Town Planning of Built-on Areas.

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BECAUSE the Town Planning Acts are the chief instrument by which certain principles of Town Planning are applied we are, perhaps, inclined to think of that art in terms of the acts, and to forget that it has a very much wider scope and is fundamentally concerned with almost all functions of human life, whether in town or country. The application of the Town Planning Acts to built-on areas is limited, but there is no limit to the application of town planning principles.

The land in respect to which a town planning scheme may be made in accordance with the provisions of the Acts is defined in Section 54 of the Town Planning Act, 1909, as amended by the Act of 1919, as "land which is in course of development or appears likely to be used for building purposes," with the proviso "that where a piece of land already built upon, or a piece of land not likely to be used for building purposes, is so situate with respect to any land likely to be used for building purposes that the general object of the scheme would be better secured by its inclusion in any town planning scheme made with respect to the last-mentioned land, the scheme may include such piece of land as aforesaid, and may provide for the demolition or alteration of any buildings thereon, so far as may be necessary for carrying the scheme into effect."

I am not a lawyer, and therefore will not attempt an interpretation of these words, except to say that it appears that justification for the inclusion of built-on land depends not so much on the needs of such land itself as on the degree to which its planning and control is necessary in the interest of the proper development of the land which is in course of development or appears likely to be used for building purposes. Each case must, therefore, be decided on its own merits.

Owing to the constant changes that take place in our towns it is obvious that land may be built on and yet be in course of development. We have all seen the house with large grounds, pulled down and replaced by rows of cottages, just as we have seen house property absorbed into factories. Unrestricted development on these lines has in many cases had disastrous results on general amenity and convenience, has hampered industry, and should obviously be controlled by town planning.

The important question is not, however, what may or may not be included in a town planning scheme under the Acts, each man preparing a scheme

must include all he thinks necessary to make a broad and complete scheme possible and be prepared to justify it, but for what part of a town a development plan is necessary, and in almost all cases my answer would be "the whole."

All our towns have had small beginnings and the history of most has been rapid, uncontrolled growth outward, accompanied by congestion of the heart so that no organ functions really efficiently.

People are beginning more and more to appreciate what this inefficiency costs the community in ill-health, loss of comfort and amenity, but few yet realize the cost in money, although to-day, when economy is our watchword, this is very important.

The difficulty in bringing this home to people is due to the fact that it is almost impossible to calculate the money cost with exactitude, but, to take one example, a little imagination will make clear the waste that is caused by traffic congestion: the business man held up in a taxi can watch the three-pences ticking off and knows also that his wasted time has a cash-value; the man and boy in charge of a van or the clerk on a bus in the same traffic-block have to be paid for all this wasted time and the motor-engines still keep running and consuming petrol. It is not only in a definite block that all this waste occurs, but the constant slowing down of traffic due to inadequate streets, makes the waste constant. If the value of the business-men's time, of that of their employees whose wages they pay, and of the petrol, wasted in this way in the course of a year, could be assessed, you would probably find that it would more than pay the annual interest on the cost of the necessary street improvements. Of still more importance is the heavy loss of life, and large number of casualties that occur continually in our congested streets. 657 people were killed and 21,660 injured in the streets of the Metropolis in the year 1920.

Most towns, therefore, have some street improvements in view, but some are perhaps inclined to think only of one street at a time, and assume that the only course is to improve a street at a time, beginning at the worst, whereas if the whole traffic problem were investigated it might be found that much of the traffic could be diverted by new by-pass streets and the necessity for an expensive widening avoided. The town should be looked at as a whole, and its probable growth and the direction of such growth considered, so that if widenings are necessary, firstly the right street should be widened, and secondly it should be widened adequately, and so connected with the part of the town that is developing that no constriction shall be permitted further on that would impair its efficiency in the future.

It is clear, therefore, that before you can properly plan the outlying land in order to direct the anticipated growth into proper channels, you must study

your town as a whole and prepare a plan for the whole. The civic survey should precede planning and planning precede works. Even if some of the built-on land is too remote from that which is unbuilt on to justify inclusion in a scheme under the Act, it is worth while planning it because not only is it possible that the Acts may some day be amended to cover all land (as they do in Canada), but central street-improvements can be carried out by other means and in any case the growth of your town will then harmonise and fit in with the reconstruction of the centre that must inevitably come. Also you will have the great advantage of having studied and considered your town as a unit.

Most towns, too, unfortunately have unhealthy areas that demand reconstruction, and it is interesting to note the emphasis that is laid in two official documents published last year, on the need for comprehensive planning in this respect.

