

# **Crime, Fear of Crime and Social Order in a Post-War British New Town**

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**A Humanistic Contribution to Environmental  
Criminology**

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## Abstract

*This study examines the continuing viability of the New Town Idea - an influential post-war Town Planning Model - in relation to current government imperatives that all future urban developments contribute to crime prevention and the diminishment of fear. The study advances an 'urbanism from below' by considering how residents of Harlow, one of the first built New Towns, experience their everyday environment and the impact it has upon their perceptions of crime, fear and disorder. By focusing upon the 'lived experiences' of a whole urban environment and its compatibility with human need, the study offers a 'Humanistic' approach to Environmental Criminology. It should, therefore, interest not only those responsible for current and future urban development but also those hoping to move Environmental Criminology beyond a narrow concern with risk reduction. The thesis suggests that the New Town Idea, as manifest in Harlow, is a weak foundation for establishing a strong urban public realm. This is probably a major reason why the town has a crime rate incommensurate with the idea's original utopian aspirations. Nevertheless, the same idea succeeds in enhancing a 'sense of place' which residents of Harlow experience in a way that reduces fear of crime. Especially important is the experience of 'mystery' and local familiarity within a context of environmental legibility and coherence that simultaneously satisfies ontological and bio-psychological human needs for security and risk. Thus, the study concludes that the New Town Idea, contrary to the claims of its many detractors, does retain a partial viability. Some important modifications to the Idea, however, are necessary. The study finishes, therefore, by suggesting that the New Town Idea may successfully combine with the principles of New Urbanism in the development of towns with both 'safe' and pleasurable environments.*

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# Research Objectives

The objective of the following research study is to assess the continuing viability of the 'New Town Idea', a term I use, following Aldridge (1979) to describe an influential town planning model that gained formal government approval in the immediate post-war decades. Given the government's recent announcement to begin building a series of 'Eco-Towns' – distinct and autonomous 'new' urban settlements - such a research project appears highly pertinent. In particular, the research examines the compatibility of the New Town Idea with current models of 'Crime Prevention through Environmental Design' (CPTED). However, in pursuing this objective, I provide a critical assessment of both the original New Town Idea and more recent town-planning initiatives that fully embrace and prioritise crime prevention imperatives. Another key objective of the research, as indicated by the dissertation's subtitle, is to introduce a humanistic approach to Environmental Criminology. Partially, this objective arose from a suspicion that much Environmental Criminology and the policy initiatives that derive from it, continues to suffer from an overly 'positivistic' methodology and strict adherence to forms of 'causal' analysis. Although such approaches can yield valuable knowledge and contribute towards the design of 'safe' urban environments I contend that they will often overlook important aspects of how people directly experience their surroundings. A humanistic research strategy, I suggest, can help environmental criminologists better evaluate the impact of urban design beyond narrow assessments of 'risk' reduction. To examine this possibility and to better address my primary objectives the research concentrates upon the human experience of one particular urban environment, a prototypical example of a post-war British New Town – Harlow in Essex.

# **Introduction:**

## **An Overview of the Research**

Harlow is a medium sized town with a population count, at the time of the 2001 census, of 77,768 people<sup>1</sup>. Located in the north-western corner of Essex adjoining the border with Hertfordshire, the town lies about 26 miles distant from Central London with which it has good rail and road connections. The surroundings are predominantly rural and the town has relatively easy access to open countryside on all sides. In most respects it is an ordinary town with little to distinguish it from settlements of a similar size. It has no significant tourist attractions and it is not the centre for any special trade or industry. Neither is it the base for any famous cultural or sporting event. Signs marking the town's boundaries declare it as the birthplace of the fibre optic cable – but such a claim is hardly renders it an especially memorable place. Yet, in the post-war decades Harlow drew numerous visitors from across the world eager to observe and experience what many now regard as a unique social experiment (Gibberd *et al* 1980). Demographic statistics and similar administrative data usually fail to capture this distinguishing element and, hence, overlook the very thing that lends Harlow its special identity – for it is a prototypical example of a *post-war British New Town*.

The British New Towns are the architectural embodiment of a social vision. In the aftermath of war the reconstruction of many city-centres throughout Britain that were laid waste by bombing became a matter of some urgency. But, the post-war government was eager to accomplish more than the re-building of these cities. Instead it took the opportunity to design and develop whole new towns. Now, the government believed, was the chance to apply a set of planning principles that seemingly promised, if not Utopia, then certainly a far more harmonious urban society free from the problems associated with the pre-war city. The New Towns were to provide environments devoid of slums in which people of all social classes might live peaceably together free from the blight of urban deprivation and social injustice. During the war years Beveridge (1942) published his famous report alerting the government to widespread national inequity and the suffering of many people from the five great 'evils' of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. And it was within the heart of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cenus2001/profiles/22uj.asp>

Britain's cities, many believed, that these evils were most prevalent. Given the publication of other parliamentary reports urging action to protect Britain's natural heritage against further suburban growth (Barlow Report 1940, Scott Report 1941), together with the then government's embrace of a radical social reform programme, the time seemed ripe for the initiation of large-scale urban re-development and the building of homes for a 'better future'. The New Town programme began amidst this zeal for social change.

In the period between the passing of the 1946 'Town and Country Planning Act' and the announcement of the post-war government's housing policy to the late 1960s about thirty 'New Towns' were built in three waves (Meller 1997). The precise number is a matter of some contention as some were really no more than extensions of existing towns and did not conform to the idea of constructing wholly new and self-contained urban settlements. Nevertheless, they all embraced the same vision of town planning as an instrument of social reform. The first wave of building, which included Harlow, was concentrated primarily in the regions surrounding London and in the North-East. Later, 2<sup>nd</sup> wave New Towns arose in conjunction with the development of specific industries such as the steel works at Corby. A final 3<sup>rd</sup> wave of New Towns, including Milton Keynes involved developments that were generally larger than the earlier towns and which adopted many design innovations suggesting, somewhat, a departure from the original planning idea. The ending of post-war economic boom and its accompanying affluence and the decreasing capacity of government to initiate bold planning policies, however, meant that the New Town 'idea' went into quiescence. From then onwards urban development became, primarily, a matter of private enterprise with the town planner typically assuming a mostly advisory role or acting as a watchdog to assure, at least, some measure of environmental coherence (*ibid*). Grand 'utopian' ambitions of urban social reform through town-planning were then regarded as either unaffordable or hopelessly naive.

But in 2007, a government announcement indicated that the New Town idea might, once again, become a viable guide for future urban growth. Recognising a need to build over four million new homes over the next quarter century in response to a growing population and a shortage of 'affordable' housing the government declared its intention to sponsor (although now through the mechanism of public-private partnerships) the development of five 'eco-towns', the construction of which would begin by 2010 with the development of a further five by 2016. Although committed to re-developing 'brown-field' sites wherever possible, the current government accepts that such a massive building programme cannot rely on such initiatives alone and that some expansion into 'green-field' sites is inevitable. But this, they remain adamant, should not involve the further extension of sub-urban 'sprawl' on the edges of existing towns and cities. Thus, the creation of wholly distinct and autonomous towns, they hope, will make a major contribution to reaching its house-building targets.

Various government spokespeople acknowledge the similarity between this proposal and the policy of 'New Town' construction set out in the post-war years. The New Towns, they believe, can provide a useful guide in designing the eco-towns. "We need to learn the lessons...from both the successes and the mistakes of previous generations" declares a junior government minister in her foreword to the Eco-Towns Prospectus (DCLG 2007). Others agree: the chairperson for the parliamentary 'Communities and Local Government Committee', for example, advises that "...the experience of the New Towns can teach us a lot about how we should approach long-term planning of current and future large-scale urban developments such as the eco-towns<sup>2</sup>". Similarly, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors insists that "...a full assessment of the positives and negatives of New Towns must be carried out before final decisions are taken on eco-town proposals<sup>3</sup>".

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from:

[http://www.bardcampaign.com/politics/national/86415/lessons\\_to\\_be\\_learned\\_from\\_the\\_new\\_towns\\_say\\_mps.html](http://www.bardcampaign.com/politics/national/86415/lessons_to_be_learned_from_the_new_towns_say_mps.html) - accessed 09.09.09

<sup>3</sup> Taken from: <http://www.rics.org/uk> - accessed 09.09.09

But what are these lessons the original New Towns can teach? Attention will undoubtedly focus upon the environmental credentials of the New Towns given the government's stated objective of reducing carbon-emissions and its identification of urban areas as major contributors to global warming. Yet, the Eco-Towns prospectus and other consultation documents clearly affirm the expectation that all planning proposals must comply with government guidelines for building 'sustainable communities' (ODPM 2005). These emphasise, amongst other concerns, the need for all future urban development to provide 'safe' environments and to contribute 'as much as possible' towards crime prevention. As such, any re-examination of the original New Towns should not only address matters of ecology but also their capacity to provide 'safe' environments in which communities might thrive. This study is intended as a contribution towards such a re-examination.

It is, however, useful to describe at the outset the form by which I intend to conduct such a re-examination. The initial idea for my research was to simply discover how effective the 'New Town' style of urban environment is as an instrument of crime prevention. Given the ambitions of the planners to provide a physical framework for community cohesion and, ultimately, a context for the attainment of social order, a criminological consideration of the New Town environment seems highly apposite. The similarities of the New Town programme with contemporary proposals for eco-town development would appear to make such an assessment all the more compelling. 'How well', I began to ask, does the New Town style of urban environment compare with current guidelines for the development of 'safe' communities? Does the design style 'work' as a model of crime prevention and what are its strengths and weaknesses? As my preliminary investigations advanced, however, I began to realise that these questions, alone, were not sufficient and that my discussion should adopt a broader scope. This did not represent a substantial shift away from my initial focus – a considerable part of the following study does, indeed, consider the contemporary viability of the New Town Idea relative to the emergence of recent developments in Environmental Criminology that significantly inform existing government planning policies. Yet, I also want to

advance in this study a strategy of inquiry that addresses the relationship between crime, fear of crime and environmental context (i.e. an Environmental Criminology' from a Humanistic perspective. This strategy, for reasons I shall now discuss, involves a focus upon the 'lived experiences' of Harlow's distinctive 'New Town' urban environment especially as it pertains to its public realm.

The term 'Humanism' is notoriously tricky to define. Historical applications of it often refer to seemingly incompatible modes of enquiry. Thus, the 'Humanism' of the Renaissance represents an early embrace of 'science' and of the scientific procedure for establishing knowledge about the world – the scientific 'method' that finally became dominant in Europe and America during the Enlightenment before extending into most of the world. Yet, much recent humanistic commentary tends to berate applications of science (see, for example, Tuan 1976). If, however, we understand the term 'Humanism' as indicating a prioritisation of the 'human' and a concomitant need to advance the conditions of existence for mankind (conditions of dignity and worth) then confusion over what the term means largely disappears. Humanism is, therefore, not a particular 'theory' or philosophical system but more an attitude that aims to guide the direction of enquiry towards whatever can help maximise human contentment. An entry for 'Humanism' within the Social Sciences Encyclopedia (Kuper & Kuper 2004) summarises this attitude concisely:

*Humanism as a technical term and as an intellectual or moral conception has always leaned heavily on its etymology. That which is characteristically human, not supernatural, that which belongs to man and not to external nature, that which raises man to his greatest height or gives him, as man, his greatest satisfaction, is apt to be called humanism."*

*"Humanism thus means many things. It may be the reasonable balance of life that the early humanists discovered in the Greeks; it may be merely the study of the humanities or polite letters; it may be the freedom from religiosity and the vivid interest in all sides of life of a Queen Elizabeth or a Benjamin Franklin; it may be the responsiveness to all human passions of a Shakespeare or a Goethe; or it may be a philosophy of which man is the center and sanction.*

When religious dogma was a major obstacle in initiatives to improve the human condition it became the primary target of Humanistic criticism. The advancement of scientific method, however, became itself the target of criticism once Humanists began to believe that it had become, itself, a hindrance to the satisfaction of human need. Thus, Humanism is not 'anti-science'. Where science serves the purposes of improving the human condition it remains fully commensurate with Humanistic principles. Yet Humanism is always wary of 'scientism' – the misapplication and over-extension of the scientific method towards the attainment of knowledge about the world and mankind's involvement with it with regard to particular areas of enquiry in which adherence to strict scientific protocols is not appropriate and which can lead to a worsening of the human condition. Scientism almost represents the binary opposite of humanism for it describes the pursuit of knowledge about human affairs while remaining indifferent to matters of experience, emotion and feeling. Scientism, as a method, can certainly produce knowledge – a way of explaining aspects of the world – but not always in a form that benefits mankind. Humanism, therefore, offers a mode of enquiry which often, although not always, embraces modes of enquiry that refuses to accept the hegemony of scientific procedure. It is a mode of enquiry familiar to students of the 'Humanities' which insists upon recognising issues of value, meaning and experience. Rather than offering explanations it endeavours more, to understand the world and the significance of its multitudinous aspects – either for good or bad – in how people experience and make sense of it.

The style of Humanism embraced in this dissertation, therefore, is one that prioritises 'needs' arising directly from the peculiarity of the human condition. It follows, loosely, in the tradition of humanist tradition of writers like WI Thomas (1967) who stressed the importance of the 'four wishes' (new experiences, security, response and recognition) in understanding human motivation; of Maslow (1970) and his establishment of a 'hierarchy of needs' (basic physiological survival at the lowest and self-actualisation at the highest) in personality development; and of Fromm (1941) and his identification of various existential needs that have to be met if life is to become meaningful but



which are so often thwarted under conditions of modern capitalism. These 'needs', following this tradition, are comprehensible as an universal element of all human existence although, depending on circumstances, they are often found wanting. Moreover, the desire to satisfy these needs will embrace different strategies according to socio-historical and cultural contexts. They remain, however, universal simply because they flow directly from the human condition which all members of our species share regardless of their differences. To a large extent this 'condition' is existential – it refers to the capacity of most human beings for self-reflective consciousness: that we do not merely exist but are also aware of our existence and are able to 'dwell'<sup>4</sup> upon it. Thus, we might posit a human need for such matters as 'belonging', 'respect and love from others and from the self', 'to be someone and to make an impact upon the world' and so on. I would further suggest that the human condition also leads to a number of bio-psychological 'needs' which are the outcome of our evolutionary heritage but which often sit awkwardly next to our existential desires. These bio-psychological needs, however, remain equally important. Indeed, following Maslow, we might only hope to satisfy our existential needs if those that are bio-psychological in origin are first obtained. Such bio-psychological 'needs', therefore, primarily refer to the basic requirements of survival such as a need for 'security' against predation. Although the origins of these needs arose in circumstances which few humans now experience as matter of everyday life – i.e. the circumstances of which our earliest forbears were familiar – they persist, given the slow pace of evolutionary change, as a fundamental aspect of our modern existence.

I suggest that a Humanistic contribution to Environmental Criminology may prove highly useful especially if it can help counter the excesses of 'scientism' that currently characterise much of the research conducted within the field. In short, I suggest that Environmental Criminology continues to embrace, albeit implicitly, a predominantly Positivist mode of enquiry – and hence a strict adherence to scientific procedure - that too often fails to register the

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'Existential Need' holds especial significance in this study, for reasons I shall explain later.

importance, complexity and ambiguity of human need as it relates to environmental experience. A 'problem-oriented' Environmental Criminology begins by isolating a troublesome variable (an environment in which crime, fear and disorder is relatively high) and proceeds to identify what in the environment is responsible. Such an approach is often worthy and delivers valuable knowledge towards constructing 'safe' environments. But such an approach too often slips into the trap of Scientism and fails to recognise the problems of Positivistic research which a Humanist mode of enquiry can highlight.

Despite the almost ritualistic demolition of Positivist explanations in nearly every introductory text-book on criminological theory and the near universal refusal of those who currently regard themselves as 'criminologists' to embrace such approaches it seems that Positivism continues to thrive within the sub-field of Environmental Criminology. Of course, few Environmental Criminologists declares outright that what they are doing constitutes a form of Positivism – indeed, most would eschew any particular philosophical 'position' as something unnecessary to the achievement of their immediate and more practical objectives. Ever since Clarke (1980) pointed out the failings of 'conventional' criminology and its supposed inability to either explain the 'pre-dispositions' of some individuals to offend or to offer useful advice that policy-makers might implement, Environmental Criminology has doggedly sought to downplay theoretical debate in favour of an adherence to more practical concerns. The greater imperative, they would argue, is not to philosophise about crime and its aetiology but to do something about it. Of course, anything that appears to avoid theoretical speculation usually conceals, behind a facade of 'obviousness' and 'utility', an implicit theoretical position – and Positivistic Environmental Criminology is no different. If Positivism involves the construction of 'testable hypothesis' and the identification of certain 'Independent Variables' which directly and measurably 'cause' Dependent Variables – at least, that is how I understand and refer to the term in this study – then it becomes quickly apparent that most contributions to Environmental Criminology remain firmly within its remit.

The 'Variable Analysis' of most forms of Criminological Positivism concerns the causal properties that 'pre-dispose', or rather, determine the criminality of particular individuals. It is a Positivism of individual behaviour – something, following Clarke's objections, advocates of Situational Crime Prevention and the other mainstays of contemporary Environmental Criminology prefer to avoid. Yet, the categorisation of certain environmental variables as 'responsible' for providing the opportunities for crime to occur – or even as responsible for not denying such suitable opportunities (a subtle, but important difference) – from which an analyst can make predictions concerning the probable extent of crime 'incidents' that will occur in the given location - still remains a version of Positivism. Following such logic the analyst need only identify what these 'variables' are to ensure that future environmental developments (especially those that are 'urban) avoid including them or remove those which may already exist. Thus, the Environmental Criminologist might predict that a plan for a housing estate, shopping centre or whatever will lead to a relatively high crime rate because it contains the variables of, say, poor Defensible Space, inadequate means of surveillance, poor lighting and concealed alcoves in which would-be offenders might lurk. The analyst might support his or her concerns by reference to 'hard data', graphs and tables of statistical correlations that derive from rigorous research investigations and which apparently show 'scientifically' that these variables are associated with 'problems' of social disorder. Such a claim makes no assertion of behavioural determinism – it does not suggest that the environment causes people to behave in particular ways – but it still remains a form of variable analysis in which the occurrence of one measurable phenomenon is irrevocably associated and deemed the causal property of another. 'Crime is high in this place' it suggests, 'because these environmental variables cause it to be that way'. This would seem to constitute a perfectly reasonable finding and any policy that flows from it would appear wholly sensible. Yet, in isolating environmental variables and measuring their impact upon the behaviour choices of people may overlook a number of key concerns with regard to capacity of that environment to satisfy broader human needs. Perhaps, an alternative approach, and one more compatible with Humanistic enquiry, would be to understand the 'meaning' of the given environment and the significance it has

in the direct experiences of people who encounter it. A Positivist approach may assume people experience the environment in particular ways by drawing conclusions from the statistical data. Yet such assumptions may well miss how that environment is actually experienced and what it means.

I fully accept that the above might appear a gross caricature of how much current Environmental Criminology actually proceeds. For example, much recent research in the field adopts a 'Realist' (see Pawson and Tilley 2004) perspective in which it is understood that a given environmental variable requires a 'trigger' before it can exert any impact upon any supposedly 'dependent' phenomena. Thus, for example, an aspect of an environment only has an impact upon rates of disorder that occur in that location *if* triggered by unemployment or deprivation. This, I agree, certainly offers a greater degree of sophistication to analysis and avoids the charge of 'mechanism' from which most Positivist claims suffer. Certainly, the need to understand environmental features within a context is something I accept in this study. But, Realist analysis remains ultimately a form of variable analysis and hence continues to suffer from the same limitations inasmuch as it fails to gauge the complexity and, indeed, frequent ambiguities by which people evaluate the environments they encounter. The weakness of such approaches, I suggest, stem from the continuing embrace of a 'problem-oriented' rather than 'experiential' mode of enquiry.

Any 'problem-oriented' examination of an urban environment that concentrates exclusively upon its capacity to prevent crime and fear and is content to only ask 'does it work' (Sherman L.W. *et al* 1997) begs a more important question. There are, currently, several models of crime prevention most of which the government embraces to one degree or another. It is possible to demonstrate that all 'work' as mechanisms of crime reduction within specific situations. Sherman *et al* (*op cit*), for example, reviewed 90 different 'place-based' crime prevention initiatives and discovered that over 90% reported some reduction of crime despite these embracing a wide variety of strategies. As Eck (2002)

states “...there are a large number of place focused prevention tactics with evidence of effectiveness”. The debate between different advocates of these various models often employs a wealth of statistical detail as supporting evidence: does, for example, a particular strategy ‘displace’ crime rather than actually prevent it (see Hakim S and Rengert G.F 1981). Seldom, however, do these debates consider the broader environmental implications that follow implementation of these crime prevention strategies especially with reference to broader human needs. Too often, a demonstration that the chosen model does indeed reduce crime is the sole criteria by which to evaluate its success or failure. Yet, it is necessary, I contend, to supplement any investigation of ‘does it work’ with a consideration of the broader impact an urban environment – or a small aspect of it – has upon the quality of life for those experiencing it directly and most often. An environment that demonstrably reduces crime and fear might ‘work’ in that narrow regard but it is hardly worth our admiration if it hinders any capacity to satisfy other ‘needs’ that will enhance life.

In pursuing a humanistic strategy this study prioritises immediate lived experiences. Rather than simply draw correlations between various environmental features and ‘measures’ of crime or fear I endeavour to understand the significance the environment has for those who experience it immediately. It is, after all, one thing to discover that a town’s environment encourages experiences of risk but another thing to know what such ‘risk’ actually means to those experiencing it. Similarly, acknowledging that people generally experience an environment as ‘safe’ does not obviously indicate that such experiences are always positive. It is only by investigating the quality of environmental experiences – to understand them in their full complexity and perhaps even ambiguity – that the true impact (the lived significance) of a town’s design has upon both perceptions of crime and broader human needs.

My Humanistic re-examination of the post-war British New Town also pays especial attention to the quality of its ‘urban public realm’ for its there that the environments of towns and cities can contribute emphatically to the

satisfaction of human needs but within which, given its 'shared' character, problems in the attainment of such needs can become all too easily apparent. Numerous commentaries on the urban experience highlight the importance of a vibrant public realm (e.g. Whyte W.H 1988, Lofland L 1973 and 1998, Crowhurst-Lennard *et al* 1997, Lennard S.H 1995, Lennard and Lennard 2004, Jacobs 1961). Towns or cities, they argue, suffer, appears lifeless and even dangerous unless they provide the conditions from which a public realm might develop. It is the public realm of a town or city that can enhance the quality of life for its residents and visitors in accordance, again, with wider human needs. The degree to which the post-war British New Town delivers these conditions would seem, therefore, a necessary aspect of my study. But, moreover, we might consider the impact of policies that follow a 'problem-oriented' Environmental Criminology upon the establishment of such a 'successful' urban public realm.

What is meant by the 'public realm'? Although the term may not frequently arise in everyday speech it commonly occurs in governmental reports, policy statements and newspaper articles testifying to its apparent importance yet usually without any elaboration as to its meaning. Those employing the term seldom attempt any definition and seemingly rely upon conventional understanding to convey its sense. Thus, usage of the term often assumes equivalence with the term 'public space': that it is a location freely accessible to all with no barriers to entrance. According to the government's 'planning portal' the public realm refers to 'outdoor areas accessible to the public'<sup>5</sup> and the planning advisory body, CABA (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) describe it as: 'The parts of a village, town or city (whether publicly or privately owned) that are available, without charge, for everyone to use or see, including streets, squares and parks (CABA 2004 p24).

Using the term as a synonym for public space has some justice. It certainly has geographical connotations for which reason this study concentrates upon the

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<sup>5</sup> At: <http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/wales/genpub/en/1105619049554.html>

impact of environmental design, especially the New Town design of Harlow, upon the area 'between the buildings (Gehl 2001) where people can freely move or gather. But the public realm always refers to something more than just public space. Instead it is better to regard it, from a humanistic perspective, as a collective, social *experience* arising from encounters between strangers. This experience usually occurs, but not always, within an identifiable and physical geographic area. Much recent discussion refers to the world-wide web as a public realm – as a 'virtual' place in which strangers interact. Those without the technological resources might lack access to this realm but nothing, legally, denies entrance if they desire. Wherever legal restrictions to the web do occur, however, it becomes part of another realm that is, at best, only partially public. The same principle applies to web sites that require special passwords or access codes. Nevertheless, it is primarily to physical space that the term 'public realm' applies. It is, however, important to remember that it is the social and experiential dynamic that occurs between strangers that defines the quality of a public realm and not the space in which it occurs. Without the co-presence of strangers – people who are biographically unknown to each other often with different cultural and ethical expectations (Lofland 1998) a public space is merely empty and a site that only has the potential to become a genuine public realm. Thus, the geographic reference of the public realm is always to *place* – a space whose significance derives from the experiences of people potentially encountering strangers within it.

The distinction between 'space' and 'place' is no pedantic quibble. Indeed, the failure to make this distinction is often at the root of why some urban design initiatives prove unsuccessful in their attempts to encourage a vibrant public realm despite this being a stated objective. Simply designating a space as 'public' does not ensure that people will use or experience it as a place where strangers are encountered. Whether or not the designers of Harlow and the other New Towns were able to provide spaces for successful public realms that are both safe and able to accommodate human needs is, therefore a major question that this study endeavours to understand.

That the public realm is usually urban is no coincidence. In villages and smaller settlements most inhabitants are personally known to each other. Encounters between people are overwhelmingly 'primary' involving, at least, some personal familiarity and background knowledge (Redfield 1969). The arrival of a stranger into such settlements is usually a source of considerable interest perhaps even alarm. As Lofland (1998) reports, where primary encounters between people are predominant the arrival of the stranger will usually initiate some 'rites of passage' the purpose of which is to assimilate the unknown into the familiar and knowable. Failing this, the stranger is liable to experience complete ostracism, expulsion or even death. The public realm, by contrast, is a forum within which most encounters are 'secondary' in which interactions between people occur without those involved having personal knowledge of each other. The commonality of such encounters means that nobody can afford the time to render strangers familiar. And it is only within cities and large towns where large populations ensure most encounters are of this secondary character that a truly public realm can arise<sup>6</sup>.

It is the distinctive experiential social dynamic of the public realm which renders it an important factor in urban criminological research. Strangers, by definition, are unknown and thereby can easily arouse feelings of unpredictability, uncertainty and cognate associations with 'disorder' (Lofland 1998, Wirth 1969). That such attributions are usually unfair is beside the point: it is the *possibility* of a stranger's dangerousness that makes the public realm inherently problematic. The traditional village is able to sustain social order upon a foundation of personal familiarity. Even a member of such a society with a proclivity for immorality is well-known and although he or she may invite disapproval the predictability of their behaviour will render it less disturbing to other members. Fellow villagers may choose to avoid or shun such a person or, perhaps, adopt precautionary tactics when they are about to encounter him or her. Within the urban public realm, by contrast, such proclivities will remain unknown until the very moment when the 'immorality' actually occurs. The

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<sup>6</sup> A few non-urban places, usually tourist attractions, can also sustain a public realm but such locations are relatively uncommon and atypical.



maintenance of social order, therefore, cannot rely upon the same foundation of familiar knowledge as it does in the village or smaller settlement. This is not to suggest that the achievement of urban public order is impossible: a considerable literature outlines the mechanisms and everyday routines by which strangers are able to establish trust between themselves despite their mutual anonymity (e.g. Goffman 1971 and 1972, Lofland 1998). Social order within cities is not dependent upon the establishment of 'formal' controls but can arise from adherence to certain informal codes and rituals. Nevertheless, the *perception* of the public realm as potentially dangerous can lead to its avoidance by people (thereby eradicating its status as a public realm) or as threatening when everyday life compels them to visit. The environmental design of the public space within which a public realm is meant to emerge can highly influence whether or not people interpret it as a suitable location and whether they behave in a manner sufficient to establish trust. A successful and 'safe' public realm, in short, depends upon people experiencing the environment in which it occurs, as able to satisfy human needs of trust and desirability. Under conditions of modernity it is, perhaps, reasonable to regard town planning as, in part, the search for a physical framework wherein a safe and viable urban public realm might develop. In this respect, urban planning has always been, if only implicitly, an instrument of crime control and order maintenance. But to know how such planning 'succeeds' or not is to appreciate its impact upon the attainment of human needs.

Finally, it is worth noting my reasons for concentrating upon Harlow as a case-study from which I draw a number of conclusions about the impact of the post-war New Towns in relation to crime and fear as a whole. Firstly, I concentrate upon one town because it allows for greater analytic specificity (Yin R 2009). It is usually the experience of actual places that hold significance in the everyday lives of people. It is 'this' place they enjoy visiting or 'this' place they prefer to avoid and not 'place' as abstraction. And as Hughes and Edwards (2005) argue, Environmental Criminology might benefit from paying greater attention to the specificities of place. It is first-hand experience and not theoretical abstraction which determines whether an environment helps prevent crime or enhances

the vibrancy – and hence success – of a public realm. Abstracting ‘place’ may certainly serve useful analytic purposes but not if it leads to artificial constructs that are unrecognisable in actual lived experiences. Like Frankenstein’s monster, a synthesis of anatomical parts taken from different bodies, the ‘generic’ New Town may approximately resemble actual examples yet always lack something essential. An abstraction can, therefore, appear as something strange – as ‘unreal’. No two New Towns are exactly alike even if they share a similar architectural ‘style’ of planning organisation. Geographical variation and historical context will always ensure that each remains a distinct and relatively unique. Harlow in Essex and Cumbernauld in Scotland, for example, are both formally ‘New Towns’ but to consider them, for analytic purposes, as the same is surely a mistake. That one occupies a location within the relatively prosperous south-east of England while the other lies within a region still suffering the impact of industrial decline must have some consequence upon how people experience each as distinctive places. By concentrating on the details of Harlow as a particular place, therefore, I am better able to extract elements relevant to my study and which may have more general significance. To move from the general to the particular, by contrast, is to risk making assertions lacking concrete foundation. I concentrate, therefore, on a case-study because it allows me to consider the distinctive features of a New Town in some depth acknowledging its full complexity in a way compatible with my Humanistic orientation.

There is, of course, always a danger that in concentrating upon a single New Town that I am making general claims that only really apply to Harlow and not the post-war new Towns as a whole. Nevertheless, throughout this study I make considerable effort to identify those features of Harlow’s built environment that grew out of a particular planning tradition and which are also evident with other New Towns. Certainly, it is difficult to claim that the experience of these features of Harlow are the same as the experience of similar features in other towns within differing geographical, historical and social contexts. For this reason I cannot claim that this study is anything other than a preliminary investigation of the impact of New Town environments upon crime and fear.

Further research in other towns may reveal different environmental experiences. However, by concentrating on Harlow I hope to identify a number of themes and 'areas' of enquiry, drawn from my humanistic approach, which should have wider application. In this regard, I suggest that the Humanism of this study might provide a bedrock for more general enquiry employing more conventional methodologies but which are aware of the 'humanistic' implications of such further research.

As one of the first built New Towns in Britain Harlow is especially suitable as a case-study for a humanistic inspired Environmental Criminological research. It contains all the core elements of what I shall later describe as the New Town 'idea' whereas later developments tended to dilute the original conception. Certainly, there was a village called Harlow before the arrival of the New Town and a few older hamlets still blend with their otherwise wholly modern surroundings. Yet, these older settlements are peripheral and do not represent significant regions within the New Town proper. Overwhelmingly, the built environment of Harlow and its public spaces are a product of a single 'Masterplan' the objective of which was to realise a particular social ideal.

My second reason for concentrating upon Harlow is more personal. From age two until my late thirties I was a resident of the town and continue to visit it regularly today. I have, therefore, my own direct experiences and close familiarity with the town and its distinctive environment. This, I maintain, grants me a methodological advantage for understanding the experience of the New Town environment commensurate with my humanistic approach – I am able to consider it not only from the neutral position of social scientific research but as someone who has immediately 'lived' it. Of course, such familiarity may hold me open to the charge of personal bias and suggest that my research fails to obtain proper objective impartiality. However, as I discuss later, I endeavour to maintain methodological rigor by faithfully reporting the experiences of Harlow's environment other than my own. But to fully comprehend such experiences it is always necessary to 'know', first-hand, what it is like to 'live'

Harlow's environment: to know it as a 'place' replete with meaning and significance and not merely as an 'object' for analysis. During my years spent in Harlow as an 'insider' I was regular visitor and participant in the town's public spaces. I attended events within them, used them with my friends for recreational purposes or as a matter of everyday life. I often discussed these places and Harlow's urban environment with people I knew, not as a social scientist, but as an ordinary member of the town's population with shared concerns and interests. It is only by reflecting upon my own experience, I suggest, and comparing it with that of other residents of Harlow that the 'meaning' of the environment and its implications for crime and fear control can emerge. If this methodological procedure has shortcomings they are more apparent to those 'stuck' within established modes of social scientific enquiry and less with the people who actually inhabit Harlow. Any weaknesses are offset by the 'immediacy' and freshness of 'data' that my approach provides.

The Humanistic 'contribution' to Environmental Criminology that this study intends, therefore, centres upon, firstly, the prioritisation of human 'need' arising from the distinctive bio-psychological and existential condition of mankind and, secondly, a methodological focus upon the often complex and ambiguous significance of environment – its 'meaning' and interpretation – in the everyday lives of people. Such a Humanistic approach, I contend, has a number of strengths which, collectively, can advance the scope and value of Environmental Criminology. It insists upon recognising people as 'active' agents of Environmental meaning rather than just passive responders to Environmental determinants. It also insists that understanding such meanings depends on a willingness to accept the 'full' complexity of the human condition. Thus, it questions the assumption that aspects of an environment represent obvious problems which research can easily identify and proffer 'solutions'. Instead, it considers how people might interpret these aspects as problematic or otherwise and respond accordingly. A key argument, which I shall develop and support throughout this study arises from my Humanistic approach and exemplifies its leading strength: that an interpretation of an 'environment' as 'risky' does not 'obviously' imply negative connotations and that the meaning

and value of 'risk' demands understanding within given contexts and according to its relationship with human need. For reasons that shall become apparent such an argument is especially pertinent in consideration of Harlow's New Town environment.

However, the adoption of a Humanistic perspective does necessitate the inclusion of what might appear methodological weaknesses. Certainly, the Humanistic methodology I adopt does not conform to conventional standards of scientific rigour: it does not, in particular, allow for 'findings' that are straightforwardly replicable or generalisable. I must accept that were somebody to conduct a similar inquiry regarding the 'impact' of Harlow's environment upon residential experiences of crime and fear he or she might draw different conclusions. As I discuss in Chapter Four, my findings are not purely personal observations but seek confirmation from those who experience Harlow's environment on an everyday basis. I research as a partial 'insider' who has had direct experience of living within Harlow and, I maintain, such 'insider' knowledge will often result in 'meanings' that are often radically different from those who interpret the town's environment from 'outside' or according to standards of scientific objectivity. As such, I endeavour to show that my 'inside' observations are not exceptional from those of other Harlow residents. Nevertheless, what might seem a primary 'weakness' of my chosen approach is that it might appear too personal for anyone with 'scientific expectations. What I do endeavour to provide, however, is a 'reading' of Harlow's environment as a text which concurs with the 'readings' of other Harlow residents. Nobody would expect a 'reading' of a text with the traditional field of the Humanities – novels, poems, artworks, etc. – to adhere to strict scientific standards. Instead, we might expect such a reading to be credible and coherent and not just some eccentric and highly idiosyncratic musing to which nobody else can empathise. I hope my 'reading' of Harlow's environment provides such credibility and coherency. Ultimately, I offer this study as a 'contribution' – not a final word but a preliminary statement – about how Environmental Criminologists (or studies of the Post-British New Towns) might proceed and to draw attention to experiential factors that a more conventional research approach might

overlook. As a 'contribution' I accept that this study, from a strictly scientific perspective, will contain weaknesses. Yet, in allowing me to recognise and discuss a broader range of issues than a conventional approach would permit maybe my 'findings' can help steer Environmental Criminology in a fruitful direction: a rigorous Environmental criminology but one better able to account and understand the significance, complexities and ambiguities of Environmental experience.

Any humanistic study that considers the capacity of an environment to support or hinder the satisfaction of human need must concern itself with two key factors which although analysis can treat in isolation are actually inseparable. These two factors are, firstly, the concrete, physical attributes of a given environment that may, potentially, exercise some influence upon human satisfaction and, secondly, how people directly experience these environments in ways that actually satisfy these needs or otherwise. The first part of this study, therefore, focuses upon Harlow's urban environment as an object to *be experienced* before it becomes a phenomenon of actual human experience. It examines the planning vision of the New Town Idea and the philosophical principles, socio-environmental assumptions and models of urbanism from which it arose. The first chapter emphasises the criminological relevance of the New Town Idea by tracing its 'conditions of emergence' as a response to, primarily, 19<sup>th</sup> Century middle-class fears regarding social disorder within the rapidly expanding industrial cities. Such apprehension, I suggest, centred upon the supposed collapse of traditional control mechanisms within these cities and difficulties in establishing alternatives within such environments. I also note the widespread belief that large city environments might actually be criminogenic. The chapter continues by considering the increasing conviction, during the *fin de siècle*, that town-planning might provide a remedy for such urban ills. If urban growth according to principles of pure *laissez faire* had wrought an environment in which immorality was flourishing then the careful design of 'hygienic' environments should yield greater social control without forsaking the economic advantages and social progressiveness that attends urban growth.

The New Towns programme, which began during the late 1940s represents the culmination and perhaps the ultimate expression of such a belief. Chapter Two extends the previous discussion by examining the stylistic motifs and underlying socio-environmental principles of the New Town Idea concentrating on the specific example of Harlow. I suggest that although New Town design shares with other 'modern' models of urban planning – especially conceptions of the 'City Beautiful' and the 'Radiant City' - the same ambition of providing physical frameworks for rational order, it remains distinct from them. This, I suggest, is a consequence of its embrace of 'pre-modern' urban patterns and desire to merge 'natural' elements into what are, otherwise, environments of human construction. Such 'organic urbanism', the proponents of the Idea thought, would provide the physical conditions from which community attachment and social integration would prosper within a public realm and disorder would thereby diminish.

If Part One addresses the New Town Idea as an 'Urbanism from Above' concerning plans, visions and attributions of what urban environments were and could be like, then Part Two offers an 'Urbanism from Below' (de Certeau 1988, see also Lea J & Stenson K 2007 and Hayward K 2004) by considering how it is actually experienced by those resident within Harlow. By adopting a humanistic methodological strategy I endeavour to capture how people 'live' Harlow's urban environment and how such experience compares with the town's design intentions and visions of social order. The strategy necessarily involves, for purposes of comparison, a further elaboration upon these planning intentions and visions.

Chapter Three describes my methodological strategy, one compatible with humanistic enquiry, that I adopted in attempting to capture such experiences. I explain how a humanistic approach can disclose a richer seam of material than conventional, empiricist methods and that it is better able to embrace the full complexity and significance of environmental experience. Although this entails a departure from conventional standards for achieving research rigour I argue

that a measure of validity is still obtainable by making the final report believable and credible. The means I employed to achieve such rigour are discussed.

Chapter Four offers a statistical profile of crime, disorder and fear of crime in Harlow. Although any reference to quantitative data might appear to clash with the tenor of humanistic enquiry, the profile reveals two key 'issues' which, I suggest, demand qualitative interpretation. While acknowledging the well known problems of reliability associated with all criminal statistics, those relating to Harlow would appear to suggest that the town has a relatively high crime rate in comparison to towns of similar socio-demographic profile: enough, at least, to indicate that the utopian ambitions of the New Town Idea are considerably unmet. Yet, an unpublished survey indicates that fear of crime is relatively low in relation to most parts of the town other than its primary retail areas. Elucidation of this apparent 'paradox' between relatively high crime and low fear – and its absence in the retail areas – I conclude, can benefit from appreciating how people actually experience Harlow's environment.

In the remaining chapters of Part Two I identify and discuss different 'forms' of experience as it relates to Harlow's environment. Firstly, in Chapter Five I discuss the 'imaginary' experience which is often implicit within representations of Harlow and the other New Towns. Such representations, I suggest, usually originate from people with little direct and long-term experience of living within these urban environments. Thus, the many derogatory claims of 'nausea' often associated with the 'New Towns' are seldom in harmony with the experiences of their residents. Secondly, in Chapter Five, I address my own 'autobiographical experience' of Harlow's environment as both an 'insider' and 'outsider'. Although the chapter is highly personal, reflection upon it discloses a number of key themes which usefully guided my investigation of the final type of experience – the everyday and, predominantly unreflective, environmental experiences of Harlow's residents.



Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine draws upon both my personal experience and that of Harlow's residents to focus upon separate areas of the town each of which epitomises aspects of the New Town Idea. Given the social ambitions of the New Town programme and the 'issues' identified in the statistical profile, these three areas warrant, I suggest, closer attention. Chapter Seven examines a prototypical residential neighbourhood in Harlow. My discussion begins by outlining the planning principles that inform its design before addressing how the neighbourhood's residents experience it as a 'place' in ways that either enhance or diminish fear of crime. I conclude that experiential accounts reveal some ambiguity in which sense of community cohesion is highly localised within the neighbourhood while identification with the whole area – and indeed, the remaining town beyond – is strong. Chapter Eight concentrates upon the Town Park as a place that encapsulates the 'Organic' promotion of natural space within otherwise urban surroundings. I highlight another experiential ambiguity in which people recognise the open space as 'risky' yet simultaneously as a highly attractive place. Such 'ambiguity', I suggest, attends all Harlow's 'green' spaces of whatever size or function. Nevertheless, rather than attempting to explain away this apparent ambiguity I suggest that it represents an important aspect of the urban experience compatible with human need. Finally, in Chapter Nine, I consider the apparent decline of Harlow's principle retail area and discuss why design weaknesses make it the area in which fear of crime is greatest. Despite recent initiatives to re-generate the area these fundamental design flaws, I conclude, will make the reduction of fear very difficult to achieve.

Part Three returns to my initial research question concerning the continuing viability of the New Town Idea and its compatibility with current government guidelines for securing 'safe' urban developments. My answer to this question, however, draws upon my experiential 'findings outlined in Part Two. My objective is to consider if the experience of Harlow's public spaces – its streets, parks, retail centre and so on – does contribute towards the establishment of a vibrant public realm that people experience, positively, as safe and which contributes towards the satisfaction of broader human needs. As my research

focus, however, is upon the town's design I begin, In Chapter Ten, by discussing how people might experience the physical features of public space in ways that induce feelings of anxiety or security. Again, I adopt a humanistic approach by discussing the existential and bio-psychological needs of people in relation to the places they occupy. Without satisfying these 'needs', I suggest, any environmental design will struggle to obtain a vibrant public realm. The design of Harlow, I argue, meets, fairly well such 'needs' for which reason fear of crime, other than within the retail areas, is relatively low. Yet other aspects of the New Town Idea inhibits the sociological component necessary for a successful public realm and, therefore, weakens any capacity for actual crime prevention – a matter I discuss in the final chapter. I finish, in that chapter, by considering how the positive aspects of New Town design, as manifest in Harlow, might combine with the precepts of New Urbanism – a currently influential town planning model – to achieve an environment which not only feels safe, meets human need but which can also contribute to the reduction of actual crime. The viability of such a proposal, however, depends upon acknowledging the importance of experiential understanding in all its complexity and possible ambiguity while abandoning crime prevention initiatives focused exclusively upon criteria of risk.

# **Part One**

## **Urban Disorder: The Problem Perceived and a Solution Conceived**

# **Chapter One**

## **Perceptions of Disorder and the Origins of the New Town Idea**

The New Town Idea encompasses a vision of the urban public realm as a place of domestic harmony and community cohesion. In the next chapter I discuss in greater depth how the designers of Harlow sought to realise this vision through the physical design of its environment. But in this chapter I want to address where this vision came from and the supposed 'problem' to which it was a response. The origins of the New Town Idea, I suggest, derive primarily from 19<sup>th</sup> century utopianism. Yet the idea was never just a manifestation of idealism for it constituted a thoroughly practical proposal to alleviate the living condition of the urban working classes within the newly emerging industrial cities. The 'problem' was certainly real: urban conditions were often appalling and the cause of considerable suffering. The proposed solution through rational town planning was borne, I suggest, from a primarily 'humanistic' impulse: one that sought to 'know' which urban environments were able to facilitate a better quality of life and through such knowing to encourage the building of environments in which social order might spontaneously arise. But, it was also, in part, a middle-class 'construction' arising from a perception of the industrial urban environment as a threat to civilisation and its values – a moral order which, of course, was understood as synonymous with their own (Lees 1985). Although mindful of the terrible sanitary conditions within the poorest city quarters and the attendant spread of disease, many within this social class looked upon the urban public realm as a problem of equal proportion. To them, this realm was a danger and breeding ground of crime and disorder (See Lofland 1973). The New Town Idea and its particular vision of the public realm, then, is comprehensible as a humanistic application of middle-class values upon a, primarily, working-class population which sought to provide a better physical framework for the attainment of human needs using environmental design as a tool for its achievement.

## **1. 19<sup>th</sup> Century Cities and the Problematic Public Realm**

During the industrial revolution numerous commentators on 'moral affairs', social reformers, politicians and policy makers began to voice concern about

the condition of Britain's cities. To these commentators, the newly emerging environments were a threat to civilisation itself and, therefore, a source of considerable anxiety (Lees 1985). To ignore this 'problem' was untenable for it might, they thought, lead to utter social disintegration. Many understood the rapidly expanding urban environment as a dangerous monster of human construction – one in need of pacification and control. These voices of concern were overwhelmingly middle-class and the object of their concern was not the possible collapse of their own moral order but that of the 'lower-orders' inhabiting the worst city districts. Rarely did they question their right to impose moral values upon others: their own propriety and rectitude, they thought, was self-evident. For, the emerging urban public realm, they were convinced, was allowing those of less moral rectitude to succumb to temptation and wickedness and the consequences were potentially damaging to all regardless of wealth and social background (Morris L 1994). The solution, many began to believe, was intervention to improve urban environmental conditions and, thereby, strengthen the social bonds able to keep the potentially 'dangerous classes' under control.

The Middle-Class attitude towards the 19<sup>th</sup> Century industrial city was, however, ambiguous (Lees 1985). On one hand, cities were regarded as filthy 'wens' of corruption and vice, morally squalid bachelors that brought out the very worst in human character. They contained unfathomable regions lacking all 'natural order' – places where long-established mechanisms for maintaining social order were largely unobtainable. To some urban critics, the only sensible option was to abandon the city as beyond redemption and return to more rural modes of habitation (*ibid*). From such anti-urbanism arose a utopian ideology that was to significantly influence the New Town Idea. Yet, on the other hand the 19<sup>th</sup> Century city was also widely acclaimed as a generator of economic prosperity and social progress: it was understood, despite its conspicuous faults, as a motor of modernity. Without urbanisation, most members of the Middle Class knew, Britain would remain an insignificant power unable to sustain empire and international prestige. Although often shoddy and unkempt, cities were widely recognised as the 'crowning jewels' of the nation's success. Thus, 19<sup>th</sup>

Century middle-class commentary did not generally pit anti-urbanists against unbridled champions of the city (*ibid*) – although some certainly took and argued vociferously for each standpoint. Instead, the debate was of a more level character in which even those most hostile to the newly emerging environments were still able to discern within them certain virtues and hope for reform. As Lees writes:

The majority of those who wrote about urban phenomena can be classified neither as city haters nor as city lovers. They saw the urban world as a complex mixture of both good and evil, a realm marked by sharp contrasts that suggested a superabundance of both dangers and opportunities (Lees 1985 p307).

This is an important point, for the New Town Idea represents a rapprochement of both urban *and* rural ideals, indicating a belief that some form of ‘ruralism’, even if it occurs within the heart of a town or city, was necessary if human needs were to ever be satisfied. Such a belief, therefore, is a direct reflection of 19<sup>th</sup> Century middle-class ambivalence. It was never a proposal to eradicate the urban environment altogether as something beyond reform. Rather, the idea is comprehensible as a bid to diminish the most unruly elements of urbanisation – meaning those most morally harmful – while retaining its more progressive aspects.

The chief source of 19<sup>th</sup> Century concern derived from the seemingly exponential growth of towns and cities – a growth that many saw as some unstoppable juggernaut lacking all rational direction or control. In a matter of a few generations and within the living memories of many, Britain had gone from being a primarily rural society in which most people lived in small towns or even smaller villages, to one in which the large town and city was predominant. In 1801 only 8.2% of British residents lived in towns with populations over 100,000. In fact, at that time only London was of this magnitude. By 1851, the urban population had risen to 21.8% with eleven cities now boasting populations over 100,000. At the end of the century the number had increased

further with over 30% of people inhabiting large urban environments. Twenty four cities now had populations exceeding 100,000 people. The trend continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century such that by 1931, 44.2% of people dwelt in cities of over 100,000 people<sup>7</sup>. In Britain, urbanism as a mode of society was now the norm for the overwhelming majority of people. And, if elements of urbanism (or, more precisely, the physical environments of the growing cities) were understood as a threat to civilisation, then it follows that the expansion of cities became an obvious cause of anxiety.

Exponential urbanisation meant the transformation of how most people lived their lives. No longer did people dwell in relatively small and distinct communities in which everyone knew almost everybody else and in which customary norms dictated how they behaved. But more disturbing was the fact that such growth was occurring without any apparent co-ordination. Following a prevailing ideology of *laissez-faire* and its eschewal of anything but the most necessary government interference, towns and cities were expanding at a pace seemingly indifferent to the consequences upon individual moral health and social cohesion (Mumford 1940). Rapid growth often meant the construction of cheap and shoddily built dwellings crowded together with little heed to sanitation, efficient routes for transportation or anything else that might contribute to 'orderly' habitation (Lawless and Brown 1986). The impact was especially hard upon the urban working class, many of whose members came from the countryside in search of opportunities to better their lives and escape the grinding poverty of their former rural surroundings.

Most building firms were local, small and vulnerable to bankruptcy. It was a precarious profession dependent on credit and profit margins were small...Land was comparatively cheap as were labour costs, but the search for profits, allied to sudden changes in demand, led to the builder's 'cutting corners' and the advent of the term 'jerry builders' suggesting 'something temporary, inferior'. Although the standard of housing for the working classes was poor in the extreme, the design of such houses was usually left to the builders themselves. The architectural profession is conspicuous by its absence when

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7 All figures from Lees A (1985) p4



it comes to the design of nineteenth-century working class housing (*ibid* pps 22/23).

Often, unscrupulous landlords, eager to extract maximum pecuniary advantage from their properties, haphazardly built extensions, adapted buildings with a few hasty modifications of dubious quality, or otherwise extended their interiors regardless of the impact upon the surrounding environs. Such zealous profiteering, however, soon became the target of reformers and led to an increasing agitation for more government intervention in defiance of *laissez-faire* dogma. Mumford, a notable and highly articulate supporter of the New Town idea, wrote disparagingly about urban growth following principles of pure free-trade.

[It] destroyed the notion of a co-operative policy and a common plan: did not the Utilitarians expect the effects of plan to appear from the unrestricted operation of private interests! By giving rein to chaos, reason and order were to emerge: indeed rational planning by preventing automatic adjustments, could only interfere with the higher workings of a divine economic providence. The test of social success was not the consequence to society in good homes and healthy lives and a friendly environment: the sole test was the pecuniary reward that flowed to the enterprise (Mumford L (1946) p154.

Laissez-Faire, as many liberals asserted, was a valuable principle that allowed British society to overcome the former system of stale feudal privilege and economic inertia. But by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, however, it was increasingly held responsible for many social ills and numerous social commentators began to urge restraint. Economically, urban growth following principles of free trade was championed as a mark of liberty and progress. Yet, because the principles of free trade are indifferent to broader human needs subsequent urban growth is always likely to breed individual misery and, ultimately, social disorder. Formal governmental intervention to ensure social safety was, therefore, increasingly understood by a large swathe of the middle-class as of urgent necessity. Although the building of the 'Garden Cities' at Letchworth and Welling, forerunners of the post-war New Towns, was primarily the result of private capital and philanthropic largess it was only through public funds that the latter were developed. The creation of an urban environment fit for human

habitation, according to its advocates, meant releasing land for 'open space' and other recreational usage and building for comparatively low population densities – leaving aside land that might otherwise yield handsome profits. After all, the 'hidden hand' of market economics, rarely builds anything unless it promises ample financial reward. Thus, the New Town Idea only emerged once sufficient numbers came to recognise the need for state intervention. And, to them, it was a need that had to be met before 'civilisation' collapsed altogether.

*Laissez-Faire* also led, many an urban critic held, to the creation of environments wholly inimitable with God-Given human nature. This 'humanistic' perception of the city as 'artificial' is described well in a verse by William Cowper:

In cities foul example on most minds  
 Begets its likeness. Rank abundance breeds  
 In grass and pamper'd cities sloth and lust,  
 And wantonness and gluttonous excess.  
 In Cities, vice is hidden with most ease,  
 Or seem with least reproach; and virtue taught  
 By frequent lapse, can hope no triumph there  
 Beyond the achievement of successful flight.  
 God made the Country, and man made the town.  
 What wonder then, that health and virtue...  
 Should most abound.

*William Cowper: The Task 1785*

Cowper's words are an example of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century middle-class tendency to compare urban environments unfavourably against some rural idyll. The city, according to this perception, was inherently corrupt and corrupting: it was a product of human artifice and was thus a container for all human faults and weaknesses. The countryside, by contrast, was considered a scene of divine purity and as the rightful place in which mankind should dwell. No wonder, then, several believed, that those who inhabit such God-blessed places had virtues so often missing amongst those living in the city. In fiction a series of, often brilliantly drawn and vividly memorable, characters came to represent what is best described as the *urban grotesque*. Dickens' portrayals of Daniel Quilp and Fagin, for example, are depicted as creatures of the urban environments they inhabit. These are figures of utter moral depravity, ruthlessly extracting anything of worth from the morally righteous without pity or remorse and excelling in the urban conditions that surround them. Their victims, by contrast, appear to somehow not belong in the circumstances in which they discover themselves and utterly lack any means to survive amidst such unsavoury conditions. Repeatedly, such fiction declares the same moral message: in the city the wicked may prosper while the good suffer at their hands. But, more than this, the city environment, through its very artificiality, was held responsible for creating such evil – it was regarded as ‘anti-human’. “Men” wrote Rousseau “are not made to be crowded together in ant-hills, but scattered over the earth to till it. The more they are massed together, the more corrupt they become<sup>8</sup>”.

