Designing Playspaces for the Emerging Society of Car Owners in Post-War Council Housing in Britain

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Introduction

In 1959, Pilkington Bros Ltd., which was led by Messrs. Jellicoe, Ballantyne and Coleridge, along with their assistant J. Colwill, introduced "Motopia": an influential plan for a city of 30,000 people, which was set at an actual site near Staines.[1] Its main design parameters were shaped around the motor car. The unprecedented growth of car ownership during that period had created demands related to traffic, road systems and highways, and the safe coexistence of pedestrians and cars had become an issue of major importance. The Pilkington Bros proposal placed residents' cars at the roof-top level on a continuous grid of multi-story buildings, which completely separated them from the pedestrians on the ground floor. The ground floor would be utilized for parks, churches, playgrounds, and other public areas. Motopia, for many, was the realization of the necessity for a new urban development in 1950s Britain, in which the car was increasingly dictating how people lived. (Fig. 1) Concepts like Motopia proliferated at that time, given that between 1950 and 1960, the number of licensed motor vehicles in Britain doubled, with many experts trying to project the future growth of that number.[2] By 1959, the number of private cars in the country was an estimated 3,750,000 for a population of 49,800,000.[3] Within the broader context of affluence, the "motor car revolution" rendered the car of equal importance to the betterment of the home, and both had to be considered when adjusting the housing typology. Car ownership was explicitly shaping the urban fabric, from the scale of the home to the scale of the city, that by 1963, an official report titled *Traffic in Towns* explicitly proposed the rebuilding of cities for the automobile.

However, whilst car ownership guaranteed increasing mobility, granting tenants the freedom to travel, escape the confines of the home and generally move around more easily, at the same time, there was a parallel tendency of people incrementally becoming "home-centered,"[4] with houses gradually becoming detached from their surroundings for the sake of the tenants' privacy. Headlines in cultural magazines such as "In this age of television, the English pub fights back"[5] illustrated a decline in public communal areas, such as pubs, bars, and taprooms, which used to be the most popular public gathering areas in British society, at least for the majority of the working class population, and which were now threatened by the acquisition of televisions that could be enjoyed in the comfort of one's home. The home was becoming a multi-functional space, which, along with the increase in leisure time, meant an increase in activities

1 See for example, "Motopia: Safety Town by The Glass Age Development Committee," *The Builder*, 2 October 1959, 339-340.

2 Colin Buchanan, *Traffic in Towns* [The Buchanan Report] (London: Penguin, 1963). See also, Simon Gunn, "The Buchanan Report, Environment and the Problem of Traffic in 1960s Britain," *Twentieth Century British History* 22 (4) (2011), 521-542.

