influence on other New Town Development Corporations.

Fig.4.13. Edmunds Tower, Hare Street
HDC, 1958-59

Fig.4.14. Hughs Tower, Netteswell
HDC, 1955-56

In 1966, Cwmbran Development Corporation constructed a twenty-two storey block of flats near the town centre, explaining in their 1967 annual report that the tower identified the centre of the town and made a 'prominent landmark.'[88] Even Stevenage Development Corporation, despite the unpopularity of the early Stony Hall flats, constructed a number of point blocks near the town centre during the 1960s, which Glendinning and Muthesius suggest were mainly for visual reasons.[89] Hatfield Development Corporation also followed suit, constructing the thirteen-storey Queensway House near the central market square (fig.4.15). These examples show the influence Gibberd and the HDC had on other New Town Development

[88] Osborn and Whittick, p. 349.
[89] Glendinning and Muthesius, p. 263.

Corporations, who, perhaps inspired by Hughs Tower, experimented with the construction of point blocks for aesthetic reasons.

Fig.4.15. Queensway House, Hatfield by Ronald Ward and Partners (1962)
(Osborn & Whittick, *The New Towns*, 1969)

In each case, when constructing their point blocks, these English and Welsh first generation New Town Development Corporations faced the same shortage of demand for flats. At Harlow, the HDC noted in 1951 that only 5 percent of incoming tenants requested a flat. By 1959, tenants living in flats within the mixed development scheme at Churchfield, Mark Hall South, gave a clear indication of how Harlow residents viewed flats. In the *Harlow Citizen,* a group of fourteen tenants complained about children of parents who were 'lucky enough to be the tenants of houses' who had been using the communal spaces and entrances to the flats as a playground. The letter continued:

> Do they not think it is unpleasant enough for tenants of flats to be condemned to live in a flat for seemingly endless years [...] without being victimized by children of more fortunate people who are given houses with gardens in which to live?[90]

As in many of the New Towns, those renting flats saw them only as a 'stepping stone' to a house and garden.[91] Other New Town Corporations faced similar

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[90] 'Fair Play Please', *Harlow Citizen*, 30 October 1959, Letters to the Editor, p. 2.
[91] 'Is there a Bias against Flats? Experience in a new town', *Harlow Citizen*, 19 February 1954, p. 7.

problems; the Newton Aycliffe Development Corporation, for example, noted that less than 1.5 percent of applications for accommodation showed a preference for flats.[92] Crawley Development Corporation also had a low percentage requesting flats; unlike the HDC, they responded by reducing their proportion of flats from 15 percent to 2.5 percent in the early 1950s.[93] Due to the recognised low demand for flats, at Crawley there are no tall point blocks, with housing reaching a maximum of only three storeys.[94] In 1951, architect planner to Crawley A. G. Sheppard Fidler, explained that flats in the New Towns were not essential since land values were relatively low, and the majority of incoming tenants wanted a house and garden. However, he added that if flats were not included, it became much more difficult to achieve visual variety in housing areas. He suggested that the 'form of the layout and the composition of the street-picture must be more carefully studied, if monotony is to be avoided.'[95] This demonstrates that other New Town architect planners were also thinking about town planning as a visual art – considering elements of variety in order to avoid the visual problems of the earlier housing, using a vocabulary similar to Gibberd's Sitte-inspired town planning language. However, unlike Gibberd and the HDC, Sheppard Fidler expressed a view to develop visual planning strategies which were in tune with people's preferences.

The experience was very different for the Development Corporations of the first generation Scottish New Towns. At East Kilbride, despite the low density initially envisaged for the town by the Corporation, due to the topography of the site – where much of the surrounding high land was unsuitable for building – a higher proportion of flats had to be introduced to achieve the target population.[96] By the 1960s, East Kilbride had a high overall proportion of 36 percent flats.[97] Aside from the difficult topography, there were a number of other factors which contributed to this high

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[92] 'Is there a Bias against Flats?', p. 7.

[93] Kynaston, p. 284.

[94] Crawley Development Corporation, 'Report of the Crawley Development Corporation for the period ending 31st March 1951', in *Reports of the Development Corporations for the period ending 31st March 1951* (London: HMSO, 1952), p. 112.

[95] A. G. Sheppard Fidler, 'Lansbury's Problems compared to those of a New Town', *Journal of the Town Planning Institute,* 38 (1951), 12-13 (p. 13).

[96] R. Smith, *East Kilbride: the Biography of a Scottish New Town, 1947-1973* (London, HMSO, 1979), p. 30.

[97] Osborn and Whittick, p. 358.

percentage. In their 1966 annual report, East Kilbride Development Corporation stated there was a demand for high-quality multi-storey flats.[98] Peter Willmott's 1964 study had compared the social characteristics of East Kilbride with those of Stevenage, to show that almost half the East Kilbride residents worked outside the town, compared with only a small percentage at Stevenage.[99] This had occurred because firstly, East Kilbride was only 8 miles from Glasgow, and secondly, the Corporation had decided to make flats in the town available to those working in Glasgow, despite the Reith Report's recommendation that the New Towns should be self-contained.[100] Those who commuted to Glasgow for work opted to move to East Kilbride to live in a new flat with modern conveniences; having previously lived in Glasgow, the idea of living in flats – or rather, tenements – was not unfamiliar as it might have been for those moving to English New Towns. Housing in Scottish cities had developed with a strong European influence, taking inspiration from high density cities in France and Italy, where housing took a vertical approach to house large numbers of families within a limited area.[101] Living in apartments became the accepted norm for many living in Glasgow, the English ideal of house and garden perhaps having little impact on housing aspirations. For this reason, Glendinning and Muthesius argue that the 'flat versus house' debate is potentially flawed, since it fails to address deep national-cultural differences within an 'Anglo-centric British formulation.'[102] David Matless has also recently observed that at times, Englishness and Britishness can become almost interchangeable; he argues, however, that Englishness should not be considered as insular and that national identity is subject to internal differentiation.[103] In the case of East Kilbride, the English (rather than British) ideal of house and garden seems to have had less of an impact on the shape of New Town housing. At East Kilbride, a total of nine fifteen-storey point blocks for higher-rent letting were built between 1965 and 1970.[104] Rather than being

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[98] Osborn and Whittick, p. 357.

[99] Peter Willmott, 'East Kilbride and Stevenage: Some Social Characteristics of a Scottish and an English Town', *Town Planning Review*, 34 (1964), 307-316 (p. 311).

[100] Osborn and Whittick, p. 357.

[101] Frank Worsdall, *The Tenement: A Way of Life: A social, historical, and architectural study of housing in Glasgow* (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers Ltd, 1979), p. 28.

[102] Muthesius and Glendinning, p. 325.

[103] Matless, pp. 17-19.

[104] Muthesius and Glendinning, p. 239.

dispersed individually throughout the town to provide picturesque vertical accents, the towers at East Kilbride were arranged as clusters. Three of the fifteen-storey blocks grouped together along Bosworth Road in the Calderwood neighbourhood can be seen in fig.4.16. In comparison to the isolated Nicholls Tower in Harlow, or Queensway House in Hatfield, the grouping of towers at East Kilbride in addition to the integration with high density three-storey flats on hilly terrain, creates a greater urban effect.

Fig.4.16. Flats at Calderwood, East Kilbride (Osborn & Whittick, *The New Towns*, 1969)

Unlike East Kilbride, there was little demand for flats at Harlow, and rather than taking on board the preferences of the incoming tenants as the Crawley Development Corporation had done, the HDC's approach was to build flats in the town for aesthetic reasons, hoping that people's opinion of living in flats would change. When considering the expansion of Harlow as requested by the Ministry in 1965, Gibberd considered stepping up the densities further, to 70 people per acre, as well as increasing the percentage of flats to 25 percent.[105] Since the Conservatives had come to power in 1951, with ambitions to prevent the encroachment of housing onto agricultural land, the HDC held the view that the population must be 'encouraged to change from house to flat dwelling.'[106] Often, the HDC admitted the aim was to run ahead of popular taste hoping that people's taste would catch up. Ben

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[105] 'Overall Densities', *Harlow Citizen*, 12 April 1963, John Citizen's Diary, p. 12.
[106] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (2), 'Future Policy on densities, dwelling-types, layouts and architectural and aesthetic treatment' Notes for discussion prepared by the General Manager, 22 January 1951.

Hyde Harvey[107] claimed that to keep 'everyone' happy (meaning the residents of the town, who preferred houses with gardens), the HDC would have had to build 'rows and rows of semi-detached houses' along the lines of inter-war house building. However, in an article in the *Harlow Citizen*, he claimed that the HDC believed it was its duty to foster the new architecture rather than to follow the failed examples of the past.[108] Gibberd added, retrospectively:

> The standard of architectural design is always some 15 to 20 years ahead of public taste. So the Board, while accepting that they must meet social demands, believed that the architectural qualities should be determined by architects and not popular taste.[109]

Anthony Jackson in his study of *The Politics of Architecture* argued, that since modernists aimed to impose ideas of the new architecture to benefit society, they ultimately believed that rather than give the public what it liked they should give them what they thought was good for them.[110] This line of thinking could explain why modernist architects like Gibberd tried to create modernist towns with modernist buildings in the new towns. It could be argued that compared to New Towns like Crawley, Gibberd's determination to keep densities and percentages of flats high at Harlow contributed to a more urban environment. However, Gibberd's attempts to create urbanity by building compactly at high densities, with buildings of varying heights had been compromised by government intervention. Richards had not only announced the failure of the New Towns in 1953, he also declared the failure of modern architecture. In Richards's mind, architects had failed to 'give society a lead and impose on it the ideas their knowledge and technical resources tell them are the best ideas.'[111] Gibberd and the HDC had fought to provide a higher percentage of flats than the Ministry permitted with the hope of firstly, achieving variety with mixed development to contribute to urbanity, and secondly, to provide visual points of emphasis throughout the town. In 1963, Gibberd revealed to the *Harlow Citizen* that he would have preferred to build a 'new Bath of four storey

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[107] Deputy General Manager between 1947-1955 and General Manager from 1955-1973.
[108] 'Multi-storey garages of car boom continues', *Harlow Citizen*, 20 September 1963, p. 1.
[109] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 104.
[110] Anthony Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture*, p. 175.
[111] Richards, 'Failure of the New Towns', p. 32.

houses' at Harlow, which he had not done since he was 'not prepared to tell people how to live.'[112] Even if Gibberd had proposed a 'new Bath', he would not have been able to gain approval for such a scheme. Jackson refers to Hatfield New Town's modernist architect planner Lionel Brett, who explained that approvals were not only subject to the Minsitry's final decision, but also to approval from the parish council, district council, county planning officer, regional office of the Ministry, in addition to planners in central government. Among the local and parish councils, Jackson argues that urbanity, as demanded by Richards in 1953, was not wanted, and could not have been imposed by a professional minority.[113] Furthermore, John Gold has recently argued that the first generation New Towns could not escape their Garden City roots; the best modernist architects like Gibberd and Brett could do was to bring an 'edgeways penetration' of ideas to the towns.[114]

A contrasting example is Peterlee New Town. Like Gibberd, modernist architect Berthold Lubetkin (who had designed Highpoint I with Tecton in 1935), was invited by Silkin to design a New Town. Peterlee, in the northern mining area of County Durham was to provide housing for 30,000, as well as an urban centre for the surrounding villages. Jackson has described Lubetkin's scheme as 'a compact town spatially defined by high-rise apartments.'[115] However, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning had already promised the National Coal Board a town of detached and semi-detached houses, which resulted in Lubetkin's departure as architect planner for the Peterlee Development Corporation.[116] At Harlow, Gibberd enforced his ideas of urbanity and his ambitions to create a modernist new town onto the HDC and the Ministry as much as possible, while at times also going against the preferences of the people. With this, the HDC was able to construct many mixed development schemes and a total of nine tall blocks of flats. In the post-war years, compromise was the only solution to obtaining the urbanity element of visual variety at Harlow.

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[112] 'A Bold Plan or a Glossy Trick', *Harlow Citizen*, 12 April 1963, p. 1.
[113] Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture*, p. 175.
[114] Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, p. 196.
[115] Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture*, p. 174.
[116] Jackson, p. 174 and Gold, p. 199.

At Harlow, point blocks helped break up any monotony which might occur in two-storey developments; for Gibberd, they also had a picturesque appeal since they created vertical accents and sharp contrasts with the surrounding landscape. However, in mixed development schemes, a greater sense of urbanity occurred when three-storey blocks lined street edges; as Chapter 2 has revealed, a sense of enclosure to the street was a key element of visual urbanity. This raises the question as to whether point blocks contributed to the urbanity of the street scene. Nicholas Bullock has recently suggested that the two-storey housing at Mark Hall North achieved no greater urbanity than the conventional suburbs of the time, whereas at The Lawn, Gibberd was more successful in creating an urban quality.[117] However, in comparison to the urbanity Gibberd observed in Bath and Saffron Walden, The Lawn and the other point blocks at Harlow created a different kind of environment entirely. With each block, a high density of people per acre was achieved; however, the high density was concentrated on a small area of land. This in fact reduced the capacity for visual urbanity, which could have been achieved with lower terraces covering a larger area of land. In this sense, it could be argued that the introduction of point blocks for picturesque reasons had a detrimental effect on visual urbanity, especially in Mark Hall North, where the low prescribed densities already restricted the creation of urbanity. This demonstrates that there may have been contradictions within Gibberd's approach to creating a visual sense of urbanity at Harlow.

4.3 SOCIAL BALANCE

The Reith Report's recommendation that New Towns should be 'balanced communities for working and living'[118] also had visual consequences at Harlow New Town. The concept of mixed development was accepted by the HDC from the outset, which in Gibberd's mind would permit the inclusion of flats for visual variety. However, to obtain a 'balanced community', the HDC would also have to provide larger 'better class' housing. In the early stages of development, the HDC viewed this as an opportunity to provide further visual variety. It was agreed that 20 percent of all housing would be 'Standard II' (i.e. non-subsidised) which would be

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[117] Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, p. 134.
[118] The New Towns Committee, *Final Report*, p. 2.

available for rent. In 1947, the HDC agreed that on planning, aesthetic and architectural grounds, Standard II houses were 'essential if the Designated Area is to become a Town and not merely a housing estate or a Dagenham.'[119] Municipal housing at Dagenham had been heavily criticised in the 1930s on both social and aesthetic grounds, as Chapter 1 has demonstrated. Such a comment reveals how the HDC fully supported Gibberd's ambition to create urbanity at Harlow; however, despite their shared ambition, as early as 1951 Chief Estate Officer R. D. Relf reported to General Manager Adams that 'Mixed Development in urban areas has never been a success.'[120] Residents living in a group of seven Standard II houses (three five-bedroom detached houses and four three-bedroom houses) in Mark Hall North had made a number of complaints. They were unhappy since they had to travel through Standard I housing to approach their own homes; they argued that not enough Standard II houses had been grouped together; and finally, they felt there was not enough screening from the Standard I housing.[121] Possible solutions to these problems included, building large groups of Standard II housing to create a 'small self-contained colony', and to design approaches to Standard II housing directly from main roads, avoiding Standard I housing.[122] In 1954, it was agreed that all future Standard II housing would be built in groups of no less than 50-100 units, segregated from lower income groups.[123] Prior to this, aesthetically the HDC had managed to integrate Standard I and Standard II houses successfully. The housing group 'Felmongers' was designed by the HDC Design Group with construction beginning in 1950 (fig.4.17).

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[119] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Standard II Houses.

[120] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/28, Chief Estates Officer's 'Mixed Development' Report to General Manager, 25 September 1951.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid.

[123] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (2), Chief Officers' Meeting 21 July 1954.

Fig.4.17. Felmongers, Mark Hall South by the HDC Design Group (1950-56)

The group comprised 250 flats and houses, 35 of which were Standard II houses (14 percent of the total). The inclusion of Standard II houses, which were large spread-out detached houses, allowed the HDC to increase the density of the Standard I housing, building compactly to three-storeys. In this instance, the concept of 'social balance' created a mixed development scheme with visual variety. In addition to this, the contrast between the two types of housing emphasised the sense of urbanity in the lower income group housing (fig.4.17). The new policy to separate large groups of Standard II housing would have a negative impact on the creation of urbanity at Harlow. The higher income groups at Harlow were able to exert great pressure on the HDC, who had no choice but to take action in order to rent the Standard II homes. After all, housing played a 'dominant role' in the finances of the HDC, and housing must 'pay its way for the town to be profitable.'[124] Later, when houses became available for sale in Harlow, owner-occupiers were also able to persuade the HDC to alter housing plans. For example, a story in the *Harlow Citizen* in 1966 revealed that a block of flats and four terraces at Brockles Mead were

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[124] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 357.

'rearranged' so that the buildings would not 'crowd too closely on owner-occupied houses in adjacent Watersmeet.'[125]

In 1957, the *Harlow Citizen* reported on the 'successes and failures' at Harlow. Referring to Rams Gorse in the Little Parndon neighbourhood, the newspaper reported that 'jumbling all income groups together had been one of the experiments which had not proved successful' since the 'mixed people have not fitted together as well as the mixed houses.'[126] The Reith Report requirements that the New Towns should be socially balanced had initially worked to Gibberd's advantage, aesthetically speaking. However, by the end of the 1950s, it had become generally accepted that the idea of mixing different income groups was not successful. The *Harlow Citizen* reported again referencing a Ministry Report which stated the attempt to 'prevent the new towns from becoming one-class communities had not been altogether successful.'[127] The *Daily Mirror* had called Harlow 'Snobland' as a result of the segregation of Standard I and Standard II housing, but had found that residents of Harlow preferred to 'live among their own kind, contrary to the belief of planners who waded firmly into the New Town convinced that they could mix up all types to obtain a balanced community.'[128] During the mid-1950s, the HDC began to accept that creating a 'balanced community' was no longer feasible. When the Conservatives came to power, they abolished the Development Charge in order to encourage private housing developments, which had effectively stopped altogether during Labour's administration. Soon after, there was evidence that those wanting to buy a house, rather than rent, were buying outside the town. As a result, the HDC turned to private developers to construct houses for sale in Harlow, in an attempt to attract those who wished to buy homes back into the town.

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[125] 'Houses shifted further away from Watersmeet', *Harlow Citizen*, 29 July 1966, p. 1.
[126] 'Success and Failure', *Harlow Citizen*, 20 December 1957, John Citizen's Diary, p. 12.
[127] 'Harlow makes news as the town where snobbery is rife', *Harlow Citizen*, 22 May 1959, p. 1.
[128] 'A Name Rejected', *Harlow Citizen*, 14 May 1955, p. 1.

Fig.4.18. Greygoose Park, Great Parndon by G Wimpey & Co. (1961-3)

Between 1961 and 1968, developer G Wimpey & Co. built 334 detached and semi-detached houses for sale in the Great Parndon neighbourhood (fig.4.18). The average density of the area was 10 dwellings per acre, or 33 persons per acre. This type of low-density two-storey detached and semi-detached housing was the antithesis of urbanity, yet the HDC had to provide areas such as these, to suit the changing, more affluent society. Those who wished to buy a property inevitably wished to buy a house with a garden, rather than a gardenless flat in a high-density area.

4.4   CHANGING IDEAS

In 1958, Gibberd began to reflect on the placing of tower blocks at Harlow, commenting 'what fun it would have been to surround the town centre with a dozen or so tower blocks like Vällingby', but concluded that it was perhaps more important to encourage the English way of life – which called for two-storey houses with private gardens.[129] Having said that, he immediately argued that towns would 'gain immeasurably' from a twenty to thirty percent flats provision, since the importance

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[129] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, 1958 Personal Diary, copy of 'The Architecture of New Towns – The Alfred Bossom Lecture by Frederick Gibberd', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts,* April 1958, p. 343.

of the extra floors was on the spatial pattern.[130] Furthermore, Gibberd later reflected on the placing of point blocks at Harlow; rather than commenting on people's preferences for houses with gardens, he took an aesthetic stance on the matter. Since together with his RFAC colleagues he had realised towers in isolation formed 'too strong a contrast with the environment'; therefore, Gibberd believed that Moor, Nicholls and Willowfield towers should have been placed together at the Town Centre. If grouped together, Gibberd argued that blocks complement one another to create a 'dynamic large-scale composition.'[131] His retrospective thoughts may have been influenced by the grouping of blocks at Vällingby (fig.4.19), East Kilbride, and Stevenage (fig.4.20).

Fig.4.19. Vällingby Centre, by Jarl Bjurström   Fig.4.20. Point Blocks at Stevenage
  (Yorke & Gibberd, *Modern Flats*, 1961)   (Stevenage Development Corporation)

Nevertheless, with the exception of two seven-storey blocks in Potter Street, by the late 1960s, the HDC had abandoned their policy of dispersing point blocks throughout the town.

The HDC responded to the changes in society by building low-density two-storey housing for sale, nevertheless, they maintained their view to create a sense of urbanity at Harlow. In other parts of Great Parndon, the HDC was at the forefront of housing design and experimentation. During this period, the *AR* had announced that housing in Britain had reached a 'critical stage', since there was a 'mounting dissatisfaction with the quality of environment produced by the approved methods

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[130] Gibberd, 'The Architecture of New Towns', p. 344.
[131] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 107.

of 'mixed development''[132] J. M. Richards had already suggested much earlier, in 1953, that flats were not necessarily the key to creating urban environments. Referring to the urbanity that was lacking in the early parts of the New Towns, Richards argued that it was not necessary to persuade people to live in flats in order to build 'real towns' like the small English market towns and cathedral towns.[133] By 1966, the *AR* was promoting the new architectural ideas of 'high-density low-rise' housing, using Harlow to demonstrate pioneering examples of this new housing type.

Gibberd had been determined to keep pace with changing ideas in housing form. In 1960, together with the HDC, Gibberd launched a competition for the housing group Bishopsfield in the fourth and final neighbourhood cluster to be developed. The *AR* praised Gibberd and the HDC, believing that they had shown 'boldness and initiative in using Great Parndon as a test bed for fundamental research.'[134] The competition brief required a minimum of 270 dwellings, 40 percent of which were to be flats.[135] In addition, there was to be 100 percent garage provision, a relatively new problem which was the result of increased car ownership. The winning scheme was announced in May 1961 and was designed by Michael Neylan. His scheme comprised a central crescent of two storey flats on the highest point of the site, with garages provided below the flats. Radiating outwards from the rear of the flats were spines of single-storey houses separated by narrow pathways, from which the houses were accessed. Neylan's scheme marked a decisive shift from the earlier mixed development schemes of houses, flats and point blocks that Gibberd and the HDC had previously built at Harlow. His competition-winning scheme for the 'Bishopsfield' housing group was a pioneering example of the new experimental concept of 'high-density low-rise' housing, which moved away from the idea of incorporating tall blocks within mixed development schemes. The LCC had also experimented with a number of high-density low-rise housing projects. Peter Shepheard (who had worked on one of the LCC schemes) wrote to Gibberd in 1966;

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[132] 'High Density: Low Rise', *AR*, 140 (1966), 36-50 (p. 37).
[133] J. M. Richards, 'Failure of the New Towns', *AR*, 114 (1953), 28-32 (p. 32).
[134] 'High Density: Low Rise', p. 37.
[135] 'Harlow Housing Competition', *AJ*, 133 (1961), 765-776 (p. 765).

his letter clearly demonstrated architects' changing views towards tower blocks. He explained that at the LCC, they wished to show that high densities could be achieved without including tall blocks. In brackets, he wrote: 'having built several of these we don't think <u>we</u> would want to live in them!'[136] Furthermore, the results of Elizabeth Denby's social surveys carried out much earlier had shown that people living in high density flats found a lack of privacy to be a key problem.[137] The issue of privacy remained a problem in high-density high-rise housing into the 1960s, which prompted a number of modernist architects to abandon the idea of tall flats in favour of new types of housing. The subject of privacy will arise again later in the study, where I discuss the issue in more depth.

4.4.1 High Density Low Rise

From the early 1960s onwards, architectural and planning journals began to explore how high densities could be achieved without building upwards. *Architecture and Building* argued in 1960 that 'the Englishman never was a flat-dweller by choice' and the percentage of the population wishing to live without a garden was very small.[138] It has been evident throughout this study that most people wished to live in a detached house with a garden; acknowledging this in 1960 however, *Architecture and Building* argued that this was now 'barely physically possible in towns.'[139] The article proceeded to argue the case for 'courtyard planning' – a method of providing houses with gardens while at the same time achieving high densities. *Architectural Design* also advocated 'the L-shaped one-storey house' arguing that low houses planned around small open courts could provide both 'privacy and intimacy appropriate to urban family life.'[140] The following year, *AD* published an article by Jane Drew which showed a variety of examples of Iranian courtyard houses designed to suit the Muslim way of life; the basic principle was that the house looked in on itself rather than out to the street.[141] By the mid 1960s in Britain, the L-

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[136] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, 1966 Personal Diary, Letter to Gibberd from Peter Shepheard, 20 June 1966.

[137] Denby, 'Rehousing', p. 61.

[138] Roy Chamberlain, 'Courtyard Planning', *Architecture and Building,* 35 (1960), 122-129 (p. 122).

[139] Ibid.

[140] 'Urban high density housing', *AD,* 26 (1956), 327-328 (p. 327).

[141] Jane B. Drew, 'Housing in Iran', *AD,* 27 (1957), 81-85 (p. 84).

shaped patio house and the new concept of 'high-density low-rise' had become established.

Sociological research had informed the implementation of the patio house at a scheme in Prestonpans. In 1959, Robert Matthew, Head of the Department of Architecture at Edinburgh University and former LCC architect, established the 'Housing Research Unit' (HRU). A recent paper by Soledad Garcia Ferrari et al. shows that Matthew believed that the 'aspiration of the Modern Movement must go far beyond the old tasks of designing beautiful buildings that worked well; now the aim was no less than that of 'solving, architecturally, the most difficult of social problems.'[142] In 1962, the HRU completed a housing scheme in Prestonpans comprising forty five single-storey courtyard houses; the design was based on research into residents' usage of open and private space, as well as by the patio house concept increasingly publicised by the journals. It seemed the patio house could go some way to providing an ideal housing solution. It could be laid out in a high density compact pattern, thus satisfying the modernist architects as well as the Conservative government, who continued to push for higher densities. At the same time, it would provide houses with gardens, thus satisfying the people. At Great Parndon, the concept of high-density low-rise housing was fully embraced by Gibberd and the HDC. Patio houses were adopted in a number of housing groups, including Neylan's winning competition entry at Bishopsfield, as well as at 'Clarkhill' designed by Associated Architects and Consultants (fig.4.21).

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[142] Soledad Garcia Ferrari, Miles Glendinning, Paul Jenkins and Jessica Taylor, 'Putting the User First? A pioneering Scottish experiment in architectural research', *Architectural Heritage,* 19 (2008), 53-82 (p. 54).
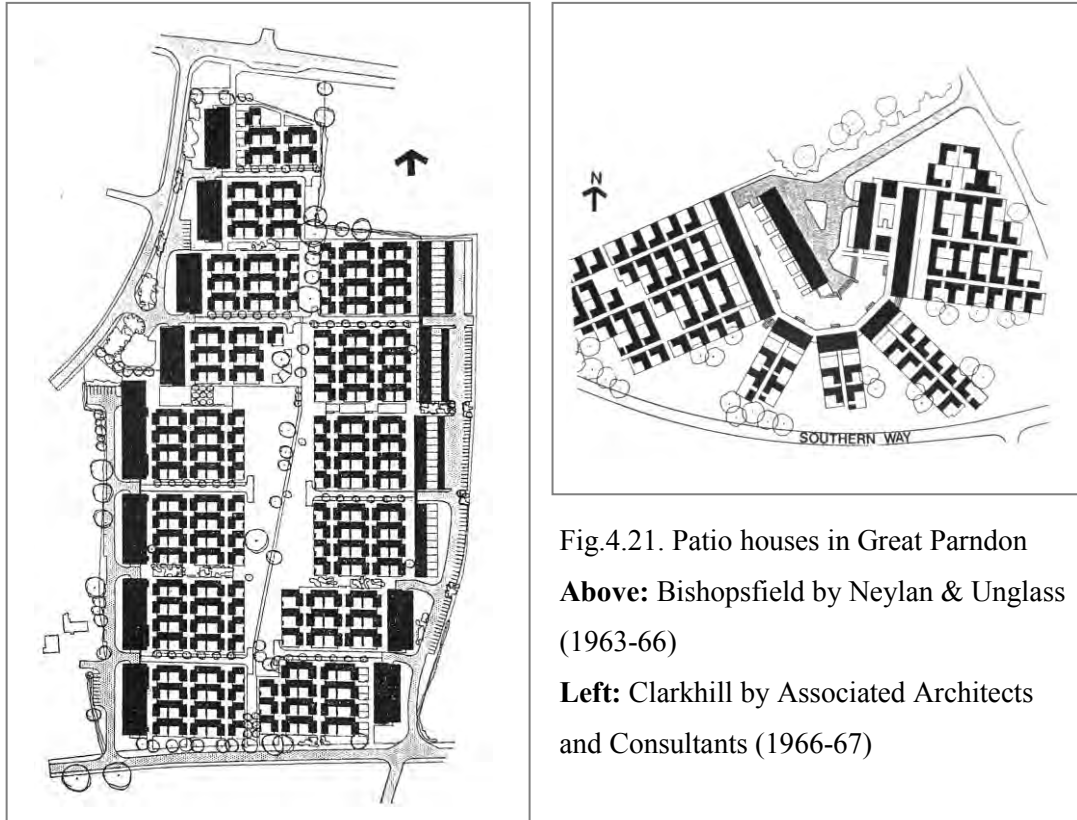
Fig.4.21. Patio houses in Great Parndon
Above: Bishopsfield by Neylan & Unglass
(1963-66)
Left: Clarkhill by Associated Architects
and Consultants (1966-67)

The *AR* praised Gibberd's promotion of the new high density low rise housing concept at Harlow, suggesting that such housing groups as Bishopsfield 'cut across the conventional division in design between multi-storey point-blocks and two-storey cottages.'[143] But what effect did these new housing types have on the creation of urbanity? The *AR* considered the element of variety in relation to the patio housing schemes, arguing that ultimately any 'superficial variety' had been overcome by the similarity of the schemes.[144] In terms of urbanity, the 'intimacy and compactness' of the houses might create images of hill cities in the minds of architects, or, as Gibberd preferred images of 'English country towns such as Lewes or Saffron Walden', yet the reality was different.[145] Since traditional country towns like Lewes and Saffron Walden grew over time, the *AR* argued that 'the Picturesque' also grew over a period of time, therefore, 'instant picturesqueness' was bound to

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[143] 'High Density: Low Rise', p. 37.
[144] Ibid., p. 38.
[145] Ibid.

feel false.[146] Furthermore, they argued that in traditional communities, streets tended to have a mixture of building uses which contributed to visual variety. At Harlow, the accepted modernist planning principles had resulted in housing being separated from other building types; variety and urbanity would have to be created with housing alone. Despite these negative comments, the *AR* considered Gibberd's implementation of the new high-density low-rise housing concept in Harlow to be an outstanding achievement. They explained:

> There is no secret of the battles which Gibberd and his development corporation have had to fight to protect such urbanity as does exist in Great Parndon.[147]

They accused the Harlow Urban District Council (HUDC) and the Essex County Council (ECC) of being 'professional objectors' who had accused Gibberd of 'building slums.'[148] To some extent, Gibberd and the HDC had given way to the councils, by singling out areas for private developers to build large areas of low-density two-storey houses. To the *AR,* this only supported the disastrous idea that only low-density housing could provide middle-class environments, while high-density housing could only create 'slums.' This theme will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter.

At Bishopsfield and Clarkhill, high densities were facilitated by the adoption of the 'L' shaped patio house. The houses were completely inward-looking; all windows faced inwards to internal courtyard gardens. This enabled the houses to be packed together at high densities of 20.1 and 22.3 dwellings per acre, or 66.3 and 73.6 persons per acre respectively, without the inclusion of high-rise blocks (fig.4.22). These were remarkably high densities to achieve with single-storey houses making up the majority of the housing groups.

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[146] 'High Density: Low Rise', p. 38.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.

Fig.4.22. Patio houses in Great Parndon, Clarkhill* (left) and Bishopsfield (right)

While the architectural press admired the patio houses, members of the public found the new type of housing unfamiliar. In the *Harlow Citizen,* public opinion showed concerns the new housing at Bishopsfield might generate feelings of loneliness, since there was no sight of a street or even of 'your next-door neighbour hanging her washing on the line.'[149] The patio house created environments which were far removed from the English tradition of the public street, and as the *AR* revealed in 1964, some were beginning to label these new environments as 'neo-slums' or alien kasbahs.[150] Chapter 2 has demonstrated that Gibberd believed urbanity existed in the streets and squares of old English towns and Georgian cities. For Gibberd, although the patio house could create 'very pleasant living conditions', in terms of the overall street picture, or a sense of urbanity, he argued such housing had 'no great value to the townscape.'[151] While other modernist architects like Matthew at the HRU were conducting social surveys which suggested the patio house could be an ideal housing solution, Gibberd and the HDC adopted patio housing as a response to changing

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[149] 'As others see us (2)', *Harlow Citizen*, 4 March 1966, John Citizen's Diary, p. 17.
[150] 'Preview 1964', *AR*, 135 (1964), p. 9.
[151] Frederick Gibberd, *Town Design,* 4th edn (London: Architectural Press, 1962), p. 266.
* The housing at Clarkhill has been rendered, painted and re-roofed since construction. The patio houses were originally clad in pre-cast concrete panels.

architectural ideas of the time. Gibberd explained that the basis of the 1961 competition for Bishopsfield was essentially a reaction to 'more adventurous new towns, like Cumbernauld [which] were attracting the young and lively architects.'[152] Furthermore, despite acknowledging the 'pleasant living conditions' of the houses, in the revised edition of *Town Design,* Gibberd was primarily concerned with the visual effects the patio houses had to the street-scene.