Such Romantic anti-urbanism, of course, rarely took heed of actual conditions within the countryside: conditions that were often dire enough to drive people towards the rapidly expanding cities. “When pastoral nostalgia coloured the discussion of cities later on” writes one historian of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, “it was for an *idea* of the countryside as much for its actuality” (Coleman 1973 pps

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8 Quoted in Briggs A (1968) p61

18/19). Moreover it was an idea that often overlooked the appeal of cities as places of opportunity and excitement – many came because they were considered better places to live. Nevertheless, the conception of the countryside as some imaginary Arcadia – a place of social harmony and 'natural order' was so powerful that many middle-class commentators began to look back upon the predominantly non-urban Middle-Ages as a time of social harmony and a period more compatible with the satisfaction of human needs. It was an idea that, arguably, has never disappeared and remains a fundamental aspect of British (indeed, Western) culture today. It is a belief that registers a nod of disapproval towards all things modern. Note that the continuing penchant for fantasy literature and Arthurian legend, for example, had its origins in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and its particular embrace of what might be termed a 'humanism of nostalgia'. The belief that 'getting closer to nature' and experiencing the beauty it has to offer can provide a tonic beneficial to both mind and spirit was certainly a significant influence upon the New Town movement and is an idea to which I shall devote much attention in later chapters.

A leading reason why many 19<sup>th</sup> century commentators drew unfavourable comparisons between the town and country was the widespread belief that the filth and squalor of the urban environment was detrimental not just for physical but also to moral health. As documented exhaustively by Lees (1985), many of the most ardent sceptics regarding urban growth were doctors or were employed in closely allied fields to the medical profession (Lees 1985). Their concern for the physical well-being of the urban working classes was undoubtedly genuine. Nevertheless, the volubility of their attack on cities would also seem prompted by other concerns. As a growing imperialist nation, Britain had need of healthy stock to supply its voracious military machine and many famous martial defeats (such as the early battles of the Boer war) led many critics to wonder if cities were responsible for producing biologically defective specimens (see Steadman-Jones 1976). Perhaps more worrying to the Middle Classes, however, was the belief that poor physical and moral health was somehow inextricably interwoven and that the cause of one undoubtedly led to

the other. Thus, it was that many medical commentaries made frequent asides to discuss urban moral depravity and campaigners for sanitary reform often made demands for environmental improvements upon moral grounds. As Lees notes:

Immorality was identified frequently as a powerful contributor to physical illness, most convincingly in the case of alcoholic drink... But the physicians were equally inclined to indict the wretched physical environment and the diseases it engendered in the aetiology of urban wrong-doing...whichever was the cause and whichever the effect, threats to physical and moral well-being were regarded as intimately linked facets of urban life (Lees 1985 p26).

The urban *miasma*, as it became known, was thought to choke the morality of urban dwellers and cause them to have scant concern for those around them. For this reason, the new cities became known as dangerous places in which muck and immorality went hand-in-hand together. Edwin Chadwick, the famous sanitary reformer, partially justified his life's work on the following moral grounds.

The familiarity with the sickness and death constantly present in the crowded and unwholesome districts, appears to re-act as another concurrent cause in aggravation of the wretchedness and vice in which they are plunged. Seeing the apparent uncertainty of the morrow, the inhabitants really take no heed of it, and abandon themselves with the recklessness and avidity of common soldiers in a war to whatever gross enjoyment comes within their reach (quoted in Lees 1985 p26).

Hence, the movement to 'clean-up' Britain's cities that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was always more than some altruistic gesture to alleviate the squalor in which large swathes of the working class spent their lives: it was also, in part, a middle-class defense of what they considered a universal morality.

Other voices were uncomfortable, not so much with the direct impact of 'foul' urban air upon working-class morality, but more with the peculiar social geography of the city: an arrangement in which middle-class and other 'agents'

of moral rectitude were unable to exert any immediate influence over those most requiring guidance. Taking a lead from various liberal philosophies, these commentators understood human nature as something naturally mischievous, selfish and immoral and maintained that only the imposition of appropriate controls could prevent social order from completely disintegrating. It was the responsibility of moral guardians – who, of course, always came from the ‘better’ classes – to ensure individual decorum and personal control. Within the countryside, such moral supervision was a matter of custom. There, members of different social classes regularly met and participated in some form of interaction – the weekly church meeting, the annual cricket match or other sporting event. Urban society, by contrast, was one in which the classes were usually kept rigidly apart and where contact between them was always minimal. Clerics often expressed the greatest distaste for this social arrangement simply because, to them, it was a threat to their own godly values. Robert Southey, the romantic poet and conservative theorist, succinctly represents this view by using the imaginary voice of the early humanist, Thomas More, in conversation with a contemporary.

...perhaps it will be found that the evil [of criminals] is at this time more wildly extended, more intimately connected with the constitution of society, like a chronic and organic disease, and therefore more difficult of cure. Like other vermin they are numerous in proportion as they find shelter; and for this species of noxious beast large towns and manufacturing districts afford better cover than the forest or the waste. The fault lies in your institutions, which in the time of the Saxons were better adapted to maintain security and order than they are now.... Every person had his place. There was a system of superintendence everywhere, civil as well as religious...None were wild, unless they ran wild willfully, and in defiance of control. None were beneath the notice of the priest, nor placed out of the possible reach of his instruction and his care (Quoted in Coleman p59).

Other guardians of moral probity also saw an absence of moral guidance arising as not just the consequence of an institutional weakness or the outcome of geographical distance between social classes but also because the ordinary constraints of everyday interaction were so lacking. As Robert Vaughan, a church minister and noted urban critic put it:

In a neighbourhood where every man is known, where all his movements are liable to observation, and the slightest irregularity becomes a matter of local notoriety, a strong check is constantly laid upon the tendencies of the ill-disposed. In such connections it is felt that should the law fail to punish, society will not. The crowded capital is to such men as some large and intricate forest into which they plunge, and find, for a season at least, the places of darkness and concealment convenient for them (quoted in Briggs 1963 p62).

His words suggest an early version of what is comprehensible as the 'urban anomie hypothesis'. It is a familiar concern: that a 'lonely crowd' inhabits a city of geographical proximity but of considerable social distance.

The increasing geographical divide both within and between the social classes in the urban environment had a powerful impact upon many a middle class cognitive map. Whole areas of the city were unknown to them and were seemingly inhabited by exotic creatures beyond the pale of civilisation. Many documenters of life within these regions, such as Mayhew, deliberately assumed the profile of the intrepid explorer and their writings often suggest the discovery of strange cultures equivalent to those found overseas rather than of peoples inhabiting their own country. However, these descriptions of such exotic 'breeds' noted one major difference from those 'found' by explorers abroad: in the city such strange creatures could and often would venture out from their lairs and plunder the innocent in surrounding middle-class districts before disappearing back to their own dominions. Such 'strangeness' was obviously a source of considerable fear. As Briggs notes:

Social segregation necessarily induced and still induces strange ways of thinking about other human beings. The fear of the city, like other kinds of fear, was often a fear of the unknown. It was because the 'crowded hives' were mysterious as well as crowded that cities provoked alarm even on the part of some of the people who lived in them (Briggs 1963 p62).

Again, this belief led to another fundamental tenet of the New Town Idea – the promotion of ‘mixed housing’ and a ‘balanced community’ as a necessary ingredient of any ‘healthy’ society.

One consequence of rapid urban growth following the logic of *laissez-faire* was the ‘sudden’ emergence of unmapped city districts able to remain relatively free from surveillance and bureaucratic authority. Within such ‘rookeries’, as they became known, crime and criminality, or at least so the middle classes believed, was nurtured and a criminal class sustained (Tobias 1967). Here immorality supposedly thrived not only as a consequence of the dire poverty experienced by most of its inhabitants (the Victorians were always eager to distinguish between the deserving and undeserving poor) but also because those of malicious intent were able to *associate* with each other without interference. Here, within the rookery a criminal *infrastructure* for vice and crime was evident: a place where stolen goods were ‘fenced’, the pub (or ‘flash house’) where burglaries were planned, even the training school where youngsters set loose from all moral constraints might receive an education in crime<sup>9</sup>.

The ‘unknown’ character of the rookery was a source of one further concern: not only was it understood as a breeding place for immorality but also as a region seemingly beyond the bounds of possible reform. To the middle-classes and representatives of moral authority it was a ‘no-go’ area, a ‘jungle’ hiding hidden dangers, a ‘labyrinth’ where only the most reckless might venture and the thief might quickly escape. Many who documented the ‘unknown’ 19<sup>th</sup> Century city often saw themselves as missionaries preaching a moral message to the unconverted.

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9 For example, see the account of Fagin’s Den in Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*



## 2. Resolving the Urban Problem: The Birth of Town Planning as a Medium of Social Control

Whether or not these Middle Class fears regarding a 'criminal class' and the true extent of moral deprivation within the unplanned city had any justification is highly debatable. What, however, is beyond dispute is that these fears were a significant part of a collective middle-class cognitive map concerning the city's public realm and it is from this 'map' that many of the themes and motifs of a town planning movement began to emerge. Planning, it was believed, could improve the physical health of the urban working class but also yield better social control through providing a more 'rational' public realm. The origins of the New Town Idea is traceable to the pioneering efforts of reformers such as Octavia Hill and her campaigns to provide 'social' housing and open space as a moral tonic to the urban poor (see Hill 2000) and Samuel Augustus Barnett, founder of Toynbee Hall, an educational institute for the moral improvement of the working classes. Other campaigns sought to ameliorate urban degeneracy through directly 'rationalising' the public realm. Movements, for example, of 'Rational Recreation' and 'Muscular Christianity', led to the construction of parks within most towns and cities (Bailey 1978). These movements were essentially paternalistic, often with strong evangelical undertones. If providing moral guidance actually within the working class home was to risk violating privacy then improvement, these campaigners thought, was possible within the public sphere. To them, the urban park was always more than a patch of pleasant greenery amidst the grey city surroundings but a public place able to exert moral lessons of some urgency. It was an alternative leisure venue that might take the most morally susceptible away from the temptations of the street and public tavern: a place, moreover, where the poor might mix with those of more fortunate means and thereby derive moral guidance through example (Conway 1991).

But, it was the 'model-town' building of various late 19<sup>th</sup> Century philanthropic entrepreneurs (See Creese 1992) that was the most obvious antecedent of the

New Town Idea and it is from them that a new 'vision' of a morally tenable urban public realm began to form. The philanthropists responsible were genuinely benevolent and deeply sympathetic towards the plight of the urban poor. To question their motives is unfair, yet in using their own funds to create better living conditions a strong paternalism is also undeniably evident. Like most 19<sup>th</sup> Century urban reforms these philanthropic initiatives are partially comprehensible as a counter to the threat of insurrection and a desire to retain a more productive workforce. The moral degradation of the urban poor was not only condemned as socially catastrophic but also considered a drain of human resources that any businessman of enlightened knowledge might exploit to his and the country's economic advantage. Such building of 'model towns' although undeniably paternalistic, derives from a humanistic impulse to establish urban environments able to better the everyday lives of the industrial working classes and thereby promote a foundation for social order. The towns were built not according to the 'problem-oriented' approach of contemporary Environmental Criminology. Instead, they were the outcome of philanthropic largesse that maintained that social order was only possible if the whole urban environment was able to promote individual satisfaction.

It is, therefore, no coincidence that many 'model-towns', such as Saltaire in Yorkshire and Bourneville near Birmingham not only provided capacious space for a public interaction with parks aplenty for rational recreation, but conspicuously no taverns in which a workforce might squander their incomes. Only in the late 1940s did any licensed bar open in Bourneville and the eventual opening of a pub in Saltaire was sarcastically given the name 'Don't Tell Titus' in reference to the founder of the town, Titus Salt's, well known temperance. Such paternalistic refusal to allow the 'evil drink' to corrupt the otherwise morally civilising public surroundings of the 'model-town' continued, it seems, into the New Town Idea and its immediate antecedents. Letchworth was, for many years famously 'dry' and even the provision of local 'neighbourhood' bars in the post-war New Towns appears a concession rather than a necessary part of their design. The origins of such paternalism, for example, is shown by Salt's alleged instruction to construct a glass dome in the

roof of his town's local constabulary so that he might better monitor the behaviour of his employees and ensure their moral probity in the streets below.

If anonymity was held responsible for many of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century city's problems then the solution of the 'model-town' was to construct environments – or, more precisely, a public realm - in which the stranger was rare. The most important contribution these towns made to the development of the New Town idea came less from the provision of open space and the removal of temptation (urban reforms already occurring within most cities by the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century) but more from their comparatively diminutive size. These were no agrarian villages but products of the industrial revolution servicing the needs of technological advance. Yet, by keeping the population small, these towns were meant to induce a more traditional form of social order based upon close ties of familiarity between people.

Of course, the small model-town could never supply the range and depth of service available in the large city – an advantage of any sizeable population's 'critical mass'. This was an issue recognised by the architect-in-chief of the Garden City Movement, Ebenezer Howard. And in his proposals for the 'Social City' (Howard 1985) he believed he had found an answer. The Garden City, like the model-town, was to remain comparatively small. But unlike the model-town, it was to become one part of a wider constellation of other Garden Cities, each distinct and relatively autonomous, surrounded by a 'Greenbelt' of countryside. Together these towns, Howard believed, would provide a fully urban 'critical mass', but separately, attain to the social order of the smaller settlement. To Howard such a proposal was eminently rational for it allowed for functional segregation – a place for all things. Each town was to assume responsibility for specific needs but the advantage would accrue to all. And if the overall population size of the 'Social City' meant that encountering strangers was inevitable at least it would occur within an organised and orderly public realm rather than one of social chaos. Again, the idea of 'functional zoning' became a

key feature of New Town design and one directly inherited from the earlier Garden Cities.

The 'Greenbelts' surrounding each separate Garden City were to offer their inhabitants easy access to the countryside with the supposed moral benefits of gaining fresh air and the opportunity for exercise. But Howard's vision extended to more than just having greenery close-by. The Garden City was to merge town with countryside such that one became almost indistinguishable from the other. The urban public realm was to become, itself, largely green – much as the communal meeting place of the rural settlement is the grassy village green. Howard made few recommendations regarding the appearance of his proposed Garden Cities: he was always more the initiator of the idea with an indefatigable zeal in persuading others to finance and realise his vision (Beevers 1988). The actual design of the two Garden Cities in Britain that were built (together with a few Garden 'suburbs') was left to the creative talents of Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker (Miller 1992). And it is from Unwin, in particular, that neo-medieval' motifs became a distinguishing element in the design of many New Towns. I shall discuss the details of such 'neo-medievalism' in greater detail in Chapter Two. However, it can be stated here that such an idea derives considerably from a middle-class misrepresentation of the medieval town: an idea that, like certain images of the countryside, was often over-romanticised. Its social purpose, however, was clear: to induce a sense of 'togetherness', and 'connectivity' perceived as missing within the industrial city and to render the public realm a place of mutual belonging. Unwin's stated admiration of past urban form, however, refers primarily to its 'visual order' something he felt lacking in the large city. The provision of beauty, he thought, was to serve more than just aesthetic purposes but also to fulfil various social functions. A visually ordered townscape, he believed was also one able to induce social order through ennobling the human spirit such that it might lead the most socially vulnerable away from moral iniquity.

The building of Garden Cities at Letchworth and Welwyn was wholly the outcome of private initiative led by the redoubtable efforts of Howard and the Garden City Association, of which he was a founding and leading member. The purpose of this association was to acquire funds to purchase suitable land and the construction of towns employing Howard's planning principles. Investors were persuaded that the sale of new properties would provide a handsome financial return. But the utopian ideology of the Garden City Movement was off-putting to many investors who preferred to invest their monies in more conventional suburban development. But the idea of building 'small', self-contained towns did not entirely disappear. In the late 1940s, with the need for post-war reconstruction, an opportunity to re-visit Howard's vision was to occur. Several war-time governmental reports, such as the Barlow Report (1940) on the distribution of the industrial population and the Scott Report (1941) on rural land use, had noted with concern the continuing spread of large cities and the threat to Britain's natural heritage. Beveridge (1942) had also published his famous report encouraging government to take a more interventionist stance in overcoming the four great 'wants' of social injustice. Abercrombie's (1942) 'Greater London Plan' was to offer a means of both curtailing urban gigantism and its association with both social and moral fragmentation, through the provision of greater welfare intervention through town-planning. His plan drew four concentric circles through London and its surroundings. Within the inner circle was to remain the old city supplying the core needs of a capital and municipal administration. Surrounding this inner core was to remain the zone of suburbia. A third circle or 'Greenbelt' of agricultural land protected from all urban encroachment, however, was to prevent further suburban spread. Thus a fourth belt beyond the agricultural zone was to become the site of New Town construction necessary to rehouse an estimated 1.5 million people from the 'slum' conditions of the inner-city zone (Meller 1997). It was an application, with some modification, of Howard's original 'Social City' proposal and was to receive formal sanction with the 1946 Town and Country Planning Act.

It was during this period that the New Town Idea came fully to fruition, borrowing much from the designs of both the earlier model-towns and Garden

Cities. How the 'idea' was to translate into actual town plans was, initially uncertain. In Chapter Two I shall discuss the 'style' that was to emerge. However, the terms of reference, set by the post-war government, was to clearly embrace a domestic civic ideal able to support community cohesion and to overcome the problems of anonymity and the poor social balance characterising the industrial urban public realm (*ibid*). Thirty towns were built according to the New Town Idea (the precise number depends on what 'counts' as a New Town) between the late 1940s and the late 1960s in three 'waves', after which date grand schemes of town-planning began to lose favour.

It is, however, perhaps no coincidence that with the recent collapse of the free market throughout the Western World, the government has become sceptical of *laissez-faire* as a mechanism for ensuring social harmony and is now reconsidering the New Town Idea as a basis for constructing environmentally friendly and socially sustainable eco-towns. In part, this new interest reflects a growing concern that the public realms of many urban environments is still unsafe and that they foster problems or crime – a concern very similar to those expressed by those Victorian commentators from whom the New Town Idea gained its initial impetus.



Fig 1 - The New Towns of England and Wales

# **Chapter Two**

## **Modernity, Town Planning and the New Town Idea**





Fig 2: The Old and the New: Two High Streets in Harlow – Old Harlow 1903 & The Stow 1956

The British New Towns, as explained in the previous chapter, are the architectural expression of the post-war government's embrace of urban planning as a mechanism for social improvement (see Cherry 1996, Meller 1997). They arose from the loss of faith in pure and unadulterated *laissez-faire* policies to secure social justice culminating in the post-war Atlee government's programme of reform in which policies of State intervention became the prevailing mechanism of change. This, amongst other radical initiatives to vitiate the social problems associated with *laissez-faire* governance, led to legislation that sought to raise the quality of housing and the urban environment in general. After the destruction and bloodshed of World War II, many in Britain insisted upon the improvement of urban conditions that the free market was, apparently, unable to deliver. The promise of 'Homes Fit For Heroes' made after the Great War was never truly honoured and the housing stock for the mass of the British population, but particularly the urban working-class, remained poor and dilapidated. Atlee's government, however was eager to do more than offer empty promises and under the guiding impetus of Lewis Silkin, then minister for Town and Country Planning, the 1946 New Towns Act was passed through parliament (Gibberd *et al* 1980).

Under this legislation the Government was able to acquire, through compulsory purchase, areas of land for the construction of complete and autonomous 'New' towns. The first designation order was for Stevenage in Hertfordshire. In 1947 work began on the building of Harlow with the initial intention of housing approximately 60,000 people (*ibid*). Before the war Harlow was simply a small

village primarily serving the needs of the local agricultural community. The site's selection was partially an outcome of it satisfying a number of practical considerations such as the provision of an appropriate geology, landscape and climate for urban development. But, perhaps a more compelling reason was that the village of Harlow and its environs lay sufficiently close to London and hence could accommodate the capital's 'overspill' population (taken mainly from the run-down areas of the East-End) without risking coalescence with and further expansion of the megalopolis. In this respect the construction of Harlow and the other 'New Towns' conforms to Professor Abercrombie's recommendation for 'Satellite Towns' in his famous 'Greater London Plan' (Abercrombie 1940).

A powerful indication of Harlow's distinctly 'New Town' environment arises from an examination of old photographs of the area taken before it was built. Bucolic images of small hamlets, fields with grazing livestock and the emblems of an obviously agricultural economy appear a world apart from the urban environment that Harlow has now become. Yet, often the viewer recognises elements in these old photographs – a group of trees or churchyard for example – that remain part of the townscape today. The viewer might recognise that what was once a rural environment has now become distinctly urban. Such transformation, of course, is true for all urban locations for each covers an area that was also once countryside. But, what makes Harlow different is that this transformation was not a consequence of market or other commercial demands but the realisation of a plan. The whole town and its environment was an idea, a planning concept, *before* it became concrete reality. One, perhaps apocryphal, story describes, Sir Frederic Gibberd, Harlow's chief architect responsible for its Masterplan, cycling around the countryside upon which the town was to be built, deciding which spots would become residential neighbourhoods, town centres, industrial zones, parks and so on. There are few townscapes in the world that began in the mind of one person (or even a small group of minds) before becoming actuality: and Harlow is one of them.

Harlow, then, is a town with a distinctive environment – not just in the sense that all towns are unlike any other but also because it crystallises a particular urban vision of what I am calling the ‘New Town Idea’. In this chapter I want to examine more closely the application of this idea and to discuss the principles that inform the design of Harlow. In particular, I want to describe how Harlow's design and the planning concept that informs it embodies a vision of an urban public realm able to overcome the ‘problem’ of social order commonly associated with the industrial city as discussed in the previous chapter. But I also want to suggest in this chapter that the impulse that drove the ‘New Town’ style of planning was ‘humanistic’ inasmuch that it always embraced, albeit implicitly, a recognition that urban planning must respond to human needs. Whereas other styles of ‘modern’ and especially post-war urban planning have received much criticism for failing to satisfy such needs, the New Town Idea was always exceptional. Although still ‘modernistic’ the New Town Idea, I shall argue, was always ‘conscious’ of human need rather than just technical or economic efficacy. As such, the New Town Idea always looked appreciatively back to ‘pre-modern forms of urban design and hence represents a ‘diluted modernity’ (Llewellyn 2004).

Written descriptions can never substitute for actual experience. Only by moving through Harlow's environment can anyone fully appreciate its sensuous details - the sights, sounds and smells of this particular townscape. Words merely hint at this experience and even the provision of photographic images will fail to capture the immediacy of direct experience. As the quality of such urban experience represents a fundamentally important aspect of this study, I need, somehow to convey in words what it is like. Although inevitably deficient, a fair representation of Harlow's environment, I suggest, may emerge from describing a typical ‘tour’ through it. Cullen (1961) notes that a townscape is an ‘art of relationship’ whose “...purpose is to take all the elements that go to create the environment: buildings, trees, nature, water, traffic, advertisements and so on, and to weave them together in such a way that drama is released” (p10). Nobody, he continues, experiences this art of relationship statically but only through what he terms ‘serial vision’ (*ibid* p11) in which scenes emerge in a pattern of ‘jerks or revelations’.

The human mind reacts to a contrast, to the difference between things, and when two pictures...are in at the same time, a vivid contrast is felt and the town becomes visible in a deeper sense. It comes alive through the drama of juxtaposition (p11).

Taking this concept of 'serial vision', what follows is an attempt to describe a possible tour a traveller might take through Harlow - one that encompasses most of its distinctive environmental features. Beginning at the 'Old Town' and continuing along a cycle-track past an industrial zone and a 'typical' 'New Town' neighbourhood before reaching the town park, the tour reaches its destination at Harlow's primary civic and shopping area.

## A Tour through Harlow

The tour begins, as perhaps it should, in Old Harlow, as the group of houses, small high street shops and other buildings became known after the construction of the 'New' town. There is little, however, that is especially ancient about this area and it is now no more than an adjunct to the adjoining New Town. There are, here and there, a few obviously old buildings including a particularly aged church and former manor house. But within Harlow as a whole there are similar remnants from the past - the occasional old farm building or hamlet that once housed agricultural workers and whose name now designates a whole urban neighbourhood. Again, photographic images of 'Old' Harlow remind the observer that the town has a past wholly different from what it has now become: images of people in 19<sup>th</sup> Century or early 20<sup>th</sup> century apparel engaging in pastimes and trades of a time now past. Upon encountering these buildings or photographs the very modernity of the adjacent New Town becomes apparent by contrast. Indeed, the curvature and asymmetry of the Old Town's street layout - an outcome of historical practice or habitual usage and not the product first conceived upon some planner's drawing board - makes plain the radicalism and conscious ambition of the New Town's design. In Old Harlow, architectural form *reflects* the social character of its former

inhabitant's lives whereas in New Harlow, architectural form is an endeavour to *construct* an appropriate social environment. Where one reflects what life once 'was' the other suggests what life 'should be'.

After leaving the 'old town' our journey proceeds past an industrial area on the right although much of it is hidden from the cycle-track by a buffer of woodland. Covering an area of approximately 270 acres, Temple Fields is Harlow's foremost industrial zone. Its name derives from the remnants of an ancient Roman temple discovered in the area although nothing archaeologically significant remains *in situ* today: the 'temple' is now little more than a grassy mound surrounded by warehouses and industrial units. A range of 'light' industries including factories and small workshops occupies the site and provides one of the most important sources of employment for Harlow's residents. Although a sizeable number of residents work outside the town's perimeter, mainly as commuters to London, the existence of such industrial zones indicates that the town has some autonomy and is able to satisfy most employment needs of its inhabitants. Harlow is no 'bedroom suburb' but a distinct, self-contained town in its own right. The recent arrival of 'warehouse style' retail outlets in Temple Fields provides an additional source of employment although such provision was never a part of the original Masterplan. There is, however, little about Temple Fields that is environmentally significant with regard to my research other than its layout which successfully provides the necessary infrastructure for industry. What is significant, however, is the complete separation of this industrial zone from any residential, civic or retail areas. It shows that the town's design embraces the policy of 'zoning', adopted in the earlier Garden Cities, in which various urban 'functions' are kept apart and assigned their own distinct locations unlike the traditional city in which such activities often combine within the same space.

On the opposite side of the cycle track is Mark Hall North, a typical example of a Harlow residential neighbourhood. Again, the buildings are mainly hidden from view by a layer of woodland although it is possible to glimpse some

through the trees<sup>10</sup>. Here, for the first time, the tour has led to an environment that exudes in its very appearance several key aspects of the New Town Idea.

Throughout Mark Hall North there is ample greenery and an apparent attempt to blend the urban streets within an almost 'rural' environment. The environs immediately surrounding a large open space, for example, are a visual reminder of the traditional village green. Buildings cluster around the edges and the ancient church of St Mary-at-Latton lends the area a rather rustic 'chocolate box cover' image wholly at odds with the more conventional imagery of a typical urban locale. Indeed, 'nature' flourishes throughout the neighbourhood with innumerable grass verges, tree-lined avenues and buildings interspersed with shrubbery. Yet, unlike most rural villages the greenery of Mark Hall North is obviously more a matter of design. Certainly, existing areas of 'parkland', originally part of the local manor's (Mark Hall) garden were kept as part of the neighbourhood. But even this evinces a design decision rather than a matter of allowing 'nature' to run its course.

Leaving Mark Hall North and continuing our journey we cross a fairly busy road and enter Harlow's Town Park. Immediately noticeable is the absence of fences or other barrier bordering this open space that would prevent access after dark. In numerous spots we perceive vistas of the Hertfordshire countryside as it adjoins the town. Indeed, the park appears to merge imperceptibly with the countryside such that it is not easy to know where one ends and the other begins. Leaving the cycle-track briefly and wandering through the park a number of other elements become discernible. Firstly, the park obviously encompasses a fairly extensive range and, secondly, it includes a number of different and distinguishable environments or 'outside rooms'. Many of these

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<sup>10</sup> The concealment of houses behind trees and bushes, for reasons I discuss later in the chapter, is a conspicuous feature of Harlow's design. It contributes to the town's 'peculiar' urban character as revealed by an episode that occurred to me. As I was walking alongside a road, well within the boundaries of the town a car stopped next to me and its driver enquired "which way do I need to go to get to Harlow"? 'You're in it' I replied and noticed a look of confusion spread across the driver's face. I knew that behind the trees adjacent to the road was a large residential neighbourhood, but as it was invisible to this stranger it was understandable that he thought he had yet to get to any town.

'rooms' are relatively uncultivated and do not evince much sign of design. The meadows adjoining a river, for example, are flooded and make walking through them, other than upon a designated pathway, very difficult. Occasionally we pass through a small copse of trees or discover ourselves in what amounts to an empty field. Other 'rooms', however, are clearly the outcome of design and echo the modernity of Harlow's buildings. In one stands a concrete stage, sufficiently large to accommodate organised performances and in another stands a water garden housing many 'avant-garde' statues. One expanse of greenery has paddocks within which animals graze including a herd of sheep and even a small group of llamas. Beyond this 'farmland' is an empty area, although patches of tarmac, electric cables and lighting poles indicate that it provides a suitable space for visiting fairs, shows and similar events. In heading back to the cycle-track we come across a small hamlet of buildings, including a pub, whose origins clearly pre-date the New Town. This hamlet nestles at the bottom of a number of hills sloping in several peculiar directions suggesting the work of human artifice rather than geological movement.

Once back upon the cycle track and continuing onwards we, at last reach, our final destination: Harlow's town-centre. Immediately we notice that entrance to this place requires us to pass through a subway for the town-centre stands upon an 'island' surrounded by a ring-road. The gathering of office blocks and multi-storey car parks on the Centre's edge marks this as a distinctive place although, from the outside, it is impossible to identify what lies within. However, upon gaining entrance we discover a number of shopping parades linking a few squares, beyond which is a shopping mall and a further retail area the design of which suggests it is of more recent provenance than the rest of the town-centre. In one square, some permanent awnings provide cover for market stalls: the other squares, however, appear curiously empty. Throughout, there are no motor vehicles for all parts of the town-centre are only accessible by foot.

Throughout this short tour two features are distinctive. Firstly, most of the town's buildings are clearly 'modern' often evincing much architectural

experimentation and innovative design. There is little attempt to achieve, at least at the level of appearances, what is today known as the 'vernacular style'. Some houses adopt distinctive rectangular shapes eschewing conventional sloping roofs although others assume a more familiar form while still displaying a highly modern image. The town-centre, however, projects its post-war modernity with few apparent nods to the past. It is a shopping precinct, the design of which almost exclusively serves retail needs with few concessions to other possibilities. Secondly, the environment of Harlow contains ample greenery and verdure throughout. At times such greenery assumes the form of a park, yet grass and shrubbery, trees and bushes occur everywhere: alongside roads, at the end of a row of houses, in courtyards and cul-de-sacs. It is plainly evident that the town attempts to build *with* rather than *against* nature. The significance of these two features and how they contribute towards the achievement of social order is, as I shall shortly discuss, fundamental in comprehending the New Town Idea's particular vision of social order.

## Modernity and the New Town Idea as a Model of Social Order

At a glance it is not immediately evident that the design of Harlow follows any 'vision' of Social Order at all. By retracing the tour from the beginning and considering the social objectives behind the design patterns observed, a particular conception of order, however, soon becomes apparent.

The New Town Idea is an expression of modernity in which town-planning is used as a mechanism for achieving social order. There is much written about architectural modernity, especially that of the post-war period, as an 'art' of spatial enclosure *within* individual buildings. But, here, I want to concentrate upon the impact of architectural modernity upon the spaces between and around the buildings within a whole townscape. It is the creation of this space as a deliberate outcome of design – the manipulation of public space wherein



the urban public realm can arise – that most clearly seeks to achieve social order. Like other post-war models of town planning, the vision of social order embedded within the New Town Idea is thoroughly 'inclusionary' (see Young 1999). The social intention behind its design concept is to create a place of common belonging, a place to which people can identify and in which they can experience both collective and personal contentment. It offers a 'vision' of social order through environmental design, in which people are meant to experience few reasons to deviate.

Several recent social commentaries (e.g Harvey 1989) write of the post-war period when the New Town Idea came most fully to fruition, as an age of Fordism. Town planning during this period, they argue, was primarily a tool of social control in an age of mass consumption, standardisation and increasing bureaucratic surveillance – an age when conformity meant the freedom and capacity to accrue the commodities upon which capitalism was becoming increasingly dependent. Perhaps this claim is too cynical, but it does describe an ideological shift in which social control became a matter of reform and 'improvement' rather than one that simply sought to keep the 'dangerous classes' at bay.

Modernity is a *mode of experience* (Berman 1982) that places mankind at the centre. It is an experience of faith in our capacity to acquire rational knowledge of the world and our ability to use it for human betterment. To the 'modern' mind, nature is no mere given to which we must accommodate ourselves while accepting its vagaries but something over which mankind has mastery. No longer are we subservient to nature's forces. Through rational, scientific knowledge we can harness it to serve our purposes. Modernity, therefore, involves a utopian pursuit of perfection. Although few modern minds believe the attainment of complete perfection is probable none are willing to give up the chase. Thus, modernity as a mode of experience is imbued with visions of order – both of the natural and social worlds – as something worth striving for and employs scientific reasoning as the means of its attainment. The implicit

utopianism of the New Town Idea was not exceptional. Rather, its pursuit of social order was a fundamental aspect of modernity's wider project. Yet, the particular modernity of the New Town Idea is distinctive and requires closer examination. But, before discussing this peculiarity it is useful to first outline how 'modern' town-planning in general became an instrument for the achievement of social order especially during the post-war period.

Firstly, town-planning under conditions of modernity accepts the necessity for *creative destruction* (Harvey 1989) in which the 'old' is torn down to allow the truly modern to arise. The modern city, Le Corbusier declares, requires a clear site upon which to emerge. Vestiges of the old city – not just ancient relics of pre-modernity but also earlier modern innovations – must disappear for the sake of progress. Sentimental nostalgia merely hinders the pursuit of order and allows chaos and confusion to thrive – a disorderly condition in which the public realm becomes a dangerous place. Often modern town-planning proposals sought (and occasionally obtained) the demolition of vast urban areas and their replacement by new environments conceived as more rational. If this meant the displacement of many people, so much the better, for modernity's onward progress would spread its influence to the ultimate benefit of all. In this regard, the construction of Harlow was not just meant to provide an alternative urban environment but was a scheme to relocate people away from what its planners understood as the 'slum' conditions of the industrial city. Wartime destruction of many of these supposed 'slums' necessitated rebuilding but it was really no more than a convenient excuse for continuing the project of urban design that had begun during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Harlow was built upon a fresh site but it still meant the creative destruction of a formerly rural environment for the sake of human 'progress'<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Some of Harlow's most ardent supporter's of the town's modernity often overlook the 'destructive' aspect of progress. Lady Gibberd, wife of Harlow's chief architect, was a vocal critic of any attempt to remove any of her husband's work. She vigorously campaigned, for example, to prevent the demolition of an office block that stood for many year's opposite the town station seemingly forgetful that the construction of this same building in the 1960s meant the demolition of a small community of houses that previously occupied the same space.

Modern town-planning, therefore, embraces a vision of social order through creating 'open', rational environments. Not the unknown and, ultimately, unknowable labyrinths of the pre-modern town and the early modern industrial city where the public realm supposedly nurtured vice and immorality, but 'clean', hygienic environments built according to 'scientific' principles and advancing rational knowledge. Modern planning represents the necessary 'imposition' of environment upon people however benign its design intentions. It imposes new, 'advanced' environments able to inhibit 'disorder' as conceived by the planner: a form of paternalistic governance in which an elite designs what it considers beneficial for the good of everybody. It is utopian inasmuch as it envisages environments of perfect orderliness and not because such perfection is ever obtained. That town-planning became an especial concern of totalitarian regimes is no coincidence for they too sought to achieve complete order through rational design: utopias of racial purity, nationalistic pride, or socialistic co-operation between people under the despotic and omniscient gaze of some autocratic cadre. But if town-planning under conditions of 'Democratic Modernity' appears less totalising it remains, nevertheless, a utopian vision of a particular group who regarded themselves as 'experts' and in possession of a knowledge which they can impart to others for their benefit. It is utopian, moreover, because it considers the urban environment as a whole and endeavours to integrate all its various aspects and all those who inhabit or work within it towards the attainment of functional utility, social harmony and personal contentment.

Although the design of Harlow and the New Town Idea from which it derives is imbued with the spirit of modernity it is, however, necessary to identify what makes both particularly distinctive. To do this I shall briefly contrast the New Town idea with two other influential town-planning design models which possess their own, distinct 'visions' of social control (Cohen S 1985).

[i] The *City Beautiful* movement arose at the beginning of the 20th century although it drew considerable inspiration from Haussman's 19<sup>th</sup> century

redevelopment of Paris and the simultaneous reconstruction of Vienna's *Ringstrasse* (Hall 1988). It was popular for a couple of decades, leading to the construction of several very well known 'cityscapes' throughout the world, before beginning to lose favour. During the 1930s and 1940s, however, it effectively became the 'official' architectural style of Nazi Germany and other totalitarian regimes: an association that contributed considerably to its eventual demise. Although its focus was the design of governmental buildings, museums, opera houses, monuments and similar constructions rather than residential areas – only the very rich or powerful could afford residence within such an environment – the *City Beautiful* had certain social control and 'moralising' objectives that renders it relevant to the present discussion.

The architectural style is monumental with *Belle Arte* ornamentations. With geometric and neo-classical precision, straight and wide 'boulevards' form immense vistas usually leading the eye towards some palatial structure of especial symbolic importance such as the White House in Washington D.C. Strict regulations govern the location, height and even depth of buildings to create harmonious environments in which all parts contribute towards the effect of the whole. Parkland and other open spaces, equally precise and geometric, enhance the environment's image granting it stately elegance and grandeur.

*City Beautiful* planning was certainly a response to the sprawling growth of the 19<sup>th</sup> century city driven, seemingly by an unstoppable *laissez-faire* momentum. It was to provide, according to its chief advocates, a measure of control in what was, otherwise, a chaotic environment where physical disorganisation was always a threat to social cohesion and personal well-being. But it was also always an architectural expression of power and a tool of civic 'boosterism'. In America, where the movement began under, primarily, the impetus of Daniel Burnham, it was a symbolic statement declaring the New World's independence and growing might. As in Europe, the growing American city was largely a scene of squalor and deprivation – both physical and moral. To its

pioneers, *City Beautiful* planning was a source of moral inspiration: a mechanism for overcoming the surrounding depravity. Through inspiring awe, reverence and pride the construction of such 'monumental' environments might, its architects hoped, instil a more moral attitude towards the city and one's fellow inhabitants. Of course, elsewhere, in the cities of Empire and totalitarian autocracy, the same architecture became an expression of dominance and all-prevailing power. But the fundamental purpose of all *City Beautiful* plans was nearly always the same: not the creation of 'art' for its own sake but the *imposition* of a social order as understood in the minds of those who produced them. Indeed, it is an architecture that compels order: an urban environment where the presence of humans is largely incidental and only tolerable if they behave themselves.

Such planning was also a mechanism for an alternative, perhaps more sinister, form of social control. Hausmann's redevelopment of Late 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris, the model for most *City Beautiful* planning, was famously a response to urban disorder (Harvey D 2003). Within the labyrinthine streets of the old medieval city 'moral depravity' was rife and insurrection a pervasive threat. Crime, moral depravity and revolution were often, to anxious members of the Parisian *nouveau bourgeoisie*, synonymous. Hausmann's solution was to 'cut' swathes through the old city, demolishing slum conditions and its accompanying 'immorality' with wide and straight boulevards that opened up the city to the Third Empire's symbols of power. Where once 'authority' could not venture and was unable to extinguish vice (see Chapter One), now militia could rapidly maneuver and deploy with significant effect, crushing, for example the uprising of the Paris Commune. There is no suggestion that *City Beautiful* planning was always a mechanism for *imposing* control, but its capacity to 'open up' and rationalise the urban environment became a significant emblem of modernity discernible in planning developments wholly distinct from the *City Beautiful* movement itself.

[ii] *Radiant City* is the name given by the Swiss Architect, Le Corbusier, to his vision of a fully 'modern' urban environment (Le Corbusier 1967). Although,

during his lifetime, he was only able to realise this vision in few developments (most notably the Punjabi capital, Chandigarh), many post-war urban developments manifest Le Corbusier's posthumous influence. Indeed, the conception of *Radiant City* was especially appealing to many municipal authorities responsible for re-building war-torn inner city areas (Hall 1988). For Le Corbusier thought he had 'discovered' the means to house large populations at high densities while retaining vast areas of open space and all at a comparatively low cost. The solution, as he understood it was to build high: to create 'streets in the sky'.

Le Corbusier was the arch-modernist. For him, all traditional pre-modern urban environments, however historic or beautiful, were fundamentally irrational and must go if the modern city was to survive and flourish. The irregularity, for example, of most pre-modern urban 'layouts' was an inefficient means for circulating the commodities and raw materials needed by industry and commerce. Better, he thought, to construct wide and straight connecting roads upon which vehicles can speed without interruption. Any home or other building lining these arteries would only provide clutter and a hindrance to rational transportation. And, because cities contain many people who need somewhere to live, it is better to house them in immense towers away from traffic and areas of commerce. It is an idea, of course, highly commensurate with that of urban zoning.

To achieve this objective it was necessary to obtain a 'clear site' (*ibid* p208) – a clean slate – upon which the rational city might emerge. Demolishing the old was an act of 'creative destruction' and, for Le Corbusier, the only means to achieve absolute urban order. Rational planning could ill-afford sentiment and depended, therefore, upon 'men without remorse' (*ibid* p207). Urban Planning was a science, a matter of expertise, which must remain wholly the responsibility of the planner. Those who are to live within the *Radiant City* and benefit from its rationality can have no say or influence in designing its

environment. Modern planning, thought Le Corbusier, was a matter of 'mass building for mass living' (*ibid* p209) and of precise geometrical calculation.

Thus, the Radiant City comprises a series of identical – or, at least, very similar – towers built within a large expanse of recreational open space kept completely apart from the main transport arteries that swiftly carry people to their places of work and other non-residential destinations. In his *Plan Voisin*, a development near Paris, Le Corbusier's 'vision' was of 24 towers housing between 400,000 and 600,000 people at a density of 1200 to the acre leaving 95% of the available land open. Near-by, a similar development was to accommodate 'workers' but at a density of 48 people to the acre – still allowing a 'generous' amount of open space in comparison to the unplanned 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial city and its pre-modern predecessors.

The 'street' in which homes, business, transport, recreation and all the other aspects of urban living freely intermingle was, to Le Corbusier antithetical to the modern urban environment. His plans accordingly 'provide' places for public congregation (a public realm), leisure and domestic need. Ultimately, his objective was a continuation – perhaps even an enhancement (see Jacobs 1961) – of *City Beautiful* principles, extending them to incorporate the whole urban environment and not just its political and cultural centres. The *Radiant City* was to 'open out' the city, to free it from inefficiency, crowding and confusion by the seemingly paradoxical process of increasing population density. Only where there is a sufficiently large population, Le Corbusier thought, can all the advantages of urbanism – its cultural and commercial possibilities – accrue<sup>12</sup>. But obtaining such advantages, he insisted, must not hinder modern progress. To Le Corbusier and his followers the 'City of Towers' (*ibid*) was the only sensible solution to the urban dilemma.

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<sup>12</sup> A point of which Howard, chief advocate of Garden City Planning, was also sympathetic although his solution differs radically from that of Le Corbusier.

The New Town Idea, a direct descendant of Howard's Garden Cities (see Chapter One) shares a number of elements with both City Beautiful and Radiant City designs. Like them, it pursues a vision of planning towards the construction of rational urban environments and accepts 'creative destruction' as a necessary aspect of social progress. It too embraces an inclusionary vision of social control by offering to plan environments in which people will *want* to conform. Yet, the Idea offers its own set of distinctive ideas for ensuring social order. As a design proposal able to facilitate social control, the Idea comprises a hybrid of various strategies which, together, make it distinctive. It offers an urban vision yet one incorporating distinctly rural elements. It is fully modern in scope and ambition, insisting upon town planning as necessary for progress yet one that looks backwards towards the Middle Ages. It champions a form of Fabian, arts-and-crafts socialism in pursuit of greater social justice and social equality yet remains conservative in its championing of the family and community ties as the basis of social order. Overall, two related although separate strategies for attaining social order are evident. Firstly, it holds to a belief that town-planning can exert a moralising influence by providing an environment in which civility, respect between people and pro-social behaviour can flourish. This ambition it pursues through insisting upon visual order in which greenery and open space is plentiful thus allowing both the physical and moral health of the town-dweller to prosper. Secondly, the New Town Idea seeks to strengthen the bonds between people and to enhance a sense of togetherness through providing a physical framework for community cohesion. Both objectives are sought by building towns according to principles of what I shall call 'Organic Urbanism'.

## Organic Urbanism

### [1] Neo- Medievalism

The concept of Organic Urbanism is of my own provenance and attempts to describe the underlying planning philosophy of the Post-War New Town Movement. In essence, it suggests a synthesis of what can seem, *prima facie*, two mutually incompatible architectural modes: on one hand a thorough



and direct embrace of *modernism* and on the other a more implicit admiration for medieval and other pre-industrial townscapes. Hence, the New Town 'style', as evident in Harlow, is an admixture of both progressive and reactionary influences: a willingness to exploit modern advances in knowledge and construction technology to achieve building design of the highest quality with a backwards acknowledgment that past urban forms remain beneficial and relevant in the contemporary age.

With the onset of the industrial revolution and the major social upheavals and problems that came in its wake – not least, the perceived increase in disorder as outlined in Chapter One – many Victorians turned to the Middle Ages as a time of relative security and aesthetic charm. To them, the Middle Ages was a historical period worth re-examining: a time in which one might discover a panacea for the ravages and excesses of rampant modernity. Indeed, this 19<sup>th</sup> century yearning for a past age often assumed the proportions of a cult, touching upon many different artistic and intellectual disciplines. Thus the 'gothic' became a major aspect of 19<sup>th</sup> Century architecture, poets wrote long romances using Arthurian themes and painters sought to regain a Pre-Raphaelitic aesthetic. That these 19<sup>th</sup> century references to the Middle Ages were seldom historically accurate and were usually overly romanticized (see Chapter One) is less important than the impact they had upon recurrent Victorian design styles. Certainly, many Victorian reforms and artistic endeavours mimic a rather idealistic image of the Middle Ages that ignored the less appealing aspects of that historical period. Yet, 19<sup>th</sup> Century medievalism was seldom a demand to return wholly to a pre-industrial past but to extract from it all that might remain useful in the contemporary age.

As discussed previously, the Victorian middle-class mind, although often appalled by the consequences of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, was simultaneously aware that these forces were progressive. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century city, according to this collective sensibility, was an unhygienic and anonymous place breeding vice and disorder. But even the fiercest urban critic often accepted the

city as a necessary motor of change. Empire and power, affluence and the conquering of nature were firmly rooted in the same city streets where disorder was apparently pre-eminent. Thus, ambivalence towards modernity became a major characteristic of many Victorian commentaries: it was regarded as something horrid to behold especially in comparison to the charms of a 'perceived' Middle-Ages but also contained within itself the germ for change and improvements beneficial to all humanity. This Victorian yearning for all things medieval was, therefore, a counterpart to the ambiguity many felt towards urban growth suggesting an unease with the pace of modernity and an expression of concern that 'progress' was, in many respects, paradoxically responsible for undermining the quality of life.

The ideology of 'organic urbanism' adopts this apparent ambivalence. It constitutes an attempt to better the conditions of urban dwellers by rigorously comprehending the cause of their woes and promoting appropriate reforms, but seeking inspiration for these changes in past urban patterns. The organic town and city planner, therefore, looks towards the future by extracting what Lewis Mumford (1940), the leading proponent of this urban philosophy, referred to as a 'usable past'. Harlow is a town of obvious modern character – architecturally it expresses the styles fashionable at its time of construction – but upon closer inspection it also reveals distinct 'neo-medieval' patterns.

Lewis Mumford (*ibid*) sought the construction of what he, following Geddes (1968), called *biotechnic* towns and found within medieval town design a blueprint for their construction. Towns and cities fully express, Mumford argued, the association between technology and the social conditions in which it arises. Mankind, *homo faber*, unlike any other species adapts the environment to serve human purposes. However, the history of technology, he argued, is one in which, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, machines began to dominate the human condition rather than serve their creators. Thus modernity, which began as a wholly humanistic enterprise that put emphasis upon mankind's mastery of the world became increasingly anti-human once science and technology ceased

operating as the instruments of human mastery and increasingly as the means by which people are dominated. Towns and cities, as the supreme expression of human artifice, reflect this development. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mumford writes:

...society itself was losing all sense of a common order: its forms were capricious because its values were uncertain and it had yielded to a belief in purely quantitative achievement: fine architecture had become a matter of size and expense, while common building, divorced from human standards, became cheap, niggardly, cramped (Mumford p405).

The 'paleotechnic' city of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, was gradually giving way to a new form of technic – *neotechnics* – which Mumford hoped might eventually become fully *biotechnic*: a condition in which technology and the adaptation of nature serves life and not the obverse.

Mumford suggests that the chief initiator of change towards a new biotechnic age was William Morris.

By making the dwelling house a point of departure for the new movement in architecture, William Morris symbolically achieved a genuine revolution. The doctrines he laid down with respect to its design were fundamental ones: implicit in them, as he himself realised in his development as a revolutionary socialist, was the conception of a new social order, oriented not towards mechanisation and profits, but towards humanisation, welfare and service. [He] achieved an attitude toward form and society that was capable of utilising and directing the real advances that were being made in the organisation of men and materials and the impersonal forces of nature. If the factory was the nucleus of the paleotechnic community, the house was to become the nucleus of the biotechnic age (*ibid* p406/07).

Biotechnic architecture and planning, therefore, does not endeavour to crush nature and the organic but to remain compatible with it – perhaps even able to

enhance its more beneficial qualities. This does not imply simply copying nature but developing a technology that co-exists with it. The 19<sup>th</sup> century 'necropolis', Mumford urged, must become "...a physical environment that respond[s] sensitively to the vital and personal needs of the occupants" (*ibid* p412).

The problem for the new age was to create a new type of living environment: to enable people to live in cities without losing the fellowship of nature, and to group together for the sake of specialised social activities without losing the means of good health and the decent nurture of children...Architecture required structural forms which were organically at one with life: flexible, adaptable, renewable (*ibid* p413).

The essential elements of the medieval town – or at least those aspects that became part of Mumford's 'usable past' were: (a) relatively small size; (b) organic hygiene; (c) a defining boundary wall; (d) a central area, usually the church square, as focal point; (e) streets as conduits of communication. Each of these elements, he thought combine to form an environment conducive to social order.

The medieval 'city' was seldom large and even the most significant did not amount to much more than the size of a contemporary market town. No example approaches the sprawl of the modern industrial city and its attendant anonymity. Instead, most denizens of the typical medieval city were probably familiar with each other to the extent that the contemporary reliance upon trusting appearances as a guide to a stranger's character was seldom necessary. Indeed, the stranger was usually the person outside the city walls rather than somebody encountered within. Further enhancing the medieval city's capacity to sustain a 'village' familiarity came from the tendency of craft guilds, within which a person was liable to spend his entire life from apprenticeship to master craftsman status, to occupy specific 'zones' within the city.

The depiction of the medieval city as a squalid disease ridden place is, Mumford, argues, largely fallacious. Because there was no sharp distinction between rural and urban lifestyles, the city was organically hygienic. The medieval city dweller was more alive to nature – its smells, seasonal variations, and fresh air - than those inhabiting most modern cities. Open space and vegetation was abundant and the life of the city dweller was one of ecological symbiosis with nature.

In the main, then, the medieval town was not merely a vital social environment: it was likewise adequate, at least to a greater degree than one would gather from its decayed remains, on the biological side. There were smoky rooms to endure; but there was also perfume in the garden behind the burgher's house: the fragrant flowers and savoury herbs were widely cultivated. There was the smell of the barnyard in the street, diminishing in the sixteenth century, except for the growing presence of horses: but there would also be the odour of flowery orchards in the spring, or the scent of the new mown hay floating across the fields in early summer (*ibid p49*).

The construction of boundary walls (often with accompanying moats) around many medieval towns was, initially, for defensive purposes. Mumford, however, suggests that these same boundaries gave to the inhabitants living within the walls several psychological benefits. “As in a ship, the wall helped create a feeling of unity between the inhabitants: in a siege or a famine the morality of the shipwreck – share-and-share-alike – developed easily” (*ibid p54*). The same function, he thought, was still necessary in an age of modernity. Although threat of invasion and occupation by external attack no longer occupies the mind of most modern urban dwellers, the need for some sense of identity by distinguishing those ‘inside’ from those ‘outside’ remains. A modern biotechnic town does not require defensive walls but should still maintain distinct boundaries even if only at a symbolic level – something, Mumford insists, the sprawl of the industrial megalopolis, and conurbation fails to achieve.

Further identification derives from the ‘central place’ as a focal point of activity. The twists and turns of the typical medieval street pattern tend to converge and

open upon the church square. Here sanctuary was obtainable beneath the protective walls of the church but also the provision of other services: town government, the market place, the tavern and hostelry. The central open space becomes a site for gathering, for social exchange and meeting - a public realm, in short, where a collective identity might emerge and thrive.

Finally, in the medieval city the street was "...a line of communication rather than a means of transportation". Rather than inhibiting social intercourse they provided a crucial mechanism by which it might occur. Again it was a place to wander, preach, and play; to observe the produce displayed by vendors or gossip with passers-by, rather than simply a means of getting from one place to another. In this respect, the medieval street pattern was like a web connecting together all the city's parts and keeping them in organic balance. "...the streets were essentially footways: marks of the daily comings and goings of the inhabitants" (*ibid p56*). But, and perhaps more importantly the street was a fundamental part of the public realm (see Lofland 1973).

A brief detour into Hampstead Garden Suburb, designed by Raymond Unwin and an acknowledged influence upon the New Town Idea, shows an almost exemplary application of the principles underlying Organic Urbanism. It is not that the architecture, there, resembles that of any actual medieval town: if anything it adheres more to 19<sup>th</sup> century standards and the trinity of buildings at its centre (two churches and an educational institute) by Lutyens are more neo-classical in their precision and stateliness than medieval. Hampstead Garden Suburb, however, clearly manifests a 'neo-medievalism' in its overall organizational design.