3 Robert Turner, "Garages in Residential Areas," *The Town Planning Review* XXX, no. 2 (July 1959), 145-160.

4 See for example, Mark Abrams, "The Home-Centred Society," *The Listener*, November 26, 1959, 914-915.

5 Slim Hewitt, "In this age of television the English pub fights back," *Picture Post*, April 28, 1956, 40-41.

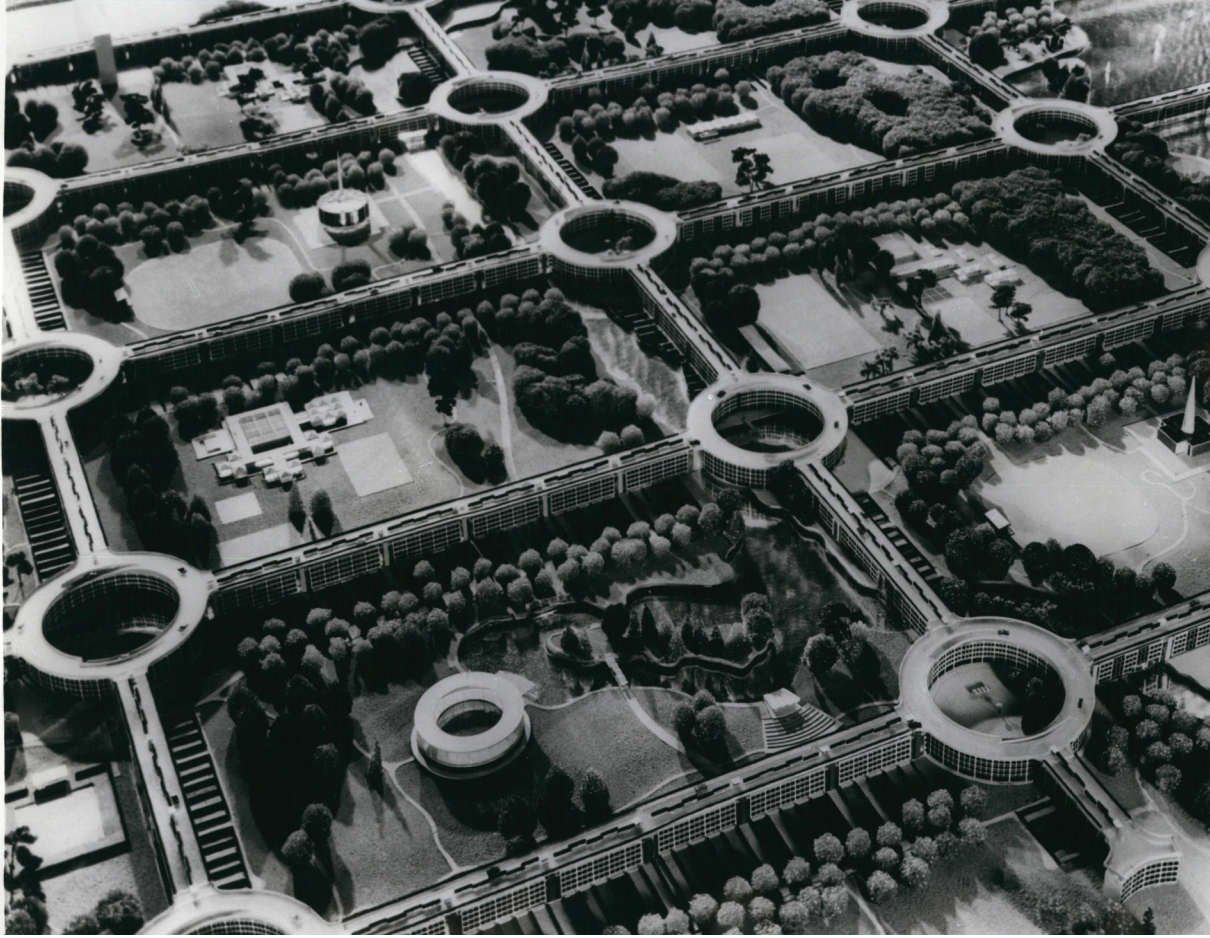


Fig. 1: The grid of terraces and roof-level roads of Motopia as featured in The Builder, 1959.

related to entertainment and relaxation, from the use of the television to "do-it-yourself" projects. At the same time, the lifestyle of the working-class was becoming increasingly blurred with middle-class spending habits, encouraged, partly, by the growth in consumption, which had increased by 60 percent.[6] Still, for many though, this consumption meant sacrificing other expenditures, such as money spent in pubs. Therefore, better-quality housing was paired with tenants' priorities regarding their budget's allocation.

Characterized as the "domestication of post-war British society,"[7] this tendency to turn inwards and the expansion of car ownership were design parameters inseparable from the layout of the housing estate. Although housing estates increasingly embraced the existence of the car, the car's presence was a matter inseparable from the availability of both space and money in the overall estate, as well as the responsibility for providing and maintaining the estate's communal facilities, including playspaces. This paper looks at a major dilemma that plagued planning decisions in housing estates in late post-war Britain. Both the state, as a housing provider and the main regulator of planning decisions, but also the emerging middle class, which was composed of working-class people climbing the social ladder, were reluctant to prioritise communal facilities. As a symptom of that period's home-centered society, this reluctance was becoming evident in official state documents—specifically, a report on space standards published in 1961, titled *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*. Several collective features were already in decline during the development and publication of this report; a condition that influenced

6 Abrams, "The Home-Centred Society," 914.

7 Claire Langhamer, "The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005), 341-362.

the report's decisions, seemingly approving the prevailing negligence. This paper focuses on demonstrating this reluctance, not as an oppositional narrative of car parks versus playspaces, but rather, in an effort to place this dilemma within a broader context of forces, interests, and actors involved in decision making and planning, including the work of government committees, the input of advocacy groups and housing providers coming both from the state and the market, and public opinion surveys, among others, that reveal the complexity of shaping post-war housing estates at that time and are still salient today.

Standards Inside and Outside the Home

In 1958, the Minister of Housing and Local Government, Henry Brooke, pushed for the compilation of a new report on space standards, because "the country has undergone a social and economic revolution,"[8] and "standards that were more than acceptable 20 years ago may already be out of accord with current ideas."[9] Indeed, between 1944, when the Dudley report was published, and the late 1950s, a series of shifts radically altered not only the broader socio-political and economic framework of the country, but also the everyday lives of ordinary people. For example, the employment of women called for housewives to be outside of the domestic shelter for hours at a time, which prompted the introduction of labor-saving appliances to the home. The popularization of television invited entertainment to the home and thus "threatened" the pub, as mentioned earlier. The widespread use of cars led to traffic and the creation of road infrastructure, the increasing need for car parks, and the altering of individuals' mobility. This new report had to pertain to all of these alterations related to the home to accommodate both "today and tomorrow."

The first official report on space standards in Britain appeared in 1918 to ensure the quality of council housing,[10] after housing became a national responsibility with the 1919 Housing and Planning Act, also known as the Addison Act. The widespread campaign for "Homes fit for Heroes" called for the increasing housing shortage to be resolved not solely as a quantitative issue, but also, and most importantly, as a qualitative concern by the state.[11] Since then, housing provision was a key promise in election manifestoes, influencing housing policy - often inconsistently.[12] For example, whereas the Labor government would boost subsidies for local authorities and council provision, the Conservative government would reduce them in order to endorse private enterprise provision. Along with socio-cultural changes in a rapid pace, alterations in housing policy and the housing market would constitute housing provision as a complex matter in need of constant reconfiguration.

The first report on space standards, namely Tudor Walters Report, became concerned primarily with the semi-detached typology as the ideal house for the conventional nuclear family.[13] Whereas flats were to be considered under "exceptional circumstances," by the 1950s, land cost, density issues, and the formation of smaller and greater in number households, which meant the continuation of housing shortage, turned the emphasis towards high-rise and high-density housing estates. Therefore, when the new report, titled *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (also known as the Parker Morris Report; from this point onwards, the PM Report), aimed

8 Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (HMSO, 1961), 1-2.

9 "P.W. 169" circulated at the 77th meeting of the Central Housing Advisory Committee, PRO HLG 37/111 (UK National Archives).

10 See more, John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1985* (London: Methuen, 1986).

11 See for example, Mark Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981).

12 See for example, Peter Malpass and Alan Murie, *Housing Policy in Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

13 See more, Alan A. Jackson, *Semi-Detached London: Suburban development, life, and transport, 1900-39* (Taylor & Francis, 2018).