The Bishopsfield competition was widely published in the journals and as a result, other New Town Development Corporations began to experiment with high-density low-rise housing. At Hatfield New Town, for example, Peter Phippen and Associates were commissioned to design a row of twenty-eight courtyard bungalows on a 2.75 acre site. The architects focused on creating a balance between community and privacy, while providing houses with gardens, private enclosed patio spaces, as well as a garage.[153] Compared to the patio housing illustrated at Harlow, Phippen's patio houses were more successful in addressing the street; however, the one-storey houses and surrounding greenery do not bring a sense of urbanity to the street picture (fig.4.23).

Fig.4.23. The Ryde, Hatfield by Peter Phippen and Associates (1965-66)

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[152] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 174.
[153] 'Private and New Towns', *AR*, 142 (1967), 363-370 (p. 364).

By the mid 1960s, the idea of space and privacy in the home had reached the forefront of architectural discussion. This was perhaps prompted by the publication of the MHLG's long overdue updated version of the *Housing Manual 1949* in 1961. The new guide, called *Homes for Today & Tomorrow*,[154] highlighted the greater general prosperity and the need to improve living standards, focusing on space within the home, rather than external spaces.[155] At the same time, sociological research had gradually become an important factor which informed housing design. As the *AR* said in 1967, the architect:

> must learn to be less arrogant about what he thinks people ought to want and make full use of sociological information rather than select what suits his visually predetermined schemes.[156]

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that firstly, while other modernist architects saw 'mixed development' as a solution to either political or social problems, Gibberd considered the concept chiefly in aesthetic terms. Yet despite modernist views that flats could generate community life, in the English New Towns, there was little demand for this type of dwelling. At Harlow, Gibberd promoted the aesthetics of flats over social considerations. He believed the inclusion of flats and point blocks could have a positive visual effect on the town as a whole. Social and economic changes in the 1960s, and a renewed interest in sociology for some, would direct housing design away from mixed development. For Gibberd, these new housing forms had a negative impact on the creation of urbanity. The earlier concept of mixed development created visual variety, an element of urbanity; however, new housing types highlighted that the creation of urbanity also required more traditional urban forms such as the street and the square. The following chapter will investigate the element of enclosure in relation to street design and urbanity at Harlow.

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[154] Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Homes for Today & Tomorrow* (London: HMSO, 1961) This is often referred to as the 'Parker Morris Report' after Chairman Sir Parker Morris. Gordon Cullen from the *AR* provided the illustrations for the guide.

[155] Ibid., p. 39.

[156] J. R. Nicholls, 'In the Townscape', *AR*, 142 (1967), 335-339, (p. 335).

5 A SENSE OF ENCLOSURE

Chapter 3 has shown that with the density increase at Harlow, Gibberd and the HDC were able to create more tightly grouped housing, such as Orchard Croft in the Mark Hall South neighbourhood. It is important to note, however, that Orchard Croft, with its close proximity to 'The Stow' neighbourhood centre, was an exceptional case. Orchard Croft had been designed by Gibberd and the HDC to a particularly high density of 18.3 dwellings per acre in an attempt to relate the housing to The Stow neighbourhood centre buildings. If this value is multiplied by the Harlow average family size of 3.3, it gives a high density of 60.39 persons per acre. Pevsner had noted the 'tightening up' of housing in Mark Hall South,[1] but Orchard Croft remained within a minority of housing with an urban character in Harlow, and certainly among the other first generation New Towns. By 1958, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government was still of the opinion that the New Towns were too open in appearance. In April of that year, Dame Evelyn Sharp, Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, contacted Ben Hyde Harvey, whom had replaced General Manager W. Eric Adams in 1955. She believed that the New Towns suffered from 'too open an appearance', yet she stated explicitly that she was not advocating higher densities, but a 'more closely knit appearance.'[2] These comments mark a major change in the way the representatives of the Ministry viewed the concept of residential density. Instead of thinking solely in terms of numbers of tenants, or spaces required for light and air, Evelyn Sharp began to think along the same lines as Gibberd; the New Towns should be more 'closely knit' to give an urban appearance. The previous chapters have revealed that from the outset, Gibberd was more concerned with the visual effects that higher densities could achieve, as opposed to the density figures themselves; or rather, that the density figures could facilitate the appearance of compact development. Gibberd's later comments in the *Harlow Citizen* in 1963 support this idea. He

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[1] Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Essex,* 2nd edn, rev. by Enid Radcliffe (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1965), p. 227.

[2] ERO, A6303, 317, 1/28, Letter from Dame Evelyn Sharp to HDC General Manager, 28 April 1958.

claimed that although the town would be 'better looking if the densities were higher': ultimately it was 'looks' he was interested in and he 'couldn't care about the numbers.'[3]

This shift in ideas within the Ministry from density figures to achieving the appearance of high density and compact development could have been attributed to influence from the ongoing visual planning campaigns of the *AR*. In particular, it may have been a response to Ian Nairn's 'Outrage' and 'Counter-Attack against Subtopia' special editions of the *AR* in 1955 and 1956 respectively. The 'Outrage' campaign began as a result of Nairn's belief that there was a lack of distinction between different types of urban environments resulting in 'Subtopia' (making an ideal of suburbia). In the 'Counter-Attack' special edition, the editors published 'A Visual ABC' which aimed to explain the basic elements of visual planning to the layman.[4] After establishing the type of environment (Metropolis, Town, Arcadia Country or Wild), the aim was to 'tidy up' the scene accordingly by 'reducing clutter'. The final step, as demonstrated by figs 5.1 and 5.2, was to design all elements in close relationship to one another.
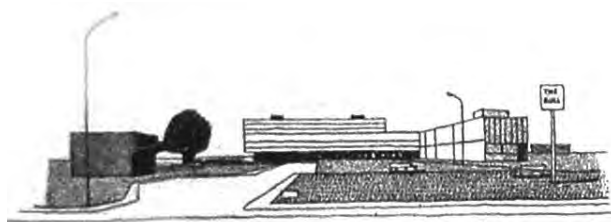
Fig.5.1. 'Pleasant things separated and isolated'[5]   Fig.5.2. 'Bringing them together'[6]
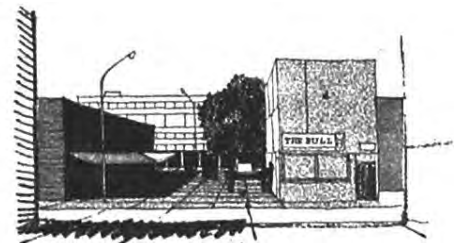
The image on the left represented elements in isolation from one another – a familiar scene, since according to the *AR,* it could be seen in any of the New Towns.[7] The image on the right demonstrated that by bringing the elements together, the wastage

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[3] 'Planner 'took the Town to bits' and decided; 'It's looks I am interested in', *Harlow Citizen*, 5 April 1963, p. 16.

[4] Ian Nairn (ed.), 'A Visual ABC', Special Number of *AR*, *'Counter-Attack'*, 120 (1956), 355-360 (p. 355).

[5] Ibid., p. 357.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

of space could be prevented while at the same time a 'living space' as opposed to a 'neighbourhood unit' could be created. According to the *AR,* 'a handful of well-designed elements can't in themselves make up a landscape or townscape: they have to be related to one another.'[8] These ideas overlapped with themes from the earlier Townscape campaign, as well as Gibberd's ideas about Civic Design, however; by 1959, with Nairn having later been hailed as this country's first popular architectural journalist[9] the term 'subtopia' – 'the world of universal low-density mess'[10] – had become a commonplace term in architectural circles as well as among members of the public.[11] In 1959, the *Harlow Citizen* published a number of letters to the editor from residents who were concerned that Subtopia had arrived at Harlow. The discussion spanned several weeks, beginning with an anonymous letter complaining about the 'plethora of traffic and other signs which now deface what promised to be a beautiful town.'[12] Further correspondence accused the HUDC of lacking 'good manners' and 'aesthetic appreciation' when siting road signs in Harlow. The anonymous reader wished to bring to the Council's attention that there were many people concerned about (using Ian Nairn's phrase) 'this creeping mildew.'[13] Another reader accused the Council of having an ambition to create a 'Wigan of the South' at Harlow, adding that he did not see what was so 'hideously funny about citizens taking a pride in the appearance of their town.'[14] Significantly, this demonstrates how through the *AR*, architectural discourse was disseminated to the general public. Furthermore, it demonstrates that some Harlow residents wished to live in an aesthetically pleasing environment. Such widespread interest in the notion of subtopia would undoubtedly have had an effect on the Ministry's view.

In writing to the HDC in 1958, Evelyn Sharp had questioned why the New Towns were so open in appearance, concluding that a key factor was the insistence from

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[8] Nairn, 'A Visual ABC', p. 357.

[9] 'Obituary Ian Nairn: 1930-83', *AR*, 174 (1983), p. 4.

[10] Ian Nairn, *Outrage* (London: Architectural Press, 1955)

[11] For example: 'Symposium on Subtopia', at the Institute of Landscape Architects, 16 February 1956, 'Can architects cure subtopia?', talk by Eric de Maré at General meeting of the AA, 29 January 1958 and 'Subtopia', *Harlow Citizen*, 6 March 1959, Letters to the Editor, p. 8

[12] 'Subtopia Comes to Harlow', *Harlow Citizen*, 6 February 1959, Letters to the Editor, p. 8.

[13] 'Subtopia Comes to Harlow', *Harlow Citizen*, 20 February 1959, Letters to the Editor, p. 11.

[14] 'Subtopia', *Harlow Citizen*, 6 March 1959, Letters to the Editor, p. 8.

local authorities on excessive widths between houses on minor roads. She had for some time believed that this was a fault in New Town layouts, and revealed that while visiting Harlow, Gibberd had highlighted the same problem.[15] She continued by inquiring as to why the Corporations had provided such 'vast and disproportionate widths between houses', and if it had been 'to satisfy some local authority' could she know the details.[16] Unable to answer Sharp's queries, Hyde Harvey turned to Gibberd for advice. Gibberd argued that if the Ministry believed that closer development was important in the New Towns, the Minister should publish a statement deploring the 'subtopia character of the New Towns' and the waste of land nationally. In Gibberd's mind, this could assist negotiations with local authorities.[17] The following year, *The Density of Residential Areas* was re-issued with Harold Macmillan's original 1952 foreword stressing the importance of conserving good agricultural land. Although there were no revisions, the statement undoubtedly carried greater weight coming not from the Minister of Housing and Local Government, but the Prime Minister. The fact that the Ministry took Gibberd's advice by reprinting their manual on residential densities further highlights Gibberd's influence on the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. Furthermore, a close working relationship developed between HDC chairman Richard Costain (chairman from May 1955 - March 1966) and Dame Evelyn Sharp that enabled the exchange of architectural ideas as well as the establishment of a good level of understanding between HDC members and officials of the Ministry.[18]

As a result of this close working relationship, Dame Evelyn Sharp invited Gibberd to write a report which could answer her queries about the open appearance of the New Towns. Gibberd carefully considered the problem, writing a detailed seven page report entitled, 'Why the New Towns Look Open'. For Gibberd, the complex problem could be simplified by dividing possible causes into two groups: the technical causes, which 'given brains and sensibility' were capable of solution; and the psychological and social causes, which were 'much deeper' and 'harder to

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[15] ERO, A6303, 317, 1/28, Letter from Dame Evelyn Sharp to HDC General Manager, 14 April 1958.
[16] Ibid.
[17] ERO, A6303, BOX 317, File 1/28, Memo from Gibberd to HDC General Manager, 2 May 1958.
[18] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 35.

solve.'[19] In terms of technical causes of open development, Gibberd deduced that the greater the spaces around the dwellings in the town, the greater the feeling of openness. For Gibberd, the spaces around dwellings could be divided into two types of space, each with different causes and solutions to the problem of openness. Firstly, there were the gaps between the ends of buildings, and secondly, the spaces between opposite buildings. The latter, Gibberd stressed, was divided into a further two types: space in front of the houses – the 'street picture' – and space behind the houses – private gardens which should be 'shut out of the view.'[20] The gaps between building ends had the potential to be closed up entirely by building terraces; however, obtaining a close relationship between opposite blocks was more problematic.

5.1   SPACE BETWEEN BUILDINGS

In her letter to the HDC, Evelyn Sharp was of the opinion that the root cause of the openness in the New Towns was the result of insistence from local councils for wide roads between housing. Although Gibberd had reported that the problem was more complex than this, in his 1953 publication *Town Design,* Gibberd suggested that a reduction in road width could obtain a more intimate relationship between house and road, and between houses on opposite sides of the road. The notions of intimacy and enclosure as urban qualities had arisen in both Thomas Sharp's and Gibberd's visual planning studies of the 1940s. In 1953 in *Town Design,* Gibberd argued that the Garden City Movement had not achieved this intimate urban quality since house facades were wide apart. Furthermore, the spaces between the houses had been laid out as landscape and gardens.[21] Drawing from his wartime studies, Gibberd used the example of Bath (fig.5.3) to demonstrate that by reducing verges and front gardens, and by bringing dwellings closer together, it was possible to 'recapture that urban quality which characterises our best town building.'[22] In *Town Design,* Gibberd contrasted the Bath image with a photograph of Luton (fig.5.4), which showed a

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[19] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/28, 'Why the New Towns Look Open', Report by Frederick Gibberd, 15 May 1958, p. 1.

[20] Ibid., p. 2.

[21] Gibberd, *Town Design*, p. 231.

[22] Ibid.

wide road lined with small houses, clearly demonstrating the 'fault of most housing schemes.'[23] By 1953, Gibberd had convinced the HDC Board members that houses with small front gardens, or no front gardens at all, could increase the feeling of urbanity in housing areas.[24]

Fig.5.3. An urban quality at Bath
(Gibberd, *Town Design*, 1953)

Fig.5.4. Wide roads in Luton
(Gibberd, *Town Design*, 1953)

Gordon Cullen observed that wide open streets had been a major fault of the New Towns in his 1953 'Prairie Planning' article, which accompanied J. M. Richards' 'Failure of the New Towns' article. Cullen's sketch (fig.5.5) symbolised the visual problems caused by the low density restrictions in the early parts of the New Towns. Cullen also used photographs of sparse street scenes in Hatfield, Stevenage and Harlow to support his argument (fig.5.6).

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[23] Gibberd, *Town Design*, p. 231.
[24] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Extract from Corporation Minutes, 7 January 1953.

Fig.5.5. Failure of the New Towns
(*AR*, Jul. 1953)

Fig.5.6 'Prairie Planning' in the New Towns
(*AR*, Jul. 1953)

The Harlow photograph showed Tanys Dell by Fry and Drew (fig.5.6, bottom left), with Cullen commenting that 'the unhappy pedestrian is left with a feeling of hopelessness in face of a terrifying eternity of wideness.'[25] As Chapter 3 has shown, Cullen argued that a greater sense of enclosure could achieve a greater urban quality, but he also argued that a by-product of low density development was the problem of what to do with the land between the houses. The images show clearly that the problem was not simply wide roads, but in addition, wide pavements and grass verges on either side of the road, spreading the houses further apart still.

5.1.1 Road Widths

For the New Town Development Corporations, road design was not straightforward. In the early stages of planning, in addition to the HDC, a further four authorities were concerned with road development: the Essex County Council, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, the Ministry of Health, and the Epping Rural District Council.[26] These authorities had differing views on road width requirements, and varying degrees of power. The Epping Rural District Council (ERDC, later the

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[25] Gordon Cullen, 'Prairie Planning in the New Towns', *AR*, 114 (1953), 33-36 (p. 34).
[26] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/30, 'Widths of Development Roads by the Chief Engineer', 22 February 1949.

Harlow Urban District Council, HUDC) was the new street by-law authority for the Harlow area, whereas the Essex County Council (ECC) was the Highways Authority.[27] Since the ECC was to take over the roads following the dissolution of the HDC, it was in the HDC's best interests to comply with the ECC standards. The HDC files show that failure to comply with ECC requirements resulted in the threat of refusal to take over roads for future maintenance.[28] The 1949 HDC guidelines for development roads (roads within housing groups), stated that the overall width of the road should be no less than that laid down by the ERDC, whereas widths of carriageways, verges and paths should conform to the minimum standards set out in the Ministry of Town and Country Planning pamphlet *Redevelopment of Central Areas*.[29] It is significant that the HDC chose to adopt these guidelines at Harlow, considering Harlow's location within Abercrombie's 'outer country ring' as opposed to a central urban area. In most cases, the ECC standards were based on the ERDC bye-laws, so conforming to those would satisfy the ECC. For development roads, the ERDC had set minimum road carriageway and pathway widths, as well as minimum distances from road centre lines to building lines. When these minimum widths are drawn to scale (fig.5.7) the remaining distances can be calculated (shown in red). This shows that the remaining distance from the edge of the pavement to the building line varies between 13.0 and 16.5 ft, thus creating wide spaces in addition to roads and footways between opposite houses. In contrast, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning recommendations gave only an overall width, without giving minimum distances from the road centre line to the building line. If the overall street width is drawn to scale for Ministry Types A and B, with the minimum road and footway widths marked, the total remaining width is 8 ft either side of the carriageway between the edge of the footway to the building line. This is half of the minimum space recommended by ECC and ERDC standards. Furthermore, Types C and D of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning guide gave neither an overall width nor a distance from centre line to building line. Again, drawn to scale, it might be assumed that housing could be built directly against the footway since no

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[27] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/30, Matters to be raised with Minister at visit on 8 March 1949.
[28] Ibid.
[29] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/30, Guide to Engineering Requirements in Connection with Planning Housing Layouts, 1 June 1949.

remaining space is created from overall street dimensions. By adopting these standards at Harlow, the HDC could minimise excess space between opposite houses, since Gibberd had stressed to the HDC 'the nearer the houses were to the roads, the more urban the town would tend to become.'[30] The HDC attempted to follow a mixture of recommendations which would gain ECC approval, while at the same time, creating the most intimate street scene as possible.
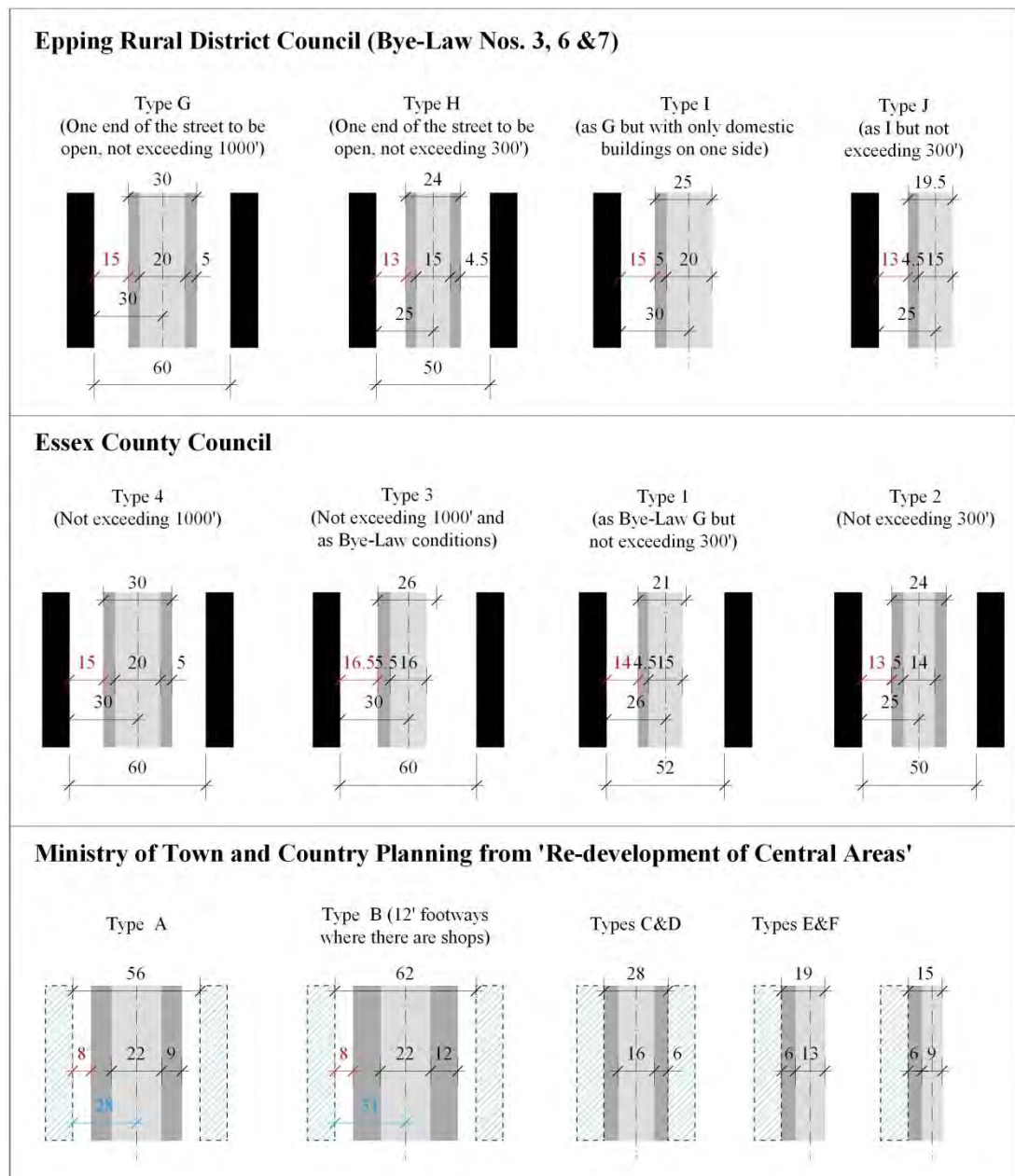
Fig.5.7. Road Standards Comparison Diagrams

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[30] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Extract from Planning Board, *Densities and Garden Sizes*, 11 December 1952.

When the Conservatives came to power in 1951, their ideas for higher residential densities were reflected in the new road width guidelines: *Schedule of Suggested Minimum Street Widths for Carriageways and Footways of New Streets,* published by the newly formed Ministry of Housing and Local Government. The schedule supported the idea of adopting narrower roads since all reference to overall widths had been omitted in order to allow 'flexibility in design.'[31]

The HDC's attempt to combine a mixture of favourable recommendations may have worked in principle, however, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning files show that there had been ongoing difficulties in persuading County Surveyors to agree to any reductions in overall road widths.[32] Evelyn Sharp noted in 1952, that although wide streets in housing developments may have been attributed to bye-law requirements and too low an overall density, in some cases, it was a result of 'demands' made by County Surveyors as a condition of 'taking over' the street.[33] The disagreements between Council Surveyors and Development Corporations were a result of two things. Firstly, as J. B. Cullingworth noted in *Peacetime History: Environmental Planning Volume III* an 'undercurrent of resentment' presented itself as friction between the local authorities and development corporations.[34] This was due to the selection process of corporation members and the exclusion of nominated councillors. This problem was particularly acute at Harlow. Minister of Housing and Local Government Harold Macmillan was keen to resolve the problems caused by the high specifications required by County Surveyors, especially after his visit to Harlow, where the HDC had faced numerous difficulties with the County Surveyor.[35] Secondly, in criticising the local planning authorities' general preference for loose low-density housing development, Evelyn Sharp noted that planning began as a 'revolt against the overcrowded towns' and was 'rooted in the Garden City

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[31] Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Schedule of Suggested Minimum Street Widths for Carriageways and Footways of New Streets* (London: HMSO, 1951), p. 2.

[32] The National Archives, HLG 104/23, Letter from Principal Regional Architect (Region 9), 27 October 1949.

[33] TNA, HLG 104/24, Report 'Waste of Land in Housing Development', Evelyn Sharp, 30 January 1952.

[34] J. B. Cullingworth, *Peacetime History: Environmental Planning Volume III New Towns Policy* (London: HMSO, 1979), p. 292.

[35] TNA, HLG 104/24, Memo, 8 February 1952.

Movement.'[36] In her view the Ministry's task was to educate the planning officials, in order to create more urban environments in the New Towns.[37]

Gibberd also noted the same problem under 'psychological and social reasons for open development'. Local Authorities, as well as some of the Development Corporations, thought mostly in terms of 'housing estates, garden city development and average housing densities.'[38] Building types which could give an urban scale, such as long unbroken terraces, three- and four-storey houses and flats, and tall flat blocks, were unpopular with both tenants and local authorities. Furthermore, Gibberd explained that speculative builders and Development Corporations building houses for sale in the New Towns built only two-storey semi-detached houses at a low density of twelve dwellings per acre, thus contributing to the overall low density picture. However, Gibberd stated that houses for sale were bound to take such a form, in order to succeed in the open market.[39] Fundamentally, in Gibberd's mind, the chief social reason for open development was that most people, particularly those moving from London into the New Towns, believed they would be 'happier in open, rather than compact development.'[40] This was indeed the case, as later in the *Harlow Citizen* a resident at the 'Rivermill' housing group argued that this area looked like a 'slum' due to 'the close density of houses, its Victorian-type terraces' as well as its 'narrow roads.'[41] Despite acknowledging the preference of incoming tenants, Gibberd proceeded to argue that the New Towns were too 'open and wasteful in layout' and that the HDC should continue to aim for the creation of a 'closely knit form of development with some feeling of urbanity.'[42]

Nicholas Bullock has recently argued that central to the campaign for better post-war housing was the opportunity created by reconstruction to continue the slum

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[36] TNA, HLG 104/24, Report 'Waste of Land in Housing Development', Evelyn Sharp, 30 January 1952.
[37] Ibid.
[38] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/28, 'Why the New Towns Look Open', Report by Frederick Gibberd, 15 May 1958, p. 5.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., p. 4.
[41] 'It looks like a Slum', *Harlow Citizen*, 19 April 1963, Letters to the Editor, p. 6.
[42] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/28, 'Why the New Towns Look Open', Report by Frederick Gibberd, 15 May 1958, p. 6.

clearances which had begun during the inter-war period. In addition, Bullock argues that the slum clearance campaigns had brought to the public's attention the poor housing conditions in the heart of Britain's industrial cities. After the Second World War, these issues remained in the public eye.[43] Between 1955 and 1974, some 1.2 million working-class dwellings were demolished through slum clearance schemes.[44] By the mid 1960s in London, the last 'urban cottages' had been cleared, while local authorities continued to demolish late-Victorian terraced housing.[45] Thus, during the slum clearance programs in Britain, the Victorian terrace became associated with working-class slum housing.

Chapter 1 of this study has demonstrated that a small number of modernist housing reformers and architects promoted the idea of the terrace in the 1930s and 1940s. Elizabeth Denby had carried out social surveys, concluding that the terraced house could be the ideal housing solution following slum clearances. Arthur Trystan Edwards and Thomas Sharp also advocated the terrace as a more collective approach to housing design. However, since the terraced house had become associated with working-class slum housing; those moving out of the inner city 'slums' into the New Towns wanted spacious houses with gardens. Therefore, in the 1940s and 50s, the public viewed the Victorian terrace with contempt, while modernist architects (aside from those listed above) disregarded them since they were decorated houses from the past. This chapter will reveal how, despite its negative connotations, Gibberd argued for the inclusion of terraces at Harlow, since he believed their aesthetic qualities would contribute to a sense of enclosure and urbanity.

At The Hornbeams and Rivermill housing groups in the Little Parndon neighbourhood, Gibberd's attempt to create a more closely knit appearance is evident. These housing groups were designed by Gibberd and Partners, with construction at The Hornbeams starting in 1956. Following the changing attitudes towards density and the subsequent density increase across the town to 50 persons

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[43] Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, p. 16.
[44] Andrew Tallon, *Urban Regeneration in the UK*, 2nd edn (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. 35.
[45] Graham Towers, *Shelter is Not Enough: Transforming Multi-storey Housing* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2000), p. 29.

per acre, The Hornbeams group was planned to a high density of 17.8 dwellings per acre (or 57 persons per acre). Again, Gibberd achieved a higher density by balancing densities across the whole neighbourhood, with adjacent groups designed to lower densities. A comparison with the earlier housing groups Mark Hall Moors and Stackfield in the Mark Hall North neighbourhood, (also designed by Gibberd), clearly demonstrates how the density increase facilitated a greater sense of enclosure. Firstly, at The Hornbeams and Rivermill, open green spaces were significantly reduced in comparison to Mark Hall North. Larger open spaces were designed to be out of sight from the street, kept to the rear of the houses. Grass verges along footways were eliminated completely, in order to draw opposite housing blocks closer for a greater sense of enclosure (fig.5.8).

Fig.5.8. Comparison of open green spaces in Mark Hall North and
The Hornbeams and Rivermill

A   B

Fig.5.9. Open development at Stackfield (A) and enclosed roads at The Hornbeams (B)

Fig.5.9 shows inverted figure-ground drawings of both housing groups, with houses shown in white, private gardens as grey and open public space shown as black. Mark Hall Moors and Stackfield comprise semi-detached houses and short terraces. The housing loosely follows the line of the roads, but they are set back from the carriageways with grass verges and open green spaces. The figure-ground drawings show how the earlier housing was positioned within open space (A), rather than being designed to create spaces as at The Hornbeams (B).

The first housing groups in the New Town had provided an opportunity for reflection, and from 1953 onwards, and perhaps as a reaction against the criticism from the *AR*, Gibberd's ideas of urbanity crystallised further. In the 1953 Ministry of Housing and Local Government design guide, Gibberd contributed a chapter on 'The Design of Residential Areas.' The underlying themes were similar to those presented in the more detailed *Town Design* published the same year. Elaborating upon his earlier ideas about three-dimensional design, Gibberd began to stress the importance of the design of urban spaces, arguing that the design of space formed by buildings was equally as important aesthetically as the design of the buildings

themselves.[46] Gibberd used the old English town of Wilton in Wiltshire to demonstrate how urban spaces could be shaped by buildings (fig.5.10).

Fig.5.10. A sense of enclosure at Wilton   Fig.5.11. Colour study at Wilton, 1945
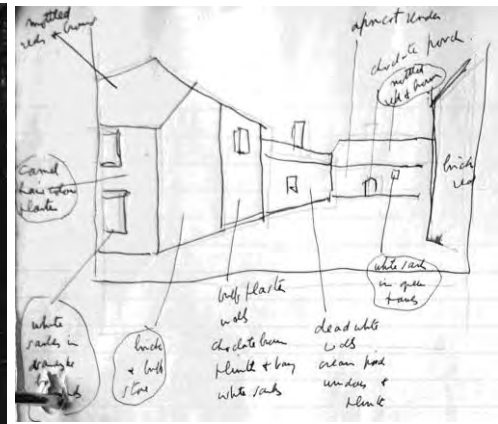
('The Design of Residential Areas', 1953)   (Diary 1944-46, Gibberd Garden Archive)

Gibberd had previously examined the same street scene in 1945 as part of his texture and colour studies (fig.5.11). Later in the 1953 Ministry design guide, Gibberd revisited the same scene, this time observing that the sense of enclosure was strengthened by the building at right angles to the row of houses. He stated that in designing the street as a space, the two major tasks were to bring the buildings on opposite sides of the road in relationship to one another, as well as to 'close the view down the street.'[47] Closing the view was important since 'the degree to which the space gives a sense of enclosure depends on how far the views out of it are controlled.'[48] The first obvious solution to closing the view down the street Gibberd stated was to place a building at the end of the street. Another method Gibberd suggested was to introduce curves into the street; this would create 'inherent interest', 'more varied street pictures' and a 'sense of enclosure.'[49] Gibberd employed both these techniques at The Hornbeams and Rivermill, closing off street views with terminating buildings perpendicular to the street, as well as introducing curved streets.

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[46] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 23.
[47] Ibid., p. 42.
[48] Ibid., p. 48.
[49] Ibid., p. 44.