The street pattern of the typical medieval town was chaotic. This was mainly the result of necessity: upon encountering a stream, boulder or other obstacle, the medieval townsman built around it and never through or over it. A sudden twist in a street's direction might indicate the existence of one such obstacle at

the time of its construction rather than a conscious design decision. Yet, the overall effect, Unwin thought, was aesthetically pleasing – in an ‘organic’ manner. Many of Hampstead Garden Suburb’s residential roads, although not all, flow and curve beneath the summit of a hill upon which lies the ‘Central Square’. These roads follow the hill’s geological contours and, like medieval streets do not attempt to ‘overcome’ them through brute imposition. Again, it is an ‘organic’ pattern of mankind working with rather than against nature. There is, however, within the Suburb a more conscious design approach: the curves are not ‘accidental’ but a deliberate planning choice. It is no coincidence that two churches stand upon the hill’s summit to which many of the suburb’s roads lead. The spire of St Jude’s Church and its truly impressive roof are visible from many places within the suburb and often provide a rather brooding, ‘paternalistic’ presence. Like the medieval town, the lofty Central Square and its famous ‘trinity’ of buildings is the hub around which the houses below gather.

The Suburb also echoes the medieval city by maintaining plentiful green spaces and ample verdure. Organic Urbanist design attempts to combine the urban with the rural to create a more wholesome scene for everyday life – an achievement that came naturally, its advocates claim, to the medieval city. Indeed, the greenery of the suburb stands in pleasant contrast to the fumes, noise and incessant concrete of the surrounding city.

To gain entry to the suburb one has to pass through a number of ‘gates’. On my initial visit I passed through the ‘Meadway Gate’. A road surrounds a small garden through which the visitor passes beneath a hedgerow archway. From outside, standing in Hook Road adjacent to the large Jewish Cemetery, it is difficult to perceive much of the suburb’s interior. Thus, the Gate forms an effective barrier which although not denying access – nothing prevents the visitor from passing through the small garden – establishes a strong visual and cognitively understood division. Other ‘Gates’ achieve the same purpose through different design. Two towers, for example, once stood either side of the

Temple Hill Gate, like guarding sentinels, before their destruction during the Second World War – yet this entrance still retains its ‘gateway’ function today.

Arriving at Golders Green Underground Station and walking towards the suburb and then entering it through the Meadway Gate a visitor may be immediately struck by the difference between its interior and exterior. Outside is an environment of noise and bustle: cars and buses spewing fumes, people busily pursuing their everyday affairs, drab buildings advertising their business. The scene is typical of many other areas of London. Yet, passing beneath the Gateway arch the environment becomes immediately more sedate and peaceful. Crossing the boundary road from Hook Lane requires the usual caution, yet within the suburb, the amount of traffic immediately lessens. The appeal of the Suburb (as reflected by its expensive property prices) no doubt derives significantly from its sense of sanctuary. It is a strange, somehow incongruous environment that exists in the heart of a busy city and manages to retain a separate identity from it. It is easy to imagine that the suburb is part of some stately Market Town with rural surroundings and not a small area within one of the world’s largest metropolises.

On one side, the suburb is bounded by the ‘Great Wall’ – a line of buildings separating the Hampstead Heath extension from the built area. A number of conduits allow access from the suburb to the heath but, like the gateways, the row of houses creates, again cognitively, an effective barrier. Unwin was eager to achieve this effect even though the need to separate the suburb from the open space of the heath might appear less urgent. Here, again, the influence derives from old ‘pre-industrial town: as Unwin writes

In the old towns we admire<sup>13</sup>...we notice that the country comes up clean and fresh right to the point where the town proper begins...In the oldest cities we sometimes find a wall, with the country coming right up to the gates which adds to the effect (Unwin 1901, quoted in Miller 1992 p98).

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<sup>13</sup> Note the assumption of universal admiration.



The effect of these 'psychological' barriers is striking. It is immediately obvious where the suburb ends and public heathland begins. No fences are necessary or signs declaring the interior's name: simply a visually powerful architectural effect.

In many respects, then, the New Town Idea, like its Garden City antecedents, mimics medieval town design. But, with regard to the attainment of social order both present wholly different visions: it is the difference between pre-modernity and modernity. Social Order in the pre-industrial town, notes Lofland (1973) was primarily 'appeariential' whereas order in modern urban environments derives more from spatial organisation. In the medieval town all 'urban' functions tended to occur within the same spaces – education, entertainment, shopping, 'industry' and residence – whereas the design of Harlow ensures that they are kept completely apart. In the pre-modern town identifying people and their current occupation was a matter of examining how they appeared whereas in the modern town like Harlow, in which appearances are no longer so reliable, it is more a matter of where they are. As shown during the tour through the town, Harlow has designated spaces for industry, residence, recreation and commerce with clear barriers separating each. A person is known as a 'shopper', 'worker' or a 'resident' at different times because that is the part of the town they currently occupy.

## [2] The 'Balanced' Community

The second strategy embodied in the design of the New Towns, the attainment of a 'balanced community' has a sociological emphasis and, as such, is not truly a distinctive element of the New Town Idea. It refers, in other words, to a set of ideals that might also arise in urban environments other than those which adhere strictly to 'New Town' design principles. Nevertheless, as government ministers and formal committees of enquiry became increasingly

convinced during the late 1940s that New Town design principles were well suited to the achievement of these social ideals, the concept of the 'balanced community' has become associated closely with them.

Lewis Silkin, the government minister responsible for initiating the New Towns programme was excited by what it might achieve. "We may well produce in the new towns" he declared before parliament, "a new type of citizen, a healthy, self-respecting dignified person with a sense of beauty, culture and civic pride" (quoted in Ward 1993 p51). Lord Reith, former governor of the BBC, who was appointed by Silkin to chair a committee with responsibility for identifying the social objectives of the New Towns, hoped that they would deliver an 'essay in civilisation' (*ibid*). These ambitions, it became clear, were to result from the development of community. The 1946 Reith Report, for example, argues that: "Of all the groups and societies to which men and women are attached, perhaps the most important, next to the family, is the local and geographical community....In a true community, everybody feels, directly or through some group, that he has a place and a part, belonging and counting" (*ibid*). Large city neighbourhoods, the report continues, are severely weak in achieving this ideal.

Official discourse justifying the construction of the New Towns rarely refers to any scholarly research to support its claims – the virtues of community cohesion are, therefore, assumed as self-evident, yet the language used seems to indicate an acceptance of a body of theory, principally although not exclusively derived from a Durkheimian sociology. Thus the problem of the 'great' cities, as understood by both Silkin and Reith, is that many people within them feel apart from others and experience little sense of belonging – that they are in short 'anomic'. By contrast, the ambition of the New Town environment was to obviate anomie by allowing 'true' community to emerge. New Town design was to not only ensure good quality housing but also provide the public spaces in which strong community relations between people outside of the family will occur – the spaces necessary for an orderly public realm. To

understand how New Town design was meant to create this realm it is useful to briefly outline the contours of the urban anomie thesis.

Perhaps the best-known application of Durkheim's anomie concept (see Orru M 1997) to the urban context is that associated with the various pre-war writings, of the Chicago School of Sociologists. Led by the inspirational figure of Robert Park, who famously urged his students to observe city-life first hand, a number of seminal ethnographic monographs began to describe the character and origins of various 'deviant sub-cultures (e.g. Anderson 1961) 'transgressive' practices (e.g Cressey 2008) case-histories of delinquents (e.g Shaw 1930) and supposedly 'disorderly' areas (e.g Zorbaugh 1929). Underpinning much of this research was a model of 'social disorganisation' first developed by Mckenzie, Park and Burgess (1967). Under free market conditions, this model suggests, a 'zone of transition' will form around the city's inner core. As a place awaiting the 'invasion' of speculators unable to afford property in the centre, the transitional zone will become inexorably an environment of dilapidation. Given its condition, new arrivals to the city, lacking personal resources, will settle within the transitional zone but eventually migrate to the city's suburbs and more salubrious quarters to be replaced with a new set of arrivals similarly lacking 'commitment' to the area. Poor commitment implies a weakness of informal social control and, hence, an escalation of social problems including crime. Shaw and McKay (1969) found consistently high rates of juvenile delinquency within the 'transitional' zone of Chicago over a long period despite the area undergoing radical demographic alterations. Thus, the origin of much urban 'disorder', it was argued, was understood to be a consequence of an environment unable to secure sufficient social organisation and not necessarily the attributes of the people who inhabit it at any one time.

Other sociologists, notably Wirth (1969), developed the Chicago School model, but suggested that the problem of social disorganisation – a synonymous term for anomie – was a problem occurring throughout the city environment. Unlike a 'folk-society' (Redfield 1969), encounters within cities were more often of a

'secondary' than a 'primary' character. Most 'meetings' are fleeting and incidental involving people who know nothing about each other. Consequently, the city dweller becomes increasingly atomistic, blasé (see Simmel 1969) and reliant upon appearances in judgement of others (see Raban 1974) It is the sheer number of stranger encounters within the modern city, therefore, that weakens any foundation upon which a healthy social order might rest. 'Deviant' activity will occur more frequently in cities than it does in smaller, more closely-knit, communities in which people are better known to each other, primary relations predominate and where a collective identity and sense of attachment will exert a greater moral force. Transgression will attract less notice, intervention become less probable (see Latane and Darley 1970) and the relative absence of a collective authority results in a confusing array of moral guidelines (Wirth *op cit*).

The solution to such urban anomie, Silkins and Reith imply, lies in the establishment of a 'balanced community'. This ostensibly meant encouraging a wide social mix in which the same community included representatives from all social classes, age groups and even ethnic groups (see Aldridge 1979). When members of the middle-class live amongst the working-classes as neighbours, thought Reith, some 'civilising influence' will accrue. People will acquire 'dignity' through example and gain access to the civilising influences of art and culture. It is notable that Reith Committee recommendations include the provision of a theatre and concert-hall but openly opposes the provision of a greyhound racing track as something liable to prove disruptive. Such a belief, strongly reminiscent of certain 19<sup>th</sup> Century middle-class attitudes, was not only patronising but, in the main, largely unmet in actual New Town design. Harlow, for example, remains a predominantly working-class town in which a few neighbourhoods, separate from the rest, house the majority of a relatively small middle class. Nevertheless, the 'balanced community' always meant more than just the provision of a wide social mix for it also relates to the provision of a physical framework where a community of primary relations and collective attachment might develop. It is in this respect that the neo-medieval design

motifs and organic urbanism of the New Town Idea resonates with the social liberalism implicit within a Durkheimian inspired urban sociology.

Thus: (1) through division of the town into a series of units, decreasing in scale, from the neighbourhood group through to the housing group the design of Harlow endeavours to maintain urbanity while allowing spaces of community identification; (2) by the inclusion of 'organic' elements - 'neo-medievalism 'street curvature', open spaces and greenery' - the design of Harlow hopes to promote a 'sense of place' and, thereby foster the 'commitment' necessary for community stability; (3) the prioritisation of pedestrians over motor traffic through the separation of walkways from busy roads and the provision of everyday services within each neighbourhood, the town's design encourages face-to-face contacts and a sense of mutual belonging. I shall elaborate upon each of these examples in Part Two when I return to some of the 'public spaces' first encountered on the tour described above.

# **Part Two**

## **The Solution Assessed**

# **Chapter Three**

## **Methods and Methodology: Understanding the New Town Experience**

The two chapters in Part One outline the design principles of the New Town Idea, the perceived problem of social order to which they were a response and how these principles are manifest in the physical design of Harlow. Both chapters describe an 'urbanism from above' (de Certeau 1988) – a town planning model in which the physical design of the urban environment aims to deliver a measure of social control. In Part Two I turn to an 'urbanism from below'. Although this analytical shift will continue to address the design features of Harlow's urban environment the emphasis will focus more upon how people experience it and the significance it has for them. We cannot assess the success or otherwise of any urban design or town planning model as an instrument of 'social order' unless we know how they are directly experienced. What is the actual impact of Harlow's design upon perceptions of crime and disorder? To what extent do people actually experience the town as an 'essay in civilisation' compatible, perhaps, with the satisfaction of human needs, as Reith hoped? Or is it more an environment that people experience in ways that, perhaps, encourages disorder and anxiety? Answers to such questions are not readily forthcoming: people rarely deliberate upon the environments they encounter let alone consider it as a force either for or against social order. To uncover the significance of such environments requires both a methodology and methods appropriate to the task. This chapter discusses and defends those I chose in pursuing my research.

To claim that I began the research with no methodological preconceptions would be disingenuous. I knew that the choice of methods and methodology should always follow the research question and that I should always be guided by those best able to secure a valid answer to it. I began, therefore, with a pragmatic attitude and a willingness to employ any strategy if it was propitious in meeting my objectives. Nevertheless, I was also aware that all researchers in any field of research never begin wholly devoid of intellectual preferences and philosophical biases even if they are often largely unconscious of them. Such leanings, of course, will inevitably inform the questions they ask. Thus, my humanistic interest in how people experience Harlow's environment and the impact it has upon perceptions of crime, feelings of security or fear derives



partially and not insignificantly from my own experiences as a former resident of the town. Perhaps more importantly, however, was my own discontent with most current contributions to Environmental Criminology. As I noted in the introduction, research, in this field, is usually a version of risk analysis in which various features of an environment are correlated with incidents of crime and disorder or expressions of fear. A feature, therefore, is ascribed as 'risky' or not – or some similar adjective - and recommendations follow suggesting its retention, modification or removal. What the environmental feature actually 'means' to people as they directly experience it, the aesthetic value it holds for them, the memory associations it can arouse, its significance within the wider environmental context and the emotional connotations it often implies are matters usually neglected within Environmental Criminological Research. I discuss examples of such an actuarial criminology throughout this study but some typical examples are: the consequences of street light improvement upon crime (see Painter K and Tilley N 1999), the defects of high rise towers upon crime prevention (Coleman A 1985), the capacity of street blocks to deter prostitution (Matthews R 1992) the reduction of vandalism on buses through using video cameras (Poyner B 1992) and nearly all research conducted by the Home Office's 'Crime Reduction' unit.<sup>14</sup> My primary motivation in adopting the methodological strategy outlined below, in short, was to advance a 'Humanistic' Environmental Criminology<sup>15</sup>.

I had begun to notice the results of such risk analysis in several environments of which I was familiar. The ornate iron railings surrounding a local school, for example, were suddenly covered by a bamboo mesh to remove the risk of potential paedophiles photographing the children playing inside. That my own children attending the school might begin to consider the world hidden beyond this mesh as dangerous rather than stimulating and that they were effectively

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<sup>14</sup> For full list see <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/cpindex.htm>

<sup>15</sup> My focus on 'meaning' and 'signification' may also suggest that I am employing what may be termed a 'Cultural' Environmental Criminology. Certainly, many of the themes I discuss have a certain resonance with discussions within 'Cultural Criminology' and 'Cultural Studies' in general. However, because my over-riding concern is with how Harlow's New Town environment either supports or undermines the attainment of human needs I prefer to regard this study as a 'Humanistic' Environmental Criminology.

cocooned away from the neighbourhood of which they were a part, and kept deliberately apart from any 'public realm' it seems, was considered less damaging than allowing the risk – not substantiated by any known incident – to continue. Environmental Criminology, as I suggested in the Introduction, can easily contribute, I believe, to the deterioration not enhancement of our surroundings by advancing recommendations based on research of too narrow a methodological focus. When an environmental feature (or, indeed, the whole environment) becomes a variable of 'risk' or 'safety' then its deeper, perhaps less quantifiable, significance is easily lost. Rather than supporting 'administrative' policies of risk reduction, therefore, I sought an alternative methodology better attuned to the nuances and complexities of actual experience.

Researching the literature on 'environmental experience' it became apparent that the methodological strategies of 'Humanistic Geography' were broadly compatible with my research objectives. Although this sub-field of geography has rarely addressed issues of crime and fear of crime its focus upon the 'meanings' people apply to 'place' corresponds to my more criminological concerns regarding perceptions of the environment as relatively safe or dangerous. Indeed, humanistic geography can help elucidate more precisely what safety or dangerousness 'means' within given environmental contexts.

As also previously discussed in the Introduction, 'Humanism' is a somewhat ambiguous term attached historically to what might appear to be incompatible modes of understanding (see Relph 1981). The 'humanism' of Renaissance Europe refers to the promotion of secular, scientific knowledge in opposition to what then was a prevailing religious dogma, whereas today, humanism more often describes a critique of the narrow 'scientism' of positivistic inquiry into human affairs. This seems to imply a contradiction in which humanists regard scientific procedure as both the problem and solution to a proper understanding of human life. No such contradiction, however, applies for humanism describes any mode of inquiry that privileges (or centres) the

uniquely distinctive characteristics of people – as people, not types or categories – in the comprehension of their thoughts and activity. When the major obstacle to gaining such comprehension was religion the humanists sought redress through scientific procedure. But today, many humanists (e.g. Tuan 1976) believe that a blind obsession with scientific procedure itself limits any valuation of human life. Thus humanism is profoundly *anthropocentric* rather than anti-scientific: it embraces scientific procedure whenever it can advance an understanding of human affairs and the enhancement of human experience but questions the assumption that this represents the only viable or useful methodology available.

Although many early humanistic geographers took an *idealist* position in their understanding of geographical knowledge, regarding it as purely a subjective matter, later contributors to the research tradition sought to overcome all dualisms between the physical space of the outside world and the mental apprehension of it. For them, geographical knowledge is a fusion of subjective spatial awareness with the physicality of the external environment in which neither takes precedence. Arguments for environmental determinism, therefore, in which the physical properties of the world directly cause behaviour are no more persuasive than idealism. People respond to the environments they encounter according to the meanings they attach to them – the physical aspects of the environment cannot compel any particular behavioural response if interpretations of it suggest alternatives. Yet, the ‘facticity’ of the environment (its physical properties) is not irrelevant. Such facticity will always provide a frame for understanding that will yield certain ‘dominant’ or ‘preferred’ responses but never compulsion. It is the reciprocal relationship between matter and mind from which geographical knowledge – our ‘understanding’ of environment – arises.

As man and environment engage each other dialectically there is no room in a humanistic perspective for a passive concept of man dutifully acquiescing to an overbearing environment. But neither is man fully free, for he inherits given structural conditions and, indeed, may be unaware of the full extent of his bondage (Ley D &

Samuels M 1978 p12).

The humanistic geographical approach strives, therefore, to understand how an environment's objectivity becomes subjectively meaningful in ways that influence how people respond to and behave within it. Subjective awareness of environment is always of something. But that 'something' holds greater value than merely providing a source of sensory stimuli. Geographical Understanding is to know an environment as meaningful. A "Positivist geography looks at environment and sees space" writes Peet (1998) whereas 'Humanist Geography looks at environment and sees place'. To reduce geography merely to an analysis of Euclidean Space, ignoring any appreciation of human intentionality, cognitive association, and symbolic representation is, therefore, to miss something vital about how people actual 'live' their spaces.

The rejection of Euclidean conceptions of space rather than place, however, does not lead the humanist geographer to ignore issues of rigour in conducting research. The establishment of place identity involves the application of intersubjective meanings and schemata. Place becomes meaningful through historical and cultural processes in which a commonly understood identity emerges. Of course, to some extent the precise meaning of place will differ between people reflecting their unique biographies, memories and associations. A hill might *mean* something different to a farmer and a walker, a railway engineer and landscape painter following the different intentions they adopt towards it. As anthropological and historical research shows (e.g. Hope-Nicholson 1959, Tilley C 1994)<sup>16</sup>, some cultures regard hills with reverence while others recoil from them as repulsive. Yet members within most groups share similar intentions and, hence, apply a common significance to the same environmental phenomenon they encounter. It becomes the task of humanistic geographical research to uncover these common meanings. To disclose such meaning, however, may necessitate a move away from traditional 'scientific'

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<sup>16</sup> Hope-Nicholson provides, perhaps, the 'classic' account of how attitudes to one particular environmental feature, mountains, have changed historically. Through exhaustive analysis of literary documents she notes that during the Middle Ages mountains were regarded as ugly and repellent only acquiring their more positive contemporary cultural 'image' during the Renaissance.

methodologies and towards those more appropriate to the humanities. I shall return to the issues of rigour that attend such a move later.

Hence, humanistic geographers in their search for common experiential themes usually blend idiographic techniques of inquiry popular within the humanities with those of a more conventional social scientific character (see Tuan 1971). Just as any reading of a novel that reduces it to a word frequency count, or a description of a painting simply as a list of colours misses the unique identity of each, so too will any examination of place that regards it as no more than a series of geometrical points – or indeed variables of risk.

Humanistic research is primarily qualitative and doubts the capacity of numerical measures to fully capture the ‘lived realities’ of human experience. Nevertheless, it will often refer to statistical details whenever they prove helpful – never as a primary data source but more as a means to identify key ‘issues’ worth further investigation. I began my research, therefore, by constructing a ‘statistical profile’ of crime in Harlow the details of which I report in the following chapter. In gathering data for this profile I referred to the most recently available ‘official’<sup>17</sup> crime statistics for the town representing all the crimes known to and recorded by the police. Such statistical data is notoriously unreliable (Coleman and Moynihan 1996). The figures, after all, only refer to those crimes known to the police and do not represent all crimes that occur within Harlow. Nevertheless, as I discuss later, the figures can provide useful ‘pointers’ by revealing patterns, trends and distributions of which my study must take some account. Moreover, I was able to compare Harlow’s crime statistics with towns of similar socio-demographic profile and with other urban and non-urban areas by examining the published records of the ‘Safer Harlow Partnership’ responsible for conducting a series of crime audits for the town. Similarly, I was able to use this source of data to compare crime rates between

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<sup>17</sup> Although the Essex Police may have access to more precise, up-to-date but unpublished statistics my intention was to highlight the crime rate in Harlow relative to other areas to which useful comparisons might be drawn. To this purpose the published ‘official’ statistics was perfectly adequate.

different wards within Harlow. I further supplemented the statistical data by assessing the results of an unpublished fear of crime survey conducted on behalf of the *Safer Harlow Partnership*. The results of this survey drew my attention to an imbalance between the town's rates of crime and the levels of fear expressed by its residents – an 'issue' that became a central focus of my subsequent research. Thus, statistical measures<sup>18</sup> did prove useful but, alone, were not sufficient to help me answer my research question. To disclose the significance of such data and the 'issues' to which they drew my attention a return to qualitative methodological strategies was necessary.

The primary philosophical influence upon the methodology of Humanist Geography is phenomenology. Although my approach does adhere, broadly, to the 'spirit' of phenomenology I hold no particular allegiance to any one of its various 'schools' each of which often promotes specific methodological protocols. My research deliberately co-mingled different strategies but always towards the attainment of understanding the essential structures of meaning by which Harlow's urban environment is experienced directly and without conscious deliberation by its residents. As such my methodological strategy was informed primarily by Seamon's (2000) discussion of the phenomenology of place, environment and architecture and especially his advice for conducting further phenomenological investigations of these phenomena. I also gained much useful advice from van Manen's (2001) broader discussion of phenomenological method. Both acknowledge, following Spiegelberg (1982), that there are probably as many styles of phenomenological method as there are active phenomenologists. Yet, as they acknowledge, a number of core themes and research protocols are common to them all.

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<sup>18</sup> I am also aware that a more thorough analysis of the relevant crime statistics, especially with reference to the more detailed and 'up-to-date' figures held by the Essex Police but which are not placed in the public domain, might have provided a more 'complete' picture. Nevertheless, the profile I provide sufficiently describes a general overview of crime in Harlow in comparison to some other areas. My intention was not to investigate the precise number of crimes that currently occur in Harlow but to understand how people relate to Harlow's New Town environment in ways that are relevant to a humanistic and cultural Environmental Criminology.

Firstly, phenomenological method almost always employs a qualitative strategy with the goal of developing some variation of *Grounded Theory* (Glaser and Strauss 1967). That is, phenomenological research endeavours to discover 'findings' that are closely 'grounded' in the real world of actual lived experience from which theory is inductively generated. This necessitates somehow grasping the experiential qualities of the 'lifeworld' – the “tacit context, tenor and pace of daily life to which, normally, people give no reflective attention” (Seamon *ibid* p8). Phenomenology, then, discloses that which people do not ordinarily make an object of their conscious thought. Although the residents of Harlow will not often deliberately consider the environment of the town, the everyday experience of it may frame feelings of security or danger. A phenomenologically oriented, humanistic approach, therefore, may usefully 'disclose' such pre-reflective consciousness – the meanings and significance of that which usually remains implicit.

Seamon describes the method for uncovering aspects of the taken-for-granted lifeworld as a 'radical empiricism' (*ibid* p13). By this he refers to “...a way of study whereby the researcher seeks to be open to the phenomena and to allow it to show itself in its fullness and complexity *through her own direct involvement* (*ibid* p13). Such radical empiricism, he suggests, demands an act of 'phenomenological intuition'.

Through intuiting, the phenomenologist hopes to experience a moment of insight in which she sees the phenomenon in a clearer light. I call this moment of greater clarity the *phenomenological disclosure*, though it might also be described by such phrases as 'the 'aha! experience' 'revelatory seeing' or 'pristine encounter'. Through phenomenological disclosure, the student hopes to see the thing in its own terms and to feel confident that his or her seeing is reasonably correct (*ibid* 2000 p14).

Nevertheless, Seamon continues to point out that there is little advice that can be given to achieve such intuitive disclosure other than that it takes 'discipline, patience, effort and care'. Yet, by approaching the phenomenon with due

openness, he suggests, analysis can yield 'patterns', relationships and subtleties of which people are not usually aware.

To facilitate phenomenological disclosure, research must, firstly, involve direct contact, even immersion, with the phenomenon. The researcher, in short, strives to maintain direct contact with the phenomenon under scrutiny. Secondly, the researcher must begin by assuming '...she does not know the phenomenon but wishes to" (*ibid* p16). Adopting such an approach necessarily involves the famous phenomenological *epoche* in which the researcher brackets all prior assumptions, expectations or predispositions regarding the phenomenon. Finally, the research must portray experience in terms that are rich, unstructured and multidimensional.

My own empirical research strategy was framed by these basic phenomenological protocols. In accordance with them I began gathering 'meaning accounts' (van Manen 2001) which describe how people directly experience Harlow's built environment and physical form. These refer to accounts that describe the significance of Harlow's environment and how it is understood by those who directly encounter it. I drew upon a variety of such meaning accounts, partially for purposes of 'triangulation' (Denzin 1989) in which the importance of a theme is shown by its recurrence within several different sources, but also because it enabled me to describe more fully how Harlow's design invokes certain experiences. My sources for obtaining experiential material included the following: -

### 1. Personal Experiences

This study is imbued with personal memories, anecdotes and experiential description. Indeed, I dedicate a whole chapter to a personal narrative describing my own history living as a resident within Harlow and my evolving attitude towards the town since leaving it. The tone of such writing avoids



analytical distance or what some might regard as scientific objectivity. This may, understandably, arouse considerable doubt. What possible value might such reminiscence provide in helping me address my primary research objectives? Does it not betray a subjective bias that can only undermine the credibility of the remaining discussion and analysis? The inclusion of such material is certainly uncommon in most examples of Environmental Criminology and appears, therefore, highly unconventional. Some justification for including such material is, therefore, necessary.

Eyles (1985) in his discussion of 'Senses of Place' notes the emphasis upon 'introspection' in humanistic research although he cautions against assuming unanimity as to its utilisation. Self-reflection, he claims, "...is seen not only as an exposure of personal values but as an interrogation of the arena from which ideas and theories are derived: the life of the theorist" (p31). Phenomenological research, after all, endeavours to describe the immediate experience of phenomena without presupposition: to bracket all prior assumptions regarding the phenomena under investigation with the aim of 're-capturing' the world. Eyles doubts the possibility of ideally and fully achieving this phenomenological reduction, or *epoche*, but suggests that because "...a presuppositionless theory is not one without presuppositions but one in which presuppositions are made explicit" (*ibid* p35), the employment of a self-reflective, biographical account can facilitate some methodological rigour. Thus, providing a self-analysis as part of any investigation emphasising 'place', Eyles concludes, can serve three purposes. Firstly, it offers an attempt to "expose the influences which help shape the author's sense of place...which may impinge upon his theorising of this phenomena" (*ibid* p35). Second it acknowledges that the researcher is not 'outside' the world he or she is investigating. Indeed, following Relph's (1976) stipulation that 'place' researchers should strive towards achieving empathetic 'insideness' with the places they study in order to gain some understanding of it, a self-reflective account is necessary to avoid possible 'outsideness'. Finally, seanalysis offers a 'case-study' of how a sense of place can develop over time.

I describe personal experiences, then, not as a social scientist or even as 'the' researcher but as someone who, himself, has close prior experience of the subject under discussion. My own experiences of Harlow are as much a form of 'data' as are those of others. I too have my own ideas as to what the town's environment is like and how it possibly impacts upon issues of crime, fear of crime and social order. Like others equally familiar with the town my thoughts are seldom made systematic but will occur in casual conversations and memories. The opportunity to reflect upon these thoughts and memories, to draw out the significance they contain, is, therefore, something that can contribute towards answering the research question. Although 'scientific' study of environmental experience, criminological or not, would avoid such personal detail as un-objective my 'humanistic' approach regards that such distance between researcher and researched as impossible and that employing strategies to avoid it as not always helpful. Indeed, an outline of my 'position' with regards to Harlow and the New Town Idea can highlight my own presuppositions and prevent them overly biasing my interpretation of other 'meaning accounts'. Thus, in recounting my personal experiences I hope to provide a 'thick description' (Geertz C 1973) and not a social scientific analysis of what growing up and living in Harlow was like for one person – myself - and to use the account as a further means for identifying themes and patterns of more general significance. Thick description as Geertz asserts involves the researcher providing the context by which an action becomes meaningful – in his example, the meaning of a wink – and it is just such a context I hoped to deliver.

In my 'autobiographical' chapter, I describe my fondness for the woods at the end of the cul-de-sac where I lived as a child and in which I regularly played. The account of such frolicking might appear superfluous, even flippant, in relation to the seriousness of my research objective. Yet, when I began to consider those parts of Harlow's environment that had significance to me the small woods came immediately to mind. This was a place where we, as children, not only played but regularly got up to mischief, took risks with our own well-being and indeed partook in what a sociologist might describe, regardless of how

trivial it was, as disorder. It was there that we sucked on stolen cigarettes, set alight twigs with matches taken from our parent's kitchens, had fights with children who lived on the other side of the woods. When one resident grumbled about the noise we were making we took it upon ourselves to dump rubbish taken from the wood into his back garden: an action for which we were severely reprimanded. It was also the wood that became the dividing line, a boundary, between our 'place' and that of outside. The same wood still stands but it is now impossible to gain easy access to it. During the 1980s a house in the cul-de-sac bordering the woods was burgled. Police investigators thought that the culprit had used the woods for purposes of concealment. Thus, access to the place of my childhood play was taken away – a clear example of a recent drive, which I describe in some detail in the final chapters of this study, to prevent crime through environmental control. The same decision, of course, also meant the removal of opportunity for the sort of lesser disorder to which I was occasionally prone. It was only through writing about my childhood games in the wood that themes of 'mystery' and the potential value of 'risk' in urban environments became apparent – themes that became an important aspect of my subsequent research as discussed in Part Three. My writing showed the potential importance of various environmental features which I could then compare against the experiences of others. That many residents in my interviews expressed an attachment to similar 'undefended' areas of their home environments, as my childhood woods are now officially classified, confirmed that my experiences were not exceptional. Such features, in Harlow, I found, yield both positive aesthetic regard and help establish a sense of place – 'findings' which began from reflecting upon my own personal experiences. The point of humanistic enquiry is not to 'prove' a point scientifically but to account for phenomena as experienced by people in a way that appears 'reasonable' and credible and to then establish, theoretically, the significance it has. This often involves reflecting upon personal experiences and orientation towards the phenomenon, before moving on to consider experiential accounts acquired from other sources. Indeed, comparing my own experiences and the inevitable prejudices I bring to the research against other 'meaning accounts' is necessary to avoid reliance upon what Silverman (2006) terms 'anecdotalism'. In qualitative research, he insists, the analyst must account for all counter-

examples or 'deviant cases' that do not support the theoretical position adopted. I do not, therefore rely upon my own memories alone in this study but integrate them with other accounts of environmental experience. Anecdotes there are aplenty, but their usage only occurs to clarify or illustrate a point and not form the foundation for theoretical discussion. A reader might object that it is sometimes difficult to discern the difference between personal experience and analysis. But as humanistic enquiry endeavours to break down the subject/object illusion of research such apparent 'confusion' does not indicate any methodological weakness.

## 2. Hermeneutic Observations

Humanistic Geography is not Idealism. The research focus always prioritises the human experience of place but not by ignoring the physical properties of environment. Meaning derives from the interplay between subjective experience *and* objective reality. Thus, an important aspect of my research was to experience directly not just the urban environment of Harlow but those of other towns and cities within the Garden City and New Town tradition. Some idea of design intentions may, obviously, derive from examining the written accounts of those responsible for or closely associated with them. But further knowledge may also derive from directly experiencing these same environments, Thus, I walked throughout Harlow and other towns, observing streets and open spaces, stopping to make notes and occasionally take photographs. I walked not as I had formerly done as a resident or tourist but now with the conscious purpose of seeking out the underlying significance of the environment. Such direct contact was a fundamental part of becoming 'immersed' in the phenomenon of my enquiry. Indeed, by adopting a walking strategy in which routes were taken randomly (that is, by deciding 'turns' before the journey began) rather than with any ultimate destination in mind or according to 'designated' paths, I hoped to gain a deeper measure of understanding.

### 3. Residential Experiences

The chief source of 'meaning accounts' used in this study derive from a series of semi-structured interviews conducted between July 2007 and August 2009 with (a) 20 residents of the Mark hall ward in Harlow; (b) 5 Harlow residents from outside the Mark hall ward; (c) 2 non-Harlow residents. I also conducted three 'pilot' interviews. I focused upon Mark Hall as the first built residential area of Harlow and one which most clearly evinces the design ambitions of the New Town idea. The interviews with residents from outside Mark Hall and from outside the town altogether were obtained primarily for comparative purposes. Three 'pilot' interviews were conducted in 2007 to 'test' the suitability of my interview 'schedule' and to provide me with an opportunity to 'iron out' any problems – these were not recorded and hence only transcribed in note-form. In acquiring a sample of Mark Hall residents I employed a snowballing technique. This, for reasons outlined later, probably meant that the sample was not fully representative. A number of 'gaps' in my sample (young people and members of so-called 'ethnic minorities') is apparent. However, I preferred the snowballing technique for one particular reason. I wanted to acquire a sense of collective experience from people who might consider themselves part of a single community. One obvious method of gaining such collective experience would have been to gain access to a particular club or society whose members shared some identifiable similarity of interest. However, such a selection would risk including only those with a similarity of outlook. Therefore I endeavoured to obtain accounts from what might loosely be described as a network of neighbours. Thus, after making an initial contact with one resident – chosen on a completely random basis – I asked if they knew any neighbours who might be willing to participate. Such 'neighbours' would be known to the previous interviewee primarily as a matter of lived proximity but not necessarily as a close friend or someone with the same background or social outlook. Through adopting such a technique I was able to obtain a collection of interviews that formed a loose 'string' of contacts involving people whose only shared interest was the neighbourhood in which they dwelt. When one particular 'string' was exhausted I began the same process again. It was a technique that proved relatively advantageous in allowing me to gain access to a fairly wide variety of

residents. Nevertheless, the same technique did 'exclude' various groups with whom the 'string' had very little contact whatsoever. I shall discuss the implications of this 'exclusion' shortly.

To help alleviate as much as possible the sense of 'awkwardness' that may easily arise in any 'interview' situation I tried to conduct most of my interviews within the homes of the interviewees or in another place of which the respondent was familiar and likely to feel more comfortable. One interview, however, was conducted in a public place within the Town Park.

In conducting these semi-structured interviews I referred to a number of prepared questions. However, to acquire the richest possible expressions of meaning I endeavoured to keep the interviews 'conversational' in tone and allowed each respondent to describe his or her own experiences with only minimal interference from myself. The prepared questions used during these interviews are provided in Appendix One. Whenever necessary I gave a few prompts or rephrased a question to make for ease of comprehension. Otherwise, I endeavoured to speak only when necessary. Throughout, I encouraged the interviewees to give examples that might illustrate their relationship to Harlow's environment. I sought to gain broad accounts of environmental experience without initially drawing overt attention to issues of crime and disorder. In conducting the pilot interviews I introduced myself as someone conducting criminological research. Most respondents, however, thought I was more interested in their views concerning 'the causes of crime' and the travails of contemporary society rather than their experience of Harlow's environment. Thus, I began introducing myself as someone who wanted to gather 'stories' about living in Harlow (which is actually accurate) for a forthcoming book. When the interviews turned more overtly to matters of crime and fear of crime it did not, therefore, seem as if such was my primary interest. However, once the interview was over I did reveal my criminological interest – something that often led to further discussion of much value, but of a character now more focused upon Harlow's environment.

The interviews were conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines set out by the British Society of Criminology<sup>19</sup> as was all my research. Each of the interviewees was assured of anonymity at the outset of the interview and it was explained that they could withdraw from the interview or refuse to answer any question. The interviews were primarily about experiences of Harlow's environment and did not raise any obvious ethical issues. Nevertheless, I was aware that (a) any discussion of crime in relation to a person's immediate surroundings might generate fear and (b) that my reluctance to declare my 'criminological' interests might appear to involve some deception. It is necessary, therefore, to explain how I dealt with each concern. Firstly, most interviews revealed a conspicuous lack of fear regarding crime in the immediate neighbourhood and hence dealt more with why the area seemed safe. Rather than causing undue alarm the interviews would, if anything, reaffirm the sense of security most residents already had. Moreover, throughout I encouraged the interviewees to provide their own examples of possible 'problematic' areas. The provision of such information was voluntary rather than suggested by myself. Secondly, I always revealed by criminological concerns towards the end of each interview – something that never aroused any consternation from the interviewees. In one sense, my strategy of not beginning with questions about crime and disorder accurately reflects my overall methodological strategy – that is, beginning with environmental experience from which matters of criminological interest is drawn – and hence was never fully deceptive.

Draft copies of some the chapters provided in this study were given to a few of my interviewees and any comments on my 'findings' were invited. Further comments were also sought from other residents and former residents of Harlow who were not included in the original interviews. This enabled me to ensure the 'credibility' of my final report. Some revisions were made as an outcome of these discussions, especially whenever it was felt that I was overstating my case or when my descriptions of various parts of Harlow's

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<sup>19</sup> Guidelines available at: <http://www.britsoccrim.org/ethical.htm>

environment were inaccurate. Generally, however, the response suggested that my views did sufficiently reflect the general experiences of Harlow's residents and that my report did not suffer from any excessively subjective bias. Interestingly, responses to my discussions of Harlow's environment from the town's residents suggested that I was, at times, slightly harsh whereas non-residents felt I was a little too laudatory. Perhaps, such different responses indicate that I achieved a fair balance.

My findings were further supplemented by listening to 10 interviews conducted with some of Harlow's original settlers taped as part of an 'oral history' project upon the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the New Town's construction, together with a review of local newspapers from the early 1950s<sup>20</sup>. Although these interviews were not conducted by myself and did not specifically address issues of crime or fear, they provided a useful source of experiential meaning related to Harlow's New Town environment as it was being built.

In addition to these accounts of 'meaning' I also consulted newspaper archives (and especially the 'Letters Column' from the local press) and 'publicity' films issued to attract new residents to the town soon after its construction.

#### 4, Imaginary Experience

As a 'social experiment' the Post-War British New Towns have attracted a considerable amount of comment from people who have never resided within any and whose experience derives only from visits. I assessed how the New Towns were represented within such commentaries focusing on how they depict the typical New Town experience. Such representations constitute an 'imaginary experience' and provide a useful comparison with first-hand experiential accounts of Harlow. My selection was unsystematic and rather than conducting any complete review I simply took notes on any 'representation' as I

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<sup>20</sup> Sourced from Harlow Museum



discovered it. This approach was inevitable: the commentaries derive from a variety of sources which are nowhere listed together. They included popular song lyrics, fictional television dramas, newspaper leader columns, movies and academic reports. For the same reason, the variety of source material I consulted was too great to allow any 'content analysis' using quantitative techniques. Instead, I was interested in identifying recurring 'themes' in representations of the New Towns. I report on my findings in Chapter Five.

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Together, these various 'meaning accounts' provided me with the 'raw materials' for what van Manen (2001) describes as 'phenomenological reflection'. To some extent, each account was unique – nobody described their experiences in exactly the same way, each 'representation' was 'true' only to itself. But the purpose of phenomenological enquiry is not to merely gather idiosyncratic descriptions – although such a task is a necessary starting point – but to assess these for underlying commonalities, regularly occurring themes and patterns that may disclose certain essential structures of inter-subjectively understood significance. By reflecting upon these accounts, closely reading the interview transcripts, attending to what each 'account' has to say whatever its mode of communication, I sought to identify the 'essence' of environmental experience as it pertains to Harlow. 'Themes', according to van Manen (2001) are the 'knots of experience' from which meaning emerges. But, they are not for rigid listing, taxonomy or any other process of classification that betrays the quality of the direct experience. Instead, the process of thematic identification emerged gradually through working with my raw materials, considering their significance and attempting to comprehend what was being said.

Human scientific methodology, states van Manen (2001) (by which he primarily means 'hermeneutic phenomenology'), is a poeticising activity. The statement not only signals that it is a methodology more applicable to research in the

humanities but also that any evaluation of 'findings' must adopt a different orientation to that expected of research in the natural sciences. This is not to suggest that phenomenology eschews 'science' if by that term is meant a form of rigorous 'knowing'. But it does suggest acceptance of a broader form of knowing – one of *understanding* rather than explanation, of *verstehen* rather than *Erklärung*. Thus, the point of phenomenology is not necessarily to arrive at a 'conclusion' or to establish the final 'result' of the research. To ask what is the 'conclusion' or 'result' of a poem, van Manen suggests, is to misunderstand the purpose of its form. A good poem possesses a meaning available to human understanding – and one certainly not obtainable through 'scientific' research. Efforts to 'know' art scientifically only succeed by destroying its essence as an art work. They will always fail to appreciate the contribution art can make to understanding the complexity of human existence. Art is only 'knowable' by attending to it on its own terms. Phenomenological research does not deliver 'poems' as such for it hopes to explicitly 'disclose' the meaning of experience rather than state them subtly and implicitly (*ibid*). But, the 'value' of the research – that of 'meaning disclosure' – only becomes apparent through the act of writing. Thus, van Manen (*ibid*) concludes, the writing stage of the research is not just some mundane activity that occurs after the research proper – the 'writing up of findings' - but is always an essential part of the research act itself. I have alluded to this point in my discussion on using 'personal materials'. It is the process by which phenomenological reflection and thematic identification occurs. In writing my research, I attempted to allow the full richness and depth of environmental experience as it relates to and is expressed by the residents of Harlow to emerge. 'Poeticising', obviously involves some literary skill – a skill which I make no claims to possess. However, in reporting on the 'lived experience' of Harlow's environment I deliberately strove to write in a plain style, avoiding unnecessary social scientific or, indeed, any other jargon and conceptualisation. Instead, I sought to capture as fully as possible what it is like to live in Harlow and experience the surrounding environment and how such experiencing might 'impact' upon crime both in terms of its actual occurrence and the fear it can generate.

Humanistic research requires empathetic openness: to try to find in one's own life what the research has discovered. Although, this approach cannot yield the absolute measures of reliability that Positivist research demands, Seamon (2000), following Polkinghorne (1983) suggests four qualities that the final analysis can possess the inclusion of which will enhance its trustworthiness: (a) that the analysis *vividly* generates a sense of reality and honesty; (b) that it is *believable* such that readers of the report can recognise within it aspects of their own lives and experiences; (c) that it is aesthetically *rich* in a manner sufficient to allow readers to engage with it both emotionally and intellectually; (d) and that it *elegantly* discloses phenomena in a 'graceful, even poignant way'. In short, rather than obsessing about reliability, Seamon concludes, the phenomenological researcher should concentrate on the *power to convince*. If such a strategy fails to meet rigorous standards of scientific objectivity it gains by offering analysis commensurate with human life as it is actually experienced.

Ultimately, the most significant test of trustworthiness for any phenomenological study is its relative power to draw the reader into the researcher's discoveries, allowing the reader to see his or her own world or the worlds of others in a new, deeper way (Seamon 2000 p28).

By adhering to these methodological protocols I hoped to gain an understanding that would allow me to return to my initial research question concerning the continuing viability of the New Town Idea. I was able to consider and comment upon current debates regarding environmental planning and crime prevention, especially as they relate to Harlow and New Town design from a humanistic perspective. The outcome of this approach is discussed in Part Three.

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The downside of adopting a pragmatic approach to methodology, however, is that weaknesses only become apparent as the research proceeds. Although I am confident that my overall strategy was correct and believe that it did allow the disclosure of experiential 'themes' which might otherwise remain hidden I became aware that my research does contain a number of 'gaps' which, given the need to prepare a final report I was unable to rectify. I do not believe these 'gaps' undermine the credibility of my research. Instead, if I were to extend my research to address and overcome these 'weaknesses' the overall account I present would, I believe, *possibly* become more complex and nuanced but not substantially different.

The most obvious 'gaps' occur in the sample of Harlow's residents I interviewed. I adopted a 'snowballing approach' in which each person was asked at the end of the interview if they knew of anyone else who might like to participate in my study. This strategy was very productive and did allow me to interview a fairly wide cross-section of Harlow's residents. Yet, the same strategy also led me to overlook two potentially important social groups: young people (aged 13-30) and members of ethnic minorities. To some extent, the absence of the latter group, given my approach, was almost inevitable. Census data indicates that the population of Harlow is overwhelmingly 'White British' with 'ethnic groups' constituting only 7% of the whole<sup>21</sup>. Yet, given that the cultural traditions and expectations of these groups might lead to experiences of Harlow's environment that are radically different from those of the majority a more concerted effort to obtain greater representativeness would have proven beneficial. The inclusion of younger representatives in my sample would, no doubt, also have extended the experiential range of my survey.

A second 'gap' concerns the focus of the interviews themselves. I deliberately chose to concentrate upon residents of one neighbourhood, including representatives from elsewhere primarily for purposes of comparison. My

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<sup>21</sup> Figure from: [http://www.harlow.gov.uk/pdf/Harlow%20Population%20Profile\\_Sep08.pdf](http://www.harlow.gov.uk/pdf/Harlow%20Population%20Profile_Sep08.pdf)

questions tended to concentrate on the environment of this neighbourhood and only tangentially to other areas of Harlow. The result was the acquisition of rich and highly useful qualitative data in my discussion of the New Town neighbourhood but less rich for other areas of Harlow. In writing about the design impact of the town's retail areas and, to a lesser extent, the town-park I was more reliant upon my own personal memories, 'hermeneutic observations', 'imaginary' experiences and statistics as discussed above. I did endeavour to secure interviews from users of the town park by approaching people primarily within the play area. Unfortunately an understandable shyness and feelings of awkwardness meant that my efforts were less than successful. I only obtained one interview from my approaches. While conducting it I was uncomfortably aware that the person involved might consider myself one of the 'weirdos' of which she occasionally spoke. I therefore opted to avoid such 'blind' approaches and concentrate on my snowballing strategy. In hindsight, the services of a 'gatekeeper' might have proven advantageous. Since completing my empirical research I have become aware of a 'park users' group who might have provided such a role. Nevertheless, the references to the town-park and the retail areas of Harlow made during my interviews did, generally, confirm the credibility and 'believability' of my writings upon them.

# **Chapter Four**

## **Crime and Fear of Crime in Harlow: A Statistical Profile**

Part One described the principles that inform the design of Harlow as a typical embodiment of the New Town Idea and how we might understand them as a response to perceived problems of urban anomie. Although the town's designers nowhere stated 'crime reduction' as a direct objective it is clear that the New Town programme pursued a particular vision of social order commensurate with the project of modernity (see Chapter Two). As such, one obvious means to evaluate the 'success' or otherwise of the New Town Idea is to consider its impact upon crime rates given that the regular and frequent occurrence of crime is widely regarded as a powerful index of social disorder. This chapter, therefore, provides a comparative statistical profile of crime, disorder and the fear it arouses in Harlow. Its purpose is to contribute towards an understanding of the impact, if any, of Harlow's distinctive 'New Town' environment upon crime. Ostensibly, as I shall show, the statistics suggest that this environment has little positive influence and that crime rates within the town are high in comparison to towns of similar demographic size and social profile. However, an analysis of a recent unpublished survey shows that fear of crime is less than might be expected in comparison to Harlow's 'reported' crime rate. This, I argue, is significant, for the figures suggest a possibility that the town's distinctive environment induces feelings of security despite its apparent failure to inhibit actual crime. If true, then the statistics may suggest something of significance with regard to the Humanistic orientation of this study.

## **The Value of Criminal Statistics to the Research**

Statistical measures of any social phenomenon, but especially crime rates, are notoriously deceptive (see Walker 1971, Coleman & Moynihan 1996). Criminal statistics never provide a complete representation of 'actual' crime rates and they usually contain fundamental inaccuracies. 'Official' statistics merely count those crimes known to the Police. Further distortions may then arise from how the police subsequently record those crimes of which they are aware. Thus, official statistics do not account for the many 'Dark Figure' crimes of which the Police are wholly oblivious or do not document. Moreover, such statistical data may simply reflect current sensitivities and priorities regarding different crimes

and the levels of public confidence in the police. To draw firm conclusions, therefore, from such unreliable data is, therefore, always a tenuous enterprise.

But the well known problems with employing criminal statistics does not necessarily imply – as many radical criminologists within the ‘Labelling’ and ‘Ethnomethodological traditions once thought (e.g. Kitsuse & Cicourel 1963) – that they are completely without value other than as a measure of institutional priorities and practice. Recent initiatives attempt to uncover much of the ‘Dark Figure’ and to take some account of crime’s impact rather than just its occurrence (e.g. Jones *et al* 1986). Maguire (2002) speaks of a ‘data explosion’ in which the gathering of data about crime, its extent and patterns, the ‘types’ of people who most frequently commit it and become its victims, and the locations where it most often occurs, is becoming increasingly sophisticated. Today, the collection of criminal statistics employs numerous methods, perhaps most significantly the ‘victimisation’ survey (see Coleman and Moynihan 1996 Chapter 4) to achieve hitherto unknown levels of precision. With due caution then, it is now possible to gain a reasonably accurate ‘profile’ of crime in Harlow through examining the relevant data. As Maguire points out:

Despite the caution with which they are now treated by criminologists and Home Office statisticians alike, and despite the increasingly high profile given in *Criminal Statistics* to comparative data from the British Crime Survey, these statistics remain the primary ‘barometer of crime’ used by politicians and highlighted by the media. They are also – a use to which they are much better suited – influential in the resource and strategic planning of the Home Office and police forces (quoted in Coleman & Moynihan p135).

The presentation of criminal statistics, regardless of their accuracy and the methodological rigor used in their collection, can, however, only assist further enquiry. “We have noted” Coleman and Moynihan state “the limitations of aggregate statistics which are produced *without much regard for explanation and understanding* (ibid p136 – my italics). Numbers signify nothing without interpretation. Yet, interpretation within a vacuum and without any reference to



'hard' data is equally suspect. The statistical profile that follows, therefore, aims to simply provide a foundation for the Humanistic and 'experiential' discussion that follows in subsequent chapters. It attempts, in short, to reveal matters of apparent significance that warrant further exploration.

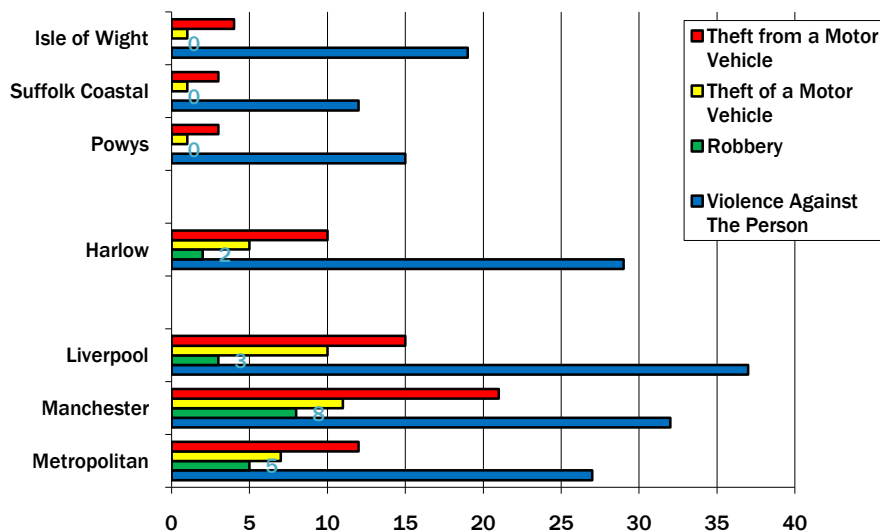
Does Harlow's urban environment inhibit crime and reduce fear and how does it fare in comparison with other areas? I first examine data from various 2004 crime audits to establish where Harlow ranks nationally and asks if this tells us anything significant about its environment. I shall, secondly, compare crime and disorder *within* Harlow at ward level distinguishing those areas with architectural styles that adhere most closely to the New Town Idea from those built during an earlier period or some time after. Finally, I discuss the findings of a recent unpublished survey examining perceptions of crime in Harlow and levels of fear.

## **Crime in Harlow: Comparisons with Other CDRPs**

This and the following sub-section draw primarily from the 'Safer Harlow Partnership's' 2004 Crime Audit. In accordance with the requirements of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act, the 2004 crime audit for Harlow was the outcome of a partnership including the Essex Police and Fire Services, the Essex County and Harlow Town Councils and the town's sole Primary Care Trust. The purpose of the audit was to acquire data towards meeting various crime reduction objectives as set by governmental 'Public Service Agreement' targets. As such, the audit gathers not only formal police data regarding reported and recorded crime but also relevant information from other agencies. One advantage of the audit is that it allows comparison with other 'Crime and Disorder Partnerships' (CDRPs) throughout England and Wales.

