

CONTENTS: “Bringing It All Back Home”

Authors: Allan Brigham and Colin Wiles

Part 1:

A community in transition – Romsey Town Cambridge 1966 – 2006

by Allan Brigham

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This could not have been written without the help of many Romsey residents past and present. Thank you.

Note: Some names have been changed.

Part 2:

Forty Years On – Changes in Housing and Society 1966- 2006 with a focus on the Eastern Region

by Colin Wiles

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About the authors



Alan Brigham (left) and Colin Wiles (right)

Allan Brigham is a well-known Cambridge street sweeper, East Anglian Blue Badge Tour guide, local historian and public speaker. He is Chair of the Friends of Cambridge Folk Museum and conducts many popular tours of the lesser-known parts of Cambridge.

Colin Wiles is Chief Executive of King Street Housing Society in Cambridge. He has worked for local authorities and housing associations in London and Cambridge and is a past chair of the CIH Eastern branch and lead organiser of the CIH eastern conference in 2005 and 2006. Colin has written many articles on housing topics and is the author of a joint NHF/CIH publication on social capital.

Allan and Colin have both lived in the same street in Romsey Town, Cambridge for the past 20 and 18 years respectively.

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Foreword

This report has been published to coincide with the Chartered Institute of Housing's 2006 Eastern Region Conference "Bringing it all Back Home", held at the new settlement of Cambourne from the 14th – 16th November 2006.

Exactly 40 years earlier, on the 16th November 1966, "Cathy Come Home" was first shown on TV. It remains the most watched TV play of all time – 12 million viewers, a quarter of the population - tuned in that night. It had a profound impact upon housing policy and led directly to the founding of Shelter and the promotion of legislation to end the trauma of homelessness faced by Cathy and thousands like her.

The conference will be looking back at changes in housing and society since the nineteen sixties.

Part 1 starts by looking at a specific neighbourhood. Allan Bringham's brilliant study of Romsey Town, a working-class district of Cambridge, places the changes of the past forty years in a societal context. His focus on personal stories shows how broader changes have impacted upon individuals and neighbourhoods.

Part 2 looks at the bigger picture, reviewing the forces that have shaped housing and society since the nineteen sixties. It also contains some challenging and controversial opinions!

In a publication of this sort we cannot hope to provide a comprehensive review of the past forty years and I should make it absolutely clear that this is no dry academic treatise. It is instead an eclectic mix of history, fact, policy analysis, opinion and polemic - more like meze than meat and two veg. I hope that all who dip into it will find something to their taste.

Colin Wiles
November 2006

PART 1: Romsey Town Cambridge

A community in transition 1966 - 2000

By Allan Brigham

CHAPTER 1: Romsey Town – a short history

'It was said that one could be born and die in Romsey Town and have everything you needed in between without ever leaving Mill Road'

Wendy Maskell

King's College Chapel rises cathedral-like over Cambridge, a unique building renowned around the world for its music at Christmas. It is the symbol of the City. Many people believe that the University created Cambridge but the town existed long before the University arrived in 1284. 'Town' is older than 'gown'.

If you walk from the city centre across Parker's Piece, one of the most magnificent urban spaces in England, you will come to a legendary central lamp upon which is written "Reality Checkpoint". This is where gown ends and the town begins. Walk to the far corner of the Piece and follow Mill Road with its multi ethnic shops and after a few minutes you will come to a railway bridge. Over the bridge is Romsey Town – a dense community of narrow streets where many front doors open onto the pavement.

Romsey Town had its origins in the Enclosure Acts of the 1800s, which dismantled the open fields that had hemmed in the town for centuries (its first green belt). The small strips of land were re-assembled and many were sold for housing. The railway arrived in the mid nineteenth century and most of the houses were built between 1885 and 1895 with the street pattern following the old field boundaries. It was the era of high Empire, reflected in the names of the public houses - The Jubilee, The Empress - and in street names - Malta, Cyprus, Suez, and Hobart. The parallel rows of streets ended to the north in footpaths that led to the uninhabited Coldhams Lane and the empty Coldhams Common where coprolites were mined.

The railway divided Romsey Town from the city. The area grew as a distinct and self-supporting community with its own shops, churches and leisure facilities. This created a sense of cohesion and community. It was a local, not a global world where work and leisure had to be within easy reach, where personal transport was limited to the bicycle, and television was in the distant future.

There were fine gradations within the terraces, and some streets had a better reputation than others. Width mattered - a frontage of 13 ft meant the front door opened into the front room, while 15 ft would give you a hallway and privacy. Most houses had three bedrooms, but in some access to the rear bedroom would be through the middle bedroom. Most toilets were outside, and the bathroom was a tub on the living-room floor once a week. The larger terraces - often home to the local elite, the engine drivers - had bay windows and front gardens. Nearly all had long gardens, not the small yards of central Cambridge.

As the side streets were cul de sacs most journeys were via Mill Road, and on foot, which led to a familiarity amongst neighbours. Mill Road was the central meeting point where residents would meet on their way to work, to the shops, or to school. By 1921 Romsey had a population of 7,000 and between the bridge and the end of Mill Road there were butchers, sausage-makers, fishmongers, bakers, a timber merchant, grocers, household

furnishers, hardware stores, drapers, hairdressers, boot repairers, milliners, and a cycle shop. Other corner shops could be found in the side streets.

This was a self-contained world ‘over the bridge’.

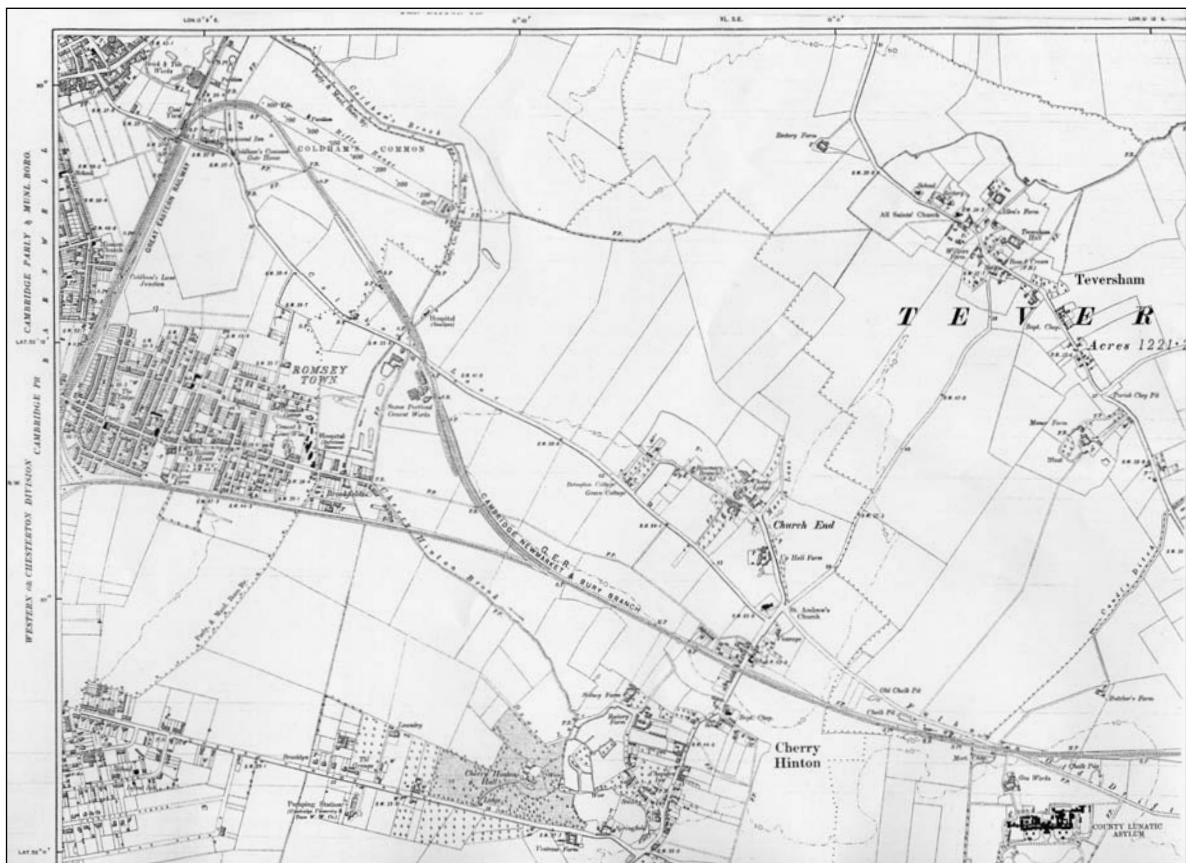
“Red Russia”

‘This was always a Labour community and when they started singing The Red Flag, that was sort of connected with Romsey Town. This was called little Russia over here.’

Most early residents of Romsey worked either in the building industry or on the railways. The railway companies were the largest employers. They did not build

Romsey, but an army of railway servants moved there— drivers, guards, boilermakers, platelayers, fitters, firemen, and clerks. With a guaranteed wage with chances of promotion, and a successful strike in 1919, they had a self-assurance that distinguished them from many of the traditional residents of Cambridge. Romsey was always more than a community of railway workers, but they came to define the area.

The sense of being a separate community was reinforced by Romsey’s political identification with the Labour party. By 1921 the last Liberal councillors were defeated and Labour held all the local council seats. Voters on the town side of the bridge were far more deferential towards authority as many relied on work at the colleges where low wages were supplemented with perks and where union membership was banned. But Romsey’s railwaymen and building tradesmen were heavily unionised, and this gave them a sense of solidarity, together with a belief in communal self help rather than dependence on handouts.



Romsey Town 1904



Romsey 1950

In 1926 4,000 Cambridge workers came out to support the national General Strike. A conservative Councillor led a team of volunteer undergraduates to keep the trains running, while the railwaymen were described by the Master of Christ's College as a Bolshevik threat. The strike confirmed

Romsey as 'Red' in the eyes of the rest of Cambridge, although family bonds were stronger than political affiliation. Romsey became known as 'Little Russia' and local residents adopted the name with pride as a mark of their independence from the paternalistic and conservative university.

"Red Russia they used to call it...Over here it was nearly all railway workers, more than 70% I should say. You no longer see the driver walking up the street and over the bridge in his smart uniform with his little black box. They were big men like the engines they drove. They wore small donkey coats, well washed overalls and black horse skin caps."

M Nicholls



Photo: Cambridgeshire Collection. Cambridge Libraries.

CHAPTER 2: Into the sixties

The 1926 General Strike seems part of history. The sixties seem (just) part of modern times, repeatedly hailed by cultural commentators as the years that broke the mould. Before, the images are black and white. After is the start of colour.

In Cambridge the population had doubled again since the turn of the century, with new jobs in light engineering and public services bringing a gentle prosperity.

Romsey Town was different but still familiar. The railway tracks still marked a clear divide from central Cambridge but the now nationalised railway no longer dominated the area as it had before the war, and there was a greater spread of employment. Rows of terraces still greeted anyone crossing the bridge, although houses that families had moved into sixty years earlier were beginning to look small and dated.

But in the twenties and thirties new council estates were built around Romsey, hemming it in and making it feel like part of the inner city. The side streets now extended towards new arterial roads, while small terraces with their front door opening onto the pavement suddenly gave way to bay-windowed council houses set back behind front gardens.

Bill Briggs, railwayman and Romsey Labour councillor, had forcefully demanded that the council houses should be built with three rooms downstairs (the 'parlour debate') or they would become the slums of the future. He argued as one who had lived in a non-parlour house and echoed the sentiments of the local Trades Council who believed "that such houses retard the moral and social advancement of the occupants."

The new inter-war housing diluted some of the cohesion within Romsey. The council houses had been filled with young families, upsetting the generational balance that had been established over the previous thirty years. Many came from the poorest parts of Cambridge, and some of the older residents saw the Council houses as "rough", filled with slum dwellers.

These distinctions remained in 1960, years after these estates had been built. But if Romsey was no longer clearly defined on the map, or by purely local employment, then the catchment area of the local schools and the pull of Mill Road continued to help local residents identify with the area where they lived. Shopping at the Co-op, playing on Romsey Rec, drinking in the Conservative Salisbury or the Labour Club still provided shared points of contact, while Mill Road bridge and the memory of 'Red Russia' remained a clear boundary between Romsey and the rest of Cambridge.



Romsey in the sixties: Sue's story

"The women had time to stand and gossip, and spend hours along Mill Rd, everybody knew everybody's business."

Sue

Sue was born in 1959. She lived in a small terraced house in Great Eastern Street, named after the neighbouring railway line. Still only in her forties today, her childhood in the sixties seems part of another era. Her mother was from Romsey Town, and worked from the day she left school just over the bridge as an auxiliary at the Maternity Hospital.

Her father was Welsh, and after he met her mother at a Mill Road dancehall the young couple moved in with Sue's grandfather. He lived and worked in Romsey as a milkman for a nearby dairy, and this proximity of employment, leisure and home repeated the pattern of earlier generations. So too did the family support mechanisms which were part of the traditional Romsey working-class culture. These were born of necessity and nourished by custom, and while they could be strengths they could also be the cause of much tension. Sue's parents could not get on with her grandfather and 'his rules', and they were threatening to separate when her other grandfather lent them £60. This became the deposit on the £625 price of the small terrace where Sue was born. Her memories of the house in the sixties are stark:

"The first things I can remember about our house was nothing! We didn't have anything much. The kitchen was very stark, we had a cooker, and one of those cabinets, everyone had a cabinet, with a fold down flap, and that was yellow, you made your sandwiches and everything on that."

There was a kitchen, a 'middle room' where they ate, and a front room. Upstairs were three bedrooms, one for her parents, one for her two brothers, and her small room at the back. The strongest memories are of the kitchen and the middle room (described as 'not the posh room') of the house because that was where the family lived. The TV which her parents watched in the evenings (no daytime TV then) was in this room. The

back door was the main entrance to the house. The front door was unused. It opened straight off the street into the front room, 'the tidy room', which was reserved for important events.



Photo: GIA archive Cambridge City Council

Facilities were basic, although "we had a gas fridge, that's something else that really sticks in my mind, we had a gas cooker and a gas fridge, because I've never seen a gas fridge since."

Her mother did all the laundry by hand, hanging it up to dry over a pulley above the coal fire in the middle room. "We didn't have a washing machine, there was a Butler sink, and I can remember being out the back with my mum and she would get me to turn the handle on a mangle."

The toilet was out the back too: "If we went to the loo in the night we had a potty. I think we emptied it, or maybe Mum did when we were little. It was a brick toilet, painted black and white with just a loo in it."

Nor was there a bath. "The bath tub hung up on a hook out the back, and sometimes my mum used to do the sheets in it. Baths twice a week. The water was heated with an Ascot. I remember it was a big old white thing... I had two elder brothers, so I always got the clean water, that's another thing I can remember. I always got first, because I was the girl, and they had to go in after, together."

"We used to go over the bridge to the Baths, when I was older. You'd go there on a Sunday. There was a woman there, and you had a little individual cubicle, and you could shout if you wanted more water, I think she supplied soap and a towel. It's awful; it's hard to believe! Scabby kids! Nobody else had it any different to how we did, it's how it was."