Fig.5.12 shows a comparison of visibility graph analyses for the Mark Hall Moors area (A), and The Hornbeams and Rivermill (B). These drawings were created using software which has been developed by part of the UCL Space Syntax team over the last decade; this type of analysis first being applied to the built environment by Braaksma and Cook in 1980.[50] The 'Depthmap' program works mathematically by producing an 'adjacency matrix', where 1 is placed in the matrix where two locations are mutually visible, and a 0 where they are not.[51] When a two-dimensional plan in DXF format is imported into the program, a grid is automatically generated in relation to the scale of the imported drawing. The space around the buildings can then be selected for analysis using the 'fill' tool. For each point at the centre of each grid square, the program calculates how many other points are visible from each point, shading the grid square accordingly. Red represents the points which are visible from the greatest number of other points, while at the other end of the scale, dark blue represents points which can be viewed from the fewest number of other points. Therefore, it could be said that the blue areas show the least viewed places, or, the most intimate and enclosed areas.
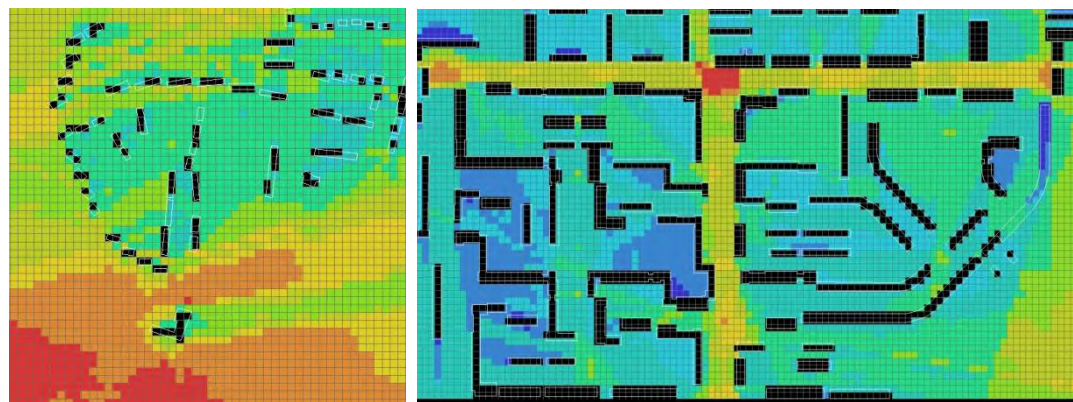
A **B**

Fig.5.12. Visibility Graph Analysis: Mark Hall Moors (A) Hornbeams and Rivermill (B)

Drawing A shows large areas of red and orange which correspond to the large open green spaces in Mark Hall North, with no sense of enclosure. In comparison, drawing B has only small areas of red and orange. The curved street in the Rivermill

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[50] Alasdair Turner, 'Depthmap: A Program to Perform Visibility Graph Analysis', Proceedings of the 3rd International Symposium on Space Syntax Atlanta, (2001) <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/3sss/papers_pdf/31_turner.pdf> [accessed 19 May 2010] (p. 1).
[51] Ibid.

group (to the right of the drawing) is shaded blue and green, demonstrating Gibberd's principle of creating enclosure by introducing curves to the street. The most visible areas in The Hornbeams and Rivermill are the straight roads, particularly at the point of intersection. The shading does, however, demonstrate how the terminating buildings at the ends of the roads contain the space. Gibberd suggested that if the roads were too long, terminating buildings would 'become too insignificant to form a satisfactory end wall to the street space.'[52] Introducing curves was one solution to this problem; another was to subdivide the long street into a series of spaces.[53] Drawing B shows a series of enclosed spaces in the Hornbeams housing group (left of the central road). These are shaded dark blue, indicating the most enclosed areas.

The following study shows a comparison of the experience of enclosure at Mark Hall North and The Hornbeams and Rivermill. In plan, points were marked at 100 metre intervals along the principal routes through each housing group (fig.5.13). Walking along each route, a panoramic photograph was taken from each point to document the sense of enclosure (fig.5.14). To clarify these images, I have produced a drawing which shows the solid vertical facades which enclose the space of the street (fig.5.15). This shows that within the Hornbeams housing group, the vertical facades form an almost complete envelope around the space creating a sense of enclosure. At Mark Hall North on the other hand, the buildings appear small and spread out within the space, rather than enclosing the space. The extent of the space viewed from each point has been mapped in fig.5.16. Again, this highlights the containment and enclosure at The Hornbeams; in contrast, large wedges of open parkland can be viewed from the unenclosed street in Mark Hall North. The reduction in road width together with the density increase, reduction of public open green space, as well as the almost complete envelope of building facades, were factors which contributed to a greater sense of enclosure at The Hornbeams. The latter aspect will be discussed in more detail in this chapter and the next.

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[52] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 44.
[53] Ibid.

Fig.5.13. Comparing enclosure at Mark Hall North with The Hornbeams and Rivermill

Fig.5.14. Panoramic photographs taken at each viewpoint at Mark Hall North (left) and The Hornbeams and Rivermill (right)
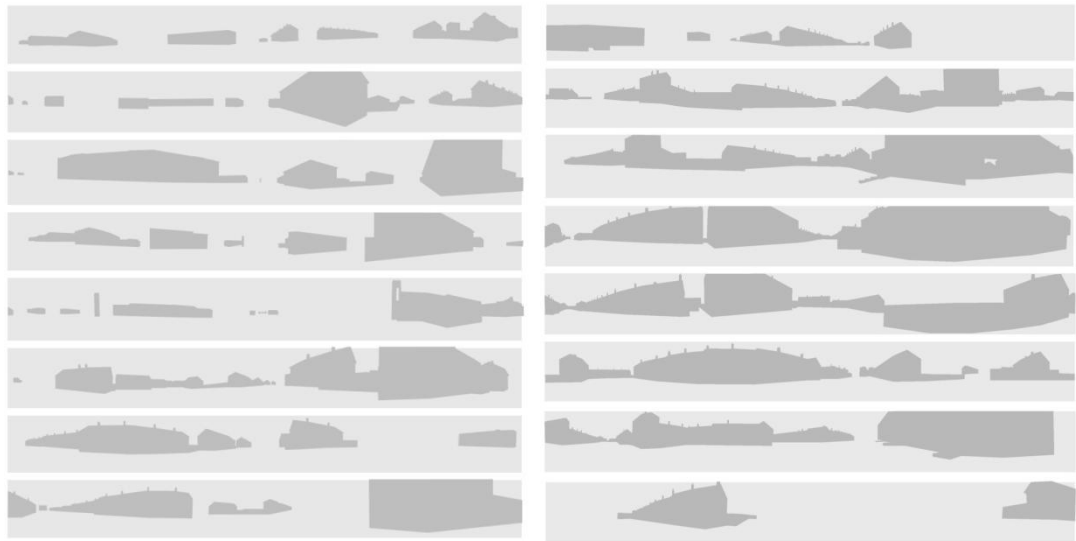
Fig.5.15. Mapping vertical surfaces which enclose the street scene at each viewpoint
Mark Hall North (left) and The Hornbeams and Rivermill (right)

Mark Hall North

The Hornbeams and Rivermill
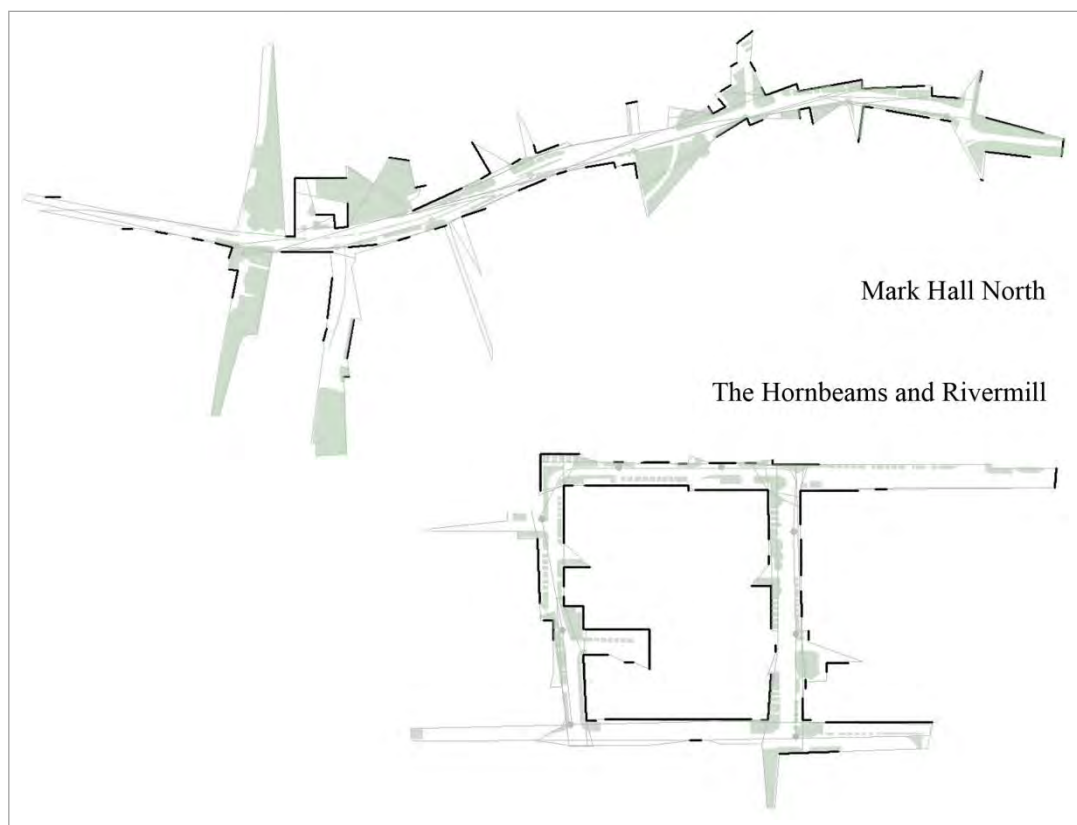
Fig.5.16. Mapping viewed spaces from each point, showing building lines and green space

As the comparison study has shown, overcoming the open appearance in the New Towns was not as simple as simply decreasing the width of the roads and closing off views along the street. Gibberd elaborated on the problem in his 1958 confidential report on why the New Towns look open. He argued that buildings opposite one another must be in proportion to the space between them, so that there could be a relationship between the two. Houses became disassociated with each other if positioned along wide roads; narrowing the road could facilitate a greater sense of enclosure; however, increasing the height of the buildings could also be a solution to the problem. Gibberd stressed that 'a wide road only leads to openness when the building height is not in proportion to it.'[54] Chapters 3 and 4 have demonstrated the difficulty Development Corporations experienced when proposing flats of three or more storeys. Given a choice between increasing building height and narrowing roads, the HDC tended to opt for the latter. Furthermore, the narrowing of roads meant more economical development, with less material required for construction.

5.1.2   Footpath-Access Housing

In 1953, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government published an additional supplement to the *1949 Housing Manual*. The previous supplement *Houses 1952*, had suggested economical ways for local authorities to provide houses in the face of limited materials, labour and capital, without compromising on standards. The following year, still faced with shortages in resources for house building, *Houses 1953* promoted new ways to save labour and materials, as well as saving land.[55] *Houses 1952* had dealt only with economical house plans; *Houses 1953* on the other hand, also dealt with economic housing layouts and road design. To save money and to create higher densities, the Ministry advocated cul-de-sac layouts and introduced the idea of 'footpath access' housing. The concept of arranging housing in rows perpendicular to the road was not entirely new, however. In Frankfurt, housing had previously been arranged in this pattern, known as *Zeilenbau*, (building in rows), by modernist architect and CIAM member Ernest May in the late 1920s. Eric Mumford

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[54] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/28, 'Why the New Towns Look Open', Report by Frederick Gibberd, 15 May 1958, p. 2.

[55] Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Housing 1953 Third Supplement to the Housing Manual 1949* (London: HMSO, 1953), p. iii.

has recently suggested that this form of housing developed in an effort to transcend old street architecture; it also reflected the modernist architects' drive for a rational scientific approach to housing design.[56] The MARS Town Planning Committee had also adopted this type of layout in their neighbourhood planning proposals. In 1953, the Ministry advocated this type of layout, for houses rather than flats, to save costs on road construction by eliminating roads between houses completely. This would allow opposite blocks to be drawn together considerably closer than previously, to create a greater sense of enclosure. However, in Gibberd's opinion, despite the closeness of opposite blocks, arranging blocks perpendicular to the road edge would have a detrimental effect on the overall street picture.
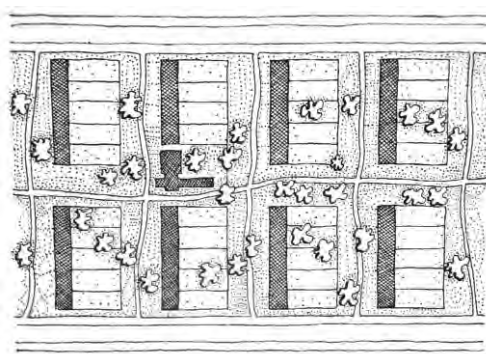
Fig.5.17. Footpath access (Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', 1953)
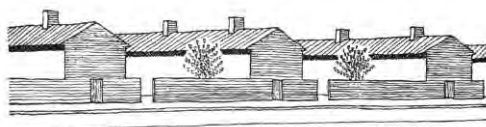
Fig.5.18. A sense of enclosure (Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', 1953)

Gibberd elaborated upon the problem in *The Design of Residential Areas*, firstly noting as the Ministry had done, that footpath access was an economical form of housing layout. However, he highlighted the key difference between footpath-access housing and conventional housing; the latter appeared as two-dimensional walls to the space of the road, while the former were seen as three dimensional objects with end elevations 'hard up' against the road (fig.5.17).[57] Gibberd believed the pattern of end elevations separated by open spaces of back gardens had a negative impact on the street picture. He suggested that if this type of development was adopted, it would be beneficial aesthetically to transform the gable ends into the dominant feature of the street, while at the same time, shutting out the private rear gardens from view. This could be done by linking the blocks with screen walls. Gibberd argued this would shift the visual emphasis away from the garden spaces

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[56] Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism*, p. 30.
[57] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 64.

between the parallel blocks, back to the road (fig.5.18). In turn, this would create a greater sense of enclosure to the street, with the layout taking on 'the characteristics of a street picture.'[58]

Another solution to retain a sense of enclosure in the street picture with footpath-access layout was 'simply to make the garden so small that it is only an incident in the scene.' Gibberd suggested that the spaces between the blocks could be designed as communal landscape, with rear gardens 'little more than terraces partially screened from view.'[59] This form of layout had been successful on the Continent, particularly in Malmö, which Gibberd demonstrated with two photographs. However, in England this idea had not been popular, mainly as a result of the strong desire for a private garden. Gibberd referred to his experience at Harlow where housing had been laid out in this way; the tenants were adamant that the communal gardens should be divided by fencing to create private individual gardens. Despite this, Gibberd suggested that it would be 'unwise to damn this form of layout outright' until more experience had been gained. Moreover, Gibberd believed it was possible that the public could change their minds about footpath-access layouts and become 'more appreciative of its advantages.'[60]

Although Gibberd had advocated footpath-access layouts in *The Design of Residential Areas*, albeit with wall screening measures, the HDC files show that in most cases, Gibberd would argue for the adoption of conventional layouts over footpath-access housing. As part of the preparation of *Houses 1953,* the Ministry approached the HDC requesting an area in Harlow for which they could design and compare various housing layouts to show differences in development costs. The Ministry were allocated 'Area 50' – 24 acres in the Brays Grove neighbourhood in the south east neighbourhood cluster. Main roads and cycle tracks had already been laid out by the HDC; this provided the basis for the Ministry's plans. Four examples were shown in the manual, each planned to a density of 16 dwellings per acre (approximately 53 persons per acre).[61] Scheme A was labelled a 'Conventional

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[58] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 64.
[59] Ibid., p. 65.
[60] Ibid.
[61] MHLG, *Houses 1953*, p. 39.

Layout' and comprised mainly two-storey terraces either positioned parallel to roads or arranged into squares around cul-de-sacs (fig.5.19). Scheme B was designed as a 'service cul-de-sac' layout, with houses chiefly organised around cul-de-sacs branching from the main roads, with some footpath-access houses in the centre of the housing area (fig.5.20). Schemes C and D demonstrated footpath-access layouts, with C showing single access layouts with enclosed back gardens (fig.5.21), and D showing 'double footpath access' layouts (fig.5.22). The latter comprised rows of housing arranged perpendicular to main roads in a similar fashion to *Zeilenbau* housing. Although arguing chiefly for economical housing design, the Ministry also indicated the social benefits of such housing; tenants could enjoy the peace and quiet of a house 'set away from the danger of traffic.'[62] Furthermore, reflecting a modernist rational line of thinking, the majority of blocks were orientated with south-facing gardens and living rooms, to maximise the tenants' enjoyment of sunshine.

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[62] MHLG, *Houses 1953*, p. 48.

Fig.5.19. Scheme A

Fig.5.20. Scheme B

Fig.5.21. Scheme C
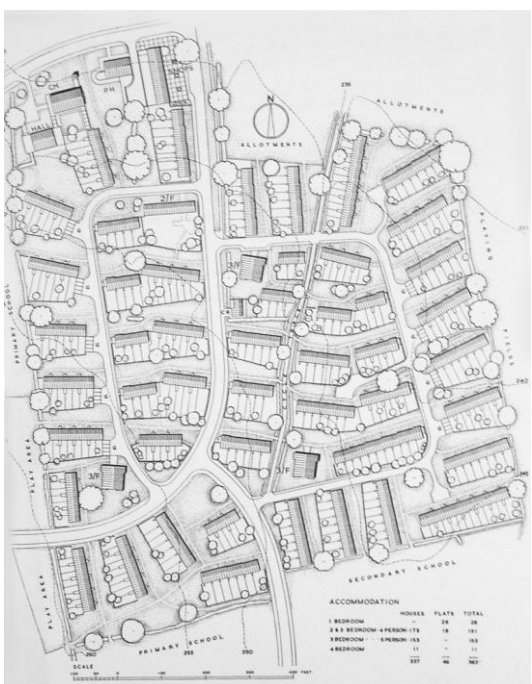
Fig.5.22. Scheme D

Fig.5.19.   Scheme A, Conventional Layout

Fig.5.20.   Scheme B, "Service Cul-de-sac" Layout

Fig.5.21.   Scheme C, Single Footpath Access Layout with enclosed back gardens

Fig.5.22.   Scheme D, Double Footpath Access Layout [63]

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[63] MHLG, *Houses 1953*, pp. 44-49.

The Ministry explained to the HDC that in turning to Harlow to demonstrate the application of Ministry designed housing layouts in the New Towns, it was hoped that the opportunity would be taken to 'investigate the possibilities of the less orthodox patterns', for example, either Scheme C or D.[64] Despite the economical and social advantages presented by the Ministry, Gibberd was of the opinion that 'Conventional Layout Scheme A' should be adopted by the HDC in Area 50 at Harlow. The Ministry argued that money could be saved by the reduction of total road area; the footpath-access schemes eliminated roads in front of houses completely, with communal landscape and paths taking their place. Gibberd on the other hand argued that such areas of communal landscape tended to give a rural character to the layout which compromised the task of creating urbanity at Harlow.[65] Writing to Comptroller and Deputy General Manager Ben Hyde Harvey, Gibberd argued for the implementation of Ministry Scheme A, rather than the adoption of cul-de-sac or footpath-access layouts, on the basis of tightening up the character of the layout.[66] Ignoring the Ministry's suggestion to opt for one of the more experimental schemes for social and economic reasons, Gibberd argued:

> We feel that it would be going against all our experience to build schemes B, C, and D. Furthermore, scheme 'D', which is based almost entirely in its conception on communal open space, has the additional disadvantage, from our point of view that the back gardens are totally exposed to view. In some of our earlier schemes we had exposed back gardens and the prospect was so untidy that we subsequently instructed our Architects to do all they could to screen them.[67]

Essentially, to maintain a sense of enclosure to the street picture, Gibberd favoured Scheme A, which kept larger private gardens to the rear of houses, screened from the public street scene. His reasons were based on aesthetics and did not take into account social aspects in relation to housing orientation. Furthermore, like the later

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[64] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Ernest Marples (Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government) to HDC Chairman Richard Costain, 21 September 1953.

[65] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Memo from Gibberd to HDC General Manager W. Eric Adams, 23 September 1953.

[66] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Memo from Gibberd to HDC Comptroller Ben Hyde Harvey, 17 September 1953.

[67] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Memo from Gibberd to HDC General Manager W. Eric Adams, 23 September 1953.

housing groups of The Hornbeams and Rivermill, the housing of Scheme A created more traditional urban spaces, as fig.5.23 shows. In order to illustrate the concept of designing buildings to form urban spaces, I have used a technique Gibberd adopted in both *Town Design* and *Three-dimensional Aspects of Housing Design*. The buildings and private rear gardens have been blacked out to show only the open public spaces of the housing layout. I have done the same for the Ministry's Scheme D (fig.5.24), which clearly demonstrates how the housing blocks are positioned in the space, as opposed to forming or enclosing it. Gibberd and the HDC proceeded to build the Ministry's Scheme A in Harlow, despite the social and economic benefits presented by the Ministry. In Gibberd's mind, as he had suggested in *The Design of Residential Areas,* footpath-access layouts had a negative impact on the sense of enclosure of the street, and therefore, to the overall sense of urbanity.
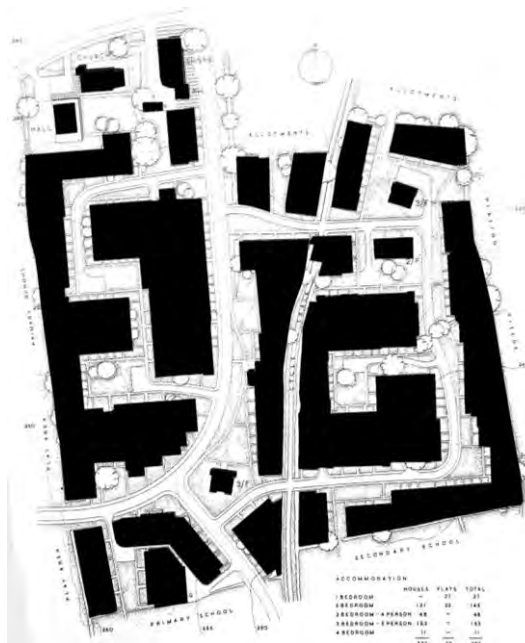
Fig.5.23. Scheme A, Open public space   Fig.5.24. Scheme D, Open public space
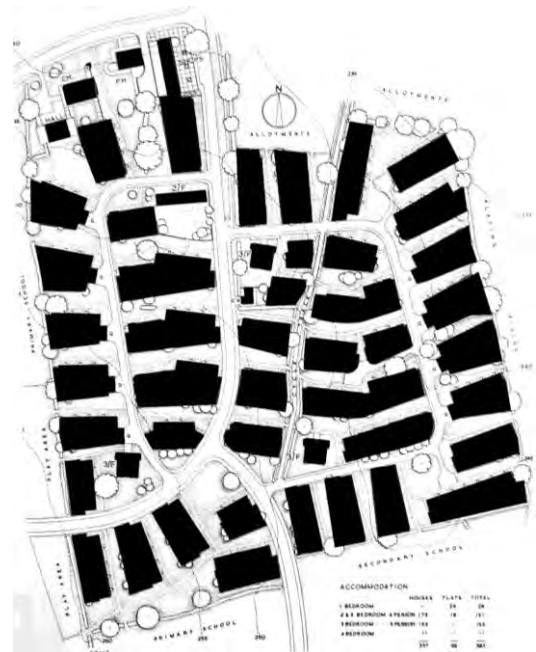
Despite Gibberd's views, a number of footpath-access housing schemes were built at Harlow, particularly during the mid 1960s in the Great Parndon cluster. Significant increases in car ownership had increased the appeal of Radburn type planning. These included schemes mainly by nominated private architects: Brockles Mead by Leonard Manasseh (1965-68); Moorfield by Clifford Culpin and Partners (1966-67) and Shawbridge by Eric Lyons and Partners (1962-64) (fig.5.25). At Shawbridge, Lyons designed a series of two-storey courtyard houses in terrace formation. The

terraces join the street at right angles; however, unlike Gibberd's earlier recommendations, screen walls were not incorporated with the flank elevations. As Gibberd suggested, the absence of screen walls shifts the visual emphasis from the street to the garden spaces between the parallel blocks, having a negative effect on the sense of enclosure to the street picture.

Fig.5.25. Footpath-access housing at Shawbridge, by Eric Lyons & Partners (1962-65)

At Hatfield New Town, architects Herbert Tayler and David Green found an alternative solution to this problem. Commissioned by Lionel Brett and the Hatfield Development Corporation, Tayler and Green designed 'Downs Central', a housing scheme which comprised two parallel streets linked with two-storey footpath-access housing. Northdown Road is the principal street of the scheme, lined to the north with three-storey terraced housing. On the south side of the street where the footpath-access houses adjoin, a one-storey block elevated on *pilotis* bridges the gap which would normally occur in such schemes (fig.5.26). The resulting visual effect is a sense of enclosure to the main street; the effect is more apparent when contrasted with the rear view of the scheme from Southdown Road. Tayler and Green were clearly aiming to create a sense of enclosure to the main street of the housing group. While Lyons's Shawbridge scheme perhaps placed greater emphasis on the design of housing rather than the relationship of the housing to the street, Tayler and Green's efforts at Hatfield demonstrate that other architects working in

the New Towns were making a conscious decision to design an enclosed urban street.

Fig.5.26. Footpath-access housing at Hatfield New Town
'Downs Central' by Tayler and Green (1959-65) viewed from Northdown Road

Fig.5.27. Footpath-access housing at Hatfield New Town
'Downs Central' by Tayler and Green (1959-65) viewed from Southdown Road

5.2 GAPS BETWEEN BUILDING ENDS

This type of linking solution was not an option when Gibberd and the HDC had to choose between the four schemes designed by the Ministry for Area 50 in Harlow. Therefore, by choosing the conventional layout rather than adopting a footpath-access design, Gibberd and the HDC Design Group were able to create a greater sense of enclosure to the street picture. The housing blocks followed the line of the street, thus creating spaces between them, rather than being objects positioned within space. In 1953 in *The Design of Residential Areas*, Gibberd explained that the semi-detached houses of the inter-war period had failed to create enclosed street pictures, since the houses were 'too short and the gaps between them too numerous for the spaces between them to be significant'. This, according to Gibberd, had resulted in development of a suburban rather than urban character.[68] To create enclosure and therefore a greater sense of urbanity, Gibberd argued that houses should be built in terraces, 'so as to form designed spaces', which would in turn 'recapture the lost art of town building.'[69]

5.2.1 Terraces

Gibberd elaborated further on the terraced house in *Town Design,* which was also published in 1953. The terrace house in the street design made a more 'urbane composition', as it could act as a two-dimensional edge to contain the street space, whereas short houses appeared to stand within the space as three-dimensional objects.[70] The terrace house, Gibberd explained, was 'a building type loved by those who seek to create a beautiful urban environment' however, at the same time, it was also a housing type 'disliked by the general public.'[71] The reason for this difference in opinion Gibberd argued was that the terrace – previously used by architects to create their most 'splendid urbane compositions' in Georgian cities like Bath – had since been 'degraded' by the speculative builder. Gibberd observed that in England, the general public disliked terraces since they associated them with working class

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[68] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 23.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Gibberd, *Town Design*, p. 221.
[71] Ibid.

housing, while local authorities tended not to construct terraces since they also associated them with the low quality housing built by speculative builders for industrial workers in the nineteenth century.[72] However, in Northern England, this was not necessarily the case. For example, the Speke estate south-east of Liverpool had a substantial proportion of terraced housing. The planning of the estate – intended for all classes – began in 1930, with construction of the residential district designed by Lancelot Keay beginning in 1938. At the end of the War, 1400 houses had been built; a further 5700 were built by 1953.[73] Gibberd's belief that local authorities in England were no longer building terraces after the War can be explained by what has recently been recognised as a projection of a 'Southern Englishness' across the country as a whole. Chapter 4 has shown how the English ideal of house and garden had less of an impact on the development of housing in the Scottish New Towns; similarly, it must be noted that there were regional differences of Englishness across the country.

Nevertheless, Gibberd continued to argue that the dislike of terraced housing in England was not based on aesthetic preferences but was a result of prejudice.[74] Since Gibberd believed terraced housing could give the town a more urban appearance, his solution was to create a demand for this type of dwelling by building 'really well-designed and well-sited terraced houses.'[75] Instead of accepting the people's preference for detached or semi-detached houses, Gibberd argued from an aesthetic standpoint that terraced houses should be constructed; if the houses were well designed, tenants might change their minds about terraced housing. This seemed to be a recurring theme in Gibberd's architectural approach at Harlow – building ahead of public taste hoping the public would 'catch up' – as Chapter 4 has also demonstrated.

It was not just local authorities who were hesitant when it came to constructing terraced housing. In 1954, members of the HDC also showed concerns over this type

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[72] Gibberd, *Town Design*, p. 221.
[73] Richard Pollard and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Lancashire: Liverpool and the South-West* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 461
[74] Ibid., p. 223.
[75] Gibberd, *Town Design*, p. 223.

of dwelling. After reviewing minutes of a Planning Board meeting he was unable to attend, Gibberd questioned why long terraces had been criticised at the meeting. Gibberd sent a memo to General Manager W. Eric Adams saying that architecturally, he would encourage the use of long terraces since firstly, they could give the town a more urban appearance and secondly, they would keep densities relatively high. Finally, he argued the point that terraces would make housing areas 'more distinctive from the usual housing schemes' that were being built throughout the country. [76] Gibberd continued by stating that he was not averse to including some semi-detached houses, however, he was 'very much against the overall pattern of short blocks.'[77] He recalled that three years previously the Board had requested his assurance that Harlow New Town would 'not look like Stevenage' and if the HDC were to insist on building only short blocks, Harlow would 'not look any different from Stevenage or anywhere else.'[78]

The views of the Stevenage Development Corporation were confirmed in 1958 when the Ministry of Housing forwarded information from a report by the Stevenage Social Relations Department to the HDC. The report argued in favour of open development in the New Towns; the large volume of criticism regarding openness did not reflect the majority of tenants' views, therefore, the report stressed the importance of residents over aesthetic considerations. Furthermore, it was argued that tenants were more concerned with the view from their house, rather than the view down the street, and views of open country were preferred.[79] The report also made reference to the psychological factors behind the preference for open development, suggesting that the New Towns were viewed as an escape from 'the evils' of the polluted, over-crowded cities which lacked gardens and openness.[80] Gibberd's ambition to create tighter development at Harlow went against all these

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[76] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Memo from Gibberd to General Manager W. Eric Adams, 22 September 1954.

[77] Ibid.

[78] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Memo from Gibberd to General Manager W. Eric Adams, 22 September 1954 - The early neighbourhoods of Stevenage comprised shorter blocks of three or four houses.

[79] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/28, HDC Liaison Officer to General Manager – forwarding letter from Ministry of Housing and Local Government containing information from the Mr Rees of the Stevenage Social Relations Department re: Should New Towns Look Open.

[80] Ibid.

points. Gibberd believed that to fulfil his artistic role as architect planner, he should focus predominantly on the visual planning of street-pictures, applying his aesthetic sensibilities to create a town with a sense of urbanity. This chapter has revealed that some residents of Harlow had become interested in the architectural discourse relating to visual town planning and took pride in the appearance of their town. In this sense, the belief shared by Gibberd and the *AR* editors that the 'layman' could learn to appreciate the visual planning elements of the surrounding urban environment proved to be possible. Conversely, Stevenage Development Corporation carried out social research which informed their design. This indicates a marked difference between the design approaches of the two Development Corporations; at Stevenage, social research informed the design of the appearance of the town; at Harlow, Gibberd advocated the development of street-pictures based on his own aesthetic sensibilities, despite the preferences of incoming tenants. In terms of including terraces as a ploy to create greater enclosure, Gibberd was able to convince the HDC to adopt long terraces, since a number of blocks were constructed in Harlow during this period (1953-1956), particularly in the Netteswell and Little Parndon neighbourhoods.

Fig.5.28 shows some examples of long two-storey terraces in Netteswell, designed by the HDC Design Group under the direction of Gibberd.

Fig.5.28. Long terraces in the Netteswell neighbourhood, Harlow

Little Parndon & Netteswell

A The Hides, (HDC Design Group, 1952-54)

B Broadfield, (HDC Design Group, 1952-54)

C Parsonage Leys, (HDC Design Group, 1953-55)

Any monotony which may have occurred at The Hides (A) is countered by the twelve-storey Hugh's Tower, which adds visual variety to the scene. At Broadfield (B) and Parsonage Leys (C), the street views have been closed by a public house on the main adjoining road, and by a four-storey block of flats respectively – a technique also employed by Gibberd at The Hornbeams and Rivermill. The continuous long terraces certainly enclose the space of the street picture; however, as Gibberd argued in *The Design of Residential Areas,* if a street was too long, this type of spatial arrangement would break down. Curved streets, as discussed previously in relation to the Rivermill housing group, was one solution to this problem. However, another solution advocated by Gibberd, was to 'subdivide the street into a series of spaces.'[81] This could be achieved by recessing terraced housing from the street edge, or by introducing open squares to the road and housing layout. Thinking back to his wartime studies of Sitte's plaza analysis, Gibberd illustrated several methods of creating squares with housing and flats (fig.5.29).
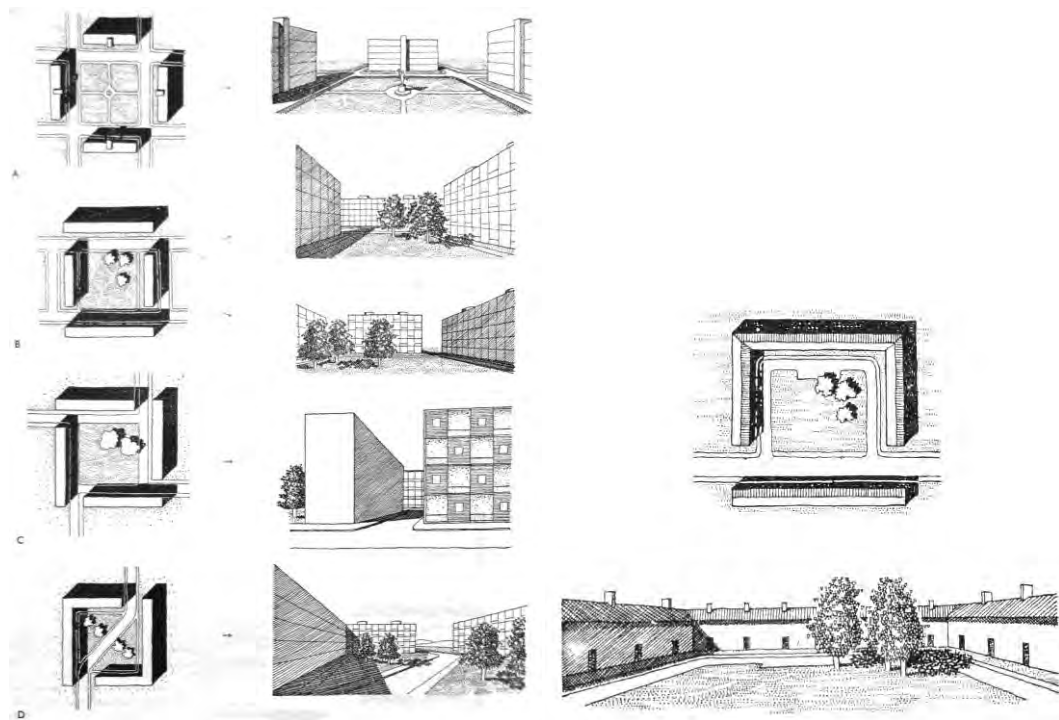
Fig.5.29. Creating squares and subdividing the street into spaces
(Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', 1953)

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[81] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 44.