In comparison to those major metropolitan areas of England and Wales that relate to traditional 'industrial' urban environments (i.e. those parts of the country that became primarily 'urban' during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century) the crime rate in Harlow is relatively positive (see Chart 1). Taking an admittedly random sample of such metropolitan CDRPs, the audit statistics for 2004/05 suggest that there were 42 'known' incidents of 'violence against the person' per 1000 people in the London Borough of Islington and 38 incidents per 1000 people in near-by Tower Hamlets<sup>22</sup>. In Manchester and Liverpool the figures were 32 and 37 incidents per 1000 people respectively. By comparison, the rate in Harlow was only 29 per 1000 people – a significantly, although not radically, smaller figure. Similarly, the rate of 'theft from a vehicle' was 7 per 1000 in both Islington and Tower Hamlets rising to 11 per 1000 people in Manchester and 10 per 1000 people in Liverpool contrasting with only 5 per 1000 people in Harlow. In Harlow there was a total of 758 crimes of 'theft *from* a vehicle' or 10 per 1000 people whereas in Islington the figure was 20 per 1000, 17 per 1000 in Tower Hamlets, 21 per 1000 in Manchester and 15 per 1000 in Liverpool.

Chart 1 Crimes by CDRP Type (Rate per 1000 People) 2004/05



<sup>22</sup> I here refer to figures not published in the 2004 audit but to statistics for 2004/05 made available by the Home Office. Throughout this chapter I focus only upon those crimes that usually occur within a public setting and are, therefore, potentially influenced by environmental factors.

In comparison with a few, again randomly chosen, CDRPs covering predominantly rural areas, the crime rate in Harlow is not, however, especially positive. In the Isle of Wight, for example, there were only 19 crimes of 'violence against the person' per 1000 people and in Powys and the Suffolk Coastal Region even fewer at 15 and 12 per 1000. None of these three areas experienced anything but a handful of robberies and only one theft per 1000 people of a motor vehicle.

These figures are also, significant. The favourable comparison of Harlow with the various metropolitan areas might suggest that the 'New Town' environment is, at least, partially responsible. Yet, the unfavourable comparisons drawn with the rural areas indicates, perhaps, that the 'Organic merger of town with countryside with the hope of achieving the latter's positive social attributes, was less than successful. Nevertheless, such statistical contrasts between these chosen CDRPs probably have less to do with their differing environments than their underlying socio-economic disparities. If so, then comparisons with those CDRPs closer to Harlow's social and economic structure may prove more revealing. Usefully, the Home Office commissioned Leeds University (see Leigh A *et al* 2000) to establish a foundation for categorising all CDRPs within 'family groups' sharing similar characteristics. This led to the identification of 20 key variables.

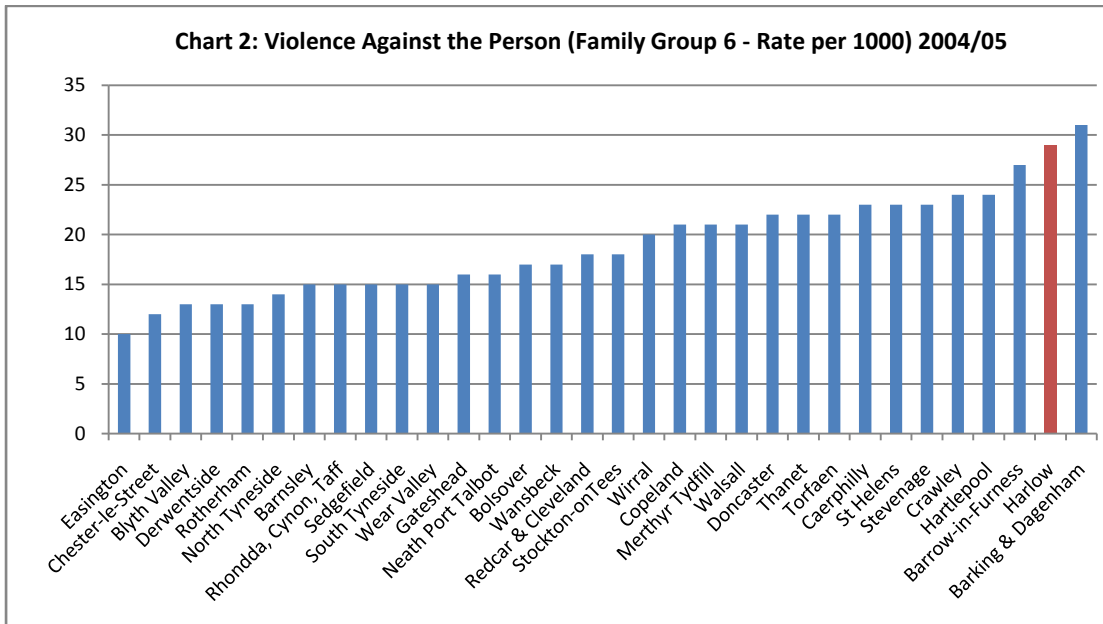
The objective in establishing these variables was to provide a quantifiable measure by which to distinguish similar 'policing environments'. Whether or not the chosen variables actually help meet this objective is highly debatable. By isolating a few supposedly crucial variables amenable to quantification the foundation for comparative analysis risks becoming insensitive to the peculiarities and distinctiveness of place. And, it is precisely the acknowledgment of these peculiarities that may prove fundamental in comprehending any area's crime profile especially as it relates to environment. Initially, the family grouping exercise put Harlow together with such areas as Gosport, Crawley, Stevenage, Blackburn, Darwen, Sunderland, Basildon, Stoke-

on-Trent, Tameside, Medway, Oldham, Bolton, Bradford, Rochdale and Northampton. Now, anyone casually wandering around these areas will probably have wholly different environmental experiences regardless of any statistical socio-demographic similarities they share. Such experiential variation is significant because it may lead people to give different 'meanings' to the same objective factors. Is, for example, the 'fact' of unemployment truly the same in Rochdale as it is in Stevenage? The differing histories, surrounding landscapes, cultural expectations, etc. of these two places are likely to make this experience subtly but, nevertheless, critically different. In a bid to clarify the basis upon which various CDRPs were assigned to different 'families' a new set of groupings was established putting Harlow together with new family members. Yet the underlying problems still remain. Such 'family grouping' simply fails to register the distinctiveness of each particular town and, in the case of Harlow, its peculiar 'New Town' environment. Nevertheless, the figures as given may still provide some useful pointers for further research.

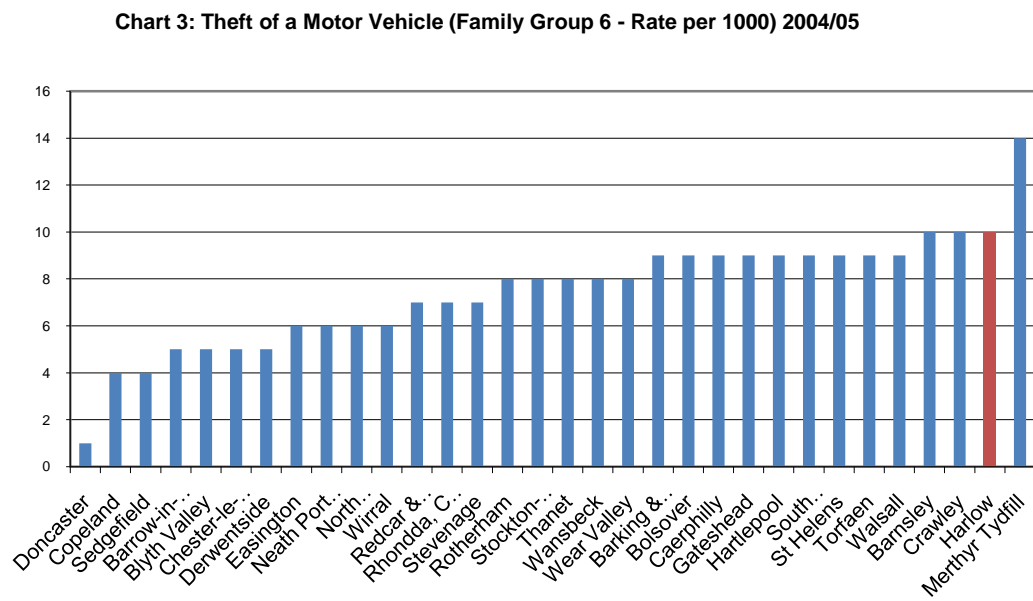
According to the 2004 crime audit (Safer Harlow Partnership 2004 p16) there were 10,303 reports of crime in Harlow between the start of April 2003 and the end of March 2004, suggesting a 14.78% increase from the previous year. In comparison to the town's first family group, Harlow rests mid-table (with the 7<sup>th</sup> highest crime rate out of 15 CDRPs). This crime rate is notably higher than such places as Blackburn, Oldham and Sunderland – places, perhaps, more closely associated with industrial decline and the industrial urban environment to which the New Town Idea was a response. Of the crimes occurring in Harlow, theft, criminal damage, violence against the person, burglary and vehicle crime constitute the five principle volume offenses – crimes that occur predominantly within public space. During the year 2003/04 Harlow had the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest rate of theft and non-domestic burglary, the 4<sup>th</sup> highest rate of violence and the 5<sup>th</sup> highest rate of racially aggravated assault within its family group.

A more recent set of figures, referring to Harlow's new 'family group' does not suggest any great improvement. As charts 2 and 3 below show, Harlow has an

above average number of crimes for both ‘violence against the person’ and ‘theft from a motor vehicle’ in comparison to its family group. Table 2 provides a more complete set of figures that, overall, suggest the impact of the New Town environment is negligible. This is not to suggest that Harlow’s environment is actually criminogenic but it does suggest the town’s utopian design ambitions – as an urban environment able to facilitate social order - are unmet.



Mean – 18.9



Mean = 7.34

Indeed, a final comparison with other post-war British New Towns indicates similar levels and further casts doubt on the capacity of their environments to inhibit crime. Basildon, for example has a rate of 16 'violent crimes against the person', 6 'thefts of motor car' and 11 'thefts from a motor Car' per 1000 people during the same period. The rates for Milton Keynes are 23, 5 and 12 respectively. Such rates are consistently higher than rural areas and often high in comparison to other 'industrial' urban areas.

## Crime within Harlow: Ward Comparisons

No urban environment ever remains the same and all are constantly changing. As towns 'regenerate' or expand (even, perhaps, diminish in size) they inevitably capture contemporary architectural fashions and adapt to changing political-economic circumstances. Harlow is no exception. Although built in the immediate post-war years as a complete 'New' town, it no longer has exactly the same environment as in the years immediately after its first construction. One useful measure of the environmental influence upon crime, therefore, may

|                    | Population | Violence Against The Person 04/05 | Sexual Offences 04/05 | Robbery 04/05 | Theft of a Motor Vehicle 04/05 | Theft From a Motor Vehicle 04/05 |
|--------------------|------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Barking & Dagenham | 165,86     | 5224 (31)                         | 244 (1)               | 739 (4)       | 1610 (10)                      | 1540 (9)                         |
| Barnsley           | 220,16     | 3372 (15)                         | 187 (1)               | 76 (0)        | 1415 (6)                       | 2143 (10)                        |
| Barrow-in-Furness  | 70,56      | 1927 (27)                         | 59 (1)                | 13 (0)        | 119 (2)                        | 375 (5)                          |
| Blyth Valley       | 81,53      | 1073 (13)                         | 97 (1)                | 34 (0)        | 163 (2)                        | 421 (5)                          |
| Bolsover           | 73,23      | 1247 (17)                         | 91 (1)                | 18 (0)        | 302 (4)                        | 645 (9)                          |
| Caerphilly         | 170,23     | 3934 (23)                         | 146 (1)               | 40 (0)        | 1088 (6)                       | 1448 (9)                         |
| Chester-le-Street  | 53,3       | 637 (12)                          | 41 (1)                | 20 (0)        | 123 (2)                        | 250 (5)                          |
| Copeland           | 69,41      | 1468 (21)                         | 62 (1)                | 18 (0)        | 135 (2)                        | 300 (4)                          |
| Crawley            | 99,31      | 2384 (24)                         | 146 (1)               | 110 (1)       | 320 (3)                        | 981 (10)                         |
| Derwentside        | 89,59      | 1077 (13)                         | 60 (1)                | 14 (0)        | 273 (3)                        | 429 (5)                          |
| Doncaster          | 288,41     | 6391 (22)                         | 363 (1)               | 200 (1)       | 1957 (6)                       | 3308 (1)                         |
| Easington          | 92,82      | 972 (10)                          | 60 (1)                | 26 (0)        | 471 (5)                        | 566 (6)                          |
| Gateshead          | 191,04     | 3080 (16)                         | 216 (1)               | 189 (1)       | 754 (4)                        | 1723 (9)                         |

|                                 |              |                  |                |                |                |                 |
|---------------------------------|--------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| <b>Harlow</b>                   | <b>77,82</b> | <b>2246 (29)</b> | <b>122 (2)</b> | <b>146 (2)</b> | <b>375 (5)</b> | <b>758 (10)</b> |
| Hartlepool                      | 90,16        | 2201 (24)        | 131 (1)        | 115 (1)        | 497 (6)        | 774 (9)         |
| Merthyr Tydfil                  | 55,39        | 1154 (21)        | 32 (1)         | 19 (0)         | 579 (10)       | 779 (14)        |
| Neath Port Talbot               | 135,33       | 2219 (16)        | 69 (1)         | 39 (0)         | 832 (6)        | 853 (6)         |
| North Tyneside                  | 190,81       | 2712 (14)        | 153 (1)        | 131 (1)        | 548 (3)        | 1160 (6)        |
| Redcar & Cleveland              | 139,1        | 2453 (18)        | 119 (1)        | 109 (1)        | 724 (5)        | 1041 (7)        |
| Rhondda, Cynon, Taff            | 231,6        | 3508 (15)        | 160 (1)        | 48 (0)         | 1394 (6)       | 1654 (7)        |
| Rotherham                       | 251,54       | 3291 (13)        | 253 (1)        | 123 (0)        | 1390 (6)       | 2131 (8)        |
| Sedgefield                      | 87,27        | 1300 (15)        | 51 (1)         | 11 (0)         | 255 (3)        | 383 (4)         |
| South Tyneside                  | 151,69       | 2252 (15)        | 143 (1)        | 109 (1)        | 507 (3)        | 1069 (9)        |
| St Helens                       | 176,73       | 4028 (23)        | 187 (1)        | 109 (1)        | 1097 (6)       | 1579 (9)        |
| Stevenage                       | 79,68        | 1867 (23)        | 138 (2)        | 89 (1)         | 231 (3)        | 545 (7)         |
| Stockton-on-Tees                | 186,28       | 3345 (18)        | 182 (1)        | 217 (1)        | 761 (4)        | 1502 (8)        |
| Thanet                          | 127,69       | 2612 (22)        | 204 (2)        | 92 (1)         | 398 (3)        | 992 (8)         |
| Torfaen                         | 90,56        | 2025 (22)        | 98 (1)         | 27 (0)         | 469 (5)        | 2148 (9)        |
| Walsall                         | 252,41       | 5347 (21)        | 372 (1)        | 376 (1)        | 1456 (6)       | 2148 (9)        |
| Wansbeck                        | 61,33        | 1032 (17)        | 68 (1)         | 12 (0)         | 218 (4)        | 478 (8)         |
| Wear Valley                     | 61,28        | 914 (15)         | 66 (1)         | 11 (0)         | 326 (5)        | 502 (8)         |
| Wirral                          | 313,85       | 6317 (20)        | 335 (1)        | 216 (1)        | 636 (5)        | 1971 (6)        |
| <b>Mean per 1000 population</b> |              | 18.9             | 1.0            | 0.059          | 4.78           | 7.34            |

Table 1: CDRP Family Group 6 Crime Comparisons – Figs in Brackets – per 1000 Population

**BOX 1: Wards in Harlow**

Group 1 = Pre “New” Town: - Old Harlow

Group 2 = New Town: Mark Hall, Netteswell, Harlow Common, Bush Fair, Little Parndon & Hare Street, Staple Tye, Great Parndon.

Group 3 – Post “New” Town: Church Langley.

come from contrasting areas of the town that substantially retain their original design profile with those built either before or after the New Town. Again, this may reveal something significant concerning the impact – positive or negative – upon crime of the New Town Idea.

Of Harlow’s eleven wards, eight predominantly retain New Town design principles, whereas three were built before or after the original New Town

construction. Such differences primarily reflect the date of first construction. Thus most buildings within the wards I designate as 'New Town' arose between 1947 and 1960. The following analysis, therefore, identifies the following 'groups' according to how 'faithful' each is to the original New Town Idea.

I exclude 'Kingsmore and Sumners' ward because it includes large areas built after the original construction of New Town although not sufficiently so to warrant putting it into group 3. 'Todd Brook and Town Centre' ward is also excluded because it includes the town's primary shopping area – a fact that almost certainly skews its crime statistics. I shall consider this ward's statistics in a later chapter when discussing the environment of Harlow's principle retail areas. I shall, however, include figures for these wards here for the sake of completion.

As chart 4 below shows, the wards falling into Group 2 (New Town design) experienced a considerably higher number of crimes than either Group 1 or 3. Church Langley had the lowest overall crime rate with only 42 crimes per 1000 people. Old Harlow (Group 1) has a higher crime rate than some wards within Group 2 but not as high as many wards that are profoundly an outcome of New Town design.

The rate of 'public order offending' however is considerably lower in Church Langley (Group 3) and very low within Old Harlow with only 0.5 and 2 offenses per 1000 people. Only Mark Hall and Netteswell within Group 2 had comparable rates with that of Group 3, with most other wards experiencing a much higher problem. The rate, for example, in the Little Parndon & Hare Street and Staple Tye wards was 22 offenses per 1000 people.

The same imbalance occurs with regard to various 'Public Disturbances' in which Church Langley (Group 3) has far lower rates than the rest of the town and Old Harlow (Group 1) experiencing rates below the average for the Group 2



wards.

Chart 4: Crimes by Ward Type (per 1000) 2004/05

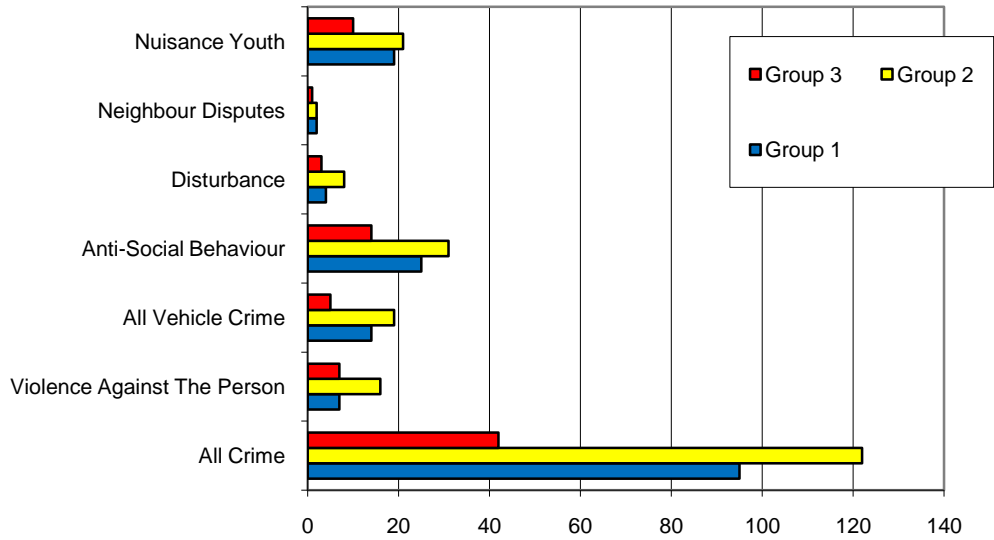
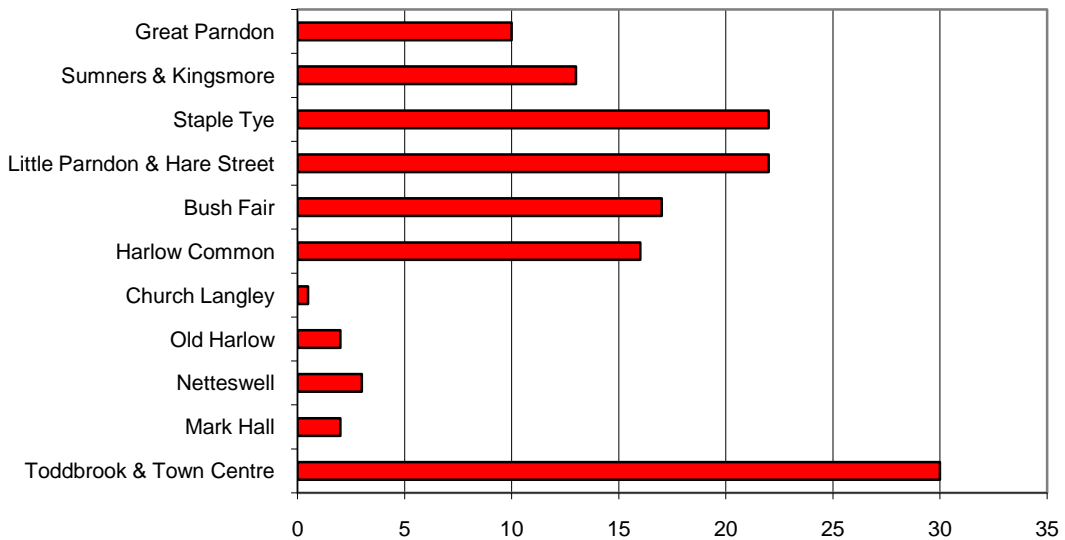


Chart 5 - Public Order Offences by Ward (per 1000) 2004/05



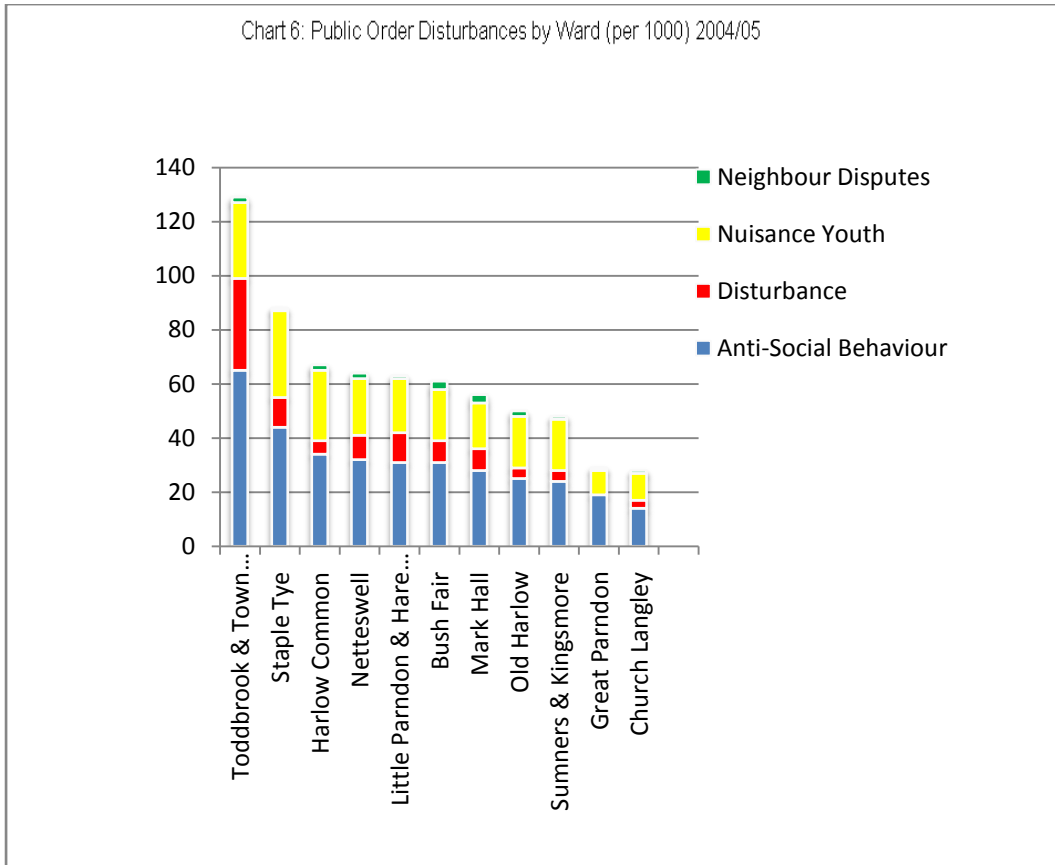
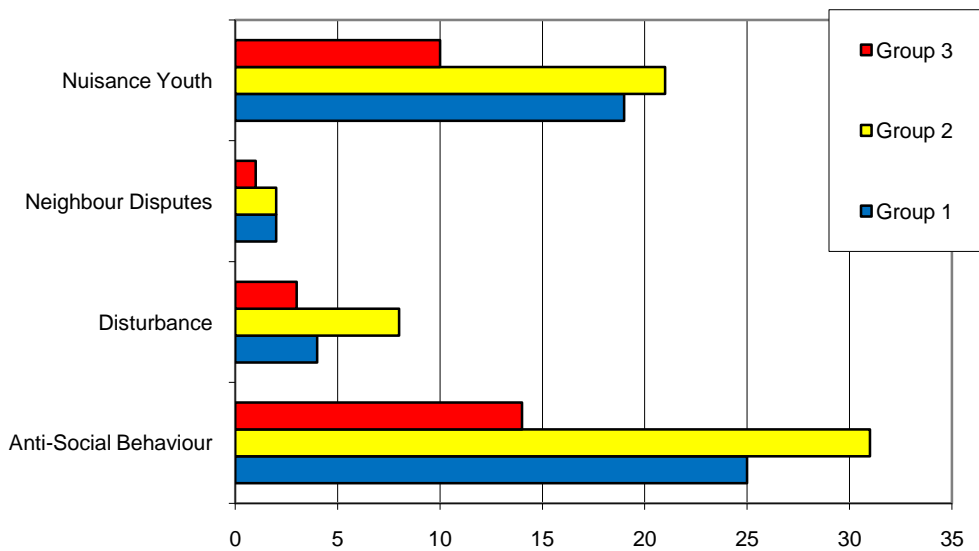


Chart 7: Public Disorder by Type in Harlow (per 1000) 2004/05



Again, however, the disparities in crime and public disturbances occurring at ward level may not so much reflect differences in environment as much as socio-economic differences. It is, therefore, necessary to interpret the above

figures alongside the rank order given for each ward upon the 'Index of Multiple Deprivation'. This index assesses seven measures of deprivation (see box 2) within 'Super Output Areas' (SOAs), each referring to an area with populations between 1000 and 3000 people. Each SOA is nested within a ward for which it is possible to calculate a cumulative score. In Harlow there are 54 SOAs and in England and Wales there are 32,482 SOAs. The Index of Multiple Deprivation, therefore, is able to 'rank' each separate SOA with '1' indicating the most deprived area in the country and '32,482' the least deprived area.

**Box 2: Measures and Weightings For Calculating Rank Order on Index of Multiple Deprivation**

- i. = Proportion living on very low incomes such as income support (22.5%)
- ii. = Proportion involuntarily excluded from work (22.5%)
- iii. = Proportion whose life quality is impaired by ill-health or disability (13.5%)
- iv. = Proportion who have no low 'key stage' exams (13.5%)
- v. = Barriers to Housing such as overcrowding (9.3%)
- vi. = Measure of burglary, theft, criminal damage and violence (9.3%)
- vii. = Living Environment (9.3%)

**Table 2: Index of Multiple Deprivation**

|                              | Rank Order (1= most deprived in UK - 32482 = least deprived in UK) Rank position for Harlow given in Brackets | Rank Order for Crime (1= most deprived in UK - 32482 = least deprived in UK) |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| Toddbrook & Town Centre      | 11784 (3)   | 9837   |
| Mark Hall                    | 11891 (5)   | 9967   |
| Netteswell                   | 11290 (2)   | 9968   |
| Old Harlow                   | 19837 (10)  | 16793  |
| Church Langley               | 23128 (11)  | 23466  |
| Harlow Common                | 12517 (7)   | 12328  |
| Bush Fair                    | 12075 (6)   | 8664   |
| Little Parndon & Hare Street | 11816 (4)   | 13742  |
| Staple Tye                   | 8517 (1)  | 4758   |
| Summers & Kingsmore          | 12772 (8)   | 10768  |
| Great Parndon                | 15256 (9)   | 15353  |

Immediately, it is noticeable that both Church Langley and Old Harlow, according to this scale, are the least deprived wards in Harlow and suffer low crime rates. Perhaps it is unsurprising, therefore, that Staple Tye, the most

deprived ward, has a significantly higher crime rate. This study does not directly address issues of criminal aetiology. Given the Humanistic orientation of this study and the problems regarding Positivist methods of 'variable analysis' outlined in the introduction I doubt that any notion of 'environmental determinism' is credible: after all, it is not the physical properties of buildings that influence human behavior but how people interpret these properties and respond accordingly. The origins of crime in Harlow undoubtedly derive from factors that have little to do with the town's design and are, almost certainly an outcome of social, psychological and economic factors that apply nationwide. That crime is relatively high within some wards is, for example, probably an outcome of relative deprivation, the cultural effects of media and other 'causes' not peculiar to the town. Yet, such relatively high crime rates are still significant in that they seem to suggest that Harlow's New Town design fails to provide a strong measure of 'situational' prevention. If the industrial urban environment was perceived to exacerbate underlying social fissures, then the New Town environment was meant to provide a considerable improvement. Such crime figures, however, suggest that, in this regard, it does not. Nevertheless, a more positive evaluation may emerge once we begin to consider fear of crime within Harlow.

## Fear of Crime within Harlow

A community crime survey carried out in 2004 on behalf of the 'Safer Harlow Partnership' explored perceptions of crime and feelings of security amongst a small sample of 727 residents. The issue that most (57%) respondents remember worrying about was 'Youth Causing a Nuisance' although of these only 26% were either 'very' or 'fairly' worried. 44% remember worrying about having their cars broken into or vandalised (of whom 38% were either 'very' or 'fairly' worried).

Box 3 outlines the percentage of people expressing various reasons for feeling

anxious with regard to crime. Notably, few respondents regarded attributes of the built environment as the cause of their concerns. Most (63%) were worried about lack of a visible police presence or (46%) previous experience of the crime. Although 26% attributed their worry to the 'reputation of the area', only 14% regarded it as 'badly lit' and 8% as 'isolated'.

**Box 3: Crime and Anxiety in Harlow – % Giving Reasons**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Lack of Visible Police Presence                              | 63 |
| I Have Experienced It Before                                 | 46 |
| I Know Somebody in Harlow Who Has Experienced It Before      | 42 |
| I Have Heard Stories About It Happening To Someone in Harlow | 41 |
| Local Media Reports  | 35 |
| Because of Specific Individuals in Area                      | 35 |
| The Reputation of the Area                                   | 26 |
| I Feel Vulnerable Because of My Age                          | 25 |
| National Media Reports                                       | 19 |
| I Feel Vulnerable Because of MY Gender                       | 15 |
| The Area is Badly Lit  | 14 |
| Other  | 14 |
| I Feel Vulnerable Because of my Disability                   | 9  |
| The Area is Isolated   | 8  |
| I Feel Vulnerable Because of my Colour, Race or Religion     | 2  |
| I feel Vulnerable Because of my Sexual Orientation           | 2  |

Most respondents (87%) felt safe in the area in which they live during the day falling to 45% after dark. The area arousing most anxiety was the town centre. 22% felt less than safe in this area during the day rising to 72% at night – a very high figure the significance of which I shall return to in a later chapter.

Given the relatively small base response rate for this community safety survey (727 from a population of over 70,000) and the means of data gathering, it is sensible to treat its findings with considerable caution. It is possible that those responding to the questionnaire were those most fearful of crime and disorder and, thus, those most likely to welcome any opportunity to express their concerns. If this is correct then the respondents to the survey were hardly

representative of the town's population as a whole. Besides, people might 'heighten' their fears and worries when their attention is drawn specifically to it. Coleman and Moynihan (*op cit*) correctly note that 'victimisation surveys' also possess a 'dark figure' although they remain useful as a guide for further research. As I report in later chapters, my qualitative research with residents of Harlow generally suggests, however, that fear of crime in the town is, if anything, lower than that shown in the survey. Particularly noteworthy was the frequent denial of fear made by pensioners and women, two groups that usually experience much anxiety often out of proportion to actual risk. Although such claims may suggest bravado, the very fact that they are made would indicate that fear of crime is, indeed, less of a problem within Harlow than the town's criminal statistics might predict and that the survey results are broadly accurate.

## Conclusion: The Need for Further Research

It is impossible to draw any firm conclusions from the preceding review of the criminal statistics for Harlow regarding the influence of its 'New Town' environment. Although its rate of crime is considerably less than the large metropolitan regions of England and Wales (especially London) to which the post-war British New Towns were a response, it is not necessarily clear that the environment is responsible. Although Harlow has many social problems the intensity of social disorganisation is considerably less than that within most metropolitan regions<sup>23</sup>. This, of course, is partially an outcome of the town's design and peculiar history – that it is comparatively small and socially homogeneous and because it enjoys an advantageous geographical position in the affluent south-east. Yet, this lack of social disorganisation is possibly fortuitous and not the outcome specifically of Harlow's distinctive 'New Town' character. Towns of similar size, geographical position and demography share similar criminal profiles although they are *not* the outcome of any particular

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<sup>23</sup> Length of residency, following the Chicago School Model, is one useful measure of disorganization. In Harlow 6518 of over 70,000 residents had lived in an address different to that listed in the 1991 Census. Yet of these 3672 had moved within the same ward, and another 1118 had moved within the town.

planning ideology. Indeed, Harlow compares relatively poorly with many of its 'family members' who supposedly share similar social structures. Even *within* the town, the wards with design patterns that borrow least from the New Town principles are those with the lowest crime rates – although, again, this is probably because they enjoy lower levels of 'multiple deprivation'.

The results from the 'community safety' survey are revealing. Although they suggest that many residents experience fear of crime few blame this upon the environment. Moreover, fear of crime is focused mainly within particular areas of Harlow, especially the Town Centre. A ward by ward analysis, however, indicates that expressions of fear are not commensurable with actual rates of crime. As already mentioned, considerable caution is needed when drawing conclusions from statistical data although it can provide useful pointers for further research. The data, by itself, does not indicate any environmental influence one way or the other although it does suggest that any conceptions of environmental determinism are invalid. To conclude that the design of Harlow, its built structure and physical form, is actually criminogenic is untenable. However, the data does allow for the possibility that the town's environment both heightens fear of crime within specific areas while inducing *general* feelings of security elsewhere. The supposed 'fear paradox' in which people express higher or lower levels of anxiety regarding crime than might be expected from actual crime levels has attracted considerable criminological research (see Hale C 1996 for a review). Much of this concerns the 'discrepancy' between experience of fear expressed by particular social groups, particularly women and the elderly, in comparison to the actual risk of victimisation. As yet, little research has investigated similar discrepancies as they relate to whole environments. As residents of Harlow do not – other than in connection to the Town Centre – generally express high levels of fear and do not express concerns about the environment in which they live it is necessary to establish a methodology that goes beyond statistical analysis and towards one able to account for this apparent 'paradox'.

As a result of conducting the statistical profile, two 'measures' – the town's relatively high crime rate particularly within certain wards and the relatively low, although uneven, expressions of fear reported by its residents – are particularly noteworthy with regard to my Humanistic approach and shall become a central point of enquiry in the following chapters.



# **Chapter Five**

## **A Case of Mistaken Identity: Representations of the New Town**

In Part One I described how the New Town Idea arose as a town-planning response to concerns about both the hygienic conditions of Britain's urban environments and the threat of social order they posed through undermining community cohesion. Thus, the New Towns were meant to provide a clean and fresh habitat in which community cohesion was strong and in which crime and disorder might diminish. It is, therefore, somewhat paradoxical that the post-war British New Towns, soon after construction, began to attract a negative reputation as places in which personal health was threatened and anomie was becoming rampant. Both weaknesses were frequently attributed to the physical design of these town's environments and to a condition of 'New Town Neurosis' or 'New Town Blues'. Such attributions are still common in both journalistic and artistic depictions of the 'New Town Experience' but are also often evident in more scholarly reports. In this chapter, however, I suggest that such attributions are invariably overblown, misplaced and, occasionally wholly wrong. Collectively such criticisms contributed towards what Clapson (1998) describes as an "...extraordinarily pervasive anti-suburban myth in English culture" from commentators who "...should have known better" (p1). Although I agree that the diagnosis of 'New Town Blues' in application to Harlow is largely a case of mistaken identity I will counter it by acknowledging how residents positively experience Harlow's environment rather than attempt to defend the notion that the town actually enjoys a strong social cohesiveness. Thus, sociologically the design of Harlow, I suggest, fails to achieve a powerful public realm from which community attachment might arise. Yet a sense of 'belonging' (both in the sense of ownership *of* and belonging *to*) emerges from how residents experience the environment. Such attachment, I suggest, is usually forgotten or overlooked in discussions of New Town neurosis – a neglect that weakens the town's credibility as a model for future urban development. Those who describe the New Towns as 'Neurotic', I suggest, correctly point out how the design style leads to a weak public realm<sup>24</sup> yet too often they fail to acknowledge other

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<sup>24</sup> A member of Harlow's leading 'punk' band which gained some national fame acknowledges such a weakness: the band was called 'The Newtown Neurotics. However, the same person frequently speaks of his attachment to the town and his love-hate relationship with it.

factors which appear to satisfy other environmental 'needs' and which strengthens attachment to place.

The concept of 'suburban neurosis' was first used by a general practitioner in the 1930s, writing in *The Lancet*, to describe a wide range of medical symptoms – backache, loss of breath, headaches, etc. – that were supposedly common amongst women who had recently moved to the newly built estates on many city peripheries (see Clapson M 1998 p121). According to the diagnosis, the cause of such 'neurosis' arose from the simultaneous loss of community and the adoption of 'false values' which followed a move to these new environments (*ibid*). Sufferers began to experience a profound sense of worthlessness and loneliness, an outcome, apparently, of becoming alienated from the surrounding environment and detachment from one's neighbours. The suggestion that suburban environments induced such anomie, however, became most powerful after the publication, in 1957, of Wilmott and Young's 'Family and Kinship in East London (Wilmott and Young 1957). In this text negative contrasts are drawn between a traditional urban working class neighbourhood and the new emerging suburban housing estates on the capital's periphery.

Wilmott and Young convincingly argue that the densely populated post-war Bethnal Green area was able to maintain very close community relations and a strong social cohesion despite its apparent crowdedness and dingy environment. Such cohesion, they found, was centred upon matriarchal kinship ties in which the extended family living in close proximity became a powerful source of social belonging from which wider social networks might emerge. The replacement of such 'traditional' working class urban communities by 'modern' estates displaying all the latest planning ideas was, they suggested, a benign but ill-conceived policy. Modern planning might supply a better quality of housing, a cleaner environment with ample open space and a more efficient infrastructure but in failing to recognise the sociological foundations that bonds

a working class community together – such as that evident within Bethnal Green - these plans were always liable to engender loneliness and social isolation.

Their [the planners] negative task is to demolish slums which fall below the most elementary standards of hygiene, their positive one to build new houses and new towns cleaner and more spacious than the old. Yet even when the town planners have set themselves to create communities anew as well as houses, they have still put their faith in buildings, sometimes speaking as though all that was necessary for neighbourliness was a neighbourhood unit, for community spirit a community centre. If this were so, then there would be no harm in shifting people about the country, for what is lost could soon be regained by skilful architecture and design. But there is surely more to community than that. The sense of loyalty to each other amongst the inhabitants of a place like Bethnal Green is not due to buildings. It is due far more to ties of kinship and friendship which connect the *people* of one household to the *people* of another. In such a district community spirit does not have to be fostered, it is already there (*ibid* p198/9 emphasises in original).

Thus, the close ties that develop between people as they visit relations in nearby streets, congregate in numerous street corner pubs and causally meet in small and highly local shops is, Wilmott and Young suggest, something conspicuously missing within the newer estates that were built, paradoxically, to improve these people's lives. The study, in short, reverses the trend of most Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century studies of urban society by suggesting that the 'solution' was somehow worse than the perceived problem it was supposed to resolve.

The accusation that the post-war British New Towns were particularly susceptible to the 'neurosis' that Wilmott and Young describe became particularly vigorous soon after their construction. Even within the architectural and town-planning professions complaints regarding the inadequacies of New Town design became commonplace. J.M Richards and Gordon Cullen (1953), writing in the *Architectural Review* derided the town's 'prairie planning' and

described them as no different from any other suburban development with all their attendant banality. It is a view shared by Nairns (1955), a popular critic of modernist architecture, who looked upon New Towns as obvious examples of 'subtopia' – a suburban dystopia lacking the density and sheer character to allow genuine 'urbanity' to emerge. Such denigrations of the New Town environment remain a common element of more contemporary discussions of town planning. Journalistic reports, for example, examining the social legacy of the New Towns will usually embrace some version of the neurosis diagnosis. Jonathan Glancey (2006) writing in *The Guardian* suggests that their design prevents any community cohesion and that they lack the "...kind of emotional core or architectural heart that makes many of us think so highly of old towns and cities". His report also makes the charge that many people came to the New Towns against their will and thus had an alienating environment thrust upon them. Many Londoners in the late 1940s and early 1950s, he claims "...felt they were being deported to cockney Siberias" and wonders about the bewilderment that surely followed such upheaval.

What must it have been like for a housewife stuck in a small house, with an apron of garden, at the end of an all but lifeless cul-de-sac on the fringe of a new town, when what she had known was the clattering street life of Whitechapel, Bethnal green, or Dalston? Where was the raucous cheer, the colours and bright lamps of Ridley Road market? Where were the shopping-laden trams swaying along Mare Street? What had happened to the coalman, knife-grinder, French-onion seller and rag-and-bone man? Could a prim, and probably teetotal, new town architect design a decent London-style boozery? With homes set a long way from anything like a proper town centre, no wonder many first-generation new towners were confused (*ibid*).

A leading article in *The Times* (24<sup>th</sup> January 1992) upon the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Milton Keynes wrote of an "eagerness to force large number of people out of city centres" before comparing the New Towns programme to the policies of an autocratic government. The consequences for those moved were described as catastrophic. Many were "...moved compulsorily and callously, [and found] themselves in single-class towns with poor services and a lack of communal continuity vital to a humane neighbourhood (quoted in Ward 1993 p9/10).

The same conception of the New Towns programme as the forceful movement of people into anomic environments is repeated in the lyrics of 'Get 'em Out By Friday', a Progressive Rock track by Genesis recorded in 1972. In this rather surreal piece, Peter Gabriel, the band's lead singer and principle lyricist, theatrically voices the part of 'Mark Hall' (a.k.a 'The Winkler'), who connives to move Mrs Barrow and her family from their existing home to create space for urban redevelopment. Initially reluctant to leave, the Barrow's accept a cash bribe from The Winkler and so move to a new 'block' in Harlow New Town 'with central heating'. Upon arrival, however, The Winkler informs the Barrows that, unfortunately, he has had to raise their rent "Just a little Bit". The track becomes more nightmarishly surreal when the narrative moves into the future. Now representatives of 'Genetic Control' announce plans to limit the height of people to four feet. This, we learn, is an experiment in an 'economy of scale' to fit more people into already existing buildings. Harlow is chosen as the site to begin.

I hear the directors of Genetic Control have been buying all the  
properties that have recently been sold, taking risks oh so bold.

It's said now that people will be shorter in height,  
they can fit twice as many in the same building site.

(They say it's alright).

Beginning with the tenants of the town of Harlow  
in the interest of humanity, they've been told they must go,  
told they must go-go-go-go<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> From track 'Get 'em Out By Friday' by Genesis on 'Foxtrot' released 1972

The lyrics to this song also hint at a theme – a supposed attribute or even causal variable of ‘New Town Neurosis’ - that suggests reasons why such environments supposedly induce high rates of crime and disorder. Not only does New Town design prevent people coming together but also imposes an artificial environment upon them in which personal and psychological pathology is bound to follow. It is a theme, for example, that emerges from a viewing of Stanley Kubrick’s famous adaptation of Anthony Burgess's novel ' A Clockwork Orange'(2001), This movie portrays many early scenes of violence set against a bleak modernistic dystopia evoking utter alienation and loss of community. The stark monumentality and greyness of the buildings, deliberately shot from oblique angles, seems to reflect perfectly the perverse hardness of the young gang as they randomly attack a tramp sleeping in a subway or each other as they stroll menacingly beside a murky canal wearing nothing but bowler hats and what looks like Victorian gents underwear.

That Kubrick chose an actual estate at Thamesmead in South-East London to film these scenes is significant. Built during the late 1960s to accommodate people 'cleared' from the slums of Central London, Thamesmead is often described as a late addition to the New Town programme and one that encapsulates all its faults. The highly modernistic style of Thamesmead's architecture, with its abundance of concrete tower blocks and residential apartments built above garages and around anonymous looking courtyards soon became synonymous with social decline. With rain seepage causing the rapid deterioration of the original concrete structures it became a large-scale 'sink' estate where few people chose willingly to live – a site, seemingly, of New Town neurosis. Crime and other forms of 'problem' behaviour soon followed leading eventually to a massive overhaul of its architecture during the 1990s in a bid to regenerate the area. The negative reputation of Thamesmead as a 'mistake' of modernity still remains. As one article in The Financial Times (Oct 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008) puts it: “Thamesmead has never quite shaken off the feel of an invented place” stating that: “Even the name is made up by one of the first residents, Anthony Walton, whose inspiration won him a £20 prize”. Yet, although sharing the New Town ambition of urban dispersal it is important not

to conflate the architecture of places like Thamesmead, which borrows more from Radiant City principles, with those more characteristic of the New Town Idea. But this, it seems, is precisely what many critics of the New Towns do – a point to which I shall return below.

In one respect, however, the association of 'A Clockwork Orange' with the post-war British New Towns might seem apt. Indeed, the social objectives that lay behind the construction of the New Towns would, perhaps, render any of them a suitable location for Kubrick's film. Alex is the leader of a gang who exalts in acts of violence against rival gangs and strangers. After mortally wounding the owner of a house he is robbing, Alex is sent to prison. In a bid to secure early release he agrees to participate in an experiment that, if successful, will prevent him enacting violence ever again. This experiment involves making him ingest a drug that renders him nauseous while forcing him to watch a series of violent images on a screen. Through repeating this experiment Alex eventually comes to associate violence – something that he once relished – with feelings of nausea. Those responsible for administering the experiment deem it a success as, now Alex can no longer enact violence without suffering debilitating sickness. The moral message of the plot however suggests that Alex's inability to inflict harm upon others does not equate to genuine human goodness for this must come 'from within' rather than from some mechanical 'clockwork' procedure. By setting his film adaptation of this novel within Thamesmead it is possible that Kubrick was implicitly offering a similar critique of all modernistic urban environments including that of the New Towns. The idea of creating moral societies through the construction of 'orderly' environments to which people will 'automatically' respond is somewhat reminiscent of the experiment that Alex undergoes. Rather than developing their own moral standards from 'within', the very inhumanity of such architecture will, conversely compel those who directly experience it to misbehave and show little compassion towards each other – a classic case of anomie. It is, if the logic of this argument is correct, no surprise that Thamesmead quickly became known as a hot spot of crime and general disorder.



The same theme is also evident, although put across less starkly, in many episodes of the classic BBC drama 'Z Cars'. The plots revolve around members of the local police force working to maintain order in a town known simply as 'New Town'. The drama was avowedly realistic in its depiction of 'honest' cops pitting their wits against a series of 'villains' and conveys a sense that it is only through their honest efforts that the deep-set 'disorder' residing in the surrounding urban environment is kept under control. In this sense the choice of the town's name is meaningful – 'New Town' connotes more than just 'any place' but a particular environment - one of modernity, where the threat of social collapse is always immanent. The producer's and writers, after all, did not choose to set their drama in a place called 'Old City'.

But, do these depictions of New Town 'neurosis', anomie, dystopia and a society on the verge of collapse truly reflect the character of these towns or do they, collectively, amount to a case of mistaken identity? As early as 1964 a survey of mental health in Harlow had cast doubt on the existence of anything amounting to 'New Town Blues'.

Our survey has shown that the creation of a new town with full social and economic planning results in an improvement in general health, both subjective and objective. About nine-tenths of the new population are satisfied with their environment and the one-tenth who are dissatisfied are for the most part constitutionally dissatisfied – that is to say, they would be dissatisfied wherever they were. Full satisfaction with environment is a product of time...We have found no evidence of...new town blues. Some people had indeed shown loneliness, boredom, discontent with environment and worries, particularly over money. It is easy enough for enterprising enquirers to find such people and attribute these symptoms to the new town. But a similar group of similar size can be found in any community, new or old, if it is sought (Taylor Lord & Chave S 1972 quoted by Ward C p13)

Both Clapson (1998) and Ward (1993) show that attributions of neurosis to the residents of New Towns are, invariably extreme reactions that singularly overlook the often thriving 'solidarity' that occurs between them. Notions of 'forced' movement away from traditional working class neighbourhoods, for

example, do not rest upon solid evidential foundations. Nearly all of Harlow's first residents actively sought to move away from the poor housing and cramped spaces of London. The prospect of possessing their own gardens, a toilet indoors, space for their children to play and easy access to countryside was, to them, highly attractive. These residents did not romanticise life back in East End London but were happy to 'escape' to somewhere promising a better quality of life. Nor did they always idealise the close-knit community of the traditional urban working class neighbourhood with mother always only just around the corner. Instead, the attainment of some privacy within the New Towns was often regarded as most welcome. Thus, although Wilmott and Young certainly acknowledge the need to renovate much of the East End and were not prone to describing Greenleigh – the name given they gave to the new estate at Debden which they contrast with Bethnal Green – as some dystopian 'Siberia' – their famous study, it seems, underestimates the many reasons why people wanted to move into New Town areas (see Clapson 1998 Chapter 3).

In questioning the foundations of the 'New Town Blues' diagnosis it is necessary to guard against embracing an equally romantic perspective. A town like Harlow certainly has its fair share of social problems and it is far from a utopia where all are happy and content. The attainment of community solidarity within the New Towns is not easily discernible. Llewellyn's (2204) study of New Town Life in Harlow between 1947 and 1953 based upon a series of oral histories, found that some residents believed that a strong community spirit had emerged yet an equal number were adamant that it had not. While generally critical of the 'neurosis' diagnosis both Clapson 1998) and Ward (1993) acknowledge a degree of alienation occurring within the New Towns. Nevertheless, overall, it does appear that New Town design does suffer from a collective misrepresentation which hardly characterises actual lived experiences. Where many Middle-Class critics of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century city looked towards the countryside as the only fit and proper place to live, today similar voices examine the New Towns with lofty disdain while championing the virtues of the big city. The city certainly offers many opportunities and the possibility of adventure and excitement. But this does not mean that those who chose to live

apart from it are suffering a form of environmental deprivation and an impaired quality of life. Such an assumption, perhaps, betrays the same snobbery towards a major aspect of British working class life that was a feature of 19<sup>th</sup> Century anti-urbanism (Clapson 1998). Indeed, research concerning working-class housing estates *within* cities that also attract considerable negative criticism will also often show that residents perceive their surroundings more positively. In conducting a series of oral history interviews with residents of the Kingsmead estate, in Hackney, London – a place with a severe reputation for crime and dilapidation – Green (2005) was able to discover many residents still able to appreciate the virtues, even beauty, of their surroundings while remaining aware of the social problems. Such research is a reminder that judgements of environment that fail to consider the everyday experiences of those who most immediately ‘live it’ can miss something of much significance. Kingsmead, like Thamesmead, classic ‘sink estates’, can still gain the affections of its inhabitants despite the many problems they suffer.

However, the defenders of the New Town Idea, I suggest, focus overly upon the social strengths of towns like Harlow. Although such strengths are apparent much evidence, including the comparatively high crime rates reported earlier, indicate that the Idea has failed to achieve its utopian ambitions. The more compelling reason why the ‘New Town Blues’ diagnosis does not apply to Harlow, my research suggests, derives less from the town’s capacity to forge close community bonds but more through the attachment residents express towards the physical environment in which they dwell. All the residents and former residents I interviewed, except one, were highly appreciative of the town’s environment. The one exception was a woman in her mid 40s who had left Harlow about five years previously. To her the town had become ‘sad’ with nothing to offer although she was strangely unaware that I was interviewing her in the town’s park where she regularly brought her young child to play. The rest did not regard the town as some bleak dystopia – a ‘cockney Siberia’ – but looked upon it as a visually beautiful town in which to live. The following two statements (the first from a former resident describing her father’s first reaction to Harlow) were typical:

He thought it was wonderful. He thought he had died and gone to heaven. There was so much art around, all these societies he could join. He thought it was beautiful (from transcript of Interview 23).

I think it's lovely. The trees and grass and stuff...yeah it's nice. I wouldn't want to move back to London now, no....I mean there's lots of nice space round here isn't there (from transcript of interview 18).

The characterisation of the New Towns as displaying the same environmental design as that of Radiant City planning is clearly shown, by such statements, as mistaken. Although Harlow has a few tower blocks and, indeed, boasts the first one built in Britain, these are scattered throughout the townscape and are of relatively low height (none higher than eleven stories). Most people live in two storey houses or maisonettes not dissimilar to that of the 'traditional' working class community. The greatest contrast, however, with the typical working-class city residential area comes from the abundance of greenery, the provision of plentiful garden and open-space commensurate with the neo-medieval model of organic urbanism. It is such features which most residents of Harlow regard as the most conspicuous feature of their environment and one in which they consistently take considerable pride. Moreover, it is one that embraces, it seems, a longstanding British love of the countryside common to all social classes and is, as such, a respecter of traditional environmental preference and is not an intrinsically alienating feature.

Most residents do criticise parts of Harlow's architecture. As I discuss in the following chapters such antipathy usually focuses upon the town's main retail areas and residential neighbourhoods other than their own. But a significant complaint addresses less the town's design principles and more the building quality by which the town was constructed. Others are disappointed in how the town has become 'run-down'. Some are incredulous, for example, that many of the town's original buildings are now demolished.

“When they build some things like Town Halls you expect them to be there all your life don't you. There are places in London they built 200 years ago....they're still there and they still look as good as new. They have character. Well we built the blooming schools in the town and the town-centre...all been knocked down and re-built again and all in under 50 years (From transcript of Interview Ten)!

