Whatever happened to Council Housing?
Whatever happened to Council Housing?

A report prepared by National Community Development Project workers in

Batley
Coventry (Hillfields)
Newcastle (Benwell)
Newham (Canning Town)
North Tyneside (North Shields)
Paisley (Ferguslie Park)
Southwark (Newington)

with the assistance of the CDP Information and Intelligence Unit
Contents

Foreword by Frank Allaun, MP 5
Introduction 7
Whatever Happened to Council Housing? 9
The Project Areas
   Batley 35
   Coventry (Hillfields) 43
   Newcastle (Benwell) 53
   Newham (Canning Town) 63
   North Tyneside (North Shields) 69
   Paisley (Ferguslie Park) 79
   Southwark (Newington) 85
Glossary of Housing Legislation 91
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I am very pleased to write a foreword to this report which asks the vital question 'Whatever Happened to Council Housing?' At a time when the number of critics of council housing is increasing and when the effects of cuts in public expenditure are becoming clear, this defence of council housing is more than welcome.

As the report makes plain, the high level provision of good quality council housing is the only way in which the acute housing problems of millions of men, women and children will ever be solved and it is the policies adopted by central governments which encourage or hinder this provision. As the local reports show, councils, whatever their desires, are greatly affected by central government action in the number of houses they build.

Whilst disagreeing with several points in this report, which is highly controversial, I am certain it will create argument and debate. However, its detailed defence of the public sector and its local experience are in stark contrast with the more sensational critics of local authority housing. For this reason if for no other it is a document of immense value.

27 January 1976
Housing is a right
Introduction

This document has been written with two clear intentions. First, to contribute to the current debate on council housing, and second, to show how the cutback in public expenditure, called for by the government, is affecting public sector housing.

The public sector has become a prime target for attacks by commentators who favour a reduction in council house building and seek to support their case with lurid and selective accounts of the cost of such housing provision. It is our intention here to participate in the debate and to try and redress the balance a little. The contributors to this report remain firm defenders of council housing. We are convinced that it is the only real method of solving this country’s appalling housing problems and have spelt out the reasons for this conviction below.

In addition, the publication of this report comes at a time when all the elements that go to make up the Welfare State have been put at risk by the government’s cuts in public expenditure. The National Health Service, education provision and welfare services are all being made to suffer as a result of the cuts. Elsewhere* CDP has shown how it is that those with most to lose are suffering the most, and in this document we show that in the provision of council housing it is again those in the worst housing who will bear the brunt of the housing cuts.

The opening section of this report details how the Labour Party lost its way in housing. We say this more in sorrow than in anger for it is the Labour Party that has in the past been the party to which the badly housed have tended to turn. In 1945 under the guidance of Nye Bevan, the Labour Government were fiercely pro-council housing and indeed had a socialist vision of the society that they wanted in Great Britain. During the thirteen years of Tory rule from 1951 to 1964, it was the owner occupier and the myth of the property-owning democracy that became predominant, and when Labour returned to power in 1964 it was clear that the new government had swalloed the propaganda as much as anybody else. As the White Paper on housing published in 1965 made plain, council housing was now regarded as abnormal and owner occupation was seen as the right and proper state of affairs.

What is the position today? Labour returned to power in 1974 committed to a radical programme of reform in housing and boosting the public sector. But even this radicalism was not backed with any clear socialist beliefs. Subsequent happenings have shown that, faced with economic difficulties, a Labour government will cut the public sector almost as much as a Conservative government.

It is now obvious that the major cuts in public expenditure on housing will be at the expense of the current council house tenant and of the would-be council house tenant. The owner occupier will scarcely be disturbed from his cosseted existence. In the White Paper Public Expenditure to 1978/79 published before the 1975 Budget, it was explained that capital expenditure on new public sector housing is expected to rise from £1,182m in 1973/74 to £1,333m in 1974/75. But compare this with £1,710m in 1969/70. In reality spending is down by £370m as compared to five years ago.

In addition local authorities were urged in Circular 24/75, published in March 1975, to lower standards of construction, to erect temporary accommodation and to reduce car parking facilities on council estates. If councils heed these suggestions it could very well lead to the creation of the slum estates of the future.

Even the much vaunted municipalisation programme as foundered. Initially local authorities were encouraged to municipalise privately rented accommodation as a means of speeding up the end of the private landlord. But their zeal was rapidly dampened by Section 105 of the 1974 Housing Act which severely limited the amount that local authorities could spend on renovating the property they bought. Even when the amount was increased as a result of the councils’ indignation, the money was taken from the local authorities’ lending fund. This meant that those with low incomes wanting to buy old property, people who would not have a chance of a building society mortgage, were prevented from joining the great property-owning democracy. Indeed those who looked elsewhere for a mortgage were snapped up by the fringe banks and other dubious financial institutions. For them the dream of home ownership so assiduously peddled by the politicians fast turned into a nightmare.

The established, largely middle-class, owner occupier remains untouched though. A well publicised leak has revealed that Labour’s influential Housing Advisory Group has rejected a proposal to cut the amount of tax relief going to the owner occupier. This is currently running at no less than £950m. It is possible that the wealthiest might have to forgo the additional tax relief that they receive as higher-rate tax payers, but that is hardly likely to make the pips squeak.

We hope then, that Whatever Happened to Council Housing? will provide some ammunition for those who seek to defend the public housing sector, both against ill-informed journalists and against governments, whether Conservative or Labour, which make council housing a scapegoat in times of economic crisis. It is vital in our view that the offensive be mounted against the opponents of council housing, whoever they may be, and that all should realise the absolutely paramount importance of maintaining a high level of good quality, public sector housing.

* Cutting the Welfare State. CDP-CIS Special Report.
The best for all, or bunkers for the deprived? What kind of housing and for whom? The 1970s:

Above and opposite: the prizewinners: council flats at Winchester and Knaresborough

Below: for the losers?
Killingworth New Town
Whatever Happened to Council Housing?

At the end of the First World War less than 2% of all houses were owned by and rented from local authorities. The overwhelming mass of working-class housing was owned by private landlords. They provided 90% of all homes. Thus, even for the middle classes, owner occupation was still a very restricted form of housing tenure. Over fifty years later, a third of all houses are now rented from local authorities, over a half are owner-occupied and less than 20% – in a still declining sector – are rented from private landlords.

Over that period therefore there has been a total transformation of the means by which society owns, rents, manages and distributes its housing resources. Owner occupation and council renting now constitute the two primary forms of tenure by which the majority of families hold their houses. But although these two main forms of tenure co-exist they do in fact represent two totally different, and opposed, ideological perspectives on how and for what purposes housing should be provided. Such perspectives are deeply rooted in the whole history of the housing question and in the development of political movements for housing reform; and they must provide a starting point for any understanding of the current state of the ‘housing question’ both in the CDP Project areas and the country as a whole.

The main result of the complete change in forms of housing provision has been that council housing has become the dominant form of decent housing for working-class families. This is true of the Project areas in which we work, where the most significant contribution to improving working-class living conditions has been made through local authority housing policies and the provision of council housing. But despite state intervention, housing conditions in all the Project areas have been – and remain – appalling, no matter what the form of tenure. Local and central government have had statutory powers to control housing conditions for over 100 years and since 1919 local councils have provided a significant proportion of all new houses built. Yet we need to ask the question ‘Whatever Happened to Council Housing?’ not just at a local level, but at a national level too.

Projects have been concerned in their work over the past three to four years with the supply and quality of working-class housing. Much of that work has revealed the inadequacies of housing policies at the local level. It has exposed the consequences of poorly designed and badly constructed council estates, of skimped or non-existent home improvement programmes, of poor standards of maintenance and of ill conceived and insensitive management policies. By working with tenants groups on these issues CDP teams have documented at the local level many aspects of the failure of council housing. In doing so they have contributed to a developing view that council housing and housing policy generally has not lived up to expectations.

Council housing has failed to provide decent housing for all working-class families. But to say that council housing has failed is an oversimplification. It has failed in different ways for different sets of interests. As a consequence different and conflicting reasons are put forward to account for that failure, and similar conflicting views are put forward as leading to a solution. The question that we have posed is a political question which requires a political answer. That is something which is not always recognised in the current debate.

The papers in this report have been prepared specifically with this in mind. They are an attempt to carry CDP’s work on housing issues within our areas beyond purely local criteria of success and failure. To effect real change in housing conditions locally requires a much deeper understanding of the determinants of wider housing policies and practices. The rest of this section of the report aims to provide that understanding and to draw out its implications.
THE CURRENT DEBATE

Current media campaigns promote an image of council tenants as privileged and cosseted members of society. We are shown how enormous sums of tax- and rate-payers' money are poured in to support incompetent local councils in providing high-quality subsidised housing at rents well below its 'economic' costs. This approach is typified by recent articles which focus on the rising costs of council housing in terms of land, construction, loan debt and interest charges, and the demands made on central exchequer subsidies and the local authorities general rate fund.

Typically using the most extreme examples of subsidised costs and comparing them with tenants having high household incomes, such articles either call for enormous increases in rent or for the almost total abolition of council housing in its present form.

Fortunately saner voices have demonstrated that the current housing crisis has not been created by over-subsidised council tenants. But this view rarely attracts publicity and is not supported by an understanding of why council housing is necessary and why it needs to be defended against the interests who would seek to destroy it. To provide such a defence is the major task of this report.

In our work the Community Development Projects have tried to help tenants to overcome the housing problems they face in the areas where they live. By exposing conditions on estates, challenging current management practices and organising tenants groups we have developed some understanding of tenants' rights and of the ways in which community action and legal remedies can be used to overcome the day-to-day problems of being a council tenant. Our work is not unique. It has merely contributed to a growing tenants movement in various localities; a tenants movement concerned to challenge the quality of the housing service provided by local authorities.

But this supportive work suffers from several defects. It often takes place in estates which represent the most extreme examples of poor design and construction, lack of maintenance, and insensitive management policies. This means that we work with tenants who are the most stigmatised and isolated not only from the community in
First, it tends to reinforce the view of opponents of council housing that council housing is a failure. Either, they say, it is intrinsically poor housing that is difficult and expensive to manage, or it is inhabited by tenants who don’t know how lucky they are and don’t know how to look after their houses properly anyway. Secondly, such work is narrow in its concerns. It is confined to specific and local problems which are all too easily seen as being unique to that locality. The consequence of this is that the tenants struggle can be contained within the locality, so discouraging the raising of wider political questions about the quality of council housing. Only implicitly does it challenge the myths promoted by those at national level who seek to undermine council housing as a form of tenure.

However these two perspectives in the present debate are merely today’s restatement of the traditional Left-versus-Right antagonism over the issue of public housing. The Left asserts the right of everyone to a decent house at a reasonable rent, through a socialised, non-profit making, subsidised system. The Right counters with a view dominated by notions of private means of production and consumption, with homes, whether owned or rented, being allocated by the market. In their view council housing, if provided at all, should be built to minimum standards and be confined to those who cannot compete in the market.

Interestingly such views are very rarely stated in such stark terms. What generally emerges now is a new conventional wisdom, particularly about rented housing, which tries to ‘balance’ these very different views over the failure of council housing. Such wisdom recognises that all is not well with council housing, particularly in terms of housing management and the position of tenants in relation to local housing bureaucracies. This has led to proposals for new forms of individual and co-operative ownership in council housing, to increase the stake of tenants in their homes and their estates, and so develop a sense of pride equivalent to that of the owner occupier.

Linked to this view, however, is an implied constraint upon any major overall expansion of the council housing sector in its present form. The task is now seen as one of equalising the choice between buying and renting and then of widening that choice by developing housing associations to replace the declining and under-financed privately rented sector. These views are usually associated with a perspective on improving poor housing conditions by rehabilitation rather than redevelopment; again this is linked to the use of housing associations to maintain a range of low cost rented housing outside the local authority sector.

With differing emphasis, such perspectives now provide common ground between the two dominant political parties. It is this ‘middle ground’ approach to housing policy which has gained ascendancy in recent years, reinforced by the views of other commentators who see the failures of council housing, and of housing policy generally, as being the result of ‘too much politics’. It is argued that housing policy has failed either because of frequent changes in policy direction reflecting changes of political control at national level, or because of more parochial forms of party squabbling at the local level. This has led to arguments for taking housing out of politics. The implication is that once a consensus approach to policy has been agreed, then the satisfaction of housing needs will be above politics – a technical exercise that can safely be left to the administrators.

But housing policy is not a isolated and peripheral issue which can simply be taken out of politics. The current debate is not a new debate, nor is it a-political. It is simply a part of the ongoing political struggle of the working class to establish the right to decent housing at a reasonable cost for all who need it. The provision of council housing has traditionally been the means by which the labour movement has tried to establish such conditions. Unfortunately at present there is no strong voice re-asserting the fundamental beliefs on which the labour movement based its original demands for council housing.

This report tries to explain why council housing has failed and to reassess what the politics of council housing should be about. We demonstrate what has happened to council housing locally and show that it has failed to deliver the goods even in those authorities where substantial numbers of council houses have been provided. Council houses are not always decent, the rents are not always reasonable and they are certainly not available for every family that needs one.

Indeed the council housing programmes of the local authorities described in this report reveal a uniformly depressing picture of lost ideals and penny-pinching inadequacy. Despite its initiation under the slogan of ‘Homes fit for Heroes’, Britain’s public housing programme has rarely managed to rise above a level of vacillating mediocrity. Even the former Director of Housing at Newcastle admitted recently that some of the council housing built in the last twenty years is the worst quality housing to be built in Britain this century.

But it would be wrong of us to lay the blame for poor council housing solely at the door of the local authorities. Central government has played a crucial role in shaping policies, and economic factors, not housing needs, have been paramount in its considerations. The kind of national policy which has constrained local authorities’ operations is illustrated by the recurring pattern of cuts in public expenditure. The costs of economic crises are repeatedly shifted onto the poorly housed with devastating effects. Arising in response to pressures from the Treasury and international financiers and speculators the benefits of such policies go to finance capital. Additionally Conservative governments have been consistently hostile to council housing and council tenants, and have encouraged owner occupation as a more desirable alternative. Recent Labour governments whilst not openly hostile to council housing have nevertheless been subject to similar pressures. They seem to be unable to resist and have produced broadly similar policy outcomes. To understand this we need to examine the history of housing policy.
THE COURSE OF HOUSING POLICY

In general terms, the history of public housing policy centres around the political struggle of the working class to establish a socialised form of housing which recognised the right of everyone to a decent house at a reasonable cost. There are certain main political themes we want to draw out of our work, which we elaborate in the conclusion to this section of the report. In particular, we would stress that the establishment of council housing as a socialised form of housing tenure was an outcome of organised political action by the working class. It was a real gain in terms of working-class living standards. Council housing on a mass scale is ideologically opposed to the interests of the right-wing parties and those they represent. The Right have always tried to contain the development of council housing by narrowly defining the purposes for which it is to be provided, and creating an alternative to it more closely related to their interests. They established and promoted the ‘property-owning democracy’ so successfully as an alternative that it has been reinforced in recent years by the policies of Labour governments.

From the beginning economic crises have consistently been used by both parties as a device for reducing public expenditure on council housing and cutting working-class living standards. Increasing central government control and lack of resources for public sector housing guarantees its failure. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy leading to the search for alternative forms of tenure and ‘middle ground’ policies, and reducing housing politics to housing administration.

THREE PHASES

We examine the history of council housing policies in three main phases: first the period between the two World Wars, then the post-war period up to 1964, and finally the ten year period from 1964 to 1974. Within each of these periods it is possible to identify the main themes of the political struggle outlined above.

The inter-war period saw the establishment of the first major programme of general needs housing in the 1920s. It was followed by a shift to slum clearance priorities in the 1930s, and the beginning of large-scale building for owner occupation. The period after the Second World War was typified by a superficially similar pattern of development. A ten year period of building for general needs to overcome the post-war crisis was again followed by a shift to slum clearance priorities and a general decline in commitment to council housing in favour of owner occupation. In general the policies in both these periods reflected conventional political stances, with Labour promoting general needs council housing, the Tories supporting minimal slum clearance replacement and owner occupation. The fall of the Tory Government in 1964, which marks the beginning of the third period, was not however followed by a full scale Labour reversal of the Tory attack on council housing. Indeed Labour’s support for owner occupation and conversion to a consensus view of housing policy created a situation in which the Tories could launch a further major offensive on council housing in 1970-74. We have called this third period 1964-74 a decade of policy in confusion.

BETWEEN THE WARS

The Addison Act of 1919 which launched the nation’s first full-scale council house building programme was based on Lloyd George’s slogan of ‘Homes fit for Heroes’. This was not merely recognition for the war effort, it arose from the government’s very real fears of revolutionary working-class action both from within and outside the country. Externally, the Bolshevik revolution represented a very real threat whilst internally there were two linked sets of forces at work.

First, industrial unrest and rent strikes in Glasgow in 1915 had effectively, by forcing the introduction of rent control legislation, put a stop to any extension of the activities of private landlords. There was now no way in which the government could look to private enterprise to provide for rent, the better-quality housing promised to the returning troops. Secondly, the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland (the Hunter Committee), established because of working-class agitation in 1912, reported in 1917. Many of its recommendations, influenced by the events in Glasgow, were concerned with the provision of municipal housing for rent and it carried considerable weight in the advisory committees of the wartime Coalition Government and in the framing of postwar legislation.

What is important here is that the political origins of council housing represented an explicit commitment by the labour movement to decent council housing as of right for everyone. Before 1914 there had been legislation which made it possible for local authorities to provide housing, but not in a way which challenged the role of the private landlord. Council housing was provided, if at all, only as a consequence of slum clearance. It was there merely to ensure that the very poorest, displaced from the slums, should have housing of minimum sanitary adequacy. It was this essentially ‘sanitary’ approach which continued, even after 1919, to underpin Conservative attitudes to council housing. They always believed that housing should be provided for by the private market, and that only in exceptional circumstances should it be otherwise.
The wartime events in Glasgow, and the prescriptions of Wheatley in particular, fundamentally challenged this approach. He and his ILP colleagues argued that the private landlord was making a profit out of working-class housing which could be eliminated by municipal enterprise. Wheatley’s evidence to the Hunter Committee demonstrated that if money was borrowed interest-free to build cottage housing, the working class could be decently housed for the same rent that they were being charged for a slum tenement. In other words, by cutting out the profit to the private landlord and the interests on mortgage loans, everyone could have decent homes at rents they could afford.4

Thus 1919 saw the achievement of policies which over fifty years of liberal public health reform had been unable to establish, and this was the result of working-class political action. A programme to provide decent housing at reasonable subsidised rents became government policy. But the effect of the Addison Act which laid a duty on local authorities to survey the housing needs of their areas was shortlived. Its revolutionary open-ended subsidies, making up the difference in costs between the rent and the product of a penny rate, caused panic in the Treasury as building costs rose. So the subsidies were cut in the 1921 economic crisis under the ‘Geddes Axe’. These subsidies themselves were, of course, blamed for the rise in building costs, and a precedent was established which was to become all too familiar in the course of British housing policy.

Barricades in Glasgow, February 1919. For Lloyd George (below) it was a case of ‘Homes fit for Heroes’ or else . . .
The homes fit for heroes were a long time coming. Indeed, it was two years before Chamberlain's 1923 Housing Act introduced new flat-rate subsidies for council housing. But the Tories still believed in private enterprise; local authorities first had to prove that private enterprise was unable to build the houses that they wanted, while the same subsidies were also available for private builders. Initially the Act had also tried to reduce the standards of municipal housing to the absolute minimum. The Tory commitment to council housing was still something less than half-hearted, and in fact only 75,300 council houses were built under this Act compared to 362,700 subsidised private houses.

It was not until six years after the end of the War, with the advent of the first Labour Government in 1924, that the conditions were created for the realisation of the promise made to the returning heroes of 1918. Wheatley, the Minister of Health, was schooled in the politics of the Glasgow ILP, involved in the Clydeside struggles and retained his direct links with the poorly housed. In his 1924 Housing Act he introduced a higher flat-rate subsidy of £9 annually for forty years from central government for houses to let at controlled rents. Along with the arrangements that he entered into with the building unions to guarantee sufficient labour, it was this Act which made possible the vast expansion of municipal housing in the 1920s.

But Wheatley's Act had one weakness from a socialist point of view, and this was a weakness that was to become magnified, particularly after the Second World War. The money required for house building still had to be borrowed and paid for in interest from finance capitalists. Even the rent increases in Glasgow in 1915 had not just been due to greedy landlords, but also to increases in interest charges. The same problem was to face local authorities as they expanded their role as housing landlords and became more dependent on loans from finance capital.

However at the time, Wheatley's Act achieved much, if not all, of what he intended. It outlasted the shortlived Labour Government and, despite a Tory cut in the level of subsidies in 1927, over half a million houses were built through its provisions before they were brought to an end in 1933. Most of the Project authorities responded well to the twenties legislation, particularly where the influence of the Labour Party was strongly represented locally. Paisley, Tynemouth, Southwark and Newcastle report the desirability even today of these well-designed, well-built estates influenced by the Garden Cities movement and the recommendations of the Tudor Walters report of 1918. The major dilemma was that such estates attracted the respectable working class, if not the lower middle class. The rents were too high for the poorest families in real housing need.

When Labour returned to power in 1929 they were committed to dealing with this problem, by adding to the Wheatley system and making subsidies available specifically to clear the slums and rehouse the poorest families. Greenwood's Act of 1930 asked local authorities to prepare five year slum clearance programmes. It did not intend that the replacement housing should be different in quality to that for general needs, although it did propose that rents of houses for slum clearance might differ, and...
made provision for a rent rebate system for houses built under the Act.

In retrospect it is difficult to know how the system might have worked out in practice. For the Labour Party the question of differential rents and rent rebate systems involving means tests, was and remains, an important ideological issue. Socialists who considered such practices divisive of the working class were to have a difficult time in the years to follow, particularly on local councils. The problem, as stated by a more recent commentator, is that, 'while costs remain relatively low and the incomes of council tenants are also low and largely undifferentiated, prevailing methods of rent fixing receive only spasmodic criticism. Once costs rise (or economies have to be made) the re-examination of the procedures and assumptions in setting rents begins.'

But the second Labour Government did not have time to answer such questions. The catastrophe of 1931 intervened and by 1933 the Coalition Government with Hilton Young at the Ministry of Health decided to abandon the Wheatley subsidy system altogether. Effectively, given that the slum clearance subsidies under the Greenwood Act would continue, this meant that all council building to relieve the overall numerical shortage of houses was to stop. Not that Young did not recognise that a shortage existed, but he argued that the existence of government subsidies was preventing private enterprise from building the houses that were needed. The simple answer, supported by evidence from the National Federation of Builders, was to abolish subsidies. 'So the decks were cleared for what was to become the biggest private building boom in British history.'

With Greenwood’s subsidies tied exclusively to slum clearance programmes, the sanitary principle was alive and well. For the rest, free enterprise would provide. The thirties effectively re-established private enterprise as the primary provider of houses, but on rather different lines to before the War. Although the government thought private enterprise housing would be for rent, in fact most of it was built for sale. Supported by the building society movement, home ownership became the new symbol of national stability. The Daily Telegraph quoting Viscount Cecil said, ‘the ownership of property cultivates prudence. Clearly it encourages thrift, fosters the sense of security and self dependence, and sensibly deepens citizens’ consciousness of having a “stake in the country”, and the influence is surely one which, spreading from the individual to the community and linking all classes, must contribute appreciably to national stability.’

By contrast council housing was second best, a fact which could not be hidden by the vociferous slum clearance propaganda campaign mounted by the National Government. It was not just a question of the numbers of council houses built, but of quality and attitudes. The five year slum clearance programmes which got under way very slowly were followed in 1935 by an Act aimed at the relief of overcrowding. Essentially the same principles were applied however, and the two pieces of legislation were combined in 1938. Subsidies were given on the basis of the numbers of people rehoused, with special additions for flats on expensive sites. Thus house designs maximised bedroom space at the expense of living space. Strict limitations on the overcrowding standard also restricted the number of families regarded as being ‘in need’ and hence cut down the number of houses required.

It was in areas where the labour movement used its strength to represent the interest of the poorly housed that slum clearance was pursued most vigorously, particularly in those cities where Labour parties gained control of the council for the first time. In other areas the independent professional strength of the Medical Officer of Health was a key element in slum clearance, often riding roughshod over the petit bourgeois interests of local landlords and shopkeepers. But, given the constraints under which they had to build, it was those local authorities who did get to clear their slums and relieve overcrowding who contributed most to the devaluation of council housing itself.

The CDP local authority areas were predominantly the older industrial areas with much slum housing. All the authorities in this report except Batley, built more council houses in the thirties than in the twenties, and in Paisley and Newcastle the numbers doubled. But the increased densities, the low standards of layout and design, the estates’ functions of rehousing people from specific poor areas made these 1930s estates immediately less desirable. Stigmatised by officials and other tenants, such places, notably in Paisley and Tynemouth, have become concentrated areas of disadvantage. Classic ghetto estates, whose problems are compounded by management and maintenance policies, they stand as monuments to a distortion of the vision of Wheatley and many other socialist pioneers of good quality council housing for all.

A ‘cuts’ estate of the thirties: Manor Road Buildings in the Canning Town CDP area; and more cuts to come.
By the end of the inter-war period then, the council house was no longer a symbol of working-class emancipation. The Right had found the means to contain the growth of socialised housing. They had established the conditions to make owner occupation as a form of tenure much more desirable, and council housing unattractive even to those in whose interests it was being provided. There were also now two sorts of council houses, the ‘respectable’ estates built in the 1920s, and the ‘unrespectable’ estates of the 1930s, which further helped to divide the working class. Ironically it was out of the problems raised by differential rents and rebate schemes that the one progressive step taken in council housing in the 1930s. The rent pooling legislation of 1936 which allowed the income and expenditure on all council houses to be consolidated into one housing revenue account was to become increasingly important after the War as a means of socialising the financial benefits of council housing.

### Houses Built in England and Wales, 1919-39

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<th>Total Private</th>
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<td>1935</td>
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### THE POST-WAR PERIOD 1954-1964

At a superficial level the post-war period repeats the pattern of the inter-war experience with general needs building being followed by a switch to slum clearance priorities. But there are essential differences to be noted. A Labour Government came into power immediately after the War, stayed in power longer than any previous Labour government and had to respond to a series of economic crises. When the Tories regained power in 1923 they continued for reasons of political expediency with the broad theme of Labour’s housing policy for several years. Then they cut back council housing and once again allowed free enterprise to expand the owner occupied sector. They also fought a lingering battle over rent control and the private landlord which although important politically is not considered in detail in this report.

Housing, as after the First World War, was a major and pressing social problem. There had been no building for six years and large-scale bomb devastation had taken place, particularly in urban industrial areas. The election of a majority Labour Government for the first time in 1945 was the reflection of a demand, if nothing else, for a more just and socially equitable society. Appropriately, it was Bevan, a key representative of left wing socialism, who, as Minister of Health, was given responsibility for the Labour Party’s major social programmes: the establishment of the National Health Service and the solution of the housing problem. Although Bevan’s links with the poorly housed were less direct than Wheatley’s his approach was deeply rooted in the same traditions and concerns, and his sympathy with Labour councils recently elected in many urban areas was strong.

‘To build good houses for poor people on a huge scale was something that had never been accomplished in modern industrialised societies’. Yet this was the task that Bevan and the government set for themselves. To achieve their objective they had to build council houses, because the housing programme had to be planned and therefore publicly controlled. To Bevan the speculative builder was by his very nature not a ‘plannable instrument’. Local authorities were. They could ensure that houses went to those in greatest need, and, even more essential for Bevan, they were locally and democratically controlled. To reach his stated objective therefore he had to enlist the support of the local authorities and release their energies for building houses.

Legislative changes in the immediate post-war period were minimal. Using the Wheatley principle Bevan established in 1946 a high level of flat-rate subsidy of £16 10s per house per year over sixty years from central government, with another £5 10s from the local rates. This was to encourage local authorities by making available the resources necessary for them to do the job he wanted. It was not just a question of subsidies, but also the availability through the Public Works Loan Board of loans for capital expenditure at interest rates which averaged around 2 1/2%. The Public Works Loan Board Act prohibited local authorities from borrowing from any other source without Treasury approval. Never before nor since have interest rates been so low and authorities had to borrow for the full period of the loan sanction. They were not allowed to borrow for shorter periods to get lower rates of interest.

The 1949 Housing Act gave local authorities wider responsibilities for all the housing needs in their area and removed the phrase ‘for the working classes’ in relation to council housing. This typified Bevan’s approach. To him council housing was for everyone. The 1930s had produced ‘castrated communities’ with speculative builders providing for one income group and local authorities for another; it was a ‘wholly evil thing from a civilised point of view’. His utopian vision, which was shared by Labour authorities such as West Ham and Coventry, was of the socially mixed estate built on garden city principles; it was ‘essential for the full life of the citizen to see the living tapestry of the mixed community’.

Bevan’s other insistence was on the quality of the houses themselves. By the end of the 1930s the average size of a three-bedroomed council house was 750sq.ft. The post-war Dudley Committee had proposed 900sq.ft. (plus 50sq.ft. for storage), somewhat above the recommendations of the 1944 official Ministry Manual. Bevan stuck to the Dudley Report, encouraged authorities to do better and by 1949 the average three-bedroomed house was 1,055sq.ft. The building of good-quality council houses was something he would not be diverted from despite Conservative attacks. To the views of those in his own party who thought that a cut in standards would enable more houses to be built, he replied that this would be a cruel thing to do to people who would live in and among those houses for many years. He concluded that ‘while we shall be judged for a year or two by the number of houses we build, we shall be judged in ten years time by the type of houses we build’.
1949 Building on Wheatley's foundations again: Aneurin Bevan opens Elstree Rural Council's 500th finished council house since the War

It is important to understand Bevan's approach in that he was perhaps the first and last Labour minister responsible for housing who wished and was given the opportunity to translate into action the ideals of the pioneers of the labour movement in the field of housing. But unfortunately Bevan was not judged on his ideals. He and the Labour Government were judged in a year or two by the number of houses and they were defeated in 1951 substantially on the basis of their housing record. Why, when they built over a million permanent houses in six years and passed the Coalition Government's inadequate estimate of 750,000 houses required to meet the housing shortage, was this so?

Bevan's emphasis was on controlled planning and equitable administration, with local authorities acting as the agents of central government in order to achieve the objectives of the housing programme. By using strict licensing and planning control at times of shortages of labour and building materials, and by controlling the activities of the private sector even more firmly, 1948 saw the public sector producing nearly 200,000 houses. With contributions from other sources, including the limited private sector, the total of all houses built was approaching 300,000 a year. Expansion or even just continuation at that time would have allowed Bevan and the government to achieve their targets. But 'the essential fact is that in the midst of its term of office, the government deliberately cut and henceforth confined the housing programme. Bevan's house building instrument was not allowed to achieve the results of which it was so buoyantly capable'.

The crunch had come in 1947, the year of crisis for the Labour Government. Demands from many quarters for cuts in public expenditure grew and the conditions attached to Marshall Aid turned the government's commitment and expenditure towards industrial redevelopment. Bevan's resistance mitigated the full effects of this pressure, but housing expenditure was cut and it became the main function of the Ministry to stop local authorities building too many houses. Housing completions declined consistently after 1948 and in Foot's view: 'the decision about housing taken in the autumn of 1947 emerges as one of the most politically fateful in the government's period of office'.

Further cuts in the housing programme were proposed in 1949 and successfully resisted by Bevan, but there is no doubt that Labour's lack of achievement in housing after
1948 contributed to the decline in their fortunes at the 1950 election. Bevan finally resigned in 1951 over health service charges but this was only a token of the many setbacks he had received in his campaign for a socialist housing and health service programme. It also marked an important turning point in the Labour Party's ideological commitment to council housing. The new approach was typified by Bevan’s successor, Dalton, who was prepared to make the cuts in standards that Bevan had always resisted. In so doing he prepared the way for Macmillan to follow after the Conservative election victory in the same year. Ironically and tragically therefore, in all the Project areas and the country as a whole, it is fair to say that the best council houses were built in the first five years after the Second World War when stringency was at its greatest. ‘Only after this most testing period was the great post-war opportunity lost to forbid the regrowth of working-class ghettos’.

The incoming Conservative Government of 1951 was committed to the target of 300,000 houses a year, a policy established at the party’s 1950 conference when Labour’s achievement was languishing at around 200,000 houses a year. The task of achieving the target was entrusted to Macmillan, who became Minister of Housing in a new ministerial set-up which included local government and planning, but no longer had anything to do with health. Although able to concentrate solely on housing to achieve his targets, he still had to use Bevan’s ‘plannable instruments’, the local authorities. The conditions were still not ripe for an immediate switch to a free enterprise system the Tory attack on working-class living standards had begun in earnest. When Macmillan assured the local authority position by further increasing the subsidy, still on a flat rate basis with a rate fund contribution, he was attacked for this by his own party and the Tory press. He himself showed greater tactical sense: ‘the houses must go up before the rents’.

And the houses did go up. In 1954 Macmillan exceeded his target of 300,000 houses and in both 1953 and 1954 council house building exceeded a quarter of a million, something that has not happened before the War or since. But more council house building was no longer his real aim; he now wanted to ‘reduce the swollen river of subsidised house building’ and increase ‘the trickle of private building’. By 1954 private house building was contributing almost 100,000 houses a year to the overall total. All licensing restrictions had been taken off building in 1954 and in 1952 Macmillan had also neatly dismantled the financial provisions of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, which had been an additional constraint holding back private enterprise building. Although Macmillan’s enterprise in the field of housing contributed substantially to the Tory electoral success in 1955 he had by then already moved from the Ministry of Housing.

His contribution to the long-term course of Tory housing policy was quite clear, however: from a peak of 257,000 in 1954 council house completions fell to 118,000 in 1961, while private housing climbed from less than 100,000 in 1954 to consistent totals of around 175,000 a year in the early sixties.