Presenting sketches of the three-dimensional spaces created by each example, Gibberd argued that the major fault with example 'A' (top example of fig.5.29), where buildings were arranged around two principal axes, was that the gaps between the buildings were too large. Gibberd suggested that example 'C' was an 'ingenious solution to the problem of the open corner', and referred to Camillo Sitte's *The Art of Building Cities*, where Sitte had examined such historical examples in great depth. After briefly analysing the fourth example in the series, where opposite corners were closed to contain space within two 'L' shaped blocks, Gibberd suggested building up adjacent corners to create 'U' shaped blocks as an alternative (fig.5.29, right).
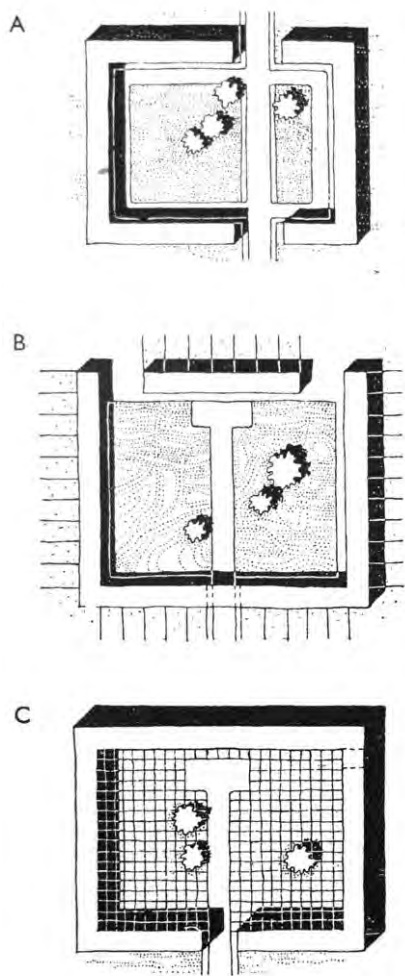
Fig.5.30. 'U' Shaped blocks
(Gibberd, 'The Design of
Residential Areas', 1953)

Gibberd had examined 'U'-shaped housing blocks in Hampstead Garden Suburb in 1941, as part of his wartime urban studies. Referring to the same example in *Town Design* later in 1953, Gibberd argued that the 'built-up corners and continuous walls of the 'U' give the space definition.'[82] Developing the 'U'-block composition, Gibberd illustrated three further examples (fig.5.30). Example 'A' showed two mirrored 'U'-blocks bisected by a road, bearing a remarkable similarity to the frequently used example of urbanity and enclosure at the Northumberland village of Blanchland. In *The Design of Residential Areas,* Gibberd took a critical stance suggesting that this type of layout was merely 'straightforward and satisfactory'; its weakness was that the floor of the space was bisected. [83] By replacing the through-road with a cul-de-sac (example B), a

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[82] Gibberd, *Town Design*, p. 280.
[83] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 54.

'strong sense of enclosure' could be achieved. Furthermore, if a single narrow entrance point was created in one side of the space only (example C), Gibberd argued that the 'absence of gaps in the corners give the strongest possible sense of enclosure.'[84] My argument that Gibberd believed a sense of enclosure could contribute to the overall sense of urbanity is strengthened by Gibberd's further comment: that 'a space of this kind can have a very pronounced urban character.' [85]

5.2.2 The Corner Unit

This type of enclosed square was first tested at Harlow in the Orchard Croft housing group in the Mark Hall South neighbourhood. Orchard Croft was designed by Gibberd and the HDC Design Group and has been discussed earlier in the study in relation to high density and three-storey development; the corner unit – a specially developed housing unit by Gibberd and the HDC – was also implemented in order to create a greater sense of enclosure. The need to develop such housing arose from attempts to create completely enclosed residential squares. When terraces were brought together at right angles to fully enclose the street, the rear gardens of adjoining blocks would unavoidably overlap. The corner unit aimed to solve this problem. Earlier in 1953, Gibberd had observed how a corner had been treated by Parker and Unwin at Hampstead Garden Suburb, showing a photograph in *Town Design* of a house designed on a corner to hide rear gardens. Viewed from its front elevation, the house concealed the rear gardens; however, since the house itself had a small garden, when viewed from the side the garden was visible, only partially obscured from view by a shed. It was not rear gardens themselves Gibberd regarded as a problem, as he stated in his 1958 report:

> Small gardens do not give greater urbanity and large gardens do not give openness, providing they cannot be seen. Unfortunately in the new towns, through lack of screening, large areas of backs can be seen with the consequent open appearance.[86]

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[84] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 54.

[85] Ibid.

[86] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/28, 'Why the New Towns Look Open', Report by Frederick Gibberd, 15 May 1958.

If units could be designed to fill the gap between terraces joining at right angles, Gibberd argued that the private space behind the houses would be shut out from view and would therefore have no effect on the character of the street picture.[87] In order to achieve this, Gibberd proposed the construction of two-storey flats built in the same style as the houses, to close the gap.[88] However, depending on which way the terraces joined, the flats would either have a communal garden to the rear or virtually no garden at all.

This was problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, while discussing garden sizes, General Manager Ben Hyde Harvey agreed with Gibberd's principles, but argued that even if tenants learnt to have visual appreciation of tighter layouts, he doubted whether many people would be 'wooed from their wish' for a detached house and private garden.[89] Most people wanted a garden of their own. Secondly, during 1955, issues relating to a lack of privacy and a 'hemmed in feeling' at Harlow were being debated among HUDC members. A resident, albeit complaining about the proposed construction of garages at The Hides, complained to the *Harlow Citizen* that his main reason for moving to Harlow was that he wanted space and no longer wanted to feel 'boxed-in', as he said to the newspaper: 'I could have stayed in London if I liked that.'[90] Most of Harlow's incoming tenants were from London, and this no doubt reflected the view of the majority. The HUDC's concerns had been brought to the HDC's attention. They argued that the hemmed-in feeling and lack of privacy was most acute in rear gardens behind long terraces and in quadrangles which were enclosed on all sides. Hyde Harvey, after hearing the Council's views, felt that the problem warranted investigation, and questioned Housing Manager C. A. Jackson as a result of this. Jackson revealed that the greatest number of applications for housing transfers within Harlow came from tenants of 'closely packed groups.' He had also experienced difficulties in placing prospective tenants

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[87] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/28, 'Why the New Towns Look Open', Report by Frederick Gibberd, 15 May 1958.

[88] Ibid.

[89] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/28, Memo from Ben Hyde Harvey circulated to HDC members, 20 May 1958.

[90] 'Picked houses for view, now they will be boxed in', *Harlow Citizen*, 1 February 1957, p. 16.

who had asked for fair-sized gardens.[91] The HDC Deputy Chairman suggested in a Planning Board meeting in October 1955 that the Corporation should obtain reactions from Harlow tenants living in terraces and squares. However, in response, Gibberd argued that research was 'unnecessary' since it was 'a fact that people liked to have as much privacy as possible.'[92] However, instead of abandoning these types of layouts, Gibberd suggested that issues of privacy and compactness should be 'reasonably weighed with aesthetic and economic considerations.'[93] Earlier in 1953, Gibberd was aware that the experimental enclosed square was far removed from the popular conception of the ideal home – a house with its own garden.[94] Nevertheless, he was determined to implement the specially designed corner units at Orchard Croft to close the gaps between terraced blocks joining at right angles, to screen rear gardens and to create the greatest possible sense of enclosure with continuous 'walls'.
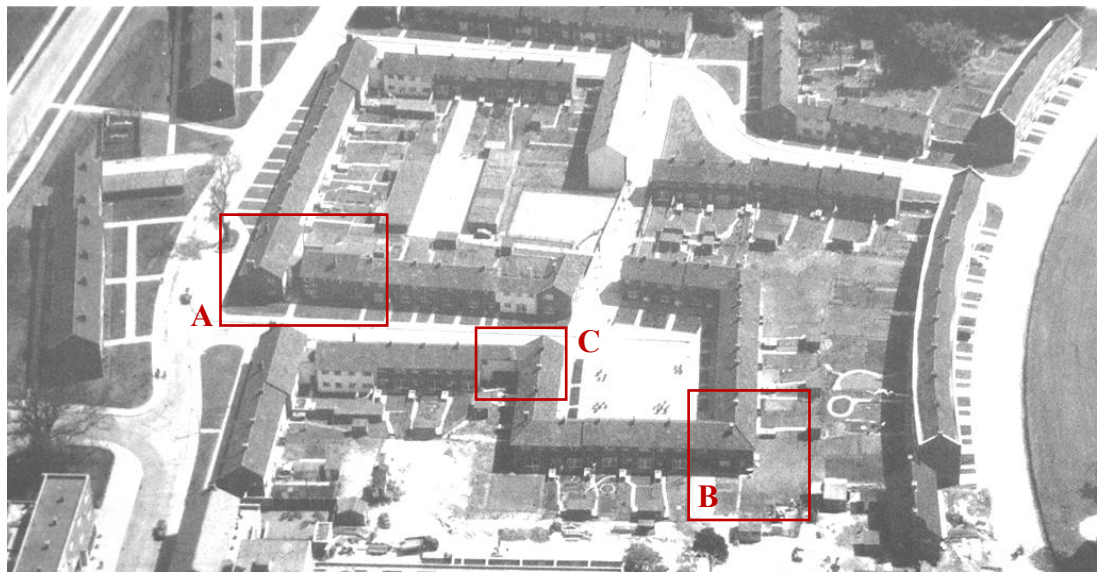
Fig.5.31. Aerial photograph of Orchard Croft with 3 types of corner unit indicated

Three types of corner unit were designed and implemented at Orchard Croft. These are indicated on the aerial photograph from *Town Design* (fig.5.31). Type A shows an 'external corner unit' used to close gaps at the corners of road junctions. It is

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[91] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (2), Extract from the Planning Board, 21 October 1955.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 55.

essentially a two-storey block of flats with a discrete central circulation core and small communal rear garden. The corner unit labelled 'C' is another example of an external corner unit, comprising two independent two-storey houses with a small shared communal garden. The type labelled 'B' is an 'internal corner unit' used to enclose the square. This unit is a two-storey five-bedroom house with a large private garden. At ground floor level, the plan steps in to allow a pedestrian passageway through to The Stow neighbourhood shopping centre. Fig.5.32 shows a photograph of the external corner unit labelled 'A' on fig.5.31. Compared to an earlier 'open' external corner at Mark Hall North by the HDC Design Group (fig.5.33), the increased sense of enclosure to the street is significant.

Fig.5.32. 'External Corner Unit' at Orchard Croft, HDC (1951-54)

Fig.5.33. An open corner at Mistley Road, Mark Hall North, HDC (1951-54)
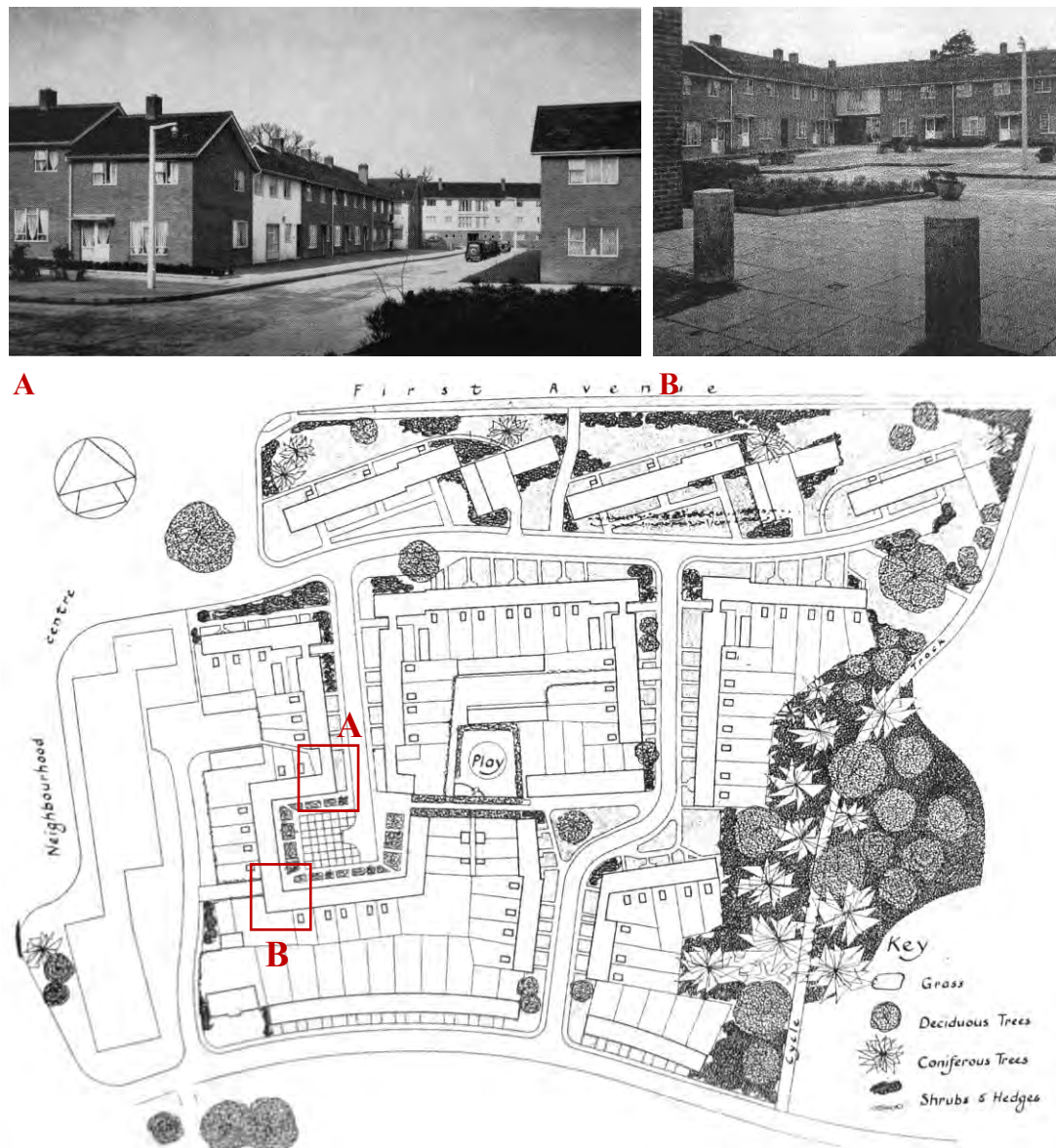
Fig.5.34 Orchard Croft plan and photograph (B) in the *AR*, May 1955

Despite the social drawbacks related to privacy in houses arranged in quadrangles, and the small gardens associated with corner units, the *AR* acknowledged the sense of enclosure at Orchard Croft. The editors described the core area as a 'tightly planned square with continuous walls and built up corners'.[95] Gibberd later added a photograph (marked 'A' in fig 5.34) of a corner unit at Orchard Croft to his revised edition of *Town Design,* referencing Hampstead Garden Suburb as his inspiration in placing houses closely together to screen gardens and close gaps, arguing that 'some

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[95] 'Harlow New Town', *AR*, 117 (1955), 311-327 (p. 324).

people like a very small garden.'[96] The Minister also recognised the achievement at Orchard Croft, awarding Gibberd and the HDC the 1954 Housing Medal Award for the Eastern Region. Other medallists included Leslie Martin at the LCC for part of the Ackroydon scheme in Wandsworth (fig.5.35), and A. G. Sheppard Fidler for housing design in the Three Bridges neighbourhood at Crawley New Town.[97] The Wandsworth flats comprised a three-storey block and a five-storey block positioned at right angles to one another, linked at first floor level. At Crawley, the award-winning housing scheme was made up of two-storey houses in short terraces, with several corner unit blocks (fig.5.36). Although the Crawley Development Corporation had maintained an ambition to build low-rise low-density houses with gardens following the Ministry's request to increase the town's population in 1951,

Fig.5.35. Flats at the Ackroydon Estate, Wandsworth by J. L. Martin (c.1954)

Fig.5.36. Corner Unit in Three Bridges, Crawley New Town by A. G. Sheppard Fidler (c. 1954)

they had in fact experimented with corner units in small areas of housing. It is possible that Sheppard Fidler was influenced by the corner units designed by Gibberd and the HDC at Orchard Croft, as the HDC annual report for 1950 shows that detailed plans for Mark Hall South and Netteswell were already complete.[98] In comparison, the Crawley annual report indicates that only detailed plans for the West Green and Northgate neighbourhoods were complete at this time, with plans for Three Bridges appearing in the following annual report. [99]

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[96] Frederick Gibberd, *Town Design,* 4th edn (London: Architectural Press, 1962), p. 266.

[97] ERO, A6306, 367, 32/12, MHLG, *Housing Medal Awards* (1954).

[98] HDC, 'Report of the Harlow Development Corporation for the period ending 31st March 1950', in *Reports of the Development Corporations for the period ending 31st March 1950* (London: HMSO, 1951), p.93.

[99] Crawley Development Corporation, 'Report of the Crawley Development Corporation for the period ending 31st March 1951', in *Reports of the Development Corporations for the period ending 31st March 1951* (London: HMSO, 1952), p. 148.

The early completion of Harlow's corner unit designs shows that Gibberd and the HDC were pioneering in the use of corner units in the New Towns. In any case, the Ministry displayed corner unit examples from both Harlow and Crawley to demonstrate economical high-density planning in the *Houses 1953* manual. Fig.5.37 shows the corner unit also used at Felmongers in Harlow as well as at Orchard Croft. The photograph demonstrates how the corner unit created a continuous facade to the street edge, while at the same time, shutting out the rear gardens from view. In the *AR*, J. M. Richards commented on the new manual stating that it was:

> encouraging that the waste of land and money resulting from the style and layout practised in most new towns and housing estates (and the lack of urbanity that goes with it) is now acknowledged by the Government department responsible for planning policy.[100]

Richards's article showed the same image of the corner unit at Harlow as an example of economical planning of flats and houses on corner sites. For Richards, the corner unit was an economical solution to housing layout; in addition, it was a visual planning strategy to avoid 'unsightly gaps' which would otherwise be left open.[101]
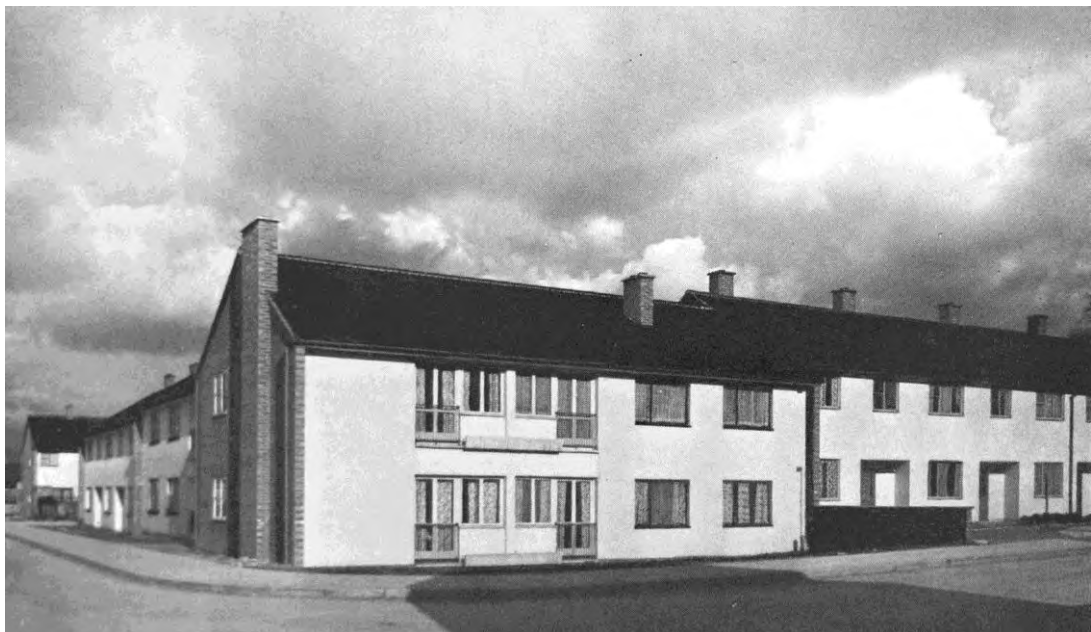
Fig.5.37. External Corner Unit at Felmongers (MHLG, *Houses 1953)*

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[100] J. M. Richards, 'Planning: the space between houses', *AR*, 114 (1953), 403-404 (p. 403).
[101] Ibid.

The Ministry had initially advocated corner units to increase density and to economise on road construction costs, rather than for the aesthetic effect of enclosure (as later desired by Evelyn Sharp). Since corner units tended to be made up of flats, this dwelling type became bound up with density debates between the Ministry and the HDC. The Ministry requested that corner unit dwellings be considered as flats. Gibberd, however, argued that they should be counted as houses, thus allowing a higher percentage of flat provision. Unfortunately for Gibberd, in March 1954, the HDC agreed to include corner unit dwellings within the overall percentage of flats.[102] Furthermore the HDC Planning Board had considered imposing a 'strict embargo' on long back-to-back terraces and corner units to ensure a greater degree of privacy for tenants.[103] Gibberd argued that banning these types of dwelling from Harlow was unnecessary, especially since corner units were to be counted as flats. Gibberd believed that in later developments these dwelling types would naturally occur less frequently due to the 'draining of the flats pool [which] restricted corner unit provision.'[104] Elaborating on this problem in his 1958 report, Gibberd argued that even though Harlow had probably built more corner units than elsewhere, even more units should have been constructed. The reason this had not been possible was because the units formed part of the flat provision, and therefore had to be 'rationed' to obtain the 'maximum aesthetic effect.'[105] The result of the 'rationing' of flats and corner units was that a sense of enclosure and urbanity could be achieved within housing groups, however, spine roads (main roads linking housing groups) were left with a sense of openness. Gibberd used The Hornbeams and Rivermill as an example to describe the problem:

> There is a case in point at Harlow (Area 29/30) where, by the use of some three and four-storey development and corner units, I believe I have obtained a closely knit and intimate layout with the heart of the scheme but fail lamentably with the main roads because my flat allocation was used up internally.[106]

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[102] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (2), Memorandum to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, March 1954.

[103] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (2), Extract from the Planning Board, 21 October 1955.

[104] Ibid.

[105] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/28, 'Why the New Towns Look Open', Report by Frederick Gibberd, 15 May 1958, p. 2.

[106] Ibid., p. 4.

Forfeiting the outer areas to create a greater sense of urbanity within the housing groups paid off, since in 1960 the *AR* showcased The Hornbeams and Rivermill in an article praising Gibberd's efforts to move away from the suburban character of the earlier New Town housing that was criticised in 1953. The editors reported that the social and economic reasons behind the demand for two-storey houses had remained unchanged since then, and with accepting this, greater efforts were needed to plan and group houses in such a way to create the 'visually satisfying qualities, if not of the traditional town, then of the traditional village; its compactness, neighbourliness and sense of enclosure.'[107] At Hornbeams and Rivermill, the editors praised the three-storey blocks which gave 'variety and enclosure to the streets'; they also observed that all distant views had been closed by buildings.[108] Fig.5.38 shows a photograph from the article of a 'typical curved street, showing a corner closed by a three-storey house.'[109]
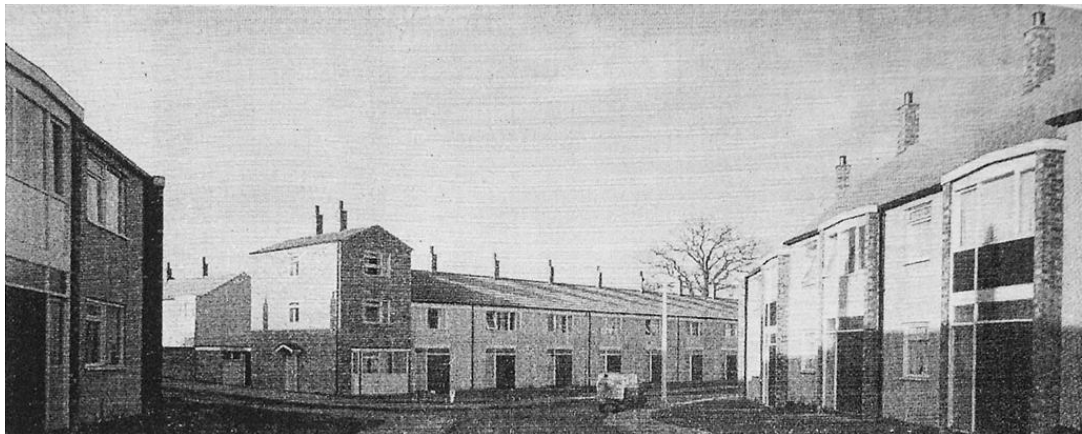
Fig.5.38. Corner closed by a three-storey house at Hornbeams and Rivermill
(*AR*, Sept. 1960)

Fig.5.39 shows another example of a corner unit used to close a gap at The Hornbeams, this time with the editors commenting on the 'townscape use of the three-storey house.'[110]

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[107] 'The New Town Village' (with an introductory article by Noel Tweddell), *AR*, 127 (1960), 195-205 (p. 200).
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] The Editors, 'The New Town Village', p. 201.
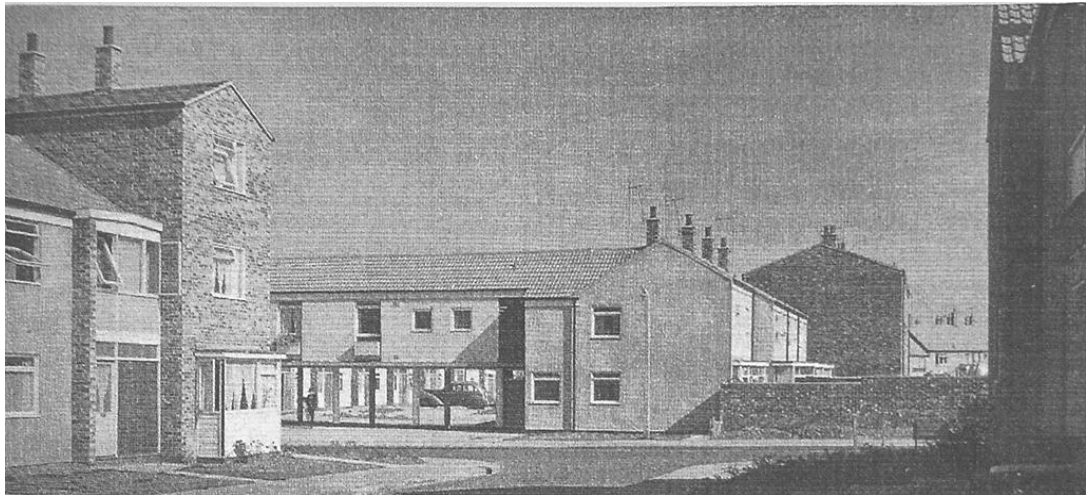
Fig.5.39. 'Townscape' use of a three-storey house at Hornbeams and Rivermill
(*AR*, Sept. 1960)

In addition to showing examples of housing design in Harlow which surpassed the 'visual insipidity' of typical two-storey housing development, the *AR* also illustrated three housing groups in Basildon New Town by Anthony B. Davies.[111] Davies had implemented Radburn planning principles to his schemes, separating pedestrians and vehicles. Like Gibberd, he created a number of residential squares using corner units for a sense of enclosure. Davies also introduced three-storey blocks to create visual variety. This further demonstrates that other New Town architect planners were applying notions of Townscape to their housing schemes. Crucially, however, the *AR* also illustrated Willenhall Wood, an area in Coventry designed by Arthur Ling. Ling had been one of the key members of the MARS Town Planning Committee and during the wartime years had contributed to the MARS Plan for London. These plans had social wellbeing at the heart of design, with little, if any discussion on the proposed architecture or aesthetics of the housing. However, Ling's designs at Coventry showed the application of visual planning ideas. He included a two-storey residential square, and like Gibberd and Davies, Ling used corner units to create the visual element of enclosure. In 1960, Ling's Willenhall Wood scheme was illustrated by the *AR*, who for the previous two decades had spearheaded the campaign for the adoption of visual planning. This demonstrates that other modernist architects affiliated to the MARS Group had taken an interest in the

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[111] Ibid., p. 197. Architect-Planner Anthony B. Davies had succeeded Noel Tweddell in 1958.

aesthetic aspects of housing design. As Chapter 4 has shown, several renowned modernist architects of the thirties, including Fry, Spence and Gibberd, had switched to The New Empiricism after the War.[112] Eric Mumford has recently revealed that MARS members Gordon Stephenson, Arthur Ling and William Holford also leaned toward notions of The New Empiricism and visual planning.[113] Recent publications have argued that architects involved in post-war reconstruction believed that improving the appearance of Britain could have a positive impact on national morale.[114] Those modernist architects who adopted New Humanist principles in order to soften the aesthetic quality of the earlier functionalism did so with the belief that after the War, 'psychological need was manifest.'[115] Gibberd on the other hand, was unique in that even before the outbreak of War his housing designs began to demonstrate a move towards visual planning. This can be observed by comparing Gibberd's first substantial housing project, Pullman Court in Streatham (fig.5.40), with Gibberd's later housing scheme Park Court at Crystal Palace (fig.5.41).

Above: Fig.5.40. Pullman Court (Gibberd, 1933-35)
Right: Fig.5.41. Park Court (Gibberd, 1936)
(F. R. S. Yorke & Gibberd, *The Modern Flat*, 1937)

Pullman Court comprised 218 flats organised into blocks of varying heights up to seven storeys; it has recently been argued by Alan Powers that it was Gibberd's

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[112] Lionel Esher, *A Broken Wave: The Rebuilding of England 1940 – 1980* (London: Allen Lane, 1981), p. 107.
[113] Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism*, p. 217.
[114] Atkinson, p. 66.
[115] Esher, p. 107.

most representative modernist work. Powers also suggests that during and after the War Gibberd's work increasingly embodied a 'sensitive and romantic attitude to building form, landscape and the use of external spaces.'[116] This is evident in Gibberd's Park Court scheme, completed in 1936 in Crystal Palace. It comprised 54 flats organised into three-storey blocks arranged in response to the triangular site. Gibberd explained the distinction between Park Court and other well-known modernist works of the time such as High Point by Tecton, was that firstly, it was concerned with the character of the total environment and secondly, it was concerned with the external spaces.[117]

At Park Court, Gibberd used the buildings to create spaces which he also carefully designed. Fig.5.41 shows how Gibberd created a sense of enclosure to the space by ensuring that any distant views out were terminated by buildings. By 1940, Gibberd argued that the Modern Movement had essentially 'done its job', allowing architects to return once more to looking at traditional things, just 'for their own sake.'[118] After the War, at Harlow, Gibberd began to design traditional urban forms such as the street and square. The corner unit provided the ideal solution to creating the visual quality of enclosure in residential squares. However, the units tended to be flats with small communal gardens which had a lack of privacy – three key aspects which went against the preferences of tenants. Nevertheless, corner units were adopted by Gibberd, and other architects such as Davies, Ling and Sheppard Fidler, in order to close the gaps between terraces joining at right angles to great a greater sense of enclosure. In Gibberd's mind, this would strengthen the quality of urbanity at Harlow New Town.

5.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown the variety of techniques employed by Gibberd and the HDC to close up the gaps between dwellings in order to create a sense of enclosure, and therefore a sense of urbanity at Harlow. It has also become apparent that to

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[116] Powers, p. 116.

[117] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, Biography File, David Ives Project – Comment by Frederick Gibberd, (no date, but possibly during the 1960s), p. 2.

[118] Gibberd, 'Wall Textures', p. 9.

Gibberd, the design of the spaces between the buildings was as important as the design of the buildings themselves. At Harlow, Gibberd advocated housing types such as the terrace and the corner unit in order to form 'walls' to create the greatest possible sense of enclosure to the space of the street, while at the same time, concealing any views of private gardens which might otherwise be seen from the public realm of the street. In many cases, these aesthetic devices went against the preferences of both the HUDC as well as residents at Harlow, who favoured open Garden City type development. This has become a common theme in the study in relation to the implementation of visual planning elements of urbanity. The following chapter will further investigate ideas of street design, and ideas of public and private space – of community and privacy – to show how Gibberd believed the creation of visually pleasing street scenes was important for the community as a whole. In particular, I will look at the idea 'unity', the final element of urbanity.