A recent album by 'Darren Hayman and the Secondary Modern' entitled 'Pram Town' begins with a song that lists the original New Town ideal but ends with another that voices the contemporary resident's dissatisfaction. Thus the album goes from a spirit of optimism:

We've got the parks

We've got the shops

We've got the factories

That give us jobs

We've put the houses

Amongst the trees

We have all the modern civic amenities

Everything as it should be

Everything as it should be

How could you live anywhere else

How could you live anywhere else

We've got the hospitals

We've got the libraries

We're an integrated urban community

We are thankful for all this safety

And everything as it should be

We've got the cycle lanes

To help you get about

Every road connected by a roundabout

You'll wonder how you did without

This is everything you ever dreamt about.

To one of disappointment:

Too many empty shops

And more are closing down

The disappointed shopper

Holds no one account

They named the pubs after butterflies

That's where the neighbours used to meet

Now the Civic Hall's a nightclub

And there's nowhere good to eat

They built high rise towers in medium size towns

They didn't stick around

To see the towers less down

And the pristine concrete

Crumbles into dust

We just had it on trust

This New Town wouldn't grow old on us

Now there's nothing left to do

They didn't plan for cars

And they want to take the bus

They put the motorway the wrong side of town

And didn't even inform us

They put sculptures by the shops

They put statues in the park

They put our favourite sculptures behind glass

We couldn't even be trusted

At least these lyrics show some familiarity with the town and express the high hopes experienced by its first residents<sup>26</sup>. But, more importantly, they register a general discontent, not with the New Town Idea with but the failure of local government to invest sufficiently to ensure its continuing success. As one resident put it:

...when Harlow was designed the planning that went into it..it was thought about...you know, how things were laid out. Yeah?... Whoever did plan the town did get it right... ..but what's happened. Was, is a bit of a er.... We've been taken over really by rampant capitalism which has destroyed everything (From transcript of interview Eight).

Thus, there is an extensive appreciation of the original New Town Idea, sympathy with its original ambitions and design vision shared by most residents of Harlow. Such appreciation is especially pronounced amongst the town's first

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<sup>26</sup> Although, again 'High Rise Towers in Medium Size Towns' is hardly a fair description of Harlow's design layout and perhaps better describes a typical Radiant City development.

settlers who, rather than forced migrants, truly thought of themselves as pioneers embarking upon a positive social experiment. But it is also a common sentiment to more recent arrivals. No resident with whom I spoke held any desire to move to London. They welcomed its proximity and the attractions it had to offer yet, ultimately, were always happy to return back home. Given the choice and with unlimited funds many stated they might want to live in a fully rural environment – but not one expressed a return to an environment possessed, according to the New Town critics, with ‘true urbanity’.

I shall finish this chapter, therefore, by contrasting descriptions about one small part of Harlow, the principle traffic route running between the town’s railway station and its central shopping precinct, made in one recent study and from a long-term resident. The contrast is revealing, for one depicts this road and Harlow generally as suffering the usual symptoms of New Town nausea in ways that make the environment unsafe while the other views it more positively. The study (Karimi *et al* 2009) employs a ‘space syntax’ methodology to explain Harlow’s design failures and begins with a number of questionable statements without any qualifying support. The New Towns are, with a few exceptions (although Harlow is, presumably not one of them) ‘not considered desirable places to live’ (p22). Later it declares that ‘social problems started to emerge very early on, particularly in the earlier New Towns where construction was often rushed and *inhabitants were generally plucked out of their established communities with little ceremony*” (p24 my emphasis). Such conditions, the report concludes, ‘created’ the poor press reputation of the New Town Blues. A note accompanying a photograph of the road declares that it provides “...no provision for walking [forcing] people to create their own ‘mouse tracks’ to access the Town Centre. Later, referring to all Harlow’s principle traffic arteries it declares that they have “...forced the streets...to become characterless and lifeless car arteries, where pedestrian and cyclist routes remain *unsafe* and poorly-used” (my emphasis). There is much in this report that confirms the findings of my own research and it does, indeed, indicate several of Harlow’s design weaknesses and I shall refer to it again in the final chapter. But it is notable that the report relies upon computer generated



models and graph algorithms, making no reference, anywhere, to actual lived environmental experience. As such, the report, despite its apparent scientific rigor, fails to appreciate the significance the environments actually have to those who directly experience them. Here, by contrast, is how the resident describes her first experience of the same road:

My first memory of Harlow is walking up er..is it Fifth Avenue...you know where they've built all those houses now. Yes. We was going to Sainsburys. Dad took us to Sainsburys and all those trees were little and they had all been set and it seemed absolutely enormous compared to the little rows we were used to in Ireland.....everything was nice, everything was lovely and green (From transcript of Interview Eight).

These words do not suggest she was 'plucked' from any community or that her walk was 'forced' in any way. Neither does she allude to any feelings of insecurity. I, too, am very familiar with this road having lived for several years in a building at the end where it adjoins the town centre. Often, it is true, I avoided the road preferring to walk through the park that runs parallel to it and which the 'space syntax' study does not mention. But my preference was not due to fearing crime along the road, or any feelings of insecurity but because I regarded the park as a more pleasant environment in which to walk. Actual environmental experience, I conclude, can tell us much that computer generated algorithms will simply never notice. Thus a statement of such experience – my own - outlined in the next chapter, might offer a start in obtaining a richer source of data by which to assess the impact of New Town design.

# **Chapter Six**

## **Experiencing Harlow's Environment: A Personal Account**

In 1965, at age two, I moved with my family to a house in Harlow where my father's employers, British Petroleum, had recently opened offices. I continued to live in the same three bedroom detached house until the end of my schooling and departure for college in London in 1981. For a short period, after university, I returned to this house before acquiring a council flat adjacent the town centre. Here I lived as a bachelor for about fourteen years, moving out to a newly built house upon marriage, staying for another two years before, in my late thirties, moving to a house in London. My parents still reside in my childhood home and, although most of my friends from Harlow have now also moved away, I continue to visit the town regularly. Thus, I have considerable and immediate first-hand experience of Harlow as both child and adult: experience that no doubt, continues to colour my attitudes and feelings towards places and especially other urban places today.

In the following sketch I reflect upon this experience and how it might influence my current research. Although autobiographical, I shall concentrate only upon those details that, I believe, especially pertain to my sense of Harlow's place in comparison to those of elsewhere. The intention is not self-indulgent reminiscence but to provide a platform for a reflective study of the New Town 'experience' as discussed in Chapter Three.

My childhood home was a detached house in a cul-de-sac on the northern edge of the town. From the upstairs windows I looked out upon a large stretch of countryside: of fields and woods, and in the distance a large country manor with Gothic turrets and towers. At various times of the year, smells from the countryside crept into our neighbourhood – the warm evocative burning of stubble at harvest-time and the sickly sweet odour of muck-spreading in spring. Our walks with family dogs meant a quick dash across a fairly busy road (where one unfortunately met her demise) before entering Herons Wood, from which our Housing Group got its name, and the river that lay beyond. The wood continued at the end of our road separating us from another housing group on the other side.

The wood was only a narrow strip and the allotment next to it a piece of wasteland now re-planted with trees and protected by high fences. But during my childhood these places had special significance. Within them I spent many long hours with my neighbour's children, playing at hide-and-seek and similar games, building camps, blazing trails through the undergrowth with broken sticks of elderberry, making fires with matches stolen from our parent's kitchens, climbing trees and occasionally falling from them. These were places close to our homes where we might seek protection when necessary yet sufficiently hidden from our parent's prying eyes to allow mischief and adventure. I remember building camps by clearing spaces within the undergrowth that were only accessible by 'secret' pathways and were otherwise wholly inconspicuous. We lined these camps with straw gathered from the allotment and made them 'ours' by the addition of various items taken from our homes or found in the wood. Some of these camps became quite complex: by cutting away of additional rooms and interlinking pathways, with defences built against intruders we were able to establish our own little worlds. We often made fires in these camps, once setting alight the straw on the ground which we extinguished only by urinating over it.

Although only small the wood held a certain mystery. With seasonal growth and change new places within it were always discoverable. At twilight it began to assume an eerie atmosphere that only heightened the opportunities for adventure until darkness fell completely and the woods became too scary a place to play within. It was, to us, a wild place amidst the 'order' of the surrounding houses – a tangle of shrubs and roots where the sounds of moving but unseen animals was always discernible. We imagined that all manner of dangerous creatures – animal and human – might inhabit its unknown regions which we occasionally sought, bravely brandishing sticks and other weaponry to ward off possible attack.

The woods also were significant to us as it provided a barrier to the kids living in the residential square who also used it as a playground. We called them the 'Big Kids', partially because they were more numerous but also because there were some who were considerably older than us. They were our rivals against whom we regularly fought for the 'right' to occupy the woods. In this rivalry we held a rather mild class snobbery: the 'Big Kids' came from terraced houses unlike our seemingly more affluent semi-detached homes and they seemed poorer. In our minds this gave them an aura of danger – that their 'poverty' must make them 'rougner' and capable of an aggression that we would never contemplate committing ourselves. This did not stop us, however, staging frequent pitched 'battles' with them. Often, whilst playing in the cul-de-sac one of our 'opponents' might suddenly appear in the woods and begin throwing insults in our direction. Returning these taunts brought further members of the 'Big Kids' and, eventually, the throwing of sticks and stones from both sides. I do not remember any serious injuries resulting from these battles: when someone got hit, it brought, on both sides, a diminishment of hostilities as if we had 'gone too far'. Besides, the battles usually ended with one of our parents (sometimes from the other side) intervening and chasing our enemy away. To us, this was 'victory' and the battles became the topic of much talk and exaggeration for days afterwards. Strangely, on rare occasions, we actually joined forces with the 'Big Kids' to take on another gang of kids from an adjoining estate – the 'McDonalds' named after the most prominent and frightening family. These battles were by far more strategic and exciting. I remember revelling in these alliances in which the woods became our base of operations, from which we ventured out in attack.

The woods, now, are closed off – the entrance we made to them from our cul-de-sac by cutting through a fence is now gone – and nobody plays within them anymore. The allotment, as I previously mentioned, is now re-planted with trees and protected by an insurmountable fence. Our tracks and camps are gone and the woodland wildlife left unhindered by the sounds of exuberant children in search of adventure. I can't help wondering why these woods no longer hold the same significance to today's kids as it once did to us (surely they could break

through the barriers just as we had) and I pity them for their failure to take full advantage of it.

Thus, although always a town-dweller my memories of childhood are replete with bucolic images and rural sensations. I understood the countryside as something distinct from the town but it was not so much a place to visit but a pervasive aspect of my childhood years: an environment that merged with the places of my everyday life. Seasonal change, for example, meant more than just a change in temperature but a qualitative shift in colour and smell that shaped my activities and focus of play. Indeed, the ample greenery and verdure of Harlow's public spaces, its interior parks and grass verges and the tree lined conduits through which vehicles and pedestrians move were, to me, simply extensions of the surrounding countryside rather than mere pleasant additions to an otherwise predominantly urban scene. To this day I prefer living in places that offer easy access to the countryside yet simultaneously enjoy the benefits of the town. Many a city-dweller of my acquaintance disdains the country as 'boring' and devoid of the innumerable urban attractions that make life interesting. Besides, they claim, if one desires tranquillity and 'nature' then surely the urban parks more than suffice. Yet, to me, such claims miss the point: the countryside with its sights, sounds, smells, colours, and textures, and the possibility it offers for finding solitude and repose provides something that few (if any) urban parks can satisfy. I do not consider myself a loner and appreciate the diversity and spectacles of urban places, yet always regard the quiet and relative absence of people within the countryside as 'therapeutic'. Indeed, when walking in a country area, its woods or riverbanks for example, I deliberately avoid other people, not through some hermetic desire to be alone but simply to be in an environment that is momentarily 'mine' and that I do not have to share with others. My inclinations are not anti-urban but the pleasure I take in non-urban places derives, I believe, largely from my childhood experiences living in Harlow.

I remember travelling with my parents by train to London. At first, the train passed fields and meadows adjoining the River Lea, yet as it came closer to the city these slowly became sparser until there was nothing but factories, warehouses, shops and houses. My impression of the city's outskirts was one of drabness. Everything seemed a monochrome grey, faintly grubby and lacking much vitality. Even occasional patches of greenery - parkland behind iron railings and flower-beds fronting houses, - appeared sickly and dull. The grass and bushes aligning a canal, it seemed, were simply sites for dumping rubbish rather than places affording pleasure and adventure. Especially troubling, to me, were the houses and flats whose 'wasteland' backyards and parking lots met the passing railway track. How miserable, I wondered, must the occupants of such abodes be, shorn of any natural beauty and countryside. I would often wonder, with something approaching horror, what must lie behind these frontages, aroused by some anxiety lest the train inexplicably stop and deposit me in its midst. The houses were like frontier posts behind which lay dangers and threats that, to me, were unconceivable within Harlow.

Now, I realise that my youthful impressions of London and other 'big-city' urban environments were unfair. Having lived 'behind' these houses I now know that the city environment is not as terrifying as it was in my youthful imagination and that Harlow offers as many 'threats' as there are in London. No doubt, my father's hostility to big cities (his childhood years were spent in a village on the Isle of Wight, an environment which almost certainly framed his 'place' attitude as Harlow has mine) greatly influenced my thoughts. Nevertheless, something of my early attitude regarding the contrast between Harlow and its openness to countryside and the apparent spoliation of nature within London and similar cities remains.

Our cul-de-sac was my 'home' in that it was a distinct place, a sanctuary, from which I was able to explore the surrounding town and elsewhere from a position of security and sense of belonging. It was the place to which I escaped the bullying attentions of the 'big kids' from around the corner and in which I was

known to my neighbours. When I injured myself, it was my neighbours who gave assistance. Once I was even taken to hospital by one. I played with neighbouring children in the actual road, racing bicycles, kicking footballs or at incessant games of 'Kerby' safe in the absence of passing traffic or unknown people. We shared an identity as coming from the same small street, an identity for which we were willing to fight against those we regarded as coming from outside – even if this only meant those from the other side of the woods. Some critics of cul-de-sacs suggest that they forge isolation and undermine any spirit of urban sociality. Perhaps, with regard to the construction of recent cul-de-sacs such claims are correct. Yet, my experience was not one of isolation at all. I always felt very much a part of the surrounding area and the town as a whole, but the cul-de-sac gave me a place from which I might venture out and explore these other places with an undeniable degree of security.

It was while attending secondary school that I became formally aware that my town was unlike most others in that it was a deliberate 'social' experiment built after the Second World War. Other towns and cities, I was taught, grew during the industrial revolution at a time when attending to human suffering wrought by appalling living conditions was secondary to the amassing of profit. For this reason, I was taught, these other towns continued to manifest innumerable social problems that were simply absent, or at least less pernicious within Harlow. We live in a town, I learnt, mainly populated by migrants from London's slums who came in search of a more hospitable environment to raise families and enjoy a better quality of life. As such, we were fortunate to have the open spaces, better housing (with gardens and indoor toilets) and pleasant environs that were still unavailable to many others living within cities. Harlow, we discovered, was planned – which meant it did not arise haphazardly according to blind economic whim but as a deliberate organisation of space to afford greater ease of living. Harlow was a product of a more enlightened approach to human affairs. It was a 'New' town and something, therefore, in which we should take pride. Being proud of one's place of origin, of course, is not common to residents of New Towns alone. Yet, my secondary education I



suspect, led me, together with my school mates, to actively defend Harlow as somewhere special.

It was only when I left Harlow to attend college and began to meet and befriend people not from the town that I became aware of a fairly insistent antagonism towards the place. To us, natives of the town, the readiness of others to disparage the town was a little bewildering. Certainly, we had our grumbles amongst ourselves concerning the town's provinciality: the 'bright lights' of neighbouring London made Harlow seem dull by comparison. Friends formed a band and sang about the town's 'rained stained pavements' and that 'Sundays in Harlow emanate such little glow'. Another band, that attained some national recognition, called themselves the 'New Town Neurotics' and sang about similar themes. Yet, such complaints did not really express any deep loathing for the town and its peculiar character: no more, at least, than others from the large cities were grumbling about their own home environments. Our biggest complaint really, as I and my friends went from childhood to adulthood, was that the spacing of Harlow's pubs curtailed any chance of a decent pub crawl. Otherwise, life in the town was satisfactory and, indeed we were all, I think, tacitly thankful for its pleasant surroundings. But, many outside the town with only passing knowledge of it (if any at all) were far more hostile. It was a 'concrete jungle' lacking any aesthetic charm, a 'confusing mess' where the stranger soon became lost in some nightmarish science fiction landscape, an 'unutterably boring place' which the right-minded person would escape at the earliest opportunity. One college friend would hum the theme tune from 'Jaws' whenever he drove into the town and others refused to visit altogether. Although never truly offended by such responses I am sure that they led me to think more closely about the town's achievements and a desire to assess its 'success' or otherwise.

My first residence in Harlow after leaving my parent's house was in an eleven-storey tower block near the main shopping centre and on the edge of the town's park. Harlow's developers had built the country's first tower block and were

eager to demonstrate that such buildings were instrumental in achieving required urban population densities with a suitable social balance without forsaking open, public and recreational space. In subsequent years tower-blocks became an emblem of urban deprivation and were often thought of as a post-war planning disaster leading to the demolition of many. The building of my tower block during the 1980s was an act of faith in this form of architectural design and a belief that it can successfully house people if the occupants share similar social characteristics. Locating it next to the park yet close to several urban facilities certainly helped achieve several of these design objectives. And again, I was made aware of Harlow's merger of town with country in a very direct manner.

From my 9<sup>th</sup> storey window I could see a panorama of Harlow's townscape, of its grouping of houses and conspicuous wedges of greenery in between, leading to open countryside beyond. I began, especially, to appreciate the park, regarding it almost as my back garden and as an Arcadian slice within the very heart of the town. I welcomed its beauty and openness, of its lack of iron railings to keep people out once darkness fell, and that it was always possible to discover places of quiet solitude within. Although 'planned' the park always seemed an authentic extension of the nearby countryside – something organic not artificial. I remember coach parties from London visiting the park during summers and the look of pleasure on the visitor's faces as they casually explored its various niches and hidden charms. I was proud that people still sought some repose from their everyday urban lives by visiting Harlow for it suggested that the original design intentions were still alive.

Other aspects of the town's design, however, appeared to support the case of Harlow's detractors. The construction of several self-contained housing groups and neighbourhood clusters each with their own shopping precinct, library, pub and so on, meant that the town never had a proper 'centre' or at least one in which I could take much pride. As I previously mentioned, it is near-impossible to have a pub crawl in the town. True, 'The High' contained all the major retail

outlets and utility company offices and on a Saturday afternoon was always busy with shoppers and teenagers simply 'hanging out': but there were no places with cafes, restaurants or bars - somewhere in which to take visitors to show off the town's vitality. The emptiness of The High in an evening, whenever I occasionally brought visitors to it, was stark. With nothing but a few newspapers blowing in the wind to animate it, the scene was embarrassing. Come darkness, the same place took on a pervasive atmosphere of danger that became almost palpable once the town's one night-club closed for the night spilling drunken revellers into the otherwise empty space. Although recent initiatives to enliven the centre by providing some residential space within it, have had some success it remains a fairly mournful and, at times, menacing place during the night.

Moving to London in my late thirties and experience of living in places not so obviously planned inevitably made me reflect further upon Harlow and its contrasts with the city. I was, initially, reluctant to move believing that Harlow remained a better place to raise a family than London where open space for children's play is scarce. My wife, however, who is from New Zealand, was eager to live somewhere more exciting and closer to her compatriot friends. She had left New Zealand to enjoy the attractions of one of the world's major cities and did not share my attachment to Harlow - especially as living in the town meant a lengthy commute each day to her workplace. Moreover, I did not want to stay in one place all my life: living in Harlow was becoming stale and somewhat unadventurous. However, our new residency in Walthamstow, a borough on London's outskirts, only seemed to deepen my doubts about living in a city. To me it was a dirty, crowded place utterly lacking any aesthetic appeal. Certainly, it offered great cultural diversity and the variety of produce available in the local market was something inconceivable in Harlow. Yet, access to a 'dozen ethnic varieties of bread on my doorstep' (a phrase I often hear to describe the advantages of living in a city) was no compensation for what Walthamstow lacked. It was the very epitome, I felt, of why towns like Harlow were built. I disliked it intensely.

And so after four years, during which time both my children were born, we moved once again to another North London borough, Enfield. Now, if living in Walthamstow put Harlow in good light then my residency in Enfield cast it in shade once again. Growing older, I became increasingly aware of the historic origins of towns and cities, noticing remnants of previous epochs in existing townscapes which often lent them a character somewhat missing in Harlow. Enfield is a typical example: its street layout, place names, old churches and other buildings reflect that much of the borough grew without the intervention of planners. Harlow, by contrast, is wholly 'modern' with barely any buildings built before the 1950s and almost everything evinces the fact that it was once an idea on some planner's draughtboard before it became concrete reality. Enfield appears more 'organic' and authentic, as, I suppose does Walthamstow, whereas Harlow's overwhelming modernity seems artificial. Furthermore, Enfield was able to accommodate our needs as parents and my own particular geographical preferences, with its plentiful parks and other open spaces and near-by woodland.

Thus I have gradually shifted, over recent years, from being a staunch defender of the New Town ideal and its particular manifestation in Harlow to having various doubts about its success. During my last few visits to the town I have begun to look at the surrounding environment with the eyes of an 'outsider'. I still notice its ample verdure and colour, but now also the rather bleak, angular design ethos of much of its architecture that seems to sit uneasily amidst the swathes of greenery. Signs of neglect – litter strewn in verges and the obligatory graffiti on walls – are now more conspicuous than ever before. Even the decrepitude that inevitably arises as buildings age – something that often gives ancient buildings an aesthetic appeal – merely tarnishes the once gleaming modernity of Harlow's image. And the people who still live there do not appear particularly happy in their sylvan surroundings. I still cannot accept the condemnation that Harlow receives and seldom regard it as fair, but I am now, at least, beginning to appreciate from where such hostility might arise.

So what can I conclude from this brief sketch of my experience of Harlow as both a resident and outsider and what is the possible impact of this experience upon my research?

1. Firstly, it frames the 'place' from which I pursue this study regarding fear of crime in Harlow. In many respects my experience as both 'insider' and 'outsider' puts me in an advantageous position to conduct this research. Although conventional 'scientific' ideals might demand complete objectivity when discussing fear of crime in relation to Harlow's urban environment, it is probably impossible to describe faithfully the experiences of those who actually live there from a wholly exterior vantage point. Having first-hand experience of living in the town means that I can adopt a more empathetic approach commensurate with the humanistic methodology I advocate. Nevertheless, as Schutz (1964), Simmel (see Wolff 1950) and others note, the 'stranger' who observes a phenomenon from inside while coming from elsewhere will probably notice peculiarities and other matters of significance that 'natives' often take for granted and upon which they will pass no commentary. As I am no longer a resident of Harlow I can regard it with the eyes of a 'stranger' while able to retain an otherwise empathetic perspective.
2. Secondly, the sketch reveals my ambivalence towards urban environments of which I must take care lest it bias the research. I am not anti-urban – far from it. Many cities I regard as highly stimulating environments that are enjoyable to explore. I welcome the opportunities they offer – entertainment, work, culture and the sheer exuberance and diversity of human society at its most intense. Nor would I want to live in rural isolation away from the splendours that towns and cities provide. Yet, simultaneously, I prefer access to countryside and the possibility of escaping the turbulence of urban living that it can provide. Whether this preference wholly derives from my upbringing in Harlow or as an outcome of my wider cultural inheritance I am not sure. Nevertheless, I believe Harlow's proximity to and merger with surrounding countryside

has had some influence.

3. My third conclusion is similar to the previous one in that it refers to my ambivalence towards the 'modern' construction of urban environments. More than once I mention that a place appears 'organic' and 'authentic' rather than 'artificial' – words I have picked up during my academic studies but which, I believe ably describe sentiments I have always applied to particular places. Certainly, living in a town in which almost the entire environment was 'planned' has made me conscious of such contrivances. And it is only in contrast to my experiences of less planned urban environments that makes me sceptical to the success of such ambitious projects. I am, in short, in the advantageous position of being neither a whole-hearted admirer or bitter critic of modern architecture and town-planning – something that, I hope, lends my research greater balance.
4. Finally, I believe my upbringing and residency in Harlow has made me 'place-sensitive'. Whenever I encounter somewhere new I always focus upon the appearance, atmosphere and *genius loci* of the place before assessing what 'utilities' it has to offer. It is probably such place 'sensitivity' that led me to conduct this research. It is also something of which I should remain aware lest I assume that it is something all residents of Harlow necessarily share.
5. Perhaps most significantly, the above sketch provides just one indication of how I related to a particular place not as a series of 'responses' to environmental variables that 'triggered' predictable behaviour patterns but according to a whole complex of memories, associations, emotions and other 'significations'. What, to an outside observer with little or no direct experience of Harlow or other New Town but possessed of a knowledge gleaned from Environmental Criminology, might appear transparently 'problematic' – the 'concealing woods' at the end of my childhood cul-de-sac for example – meant something wholly different to

me who has 'lived' that particular environment. What might appear, in hindsight, a planning mistake that eases the occurrence of crime might represent something that satisfied certain of my 'needs' and led me to interpret the same environment as pleasurable. Thus, the above sketch simply indicates how a 'Humanistic' rather than 'Problem-Oriented' approach can reveal levels of signification and valuation that an apparently objective scientific approach might easily overlook.

# **Chapter Seven**

## **Fear and Crime in a New Town Neighbourhood**



In the heart of Mark Hall North stands an old church, St Mary's at Latton, partially obscured from outside by a surrounding clump of trees although its towering spire is visible from most parts of the surrounding neighbourhood. The dates on the few headstones in the adjacent graveyard, mostly from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, reveal the building's antiquity. Before this church is a large open expanse of greenery gently sloping down towards a row of houses on one side and the local primary school on the other. A cycle track cuts through this green space but cars and other large motor vehicles can only move on roads around its perimeter. Here and there are more trees and patches of shrubbery but otherwise the space is open for light recreational usage. Near the school, enclosed by low iron railings and a gate is a playground, the only obvious physical human interruption within what is apparently 'natural' parkland.

But this open space is no more 'natural' than the roads and buildings on its perimeter – it is an outcome of conscious design. Photographs taken before the New Town's construction show the old church and some of the trees still growing in the adjacent parkland. Their survival, however, was considered by the town's designers as a necessary allowance and a fundamental element in their plans. For the church, parkland and surrounding buildings are meant to evoke a particular image and symbolise the town's social vision. If it were not for the obvious 'modernity' of the adjacent buildings the space might easily be mistaken for a traditional English Village Green.

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century the 'Traditional English Village' has become a metaphor signifying a mode of life lost within the industrial city. It is, for example, a favourite 'chocolate box' image suggesting a place untouched by the pace of modernity. The sky, in such images, is always cerulean blue with obligatory fluffy and apparently motionless clouds. Trees are laden with leaves or are in full blossom. A stream may gently flow beneath the graceful arch of some stone bridge upon which children joyfully play. Few other people are present – no crowds, no queues, no congestion – and those visible appear to occupy their days in amiable chat with neighbours or attend to some trade that

belongs to yesteryear - the Blacksmith or Drayman, the Milkmaid or Country Squire. Cottages are thatched and their windows never without a bunch of colourful flowers that extend around the doorways. No grass is greener, no field of wheat more yellow and ripe for the harvest. It is an image with connotations of continuity where everyday activity is languid, relations between people are intimate and human habitation merges with nature. Carts rather than cars occupy the roads; no TV aerials perch on roofs, or electricity pylons punctuate the horizon. Even if the people adorn contemporary styles of dress, the overall scene suggests something essentially 'pre-modern' in which tradition and traditional ways of behaving remain dominant. Everything appears sedate. There is no apparent rush, no possibility of sudden jolts or surprises against which the person must remain ever vigilant. The surrounding landscape enhances a lethargic atmosphere in which, again, no one can expect the out-of-the-ordinary to occur. Moreover, it is clear that the people within these images know each other or, if not, are ready to welcome any stranger with a friendly inquiring smile. It is a scene of co-operation not competition, of intimacy not distance. All know their place and are content to fulfill their social station without question.

It is, therefore, fitting that the design of Mark Hall North has at its centre a space approximating the image of a Traditional English Village - or, more precisely, the social connotations the image expresses - because it is that towards which it aspires. The design of this residential neighbourhood has one primary intention: to provide a physical framework, an appropriate environment, in which community can thrive amidst urban surroundings. And it is such framework, its designers believed, that can overcome the problems of disorder they perceived within the industrial city. Mark Hall North, in short, represents a quintessential realisation of the New Town Idea and its philosophy of Organic Urbanism.

## The New Town Idea and the Neighbourhood Unit Principle

Covering an area of 165 acres in a roughly rectangular shape, Mark Hall North was the first built neighbourhood in Harlow, constructed between 1950 and 1954. A cycle-track marks the area's northern boundary and provides a barrier against a near-by industrial zone. Three arterial roads, to the south, east and west define its remaining boundaries and give the area a distinct, self-enclosed character<sup>27</sup>. With 2,700 residents, Mark Hall North has a low population density in comparison to more conventional urban neighbourhoods and even others within Harlow. To a considerable extent this low density is an outcome of the ample greenery that occurs not just in the centre but throughout the area. Patches of open space, grass verges and small playgrounds abound. Small roads grant access to motor vehicles but busy traffic remains predominantly outside on the boundary defining perimeter roads. A short row of shops – or what in Harlow is called a 'hatch' – a school, pub, museum and two churches provide some source of local employment but, otherwise the area is wholly residential. With these details, the design layout of Mark Hall North closely adheres to a planning model that became a core principle of the Post-War New Town movement: the 'Neighbourhood Unit'.

In this chapter I want to consider the 'Neighbourhood Unit Principle', its compatibility with the New Town Idea and its key design elements as manifest in Mark Hall North. But more than this, I also want to examine how the design of this neighbourhood impacts upon its residents' experiences of crime within the area's public spaces together with a broader consideration of how the environment meets their needs or otherwise. My discussion draws upon a series of interviews I conducted with a sample of these residents, from reading local newspaper archives and from my own personal observations and hermeneutic analysis.

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<sup>27</sup> Because the Altham Grove 'Housing Group' lies across the eastern boundary road I shall not consider it in the following discussion although, administratively it is a part of Mark Hall North.

The Neighbourhood Unit Principle is a cross pollination of British Garden City design themes with an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American town-planning proposal for the redevelopment of the New York Region. It originates from the writings of Perry (1929), a sociologist with a particular interest in urban planning and was first applied by Henry Wright and Clarence Stein at Radburn, in New York State. Both were admirers of Howard's Garden City model and were sympathetic to its social ambitions. According to Golany (1976) the design of Neighbourhood Units should satisfy five social purposes: (i) to introduce physical order into an otherwise 'fragmented' and 'chaotic' urban aggregate; (ii) to provide a physical foundation for 'face-to-face' contact and overcome urban anonymity through encouraging a sense of community; (iii) to allow people to establish local loyalties and attachments and offset the personal detachment often evident in large cities especially through 'extensive social and residential mobility'; (iv) to 'stimulate personal feelings of identity, security, stability and rootedness in a threatening world; (v) provide a local training ground for the development of local loyalty. In short, the principle is a planning device for the overcoming of urban anomie and it resonates with modernistic town planning models in general and Organic Urbanism particularly.

Overall, the design of neighbourhood units intends to provide the infrastructure for community development and cohesion. To its supporters, 'community' is not something that can emerge through the provision of appropriate architecture and urban design alone. Nevertheless, they contend that a neighbourhood unit can deliver a critical stepping-stone without which a community may never emerge given the occurrence of urban forces which might so easily undermine it. As Golany says: "Perry's main goal in the neighbourhood was to produce social interaction, and the physical layout was a means to this end" (*ibid* p187) and according to Gibberd, Harlow's chief planner and principle designer of Mark Hall North:

The object of arranging the town's housing in the form of neighbourhoods is to enable the family unit to combine, if it so wishes, with other families into a community which has definite social contacts and a recognisable physical unity (Gibberd 1963 p255).

Indeed, community development through such neighbourhood design intends to reinforce the satisfaction of family needs and child-rearing. The intimacy and convenience of the neighbourhood unit offers what its advocates hoped would become a secure environment within which children can play, attend early school and learn from others around them – something, they believed is often lacking in the large city. Hence, the neighbourhood unit, they thought, should contain a sufficient population to support various civic amenities and lend the area a prevailing urban 'feel' while not exceeding a size that might hinder the establishment of close bonds between people. Perry's proposal was to keep population just high enough to sustain a local primary school (*Perry op cit* Chapter 3). He hesitates in giving any precise figure, probably because he was aware that school sizes vary between countries. But in Britain this would imply that the neighbourhood unit should house about 2,500 residents – the approximate size of Mark Hall North. Making the primary school the focal point of the neighbourhood unit, however can yield, its proponents claim, benefits beyond just the setting of demographic limits.

The undisputed reason for making schools for younger children an integral part of the neighbourhood is that education is based on both family and school life. With the school building within easy reach of the home there is every chance for contact between parent and teacher; and of school being accepted by children as a natural part of their existence – the same children playing together out of school hours, and the buildings not being in some foreign place to be visited for certain hours only during the week (*Gibberd op cit* p255).

In this emphasis, the Neighbourhood Unit Principle continues an American reform tradition in which the school is understood as the key to a healthy community and more than just an institution solely responsible for educating children. J.H. Ward, for example, proposed that the local school also become a "...public lecture centre, branch library, public art gallery, festival centre, motion picture theatre, vocation centre and employment bureau and public health

office” (Herbert 1963 p168). It is a proposal of which the Victorian ‘urban missionary’ and campaigner for ‘Rational Recreation’ would surely approve. Although Ward’s ambitions were never met in any actual neighbourhood, the placement of the primary school at the centre of most New Town Neighbourhoods largely conforms to his ideals.

Although the local primary school should help establish the neighbourhood unit's size its ‘success’, its chief advocates suggest, depends upon other design features. Geographically, for example, they believe, a neighbourhood unit must serve the needs of the pedestrian over that of the motorist<sup>28</sup>. It must satisfy -

...the requirement that each element in the area...be within walking distance from every other, for once one has to board a bus or to get out a motor car, one has the sense of leaving one’s particular area and going to a foreign one (Gibberd *op cit* p256).

Roads, they insist, must remain unobtrusive and never impair the ‘village’ atmosphere of the neighbourhood. Thus according to Gibberd, the area should not exceed a  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile radius with all parts accessible within 10 minutes based upon a “...walk with a dragging child at 4mph” (*ibid* p257).

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<sup>28</sup> A clear example of the Humanist leanings of Harlow’s architects and designers. In contrast to Le Corbusier and his arch-modernist followers, the design of Harlow always endeavours to put human need before that of technology.

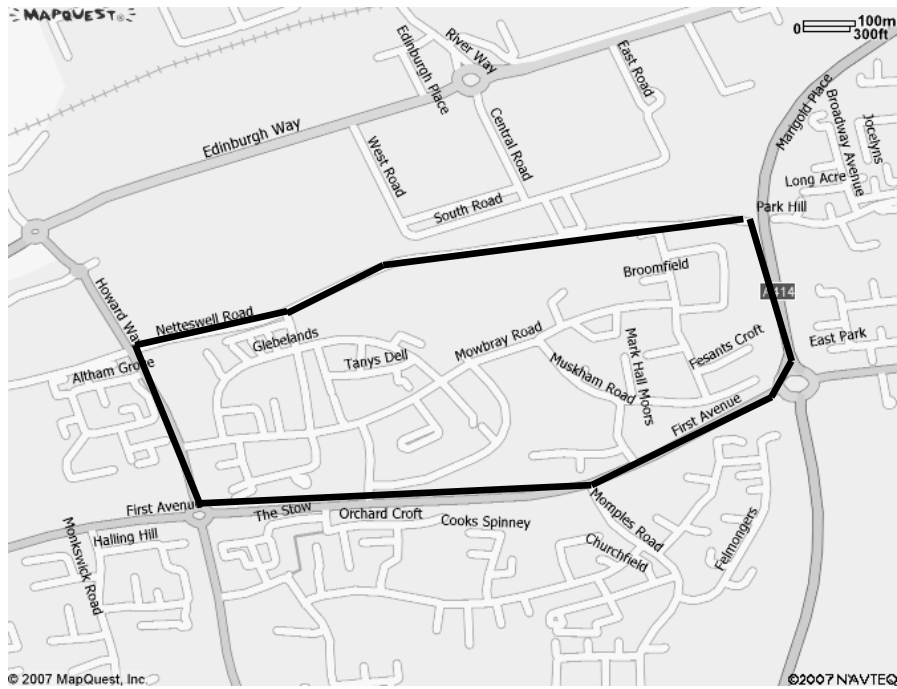


Fig 3 - Map Outlining Area of Mark Hall North

This requirement also implies the provision of local shops catering to the neighborhood resident's everyday needs, a pub (in Britain) or its equivalent, a health centre, branch library and other civic amenities. With these facilities available, the hope is that residents will have fewer reasons for leaving their neighbourhood and can meet their everyday needs by taking a short walk during which they might, perhaps, make contact with neighbours and others they know. It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that advocates of the neighbourhood unit principle want to provide an urban public realm yet one where the problematic intrusion of strangers and the attendant anonymity which can foster disorder is negligible. Whether or not this is a self-defeating ideal is something to which I shall attend later.

Further collective identity, these advocates also propose, can arise from the clear demarcation of neighbourhood boundaries. A neighbourhood's distinctiveness, they acknowledge, may derive from some landscape feature or other prominent landmark that becomes the community's totem. In the absence, however, of such features the provision of easily definable boundaries can help residents distinguish between 'inside' and 'outside'. The

neighbourhood thereby becomes an identifiable 'place' whose members are better able to experience it as 'home'<sup>29</sup>. The chief cognitive 'function' of boundaries, they suggest, is to differentiate between the 'inside' and 'outside' of any specific place. It is difficult, they argue, to identify different areas as distinct places if they merge into each other: instead the perceiver will probably recognise both areas as one place. The stronger or more conspicuous the boundary is, therefore, the greater will it facilitate cognitive legibility. Attachment to place, they might conclude with reference to current 'Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design' models, (and especially those that draw upon principles of Defensible Space) the willingness to 'defend it', survey activity that occurs within it and enjoy any sense of belonging to it, depends significantly upon the presence of distinct boundaries that, first, allow recognition of it as a place. To transcend or pass over a boundary is to symbolically leave a place with which people can identify and enter another to which they have less attachment. To declare that people come 'from the other side of the tracks' or live 'over there' implies the recognition of place boundaries. The boundary, they might also accept, invites emotional associations that can arouse either personal anxiety or security. By passing through or transcending a boundary people may believe they are entering an area in which they expect to encounter danger or safety. Although boundaries do not necessarily involve physical obstruction or impediment to movement, their impact may arouse definite symbolic feelings and expectations. The design of neighbourhood unit, then, according to its proponents, must make the distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' clear.

Finally, Perry's 'vision' for neighbourhood design insists upon the provision of plentiful Open Space and the inclusion of meeting halls or other community buildings (Perry 1929 *op cit* chapters 4 and 5). It is noteworthy however, that for Perry, such open space should serve light recreational purposes and that community gathering is to occur 'indoors' within dedicated buildings in which strangers are unlikely to venture. As the provision of open space is a design feature characterising the whole town and not just neighbourhoods units I shall

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 10



discuss its public realm implications in a later chapter. It is sufficient, here, to note that for Perry and his followers the provision of open space was primarily an aesthetic rather than social virtue although one that might hopefully augment the pride local residents take in their neighbourhood and enhance their attachment to it.

The design of Mark Hall North remains highly faithful to Perry's original Neighbourhood Unit Principle. Harlow's design endeavours to encourage a hierarchy of loyalties and, thus, contains numerous neighbourhood units as places of local attachment. However, this neighbourhood, like others in Harlow, is further sub-divided into Housing Groups and Architectural Enclosures as mechanisms for further fostering even closer bonds of familiarity and identification.

To achieve distinctiveness and enhance identification each housing group has its own architectural style. All possess a "...marked individuality in character...imprinted on the area" (Gibberd 1953 p261). Furthermore, to avoid stylistic uniformity within the neighbourhood unit as a whole, separate architects were responsible for designing different housing groups each chosen for their reputation as stylistic innovators (Gibberd *et al* 1980).

There can be no doubts that this method of housing group design has given the town variety and the people a wide choice of homes to live in. Contrasts between one area and another were often confused by later in-filling and by the Ministry's [Town and Country Planning] insistence (in the interests of conserving the use of scarce traditional building materials) that a percentage of the dwellings should be standard 'system built' types, like the Wimpey 'no fines' concrete house. Nonetheless, each area does have a distinct character and one notices the change when passing from one to another (Gibberd *et al* 1980 p105).

Tanys Dell and the Glebelands are two of the neighbourhood's largest housing groups and lie adjacent to each other in the Northeastern corner of the area. Both began construction in April 1950 and were complete by the end of 1953 and the spring of 1954. A small road divides the two housing groups making

each accessible to traffic. A grass verge instead of curbs, however, gives this road the appearance of a country lane (see fig 4). Although an apparently superficial aspect of the neighbourhood plan – seemingly of utilitarian significance only – this separation of the two housing groups is a necessary contribution to establishing community identification. No physical barrier keeps the two housing groups apart, but perhaps at an unconsciously symbolic level the ‘lane’ creates a recognisable distinction between them: that one side belongs to this group and the other side to that. Such distinctiveness, as already noted above, is further developed by the use of separate architects to design each housing group. Tanys Dell, for example, was designed by Maxwell Fry who, at the time of its construction was an ‘up and coming’ architect but already with a reputation for distinctively modern design. Indeed, the frequent employment of innovative architects throughout the design of Harlow lends the town its modernistic image while the Masterplan and general design principles allows it to retain the ‘medievalism’ commensurate with a *biotechnic organic urbanism*.

Set back from the Mowbray Road (the neighbourhood’s distributor conduit) and shielding the remainder of the housing group behind is a solid, three-storey block of flats. This block acts as a strong marker dividing the housing group from others in the neighbourhood. On either side of this block are grassy areas with no specific purpose other than to allow light recreation and the beautification of the area. The colour scheme of this block is the same as the houses behind – a sort of light brown. All the buildings share a rectangular shape with no sloping roofs. Conduits pass through the block of flats providing easy pedestrian access to all parts of the group.

By contrast, the construction of cul-de-sacs offers an alternative design style evident throughout Glebelands: one that eschews the ‘block’ approach of Tanys Dell in favour of greater architectural angularity. The houses in Glebelands also display, predominantly, reddish brick facades in contrast to the adjacent group’s more light brown hues.



**Fig 4- A 'Country' Lane Dividing Two Housing Groups**



**Fig 5 - Open Space Fronting Tany's Dell Housing Group**

**It is worth noting that cul-de-sacs occur throughout Harlow, a design choice facilitating enclosure and, with it, potentially greater levels of place attachment and a corresponding enhancement of communal identification. Architectural**

enclosure, in fact, occurs throughout the two housing groups in the form of squares, (formed, usually, by houses surrounding an open, green area reminiscent of the famous Bloomsbury Squares in London but without the same prestige), courtyards, together with the aforementioned cul-de-sac, as shown in figure 6 below. The general layout of the two housing groups evinces the influence of Sitte (1965). His short chapter on 'Streets', for example, offers guidance on establishing neighbourhood identity and pride in place. The ideal street, he claims, should "...form a completely enclosed unit" as a means of inducing personal happiness and the reduction of anxiety.

The more one's impressions are confined within it, the more perfect will be its tableau: one feels at ease in a space where the gaze cannot be lost in infinity (Sitte 1965 p61).

Thus the street curvature found in many medieval towns, which prevents the gaze becoming lost, is also discernible within the layout of Mark Hall North (see figure 6).



Fig 6 - Street Curvature in Glebelands

The Mowbray Road crosses east-west bisecting the neighbourhood. Flanking either side of this road is Tanys Dell primary school and Ward Hatch, a small

parade of shops now consisting of a general grocery store and a Take-Away restaurant. Next to Ward Hatch is a Christian Science meeting-house. The road also passes by the parkland fronting St-Marys-At-Latton church. Smaller roads lead off into the various housing groups most of which terminate into cul-de-sacs. Thus, all parts of the neighbourhood remain accessible by road although the motorcar is never able to overwhelm pedestrian traffic or hinder face-to-face interaction. The fact that vehicles now line these side streets, occasionally blocking the movement of other vehicles, shows that the neighbourhood's designers had no idea of the growth of car ownership in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Gibberd and his colleague's intentions regarding traffic, however, remain clear:

At the time of the Mark Hall North development plan, most housing estates were designed on the basis of the road pattern on to which the buildings were fitted. They still are in most speculative estates. We believed that housing design begins with the grouping of dwellings and from that the architect will determine the road plan. Therefore the only road shown on the development plan was a spine road running east to west through the heart of the site...with two connections to First Avenue (Gibberd *et al* 1980).

Indeed, another cycle track that winds a path through the open area connecting Temple Fields with shops and services at The Stow expresses Gibberd's preference for more intimate and community friendly modes of locomotion. The design of Mark Hall North prioritises the pedestrian and not the motor car.

Population is the lowest in the town (at 35 people per acre<sup>30</sup>) fulfilling the objective to avoid overcrowding with its attendant social and psychological problems. Yet, despite these design and demographic features, the area of Mark Hall North remains predominantly urban.

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30 N.B. Subsequent pressure for more housing led to the design of other neighbourhoods within Harlow with population densities of about 50 people per acre (Gibberd *et al* 1980 p104). Mark Hall North, therefore, conforms to the town architect's original design intentions.

In devising the landscape design we have to take care that we do not introduce so much open space that the area becomes an even mixture of landscape and building. In a very low density area the architecture is entirely subordinated to the landscape, but if an urban character is desired the aim must surely be to plan well built-up areas in sharp contrast with open spaces (Gibberd 1953 p258).

One means to achieve a sufficiently 'urban' population density without suffering the consequences of crowding was the introduction of flat maisonettes and tower blocks. The Lawn, a nine-storey structure adjacent to the Mark Hall Moors housing group, was notably Britain's first built tower block. With its distinctive 'butterfly' shape and positioning between seven oak trees, it remains faithful to the surrounding architectural ethos while providing much accommodation.

The success of The Lawn led to a plan for placing tower blocks as part of the town's overall scene. It showed them sited at the centres, where they would increase the quality of urbanity and because small families often prefer to live near a busy environment, and sited on the main approach roads to the Town Centre where they would both act as a visual focus and contrast with the open landscape (Gibberd *et al* 1980 p107).

The presence of this tower block, however, does not draw any strong influence from Radiant City design. The architectural differences are too great. The Lawn stands alone, kept company only by a few Oak Trees and adjacent houses. It is not especially tall (nine stories high) and it is not one of a series. The nearest block to it, Stort Tower, is on the opposite side of the neighbourhood. All other buildings are comparatively low with only two or, occasionally three stories. Throughout Harlow, similar high rise blocks punctuate the environment but there is none of the monumentality that characterizes the Radiant City. Furthermore, The Lawn has a distinctive design. Most Radiant City tower blocks in accordance with 'Internationalist' disdain for ornamentation are solidly rectangular in shape. The Lawn by contrast has a 'butterfly' design with three separate wings. Thus, although small, the apartments within the structure appear relatively autonomous rather than mere microcosms of a monolithic whole. It is low, it has an interesting shape that merges with the surrounding space, and it is a punctuation mark – a landmark, in Lynch's terminology (see

Chapter ten), that intends to further enhance the area's legibility.



Fig 7 – The Lawn

How, then, does the neighbourhood's design and especially its attempt to foster a sense of place, legibility and community attachment, impact upon crime within Mark Hall North?

## The Experience of Crime and Disorder in Mark Hall North

A case-study of Mark Hall North as a typical neighbourhood unit can provide several useful lessons when considering the continuing viability of the New Town Idea as a model for future urban development in Britain in accordance with the Government's stated objective of creating 'safe' environments. As the first built neighbourhood in Harlow, this residential area is a quintessential product of the New Town philosophy and manifests several of its most fundamental ideals. Examining the impact of its design, therefore, upon the experience of crime can help assess its 'success' or otherwise as a sustainable community that future developers may want to consider.

An initial examination of the relevant crime statistics for Mark Hall North does not offer much encouragement. Like the rest of Harlow, the neighbourhood has a crime rate comparable if not worse than other urban environments that did not emerge through the application of any 'grand' planning vision. Detailed Crime figures for Mark Hall North are, however, unavailable. Instead the Essex Police record crime by 'beats' within the town which usually cover more than one neighbourhood. The relevant 'beat' for Mark Hall North also includes three other 'wards' each of which corresponds to two neighbourhood units. The figures for 2001, as an example, show a crime rate consistently high in comparison to other areas of the town (see Box 4) and even higher in relation to Essex as a whole. The collation of data, however, makes it difficult to assess the degree to which this crime rate relates to issues of environmental design – a point compounded by the fact that official figures only register crimes known to and recorded by the police rather than all that actually occurs. Given that two of the wards included within the same Beat as Mark Hall North lie adjacent to the town's central shopping area and its greater opportunities for crime may bias the overall figures and suggest a 'crime profile' for the neighbourhood that is not accurate. The Essex Police's 'Crime Map' (available on-line)<sup>31</sup>, however, is more specific and makes data available for the ward that encompasses Mark Hall North and that is most distant from the town centre. Together the crime rate for this ward in comparison to the Essex area as a whole is described as 'Above Average'. How much of this is due to crimes that typically occur within public space is uncertain although the rate of 'anti-social behaviour' – an offense category covering misdemeanours that are usually 'public' in character – is one standard deviation point above the mean for Essex. Although considerable caution is necessary when interpreting these figures it seems reasonable, then, to conclude that the original design aspirations for Mark Hall North as a place where strong community attachment should inhibit 'disorder' remain significantly unmet.

| <b>Beat G11C</b><br>Netteswell and Mark Hall | <b>No.</b> | <b>% of</b><br>Crime <sup>1</sup> | <b>Beat Rank</b><br><b>(out of 8)</b> |
|--|------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| All Crime                                    | 1,578      | 21.7                              | 1                                     |
| Burglary in Dwelling                         | 66         | 20.1                              | 2                                     |
| Burglary other than in Dwelling              | 102        | 21.7                              | 1                                     |
| Theft from Motor Vehicle                     | 141        | 24.0                              | 1                                     |

31 At: <http://essex.crimemapper.co.uk/map/mark-hall/> (Accessed on 12.03.09)



|                              |     |      |   |
|------------------------------|-----|------|---|
| Theft & Taking Motor Vehicle | 81  | 21.8 | 1 |
| Vehicle Interference         | 43  | 32.3 | 1 |
| Theft of Pedal Cycle         | 35  | 27.6 | 1 |
| Shoplifting                  | 114 | 20.2 | 2 |
| Criminal Damage              | 392 | 22.9 | 1 |
| Offences against the Person  | 248 | 19.2 | 2 |
| Robbery                      | 17  | 26.6 | 1 |
| Rape                         | 3   | 15.8 | 2 |
| Indecent assault on a female | 7   | 17.1 | 2 |
| Woundings etc.               | 78  | 19.4 | 3 |

**Box 4: Crimes in Nettweswell and Mark Hall Beat**

Any assessment of the design of Mark Hall North as an instrument of crime prevention must take account of these figures. To claim, however, that design is directly responsible for the area's 'disappointing' crime rate is highly debatable: a host of other social and economic factors are, no doubt, equally if not more significant. Yet, regardless of what causes crime the apparent failure of Mark Hall North to inhibit its occurrence indicates a 'failure' in terms of the original and utopian ambitions of its designers.

But this apparently reasonable conclusion may miss an even more significant point – one that only becomes apparent by adopting a Humanistic perspective. After finishing each interview with a sample of Mark Hall North's residents I usually revealed that my research was focused upon crime in Harlow. Statistical evidence, I mentioned, suggested a comparatively high crime rate for their neighbourhood. Consistently, the response was one of surprise. The following excerpt typifies this reaction:

"Really? I didn't know that. I mean, I know round here has its troubles but I thought it was OK. Like, I thought it would be over the other side of the town. You know, round Staple Tye

...over that way. I always thought that's where most of the trouble was...round here always seems quiet. Kids sometimes get up to a bit of mischief but nothing much...not really crime. Yeah, I'm a bit surprised really. You sure"? (From transcript of Interview Five)

No, I'm not sure. But, such statements of surprise are, in themselves important. Regardless of how high the crime rate actually is, nearly all the residents of Mark Hall North with whom I spoke do not regard it as a major problem. Repeatedly, they expressed few reservations about moving through the area and were not deterred by the possibility of criminal victimisation. The one exception was a male pensioner who felt the neighbourhood had gone 'downhill' since he and his wife had moved there forty three years previously. While happy to walk the area at any time of day, he stated his reluctance to allow his partner such freedom 'unaccompanied'. Yet, such feelings were not reciprocated: his wife declared an equal lack of fear regarding crime. Like other residents, both did not regard the neighbourhood as 'especially' dangerous and certainly safer than the typical London neighbourhood. This, it seems, is a significant finding for if the surprise expressed above is typical then it is possible that the design of Mark North as a neighbourhood unit has had some positive effect even if its impact on the occurrence of crime is apparently minor.

Much criminological discussion insists upon regarding 'fear of crime' as a significant problem even if it does not equate to actual crime rates. Even if the actual threat is low, any perception that crime is high within a neighbourhood is liable to reduce the quality of life of its residents. A pensioner who remains indoors rather than venture into public space through fear of crime experiences a 'problem' regardless of how 'realistic' his or her perceptions. This point is, without doubt, correct. But, it also applies in reverse – we must also take seriously any declaration of 'low' fear' even if actual crime rates are comparatively high and attend to its possible reasons. Thus, in assessing the possible impact of Mark Hall North's design upon the experience of crime two related issues appear to demand particular attention: (a) the apparently high crime rate in comparison to other urban areas and; (b) the apparent low of fear it arouses amongst its residents.

My research suggests one key factor, the understanding of which can help explain both issues. This factor derives from the residents of Mark Hall North common experience of 'insiderness' in relation to the neighbourhood in which they live and the attachment they have towards it. Often, for example, they describe it as 'better' than both the typical London environment and other neighbourhoods within Harlow. The ample greenery and plentiful open spaces are regarded as a particular source of pride and something which visitors from 'outside' will often comment favorably upon.