With the private sector once again firmly established by the mid 1950s, and total housing production booming beyond capacity it was inevitable that the local authority programmes would be cut and subsidies slashed to control public expenditure. Treasury panic had set in almost before Macmillan reached his record targets, but once again the Minister had prepared the ground for a shift in policy. In his 1953 White Paper Housing – the Next Step he now began to turn attention to the problems of older housing and slum clearance, linked to those old Tory favourites rent control and the privately rented sector. Under Macmillan’s successor Sandys, and then Brooke, this direction turned into legislation which attempted to undermine the public housing sector altogether.
Beginning with the Housing Repairs and Rents Act of 1954, which required local authorities to assess the number of unfit homes in their areas and put forward proposals for dealing with them, a series of legislative steps reduced general needs subsidies until they were totally abolished, except for one-bedroom dwellings, in 1956. The same year also saw the abolition of the compulsory rate fund contribution to the Housing Revenue Account, which followed the government’s decision in 1955 to force local authorities onto the open market for loans instead of allowing them access to the Public Works Loans Board at protected rates of interest. Such steps at a time when building costs and interest rates were beginning to rise put great pressure on local authority housing finances. Their only recourse was to the slum clearance subsidies, and these offered differential rates to encourage flats and high rise building, a factor which was to prove very significant in reducing council housing standards.

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<th>PWLB rates from 1945-55</th>
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<td><strong>PWLB rates from 1945-55</strong></td>
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<td>August 1945—31%</td>
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<td>June 1946—21%</td>
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<td>January 1948—3%</td>
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<td>November 1951—34%</td>
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<td>March 1952—43%</td>
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Of these changes, the forcing of local authorities onto the open market for loans was probably the most important step. Even though the restrictions requiring local authorities to borrow only from the PWLB were lifted between 1953 and 1955, nevertheless 70% of all local authority borrowing was still from the PWLB, despite the rising rate of interest they were being charged.

In October 1955 the Chancellor announced a change in the way the PWLB interest rate would operate. In future no loans would be granted by the Board until the local authority had been refused on the open market. Demand on the PWLB and the Exchequer was relieved, but in Parker’s words, in 1956, local authorities were ‘exposed to the full blast of increased interest rates and reduced Exchequer subsidies’.

Thus although Labour controlled councils might wish to go on building and certainly those in the old industrial areas wished to advance the slum clearance programme, they found it increasingly difficult to do so. All the CDP authorities had responded to the Macmillan housing drive, but when they were forced to change to slum clearance priorities their programmes faltered. Unable to build good houses without drastic increases in rents the shift of emphasis was marked, as in the thirties, by a further reduction in standards. Once again Labour controlled councils trying to represent the interests of the poorly housed found themselves building houses described as slums from the time they were built. Noble Street in Newcastle and Wood End in Coventry represent not untypical examples of estates built in this period. They reflect little credit on either the councils who commissioned them, central government which imposed such low standards or the contractors who built them. But more
important they were the logical and predictable outcome of the financial system of which council housing had become a part.

The Tory legislation was clearly intended to place more of the burden of housing costs on council tenants. Sandys had stated in 1955 the need for more realistic rents: 'there is no doubt that in general, council house rents are being subsidised to a greater extent than the financial circumstances of individual tenants require . . . the reduction of rate subsidy will tend to encourage local authorities to charge rents more in line with the present day value of money'. But many Labour controlled authorities including Batley, and the two London boroughs in this report resisted rent increases. Tory controlled Tynemouth did not. In general terms the proportion of housing revenue income derived from rents tended to rise in relation to Exchequer grants and rate fund contributions. The abolition of the compulsory rate fund contribution encouraged such moves, particularly in Tory controlled authorities such as Tynemouth where proportion of income from rents was raised by 16% in one year (1956-57). Newcastle took similar though less extreme steps and in Coventry the rent contribution had reached 70% by 1959-60. Batley and the two London boroughs kept a fairly high rate fund contribution to keep down the proportion of income derived from rents.

Below: from old slums to new. Noble Street, Newcastle, built in 1956-9 as a slum-clearance estate: a monument to the system of council house financing

Even less within the local authorities' control was the proportion of the housing revenue account they had to pay out on interest charges to cover loan repayments. With rising building costs and high interest rates the impact was particularly hard on those local authorities like Batley and Coventry who were catching up on previous low rates of building and were committed to the development of major slum clearance programmes. By the late fifties the proportion of expenditure on interest charges in most authorities was rarely less than 60%. During this period, when local authorities were exposed to a competitive market in capital borrowing, local authority treasurers had to become skilled manipulators in short-term borrowing in anticipation of longer-term falls in interest rates. The actions of the Tory Government ensured that 'local authorities had of necessity become part of the world of speculation'. The consequence was that pressure on local authorities to raise rents or reduce building began to mount.

By the late 1950s, while owner occupation boomed, further encouraged by the 100% local authority mortgages introduced in 1959, urban Labour councils were bewildered by national policies which completely disrupted their housing programmes and worsened conditions in their areas. The Labour Party in opposition criticised the Tories for bad administration. It was left to the
Labour Research Department to expose the class nature of the Tory cuts:

'It is clear that the main purpose of the cuts cannot be to save money, for the amount of money involved is not decisive. The main purpose is clearly stated to be a rise all round in the rents of council tenants . . . one of the immediate results will be a reduction in purchasing power all round for working-class people . . . The cuts in subsidies reinforced by obstacles to future local authority borrowing must be seen as part of a plan to reduce the total amount of local authority building . . . When housing is left to private enterprise only houses for the well to do and middle class get built to a reason­able standard . . . A decent standard of housing for the mass of the people and the elimination of the present shortage of accommodation depend on a continuation of a high rate of municipal subsidised building for many years to come'.

This might have stood as an epitaph to the Conservative approach to housing 'administration', but worse was to come. Dissatisfied by the response of many authorities to their desire to see rents increased, the Tories introduced further legislation to make this more certain. The 1961 Housing Act restored general needs subsidies, but by introducing a differential system based on the state of the local authorities' housing revenue accounts, authorities charging the highest rents were rewarded by a higher level of subsidy. The intentions set out in the 1961 White Paper, whilst recognising that it was the local authorities who would decide the balance of income between rent and rates, stated clearly that 'in determining the amount of subsidy which the Exchequer should pay, the government are entitled to assume that councils will pursue reasonable rent policies and the changes to be made in the subsidy arrangements will encourage them to do so'. The subsidy arrangements involved a test formula applied to the housing revenue account. This assumed a local authority to have a rent income that was twice the 1956 gross value of all the authority's houses. The net effect was that Labour authorities in those urban areas with the greatest housing need who charged 'low' rents received less subsidy than Conservative authorities in non-stress areas who charged high rents.

Although they successfully transformed the conventional ideology of housing provision, and the thirteen years of Tory government are important for just that fact, the Tories lost the election of 1964 largely because of housing issues. The scandals consequent on the effects of the 1957 Rent Act, particularly in London, and the abysmal building record of the early sixties gave the latter day Tory housing policies the stamp of failure. In 1963 the free-enterprise philosophy had backfired as the local authorities embarked increasingly on short-term borrowing at fluctuating interest rates. This was difficult for the government to control by normal methods and it raised serious implications for the balance of payments situation. The government had to resort to control through a 'quota' system to local authorities from the PWLB. But interest rates remained high and rent pooling by local authorities still couldn't keep pace with the fact that the declining share of Exchequer subsidies had to be balanced by increases in rents or rates.
1964-1974 POLICY IN CONFUSION

The policies pursued from 1964 to 1974 display a clear divergence from those described in the inter-war and post-war periods. Following the Labour Party's failure to support Bevan's policies through the crises of the late forties, they saw in opposition, the development of Tory policies which established owner occupation in an impregnable position and devalued the status of council housing. The success of these aspects of Tory policy together with wider ideological shifts within the labour movement pushed the Labour Party away from a high level of commitment to council housing toward a more 'balanced' approach to housing tenure. Labour therefore came to power in 1964 committed to a massive housing programme equally divided between the public and the private sectors. Council housing, continuing the Tory tradition, was now only for those in special need, and when hit by economic crises, the inevitable public spending cuts shifted priorities not, as before, toward slum clearance policies, but away from council housing altogether, towards the improvement of older private houses. The even more effective cuts in council building imposed by Tory local councils in 1968, prepared the way for a full scale onslaught on council housing by the 1970 Conservative Government, who at the same time were able to maintain support for the 'middle ground' policy of home improvement.

The ambitions of the incoming Labour Government were set out in the White Paper The Housing Programme 1965-70. And what ambitions they were. The target was to build half a million houses a year by 1970, with 50% in each of the two major sectors. Although this represented a vast increase in terms of construction, the programme was not backed by any coherent philosophy. Indeed the White Paper almost apologised for the necessity of building council houses at all. It stated that, 'once this country has overcome its huge problem of slumdorm and obsolescence and met the need of the great cities for homes to let at moderate rents, the programme of subsidised council housing should decrease. The expansion of the public programme now proposed is to meet exceptional needs. It is born partly of short-term necessity, partly of the conditions inherent in modern urban life. The expansion of building for owner occupation however is normal: it reflects a long-term social advance which should gradually pervade every region' ^16.

Wheatley and Bevan along with many other socialists might well have turned in their graves. Gone were the days of council housing for all; now council housing was not even normal, it was exceptional. Nothing indicated the shift in thinking in the Labour Party during the thirteen years of Tory government so clearly. But at least the commitment to build was carried through. By 1967 public housing completions exceeded 200,000 for the first time since 1955. In the private sector the record was even better and over 200,000 houses were built every year from 1964 to 1968. Overall totals exceeded 400,000 in both 1967 and 1968, the latter proving to be a record year that brought the government in sight of its half million target. Compared with the previous years of Conservative government, Labour’s policies, at least in terms of numbers were succeeding. They also improved protection for private tenants under the Rent Acts in 1967 and, in pursuit of their programme to promote owner occupation, introduced the option mortgage scheme to encourage low-income owner occupiers, and leasehold reform.

But council housing still dominated government policy, and it in turn was dominated by the need to build quickly in order to meet the exceptional needs of the poorly-housed slum dwellers of the industrial conurbations. To do this government planners developed programmes to maximise the use of industrialised system building, and high rise flats. Between 1945 and 1964 less than a third of local authority building was in the form of flats, but from 1964 to 1972 it was well over a half. Similarly, in 1964 industrialised building provided 21% of council housing whereas three years later it was 42% ^15, ^17.

The Ministry, itself advised by the National Building Agency, was committed by the mid sixties to industrial systems as the answer not only to quicker but, in the long run, cheaper building. It put local authorities under considerable pressure to build at least a proportion of their houses by systems methods, as did architects and councilors who wanted to project a modern image. But it was the building firms who benefited. The large construction companies who had tested and patented industrialised systems now sought large-scale continuous contracts to make their operations profitable. Those who offered 'package' deals ruthlessly exploited those local authorities most committed to large-scale clearance and redevelopment ^18.

Below, opposite and on the cover, Red Road flats, Glasgow: six thirty-storey blocks and two at twenty-four storeys, built in the early sixties
The effects proved disastrous. They provided not cheap but more expensive houses. High rise flats, particularly for families were unpopular and labelled as socially undesirable. In the words of one commentator, the white heat of the technological revolution was heat "which in a concrete walled flat has tended to congeal into grey dampness of fungus blotched walls". Of the Project authorities only Batley stood out against pressure to build high. The others all succumbed under a variety of very real pressures and once again it was Labour councils committed to the needs of the poorly housed and the clearance of slum housing who had to take responsibility for policies imposed upon them. The utopian vision of garden estates had now given way to vertical ghettoes. Their all too apparent shortcomings had already led to the beginning of the end when Canning Town's Ronan Point collapsed. Its effects reverberated round the local authorities, not least those who had to pay to strengthen similar blocks, and brought an end to the high rise boom.

May 1968: Ronan Point. Twenty-three storeys minus one side
Three people died and eighty were trapped
In other words, the legislation confirmed the role that finance capital now played in the provision of council housing. It did nothing to challenge that role or raise questions about why local authorities should pay such high rates of interest even when borrowing from the PWLB. The intolerable position in which local authorities were placed was recognised by the Prices and Incomes Board who stated in their report on Bank Charges in 1967 that 'It would make sense to force local authorities to borrow on their own account at commercially high interest rates if they were commercial institutions whose rate of capital spending were influenced by high interest rates. But this is not so'.

The new subsidies were also related to new standards for council houses based on the Parker Morris Report of 1961. But as Greenwood, the Minister, explained, 'the proposed new subsidy will be a percentage contribution towards the cost of each house. I therefore have to ensure that the cost of the house is kept at a reasonable level to avoid an open ended commitment of Exchequer monies'. This led to the introduction of the cost yardstick, a device which set cost limits beyond which subsidy would not be payable.

Compared to any previous subsidies the arrangements were extremely generous and for a short time supported a minor boom in local authority construction in all the Project areas. The effect however was shortlived for 'almost from the moment the Act was passed interest rates began to rise and so of course did the level of subsidy. It was only a matter of time before pressure from the Treasury to reduce the subsidy level or abandon the idea altogether would prevail'. But subsidies were not reduced, nor was the idea abandoned. Instead the government concentrated its resources into priority areas where the need for slum clearance and the relief of overcrowding was greatest, and judiciously used the cost yardstick as a means of either keeping down costs or preventing building altogether. Negative use of such a useful instrument led to reductions in standards as authorities skimped on the quality of materials and finishes to keep within the yardstick limit. Inevitably the results were costly. Southwark, for example, faced major repair bills totalling £10m on a number of estates, and in Batley complete central heating systems have had to be replaced on an estate built under the 1967 Act.

But the yardstick alone was not responsible for the falling numbers of local authority houses being built in the late sixties. This has to be seen in relation to two other facts. First, the 1968 economic crisis led to the abandonment of Labour's target of half a million houses a year and a shift of resources to the improvement rather than the clearance of older housing areas. Second, the local elections of 1967 and 1968 brought many urban councils under the control of Tories who cut council housing programmes often quite viciously. Although the overall effect was a near collapse in Labour's programme the effects of these two different threads must be disentangled.

As the council house building programme neared its £1m target in 1968 the government cut expenditure by £82m. Parker Morris standards, high rise flats, industrialised systems building and the 1967 subsidies were using up enormous resources in slum clearance and replacement programmes. The cheap slum clearance houses of the thirties and fifties had been replaced by expensive and gimmicky designs which proved even more unpopular and unsatisfactory. The 'social' evidence on the unsatisfactory nature of high rise flats, and the disruptiveness of large scale clearance coincided with a strand of policy thinking which had been developed in the mid sixties, that the improvement of older areas might prove more satisfactory than clearance.

So at a time when the government's housing programme was on the point of collapse the White Paper Old Houses Into New Homes brought together new evidence on housing conditions and the results of a number of local experiments in area and home improvement. The legislative result was the 1969 Housing Act which despite its 'social' rhetoric had one key advantage over other ways of improving housing conditions: it was cheaper. In the words of the White Paper, 'as a result of the very large increase in house building in the last few years, it is possible to plan for a shift in the emphasis of the housing effort... the balance of need between new house building and improvement is now changing... The government intend that within a total of public investment in housing at about the present level it has now reached, a greater share should go to the improvement of older houses'.

Essentially the 1969 Housing Act merely streamlined and updated legislation dating back to 1949 and revamped the idea of improvement areas contained in the 1964 Act.

December 1968: Squatters take over a west London house empty for eighteen months. With the standards and quantity of council housing cut, many other houses standing empty and thousands of people still without a home, squatting began to spread again in the late sixties.
Although the shift to improvement policy represented yet another move by the Labour Party away from council housing in the longer term, a more immediate effect was felt in those areas that had elected Tory councils. Of the CDP authorities only Southwark and Newham remained under Labour control, and their building rates remained high at a time when others were cutting back. In almost every case where the Tories took over, council house building programmes were cut. Our Project reports the doctrinaire measures taken by local Tory councils to favour private enterprise at the expense of tenant and worker. Prime building sites were sold to private developers (Coventry and Batley), council house building limited to the needs of the aged (Tynemouth, Coventry and Batley), council houses were sold to sitting tenants (Newcastle, Tynemouth and Coventry) and direct labour departments were run down (Newcastle and Coventry).

These examples illustrate the widespread and successful attack on council housing which took place in the late sixties under Tory local councils. In many ways they achieved the 'economies' that the Labour Government had been looking for and maintained the momentum of the 'long-term social advance' towards the 'normality' of a property-owning democracy. But that was not how it was viewed in other quarters. In areas where Labour control had been long established – for example in Coventry, Batley and to some extent Newcastle – the Tories set out to attack all aspects of public sector housing. The major impact was felt by tenants. They were hit by rent increases designed to keep down the rate fund contributions, and to encourage those who could afford it into owner occupation.

By 1970 there was little left in many areas of any pretence at a socialist housing policy. When the Tories regained power in 1970 they set out determined to ensure the national adoption of Conservative policies. Their attitude to council housing was not unknown. Changes in the rent structure of local authority housing had been outlined and on building, Peter Walker, Shadow Minister of Housing, said in 1969 'I hope that Conservative councils will . . . resist the temptation to go on building houses for all sorts of seemingly good purposes . . . The stock of 30% of houses in local authority houses is already too high with the level of wages . . . I hope that under the next Conservative Government there will be a shift in the other direction' 22.

There was! The new government didn’t have to do much to ensure cuts in local authority building programmes. Tory councils were already building little or nothing anyway and housing officials in many parts of the country were, as in some Project areas, reporting that the housing problem had been solved and that the waiting list was falling. Where authorities did want to build, the cost yardstick proved once again a more than useful device for ensuring that schemes would be delayed or not approved. The very presence of the yardstick procedure discouraged some authorities from even bothering to submit schemes. Thus while private building increased and remained constant at just below 200,000 houses a year in the early 1970s, local authority completions slumped from 180,000 in 1970 to 107,000 in 1973 – the lowest total since 1947. Further encouragement to councils to sell their houses helped to reduce the number of houses available for rent. Council house sales increased from 6,500 in 1970 to nearly 40,000 in 1973.

The shift to improvement policies: also an improvement for private builders' profits
But the Conservatives' major attack was again reserved for council rents and subsidies through the medium of the 1972 Housing Finance Act. The Act sought to turn council rents into 'fair' rents fixed on the same basis as those in the private unfurnished sector. Despite the nebulous concept of 'fair rent' the long-term intention was clear enough: to cut central government subsidies to the public sector by ensuring that local authority housing revenue accounts made a profit from their rents, and to shift the burden of subsidising the poorest tenants through a rebate scheme paid for out of the inflated rents of their fellow tenants. Most importantly, however, it took rent setting procedures totally outside elected democratic control and ignored the major advantage available to council tenants: the pooling of costs, rents and subsidies across the whole housing stock; a procedure which ensures that the financial benefits of council housing are 'socialised' to the advantage of the individual tenant and the community as a whole.

This total attack on the housing of the working-class people was resisted ineffectively, with one or two notable exceptions, by the labour movement as a whole. By 1972 both Coventry and Batley were back under Labour control, but neither these Labour councils nor Newham, Southwark and Paisley offered more than token resistance to this anti-working class piece of housing legislation. Such generally supine acquiescence to the Act led to the emergence of tenant activity against Labour councils in addition to traditional opposition to Conservative councils. As the Batley report emphasises 'this was the first time a Labour controlled Batley Council had been directly and publicly challenged by some of its tenants on a major issue of housing policy'. It had happened earlier in Newham after the collapse of Ronan Point (1968) but the Housing Finance Act can, in retrospect, be seen as the issue which confirmed that council tenants could no longer regard the Labour Party as being the automatic protector of working-class housing rights. The Tories won the struggle over the Housing Finance Act, and once more put council housing firmly in its place, but the longer term impact of their housing policies was not quite so clear cut. There was no massive shift of council tenants into owner occupation as had been predicted. Indeed the house price boom of 1970-73, fuelled by the building societies excessive release of funds, ensured that it became more rather than less difficult for the average income earner to buy into owner occupation. One recent study of the period concludes that 'the high level of house prices means that the proportion of the population who can afford to buy out of income a house which is in good condition and provided with what is generally regarded as acceptable standards of facilities is probably as low as at any period in Britain's history'. Declining investment in public housing, accompanied by continued clearance in many areas, also ensured that it was more difficult to rent.

The Tory answer was to use the 1969 Housing Act to stimulate the more rapid improvement of older houses, which with the provisions of 75% grants in the assisted areas from 1972 to 1974, they did very effectively. But the grants rarely went to those in greatest need, the private tenants. In London in particular, improvement grants were blatantly used for speculative purposes. Partly to overcome these problems and also to buy off pressure for privately rented housing to be taken into municipal ownership, the Conservatives turned to housing associations. New legislation was enthusiastically prepared, effectively updating the 1964 Housing Act and strengthening the role of the Housing Corporation.

In the Project authorities the response to the push towards improvement was very mixed. Batley and Tynemouth showed very little interest in private sector improvement and GIA. Although the general take up of improvement grants increased with the 75% legislation, the main emphasis in these authorities was on the improvement of inter-war council housing. Paisley, in common with many Scottish authorities, showed little interest in fostering the improvement of older tenement property and engaged in only piecemeal improvement of council houses. By contrast Newcastle vigorously pursued improvement in the private sector by use of a 'Revitalisation Agency', and the large-scale declaration of GIA. Coventry and Newham both took longer to be converted to area improvement, but in the former authority the general level of grant takeup was higher because of the larger proportion of owner occupiers.

In addition to improvement policies, the 1970 Conservative Government set great store by the development of housing associations. Essentially these were seen as an alternative to council housing both in the field of improvement (municipalisation) and new building. Derived from pre-First World War paternalism, housing associations have been promoted as a less bureaucratic alternative to council housing, and a means of widening choice in the rented sector. But they can be seen more realistically as a replacement for the private sector. Charging 'fair' rents, supposedly non-political and non-profit making, they allow the local agents of private capital, solicitors, estate agents, etc., to derive a return from a state-subsidised enterprise. In all these respects housing associations represent yet another political attack on council housing.

In as much as both the 1969 Housing Act and the 1974 Housing Act have been supported and implemented by both major political parties, it is clear that their enactments have established a new 'middle ground' of housing policy. But are the interests represented in this new consensus likely to solve the housing problem? And what about the present position of the Labour Party? Are their current policies likely to solve the housing crisis?

**CRISIS 1975-1976?**

When Labour returned to power in 1974 the crisis precipitated by Tory complacency was escalating rapidly. Waiting lists had risen dramatically in all the local authorities studied, and in addition overcrowding and homelessness indicated the absolute failure of Tory policies for those on low and middle incomes. Although many other factors were involved it was above all the run-down in house building in general from 1968, and council house building in particular from 1970, that was the major factor behind the present crisis. Council housing output in 1973 was the lowest since 1947.
It was not difficult then for a government committed to action on public housing to double the level of investment in new council building, to repeal the Housing Finance Act, to increase central exchequer subsidies and impose a rent freeze. But what happens in the longer term given the current economic situation? Estimates of public expenditure for the next five years indicate that capital investment in new housing in the best year will only be half of what it was in 1968-69. Use of the 1974 Housing Act has led not, as was anticipated, to large-scale improvement through municipalisation, but to cutbacks in improvement funds to local authorities under Section 105 and increased support for housing associations.

But it is no longer a question of simply spending more money - this in itself no longer guarantees that more or better houses council houses are built. Over the last three years the proportion of total public expenditure allocated to housing has increased from 5.3% to 9.4%; but while public expenditure and subsidies have increased, local authority capital investment and house building rates have fallen. Investment in new housing by local authorities fell from £1,982m in 1968-69 to £1,333m in 1974-75, and housing completions from 192,000 to 129,000 over the same period. In 1973 only 107,000 council houses were built, the lowest total since 1947. This represents a fall in local authority investment on new housing from 89% of housing public expenditure in 1968-69 to 50% in 1974-75.

By contrast, subsidies to council housing over the same period have risen dramatically: from £384.9m to £1,077m. Although rent rebates and allowances, increased land and building costs, and higher management and maintenance charges all contributed to this increase, by far the biggest factor in the rise in subsidies was the rise in interest rates. The PWLB interest rate for short-term loans rose from 8.9% in 1972 to 13.4% in 1974, and for long-term loans from 9.8% to 12.4%. In these circumstances, particularly when local authorities are re-financing old debts, it is not surprising that debt charges on housing loans increased from £449m in 1968-69 to £1,126m in 1974-75. Furthermore, public expenditure on housing is not confined to investment and subsidies for council housing. In 1974-75 30% of total public expenditure went into the private sector through local authority mortgages, improvement grants and mortgage tax relief.

So 'Whatever Happened to Council Housing?' First, from creditable and idealistic origins it has descended to a miserly output of often poorly designed and constructed homes for 'underprivileged' groups. The poorest sections of the population have become increasingly concentrated in public sector housing; and the proportion of households in the bottom three income groups (i.e. the poorest 30% of the population) has increased from 26.3% in 1963 to 41.1% in 1972. Second, most of the public subsidies and rents which fund council housing go not to adding to the housing stock or further improving conditions, but back to the money-lenders in the form of interest charges. How in such a situation do we re-establish the right of everyone to a decent home at a reasonable cost?

1975: Liverpool tenants mass meeting against enormous council rent increases. With what remains of the ideals of council housing under attack yet again, the issue rests where it began: real improvements in working-class housing have only ever been won by working-class action.
POLITICAL THEMES

Origins
We noted at the beginning of this account how the origins of British council housing lie not in liberal public health reform but in working-class political action notably the Glasgow struggles of 1915. But the unique events in Glasgow although critical should not be over-emphasised, and in more general terms it is possible to conclude that from the beginning of the twentieth century pressing demand by working people was more significant in effecting change than lobbying by social theorists. Once the breakthrough was made however the gains had to be consolidated. It became clear that despite the ‘Homes fit for Heroes’ slogan neither Tory nor Liberal administrations were able to accept the full consequences of the end of the private housing market and the initiation of state-subsidised council housing as the primary form of working-class housing. It took John Wheatley, a representative of the Clydeside working class to make that possible, and to demonstrate that council housing was a distinctive form of tenure, which was not just a part of sanitary policy.

Ideological Divergence
Although the vision of council housing for all was established in the 1920s then, it was not fully accepted as a principle that decent housing was the right of the whole working class; nor that this should be realised through a socialised form of provision that did not put profit into private hands. Council housing was a challenge to free market systems, a form of provision directly antagonistic to Tory interest. Their response was to contain the growth of council housing and to promote owner occupation as a more desirable free market form of housing tenure. The ‘property-owning democracy’ was developed as the alternative ideological vision to the socialist ‘council housing for all’.

Convinced that home ownership eroded socialist zeal and led to wider electoral support for the Conservative cause, the Tories sought to give as many people as possible a stake in it. The massive expansion of owner occupation in the 1930s and 1950s can therefore be seen as a direct response to the ‘threat’ of council housing; and such policies downgraded council housing to a subsidiary form of tenure for those unable to compete in the market. The Labour Party shifted its ground in response to this development and in turn contributed to the failure of the tenure form intended to serve the interests of its own supporters. In so doing, it has increasingly ignored one of the decisive advantages of council housing - pooled historic costs. As we have already pointed out, in 1936 local councils were permitted to consolidate the income and expenditure on all their houses into one ‘housing revenue account’. As the years have passed, local authorities’ housing stocks have increased and, most importantly, the loan costs of the older housing are now minimal in
relation to the total loan charge. On the other hand, housing built more recently has very high loan charges for reasons already outlined, but local authorities are able to spread most of this cost over all their tenants, with the addition of subsidies from the Exchequer and the rates. Thus although tenants of new houses are partly subsidised by those living in older ones, the end result for all tenants, however, is that rents are set at reasonable levels which reflect the pooled costs of housing as a whole to the local authority.

Contrast this with the financing of owner occupation where the price which an owner occupier pays for his accommodation reflects, not the cost of building that accommodation (which in the case of all but brand new houses is now irrelevant), but the price that property will command on the market and the specific interest and loan conditions of the time. Every incoming occupier is, in effect, paying for a new house, and if and when the capital gain (the main advantage to the individual) on such a house is realised, it is achieved at the expense of the next purchaser. The community is forced, by way of mortgage interest tax relief, to repeatedly and expensively subsidise a succession of occupiers of one private house. In the council sector, on the other hand, the community pays just once for the cost of building the house itself.

The rents of council houses do not, therefore, represent enormous subsidies paid to council tenants, but reflect this ability to pool the costs of council houses amongst all their tenants. The whole community benefits, and rents are still reasonable for their individual tenants. The private sector however encourages individual gain, at the expense of the community as a whole through a system of tax relief which is totally inequitable. Not only does the highest level of tax relief go to those with the highest incomes and the most expensive houses, but tax relief starts again every time an owner occupier moves. The decisive advantage of council housing, even in a capitalist economic system, is its potential for socialising capital gains to the benefit of both the individual tenant and the community as a whole.

Economy

Whilst the ideological distinctions drawn above have formed the basis for the struggle over working-class housing, other 'objective' factors have been used to undermine consistently the quality of the council housing being built. The need for cuts in public expenditure at times of economic crisis has repeatedly been used in this way. Under Conservative governments such cuts, often associated with policies to increase rents and further reduce subsidy levels, have used Treasury orthodoxy as a blatant excuse for attacking working-class housing standards.

Such cuts are necessary however because of the nature of council housing finance itself. This, although capable of socialising capital gains to the advantage of the tenant, is still dependent on finance capital and tied to heavy interest charges. In the early days of council housing the rents paid by working-class council tenants contained a very low element of interest payments to finance capital: the government protected their interests through the PWLB which enabled local authorities to borrow at interest rates of 2½%. But since the 1950s the local authorities have had to compete for loans on the open market. At the present time they raise over 60% of their loans on a short term basis at interest rates of between 14% and 16%. 70% of local authority revenue from housing now goes to pay interest rates on loans. Thus although council housing has failed to provide decent homes for the working class, it has succeeded in serving the interests of finance capital.

It is at times of economic crisis, when the country can no longer afford to underwrite the profits of finance capital through Exchequer subsidies to housing, that the pressure comes especially for cuts in public expenditure on housing. Labour governments, although less deeply opposed to the idea of council housing than the Conservatives, are in no better position to resist the demands that cuts be made. Indeed it is clear that over the years, in line with their general shift in ideology, Labour governments have become increasingly unable to resist such cuts. It makes no difference that these undermine the housing standards of those whose interests they were intended to serve. A real socialist commitment to decent council housing for all would have to deal with the institutions of finance capital in order to ensure that such situations do not arise.

Slum Clearance

One particularly insidious form in which the need for economy manifests itself is the move to define morestringently the purposes for which council housing is to be provided. 'General needs' council housing provision stems from a broad vision of the purposes to which such housing is to be put. In other words, the idea of council housing for all has usually been associated with the building of high quality houses. By comparison, slum clearance priorities, and the quality of housing associated with them, derive from a narrow sanitary view of the purposes for which council housing is intended. Such views, which date back to the nineteenth century Liberal reformers and their charitable associates, enable cuts to be made in the standards and quality of housing because it is being provided for those with no other choice.

Such policies were pursued in the 1930s, the late fifties and the mid sixties with disastrous results. The combination of cuts in public housing in general, and a shift to clearance priorities in particular, has further reinforced the view that council housing is a poor second best to owner occupation and intended solely for those unable or unwilling to compete in the market.

This should not be interpreted as an argument for not clearing slums. On the contrary we would argue that sufficient resources are needed to build good quality council houses both for general needs and for those displaced by clearance. By contrast, the Labour Party's shift towards middle ground policies with its promotion of owner occupation and new forms of tenure based on improvement rather than the clearance of inadequate housing are unlikely to provide the answer to the large-scale need for decent working-class housing.
Government Legislation and Local Authorities

Both the forces of economy and the emphasis on slum clearance at certain periods have usually been associated with increased control by central government over the policies and priorities of local authorities. Only under the Wheatley Act in the 1920s and briefly under Bevan in the forties were local authorities encouraged to pursue the provision of good quality housing with any vigour. Within a broad subsidy framework they had the freedom to set their own rents subject only to the satisfaction of the District Auditor that they were reasonable.

But outside those periods the trend has been to tighten control over local initiative. The cut-back in general needs subsidies in the thirties and fifties shifted policies towards slum clearance and the reduction of standards. Manipulation of subsidies encouraged the raising of rents under the 1961 Act, whilst the 1972 Housing Finance Act took away local authority control over rents altogether. Differential subsidies under the 1956 and 1961 Acts encouraged councils to build high rise flats, and industrial systems were heavily promoted by central government in the mid sixties. Perhaps the tightest control, however, has been the housing costs yardstick. This, although introduced in the specific context of the 1967 Housing Subsidies Act, has proved so useful to central government as a regulator of housing costs and output that it is still used in relation to the totally different subsidies systems now prevailing.

Apart from the general influence of central government in the control of the national economy such detailed controls have increased the power of ministry bureaucracies and reduced the scope for local initiatives. As in many other areas of social policy this has effectively turned local authorities into mere agents of central government, while allowing central government to protect itself from the direct political consequences of its actions at a local level.

Local authorities have been given little freedom and no finance to determine the balance of priorities within their areas on the basis of their understanding of local conditions. Apart from one or two examples of authorities who stood out against high rise flats or refused to increase rents as a means of cutting the rate subsidy, the general pattern has been for local authorities to follow the lines determined by central government. Local democratic accountability has little meaning in housing any longer and authorities find themselves exposed, as landlords, to pressure from tenants on issues over which they have little or no control. Particularly for Labour councils this raises very real dilemmas as to their purpose as representatives of working-class interests.

The Labour Party and the Future of Council Housing

In a very real sense this situation, at a time of growing crisis, bears greatly upon the state of housing politics both in our Project areas and in the country as a whole. It brings us back to our first theme and to the state of the current housing debate referred to at the beginning of this account.

The first national council housing programme came into being as the result of organised political action, and the creation of a situation where the Tory-Liberal establishment could no longer resist the demands that were being made. After a faltering start under the 1919 Act the breakthrough was consolidated and very real gains achieved by Wheatley who was intent upon ensuring that good municipal houses were built for all. Whilst in the 1930s local Labour parties were at the forefront in pressing for slum clearance, they were trapped by the poor quality of the replacement housing. After the War, Bevan identified this very problem and determined that in the spirit of Wheatley and other pioneers he would ensure that the council housing he provided would be of the highest quality and intended for everyone.

The shift in Labour Party ideology since the early fifties has brought a decline in commitment to socialist housing policies. The drift towards middle ground policies, greater central government control and the demands of finance capital have placed Labour controlled authorities in an increasingly invidious position.

Although more exposed to pressure from the poorly housed than central government, controlling Labour groups because of the lack of an organised mass political base within the community are more responsive to pressure from above than they are to pressure from below. Instead of acting as the representatives and advocates of their community on issues like housing which vitally affect them, local councillors are forced to act as apologists for a central government, particularly a Labour government, which is even more remote from the interests of particular localities.