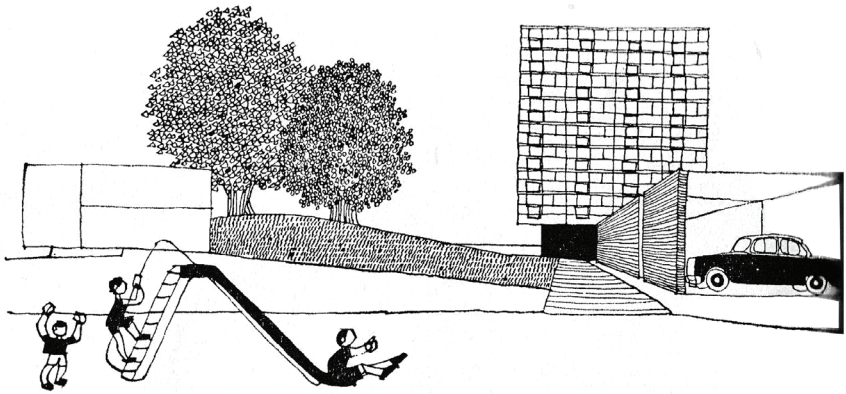


Fig. 2: "The Home in Its Setting" sketch by Gordon Cullen for *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (HMSO, 1961).

to propose ambitious new standards for the home, and yet the exterior of the home and the layout of housing estates were, paradoxically, considered to be outside of the sub-committee's scope, there was a wave of reactions.[14] Particularly because it was already evident that high-rise developments would dominate in the future, raising the issue of the need to create suitable areas in which children could play, socialize, and grow, as well as the importance of landscaping and parks, and even more so at that period the provision for adequate car parking, this negligence was perceived to diminish the value of the external environment of the home.

Specifically, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) explicitly denounced this decision, explaining that they "were disturbed," and felt that "you too must be disturbed, that the terms of reference given to your Sub-Committee, Mr. Chairman, were in the main restricted to the design of the house rather than making a comprehensive approach to the whole subject of Housing design."[15] Sir Parker Morris, the chairman of the report's sub-committee, responded to this dissatisfaction, reassuring that even though housing layout was purportedly outside the sub-committee's terms of reference—primarily due to time constraints—they would still consider those features that were significant enough to warrant immediate attention. The final PM Report included a chapter titled "The Home in Its Setting," (Fig.2) which, according to the sub-committee, was an acknowledgment that:

> "We have understood our terms to mean that our primary task was to consider standards of internal design. This cannot be done sensibly without taking full account of the relation of the house or flat with its layout on site, and we have had this inter-relationship constantly in mind. Moreover, we were given to understand that recommendations on certain aspects of layout, such as play space for children living in blocks of flats and storage for cars, would be welcome. These two topics we have considered in some detail; and we have also dealt with a number of other matters of the same kind which seemed to demand it."[16]

To explore parts of the exterior as well, the sub-committee, in the same manner they investigated the recommendations for the interior of the home, collected evidence in the form of a questionnaire, which was distributed to various relevant actors and stakeholders. They also utilized existing surveys that had been conducted by other state departments. This paper looks through this collected data to illustrate the broader tendencies of that time in relation to playspaces and car parks, which informed the final report's recommendations.

14 See more on the making of the Parker Morris Report: Savia Palate, "Towards A Deregulated Domesticity: The Making of 'Homes for Today and Tomorrow,'" PhD diss., (University of Cambridge, 2020).

15 Oral Evidence by the RIBA (Mr. Culpin, Mr. Vincent, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Waterhouse, Mr. Waring), HLG 37/198 (UK National Archives).

16 MHLG, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, 3.

Interiorizing Play

Of the most prominent discussions regarding the planning of the housing estate was the provision of playspaces: an issue that was allegedly relatively unexplored, but which was also essential, particularly because of the increasing number of high-rise housing estates and the shrinking size of flats. At the same time, these high-rise developments were often heavily criticized by sociologists and child welfare advocates, who claimed they were detrimental to children's emotional and social development.[17] These advocates also emphasized the necessity of playspaces for children's growth and progress, to which not only school activities but also after-school activities were considered to be of equal importance in terms of child development—constituting, subsequently playspaces to be a vital part of a housing estate.

In response to this necessity, several studies on the topic proliferated in the 1950s, including the "Playgrounds for Blocks of Flats," published in 1953, and the booklet "Living in Flats," published in 1952 under the chairmanship of the current minister, Henry Brooke.[18] Both stressed that "the provision of one or more playgrounds must be the first call of available space around flats, because it is on children that the inevitable restrictions of flat life press most hardly."[19] It was also recognized that most of the research placed an emphasis on playspaces in high-rise flat estates, because children living in flats not only did not have a garden, but the flats themselves were evidently smaller than those houses in low-rise housing developments.[20] According to an earlier pamphlet released by the ministry, called "Design for Play," a playspace is defined as:

> "An area primarily for children up to the age of 15, where they may play in healthy conditions and complete safety, and it may be supervised or not. It excludes pitches or organized team games provided for club use, recreation grounds, small parks or gardens, which are not exclusively for the use of children."[21]

Open public spaces specifically for children were introduced in Britain in the nineteenth century, and were built by social reformers with the purpose to "moralize" children by protecting them from the seemingly "demoralized" influence of the streets.[22] For many, the endorsement of play by social reformers was perceived as an imposition of one class on another, even though their agendas were diverse and manifold;[23] an "imposition" that was later moved to the responsibilities of the state, when local authorities became a major housing provider for the working class population. By the late 1950s, however, this responsibility, combined with the widespread necessity of playspaces as imperative to children's growth, had been taken on by every housing provider, from the state to those on the private market, given rising discussions on whether such a provision should be mandatory and protected by law or whether it could remain as solely a recommendation.

