From social democracy to neoliberalism? Housing, community and the state in two English new towns, 1947-2010

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism in the two early postwar new towns of Basildon and Harlow in Essex. It does this by examining the changing nature of housing, community and the local state in these areas through a combination of archival research and oral testimony. It builds on a growth of recent research that has renewed attention towards new towns, postwar council housing and the relationship between community and individualism in postwar Britain.

It examines the changing ways in which new town development corporations pursued 'balance' and how they navigated growing pressure to increase owner occupation in order to draw out tensions within the social democratic settlement and question the temporality of the shift to neoliberalism. It examines the role neighbourhood sociability and structural factors played in shaping working class community, and the way the ubiquity of publicly rented housing generated a sense of egalitarianism. It draws attention to the role sales to sitting tenants from the 1970s played in generating snobbery and intra-class distinction to explore the messy relationship between individualism and community in order to shed light on recent attempts to historicise the decade.

It draws attention to the variegated experience of new town housing by examining experimental as well as traditional suburban neighbourhoods, and investigates how privatisation, stigmatisation and residualisation shaped narratives of decline, arguing that individualised narratives of aspirational self-betterment from the late twentieth century onwards can be seen as emerging out of sense of collective loss. Through a local case study that traces dwindling public investment and demunicipalisation, it argues that the changing nature of the local state in new towns is intimately related to how local vernacular narratives have made sense of what the thesis argues is an elongated and complex shift from social democracy to neoliberalism.

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Word count: 99,443

List of abbreviations

BDC – Basildon Development Corporation

BRA – Bishopsfield Residents Association

BSA - Building Societies Association

BCCRA – Bishopsfield and Charters Cross Residents Association

BCCGCRA – Bishopsfield, Charters Cross and Gibson Court Residents Association

BUDC – Basildon Urban District Council

CNT - Commission for New Towns

DOE – Department of Environment

ECC – Essex County Council

ERO – Essex Record Office

GLC – Greater London Council

HDC – Harlow Development Corporation

HUDC – Harlow Urban District Council

IMF - International Monetary Fund

ISS – Industrial Selection Scheme

MKDC – Milton Keynes Development Corporation

MHLG – Ministry of Housing and Local Government

MTCP – Ministry of Town and Country Planning

LCC – London County Council

NTDC – New Town Development Corporation

TNA – The National Archives

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Chapter 1: Introduction

At the end of the eighties, an 'estate tradition' was born in the experimental Harlow new town housing area of Bishopsfield, one that continues to this day. Residents banded together to participate in what would become an annual 'garden festival', to share their secluded, private spaces with one another, given that the estate, designed in the early sixties for 'maximum privacy', entirely prevented neighbours and passers-by from seeing in. More than just a community event, it became a way countering an external stigmatisation exacerbated by underinvestment and partial demolition, for residents to showcase their 'oases in the desert', in a way that would– in the words of a later flyer for the event - make 'Bishopsfield detractors eat their words.'[1]

Gardens, greenbelt and green open spaces, have always played a pivotal role in Britain's ambitious postwar new towns programme, whether through the master plans of new town planners or the fond memories of early migrants. The Ministry of Information's 1946 film *The Proud City: A Plan for London*, which set out the London County Council (LCC)'s 1943 plan for the city, presented a bold, optimistic and ambitious vision of postwar reconstruction for weary postwar audiences, sketching the idealistic and practical rationales for Britain's postwar new towns. This plan, the LCC's chief architect J. H. Forshaw told audiences, was not a 'hard and fast blue print', but rather 'an idea, a plan for something that is living, something that is growing', at which point Patrick Abercrombie interjected:

> Yes, its rather like the way you plan the garden, you've got to give the plants air and sunshine, and then also you've got to give them shelter from wet and cold, and they've got to have room to grow, and I'll tell you what, there mustn't be any overcrowding. There must be change, always change, as one season or one generation follows another.[2]

Abercrombie's idealism, emblematic of the postwar optimism that underpinned the expansion of the welfare state, is somewhat jarring when considered alongside a comment made by a

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[1] Bishopsfield and Charters Cross Residents Association newsletter (August 1993)

[2] Keene, R. (director) 'Proud City: A Plan for London', Greenpark Productions/Ministry of Information, United Kingdom (1946), accessed online via BFI player: https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-proud-city-a-plan-for-london-1946-online

member of Basildon's 'second generation' interviewed for this thesis, who whilst appreciative of the opportunities afforded to him, articulated – as did others – a seemingly inevitable, temporal limitation to the opportunity available: 'I wouldn't knock the new town system itself, but it just works for a couple of generations and then you've got problems.'[3] A thread of inevitability shapes vernacular narratives of decline in Basildon, one that for the most part has been paralleled by a largely unsympathetic at best, hostile at worse political and media scepticism towards these grand statist projects that once embodied the postwar social democratic optimism presented above.

This thesis examines the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism in the two early postwar new towns of Basildon and Harlow in Essex. It does this by investigating the changing experience of housing, community and the local state in order to examine the implications for individualism and community, and what this can tell us about the elongated, complex and variegated nature of this transition. In doing so, it builds on the findings of a growing body of scholarship that has sought to re-evaluate social democracy, postwar council housing and the new town experience in opposition to their historic – and often over-simplified - denigration.[4] It does this through archival research, chiefly the records of both Basildon Development Corporation (BDC) and Harlow Development Corporation (HDC), supplemented by oral testimonies of past and present residents.

Whilst the Abercrombie Plan laid out ambitious plans for new towns set beyond a 'greenbelt', it was also premised upon extension of the LCC's existing programme of out-of-county suburban 'dispersal' estates, of which Debden in semi-rural Essex was a part.[5] Debden became widely known following Young and Willmott's landmark study *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957), which in comparing Debden to Bethnal Green, posited that the fundamental implications of working class migration from the slum to the suburb was 'a change from a people-centred to a house-centred existence', 'bitterness' and 'competition for status'

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[3] Interview with Micky (2017)

[4] Clapson, M. *Invincible Green Suburbs, Brave New Towns: Social Change and Urban Dispersal in Postwar Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Clapson, M. *A Social History of Milton Keynes: Middle England/Edge City* (London: Frank Cass, 2004); Boughton. J. *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing* (London: Verso, 2018); Ortolano, G. *Thatcher's Progress: From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism Through an English New Town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019)

[5] Boughton. *Municipal Dreams*, p. 73

prevailed, rooted in 'isolation from kin' and resulting in 'estrangement from neighbours.'[6] Whilst the impact of this study on popular perceptions of 'traditional' working class urban life and accompanying negative implications of suburban re-housing cannot be understated, the political nature of this project has been documented.[7] Throughout the fifties and sixties as slum clearance accelerated, what were once regarded as 'slums' increasingly became articulated by sociologists as 'communities.'[8] However, it has been shown that migration to suburban council estates or early new towns often provided opportunity for social reinvention and enabled greater scope for both elective sociability and family-centred privacy, in contrast to the 'enforced sociability' of many older neighbourhoods.[9]

Recent work by Jon Lawrence has sought to 'overturn simplistic assumptions about the 'decline of community' since the Second World War', while Stefan Ramsden has cautioned 'morally loaded declinist narratives' surrounding working class community, particularly at a 'moment when the working classes are the subject of a multiplicity of negative and distorting representations.'[10] Abrams *et al.* have used East Kilbride new town in Scotland to challenge narratives of 'Scottish exceptionalism' and accompanying dominant narratives of deindustrialisation, failed public housing and urban decline that characterise historicisations of Scotland's postwar working class. They argue that postwar new towns were 'an important arena for the production and performance of post-war individualism, offering a space where individualist aspirations were shaped.'[11] Mark Clapson's work on suburban aspiration has rebutted demonisations of working class suburbanisation by drawing attention to what he

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[6] Young, M. and Willmott, P. *Family and Kinship in East London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 154

[7] Butler, L. 'Michael Young, the Institute of Community Studies, and the Politics of Kinship' in *Twentieth Century British History,* vol. 26, no. 2 (2015), pp. 203-24; Lawrence, J. 'Inventing the "Traditional Working Class": A Re-analysis of Interview Notes from Young and Willmott's *Family and Kinship in East London'*, in *Historical Journal*, vol. 59, no. 2 (2016), pp. 567-93

[8] Topalov, C. '"Traditional Working-Class Neighbourhoods": An Inquiry into the Emergence of a Sociological Model in the 1950s and 1960s', in *Osiris*, no. 18 (2003), pp. 212–33

[9] Jones, B. *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth-Century England: Community, Identity and Social Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Abrams, L., Hazley, B., Wright, V., and Kearns, A. 'Aspiration, Agency, and the Production of New Selves in a Scottish New Town, c.1947–c.2016' in *Twentieth Century British History,* vol. 29, no. 4 (2018), p. 597

[10] Lawrence, J. *Me, Me, Me? The search for community in post-war England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 2; Ramsden, S. 'Remaking Working Class Community Sociability Belonging and Affluence in a Small Town 1930-80', in *Contemporary British History,* vol. 29, no. 1 (2015), p. 19

[11] Abrams *et al.* 'Aspiration, Agency, and the Production of New Selves in a Scottish New Town', p. 579

identifies as a 'flourishing' of associational culture in the new town of Milton Keynes.[12] Furthermore, Clapson has countered narratives of 'new town blues' or 'suburban neurosis' pejoratively associated with postwar planned communities and working class suburbanisation, arguing that the transition to suburbs was a 'favourable experience' for a majority of working class women.[13] On top of this, Lawrence has recently revisited transcripts from Raph Samuel's 1960 Stevenage survey to challenge 'overly deterministic accounts of the 'rise of individualism' which assume that affluence and aspiration to 'better oneself' necessarily meant disregarding others and rejecting the claims of community.'[14] For Lawrence, the 'ability to reconcile self and society – personal 'betterment' and general social progress – appears to have been a distinctive feature of these new post-war communities', even though the ability of these areas to 'reconcile individualist and collectivist impulses rested on a fragile new equilibrium.'[15] Taking these suggestions further and into the late twentieth century, this thesis suggests that what lies at the heart of this 'fragile equilibrium' is the changing nature of collective provision, upon which the development of these two early new towns heavily relied, and the accompanying implications this had for the changing meanings of place and collective identity.[16] What happens when we trace the 'fragile equilibrium' of individualism and collectivism within these postwar communities into the seventies and eighties, and what can this tell us about the nature of rising individualism and the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism?

Recent work on 'popular individualism' has sought to disentangle the notion of individualism from its association with both Thatcherism and the New Right, to decouple self-realisation, strategies of self-betterment and the quest for personal autonomy from the atomised, selfish, greedy materialism associated with both Thatcher and neoliberalism.[17] There is also a growing body of literature that has sought to muddy the overbearing, dominant narratives of a shift from

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[12] Clapson. *Invincible Green Suburbs*

[13] Clapson, M. 'Working-Class Women's Experiences of Moving to New Housing Estates in England since 1919', *Twentieth Century British History,* vol. 10, no. 3 (1999), pp. 345-65;

[14] Lawrence. *Me, Me, Me?,* p. 75, see: pp. 72-102

[15] Lawrence. *Me, Me, Me?,* p. 101, 100

[16] Rogaly, B. and Taylor, B. *Moving Histories of Class and Community* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Jones. *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth-Century England*

[17] Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, F. *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England, 1968–2000* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 8; Robinson, E., Schofield, C., Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, F., and Thomlinson, N. 'Telling Stories about Post-war Britain: Popular Individualism and the 'Crisis' of the 1970s' in *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2017), pp. 268-304; Lawrence. *Me, Me, Me?*

'community' to 'individualism.' This has been done in a variety of ways. Liz Spencer and Ray Pahl have emphasised the saliency of friendship and its 'hidden solidarities', whilst Jon Lawrence has demonstrated that it is not so much that community has disappeared, rather, that it has changed profoundly and taken new forms, 'less localised, less formal', pointing to greater personal choice, spatial mobility, and new technologies which have made it easier for people to 'sustain meaningful personal communities which transcended the limitations of physical space.'[18] Rogaly and Taylor point to the increasing theoretical destabilisation of the link between community and place, drawing on Cohen to highlight a shifting understanding of community away from an 'emphasis of community as social interaction based on locality towards a concern with meaning and identity.'[19] The thesis considers these questions of what it argues is an elongated, complex and messy shift from social democracy to neoliberalism, which through the experience of these two early new towns, it can be suggested is intensely local and variegated. Indeed, as Rogaly and Taylor have suggested, 'neoliberalist restructuring has not occurred in a vacuum, but rather remains an intensely place-based experience.'[20]

James Vernon has suggested that the 'central historical problem' in twentieth-century Britain is 'the brief life of social democracy.'[21] He argues that the end of social democracy in Britain resembled 'gradually eroded' coastlines: 'in some places, that erosion was rapid, but in other areas, as with rocky headlands, it took longer.'[22] Similarly, Geoff Eley has described postwar social democracy as 'an extremely finite and exceptional project', amounting to a 'brief blip in the history of capitalist social formations.'[23] The theorisation of the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism also inevitably leads to questions about the 1970s. A growing body of scholarship has sought to decentre the 1970s from its reduction to merely a decade of 'crisis.' As Joe Moran has suggested, histories of the 1970s have been dominated by 'a Thatcherite

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[18] Spencer, L. and Pahl, R. *Rethinking Friendship: Hidden Solidarities Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); see also: Pahl, R. On Friendship (Cambridge: Polity, 2000); Lawrence, J. 'Individualism and community in historical perspective' in Cohen, S., Fuhr, C., and Bock, J. (eds.) *Austerity, Community Action, and the Future of Citizenship* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2017), p. 240; Lawrence. *Me, Me, Me?*, p. 228

[19] Rogaly and Taylor. *Moving Histories,* p. 19; see also: Cohen, A. P. *Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Tavistock, 1985). For discussion on Cohen's approach, see: Day, G. *Community and Everyday Life* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 158-65

[20] Rogaly and Taylor. *Moving Histories,* p. 20

[21] Vernon, J. 'The Local, the Imperial, and the Global: Repositioning Twentieth Century Britain and the Brief Life of its Social Democracy', in *Twentieth Century British History,* vol. 21, no. 3 (2010), p. 418

[22] Vernon, J. *Modern Britain: 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 431

[23] Eley, G. 'Historicizing the Global, Politicizing Capital: Giving the Present a Name' in *History Workshop Journal,* vol. 63, no. 1 (2007), p. 166

narrative' presenting 1979 as the 'year zero' when postwar compromises and economic decline and were swept away with a 'harsh medicine of market forces.'[24] This has led to a tendency towards 'narrative-driven decadology' which has 'dominated representations of the 1970s.'[25] As Robinson *et al.* argue, political narratives of the seventies have the tendency to reduce it to 'the end-point of increasingly feeble attempts to maintain the post-war settlement', a decade of 'crisis' located between postwar social democracy and the 'triumph of neoliberalism.'[26] There have been other attempts to destabilise this narrative, with Pemberton, Black and Thane suggesting the seventies was in fact a decade of possibility in which a 'vibrant marketplace of ideas' flourished.[27] Similarly, John Medhurst has attempted to revive the decade as 'one of the most politically fertile, liberating and exciting periods in British history.'[28] Significantly, Guy Ortolano has recently utilised the experience of 'third generation' new town of Milton Keynes to advance the idea that Britain's new towns testify to the breadth and ambition of the social democratic settlement in an attempt to counter accounts of post-war Britain which emphasise social democracy's 'brevity at the expense of its life.'[29] In light of this, Ortolano's core thesis is that social democracy 'proved dynamic in its response to the economic, social and political challenges of the 1970s', examining how the Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) adapted to this postwar political and economic transformation.[30]

This thesis seeks to contribute towards this growing body of scholarship to further interrogate the questions surrounding the nature of this transition, and of social democracy, as well as subsequent consequences for both individualism and community, and their complex interrelation with this political economic transformation. The periodisation of this thesis begins in 1947, with the designation of Harlow new town, and ends at the close of the first decade of the twenty first century, when the HDC's onetime 'showpiece' the Bishopsfield estate, the subject of chapters 5 and 6, was threatened with the prospect of demolition. Before setting out the research questions, methodology and outline of this thesis, the two case study areas of

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[24] Moran, J. ''Stand Up and Be Counted': Hughie Green, the 1970s and Popular Memory' in *History Workshop Journal,* vol. 70, no. 1 (2010), pp. 187-88

[25] *Ibid*., pp. 194-5

[26] Robinson *et al*. 'Telling Stories about Post-war Britain', pp. 269, 268-9

[27] Black, L. and Pemberton, H. 'Introduction: The benighted decade? Reassessing the seventies' in Black, L., Pemberton, H. and Thane, P. (eds) *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 17

[28] Medhurst, J. *That Option No Longer Exists: Britain 1974-76* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014), p. 10

[29] Ortolano. *Thatcher's Progress*, p. 19

[30] *Ibid*., p. 29

Harlow and Basildon will be situated within the political and legislative frameworks from which they emerged, highlighting the utopian origins of the post-war new towns programme and its centrality to postwar social democracy and the welfare state.

Political and legislative origins

One of the primary origins of post-war new towns programme was the Garden City Movement.[31] The commissioning of the new towns in 1946, for Frederic Osborn, a key figure in the Garden City movement, represented an immense triumph: 'the cause of the garden cities, albeit now with a new name.'[32] In 1921, garden cities were defined by the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association as 'a town designed for industry and healthy living; of a size that makes possible a full measure of social life, but not larger; surrounded by a permanent belt of rural land; the whole of the land being in public ownership or held in trust for the community.'[33] As noted by Peter Hall and Colin Ward, the garden city was 'a vision of anarchist co-operation, to be achieved without large-scale central state intervention', in which 'citizens would own the land in perpetuity.'[34] In the utopian thinking of social visionary and founder of the garden city movement, Ebenezer Howard, 'town and country must be married, and out of the joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilisation.'[35] Much of this idealism, born out of a socialistic, utopian response to rapid industrialisation and urbanisation that had occurred in Britain throughout the nineteenth century, would go on to heavily influence an array of reports and plans that would shape the legislative framework of the early postwar new towns.

Decades of campaigning by urban reformers throughout the interwar years culminated in the 1940 Barlow Report, a 'watershed publication that carried out the long-overdue survey of British towns.'[36] The Barlow Report criticised the economic dominance of London and the

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[31] Wakeman, R. *Practicing Utopia: An Intellectual History of the New Town Movement* (London: University of Chicago, 2016); Hardy, D. *From Garden Cities to New Towns: Campaigning for Town and Country Planning, 1899-1946* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1991)

[32] Hardy. *From Garden Cities to New Towns*, p. 282

[33] Town and Country Planning Association. *New Towns and Garden Cities: Lessons for Tomorrow* (London: TCPA, 2014), p. 3

[34] Quoted in: Ward, C. *New Town, New Home: Lessons of Experience* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1993), p. 26

[35] Quoted in: Altman, I. and Chemers, M. *Culture and Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 271

[36] Wakeman. *Practicing Utopia*, p. 26

'patchwork of schemes of varying size and varying merit' that made up the pre-war planning system, concluding that 'a central planning authority' was needed to formulate a *national* policy to deal with the congested urban areas and their accompanying ills through urban dispersal and balanced regional development, endorsing the idea of a Ministry of Town and Country Planning (MTCP) to carry this out.[37] It established the principles of urban containment and the dispersal of both population and industry as a means of solving the array of intersecting social and economic ills caused by unplanned urbanisation.[38] As Barry Cullingworth suggests, the report's recommendations were given even 'greater urgency' by the prospects of post-war reconstruction, with the coalition government accepting the report – and with it the 'principle' of planning at a national level through some form of central authority – in February 1941.[39] Perhaps the most crucial in developing the embryonic frameworks of the postwar new towns, however, was Abercrombie's Country of London Plan of 1943 and Greater London Plan of 1944 – collectively known as the 'Abercrombie Plan', which emerged out of the unique opportunity presented by the destruction of large urban areas of wartime bombing. In planning for postwar London, the Abercrombie Plan sought to curtail outward expansion, affirmed the need for a 'green belt' and called for new towns to facilitate the decentralisation of industry and dispersion of population by proposing eight of them beyond the city's greenbelt but within 50 miles of London, sketching much of the groundwork that would go on to shape subsequent new town legislation. Alongside the 1942 Beveridge report - was the same recognition that, in the words of Helen Meller, 'individuals in a modern, industrialised and urbanised society need to be protected, collectively, from hostile forces which, as individuals, they were powerless to withstand.'[40] This constituted, Meller continues, a 'total rejection of the Victorian idea that poverty and suffering were caused by the moral failings of individuals.'[41] Thus, the new town idea was one that emerged in tandem with the radical expansion of both the welfare state and council housing. As John Boughton has suggested, the first generation of new towns corresponded to a historical moment in which the state 'assumed direct responsibility for housing its people decently.'[42]

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[37] Quoted in Cullingworth, B. *British Planning: 50 Years of Urban and Regional Policy* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), p. 46; Wakeman. *Practicing Utopia*, p. 26

[38] Wakeman. *Practicing Utopia*, p. 26

[39] Cullingworth. *British Planning*, p. 46

[40] Meller, H. *Towns, Plans and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 70

[41] *Ibid*., pp. 70-71

[42] Boughton. *Municipal Dreams*, p. 85

Council housing, which expanded rapidly following the Second World War, represented a 'major intervention in the market' that was 'eventually incorporated into the Welfare State, where it took its place alongside the national systems of health, insurance and education.'[43] The early new towns, of which collective provision of housing was key to their development, constitute an integral part of this postwar settlement. Guy Ortolano has argued that Britain's new towns 'comprised the spatial dimension of the welfare state', highlighting that the postwar new towns programme was launched alongside the extension of National Insurance and establishment the National Health Service, and subsequently terminated 'in tandem with the state's withdrawal from housing, industry and municipal utilities.'[44] Michelle Provoost has similarly argued that postwar new towns 'became the quintessential instrument to shape social democracy, to achieve an inclusive society, guarantee security and social stability and relate housing to social services: in short, to shape the welfare state.'[45] Decent housing was a key draw for those migrating from urban areas, with Peter Willmott's 1960 study in Stevenage finding that whilst it was tenants' occupations that had enabled them to move to the new towns, the biggest draw for most was the prospect of a new house.[46] This was affirmed by Clapson's findings in Milton Keynes, with many migrants feeling like 'the prospect of getting decent housing in London was virtually non-existent.'[47] This points to the welfare state's geographically variegated nature, and its arguable 'concentration' in Britain's new towns. However, as some have suggested, postwar council housing constituted the 'wobbly pillar' under the welfare state, something which this thesis seeks to examine through the experiences of collective provision in these two early new towns.[48]

The New Towns Act 1946, introduced by the post-war Labour administration provided the legislative framework for the designation, delivery and management of New Towns, giving wide-ranging powers for government to designate areas for new town development. Alongside

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[43] Ravetz, A. *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 3

[44] Ortolano. *Thatcher's Progress*, p. 8

[45] A phenomenon that, she suggests, spread far beyond Britain. Provoost, M. 'Exporting new towns: the welfare city in Africa' in Swenarton, M., Avermaete, T., and Van Den Heuvel, D. (eds) *Architecture and The Welfare State* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 277

[46] Willmott, P. 'Housing Density and Town Design in a New Town: A Pilot Study at Stevenage' in *The Town Planning Review,* vol. 33, no. 2 (1962), p. 117

[47] Clapson. A *Social History of Milton Keynes*, p. 92

[48] Malpass, P. 'The Wobbly Pillar? Housing and the British Postwar Welfare State' in *Journal of Social Policy*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2003), pp. 589-606

the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, which introduced nationalised land assets and captured development value, the New Towns Act 1946 epitomised the postwar belief in state planning.

As Stephan Ward posits, in both law and practice, the 1946 Act 'enshrined the New Towns as a statist concept', as private developers were 'excluded from playing major formative roles in the New Towns of the post-1945 years.'[49] The decision for the new towns to be Treasury-funded and implemented through state-run development corporations, Peter Hall suggests, 'destroyed the essence of Howard's plan, which was to fund the creation of self-governing local welfare states': 'Top-down planning triumphed over bottom up; Britain would have the shell of Howard's garden-city vision but without the substance.'[50] Nonetheless, in commissioning the new towns, the Labour government had embarked upon, as Fothergill *et al.* have suggested, 'an unprecedented and radical strategy to decentralize population and employment from Britain's largest cities', and to halt the 'unregulated development' that had led to ever–larger urban agglomerations.[51]

This legislation initiated the first wave of 'mark I' British new towns, designated in the immediate post-war era between 1946-1950. Of the 13 designated during this first phase, eight were located in Abercrombie's outer London ring to ease the capital's overpopulation – including Harlow and Basildon, designated in 1947 and 1949 respectively.

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[49] Ward, S. V. 'Consortium Developments Ltd and the failure of 'new country towns' in Mrs Thatcher's Britain', *Planning Perspectives,* vol. 20, no. 53 (2005), p. 331

[50] Hall, P. *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design since 1880* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 139

[51] Forthergill, S., Kitson, M. and Monk, S. 'The impact of the New and Expanded Town programmes on industrial location in Britain 1960-78' in *Regional Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1983), p. 251

Table 1.1 - Designation and location of 'mark I' new towns

Date designated	Town	Area
November 1946	Stevenage	Outer London ring
January 1947	Crawley	Outer London ring
February 1947	Hemel Hampstead	Outer London ring
March 1947	Harlow	Outer London ring
April 1947	Newton Aycliffe	County Durham
May 1947	East Kilbride	Scotland
March 1948	Peterlee	County Durham
May 1948	Welwyn Garden City	Outer London ring
May 1948	Hatfield	Outer London ring
June 1948	Glenrothes	Scotland
January 1949	Basildon	Outer London ring
June 1949	Bracknell	Outer London ring
November 1949	Cwmbran	Wales
April 1950	Corby	South Midlands

The Act empowered the MTCP to establish new town development corporations (NTDCs) as vehicles through which new towns, once designated, would be developed. Financed by treasury loans and accountable to the minister, NTDCs were entrusted with the power, as the Act stated:

> to acquire, hold, manage and dispose of land and other property, to carry out building and other operations, to provide water, electricity, gas, sewerage and other services, to carry out any business or undertaking on or for the purpose of the new town, and generally to do anything necessary or expedient for the purposes of the new town.[52]

At the top of the political structure of these organisations was the Board, the members of which were appointed by the minister, and was usually made up of a General Manager, Chairman, Deputy Chairman, and a handful of key officers, such as the Chief Finance Officer, Chief Architect, Housing Officer, Estate Officer, Chief Solicitor and a Social Development Officer. Whilst master plans and housing proposals required Ministry approval, NTDCs retained some degree of autonomy and agency and developed their own organisational character and personality.[53] In fact, it has been suggested that NTDCs possessed 'wide-ranging initiative',

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[52] Quoted in: Hebbert, M. 'The British Garden City: Metamorphosis' in Ward, S. *The Garden City: Past, present and future* (Abingdon: Spon Press, 1992), p. 173

[53] Sharp, L. 'The Government's role' in Evans, H. (ed) *New Towns: The British Experience* (London: Charles Knight & Co. Ltd., 1972), pp. 42-3

with 'the people who make up the corporation and exploit the Act [determining] the quality of the results, and – to a degree – the speed of the operation.'[54] Whilst not necessarily omnipotent, these local states possessed sweeping powers, and over the span of their lifetimes, amassed a wealth of commercial, industrial, land and housing-related assets.[55]

Furthermore, there was often local antipathy towards the 'undemocratic' structure of the NTDCs.[56] Richard Crossman, Housing Minister (1964-1966), suggested that some of the local county or district councils 'felt the usual hate of the development corporation, with their brand new offices, their big salaries, and their air of being feudal masters.'[57] Often there was 'vitriolic criticism from local residents in the Conservative-voting heartlands of the English Home Counties against inner-city Labour voters entering their constituency en masse.'[58] Stevenage was branded 'Silkingrad' by local detractors in 1946, with post-war new towns generally being viewed, as Clapson posits, 'with suspicion as socialist urban encroachments into the countryside, spawning associated criticisms and negative judgements that continue to dog the new towns today.'[59]

New town development corporations and social democracy

NTDCs have often been portrayed as bullishly omnipotent; 'the authoritarian face of utopias' that characterised 'the postwar style of planning.'[60] For instance, Ravetz comments, regarding new towns, that: 'everything that happened in them, and indeed their very existence, appeared to occur at their planners' behest.'[61] As David Taylor, Town Manager at Basildon in 1969 – who had worked in multiple other local governments prior to joining the new town authority –

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[54] Thomas, W. The management task' in Evans, H. (ed.) *New Towns: The British Experience* (London: Charles Knight & Co. Ltd., 1972), pp. 46-7

[55] Aldridge, M. *The British New Towns* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 39

[56] Booth, S. 'Councillors' Attitudes Towards New Town Development Corporations', in *Policy & Politics*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1976), p. 71

[57] Quoted in: Aldridge. *The British New Towns*, p. 70

[58] Alexander, A. *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 97

[59] Clapson, M. 'From Garden City to New Town: Social Change, Politics and Town Planners at Welwyn, 1920-48' in Meller, H. E. and Porfyriou, H. (eds) *Planting New Towns in Europe in the Interwar Years: Experiments and Dreams for Future Societies* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), p. 11

[60] Ravetz, A. *Remaking Cities: Contradictions of the Recent Urban Environment* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1980), p. 340

[61] *Ibid*., p. 71

recalled: 'Basildon works more quickly and more effectively than any other local government organisation I've seen, […] its pattern of organisation allows it to do so.'[62] Combined with a social vision, and an undemocratic, unaccountable mode of operating that paternalistically sought what was best for residents, the development corporations were organisations of, as one general manager put it, '*sympathetic efficiency.*'[63]

There is something sinister about this phrasing, yet it seems to sum up the NTDCs well – powerful, paternalistic, largely undemocratic and committed to efficacy, yet simultaneously sympathetic. Committed to the economic, social and reputational 'success' of their towns, leading staffers of these organisations – at least in the new towns under discussion - developed over time a deep social and moral commitment to the wellbeing of the town and its residents. The social idealism at the heart of the new towns programme committed NTDCs to the lofty, elusive postwar principle of building 'self-contained and balanced communities for work and living.' For Clapson, this integral principle of 'balance' was drawn from the 'idealised Blitz spirit of cross-class unity appropriated for a vision of egalitarian decentralisation.'[64] Lewis Silkin, Minister for Town and Country Planning (1945-50) during the reading of the Bill in parliament in 1946, stated that:

> Our aim must be to combine in the new town the friendly spirit of the former slum with the vastly improved health conditions of the new estate, but it must be broadened in spirit, embracing all classes of society… We may well produce in the new towns a new type of citizen, a healthy, self-respecting dignified person with a sense of beauty, culture and civic pride.[65]

In many ways, this paternalism imbued within the early postwar new towns paralleled that of council housing, upon which the development of these early new towns relied so heavily – constituting in the words of Ravetz: 'a vision forged by one section of society for application to another.'[66] An environmental determinism at the heart of the new town programme, as Anthony Alexander has suggested, 'led to a tacit view that a better environment would

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[62] ERO SA 20/2/7/1 Interview with David Taylor, Basildon Town Manager (1969)

[63] Thomas. The management task', p. 51

[64] Clapson, M. *The Blitz Companion: Aerial Warfare, Civilians and the City since 1911* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2019), p. 125

[65] Quoted in: Ward. *New Town, New Home*, p. 51

[66] Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 5

therefore produce a better society.'[67] The early new towns, like council housing, as Ravetz suggests, were based on a 'complete trust in the power of 'ideal' environments to bring about not only material but social reform.'[68] John Boughton has also suggested that 'community' became the 'Holy Grail' throughout the post-war era, with the 'quest for community' preoccupying postwar planners.[69] Andrew Homer has shown that the concept of the neighbourhood unit, deployed throughout the early postwar new towns, sought to 'reverse the perceived breakdown of 'community spirit' during the interwar years,' whilst James Greenhalgh has demonstrated that retail units were at the heart of this vision due to their perception by planners as hubs for 'face-to-face' interaction through which the nebulous idea of 'community spirit' could be facilitated.[70]

However, just how such 'ideal' environments were to be achieved remained a contention throughout the development of these towns. Early new towns were attacked by some for their supposed lack of architectural ambition and 'urbanity', being considered to have conceded too much ground to the pattern of garden suburbanisation that drew sneers in some architectural quarters.[71] Otto Saumarez Smith has recently drawn attention to this polarisation, as well as tension *within* the new towns programme, citing *The Sunday Times'* architectural correspondent in 1965, who commented on:

> the two apparently irreconcilable groups of people who want to determine the character of our future towns and cities: the garden city planners (or water colour school as their enemies call them) who like their new towns bosky, diffuse and full of nice little houses nice little people want, and the city-in-a-garden planners (or arrogant, intellectual, theorising high density madmen as

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[67] Alexander. *Britain's New Towns*, p. 72

[68] Ravetz. *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 4

[69] Boughton. *Municipal Dreams*, p. 59

[70] Homer, A. 'Creating new communities: The role of the Neighbourhood unit in post-war British planning' in *Contemporary British History*, vol 14, no. 1 (2000), p. 63; Greenhalgh, J. 'Consuming communities: the neighbourhood unit and the role of retail spaces on British housing estates, 1944–1958' in *Urban History*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2015), p. 158

[71] For instance, see: Richards, J. 'Failure of the New Towns', in *Architectural Review*, vol. 114 (1953), pp. 29-32; see also: Bullock, N. *Building the Post-War World Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (Routledge, 2002), p. 136

their enemies call them) who think a town should be planned first of all as a *town*, tightly packed, many stories, and visually exciting.[72]

As Saumarez Smith highlights, it was the latter of these groups that both Crossman and his private secretary Dame Evelyn Sharp were – in the former's words - 'excited about, in contrast to the cosy garden suburb atmosphere of Stevenage or Harlow or Basildon.'[73] A shift towards more 'urban' and 'compact' densities was expressed in the design of the first mark II new town, Cumbernauld, as well as the subsequently abandoned Hook new town.[74] As the LCC's plan for the abandoned Hampshire new town read: '… the Hook plan represents an attempt to retain some of the assets of urban life lost in the garden cities'; a 'city in a garden' rather than a garden city, as Hook's planners had put it.[75] We should, however, be cautious of a dichotomy between the first generation suburban towns, and the second generation towns, chiefly Cumbernauld, known for their bold, modernist radicalism. These shifting ideas unfolded *within* the development of early new towns like Harlow and Basildon too, something which led to more experimental, higher density developments throughout the sixties that make for intriguing case studies into the complex questions of individualism and community, as well as insights into the changing local status of collective provision. Whilst scholarship has rightly sought to understand the new town experience as a quintessential working-class suburban experience, there are more variegated experiences of new town housing in these early statist projects than is often accounted for, something this thesis seeks to redress (chapter 4, 5 and 6).[76]

Research questions and methodology

Having set out the key areas of existing literature to which this thesis contributes, this section will outline the research questions of the thesis and the methodological approach to answering them. The research questions are as follows:

1. What was the relationship between new town residents and the (local) state? And what was the relationship between the state and local state? How did these change over time?

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[72] Quoted in: Saumarez Smith, O. *Boom Cities: Architect Planners and the Politics of Radical Urban Renewal in 1960s Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 133
[73] *Ibid*., p. 133
[74] Willmott. 'Housing Density and Town Design in a New Town', p. 118
[75] Quoted in *Ibid*, p. 127, 121
[76] See: Clapson. *Invincible Green Suburbs*

2. How did housing policies specific to new town development (social balance, rented corporation house sales from the late sixties) as well as national trends in publicly rented housing (demunicipalisation, stigmatisation of social renting, estate residualisation) play out in the early new towns?

3. How did these policies alter relations between residents themselves? In what ways did they reshape individualism and the experience of community, everyday sociability, the use of public space, privacy and the home?

4. What makes the experience of new town corporation housing unique? Do commonalities with the national experience of council housing and 'estate life' outweigh differences? To what extent is there a specificity of new town housing experience worthy of further investigation?

5. What can the experiences of new town housing tell us about the shift from post-war social democracy to neoliberalism and where do new towns fit into this narrative? How have residents made sense of the widespread feeling of decline and loss in new towns that has accompanied this transition?

Of these research questions, it is the fifth and final question that is the most central to the investigation of this thesis. Whilst other questions shape particular chapters, this question underpins them all. In order to answer these questions, the thesis utilises archival research, chiefly, the records of both development corporations of the new towns in question, resident association material from the Bishopsfield estate, and oral testimonies from past and present residents.

Regarding archival research, the thesis has sought to explore beyond 'official' accounts of new town development, as carefully presented by planners themselves in their Corporations' Annual Reports. It is therefore particularly interested in notes of meetings, draft plans and most crucially, correspondence. Correspondence both between national and local state actors, as well as correspondence *within* the Corporations themselves, between their various departments. Close examination of these has provided the thesis with a breadth of insight into the political

economic processes at play and how the Corporations navigated these, offering greater clarity and nuance behind the thinking, intention, and imperatives of planners, where these came from and how they changed throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Conscious still that this would only tell *part* of a story, and a story that would ultimately still be told 'from above', as much planning and urban history tends to be, the thesis incorporates oral testimonies from past and present new town residents to provide an adjoining perspective 'from below.'

By utilising oral testimony, the thesis sets out to capture not just how policies and processes of historical change 'impacted' residents in a material sense, but how these 'felt', what they 'meant', and how those affected have made sense of these complex processes of historical change. Investigating, challenging and destabilising broad and often over-simplified change narratives such as the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism, the decline and 'failure' of council housing (particularly experimentally designed estates), and the alleged 'loss' of community, requires oral testimony from those affected to avoid the risk of reducing individual lives to masses and to draw out individual trajectories and stories. Incorporating a 'from below' perspective sheds light on the inherently messier nature of these changes. Furthermore, for the thesis to bring an examination of tenant experience into the late twentieth century and beyond, participant interviews were key. Whilst attempting to retrieve resident perspectives from the archives wherever possible, this was inherently fragmentary and grew increasingly challenging with later decades. Conducting interviews and using resident association material have enabled the thesis to present a more complete account of the changes that have taken place.

The thesis draws upon 15 interviews conducted with past and present residents between 2017 and 2020.[77] The sample includes eight participants relating to the case study areas of Lee Chapel North and Laindon in Basildon, and seven from Harlow's Bishopsfield. Eight were men and seven were women, and of the 15 participants, four (Silvia, Jim, Sandra and Moira) were new town 'pioneers' who moved to the towns during their formative decades for work, nine were 'second generation' new towners, the children of the initial 'pioneers', and two – Rosa and William – were, in turn, the children of those children. Nine of the participants still lived in the towns under discussion, whilst the others had moved to the surrounding areas.

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[77] See Appendix A for an overview of participants.

My approach to reaching participants was different in both case study areas. Having been born in Basildon and growing up nearby, I was able to utilise local contacts through recommendations and a natural 'snowballing' technique where I was put in touch with more people willing to participate. In the case of Harlow, whilst attending a new towns event in the town, I encountered local activists who were able to put me in touch with Moira, a key figure in the Bishopsfield Residents Association, whose enthusiasm, phonebook, and reputation on the estate enabled me to meet dozens of other residents.

The snowballing technique used to reach participants provided a space for informal interaction and discussion which allowed me to build rapport and familiarise participants with the research project ahead of a more formal interview. This enabled me to ensure participants found the interview comfortable, enjoyable, and meaningful. Regarding how the interviews were conducted, these often took place in participants' homes and lasted between one and two hours. Interviews were loosely structured with open-ended questions and prompts directed around key themes relevant to the thesis. At liberty to speak at length without interruption, participants were free to lead the conversation in ways they preferred and felt comfortable with.

Participants were selected in some instances due their proximity to, and first-hand encounters with, the local state. All participants either were or presently are council (previously 'corporation') tenants, and many had other engagements with the local state. Jim of Bishopsfield was both once a tenant and local elected representative who played a key role in navigating the difficult challenges posed throughout the 1990s examined in chapter 6, Steve worked for Harlow council as a gardener, witnessing first-hand changes to the quality of local services, Alan – a self-employed floorer – occasionally undertook jobs for Basildon Council in their rented properties, whilst Maxine worked for the council during the regeneration of Five Links. Participants such as Sandra, Moira, and Maxine had also encountered the local state through either resident campaigns or civic activism in relation to the town's heritage and artworks. With the thesis' interest in how people mobilised 'community' to make sense of change, participants like Clare and Rosa were selected because of their first-hand experience of Bishopsfield's community events.

Mindful of tropes and stereotypes relating to both Basildon and Essex, I was interested in talking to self-employed tradesmen with a relationship to the town, such as Alan and Bill. The former grew up in council housing in Laindon and still occasionally works in the town, whilst the latter lived in Five Links and later – to his relief – was able to move out. Chris and Mickey were previous residents I encountered through 'snowballing' who were also disillusioned and disappointed by the trajectory of Basildon and were selected to represent this alternative perspective.

I was particularly keen to speak with past and present second-generation residents. These were people whose parents moved to Basildon or Harlow during the towns' post-war development, being either very young babies at the time of, or often born shortly after, their parents' migration, usually in the late fifties or sixties. It could be said that this generation were more 'shaped' by the new towns and the political economy that underpinned them than their parents were. With 'the child' sat firmly at the centre of the planner's mind, these new town children were the metrics by which planners measured the success of their towns. In a sense they were *the* social democratic subjects, the 'new type of citizen' that Silkin had boasted of and were growing up or coming of age at the complex intersection between the two political formations of social democracy and neoliberalism, making for particularly intriguing interviewees.[78] This becomes more interesting when one considers the centrality of one's place in the life course in shaping perception, memory, and experience of place. As children growing up throughout this period of change, there is a degree of intrigue and insight into daily life that adults may be more inclined to overlook, with children being in and out of neighbour's houses, spending lots of time in public spaces 'playing out', or peering over garden fences. There is a real value to the insights of these grown-up new town children, and they represent a valuable vantage point into the complex histories of these towns. Some participants seemed aware of this significance, with Steve proud to inform me that he was 'as old as the town itself', acknowledging a shared a lifespan.[79]

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[78] Quoted in: Ward. *New Town, New Home*, p. 51
[79] Interview with Steve (2019)

Introducing Harlow

The designated area for Harlow new town in 1947 was a 6000-acre site encompassing the village of Harlow in Essex, a small settlement that predates the Domesday Book 1086, which would later become known as 'Old Harlow' and become a neighbourhood located in the new town's northeast corner. Beyond this settlement, the population had been sparse, based in scattered village hamlets, isolated cottages and a handful of farms.[80] The master plan for the new town was drawn up by chief architect of the HDC Frederick Gibberd for a population of 60,000, which was approved by central government in 1949, and was later revised in 1952 to 80,000 and again in 1966 to 90,000. Significantly, these targets came without an increase in the designated geographical area, leading to later developments having much greater density than earlier ones.[81]

Figure 1.1 - Plan of postwar Harlow showing residential, industrial and open space. Source: JR James Archive

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[80] Newens, S. 'The Genesis of Harlow New Town' paper (2007)
[81] 'Harlow Town', in W R Powell *et al* (eds.) *A History of the County of Essex: Volume 8.* (London, 1983), pp. 149-158. Accessed on 4 November 2019 via: British History Online http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/essex/vol8/pp149-158

The main industrial area of Templefields opened in 1950 and was sited near the northern boundary of the town along the railway and the River Stort. A second industrial estate, Pinnacles, situated at the northwest edge of the town, opened in 1956. As one of the outer London ring new towns designated for absorbing the London overspill, early migrants came primarily from Walthamstow, Tottenham and Edmonton, and later from across all of northeast London.[82] Due to post-war resource and labour shortages, the development of Harlow was initially slow, but as housing construction took off in the early 1950s, its population increased rapidly until the 1970s.

Figure 1.2 - Population growth in Harlow, 1951-2011.[83]
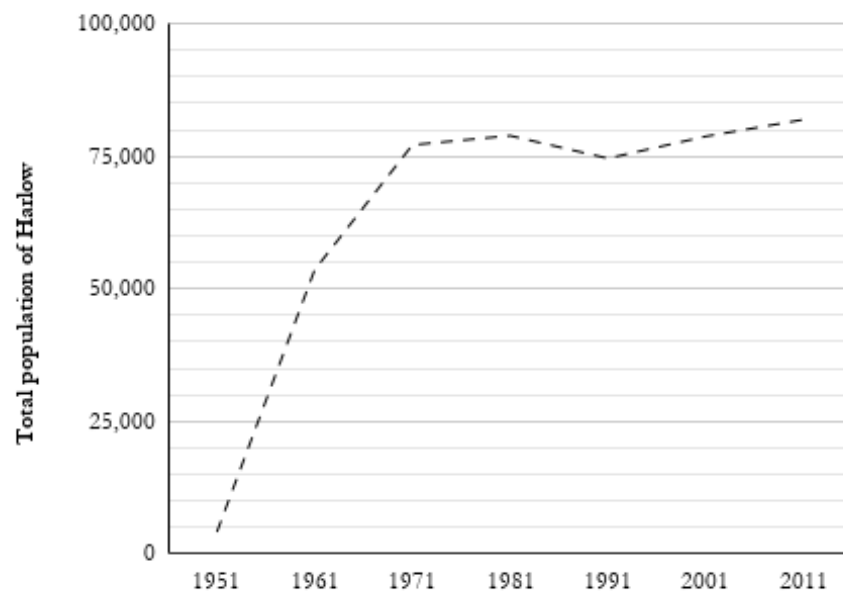
Within five years of designation in 1952, Harlow had acquired the nickname 'pram town' in the national media.[84] This was owed to widespread reports of 20% of the town's population being beneath the age of 5.[85] As the presenter of a 1956 US film exploring the town boasted: 'For in the front of the planner's mind has always been a woman pushing a pram with a toddler at her

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[82] *Ibid*., pp. 149-158

[83] Compiled from census data via: GB Historical GIS, University of Portsmouth. 'Harlow District through time: Total Population', *A Vision of Britain through Time* (Accessed 30 November 2020 via http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10057279/cube/TOT_POP)

[84] Miller, D. *Consumption: Disciplinary approaches to consumption* (Routledge, 2001), p. 258

[85] Chataway, C. (presenter) 'Transatlantic Television: New Towns in Britain', World Wide Pictures/Central Office of Information (1956), accessed online via East Anglian Film Archive: http://www.eafa.org.uk/catalogue/249

side.' Such a sentiment was affirmed by comments by general manager, Ben Hyde Harvey, accounting for this thesis' subsequently examined attachment by the HDC to meeting the needs of the town's 'second generation', in spite of changing priorities at central government level: 'I would point to the young people of Harlow, who I've seen growing up, they are going to be the citizens of the new Britain, they're growing up in healthy, happy conditions and I think they're going to be our greatest investment in Harlow.'[86]

Harlow's favourable landscape was exploited by Gibberd, whose master plan retained the 'character' of the landscape and preserved generous 'green wedges' throughout the new town which divided neighbourhoods.[87] Gibberd planned three major neighbourhood 'centres' alongside the town centre. Each of these 'clusters' had two to four residential 'neighbourhoods', a shopping centre of around 30-40 shops, a church, pub, library and its own small industrial area. Each neighbourhood in turn had a primary school, community hall, pub and 'hatch' (row of shops).

Mark Lleweyln has suggested the town's design represented a 'diluted Modernism', with a number of different *avant-garde* architects designing housing groups which became 'somewhat of a hybrid between Modern Movement ideals and garden city pragmatics.'[88] Mark Hall North was built in 1950, which included Britain's first ever-residential tower block, 'The Lawn', with development moving to Mark Hall South between 1951-53, and then south of these to Netteswell, whilst previously existing settlements at Old Harlow and Potter Street were enlarged into neighbourhood areas. During the latter half of the 1950s, Little Parndon and Bush Fair were built, and previously mentioned developments in the northwest and southeast areas of the new town were finished. In the 1960s, Great Parndon and Passmores, located at the south west of the town, were built, and in the second half of the decade, Stewards and Kingsmoor neighbourhoods were constructed to the south of these. Throughout the 1960s the HDC met centrally-imposed higher density targets through architecturally ambitious, experimental housing areas such as Bishopsfield and Charters Cross, as well as the 'three hills' estates – Fernhill, Honeyhill and Clarkhill. Whilst latter estates were, after multiple attempts at

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[86] *Ibid*.

[87] Gibberd, F., Hyde Harvey, B., and White, L. *Harlow: The Story of a New Town* (Stevenage: Publications for Companies, 1980); Homer. 'Creating new communities', pp. 63-80

[88] Llewellyn, M. 'Producing and Experiencing Harlow: Neighbourhood Units and Narratives of New Town Life 1947-53' in *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2004), p. 160

regeneration, demolished at the turn of the millennium, the surviving, architecturally revered Bishopsfield estate serves as a case study in this thesis to examine the questions of community, stigmatisation and the changing nature of the local state.[89]

Throughout the postwar era, Harlow gained a reputation for its arts, culture and its enduring commitment to public art, chiefly sculpture, widely dispersed throughout the town and its neighbourhoods by its master-planner Gibberd, who in 1953 set up the Harlow Art Trust.[90] In continuing to commission sculptures to the present day, it works to establish Harlow as a 'sculpture town', prompting long-deserved recognition of the new town's rich postwar heritage, something that has long been campaigned for by the town's active Harlow Civic Society.[91] Gibberd's profound influence on the town's design and development cannot be understated, bringing additional social idealism, 'vision' and 'humanity' to this local manifestation of the postwar new towns programme.[92] Some early new towns such as Harlow eventually achieved considerable financial success, with the HDC becoming a 'significant lender of money' to organisations including the Thames Water Authority, enabling them to generate further surpluses from interest payments. However, Harlow, along with Bracknell and Stevenage, were required to pay these growing surpluses back to the Treasury in 1975.[93] The HDC was wound up by central government in 1980, making the 'life' of this NTDC similar to conventional periodisation of the social democratic era that underpinned its development.

Most industrial firms in the town either transferred or expanded from existing sites in London, bringing their employees with them. In pursuit of 'industrial balance', the HDC sought to avoid becoming a single-industry town, and sought a diversity of employment. Brian Heraud has drawn attention to the HDC's early efforts to attain a 'mixed community' by prioritising industries employing 'a high proportion of skilled workers' such as technicians and

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[89] Alexander. *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities*, p. 153

[90] Hopkins, P. *Long and the Short and the Tall: Half a Lifetime of the Arts in Harlow by the People Who Have Lived it* (Harlow: Harlow Arts Trust, 1983); Bettley, J. and Pevsner, N. *Essex* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 450

[91] See: Congreve, A. 'Public Art in British New Towns: The Past, Present and Future' in (eds) Colenutt, B., Fée, D., and Coady Schäbitz, S. *Lessons from British and French New Towns: Paradise Lost?* (Bingley: Emerald, 2020), pp. 159-172; Coady Schäbitz, S. 'A Controversial Heritage: New Towns and the Problematic Legacy of Modernism' in (eds) Colenutt, B., Fée, D., and Coady Schäbitz, S. *Lessons from British and French New Towns: Paradise Lost?* (Bingley: Emerald, 2020), pp. 197-213

[92] Bettley, J. and Pevsner, N. *Essex* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 450

[93] Department of Planning, Oxford Brookes University. 'Transferable Lessons from the New Towns' report (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006), p. 38

administrative staff.[94] As a consequence, there was a mix of light engineering, electronics, printing, glass, food and furniture manufacturers within the town, and by 1973, electrical engineering firms employed 36.2% of the town's working population, with mechanical engineering firms employing a further 15% of the town's population.[95] Key Glass (later United Glass) was, according to Stan Newens, the only major employer in the town that employed primarily 'unskilled' labour.[96] In 1979, manufacturing jobs in Harlow were concentrated mainly in large firms, ten of which employed over 500 people, accounting for 63% of all manufacturing jobs.[97] These firms account for Harlow's sizeable manufacturing base during the first few decades of its existence, and were concentrated in the town's two industrial areas.

Table 1.2 - Number of jobs in major employment areas in Harlow in 1979.[98]

Area	Employees (1979)
Temple Fields	8,906
Pinnacles	7,003
Riverway (warehousing)	1,302
Burnt Mill (warehousing)	532
Staple Tye (neighbourhood centre)	449
Bush Fair (neighbourhood centre)	573
The Stow (neighbourhood centre)	154

The town was significantly effected by the subsequent loss of many of these manufacturing firms. In 1979, the HDC's employment survey found that 54.2% of the town's working population worked in manufacturing.[99] Census data shows that by 1991 this had fallen to 31.5% and further to around 11% by 2011.[100]

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[94] Quoted in Heraud, B. J. 'Social Class and the New Towns' in *Urban Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1968), p. 40
[95] 'Harlow Town', pp. 149-158
[96] Newens. 'The Genesis of Harlow New Town' (2007)
[97] ERO A6306/345-406 HDC. *Employment Survey 1979* (20 October 1980)
[98] *Ibid*.
[99] *Ibid*.
[100] GB Historical GIS, University of Portsmouth. 'Harlow District through time: Simplified Industrial Structure, *A Vision of Britain through Time*. (Accessed on 30 November 2020 via http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/place/1207)

Introducing Basildon

Basildon was both the largest of the early new towns and the last of this first wave to be completed, with the BDC lasting until 1986. Following the designation of Harlow in 1947, the Ministry proposed that nearby Ongar would be the second Essex new town. But this changed following lobbying by the Essex County Council (ECC) and Billericay District Council that the area of Pitsea-Laindon be designated, a decision which, as Billericay's local Conservative MP Bernard Braine boasted in parliament in May 1950, 'resulted in the removal of almost every Labour councillor from the Billericay Council.'[101] The reason for this was the thousands of self-built dwellings that had sprung up around the settlements of Laindon and Pitsea during the agricultural depression when plots of land were sold cheaply mainly to East Londoners for weekend homes.[102] Many moved out on a permanent basis following the wartime bombing. These Laindon, Pitsea and Dunton plotlands, as they became known, have been historicised by some, including many who lived there, as a 'little arcadia out in the Essex flatlands', and derided by others – often those making planning decisions at state-level - as 'proletarian shanty towns'; unorganised bundles of crammed and substandard dwellings linked together by a labyrinth of muddy pathways, and lacking basic infrastructure such as water mains, sewage systems and made roads.[103] The local authorities believed that necessary urban infrastructure could only be ensured through a direct flow of Treasury funds, and Colin Ward has noted that the County Boroughs of West Ham and East Ham joined the Essex local authorities in pushing for the move, as they 'saw the place as the natural overspill for their boroughs', given that many of their former residents were already living there.[104]

Basildon's 7,800 acre designated area, with its four very small settlements - Pitsea, Laindon, Vange and Basildon - and thousands of existing landowners, stood in firm contrast with the 'small number of aristocrats' that owned designated area land in places like Harlow.[105] With an existing population of around 25,000 people at the time of designation in 1949, the BDC found itself saddled with complex, costly land acquisitions and rural slum clearance, something which

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[101] Quoted in: Ward. *New Town, New Home*, p. 38-9

[102] See: Hardy, D. and Ward, C. *Arcadia for All: The Legacy of a Makeshift Landscape* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2004)

[103] Granath, M. G. *Searching for the Promised Land: Basildon and the Pursuit of Happiness* (Bexleyheath: Goldstar Books, 2004), p. 40

[104] Ward. *New Town, New Home*, p. 38-9

[105] Alexander. *Britain's New Towns*, p. 32

was met with fierce opposition from local groups. Thus, Basildon has been described as the 'poor relation' of the 'mark I' new towns, and by the early 1960s, due to reasons that will subsequently be explored, was the least middle class of the outer London ring.[106]

The initial master plan was drawn up for a target population of 86,000 people, later revised to 106,000, and in 1965, was further revised again to a proposed 140,000.[107] Like Harlow, the Basildon master plan was centred strongly around the neighbourhood unit. By the early 1960s, the new town comprised of ten of such 'neighbourhoods', some incorporating existing settlements. These were Pitsea, Laindon, Langdon Hills, Vange, Lee Chapel North, Lee Chapel South, Fryerns, Ghyllgrove, Barstable and Kingswood.

Soon after the site's designation in 1949, an industrial estate was built in Nevendon, located in the northeast of the town's centre, situated along the south of the A127, one of the two arterial roads that the town is sandwiched between. From 1951, this hosted a range of industry, including a dairy factory, a radiator plant, a coach-building factory, and steel cable manufacturers. In the 1960s this site was expanded along with the creation of a new industrial estate located at Pipps Hill, west of the first site and north of the town's centre. This expansion was the arrival of an electronic manufacturing company, clothing manufacturers, an ice cream factory, Pembroke Carton & Printing Co. Ltd, as well as large employers such as Yardley of London, Marconi, MK electronics and Standard Telephones & Cables, to name a few. In 1965, Ford Motor Company became a major local employer after building a tractor manufacturing and assembly plant, moving from Dagenham to a purpose-built 100-acre site between the two existing industrial estates in the new town.

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[106] Aldridge. *The British New Towns,* p. 53; HLG 115/665 Margaret Willis. 'BDC: Revised Master Plan to an ultimate 140,000 population: Sociological Report' (November 1966), p. 2
[107] Wannop, U. 'New Towns' in Cullingworth, J. B. (ed.) *British Planning: 50 Years of Urban and Regional Planning Policy* (London: Athlone Press, 1999), p. 216

Figure 1.3 - Map of postwar Basildon, c. 1970s.[108]
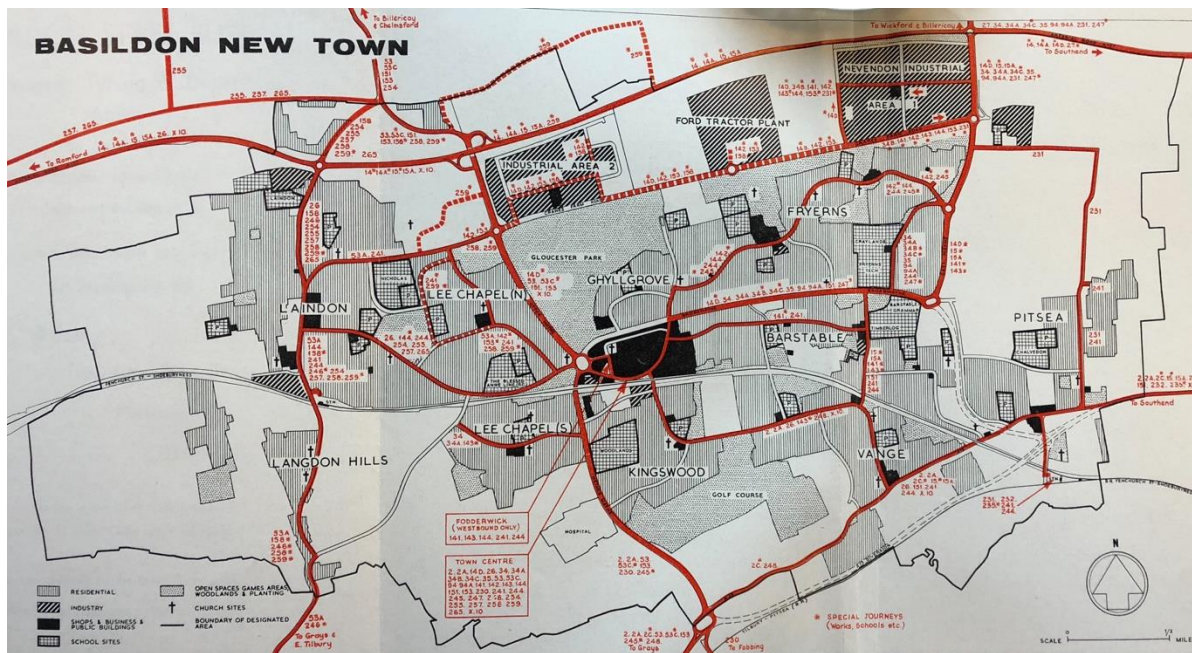
As with Harlow, pressure for greater population targets led to higher densities throughout the sixties, something which particularly effected the early development of the Laindon neighbourhood, which makes up a case study of chapter 4. The substantial postwar growth in population is demonstrated below.

Table 1.3 - Basildon population change, 1949-2011[109]

Year	Basildon population
1949	25,000
1959	52,000
1969	122,760
1971	129,073
1981	152,000
1991	157,700
2001	165,661
2011	174,500

[108] ERO A8891/6 BDC. 'Basildon Tenants Handbook' (undated)

[109] Compiled from ONS census data, and: Cullingworth, J. B. *Housing Needs and Planning Policy: A Restatement of the Problems of Housing Need and 'Overspill' in England and Wales* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 100; Wannop. 'New Towns', p. 216

The centrality of collective provision

As with all of the early 'mark I' new towns, Basildon and Harlow were enormously reliant on the collective provision of housing throughout the crux of their development.[110] As the below table shows, the nature of development led to a near universality of publicly rented accommodation in these towns during their founding decades.

Table 1.4 - Housing constructed by or under the instruction of HDC since 1947 as of 31st March 1967.[111]

Dwellings let by Harlow Development Corporation	16,968	92%
Dwellings sold by Harlow Development Corporation, including sales to sitting tenants	801	4%
Dwellings sold by private enterprise	727	4%
Total number of dwellings	18,496	

This trend continued into the seventies, although there were significant attempts to alter this trajectory, as will be subsequently explored. By the end of 1976, of the 27,369 houses built in Basildon since designation, 21,600 of these were by the development corporation, 3,618 by the local authority and 2,151 by private enterprise.[112] This led to these early new towns having a considerably high degree of publicly rented accommodation in contrast to the rest of the country, as displayed below.

Table 1.5 - Tenure breakdown comparing Basildon and Britain in 1971.[113]

Tenure	Basildon	Britain
Public rented	86.5%	31%
Owner occupied	11%	49%
Other	2.5%	21%

The centrality of collective provision in early new towns like Basildon and Harlow was increasingly problematised at a national level, and considerable attempts to rectify this occurred from the late sixties onwards in pursuit of 'balance' (examined in chapter 2). One of

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[110] See: Cullingworth, J. B. and Khan, V. A. *The Ownership and Management of Housing in the New Towns* (London: HMSO, 1968)

[111] HLG 116/323 HDC Memorandum from General Manager to Leavett, A. MHLG entitled 'Owner-occupation in new towns' (6 June 1967)

[112] Osborn, F. J. and Whittick, A. *New Towns: Their origins, achievements and progress* (London: Leonard Hill, 1977), p. 208

[113] ERO A8891/6 BDC. 'A Social Profile of Basildon: August 1979' (1979), p. 11

the primary means of achieving this was through rented house sales to sitting tenants, which this thesis traces from the sixties onwards, with particular attention to the concessionary sales that occurred throughout the Heath administration between 1970-74.

These early sales set new towns up for unique trajectories of tenure change throughout the seventies, the implications of which this thesis examines. Between 1971 and 1979, the proportion of those living in public housing nationally continued to climb from 31% of 34%, whilst in Basildon, this plunged from 86.5% to 69% throughout the same period. As homeownership similarly climbed nationally, from 49% to 52%, in Basildon, this rose from 11% to 29.5% during the same period, the overwhelming majority of this increase was owed to tenants purchasing their corporation houses.[114] Throughout the Conservatives' time in office between 1970 and 1974, in the South East, where many of the London ring new towns were located, the average house price surged from £6,223 in 1970 to just under £14,000 by early 1974, an increase of 124%.[115]

The incoming Labour government set limits on NTDC rented house sales in 1974 (although conditionally resumed in 1976). This led to the increasing politicisation of the issue, emphasised through broadcasts and election literature. As one Conservative MP boasted in light of local council election results in May 1976, on the role that the Labour government's 'ban' on new town house sales:

> We did particularly well in New Town areas where the government's ban on the sale of new town houses has seemed particularly doctrinaire. Bracknell, Northampton, Peterborough, Redditch, West Lancashire, Chorley, Corby, Milton Keynes, Welwyn and Hatfield and Dacorum – all New Town councils – came under Conservative control.[116]

The sale of council and corporation homes to sitting tenants constitutes – as Forrest and Murie have suggested - an important element in the 're-organisation of the welfare state.'[117] Cole and

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[114] *Ibid.*, p. 11

[115] *Hansard*. House of Commons debates. 'Council and new town houses (sale)' (18 May 1976), vol. 911, col. 1245

[116] *Hansard*. House of Commons debates. 'Council and new town houses (sale)' (18 May 1976), vol. 911, col. 1238

[117] Forrest, R. and Murie, A. *Selling the Welfare State: The Privatisation of Public Housing* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 3

Furbey have also articulated the attack on state-provided housing as a component, albeit a significant one, of a broader, 'more comprehensive overhaul of the post-war welfare state', and similarly insist on the need for the privatisation of state housing to be 'set in a wider context of the restructuring of the British welfare state.'[118] By examining how these early sales play out in Harlow and Basildon, and identifying their origins in social democratic principles such as 'balance', this thesis sheds light on the elongated, complex and messy shift from social democracy to neoliberalism.