Essentially this stems from a political weakness. Organised political pressure of the grass roots has been unable to force issues. It has failed to create situations where sufficient resources are made available on the right terms for local councils to build enough decent houses to solve, rather than contain their housing problems. Housing cannot be a-political or reduced to an administrative exercise. It is not too much politics that is the problem in housing, but too little. The creation of political conditions in which housing demands can be made and met is the most urgent and difficult task.

The first major problem is the presence of strong national pressure campaigns promoted through the media to show that council tenants are over-subsidised, that council housing is too expensive and that standards are too high. The acceptance of such arguments will lead inevitably to the building of unacceptably low-quality houses and further stratification of housing tenure on the basis of need and income. Poor quality council estates providing unattractive and alienating environments are then used as further evidence that council housing has failed.

At the present time there is no strong counter pressure to this politically constructed self-fulfilling prophecy. Supporters of council housing, unlike its opponents, are divided and lacking in political weight. Tenants associations are usually concerned with specific issues and their demands are made upon the landlord who is often a Labour controlled council. Labour councils find them-
selves defending their actions against the tenants and making marginal concessions to buy off the pressure. They are constrained by central government and are placed under a different sort of pressure from rate payers who are usually anti-council housing.

Although much of the strength of the Labour Party vote comes from council estates, local ward Labour parties are usually small and weak, with little effective representation of broad grass-roots opinion. They are electoral machines rather than political groupings, forced to defend the Labour group in control rather than mobilise and articulate the views of a broadly based membership. Trade unions are a major source of labour movement strength in the industrial sector but they are still predominantly concerned with industrial issues, despite increasing recognition of the need to defend the 'social wage'. Trades councils provide a more community-based forum for trade unionists in a particular area and are more likely to take a direct interest in housing and broader social problems. But their effectiveness may depend upon many other factors including their organisational strength and their ties back into the community.

These then are the main groupings which might be expected to organise together, not only in defence of council housing, but to actively promote its advantages as a form of housing tenure. Nationally and locally the labour movement is divided and in many areas weak in numerical strength. But one of its ideals is still the right of every movement to organise together, not only in defence of council housing, but to actively promote its advantages as a form of housing tenure. Nationally and locally the labour movement is divided and in many areas weak in numerical strength. But one of its ideals is still the right of every member of the community to a decent home at a reasonable rent, then we would argue that this can only be achieved by the provision of council housing. Sufficient resources to enable the ideal to become a reality must be a fundamental demand. It must be sustained by the labour movement both locally and nationally; and this is something which can only be done with a unified movement built on the basis of a regenerated housing politics, at the grass roots.

We put these propositions not because we think that council housing in its present form is perfect. It clearly is not. But major gains have been achieved by the working class in the field of housing and it is possible to defend and advance upon the gains already made, the greatest of which is municipal provision of housing at regulated standards. Local authority housing is not an outpost of socialism... It exists within a capitalist system... But it makes possible a rational and democratic system in which the allocation of housing services and housing costs is taken out of the market. At present the system is not yet democratic or rational... The struggle to advance beyond the first step must continue. Perhaps more important though, this first step must be defended against the forces which seek to undermine it, ideologically, politically and economically.27.

References

1. For a list of local CDP reports on housing see: The Coventry CDP Final Report, Parts I and II (March 1975), price 60p per part. Available from CDP Information and Intelligence Unit, Mary McDintosh, 5 Tavistock Place, London, WC1H 9SS.
2. Housing for the Poor, by Neil McIntosh (July 1975), price £1. Available from Southwark CDP, 38 Braganza Street, London, SE17.
4. Not in Permanent Accommodation, by Mike Clifton (June 1975). Available from Oldham CDP, Community Development Centre, 250 Waterloo Street, Oldham, OL4 1ES.
6. Who Owns Saltley? Available from Birmingham CDP, 186 St Saviour's Road, Saltley, B8 1HG.
TOTAL PUBLIC SECTOR HOUSING COMPLETIONS 1920-1975 IN GREAT BRITAIN
Note: 1920-1939 England and Wales only
The Project Areas
INTRODUCTION
A town of just over 40,000 population, the former Municipal Borough of Batley has since April 1974 been part of the extensive West Yorkshire Metropolitan District of Kirklees which has a total population of 369,000 from eleven formerly separate administrative areas. Batley along with its neighbours Dewsbury (50,000), Spenborough (40,000) and Heckmondwike (10,000), lies at the north-eastern periphery of the new Metropolitan District, the whole area being commonly known as the 'heavy woollen district'. This district of small textile towns forms an urban-industrial complex which is somewhat distinctive and separate from the other major population centre of the Metropolitan District, the city of Huddersfield (130,000) which now forms the administrative centre of the new authority.

The heavy woollen district has traditionally been one of the poorer areas of the West Yorkshire textile zone, a fact demonstrated most clearly in the low wages paid to the workers in the staple industry and the poor quality of the area's nineteenth century working-class housing. In more recent years the disadvantages the area carries as a result of its economic history have been compounded by the effects of structural decline in the woollen textile industries, the consequences of which have been felt most severely in Batley and Dewsbury. By contrast the Huddersfield and Spenborough areas have a more diversified economic base and do not face the same chronic problems of industrial decline.

The differences between the constituent areas of Kirklees are reflected however not only in the industrial structure, but in politics and in approaches to public policy in housing. Kirklees inherited from its eleven predecessors some 35,000 council houses, the majority from the four largest former housing authorities, Huddersfield (12,000), Dewsbury (7,000), Batley (5,000) and Spenborough (3,000). In Dewsbury and Batley where in the post-war period control of the local authorities was most commonly in the hands of the Labour Party council houses represent 42% and 33% respectively of the total housing stock. But in Huddersfield and Spenborough where the Labour Party was less well represented on the former councils, local authority houses constitute respectively 27% and 21% of the housing stock.

Perhaps more significant in identifying the relative commitment of the former authorities to council housing is the age structure of the council housing stock and the makeup of the housing revenue account. In Dewsbury and Huddersfield 36% and 42% of the council housing dates from between the Wars, whereas in Batley less than 20% was built during this period. In the post-war years Spenborough, Dewsbury and Huddersfield all reached peaks of council house construction during the housing boom of the 1950s whereas in Batley the boom occurred during the mid sixties. Nearly 40% of Batley's council housing was built after 1964 whilst in the other three areas the proportion built in this period stands in all cases at only just over 15%.

Examination of their housing revenue accounts (HRA) provides an even clearer indicator of the political values embodied in the housing policies of the former authorities. Huddersfield and Spenborough most faithfully reflected the impact of national policy directives from the mid fifties onwards with rents increasing from 65% of income to the HRA to 75% by 1961 and 80% by 1963. Their contribution from the rates to the HRA fell sharply, Spenborough's from 10% to zero in 1957, Huddersfield's from 10% in 1957 to 1% by 1963. The Labour controlled councils in Dewsbury and Batley by contrast were committed to low rent policies and continuing rate fund subsidies. Dewsbury with its large stock of pre-war houses stabilised rent to just over 70% of income throughout the sixties and rates to around 8%. Batley despite its heavy commitment to new building managed to keep rents at around 60% of income until the mid sixties whilst the rate fund contribution, particularly as Exchequer subsidies fell sharply from 1961, averaged around 10%.

Even from this brief and somewhat sketchy outline it is possible to see how the former Batley Council tried to maintain throughout the post-war period a traditional Labour approach to the provision and financing of council housing. This became increasingly difficult however as their commitment to council house building escalated in the 1960s. Given the framework of national council housing policy established by the Conservative Government in the mid fifties, and continued by Labour from 1964, this commitment was related exclusively to the requirements of a slum clearance programme – the classic sanitary approach to council housing provision.

Such an approach was not unjustifiable. In the mid fifties and early sixties it could be argued that privately rented working-class housing in Batley (46.4% of the housing stock in 1961) represented one of the most severe – albeit in national terms small and localized – concentrations of housing deprivation in the country. But, with the constraints built into the course of council housing policy at the national level, particularly in the last twenty years, it became all but impossible for a purely local administration to pursue distinctive policies, and to sustain a wider political vision of the functions of council housing.

NINETEENTH CENTURY RESIDENTIAL BUILDING
The recent development of council housing policy in Batley can only be understood in the context of some
appreciation of the process of the urban industrial development of the town and the local characteristics of its residential building in the nineteenth century. In the simplest terms Batley was created as an industrial town between the late 1840s and the mid 1870s, to serve the needs of a developing section of the 'low-end' of the woollen textile industry, the shoddy and mungo trade. What was built during this concentrated period of urban development when the population grew from less than 8,000 to over 25,000 was nothing more nor less than an industrial labour camp, built to exceedingly low standards of space, construction, sanitation and amenity.

The characteristic working-class house of that period was a one up one down back to back, with a cellar. The back to back was a dwelling type peculiar in its predominance to the West Riding woollen textile area, and its building continued in certain towns and cities of the country long after it was officially outlawed by legislation. Clusters of these early back to back houses were built around old industrial village nuclei, and what was to become the town centre of Batley, on the lower and more gently sloping parts of the valley. The layout of the back to back terraces was not planned and they were generally constructed in conformity with the existing field boundaries footpaths and patterns of ownership in concentrations of anything up to 200 houses per acre.

From the mid 1870s up to the turn of the century Batley grew more slowly than in the previous thirty years, and early 'bye-law' housing in Batley was consequently built to a fairly limited extent. That which was built was still constrained within the 'vernacular' of the back to back, particularly in the form of the 'four block', i.e. back to backs, split into free standing units of four. The result was that the classic two up two down through terrace house was hardly built in Batley, and it was not until around the turn of the century that Batley Co-Op pioneered the building of improved forms of working-class housing in the town. They built some 200 houses in the twenty years from 1890 to 1910.

However, any improvement in working-class housing standards was extremely limited, and the continuing prevalence of the back to back house was becoming the focus of political concern. The Local Government Board published a special report on back to back standards was extremely limited, and the continuing prevalence of the back to back house was becoming the focus of political concern. The Local Government Board published a special report on back to back housing in 1888, and in 1893 Batley's first Labour councillor Ben Turner was elected on an election address almost totally devoted to the evils of back to back housing:

'If elected I would, if the opportunity presented itself, oppose any more back to back houses being built . . . Scientists of the highest character are against back to back houses, and having lived in them I appreciate their wisdom and judgement. Property owners and men of means don't live in back to back houses nor at the rate of 200 houses to the acre as in some places in Batley, and there is no reason why the workers should be crowded into unhealthy dwellings. I would go in for artisans' dwellings on the most improved principle.'

Turner remained a member of Batley Council for nearly fifty years, and it is from this starting point that the development of public housing policy in Batley, and in particular the local Labour Party's approach to that policy, can be understood.

Also touched upon but not spelt out in Turner's address was the other significant feature of the physical development of Victorian Batley, the creation of the middle-class residential area of Upper Batley. This occupied the land above the valley's south-facing slopes where several of the town's major institutions were located, including the grammar school and hospital, and later a large part of it became the town's park and the mansion within it the museum. It was in this wooded semi-rural environment that the milocracy built their mansions, secluded themselves from the industrial squalor of the valley floor and unknowingly set the stage for later political battles over the location of council housing.

HOUSING IN BATLEY BETWEEN THE WARS

The inter-war years were singularly depressing ones for working-class housing in Batley. The inheritance of the nineteenth century was in 1919 a housing stock of some 9,000 houses of which, according to the Medical Officer of Health, 8,600 were 'for the working classes', 3,000 being back to backs 'of the worst type'. The combination of small, badly-constructed, insanitary and overcrowded back to back housing required drastic action by way of improvement, clearance and new building. Such action was not forthcoming. The dominant political elite of mill owners and small businessmen doggedly resisted efforts at improvement and it was only by a combination of central government coercion, local political pressure and what at times almost amounted to blackmail by the MOH, that the first faltering steps were taken to improve working-class housing in Batley.

Although the MOH advised in 1919 that 1,750 new houses were required to relieve overcrowding, the Council's Housing and Town Planning Committee resolved to build only 500 council houses, which to the MOH was 'a scheme of moderate proportions'. By the mid twenties the MOH had revised his estimate of houses required to 2,000, but in 1928 when 368 council houses had been built on the Wilton Estate under the successive housing acts of 1919, 1923 and 1924 there were no plans for any more. At the end of the 1920s when the number of applicants for council houses was down to two the MOH concluded that 'undoubtedly the rents are the cause of many persons living under conditions of overcrowding not applying for corporation houses'.

When Greenwood's Housing Act of 1930 introduced new legislation to deal with unfit housing it was unenthusiastically received by the members of Batley Council, but it gave the MOH an opportunity to begin to document and expose in detail the nature of working-class housing conditions in the town. He was not above using his annual report to demonstrate the indolence and inconsistency of his political masters. 'The trouble appears to arise through the lack of definition or recognition of what is a reasonable standard of housing applicable to the Borough . . . whilst officials base their definition upon general requirements laid down under . . . (the) . . . Housing
In the immediate post-war period the Labour Party became the largest single party on Batley Council and took most of the key committee chairmanships, including housing. But it was not until the early fifties that they achieved a strong overall majority, a position which they were to retain until 1967. During much of this period they held two-thirds of the seats on the Council and at times during the late fifties returned candidates unopposed in three out of five wards. In general terms Batley's post-war housing performance follows the national pattern, but with a significantly greater emphasis on slum clearance and replacement from the mid fifties onwards than on housing for general needs in the immediate post-war years.

In fact in the first ten years after the War Batley made comparatively slow progress in providing council housing. Over the whole period up to the end of 1955, only 1,000 council houses were built, along with just over 200 private houses. In 1945 the Medical Officer had estimated that the town's minimum requirement was for 2,000 houses, and throughout most of this period the housing waiting list varied between 1,500 and 2,000. Although the rate of house building both public and private increased steadily throughout the fifties, Batley can hardly be said to have shared in the 'Tories fifties 'housing boom'; it was 1960 before more than 200 council houses were built in one year, and 1963 before more than 100 private houses were built in a similar period.

The most significant influence on housing policy in Batley in the post-war period was the Conservative Government's shift in national housing policy in the mid fifties towards an increased emphasis on slum clearance. The surveys carried out in 1954 to provide the basis for this policy change revealed that Batley had the highest proportion - 48% - of back to back houses in the country and one-third of the housing stock - 4,796 out of 14,075 houses were classified as unfit. Coinciding with the shift towards overwhelming Labour dominance of the council chamber, the opportunity provided by central government was taken to make slum clearance and housing redevelopment the Labour Party's central policy commitment. Given the local party's traditional desire to rid the town of its sub-standard back to back housing and the private landlord, the escalation of this commitment in the subsequent fifteen years is hardly surprising.

The clearance programme began slowly in the late fifties but accelerated rapidly until by the mid sixties it averaged around 400 houses per annum with a peak of 600 in 1966. The first five year clearance programme envisaged the clearance of 600 houses between 1956 and 1960, starting in central Birstall in an area first scheduled for clearance in 1938 and moving on to central Batley and Batley Carr. This clearance target was easily met with 646 houses being demolished and replaced by 731 council houses over the same period.

For the second five year programme from 1961 to 1965 the clearance target was 800 houses, but with the personal encouragement of Leeds MP Sir Keith Joseph, the Minister of Housing, the commitment to clearance and rebuilding was increased to 400 houses a year between 1963 and 1967. This was even more ambitiously revised in 1964 when the Housing Committee stated their intention to clear all the remaining slums, amounting to nearly 3,000 houses, and to build a total of at least 4,000 houses both
public and private between 1964 and 1971. Significantly it was not until 1964 with the return of a Labour Government that the provision of new private housing for owner occupation was introduced explicitly as an element of local housing policy, pushing council housing more clearly into the role of slum clearance replacement with private housing providing a surplus for meeting more general needs.

Although purely in terms of numbers these ambitious programmes in the long run almost met their targets, there were considerable early difficulties in developing a building programme sufficient to match the rate of clearance. The acceleration of clearance in the early sixties meant that in the three years 1961-63, 706 houses were demolished, but house building stagnated providing a total of 319 council houses and 297 private. It was only between 1964 and 1968 that the local ambitions fostered by Sir Keith Joseph began to come to fruition, now under a Labour central government. In those five years 1,899 houses were cleared and 2,880 built, 1,771 by the local authority and 1,109 privately. It was those five years that did the most to change the structure of housing provision in Batley, and behind the simple numerical facts lay a more complex process of transformation in the planning, building and financing of housing.

Batley as a small and relatively poor local authority in terms of rateable value per head of population was constrained in trying to build up its housing programme by a lack of resources both financially and in terms of professional expertise. Until 1964 when the first Housing Manager was appointed, the Council’s guidance on housing policy was in the hands of the Borough Treasurer, who supervised housing management, the Medical Officer of Health and the Borough Engineer. The Medical Officer’s influence was clearly decisive in determining the scale and urgency of the slum clearance programme, but the bulk of the work on implementation of the overall housing programme was in the hands of the Borough Engineer who advised on and supervised all aspects of planning, design and building. A critical feature in the progress of Batley’s redevelopment programme was its second tier status as a planning authority to the West Riding County Council, whose zoning policies and attitudes to the suitability of land for housing, particularly in the Upper Batley area, detrimentally affected the scale and continuity of Batley’s building programme in the sixties.

Until that time Batley not only built slowly, but built cheaply and maintained a low rent policy, at times building the cheapest houses and having the lowest average rents in the country. These cheap houses, designed to the low space standards of the fifties, were built by a combination of local private tradesmen and the Corporation’s own direct works department, on contracts of usually less than fifty houses. The vast majority of houses (65%) built in the period up to 1964 were two- and three-bedroom family houses of standard designs devised by the Borough Engineer. As the rate of slum clearance increased however such methods proved inadequate to keep pace with the town’s house building requirements, and almost inevitably regional and national contractors became involved in larger and more expensive contracts. The first big contractors to become involved in housing in Batley were Wimpeys with their scheme for the redevelopment of Batley central area.

Encouraged by the Ministry of Housing to experiment with Wimpey’s ‘rationalized/traditional’ methods as a cheap and rapid way of carrying out redevelopment, Batley’s Housing Committee and the estate residents were not impressed. Some of the houses and flats were dumped within two years, and parts of the estate, particularly the deck access maisonettes, have been the subject of recurrent complaints and special repairs programmes ever since. Although other national contractors continued to be involved in the development of the housing programme, particularly on the extensive Fieldhead Estate, the Wimpey experiment was not repeated and the Housing Committee firmly resisted further advances from the Ministry and contractors alike to use more ‘advanced’ industrialised methods in building multi-storey flats.

Through a combination of adverse geological conditions in parts of the town and the Housing Committee chairman’s expressed desire ‘to build the sort of houses that people want to live in – not multi-storey flats’ Batley avoided the worst excesses of multi-storey housing in the sixties. But it is not without significance that despite this, 65% of all homes built after 1964 were in the form of flats and of those built to Parker Morris standards the proportion of flats was no less than 70%. Batley’s mid sixties housing landscape is dominated not by twenty-storey concrete towers, but squat three-to four storey walk ups and brick facings. Given the Housing Committee’s desire to build houses with gardens, why were they forced to build such a high proportion of flats?

It could be argued that the county’s strict zoning policy, and in particular their refusal to zone 100 acres of land at Upper Batley for housing, forced Batley to build at higher densities on the limited amount of land which was available. The Housing Committee first became interested in building at Upper Batley in the mid fifties, but they were refused planning permission by the County Council. The application was renewed in 1960 and despite appeals from the county to withdraw it, the application was pursued to a public inquiry which brought forward considerable resident opposition to the plan to build council houses on such a desirable open site close to the ‘residential’ area of Upper Batley. The appeal was dismissed and the Housing Committee had to be satisfied with obtaining planning permission in 1965 for twenty-five acres of land at Intake Lane adjacent to the Park, although a further planning application for 100 acres was refused and the site remained very firmly on the Housing Committee’s agenda.

In these circumstances the large peripheral site at Fieldhead became the main focus for council house building activity in the early and middle sixties despite its reported unpopularity with tenants because of its distance from the town centre. It was eventually expanded to over 750 houses, and was supplemented by a number of smaller estates at Howden Clough, Soothill and Carlinghow Field Hill of approximately 200-250 houses each. The largest proportion of homes built on these estates were walk up flats. However even had more land been available
would this have resulted in lower densities? Given the housing subsidies legislation introduced in 1961 the answer is likely to be no. The 1961 Act was a critical measure changing the pattern of housing subsidies, at a time of rising interest rates when Batley was about to enter upon its most significant period of clearance and building. The Act attempted through its subsidy arrangements to coerce housing authorities into introducing 'economic' rents related to gross value and encouraged them, again through subsidies, to build to higher densities.

The effect of the Act on housing finance in Batley was potentially disastrous, and Batley Council tried to resist its provisions. The leader of the Council stated that although 'the Minister believes in “economic” rents, Batley Council think of housing as a community service owned by the community . . . (it has) . . . built houses cheaply and its tenants pay some of the lowest rents in the country'. Despite rising interest rates since 1955, rents had been kept low with the aid of a continuing voluntary rate fund contribution to the housing revenue account. Throughout this period rents contributed around 60% of income to the housing revenue account, Exchequer subsidies just over 30% and rates around 10%. Although rents were increased in 1961 and again in 1963 an increasing rate fund subsidy was necessary to balance the sharp decline in Exchequer subsidy from over 30% of income in 1961 to 21% in 1966.

Council house completions slumped to eighty-six in 1963, partly as a result of these measures, but as the building programme accelerated again in the mid sixties, increased building costs and rising interest rates further exacerbated the local financial situation. Interest charges as a proportion of housing revenue account expenditure had increased steadily from 55% in 1955 to 64% in 1964, but rose even more sharply from then on to 75% in 1968. In such circumstances the only way to meet building targets and to attempt to keep down rents was to build a large proportion of the cheapest and most economic form of housing, one- and two-bedroom walk up flats.

The Labour Government’s Housing Subsidies Act of 1967 brought some hope of relief, but by then it was too late. Capital expenditure on housing in Batley reached a peak of £1 2m in 1967-68, following a year when the rate fund subsidy peaked at £50,000. The prospect of further capital expenditure accompanied by rent rises and increased subsidies from the rates exposed the Labour Party to local political pressure over its housing policies. Rising costs had begun to make council housing appear a less attractive alternative to cheap, if sub-standard, older housing, and to new private housing, which was also still comparatively inexpensive.

Although in the early sixties there had been all-party support for policies of rapid slum clearance and rebuilding – indeed the main criticism was lack of progress – in the council chamber opposition to the Labour Party and its council housing policies had grown throughout the sixties. A re-formed Liberal Party and the Independent Municipal Association supplemented increasing Conservative representation so that by 1967 Labour had lost its overall majority. In the following year as the national economic climate worsened local debate on council housing costs and the housing revenue account reached a crisis, and in line with the national swing, control of the Council was taken by the Conservative/Independent alliance ready to bring a rather different perspective to bear upon the town's housing policies.

1968-1972

As late as February 1968 the Housing Committee, still under a Labour chairman, approved a further building programme of 700 houses for the period 1968 to 1972, including 450 at Intake Lane, the site at Upper Batley which had been finally approved for development by the county planners. This programme it was anticipated would be sufficient to allow the slum clearance programme to be completed by the demolition of the remaining 1890s unfit houses over the same period. But even as this programme was being approved the impact of the heavy programme of recent building resulted in further immediate rent increases. A comprehensive review of the Council’s rent policy was set in hand, and a five year programme for the improvement of the inter-war housing stock was approved in principle. The stage was thus well set for the cuts in the building programme, changes in priorities, and the additional rent increases that took place when the Conservative/Independent alliance gained power.

In May 1968 the newly constituted Housing Committee met to review priorities, in particular the building programme and the plans for a council estate at Intake Lane. By October when a newly appointed Housing Manager reported on his review of the housing waiting list it was decided that only 100 houses out of the programme of 700 would be allowed to proceed. The plan for council housing at Intake Lane was to be abandoned and the land sold for private development, whilst several small clearance areas were to be held in reserve as potential sites for special old people’s housing schemes.

These actions by the Conservative/Independent alliance were perfectly understandable in ideological terms, and by the end of 1968 their general policy towards housing in Batley had taken shape. The cuts in the scale of the housing programme would immediately reduce capital expenditure and prevent further increases in the Corporation’s capital debt on housing which had more than doubled in four years from £4m in 1964 to £8 3m in 1968. In addition to general increases in rents and the proceeds from the sale of land this would help to begin to reduce the rate fund contribution to the housing revenue account, and allow expenditure to be diverted into other areas. The Conservatives attached considerable importance to the commercial redevelopment of the town centre, which the Labour Party they argued had ignored in favour of council housing, and this became their major policy commitment in succeeding years. Slum clearance however was to continue until the clearance programme had been completed in 1972, the Housing Manager having demonstrated that the displaced families could be accommodated by re-lets without any real expansion of the council housing stock. Despite bitter opposition from the remaining Labour councillors and their supporters on the Trades Council this was the policy that emerged, although in practice the results were not quite as anticipated.
The Intake Lane site, located on the lush south-facing slopes of Upper Batley overlooking the Park, already serviced with roads and drainage, seemed ripe for development. The potential of the Batley area for private development had been increasing over a number of years with its accessibility to the large cities and its relatively low prices. In the early sixties private house completions in Batley were less than 100 per annum, but by 1964 and 1965 they were up to around 350 per annum, although the numbers fell again after 1967 as land availability decreased. However, the land at Intake Lane which was laid out for a council estate, then put up for sale by the Tories, was not actually sold and developed privately until after Labour regained control. Ironically therefore, despite the ideological commitment, fewer private houses were built in Batley under the Conservative administration than under Labour.

Nor did reductions in the level of rate fund subsidy to the housing revenue account prove immediately possible. In fact despite cuts in capital expenditure and substantial rent increases the rates contribution was not reduced until 1971-72. Up to that time when the burden of interest rates began to fall slightly the proportion of rates contributing to the housing revenue account remained steady at around 8% of income, reaching a peak of £62,423 in 1970-71. But it was rents which continued to bear the brunt of rising costs and as a proportion of income to the housing revenue account they increased from under 70% in 1967-68 to over 77% in 1971-72.

Thus, by 1970-71 the average council house rent in Batley was £111.20 per annum, and in 1971-72 £118.12 per annum. These compared to average rents in Dewsbury for the same years of £90.50 and £95.69. Batley's 1970-71 rents were £2.40 per annum above the conurbation average and £12.40 per annum above the regional average, and in 1971-72 £4 per annum and £12 per annum above those respective averages. This is an authority which in the early sixties prided itself in having some of the lowest council house rents in the country. Not surprisingly in a low income area rent arrears as a proportion of the annual collectable rent doubled from 1·8% in 1967-68 to 3·4% in 1971-72. The busiest, if not the most powerful sub-committee of Housing, became therefore not the House Building Sub-Committee of earlier years, but the Rent Arrears Sub-Committee.

The rent increases of 1968 and 1969 were sufficiently large to stimulate the formation of tenants associations on the largest estates to protest against the increases. The most vociferous objections came from tenants on the inter-war estates who because of rent pooling had to bear their share of the cost of the new building programme by paying higher rents for relatively sub-standard housing. The one concession granted to the protestors was the rapid implementation of the programme approved in principle for the modernisation of all the Council's inter-war houses. Although the relative inadequacy of these houses had been recognised since the early sixties, their improvement had always been deferred by the Labour Party in favour of a high level of new construction.

The timing now conveniently coincided with the introduction of the 1969 Housing Act and inevitably Batley's response to this Act focussed almost entirely upon the needs of its own housing stock; all 913 pre-war council houses were modernised within three years. This approach reinforced the history of relative neglect of the town's non-slum private older housing areas which the 1969 Act was intended to reverse. Although giving mortgages to encourage owner occupation and standard grants for basic improvement, the advice of the Public Health Inspector was against the declaration of general improvement areas until the slum clearance programme was completed in 1972. It was not until the 75% grant provision was introduced in that year that there was any real encouragement to improve older houses in Batley up to the twelve-point standard.

Further reports from the Housing Manager and his fellow chief officers in July 1969 and January 1971 reaffirmed that no new building was required, except for the construction of a further limited number of old people's flatlets on small clearance sites. The report of January 1971 when the waiting list was less than 500, even went so far as to anticipate that the local authority would find difficulty in letting dwellings after 1972. The cuts in the building programme were justified so well as to create the myth that Batley's housing problem had been solved. In fact it was being recreated.

In the four years from 1969 to 1972 over 1,560 houses were cleared and only 211 council houses built. In the two years 1969 and 1970 alone clearance exceeded 1,000 houses, and the peak year for clearance, 651 houses in 1970, was followed by the completion of only eleven council houses in 1971. Even private building slumped to less than 100 houses a year during this time, only 319 being built over the four year period. Such a massive loss of housing could not be sustained without some reaction, but it was two-and-a-half years before the realities of the growing housing crisis began to emerge in mid 1973 to scotch the myth that the town's housing problems had been solved.

1972-1974

The Labour Party regained full control of Batley Council in 1972, having once again been the largest single party and held committee chairmanships in the previous year. Perhaps more importantly however they returned to power minus several of the major figures of previous years who had been the moving forces behind the housing redevelopment policy. Thus a period of political change also coincided with the imminent completion of the slum clearance programme, and with the introduction of the Housing Finance Act. The net result for housing policy and the Labour Party in Batley seems to have been almost total disorientation. The tendency was to continue with established policies and in particular to give priority to plans for the commercial redevelopment of the town centre.

As far as the Housing Finance Act was concerned this led to tenant action more vociferous than that generated by the rent increases of three years before. The tenants demanded of the Labour Council non-implementation
of the Act; a demand which raised a good deal of emotion and political steam, but one which the Council would not consider. The £1 rent increase was implemented in October in the face of what became a rather token rent strike. The significance of this lay however in the fact that it was the first time that a Labour controlled Batley Council had been directly and publically challenged by some of its tenants on a major issue of housing policy. In the longer term the issue provided the basis for tenant organisation which has continued to challenge the quality of the housing service provided by the local authority.

But on the immediate issue of rents there was not, as there had been for the Conservatives three years earlier, an easy way out, no concession that could be granted to offset the increases. Indeed, the consequences of what now appeared to be a hurriedly planned and poorly administered modernisation programme on the inter-war estates were beginning to fall into the Labour Party’s lap and compounded the problem of rent increases. The local political consequences of the implementation of the Housing Finance Act had to be lived with – and as elsewhere for Labour councils they were uncomfortable. The other consequences of the Act were of course high technical and administrative work loads for the housing and finance departments. These factors along with the ever growing ‘threat’ of local government reorganisation further inclined the Council to caution and towards the view that now was not the time for a major review of housing policy.

Although a general improvement area programme eventually began to take shape it was difficult to identify any consistency of direction in the policies adopted. By March 1974 five GIAs were in progress, in that public meetings had been held and residents committees formed, but only three had been formally declared. The five GIAs to which priority had been given contained 1,065 houses – 582 council and 483 private. The Public Health Inspector had identified a further nineteen potential GIAs containing 1,676 houses – 1,537 private and 139 council. None of these potential GIAs included the three 1930s estates most in need of environmental improvement, whilst one of the declared GIAs included forty-eight post-war council houses.

Most importantly however during most of the two years up to local government reorganisation the Housing Manager stood by his view that despite the continuation of slum clearance at around 200 houses a year the level of re-lets was still sufficient to meet the demand for rehousing. The waiting list, the main yardstick of housing need, which had almost reached 1,000 by the end of 1972, was still thought not to be growing fast enough to justify a review of building policy. In addition meeting the stringent cost yardstick on the limited number of old people’s flatlets that were proceeding was now proving so difficult as to reinforce the view that now was not the time to enter into further commitments for new building. Thus it was not until the middle of 1973 when the Housing Manager revealed recent larger than average increases in the waiting list and the problem of homeless families began to emerge that the growing housing crisis gained local political recognition.

But the first response was still cautious, to build a limited number of four-bedroom houses and several more old people’s sheltered housing schemes so as to reduce overcrowding and under occupation in two- and three-bedroom houses. Eventually, following a further report from the Housing Manager, it was decided to build 100 family houses on the site of the post-war pre-fabs at Healey which had been cleared in 1971. Although an estate layout and house plans were produced rapidly by consultant architects and approved by the Housing Committee no further progress was made before April 1974 and the commitment had to be passed on to the new authority.

Effectively therefore in the two years up to local government reorganisation nothing was done by the Labour Party either to alter the policies of the previous administration or to more generally redefine the purposes of council housing provision in terms other than the essentially ‘sanitary’ approach of the previous twenty years. Consequently the housing situation inherited by Kirklees, the new local authority, was nothing short of disastrous, a situation which was replicated to a greater or lesser degree in all the other former authorities.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION AND THE FUTURE

At the time of local government reorganisation house building activity throughout the new authority’s area was at a low level and the growing waiting list stood at over 8,000. In 1973 only 247 council houses and 1,033 private houses had been built in Kirklees whilst 688 had been demolished. In the five years up to the end of 1973 the total of 2,559 council houses built compared to a demolition total of 5,900, and a private house building total of 6,424. The gains and losses in this period were however spread unevenly throughout different parts of the area.

All four of the largest former authorities sustained losses in their housing stock during this time though none on the same scale as Batley. The balance of slum clearance against council house building, in the five years up to the end of 1973, had meant losses of 143 houses in Huddersfield, 421 in Spenborough, and 956 in Dewsbury, whilst in Batley the loss was 1,522. In Spenborough and Huddersfield private building was sufficient to create net additions to the housing stock over that period of 729 and 1,521 houses, but in Dewsbury and Batley even taking private building into account the losses were of the order of 559 and 1,097 houses.

The first elections for the new authority provided the Labour Party with a substantial overall majority, and significantly the former chairmen of the Dewsbury and Batley Housing Committees were made chairman and vice-chairman respectively of the Kirklees Housing Committee. The Committee’s response to the inherited situation was to establish a target and budget for the building of 1,000 council houses a year for the next five to six years. This policy commitment does not seem to have been based either upon any thorough going or far
reaching assessment of the housing requirements of the new authority or upon a wider political view of the need for a sustained large scale provision of new council housing. It is essentially a pragmatic view of what is achievable in the present economic circumstances, but given an original waiting list of over 8,000 which now exceeds 11,000 and a projected clearance programme averaging 500 a year, it now looks a very modest target. Indeed the local authority's own planning department has recently put forward the view that 1,000 council houses a year is the minimum required merely for the replacement of houses lost in recent years and for future slum clearance, whilst 2,000 council houses a year would be needed to 'keep pace with' the overall problem of housing need.

Financially however new council house building represents by far the largest sector of capital expenditure proposed by the Kirklees Council at approximately £10m per annum. This originally represented around 60% of housing revenue account expenditure and over 40% of all housing expenditure. The next largest original commitment at 20% of all housing expenditure, was to the modernisation of existing council houses.