"Everyone I know who visits me in Harlow say...I can't believe...I think when you leave you get used to it but...I can't believe the amount of green space in Harlow...You wouldn't believe you were in a New Town...that you weren't further out from London because there is so much green space and it's lovely". (From Transcript of Interview Twelve).

The greenery and general appearance of Mark Hall North, my research findings consistently show, is something most residents appreciate and it is something that gives the neighbourhood an identity which they recognise as distinctive. 'Inside' is a place of verdure and a 'pleasant' environment to live in contrast to many urban environments 'outside' that are regarded as dull and dingy. Nobody, with whom I spoke, thought the 'big' city environment was a preferable environment to their own. Yet, neither did anybody regard it as their 'ideal' environment. Most, given the resources, stated their desire to live in a 'properly' rural area. Mark Hall North is experienced as an 'inside' but not one without problems.

Such statements of 'insiderness', moreover, suggest that most residents of Mark North do possess a 'hierarchy of loyalties' commensurate with the town's design intentions. The source of 'trouble' when it does occur within the area, for example, is understood as coming from 'outside'. Several residents spoke, for example, of drug peddlers travelling from London by train, making illicit transactions close to the station and especially within the near-by park or Town-Centre, before returning to their place of origin. A few residents also spoke of

nuisance behaviour during the evening and night-time hours within some of Mark Hall North's 'open spaces', especially the 'parkland' fronting St Mary at Latton's church and a small playground at the centre of the Glebelands Housing Group. But, yet again, the assumption is that those responsible are not residents of the neighbourhood itself – but teenagers from 'elsewhere', for example, purchasing alcohol from 'The Stow' and finding space within the neighbourhood to consume it where they can evade the attention of local police.

"We get visitors who come over to the Park here...generally they come from other areas. And if they cause problems it's because they don't live in this area and so they don't appreciate it. [What sort of problems do you think they cause?] Well breaking bottles on cycle tracks. Using the kiddies play area. Leaving litter. You know they come from the other side of town you know...It's not the people who live here that do that". (From Transcript of interview Fifteen)

Most of my interviewees acknowledge that some anti-social behaviour is the fault of people living within Harlow. But, again, most of these, they maintain, live on the 'other side of town' and rarely come from their own neighbourhood. One particular part of Harlow – the neighbourhoods surrounding the Staple Tye shopping precinct - is regularly mentioned as the chief problem with many residents declaring it a 'no-go' area.

"A lot of the...the ones over by Staple Tye...they look like army barracks...and.....they give off a vibe. They don't...A lot happens there because of the way they are designed....you've got the alleyways. You've got all the underpasses. Whereas if you go into Mark Hall North it's completely different. So obviously that's much more spaced out....Much nicer ...nicer atmosphere....if you go to a lot of the estates over in Staple Tye...their so... you can actually see someone having their breakfast. That's the way they have been designed...a lot of alleyways...a lot of walkways that seem very intrusive". (From Transcript of Interview Twelve).

“Generally you get more trouble up in that area..... the north er the south part of Harlow. There’s lots of things that tend to attract er the wrong type of people or people I wouldn’t like to live next door to”. (From transcript of Interview Five)

Indeed, so strong is this belief that ‘South’ Harlow has become something of a symbolic antithesis that defines their identification with their own neighbourhood: the ‘outside’ that defines Mark Hall North as an ‘inside’. Place is not only meaningful because of what it is but also because of what people believe it is not.

So adamant are these statements that ‘trouble’ is a problem that arrives from ‘Outside’ that I thought it useful to briefly investigate one of these ‘external’ places from where it supposedly derives and compare it to Mark Hall North. To this purpose I went to Bishopsfield, Housing Group in the heart of South Harlow, which many of my Mark Hall North interviewees regard as the epitome of danger – a place, they felt, lacking any community spirit where personal attack is always a pervasive threat. Yet, after conducting a few interviews I found that many of Bishopsfield’s residents take as much pride in their neighbourhood as its detractor’s from Mark Hall North take in their own. Indeed, such expressions of pride are, if anything, greater.

Built in 1966, several years after the construction of Mark Hall North, Bishopsfield won many prizes for its architectural design (by the then young and soon to be famous, Michael Neylan) and gained considerable international acclaim drawing many visitors from far afield. Initially, it was the innovative character of Bishopsfield’s architecture that led ‘outsiders’ to appraise it positively – one that, at first glance, appears to draw more inspiration from the ultra-modernistic ‘Internationalist’ movement from which Radiant City designs emerged than any style in harmony with the New Town Idea. Yet, such appearances are deceptive for, despite its avant-garde appearance, the Housing Group conforms, in the main, to the Neighbourhood Unit Principle.

A number of lanes radiate from a central hub like spokes on a bicycle wheel.

Aligning each of these spokes are doorways to residential 'terrace' homes offering little clue as to what lies behind. The pathways are relatively narrow, supposedly reminiscent of a Spanish village although the building materials and uniformity characterising the frontage of these homes is thoroughly modernistic in appearance rather than what might be described as 'Traditional Iberian'. Built on a slope, each spoke converges on the hub at the estate's highest point. This 'hub' is roughly semi-circular with further residential apartments on its periphery built over a subterranean garage area that serves much of the neighbourhood's parking needs. Fronting these homes and also over the garage is a fairly wide concrete concourse dotted with trees, statues and stairways leading to the areas below. From behind, these same homes peer over the radiating lanes beneath and towards surrounding grassland and shrubbery.

Largely owing to this distinctive design, Bishopsfield has retained a core community with many of its members declaring a strong commitment to the

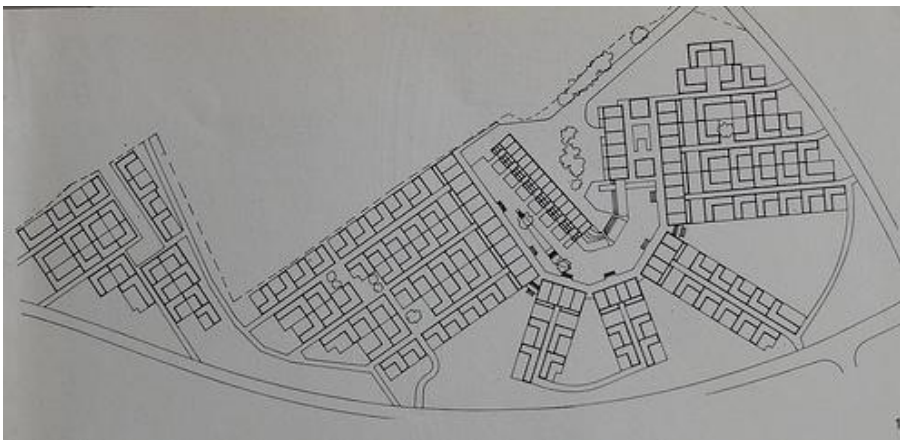


Fig 8 - Design Outline of Bishopsfield

neighbourhood. Indeed, today Bishopsfield boasts something of an active middle-class and quasi-bohemian population, many of whom were original residents of the estate. Members of this group are proud of their area and choose to remain even though they possess the means to live elsewhere. One ex-schoolteacher, with whom I spoke, consciously sought accommodation in

Bishopsfield because of its architectural 'peculiarity'. Partially, such attachment derives from the interior design of the buildings in which living areas gather around and open onto small garden courtyards providing something akin to the Garden-City ideal in microcosm. In conversation with several other residents of Bishopsfield, many expressed delight in these garden courtyards and the light they shed upon the interior of their homes. Annually, a number of residents 'open' their gardens to outside visitors in a further display of local pride. Nevertheless, most of these same residents also appraise highly the neighbourhood as a whole and openly advocate the aesthetic value of its architectural design. To some extent, a community 'spirit' prevails *because of* and not despite its rather negative reputation with 'outsiders' – a point that echoes the defense of Harlow by its residents in general against what they regard as its 'unfair' image. Sporadically, very active and vocal Residents Association stage festivals, recalling similar events in Bishopsfield's early history, with music and other performances occurring on the concrete concourse. Indeed, from casual observations on my visits to the neighbourhood, there was always plentiful activity occurring on this concourse – children playing, women chatting on doorsteps, men repairing vehicles down below – to suggest a fairly vibrant community atmosphere. At no point did I feel in any danger and neither, apparently, do its residents. One pensioner expressed such feelings of security by declaring her willingness to 'walk dogs at midnight' – a phrase that echoed the same lack of concern regarding crime made by residents of Mark Hall North.

Why, then, do the residents of Mark Hall North typically consider this neighbourhood with such antipathy? The answer, I believe, sheds light on the character of their own neighbourhood attachment and also the 'problems' it experiences. From 'outside' the design of Bishopsfield may encourage negative assessments. The design certainly makes the Housing Group a distinct and recognisable place – somewhere that stands apart and above from its surroundings. Visitors know immediately when they are within the Housing Group and where its boundaries lie. This distinctiveness (or, 'legibility') induces, however, two responses. Situated upon a hill-slope with its uppermost buildings seemingly surveying the surroundings below, Bishopsfield possibly has, in the

eyes of many 'outsiders', a formidably imposing, even menacing image. Compounding this image are the compact lanes converging towards the centre suggesting an impenetrably dark interior. From the perspective of 'Defensible Space Theory'<sup>32</sup>, Bishopsfield supplies numerous examples of poor visual security. Inside, there are few windows or other means of surveillance that look out upon the pedestrian walkways and there are many hidden 'nooks' offering the opportunity for 'offender-concealment'. The subterranean garage area curves around the central hub creating several blind-spots and a separation from the daily activities that might provide 'eyes on the street'. Even the very prominence of the buildings prevents Bishopsfield blending in with its surrounding milieu as per Newman's recommendations<sup>33</sup>. Yet, simultaneously, the same architecture provides its residents with a means of identification allowing a strong community attachment to arise that may well negate its points of weak defensible space. The design, which, despite appearances, firmly adopts the New Town Idea, seems to allow as much 'inside' attachment as that of Mark Hall North.

Why does the design of Mark Hall North foster similar expressions of 'insideness'? Certainly, the establishment of clear boundaries might help although several residents I interviewed appeared uncertain that they exist. All acknowledge Mark Hall North as a distinct 'place' and are happy to designate it by name. But, their identification of an 'inside' relies more upon interior features than any particular boundary line. The boundary, as I shall shortly discuss, exerts another and perhaps more negative influence. It is the interior neighbourhood design that mainly fosters place attachment. No single feature stands out, yet several contribute to the neighborhood's interior identity.

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<sup>32</sup> In chapters Ten and Eleven I discuss Defensible Space Theory in greater detail.

**33** The poor 'outside' reputation of Bishopsfield, however, derives as much from its history as its architectural style. During the 1970s problems with heating led many of its original residents to leave. Vacant properties were, then, often taken up by the local council to rehouse certain families with known problems. The classic vicious spiral of a 'sink estate' then ensued and, for a time, the neighbourhood did experience a real increase in crime and anti-social behaviour. But local community initiatives have largely overcome these problems and it is now unfair to regard Bishopsfield as a 'sink' estate even though many from 'outside' continue to regard it as such.



“Well the most prominent landscape you know is the chimney above this school you know. It stands out quite a long way. And also the Church across the road which is almost a Spanish Redwood...Yeah the Christian Science....very noisy um live music. Um I think if people were dropped in the middle of that field [pointing to the parkland fronting St Mary-at-Lattons Church] and not told where they are going I think they would recognise the church roof...the school, the school itself actually...because that’s quite a landmark.....and then you’ve got the church at the top of the Hill...St Mary’s”. (From Transcript of Interview Sixteen)

“Even when I go over on the aeroplanes from Stanstead airport...they come in this way....you can see the tops, you can find the church you can find the top of Stort Tower quite easily”. (From Transcript of Interview Eleven)

**One resident described the importance of a statue as a point of local identification.**

“The Barbara Hepworth statue. Literally right...because I live in a small block of flats it’s right downstairs...and it’s always had lots of media attention. BBC were there a few weeks ago to interview what we thought of the statue...but no one really knows what it is. But that signifies...that’s like a landmark. So if anyone was to get a cab home or visit for the first time...that’s what to look for is the statue”.(From Transcript of Interview Twelve)

**Such a statement would surely please the designers of Mark Hall North. Sir Frederic Gibberd describes how this statue ‘Contrapuntal Forms’ became a community focal point.**

Barbara Hepworth was adamant that her work must one day go to the Civic centre, but in the meantime, must be placed in a completed environment. We found it a home in our first housing group, in the New Town proper, Glebelands. When many years later, the Trust tried to carry out her wishes, the residents objected so strongly to losing ‘their sculpture’ that it has remained there ever since (Gibberd *et al* 1980 p244.)

**Yet, the real strength of ‘insider’ attachment appears to derive from the**

deliberate creation of *architectural enclosure* within the neighbourhood. Upon asking what constitutes their 'neighbourhood' most residents did not refer to Mark Hall North as a whole or even to specific Housing Groups within it but more to the immediate space adjacent to their homes. 'What' I asked 'do you consider your neighbourhood'?

"It's this little bit here really. It's this little street for me". (From Transcript of Interview Eighteen)

"Right over the other side of the road in the Chantry, my area, you've got a row of houses next to the pub...and I wouldn't say cliquey but it's very tight and friendly. I think the neighbourhood we're talking about is the row of houses I live in...just generally that I think. And the little grassy area that grows in front of it. That's how I see my little bit of neighbourhood. We've got this lot...the Tanys Dell Lot. We've got the Mark Hall Moors lot. Stackfield. They are... I see them as separate. Although I know they're in the same area...That is my area. This is a different area. I see them in little blocks". (From Transcript of Interview Five).

"This square is my neighbourhood. This square is our area. I talk to most people around here. There's some I'm not keen on but you get that in any neighbourhood don't you. Yeah?" (From Transcript of Interview Twenty One)

The experience of these *architectural enclosures* appears to confirm Newman's Defensible Space Theory. These relatively small places afford considerable proprietorial control with residents identifying more closely with them than the neighbourhood as a whole. Not only do these residents 'know' who their neighbours are and can place them within adjacent buildings but they also indicate a willingness to protect them against possible crime or other threats. Moreover, they believe this collective proprietorship provides them with much security.

“Yes we all stick together the lot of us. If there’s a car alarm going off we tend to ignore that but we generally know whose car it is...so we knock on the door and see if everything is alright”. (From Transcript of Interview Five).

“We live together. But if I was to see anything I would go out and say ...or another neighbour would go out and say...so because um..we...we’re...it’s a very small block of flats but it seems the block opposite is where all the trouble is. All the trouble. Where all the children are coming over to our part...destroying it and then going back to theirs’ again...so we all had a word with them to say..’you can’t do this and...one tried to set fire to the hedging around the communal garden and then my friend went out and said ‘you know I’ve got a garden heater a gas canister. Do you know how dangerous it is and she tried to.....she’s not intimidated by young people”. (From Transcript of Interview Twelve).

“In the block we’ve had a prowler...All the neighbours went out to try and chase him erm or kept a lookout to see if anyone was around so I think.....my friend lives on the ground floor so we made the council cut all the bushes down so he couldn’t hide in there...And everyone kept an eye out...And one of my neighbours tried to chase after him but...he had already gone. (From Transcript of Interview Twelve).

**One resident even explained why she felt the spatial enclosures of Mark Hall North afforded better security than Bishopsfield.**

Because, because of the nature of the way they are built, because they are not open. You know if I look out the door I can see that way and I can see that way can’t I. But I can’t look out my door in Bishopsfield for instance. I don’t think I would be able to see everything around...sort of have the full picture and I think those little alleyways have been placed, you know, where young people can congregate where people get bored and do stupid things. I feel safe here but I would feel less safe living in that area, yeah. Definitely. (From Transcript of Interview Twelve).

**Such expressions of immediate attachment may explain the relative absence of fear and even suggests that most architectural enclosures are 'defended' against actual crime. But why, then, does Mark Hall North as a whole apparently evince a comparatively high crime rate? The answer, my research**

indicates, also relates to the same enclosures and the plentiful greenery in which most residents take much pleasure.

A frequent criticism of community as an 'inside' opposed to an 'outside' is that it encourages discrimination and exclusion. Those deemed 'outsiders', this criticism suggests, are forcefully kept apart and, are often subject to racist or other discriminatory prejudice. Racism is certainly not absent amongst Harlow's residents and many well-known members of Far Right political groups have lived or still live within the town. Yet, to regard Harlow's residents as especially intolerant of anyone 'different' is unfair. Nobody I spoke to was overtly racist and most, I suspect, would react badly to any accusation that they are. If racism is a problem, it is no less or more than that of any other town whose population is primarily white and working-class. Attributing this problem to environmental design is too simplistic and overlooks deeper and more profound social fissures which I cannot consider here. Nevertheless, the design of Mark Hall North and other neighbourhood units within Harlow does little to obviate the problem and may even give it some nourishment. For the same design features that appear to facilitate immediate attachment to *architectural enclosures* and 'insider' identification also undermines the neighbourhood's public realm. And it is this that also probably helps explain the neighbourhood's relatively high crime rate even if it is one not arousing much anxiety amongst its residents.

There is little of a public realm within Mark Hall North. An over-riding impression I always got from my various visits to the Neighbourhood was one of quietness. Many of these visits were during the week when, presumably, many of its residents were at work and hence the quietness was of little surprise. But even during my evening visits and once on a sunny, autumnal Saturday afternoon the place was always empty. Not once did anyone inquire as to why I was wandering around without any obvious aim, taking photographs of what most people would consider as the utterly mundane and unremarkable. There was rarely anybody around to make such inquiries even if they were so inclined. Certainly there were too few to constitute a public realm as previously defined.

And even if such quietness was a consequence of residents working elsewhere, that in itself is indicative that no true public realm exists. But whether or not this quietness indicates a failing of the neighbourhood's design is a moot point. Did the designers of Mark Hall North intend to foster a public realm?

The prioritisation of the pedestrian over the motorist and encouragement of face-to-face contact suggests that the designers of this neighbourhood did envisage such a public realm. Moreover, their provision of plentiful open space was, perhaps, partially meant to provide a forum where people can meet. Yet, in other respects the design concept clearly eschews the genuine public realm as something too 'messy' and disorderly: something not compatible with a 'modern' urban environment. With its removal of through roads, industry and commerce and the establishment of boundaries separating it from the surrounding town, it is reasonable to ask: 'who would participate in any public realm other than those who live within the neighbourhood'? Few people from 'outside' will casually pass through – there are no shops of especial note, few workplaces they must attend, no centres of civic government in which they can express their concerns. Given these circumstances it is more surprising that I encountered anyone at all on my visits and not that the neighbourhood was quiet. When 'strangers' do arrive they become a source of concern – they are outsiders. Residents perceive these strangers as sources of trouble, primarily responsible for the neighbourhood's crime and not as contributors to any possible vitality. The consequence, as Jacobs (1961) might have astutely noted had she ever visited the neighbourhood, is an absence of any public network between people who, apart from immediate neighbours, remain unknown to each other. Mark Hall North, in short, is a neighbourhood of semi-private enclaves each evincing semi-private proprietorial control interspersed with open spaces that lends the area a pleasant appearance but within which strangers are unwanted and who are perceived as and occasionally actually are sources of disorder.

Many residents with whom I spoke did not regularly 'walk' through the area or even use the facilities available. None ever went to the local pub. They preferred

to shop 'out of town' and those of employable age, other than one who was the local school caretaker, worked outside the neighbourhood. Despite the provision of accessible walkways, most opted to use a car to meet their everyday needs.

"You see one of the other things that has changed our lives is that we drive everywhere. So I drive past it [Ward Hatch] quite often but we don't...we've lost the art of walking. Especially since the dogs have gone now. That's another reason yeah...there's no animals to walk. So we don't walk that much...around the neighbourhood. [Is it because you think Ward Hatch is too far, it's inconvenient?] There's nothing there that I would want to go...and it's in the wrong direction really". (From Transcript of Interview Sixteen).

Newspaper archives suggest that a local Community Association was successful during the neighbourhood's early years. This, it seems, was a consequence of the town's first settlers 'pioneering' enthusiasm for the New Town Idea. Given the paucity of central facilities these early residents were eager to provide their own entertainment and to encourage their neighborhood's development. But today, no active association exists and the local 'hall' built as an extension to the Tanys Dell Housing Group remains unused for most of the time. Even the primary school fails to attract significant community participation. The Principle of this school spoke of her concern that parents were simply using it as a form of surrogate child-care rather than recognising it as a potential forum for collective identification.

But, although Mark Hall North has no public realm it is surely unfair to regard the design as a failure. It certainly meets several of its intended design objectives and fosters some place attachment and feelings of security and contributes to what most residents regard as a pleasant place to live. But, if by 'success' is meant the absence of disorder then the same design has obvious weaknesses especially with regard to its capacity to sustain an authentic public realm. Fear of crime is low but the means of achieving this also prevents the consolidation of any deeper sense of community, the primary objective of the neighbourhood unit principle.

# **Chapter Eight**

## **The Pleasure of Risky Places: Crime Fear and Harlow's Town Park**

Over one third of Harlow's interior environment is designated as 'open space'. This includes the 'green wedges' that separate each neighbourhood cluster within which are areas of woodland and meadowland grass kept short by grazing horses and other pasture animals. Even a working farm still functions within the heart of the town, its livestock feeding in fields overlooked by modernistic buildings. Together with the grass verges that run parallel with all major roads, the innumerable courtyard lawns around which houses gather and small play areas that intermingle with the town's buildings, Harlow plainly manifests its 'Garden City' heritage. Its 'green' image gains further reinforcement from the close proximity of countryside on all sides: accessible to most residents if they so choose.

Given this abundance of greenery, therefore, the provision of an area of comparatively extensive parkland might appear superfluous. To describe Harlow as a 'town within a park' or a 'city within a garden' is, perhaps, excessive for it retains an abiding urban character. Yet, such descriptions correctly point to the plenitude of available space which may serve the same 'functions' that parks and gardens conventionally serve. Even without its 'Town Park', Harlow would still possess more land for recreational pursuits, walks, solitary contemplation of 'nature' or temporary escape from the 'hurly-burly' of urban society than most towns and cities in Britain. Nevertheless, the provision of a 'Town Park' was always a fundamental aspect of Harlow's design. When Sir Frederic Gibberd first surveyed the agricultural region upon which Harlow was to arise, he identified a particular area as particularly suitable for a park and expended much effort together with the renowned landscape architect, Dame Sylvia Crowe, to ensure its 'appropriate' design. It was never an afterthought, a piece of land left after the construction of the urban environment proper and casually made into something with a park-like appearance but always a core element of the New Town Idea. Covering an area of approximately 164 acres the park is simply too large and prominent within the town to suggest that it has only an incidental purpose. But, what this purpose is and how it helps satisfy the original ambitions of the New Town Idea is not immediately apparent.



Any visitor to the park at nearly any time of year will probably notice one prevailing characteristic: that it 'appears' predominantly empty. On infrequent occasions when it becomes the site for some event or other and on fine days during the school holidays parts of the park become relatively busy. Yet, even at such times few people are present within the remaining parts. It is always possible to achieve complete solitude somewhere in the park and the visitor will seldom need to search far to evade the company of others. If the function is to provide a community 'centre' for the town's population – a public place where they might freely gather – then it is difficult to conclude that the park is anything other than a failure. A critic, for example, might suggest that the park's emptiness is evidence of its unpopularity and that it is a 'wasted' space that could better satisfy alternative needs. Indeed, the critic might draw upon current CPTED thinking to account for the park's apparent unpopularity and condemn it as inherently dangerous. Wherever public space is empty and devoid of 'eyes' able to inhibit anti-social behaviour, such thinking suggests, the possibility of personal attack becomes pervasive and the resulting fear will tend to keep 'legitimate' users away. Thus, the park's seeming unpopularity, the critic will conclude, reflects how people perceive it as threatening.

But to draw such a conclusion, I believe and shall argue in this chapter, is a mistake. The comparative emptiness of the park is not a measure of its unpopularity but actually demonstrates its success in fulfilling the designer's original intentions. Throughout my research the residents of Harlow, contrary to the expectations of a 'problem-oriented' Environmental Criminology, expressed great attachment to those parts of the town which would appear most risky. Perhaps only a 'Humanistic Approach' can begin to understand such an apparent paradox.

Harlow Town Park does not serve the same functions as that of the traditional urban park – given the availability of open space throughout the town it does not need to. But this does not imply it serves no purpose whatsoever. To

adequately assess its 'function' the visitor must first appreciate the park's conformity with the fundamental principles informing the entire New Town Vision and the distinctive ideals of social control it embodies. Whether or not these ideals are naïve is another matter which I shall also discuss – for it is possible that the park simultaneously gains the affections of many Harlow residents while deterring them from actually using it through fear of crime. But, without acknowledging the New Town context in which it occurs it is difficult to properly assess the park's success or otherwise.

An episode in the history of Harlow's local politics perhaps suggests the affection many residents of Harlow hold for 'their' park. In the late 1990s the local council announced plans to 're-develop' a small section of the park using the land for the construction of a privately owned leisure complex. Existing facilities around the town, council spokespeople explained, had become run-down and the building of a fully up-to-date leisure centre upon the park would enhance the quality of life for the town's residents. The residents were unconvinced. A campaign under the banner 'Hands Off Our Park' (H.O.O.P.) demanded the council retract their plans. Protest meetings were held, letters written to the local newspaper and some council sessions disrupted. So successful was this campaign and so widespread was its support throughout the town that, within a matter of months and despite attempts at prevarication, the council's plans were discretely shelved. The Town Park, it seems, is something many residents of Harlow are willing to protect even at the expense of forsaking 'developments' supposedly in their interests and despite the fact that few are regular users of the existing space.

This episode suggests that the park provides a purpose which many of the town's residents appreciate and one fulfilling 'needs' that most traditional urban parks cannot easily deliver. It is well to remember that the New Town Idea represents an attempt to merge rural elements into an urban environment. Although this idea partially derives from a conception of the unrelieved urban environment as physiologically unhealthy it also includes a

moral vision in which access to 'open space' and contact with 'nature' will 'improve' the character of the town's dwellers. Most 'traditional' urban parks arose between 1840 and 1895 as a direct response to the obvious lack of open space available within the rapidly expanding industrial environment (Conway 1991). Such parks, however, were necessarily islands of greenery whose impact came from the contrast with their urban surroundings. That provision of such spaces was also to serve purposes of moral improvement does not render them any the less exceptional within their surroundings. Thus, any visitor is immediately aware of 'entering' and 'exiting' the park and recognises its difference from the adjacent environment. Such awareness of environmental difference, however, is not so readily apparent when entering or leaving Harlow Town Park. It has no distinct boundaries that physically separate the 'inside' from the environment 'outside': no fences or gates restrict access and the park remains accessible at all times. Indeed, on one side, the park 'flows' imperceptibly into the adjacent Hertfordshire countryside rather than adjoining anything obviously urban. As such, Harlow Town Park serves a symbolic purpose indicative of the town-country merger that conforms to the New Town ideal. If it is possible to 'read' any symbolism into the park, then its message is one of continuity rather than contrast.

The design of traditional 19<sup>th</sup> Century urban parks as a 'mechanism' of social control is well documented (see, for example, Conway 1991, Taylor 1994). Their 'success' depends upon continuous usage during times of 'opening' and a capacity to attract a wide range of people while still retaining an impression of spaciousness in contrast to the crowdedness of the city's streets and thoroughfares. Praise for the design of these parks usually refer to the ingenuity by which these two, seemingly incompatible, objectives are met. Thus, the same park might facilitate a range of recreational pursuits, casual walking or the opportunity to experience some tranquillity apart from others all within a relatively narrow compass.

The design of most traditional parks not only attracts users but also helps ensure appropriate usage. 19<sup>th</sup> century promoters of urban parks and the benefactors who made land available within the town or city were typically eager to ensure behaviour within them that was compatible with their own moral values. Parks were to become locations for 'rational recreation', moral improvement and an alternative to the corrupting influence of the street and public tavern (see Chapter Two). Everything about the design of the typical 19<sup>th</sup> Century urban park expresses a compulsion for order. Although they offer patches of 'nature' within the heart of what is often an unremitting urban environment it is of a sort that wholly bespeaks the contrivance and control of mankind. The aesthetic is overwhelmingly 'Classical' from the geometrical precision of walkways that lead the walker past points of 'interest' and activity towards identifiable 'centres' where usually stands a fountain, monument or other structure meant to evoke civic pride, to the careful placement of highly cultivated flowerbeds, topiary or other horticultural display. Park users can contemplate nature and enjoy its splendours without the necessity of ever getting dirty. The purpose of such design, as Taylor comments, is to function as a 'metaphor for civilised society in an age of order'.

...this was...a carefully constructed *image* of nature; an image which embraced and revealed many of the guiding philosophies of the age. This was not a rustic nature; it was not anything which suggested the agricultural landscapes so recently abandoned by many urban dwellers; it was not usually elemental nature, wild and awe-inspiring. It was, in fact, something more civilised and organised. This was nature operating as a metaphor for an ideal and rational society, a spectacle of nature managed and understood (*op cit* p6).

Constant 'guided' usage, however, also helps ensure appropriate behaviour and the satisfaction of the parks moral objectives. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century park offers a place apart from the urban environment in which all users are under the watchful inspection of others. Its compactness allows for recreation but always within the sight-lines of other people. Park benches, for example, usually overlook those parts of the park in which activity is most frequent and are in

locations where any 'transgression' becomes noticeable. Areas of concealment – woodlands and thickets – are scarce. And, of course, these parks close at dusk when the quality of light is most advantageous for misdemeanour.

The demand for social order and 'appropriate' behaviour within the 19<sup>th</sup> Century park was further met by the employment of park-keepers whose duties combined general maintenance with the administration of security (Lambert – date of publication unknown). In later years the 'Parkie' became a synonym for officiousness and a bastion of conservative values, often a figure of ridicule if not contempt for many of the park's visitors. Yet, recent discussions suggest that the presence or re-introduction of park-keepers will make users feel safer and restore the popularity of some parks which now possess a dangerous reputation. By upholding the general image of the park and with special powers to prevent disorderly behaviour and remove offenders the presence of the 'Parkie' suggests, many believe, that it is 'cared for' and that 'misbehaviour' is intolerable.

In most respects traditional urban parks offer a model for current CPTED design. They are controlled spaces offering plentiful natural surveillance and a positive 'image' suggesting considerable proprietorship. It is, therefore, unsurprising that most retain a reputation for safety. One national survey of 'park use' in England<sup>34</sup>, for example shows that two thirds of all adults have visited a park during the previous 12 months although the figure is slightly lower for members of social groups D and E, for ethnic minorities and those with disabilities. 57% of respondents regard the safety of parks as 'good' with a further 34% regarding it as 'fair'. Only 10% felt that safety in urban parks is 'poor'. Women, the survey states express slightly more safety concerns than men although they are more regular users of parks. For those who do not visit parks the primary reasons given are 'no reason to go' and 'too busy'. Fear of crime is a relatively minor reason for avoidance. Another survey conducted by

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34 [Http://www.sportengland.org/use-of-parks-in-england.pdf](http://www.sportengland.org/use-of-parks-in-england.pdf)

the think-tank Comedia (1995) confirms these findings with only between 16% and 26% of respondents declaring concerns about park safety. Although it remains important to consider why some people regard urban parks as 'unsafe' and not dismiss their concerns, it is equally relevant to acknowledge that the overwhelming majority regard them as secure. When traditional urban parks do possess a poor reputation for safety it is usually after a diminishment of funding leads to inadequate maintenance or the removal of dedicated and constantly present park-keepers. Some parks also become 'dangerous' after the removal of perimeter fences and gateways allows access at all times of day with the consequent arrival of drug-dealers, vagrants and other 'disreputables'.

The design of Harlow Town Park, however, conspicuously fails to provide all those elements that appear to make the traditional urban space safe. Firstly, it is too large to survey at a glance and contains many areas that are hidden from view. The park, for example, contains several small woodland copses with short pathways cutting through undergrowth. It has 'meadows' surrounded by trees often connected by hedge-lined lanes, even a disused chalk pit surrounded by a low and easily penetrable fence. Some parts of the park, such as the 'perfumed garden for the blind' and the 'Water Gardens' are deliberately enclosed to facilitate space for quiet relaxation but whose interiors are thereby beyond the sight of any passer-by. Some parts are seemingly left 'wild' and evince no design or apparent purpose other than a habitat for wild-life. There was a time when attendants did patrol the park: figures that were mostly identifiable, by their accompanying German Shepherd dogs more than any distinctive uniform. Yet, their absence today probably reflects as much the impracticality of monitoring such a large area as it does any financial cutback in the park's maintenance budget.

Secondly and as already mentioned, the park has no distinct boundaries or entrances. On one side it merges with the adjacent Hertfordshire countryside such that it is difficult to determine where one ends and the other begins. Nothing prevents access at any time of day. Thus the park can easily become

the site of those misdemeanours that welcome access to a place offering plentiful concealment.

Thirdly it has no obvious centre towards which people might gather. Certain parts attract different users at particular times: a children's playground, a 'modern' band-stand, an 'events' area for circuses, fairs and other 'shows', a pets corner, a skate-board park. Yet all these stand apart from each other and are empty for much of the time. A cafe located on the ground floor of an old manor house built before the town's construction struggles to attract regular custom and is only open sporadically. The park, if anything, has a series of centres, some popular at particular times and empty at others. But there is no natural 'pull' towards anything.

Finally, the park's surroundings fail to provide the variety of function able to deliver a constant stream of users (Jacobs 1961). Neighbouring it is nothing more than roads, an industrial estate and countryside. Few of the town's residents are, therefore, likely to enter the park on impulse but must deliberately prepare for any visit - something for which they will usually depend on car or public transport. Even its location, on the town's northern edge rather than at its centre, makes the park relatively inaccessible to most residents.

Given the absence of those design features within Harlow Town Park that elsewhere promote security it is, perhaps, surprising to discover that it does not present any significant problem of crime or other form of social disorder. I was unable to obtain any precise crime data for the Town Park but this unavailability suggests that it is not of a level to cause especial concern. This is not to suggest that the park is without crime or other 'disorderly' behaviour. Newspaper reports occasionally bemoan the park's use by homeless indigents at night and the occurrence of drug-dealing. On investigation, however, I found that such reports are largely apocryphal rather than true. Some acts of vandalism are certainly apparent - branches torn from trees, some graffiti,

perhaps a broken bottle left on a footpath. A former 'roller skating park' (enclosed by walls and hidden to outside viewers) began to attract gangs of 'rowdy' teenagers before it was torn down. But, considering the extent of the park and the numerous opportunities for anti-social behaviour it provides, such 'incidents' are remarkably scarce. I tried to remember any notorious crimes that had occurred within the park but was unable to recall any. A browse through the local newspaper archives was equally unforthcoming. An elderly lady was once found dead in one of the park's water gardens but this was later confirmed as an unfortunate accident or a suicide and nothing more sinister. In fact, the only 'disorders' I am aware of happening within the park were ones in which I was personally involved: bouts of teenage drunkenness in the years before I was allowed legal entry to a pub or an early (and disappointing) experiment with marijuana. Like the supposedly 'rowdy' teenagers my behaviour – although potentially troubling to some – was far from serious and unlikely to deter many potential visitors.

When I asked residents if they were regular users of the park most replied that they were not. The reasons given tended to confirm the survey reports mentioned above. Most residents stated 'no reason to go' or a similar reason. All, however, were appreciative of its open space and 'picturesque' charm. A few women declared reluctance to visit the park on their own - "you never know what weirdos are there" declared one and "I'd look a bit odd just wandering about with nothing to do" stated another before explaining that such behaviour is an open invitation to the 'weirdos'. None had ever encountered trouble personally within the park or were aware of anyone who had but, nevertheless, they were still unwilling to make a visit by themselves. Occasional trips were made in the company of others or to accompany a child to the playground but never on a regular basis. Certainly, such comments suggest that the park does arouse some fear of crime, especially amongst women, and that this is largely attributable to its design. That it is 'empty' or 'quiet' were the most frequently expressed reasons given by my female interviewees for avoiding solitary visits.



Yet nobody with whom I spoke, either male or female, disliked the park or saw the need to radically alter its design. Indeed, several of my interviewees were active in the campaign to prevent part of its redevelopment into a leisure centre. Certainly, some were 'fearful' of personal attack but did not blame this on the park itself: society's failure to deal directly with potential criminals was usually regarded as the greater disappointment. Although some were reluctant to make solitary visits to the park so also were they unwilling to walk alone on a river bank or through woodland without ever wishing to 're-design' such features to make them safer.

Although the appearance of Harlow Town Park evinces less obvious design in comparison to the traditional 19<sup>th</sup> Century park – it eschews all geometric precision, has no banks of neat and tidy flowerbeds, its trees and shrubbery are often left untrimmed – it, nevertheless, is also a product of human contrivance. Close inspection quickly shows that its seemingly natural contours are, in fact, an outcome of careful shaping and deliberate design. The slopes, for example, at its centre, are no more 'natural' than the horticultural displays that lend colour to many a city park but are the result of major earth-moving at the time of Harlow's construction. Many of the park's trees are 'specimens' imported from 'outside' rather than authentic growth spontaneously arisen from local soil. The park's design, in short, is as much an attempt to create 'visual order' as any of its 19<sup>th</sup> Century predecessors. Nevertheless, the social implications of its design are of a wholly different character. It is the difference between the neo-classical pursuit of order through constraint and the picturesque championing of liberty: of the manipulation of landscape to express complete control and its arrangement to show 'nature' at its best and in a form that may cast some beneficial influence over those who encounter it.

It is difficult to comprehend the connection between the design of Harlow Town Park and the achievement of social order simply because so much recent CPTED thinking embraces a return to neo-classical ideals. Harlow Town Park, however, also offers a model of crime prevention through environmental design

although of a more subtle and indirect form. It does not endeavour to directly place limits on behaviour, to guide the activity of people towards ideals of moral probity and rational recreation but prefers to facilitate social order through allowing freedom of expression. Such design does not promote anarchy – it is a 'visual order' or perhaps even a visual rhetorical order which hopes to encourage civility through persuasion. As one interviewee, a long-time champion of the New Town Idea and a leading cultural figure put it: “Give the people somewhere that’s nice and they will behave nicely”.

A consideration of Mumford's (1968) critique of Jacobs' urbanism can help indicate how the park contributes to the attainment of social order. Generally Mumford avoids giving separate attention to urban crime or indeed focusing upon any particular 'problem'. Rather, he maintains that by creating decent and beautiful environments most of these problems will also eventually disappear. To design 'out' crime as an exclusive objective of planning, he argues, will always create an imbalance within the whole 'organic' urban structure. Towns and cities, he suggests, represent a complex integration of several elements none of which can take priority over the others. Thus, urban planning, he thought, must consider designing complete structures in a way that will help most social 'problems' to diminish if not disappear. In this respect he criticises Jacobs' emphasis on crime and its control through 'eyes on the street' as ignoring or belittling other, equally important aspects of the urban environment such as its architectural and scenic beauty and ease of transportation. Although reluctant to draw especial attention to the environment's capacity to inhibit crime and disorder, Mumford's critique of Jacobs does point to two possible advantages that a visually ordered townscape may enjoy. The first reason echoes certain sentiments of the 'City Beautiful' movement: that by providing beautiful surroundings people will take pride in where they live and prefer not to spoil it through delinquent activity. There is, he thought, a close association between the decency of the environment and the decency of those who live within it. If a city's streets are bleak and ugly and evince little sympathy for human well-being then how can we expect the people who use them to behave well? Making the urban environment beautiful (either through the provision of

monuments or park landscaping) can not only satisfies aesthetic tastes but provides also a solid moral foundation. Jacobs' insistence that urban beauty is not of paramount importance (the city, she famously declares can never be a work of art) is something that Mumford finds unacceptable. Tell the dwellers of Renaissance Venice, he exclaims, that the beauty of their city did not matter (*ibid*). (That the Renaissance city was also the scene of frequent violence to a degree almost inconceivable within today's cities is something, however that Mumford conveniently ignores).

Mumford's second claim is that the New Town provides the space and access to countryside in which youthful exuberance can find release without engaging in crime. There is a subtle and implicit use of criminological theory here: that, ultimately, most crime is simply adolescent 'mischief' and that rather than prosecuting the young it is better to create environments that cater to their particular generational needs. The Town Park and its more relaxed design is, therefore, an example of how 'free' open space can act as a cathartic mechanism offering some release of youthful pent-up energies.

To conclude that the 'emptiness' of Harlow Town Park is evidence of failure is, therefore, to misread the purpose its design is supposed to fulfil. It is meant to appear empty and to offer people a release from the pressures of urban society. That such design inevitably restricts the park's capacity to ensure 'order' and that experience of it will often arouse feelings of risk is actually part of its appeal. It offers a degree of mystery, which several psychologists (see Kaplan & Kaplan 1989 and Chapter Ten) suggests is an important feature of what people like about landscapes. It allows discovery and invites curiosity – features that seduce the picturesque imagination. The park and its 'riskiness' affords the same pleasure I found during my childhood play in the woods at the end of the road and which is discoverable in several other 'open' areas of Harlow. Those who live in the town, my research shows, appreciate these elements and are reluctant to have it any other way. When students of landscape architecture at Harvard University were given the task of tendering proposals for the redevelopment of the Town Park their results were revealing:

the only changes they were able to recommend was to 'enhance' the park's existing character rather than radically alter its design. Ultimately, it seems, the 'greenery' of Harlow, of which the park is a major contribution, is something that induces pride amongst its residents and provides an environment in which they prefer to live despite the increase in risk it will always present. According to the British Society of Criminology's 'Benchmark Statement'<sup>35</sup> criminology is a 'rendezvous' discipline that draws upon any other academic and research discipline in attempting to address its core concerns. Such a stance is highly necessary for, unlike other social scientific and human science disciplines it does not possess its own distinct field of enquiry (human society, psychology, culture etc) or even its own peculiar methodological strategy but is willing to consider any contribution, regardless of its origin, if it adds to the understanding of the issues of crime and crime control. The stance is also important as a reminder that policy initiatives to control crime are not applied in a vacuum but will usually impact upon wider affairs. This is true of attempts to prevent crime through environmental design. As suggested in Chapter One, criminological analysis of policy in terms only of 'what works' might adjudge a policy initiative as 'successful' when its wider impact is more negative. Thus, the increasing demand to make urban parks safe might overlook the fact that many people appreciate these areas not just despite the 'risk' they present but maybe, also because of it. My research of Harlow's 'open spaces' and especially its Town Park would appear to bear out this point and is something I shall address in more detail in Part Three.

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<sup>35</sup> See

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/Criminology07.asp> last accessed 11.09.09

# **Chapter Nine**

## **Agoraphobia in Harlow's Town Centre**

For decades, Henry Moore's statue, 'Family Group', sat within Harlow's Civic Square. As one of Britain's foremost 'modern' sculptors, the commissioning of Moore by Harlow's Art Trust to provide the town with its first public art-work, was highly apposite. The Masterplan for Harlow was, itself, an emblem of modernity: a 'rational' design for the furthering of human betterment and social progress. Harlow, its designers believed, would become a place of strong community and individual contentment – an environment in which the family might thrive. The robust dignity of Moore's statue and its contemporary aesthetic depicting two parents and a child sitting upon the mother's knee all gazing with stoic satisfaction out over the square towards an open expanse of greenery beyond, was symbolic of the designer's hopes. It spoke a message: here is a place that has harnessed the onward march of modernity and shaped it to fully meet human need – a place where people might truly discover peace and happiness.

The placement of the 'Family Group' within the Civic Square was also significant. Designed by Sir Frederick Gibberd, Harlow's 'master-planner', this square was intended to become the 'town's most important space' (Gibberd *et al* 1980). It was to architecturally embody a civic ideal. With the Town Hall, library and other civic offices forming its sides, the square was designed as a focal point, gathering place and centre for local democracy. The Town Hall, with its distinctive arched roof and dominating height was a conspicuous landmark beckoning people towards the public forum resting at its feet. Yet, as a symbol of the town's civic ideals, the 'Family Group' was the square's ideal centre-piece. Soon, the statue's image became an unofficial icon, adorning many letterheads, publicity brochures and other documents.

But the 'Family Group' no longer sits in the Civic Square. There is no longer any Civic Square for it to sit. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the square and its adjoining Town Hall was torn down and replaced by a new retail development and two-storey car park. This development accommodates a new civic office but its architecture is unremarkable and looks out upon no forum for public

debate or gathering. It too speaks a message: here is place for public administration and management of the town's affairs. It is architecture of convenience rather than one encouraging participatory democracy. If the 'Family Group' is still symbolic its removal now signifies absence: that Harlow lacks any public space as a centre of genuinely communal gathering and collective identification.

But the passing of Harlow's old Civic Centre evokes little mourning. Certainly, some people in Harlow – probably only a few – bemoan the triumph of commercialism and regard the new retail centre as a paltry replacement for Gibberd's democratic vision. Many more, no doubt, welcome the increased opportunity for consumption and availability of well-known 'chain' shops. Yet the former Civic Square was rarely used to fulfil Gibberd's original intentions and nobody I interviewed regards its demolition as any great loss. I have no memories, during my years living in Harlow, of attending any event within the square or even visiting it to savour any public life present. It was always a lonely place, empty other than for a few people passing through en route to the nearby shopping parades. The Civic Square was a failure and the reason, I propose, rests with the design of the wider town-centre of which it was a part.

I do not intend to denigrate Sir Frederick Gibberd's architectural reputation. As the designer of many buildings of international renown, such as Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral and the Hyde Park Mosque he is deservedly known as one of the great architects of the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Moreover, his obvious talent for landscape design adds genuine touches of beauty to much of Harlow and other urban developments for which he was responsible. But his adherence to the New Town Idea and especially its application to town-centre design led to many urban developments that are conspicuously wanting. The fault is not his alone: many of Britain's town-centres evince the influence of the New Town Idea even if their surroundings are of much older provenance. And, because of this influence, many of these town-centres, like Harlow, are now having to 're-generate'.

A parliamentary report to the now defunct 'Urban Affairs Committee' states that most New Towns possess centres whose designs are now 'out-of-date' (TLGR 2002). This suggests that such designs were once viable and effective. Certainly, during its first years 'The High' – a name given to Harlow's town-centre after its hill-top location – was very successful. Early photographs show a bustling and vibrant scene of people intermingling amidst a sea of children's buggies – a scene from which Harlow acquired its name of 'pram town'. Its innovatory design won international plaudits and drew many town-planners in search of inspiration for their own work. But at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, 'The High' entered a downward spiral: no longer was it attracting high volumes of shoppers, some of the original building materials were showing signs of age and it began to acquire a general reputation for shabbiness. A national newspaper report, written by a former town resident, describes the transformation:

The town centre is no longer a place to cherish. I return to Harlow on a Tuesday, which used to be market day, a riotous, bustling occasion. But there are very few stalls operating here now, and the once vibrant shopping precinct is sluggish. Where there were once major department stores and stylish independent shops, I discover only amusement arcades, budget stores, fast-food joints and an obligatory table-dancing bar. 'A friend of mine tried 12 years ago to set up a stall selling electrical goods on the market', says local security guard Brian Payne, gesturing towards the desultory marketplace. 'The demand was so great he couldn't get a site. He could have 10 stalls there now, if he wanted<sup>36</sup>'.

Another report is more scathing. Harlow, it says, has no town-centre: "...a space goes by that name but the effort of finding the 'shopping' arcade is rewarded with nothing but anti-climax as the concrete turns Stalingrad-grey<sup>37</sup>".

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36 The Guardian 01.08.02

37 The Independent 10.08.03



The demise of 'The High', of course is not all attributable to Gibberd's original design or, indeed, anything specifiable to the New Town Idea. With the growth of huge out-of-town malls and the increasing popularity of 'digital shopping' all traditional town-centres struggle to compete. Yet, the 'New Town' design of 'The High' makes it particularly vulnerable. It is not just because alternative means for satisfying everyday retail needs are available that explains its' poor usage but also because many people increasingly regard it as unsafe. Official statistics appear to confirm their concerns: the 'town-centre region' (which confusingly includes an adjacent residential neighbourhood) has Harlow's highest crime rate with the greatest levels of theft, criminal damage, violence-against-the-person, burglary, public order offenses, drug possession and supply, anti-social behaviour, public disturbances, nuisance youth and hate crime.

It is actually difficult to determine how this crime rate compares with that of other town-centres. An analysis of the crime audits for 'similar' towns to Harlow, for example, shows considerable variation in how crime is catalogued with some not registering any specific figures for their town-centres at all. An initial assessment, however, indicates that 'The High's' crime rate is unexceptional. It is possible that the 'problem' merely reflects the concentration of shops and 'drinking establishments' within the town centre and with them a correspondingly higher number of 'opportunities' for shop-lifting and other transgressions. If so, then it is hardly fair to blame the design of 'The High' for its apparent unattractiveness to potential users. Yet, an unpublished survey highlights 'The High' as an especially problematic area in which fear of crime is significant. The same survey shows that such fear is the primary reason why people are reluctant to visit the area. This reluctance is especially high during the hours of darkness but neither is it negligible during the day. The easy availability of 'Out-of-Town shopping facilities may certainly 'pull' many people away but the perception of 'The High' as a dangerous place also exerts a considerable 'push' factor and undermines its capacity to entice alternative usage. People, of course, commit crime not buildings, but the design of 'The High' compounds deeper social ills and other trends that render it increasingly

unattractive and by inducing a form of collective 'agoraphobia' it certainly contributes to the problem.

That people also regard Harlow's smaller shopping centres as equally unattractive suggests they too suffer from problems of design. Like 'The High' these centres were also built according to New Town design principles and were once popular nodes of community activity. But, also like 'The High' they are now severely underused and have become centres for frequent episodes of anti-social behaviour that inhibits the patronage of many local residents. 'The Stow', for example, supposedly serves the Mark Hall Neighbourhood group but few of the residents I interviewed regularly visit it. The following exchange was typical:

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[Some people I've interviewed in the past say The Stow's in decline...]

It is in decline. Cos, again because of the people that live there. They've got no respect for their own place. Then again the young people can go and buy alcohol. Sit on the benches and just chuck rubbish down. And shout and just cause trouble.

[Do you ever feel intimidated? In any form. Or wary?]

Er..I do feel intimidated...I've got a young, well I say young he's 18, he's coming up to 18 soon. If he's going out we ask him where he's going...and sometimes he goes up The Stow. That's one of the areas I would specifically tell him to be careful of. Because of what goes on there. Personally, I've never been the type of person to be intimidated by youths...although nowadays you have to be a bit more wary than you used to be. If I don't have to go up there I don't bother but if I want to go somewhere I'll go because there is a reason for me to go there in the first place. (From Transcript of Interview Five).

The Bush Fair centre experiences similar troubles. In the evening, after the shops close, it becomes mainly empty except for the occasional group of youths 'hanging about', seemingly waiting for something to happen. I have never witnessed any actual crime within this centre but, during my infrequent evening visits it had a definite menacing atmosphere as if danger was covertly lurking around every corner. The original Staple Tye centre went many years ago,

supposedly due to the deterioration of its building materials. Yet, like the other centres, it had grown a reputation for danger that was certainly a contributory factor in its downfall. Replacing this centre is now a 'crescent' of shops fronting a large and highly visible car-park evidently built according to 'Secured by Design' principles and lacking any provision for a public realm. As these centres are, however, essentially, miniature versions of 'The High', a closer inspection of its design might also shed some light on the problems they currently face.

The original plan (see *fig 9*) centres upon a comparatively wide, pedestrian parade of shops, 'Broad Walk', running north-south, with the 'Market Place' at one end and the town's main library at the other. Behind the library is the previous site of the Civic Square, former home of Moore's statue, but now the location for the new retail development. A smaller shopping parade, 'Little Walk' branches off Broad Walk leading to West Square on the right and the Harvey Centre – a covered, two-storey shopping mall – to the left. West Square was once dubbed by its designers 'Entertainments Square' because of the presence of the town's main cinema. Today, however, all entertainment is gone (other than for a Chinese restaurant and a pub converted from a former municipal building) and only estates agents, solicitor's offices and a few shops remain. Beyond The Harvey Centre lies 'College Square' bounded by a theatre, church and the educational institution from which it gets its name. A further small parade of shops, 'Post Office Walk' leads off from one corner of Market Place. In the opposite corner a short walkway – although once open to traffic – connects with West Square. A third corner leads to 'Bird-Cage Walk' named after a long-gone aviary once housing a variety of tropical birds. The final corner lead to 'Terminus Street', running parallel to Broad Walk, where the town's bus depot is located.. At one end and adjacent to the former Civic Square is the 'criminal justice island' accommodating a police station and magistrate's court. Surrounding this collection of parades, walkways and squares are a series of multi-storey car-parks, beyond which runs a ring-road system separating the town-centre from the rest of Harlow.

Thus within this broadly rectangular space, perched atop its hill and overlooking the surrounding town, is concentrated a diverse selection of services and facilities: civic and professional offices, shopping parades and malls, 'entertainments', a market place, police station and magistrates court. Although the original design made no provision for residential apartments – a significant absence that I shall discuss shortly – the town-centre contains most elements necessary for urban vitality. Yet, today, parts of the town-centre appear lifeless especially after the shops close, and induce the collective agoraphobia from which it suffers. Most of the necessary elements are there, it seems, but its design prevents them coalescing into a continuously vibrant and fully extensive public realm.

The primary weakness of 'The High' derives principally from its original 'neo-medieval' design. As discussed earlier, such neo-medievalism does not attempt to exactly replicate the design of any actual medieval town. It remains thoroughly 'modernistic' in its ambition and architectural style. Nevertheless, it endeavours to retain what its advocates regard as the essential underlying structure of the medieval town while removing its otherwise, supposedly irrational and 'chaotic' elements. Under conditions of modernity, any attempt to completely mimic medieval town design usually produces a 'kitsch urbanism' unable to properly meet the demands of contemporary life. In designing Harlow, however, Gibberd's objective was not to build an echo of the past but provide an environment commensurate with contemporary sensibilities. Thus, the immediate appearance of 'The High' is anything but medieval: from the choice of its building materials to the architectural style of individual buildings the overall impression is one of a typical post-war urban development. The underlying organisational pattern of 'The High' – the arrangement of its buildings, streets and squares – however, borrows heavily from medieval and other pre-industrial towns. But, what Gibberd and his fellow designers of 'The High' abandoned as 'dysfunctional' is precisely that which their constituent 'neo-medieval' elements require to enable a vibrant and 'safe' public realm: diversity arising from *mixed-usage*. In this regard, their design is conspicuously lacking.