"I remember a woman down the road called Hilda, she got this little square washing machine, and that's all it was, a square washing machine, and it had a mangle, an automatic mangle on the top...I can see myself pushing this square washing machine from Hilda's to our house so that we could borrow it. And that was amazing, it had a separate spinner, so the clothes were washed, and there was this automatic mangle on the top, then you spun them out afterwards."

"We always played in the road, you got up in the morning and you had breakfast and you just went out to play. You probably went back at lunch time, but there was no 'Where you going?', nobody needed to know where you were because you just went off to play."

Romsey Town still felt distinct. There was only one car in the road, and only one telephone, most journeys were still on foot and face to face contacts with neighbours and nearby family – love them or loathe them - were still very much part of everyday life: "You knew everybody, and everybody knew everybody."

With few labour saving gadgets housework was woman's work, and a full time job. Sue's mother did the washing, cleaning, shopping and cooking, and would then go out to work when her father returned home. She was also the prime carer, looking after the three children, and walking daily down Mill Road to help her wheelchair-bound mother.

The house and the street were the women's preserve during the daytime: "They were always in each other's, everybody was always in our house, all the women. And as soon as my dad came home from work they used to

go, always. Dozens of kids everywhere. It's hard to believe we all got in that little room."

Beyond the street, Mill Road continued to be a wider focal point. It was a daily destination in an age before freezers, or supermarkets when meals still consisted of meat and two veg, everybody 'bought fresh' and 'nobody had a car to go any further.'

On Mill Road were vegetable shops, an electrical shop, a haberdashery, a furniture shop, an ironmongers, a barbers, a cycle shop, a bakers, butchers and the Co-op, the biggest store ("I can still remember the number, isn't it funny - 49509. Don't forget your divi number!"). Christmas was memorable for toys from the toy shop where her mother saved all year at the Christmas Club, while across the road at the Continental Shop run by post-war eastern European refugees there would be a big barrel of live eels: 'I remember that so well.'

It was a world of trust: "A family moved in down the road, I can't remember their name, and they had a small baby. And the next day me and this girl Deborah, we went and knocked on the door, and we said 'Can we take the baby for a walk?' and she gave us her baby! Can you imagine it now! 'Bring it back at 12.00 for dinner'. 'OK'. We got a clean nappy and a pair of rubbers, and you just pushed this baby about quite happily. It would never happen now. But then people let you do it, they trusted you to do it."

It was a world where children were naughty but 'you didn't pinch anything short of Corona bottles' (for the 3d deposit), and 'anything you did wrong it was 'Oh, I'll tell your mum.' And you were frightened of her. She had a stick. And we got it!'

But although Sue's memories of Romsey in the sixties are of 'good times', she recognises: "they can say it was happier, but I'm sure it must have been much harder. You wouldn't do that now, I wouldn't want to! It was hard, I'm sure it was very hard for my mum.... people just wouldn't go back to it would they?"

CHAPTER 3: Home Improvements: Into the seventies Ralph and Maureen's Story:

"He was playing football on the Rec, I'd got my little cousin on the swings, he waved at me, and I waved back, and that was sort of it. I was 15, he was 20! We were engaged when I was 16 and married when I was 21."

Maureen

Ralph was brought up in one of the 19th century terraces near the Recreation Ground. On the day that he was playing football – 'I was sport mad' – his future wife Maureen had been looking after her young cousin. She decided to walk to the swings from the council houses where she lived on the other side of Mill Road. Today no parent would let their child venture so far from home, or risk crossing Mill Road with its steady stream of traffic.

Ralph and Maureen were married in the early sixties. Ralph's was a traditional Romsey railway family. His parents had moved to the area from another railway town, March, when his father had been promoted to Works Inspector: "Romsey itself was called Railway Town, Railway City, Red Russia was another name it got. The air's lovely and fresh, but you used to just get that sulphur smell too." They bought a house in the street next to where he had been brought up. "We wanted to buy. My father rented privately, Maureen's father was in a Council house, but my father always said 'You don't want to rent, it will never be your own'. But on the other side of the coin people used to say 'Oh, you ought to get a Council house, they do all your repairs for you'. But we went with my parents, we got a mortgage."

Getting a mortgage wasn't easy as Ralph only earned £11-6-0 (£11.30) a week and the house cost £2,375. He could just about afford it because he supplemented his wages with Sunday work, but most Building Societies would not take overtime earnings into consideration. One did, although it still

insisted on the minimum 10% deposit that was then normal, and they were able to buy the superior terrace with a bay window and small front garden in one of the most sought-after streets in Romsey.

When they moved in they had very few possessions: "We didn't have a carpet. We had bare boards and a little bit of lino. We had people come round one night and we had to sit on the floor, we only had two little fireside chairs. We had Mum's second-hand cooker in the kitchen, and a spin drier, no washing machine, everything had to be done by hand, sheets and everything."

The house needed modernising, and through the sixties and seventies Ralph slowly improved and adapted it. The bathroom and toilet had been accessed through a sliding door from the kitchen and one of the first things they did was to knock the bathroom out and move it upstairs. He did this by sub dividing the back bedroom, which left them a small third bedroom so that his two children could each have their own room (unlike in many earlier generations where large families often led to two or even three children sharing until they left home).

In the seventies he knocked out the dividing wall between the two downstairs rooms to create a larger living area, and put in central heating to heat the bigger space. Later he added an extension to the rear of the kitchen. It was a street of families many of whom were also improving their homes, and they helped each other out: "We were neighbourly. I didn't do John's for money, I

helped him do it. We put windows in John's place, put fences up. Same as when I built my extension. My mates all lived round here, if you knew a plumber, I'd go round and do their brickwork and they'd come round to do my plumbing."

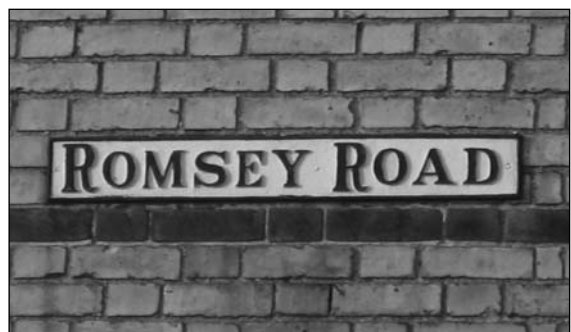
It was self-help that recognised the benefits of exchanging labour and skills, rooted in a sense of belonging to a local community: "You never mentioned money. Everybody kept to their promise, they didn't let you help them and then not turn up at yours. That's how it was."

Family was important too. Ralph's mother continued to live in the next street where he could keep an eye on her until she was 80: "I used to walk the dog through the Rec, walk up Ross Street, see if my mum was alright, then come round the block, and then to work. The neighbourly thing was good, you can see a big gap."

Ralph still walks around the Rec where he played football as a teenager and where he met Maureen. It had been the centre of his leisure activities as a child, where he bonded with his mates who remained friends as adults, and where he learnt to respect not disregard the police: "I preach this to the kids today when you hear them swearing and blinding, our Coppers, Coppers in those days, they'd come on the Rec and we'd be playing, and off would come the tunic top and they'd be in goal. We respected them all, and they respected us. We never had no trouble."



Ralph has carried the values of respect and neighbourliness through his adult life, but no longer feels that these are shared by those who are moving into the area. He is now more at ease down in Norfolk where they spend much of the summer in their caravan: "I've got to say this, people in Cambridge today only talk to you if they want something. You go down to Norfolk and they're so obliging. If you run for a bus in Cambridge it keeps going, if you run for a bus in Norfolk it stops, and if it's pouring with rain they'll stop outside the old lady's house."



CHAPTER 4: Improving the Area: The seventies and eighties

Ralph wasn't the only one altering his house. During the seventies Sue's father knocked out the dividing wall between the rooms downstairs, ending the segregation between a 'tidy' front room and a living room at the rear. He also built a 'lean-to' at the back of the house for storage, and installed a bathroom in the kitchen where the outside toilet had been. A neighbour helped with the 'lean-to', her brother who was training to be a plumber helped with the bathroom. Like Ralph, the labour and skills of neighbours and family made alterations affordable.

By the mid-seventies Romsey was beginning to look old fashioned to many, 'like Coronation Street.' For every house that was improved, there was another that was becoming unfit for habitation. Amongst the problems were the bad condition of some of the thirties council houses, and the number of older terraces that were privately rented by landlords with little incentive, or little capital, to modernise their properties - about one in four were privately rented in 1977.

Nor could any home improvements compare with the facilities of the new houses that were being built across Cambridge and in the outlying villages on council and private estates. With rising incomes and increasing car ownership there was no longer any need to live within walking distance of work, or of the shops. Post-war planning policies led to a surge of house building in the villages beyond the Green Belt rather than in the city. Older residents stayed, and their children might stay too. But Romsey was no longer an area for an aspirational young couple to start a family home.

Sue's father didn't move to the countryside, but he bought his first car in 1971. At first it stood proudly and nearly alone in the street. But slowly the elderly who didn't drive or could not afford a car died, and were replaced by those for whom a car was an essential part of late 20th century life. The cul de sac where Sue had played as a child became choked with parked cars, and in other once quiet through streets residents found themselves living in 'rat runs'. Even worse, as they became dependent on cars, or found that they had no choice but to be dependent on cars, they found they couldn't park THEIR car outside THEIR house. Slowly the absence of garages or off street parking in terrace houses that abutted the pavement became as big an issue as the absence of bathrooms or inside toilets.



A General Improvement Area (GIA): The eighties

If Romsey had always felt it had a separate identity, it was starting to become an identity based on neglect and a feeling of deprivation rather than pride. A survey of 1,871 Romsey houses in 1977 revealed nearly one in three (583) still lacking one or more basic amenity, and one in five (343) as being unfit for habitation.



The City Council proposed creating a General Improvement Area (GIA) as the solution and the Romsey GIA was declared in 1981. This marked a recognition that the earlier policy of total clearance of older properties was neither appropriate nor affordable. It recognised that rehabilitation was a better option and that with improvements the life span of the Romsey houses could be extended by thirty years or more. It also recognised that in the process communities were not broken up, and that communities were more than the houses people lived in. GIAs were not magic wands, but for the first time they offered help to improve not just houses but the wider local infrastructure.

Merryn's Story: The Middle Classes Move in

"There are three aspects of generally improving the older housing areas, of which the General Improvement Areas are intended under the terms of the Housing Act (1969). Two aspects are obvious, being the improvement of the houses themselves and of the environment in which they stand. The third is the involvement of the people living in the houses." Cambridge General Improvement Areas (Cambridge City Council)

Merryn burst into tears on her first night in Romsey. She had moved to the area from London in February 1980 with her husband and two-year-old child. It was cold, there was no central heating, they couldn't walk on the kitchen floor because it had been re-concreted, and the boiler burst the first time they turned it on. But, "I also remember that I instantly felt at home both in the house and in the area."

The next day she went shopping and was "struck by how friendly and chatty the shopkeepers were. We liked the idea that we were living in Romsey Town – separate from Cambridge, with its own particular character." Their first months in another part of the city had been disheartening: "That part of Cambridge felt bleak to me. It also felt like it could have been anywhere – any suburban development on the outskirts of any English town. Romsey had a totally different feel to it. It had "character". The old Cambridge brick houses were huddled together in a way which made you feel it would be impossible not to be neighbourly here." Affordability was an issue too. When they had asked the estate agent why a similar house on the other side of the bridge was more expensive he had replied that Romsey was 'not the most favoured area of Cambridge'.

Merryn moved to Romsey for many of the reasons that the children of older inhabitants were leaving. Where she saw 'character' in the old terraces and narrow streets, they saw tiny houses and no parking spaces. She saw Victorian features "including a lovely open fire-place with picture tiles, the original wood panelled doors (which we lovingly stripped by hand over the years, leaving them with a warm golden glow) and a nicely patterned tiled floor in the porch." For others these were old-fashioned relics that should be thrown out.

She "discovered a lot of young families rather like ourselves moving into the area - teachers, social workers, university researchers – educated, middle class, leftish wing, with houses full of books and musical instruments, but not a lot of money." Others saw this as an alien takeover by a different class with different values. It was the start of what is now called gentrification.



Merryn recognised the problems of being 'incomers': "We were well aware of the fact that there was already an established community here into which – by reason of education, interests and lifestyle - we did not really fit and who probably resented the fact that they and their families were being priced out. At the same time, it was this feeling of community that we particularly valued in Romsey and we were anxious to be an accepted part of it."

Merryn was probably typical of the first middle-class incomers. She was new to Cambridge, wanted to meet other families with young children and shared interests, and wanted to be part of the wider community. So with other 'incomer housewives' she joined 'Romsey Neighbours', visiting new families who moved into the area and helping elderly residents with shopping, gardening or redecorating. In turn the GIA officer visited her.



Minimal consultation during the first Cambridge GIA had sparked a protest. To avoid a similar response in Romsey a residents consultative group was seen as a priority and one of the proposed mediums for engaging as many as possible was a local newsletter. Merryn was enthused: "I immediately thought, "Yes! I could do this." I had the time, I enjoyed writing and it would give me a chance to get out and about and meet local people." The Newsletter was called 'Over the Bridge', and Merryn became its Editor.

She found Romsey in the early eighties a-buzz with community groups, few of which would have been found in the sixties: "the local political parties, (Labour and Liberal – not many Conservatives about) were very active, there was CND, Mums & Toddlers, Babysitting Circles, a toy library and a 'skills swap' scheme. It's true that you generally saw the same faces everywhere you went, but they were not all middle-class incomers. The residents of Ross Street (thirties council housing) set up a group and organised a street party to celebrate the Charles/Diana wedding."

'Over the Bridge' publicised these activities, along with details of proposed improvements. The lack of greenery was addressed. The problem of large trucks using the narrow streets as through-roads was raised, and the noise from local businesses was discussed. All these issues came together in 1986 with the 'Romsey Local Plan', designed to "protect and enhance the quality of life in Romsey." This led in the 1990s to traffic calming measures in the side streets designed to discourage their use as 'rat-runs'.

One of the significant differences between 1980 and 2006 is that then Romsey houses were still affordable on one middle-class income. With universal child care dreamed of only by a few Merryyn had little option – and accepted and could afford – her role as housewife. Despite being a middle-class incomer she was tied to the home. She looked to the immediate neighbourhood in a way very similar to older working-class residents, and very different from someone of her class today. These bonds are looser now because most couples, even those with children, are working. They see the home only in the evenings where it is a haven to relax rather than a base from which to go out and meet others in the broader local community.

“Small wafers of shedding pine, cheerful gingham patchwork quilts and the tap of mallet on lintel were an immediate reminder that summer is the season of rebirth for Romsey’s cottage industries. It is true that nearly everyone in Romsey lives in a terraced house yet everyone is busy every hour that the local Labour Party spends trying to restore their residences to what they never were in the first place: hence Romsey’s main cottage industry is cottages.”