It is this part of the housing capital programmes however which has been the subject of central government's most recent cuts. The authority's original request for over £4m has been cut back to an allowable expenditure of £1.8m, the main effect of which will be to cut the scale of the commitment to the improvement of inter-war council houses and to reduce the standard of improvement in those which are allowed to proceed. The major impact of this will be felt in Dewsbury and Huddersfield where there are respectively two-and-a-half thousand and five thousand pre-war council houses. In Dewsbury less than 20% have been modernised and in Huddersfield less than 10%. Surprising as it may seem the largest single item of expenditure in the improvement programme is for the replacement of solid fuel central heating systems in 487 predominantly post-1964 houses in Batley, the shortcomings of which have been the contentious subject of tenant action for over three years.

Inevitably therefore further strain will be placed upon routine repairs and maintenance expenditure, which is itself already the subject of restraint and creating difficulties in some of the early post-war estates. More recent cuts in local authority mortgage loans, which in Kirklees will bring this year's expenditure to an almost immediate halt, will in turn add further families to the local authority waiting list.

Although no cuts have yet been made in the new building programme one must return to the question of whether the projected programme is likely to be sufficient either overall or within the individual areas of Kirklees. In Batley for example no new firm commitments for council house building have emerged beyond what was in the pipeline in March 1974. The inherited programme of 150 old people's flatlets is now complete, but construction of the additional 144 family houses on which planning work began in mid 1973 has only just started. It seems unlikely therefore that the houses required to meet Batley's urgent housing needs of three years ago will be completed until towards the end of 1976.

The Kirklees Labour group is apparently committed at least in principle to a sustained if, by the yardstick of its real requirements, limited programme of council house building. Very little attention has been paid by comparison to the provisions of the 1974 Housing Act, either to municipalisation or to improvement in the private sector. But politically, following the most recent elections, Kirklees is now evenly balanced with Labour holding power on the casting vote of the Mayor. It seems almost inevitable that Labour will lose control next May. Given this and the climate of opinion prevailing nationally towards council housing the future prospects for working-class housing in Kirklees do not, to say the least, look very bright. Only a total transformation in the level of political commitment to council housing both nationally and locally can now hope to prevent a further escalation of the housing crisis.

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A second important feature of Coventry has been the drive for reconstruction accepted by the Labour Council after the 1940 bombing. This has led to a concentration on big capital projects and big splashes of municipal enterprise which have occurred largely in the city centre. The key instrument in this policy has been the Architecture and Planning Department which was set up by the Labour Party soon after it first took control of the city in 1937. The 'good' relationship which developed between this department and the Labour Council gave it a 'hegemonic' position in the post-war council hierarchy long before this tended to occur in other authorities.

The Labour Party lost control of the City Council between 1967 and 1972, and during this period Corporate Planning and Management was introduced, though with the agreement of both parties. Much importance has been given to the role of corporate management in Coventry, but it is probably more realistic to regard it as a natural progression from techniques used previously, and one which has not been notably successful from a technical point of view.

The Coventry CDP has now reached the end of its five year period, though various aspects of its work are continuing in different ways. The Project was located in Hillfields, a ribbon-weaving settlement which developed
strongly in the nineteenth century and was, until the interwar period, an area of lower middle-class and artisan housing. The community up to that period included watch, bicycle and motor vehicle skilled workers. The area was considerably damaged in the World War II bombing, but it still seems to have been a tightly-knit working-class community. After the War, however, due to a combination of the bombing and blight caused by the slow and piecemeal implementation of comprehensive redevelopment, Hillfields became to some extent a ‘zone of transition’, and it has been labelled as a twilight area, with a reputation for prostitution, vandalism etc. since the late 1950s at least.

In 1975 the physical appearance of the area is fairly striking. It is a chaotic mixture of cleared sites, partial redevelopment in the form of high rise and slab blocks, low rise estates (including a new private enterprise estate sponsored by the former Conservative Council), older redevelopment, Hillfields became to some extent a ‘zone of transition’, and it has been labelled as a twilight area, with a reputation for prostitution, vandalism etc. since the late 1950s at least.

In 1901 the Coventry Housing Reform Council laid two resolutions before the City Council drawing its attention to the need for an improvement in living conditions and lack of sanitation in the city. It was five years after this, however, that George Poole finally carried a motion in the Council pledging it to take some action to provide houses for the working classes. Little resulted from all this, despite a report drawn up by a Special Committee of the Council in May 1899 recommending that ‘as soon as the Council becomes possessed of a suitable plot of land at a reasonable cost an experiment be made by erecting dwellings of from two to three rooms to be let at rents of about 2/6d and 3/6d a week under regulations to secure their proper and legitimate use’ (Richardson 1972).

In 1901 the Coventry Housing Reform Council laid two resolutions before the City Council drawing its attention to the need for an improvement in living conditions and unsuccessfully urging an official inquiry into the extent of overcrowding and lack of sanitation in the city. It was five years after this, however, that George Poole finally carried a motion in the Council pledging it to definite action, and only in 1907 that the Council put aside its fear of increased rates sufficiently to agree to the building of twenty-two tenements in Short Street and forty-eight houses in Narrow Lane (Kingfield Road). In an attempt to justify this rash move an editorial in the Coventry Herald emphasised that the Committee ‘believe that there will be no charge on the rates’. The latter was an abiding theme up to 1945, even for the Labour Council. The two 1907 estates were very ‘successful’ and within a few years the Kingfield Road estate had 183 dwellings.

As the First World War brought more and more people crowding into Coventry for war work, central government was forced to step in to help finance and build row upon row of cottages and hostels near the new factories to the north of the city. These included 609 dwellings at Stoke Heath and 198 at Stoke Estates, bringing the total number of council dwellings built in the city under the 1890 Act to over 1,000 in the twelve years from 1907 to 1919.

The need for ‘Homes fit for Heroes’ was as great in Coventry as anywhere else after the Great War: Coventry’s industrial militancy is said to have reached its all-time peak on May Day 1920 with a total general strike in the city and a large political rally. 715 houses were built in the city under the short-lived Addison Act; a further 300 were built in the 1920s under the Chamberlain Act. In 1924 over 138 acres of land were set aside for housing at Radford, and before the beginning of the Second World War nearly 2,500 terraced houses had been built on the estate. By the end of March 1926 the Corporation owned over 2,000 houses, had guaranteed over £10,000 to building societies on behalf of people buying their own homes and had subsidised nearly 700 houses built by private builders. 1,700 dwellings were built under the Wheatley Act.

By the end of the 1920s, despite all these achievements, there were still about 5,000 people on the waiting list. The MOH was still complaining about the influx of munitions workers which had so aggravated the housing problem in the city since 1915. In 1929 he commented: ‘Council houses are allocated to “suitable” tenants. It is in the interpretation of the word “suitable” that the public health worker and the housing administrator do not see eye to eye. By the former, the word is applied to families who urgently need re-housing because their present environment is prejudicial to health. By the housing administrator, the term “suitable” is applied to those families seeking council dwellings who can well and regularly pay the rent demanded therefor. These two views are irreconcilable . . .’ Nothing changes!

The 1930 Slum Clearance Housing Act only helped those who happened to live in clearance areas. To some extent it aggravated the housing shortage. Coventry by this time had many slums and in 1930 announced plans to demolish 225 houses; after the 1933 Circular it announced further plans to clear another 938 unfit dwellings. Under the 1930 Act 1,200 slum-clearance rehousing dwellings were put up indicating that the programme was fulfilled. ‘Slum clearance’ estates were built in various places around the city notably Stoke Aldermoor, Canley, Bell Green and Radford. By the beginning of the Second World War the Corporation owned over 6,000 dwellings.

In the early 1930s the motor industry began to ‘take off’ and the influx of population looking for jobs began again, but it was the private sector which was in a position to respond to the demand for housing: between 1933 and 1936 private builders and building societies made great efforts to provide workers with houses for sale on easy terms. In 1936, 3,841 houses were completed in the city
- the all-time record for annual completions in Coventry. In the late 1930s, however, manufacturers who had workers to accommodate felt that this was not enough. They told the Housing Committee that it was essential the Council should provide still more houses for letting. As so often in national and local politics, it was the Labour Party which offered to come to capital’s rescue by advocating a large council estate for letting to be built at Canley: this may not be unconnected with the coming to power of the Labour Party on the City Council in November 1937. The Canley site was conveniently placed beside the new factories of Coventry Gauge & Tool, Wickman’s and Standard Motors. Unfortunately the scheme was unfinished because of the War and was only completed in the Bevan era. Some parts of the Canley estate are the best houses materially and environmentally that have been built by the Council, reflecting the quality of that second period.

It is interesting that a subsidy from the rates was absolutely out of the question even for the Labour Council before 1945. When Labour came to power in 1937 with what George Hodgkinson (the Labour leader) called his ‘ten point plan for a Socialist City’, housing was not amongst the ten points and it was even emphasised in that plan that housing would be financed from government subsidies and rents alone. The Council built over 800 ‘cost-rent’ unsubsidised dwellings under the Housing Acts of 1925 and 1935.

THE POST-WAR PERIOD

The Local Authority and Housing

To begin an account of post-war housing developments in Coventry, we must remember some of the basic contradictions in the structures involved; the local authority has two factions – the officers and the members. Outside the local authority, there are two structures which exert crucial influence on the local authority’s intervention – the private markets (particularly the labour, building materials and financial markets) and the state. The members and the officers are continually struggling with these outside constraints. In Coventry the members who believed in the ideals of municipal socialism were well aware of the reality of the situation as it affected housing. In June 1945 the Housing Committee heard a report by the City Engineer and City Architect which estimated that 20,000 dwellings were required of which only half would be provided by the Corporation.

This raises two important points. Firstly it is clear that during this period the demand for housing in the city was by no means constant so that the political pressures on the Housing Committee varied as did the demand for private enterprise housing. Housing demand is obviously closely related to labour demand; predictions of housing demand have largely been based upon demographic data and the state of the waiting list – two very crude indices. Until we have a clearer picture of changes in labour demand, the waiting list provides as good a guide as any to the immediate housing demand, but we obviously need a more thorough examination of the ideologies behind, and the structural nature of, the waiting list. It is interesting to note that in June 1972 a council document on housing predicted that ‘... the waiting list will fall slowly to around 3,750 at 1976 and 2,440 at 1981’ – figures so wide of the mark perhaps, that they indicate well some of the difficulties.

The second important point is that we have concentrated here on the provision of council housing. However, the most striking trend has been the decline of privately rented accommodation in the city and the rise of owner occupation, two trends which have continued unabated since the turn of the century. In June 1972, 61% of the stock was owner occupied (8% above the national average) 15% privately rented (below the national average) and 24% rented from the Council (below the national average). Private enterprise produced a record number of dwellings in 1955 at 1,898 and since then has provided houses at the remarkably constant rate of about a thousand a year. It has apparently been largely impervious to outside influences until the recent effects of rising interest rates. The national boom in private enterprise building of the late fifties and sixties manifested itself in middle-class, suburban areas of which Coventry boasts very few, although Cannon Park (promoted by the Tory Council in the late sixties) is a fine example. On the other hand, considerable private estates were occupied by ‘affluent’ car workers whose class status is difficult to define.

It will become obvious in the following history of post-war housing developments what the constraints were that the Housing Committee was working under and also at what points there was perhaps a failure of nerve on the part of municipal socialists. In particular the continual crisis of the post-war economy has exerted great and increasing pressures on housing finance, the building industry and the central state. The state has pursued different housing policies at different periods not just because of economic constraints but also because of political ideology and the ebb and flow of the ideologies concerning poverty, affluence and ‘homelessness’. This is particularly true of Coventry where the picture of a boom town of affluent workers and triumphant municipal socialism has obscured the material reality of daily life enjoyed by many of the inhabitants. Five other factors at the local level have also been important in constraining housing provision:

1. The very large waiting list at the end of the War due to the war damage and the large number of jobs available.
2. The extreme shortage of building labour in the city, especially after the War, due to the unrestrained competition from industry for labour power, and the inertia of local firms in seeking to provide large numbers of houses for the Council.
3. The housing aspects of the city’s development plan and the planners’ apparent inability to predict future labour (and hence housing) demand. It is curious that the national economic crises affected both employment and housing finance adversely in general, but in Coventry only housing finance has been affected while the employment situation has remained relatively healthy. The recurrent situation until recently in Coventry has been ‘plenty of jobs and no houses’ – the reverse of the situation in the North East or Northern Ireland.
4. The apparent political impossibility of increasing the rate fund contribution to the Housing Revenue Account, due no doubt to the large number of owner occupiers. This is a great indictment of municipal socialism; the contribution from the rates to the Housing Revenue Account has never risen above 10% of the total income since 1957-58 – this is consistently well below the national average.

5. Housing has never really been the top priority of the Corporation since the War; the officers at least have obviously concentrated their attention on the rebuilding of the city centre. This is not to say that housing was not important but that it has always been thought of purely in terms of numbers of units even after the immediate post-war pressure had been dealt with. Physical planning of housing estates particularly in the 1950s has taken second place to the physical planning of the city centre and the ring road, and later perhaps to theoretical productions such as Corporate Planning Survey Report documents and the Structure Plan.

An attempt will be made to mention all these constraints at the appropriate time in the following analysis but they must be borne in mind throughout. The post-war period is divided into four phases for the purposes of the analysis.

1. 1945-49

Between the end of the War and October 1947 only 1,000 prefabs and 147 permanent houses were built in Coventry. There were about 250 squatters on military sites and about 400 in hostels and some people were apparently reduced to living in hollows in the ground. The squatting was made semi-official in 1947 when the Housing Manager got fuel rations and further military sites for the squatters in exchange for the eviction of ‘undesirable’ squatters and proper organising committees amongst the ‘desirables’.

In this period the Labour Government’s efforts to produce large numbers of good working-class homes founded on the rocks of non-cooperation from the monopolies in the building materials industry, a shortage of materials and labour, and, above all, the financial crisis of 1947. The bankers of Wall Street offered Marshall Aid only if the extravagant Labour welfare programme was cut; investment had to be directed towards industry and the effects of this were obvious in the cutbacks on the licenses given to Coventry from 1947 to 1949. Meanwhile the waiting list was over 14,000 and it was becoming obvious that after the immediate financial crisis a massive building programme would be required if the supply of labour to the city’s industries was to be maintained; an obvious contradiction was, however, the acute shortage of building labour in the city due partly to the competition for labour from the engineering industry. There also appears to have been a political struggle going on between local builders and the Labour Council. In April 1947 the Coventry and District Association of Building Trade Employers (C & DABTE) sent a deputation to the Housing Committee suggesting that ‘... of the large number of people desiring accommodation in Coventry, the larger proportion would prefer to purchase a house and that it would materially assist the housing situation if builders were granted licences to erect houses for sale’. The Council did in fact allocate as many licenses as they were statutorily allowed to private enterprise (one in four), so they more or less acceded to this request. The C & DABTE also said that ‘... of the large number of registered master builders, a substantial proportion are not adaptable to the building of houses by contract whose specifications etc. have to be followed, but that most of them can build good houses of their own design and in the manner to which they have been accustomed’. In other words local small builders were not very keen to involve themselves in the Council’s attempts to provide state housing for those who could not afford owner occupation. Those firms who were prepared to work under contract for the Council were rewarded with a steady stream of contracts in the post-war period distributed through the C & DABTE. Some privately built houses were offered for sale to the Council at this time and they were turned down because the standards of construction are said to have been appalling and below statutory council house standards.

As early as November 1946 the Council had decided that ‘neighbourhood units’ of a population not exceeding 10,000 would be required to meet the housing shortage. The idea of large neighbourhood units emerged from the planning ideas of the thirties, large-scale zoning of land usage, and the garden city idea of residential development. The land on the outskirts of the city zoned residential was already largely in Corporation ownership, consisting as it did of farming land bought in fairly large plots. The social planning of communities of 10,000 people was not so well advanced, however, since the Housing Committee resolved that for such communities ‘... three licensed premises should be provided namely (a) a fairly large public house on the outskirts of the neighbourhood and (b) in the centre of the community a fairly large hotel at which residential accommodation is provided and (c) a small “family” type public house.’ These ideals of municipal socialism, which were energetically shared by the Minister, Aneurin Bevan, were nevertheless quickly swept aside in the realities of financial crisis and the Macmillan housing drive.

As the 1947 crisis abated, by January 1949 the City Architect was able to present detailed plans for the next two years with over 1,500 housing starts in each year. Included in this were 100 houses at Hipswell Highway to be built by George Wimpey by their non-traditional ‘no fines’ method. These concrete houses of rather depressing appearance could be built at tremendous pace at reasonable cost and the Housing Committee immediately saw that Wimpey could solve their enormous problem in a way which local capital, for whatever reasons, was unable to do. Wimpey was, and still is, a large corporate engineering firm; it could not only build houses, it also put in the roads and sewers – it could fulfil almost all the tasks of constructing a large estate. Most important, it had its own labour force which appears to have been very efficiently organised by a large and infamous Scot, Dan Jardine (whose name was commemorated in Jardine Crescent, Tile Hill). Wimpey of course saw the enormous profits to be made out of local authority contracts by using efficient methods in a notoriously unrationised industry which was still largely the haven of small capital. It was eager to meet the needs of its clients while small capitalists have always regarded local
authority work as something which need not be taken very seriously; indeed the Council had continual trouble with the small builders who failed on contracts, and some of these were taken over by Wimpey.

2. 1949-56

On 7 July 1950 the City Architect announced a scheme for 1,440 dwellings with fifty-seven shops at Tile Hill North. Initially, consideration was given to the erection of this 'neighbourhood unit' by direct labour but crucially the Housing Committee decided that this was beyond the limits of Coventry's municipal socialism; friction between the City Engineer, Ford, and the City Architect, Gibson, may have contributed to this failure. As it was several small developments were carried out by direct labour but the big business was left to private contractors. It was inevitable that Wimpey would land this contract, by far the largest contemplated up to that time, and there was no problem in getting the Ministry to approve the loan of £1,150,000 required for the initial 1,049 houses. Tile Hill North was the beginning of an era of large-scale Wimpey developments in Coventry which carried on into the late sixties.

This period, the early and mid fifties, was of course the time when the Conservative Government had made and fulfilled a promise of 300,000 houses a year. This was achieved by using non-traditional methods, by cutting standards (e.g. ceiling height, square footage per dwelling, landscaping and community facilities such as hostels!) and by encouraging the large-scale contracts with building corporations such as Wimpey, Laing, Costain and Taylor Woodrow. M. Pinto-Duschinsky has interpreted the Conservatives' housing policy in this period as stemming from a conviction that home ownership, or at least a decent council house would erode socialist zeal.

It is important to mention the long-term planning which took place at this time in the city. The Development Plan for the next twenty-five years was published in 1951 and approved in 1957. A large amount of agricultural land on the edges of the city was zoned for residential purposes and additional infilling sites in existing residential zones were earmarked. The Plan also included proposals for the two Comprehensive Development Areas and road schemes, all of which would evict large numbers of people from their houses. It was predicted that the land zoned for residential use would yield dwellings for 120,000 people while the expected increase in population was 82,000 and the number of rehoused persons 15,500. Already in July 1949 the City Architect had detailed proposals for 5,863 dwellings on parts of the zones already in Corporation ownership. Land acquisition outside the city centre and the CDAs does not seem to have been a great problem, although by the mid fifties the City Architect was expressing fears over future land shortages for housing. At this time outside architects were appointed for the housing projects at Manor House, Hall's Farm, and Henley Green since the City Architect's office was apparently overworked; it may also be true to say that they were less interested in residential developments, and more concerned with the development of the city centre and the road system as mentioned above. By January 1951, at the government's behest, the city had

47

a rolling five year housing programme and the City Architect was suggesting that the programme might be improved '...by experimental design and construction ... involving moveable partitions ... four storey maisonettes ... pre-stressed concrete first floors and roof constructions ... resulting in reductions in the use of site labour and timber'. These economies particularly suited the Macmillan ideology of 300,000 houses a year and by early 1952 these new cheap designs, including shale floors, were being put into practice by Wimpey and C & DABTE at Tile Hill North and Willenhall. In May 1953 Wimpey completed the 1,049 dwellings at Tile Hill North in two years instead of the estimated three, to the great joy of the Housing Committee. As the state relaxed the licensing restrictions on private enterprise house building in 1953 there was increased demand for labour and materials and the Council was forced to resort to more non-traditional building by Wimpey.

1955 was in fact the all-time record year for house completions in the city as a whole. But it was quickly followed by a large-scale switch over to private building as the result of the change in state policy which henceforth saw council housing as primarily being for those in 'need' - slum dwellers, the old and the disabled. The measures documented in the historical introduction to this report (which restricted local authority housing for 'general needs' and forced up the cost of local authority loans) had an immediate effect in Coventry. In November 1954 the government brought pressure to bear on the Housing Committee to slow up the building programme and despite resistance from many quarters, the architects at Hall's Farm (Stoke Aldemoor) and Willenhall were told that it would not be possible to commence further schemes there in 1955. The Ministry was urged, however, to consider the scheme for Bell Green Neighbourhood Unit No. 4 (to be called Wood End) as one contract for 1,800 dwellings to be erected by Wimpey. The justification for this very large contract was that it would save money and that Wimpey had been guaranteed continuous contracts by the Council. The loan sanction seems to have been pushed through quite swiftly since it was obvious that the government were about to cut the housing subsidy. The Housing Committee seem to have done some desperate negotiations with Wimpey to get a price reduction on this scheme in order to convince the Ministry. It also seems that another 'price' was paid; according to a housing official at that time, the Council was being asked to house miners from Scotland and the North who were coming to work the expanding Coventry mine. These families had to be housed at Wood End and Willenhall in four storey maisonettes unsuitable for large families in schemes that were not the most pleasant in design anyway. According to the housing official, some of these families had different standards of daily life to the respectable tenants of Tile Hill and they 'poisoned' these estates with their anti-social habits. Carter and Holliday (1970) have, however, documented the subsequent history of these estates, and it seems clear that, whatever may have been the distinctive characteristics of some of the original tenants, the poor quality of Wood End and Willenhall, and the general allocation procedures followed by council officials, have been far more potent factors in explaining why these estates are labelled as 'problem estates'.

47
By the end of 1954 the contract for Wood End had been agreed and a loan of £2.1m sought for 1,668 dwellings in a single stage. Meanwhile the Housing Committee was giving '... careful and detailed consideration to certain complaints which have arisen of dampness in a number of Wimpey “no fines” dwellings erected in the city'. Fifty-seven complaints from Tile Hill North were 'remedied' at Wimpey's expense but they were the first of many such complaints about 'no fines' dwellings. Other problems were looming in February 1955.

The City Architect reported that there was a shortage of land for future housing developments (very soon after the optimism of the Development Plan produced by his predecessor) and the land shortage problem has been a recurring theme ever since. It seems probable that the Council was now encountering greater difficulties in acquiring land for residential development particularly as the price of urban and suburban land was now a matter of speculation and high finance; here the market intervened with a vengeance. Hopes were expressed in 1955 that the Council could continue to build 2,000 dwellings a year for the next five years, but with the fall in the waiting list, state intervention to discourage council building and a fierce market in housing finance (favouring the owner occupier), by 1960 the Council was building barely 200 dwellings a year.

Relying on the two arms of the building industry, the large corporation and the small builder (Wimpey and C & DABTE), Coventry's Housing Committee built up the large estates in the north-east and south-east of the city by the late fifties. By then the ‘spirit’ of producing urgently needed homes had been lost. There is no need to dwell on the products of the fifties' boom in council building in the city; Carter & Holliday (1970) and the Shelter Damp Report (1973) give ample local evidence of the miserable standards of working-class state housing provision, and the related creation of new slums and ‘problem’ estates. Municipal socialism failed to counter the aims of the state which was to break the back of the ‘post-war shortage' as quickly and cheaply as possible and then put housing back into the lap of private enterprise. There was no resistance in Coventry to the ideology of a property-owning democracy, nor any consciousness of what was being created on the estates until it was too late.

3. 1956-67

As already mentioned, at the beginning of this period there were radical changes in local and central state policy. The approval of the Development Plan in 1957 and the concentration of state subsidies on slum clearance meant that the Housing Committee was about to focus much more of its attention on urban renewal. The period is marked by more modest council house building which concentrated on slum clearance and provision for the elderly for which state subsidies were still available. The Development Plan designated CDAs at Hillfields and Spon End and it was in those areas that a great deal of the housing authority's attention was focussed – at least, in the provision of dwelling units, though less so in terms of physical and social planning. The period is also marked by a move from three and four storey development into higher blocks. Not only were state subsidies higher for high rise but the ideology of preserving an urban (in effect high-density) atmosphere was popular with the current City Architect, though his predecessor, who had produced the original plans, was against high blocks. The original plans for Hillfields and Spon End contained two, three and four storey houses, flats and maisonettes but by December 1956 the council officers were suggesting that ... residential development should be urban in character, in contrast to the suburban character of the new districts of the city. This is best achieved by taller buildings grouped with lower buildings about small open space'. This was achieved with some success at Spon End but Hillfields has been a bleak disappointment. The CDA at Spon End, a small area, was dealt with as a whole, and more or less built as a whole, by Wimpey in eight years, and did not suffer the very dense, high rise development which has occurred in Hillfields. It is likely that Spon End was susceptible to mining subsidence and hence avoided the City Architect's delight in the ten storey Wimpey 'no fines' blocks which were erected in Hillfields one by one throughout the 1960s. Someone once said of Manhattan that 'it would be alright when they finished it' and this description might be applied to the way the planners and architects have dealt with Hillfields; there is, it appears, no point in finishing it off (i.e. landscaping, providing amenities, or otherwise making it bearable to live in) until all the redevelopment is over. This 'rational' ideology came unstuck, however, in 1968 and 1973 when the state cut back on investment in redevelopment. Hence in 1967 and 1968 the local authority was busy pulling down 'condemned' houses in the Barry/Vernon Street and East Street/South Street areas of Hillfields at the same time as the government was instructing local authorities to cut spending. The Conservative Council's Policy Committee were quite decisive about where such cuts were to be made – the developments in the two areas mentioned were to be delayed for at least five years in order '... to achieve balance of financial commitment in the CDA'. Hence there are now vast open spaces in the middle of the CDA which temporarily provide relief from the high density Primrose Hill Street area.

Going back for a moment to 1957, the City Architect had, at that time, plans for several ten storey blocks, and also for the first seventeen storey block at Bell Green District Centre. All these contracts went to Wimpey. At this point the Council were faced with two important problems. Firstly the acquisition of land in the CDAs proved to be very slow and painful as a large number of small landlords were dealt with and this was often used as a legitimate excuse for the piecemeal development of the CDAs. The Housing Committee were caught in a vice; they had promised Wimpey continuity of contracts with penalty clauses if these conditions were not fulfilled but they were not able to get the sites quickly enough to do this and Wimpey threatened to leave the city completely. The second problem which the Council faced in the late fifties and early sixties was financial crises. Late programmes had to be further cut back. The Planning and Redevelopment Committee and the Housing Committee both agreed to release corporation-owned land for residential development by private enterprise as a result of the cutbacks in the municipal programme. The final demise of municipal socialism in housing followed
with the decision to build 200 houses at the Wyken Hostel site (now Belgrave Estate) for direct sale to owner occupiers, despite the fact that the Council had previously staunchly refused the sale of council houses. It was also at this time that a block of 'cost rent' flats in the city centre was proposed. These would be built by the Council's contractors but would not be subsidised from the rates or the Exchequer. This eventually emerged as 'Mercia House' after the exit of the original contractor and many delays. In 1964 the two committees agreed to the even more amazing decision to lease city-centre land to a property company to build luxury flats. These desperate and unsuccessful attempts to enliven the city centre have proved extremely embarrassing to the proponents of socialist ideals on the Council, who in the late fifties abandoned those ideals in favour of the property-owning democracy. It is interesting to note that exactly the same thing occurred in national Labour housing policy at this time when the policy of municipalisation of all housing was abandoned as too expensive, and ideas such as the option mortgage scheme found more favour with members and the electorate alike. A modest rent rebate scheme was introduced in 1959 at a time when means tests were still being firmly resisted by local Labour parties in other boroughs, most notably in St. Pancras, London.

An important event in 1966 was the publication of the Review of the Development Plan. Despite new land being zoned for residential development, the planners anticipated that all the available land would be used up by 1975 and that by 1981 there would be an 'overspill' of 51,500 persons requiring a further 1,030 acres for residential development. Even to achieve the number of dwellings for which there was land available '. . . an average rate of construction of 1,800 dwellings by the Corporation and about 450 dwellings by private enterprise would be required for the next ten years. Beyond this period the supply of new land will be exhausted and resources will have to be concentrated on redevelopment land. This represents a shift in emphasis from private to corporation development; currently the greater proportion of housing is being carried out privately. ' In other words the planners were warning of an impending housing crisis - or at least a crisis of greater proportion than the 5,000 waiting list at that time - which could conceivably affect the economic prospects of the city. Their solution appears to lie in a new local state initiative in developing land they already owned and in pursuing new high density redevelopment schemes. In practice neither the immediate crisis nor the increased state intervention took place.

4. 1967-72

It is worth continuing the planning story up to the present day. According to the Corporate Planning Survey Report on Housing (1972) '. . . although the rate of house building between 1966 and 1971 did not reach the level proposed in the Review Plan (1966) the unanticipated slackening in population growth - the figure was 25,000 less in 1971 than forecast - has produced an almost exact balance between households and dwellings . . . most of the land earmarked for residential use has been bought up by the Corporation and recent policy has been to sell this land to private developers. It is expected that all residential sites on available building land will have been developed by 1986 . . . ' Apart from the very different population projections which show the impossibility of trying to predict capital's labour demands from afar, it is clear that the council policy which informed the planners' perspective had changed radically from 1966 to 1972; the anticipated programme of council building between 1971-72 and 1985-86 was now only 1,040 dwellings in all, leaving 16,000 for private enterprise. The strict parameters which the Conservatives brought to housing policy in 1967 are clearly manifest in the planners' recent work. It would be a matter for further research to elucidate how ideology is woven into the 'scientific' productions from the planning department. The 1972 CPSR document also contained the unfortunate prediction that the waiting list would be reduced to 3,750 by 1976. It suggested that even redevelopment work in the new CDAs would be carried out by private enterprise rather than the Council.

When the Conservatives came to power in 1967 they immediately wound up all council house building by direct labour, even to the extent of renegotiating two already-signed contracts. In September 1967 the Policy Committee decided to increase council rents from 1 January by an average of 17/3d per week, and introduced a new rebate scheme; this led to rent strikes and many notices to quit. During 1968 the Prices and Incomes Board report on council rents was published, and the Ministry forced the Council to reduce the rents as from 1 January 1969, but of course the reduction was not retrospective and the struggles over arrears continued for many months. On 21 October 1968 the Policy Committee, which took all the significant decisions for the Conservative Council, reported that ' . . . having regard to the position about re-lets (at almost 2,000 a year) and of the effect on rents of a large forward building programme, the Committee recommend that for the next two or three years . . . there should be a considerable reduction in the programme of corporation building for letting and that such a programme should be restricted to (a) the completion of house building schemes under contract (b) replacement of prefabs and (c) sixty to eighty dwellings per annum of a special character (disabled and elderly) . . . the Committee do not favour erection of dwellings by the Corporation for sale'. Large council owned sites at Cannon Park, Stoke Hill Guildhouse and Ernesford Grange were sold off for private development and later the residential development at Sackville Street/Primrose Park was also given to private enterprise - this was the first CDA work undertaken by private enterprise in the city. It is significant that in the quote above from the Policy Committee residential redevelopment is not even mentioned; this, taken with the CDA financial cutbacks already mentioned, indicated a positive rejection of interest in Hillfields CDA which was not quite so obvious under the Labour Council.

5. 1972-75

In May 1972 the Labour Party returned to power in Coventry to face a worsening housing crisis. Most of the city's industries appeared to be healthy and were still attracting labour from Scotland and Ireland, while there was a chronic shortage of both privately rented and
council accommodation, and of mortgages at reasonable charges. However, the Labour Housing Committee accepted the CPSR recommendations outlined above which implied that they would build a minimal number of houses. Later they announced some schemes which went beyond the 1972 CPSR recommendation a little way. Since they came to power, there has been a severe housing finance crisis affecting all aspects of the market and state policy. The latter has of course been forced to concentrate on improvement and of its own free will has concentrated on nurturing housing associations rather than building new houses. In its three years back in power, the Housing Committee seems to have been obsessed by the reorganisation of the Housing and City Estates Departments into 'Homes and Property Services'. This grand strategy was foisted upon the Committee by the public relations-minded corporate managers as soon as they returned to power. 'The basic concept of the proposed new housing service is one of providing a personal service to the individual for his housing needs, throughout his lifetime...' There is no need to dwell on the incredible gap between the visions of the Corporation's officers and the experience of many of their clients. What is, perhaps, more surprising is the fact that the level of tenant activity in opposition to the Council has always been fairly low. In some wards the tenants associations are very important in bringing out the Labour vote, and in Willenhall the tenants association was able to mobilise some opposition to the Tory rent increases of 1967-68, and to the implementation of the Housing Finance Act in 1972 by the new Labour Council. That said, however, it is the case that in Coventry, a city famed for its militant workplace organisation, working-class solidarity has never spread strongly into the community.

In line with most recent developments in state policy, the Council has given increased encouragement and assistance to housing associations, which up till March 1972 owned only 322 houses in the city. The Housing Finance Act (1972) however withdrew subsidies to housing associations for new building and confined state aid to conversion, improvement and acquisition. This hardly encouraged the embryonic 'voluntary housing movement' in Coventry. Apart from one scheme which was announced before the GIA concept was brought in with the 1969 Housing Act, the first proper GIA was declared in October 1971. In line with most recent developments in state policy, the latter has of course been forced to spread strongly into the community.

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The second arm of the Council's policy over the last two years has been municipalisation. In the last year they have bought over 200 houses all over the city which is quite unprecedented, and these dwellings are by no means confined to redevelopment areas or GIAs though it includes some of these. There are no further details of the scheme as yet but though the target is to purchase 400 dwellings a year this may have to be curtailed in view of cutbacks in public expenditure.