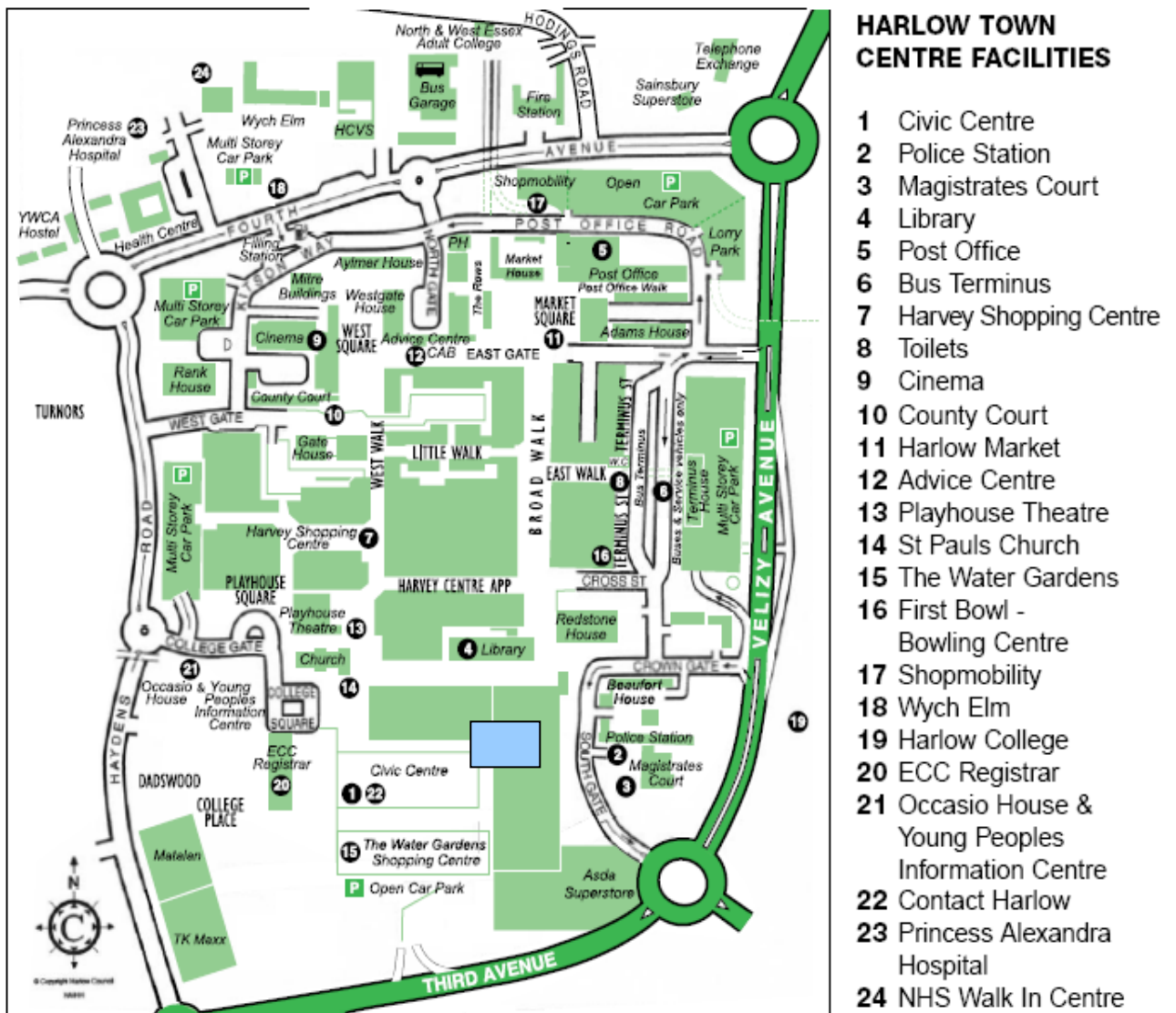



Fig 9 :- Map of 'The High' Today

Former site   
of Civic Square

The ring-road system encircling 'The High' is one notable application of neo-medieval design. This, Gibberd thought, was the equivalent of many 'historic' towns' medieval wall. The obvious purpose is to keep traffic outside of the town-centre and enhance the interior's 'walkability'. But the intention is also to enclose 'The High', to separate it from the residential surroundings and to render it a distinct and special place whose importance is visibly tangible. The

intention is laudable: 'walkability' and architectural enclosure are two key elements by which the design of a town-centre can support its public realm. Yet, the ring-road system acts as a 'wall' in a more directly negative manner: it inhibits accessibility. Whereas the enclosure of actual medieval walls gave protection to the citizens within, shielding them from the dangers outside, the 'wall' around 'The High' has the opposite effect.



Fig 10 - Multi-Storey Car Park on Terminus Street

Unlike the medieval town, Harlow's citizens live outside the 'wall' in the town's residential neighbourhoods. The 'wall' offers them no protection: instead it is a hurdle they must overcome to gain entry into the town-centre beyond. For many, accessibility is dependent upon a car. The series of car-parks on the town-centre's periphery supplies plentiful opportunities for parking for those arriving by such means. But these formidable structures create a further barrier around the town-centre and, lacking Defensible Space, they provide almost ideal opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour regardless of the many CCTV cameras monitoring the behaviour of those who use them. Besides, many citizens have no access to a car and must rely on alternative modes of transport such as walking. But arrival by foot requires passing beneath a series of subways, most of which are dimly lit, damp-smelling tunnels with graffiti

adorning their sides – an intimidating and hardly welcoming prospect especially at night.



Fig 11- Subway Entrance

Having successfully crossed the 'wall', any visitor to 'The High' passes through one of its entry 'gates' – another nod towards its neo-medieval design origins – and into the parades and squares of the town-centre proper. The relationship between the 'streets' and squares is important with the former supposedly directing people towards the activity centres of the latter. Again, the intention behind this design as a means to support the public realm is commendable. Zucker (1959), in his classic study of urban squares describes this intention well:

If one visualises the streets as rivers, channelling the stream of human communication – which means much more than mere technical 'traffic' – then the square represents a natural or artificial lake. The square dictates the flux of life not only within its confines but also through the adjacent streets for which it forms a quasi-estuary (p2).

The Market Place, for example, was designed to accommodate the requirements of small independent traders, purveyors of local produce and handicrafts. On occasion, it was also to become a scene for entertainments and festival. The provision of a small cafeteria (significantly named the

'Rendezvous' Cafe) on one side jutting into the centre, with seating available on a terrace above, was to enable people to sit, watch and perhaps comment upon the activity before them. It was a setting, Gibberd hoped, that might resemble the ancient Greek Agora – a place where citizens might come to watch, listen, debate, deliberate, decide, intermingle and occasionally to shop. 'The High's' other squares were also intended to become similar nodes enhancing the towns public realm and civic virtues. Gibberd's ambition that the Market Place become as visually stimulating and intensely public as those of many pre-modern towns, however, seems, today, sadly forlorn.

A clue to explaining the 'agoraphobia' currently afflicting the town-centre's squares comes from Jacobs' (1961) observations regarding the complex order of cities. Although Jacobs had little to say regarding urban squares specifically, her comments on why some parks become successful while others decline into unused and, frequently, dangerous places are equally applicable in this context. Both the urban square and park serve essentially the same function: to provide an open space for public gathering, recreation, relaxation and co-mingling. The same dynamics that nourish a vibrant park also feed a successful urban square.

A park, Jacobs declares, requires people to become vibrant and attractive. Simply creating a pleasant 'island' of greenery within the built environment will not automatically generate usage. Instead, a successful park reflects the diversity of its surroundings or has its own specialised purpose. Where the surroundings are diverse, a continuous supply of people becomes available, many of whom will use the park for different reasons and throughout all hours of the day. Parents from near-by residential apartments may use the park during the morning and late afternoon hours to occupy their children; workers in adjacent offices may pass through it en route to or from their places of employment; others will use it to relax during their lunch breaks; shoppers might stop-by and adults visit it to play sport in the evening.



Even the same person comes for different reasons at different times; sometimes to sit tiredly, sometimes to play or to watch a game, sometimes to work sometimes to show off, sometimes to fall in love, sometimes to keep an appointment, sometimes to savor the hustle of the city from a retreat, sometimes in the hope of finding acquaintances, sometimes to get closer to a bit of nature, sometimes to keep a child occupied, sometimes simply to see what offers, and almost always to be entertained by the sight of other people (Jacobs 1961 p103).

A park whose surroundings cater only for single usage, by contrast, may have occasional flurries of activity but are otherwise empty for long periods. And when a park stays empty there is an absence of the 'eyes-on-the-street' necessary for natural surveillance and the enforcement of order. The park then becomes a locale in which crime and other transgression might easily occur. It may acquire a 'dangerous' reputation further inhibiting legitimate usage leading to a vicious circle of decline. The urban square, like the park, also requires continual usage to become successful. And like the park, such usage depends upon the diversity of its surroundings. Simply constructing a square in the midst of a mono-purpose urban environment will not, in itself, attract people: it will simply remain empty for much of the day or become a place merely to pass through and not to linger.



Fig 12: Market Place Facing Towards Broad Walk

A number of factors beset the town-centre's squares in the manner Jacobs describes and prevents them from achieving their original design purpose. The most significant arises from the New Town's embrace of 'zoning' and separation of functional uses into discrete urban spaces. That industry is kept apart from both residential areas *and* the town centre has obvious advantages, for it allows people to peacefully pursue their everyday needs without the 'irritation' of noise and bustle. But, the application of zoning *within* 'The High' results in a separation of uses that might well co-exist together. Although 'The High' offers a diverse range of services, these occupy specific spaces: shopping in some parts, civic administration in another, professional offices bordering the squares but never within the parades and residential quarters kept wholly outside the centre altogether. The consequence is a flurry of activity at some points in the day but emptiness for the remainder. During the day many shoppers flow into the retail precincts and the much of the centre becomes busy and vibrant. But, once the shops close, the town-centre empties and its squares become lonely places devoid of people.

Compounding this problem is the almost total absence of bars, cafes and restaurants that might draw a night-time economy. In recent years a number of bars and clubs have begun to occupy the premises of former shops. The ground floor of what was once a department store at the top end of Terminus Street is now a bar with a night-club functioning on the floor above. Another bar now occupies a corner space in Market Place where once there were only shops, and a converted office provides another in West Square. But these new premises cater almost exclusively for a young-adult market and fail to attract the diverse range of people able to foster a fulsome public realm. Originally 'The High' had only one pub – 'The Painted Lady' which has now become 'The Jean Harlow' – occupying a corner of Bird Cage Walk on the town-centre's northernmost edge. Although conventional wisdom might suggest this comparative lack of drinking establishments must bolster not undermine social order – considerable research evidence, after all, suggests a strong link between alcohol consumption and crime – in practice the opposite applies. Every Friday and

Saturday night, and often during the week as well, revelers arrive *en masse* from the various pubs spread throughout Harlow, to attend one of the town-centre's few nightclubs. The sudden accumulation of, often drunk, young people into an otherwise empty town-centre regularly leads to fights, disputes, acts of petty vandalism and a host of other incivilities. At such times various parts of the town-centre, where there are no evening attractions, remain empty, and develop a slightly sinister atmosphere.

Binge-drinking', of course has become a nationwide issue and is not specific to Harlow. Yet, the design of 'The High' compounds the problem. Some 'failings' of these squares are not, admittedly, the fault of their designers. Gibberd (1980) writes of his efforts to place a 'winter-garden' in the centre of West square to relieve its monotony only to be thwarted by cash-strapped municipal authorities. His plans for the Civic Square were never fully realised. One side, meant to house civic offices, remained un-built and was left open to face onto a patch of unused land. During the 1980s, the erection of permanent structures within the Market Place, to give better shelter to stall-holders, meant that it became unavailable for other uses. But these 'over-sights' merely made worse the deficiencies arising from the square's positioning.

Jacobs' mentions the need for a park – and hence, also a town-square – to provide a 'centre' as a focal point for gathering and to evince a sense of enclosure such that it “...make[s] a definite shape out of space”. The park (and square), she states, should “...appear as an important event in the city scene, a positive feature, rather than a no-account left-over” (*ibid* p106). Many urban squares and especially those of genuine pre-modern origin usually provide such spaces through exerting a centrifugal force. Their central position means that most surrounding streets flow *into* them delivering a continuous supply of people and hub of activity. But in 'The High' the squares occupy sites on the edge of the town with the shopping parades and malls in the centre<sup>38</sup>. Thus, the

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38 The positioning of 'The High' as a whole is also significant. Its hill-top location rests on the southern side of Harlow and, thereby, does not really constitute a town 'centre' at all. Instead,

squares become centripetal places which most people only pass through *en route* to the town-centre's interior.

The overall design weakness of 'The High', however, derives from its construction as a place to experience as an art-form and not as a public realm. Reading Gibberd's various commentaries on town design (e.g. Gibberd 1963) one is struck by his desire to achieve 'harmonic balance', 'pleasing sight-lines' and visual order. His embrace of neo-medieval design derives, it seems, more from a belief that pre-industrial towns are pleasant places to live because they are appealing to look at. This, in itself, is admirable: no design should strive to make an urban environment deliberately ugly. But if the desire for visual order undermines an urban environment's function as a public realm, people will experience it as unwelcoming no matter how satisfactory its surface veneer. Jacobs was aware of this problem: art-forms, she says, give meaning to life through the individual artist's control of materials. Urban design, however, is not of the same order for it concerns a form of 'organised complexity' in which no consensus regarding what is and what is not beautiful is possible. To approach urban design, she concludes, "...as if it were a larger architectural problem, capable of being given order by converting it into a disciplined work of art, is to make the mistake of attempting to substitute art for life" (*ibid* p373). It removes an urban environment's potential to succour town life in all its complex variety. The following account is intentionally facetious but effectively summarises how some people actually experiences the 'art' of 'The High':

There are two sculptures in the centre of Harlow that are of particular note (there are actually loads of the bastards but most are gargoyles, strategically placed to take your attention away from the dogshit and gangs of rat-faced yobs that litter the place). The first of these, by Elisabeth Frink, is a sculpture of a barefooted woman dressed entirely in cheap clothes which look like they've been stolen straight from the bargain basket in

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people living on the northern side of the town are further compelled to use motor transport to visit 'The High' or must walk a considerable distance. Again, such positioning was not entirely Gibberd's fault. Originally, the M11 was planned to pass Harlow on its southern side such that the location of The High might attract passing traffic. The eventual construction of the motorway on the northern side, however, means the positioning of much of Harlow, including 'The High' is awkward.

Poundstretcher. She has a haircut that only a particularly deranged bag-lady could like and is poised in an overly cautious stance that suggests she is being approached by hooligans and is just about to be mugged and beaten, which going on Harlow's track-record, she probably is. Overall she just looks miserable, lost and has the unmistakable air of a person who is about to sling themselves under the Stansted Express at the first available opportunity<sup>39</sup>.

It is useful to conclude this chapter by briefly comparing the design of 'The High' with that of another town-centre with which I am also familiar. It is difficult to define exactly where Enfield's central area begins: no line on a map can sufficiently mark its boundaries. Instead, it flows imperceptibly into the surrounding area with shops gradually mixing with residential buildings. Yet, Enfield's central area concentrates all the services available in 'The High' and more besides. It has its own shopping mall adjacent to a more traditional 'High Street' that allows traffic to pass through its centre. Offices and shops, schools and churches, civic units and open spaces all freely intermingle without any identifiable zoning. Even a row of houses hidden behind one side of the High Street provides some residential accommodation. Enfield's town-centre has no obvious square (other than a very small market-place fronting a church) but it has no need for one: in several places, roads widen to allow for some public gathering and its open spaces provide ample space for recreational usage. But most importantly, the mixture of usage delivers a continuous flow of activity for nearly all hours of the day. People can bring their children to school, attend church, visit shops, the park and the library or conduct business in the near-by 'town-hall' all without necessitating use of a car. In the evening pubs open but compete with a number of restaurants and coffee shops for custom. I am not suggesting Enfield Town-Centre is problem free: on any weekend night, for example, binge-drinking is clearly evident and the presence of 'undesirables' is often discernible. Its historical context and 'city' location also makes any comparison with Harlow somewhat unfair. But the *experience* of Enfield's town-centre, in contrast to 'The High' is always less intimidating. It is a place many people want to use. No survey is necessary to confirm this point – any

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39 Taken from:  
<http://www.chavtowns.co.uk/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2336> (accessed 23.02.09)

observation of its activity is sufficient. It is a place, in short, that curtails not promotes public agoraphobia.

So what became of Moore's 'Family Group'? One night during the 1980s, a young man returning home from a 'night-out' with his friends and slightly the worse from drink, passed through the Civic Square. On a whim, he mounted the statue in the centre and, with a heavy object, knocked the head off the child sitting sedately upon its mother's knees. The head was later recovered – it was hidden by the remorseful young man under his bed – and the statue was repaired. But preferring not to risk further damage, the town's art-council decided to remove the sculpture and keep it in storage until a more 'secure' site became available. It now sits within the newly built civic-centre, safe behind closed doors and gazes out upon nothing, on a site previously occupied by the town's 'most important' public space. It seems the 'Family Group' is still a symbol but now one expressing the evaporation of a once cherished civic ideal.

# **Part Three**

## **The New Town Idea Today**

# **Chapter Ten**

## **Urban Fear and the Affective Evaluation of Environments**



I recall walking through an unfamiliar city. It was a pleasant morning. I was enjoying the new scenery and I felt good. At some point, however, the character of the environment changed and I believed I might be entering an unsafe area. I cannot tell you what features led to my inference or whether my inference was accurate, but it led me to change directions to avoid this area (Nasar 2000 p117)

Why do people often fear crime in places where there is nothing tangible to account for their concerns? Or, conversely, why do people often experience feelings of relative security in places where actual crimes are comparatively high? Given that residents of Harlow express lower levels of fear than the town's crime rate would appear to warrant and given that they value parts of the town, such as the park and other areas of greenery despite believing them relatively unsafe, knowing an answer to such questions is highly pertinent to my research. Such knowledge might seem less important than understanding the actual causes of crime as they pertain to Harlow. Yet a growing body of research literature suggests that knowledge of this sort might prove helpful in considerations of urban design. As a medium for combating the aetiology of crime, Harlow's peculiar New Town design would seem not effective. Yet, the relatively low levels of fear that residents of Harlow express might indicate that the town's design does possess something that provides a more positive impact. Such a possibility is of potential value in considering the continuing viability of the New Town Idea. As many municipal authorities and others responsible for crime control policy now acknowledge fear of crime as a distinct problem can severely restrict and undermine the quality of life of many people regardless of its commensurability with actual risks of victimisation (see, for example, Skogan W.G. & Maxwell M 1981). Equally significant is a wide acknowledgment that places where fear of crime is high are less able to support cohesive community relations and a vibrant public realm and that this can, ultimately, foster an environment conducive to crime itself. Following Jacobs' (1961) pioneering discussion and promotion of 'natural surveillance' through 'eyes on the street' as a highly effective mechanism of crime prevention, the necessity of informal control networks has become a matter of widespread recognition amongst most municipal policy authorities together with an awareness that fear of crime can hinder its accomplishment. When

people avoid particular places through fear of crime, the social consequences are detrimental regardless of the 'rationality' of their concerns.

That fear of crime usually involves some evaluation of environment is a relatively non-contentious point. It is, after all, an emotional condition in which a person perceives some threat to their well-being within a particular context. Fear, generally, arises when a perceiver recognises something within an environment as dangerous. Whether or not such danger is 'imaginary' or 'real' is insignificant: what matters is that the perceiver *believes* that something in the environment poses a potential threat. Thus, for example, to encounter a person or group of people with a known propensity for violence might arouse fear – especially if the perceiver has previous experience of victimisation. If this encounter occurs within the perceiver's *umwelt* (Goffman 1971) it will most probably trigger *alarm*. Goffman borrows the term *umwelt* from ethological studies of animal behaviour. It refers to a zone surrounding each person (or animal) which is routinely scanned for signals of danger. Alarm, therefore arises whenever a perceiver identifies known signals that directly denote danger – the antelope espying the prowling lion in the near vicinity, for example or a person observing the knife-wielding madman. Such signals will denote danger regardless of the environmental context in which they occur and are, for that reason, not the focus of attention here. Instead, my concern is with fear of crime that is the outcome of a person evaluating an environment as *potentially* dangerous when no source of alarm is perceptible. Such evaluations will arouse *anxiety*: an emotional condition in which the perceiver 'recognises' – consciously or not – that the environment they are within poses some possible threat to their well-being.

Anxiety, as I shall use the term, refers to any response to an evaluation of an environment in which the perceiver *symbolically* infers and anticipates danger. It involves a connotative 'reading' of the environment as threatening when no tangible danger signals are perceptible. Such 'readings', therefore, do not interpret the environment itself as dangerous but register it as place in which

an encounter with danger is highly possible. Thus graffiti left on a wall, for example, poses no intrinsic threat – dried paint can hurt nobody – yet it may symbolise the prior presence of people within the same environment with a propensity to commit crime and victimise the perceiver.

That people 'read' the places they encounter and adjust their behaviour according to their interpretations is an assumption, usually implicit, informing all the principle models of Environmental Criminology. Yet few of these models address directly the psychological structures that frame these interpretations and are, therefore, of only partial assistance in helping us know how evaluations of the physical environment can arouse feelings of fear or security. The 'target hardening' of certain environments, for example (see Clarke R 1997), which aim to discourage criminal activity by removing the opportunities for its occurrence or which warn would-be offenders of their probable detection obviously hopes to communicate a particular message. But such initiatives can just as easily heighten fear of crime. Batteries of CCTV cameras, for example or razor-wire on top of walls might suggest that crime is frequent in an area and that it is profoundly unsafe. Target hardening initiatives, therefore, only address the mechanics of committing crime within an environment and not how people emotionally evaluate the environment itself.

The well known 'Broken Windows Hypothesis' (see Wilson J.Q & Kelling G.L 1982) assumes a particular mode of environmental evaluation. Where 'incivilities' freely occur, the hypothesis declares, people are liable to discern a general toleration for social disorder. This will suggest that criminal activity is unlikely to attract attention or intervention and, thereby, might entice would-be offenders triggering, a 'spiral of decline' and an escalation of further disorder in terms of both frequency and intensity (Skogan W.G 1990). Wilson and Kelling explain this process in an often repeated quote.

Social psychologists and police officers tend to agree that if a window in a building is broken *and is left impaired*, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken. This is as

true in nice neighbourhoods as in run-down ones. Window-breaking does not necessarily occur on a large scale because some areas are inhabited by determined window-breakers whereas others are populated by window-lovers; rather, one unrepaired broken window is a signal that no one cares, and so breaking more windows costs nothing (Wilson J.Q. & Kelling G.L (1982 p2/3).

Incivilities include both 'social' and 'physical' infractions of consensual norms. The drunk urinating in a shop doorway is an example of the former and the graffiti-laden wall an example of the latter.

The Broken Windows Hypothesis concentrates on an environment's 'image' as either conducive or not for criminal activity: it only addresses fear of crime, however as a secondary consideration. Perceptions of an environment as disorderly might arouse fear although such a response is not inevitable. Useful as it is, then, the hypothesis only concerns behaviour that happens *to or within* a given environment and does not really address how people perceive and evaluate the formal design properties of the environment itself. Apprehension may, after all, arise upon encountering an environment in which no signs of disorder, social or physical, are apparent. Equally, it has little to say regarding how people evaluate the opposite type of environment – one of unbroken windows – which induce feelings of security.

Jacobs' (1961) promotion of 'natural surveillance' complements the Broken Windows Hypothesis by suggesting how a spiral of decline can begin. Where people are absent, she notes, anti-social behaviour can occur beyond the sightlines of what Felson (1994) calls 'capable guardians' - those who might intervene and prevent continuation of the offence. To Jacobs, fear of crime is wholly a matter of social not environmental evaluation: it is something that arises when people perceive an absence of others who might offer assistance when necessary. The formal design properties of the environment are, she claims, almost irrelevant other than in their capacity to promote urban diversity. The pursuit of 'visual order' for its own sake, she continues, can hinder the

achievement of such diversity and thereby undermine the foundations of social order leading to an increase in crime and fear. Her approach, which now influences many CPTED design proposals, does not, however, allow for the possibility that the formal properties of an environment might, in themselves, drive people away and deny the area its requisite 'eyes on the street'.

Finally, design initiatives that adhere to principles of Defensible Space (Newman 1972, 1996 Coleman 1985) aim, primarily, to evoke a sense of proprietorial control rather than appeal to any other affective evaluation of an environment. Although Defensible Space initiatives require people to 'read' environments in particular ways that often invokes some emotional response, the focus upon proprietorship denies any wider consideration of how people interpret the physical properties of place. Again, some Defensible Space initiatives may enhance rather than diminish fear of crime. But perhaps more importantly, and for reasons that I shall discuss later, they may lead to the construction of environments that feel 'safe' yet which evoke few other positive responses.

The affective evaluation of environment involves both recognition of objective physical properties and the subjective interpretation of them. Both aspects occur simultaneously in the experiencing of environments with neither having priority – a person experiences an environment not just as shapes and colours but as meaningful forms. Any conceptual framework able to help elucidate how and why people evaluate some places as threatening and others as secure must, therefore, address both the perceived physical properties of the environment and the significance attached to them. For this reason, the following conceptual framework endeavours to combine a number of theoretical ideas drawn from two seemingly incompatible research disciplines: Humanistic Geography and bio-psychological environmental evaluation studies. The first centres upon a conception of 'existential space' and suggests that the 'implication' of the human 'condition' inevitably involves a desire for ontological security. Recognition of the formal properties of a physical

environment able to satisfy or deny this 'need', however, depends upon psychological structures that are the outcome of evolutionary adaptations and which centre upon symbols of 'prospect' and 'refuge', 'mystery' and 'hazard'.

## EXISTENTIAL SPACE

At first glance the concept of existential space might appear mundane, even obvious, for it simply refers to space as experienced by people (Bollnow O 1963, Norberg-Schulz C 1971). That everybody has spatial experience is beyond question for human existence is always 'implaced' (Casey E.S. 1993). Everyday life always occurs within space and it is impossible to conceive of any event, however trivial, as non-spatial. Geographical knowledge is a fundamental aspect of everyday life for it guides and shapes the cognitive awareness and behavioural strategies of people. Yet, the processes by which people acquire geographical knowledge, the understanding they have of the spaces they encounter and the significance they attach to them seldom receives academic attention. Instead, most studies of human behaviour usually regard spatial experience as 'background context' if they consider it at all (see Relph 1976). Existential space, however, is always more than mere background but a primary condition for the attainment of ontological security. To experience a sense of certainty, predictability and well-being within the world a person must embrace a particular level of spatial awareness and construct meaningful places out of the spaces in which they exist. That is, *implacement*, must induce feelings of security and an absence of anxiety.

We might better appreciate the importance of space to existential well-being by considering the meaning of becoming 'lost'. To not know one's whereabouts is often a more troubling experience to people than simply constituting an inability to navigate successfully around a given space. Becoming 'lost' has

existential connotations – it suggests discomfort and unease, a sense of out-of-placeness within the world involving some cognitive disorientation.

...let the mishap of disorientation once occur and the sense of anxiety and even terror that accompanies it reveals to us how closely it is linked to our sense of balance and well-being. The very word 'lost' in our language means much more than simple geographical uncertainty: it carries overtones of utter disaster (Lynch K 1960 p4).

Ontological security requires a person to experience familiarity with the places they inhabit such that they can establish “...an harmonious relationship between [themselves] and the outside world” (*ibid* p4). Familiarity does not necessarily suggest previous experience of a given place but a capacity to 'read' it as knowable or 'legible'. Thus, people 'live' the spaces they encounter as part of 'being-in-the-world' and strive to relate to it as a vital aspect of their everyday existence (Bollnow O 1967). Existential space as something 'lived' is never a mere 'pre-given' – some backdrop that the student of human life can conveniently ignore – for it is always “...thick with human values and meanings” (Peet R 1998).

The scholarly neglect of *existential space* reflects, perhaps, an obsession with obtaining scientific objectivity with regard to human affairs. Because an appreciation of spatial experience involves recognising individual subjectivity, interpretation and intentions it necessitates an embrace of knowledge that escapes easy categorisation, measurement and generalisation. A positivistic approach to space, therefore, tends to regard the environment people inhabit as little more than a geometric series of surfaces and points in which a calculus of 'distance and friction' becomes the chief mechanism for understanding geographical behaviour. Thus the positivist will usually ignore how people actually experience the environment, its symbolic connotations, the emotional relationship they have with it, the memories it arouses and the expectations that they have towards it, as matters beyond scientific purview. Only by regarding space from the perspective of the natural sciences, the positivist

insists, can we properly acquire true geographical knowledge of any practical use. Thus, architects, town planners and other agencies directly responsible for environmental design, might turn confidently to positivistic 'hard' data rather than permit any guidance from the hearsay, opinion, and prejudices that shape unscientific discourse. Such neglect Norberg-Schulz (1971) argues, has increasingly impoverished the relationship between mankind and environment often leading to existential disorientation. Instead, he calls for a more *humanistic* approach to our spatial relations employing methodologies more appropriate to human existence than those finding positivistic favour.

Although not wholly different from that of other animals it is advisable, then, to acknowledge the peculiarity of human responses to the environments they encounter. Animal responses are overwhelmingly instinctual although some learning is apparent for certain species. The significance of Existential Space, by contrast, is not wholly innate but something people acquire through learning. However such acquisition is not wholly devoid of any instinctual foundations – a point I shall return to in the next section. Norberg-Schulz (1971) suggests that people relate to environments through developing cognitive *schemata*. A schema, as Norberg-Schulz, following Piaget, defines it, is a typical reaction to a situation “...formed during mental development through the interaction between the individual and his environment” (*ibid* p10). Through such development our “...actions or 'operations' are grouped into coherent wholes” (*ibid*). This involves processes of *accommodation*, in which people modify their environmental perceptions in conformity with their own cognitive structures and *assimilation* in which the environment modifies the cognitive structures themselves. *Adaptation* represents a condition of cognitive equilibrium between accommodation and assimilation and is, hence, an outcome of a two-way process in which a person's cognitive structures both modify and are modified by environmental experience. Existential Space, therefore, is a “...stable system of perceptual schemata, or 'image' of the environment (*ibid* p17). It refers to neither the physical properties of any particular environment or just the perception of them but a combination of both working upon each other simultaneously.



With reference to Piaget's concept of conservation, Norberg-Schulz suggest that people first develop existential relations with space through discovering the *permanence* of objects in the environment – the awareness that objects continue to exist when not immediately perceptible. Permanent *environmental images* develop and bring to the perceiver a sense of inner order and coherence. The image of an environment, for example, containing swings and a roundabout becomes *recognisable* as a space for child's play even when no children are present. Although such familiarity usually derives from first-hand acquaintance with a particular playground the image will also apply to other environments sharing the same properties. The child encountering for the first time another site also containing swings and a roundabout will recognise it as a certain type of environment in which to expect certain activities to occur. The same process, therefore, will apply to a person's perception of a place as 'safe' or 'dangerous' even when encountering it for the first time.

The earliest childhood cognition of space, Norberg-Schulz continues, is fundamentally *topological* in that it focuses more upon its significance to the perceiver than with its geometrical properties. This topology will embrace relations of proximity, separation, succession, closure and continuity. Thus "...the elementary organisational schemata consist in the establishment of *centres* or places, *directions* and areas or *domains*" (*ibid* p17). By centre, Norberg-Schulz refers to external points of reference within an overall environment to which people orientate their behaviour and focus their intentions. By recognising centres people discover a foundation for basic ontological security within a world that would otherwise appear threatening. "From the beginning...the centre represents to man what is known in contrast to the unknown and somewhat frightening world around (*ibid* p19). A primary centre, he argues, is the home or *dwelling*: a place that affords a profound sense of existential comfort.

The concept of *dwelling* draws primarily upon the seminal but controversial late philosophy of Heidegger (1971). Through *dwelling*, contends Heidegger, people are able to experience a rootedness and attachment to place. This place of dwelling orients the person to the world from a position of security, peace and freedom. Human 'Being', he famously insists, is always 'in-the-world' – *Dasein* – and all people are, therefore, inextricably integrated with the places in which they are 'thrown'. Place (or centre) is not, then, some addition to but always a fundamental aspect of existence by which people attain meaning in their lives. Yet, with the onset of modernity, continues Heidegger, and our submission to the forces of technology mankind has forgotten or, at least, has come to neglect this fundamental element of Being – the fact that we exist and our integration of our being with place. Environment becomes a resource for exploitation and human mastery and less a place in which we might dwell. This, Heidegger concludes, inevitably alienates us from the world and arouses a sense of disorientation. Thus, despite the obvious advantages we gain in material comfort and the rational organisation of space to serve human purposes we forget how to dwell and experience many environments we encounter as existentially alienating. We set ourselves apart from the world as subjects and regard it as an object only truly comprehensible through scientific procedures. For Heidegger, this is a mistake for *Dasein* is always an integration of subject with object in which neither takes precedence.

To 'dwell', therefore, means something different than to 'build' although, as Heidegger reminds us, we attain to dwelling through building. Through dwelling, place becomes meaningful as an integration of person with world, whereas building in the sense of just construction is to only impose the self upon the world. Only through building as a means of achieving dwelling can *Dasein* attain true ontological security and well-being. Heidegger notes that the etymological root of the word 'build' reveals the true association between building and dwelling – the meaning of which has become lost under conditions of modernity. Etymology reveals, however, how people previously experienced the environments in which they built and dwelt.

The Old Saxon *wuon*, the Gothic *wunian*, like the old word *bauen*, means to stay in place. But the Gothic *wunian* says more distinctly how this remaining is experienced. *Wunian* means: to be at peace, *Friede*, means the free, *das Frye* means preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, safeguarded (Heidegger 1971 pps 148/149).

Thus, dwelling is not to impose the self upon an environment, to exist at odds with it or regard it as something to overcome, but to *be* with it through experiences of *preserving*, *caring* and *staying*. To dwell is not, therefore, a matter of just constructing materials within an environment but is more akin to an act of gardening in which a person nurtures the environment and facilitates growth for the mutual benefit of both. To dwell is to exist *authentically* with an environment and to forge a sense of place in relation to it. It is, as Norberg-Schulz puts it, to create *cosmos* out of *chaos*,

To dwell is not an activity like any other but a determination of man in which he realises his true essence. He needs a firm dwelling if he is not to be dragged helplessly by the stream of time (Norberg-Schulz 1971 p180).

This involves, cognitively, the recognition of an environment as an *inside* which is meaningful only in contrast to an *outside*. To exist 'inside' is to belong to it and to experience it as a sanctuary against the perpetual threat of the outside world.

Outer space is the space of openness, of danger and abandonment. If that were the only space, man would really be the eternally hunted fugitive. [Mankind] needs the space of the house as an area protected and hidden, an area in which he can be relieved of continual anxious alertness, into which he can withdraw in order to return to himself (*ibid* p181).

The experience of place as an 'inside' is only meaningful in relation to recognition of an 'outside'. This is an important point, the implications of which I discuss in further detail below. Yet, at this point, we must recognise that the

experience of 'place' as secure does not depend upon the eradication of all risk. Security, like 'insideness' is only significant in contrast to something which poses a potential threat. Humans do not, therefore, abhor all 'risky' places and indeed may often value them as 'exciting' or as pleurably 'mysterious' but only if another place is experienced as 'home'. It is, therefore, a mistake to consider humans, existentially, as risk avoiders. As some recent 'cultural criminological' discussion asserts, people often engage in 'edgework' (Lyng 1990) such as extreme sports and deliberately flirt with danger even if this occasionally involves deviant and criminal activity. The thrill of rock climbing, for example, derives from its liaison with danger. Would it attract such enthusiasts if it were a completely safe pastime devoid of all risk? Similarly, is it not the case that roller-coaster rides attract custom because they, at least, give the impression of risk? Such pastimes become meaningful only in contrast to 'everyday life' which, for the most part and for most people, is relatively mundane and risk free. If a person's life was one endless experience of risk then it is doubtful that they would ever countenance rock-climbing, fairground rides and such like. The same principle also applies to environmental experience. A 'risky' environment does not necessarily repel but can actually arouse positive emotions but only if the experience or even just awareness of it occurs within a context of ontological security. The experience of the wood in which I played as a child in relation to the cul-de-sac of my parent's house, but also the apparent willingness of pensioners in Harlow to move around their neighbourhoods even at night is evidence of such an acceptance of risk within a context of ontological security.

Relph (1976) further expands the concepts of existential 'insideness' and 'outsideness' by emphasising the varying degrees of intensity by which people experience environments. To be 'inside' a place, he notes, is to "...belong to it and to identify with it and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is this identity with place". The experience of 'outsideness', by contrast, is to look at a place like a "...traveller might look at a town from a distance" (p49). The strongest place *attachment* involves what he terms *existential insideness* in which the person experiences a deep sense of belonging and security. This

differs from *vicarious insideness* in which the person empathises with a place and attempts to capture its *genius loci* – the spirit of the place – without ever feeling any sense of belonging to it. Vicarious Insideness, therefore, is the experience of the artist or, indeed, the humanist researcher who endeavours to remain faithful to what the place is while maintaining some existential distance from it. Whenever a person regards an environment or place as just a backdrop to their activity – a driver, for example, passing through some landscape – they experience it *incidentally*. Positivist research, Relph notes, deliberately employs some methodological strategy to achieve greater objectivity yet, in so doing, loses empathy and hence any full understanding of what the place signifies to those who are insiders. Such research strategies deliberately embrace an *objective outsidersness*. Finally, complete alienation from place and a corresponding sense of profound un-belonging in relation to it is to experience *existential outsidersness*.

If existential orientation depends upon people identifying spaces as centres and experiencing them as places it is necessary to outline how the properties of certain environments lends themselves or not to existential attachment. The classic studies of Lynch (1976) provide a useful conceptual framework towards gaining this understanding. Environments, he argues, that are *illegible* – that are not easily recognisable and defy the capacity of mind to ‘place’ them within a coherent schemata – promote disorientation, whereas the *legible* environment “[furnishes] the raw material for the symbols and collective memories of group communication” (*ibid* p4). Evaluation of risk in relation to environment, therefore, depends upon the extent to which the experience occurs within a context of legibility.

A good environmental image gives its possessor an important sense of emotional security. He can establish an harmonious relationship between himself and the outside world. This is the obverse of the fear that comes with disorientation: it means that the sweet sense of home is strongest when home is not only familiar but distinctive as well (p4/5).

To achieve legibility, or what Lynch calls *imageability* the environment must possess a distinct identity, structure and meaning. It must exude distinctiveness as something different from other environments with an identity that simultaneously conforms to known patterns or schemata *and* allows people to make sense of it from their points of view. “Thus an image useful for making an exit requires the recognition of a door as a distinct entity, of its spatial relation to the observer, and its meaning as a hole for getting out” (*ibid* p8). Legibility arises when the environmental image is (a) sufficient to meet the observer’s needs; (b) is readable; (c) safe; (d) open-ended in a way that allows observers to apply their own meanings to it and (e) communicable. Imageability, then, is a “...quality in a physical object which gives it a higher probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer” (*ibid* p9). This attribute, Lynch concludes, derives from the identification of five elements: -

[i] Paths – Clearly identifiable channels along which the observer ‘customarily, occasionally, or potentially’ moves.

[ii] Edges – Distinctive linear features that are not paths and which mark the boundaries between one environment and another: that separate the ‘inside’ from the ‘outside’.

[iii] Districts – Medium to large areas that the observer is either ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ and which are distinct geographical entities often distinguished by a place name.

[iv] Nodes – Strategic points that the observer can move towards along paths and physically enter. Nodes often give meaning to a district and act as centres.

[v] Landmarks – Other types of point-reference within an environment but which the observer cannot enter.

As my research, reported in Part Two, shows residents of Harlow do generally experience the town’s environment in ways that suggest it is legible. The division of the town into neighbourhood and housing groups, for example, does

allow for recognition of distinct 'districts' with reasonably clear 'edges' and with identifiable 'landmarks' and 'nodes'. It is an environment that allows a sense of existential 'insideness' to develop, which most residents regard as 'home' and within which there is a considerable experience of ontological security.

The implicit criticism of modern town planning forms that flows from Heidegger's late writings and which was subsequently taken up by humanist geographers like Relph (1976 & 1981) and Seamon (1993) or by architects like Norberg-Schulz (1970, 1981 & 1988) is of interest when considering the philosophical foundations of the New Town Idea. As pointed out earlier, New Town design is thoroughly modernistic yet derives its distinctiveness by drawing inspiration from pre-modern urban design patterns and its merger of town with country. If modern planning alienates and undermines the establishment of dwelling, perhaps it is such distinctly 'organic' features that are common throughout Harlow that may account for the ontological rootedness, sense of place attachment and, ultimately, relatively low fear of crime which the town's residents express. Without over-emphasising the extent of such existential rootedness – Harlow does contain many places which evince little affection or attachment from its residents – my research does suggest that there is a considerable degree of 'insideness' (especially with regard to the neighbourhoods), that it is 'legible' to those who regularly experience the town and that the greenery and open space provides a source of pride and belonging. Indeed, it seems that the same aspects of Harlow's design that, from the perspective of environmental criminological positivism would appear most vulnerable and a cause of fear actually helps establish a strong measure of ontological security. The 'riskiness' of some parts of Harlow are, therefore, not always detrimental to everyday environmental experience – indeed, it may enhance it. To account for this seemingly paradoxical feature of Harlow's environment and to supplement the concept of existential space we might usefully turn to bio-psychological studies of environmental evaluation.

### **Prospect-Refuge, Mystery and Hazard**

A small but growing body of research that examines the psychological structures of environmental preference can usefully complement and help clarify the concept of existential space in regard to its application to fear of crime. Much of this research operates within a 'Darwinian' paradigm in that it insists that human environmental preferences are driven by the evolutionary adaptations of our earliest ancestors. In common with all animal species, this paradigm claims, human survival depends upon a capacity to process information about environments (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989). Given that genetic replication requires individual members of a species to survive, evolutionary adaptation will favour those who are best able to process information from the environments they encounter and respond appropriately to them. Thus, individuals who were unable to recognise, for example, that a foul smelling bog can entrap anyone wandering into it were highly likely to perish and would not then pass on their genetic pattern. Those able to process the information that bogs are dangerous were more likely to survive and pass on their genes to offspring who innately became 'bog avoiders'. That we are today a species of bog avoiders is, therefore, not just a matter of learning – people know they are dangerous even if they have no previous experience of encountering one – but a reflection of our evolutionary heritage. The same principle applies to all environments (or elements of an environment) that are propitious to survival. Such information processing, however, is not just cognitive – a matter of correct recognition and categorisation – but also affective. People, according to this paradigm, actively prefer environments that once favoured the survival of our earliest ancestors.

In 1975 Jay Appleton, a lecturer in geography at Hull University, published a book entitled 'The Experience of Landscape' (Appleton J 1996). The book examines 'what is it that we like about landscape and why do we like it'? It scarcely mentions crime or fear of crime but concentrates mainly upon aspects



of the 'natural environment' that people might experience directly on visits to the 'countryside' or indirectly through viewing paintings or reading literature. Yet, the theory Appleton develops to answer his primarily aesthetic question develops a number of concepts that seems highly relevant to criminological concerns and especially the issue of anxiety as it relates to fear of crime and environmental evaluation.

Before discussing the relevance of Appleton's theory to criminological concerns, however, a few words are necessary to explain why it is compatible with the humanistic perspective of my research and especially the concept of existential space. Firstly, existential humanism is not idealism – it does not suggest our emotions and preferences derive only through conscious thought but that they are always a response to the facticity of existence. That we are 'thrust' into the world is a given – how we make sense of our experiences is not. Thus, it is not unreasonable to assume that 'ultimately' we are born with various psychological structures derived from our evolutionary heritage. However, these structures allow considerable cultural variability. That is, we are possibly drawn to certain elements of the environment because of what they symbolically represent. Such symbolism is 'natural' in that its significance derives from evolutionary processes. The precise form of such symbols may vary but the structure by which they become meaningful is something all people share. The widespread scientific acceptance of evolutionary theory is almost wholly beyond dispute and, thus, it is unwise to ignore it in any considerations of human behaviour or preferences. To claim that the root of our environmental preferences has nothing to do with our evolutionary heritage would, then, also be unwise. After all, there is no identifiable point in human history when evolutionary imperatives were wholly overlain by culture and became irrelevant. Thus, although we possess no innate desire for, say, hills we are drawn to elements of the environment that possess some 'natural' symbolic meaning which hills might well satisfy. Environmental preferences are diverse but the underlying structures that frame them are not. As argued above, all humans desire existential attachment or insideness to place and search for security in the environments they encounter. There is nothing antithetical in such a

statement with a Darwinian perspective. Appleton's theory is useful as it offers a bridge between scientific and humanistic modes of understanding. It is embedded firmly in science, yet his chosen method of study concerns an analysis of paintings, poetry, and landscape designs, all of which usually attract the attention of the humanist. It is worth noting that he entitles his book '*The Experience of Landscape*' suggesting a resonance with humanistic methodologies even though he refuses to dismiss the scientific evidence of evolutionary theory. His objective, in short, is highly similar to those of my research.

Appleton begins by acknowledging the basic Darwinian position as outlined above – what he terms 'Habitat Theory' – that environmental preference relates to needs of biological survival. But Appleton develops this idea further in a way that renders it more relevant to criminological study. Not only does survival depend upon an individual possessing the ability to 'recognise' whatever is biologically propitious within an environment but also an ability to either see potential predators or prey or, conversely, identify places of concealment. The capacity of an environment to allow the perceiver to 'see without being seen', Appleton claims, is a fundamental attribute to which people are inexorably drawn. When a landscape affords plentiful opportunities for both 'prospect' and 'refuge' it will appear aesthetically attractive.

By replacing the terms 'predator' and 'prey' with those of 'offender' and 'victim' the criminological relevance of Appleton's theory becomes plain. Although our survival no longer depends upon evading predators or the capacity to accomplish a successful hunt our need to appraise the environment remains. As Kaplan states:

While the survival requirements of contemporary humans differ in many ways from those of our ancestors, in many respects the story has not changed dramatically. One must still negotiate the physical environment, assess lurking threats and dangers, and concern oneself with finding one's way back. Nor have humans ceased to be information-based

animals, continuously struggling to make sense of their surroundings and exploring new adventures (Kaplan S 1992 p586).

Thus, an environment in which an individual as potential prey/victim is able to see potential predators/offenders or is able to identify spots where they can remain inconspicuous is one that will feel safer and will 'afford' a large measure of affective, ontological and aesthetic satisfaction.

A few research studies have directly applied Prospect-Refuge theory to understanding fear of crime in relation to the evaluation of environments. The best-known is Nasar and Fisher's (1992) study of the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts at Ohio University. The study begins by suggesting that fear will be greatest in relation to areas of the university campus in which prospect levels were adjudged 'low' and refuge 'high'. Conversely, fear of crime, it asserts, should be minimal where prospect was high and refuge low. This, the authors of the study believe, would reflect perceptions of the environment as containing places where potential offenders might 'lurk' and the degree to which such threats are visible. Levels of fear, they thought, would vary when either prospect or refuge was identified as moderate. Nasar and Fisher, however, 'factored in' an additional variable – the perception of possible escape routes. Thus a place with high prospect and low refuge – such as an alley – would, they thought, still arouse considerable fear of crime as it provides little opportunity for evading danger. The findings of the study generally confirmed these expectations. Three strategies were used: a survey of students familiar with certain spots on the campus chosen to represent degrees of 'prospect', 'refuge' and 'escape', an on-site survey involving people passing through these spots and direct observations of behaviour within the campus during hours of day and night. It was found that students avoided spots of high refuge particularly when opportunity for prospect was diminished with the onset of darkness. A further elaboration of this study by the same authors (Nasar J.L, Fisher B and Grannis M 1993) and by Petherick (1992) employing similar methodological strategies generally confirm the applicability of Appleton's theory. Although the campus had won several architectural awards, the design of the Wexner Center failed to

meet, the authors concluded, human needs – that it was designed according to a formalist aesthetic criteria which paid no attention to the foundations of human environmental preference. It is a criticism that resonates with the Heideggerean school of environmental evaluation. The extent, however, to which it also applies to the modernity of Harlow, for reasons outlined above, is not obvious.

It is important to recognise that most bio-psychological studies, including that of Appleton, acknowledge ambivalence in how people respond to environments. Such ambivalence does not relate to the theorisation itself but more to what it purports to explain. Only by acknowledging this ambivalence, I contend, can the existential significance of environmental preference and the affective evaluation of environments become known. Thus, I return to the point, yet again, that those parts of Harlow which seem most risky are often the same places in which the town's residents take most pride and towards which they show much affection (see Appendix Three for some photographic examples of where such ambivalence applies).

One level of such ambivalence concerns the emotional significance that people will often attach to 'prospect' and 'refuge' symbols. Elements of an environment symbolizing these two concepts might, for example, invoke a positive reaction: a perceiver could welcome a good prospect symbol for its capacity to reveal potential predators or a refuge as offering a place of sanctuary against threat. Yet, presumably a prospect could prove equally propitious for predation – an opportunity to discern prey – just as the refuge symbol could suggest a good opportunity to wait in ambush. Thus both prospect and refuge symbols can, presumably, enhance either a sense of security *and* fear. Nasar and Fisher suggest that people as potential victims, prefer environments of high prospect and low refuge whereas the would-be offender, presumably, prefers the opposite. Yet such an approach ignores the existential foundations by which people relate to environment. Rather than categorise people and comprehend their understanding of environment as either potential 'prey' or 'predators' it is

better to accept the ambivalence by which environmental evaluation occurs. Perhaps our 'natural' preference is not for one or the other but for environments that simultaneously symbolise both prospect and refuge in equal measure.

The Kaplan's information-processing model of environmental preference may provide some clarification. Like Appleton, they assume preference structures derive from evolutionary adaptations. Naturally, they suggest, we are creatures who intuitively seek safety in the environments we encounter. To some extent, this inevitably leads to a desire for environments that are familiar and predictable – an understanding of place as 'home'. Yet, as survival also demands a readiness to seek out food supplies, the abundance of which often varies according to seasonal change or exhaustion of existing supplies, mankind is also naturally an exploratory creature. Thus, our evolutionary heritage equips us with a desire to explore – to seek out the unfamiliar, but always from a position of security.

Exploration of one's environment in order to know it well enough to range widely and yet not get lost was thus an important element in a larger survival pattern.....There is... reason to believe that selection pressures in early humans favored acquiring new information about one's environment while not straying too far from the known (Kaplan S 1992 pps 584 – 585).

This claim, of course, corresponds closely to the Humanistic Geographer's conception of dwelling as a meaningful place of 'insideness' allowing people to explore the outside from a position of security.

Given our simultaneous need for both 'understanding' and 'exploration' together with our capacity to 'read' an environment in terms of its immediate denotative significance but also through symbolic inference the Kaplan's suggest that preference is predictable according to four variables as outlined below.

|                  | <b>Understanding</b> | <b>Exploration</b> |
|------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Immediacy</b> | Coherence            | Complexity         |
| <b>Inference</b> | Legibility           | Mystery            |

Again, this model corresponds closely to the key precepts of Humanistic Geography. The existential desire for legibility and coherence is simultaneous with a desire for the complex and mysterious and is an outcome of evolutionary adaptation. It also reveals the existential significance of prospect/refuge symbolism. Refuge can equate to home or dwelling, a place of existential insideness from which the perceiver may 'prospect' places of existential outsideness from a position of security. Where the refuge symbol occurs within a context of illegibility and poor coherence it will, however, invoke fear and insecurity. The preference of 'mystery' within an environment consistently figures in the Kaplan's various surveys (Kaplan S 1992, Kaplan R & Kaplan S 1989). It satisfies, they argue, a need for exploration which has evolutionary origins. The 'unknown', of course, can invoke both pleasure and apprehension. Yet the absence of mystery in an environment, although enhancing its 'safety' will undermine the pleasure by which people experience it. Herzog and Miller (1998), for example, after surveying perceptions of safety and danger in relation to 'mysterious' elements' of the environment conclude that it will only arouse feelings of pleasure when accompanied by perceptions of legibility and coherence.

Appleton acknowledges yet another layer of symbolic ambivalence to his analysis of environmental preference which, again, contributes to the value significance of prospect and refuge symbols. Without symbolic 'hazards', he argues, the perceiver would have nothing to prospect or seek refuge against. A direct confrontation with a hazard symbol or even its observation would arouse uneasiness. Yet the encounter of mystery from a position of security is

something, according to bio-psychological research, that people universally desire. In short, just as with the preference for mystery, it seems, people often embrace and deliberately court danger: a point that confirms the existentialist argument outlined above.

...fear entails avoidance, and so do horror and offensiveness; yet humans seek situations that produce fear in the guise of 'thrill' or 'adventure'...It was suggested earlier that 'civilisation' is a protective cocoon, an ordering of the physical environment and of human social behaviour in such a way as to insulate adult members of society from most of the emotional provocations that they would otherwise be subject to. But the result of such insulation – especially in the economically successful society, such as Ancient Rome or the Western World today – is that life may become dull and the need for excitement pressing, at least some of the time and for most people (Hebb & Donderi 1987 p256)

Appleton discusses Burke's and other 18<sup>th</sup> century aesthetic conceptions of the 'sublime' as an implicit recognition of this desire. To witness the potentially destructive force of nature from a position of relative security – watching a stormy ocean from the safety of a cliff-top, for example – yields sublime pleasure. Thus the refuge offers greater existential comfort when it is set against the hazards of nature. The 'designing out' of all hazards, just as the designing out of all mystery, within urban environments is not, therefore, necessarily advantageous. People, in short, do not prefer safe environments if they are sterile – indeed, they may prefer environments containing risks if they also contain opportunities for refuge. The appreciation of Harlow's Town Park and its other 'green spaces' shown by the town's residents despite acknowledging the risks they present would seem to bear this point out.