6 UNITY

From the outset, Gibberd intended to apply the picturesque planning principle of variety to housing design at Harlow. However, in 1948 while explaining the overall master plan in the *AR,* Gibberd stated that a condition of any work of art – since he considered Harlow New Town to be a work of art – was that it should have the qualities of both unity as well as variety.[1] Since Harlow would be built over a relatively short period of time, Gibberd was concerned that unity across the town would be too obvious; in fact there was a danger of producing a 'uniform dullness.'[2] This was to be avoided, since 'uniform dullness' had been a major criticism of the inter-war housing developments. This study has shown that variety at Harlow had been achieved at three levels; first, built up areas were contrasted with open landscape; second, housing groups were designed by different architects to create variety between groups; and finally, variety within housing groups was achieved through mixed development. Gibberd's task then, was to create a sense of unity across all levels of variety. This problem can be simplified by first examining the creation of unity at street scale.

6.1 UNIFIED FACADES

During his wartime urbanity studies, Gibberd had analysed a street elevation at Honiton, noting that while contrast had been achieved through changes in colour and texture, unity had been achieved through the continuity of the facade. The previous chapter has shown that Gibberd pressed for the inclusion of terrace houses at Harlow, since he believed they created a greater sense of enclosure to the street picture. However, Gibberd's earlier Honiton study suggests that Gibberd also believed the terrace could contribute to an overall sense of unity. Earlier in 1940, Thomas Sharp had also examined the quality of unity in *Town Planning.* Sharp

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[1] Gibberd, 'Landscaping the New Town', p. 85.
[2] Ibid.

argued that unity was inherent in a street of continuous blocks; in contrast, a street of detached or semi-detached houses had 'cast aside' any quality of unity. The small single family house, according to Sharp was the core of the problem when attempting to give a town 'architectural cohesion and character.'[3] Part one of this study has shown that Sharp and other modernist architects advocated a return to building terraced housing in response to the semi-detached suburban developments of the inter-war period.

Fig.6.1. Continuity and monotony
(Sharp, *Town Planning*, 1940)

Like Gibberd, Sharp also noted that the terrace house had fallen out of favour with local authorities as well as with the public. The traditional English Georgian terrace had become 'debased' during the industrial days of the Victorian period; standardisation and bye-laws had invited monotony to the street picture. How then could building continuous terraced housing overcome the monotony of the detached and semi-detached houses of the inter-war period? Sharp argued that continuity was not the cause of monotony, rather, it could be an insurance against it. Fig.6.1 shows Sharp's sketch of 'the worst kind' of continuous monotonous street in *Town Planning* (top row). Sharp compared this with his sketch of a street of detached houses (fig.6.1 bottom row), where continuity had been eliminated. According to Sharp, the absence of continuity made monotony 'almost a certainty.'[4] In Sharp's mind, it was 'only by building in continuous street formation that the town can be given true picturesqueness.'[5] Furthermore, Sharp shared Gibberd's view that the planning of a street scene was an art form, arguing that each street should be regarded as 'an architectural composition, a composed unity, a single entity designed with the most deliberate art for pictorial effect.'[6]

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[3] Sharp, *Town Planning*, p. 91.
[4] Ibid., p. 95.
[5] Ibid., p. 93.
[6] Ibid., p. 102.

Unlike Gibberd, however, having argued the case for the development of unified continuous terraces from an aesthetic point of view, Sharp considered the social aspects of the terrace. Sharp explained that 'entangled with the question of aesthetic meanness in the street' there was also the 'question of social meanness.'[7] The inadequacy of the terrace, in social terms, was that architecturally it failed to reflect that it was inhabited by individual families. Sharp was opposed to the individualistic suburbs, although, referencing Arthur Trystan Edwards, he understood it was important for people that their dwelling was distinguished from other dwellings. Edwards, who had begun to consider the concept of urbanity in *Good and Bad Manners in Architecture*, continued to advocate the terrace, despite their unpopularity. He believed that if individual dwelling units within the terrace received formal expression in order to dissociate family from family, for example,

special emphasis to front doors, the problem could be solved.[8] Sharp agreed and included a sketch which demonstrated what he called 'designed street continuity.'[9] This avoided any visual monotony, while at the same time, responded to the people's need for individuality (fig.6.2).

DESIGNED STREET CONTINUITY.

Fig.6.2 Designed Street Continuity
(Sharp, *Town Planning*, 1940)

In *The Design of Residential Areas,* Gibberd's section on 'Street Pattern and Picture' dealt only with the visual aspects of street design. In addition to creating a greater sense of enclosure, Gibberd argued that greater unity could be achieved if houses were strung together in terrace formation. In fact, Gibberd suggested that it was 'generally accepted' that terrace blocks 'looked better' than detached or semi-detached houses.[10] The 1953 Ministry of Housing and Local Government publication was intended to influence local authorities on the design and layout of

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[7] Sharp, *Town Planning*, p. 102.
[8] Ibid., p. 97.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 39.

housing.[11] Despite advocating the terrace in the design of residential areas of towns, Gibberd recognised that the majority of local authorities continued to build semi-detached housing due to an association of terraces with the 'monotony and dreariness of nineteenth century slum building.'[12] With this in mind, Gibberd provided advice on how separate detached houses could be visually unified in other ways. Firstly, houses of with a similar character or form would have greater unity between them. In old villages, Gibberd explained that despite differences in form, the houses held together as a unity since they were built of local materials in a common vernacular. Gibberd argued that since such traditions no longer existed housing could be unified if designed by one architect, thus giving them the 'common imprint of his personality.'[13] The housing groups in Harlow provided an overall variety, while unity was created within each housing group. Secondly, a relationship could be formed by rhythm; however, since rhythm was a 'dramatic characteristic', Gibberd argued that:

> If small houses cannot be combined into terraces, it is usually best to reduce the gaps between then by ground floor links, like screen walls, sheds or gardens, which can give continuity to the facade.[14]

In Gibberd's mind, the longer the building and the fewer the gaps, the less need for formal correlation, since a continuous facade would create a unified facade to the street scene. A solution to creating unity within a street lined with semi-detached houses was to link the houses, and to design each house in relation to its neighbouring building. Gibberd provided two comparative sketches to demonstrate how this could be achieved (fig.6.3).

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[11] MHLG, *Design of Town and Village*, p. iii.
[12] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 39.
[13] Ibid., p. 34.
[14] Ibid., p. 32.
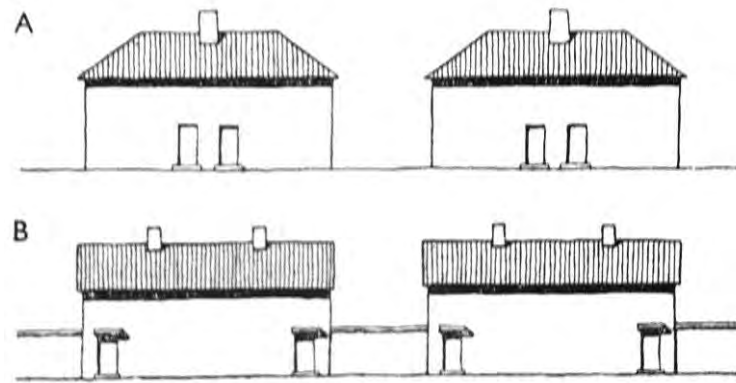
Fig.6.3. Linking semi-detached houses
(Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', 1953)

Fig.6.4. The Urban Semi-Detached House
(Ministry of Health, *Housing Manual 1949*)

Gibberd argued that sketch 'B' had greater unity as a street picture than the houses in sketch 'A'. This was because firstly, the horizontal roofline gave a stronger visual link between dwellings and secondly, the porches and chimney stacks of adjacent houses had been designed in relation to one another.[15] More crucially, however, the individual blocks had been linked at ground floor level. This was not a new idea, as the 1949 *Housing Manual* had shown a variety of linked semi-detached houses. Fig.6.4 shows an 'urban semi-detached house' linked at ground floor with storage blocks, demonstrating how semi-detached houses could be treated architecturally in a similar way to terraced housing. The manual, which was a more comprehensive updated version of the 1944 manual, stressed the need to consider 'the street scene as a unit of architectural design.'[16] The linked detached or semi-detached house was a useful compromise; visually it created unity through a continuous facade, thus contributing to a sense of urbanity, while at the same time, it provided a house-type preferred by the majority.

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[15] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 37.
[16] MH, *Housing Manual 1949*, p. 50.

Gibberd and the HDC included a number of linked houses at Harlow, particularly in areas of 'Standard II' housing. Fig.6.5 shows a row of detached houses linked with garages in the Herons Wood housing group, adjacent to The Hornbeams. The large detached houses were designed by Gibberd to a very low density of 7.1 dwellings per acre. This not only facilitated a higher density at The Hornbeams and Rivermill, but it was also an attempt to attract higher wage earners to Harlow to create a 'balanced community', as the Reith Reports had specified. Gibberd recalled in 1980 that generally, Standard II houses were linked together with garages, which had a 'marked effect on the quality of the environment.'[17] The first houses designed for sale by the HDC at Upper Park (built 1955-7) were also of the linked semi-detached type (fig.6.6).

Fig.6.5. Linked detached houses at Herons Wood (Gibberd, 1956-57)

Fig.6.6. Linked semi-detached houses at Upper Park (HDC, 1955-57)

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[17] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 116.

In 1956 the Conservative Government began to encourage development corporations to sell land in the New Towns to speculative builders, in order to construct houses for sale. However, unhappy with the large housing groups by private developers which lacked 'any real distinction', the HDC opted to design a variety of house types for sale at Upper Park, in Little Parndon.[18] To attract buyers the HDC built semi-detached houses, however, to obtain a sense of unity, the HDC linked the houses with garages to create unified facades. Fig.6.7 shows a sketch used to advertise the 'Type 125' semi-detached house at Upper Park. It was described as an 'attractive 'cottage' style semi-detached house with a garage attached at the side.'[19] The houses were shown to be in isolation rather than linked with other pairs, and were set in a rural environment. Furthermore, the sketch purposely emphasised only one entrance with a sweeping driveway leading to the garage and front door. The garage of the adjoining house was partly obscured by a figure and a tree, perhaps in an attempt to give the illusion of a detached house rather than a semi-detached house. This was a tactic used by Gibberd and the HDC earlier in Mark Hall North – designing semi-detached houses which had the appearance of detached houses, not only to attract higher wage earners, but also to attract the aspirational middle classes, who wanted the appearance of higher-class housing without the expense.

Fig.6.7. 'Type 125' semi-detached houses advertised for sale in Upper Park

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[18] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 186.

[19] HDC, *Home Ownership in Harlow Upper Park* (Harlow: Harlow Development Corporation, [1956 (?)])

Fig.6.8. 'Type 128' semi-detached houses advertised for sale in Upper Park

Fig.6.8 shows another sketch from the sales pamphlet advertising the 'Type 128' semi-detached house. Like the 'Type 125' house, this type also had garages attached each side. The sketch is cut off at the point where another semi-detached house would adjoin, to give an illusion of an isolated block. The majority of Standard I houses for rent were provided as terraced housing, a form which lent itself well to creating a unified street. The linked semi-detached house provided an ideal compromise for the HDC; it was more attractive to prospective buyers, while at the same time, it had the potential to maintain a sense of unity.

As Gibberd stressed earlier in the 1947 master plan, the design of Harlow must obtain the qualities of both variety as well as unity, to avoid the monotony of inter-war suburbia. At Upper Park, detached and semi-detached houses were linked with garages to unify housing facades along street edges. However, in order to avoid monotony, a variety of housing types were designed by the HDC, positioned on the site in an irregular pattern. In contrast to the plan of a typical speculative suburban development in Colindale shown in fig.6.9, the variety of housing types at Upper Park is clear. At Colindale, the majority of the semi-detached houses are identical, spaced at regular intervals. Of the sample area drawn, only five semi-detached houses are of a different design, and only one house – a bungalow which was built more recently – is of a different type. At Upper Park, the HDC included terraces, detached and semi-detached, as well as bungalows. Of the linked semi-detached houses, there are six different designs to create further visual variety.

SPECULATIVE SUBURBAN HOUSING, COLINDALE
London Borough of Barnet
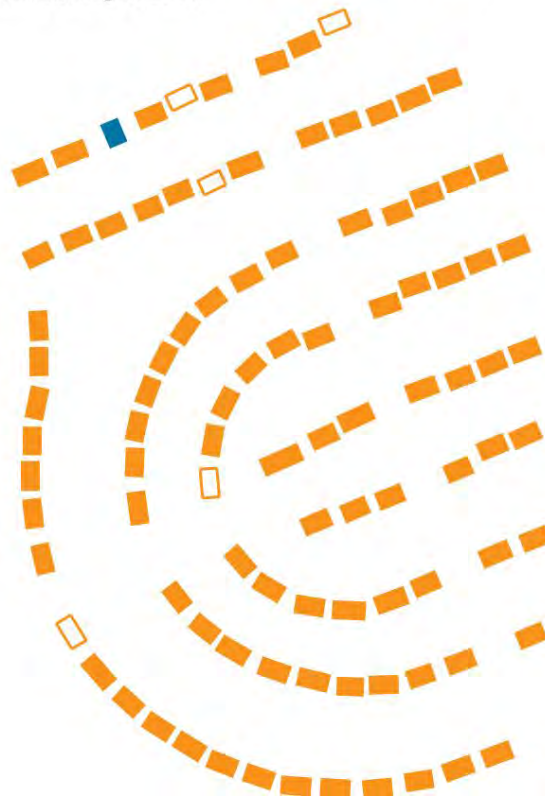
Semi-detached house
Principal type

Semi-detached house
Alternative type (5No.)

Bungalow
Built more recently on the site of a
semi-detached house

KEY

2 storey semi-detached, principal type
2 storey semi-detached, alternative type
1 storey bungalow

UPPER PARK, HARLOW
Houses for sale by the HDC, 1955-57
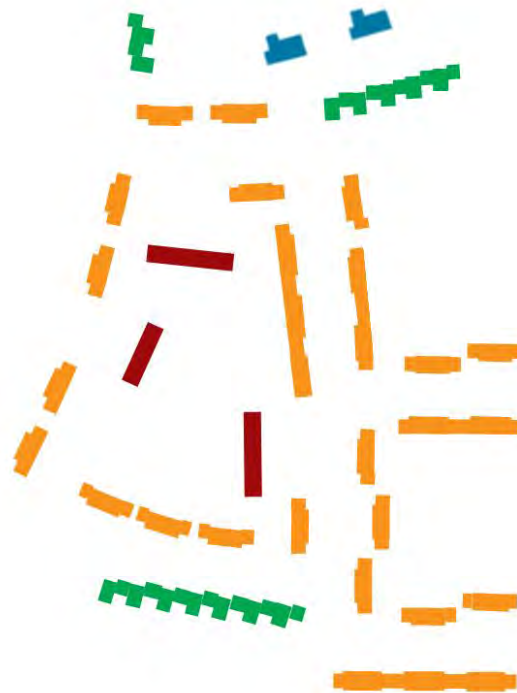
6 different types of
semi-detached houses

KEY

2 storey terrace
2 storey linked semi-detached
2 storey linked detached
1 storey bungalow

Fig.6.9. Unity without monotony - comparative study   261

Fig.6.10. Linked semi-detached houses by the HDC Design Group at Felmongers (1950-56)

Linked semi-detached houses were also included by the HDC at 'Felmongers' in Mark Hall South. The visual effect of unity is clear, while at the same time, monotony has been avoided (fig.6.10). Built between 1950-6, the garages were flush with the facades of the houses, allowing a stronger horizontal 'visual link' between the dwellings than at Upper Park. The houses were designed as one composition, and as Gibberd explained in *The Design of Residential Areas,* this could bring greater unity to the street picture. There were, however, further ways of strengthening the sense of unity in the street scene. Chapter 5 has shown that Gibberd believed the closer the houses were to the road, the greater the sense of urbanity. The 1951 *Schedule of Suggested Minimum Street Widths* had not specified overall street widths thus allowing flexibility in design. This allowed the HDC to omit grass verges in the schemes which followed, bringing houses closer still. All that remained in terms of open space in the street picture were the front gardens to the houses. In Gibberd's mind, this should also be designed as part of the overall street picture. Not only should the vertical plane of housing facades be unified, but the horizontal floor plane should be designed in relation to the vertical plane. The idea that the ground surface – or 'floorscape' – was an integral part of the urban scene was popularised from 1949 onwards as part of the *AR's* Townscape campaign. Gibberd had advocated variety in texture and pattern of the floors of urban spaces in 1951, citing Thomas Sharp, who had earlier demonstrated the importance of the relationship in scale between the wall and floor materials in the urban scene.

6.2 UNIFIED SURFACES

In 1953 in *The Design of Residential Areas,* Gibberd elaborated on the subject of floorscape and its impact upon the overall street picture. He argued:

> In an arrangement of houses to form a street picture the two chief elements are the horizontal plane, formed by the carriageway and pavement, and the vertical planes formed by the house facades. It is an obvious and simple principle that these two planes are likely to be more completely united the closer they are together.[20]

Therefore, at Harlow, in addition to constructing narrow roads, narrow pavements and eliminating grass verges, Gibberd argued that front gardens should also be kept to 'an absolute minimum' in order to create a more urban appearance.[21] The 'visual link' between the road and the facades of the houses, Gibberd suggested, could be strengthened further by designing the paths in a 'continuous pattern with the public footpath.'[22] Gibberd called this the 'house-to-paving relationship' and used housing designed by Chief Architect to the Crawley Development Corporation, A. G. Sheppard Fidler at Crawley New Town as an example (fig.6.11).
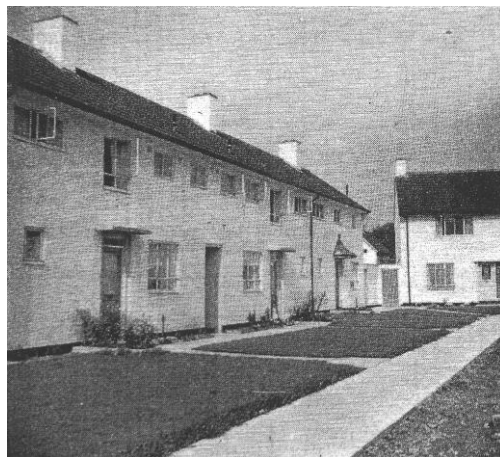
Fig.6.11. Kites Close, Crawley (Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', 1953)

Fig.6.12. Satellite image of Kites Close (https://maps.google.co.uk/maps)

The photograph, however, captured only the houses and their pathways, excluding their immediate surroundings. Fig.6.12, a 'Google' satellite view of the housing

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[20] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 31.
[21] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Planning Board Minutes, Densities and Garden Sizes, 11 December 1952.
[22] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 32.

scheme shows the houses surround a large open green. The houses may have been unified with the floor surface through a continuous path pattern; however, the open green space in front of the houses was almost certainly contrary to Gibberd's view of an urban environment.

Gibberd had argued that the greater the spaces around dwellings, the greater the feeling of openness. He also argued, however, that if such open spaces in towns were planted, a rural rather than an urban environment would be created.[23] Green spaces could also have a negative impact on the unity between the vertical and horizontal planes. Gibberd observed that if the wall and floor planes were designed to be similar in texture and pattern, there would be greater affinity between the two. For example, hard textures such as paving or concrete, rather than grass, on the ground could create a stronger relationship between horizontal and vertical planes.[24] Gibberd used Pekin Close in the Lansbury neighbourhood, designed by Bridgwater and Shepheard[25] as an example of how this could be achieved (fig.6.13). Since these were footpath-access houses with no carriageway between them, Gibberd stated that it had been possible to extend the floor pattern across the entire space between the houses, thus 'bringing all three planes into visual relationship.'[26]
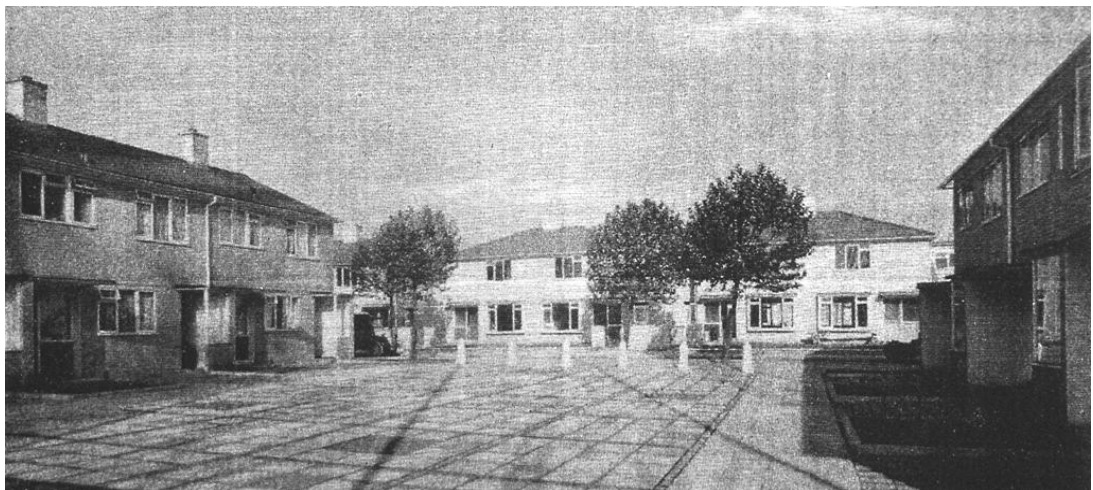
Fig.6.13. Pekin Close, Lansbury, by Bridgwater & Shepheard
(Gibberd, *The Design of Residential Areas*, 1953)

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[23] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/28, 'Why the New Towns Look Open', Report by Gibberd, 15 May 1958.
[24] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 32.
[25] After working on the Greater London Plan with Abercrombie, Shepheard went on to serve the Stevenage Development Corporation as Deputy Chief Architect between 1947 and 1948.
[26] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 34.

At Harlow, Gibberd and the HDC attempted to replicate a similar street picture between footpath-access housing at 'The Hides' in the Netteswell neighbourhood (fig.6.14). The wide paved pathway does not go from building edge to building edge, since either side of the pathway are small areas of grass.

Fig.6.14. Paved floorscape between footpath access housing at 'The Hides' (HDC, 1952-54)

Fig.6.15. Grass, hedges and paving between houses at 'Leaves Spring' in Stevenage

In comparison to footpath-access housing at 'Leaves Spring' built during the 1950s in the Broadwater neighbourhood at Stevenage (fig.6.15), the wide paved area at The Hides gives greater definition to the space, unifying the two opposite vertical planes to a greater extent.

At Lansbury, in Gibberd's mind, large areas of paving rather than grass created a more urban appearance. The Lansbury neighbourhood in Poplar, East London, was designed as a 'Live Architecture' exhibition as part of the 1951 Festival of Britain. Gibberd was originally approached to be the lead architect to the South Bank site; however, since he considered town design and architecture his strengths rather than exhibition planning, he turned down the role. Instead, he proposed that in addition to the South Bank site, a bomb-damaged site in London should be rebuilt as a neighbourhood to form part of the exhibition.[27] Since much of the construction in the first generation New Towns had yet to begin, Lansbury would be the first chance for the layman to see the neighbourhood planning principle in practice.[28] Elain Harwood has recently argued that although the younger generation of architects would have preferred to see high-density housing based on the ideas of Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* developed at Lansbury, in 1949 the architects with experience in planning and public housing design were those working in the New Towns – Gibberd at Harlow, Shepheard at Stevenage, and Jellicoe at Hemel Hempstead. With this, she argues, the architects brought with them to Lansbury a 'New Town aesthetic.'[29] Although Forshaw and Abercrombie's County of London Plan had proposed a high density of 136 persons per net residential acre, the housing was designed at Lansbury to densities of approximately 87-110 persons per acre.[30] Harwood argues the scheme was essentially a model for the New Towns rather than a model for London rebuilding. The early neighbourhoods in the New Towns were, however, restricted to very low densities of 30-40 persons per acre. At Lansbury, as fig.6.16 shows, a high density of 87-110 persons per acre allowed the majority of housing to be in terraces of three or more storeys, creating a greater sense of urbanity than was possible in the early parts of the New Towns.

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[27] Frederick Gibberd, 'Lansbury: The Live Architecture Exhibition' in *A Tonic to the Nation,* ed. by Mary Banham and Bevis Hillier (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), pp. 138-141 (p. 138). The overall Stepney-Poplar area containing eleven neighbourhoods was to be planned by LCC architect Robert Matthew, while the first section of 30 acres was prepared in the Town Planning Division under Arthur Ling, 'Lansbury Neighbourhood, Poplar: Festival of Britain 'Live Architecture' Exhibition', *AJ*, 111 (1950), 738-751 (p. 738).

[28] The Editors 'Lansbury: A principle put into practice', *AJ*, 114 (1951), p. 275.

[29] Elain Harwood, 'Lansbury', in *Festival of Britain*, ed. by Elain Harwood and Alan Powers (London: Twentieth Century Society, 2001), pp. 139-154 (p. 147).

[30] 'Lansbury Neighbourhood', p. 738.
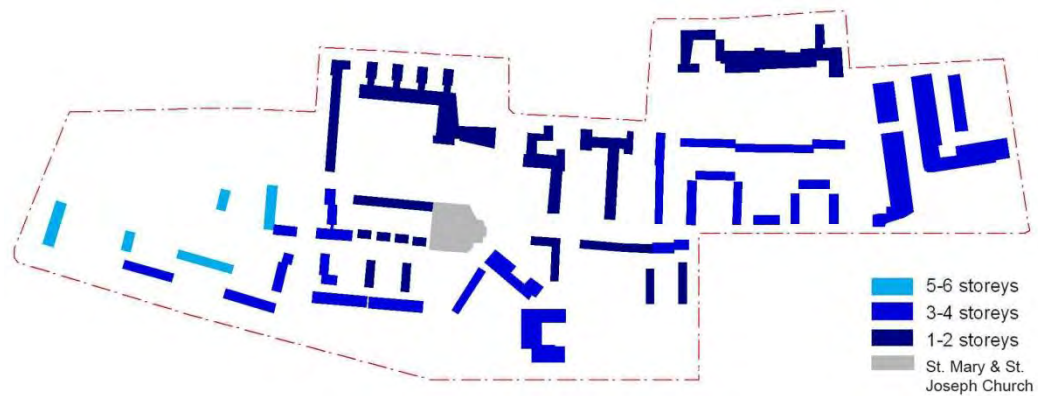
Fig.6.16. Lansbury Plan with storey heights indicated

However, the lower density (in comparison to the high 136 persons per acre) meant a shift away from the idea of tall slab blocks within open space, as advocated in the County of London Plan, and a move toward smaller scale housing. In terms of 'urbanity', from the outset, the picturesque element of visual variety was implemented through a policy of mixed development, while at the same time, a palette of materials and an overall process for landscaping treatment was agreed by all co-operating architects in order to create a sense of unity.[31] This shows that the New Town architects working at Lansbury were considering visual planning principles that were associated with urbanity. This is supported by comments from the Chief Architect to the Crawley Development Corporation, A. G. Sheppard Fidler. Of the Lansbury scheme, he claimed that mixed development had facilitated the creation of 'an interesting and varied composition and street-picture'; it was, according to Sheppard Fidler 'a most interesting architectural experiment in 'townscape' for this very reason.'[32] This is significant as it shows that other New Town architects shared Gibberd's visual planning ideas.

In terms of 'urbanity' at Lansbury, however, J. M. Richards was highly critical, concluding that the existing Georgian three-storey houses had the greatest sense of urbanity within the new neighbourhood.[33] He argued that the rhythm required to create a unified street facade while maintaining a human scale was lacking from the

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[31] 'Lansbury Neighbourhood', p. 738.

[32] A. G. Sheppard Fidler, 'Lansbury's Problems compared to those of a New Town', *Journal of the Town Planning Institute*, 38 (1951), 12-13 (p. 13).

[33] J. M. Richards, 'Lansbury', *AR*, 110 (1951), 360-367 (p. 361).

new buildings. Yet he noted the linked semi-detached houses by Bridgwater and
Shepheard (shown in the background of fig.6.13), suggesting that a 'more positive
architectural character' had been achieved.[34] Gibberd also praised the visual effect
of the houses linked at ground and first floor levels, which was a successful
compromise between the terrace and the semi-detached form.[35] Despite Richards's
criticisms of the scheme, he observed that although the new housing was 'cottagy' in
scale, certain parts of the scheme had achieved the 'compactness and the sense of
enclosure required in an urban precinct.'[36] These areas according to Richards, were
those planned as squares as opposed to streets, including Pekin Close by Bridgwater
and Shepheard, and the open-fronted square at the end of Sturry Street, designed by
Geoffrey Jellicoe. However, unlike Gibberd, Richards made no comment on the
'floorscape' of the housing.

In terms of visual planning, the *AD* journal commented on the three-dimensional
layout of Lansbury, observing that it had been planned as a 'series of visual groups',
with buildings designed around varying open spaces, each with its own character.
The layout could be regarded as a series of groups linked by open spaces; however,
the grouping had importance from 'both a sociological as well as visual point of
view.'[37] Referring to Gibberd's design for the market place and arcaded shops in
Lansbury, *AD* described the paved area as being 'laid out in a varied rectangular
pattern, to provide visual interest'; adding a functional aspect, however, the editors
suggested the paving also defined positions for the stalls in the market area.[38]
Richards had also commented on Gibberd's market place and shopping precinct,
since it was a 'great advance on anything to be found in the housing estates', the
best quality being the relationship of the space to the buildings.[39] The Lansbury
neighbourhood serves as an example of urbanity; it comprises mixed development
compact housing at a relatively high density, arranged into streets and squares with a
sense of enclosure, and finally, in Gibberd's mind, it displayed the use of

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[34] Richards, 'Lansbury', p. 363.
[35] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 36.
[36] Richards, 'Lansbury', p. 363.
[37] '"Live Architecture" 1951 Exhibition', *AD*, 20 (1950), 153-159 (p. 154).
[38] '"Live" Architecture Exhibition, Lansbury', *AJ*, 114 (1951), 284-292 (p. 291).
[39] Richards, 'Lansbury', p. 367.

'floorscape' as a means of unifying the vertical planes of housing facades. Lansbury was significant since it was not only the first chance for the public to see neighbourhood planning in practice, but also a chance for the New Town architect planners to test their visual planning ideas because construction in the New Towns had yet to commence.

6.2.1 Floorscape

Chapter 2 has shown that in 1949, the *AR* had introduced the term 'floorscape' in Cullen's 'Townscape Casebook'. Cullen stressed the importance of floor design in town planning since the space between the buildings was as equally important to the total urban scene as the buildings. This was a view shared by Gibberd, as his papers on three-dimensional planning in 1948 and Civic Design in 1951 have shown. Gibberd had already begun to experiment with floor textures earlier in 1946 at the Somerford Grove housing scheme in Hackney. Upon completion, the *AR* praised the 'contrast and interest' Gibberd had achieved through the use of a variety of materials – for example, gravel, stone, concrete and tarmac – on the ground.[40] Specifically in relation to the element of unity, Gibberd discussed his Somerford Grove designs in *The Design of Residential Areas*. Using similar materials on the floor plane to those of the vertical plane could create a greater unity between planes; however, Gibberd suggested that arranging the main lines of the floor and wall planes to correspond with one another could create a greater affinity between the two planes.[41] At Somerford Grove, Gibberd explained that the asphalt and concrete paving slabs had been designed to correspond with the wall and window pattern of the houses (fig. 6.17).[42]

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[40] The Editors, 'Housing at Hackney', *AR*, 106 (1949), 144-152 (p. 146).
[41] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 32.
[42] Ibid.

Fig.6.17. Corresponding walls and floors at Somerford Grove, by Gibberd, 1946
(Gibberd, *Town Design*, 1953)

The floorscape at Somerford Grove had functional purposes in addition to the visual qualities Gibberd described. Firstly, the pathways led from the road to the entrances of the dwellings, and secondly, as Gibberd explained in *Town Design*, since the residential density was high, large areas of paving had been laid, rather than grass, to avoid erosion.[43] This comment on the functional aspects of floorscape design at Somerford Grove seems to conflict with the idea that Gibberd emphasised visual planning elements, with little concern for social or functional design issues. It could be argued, however, that Gibberd made this functional argument as he was a modernist architect, and this was what the CIAM doctrine called for. In addition, by arguing for functionality from an economic perspective, Gibberd could perhaps make his urbanity principles more appealing to local authorities who favoured Garden City-type development. At Somerford Grove, such floorscape design would have been appealing to the Borough Council, who was responsible for maintaining open spaces. At Harlow, maintenance costs of open public spaces were also a key concern for the HDC. In 1951, the General Manager reported that the Corporation was concerned with the expense and estimated maintenance costs related to the large open green spaces at Mark Hall North. It was therefore agreed that in future schemes, any open spaces for 'amenity or aesthetic reasons should be provided only

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[43] Gibberd, *Town Design*, p. 287.

when absolutely essential.'[44] Furthermore, the HDC had decided that paved areas should be provided in preference to grassed areas in order to reduce maintenance costs.[45] For the HDC, the floorscape should be designed to be hardwearing to reduce costs; Gibberd, on the other hand, while recognising such reasoning argued that:

> Extensive landscape gardening cannot be used to form urban street pictures. There is no reason why it should be so used, for (and this is an important proposition) the fusion between the dwelling and the road will be greater if the horizontal surfaces against the walls of the dwellings are hard and natural things are suppressed. [46]

At Somerford Grove, Gibberd necessarily took into account the function of the floorscape; however, when describing the scheme, he placed emphasis on the visual elements, explaining that the varying patterns to the floor had been provided to 'make interesting floors to the open spaces', as well as to unify the wall and floor planes.[47] Such an emphasis could be recognised as opposing key modernist values; on the other hand, it could be argued that Gibberd's references to planes, colours and textures resonated with the earlier ideas of the Formalists.