The main arm of housing policy is of course council house building and over the last year this has begun to revive from the extremely low level of the early 1970s. A council house building scheme began recently for 120 houses in the middle of Hillfields CDA, the first such scheme for almost a decade, apart from infilling. Encouragement from the new Labour Government can be seen as crucial in the latest development; in the future the Council hopes to build 200 or 300 houses a year, although there is a land shortage problem. They have recently promised to build a 'new utopia' in the late 1970s at Westwood Heath near the University to house around 10,000 people. This land is in corporation ownership and is zoned residential; it is rumoured that some or even all of the building will be done by housing associations, since finance might otherwise be hard to come by. The Corporation have also promised to fill in the huge gaps left by clearance in 1970 in the middle of Hillfields CDA, where several hundred houses have been promised for over a decade.

As for rehabilitation, the Corporation and the Labour Council have never been very keen on GIAs, preferring demolition wherever possible, and only two have been declared so far. Several more GIAs are planned but will be held back by government stringencies. The number of improvement grant applications has actually dropped over the past few years and this trend seems unlikely to change in view of the Budget and the White Paper on Public Expenditure, despite the Housing Act 1974 provisions and the January 1975 Circulars.

The council house waiting list has dropped from 6,800 to 6,300 over the past year and the Council has been
quick to point out that this is the result of the progressive Socialist policies outlined above. It is possible to argue that a more important factor has been the recession in the motor industry which has led to a population decline in the city, as it always has done in the past, and a consequent reduction in the size of the waiting list.

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Interviews with past and present officers, members and tenants.
INTRODUCTION

Newcastle developed as the commercial centre of Tyneside before the industrial revolution, and the rise of industrial Tyneside confirmed and expanded Newcastle's commercial role, and added an important industrial base to the economy. This duality in Newcastle's character contrasts with the more solidly industrial nature of other towns in the Tyneside conurbation, and has been reflected in the political life of the local authority, and hence in its housing policies. The City Council did not go Labour until 1945, and since the Second World War the Progressives/Tories have been in control for sixteen out of the thirty years. Additionally, Newcastle's diverse nature seems to be reflected in its Labour Party, in which professional groups have tended to be more strongly represented than in other Tyneside Labour parties. The formulation of housing policies in Newcastle has, therefore, occurred in a complex and shifting political environment.

Under local government reorganisation Newcastle MDC took in the adjacent districts of Newburn, Gosforth and Castle Ward (part), but no great administrative or political changes have resulted from this; the city has, however, been actively developing its corporate management system for a number of years.

The Community Development Project area in Benwell lies about one-and-a-half miles west of the city centre, and was developed by private enterprise largely in the period from 1880 to 1914. Tenure is still dominated by private landlordism, but older housing is being cleared and replaced by council housing, which now forms about 30% of the area's housing stock. The Project's interest in overall council housing policy arises both from work with council tenants in the area and from a wider concern to place community change in Benwell over time within a wider city context.

AN OUTLINE OF COUNCIL HOUSING POLICY 1918-75

The first council housing was built in Newcastle in 1904; in 1973 the City Council owned 47% of the city's housing stock. In a period of nearly seventy years, therefore, council housing rose from nothing to be the dominant form of tenure in the city, and this section outlines some key aspects of this process.

1. House Building Rates and the Total Stock

Prior to 1919 about 622 council houses were built – an insignificant total as compared with the activities of private enterprise during this period. With the introduction of more positive legislation and higher subsidies following the First World War, the Council's building rate increased dramatically, especially following the Wheatsley Act of 1924. From 1925 to 1939 an average of 774 houses per year was built with peaks occurring in 1927-29 and 1931-34; by 1939 about 12,700 had been completed. The Second World War halted this, and, despite the return of Newcastle's first Labour Council in 1945, recovery of the house building programme was slow. Only from 1951 was real impetus gained, but in the fourteen years from 1951-65 the number of houses built exceeded that of the previous thirty years and by 1973 the total stock stood at 40,953 of which 27,409 had been built in the post-war period. Completions varied a good deal during the 1951-73 period, however, with peaks occurring from 1953-57 and again from 1962-69. A marked decline set in from 1970 onwards but current policy aims at raising completions to about 1,022 per year in the period up to 1979.

2. Housing-Expenditure and Income

Detailed statistics on the financing of Newcastle's council housing programme are only available from 1945 onwards but these figures indicate a changing pattern of emphasis in terms both of housing relative to other council activities, and within the financing of the council housing sector itself.

In relation to capital expenditure the post-war period is characterised by a hesitant rise in expenditure, in real terms, on council housing; this picture is offset, however, by a much faster rise in other local authority capital expenditure, so that the percentage being spent on housing has dropped in halting steps since two early post-war peak periods (1946-48 and 1952-56) during which it stood at over 70%. The proportion rapidly dwindled to between 53% and 60% during the 1957-62 period and, since then the decline has continued, so that only once since 1963 has the figure topped 50%. The picture is, then, of declining relative importance being attached to council house building since the early post-war peak and, indeed, in the years 1957-58 actual expenditure was drastically cut back, and only recovered (in real terms), to levels approaching those of the early 1950s for a very limited period between 1966 and 1968.

Turning to income and expenditure in the Housing Revenue Account, the picture is of a generally rising proportion of revenue being gained from rents, so that from an average of about 63% in the 1950s it has risen to between 70% and 80% more recently. The burden has been shifted to the tenant from both the Exchequer and the ratepayer, and in 1971 the rate fund contribution had disappeared. In common with the experience of other authorities, however, the rate fund contribution rose rapidly in 1974, and in the current financial year
reasonably constant, and the most important feature here is the overwhelming proportion of expenditure going in debt charges; in only one year since 1950 has this fallen below 70% of expenditure (in 1951) and the average proportion for the period 1950-71 is 75-9%. Other expenditure is small beer by comparison but it is noteworthy that the repairs contribution fell from an average of 13-8% during the period 1950-55 to 12-6% in the period 1967-72; several tenants associations in Newcastle hold that the quality of repairs and routine maintenance on council estates has fallen off more drastically than this figure would suggest.

3. Housing for General Needs
Discussion so far has concentrated on aggregate totals and financing, but underlying the Council’s general housing policies have been shifts of emphasis on for whom the housing is built, and between varying types and quality. The two are interrelated; during successive periods housing emphasis has alternated between priority for ‘general needs’ (the waiting list) and for slum clearance, and the quality of housing has reflected these shifts of emphasis. The earliest housing schemes (1904-14) were designed to high standards and let at relatively high rents to ‘the respectable artisan’ type of tenant. This flavour was maintained after the First World War, and the ‘Homes fit for Heroes’ housing drive, enshrined in the 1919 Addison Act and continued in the 1924 Wheatley Act, produced a number of well designed and spacious estates (Walker, Pendower, Heaton, Two Ball Lonnen, Fenham) which were occupied mainly by ‘respectable’ working-class tenants from the waiting list; some of these were cleared) but new permanent houses were built to generous space and design standards. Due to material shortages and national economic problems, however, the number of houses actually built during this period was disappointing and when the completion rate picked up in the 1950s priorities had again moved away from housing for general needs.

During the late 1940s most new housing was allocated to waiting list tenants, with a special emphasis on easing overcrowding caused by the desperate post-war shortage of housing; more than 1,000 ‘pre-fabs’ were built (now cleared) but new permanent houses were built to generous space and design standards. Due to material shortages and national economic problems, however, the number of houses actually built during this period was disappointing and when the completion rate picked up in the 1950s priorities had again moved away from housing for general needs.

Housing for general needs has, therefore, had priority during three periods – 1904-14, 1919-30, and 1945-56 – but in each of these periods, apart from 1952-56, the rate of new construction was lower than at other times. The majority of Newcastle’s council houses have been built for slum clearance tenants.

4. Slum Clearance and Rehousing
During the 1920s housing debates in Newcastle City Council frequently concerned the extent to which council houses should be built for the poor and, if so, the extent to which quality should be sacrificed to produce lower rents. Right-wing councillors were usually against building any council houses, but middle-of-the-road councillors from all groups on the Council tended to argue in favour of building cheaper estates for the poor, partly on the grounds that the artisan class should be encouraged to go for owner occupation, and partly from a general desire to keep spending on council housing to a minimum. A minority socialist view, strongly held in particular by some trade union councillors, was that this order of priorities conflicted with the ideal of ‘Homes fit for Heroes’. In practice, both the latter policies were followed so that even amongst housing built in the 1920s there were wide variations in quality which were reflected in the social composition of tenants – for example, a survey in 1932 found that on Pendower Estate, a well-designed scheme, 79% of the tenants were manual workers, whilst in Rochester Dwellings, a cheaper 1923 tenement block, 94% were manual workers.

In the 1930s central government reduced, and later abolished, subsidies on general needs housing and brought in new subsidies to stimulate slum clearance. Newcastle’s policy rapidly switched to slum clearance and rehousing, and in the years 1931-38 about 3,800 dwellings were proposed for clearance to be replaced by 7,333 new council houses and flats. In practice, a considerable number of houses scheduled for clearance in 1938 remained standing long after the War, but the decisive switch of emphasis in the 1930s is clear. It was repeated in the 1950s; the Council published its first Post-War Slum Clearance Plan in 1953 and this provided for the clearance of 4,500 houses. The programme was got under way with the final clearance of housing declared unfit in 1938, and the first post-war clearance area (Noble Street) was dealt with in 1955-57. The decisive switch to rehousing from slum clearance can be seen in the following figures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12 months ending</th>
<th>Rehoused from waiting list</th>
<th>Rehoused from slum clearance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 1956</td>
<td>965</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 1959</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 1960</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1,235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The switch to slum clearance rehousing was associated again, as it had been in the inter-war period, with a dramatic drop in the quality of replacement housing. The characteristic development of the 1950s, was of five storey balcony-access flats – the cheapest type possible, ‘without (an) expensive system of refuse disposal, without lifts, without a laundry – without the very expensive steel frame’. These flats quickly became notorious and even whilst being built were described as slums. From 1959 no more were completed, but the emphasis on clearance rehousing has remained through to the present day. In the 1963 Review Development Plan 9,400 dwellings were scheduled for clearance by 1967, of which 5,820 were the ‘remaining statutory slums’ and 3,580 had to go to allow city centre redevelopment; a further 15,200 were scheduled for clearance in the period 1967-81. In practice, therefore, the city was prepared to knock down considerable numbers of houses which were not unfit to...
pursue major redevelopment policies, and this in turn has meant that rehousing from the waiting list has continued to be a low priority during the past twelve years.

Despite optimistic forecasts, therefore, Newcastle's housing problems remained, and this led to the development of explicit policies designed to safeguard and improve the existing stock.

5. Housing Improvement and the Private Sector

Improvement (or 'revitalisation' in the local jargon) of old houses as an alternative to clearance was advocated even in the inter-war period, but in practice little was achieved. Since 1963, however, large blocks of pre-1914 housing have been given 'short term' or 'long term revitalisation status'. The numbers in each category have varied over time – in 1963 15,200 dwellings were 'short-term' and 11,700 'long-term', but in 1971 over 1,000 houses were moved from 'long-term' to clearance status: since 1974, however, policy has veered dramatically back to improvement, 3,878 dwellings being changed from clearance to improvement status in that year. In practice the stumbling block to housing improvement has been the unwillingness of private landlords to act, and the Council has attempted to counter this by a mixture of municipalisation and encouragement to housing associations; it was also planned to encourage owner-occupation in General Improvement Areas and Housing Action Areas by means of local authority mortgages, but this policy has been rapidly emasculated by central government restrictions.

Since 1918 owner-occupied housing has been a minor but increasing sector of the city's housing stock. In 1971 29% of dwellings in the city were owner-occupied. During the inter-war period 16,819 private sector houses were built\(^3\), 57% of the total built in Newcastle; in the post-war period this proportion dropped drastically so that from 1967-73 only 11% of completions in the city were in the private sector. In the Newcastle MDC area during the same period, however, 34% of completions were in the private sector. Private housebuilding has recently been predominantly in the suburban fringes of the city, leaving the Council with cleared sites which have been extremely costly to redevelop.

Conclusion

Council tenancy has therefore become the dominant form of tenure in Newcastle, but this section has illustrated that the stages by which this situation has been achieved have been marked by changes of pace, emphasis and quality. The following section reviews some present policies and likely future problems.

CURRENT HOUSING POLICY – A REVIEW

Since the War political control in Newcastle has changed five times:

1945-49 – Labour
1949-58 – Progressives (a combination of Liberals, Conservatives and Independents, which collapsed after 1958)
1958-67 – Labour
1967-74 – Conservative
1974 + – Labour

Housing policy has therefore been subject to the marked changes of emphasis which characterise politically marginal authorities, but in Newcastle this picture is complicated by political diversity within the city Labour Party. It is impossible to understand the attitudes to housing policy revealed by Labour councillors in terms of a simple 'left-right' analysis. In broad terms the distinctions have tended to be between those councillors with a 'gut socialist' view of council housing as a cornerstone of Labour Party policy, and those with a more pragmatic outlook. The former view tends to be represented by older councillors and paradoxically includes some councillors whose overall stance is on the 'moderate' wing of the party. The latter view is more characteristic of the younger professional elements. In this situation of ideological diversity, particular personalities have wielded great influence (e.g. T. Dan Smith or, more recently, John Gower Davies) a trait which has tended to reflect their strength of view or personal domination. This pattern contrasts, for example, with the picture in Newburn UD, a former mining area included in Newcastle in 1974. That authority implemented a self-confessedly 'socialist' housing policy with considerable determination over a long period of time, and this policy appears to have been institutionalised as a party commitment rather than being dependant on the domination of particular individuals.

In Newcastle, the Dan Smith era of the late fifties/early sixties was characterised by a grandiose view of the city's regeneration which included city centre redevelopment, urban motorways and the replacement of slum housing by high rise blocks which would boldly herald the townscape of the future. Whilst time has revealed the inadequacies of both the man and the policies he espoused, this vision represented a quite strong, if simplified, socialist commitment. In practice, however, the vision was highly constrained by the realities of planning and development in a capitalist economy, and by an inability to translate socialist commitment to good housing into more than infusions of technical expertise, numbers and bold physical design. Since the decline of this influence, however, the local Labour Party's attitude to housing has become less focused and it is difficult to identify particular strong ideological stances behind the current policies.

Prior to local government reorganisation Newcastle had been under Tory control since 1967, and the council housing programme had been steadily whittled down, reaching an all-time post-war low of 317 completions in 1973. The new Labour Council of 1974 initiated a rapid and comprehensive review of housing policy which resulted in vigorous action in a number of fields. As a result Newcastle was very quick off the mark in responding to the various government housing initiatives of 1974, and this rapid action seems likely to benefit the Council during the period of expenditure cuts now in progress.
The city undoubtedly got its foot in the door at the right time to increase the resources available for housing whilst other councils dithered. Nevertheless, the government cut-backs will doubtless hit various areas of local policy.

New policies have been developed in three major fields since Labour took control:

1. **Slum Clearance**

Under the Conservatives an additional 1,000 houses had been moved from long-term revitalisation to clearance on the basis of a rapid and fairly indefensible survey (known locally as the 'windscreen survey' a description of the survey method adopted). This policy was reviewed by Labour, and by the end of 1974 3,878 dwellings had been redesignated for long-term improvement, 2,800 of them in Housing Action Areas, and the remainder in a large number of scattered 'Special Improvement Areas'. The current programme envisages the clearance of 5,625 dwellings in the period 1974-79. Labour policy in Newcastle has, therefore, swung significantly against clearance both because it is undoubtedly cheaper to improve than to redevelop, and also because 'there was a wish to give the fullest consideration possible to the view of residents . . . (on) . . . whether communities wanted to be kept together and whether modernisation was a feasible alternative to the more drastic policy of ultimate clearance'. *(Annual Report of Director of Housing, 1974.)*

In the local situation this point about participation was important. John Gower Davies had documented the inept disregard of residents' views in the Rye Hill Improvement Scheme in the mid sixties and things had been no better under the Tories; they had arbitrarily switched 1,000 houses from improvement to clearance. Labour therefore came in committed to responding to residents' views, and the Housing Renewal Sub-Committee (under Davies' chairmanship) initiated a programme in 1974 to survey residents' opinions in potential HAAs. These surveys have revealed that in many former clearance areas majority opinion is against clearance, but it is arguable that this attitude frequently reflects an attachment to the convenient location of older areas to established shops and services rather than attachment to the houses themselves. Residents are in effect asked, on the basis of inadequate information, to choose between two unpleasant alternatives - either removal to possibly inconvenient council estates after a long period of blight and upheaval, or staying put to suffer poor environmental standards and the strong likelihood that house improvements will not be carried out. This brings us to the second strand of current policy.

2. **House Improvement, Municipalisation and Housing Associations**

Newcastle Council moved rapidly to take advantage of the provisions of Circular 70/74 on Municipalisation and the 1974 Housing Act. Seven Housing Action Areas (covering nearly 2,800 houses) had been declared by April 1975, and the Council was actively buying up older houses in both HAAs and GIAs for improvement. Inadequate provision of government resources has already restricted direct intervention of this kind, however, and in one of the first HAAs the Council is working in partnership with a housing association; over 100 council-owned properties have been sold to it. In general the Council is attempting to work within housing associations to a much greater extent than many other local authorities, but even so this policy is somewhat contentious within the Labour group. Though the debate is normally muted, attitudes to housing associations tend to exhibit the divergence between 'gut socialist' views and the more pragmatic approach alluded to earlier, but central government and local majority pressures are both likely to ensure the continuance of this policy.

Owner occupation in HAAs and GIAs is also being fostered in the belief that it 'secures' such areas, but the provisions of Circular 64/75 which restrict council mortgages seem likely to reduce the effect of this policy. Building societies locally refuse to lend money at all in HAAs, and only a small number are prepared to give mortgages in GIAs.

The council house modernisation programme is also likely to be restricted in the medium term. A substantial proportion of the city's inter-war council housing was modernised between 1971 and 1974, eleven of the first twenty GIAs being declared on council estates; in the year ending March 1975 563 houses were improved. The city obtained an allocation of £4-3m (under Section 105 provisions) for 1975/76 to modernise between 700 and 800 houses, but emphasis is being switched to the improvement of older acquired properties, and the number of council houses to be improved this year will fall to between 350 and 450. As the cuts increase in severity over the coming years, the improvement of purpose-built council housing is likely to become almost impossible. The future looks bleak for tenants in unmodernised inter-war houses, and in the thousands of post-war houses which were built to standards lower than those acceptable today.

3. **New Council Houses**

Newcastle Council actively purchased new private houses from local builders after Labour took over, and within a year nearly 1,700 properties were in course of purchase. The policy undoubtedly baulked out a number of local builders as well as adding quickly to the city's council housing stock after the lean Tory years. These private houses are overwhelmingly on green-field sites on the edge of the city, whereas the Council's own building programme is mainly concentrated on expensive clearance sites in the inner city; one such site in South Benwell has 1 in 6 slopes and is so riddled with old coal workings that three site surveys have been necessary.

In 1974, 946 houses were completed, a substantial rise on the 1973 figure (317), and in June 1975 the following programme was published for the coming five year period:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Planned Completions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>1,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>1,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>1,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>5,110</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is therefore planned to retain the considerable increase in the building programme over the Tories' worst year, but the targets set are considerably lower than those achieved in the 'boom' periods of the early 1950s or the late 1960s. The programme will also diminish over time. Despite a 15,000 waiting list in July 1975, the Housing Department estimates that the coming five years will see a 'substantial reduction' in the number of persons living in housing need (though to what levels is not specified), and that the slum clearance programme will be virtually completed. Similar optimism has been expressed in the past, however. The achievement of these goals depends heavily on the success of the revitalization programme and on the ability to keep building good quality council housing in the face of probable central government pressures to economise; past experience is not encouraging on both these points. Nevertheless, this optimism has led the Housing Committee to reject the Secretary of State's suggestion that local authorities might build low cost housing to alleviate the current housing crisis. Given the appalling legacy of 'cheap' estates like Noble Street, this decision can only be the correct one.

In its first eighteen months, therefore, the new Labour Council has considerably increased the scope and size of the city's housing programme from the low levels reached by the Tories. Council-built housing tends to be seen, however, as only one of a number of policies which are largely determined on technical grounds. At the present time the building programme has been increased to respond to the immediate crisis situation, but this appears to be seen as a temporary phase. Much faith is being placed in revitalization to reduce the clearance programme to low levels, but in-built bias of national improvement policies against the improvement of privately-rented housing occupied by low income groups is likely to ensure that such people will continue to live in bad conditions in Newcastle. A strong council building programme will therefore be necessary for a considerable period into the future to cater for groups in housing need. It is impossible to assess the future commitment of the Labour Party to such a programme, but the following section attempts to explore the factors which have shaped policies in the past.

**FOUR ISSUES**

The formation of Newcastle's council housing policies has inevitably brought into play a whole range of factors relating to the local and national political environment the influence of technical and professional values and pressure of private enterprise interests. It is impossible at this stage to offer definitive views on the relative strength of these factors at any one time, but this section attempts to provide clues towards such an analysis and to raise debate on the strengths and weaknesses of Newcastle's council housing policy. In particular we need to understand how and why the Labour Party has failed to produce consistent and 'socialist' support for the role of council housing in alleviating housing problems.

The section is structured around four issues:

1. The considerations behind detailed council housing policies.
2. The wider local government context.
3. The role of private enterprise interests.
4. The role of central government.

**1. The considerations behind detailed Council House Policies**

The seventy-year history of Newcastle council housing reveals a number of policy issues which have repeatedly appeared in local debates. These can be summarised as:

(a) Tenure split — public, housing associations and trusts, owner occupation, private landlordism.

(b) To whom should council housing go — the waiting list or slum clearance tenants?

(c) How good should the new housing be — and what burden should fall on the tenants and ratepayers?

(d) What improvements can be made to the existing stock of houses?

Discussion of these issues has always been intermixed and somewhat confused, but the end result, outlined in the first two sections, has been wide variations of policy emphasis.

It is probably true to say that, in Newcastle, council tenancy as a general form of tenure has never had the degree of stigma attached to it that may be found in more affluent, southern, parts of England. Thus there has, since 1918, been little question in the City Council that a substantial council housing sector was needed. Debate has centred, rather, on the extent to which owner occupation and the voluntary housing sector (housing associations) should also be fostered as parallel policies to public and private tenancy. In the 1920s working-class owner occupation was suggested by one councillor as 'leading to contentment and happiness ... every house purchased was a link forged in making the Empire safe'; in other words housing policy was being seen in terms of a social control function. Such views found little favour, and Newcastle experienced a relatively smaller boom of private enterprise estates in the 1930s than occurred further south. In only one case was a pre-war council estate built for owner occupation, and this was seen by Labour councillors as the betrayal of basic socialist principles.

Although there has been little argument that a substantial council sector would be a desirable goal, in practice various policies have been advocated aimed at improving working-class living conditions at less cost to the Council than by actually building new houses itself. Housing associations were enthusiastically backed before the First World War as a way of housing the working class at no cost to the Council, but were viewed with little favour during the inter-war period. It has been in the period since the Second World War, and especially from 1963, that debate on the comparative merits of different forms of tenure has become more vociferous. The recognition that many older homes would have to be retained and needed improving raised the question of how this was to be done; carrots and sticks have been tried, the latter exemplified by the bureaucratically bungled Rye Hill scheme documented by J. G. Davies, the former by the establishment in 1969 of a Revitalisation Agency to promote and coordinate improvement grant uptake. Both these approaches have run up against the inactivity
of the private landlord and debate revolves around how best to supplant him and get houses improved.\(^7\)

Four approaches are currently being adopted:

1. Outright municipalisation and continuing Council ownership i.e. additions to the Council stock.
2. Municipalisation and sale to owner occupiers on condition of the uptake of improvement grants.
3. Help to owner occupiers through Council mortgages.
4. Partnership with housing associations.

A considerable range of interests both within and outside the Council, champion the relative merits of these different approaches, and the debate around this issue exhibits a highly complex intermixture of personal, ideological, ‘professional’ and special interest arguments on which it is impossible to generalise at this stage. In summary, however, the debate on tenure options for older houses is one of the sharpest arising from questions of desirable tenure since Newcastle Council became involved in housing.

As was outlined earlier, the issue of slum clearance or ‘general needs’ housing priorities has been important in Newcastle, but, in contrast to the ‘public/private split’ debate, this debate has tended to become more muted over time. It has been noted how early council housing provision attempted to reflect the ideal of ‘Homes fit for Heroes’, and it is significant that Labour had established housing, even before the 1914 War, as one of their main concerns; they dominated the relevant committees from the turn of the century onwards even though they were the minority group on Council. In addition, a strong lobby throughout the inter-war period by organised labour and other local groups added support to the Labour caucus on housing issues, and this seems to have found solid expression in a number of well-designed and built housing estates whose first occupants – respectable working-class tenants – were from groups who were the bedrock of the labour movement in Newcastle. Attitudes to council housing for the ‘poor’, in contrast, have always been ambivalent. Labour politicians, especially in the inter-war period, were never able to square the economic realities of rehousing the poor with their desire for high quality housing schemes, whilst the right-wing favoured concentration on slum clearance housing, but of lower standards and with an implicit charity function for those unable to house themselves adequately in the private market. National Government policy seems to have been decisive in sending actual housing policy down this road in the 1930s, and, apart from the 1945-56 period, slum clearance has been the dominant concern of both parties since. The interesting feature of later provision, is, however, that its quality is less overtly tied to its function (slum clearance or general need) than in the inter-war period. Thus the introduction of the notorious five storey flats in the early 1950s appears to have reflected both the national and local desire to produce a lot of houses quickly but cheaply (the Macmillan housing drive) as well as a specific local decision to build ‘down’ to the slum clearance tenants who were to be their first occupants.

Since the 1950s this trend has become more marked. Housing quality has tended to reflect the architectural fashions of the period (high rise, factory building, low-rise high density) and their encouragement nationally by subsidy and exhortation, and the tenants to be found on schemes of the recent period may well be a mixture of slum clearance and waiting list families – with the former predominating due to the overall balance of emphasis in the housing programme since about 1956.

Thus ‘slum clearance or general needs’ has become a clouded issue in the post-war context, but in no way have differences between council estates been eradicated. Having said above that a scheme of the recent period may well be a mixture of tenants, in practice very marked differences are visible between estates in terms of their social characteristics, physical design quality and maintenance standards. In other words, the different estates in Newcastle, both old and new, are of widely varying desirability, and this raises the issue of allocation policy. The Project has not studied this in detail, but the fact is that certain estates have become areas where only families with little or no choice in the matter go to live. The following factors may contribute to this:

- stigma or ‘image’ attaching to the original tenants (e.g. from particular slum clearance areas)
- poor physical design and high density
- officer judgements of tenants, judgements which may well reflect bureaucratic and middle-class values
- poor maintenance and heavy vandalism
- council transfer policies
- statutory duty of the local authority to house the homeless
- wider economic questions of low pay, unemployment and welfare dependency.

The Project has examined this range of factors as they apply to one particular estate, but in the context of Newcastle as a whole it is important to emphasise the extent to which public sector housing – supposedly distributed administratively according to need – has in practice taken on the wide area differentiation characteristic of allocation by the market in the private sector.

As the figures quoted for the two estates in 1932 showed, social differentiation between estates is not new. It does seem, however, to be far more subtle and widespread today and this links in with the increasingly differentiated financial burdens imposed on tenants and ratepayers as time has gone on. The cost of council housing has been increasingly shifted on to the tenant, and the Housing Finance Act of 1972, with its fixing of ‘fair rents’, widened the differentials between rents on different estates considerably. Newcastle City Council (then Conservative) implemented the Act in the context of very muted local debate and opposition. Despite the repeal of the Act, considerable cost differentials will remain – for example compare:

1. a pre-war three-bedroomed house – Scotswood
   - Rent (June 1975+) — £4.50
   - Rates — £1.87
   - Total — £6.37
2. a new three-bedroomed house – South Benwell
   Rent (June 1975+) — £6.33
   Rates — £3.07
   Total — £9.40

This type of rental differentiation, as well as factors of 'desirability' and allocation policy, contribute to a picture of wide, and possibly widening, social differentiation between estates.

2. The Wider Local Government Context

This section attempts to indicate how wider questions of the local authority's policy making and management have influenced its council housing record. Two issues in particular are relevant here – changing council attitudes to the management of council houses (and their tenants) and the development of 'planning' as a major political and bureaucratic concern in the local authority.

As in many local authorities, Newcastle's administrative response to the imposition of statutory housing functions was ad hoc. Not until 1953 was a Housing Manager appointed responsible for all major housing functions except rent collection; seven years later rent collection was transferred from the City Treasurer's control to the Housing Department and the Manager upgraded to Director of Housing, but not until recently was he given chief officer status. Thus, as one councillor stated in 1960, 'Housing management (was) the Cinderella of the Council' for many years, but it is a moot point whether this profoundly affected the actual quality of housing maintenance and management; considerable feeling is currently expressed by a number of tenants groups at the decline in standards over the past few years, a period when the unified Housing Department, working as part of Newcastle's developing corporate management system, might have been expected to improve matters.
The status of the Housing Department has greatly improved though within the realm of housing policy it is still a Cinderella in the Council's interests. Nevertheless, the City Council is deeply committed to such policies, and under the Tories these policies meant the sacrifice of a large number of fit corporation tenants were not so careful as they might be in the care of council houses and recommended stronger corporation powers for officers and drastic measures to deal with irresponsible and 'undesirable' tenants. Such attitudes, reflecting a paramount administrative concern for good property management rather than responsiveness to tenant needs and the possibilities of tenant control, have remained important through to today.

This view of housing management as a low-level administrative function has been reinforced by the rise of the Planning Department to become the major forward policy department in the city. As a result, since the Second World War it has been the Planning Department, rather than Housing, which has attempted to quantify and plan the broad lines of housing provision in the city; housing policy has been incorporated into an overall city policy described by the City Planning Officer in 1963 as 'a comprehensive planning exercise'. In practice, these policies were (and are) mainly concerned with clearance, redevelopment and area improvement, so that the great bulk of existing council housing does not overtly form part of the overall 'housing plan' for the city - it tends to be forgotten.

The recent pre-eminence of the Planning Department (which is declining due to the transfer of many planning functions to Tyne-Wear County Council), is symptomatic of a decisive change in policy priorities which occurred in the post-1945 period. As outlined earlier, housing had been an early - and major - concern of Newcastle Labour councillors, but in the aftermath of the Depression, and particularly following the War, greater enthusiasm for good property management rather than responsiveness to tenant needs and the possibilities of tenant control, have remained important through to today.

As a consequence of its apparent role as a political football, from 1967 the DLO's work often seemed to be that which private builders were unwilling to do, such as routine maintenance and repairs, conversion jobs from maisonettes to flats in the 1950s, five-storey blocks, and the completion of a contract for an industrialised building project when the original private contractors went bust. After Labour took control of the Council in 1974, plans were announced for a considerable expansion of the DLO. However, since the majority of the work carried out by the DLO is on council house improvement and maintenance probably dominate councillors' interests, since there has recently been considerable tenant pressure to improve the performance of the city's repairs and maintenance section.

3. The Role of Private Enterprise

It was noted earlier that debates on the public/private split in the provision of housing have tended to be somewhat muted in Newcastle. In contrast, the issue of the public/private split in terms of who builds council houses has frequently been a keenly contested one. Since 1918 the division of support for a Council direct labour organisation (DLO) has been on clear party lines, and it is significant that, in the inter-war period at least, a number of right-wing councillors derived their income from the building and allied trades, and therefore had a clear interest in fighting the development of the DLO. The post-war situation is less clear here, but in practice the DLO has tended to expand under Labour administrations and contract under Progressive/Tory ones. Under both Labour and Tory councils, however, private enterprise has always received the majority of contracts, but since 1920 the type of firms winning contracts has tended to change. At the start of the major building programme in the 1920s evidence points to its execution by small local builders. By the 1930s firms active throughout the region appear to have become predominant, whilst from the 1950s the development of larger contracts (1,000 houses or more), system-building and multi-storey tower blocks created work which only the large national building firms could undertake. Thus the trends of council house construction since the 1920s have favoured big firms at the expense of smaller ones, and this in turn has created problems for the switch of emphasis to housing improvement. Big firms find it difficult and unprofitable to do such 'jobbing' work, and there is a chronic shortage of reliable small firms to fill the breach.

4. The Influence of Central Government

It has been emphasised that in Newcastle, a large local authority subject to swings of political control, the development of council housing policies has rarely been the result of clear and consistent local pressures, either political or administrative. Of all the factors at work,
and those relating to central government seem to have been the most influential in determining the particular direction policies have taken at any one time.

In short, the general lines of Newcastle’s policies have always broadly followed the wishes of central government as conveyed through legislation, financial provisions and exhortation. This can be seen clearly in relation to three issues – slum clearance, general needs priorities, quality and type of housing and, finally, the administration of the Housing Revenue Account. We have shown that, from a concentration after each World War on housing for general needs, policy shifted suddenly to priority for slum clearance rehousing (after 1930 and again after 1956), and in each case this reflected government changes in subsidy arrangements designed to do just that. Similarly, the fairly generous design standards permitted after each War were whittled away to increase output and/or reduce costs per house, and in Newcastle this was achieved most dramatically in the appalling five-storey flats built in the 1950s. During the period when the Ministry of Housing was encouraging multi-storey blocks of flats, Newcastle followed suit, but later swung to high-density low rise developments when the national emphasis went in that direction in the 1960s. The national switch to improvement of older housing stimulated by the 1969 Housing Act has also been taken up enthusiastically by Newcastle Corporation, though here, perhaps, it is possible to see a case where Newcastle led rather than followed the fashion, and has pursued the policy with a certain amount of locally-generated enthusiasm.

Thus in terms of broad policies it is impossible to discern any case where Newcastle Corporation has been prepared to pursue highly distinctive local policies which conflict with those of central government, but this is not to argue that the City Council has merely acted as the local agent of central government. Such an interpretation of events is too simplistic. Newcastle is a large local authority, and the processes of policy generation are inherently diffuse; this in turn means that they are difficult to study. This report has attempted to outline factually some of the key elements in the city’s housing policy since 1904. The concluding section summarises some of the unanswered questions which have been thrown up by this review of past policy.

CONCLUSIONS

It is necessary to identify the key agencies determining the quality and strength of the public housing sector in Newcastle, and to suggest some of the important issues which arise from an examination of their roles. Five major interest groups have been important in the past, but the precise nature of their importance is open to question, and the answers to such questions may determine directions for future political action.

1. The Local Politicians

It is far from clear how distinctive political ideologies – from the Left and Right – have contributed to the actual policies pursued in Newcastle. In particular, it is plain that there has never been a coherent ‘socialist’ approach to housing policies, and the ideological content in local debates appears to have diminished over time. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to dismiss politicians and the strength of political ideas as forces helping to shape housing policies, and certain issues particularly the Direct Labour Organisation, housing associations and, of course, rents continue to excite considerable political debate.