Thus Appleton concludes that environments offering a balance between prospect and refuge usually evoke the greatest aesthetic pleasure simply because they are able to embrace the essential ambivalence arising from the human condition. Simply counting the number of prospect, refuge and hazard symbols is not sufficient, for the significance of an environment only emerges

through experiencing the relation between them and acknowledging the existential significance it affords and the degree to which it meets human need.

Thus, the 'insideness' felt by residents of Mark Hall North derives partially from the area's distinction from environments 'outside'. It is a place they experience as 'home'. Yet, such 'insideness', which affords feelings of security and helps obviate the anxiety which, given the neighbourhood's crime rate, could be much higher, also derives from the inclusion of environmental elements that add complexity and mystery. It is, to repeat once more, the same 'risky' elements of the neighbourhood and discernible throughout much of the surrounding town, which helps establish ontological security. Similarly, the appeal of Harlow Park and the pride most Harlow residents take in its verdure and mock country lanes despite the obvious 'risks' they manifest becomes more explicable if understood from a perspective combining conceptions of existential space and the universal desire for prospect-refuge symbols. The town centre and other primary retail centres in Harlow, however, fail to elicit much sense of insideness. It is existentially 'illegible' and thus the many points of concealment it contains fails to invoke positive reactions – especially at night – and, thereby heightens anxiety, feelings of danger and fear.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter provides a conceptual framework for understanding how residents of Harlow experience the town, of their environmental preferences and dislikes, as reported in Part Two. It provides a foundation from which I can further assess the continuing viability of the New Town Idea. By providing such a foundation I am able to consider the impact of Harlow's physical environment less upon the town's sociological cohesion and more upon its importance to the town's residents in their everyday 'implacement'. As such a consideration will also frame my discussion of Harlow's New Town design in relation to current models



of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design it is useful to finish by summarising the key arguments made.

a. Fear of crime will diminish when people evaluate an environment as 'home' – as a place in which to dwell. This involves establishing a sense of belonging to the environment as an 'existential insider' and from an understanding of it as predictable and knowable. Firstly, such understanding demands that the environment is legible (imagable) and that it has clear paths, nodes, landmarks, edges and is a recognisable domain or place. Secondly, such understanding requires that the home is understandable as a refuge from which 'mysterious' elements of the environment become less threatening.

b. Fear of crime will diminish when the environment allows good prospects (that it affords visibility) but not at the expense of complexity. Thus, for example, vegetation is not necessarily a cause of fear – indeed, it can diminish fear through creating a preferable environment so long as it does not diminish the environment's prospect value. This claim is commensurate with recent research (e.g. Kuo F.E & Sullivan W.C 2001, Kuo F.E, Bacaicoa M, Sullivan W.C. 1998, Spreeuwenberg J.M *et al* 2008) which suggests that feelings of safety increase with the provision of greenery in urban areas.

c. Mystery is a crucial element of the environment but can arouse fear unless the perception of it occurs within a context of coherence and complexity. Thus, 'mystery' in an environment is essentially ambivalent and is neither intrinsically bound to arouse either fear or pleasure (Herzog T.R & Flynn-Smith J.A 2001, Herzog T & Smith G.A 1988, Herzog T.R & Kunzli G.E 2002) Mystery can be accomplished through such elements in the environment as deferred vistas, vegetation or pathway curvature. Humanistic enquiry can help establish whether mystery invokes feelings of security or anxiety in a specific context.

In the final chapter I further discuss the extent to which the New Town Idea satisfies these 'existential' and 'bio-psychological' needs and whether or not such criteria alone is a sufficient basis to evaluate the continuing viability of the New Town idea.

# **Chapter Eleven**

## **The Viability of the New Town Idea Today**

## **Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design and the New Town Idea**

Section 17 of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act (H.M.S.O 1998) stipulates that planning authorities must take all reasonable measures to maximise safety in new urban developments. A series of governmental publications, most importantly 'Safer Places' (ODPM 2004) and the 'Manual for Streets (HMSO 2007) together with other documents such as the British Police's 'Secured by Design' (ACPO 1994 see also Cozens P.M *et al* 2004) provide guidance for how such an objective is to be achieved. Given my research question concerns the continuing viability of the New Town Idea especially in relation to such programmes as the eco-towns initiative (see Introduction) it is useful to compare Harlow's design against the recommendations made in these documents. It is my intention in this final chapter, however, to pursue such a comparison while drawing upon the research outlined and discussed in the previous chapters.

It is doubtful that Sir Frederick Gibberd's Masterplan for Harlow, drawn in the late 1940s, would survive formal governmental scrutiny today. Not, at least, without attracting several demands for radical alterations. The town's 'organic urbanism' and 'neo-medieval' motifs might not arouse great consternation although the underlying utopian ambitions of the design would, no doubt, raise eyebrows and suggestions of naiveté. The term 'organic' resonates with an increasingly ecological consciousness amongst policy makers and with governmental stipulations that all new urban development enhance sustainability. Moreover, few would challenge the ambition to create a visually beautiful townscape and, no doubt, might readily agree that medieval urban form can provide a useful guide for its attainment. Yet, the means by which Gibberd chose to achieve these ideals would, I suspect, attract considerable scepticism today. It is clear that the design of Harlow offers a form of architecture that belongs to an earlier age – one of grand collectivist ambition and high faith in the capacity of inclusionary modes of social control that is now, in several respects, at odds with current forms of governance<sup>1</sup>. Simply put,

there are many aspects of Harlow's original design that clashes with recent thinking regarding the design of 'safe' urban environments. That Harlow has a relatively high crime rate (see Chapter Four) is, after all, surely evidence that the New Town Idea cannot be wholly adopted today without several often radical, revisions.

But this does not necessarily imply that New Towns like Harlow have no positive lessons to offer to the designers of the eco-towns or other contemporary urban developments. It is too simplistic to dismiss the New Town Idea as only another example of post-war architectural modernism which has proven, in social terms, an utter failure. Too often commentary on such modernism adopts extreme positions. Popular opinion, for example, tends to revile the brutalism and environmental aridity of such architecture and demands its complete demolition. The fate of the Pruitt-Igoe development in New York – a scheme which despite winning several awards soon after its completion, rapidly became known for its excessively high rates of crime and other social problems and was, subsequently torn-down. Such a fate is now popularly considered appropriate for all modernistic architectural design. A few supporters, however, usually from within the architectural profession itself, insist upon preserving these planning schemes as an important part of our cultural heritage while apparently remaining blind to the social problems that so often occur within them. Thus, Post-war architectural modernity, it seems, either attracts outright antipathy or complete admiration in equal and absolute proportion. My analysis of Harlow as a quintessential New Town, however, suggests that a more cautious assessment is necessary. We must remember that Harlow's distinctive 'neo-medievalism' – its synthesis of 'new' architectural forms commensurate with the contemporary industrial age and the patterns or design motifs of the pre-industrial urban settlement - lends the town a peculiar form of what Llewellyn (2004 p160 ) calls a 'diluted' modernism. Both the brutalism of the Radiant City (of which the Pruitt-Igoe estate was a prime example) or the rationalistic excesses of the Internationalist style, and the imposing monumentalism and brazen symbolism of power that City Beautiful architecture communicates (see Chapter Two) are not elements that

conspicuously feature in Harlow's design. It is true that the town does possess several buildings and whole housing areas that proclaim their modernity and which are distant from what is now commonly known as any 'vernacular' architectural style. Yet, it is a gentler, less in-your-face, form of modernity which subtly continues several of the country's traditional urban styles rather than attempts to move completely beyond them. It retains, for example, the traditional 'workman's' cottage, the village green, the country lane and urban square albeit beneath a guise of modernism. The tendency, therefore, to lump together all forms of post-war architectural modernity and dismiss them all equally as suffering from the same faults is to overlook several important differences between them.

I shall begin this chapter, therefore, by assessing how features of Harlow's built environment that are most readily identifiable as an outcome of New Town principles compare with the 'seven attributes of safer places' as described within 'Safer Places' (ODPM 2004). The identification of these seven attributes represents a synthesis of early, or 1<sup>st</sup> generation CPTED models and in particular Newman's Defensible Space Theory (1972), Jacobs' promotion of 'Natural Surveillance' (1961) and Felson's Routine Activities Theory'(1994). Although two of these models were introduced in the previous chapter it is useful to provide a brief summary of each at this point.

1. Defensible Space Theory promotes environmental security through enhancing a sense of proprietorship over a given place (see Newman 1972 and 1996). A place that suggests it belongs to someone or to a group who actively monitor what occurs within it and who seem willing to take action towards ensuring its maintenance or good image will deter would-be offenders. Assuming that crime is an outcome of rational decision-making, the theory suggests that those liable to offend will avoid places with good Defensible Space. Given that the chances of successfully completing a crime without the intervention of the place's proprietors, the chances of its occurrence will lessen. If necessary, an environment can directly evince a

sense of proprietorship through erecting physical impediments, the overt construction of territories and conspicuous improvement of surveillance through better lighting, assurance of good sightlines or even through artificial means of surveillance such as CCTV.

2. The concept of Natural Surveillance follows Jane Jacobs' (1961) championing of 'eyes on the street' to enhance public safety. Often, Jacobs' actual ideas are subject to simplification especially when subsumed – erroneously – within the broader category of Defensible Space Theory (see below). A more careful analysis of her ideas supports the development of a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation CPTED which I shall discuss shortly. However, it is sufficient now to note that natural surveillance occurs wherever there are plentiful people who have something worth looking at. Given the tendency for people to observe each other and the reluctance of would-be offenders to behave anti-socially when they believe they are being watched, then it follows that any planning able to create a plentiful supply of eyes will simultaneously help the spontaneous achievement of social order. Note, however, that this approach emphasises the availability of 'eyes' and not the delivery of good visual opportunities (sightlines, CCTV etc) which is more a feature of Defensible Space Theory approaches.
  
3. The fundamental premise of Routine Activities Theory (Felson 1994, Clarke R.V, & Felson M 1984) is that no crime can occur without the presence of three variables: a motivated offender, a suitable victim (or target) and the absence of a 'capable guardian' who can otherwise inhibit the occurrence of the crime. To some extent the theory is merely an elaboration of both the Defensible Space and Natural Surveillance approaches but it has a particular application to planning ideas by insisting that 'everyday life' can become safer through the target hardening of environments and the placement of ordinary activities within an environment where capable guardians (both formal agents of control and 'eyes on the street') are available.

Together, these three models form the foundation of an environmental criminology that focuses less upon aetiology of individual criminality and upon the context within which crimes commonly occur. To supporters of such approaches, traditional criminological research suffers from an aetiological bias and ignores the fact that all crime is 'situated' - that it has an inevitable place dimension (Brantingham & Brantingham 1991). As empirical evidence (increasing crime rates throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and high recidivist rates) suggests that crime prevention measures focusing upon the offender are, at best, only partially effective, advocates of CPTED believe greater gains are possible by addressing the environmental context in which offences actually occur (Clarke R 1980). The attributes and recommendations listed in 'Safer Places' offers a synthesis of 1<sup>st</sup> generation CPTED ideas (Cozens PM, Saville G & Hillier D 2005). However, such terminology is perhaps mistaken given that several earlier researchers and social commentators, not least the Chicago School sociologists, had previously noted the environmental context of crime (e.g. Shaw CR & McKay HD 1969). These earlier contributions, however, emphasise the capacity of environments to either sustain or weaken community cohesion which can then exercise an impact on criminal and other disorderly activity. A more recent wave of commentary hopes to develop a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation CPTED (Saville G and Cleveland G 2003) - one which returns to a more communitarian based approach begun by the Chicago School and influenced by early sociological investigations. As such a communitarian approach adheres more closely to the original 'social' aims of the New Town advocates.

Moffat (1983) identifies six characteristics of 1<sup>st</sup> generation CPTED which broadly equate to the seven attributes listed in 'Safer Places'. These are as follows: territoriality, surveillance (both formal and informal), access control, image maintenance, activity programme support and target hardening. These six characteristics are further reduced by Fisher and Nasar (1992) to a form more compatible with the evolutionary based environmental visual assessment model outlined in the previous chapter. Thus, an 'unsafe' environment is one



that affords good potential for offender concealment but low prospect and possible escape for any potential victim.

The first 'attribute' listed in 'Safer Places' refers to 'Access and Movement' and declares that safer places offer "...well-defined routes, spaces and entrances that provide for convenient movement without compromising security" (ODPM 2004 p16). Routes for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, it declares, should wherever possible run alongside one another and avoid separation. Thus, town-planners should establish a number of 'primary routes' to avoid the necessity of footpaths, shortcuts and other minor access points. Wherever footpaths do become necessary they should follow as straight a course as possible to enhance sightlines and remove potential places of offender-concealment. Pedestrians and motor vehicles should remain at the same level thereby avoiding the necessity of subways and footbridges.

Harlow's design falls short on each of these recommendations. Cycle tracks often run alongside (albeit in a rather vague manner) the principle traffic conduits, but frequently branch away to meander through areas of woodland or other 'open space' often at some distance from any road. Entrance to the principle shopping areas, as noted in Chapter Nine, requires the use of underpasses when not arriving by motor vehicle. Such 'routing' is a direct reflection of the Town's neo-medieval' design principle and the attempt to create a more rural ambience within the town's otherwise urban surroundings. It is, after all possible to travel by foot or bike, throughout much of the town while only occasionally viewing a car or even any residential building. Such design is meant to enhance pedestrian mobility and the possibility of face-to-face encounters thereby diminishing urban anonymity. Yet, the frequent, although not commonplace, evidence of vandalism, illicit drinking and other signs of disorder upon the Town's cycle tracks suggests that such design fails to achieve this design intention. One short stretch of cycle-track near the town-centre, for example, has recently become a gathering spot for the town's alcoholics and local newspapers regularly report on 'muggings' occurring on

other stretches. A 'space syntax' survey (Karimi *et al* 2009) first introduced in Chapter Five notes that the urban structure of New Towns in general and Harlow in particular leads to greater 'movements' on the urban periphery rather than the centre. This, the survey concludes, has led to a separation between various modes of movement and, hence, to "underused and unsafe pedestrian spaces" (*ibid* p31).

Harlow's design fares better with regard to the second attribute of 'safer places' although, in certain respects, it still falls considerably short of current guidelines. This attribute suggest that a safe place is 'laid out so as to discourage crime' (*ibid* p20). Harlow's residential buildings rarely stand in isolation with all sides exposed and vulnerable to criminal predation. Yet, within the residential neighbourhoods, back alleys are common and are impossible to view from any genuine public realm. Again, the neo-medieval penchant for courtyards and the setting of homes back from any thoroughfare does create innumerable areas of what Newman terms 'semi-public' space: areas that are accessible to all yet not obviously public in the same way as a park or city street. The 'Radburn Style' housing, in which buildings are kept apart from roads has become the focus of much criticism from advocates of Defensible Space Theory, yet is a common feature of Harlow's design.

Again, and for similar reasons, the design layout of Harlow falls considerably short of the third attribute of 'Safer Places': that "... all publicly accessible spaces are overlooked" (*ibid* p24). Frequently, such provision is not evident. Significantly, the reduction of surveillance opportunities is not a design oversight but a deliberate decision commensurate with the New Town Idea. That the cycle tracks pass through several 'lonely stretches', the town park provides large expanses of space seemingly empty of people, that other open areas are shielded by clumps of trees and shrubbery, is a fundamental aspect of 'organic' design. Harlow's environmental plan strives to achieve a large measure of 'privacy' despite its typically urban population density. Yet, the means to achieve this ideal, it would seem, renders much of Harlow's interior

weak in terms of surveillance. Furthermore, the failure of the Town's designers to foresee the growth in personal car ownership means that many of its roads are lined with parked vehicles (often reducing traffic to a single lane) usually some distance from the homes of their owners or other capable guardians.

So far this discussion suggests that Harlow's design is conspicuously weak. It does, however, offer some redemption with regard to the fourth attribute of 'Safer Places' which promotes places with a 'sense of ownership, respect, territorial responsibility and community. As detailed in Chapter Two, the achievement of these features was always a key objective of the original design. The Town's physical layout was meant to encourage a 'hierarchy of loyalties' and to create a sense of place through the establishment of distinct neighbourhood areas, housing groups and perceptible boundaries. My research indicates that Harlow's design does facilitate considerably such place identification, if only symbolically, and that some territorial responsibility (if not outright proprietorship) is clearly held by most residents. Courtyards, cul-de-sacs, the curvature of roads, all further contribute to the establishment of architectural enclosure and hence proprietorship. Moreover, the creation of separate design styles for each housing group reinforces feelings of territoriality that are fully compatible with Newman's recommendations. Indeed, the design of Harlow appears to anticipate several Defensible Space protocols and what has become standard practice amongst today's CPTED conscious designers. Although there are no 'gated communities' within the town, the division of the environment into clearly identifiable 'places' that are meaningful as territory to those most familiar with them, renders such extreme security measures unnecessary. In Mark Hall North, for example, most residents suggest that they do exercise some control over their surroundings and are willing to intervene if they witness 'trouble'.

The fifth attribute of 'Safer Places' which states the need for 'well-designed security measures' refers to the urban environment at a micro-scale and is not, therefore, relevant to a town's design as a whole. Thus, there is nothing peculiar

to the New Town Idea that either directly enhances or diminishes this requirement. Such 'target-hardening' measures, however, can collectively influence how people experience a given environment. It is, therefore, necessary to discuss them briefly in relation to Harlow's design and the 'vision' of social order in encapsulates.

CPTED initiatives offer, ostensibly, a thoroughly practical instrument for the reduction of crime and fear. They pursue an objective that is commendable and, for nearly everyone, highly desirable. If the quality of environmental design can assist in achieving this target and can help overcome a major social problem that blights the lives of many, and especially the most socially vulnerable and if empirical evidence suggests that its application is successful then it might seem churlish to question such initiatives. Thus, with advancing knowledge of how environmental design impacts upon crime and fear it seems reasonable to conclude that the utopian ambitions of the New Town Idea were naive and, ultimately, defective. Fortuitously, elements of this idea as manifest in Harlow remain compatible with such CPTED initiatives. Harlow, indeed, has patches of strong Defensible Space that lessens the need for 'well-designed security measures' and that can target harden an otherwise vulnerable environment. Yet, given that the town's design includes much that weakens Defensible Space it would seem reasonable to conclude that the planning principles informing them are, today, primarily redundant.

But what if we examine Harlow and, especially how its residents experience their surroundings from a perspective not taken by today's advocates of CPTED. That is, an alternative perspective that refuses to prioritise crime prevention primarily as a mode of risk management but one that emphasises human need and environmental preferences. After all, CPTED never addresses why people commit crimes, their motivations, the social fissures and tensions, or psychological frustrations even pathologies from which such behaviour arises. Instead, CPTED simply concentrates upon making the commission of the criminal act itself more difficult. Issues of aetiology are mainly ignored as either

irrelevant or irresolvable (see Clarke 1980). The designers of Harlow, although mindful of securing social order and a form of society in which crime remains low, never sought to tackle the problem directly. That the town was built at a time when crime was not as pervasive as it is today may have meant that notions of 'risk management' were not so urgent. Yet, as discussed in Chapter One, to comprehend the origins of the New Town Idea without considering the widespread fears of crime and disorder within the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century's industrial cities (especially that pertaining to the public realm) is to overlook something of key importance. That is, the New Town Idea sought to combat crime by addressing its supposed 'root' causes by creating an environment of collective belonging and community attachment – an environment where the reasons for behaving anti-socially become largely obsolete. As such, the logic of the idea suggests that the need for target-hardening measures, or indeed the provision of appropriate means of visual surveillance, should become unnecessary. The town would become 'safe' not because the environment prevents crime from actually occurring but because it removes the willingness of people to behave poorly towards each other.

Of course, the crime rate in Harlow suggests that the town's design fails to secure this noble objective. Yet, perhaps we should hesitate in completely condemning the town's design. Urban planning that only follows criteria of risk management can easily result in the creation of sterile, uniform and uninspiring places – environments that are 'safe' but dull to experience. Any environment that 'prevents crime only by removing the opportunities for its occurrence is probably a place in which very little else happens. To some extent, Harlow suffers from this problem: it represents the urban 'vision' of a small group of designers able to impose their values upon others. Although well-meant and genuinely philanthropic the construction of the New Towns represents, in this respect, an act of paternalistic arrogance. Yet, the character of their particular vision was never as overwhelming as is evident with other styles of modernistic town-planning and, subsequently their designs left 'room' for what, according to CPTED criteria, are 'risky' areas. It is within such places – the woodlands, the cycle tracks, the hidden 'open' spaces – that 'mystery' is attainable (see

Chapter Ten): places that promise some adventure and in which people are able to forge their own identity. The wood at the end of my cul-de-sac when I was a child is, no doubt, a risk. It is a place where would-be burglars can easily lurk unseen, awaiting a suitable opportunity to 'invade' the properties near-by. Today's CPTED conscious designers would, no doubt, ensure that no such 'unassigned' space be allowed to exist or at least prevent access to it using suitably 'well-designed security measures'. But it is a place that holds much significance to me and which I continue to regard with much affection regardless of any supposed hazard it presents. My research indicates that other residents of Harlow share a similar attachment to parts of Harlow which most clearly evince New Town principles of design even if they are, simultaneously, conscious of the dangers – the risks – such places present. Where such places are lacking the town is at its weakest – places that are not only risky but also uncared for. The town centre is an example where the functional zoning of retail away from any other activity has proven disastrous. But, elsewhere, my research indicates – within the neighbourhoods and the large seemingly empty park, along the pathways passing through dense verdure - the possibility of mystery and establishment of ontological security still prevails. Thus, from the perspective just outlined, the occurrence of 'well-designed security measures' should not necessarily be understood as a criteria of strength but one, in preventing the experience of any mystery, of failure.

The design of Harlow, however, becomes almost indefensible once again with regard to the sixth attribute of Safer Places: that they allow suitable levels of activity. The inclusion of this attribute represents a departure away from notions of Defensible Space and towards the Natural Surveillance model of Jacobs. Put simply, it suggests that a vibrant public realm is one in which criminal behaviour becomes easily detectable and thereby less liable to occur. Again the rigid adherence to principles of functional zoning would appear to undermine the possibility of achieving this standard. Certainly, Harlow has areas of lively, almost bustling, activity. But too often such vibrancy depends upon the time of day: residential neighbourhoods are quiet during 'normal' working hours when many residents leave the area to attend their employment.

Neither do they really become lively during the hours after work given that there is little reason for the residents to venture outdoors. The town-centre thrives during the day, but at night empties. The park has 'spots' which attract users but vast areas facilitate no other purpose than casual walking. In attempting to rationalise the public realm, to domesticate it and remove its dangers, the design of Harlow has led, almost, to its eradication altogether.

The seventh and final attribute of Safer Places demands an environment that is well-maintained and managed – a nod back, once again to Defensible Space theory but also Wilson and Kelling's 'Broken Windows' hypothesis (See Chapter Ten). A repeated complaint that emerged during my interviews was that the maintenance of Harlow was diminishing, that the investment needed to uphold its image was becoming scarce. The following excerpt was typical:

Oh..er living in a New Town has a different connotation now that it did those 40 years ago. ....because everything was brand new....everything was nice...everything was lovely and green. Harlow is still one of the nicest places in the Spring. Because there is beautiful trees everywhere. The only tragedy is that they're not maintained and the gardens are not kept as nice as they used to be anymore. They're just left to grow..you know...as you go round you see where the council used to employ gardeners to do the gardening. And there was always green verges and little bushes around places and people would come round...you know...they would be dug over and weeded couple of times a year. And the rose bushes pruned. That doesn't happen anymore (From Transcript of Interview Eighteen).

Some of my respondents simply felt such decline was a matter of natural ageing but bemoaned the lack of foresight on behalf of the town's architects to recognise how building materials perish. Others were adamant that the decline was due to wilful political mismanagement. But, whatever the cause, it seems that the 'gleaming' modernity of the New Town, which may well have suggested its residents cared for it, is now beginning to show signs of neglect.

Thus, an assessment of Harlow's design against the government's own recommendations for creating safer places does not particularly suggest that the New Town Idea has much contemporary viability. Although not wholly lacking in the 'seven attributes' of safer places as identified in official documentation, the strengths that are apparent within the town seem to occur more as matter of chance than a deliberate outcome of any specifically 'New Town' vision. However, as suggested earlier, the Idea might compare more favourably from an alternative perspective which does not focus so exclusively on the target-hardening of environment but more upon the enhancement of the public realm.

Advocates of a 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation CPTED (Saville G & Cleveland G 2003) argue that Crime Prevention initiatives should focus less upon the micro-management of environments towards the removal or modification of risky elements and more upon the enhancement of community cohesion. Not only would such a strategy, they argue, represent a return to the more sociological concerns of the Chicago School but also one more compatible with the true drive of Jacobs' conception of 'eyes on the street'. That is, by emphasising the improvement of 'sight-lines' and maximising possibilities of visual surveillance 1<sup>st</sup> Generation CPTED initiatives tend to forget the need to obtain the actual eyes able to deliver a measure of security. Only the presence of such eyes and not the sight-lines as such can prove effective. It is, they claim, only by building in ways able to encourage community, but more specifically, a vibrant public realm, that environmental design can make any successful impact upon crime prevention.

Perhaps with our focus on the physical design aspects of CPTED we have...grabbed the wrong handle. Have we forgotten that what's significant about Jacobs' 'eyes on the street' are not the sight-lines or even the streets, but the eyes? Jacobs' synecdoche – using eyes to represent entire neighbourhoods of watchers – reminds us that what really counts is a sense of community. When we fail to 'design' our affective conditions that help generate that sense of community, with the same careful scrutiny as the physical, we are doing less than half the job (*ibid* p1).



In many respects 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation CPTED proposals are more compatible with the government's promotion of 'community safety' as a necessary element of crime prevention (see Crawford 1998). As Squires (1997) says "The concept recognises that improving the physical security of individual houses and estates, while useful, will not of its own necessarily improve people's safety or sense of security in their own homes and neighbourhoods. A sense of safety is related to the relations among the people who live in the neighbourhood", This promotion does not imply any shift away from concerns with 'situational crime prevention'. The stipulation that local authorities and other bodies responsible for urban development take all reasonable measures to maximise safety remains. Nevertheless, following the 1991 Morgan Report, there is a firm recognition that crime and fear reduction requires measures of 'social' and not just 'physical' prevention (*ibid*). To some extent, conceptions of multi-agency policing, and crime prevention partnerships involving a wide range of bodies such as health and education authorities and local community associations, refer to policy initiatives that do not apply to any particular Town Planning model or specific types of urban environment but to them all. Harlow's distinctiveness from other urban areas derives from the character of its physical environment rather than from its network of community relations and civic institutions. My study, for this reason, concentrated more upon Environmental Criminology than with broader concerns with community safety. Yet, given the original ambition of the New Town Idea to establish, through means of town-planning, a framework for a cohesive and balanced community, it is necessary to consider how well Harlow's design provides a foundation for 'social' safety.

From the perspective of a 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation CPTED, however, the design of Harlow does not, again, appear especially successful. Throughout my study I mention the apparent absence of any strong urban public realm and the comparative weakness of community participation. The public spaces of the neighbourhood areas are not exactly busy, the Town Park is 'under-used' and the town-centre empties in the evening and during the night. This is not to suggest there are no organisations that can participate in community safety programmes – Harlow

does boast a 'Civic Society', a 'Park-Users Group', some neighbourhood Watch schemes and the occasional community association. But, overall, these organisations fail to indicate the levels of community cohesion clearly hoped for by Harlow's first designers. For reasons discussed above, however, Harlow's design does 'win' the attachment of most of its residents and does provide the physical framework for a 'sense of place'. Such attachment certainly helps reduce feelings of fear and 'ontological' security. It is an aspect of the New Town Idea that has proven successful and should, perhaps, remain a feature of future urban 'town' development. Yet, the weakness of the town's public realm remains problematic and suggests that other aspects of the New Town Idea require radical modification. But rather than relying upon 1<sup>st</sup> Generation CPTED initiatives – which can undermine those elements of Harlow's design that are successful – it is better to adopt the more communitarian approach of 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation CPTED. In this respect, a merger of the positive and primarily environmental aspects of the New Town Idea with the more sociological aspects of New Urbanism might prove propitious in terms of community safety.

### **An Alternative Paradigm – New Urbanism, Crime Prevention and the New Town Idea**

Surveying the rapid modernisation of Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century France Emile Durkheim began to question how order was possible amidst the bustling diversity of the newly emerging society. How, he asked, can a group of people, each with different interests and talents, all pursuing a wide diversity of lifestyles and working in a complex variety of trades and professions, cohere into something recognisable as a society? Why does the predominant individualism characteristic of modernity not lead to atomistic disintegration in which no bonds can draw such a disparate group of people together? His answer to these questions suggests that social order in modern society derives from the same diversity that was the initial source of his concern (see Durkheim 1984) A degree of individualism is necessary to allow innovation and to drive social progress but it also entails that people will become increasingly dependent

upon one another: few people in modern society possess the range of skill to render themselves self-sufficient. Morality in modern society, Durkheim concluded, was 'organic' in that it arises from difference and mutual dependency. Such a moral foundation, Durkheim was also aware, is inherently fragile and always liable to collapse. Whenever the pull of individualism becomes too great, he suggested, society and its individual members will enter a stage of anomie. Given the diversity amidst density that characterises modern urban societies, we may conclude they suffer particularly from this threat. Ultimately, it is this tension between individualism and a collective conscience that remains at the root of most problems concerning urban social order. And, just as Durkheim saw the need to establish an 'organic' foundation for moral order under conditions of modernity, so the progenitors of the New Town Idea saw an 'organic' solution in urban design.

Jane Jacobs' classic study (1961) concerning how healthy urban societies 'work' and why some cities fail to ensure reasonable levels of social order unwittingly – she was always more a journalist and free-lance writer drawing inspiration more from a passionate observation of cities than social scientific research – suggests answers that generally confirm Durkheim's analysis. Cities become 'great' and provide order, she argued, by exploiting the vast reservoirs of diversity that such settlements make available. In a society of strangers who often have little in common, it is this very diversity and the condition of mutual dependency it obligates that prevents urban society from disintegration. Yet, as with modern society as a whole and of which cities are really but a microcosm, the foundation of social order is always fragile and can quickly fall into a condition of anomie.

Jacobs' single most important contribution was to guide planners, developers and related professionals into building environments that enhance diversity. Yet her message fell, predominantly, upon deaf ears. During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and especially through the post-war decades when the New Towns were emerging in Britain, most urban development sought to provide a framework of anything but

diversity. Instead, most development led increasingly to suburban 'sprawl' – a form of urban environment that rigidly separates people by income-differential, ethnic profile and function (Duany *et al* 2000, Howard-Kunstler J 1993) – or divides existing cities into specialised zones of usage. The latter, of course, was however, and in hindsight quite erroneously one key strategy of the New Town Idea. The consequence, according to a group of architects and planners who share a philosophy of what has become known as 'New Urbanism', is an evaporation of any genuine urbanism. The social decline that results, they agree, is something that Jacobs' would have predicted. The 'Charter of New Urbanism' (Leese M & McCormick 1999) sets out to rectify such decline and to promote a return to 'traditional' forms of urban development. Again, it is useful to compare the New Town Idea against the key principles of New Urbanism especially with reference to issues of social order, for together they can offer a basis for a fully organic model of town planning.

The twenty-one point Charter of New Urbanism urges the construction of new and the 'retro-fitting' of failed urban environments to encourage diversity through, amongst other things, enhancing 'walkability', the overcoming of zoning regulations and provision of affordable housing within 'mixed-neighbourhoods. An interconnected network of relatively narrow streets accommodating a variety of usages, the Charter states, can provide both pedestrians and motorists with a choice of routes, thereby reducing traffic congestion and increase the number of people using them. People from a wide variety of backgrounds will, thereby share a vibrant public realm and mutually establish a sense of community and of place (see Duany A 2000). Like Jacobs, the New Urbanists implicitly pursue a 'Durkheimian' vision in which people will share a collective identity and the enforcement of morality through forms of self-policing regardless of how many strangers are present. It is also a vision that is strongly reminiscent of the New Town Idea although one which favours rather than eschews diversity. New Urbanism is of especial interest to my research given that it offers a synthesis of both CPTED and communitarian approaches (see Hughes 1998) to crime prevention and thus is a model that

should prove more sympathetic to the New Town Idea while recognising its weaknesses and need for modification compatible with government guidelines.

New Urbanist Theory has already led to the construction of innumerable developments in America (see Katz P 1994 for some early examples) and, increasingly throughout the world. In June 2003, the former British Deputy Prime-Minister, John Prescott, attended the Congress for New Urbanism in Washington where he declared his sympathy with its design 'vision' and drew connections with his own government's planning policies. The government led 'Urban Renaissance' initiative (see Urban Task Force 1999) and its guidelines for building 'Sustainable Communities' (ODPM 2005) together with other important governmental planning guidelines (e.g. DoT 2007) all evince the influence of New Urbanist theory.

Yet, New Urbanism has begun to attract criticism, particularly from advocates of conventional, 1<sup>st</sup> Generation CPTED approaches, as a planning model unable to deliver safe urban environments (e.g. Town S and O'Toole R 2005, Knowles P - date of publication unknown). Rather than providing an appropriate physical framework for security, these critics claim, New Urbanist design provides plentiful opportunities for crime and is often responsible for the denigration of the very communities it claims to help. The primary contention concerns the issue of what New Urbanism describes as 'Openness' but which the critics deride as 'permeability' (White G.F 1990). By encouraging diversity through enhancing interconnectedness, the critics warn, such design invites the would-be offender and supplies an ideal opportunity for anti-social behaviour. For example, the closure of streets and reduction of access in the often reported case of the Five Oaks neighbourhood in Ohio (Newman O 1996) led to a 26% reduction in reported crime and a 50% diminishment of violent crime with over half the residents declaring a reduction in fear of crime. Thus, these critics warn that the 'openness' of much New Urbanist design can lead to an opposite effect: properties that were once protected enclaves might become 'hotspots' of crime simply by allowing permeability and the entrance of strangers who

may not always be welcome. Advocates of New Urbanism, of course, disagree and suggest that these critics both misunderstand the design initiatives they propose or use examples which are not relevant.

Both proponents of traditional CPTED design and New Urbanism refer favourably to Jacobs' (1961) conception of Natural Surveillance. Both also promote the necessity of a lively urban public realm and insist that it is kept distinctly separate from the private sphere. As such both approaches would regard aspects of the New Town Idea with some scepticism. Nevertheless, a closer examination of both conventional 1<sup>st</sup> generation CPTED approaches predicated primarily upon Defensible Space principles and New Urbanist design approaches reveals a number of key differences with regard to the public realm which makes the latter more amenable to New Town design. It seems that supporters of Defensible Space often misread Jacobs' original conception of Natural Surveillance and thereby advance a form of anti-urbanism that is wholly incongruent with her implicit Durkheimianism. Although they acknowledge, again implicitly, the problem of urban anomie and recognise its ever-present threat, the solution they offer is to effectively remove the public realm as something intrinsically vulnerable rather than suggest designs that may improve its safety. New Urbanist design by contrast, offers a genuine communitarian strategy of crime prevention and order maintenance that remains wholly pro-urban. Critics of New Urbanism tend to use examples of urban development that are not New Urbanist at all. Such misreading appears to arise from regarding the urban environment as an 'administrative' tool of immediate and direct crime prevention rather than considering it as a possible framework for community development, place attachment and the ontological security that comes from 'dwelling'.

Jacobs' understanding of urban 'natural surveillance' may appear occasionally naïve – a consequence of its deliberate refusal to consider the 'root' causes of anomie. It relies, for example, upon strangers observing a moral consensus within the public realm which may not, given a city's cultural diversity, actually

exist – a feature of urban society noted by Wirth (1931), Sellin (1938) and other 'conflict' criminologists during the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Similarly, it fails to address the deliberate targeting of the city's busiest and most vibrant places by, for example, pick-pockets and confidence tricksters. Given their peculiar character, cities may suffer comparatively high crime rates regardless of how many eyes peruse their streets. Yet, Jacobs' analysis appeals, I suspect, because it describes an ideal urban scene that many want to experience firsthand. Jacobs' success derives from her ability to describe how it is achievable without forsaking personal security. In fact, Jacobs never intended to address the 'root' causes of crime. These, she thought, were an outcome of deep social ills of which she admitted to have no expert knowledge. But, in providing an appropriate urban environment able to enhance natural surveillance, town and city planners might, she believed, provide a physical framework where effective solutions to crime might begin to emerge. Although the physical design of the urban environment can never, in itself, solve problems of crime to build in ways that enhance its opportunities for occurrence, she thought, is stupid.

Several proponents of Newman's 'Defensible Space' approach to crime prevention, however, not only regard Jacobs' conception of natural surveillance as naïve but also damagingly wrong. Although they agree that a lively public realm can inhibit crime this should constitute a far narrower part of towns and cities than that proposed by Jacobs and especially her New Urbanist followers. It is when design makes permeable those parts of the urban environment that rightfully should remain under private control, they claim, that problems of crime arise. The ability to move through the environment, they acknowledge, is a fundamental requirement of urban habitation: nobody can maintain a purely sedentary existence without incurring psychological harm. Yet careless planning they suggest, often following New Urbanist principles, allows movement through otherwise 'protected' spaces, inviting potential harm. Town and O'Toole (2005), for example, refer to Burras Road in Bradford as an example. Once a 'crime-free' cul-de-sac, the opening of a pathway at one end to provide access to a near-by shopping centre made it into what one resident called a 'hell-hole'.

As people began using this pathway, especially students from a local college, the burglary rate rose, they claim, to fourteen times the national average with a similar escalation of other crimes. The experience of Burras Road, states Knowles (2001), is common wherever development follows New Urbanist design principles. In his survey of 4500 'New Urbanist' 'homes', he found 167 reports of burglary, 135 thefts of motor vehicle, 357 thefts from motor vehicle and 360 cases of criminal damage. This compares with figures of 22 burglaries, 24 thefts of motor vehicle, 63 thefts from motor vehicle and 92 cases of criminal damage occurring in the same number of dwellings built according to 'Secured by Design' guidelines (a British police led initiative that fully embraces the 'Defensible Space' model).

It is significant that Knowles discusses New Urbanist 'homes' rather than town plans, townscapes or even environments. Nowhere does he detail the criteria for describing individual dwellings as New Urbanist although, presumably, he is referring to such themes as their frontage onto streets, adjacency to back alleys and other motifs of New Urbanist design (see Duany *et al* 2000 for further details). Such motifs, however, do not belong to any specific architectural style. New Urbanism, like the New Town Idea, is a movement for the construction of whole urban environments following identifiable organisational patterns. Although it is often associated with a return to 'traditional' architecture – Poundbury in Dorset with its Neo-Georgian aesthetic and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century American appearance of Seaside in Florida are often used as typical examples – and, indeed it is also known as 'Neo-Traditionalism' by some of its supporters – the New Urbanist movement welcomes any style if it remains compatible with the underlying structures that allow a town or city to thrive. Duany *et al* (2000) regard the term 'Neo-Traditionalist' as referring to a pragmatic design approach that blends both the old and new towards the creation of something that works. To isolate single dwellings as 'New Urbanist', therefore is to misunderstand the term. Similarly, the photographs of Burras Road accompanying Town and O'Toole's critique do not appear to picture any form of Neo-Traditionalism, yet are offered by them as a typical illustration of New Urbanist design. The footpath that attracts their ire was built, they claim, in conformity with a New



Urbanist code for 'openness' regardless of its detrimental consequences upon the adjacent residences. Yet, the path links a cul-de-sac with the extensive and apparently empty car-park of a large supermarket: hardly two environmental features New Urbanists warmly embrace.

But supposing statistical evidence does indicate that areas of 'Defensible Space' are less crime prone than those of New Urbanist design – which is actually difficult to establish – would this imply it is a more appropriate model for future urban development? The answer to this question depends less on analysing narrow statistical profiles of specific locations but upon understanding the impact upon the whole environment of each design approach. It is in this regard that the difference between both models becomes most apparent. New Urbanism, as already discussed, prioritises *public* urbanity through mixed usage, interconnected streets and other mechanisms for diversity and promotes eyes-on-the-street as a security enhancement. Defensible Space models, by contrast, prioritise the *private* control of territory to obstruct would-be offenders. It is, for this reason alone, a profoundly anti-urban strategy of crime control: a strategy that responds to the possibility of anomie by encouraging avoidance of contact.

Jacobs noted how avoidance of 'contact' within American cities often led to the protection of 'turf'. In lower-working class districts of these cities, 'turf' designates the territory of local neighbourhood gangs. These gangs, as is well known, often monitor the movements of anybody venturing into their turf and repel, frequently with violence, anybody they consider an intruder. It is, if nothing else, a display of strong neighbourhood attachment. Jacobs pointed out, however, that an increasing number of affluent, middle-class residents designate their own 'turf' by severely restricting access to their neighbourhoods. The impact, she thought, is no less detrimental to the maintenance of public urbanity than the aggressive posturing and intimidating displays of the youthful gang. It is, however, a trend continuing apace with the encouragement of Defensible Space schemes throughout the world. In America the 'Gated

Community' is rapidly becoming the fastest growing form of real estate – often contributing to the spread of suburban 'sprawl'. Blakely and Snyder (1997) report that eight out of every ten new residential developments in the US offer some version of 'gated' protection to their residents. Even within cities, modifications to the environment are creating whole enclaves detached from their surroundings by walls and insurmountable fences. That those responsible for excluding strangers from these enclaves are usually well-off and figures of apparent respectability, and if the means they employ are usually non-violent, does not mean they are protecting 'turf' any less than the poor, working class 'hoodlum'. In fact, the 'Gated-Community' is as much an expression of urban anomie as it is an effective response to it.

Jacobs was no utopian: her book did not sweepingly acclaim the public aspect of cities by denigrating the private. Rather, she recognised that both socially and psychologically, a healthy urban environment must facilitate public contact through plentiful interaction *with* personal privacy. It is only when fear of strangers within the urban public realm leads to withdrawal and an obsession with privacy that a pernicious territorialism may ensue. Her argument is a reminder that the meaning of social 'order' and 'disorder' are rarely obvious. Behind the walls and fences of the Gated Village, the environment might appear orderly and evince low crime rates, whereas the bustle of a 'slum' sidewalk might appear to epitomise disorder. Yet, the apparent chaos of the slum conceals, Jacobs suggested, a complex order able to inhibit both crime and fear whereas the respectable 'order' of the defended neighbourhood may simply hide deep social fissures. As Jacobs says: "There is a quality even meaner than outright ugliness or disorder, and this meaner quality is the dishonest mask of pretended order, achieved by ignoring or suppressing the real order that is struggling to exist and to be served" (Jacobs 1961 p15).

Of course, to claim that Gated Communities are the inevitable and only outcome of adopting Defensible Space strategies is unfair. Although, arguably, the Gated Community epitomises a growing trend of public withdrawal as a

response to problematic crime rates, proponents of Defensible Space seldom regard it as the only mechanism available. Instead, they usually recommend the employment of more subtle environmental designs to indicate that an urban space is under private control. These include, for example, the building of cul-de-sacs and others forms of architectural 'enclosure', street 'closures' and the use of different paving stone colours to indicate where public space ends and the private begins (see, for example the ACPO guide, 'Secured by Design: New Homes'). Such designs, however, are still liable to weaken the public realm and exacerbate, not resolve, the forces of urban anomie. "It is futile" says Jacobs, "to try to evade the issue of unsafe city streets by attempting to make some other features of a locality, say interior courtyards, or sheltered play spaces, safe instead (p35).

Defensible Space strategies do, however, hold one apparent advantage – ease of comprehension. Both models of crime prevention advocate the design of environments that suggest somebody is willing to intervene if transgression occurs. The willingness to protect defended private space is comparatively easy to understand: it belongs to somebody or some group who can and probably will act quickly to protect their property. Explaining why, given the forces of urban anomie, strangers should intervene in the public realm is not, however, so simple. To succeed, New Urbanist design must both encourage and clearly evince *public* ownership. This, its advocates suggest, can arise through invoking a 'sense of place' by which users of the public realm experience environmental comfort, attachment and belonging. Admittedly, much New Urbanist writing is hazy on this topic and does not always clearly show how feeling comfortable within an urban environment can enhance public ownership. Zelinka and Brennan (2001) in a crime prevention 'manual' clearly evincing the influence of Jacobs model of natural surveillance, provides some clarification by emphasising the need for 'legibility with urban environments. In short, they repeat the central claim of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation CPTED by insisting upon the encouragement of eyes on the street whose owners regard the public realm – and not just some ostensibly public space that is, in reality, private – as 'theirs'.

It is, then, this aspect of the New Town Idea – its facilitation of legibility amidst complexity – that has lasting relevance for today’s urban designers. Those unfamiliar with New Towns might question this conclusion especially when their occasional visits lead them to become lost. Yet, it is not ‘legibility’ in the sense of navigability – although an important element of Lynch’s (1960) original argument on the topic – which New Town design fulfils. Instead, it is the sense of belonging, the attachment to place and existential comfort that comes from experiencing the urban environment as ‘home’: a place in which to dwell while not extinguishing the mystery by which such attributes are lent even greater intensity and by which a town like Harlow ‘succeeds’. Other aspects of the New Town Idea, its embrace of zoning and creation of areas allowing meagre visual surveillance are, it is true, incompatible with contemporary requirements for safety. Yet its promotion of ‘walkability’, its attempts at ‘rural’ and neo-medieval beautification and its combination of architectural enclosure with ‘openness’ resonates with New Urbanist ideals and, perhaps, grants the New Town Idea at least some measure of continuing viability.



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| Zorbaugh H.W.            | 1929 | <b><i>The Gold Coast<br/>and the Slum: A<br/>Sociological<br/>Study of<br/>Chicago's Near<br/>North Side</i></b>      | Chicago  | University Press                  |
| Zucker P                 | 1959 | <b><i>Town and<br/>Square: From<br/>the Agora to<br/>the Village<br/>Green</i></b>                                    | New York | Columbia<br>University Press      |
| Zukin S                  | 1991 | <b><i>Landscapes of<br/>Power: From<br/>Detroit to<br/>Disney World</i></b>   | Berkeley | University of<br>California Press |



## Appendix 1: Questions Used In Interviews

**1. How long have you lived in Mark Hall and in Harlow?**

**1:1 Where did you live before?**

**1:2 Why did you move to Harlow?**

**1:3. Can you remember what you thought about Harlow before you lived in the town?**

**2. Do you live in a neighbourhood?**

**2:1 Is your neighbourhood a physical area?**

**2:2 Where do you think your neighbourhood ends?**

**2:3 Usually, when people see an image of the Eiffel Tower they think of Paris just like they think of New York when they see an image of The Statue of Liberty. Is there anything in your Neighbourhood that might similarly represent it?**

**2:4 How often do you use the local shops or other services near your house?**

**Prompt: What might be used on the letterhead of a neighbourhood association to represent the area?**

**3. You live in a 'New Town'.**

**3:1 If you were asked by a friend who has never visited Harlow what a New Town is what would you reply?**

**3:2 Is there anything near your home that you think typically represents what a New Town is?**

**Prompt: Is there anything near your home that you think makes the area different from other residential areas outside of Harlow?**

**4. Harlow has many open spaces of greenery. What does this mean to you**

**5. How would you usually get to The Stow (or local shops) from your house?**

**5:1 Is there any route you might avoid?**

**5:2 Would you take a different route after dark than that you might usually take during the day?**

**6. How much do you care about what happens in your local area?**

**6:1 Would you personally do anything to stop any activity or behaviour in your local area of which you disapproved?**

**6:2 If you were in trouble how likely is it that somebody who lives near you would come to your aid?**

**7. Is there anywhere near your home that you would not like to go on your own?**

**7:1 Do you think there is anywhere near your home that is dangerous?**

**7:2 Can you mark on this map where you think is safe and where is dangerous?**

**8. Are there any areas near your home that attracts nuisance behaviour?**

**8:1 Can you give me any examples?**

**8:2 Why do you think this is?**

**9. Would you like the local authority to make any physical changes to the area near your home?**

**\* Prompt: - To make the area feel safer?**

**10. If you had a choice would you prefer to continue living in Harlow or would you prefer to ideally live elsewhere?**

**10: 1 What type of place would you prefer to live in?**

**- What do you think makes a good place to live in?**

**10: 2 How does Harlow compare to London or another large city?**

## Appendix Two – Interviews Conducted for the Research

### Interviews with Residents, Former Residents and Non-Residents of Harlow

| <b>Interview Number</b><br>R = Recorded | <b>Interviewee</b><br>(Approximate Age in Brackets) | <b>Address</b>                        | <b>Date of Interview</b> |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Pilot Interview One                     | Female – Late 60s                                   | Home Address:<br>Mark Hall North      | 12.07.07                 |
| Pilot Interview Two                     | Male - Pensioner                                    | Home Address:<br>Bishopsfield         | 15.07.07                 |
| Pilot Interview Three                   | Female – 40s  | Home Address:<br>Bishopsfield         | 15.07.07                 |
| Interview One (R)                       | Female - Pensioner                                  | Home Address                          | 11.06.08                 |
| Interview Two (R)                       | Female - Pensioner                                  | Home Address                          | 12.06.08                 |
| Interview Three (R)                     | Female – 40s  | Town Park Harlow                      | 20.06.08                 |
| Interview Four (R)                      | Female – 50s  | Home Address:<br>Mark Hall North      | 23.06.08                 |
| Interview Five (R)                      | Male – 40s  | Tanys Dell School:<br>Mark Hall North | 30.06.08                 |
| Interview Six (R)                       | Female – 40s  | Tanys Dell School:<br>Mark Hall North | 03.07.08                 |
| Interview Seven (R)                     | Female – Late 50s                                   | Home Address:<br>Mark Hall North      | 12.07.08                 |
| Interview Eight (R)                     | Male - Late 50s                                     | Home Address:<br>Mark Hall North      | 10.07.08                 |
| Interview Nine (R)                      | Female – Late 60s                                   | Home Address:<br>Mark Hall North      | 15.07.08                 |
| Interview Ten (R)                       | Male – Late 60s                                     | Home Address:<br>Mark Hall North      | 15.07.08                 |
| Interview Eleven (R)                    | Male – 40s  | Home Address:<br>Mark Hall North      | 17.07.08                 |
| Interview Twelve (R)                    | Female – 40s  | Home Address:<br>Mark Hall North      | 17.07.08                 |
| Interview Thirteen (R)                  | Male – 30s  | Home Address:<br>Mark Hall North      | 17.07.08                 |
| Interview Fourteen (R)                  | Female - Pensioner                                  | Home Address:<br>Mark Hall South      | 21.07.08                 |
| Interview                               | Male – 40s  | Home Address:                         | 04.08.08                 |

|                                  |                    |   |          |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|---|----------|
| Fifteen (R)<br>Interview         | Female - 50s       | Mark Hall North<br>Home Address:                    | 07.08.08 |
| Sixteen (R)<br>Interview         | Male - 50s         | Mark Hall North<br>Home Address:                    | 07.08.08 |
| Seventeen (R)<br>Interview       | Female - 40s       | Mark Hall North<br>Home Address: Mark<br>Hall North | 14.08.08 |
| Eighteen (R)<br>Interview        | Male - 40s         | Home Address:                                       | 14.08.08 |
| Nineteen (R)<br>Interview        | Female - Pensioner | Mark Hall North<br>Home Address:                    | 21.08.08 |
| Twenty (R)<br>Interview          | Male - 50s         | Bishopsfield<br>Home Address:                       | 21.08.08 |
| Twenty (R) One<br>Interview      | Female - Pensioner | Bishopsfield<br>Home Address:                       | 21.08.08 |
| Twenty Two (R)<br>Interview      | Female - 50s       | Bishopsfield<br>Home Address:                       | 03.09.09 |
| Twenty Three<br>(R)<br>Interview | Female 40s         | Chelmsford<br>Sheering, Essex                       | 04.09.09 |
| Twenty (R) Four                  |                    |   |          |

### Other Interviews

|   |                       |          |
|---|-----------------------|----------|
| Former MP for<br>Harlow                               | Home Address:         | 12.01.07 |
| Chief Co-<br>Ordinator Safer<br>Harlow<br>Partnership | Work Address          | 17.01.07 |
|   | Staple Tye,<br>Harlow |          |

## Appendix 3 – The Ambivalence of Risk: A Photographic Essay



**A: Cycle Track Passing Woodland near Town Centre**



**B: Pathway Passing Between Woodland Leading to Housing Group**

Photographs 'A' and 'B' show examples of pathways which take pedestrians or cyclists away from the principle traffic conduits. These routes often allow the traveller to pass through or by areas of woodland or dense shrubbery and help define and enclose housing groups. Residents of Harlow experience such

**'green' routes as pleasant and prefer them to pathways adjoining busy roads. Nevertheless, the same routes provide plentiful opportunities for offender concealment especially at night.**



**C: Entrance to Woodland at End of Residential Street**



**D: Private Gardens Backing onto Woodland**

**Photographs C and D show the merger of woodland with residential areas within the heart of Harlow. As a fundamental attribute of 'organic urbanism', such greenery makes available patches of countryside without needing to leave the town. The woodland also helps provide a 'sense of place' – the adjoining**

residential areas are named after each piece of woodland (Herons and Rectory Wood). Nevertheless, the same trees also deliver environments which can facilitate crime. Rectory Wood, which backs into several private gardens and which is near the Town Centre is often the location for illicit drug consumption and the gathering place for groups of 'problem' drinkers.



**E: 'Picturesque' Pathway in Town Park Passing Under Bridge**



**F: Woodland at End of Cul-de-Sac**

The curving pathway leading beneath a bridge in photograph E adds to the picturesque beauty of the town park. It suggests both prospect and refuge within a context of mystery. Concealment and lack of escape routes, however, may lead to people experiencing such mystery as threatening. Photograph F shows the wood at the end of my childhood cul-de-sac. The wood is now fenced



preventing access to would-be offenders but also to children who might appreciate its 'mystery' in play.



G: Entrance to housing Group

Access to a housing group while retaining its 'architectural enclosure' is facilitated this entrance. Such architectural devices may enhance Defensible Space through allowing greater territoriality but, simultaneously creates a shadowy space with poor visual surveillance.



H: 'Gateway' to Harlow Town Centre

The gateway leads to the Market Square and is an example of Harlow's neo-medievalism. Pedestrians passing through the gate are meant to experience a sense of arrival into a civic space. But the gateway helps separate the retail area beyond from the surrounding town and creates an ominous impression.

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