From: Over the Bridge (1985)



CHAPTER 5: Towards the 21st century

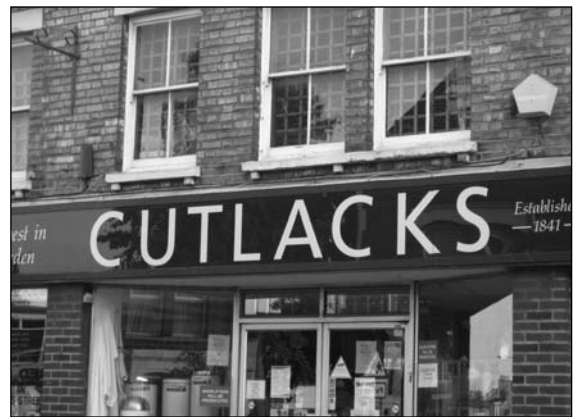
"We chose Romsey because it was cheap, the Council rates were low and there were grants available for improvements " *Jeanette*

Jeanette and her husband bought their first home together in Romsey in 1979. Cambridge born, they were drawn to Romsey not because of family connections but because it was affordable and had potential. At 24 she was a pharmacy technician, her husband, 30, a photographer.

"The house was in a poor state, we had to have a new damp-proof course, timber treatment, much of the flooring was rotten. The bathroom was downstairs and opened into the kitchen so that had to be changed. We also had to have central heating put in, a new roof and loft insulation, all of which we received grants for (not the heating)." Eight years later (1987) they added one of the first loft conversions in the area. There are many others now.

As a young mother Jeanette found "the local facilities were great, school at the end of the road, shops near by, playgroups. I attended the GIA meetings and was involved with the 'Over the Bridge', delivering and contributing. I was a Governor at St. Philip's school for nine years and was heavily involved with the playgroup." The availability of improvement grants had drawn them to Romsey, and involvement with the GIA helped to bond them into the area.

At the same time that Jeanette saw in the older terraces - with tax funded subsidies - a chance to buy a family home, Steve, living in a council house next to the Common, also became an owner occupier - with the tax funded subsidies of 'Right to Buy': "My mother had died and they said I had to move out and we were offered a flat, but I was a single parent, and I liked Romsey, and my son grew up there and wanted to stay there, so I took advantage of the right to buy. But it was a fear, going into the unknown."



Twenty-five years earlier Steve's family had been able to move to Romsey close to his grandparents because of the large stock of Council houses in the area. But with every Council house that was sold, keeping the traditional extended family networks together that had made up the 'community' that Merryn found so attractive became more difficult.

With a diminishing stock of housing and ever more stringent requirements on whom they had to house, Council housing in the eighties and nineties became the preserve of those with greatest need and – often – the greatest problems. Despite wanting to stay in Romsey Steve found himself coming home from work to noisy neighbours. The area had always had high housing densities, but both the formal and informal social controls now seemed to be slipping away. Unable to relax, ‘on edge all the time’, he moved away in 1990 to a private housing estate: “I can go home and I’ve got wonderful neighbours all around me, I go home and there is peace.”



Romsey Road Street Party. Photo: Cambridge Evening News

CHAPTER 6: Romsey Town in 2006

The Ugly, the Bad, and the Good

Steve found the community that he grew up in dissolving, and left. He was not alone.

Others could not leave, and are resentful. Ralph blames the prevalence of 'Buy to Let', with many houses now rented out on short leases to students or young single people: "As soon as you got the student lets it's just gone down. The signs are abandoned rubbish sacks, wheelie bins left on the pavement, uncared for back gardens." Gardens are seen as important in areas of high-density terraced housing. Often the largest space in the home, they are a place for children to play, for adults to relax outside in privacy or for families to meet around barbecues. Ralph had 'a nice lawn, but it never got the sun because the students next door let their garden become overgrown, so I took it all up and put a patio down. It is not nearly so nice.'

Ralph finds the deterioration of parts of the physical environment threatening and feels unsupported by the local Councillors. Neither he nor his wife were directly involved in politics, but they remember a former Labour councillor as "'a people's man, not like they are today", and Maureen fondly recalls that when she started work at a University department the boss said: "Oh, Red Russia girl!" Lib Dems, not Labour, now win elections in Romsey. Their priorities may not be very different from Ralph's, but he feels no connection.

Ralph is not alone. Roy and Sandra are in their fifties, and moved back to Romsey twenty eight years ago after a brief spell on a distant council estate. They missed Romsey because "if you went to the Co-op and came back it took you an hour because you just knew everybody and you just chatted! It was a village, it was families." But now, "we know our own generation that's still here, but there's more students now, its not got the same atmosphere. We're trying to run a Residents Association and get people to join in, but it's really hard because a lot of the people who live here don't have a commitment."



Roy, like Ralph, blames absent owner landlords: "They don't see what it looks like, they don't care what it looks like, they're not really bothered, they're just in it for making money. So you go around and it just looks scruffy. It doesn't bother them. But WE have to live with it."

Complaints are not just from traditional residents either:

Ellen, 30, moved to Bury St Edmunds in despair at the failure of her (resident-abroad) landlord to maintain her rented house, problems with neighbours and late-night drug raids down the street.

Ian moved into the area in the nineties, with his wife and young family, but moved out five years later "due to the amount of houses rented to students. Various noisy neighbours made life miserable and with much sadness we left to get some peace."

With similar disappointment the daughter of one of the eighties middle-class incomers had bought a house in the area but "no longer feels that it would be a good place to bring up children. Too many of the houses have been given out for rent and she has concerns about the purposes to which some of these houses have been put." Recent well-publicised raids on brothels confirm her fears.

Being in the catchment area of a failing secondary school for the last decade has also had an impact. This may now be improving, but Bridget with two children at the local primary school, sees friends fighting to obtain places in feeder schools for the secondary school in the town centre: "This undermines the sense of community. I think residents would get to know each other better if their children went to the same school. The secondary school situation has not benefited Romsey, and this is the reason some parents leave the area. But I am really pleased to see the local secondary school is on the way up at last."

And the Good!

In contrast many residents are far more positive.

Andy was bought up in a Romsey Council house in the sixties. When he was first married they lived on another council estate: "The people over there are appalling, drugs, burglaries, theft of vehicles, it's totally different. I wouldn't live there if you paid me." He requested a transfer back to Romsey: "Oh the difference is chalk and cheese. Everything is on top of you in Romsey. Mill Road, excellent for shopping. You've got Sainsburys, Asda, and the new Tesco, everything within ten minutes. The town centre, the bus station, the rail station, everything is close by. I wouldn't move out of Romsey Town."



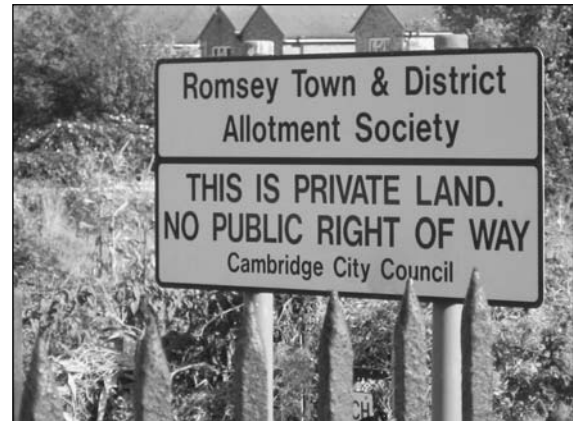
Andy may now be in a minority but at 45 his lifestyle is not very different from that of previous generations of Romsey residents. His father came to Cambridge as a railwayman; he lives around the corner from the street where his parents still live and is married to the girl he knew as a teenager and he enjoys having shops and services within easy reach. Perhaps one of the bigger differences is that also around the corner live a number of Asian families and that nearly 9% of Romsey inhabitants are described in the 2001 census as 'non-white'.

Elizabeth lives with her husband and two children five minutes walk from Andy's house. An editor for a local publisher she moved to Romsey in 1992 because it was affordable and because she liked the Victorian houses.

In 2005 Elizabeth knocked down the side wall of her terraced kitchen and extended it across what was the patio to give more living space. Unlike Sue's childhood in the 1960s "there aren't many children in our street. It would be nice if the kids could go more freely between houses of people very near, but there aren't many." But the contrast with her earlier life in the suburbs remains stark: "People in the street say 'hello'. Also, it always feels safe. I like it that there are always people on the streets at midnight. What a contrast to my previous home in Stapleford, where you didn't see a soul after 8pm!"



Elizabeth has an allotment nearby, and so does Heather who moved to Romsey from London in 2003. They wanted somewhere affordable and close to a railway station: "We moved from a very small flat in London to what seemed like a palace – a two bedroomed house in Romsey. The garden is small but the allotment provides space: We use it a lot for getting together with friends, we have a fire here, we have barbecues, picnics, and the kids run around here a lot, we've got a little paddling pool. We love it. I'm a keen gardener, so I enjoy just being able to get my hands in the soil."



Bridget likes the convenience of being able to walk and cycle 'to town, to the shops, to the school, to the station, to the cinema, pubs and swimming pool. The streets feel secure and the children can visit friends by themselves and have more independence than many children the same age. We can live our daily lives without having to rely on the car.'

Others like the buzz of Mill Road. Mary “chose to live in Romsey Town because we immediately fell in love with the house and its proximity to the multicultural buzz of Mill Road. The house, a three-bedroom end of terrace had previously housed three male students who had littered the garden with beer cans and bottles and painted life-sized drawings of naked women on the walls. We pulled out the pink bathroom suite, sanded the floors and painted the house from top to toe. I love sitting in my garden watching the world go by, saying hello to my neighbours. We're connected by our gardens, our wheelie bin routes and the walls of our houses. We borrow chairs, feed each other's cats and share stories of our lives. I love the fact we live on the right side of the bridge - I feel that it's edgier than the other side - not quite so smug, prim and proper. There's nothing that I like more than the fact that I'm known in a few shops - they know what paper I read, the content of my favourite sandwich and that I like an extra shot in my coffee. I take great pleasure in chatting to my neighbours - it all adds up to feeling like I have a sense of belonging. It feels like home.”



For Ralph and Mary, Andy and Roy much depends on their immediate experience in the street around them, rather in the wider ‘Romsey Town’. Perhaps that is the chief distinction between 1966 and today. They may have friends nearby but their horizons extend over the bridge and beyond the tight networks of family and shared workplace of earlier residents. Even Ralph now drives to shop at a superstore, and has another ‘community’ around his caravan site in Norfolk.

Advancing into the Past

Iain and Gillian moved to Romsey in 2000.

“We were both well into our careers and our thirties before we could afford what might have been considered in the past a starter home. The other night I was flicking through a book of memories of ‘Old Cambridge’ and a subtitle grabbed my eye. It said, “In those days many houses had open fires...” I found this funny because as part of our redecoration of our semi-detached Victorian house in Romsey, we re-opened the fire in the front room. Again, this room was recreated by us putting a wall back in place that had been removed, probably in the seventies. The open fire is not really an affectation: because we chose the bare floorboards fashionable in houses today, in winter the house can be genuinely cold even with the central heating system on full and the fire seems necessary. Sometimes we advance into the past.”

CHAPTER 7: Summing Up Len's Story: 1960-2006

Len's journey seems to sum up the changes that have taken place in Romsey over the past forty years.

"In terms of money, up until about 1960 people always lived from hand to mouth. There were no bank accounts in my family. And now both my children have got bank accounts, they seem to have savings, they've finished college – they went to college, like 40% of people now."

"What an enormous revolution it's been for someone like me. From an outside tap and an outside toilet to a house which has heating, hot water, shower, bath, and some savings. I don't have to worry about money like I did. That's amazing. And two toilets!"

Len's story reflects the social changes that have happened in Romsey since 1960. Born during the Second World War his childhood was spent amongst his extended working-class family. When he lived with his grandmother he accepted the outside tap and the outside toilet, coal fires and gas lighting as normal: "It worked. So though it seems a great hardship I don't think it was really." There was no electricity: "Until I was 13 I didn't live in a house with electricity.

And I can remember being in a house, and switching on the light, and switching it off, and just being absolutely amazed by this thing, this simple act that you could turn a light on and off."

As a teenager in the early sixties he moved in with his Uncle and Aunt a few minutes walk from where he now lives. There was no bathroom and washing was done either in the kitchen sink, or, like Sue, over Mill Road bridge at the public baths. The kitchen was tiny, and the family lived and ate in the back room. Money was always scarce: "The main problem was lack of money to buy things, so if you wanted new shoes you had to save up, or else you'd get them on the tick, but that was unusual."

The upbringing was typical of earlier Romsey generations. But Len was a beneficiary of the sixties expansion of higher education. He went to college, got a degree, became a research assistant at Cambridge University, and finally an electronics lecturer. It gave him enough money to buy his own house and he moved back to Romsey in 1978.



He still lives in the detached house he bought. Built at the same time as the surrounding terraces, it was once a farmhouse for the local dairy. Len has modernised and extended it to provide a contemporary family home where he and his wife have bought up their two children. There is a big living room and a kitchen you can eat in. His children each had separate bedrooms, and there is a bathroom: "Some of the greatest times actually were bathing the kids, putting them in the bath, letting them splash around, plastic ducks...we've got two loos. How ridiculous is that! We've got one downstairs and one upstairs. In my uncle's house there was one outside. On cold winters night you got hardened to it, but it was not as comfortable as the choice of not even having to go downstairs, I can go to the toilet upstairs! What luxuries they are in comparison."

At the rear of the house some of the cow-sheds have been converted into accommodation, and the remaining open barn recently hosted a group of Peruvian children playing brass instruments. At the front of the house overlooking the garden he has recently built a conservatory where they now eat most days.

Len has become middle class. So has much of Romsey. It is part of the story of the last forty years. The hidden story is the fate of those children of the traditional working class residents who remained in manual jobs. Some still live in the area. But many more are dispersed to distant villages where houses are cheaper because facilities are inferior. Providing the labour to service the booming Cambridge economy, they are excluded from its benefits.



CHAPTER 8: Conclusions

Romsey Town has only existed for 120 years. It was a new community that quickly forged a clear sense of identity. In part physical and in part social and political, this identity was strong enough to survive the inter-war expansion and into the sixties. It remains today as an historic memory that helps to distinguish the area from other parts of Cambridge.

Forty years ago much of Romsey could have joined the redevelopment programme that saw streets of Victorian terraces demolished elsewhere in the city. Instead the boost of being declared a General Improvement Area coupled with the success of the Cambridge economy gave the area a new life. Existing residents like Ralph adapted their houses to modern standards. Young middle-class couples like Jeanette or Merryn and their husbands, aspiring to be owner-occupiers, moved in. Both groups accepted smaller houses than their contemporaries who were moving to surrounding villages in exchange for the convenience of local facilities and proximity to the city centre.

Romsey looks very similar today to the way it looked in the sixties. But the social composition of the area has changed dramatically. The last forty years have seen the traditional working-class residents in retreat. But those living in council houses have a security of tenure that gives them stability and they remain a significant part of the community. Ironically the successful regeneration of the area has made owner-occupation unaffordable on manual wages while the 'right to buy', although benefiting those who took it up, leaves a diminished number of family houses to rent.

The first middle class incomers were public sector workers. They moved to Romsey because it was run down and cheaper than any other part of Cambridge. Few of them could afford to buy their own houses today if they were beginning again on their present incomes. Rising house prices encouraged by the local housing shortage and easy access to the railway station, are making Romsey home to a new class of young, higher paid professionals, often London commuters.