Party politics in Basildon and Harlow

In the 1979 election, the Conservative Party captured the Basildon constituency seat, electing notorious right-wing populist and member of the 'hard-right' Conservative Monday Club, Harvey Proctor, who was said to have 'campaigned hard on the issue of council house sales by targeting potential beneficiaries in the course of his canvassing.'[119] Ever since, 'through political folklore', Basildon has become an 'emblematic Thatcherite constituency', with well-known tropes of the 'Basildon Man', 'Essex Man' and 'Mondeo Man', caricaturing working class embrace of Thatcherism and atomised, self-interested individualism.[120] The county of Essex, in which both towns fall, has become a target of national derision and classed snobbery, cemented by dominant representations in television and media. The frequently deployed trope of the 'Essex Man' caricatures an 'aspirational and upwardly mobile working class.'[121] Or as John Davies has put it, the quintessential 'Essex Man' was 'culturally working class but politically beyond Labour's reach during the Thatcher years.'[122]

For David Haigron, increasing identification of an alleged 'new working class' and 'class de-alignment' from the mid-1960s 'anticipates the "Essex Man" phenomenon'; 'its members live in the southeast of England, where they work in the private sector with no union membership,

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[118] Cole, I. and Furbey, R. *The Eclipse of Council Housing* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 2, 1

[119] Evans, B. 'Thatcherism and the British People' in (eds) Holliday, I. and Ball, S. *Mass Conservatism: The Conservatives and the Public since the 1880s* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), p. 227

[120] *Ibid.*, p. 218

[121] Haigron, D. 'Targeting "Essex Man" and "C2 Wives": The representation of the working class electorate in the Conservative Party political broadcasts (1970s-1980s)' in Capet, A. (ed) *The Representation of Working People in Britain and France: New Perspectives* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), p. 138

[122] Davies, J. 'The London Cabbie and the Rise of Essex Man' in Griffiths, C., Nott, J. and Whyte, W. (eds) *Classes, Cultures & Politics: Essays of British History for Ross McKibbin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 102

and own their own homes.'[123] Others have traced the cultural roots of the 'Essex Man' trope to the idea of 'Selsdon Man', which emerged in the press following a Conservative leadership pre-election 'brainstorming session' in Selsdon Park Hotel, Surrey in 1970.[124] The subsequent aggressively free market rhetoric of the Conservatives' *A Better Tomorrow* (1970) election manifesto signalled a discursive end of the so-called 'Butskellite' Keynesian post-war consensus and 'One Nation' Conservatism in Britain.[125] Keith Joseph has suggested that the Selsdon declaration of 1970 carried the seeds of what was more or less carried out after 1979.[126]

The treatment of the town as a political barometer culminated in Hudson and Hayes' *Mood of the Nation* study of 1990s Basildon, which demonstrated that a strong, working class identity (73% identified themselves as working class in 1997) could co-exist with 'a strong sense of individualism and self-improvement.'[127] The report echoed in many ways the famously bleak prognosis by Robert D. Putnam's *Bowling Alone,* which emphasised a decline in civic, social and political engagement in the US.[128] Similarly, the Basildon study claimed that 'the balance of social activity in Basildon is skewed fundamentally towards individualised activities – to the practical exclusion of communal and even joint interests.'[129]

Prior to 1974, the new town of Harlow fell within the parliamentary constituency of Epping. After this, it had its own constituency that has remained the same to present.

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[123] Haigron. 'Targeting "Essex Man" and "C2 Wives"', p. 147; See: Särlvik, B. and Crewe, I. *Decade of Dealignment: The Conservative victory of 1979 and electoral trends in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Goldthorpe, J. H. *et al. The Affluent Worker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968)

[124] Beckett, A. *When The Lights Went Out* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), p. 31; Caines, E. *Heath and Thatcher in Opposition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 277

[125] Caines. *Heath and Thatcher in Opposition*, p. 277

[126] *Ibid.*, p. 277

[127] Hayes, D. and Hudson, A. *Basildon: The mood of the nation* (London: Demos, 2001), p. 21, 11

[128] See: Putnam, R. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000)

[129] Hayes. and Hudson. *Basildon*, p. 26

Table 1.6 - Parliamentary representation in Harlow, 1951-2010

	Seat	Member of Parliament	Years
	Epping	Graeme Finlay (Con)	1951-64
	Epping	Stan Newens (Lab)	1964-70
	Epping	Norman Tebbit (Con)	1970-74
	Harlow	Stan Newens (Lab)	1974-83
	Harlow	Jerry Hayes (Con)	1983-97
	Harlow	Bill Rammell (Lab)	1997-10
	Harlow	Robert Halfon (Con)	2010-

The Labour Party controlled the Harlow District Council since its inception in 1973 until 2002, regaining control in 2012. Basildon was also given its own constituency with 1974 boundary changes, which lasted until 2010, during which it became well known for being a 'bellwether' of public opinion. It has since been split between the two constituencies of Basildon and Billericay and South Basildon and East Thurrock.

Table 1.7 - Parliamentary representation in Basildon, 1950-2010

	Seat	Member of Parliament	Years
	Billericay	Bernard Braine (Con)	1950-55
	Billericay	Richard Body (Con)	1955-59
	Billericay	Edward Gardner (Con)	1959-66
	Billericay	Eric Moonman (Lab)	1966-70
	Billericay	Robert McCrindle (Con)	1970-74
	Basildon	Eric Moonman (Lab)	1974-79
	Basildon	Harvey Proctor (Con)	1979-83
	Basildon	David Amess (Con)	1983-97
	Basildon	Angela Smith (Lab)	1997-10
Constituency abolished and subject to multiple boundary changes			

The Labour Party controlled the Basildon Urban District Council from its inception in 1973 to 1979 under the leadership of John Potter, and after three years of local Conservative government (1979-82), Labour regained control in 1982 and held it for ten years under Harold Tinworth until 1992. These two periods of Labour control in Basildon are remembered for their socialist leaderships. In the eighties the local authority was attacked in the commons by Proctor for 'tenpin bowling alleys being run at a loss on the rates', 'nuclear-free zones and CND flowerbeds', and pursued alongside London borough authorities in 1984 by Patrick Jenkin, Secretary of State for the Environment (1983-85), for allegedly being a 'grossly extravagant

authority.'[130] Both councils in Harlow and Basildon went to great lengths to meet the needs of the elderly in their towns, providing provision which was not being provided at a county level and had for much of the town's development been overlooked by the development corporations. As one Basildon Labour councillor remembered of the 1970s, 'that was real socialism in those days because we looked after the old first.'[131]

Meanwhile the town's development became increasingly politicised. In both new towns, the local Conservatives often tried to popularise opposition to town expansions and development – such as opposition to Harlow's 1974 expansion and opposition to the expansion of South West area in Basildon.[132] In the 1970s, Labour-left Basildon Council leader John Potter had been a BDC board member following a campaign from the local authority for political representation, something local Tories attacked as political bias.[133] In response to accusations from local Conservative councillors that there was a "Labour-controlled Corporation board", chairman of BDC Arthur Kelting responded in a local newspaper letter: 'It is not difficult to see that at present a majority [of the Corporation board] are probably supporters of the Labour Party.'[134] In 1980, Michael Heseltine, Secretary of State for the Environment (1979-1983), made new appointments to the board – one of which was a prominent member of the City of London and Westminster Conservatives, causing council leader Potter to comment to a local newspaper at the time:

> The Government has taken no notice of us whatsoever. The Minister is riding roughshod over the views of Basildon Council. These board members are outsiders and estate agents brought in to dispose of the Corporation's assets.[135]

Later that year a local Labour Councillor and board member and chairman of the housing committee at the BDC, Ron Austin, resigned after six years, citing his strong opposition to the lack of new housing in Basildon, the Government's threat to increase rents and the appointment

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[130] *Hansard.* House of Commons debates. 'Rate Support Grant', vol. 64, col. 847 (24 July 1984)
[131] Quoted in: Hayes and Hudson. *Basildon: The Mood of the Nation*, p. 17
[132] Kelting, A. O. 'New Town chief raps 'irresponsible critics'', *Basildon Recorder* (19 August 1977)
[133] 'Council leader talk with forked tongue – Tories attack Labour abuse of power', *Basildon Standard Recorder* (29 October 1976)
[134] ERO A8791 Letter from A. O. Kelting General Manager of BDC to Mr Blandford, Editor of Basildon Standard Recorder (9 August 1977), also published in the recorder; see: Kelting, A. O. 'New Town chief raps 'irresponsible critics'', *Basildon Recorder* (19 August 1977)
[135] 'Protest over Corporation appointments', *Basildon Recorder* (11 April 1980); 'Tories deny secret move', *Evening Echo* (9 January 1980)

of Dame Elizabeth Coker as Chairwoman of the Board by Heseltine. Austin said to the local press:

> I have found it increasingly difficult to wear two hats as a Labour councillor and a board member. I feel I cannot go along with Government policies. […] [Dame Elizabeth Coker] is replacing Sir Reg Goodwin, who has been *removed by the Government*, and I see this as a direct move to impose Government policies on the Development Corporation.[136]

Whilst this conflict arose over the disposal of industrial, retail and land assets, this thesis is concerned with elongated disposal of new town housing assets. These changes were to have enormous local implications for both towns under discussion, as will be shown, leading to residualisation, stigmatisation and a sense of collective loss. Collective provision had been integral to strategies of individual and familial self-betterment in these postwar new towns, but the foundations upon which this laid was fragile and tenuous. Selina Todd has pointed to how 'focusing on children is a means of expressing and finding love, in a society that offers little scope for collective endeavour outside the family', quoting Hayes and Hudson's findings in Basildon that gloomily argued 'outside the family, there is no way of linking an individual project or set of hopes and aspirations with collective fortunes and endeavours.'[137] In a town that was born out of such a collective ethos, how did this happen?

Outline of thesis

To answer my research questions, the thesis is set out as followed. The thesis starts with **Chapter 2** investigating how the Harlow Development Corporation (HDC) navigated the social democratic commitment to balance and the growing pressure to increase owner occupation. It examines the shift of the 'balance' concept from the early postwar idealism of social mixing to an increased emphasis on owner occupation, enacted locally through building Corporation houses for sale and later through sales to sitting tenants – charting the HDC's unique experimentation with 'designated sale areas' in the sixties and later the concessionary sales blitz of the early 1970s (research questions 2 and 4). It demonstrates that whilst the HDC

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[136] 'Homes man quits in protest', *Basildon Recorder* (12 December 1980)

[137] Todd, S. *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010* (London: John Murray, 2015), pp. 358-9

was driven by social ideals borne out of the post-war social democratic moment, these were continually tempered, constrained, minimised and contorted by the central state – the Ministry – which was increasingly driven by economic and ideological imperatives, seeking to inject the market and private enterprise into what was ultimately a statist project. It deduces that the social democratic period was fraught with tensions, as the local state in Harlow struggled to navigate growing homeownership, increasing pressure from the central state and popular attitudes of residents demonstrated by lingering local state frustrations surrounding restrictive covenants and disposal deeds, as the ability of Harlow's planners to maintain control and oversight over the spaces they built was progressively eroded (research question 1). It argues that changing interpretations of 'balance' in light of homeownership opened the door to the concept being deployed by central government to justify a rapid disposal of public housing and land. Thus, the chapter questions the temporality of conventional narratives relating to the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism by showing that the sales drive in both Harlow and Basildon in the early 1970s had far more in common with the hasty disposal of assets which came to represent the *Right to Buy* programme throughout the 1980s, than they did with the social idealism that underpinned the initial postwar pursuit of 'balance' (research question 5).

The unique early new town circumstances foregrounded in this chapter are further investigated in **Chapter 3** through a local case study of Basildon's Lee Chapel North neighbourhood, which uses the new town pursuit of balance, specifically the rented corporation house sales of 1970-74 and their aftermath, as a basis upon which to investigate the messy relationship between individualism and community in Basildon throughout the seventies (research question 2 and 3). Through resident testimonies, it identifies an initial, implicit egalitarianism based on shared background, employment, the uses of local public space, and most importantly, the ubiquity of publicly rented tenure in the new town (research question 4), with this perceived egalitarianism profoundly shaping perceptions of 'community.' The chapter illustrates the pivotal role rented house sales played in undermining this, as social snobbery and intra-class distinction became considerably more noticeable throughout the decade, in turn shaping vernacular grapplings of this local, elongated transition from social democracy to neoliberalism as a descent from 'community' into 'individualism.' The chapter also examines how the popularity and subsequent impact of this early sales experience elicited intriguing responses from both local states in the town, who in different ways sought to mediate the increasingly fraught tensions

between perceptions of community and increasingly outward self-expressions of individualism, represented most strikingly by external modifications to recently purchased dwellings. It argues that the response from Basildon Distract Council disrupts oversimplified narratives of the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism, all the while pointing to the potentially contingent nature of latter (research question 5).

The thesis then broadens to investigate what it demonstrates were intersecting processes of privatisation, residualisation and stigmatisation as they play out across Basildon in **Chapter 4** (research question 2). This is done by examining the shift towards higher densities and experimentation in the early development of the Laindon neighbourhood, in particular, the 'Five Links' housing estate. In identifying the origins, consequences and resident experience of these changes, the chapter examines their complex intersection with other trends occurring at this time, chiefly, the elongated shift from social democracy to neoliberalism, represented most strikingly by the 1970-74 sales, the *Right to Buy* from 1979 onwards and the radically changing priorities of central government throughout this same period (research question 1). It identifies narratives of self-betterment and aspirations to 'get out' that emerged as a result of the disillusionment borne out of the perceived declining status of the town. By situating individualised narratives of self-betterment within these processes of privatisation, residualisation, stigmatisation and an erosion of green space, it argues that whilst personal, individualised narratives of self-improvement and familial betterment arguably serve as evidence of a 'popular individualism', these narratives crucially emerge out of a palpable feeling of *collective loss*.

Building on the discussion of trends identified in the previous two chapters, **Chapter 5** seeks to muddy the notion of a clear, linear 'decline' in community by examining Harlow's experimental Bishopsfield estate. It draws attention to early limitations of the estate's built design and lack of communal amenities which led to the formation of the residents' association, something actively encouraged, assisted and – at times – financially supported – by the HDC. It explores the changing social composition and residualisation of the estate that occurred throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Crucially, it demonstrates how public and private space has consistently been utilised by residents to counter damaging external perceptions of the estate, arguing that despite the retreat of the local state from telling Bishopsfield residents how to play

out their collective lives, various place-based community activities and events have endured or *re-emerged* as a means of contesting stigmatising narratives (research questions 2 and 3).

Moving from the theme of community to that of the state, **Chapter 6** further uses the Bishopsfield estate in Harlow to examine the relationship between residents and the local state as a housing provider and landlord (research question 1). Given that this has taken the form of a development corporation (1961-1980), a local council (c. 1980-present), and a housing association (1994-present), this case study provides rich insight into processes of new town asset transfer and demunicipalisation. It examines the changing relations between residents and the estate's housing providers over time, flagging moments of conflict and cooperation, and situating these changes within the broader context of the shift from social democracy to neoliberalism. It argues that the consequences of demunicipalisation, the fragmentation of estate management and the local council's immiseration – particularly pronounced in its powerlessness in the face of Harlow's ongoing Permitted Development scandal, have shaped the way residents have made sense of the past forty years of political economic transformation, suggesting that local specificities regarding the transition to neoliberalism have produced unique vernacular narratives of decline (research questions 4 and 5). It argues that local vernacular narratives that make sense of this messy shift from social democracy to neoliberalism are intimately connected to the changing nature of the local state in early new towns.

Chapter 2:
Navigating 'balance' and homeownership in Harlow New Town: The state, the market and sales to sitting tenants, 1947-1974

This chapter examines how the Harlow Development Corporation (HDC) navigated the question of balance and the growing pressure to increase owner occupation in the town. It examines the shift of the 'balance' concept from the early postwar idealism of social mixing to an increased emphasis on owner occupation, enacted locally through building Corporation houses for sale – examining the case of Harlow's Upper Park development, and later through sales to sitting tenants – investigating the HDC's 'designated sale areas' policy in the sixties and later the concessionary sales blitz of the early 1970s. It suggests that the HDC was driven by social ideals borne out of the post-war social democratic moment that were constantly tempered, constrained, minimised, and contorted by the central state – the Ministry – which was increasingly driven by economic and ideological imperatives, seeking to inject the market and private enterprise where possible. The chapter suggests that the social democratic period was fraught with tensions, as the local state in Harlow struggled to navigate growing homeownership, the popular aspirations and individual impulses of tenants, and increasing pressure from the central state. As the prevalence of homeownership and the market increased within the town, the ability of Harlow's planners to maintain control and oversight over the spaces they built waned – with an examination of covenants providing insight into how both tenants, homeowners and the local state navigated these changes. A shifting interpretation of the 'balance' principle, from one based on socially mixed integrated housing to an increased emphasis on 'tenure balance' and the statistical aping of a national trend throughout the sixties led to local experimentation in Harlow which testifies to the diversity of new town experience, but subsequently opened the door to the concept being deployed by central government to justify a rapid disposal of public housing and land. In light of this, the findings in this chapter question the temporality of neoliberalism, as the sales drive in both Harlow and Basildon, particularly in the early 1970s, had far more in common with the hasty disposal of assets which came to represent the *Right to Buy* programme throughout the 1980s, than they did with the social idealism that underpinned the pursuit of 'balance' that characterised the early social democratic era.

I: From integration to segregation? 1947-54

This section foregrounds the idealistic postwar principle of 'balance', examining Harlow's local implementation of this ideal through its integrated development and subsequent pressure from the Ministry to abandon this ideal by pushing for greater segregation of classes, which it suggests is motivated by a desire to increase owner occupation and profitability. This foregrounds a theme of the chapter, that pressure from the central state to increase the market mechanisms sits uneasily with the implementation of the new town.

The Reith committee, which was tasked with determining the 'guiding principles' upon which the post-war new towns were to be 'established and developed as *self-contained and balanced communities* for work and living', stated that 'if the community is to be truly balanced, so long as social classes exist, all must be represented in it', envisioning a 'diverse and balanced social composition.'[1] Whilst the history of the 'social mix' concept has been associated with 'social control' under the guise of middle class leadership, the principle was re-articulated in a post-war mood of collective idealism, and was shaped by an egalitarian ethos which underpinned the entire new towns programme.[2] The new town principle of 'social balance' was thus, Aldridge suggests, formulated by Reith and his colleagues in a context of extensive post-war social reform, and under the assumption that class distinctions were eroding in significance, and that social class as a whole was breaking down.[3] In turn, the social mixing of classes was considered 'a desirable end in itself', with the New Town commitment to 'social balance' constituting – in the words of Cresswell and Thomas - 'the best single illustration of the post-war mood of euphoric socialism.'[4] As Cole and Goodchild posit, throughout the early years of British post-war social democracy, 'claims of social mix were infused with the language of national reconstruction and the post-war settlement and the development of universal state provision.'[5] A proximity of habitation between classes, deployed through the medium of the neighbourhood, was believed by the Reith committee to 'encourage social interaction, reduce

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[1] Quoted in Orlans, H. *Stevenage: A Sociological Study of a New Town* (London: Routledge, 1952), p. 84

[2] See: Glass, R. 'Urban Sociology in Great Britain: A Trend Report' in *Current Sociology*, vol. 4, no. 4 (1955), pp. 5-19

[3] Aldridge. *The British New Towns*, p. 32

[4] Cresswell, P. and Thomas, R. 'Employment and population balance' in Evans, H. (ed.) *New Towns: The British Experience* (London: Charles Knight & Co. Ltd., 1972), p. 66, 68

[5] Cole, I. and Goodchild, B. 'Social Mix and the 'Balanced' Community in British Housing Policy – a Tale of Two Epochs' in *GeoJournal,* vol. 51, no. 4 (2000), p. 351

class differences and result in a more socially cohesive society.'[6] As Aneurin Bevan, Minister for Health, which at this time encompassed housing, optimistically proclaimed in 1945:

> We should try to introduce in our modern villages and towns what was always the lovely feature of English and Welsh villages, where the doctor, the grocer, the butcher and the labourer all lived in the same street. I believe that is essential for the full life of a citizen […] to see the living tapestry of a mixed community.[7]

Bevan's rhetoric of balance sought to establish a universal basis for state housing provision, as opposed to residual provision reserved exclusively for those in special need, and so sought to build popular support for various classes living amongst one another and under a 'single, inclusive tenure.'[8] Bevan was staunchly opposed to house building for one particular class, suggesting that the arrangement whereby speculative builders built for one income group and the local authorities for another was 'a wholly evil thing from a civilized point of view, […] a monstrous infliction upon the essential psychological and biological one-ness of the community.'[9] In government, Bevan and Lewis Silkin, the Minister for Town and Country Planning (1945-50), were, according to Foot, on 'excellent terms' and shared 'common aims and interests.'[10] With Silkin declaring during the passing of the new towns legislation that 'different income groups living in the new towns will not be segregated', an imperative which fed into and shaped the remits of new town development corporations, he added, in the subsequently much quoted phrase which encapsulated the idealism of era:

> when they leave to go home I do not want the better off people to go to the right, and the less well-off to go to the left. I want them to ask each other 'are you going my way?'[11]

The principle was partially driven by an attempt to avoid the single-class housing estates of the interwar period, to combat the image of new towns, as Ray Thomas posits, as 'a sort of

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[6] Homer, A, 'Planned Communities: The Social Objectives of the British New Towns, 1946-65', in Black, L. *et al.* (eds) *Consensus or Coercion? The State, the People and Social Cohesion in Post-war Britain* (Cheltenham: New Clarion, 2001), p. 125

[7] Foot, M. *Aneurin Bevan, 1945-1969* (St Albans: Granada Publishing, 1975), p. 76

[8] Cole and Goodchild. 'Social Mix and the 'Balanced' Community in British Housing Policy', p. 353

[9] These, in turn, created what he called 'castrated communities.' Quoted in: Foot. *Aneurin Bevan, 1945-1969*, p. 75

[10] *Ibid*., p. 75

[11] Quoted in: Clapson. *The Blitz Companion*, p. 125

Becontree set in the countryside.'[12] The policy was not without its criticisms, which grew throughout the post-war period. As a frequently quoted passage from Mass Observation's *Enquiry into People's Homes* from 1943 suggested, regarding findings from a working class area of Letchworth:

> People like sociable, but not inquisitive, neighbours of the same "class" as themselves. This last point was one of the sorest in the whole social set up, and there were two sharply contrasted viewpoints. Some people considered that their neighbours belonged to a lower social grade than themselves and were dragging the neighbourhood down; while others disliked what they alleged to be the "snobbishness" of their neighbours.[13]

This is something that has further been identified in subsequent studies of working class housing.[14] Despite an emerging scepticism in town planning policy making circles regarding the ideal, the HDC – enamoured with the post-war social vision of balance - pursued a policy of integrated housing.[15] Having firmly embraced the lofty, albeit elusive, ideal of 'balance', the Corporation – encouraged by its first Social Development Officer Marjorie Green - quickly established a policy which paid special attention to the 'types' of families that were expected to live in certain areas, and drew up percentages of subsidised and non-subsidised housing to enshrine Harlow's 'balance' from the outset.[16] As reflected in the early developments of Marks Hall South and Netteswell, 80% of dwellings were of the original 'subsidy type' standard, known as Standard I, and the remaining 20% of dwellings as the 'better types' ('Standard II'), with 20% of dwellings being flats.[17] Whilst local authorities' restrictions in providing subsidised rented dwellings for the 'working class' was lifted by the 1949 Housing Act,

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[12] Whilst local authorities throughout the interwar period like the LCC had formally adhered to an 'official' policy that was 'adverse to segregation', Andrzej Olechnowicz has suggested that segregation occurred – intentionally or otherwise - through the selection process of tenants; Thomas, R. *London's New Towns: A Study of Self-contained and Balanced Communities* (London: Political & Economic Planning, 1969), pp. 383-4; Olechnowicz, A. *Working-class Housing in England Between the Wars: The Becontree Estate* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 125

[13] Mass-Observation. *An Enquiry into People's Homes* (London: John Murray/Advertising Service Guild, 1943), p. 207

[14] For instance, see: Olechnowicz. *Working-Class Housing in England between the Wars*; Orlans. *Stevenage*

[15] For this growing scepticism, see: Osborn, F. J. *Green-Belt Cities* (London: 1946), pp. 92-3

[16] Manley, C. 'New town urbanity: theory and practice in housing design at Harlow', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow (2014), pp. 164-5

[17] HLG 91/417 New Towns Act 1946 Section 3(1) proposal: Mark Hall and Netteswell neighbourhoods development (March 1950), pp. 6-7

allowing them to build for a wider range of tenants, the following year the Ministry of Health blocked the HDC's proposals to construct larger houses of over 1,500sq ft. within 'integrated areas.'[18] However, this was subsequently resolved in the HDC's favour, providing such dwellings 'do not exceed a proportion of the total [housing] programme by 5%', with all dwellings over 1,500sq ft. requiring Ministerial approval.[19] Thus, a policy of integrated development by the HDC was undertaken, as one of the more idealistic NTDCs of the early new towns.

Throughout the early 1950s, there were emerging divisions over how the new towns should navigate the question of attracting 'higher classes' to the town in fulfilment of the 'balance' principle.[20] Whilst sections of the newly formed Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) held that Corporations should be allowed to 'experiment' locally, providing scope for the HDC to pursue a policy of integrated development, they had opponents that 'constantly opposed proposals containing pockets of better class houses' within 'mixed neighbourhoods.'[21] However, as proponents of greater segregation suggested in 1955, 'such an outlook was difficult to carry conviction in the early days because of a feeling within the Department itself that some proof was required that our ideas were not outmoded on account of changes in the outlook amongst people resulting from the war';[22] a reference to the lasting impact of the 'People's War' rhetoric of 'fair shares' and 'equality of sacrifice', and the ensuing social idealism of the 'People's Peace'[23] which sat uneasily with the idea of spatially segregating new town migrants on the grounds of class. Throughout the 1950s, however, such idealism was gradually eroded.

Correspondence between the Ministry and HDC suggest that this point of contention came to a head when the Ministry began increasing pressure on the Corporation to increase owner occupation. In Harlow, the General Manager optimistically identified in 1952 that 'there is

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[18] HLG 90/310 Correspondence from Coles, G. R. MTCP to Cauthery, H. W. Ministry of Health (28 April 1950)

[19] HLG 90/310 Correspondence from Cauthery, H. W. Ministry of Health to Coles, G. R. MTCP (5 May 1950)

[20] Attempts at establishing clarity over the vagueness of 'better-class housing' resulted in some Corporations described such as 'houses of types which prior to the Housing Act 1949 would not have qualified as working class dwellings.' See use by Hemel Hempstead Development Corporation in HLG 90/310/6

[21] HLG 90/310 Correspondence from Oswald (HQ Estates) to Niven, J. R. 'Better class-housing/private development areas' (February 1955)

[22] *Ibid*.

[23] Brooke, S. 'Class and gender' in Carnevali, F. and Strange, J. M. (eds) *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 48

evidence of a reluctance to buy now that the pre-war prejudice against subsidised houses has almost gone.'[24] In other words, the HDC felt that higher class tenants in Harlow were content with renting, and did not feel a need to purchase the house in which they were living. As notes from an MHLG circular the following year stated:

> It must be accepted that there are many at the present day who live in local authority housing or other rented accommodation whose net family incomes would permit them to buy if they so chose – but in many cases they do not so choose, they prefer to rent.[25]

The pressure that came from within the Ministry, which increasingly attacked the Corporation's insistence on pursuing integrated housing development occurred amidst a push for greater owner occupation. Civil servants in the Ministry increasingly attacked what they scolded as 'the hollow theory of mixed development' and 'the stupidity of the Harlow policy.'[26] What was sought, instead of the 'pepper-potting' of better class housing within standard subsidised housing, was the 'creation of districts of high value.'[27] Elaborating upon this shift within policy making circles, MHLG correspondence reads:

> If the Department would now be prepared to support a policy of districts as against pepper-potting, I think something more than acquiescence is called for because in the absence of some positive action we may eventually find that the best land for a high value area has been progressively eaten into by Standard I development, with the result that there may remain, within the designated areas of some New Towns, insufficient land for the creation and stabilization of high values.[28]

As a member of the Regional Estate Officers meeting in 1954 suggested: 'As most of the housing in New Towns was non-profit making it had been hoped that middle and higher income houses would show a reasonable developer's profit.'[29] If such properties were to be

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[24] HLG 90/310 HDC's General Manager. 'Houses to be built under License' to Barber, G. L., MHLG (21 January 1952)

[25] HLG 90/310 Oswald and Plamping, MHLG. 'Draft notes on development of better class housing estates in new towns' (1953), p. 2

[26] HLG 90/310 Correspondence from Oswald (HQ Estates) to Niven, J. R. 'Better class-housing/private development areas' (February 1955)

[27] *Ibid*.

[28] *Ibid*.

[29] HLG 90/130 Minutes of the Regional Estate Officers' 82nd meeting, Whitehall (14 December 1954), p. 3

interspersed with subsidised rented housing, their ability to turn a profit on sale would be put in doubt, hence the Ministry' drive for 'districts of high value.' This corresponds to Ikke Surge's study of decision making in Basildon, which has suggested pressure from the Treasury came in response to the 'relatively unprofitable' nature of the BDC's subsidised dwellings, who in turn promoted both rent increases and owner occupation.[30] Surge states that 'the treasury's direct and indirect requests for profitability pressured the BDC, and resulted in changes in housing policy.'[31] This occurred in Harlow as well. Thus, the way class is written into the early development of the new towns is underpinned by centrally enforced pressure for owner occupation and profitability, which appear to have had more driving factors that merely attaining a 'balanced community.' Minutes from a meeting of the regional estates officer in 1954, show the representative from the Ministry highlighting this concern:

> an impression widely held was that New Towns were large scale Council housing estates, an inspection sometimes strengthened this view. If estate agents could with conviction tell clients about proposed high value development areas in New Towns, success might be on the way, but the high value areas would have to be zoned and made secure against encroachment. This might materially assist mortgage arrangements.[32]

What was suggested was 'carefully selected in locations which provided special visual amenity and tended to be segregated by such features as woodland or topography.'[33] Such areas, one Estates Officer suggested, 'should be large enough [for better class residents] to impose their tone on the neighbourhood, rather than the reverse.'[34] Other attendees, however, 'thought that by good design small blocks of sites could be provided which were part of neighbourhoods and yet would retain high value. And even if this method did not earn maximum possible site value, it was preferable for the town as a whole than segregation on the lines suggested.'[35] Pressure to maximise site values later led to talks of creating 'prestige areas' or 'snob areas', which whilst something eschewed by the HDC, will be explored in chapter 3 when the thesis turns its attention to Basildon.

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[30] Suge, I. 'The Nature of Decision-making in the Post-war New Towns policy: The Case of Basildon, c. 1945-70', in *Twentieth Century British History,* vol. 16, no. 2 (2005), p. 156

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 154

[32] HLG 90/130 Minutes of the Regional Estate Officers' 82nd meeting, Whitehall (14 December 1954), p. 3

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 4

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 4

[35] *Ibid.* pp. 4-5

MHLG correspondence from 1955 complained that:

> Harlow has consistently refused to heed advice on this subject and as a result have wasted about four years of planning and incurred a lot of capital expenditure on houses which may not only prove to be a financial liability, but also unlikely to attract permanently the type of person for whom they were intended.[36]

What this indicates is that the social democratic idealism of the HDC and the economic and ideological priorities of the Ministry were in tension with one another from very early on. This is a theme that re-emerges throughout both the chapter and the thesis, and which illustrates both a degree of fragility to the social democratic settlement and its uneasy relationship to the market. As Alexander McCowan, architect for HDC said in an interview in 1982, 'there was a general idealism after the war, the New Towns were born out of it, and the Harlow Development Corporation reflected this idealism *for the whole of its existence*.'[37] This idealism of the HDC increasingly came into conflict with the economic and ideological priorities of the central state. These pressures can be linked to the findings of Peter Weiler, who has argued there was no 'postwar consensus' between Labour and the Conservatives on housing due to the latter's embrace of the market, indeed: 'it is striking how much of what is often seen as a unique Thatcherite view of housing had been worked out by the mid-1950s', and this shaped Harlow's development very early on in the town's life.[38]

Not only had the Corporation come under pressure from the Ministry, but also from the town's local Conservative MP for Epping (1951-64) Graeme Finlay, who argued that:

> The "integration" policy of the Corporation has been theoretical rather than practical. Originally the social idea was that New Harlow should have no "east end" and no "west end". This may be all right in theory, but in practice it simply does not work. […] As one constituent expresses it: "People prepared to pay

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[36] HLG 90/310 Correspondence from Oswald (HQ Estates) to Niven, J. R. 'Better class-housing/private development areas' (February 1955)

[37] ERO SA 22/1356/1 Interview with HDC architect, Alexander McCowan (1982)

[38] Weiler, P. 'The Rise and Fall of the The Conservatives' 'Grand Design for Housing', 1951-64' in *Contemporary British History*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2000), pp. 143-44. For how this played out in Crawley, see: Simmonds, A. G. V. 'Conservative governments and the new town housing question in the 1950s' in *Urban History*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2001), pp. 65-83

£250 per annum for their house do not want to live virtually on the doorstep of a Council Estate."[39]

Finlay stressed the need for 'attractive designs', 'good sites', and 'publicity in the right quarters', criticising the Corporation's lack of success in increasing owner occupation in the area. As the MP for Epping argued: 'The styles of architecture offered by the New Town Development Corporation in their booklet "Homes in Harlow" are all of a highly modernistic type', with the intending purchaser preferring 'something in a more traditional or orthodox style.'[40] He also criticised the Corporation's advertising policy for being 'almost purely local', pointing to efforts in Bracknell New Town, whose NTDC had advertised nationally in both *The Times* and *Country Life*.[41] This was to become an increasingly common attack upon the HDC, and stood in tension with their imperatives, remaining committed throughout the entirety of its life to the principle of self-containment. As the HDC boasted in defence of its policy, 'Harlow has proportionately fewer commuters than most of the other new towns, and we have deliberately avoided much national advertisement in order to restrict this type of applicant.'[42]

Despite somewhat retreating from integrated development (albeit not the extent of other Corporations), the General Manager of the HDC later defended the corporation's legacy of mixed development against criticism from central government:

> There has been talk that the first group of 'integrated' housing has failed in new towns, but I think this is unfair. Some areas are more popular than others, as one would expect, and turnover is higher than that of ordinary standard houses but, on the whole, I think they are a success within their limitations.[43]

The HDC's early policy of intimately mixed, integrated development became unsustainable when the 'better class' houses *to let* were pressed by the Ministry to become 'better class' houses *for sale*. In Harlow, this economic imperative that emerged within the Ministry, diluted the social idealism of 'balance' principle and its local implementation from early on, and continued to do so in new forms in the coming decades.

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[39] Quoted in ERO A6306/390 Letter from Heady, H., MHLG to Adams, W. E., HDC (20 December 1954)
[40] *Ibid*.
[41] *Ibid*.
[42] ERO A6306/390 Adams, E. General Manager of HDC. Letter entitled 'Middle Class Development' to Heady, H. MHLG (29 December 1954)
[43] HLG 116/70/10 Hyde-Harvey, B. General Manager of HDC. Letter entitled 'Better-class Housing' to Rogerson, J., MHLG (3 February 1960)

By October 1954, in response to this pressure, the Corporation acknowledged the preference of 'middle class families […] to be somewhat isolated and to have big gardens or to have a large number of their neighbours drawn from similar income groups', with a local newspaper article on the matter adding that 'higher-rented houses are now being placed on the edge of each neighbourhood as a concession to such feeling.'[44] Retaining its idealism, the HDC hoped that this would 'not lead to rigid social barriers which would be detrimental to the development of the town as a whole.'[45] The Ministry, however, remained unimpressed with the Corporation's 'policy of concession', commenting that:

> we can in no way accept this policy of concession in regard to better class housing and private development as expounded by the Corporation, we are still of the opinion that any such compromise is doomed to failure.[46]

The pressure led to the HDC further modifying their policy of integrated housing, despite persisting in not adopting more rigid forms of 'segregation' that occurred in other early new towns (and further explored in the subsequent chapter through the experience of Basildon). As the General Manager conceded in December 1954:

> We have indeed changed our policy on integration […]. While we are most anxious to avoid creating "East" and "West" ends we agree that our original policy of mixing small pockets of 6-10 middle class houses with large areas of cheaper houses has certainly deterred people from buying these homes. In future we shall collect together our middle class families and set their houses in larger groups of 50-100.[47]

The HDC reviewed its existing plans and modified upcoming developments in order to – in the words of the General Manager – '[take] out a number of small groups which we considered too isolated from similar types of family and too close to working class housing.'[48]

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[44] HLG 90/310 Unnamed article from *Harlow Star* (14 October 1954)

[45] Quoted in *Ibid*.

[46] HLG 90/130 Westcott, J. G. (HQ Estates Division) to Sylvester-Evans. 'Re: Harlow – press report. Better class housing' (20 October 1954)

[47] ERO A6306/390 Adams, E., General Manager of HDC. Letter entitled 'Middle Class Development' to Heady, H., MHLG (29 December 1954)

[48] *Ibid*.

II: Houses for sale

In 1954, in response to this pressure from central government, the HDC decided to re-plan Upper Park (Area 34) 'entirely as middle class development and to offer all the houses for sale.'[49] Built between 1955 and 1957 and located in Little Parndon, Upper Park became the Corporation's first 'homes for sale' scheme. As the General Manager boasted:

> The scheme includes about 70 houses of a wide variety of types and is set in an attractive area with lots of tree. While the Standard I housing areas are nearby, Area 34 should make an attractive homogeneous unit and we hope pleasantly "exclusive."[50]

This sense of 'exclusivity' was something encouraged by the MHLG in its bid to further the success of 'better class developments' and owner occupation in new towns. The General Manager accepted prior criticism of the 'modernistic' nature of the HDC's housing design, and admitted that the Corporation had 'completely redesigned the house-types of Area 34, so as to give them a less austere exterior', subjecting the front elevation to 'softening.'[51] However, in an 'all out effort to compete with the speculative builder on more equal terms', the HDC 'reduced the size, increased the proportion of cheaper houses and cut out the frills' in a bid to make the sales price 'more competitive' with private development outside the designated area.[52] The General Manager boasted that the HDC was to 'make an all out effort to sell the houses in Area 34', and prepared brochures for this purpose, adding – and indicating a shift in policy - that:

> Naturally we hope that most of the new householders will work locally but we are prepared to take up to 50% who work outside the town in order to attract some of the right kind of people.[53]

This prioritisation of attracting 'the right kind of people', i.e. middle classes homeowners, in pursuit of 'balance', over the adjoining new town principle of self-containment, illustrates the

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[49] ERO A6306/390 HDC. 'Houses for Sale – Upper Park' (29 June 1959)

[50] ERO A6306/390 Adams, E., General Manager of HDC. Letter entitled 'Middle Class Development' to Heady, H., MHLG (29 December 1954)

[51] *Ibid*.

[52] The HDC calculated in 1956 that it cost them £3,000 to build a house which a speculative builder could build for £2,500 outside the Designated Area. *Ibid*.

[53] *Ibid*.

largely ubiquitous prioritisation of the former principle over the latter. Whilst a loss of 'self-containment' was regrettable, balance was increasingly prioritised.

Records show that whilst there was 'considerable interest' in the scheme during its construction, the number of reservations made during this period was 'disappointingly low.'[54] As a HDC report from later on in the decade recalled, the corporation had struggled to sell houses on the new Upper Park development:

> Houses became available for selling in January 1957 and were all complete by October 1957. In spite of an extensive sales campaign, including the use of show houses, houses sold very slowly and by March 1958 only fifty houses had been sold, and it was not until May 1959 that all were finally disposed of, the last eighteen with the inducement of a 100% mortgage.[55]

These struggling sales in Upper Park closely parallel the experience in Basildon with the BDC's construction of the Castle Mayne estate in Lee Chapel South at a similar time (examined in the following chapter). Stevenage also similarly reported difficulty finding purchasers on its for-sale developments during this same period.[56] What had been shown from the experience of Upper Park, however, was that – sold at a 6% profit – building homes for sale provided better returns for the Corporation than building for subsidised rent, once subsidies were factored in.[57] The Corporation calculated annual savings on subsidies of £2,269, representing a capital sum of around £40,000. On top of this, the corporation had provided mortgages in connection with 69 of the 90 dwellings, which guaranteed a profit of around £130 per annum.[58] What's more is the Upper Park development functioned as a learning curve for the HDC, not just in terms of the potential profitability of building homes for sale, but also in regards to the local aspirations and expectations of the new town's more affluent residents, as the Corporation was particularly responsive to feedback from these groups, shaping both its future 'for sale' developments *and* the nature with which it later disposed rented dwellings to sitting tenants.

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[54] ERO A6306/390 Memorandum entitled 'Upper Park' from HDC's Housing Manager, Jackson, C. A. to General Manager (12 November 1956)

[55] ERO A6306/390 HDC. 'Houses for Sale – Upper Park' (29 June 1959)

[56] ERO A6306/390 HDC. Report of 'Encouragement of owner occupation' meeting, General Manager's Committee (held on 19 October 1956)

[57] ERO A6306/390 HDC. 'Houses for Sale – Upper Park' (29 June 1959)

[58] *Ibid.*

Figure 2.1 - Semi-detached housing in Upper Park. Source: JR James Archive, University of Sheffield

The Housing Manager had sought to establish the 'popularity of the various types' of dwellings in Upper Park from prospective homeowners, and compiled a report based on the opinions 'expressed by a number of visitors to the Show House', of which there was approximately 600.[59] The report found that 'terraced houses are generally disliked', and that a 'separate living room/dining room' was generally favoured.[60] Leasehold purchase was also unpopular in light of the offer of freehold by speculative developers outside the designated area, and as well as this, it was found that 'the clause permitting the alteration of the external colour schemes only to the approval of the Corporation is disliked.'[61]

The report also found that 'garden sizes are too small in spite of the lower density', and a common complaint was that 'too much space has been used up on 'public areas.'' Areas of Upper Park that adhered to the Radburn principle of separate garage blocks for the development's terraced houses were also considered 'unnecessary', with prospective purchasers preferring to erect their own garage themselves in their back garden where possible.[62] There was also a desire for greater privacy, with feedback suggesting that a greater

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[59] ERO A6306/390 Memorandum entitled 'Upper Park' from HDC's Housing Manager, Jackson, C. A. to General Manager (12 November 1956)

[60] *Ibid*.

[61] *Ibid*.

[62] *Ibid*.

degree of screening should be included between the rear of the houses. These findings sat uneasily with the Corporation's architectural and aesthetic preferences, but – due to pressure from the Ministry for greater owner occupation - would go on to shape and inform the housing programme of the HDC.

This feedback relating to Upper Park is significant because it occurred amidst a shift in Corporation policy, away from 'integration' of Standard I and Standard II houses to increased 'segregation' (to use the word of other NTDCs and MHLG planners). As a consequence, Upper park became a sort of prototype for the new town's more secluded Standard II developments. As internal HDC correspondence shows:

> When the Corporation changed its policy about the grouping of middle class houses, the emphasis changed from houses to let to houses for sale. At that time all Standard II housing was reviewed, a number of small groups of houses were deleted and instead entire areas (e.g. Area 63) were earmarked for development on the lines of Upper Park.[63]

III: Restrictive covenants: Paternalism in crisis?

The sale of houses in Upper Park was to throw up new problems for the Corporation, particularly in regards to restrictive covenants, which increasingly cropped up amidst sales to sitting tenants throughout the sixties and early seventies. An examination of this provides rich insight into the complex intersection between declining deference and rising individualism, as well as the tensions between the 'individualist and collectivist impulses' of early new towns like Harlow, which – as Lawrence suggests - 'rested on a fragile new equilibrium', as expectations of 'betterment' risked conflicting with 'the still strongly paternalist instincts of post-war welfare politics.'[64]

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[63] ERO A6306/390 Memorandum from Layton, E., Senior Executive to General Manager entitled 'Houses for sale and houses to let: middle income groups' (11 March 1957)

[64] Lawrence. *Me, Me, Me?,* p. 101; see also: Sutcliffe-Braithwaite. *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England*; Lawrence, J. 'Paternalism, class and the British path to modernity' in Gunn, S. and Vernon, J. (eds) *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 147-164

As shown above, leasehold purchase was unpopular with prospective purchasers – particularly in regard to the offer of freehold by speculative house-builders outside the town's designated area, and restrictions on external colour schemes was particularly disliked.[65] Such preferences gave rise to tensions within the Corporation over the merits and drawbacks of both freehold and leasehold, and the accompanying use of restrictive covenants. Whilst leasehold enabled the corporation to exercise greater degrees of control through restrictive covenants, freehold bolstered selling prices and was increasingly pushed by central government. This points to a tension between the desire of the individual house purchaser to do as they pleased with their property, and the corporation's inherent propensity to want to retain both visual and aesthetic oversight in regards to layouts, designs and the homogeneity of areas, and future choice over the inhabitants of sold dwellings.

The 'strong market resistance to leasehold purchase' in Upper Park led the Corporation – in pursuit of owner occupation – to allow freehold sales.[66] But the corporation explored the option of freehold disposal providing 'appropriate protective covenants be inserted in any freehold conveyance', owing to a 'certain resistance to leasehold purchase' from would-be purchasers, rooted in the higher re-sale value of freehold.[67] Many Corporations believed that 'leasehold sales would enable them to retain some control over the appearance of a neighbourhood.'[68] Whilst the HDC preferred leasehold sales, there were anxieties over its ability to act on covenants:

> But in practice enforcement of leasehold covenants was not always as easy as might appear on paper, particularly for a body not unconcerned with public relations.[69]

The Corporation deliberated over the 'moral effect' of the leasehold system and the use of lease covenants, for giving 'an impression of greater control by the landlord.'[70]

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[65] ERO A6306/390 Memorandum entitled 'Upper Park' from HDC's Housing Manager, Jackson, C. A. to General Manager (12 November 1956)

[66] ERO A6306/390 Extract from Chief Officers notes from Corporation meeting, entitled 'Disposing of housing freehold' (9 February 1966)

[67] ERO A6306/390 HDC board minutes (5 December 1956)

[68] ERO A6306/390 HDC notes from General Managers' Committee (21 June 1963)

[69] ERO A6306/390 Extract from Chief Officers notes from Corporation meeting, entitled 'Disposing of housing freehold' (9 February 1966)

[70] ERO A6306/390 HDC memo from Chief Solicitor to Commercial Estates Officer entitled 'Houses for sale' (4 March 1966)

The visual harmony of neighbourhoods was something that possessed the HDC as house sales weakened and fragmented their control over areas. In 1964, the board laboured over solutions to this problem, and both the Liaison and Housing Officers were tasked with reporting back 'possible means of inducing house owners to maintain the exteriors of their homes in harmonious colours.'[71] The HDC lamented the state of houses sold in Westfield, decrying that 'the damage has already been done' in regards to widespread individual re-paintings of homes in the area: 'The general appearance is terrible.'[72] However, the HDC felt that not only would there be 'practical difficulties of enforcing legal covenants', but there was also 'the risk of adverse publicity if a dictatorial line were taken in a matter of subjective opinion', and it was accepted that 'the best, though possibly not a strong, hope lay in education and perhaps some means of incentive.'[73] The Board examined the prospects of contributing to the cost of Corporation-approved colours for external application, as well as providing materials themselves.[74] The Board even went as far to explore the option of inducing Harlow Technical College to 'run evening classes in home decoration incorporating aesthetics.'[75] The Corporation, as its meeting notes suggest, 'preferred positive incentives to negative covenants.' This did not stop the Corporation from attempting to maintain homogeneity of neighbourhoods. In 1968, guidance for house purchasers relating to maintaining homogeneity and appearance were stern, illuminating the Corporation's concern:

> The Corporation will require you to maintain the present open front policy, which precludes you from erecting fences, walls etc. around the front garden area. In an effort to maintain a good appearance in areas for sale the Corporation will require you not to make any alteration to the colour or quality of external paintwork. The Corporation's prior consent is necessary before any external addition or alteration is made to the property.[76]

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[71] ERO A6306/390 HDC Chief Officer's notes from matters arising out of the meeting of the Corporation (11 February 1964)

[72] ERO A6306/390 Memo from HDC Housing Manager, Jackson, C. A. to Administrative Officer entitled 'Houses sold in Westfield (7 May 1964)

[73] ERO A6306/390 HDC board minutes (14 June 1964)

[74] ERO A6306/390 Chief Officer's notes from matters arising out of the meeting of the Corporation (11 February 1964)

[75] *Ibid*.

[76] ERO A6306/390 HDC's Housing Department. 'General notes for the guidance of house purchasers' (June 1968)

The Corporation were also anxious that new owner occupiers of previously rented Standard I houses 'would park cars on the open front gardens', believing that 'preventative action and control may be difficult.'[77]

There was concern over maintaining the 'aesthetic standards of neighbourhoods' following rapid house sales in the early seventies.[78] By April 1971, the Corporation feared that 'with the increasing number of houses being sold, enforcement of restrictive covenants would become progressively more difficult.' The Corporation's solicitors expressed 'grave doubt' at both the desirability of and ability for the HDC to pursue new homeowners over cases of non-compliance regarding 'colours of house paint' and 'unauthorised extensions.'[79] There was also the growing 'unauthorised parking of cars on front gardens and paths of properties.' This occurred with both renters and new homeowners, but the Corporation avoided taking a 'strong line' with persistent offenders for reasons of public relations.[80] As a consequence, the Housing Manager arranged for periodic inspections by Area Office staff of neighbourhoods with concentrations of houses sold in order to detect offenders, but acknowledged little more could be done than to write letters these people 'pointing out the purpose of the covenants.'[81] This hang up with appearing authoritarian had shaped the HDC's ease in its approach to the town's development and policy since its inception. In a meeting of the HDC board in September 1948, when it was still based in central London, a discussion ensued on the question of private enterprise housing in the town. As the minutes read:

> Mr Newton said that the Corporation might be looked upon as totalitarian if it did not allow private enterprise.

> Lady Russell disagreed on the subject of totalitarianism. All the finest examples of town planning in history had been the result of dictatorial powers held by someone – in that way they had achieved homogeneity.[82]

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[77] ERO A6306/390 Memorandum from Housing Manager to General Manager entitled 'Report on sale of houses' (1 April 1966)

[78] ERO A6306/390 HDC's planning board (19 April 1971)

[79] *Ibid*.

[80] *Ibid*.

[81] *Ibid*.

[82] ERO A/TH 1/1/1/1A Minutes of the Board of the HDC. Notes of meeting on leasing and building policy, held at No. 13 Grosvenor Square (14 September 1948)

This brief exchange illuminated the bullish, authoritarian confidence for which Britain's NTDCs earned a reputation – alongside the lesser known or documented self-consciousness or even anxiety of this emergent reputation, a hang up which was to characterise the HDC's decision-making in the realm of housing throughout its existence. As demonstrated, this was characterised in part by a concern for public relations vis-à-vis the increasing willingness for tenants and purchasers to breach rules and covenant requirements. It also speaks to a contradiction at the heart of the project. The drive to maintain greater control, to fulfil certain imperatives and principles, aesthetic and architectural standards sat uneasily with a desire to appease a certain subsection of the town's residents, for which it was considerably more responsive and amenable. This was rooted in the HDC's commitment to 'balance' through attracting higher income groups to the town and retaining their presence, which gave a certain degree of leverage to more affluent residents in the realm of housing.

Whilst a growth in owner occupation in the town strengthened these tensions, it did not create them. Harlow's tenants had always made alterations to their homes. The determination to assert greater personal autonomy should not be confined to the experience of home ownership. HDC architect, Alexander McCowan, in a 1982 interview, drew attention to the popularity of DIY and the common occurrence of the 'the *Do It Yourself* handy man who put up all these sorts of shelves and divisioning walls and changed doors, all that sort of stuff inside, despite the fact they were rented housing, […] right from the beginning people did things for themselves.' Had they been allowed to?

> within reason […] a lot of them did it surreptitiously, changed the colour of tiles, boxed in bits here and there, and all sorts of things. When its done its done. But I think generally architects, especially if you're working in mass housing, you just have to accept that sort of thing goes on, you've got to try and design a platform, or a basic framework in which people *can* do their own thing. They're going to do it anyway, unless you've got a stern authority that's going to prevent them.[83]

What changed with owner occupation was a shift in alterations from within the walls of the home to the outside of it. This, McCowan subsequently adds, 'manifested itself very much indeed after the period when they started selling houses to sitting tenants, you can pick out all

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[83] ERO SA 22/1356/1 Interview with HDC architect, Alexander McCowan (1982)

round the town the houses that have been purchased because the first thing the person does is change their front door, the colours, some mock Georgian door, small panes in the window, what do you call it? Maulin glass? And all these sorts of things.'[84] Such alterations, McCowan suggests, had less to do with design preferences and more to do with the fact that 'they're expressions of pride of ownership.'[85] This theme was reiterated by Jim Desormeaux, who chaired of the Estates Committee:

> Now one of the oddities of human nature is that when people become property owners, they do want to enclose it, and so there is a constant struggle between the open plan and the desire of the owner occupier to mark out his particular plot and say: 'This is mine, keep off!' or 'keep out![86]

All of this came down to 'building covenants in the town, one of our greatest problems in the town is to know what to do about this.'[87]

House sales by the HDC included a pre-emption clause where if purchaser decided to re-sell within the first 21 years of ownership, they were required to offer the property for sale to the Corporation 'in the first instance.'[88] This was in order to enable the Corporation to maintain control over the inhabitants of the town, to ensure self-containment, meet its overspill function and ensure houses were reallocated to incoming employees. Since the fifties, the Corporation's policy on re-sales had been attacked for being 'too restrictive.'[89] In 1967, the Ministry insisted that sitting tenants subject to pre-emption clauses should be offered a concessionary price, recommending 20% off market value. [90] It also reduced the duration of the pre-emption clause being made 'to the expected duration of the town's overspill function', a restriction which from the HDC records was accompanied by a Corporation staffer's handwritten scribble: 'why?!'[91]

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[84] *Ibid*.

[85] *Ibid*.

[86] ERO SA 22/1352/1 Interview with Mr Jim Desormeaux, Harlow councillor and chair of the Estates Committee (1982)

[87] *Ibid.*

[88] ERO A6306/390 HDC's Housing Department. 'General notes for the guidance of house purchasers' (June 1968)

[89] Quoted in ERO A6306/390 Letter from H. Heady esq, CBE. MHLG to W E Adams, esq, CBE, Harlow Development Corporation (20 December 1954)

[90] ERO A6306/390 'Appendix to draft Circular: 'Selling Prices and Disposal Terms: Sales with Vacant Possession' / MHLG circular, Owner Occupation in New Towns, circular no. 43 (16 August 1967)

[91] *Ibid*.

This points to a tension between the Ministry and the HDC over the future of the town. For the MHLG, the new town's oversight and objectives were temporary until the town's development ended and Harlow became a 'normal' town, but for the HDC, these were universal points of reference for a 'successful' town. In 1971, the Ministry sought for re-sales to be entirely 'unimpeded by a right of pre-emption by corporations.'[92] The Department of Environment's New Town Division attacked the 'thinking behind' the HDC's pre-emption clauses in its house sales, suggesting that it 'seems to envisage an indefinite continuation of the situation whereby nearly all the housing stock in the town – even that which is owner-occupied – is at least to some extent under the Corporation's control, with the object of ensuring that the town is as far as possible "self-contained".'[93] This affirms the social idealism and propensity to retain control over their built environment that sat uneasily with greater market involvement in the new towns, to which this section has sought to show attention. The Ministry pointed to the Second and Third generation of new towns as having been built with greater private involvement and higher targets of owner occupation, where 'this very tight control over who shall live in the town will never be operative, and in the first generation new towns, which must someday lose their "new" label and become just "towns", it seems neither realistic nor desirable to think of this degree of control continuing for ever.'[94]

IV: Experimenting with sales to sitting tenants, 1960-70

> It was considered that the MHLG would have to leave it very largely to each Corporation to tackle its own problems in its own way according to local considerations, so long as Corporations observed certain very broad principles which Government would have to lay down.[95]

Whilst the Ministry forced the Corporation into abandoning its policy of intimately integrated development throughout the early 1950s, when it came to increasing the proportion of owner occupation in the town, there appears to have been a degree of relative autonomy and scope for Corporations to approach the question locally and experiment, as the above report from the

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[92] ERO A6306/390 Marlow, J. to Hyde-Harvey, B. 'Sale of rented houses' (1 January 1971)
[93] *Ibid*.
[94] *Ibid*.
[95] ERO A6306/390 HDC. Report of 'Encouragement of owner occupation' meeting, General Manager's Committee (held on 19 October 1956)

HDC's encouragement of owner occupation meeting in 1956 suggests. As a strategy for achieving 'balance', sales to sitting tenants emerged as a policy in Harlow from as early as the fifties, although it wasn't until the sixties that there was the experimentation and refinement of a particular strategy that set Harlow against the other early new towns. David Truesdale has also explored sales to sitting tenants in Stevenage.[96] Some Tory councils engaged in council house sales prior to the 1980 Housing Act which made sales compulsory. The phenomenon of pre-*Right to Buy* house sales to sitting tenants has been brought to light by the work of Ben Jones in Brighton, Keith Bassett in Bristol, and Alan Murie and Ray Forrest in Birmingham.[97] Aled Davies has also drawn attention to policy origins of the *Right to Buy,* identifying the embryonic nature of a policy that had festered for decades in Conservative Party subcultures and found sporadic expressions in certain aforementioned Tory-led local authorities decades prior to the 1980 legislation.[98]

In Harlow, a 'lack of response to efforts to sell to sitting tenants' throughout the fifties led to the Corporation adopting a new strategy. In April 1960, a decision was taken by the Board to adopt a strategy of sales to sitting tenants based on the designation of carefully selected 'areas of owner occupation.'[99] Once an existing rented area was chosen for owner occupation, the Corporation was to 'launch a special sales drive among the tenants there.'[100] Whilst the Corporation had sold – albeit few - rented dwellings to sitting tenants in the past, an 'intense drive was now to be directed in selected areas', with the Board suggesting that one officer be nominated to 'act as salesman, if necessary devoting all his time to the scheme' – a practice inspired by the private speculative development the Board had observed outside the designated area.[101] A significant feature of this drive was that 'any houses falling vacant in those areas

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[96] Truesdale, D. 'House sales and owner occupation in Stevenage New Town', in *Policy and Politics*, vol. 8 (1980), pp. 318-23

[97] Jones, B. 'Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization: The Practices and Politics of Council Housing in Mid-twentieth-century England' in *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2010) pp. 510-539; Bassett, K. 'Council House Sales in Bristol 1960-1979' in *Policy & Politics*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1980), pp. 324-333; Murie, A. and Forrest, R. *Social Segregation, Housing Need and the Sale of Council Houses* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1976)

[98] Davies, A. ''Right to Buy': The Development of a Conservative Housing Policy, 1945-1980' in *Contemporary British History,* vol. 27, no. 4 (2013), pp. 421-44

[99] ERO A6306/390 HDC board minutes – 'Sale of houses' extract (5 April 1960)

[100] *Ibid.*

[101] ERO A6306/390 Extract from Chief Officers notes of matters arising out of the meeting of the Corporation (5 April 1960)

would not be re-let but offered for sale only.'[102] This resembled the Conservative-controlled council in Brighton's effort at council house sales throughout the fifties and sixties, which designated sale areas and like the HDC, in some instances, re-let dwellings on these estates as they became vacant only to tenants wishing to buy, which in turn – as Jones shows – contributed to a process of residualisation.[103] 'In selecting areas at Harlow', a civil servant suggested to NTDCs across Britain in 1970, 'regard has been paid to the average level of tenants' income in different areas, and to the popularity of areas as measured by the rate of removals.'[104] In other words, less popular, more transient areas were unavailable for purchase, whilst more stable 'popular' areas were. The corporation discussed the possibility of 'refusing to sell houses to persons who were eligible but thought unlikely to make good neighbours', but felt there were difficulties with such implementation – although 'any really doubtful cases' were to be referred to the General Manager.[105] This is evidence of the local state governing the parameters of 'respectability' of areas and the 'acceptability' of certain 'types' of people. In another meeting, board members drew attention to 'certain nuisance risks', and decided that a 'history of rent arrears would disqualify an applicant for a [Corporation] mortgage.'[106] It was decided that 'the campaign should be devoted solely to selected areas', and in the face of enquiries from tenants in non-selected areas, the Housing Manager was under instruction to 'do everything possible to divert sales to the selected areas.'[107] In a paper circulated by the MHLG in 1970 on the sale of corporation houses to sitting tenants, explicitly informed by the experience in Harlow, J. Marlow outlined the rationale and benefits of the 'selected areas' policy. Alongside 'the desire not to flood the market':

> One of the factors that may have kept down the number of sales is a reluctance to be the first, and perhaps the only, owner-occupier in a sea of rented houses. But a small carefully chosen area may produce a reasonably high proportion of people willing to buy, and if this is coupled with a policy of selling any houses that fall vacant within that area, a high level of owner-occupation can be built up over a few years. Once the character of the area begins to change in this way,

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[102] ERO A6306/390 HDC minutes – 'Sale of houses' extract (5 April 1960)
[103] Jones. 'Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization', pp. 531-2
[104] HLG 116/501 Marlow, J. 'New towns – sale of rented houses' circulated MHLG paper (August 1970), p. 5
[105] ERO A6306/390 Extract from chief officers notes on matters arising out of the meeting of the Corporation (13 June 1961)
[106] *Ibid.*
[107] ERO A6306/390 Extract from Chief Officers notes on matters arising from meeting of the Harlow Development Corporation (15 March 1961)

values begin to appreciate even faster, so that corporations can reap an even greater profit on later sales. There is some evidence too, that such a policy would meet the wishes of potential purchasers.[108]

Correspondence between officers in the run up to their sales programme suggests that areas were designated for owner occupation on the basis of perceived popularity and saleability, largely informed by feedback from the sales at Upper Park, examined above. Of Area 64 – which was to make up Randells and Radburn Close - the Housing Manager suggested that: 'The long terraces and the planning of the area would not, in my mind, appeal to house purchasers.'[109] The risk averse Corporation generally opted against designating 'unusual' areas for sale.[110] Bishopsfield – still a couple of years from being built – represented the most extreme point on the perceived scale of 'unsuitability' for owner occupation, given that the basis of suitability was governed by a combination of political pressure from outside the Corporation, estate management concerns and the 'learning curve' based on feedback from prospective purchasers, which tilted 'designation' towards conventional preferences of home ownership (standard designs, front gardens with driveways for motor vehicles, pitched roofs, semi-detached properties). The development corporation's Housing Manager carried out a 'trial run' with the rented houses in Watlington Road and the Gowers, 'so that useful practical experience can be gained of the tenants' reactions.'[111]

The new 'designated areas' policy introduced in April 1960 ruled out 'pepper pot' sales to individuals in non-designated areas, encouraging them to move instead.[112] This led to a series of complaints from prospective purchasers, causing the Housing Manager to subsequently earmark the two areas in Rectory Wood and Arkwrights for later inclusion as 'designated sale areas.'[113] Furthermore, sales were initially restricted to sitting tenants in local employment

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[108] HLG 116/501 Marlow, J. 'New towns – sale of rented houses' circulated MHLG paper (August 1970), p. 4
[109] ERO A6306/390 Memorandum from C. A. Jackson Housing Manager. 'Houses for Sale – Planning Board Note No. 56' to general manager (7 October 1959)
[110] *Ibid.*
[111] ERO A6306/390 HDC. 'Report of action taken' (28 October 1960)
[112] ERO A6306/390 HDC. Housing Manager's memo entitled 'Sale of Houses in Rented Areas' to General Manager (14 April 1961)
[113] ERO A6306/390 Extract from chief officers notes on matters arising out of the meeting of the Corporation (11 April 1961); HDC. Housing Manager's memo entitled 'Sale of Houses in Rented Areas' to General Manager (14 April 1961)

within the town, 'because of the demand from those in local employment and because of the importance of keeping the number of commuters down to a reasonable level.'[114] Pressure from residents in Little Parndon led to the Corporation reviewing and 'reluctantly' relaxing these restrictions to allow tenants working outside of the town to buy a rented dwelling, providing five-years of residence in Harlow, a blow to town's 'self-containment.[115] Lastly, in July 1966, the Housing Manager received a petition signed by 18 tenants of the Standard II housing area in Halling Hill, 'stating that they are interested in purchasing the houses in which they reside.'[116] Despite the fact the HDC felt 'that the time is not ripe for increasing the existing areas for sale', the imploration constituted – in the words of the General Manager - 'one to which we ought to give way.'[117] In turn, a decision was taken to add the 26 Standard II houses in Halling Hill to the list of designated areas for sale, yet with just 11 of the tenants following through with the purchase – those remaining were 'earmarked for sale as they became vacant.'[118] This points to the influence small groups of higher income residents were able to exert over the pattern of housing development and policy in the town. As a consequence, the policy came to be driven from pressure from those tenants who were in a position to buy and more likely to be concentrated in the 'better class' housing areas. Enquiries to purchase came largely from occupiers of rented Standard II properties, much to the unease of the HDC given the latter's short supply and the Corporation's desire to attract middle classes to the town. As in Basildon, throughout the sixties, the number of migrants coming to Harlow to work in 'office projects' who wished to purchase was considerably less than expected, with a large number expressing a 'preference to rent.'[119]

By 1966, the Housing Manager's report on the sales campaign painted a picture of apathy in the face of the sales drive, drawing attention to the 'limited demand from tenants to purchase houses in the older areas', with interest diminishing once it was known that any sale would be at market value rather than at a special, discounted price.[120] In one housing area, 35 tenants

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[114] ERO A6306/390 HDC meeting minutes (11 April 1961)

[115] ERO A6306/390 HDC. Memorandum from Housing Manager to General Manager (25 March 1961); General Manager to Housing Manager memo entitled 'Houses for sale' (20 July 1966)

[116] ERO A6306/390 Memo from Housing Manager to General Manager entitled 'Houses for sale' (19 July 1966)

[117] *Ibid*.' HDC Housing Manager; ERO A6306/390 General Manager to Housing Manager memo (21 July 1966)

[118] ERO A6306/390 Housing Report (no. 12) to the housing management committee (24 December 1966)

[119] ERO A6306/390 Extract from chief officers notes on matters arising out of the meeting of the Corporation entitled 'Ratio of house sales to lettings' (6 April 1966)

[120] ERO A6306/390 Memorandum from Housing Manager to General Manager entitled 'Report on sale of houses' (1 April 1966)

who had declared an interest in purchasing were circulated with details of selling prices of their houses – 'no houses were subsequently sold and the interest died out.'[121] Of the fourteen (Standard II) houses sold in Herons Wood, only two were sitting tenants taking advantage of the opportunity to purchase, the other 12 were eventually sold upon becoming vacant.[122] The consensus by 1970, in Harlow and elsewhere, was that: 'Many tenants, when they buy, like to signal their change of status, by buying a house other than the one they are renting.'[123] Rented areas designated for sale were overwhelmingly made up of Standard II properties, reflecting the class of purchasers, although the HDC later increased the number of Standard I areas.[124] More affluent tenants of popular areas were able to take up the opportunity to buy, coding areas as 'rented' or 'owner occupied'; 'unsuitable' or 'popular.' It could be suggested that this played a role not only in locally 'engineering taste', to use Ortolano's phrase, by consolidating popular attitudes in favour of more traditional styles, but spatially concentrating those who were in a position to buy, which by the HDC's own admission – were a small minority of higher income tenants, into various small pockets across the town.[125]

A renewed national push for 'balance'? 1966-70

The 1968 Cullingworth and Khan report into ownership and management of new towns recharged the new town commitment to housing balance, cementing the need for 'rapidly increased owner occupation.'[126] As a consequence, owner occupation was to be aggressively encouraged by increased speculative private development, as well as, particularly in the older new towns, through selling rented corporation houses to tenants, in a bid to achieve 'better tenure balance.'[127] The report enshrined a commitment to 'normality' – and aligned this to the elusive notion of 'balance': a 'much greater degree of owner-occupation' would help to 'make the new towns more 'normal' in light of the national trend in homeownership.[128] The report led to the adoption of a 50% target for owner occupation in new towns – as a present housing output target for new towns designated before 1961 and an overall target for those designated

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[121] *Ibid.*
[122] *Ibid.*
[123] HLG 116/501 Marlow, J. 'New towns – sale of rented houses' circulated MHLG paper (August 1970), p. 4, 5
[124] ERO A6306/390 HDC. Housing Manager's report entitled 'owner occupation in new towns' (8 June 1967)
[125] See: Ortolano. *Thatcher's Progress,* pp. 132-40
[126] Cullingworth and Khan. *The Ownership and Management of Housing in the New Towns*, p. 113
[127] *Ibid.*, p. 30
[128] *Ibid.*, p. 161

after. Such a target constituted a 'crude extrapolation from the national trend in house ownership', ignoring the needs and nature of the new town housing market, as well as the composition, price and mortgageability of new town housing stock, with scant attention given to the social consequences of such a radical change in policy.[129] In a sense, it was premised upon the idea that aping a national statistical trend was a desirable social objective. This target had emerged prior to the report. When the Ministry floated the idea of achieving 50% owner occupation in a 1966 meeting between the new town general managers' committee and MHLG representatives, the general managers' committee subsequently agreed that the remarks of the civil servants were 'directed to finding means for the reduction of government investment in New Towns.'[130]

The Cullingworth and Khan report drew on surveys of residents to suggest that a majority favoured homeownership, bolstering a narrative that popular support for house sales came 'from below.' However, at a national level, civil servants rued the situation in Basildon, with an internal MHLG memo suggesting that 'existing tenants are allegedly indifferent to owner occupation so little hope is seen of reaching 50%.'[131] The chief officers of the HDC similarly worried in 1968 over the 'current lack of interest in house purchase', as 'there was a risk of the pool of houses awaiting sale becoming excessive', a situation that was closely monitored by the HDC.[132] Whilst tenants may have had a preference for owning the home they rented, the Cullingworth and Khan report noted: 'Many development corporations felt that the chances of selling on a large scale to sitting tenants were slight. The demand from sitting tenants was described by most development corporations as 'negligible', 'very small', 'very limited', 'almost non-existent' or 'incipient only.'[133] Thus, a greater provision of private enterprise – proclaimed a MHLG circular from December 1968 - was to be 'coupled with a vigorous public relations programme' which was to be carefully timed and closely 'co-ordinated with the Building Societies operating in the town, to "sell" home-ownership and saving for it.'[134] As

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[129] Aldridge. *The British New Towns*, p. 196

[130] ERO A6306/390 General manager's committee – 'private enterprise building in new towns' (18 February 1966), with Miss J. Hope-Wallace

[131] HLG 115/798 Pugh, I.V. 'New Towns – Cullingworth report' to Secretary MHLG, E2 (5 April 1968)

[132] ERO A6306/390 HDC. Chief Officers meeting (10 January 1968)

[133] Cullingworth and Khan. *The Ownership and Management of Housing in the New Towns*, p. 114

[134] ERO A6306/390 MHLG. Leavett, A. 'Private enterprise housing in new towns', new towns circular no. 86 (24 December 1968)

Kenneth Robinson, Minister of Planning and Land (1968-1969) later argued in a letter to HDC's Chairman suggested:

> Because renting has become the dominant pattern in the first generation new
> towns, it seems likely that at least at the beginning Corporations will need to go
> out into the market place and "sell" the advantages of owner occupation.[135]

The Ministry sought the 'active co-operation' of the HDC 'in pursuing a vigorous policy to promote sales in Harlow', and encouraged making all houses available despite acknowledging the HDC's 'special reasons' for preferring not to make this 'dramatic move in this direction just at this present moment.'[136] The HDC opted to 'resist' the pressure from central government to make all rented dwellings available for sale, and instead responded by agreeing to designate more areas for sale, 'including a different class of properties from that which we have previously considered suitable.'[137]

It was at this point that the Ministry entered discussions with the Building Societies Association with the intention of securing their 'greater involvement', and made arrangements to give power to Corporations to offer second mortgages 'to ensure that sales are not frustrated by difficulties over finance.'[138] The Corporation's existing 100% LTV 'last resort' mortgages were replaced by the Building Societies Association (BSA)'s flexibilised mortgage lending terms supplemented by 'second mortgages' to be provided by Corporations. A MHLG memorandum summed up one advantage of the move – arguably an underlying imperative:

> The economic advantage is that sales would secure early and substantial cash
> flows and to that extent replace public money by private money; this would

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[135] ERO A6306/390 MHLG Kenneth Robinson, Minister of Planning & Land (1968-69) to Sir John Newsom (25 September 1969)

[136] *Ibid*.