In the Ministry of Health Manual on Unfit Houses and Unhealthy Areas it is stated "slum clearances are likely at best to be costly. Unwise indeed, therefore, were it to undertake them without having regard to the future and fundamental needs of the town or district."

"It should be a truism that no large cleared area should be replanned without bearing in mind what is to be the future development of the town ; where the big main roads are to run ; where are to be the business quarters ; where the factories ; where the residential quarters ; where the parks and playgrounds. Towns change ; any large alterations should be in accord with the gradual growth, otherwise it may be found, years hence, that costly expenditure now has become a serious hindrance to the then urgent needs of the town."

"For these reasons, and for others, local authorities are strongly counselled to have before them a plan, in broad outline at least, of the future development of the town before they undertake any large scheme of improvement ; delay need not be, and should not be, incurred."

In the Interim Report of the Unhealthy Areas Committee it is said : "The first essential in considering the reconstruction of London is that it should be studied and planned for as a whole. A plan should be prepared now which should broadly assign to the various districts in and about London their respective functions in the future, so that every reconstruction scheme may conform to such a plan in its main details. This would at once provide the key to the problem so often put as to whether the displaced population should be rehoused upon the site or elsewhere. Such a plan would harmonise all future operations and correlate housing, industry and transport to their mutual advantage. Without such a plan the isolated improvement of any one of these public services may be nullified by, or may itself baulk

the improvement of, any of the others. It is obvious that no great clearance can be made until alternative accommodation has been provided, and therefore there is opportunity for the problem to be considered very carefully before action is taken."

Reconstruction not only involves destruction of the bad, but also preservation and development of the good, and this is another reason for planning. In the old parts of many towns there are buildings of historic and archaeological interest, and sometimes, unfortunately, they seem to block the way. If the street they are in is considered by itself it may seem inevitable that these old buildings should be destroyed for the sake of modern requirements of traffic, but if the town is considered as a whole it may well be that an alternative and more profitable route can be found and even the opportunity taken to clear away inferior buildings that hide the ancient treasures, so that they may be shown off to the best advantage. In many towns, too, there is the old house with large grounds that has survived near the middle of the town and that may come into the market at any moment. It is clear that the proper destiny of such an estate should be thought out in advance, not losing sight of the possibility of making it a fine feature of the town.

In planning any reconstruction the importance of providing recreation grounds, within easy reach of all households, should not be lost sight of. An article by Dr. W. A. Potts, in the current number of *National Health*, refers to the result of investigations made at Liverpool some years ago, when it was found that the prevalence of juvenile crime depended not on the social conditions of the home, not on the wages that went into the home, but almost entirely on the distance of the house from a public park. In view of this, to lose any opportunity of remedying lack of recreation space would be wrong indeed. If we realise that it is park versus prison it will make us study our towns in a new light, seeking space for prevention, instead of relying on costly correction, as has, perhaps, been the tendency in the past. The civic survey plan should show $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile rings, round all existing parks and recreation grounds, so that the dark spots outside their radius, where space must be made, may become apparent.

The question of Zoning generally is also of great importance. In your town planning scheme you will want to allocate to each part the function to which it is best suited, that is either for residence or for factory purposes, and so that the functions can be exercised to their mutual advantage. Your scheme will endeavour to foster industry, and at the same time provide that the home life of the citizens may be lived under the best possible conditions. This is obviously a matter that concerns the town as a whole, as you could not allocate functions to the land which will be absorbed by its growth without regard to the tendency of that growth, the whole of which

it is necessary to direct on right lines so that the town may gradually be extricated from its tangle of works and houses.

In any town reconstruction, consideration should be given to the possibility of grouping the chief public buildings to form a civic centre. Sometimes existing public buildings, erected without relation to each other, could be brought into one significant group by a little clearance of intervening property and rearrangement of street lines. Most English towns also sadly lack an "entrance hall" of any dignity or convenience, and therefore the possibility of providing a railway station "place" should not be lost sight of, not only on the score of amenity, but also in order to improve traffic circulation.

One could mention other instances indicating the desirability of preparing a plan for the whole of a town, including the built-up portions. The necessary present restrictions on public expenditure make most reconstruction schemes impossible at the moment, and therefore there is a golden opportunity to prepare plans so that when the time comes for works to be carried out, they may be on sound economic lines and forming a part of a whole pattern gradually being evolved towards a town where all functions of life can be carried on efficiently, comfortably and without waste.