2. The Officers

When reading the debates in committees and council it is quite easy to see the extent to which officers’ views and values weigh heavily on the politicians, but it is also obvious that the officers try to ensure that their recommendations relate to the political climate of the time as they understand it. In Newcastle, the extent to which planning policies (with their particular ‘professional’ definition of problems) have captured the politicians’ support has been noted, but what is less clear, both in relation to planning schemes and public health issues, is the extent to which professional ‘technical’ advice has tended to facilitate the operations of less obvious property and political interests.

3. Political Constituencies in Housing

The Council does not act in a political vacuum; it is influenced by actual or latent groups in the community and this report has noted how the Labour councillors, in particular, have come under direct pressure from the labour movement to pursue certain policies. On the other hand, the influence of (owner-occupying) ratepayers is less easy to discern, whilst tenants groups have not obviously affected policies at anything beyond the estate level. Nevertheless, the influence of these groups as potential opposition cannot, presumably, be ignored.

4. Business and Finance Capital

Public housing provision has developed as one of the largest capital investment sectors in Britain in the twentieth century and the interrelations between business interests and Council policies have been dramatically illustrated by the Poulson case. The more important extent to which generally complementary relationships have developed between business interests building housing and financial interests lending money to pay for it, and the policies pursued by local authorities (and who gains and loses from these relationships) are an important area which has been less closely studied.

5. Central Government

The policies followed by the state in relation to housing have been treated in this report as given, but the national document of which this forms part offers CDP’s interpretation of the state’s motivations for pursuing particular policies at different times which favour or penalise council housing. In Newcastle, the local authority, whilst often disagreeing with details of policy, has generally tended to accept the state’s general order of priorities and objectives; elsewhere this has not always been so.

We have, therefore, to ask, not why Newcastle Council pursued the sorts of policies it did, but what other courses it could have followed given the circumstances. The experience of the other CDP local authorities in this...
report offers some scope for comparisons but it is necessary to go beyond this to examine the historical evidence critically in the context of both the original socialist ideals of the labour movement and current discussions on the effectiveness of improving working-class living conditions by piecemeal social reforms.

References
1 There are discrepancies in published statistical information.
2 All quotations are from contemporary Council Minutes.
3 Though many of these were built for private rental. Traditional 'Tyneside Flats', consisting of two self-contained flats, one above the other, continued to be built in the inter-war period. Tenure typically consists whether of an absentee landlord of both flats or of the owner-occupier of one flat being landlord of the other.
6 John Gower Davies—op. cit.
7 See Benwell Grove Residents' Association, GIAs—Left to Rot? A short but detailed study of the difficulties of getting improvements done to privately landlord houses in one of Newcastle's GIAs. BGRA, 45 Benwell Grove, Newcastle 4 (November, 1975).
Canning Town is part of the London Borough of Newham. Most of the Borough is drab, being flat and low lying and it was developed as industry pushed east out of London in the 1840s and 1850s. The industrial sprawl continued down river into Barking, the neighbour on the east, during the present century. Newham is an amalgamation of the old boroughs of West Ham and East Ham. West Ham as a whole is a relatively homogeneous working-class community relying on semi- and unskilled work for its employment and living in recently built municipal housing or shoddily constructed privately owned homes from the 1890s and early 1900s. East Ham, further away from obnoxious industries, is seen as a more salubrious area with tree lined terraces of artisan dwellings, built more soundly than those of West Ham, and with less municipal housing.

Canning Town is a district in the south-west of Newham, formerly West Ham. It lies to the north of the Royal Group of docks – and contains a substantial industrial belt on the north bank of the Thames and the east bank of the River Lea. Canning Town has been a financially poor, hard-pressed community ever since its first houses were built bringing labour close to the docks and developing factories. Like other parts of the East End the community has survived for more than a century on a diet of low wages, casual work, unemployment and overcrowded housing in spite of the efforts by the civic authorities and developing trades unions to curb the worst excesses of industrialisation. Today Canning Town is still very much a community under assault. Industrial investment has dried up with better organised companies moving resources out of the district creating redundancies and reducing average incomes.

Although the population growth in Canning Town peaked in the mid thirties the most dramatic changes in the Borough were caused by the devastation by enemy bombers during the Second World War. It has been estimated that 60% of Canning Town’s housing was structurally damaged. Thousands left never to return. Post-war policies have capitalised on this exodus, reconstruction of housing being of a much lower density, and overcrowding, although still substantial, has been considerably lowered since the war. Substantial reconstruction of the housing has taken place with more than half the present population living in post-war accommodation but transport, shopping and recreational facilities leave much to be desired.

The Borough has always been Labour controlled with many councillors serving for thirty years or more. When Newham became part of the GLC there was considerable hostility to the potential intervention of GLC in any of Newham’s programmes, particularly housing. Even now the GLC only owns 1.5% of dwellings in the Borough. This historical antagonism is in part based on the parochial view of Newham representatives — e.g. West Ham is for the Hammers, and part of the political constitution of the GLC which has shifted from Labour control (1964) to Tory control (1967) and then back to Labour. Recently there has been more involvement of the GLC who have housing schemes in Beckton (part of Docklands area) and have been buying up older property in the Borough.

THE ROOTS OF PUBLIC HOUSING POLICY

In 1898 the first socialist group in local government in Britain was elected in West Ham. Its reign was brief but its policies and programmes included a commitment to building council housing using direct labour. As a result the first council houses in West Ham were built between 1899 and 1905. The aim was to improve the standards of working-class housing, and two storey flats were built at Bethel Avenue, Canning Town. These were seen as an improvement on either self-contained houses provided by the private sector which a family couldn’t afford and which were therefore multi-occupied, and better than the four-storey tenements being built in Tower Hamlets and other parts of inner London.

So, in theory, in its earliest days West Ham was committed to:—

(a) publicly financed housing
(b) the use of direct labour
(c) building to improve standards of working-class housing — not just to meet shortages.

But in practice only a very few council houses were built in the period 1899-1905 and most of the massive demand for housing continued to be met by the private sector. Council housing in West Ham at this time was both marginal and experimental, whereas in an area like Tower Hamlets both the Council and trusts were meeting a fair proportion of housing need with the construction of four storey tenements.

THE INTER-WAR PERIOD

Only a minute proportion of Newham’s council housing was built before 1945 and the Project area of Canning Town has just one inter-war estate. By the 1920s the greater part of the Canning Town area had been developed for industry and private landlords and speculators had built up terrace houses for rent over most of the remaining land. The low density suburban council housing of the 1920s is not part of the Canning Town landscape as there was no extent of virgin land for such development to take place. The one large estate built in Canning Town during this period consisted of 440 dwellings in four storey tenement blocks, the Manor Road Estate. Manor Road was isolated from the main part of Canning Town and over the years began to be seen as the sink estate for the area. It was totally unsuited to the large number of
children that lived there, there was little open space and the blocks were crowded together. Now, fifty years later, £1.5m is being spent renovating the estate and clearing some of the blocks to create more open space. It even has a new name – the Woodlands Estate. The trees have yet to grow.

THE POST-WAR VISION
In 1945 the Labour Party in West Ham was confronted with the task of replacing homes devastated by bombing during the war. 14,000 houses were destroyed and 38,000 damaged. The aim of the Council was to rebuild, as fast as possible, decent homes for working-class households. Central government with Labour in power also shared this aim. There was a sense of utopian optimism in the statements about housing made at this time. The vision of the garden city was prevalent – every household had a right to their own dwelling – preferably with a garden. In West Ham the first manifestation of this view of council housing was a scheme called after Keir Hardie, the first socialist MP in parliament elected from the Borough.

ANTIPATHY TO FLATS
The Council’s views on flats were clear. ‘The dislike of flats is particularly strong in West Ham, where people have not previously been accustomed to this form of living. It is essential therefore that the number of flats built should be the absolute minimum possible.’ But to do this the Council depended on resources from central government and the level of resources was to change.

When the Tories came into power in the 1950s they did so with a promise of 300,000 dwellings a year (public and private) and an increased general needs subsidy for council housing (from approximately £16 to £26+ per dwelling).
Post-war vision: Newham as the garden city revived?

This was welcomed by West Ham who had been building to quotas determined by the previous government and who believed they had the capacity to build beyond them. At the end of the forties and early fifties West Ham was completing about 200 dwellings each year but in 1954 they completed 320 and in 1954/55, 290 dwellings.

These relatively favourable conditions did not last long. Only a year later in 1954 subsidies were reduced for general needs and the subsidy structure was altered to encourage building flats higher than four storeys.

In 1954 West Ham announced ‘its first skyscraper scheme’: an eleven storey block in the north of the Borough. The Housing Department issued a statement:

‘We are now building these multi-storey flats because the Council feel some attempt should be made to utilise the space we have got to its best advantage... The areas in which any more of the new multi-storey flats will be built will have to be chosen carefully... It is unlikely that any of the skyscrapers will be built in the south of the Borough where such building is more expensive because of the need for deep pile driving’ (n.b. Canning Town is in the south of the Borough and so are 1,000 flats in twenty-two storey point blocks).

In the same year the Council made a more vigorous attempt to decant some of the population to new towns. They joined with East Ham, Dagenham and Romford and sent a deputation to the Ministry to ask for a set allocation of homes in new towns, demanding that the industrial qualification be scrapped. West Ham claimed to have had only 430 of the 18,500 houses in the seven new towns between 1945 and 1954. This ‘joint deputation’ was one of the few records we found of the Council actively joining with other boroughs to challenge a central government policy at this time. Generally in response to subsidy changes or building programme restrictions the Council sent either a letter to the Ministry or asked the local MP to raise it in the Commons. There is little evidence of collective action by Labour councils to defend their borough’s interests and their council housing policy against central government legislation which eroded their policies.

**THE PROGRAMME IN 1956**

By the mid fifties it was evident that West Ham was not going to meet housing needs as well as build decent houses. The council priority was to build as many units as possible as fast as possible.

Despite the fact that the population was falling (by 1958 it reached the deemed 165,000) in 1955 the waiting list stood at 17,000 of whom 12,000 were classified as priorities. At the same time there was a shift in emphasis throughout central and local government from building to meet need to recognising and tackling slum clearance programmes.

West Ham came out with a new housing plan in 1956 directed at meeting their slum clearance programme (of 2,000 dwellings in two years) and at meeting the waiting list. Previously all new housing had gone to waiting list applicants – now 40% would go to slum clearance families. And at a special council meeting the waiting list was chopped from 16,700 to 7,900 – ‘we should be frank and honest and tell them they have no prospect of being rehoused’ (a councillor). ‘They’ were mainly applicants from outside West Ham and people with adequate bedroom space.

This was a radical re-definition of what council housing was for – it was put through by a Labour council and there was no record of dispute within the Council. And it was also a move in the ratepayers’ interest. Whilst in reality households with adequate bedroom space might never have got a council place the Council had maintained that in theory they had a right to one. Now the Council, keen to have only a waiting list which they felt able to meet (not that they have met it), defined eligibility more in terms of ‘need’ according to criteria of stress and overcrowding than as a right of working-class households, and at this point the debate about flats temporarily disappears from the council agenda which focuses on the numbers game.
These changes were not at all unique to West Ham – they were forced on many local authorities as a result of the legislation passed during 1956, the main characteristics of which were:

(a) a reduction of the general needs subsidy to £10 per dwelling and later in the year the abolition of this subsidy,
(b) increased emphasis on slum clearance with the subsidy maintained at £22½ per dwelling,
(c) increased subsidies for flats – the higher you go the more money you get.

And on top of all this from 1955 councils had to raise part of their loan finance on the market at rates of 5% or more. From 1956-57 onwards the repayment of loan charges accounts for more than 70% of expenditure on the Housing Revenue Account.

This legislation pushed local authorities unwillingly towards the building packages of the big construction firms. Whether they ‘wanted’ private contractors to build blocks of flats or not they had little option if the use of limited Exchequer subsidy was to be maximised. And the building programme and rate of expenditure had to be continuously reviewed in light of current interest rates. For example when in 1957 the bank rate rose to 7½% the Council decided to place no more tenders till the bank rate fell in June 1958. The Housing Chairman reported that on £1½m borrowed, £87,000 had to be paid out in interest which meant an extra £1 on council rates compared with 1951.

A further control was a block on the building programme. When West Ham were building about 600 dwellings per annum (1959-61) they were chopped by the government who in 1962 stated that the Borough could only build to two-thirds of their target (i.e. to 450) ‘because of the economic situation’.

WHAT OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD VISION?

By the end of the fifties there was little evidence that the Council was re-creating a satisfactory neighbourhood. Both local Council and central government made appalling decisions, for example, the Council proposed to build over the Memorial Ground Park, in an area low in open space – luckily the Ministry prevented this. But the Ministry in its turn changed the zoning of a few acres of land in a primarily industrial area from industrial use to residential use. The result is the two tower blocks at Barnwood Court in Silvertown – an isolated scheme surrounded by industry. Both the Chief Architect, North, and the Housing Committee chairman, Kebbell, maintained that the schemes proposed in the early sixties – the majority of which were tower blocks – were satisfactory.

For example – when a scheme for the Fyfe Road/Totnes Street/Exeter Road area of Canning Town was publicised in 1962 the Borough Architect claimed that: ‘the whole area has been designed on neighbourhood lines and provision has been made for all facilities of community life’. The scheme comprised 188 flats, mainly in fifteen storey blocks, and ninety garages with limited shopping provision. Other schemes were:

- Thomas North Terrace – a ten storey slab block.
- Carpenter's Road – twenty-two storey slab blocks.

In terms of their own criteria the Council was succeeding – building 640 dwellings in 1963.

During the sixties major construction companies became heavily involved in council house building. They began to offer packages to local authorities e.g. six tower blocks using systems building methods, which were both the most profitable use of the companies' capital and equipment and also became the only available economic proposition for councils who were having to build at densities of 120 plus and depend on a subsidy structure which was geared to high blocks of flats.

The first public inkling of the policy decision to use systems building came in 1964 when Councillor Kebbell (Chairman, Housing Committee) announced that the Council had been looking at flats in Liverpool and Greenwich and that 1,000 might be built at Cleaver Road, Canning Town using the systems approach.

When East Ham and West Ham merged in 1965 there was a public controversy about Newham's implementation of this policy. Former chairman of East Ham Housing Committee, Councillor Doran, feared that Newham would build tower blocks in East Ham. He referred to the new flats in Silvertown: ‘I was down there today and was shocked to see the surroundings people are expected to live in’.

Kebbell defended the policy to build 1,000 dwellings in twenty-two storey blocks: ‘This will not be a series of concrete boxes with lids on: although it involves a lot of high density building it will be attractive and pleasant’. Kebbell had his way and Taylor Woodrow got the contract to build Ronan Point and its sister blocks.

FROM COUNCIL HOUSE POLICIES TO THE COUNCIL’S HOUSING POLICIES

The last ten years have seen two major changes. Firstly the amalgamation of East Ham and West Ham to become Newham, part of the Greater London Council Area in 1965. Secondly, the broadening of housing policy to take more account of the total housing situation within the Borough.

Newham maintained the approach of target building and in 1965 drew up a new programme for building incorporating the approved scheme of East and West Ham and redevelopment yet to be carried out: 7,080 houses to be demolished and 11,868 to be built. And again in 1967 a seven year plan ‘to wipe out slums’ was published after a Ministry report came out stating that Newham had the second highest number of slums in London. The waiting list had fallen from the topped figure of 7,500 in 1956 to 6,500 in 1967 but rehousing from slum clearance now became the priority – though it was stated that a small proportion of new homes would go to ‘urgent cases on the waiting list’.
Again Newham extolled its virtues in terms of the building record stating that East and West Ham had owned 2,900 properties in 1939 and now Newham owned 23,000. And compared with other London boroughs, Newham maintained a rate of building second only to Southwark.

The emphasis on slum clearance underlines the physicalist approach to housing. There was a borough-wide interest in wiping out physically old areas which were seen as structurally unfit and replacing these with modern units. This process meant that many households received better housing - defined in terms of overcrowding, amenities and lack of damp. But the redevelopment machinery as we know is insensitive to social needs or to a group of households whose living conditions may be appalling but who do not live within a spatially neat area for planning or housing purposes.

**IMPROVEMENT**

During the late 1960s Newham was influenced, as were other local authorities, by the central government's improvement policies. Whilst improvement grants had been available for years the emphasis on house improvement rather than redevelopment was only apparent locally some time after the 1969 Housing Act was published. To a council geared up to target building programmes, it represented a substantial shift in policy and the first General Improvement Area in Newham was not declared till 1971. This is an area in Canning Town where long established landlords, whose families built the houses at the turn of the century, have major holdings. This was to be the first of a ten year rolling programme dealing with 20,000 sub-standard properties. The officer in charge of improvement sees a General Improvement Area as a declaration that the housing involved will not be knocked down. In a borough like Newham where council action has meant blight and redevelopment, it was seen as significant to say 'these however will not be knocked down', even if not much improvement took place.

The Council has also pursued schemes to enable young married couples who are not eligible for a council house to save and purchase houses. This was part of the social balance ideology which was the subject of a report in 1968. 'Out will go Newham's image as a predominantly working-class area. In will come luxury flats, penthouses, large open spaces and executive style homes to attract professional people' reported the local paper, albeit a somewhat crude summary. And in 1970 the Council agreed to Councillor Watts, said in May 1972 that there was a housing revolution(!) 'We must encourage people to own their own houses'.

This ‘housing revolution’ has not taken place. The Council is still trying to meet its waiting list through the traditional council building programme. And local households can ill afford houses on the private scheme that has gone ahead. Sites marked for private development have been re-zoned for council housing. Municipal socialism – or the commitment to building state houses for rent – came under attack but has survived (without actually flourishing).

With interest rates and building costs escalating and a shortage of labour the projected building programme fell behind – in 1973 with 750 or so completions set against the previous records of around 1,000. The officers put forward a crisis report in Autumn 1974 analysing the building programme in terms of land, money and staff shortages – they recommended closing the waiting list. This report was not welcomed by the Council who neither approved nor rejected it and - after calling special committee meetings - merely noted its existence. There was no public statement of policy changes or major initiatives to 'solve the crisis'. But in practice no cases were approved for the waiting list between March and December 1974.

**GRASS ROOTS ACTIVITY**

During the early fifties West Ham were getting an ever more ambitious building programme off the ground. The fact that new and better housing was a possibility for local families became evident as old housing was ripped down and new housing rebuilt. But the pace and phasing of the programme meant many families could not see when, if ever, their conditions were going to change.

For example in 1953, 300 people from the Tenants Association of Radland Road and affiliated roads called for the resignation of West Ham Council en bloc and for a government inquiry into housing conditions.

In August 1954 tenants from the tidal basin area of Canning Town held a mass meeting to demand rehousing from their damp and appallingly repaired houses. Tidal Basin is a low lying area, subject to flooding, poorly drained and it was here some of the worst speculative housing was built at the end of the nineteenth century. The tenants' cause was championed by the local prospective Tory MP. In September tenants from another area of West Ham petitioned the government to ask for better housing (Lawrence, Peters, Cooper, Bradley, Mary Burke and Mona Streets). By October the Chairman of West Ham Housing Committee was carrying out a personal investigation of West Ham's slums, particularly the Tidal Basin and Radland Road area. The local newspaper carried the following comment: 'I will tell the officers to their faces your assurances that your houses have had repairs done to them and yet they are still the same as before'. He took lists of complaints and promised people they would be out within five years.

Again in 1955 tenants called for central government to take over the Borough's housing. The Minister was reported to have refused the request from 2,000 tenants to take over West Ham's housing, but promised to put pressure on building rates.

The next record of massive tenant organisation was after the collapse of Ronan Point when there was outraged and organised attack from tenants in redevelopment areas and other tower blocks. This (1968) was the most intensive period of collective tenant action the Council had experienced. In July 1968, 700 tenants in Custom House met and refused to be rehoused in tower blocks and threatened to barricade themselves in. Beckton Ward Residents Association organised a petition in May calling for
improvement not redevelopment and argued that with the decline in population there was no need for tower blocks. There was division in the Council, e.g. one councillor (Taylor – Labour) asked why tenants couldn’t have been consulted before blocks were built, whilst the Chairman Kebbell was hostile to tenant involvement, thought the blocks were fine and refused to attend a meeting called by BWRA because the public enquiry results (on the Ronan Point collapse) were not yet out.

Arthur Carr, prospective Tory MP for East Ham, got in on the issue and organised what he called ‘the peasants’ rebellion, with ‘captains’ in streets involved in clearance, and encouraged resistance to being moved. By October the Town Planning and Housing Committee decided against further high rise developments. The government report came out in November and criticised officers’ lax attitudes to enforcing bye-laws. By December Policy and Resources were discussing whether to abandon four tall blocks already started. The Chief Architect and Kebbell continued to defend them.

The issue raged on through to 1970 and it appears that energies died down, that the Council managed to split any major opposition and the tenants continued to be moved into tower blocks though no more were built.

There was little activity over the Housing Finance Act. One tenants association organised a motorcade. There was a demonstration for which only thirty people turned out and the Council made little of the issue. When it came to the time to vote the Labour group voted 26-24 for implementation but in the full council meeting thirteen councillors went against the whip.

Now in 1975 there is a variety of grass roots activity. Many of the council estates have tenants associations which are mainly social. The more active associations are involved in redevelopment issues. Here the Council is fairly actively involved in ‘participation’ and there are increasing numbers of meetings with tenants associations as a whole and with the committee members. Recently an association had the discussion about the future of its area deferred from the Housing Committee agenda till there had been a proper discussion with local residents. And another group got the Committee to defer approval of plans for new housing until the tenants had worked out their own proposals for the use of the site. The Chairman of the Housing and Planning Committee actively attends all meetings and tries to accommodate the demands of groups where they don’t threaten the basic fabric of housing policy. In some wards councillors support the work of tenants groups, in others they are disinterested or opposed.

FORWARD PROJECTION OF POLICIES

What will happen in the next ten years? On the one hand Newham is committed to a programme of clearance and new housing which stretches into the mid eighties plus General Improvement Area work; on the other hand central government restrictions look as if they may impede this programme especially in the immediate future.

The draft capital estimates for housing over the next five years show a total expenditure of around £100m the majority of which is for clearance and new building. The estimates did not take account of any restrictions which might result from the government Circular stressing the need for renewal rather than redevelopment. Nor of the more recent and expected restrictions on council acquisition or improvement of council property. But the Director of Finance indicated areas of potential cuts to bring the estimates in line with Newham’s target capital expenditure. And these would be on new building improvements to pre-war dwellings and acquired dwellings, and council acquisitions in GIAs. Cuts in these areas would be in line with government directives.

The scale of new building is illustrated by the submission to the DoE of Anticipated Tenders for Housing. This shows probable tenders for roughly 400, 800, 750, 775 and 550 dwellings in 1976/77/78 and 1980 respectively. The present form of new building in Newham is of three storey flats and houses at densities of about 100 persons per acre. We can speculate that this form of development using traditional methods may continue with increasing proportions of housing. But it seems likely that there will be greater investment in prefabricated or industrialised systems of houses, such as the timber-clad houses of TRADA which are being piloted in the Borough and the new material called Slabcon which Newham is to try in the near future.

Whilst we can suggest that Newham will maintain its present degree of commitment to state housing, what happens in practice will be largely determined, as it has been in the past, by the future policies of central government. Finally the development of the Docklands area, over a third of which is in the Borough, will influence the pattern of housing as a whole. If Newham maintains a determining interest in the development through the joint Borough and Greater London Council Docklands Development Committee then housing may develop in line with local council thinking. But if the plans for this area are determined and executed by a national body like a New Town Corporation then the interests of the local population may be subsumed to those of national economic planning.
North Tyneside (North Shields)

INTRODUCTION
During the time in which we have been working in North Shields the greater part of our work has been with local residents who are in some way concerned about housing. We have worked with action groups in clearance areas; in a GIA in private stock; in two areas in which local residents want to reverse local authority clearance decisions and on an existing pre-war council estate. We have also run two (more recently three) information shops in the Project area and by far the greater number of enquiries made by the public at these shops have been in some way to do with housing. On the surface, different people have different concerns. Residents in clearance areas want to get out of the slums they now live in. The tenants in the South Meadowell want their grossly inadequate 1930s flats improved into decent homes. Young couples living in with their parents and older couples whose families are outgrowing small flats want to be rehoused from the waiting list. Underneath, they all have the same problem. In North Shields there are not enough decent homes for the people who live there. Yet since 1924 council housing has been the main device used by local and national government as a way of providing just such decent homes for working-class people. Why aren't they available now, fifty years later? The objective of this paper is to suggest some answers to this question.

NORTH TYNESIDE, TYNEMOUTH COUNTY BOROUGH AND THE PROJECT AREA
The Project's area includes the central and western parts of North Shields, the 1930s Meadowell Estate and the two industrial villages of East Howdon and Percy Main. Immediately to the east of the Project area lies the Dockwray Square/East End council flats. With the exception of these the Project area contains the riverside working-class areas of the old Tynemouth authority. Historically Percy Main and East Howdon developed separately from North Shields, one as a dockside village, the other as a pit village. However, they have been administratively linked with North Shields throughout this century. The core of both areas consists of pre-1914 Tyneside flats. East Howdon also contains a small 1920s council estate. In Percy Main there are some post-war private semis, a small amount of immediately post-war council housing, and a larger very recent council estate.

The Meadowell Estate lies between Percy Main/East Howdon and North Shields proper. It contains a fairly substantial amount of post-war infill council development of varying character but the central core of the areas comprises roughly 1,900 1930s council flats. These were built to replace the industrial and indeed pre-industrial slum dwellings known as 'the caves' which were cleared from the steep river banks in North Shields. There is a small very recent estate at Minton Lane between the Meadowell and North Shields.

The part of North Shields which lies within the Project area consists almost entirely (i.e. apart from some council dwellings infilled on bomb cleared sites) of pre-1914 housing. Part of this is in the form of Tyneside flats but in the North Trinity area there is a substantial amount of self-contained terraced housing. The 'East End' of the town lies outside the Project area but in many ways resembles it. The East End flats were built to replace slum-cleared dwellings in a minor clearance spur by the local authority in the 1960s. The older housing in the Project area is of varying quality. Some of it, in Percy Main and in central North Shields is scheduled for clearance. In general the clearance areas contain the oldest bye-law Tyneside flats but in the Ropery Banks area where clearance is proposed on planning rather than housing grounds, the flats are much newer. The only General Improvement Area of private housing in the project area is in East Howdon but a fairly high proportion of North Trinity has been spontaneously improved. Council housing has been or is being improved in East Howdon and the North Meadowell but not in the South Meadowell.

It is important to realize that the Project area is made up of the riverside part of North Shields and its westward extensions. The Project area contains the core of the old working-class port district and the 1930s council estate built to replace the worst housing in the original area. It is bounded on the north by some of the natural extensions of such an area. North Trinity continues into Chirton and both closely resemble the Linskill area of North Shields. In these areas the pre-1914 housing is of better quality and was originally the residential area for non-manual North Shields workers. They are now populated by a mixture of such people and commuters to the central business district of the conurbation in Newcastle. Much of the rest of Chirton ward and most of the Collingwood ward consists of high quality housing, either from the 1920s on the Balkwell Estate or from the late forties early fifties on the Chirton Grange Estate. These areas represent the twentieth century development of nineteenth century North Shields. They are duplicated in any largely nineteenth century industrial working-class town in this country. What is peculiar about North Shields is its relationship with Tynemouth and with the coastal commuter belt. Most industrial towns include an outer middle-class fringe of 1930s and 1950s/1960s middle-class owner occupied dwellings. In the area of the old Tynemouth County Borough the proportion of such dwellings in the area is magnified because working-class North Shields not only generated its own outer middle-class ring, but is also surrounded by an important part of the middle-class ring of Newcastle. The Project area thus consists of an inner-city working-class area which is related to 'outer city'...
working-class areas but is in many ways dominated by middle-class areas generated by another town. This dominance has been of crucial importance for the political history of the area.

In contrast with most working-class areas North Shields has never until very recently indeed been governed by the Labour Party. Before the War most Tyneside local councils were usually Conservative/Independent, although Labour did govern in Gateshead for a considerable time. After 1945 most Tyneside councils have been Labour. Newcastle city has had an evenly-divided post-war history of political control and South Shields was lost to the Tories briefly in the late sixties. Otherwise, with the exception of overwhelmingly middle-class and suburban Whitley Bay, Tyneside has been Labour. Tynemouth, on the other hand, has never been Labour controlled. In the 1945-50 Parliament the Tynemouth constituency (which includes Whitley Bay) had a Labour MP, but the Labour Party was never able to take control of the Tynemouth County Borough Council although it often came fairly close to achieving this. In 1967, for example, the Labour Party only needed one seat to take control of the authority and in the 1972 local government elections Labour won most seats and for one year controlled some council chairmanships, but overall control was never achieved. Often this exclusion from control was due to the aldermanic bench which was normally Tory/Independent, but Labour has done very badly in direct elections. In 1969 there were only three Labour members on the Tynemouth Council. Indeed, the Labour Party has never been able to totally rely on the Trinity and Percy wards in the Project area which both returned Independent councillors in the late 1960s. However, Labour generally lost traditional seats on Tyneside at that time, so perhaps too much should not be made of this. To the left of the Labour Party the Communist Party was very active in the North Shields area in the 1930s, particularly in the National Unemployed Workers Movement and did well in local elections during and immediately after the War without, however, winning a seat. The Communist Party has now faded almost entirely from the local political scene.

Thus, in the old Tynemouth County Borough we had an unusual situation where the dominance of the traditional local elite over the working class was never really broken. This has had increasing significance in housing, as in other areas of service provision. North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough, as created by reorganisation on 1st April 1974, is very different. This authority is made up of the old Tynemouth County Borough, Wallsend and Whitley Bay Municipal Boroughs, Longbenton Urban District, and part of Seaton Valley Urban District. The division between Tynemouth and North Shields within the old Tynemouth County Borough has already been described. Wallsend was overwhelmingly working-class and typically Labour. As an area it resembles the more affluent parts of North Shields. Longbenton is made up of a mixture of pit villages and post-war overspill council housing from East Newcastle and was again overwhelmingly working-class and Labour. The part of Seaton Valley consists of the pit village of Earsdon, Backworth and Shiremoor and is traditionally working-class and Labour. Whitley Bay, although a middle-class residential district, has seen something of a Labour resurgence in the early 1970s and a third of the councillors in its last year were Labour. Middle-class Tynemouth/Cullercoats and Whitley Bay are now dominated by working-class areas in exactly the way in which the working-class areas of North Shields were dominated by middle-class Tynemouth. Unfortunately, it may well be the case that North Shields has missed the boat in terms of the impact of Labour local control. This will be discussed in detail in the review of the forward plans of the new authority.

COUNCIL HOUSING IN NORTH SHIELDS

The Project area lies wholly within the old Tynemouth County Borough which is now part of North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough. The new authority only took over on 1st April 1974, so in looking at housing policy and provision and their effects on the situation in the past it is a record of Tynemouth County Borough which has to be examined.

The housing policy of Tynemouth County Borough very faithfully reflected the commitments of national government. A detailed description of council housing construction for these and other local authorities can be found in official sources. In the 1920s, 853 council houses were built, mainly under the 1923 and 1924 Housing Acts. These were the family semi-detached houses on the Balkwell Estate which are still among the most popular council houses in the town. In the 1930s 2,190 'houses' were built. The vast majority of these were flats on the Meadowell Estate which were built under the 1930 Greenwood Act to rehouse people displaced by slum clearance in the oldest part of North Shields. As is generally the case, this 1930 construction is much inferior to the 1920s construction which preceded it.

The best years for council construction in this area were those immediately after the War. In the years 1946-50 alone, 1,886 houses were built, mainly in the Marden, Chirton Grange, and North Balkwell Estates. In the next five years another 930 dwellings were built. This housing built between 1946 and 1955 is probably the best council housing in the North Shields area. It should be noted that although Labour did not control Tynemouth CBC in the immediate post-war years, the Housing Committee was chaired by a Labour member, and it seems as if this Labour chairmanship was largely responsible for the excellent provision. Since 1955 council housing construction has steadily declined. In 1956-60, 886 dwellings were built; in 1961-65, 496; and in the years 1970 to 1st April 1974, 332. Much of the building in the early sixties was as medium rise flats in the Dockwray Square area. These flats are not highly regarded. More recently, the small amount of building has been low-rise semi-detached homes, terraced houses, and flats of excellent quality. Private housing construction in the area increased rapidly after 1956 in line with the policy of the national government, but it has declined since 1966. After the passing of the 1969 Housing Act Tynemouth began fairly large-scale improvements in its pre-war housing stock.

Council housing has not always been seen simply as a general method of providing houses. In the 1930s and
after 1956, central government saw council housing as being primarily a way of replacing slum cleared dwellings. The distinction between such building and building for ‘general housing needs’ has always been of great importance. Tynemouth County Borough’s building objectives before the War very much reflected the orientation of national policy. In the period before 1930 most of the housing was for general needs, although some small scale slum clearance took place. In the 1930s almost all building was to rehouse slum cleared or grossly overcrowded families. Indeed, when the river banks were cleared, single persons and couples without children were not rehoused. Instead, overcrowded families from outside the clearance areas were given new dwellings and smaller households from the clearance areas were left to make their own arrangements. This policy was the ultimate cause of the very high proportion of children that there has always been in the population of the Meadowell Estate.

In the period since the War the practice has not been so simple. Very little slum clearance was done until the mid 1960s when a start was made on the oldest bye-law housing in central North Shields. Until 1963 there had been a declining amount of building for ‘general needs’. After 1968 a very high proportion of new council house building was committed as slum clearance replacements. 478 dwellings were built up until 1973 and 307 were cleared. Assuming that each dwelling cleared meant a family to be rehoused (which is reasonable in North Shields), 63% of a very small amount of new construction was needed for this purpose alone. In addition, the improvement programme of the authority tied up a proportion of new construction. On the Meadowell Estate the overall number of dwellings was reduced by the conversion of flats into self-contained houses and decanting during improvement tied up a good proportion of overall stock. The impact of all this was very severe. For four years until 1974 Tynemouth County Borough simply closed the housing waiting list and made it impossible for anyone to join it. During this time only a minimal amount of general needs rehousing went on.