[137] The plus side was considered by the HDC, in that such a move 'might have the effect of improving the standard in some of the less successful areas.' ERO A6306/390 HDC. Memo entitled 'Sales of Rented Houses' from General Manager to Housing Manager (2 October 1969)

[138] Changes were made so that Corporations were only allowed to lend at ¼% above the BSA's recommended rate. ERO A6306/390 MHLG Kenneth Robinson, Minister of Planning & Land (1968-69) to Newsom, J. HDC Chairman (25 September 1969)

benefit not only the Exchequer but (because the amount of public money available for new towns is not unlimited) the new towns themselves.[139]

Similarly, for Building Societies, the move towards sales to sitting new town tenants represented 'an opportunity to release some part of the huge investment of public capital tied up in housing.'[140] This eagerness was accompanied by the classic ideological justifications for sales – that not allowing new town tenants to purchase the rented properties in which they lived was tantamount to 'an infringement of natural justice' and 'out of tune with the freedom of the individual.'[141] But it also struck out at the post-war principles upon which the new towns were constructed:

> Surely the old policy of "tied" labour is no longer necessary. Local industry could recruit workers without having to offer the bribe of a rented dwelling.[142]

Following the report, the elusive principle of 'balance' became more explicitly attached to achieving tenure balance. Prior to this, the goal had been to achieve class balance, with increasing owner occupation being a component in the strategy for achieving this. The MHLG now proposed that 'real efforts should be made to alter the balance between renting and owner occupation by offering substantial numbers of houses for sale to existing tenants.'[143] Whilst for the Corporations eagerly participating in sales to sitting tenants on the basis of a genuine commitment to achieving 'balance', there appears to be other imperatives at work, such as the propensity for central government to want to reduce spending on new towns by releasing equity 'locked up' within them. Such a predicament begs the question: at what point does the driving factor in new town house sales shift from a principle of attaining social balance to an ideological commitment to disposing of state assets as swiftly and smoothly as possible? This becomes clearer with the change of government in 1970.

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[139] ERO A6306/390 Memorandum by MHLG. 'Financing of sales of development corporation rented houses: second mortgages' (October 1969)

[140] ERO A6306/390 Dunham, J. 'New town tenants want to buy their homes' in *The Building Societies' Gazette* (April 1969)

[141] *Ibid*., see also: Bassett. 'The Sale of Council Houses as a Political Issue'

[142] ERO A6306/390 Dunham, J. 'New town tenants want to buy their homes' in *The Building Societies' Gazette* (April 1969)

[143] ERO A6306/390 MHLG. 'Sales of rented houses: effect on housing revenue account', new town circular no. 127 (5 September 1969)

V: Concessionary sales to sitting tenants, 1970-74

Attempts at achieving 'balance' through rented house sales had, by 1970, at the admission of the Ministry, led to a 'very disappointing' response from tenants. Stevenage had offered all its rented dwellings for sale, 'had gone to considerable trouble in publicising their scheme' and had sold fewer than ten dwellings. In northern new towns, 'the demand for purchase was practically non-existent.'[144] Whilst Harlow's sales to sitting tenants had been slow, it was still heralded, along with Basildon's, as having been 'met with the most success in their sales efforts.'[145]

In October 1970, the Conservative government's new towns circular no. 179 required all development corporations to make all their rented dwellings available for sale at a 20% concessionary discount.[146] The bout of sales that ensued, prior to being halted in 1974 by the Labour government, should be considered within the context of a broader, more elongated shift towards neoliberalism. This section attempts to show this by bringing out the culture and form with which these sales took place, and the nature of the pressure from the Ministry. From this point on, under the direction of the central state, the policy of sales to sitting tenants, drawing on the foundations laid by the Cullingworth and Khan report and the previous Labour government, took on a greater urgency, becoming a programme of 'selling as many rented houses as quickly as possible', with Corporations facilitating a 'quick turnover of assets.'[147] The concessionary price expanded the base of affluent tenants able to purchase the home in which they rented. As of September 1970, the price of a typical older 3-bed rented house was £4,700 in Basildon and £4,800 in Harlow. Ministry projections suggested that the percentage of tenants able to afford the existing 100% mortgage was 17% in Basildon and 16% in Harlow. With a 20% reduction in price of dwelling, however, the percentage of tenants able to afford a 100% mortgage increased to 54% in Basildon and 48% in Harlow.[148]

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[144] ERO A6306/390 HDC. 'Note of meeting held at Ministry of Housing and Local Government on 24th July 1970, re Sales of Rented Houses' (1970)

[145] *Ibid.*

[146] HLG 116/501 Marlow, J. 'Sale of rented houses in new towns', new towns circular no. 179 (23 October 1970)

[147] HLG 116/501 Marlow, J. 'New towns – sale of rented houses' circulated MHLG paper (August 1970), p. 5

[148] HLG 116/501 Sharp, R. J. A., MHLG. 'Sale of new town houses – tenant incomes' memo to Gilbert (11 September 1970)

In response to new towns circular no. 179, the HDC intensified its sales campaign in the designated areas. However, the Board was not without its reservations. They were concerned with the depletion of their rented housing stock, as 'the purpose for which the new town was built would not be maintained', which was a particular concern in regards to housing the town's 'second generation' – as well as the 'detrimental effect on the housing revenue account and therefore on the rents of the remaining property.'[149] They were also anxious about a loss of local control - the Corporation sought an extension of re-sale period from five to ten years, as well as seeking to retain its 21-year pre-emption clause allowing the Corporation to buy-back sold dwellings, in the words of the general manager, 'otherwise there would be a danger, after an initial period, of an increasing number of houses coming into the hands of estate agents and being sold on the open market to commuters, etc. and again the purpose of the new town would be defeated.'[150] The HDC foresaw many of the problems that subsequently emerged in Harlow, and in particular, Bishopsfield, shown in chapters 5 and 6. A report into the effects of the Ministerial directive found that the reduction of rented housing stock would make it more difficult 'to transfer expanding families from flats; to house pensioners and newly married couples in flats; to house low-income families and those in special housing need', and would be inaccessible for large families, single parent households and those over 40 and especially 50. It would also overwhelmingly benefit tenants in older areas as well as those in Standard II houses.[151]

The Ministry contacted the HDC after the Corporation's local press statements came to the attention of civil servants, who attacked the Corporation for continuing to pursue a programme of 'designated sale areas.' The MHLG stated that new towns circular no. 179 had not been a recommendation, but rather a directive, with the Corporation, regardless of any protests or prior policies, bound to apply it 'to the whole of the Corporation's housing stock', something which came as a surprise to the HDC's General Manager.[152] Whilst he believed that 'it would be

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[149] ERO A6306/390 Letter from Hyde-Harvey, B. General Manager of HDC. entitled 'Houses for sale' to Philipson, G. Head of Secretariat, New Towns Chairman's Conference, sent due to absence of Harlow representative (16 November 1970)

[150] *Ibid.*

[151] ERO A6306/390 HDC. 'Probable effects of new Ministerial directive on sales to sitting tenants on HDC long-term policy' report (1970)

[152] ERO A6306/390 Marlow, J. Letter entitled 'The Sales of rented houses' to Hyde-Harvey, B. General Manager of HDC (24 November 1970); A6306/390 Hyde-Harvey, B. Letter entitled 'The Sales of rented houses' to J. Marlow (25 November 1970)

difficult if not impossible for the Corporation not to follow the spirit and intentions of the Circular', there was an assumption – from past experience - that the Corporation would have a degree of autonomy to go about implementing them in their own ways that suited their local context.[153] From this point on, the Ministry took on a greater disciplinary character on the topic of rented house sales. This is represented by the requirement for quarterly house sales to sitting tenants to be provided to the Ministry 'within fourteen days of the end of each quarter.'[154] In December 1970, the Ministry reiterated to the HDC the compulsory nature of the concessionary sales, the terms laid down by the circular were binding and non-negotiable.[155]

As a 1973 HDC report into the concessionary sales from 1970 onwards noted: '[The] Department kept complaining that we were not pursuing vigorously enough, and asking for up-to-date figures every few weeks. Harlow accused of "dragging its feet" deliberately.'[156] The Corporation worked as fast as it could with the Land Registry in registering titles for sales, working through area by area, for which the Corporation was again attacked by the Ministry.[157] As the report adds, 'pressure from the Department to speed up sales increased and, although we could foresee being inundated with work, we gave in.'[158] Mass circulation of the policy proceeded, and extra staff were recruited in both the solicitors and housing departments, yet pressure to speed up sales continued, from both the local Epping MP, Norman Tebbit, as well as from 'the Department, who, it appeared, were only anxious for us to get rid of as many houses as possible as fast as possible.'[159]

These increasingly rapid concessionary sales occurred amidst moves for greater private investment in the new towns. Whilst utilising the language of achieving a 'sensible balance' (between private enterprise housing for sale, the existing programme of rented housing and their programme of selling rented houses to their tenants), a 1971 circular ruled that:

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[153] ERO A6306/390 Hyde-Harvey, B. Letter entitled 'The Sales of rented houses' to J. Marlow (25 November 1970)

[154] MHLG. Marlow, J. 'Sales of corporation houses', new town circular. 182 (25 November 1970)

[155] A6306/390 Marlow, J. 'Sales of corporation houses' to Hyde-Harvey, B. General Manager of the HDC (1 December 1970)

[156] ERO A6306/391 HDC. 'Sales to sitting tenants at 20% discount' (29 November 1973)

[157] *Ibid*.; ERO A6306/390 Channon, P. DOE's Permanent Under Secretary of State. Memo to Newsom, J. HDC Chairman (7 April 1971)

[158] ERO A6306/391 HDC. 'Sales to sitting tenants at 20% discount' (29 November 1973)

[159] As the report concludes: 'All this gives a fair indication of the vigour with which the Department pressed the 20% discount scheme, sometimes in spite of misgivings on the part of the Corporation.' *Ibid.*

'Corporations should take continuing active steps to ensure that private builders make the maximum contribution to the development of the town that market conditions permit.'[160] In order to secure this 'rapid and substantial increase' in private building in the towns, Corporations were to relax their restrictions and requirements for private builders. The Department took issue with the more idealistic Corporations, such as the HDC, who 'in disposing of land to private builders impose conditions about the categories of people to whom houses may be sold.'[161] As the circular added:

> [At present] it may be required that all or a specified proportion may be sold only to people living or working in the town, or who come from an exporting area. The Secretary of State considers such conditions incompatible with the free market conditions which are needed to secure a greater spread of owner occupation in new towns and they should not therefore be imposed on any future disposals of land to private builders.[162]

On top of the undermining and eroding of the postwar new town principles that shaped the idealism of the HDC, it was ruled that 'developers should be given as much freedom as possible in such matters as layout, dwelling types, architectural treatment, specifications and so on.'[163] On top of this, Corporations were also discouraged from building their own dwellings for sale. As the MHLG had suggested in 1970 that 'the type of house and/or layout favoured by development corporations has less appeal than the more stereotyped designs and layouts usually provided by private builders.[164] The 'attractiveness of corporation rented houses' were questioned, and 'doubts have been expressed as to whether tenants regard corporation houses as a "good buy", linked to the idea that 'because it is a corporation house, it is less desirable.'[165]

There were considerable concerns amongst Corporations about this hasty re-orientation towards the market. The HDC were opposed to the new measures, arguing that 'the expansion of speculative building will present a particular problem to the London new towns insofar as it will give rise to a tendency for these towns to become mere dormitories. This will have serious

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[160] ERO A6306/390 DOE. New town circular, no. 206 (18 May 1971)
[161] *Ibid.*
[162] *Ibid.*
[163] *Ibid.*
[164] HLG 116/501 Marlow, J. 'New towns – sale of rented houses' circulated MHLG paper (August 1970), p. 12
[165] *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12

implications on our responsibilities to employers.'[166] For HDC, it was 'a pity that the degree of self-containment which has been achieved to date and which is the envy of the USA should deliberately be jeopardized.'[167] On top of this, there was 'the lowering of standards of materials, design, space and workmanship' to levels lower than existing new town rented housing stock. It was also seen as 'essential' to retain some control over house-building, over fears private enterprise 'will not produce the mix of house types and sizes essential to accommodate the new town population of the future', as well as to avoid 'monotony of unrelieved repetition of a uniform design which may sell well at the time but produces a dull and uninteresting town.' Issue was also taken with the new private housing being built to the lower NHBRC standards, which existed to 'protect the public from exploitation and were never intended to be a standard to which New Towns should be built.'[168]

A discourse of 'balance' was deployed by the Department to secure greater market involvement, disposal of housing assets and land, which undermined and eroded the new town principles upon which the HDC operated. These principles were increasingly disregarded in pursuit of greater market involvement. The line between a genuine, 'social democratic' commitment to securing a 'balanced' population within the town, and the ideological imperative to dispose of assets as quickly and rapidly as possible – whether through the form of sales of subsidised rented housing to tenants or the disposal of land for private development under increasingly relaxed conditions, is considerably blurred, and testifies to a complex and messy shift from social democracy to neoliberalism.

By May 1971, the Ministry considered Harlow to be 'among the front runners' in regards to the completions of sales to sitting tenants.[169] As the below table shows, Crawley and in particular Basildon also excelled in concessionary sales. Of all sales that occurred in English new towns throughout this two-year period, Basildon and Harlow's combined efforts (5,590) made up 41.1% of all concessionary sales.

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[166] ERO A6306/390 Hyde-Harvey, B. to Phillipson, G. New Towns Association entitled 'new town circular 206' (1 July 1971)

[167] *Ibid.*

[168] ERO A6306/390 Washington Development Corporation. Letter to Julian Amery MP, Minister for Housing and Construction 1970-72 (23 June 1971)

[169] ERO A6306/390 Correspondence from Channon, P., Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, DOE and later Minister for Housing and Construction (1972-74) to Newsom, J. Chairman of HDC (18 May 1971)

Table 2.1 - Sale of corporation dwellings in English new and expanded towns between 1 October 1970 and 30 September 1972.[170]

	Concessionary sales	Other sales	Total
Crawley	2,041	360	2,401
Hatfield	445	6	451
Hemel Hempstead	1,330	208	1,538
Welwyn Garden City	588	172	760
Aycliffe	454	12	466
Basildon	**3,573**	**166**	**3,739**
Bracknell	960	142	1,102
Corby	777	-	777
Harlow	**2,017**	**139**	**2,156**
Milton Keynes	56	102	158
Northampton	-	1	1
Peterborough	-	27	27
Peterlee	99	31	130
Redditch	2	49	51
Runcorn	19	180	199
Skelmersdale	5	281	286
Stevenage	1,221	-	1,221
Telford	-	10	10
Warrington	-	2	2
Washington	5	180	185
	13,592	**2,068**	**15,660**

Both Corporations scrambled to provide – or bolster existing - infrastructure to facilitate a rapid disposal of housing assets. In Harlow, the Corporation – as shown - had already been engaged in a house sales campaign when the discount scheme was introduced, and had 'in existence a small, experienced house sales unit', which was in turn augmented, along with Estates department staff 'to deal with the flood of enquiries.'[171] In Basildon, the Corporation were at an advantage due to their history of complicated land acquisitions, owing to the scale of existing rural 'slum' settlements in their designated area, which meant their Estates department possessed in readiness 'an administrative system which is experienced and well suited to

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[170] *Hansard.* HC Deb. vol. 847 written answers, col. 101 (28 November 1972)
[171] ERO A6306/390 Hyde-Harvey, B. Notes of contribution made at Owner Occupation in the New Towns seminar entitled: 'Administrative resources' (20 July 1971)

dealing with large numbers of individual cases expeditiously.'[172] This enabled the BDC to launch a 'large scale publicity operation' within just two weeks of receiving the Circular. The BDC also arranged a series of public meetings, 'where Corporation officers and representatives of Building Societies could address the tenants, explain the scheme and answer questions.' Within less than a year of the circular they had held 10 such meetings across the town's school halls, all with attendance of over 200 people, and on several occasions meetings had been 'packed with well over 400 people attending.'[173]

One of the BDC's 'secrets of success', its Deputy Estates Officer boasted, was being highly organised on the 'mortgage side' of sales - it liaised with Building Societies, set up a 'private mortgage advisory service', and even obtained a 'completely new office' the town centre for this purpose - with over 20 people employed solely for dealing with concessionary sales to sitting tenants.[174] The HDC similarly maintained a 'close and friendly liaison' with multiple building societies.[175] Existing sales techniques honed in Harlow prior to the concessionary sales served as an example to other corporations, as the MHLG circular points out:

> Corporations, such as Harlow, who have been more successful than the average in selling houses, have stressed the importance of making it easy for tenants to buy. It is essential to have someone readily available who can deal with queries on prices, terms of sale, mortgage facilities and so on. Even better is to have a small team who will call on tenants, in the evening if necessary, to make the whole process of buying as painless as possible.[176]

As the HDC's Chairman reiterated in 1971:

> Tenants have to be guided to a building society and second mortgages have to be arranged. For many of these people this is the most important thing that has ever happened and the whole family become involved and attend for interview. We could, of course, be brusque and send them off to work it out for themselves,

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[172] ERO A6306/390 Radford, A. Deputy Estates Officer for the BDC. 'Solved and unsolved problems in the sale of rented houses' seminar note for 'Owner Occupations in the New Towns' seminar (20 July 1971)
[173] *Ibid.*
[174] *Ibid.*
[175] ERO A6306/390 Hyde-Harvey, B. Notes of contribution made at Owner Occupation in the New Towns seminar entitled: 'Administrative resources' (20 July 1971)
[176] HLG 116/501 Marlow, J. 'New towns – sale of rented houses' circulated MHLG paper (August 1970), p. 12

but we took the line that it was right to hold their hands and help with the building society and the lawyer, etc., however time-consuming.[177]

Likewise in Basildon, staff had carried out 'an enormous amount of evening interviews and evening meetings.'[178] Even prior to the introduction of concessionary sales in October 1970:

In Basildon a small team had been set up for this purpose. Publicity was often conducted on a personal basis with members of the team visiting people at home in the evenings.[179]

Such trends and tactics predated the election of the Heath administration. As with the HDC, the BDC's approach prior to concessionary sales had been to 'select as a result of market research, small areas which might be attractive to purchasers and which could grow into areas of owner occupation – a group of houses around a green for example. […] The corporation then set about selling the houses as an estate agent would when they became vacant.'[180] Both Corporations had a 'small publicity unit' of which they sought to produce a 'glossy pamphlet' providing tenants with the details of house purchase.[181] In Harlow, occasionally 'a prospective purchaser would be used as an agent. The Corporation would seek his help in engaging the interest of other people living in the immediate vicinity of his house, in purchasing their houses. In this way a small area of owner-occupation might be created.'[182] Both Corporations had similarly avoided 'pepper-pot' sales, this was 'for a variety of administrative reasons and not least because houses in clear-cut areas of owner-occupation tended to accrue in value more rapidly than those surrounded by rented property and in consequence drew more prospective purchasers.'[183] Whilst the experience from the early experimentation of sales to sitting tenants which had occurred prior to these concessionary sales in Harlow and Basildon served as subsequent inspiration for the MHLG in formulating advice to other Corporations, this latter point was ignored, as the goal was to sell as many houses and quickly as possible.

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[177] ERO A6306/390 Reply from HDC Chairman Newsom, J. to Channon, P. DOE (22 April 1971)

[178] A6306/390 Radford, A. Deputy Estates Officer for the BDC. 'Solved and unsolved problems in the sale of rented houses' seminar note for 'Owner Occupations in the New Towns' seminar (20 July 1971)

[179] HLG 116/501 MHLG. Note of a meeting on 'Sales of rented houses in new towns' with general managers of Corporations with rented housing stock that surpassed 5,000, held in Caxton House, London (24 July 1970)

[180] *Ibid.*

[181] *Ibid.*

[182] *Ibid.*

[183] *Ibid.*

Illustrating how the bolstering of owner occupation had been elevated in importance to the level of attracting industry, the Circular read that:

> The Secretary of State also feels that publicity material and explanatory leaflets designed to encourage the sale of existing houses should always be up to the standard of the material designed to attract industrialists and people coming to live in the town.[184]

Figure 2.2 - Literature distributed to HDC tenants in 1970.[185]
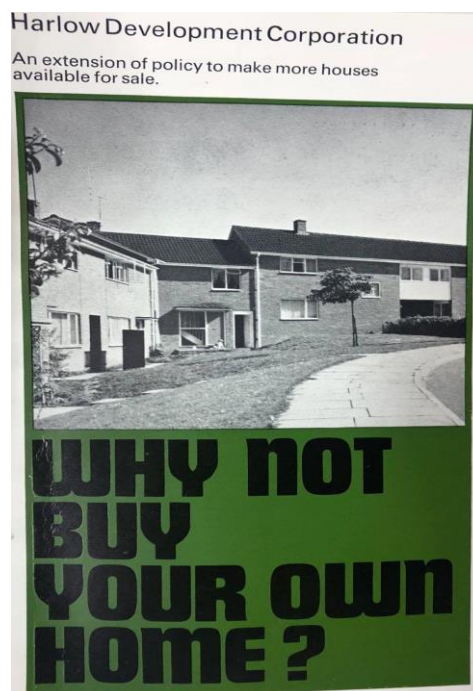
Whilst the Khan and Cullingworth report identified that a majority of tenants in new towns expressed a *preference* for owning the home in which they presently rented, this did not necessarily mean that those tenants were not content with renting. The HDC knew this, and sought to entice would be homeowners through appealing explicitly to the economic instrumentalism of tenants. Whilst financial barriers were often cited in explaining the lack of interest in house purchase, another understated factor was there was little imperative to change. New town corporation tenants generally enjoyed high levels of housing security, lived in towns in which subsidised rented housing was the norm, in fact, near universal, and – contrary to popular perception – *were* able to and did frequently move around their neighbourhoods and

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[184] HLG 116/501 J. Marlow. 'Sale of rented houses in new towns', new towns circular no. 179 (23 October 1970), p. 4
[185] ERO A6306/390 HDC. 'Why not buy your own home?' pamphlet (1970)

town as their circumstances changed (usually when family size increased). On top of this, and despite the lingering paternalism of the HDC, tenants were able to express a relative degree of personal autonomy within their homes (as demonstrated in the section on covenants). As Judy Attfield has shown, postwar HDC tenants 'were making [rented] places their own through the use of design', taking 'control of their own interior space and at the same time ma[king] a public declaration of their variance from the architects' design.'[186]

The HDC's Housing Manager elaborated on the HDC's difficulty with convincing tenants to purchase in 1967:

> One of the primary reasons for people to purchase their own home is the insecurity of tenure of privately rented property. This factor does not exist in respect of Corporation or Local Authority rented property and the main consideration for a tenant in contemplating house purchase is, therefore, a financial one, being a comparison of rent with mortgage repayments.[187]

Thus, the HDC's literature on house sales was overwhelmingly oriented towards financial self-betterment and economic self-interest. As shown from drafts of literature sent to tenants in 1970, the HDC emphasised the yield on property values of corporation houses from date of sale to present price in 1970, one example of this is listed below:

Table 2.2 - Market values of ex-HDC properties, 1970.[188]

	Date of sale	Original price	Market value in 1970
Upper Park	March 1957	£2,795	£5,150
Brooklane Field	July 1959	£3,200	£6,350
Westfield	December 1960	£2,925	£5,400
The Gowers	February 1961	£3,175	£5,150
Finchmoor	June 1962	£3,200	£4,775

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[186] Attfield, J. *Bringing Modernity Home: Writings on Popular Design and Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 160, see: 148-71

[187] ERO A6306/390 HDC. Housing Manager's report entitled 'owner occupation in new towns' (8 June 1967)

[188] ERO A6306/390 HDC. Draft pamphlet for distribution to tenants in rented areas designated for sale (1970)

The deployment of such information helped create a sense of urgency, engineering a panic to act on the opportunity. Tenants were told that: 'paying rent is paying out'; 'improvements can add to the value of your house'; 'you become your own master'; 'the same amount of rates are payable whether you rent or own a house'; 'once you own a house, and wish to move, you have a useful asset to help you buy your new house'; 'property values have steadily appreciated', and across the bottom, printed in capital letters: '*HOUSE OWNERSHIP PROVIDES A VALUABLE ASSET FOR YOUR FUTURE.*'[189] The overwhelming emphasis of these arguments was an appeal to the tenant's narrow self-interest that sits uneasily with the egalitarian ethos that underpinned the new towns programme. In Stevenage, drawing on a Corporation survey with house purchasers who participated in the 1970-74 sales drive, Truesdale has shown that for 80% of respondents, 'the attractiveness of the bargain, and the opportunity for financial investment, outweighed all others in the decision to buy.'[190]

In January 1971, the *Harlow Citizen* led with a story in bold print: 'Corporation predict sales boom as rents go up', after the General Manager tactfully briefed the local press. He was quoted in the article as saying: 'I expect a rise, perhaps gradual but considerable in total, in rent levels which will bring the cost of renting close to that of purchase, particularly when you take account of the 20 per cent discount on purchase and the income tax concessions to house-buyers.'[191] Similarly, in delineating 'the Redditch approach' to strategies relating to increasing sales to sitting tenants, general manager of the Redditch Development Corporation, A. M. Grier, stated to general managers that the Corporation had developed a local narrative that: 'rents were too low for the Corporation to break even. Tenants must expect continuing increases. Their only safeguard was to buy their own home.'[192] Local mortgage providers similarly targeted Harlow renters in material distributed to all of the town's houses, which emphasised that despite mortgage payments being higher than Corporation rent, 'it will be cheaper to own your own home in the long run, and remember that rents are always rising.

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[189] ERO A6306/390 HDC. 'Why not buy your own home?' pamphlet (1970); HDC. Draft pamphlet for distribution to tenants in rented areas designated for sale (1970)

[190] Truesdale. 'House Sales and Owner Occupation in Stevenage New Town', p. 320

[191] ERO A6306/390 'Corporation predict sales boom as rents go up', *Harlow Citizen* (1 January 1971)

[192] ERO A6306/390 Notes for talk by Mr. A. M. Grier, general manager of Redditch Development Corporation, at private housing seminar to be held on 20 July 1971

They will probably double within ten years, but mortgage payments will always stay virtually the same.'[193]

These rapid sales, which coincided the Housing Finance Act in 1972, also prompted a local house price boom. The Corporation's District Valuer was, in the words of the HDC's General Manager, 'of opinion that values generally in his District have risen quite by 20% in the last 3-4 months.'[194] This is compared to England's average price increase of 8.6% in the first six months of 1971.[195] Willowfield, a 'typical popular housing area', saw prices surge way ahead of national trends, as shown in the table below.[196]

Table 2.3 - Valuation of properties in Willowfield, Harlow, 1971

No.	Estimated value on 1st Jan. 1971	'Proposed Revised Value as informally advised by District Valuer' (June 1971)	Approximate increase
7	£7,800	£8,500	9%
45	£4,800	£6,400	33.3%
75	£5,750	£7,400	27%
83	£7,750	£9,000	16%
87	£4,450	£6,050	36%
146	£4,250	£5,750	35%
219	£4,850	£6,500	34%

Such a situation further bolstered a sense of urgency amongst tenants in a position to buy, as local 'hard luck' news stories emerged of HDC tenants missing the three-month time limit imposed for the acceptance of valuations throughout this period.[197] This sense of urgency at the prospect of individual self-enrichment was compounded by local new stories relating to the sales, an example of one being in 1973 of money being made off of new town house sales, involving allegations against an individual making £15,000 from buying and selling a plot and

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[193] ERO A6306/390 Essex Mortgage Centre advert: 'House purchase in Harlow – the facts!' in *Classified* newspaper (4 September 1971), p. 6

[194] ERO A6306/390 Hyde-Harvey, B. to Marlow, J. 'Sale of rented houses' (6 July 1971) appendix: Harlow Development Corporation. 'Sale of rented houses: Willowfield'

[195] HM Land Registry. UK House Price Index. England's average house price from January 1971 to June 1971 or July 1971 (accessed via landregistry.data.gov.uk on 4 March 2020)

[196] The higher increases occur on the estate's terraced houses. ERO A6306/390 Hyde-Harvey, B. to Marlow, J. 'Sale of rented houses' (6 July 1971) appendix: HDC. 'Sale of rented houses: Willowfield'

[197] ERO A6306/391 HDC. 'Sales to sitting tenants at 20% discount' 55/32/1 internal reference (29 November 1973)

then purchasing a corporation property under the 'discount scheme', which - according to the editor - turned out to be 'a member of Corporation housing staff.'[198]

By the time the 1974 Labour government's new town circular 371 suspended sales to sitting tenants in the new towns, the HDC had sold over 3,900 units of its rented housing stock.[199] This local sales blitz, whilst undertaken in fulfilment of 'balance', manifested as particularly skewed and lopsided campaign, and was reminiscent of the promise made by Conservative maverick Horace Cutler, an early forerunner of Thatcherism and leader of the GLC from 1977 to 1981, for the 'sale of the century' at the 1976 Conservative Party conference.[200] Cutler, as Chairman of the GLC's Housing Committee from 1967 to 1970, initiated a sales campaign that saw the administration sell 16,000 houses by the time the local Conservatives left office in 1973.[201] The rapid sales that occurred in the early mark I new towns of Harlow – and Basildon – throughout this same period, despite the accompanying rhetoric, appear to have more in common with Cutler's ideologically driven policies than with a meaningful pursuit of a balanced, social mix that characterised the early social democratic period.

Where does this sales blitz fit within the elongated shift from social democracy to neoliberalism? Writing in 1986, Forrest and Murie suggested that whilst 'the emergence of a privatised mode of consumption is sometimes viewed as involving progressive withdrawal of state support […] in the housing sphere owner occupation is increasingly supported by grants and fiscal concessions.'[202] In the case of Harlow and Basildon, this argument can be taken even further, with the local state going to extraordinary lengths to facilitate owner occupation, with

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[198] ERO A6306/391 'How to make £15,000 in six months!', *Harlow News* (quarterly: Summer 1973); Correspondence from Editor of *Harlow News* to White, L. Liaison Officer (13 August 1973)

[199] ERO A6306/390 HDC's Social Development Officer. 'Owner occupation in Harlow' report (14 November 1977), p. 3

[200] Cutler went on to describe council house sales as 'the deadliest weapon we possess against socialism and Marxism.' Bassett. 'The Sale of Council Houses as a Political Issue', p. 292, 295-6

[201] Davies, J. 'Cutler, Sir Horace Walter (1912–1997)' in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (23 September 2004), DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/65252

[202] Ironically, a couple of years following publication in 1988, the state would begin unwinding some of these subsidies in the form of reducing MIRAS (Mortgage Interest Relief at Source) benefits, though not fully abolished until 2000. Forrest, R. and Murie, A. 'Marginalisation and subsidized individualism: the sale of council houses in the restructuring of the British welfare state' in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 10, no. 1 (March 1986), p. 61

representatives speaking of the need to 'hold the[…] hands' of tenants throughout the process.[203] As Forrest and Murie suggest:

> We must be aware of the ideological loading of the term privatization. In housing it begs the question of the extent to which council housing was ever divorced from the market in housing production and how far owner occupation is (or ever was) the product of the free market. It is certainly becoming more appropriate to describe home ownership as a 'socialized' form of housing provision, a form of state subsidized individualism.[204]

Thus, the behaviour of the HDC throughout the 1960s and early 1970s constituted 'not a disengagement of the state from the sphere of consumption but a *reorientation towards individualised benefits.*'[205] This episode illustrates the messiness of the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism, whilst highlighting a tension between a growing individualism in places where 'community' was simultaneously heavily evoked by the local state, as will be later shown. The findings of this section also compliment and correspond to the work of Guy Ortolano, who in Milton Keynes identified from 1977 the similar lengths the MKDC went to encouraging owner occupation in the town, concluding that: '[whilst] discussions of the right to buy often depict it as a bottom-up social revolution, […] as public authorities sought ever more buyers, these market manipulations and information campaigns resembled top-down social engineering.'[206] Evidence of this phenomenon identified by Ortolano in Milton Keynes can also be found in the earlier new towns during not just the early 1970s, but prior to this as well.

Conclusion

The HDC was driven by social ideals borne out of the post-war social democratic moment that were continually tempered, constrained, minimised and contorted by the central state – the Ministry – which was increasingly driven by economic and ideological imperatives, seeking to inject the market and private enterprise wherever possible. In demonstrating how the local state in Harlow struggled to navigate growing homeownership, the popular aspirations of tenants

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[203] ERO A6306/390 Letter from Newsom, J. HDC Chairman to Channon, P. DOE (22 April 1971)
[204] Forrest and Murie. 'Marginalisation and subsidized individualism', p. 61
[205] *Ibid*., p. 61
[206] Ortolano. *Thatcher's Progress*, p. 243

and increasing pressure from the central state, this chapter has drawn out tensions within the social democratic settlement. As the prevalence of homeownership and the market increased within the town, the ability of Harlow's planners to maintain control and oversight over the spaces they built waned – with an examination of covenants providing insight into the complex intersection between postwar paternalism and the desires of residents. A shifting interpretation of the 'balance' principle, from one based on socially mixed integrated housing to an increased emphasis on 'tenure balance' and the statistical aping of a national trend throughout the sixties led to local experimentation in Harlow which testifies to the diversity of new town experience. This also subsequently opened the door to the concept being deployed by central government to justify a rapid disposal of public housing and land. This chapter has also questioned the temporality of neoliberalism by showing that the sales drive in both Harlow and Basildon, particularly in the early 1970s, had far more in common with the hasty disposal of assets which came to represent the *Right to Buy* programme throughout the 1980s, than they did with the social idealism that underpinned pursuit of 'balance' that characterised the early social democratic era. It is to the ramifications of these rented town house sales, and what they can tell us about individualism and perceptions of 'community' in nearby Basildon, that this thesis now turns.

Chapter 3: From community to individualism? Balance, house sales and perceptions of snobbery and intra-class distinction in Basildon, 1959-79

This chapter uses the pursuit of balance, specifically the rented corporation house sales of 1970-74 and their aftermath, as a basis upon which to investigate the messy relationship between individualism and community in Basildon throughout the seventies. Through a case study of Basildon's Lee Chapel North neighbourhood, the chapter argues that despite the way in which class was written into Basildon new town in the pursuit of 'balance' (section 1), there was an initial widespread sense of there being a 'level playing field', with tenants 'all being in the same boat', particularly amongst the town's 'second generation.' This was based on shared background, commonality of experience and the uses of public space - and was strongly underpinned by the ubiquity of publicly rented tenure in the town. All of these factors, particularly the last, generated an implicit egalitarianism (section 2). The chapter argues that this was significantly disrupted by the house sales that took place from 1970-74, which brought social snobbery and intra-class distinction to the fore (section 3). The popularity and subsequent impact of this early sales policy elicited intriguing responses from both local states in the town (section 4), who sought to mediate the increasingly fraught tensions between community and individualism, illuminating the messy shift from social democracy to neoliberalism, as well as the potentially contingent nature of the latter.

I: 'Hastening the creation of a balanced community': Planning for class? 1959-68

In examining Harlow Development Corporation's post-war relationship with homeownership, the previous chapter foregrounded a changing interpretation of balance which increasingly problematised the high proportion of rented tenure found in 'mark I' new towns. This section uses the foundations laid by the previous chapter to examine how these changes played out in nearby Basildon, and, more explicitly, how the BDC injected class into the town they were building. In doing so, it provides a foundational reference point for the arguments made throughout both this chapter and the next.

As highlighted in Chapter 1, Basildon has been described as the 'poor relation' of the 'mark I' new towns.[1] When designated in 1949, the new town's designated area had an existing population of around 25,000 people, leaving the corporation saddled with complex, costly land acquisitions and rural slum clearance, which partially accounts for its comparatively high number of unskilled workers, skewing the town's class composition.

Table 3.1 - Social class in London ring new towns, 1961.[2]

(%)	Basildon	Harlow	Stevenage	Crawley
Middle class	11.7	21.2	21.6	20.7
Lower middle class	17.2	16.2	19.3	19.7
Skilled manual	35.0	37.7	33.9	37.4
Semi and unskilled manual	30.4	20.3	20.9	17.2
Others	5.7	4.6	4.3	5.0

As shown in the above table, Basildon was evidently the least middle class of the outer London new towns, and this was something the BDC was eager to redress in a number of ways throughout the sixties. Firstly, through having been 'very selective in the acceptance of industries for the town.'[3] By the end of the decade, the BDC had rejected 72 companies, largely on the basis of industrial applications not meeting criteria based on 'reasonable worker-per-acre density' and a 'reasonable wage rate.'[4] As Ray Thomas has suggested, NTDCs were much less selective in their earlier days, which partially accounts for the composition of earlier neighbourhoods, combined with the fact these early housing areas played a key role in housing construction workers and their families.[5] On top of this, it attempted to introduce 'higher class' shops and leisure facilities - it successfully lobbied M&S to open a store in the town centre (since closed), and it continually pursued office employment despite regional competition.[6]

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[1] Aldridge. *The British New Towns*, p. 53

[2] Reproduced from HLG 115/665 Margaret Willis. 'BDC: Revised Master Plan to an ultimate 140,000 population: Sociological Report' (November 1966), p. 2

[3] ERO A8791/3 BDC. Fifteenth Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 1964 (1964), p. 35

[4] Criteria was also based on present location of existing firm and required to be male employment, with the latter excluding the 'rag trade.' It also refused 'untidy' industries such as scrap iron and waste paper; HLG 116/365 Letter from Boniface, C. 'Allocation of Tenancies' to Palmer, J. MHLG (5 June 1969)

[5] Thomas. *London New Towns,* p. 386; As the BDC themselves suggest, in the earlier neighbourhoods such as Vange, 'new dwellings were allocated mainly to building workers and staff recruited by the Corporation.' See: ERO A/TB 1/2/25/1/1 BDC's Housing Department. 'Allocation of housing tenancies' board report (14 October 1965)

[6] ERO A8791/3 BDC. Fifteenth Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 1964 (1964), p. 35

This imperative was also displayed clearly through its housing policies, and as Mark Clapson has suggested, 'housing provision was at the heart of the success or failure of social mixing.'[7]

By its own admission, the BDC had 'little success' in attracting 'higher income groups' to the town during its first decade.[8] Some board members attributed this to the fact that 'the tradition of the area is one of poverty and "East Endishness",' commenting on the presence of 'shacks', unmade roads, and the fact that 'new neighbourhood shops resemble too much the East End in standard of service, goods sold and cleanliness.'[9] Any choice of location for private development was – as a consequence - to be governed by their 'proximity to subsidised housing and shacks.'[10] In brainstorming a plan for attracting such groups to the new town, Basildon's general manager suggested to the Ministry that they 'would certainly wish to be well segregated from subsidised housing and integrated in self-contained groups; adjacent to open space and in an area topographically pleasing with a matured landscape.'[11] As another NTDC general manager summed up, 'before attempting to sell anything, be it houses or plots, there must be established a *prestige area* of considerable dimensions',[12] speaking of his Corporation 'build[ing] up a prestige area in this particular quarter of the town.'[13] A MHLG civil servant elaborated upon the strategy:

> Once you have successfully established a small colony it may become fashionable and grow rapidly. […] Basildon may never completely escape the "shack" stigma, although Langdon Hills is potentially a very good area for

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[7] Clapson, M. 'The English New Towns since 1946: What are the lessons of their history for their future?' in *Société française d'histoire urbaine*, vol. 3, no. 50 (2017), p. 98

[8] HLG 116/70/49 Boniface, C. General Manager of BDC. Letter entitled 'Better-class housing' to Rogerson, J. (11 March 1960)

[9] ERO A7722/28 Tweddell, N. BDC Chief Architect. Interdepartmental memo: 'Notes on private housing' (13 January 1958)

[10] *Ibid*.

[11] HLG 116/70/49 Boniface, C. General Manager of BDC. Letter entitled 'Better-class housing' to Rogerson, J. (11 March 1960)

[12] HLG 116/70/7 McComb, J. E. General Manager of Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield Development Corporations. Letter entitled 'Better-class housing' to Rogerson, J. (2 February 1960)

[13] HLG 116/70/19 McComb, J. E. General Manager of Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield Development Corporations. Letter entitled 'Houses for sale to Rogerson, J. (9 February 1960)

expensive housing, undulating with fine views and well-wooded. Perhaps Harlow and Stevenage will successfully establish their "snob" areas.[14]

In the early 1960s, the BDC set aside 98 acres in Langdon Hills for higher class housing, which was to be either private development, or individual plots for those seeking a house in the price range of £5,000 and beyond. In 1959, the corporation had built 17 detached houses for sale in the outer edge of Vange ('The Knowle'), segregated from the rest of the neighbourhood with its 'general air of being a world apart', as one press report suggested.[15] On top of this, the corporation sold land for private development in the neighbouring Kingswood neighbourhood (two areas being developed with 390 houses selling at up to £4,000), and undertook their own 'better class' housing development – against the advice of the Ministry - of around 270 'class III and IV' houses for sale or letting on the nearby outer edge of Lee Chapel South. As the general manager concluded in correspondence to the Ministry:

> When carried through, these schemes together with the Langdon Hills development should have the effect of producing in the New Town a balanced and socially successful population.[16]

In close proximity to these developments was to be a golf course, built in the mid-1960s in a bid to 'encourage the managerial, executive and professional classes to come to the town.'[17] The construction of the golf course was undertaken with the explicit aim of 'furthering the Corporation's policy of encouraging all income groups to live, and to take part, in the life of the Town.'[18] Similarly, as the Corporation's 1964 annual report states, the 270 houses on Castlemayne in Lee Chapel South 'will have an appeal for those engaged in industrial management and to professional and business people.'[19] For the Corporation, these combined strategies for better class housing and the provision of higher class amenities constituted 'progress' on this front, representing an explicit attempt at 'hastening the creation of a balanced community, socially and economically.'[20]

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[14] HLG 116/70/61 Marlow, J. 'Better-class housing' internal MHLG correspondence addressed to Mann, L. (7 June 1960)

[15] HLG 115/191 '£7,000 houses – but who wants them?', *Basildon Standard* (10 July 1964)

[16] HLG 116/70/49 Boniface, C. General Manager of BDC. Memo entitled 'Better-class housing' to Rogerson, J. (11 March 1960)

[17] HLG 115/486 Boniface, C. BDC. Memo entitled 'Golf course' to Schaffer, F. MHLG (8 July 1964)

[18] HLG 115/486 BDC Department of architecture and planning: 'section 3(1) proposal under New Towns Act, 1946. Proposal no. BDC/c.64/P.1 Basildon Development Corporation golf course' (18 February 1964)

[19] ERO A8791/3 BDC. Fifteenth Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 1964 (1964), p. 41

[20] *Ibid*., p. 35

Figure 3.1 - Map of Basildon's residential development, colour coded by tenure, 1965

Initially, Castlemayne, the 'better class' housing area made up of 270 dwellings on the outskirts of the Lee Chapel South neighbourhood was to be mixed for sale and for let. The Ministry described the proposals as a 'pretty risky business' given that those wishing to buy such houses at present 'prefer to live in places like Billericay rather than in the new town.'[21] The BDC sought to attract the higher grade employees of Ford tractor plant and Standard Telephones & Cables Ltd., who had recently announced transfer to the new town, and also anticipated interest from higher paid clerical staff and managers at the new Dunton Technical Centre who could commute (further illustrating how the imperative for 'balance' was often prioritised over 'self-containment').[22] Whilst Ford had put down around 150 deposits for houses on the estate, only 37 staff members took up the opportunity to move to the new housing area.[23] The initial plan for mixed tenure changed to all 270 being for sale, despite issues with saleability, reflecting the increasing imperative for greater levels of owner occupation in new towns throughout this decade. Two years after the Castlemayne development in Lee Chapel South was completed, around half of the properties remained unsold, with many remaining unoccupied for years (the last of which was eventually sold in 1970, some six years after completion).[24] One disgruntled couple in their sixties who bought on the estate, attributed the corporation's difficulty in selling the properties to them being 'too near the council estate of Lee Chapel South' when interviewed in 1966 by a local newspaper, with the wife adding:

> I am sure that if these houses were somewhere other than Basildon they would sell, but you have only to mention Basildon to people who live out of this area, and they shake.[25]

Correspondence between the MHLG and the Treasury noted an inability to sell properties in Lee Chapel South 'except by generous mortgage provision', testifying to the financial mechanisms developing to facilitate the expansion of owner occupation.[26] The explanation was that Castlemayne had not been sufficiently 'segregated' from nearby subsidised housing, something that was taken into account for subsequent 'higher class' housing developments.

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[21] HLG 115/191 Mitchel, A. 'BDC Lee Chapel South: Area no. 3' to Curtis, C. F. MHLG (1 May 1962)

[22] HLG 115/191 Rawes, G. R., BDC Chief Finance Officer. 'Lee Chapel South 3: Higher income group houses' to Cairns, MHLG (20 December 1962)

[23] HLG 115/191 'We've no need for these houses – Fords' (21 December 1966)

[24] HLG 115/191 'This house is now sold!', *Basildon Standard Recorder* (13 March 1970)

[25] HLG 115/191 "Disgrace' that 148 homes are empty – says councillor', *Basildon Recorder* (23 November 1966)

[26] HLG 115/191 Green, R. J. MHLG. Memo to Marsh, V. C. Treasury. 'New towns – House mortgages' (4 December 1968)

Pointing to this gradual shift in housing policy throughout the 1960s towards greater class segregation in new town housing developments, MHLG correspondence from 1968 states that for some time, 'new towns have abandoned the original policy of mixing all classes of people and have returned to the old system of segregation.'[27]

Figure 3.2 - Local press coverage of Castlemayne's struggling sales, 1964.[28]

Throughout Basildon's founding decades, the Corporation's pursuit of balance had been on altering the social and economic composition of the town, and was thus overwhelmingly occupational in nature. Planners spoke of attracting 'professionals', 'directors, senior managerial staff', 'senior executives' and 'senior technical staff', with tenure commonly decoupled from their need to attract such people (many of these groups, they found, preferred to let).[29] Whilst homeownership was often deployed as a mechanism to achieve this, an increase in homeownership for its own sake was not the stated objective, and it was not until the 1968 Cullingworth report examined in the previous chapter that an explicit attempt to rectify tenure 'imbalance' became a policy priority. Prior to this, however, a lack of consideration for tenure balance had led to enormous levels of rented housing in the town (see Tables 1.5 and 1.6), and before the aforementioned changes and priorities came into proper fruition, the neighbourhood of Lee Chapel North was built and populated as an entirely corporation rented housing area. It is to this neighbourhood that this chapter now turns.

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[27] HLG 116/554 G. R. Coles. MHLG correspondence to Sylvester-Evans (25 January 1968) (memo)

[28] HLG 115/191 '£7,000 houses – but who wants them?', *Basildon Standard* (10 July 1964)

[29] HLG 116/70/49 Boniface, C. General Manager of BDC. Letter entitled 'Better-class housing' to Rogerson, J. (11 March 1960)

II: 'We were almost on a level playing field': housing and community in Lee Chapel North

Introducing Lee Chapel North

The Lee Chapel North neighbourhood lies to the immediate north-west of the town centre, constituting an area of around 235 acres. Bounded by main roads to the north, east and south, the neighbourhood's western boundary is adjoined by a 'Games Area' and a (then-new) secondary school, of some 70 acres in size, forming a 'green wedge' that separates Lee Chapel North from the nearby Laindon neighbourhood.[30] Immediately east of the neighbourhood is the town park, 150 acres of green space known as Gloucester Park. On the other side of the road delineating the neighbourhood's northern edge was another 'Public Open Space', some 40 acres, which surrounded the pre-existing St Nicholas Church, from which the neighbourhood's comprehensive secondary school took its name. The provision of public open space saw 17.2 acres reserved for playing fields within the neighbourhood (2 acres per 1,000 population), considered adequate owing to the aforementioned fact of the neighbourhood being 'adjoined on three sides by extensive open spaces.'[31]

The plan for Lee Chapel North envisioned a neighbourhood centre providing nine shops, a public house, community hall – or tenants common room - a Methodist church and a workshop. The neighbourhood centre was built to be smaller than others in the town, due to the neighbourhood's proximity to the Town Centre.[32] Designed and built from 1959 to 1966, amidst the Corporation's various attempts to 'hasten[…] the creation of a balanced community' foregrounded in the section above, Lee Chapel North's 2,650 dwellings were made up of 2,040 terraced houses built to either 1952 or 1949 Housing manual standards (77%), 450 flats (17%), and 160 'class III' semi-detached houses (6%).[33] Whilst dwellings ranged from one bedroom flats to four bedroom semi-detached houses, the overwhelming majority of dwellings were 2 or 3 bedroom terraced houses, making the neighbourhood ideal for young, growing families

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[30] ERO A8791/18 BDC. 'Section 3(1) proposal: Lee Chapel North Neighbourhood' to the MHLG (17 February 1959), p. 2

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 5

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 3

[33] The latter of these were often positioned on the outer edges of the neighbourhood. *Ibid.*, p. 4

who would upsize over a number of years. Despite housing within the neighbourhood being categorised by planners into three different 'classes', Lee Chapel North was designed with 'co-ordinated architecture throughout.'[34]

Figure 3.3 - Housing in Lee Chapel North (circa. 1964-66)

Whilst the general layout of the neighbourhood was broadly based on that found in the Master Plan approved in 1951, subsequent pressure from the Ministry for greater density led to the Corporation increasing the general density of the area in accordance with Ministry requirements, which led to the anticipated population increasing by around 20% to approximately 8,700.[35] A density of 15 dwellings per acre was agreed for Lee Chapel North (it ended up being 15.4), with the Corporation 'aiming at considerably higher figures in the redevelopment of the later Neighbourhoods at Basildon.'[36] On top of this, in 1964, with the neighbourhood only a couple of years from completion, the Corporation noted that the housing schemes currently in progress were 'probably the last to be undertaken by the Corporation in

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[34] ERO A8791/18 BDC. Minutes of the 58th meeting of the sites and plans committee, held at Caxton House, London (2 January 1959)

[35] ERO A8791/18 BDC. 'Section 3(1) proposal: Lee Chapel North Neighbourhood' to the MHLG (17 February 1959), p. 2

[36] ERO A8791/18 BDC. 'Lee Chapel North Neighbourhood Section 3(1) proposal' to Winter, R. N. Ministry of Housing and Local Government (24 March 1961)

traditional construction.'[37] Thus, Lee Chapel North's construction and population straddled the intersection between the garden city ideals of the early new town housing areas and the later experimental styles embodied by nearby Laindon 1, 2, 3 and Laindon 5 (see below), examined in the subsequent chapter, estates which played a complex yet key role in the town's reputational decline.

Figure 3.4 - Map showing Laindon 1, 2 and 3 (centre), Laindon 5 (south) and Lee Chapel North (east).

In Lee Chapel North, working class community was facilitated in two ways. The first of these was the role green outdoor space, as well as age/stage in the life course, played in mediating sociability and friendship, and the second was structural factors based on work, tenure and shared background, which fostered a sense of homogeneity and underpinned a feeling of egalitarianism. These two factors will be discussed in turn.

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[37] ERO A8791/3 BDC. Fifteenth Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 1964 (1964), p. 40

Figure 3.5 - Lee Chapel North. Pedestrian square showing toddlers' playground in relation to houses

Sociability, green space and gardens

Whilst rented houses in older housing areas such as Fryerns and Barstable tended to have bigger gardens, the later neighbourhood of Lee Chapel North, and even more so in the subsequent Laindon 5 (Five Links) development, saw reduced garden space as increasing overall density and providing for both motor vehicles and greater internal space standards took priority. Bolstering literature that has pointed to the international dimension of the post-war new towns movement,[38] a report by Nigerian Federal Government officers who came to examine Basildon's neighbourhoods in 1977 commented on this disparity between areas, suggesting that:

> much as the type with bigger gardens offered children from the same family greater scope for play under the care of their parents, it tended to reduce the scope for social interactions amongst neighbours within the same Unit.[39]

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[38] See: Wakeman. *Practicing Utopia*; Ortolano. *Thatcher's Progress*, chapter 5

[39] ERO A8891/6 Obaweya, E. O. *et al.* 'The Neighbourhood Unit Concept in New Towns: The Basildon experience' (London: Royal Institute of Public Administration, 1977), p. 4

On the other hand, reduced garden sizes of later areas like Lee Chapel North, they suggested, 'increased opportunity for the children in the same unit to play in the open spaces.'[40] The centrality of 'playing out' in facilitating sociability, by making use of the neighbourhood's extensive adjoining green space as kids and later teenagers and continually being 'in and out' of neighbours' houses, was a recurring theme in interviews with 'second generation' residents.[41] As Lawrence suggests, 'the experience of lived community was closely tied to the life-course', with community being something children and the parents of young children 'felt most strongly because their social networks were more tightly bound to place.'[42] Testimonies of the pervasiveness of children's play in the early decades of Lee Chapel North's life correspond with the BDC's concerns for the high levels of vandalism in the neighbourhood, often ascribed to there being children 'everywhere.'[43] Not only did adjoining green spaces function as key sites of sociability, but green public space became territories based around neighbourhood identities, with rivalries developing between children of different housing areas, and with major roads that separated neighbourhoods acting as spatial barriers that governed the parameters of how far children were allowed to venture.[44] The centrality of the neighbourhood continued into adolescence, as one second generation interviewee who still lives in the area recalled:

> Community really was 'round the shops, your local shops, you know? Local pub, cuz every area had a pub, as you got older you'd go to that pub, and then you'd meet other people from other areas and you'd go to their pub. It was kind of the same in every area, I suppose.[45]

Intriguingly, the aforementioned study, which interviewed residents in 1977, made an observation that destabilises historical narratives of the 'tight-knit' nature of the urban slums standing in stark contrast to the new estates that succeeded them.[46] It suggested that the first generation to transfer to Basildon from the older areas 'seem not to interact closely with their neighbours *because of old habits*', and that 'it is the second and future generations who are

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[40] *Ibid.*, p. 4
[41] Interviews with Maxine (2020), Susan (2017), Alan (2017) and Chris (2017)
[42] Lawrence. *Me, Me, Me?*, p. 14
[43] ERO A8225/30 BDC. Inter office memo from Chief Estates' office to Chief Architect's office. 'Lee Chapel North Community Centre' (15 December 1976); ERO A8225/30 BDC. Inter office memo from Chief Architect's office to Chief Estates' office (20 July 1978)
[44] Interviews with Maxine (2020) and Susan (2017); see: Rogaly and Taylor. *Moving Histories,* p. 67
[45] Interview with Maxine (2020)
[46] See: Lawrence. 'Inventing the "Traditional Working Class"'

likely to see themselves as members of the same community.'[47] Indeed, in many ways, as will be explored in the subsequent chapter, the 'second generation' of new town residents were the ultimate focus of development corporation efforts. In a sense, these were Silkin's 'new type of citizen.'

The neighbourhood's outdoor spaces and the homogeneity of its households facilitated both familiarity and friendship, which in turn underpinned a sense of safety. As Maxine suggested: 'Everybody looked out for each other... You didn't feel unsafe, whereas now, you go out, and- well, I just wouldn't, I just don't.' As she elaborated:

> We all went on holiday together, we all had our holidays together, we'd all go [camping], there was like four or five families all go on holiday together, yeah, it was a close-knit community, for my area, which was Lee Chapel North.[48]

Whilst Ray Pahl has articulated the growth of the social and political importance of friendship as 'traditional forms of social glue decline or are modified', in Lee Chapel North, the place-based friendship of neighbours, intimately linked to the life course, appears to have further shaped perceptions of local community.[49] Furthermore, being 'known' and looking out for each other were key themes in recollections of early life in Lee Chapel North. One second generation interviewee, who grew up there throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and whose mother still resides there, spoke fondly of the area:

> In general, it's a bloody good area, I don't knock it, I won't knock it, it was good area to grow up. We had good housing, the place was clean, we had *a lot* to do, and it was in general a *pretty good* place to live, we didn't have a lot money, ah - we didn't have hardly any money at all, and it was safe, because everyone knew each other, and everyone really looked out for each other.[50]

This assertion of Lee Chapel North's 'goodness' by Chris can be interpreted as an act of radical nostalgia, an attempt to contest and critique dominant stigmatising representations of the town,

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[47] ERO A8891/6 Obaweya, E. O. *et al.* 'The Neighbourhood Unit Concept in New Towns: The Basildon experience' (London: Royal Institute of Public Administration, 1977), p. 6
[48] Interview with Maxine (2020)
[49] Pahl, R. *On Friendship* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 12; 134; On the topic of holidays, Pahl has also pointed to the importance of the subsequent growth in 'package holidays' in facilitating more choice-based friendships
[50] Interview with Chris (2017)

its inhabitants and the working class more generally.[51] Another resident reiterated this sense of familiarity:

> everybody kind of knew each other, we used to say, "if you sneezed up one end of the town, somebody would know up the other." It was just that way.[52]

Knowing other people's business has been a historic source of tension and conflict between neighbours, but a degree of inquisitive intrigue was required in Lee Chapel North's early days in order to discern class differentiation.[53] Whilst class differentiation within the neighbourhood was there from the start, as shown by the three distinct "classes" of housing, it was subtle, and required a certain degree of nosiness or child-like intrigue to spot. Whilst all rented properties possessed the same exterior patterns and small front gardens, the key giveaway was usually the back garden, something Maxine had noticed from a young age:

> Some of the houses in our square, corner houses - massive, the gardens massive, but that would have been for a doctor. […] If you was a teacher or a doctor you got a bigger garden, […] I just remember people telling me, these houses were for the doctors, cuz I always wondered "why are they not all exactly the same? Why did that tenant get a bigger garden?", you know, but it was for that reason. The more professional you was you would get offered a better type of house although they were all the same. [And] there was councillors in those houses as well. I remember the local councillor being in one of those houses, and their boys didn't go to the same school as us.[54]

Folklore within the estate was that these houses were for 'the professionals' a vernacular class moniker that occurred throughout multiple interviews (a term that resurfaces in chapter 5), to denote a class of teachers and doctors brought in by the development corporation, usually from across the South East region rather than from the East End of London.[55] Sylvia (b. 1938), former corporation tenant who moved to Lee Chapel North in 1965 with her husband, a doctor, from Sheerness in Kent, spoke of the area in which they lived during the 1960s:

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[51] Jones, B. 'The Uses of Nostalgia: Autobiography, Community Publishing and Working Class Neighbourhoods in Postwar England' in *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2010), pp. 356, 368-9
[52] Interview with Maxine (2020)
[53] See: Cockayne, E. *Cheek by Jowl: A History of Neighbours* (London: Vintage, 2013)
[54] Interview with Maxine (2020)
[55] Interviews with both Maxine (2020) and Moira (2017)

> On Lee Chapel North, our neighbours, we had dentists, and schoolteachers, and, you know, vets, all on the same estate, along with Ford workers and everyone like that. […] They had a lot of people who worked at Ford's, and also Marconi's and Ford Dunton's as well, there was also Ford tractor plant, and Carreras, which was a cigarette factory, a lot of people worked for that.[56]

As professionals, however, Sylvia and her husband moved away to Billericay before the end of the decade. Only 2.8% of Basildon's population migrated out of the town between 1966-71, less than the new town average, and of all the London ring new towns, it was only Harlow had a lower rate of out-migration. Of this small minority who did leave Basildon, 57% moved to other areas in Essex, whilst 14% returned to London.[57] In contrast to accounts of working class community's disruption by high levels of social churn, this suggests a high degree of residential stability amidst a minor departure of professionals, like Sylvia's household, who once settled in the new town area, moved out to affluent, neighbouring towns, further bolstering the homogeneity of those who remained.[58] The predominance of these manufacturing firms in the neighbourhood's composition highlighted by Sylvia is significant. Stefan Ramsden has pointed to the understated importance of industrial workplaces in shaping post-war community life, with Lee Chapel North tenants working at the town's key manufacturing firms, and some interviewees referring to 'going up' to their parents' employer's social events on weekends.[59] It is to these 'structural' factors and the way they further shaped perceptions of community, that this chapter now turns.