The post-war period in general saw a rise of social approaches to planning and the evolution of playspaces, which was also being talked about within architectural circles. By the early

17 Roy Kozlovsky, *The Architectures of Childhood: Children, Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Postwar England* (Routledge, 2013), 175.

18 "Playgrounds for Blocks of Flats," in the Evidence by the National Playing Fields Association HLG 37/174 (UK National Archives). Along with these pamphlets the Sub-Committee relied on three key references: the evidence submitted by the National Fields Association, Muriel Smith, a member of the PM sub-committee with experience in playspaces and one of the most important figures in Britain regarding the issue, Lady Allen of Hartwood.

19 MHLG, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, 40.

20 Oral Evidence by Abner Silverman (6 January 1960) HLG 37/198 (UK National Archives).

21 From the pamphlet "Design for Play," published by the ministry in collaboration with the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust, HLG 37/190 (National Archives).

22 See for example, Octavia Hill, *Homes of the London Poor* (London: Macmillan, 1875).

23 See for example, Kevin Brehomy, "A 'socially civilizing influence?' Play and the urban 'degenerate'," *Pedagogica Historica* 39 (1) (2003), 87-106.

1950s, CIAM members called for "the heart of the city,"[24] while in a subsequent meeting in 1953, the Swedish delegation of CIAM proposed "The Child and the City" as a theme to further spread the child-focused urbanism that had already been emerging in the country.[25] Even though Le Corbusier rejected the Swedish proposal, insisting instead on conducting the meeting in Marseilles to present his newly constructed *Unité d'Habitation*, it was during that meeting that Peter and Alison Smithson presented the "Urban Re-identification Grille," which depicted children playing on the streets of Bethnal Green in Britain. The photographs by Nigel Henderson, which were perhaps a bit ironic considering nineteenth century efforts to remove the children from the "demoralizing" streets, depicted child's play on the streets of slums as an indispensable aspect of urban planning that served to enhance notions of freedom and belonging.

The street, however, despite its increasing popularity in architectural debates as an important aspect of neighborliness, was not enthusiastically embraced as a safe playspace by mothers, as the main caregivers of children. Even the use of planned playspaces was, for many, inconvenient or unsafe, unless proper supervision was in place beyond the design elements that would seclude this common area from cars, strangers, and other dangers passing by. A report called "Small Children in High Flats," which was the product of collaboration between the Ministry of Housing, local government, and the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust, was based on visits to 200 families following a pilot study undertaken by graduate students at the London School of Economics, who had visited 279 families with children. The study showed that only one in four parents used the existing playspaces on their estates, while those living above the fifth floor with children two to three years old firmly rejected the use of these facilities due to the lack of proper supervision. Instead, they would prefer to keep their children inside the home, safeguarded by their parents' supervision while retreating the anxiety of the mothers over their children's safety.

On the one hand, the great lack of playspaces in general at that time and the lack of supervision in those few existing ones meant that the majority of children played exclusively within the confines of their homes:

> "The flat is the most important, the most frequent and the most regular place of play for most of the young children in the sample. In about half of the cases, it is the only place of play."[26]

On the other hand, in that same survey mentioned earlier, when asked about potential supervision, most of the mothers claimed to prefer that their children play at home under their own supervision. Therefore, it was becoming evident that the obligation of the state to intervene in the development of its subjects within public spaces was shifting.[27] According to Philippe Ariès, the first who analyzed housing in relation to childhood, this process of "privatizing" childhood was directly connected to the way Western societies would organize spaces. The privatization of childhood was occurring alongside the decline of public life and sociability, with the family reinforcing "private life at the expense of neighborly relationships, friendships and traditional contacts."[28] This was particularly clear in the case of the late post-war housing estate, where the majority of the working-class residents that were no longer financially constrained to share a housing unit with two, if not more, families, could instead, for the first time, enjoy their own private space.

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24 See for example, Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism 1928-1960* (The MIT Press, 2000); Leonardo Zuccaro Marchi, *The Heart of the City: Legacy and Complexity of a Modern Design Idea* (Routledge, 2017).

25 See, Roy Kozlovsky, "Urban Play: Intimate space and postwar subjectivity," in *Intimate Metropolis*, eds. Vittoria di Palma, Diana Periton, Marina Lathouri (Routledge, 2009).

26 From the "Small Children in High Flats" submitted to the Sub-Committee, Proposal for Children's Play Space, HLG 37/190 (UK National Archives).

27 See also, Roy Kozvlovsky, "Adventure Playgrounds and Postwar Reconstruction," in *Designing Childhoods: History, Space and the Material Culture of Children; An International Reader,* eds. Gutman, Marta and Ning de Coninck-Smith (Rutgers University Press, 2007), 171-190.

28 Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (Vintage, 1965), 398.

The efforts at that time to improve the quality of housing as a distinct unit enabled the unit's quality to be in competition with the rest of the estate, where the one had to compromise the other instead of enhancing both. Mothers living on the eighth floor of a high-rise housing building, when asked about the potential of moving out if they could move to a lower floor to be closer to the ground floor, and subsequently to easily access playspaces, mostly expressed satisfaction with their current accommodations and stated that they would not move solely to ensure playspace provision. For the first time, most of these families had access to heating, hot water, a modern kitchen, laundry facilities, and easy forms of refuse disposal, among other upgrades to their housing conditions, with many claiming that "the only snag is that we haven't a garden—otherwise it's ideal."[29] Indeed, for these families who had received an unprecedented upgrade to their housing conditions, the playspace was a lesser priority compared to home improvements; an attitude that, in a way, released the PM Report's responsibility from addressing playspace provision for all and focus instead particularly to high-rise housing estates.