Sally Everett has recently explained that the Formalists – or Modernists – coined the term 'Art for Art's Sake' since they were concerned solely with the arrangement of lines, shapes, textures and colours to create visually pleasing compositions.[48] Chapter 2 has shown that during the early 1940s, Gibberd examined the visual effects of colour and texture in the street scenes of Lewes and Saffron Walden. In his 1940 *AR* article, Gibberd argued that the Modern Movement had 'done its job' therefore it should be possible to look at the purely visual effects of materials 'for their own sake.'[49] Gibberd's abstract formal thinking as well as the language he used to describe his view on textures in the street reflected the earlier ideas of modernism

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[44] ERO, A6306, 317 1/32 (2), W. Eric Adams to Gibberd 20 February 1951, Report of Special meeting of the Corporation on the 25 January 1951.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 32.

[47] Gibberd, *Town Design*, p. 287.

[48] *Art Theory and Criticism: An Anthology of Formalist, Avant-Garde, Contextualist and Post-Modernist Thought*, ed. by Sally Everett (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1991), p. x.

[49] Gibberd, 'Wall Textures', p. 9.

in art. Geometric abstract art had a significant influence, particularly in the Netherlands, on artists and architects within the *De Stijl* movement.[50] This strand of Dutch modernism, as Alan Colquhoun has explained, was related to the Arts and Crafts movement, inheriting William Morris's idea that society could be transformed by art.[51] At the same time, the movement advocated the simplification of visual compositions to lines and planes. In architecture, *De Stijl* architects took a holistic approach to design, aiming to unify elements and planes. Internally, by using colour and designing vertical and horizontal planes in relation to one another, these architects aimed to merge architecture with the 'tectonic elements' of a room – doors and furniture for example – in order to create a new unity.[52] Many parallels can be drawn between the modernist *De Stijl* movement and Gibberd's approach to the design of streets. Gibberd argued that the vertical planes of building facades must be designed in relation to the scale of the space – or the horizontal floor plane – between the buildings. Furthermore, the floorscape texture should relate to the vertical building facades, to unify the street scene. Interpreted in this way, it could be argued that Gibberd's visual approach to planning was modernist in a wider artistic sense.

Later in 1961, Cullen also referred to the visual effect of floorscape in his publication *Townscape* – a collection of articles and images from *AR's* Townscape campaign. He argued that if buildings, which were 'rich in texture and colour', stood on a 'flat expanse of greyish tarmac', the floor would fail to intrigue the eye in the same way as the buildings did.[53] Therefore, the buildings would remain separate. He argued that one of the most powerful ways to unify the town was through the floor.[54] He used two photographs borrowed from Hastings's 'floorscape' collection to demonstrate his point of 'linking and joining' the town with the floorscape (fig.6.18).

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[50] Michael White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 12.
[51] Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 109.
[52] Ibid., p. 114.
[53] Gordon Cullen, *Townscape* (London: The Architectural Press, 1961), p. 53.
[54] Ibid.

Fig.6.18. 'Linking and Joining' (Cullen, *Townscape*, 1961)

However, unlike Gibberd, Cullen explicitly emphasised the functional element of floorscape in a detailed section on 'The Floor'. He argued that the 'distinctive patterns formed by differing materials [should] arise from use', rather than from the 'desire to add decoration.'[55] The 'arbitrary use of cobbles to form patterns' Cullen was opposed to originated from a desire to decorate rather than a modernist approach, which might use varying textures in response to 'movement patterns' in the town.[56] Again, Cullen used photographs from Hastings's collection, this time of floorscape examples in the small English market town of Woodstock in Oxfordshire. Cullen described the cobbles shown in fig.6.19 (left) as a 'warning buffer' for pedestrians between the road and the pavement.[57] Of the image on the right, Cullen observed that the difficulty of driving over cobbles made them an obvious surface for motorists to park on, thus the 'beginning of pattern based on function.'[58] As Chapter 2 has shown, Richards, Hastings and Cullen of the *AR* frequently reaffirmed their commitment to the earlier modernist functional principles when discussing visual planning. *Townscape* was chiefly concerned with visual planning and ways of seeing the town; however, Cullen stressed the importance of designing to suit the

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[55] Cullen, *Townscape*, p. 128.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., p. 130.
[58] Ibid., p. 129.

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movement of people and the various functions within the town. Although Gibberd considered functional aspects while designing his floorscapes, he placed a greater emphasis on the visual qualities of the floor and their contribution to the overall street picture in comparison to his contemporaries at the *AR*.

Fig.6.19. 'Functional Patterns' (Cullen, *Townscape*, 1961)

Fig.6.20. Floorscape at Glebelands, Mark Hall North by the HDC Design Group, 1950-54

The HDC Design Group incorporated a variety of floor textures at Glebelands in Mark Hall North (fig.6.20). Cobbles were used to create visual variety and to define pathways, while the use of hard textures rather than grass facilitated a greater sense of unity between vertical and horizontal planes, as well as giving a more urban than rural appearance. This is interesting since construction at the Glebelands housing

group began in April 1950 – almost a year before the HDC's decision to minimise open green spaces in favour of low-maintenance surfaces – which suggests that Gibberd and the HDC Design Unit designed the floorscape chiefly for visual reasons. To complete the composition of the street picture, a sculpture by Barbara Hepworth was placed on the main cobbled area. 'Contrapuntal Forms' was inherited from the Festival of Britain and forms part of a large collection of sculptures sited throughout Harlow New Town. The Harlow Art Trust, founded in 1953, was responsible for procuring the collection and as a Trustee, Gibberd promoted the idea that creative arts within the town should be valued and given an important role in the community.[59] In a recent interview, John Graham explained that the role of the Harlow Arts Trust is to 'improve the artistic health of Harlow.'[60] In my view, this idea underpinned Gibberd's ambition to create a visually pleasing town with a sense of urbanity at Harlow. He viewed architecture and town planning as a form of art; therefore, in Gibberd's mind, to create aesthetically pleasing street scenes would be beneficial to the community as a whole. This reflected Morris's conviction that the total design of everything for maximum beauty could have a positive effect on all members of society. Unwin had also been influenced by this notion, believing that social coherence could be achieved through visual unity and a sense of community encouraged by the aesthetic control of housing design and layout.[61] By the 1940s, in addition to Gibberd, other modernist architects – including CIAM members Gropius, Giedion and Sert – were promoting the idea that in addition to answering functional requirements, modern architecture should respond to people's cultural aspirations. They argued that buildings should fulfil people's aspiration for joy, pride and excitement, which could be achieved by the integration of the work of the 'planner, architect, painter, sculptor and landscapist.'[62] This is important as it demonstrates a view shared by modernist architects that the visual qualities of architecture could benefit society.

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[59] *Sculpture in Harlow*, ed. by Danielle Olsen (Harlow: The Harlow Arts Trust, 2005), p. 7.

[60] John Graham (former partner of Frederick Gibberd & Partners – Harlow Office), interviewed by author, 25 May 2012.

[61] Abigail Beach and Nick Tiratsoo, 'The Planners and the Public', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Volume III 1840-1950*, ed. by Martin Daunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 525-550 (p. 528).

[62] J. L. Sert, F. Léger, S. Giedion, 'Nine Points on Monumentality', *Centre for Research in Polis, University of Barcelona* (1943) <http://www.ub.edu/escult/doctorat/html/lecturas /sert1.pdf > [accessed 25 Nov 2013] (p. 2)

In terms of floorscape, other New Town Development Corporations also experimented with the design of floor patterns within housing layouts. However, in comparison to Gibberd's floorscape at Somerford Grove and the HDC's designs at Harlow in the late 1940s and early 50s, floorscape patterns only seemed to emerge in other New Towns during the mid 1960s (fig.6.21).

Fig.6.21. Floorscape in the New Towns, clockwise from top left:

    Austen Paths in the Chells neighbourhood, Stevenage New Town (mid 1960s)

    Seafar 2, Cumbernauld New Town, (1961-63) (*AR,* February 1964)

    Downs Central, Hatfield New Town, by Tayler and Green (1959-65)

    Forestfield, Crawley New Town, by Peter Phippens (1967)

In 1964, the *AR* published an article on housing in Cumbernauld New Town. The editors argued that the 'Seafar 2' and 'Muirhead 3' housing groups were of 'special interest to disciples of the art of townscape' due to the 'intimacy and variety [...] achieved by means of the floor pattern.'[63] The editors stated that the 'imaginative

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[63] The Editors, 'Housing at Cumbernauld New Town', *AR*, 135 (1964), 93-99 (p. 95).

treatment of the ground surface in relation to the buildings and spaces between them' represented 'a real break-through.'[64] This was an unusual statement to make considering the *AR* had published Gibberd's Somerford Grove scheme in 1949, commenting on the contrast and interest created by the varying floor textures. Furthermore, by the mid 1960s, Harlow had a variety of floorscape patterns within housing layouts, for example, at Orchard Croft and The Hornbeams. It could be argued that Gibberd and the HDC were pioneering in the design and implementation of floorscape in the New Towns.
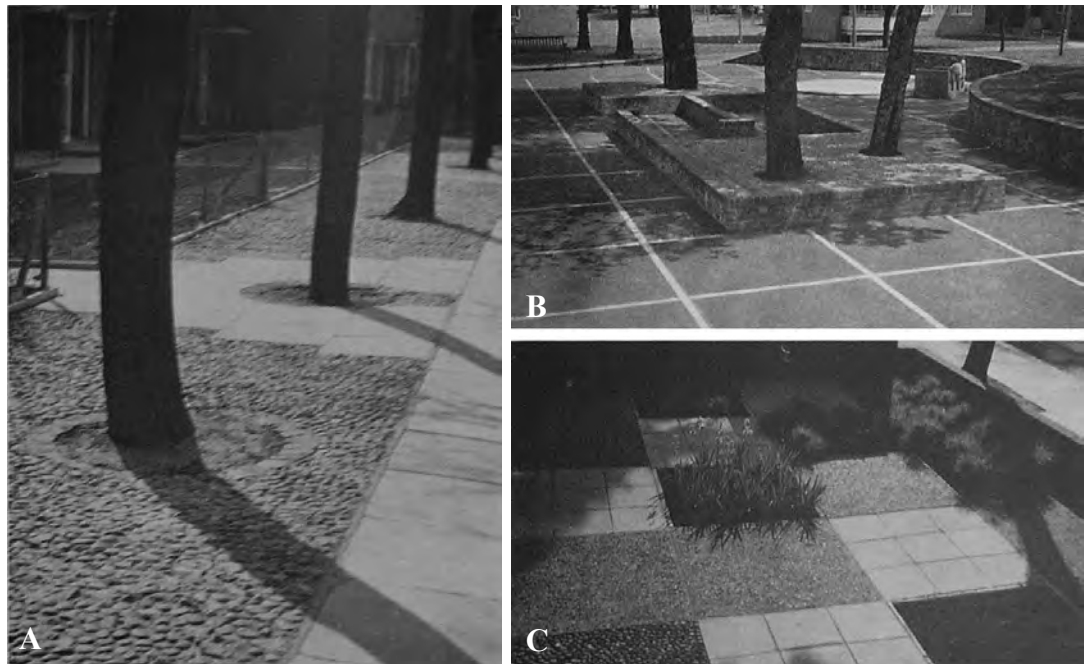
Fig.6.22. 'Some Details of Landscaping' - examples shown in *Flats and Houses 1958*:

By the late 1950s the Ministry of Housing and Local Government began to encourage local authorities to incorporate floorscape design in their housing schemes. In *Flats and Houses 1958: Design and Economy*, Minister of Housing and Local Government Henry Brooke explained that more attention must be given to the treatment of space around buildings in order to save costs in high-density schemes.[65] The Ministry showed several 'details of landscaping' including four examples of floorscape design completed by the LCC by the mid 1950s; three of these are shown in fig.6.22.

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[64] 'Housing at Cumbernauld', p. 95.

[65] MHLG, *Flats and Houses 1958, Design and Economy* (London: HMSO, 1958), p. v.

The Ministry was promoting the use of hard ground surfaces, as the HDC had done, to save maintenance costs. However, they recognised the aesthetic benefits floorscape design could have and used this as a way to seduce local authority and development corporation architects to adopt hard landscaping. Image 'B' in fig.6.22. shows an example of floorscape at the LCC Quadrant Estate: the Ministry described the design as a 'pleasing treatment of surfaces.'[66] Image 'C' was described as 'an attractive corner,'[67] while image 'A' was described as 'surface treatment to define footway and entrances to the dwellings.'[68] The technique used by the LCC at Croydon Road in West Ham was similar to the techniques used earlier by Gibberd at Somerford Grove and Glebelands, which again, highlights Gibberd's pioneering role in the implementation of floorscape design.

6.2.2   Open Fronts

A further example of the greater emphasis Gibberd and the HDC placed on the visual planning of the street scene over social or functional aspects, was the HDC's implementation of an 'open fronts' policy. Gibberd had explained his ideas about the 'house-to-paving relationship' in *The Design of Residential Areas* in 1953; paving leading to dwelling entrances could be designed to correspond with the public footpath, as well as with the rhythm of the facade to create a greater sense of unity to the street picture. Similarities in floor and wall materials could create a greater unity between the horizontal and vertical planes. However, Gibberd elaborated on the concept further by introducing the idea of the 'house-to-road relationship.' Despite implementing measures to strengthen the house-to-pavement relationship, Gibberd argued that:

> the two planes are scarcely united at all when the house stands back from the road and is separated from it by the visual barriers of hedge and front garden [...] if all the front walls and fences are swept away and the space between the pavement and the house is designed as a communal front lawn, the compositions will be even more complete.[69]

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[66] MHLG, *Flats and Houses*, p. 49. (Quadrant Estate, Islington by the LCC).
[67] Ibid. (Tor Gardens Estate, Kensington by the LCC).
[68] Ibid., p. 48. (Croydon Road, West Ham by the LCC).
[69] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 31.

Chapter 5 has shown that Gibberd considered the space in front of houses as public, since they formed part of the street picture. This not only included roads and pavements, but front gardens too. Gibberd argued that at Harlow, front gardens should be designed as open communal lawns, free from any form of enclosure. This was a concept the HDC agreed upon, and throughout the development of Harlow, an open fronts policy – where walls, fences or hedges were not permitted around front gardens – was enforced. Gibberd believed that the omission of such visual barriers could create a strong sense of unity between the horizontal and vertical planes, therefore contributing to the overall sense of urbanity to the street scene.

The earlier Reith Reports had briefly discussed front gardens in relation to housing layout and grouping. The final report stated that as a rule, houses should be set back from roads and footpaths. Front gardens could be provided in the form of 'open forecourts' as an alternative to, or in combination with, enclosed front gardens. With this statement, however, the report stressed that before such open gardens were incorporated into housing layouts, the preferences of prospective residents must be studied, and the tendency for people to take short cuts should be taken into account.[70] The idea that communal open forecourts could be adopted in the New Towns was perhaps due to an earlier influence from the Austrian socialist housing schemes of the inter-war period. John Gold has recently shown that the large perimeter blocks with communal courtyards and amenities became some of the most visited and influential housing developments in Europe.[71]

After the War, however, the Central Housing Advisory Committee under the Ministry of Health began to take an interest specifically in the aesthetics of Local Authority housing estates. Chapter 3 has shown that recent publications have argued that those involved in post-war building and reconstruction believed that improving the appearance of Britain following the Blitz, would have a positive impact on national morale.[72] In October 1948, the Central Housing Advisory Committee appointed the Sub-Committee on Means of Improving the Appearance of Local

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[70] New Towns Committee, *Final Report*, p. 16.
[71] Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, p. 51.
[72] Atkinson, *The Festival of Britain*, p. 66.

Authority Housing Estates. By enlisting the help of tenants, the sub-committee was to make proposals on how this might be achieved. The sub-committee described a new 'movement' in favour of unfenced gardens, however, its success they stated, depended entirely on the cooperation of the tenant. Visually, the report stated that open gardens could give a feeling of openness and space. Significantly, the sub-committee suggested that 'architectural design and "urbanity" of the houses [was] allowed a chance to appear.'[73] Of the ten members, Louis de Soissons was the only architect; therefore, it is likely that these comments originated from him. At the recommendation of the RIBA, Soissons was appointed chief architect to Welwyn Garden City in 1920. Despite planning a Garden City, a recent biography by William Allen has shown that Soissons was not greatly influenced by Welwyn's predecessors - Letchworth or Hampstead Garden Suburb. In fact, Allen shows that Soissons had a personal affection for the eighteenth-century English classical vernacular, in particular, the buildings of Regency Brighton and Cheltenham.[74] Gibberd was later to cite Cheltenham as one of the diverse ideals of tightly-built high density urban environments. This suggests that Louis de Soissons might have shared similar ideas with Gibberd about urbanity. In fact, the revised *Housing Manual 1949* used an example of housing from Welwyn Garden City showing an open front (fig.6.23).

Fig.6.23. Open Fronts at Welwyn Garden City, *1949 Housing Manual*

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[73] Sub-Committee on Means of Improving the Appearance of Local Authority Housing Estates, *The Appearance of Housing Estates* (London: HMSO, 1948), p. 14.

[74] Willam Allen rev. by Andrew Saint, 'Soissons, Louis Emmanuel Jean Guy de (1890–1962)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004)
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31245> [accessed 13 June 2013] (para. 5 of 9)

This suggests that firstly, Soissons used open fronts in order to contribute to the sense of urbanity. Secondly, it shows that the Ministry of Health supported and promoted the idea of open fronts; the new Manual suggested that the open treatment of front gardens could unify groups of houses, adding a 'three-dimensional interest.'[75] Like the earlier guide to *The Appearance of Housing Estates,* however, the Manual recommended that people's preferences should be taken into account, suggesting that where enclosed gardens were desired, they could be provided using low walls backed with flowering shrubs.[76]

At Harlow, Dame Evelyn Sharp, who had earlier requested a report from Gibberd as to why the New Towns looked open, applied her aesthetic judgment to the open fronts in the town. Gibberd's intentions had been to unify the street scene by eliminating visual barriers, while at the same time a consistent policy across the town would help to create an overall unity. In June 1959, however, following a visit to the town, Sharp questioned the HDC's policy of open fronts. She argued that visually, they had resulted in a 'uniformity that was tantamount to drabness.'[77] From a sociological point of view, she argued that open fronts prevented occupiers from expressing individuality, and that generally, they preferred enclosed gardens, therefore, their wishes should be met. Furthermore, the Minster of Housing and Local Government, Henry Brooke, supported Sharp's observations and believed the Corporation should experiment in a small area with low walls.[78]

These comments forced the HDC to reassess their policy of open fronts. The subject was discussed at great length during a Planning Board meeting in November 1959. The archive evidence shows a summary of arguments which influenced HDC members on the decision outcome of whether to continue or discontinue their policy. From an aesthetic point of view, the members agreed that since the town had been built to a high density with short front gardens, enclosing them would 'undoubtedly make for a mean appearance.' Furthermore, it was argued that the 'spaciousness'

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[75] MH, *Housing Manual 1949*, p. 122.
[76] Ibid., p. 36.
[77] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (1), 'Visit of the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government', Extract from Planning Board, 19 June 1959.
[78] Ibid.

afforded by open fronts helped to make the town 'look better class.'[79] General Manager Hyde Harvey supported this view and added that the vast majority of visitors had commented favourably on the spacious effect the open fronts gave. It was also argued that the policy should be retained on the basis that a change in policy would attract negative press.[80] These key arguments were concerned with the appearance of the street scene and its effect on the visitor and the press, rather than the impact of open fronts on the residents. Gibberd added to the argument by declaring that the open fronts at Harlow were an 'integral and essential part of the planning conception'. He suggested that all tenants at Harlow enjoyed public as well as individual interests, and although they might in theory wish for separate enclosed fronts, he argued that in reality they would probably find they disliked the 'overall picture' if enclosed fronts were adopted.[81]

Before reaching a final decision on open fronts, several HDC members visited the New Towns of Bracknell, Stevenage and Crawley, to examine the visual effect of enclosed fronts. Gibberd, accompanied by Board members Dr Stephen Taylor and Dame Alix Meynell, returned from Stevenage, arguing that the 80 percent proportion of houses with varying types of enclosed fronts had been 'unattractive aesthetically.'[82] The Bracknell and Crawley parties, including Executive Architect Hamnett and General Manager Hyde Harvey returned unanimously in favour of continuing the open-fronts policy at Harlow. They reported that the closed fronts they had seen were 'unattractive and unkempt'.[83] The archive evidence suggests that the HDC's decision to retain the open-fronts policy was based mainly on aesthetic reasons, rather than on social considerations. The Board agreed that of all the New Towns, Harlow was unique since special attention had been paid to 'street architecture' – for example, 'closes, squares, views stopped off with buildings, skyline.' According to HDC Chairman Richard Costain, street architecture did not

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[79] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (1), 'Summary of Arguments Influencing Members', by Chairman Costain, 11 November 1959.

[80] Ibid.

[81] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (1), 'Summary of Arguments Influencing Members', by Chairman Costain, 11 November 1959.

[82] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (1), 'Visit of the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government', Extract from Planning Board, 19 June 1959.

[83] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (1), Notes from meeting following New Town visits, 13 October 1959.

lend itself well to enclosed fronts, which would only create a 'mass of conflicting spaces.'[84] In essence, the enclosure and separation of front gardens conflicted with the creation of urbanity. As Gibberd frequently asserted, the spaces in front of buildings belonged to the public street picture. These spaces between buildings were of equal importance to the buildings themselves and should be designed in such a way to create an overall street scene with a sense of urbanity. A comparison of the appearance of open and closed fronts can be seen in figs 6.24 and 6.25. Fig.6.24 shows open fronts at Long Ley in Netteswell by the HDC Design Group, whereas fig.6.25 shows a variety of 'closed fronts' at Elm Walk in Stevenage.

Fig.6.24. Open Fronts at Long Ley Harlow, by the HDC Design Group, 1952-54

Fig.6.25. Various 'closed fronts' at Elm Walk in Stevenage

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[84] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (1), 'Summary of Arguments Influencing Members', by Chairman Costain, 11 November 1959.

The absence of walls, or 'visual barriers', in relation to the street picture at Long Ley facilitates a strong unification of vertical and horizontal planes. The space is well defined with a strong sense of enclosure. At Stevenage, on the other hand, the space is less well-defined due to the closed fronts of Elm Walk. The sense of enclosure is weakened by the open view along the street, in comparison to terminating building at right angles to the road at Long Ley. However, it could be argued here that the closed fronts at Stevenage contributed to the visual variety of the street picture, giving a more haphazard, perhaps more urban appearance. The *AR* had argued in 1966 that since the urbanity and 'picturesqueness' of country towns like Lewes and Saffron Walden grew over time, any attempt to create 'instant picturesqueness' would feel false.[85] In comparison to the cold designed, or 'false' feel of the open fronts at Long Ley, the photograph of Elm Walk in Stevenage reveals a sense of development over time; the residents have grown hedges, or constructed brick walls or fences to enclose their own gardens. In his seminal work *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre argues that every society produces its own space.[86] This social space of the inhabitants – or what Lefebvre calls 'representational space' – has a significant influence on the production of space.[87] According to Lefebvre, representational space 'embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time.'[88] At Stevenage, the physical space has been overlaid with a social space which incorporates social actions. Some of the residents, influenced by the ideal of the enclosed private front garden, have created their own private spaces within the public street scene. As a result, the Stevenage street scene looks more 'lived in', perhaps more urban. In relation to Lefebvre's conceptual triad, the physical space – or 'spatial practice' – as well as the spaces conceptualised by town planners – or 'representations of space' – were potentially in conflict with social 'representational space', as the Stevenage example demonstrates.[89]

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[85] 'High Density: Low Rise', p. 38.

[86] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1991), p. 31.

[87] Ibid., p. 41.

[88] Ibid., p. 42.

[89] Ibid., p. 33.

Architect-planners may have tried to capture representational space in spatial practice, but perhaps in doing so, a feeling that such spaces were 'lived in' was lost. Yet at Harlow, despite the strict open-fronts policy, there were examples of residents creating their own social spaces within the physical spaces created by Gibberd and the HDC. From the mid 1950s onwards, the *Harlow Citizen* published a number of letters from Harlow residents who were unhappy with their open front gardens. In fact, in June 1957, a survey by the newspaper revealed that by far the most unpopular feature at Harlow were the open fronts.[90] One of the complaints featured in the paper was that communal open gardens put young children at risk from passing traffic. In March 1957, the *Citizen* printed a front page story which showed mothers living in a block of maisonettes in Wedhey constructing their own space using barricades made from household items, in order to prevent their children from running into the road (fig.6.26).[91]

Fig.6.26. 'Barricades up to protect toddlers', *Harlow Citizen*, 22 March 1957

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[90] 'Open Fronts Unpopular', *Harlow Citizen*, 7 June 1957, p. 1.
[91] 'Barricades up to protect toddlers', *Harlow Citizen*, 22 March 1957, p. 1.

The most common complaints, however, were that the lack of enclosure failed to keep either children or pets from wandering onto the open fronts. The 'letters to the editor' section of the *Harlow Citizen* frequently displayed letters from tenants who were 'driven almost insane by unruly children'[92] or complaints about people's pets fouling open fronts.[93] Many appealed to the HDC through the *Harlow Citizen* to permit walls or fences to enclose fronts, since open fronts were deemed the root cause of these problems. Gibberd continued to argue the case for open fronts, making statements in the newspaper such as: 'once you start putting fences around them and gnomes in them you lose the total effect of the town.'[94] Gibberd envisaged the fronts as public spaces, as part of the overall street picture; the residents on the other hand, considered them to be private front gardens. In many cases, residents constructed their own walls to obtain a private closed garden. From 1959 onwards, the HDC Commercial Estates Officer carried out checks in housing areas to ensure the open-fronts policy was adhered to; if walls or fences appeared, residents would instructed to take them down.[95] In an attempt to create an overall unity, private developers were also instructed to conform to the open-fronts policy. In later developments in the Great Parndon neighbourhood cluster, land was made available for people to obtain the freehold of a site and build their own homes. Despite the freedom to design and build their homes, the owners were required to follow the HDC open-fronts policy. In 1980, Gibberd explained that this was in order to obtain visual unity in the area.[96] The residents of 4 Burnett Park were strongly opposed to the open fronts policy, since pedestrians tended to take a short cut across the open green in front of their property, that in 1977, they constructed a concrete wall around the garden. The owners refused to demolish the wall and instead were taken to court, which resulted in a court order to demolish the wall in 1978.[97] At Stony Wood, another private housing project with twenty-three plots for sale, there were also difficulties. The *Harlow Citizen* reported in 1963 that 'a rumpus was brewing' over the HDC's open-fronts policy. Social Development Officer Len White had

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[92] 'Open-Front Poll?', *Harlow Citizen*, 10 March 1961, p. 2.
[93] 'Dogs and Open Fronts', *Harlow Citizen*, 16 October 1959, p. 1.
[94] 'What I want now – Harlow's Planner', *Harlow Citizen*, 17 May 1957, p. 10.
[95] ERO, A6306, 186, DL/2 (1), A number of letters were sent to residents of Water House Moor, Sakins Croft and Great Leylands.
[96] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 182.
[97] ERO, A6306, 186, DL/2 (2), Harlow County Court Order, 18 October 1978.

explained that it was 'in the interests of all to have harmonious designs'; the buyers argued that the regulations were 'over-stringent'.[98]

Gibberd understood that prohibiting closed private front gardens at Harlow might have raised questions of personal freedom, and claimed that Dame Evelyn Sharp had accused him of being a dictator. However, he argued:

> If one elects to live in a community it is not unreasonable to ask for restraint in the interests of the community as a whole.[99]

Georges Teyssot has recently examined the idea of the open front lawn in relation to the twentieth-century American suburb. He argues that the idea of open yard gained significant ground during the 1930s as a result of Leonidas Ramsey's publication *Landscaping the House Grounds,* which stressed that the front yard belonged to the public. Teyssot argues that Ramsey linked the principle of open fronts to civic responsibility – by way of open fronts, residents could contribute to making the street more attractive.[100] Parallels can be drawn between this idea and Gibberd's own interpretation of the front garden. At Harlow, Gibberd implemented open fronts to create unified street pictures for the enjoyment of the overall community, and as the quote above suggests, open fronts could promote the participation of citizens in community life. This contradicts the idea that Gibberd's concept of urbanity was purely aesthetic, as he clearly recognised a social benefit to the open-fronts policy, (although it was not necessarily a benefit the people were willing to accept). However, his social motivation ultimately came through as an aesthetic decision; Gibberd would argue for open fronts predominantly from an aesthetic point of view, claiming that no one could doubt that the appearance of open fronts was 'immensely superior to that of the enclosed front garden.'[101] Gibberd and the HDC used open fronts to unify the horizontal and vertical planes, as according to Gibberd, a work of art must have the quality of unity as well as variety.

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[98] 'Housing rumpus brewing over restrictions on design', *Harlow Citizen*, 6 December 1963, p. 1.

[99] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 115.

[100] Georges Teyssot, 'The American Lawn: Surface of Everyday Life', in *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture,* ed. by Barbara Miller Lane (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 297-98 (p. 297).

[101] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 31.

Ensuring the policy of open fronts was implemented across all residential areas in Harlow was also an attempt to unify the housing in the town on a larger scale. The large detached houses of Burnett Park and Stony Wood received the same open front treatment as the Standard I terraced houses. This equal treatment of street scenes follows the Reith Report's original requirements that the New Towns could be balanced classless societies. Furthermore, the HDC Board believed open fronts helped to make the town look 'better class'. While attempting to create an egalitarian town, Gibberd and the HDC hoped the visual effect of open fronts could even out visual discrepancies which might have otherwise existed between housing for different levels of wage earners. The idea that art and sculpture in the town could enrich the artistic life of the Harlow residents also demonstrates how the HDC believed they could enrich the cultural lives of Harlow residents, again as an attempt to eliminate barriers which might exist between classes. These ideas resonated with J. M. Richards's belief that the arts, particularly modern architecture, should engage with the common man. The premise of the *AR's* Townscape campaign in fact, was to re-educate the eye – to educate the layman in ways of seeing and appreciating the urban environment. The open-fronts policy at Harlow demonstrates how Gibberd and the HDC applied visual planning techniques – sometimes in opposition to the preferences of the tenants – firstly to eliminate visual differences between various housing types, and secondly, to contribute to the aesthetic quality of urbanity, which Gibberd believed could be enjoyed and appreciated by the community as a whole.

6.3   COMMUNITY AND PRIVACY?

The idea of 'community' was central to modernist thinking about architecture and urban planning. Chapter 4 has shown how modernist architects in the former Soviet Union generated new architectural forms with the hope of facilitating communal living. In Britain, the MARS Group Town Planning Committee also embraced the idea of community, employing neighbourhood planning principles in their plans for London. At Harlow, the concept of mixed development, the implementation of neighbourhood planning, as well as the open-fronts policy, can all be viewed as attempts to facilitate good community life. However, as Glendinning and Muthesius

have recently argued, from the outset, the notion of community conflicted with ideas of privacy.[102]

The issue of privacy has arisen a number of times in this thesis. Chapter 1 demonstrated that during the flat versus house debates of the 1930s, Denby highlighted a lack of privacy as a key problem for flat dwellers. In a later study during the 1970s, Oscar Newman argued that the lack of privacy in tall blocks of flats was a result of a lack of architectural expression around the entrances, which in turn, led to the space being perceived as public rather than private.[103] New forms of housing had led to new, unfamiliar types of space, whereas in the past, clear boundaries between public and private space had been established by positioning single family houses on their own pieces of land.[104] Thus, the individual dwellings were 'buffered' from neighbouring dwellings by the public street and intervening grounds; the buffer being reinforced by hedges and fences.[105] In the case of open fronts at Harlow, the absence of hedges or fences weakened the buffer zone between private and public spaces. This conflicted with the preferences of those migrating from existing well-established communities to new housing estates, as Michael Young and Peter Willmott demonstrated in their 1957 sociological study. In *Family and Kinship in East London*, Young and Willmott showed how strong social networks in a working-class community in Bethnal Green were broken as residents were relocated to the LCC estate of Greenleigh.[106] With the absence of kin nearby, those from Bethnal Green were reluctant to establish new networks of personal relationships in Greenleigh, tending to 'keep themselves to themselves.' Their lives had changed from being 'people-centred' to 'house-centred' and as a result, residents felt the need for greater privacy in their homes.[107] The majority of Harlow's incoming inhabitants moved from similar circumstances, and as the thesis

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[102] Glendinning and Muthesius, p. 113.

[103] Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space: People and Design in the Violent City* (London: Architectural Press, 1972), p. 3.

[104] Ibid., p. 51.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957)

[107] Young and Willmott, pp. 127-134.

has shown, most Harlow residents preferred a house and garden, and in particular, a front garden that was enclosed.

This ideal can be traced back to the early and mid-Victorian period, as M. J. Daunton has recently argued; the trend of the private 'encapsulated' dwellings within the public 'open' realm formed during this time when the house was located within urban space. Daunton argues that this process realigned the relationship between private and public, with the threshold between the two spheres becoming less ambiguous.[108] Mike Hepworth suggests that as a result of the Victorian Ideal of the home, the dwelling evolved in certain ways, with emphasis on the distinction between the public and private, and between notions of 'front' and 'back'.[109] Furthermore, Hepworth argues that despite rapid social and economic changes since the end of the nineteenth-century, the Victorian idea that the home was a 'private retreat' separate from the public realm has remained largely unchanged.[110]

At Harlow, the HDC recognised the importance existing, as well as prospective tenants placed on privacy in and around the home. Prompted by concerns raised by the HUDC, the HDC discussed the issue in a Planning Board meeting in 1957. With particular reference to 'Northbrooks', a mixed development scheme by Powell and Moya, the General Manager stressed that there had been 'an unquestionable resistance to living in accommodation that was overlooked.' He recognised the aims of the Architect Planner to 'secure urbanity and avoid wastage of land and a suburban environment' but requested that 'special care be taken in the future to safeguard privacy, in order to meet the wishes of occupiers and so discourage an inclination that might otherwise be fostered to move outside the town.'[111] Gibberd's efforts to create urbanity through mixed development and enclosure had resulted in a reduction of privacy, particularly to the rear of houses. In Gibberd's mind, however,

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[108] M. J. Daunton, 'Public Place and Private Space: The Victorian City and the Working-class Household', in *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture*, ed. by Barbara Miller Lane (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 128-132 (p. 128).