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[56] Interview with Sylvia (2017)

[57] ERO A8225/30 Davies, R. L. and Shepherd, B. Department of Geography, Newcastle University on behalf of DOE. 'Analysis of 1971 census data for new towns: Basildon' (1976)

[58] For instance, see: Bourke, J. *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994)

[59] Ramsden, S. *Working-Class Community in the Age of Affluence* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 114, see: pp. 113-130

Structural factors shaping community: An implicit egalitarianism?

Alongside sociability, children's play, and familial interaction and friendship, structural factors shaping community such as shared background and migratory experience, manufacturing employment and the ubiquity of publicly rented accommodation were all key in further bolstering a sense of belonging, sameness and collective participation, which reinforced a feeling of social equality. As Maxine recalled:

> Everybody was in the same boat, everybody seemed the same. I can't remember anybody having more than anybody else, everybody seemed the same, all our friends seemed similar, families we went on holiday with, kids I played with… Everyone was kind of in a similar situation.[60]

Similarly, Micky, whose mother worked at Pembroke Carton & Printing Co., grew up in corporation housing on the edge of Lee Chapel North during the same time and reaffirmed this sense of sameness:

> It was a bit of a monoculture, it would be like East End, white working class, by and large, you know? That's another thing - when I moved away from Basildon, to meet people who were, I don't know, Jehovah's Witnesses or Jewish or anything, anything that was outside of that was really strange. Everyone was really much the same, same class, it did create a good community spirit in some respects, because there was a cultural language, you didn't have to learn any cultural language, you knew it straight away.[61]

As foregrounded in chapter one, both Basildon and Harlow were linked to the following "exporting authorities" through the Industrial Selection Scheme (ISS): Barking, Chigwell, Chingford, Dagenham, East Ham, Hornchurch, Ilford, Leyton, Romford, Walthamstow, Wanstead and Woodford, and West Ham (as well as LCC and Metropolitan Borough), inevitably contributing to a homogeneity of migratory experience spoken of by Micky.[62] At the time of Lee Chapel North's completion, the ISS or nominations from employers accounted for the vast majority of granted tenancies (see below table), at a time when the BDC – as mentioned above - was being more 'selective' over its choice of manufacturing industry.

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[60] Interview with Maxine (2020)
[61] Interview with Micky (2017)
[62] ERO A/TB 1/2/25/1/1 BDC's Housing Department. 'Allocation of housing tenancies' board report (14 October 1965)

Table 3.2 - Tenants housed by Basildon Development Corporation, 1965.[63]

	Applicants housed in 1964-65 year	Total number of tenants in occupation as of 30/09/1965
Nominations by employers	1,151	10,868
Re-housed following redevelopment	191	1,250
Second generation	291	788
Retired persons	44	378
Total	**1,677**	**13,284**

As of 1971, 62.7% of the ward of Lee Chapel North's workforce were employed in manufacturing.[64] This was roughly in line with Basildon (61.9%) and significantly higher than both the South East region (29.8%) and the new town average (48.7%). This seems to have played a significant role in the interrelated memories of homogeneity and 'community.' In particular, the ubiquity of corporation rented housing played a key role in furthering this sense of homogeneity and egalitarianism. As with other neighbourhoods in the town at this time, the Lee Chapel North ward had a 1.5% rate of owner occupation, compared with 11% in Basildon.[65] As Micky suggested:

> I think when you get a flat structure, almost everyone was in a council house and the houses were all very similar, so there wasn't much of a class structure there, you know? It was very flat, everyone was – I supposed we used to say – 'upper working class' because it was like semi-professionals, I think that did bring a sense of community.[66]

This 'flat structure' was similarly evoked by Alan, who discussed the experience of growing up in the area more generally:

> One of the things was- growing up in Basildon, council housing, in the new town, the thing that struck me as different to anywhere else was that we were almost on a level playing field, if you understand, you know? There was no… If you went to a different area, for instance, if you went to Southend area […] you could literally walk along and see different class divides really, middle class

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[63] *Ibid*.

[64] ERO A8225/30 Davies and Shepherd. 'Analysis of 1971 census data for new towns: Basildon' (1976), p. 10

[65] An anomaly here is the 34.3% owner occupation rate in Langdon Hills, the highest of any area in the new town. This is significant and will be addressed in chapter 4. *Ibid*., p. 10

[66] Interview with Micky (2017)

mixing with working class whatever in different areas, you can do that today. But growing up in Basildon, there was no such thing, it was all totally on a level playing ground. It was quite unique from that point of view. I mean the posh-est it got in Basildon was the Kingswood area, really, and you can hardly call that posh, wasn't middle class or anything like that but the housing was a bit nicer, just a small corner around Kingswood area, otherwise it was- everybody was all sort of equal, all lived in council-type housing, and all fairly young families. […] Obviously you would get some streets, a bit rougher than others depending on who lived in them, but as a rule, [there was no real difference].[67]

John Gold has argued that 'the traditional townscape readily expressed inequality through the way that developers parcelled out space', be this through 'large town houses with squares delimited with iron railings or detached villas set in their own grounds surrounded by walls and symbolic barriers' reserved for the wealthy. As picked up on by Alan, in Basildon's neighbouring towns, to again quote Gold, 'superior access to space and differentiated dwellings were the norm and acted as ready symbols of a hierarchical order.'[68] Alan's testimony points to an understated, arguably unique, experience of new town corporation housing, one that is – at least for the early generation of new towns - intimately related to the ubiquity of social renting. This personal experience of past and present residents is something backed up by a statistical comparison between Basildon and the areas surrounding it, as shown in the below table.

Table 3.3 - Tenure profile of Basildon and surrounding areas, 1971.[69]

Tenure (%)	Basildon	Brentwood	Chelmsford	Thurrock	Urban Essex	South East region	New town average
Owner occupation	11	60.7	57.3	42.1	61.7	49.1	29.5
Publicly rented	86.4	24.9	28.4	46.6	24.8	24.4	62.4
Privately rented	2.4	14.2	14.3	11.2	10.9	26.2	7.8

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[67] Interview with Alan (2017); see also: Rogaly and Taylor. *Moving Histories,* p. 18

[68] Gold, J. *The Practice of Modernism: Modern Architects and Urban Transformation, 1954–1972* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 206

[69] Data drawn from: ERO A8225/30 Davies and Shepherd. 'Analysis of 1971 census data for new towns: Basildon' (1976)

The sense of egalitarianism underpinned by the near-ubiquity of social renting was further bolstered by the architectural parity to which Alan refers: 'all *council-type* housing.' In Lee Chapel North in particular, a mixture of prevalent architectural design trends and standardised house types owing to fiscal stringency rooted in bulging construction costs helped to imbue the area with what John Gold has called one of the integral 'sociological characteristics' of post-war modernism's style: 'social equality.'[70] Alan's point about 'council-type' housing points to an aesthetic of social equality, a similarly of design styles for both subsidised rented and economic rented houses. In contrast to Basildon's nearby settlements, the modern movement, of which the new towns have proven to have had an intimate relationship with, and in which the design of many of Basildon's neighbourhoods are largely indebted, 'reconceptualised space in an egalitarian manner', with dwellings 'identical save for the necessity of catering for different sized households.'[71] This is demonstrated above by how the subtle giveaway for class distinction within Lee Chapel North was the size of one's back garden, an observation which required a certain degree of nosiness to ascertain. As Gold adds, 'stripping architecture of ornament and unnecessary stylistic devices removed the opportunity for external displays of ostentation and expressed a transparent honesty.' Furthermore, 'with no one categorised by the appearance of their home or the perceived status of their neighbourhood, design could counter some of the traditional bases of inequality and raise the self-image of the residents of the new dwellings.'[72] These environmental factors, coupled with a conjured homogeneity rooted in shared background, migratory experience, tenure and employment, underpinned narratives of community.

Public green space played a key role in facilitating sociability, particularly with second generation residents growing up in the neighbourhood. This could be found in the squares surrounding houses, the nearby 'games areas' and, of course, the large open green spaces of Gloucester Park and Laindon Park that surrounded the neighbourhood area. Significantly, however, it also includes the efforts made by the Corporation in extensively landscaping tenants' front gardens, with the space between the pavement and front door often being composed of an uninterrupted arrangement of trees and shrubs. In the spirit of modernism, this

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[70] Gold. *The Practice of Modernism*, p. 205
[71] *Ibid*., p. 206
[72] *Ibid*., p. 206

landscaped public space which surrounded residential dwellings, to use Gold's words, 'belonged equally to all who lived there', something which – as demonstrated in the following section - was not always going to remain the case.[73]

Whilst bolstered by the architectural and environmental choices of planners, the sense of egalitarianism documented above was rooted in genuine economic and social foundations (employment, background and tenure). The 'second generation' that emerged out of this moment of egalitarianism were very much products of the town, and in a sense, outcomes of the social democratic state. Whilst their parents had participated in this statist project, the project itself had played a key role in producing and defining them as subjects. It is, therefore, perhaps little surprise that the undoing of this settlement, which in Basildon can be traced nearly a decade before the election of Margaret Thatcher, was met with unease and frustration by these same subjects.

III: 'Some of us own our houses, you know?': The impact of sales to sitting tenants in Lee Chapel North, 1970-79

As previously shown, the Labour-commissioned 1968 Cullingworth and Khan report into the ownership and management of new towns recharged the Reith committee's commitment to tenure balance and cemented the need for 'rapidly increased owner occupation' in new towns, to be achieved through sales to sitting tenants and greater private development.[74] One resident recalled subsequent, more secluded and 'exclusive', privately built developments in Kingswood that occurred throughout the 1970s:

> I mean I suppose it was the introduction of class because I remember when people moved in there, they thought they were a cut above. A lot of people hadn't done the *Right to Buy* thing yet and they moved into these private houses, and they even made a little club there, with its own squash club on the estate,

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[73] *Ibid*., p. 206
[74] Cullingworth and Khan. *The Ownership and Management of Housing in the New Towns*, p. 113

and only people from that estate could go there. I think there was a slight, sort of, you know, people went there, thought they was *Billy-made-it* sort of thing.[75]

Micky's reference to the 'introduction of class' can be seen to correspond to what Sutcliffe-Braithwaite has drawn from her re-examination of ethnographic observation into Tyneside workers in 1968-71, in that 'when people said 'class' what they meant was 'snobbishness', i.e. attitudes of superiority and inferiority.'[76] The same here appears with Micky, he is articulating what appears to be an emergence of 'snobbery' and more palpable status hierarchies. Another interviewee also remembered nearby private development taking place at the beginning of the seventies, suggesting that it was quite an event for existing tenants:

> It was a big thing, it was a really big thing, you know? It was. I just remember going round there as a kid and we used to play, you know it was like, "oh wow it's a private estate, I wonder whose gonna live here?"[77]

The increase in private development that occurred at a town-wide level, observed eagerly by Lee Chapel North residents, unfolded alongside an intensely successful concessionary sales blitz that was foregrounded in the previous chapter. After just eighteen months of local concessionary sales in July 1972, Lee Chapel North and Lee Chapel South had the highest proportion of sales to sitting tenants in all of Basildon, with 26% of Lee Chapel North's rented houses being sold off and 30% in Lee Chapel South – making them the most popular areas with purchasing tenants. This rate of sales stood in contrast to other areas of the town, such as the Vange neighbourhood, which saw just 13% of rented house sales in this period. Basildon new town itself, by this point, had sold 20% of its rented housing stock (or 17% of all rented stock when flats were included).[78] By March 1973, the percentage of houses sold in Lee Chapel North and South had risen to 37% and 44% respectively – considerably higher than Basildon's 23.5%.[79]

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[75] Interview with Micky (2017)

[76] Sutcliffe-Braithwaite. *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England*, p. 33

[77] Interview with Maxine (2020)

[78] ERO A7722/14 Brown, M. D. 'The sale of new town houses to sitting tenants – is it wrong?', unpublished thesis (Polytechnic of Central London, December 1972), appendix d

[79] *Ibid*., p. 36

From community to individualism?

Between 1971 and 1979, the proportion of those living in public housing nationally continued to climb from 31% of 34%, whilst in Basildon, this plunged from 86.5% to 69% throughout the same period. As homeownership similarly climbed nationally, from 49% to 52%, in Basildon, this rose from 11% to 29.5% during the same period, the overwhelming majority of this increase was owed to tenants purchasing their corporation houses.[80] In the space of a decade, a tenure that had largely been hemmed into the pockets of what national planners had distastefully termed as 'snob areas' in the sixties, now cut through the streets of working class neighbourhoods throughout the town. Thus, throughout the seventies and eighties in Basildon, as the metrics of hierarchy and social status become muddied by rapid transformations in the tenure structure that cut through a perceived homogeneity of place, intra-class forms of snobbery and stigma came to be felt by some, damaging the sense of collective participation imbued by the distinctive nature of early postwar new towns foregrounded above. As Mike Savage suggests, 'sensing uncertainties about where class boundaries actually lie, people feel inclined to *draw* boundaries, by being judgemental, even snobbish, towards others, often people they have quite a lot in common with.'[81]

Savage has emphasised the 'underground route' that snobbery has taken in recent decades.[82] Whilst an increasing number of people have claimed to 'shun snobbery and proclaim a distinct spirit of openness and egalitarianism', he argues that 'serious contradictions to this stance surface at the same time.'[83] David Morgan has built on these findings by articulating the notion of the 'democratisation of snobbery', 'as snobberies of possession replace snobberies of position.'[84] As Morgan posits, snobbery is 'one of the mechanisms, often unacknowledged and concealed, through which class distinctions are maintained and reproduced.'[85] Despite the veiled and supple nature of this 'new snobbery', with its 'numerous subtle interactional processes', Savage suggests, it is 'nonetheless tremendously socially powerful.'[86] Whilst interviewees demonstrated an antipathy towards snobbery in line with Florence Sutcliffe-

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[80] ERO A8891/6 BDC. 'A Social Profile of Basildon: August 1979' (1979), p. 11
[81] Savage, M. *Social Class in the 21st Century* (London: Pelican, 2015), p. 381
[82] *Ibid*., p. 364, 388
[83] *Ibid*., p. 383. See also: Sutcliffe-Braithwaite. *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England*
[84] Morgan, D. *Snobbery: The Practices of Distinction* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018), p. 97
[85] *Ibid*., p. 98
[86] *Ibid*. p. 98; Savage. *Social Class in the 21st Century*, p. 388

Braithwaite's findings, they nonetheless identified a growth in snobbery which this chapter links to the changing status of collective provision.[87]

This is something which has been particularly significant for Basildon and Harlow, given the integral role collective provision played in their development. Of leaving Basildon in the 1990s, one ex-resident admitted: 'It's a bit of snobbery to be honest with you, we just want to get out and *visibly* better ourselves', whilst another interviewee who grew up in Laindon Five Links throughout the 2000s, which remained predominantly council-rented, posited: 'people were quite snobby towards it, would have looked down on it, cause it was a pretty rough part of Basildon.'[88] As later shown, there was a tendency for a perceived increase in snobbery to be articulated as part of a broader narrative of decline and collective loss, in one instance, the town's shift away from its early postwar policy of 'self-containment': 'Everybody worked and lived in the town and cycled to work […] now of course they're all commuters and there's an awful, snobbish feeling about Harlow all around the villages.'[89] Something which stood in contrast for many interviewees with the days when rented public housing was nearly the universal tenure across the town: 'I don't think there was room for snobbery, they weren't that much different from anyone else.'[90] As will be explored, this was something some residents felt was a direct consequence of rented house sales that occurred throughout Basildon. As one Lee Chapel North resident suggested:

> I think that's personally when everything really changed, cuz you had people buying their own homes, for next to nothing, and then all of a sudden there was this snobbery – 'I'm the owner', and my mum and dad, they were that and I remember my nan, she came down, we got her a flat in the end cuz we were living here, and she used to call everybody snobs 'cuz they were all starting to buy their houses, and that's when you had a lot of people buying, and a lot of people renting and it – you know – you've got it now, dotted within our estate there's still council tenants and they stick out like a sore-you know, everybody knows they're a council tenant, you know, it isn't nice, because we were all council tenants… you know, predominantly everybody that came to Basildon

[87] Sutcliffe-Braithwaite. *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England*
[88] Interview with Chris (2017) and William (2017)
[89] Interview with Moira (2017)
[90] Interview with Micky (2017)

were council tenants, the class distinction began to become quite prevalent, I think.[91]

The everyday social and personal consequences of house sales played a profound role in shaping local, vernacular understandings of the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism. With some residents feeling as though sales introduced a degree of intra-class distinction into the neighbourhood, a recurring theme in interviews was the role personalised, external modifications to newly purchased properties played in this. Drawing attention to the ways in which new homeowners broadcasted their elevated social status, Chris recalled that:

> Most people when they bought their house, first thing they did was change the front door. That's a classic way of finding out whether someone's bought their house, they change the front door to let everyone know they've bought their house.[92]

This point was further reiterated by Maxine, who noted that alongside changing or painting one's front door, many new homeowners went further, despite restrictions imposed by the Corporation:

> All of a sudden, everybody got, like, um, cladding, what was it? Like crazy paving, and they had it all put on their walls on the front of their house, it was like a marble or something, everybody started to put this underneath their doorframes and have their paths crazy-paved and the backs crazy-paved, it was like: people who had crazy-paving owned their house, it got a bit like that, you know?[93]

In 1972, an ex-BDC staffer, M. D. Brown, who had worked in the Corporation's architectural department prior to writing a thesis on the issue of sales, having witnessed the unfolding consequences first hand, suggested that 'sales are making people more aware of social class.'[94] This point was reaffirmed by Micky, who suggested that:

> It put a divide between people – you were now a homeowner, people put pebbledashes on the front of their house, to declare themselves as *Made It*, or different to other people, you know? They would do these pointless architectural

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[91] Interview with Maxine (2020)
[92] Interview with Chris (2017)
[93] Interview with Maxine (2020)
[94] ERO A7722/14 Brown. 'The sale of new town houses to sitting tenants – is it wrong?', p. 40

things to their house, it wouldn't improve the house in any way, it was just a declaration of "look at me, I've made it, I'm a homeowner" and that's when the stigma of being a council tenant came in really.[95]

To some interviewees, a rapid growth in personalised alterations, at least retrospectively, represented the end of something – not just in regards to the changing local status of the recently ubiquitous collective provision of housing that the development of the town had relied, but also the sense of 'community' and collective participation that its prevalence was considered to have encouraged. Such testimonies suggest a sudden heightening of intra-class distinction, articulated through a vernacular language of class (of having 'made it' or thinking one was a 'cut above'), that occurred as a result of sales, closely related to the subsequent external modifications being made throughout the area. This phenomenon of 'unauthorised alterations' in Basildon, Brown suggests, did not occur in the housing developments built for sale, but was intriguingly limited to the town's formerly rented areas.[96]

In discussing how changes in corporation house sales changed Lee Chapel North, Chris felt the change was palpable and immediate: 'It's all about me, all of a sudden.' Chris used a metaphor to explain the social implications at play during this stampede of local house sales, in a way that was reminiscent of how the architectural and aesthetic uniformity of the estate was disrupted by increasingly bold personalised modifications:

> It's that classic thing, I dunno if this makes sense, but with school uniform, if you get everyone to wear a school uniform, everyone's okay. Soon as you start relaxing the rules and people start wearing what they want – everybody wants that. It all changes. Nobody wants to be part of something cuz everyone wants to be an individual. And I think that with the housing as well.[97]

Given the visual unity of Lee Chapel North's design, alterations were particularly obtrusive, as illustrated by the BDC's literature on the matter from 1979 reproduced below.

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[95] Interview with Micky (2017)
[96] *Ibid*., p. 67
[97] Interview with Chris (2017)

Figure 3.6 - Literature distributed by BDC showing before and after 'unauthorised alterations.'[98]

Much of the Corporation's green 'open plan' layout now fell under the jurisdiction of new homeowners, with landscaped verges which had been provided and maintained by the Corporation occasionally being removed or destroyed, leading the Corporation to criticise 'various types of unauthorised fences and walls in front gardens' which spoiled the 'open plan' design of neighbourhoods.[99] Open plan greenery was increasingly divided and disrupted by unauthorised walls, concreted driveways, and occasionally the zealous removal of trees and shrubs outside the houses of new owners. Ex-staffer M. D. Brown picked up on changes made to purchased houses and their surrounding environments in Lee Chapel South to demonstrate this point, photographing a conventional block of six terraced houses with thick five-foot-high shrubbery lining the verge that separated the dwellings from the road. One of the six properties

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[98] ERO A8891/6 BDC. 'How to go about improving your home' leaflet distributed to tenants (1979)
[99] *Ibid*.

had entirely removed the shrubbery outside of their house, replacing it with a rock landscape, and had installed a large porch, new windows and mock shutters in stark contrast to the remaining properties.[100] Other examples show trees on the wide verges of corner houses in Lee Chapel North, enclosed by a newly built brick wall that lined the pavement, captioned sarcastically: 'They're my trees now so why should <u>you</u> see them?'[101] This was something particularly despaired by the Corporation given the role they felt such greenery played in 'softening' the modernist style of the dwellings - and there is a similar degree of importance given, more generally, to green areas by interviewees as well. As Ortolano's findings in Milton Keynes have suggested, 'shrubberies and trees, more than buildings and estates, promised to fix identities in Milton Keynes, instilling a sense of rootedness and belonging to new residents in new homes in a new city that otherwise lacked historical markers.'[102] This is somewhat symbolic, given that the benchmark for rootedness and one's sense of having a 'stake' in the town was changing. In the founding decades of the new town, the BDC sought to facilitate the rootedness of new residents through their 'personal participation' in the town, through active participation in their respective community.[103] Those who had taken the plunge of leaving the known world of inner and outer London to embark upon the 'brave new world' of provincial new towns had already staked their futures and that of their children's in these statist projects, yet, having a 'stake' in the town was increasingly articulated through a language of financial ownership. Literature sent to residents during the early concessionary sales reflected the cultural privileging of homeownership, enticing them to participate in the scheme by stating in bold capital letters: 'HAVE YOU BOUGHT A STAKE IN THE FUTURE OF BASILDON?'[104] This was also one of the chief reasons for recommending rented house sales by the 1968 Cullingworth and Khan report.[105] What occurred was a gradual shift in emphasis from belonging and rootedness in the new town being based on the extent of one's active participation in the 'life of community', to a newfound emphasis of having an individual *financial* stake in the town; a property investment or financial asset located within the new town's designated area. Such a shift illuminates the cultural privileging of homeownership throughout this period, and a problematic implication that a sense of belonging, attachment to

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[100] ERO A7722/14 Brown. 'The sale of new town houses to sitting tenants – is it wrong?', pp. 69-70

[101] *Ibid*., p. 71

[102] Ortolano. *Thatcher's Progress*, pp. 124-5

[103] ERO SA 20/2/7/1 Interview with Charles Boniface, General Manager of BDC (1967)

[104] ERO A8891/14 Wilson, P. J., BDC Estates Officer. Letter entitled 'Have you bought a stake in the future of Basildon?' (January 1972)

[105] See: Cullingworth and Khan. *The Ownership and Management of Housing in the New Towns*

place and sense of having invested in something being the exclusive reserve of those capable of purchasing the dwelling in which they lived (a theme subsequently examined in chapter five).

The form of tenure that had played a foundational role in establishing a sense of likeness and affinity between residents was suddenly functioning as a wedge that seemingly divided them into a new social hierarchy, fragmenting a perception of cohesion and the 'sense of community' that accompanied it. As the ex-staffer noted in 1972, recalling a 'common occurrence' witnessed throughout his time working for the BDC during this period of rented house sales in Basildon, describing a situation in which children of large families were playing noisily in an outdoors green or similar, 'to the annoyance of neighbours whose children have grown up and left school':

> Offended neighbours, instead of simply expressing their annoyance and telling children to play elsewhere, have been heard to add something to the effect of "after all we have bought our house, you know."[106]

Maxine similarly recalled that 'all of a sudden there was this snobbery' following the purchase of rented houses, something which – as with many interviewees – she considers a significant turning point in the history of both the neighbourhood and town:

> I remember [my nan] called my mum a snob, you know? Cuz they still lived in a council flat, my nan and granddad, they did all their lives, even though it was in Basildon they stayed council tenants, and you know – it's the snobbery, she's bought her house, they've bought their house, you know, it became like that […] you knew who had bought their house, and you still do now, because the windows are different to the council house windows, the houses are all exactly the same, they have a slightly different window so you know whose council tenants – you think (snobbish voice) "oh they're council tenants" - you think council tenants come with a problem, they're just people trying as hard as the next one is.[107]

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[106] ERO A7722/14 Brown. 'The sale of new town houses to sitting tenants – is it wrong?', p. 40

[107] Interview with Maxine (2020). A similar sentiment of people 'chang[ing] overnight into "snobs"' has been drawn out of Mass Observation's 1990 directive on 'social divisions' by Sutcliffe-Braithwaite. See: Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, F. 'Discourses of 'class' in Britain in 'New Times', in *Contemporary British History,* vol. 31, no. 2 (2017), p. 309

Again, this 'sudden' emergence of snobbery appeared to contrast the sense of egalitarianism examined in the previous section. As Susan, who grew up in different rented dwellings between Lee Chapel North and South – still living in the former, recalled: 'In the early days everyone was in the same boat, I don't think there was much room for judging others.' Susan also recalled the centrality of the neighbourhood's community centre to her family's social life. Her family had moved into the Lee Chapel area in 1965 following her father's transfer from Ford's in Ilford to Basildon. Without a family car, her father lift-shared to work with colleagues that lived on his street. Much scholarship has found fault with the limited sociability implied by the post-war concept of the neighbourhood unit, and Clapson has suggested that the 'good intentions' of neighbourhood planners were 'undone by the motor car', which allowed for 'greater levels of privatized, personal mobility.'[108] But for those without such spatial mobility, the neighbourhood community centre – where Susan's family spent 'every' weekend (Friday and Saturday nights) throughout the seventies – remained a core feature of social life. By the end of the decade in 1979, 82.3% of Basildon's 'semi and unskilled manual workers, casual workers and pensioners' (Basildon's largest demography by social grading – 38.2%) still lived in socially rented housing.[109] 62% were also without a motor vehicle.[110] In regards to the sales that took place in the seventies, Susan recalled:

> Unfortunately, at the time when my mum and dad were offered their corporation house my dad was on a three-day week, so he couldn't afford to take up a mortgage at that time. You know, so they were in that situation where whenever that opportunity come along, because they were striking, they didn't have the opportunity to do it. And as they got older, they just continued to rent.[111]

It is perhaps unsurprising that with moments of collective sacrifice impinging one's ability to pursue financial self-betterment, alongside greater reliance on the neighbourhood's communal facilities, that participation in sales and outward expressions of personal affirmation could be seen to sit uneasily with existing perceptions of 'community' based on shared experience, 'likeness' and collective provision. For some interviewees, house sales in Lee Chapel North were a moment in which the lives and destinies of the neighbourhood's residents, which were

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[108] Clapson. *Invincible Green Suburbs*, p. 162
[109] ERO A8891/6 BDC. 'A Social Profile of Basildon: August 1979' (1979), p. 10, appendix A
[110] A third of all of Basildon's households did not own a motor vehicle in August 1979. ERO A8891/6 BDC. 'A Social Profile of Basildon: August 1979' (1979), p. 3, 18
[111] Interview with Susan (2017)

ultimately not too dissimilar, bifurcated into very different trajectories, based on whether one was able to take up the opportunity provided by the Corporation or not, and there was a degree of chance and luck in one's ability to do this. As Maxine recalls:

> My mum and dad only could afford to find the deposit because they won the football pools, and they didn't win a lot but it was enough to pay a deposit, otherwise we wouldn't have bought the house.[112]

Maxine felt as if this somewhat arbitrary opening had led her family to lead a very different life to those who hadn't taken up the opportunity that emerged:

> We had neighbours just to the side of us, they died not long ago, they stayed as council tenants, there was a row of houses in my square that predominantly stayed council tenants, and they were the ones that continued to go out up to the Bluehouse Club and to use the community centre as they got older, they kind of had a different life to us. They were more care free, they didn't have the big jobs, they were just, kind of normal, more laid back and- more time to talk and, one of the ladies still lives in her house as a council tenant now. [They were] content with their lot.[113]

In contrast to this, Maxine felt as though house purchase had considerable personal ramifications for her family, something which she felt was common for many other households at the time:

> I remember that being a big change. My mum and dad scrimped and saved at the beginning to afford the mortgage, and I think a lot of people did, unless you were wealthy, and there wasn't- in our area, where I was, if you were wealthy you wouldn't be living there, you'd be somewhere else. […] There wasn't wealthy- I can't remember the wealthy. I just remember people- all of us being in the same boat, I don't really remember thinking: "oh they've got loads of money", not until later… […] I remember my dad being under so much pressure, he had to change his job. He was a bus driver, then he was a tanker driver […] and that's when my mum went up to London because they couldn't afford the mortgage, […] that's when things started to get tense indoors. And

[112] Interview with Maxine (2020)
[113] *Ibid.*

then she had to work longer hours, before she went up to London, she got an industrial disease working in Gilbarco, because the hours were so long, to pay the mortgage. It all came to be about paying your mortgage, and having better.[114]

Maxine felt like the financial predicament of her family and many others in the area who had purchased facilitated a growing tendency for households to look inwards to their own problems at the expense of looking outwards to the 'community', which in turn was felt to have fragmented as a result of the policy:

> I just think that's when the divide came, I just feel that that's where it all started, people started to spend a lot more time at work, and needed to work to pay their mortgage, and work became something that- I remember my mum having to go back up to London to work, so she had a local job, but to carry on paying the mortgage she had to go back up to London, and that left us as like, door-latch kids, you had to make your own way- I was devastated. But people then began to struggle because they had a mortgage […] I just think that that's when the pressure began to build, you know, people began worrying about their jobs, thinking about their jobs, working longer hours, doing more shifts, kids were growing up, they had to go to work, it was a Catch 22, I think, when the housing stock was sold off.[115]

Lawrence has drawn out from the Raph Samuel's Stevenage survey in the 1960s how mothers that worked full time tended to feel marginal to local female networks, causing them not to mix within them to the same degree as other households, sometimes leading to resentment, something which 'placed them outside the dominant culture of their respective neighbourhoods.'[116] Interestingly, in Lee Chapel North, a drastic rise of overtime and housewives seeking part time or full time work in response to meeting mortgage repayments – something which Maxine suggests occurred in nearby households as well as her own – followed house sales. Not only had this altered the family household dynamics but also perceptions of the household's relationship to the neighbourhood. It represented another aspect of life that 'set them apart' from those that remained tenants, those who – in Maxine's own

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[114] *Ibid.*

[115] *Ibid.* See also: Smith Wilson, D. 'A New Look at the Affluent Worker: The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain' in *Twentieth Century British History,* vol. 17, no. 2 (2006), pp. 206-229

[116] Lawrence. *Me, Me, Me?*, p. 97

words – had remained more 'laid back.' Similarly, a local 1971 press report of Basildon's 'homes bonanza' covered a typical story of young couple Brian and Susan, aged 23 and 21 with young children, who had purchased their two-bedroom terraced house in Lee Chapel North as soon as the opportunity emerged. Brian, a welder at the local lorry bodybuilders factory, had sold his car and was 'working overtime up to 16 hours a week to make extra money' for the mortgage.[117]

In 1981, Margaret Thatcher opined that 'economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul [of the nation].'[118] In examining the social implications of the local sales policy in Basildon in the early seventies, many features of what would come to be understood as neoliberalism and the ways in which it 'reshape[d] subjectivity' were already being exhibited as a consequence of a policy based on privatisation and individual economic self-betterment.[119] As Lavel and Dardot note, 'neoliberalism is not merely destructive of rules, institutions and rights. It is also *productive* of certain kinds of social relations, certain ways of living, certain subjectivities. In other words, at stake in neoliberalism is nothing more, nor less, than the *form of our existence* – the way in which we are led to conduct ourselves, to relate to others and to ourselves.'[120] Neoliberalism, they suggest, engenders a 'certain existential norm' which 'enjoins everyone to live in a world of generalised competition.'[121] As Maxine recalled, '…it all came to be about paying your mortgage, and having better.'[122]

In light of these findings, there is a perhaps scope to consider this phenomenon and its social implications as 'proto-neoliberal' in nature, and in this particular instance, neoliberalism, rather than being an 'agentless abstraction',[123] appears very much to have had its agents. Not just in the local state, in this case the development corporation, which went to considerable lengths to manufacture this predicament, but also in the thousands of tenants who embraced the arguably

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[117] ERO A8891/14 Moore, P. 'The home hunters: families rush to stake out a claim!' in *Evening Echo* (10 August 1971)

[118] Matthijs, M. *Ideas and Economic Crises in Britain from Attlee to Blair, 1945-2005* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 103

[119] Dardot and Laval suggest the 'social aspect' of this is based upon 'the individualisation of social relations to the detriment of collective solidarities', and the transformation of the individual, who is 'called on to conceive and conduct him or herself as an enterprise.' Dardot, P. and Laval, C. *The New Way of the World: on neoliberal society* (London: Verso, 2017), p. 3

[120] *Ibid*., p. 3

[121] *Ibid*., p. 3

[122] Interview with Maxine (2020)

[123] Ortolano's phraseology. *Thatcher's Progress*, p. 112

irresistible opportunity to participate in it. This is not to reproach those who participated in this exercise of financial enrichment and the often arguably ostentatious outward expressions of personal autonomy that followed, but to acknowledge that when this fragmented parcelling out of personal and financial empowerment occurred under a political formation in which class hierarchies 'were blurred but in no way destroyed', an appearance of egalitarianism was shattered.[124] This helps us to understand a vernacular grappling with the changes that occur in the complex, elongated transition from social democracy to neoliberalism in Basildon, in which a descent from 'community' into 'individualism' takes centre stage.

The very visual markers of individualism throughout the seventies and eighties occurred in Basildon amidst a variety of broader trends that were undoing place-based community throughout this period. Firstly, Ray Pahl and Stefan Ramsden have pointed to increasingly new forms of sociability based on shared conjugal sociability 'with friends drawn from beyond the neighbourhood.'[125] Secondly, the structural making of community based on manual work and tenure came undone during the late twentieth century, and these sales can be seen as a visual forerunner to the social polarisation of working class communities identified by Pahl in Sheppey, Kent which occurred with unemployment, deindustrialisation and new homeownership in the 1980s, accompanied by an increased stigmatisation associated with welfare dependency.[126] Indeed, as Pahl showed, homeownership altered patterns of domestic life, consumption and relationships, but also, as Sutcliffe-Braithwaite posits, new homeownership sat uneasily with the images some people held of 'traditional working-class life' in their heads, identifying - from her re-examination of responses to the 1990 Mass Observation directive on 'social divisions' - an attachment to 'authenticity' and not 'changing' on the question of housing.[127] In light of these considerations, it is easy to see how an outwards facing 'individualism', as expressed in something as mundane as personal alterations to the exteriors of recently purchased dwellings, came to be felt as the undoing of something much

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[124] Robinson *et al* 'Telling Stories about Post-war Britain', p. 277

[125] Ramsden. *Working-Class Community in the Age of Affluence*, pp. 98-99; Pahl. *On Friendship*

[126] Pahl, R. *Divisions of Labour* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984). See also: Elliot, J. and Lawrence, J. 'The Emotional Economy of Unemployment: A Re-Analysis of Testimony From a Sheppey Family, 1978-1983' in *SAGE Open* (2016), pp. 1-11

[127] Sutcliffe-Braithwaite. *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England*, p. 87; Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, F. 'Discourses of 'class' in Britain in 'New Times', in *Contemporary British History,* vol. 31, no. 2 (2017), p. 308

greater, eroding the sense of collective participation upon which the postwar new town communities were based.

IV: Local state responses to growing individualism, 1974-79

The success, impact and aftermath of the 1970-74 sales elicited intriguing responses from both local states in the town, illuminating tensions that emerged between an insurgent individualism and the elusive idea of 'community' which NTDCs had placed great emphasis on from the outset. This section examines how local actors negotiated such tensions, drawing attention to the lingering paternalism of the BDC whilst demonstrating how Basildon District Council imagined alternatives to demunicipalisation towards the end of the decade, bolstering recent literature that has sought to re-define the seventies as a 'decade of possibility', in which 'Thatcherism appears not as the inevitable solution to an objective crisis, but as a contingent outcome.'[128]

At the close of the decade, when the Conservatives promptly reintroduced concessionary sales in 1979 prior to the formal introduction of the 1980 Housing Act, the BDC issued literature pleading with residents – in light of their past experience - to respect the requirements of their covenants and disposal deeds when altering their newly purchased dwelling. It reminded prospective purchasers that Basildon was 'admired by visitors who come from all over the world to see it', and that were 'particularly impressed by the housing areas.' The literature stated that:

> They like the houses and the way they are set together among carefully planned open space and landscape areas, which 'soften' the bricks and mortar. It is essential to conserve the landscape for the benefit of both the existing community and for future generations.[129]

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[128] Robinson *et al*. 'Telling Stories about Post-war Britain, p. 271; Black and Pemberton. 'Introduction: The benighted decade? Reassessing the seventies'; see also: Saumarez Smith, O. 'The Inner City Crisis and the End of Urban Modernism in 1970s Britain' in *Twentieth Century British History,* vol. 27, no. 4 (2016), pp. 598; Medhurst. *That Option No Longer Exists*

[129] ERO A8891/6 BDC. 'How to go about improving your home' leaflet distributed to tenants (1979)

House sales in rented areas had led to a 'random mixture of rented and owner-occupied dwellings throughout the town', which made 'the comprehensive management, and thus the protection and preservation of the existing environment, a more difficult task.'[130]

Figure 3.7 - Example of literature distributed to tenants upon resumption of sales in 1979.[131]
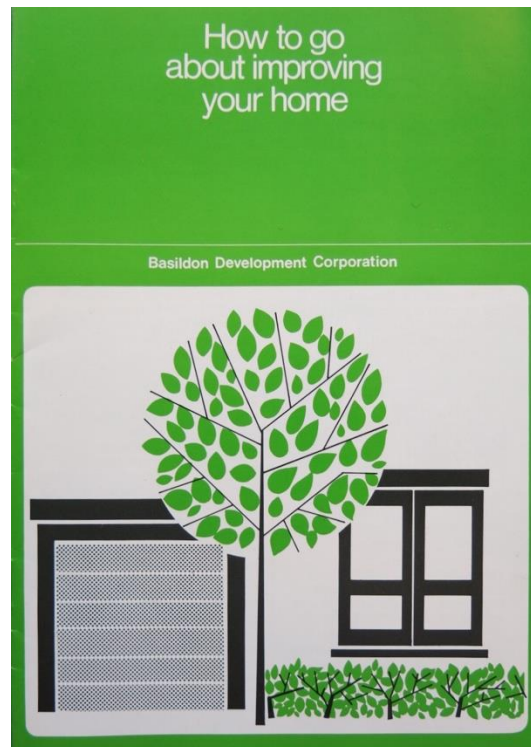
The literature stated that whilst 'most people agree that the quality of the environment needs to be protected and both purchasers and tenants owe a duty to the community as well as to each other', there existed 'a small minority likely to cause offence and spoil the appearance of the area.'[132] The leaflet accused such people of 'spoiling the street scene as a whole' and of devaluing - 'both in visual and money terms' - not just the general area, but their own houses and others in the neighbourhood.[133] What is interesting here is the need the corporation feels to appeal to the property values of owner occupiers' recently purchased dwellings. It is almost as though when a shift to sales occurs, people's priorities change, and the local state – aware of this fact – adds a financial dimension to its appeal. Not only did it evoke the financial value of properties, but also an appeal to 'community':

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[130] *Ibid.*

[131] *Ibid.*

[132] *Ibid.*

[133] *Ibid.*

> The Corporation appreciate that many owners want to improve and alter their homes, but although these proposals will be for the benefit of the individual, they may be the reverse for the community as a whole and some form of control has to be enforced.[134]

This positioning of individualised, external modifications against 'the community as a whole' affirms a tension that emerged in neighbourhoods like Lee Chapel North between perceptions of 'community' and an insurgent individualism. The positioning here by the BDC corresponds to the testimonies of those unable or unwilling to buy throughout this period, who felt – perhaps more so than those purchasing – that these increasingly bold affirmations of personal autonomy and self-expression came at a particular societal cost. This lingering paternalism by the BDC can be seen as an attempt to reconcile these two conflicting priorities of 'community' and individualism, which appear to sit in uneasy opposition with one another.

Whilst BDC literature made threats of court action against those who broke covenants and disposal deeds, widespread flaunting of rules and guidelines laid down by the BDC throughout this decade testifies to a marked decline in deference to local political authority, which – as indicated by the previous focus on Harlow in the 1950s and 1960s in chapter two, had a longer post-war trajectory.[135] Whilst this does not suddenly emerge from the 1970-74 sales, the local extravaganza of personal affirmation no doubt emboldened many more to participate. Given the scale of individuals altering their newly purchased homes, there did not seem to be much weight behind the Corporation's threats of discipline, and like its equivalent in Harlow, the BDC appeared to have been operating from a considerable position of weakness in relation to the thousands of new homeowners across the town who participated in increasingly defiant expressions of personal autonomy.

Meanwhile, in a bid to tackle many of the issues and insecurities thrown up by the 1970-74 sales investigated in the previous section, Basildon District Council also took a number of steps to mediate and manage these arising tensions. In light of the proposed transfer of housing assets planned for 1978, in which the local authority was set to absorb 21,500 rented corporation dwellings, taking its housing stock across the district to just under 29,000, the district council

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[134] *Ibid*.

[135] See also: Sutcliffe-Braithwaite. *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England*

set out its vision for the future.[136] The council's leadership relished the opportunity to become 'one of the largest [housing authorities] in the country', and sought to organise housing 'for the benefit of tenants and under their control through the extension and development of tenants participation and management.'[137] The council's *Homes For Our People* (1977) programme sought to rectify many of the common criticisms levelled against council and corporation housing, subsequently articulated in critiques of council housing management by Annie Power and Alison Ravetz, which was held to be paternalistic, bureaucratic, non-responsive and centralised.[138]

The council's 1977 Tenants' Charter acknowledged that the relationship between councils and their tenants were 'unnecessarily restrictive and paternalistic' and sought to achieve 'an equality in control and influence over the home in which one lives', as well as enabling tenants to 'participate in the running of council housing.'[139] Chairman of the Housing and Welfare Committee Harold Tinworth boasted that: 'we believe we are going farther than any other council in giving our people freedom. [...] In Basildon, it is part of a socialist philosophy that working people should control their own lives.'[140] The proposed charter drew attention from the national press, partly because local authority and corporation tenants played a key role in writing and compiling the document themselves.[141] It was pioneered by local activists and tenants such as Rene Harlow, who went on to speak at national events of MPs, councillors and local authority officers in a bid to encourage other councils to follow suit – insisting that the new freedoms of the charter would help to break down the divisions between owner occupiers and council tenants, and perceptions of the latter as 'second class citizens.'[142] As one local newspaper put it, 'tenants will be able to do virtually everything except buy their homes.'[143]

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[136] ERO A/TB 1/8/14/5 Basildon Council. *Homes for our People: Basildon Council's Housing strategy* (Basildon: Basildon Council, 1977), p. 15

[137] Tinworth, H. 'Transfer of housing assets', *Link* (December 1976)

[138] Power, A. *Property Before People: The Management of Twentieth-Century Council Housing* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987); Ravetz, A. *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (London: Routledge, 2001), chapter 8

[139] ERO A/TB 1/8/14/5 Basildon Council. *Homes for our People: Basildon Council's Housing strategy* (Basildon: Basildon Council, 1977), p. 1

[140] 'Tenants given a voice in housing policy', *The Times* (18 October 1977)

[141] *Ibid*.; Tinworth, H. 'Transfer of housing assets', *Link* (December 1976)

[142] Green G. 'First class! That's Rene the tenants' champion', *Evening Echo* (8 March 1978)

[143] 'Opening the tenants' door to freedom', *Evening Echo* (18 October 1977)

Thus, the goal was to achieve 'an equality in control and influence over the homes in which one lives', with the report subsequently elaborating that:

> Differences between what an owner-occupier can do and a tenant can do in their property and their immediate surroundings should ideally be in no way different and both should be able to control the way they live and the manner of their living.[144]

Both new town local authorities in Basildon and Harlow were, perhaps uniquely, able to proactively and dynamically respond to the drastic transformations occurring in what was subsequently termed the 'wobbly pillar' of the welfare state by Peter Malpass.[145] Prior to the election of Thatcher and her subsequent 'war' on local government, and operating under a Labour administration elected on a radical programme that promised democratic control and political autonomy, innovative ideas and solutions were locally formulated in a mood of optimism and excitement that challenges conventional understandings of the decade. In a local newspaper article introducing the plan, Tinworth elaborated on the radicalism of the council's vision, shedding light on the uniqueness of the new town local authorities predicament:

> The Labour Council intends to make the Housing Authority a national leader in every respect. It will not be a merger or takeover but a creation of something radically new and different – another step in the completion of Labour's vision of the New Town controlled by its people. It will not be achieved on April 1 1978, but in the years ahead. It will need the active participation of tenants and of the staff forming the new Housing Authority.[146]

These demands had become a key theme for Basildon District Council at this time, as illustrated by the insistence by council leader John Potter in 1977 that 'the ordinary people of Basildon should be able to control their own destinies; transfer of *all* the assets to a democratically elected body is the first step towards achieving this.'[147] In a sense, what was being proposed was the extension and expansion of the social democratic idealism that underpinned the designation and development of Basildon and other new towns across the country.

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[144] ERO A/TB 1/8/14/5 Potter, J. R and Tinworth, H. W. 'Foreword: Homes for our people' in Basildon Council. *Homes for our People: Basildon Council's Housing strategy* (Basildon: Basildon Council, 1977); Basildon Council. *Homes for our People*, p. 17

[145] Malpass. 'The Wobbly Pillar?'

[146] Tinworth, H. 'Transfer of housing assets', *Link* (December 1976)

[147] ERO A/TB 1/8 Draft letter from BDC Chairman to Councillor John Potter (26 April 1977)

These themes relating to the demands for political autonomy, greater self-expression and democratic control by 'ordinary people' (a phrase successfully mobilised by opposition leader, Thatcher at this time) throughout the seventies corresponds to recent work by Robinson *et al.* that has sought to challenge the 'one dimensional' rise and decline narrative of social democracy with a new meta-narrative relating to the rise of what they term 'popular individualism' in post-war Britain.[148] As Basildon District Council's *Homes for Our People* stated:

> One of the key political issues for the last quarter of the twentieth century is how an advanced industrial society, with an expanding public sector, is sensitive to and is controlled by ordinary people. The frontier for advance is in the methods of democratic control to deal with this type of society. This is an issue to which Basildon must significantly contribute.[149]

The policies and ideas expressed throughout the text, in the words of its authors, had served as the council's 'guide in the seventies', having 'evolved over a period of time' culminating in the 1977 document.[150] This further bolsters arguments that the emergence of popular individualism, as suggested by Robinson *et al.,* was 'not an inherently right-wing phenomenon', but rather, had expressions in progressive outlets as well.[151] The local authority in the seventies can be considered as such, given that it incorporated and articulated growing demands for greater autonomy, self-expression and democratic control within its housing priorities and policies throughout this period.

Political narratives of the seventies have the tendency to reduce it to 'the end-point of increasingly feeble attempts to maintain the post-war settlement', a decade of 'crisis' located between postwar social democracy and the 'triumph of neoliberalism.'[152] Recent scholarship has sought to destabilise this narrative, with Pemberton, Black and Thane suggesting the

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[148] Lawrence, J. and Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, F. 'Margaret Thatcher and the decline of class politics' in Jackson, B. and Saunders, R. (eds) *Making Thatcher's Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 132-147
[149] ERO A/TB 1/8/14/5 Basildon Council. *Homes for our People: Basildon Council's Housing strategy* (Basildon: Basildon Council, 1977), p. 17
[150] ERO A/TB 1/8/14/5 Potter, J. R and Tinworth, H. W. 'Foreword: Homes for our people' in Basildon Council. *Homes for our People: Basildon Council's Housing strategy* (Basildon: Basildon Council, 1977)
[151] Robinson *et al*. 'Telling Stories about Post-war Britain', p. 269
[152] *Ibid*., p. 269, 268-9

seventies was in fact a 'decade of possibility' in which a 'vibrant marketplace of ideas' flourished.[153] Similarly, John Medhurst has attempted to revive the decade as 'one of the most politically fertile, liberating and exciting periods in British history.'[154] Much of this has understandably been achieved through developments at a national level, in particular emphasising the radicalism of the Labour Party's Alternative Economic Strategy, with its themes of participatory politics and democratic control, as the left sought to forge an alternative beyond what they saw as elitist corporatism.[155] In Basildon at this time, the prevalence of an emergent individualism, heightened by the early sales at the start of the decade, did not, to quote Robinson *et al.*, 'lead in a straight line to Thatcherism', but intriguingly played a key role in producing imaginative alternatives based on popular aspiration and equality that sought to rectify genuine limitations of the social democratic set up.[156] Not only does this destabilise linear, one-dimensional trajectories of a unidirectional transition from social democracy to neoliberalism, but it also bolsters literature that points to the seventies as a 'decade of possibility', in which 'Thatcherism appears not as the inevitable solution to an objective crisis, but as a contingent outcome.'[157]

As will be shown in the following chapter, the planned transfer of housing assets to Basildon District Council in 1978 collapsed, with those who remained tenants in Lee Chapel North remaining corporation tenants into the eighties. Whilst the sales of the early seventies can be considered 'proto-neoliberal' in nature, they must also be acknowledged as very much products of the postwar social democratic period and its elusive, shifting imperatives, illustrating not just the convoluted nature of the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism, but also this local flourishing of individualism's 'complex relationship to both those political formations.'[158] As Robinson *et al.* argue, 'the social democratic post-war settlement was a key driver of growing individualism, but in complicated ways.'[159]

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[153] Black and Pemberton. 'Introduction: The benighted decade? Reassessing the seventies', p. 17

[154] Medhurst. *That Option No Longer Exists: Britain 1974-76*, p. 10

[155] For instance, see: Jones, M. W. 'The Challenge of Stuart Holland: The Labour Party's Economic Strategy during the 1970s', in Black, L., Pemberton, H. and Thane, P. (eds) *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 123-48; Holland, S. 'Alternative European and Economic Strategies', in Black, L., Pemberton, H. and Thane, P. (eds) *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 96-122; Medhurst. *That Option No Longer Exists*, pp. 100-109

[156] Robinson *et al.* 'Telling Stories about Post-war Britain', pp. 274-5

[157] *Ibid.*, p. 271

[158] *Ibid.*, p. 304

[159] *Ibid.*, p. 277

Conclusion

This chapter has not sought to suggest that individualism, social snobbery and domestically oriented privatism suddenly emerged out of these local sales, or that status-consciousness and social aspiration within post-war suburban working class communities had not existed prior to this local turning point – a longer, more gradual manifestation and evolution of these trends have been well documented elsewhere.[160] In reality, these changing patterns of social distinction and disparity were not mere products of the sales policy, but were rather brought to the fore by it, rendered visible, and manifested in new and overt ways due to their sharp and seemingly sudden physical delineation in the neighbourhood's built environment. The sales policy and its consequences made social disparity visibly unavoidable, in ways that re-enforced intra-class division and hierarchy, whilst redefining them. In other words, despite claims to the contrary, the seventies witnessed a growth in the 'political salience of class', but in increasingly complex ways.[161] Before, as suggested in chapter two, there had been a certain degree of subtlety and discreetness to how tenants on suburban estates altered their home and projected one's social aspirations and tastes (prior to sales this overwhelmingly occurred *within* the domestic sphere).[162] Whilst front gardens and their 'tidiness' have also played an important historical role in delineating poverty or social status, there was limited scope for this in Lee Chapel North, as the extensive landscaping efforts of the BDC, foregrounded above, rendered such potential less pronounced.[163] External scope for broadcasting social status was relatively impinged, until the early seventies saw policy mechanisms that allowed them to play out in the exterior of dwellings and their surrounding environment. As was suggested by Maxine's testimony, identifying middle class professionals in the 'early days' of the neighbourhood required a particular degree of nosiness, a certain stalking out of a neighbour's back garden to determine its size.

Whilst irreproachable participants of this unique opportunity carried out modifications with zeal, impulse and excitement, their arguably obtrusive personalised expressions of social status

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[160] Lawrence, J. 'Class, 'Affluence' and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain, c. 1930–64', in *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2013), pp. 273-299; Clapson. *Invincible Green Suburbs*; Bourke. *Working Class Cultures in Britain 1890–1960*

[161] Black and Pemberton. 'Introduction: The benighted decade? Reassessing the seventies', p. 7

[162] See also: Attfield. *Bringing Modernity Home*, pp. 148-71

[163] Rogaly and Taylor. *Moving Histories,* pp. 54-55

and personal independence served as constant visual reminders, inescapable visual prompts and outward expressions of social hierarchy to those unable or unwilling to buy, reinforcing inferiority and the 'second-class' status of those who remained tenants, reconstituting class experience and its 'hidden injuries' in the process.[164] As Meryl Aldridge notes, the recommendations for balance were formulated by Reith and his colleagues under the assumption that class distinctions were eroding in significance and that social class as a whole was breaking down.[165] When this key, central imperative of the new towns programme was pursued and implemented in Basildon, rather than strengthening the social idealism that underpinned the post-war new towns, the opposite effect emerged, highlighting and exposing the persistence of class disparity and social inequality that the social democratic era may have partially obscured, but ultimately failed to comprehensively address. As with the previous chapter, this sheds light on the fragility of the social democratic experiment and the profound tensions between the pragmatics of collective provision on the one hand, and the ideals of social balance/mix and their interpretation on the other.

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[164] Sennett, R. and Cobb, J. *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993)
[165] Aldridge. *The British New Towns*, p. 32

Chapter 4: Escaping "Alcatraz"?
Stigmatisation, residualisation and vernacular narratives of decline and self-betterment, 1962-2000

This chapter investigates the intersecting processes of privatisation, residualisation and stigmatisation as they played out across Basildon, and does this by examining the BDC's shift towards higher densities and experimentation in the early development of the Laindon neighbourhood throughout the sixties, in particular, the 'Five Links' housing estate, which serves as the chapter's case study. It charts growing socio-spatial polarisation and stigmatisation that occurred throughout the seventies and eighties in Basildon, situating the local impact of the *Right to Buy* within a broader process of residualisation, of which the 1970-74 house sales played a key part, and the changing attitudes in central government towards new towns, which provides further insight into the nature of this local transition from social democracy to neoliberalism. Whilst the previous section examined the impact of sales in Lee Chapel North, this chapter broadens the scope of investigation in order to examine how these played out at a town-wide level - between neighbourhoods rather than between neighbours. Through an examination of these processes, the chapter draws attention to a propensity for some second generation residents by the 1990s to have either embraced or entertained the idea of moving away from the town as a strategy for individual and familial self-betterment, in order to explore vernacular narratives of decline and loss. By situating these individual trajectories and aspirations within the wider processes of privatisation, residualisation, stigmatisation and an erosion of green space, it argues that these personal, individualised narratives of self-improvement and familial betterment have often emerged out of a palpable feeling of *collective loss,* disillusionment and frustration.

I: From garden city to 'concrete jungle'? The shift to higher density house-building in Laindon, 1962-68

In 1975, an article in *The Times* encouraged young planners to 'hurry on down to Basildon', because: 'there, more than in most new towns, they can study at first hand the rapid changes in housing and thinking that have taken place in 25 years. These range from the openness of garden city housing estates in the 1950s to the secretiveness of today's inward-looking

developments, which shut out the world in the manner of medieval almshouses.'[1] In visiting the town, these young planners would be able to 'ponder […] the bewildering differences between the Britain in which Basildon Development Corporation was set up in 1949 and that of today.'[2] In the early 1960s, the BDC altered the trajectory of its housing design and optimistically embraced decisions which would go on to have unintended consequences for both the reputation of the organisation and the town it was building, something which this chapter subsequently suggests played a key role in shaping vernacular narratives of decline. This section traces the origins and reasons for the BDC's shift to higher densities in the 1960s, and the subsequent experience of the spaces it produced.

The Laindon neighbourhood plan was revised following the principal decision in September 1960 by the MHLG, ECC, BUDC and BDC (final decision in 1962) to increase the ultimate planned population of Basildon from 80,000 to 106,000.[3] Given alterations to the master plan and target population, the neighbourhood 'required an overall density of 19.5 dwellings per acre, with the proportion of flats to achieve an average over the whole town of 10% being calculated as 20.5% for Laindon', giving it a higher density and proportion of flats than any area hitherto built by the Corporation.[4] The 'fragmented nature of the neighbourhood', which was divided between a handful of major roads, was a further justification for a higher proportion of flats.[5] Laindon was the first neighbourhood area to be considered a 'comprehensive redevelopment' of an existing area. The cost of this, 'inevitably higher than the development of a relatively open neighbourhood area', was 'recognised by proposing a higher development density per acre.'[6]

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[1] ERO A8791/4 O'Leary, P. 'Special report on Basildon' in *The Times* (10 September 1975), pp. 18-19

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Pitsea, Vange, Langdon Hills and parts of Barstable were also re-examined to accommodate this population increase. ERO A8791/18 BDC's Department of Architecture and Planning. 'Laindon Neighbourhood' (March 1962)

[4] ERO A8225/30 BDC. Inter office memo from Chief Architect to Chief Engineer entitled 'Laindon Housing Areas 1, 2 and 3' (24 July 1962)

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] ERO A8791/18 BDC. 'New Towns Act 1946 - Section 3(1) proposal: Laindon Neighbourhood' to MHLG (5 January 1962)

This overall population expansion corresponded with an increasing realisation in planning circles of the need for car ownership provision.[7] Between the original Master Plan for Basildon in 1949 and 1964, car ownership had expanded fourfold, something which – as with all other early new towns – was not anticipated in early neighbourhood designs.[8] Lee Chapel North was the first neighbourhood designed to carry the increased traffic, but planning to meet the full implications of car expansion came with a shift in official policy that accompanied the 1963 Buchanan Report.[9] In the enthusiasm of this moment, the BDC sought to develop the Laindon neighbourhood with 'almost complete pedestrian segregation from vehicular routes', something which was to profoundly influence the design of two of this neighbourhood's earliest developments.[10]

This also entailed greater provision of garaging and car-parking in housing areas, which in Laindon's new plans worked on the assumption of 'not less than one car per family' with an additional 25% provision for visitors, so a total of 125% car parking provision, radically higher than any previous neighbourhood.[11] As the minutes from the meeting in which the Chief Architect presented his plans for Laindon's new housing developments read:

> The Chief Architect suggested that the Garden City approach, up to now current, with its open type development and extravagant use of land was no longer appropriate if one supposed one car per family because that car now provided the link between the household and the country. It was reasonable, therefore, to create a tighter, more urban, environment in the housing areas.[12]

In achieving a 'tighter, more urban, environment', 'economies could be effected which could help to pay for the increased amenities and screening of the dwellings, and the increased garaging and parking areas necessary for cars.'[13] In other words, savings would be made through innovation in construction and design in order to save costs that could instead be spent

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[7] See: Gunn, S. 'People and the car: the expansion of automobility in urban Britain, c.1955–70' in *Social History*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2013), pp. 220-237

[8] ERO A8891/6 BDC. 'Northlands/Felmore report: A report presented to the Chief Architect by the Northlands/Felmore Design Team' (March 1975), p. 14

[9] *Ibid*., p. 14

[10] ERO A8791/3 BDC. Thirteenth Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 1962 (1962), pp. 44-45

[11] ERO A8225/30 BDC. Minutes of the 88th meeting of the Sites and Plans Committee entitled 'Laindon neighbourhood housing areas' held on 11 October 1962

[12] *Ibid*.

[13] *Ibid*.

on maximising privacy lost by high density design and facilitating widespread car usage. The zeal of the moment and belief in the mobility of the future eclipsed careful consideration of the key role public green space played in early sociability as well as in the identities of new town migrants (foregrounded in chapter 3), for whom testimonies (and familial narratives) of departure from dense urban areas to provincial new towns are heavily reliant on one's new environmental surroundings.[14] As one resident of Lee Chapel North had recalled:

> My granddad would always say we were like country bumpkins, and that's what he always called me, because we were, it was like living in the country, in the middle of nowhere.[15]

This oversight on the part of the planners is something which came to play a considerable role in shaping vernacular narratives of decline and *collective loss*, something which grew as green space and surrounding fields were progressively eroded in the name of outward expansion and population targets. This was accompanied by a social stigma attached to those inhabiting these redeveloped high-density spaces. For instance, existing resident groups attacked the BDC's planned redevelopment of Laindon and Langdon Hills following further revision and expansion of the master plan in 1965 to an ultimate population of 140,000. As a local paper reported, attendees showed 'great concern at the high density building rate for Laindon', fearing they would result in 'East End-type slums.'[16] Whilst pressure from the Ministry to increase the ultimate population was initially achieved through higher densities of existing neighbourhoods, the 1965 master plan expansion combined this through the creation of entirely new neighbourhoods as well, further eroding the surrounding green areas in decades to come.[17] These dual concerns for the loss of green space and an anxiety regarding high densities became intrinsically linked.[18] Opposition to the higher densities was also vocalised in the local paper, which demonstrated the tension between the Corporation's commitment to swift urban dispersal on the one hand, and its pursuit of class 'balance' on the other:

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[14] See: Abrams *et al.* 'Aspiration, Agency, and the Production of New Selves in a Scottish New Town', p. 591

[15] Interview with Maxine (2020)

[16] HLG 115/479 'Laindon fears 'East End type' slums', *Basildon Recorder* (26 October 1966)

[17] HLG 115/479 'Laindon Plan' in *Basildon, Billericay & Wickford Standard* (28 October 1966)

[18] There was similarly opposition, especially from Plotlanders, to the expansion of industrial areas, particularly in regards to the large Ford Research Centre being built in the north west of the town. As a report of a heated 1966 consultation read: "We owned those fields and we were not allowed to build', a woman said. Among other shouts were remarks about Ford's being foreigners and that the Centre was built on Green Belt land.' HLG 115/479 'Don't spread Basildon plea from Laindon' in *Basildon, Billericay & Wickford Standard* (28 October 1966)

It is a public disgrace to any political party, or government, to build as they have done in Laindon. If the Development Corporation believe that the rate should be 18 or 20 to the acre, then why was the private housing estate in Castlemayne laid out so beautifully? It is in fact, proof that people don't want to be crowded together like cattle – and the Corporation know it.[19]

The need to build to higher densities was also rooted in the fact that Laindon was the first neighbourhood to be revised and redesigned on the basis of the Parker Morris committee recommendations. The BDC's commitment to accommodating Parker Morris' *internal* space recommendations, greater car usage and parking provision came at the expense of the neighbourhood's *external* space - green landscaping, private outdoor areas, and space *between* dwellings, and led to a higher density of housing. Whilst Parker Morris standards did not become mandatory for newly built rented new town dwellings until 1967 (1969 in local authority rented), the BDC discussed them as early as the drafting stages of the report and sought to meet them as soon as 1962. The 1959 Parker Morris committee criticised the current practice in public house building on the basis of its inadequate domestic space standards, suggesting that:

Homes are being built at the present time which not only are too small to provide adequately for family life but also are too small to hold the possessions in which so much of the new affluence is expressed.[20]

Whilst Parker Morris, to quote Jos Boys *et al.* 'perpetuated a very traditional picture of the nuclear family and women's role in it,'[21] it arguably embodied the 'pervasive optimism of the time', in that it foresaw problems of the future as the 'problems of success' and affluence.[22] Jamileh Manoochehri has argued that the Parker Morris recommendations embodied post-war social democratic universalism,[23] whilst Alison Ravetz has argued that the original utopianism

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[19] HLG 115/479 Roper, L. 'Slums for future generations', *Basildon Recorder* (2 November 1966), p. 7

[20] Quoted in: Crow, G. 'The Post-War Development of the Modern Domestic Ideal' in Allen, G. and Crow, G. (eds) *Home and Family: Creating the Domestic Sphere* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 24

[21] Boys, J. *et al.* 'House design and women's roles' in Matrix, or Boys, J. *et al.* (eds.) *Making Space: Women and the man-made environment* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p. 78

[22] Crow. 'The Post-War Development of the Modern Domestic Ideal', p. 24

[23] Regarding the 'universalism' of Parker Morris, given that its guidelines were applicable to both public and private homes, Boys *et al.* have suggested that '[this] convergence in space standards of middle-class and working-class women's homes, and to some extent a convergence in their roles, means that all women who work in the home as wives and mothers experience similar problems and contradictions in the way these houses are designed.'

of council housing was 'revived, […] albeit in new forms' by both the establishment of the welfare state in 1945 and then again by the 'technological revolution' of the 1960s, and the renewed belief in the future that came with it, which would assist the adherence to Parker Morris.[24] In Laindon, the utopianism Ravetz highlights in regards to the 'technological revolution' of the sixties was embraced to achieve the social democratic universalism Manoochehri links to Parker Morris. Both of these social democratic utopianisms are at work (and entwined) in the early development of Laindon, and the 'Laindon 1, 2, 3' and 'Laindon 5' (later known as 'Five Links') were both products of this optimism, and of a hasty embrace of Parker Morris which came at the expense of other considerations. Alistair Kefford has perceived the Parker Morris 'moment' as evidence of 'intensely consumer-driven individualism transforming political norms and public policy as early as the 1950s.'[25] For Kefford, Parker Morris, rather than representing a bold reinvigoration of social democratic utopianism, exposes this political formation's 'brevity' as it enables us to 'identify marketised logics and imperatives pervading norms of governance at the height of the supposed social democratic consensus.'[26] This speaks to the tensions in the relationship between social and material progress, with such local considerations for accommodating affluence and car ownership in Basildon emerging as the question of affluence and the extent to which it should be embraced and built upon, remained 'hotly contested' by those on the left.[27] Parker Morris was an acknowledgement of collective self-betterment through affluence, broadening individual scope for self-betterment within a broader, collective welfarist framework. The subsequently discussed estates were very much products of these tensions within the affluent society.