This tendency, though, would become a guiding force for several private developers to reduce their costs and responsibilities regarding communal areas of housing estates as well. As Muriel Smith, an expert on children's housing needs from the London Council of Social Service and member of the PM sub-committee, claimed in a conference in 1960,[30] there were several issues that were obstructing the proper planning and provision of playspaces in housing estates, with lack of space being the primary issue. Indeed, many housing providers at that time would have preferred to add another house rather than to add a playspace to balance their profits, which could be also considered a slight improvement to the acute housing need that was constantly pressing throughout the twentieth century. The increase in land value was another factor that contributed to the limitation of this provision, pairing lack of space with lack of money and raising the question of to what extent a playspace could be seen as an essential feature of a housing estate.

Combined with the broader tendency of tenants not being willing to use the playspace, private enterprise housing providers could easily deny the need for playspaces as an essential element of the housing estate, instead prioritizing market preferences and consumerist aspirations that would eventually exclude children as being users of that same housing estate. Occasionally, they would claim that playspace provision was unpopular and not worth the effort, with some alleging that "this is a matter for local authorities"[31] and that "playspaces were not needed in ordinary housing areas as house purchasers usually liked their children to play in the garden."[32] Moreover, playspaces were claimed to reduce the real estate value of housing estates because of noise disturbance and "fights" among younger and older children.[33] (Fig. 3) Ironically, some of these developers would even suggest that children in fact disliked a fenced-in designated area for play, claiming that many children "prefer the street,"[34] counter-arguing the earlier efforts of "moralizing" childhood by social reformers.

For those living in flats where having a garden was not an option, the PM sub-committee's questionnaire specifically raised the question of the balcony for the use of children at play: "To what extent are balconies necessary or desirable for children?" (Fig. 4) Similarly to the reluctance for playspace provision, the responses included blunt answers such as "balconies not necessary or desirable – would rather see space in rooms,"[35] while others noted:

29 From the "Small Children in High Flats" submitted to the Sub-Committee, Proposal for Children's Play Space, HLG 37/190 (UK National Archives).

30 Muriel Smith, "Children's Needs in Housing Areas," *Ekistics* 9, no. 51 (January 1960), 68-70.

31 Evidence by Building Societies Association, HLG 37/154 (UK National Archives).

32 Oral Evidence by Federation of Master Builders [Mr Parrish] (5 May 1960) HLG 37/198 (UK National Archives).

33 Ibid.

34 Evidence by The National Federation of Housing Societies, HLG 37/175 (UK National Archives).

35 Evidence by the Federation of Master Builders HLG 37/173 (UK National Archives).



Fig. 3: Three small boys playing with truck and blocks (1950s).
Fig. 4: Children looking through a protected balcony. Sherborn Nursery School on a roof, St. Pancras, London, 1958.



> "Today the design of living-rooms with large windows enables the advantages of balconies (i.e. fresh air for young babies) to be obtained without their provision. Where balconies are provided they are rarely used for children and their use as places for the storage of junk etc., plus their cost render them, in our opinion, neither necessary nor desirable."[36]

Indeed, during that time the tenants would use their balconies in various ways, with members of the sub-committee asking themselves whether a "balcony [is] worthwhile."[37] The issue was that either tenants did not know how to functionally use their balconies, or the balcony itself was too poorly designed to efficiently contribute to their daily activities, eliminating its benefits in terms of health and sanitation.[38] However, several ideas were discussed to ensure the safety of its use by children. These ideas aimed to be imaginative, contrast to the design of the few existing playspaces in estates across the country, that were observed to be "badly designed"[39] and "inadequate."[40]

The design of the playspace was considered to potentially offer "a sense of locality"[41] in the otherwise uniformly designed and mostly treeless housing estates. For the RIBA every possible scheme was welcomed: from the use of conventional equipment, such as swings, seesaws, paved paths and trees, to more abstract and conceptual designs that would allow children to "invent their own games"—an approach that was, in fact, cost effective when compared to conventional equipment.[42] Indeed, the more abstract concepts for playspaces even though less popular were not absent from several housing estates.[43] Initially introduced by the Danish architect C.T Sørensen in the 1930s, the "junk playspace" was renamed to fit the British context using the term "adventure playspace" by Lady Allen of Hurtwood. Lady Allen in her influential publication "Why not use our bomb sites like this?"[44] promoted the idea of the adventure playspace as an easy and convenient way to utilize vacant bombed sites, but also as a mechanism to enable children "to come to terms with the responsibilities of freedom,"[45] implicitly touching about the parents' issue on supervision. (Fig. 5-6) Though scrutinized by many—at least when first introduced—adventure playgrounds became widespread during the 1950s, while, strikingly, by the end of the 1960s, were ultimately destroyed due to the sites they were on gaining value in the real estate market.[46]

Even in the case of cost-effective designs, such as the adventure playground, in various areas playspace provision would remain less of a priority. Local authorities, who were facing hardships, still dealing with slum clearance demands and accumulating long waiting lists for housing from those who had been relocated from slums, could not prioritize the provision of playspaces, and this was accepted by experts working on the improvement of childhood. As openly stated in the Ministry's document "Small Children in High Flats,"

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36 Evidence by Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors HLG 37/163. See also a similar suggestion by the Oral Evidence by Federation of Master Builders [Mr Parrish] (5 May 1960) HLG 37/198 (UK National Archives).