As expectations and incomes have escalated terraces have been adapted with bathrooms and toilets. Central heating has made more rooms habitable and given privacy undreamed of when everyone clustered in 'the middle room'. Small terraces that were once full of children are now home to childless couples, while loft conversions and extensions, workshops and garden 'offices' have made other houses suitable for 21st century families with all their possessions. Victorian fireplaces and pine-panelled doors have been restored. Wooden sash windows have replaced the aluminium windows that replaced the original sash windows. The houses reflect the changing values of their inhabitants.

Romsey retains a street pattern, a neighbourhood shopping centre based around Mill Road, and a clear green boundary at Coldhams Common that make it unique in Cambridge. It has a clear physical identity and many points of contact – pubs, clubs, two community centres, allotments, two primary schools, pre-school nurseries and after-school clubs. One of the most important meeting places remains the 'Rec', where dog walkers, joggers and basketball players rub shoulders with teenagers 'hanging out' or playing football. On the route to and from the primary school it is also where parents and children pause to chat.

But the social cohesion of forty years ago has been weakened by increased mobility, rising prices and the peculiarities of the Cambridge housing market that have encouraged landlords to buy former family homes and transform them into bedsits for a transient population of young people. The young people provide the 'buzz' and maintain the shops, pubs and cafes on Mill Road that make the area so attractive to many newcomers. But if their numbers, cars and parties overwhelm the traditional residents or the middle-class professionals, or absorb too many houses that could be family homes, then the delicate balance will be destroyed.

Yet although the balance is under pressure, where it works the streets of Romsey can provide the same sense of community that they did for Sue forty years ago. Charlie is a teacher, and he says:

"It has an absolutely wonderful sense of community and certainly for our children they've formed amazing good friendships on the street. There are kids down the road, kids up the road. I particularly like the long hot summer days and evenings when all the kids are on the pavement. There isn't much traffic on the road at all. Not just the children, when we first moved in we were asked across to an open house party for the street. It seemed to typify the atmosphere, it's a very warm, welcoming atmosphere."



"We looked for a house in a number of villages. But our kids were adamant that they wanted to stay round here. Before we moved here we were told a lot about the wonderful community feel, and at the time I thought 'Everybody talks like that about where they live', but it has proved to be true."

The last land for a major development opportunity in Romsey has recently come on the market. Roy and the Community Group would like to see family houses and green spaces: "You need green spaces. I don't know what it is about it, but when you see green open spaces it is just different, a nice atmosphere." Others would like to repeat the tall, barrack-like blocks of flats that have already been built by the railway.

In reality there is a need for family housing, and for housing for single people – rented and private. How this land is developed will impact on the whole area and help shape 21st century Romsey. Will it be the community of the past, communities of today, or simply a service area for young people passing through Cambridge, with a few families clinging on while others are forced to live even further from the town centre?



New affordable homes in Romsey

Allan Brigham November 2006

PART 2: Forty Years On Changes in Housing and Society 1966- 2006 with a focus on the Eastern Region

by Colin Wiles

CHAPTER 1: A personal history

“Yes, there is something distinctive and recognizable in English civilization. It is a culture as individual as that of Spain. It is somehow bound up with solid breakfasts and gloomy Sundays, smoky towns and winding roads, green fields and red pillar-boxes. It has a flavour of its own. Moreover it is continuous, it stretches into the future and the past, there is something in it that persists, as in a living creature. What can the England of 1940 have in common with the England of 1840? But then, what have you in common with the child of five whose photograph your mother keeps on the mantelpiece? Nothing, except that you happen to be the same person.”

George Orwell England Your England 1941

So what does the England of 2006 have in common with the England of 1966? What do I have in common with the boy I was in the sixties? For many people 1966 is a place that exists beyond memory, seen only through the selective filter of films and TV – Booby Moore aloft with the Jules Rimet trophy, Michael Caine in ‘Get Carter’, Harold Wilson with his pipe, Twiggy and The Beatles. When I started to write this report I thought about my own history, and what it meant to grow up in the sixties. So that is probably as good a starting point as any, because my story may help to set the scene and put the changes of the past forty years into context and shed some light on the key themes highlighted in the rest of this report.

It is a Monday in 1966 and my mother is busy at her mangle, forcing damp sheets through the stubborn wooden rollers. Monday is wash day and the air is damp with the smell of soap flakes. The washing is all done by hand and the sodden items are squeezed through the mangle and put in front of the fire in winter, or on the washing line in summer. The house has a rhythm and a ritual driving it forwards. My mother shops for food almost every day at local shops for we have no car. On Sunday, when the streets are empty and only the newsagent and the pubs are open, we have a roast lunch which lasts for the next three days – cold on Monday, minced or cut up in a curry or rissoles on Tuesday, boiled up into a soup or stew on Wednesday. Every evening we have a proper pudding with custard – apple dumplings, spotted dick, plum crumble.

My earliest years are spent in Cyprus, Germany and the north east of England. I am the youngest of five and my father is a soldier. When I am four my father retires from the army and my parents buy their first property, a Victorian terraced house in an English seaside resort. My father works in a government office and struggles to pay the mortgage but he is determined to be a homeowner and looks down on those who live in council housing. He wants no help from the government. It is a base prejudice that Margaret Thatcher will appeal to fifteen years later.

We have no central heating, fridge, washing machine, TV or vacuum cleaner. My mother spends most of her time washing, cleaning, raking out and setting the fire, cooking and shopping. She is a full time housewife, or more accurately a domestic drudge. She also knits and sews, to make jumpers and clothes because such items are expensive in the shops. Some of my clothes are handed down. If we want hot water we either light the coal fire (which is connected to a cast iron hot water tank), or boil kettles and saucepans. My siblings and me share a bath once a week – I am the youngest and so go in last when the water is often tepid and scummy. It is a four-bedroom house for seven of us. Two of my sisters share a double bed in one room and I share a bedroom with my brother, who is ten years older than me. In the coldest weather my mother lights a couple of paraffin heaters which leave condensation on all the windows. Through the cold winter of 1963 the snow builds up into six-foot drifts and the pipes freeze. We wear coats and gloves indoors and ice covers both sides of the windowpanes. Beneath the house a primitive cellar has been hacked out of the chalk and the coal is kept there. We are sent down the rickety stairs to fill up the scuttle or put sixpences into the gas meter. A colony of mice live in

and around the kitchen and we fight a constant battle against them – the slamming of mousetraps interrupts us as we sit reading or listening to the radio on winter evenings. I devour books and radio programmes and make a weekly trip to the local library, one of 2,500 endowed by Andrew Carnegie. At the age of eleven I go away to boarding school and come home in the school holidays to a cold and damp bed where I quickly catch influenza.

Very little is wasted. We go out collecting cardboard and rags and take them to the rag and bone warehouse where the man weighs them and gives us a few shillings. My mother keeps odd bits of string and brown paper and she patches our clothes. We have only one small metal dustbin that is put out once a week for a family of seven. There is little packaging and no plastic bags. All of the vegetable waste goes to the compost heap or the guinea pigs. The roads are mostly empty of cars and we roam the streets in gangs from the age of four in complete safety. We know who the strange men are and keep clear of them. We spend the summers on the beach, swimming and sunbathing and searching for glass bottles that pay a deposit. With my mates I go scrumping and camping in nearby woods or fishing along the harbour walls. I witness mild cruelties upon fish and other animals and spectate at numerous fights. We never have a holiday for why would we need one when we live by the sea? Yet by the late nineteen sixties many Britons are flying abroad for their holidays and the resort is declining around me.

Few public events register upon my consciousness. The first is the assassination of JFK because the grown ups are all crouched anxiously around the radio – they think it means war. I confuse Africa and America and when they say the President's body has been taken to the White House I picture a huge white-painted mud hut with a straw roof. Later, the tragedy at Aberfan makes a similar impression. The Beatles and The Rolling Stones both play locally and my older sisters go to see them. The first sighting of local hippies causes much amusement but soon everyone is wearing flowers in their hair and singing "Let's go to San Francisco". Mods and Rockers fight each other on the seafront on bank holiday weekends. Then there is Harold Wilson with his pipe and the pound in your pocket and Enoch Powell with his rivers of blood, but there are few Black or Asian people in our town and any that appear are treated as curiosities. Many men wear suits, ties and polished shoes and many women wear hats. The last hangings take place on the 13th of August 1964 when Peter Anthony Allen and John Robson Walby are executed simultaneously at Liverpool and Manchester. I am living through the end of an era, but am oblivious to it. It is literally a case of in one era and out the other.

We were materially poor yet it was a life that was rich in social capital and human interest, not all of it positive. We had an intimate knowledge of the streets and those who lived around us. We knew everyone's business and they knew ours.

So that is a short history of my housing life in the sixties. It may be atypical but it does perhaps illustrate the changes in housing conditions, technology and society that have taken place over the past forty years and highlights what we have gained and what we have lost and, I hope, informs some of what follows.



CHAPTER 2:

A short policy review of the past forty years

"The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there"

L.P.Hartley The Go Between

The nineteen sixties

The fifties had been a decade of rationing and austerity. We were still clearing up after the war, and an archipelago of bombsites blighted most British cities. There was cross party support for a major programme of municipal building and redevelopment. Many city centres, such as Coventry and Plymouth, were re-modelled. By 1965 over five hundred redevelopment schemes were in train across the country with new shopping centres, ring roads and flyovers being welcomed as "an exciting new element" that would inject "movement" and "vitality" into our cities. The dismal results can be seen today in towns and cities as diverse as Watford, Birmingham and Huntingdon.

In 1961 Parker Morris standards were introduced and remained in place until 1981. They led to good space standards in council housing but poor design and workmanship often outweighed the benefits. Housing had been a major issue in Labour's 1964 election victory and the 1967 Housing Subsidies Act introduced a new regime that was more generous to local authorities. Over 400,000 new private and public homes were being built by 1968 – the highest ever – and almost half were council homes.

In 1964 the Housing Corporation was established. In 1965 fair rents were introduced in response to the vile activities of Peter Rachman and other rogue landlords. Pressure from vested interests to avoid overspill beyond existing urban boundaries led to higher densities and high rise blocks, which were encouraged by the subsidy system.

Sixties architecture tended to be an overhang of the modernist movement of the twenties and thirties – a foreign import inspired by Bauhaus and Le Corbusier. Pioneering British architects like Peter and Alison Smithson (The Economist Building), Sir Basil Spence (Coventry Cathedral) and the Hungarian émigré Ernő Goldfinger (Trellick Tower) began to make their mark. Ian Fleming disliked the work of Ernő Goldfinger so much that he named one of his James Bond villains after him (when Goldfinger threatened legal action Fleming offered to change the name to Goldprick and the case was dropped).

Concrete became the material of choice for this new cohort of architects but in May 1968 part of Ronan Point, a council tower block in East London collapsed following a gas explosion. Four people died and seventeen were injured. Investigators found that some joints had been filled with newspapers and that some of the walls rested on bolts instead of mortar. It confirmed the public in its view that it was unnatural to live in the sky and it was the beginning of the end for council high rise. Kenneth Campbell, head of design at the Greater London Council between 1959 and 1974 pithily listed the key failures of the high rise experiment – the lifts (too few, too small, too slow), the children (too many) and the management (too little). In August 1968 the Ministry of Housing announced that further tower blocks would be discouraged.

Meanwhile, poverty was rediscovered by a new generation of activists. Housing conditions were exposed and many new housing associations were formed. Immigrants from the Caribbean and South Asia faced worsening housing conditions and racism was rife in the private letting market and the local authority sector. Signs announcing “no coloureds” were commonplace. The screening of “Cathy Come Home” on 16th November 1966 had a deep impact on public opinion and led to later homelessness legislation and the creation of Shelter, the national campaign for the homeless. As the decade ended there was awareness that the scale of demolition had gone too far and there was a greater emphasis on renewal and improvement. The 1967 Civic Amenities Act created conservation areas. The 1969 Housing Act introduced “general improvement areas”, with grants for the improvement of private properties.

Everywhere colours became bolder, with geometric and psychedelic designs. The first Habitat opened on the Fulham Road in 1964. Televisions began to flood into the west from Japan. The Beatles conquered America and Bob Dylan went electric. At the end of the decade in August 1969 Dylan played to a crowd of 150,000 at the Isle of Wight Festival and sang “How does it feel, to be without a home...like a rolling stone?”



Ronan Point collapses 1968

Focus on the East - tower blocks

Britain’s first tower block was built in Harlow in 1951. The Lawn, now a Grade II listed building, was designed by Frederick Gibberd to an irregular trapezoid plan over ten stories.

There are two one-bed flats and two bedsitters on each floor and each flat has a south-facing balcony. A warm red brick was used as the main cladding material of the reinforced concrete structure, unusually laid as a solid 14" wall in double stretcher bond. The original metal windows have been replaced by uPVC.



The nineteen seventies

There was a mini housing boom in 1971 and 1972 with prices increasing by 40% in 1972. Inflation jumped during the first half of the decade – up to 15% by 1973 - and high interest rates caused destabilisation for both homeowners and local authorities. Building Society rates tended to lag behind market rates and this led to a "mortgage famine" which generated a housing slump - the number of private sector homes being built halved between 1973 and 1974. Higher interest rates meant higher loan charges on capital expenditure but also higher loan repayments on existing debt.

By the early seventies there were 440,000 high rise flats in Britain with almost half in London. Between 1961 and 1968 seventy five percent of Glasgow's new council housing comprised high rise blocks, reaching 31 storeys in the Red Road flats.

The 1972 Housing Finance Act required local authority rents to be set on the same principles as registered "fair rents" for private sector tenancies. This led to rent increases and widespread protests (Councillors in Clay Cross, Derbyshire fought to the end and were surcharged and banned from office). The incoming Labour government in 1974 used Counter-Inflation Act powers to freeze local authority rents, which added still more to the amount to be met by central government subsidy and (to a lesser extent) from local authority rate funds.

The greater emphasis on housing renewal and improvement continued. The 1974 Housing Act introduced Housing Action Areas where additional grants and powers were available to deal with disrepair and dereliction. At a time of high inflation the Labour government switched its control on council building from numbers built to cash spent. This was window dressed as devolution of power, but was actually a tightening of central control and introduced an annual bidding system for capital grants using the Housing Investment Programme.

Focus on the East: General Improvement Areas in Ipswich

Between 1977 and 1986 ten General Improvement Areas were declared in Ipswich covering 4,000 properties. Ipswich, like many other urban areas, had properties that lacked basic amenities, were in disrepair, and many residents were unable to afford to improve their properties - mainly terraced properties built before 1900, constructed of red brick with slate roofs, often with doors opening onto the pavement. Higher levels of grant (up to 60% of eligible costs) were made available to renovate properties, improve the local environment and provide pedestrian areas and playgrounds. In 1969 the price of these houses ranged from £900 to £1,200.



Surrey Road Ipswich

The 1975 Housing Rents and Subsidies Act ended the system of fair rents in the council sector set up by the 1972 Act and the 1976 Race Relations Act made it unlawful to discriminate against a person, directly or indirectly on racial grounds in employment, education and housing. The 1975 Sex Discrimination Act had outlawed discrimination on grounds of gender.

The 1977 Homeless Persons Act placed a requirement on local authorities to provide assistance and advice to vulnerable homeless people.

By the end of the seventies housing conditions across the east had improved markedly. Nationally, overcrowding of more than 1.5 persons per room had declined from 18.7% in 1931 to 2.9% in 1971.