Boys, J. *et al.* 'House design and women's roles', p. 79; Manoochehri, J. *The Politics of Social Housing in Britain* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012)

[24] Ravetz. *Council Housing and Culture,* p. 90, 2

[25] Kefford, A. 'Housing the Citizen-Consumer in Post-war Britain: The Parker Morris Report, Affluence and the Even Briefer Life of Social Democracy' in *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 29, no. 2, (2018), p. 257

[26] *Ibid*., p. 258; see also: Vernon. 'The Local, the Imperial, and the Global'

[27] See: Black, L. *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951-64* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), chapter 6 entitled 'Must Labour Lose? Revisionism and the 'Affluent Worker'', pp. 124-54

Early experiments in high density housing: 'If only I could move this house to a green area'

As the first neighbourhood to be entirely redesigned on the basis of the Parker Morris committee's recommendations, Laindon saw 'entirely new house types' deployed to achieve 'higher standards of space and insulation with better heating and increased privacy, in line with today's requirements', as the annual report of 1962 stated.[28] This was accompanied by a 'careful cost analysis' made to ascertain whether 'the increased standards proposed by the Parker Morris Sub-Committee can be achieved at rents likely to be within the reach of Basildon's future inhabitants.'[29] As a consequence, early ideas for the neighbourhood epitomised the 'industrialisation of production, predicated on the rationalisation of design and construction processes, and the use of non-traditional materials and methods.'[30] The proposals for the neighbourhood's first housing area, Laindon 1, 2, 3, as the minutes of a meeting proposing the scheme suggested, 'presupposed a departure' from the Corporation's existing estate layouts, and 'the elimination of the current catalogue of some 200 house types and their substitution with some 6 or 8 standard new types.'[31] In short, in the words of the meeting's minutes:

> If the improved standards of the Parker Morris Sub-Committee were to be met, then savings had to be made by economies in layout, more simplified design, and improved building techniques, so that rents did not exceed the ability of the tenants to pay. These factors were implicit in his proposals.[32]

Thus, the facilitation of greater internal domestic space, rooted in accommodating a newly recognised mass affluence based on greater domestic consumption of goods and labour-saving technologies, was to be achieved through skimping on built environment, public space and proximity *between* dwellings, all the while economising on housing design and construction through standardisation and industrialisation of construction.

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[28] ERO A8791/3 BDC. Thirteenth Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 1962 (1962), pp. 44-45
[29] *Ibid*., pp. 44-45
[30] Wall, C. *An Architecture of Parts: Architects, Building Workers and Industrialisation in Britain, 1940-1970* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 1
[31] ERO A8225/30 BDC. Minutes of the 88th meeting of the Sites and Plans Committee entitled 'Laindon neighbourhood housing areas' held on 11 October 1962
[32] *Ibid*.

Whilst being 'widely used for low cost housing in Sweden', an 18-dwelling pilot scheme in Lee Chapel North represented the first use of Siporex for housing in the UK, having only been used for offices and industrial buildings.[33] Siporex – a form of aerated concrete - was partially chosen due to 'much higher insulating properties than are obtainable in traditional construction.'[34] The dwellings, which interlocked with one another (see figure 4.1), required a system of construction that 'almost completely' eliminated bricklaying, plastering and rough carpentry.[35] This experimental pilot scheme was conducted on the basis of providing knowledge and experience for wider application. The benefits of which, the BDC excitedly noted, were as followed: 'quicker construction; greater standardisation of fittings and equipment, improved thermal insulation; greater privacy from immediate neighbours [and] improved space standards' which conformed to the recommendations of the Parker Morris report.[36] Alongside the 'simplification of planning and construction', there was also a 'greater flexibility in the use of space' for the tenant, and an 'improved kitchen layout.'[37]

This would go on to form the basis of the Laindon's first development - the 'Laindon 1, 2, 3' development, which was to be the 'central core' of the new neighbourhood.[38] In order to achieve an average neighbourhood density of 19.5 acres per dwelling, the neighbourhood's first development was to be built at a density of 22 dwellings per acre; 'higher than the density of any housing area so far developed in the town.'[39] As the Chief Architect noted: 'The layout is a departure from previous housing layouts in Basildon as a result of the changing

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[33] ERO A8891/6 BDC. 'Siporex housing, Basildon', reprinted from *The Architect & Building News* (11 March 1964)

[34] ERO A8791/18 BDC. New Towns Act 1946, Section 12 (1). Lee Chapel North Neighbourhood, Housing Area No. 4A: Siporex Experimental Homes' (1962)

[35] ERO A8891/6 BDC. 'Siporex housing, Basildon', reprinted from *The Architect & Building News* (11 March 1964)

[36] ERO A8791/18 BDC. New Towns Act 1946, Section 12 (1). Lee Chapel North Neighbourhood, Housing Area No. 4A: Siporex Experimental Homes' (1962)

[37] ERO A8791/18 BDC. Chief Architect memo to Chief Estates Officer entitled 'Lee Chapel North 4A – Siporex Houses' (6 February 1962)

[38] ERO A8225/30 BDC Inter office memo from Chief Architect Anthony B. Davies to Housing Manager (9 August 1962)

[39] Later developments in the neighbourhood, due to changing pressures related private provision foregrounded in the previous section would see individual plots sold and spacious, 'executive' housing estates built in West Laindon throughout the eighties. ERO A8225/30 BDC. Inter office memo from Chief Architect to Chief Engineer entitled 'Laindon Housing Areas 1, 2 and 3' (24 July 1962); ERO A8225/30 BDC. Inter-office memo from Housing Manager to Chief Architect entitled 'Laindon Housing Areas 1, 2 and 3' (30 July 1962)

circumstances we must now meet', with 'complete pedestrian-vehicle segregation' being achieved through a 'concentration of cars in courts on the access side of the dwellings.'[40]

Figure 4.1 - Layout of the 'Siporex' pilot scheme in Lee Chapel North
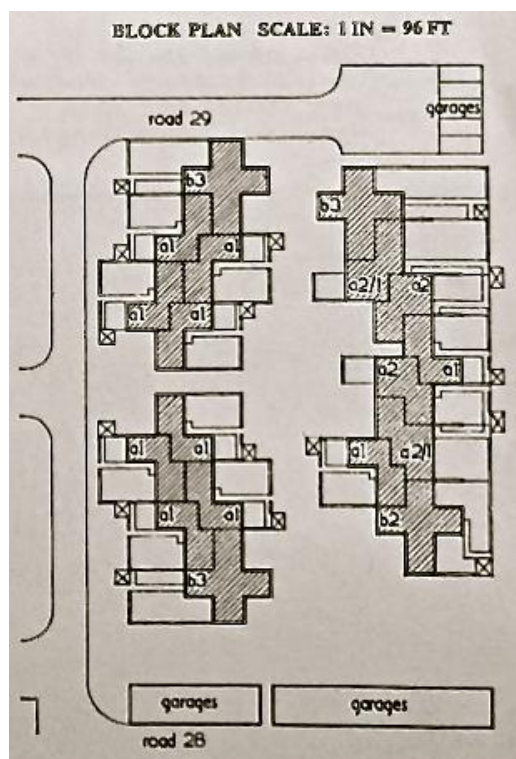
Not only did the house designs 'conform to all the recommendations of the Parker Morris Committee', they also – in the words of the Chief Architect Anthony Davies, 'contain an external privacy and an internal flexibility not attained by previous house types.'[41] With living spaces that maximized flexibility, kitchens were designed 'to take a full complement of kitchen equipment.'[42] Internal flexibility which gave the tenant a greater degree of consumer choice over how they used their domestic space, with Parker Morris standards providing a higher degree of scope for domestic-oriented consumption. Dwellings were designed 'to give as much privacy close to the dwelling as possible.'[43] With most houses roughly falling into an L-shape

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[40] ERO A8225/30 BDC. Inter office memo from Chief Architect to Chief Engineer entitled 'Laindon Housing Areas 1, 2 and 3' (24 July 1962)

[41] ERO A8225/30 BDC Chief Architect Anthony Davies. 'Laindon Areas 1, 2 and 3' to Conway, J. S. Ministry of Housing and Local Government (20 November 1962)

[42] ERO A8225/30 BDC. Minutes of the 88th meeting of the Sites and Plans Committee entitled 'Laindon neighbourhood housing areas' held on 11 October 1962

[43] ERO A8225/30 BDC. Inter office memo from Chief Architect to Chief Engineer entitled 'Laindon Housing Areas 1, 2 and 3' (24 July 1962)

design, and slatted screen fences enclosing private patios, privacy was emphasised throughout the estate's design.[44] The dwellings were positioned in 'serrated' terraces to provide 'recessed private patios', and the gardens, whilst very small, were 'enclosed by brick screen walls or full height timber screens to give complete privacy.'[45]

Figure 4.2 - 'Siporex' pilot scheme in Lee Chapel North

Despite the optimism of the rest of the board, the housing manager felt as though this high density, with the estate's large amount of 'very small gardens' and a 'restriction of outlook' was 'likely to render these proposed dwellings a good deal less popular than those in other neighbourhoods.'[46] The housing manager also expressed concern about the 'apparent lack of space for children of 11 and upwards wanting to play football and cricket', fearing the attempts to do so in the small open areas within the layout would prove to be 'constant sources of

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[44] ERO A8891/6 BDC. 'Siporex housing, Basildon', reprinted from *The Architect & Building News* (11 March 1964)

[45] ERO A8225/30 BDC. Minutes of the 88th meeting of the Sites and Plans Committee entitled 'Laindon neighbourhood housing areas' held on 11 October 1962

[46] ERO A8225/30 BDC. Inter-office memo from Housing Manager to Chief Architect entitled 'Laindon Housing Areas 1, 2 and 3' (30 July 1962)

nuisance and annoyance to tenants.' As well as this, 'doubts were expressed on whether people welcomed living at "tighter" densities, and whether they wanted such a high degree of seclusion.'[47] Despite this, the Chief Architect:

> could not see the area degenerating into a slum, which resulted from social and economic factors and not high densities. These houses provided more space, light and hygienic conditions than any previous standard dwelling.[48]

Following the completion of the Laindon 1, 2, 3 housing area in 1967, a survey of the estate was carried out of the estate by MHLG's Social Research section, which interviewed 17 tenants/housewives. It found that 'most of the tenants were either completely or fairly satisfied' with their dwellings, with over a third of housewives stating that they liked everything about their dwellings, in particular, interviewees 'liked the modern appearance of the dwelling; the practical size of the kitchen, the bathroom; the heating and the spaciousness of the dwellings', although some were 'extremely critical of the sound insulation of the dwellings', which compromised the intended heightened privacy.[49]

Whilst tenants liked the 'clean appearance of the estate' and were grateful for the pedestrian/traffic segregation because 'children were able to play freely outside their homes without anxiety about their safety', the appearance and layout of the estate more generally 'was not liked at all', and 'many referred to it as "the barracks."' This was rooted in the fact that 'houses were too close together which resulted in encroachment of privacy', as well as the fact that tenants 'would have liked more green areas to relieve the concrete appearance of the estate.' As a result:

> One third of the tenants said that they would like to move from the estate, eventually if not immediately, but only one of them had applied for a transfer. Comments such as the following were made frequently to us: "If only I could move this house to a green area, I would be happy."[50]

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[47] ERO A8225/30 BDC. Minutes of the 88th meeting of the Sites and Plans Committee entitled 'Laindon neighbourhood housing areas' held on 11 October 1962
[48] *Ibid*.
[49] ERO A8225/30 Abraham, S. Sociological Research Section of the MHLG. 'Short report of preliminary survey carried out on Laindon Estate in Basildon' (1 June 1967)
[50] *Ibid*.

This represents the beginning of a complaint that would increasingly emerge throughout the period, and which comes to feature prominently in vernacular narratives of decline that accompanied the gradual demise of social democracy. In fact, as early as 1968, following Laindon 1, 2, 3's completion and as Laindon 5 was in the process of development, the Conservative-run council publicly attacked Basildon's lack of class 'balance' alongside criticising the encroachment of green areas and its increased densities.[51] This would be the beginning of an implicit linkage of a loss of green space to the social composition of later new town migrants held 'responsible' for this loss. The estates built at this moment, particularly Laindon 5 and its external appearance, further bolstered this narrative.

'The land of opportunity'? The built-in sociability of Laindon Five Links, 1968-73

Sited to the south of Laindon 1, 2, 3 and south west of Lee Chapel North (see figure 3.4), 'Laindon 5', later known as the Five Links estate, was built from 1968 and populated throughout the first two years of the seventies, with the first tenants moving into homes in the spring of 1970. Designed as an extensive network of 195 courtyards, the estate was made up of a total of 1,364 dwellings, and would go on to house around 5,000 people. Housing consisted primarily of two-storey dwellings grouped around small courtyards, which were linked to a 'multi-directional footpath system' which fed back to the service nodes, and were bounded by garage courts on the one side, and 'park-like open space' on the other.[52] As the architect himself suggested, the provision of 125% car ownership at Laindon 1, 2, 3 'had stretched Radburn-type planning to its limit', and 'long access culs-de-sac made open spaces cramped, depriving children of safe play areas near their homes.'[53] In response to this, architects situated garage courts around the outer edges of the estate, and provided green spaces throughout the interior of the estate, including one large central green at the centre of the site. Flats were located above peripheral garages that lined the outer edge the estate, and there was also a concentration of flats and maisonettes in the eastern edge of the development (see figure 4.4). The Laindon 5

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[51] ERO A8891/14 'Dangers of a 'one class' Basildon to be averted' in *Basildon Standard Recorder* (23 February 1968); 'New town: one in three homes to be private?' in *Southend Standard* (29 February 1968)
[52] ERO A8891/6 'Building study: Laindon 5 housing area at Basildon, Essex' in *Architects' Journal Information Library* (16 February 1972), p. 355
[53] *Ibid*., p. 358

development did not exceed four-storeys, with the architects being 'influenced by public preference' to avoid high blocks of flats, a decision that was welcomed by early residents upon appraisal.[54] As with Laindon 1, 2, 3, provision for car parking spaces was set at 125% (although it ended up providing 129%).[55]

Figure 4.3 - Map of the Laindon 5 development
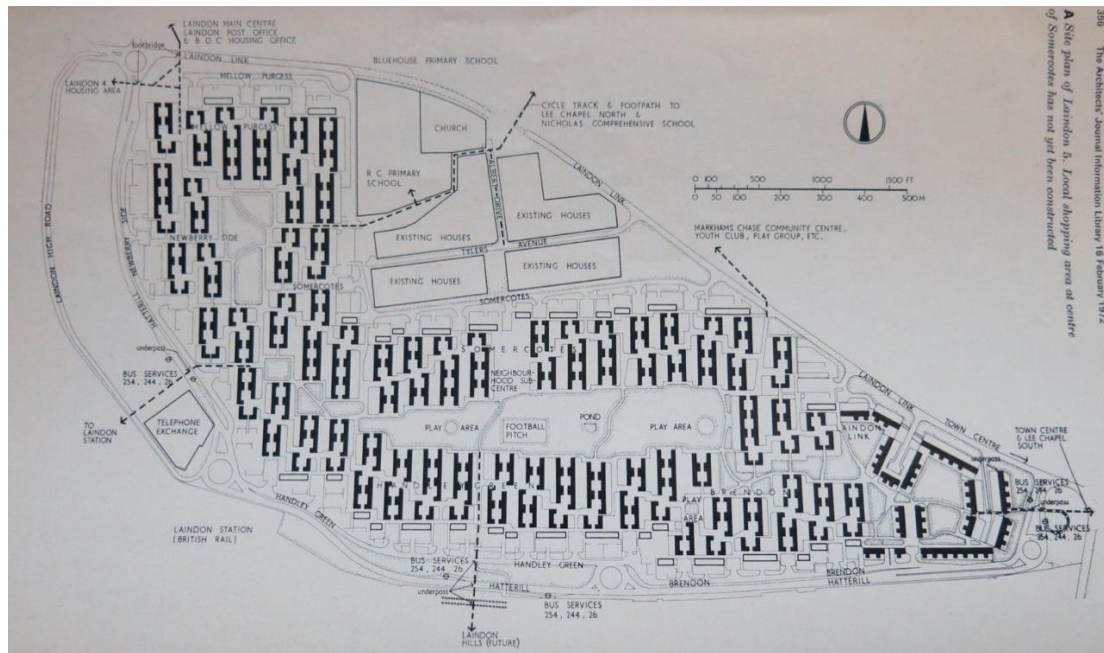
The estate was built as a mixed development of two, three, four, five and six-person dwellings, with 15% suitable for old people, illustrating the shift in Ministerial requirements based on meeting the wider, initially overlooked, needs of inner urban areas.[56] Whilst two members of the Laindon 5 design team had worked at Cumbernauld and Peterlee respectively, they stressed that this had not influenced their contribution to the neighbourhood, and 'that Laindon was part of a progression of ideas that has evolved at Basildon.'[57] Despite popular perception, and whilst intended to have been prefabricated construction, 'primarily for reason of cost, they were built in traditional brick construction.'[58]

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[54] *Ibid.*, p. 362
[55] *Ibid.*, p. 355
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 355
[57] *Ibid.*, p. 358
[58] Heating was by electricity, underfloor heating in houses and ceiling heating in flats; *Ibid.*, p. 362, 358

The relatively large, green open areas located in the interior of the estate were achieved through a more compact housing layout.[59] A subsequent appraisal by an architectural journal found through interviews that 'the nearer residents are to one of the two major open spaces, the more satisfied they are likely to be.'[60] Despite the provision of green space *within* the estate, the outer edges of Laindon 5 suggested an entirely different story. As noted in an appraisal by an architectural journal from 1972, 'one's first impression is of a compact, walled town, unlike the earlier neighbourhoods at Basildon. This character is apparent throughout the whole scheme.'[61] Dwellings were entirely without front gardens, with front doors opening straight onto the courtyard or pedestrian walk ways. Whilst every dwelling was provided with a small garden, every flat and maisonette was, where possible, given an 'outdoor living space directly related to the living room, free from overlooking and overshadowing, with a view wherever possible; hence the characteristic staggered profile' (see figure 4.4), with some ground level flats also having gardens.[62] An appraisal by the *Architects Journal* in 1972 found that the 'overall impression of Laindon 5 is of a high quality in design and execution,' and later that year in November a section of the estate won second place in the Department of the Environment (DOE)'s 'Good Design in Housing.'[63]

The chief architect planner of the Laindon 5 estate was Douglas Galloway, the BDC's Chief Architect and Planner (1964-79) and later General Manager (1979-86). Galloway stated upon completion that the courtyard system sought to provide 'a means of reconciling the conflicting requirements of social contact and privacy.' In order to achieve this, doors and kitchen windows opened into the courtyards, 'making for easy supervision of toddlers' play', whilst living areas faced onto 'screened gardens': 'there are virtually no bedroom windows on the garden side; hence, no overlooking.' On top of this, bedroom windows faced onto the courtyards but through vertical slits, in order to give 'a view out with no loss of privacy' (see figure 4.4).[64] As with Laindon 1, 2, 3, the appraisal by the *Architects' Journal* in 1972 similarly

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[59] *Ibid*., p. 362

[60] *Ibid*., p. 365

[61] *Ibid*., p. 358

[62] *Ibid*., p. 358

[63] This award was won by the HDC's Bishopsfield estate in 1969, the focus of chapters 5 and 6; *Ibid*., p. 365; Cox, W. 'Five Links housing estate' on *Basildon History Online* (2003) (http://www.basildon.com/history/laindon/5links.html, accessed: 6 November 2019)

[64] ERO A8891/6 'Building study: Laindon 5 housing area at Basildon, Essex' in *Architects' Journal Information Library* (16 February 1972), p. 355

found residents interviewed very much liked the interiors of their units.[65] The following year in 1973, a young researcher who worked for the Corporation's Community Section conducted a college thesis into the estate. The author, who carried out a survey with 10% sample of households - one dwelling in every courtyard – found that 'almost all respondents were very impressed with the internal design [of their homes].'[66] Most of the estate's respondents had come from small or substandard flats in either Barking or Dagenham, and so were particularly content with 'a home of their own' in Laindon 5 - which fully adhered to Parker Morris' recommendations.[67] As Abrams *et al.* posit in their study of East Kilbride, 'renting a state-subsidised home was a means to social improvement in a material and cultural sense.'[68] As one resident recalled in the local press in 2002, Laindon 5 estate was 'the land of opportunity' when her and her family moved to Basildon in 1973.[69]

Figure 4.4 - Laindon 5 housing in 1972. Courtyard housing in Somercotes (top left); four-storey flats and parking provision that situated along the periphery of the estate (top right, bottom)

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[65] *Ibid*., p. 362

[66] ERO A8891/6 BDC Community Officer, Hadert, T. to Chief Architect. Inter office memo entitled 'Study of Laindon 5 Housing Area' (9 June 1973); ERO A8891/6 Pearson, L. 'Laindon Five: a study in architectural determinism and neighbourliness' unpublished thesis (Middlesex Polytechnic, 1973), p. 24

[67] ERO A8891/6 Pearson. 'Laindon Five: a study in architectural determinism and neighbourliness', p. 24

[68] Abrams, L. *et al.* 'Aspiration, Agency, and the Production of New Selves', p. 589

[69] 'Basildon: Knock down 'Alcatraz', MPs are asked', *Essex County Standard* (24 April 2002)

Whilst the *Architects' Journal*'s appraisal highlighted doubts expressed by one housewife that the courtyards were 'too quiet', those interviewed found neighbours to be 'very friendly.'[70] Returning to Pearson's findings, Laindon 5 residents were found to visit their neighbours 'significantly more' than other areas of the town, with 73% of respondents having visited a neighbour in their home in the last week, and 96% of respondents regularly chatting with neighbours that lived in their courtyard.[71] Further identifying practices of sociability and mutuality within the estate's courtyards, the study found that 56% of respondents went shopping with their courtyard neighbours, 40% attended social events together, 37% took a courtyard neighbour's washing in when raining, and 20% of respondents took courtyard neighbour's children to school.[72] In fact, if anything, many respondents found Laindon 5's courtyards 'too friendly.'[73]

Such informal sociability and mutuality has, as suggested by Stefan Ramsden, been a 'central plank in models of working-class community', and there is an extensive historiography detailing such social networks from the late Victorian period to the mid-twentieth century.[74] It is possible, thus, to identify a degree of continuity here in the face of narratives that emphasise

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[70] ERO A8891/6 'Building study: Laindon 5 housing area at Basildon, Essex' in *Architects' Journal Information Library* (16 February 1972), p. 363

[71] ERO A8891/6 Pearson. 'Laindon Five: a study in architectural determinism and neighbourliness', p. 21, 19

[72] This last statistic is compared to 7% elsewhere in the town. *Ibid*., p. 27

[73] *Ibid*., p. 19

[74] Ramsden. *Working-Class Community in the Age of Affluence*, p. 59

or overstate transformation, although the estate's architecture arguably played a role here.[75] Whilst the design of many new provincial, suburban council estates saw the 'enforced sociability' of the old, inner urban areas replaced with greater scope for domesticity and reduced everyday sociability, the Laindon 5 re-produced the 'enforced sociability' of nineteenth-century urban terraces throughout its design.[76] Jos Boys has suggested that much of the experimental architecture of post-war council housing, particularly its more 'brutalist' variety, often operated on the basis of a misplaced, mythologised understanding of 'working class community' that presumed an innate 'gregariousness' and internal homogeneity, which middle class architects sought to replicate through a renewed emphasis on the 'urban street.' Architectural critic, Reyner Banham, in 1973, praised the high-profile Park Hill estate in Sheffield – widely known for its 'streets in the sky' and attributed its success to the fact it was designed 'by architects who fiercely believed that the working classes are a very special breed of folk with a unique (Young and Willmott) way of life that should be supported.'[77] This testifies to the profound impact the 1957 *Kinship* study and its politically motivated, mythologised assumptions about working-class community had in shaping postwar Britain.[78]

In Laindon 5, it was hoped that the success of the estate's central parks would draw young people from across Basildon's neighbourhoods via the estate's 'extensive pedestrian network', and so 'enlivening the courtyards.'[79] These ideas, more often than not, were accompanied by expectations of women as 'community-oriented.' A criticism of much post-war housing design was that frequently "women's rooms", such as the kitchen, were 'small and placed well away from the public world of the street.'[80] In Laindon 5, however, the reintroduction of 'street life' was likely seen as an architectural corrective to the potential social isolation of housewives and mothers, as over 1,000 kitchens faced onto and overlooked nearly 200 courtyards throughout

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[75] For instance, see: Young and Willmott. *Family and Kinship in East London*; Bourke. *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960*

[76] Jones. *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth-Century England*

[77] The architectural critic later commented that regarding this particular conception of 'community', he, 'like the rest of [his] generation, had swallowed whole from those great mythmakers of our time, Willmott and Young.' Both quoted in: Boys, J. 'From Alcatraz to the OK Corral: Images of Class and Gender' in Attfield, J. and Kirkham, P. (eds) *A View from the Interior: Feminism, women and design* (London: Women's Press, 1989), p. 40 and 52 respectively.

[78] See: Lawrence. 'Inventing the "Traditional Working Class"'

[79] ERO A8891/6 'Building study: Laindon 5 housing area at Basildon, Essex' in *Architects' Journal Information Library* (16 February 1972), p. 365

[80] Darke, J. 'Women, architects and feminism' in Matrix, or Boys, J. *et al.* (eds.) *Making Space: Women and the man-made environment* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p. 12

the estate, endowing women as the facilitators of community and estate sociability, whilst – crucially – enabling them to keep an eye on their playing children.[81] But as the Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative found throughout the eighties, many women in post-war housing estates felt like they didn't have enough privacy.[82] The aforementioned survey found that some felt the design left them 'too exposed', given that all 5-6 doorways (and all kitchen windows) faced into the shared courtyard, meaning that 'visual contact certainly is inevitable' – and minor incidents had blown up following accusations of 'rubbernecking.'[83]

These perceptions of 'working class community' – particularly the supposed innate characteristic of 'gregariousness' presumed by post-war planners - were particularly convenient in allowing the Corporation to believe it had effectively solved the conflicting imperatives of meeting Parker Morris standards, rising affluence and surging car ownership on the one hand, whilst housing London overspill in increasingly dense, fast and affordable ways on the other. Whilst Laindon 5 – with its neighbourly atmosphere and popular domestic interiors that provided sharp relief for tenants arriving from substandard and inadequate housing in London – appeared somewhat of an architectural success from above and a 'land of opportunity' from below, these achievements did not manifest in isolation, but occurred amidst intertwined processes of privatisation, residualisation and stigmatisation, trends to which this chapter now turns.

II: Residualisation and the impact of *Right to Buy,* 1970-1986

This section charts the growing stigmatisation and socio-spatial polarisation that occurred throughout the seventies and eighties in Basildon, charting the local impact of the *Right to Buy,* and arguing that this must be situated within a broader process of residualisation, of which the 1970-74 house sales played a key part. Whilst the previous chapter demonstrated the social ramifications and accompanying vernacular understandings of the Corporation's 'proto-neoliberal' house sales programme throughout 1970-74 in the neighbourhood area of Lee Chapel North, this section broadens the scope of the examination of these two bouts of sales in

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[81] See also: Roberts, E. *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Ross, E. *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993)

[82] For similar complaints identified by Leo Kuper in his 1953 study of Thimbler Road, Coventry, see: Cockayne. *Neighbours,* pp. 158-9. Darke. 'Women, architects and feminism', p. 15

[83] ERO A8891/6 Pearson. 'Laindon Five: a study in architectural determinism and neighbourliness', p. 21

order to investigate how this played out at a town-wide level - between neighbourhoods rather than between neighbours. It also situates these processes amidst the changing attitudes and priorities within central government, how the BDC responded to these, and what this can tell us about the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism.

The 1970-74 sales and the onset of residualisation

Tenants moved into Laindon 5 in the years immediately prior to and during the height of local sales, the extent and impact of which was examined in the previous chapter. By the end of 1971, the BDC was yet to make any offers to tenants in either the Laindon 1, 2, 3 or Laindon 5 housing areas, despite the majority of their dwellings being eligible for sale. In fact, before the BDC had made any offers to the residents of these two estates, a rented 3-bedroom semi detached house in Clayhill Road (in either Kingswood or Vange) had been valued at £5,850 and sold with a 20% concession for £4,680 in 1970, and subsequently resold by the tenant purchaser on the open market for £8,295 the following summer in 1971, a fact the BDC's Estates Department were keen to let remaining tenants know.[84] Pre-paid questionnaires – sent out to BDC tenants in six phases to gauge interest in purchase – were eventually sent out to tenants in these two estates at the end of 1971. The tenants of these two Laindon estates, along with those in 'Pitsea 2/3' – the town's other unconventional designed estate, were the last tenants to be contacted in regards to the sales. The Corporation noted that returned questionnaires indicating in principle a wish to purchase the dwelling in which one lived was 'approximately 50% lower than the response from tenants in any of the other five phases.'[85]

There were a couple of factors at play in regards to this, alongside the obvious historic, well documented preference for more traditional, suburban houses. The first is that from the late sixties, it was suggested (although never explicitly stated in policy) that both the BDC and HDC allocated tenancies in light of developing 'areas of owner occupation', and so allocated particular dwellings in particular areas to those who intended to subsequently purchase. This no doubt skewed those able or wanting to buy away from such irrevocably 'rented'

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[84] ERO A8891/14 BDC's Estates Department. Letter entitled 'Sale of Rented Corporation Houses: This letter concerns you – please read it carefully' sent to Corporation tenants (November 1971)

[85] ERO A8891/14 BDC's Estates Department. 'Sale of properties in Phase 6, e.g. Laindon 1, 2, 3 and 5 and Pitsea 2/3' (15 December 1971)

developments. On top of this, 1971 – the year the estate was completed – was the year the Corporation, 'through co-operation with Shelter, started helping homeless families in the London area be rehoused in the new town', and there is the possibility that this altered the estate's composition.[86] Secondly, sales were to not drop beneath 'cost price', which disproportionately impacted newer developments, so there was considerably less legibility for the full 20% concession due to these developments being relatively new. Another problem for the Corporation was that some local building societies refused to lend to tenants on these properties.[87] The Corporation found that building societies imposed tighter requirements for tenants from these two Laindon estates. As the Estates Officer noted in 1971:

> Experience with the Building Societies to date has shown that untraditional design cuts back lending facilities offered.

The Corporation found that Building Societies – 'concerned about the re-sale potential of dwellings' - considered tighter lending (imposing shorter terms) and 'less liberal salary assessments' for tenants on these estates.[88] 'Anything untraditional', the Corporation found, led to tenants wishing to buy in these areas having 'fewer Building Societies to choose from', with tenants living in dwellings with 'flat roofs' seeing a curtailment of lending facilities offered, chiefly, a limited lending term, which further priced many tenants in these areas – who were less established in their recently relocated jobs and already faced with less affordable purchase prices due to the 'cost price' restriction for sales price setting, pricing them out of the rapidly expanding local housing market where, as shown in the previous chapter, house values were rocketing.[89] Ortolano has identified a similar situation in Milton Keynes, where building societies followed through on warnings by refusing mortgages to modernist houses in Milton Keynes in 1980.[90]

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[86] ERO A8891/14 BDC. 22nd annual report for year ended 31st March 1971 (1971), p. 38

[87] ERO A8891/14 BDC's Estates Department. 'Sale of properties in Phase 6, e.g. Laindon 1, 2, 3 and 5 and Pitsea 2/3' (15 December 1971)

[88] ERO A8891/14 BDC. Notes of a meeting to discuss the owner-occupation policy (22 March 1972); ERO A8891/14 BDC's Estates Department. 'Sale of properties in Phase 6, e.g. Laindon 1, 2, 3 and 5 and Pitsea 2/3' (15 December 1971)

[89] ERO A8891/14 BDC's Estates Department. 'Sale of properties in Phase 6, e.g. Laindon 1, 2, 3 and 5 and Pitsea 2/3' (15 December 1971)

[90] Ortolano has emphasised the role this played in 'engineering taste' locally, whilst conceptualising the phenomenon as an 'architectural' variant of the American practice of redlining. Ortolano. *Thatcher's Progress,* p. 137

Despite concerns over Laindon 1, 2, 3 and Laindon 5's intended role in providing rented accommodation indefinitely for the town, and requiring comprehensive estate management, the BDC resolved to press ahead with sales in these areas in order to ensure that a 'ghetto situation of "right and wrong side of the tracks" is avoided', suggesting that whilst entire areas had historically been bracketed into different tenures *en masse* by the Corporation, they were mindful of entrenching socio-spatial polarisation. On top of this, as justified by the Estates Officer, 'a sale is a sale, and improves the overall figures.'[91] This offers further insight into the elusive 'balance' principle in action, and testifies to how the heady postwar ideals of social mix had receded into statistical calculation.

Subsequently, the Estates Officer was tasked with taking 'whatever action he thought fit to persuade building societies to grant mortgages for dwellings at Laindon 5', whilst sales at Laindon 1, 2 and 3 were delayed until results from Laindon 5 were known.[92] As alluded to in chapter two, building societies played a prominent role in shaping the town's socio-spatial direction and general tenure structure. The extent of this relationship between the BDC and building societies had been borne under the 1966-70 Labour government which, following negotiations with the BSA, had encouraged NTDCs to enter discussions with regard to the joint financing of sales of corporations and building societies.[93] Prior to the 1970-74 concessionary sales, building societies locally expressed their preference for Standard I houses to be offered for sale in groups rather than individually sold, which the BDC followed through on.[94] Later in the year, it was reaffirmed that: 'they [building societies] would much prefer to see us proceed as we are doing with selected pockets (further selections can of course be made) so that the pocket becomes recognised as an owner occupation area and the security of both the purchaser and the Society is enhanced by better re-sale prospects.'[95] This was prior to the concessionary sales announcement, when a couple of months later, the General Manager boasted in the press that Basildon was 'like an oyster whose shell is being opened up.'[96]

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[91] ERO A8891/14 BDC's Estates Department. 'Sale of properties in Phase 6, e.g. Laindon 1, 2, 3 and 5 and Pitsea 2/3' (15 December 1971)

[92] ERO A8891/14 BDC. Notes of a meeting to discuss the owner-occupation policy (22 March 1972)

[93] This occurred alongside national policies such as the Option Mortgage Scheme, introduced in 1968. ERO A8891/14 BDC minutes of the 267th meeting (11 June 1970)

[94] ERO A8891/14 BDC minutes of the 267th meeting (11 June 1970)

[95] ERO A8891/14 BDC's Estates Officer. Memo entitled 'Sale of rented houses' (22 July 1970)

[96] ERO A8891/14 Langton, R. and Russell, C. 'For sale: a whole town of houses' in *Evening News* (25 September 1970), p. 7

Subsequently, building societies, as celebrated by the estates officer in 1972 – had 'played a major part in what undoubtedly has been a successful sales campaign.'[97] The presence of building societies loomed large in all of these decisions and campaigns. Whilst this local financial infrastructure and increasingly close relations between the local state actors and private sector were fully mobilised under the Heath administration, their foundations were built long before its election in June 1970.

Encouraged by local building societies, the approach adopted in Basildon prior to 1970 was 'to select as a result of market research, small areas which might be attractive to purchasers and which could grow into areas of owner occupation', before the corporation would 'set about selling the houses as an estate agent would when they became vacant.'[98] As one MHLG paper explained: 'Many tenants, when they buy, like to signal their change of status, by buying a house other than the one they are renting', a phenomenon that was allowed by the Corporation to facilitate sales.[99] The Corporation, in seeking to achieve enclaves of owner occupation, unwittingly sowed the seeds of spatial polarisation by targeting more affluent and desirable areas. As Pearson, who had worked in the Community Section of the BDC during this period of sales wrote in 1973, there 'is a middle class/managerial exodus to a certain few neighbourhoods.'[100] Whilst hastened by concessionary sales, these processes had been at work prior to their introduction, with mutual exchange policies and the option of refusing a tenancy offer already playing a role in creating distinction between housing areas.[101] For instance, in 1965, the BDC's housing manager noted areas of Basildon, such as the 'Ghyllgrove III' area, having transfer lists that were twice as high as the rest of the town, where 'the better type of family frequently either seeks a transfer to another area or avoids accepting an offer of tenancy in the district' – this was often linked to density, house type and the prospect of privacy.[102]

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[97] ERO A8891/14 BDC's Estates Officer, Wilson, P. J. L. 'Sale of rented corporation houses' report (February 1972)

[98] HLG 116/501 Note of a meeting held at 10am on Friday 24 July 1970, room 441, Caxton House, SW1. 'To discuss sales of rented houses in new towns' (24 July 1970)

[99] HLG 116/501 Marlow, J. 'New towns – sale of rented houses' circulated MHLG paper (August 1970)

[100] ERO A8891/6 Pearson. 'Laindon Five: a study in architectural determinism and neighbourliness', p. 30

[101] ERO A7722/14 Brown. 'The sale of new town houses to sitting tenants – is it wrong?', p. 35

[102] ERO A7722/29 BDC Housing Manager. 'Inter office memo' responding to proposals put forward by Collister and Davies (March 1965)

Neighbourhoods such as Vange, Ghyllgrove and Barstable had low levels of sales, attributed by a corporation staffer to the 'austere appearance of terraced houses with flat roofs, rendered walls and hard landscaping.' On the other hand, as explored in chapter three, neighbourhoods with more spacious layouts and traditional style houses such as Lee Chapel North, Lee Chapel South and Kingswood saw a considerably higher proportion of sales.[103] This played a role in hastening social polarisation, leading to a clearer demarcation between 'respectable areas' and 'rough areas', with some neighbourhoods becoming 'bywords for poverty, unemployment and anti-social behaviour', a status cemented by notorious press reports.[104] Jones has shown through his case study work in Brighton that the 'selective' privatisation of rented local authority dwellings, alongside various allocations policies of the council, played a central role in the residualisation of its inter-war estates well ahead of the *Right to Buy* policy of the eighties.[105] This can similarly be identified in Basildon. As one second generation resident recalled:

> I mean, you look at something like the Craylands estate. [By the end of the seventies], I started to see the Craylands estate starting to collapse, and then, you know, by the nineties it was an infamous place. Certain areas of Basildon seem to have decayed quicker than others.[106]

Chris also drew attention to the decline of Craylands, and pointed directly to a process of residualisation that was occurring as early as when he lived in the town during the 1970s and early 1980s:

> It *seemed* as though they put all the families with issues in one area, which can't have been a joy for anyone, and anyone that did want to make their life a bit better – they were stuck in a pretty shit area.[107]

Meanwhile, as early as 1973, the researcher who had worked with the BDC's Community Section, in recording the 'class characteristics' of the Laindon 5 estate, suggested that 'middle class elements tend to gravitate out', generating a 'homogeneous population', which is 'accentuated by the fact that those middle class tenants who do not move to other areas in the town, tend to be young married couples who are 'in transit', those who stay for only a short

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[103] ERO A7722/14 Brown. 'The sale of new town houses to sitting tenants – is it wrong?', p. 62
[104] Jones. 'The Uses of Nostalgia', p. 364
[105] Jones. 'Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization'; see also Davies. 'Right to Buy'
[106] Interview with Micky (2017)
[107] Interview with Chris (2017)

period.'[108] This appears to be a recurring theme in experimental new town housing estates, a phenomenon which similarly emerged in Harlow's Bishopsfield as well (chapter five). In a similar way to Lee Chapel North, Pearson's study identified an overwhelming preponderance of 'working class' residents, mostly young married couples with small families, who were able to 'relate with their "own type" of people' as neighbours, and shared 'common outlooks on life' - rarely feeling like outsiders in neighbourly situations.[109]

Micky, who grew up in neighbouring Lee Chapel North, worked as a milk boy on the Five Links estate throughout the seventies and came to know the area well. Despite its reputation, he suggested: 'everyone knew each other really well, there was a sort of community spirit there, but yeah, it was a rough old place.'[110] The estate had also produced a degree of cynicism towards the town's planners. As Micky added: 'the architects won awards for cramming as many people in a small area with the legal amount of green space.' This cynicism, a common sentiment towards the estate, inextricably linked the Five Links development to the town's dwindling provision of green space, which as subsequently shown, lamented a rural idyll compromised by concrete and car-parking. As Micky continued:

> I mean, when I was a kid, everyone called it Alcatraz from the beginning, and I thought it *was* called Alcatraz, I didn't know there was a prison in America… And then I remember watching a programme on American prisons, and they had this prison called Alcatraz and I'm thinking - why are they naming it after some Basildon estate? [111]

This was a relatively commonplace phenomenon in regards to post-war council housing. As Jos Boys suggests, many council estates designed to reflect 'working class community' were popularly interpreted, through a contested process of renaming - as 'barracks, prisons and concentration camps such as Alcatraz or Colditz.'[112] Micky did, however, suggest that people's attitudes towards the estate during its early days were of a playful character, suggesting that apart from what was felt to be the flawed design of the estate, not much separated his own

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[108] ERO A8891/6 BDC Community Officer, Hadert, T. to Chief Architect. Inter office memo entitled 'Study of Laindon 5 Housing Area' (9 June 1973); ERO A8891/6 Pearson. 'Laindon Five: a study in architectural determinism and neighbourliness', p. 17

[109] ERO A8891/6 Pearson. 'Laindon Five: a study in architectural determinism and neighbourliness', p. 31, 30

[110] Interview with Micky (2017)

[111] *Ibid.*

[112] Boys. 'From Alcatraz to the OK Corral', p. 46

neighbourhood of Lee Chapel North from theirs. Did the reputation of Five Links throughout the 1970s have anything to do with class?

> Not at that time, there wasn't significantly different class. It's that Basildon sense of humour, everyone laughs at each other, you know? "Where'd you live?" - they go "Alcatraz", and you go: "fucking hell, Alcatraz?" - they go "yeah..." and laugh. I don't think there was room for snobbery, they weren't that much different from anyone else.[113]

Regardless of such perceptions, the estate's design undoubtedly contributed towards the stigmatisation of the area and its residents. As Jane Darke posits: 'if a block of council flats looks like a filing cabinet or prison, we are right in thinking that this carries ideas about the status of people who live there.'[114] As early as 1973, the BDC's Community Section researcher had noted a recurring phrase throughout his survey: 'we all sweep our courtyards, but you should see some in Somercotes.'[115] Such a comment indicates that even at this early stage of the estate's life, a degree of stigmatisation existed, with residents – as frequently identified in studies of council housing - mediating external representations by adopting outsiders' narratives and re-focusing them 'elsewhere' within the locality.[116] The peripheral garaging and flats (see figure 4.4) possibly had the unintentional (or intentional) effects of delineating a clear, visual distinction between the 'inside' of the estate and the 'outside' world.[117] Whilst it was hoped that the estate's courtyards would be 'enlivened' by those coming to use the estate's interior green space, William, an ex-resident of the estate, who grew up there throughout the 1990s and 2000s (and who similarly described it as 'that big Alcatraz-looking thing'), suggested that: 'I imagine people steered clear of it - it's not very inviting.'[118]

These early changes occurred amidst John Silkin, Minister of State for Local Government and Planning (1974-76), making a renewed call for new towns to 'give more direct help to those in greatest housing need in the inner cities – those living in conditions of housing stress, the elderly, the disadvantaged, single-parent families and so on', shifting the town's tenant intake

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[113] Interview with Micky (2017)

[114] See also: Boys. 'From Alcatraz to the OK Corral', pp. 39-56; Darke. 'Women, architects and feminism', p. 12

[115] ERO A8891/6 Pearson. 'Laindon Five: a study in architectural determinism and neighbourliness', p. 25

[116] Rogaly and Taylor. *Moving Histories,* p. 18

[117] Boys, J. 'Concrete visions: Towards new understandings of architecture and the social', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Reading (2001), p. 175

[118] Interview with William (2017)

away from its historic overreliance on skilled and semi-skilled manual workers and their families.[119] By 1975 the national press was reporting on various bulging new town populations, and even went as far to suggest that new towns were 'splitting at the seams.'[120] That same year, a campaign emerged in Lee Chapel North against the building of a set of three-storey buildings made up of 30 single-person flats planned by the Corporation in response to calls from the Ministry to meet other housing needs. Lee Chapel North was built on cleared plotlands sites where a handful of existing properties remained, and the proposal was to remove the existing plotlands dwelling of an elderly couple on a pocket of green land within the neighbourhood. A petition was signed by 250 Lee Chapel North residents in two days opposing the move. As Corporation records show, residents 'said that the use of the area for children's play near their homes was essential', and it was felt that Lee Chapel North was 'fully developed and no further building can take place without detriment to the environment', that 'the proposal would result in loss of an attractive, well treed, open space used by children.'[121] Whilst not developing into common British usage until the late 1980s, this could be seen as a classic act of NIMBYism, which Stephen Ward has articulated as a 'selfish protectionism'; 'the environmental embodiment of Galbraith's culture of contentment.'[122] But perhaps more is at play here than just short-term 'selfish' protectionism, perhaps this tells us something about the centrality green space played in familial stories of 'self-betterment.' As well as this, Chapter 3 foregrounded the centrality of green space as a site of working class sociability, particularly for the town's second generation, and the progressive loss of this space, as the development of Basildon continued throughout the seventies and into the eighties, has come to play a considerable role in shaping vernacular narratives of decline based on a palpable sense of *collective loss*.

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[119] Hansard, House of Commons. Orders of the day: 'Town House (sale)' (18 May 1976), col. 1246 (22 h 26)
[120] ERO A8791/4 Stephenson, K. 'Splitting at the seams' in *Estates Times* (24 October 1975)
[121] ERO A8225/30 BDC's Department of Architecture and Planning. Notes of a meeting entitled 'Proposed single person flats, Falstones, Lee Chapel North' held at Gifford House on 3 June 1975 (4 June 1975)
[122] Ward, S. V. *Planning and Urban Change* (London: SAGE, 2004), p. 187

Figure 4.5 - Cartoon from a BDC brochure illustrating the town's projected population growth, 1973.[123]

Thirties	Fifties	Seventies	Nineties
15,000	40,000	90,000	134,000
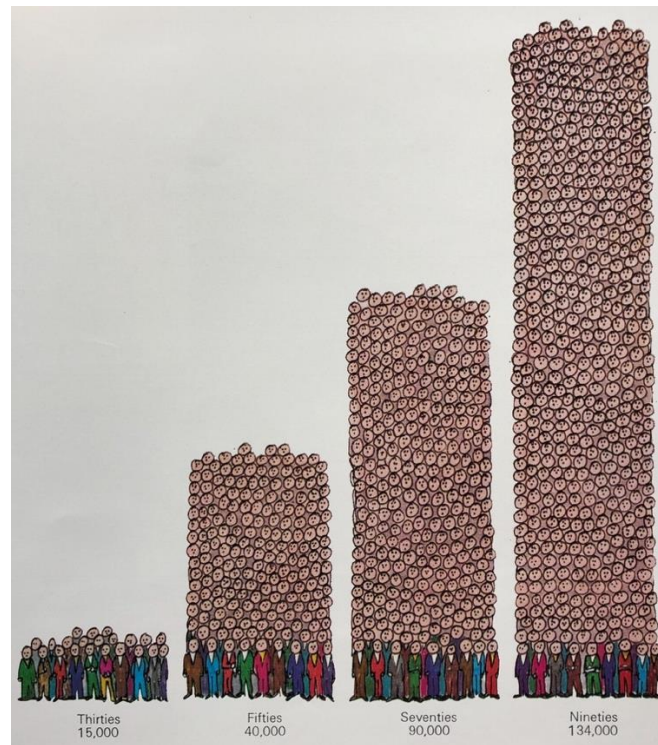
Shifting priorities, unfinished business? 1977-86

This section situates the foregrounded processes of privatisation, residualisation and stigmatisation within the changing priorities of central government vis-à-vis new towns. In April 1977 Peter Shore, Secretary of State for the Environment, announced that Basildon and Harlow, amongst seven other development corporations, were to be 'wound up.'[124] This came just six months after the British government borrowed just under $4 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the biggest IMF loan in history, the conditions of which demanded heavy public expenditure cuts to reduce the national deficit.[125] The responsibility for dissolution fell under the responsibility of the incoming 1979 Conservative government, with Michael Heseltine as Secretary of State for the Environment. The Corporations were, in turn, dissolved amidst a broader drive to wind up what Heseltine lambasted as 'Quangos'

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[123] ERO A8791/4 BDC's Estates Department. Brochure prepared for Idex exhibition entitled 'Basildon, Essex' (BDC: 1973)

[124] The HDC was dissolved in 1980 along with Corby and Stevenage, whereas Basildon – the last of the mark one new town corporations to be dissolved – lasted until 1983; ERO A6306/345 HDC: The negative decision on expansion (18 April 1977)

[125] Hickson, K. *The IMF Crisis of 1976 and British Politics* (London: Tauris, 2005), pp. 58-9; See also: Burk, K. and Cairncross, A. *Goodbye, Great Britain: The 1976 IMF Crisis* (Yale University Press, 1992)

(Quasi Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisations): 'I am responsible for 119 Quangos. 57 of these will either cease in due course, under existing plans, or will be wound up as a result of my decision.'[126] The task was officially then presented as an apolitical 'tidying up' of unnecessary branches of the state. In reality, the arguably premature wrapping up of these Corporations and the cutting short of their responsibilities was a highly political move that ended state-oversight of expansion in both towns concerned. In Harlow, proposals for expansion to meet local needs through rented accommodation within the designated area for the next 15 years became known as 'Expansion 74',[127] and in a similar vein to Basildon, the expansion proposals were primarily regarding 'housing Harlow's second generation, for essential key and replacement workers, upon whom the economic viability of the town depends', as well as alleviating the inner city problems of the elderly and disadvantaged in London.[128] This expansion plan was rejected by Shore in April 1977, the same month the HDC learned it was to be dissolved in 1980.[129] The rejection of the expansion, the HDC insisted, 'would be seen by the people of Harlow as a betrayal of the concept upon which they were invited to come and live in the town.'[130] In the words of Andrew T. Bardsley, General Manager of the HDC:

> If the Secretary of State makes a decision against expansion he will be breaking faith with Harlow's second generation, born and brought up here, for whom there has always been a moral obligation that homes in the town would become available within an acceptable time scale. If the expansion proposals are not approved the government will be walking away from "a mess of their own making."[131]

The DOE indicated that responsibility for expansion for 'local needs' lay with the local authority, and it no longer saw the development corporation's role as needing to expand and provide housing for the town. A report by the HDC suggested that as of 1980, 'new house building will cease – at a time when demand from the second generation will be at a peak', and

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[126] ERO A/TB 1/8/6/6 'Michael Heseltine axes quangos', Press Notice 394, DOE (17 September 1979)

[127] Gibberd, F. *et al. Harlow*, pp. 278-9

[128] ERO A6306/345 Bardsley, A. T. General Manager of HDC. 'The impact on Harlow of a negative decision on expansion' (4 April 1977)

[129] See: ERO A6306/345 HDC. 'The negative decision on expansion' report (18 April 1977)

[130] *Ibid.*

[131] ERO A6306/345 Bardsley, A. T. General Manager of HDC. 'The impact on Harlow of a negative decision on expansion' (4 April 1977)

when housing waiting lists are longer than any time in the history of the town.[132] David Guess, a Harlow resident from 1951 (since moved out) stated in 2017 interview with *Your Harlow*:

> Harlow – I think – suffered when the Development Corporation ceased, because
> […] Harlow suddenly became an old town, no new housing, a lot of the Harlow
> children, you know the size of Harlow schools, producing, turning out very
> good students to go into it, where were they going to live? […] Harlow people
> went [Bishop's Stortford], moved to Saffron Warden because the housing was
> cheaper – obviously we know its not that case now […] and I do feel that
> looking back the government at the time should have expanded Harlow, […]
> instead it stagnated.[133]

A similar sentiment occurred in regards to the BDC, which was dissolved later in 1986, with correspondence within the DOE at the time stating: 'the end of the [Basildon Development] Corporation has come whilst very significant development work is still underway, with important features of the town yet to be put in place.'[134] In internal correspondence within the DOE from 1984, civil servants admitted that the ulterior reason for transferring assets and responsibilities to the Commission for New Towns (CNT) was because:

> Basildon Development Corporation and its senior officers have fallen into the
> habit of thought that their task is a continuing one of indefinite duration.
> Removal of the Corporation as a separate institution and subordination of such
> of the present senior staff as remain to the Commission's Board and senior
> management will have the desired effect of switching the emphasis fully on to
> orderly disengagement.[135]

In 1977, negotiations between the DOE and the Labour-led Basildon Borough Council over the transfer of housing and house-building responsibilities collapsed after the latter rejected the offer on the basis that it would be 'impossible' for them to carry out the necessary expansion planned by the development corporation without financially crippling local rent and ratepayers,

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[132] ERO A6306/345 Bardsley, A. T. General Manager of HDC. 'The impact on Harlow of a negative decision on expansion' (4 April 1977)

[133] Interview with David Geiss in 'Harlow is 70: Why I Came Here: David Geiss', *Your Harlow* (14 February 2017), accessed online (10 September 2017): https://www.yourharlow.com/2017/02/14/harlow-is-70-why-i-came-here-david-geiss/

[134] ERO A/TB 1/8 Letter to Tracey, R. Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Environment from K. F. Dribben (4 July 1986)

[135] ERO A/TB 1/8 Simcock, A. J. C. Draft minute to Young, G. DOE (1984)

blighting the ambitious post-transfer plans outlined earlier that year in the previous chapter.[136] The BDC firmly believed it was their role to complete the town, as only they could secure the adequate funds from central government to complete it to the standards and level that the social democratic period had set.

Amidst these changes, the BDC came under increasing attack from the Conservatives at a number of levels. The Shadow Minister for Housing Hugh Rossi launched a high profile attack against the BDC in 1977, describing them as the 'bunglers of Basildon' and heralding them 'autocratic' and 'insensitive' in light of recent moves to seek continued expansion of the town.[137] This was replicated by local Tory councillors as well, who accused the BDC (and its plans for expansion) of turning Basildon into a 'dole town' for the London unemployed.[138] The HDC's Social Development Officer had similarly previously noted that 'many people believe that the Corporation is authoritarian, non-elected and therefore non-democratic, and tends to speak for Londoners rather than the local community.'[139] As resources became increasingly scarce throughout the seventies, and an emphasis shifted from key workers to 'housing needs', tensions emerged. A similar, albeit more politically charged, phenomenon has been examined by Harold Carter in the London borough of Southwark, an area with similarly historically significant levels of council housing although a radically different historical context.[140] Carter identified that a shift in local housing allocation policy, which stressed *housing need* over long-term residence or the historic prejudice towards housing 'respectable' working class families, led to overseas 'newcomers', disproportionately concentrated in substandard privately rented accommodation, being the primary beneficiaries of the council's slum clearance and subsequent re-housing programmes. Carter concludes his case study by suggesting such 'divisions and conflicts are *intrinsic* to the social democratic programme since socially-provided resources are scarce', adding to the notion that particular selectivist approaches to housing undermine the universalist underpinnings of the early post-war era.[141] One can identify a similar dynamic developing in the new towns of Basildon and Harlow throughout the

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[136] 'Get lost – we can't afford your deal', *Basildon Standard* (30 September 1977); 'Bigger say for tenants', *Evening Echo* (10 August 1983)

[137] 'Tory lashes the 'bunglers of Basildon', *Evening Echo* (4 July 1977)

[138] Barnes, J. 'Planners are making a Dole Town – councillor', *Evening Echo* (19 August 1977)

[139] ERO A6624/7 White, L. E., HDC Social Development Officer. Memo to General Manager (30 May 1974)

[140] Carter, H. 'Building the Divided City: Race, Class and Social Housing in Southwark, 1945–1995', in *The London Journal*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2008), p. 156

[141] *Ibid.*, p. 179

seventies, and it was in this context that the incoming Conservative government's flagship *Right to Buy* policy was rolled out.

The rolling out of the Right to Buy: tensions within the transition?

Within 14 days of the Conservatives taking office, a new town circular in May 1979 gave development corporations a new 'general consent' for the sale of new town houses and flats (at generous discounts ranging from 33% for those who have been tenants for 3 years and up to 50% of 20 years standing).[142] The circular also required development corporations to prepare a statement of its policies for increasing home ownership.[143] A couple of months later, a letter to HDC's General Manager from central government stated that 'development corporations are being asked to take all possible steps to ensure that this important policy objective is achieved as quickly as possible.'[144] Thus, NTDCs were again compelled to carry out a second further bout of sales *prior* to the formal introduction of the 1980 Housing Act, once again 'pioneering homeownership in the communities they serve', as the Minister for Housing boasted in July 1979.[145]

Reminiscent of the sales drive initiated nearly a decade prior, central government exerted pressure and control towards the BDC, demanding explanations of 'how you are trying to speed up house sales', calling monthly for updated sales figures and recommending 'special approaches to speed up the sale of houses', chiefly by employing local firms of solicitors to handle bottlenecks.[146] Within two months of restrictions being lifted, the BDC sent letters to tenants informing them of their right to buy, with 5,322 corporation and 1,250 council tenants applying to purchase their rented dwellings.[147] The vast majority of these first sales were secured through Corporation mortgages, with the BDC funding 'about 85% of all current sales' as of April 1980.[148]

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[142] ERO A/TB 1/8/4 DOE. New town circular No. 577 (18 May 1979)

[143] *Ibid*.

[144] ERO A/TB 1/8/4 Notes from letter by A. R. Atherton to General Manager of HDC (5 July 1979)

[145] ERO A/TB 1/8/4 Speech by Minister for Housing and Construction at Northampton (6 July 1979)

[146] ERO A/TB 1/8/4 Simcock, A. DOE. Letter to Galloway, D. General Manager of BDC (9 January 1980)

[147] Labour lost control of the council from 1979-1982, during which a Conservative administration enthusiastically embraced council house sales. 'The great rush hits homes snag', *Evening Echo* (30 July 1979)

[148] The letter sent out to the BDC's 17,994 remaining tenants had seen 32.1% of households replied indicating a wish to purchase. ERO A8891/12 Letter from Galloway, D. General Manager of BDC to Hobden, R. H. entitled

Whilst the BDC and HDC did pursue these targets, there was a growing apprehension at this renewed forceful direction on sales taken by central government from 1979. They were concerned about a rapid loss of rented accommodation hindering their ability to meet local waiting lists and allocate houses in accordance with the demands of local industry. The social development officer of the HDC noted in 1979 that the town was 'experiencing very high levels of housing demand from second generation residents and will continue to do so until the mid 1980s', which was due to the town's particular stage of development.[149] The children who had given Harlow its reputation as a 'pram town' in the 1950s were now in nearby employment, getting married and looking to move out.[150] Basildon, like Harlow, as shown through reports and correspondence informed by meticulous statistics, was also experiencing the 'typical new town 'bulge'', set to peak in the early eighties and swell demand for rented accommodation.[151] Alongside the number of people in their late teens and early twenties 'increasing rapidly', there was a variety of other contingent reasons for the necessity of socially rented accommodation, such as increasing employer nominations as a result of the corporation's job creation programme and schemes to house the growing number of elderly.[152]

Anxiety was also felt in Basildon regarding the quantity of sales given the corresponding 'extensive cuts' which 'the Corporation did not contemplate', and the subsequent steep reduction of allocated, ministerial-approved house-building for rent.[153] The BDC sought permission from the DOE to build 650 socially rented dwellings a year to meet the growing housing crisis, but corporation staff, in the general manager's words, were 'dismayed' to receive the allocation of rented houses in Basildon for 1980, which was only a third of the minimum required need they had submitted.[154] Similar concerns occurred in Harlow: It is 'indisputable', Rosemary Wellings, HDC's Social Development Officer (1977-80) stated, that

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'Sale of council houses', including completed questionnaire entitled 'Sale of rented corporation dwellings' on behalf of the Corporation (15 April 1980)

[149] ERO A6306 Memorandum from Social Development Officer to Administrative Officer, HDC (7 September 1979)

[150] Gibberd *et al. Harlow,* p. 279

[151] ERO A/TB 1/8/4 Galloway, D., BDC General Manager. Report addressed to Eden, D. DOE (23 October 1979)

[152] ERO A/TB 1/8/4 Notes from a Letter from Eden, D. to Galloway, D. (16 November 1979)

[153] ERO A/TB 1/8/4 Letter to Atherton, A. R. DOE. from Galloway, D. General Manager of BDC (24 September 1979)

[154] ERO A/TB 1/8/4 Galloway, D., BDC general manager. Report addressed to Eden, D. DOE (23 October 1979); Letter from Douglas Galloway to Dorothy Eden (2 November 1979)

coupled with central government's negative decision on expansion of the town and cut backs to house-building budgets, 'giving tenants the right to buy their dwellings in Harlow would be in conflict with [meeting local housing needs].'[155]

The BDC also encountered pressure from the local Conservative MP Harvey Proctor, who was elected in 1979 having campaigned hard on the issue of council house sales in the town.[156] His complaints over the time taken to process house sales by the corporation were met with a rebuttal from the corporation's finance officer who insisted that: 'the main role of the corporation with regard to housing is to provide rented housing for a wide range of needs', not just second generation prospective tenants but such special categories as old age pensioners, the disabled and single parent families.[157] Leading members of the BDC possessed – it appears – great personal and social responsibility to their respective new towns and their 'second generation.' Wellings has suggested – in hindsight - that 'from the outset, we concluded that our principle responsibility was housing Harlow's second generation, married and single.'[158] It can be deduced from correspondence that a sense of social responsibility holds firm at a local level, despite having gradually – and now entirely - withered away at a central level. From correspondence, one can see repeated attempts from Corporation staff in Basildon and Harlow drawing upon their remits, citing past documents and circulars where promises and guarantees had been made, to insist central government heed the expectations which 'formed part of the understanding upon which people moved into the town.'[159] Despite changing national priorities, these corporations remained steeped in a culture of and commitment to the earlier social democratic nature of the new town endeavour. As was foregrounded in chapter two, the HDC retained a general idealism throughout the entirety of its existence.[160]

The HDC, led by its social development office, unsuccessfully sought to 'seek exemption from the right to buy in those areas where the waiting lists for rented housing is longer than a certain

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[155] ERO A6306 Memorandum from HDC Social Development Officer to Administrative Officer (7 September 1979)

[156] Proctor was a member of the hard right Conservative Monday Club, which published a paper in 1966 arguing that 'by compelling councils to sell their housing stock the Conservatives could destroy British socialism.' Davies. 'Right to Buy', p. 434

[157] ERO A/TB 1/8/4/19 Letter from BDC Chief Finance Officer to Harvey Proctor MP (4 January 1980)

[158] Interview with Rosemary Wellings, HDC Social Development Officer (1977-80) in Gibberd et al. Harlow, p. 279

[159] ERO A/TB 1/8/4 Galloway, D., BDC General Manager. Report addressed to Eden, D. DOE (23 October 1979)

[160] For instance, see: ERO SA 22/1356/1 Interview with HDC architect, Alexander McCowan (1982)

period', seeking to return to the policy that Labour introduced between 1974-9 when indiscriminate house sales were halted – a move that would effectively halt all corporation sales in Harlow.[161] This was to be justified on the basis that the policy contravened 'the corporation's and the council's major housing objective: local needs.'[162] This interestingly led to the HDC, during the late 1970s, disregarding their historic objective of achieving a 'balanced community' in relation to housing tenure, arguing that the tenure structure of the town – whilst deeply unbalanced – should be evaluated 'not in terms of a national average but in relation to the current future needs of the town.' In other words, local needs required rented accommodation, so that was what should be provided.[163] The BDC also demonstrated a persistent commitment to providing for the elderly parents and grandparents of present new town residents, in order to allow families to live in proximity whilst relieving the strain on the housing stock and social services of exporting London boroughs.[164]

In October 1979, correspondence with the DOE confirmed that the local housing needs of the second generation and retired were no longer the responsibility of the development corporations and should be left to the local authorities. Not only did this contravene the remit and founding objectives of the corporations, it was not financially feasible for the local authorities to meet these needs.[165] In early 1980, central government allocated the BUDC just £5 million for housing throughout the district for the 1980-81 financial year, less than half of the £13 million asked, with representatives fearing this would lead to a 'complete halt on new [rented] housing projects', including the rented areas of Laindon still being built.[166] Later that year, the General Manager was told by a DOE representative: 'I cannot, obviously, promise you the sort of public housing programme you would like.'[167] In regards to BDC protest over its responsibilities to provide for the new town's second generation, the Department stated that 'they have, hitherto, been in a much more favourable position than the children for council tenants in most parts of the country.' Similarly, on the topic of single people, the Corporation

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[161] ERO A6306 Memorandum from Social Development Officer to Administrative Officer, HDC (7 September 1979)

[162] *Ibid.*

[163] *Ibid.*

[164] ERO A/TB 1/8/4 Galloway, D., BDC General Manager. Report addressed to Eden, D. DOE (23 October 1979

[165] ERO A/TB 1/8/4 Galloway, D. BDC General Manager. Letter to Atherton, A. R. DOE (24 September 1979)

[166] ERO A8891/12 '£8 million shocker for council homes scheme, Council waiting list is set to grow', *Basildon Recorder* (29 February 1980)

[167] ERO A8891/12 Atherton, A. R. DOE to General Manager of BDC Galloway, D. (29 April 1980)

was told: 'in most parts of the country, they have to make their own arrangements and they are, almost by definition, mobile.'[168] This illustrates how the prevalent discourse of 'normalisation', of attaining 'normality', or of achieving 'balance' (increasingly articulated as achieving national statistical averages), were deployed by central government to effectively scale back the social democratic ambitions and responsibilities of the early new towns, and an accompanying active and attentive role of the local state in housing provision, masking this political and ideological process in an apolitical, antiseptic language of inevitability.