37 Impressions to Visits (H.S. 21) Revised version – Addendum to Minutes of 7th Meeting (November 12, 1959). HLG 37/201 (UK National Archives).

38 See for example, evidence by Association of Met Borough Engineers and Surveyors HLG 37/165. Evidence by The Institution of Municipal Engineers HLG 37/159 (UK National Archives).

39 Oral Evidence by Metropolitan Boroughs Standing Joint Committee [Dr Dewar, Mr Edwards, Mr Scrase, Mr Wilson], 1 June 1960 HLG 37/198 (UK National Archives).

40 Evidence by The Housing Centre Trust HLG 37/168 (UK National Archives).

41 Evidence by RIBA HLG 37/177. See also, Oral Evidence by Stevenage Development Corporation [Mr Vincent, Miss Tabor] (6 April 1960) HLG 37/198 (UK National Archives).

42 Evidence by RIBA. HLG 37/177 (National Archives).

43 Oral Evidence by Institute of Housing (3 March 1960) HLG 37/198 (National Archives).

44 Lady Allen of Hurtwood, "Why not use our bomb sites like this?" *Picture Post*, November 16, 1946, 26-29.

45 Lady Allen of Hurtwood's foreword in the book Arvid Bengtsson, *Adventure Playgrounds* (New York: Praeger, 1972), 8.

46 Christos Papastergiou, "Junk playgrounds: The 'anti-aesthetics' of play in postwar playground design," *sITA* 8 (2020), 245-264.



Fig.5 (above) and 6 (following page): Notting Hill Adventure Playground (1950s).

> "We cannot ignore the fact that there are families who live in shared dwellings; who have no bathrooms, nor the sole use of a toilet; who have no modern conveniences and whose homes are dilapidated and overcrowded, and which may, in addition, face main road traffic. […] While we should not ignore the play needs of those who have been provided with new accommodation, we should also see that any planning for play needs includes those who are likely to grow up in unfavorable housing conditions."[47]

At the same time, this scarcity would, in a way continue the "freedom" of private enterprise providers to disregard the provision of playspaces in housing estates unless prospective homeowners would alter the demands of the housing market, and subsequently the housing market supply.

Evidently, the broader social trajectory of the time, which saw people envisioning a prosperous future, better quality-housing, and the majority of the working-class climbing the social ladder, was in opposition to the persistent housing shortage for the remaining minority of poor citizens that could not find a shelter over their heads. Subsequently, the fact that the PM Report avoided the inclusion of all kinds of housing estates was not incidental:

> "The recommendations about playspace in this report refer primarily to housing estates in which many families live in flats. The National Playing Fields Association represented

47 From the Report "Small Children in High Flats" submitted to the Sub-Committee, Proposal for Children's Play Space, HLG 37/190 (UK National Archives).



> to us that playspace provision should be compulsory in all housing, but we think that a recommendation to this effect would be beyond what we were asked to do. We nevertheless urge those responsible for the layout of all new housing developments to make generous and imaginative provision for children's play, especially where gardens are small."[48]

On the other hand, it clearly stated that it was necessary "to safeguard a proportion of the total space and to ensure that it is available for children's play"[49] prior to planning approval so as to prevent the confiscation of the playspace for other purposes, especially for parking.[50] The advent of car ownership paired with the provision for a garage in every house and with the high cost of land composed a growing threat to the provision of the already non-existent playspace as a social function.

Car Parks as Extensions of the Home

The prevailing preference for interiorizing the playspace was in line with the increasingly home-centered society at that time. In the same manner, the car park was increasingly perceived as an indispensable extension of the home. Within the broader context of a society of aspiring homeowners, the widening rate of car ownership was another means of establishing the comfort of one's private sphere. Housing estates for homeowners in particular were expected to allow for a 90 to a 100 percent car park provision in order for houses to be sold.[51] Car parks, especially when adjacent to the home, was according to the National Federation of Registered Builders, another motivation for homeowners to invest in a house that could satisfy their social aspirations and demonstrate their financial means. On the other hand, the threat was for this rate not to become determinant of other amenities, estimating that only 10 percent of the space around buildings could be used for cars.[52]

Regarding car parks provision, most discussions were focused on the separation of the pedestrians from cars, while the safety of children was a recurrent concern. Street layouts that were often out of date and unable to cope with increasing traffic, as well as proper planning considerations for children's safety and car provisions in housing estates that were seen as "jungles of concrete, asbestos, and tarmac"[53] were additional challenges for architects and planners. Similar to the playspace provision, the major obstacles to the car park provision were a shortage of land and additional costs.[54] Both the aspiration and demand for car ownership were gaining substantial ground, even leading to the suggestion of demolishing old houses "to allow for better use of the land, even if this meant losing the subsidies."[55] In existing estates, where the lack of space was explicit, the most probable solution was to sacrifice a part of the garden, creating the issue of houses without gardens.

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48 MHLG, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, 49.

49 Ibid., 40.

50 Oral Evidence by Lady Allen of Hurtwood (2 June 1960) HLG 37/198 (National Archives). Also raised in the Evidence by The National Playing Fields Association HLG 37/174; Evidence by Exmouth Urban District Council HLG 37/130 (National Archives).

51 Evidence by the Women's Advisory Council on Solid Fuel HLG 37/150. See also, Oral Evidence by Association of Municipal Corporation [Ald Maudsley, Ald Hunt, Mr Nowell, Ald Mason, Mr Pollard, Mr Stirling, Cllr Wicks, Mr Slater] (6 July 1960) HLG 37/198; RIBA HLG 37/177 (National Archives).