[109] *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture*, ed. by Barbara Miller Lane (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), p. 149.

[110] Mike Hepworth, 'Privacy, Security and Respectability: The Ideal Victorian Home', in *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture*, ed. by Barbara Miller Lane (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 150-155 (p. 150).

[111] ERO, A6306, 362, 32/2 (1), Extract from Planning Board Minutes, 13 September 1957.

the rear gardens were kept private, since they were hidden from view from the public street. In designing the street picture, Gibberd frequently stressed that public and private spaces should be kept visually separated from one another. However, Gibberd was largely concerned with screening the untidy rear gardens from the public street scene, rather than creating private rear gardens for the residents. Furthermore, he saw front gardens as belonging to the public scene, which conflicted with the views of the majority of tenants, who saw front gardens as private.

While designing the public spaces in front of the houses at Harlow, Gibberd and the HDC developed the 'corner unit' to increase the sense of enclosure and urbanity. By 1953 the Ministry of Housing and Local Government was promoting the housing unit to increase densities while saving costs on road development. However, just as high-rise flats had introduced unfamiliar spaces which were neither public nor private, so too did the corner unit. In particular, the 'external corner unit', used at Crawley and Harlow, confused the traditional idea of 'front' and 'back'. Fig.6.27 shows an example of a ground floor plan for an external corner unit. Flat types 'A', 'B' and 'C' are all accessed from the rear internal courtyard via one main access point from the street. The plan demonstrates that the residents of flat 'A' to the far left of the plan, would have to walk directly past the bathroom window and front door of flat 'B' to access their home. Fig.6.28 shows the photograph which accompanied the plan, an external corner unit at Crawley New Town designed by A. G. S. Fidler. The residents have opted for net curtains to prevent views from the access pathway into their homes.
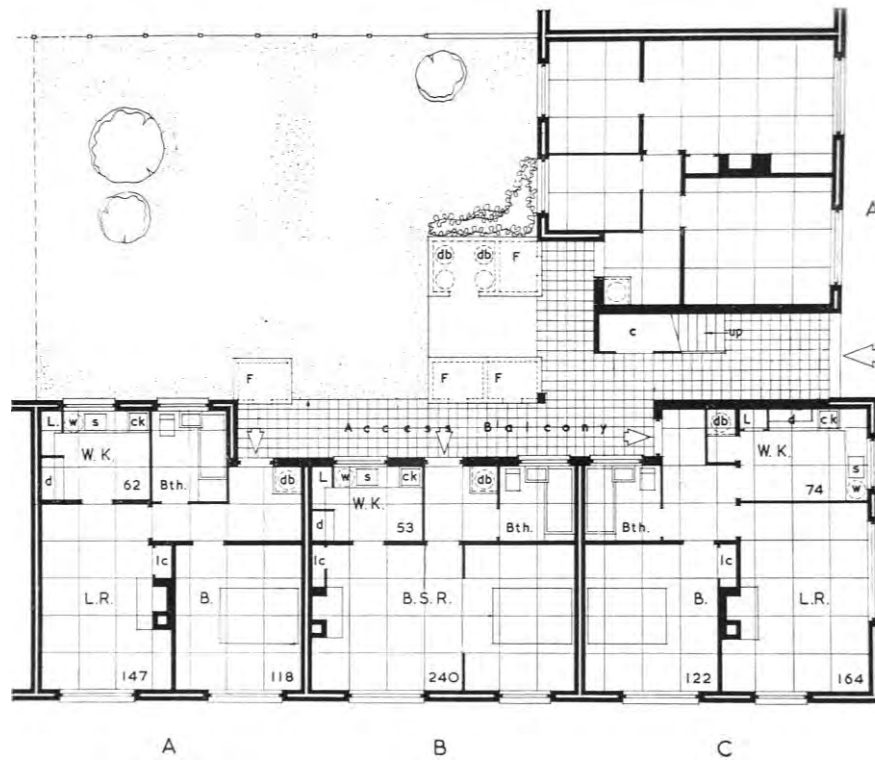
Fig.6.27. Example of ground floor corner unit plan from *Houses 1953*

Fig.6.28. 'View from the inner courtyard of an "external" corner block
of flats at Crawley New Town, A. G. Sheppard Fidler'[112]

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[112] MHLG, *Houses 1953* (London: HMSO, 1953), p. 17.

In the 1957 *AR* special edition 'Counter-attack against Subtopia', Town Planner Walter Manthorpe investigated the distances which might be required between windows and members of the public in the street to safeguard visual privacy in the home. This was part of a wider investigation into how planning controls had impeded the creation of urbanity and compactness in residential areas, particularly in the New Towns.[113] He described street width bye-laws and the consideration of daylighting as the two principal factors which governed spaces between buildings. A scientific approach to spacing buildings in relation to sunlight was an important factor to modernist architects during the earlier period of modernism. But in terms of privacy, Manthorpe argued that there was little agreement on distances required to preserve visual privacy in the home, presenting a range of 'privacy distances' specified by a diversity of local authorities. These ranged from 150 ft in Hertfordshire, to 60 ft in London. At Harlow, the Essex County Council specified a minimum distance of 80 ft between the backs of dwellings to secure privacy.[114] Manthorpe argued that these distances could be minimised significantly if 'common-sense privacy', rather than 'complete privacy' were to be achieved. He argued that residents were only visible to the public if they stood close to the window. If they stepped 12 ft into the room, they could only be seen 'dimly' from the street.[115] Although Manthorpe's use of 'privacy distances' which applied to the rear of dwellings was largely polemical (since Chapter 5 has shown minimum road standards allowed distances of 50-60 ft between buildings), he was essentially arguing for more compact development at the expense of privacy to the residents. Similarly, during the mid 1950s, in relation to creating urbanity at Harlow, Gibberd had advised the HDC that levels of privacy should be 'reasonably weighed with aesthetic and economic considerations.'[116] This is further evidence to suggest that the concept and practice of urbanity placed a greater emphasis on aesthetics over the requirements of the user. In this sense, not only did urbanity conflict with ideas of privacy, it also conflicted with the modernist principle that the user should be at the heart of design. Having said that, the modernist ideas of community also conflicted

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[113] Walter Manthorpe, 'The Machinery of Sprawl', *AR*, 120 (1956), 409-422.

[114] ERO, C/DP 10/106, Leslie A. Leaver (County Planning Adviser), *The Density, Form and Character of Residential Development*, (March 1962) p. 6.

[115] Manthorpe, p. 421.

[116] ERO, A6306, 317, 1/32 (2), Extract from the Planning Board, 21 October 1955.

with the people's desire for privacy; the issue of privacy was complex, and therefore, perhaps in this instance, urbanity can still be considered within a modernist framework.

Chapter 4 has demonstrated how during the late 1950s and early 60s, there was a new drive to use sociological studies as the basis for creating architecture and urban forms. During this time, Willmott and Young had highlighted the loss of community life experienced when Bethnal Green residents were relocated to the new Greenleigh estate.[117] Modernist architects, particularly those from the younger generation like Alison and Peter Smithson, were searching for new urban forms which maintained the traditional elements of the house and street, in order to promote the idea of community.[118] In 1963, CIAM member Serge Chermayeff together with architect Christopher Alexander searched for new urban forms which could retain the long-established ideas of privacy and community. They argued that a new physical urban order was required to restore 'the precious ingredient of privacy' in a world of mass culture. However, they sought to develop a dwelling type in which residents could benefit from the advantages of living in a community, while at the same time, satisfying the resident's desire for privacy.[119] In order to do this, they distinguished a new urban hierarchy of spaces in relation to community and privacy, based on the use of space. They established what they called the 'Six Domains of Urbanity' – a spectrum of different spaces ranging from the most public urban areas such roads and civic parks, to the most private, the bedroom of the individual. The hierarchy comprised the 'Urban-Public', the 'Urban-Semi-Public', 'Group-Public', 'Group-Private', 'Family-Private', and finally, 'Individual-Private'.[120] Gibberd's perception of urban space was that visually, it could be divided into two types of space: the 'public', in front of the houses; and 'private', behind the houses. Chermayeff and Alexander on the other hand, had identified six levels of space between the public and the private spheres, based on how the spaces were used. Focusing on the

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[117] Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957)

[118] Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, p. 139.

[119] Serge Chermayeff and Christopher Alexander, *Community and Privacy: Toward a New Architecture of Humanism* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1963), p. 39.

[120] Ibid., p. 129.

'Group-Private' domain, which included spaces such as community gardens, playgrounds and communal circulation areas, Chermayeff and Alexander argued the 'front yard' was wasteful as a functioning expression of the street. For them, the front garden failed as an outdoor extension of the inner private space and was neither public nor private.[121] They concluded that this 'random distribution of house and land' had no place in the functional hierarchy they were seeking to establish. In contrast, Gibberd saw the front garden chiefly as a visual component of the public street scene, implementing open fronts predominantly for visual reasons rather than functional ones.

In a 1980 paper on urban planning, R. K. Jarvis described the two broad traditions of urban design which existed in the twentieth century – one which emphasised visual form, and the other, which was concerned primarily with the public use of the urban environment. For Jarvis, Gibberd's treatment of front gardens at Harlow exemplified the artistic approach to urban planning, since notions of privacy, trespass and individuality of the house were disregarded while problems of pictorial composition predominated.[122] In contrast, Chermayeff and Alexander's study of the space around dwellings might be considered as the opposite planning tradition, which focused on social usage. Their idea of 'domains of urbanity' explored the residents' use of spaces, as well as how internal private spaces might relate to public spaces around the home. This demonstrated a later, alternative approach to thinking about spaces between buildings – or about urbanity. Nevertheless, in *Community and Privacy* there are hints that there may have been parallels between Chermayeff and Alexander's urbanity, and Gibberd's earlier version of the concept. Chermayeff and Alexander suggest that 'the life of urbanity' existed in the well-defined cities of the past. They also argued that the 'civic beauty' of such urban environments induced feelings of loyalty and pride, while the 'visible features of urbanity' brought about a sense of belonging, identification and affection.[123] The idea that urbanity was a visible quality found in historical urban environments was similar to Gibberd's idea of urbanity. However, where Chermayeff and Alexander placed greater emphasis on

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[121] Chermayeff and Alexander, p. 132.

[122] R. K. Jarvis, 'Urban Environments as Visual Art or Social Setting', in *Urban Design Reader*, ed. by Steve Tiesdell and Matthew Carmona (London: The Architectural Press, 2007), p. 26.

[123] Chermayeff and Alexander, p. 129.

the social aspects of urban life, Gibberd's idea of urbanity placed emphasis on the appearance of the street. Yet this chapter has demonstrated that although Gibberd's choice to adopt open fronts at Harlow was essentially an aesthetic decision, he believed open fronts could benefit society by fostering a sense of community. In addition, Chapter 2 has shown that 'unity' was an element of urbanity and for Gibberd, this idea stemmed from Picturesque principles of composing artistic scenes which had the qualities of both unity and variety. The idea that people should be free to wander the landscape to enjoy the views of the surrounding environment was also a notion which stemmed from the Picturesque movement.[124] Initially, the open-fronts policy comes across as a visual design principle; however, a closer inspection has shown that Gibberd saw open fronts to have social as well as aesthetic benefits.

6.4   A UNIFIED TOWN

Implementing the open-fronts policy across all housing areas in the town was one technique used by Gibberd and the HDC to obtain a sense of unity on a large scale. Gibberd also believed that unity throughout the town could be achieved if an architect with an aesthetic sensibility held a key position in the design of the total urban scene.[125] Although Gibberd and the HDC nominated a number of different architects to design housing groups to ensure variety, it was Gibberd who outlined the overall design intentions of each neighbourhood.[126] Furthermore, all schemes were subject to approval from Gibberd and the Planning Board. The Final Reith Report had suggested that a high degree of architectural unity would be desirable in the New Towns and could be achieved by entrusting the design of a street or housing scheme to one architect. Several architects might be employed, but unity could be secured if designs were subject to the chief architect's approval.[127] The key technique employed by Gibberd to create a unified town, however, was by attempting to fuse the housing groups together within an overall landscape design.

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[124] Merlin Coverley, *The Art of Wandering: The Writer as Walker* (Harpenden: Old Castle Books, 2012).

[125] Gibberd, 'Detail in Civic Design', p. 305.

[126] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 105.

[127] The New Towns Committee, *Final Report*, p. 17.

6.4.1 The Landscape Pattern

In 1948, Gibberd explained this principle an article in the *AR*. At Harlow, after breaking built up areas down into neighbourhood clusters to obtain contrast and variety, he argued that the buildings and landscape could then be 'welded together again into an aesthetic whole' by the overall landscape pattern.[128] Such wording echoed Unwin's as he spoke of the picturesque qualities of harmony and unity in *Town Planning in Practice* in 1909. Gibberd believed that if the building groups were designed into the landscape, the landscape pattern itself could form a 'structural framework' that could 'fuse together the built-up areas of the town.'[129] Fig.6.29 shows a plan I have produced using the 1980 OS Map, to highlight the landscape pattern. It clearly demonstrates Gibberd's idea that broad wedges of landscape could reach the centre of the town while separating the four neighbourhood clusters. In order to create a cohesive town plan, green areas were dispersed throughout the residential areas, to give the impression that the buildings were 'designed into' the landscape.
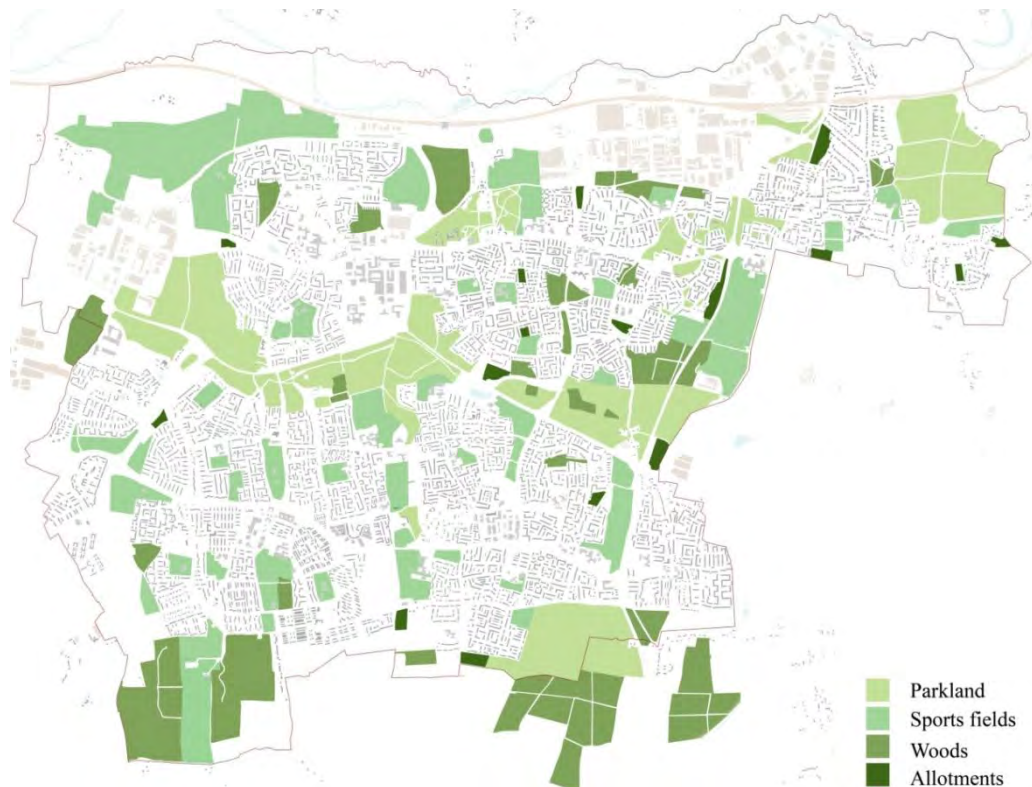
Fig.6.29. Landscape Pattern at Harlow (based on 1980 OS Map)

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[128] Gibberd, 'Landscaping the New Town', p. 85.
[129] Ibid.

Reflecting on the overall landscape design in 1980, Gibberd recalled that the housing at Harlow had been criticised on the basis that separate groups had not related successfully to one another. Gibberd maintained the view that the landscape could 'weld' the neighbourhood areas into a whole.[130] However, in the early stages of development, the large areas of open landscape at Harlow had led Professor Abercrombie to criticise the town as the 'loosest' of the New Towns during a talk at the Housing Centre. He promoted the idea of tighter urban planning in the New Towns, arguing this would improve the towns by giving urbanity. Comparing the first generation New Towns, Abercrombie noted that the most tightly planned town was Hatfield, since it had the least green space inside. He considered Harlow the most loosely planned town, since it had the most green space inside.[131]

Fig.6.30 shows a comparison of outline plans for several of the first generation New Towns taken from A. G. Champion, K. Clegg and R. L. Davies's *Facts about the New Towns*.[132] Scanned and put together to scale, the diagrams support Abercrombie's observations, since at Harlow, the residential areas are broken up by more open spaces than in the other towns. Architect Planner of Hatfield, MARS Group member Lionel Brett (later Lord Esher), shared a similar ambition with Gibberd in that he also wished to build a compact town with an urban quality. Hatfield however, was less than half the size of Harlow, which enabled tighter planning with little open space. Having said that, Chapter 3 of the thesis has shown that as a result of Harlow's extensive boundary, Gibberd deliberately included large open spaces hoping to create small compact groups of housing within it. Nevertheless, Abercrombie believed Harlow was the most loosely planned New Town at this early stage, and therefore had the least urbanity. Furthermore, with so many spaces between housing groups, it would inevitably become difficult to relate adjacent housing groups to one another in all cases, to create a sense of unity across the town.

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[130] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 183.

[131] ERO, A6306 317, 1/32 (2), Dr Stephen Taylor's notes for the HDC on Sir Patrick Abercrombie's *Housing in the New Towns* talk, 26 January 1951.

[132] A. G. Champion, K. Clegg and R. L. Davies, *Facts About the New Towns: A Socio-economic Digest* (Northumberland: R. P. A. (Books), 1977)
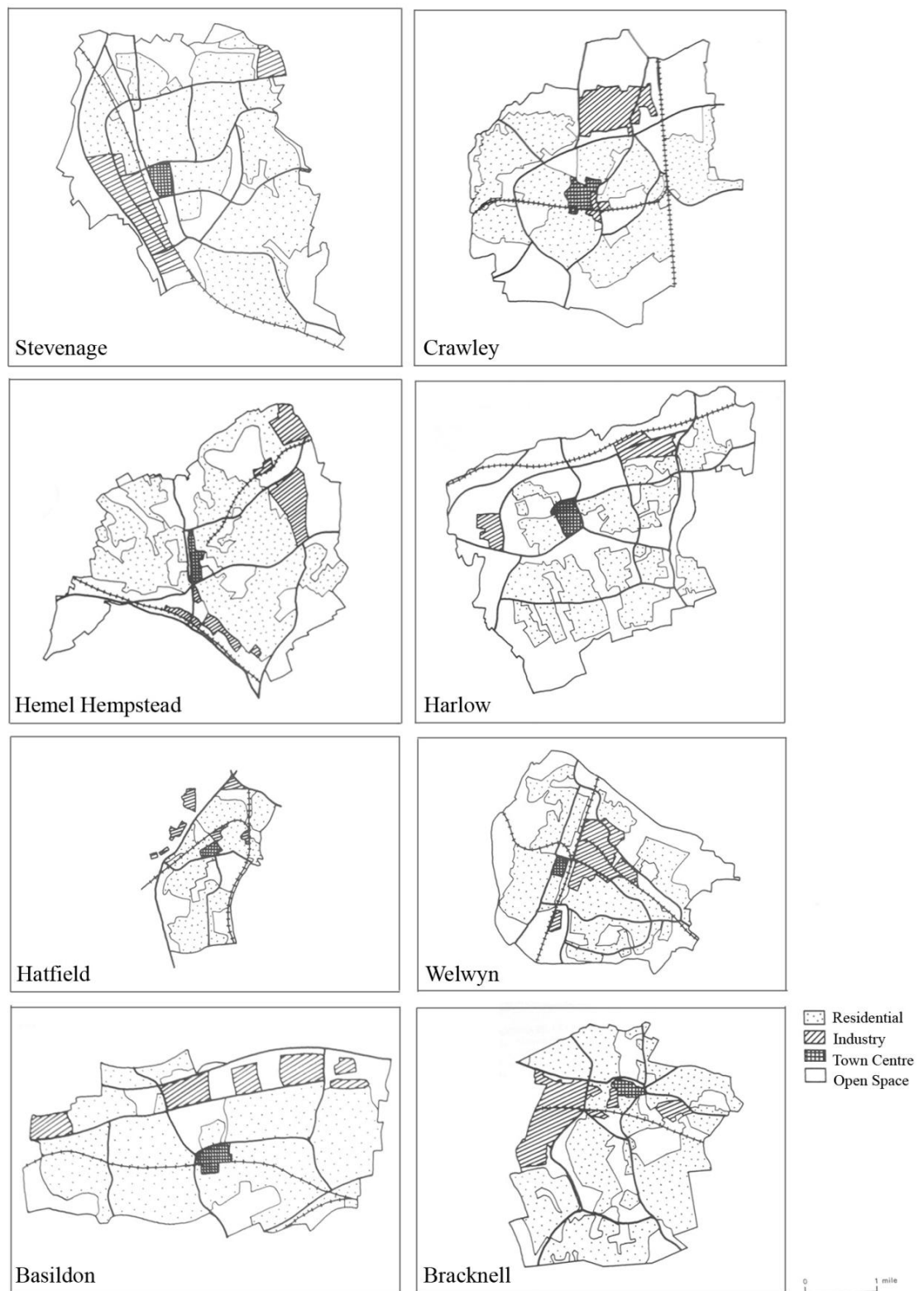
Fig.6.30. A comparison of outline plans of the first generation London New Towns

Fig.6.31. Barley Croft (1965-7) and Long Banks (1965-7) by the HDC Design Group

Fig.6.31 shows an example of a residual space that has prevented two adjacent housing groups from relating to one another. To the left is footpath-access housing in Barley Croft by the HDC Design Group. The houses face out onto the green space, while at Longbanks, also by the HDC, the houses face inwards relating only to houses within the same group. The compact Longbanks housing scheme featured in the *AR's* 'high density low rise' article; built between 1965-7, it shared many of the same features as Neylan and Unglass's Bishopsfield – a high density of 23 dwellings per acre, private patio houses, intimate pedestrian spaces and garages incorporated beneath dwellings.

Fig.6.32. Intimate spaces at Longbanks

(Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, 1980)

Internally, the scheme comprises a series of intimate enclosed spaces formed by compact building (fig.6.32). Houses are linked to form continuous walls to the spaces and a range of floorscape materials and combination of two- and three-storey

building creates visual variety. Earlier in 1953, Gibberd had stressed in housing layout a balance should be obtained between the localised intimate spaces, and the larger open spaces. This could be achieved by merging the two types of spaces.[133] The deliberate exclusion of large open spaces from Longbanks facilitated a high density compact environment; however, the intimate inward character of the houses meant that internal and external spaces were not successfully merged.

6.4.2   Reflection

By the mid 1960s, the *AR* began to reflect upon the earlier ideas which had so far been tested in the first generation New Tows. In a special issue dedicated to discussion on 'Housing and the Environment', the *AR* argued that the visual impact of housing in the early New Towns was 'seldom considered in relation to the function and appearance of the town as a whole.'[134] The separation of housing groups by landscape, and indeed, the separation of housing from the town centre, had led the editors to believe the first generation New Towns were not unified towns. In contrast to the first generation towns, J. R. Nicholls argued that Cumbernauld and Hook New Town Development Corporations had attempted to create a 'total image.'[135] Cumbernauld was designated in 1955 to re-house Glasgow's overspill population. It was the only New Town to be designated during the 1950s. Miles Glendinning has recently argued that Cumbernauld New Town serves as a key monument of the later period of modern architecture in Britain, which spanned from the early 1960s to the 1970s. He argues that some 'utopian catchwords' such as 'community' and 'urbanity' were carried forward from the earlier period, although their stylistic association had changed entirely.[136] The widespread criticism of the low-density Garden City appearance of the earlier New Towns had led the younger generation of architects to place greater stress on their idea of 'urbanity', which Glendinning argues was elaborated into a notion of a 'high

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[133] Gibberd, 'The Design of Residential Areas', p. 59.
[134] J. R. Nicholls, 'In the Townscape', *AR*, 142 (1967), 335-339 (p. 335).
[135] Ibid.
[136] Miles Glendinning, 'Cluster Homes: Planning and Housing in Cumbernauld New Town', in *Housing the Twentieth Century Nation*, ed. by Elain Harwood and Alan Powers (London: Twentieth Century Society, 2008), pp. 133-146 (p. 134).

density urban agglomeration', or as the Smithsons called it – a 'cluster city.'[137] The Smithsons sought an alternative strategy to urban design with new urban forms to better suit the conditions for modern living. Their introduction of new terms only emphasised their ambition to move away from traditional urban forms.

At Cumbernauld, most of those on the design team were young, avant-garde English architects, and according to Andrew Derbyshire, partner of Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall and Partners, the structure of the town was 'a brave and bold attempt to remedy some of the more dramatic failures of the Group I towns.'[138] Although the younger generation was striving for new urban forms, Derbyshire argued that the work of the Cumbernauld Development Corporation was:

> the first attempt to recapture the cohesion, tightness and urbanity of the historical towns that was lost in the earlier models.[139]

At Harlow, Gibberd had set out to recapture these identical qualities; his wartime urban studies, lectures and publications had contributed greatly to the definition of 'urbanity' during the earlier period of modernism. This statement which appeared in the *RIBAJ* in 1967, however, suggests that the architects at Cumbernauld were striving for the same visual urban qualities that Gibberd and the HDC had been striving for at Harlow. How, then, did the Cumbernauld architects implement their idea of urbanity? John Gold has recently shown that compared to the relatively low population density of 32 persons per acre at first generation New Town East Kilbride, at Cumbernauld, the initial density chosen for the town was 95 persons per acre, which would step up in later development to 120 persons per acre.[140] Chapter 2 of this study has demonstrated that Gibberd argued that if urbanity was to be achieved, compact high-density building was essential. Gibberd's own attempt to achieve urbanity through high density building, however, was compromised by the prevailing preference for low-density house building. When the Tories came to power in 1951 their preference for urban containment and protection of the

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[137] Glendinning, 'Cluster Homes', p. 134.
[138] Andrew Derbyshire, 'New town plans: a critical review', *RIBAJ*, 74 (1967), 430-440 (p. 433).
[139] Ibid.
[140] Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, p. 208.

countryside was embraced by modernist architects, and the 1950s saw a gradual increase in densities deemed acceptable at which to build. In this sense, changing politics facilitated changing ideas about density, which in turn led to higher-density building in the later New Towns. It could be argued that the notion New Towns should be built to high densities, to secure a feeling of urbanity, descended directly from the earlier attempts by modernist architects like Gibberd and Brett in the first generation New Towns. Such efforts to create urbanity are often overlooked as a result of the widespread criticism the New Towns received in their early stages.

In addition to high density, the idea of 'unity' in the town was also taken forward to the designs of later New Towns. In the 1967 *AR* edition on housing and the environment, the element of unity was considered to be missing from the early New Towns. Nicholls argued that the introspectively planned housing groups and neighbourhoods seemed to 'turn their backs' on the main town centre, and that urbanity had been 'diffused' by large open spaces which were no more than 'expanded roadside verges.'[141] This supports my own observations at Harlow New Town – that at times, rather than unifying adjacent housing groups, residual green spaces tend to have the opposite effect. This was not a fault of Gibberd's unifying landscape pattern, but a result of the acquisition of too much land in relation to Gibberd's ambition for compact development. In his 1967 *RIBAJ* article, Derbyshire acknowledged this problem in the first generation New Towns. He stated that previously, the Government would make New Towns designations, indicating a boundary on a map for the town prior to the design of the master plan. By 1967, architect planners of the later New Towns had the opportunity to carry out studies in relation to the proposed town structure which could inform the size and position of the town boundary lines.[142]

At Cumbernauld, the abandonment of the earlier neighbourhood planning principle was a further attempt to create a unified town. In 1967, the *AR* argued that in the earlier New Towns the 'strong neighbourhood centres' had diverted attention away from the main centres, which in turn meant the town as a whole lost its 'visual

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[141] Nicholls, 'In the Townscape', p. 338.
[142] Derbyshire, 'New town plans', p. 434.

cohesion.'[143] At Hook and Cumbernauld, the town centres were planned as multi-level 'megastructures' containing car parks, which connected to shops, offices, and housing at upper levels. At Cumbernauld, instead of separating housing as at Harlow, dwellings were organised in a single band which encircled the hill-top megastructure. Referring to Kevin Lynch, the *AR* argued that while surrounding town centres with housing, it was 'socially important' to create a 'sense of visual cohesion.[144] This chapter has demonstrated how Gibberd believed that creating a unified town would be beneficial to the community as a whole. Gibberd, unlike his contemporaries, considered aesthetics the primary concern of town planning.

By the mid 1960s, academic sociology, which had been developing since the inter-war period, had become fully institutionalised.[145] Although the modernist architects of the earlier period believed they were putting the user at the heart of design, by 1967, the *AR* argued that ultimately, there had been 'no thought for what people really want.'[146] In parallel to the advance of sociology as an academic subject was the emergence of an urban sociology. The *AR* praised the work of the HRU at Prestonpans, where professional teams had worked together to investigate the social, economic, visual and functional needs, the results of which informed the design of the housing. According to the *AR*, this showed encouraging signs that there was a growing awareness of the 'real needs of society.'[147] Nicholas Taylor explained that there were also 'transatlantic breezes of urban sociology' at this time, bringing with it subtle changes of emphasis which were 'diametrically opposed to urbanity' as well as to the neighbourhood unit.[148] This was as a result of greater affluence and a vast increase in car ownership, which in Taylor's mind would diminish the notion of 'community.'[149] Even the idea of urbanity took a more sociological stance. John

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[143] Nicholls, 'In the Townscape', p. 338.

[144] Ibid., p. 335.
Unlike CIAM and MARS, American urban planner Lynch believed there were advantages to unifying rather than separating city functions.

[145] A. H. Halsey, 'The History of Sociology in Britain', in *British Sociology Seen from Without and Within,* ed. by A. H. Halsey and W. G. Runciman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) pp. 13-22 (p. 17).

[146] Nicholls, 'In the Townscape', p. 335.

[147] The Editors, 'Housing and the Environment', *AR,* 142 (1967), 333-334 (p. 333).

[148] Nicholas Taylor, *The Village in the City* (London: Temple Smith, 1973), p. 209.

[149] Taylor, p. 209.

Gold has recently demonstrated how leader of the Cumbernauld Development Corporation design team Hugh Wilson, argued that neighbourhood units encouraged residents to look in towards local centres rather than seeing the town as a whole, which was detrimental to the creation of civic pride.[150] Referencing the *Cumbernauld Technical Brochure,* Gold suggests that 'urbanity', which was described as 'a way of life in which the concept of the town as a meeting place plays an important part' was the key to Cumbernauld's conception.[151]

The second and third generation New Towns, designated between 1961-6 and 1967-70 respectively, responded to these changes in society. There was an emphasis on dispersal and open-endedness rather than compactness. Following the high densities at Cumbernauld, the consensus switched to favour lower residential densities. This was partly in response to the experience of the first generation New Town development corporations – relatively few people wished to live in a flat, and the expectation of rising standards of living created a demand for more space both within as well as outside the dwelling.[152] At Warrington, a third generation New Town designed by the Austin-Smith, Salmon, Lord Partnership the net residential density was kept to a low 45 persons per acre in response to the people's preferences. At Milton Keynes, a third generation town designated in 1967, the planned target population of 250,000 warranted the term new 'city' rather than town. The master plan by Llewelyn-Davies, Weeks, Forestier-Walker and Bor, took the form of an American-inspired grid pattern which could facilitate further expansion. Andrew Saint has shown that during the 1960s, British planners began to move away from the idea that they could impose pre-conceived urban forms upon new communities; instead, the layout of towns should be more flexible, offering opportunities within a loose framework. Such urban design philosophies came from the American ideas of prosperity and mobility. However, despite the radical departure from the urban patterns of the first generation New Towns, Saint argues that Milton Keynes essentially remains an English New Town, since the principle of

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[150] Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, p. 149.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Derbyshire, 'New town plans', p. 434.

neighbourhoods separated by open spaces was implemented.[153] The underlying principles of the first generation New Towns were taken, adapted, and implemented in the later New Towns, to suit the rapidly changing needs of society. In 1980, Gibberd reflected on Harlow in relation to the second and third generation New Towns. When discussing housing in the central area of Harlow, Gibberd revealed that it was:

> [...] disconcerting, now, to see later new towns like Runcorn and Milton Keynes praised for the urban quality of their central area housing.[154]

This demonstrates that in the 1980s, the subject of 'urban quality' in relation to housing remained a topic of architectural discussion. It also suggests that architect planners of the later New Towns were also striving to create an urban quality – or urbanity – in New Town housing schemes. Gibberd recalled that although some degree of urbanity was created at The Hornbeams and Rivermill, the housing group nearest to Harlow's town centre, he believed his original designs could have produced a greater urban quality.[155] This original plan can be seen in fig.6.33 (left), an extract from the 1952 Harlow Master Plan document. In comparison to my figure-ground drawing based on the 1980 OS Map, it shows how Gibberd had originally intended to create a stronger relationship between the housing and the town centre area. Gibberd described his 1952 plan for the area north of the town centre as a series of urban terraces enclosing recreation areas. The plan also indicated four tall blocks of flats, including one which was a Corbusian inspired cruciform block, connected to the town centre by a main road. The plan did not materialise since Gibberd was commissioned by the HDC to design The Hornbeams and Rivermill to the permitted residential density of 50 persons per acre.