Whilst sales disrupted Corporations' social commitments to residents, they also disrupted obligations to employer nominations. Having outlived its equivalent organisation in Harlow by six years, the BDC sought to maintain its commitment to key workers despite its dwindling housing stock, and even provided 15 dwellings for key workers required by the new Gordon's Gin factory that opened in Laindon in 1984.[169]

Table 4.1 - The number of dwellings let to 'key workers' by BDC, 1979-84

Financial year	Dwellings let to key workers
1979-80	513
1980-81	391
1981-82	298
1982-83	224
1983-84	186

As Jim Tomlinson suggests, 'the freeing of the labour market from state intervention has always been a key objective for neo-liberals.'[170] It is, thus, interesting to observe that this corporatist, social democratic imperative of the BDC lasted as long as it did into the Thatcher years (see figure 4.1), further affirming a degree of complexity and messiness to the shift from social democracy to neoliberalism, and the temporally and geographically variegated nature of this transition. This testifies to how 'the life of social democracy continue[d] to flicker after the ascension of neoliberalism', largely through, as Stephen Brooke suggests, 'the stubborn persistence of social democracy' at the level of the local state.[171] The tightly organised

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[168] *Ibid.*

[169] *Hansard*. House of Commons debates. 'Written answers' (14 June 1984), col. 549-550

[170] Tomlinson, J. 'De-industrialization Not Decline: A New Meta-narrative for Post-war British History', in *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2016), p. 98

[171] Brooke, S. 'Living in 'New Times': Historicizing 1980s Britain' in *History Compass,* vol. 12, no. 1 (2014), p. 26, 27

relationship between industry, employment and housing, and the self-contained nature of the town had been key objectives that local planners had worked to achieve for decades. Yet, as noted in the minutes of a BUDC meeting in 1977, the 'Ministerial philosophy' at this time – that legitimised the subsequent winding up the NTDCs - was one that sought 'normalisation' for new towns.[172] As suggested above, this seemingly apolitical discourse of 'normalisation' effectively functioned to dilute and disable the last vestiges of postwar corporatism and social idealism that had been integral to the development of both of these towns: to overcome the abnormally state-owned and planned nature of the spaces the 1946 Act had produced, to justify asset disposals, to erode high levels of public ownership by problematising 'abnormal' tenure structures, to abandon state intervention in housing provision, and ultimately, to relinquish the historic duties and responsibilities of the postwar state that had characterised the social democratic era. The development corporations in Basildon and Harlow increasingly found that they were operating with the imperatives, priorities and responsibilities of a bygone era, one that had – for the new towns - been abruptly brought to a close by the 'swingeing public spending cuts' enforced by the 1976 IMF loan that helped consolidate the country's direction of travel, and by the end of the decade, it was clear: the historic remits of the development corporations had expired in the eyes of those that signed off their funding.[173] These decisions on cutting short of the HDC and BDC's programmes and the accompanying responsibilities and obligations attached to them, can also be interpreted as a gradual re-configuration of who matters in the eyes of the state. When General Manager of the BDC Charles Boniface criticised the Conservative-controlled ECC's opposition to the BDC's expansion plans in the sixties, he described their attitude as: 'don't bother about your second generation - let them find their jobs and homes anywhere they can. I described them as the lost tribes of Judah sent out to fend for themselves.'[174] This mentality, and accompanying processes of residualisation and stigmatisation examined in this section, played a role in shaping local, vernacular narratives of self-betterment and loss, as will now be explored.

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[172] ERO A/TB 1/8/4/1 BDC notes from a meeting with Chairman M. Clayton of BUDC (10 August 1977)

[173] Jones, B. and O'Donnell, M. *Alternatives to Neoliberalism: Towards Democracy and Equality* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2107), p. 2

[174] ERO SA 20/2/7/1 Interview with Charles Boniface, General Manager of BDC (1967)

III: Moving up in the world, moving out? Narratives of self-betterment in 1990s and 2000s Basildon

This section draws on the propensity for some second generation residents to embrace or entertain the idea of moving away from the town in order to comment on vernacular narratives of decline and loss. By situating individual narratives of self-betterment within the foregrounded processes of privatisation, residualisation, stigmatisation and an erosion of green space, it argues that whilst personal, individualised narratives of self-improvement and familial betterment arguably serve as evidence of a 'popular individualism', these narratives crucially emerge out of a palpable feeling of *collective loss*. One interviewee who resides in Lee Chapel North pre-empted our discussion, stating: 'Things aren't great in Basildon, people wanna get out.'[175]

Escaping 'Alcatraz'?

In a 1980 report to the Ministry, the BDC highlighted lingering concerns and lessons from the 1970-74 sales, drawing attention to the heightening of management and maintenance costs following the fragmentation of estate ownership (further discussed in chapter 6), as well as identifying how throughout the seventies, popular housing areas where there were higher numbers of sales had experienced an 'uplifting' of the environment, whilst simultaneously:

> There are pockets of development that have proved to be unpopular, usually housing the poorest families and problem families. If [*Right to Buy*] sales are successful, the tendency would be to leave these pockets with the authority with the possible creation of ghettos.[176]

Due to problems emerging with the Siporex housing in Laindon, houses here were not to be sold, with tenants encouraged to purchase alternative properties in the town 'so that no tenant is denied the right to buy a home', further fuelling spatial differentiation.[177] Throughout the eighties, a number of properties in Five Links were underpinned as a result of clay heave,

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causing cracks to appear on the interior and exterior of some dwellings.[178] By 1981, 10 properties on the Five Links had become void due to structural defects, with a further 100 – disproportionately concentrated in Somercotes - showing 'signs of distress.'[179] During the Great Storm of 1987, a number of walls that enclosed the service areas throughout the estate were blown down, many of which were never replaced.[180] These issues occurred amidst local newspaper reports throughout the decade of 'crumbling', 'concrete' homes and 'concrete cancer', as system-built housing in other areas of the town failed to stand the test of time, something the Commission for New Towns (CNT)'s executive manager apologised for.[181] One resident felt as though:

> everything started under Maggie Thatcher, […] that's when things *really* changed. There was lack of funding, not a lot of money put into the streets, it come under disrepair, council houses became horrible, Five Links became dilapidated, everything started to crumble around you, I suppose.[182]

It was around this time that Five Links developed a local reputation for drugs and criminality:

> Then all the glue sniffing started to go on, that kind of thing changes a place, cuz then people don't want to go there and it gets a name for itself, and people start to move out, the reasonable people, and then they start to move the unreasonable people in, and then you've got: Five Links estate.[183]

In many ways by the 1990s, the new town housing estate's trajectory paralleled the experience of Southwark's inner urban Heygate and Aylesbury estates, as documented by Michael Romyn, suggesting that despite the way 'inner cities' and new towns were positioned against one another throughout the 1970s and 1980s by policy makers, commonalities existed by the 1990s, demonstrating a wider picture of what happened to working-class social housing throughout

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[178] Cox. 'Five Links housing estate'

[179] This was believed to be due to the large number of trees extracted to build the estate, with the resultant effect of ground heave. ERO A8891/13 BDC. Chief Engineers Department. 'List of properties reported by Housing Department showing structural defects' (11 June 1981); ERO A8891/13 BDC. Interoffice memo chief housing officer to general manager entitled 'Structural repairs to corporation houses' (1981)

[180] Cox. 'Five Links housing estate'

[181] ERO A8891/13 'Misery for families fighting for a rent cut' in *Evening Echo* (8 November 1982); ERO A8891/13 'The crumbling homes: 'We got it wrong' in *Standard Recorder* (29 May 1987); ERO A8891/13 'Desperate measures as homes fall apart' in *Yellow Advertiser* (5 June 1987)

[182] Interview with Maxine (2020)

[183] *Ibid*.

this period.[184] Bill, an ex-resident of Five Links throughout the 1990s and 2000s, where he had privately rented from family, described the area as 'very rough and run-down', and said that, by the 1990s, the area had become 'ghettoized':

> The *Right to Buy* probably killed it. Private landlords bought the properties because they were cheap and rented them out. A lot of unemployment in the area, a lot of drugs, it was just generally run down.[185]

As illustrated in table 3.3, the year Five Links was completed, the 1971 census in Basildon showed that private landlordism was negligible, particularly in comparison to the town's surrounding areas. Most localities with a historically high proportion of council housing had often replaced or coexisted alongside large numbers of privately rented dwellings. In Basildon, however, the shift from public to private ownership that occurred throughout the last three decades of the twentieth century saw the sudden emergence of an entirely new tenure in an area which had hitherto epitomised the 'dual tenure' structure of public renting and homeownership that made up the 'property-owning social democracy' theorised by Guy Ortolano, albeit largely skewed towards the former.[186] It also testifies to the socio-spatial polarisation between neighbourhoods. As of 2011, areas of Five Links had 71% of dwellings being either socially or privately rented.[187] This is compared to a nearby section of housing in Lee Chapel North, separated from the estate by just the Laindon Link road, which had owner occupation rate of 67%, social renting at just under 28%, and private renting at a mere 3.6%.[188] This was compared to private landlord levels in the Five Links estate of up to 15%. According to Bill, whose grandmother and mother had both lived on the estate, tenants who could afford to buy their rented dwellings soon sold their properties. Often, he suggested, new homeowners 'moved out' to more affluent areas such as Langdon Hills and to the neighbouring town of Billericay, the latter of which he described as a 'much more desirable area and more socially acceptable.'[189] He was keen to emphasise that his mother would have had 'very fond memories of the place, at least in the early days', and so a palpable sense of loss persisted throughout the

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[184] Romyn, M. 'The Heygate: Community Life in an Inner-City Estate, 1974-2011' in *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 81, no. 1 (2016), pp. 197-230; Romyn, M. *London's Aylesbury Estate: An Oral History of the 'Concrete Jungle'* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)
[185] Interview with Bill (2017)
[186] Ortolano. *Thatcher's Progress*, p. 251
[187] UK census data (2011). Lee Chapel North E00108156. Accessed online (1 November 2019) via http://www.ukcensusdata.com/
[188] UK census data (2011). Lee Chapel North E00108143. Accessed online (1 November 2019) via http://www.ukcensusdata.com/
[189] Interview with Bill (2017)

interview.[190] Bill also spoke of his frustration with the estate's design, due to the fact that as a self-employed plumber, he had had his van broken into and tools stolen on a number of occasions, which he ascribed to having to leave it unattended overnight in the estate's peripheral parking bays. There was a sense that Bill's trade and self-reliance was at odds with both design and the predicament of the estate (and town), and that it increasingly hindered his ability to make his own way in the world, bolstering a desire to 'get out' while he could, something he eventually did.[191]

A similar sentiment was expressed by another second generation interviewee, who grew up in corporation housing in Lee Chapel North and later moved out to nearby, and more affluent, Leigh-On-Sea by the turn of the century:

> First time that we got a chance to get out of Basildon, we did, because we just didn't like the way it was going. […] You wanna better yourself - simple as that. You just want to better yourself. […] A lot of people I know did do that. I'm not saying their lives have been tickety-boo since then, but it must have changed for the better. Mine certainly has.[192]

These sentiments of Chris, whose previous comments highlighted the negative impact of house sales from an anti-individualistic inclination, corresponds closely to Lawrence's findings from Pahl's study of Sheppey, in that 'many residents continued to uphold mutualist, non-market values, sometimes in conscious defiance of the newly assertive Thatcherite Right, but when they talked about improving their own lives the default assumption was that this would depend on individual effort; it was no longer something to be expected.'[193] This corresponds to the changing local policies and priorities of the BDC, as enforced from the central state, during its protracted dissolution and rolling out of the *Right to Buy* outlined in the previous section, related, but not entirely aligned, to broader changes occurring at a national level. When Chris was prompted about where this sentiment comes from, he responded:

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[190] *Ibid.*
[191] *Ibid.*
[192] Interview with Chris (2017)
[193] Lawrence. *Me, Me, Me?*, p. 194

> Because we are your typical working class people, we all want to own our own homes, it's a bit of snobbery to be honest with you, we just want to get out and *visibly* better ourselves.[194]

This corresponds to Hudson and Hayes' suggestion regarding how working class identity can co-exist with 'a strong sense of individualism and self-improvement.'[195] The crucial point of contention here, however, is that for Chris, this admission of snobbery was rooted in a resigned sense of collective loss: 'Nobody wants to be part of something cuz everyone wants to be an individual.'[196] Whilst on the surface this is emblematic of the 'Basildon man' trope, it is enjoined with a lament towards everything the trope culturally represents: a working class that is shorn of its collective interests, responsibilities and mutuality. Chris' testimony is also interesting in that it articulates a narrative of self-betterment which combines the experience of the seventies and eighties, in which homeownership was one's means of bettering one's lot, to an increasingly prevalent local phenomenon by the 1990s in which spatially distancing oneself from the town that had provided one with such opportunity was now a perceived prerequisite for furthering an advancement of one's lot.

Rosemary Wellings, the HDC's last Social Development Officer, described the new town as a 'social escalator.'[197] With the 'second generation' of the town (children of the 'pioneers') benefiting from a higher standard of education, recreational facilities and extensive social infrastructure, new towns, as Aldridge suggests, tended to 'manufacture' an 'upward social mobility.'[198] BUDC leader John Potter stated as early as 1975 that 'one of the tragedies of the new town' was that the many school leavers wanting clerical work were not finding it locally and travelled to London for an office job.[199] Not only had this weakened the town's postwar commitment to 'self-containment', but it also exposed many of its second generation to the extent of the external categorisation and stigmatisation increasingly attached to the town. The stigmatising effect of an estate's negative categorisation (and in turn, that of its residents), can be identified by the eighties and nineties as manifesting on a town-wide scale. If we are to consider new towns as being the 'spatial manifestation' of the postwar welfare state, as

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[194] Interview with Chris (2017)
[195] Hayes and Hudson. *Basildon*, p. 21, 11
[196] Interview with Chris (2017)
[197] Boughton. *Municipal Dreams*, p. 80
[198] Aldridge. *The British New Towns*, p. 123
[199] ERO A8791/4 Colver, H. 'Basildon: An affluent new town' in *Financial Times* (Special report – 9 May 1975), p. 14

Ortolano has encouraged, then we can consider them a space which, for some time, produced a tenet of individualism highlighted by Robinson *et al* that was attached to the idea of individual self-worth, as articulated by Carolyn Steedman. Steedman's recollection of how the welfare state shaped her individuality encapsulates this overlooked consequence of the post-war welfare state:

> I think I would be a different person now if orange juice and milk and dinners at school hadn't told me, in a covert way, that I had a right to exist, was worth something... its central benefit being that, unlike my mother, the state asked for nothing in return.[200]

It could be suggested that within the space of a few decades, the postwar welfare state that produced the new towns – and perhaps contributed to many of Basildon's second generation feeling as though they were 'worth something', in turn led some to seek out something better for themselves beyond the new town, which appeared to no longer be fulfilling their expectations. And yet, complexly, stigmatisation was readily encountered when one ventured beyond the parameters of the town. As Maxine recalled on the experience of getting clerical work in the City from the eighties onwards:

> Cuz I always worked in London, and coming from Basildon you was, and even now – I have got a chip on my shoulder, even at my age, because you're always judged - by the way you speak and where you come from, and soon as you say, when working in London, it was like, "oh where'd you live?" "Basildon", it was like, "uhhh", you know? there's always that sarcasm, or there's that - you don't ever feel as if you're as good as everybody else that comes from somewhere else, other than the new town, especially Basildon, I don't know why, I really don't…. A lot of people that I know don't even go out of Basildon for that reason.[201]

This parallels the national experience of council housing in that it corresponds to accounts of stigmatisation in both personal testimonies – such as Lynsey Hanley's *Estates: An Intimate History,* but those also as identified by Rogaly and Taylor in their study of three estates in Norwich, in which living on the estate 'did that to you. It made you feel as if you weren't worth

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[200] Steedman, C. *Landscape for a Good Woman* (London: Virago, 1986), p. 122
[201] Interview with Maxine (2020)

anything.'[202] Secondly, and significantly for this thesis, it shows that stigmatisation stretched beyond any estate or neighbourhood, and came to eventually encapsulate the entire town. Whilst there had always been snobbery towards new towns, largely rooted in the social composition and predominance of collective provision within these early, grand postwar projects, the gradual and then later rapid denigration and fragmentation of this tenure throughout the closing decades of the twentieth century saw snobbery increasingly play out at an *intra-class* level. Testimonies of 'snobbery' demonstrate something important about the way people in Basildon were conceptualising social change throughout this period, and it is no coincidence that the two places that appear to exceed all other areas of Essex in terms of reputational denigration are the two early new towns borne out of the idealism of the post-war moment that relied as heavily as they did on collective provision. Amidst the changing status of both the town and the collective provision of housing upon which its development relied, there is a structural shift in the metrics of 'social acceptability' which shaped and continue to shape some people's strategies for individual and familial self-betterment in the late twentieth century, and snobbery and perceptions of snobbery play a key role in mediating this shift.

In the 1990s, both the estates discussed throughout this chapter under went regeneration efforts following housing association involvement. Laindon 1, 2, 3 was entirely demolished following years of structural defects, and Five Links underwent three phases of regeneration (starting in 1995, 2004 and 2008), which saw its subways in-filled, the demolition of its flats and maisonettes, redevelopment of the estate's peripheral areas and a controversial re-branding effort by the local authority. Chapter six, which traces the changing role of the local state throughout this long and elongated transition, addresses these themes in depth through a case study of Bishopsfield in Harlow. As Dunleavy suggests, despite their flaws, much of this housing had constituted a considerable improvement from the places its new inhabitants were leaving.[203] For instance, 81-year-old Lilian Sibley, who won the Best Kept Homes Award on the Siporex estate in 1982, stated in 1992:

> I would not move way for anything. I have got some very good neighbours and
> I am pretty active so I take part in most things that are going on. Basildon has

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202 Rogaly and Taylor. *Moving Histories*, p. 60
203 Dunleavy, P. *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain 1945-75* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 1

been very good to many people. It was and is a very good place to live. Of course we have to fight to protect our green bits but its like that anywhere.[204]

Similarly, as one interviewee that worked for the Council during the redevelopment of Five Links stated:

I did the consultation there for the first two phases, and speaking to the people that lived there, they loved it, they didn't wanna- you know, it was all Compulsory Purchase we had to move people out and purchase their homes and there was a lot of people that had moved there and lived there all their lives, they didn't wanna move out, and that was- it was quite shocking actually, […] some of the people were devastated to move out of their homes, that's the kind of first generation of Basildon that were so grateful.[205]

Despite this, a strong – occasionally resentful - narrative of decline persists, one that is a clear product of the trends that have been examined throughout this chapter – the shift towards higher densities and outward expansion, the progressive erosion of green, open space, and crucially, the privatisation, residualisation and increasing stigmatisation of public rented housing. These themes play a strong role in shaping narratives related to leaving the town, as can often be seen by testimonial comments left within online forums:

Me and my mum moved to Basildon in 1958 and my mum was highly delighted when she was awarded a council house after our grotty flat in London. I was very happy there when I was young, as there were fields to roam, ponds to fish and lots of open space. […] As I grew up I started to hate Basildon as it became a concrete jungle. All the fields were built on and farmland, where we used to roam, became a golf course. I couldn't wait to move when I was an adult and when I was 19 I moved nearer London.[206]

A vernacular anti-planning sentiment can also be seen, often characterised by resentment and bitterness, towards the planners themselves, as well as the town's residents, testifying to how the external categorisation of an estate – demonstrated in the case of Five Links – had by the 1990s and 2000s become an external categorisation that encompassed the entire town:

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[204] Hill, M. *Basildon: Events, people and places over the last 100 years* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000), p. 108
[205] Interview with Maxine (2020)
[206] Online comment made on 15 October 2012 on *francisfrith.com*

I hate Basildon because what started as country town ended up as a thug-filled town full of dimwits who never respect the good things in life. We who came from the hell hole of London in the early 1960s got a better start in life because of Basildon and the schools within it. The wholesale destruction of this town is due to the poor planning of the planners with small minds and less life experience. I am sorry those idiots have wrecked a little piece of heaven that once was Basildon and Laindon.[207]

Interviewees for this thesis, whose criticisms of the town were of an entirely different nature, whilst appreciative of the 'new town system', felt as though there was a temporal limitation on the opportunity it was able to offer, underpinned by a degree of inevitability to its decline:

But for people like me, who would've been educated in the East End in poorer housing conditions, it served me personally really well, because it had more open spaces, better education, better standard of living generally, a lot of people like got a good education and done well out of the new town system, I wouldn't knock the new town system itself, but it just works for a couple of generations and then you've got problems.[208]

The reality is that the opportunities offered to and grasped by the first and second generation of the town, be this through urban dispersal and rehousing in a superior home and environment, the chance of homeownership through rented house sales at various stages, or the high levels of educational and recreational facilities offered to the young, were all products of social democracy and its 'brief' and complex life. As one current resident suggested, in light of the run-down nature of the town's high street and local neighbourhood centres, as well as issues of crime and nearby drug-dealing:

I think its these kinds of things that make people think: "hang on a minute, what's happened? Because this is not what we bought into, this is not what its supposed to be." And it's the same for me, where's this gonna be for my family? You know, its supposed to be a third generation, fourth generation town. Opportunity – where is that now? I can't see it.[209]

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[207] Online comment made on 9 May 2010 on *francisfrith.com*
[208] Interview with Micky (2017)
[209] Interview with Maxine (2020)

This is something that for many residents, appears to stand at complete odds with the opportunity for self-betterment grasped by their parents:

> They came from the slums, they had no toilet, they had a really tiny flat above a petrol garage […] my mum would say, she would never ever look back, ever, because it was the best thing that had ever happened to them, you know?[210]

There are shared, intergenerational characteristics to these personal histories of self-betterment through migration and upward mobility that parallel one another, from leaving urban poverty in London to the leaving the new town; one away from the culminating result of decades of unregulated, urban development which led to crowded, polluted cities, the other away from the new towns that had sought to rectify these social ills, and which, in turn, were subject to decades of defunding, deregulation and privatisation. In between these two variations of spatial self-betterment, lies another - the thousands of Basildon residents that purchased their rented dwellings throughout both the seventies and eighties. The scale of this opportunity and the social rewards it entailed have been examined in the previous chapter, but this process – ironically – played a crucial part in the facilitation of the town's broader trajectory, the fate of which was intimately tied to the status of publicly rented housing. Throughout all three stages, the 'home' has been a key and integral basis in the pursuit of individual and familial self-betterment.

Conclusion

Through their study of East Kilbride, Abrams *et al.* have drawn attention to 'the important and often unacknowledged point that social mobility or aspiration for oneself and one's children was a major factor in moving to the new town.'[211] First generation new town migrants staked their future and the futures of their children in these grand postwar projects, and relied upon the town's lasting success for continued upward social mobility (the "social escalator" as one HDC staffer called it). This intergenerational memory (or familial narrative) of betterment was frequently evoked by interviewees, and was something remembered by some as a responsibility, whose sense of betrayal and abandonment has underpinned a determination to

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[210] *Ibid.*

[211] Abrams *et al.* 'Aspiration, Agency, and the Production of New Selves in a Scottish New Town', p. 585

stymie any decline and restore their towns to their former glory.[212] For others, it served as a lesson, and an instructive to go on and do the same thing their parents or grandparents had done, to move out and better themselves by grasping the opportunities at their disposal – for some, this meant 'getting out' as soon as they could, and attempting to continue an inter-generational pattern of upward social mobility through migration, in many cases to surrounding towns and areas, that as Bill said, were considered more 'socially acceptable.'[213]

This chapter has sought to draw together the complex, interrelated nature of changing government priorities, residualisation and stigmatisation in order to shine light on a broader continuity of individual self-betterment for oneself and one's family, that has manifested in very different ways at different stages of the new town's life: during its development (urban dispersal), privatisation (rented house sales) and perceived 'decline' (the cumulative effects of privatisation, residualisation and stigmatisation). The popular tendency towards individual self-betterment was present throughout both the 'brief life of social democracy' and the political formation that replaced it, and was crucial in the local success of rented house sales, which in a unique and complex way, locally straddled these two political formations. Not only does this testify, in line with the core argument of this thesis, to the messiness and complexity of this transition, but it also points to a core feature of narratives of self-betterment that emerge in the context of the town's 'decline.'

Robinson *et al.* have suggested that the 1970s 'was a key moment in the spread of a popular, aspirational form of individualism.'[214] This chapter has pointed to the 1970s as also being a key moment in which local processes of privatisation, residualisation and stigmatisation cohered and went on to shape the town's subsequent trajectory. By the 1990s and 2000s, whilst narratives of individual aspiration and familial self-betterment serve as evidence to this concept, an important and perhaps understated characteristic of this individualised aspiration is that it often appears to emerge out of a feeling of collective loss. Aspirations of 'getting out' are as much about individual trajectories as they are about collective identities, and the sense of loss attached to the latter: that this used to be a 'good' working class place that represented

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[212] For instance, through campaigns against the thoughtless redevelopment of Basildon's historic town centre and the fight to keep the town's artworks in public hands, or to protect Harlow's civic heritage. Interview with Maxine (2020) and Moira (2017)

[213] Interview with Bill (2017)

[214] Robinson *et al.* 'Telling Stories about Post-war Britain', p. 304

something better, that 'our parents' had or 'we' had as children – better housing, good quality employment opportunities, decent secondary education, abundant green space. These narratives are negotiating a tension between an individual desire to 'get out' and improve oneself on the one hand, and an accompanying feeling of loss on the other, particularly when reflecting on these processes of privatisation, residualisation and stigmatisation. This feeling of loss which accompanies narratives of individual and familial self-betterment coalesces around this social democratic moment that new towns like Basildon and Harlow embodied, where it was about a *collective* project to improve working class life as much as it was an *individual* one. Are these narratives of 'getting out' of Basildon in the late twentieth century necessarily fuelled by an enlivened individualism? Or are they underpinned by a resignation and frustration that a collective project of self-betterment has finished? Rather than being mutually exclusive, it would appear that they are affixed in a complex and messy way.

Chapter 5: 'It's like an old East End street up there': Housing and community in Harlow's Bishopsfield

Building on the previous chapter's themes of residualisation and stigmatisation, this chapter focuses on the Bishopsfield estate in Harlow in order to undertake a closer inspection of how these trends and processes play out at a micro-level, and how one small estate community has responded. This chapter troubles accounts of a clear, linear 'decline' in community by examining experiences of housing and sociability in Harlow's experimental Bishopsfield estate. The chapter begins by arguing that even though there was a scaling back of planned provisions and amenities, the estate can be considered to have represented the idealism of the new town ethos at its boldest, and that the initial excitement surrounding Bishopsfield attracted enthused tenants and inspired planners alike. It then demonstrates how the lack of planned amenities, alongside the heightened privacy of the estate's design, led to the formation of the residents' association, something actively encouraged, assisted and financially supported by the HDC. It examines the partial residualisation of the estate throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, and points to how negative, external perceptions of the estate often stood at odds with resident experience. Crucially, it demonstrates how public and private space has been utilised by residents to counter damaging external perceptions of the estate, arguing that despite the retreat of the local state from telling Bishopsfield residents how to play out their collective lives, various place-based community activities and events have endured or *re-emerged* in intriguing ways. It suggests that this constitutes a lasting legacy of the HDC's social development office, with its emphasis on 'community' as formal association and social interaction based on locality, and demonstrates how this heritage, a product of the postwar social democratic years, was repurposed by residents from the late eighties onwards to alter perceptions of their homes amidst a harsher, neoliberal context.[1]

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[1] Material used throughout chapters 5 and 6 relating to the Bishopsfield estate and its residents' association is presently in the process of being catalogued at the Essex Record Office.

I: Design, background and local context, 1960-69

This section foregrounds the Bishopsfield estate's architecturally radical and experimental modernist design, which epitomised the utopian hopes of the 1960s. It suggests that the estate represents the boldest example of the postwar new town, reinvigorated by 'modern' concerns for new urban living. It presents the estate as a unique product of the new town situation, whilst situating this within changing local patterns of homeownership. It then presents a brief overview of the estate's recent past, to provide context for this chapter and the next.

Background of the competition

The Tye Green neighbourhood of Harlow new town, where the Bishopsfield estate was subsequently built, caused concern for the HDC in the late 1950s. The developing neighbourhood was 'well below the 10% formula' of the HDC's preferred ratio of subsidised rented dwellings to owner occupied dwellings in any given area.[2] Linked to these anxieties, the HDC was conscious of the need to attract 'middle income groups' (often referred to more elusively as 'professionals') to the town, under the imperative of attaining 'balance' (the shifting local interpretations of which have been examined in chapter 2). Alongside sporadic schemes for owner occupation, balance was sought through 'building more middle class houses *to let',* given the need was – as the Corporation suggested - for middle income groups 'who do not intend to settle down [permanently] in the town.'[3] It is in this context of concern for housing balance that Area 71 of Harlow's master plan, which fell within the Tye Green neighbourhood, was subject to an open competition in 1960.

For the competition, the HDC used its clout to encourage both Essex County Council and Harlow Urban District Council to relax local bylaws in readiness for the winning design, in order to bestow the architect with 'a freer hand to solve these old problems in new ways', which it hoped would 'result in a pattern of living better suited to the needs of modern urban society.'[4] These 'old problems' referred to local demands for greater privacy, which occurred amidst

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[2] ERO A6306/390 Memorandum from Layton, E., Senior Executive to General Manager entitled 'Houses for sale and houses to let: middle income groups' (11 March 1957)

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] ERO A10417/6. HDC. 'Architectural competition: Houses and Flats on Area 71 – general conditions' (Harlow: Shenval Press, 1960)

Ministry pressure for higher housing densities, the unsuitability of tower blocks for family life, and increased motorcar usage. The HDC encouraged a radical 're-thinking on layout and house design in the light of modern needs and the changing use of space in housing.'[5]

The winning design belonged to architect Michael Neylan, a 24-year-old graduate who had been working at Chamberlin, Powell and Bonn – a modernist architectural firm best known for their design of the Barbican Estate in London. The guidelines stated that 'consideration should be given to the problem of providing privacy to the rear of the house and garden', a common criticism of the HDC's higher standard housing throughout the 1950s, as shown in chapter 2.[6] The imperatives of 'balance' are reflected in the guidelines' insistence on a variety of housing types, and within each housing type variations in standards of finishing, in order to attract a diversity of rent ranges, encouraging competitors to 'consider carefully the sitting of the better type houses to ensure they will attract a higher rental.'[7]

Bishopsfield's design

The Bishopsfield estate, built between 1961 and 1966, is made up of a staggered set of 267 dwellings, ranging from bedsits to five-bedroom patio-houses, organised around a 'hill top piazza' in an angled horseshoe formation, with sloped narrow lanes leading outwards from the centre, linking the outer patio-houses to a large pedestrian concourse or 'podium' lined with two-storey maisonettes.[8] Intended to resemble a 'Mediterranean hill-top village', the estate has fully segregated parking areas restricted to the summit of the site and underneath garages.[9] 'Unlike any other housing estate in Harlow', the built design, in the Corporation's own words, 'gives an atmosphere not unlike a village community', and 'provides special opportunities for social integration.'[10] A smaller adjacent housing area - Charters Cross - built as a pilot scheme for Bishopsfield, also makes up part of the housing area.

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[5] HLG 91/740 HDC. 'Architectural competition: Housing and Flats on Area 71' (February 1960), p. 6
[6] ERO A10417/6. HDC. 'Architectural competition: Houses and Flats on Area 71 – general conditions' (Harlow: Shenval Press, 1960), p. 6
[7] *Ibid*. p. 4
[8] 'Harlow recommendations for Grade II Listing: Nos. 1-195 Bishopsfield', for *English Heritage* (1995)
[9] HDC 'Bishopsfield: a guide for new tenants' (Harlow: Harlow Council's Information Services: 1966)
[10] *Ibid*.

Architect Bill Ungless – who Neylan quickly recruited for the project and later formed a firm with, described his lifelong colleague as a 'passionate advocate of radical social housing', who in Bishopsfield, 'displayed, elegantly and effectively, many of the ideas that our generation of architects was concerned with.' Following Bishopsfield, he adds, 'Neylan became a rallying point for those of us who could see it was possible to build local authority housing both radical and sensitive to family needs.'[11] As Emily Greeves has suggested, Neylan and Ungless developed a reputation in the world of British architecture for housing design that encouraged 'the individual to experience a sense of belonging and feel at home.'[12] In Ungless' own words:

> Neylan's view was that everybody should be treated equally and this found expression in Bishopsfield. Firstly, in the way he provided every home with a private open space and a front door at ground level – not easy with higher density schemes, and secondly, in the way the scheme, necessarily comprising many small units, was designed so everybody could identify with their own particular dwelling, as well as with the community as a whole.[13]

This egalitarian design was underpinned by 'a desire to reduce the distinction between flats and houses', with the outward appearance of each dwelling being almost indistinguishable – irrespective of house type or size.[14] Such idealism epitomises, to quote Ortolano, the 'visual unity through which modernism had sought to banish social distinctions.'[15] As the Corporation's Liaison Officer suggested at the time:

> Bishopsfield is rightly regarded as one of the Corporation's outstanding show-pieces, embodying some of the most advanced thinking in the country in housing layout.[16]

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[11] Ungless, B. 'Michael Neylan dies at 81' in *The Architectural Journal* (12 July 2012), p. 20

[12] Greeves, E. 'Neylan & Ungless', *emilygreeves.com.* Accessed online (2 March 2019) via http://www.emilygreeves.com/neylan-and-ungless/

[13] Ungless, B. 'Michael Neylan dies at 81' in *The Architectural Journal* (12 July 2012), p. 20

[14] ERO A10417/6 HDC. 'Bishopsfield: Architects Design Intentions' (June 1970)

[15] Ortolano. *Thatcher's Progress,* p. 130

[16] ERO A10417/6 HDC. Memo from Liaison Officer (3 March 1967)

Figure 5.1 - Maps of Bishopsfield and Charters Cross
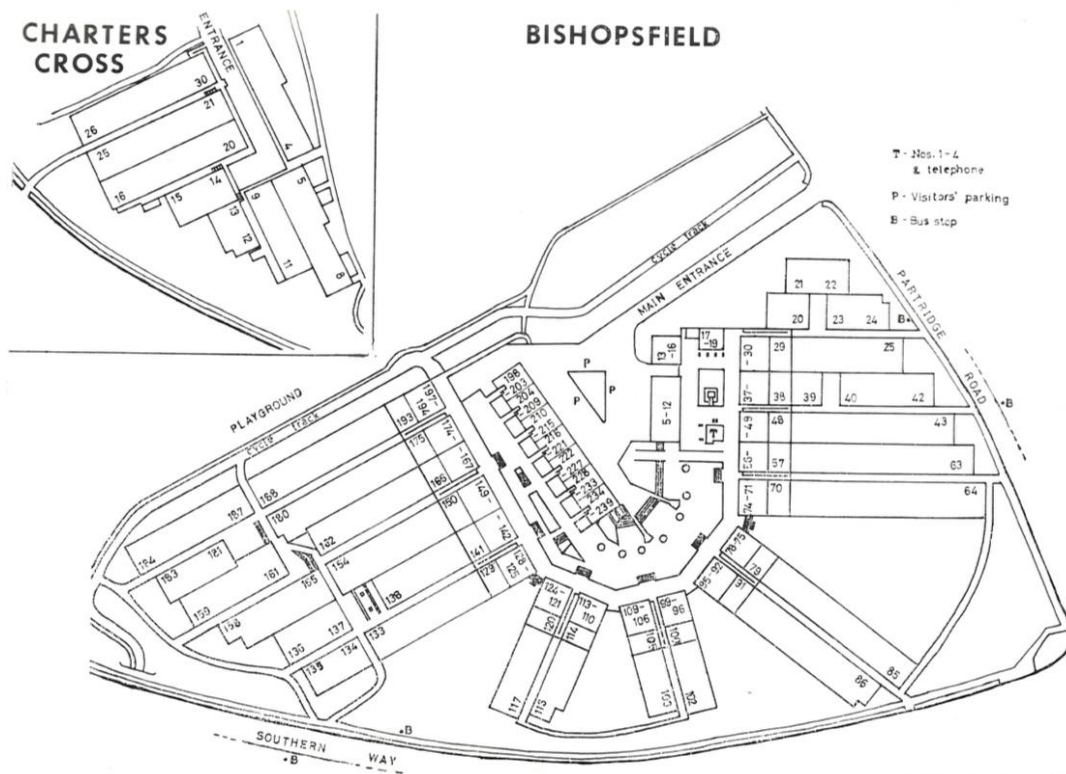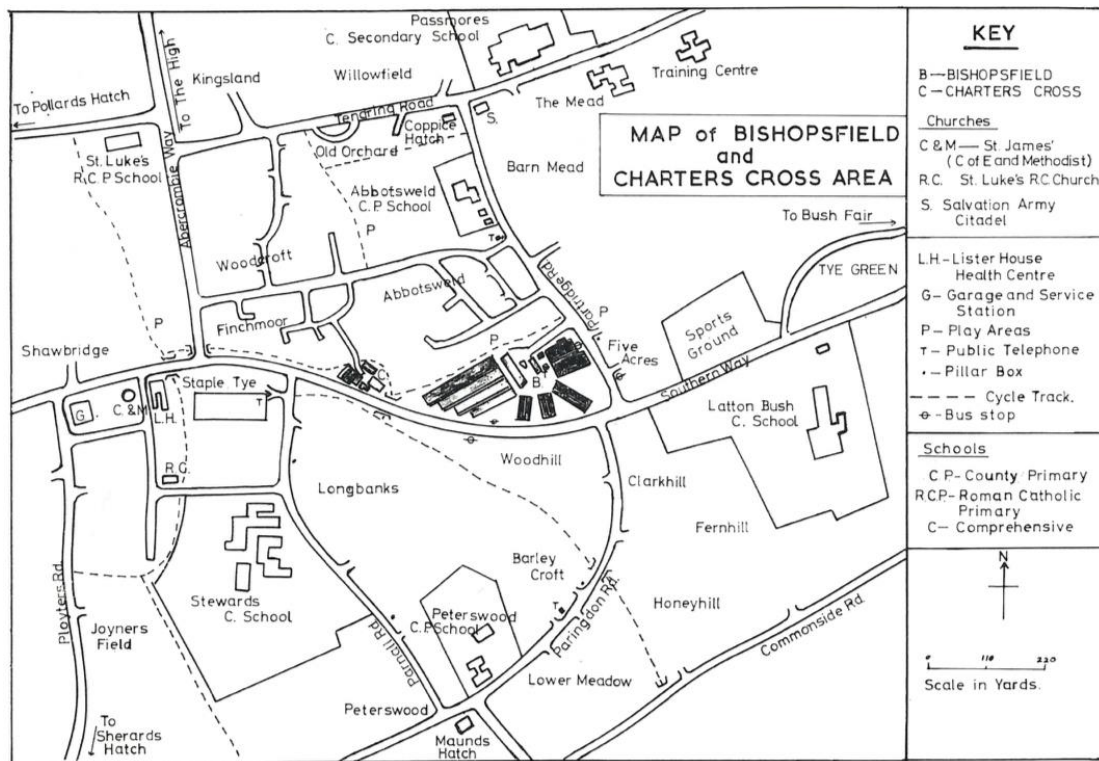
The estate's design was much celebrated in the architectural press, winning a Civic Trust Award in 1968 and 'Good Housing Design' Award in 1969, consolidating the new town's

reputation as 'a town which has since its inception been an experimental test bed for ideas in housing (however unambitious the more avant garde members of the profession may consider them).'[17] As local journalist Steve Farrer suggested of Bishopsfield: 'Shot through with egalitarianism, it was a child of its time, optimistic and quite daring, reflecting the enthusiasm of the young architect and capturing the bold spirit of the whole new town experiment.'[18] The Corporation's press release for the estate captures the optimistic, idealistic mood of the moment:

> Underground roads and garages… Electric trollies for milkmen and dustmen… self-contained flats for grandparents attached to their children's houses… Complete privacy… Space age living![19]

Figure 5.2 – Photograph of Bishopsfield's podium and bedsit block, c. 1968

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[17] ERO A10417/6 MHLG circular. 'Good Design in Housing: 1969 Results' (17 September 1969), No. 224; see also: Moore, J. 'Casework: Bishopsfield Estate, Harlow and Excalibur Estate prefabs', *Twentieth Century Society* (January 2009); Chisholm, J. 'Harlow's 'Kasbah'', *Daily Telegraph* (7 October 1968), pp. 10-12

[18] Farrar, S. 'Breathing new life into Bishopsfield', *The Harlow Star* (9 March 1995)

[19] ERO A10417/6 HDC. Press release: 'Official opening of the Showhouse, Charters Cross, Harlow on January 26th, 1966' (1966)

Figure 5.3 – Photograph of Bishopsfield's annual 'Mini Festival', 1969

The buildings' chic design, with internal split-level lounge space and furnishings chosen by the Corporation's housing unit were 'modern' and fashionable, something which characterised around a third of the housing areas they furnished in readiness for tenants.[20] It was suggested by one HDC architect, that the immensely 'modern' furnishings of many of the show houses had set particularly high expectations for residents.[21] The underappreciated marketing capacities of NTDCs, something Ortolano has recently brought attention to in the case of Milton Keynes, manifest themselves not only in their ability to 'sell' the town to prospective industrialists, or to 'sell' the 'idea of owner occupation' to its tenants as instructed by the Ministry (as demonstrated in chapter 2), but also to 'sell' housing areas to prospective tenants. As a 2006 report into new towns suggested, the NTDCs were 'powerful place marketing organisations', given that it was their job to successfully promote 'a clear brand image for their New Town.'[22] This ability was also used to generate a sense of place for their housing areas. In Bishopsfield, the space age futurism of the moment was mobilised alongside age-old English concerns for privacy and 'village community life' to invite tenants to participate in a new and exciting way of living that was – implicitly – superior to the Corporation's earlier housing

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[20] ERO SA 22/1356/1 Interview with HDC architect, Alexander McCowan (1982)

[21] *Ibid*.

[22] Department of Planning, Oxford Brookes University. 'Transferable Lessons from the New Towns', p. 21

developments. Lawrence has pointed to how many in Stevenage had 'clearly internalised a sense that they were part of a great social and political experiment', and for Bishopsfield's new town residents, such a feeling was heightened.[23]

Figure 5.4 - Photograph of interior of Bishopsfield's patio-housing

This sense of importance amongst early estate residents was further bolstered by the architectural attention shown to the estate during its early years. Testifying to the international dimension of Britain's new towns movement, as has been shown by both Rosemary Wakeman and Guy Ortolano, the Bishopsfield estate's design attracted international architectural attention that facilitated a continual stream of visitors to the estate during its early years, something remembered fondly by residents today.[24] A party of Soviet town planners from Moscow visited the estate in Spring 1971, whose schedule included visits to both Cumbernauld new town and the Barbican development in London.[25] Later that year, in July alone, around 500 visitors had flocked to Bishopsfield in 29 separate parties from a total of 11 different countries, ranging from 'retired millionaires from Hong Kong' to American students and a 'sprinkling of sociologists, planners and architects.'[26] The significance of this is that it created an environment in which residents felt in which they were part of something special, ground-breaking and exciting.

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[23] Lawrence. *Me, Me, Me?,* p. 75
[24] See: Wakeman. *Practicing Utopia*; Ortolano. *Thatcher's Progress*, chapter 5
[25] ERO A10417/6 BCCRA. *The Casbah* newsletter, no. 7 (May 1971)
[26] ERO A10417/6 BCCRA. *The Casbah* newsletter, no. 8 (August 1971)

The scaling back of planned shops and amenities

Neylan's original plan for Bishopsfield had included a common room, a handful of shops and a village green, in order to temper the design's intense domestic privacy with shared social facilities. But the HDC dropped Neylan's original plans for Bishopsfield to have a community centre or common room, citing restrictions in their policy:

> Corporation's current policy is to include only a limited number of these buildings – virtually one per neighbourhood – and strategically sited adjoining the neighbourhood-sub-centre. A common room is already in design for a site within the Passmores neighbourhood and I am afraid it would not be possible to make an addition to the programme.[27]

The following year, the HDC's proposal to the Ministry for 'two shops in the central podium' was also dropped, as were plans for a village green.[28] An unimplemented architectural plan from 1989, constructed with resident involvement and concerned with helping to 'form a sense of community, a citizenship of Bishopsfield', highlighted the 'incomplete nature of the experiment of Bishopsfield as a village and a community', recommending 'future community facilities', which included a village green as originally conceived.[29] The omission of these features, was later regretted by the Corporation, which picked up on their disproportionate impact on families living on the estate.[30] The HDC's chief architect and master planner Frederick Gibberd, lamented the financial restrictions increasingly imposed throughout the town's development, commenting in 1982:

> Well the town hall is, I suppose, typical really, the whole thing has been done on a shoe string. They needed a town hall so we're allowed *just* enough money to build what was needed at that moment […] I feel very strongly that having embarked on this fantastic programme of building a town, the new town corporations ought to have been left to have done the job properly. This is one

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[27] ERO A10417/6 HDC. Letter from Liaison officer to Michael Neylan (25 April 1962)

[28] ERO A10417/6 HDC. 'Proposal no. 18: Great Parndon Area 71' (22 March 1963), p. 1

[29] Harlow Council. Bishopsfield sub-committee minutes (15 May 1989), p. 2; See: Architecture Research Studio, Polytechnic of North London. 'Community and Architectural Spirit of Bishopsfield: a plan for regeneration' (1989)

[30] ERO A10417/6 HDC. Memorandum from Liaison Officer to Housing Manager (16 January 1969)

of the awful things about this country, we get marvelous ideas and we don't carry them out![31]

Resident association material later referred to the decision to axe shops and small intimate public meeting places that other areas had as worsening feelings of 'isolation' felt by some.[32] The 'planned communities' of the new towns were, as suggested in the interim report of the new town committee, intended to be 'the antithesis of the dormitory suburb,' referencing the interwar estates which were criticised for being large housing areas with a lack of adequate shops or amenities.[33] Whilst often juxtaposed to the failures of the interwar estates, Clapson has pointed to how early new town migrants often felt as though had been 'marooned' on housing developments with pending basic amenities and shops – for which they were forced to stir development corporations into action through self-organisation.[34]

Despite widespread rhetorical commitment, this scaling back of planned amenities can similarly be identified in Basildon. Disrupting the linear narrative of a 'decline' in community throughout the postwar era, a BDC report from 1975 criticised earlier neighbourhoods in the town, which despite being built at the height of the Corporation's rhetoric that emphasised 'community', saw many community buildings and investments in communal provision delayed, put off or overlooked. The problems with earlier housing areas were not only that community buildings were 'very sparsely provided', but crucially that 'they are not available in the early days when the community needs them most', when 'initial social patterns are being established.'[35] The delay on this front had been caused by the fact that neighbourhood centres – made up of mostly shops - were 'not constructed until the catchment population is sufficient to justify the investment in commercial terms' – with community buildings not considered separately from their adjoining commercial facilities.[36] For a local state actor for which 'community' played such an integral role in its literature and remit throughout its founding decades, this was quite an oversight. Thus, the Corporation sought to build and acquire a

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[31] Purton, M. (producer) 'Changing Places: Nearly New Town (Harlow)', BBC East, United Kingdom (1982), accessed online via East Anglian Film Archive: www.eafa.org.uk/catalogue/5010

[32] BRA. *Bishopsfield in the Seventies* (1970)

[33] Quoted in: Deakin, N. and Ungerson, C. *Leaving London: Planned Mobility and the Inner City* (London, Heinemann Educational, 1977), p. 31; Olechnowicz, p. 76

[34] Clapson, *Invinsible Green Suburbs*, pp. 169-70

[35] ERO A8891/6 BDC. 'Northlands/Felmore report: A report presented to the Chief Architect by the Northlands/Felmore Design Team' (March 1975), p. 27, 12

[36] *Ibid*., p. 12

community centre, youth centre and various meeting rooms for tenants, as well a play leadership hut (a 'sports pavilion') within the first year of there being dwelling completions.[37] Ironically, the community buildings most punctually provided by the Corporation were those provided for its very last neighbourhood, built towards the end of a decade of flourishing individualism (demonstrated in chapter 3). Despite the prominence and centrality of 'community life' in the Corporation's rhetoric, and how Corporations generally perceived of community associations and community centres as integral to the fulfilment of this arguably narrow conception of 'community', the BDC and BUDC tussled over contributions of cost to the community facilities in Lee Chapel North (the Corporation attempted to have the Council contribute, but ended up covering all costs itself).[38] From projections, Lee Chapel North's community centre was completed when over half the population of the neighbourhood had already been housed (around 4,600 of its 8,700 total population).[39]

Table 5.1 – Delay between housing completions and the opening of community centres in Basildon.[40]

Neighbourhood	Population	Main dates of occupation	Community centre opened	Delay (years)
Fryerns	1,500	1952-60	1960	8
Barstable	11,000	1952-61 1970-75	1970	18
Vange	13,000	1952-68 1975-76	1978	26
Kingswood	5,200	1957-59	1959	2
Ghyllgove	3,300	1960-62	1963	3
Lee Chapel South	5,000	1959-62 1966	1962	3
Lee Chapel North	8,600	1961-66	1964	3
Laindon East	8,000	1965-67 1970-72	1973	8
Pitsea	3,600	1969-71	(*)	6+
Chalvedon	5,500	1974-77	1977	3

*opening date unknown, provided in Pitsea District Centre by BUDC

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[37] *Ibid*., p. 30
[38] ERO A8225/30 BDC. Correspondence to BUDC entitled 'Lee Chapel North community hall' (17 April 1961)
[39] *Ibid*.
[40] Reproduced from ERO A8891/6 BDC. 'Northlands/Felmore report: A report presented to the Chief Architect by the Northlands/Felmore Design Team' (March 1975), p. 13; projections made in 1975 were updated with correct years.

In other words, the provision of community facilities was more efficiently fulfilled in rented developments that followed the concessionary sales than those built before them, in particular the earliest neighbourhoods such as Vange, where residents had to wait over a quarter of a century for theirs (see table 5.1). Whilst the Corporation seemed adept at balancing these twin responsibilities throughout its subsequent developments, this should not obscure the difficulties it appears to have had in mediating the arising tensions that did emerge in existing areas at this time.

II: Early impressions and tenant responses

This section examines tenants' early impressions of the estate, a lack of residential stability within pockets of the estate and the subsequent formation of the resident's association.

Transience and early composition

A high degree of spatial mobility occurred in particular parts of the estate from early on in its life, leading to residential complaints of transience that were – and have remained – discursively positioned against 'community.' Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with the residualisation of council housing stock, this manifested more divisively, but has been a characteristic of the estate since its inception. One tenant, a young woman interviewed for a local film made about the estate in 1969, stated that 'there's a lot of shifting about here. People move in for a few months and then go away again. It's a very transient population.' Another woman interviewed similarly added: 'People don't seem to stay awfully long.'[41] In 1968 the HDC undertook a survey based on a random sample of 10% of Bishopsfield households, consisting of equal distribution of all housing types.[42] It found that in contrast to Harlow's migrant population, a majority of those surveyed were from other parts of the UK, and also that 'the attraction of work' being the most significant factor influencing their move to the new town.[43]

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[41] Greenman, J. (director) 'A view of Bishopsfield, Harlow, Essex', Harlow Cine Club, United Kingdom (1969), accessed online via East Anglian Film Archive: http://www.eafa.org.uk/catalogue/253

[42] ERO A10417/6 HDC. 'Bishopsfield survey' (1968), p. 1

[43] *Ibid*., p. 2

Table 5.2 - Expected length of stay in Bishopsfield and Harlow. HDC's Bishopsfield survey, 1968.[44]

	Expected length of stay in Bishopsfield	Expected length of stay in Harlow
Less than a year	4	1
1 to 2 years	8	6
5 years	5	6
Rest of life	7	11

This heightened spatial mobility was not distributed evenly across the estate. Whilst the annual tenant turnover of the outer patio-houses was around the new town's average of 5% a year, this rose to 1/8 in the podium maisonettes and 1/3 in the bedsit block.[45] In accounting for this higher turnover, the HDC's Information Officer pointed to 'special reasons' owing to the fact that:

> There are many teachers and professional people in the Bishopsfield flats and, as you will well know, these occupations lend themselves to frequent change of job. When these people leave Harlow we tend to replace them by others in the same occupation, thus perpetuating the tendency towards a high turnover.[46]

The HDC repeated this explanation multiple times, that the 'movers are often professional people' who tend to be single or childless, and generally 'more mobile.'[47] Resident literature was quick to pick up on the difference between areas, and went as far to suggest that:

> the estate is split in two, and the young couples around the podium have little in common with the older families in the passages. There is also the problem of lack of continuity which results from a young and shifting population.[48]

As Sandra, council tenant and current Chair of the Bishopsfield, Charters Cross and Gibson Court Residents Association (BCCGCRA) affirms: 'There were quite a lot of teachers and young professionals [in those days], young couples or single people.' Sandra moved to Bishopsfield in 1976 as a teacher, because 'Harlow at that time gave teachers preference in housing options, when I got divorced it was easier to get a house here in Harlow than anywhere

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[44] *Ibid*., pp. 2-3
[45] BRA publication. *Bishopsfield in the Seventies* (1970)
[46] ERO A10417/6. HDC's Information Officer Joan Long's correspondence with BRA (5 August 1970)
[47] ERO A10417/6. HDC Liaison Department. Correspondence with BCCRA and editor of 'Casbah' - and notes (21 September 1970)
[48] BRA publication. *Bishopsfield in the Seventies* (1970)

else.'[49] Sandra, who had lived in a Bishopsfield podium flat until around five years ago when she downsized to a 'granny flat' in Charters Cross, spoke of her excitement at first seeing the light, spaciousness of Bishopsfield, especially compared the dark, gloomy Victorian terraced houses of London she has grown up in:

> Some friends of mine lived in Bishopsfield and when I visited them the first time, I said "oh I've got to live here." They moved, and when they moved I applied to the corporation to swap. It was just so different […] These ceilings [*points upwards*], I love this sort of feeling of space. I mean, this is small, this place, its only 22 feet the whole length, but because the [high ceilings] and its got all of these windows which gives you so much light coming in.[50]

The estate's design also attracted Moira to move to one of Bishopsfield's patio-houses that same year. Moira and her husband – also a teacher - moved to Harlow in 1957, moving around the town a couple of times before eventually transferring to Bishopsfield.[51] As she recalled: 'it was a very exciting time to move to Harlow. Everything was being built and we felt as if we were in a colony that was setting up […] it was a great time to be here in the town, with everything brand new and spotless.' Moira also reiterated the diverse class composition of the estate, suggesting that its experimental, modernist style had attracted an eclectic mix of people:

> We saw it when it was being built. We thought: "this is amazing… nothing like it!" A lot of people came who loved architecture. Interesting people. A lot of college lecturers were here, and you know, intellectual people, I suppose. We all got to know each other and we all helped each other.[52]

This led to a general point about the decline of the number of 'professionals' living on the estate and in the town more generally, suggesting that many had moved away to more affluent neighbouring towns like Bishop's Stortford and surrounding areas, a similar shift to what was identified in Basildon's Lee Chapel North in chapter 3:

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[49] Interview with Sandra (2019)

[50] *Ibid*.

[51] Interview with Moira (2017)

[52] *Ibid*.

> Everybody worked and lived in the town and cycled to work […] now of course they're all commuters and there's an awful, snobbish feeling about Harlow all around the villages.[53]

Again, we see the theme of snobbery shaping narratives of decline, as illustrated in the last chapter. Some interviewees pointed to how outer areas of both Basildon and Harlow had in recent decades sought to distance and disassociate themselves from the towns all together, such as the more affluent Langdon Hills neighbourhood in Basildon, or Harlow's more recent housing development of Church Langley built in the 1990s.[54] The latter of these has persistently marketed itself as a 'village', with some residents lobbying the council against the allocation of homes to housing association tenants, and attempting to have 'Harlow' removed from their addresses.[55]

The popularity of privacy versus external perceptions

Emily Cockayne has drawn attention to what she calls the 'postwar clash of neighbourhood planning ideologies', positioning the imperative to maximise isolationism and heighten privacy against the planned fostering of 'neighbourly living.'[56] Bishopsfield's design appeared to be an attempt by Neylan to reconcile these two postwar priorities and seemingly antithetical modes of living. The design of the L-shaped patio-houses of Bishopsfield had arranged all living areas around an entirely secluded private courtyard or garden, creatively providing – as one architectural journal observed - privacy 'of a kind undreamed of in the estates of developers' semis'.[57] The architectural competition, in the HDC's later words, 'emphasised the need for as much privacy for individual households as possible.'[58] As the HDC itself noted:

> the visual aspect of [Bishopsfield's] lanes can be contrasted with a typical British street where the windows face on to the street, so making it easy for the passer-by to see inside or over fences into the neighbour's gardens.[59]

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[53] *Ibid*.
[54] Interview with Sylvia (2017)
[55] Moreton, C. 'Old village, new village green', *Independent* (22 October 2011)
[56] Cockayne. *Cheek by Jowl*, p. 152. For the post-war popularity of privacy, see: pp. 159-160
[57] From *The Architect* (1974), quoted in Moore, J. 'Casework: Bishopsfield Estate, Harlow and Excalibur Estate prefabs', *Twentieth Century Society* (January 2009)
[58] ERO A10417/6 HDC. 'Bishopsfield survey' (1968), p. 1
[59] *Ibid*., p. 1

Had these features attracted the sort of residents who did not want to have contact with their neighbours? The aforementioned 1968 survey found that the chief attraction to Bishopsfield amongst those who had chosen to move there (16 said they had been given a choice, 13 denied this), was the 'facilities' offered by the dwellings, most likely referring to the modern furnishings and the privacy afforded by the design.[60] The privacy of dwellings and their gardens was a common feature of what residents loved about their homes.[61] As consultants who led the surveys and focus groups on behalf of the council when the estate was threatened with demolition in 2008 stated: 'One of the striking things *Partners in Change* found during the consultation was that people were very positive about the design of the estate.'[62] Focus group research with Bishopsfield's council tenants by the firm found that whilst registering a 'general dissatisfaction with the HDC's repairs service […] nearly everyone was positive about living in Bishopsfield, saying that there was a good feeling of community and neighbourliness.' As well as this, the consultants noted that amongst council tenants, there was 'strong attachment to the homes and the area.'[63] Similarly, the conclusions of the focus group with residents of Charters Cross painted a similar picture: 'Charters Cross residents were very positive about their area. In particular, they mentioned the community spirit and the feeling of privacy and, in some cases, security resulting from the design of the bungalows and the layout of the area.'[64] As one resident proffered in light of the threatened redevelopment: 'All it needs is a bit of tender loving care.'[65]

Since the estate's inception, residents have battled with the stark contrast between their lived experience and external perceptions of the estate (which worsened throughout the 1980s and 1990s). One woman interviewed for the 1969 film, happy with her flat on the estate, said: 'I think people tend to be put off by the appearance, they think its bleak, and I've had people say to me "oh you live in a prison", you know? I can't understand this at all - they've obviously never been in.'[66] Another tenant in the film conveyed a similar frustration: 'They look at it and

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[60] *Ibid*., p. 2

[61] Interviews with Derek (2019), Steve (2019), Clare (2019), Sandra (2019), Moira (2017)

[62] Minutes from BCCGCRA Special Meeting with Bill Rammell MP, held at Bishopsfield common room (19 December 2008)

[63] Partners in Change. 'Bishopsfield, Charters Cross and Gibson Court: Consultation Report' (December 2008), p. 6

[64] *Ibid*., p. 12

[65] *Ibid*., p. 13

[66] Greenman, J. 'A view of Bishopsfield, Harlow, Essex'

say, "well how could you possibly live up there?" and I mean once you come inside, its entirely different.'[67] The woman reiterates her initial point, adding that:

> Inside, I like it, that's why I chose to come here. We're very happy here. We like it very much. I think it's the outside, its misleading […] The effect of the small windows outside, people don't realise that we've got the glass inside, and the lightness of it. Oh I think the windows are light, they're very nice, and the patios, of course.[68]

Moira similarly felt that negative, external categorisations of the estate stood at odds with how residents themselves experienced the estate:

> Oh we've always had these criticisms, "these people have been put here", you know? "It's a prison" and so on, but we've all sort of melted into the community, and we've all been friends with each other, all speak to each other. When you come down these lanes, they were called alleys, but they're lanes, it's impossible not to speak to people, really, so it creates a really friendly community.[69]

Whilst the privacy afforded by the design was a huge draw for many, some found estate life a bit *too* private. As one woman tenant commented in 1969: 'They've made it a bit too private for us, because you have to intrude on somebody, really, to talk to them and it makes you feel as though you're being a bit of a pest.'[70] This was, in part, the reason why a residents association was founded that same year in 1969, as was later suggested by its founding chairman: 'to overcome some of the problems inherent in the design of the estate.'[71] In 1971, the new association collaborated with the HDC to produce a guide to living on the estate, which suggested that 'meeting your neighbours casually is made difficult by the high degree of privacy which is incorporated in the design of most of the dwellings: a positive effort must be made to meet the other residents.'[72]

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[67] *Ibid*.
[68] *Ibid*.
[69] Interview with Moira (2017)
[70] Greenman. 'A view of Bishopsfield, Harlow, Essex'
[71] Lewis, M. 'Atomic age Bishopsfield – but it still has a village atmosphere!' in *The Harlow Gazette* (22 November 1974)
[72] BCCRA and HDC. *Living in Bishopsfield and Charters Cross* (London: Purbrook & Eyres Limited, 1971), p. 2

Formal association in new towns

This was firmly encouraged by the Corporation. As the HDC's General Manager, Ben Hyde Harvey, stated, whilst acknowledging the architectural success of the estate, conceded in the preface that 'brilliant architecture does not make a community', instead, what was needed, was an 'active and efficient residents' association', which could do 'a great deal to promote the happiness of its members, and to impart that sense of pride and "belonging" which alone can make a place.'[73] The encouragement shown by the HDC was indicative of wider trends. Indeed, as the BDC's general manager stated in 1967, around the time Bishopsfield was completed, about the migrants the BDC were housing:

> so much had been provided for them - new house - they were getting their first house, their first furniture, their first baby. Everything was new and that was their life - they weren't inclined to put anything back into the town, they were taking everything the welfare state offered them - I mean the welfare state offers a lot. And just when one was beginning to despair at this, at this never putting anything back, suddenly many community activists started to flourish.[74]

In the eyes of these local states, formal association was paramount to the 'social success' of their towns, as Boniface elaborated on how he defined this:

> how far do people coming to Basildon, how far are they prepared to accept a pattern of life or create a pattern of life in which personal participation plays a part. When they are prepared to do that, they will know that Basildon is succeeding as a social engineer.[75]

As Ravetz posits, council housing 'asked nothing more of tenants than to live in the houses and to participate in estate life in ways approved by middle-class reformers.'[76] In 1969, the HDC's Liaison Officer estimated that the estate's residents' association had approximately 175 paying members.[77] This is from a total of 267 households.