Elsewhere, the seventies was the decade that style forgot. Loon pants, platform shoes, butterfly collars and tank tops prevailed among the young. But it was the best decade for sit coms – Dad’s Army, Fawlty Towers, Porridge and The Good Life. There was some brilliant music in the early part of the decade but punk came along in 1976 to destroy the complacency of ten- minute drum solos and themed albums. When the Sex Pistols reached number one during the Queen’s Golden Jubilee in 1977 it felt as if some seismic change had taken place in the country.



Focus on the East - Conservation areas in Ipswich

Conservation areas were created by the 1967 Civic Amenities Act to protect areas of historic and architectural importance.

There are now 13 conservation areas in Ipswich starting with a large part of the historic centre in 1974 and ending with Holywells Park in 2003.

Conservation Areas protect the special character of an area. Houses may be extended by up to 50 cubic metres or 10% (up to a max of 115 cubic metres). Consent is required for all demolition work. Tree felling and lopping also requires consent.

If an unoccupied building, considered by the Council to be of "key" importance to the area, falls into disrepair then the Secretary of State can be asked to confirm an order under Section 54 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act requiring urgent repairs to be carried out. If the owner fails to implement the order, the Council can carry out the work and recover the cost. In Conservation Areas extra powers are available for the further protection and enhancement of the environment.

The Council has powers to require additional information in support of any planning application showing how the proposal will relate to the Conservation Area. This can mean the submission of elevations of adjacent buildings, full details of the proposal and examples of materials and colours. Usually only a fully detailed planning application will be considered. The Ipswich Local Plan Built Environment Chapter contain the policies regarding the designation of Conservation Areas and other related matters such as the design of new development, street furniture and landscaping.

The nineteen eighties

The Conservatives were elected in 1979 on a manifesto of popular capitalism and the creation of a share and property owning democracy. State utilities were privatised and the promotion of home ownership was a key plank of their programme. It was the end of the post war consensus on housing (remember that a Tory government had built the most council houses in any year - almost 250,000 per annum in the early nineteen fifties). Housing bore the brunt of public spending cutbacks - 75% of all spending reductions were accounted for by housing. Under Margaret Thatcher, council house building fell to the lowest peacetime level since the twenties. Subsidies were shifted from bricks and mortar to individuals, a change that would help to widen the poverty gap and attach an added stigma to the council housing sector.

In 1980 housing associations owned and managed only 2% of all dwellings.

The 1980 Housing Act introduced the Right to Buy in the face of fierce opposition. Significant discounts of up to 70% were given to longstanding tenants. By 1997 two million homes had transferred to owner occupation, with 180,000 being sold in 1982 alone. The impact has been a curate's egg – it has undoubtedly created a better social balance on some estates, but has led to the ongoing "residualisation" of the sector, whereby the poorest and most disadvantaged citizens are left behind in council housing. Capital receipts from sales amounted to £27 billion between 1979 and 1996.

During 1981 there were serious riots in Brixton, Liverpool, Birmingham and other major cities. Lord Scarman's report into the Brixton disturbances highlighted discrimination, unemployment and poverty as the primary underlying causes. Government money was used to provide showpiece projects in some of the affected areas. Liverpool spent most of its money on a garden festival.

The 1988 Housing Act further deregulated the private sector and introduced assured tenancies for new housing association tenants allowing associations to secure private funding. Housing Action Trusts were established. The role of local authorities changed from provider to enabler and tenants were given the right to choose their landlord.

The Building Societies Act of 1986 allowed building societies to turn themselves into banks. The mortgage market boomed but this all ended in tears when the Chancellor gave lengthy notice that double tax relief on mortgages would end. Many couples rushed to buy and over-extended themselves, leading to negative equity and repossessions when the housing bubble burst.

The first personal computers appeared – including the Sinclair ZX. Sinclair also produced the disastrous C5 electric car. The decade was truly a nadir for fashion and music– anyone for the new age romantics? Howard Jones? The Soviet Empire collapsed from within and Mrs Thatcher said there was no such thing as society. Personal electronic items such as Walkmans and mobile 'phones began to appear.

The nineteen nineties

By February 1990 interest rates had increased to 15.4 per cent and house prices slumped. Arrears and repossessions increased and 1.7 million homeowners were in negative equity by 1992 (up from 230,000 in 1989). The number of repossessions peaked in 1991 when 75,540 people lost their homes. In 1992 the Chancellor Norman Lamont announced the "Housing Market Package" and gave funding to 27 housing associations to buy 18,000 homes in 100 days as a way of jump-starting the market. It was a crazy time.

The 1992 Local Government Act extended compulsory competitive tendering to housing management. The 1993 Leasehold Reform Act allowed leaseholders to buy their freeholds and introduced the rent to mortgage scheme. After 1992 local authorities were required to submit planning proposals for affordable housing in their local plans.

The 1996 Housing Act set out a new regulatory framework for housing associations (which became Registered Social Landlords). It also introduced compulsory competitive tendering for housing management in the council sector. The 1997 Local Government Act replaced compulsory competitive tendering with best value and housing associations were included in the regime.

50 local authorities had transferred their stock by 1997 when Tony Blair was elected. With Labour's return to office the long awaited return to council house building failed to materialise and it was a case of business as usual. Housing associations continued as the main providers of new affordable homes and local authorities continued to be enablers. The switch to personal subsidies from bricks and mortar

continued but this had the effect of catching poorer people in a poverty trap and the bill for housing benefit and rent allowances increased from £4 billion in 1986 to £11.4 billion in 1996. In effect, housing funding had merely switched from the Department of the Environment to the Department of Social Security. It was like a council street sweeper sneakily discarding his rubbish on someone else's patch.

The government placed greater emphasis on area renewal, with housing often a side issue. Health Action Zones, New Deal for Communities, Education Zones, and Employment Zones were the result, a recognition that poverty and social exclusion often transcended tenure and ownership. There was a boom in buy to let.

Music and fashion picked up during the nineties. Forget the boy bands but the likes of Blur, Oasis and Pulp revitalised British music. The death of Diana in 1997 was perhaps the defining moment of the nineties. It seemed to unleash a very un-English period of mourning - we became less buttoned up, more like southern Europeans or Italians in our displays of emotion and grief. Internet business began to appear along with 24- hour banking and supermarkets. DIY shows proliferated on TV and many gave the dangerous impression that any fool could become the new Terence Conran or make a million from property development.

Focus on the East - Bedford stock transfer

In June 1990 one of the first local authority stock transfers took place in the eastern region. North Bedfordshire Council gave the go-ahead for its housing stock to transfer to Bedfordshire Pilgrims' Housing Association at a price of £64 million for 7,400 properties. A 670 page legal document sealed the deal, which was funded by a £95 million loan that will have to be repaid within 20 years.

By 2006 BPHA had become one of the largest associations in the region, with 11,500 properties and heading a consortium of seven independent housing associations.

Into the new millennium

In 2002 the government introduced rent restructuring in the affordable sector, with the aim that local authority and housing association rents should converge by 2010.

In 2003 John Prescott published the Communities Plan, which aimed to tackle housing supply issues in the South East where affordability was a key issue and low demand in other parts of the country. The Plan also aimed to bring all social housing up to the Decent Homes standard by 2010, protect the countryside and improve the quality of our public spaces. The decent homes requirement was the final twist of the thumbscrews to force local authorities into stock transfer. Three of the four growth areas were wholly or partly in the eastern region - Thames Gateway, Cambridge and Milton Keynes.

Regional housing strategies and regional housing boards came into being. The former were hurriedly put together in the first year and the latter were unelected bodies. Local authority capital allocations were also regionally determined with some local authorities receiving nothing at all.

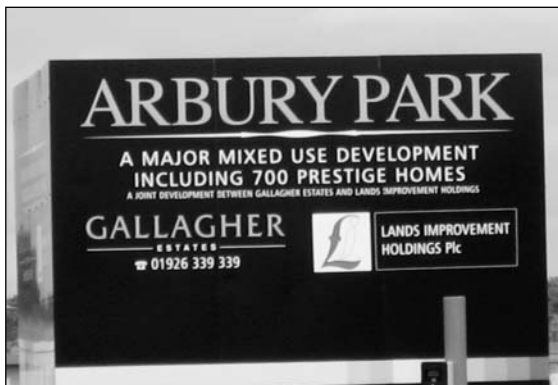
By 2003 the Housing Corporation was providing capital funding to over 300 housing associations but the Corporation announced that in future fewer than a hundred associations ("lead investors") would receive social housing grant with private developers also becoming eligible. A spate of mergers and partnerships followed. By 2006 most of the larger associations in the eastern region were either lead investors or in a relationship with a lead investor. The strategic role of local authorities continued to decline as sub-regional agendas took over and housing associations increased in size, often working across dozens of local authority areas. This highlighted the need for stock rationalisation, an issue that the Housing Corporation sought to address by commissioning the CIH to study the problem in 2006.

By 2004 1.1 million households in England owned a second home. In the same year, the proportion of first-time buyers taking on new mortgages fell to 29%, the lowest ever. In 1993 it had been 55%.

Supporting People was introduced, with the aim of taking care costs away from rents and service charges and into a centrally allocated pot but the cost estimates doubled and most providers view the regime as a bureaucratic nightmare. The expansion of the European Union led to an influx of workers from Poland and other eastern countries. Almost 500,000 citizens of the new EU countries were in the UK by September 2006, with 65,000 in East Anglia.

There was a greater emphasis on affordable home ownership with special schemes for key workers. An anti-stock transfer organisation called Defend Council Housing continued to oppose the “privatisation” of council housing and the transfer of stock to housing associations. They exploited tenants’ fears of a democratic deficit within associations and massive post-transfer rent rises. By 2006 over 200 stock transfers had been completed by 155 English local authorities and over 900,000 dwellings had transferred. Across the sector as a whole there was a continuing emphasis on resident involvement and consumer choice, with choice based lettings schemes replacing paternalistic allocation systems in some areas. In 2005 it was announced that the 2012 Olympics would be held in London. This could have a major impact on the east, taking public funds and construction workers away from the region.

By 2006 over 70% of the housing stock in the UK was owner occupied compared to 42% in 1960.



An overview of housing policy 1975 -2000

In 2002 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister carried out a review of housing policy between 1975 and 2000. The main conclusions were:

1. Policies often had unintended consequences. For example, the Right to Buy had allowed millions to buy their own homes but had contributed to the residualisation of social rented housing leading to concentrations of poverty and exclusion.
2. Many policies resulted in trade-offs. Greater choice for borrowers that arose from the liberalisation of the mortgage market also resulted in greater risks for certain households, as did changes in the safety nets. The planning system may have protected the countryside, but it had also contributed to housing shortages and higher prices (see chapter 3). Transferring social rented housing to the housing association sector had fragmented management and increased the costs of funding. It had also fragmented ownership and therefore made regeneration and renewal more complex.
3. Policies were more successful when they followed the grain of economic and social change, and least successful when they do not. For example, the stepped removal of mortgage interest relief occurred when interest rates were falling so people did not feel worse off. On the negative side policies aimed at neighbourhood regeneration have often produced disappointing results because they have been overwhelmed by unfavourable economic circumstances.

Three policy clusters were identified as being of prime importance

1. Deregulation and liberalisation. The deregulation of the financial system combined with housing privatisation mainly through the Right to Buy, were key to promoting the growth of owner-occupation from about 58 to 70 per cent of households. The deregulation of private sector rents laid the foundations for the successful growth of the private rented sector towards the end of the period. However, despite the emphasis on the independence of social landlords, policies in the social rented sector became more centralised and detailed, as governments attempted to improve management performance.
2. Restructuring housing subsidies. Housing subsidies were radically restructured. In 1975 more than 80 per cent of housing subsidies were supply-side subsidies intended to promote the provision of affordable homes. By 2000 more than 85 per cent of housing subsidies were on the demand-side reducing housing costs for those on low incomes, with Housing Benefit emerging as the main subsidy instrument. Public spending on housing rose by 35 per cent in real terms between 1975 and 1992, but has since fallen to 16 percentage points below the 1975 level because supply-side subsidies were cut and Mortgage Interest Relief (MIR) for home-owners was finally removed. The phasing out of MIR was progressive because it was on average worth more to better off households.

Changes in the balance between demand and supply-side subsidies in the rented sectors redistributed resources progressively between relatively poor households, but because tenants in the social rented sector are relatively poor as a group this change can be seen as regressive.

3. Asset restructuring. Both of the above strands of policy changes were associated with a massive asset restructuring as ownership of much local authority housing was shifted to the housing association sector, which also became the main provider of new social rented housing. This occurred while public funding commitments were in decline and helped to maintain affordability. The creation of a more business-orientated social rented sector together with the expansion of both private equity and private finance had fundamentally changed governance and incentive systems across tenures although the process is by no means complete.

CHAPTER 3: It's all about Land, Stupid

"My own recipe for world peace is a little bit of land for everyone"

Gladys Taber

"This land is your land, This land is my land...

This land was made for you and me"

Woody Guthrie

The price we pay for our homes is directly related to our policy on land. It is a simple statement, for simple economics would suggest that when house prices are high more houses would be built on more land until prices start to fall, and vice versa. Yet this simple economic model does not work in the housing market and the relationship between price and construction is highly inelastic, because land supply is restricted. Moreover, planning policy since 1947 has ignored market forces and many planners are proudly ignorant of the economics of development. Only with the recent review by Kate Barker has the attitude and responsiveness of planners to the state of the market been challenged (see box on page 46).

In his brilliant book "The Intellectuals and the Masses" (1992) Professor John Carey describes how intellectuals in Victorian and Edwardian England were alarmed by the growth of the working and lower middle class masses. Figures like W.B. Yeats, Bernard Shaw and Aldous Huxley supported eugenics as a way of breeding a stronger populace and many intellectuals feared a lowering of standards if literacy spread to the lower classes. "The great mass of humanity should never learn to read and write" wrote D.H. Lawrence. They were horrified by the spread of suburbia and the cocky intellectual pretensions of its clerkly inhabitants with their predilection for tinned food. The spread of plotlands (See Chapter 6) across large tracts of the countryside also horrified the intellectual elites. John Betjeman's 1937 poem Slough sums up the mood:

*Come friendly bombs and
fall on Slough!
It isn't fit for humans now,
There isn't grass to graze a cow.
Swarm over, Death!*

*Come, bombs and blow to smithereens
Those air -conditioned, bright canteens,
Tinned fruit, tinned meat, tinned milk,
tinned beans,
Tinned minds, tinned breath...*

Even liberals like E. M. Forster knew that the slums had to be cleared and the people housed but felt that each new development destroyed a piece of England as surely as if a bomb had hit it. "I cannot equate the problem. It is a collision of loyalties," he wrote. In a 1938 essay, C.E.M. Joad described the horrors of suburban growth: "in fifty years' time there will, in southern England, be neither town nor country, but only a single dispersed suburb, sprawling unendingly from Watford to the coast...the extension of the towns must be stopped, building must be restricted to sharply defined areas, and such re-housing of the population as may be necessary must be carried on within those areas."