52 Ledeboer, "Homes for Today and Tomorrow," 56.

53 MHLG, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, 50.

54 See for example, Evidence by London County Council HLG 37/160; Evidence by The National Federation of Property Owners HLG 37/146; Oral Evidence by London Standing Conference of Housing Estate Community Groups [Mr Blanckensee, Mr Hayes, Mr Johannes, Mr Ludlow, Mrs Newman, Miss Whetman] (1 June 1960) HLG 37/198 (UK National Archives).

55 Oral Evidence by Birmingham City Council [Ald Grogan, Ald Webster, Mr Macey, Mr Sheppard-Fidler] (7 July 1960) HLG 37/198 (UK National Archives).

In new estates, the prevailing solution was found in the concept of the Radburn layout,[56] which was known to work better "mainly in the provinces where land scarcity was less of a problem."[57] The Radburn layout, as such, was officially pioneered in Britain in 1950 by Professor Gordon Stephenson in the preparation of layouts for a number of housing areas at Wrexham. It was not embraced, however, until the pressing demand for garages in residential areas radically increased. Of the most fervent supporters of the Radburn layout in Britain was Lewis Womersley, member of the sub-committee and council architect in Sheffield, who introduced the layout for a residential project in Netherthorpe; a scheme widely discussed in architectural press precisely because of its capacity to secure car provision and its "intelligent use of courtyard access, which coupled with a sloping site has given rise to opportunities for spatial relationships and great play with levels."[58] Similarly, for the PM sub-committee members, following their visits to Basildon, Coventry, Cumbernauld (Scotland), Northampton, Sheffield, Stevenage, and Wrexham, where they documented the current use of the Radburn layout, it was unanimously agreed that the Radburn layout would "represent the right general direction for the future."[59]

This growing provision of car parks in council housing, however, was not uncontested. Car provision and decisions surrounding the rates of this provision were fueling opposition to the state's public expenditures on council housing. For many, if car parks were to be provided in local authority housing, they should not be subsidized. Instead, it was seen as the tenant's responsibility, and the case was even raised for private "low-cost estate owners."[60] This was a similar approach in the US practice where the PM sub-committee turned for advice: "in public housing none is provided. There is off-street parking on the site at the ratio of at least 50 percent; 75–100 percent in Los Angeles and Detroit."[61] Paradoxically enough, while in some councils in the UK people would not even have a car, in other councils there was a provision of two-car garage per dwelling! For example, Coventry, "had gone even further and was providing parking space for the younger members of the family who also wanted to enjoy motoring."[62]

During the *Vehicles in Housing Areas* symposium at the Architectural Association in 1955, C.H. Dodson, Housing Superintendent at Coventry, questioned whether local authorities' housing provision had to be reduced in order to accommodate only the lowest classes of the population to potentially eliminate the costs and facilities that came along with the aspiration of car ownership, which could only be realized by better-off council tenants. Dodson's suggestion was an increasing tendency among members of the Conservative government, which with the 1956 Housing Act pushed forward the elimination of the state's responsibility to provide housing for citizens of general needs, leaving this task entirely to private enterprise provision. Similarly, the rising opposition to council housing saw the lack of car parks in council estates as a way to "envisage the restoration of the national housing program to its former place in society,"[63] referring to public expenditures used only for those in the "lowest" class, a label that was increasingly getting confused with the blurring of social distinctions in the late 1950s.

56 See more on the Radburn layout, Daniel Schaffer, *Garden Cities for America: The Radburn Experience* (Temple University Press, 1982); Eugenie Ladner Birch, "Radburn and the American Planning Movement: The Persistence of an Idea" *Journal of the American Planning Association* vol. 46 (4) (1980), 424-439; Larry Lloyd Lawhon, "The Neighbourhood Unit: Physical Design or Physical Determinism?" *Journal of Planning History* 8, no. 2 (2009), 111-132.

57 Oral Evidence by City and Borough Architects Society [Mr North, Mr Hayes, Mr Southgate, Mr Cook] (5 February 1960) HLG 37/198 (UK National Archives).

58 Turner, "Garages in Residential Areas," 151.

59 MHLG, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, 44.

60 Evidence by The National Federation of Housing Societies HLG 37/175 (UK National Archives).

61 Oral Evidence by Abner Silverman (6 January 1960) HLG 37/198 (UK National Archives).

62 Discussion in Evelyn Dennington, "Influence of Standards on Management and Social Aspect," *Housing Review* vol. 9 no. 5 (September-October 1960), 145-150.

63 Turner, "Garages in Residential Areas."

On the other hand, there were others who considered car ownership to no longer be "indicative of middle-income group houses";[64] raising the controversy regarding the provision for a car park in terms of social aspirations, actual costs, and issues of affordability. In the evidence presented in response to the sub-committee's question about whether car parks are worth the cost, the majority responded affirmatively, while some noted that the car park could be used as extra space for general storage and DIY activities.[65] The seemingly transitory period of the formulation of the PM Report, with the majority of the working class adopting more affluent living conditions, eventually resulted in calls for a full car park provision, meaning one car per dwelling—suggesting, perhaps, the level of the state's efforts to cater to a cross-section of the community, given their diverse needs and means. The reality though was more complicated with the provision of car parks encompassing an increase in costs and a subsequent increase in rents, at least in London. Despite the improvement of living standards for the majority of the population, this "middle class" ideal was an illusion retaining the visibility of enduring social distinctions:

> "There are tenants with good modern cars, often supplied by their firms willing to pay up to 16s. a week for garage; others have very old cars and are reluctant to pay 3s.6d. a week for a parking space. The proportions of these two types vary from estate to estate."[66]