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[73] Hyde-Harvey, B. 'Preface' in BCCRA and HDC. *Living in Bishopsfield and Charters Cross* (London: Purbrook & Eyres Limited, 1971), p. i
[74] ERO SA 20/2/7/1. Interview with Charles Boniface, General Manager of BDC (1967)
[75] *Ibid*.
[76] Ravetz. *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 5
[77] ERO A10417/6. HDC's Liaison Office. Internal memo (11 February 1969)

Harlow's Social Development Officer, Len White, who was active in the Community Associations movement, kept a watchful eye over the development of 'community' in Bishopsfield, and viewed the formal activity of the residents' association – it's subsequent high profile events, formalised associational culture and lobbying for facilities - as a metric of success in achieving the nebulous objective of 'community spirit.'[78] As Clapson suggests, NTDCs tended to view campaigns for these amenities as 'healthy signifiers of neighbourhood life.'[79] Whilst the HDC had initially emphasised 'privacy' in the competition's guidelines, this feature – combined with lack of amenities on the estate – became a source of anxiety for the HDC's social development office, particularly in relation to the situation of women on new town housing estates such as Bishopsfield. White made the following plea to Bishopsfield 'husbands':

> And a question to husbands whose wives are not working […]. We husbands get out of our homes, out of their vicinity; we have a job to do and we meet people. Are our wives happy in an environment that can be very limited?[80]

White had previously suggested that 'housewives, whose influence has transformed the kitchen, should now turn their attention to bettering the neighbourhood and the town.'[81] In the late sixties, the residents association established a 'fully functional baby-sitting/child-minding scheme', which distributed child care responsibilities across participating households on a points-based system.[82] This operated throughout the 1970s, expanding to playgroups for parents with young children on the estate.[83] Cockayne suggests that the expansion of the welfare state throughout the mid-twentieth century altered neighbourly duty, obviating certain

[78] Baldock suggests that White's work on 'community' carried 'undertones of order, cooperation, the harmonious working and development of an established system.' The genial co-operation between the HDC and residents' association stands in stark contrast to later experiences with state and non-state actors on the new town estate throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as shown in chapter 6. Baldock, P. 'Why community action? The Historical Origins of the Radical Trend in British Community Work', *Community Development Journal*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1977), p. 68; See also: White, L. E. *Community or Chaos: Housing Estates and their Social Problems* (London: NCSS, 1950); White, L. *New Towns: Their Challenge and Opportunity* (London: National Council of Social Service, 1951)

[79] Clapson. *Invincible Green Suburbs*, p. 169

[80] ERO A10417/6. HDC. Draft article 'Bishopsfield in the Seventies' for Bishopsfield resident publication by L. E. White, Liaison Officer (1970)

[81] Quoted in Clapson. *Invincible Green Suburbs,* p. 145. See: White, L. E. 'Good kitchens and bad towns', *Town and Country Planning,* vol. 19, no. 89 (1951), p. 396

[82] ERO A10417/6 BRA leaflet. 'Why you should join the Bishopsfield Residents' Association' (1969); BCCRA. The Casbah newsletter, no. 8 (August 1971)

[83] BCCRA newsletter (April 1977); Lewis, M. 'Atomic age Bishopsfield – but it still has a village atmosphere!' in *The Harlow Gazette* (22 November 1974)

needs for 'neighbourliness.'[84] An overwhelming number of new town migrants throughout this period were largely young adults and young children, with new towns differing considerably from the national average.[85] Whilst new towns can be considered, as Ortolano suggests, the 'spatial manifestation' of the post-war welfare state, they did not obviate gendered care expectations. As noted in a special issue of *Town and Country Planning* from 1968:

> New towns are full of young people and babies, and not enough elderly people have been housed. There are not enough baby-sitters; the advice of "grans" and "mums" is not at hand and the community is aware of their lack.[86]

The association also ran weekly coffee meet ups and table tennis sessions, visited new tenants, offered a meter-reading scheme and organised discounts at local decorating firms for members.[87] Resident literature also suggests that the estate had a volunteer warden system for 'Helping the Elderly', of which there was a small but sizeable community on the estate due to the 'balance' of house types.[88]

Countering local perceptions of the estate as 'bleak' and 'soulless', and lacking a central organising space, the association exploited public space available to them by hosting what they called a 'Mini-Festival' around the central podium of the estate in 1969, as the unique design – one of the organisers recalls - provided a sort of 'natural amphitheatre':

> Music was provided by our members and their friends and talented residents were able to display their artistic efforts by using the structure to hang their paintings. A fancy dress competition was organised for the children and a local Morris Team performed during the general dancing in the arena.[89]

This became an annual occurrence throughout the 1970s, and was highly encouraged by the HDC, who initially underwrote the event for losses up to £100, and later provided other forms

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[84] Cockayne. *Cheek by Jowl*, p. 164; for more on the postwar welfare state's impact on 'neighbourliness', see: pp. 163-8

[85] Cooke, R. L. 'An analysis of the age structure of immigrants to new and expanding towns' in *Journal of the Town Planning Institute,* vol. 54, no. 9 (1968), pp. 430-436; Kellaway, A. J. 'Migration to eight new towns in 1966' in *Journal of the Town Planning Institute*, vol. 55, no. 5 (1969), pp. 196-202

[86] Denington, E. 'Lessons of twenty-one years' in New Towns Come of Age [Special issue] *Town and Country Planning,* vol. 36, no. 1-2 (1968), p. 95

[87] BCCRA. 'Did you know?' pull out in *Casbah* newsletter (November 1970)

[88] Mentioned in BCCRA. *The Resident* newsletter, no. 4 (June 1989); Second edition of 'Casbah'

[89] ERO T/P 842 Ex-resident's comment on Bishopsfield Mini Festival 1969 (2011)

of financial assistance.[90] Reporting back on his attendance of the 1970 event to the General Manager, White said that:

> Judged by any standards, the Bishopsfield Mini-Festival was a resounding success. Although the numbers were very great, the organisation stood up well to the test.[91]

Reporting again in 1976, this time of sunny weather and a 'fairly sizeable crowd', White explains how the organisers 'arranged a continuous programme of entertainment from 3pm onwards, varying from street theatre to country dancing to jazz and pop groups. There were in addition stalls showing local handicrafts.'[92] The report also encouragingly notes how the residents association mounted a 'small exhibition dealing with the working of the Heating Action Group and calling upon members to continue their efforts' (discussed further in chapter 6).[93] Interestingly, White's retirement in 1977 roughly corresponds to the petering out of formal, structured associative activity organised through the residents' association, most notably its annual mini-festival. Residents suggest, however, that a sense of 'neighbourliness', of willingness to help one another, remained, but in a considerably more informal, instinctual way.[94] As resident literature from 1981 stated:

> For many years Bishopsfield had a most flourishing Residents Association which was known and respected throughout the town. It not only negotiated with the HDC, but also organised a variety of social events including the Bishopsfield Festival. Sadly, the Association declined and eventually passed quietly away.[95]

This bears similarities to Ruth Durant's findings in the LCC's Watling estate (1939), where following the initial success of the residents association, underpinned by the strong sense of being pioneers amongst intimate early members, the membership eventually slumped and

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[90] ERO A10417/6 HDC. Liaison Officer correspondence with General Manager (23 July 1970); Letter from White, L. E. Social Development Officer to General Manager. 'Bishopsfield Mini Festival' (13 September 1976)
[91] ERO A10417/6 HDC. Liaison Officer correspondence with General Manager (23 July 1970)
[92] ERO A10417/6 Letter from White, L. E. Social Development Officer to General Manager. 'Bishopsfield Mini Festival' (13 September 1976)
[93] *Ibid*.
[94] Interview with Sandra (2019) and Moira (2017)
[95] Pamphlet and survey distributed on the estate entitled 'Bishopsfield news' (November 1981), which would later become the publication of the newly re-established residents group

descended into decline, division and 'ultimately secession.'[96] The work of both Olechnowicz and Jones in other interwar estates in Becontree and Brighton have both suggested that associations in these areas were largely minority pursuits that carried a propensity for 'cliquishness', a common charge from past-members, with many tenants preferring private, home-centred leisure to association-organised social events.[97] However, it re-emerged in the 1980s with a greater emphasis on housing repairs, offering insight into the way in which tensions emerge and play out in the following decades.

III: Stigmatisation, residualisation and changing social composition, 1980s-90s

The circumstances and outcome of the HDC's 1960 competition – with its emphasis on housing density and egalitarianism, stood in contrast to another new town housing competition that occurred a decade later in 1971 on behalf of the Corporations in Bracknell and Redditch. Whilst Bishopsfield was built entirely corporation rented, and was evoked by HDC staff in justifying their opposition to 'pepper pot' sales encouraged – and later forced – by central government - the 1971 competitions were for housing developments with all dwellings to be sold on the open market. The objectives of the competitions were in order to provide:

> an opportunity to both developers and architects in collaboration to make a contribution to residential design and marketability in relatively low cost private housing, achieving the best environmental design combined with value for money and saleability.[98]

The emerging priorities of 'marketability', 'saleability' and 'value for money' testify to the drastic speed in which priorities relating to homeownership in new towns changed throughout the 1960s and 1970s, which serves as a crucial backdrop to the aesthetic and architectural dimensions of the deepening demonisation of modernist new town estates like Bishopsfield, something which can be situated within a historical process of aesthetic change related to what

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[96] Olechnowicz, p. 185-6; see: Durant, R. *Watling: a survey of social life on a new housing estate* (London: PS King, 1939)

[97] Olechnowicz, p. 192; See also: Jones. *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth-Century England*

[98] ERO A6306/390 Joint RIBA/NHBRC press notice: 'Developer/Architect competition for housing in New Towns' (July 1971)

Guy Ortolano has theorised as the collapse of 'welfare state modernism' in the face of shifting metrics of "success" in housing, 'from the number of people housed to the number of units sold.'[99] Interestingly, as one Bishopsfield tenant commented in 1982 as the estate was becoming increasingly run down, testifying to both the popularity of the domestic space and the increasing role 'saleability' played when judging housing: 'The outside is pretty boring, there's nothing here, it's bleak really' [reporter: 'what's it like inside?'] *really nice actually*, I quite like the inside but as I say its not the sort of thing you'd buy.'[100]

Neylan himself said in an interview from 2009: 'I was, and am, proud of it. [But] I think that by the time it was finished in '67-ish, the tide of critical opinion had changed and it was not as well regarded as it had been when it started out.'[101] Throughout the 1970s, estates like Bishopsfield were subject to sustained attack by academics and media alike based on 'environmental determinism' and a demonisation of such places as havens of criminality, vandalism and social malaise.[102] The consequences of this have been demonstrated by Romyn in his study of the now demolished Heygate estate in Southwark.[103]

As foregrounded in the previous chapter, by March 1977, the HDC's waiting list exceeded 2,100 and was projected to reach 3,000 by the end of the decade – at a time when the combined new house building capacity of both the authorities in the town has been 'severely curtailed at a time when housing demand is at its peak.'[104] On top of blocking expansion plans for the town, 'severe' expenditure cuts led to the development corporation's suspension of any repurchasing of houses sold to sitting tenants.[105] Meanwhile, by the mid seventies, only 27 households out of Bishopsfield's 267 dwellings were owner occupied following the 1970-74 sales.[106] The estate remained overwhelmingly publicly rented, with sales concentrated in the estate's outer

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[99] Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress*, p. 130, see also: pp. 125-132

[100] Purton. 'Changing Places: Nearly New Town (Harlow)'

[101] Moore, J. 'Interview with Michael Neylan', *Twentieth Century Society* (June 2009)

[102] Romyn. 'The Heygate', pp. 199. See also: Coleman, A. *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* (London: Hilary Shipman Ltd, 1985); Newman, O. *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention Through Urban Design* (New York: Macmillan, 1972)

[103] See: Romyn. 'The Heygate'

[104] ERO A10417/7 HDC's Social Development Officer correspondence with Editor of Harlow Gazette and Citizen (15 June 1977); HDC. Memorandum from Wellings, R. Social Development Officer to Administrative Officer (16 June 1977)

[105] ERO A10417/7 HDC minutes (8 September 1976); HDC minutes (9 February 1977)

[106] ERO A10417/6 HDC. Minutes of meeting with BCCRA on 'Housing co-operatives', held at Gate House, Harlow (9 July 1975)

patio-houses. Corporation statistics show that by 1976, Bishopsfield had a lower rate of sales to sitting tenants (12.2%) than the average for its wider neighbourhood area Great Parndon (19.8%), and considerably below the town's average.[107]

Whilst Chapter 6 will examine the deterioration of Bishopsfield's physical environment amidst the changing nature of the local state in more depth, it is worth foregrounding these changes here first to lay the foundations for the subsequent arguments of this chapter. The physical decline of the estate that subsequently ensued disproportionately affected podium and bedsit dwellings located in the centre of the estate, and by the mid-1980s, around half the podium flats had fallen into disuse.[108] This led to these areas of the estate being used by the council for temporary accommodation, leading to an influx of homeless families. By 1989, overcrowding became an issue in the podium properties, with at least five cases emerging of one and two bedroom maisonettes being occupied by 'more than one' family.[109] Thus, residualisation occurred in concentrated pockets of the estate located around the estate's central public space. Demonstrating the magnitude of the crisis in 1992, the General Manager of the District Council wrote, regarding the changing composition of the estate:

> In the context of a dire shortage of all properties in all locations, the over-riding Council policy is to avoid placing families in bed and breakfast hotels, many of which would be away from Harlow. Despite various measures, including the recent construction of some temporary mobile homes, the growth in homeless families goes on relentlessly.[110]

This contrasted to the largely unaffected patio-houses on the outer edge of the estate, which were more spacious, less prone to design faults, and more likely to have been purchased. Despite the high tenant turnover and changing social composition of the podium area throughout this period, Sandra – who had rented her place from the council for over forty years, said:

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[107] ERO A10417/7 HDC. 'Housing stock at 31st March 1976' (1976)
[108] Beigel, F. and Christou, P. 'A tapestry in the landscape', in *arq*, vol. 1 (Autumn 1995), p. 30
[109] BCCRA meeting minutes (6 November 1989)
[110] Correspondence between BCCRA and Harlow Council (1 April 1992)

I mean, a lot of people had been, were there, almost as long as I was. Because they'd been council tenants and they'd just stayed as council tenants [leans forward and whispers] *I think most of us actually liked it*![111]

Her experience stood in contrast to how outsiders perceived the estate:

It's not a good reputation unfortunately. People have the totally wrong perception of it, they think there's a lot of crime going on.[112]

Another podium council tenant Derek, who works at nearby Stansted Airport, also loved the place he's called home since the mid-1970s, when rent was £9 a week. Regarding the press stories of anti-social behaviour and criminality associated with Bishopsfield in the 1990s, he laughed:

People come up with the most amazing stories. I haven't seen any things like that, you know… well, I don't think its any worse than anywhere else.[113]

Whilst testifying to the friendliness of the area, Derek spends most of his free time pursuing hobbies outside of the town, highlighting the lack of nearby pubs:

[Pointing out his window] We used to have a pub over there, but they knocked that down and they never replaced it. The pub down the road, well got overtaken by druggies and so on, brings it down, so eventually it closed and now it's a curry house, it's a very good curry house actually. […] I enjoy living here, I just wish there was somewhere else that- er, you know, live in a village you could walk down the pub, we've got nothing here […] It's more of a Harlow problem really.[114]

Other residents were keen to impress the in-built sociability of the area. As Jim recalled, whose patio-house sits on the very edge of the podium, further testified to the neighbourly atmosphere of the area:

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[111] Interview with Sandra (2019)
[112] *Ibid.*
[113] Interview with Derek (2019)
[114] *Ibid.*

I mean up on the podium, it's like an old East End street up there, where they all sit out and chatter, and of course the kids can race about, there's no traffic, and in that respect, its quite popular.[115]

Another resident, Rosa, fondly recalled growing up on the estate:

I've lived here all my life and all my childhood and I made friends there and up at the podium, from all the other lanes. And I wouldn't have known my neighbour over there and down there if it hadn't've been for that. And especially the square. The kids love playing in the square and it's also nice for bicycles. […] Kids with their small bikes come up and down [the lanes], they get to know people they wouldn't have experienced had they lived in like, joined houses, not in estates. It's really nice as a child to be able say I'm just going to the square or the playground up there.[116]

These experiences of Bishopsfield, and the popularity of the spacious and intensely private dwellings have long stood in contrast to how outsiders have perceived the estate, as has been shown. At the nadir of the estate's physical deterioration at the end of the eighties, and despite the retreat of the local state from telling Bishopsfield residents how to play out their collective lives, this period witnessed the re-emergence of community events and activities reminiscent of the early years underpinned by associational life encouraged by the HDC in a new, neoliberal context.

IV: Contesting narratives and countering estate stigma through the utilisation of public and private spaces

"Paradise" is the Persian word for garden. Bishopsfield is, for some, far from paradise, yes, but it certainly contains a fair number of small paradises.[117]

This section examines the utilisation of public and private space by residents to counter estate stigma, and suggests that the experience foregrounded throughout sections 2 and 3 of this

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[115] Interview with Jim (2019)
[116] Interview with Rosa (2019)
[117] BCCRA. *The Resident,* no. 16 (July 1990)

chapter profoundly shaped the way some have residents participated and performed (outward expressions of) 'community.' This constitutes a lasting legacy of the HDC's social development office, with its emphasis on 'community' as formal association and social interaction based on locality. This heritage, a product of the postwar social democratic years, was repurposed by residents to alter perceptions of their homes amidst a harsher, neoliberal context.

Due to a variety of factors covered above and examined in further detail in relation to the local state in the following chapter, by the 1990s, the Bishopsfield estate, run down and in disrepair, 'ha[d] gained a particularly unenviable reputation.'[118] A front page spread on the local *Harlow Herald & Post* in 1991 proclaimed Bishopsfield 'the problem estate of the 1990s', reinforcing its local reputation as what some dubbed 'the slum of Harlow.'[119]

Towards the late eighties, a 'garden festival' was set up by residents. The initial aim had been, as stated in 1989, to 'give everyone a chance to see our "Secret Gardens"' - as the design of the estate's L-shaped patio-houses concealed entirely private courtyards from the view of passers by and neighbours alike, as did the top-level podium maisonettes with their secluded roof terraces.[120] The design prevented neighbours from casually 'seeing in' to others gardens, and so a suggestion was made to open them up for neighbours and estate residents.[121] In more conventionally designed estates, gardens have often functioned as 'sites in which neighbourhood relations were enacted', yet in the experimentally designed Bishopsfield, residents took action to formalise this through ritual and tradition, and sought to use their private – and presumably well kept - gardens as a means of countering stigma with traditional metrics of 'respectability.'[122] The following year, dozens of gardens were on display where 'friends combine duties so that everyone can have time off to see other gardens', followed by an estate barbeque held in one of the estate's squares.[123] This event quickly expanded to include non-estate residents too, and by 1993, the day had materialised into an organised attempt to combat the local stigma towards the estate, with dozens of residents coming together to

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[118] Farrar, S. 'Breathing new life into Bishopsfield', *The Harlow Star* (9 March 1995)
[119] 'D-Day Dawns! Angry residents wait for the go-ahead for crucial scheme', in *Harlow Herald & Post* (21 March 1991), p. 1
[120] BCCRA. Newsletter: 'Garden festival special' (June 1989)
[121] BCCRA. 'Bishopsfield gardens' in *The Resident* newsletter, no. 4 (June 1989)
[122] Rogaly and Taylor. *Moving Histories,* p. 55
[123] BCCRA. 'Bishopsfield garden festival and barbeque – Sunday 24th June 1990' flyer (June 1990)

showcase their 'oases in the desert' that would – in the words of a flyer for the event - make 'Bishopsfield detractors […] eat their words.'[124] This has become an 'estate tradition', says Moira, whose patio-house courtyard on the outer edge of the estate is a permanent feature on the estate's annual festival. One resident, Rosa, who grew up on the estate, testified with excitement:

> So every summer we have open gardens… sometimes you see the front bit of a house like the living room but its mainly the garden… um and everyone is sort of walking around and you meet someone out in the alley and say "what houses have you been to?" and "what house do you like?" … People would bring food and all the kids would play out and there was tons of bubbles and everything. It was a really nice place to be as a child - and we'd get chalk out and chalk the pavements.[125]

The 'effortless sociability' built into Neylan's design allowed for a somewhat privately held event to take on a more communal character. The estate's layout and design generally prompts greater social interaction between residents, as Clare's point reiterates:

> Often you are walking up here and you might bump into two or three neighbours which you probably just wouldn't if you lived in a conventional building where you have your car outside and you just jump in, jump out.[126]

Patio-house resident Moira similarly iterated a sense of neighbourly amicability in a subsequent follow-up interview:

> We all know each other, these lanes, everybody knows each other, you can't pass people in the lanes without speaking to them, so we always speak to each other, it's a very friendly place.[127]

Estate residents also went beyond utilising their own private spaces to counter perceptions, and utilised public space as well. That same year, residents worked with architects to put together a 'small exhibition in the central library' about the estate, showcasing photographs taken at the Garden Festival, 'in an attempt to show the rest of the town that Bishopsfield is not the dump

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[124] BCCRA newsletter (August 1993)
[125] Interview with Rosa (2019)
[126] Interview with Clare (2019)
[127] Interview with Moira (2019)

they think.'[128] A year prior, in 1992, the 'mini festival' – albeit on a smaller scale - was revived and continued through to 1996, with the explicit intent of rebutting perceptions of the area. Testimonies suggest that these were relatively well attended by residents, with play buses, live music, raffles, clowns, jugglers, BBQs, face paintings, bouncy castles, and on one occasion a fire engine courtesy of Harlow Fire Brigade.[129] As council tenant and current chair of the association, Sandra, suggests:

> We used to have good reports when we had a gala, a sort of fete every year, and that brought a lot of people in – yeah - I think a lot of people came in and thought "oh you know there's a good sort of sense of community here and a lot going on", and I think that got good reports.[130]

A few years later, the association went further and appointed a 'Public Relations press officer for Bishopsfield' tasked with writing to the press to counter unfavourable stories and inaccurate claims made against the estate, something which was 'warmly welcomed in view of the continual denigration of Bishopsfield.'[131] Later that year, a circular posted to residents by the appointed press officer read:

> Bishopsfield has a pretty bad press. Local politicians play "games" with it to enhance their own image; vandalism is common – ah – you've heard it all before. *ALL NEGATIVE!* How about the positive?

The circular, posted to residents, sought suggestions to 'improve and promote the estate in such a way as to enhance its appearance and reputation.' Suggestions included 'regular, positive press articles for the local newspapers', along with creating resident profiles of who lives on the estate, and reviving the annual festival.[132] Some of these were subsequently taken up. The frustrated newly appointed officer added a more personal point in their letter to residents:

> As a New Zealander I have never been able to understand the British passion for dividing into THEM and US – by accent, income or "class" – WE ALL LIVE HERE – let's get together and promote Bishopsfield.[133]

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[128] BCCRA newsletter (May 1993)
[129] 'Bishopsfield '96 Festival - Sunday August 18 1996' programme (1996)
[130] Interview with Sandra (2019)
[131] BCCRA. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting (19 May 1997)
[132] 'Bishopsfield: Estate? Or community?' flyer (1997)
[133] *Ibid.*

Amidst narratives that have emphasised a shift towards individualism, this push towards collective identity and action was key in contesting external categorisation and stigmatisation, and as will be shown in the subsequent chapter, such collective identity was sporadically rekindled in opposition to the estate's various landlords, when they were perceived to be neglecting the estate.

Conclusion

Whilst the estate's design generated an 'effortless sociability' that facilitated familiarity and friendship, this was not enough to counter damaging, local narratives of the estate, and so a large handful of residents felt an outward show of 'community' was required. Residents felt that external perceptions of their estate did not meet up to their personal experiences of both sociability and the home – and so external perception was a key factor in shaping the nature of social events, and the way residents utilised both public and private spaces available to them. Interestingly, these bottom up responses from residents to countering stigma emerged around the same time as the estate was undergoing partial demolition and renovation throughout the 1990s. As Annette Hastings has shown, regeneration initiatives by local state and non-state actors have tended to assume that the placed-based stigma will improve along with the estate's physical environment and regeneration.[134] In light of this oversight, some residents felt the need to take action into their own hands, and drew upon the estate's formal associational heritage which was very much a product of the new town environment and of the postwar social democratic period. This heritage was utilised from the eighties onwards to alter perceptions of their homes amidst an increasingly harsh shift towards neoliberalism, and it is to the impact of this transition on Bishopsfield, and what this can tell us about the changing nature of the local state, that the thesis now turns.

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[134] Hastings, A and Dean, J. 'Challenging Images: Tackling Stigma through Estate Regeneration' in *Policy & Politics,* vol. 31, no. 2 (April 2003), pp. 171-84

Chapter 6: From showpiece to 'slum'? State and non-state actors in Harlow's Bishopsfield, 1960-2008

This chapter uses the Bishopsfield estate in Harlow to examine the relationship between residents and the local state as a housing provider and landlord, which has taken the form of a development corporation (1961-1980), the local council (c. 1980-present), and housing association (1994-present). It examines the changing relations between residents and the estate's housing providers over time, flagging moments of conflict and cooperation, and situating these changes within the broader context of the shift from social democracy to neoliberalism. Building on the last chapter, it examines how the sense of place and accompanying expectations generated by HDC during the construction of Bishopsfield differed from perceptions of the housing area by representatives of the council, highlighting a local narrative of decline that suggests a 'retreat' from early postwar ideals occurred as early as the 1950s. It examines issues with the estate's design that occurred prior to transfer of responsibilities from the Corporation to the Council in the late 1970s, and identifies a unique dynamic which existed between residents and the local state as shown through Bishopsfield's resident-led campaign for remedial action over its faulty heating system. It then traces the deterioration of relations between residents and the successor landlord, the Harlow District Council, as funds dried up and chronic under-investment ensued, situating this within the latter's ambitious intentions for its newly attained housing stock, which fatefully corresponded to centrally imposed spending restrictions that disproportionately impacted early new towns. It demonstrates the consequences of demunicipalisation on the estate, and how this, along with the local council's immiseration, have shaped the way residents have made sense of the past forty years of political economic transformation, suggesting that local specificities regarding the transition to neoliberalism have produced unique vernacular narratives of decline.

I: The construction of place in Bishopsfield

This section examines how planners conceived of Bishopsfield and foregrounds the construction of the estate within a broader local trajectory, primarily as it was understood by local elected representatives that were set to take over the running of the estate following the dissolution of the HDC in 1980.

As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the HDC perceived the Bishopsfield housing area as its architectural showpiece; as one of its proudest achievements. It's very existence testified to the radical optimism of the 1960s, and the language that accompanied the estate's completion was one of futurism, optimism and boundary-pushing developments in 'modern living.' The Corporation, in its press release of the first show house that opened in Charters Cross in 1966, boasted that the estate's design constituted 'space age living.'[1] The Corporation excitedly mobilised the language of the 'white heat' discourse of Harold Wilson's government. This optimism was reminiscent of something Selina Todd has drawn attention to - that many re-developed urban conurbations, particularly in the north of England, were considered 'cradle[s] of modernity', with cities praised by Labour ministers as 'space age', and where 'new buildings and precincts proved fertile foundations on which to build dreams that were imbued with optimism for the future.'[2] The Corporation, through literature provided to newcomers, interpellated early residents into this mood of optimism, as though they were participating in a cutting edge experiment in community and new ways of living, imparting residents with a profound sense of purpose and importance, generating the sense that Bishopsfield constituted 'the future.'[3] As previously shown, this was bolstered by the estate's modern, chic interior furnishings provided by the Corporation and the stream of architects and planners that came to visit the estate during its early years.

The contrasting view from the Council

The HDC's construction of identity and place in Bishopsfield, however, stood uneasily with the more reserved perception of these new housing areas by local representatives of Harlow's Urban District Council, who would go on to succeed the HDC as Bishopsfield's landlord in the late 1970s. Intriguingly, the perceptions of Bishopsfield and the new town's south-west development more generally by local representatives also temporally destabilises narratives of 'decline' that usually accompany the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism,

[1] ERO A10417/6 HDC. Press release: 'Official opening of the Showhouse, Charters Cross, Harlow on January 26th, 1966' (1966)

[2] Todd, S. 'Phoenix Rising: Working-Class Life and Urban Reconstruction, c. 1945–1967' in *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 54, no. 3 (2015), p. 700

[3] Interviews with Moira (2017) and Steve (2019)

pointing to the more tenuous and fragile nature of the initial post-war social democratic gains that manifested in the early new towns.

As Neylan noted in a 1966 article on Harlow's housing development and design, the Great Parndon neighbourhood area, located in the south west area of the new town's designated area, was used by the HDC as a 'test bed' for experimental architecture and non-traditional construction methods – which crucially – responded to Ministry pressure for higher densities.[4] In building these more experimental, higher density developments in Great Parndon, the HDC were criticised by the HUDC for 'building slums',[5] as they were perceived by representatives as a retreat from the more generous space standards that characterised earlier housing developments that went to greater lengths to conform to the traditional, suburban ideal. HDC architect Alexander McCowan, suggested in 1982 that the local 'embitterment' which rapidly grew towards the Corporation's more experiential estates such as Bishopsfield and neighbouring Clarkhill soon after they were built was: 'fanned by the local politics of almost encouraging people to say, you know, "this is the most awful place on earth."'[6] This, in turn, generated a situation in which:

> The headlines of the local papers keep on condemning the place, 'til eventually the people who are all living in it, they almost feel like they've been chosen to live in a ghetto or something and they can't get out of, and gradually the whole thing simmers along until they start talking in the paper: "shall we demolish it all together." There's always bits of fuel added to the fire, kind of thing. The whole thing becomes so much maligned, it's unbelievable.[7]

A similarly hostile local response was shown to the completion of chapter 4's case study Five Links by Basildon Labour councillor Joe Morgan, who tactlessly dubbed the estate 'Alcatraz' in 1970, whilst Mark Swenarton has noted a similar opposition to these styles by the new urban left-led Camden Council in the late seventies.[8] In Harlow, this disinclination and distrust of the

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[4] Neylan, M. *et al.* 'High density, low rise: housing experiments at Harlow' in *Architectural Review,* vol. 140 (1966), p. 38

[5] Manley, C. 'New town urbanity: theory and practice in housing design at Harlow', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow (2014), p. 201

[6] ERO SA 22/1356/1 Interview with HDC architect, Alexander McCowan (1982)

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Cox. 'Laindon Five Links'; Swenarton, M. 'Developing a new format for urban housing: Neave Brown and the design of Camden's Fleet Road estate' in *The Journal of Architecture,* vol. 17, no. 6 (2012), p. 998

style and the political motive perceived to be underpinning it, was compounded by a growing caution and awareness of the cost that would be required to maintain these non-traditional designs and experimentally constructed estates, as faults became increasingly apparent throughout the decade.

There was a sense amongst those within and around HUDC that the later high-density developments of the 1960s and 1970s – concentrated in the south west area of the town - were a retreat from or 'deterioration' of earlier post-war gains for working class families that characterised earlier estates such as Chippingfield and Mark Hall North. Such scepticism is summed up by local Labour councillor and chair of the Estates Committee, Jim Desormeaux, whose comments in 1982 epitomise this sentiment:

> The density of the dwelling per acre increases considerably, and when you examine Harlow and you look at Mark Hall North where the new town was first started, you'll see there a conception of space and openness of exterior, people are able to get visions of distance between their houses and the houses opposite, and you compare that with some of the newer estates in the town, those built within the last 10 years. You'll see that we have a new conception, we have people now crowding in on each other, which is not to say that that is not an improvement on the housing conditions that people came from, but quite definitely, is a deterioration of the original planning that went into the town.[9]

In contrast to the narratives of decline that emerge from Bishopsfield residents themselves, this testimony suggests a narrative of decline within the town that does not correspond to the loss of the development corporation (as will be subsequently shown from residents in Bishopsfield), but that dates earlier to the retreat from the very 'early days' in which the Corporation was permitted to build more popular, 'integrated' estates such as Mark Hall North or Chippingfield. linking this sense of loss to the idea that 'the new town has fallen far short of what was envisioned by Sir Frederick Gibberd and his colleagues in the early days.'[10]

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[9] ERO SA 22/1352/1 Interview with Jim Desormeaux, Harlow councillor and chair of the Estates Committee (1982)
[10] *Ibid.*

This sense of disappointment was amplified by another Labour representative, Sonia Anderson who served as a councillor between 1952-1997, who evoked one of the first built housing areas in which she had first lived - Chippingfield – to lament the perceived cut backs in subsequent developments:

> [In Chippingfield…] they were supposed to be the first sort of pattern that would be improved as the town went on, but of course as the years went by they got smaller and smaller, and tighter and tighter because you know things got more expensive and so this improvement never happened.[11]

This narrative of 'decline' or 'retreat' corresponds more explicitly to the growth of the Corporation's use of system-building during the later developments in the town. As Chapter 2 showed, given the new towns were perceived by Ministers as 'projects over which they could exert direct influence, to a greater extent than local authority projects', they were often used as testing grounds (or 'demonstration projects') for trends in housing policy.[12] This manifests not only in attempts to socially engineer higher levels of owner occupation (chapters 2 and 3), but also in the 'latest fashions in development' such as industrialised system building, which was firmly pressed upon the early new town Corporations from as early as the late 1950s.[13] This shift away from traditional house building to system-built construction was underpinned by Ministry pressure for cheaper building costs and higher densities, and was articulated with frustration by D. L. Anderson, Estates Officer for the Corporation and later Chair of Harlow Council in an interview in 1986, in which the shift to higher density, system-built housing, is again, articulated through the prism of decline and retreat from earlier achievements – with disparaging reference to the southwest of the town:

> [In the early days] we started very slowly, and that's one of the reasons why, the cost thing, which meant we could have bigger houses further apart in those days, and we could design them more slowly, and therefore one can be reasonably proud of the first couple of thousand. And slowly begin apologising more and more as go off into the horrors of system-building down in the south west.[14]

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[11] ERO SA 22/1361/1 Interview with Sonia Anderson, Labour councillor 1952-1997 (1986)

[12] Department of Planning, Oxford Brookes University. 'Transferable Lessons from the New Towns', p. 26, 56

[13] *Ibid*., p. 26

[14] ERO SA 22/1366/1 Interview with D. L. Anderson, Estates Officer for HDC and later Chair of Harlow Council (1986)

In having had access to both the HDC and the HUDC, Anderson was able to ascribe blame or causation more lucidly to pressure from central government, transcending the architectural prejudice that characterised much distrust of this style of housing:

> The problem there is not architectural, its administrative, the Ministry, who were very much our masters, said: you must build 50% system building in the latter stages. And the real problems is in the system-building. [...] It was about that time, in the early sixties […] the Ministry, the civil service, there was a real push towards system. […] Essentially there was this policy decision and it was screwed down to having to find some way of producing - at very limited cost levels - something which might be half way reasonable, and of course it wasn't. I mean, even the Casbah, the thing that won the gold medal. You know all the troubles about that and all the leakages? Well, that's the sort of problems that kept on cropping up.[15]

In contrast to accounts of the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism occurring throughout the 1970s and 1980s, testimonies from local representatives suggest a more broader, elongated sense of decline, which corresponds to an increased retreat from the post-war social democratic generosity of the new town's 'early days' that manifests in Harlow as early as the 1950s, as increased fiscal restrictions and pressures to house greater numbers were perceived as a shift away from the initial post-war generosity and idealism, as well as flexibility and autonomy of the local state to fulfil these ideals (foregrounded in chapter 2). This suggests a tension within some more recent accounts of new towns that have mobilised the 'breadth' of Britain's new towns programme to criticise postwar histories of the social democratic era that portray the latter as 'brief', 'fleeting' or 'continually undermining itself.'[16] Ortolano's in depth examination of the MKDC testifies to a dynamism which suggests a more solid foundational basis to social democracy that spans decades longer than less generous accounts would suggest, possessing a strength to adapt to pressure from external political and economic forces. Interestingly, in the Mark I new town of Harlow, local perceptions of retreat from this early post-war social democratic moment gloomily suggest a much more fragile picture, portraying a social democratic idealism, optimism and enthusiasm of the initial post-war moment that was continually undermined and 'scaled back' from as early as the 1950s (this theme was

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[15] *Ibid*.

[16] Ortolano. *Thatcher's Progress,* pp. 19-20

foregrounded in chapter 2), suggesting temporal and geographical diversity *within* the new town experience itself, rather than following its local termination in 1980. In regards to the earlier new towns, it could be suggested that there is a far greater degree of 'fragility' to these post-war gains in terms of local perceptions than Ortolano has found in his examination of the later new town of Milton Keynes.

II: Relations between residents and the Corporation

Cordial, strong relations existed between the Corporation and the residents group throughout the early years of the estate, with the HDC perceiving the group as 'extremely co-operative' and 'courteous', with the Liaison officer having 'been closely associated with them' and 'glad to give the Association all the help we can,' whilst the residents group sought to maintain a 'close association with the Development Corporation.'[17] From interviews with long-standing residents of the estate, there was a collective memory of a higher degree of inclusion, as well as a perception that their lives and the fortune of the estate 'mattered' in the eyes of the Corporation. From the records, there appears to have been a relative degree of co-operation between the HDC and residents group, which can be identified in their inclusion in small-scale decision making on the estate.[18] A lack of toddler spaces in Bishopsfield had led to complaints from residents, which prompted the Corporation to contact the original architect and acquire sketches of suggestions. These were subsequently put to the residents group to 'ask them for their ideas on the ways in which these pedestrian squares could be more conveniently used for toddlers' play.'[19] At other points in time, residents were also given the choice of colour schemes during the HDC's re-painting of areas of the estate's built environment.[20]

The records of the corporation also illuminate a general eagerness to support community events on the estate. It has been suggested that NTDCs generally were 'eager to take every opportunity to respond to, support (and publicise) local community events of almost any type.'[21] As

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[17] ERO A10417/6 HDC's Liaison Officer, L. E White to Assistant Commercial Estates Officer (15 July 1969); HDC. Correspondence from White, L. E. Liaison Officer to Michael Neylan (20 Janaury 1970); HDC Liaison Department. Correspondence from BRA to L. E. White, Liaison Officer for HDC (6 January 1970)

[18] ERO A10417/6 HDC. Memorandum from Liaison Officer to Executive Architect (4 November 1970)

[19] *Ibid*.

[20] ERO A10417/6 HDC Staple Tye Area Manager to BCCRA Liaison Officer (22 January 1974)

[21] Department of Planning, Oxford Brookes University. 'Transferable Lessons from the New Towns', p. 57

discussed in the previous chapter, the most notable example of this was regarding the estate's 'Mini-Festival' that run throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, which was aided by HDC's encouragement and financial support. As reports from the event suggest, residents were 'highly appreciative' for the support, and 'appreciative of the financial assistance given by the Corporation.'[22] It should be noted however, that the festival was also occasionally received funds from HUDC.[23] Nonetheless, the Corporation's vocal and active support fostered a sense of closeness and co-operation between residents and this local state.

From 1972, the HDC pursued the Ministry for finance to assist with the conversion of a Bishopsfield dwelling into a common room, which subsequently led to the transfer of no. 1 Bishopsfield to the residents group in 1973.[24] Bolstering this sense of collaboration, the HDC further wrote to the Association in 1976, to quote resident literature from the time, 'asking us for our views on the establishment of a Community Centre in Bishopsfield.'[25] The HDC were prepared to spend up to £1,000 on such a venture, which residents relished, given that 'this would clearly give us the opportunity to expand our functions and possibly provide a proper centre for people living on the estate.'[26] This offer had emerged in response to lobbying from residents for greater community facilities on the estate. As suggested in the previous chapter, Len White, the HDC's Social Development Officer, relished such campaigns by residents for better facilities, seeing co-operation and collaboration on behalf of his organisation as key to the elusive process of 'community development.' In White's 1951 publication *New Towns: Their Challenge and Opportunity*, he complimented the UN's definition of community development as 'processes by which *the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of statutory authorities to improve the social and cultural conditions of communities* (my

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[22] ERO A10417/6. HDC. Liaison Officer correspondence with General Manager (23 July 1970); Letter from L. E. White, Social Development Officer to General Manager. 'Bishopsfield Mini Festival' (13 September 1976)

[23] As Gibberd *et al* note in their history of Harlow's development: 'By the end of the 1960s, the Corporation's role was changing. HUDC, representing a community of over 60,000 people, now played an increasingly important role… In Harlow, the principal area where they made their mark was in recreational provision.' Gibberd *et al. Harlow*, p. 256; See also Ron Bill's *Civic History of Harlow* for a tremendous account of the role the District Council played in facilitating social and cultural activities across the town.

[24] ERO A10417/6. HDC. Social Development Office's correspondence with BCCRA (14 April 1972); Minutes of the meeting between the HDC and BCCRA, held at No. 1 Bishopsfield (14 November 1973)

[25] Bishopsfield and Charters Cross Neighbourhood Association newsletter (November 1976), p. 1

[26] *Ibid*., p. 1

emphasis).'[27] Hence, efforts by residents 'from below', combined with co-operation from the local state 'from above', constituted the elusive development of 'community' that his office was tasked with fostering. This ethos structured the patterns of interaction between Bishopsfield residents and the local state throughout this period, and appears to have had a lasting effect on long-standing residents' perception of the Corporation.

It could be suggested that this culture of co-operation is somewhat unique to the new town experience. As an Oxford Brookes report from 2006 suggests, it was actually through this ability to 'organise and involve communities in governance' that the NTDCs were strengthened in their negotiations with their Ministerial superiors to 'secure better facilities for the New Towns.'[28] Such a culture of co-operation, which took shape during the 'gumboot' phases of the mark one new towns' development with migrant 'pioneers' forming residents associations in response to lacking neighbourhood amenities, had a significant impact in shaping the way in which the HDC was to interact with these organisations throughout its lifespan.[29] As shown in chapter 2, contrary to popular perceptions, the NTDC in Harlow could be considerably responsive to criticisms, comments and appeals from individual residents, but on top of this, it was also particularly co-operative with organised groups of residents too. One new town pioneer, who would also go on to become a Labour councillor in the town, hints at residents' ability to 'feed' into the development corporation's patterns of behaviour, suggesting a responsive channel for feedback when it came to limitations in design or maintenance:

> I think we had very, very high expectations, everybody did. Living in a new town and this wonderful place it was going to be. Anything that wasn't perfect, we started criticising and grumbling about, if there was a crack in the wall that shouldn't have been there [..,] so all these things got registered and fed back into the development corporation via the people who got together and formed this residents association. […] Everybody, I think, expected perfection, and it wasn't perfect […] so we did achieve a few things.[30]

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[27] Quoted in: Llewellyn, M. 'Producing and Experiencing Harlow: Neighbourhood Units and Narratives of New Town Life 1947-53' in *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2004), p. 166; see: White. *New Towns: Their Challenge and Opportunity* (London: National Council of Social Service, 1951)

[28] Department of Planning, Oxford Brookes University. 'Transferable Lessons from the New Towns', p. 57

[29] This can be considered to stand in contrast, however, to pre-existing Plotlands communities in Basildon, who had a very difference experience of the local state throughout this period.

[30] ERO SA 22/1361/1 Interview with Sonia Anderson, Labour councillor 1952-1997 (1986)

This local dynamic between the Corporation and its resident groups – as Anderson goes on to suggest - resulted from a lack of meaningful representation through the Parish council in the town's formative years, given that HUDC was not formed until 1955, eight years after the area's designation in 1947. In the very early days – such groups became key channels for direct communication with the Corporation, receiving a relatively a high degree of responsiveness. Evidence of this local dynamic can be seen in the Corporation's handling of the residents of Bishopsfield.

Whilst these unique factors influenced the way in which 'community' developed on the estate during its early years (as examined in chapter 5), it also played a key role in generating a lasting perception of the local state as one that was 'co-operative', 'on our side', 'with us.'[31] In 1975, when the prospect of introducing a housing co-operative was mooted by the HDC with Bishopsfield residents, the Corporation – presuming residents would want more control and power over their own lived environment – were surprised by the response from residents in a meeting to discuss the issue.[32] As the Corporation's minutes of the meeting reveal:

> Many residents were satisfied with the Corporation as Landlord, liked having the backing of a powerful and influential body and were not interested in changing the system.[33]

This sentiment of having 'the backing of a powerful and influential body' was a common thread in resident testimonies. There is a sense amongst long-standing residents that they once had a powerful organisation 'looking out for us and the town.' Implicit within these testimonies is a notion of shared interests, as if the local state and its residents both wanted what was best for themselves, their estate and their town. Such a sentiment, for many residents, stands in contrast to perceptions of the Corporation's successor, but as will be shown, this needs to be understood within a broader process of the local state's 'immiseration' in the face of centrally imposed cutbacks and restrictions from the 1970s onwards.

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[31] Interview with Moira (2019)

[32] ERO A10417/6 HDC. Minutes of meeting with BCCRA on 'Housing co-operatives', held at Gate House., Harlow (9 July 1975)

[33] *Ibid.*

The emergence of issues: from co-operation to conflict?

The built-in electric underfloor heating fitted throughout Bishopsfield had been typical of the housing area's modern and cutting edge design and furnishings – and was evoked by the corporation when portraying the housing area as indicative of 'space age living.[34] However, problems emerging from this electric underfloor heating system on the estate can be traced back to the opening years of the estate in 1968, with some early residents refusing to pay their heating bills 'on principle.'[35] This was a feature of the estate's design that was to become increasingly faulty and unreliable, as well as expensive, and came to a head with the formation of the Bishopsfield & Charters Cross Housing Action Group in 1976. As Moira recalls - the underfloor heating that was too expensive for most tenants to use, and 'so after a great campaign, we got the radiators!'[36] This saga provides insight into the dynamics that underpinned relations and emerging tensions between residents and their housing provider, as by the mid-1970s, faults in the heating system had gone on to effect more or less every estate resident in some way.

The action group, formed to put 'maximum pressure' on the HDC, carried out surveys, documenting the rising bills and finding that due to soaring costs, 76% of tenants were forced to use alternative sources of heating, and that 70% of the estate's dwellings suffered from condensation and dampness issues.[37] The group campaigned to the Corporation for a new heating system, as well as for Bishopsfield to be classified as an area of 'exceptional heating needs' to help pensioners and those on welfare obtain additional heating allowance. In the patio-houses, off peak electricity bills could amount to over £100 in a single quarter.[38]

Despite being a microscopically local, single-issue campaign, the push from residents quickly acquired a 'national' orientation, directing pressure towards Ministers rather than Corporation Board members. Significantly, the Corporation, by virtue of its direct funding from the central state, was able to 'pass up' the problem, and in turn, present itself as lobbying the government

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[34] ERO A10417/6 HDC. Press release: 'Official opening of the Showhouse, Charters Cross, Harlow on January 26th, 1966' (1966)

[35] ERO A10417/6 HDC Liaison department files. Letter from Eastern Electricity Northmet Group to Stan Newens MP (17 January 1968)

[36] Interview with Moira (2019)

[37] Bishopsfield and Charters Cross Heating Action Group, newsletter no. 1 (1 March 1976), p. 1

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 1

on behalf of residents. As a newsletter from the campaign stated: 'we understand that the Corporation is pressing very strongly for an alternative form of heating.'[39] As Andrew Bardsley, the General Manager of HDC, stated, in response to the Corporation's position on the heating crisis in Bishopsfield:

> I regret to report that despite strong pleas to the Department of Environment for an early decision on our application… we have not yet received approval. I can only assure you that we are continuing to press the matter, through all channels open to us.[40]

The residents campaign linked up with local MP Stan Newens, and reached out to Labour ministers John Silkin (Minister for Housing and Local Government, 1974-1976), Peter Shore (Secretary of State for the Environment, 1976-1979),[41] and Tony Benn, Secretary of State for Energy – where 30 demonstrating Bishopsfield residents met with the latter in Whitehall to explain their predicament.[42] When the necessary remedial work was finally granted the following year in 1977 – with the underfloor system being abandoned for newly fitted radiators – it was owed to the Corporation obtaining 'the go-ahead' from the Department of Environment.[43] Whilst the HDC required prompting by a sizeable group of organised residents to take up their cause with the central state, the Corporation remained co-operative throughout the ordeal. This bears resemblance to testimonies from Basildon, indicating the scope for NTDCs to shift local conflicts upwards towards the central state. Bill Ferrier, leader of the Basildon Tenants' Association and key local Labour party activist had described the 'very good relationship' between the tenants and the Corporation in Basildon during the 1950s and 1960s, suggesting the Corporation's implicit support for a rent strike the association organised against housing rent increases imposed from central government:

> Actually, the Development Corporation was quite ready to back the Tenants' Association, quite ready to back us to keep down the rents, but there was a bit of infighting somewhere, and the Corporation eventually pulled out, but I think

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[39] Bishopsfield and Charters Cross neighbourhood association newsletter. 'Heating campaign – latest position' (1 August 1976)

[40] Quoted in: *Ibid.*

[41] Bishopsfield and Charters Cross Heating Action Group, newsletter no. 1 (1 March 1976), p. 2

[42] Parsons, J. 'Mr Energy in Action: Benn orders 'heat' probe', unspecified newspaper (1976)

[43] Bishopsfield and Charters Cross Heating Action Group. 'Heating Victory at last!' (1977)

we had their sympathy, think they were quite pleased that we put up a fight against the government.[44]

This suggests a similar dynamic to which occurred throughout the mid-1970s with the Bishopsfield heating action group, in which potentially explosive local conflicts were bypassed by being handed up to a national level. There is a sense that, due to the centralised implementation of the new towns programme, both the HDC and BDC had their 'hands tied' in the face of local conflicts when it came to unpopular decisions, and were very easily able to shift blame upwards, which has had a lasting impact on long standing residents' collective memory of the Corporation. This discursive flexibility is something that Bishopsfield's successor landlord – the local authority – did not share the privilege of, despite its inability to meet residents' expectations in regard to repairs and general maintenance being profoundly shaped by decisions (and restrictions) made at the level of the central state.

This same dynamic emerges in the third generation new town of Milton Keynes where resident-led agitation for a local hospital led to the formation of the Hospital Action Group in the 1970s that similarly targeted its pressure upwards to a national level, lobbying and petitioning Ministers, allowing crucial scope for the MKDC to 'present themselves as champions of the community against an unsympathetic state.'[45] However, whilst this goes some way in explaining a relatively widespread fondness for the Corporation in the folklore of the estate, particularly in contrast to the experience of subsequent housing providers on Bishopsfield, the picture remains a complex one, as more fractious relations between new town residents and development corporations did occur throughout this period. For instance, Clapson has drawn attention to events in Milton Keynes that occur at a similar moment in time, pointing to the Beanhill Tenants' Action Group, who battled issues of condensation and general disrepair on their similarly modern housing estate built in 1972, and later successfully campaigned for pitched roofs with loft insulation on once flat-roofed metal-clad dwellings of Beanhill and other estates.[46] By 1977, the Beanhill Residents' Association were holding one hundred-strong meetings with MKDC officials, and the corporation ultimately ended up in court in a dispute

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[44] ERO SA 3/411/1 Interview Bill Ferrier, ex-leader of Basildon Tenants' Association (1988)

[45] Department of Planning, Oxford Brookes University. 'Transferable Lessons from the New Towns', p. 57; Clapson, M., Dobbin, M., and Waterman, P. (eds). *The Best Laid Plans: Milton Keynes since 1967* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1998); see also: Clapson. *Invincible Green Suburbs*, p. 176

[46] Clapson. *Invincible Green Suburbs*, pp. 176-7

over the responsibility of design failings on the estate.[47] On top of this, the BDC's handling of many existing residents during their land acquisition phases, show an entirely different experience of the state, which corresponds to this thesis' earlier suggestions in chapter 2 that the 'sympathetic efficiency' of NTDCs highlighted in chapter 1 was largely conditional and based on one's particular relationship to the town.

What this episode demonstrates, however, is a degree of continuity between residents and the local state before and after the HDC's dissolution in 1980, as residents increasingly relied on agitation and organisation to goad their landlord into remedial work and repairs throughout the 1980s and 1990s. But it also demonstrates a marked difference, particularly in the way the Corporation was able to largely bypass conflict by 'passing it up' to the relevant ministers and retain relatively cordial relations with resident groups. The emergence of the campaign in Bishopsfield represents the beginning of a series of resident-led actions based on demands for improved housing conditions and estate maintenance, which continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s. As Moira recalled: 'You have to fight for everything - and the Residents' Association was a vehicle for that.'[48]

III: The transfer of assets and responsibilities from the HDC to HUDC, 1976-78

Bishopsfield's heating action campaign occurred amidst considerable disruption within the Corporation. As Gibberd *et al.* note, the closing years of the HDC saw:

> sweeping changes on every front – at Board level, among the management team, in the town's problems and prospects, and finally, in the nature of the Corporation's task. In no other period, except perhaps at the very outset, was so much to change so rapidly, often in unpredictable directions.[49]

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[47] Clapson has suggested the struggle in Beanhill represented 'a triumph for 'bottom-up' traditionalism over the 'top-down', like-it-or-lump-it purveyors of rational modern architecture.' But for a more nuanced account of this fall out, see: Ortolano. *Thatcher's Progress*, pp. 110-111; Clapson. *A Social History of Milton Keynes*, p. 130

[48] Interview with Moira (2019)

[49] Gibberd et al. *Harlow*, p. 261

It was throughout this period that 'the Harlow District Council was pressing for more control over the Corporation's activities, notably housing.'[50] As has been shown in previous chapters, throughout the 1970s, the local authorities in both Harlow and Basildon made ambitious plans to expand their municipal functions as they eyed up the assets they were set to inherit from their respective development corporations. A report compiled by the Eastern Regional Council of the Labour Party in 1972, made up of local new town MPs and councillors and headed by Harlow's socialist MP Stan Newens, foresaw a 'dramatic increase in responsibility' for local authorities, and supported this on the basis that the 'concentration of assets in public hands which already exists in the new towns provides a golden opportunity for socialist advance on this front.'[51] For these local actors, the 1970s represented an opportunity to extend the social democratic basis of the new towns programme further – beyond both the paternalism and centralism associated with the period. The report called for 'the promotion of experiments in democratic management involving the formation of committees representative of tenants and users of new and expanded town assets of all kinds.'[52] Such an endeavour would require an en bloc transfer and assimilation of existing Corporation staff and a considerable enlargement of existing local authority departments in order to absorb the heightened scale of responsibility.[53] In 1976, a working group – made up of 5 members of Harlow District Council, 3 members of Harlow Labour Party CLP and local trade union representatives - met to discuss the 'imminent takeover of Development Corporation housing and related assets.' The dissolution of the Development Corporation was seen by members of the working group as 'a once in a lifetime opportunity to provide a comprehensive and "total" housing service', pointing out that the Council would be in 'a unique position of not only controlling all public housing, some 19-20,000 dwellings, but virtually 75% of all dwellings in the town.'[54] The Labour Party in Basildon, who controlled the council until 1979 (re-establishing control in 1982) similarly relished the prospect in 1976 of becoming 'one of the largest [housing authorities] in the country', and to organise housing 'for the benefit of tenants and under their control through the

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[50] *Ibid.*, p. 261

[51] ERO A14717/1 Eastern Regional Council of the Labour Party. 'The Future of the New and Expanded Towns: Report of a Working Party established by the Eastern Regional Council of the Labour Party:' (London: Godbold & Sons, 1972), p. 11

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 14

[53] *Ibid.*, pp. 11-13

[54] These representatives included a member of Harlow Trades Council, a member of Harlow DC Branch NALGO, and one member of local UCATT branch; ERO A6306/347 Harlow District Council. 'Interim report of the Housing Policy and Working Party' (12 July 1976), p. 3

extension and development of tenants participation and management.'[55] In Harlow, it was suggested that on receiving the development corporation assets, the local council integrate all housing stock and move towards the same rent structure, reducing the average corporation rent (which was then 12.5% higher) to the average of the council rent, with 'any deficit offset by rate fund contribution.'[56]

Throughout the latter half of the 1970s, a handful of Joint Committees were established between the District Council, HDC and ECC to negotiate the transfer of assets. The scale of the transfer was considerable. The District Council were to take over 18,000 development corporation homes, leaving them with control of over 20,000 dwellings, as well as 179 shops in three of the town's four neighbourhood shopping centres,[57] on top of this, they were to acquire 18 tenant common rooms, all of the area housing offices, nurseries, the leaseholds of all public houses, the housing and landscape depots and 335 acres of landscaped or other open spaces.[58] This enormous scaling up of the Council's responsibilities led to plans to radically enlarge existing departments. To give one example, the Technical Services Department – responsible for housing maintenance – planned for an intake of 310 additional staff.[59]

There were, however, disagreements within the Council over the reluctance of some to take on these new responsibilities, with some fearing that the enormous absorption of Corporation housing assets would be 'more of a liability than an asset.'[60] This was an increasingly common concern for new town local authorities throughout the 1970s, despite having pressed for their local Corporation's housing assets for years, due to increasing control over local authority spending, housing subsidies from central government dwindling and the gradual awareness of more recent, non-traditionally built corporation housing – such as Bishopsfield - proving

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[55] Tinworth, H. 'Transfer of housing assets', *Link* (December 1976)

[56] ERO A6306/347 Harlow District Council. 'Interim report of the Housing Policy and Working Party' (12 July 1976), p. 8, 16

[57] ERO A6306/347 'Harlow Council Contact: a newsletter for all employers', no. 10 (December 1977)

[58] In 1976, Basildon's council housing stock was set to increase from the 5,300 to an estimated 21,500 following the intended transfer of BDC housing assets, which would have totalled 29,000 dwellings throughout the District. Bill, R. *A Civic History of Harlow Council, 1955-85* (Harlow: Ron Bill, 2010), p. 133; ERO A/TB 1/8/14/5 Basildon Council. *Homes for our People: Basildon Council's Housing strategy* (Basildon: Basildon Council, 1977), p. 15

[59] Post-transfer housing maintenance was to be undertaken by five distinct groups, each with the responsibility of 4,000 housing units each, with each area having two mobile caravans that would provide both an office and a workshop store. Bill. *A Civic History of Harlow*, pp. 133-134

[60] *Ibid*., p. 134

increasingly costly to maintain and remedy faults.[61] In contrast, neighbouring Basildon Council, despite similarly eager and ambitious plans for the BDC's housing stock, pulled out of their housing transfer agreement over fears it would be too expensive to maintain. As Basildon's local Conservative MP, attacking the 'Socialist-controlled Basildon District Council' in Parliament over the decision, later recalled:

> In 1977, the council had the opportunity to take over the housing, as Labour-controlled Harlow did, but said that it was too expensive. In 1976–77 the council was in deep consultation with the Department of the Environment and got to the point of taking over the property. At the last minute, it phoned the Department and the deal was called off.[62]

This put the two new town authorities on relatively different trajectories in regards to their respective housing stocks, although both were deeply impacted by centrally imposed cuts throughout the 1980s, with legislators drawing attention to these two Essex new towns as being the only 'two authorities' in 'non-metropolitan districts' set to lose their *entire* block grants in 1984, with Basildon going on to become one of the eighteen local authorities designated for rate-capping later that year by the Secretary of State.[63]

The cost of local government financing by central government, such as the Rate Support Grant, had been rising throughout the 1960s and 1970s as councils expanded services and housing responsibilities grew. From the perspective of the Conservative administration assuming power in 1979, manpower employed in local government had doubled over the previous 30 years, from nearly 1½ million to just under 3 million, which for them – in the words of Heseltine, the Secretary of State for the Environment (1979-83, 1990-92) – constituted 'a remorseless upward spiral of spending on services.'[64] As Heseltine suggested, 'local government administers a range of services, vital by any standards—education, social services, the police, much of our housing, and a good deal more. These services are not in question, but *their scale is under*

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[61] Department of Planning, Oxford Brookes University. 'Transferable Lessons from the New Towns', p. 52

[62] *Hansard*. House of Commons debates. 'Housing', vol. 219, col. 50 (15 February 1993)

[63] 11 of these 18 local authorities were concentrated in London. The full 18 were: Basildon, Brent, Camden, the GLC, Greenwich, Hackney, Haringey, the Inner London Education Authority, Islington, Lambeth, Leicester, Lewisham, Merseyside, Portsmouth, Sheffield, Southwark, south Yorkshire, and Thamesdown; *Hansard*. House of Commons debates. 'Rate Support Grant (England)', vol. 64, col. 365 (18 July 1984); *Hansard*. House of Commons. 'Rate Support Grant', vol. 64, col. 828 (24 July 1984)

[64] *Hansard*. House of Commons debates. 'Rate Support Grant' vol. 996, col. 993 (14 January 1981)

scrutiny (my emphasis).'[65] Consequently, the Conservative administration from 1979 legislated for a range of discretionary powers in a bid to curb local authority spending and exercise greater control over their fiscal decisions.

These cuts to public expenditure had a considerable impact on Harlow Council's ability to maintain and manage its housing stock to the standards it had intended. Local historian Ron Bill estimates that between 1980 and 1984, the Council lost a total of £6,798,000 in Rate Support and Housing Subsidies.[66] Its annual housing subsidy dropped from £5 million in 1980/81 to £2 million in 1981/82, and the local authority lost £1,246,000 in Rate Support Grant between 1980/81 and 1981/82.[67] As Harlow's MP suggested in 1981, rapid reductions in eligibility for rate support grant had disproportionately affected 'authorities in areas in which rapid population growth has taken place, above all, local authorities in new towns.'[68] Of the 28 authorities listed by the government in 1981 for having overspent by more than 15% against the Government's target, seven (or 25%) of these local authorities were in new towns.[69] New towns, in Newen's words, stood to 'lose heavily' from central government's alterations to the rate support grant, which overlooked the 'particular circumstances' of new towns and their considerable housing stock, with Harlow Council losing the equivalent of a 9.2p rate, Stevenage Borough Council losing 6.5p, and Dacorum Borough Council (Hemel Hempstead) losing 7.1p.[70]

These blows to Harlow Council's ambitions to sustain, maintain, manage and expand its newly acquired housing stock was further compounded by another significant, even more localised factor. In order to assess the standards of maintenance and repair needs prior to the transfer of assets in 1977, the Council undertook a survey of 100 Corporation properties, which revealed considerable deficiencies and a large backlog of maintenance and refurbishment, leading for them to claim £10,000,000 from the DOE to finance the upkeep of incoming housing stock under Section 10 of the New Towns (Amendment) Act of 1976.[71] The final outcome from the

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[65] *Hansard*. House of Commons debates. 'Rate Support Grant' vol. 996, col. 994 (14 January 1981)

[66] Bill. *A Civic History of Harlow*, p. 175

[67] *Hansard*. House of Commons debates. 'Rate Support Grant' vol. 996, col. 1061 (14 January 1981)

[68] *Ibid.*

[69] *Hansard*. House of Commons debates. 'Rate Support Grant' vol. 996, col. 1059 (14 January 1981)

[70] *Hansard*. House of Commons debates. 'Rate Support Grant' vol. 996, col. 1059-60 (14 January 1981)

[71] Of this, it claimed £3.4 million for design faults and £6.5 million for outstanding maintenance. Bill. *A Civic History of Harlow,* p. 151

government came a couple of years later, when it reduced the total amount to less than 5% of what was asked. As Harlow councillor and chair of the Estates Committee, Jim Desormeaux stated in 1982:

> Unfortunately despite very generous promises from the government encouraging us to put the defects right, the government have now backed out of making themselves financially responsible, and our £10,000,000 claim has been whittled down to something under £400,000, which the government will provide part and the ratepayer the rest.[72]

Alongside these changes, many early new towns found that whilst non-remunerative community-related facilities were transferred to local authorities, there was a tendency for more lucrative, income-producing assets to be transferred to the Commission for New Towns and sold off, with the Treasury benefiting from the accrued investments. In the five years from 1979 to 1984, as George Young, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (1981-1986) boasted that 'nearly £500 million of industrial and commercial assets have been transferred from public ownership to private ownership, bringing about a better balance in the new towns.'[73] This was justified by the Conservative government through an aforementioned discourse of 'normalisation', which morphed the postwar social democratic commitment to attaining industrial diversity and social balance into a justification to privatise publicly owned assets in the early new towns, as shown in chapters 2 and 4. As Ian Gow, Minister for Housing (1983-5), stated: 'new towns should not be distinguished from others by the continuing presence of a dominant public sector landlord. [...] We shall introduce the magic of the market place in a way which will benefit a new town', an approach which was criticised for constituting 'forced sales' that did not allow the 'public purse to realise the full mature value of its investment over a period of nearly 30 years.'[74] In Harlow, after an agreement had been reached over the housing stock transfer, the DOE decided that various income-generating assets (commercial, industrial and land) in the town were to be instead transferred to the Commission for New Towns, scaling back the forecasted future income for the Council.[75] As

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[72] ERO SA 22/1352/1 Interview with Jim Desormeaux, Harlow councillor and chair of the Estates Committee (1982)

[73] *Hansard.* House of Commons debates. 'New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Bill', vol. 68, col. 163 (20 November 1984)

[74] Hansard, House of Commons debates. 'New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Bill', vol. 68, cols. 163, 173-4 (20 November 1984)

[75] Bill. *A Civic History of Harlow*, p. 151

Patricia Gibberd, local activist and wife of the town's master planner and chief architect, Frederick Gibberd, lamented in 1987:

> Asset stripping, that's right, that's one of the tragedies that's happening in Harlow. The development corporation investment was a very very good one, highly profitable, and all those profits are being taken out of the town, they're not being reinvested in the town, it's terrible. The New Towns Commission brief was to sell as much as possible at the highest price possible, and all that money goes back to national government, even though its generated in the town […] And the local authorities left with the housing, which, some of its falling to bits, needs a lot of maintenance, left with the public spaces which of course are expensive [to maintain], and all the profitable bits – like shop rent – will go away.[76]

These radical changes during the late 1970s and the early 1980s, many of which occurred after the Council agreed to take over housing responsibilities, had a considerable impact on Bishopsfield's new landlord's ability to manage and maintain its housing stock to its intended standards, as will be subsequently shown.