It is quite clear that the housing record of Tynemouth County Borough in its last five years was miserable indeed. In part this was locally determined. The anti-Labour majority in that authority was also anti-council housing. At the same time the Tynemouth authority’s practice was clearly in line with the general trend of national policy except that the authority did not take part in the mini-boom in construction that followed the 1967 Housing Subsidies Act. Indeed, in the mid sixties, the Borough Treasurer, who was the officer responsible for housing in Tynemouth County Borough, presented a report which argued that the Borough had no real need for any more council housing. He suggested that no further slum clearance would be necessary and that new households would find dwellings in the owner-occupied sector. Roughly three years later the same officer recommended the cessation of rehousing from the general waiting list and the closing of that list because of the shortfall in housing provision over housing needs. In Tynemouth County Borough in the late 1960s and early 1970s new housing construction was primarily for the replacement of slum cleared dwellings and to assist in the improvement and management of the council’s existing housing stock. It had almost no relevance to general housing needs.

Other authorities which now form part of the North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough were not that different from Tynemouth CB. With the exception of Whitley Bay MB they all had better construction records. However, in both Seaton Valley and Longbenton a good deal of the most recent construction was in local authority ‘new towns’ which related to the housing of the Tyneside conurbation as a whole. In Wallsend, the more ‘normal’ authority, 1,159 dwellings were built between 1967 and 1st April 1974, and 532 were cleared. Thus about 40% of the housing programme was slum clearance replacement. Even in Wallsend the recent past has been miserable in terms of local authority housing construction in comparison with the immediate post-war years.

It is with those years that recent housing records have to be compared. In the years 1946-50 Tynemouth County Borough alone built 1,886 council houses, almost all for general housing needs. If that impetus had been maintained throughout the post-war period there would have been 6,360 more council houses in the area of that authority than there are now. This would have more than doubled post-war construction and nearly doubled all local authority stock. In fact, of course, the 1946-50 quinquennium was, for housing purposes, only four years long, since no council dwellings were completed in North Shields in 1946. As the discussion of national policy and trends at the beginning of this report shows, Tynemouth County Borough is merely an example of what has happened to the political commitment to the general construction of council housing in this country.

THE FUTURE

The past few years have been among the worst for council housing construction since the War. Tynemouth’s record was very much in line with the intentions of the central government. Both were Conservative and anti-council housing. Since April 1974 both national and local government have been Labour and strongly committed to council housing. In the introduction to this pamphlet it has been demonstrated that the national government’s commitment is not all that it was claimed to be and that there are indications that housing will be vulnerable to cuts in public expenditure. This is clearly what has happened at the local level in North Tyneside. The original capital plan for that authority covering the years 1974-75 to 1978-79 gave a committed capital expenditure of £14,062,900 for new construction and an uncommitted expenditure of £25,116,700. This expenditure covered a total of 6,090 dwellings, not all of which would be completed during that period. The authority was committed to 3,912 of these and 2,178 were in uncommitted schemes. Of the ‘uncommitted’ dwellings, 372 were earmarked for pre-fab replacement and were not therefore available for general needs replacement. At the same time the five year clearance programme of the authority was for 2,885 dwellings under slum clearance procedures and a further 290 under the Planning Acts. Thus on the not unreasonable assumption that a dwelling cleared means a dwelling...
required for rehousing a family, 3,547 dwellings or roughly 60% of new construction were tied up in some way. In five years the new authority would be constructing just over 2,000 dwellings for general needs, or almost exactly the same number as Tynemouth County Borough alone constructed for this purpose in the years 1947-51.

In fact, since the publication of the clearance programme the authority has decided to clear sixty-five council flats at Riverview, North Shields and 106 dwellings at Gordon Street, Wallsend, giving a clearance programme of 3,718 dwellings or 62% of original new construction. In November 1974 a much purged general needs waiting list stood at 4,382 and this has increased since then.

As originally proposed, North Tyneside's construction programme was neither remarkably good nor remarkably bad. Indeed, in the first nine months of its existence housing completions, at over 1,000, were the best in any metropolitan district in Tyne-Wear. However, completions represent dwellings started in the past. New programmes are of more importance now. Recent developments illustrate only too well the vulnerability of housing programmes to cuts in public expenditure. In the two years 1975/76 and 1976/77, £6,639,000 have been cut from the house-building programme. These cuts represent rather more than a quarter of all construction expenditure in these two financial years and it should be noted that construction expenditure has been cut less than expenditure on improvement of both council and non-council dwellings.

After the cuts have been made, North Tyneside's construction programme is for 5,323 dwellings. 3,718 dwellings are in the clearance programme. 179 pre-fabs (post cuts) are to be replaced. 4,382 families are on the waiting list. Assuming, generously, that new household formation over the quinquennium is matched by casual vacancies, then housing needs exceed projected supply by 2,956 dwellings, or by 56%.

North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough's council leader has recently been boasting that the authority's increase in rates is among the lowest in the country. The not noticeably radical local Shields Weekly News was moved to muse 'At what cost?' The above is part of the answer.

COUNCIL HOUSE IMPROVEMENT

Patterns of new construction are only part of the story in relation to council housing. In any authority in which a significant proportion of council housing stock was built pre-1939 improvement is a very important aspect of the situation. The authorities which have now make up North Tyneside Borough took considerable advantage of the special grants in aid available from central government in development areas after the passing of the 1969 Housing Act and a significant amount of improvement has been done. By the end of 1973 nearly 5,000 council dwellings had been improved to twelve-point standard and that impetus has been maintained during 1974. In the quinquennium for which the Capital Plan was drawn up the new authority was committed to the improvement of 1,820 dwellings and had uncommitted schemes involving 1,011 others. In addition, after this Plan was produced, local residents were promised that a further 500-odd dwellings on the South Meadowell Estate in the Project area would also be improved. When the cuts were made in early 1975 a total of £3,382,000 involving 749 dwellings was cut for the years 1975/76 and 1976/77. These cuts represented over a quarter of proposed improvement expenditure on council dwellings. Again, the cuts came in the form of postponement of schemes which it had been intended to start in 1975/76 or 1976/77 and again it is clear that improvements are likely to be eventually carried out but that the cuts will have a rolling effect. As things now stand the improvement total of 2,082 dwellings is less than half of the total in the years 1969 to 1974 which is well in accord with central government intentions as expressed in the most recent White Paper on Public Expenditure. Unfortunately, North Tyneside's housing stock and housing needs are much more like those of Scotland than those of the rest of England, and there is a clear need for a continued high level of council housing improvement, especially in North Shields.

HOUSING FINANCE

It is a relief to turn from areas in which the outlook is so gloomy to one in which there is some likelihood of improvement on at least one side of the picture. However, let us first look at the recent past. It is clear that between 1945-46 and 1972-73 council housing in Tynemouth County Borough virtually ceased to be subsidised in any way. In 1945-46 rents met 42% of revenue account expenditure, exchequer subsidies met 33% and rate fund subsidies met 8%. In 1972-73 rents met 89% of expenditure, exchequer subsidies met 2% of expenditure and rate fund subsidies met 7% of expenditure. 1972-73 was the first year since 1955-56 in which a rate fund subsidy had been paid and although the exchequer subsidy had declined dramatically in that year in consequence of the 1972 Housing Finance Act its normal level was of the order of 20% in the 1960s and early 1970s. This ridiculous situation in an area where the housing crisis was so acute that the waiting list was for a long time simply closed can be unequivocally laid at the doors of central and local government pursuing a straightforward anti-council housing policy. However, even in Wallsend where Labour held local power throughout the period 1950-51 to 1972-73 the makeup of housing revenue account income was 52% rent, 33% exchequer subsidy and 9% rate fund subsidy in the first year and had changed to 66% rent, 20% exchequer subsidy and 9% rate fund subsidy by the latter year. In fact, of the four major authorities only Longbenton urban district maintained a significant element of rate fund subsidy throughout the fifties and sixties. In Wallsend 1972-1973 was the first year since 1963-1964 in which rate fund subsidy to the housing revenue account had exceeded 2%.

The figures for the last year of the old authorities, 1973-74, are not yet available but in the first year of the new authority 1974-75 the makeup of housing revenue account income was 54% rent, 29% central government subsidy and 18% rate fund subsidy. However, although the level of central government subsidy is likely to massively increase under the Housing Rents and Subsidies Bill, locally generated subsidies have been drastically cut under the general expenditure cuts of the authority. An original
Exchequer subsidies are undoubtedly going to be very much more generous in coming years but the necessity for this arises from the massive increase in interest rates. In 1945-46 Tynemouth CB's housing revenue expenditure was made up as follows: 57% capital charges, 13% repairs and maintenance, and 9% management. By 1972-73 the proportions were 71% capital charges, 20% repairs and maintenance, and 9% management. In Longbenton capital charges took nearly 90% of housing revenue account income in 1972-73 and it is Longbenton which built most dwellings in recent years. In the first year of the new authority the makeup of housing revenue account expenditure was 78% capital charges, 12% repairs and 7% administration. Next year the estimates indicate an expenditure divided 79% capital charges, 12% repairs and 7% administration. It is clear that capital charges (overwhelmingly interest charges) are likely to represent roughly 80% of the housing revenue account expenditure for the foreseeable future and as central government will be meeting 33% of old capital charges and 66% of new capital charges it is this which attracts large subsidies. The impact of these subsidies will help to keep rents down but if the authority continued to phase down rate fund subsidies then rents will rise.

PRIVATE IMPROVEMENT

In contrast to neighbouring authorities, North Tyneside Municipal Borough is not heavily committed to a programme of private house improvement. As yet (April 1975) no Housing Action Areas have been designated in the Borough and the original quinquennial estimate of an expenditure of £1.1 m a year on private improvement has been cut to £0.1 m per annum. The sum allowed for 'purchase' and conversion of miscellaneous dwellings was originally £668,000 per annum. This has been cut to £418,000 per annum. Thus the prospects for any large-scale municipalisation are not at all good.

There are several GIA's in the Borough, one of which - East Howdon - is in the Project area. Progress on GIA's has been slow and in the recent estimates the sums available for environmental improvements have been drastically cut. For example, East Howdon was originally due to have £200,000 expended in 1974-75. Now £76,000 will be expended in 1975-76. Most of the GIA's are in the area of the former Whitley Bay Municipal Borough, and it is certainly questionable if these largely middle-class areas of high quality Victorian and Edwardian housing ought ever to have been so designated. On the other hand, at least one of the GIA's, Carville in Wallsend, is in an area where clearance was a strong possibility. In addition, there is the ongoing problem of the Ropery Banks area of North Shields where approximately 300 dwellings are blighted by planning proposals.

On balance, the private improvement record of the authorities which came together to make up North Tyneside was by no means outstanding. It is true that many middle-range owner-occupied dwellings, typically good pre-1914 terraced houses or pairs of Tyneside flats, have been improved and that the improvements, in the area of the old Tynemouth County Borough at least, are of good quality. However, this was largely the result of the availability of 75% grants for home improvement in development areas until mid 1974 and had little to do with any sustained local authority policy. Indeed, the General Improvement Area in East Howdon has rather fewer improved dwellings than non-GIA areas in North Trinity or the Grey Street area where the original dwellings were of rather better quality.

The poorest improvements under the 1969 Act were those carried out by the Craghall Housing Association in White City, Longbenton, and it was probably this experience that led the new authority to resolve, in 1974, that housing associations would not be involved in home improvement work. The decision in 1974 that housing associations would not be involved in housing improvement work did not, of course, relate to stock already owned by housing associations. It seems to have been intended that housing associations should not be deliberately brought into General Improvement Areas. Given the shortage of funds available to the local authority and the generous assistance available to housing associations under the proposals of White Paper on Public Expenditure, it is not clear if this admirable intention can be maintained. Certainly, the authority has no clear contrary policy of municipalisation in potential improvement areas and the Housing Committee is constantly refusing to buy dwellings freely offered to it by private landlords, including dwellings in improvement areas, on the grounds that these have "management difficulties".

It thus seems fair to say that North Tyneside as an authority has no clear private improvement programme which can be thrown into the balance as a counterweight to shortcomings in new housing construction or council housing improvement.

PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT

The importance of new private housing construction in Tynemouth County Borough has been referred to previously. From 1918 to 1st April 1974 8,341 dwellings were built for private occupation in the area of Tynemouth County Borough compared with 8,000 council dwellings. 4,584 pre-war private dwellings were built compared with 3,150 council. Post-war 4,297 private dwellings have been completed compared with 4,942 council. Whereas the peak of council construction was in the immediate post-war years, private construction (since 1945) peaked in the early sixties. Most privately constructed dwellings since 1919 and virtually all since 1945 will have been built for owner occupiers. However, a good many owner occupiers have moved into that tenure sector by purchasing pre-1914 accommodation which was previously privately rented. Such a tenure change adds nothing overall to the housing stock. The only importance of such moves was that in a period when house prices were rising rapidly the capital
gain made on an older house could be used to finance the purchase of a new semi at a later date.

It is reasonable to say that owner occupation was well beyond the means of residents of the Project area in the 1930s. However a case might be made for assuming that some skilled manual workers could afford to buy new houses in the early 1960s. Unfortunately, data is only available from 1969 but this does cover the period of massive inflation in house prices. The point that has to be concentrated on is the relationship between house prices and wages, and the relative changes in these. The table below gives the relationships for the northern region for three-bedroomed semis built since 1968. Incidentally, older semis were more expensive, and the price of new three-bedroomed semis was very close to average house prices.

### NORTHERN REGION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>£ House Price (A)</th>
<th>£ Average Annual Earnings (B)</th>
<th>Ratio A/B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969 (all dwellings)</td>
<td>3,714</td>
<td>1,291-16</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970 (semis)</td>
<td>4,210</td>
<td>1,458-6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>4,490</td>
<td>1,608-36</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>5,780</td>
<td>1,862-64</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>7,240</td>
<td>1,996-8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974 (all dwellings)</td>
<td>8,353</td>
<td>2,395-1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted here that northern regional house prices, which are well below national average prices, are being compared with national average earnings, which are well above northern average earnings. In addition to change in prices the interest rate between 1969 and 1974 increased from 8 1/2% to 11% for building society loans, giving a post-tax relief increase of roughly 30% in the cost of borrowing money. Thus the annual outlay in the first year of purchase of buying a house has risen 60% faster than real incomes. In this situation it is scarcely surprising that new private housing starts in the northern region in the second quarter of 1974 were less than half what they had been a year earlier. In other words, the possibility of buying a new house was receding fast, if it ever existed for Project area residents. This stoppage at the top of the market has totally disrupted filtration from older owner-occupied stock into new dwellings and meant that it is hard for a young couple getting married to become owner occupiers, by for example, buying a pair of Tyneside flats.

### HOUSING ALLOCATION

Although it is to some degree separate from other issues raised here, no account of the problems caused by bad housing in North Shields would be complete without some discussion of the effects and causes of local authority allocation policies and the absolute necessity of extensive council house improvement is a product of both of these. The cause is straightforward. The local authority housing stock in North Shields is highly differentiated. Some of it is very high quality indeed. The 1920s Balkwell Estate, the post-war developments in Marden and Chirton Grange, and the very recent developments in Percy Main and Minton Lane are exceptionally good quality housing which is comparable and indeed often better (after improvement for which in this context read updating of the 1920s stock) with the products of the private speculative builder. Typically, these dwellings are self-contained houses, whether terraced or semi, and they were, with the exception of the small amount of recent Parker Morris standard construction, built in a period when the central objective of housing policy was the provision of good quality housing for the working classes as a whole. In other words, they were built for general needs. On the other hand, some of the housing stock is pretty bad. In the North Shields area no post-war development is that bad. It seems that the early 1960s flats around Dockwray Square are not all that popular, and certainly this form of medium rise development from around this period is often the worst housing in many local authority stock, e.g. Noble Street in Benwell. However, the Dockwray flats are well located on a good site, close to what is left of the town centre, and they look to be a rather better finished job than much housing of their style.

In pre-war stock the practice is very different and to understand the import of this it has to be realised that 38% of the housing stock the old Tynemouth County Borough handed over to North Tyneside was pre-war. Of this stock 20% was in the form of flats on the Meadowell Estate. These flats were all built in the 1930s to Greenwood Act standards although for technical reasons some were built with Wheatley Act subsidies. In their unimproved form they illustrate the housing commitments of the National Tory Government. They were designed to provide the maximum number of bedspaces with the minimum level of social amenities. Thus in Tynemouth 66% of dwellings with four or more bedrooms were flats on the Meadowell Estate in 1973-74. In consequence the child density on this estate at the time of the 1971 census was more than twice that of Tynemouth CB taken as a whole.

The Meadowell Estate has had a chequered history. Originally known as the Ridges, it was filled up with larger families after the 1935 Housing Act. Single persons and those couples without children were not rehoused to the estate in the 1930s, even when slum-cleared, and there seems to have been reluctance to rehouse couples with only one child. These households were supposed to take up accommodation vacated by larger, overcrowded families in households in non-slum dwellings.

Immediately after this 'stocking up' the estate suffered from the Second World War in the simple fashion that virtually no money appears to have been expended on its maintenance during those six years. In consequence, after 1945 the stock, which was originally of poorer quality than the Wheatley Act Balkwell semi's, was of even more markedly inferior quality than the newer post-war dwellings constructed in large numbers before 1954. Originally, the estate appears to have lacked any special reputation but one set in the early sixties of the Ridges as the ghetto of North Shields. This was reinforced and to some degree
sealed by a pattern of hostility to the estate on the part of some Tory/Independent councillors. In many respects the hair-raising reputation of the estate is surprising. At no point in time did it contain less than about 15% of the total population of Tynemouth CB and it was thus an exceptionally large ghetto in terms of the total proportion of the town’s population based in it. In contrast, the Deans and Egerton Square Estate, which had a similar reputation in South Shields, never contained even 5% of that town’s population between them.

It is clear that the Ridges/Meadowell tended to contain people who could find nowhere else to live. In particular the estate has always had a high concentration of large families. This was reinforced by a rigid and rigorous grading system operated by the old Tynemouth CB Housing Department in which prospective and existing tenants were classified on a scale ranging from A to E and the dwelling to which they were originally allocated together with their subsequent chances of transfer from it were largely determined by these classifications. Initially rent differentials reinforced this grading process. Poorer families were allocated to the Meadowell because the rents were lower. Tynemouth CB introduced a differential rent scheme comparatively early, so the importance of such differentials was soon reduced and they are now largely unimportant. Recently a cut in rate fund subsidy to the Housing Revenue Account was replaced by a 50p per week increase in the rent of all council dwellings in North Tyneside regardless of standard and in the area of rent rebates this has further eroded the importance of comparative cost. However, all this should not be overstated.

In 1973 no less than 59% of households on the South Meadowell, which is the unimproved and supposedly worst part of the estate was classified at B+ or above, which was supposed to be of amply sufficient standard to be allocated a post-war house. Not surprisingly it was larger families that tended to have lower classifications.

Since local government reorganisation this system of classification has been abandoned. It has been replaced by a dwelling allocation system based on the route by which new council tenants arrive in council housing stock. In North Tyneside there are four of these: from slum clearance areas, from a priority social/medical waiting list, from the general waiting list, and from being homeless. Those being rehoused from slum-cleared dwellings have considerable power to decide where they go, and almost no one from processes we have monitored has ever gone to the unimproved South Meadowell. The homeless have almost no power and it appears from reports from the area that a substantial proportion of homeless families are given tenancies there because nobody else will take them.

The major problem is the stock. In the North Meadowell, where the flats have been substantially improved, these difficulties do not arise. Even on the North Meadowell the proportion of flats as opposed to self contained houses is too high but the dwellings are of a good standard. In the unimproved – and God knows when to be improved – South Meadowell, the flats, although now better maintained thanks to the vigilance of the local tenants’ working party, are still grossly inadequate. The new authority does not
have a deliberate allocation policy as such but the major differences in its stock predicate the same result. The only solution is the massive improvement of this stock. The likelihood of this is discussed elsewhere.

The Politics of Housing in North Shields

The most surprising thing about council housing in North Shields is the failure of personal issues in terms of inadequate housing to get translated into general political action. Housing conditions in the 1930s on Tyneside were by far the worst in England and fully as bad as the worst in Scotland. In the 1930s local political activity centred on the household means test and opposition to the general imposition of this by the Tynemouth Public Assistance Committee. This was led by local communists active in the National Union of Unemployed Workers and the dominant mass political concern. The local Labour Party was notably timid on this issue. Housing as such does not appear to have been the focus of local politics. The left parties did refer to deplorable housing conditions in their 1930s election material but the main impetus for the slum clearances of the time appears to have come from the local Medical Officer of Health. The dominant Tory/Independent coalition made a practice of selling off the better council housing on the Balkwell to sitting tenants during the inter-war years, particularly in 1929, and Tynemouth continued to sell council houses throughout the life of the authority. In the twenties and thirties developments in council housing seem to have been the result of the local authority following the initiatives of central government and the pushing of one of its officers rather than anything else.

This also seems to have been the case in the immediate post-war period. Although Labour did not control the local authority they were strongly represented and demands for decent housing for returning ex-servicemen formed an important part of their political platform. The exceptional building achievements of the authority in the years 1946-59 can be put down to a combination of this local pressure and the very tight control exercised by the Labour Government. It is noticeable how quickly Tynemouth County Borough construction programmes started to run down once the political colour of central government changed.

The only occasion on which council tenants in North Shields challenged the local Council was in early 1964 when the Tynemouth Municipal Tenants United Action Committee was formed to oppose rent increases and produced a programme on rent repairs and other management issues. This Committee also wanted the establishment of a direct labour force. It had the support of 3,339 council tenants in its opposition to the rent increases and a petition was presented to the local authority. The council committee concerned (that is, the Finance Committee) rejected all the tenants’ recommendations. A number of amendments by Labour councillors were all defeated. The Tenants’ Action Committee appears to have collapsed after this.

It should be noted that the dispute in 1964 was largely about deferred maintenance. At the time £837,000 worth of maintenance work was outstanding in council housing and the Tory (Independent) Council proposed to increase rents to pay for this while holding rates steady. Labour councillors and tenants’ representatives claimed, as far as we can see correctly, that the situation arose because of under-subscription to the Housing Repairs Account over many years. This poor maintenance had particularly bad effects on pre-war council housing, especially that on the Meadowell Estate.

So far as housing politics went in the period 1950 to 1974 it seems reasonable to say that the local Labour Party was vigorously pro-council housing whereas the ruling Tory/Independent coalition was generally hostile to it. The rate fund subsidy to the housing revenue account was eliminated as soon as this ceased to be mandatory. Tynemouth did not participate in the post-1967 council housing increase in construction programme which, brief as it was, did have beneficial effects elsewhere. As has already been mentioned, in the mid sixties it was decided that no further council housing construction on any scale was necessary in the Borough. The Labour opposition was vigorously against all these developments but that opposition was largely confined to the council chamber. Thus in 1969 at the height of a local housing crisis to which the ineptitude of the prevailing administration had largely contributed, the Labour Party was reduced to three seats on the Council. It is true that there was a national anti-Labour trend in local elections at this time but nowhere else on Tyneside did it go as far as in Tynemouth CB. Labour lost seats in the Percy and Trinity wards at this time which, given the character of these wards, was remarkable indeed. In both areas the central issue was undoubtedly housing.

It is tempting to assign responsibility for the housing crisis in North Shields to thirty years of Tory misrule. Indubitably more council houses would have been built if the Labour Party had retained power continuously since the War. Nonetheless in the 1946-50 period the Tory authority built a good many houses. At that time Labour central government appears to have been able to impose its housing commitments on even such authorities as Tynemouth. This is in marked contrast to the post-1967 period when the national commitment represented by the 1967 Housing Subsidies Act had no discernible impact on the construction programme of Tynemouth County Borough. In a sense the political issues inherent in the different attitudes to council housing of the local Labour Party on the one hand, and the Tory/Independent coalition on the other, never became the basis of mass politics in Tynemouth County Borough. Rather, the political level of action was in terms of competing administrations. The frustrations of local people were never channelled around the local political processes which affected them. Whereas in the 1930s the non-payment of dole was a basis for mass politics in North Shields, in the 1950s and sixties the non-building of council houses was not.

When local government reorganisation occurred considerable attention was given to Labour Party policy in the new authority. Housing was given first place in these discussions and in the resulting policy statement: ‘Labour will give
ment where the attitudes of Crosland and Freeson to even more housing association tenure, are distinctly council housing in contrast with owner-occupation and humble have not been raised up.

ambiguous. However, that genuine commitment locally, probably markedly stronger than the national commit­

One of the first initiatives taken by the new authority in the area of housing management was the establishment of area housing consultative committees which include both local councillors and tenants' representatives. The committees deal primarily with management issues and it seems fair to say that, while they do provide a channel for dealing with day-to-day matters they have little relevance to larger-scale and more fundamental issues. In fact, the consultative committees have not been successful in involving the mass of tenants. The initial meetings at which tenants' representatives were elected were not well attended. This seems to be largely a consequence of the limited role of the consultative committees. In most of the areas improvement is a major issue; certainly this is the case in the North Shields area, but it is quite clear to all concerned that the resolving of this issue lies far beyond the scope of the consultative committees.

Indeed, since the main body of this document was compiled North Tyneside MBC have submitted their housing capital programme to the Department of the Environment. The Evening Chronicle on 5 March 1975 reported that North Tyneside had asked for £3.6m and was being allowed to spend £1.6m. Subsequently, this has been raised to £2m. The initial request was the smallest on Tyneside. Newcastle had asked for £8m and had been allocated £4.3m. Gateshead had asked for £10m and had been allocated £3.8m. South Tyneside had asked for £7m and been allocated £4.3m. On an impression of the relative character of the council housing stock of these authorities, North Tyneside asked for nothing and got less. On balance it could be said that North Tyneside needs as much money spent on council house improvement as any of the other authorities. It appears that in this case the humble have not been raised up.

There is no doubt that the North Tyneside Labour group is committed in principle to the building of council housing. Indeed, the local commitment of the Labour Party is probably markedly stronger than the national commit­

The policy statement estimated the housing needs in terms of construction of the new authority as being (in order of priority): 3,000 dwellings for slum clearance replacement; 2,000 dwellings for priority waiting lists; 6,000 dwellings for the general needs waiting list.

It was considered that there was an urgent need to build 11,000 dwellings, 4,800 of them in the area of the old Tynemouth CB. As the policy statement says: 'To make an impact on the present situation would require 3,000 per year for the next four years at least.' This seems absolutely right. However, at a meeting of a Joint Local Government Conference held on 23 March 1974 discussion was in terms of difficulties of supplying 1,500 dwellings per year.

On balance it could be said that North Tyneside needs as much money spent on council house improvement as any of the original capital programme. The method of curtailment has been to postpone expenditure so that schemes for all aspects of housing have been pushed back into the later 1970s.

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like the more spurious commitment nationally, has been to a large degree sacrificed to economic exigency. The reason why such sacrifices, which have enormous and ongoing significance for the lives of people in the Project area, are so easily made is that housing has become an administrative issue and decisions about it are taken on the administrative level alone. The discontent and misery of those afflicted by the decisions has no channel to those who take them, precisely because there is no real involve­

The most significant development in North Tyneside Housing since the main part of this document was written has been the curtailment of all aspects of the authority's original capital programme. The method of curtailment has been to postpone expenditure so that schemes for all aspects of housing have been pushed back into the later 1970s.

Expenditure 1974-75 to 1977-78 as percentage of that originally planned. (Capital Plan Review, November, 1975.)

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<th>1974-75</th>
<th>1977-78</th>
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<tr>
<td>New Housing</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council House Improve</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIA Work</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Housing Capital Expenditure</td>
<td>86%</td>
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Not only has an originally inadequate programme been cut but the authority is so far behind on some schemes that it has recently set up a review of its overall housing function.

On the financial side rents have recently been increased across the board by 60p a week. Rents were increased by 50p a week on 1st April, 1975 so that even with an improved rebate scheme in operation the average council house rent in North Tyneside (i.e. net of rates and rebates) has now increased by more than 30% in less than 9 months.

The most encouraging development has been the recent establishment of a North Tyneside Housing Campaign Committee drawn from Labour councillors and party members, Tenants and Residents groups, the local Trades Council and the Building Unions which is co-ordinating a sustained campaign in North Tyneside demanding not cuts in an already inadequate programme but instead an aggressive commitment to decent housing for all by 1980.
This committee is a stronger version of the early 1960s joint action committee with a broader base but a similar political commitment. It is working together with tenants and residents groups on particular issues e.g. the continuing non improvement of the South Meadowell Estate. Housing is once again a political issue in North Tyneside, which is precisely as it should be.

POSTSCRIPT

Under Section 105 North Tyneside Council have had their budget for housing cut by £3.6m for the year 1976/77, so no council house improvements will be carried out next year.

Sources

A variety of sources were used in writing this report. Among the most important are:

Tynemouth County Borough: Annual Abstracts of Accounts
Council Minutes
Annual Reports of Medical Officer of Health.

North Tyneside Borough: Council Minutes
Five-Year Capital Plan
1974-75 to 1978-79
Digest of Budget 1975-76

Shields Weekly News (previously Shields Evening News).
Department of Environment: Local Housing Statistics.

Considerable help was received from a number of people on the Project. For ease of reading neither detailed acknowledgment has been made or detailed reference.
Before the reorganisation of Scottish local government in May 1975 Paisley was a large Burgh with a population of 95,000; references here are to the pre-reorganisation situation. Paisley has since become part of the Renfrew District, which is the housing authority, within the Strathclyde Region. The town is part of the central Clydeside conurbation and has a wide range of manufacturing industry. The population of the town has been stable for some years and has started slowly declining.

Council housing is important in Paisley; there are over 20,000 council houses which, together with a small number provided by the Scottish Special Housing Association, amount to two-thirds of the total. But this proportion is not exceptionally high for central Clydeside; Coatbridge and Motherwell for example have considerably higher proportions.

Paisley built a substantial number of council houses in the inter-war years. Already by 1945 council housing comprised about a quarter of the total housing stock. Building showed the usual double peak: Wheatley Act general needs building in the late twenties, and 1930 Act slum clearance building in the thirties. Building for rehousing amounted to over a third of the total. It may be noted that about 87% of all building for rehousing in the thirties took place in Ferguslie Park.

Public sector building has predominated in Paisley since the War. The number of council houses built has followed the UK trend, with the highest levels in the periods of the Macmillan housing drive in the mid fifties and of the Labour Government in the mid sixties. On the other hand, building for owner occupation has never really achieved a continuing importance in the way that it has in England. Council building has twice fallen to a low level: first in the early sixties and then in the last few years. Both these falls also happened nationally. The first mainly reflected national policy, in particular restrictions on subsidies. National policies hostile to council housing were no doubt a factor in the last decline but the local situation was of importance. Around 1970 it looked to councillors and officials as though Paisley would have a surplus of council housing – the waiting list had fallen drastically in size and some houses were very difficult to let. But more recently the waiting list has been rapidly growing, due to the general tightening of the housing market, and council building is increasing again. There has been continuous Labour control since 1954 (except for the single year 1966/67) and house building has always been a particularly important objective for the party in central Scotland – for very good reasons given the appalling working-class housing conditions.

In the last few years slum clearance has exceeded council building, though not overall building, in the Burgh. But population loss is not providing a leeway of empty houses, as is happening in many urban areas. On the basis of the 1971 Census there appear to be of the order of 5,000 sub-tolerable houses (which would be unfit in England) in Paisley. Therefore, a realistic slum clearance programme will require a substantial council housing programme.

Rents have been relatively low in Paisley and have provided only a modest proportion of HRA revenue. After rising in the late fifties (reflecting the general trend which often largely eliminated rate subsidies in England) rents levelled off at 40-45% of costs. But rents started off at a lower level and the rate fund contribution at a higher level than in England, so the latter is still substantial. This reflects the general pattern in central Scotland rather than a conscious policy on the part of Paisley. The falling proportion of costs met by central government grants is a disturbing and inequalitarian trend, established long before the 1972 Act.

In Paisley there has been some improvement of council housing. A good deal of minor improvement on the lines of rewiring has been carried out and some more extensive improvement. There have been no improvements as such in Ferguslie Park, although some houses have been rendered habitable after a long period of non-occupation. This has not been grant-aided improvement and does not result in a house of an improved standard. Improvement in the private sector has been largely confined to the individual initiative of the owners using grant aid.

**HOUSING IN FERGUSLIE PARK**

Ferguslie Park, the Project area, is a large council housing scheme in the north-east of Paisley. The area is almost completely surrounded by railways and industrial land so that, although situated within a mile of the town centre, it is to a large extent cut off from the rest of the Burgh. Ferguslie Park has a population of about 10,000 which is nearly 11% of the Paisley total. About 97% of the houses are owned by the local authority.

The population of Ferguslie Park fell rapidly between about 1968 and 1974 and the number of empty council houses increased. The number of council houses reached a peak of 3,536 in the mid sixties. Soon after the completion of the last houses the problem of unlet houses started to appear, until at the beginning of 1974 less than 2,700 were occupied. It is estimated that the population of Ferguslie Park was about 13,500 in the mid sixties. It had fallen to 12,300 at the time of the 1971 Census which was about 13% of the Burgh total. The population fell by about a further 2,000 to a total of some 10,000 in 1974 at which level it has stabilised at least for the time being.

Conditions in Ferguslie Park vary enormously from one part of the scheme to another. Whilst much of the area...
1924 Act houses at Ferguslie Park: still among the most sought-after Council homes

has serious difficulties - poor physical conditions, unkept gardens and empty houses - other parts are in good condition, have no empty houses and do not seem, on the surface at least, to have serious problems. These differences can be related to the origins of the scheme. The main groups of houses are as follows:

(i) 1924 Act houses (Craigielea). These are mainly cottage (four in a block) flats with separate entrances to each house. They were built in the late 1920s. In the twenties council housing was relatively expensive and could only be afforded by better paid working-class people in regular employment. In most towns 1924 Act housing is among the most pleasant and sought-after council accommodation and these houses are no exception. There are no empty houses and the houses and gardens are well maintained.

(ii) 1930-38 Act houses. These are mainly tenement flats and comprise more than half of Ferguslie Park. They were built between 1937 and 1943. Housing policy changed in the thirties with the inception of the first slum clearance campaign. Many of the original tenants of these houses were people displaced from slums, with large families, low incomes and irregular employment. Tenements are less attractive and are subject to wear and tear from large numbers of children. The common parts of buildings are often neglected and common gardens uncultivated because responsibility for them is diffuse. The problems of physical deterioration and empty property are concentrated in these houses though not all of them are affected.

(iii) Blackstoun Oval. An area of cottage flats which, though built in 1936 and 1937, is similar to Craigielea in its physical and social characteristics. There are no empty houses and the area is well maintained.