The sub-committee's recommendation for a full provision overall was ambivalent. It could be read as an encouragement for tenants to purchase a car, even for those few who did not own one yet; an oxymoronic response considering the issue of heavy traffic and the increase in commuting by cars, which has led to the formulation of policies encouraging "commuters [to] use public transport"[67] and a ban on car use on several streets. For others, the use of cars was unilateral or time limited, even before the publication of the PM Report. At the same time, financial constraints made the ministry hesitant to provide large sites on which to build garages until 1959, a condition that frustrated planners and made urban layouts challenging. While these paradoxical tendencies were reflecting contradictory directives from the government, with one department encouraging car ownership and another one discouraging the use of cars, the PM Report clarified that this full provision was only suitable for a maximum of 180 people. For higher density areas, and in areas where land acquisition was difficult, such an arrangement would be highly unlikely. In such cases, they instead suggested exploring "the possibilities of using the same car parking facilities in dual capacity—at some hours reserving them exclusively for residents' cars, and at other times allowing parking by the general public."[68]

Regarding car parks, when finalizing the PM report, the minister "was anxious to avoid publicly supporting the proposition of one garage for every council house" because "there were political and publicity dangers in this."[69] Interestingly, the minister's anxieties included the presence of recommendations related to playspaces; he preferred to keep them vaguely defined until the public was convinced that tenants should pay more for better houses, to which the PM Report's role as a public document would be instrumental. On the bright side, though, the many advocates for children arguing at that time, that "enlightened social policy should make efforts to discover human needs rather than to assume that the absence of demand reflects the absence of need,"[70] eventually led to debates in the House of Commons in making obligatory the provision for children's play in housing estates, not only for council housing estates but private ones as well.[71]

64 Evidence by Aycliffe Development Corporation HLG 37/116 (UK National Archives).

65 See for example, Evidence by The Institution of Municipal Engineers HLG 37/159; Evidence by the residents of Bracknell Development Corporation HLG 37/116 (UK National Archives).

66 Evidence by London County Council HLG 37/160 (UK National Archives).

67 See related article Fyfe Robertson, "Parking meters won't end a menace," *Picture Post*, May 12, 1956, 12-14.

68 HMLG, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, 46.

69 Letter from H.R. Savage to Mr Philips on the draft circular of the PM Report (December 21, 1961), HLG 37/207 (UK National Archives).

70 "Small Children in High Flats," Proposal for Children's Play Space, HLG 37/190 (National Archives).

71 See for example, "Housing Estates (Children's Play Spaces)" in Volume 705: Debated on Tuesday 2 February 1965 House of Commons (Online Hansard Archive).

Conclusion

On several occasions, there was a reluctance to deal with either the playspace or the car park, with a series of studies being unable to provide a sufficient solution. By the early 1960s, however, financial constraints, as well as several political antagonisms that suggested the decline of the current government, played a significant role in the eventual recommendations of the PM report. On the one hand, the car park was still considered a luxury for many people, who saw it as an indulgence. On the other hand, playspaces as communal facilities embodied additional financial costs that would be necessary both in the present and in the future to ensure good maintenance and management. For some, the PM Report "recommended a standard for assessing playspaces"[72] that could be used by legislators to ensure playspace provision accordingly, while for others, it was a missed opportunity to improve the living quality of tenants in high rise buildings, including children, given that, eventually, the report neglected the increasing number of flats and retained instead the ideal of a garden suburb,[73] which by the late 1960s was not the most cost-effective nor affordable option. The formation of communal areas in housing estates inevitably involved an increase in costs for their development, maintenance and management, causing greater difficulties to those housing providers, especially in times of hardship. The post-war prosperity for the majority of the population was soon followed by an erosive economic instability that culminated in the 1970s, raising the opposition of the public against state interventionism and public expenditure. It was then no coincidence that the abolishment of the PM standards followed the privatization of council housing in 1980 by the Thatcherite government.

According to Lynsey Hanley in the book *Estates: An intimate History*, a 1986 quote was attributed to Margaret Thatcher saying that "a man who finds himself beyond the age of 26 on a bus can consider himself a failure."[74] Reflecting the common tendency of the 1950s towards a home-centered society and the increasing rates of car ownership, the reluctance of tenants to take part in public life was already evident. Council housing provision and the shaping of the external setting of communal areas within estates, both required tenants' participation in public life: either this was in physical presence and demand for the provision of communal facilities in relation to better-quality housing for all, or their collective contribution derived from taxes; "the most prominent and most extensive intrusion of the State's power into the sphere of the individual."[75] Yet today, these dilemmas persist, where the acquirement of private assets is greater than the desire to improve public life,[76] with several councils admitting the closure of playgrounds due to "unprecedented budget constraints"[77] despite the benefits of community playgrounds in childhood obesity and health and, even more so, studies that suggest that "UK parks save NHS more than £111m a year."[78]

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72 Ibid.

73 See for example, Jo Milner and Ruth Madigan, "Regulation and Innovation: Rethinking 'inclusive' housing design," *Housing Studies* 19 (2004), 727-744.

74 Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History* (London: Granta Publications, 2007).

75 Schön Wolfgang, "Taxation and Democracy," *Tax Law Review* 72, no. 2 (16 October 2018).

76 See related, Peter King, *Private Dwelling: Contemplating the Use of Housing* (London: Routledge, 2004).

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Fig.2: Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (HMSO, 1961).

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Fig. 4: © Sherborn Nursery School on a roof, St. Pancras, London, 1958. St. Pancras Housing Society.