IV: The consequences for Bishopsfield, 1979-1994

The Council's ability to maintain and repair housing stock in Bishopsfield was increasingly constrained by the aforementioned centrally imposed cuts and controls - as well as borrowing restrictions, which badly impacted new town local authorities. These pressures were a common predicament for local authorities during this period.[77]

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[76] ERO SA 22/1368/1 Interview with Lady Patricia Gibberd (1987)

[77] See: Malpass, P. *Reshaping Housing Policy: Subsidies, Rents and Residualisation* (London: Routledge, 1990)

Table 6.1 - Gross publicly funded social housing investment in England, 1979-2001.[78]

Financial year	Gross publicly funded social housing investment in England (£ million)
1979/80	14,275
1980/81	11,543
1985/86	9,273
1990/91	7,748
1995/96	5,743
2000/01	4,740

Despite these commonalities, however, Alan Murie has stressed 'the incremental, incomplete and uneven geography associated with dismantling municipal housing in England.'[79] In their theorising of neoliberalisation, Peck and Tickell sought to establish a stylistic distinction between what they term 'roll-back' and 'roll-out' neoliberalism, the former referring to the 'destructive' processes of 'dismantlement' and 'deregulation' dominant throughout the 1980s, which included the 'discreditation of Keynesian-welfarist and social-collectivist institutions.'[80] As Smyth elaborates on this theoretical distinction in relation to council housing, suggesting that:

> Roll-back reforms, aimed at destroying and discrediting the previous welfare state, centered on a severe reduction in public spending throughout the 1980s and 1990s, leading to an unsustainable backlog of repairs and maintenance.[81]

These developments preceded a sharp decline in relations between the local state and Bishopsfield residents. Already in 1982, a report by the residents group decreed that:

> We are concerned at the lack of real housing management by the district council. This area in particular has been allowed to deteriorate and as a result is a less

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[78] Reproduced from: Wilcox, S. (ed) *Chartered Institute of Housing's UK Housing Review 2015*. 23rd edition (London: Chartered Institute of Housing, March 2015), pp. 112-3 (table 57b)

[79] Murie, A. 'Shrinking the state in housing: challenges, transitions and ambiguities' in *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2018), p. 487

[80] With the latter 'roll-out' phase, emerging from the 1990s, based on the 'purposeful construction and consolidation of neoliberalised state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations.'; Peck, J. and Tickell, A. 'Neoliberalizing space' in *Antipode,* vol. 34, no. 3 (2002), p. 384

[81] Smyth, S. 'The privatization of council housing: Stock transfer and the struggle for accountable housing', in *Critical Social Policy*, vol. 33. no. 1 (2013), p. 39

desirable area. Properties are not inspected and maintenance is confined to complaints from tenants.[82]

In the mid-1980s, unhappy Bishopsfield residents formed an action committee to monitor water penetration problems on the estate. Reminiscent of the estate's housing struggles of the 1976-77, residents carried out estate-wide surveys in 1986 to collate all outstanding repairs to the homes of council tenants in Bishopsfield and Charters Cross, which would be submitted to the council collectively, asking tenants to report back on whether the repairs had been carried out after three months.[83] The survey, renewing an estate-wide sense of collective action throughout a period that is often portrayed as a shift towards a heightened individualism, argued that: 'If we can act as a group, we can be stronger than the individual.'[84] This helped forge a sense of collective identity on the estate, as the council became a target for resident anger in the face of perceived neglect. Local literature subsequently identified a 'Them and Us' mentality which characterised relations between residents and the Council.[85] When the council eventually acknowledged in 1986 that eighty percent of podium properties were suffering from water penetration, tenants had been 'regularly requesting' examinations since 1982.[86] At the height of its maintenance-related activity in 1986, the residents group had assisted over 50 households in various ways over a 9 month period.[87]

By the mid-1980s, around half the podium flats had fallen into disuse.[88] The chronic under-investment in housing stock and inability of the Council to sufficiently carry out repairs and maintenance generated a sense of abandonment amongst many residents. In 1991, a residents' association publication lambasted what it felt was the council's intentional neglect of the estate, arguing that 'Bishopsfield, the only piece of international repute in Harlow has acquired the reputation to people who don't live here of a slum! Official policy seems to be to procrastinate until that becomes true! Are they waiting for an excuse to pull it down?'[89] This cynicism towards the council was accompanied by an account of the estate's predicament:

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[82] BCCRA. 'Report to Passmore councillors by Bishopsfield Residents Association' in *Bishopsfield News,* no. 5 (1982), p. 3
[83] BCCRA. 'Repair survey' in *Residents' News,* no. 1 (June 1986), p. 3
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 3
[85] BCCRA. *The Resident,* newsletter no. 27 (June 1991), p. 3
[86] BCCRA. 'Delays! Delays! Delays!' in *Residents' News*, no. 2 (September 1986), p. 1
[87] BCCRA. 'Annual Report 1986' (January 1986), p. 4
[88] Beigel, F. and Christou, P. 'A tapestry in the landscape', in *arq*, vol. 1 (Autumn 1995), p. 30
[89] BCCRA. *The Resident,* newsletter no. 23 (March 1991)

> Have you looked at Bishopsfield lately? Of course you have! Have the councillors? Have the officers? Are they blind to the boarded buildings, to the air of desolation on the podium and at the top of each lane, to the rubbish tip that is spreading from 'THE SKIP' […] to the garage system, dark, dirty, damp, with its battered graffitied doors, to the shrubbery on the approach road which has become a 'fly tippers' rendezvous.[90]

This had led some residents to feel as though not only had Bishopsfield residents been 'forgotten' by the council, but had been put 'firmly and continuously out of mind.'[91] Furthermore, meeting minutes from later that year suggested that: 'It was felt by some members that there was an active campaign to turn Bishopsfield into a slum.'[92] Whilst there is no doubt a degree of hyperbole occurring here, this does tell us something about the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism, and accompanying particular, local characteristics that emerge in new towns, and how this is experienced by residents, as a drastic alteration in one's perceived status vis-à-vis the local state.[93]

In their study of three interwar estates in Norwich, Rogaly and Taylor have pointed to the significance of the 'changing range of meanings which the physical space of […] estates has had for residents.'[94] In Bishopsfield, the Podium's meaning changed considerably in a relatively short space of time. The area - under the aegis of the development corporation – had been an organising social space for the estate's Mini-festival, which attracted those from outside the estate and helped counter perceptions of the area. By the early 1990s, less than fifteen years after the Council had assumed responsibilities, the podium had become a source of shame for residents. It was at this time that there were estimated to be around 57 properties on the estate that were uninhabitable, heavily concentrated in the podium and bedsit block, around 30 of which were boarded up.[95] As a resident newsletter from December 1992 read:

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[90] *Ibid*.

[91] *Ibid*.

[92] BCCRA. 'Report of the last meeting' held at 215 Bishopsfield (18 September 1991) in *The Resident,* newsletter no. 30 (October 1991)

[93] Similarly, in their work on the interwar Norwich estates, Rogaly and Taylor ponder 'how, over time, state practices are experienced and responded to by individuals, including through identification and categorisation processes, and consequently what they signal about an individual's status in relation to the state.' Rogaly and Taylor, *Moving Histories,* p. 109

[94] *Ibid.,* p. 37

[95] Clancy, M. 'Fighting a damp cause', *Harlow Citizen* (20 March 1991)

> At present, you may feel that you will want to blindfold your Christmas guests this year, until they are inside your home. Let us hope that by next year, you will be proud to take them on a conducted tour.[96]

Jim, a resident of Bishopsfield from 1975 and local Labour councillor from 1984 to 2002, had experienced the collective frustration of residents whilst appreciating the severity of the financial straightjacket which had incapacitated the council from fulfilling attentive, pre-emptive estate maintenance since the years of 'Mrs T.'[97] He pointed to rate capping and borrowing restrictions, which he says hindered the local authority from maintaining their estates to the standards they would have wanted to. Jim pointed out chronic water leakage in the garages at the top of his lane, which had been doing that 'to the best of my belief for about the last fifteen, twenty years', but resigned himself to the council's inability to act, even though the leaking would likely cause long term damage to the estate's built environment. He recalled his time in local government when raising 'cases like that' within the Council:

> Our Head of House, 'e said to me: "now look here, councillor", he said, "what do you want us to spend the money on? *Posh garages* or keeping the housing stock in reasonable nick?" Like, an' of course there's no answer to that, you can't say "nah sorry mate you've gotta 'ave water running down ya windows cuz we gotta sort this garage out." I don't think you'd stay elected very long.[98]

Jim recalled the frustration of the Council becoming the target of local anger for decisions that were being made and enforced from central government:

> We were levying the council tax to meet [rate capping requirements] and, I mean, people got a cut in their tax but they also learnt how to bend your ear'ole - "what's happened to this? what's happen to that?" or somethin'… go and ask Mrs. T down the road, it was her idea![99]

In the early 1990s, further capping limits took place, when central government forced Harlow Council to make cuts from £24 million to £11.2 million – a further blow to the council's ability to provide 'vital services' for its residents.[100] As Jim recalled:

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[96] Bishopsfield & Charters Cross Residents Association newsletter (December 1992)
[97] Interview with Jim (2019)
[98] *Ibid*.
[99] *Ibid*.
[100] This saw services such as the Council's advice centre forced to cut its hours – with the shifting of certain services to the Essex County Council office in Chelmsford; Harlow District Council. *Great Parndon Neighbourhood News* (June 1993)

We got hit by Master Redwood & company[101] […] so we goes up there to appeal, but we 'ad about 12 people who also wanted to go, because – like, residents associations, [they] wanted to have a go, right? Cuz Harlow used to put quite a lot of money into the social side, social services, like the Leah Manning Centre, I mean, that was built by Harlow Council, it was like a *hub*, you know, for all the elderly, play this, play that, or be entertained, fed, and so forth. And, erm, of course, when we got capped, we were fortunate, for a while that we had a fair whack of reserves, but the cap we got- to start with- was from 22 to about 8.9 million! We had to appeal, there was no way about it! So we went down there, we appealed and I think we got it up to just over 11, which itself still meant that in the following months, I think 800 people, off the council's workforce, made redundant. Our own Direct Labour Organisation, well they were a shadow of their former selves, we just kept enough on the books… like, you know… to do the really urgent stuff.[102]

As Jim mentions, these cutbacks had a considerable impact on the council's DLO and its ability to perform to its earlier standards. This shift was picked up by one tenant in 1992, who described himself as a staunch supporter of council housing, DLOs and 'social initiatives', who complained to the council about the standard of some recently refurbished rented properties on the estate, flagging the stark contrast to when he had first moved into his corporation flat in Bishopsfield twenty-five years prior in 1967. He described the work undertaken on the properties as 'the kind of job which is done to a really decrepit building in East London to give them a few more years.'[103] In a sense, this was the primary impact of cuts summed up - the inability for the council to do anything other than keep things 'ticking over.' A relatively comprehensive service was supplanted by sporadic, piecemeal patch ups and a bare minimum level of maintenance. As former Harlow council worker and Bishopsfield patio-house resident Steve recalled: 'when I first started working, the council would renew parts of housing stock on a continual basis.'[104] This sort of pre-emptive, routine maintenance, Steve suggested, became much less common throughout the 1980s as council funds 'rapidly decreased',

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[101] A reference to John Redwood, Conservative Party Housing Minister, 1992-93
[102] Interview with Jim (2019)
[103] Letter from BCCRA member to the General Manager of Harlow District Council. 'Refurbishment of the Pilot Block' (9 April 1992)
[104] Interview with Steve (2019)

something that had a considerable impact on Bishopsfield, where he's lived for nearly thirty years.

The frustrations and feelings of abandonment during the early 1990s were compounded by the high amount of unoccupied, boarded up properties on the estate. As correspondence from the general manager of Harlow Council to the residents group insisted: 'We are pressing ahead now, within the financial limits imposed upon us, to get more properties returned to occupation as speedily as possible.'[105] Eighteen months later, however, a total of 48 properties on the podium remained empty, with at least 33 deemed fully uninhabitable by the council.[106] By 1993, many of these dwellings were being used for temporary accommodation, with the council designating 11 'welfare properties' and five 'special' temporary properties, the latter of which was for newly arrived Bosnian refugees.[107] As meeting minutes from 1993 recall, a council representative 'said that the Council would try to bring properties back into permanent letting as soon as the Housing budget allowed sufficient repairs.'[108]

Throughout the 1990s, Bishopsfield underwent major redevelopment, which included the demolition of the bedsit block in 1993, the partial demolition of a smaller freestanding podium block in 1996, a series of podium improvements and a new development on the estate, completed in 2000.[109] Initially the council had floated redevelopment proposals which included demolition of the estate's podium, but as Rowan Moore wrote in 1994, residents, to the local council's surprise, 'campaigned for it to be saved.'[110]

Throughout the early 1990s, the council's 'Southern Regeneration' refurbishment work on the estate was slow and continually delayed, with funding staged 'as funds permit' due to the dire financial situation, which, were caused by - as council representatives explained to residents in 1992 - 'capping, non-access to "right-to-buy" money and restrictions on borrowing.'[111] In 1992, Harlow's bid for extra government funding failed for 'two of Harlow's problem estates',

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[105] Letter from General Manager at Harlow Council to Secretary of BCCRA (1 April 1992)
[106] BCCRA and Harlow council meeting notes: 'Temporary welfare lettings and empty properties', held at Harlow Town Hall (15 December 1993)
[107] *Ibid.*
[108] *Ibid.*
[109] Harlow Council. 'Residential Estate of Bishopsfield Harlow: Project & Programme update' (September 1997)
[110] Moore, R. 'Minimalism for the masses' in *Blueprint,* no. 111 (October 1994), p. 52
[111] BCCRA. Notes of meeting with local councillors, held at 54 Bishopsfield, 19.30 (12 April 1992)

these being Bishopsfield and Three Hills, with the Council's Head of Housing stating that central government 'think we should be looking again at a housing action trust.'[112] Residents attacked the suggestion however, arguing that 'the move was just part of an attempt to take social housing away from local authorities.'[113] Whilst a small pilot scheme had managed to successfully modernise fifteen of the podium's dwellings, the rest of the central area was set for further deterioration, and following the partial demolition of the bedsit block, the estate was at risk of remaining like a 'bomb site.'[114] Bishopsfield's desperate need for further refurbishment is the context in which demunicipalisation subsequently occurred, with its attraction of much needed funds. It is to this process – which happens in Bishopsfield from 1994 onwards - that this chapter now turns.

V: Demunicipalisation and its consequences, 1994-2008

The entry of East Thames Housing Association onto the Bishopsfield estate came between 1994-96 as part of a deal for renovation works, which resulted in the stock transfer of 55 council properties in exchange for much needed refurbishment work on the estate.[115] Subsequent redevelopment and refurbishment that took place in Bishopsfield following this move was funded with crucial reliance on the private funding resources from East Thames Housing Group.[116] This section examines the implications and consequences of this process of demunicipalisation. It looks at the impact this has had on Bishopsfield, and how it has further demoralised and disillusioned residents, examining the implications of what happens when an increasingly expansive housing association based in Stratford becomes the 'majority' landlord of an estate in Harlow, and how this has shaped resident perceptions of this complicated and obfuscated shift from social democracy to neoliberalism.

East Thames Housing Association's involvement on the Bishopsfield estate constitutes a process of 'demunicipalisation', something Stuart Hodkinson has described as 'an alternative privatisation front', when management, repairs and ownership of local authority housing is

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[112] 'Cash blow 'a slap in the face'', *Harlow Star* (16 January 1992)
[113] *Ibid.*
[114] BCCRA. Minutes of General Meeting, 7.30pm (16 June 1993)
[115] BCCRA general meeting minutes, held at the Red Room, Latton Bush at 7.30pm (15 July 1996); Letter from Strategic Housing at Harlow Council to Bishopsfield residents (7 November 1996)
[116] Harlow Council. 'Residential Estate of Bishopsfield Harlow: Project & Programme update' (September 1997)

transferred to non-public landlords.[117] Norman Ginsburg has similarly argued that stock transfers to housing associations amount to privatisation, 'with public control and accountability fading away over time.'[118] Others, such as Pawson, have argued with greater nuance that a 'web of legal obligations and regulatory controls' confuses and undermines the notion that such constitutes a clear shift from public to private.[119] Pawson suggests that a process of restructuring has impelled housing associations to 'move away from the community-based, voluntary ethic widespread in the 1980s', with the organisations evolving into 'social businesses with a keen sense of commercial opportunities and risks', a tendency to recruit from the private sector and a 'strong culture of asset management.'[120] Mullins and Craig have identified the tendencies of housing associations towards 'inter-organisational collaboration', integration, merging, and general expansion, drawing attention to housing associations' desire to increase the scale of their activity, spread corporate overheads across ever-greater stock numbers, increase influence and secure more favourable terms from suppliers and funders.[121] Stewart Smyth has also pointed to how in much of the scholarship examining the process of stock transfer, tenants' experience is 'almost completely absent from this literature.'[122]

Some of these aforementioned characteristics are present in the housing association in question. For instance, the tendency towards greater expansion. East Thames was founded in 1979 out of three smaller associations, and when it first became involved in Bishopsfield in 1994-5, had been the 'East London Housing Association', subsequently changing its name to 'East Thames' to reflect its gradual expansion beyond the capital into Essex, subsequently becoming part of the G15 group, an organisation of the 15 biggest housing associations in and around the capital. In 2016, East Thames entered into three-way merger discussions with L&G and Hyde Group,

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[117] Hodkinson, S. *Safe as houses: Private greed, political negligence and housing policy after Grenfell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), p. 31

[118] Ginsberg, N. 'The privatisation of council housing' in *Critical Social Policy*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2005), p. 132

[119] Pawson, H. 'Restructuring England's Social Housing Sector Since 1989: Undermining or Underpinning the Fundamentals of Public Housing?' in *Housing Studies*, vol. 21, no. 5 (2006), p. 781

[120] *Ibid.*, p. 781, 780, 775

[121] Mullins, D. and Craig, L. *Testing the Climate: Mergers and Alliances in the Housing Association Sector* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2005)

[122] Smyth. 'The privatization of council housing', p. 37; However, he suggests there is a growing, albeit marginal, literature on the topics of housing stock transfers from tenants' perspective. see: McKee, K. 'Empowering Glasgow's Tenants through Community Ownership?', in *Local Economy,* vol. 24, no. 4 (2009), pp. 299–309; Mooney, G. and Poole, L. 'Marginalised Voices: Resisting the Privatisation of Council Housing in Glasgow', in *Local Economy* vol. 20, no. 1 (2005), pp. 27–39; Watt, P. 'Housing Stock Transfers, Regeneration and State-led Gentrification in London', in *Urban Policy and Research*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2009), pp. 229–242

with 'aspirations to create the biggest housing association in Europe.' Despite Hyde Group dropping out, East Thames merged into L&Q in December 2016, making L&Q the fourth biggest housing association in the UK (after PfP, Clarion and Sanctuary).[123] As far as the corporatisation of housing associations is concerned, L&Q have recently received criticism for the salaries of their senior executive staff, confirming increased corporate private sector culture following their growing commercialisation.[124] In response to media attention surrounding this, L&Q responded by claiming that pay was set by a governance and remuneration committee and reflects 'value for money, current market levels, and the importance of talent retention for an organisation that is large, complex and commercially driven to deliver social goals.'[125] With approximately £23bn of assets, and a record operating surplus of £420m in 2017-18 - 40% of L&Q's £1bn annual turnover came from rents and sales at market rates.[126] Crook and Kemp have argued that in recent years large 'property developer housing associations' have begun to invest in for-profit private rented dwellings at market rent, and suggest that over time, this 'partial recalibration' of their landlord role will 'gradually transform the institutional rules, everyday practices and norms that shape their behaviour.'[127] It is in this context that this chapter considers housing association involvement in Bishopsfield, and in which this section asks what has the process of demunicipalisation since 1994 meant for residents? How have they experienced this and what has it meant for the estate?

Since the idea was first mooted by the council in 1994, residents had been apprehensive about a stock transfer in Bishopsfield. Following a meeting in 1995 in which the estate's prospective landlord gave a presentation: 'The consensus of opinion was against any involvement with a Housing Association.'[128] Again, the following year, 'the podium tenants do not want a Housing Association as a landlord' stated a report of an emergency meeting, which added that 'all wish to remain Council tenants.'[129] This opposition, however, was tempered by a dilemma. The council would be unable to refurbish the estate's forty empty properties, which were to remain

[123] Cross, L. "Hyde pulls out of L&Q and East Thames merger plan", *Social Housing* (4 August 2016)

[124] Brandon, S. 'Chief executive salary survey 2017', *Inside Housing* (29 September 2017); Tims, A. 'Raw sewage, no water - but service costs still rise for L&Q tenants', *The Observer* (12 August 2018)

[125] Quoted in: Tims, A. 'Raw sewage, no water - but service costs still rise for L&Q tenants', *The Observer* (12 August 2018)

[126] Montague, D. 'Could a Carillion-style collapse happen in social housing?', *Inside Housing* (19 January 2018)

[127] Crook, T. and Kemp, P. A. 'In search of profit: housing association investment in private rental housing' in *Housing Studies*, vol. 34, no. 4 (2019), p. 666

[128] BCCRA. *The Resident,* newsletter no. 58 (April 1995)

[129] BCCRA report of the Emergency meeting held at Latton Bush Centre, 7.30pm (5 April 1996)

uninhabitable and further deteriorate, increasing the likelihood – in the minds of many residents - of potential estate demolition. The Council were also in a difficult position. Crucially needed renovation could only be guaranteed with the external funding available from East Thames' ability to borrow in ways the local authority could not. The move made by the local authorities, agreed reluctantly by residents, that was not of an ideological nature. As Murie suggests:

> Decisions to opt into estate renewal and stock transfer may be compatible with a neoliberal, modernisation agenda but the choices made by many tenants and local authorities were often pragmatic responses to problems of housing standards and living conditions.[130]

As Jim recalled:

> You see, the way East Homes got into here, I mean, its partly at our feet, the residents, 'cuz we kicked up, "nah you ain't gonna bloody demolish us", right, and the council were saying "oh its costing a bloody fortune to maintain" and all the rest of it, and of course they felt obliged to look around for partners, and they came up with East Thames, and East Thames thought "oh well that's a decent little offer" so that's how it came about.[131]

The transfer of 55 properties from the ownership of Harlow Council to East Thames Housing Group took place without a stock transfer ballot because properties were decanted prior to transfer, with residents moved to other dwellings on the estate or into the surrounding area. The subsequent securing of funding for the refurbishment, however, was delayed, fostering disillusionment and cynicism that people had been moved out for work that was to be delayed.[132] As a frustrated resident newsletter from 1997 laid out in greater depth:

> Unless BCCRA call meetings, we hear nothing. Residents are demoralised by this state of affairs. The councillors also were dismayed and angry. Dwellings would not have been emptied had it been known that funds for their refurbishment were not forthcoming.[133]

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[130] Murie. 'Shrinking the state in housing', p. 496
[131] Interview with Jim (2019)
[132] BCCRA. *The Resident,* newsletter, no. 66 (January 1997)
[133] *Ibid*.

This was coupled with frustrations over what was felt to be a lack of meaningful consultation over plans for a new development in the middle of Bishopsfield to replace the demolished bedsit block (see figure 5.1, units 1-19):

> All those questionnaires were completed in vain, and promises of a green centre, common room, footpath along the access road, cannot be substantiated. They remain 'Bishopsfield Promises' made, like all the others over the past fifteen years, only to be broken.[134]

In 1997, when the housing association's plans for what would become Gibson Court were put on display: 'none of the plans seemed acceptable to residents.'[135] By 1998, this had developed into a 'Lukewarm approval' after hearing the prospective new building was to be 'sheltered housing' for the 'active retired.'[136] However, Moira – one of the many residents who has been disillusioned with the outcome of the Gibson Court development - felt like Bishopsfield had been wronged by the housing association. As she disappointingly recalled:

> when [the bedsit block] was demolished, we were told another building could go up, because people needed housing, thirty houses and flats were demolished, so they put up this block… East Thames housing association – which wasn't in keeping at all with the rest of the estate, and they showed us something quite different, courted us, and wooed us, unashamedly, they took us down to Stratford, sandwiches, coaches, everything, to get us on their side to build this block.[137]

Similarly, a resident publication from as early as 2002 stated that 'East Thames Housing Association pushed us to get Gibson Court built, but since then we have had no cooperation.'[138] Minutes of the group also referred to the difficulty in maintaining a 'feeling of enthusiasm in the face of so many disappointments and setbacks.'[139] Whilst the new block had been completed, many residents of the remaining estate felt as though refurbishments and repairs to

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[134] *Ibid*.
[135] BCCRA. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting (19 May 1997)
[136] BCCRA. *The Resident*, newsletter no. 69 (January 1998)
[137] Interview with Moira (2019)
[138] BCCRA. *The Resident,* newsletter no. 78 (January 2002), p. 2
[139] BCCRA. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Gibson Court common room (15 January 2002)

the built environment which the housing association 'promised to complete at least three years ago' had yet to be undertaken, sowing distrust and disillusionment.[140]

Resident frustration and the fragmentation of estate maintenance

Since East Thames arrived on the estate in the mid-1990s, residents commented in their interviews on the housing association's declining estate presence, and how the fragmentation of estate services has emerged as an issue. Between 1969 and 1971, when the Ministry attempted to get the HDC to shift from its 'designated areas' sales policy to a 'general sales' policy, the HDC frequently evoked Bishopsfield as an example of a housing area that required comprehensive estate management with the oversight from a single body.[141] Forty years later, the estate's management, maintenance and ownership was split between East Thames Housing Association, Harlow Council, owner occupiers, private landlords and outsourced maintenance company Kier Harlow.[142]

Table 6.2 - Tenure breakdown in Bishopsfield, Charters Cross and Gibson Court, 2008.[143]

	Council rented	East Thames rented	Freehold (leasehold)	Shared ownership
Bishopsfield	58	55	64 (+1)	0
Charters Cross	15	0	15	0
Gibson Court	0	24	0	24
Total	**73**	**79**	**80**	**24**

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[140] BCCRA. Letter to Corinne Walsh, East Thames Housing Association (14 July 2003)

[141] ERO A6306/390 HDC. General Manager to Leavett, A. New Towns Division, MHLG. Memo entitled 'House sales' (16 July 1969); ERO A6306/390 Hyde-Harvey, B. Letter entitled 'The Sales of rented houses' to Marlow, J. (25 November 1970); Letter from Hyde-Harvey, B. entitled 'Houses for sale' to Philipson, G. Head of Secretariat, New Towns Chairman's Conference (16 November 1970)

[142] In 2017, due to the local unpopularity with this outsourcing experiment, Harlow Council brought services back in-house by setting up their own company, HTS (Property & Environment) Limited.

[143] Table composed from figures taken from *Partners in Change* consultation report 2008; see: Partners in Change. 'Bishopsfield, Charters Cross and Gibson Court: Consultation Report' (December 2008), p. 1-2

In a report from February 2007, East Thames admitted that there:

> …have been frustrations and inconsistencies with the fragmented and piecemeal approach to estate services provided by East Homes and to a lesser extent by Harlow District Council.[144]

Vindicating the concerns of the Corporation, Sandra also commented on the effects of the fragmented nature of estate management since East Thames' arrival, compounded by the Council's subsequent outsourcing of estate, street and landscape maintenance in 2007:

> Things like the podium leaking, this sort of thing, its difficult to get anyone to sort of say yes its our responsibility, we'll deal with it.[145]

This corresponds to Hodkinson's argument that the process of demunicipalisation has meant that increasingly 'residents find themselves routinely fobbed off and passed around by their landlord and its contractors.'[146] Speaking more generally about the reputation of the housing association on the estate, Jim joked: 'I think if you was to do a popularity poll 'round here I doubt you'd get many people, you know, waving the flag for East Homes, quite honestly.'[147] Some residents also felt that they were better looked after than their neighbours who rented from the housing association. As one tenant, who spoke highly of the Council's recent repairs to his home suggested:

> I'm glad I'm not in the housing association, well – you've only gotta look at the front doors, I've got a modern front door, look what they've got! And I've got more security of tenure, haven't I?[148]

As Jim's bungalow is adjacent to the podium flats owned and managed by East Thames, his neighbours have all been East Thames tenants. He recalled:

> I've known at least eight to ten tenants and I don't believe I've actually heard a good word from *any* of them regarding East Thames. I mean, the flat next door here, the last but one tenant, he was reporting a problem in there, like water penetration and dampness and all this, which as far as I can remember, the

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[144] 'Initial findings from Bishopsfield opinion survey', *East Homes* (February 2007), p. 3
[145] Interview with Sandra (2019)
[146] Hodkinson. *Safe as houses*, p. 7
[147] Interview with Jim (2019)
[148] Interview with Derek (2019)

previous six tenants had been reporting! [...] Mind you, its like any tight-fisted landlord, they won't spend money until someone's got a gun to their head.[149]

This disillusionment was compounded by the reduced presence of local state and non-state actors on the estate. In the early days of the housing association's involvement on the estate, during the construction of Gibson Court, the housing association had held monthly surgeries for residents.[150] As a council tenant in close proximity to East Thames properties, Sandra's opinion of the housing association had changed considerably over the years, something which was linked, in part, to their declining estate presence:

> When East Thames first came, there was a man who was sort of responsible for them, for looking after the East Thames bit, he was very good and very efficient, he would get things done quickly. But then again, East Thames kind of ran out of money and were cutting back all the time.[151]

Literature distributed to residents in 2001 show that East Thames tenants requiring a service or reporting repairs needed to contact East Thames Housing Group's London-based Service Centre 'Connect Direct.'[152] Sandra also drew attention to the housing association's inability to build up 'familiarity' with the estate and its residents due to its high turnover of staff: 'The housing officer used to change every year or every two years, and so there was not that build up of familiarity with what was going on', adding that with housing officers based in London, the housing association found it 'difficult to get people here.'[153]

On the council side of things too, a gradual decline in estate presence occurred throughout this period. Throughout the early nineties, the estate had the weekly presence of the council's Housing Officer, at her sub-office at 215 Bishopsfield for two hours every Wednesday.[154] This would also include monthly 'walkabouts' between residents and the housing officer, identifying issues with the estate.[155] As a publication from 2003 complained, 'for 37 years Bishopsfield had its own housing officer' before the post was 'scrapped with no warning or consultation.' The publication added, 'Now four housing offices cover the whole town and

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[149] Interview with Jim (2019)
[150] BCCRA. Minutes of meeting held at Latton Bush (22 March 1999)
[151] Interview with Sandra (2019)
[152] Harlow Council. 'Bishopsfield Estate Agreement' (2001)
[153] Interview with Sandra (2019)
[154] Harlow council newsletter: 'Bishopsfield and Charters Cross: Housing Sub Office' (November 1991)
[155] BCCRA. *The Resident,* newsletter no. 75 (November 1999)

Staple Tye Housing Office [Bishopsfield's nearest] is used solely for rent arrears.'[156] As of 2011, the council ward within which Bishopsfield's Tye Green neighbourhood largely falls has an owner occupation rate of 49%, a rate which according Harlow council, is 'significantly lower' than the town's average.[157] In many ways, the BDC had foreseen these problems when it reflected on the impact of the 1970-74 sales in Basildon, highlighting that '*maintenance costs,* associated with the fabric of the dwelling reduced with each unit sold but the *management* costs did not fall proportionately in the same way.' It also noted the 'problems of identifying responsibilities in connection with shared facilities and common parts arising from mixed owner occupied/tenanted estates' and found that 'district rent offices serve a reducing number of dwellings and become less cost effective as a result.' In short: 'the Corporation loses the benefit of the effect of scale with the corresponding increase in overheads.'[158]

The subsequent restructuring of Harlow Council's housing services in 2003 was explained in literature provided to residents as setting out to 'improve its housing management performance' and 'reduce the cost of providing the service.'[159] The streamlining saw area-based housing services replaced by positions such as Head of Capital Programmes, Tenant Relations Manager, Property Services, Housing Management Services, Community Consultation Manager, Community Link Officer, Estate Tenancy Officer and Estate Management Officer. These changes represent a gradual depersonalisation of estate management, something that occured with both of Bishopsfield's landlords. This bears close resemblance to Rogaly and Taylor's findings from their study of three estates in Norwich which has drawn attention to the gradual removal of regular, everyday 'face-to-face encounters' with council staff, underpinned by a centralisation of services following cut backs, which has in turn fostered a sense of abandonment and substantiated 'folk belief in a remote and bureaucratic council.'[160] This shift towards 'faceless encounters'[161] occurred amongst a gradual decline in housing association presence on the estate, bolstering a sense of distance and remoteness that many residents in their interviews juxtaposed with what was felt to be the more palpable presence of the

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[156] BCCRA. *The Resident,* newsletter no. 80 (Octover 2003)

[157] Office of National Statistics. 2001 and 2011 census data, drawn from Harlow Council. 'Toddbrook ward profile' (March 2019), p. 22

[158] ERO A8891/12 Letter from Galloway, D. General Manager of BDC to Hobden, R. H. entitled 'Sale of council houses', including completed questionnaire entitled 'Sale of rented corporation dwellings' on behalf of the Corporation (15 April 1980)

[159] 'Housing Management Services reorganisation' in *Harlow Home* (March 2003), p. 2

[160] Rogaly and Taylor. *Moving Histories,* p. 129, 122

[161] *Ibid.,* p. 111

development corporation, most commonly in the form of Social Development staff, as well as the perceptions of a higher, smarter standard of maintenance.

This was compounded by the sense that maintenance of the estate was inadequate, and residents recalled how upon first moving to Bishopsfield in the 1970s, there had been caretakers that would patrol the estate identifying problems.[162] In 1999, the Council eventually axed Bishopsfield's 'resident caretaker' following a town-wide review of caretaking services.[163] Responsibilities were subsequently transferred to a less frequent mobile town-wide caretaking team.[164] As one council representative stated, defending the move: 'the Council could no longer afford to provide that level of service, and a more cost effective system of mobile caretakers had been devised and was up and running.'[165] This was something that residents felt overlooked the 'special needs' of Bishopsfield, given its unique architecture and the enclosed nature of the estate.[166] As shown from development corporation records from 1960 regarding the winning design for Bishopsfield:

> The more centralised the scheme the more necessary it seemed to need a caretaker. It is normal practice in Harlow for the existing point blocks to have a caretaker, and it is accepted that such a person would be required for the winning design.[167]

Bishopsfield's residents subsequently felt that the new mobile caretaking team routinely overlooked the estate.[168] In 2004, when residents suggested East Thames – the estate's majority landlord - provide a caretaker for the area, a representative of the housing association present 'told the meeting that East Thames were also moving away from having caretakers.'[169] The gradual loss of or scaling back of previous services also appears to have happened with gardeners throughout the town too. As Steve recalled:

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[162] Interview with Sandra (2019)

[163] Notes of special BCCRA meeting held at Great Parndon neighbourhood office (13 October 1999); Resident: Bishopsfield and Charters Cross newsletter, no. 77 (November 2000)

[164] BCCRA. Minutes from special meeting held at Barn Mead Resource Centre (11 December 2000)

[165] BCCRA. Minutes from special meeting held at Barn Mead Resource Centre (20 November 2000)

[166] BCCRA. Minutes from special meeting at Harlow town hall (27 June 2000)

[167] ERO A10417/6. Cadbury-Brown, H. T. and Hamnett, V. (Harlow Development Corporation). 'Architectural competition. Layout and Design of Bishopsfield (Area 71, Passmores)' (1960), p. 3

[168] BCCRA. Minutes of special meeting, held at Barn Mead Resource Centre (30 April 2001)

[169] Quoted in: Notes from Bishopsfield Action Meeting, held at Gibson Court common room (25 February 2004)

I used to work for the council as a gardener and at one time when I first started there were people who could tell tales of what went before and I think in the area I worked in there were 22 gardeners in there at one point. Now they don't have any of that. They have a little handful whose mobile and that particular area I used to work in, they would only drop in and do- and do some work in an area that looks really bad and they'd leave the rest. They just firefight in a way.[170]

This was a prominent theme within narratives of decline regarding both the estate and the town, the deterioration in maintenance and attention shown to public space, housing and landscape, a predicament that was often contrasted to the time of the development corporation.

In 2008, when the estate was threatened with demolition due to the Council's need to meet New Labour's *Decent Homes Standards*, a consultation was undertaken which found that residents overwhelmingly blamed the Council for the estate's predicament. As the feedback from the survey, which listed individual responses, showed:

'We love our home and our neighbours are great. We feel the Council have neglected the estate.'

'Not so much poor maintenance as no maintenance.'

'Not been maintained for the past ten years, no repairs, no cleaning.'

'I have lived here for 34 years and my husband for 23. We have watched it deteriorate. The current structural and financial problems are unfairly affecting us all.'

'Problems in Bishopsfield could have been avoided by preventative maintenance.'

'If the Council had acted many years ago, this situation would not be happening.'

'The Council has let things drift for far too long and made residents very suspicious of their intentions.'

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[170] Interview with Steve (2019)

'The Council has had their chance to make Bishopsfield a good place to live, but refused to put their hands in their pockets.'[171]

Despite moments of reinvestment and redevelopment on the estate by both the council and housing association, particularly throughout the 1990s, there was the sense that the estate had been left to decline following the departure of the development corporation. These changes occurred amidst what Jerry White has called the 'immiseration of local government in its present state', in which its powers 'have largely been abdicated to Whitehall at the centre (the Attlee model) and to school governors, urban regeneration companies, housing associations and others at the periphery (the Thatcher model, still actively pursued).'[172] Residents' perceptions of change (or decline), manifested as a shift from a 'powerful', 'well-intentioned', 'well-funded' or 'caring' development corporation who looked after the town and the estate, to an 'underfunded' council incapable of these qualities due to stringent fiscal constraints, and a housing association that was distant, remote, and not interested in Bishopsfield or the town.[173]

Discussions of decline within the estate gradually shifted outwards towards the general issues within Harlow itself, in particular the town's on-going Permitted Development crisis, widely covered in the local press, which was a frequent point of reference by Bishopsfield residents when indicating the town's changing fortunes, with specific mention of the highly controversial and recently converted office block Terminus House.[174] Because this falls outside of the thesis' time frame, this recent predicament will be revisited in the conclusion.

Conclusion

Along with the financially constrained council's inability to maintain the Bishopsfield estate to the standards that many residents came to expect – with expectations set high by the Corporation's early place-making (and co-operation with resident groups) - this has generated a profound sense of loss in relation to the Council's predecessor, which is collectively remembered by interviewees as having 'cared' for the town, the estate and its inhabitants –

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[171] Partners in Change, on behalf of Harlow Council. 'Bishopsfield consultation survey results' (February 2008)
[172] White, J. 'From Herbert Morrison to Command and Control: The Decline of Local Democracy and Its Effect on Public Services' in *History Workshop Journal,* No. 59 (2005), p. 76, 77
[173] Interview with Moira (2017) and Sandra (2019)
[174] Interviews with Jim (2019) and Moira (2019)

ultimately, a loss of benevolent oversight, a 'powerful' organisation that was 'on our side.' This romanticisation of the development corporation can be understood both as a coded lament for the collapse of the post-war ideals upon which the town was founded, despite the local authority's ambition throughout the 1970s and 1980s to expand upon and further these collective gains, as well as an implicit critique of the hollowed out, immiserated local state that succeeded the 'powerful' Corporation and the extensive range of assets it had spent over 30 years building. In Bishopsfield, this romanticisation and sense of loss is bolstered by the process of demunicipalisation that has occurred since the 1990s, and the shift to having a housing association as 'majority' landlord that is largely absent, distant and remote from both the estate and the town, which for longer standing residents stands in sharp contrast to the intensely 'local' aims, ambitions and orientation of the development corporation, and its eagerness to cultivate local, civic pride.

This chapter has also sought to show that things were perhaps not as 'golden' as many remember, drawing attention to issues with the estate's design that emerged prior to the transfer of responsibility to the Council – flagging an interesting dynamic that enabled the local corporation to 'pass up' potentially explosive local conflicts to the central state. Even though their repairs weren't being done, even though they had to fight for remedial work on their estate to go ahead, there was a sense that the development corporation was on their side, looking out for them, their estate, and the town. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, in their *The Myths We Live By,* warned against the tendency for memory to construct overly rosy narratives of 'the good old days', arguing that the past 'is not fixed and stable, but is constantly subject to change, contingent upon the ways in which we re-read past events in the light of the present.'[175] Lawrence has suggested that a widespread longing for a mythologised 'lost golden age' of community can be attributed to people's response to a 'dehumanising and alienating present'; a sort of critique of the current neoliberal moment.[176] In a similar vein, this chapter suggests that local folk belief in Bishopsfield, which romanticises the new town development corporation and its mode of governance, with its tendency to perhaps overstate the care and attention shown to residents, and overlook its flaws, can be understood as a lament at the

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[175] Rogaly and Taylor. *Moving Histories*, p. 38; Byrnes, G. 'The Myths We Live By: Reframing History for the 21st Century', Professorial lecture series, Charles Darwin University (26 July 2012), p. 1; Samuel, R. and Thompson, P. *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990)
[176] Lawrence. *Me, Me, Me?*, p. 229. On this point, see also: Jones. 'The Uses of Nostalgia', pp. 368-369

estate's loss of status and the town's present predicament, and an implicit critique of neoliberalism's hollowing out of the 'welfare', 'social democratic' or 'planning' arm of the state and the accompanying stifling of public investment in public spaces and communal amenities.

The shift from social democracy to neoliberalism is temporally and geographically uneven, and has been an intensely place-based experience. In Bishopsfield, and perhaps in new towns in general, a vernacular longing for the 'days of the development corporation' should be historicised within the broader transition from social democracy to neoliberalism, and the loss of forms of public investment that facilitated a greater degree of housing provision, public space, community involvement and participation, as well as a general feeling of progress and a sense of benevolent oversight, whether real or imagined, that came with the presence of a powerful public sector delivery vehicle. Whilst this chapter has identified commonalities with the national experience of council housing, it has also drawn out the unique local manifestations that emerged with the shift to neoliberalism, and how this played out in an experimental new town housing estate. It suggests that local vernacular narratives that make sense of this messy shift from social democracy to neoliberalism are intimately connected to the changing nature of the local state in early new towns.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis has mobilised the experience of housing, community and the local state in the early postwar new towns of Harlow and Basildon to investigate the nature of the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism. In doing so, it has shed light on the messiness of these local transitions, as well as the complex local relationship between an emergent individualism and experiences of 'community', providing insight into vernacular understandings of this transition, and accompanying perceptions of decline.

Building on the recent work by Ortolano into Milton Keynes, it has situated the *early* postwar new towns of Harlow and Basildon within the context of Britain's two postwar political formations, and used these two areas to demonstrate what it argues is a complex, messy, and elongated transition. Amongst other things, Ortolano's recent contribution has re-examined the social democratic project's relationship to home ownership, coining the term 'property-owning social democracy' to describe a 'dual tenurial system' of home ownership and social renting, 'motivated by the vision of social, economic and spatial balance.'[1] As much as this has provided a solid, conceptual corrective to the misconception that social democracy was a political economy of universal public-rented accommodation, it should not be assumed that this principle wasn't without its tensions and arguably irreconcilable contradictions. Chapter 2 has demonstrated that the HDC's lasting commitment to postwar social ideals – chiefly 'balance' - were constantly tempered, constrained, minimised and *contorted* by a central state that was increasingly driven by its own economic and ideological imperatives, seeking to inject the market and private enterprise when possible, thus highlighting tensions and contradictions within these early postwar social democratic projects. This chapter also questioned the temporality of neoliberalism by showing that the sales drive in both Harlow and Basildon, particularly in the early 1970s, had far more in common with the hasty disposal of assets which came to represent the *Right to Buy* programme throughout the 1980s, than they did with the social idealism that underpinned the postwar pursuit of 'balance.' The thesis mobilised these early rented house sales to further destabilise conventional periodisations of the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism, suggesting that – through an examination of the Corporation's implementation of the elusive principle of 'balance' – a clear demarcation

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[1] Ortolano. *Thatcher's Progress,* p. 251; see also: 212-252

between these two political formations becomes harder to ascertain. The line between a genuine, 'social democratic' commitment to securing a 'balanced' population within the town, and the ideological imperative to dispose of assets as quickly and rapidly as possible – whether through the form of sales of subsidised rented housing to tenants or the disposal of land for private development under increasingly relaxed conditions, is considerably blurred, and further attests to a complex and messy shift from social democracy to neoliberalism. From this, it has sought to shed light on the fragility of the social democratic experiment by drawing attention to the historic, irreconcilable tensions between the pragmatics of collective provision on the one hand, and the ideals of social balance/mix and their interpretation on the other. Whilst 'balance' featured as a recurring policy imperative for these two development corporations, we must not assume that this necessarily entailed harmony, equilibrium or stability.

Furthermore, whilst Chapter 2 utilised these early rented house sales to provide insight into the behaviour of the local state and its changing relations with a certain demography of residents within the town (homeowners and prospective homeowners), Chapter 3 examined their ramifications for the individual and the experience of 'community.' Whilst Lawrence has cautioned against treating individualism and community as 'irreconcilable opposites', the findings of the chapter trouble the uncertain boundary between individualism and community by drawing attention to the perceived emergence of snobbery and intra-class distinction from the seventies onwards.[2] A recurring theme in material collected from residents, past and present, was the perception of snobbery and an antipathy towards it, which played a key role in determining vernacular narratives of a descent from 'community' into 'individualism.' This is perhaps rooted in the *unique* development of these areas, in particular, the integral role collective provision played in underpinning them. In tracing the Corporation's early failure to attain 'balance' in neighbourhoods like Lee Chapel North, the chapter highlighted an implicit egalitarianism which underpinned feelings of social cohesion, 'community' and collective identity. It thus identified a very real material basis for vernacular narratives that make sense of the complex shift from social democracy to neoliberalism as a descent from 'community' into selfish 'individualism.'

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[2] Lawrence. 'Individualism and community in historical perspective', p. 240

In investigating the local states' responses to these changes, Chapter 3 also demonstrated fluctuating dynamics between community and individualism as perceived by Basildon's two local states, suggesting that rather than these having an entirely top-down influence, there was a more dynamic, fluid interchange which occurred between residents' behaviour on the one hand, and responses of the local states on the other. The BDC demonstrated a lingering paternalism, whilst a focus on Basildon District Council's post-transfer of assets vision for council housing contributes to a growing body of scholarship that has sought to redefine the seventies as a 'decade of possibility' and a 'marketplace of ideas', with the contingent character of Thatcherism revealed.[3]

Chapter 4 built on the groundwork laid out by the preceding chapter by considering the elongated local processes of residualisation and stigmatisation through the investigation of Basildon's shift towards higher density housing throughout the sixties, as well as the changing attitude of the central state towards the essentially social democratic remits of these local state actors, to situate individual and familial narratives of self-betterment by the nineties as *emerging out of a sense of collective loss.* It also linked these to the perhaps underappreciated role the progressive erosion of green space played in these intensely local vernacular narratives of decline, something which played a pivotal role in shaping intergenerational migratory narratives from inner urban areas.

The thesis then turned from a town-wide examination of Basildon to a highly focused examination of how these changes play out in a small, experimental housing estate in neighbouring Harlow, to further destabilise over-simplistic narratives of a shift from community to individualism. In the unique, experimental Bishopsfield estate, whether under the social democracy or the neoliberal era that replaced it, Chapter 5 identified a recurring operationalization of place-based 'community' in strikingly similar ways, albeit for different reasons. *Formal* manifestations of 'community' which initially emerged as residents sought to navigate the limitations of the estate's heightened privacy and lack of communal amenities, a process applauded and facilitated by the development corporation, were later redeployed to combat processes of external categorisation and stigmatisation. Despite the retreat of the local state from telling Bishopsfield residents how to play out their collective lives, various place-

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[3] Black and Pemberton. 'Introduction: The benighted decade?'; Medhurst. *That Option No Longer Exists*

based community activities and events endured and *re-emerged* in intriguing ways, with the chapter showing that by the late eighties and nineties, the stigmatisation residents sought to push back against was more than merely architectural prejudice. Michael Neylan, architect of the estate, had been working at Chamberlin, Powell and Bon, a British architectural firm whose most well known work was the design of the City of London's stylistically similar, private Barbican estate, and yet, no one has ever tried to demolish the Barbican. Residents of Bishopsfield seemed aware of this disparity, rooted in a broader area-based stigma linked to poverty and the reputation of early new towns. As one Bishopsfield resident joked to the local press in 2008 when the estate was again threatened with demolition: 'Imagine how much you'd pay for this if it was on Hampstead Heath!'[4] Furthermore, studies of working class new town housing have – understandably - overwhelmingly concentrated on the experience of traditional suburban housing.[5] This thesis' investigation of Harlow's Bishopsfield and Basildon's Laindon 5 estates has sought to demonstrate a more variegated experience of new town housing, identifying patterns reminiscent of the experience of inner urban estates in large cities such as the now demolished Heygate estate in Elephant and Castle, reflecting a wider picture of what happened to the working class throughout this period.[6]

Lastly, Chapter 6 demonstrated that local vernacular narratives that made sense of this messy shift from social democracy to neoliberalism were intimately connected to the changing nature of the local state in early new towns. Whilst Bishopsfield represents a sharpened experience of the negative implications of this, it illuminates a very real phenomenon. Thus, a vernacular longing for the 'days of the development corporation' should be historicised within the broader transition from social democracy to neoliberalism, and the loss of forms of public investment that facilitated a greater degree of housing provision, public space, community involvement and participation, as well as a general feeling of progress and a sense of benevolent oversight, whether real or imagined, that accompanied the presence of a powerful public sector delivery vehicle. Indeed, broadening an argument made by Lawrence, it argued that folk belief in Bishopsfield, with its tendency to romanticise the HDC and its mode of governance, and to perhaps overstate the historic care and attentiveness shown to residents, can be understood as

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[4] Tanfield, J. 'Ideal estate to live a life less ordinary', *The Harlow Star* (28 February 2008), p. 8

[5] Clapson. *Invincible Green Suburbs*; Clapson. *A Social History of Milton Keynes*

[6] Romyn. 'The Heygate'; see also: Watt, P. 'Social Housing and Regeneration in London' in Lees, L. et al. *Regenerating London* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 212–233

a coded lament at the estate's loss of status and the town's present predicament, and an implicit critique of neoliberalism's hollowing out of the 'welfare' or 'planning' arm of the state and the accompanying stifling of public investment in public spaces and communal amenities.[7] This can also be tied to the loss of feeling as though one was a participant in a grand, collective endeavour, not just of the new town, but of its most architecturally ambitious housing area. In accounting for the changes that occurred in Bishopsfield, the chapter also sought to contribute towards rectifying the dearth of scholarship on resident experiences of stock transfers and housing associations by investigating a process of demunicipalisation in a provincial, new town environment. Such seemingly mundane phenomena, largely limited in scholarship to the urban experience in large cities, represents a significant *obfuscation* of an elongated process of demunicipalisation throughout the 1990s and 2000s, further attesting to the messiness of this political economic transformation.[8]

At the time interviewing Bishopsfield residents in early 2019, due to local press reports and national media attention, responses tended to gravitate towards the town's on-going Permitted Development crisis, which was a frequent point of reference for Bishopsfield residents when indicating the town's changing fortunes.[9] Under the Conservative government's changes to Permitted Development Rights in 2013, private developers have been able to turn offices into residential premises without planning permission.[10] Following these changes, Harlow has become the national 'hot spot' for such conversions, which are used by local authorities, mostly in London, seeking cheaper ways to house their growing waiting lists.[11] Even Harlow's local Conservative MP, Robert Halfon, has spoken out on the issue, drawing attention in Parliament to what he called:

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[7] Lawrence. *Me, Me, Me?*, p. 229

[8] For instance: Daly, G. et al. 'Housing Stock Transfer in Birmingham and Glasgow' European Journal of Housing Policy, vol. 5 (2005), pp. 327–341; Watt, P. 'Housing Stock Transfers, Regeneration and State-led Gentrification in London', pp. 229–242

[9] Interviews with Jim (2019), Moira (2019), and Sandra (2019)

[10] Local authorities have little meaningful control over such developments, unless they are able to find demonstrable issues of contamination or flooding

[11] Children's Commissioner. 'Bleak houses: Tackling the crisis of family homelessness in England' report (August 2019), p. 9

a pressing and ongoing issue in my constituency of Harlow that can be described only as ghetto building, human warehousing and social cleansing, under the expanded permitted development rights legislation.[12]

With a total of 12 former office block conversions of up to around 1,100 units in Harlow, the new town has become, in the MP's words, a 'prime location' for such developments.[13] Harlow, with it's significantly lower property prices make the new town an attractive location for predominantly London councils to house their homeless populations in out-of-area placements, through property management companies like Caridon Property Services – who own and manage Terminus House, along with 40% of the Permitted Development flats in the town.[14] The property management company also own and manage a handful of similar converted office properties in Crawley, another one of the early mark one new towns.[15]

A report into the recent boom in Permitted Development conversions by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyers found that the legislation had 'allowed extremely poor-quality housing to be developed', and that 'there was direct evidence of the profitability of conversions for developers and land owners, but little evidence of contribution to the additional public infrastructure required to support the quantity of additional housing.'[16] Due to the postwar new town planning legacy of strict zoning between employment and industrial areas on the one hand, and residential areas on the other – with their local schools, health services, shops and amenities – homeless families re-housed in Harlow have often found themselves in heavily isolated, industrial areas with limited access to public transport, road safety concerns and questionable air quality. It also identified the frequent construction of 'studio' flats that were just 15 or 16m², with only 30% of these types of conversions meeting national space standards.[17] On top of this, the report found that common features of such conversions were: 'no access to private or communal amenity space; buildings with barely any changes done to convert from office to residential use; [and] residential developments in the middle of industrial

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[12] Hansard. House of Commons. 'Office Block Conversions: Essex' (13 February 2020), vol. 671, column 393
[13] *Ibid*.
[14] Jones, R. 'Is Harlow being used to 'socially cleanse' London?' *Guardian* (16 March 2019)
[15] Caridon Property. 'Our properties', (accessed 13 April 2020)
https://www.caridonproperty.co.uk/our-properties/
[16] Clifford, B. *et al.* (Bartlett School of Planning, UCL) on behalf of Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. *Assessing the impacts of extending permitted development rights to office-to-residential change of use in England* report (May 2018), p. 10
[17] *Ibid*.

estates.'[18] As one Bishopsfield resident and ex-local representative, incensed by the situation, said:

> It's absolutely ridiculous! What a way to get rid of ya waiting list, well it wasn't our waiting list we were getting rid of, it was blimmin' Islington's, and- god knows who else's. God knows what's gonna happen, if they try and change it, an awful lot of people are gonna find themselves being treated like gypsies, 'oh send them up to Leicester or somewhere', that sort of thing, its absolutely diabolical.[19]

Other Bishopsfield residents contrasted this predicament – chiefly, the Council's inability to prevent these developments taking place - to the 'days of development corporations', in which this sort of thing would not have been 'allowed to happen.' Such testimonies bolstered the sense that the development corporation's interests aligned with those of both the estate and the town, and that Permitted Development represented the ideals of the new town 'turned on its head.'[20] Terminus House, which ironically used to house the Harlow Development Corporation's Social Development Office, has become one of the most notorious of such blocks in the country following a slew of national press coverage. The building is a 9-storey tower block that sits upon 5-storey car park above a bus station near the town centre, which has been converted into 200 individual flats - its floors have one central, windowless corridor, and its dwellings one single window each.[21] The aforementioned report considered Permitted Development Rights to be a consequence of 'the hard governance deregulation seen in England' and that on the whole, 'office-to-residential PD has been a fiscal giveaway from the state to private real estate interests.[22]

This local predicament had become symbolic for many residents, about how far the town has drifted from its founding new town ideals.[23] The helplessness of the council due to the nature of PDR legislation – despite their firm opposition - further testifies to the local state's 'immiseration', and leaves a yearning for a 'powerful', strong, benevolent local state that operates on behalf of the town and its residents, a perception of the development corporation

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[18] *Ibid*.
[19] Interview with Jim (2019)
[20] Interview with Moira (2019)
[21] Jones, R. 'Is Harlow being used to 'socially cleanse' London?' *Guardian* (16 March 2019)
[22] Clifford *et al. Assessing the impacts of extending permitted development rights*, p. 11
[23] Interview with Steve (2019), Jim (2019), and Moira (2019)

that exists in the collective memory of estate residents old enough to remember it. This is a theme that emerged with interviewed residents when discussing Basildon council's ongoing regeneration of the town centre as well. This maps a general sentiment about the welfare state, and social democracy's provision of both economic and housing-related security, onto a geographical terrain. Places created as embodiments of the postwar principles of the welfare state are now shells of their former selves. If, as Ortolano has posited, new towns constitute the 'spatial manifestation of the welfare state', then romanticisation of the postwar era as one of security and stability becomes coded onto the pioneering decades of the new town's development – even though these were characterised by perpetual development and change. As one resident recalled fondly, when contrasting the past to the present: 'in those building days… excitement and opportunity… and everyone had a house.'[24] It could be said that for longstanding residents of Bishopsfield, the shift from social democracy to neoliberalism has been experienced as shift from 'futurism' to nostalgia.

This is not to suggest that local authority in Harlow does not act in the town's interest out of mal-intent or disregard, but rather that it is hindered in its ability to appear as if this is otherwise the case, as illustrated most poignantly by the current Permitted Development scandal, which it has consistently opposed and criticised.[25] In the early 1960s, Harlow's development corporation used its local power and political clout to overturn local bylaws and national planning restrictions with the local Urban District Council, Essex County Council and the MHLG, in order to allow for the construction of the Bishopsfield estate, in a bid to facilitate the heady ideals of social mix, foster 'new ways of living', and to meet housing targets to improve standards of living for migrating Londoners. Less than sixty years later, the town's local state is largely powerless in the face of corporate interests converting once-zoned office areas into 'rabbit-hutch housing developments' for vulnerable, homeless families, and often in places that lack access to amenities, shops, schools, green spaces and health centres, something diametrically opposed to the idealistic neighbourhood unit principle that these two towns heavily relied upon and prided themselves upon achieving.[26]

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[24] Interview with Moira (2017)

[25] Health, L. 'Harlow Council leader hits out at government over office-to-resi conversions' in *Inside Housing* (22 August 2019)

[26] Hansard. House of Commons. 'Office Block Conversions: Essex' (13 February 2020), vol. 671, column 394

In 1967, Charles Boniface, General Manager of Basildon Development Corporation, recalled a story of Henry Ford Jr. visiting the Ford tractor plant in Basildon:

> […] He was so impressed with what was around the tractor factory - when he was told it was Basildon new town he asked how much it would cost to buy it. Needless to say he was very promptly told by the executives that it wasn't for sale.[27]

Of course, Basildon and Harlow were eventually offered up to sale – not just housing-related assets, as investigated throughout this thesis, but non-housing assets such as shopping facilities, industrial sites and public land. Whilst a detailed examination of this complex, elongated disposal of new town assets was beyond the scope of this thesis, it serves as a crucial backdrop to how housing, community and the local state were shaped and altered by this phenomenon. Whilst Harlow's centrally located Terminus House has come to symbolise the crisis many early new towns find themselves in, another gloomy predicament of Basildon's run-down town centre was recently lamented by its current Council Leader (Labour), who revealed that as of 2019, Glasgow City Council made more money out of Basildon town centre's retail units than its own local authority.[28] In responding to this immiserated predicament, the Leader mooted the idea of setting up a joint venture company, suggesting: 'I will speak to anybody. I don't care if they are princes in the Middle East or businessmen in Texas. I will take Basildon anywhere in order to have a better town.'[29] This has culminated in a plan for comprehensive re-development and high-rise housing within Basildon's town centre, something which has frustrated some of the town's residents.[30] As one interviewee lamented:

> Basildon was a great place, people used to come down from London to come to Basildon, for me, growing up, its been a great place, its only now that I'm realising, 'what am I doing? What's next?' Knocking the town centre down and putting up high rise flats wasn't what people bought into, so I'm protesting against that at the moment, because it wasn't meant to be that way.
>
> There's quite a big campaign in Basildon at the moment, I think they've got 700, 800, 900 people, strong, protesting against the plans for the town centre,

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[27] ERO SA 20/2/7/1. Interview with Charles Boniface, General Manager of BDC (1967)

[28] Thomson, C. 'Future proof! New alliance reveals massive 10-15-year project to revive town centre' in *Yellow Advertiser Basildon* (7 June 2019)

[29] *Ibid*.

[30] Emes, T. 'Fears over plans for 492 flats on Market Square, Basildon' in *Thurrock Gazette* (17 August 2020)

so you never know, they may be able to stop it, I don't think they will, because you can't seem to stop these developments but- and that's the good thing about Basildon there are a lot of people that are still passionate about it and are sticking together […] it's kind of been bred into you, even though I want to move out, I still got this thing, I don't want [the town centre] to be built on, it's a liberty, you're- its what our parents, they built up, and you're just gonna knock it all down, and the future, like, for my son, where's that gonna leave him then? Why do you want high rises in the town centre, you know, if we moved out of London to get away from all of that, you're bulldozing now and building *that*, why?[31]

Even today, a conflict persists between collective identity and individual and familial strategies of self-betterment in Basildon. Thus, at different local stages of social democracy's life, individual and familial strategies for self-betterment can be identified - whether during its height when rehousing through collective provision, or during the intensely local and messy transition to the political formation that replaced it in the form of early concessionary house sales, or its elongated, drawn-out death throughout the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s (loss of corporations, elongated processes of residualisation and demunicipalisation, perceived decline). But the temporal basis for compartmentalising varying strategies of individual and familial self-betterment that emerged at different moments in social democracy's life are not clear cut – they overlap and feed into one another.

In the early seventies, as Basildon's Laindon 5 was hailed 'the land of opportunity' by families who had recently fled inner urban London for vastly superior, collectively provided municipal housing, tenants in neighbouring Lee Chapel North were seizing the opportunity for individual and familial self-betterment through demunicipalisation. In line with the core argument of this thesis, this attests to the complex character of both social democracy and the transition to the political formation that replaced it, and the intensely local and variegated nature of this shift. As well as this, it also illustrates the fragile post-war equilibrium between the personal and familial self-betterment inherent within and offered by the early new towns of Harlow and Basildon, and the collective provision upon which their development relied.

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[31] Interview with Maxine (2020)

Appendix A: Interviewees

Alan (2017) grew up in council housing in Laindon, Basildon throughout the 1960s and 1970s. His father worked at a nearby chemical plant. Whilst Alan moved out in the 1980s, as a self-employed floorer, he often returns to Basildon on contracted work from the council.

Chris (2017) moved with his family from East London to Lee Chapel North, Basildon in the 1960s. His father worked at Marconi's, an engineering firm based on Basildon's industrial estate. Chris left the town in 1990s.

Maxine (2020) grew up in Lee Chapel North, Basildon throughout the 1970s and 1980s and still resides in the area. Her father was a lorry driver and her mother worked in Gilbarco's, a local fuel dispensers factory. During a brief stint at the council, she worked on the Five Links regeneration consultation in the late 1990s-2000s.

Micky (2017) and his family moved from Walthamstow to Lee Chapel North, Basildon in the 1960s, where his mother worked for a local printing firm and rented from the corporation. He moved out of Basildon in the early 2000s.

Susan (2017) moved to Lee Chapel North as a baby with her family in the 1960s from London, after her father transferred to the town with Ford Motor Company. She still resides in the area.

Sylvia (2017) moved to Basildon's Lee Chapel North from Kent in 1965 with her husband, a doctor. By the end of the decade they had moved out to neighbouring Billericay.

Bill (2017) is a self-employed plumber who privately rented from family on Basildon's Five Links estate throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

William (2017) grew up in Basildon's Five Links estate during the 2000s and left to pursue higher education at the end of the decade.

Clare (2019) has lived on Harlow's Bishopfield estate since the 1980s.

Derek (2019) works at nearby Stansted Airport and has rented his maisonette in Bishopsfield, Harlow, since the early 1970s.

Jim (2019) is a retired fireman who has lived in Bishopsfield, Harlow since the 1970s. He was a local Labour councillor from 1984 to 2002.

Moira (2017 and 2019) moved to Harlow in 1957 and has lived in Bishopsfield since the mid-1970s. She is retired and secretary of the estate's residents' association.

Rosa (2019) grew up in Bishopsfield, Harlow throughout the 2000s and still resides on the estate.

Steve (2019) is a musician who used to work for the local council as a gardener. He has lived on Harlow's Bishopsfield estate since the 1980s.

Sandra (2019) is a teacher who moved to Bishopsfield in the 1970s, where she is chair of the estate's residents' association.

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