In essence, this horror of the masses and suburban sprawl formed the intellectual bedrock upon which both pre and post-war planning policy was built – a policy that sought to contain existing cities, protect the countryside and restrict any uptake of additional land to the new towns. These measures would contain the urban population and help to protect the countryside for the benefit of the upper classes and its subservient agricultural workforce.

The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act did indeed put a stop to the chaotic suburban sprawl of the inter-war years and set the pattern for land use over the next sixty years. The war had been won by centralised planning and control, which the population had accepted as the only way to beat Hitler. Clement Atlee's Labour government was elected in 1945 on a programme of nationalisation of the means of production, distribution, and exchange (Clause 4) and Labour believed that it could

win the peace using the same command-economy methods. The Act effectively nationalised the right to develop land and required local authorities to set out what kind of development would be permitted where. The first aim of the Act had been that all development would be public, on land acquired by the government. If private development took place it would be taxed at a Betterment Levy of 100 per cent. This meant that there was little incentive for private development. The Conservative government elected in 1951 abolished the tax and, over time, more and more construction was carried out by the private sector. But for the next fifty years land use continued to be planned and controlled by central and local government, irrespective of market forces. So if house prices were beyond the reach of a significant proportion of the population the planning system was not impelled to release more land. This has led to a dysfunctional housing market, where the state has intervened to help the poor, whether through housing benefits and rent allowances or the provision of affordable housing or both.

The Act also had the effect of stamping down on self-help builders, perhaps helping to create a passive population who saw the state, rather than themselves, as being responsible for meeting their accommodation needs. This resulted in notions of “they know best” and “they must do something”, a dependency culture that has both sustained and saddened housing managers over the years.

Paradoxically, this level of state control in planning also suits the interests of reactionary elements. Those with nimby (“not in my back yard”) tendencies enjoy the protection afforded by strict planning laws that allow them to protect their own patch, keeping the hoi polloi outside the city gates, so to speak. Indeed Peter Hall has described our planning system as “a polite English version of apartheid”. Even ardent free marketeers like Nicholas Ridley, Secretary of State for the Environment in 1986 under Margaret Thatcher, described the green belts as “sacrosanct in my hands”, a dissemblance that was extreme even by his standards.

So the planning system serves the interests of homebuyers and homeless people badly. By restricting the supply of land for new homes it has helped to force up prices and put home ownership beyond the reach of many. This is a view shared by Andres Duany, one of the world’s most influential architects and designer of Seaside in Florida (as featured in *The Truman Show*). “The way you constrain land rather absurdly artificially raises values. Instead of going out and saying ‘we need 5 or 7m dwellings’ and laying them out efficiently so there is enough supply and the market can adjust, you have a system here that, in effect, might be the worst of both worlds.”

So by 2006 there were over 1.5 million households seeking housing from local authorities in England – an increase of nearly 50% since 2000.

The post-war period also saw the launch of the new towns programme (see chapter 5) and green belts were put in place round many cities and historic towns. Green belts now comprise 13% of England’s area. Outside of the London fringe, Cambridge is the principal city in the eastern region with a green belt, which (depending upon your point of view) either protects it from unplanned growth or strangles its development, forces up house prices and worsens congestion. In Cambridge the green belt has certainly protected a swathe of countryside (much of it of dubious aesthetic value) but because of the city’s imbalance between homes and jobs it has also forced workers to commute from greater distances, leading to colossal levels of congestion. As Allan Brigham’s study of Romsey Town shows, Cambridge had a “green belt” in the nineteenth century, but this has since been built upon. There is no reason why Cambridge’s existing green belt cannot be pushed outwards, so long as areas of outstanding beauty, such as Grantchester Meadows and the Gog Magogs are protected. In fact, it could be argued that a larger, more populous urban Cambridge would make a decent tram or light rail system in the city more viable and help to reduce the amount of traffic congestion that now surrounds it.

Le Corbusier 1887 - 1965

"The design of cities is too important to be left to citizens"

Le Corbusier

Has anyone had a more malign influence on twentieth century urban policy than the Swiss architect Le Corbusier? The dystopian tower blocks surrounded by wastelands of unused grass that blight so many cities around the world can be traced back to his vision. In the twenties and thirties he called for the existing centres of major cities to be razed and replaced with huge tower blocks. He imagined towers housing 40,000 people and told the press in New York, "Your skyscrapers are too small." Tower blocks would solve overcrowding and urban sprawl and up to 50 percent of urban space would be parks with tennis courts on the tops of the towers and fast-flowing freeways linking the different zones of the city. He despised the narrow-minded outlook of suburbanites. "We must eliminate the suburbs."

His own commissions were dismal failures, and were often swiftly re-modelled by their inhabitants. To one client who complained that the flat roof leaked he replied, "Of course it leaks. That's how you know it's a roof."

Le Corbusier was an ego-maniac who, instead of being diagnosed as clinically insane, was taken up by politicians and intellectuals as a visionary. But his plans simply do not work because they ignore human beings and the impact of the motor car. The public housing projects influenced by his vision have created isolated, poor communities in monolithic high-rise blocks where the social ties of community life are destroyed. Jane Jacobs, in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, savaged Le Corbusier for this lack of humanity. Cities work, says Jacobs, not so much because of government and policing but because of the "the eyes on the street". For Le Corbusier streets were an obsolete notion: "There ought not to be such things as streets; we have to create something that will replace them." In the new city people would have their own footpaths winding through woods and forests. "No pedestrian will ever meet an automobile, ever!" Brasilia, the one city that is based on Le Corbusier's principles, is a disaster.

The Town and Country Planning Act of 1968 sought to increase the level of public participation in the planning process but this further strengthened the powers of nimbyism by giving vested interests a say in planning decisions. This can lead to an imbalance between national and local interests. Cambridge, for example, is a city of international importance where high tech businesses need space to expand and to house a growing workforce, but local interests can often thwart development proposals. The Chartered Institute of Housing has called for better integration at local and sub-regional level to drive forward the national agenda for growth. Local authorities often face problems in promoting the benefits of new housing developments to sceptical local communities and a debate is taking place about how to solve these issues through more efficient funding regimes and further planning reforms. There is clearly a balance to be struck between local and national needs but regional housing boards will need to encourage an integrated approach, where a better understanding of local housing markets will inform policy and investment decisions in housing and planning in order that markets can be re-balanced. Local authorities will be forced to adapt and, where necessary, radically change the way they work.



New homes at Cambourne

The Barker Review 2004

Kate Barker, a member of the Bank of England's monetary policy committee, was asked to review the housing market and the problems of the planning system by the Chancellor Gordon Brown. Her final report, published in 2005, found that a shortage of new houses had contributed to soaring property prices in the UK and rising homelessness and that a shortage of land was the main cause of the problem. Incomes had failed to keep pace with house prices in many areas. Barker also found that housebuilders were reluctant to develop brown field sites and controlled the release of new properties on large developments to maximise profits. She also found that equity from the housing market was leaking into consumer spending, which impacted upon inflation and interest rates.

Kate Barker also found that the planning system failed to respond to demand in the housing market, and local authorities had few incentives to grant planning permission to developers. In 2001 only 175,000 new homes were built in the UK, the lowest level since the Second World War. Meanwhile the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation had doubled to 93,000 in the last eight years.

Her review reported that supply shortages had caused house prices to rise by 2.4% in real terms during the past 30 years, compared with an average of 1.1% in Europe and 0% in Germany. The UK housing market was markedly out of step with the rest of Europe, which hindered any convergence prior to joining the Euro.

As a result, in 2002 only 37% of new households in England could afford to buy a home, compared with 46% in the late 1980s. There would need to be an increase of 70,000 to 120,000 dwellings each year to improve affordability.

Kate Barker said: "The government is already doing a great deal to tackle housing supply problems. However, it is clear that the UK housing market is not working as well as it should."

The Barker proposals would only consume 1% of available land.

In July 2006 The Guardian reported on the case of Stephen Grendon who had lived as a recluse on a patch of land in the Cotswolds for the past 10 years and was now threatened by eviction. Stephen, a 41 year old man who, as a child actor had played Laurie Lee in "Cider with Rosie" and appeared in "Swallows and Amazons" had suffered mental health problems for most of his adult life. He bought the land for £1,000 after the break-up of his marriage and lives in a simple hut. He has no running water or toilet and uses a local spring for his water supply, although he does have electricity. For many years his nearest neighbours did not even know he was there. Cotswold District Council has taken action under planning legislation for lack of planning permission. The case has been to the High Court and Stephen has lost. He awaits eviction.

To summarise, post-war planning legislation had its roots in the pre-war fear of suburban sprawl. A 1973 study of the effects of post-war planning by Peter Hall and others concluded that three key outcomes were apparent:

1. Containment – existing urban centres had been contained
2. Suburbanisation – a growing separation between residential and employment areas leading to longer commuting times
3. Inflation of land and property values

The losers, found Hall, were the underclass; especially those living in privately rented accommodation in the cities. In its workings the planning system had therefore been regressive, favouring the rich and harming the poor. He concluded, "Somewhere along the way a great ideal was lost, a system distorted and the great mass of the people betrayed."

CHAPTER 4: Building for wildlife (or “the myth of concreting over the countryside”)

*They watched the landscape, sitting side by side
-An Odeon went past, a cooling tower,
And someone running up to bowl -and none
Thought of the others they would never meet
Or how their lives would all contain this hour.
I thought of London spread out in the sun,
Its postal districts packed like squares of wheat.*

The Whitsun Weddings Philip Larkin

Why do we have such a fetish about protecting the countryside? The CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) is one of the country's most effective lobbying organisations with 60,000 members and over a million affiliates. The CPRE argues that the countryside is sacrosanct and that virtually all housebuilding should be on brownfield sites within existing urban areas. But what are they campaigning to protect exactly?

The CPRE propagates the myth that we live in a dense and overcrowded island where every scrap of countryside is precious. We do not. We certainly do live in dense and overcrowded towns and cities, but there is plenty of available land as any flight above the eastern region or a glance at an ordnance survey map will quickly demonstrate. It is just that we choose not to build on it. And it is simply not the case that all of our countryside is valuable, either in terms of wildlife or its aesthetics. Indeed, there are many areas of rural England that would benefit from selective suburban expansion, as I shall show below.



Only 8 per cent of land in the United Kingdom is ‘urban’ compared to 15 per cent in Holland, 15 per cent in Belgium and 9 per cent in Denmark. Furthermore, the proportion of our land devoted to agriculture is one of the highest in Europe at 78 per cent.

A cynic (such as myself) might wonder why we choose to subsidise farmers to produce tasteless food on chemical-soaked, publicly inaccessible prairies when we could obtain cheaper, healthier and often tastier food from many developing countries. This would not only assist their economies but would reduce the need for overseas aid. If the Europe and US removed their farm subsidies the value of African food exports would

double. According to Oxfam, protectionism in rich countries costs the developing world £60bn a year. Sugar in the UK, for example, sells at almost three times world market levels and it is UK consumers and taxpayers who pay the price. Almost 50% of the European Union budget is spent on subsidies to farmers, and most of it goes to the very biggest producers - large agribusinesses and hereditary landowners. The sugar company Tate and Lyle was the biggest recipient of funds in the UK in 2005 with £127million. Is this really how we want our taxes to be spent when only 5% of EU citizens work in agriculture?

The present government has pledged that 60 per cent of new homes will be built on brownfield sites at high densities. Densities are on the up. In 2004 new homes in England were being built at an average density of 40 per hectare compared to 25 per hectare in 1997. But people in this country do not like living at high densities and especially dislike flats. Surveys over the past sixty years have consistently shown that most people aspire to live in a house with a garden. A survey financed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2004 found that, when asked about development in their area, people preferred houses to flats, and that the type of housing they most disliked was blocks of flats of four storeys or more. Similar research shows that those living in higher density built forms were a quarter more likely to be dissatisfied with their neighbourhood. Public opinion conflicts with expert opinion on this matter. Lord Rogers, among others, argues that better architecture will make high-density living desirable and that 'vibrant urban environments' would be created in which people would want to live. But if we are serious about listening to the public should we not respect what they want? Is this a case of "do as we say, not as we do" and are we merely storing up problems for the future?

If we chose to do so we could, by releasing more land, build more of the types of homes people want (houses with gardens) in the places that they want (close to existing towns and cities) at a price they can afford. This has the added benefit of improving the viability of existing settlements, for example in terms of public transport networks, leisure, education and retail. It would also open up additional tracts of countryside to the public, by the creation of country parks and commons, which would be created alongside suburban development. This makes more sense than providing new settlements, which, because they are not self-sufficient, increase the number of movements by car.

But this can only be achieved if we are prepared to stand up to the power and influence of the countryside lobby. Bodies such as the CIH and the NHF will have to be in the forefront of this battle. Interestingly, as house prices in some rural areas reach almost ten times local earnings, the Campaign to Protect Rural England has announced a joint campaign (2006) with the National Housing Federation to build more affordable homes in rural areas. I wonder if the ideologues of the CPRE ever pause to consider that their activities may have helped to push house prices up.

Nuisance and high density living

The Noise Abatement Society reports a 28% rise in complaints of garden noise in 2006 over 2005 (Sunday Times August 6 2006). During the heatwave people have treated their gardens as an extended living area and this has led to severe friction between neighbours. 10 million homes have barbecues, there are sound systems designed as plastic rocks, hot tubs, outdoor showers and trampolines. In Fife a special hotline on trampoline rage had been set up. Insurance company Direct Line reported that 24% of people had confronted their neighbour over a garden related problem.

As the climate warms up it seems that we will increasingly get on each other's nerves. High-density neighbourhoods are simply not conducive to neighbourly relations in very hot weather.

Wildlife and sustainability in suburbia

It is a fact that the average suburban garden contains infinitely more plant and animal species than the average tract of countryside and there is a strong argument to be made in favour of suburban development as a way of promoting wildlife. Moreover the countryside is an increasingly polluted and unsafe place with widespread reports of pesticides causing ill health and cancers.

The Royal Horticultural Society commissioned the University of Sheffield to carry out a study, which showed that a sample of 61 gardens contained nearly as many plants as the native flora of the British Isles. Over 37,000 individual invertebrates were found. The authors concluded: "Gardens are brilliant for wildlife . . . we would simply say gardens are England's most important nature reserve."



Another study by the RSPB emphasised the positive role that gardens play when it comes to saving species of birds from extinction. Evidence from Germany confirms these findings. Professor D. K. Hofmann, a biologist at the University of Bochum, found that 'from a biologist's point of view, living on the outskirts of cities has created niches for plants and animals that would not have prospered in agricultural areas' and concluded that low density 'sprawl', or what would have been called 'garden cities' in the early twentieth century, provide favourable conditions for a wide variety of species. One interesting finding of biological research in Germany was that the number of bird species increased rather than decreased with population, so the larger the City the greater the number of species. In the UK many species associated with the countryside, such as the skylark, are in sharp decline due to farming practices, whereas species that can adapt to suburban living are thriving.

The conclusion is that suburban development is good for wildlife whereas agriculture, as practised on most farms across most of England, is bad for both wildlife and humans. Suburban development also gives people what they want – houses with gardens – and it helps to improve the viability of existing settlements in terms of leisure, transport, employment, retail and education.

CHAPTER 5: New Towns in the Eastern Region - Triumph or Disaster?