(iv) Post-war houses. These are a mixed group of houses built between 1944 and 1965. The bulk of them are an updated version of the pre-war tenement flat, together with some non-traditional semi-detached houses. Their physical condition is in general reasonably good and the number of empty houses small.

(v) System built flats ('Crudens' houses). Many designed for old people, these houses were completed in 1966 and 1967. Their physical condition is good and virtually all of them are occupied.

Taken as a whole, however, Ferguslie Park is undoubtedly the most deprived and the least popular housing scheme in Paisley. This situation arises not only from its role as the major pre-war slum clearance estate, but also from a notorious group of supervised houses in the scheme. These supervised houses were demolished a few years ago, but some idea of their disastrous effect on the reputation of the area is given by the ostensibly favourable comments on them from a Scottish Housing Advisory Committee Report, *Housing Management in Scotland*, published in 1967.

The attitudes expressed in these extracts from the SHAC report* also say much about prevailing attitudes within housing management in Paisley only a few years ago.
1930-38 Act tenements: cuts housing, neglected even before it was built

Housing management in Paisley, at least as regards the more deprived part of the stock, has been markedly paternalistic. This approach, while common enough in housing management, is less expected in an area where the local authority sector caters for so wide a section of the population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing situation in May 1975</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing stock</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craigielea (1924 Act)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blackstoun Oval (1930/38 Acts)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other 1930-38 Acts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-war (except 'Crudens')</td>
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<tr>
<td>'Crudens' houses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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A broad distinction can be made between the 1930-38 Act houses and the remainder. The latter, comprising about 1,300 houses (half the total currently occupied), are in generally good condition and are nearly all let. They do not seem to be in imminent danger, though if conditions further deteriorate in the rest of Ferguslie Park blight could spread to these houses.

HOUSING ALLOCATION

It is clear that in Paisley there is a marked distinction between Ferguslie Park and other housing schemes in the Burgh. In general, housing allocation in Paisley is based on a detailed set of housing rules. These detail priority, schedule number of offers to be made, and exclude non-residents (except for servicemen) from consideration. The allocation system is basically a group quota scheme. Rule 7 of the housing rules defines these quotas as: overcrowded, 20%; homeless, 20%; badly housed (including slum clearance) 40%; and medical cases 20%. In practice, difficulty is found in maintaining these proportions.

When a person applies for a house he selects a scheme on the application form. Advice about differential waiting time seems not generally to be given at this stage: many applications are sent in by post. But there is a strong tradition of applicants coming to the department for interviews (there is a rule that no-one may be interviewed more frequently than once a month). The interview is an opportunity to discuss waiting times and an applicant may be advised to put down for a more ‘realistic’ scheme.

Apart from Ferguslie Park, houses are most readily available in perimeter schemes which are difficult to let. At one time the wait was down to about a year, but it is now two or three years. The main reason for this is that few houses are being built so existing tenants are not filtering out of these schemes so rapidly. New houses
have been largely allocated to transferees in recent years. Apart from anything else they have been cottage type houses which according to the housing rules can only be let to transferees, medical cases and persons from development areas who have lived in their house for over four years.

In deciding priority for transfers, apart from length of residence, the chief factor seems to be overcrowding. A difficulty is that there is a shortage of five-apartment houses.

The actual process of matching applicants and houses is routinised, utilising only a few pieces of information about each case—house size required, length of residence and area wanted. But Ferguslie Park allocations are dealt with separately; using a special file of application cards. This reflects the fact that these allocations are to a considerable extent outside the ordinary rules and norms. Housing visits (by housing assistants) are always used; sometimes these are made in advance of an allocation, when someone is getting near an offer, but in others they are not made until a prospective allocation has been decided. The basic rule is two offers: a letter is sent after the first refusal saying that if a second offer is refused there will be no more for two years (though people can go to the committee on grounds that an offer was not reasonable and get a third for two years (though people can go to the committee on grounds one). As with other aspects of the rules, this one does not in practice apply to Ferguslie Park.

Policy on arrears is that they must be cleared before an allocation is made, except possibly in cases of separation. But the Housing Committee can waive this rule.

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Transfer applications are dealt with in order of date of entry into present house, though there are different lengths of wait for different schemes depending on their popularity.

In summary, therefore, housing allocation policy in Ferguslie Park is not different in degree from other schemes—there is a wide range from the most to the least popular amongst them—but different in kind. Ferguslie Park is dealt with separately as a special case. Most of the normal rules do not apply to it. Because of the unpopularity of the scheme and the difficulty of letting houses there the Housing Department places few restrictions on whom it will accept. The allocation system does not need to ration houses in Ferguslie Park, its basic function elsewhere, because demand is less than supply. People go to Ferguslie Park for three reasons. First, because they are not eligible for anywhere else, usually because they do not fulfil the ordinary residence qualifications. Second because although they are eligible for somewhere else (or in the case of people from outside Paisley would in due course become eligible) they are in no position to exercise the option of waiting two or three years for a house elsewhere. In other words, they are desperate—homeless people, unsupported mothers and so on—and clearly they are for the most part likely to be an untypical section of the population. Third, some people go to Ferguslie Park because that is what they want to do. Hopefully this group will increase in numbers if improvements can be made to the scheme.

Ferguslie Park is not, of course, typical of council housing in Paisley, though there are similar estates in other towns all over Britain. Council housing meets the need of a wide section of the community in Paisley and can be seen to a considerable extent as the normal form of housing tenure in the Burgh. In Paisley and other areas with a high proportion of council housing local attitudes which elsewhere attack and demean the public sector in general may be directed at certain estates such as Ferguslie Park. All council housing in Paisley is obviously subject to national policies and has suffered from them, but Ferguslie Park and estates like it have many additional problems. New policies directed at council housing in general will be of limited value to deprived estates unless there is also a change of attitudes and priorities at the local level.

APPENDIX

*Extract from Housing Management in Scotland, Report by a Sub-Committee of the Scottish Housing Advisory Committee, HMSO, 1967.

The Paisley Scheme

168. At this point, therefore, we refer to the scheme at Paisley where a special area (forty-five houses) in one housing estate has been set aside for problem families, where they are given daily supervision combined with training and instruction designed to teach them the elements of homemaking and mothercraft so that in due course, when they have proved they can manage their own affairs, domestic, financial and otherwise, they can return to a better house in a more desirable neighbourhood.

169. Nowadays the word “segregation” has become virtually a term of abuse. Several of our witnesses expressed strong opinions against formal segregation, but we noticed that they had no equally constructive alternative suggestion to offer. We also feel bound to point out that all local authorities exercise segregation to a greater or lesser degree in their allocation procedure, for example by assessment of income levels and visitation reports determining suitability for certain schemes or houses. Some people are opposed to any form of grouping together of problem families on the grounds...
that the particular group of houses would soon become known for what it was and a stigma would be attached to the people living there. They also pointed out that the bad example which the tenants would set to each other would make it difficult or impossible to educate them to better standards.

170. We were, however, impressed by the fact that the experience of Paisley Town Council with their supervised area did not fully bear out these criticisms. As far as the social stigma of having lived there is concerned, this is thought to be no worse than the stigma of having been evicted from a council house, and it is only when the latter course would otherwise be unavoidable, and after a long period of warning (which in itself is effective in a large number of cases), that a transfer to the supervised area is made. We stress that a scheme of this kind is a last-resort remedy, employed only when the family cannot be allowed to remain in normal accommodation and would otherwise have to be evicted. No-one is compelled to enter the supervised area; those who do clearly find it preferable to being left without any house of their own.

171. Clearly a scheme of this nature has its pitfalls. We have no doubt that if it were possible to provide the same degree of close supervision and help for all problem families in their present homes without concentrating them into a special area, this would be preferable, although it would not solve the problem of the family whose behaviour leads to endless complaints from neighbours. This last problem, with which many local authorities are faced, can result in the serious deterioration of whole housing areas because of the presence of a few difficult families: other families tend to move away until it becomes impossible to find tenants for vacant houses, in spite of the length of the waiting list. In any case, we have to accept that there is a serious shortage of suitable trained staff to carry out work of this kind and that for a given cost and number of staff, more concentrated attention can be given to a greater number of people if they are brought together into one easily supervised area.

172. For this reason we regard the Paisley scheme as a positive contribution to a situation in which housing departments are accustomed to being told that welfare staff cannot take on any more cases. Moreover, as far as training is concerned, the record at Paisley is good. Out of 243 tenants who have been recommended for supervision since the inception of the scheme in 1942 only thirteen had to be finally ejected; fifty-three improved prior to supervision, and seventy-one have been transferred out to normal scheme tenancies. Behaviour in the supervised area has been found to be no worse than outside it and the fact that it does in fact form part of a much larger estate and that removals in and out are arranged within the housing department and without publicity helps to reduce resentment to a minimum. We consider certain outside comments which have been loosely quoted from time to time in the press to the effect that the Paisley scheme has ‘failed’ to be quite unjustified. On the other hand we would not wish our own comments on this scheme to be given excessive publicity for the simple reason that all publicity, good or bad, given to a

scheme of this kind, is bound to have an adverse effect on the scheme itself which will work best without too much attention from outside.

173. It must be recognised that many of these families, either from mental retardation or from moral or physical behaviour, have become so helpless in themselves that only close attention and care will be good enough to restore a semblance of self respect. Likewise, consideration for the children in such a family must be of paramount importance if generation is not to succeed generation as the rejects of society.

174. We therefore recommend that the idea of a scheme of the Paisley kind should not be dismissed out of hand as has tended to happen in the past, but should be kept in view as an expedient which can be of value in appropriate circumstances. We stress, however, that the way in which a scheme of this nature is administered is of the greatest importance. The first essential is for the housing department to ensure that any action is only taken after close consultation with all authorities and departments with an interest in the problem, including the health, welfare and children’s departments. Above all, although the demands on skilled welfare staff may be less than if the same results were to be obtained without moving the tenants to a special area, nevertheless it is essential that thoroughly competent and dedicated staff to run the scheme should be available. An outline of the way the scheme is operated in practice at Paisley is given at Appendix D.

APPENDIX D

The Difficult Tenant – Method of Supervision and Training adopted by Paisley Town Council

In Paisley, tenants of local authority houses who require supervision are dealt with as follows:

(a) A lady inspectress reports on the sanitary standard of the house to the Sanitary Inspector, who submits his report to the Burgh Factor and Supervisory Committee. If the Committee are satisfied that no other remedy is possible they instruct the name to be placed on the Burgh Factor’s list for supervision.

(b) The tenant is informed that his name has been placed on the list and advised to make every effort to improve the condition of his house.

(c) Failing an improvement within a reasonable time his let is terminated but he is given the option of removing to a supervised house.

(d) If he agrees to accept supervision he is again written to and told that he has been given the opportunity of a fresh start and that he will be transferred out, if reports are favourable, but if unfavourable, may be ejected altogether.

(e) When the Supervisor’s reports regarding him have been consistently good, he is given a transfer-out under periodic visitation. He is notified that this will cease if he maintains the required standard of cleanliness.

The Duties of the Supervisor are as follows:

(a) The Supervisor is under the control of the Burgh Factor.
(b) A daily inspection is made of the houses, stairs, closes and gardens in the area.
(c) By advice and admonition an endeavour is made to persuade the tenants to keep their houses, stairs and closets clean, their gardens cultivated and the children cared for. The ideal is to help the tenants and their children to become good citizens.
(d) A separate report is kept for each household and a report submitted on all households to the Burgh Factor at the end of each month. A copy of a report form is appended.
(e) Any wilful damage done by the tenants or their children is reported to the Burgh Factor.
(f) All repairs which come to the notice of the Supervisor are reported to the Burgh Factor.
(g) Rents are collected weekly and a return submitted to the Burgh Factor.

Monthly Report Form for Supervised Dwellings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inmates (M ) Total Apts. (F )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<th>Condition of Living room</th>
<th>Bed/room</th>
<th>Actual Total</th>
<th>Possible Total</th>
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</thead>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceilings ...........</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walls ..............</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floors ............</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beds and Bedding ....</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture ..........</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermin ............</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lavatory ..........</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stairs or Close ....</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back Court .......</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Payment of Rent

Behaviour of Children

Remarks

Date  Supervisor
The London Borough of Southwark is an Inner London Borough stretching from the Thames south to Dulwich and Crystal Palace. Until local government in London was reorganised in 1965, the northern section of the area was administered by the two small Metropolitan Boroughs of Bermondsey and Southwark. Both of these were acutely overcrowded working-class areas which in earlier years had some of the worst slums in the city. Both boroughs were very dependent on the wharves and docks which line the river and Bermondsey in particular has suffered as a result of the decline in the docks which are now virtually all closed.

The earliest efforts of Bermondsey were thwarted to some extent by the London County Council which was the sole planning authority until 1965 and both the quantity and quality of the council house building was substantially determined by governments which were in general unsympathetic to the efforts of the Council to create a decent environment for the working classes to live in, out of the slums of the nineteenth century. The major exception to this was the 1924 'Wheatley Act' under which both Bermondsey and Camberwell built low density, cottage...
Although there was a certain amount of building by the private sector in the form of Housing Trusts in the 1920s, the vast majority of housing development in Southwark as a whole has been by the public sector. By 1939 there were over 3,000 local authority dwellings in Bermondsey and 2,000 of those constructed by the Borough, 2,600 in Camberwell of which the LCC had built 2,200 and almost 2,000 dwellings in Southwark of which the Borough had developed 286 and the LCC 1,705.

1945—REORGANISATION

The post-war period brought an extensive programme of construction from the LCC and the Metropolitan Boroughs, all three of which had been extensively damaged by wartime bombing. These programmes were restricted after the economic crisis of 1947 but the boroughs completed their initial post-war plans in the mid fifties. Nationally the pattern was an upsurge in building in the late forties, which fell off slightly then rose again to a peak in 1954 to be followed by a prolonged slump, particularly in the public sector.

The construction achievements of the public authorities in the Southwark area did not differ greatly from the national developments. However it is worth noting that the largest number of men employed by the LCC on housebuilding was in 1950 and that insofar as there was an improvement in the number of units constructed in the first few years of Conservative government a very large proportion of these dwellings had been planned and designed at the time of the first post-war thrust of the Labour Government. The private sector role during these years was minimal. In the three boroughs only 7% of new construction was private and 93% of that was in Camberwell.

For obvious reasons there was no need for demolition after the War so that all the housing built up to 1951 represented pure gain. Thereafter demolition and slum clearance began to be more extensive until in 1956 the Subsidies Act of that year returned to the position of the 1930s Acts whereby basically subsidy was given not for a particular building but for each person rehoused from property which had been cleared.

As a direct consequence of this measure the waiting lists of the local authorities became inoperative. The boroughs closed down their lists rather than pretend to people that there was a chance of being rehoused, while the LCC split their list into two with the minority of applicants going onto the urgent list and the great majority, numbering nearly 50,000 families, being informed that their chances of rehousing were very slim.

Financially the situation had become very much more difficult by this time. In London, unlike the rest of the country, the proportion of Housing Revenue Account income which came from the rents was falling in the mid 1950s. The Conservative Government attempted to redress this situation as is shown by the sharp rise in 1958 in the proportion paid by tenants matched by a similarly steep decline in the rate contribution. This situation was more or less maintained until reorganisation.

In 1951 the Conservative Government had almost immediately rearranged the subsidy system and put up interest rates. In fact interest rates rose slowly but progressively over the ensuing years so that within four years the LCC were calculating that if the interest charges of 1955 continued at that level for another five years, the cost to the Council would be £750,000 per annum for sixty years.

The effects of increasing interest rates are also evident. In 1950 the proportion of Housing Revenue Account expenditure which went on repayment of interest charges on capital debt was 43%, almost exactly the same as the amount expended on management and maintenance of the Council's housing stock. By the time the Metropolitan Borough of Southwark was amalgamated fifteen years later the proportion of expenditure going on payment of interest was 64%, getting on for three times the amount being spent on management and maintenance.

These increases were inevitably felt by the tenants in the form of rent increases. In general the authorities had held rents very stable immediately after the War and the only attempt by the boroughs to raise rents was by Bermondsey in 1949. At that time Bermondsey rents were lower than the other boroughs and their Housing Revenue Account had a deficit of £28,000. Even so the decision to increase rents met with vociferous and well organised opposition from a borough-wide tenants association and the Council were forced to postpone the increases until widespread repairs were carried out. By 1956 however, the fall in subsidies and rise in interest charges was biting hard and between 1956 and 1958 all three boroughs were forced into increasing their rents.

THE NEW AUTHORITIES SINCE 1965

The London Borough of Southwark, with a population of about 300,000, and the GLC took over as housing authorities for the area at the same time as the new Labour Government were planning a major housing drive with the aim of building 500,000 houses per year. Southwark's response to this drive was immense. Within a few months 491 acres of the borough had been designated for redevelopment. This represented almost 10% of the area covered by the borough, given that around 20% of the borough's land was owned by Dulwich College who would sell neither freeholds nor leaseholds for conversion of large properties.

The programme that Southwark produced envisaged the construction of almost 14,000 new dwellings in the seven years from 1965. However, this was not seen as a response to a shortage of housing but rather as replacement of existing houses. The MP for Bermondsey, Bob Mellish, who was then a junior minister at the Ministry of Housing, admitted that in order to achieve these 14,000 starts by 1972 some 15,500 houses would have to be demolished. It was clear, therefore, that little impression could be made on the waiting list for some time, though in 1965 the list still contained 9,000 families. General needs were still not restored to their former position of importance.
In Circular 21/65 the Labour Government had required local authorities to produce five-year slum clearance programmes and seven-year development programmes. The Circular also asked councils to state how many of their new starts were going to be in blocks of more than five storeys and the number which were going to be constructed using industrialised building techniques. Southwark was, at the same time, specifically urged by Mr Mellish to look closely at the possibility of using industrialised methods.

Southwark responded very positively to these approaches. The Metropolitan Borough of Southwark had, shortly before reorganisation, been planning a ten-acre development on the east side of the Walworth Road. After reorganisation the combination of the build-up of the redevelopment programme and the pressure to use reorganisation the combination of the build-up of the redevelopment programme and the pressure to use industrialised building methods made the new borough revise this plan. Instead of the ten-acre site a development covering sixty acres was planned. This involved an immediate loss of £65,000 in abortive fees on the original ten-acre scheme but the cost advantage, using industrialised techniques, of having one massive site far outweighed those initial costs. That sixty-acre site now contains the Aylesbury estate with 8,000 tenants and a unenviably bad reputation both in and outside the borough.

Oddly, at the same time that the Ministry were impressing Southwark with the need for speed (it was always stated that the relative cheapness of industrialised techniques was considered much less important) they were also in Circular 62/65 limiting the number of new starts that boroughs could make over a particular period with LBS being permitted 5,700 between 1965 and 1968. Almost immediately after this the Government again issued a Circular (76/65) stating the need to start a drive toward the use of industrialised building techniques. The reason, it was said, was for speed and not to save expense though it was admitted that the Government’s programme could only be fulfilled with a much larger labour force if conventional methods were used. It was not thought possible to raise this labour force. In fact the use of such techniques did not prove cheap. Costs escalated and it became apparent that they could be cut only if firms had a guaranteed market over many years for enough standard parts to make the setting up of new plants to manufacture them an economic proposition.

During this period the Labour Government’s attitude to subsidies became apparent for the first time with the publication of the Housing Subsidies Act (it was never passed because of the 1966 Election). Amongst other things this bill removed part of the expensive site subsidy for developments of less than five storeys and at the same time gave a positive push to high rise building by giving an extra subsidy for a high rise flats. The incentive to boroughs in areas of high cost land to build high rise blocks became very considerable and this encouragement was continued in the subsidy arrangements of the government after the election. At the same time subsidies were quite inadequate to persuade boroughs to consider conversion and this was a blow even to councils like Southwark which were, in general, committed to redevelopment.

In 1967 the new Housing Subsidies Act introduced the housing cost yardstick which confirmed the change back to a situation where subsidies were related to the cost of the development rather than to the number of people housed. The yardstick was introduced partly because of the low standards to which some local authorities had been building and partly out of a genuine belief that cost controls could be more effective without affecting the authorities who had built to a higher standard.

The effect of the yardstick at that time was, however, to make it very difficult to build certain types of units and as such there is a severe shortage of the smaller, more expensive dwellings in Inner London. One indirect result of this may have been that the number of larger dwellings on the post-1967 estates may tend to be higher and certainly the proportion of children up to the age of sixteen is notably higher in the enumeration districts covering the Aylesbury estate than anywhere else in the borough and it seems likely that this is as important a cause of vandalism on the estate as is the alienating environment.

In addition as costs escalated and the yardstick was not revised upwards to meet these increases, local authorities had to cut costs. The easiest way of doing this has generally been to provide lower quality finishing materials or poorer communal facilities. The effect of these cuts on the quality of life on new estates is impossible to quantify. The effect on future maintenance costs is also difficult to assess but some glaring examples are apparent. For example, Southwark was recently forced to spend £55,000 on resurfacing balconies on the Aylesbury estate that had melted in the sun. The borough had earlier been prevented by the Department of the Environment from putting good quality tiles on those balconies. More seriously Southwark are in the appalling position of having a number of new estates which should be costing very little in major repairs in need of no less than £10m worth of capital repairs.

Since local government was reorganised in London, costs have rocketed upwards. In 1969-70 the housing capital expenditure of the London Borough of Southwark, was considerably greater than the entire capital expenditure of the Metropolitan Borough of Southwark throughout its history. Repayment of interest alone took up 77% of housing revenue expenditure while management and maintenance costs were a mere 14%. In that situation complaints about the overmanning and maladministration of local government begin to take on a new perspective.

Southwark’s development programme between 1965 and 1972 was, in many ways, impressive, with annual completions averaging about 900 even although major delays in the clearance and reconstruction of certain areas was apparent by that time. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the waiting list had remained almost static at a figure fluctuating slightly between 8,000 and 10,000 families.

THE DIRECT LABOUR FORCE

Southwark has a long tradition of making use of direct labour to construct new council housing. The Metropolitan Borough of Camberwell set up a direct labour force immediately after the First World War but because
of the change of political control in 1922, it was Bermondsey which made most use of their own labour force in the 1920s. Each contract which was put out to tender during this period was won by the direct labour department. At the same time the building workers employed by Bermondsey enjoyed notably better conditions of employment than workers employed by private contractors, so much so that eventually Neville Chamberlain as Minister of Health introduced legislation in Parliament to force boroughs like Bermondsey to lower the wages of their direct labour workers.

Since the amalgamation of the boroughs the direct labour force of the new borough has contributed a comparatively small proportion of the housing development in the area. In 1974 the section of the Building Department concerned with capital works was amalgamated with a division of Bovis Ltd. to form a company called Southwark Construction Ltd., in which the borough holds a controlling interest. The figures below indicate the number of units being worked on by outside contractors and by Southwark Construction Ltd. during 1974-75.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>New Building</th>
<th>Conversion</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
<th>Short Life Housing</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outside Contractors</td>
<td>1,001 units</td>
<td>138</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southwark Construction</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>19</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

THE FUTURE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR

By 1972 the number of development areas defined by the council which had still not been dealt with numbered forty-seven, though there are now indications that the council are having second thoughts about the comprehensive development of areas which have now suffered from planning blight for around ten years. In 1972 a Borough Development Department Discussion Document suggested confidently that the waiting list could be adequately dealt with by the existing programme of development and that there would be a 'float' of housing which the Council would then be able to allocate as it wished. Although this optimism had been somewhat shaken by the recent increase in homelessness in London, the Housing Department are still confident that the 'float' will be forthcoming.

Other figures in the same document throw some doubt on the belief that housing need can be largely eradicated in the borough by 1981. The gross housing shortage in terms of dwellings over households was 11,600 in 1971. The total number of dwellings scheduled for demolition in the period 1971-81 is 24,340 and the number of new units available from new construction and conversion during the decade is a maximum of 29,000. Even allowing for the declining population the document confirms the simple arithmetic involved in estimating that the gross shortage of dwellings in 1981 will be 5,800. Southwark Borough Council will have a 'float' but only in the sense that it will have a substantial number of units left after it has fulfilled its statutory obligations. It is equally clear, however, that Southwark cannot adequately house all its population within its own boundaries however much building it does, and it will have to rely on the GLC to acquire and develop land in the outer boroughs if a real solution is to be reached.

The amount of new construction is, of course, dependent on government policies. Like other authorities Southwark's new construction has slumped dramatically over the last two years. The extent to which they can recover from that will be determined by the attitude of the Department of the Environment and the state of the building industry.

It was hoped, however, that the new Housing Subsidies Act would move away from the Housing Cost Yardstick and return instead to a system of global allocations to councils based on the development programmes which the submit to the Department of the Environment. It would be clearly vital that the global sum should restrict those programmes as little as possible but given that situation the global sum allocation is highly desirable in that it leaves local authorities with more control over the quality of their developments and means that Parker Morris standards, which are in effect maximum standards under the HCY system revert to being the minimum standards which they were intended to be. Sadly, Treasury pressure ensured the retention of the HCY while the drawback of the global sum allocation was demonstrated by the cuts in finance for improvement. A recent circular, 61/75, indicated that the DOE are examining the basis of the HCY and are thinking of placing more responsibility for cost control with local authorities.

Equally vital for the people of Southwark is the need to maintain existing stock at reasonable standards. The Section 105 cuts in improvement expenditure will mean that many pre-war estates which are desperately in need of major improvements will not get them. The consequences of this are serious as such estates will increasingly become the 'housing of last resort' which only those who are too poor or otherwise disadvantaged will accept.

The allocation of council housing has had a good deal of attention recently. There are really two facets to this. The first is how councils allocate individual dwellings to individual families and the other is the extent to which council housing is available to certain groups both in terms of family size and income. The major concern on the first item is that councils should not, at worst, create 'ghetto estates' in which they place all their most socially disadvantaged tenants. The poorly articulated but quite evident fear on the question of the mix of council housing is that it is strange to note that it is precisely those groups who have tended to see public housing as a service for the poor and who have, through legislation, restricted council housing to the most needy, who are now complaining that local authority developments are necessarily havens of vandalism and social isolation and who believe that in some way council tenure causes the problems that exist.
Doddington Grove, an early thirties estate: once quite popular, now surrounded by blighted land.

1939, the Wesley Place Estate: very high density but now half empty.

1940s, Kennington Park House.
The term that is now widely employed to describe the objective which many commentators believe councils ought to be aiming for is social balance. In effect, this means laying aside part of the housing stock in the area, not necessarily for people in need, but for middle-class white-collar workers. It has been suggested that councils should build for sale in areas surrounded by large local authority estates. Alternatively it is suggested that there should be a special allocation for certain ‘key workers’ such as teachers. The government response to the same fears about social balance seems to be to encourage housing associations to provide a different input into areas dominated by public housing.

All these policies may have something to be said for them but it seems most unlikely that they will do anything to raise the standard of council housing which is the supposed intention. They are based on the belief that it is the people that are inadequate not the resources. This is not to deny that if there is a concentration of those people with least resources in an area that there are certain implications for that area. It seems more useful, however, to look at where the policies which create that concentration go wrong rather than looking for minor cosmetic measures which might allow the area to show up rather better on various social indicators but would effect the general population very little.

The experience of Southwark CDP suggests that existing estates often have identifiable, individual problems which can be dealt with at the level of that estate. In some cases those problems will be particularly severe as, for example, in older estates which are allocated only to those families with least resources who are in the greatest need.* Although Southwark follows a policy of dispersal of the most disadvantaged families this policy has not been wholly successful as the Wesley Place estate in Newington showed. Therefore, in a few cases, there is a need for drastic, major action to revitalise these older estates. Thereafter councils might be well advised to try and devise a system which would allow the necessary changes in management policies to be made at an early enough stage.

A council’s room for manoeuvre in this respect will remain very small as long as need is examined in an individual way so that no account is taken of the collective needs of a neighbourhood for an economically viable population. The more statutory restrictions there are, therefore, on a local authority’s freedom to build housing for its working population generally, the more likely it is that boroughs like Southwark will house an increasingly dependent population demanding a degree of service support which will become increasingly expensive, and as the relative resources of that population fall even further, increasingly inadequate.

* For a fuller discussion of these questions, see Housing for the Poor? Council Housing in Southwark, price £1, from Southwark CDP, 36 Braganza Street, London, SE17.
Glossary of Housing Legislation

ENGLAND AND WALES

Housing and Town Planning, etc. Act, 1919 [Addison Act]
Subsidy equivalent to all losses incurred by a local authority in excess of the product of a 1d rate. Extended in 1920 to include a lump sum subsidy of £130 to £160 to any builder who built a house (up to a certain floor area) for sale or rent. Rents for local authority dwellings built under this Act were to be based (at any rate until 1927) on rents charged for comparable working class dwellings although allowance could be made for better amenity.

Housing etc. Act, 1923 [Chamberlain Act] Flat rate subsidy to local authorities of £6 per house for twenty years. No subsidy from rates required. Also lump sum available to private builders. Subsidies reduced in 1927 and abolished in 1929. Also 50% grant on losses incurred by local authorities on slum clearance schemes (replaced by 1930 Act subsidies).

Housing Act (Financial Provisions), 1924 [Wheatley Act] Made available subsidies of £9 per house for forty years for local authority houses. Rents were to be fixed at the general level of the pre-war rents of working-class houses. Local authorities to make contribution of up to £4-10-0d from the rates to achieve this objective and only if this was insufficient could higher rents be charged. Wheatley negotiated an agreement with building employers and unions which permitted an expansion of skilled labour as a basis for the new programme lasting until 1939. Subsidies reduced by Review of Contributions Order in 1927.

Housing Act, 1930 [Greenwood Act] First modern slum clearance legislation. Subsidies varied within the number of people displaced and rehoused by the local authority. Special subsidies in urban areas for flats on expensive sites. Rent rebates legalised but doubt existed whether these only applied to 1930 Act houses.

Housing (Financial Provisions) Act, 1933 Abolished Wheatley subsidies.

Housing Act, 1935 Subsidies introduced for relief of overcrowding. Also introduced unified Housing Revenue Accounts which allowed rents for houses built under various acts to be equalised. Rent rebates specifically legalised for all council houses.

Housing Act, 1936 Consolidated previous legislation.

Housing (Financial Provisions) Act, 1938 Consolidated overcrowding and slum clearance subsidies.

Housing (Financial and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1946 'General needs' subsidies on Wheatley pattern made available at increased level.

Housing Act, 1949 Introduced improvement grants. Removed requirement that council housing was 'for the working classes'.

Housing Act, 1952 Raised subsidies as part of Macmillan 'housing drive'.


Housing Subsidies Act, 1956 plus Housing Subsidies Order, 1956 Effectively abolished general needs subsidies. Contributions from rates made optional.


Housing Act, 1961 Restored general needs subsidy but in a form designed to pressure local authorities into charging 'economic' rents (with rebates).

Housing Act, 1964 Attempted to encourage housing associations. Established the Housing Corporation. Introduced compulsory improvement on an area basis.

Housing Subsidies Act, 1967 Recast subsidies to enable local authorities in effect to borrow at a low rate of interest. Introduced housing costs yardstick.

Housing Act, 1969 Shifted emphasis on to improvement as opposed to slum clearance. Introduced General Improvement Areas.

Housing Finance Act, 1972 Introduced Fair Rents in council housing.

Housing Act, 1974 Modified improvement procedures. Introduced Housing Action Areas.

Housing Rents and Subsidies Act, 1975 Introduced new and higher subsidies for council housing. Repealed the 1972 Act and reintroduced pooled historic cost rents.

SCOTLAND

Separate housing legislation has usually been passed for Scotland though generally the provisions have been broadly similar to those in England and Wales. Nevertheless there have been at least two important differences; council housing has been a proportionately much more important form of provision in Scotland and rents have been lower. But the Housing (Financial Provisions) (Scotland) Act, 1972 (which was modified by the Housing Rents and Subsidies (Scotland) Act, 1975) was substantially different from the Housing Finance Act. Because of the
generally lower level of council rents in Scotland, the aim was limited to achieving historic cost rents. But there was an implied intention to legislate for fair rents in the future.

References
The above is a very brief and incomplete summary of legislation. For fuller details refer to:
M. Bowley: Housing and the State, Allen and Unwin (1945).
The National Community Development Project

The National CDP was set up by the Home Office in 1969 as a 'Neighbourhood based experiment aimed at finding new ways of meeting the needs of people living in areas of high social deprivation'. It consisted of twelve local projects: Batley; Birmingham (Saltley); Newham (Canning Town); Coventry (Hillfields); Cumbria (Cleator Moor); Liverpool (Vauxhall); Newcastle (Benwell); North Tyneside (North Shields); Oldham (Clarksfield); Paisley (Ferguslie Park); Southwark (Newington); West Glamorgan (Upper Afan).

Each project was given a five year life span. The first two started in 1970 and finished earlier this year (Coventry and Liverpool) and the last are scheduled to finish in late 1977 but in the light of the present situation there is some doubt as to whether all the projects will be allowed to run their full course.

The CDP Information and Intelligence Unit acts as a central resource agency for the projects and co-ordinates, publishes and distributes inter-project publications.

Postscript: several of the local projects were in fact closed prematurely and the CDP Information and Intelligence Unit was also forced to close early due to the withdrawal of government funds. However a number of other interproject reports and local project reports have been completed and are available from the address on the back cover.
Whatever happened to council housing?

This report, based on the experience of six of the National Community Development Project local areas, appears at a time when the whole idea of council housing is under attack. Commentators in the national press decry it, and the government’s latest White Paper on public expenditure promises savage cuts in the public sector housing subsidy. In practice these attacks mean an estimated £2.50 a week rise in council house rents within two years, in some areas even more.

*Whatever Happened to Council Housing?* explains why council housing is the only socially just form of housing tenure. It traces the origins of council housing to the threat of working-class revolt at the time of the First World War. It goes on to show how from the beginning council housing has been compromised, to a point where many people now regard it as only fit for those who are unable or unwilling to become the owner-occupiers of our ‘property-owning democracy’.

*Whatever Happened to Council Housing?* offers a well-argued and researched rebuttal to all those bent on diminishing council housing. We hope that it will be useful to people in the forefront of the struggle for decent housing for all, and to all who resist the current attack on working-class living standards. It is our belief that now, perhaps more than ever before, council housing must be defended against those who wish to see it downgraded and destroyed.

Price £1.30p

Benwell CDP,
87 Adelaide Terrace,
Newcastle upon Tyne,
NE4 8BB.

A full list of CDP publications can be had from the same address.