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[153] Andrew Saint, 'The New Towns' in *Modern Britain, The Cambridge Cultural History*, ed. by Boris Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 156.
[154] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, p. 298.
[155] Ibid.
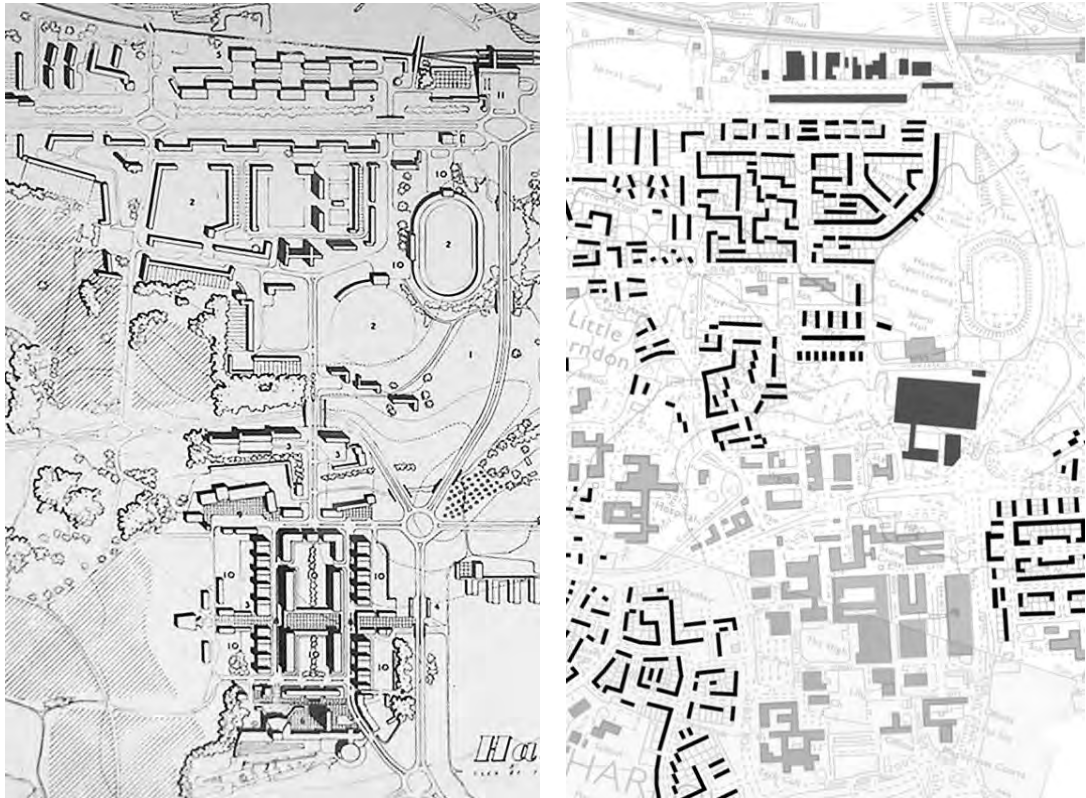
Fig.6.33. Comparison of the 1952 Town Centre Plan with the 'as built' plan in 1980

This evidence has come to light towards the end of the study, and it brings into question my interpretation of Gibberd's idea of urbanity. The 1952 plan shows high-density modernist flats and terraces positioned around large recreation spaces. This is reminiscent of the modernist urban plans promoted by Le Corbusier as well as by the MARS Group Town Planning Committee, where high-density flats could open up recreational areas for the enjoyment of the community. It could be an indication of Gibberd's commitment to the MARS Group during the early stages of the development of Harlow. However, earlier in 1948, Gibberd had criticised Le Corbusier's work as 'hopelessly out of human scale.'[156] The reduction in scale from the original scheme may have initially been as a result of the density requirements of the Ministry; however, Gibberd's other works of this period demonstrate that he increasingly adopted historical forms of housing and layout design. At Somerford Grove and Lansbury for example, although including some modern flat blocks, Gibberd's designs abstracted historical urban forms such as the street and the square, while also including conventional two-storey houses with pitched roofs. This has

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[156] Gibberd, 'Three Dimensional Aspects of Housing Layout', p. 439.

been described in Chapter 2 as an English humanised version of modern architecture – an idea which was developed in the *AR* and had a significant influence on Gibberd's ideas of urbanity. Bearing this in mind, it could be argued that the initial scheme put forward by Gibberd for the town centre was experimental, and as the development of Harlow progressed, so too did Gibberd's practice of urbanity. Furthermore, the original scheme, although it was not built, demonstrates that Gibberd's idea that housing should relate closely to the town centre, was pioneering in the context of the early New Towns. This was one of the major criticisms of the first generation New Towns in the 1960s.

6.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined how Gibberd and the HDC applied the element of 'unity' to the design of residential areas in Harlow. 'Unity' was the fourth and final element of urbanity identified in Chapter 2 of the study. At Harlow, the notion of unity was applied on many levels. As part of an effort to create urbanity, the Picturesque element of unity was applied to the composition of the street to balance out visual variety. This was achieved by designing unified facades, as well as unifying vertical and horizontal planes through floorscape design. Gibberd also attempted to create a visually-unified town through landscape design and an 'open fronts' policy. Despite the later possibilities for socio-political interpretations of open fronts and indeed, of urbanity, Gibberd maintained his artistic approach to town design throughout the development of Harlow.

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 VISUAL VERSUS SOCIAL PLANNING

Part 1 of this thesis has revealed that during the 1940s and 50s the idea of 'urbanity' was predominantly concerned with the aesthetic aspects of town design. At first, this seemed to conflict with mainstream modernist thought on architecture and planning of the time. However, by tracing the development of visual planning ideas in the wartime and post-war periods, it has been possible to understand how despite an emphasis on aesthetics, artistic town planning can be understood as a development of mainstream modernist ideas from a modernist standpoint. Ideas such as 'humanising' the aesthetics of earlier modernism were part of a move to address the psychological needs of the people in the aftermath of war; striving for an English version of modern architecture, it was hoped, could promote cultural continuity and cultural development.

Part 2 of the thesis has shown that the practice of urbanity also placed emphasis on aesthetics. At Harlow, there were many instances when Gibberd applied elements of urbanity to housing design which went against the preferences of the inhabitants. However, Chapter 6 demonstrated how Gibberd's application of visual planning techniques can be understood as 'modernist' in a number of ways. Firstly, Gibberd believed open fronts could foster a sense of community. At the same time, open fronts can be interpreted as an attempt to create an egalitarian community. Secondly, an examination of Gibberd's floorscape design has shown that beneath a functional agenda was an underlying concern for the visual aspects of ground surfaces. Thirdly, Gibberd's ambition to surround Harlow citizens with art, sculpture and townscape can be understood as an attempt to enrich the cultural lives of the residents. Finally, Gibberd's aim to create visually pleasing street pictures to benefit the community, thinking in terms of planes, colours and textures, echoed the ideas of the earlier De Stijl Movement. Interpreted in these ways, it is possible to recognise how Gibberd's artistic approach to town design can be understood within a modernist framework.

However, these arguments contradict the initial hypothesis – that urbanity was a purely visual concept. Part 1 highlighted that Gibberd was unique among his contemporaries, in that he did not reiterate his commitment to modern architecture when discussing visual town planning. Part 2 on the other hand, has demonstrated that when applying urbanity elements to the design of housing, at times, functional factors were an integral part of the overall design. In addition, some of Gibberd's visual planning techniques, namely open fronts, clearly had intended social effects. In conclusion, it could be argued that Gibberd's concept of urbanity was predominantly visual, but with intended social and functional effects.

7.2   THE ART OF COMPROMISE

Chapter 1 has shown that modernist architects advocated high-rise high-density housing, in opposition to the low-density Garden Cities and suburbs. Gibberd was determined to create a high-density compact urban town at Harlow, rather than a low-density Garden City, which further highlights Gibberd's alignment with modernist thought on urban planning. However, Chapter 3 revealed that many of the government and local authority officials involved with the New Towns favoured the low-density Garden City-type planning. As a result, government recommendations restricted the creation of urbanity; therefore, Gibberd had to strive for a compromise in the creation of an urban quality in certain parts Harlow, in order to ensure a sense of urbanity in other parts.

Chapter 4 showed the consequences of failure to compromise. Modernist architect Berthold Lubetkin had planned a compact town of high-rise apartments for Peterlee New Town in County Durham. Upon hearing that the Ministry of Town and Country Planning had promised the National Coal Board a town of detached and semi-detached houses, Lubetkin resigned his post as architect-planner for the Peterlee Development Corporation. Unlike Lubetkin, Gibberd was willing to compromise at Harlow. By devising clever tactics in the face of opposition from the Ministry as well as the HUDC, Gibberd was able to create small areas of urbanity, rather than no urbanity at all.

Compromising the creation of urbanity may have led the younger generation to view Harlow as a Garden City rather than a modern new town; however, the very art of compromise was bound up with ideas of 'Englishness'. As Chapter 2 has shown, Pevsner argued that Englishness could be a contributory factor to the humanisation of modern architecture. Hastings also promoted the idea of the 'English art of compromise' in his 1944 article on Exterior Furnishing. He described planning theory as a fight between the 'garden city people, the Bauhausians, and the County Councils.'[1] Exterior furnishing was sympathetic to all three groups; there was room for the old and the new, and for both tradition and innovation. Sharawaggi, or the art of making urban landscape – the forerunning notion which fed into 'Townscape' – according to Hastings, lent itself well to compromise, which was the English form of synthesis.[2] With this, it could be argued that Gibberd's implementation of urbanity at Harlow was practised in an 'English' manner, which according to Pevsner, would have contributed to the humanising of modern architecture and planning at Harlow. Gibberd's view supports this idea; in 1968 he explained that in architecture, the architect could solve functional problems in accordance with his client's wishes, without compromise. The Town Planner on the other hand, must strike a balance between the conflicting interests of many clients. The whole process, he explained was 'one glorious compromise.'[3]

7.3 URBANITY IN THE NEW TOWNS

The thesis has demonstrated that visual planning elements of urbanity can be seen in other post-war New Towns besides Harlow. In most cases, however, Harlow was pioneering in the implementation of such elements. For example, Gibberd and the HDC pioneered the construction of point blocks in the New Towns during the early 1950s. The Lawn point block was widely published, while Hughs Tower was illustrated in the Ministry's 1958 *Flats and Houses* design guide. As a result, other New Town Development Corporations followed suit – including Hatfield, Stevenage

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[1] 'Exterior Furnishing or Sharawaggi', p. 6.

[2] Ibid., p. 7.

[3] Harlow, Gibberd Garden Archive, New Town File, Frederick Gibberd, 'Human Factors in Urban Planning: The Development of Harlow New Town', (unpublished paper, Alcan Conference, 1968), p. 1.

and Cwmbran – which constructed point blocks during the 1960s near to town centres to increase the visual urban quality. However, as Chapter 4 has shown, the construction of point blocks in the New Towns had a detrimental effect on visual urbanity. Having said that, the use of point blocks to create landmarks or picturesque vertical accents, still represented a predominant visual approach to planning. Harlow was also pioneering in terms of floorscape design; other New Towns, including Crawley and Hatfield, have examples of floorscape, but these were constructed much later than at Harlow, during the 1960s.

The thesis has also demonstrated that Gibberd and the HDC were pioneering in the implementation of elements of urbanity in a wider context; the younger generation of modernist architects, although allegedly opposed to the first generation New Towns, carried forward the earlier concepts of 'community' and 'urbanity' to housing and New Town design. However, the thesis has also shown that Gibberd and the HDC were pushing for higher densities for visual reasons at a time when many other New Town Development Corporations were lowering overall residential densities. In this respect, Harlow was distinctive rather than pioneering, in relation to the other first generation New Towns.

At a lecture to the Royal Society of Arts in 1958, Gibberd pointed out that it was common for the first generation New Towns to be regarded as indistinguishable from one another. He referred to the low density and low flats percentage at Crawley and explained that although the New Towns had 'very different policies', they had all been 'branded with the same iron.'[4] From the outset, Gibberd was determined to create a town with a sense of urbanity at Harlow. Crawley New Town Development Corporation on the other hand, had focused on providing low-density family houses with gardens, with residential areas following the pattern of the 'English village green.'[5] Each development corporation had devised their own design agenda for their New Town, within the framework of the New Towns Committee reports and

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[4] Gibberd, 'The Architecture of New Towns', p. 344.

[5] Crawley Development Corporation, 'Report of the Crawley Development Corporation for the period ending 31st March 1948', in *Reports of the Development Corporations for the period ending 31st March 1951* (London: HMSO, 1949), p. 31.

the *Housing Manual* recommendations. Crawley Development Corporation had opted for low-density low-rise housing in line with government recommendations, as well as tenants' preferences. As a result, Crawley is very different from Harlow. In fact, Crawley has no housing above three-storeys, which would have perhaps satisfied Minister of Town and Country Planning Lewis Silkin, who had argued that dwellings should not go above four storeys in height.[6] Despite the lack of ambition to create a visual urban quality, the thesis has shown that Crawley does have examples of urbanity elements, for example, floorscape design (unity) as well as corner units (a sense of enclosure). This can perhaps be explained by the additional functional and economical benefits some urbanity elements had in addition to their visual urban qualities. Such techniques were later promoted by the Conservative government as they encouraged the construction of high-density, cost-effective housing.

Yet the evidence has also shown that although the Stevenage Development Corporation regarded the Stony Hall development as 'too urban', in a 1954 publication the Corporation indicated that they too, wished to build houses close together to give a more urban street picture. This suggests that other New Town Development Corporations shared the same ambition to create urbanity as Gibberd and the HDC. This further highlights the influence Gibberd and Harlow had upon housing design in other New Towns, an influence which was perhaps facilitated by the close working relationship Gibberd and the HDC established with officials within the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. As a result of this relationship, the Ministry often turned to Gibberd for his town planning expertise; for example, in 1953 Gibberd's extensive chapter on 'The Design of Residential Areas' was published in the Ministry's design guide, in addition to examples of Harlow housing being published in a number of other government publications as previously mentioned. As a result, the use of the term 'urbanity' during the 1950s as well as the implementation of visual planning techniques had become widespread.

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[6] Silkin, *Working-class Housing on the Continent*, p. 27.

The thesis has demonstrated, however, that in the early stages of development, government recommendations hampered the creation of urbanity in the New Towns. In 1958, Gibberd argued that it was 'sad' that in deciding to build the New Towns the Government had not 'freed the towns from the restrictions made for old ones.'[7] Earlier in 1951, the HDC had reported that unnecessary delays and expenditure had resulted from 'prolonged scrutiny on the part of Ministry officials on matters of detail which might reasonably have been left up to the Corporation's discretion.'[8] The *Housing Manuals* initially restricted the creation of urbanity, which gives rise to the question – were Gibberd and the HDC wrong to go against government guidelines in striving to create a visual town-like quality at Harlow? The evidence has indicated that in several cases, where Gibberd and the HDC struggled against the Ministry to create housing with a sense of urbanity, upon completion, the Ministry later rewarded such housing with Housing Medal Awards, or publicised the housing as exemplars to other development corporations and local authorities. Again, it could be argued that elements of urbanity had functional and financial benefits in addition to the visual qualities in which Gibberd was interested.

However, as Chapter 5 has demonstrated, the ongoing visual planning campaigns of the *AR* began to have an influence on Ministry officials. Where before, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government had encouraged higher densities for economic reasons, by the late 1950s, Ministry officials had become particularly interested in the appearance of housing developments. This idea is supported by the establishment of the Civic Trust by Duncan Sandys in 1957, and the annual Civic Trust Award in 1959.[9] The aim of the Award was to encourage architects, engineers, town planners as well as the general public to take a greater interest in the appearance of their towns, villages and streets.[10] This was, in effect, the same aim as

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[7] HDC, 'Report of the Harlow Development Corporation for the period ending 31 March 1980', in *Reports of the New Town Development Corporations for the period ending 31st March 1980* (London: HMSO, 1981), p. 141.

[8] HDC, 'Report of the Harlow Development Corporation for the period ending 31 March 1951', in *Reports of the New Town Development Corporations for the period ending 31st March 1951* (London: HMSO, 1952), p. 103.

[9] Duncan Sandys served as Minister of Housing and Local Government under the Conservatives between 18 October 1954 and 12 January 1957.

[10] 'Civic Trust Amenity Awards: Complete list of winners', *Official Architecture and Planning* (1960), pp. 21-27 (p. 22).

the *AR*'s ongoing Townscape campaign. The Civic Trust promotes the idea that good design in architecture, planning, townscape and infrastructure, can benefit local people and communities.[11] The view that the design and appearance of the built environment could have a positive impact on society reflects Gibberd's idea that the design of visually pleasing townscapes could benefit the community as a whole. However, as Mark Llewellyn has recently pointed out in his recent paper on Fry and Drew's work at Tanys Dell and The Chantry, it was up to the people living in the housing to develop a 'neighbourhood feeling', whilst the architecture and planning around them appeared to be incidental.[12] In addition, as Chapter 6 of the thesis has pointed out, Lefebvre has argued that every society produces its own space. In this respect, is it possible for the architect planner to design urban spaces which foster community life at all? Furthermore, if the majority of people preferred a house with a garden, was it right for modernist architects to build high-density high-rise flats? This question can perhaps be answered by arguing that the post-war New Towns were experimental design projects – both socially and architecturally. Responding to the dreary appearance and lack of community life in the inter-war suburbs, modernist architects believed that their architectural designs could facilitate social betterment; sociological reports of the time informing their architectural designs. At Harlow, having realised the shortage of demand for flats after experimenting with point blocks, Gibberd and the HDC turned their focus to pioneering experiments in high-density low-rise housing. Perhaps they were wrong in the first instance to go against the preferences of the people; in other parts of the country, particularly in Glasgow, many high-rise towers have recently been demolished for being socially and aesthetically undesirable. However, at Harlow and many of the other New Towns, much of the housing still stands today and continues to house residents who are contented with their homes.

In 1958, Gibberd drew attention to the difficulties he faced in relation to opposition from the Ministry. He argued that the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, on the one hand, encouraged three-storey houses and flats to save land, but on the

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[11] 'Civic Trust Amenity Awards', p. 22

[12] Mark Llewellyn, 'Producing and experiencing Harlow: neighbourhood units and narratives of New Town life 1947-53', *Planning Perspectives*, 19 (2004) pp. 155-175 (p. 167).

other, would argue that New Town Development Corporations 'must be mad going over two storeys with land at only £100 an acre.'[13] The fact that the Ministry compromised the creation of urbanity raises the possibility that other housing, as well as other New Towns of the earlier period faced a similar outcome. This in turn, opens up the possibility that other housing of this period was designed from a modernist standpoint; the art of compromise obscuring attempts to create modernist housing, or housing with a sense of urbanity. Understanding how the processes, influences and policies had a marked effect on the production of housing during this period could help create a much richer history of modernist architecture in Britain. Much of the housing constructed during the period of study, particularly during the 1950s, is often overlooked. It is often considered as suburban, formless and dull, as opposed to contributing to a history of modern architecture and planning. In this study, I have focused on Harlow New Town while only briefly considering other New Towns. Further work could therefore include a more detailed examination of the development of other first generation New Towns by studying the implementation of urbanity elements in relation to Development Corporation design agendas. The results could support the argument that other early New Towns were perhaps conceived from a modernist standpoint, as opposed to being based on Garden City principles. Hatfield New Town, planned by MARS Group member Lionel Brett would be an ideal case study for further work; as John Gold has recently highlighted, Brett as well as Gibberd struggled to implement his design ideas against planning procedures and Ministry guidelines.[14] Urbanity elements in Hatfield, such as three-storey development, or floorscape, could serve as a starting point, while a thorough examination of the design process could either confirm or disprove the notion that Brett was also attempting to create a visual sense of urbanity from a modernist standpoint. The thesis has highlighted elements of urbanity by studying the theory of urbanity in relation to practice. This in turn, could initiate further studies; where urbanity elements are discovered, they could be examined in relation to the theory, revealing that other modernist architects were also working to create a visual town-like quality.

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[13] Gibberd, 'The Architecture of New Towns', p. 344.
[14] Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, p. 196.

7.4 URBANITY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

By demonstrating that the concept of urbanity can be understood within a modernist framework, this thesis supports the argument that during the period of architectural modernism in Britain, there were a range of modernist narratives. My study has also highlighted that rather than clear-cut divisions between 'hard' and 'soft', or 'modernist' and 'traditionalist' approaches to architectural design and planning, architects and planners of this period operated with varying degrees of commitment to social, functional and aesthetic aspects of design. Furthermore, where the CIAM doctrine called for a break with the past and a dedication to functional over aesthetic design, it has become clear that many modernist architects were still interested in the aesthetics of historical urban spaces. It could be argued that CIAM member Sigfried Giedion provided the framework for looking to the past from a modernist viewpoint. In his seminal book *Space, Time and Architecture*, first published in 1941, Giedion argued that it was necessary to look to the past to understand human activity in a wider context.[15] He stated, however, that it was the historian's responsibility to distinguish between 'constituent facts' and 'transitory facts' when referring to the past.[16] According to Giedion, 'constituent facts' were tendencies which inevitably reappeared throughout contemporary history, for example, 'the undulation of a wall, the juxtaposition of nature and the human dwelling, the open ground-plan.'[17] Such elements, Giedion argued, could contribute to the creation of a 'new tradition' in architecture and planning. On the other hand, 'transitory facts' – such as objects which had followed fashion or past styles – according to Giedion, lacked the permanence to have such an impact.[18] Examining the organisation of historical 'outer spaces', Giedion argued that 'an immense fund of architectural knowledge' was revealed in the squares of Nancy, where each element had been coordinated with all the others to 'form the most effective whole.'[19] He drew parallels between the spatial arrangements of the Royal Crescent at Bath with those of Gropius and Fry's St Leonard's Hill scheme (fig.1.9, Chapter 1). Giedion's writing strengthens

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[15] Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, 5th edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 8.
[16] Ibid., p. 19.
[17] Ibid., p. 18.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., p. 146.

the argument that 'urbanity' can be considered as an additional strand of modernist thinking about town design.

Today, Harlow New Town is currently being extended to the East by landowners Jon and William Moen, who inherited 280 acres of Essex farmland in 1980. The Moen brothers previously developed part of the Church Langley housing estate to the East of Potter Street during the 1980s (fig 7.1. blue). Church Langley comprises mainly detached and semi-detached houses arranged in a web of cul-de-sacs. In 2004, the *AJ* reported that the Moens were disappointed with the housing, as well as surprised how 'far down the pecking order' architects had become in developer-led housing construction projects.[20]
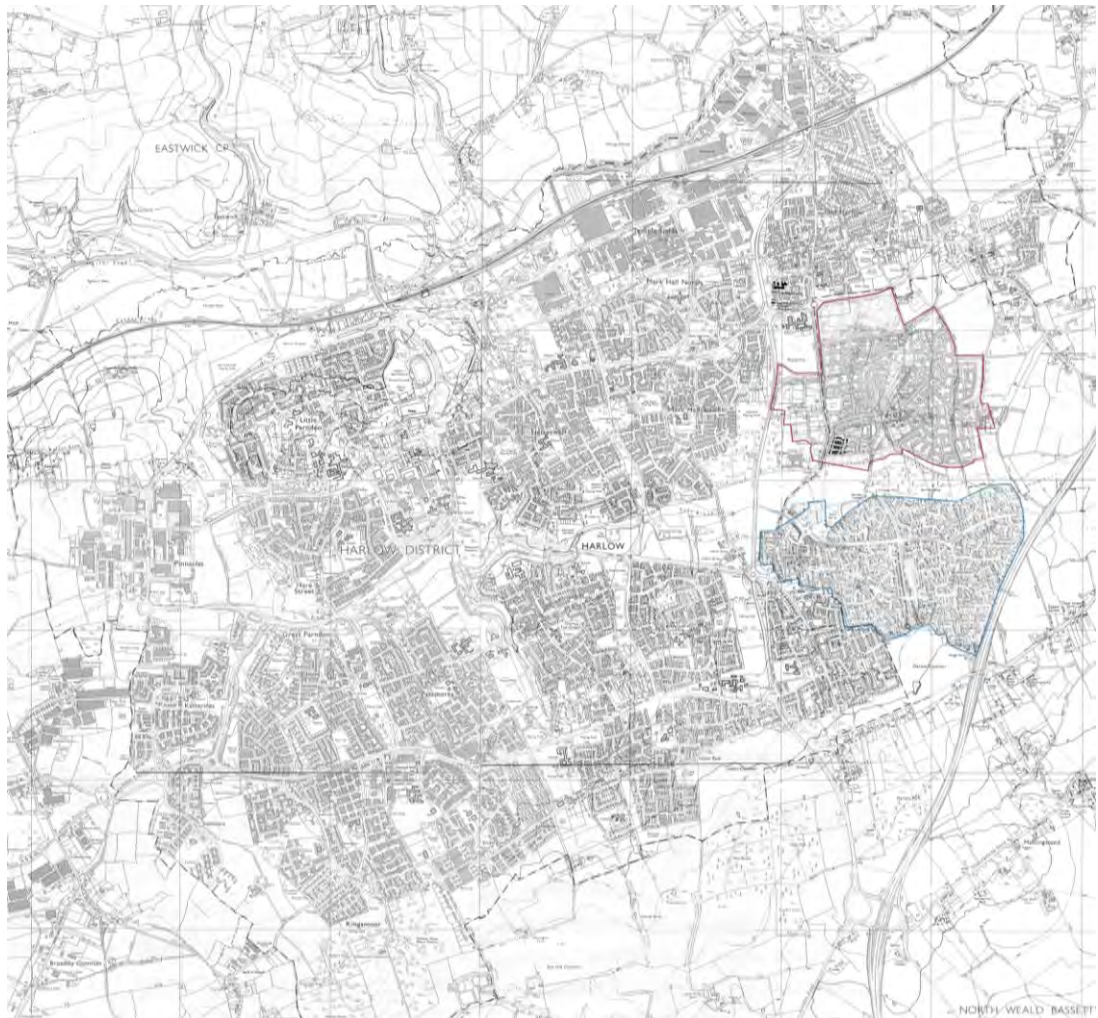
Fig.7.1. 1980 Harlow OS Map with Newhall (red) and Church Langley (blue) superimposed

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[20] Michael Hammond, 'Cracking the code', *AJ* (2004) <http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/home/cracking-the-code/138479.article> [accessed 28 November 2013] (para. 7 of 19)

To avoid the suburban 'placelessness' of Church Langley, the Moens teamed up with architect and urban planner Roger Evans to plan the Newhall neighbourhood (fig.7.1. red). The *AR* has recently explained that in order to create a 'sense of place' at Newhall, Evans began planning the neighbourhood by overlaying street plans of cities such as Oxford and Bath.[21] As this thesis has demonstrated, these were historical cities which Gibberd, Sharp and Pevsner believed had a sense of urbanity. It could be argued that Gibberd's influence continues directly in the Newhall plan, as architects and developers continue his approach and value his arguments.

Fig.7.2. Newhall neighbourhood master plan by Roger Evans (*AR*, May 2013)

The Newhall master plan (fig.7.2.) has resulted in a hierarchy of mews, lanes, avenues and a high street with housing at a density of 18 dwellings per acre.[22] The

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[21] 'Housing, Newhall, Essex by Alison Brooks Architects', *AR* (2013) <http://www.architectural-review.com/buildings/housing-newhall-essex-by-alison-brooks-architects/8648212.article> [accessed 6 November 2013] (para. 8 of 26)

[22] Ibid.

neighbourhood for a population of 6000 has been sub-divided further into housing groups, each to be designed by a different architect to create visual variety, while 'design codes' are implemented to create a sense of overall unity. Open natural landscape is contrasted with compact high-density residential areas.[23] There are many similarities between the planning of Newhall and Gibberd's original master planning concepts for Harlow. In 2003, the Newhall plan was recognised by the Royal Town Planning Institute, who awarded the scheme the annual Award for Planning a New Neighbourhood. As the housing groups gradually reach completion, the scheme continues to win awards. This year the housing group designed by Alison Brookes Architects in the 'Newhall Be' area (shown in black, fig.7.2.) was shortlisted for the RIBA Stirling Prize. Like the overall master plan, the housing at Newhall Be shares many of the same characteristics Gibberd and the HDC had adopted 60 years earlier. The detached houses are three-storeys high, built compactly; they are linked to create unified facades and a sense of enclosure to the street; the road is narrow, the open fronts are short, there are no grass verges (fig.7.3).

Fig.7.3. Newhall housing by Alison Brooks Architects (*Building Design*, Jan. 2013)

The success of the overall scheme has been put down to the Moens' approach to developing the site. From their previous experience at Church Langley, the Moens

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[23] *Studio REAL Architects + Urban Planners* <http://www.studioreal.co.uk/files/file/Newhall_Data_Sheets_Masterplanning.pdf> [accessed 25 Nov 2013] p. 1.

learned that the developer had compromised the appearance of the overall scheme by not adhering to the architectural design; at Newhall, the Moens aimed to 'free up the architect' by adopting design codes to maintain coherence and design quality.[24]

At a time when Britain still faces a significant shortage of housing, the Labour Shadow Minister of Housing, Emma Reynolds, has announced that a Labour government would aim to 'recapture the spirit of the post-war house-building boom.'[25] Like their post-war predecessors, Labour would incentivise councils to give land to development corporations to build new towns. However, unlike the post-war New Towns, these contemporary development corporations would seek private funding, rather than money from the Treasury.[26] Although in the past, development corporations had been given the responsibility of developing New Towns by statute, in reality, since the New Towns were Government funded projects, corporations were subject to the 'meticulous control' of Ministry officials.[27] Should development corporations seek private rather than public sector funding to build the new towns of the future, they might be freed from the control which compromised the architectural design objective of urbanity. Furthermore, if future new town development corporations were to adopt design codes as means of control, it might free the architect to draw from the past and to focus on design and aesthetics in order to create pioneering award-winning housing as seen at Harlow today.

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[24] Hammond, (para. 3 of 19)

[25] Elizabeth Hopkirk, 'Labour promises to build 'four or five' new towns in first term', *Building Design* (2013) <http://www.bdonline.co.uk/5064073.article?origin=BDdaily> [accessed 26 November 2013] (para. 1 of 10)

[26] Ibid., (para. 7 of 10)

[27] Gibberd and others, *Harlow: The Story of a New Town,* p. 357.

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APPENDIX I : TIMELINE

▮ (blue)	Conservative government
▮ (red)	Labour government
▮ (yellow)	Liberal government
▯ (yellow border)	Coalition (led by Liberals)
▯ (red border)	Coalition (led by Labour)
▯ (blue border)	Coalition (led by Conservatives)

1900

← 1903 Letchworth - First Garden City

← 1907 Hampstead Garden Suburb

1910

WWI

Housing Manual, 1919 → ← 1919 Welwyn - Second Garden City

1920

← 1928 Formation of CIAM

1930 Housing Act (Slum Clearance) → 1930

← 1933 Formation of the MARS Group

1936 Housing Act →

1940 Barlow Report → 1940
1941 Scott Report →
1942 Uthwatt Report → ← 1942 MARS Group's Plan for London
Size and Social Structure of a Town 1943 → ← *1943 County of London Plan*
Housing Manual, 1944 → ← *1944 Greater London Plan*

WWII

1946 New Towns Act, 1946 Reith Reports → ← 1946 Stevenage
1947 Town and Country Planning Act → ← 1947 Crawley, Hemel, Harlow, Newton Aycliffe, East Kilbride
← 1948 Hatfield, Welwyn, Peterlee
Housing Manual, 1949 → ← 1949 Basildon, Bracknell, Cwmbran
1950 ← 1950 Corby

1st gen.

Schedule of Minimum Street Widths, 1951 →
The Density of Residential Areas, 1952 →
Design of Town and Village, 1953 →

← 1955 Cumbernauld

Flats and Houses : Design and Economy, 1958 →

1960

Homes for Today and Tomorrow, 1961 → ← 1961 Skelmersdale
Residential Areas: Higher Densities, 1962 → ← 1962 Livingston
← 1963 Dawley (Telford), Glenrothes
← 1964 Redditch, Runcorn, Washington
← 1965 Craigavon

2nd gen

← 1966 Irvine, Antrim
← 1967 Newtown, Peterborough, Ballymena
← 1968 Northampton, Warrington, Telford
← 1967 Londonderry

3rd gen

1970 ← 1970 Milton Keynes, Central Lancashire

APPENDIX II: NEW TOWN LOCATIONS

See Appendix III

APPENDIX III: LONDON 1ST GENERATION NEW TOWNS