“Town and country must be married, and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilisation.”
Ebenezer Howard 1902

“Look at that. ‘Accident Blackspot’? These aren't accidents. They're throwing themselves into the road gladly. Throwing themselves into the road to escape all this hideousness.”
Withnail (Withnail and I, 1987)

There are seven new towns in the eastern region – Basildon, Harlow, Hemel Hempstead, Letchworth, Peterborough, Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City.

The Victorian Ebenezer Howard (1850 – 1928) was the father of the new town movement. His book “Garden Cities of Tomorrow” (1902) led directly to the construction of Letchworth and Welwyn, but Howard is a much misunderstood figure. He was a social visionary rather than a planner, who envisaged garden cities of around 1,000 acres joined together in a vast conurbation of perhaps millions of people, all connected by rapid transport systems. Moreover, these communities would be self-governing with the land owned by the community and where the growing value of land would create a local welfare state without the need for state support. As with so many visionaries Howard’s revolutionary ideas were corrupted and only certain elements were taken forward.

In October 1945 the Labour government appointed Lord Reith as chairman of a New Towns Committee which concluded that new towns should be created by government-sponsored corporations financed by the taxpayer. This top-down planning was in direct contradiction to Howard’s bottom-up approach. The New Towns Act 1946 designated Stevenage as the first new town. By the late 1950s some of the earliest new towns were coming to the end of their main development phase. The Act envisaged that as the towns grew the development corporation would eventually transfer any remaining assets to the local authority, but the government decided to create the Commission for the New Towns (CNT), which from 1961 was responsible for managing and disposing of the land and property assets of the development corporations. The CNT later merged with English Partnerships and now owns about 5,700 hectares of land valued in excess of £1bn. By 2006 a further merger with the Housing Corporation was on the cards.



During the 1960s a further nine new towns were designated, including Peterborough and Milton Keynes. Some critics decry the suburban, low-rise style of the new towns but this was exactly what appealed to their new residents - typically the ambitious working class. It was only where architects and planners sought to create a brave new world that things went badly wrong. Cumbernauld, with its brutalist town centre and reliance on the motor car is regularly voted as one of the worst places to live in Britain.

By 2002 Members of Parliament were warning that the new towns were in danger of falling into a "spiral of decline". The Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee said many of the communities built as a model of 20th century living now suffer from collapsing house prices and high crime rates. The 22 new towns had been overlooked in successive government programmes to regenerate urban areas and were in danger of becoming expensive liabilities, they said. Telford in Shropshire, for example, suffers from a collapsing housing market, high crime levels and pockets of severe deprivation. A comprehensive investment programme is needed to prevent a spiral of decline. Another problem highlighted by the report is that many of the new towns were designed around the car and their central areas need to be completely rebuilt to reflect this. Committee chairman Andrew Bennett MP said: "The government needs to recognise that the New Towns are up to 50 years old, and large amounts of the housing and infrastructure are desperately in need of a thorough overhaul. They also have major social and economic problems." The report adds that: "This failure of public policy to adapt to change may well create a text book example of how not to manage public assets."

Don Burrows, of the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation - a Telford-based charity that aims to help improve local communities said the original design of some estates had led to many of the problems. "High density large estates with poor amenities, mainly designed for the car not the pedestrian are turning into breeding grounds for petty crime and drug abuse," he said.

The MPs suggest regional development agencies should take control of strategic sites and a New Towns Reinvestment Fund could allocate profits from the sale of these according to need.

Focus on the East - New towns

	Date of designation	Population	Key issues and facts
Letchworth	1903	35,000	Established stable community. Is home to one of the only colonies of black squirrels in the country.
Welwyn Garden City	1920/1948	55,000	Established stable community. English Partnerships is drawing up plans to regenerate Hatfield town centre. Until a mistake in 2005 there were no street names with the word "street" in the town.
Harlow	1947	80,000	Town centre to be regenerated. Harlow Gateway project will build 450 new homes on 11 hectares.
Basildon	1949	102,000	Now in need of regeneration. Basildon is a key hub for the Thames Gateway redevelopment. Much of it is built on an old plotlands area.
Stevenage	1946	80,000	Town centre being redeveloped. English Partnerships owns a 28 hectare former waste disposal site adjacent to the A1 that could be developed along with adjoining land holdings to relieve housing pressure in the area.
Hemel Hempstead	1947	83,000	Famous for its magic roundabout where traffic apparently flows the wrong way. English Partnerships is working with Stanhope plc to bring forward employment opportunities for Breakspear and an adjoining site, in the east of Hemel Hempstead.
Peterborough	1967	160,000	City centre undergoing regeneration to exploit distinctive features such as its river frontage and the potential for a substantial increase in shopping, leisure and urban employment. Housing stock now transferred to Cross Keys Homes.

The English new towns have accommodated over two million people, provided more than one million jobs and on the whole have evolved into economically successful communities. Whether they are socially successful is probably, as Chou en Lai said of the French Revolution, "too soon to tell".

The lessons from the New Towns are being reassessed and used to help deliver the

government's Sustainable Communities Plan. However, there is a question mark over whether some of the new settlements that are proposed, such as Northstowe near Cambridge, are large enough to be self-sustaining. The fear is that they will merely add to traffic congestion because residents will look elsewhere for work and leisure opportunities.

CHAPTER 6: Plotlanders – Doing it for Themselves

“Brains first and then Hard Work. Look at it! That's the way to build a house”

Eeyore

No overview of housing in the eastern region would be complete without mention of the “plotlands”, those areas of unregulated self-built housing that were mostly built in the first half of the last century on marginal land that was traditionally unfit for agriculture or mainstream building. Examples can be seen at the Dunton plotlands in Basildon, Jaywick Sands near Clacton and Canvey Island in Essex, as well as throughout the Fens. The word “plotlands” evokes an image of bungalows made from army huts, old railway coaches, sheds, shanties and chalets but many have evolved into areas of desirable and good quality housing. Dozens of plotlands sites in south Essex were built on heavy clay known to farmers as 'three-horse land', which was the first to go out of cultivation in the agricultural depression. Many date back to the twenties and thirties and are a great example of working class people building their own homes and doing their own thing. It was a genuinely democratic and working class movement that appealed to the libertarian and anti-establishment instincts of the English people going back to the Diggers and the Levellers and portrayed in films like “Passport to Pimlico”. More recently new age travellers and the Gypsy and Traveller community have shown the same spirit. It is a spirit that has been largely broken by legislation (see Chapter 3) but which could rise again.

Plots were sold off by enterprising landowners for as little as £3, often to city dwellers who could be seen cycling out at weekends with materials and tools strapped to their bikes. These self builders did not need expensive mortgages because once they owned their land they could rely on bought and scrounged materials and their own “sweat equity” to build their dream home. This self-help ethos fostered a good community spirit. The residents of Jaywick Sands, for example, had for decades organised a service for emptying Elsan closets, known locally as the 'Bisto Kids' until, after fifty years, a sewer was built.

The authorities reacted to the plotlands either by ignoring them or trying to destroy them. The new town of Basildon was designated in 1949 to make some kind of urban entity out of the plotland settlements of Pitsea and Laindon, where there was a settled population of about 25,000 served by 75 miles of grass-track roads, mostly with no sewers and with standpipes for water supply.

With time the properties were improved by extensions, the addition of bathrooms and partial or total rebuilding. Mains services and the making-up of roads were part of the continuous improvement process in any old plotland settlement that has not been economically undermined or subjected to the restraint on improvements known as planners' blight. In Jaywick, the Guinness Trust has been actively involved in improving the housing stock.

The plotlands story runs parallel to that of the Land Settlement Association, which was set up in 1935 to aid unemployed workers from the distressed areas. It gave them a smallholding and helped them to build their own homes. The first estate to be equipped was in Bedfordshire at Little Park Farm in the village of Abbots Ann, and which consisted of some 500 acres. Eventually there were 18 estates throughout the country including Fen Drayton and Abington in Cambridgeshire. Money was raised privately, and helped by grants from the Carnegie Trustees and the Pilgrim Trust. The Government made funds available at the rate of £1 for £1, a system that was then in use for the relief of unemployment.

After World War 2 thousands of homeless people squatted in vacant military camps and organised their own communal services. In the sixties and seventies a similar squatting movement emerged which tended to target empty public buildings. Many evolved into housing co-operatives. This self-help ethos has echoes in the dilemma now faced by new age travellers and many in the Gypsy and Traveller community who have been affected by the disappearance of official stopping places. They have responded by buying their own land and seeking to provide settled homes for themselves, often to the chagrin of local residents who invoke the planning laws to remove them.

Although frequently condemned by polite society this form of self-help is often very effective and requires little or no public subsidy and is a great way of building human and social capital. In the opinion of some people there should be more of it. Organisations like the Walter Segal Trust are doing their best to push the case for self-build but their impact is limited.

In his book *Mind the Gap*, Ferdinand Mount, proposes a loosening of planning rules and a return to the plotland principles, spreading land ownership to allow the worst-off a chance of having a stake in the country. He suggests that every landowner should be allowed to sell off 10 per cent of their land up to a maximum of ten acres. Every village or town would set up plotlands on low-grade farmland or brown land, to be leased out at low rents to local residents to do whatever they fancied, whether growing vegetables, setting up a workshop or building a house.



Eel Pie Island

Mount believes that his proposals would increase the supply of land and make house prices affordable. Urban landowners would no longer be tempted to hang on to their land in the hope of higher prices. In fact, they would have every incentive to sell, for fear that prices might fall. Of course, such a relaxation of the planning system would be ferociously resisted, not least by the CPRE and other vested interests, although farmers and other owners of marginal land would presumably welcome it. Those opposed to such changes would be driven by the fear that, after five or ten years of a looser

planning regime, parts of the country might be changed utterly, but Mount envisions a dense panorama of small-plot gardens with orchards and vegetable plots dotted with attractive houses and chalets. Is this, he asks, any less aesthetically pleasing than a panorama of featureless, 20-acre fields? Similar landscapes can be seen in parts of northeast France and Belgium and are conducive to wildlife and community activity. He cites the densely developed and eccentric Eel Pie Island on the Thames as an example of how his vision could evolve.

Colin Ward is an anarchist writer who sits on a very different part of the political spectrum to Mount, but their views are similar. Ward writes about the scandal of EU subsidies to rich farmers in and around his village: "Fifty years of subsidies had made the owners of arable land millionaires through mechanised cultivation and, with a crisis of over-production, the European Community was rewarding them for growing no crops on part of their land. However, opportunities for the homeless poor were fewer than ever in history. The grown-up children of local families can't get on the housing ladder." His solution is that, "there should be some place in every parish where it's possible for people to build their own homes, and they should be allowed to do it a bit at a time, starting in a simple way and improving the

structure as they go along. The idea that a house should be completed in one go before you can get planning permission and a mortgage is ridiculous. Look at the houses in this village. Many of them have developed their character over centuries - a bit of medieval at the back, with Tudor and Georgian add-ons."

Is the product of self-build any less pleasing than some of the soulless boxes that now scar our towns and cities and blight the lives of our citizens? Do we really want to live in a country where house types from Newcastle to Newquay are identical? The fact is that most of the world's population live quite happily in self-built houses. The most widely used building materials are wood, grass (from straw to bamboo) and earth (from rammed earth to fired bricks). There is a strong argument to be made about unleashing the value of sweat equity and self-help upon the housing market, not just on economic grounds but also on the basis that it would add to social capital and human happiness, giving people a sense of purpose and a genuine feeling of ownership of their homes and communities.



Eel Pie Island

Focus on the East - Travellers and Gypsies

If we think of plotlanders in terms of notions of self-help and their desire to live slightly outside the confines of bureaucratic intervention then parallels can be drawn with the Gypsy and Travelling community. Throughout English history there have been travelling people who have played an indispensable role in the labour-intensive rural economy. Even today they play a key role in potato-lifting, fruit picking, and in hopfields and orchards. Post-war planning legislation, allocating an approved use to every patch of land, added to the problems faced by travelling people. In recognition of this the Caravan Sites Act of 1968 was passed. It required local councils to provide sites for Gypsies with a 100 per cent grant from central government. Less than two-fifths of them provided sites and the Act was not enforced. In 1978 the government commissioned Professor Gerald Wibberley, a respected authority on countryside planning, to report on the Act. He concluded "the Act is working, slowly, but quite well in a few areas, even though councils and the government didn't have their heart in it."

In 1992, Sir George Young, the Minister of State for Housing and Planning, announced that it would become a criminal offence to park a caravan or similar vehicle on any land without the landowner's consent, and to remove the obligation on local authorities to provide sites. Sir George said that it was up to Travellers to acquire their own land for sites and to apply for planning consent (which is what many have since done). This policy proposal was incorporated in the Criminal Justice Act of 1994, and a series of test cases through the rest of the decade have shown just how difficult it can be to get planning consent.

The long-running battle at Smithy Fen at Cottenham near Cambridge is an example.

A Gypsy named Richard Oakley, who had used a council site outside Bury St Edmund's in Suffolk, bought a nearby plot where he had grazed his horses, and installed his mobile home and touring caravan there. However, the council refused him planning permission and the planning Inspector dismissed his appeal, as his premises "were entirely inappropriate features in a Special Landscape Area ... and the conifer hedge, trimmed in neat, suburban style, was totally out of place in the Suffolk countryside."

It is estimated that there are up to 300,000 Gypsies and Irish Travellers living in the UK with 7,000 in the Cambridge sub-region alone. They have the worst life chances and health expectations of any ethnic group. The majority live perfectly legally in trailers (caravans) on local authority owned or privately owned sites. Nationally, around 28% live on unauthorised developments or encampments where they are at risk of eviction.

The Housing Act 2004 required Local Authorities to assess the need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in their areas when they consider the housing requirements for the rest of the population and to make provision accordingly. In February 2006, the Government published a circular (1/2006), 'Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites', which sets out clearly how the needs assessment should be carried out and the arrangements for dealing with site provision through the Regional Spatial Strategy and Local Development Frameworks.

CHAPTER 7: Facing up to the future

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change."

Charles Darwin 1835

"When the Paris Exhibition closes electric light will close with it and no more be heard of"

Erasmus Wilson (1878) Professor at Oxford University

It is a truth universally acknowledged that anyone who seeks to predict the future must be in want of a brain. As the quote from the eminent Professor demonstrates, futurology is a murky business. Hindsight, on the other hand, is cheap and easy. When Ronan Point collapsed in May 1968 tower blocks were universally condemned as a folly, but their designers sincerely believed that they were offering people a better life than in the slums. Similarly, today's housing and planning decisions are being made with the best of intentions but forty years from now will our descendants look back and marvel at our stupidity? Will they wonder why we sacrificed quality for quantity and built so many box-like homes at high densities without adequate infrastructure in soulless new settlements that were entirely dependent on the motor car? What happens when fifty percent of England sits under water once global warming has done its stuff? Will they wonder why we failed to take avoiding action? And what happens if and when the oil and gas runs out? Will we see housing managers on bicycles and plumbers in electric vans?

I don't know the answer to these questions. But what we do know, is that in 2006 the need for affordable housing in the eastern region remains acute and unless steps are taken to increase the supply things are going to get a lot worse. In 2006 the National Housing Federation painted a bleak picture of housing futures in the east (see box).



Focus on the East

A housing timebomb

“There is a timebomb ticking under the East of England’s housing market and the sound is growing louder”, according to the National Housing Federation in 2006. Their new forecasts show that by 2011 the average house price in the region will be over £285,000, more than 40% higher than in 2006. This is creating a society of ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’.

- Average house prices in the region are now 8 times average incomes.
- Up to 11,500 new affordable homes are needed each year to 2021. In 2004/05, fewer than 3,000 affordable homes were built in the region.
- Homelessness is up 16% in five years in the East and housing waiting lists have grown by a third in the same period.
- House prices in the region have risen by 154% since 1997, while incomes have grown just 34% in the same period.
- Last year a total of 19,954 homes were built in the East of England, but crucially only 2,984 of these were affordable homes for people unable to buy in the open market.
- Right to Buy sales of affordable homes in the region offset the new affordable homes built - in 2005 for every home built more than one was sold.
- On average, each local authority in the eastern region had a net loss of almost nine new affordable homes after taking into account the effects of sales.

The eastern region is at the forefront of the government’s growth plans, with three of the four growth areas wholly or partly within the region. 47,000 new homes are planned for the Cambridge sub- region alone by 2016. But there is still a question mark over whether the infrastructure will be put in place to deal with these new homes - not only public transport but also electricity, water, schools, and leisure. There is much talk of sustainable communities but if we place an increasing reliance on the private motor car over public transport and the continued spatial separation of work and housing then communities are not likely to be sustainable. If we are thinking about the long-term should we not seek to design out the motor car and seek to create a world where owning a car is optional? The motor car is the elephant in the room – it kills, it maims, it pollutes, it destroys communities – yet no one does anything to reduce its use, least of all planners. The motor car each year causes over 3,000 deaths and almost 30,000 injuries. In 1966 there were fewer than 4 million cars in this country - today there are 32 million. As Robert Putnam points out, every 10 minutes added to your commute decreases by 10 percent the time you dedicate to your family and community and this reduces the level of social capital pro rata. In addition, adult obesity has almost quadrupled in the last 25 years - 22% of Britons are obese and three-quarters are overweight. This is a national crisis that is costing the NHS £500 million a year and the overall cost to the country is estimated at up to £7 billion a year. The principal cause of this crisis is our car-obsessed, sedentary lifestyle.

The issue of migrant workers is becoming increasingly topical in the eastern region with latest estimates showing that 65,000 eastern Europeans are working and living in East Anglia, mostly Poles. The vast majority are making a significant contribution to the economy, doing jobs that few locals want or are able to do, but with the imminent accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the European Union this topic is likely to dominate the headlines over the next few years.

Meanwhile, the British Association (September 2006) is warning that climate change is inevitable because China and India have not signed up to the Kyoto agreement and the United States "does not take any notice". This means we need to adapt to global warming and develop drought-tolerant crops, construct flood defences, improve building insulation and ban building close to sea level and rivers. Frances Cairncross, the president of the British Association says, "We need more sheltered public spaces. It is going to be either sunnier or rainier...five million people who live near rivers — 10 per cent of the UK population — can expect to be flooded with increasing regularity in the future." Up to fifty percent of land in England could be lost to the sea in due course.

So change, in its many guises, appears to be unstoppable but there are bigger questions that we need to face about the pace of change and our role in the global economy. We know that we cannot compete with China or India on production and labour costs so we need to find our own Darwinian niche where we can survive and adapt.

At a local level, the Housing Corporation's decision to restrict funding to lead associations means that the number of mergers and group structures will increase. An increasingly bedlam spread of stock ownership could store up potential problems for sustainability with remote management becoming a real concern for many tenants, and stock rationalisation will become a bigger issue for the sector. As Jon Rouse, Chief Executive of the Housing Corporation has pointed out, development, ownership and management are three separate entities that can be carried out by different bodies. There is no reason why a housing association cannot specialise in development and pass on ownership or management to local subsidiaries or partners. A major study by the CIH in 2006 has sought to address stock rationalisation concerns, with the issue of "engagement" with communities and customers being the litmus test for future ownership and management. You simply cannot engage with customers if your nearest office is fifty or a hundred miles away. This may mean working with smaller community based housing associations or group subsidiaries. This is the model being developed, for example, by BPHA with their Key Communities consortium stretching from Gloucestershire to Norfolk and which now embraces seven independent housing associations.



Polish shop in Cambridge

There are concerns too about the volume and quality of homes being built in both the private and affordable sectors. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment commented on this on 2004 (see box).

CABE Housing Audit 2004

CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) carried out an audit of 100 recent housing developments and assessed their quality in terms of layout, urban design and place-making, and the processes that helped to shape them. "The evidence shows that the design quality of the majority of new supply is average. If we carry on this way we will leave a sorry legacy to future generations."

This audit goes further, to find out if the lessons from the very best feed into the bulk of the industry's product. It reveals that the flagship projects that appear on the covers of corporate brochures and annual reports often mask a raft of mediocrity. "In our haste to build new homes it would be a crime if future generations have to suffer the consequences of a lack of ambition to achieve design quality".

The National Housing Federation has called on the government to commit more funds to housing in the Comprehensive Spending Review and to reform the planning system to ensure that more land is made available for housebuilding. Whatever happens, the future is bound to be interesting and unpredictable. It always is.



CHAPTER 8: Conclusions 1996-2006

"If we do not change our direction, we are likely to end up where we are headed"

Chinese Proverb

*"Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone*

For the times they are a-changin'" Bob Dylan 1964

I started this report with the image of my mother at her mangle. It is an image that highlights the profound changes that have occurred over the past forty years. Does anyone still use a mangle? Almost every home now has a television, Hoover, washing machine, central heating and dozens of other labour saving devices. Meals come pre-packaged and most people shop weekly at a supermarket and just about everything is disposable. The average time spent on housework has fallen significantly since the sixties to an average of 2 hours a day (although women still do almost twice as much as men - 3 hours a day compared to 1 hour and 41 minutes). Together with improvements in birth control, around 70% of women now work compared to 40% in 1966. The relative liberation of women has been one of the principal social revolutions of the past forty years.

In the opinion of some commentators this fundamental change has also been responsible for house price inflation because increases in household income have not been matched by increases in housing supply (see Chapter 3) with the result that increased demand has merely forced housing prices up.

Since the 1960s housing conditions have improved immeasurably and the convenience of life in the eastern region is infinitely better in numberless ways, whether it is shops that stay open when people want to use them, 24-hour cash machines, the internet, entertainment, healthcare, holidays, clothes or the quality and range of our food (although not necessarily its healthiness or its price). Most things are relatively cheaper than they were in 1966 and we have more disposable income.

In addition IT improvements have had a profound impact on our lives and the way the way we run our business. The reducing cost of car travel and improvements in road quality mean more of us can afford to live at greater distances from our place of work.

Yet housing need is still acute and poverty is relative. Most would agree that the residualisation of the social housing sector has been a disaster and that there is now a veritable rift valley of inequality between those who own and those who do not. We need to accept that most people aspire to home ownership. Others believe that we are storing up potential problems for the future by sacrificing quality for quantity in housebuilding and that the essential infrastructure for new communities is simply not being put in place. Others such as Defend Council Housing continue to argue that we need affordable housing to be put back under local authority control and decry the growing power and influence of "private" housing associations.

And although most of us are richer the level of trust has halved since 1950 and happiness has remained static. With rising levels of crime, obesity and depression, added to rising levels of stress, congestion and fragmentation there is clearly something amiss. And is there not something sick about a society where talent-free "celebrities" are more famous than engineers and doctors? So should we seek to re-discover wellbeing and happiness as a benchmark for future decision making? After all, isn't our principal personal aim in life to be happy? (see box).

Housing and Happiness

In 2006 the Conservative leader David Cameron proposed that a General Wellbeing Index (GWB) should replace Gross National Product (GNP) as the main measure of national prosperity and success. It is not a new idea. The American Declaration of Independence states that "Life liberty and the pursuit of happiness" are unalienable Rights. Jeremy Bentham (1748 - 1832) whose embalmed body can still be seen in University College London, proposed that the one goal of public policy should be the pursuit of happiness and he outlined "the greatest happiness principle". In the late nineteenth century economists generally agreed that human happiness should be the goal of economic policy.

Even Adam Smith, the doyen of free marketeers, recognised this when he said, "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature which interest him in the fortune of others and render their happiness necessary to him though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it."

It was only during the depression of the thirties that GNP and GDP came to be seen as the main measures of national success. But GNP has increased significantly since the sixties and we now work fewer hours, have longer holidays, are healthier and live longer yet the level of happiness has been stagnant since 1950. The level of trust (a key factor in happiness) is half of the 1950 figure. Moreover, rates for depression, suicide, crime and alcoholism have increased in almost every developed country since the sixties. So something is clearly amiss.

There are six factors that explain the average level of happiness in any country:

1. the percentage who say that other people can be trusted:
2. the percentage who belong to social organisations:
3. the divorce rate
4. the unemployment rate
5. the quality of government
6. the level of religious belief

Maslow's hierarchy of needs tells us that as we get richer and our basic needs are satisfied extra income does not increase our happiness proportionately. Instead, we seek other goals such as status, self knowledge and spiritual growth. However this can lead to status anxiety because the amount of status is fixed and if I win you lose and vice versa. It is a zero sum game.

What we need to do instead is rediscover some of the old notions of co-operation and the importance of personal relationships. This means acknowledging that we have a shared purpose. In the UK we are often pulled by American and European models, and since 1980 the US ethic of long hours, change and competitiveness has tended to prevail. (A recent survey revealed that 40% of US workers questioned at the start of the summer in 2006 said they had no plans to take any holiday at all for the next six months, more than at any time since the late 1970s.) Yet most people in the UK are not keen on the US model. They do not want permanent reorganisation in

their workplace because it makes them anxious and reduces trust. Furthermore, the European way of life is generally healthier and happier than ours. They understand that constant change can be bad for you and that family and personal relationships are paramount. Scientific studies also show that you are more likely to be happy if you settle for “what is good enough” and that people hate losing things more than gaining things. Generally speaking, a loss of £100 hurts twice as much as a gain of £100.

So what does all this mean for housing providers? Should we seek to factor happiness into future decision-making? It is known, for example, that high turnover in jobs, housing and relationships cause unhappiness and that crime and mental illness are worse in transient neighbourhoods, so building stable communities with high levels of social capital must be a priority, as well as measures to improve community engagement. Family friendly employment policies are important, and staff should be actively encouraged (and financially supported) to engage with their communities, whether as local politicians, volunteers, JPs or by joining clubs and societies. But on a wider level, as we have noted above, living in flats and at high densities causes unhappiness, whereas houses with gardens promotes happiness. So we need to push through our trade and representative bodies for a concerted campaign of housebuilding beyond urban areas, creating mixed suburban areas that will support wildlife and a high quality of life.

(Some of these issues are explored further in a CIH Eastern region Branch Report called “Building for Success: The role of social capital in successful neighbourhoods” published in 2003.)

I said at the outset that this report was an eclectic mix of history, fact and polemic. Is it possible to draw together any general conclusions from such a mixed bag of information?

Well, firstly we obviously need more homes and more affordable homes in particular. We also need more of the homes that people want, namely lower density houses with gardens close to existing towns and cities. To achieve this we need to face up to the anti-development lobby and state the case for housing growth beyond existing urban boundaries. The CIH and the NHF will need to be at the forefront of this battle. Public opinion needs to be swung on this issue but every parent in the region is potentially persuadable about the difficulties their offspring will face in getting their feet onto the first rungs of the housing ladder. Such parents, even those who live in the countryside, are potential allies and we need to recruit them to the cause.

Secondly we need to address the planning system. It frustrates housing professionals, architects, developers and builders and inhibits creativity and effective project management. It needs to be reformed. Planners also need to be educated in the economics of development and understand how their decisions can frustrate the delivery of affordable housing projects. Given some of the dire schemes that have been built under the existing planning regime we can hardly do worse. The planning system also needs to do more to embrace and encourage local vernaculars and eccentric creativity. Do we really want to live in a country where every new housing estate looks the same and where every high street from Penzance to Perth is identical? We need to find ways of encouraging difference and oddity and to fight the corporate culture that is blighting our towns and cities. Jane Jacobs saw the best cities as "organic, spontaneous and untidy." Consider Camden Market, for example, where the planners have bravely allowed a plethora of eccentric shop frontages and designs. People come from all over the world to see it. Do they flock to see ersatz shopping centres in Luton or Milton Keynes? No they do not. Do we have anything in the eastern region to match it? No we do not.

Thirdly we need to rediscover some of the enthusiasm and self- help ethos of the plotlanders and realise that their spirit is deeply rooted in English culture. History shows that when people gain control of

their lives they can be incredibly creative and resourceful. When I worked for Camden in the eighties I used to "manage" short-life and long-term squatted properties where younger people were doing their own thing, fixing places up and managing their own neighbourhoods. Twenty years later I discovered that this self-help housing had provided a home and a launching pad for people like Shane McGowan and Grayson Perry, among others. I can also remember when we held street parties in our road in Cambridge. We told the Council the day before that we were closing the street and we persuaded every resident to remove their cars. We had wheelie bin races, slow bicycle races, barbecues, dancing and live music. The Mayor even turned up to judge the pet show (won by Alfie the mongrel). It was an incredibly liberating experience and made us realise what could be achieved when people take over their neighbourhood. Bureaucrats often shudder at the anarchy of people power but if we are genuine about democracy and resident participation we need to put people in the driving seat so that they change from being passive consumers of services to active shapers of services. We should not be scared of this kind of activism but accept it and encourage it because, with falling electoral turnouts and a democratic deficit in many town halls we can hardly do any worse. When all is said and done (and a lot more is usually said than done) most people are basically decent and trustworthy.



Camden Market

Fourthly, we need to take environmental and social sustainability seriously and not just pay lip service to it. In particular, we cannot go on creating new homes and settlements that are dependent upon the motor car. It is not sustainable. This means investing more heavily in public transport systems such as trams and light rail and encouraging cycling. New settlements are not the answer, because they are not self-sufficient. They merely encourage additional car journeys to places where better employment, leisure and retail opportunities are to be found. Similarly, with the imminent impact of global warming we need to start doing some serious thinking about future development – this could mean selective demolition along flood plains, houses on stilts and creating new land as they do in Holland. We also need to think carefully about stock rationalisation, because the spread of stock ownership and management is neither sensible nor sustainable in the long term.



Finally, as Allan Brigham's study shows, although there is a danger of over-romanticising the past we have clearly lost something in terms of community and neighbourhood cohesion. We must try to rediscover some of the bonds and gestures that made communities like Romsey Town a good place to live and bring up children. We need to reach a proper understanding of social capital and its role in building successful communities. Social capital is a key determinant of general wellbeing and happiness. Apart from anything else, this means building trust and giving people genuine choices about where they live and the type of homes they live in, not just cosmetic choices about kitchens and bathrooms but a genuine choice about the home they rent or buy. It also means doing some serious thinking about the spatial relationship between housing and employment. And included within this, we need to do some thinking about human happiness and perhaps introduce a "happiness index" in assessing new projects in the future. "Does this project add to or detract from the sum of human happiness?" Discuss. If nothing else, the ensuing debates would be fascinating!

Thank you for reading.

Colin Wiles Cambridge November 2006

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