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Mapping the geographies of Manchester's housing problems and the twentieth century solutions

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"Manchester is a huge overgrown village, built according to no definite plan. The factories have sprung up along the rivers Irk, Irwell and Medlock, and the Rochdale Canal. The homes of the work-people have been built in the factory districts. The interests and convenience of the manufacturers have determined the growth of the town and the manner of that growth, while the comfort, health and happiness have not been considered. ... Every advantage has been sacrificed to the getting of money." Dr. Robertson, a Manchester surgeon, in evidence to the *Parliamentary Committee on the Health of Towns*, 1840 (quoted in Bradshaw, 1987).

The industrial city and its housing conditions

Where people live and the material housing conditions they enjoy has been a central concern to geographers, planners and scholars in housing studies and urban sociology throughout the twentieth century. The multifaceted challenge of adequately housing an expanding population has been at the heart of the history of Manchester and its changing geography. From the city's rapid industrialisation in the 1780s onwards, through physical growth into a metropolis with global influence by the middle of the nineteenth century, Manchester had severe housing problems, especially in regard to conditions endured by working people and the urban poor.

In his critique of industrial capitalism in Manchester, Friedrich Engels highlighted the impact of exploitation and inequality in terms of dreadfully unhealthy housing suffered by thousands of workers. In the *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), attention was directed particularly to the Little Ireland district, one of the worst places in the city, located in a bend of the River Medlock. Angel Meadow, off the Oldham Road, was another talismanic Victorian slum in Manchester.

The situation in regards to housing was much different at the other end of society. From the

mid-nineteenth century, private estates of substantial suburban villas were constructed, away from the poverty and pollution of the inner industrial neighbourhoods. An example of these early suburban housing developments for the elites was Victoria Park, planned in 1837; large detached mansions on tree lined avenues were built in the 1840s and 1850s. The goal was to provide a sense of seclusion and tranquillity of countryside, but with proximity to the city centre and commercial activity; gated entrances to estates were installed to enforce social exclusivity.

From the second half of the nineteenth century, a distinctive shape of suburban housing development grew to the north and, most particularly, to the south of Manchester's commercial core. This was encouraged by available open farm land and the dearth of noxious industrial facilities, which had tended to congregate to the west, in Salford, and on the eastern side of Manchester. Significantly improved intra-urban transport through the nineteenth century, firstly via horse trams and later by electric trams and local train services, encouraged daily commuting and extending suburban development.

Here, some of Manchester's geographical changes and noteworthy social housing schemes through the twentieth century are examined. In particular, evolving efforts to deal with

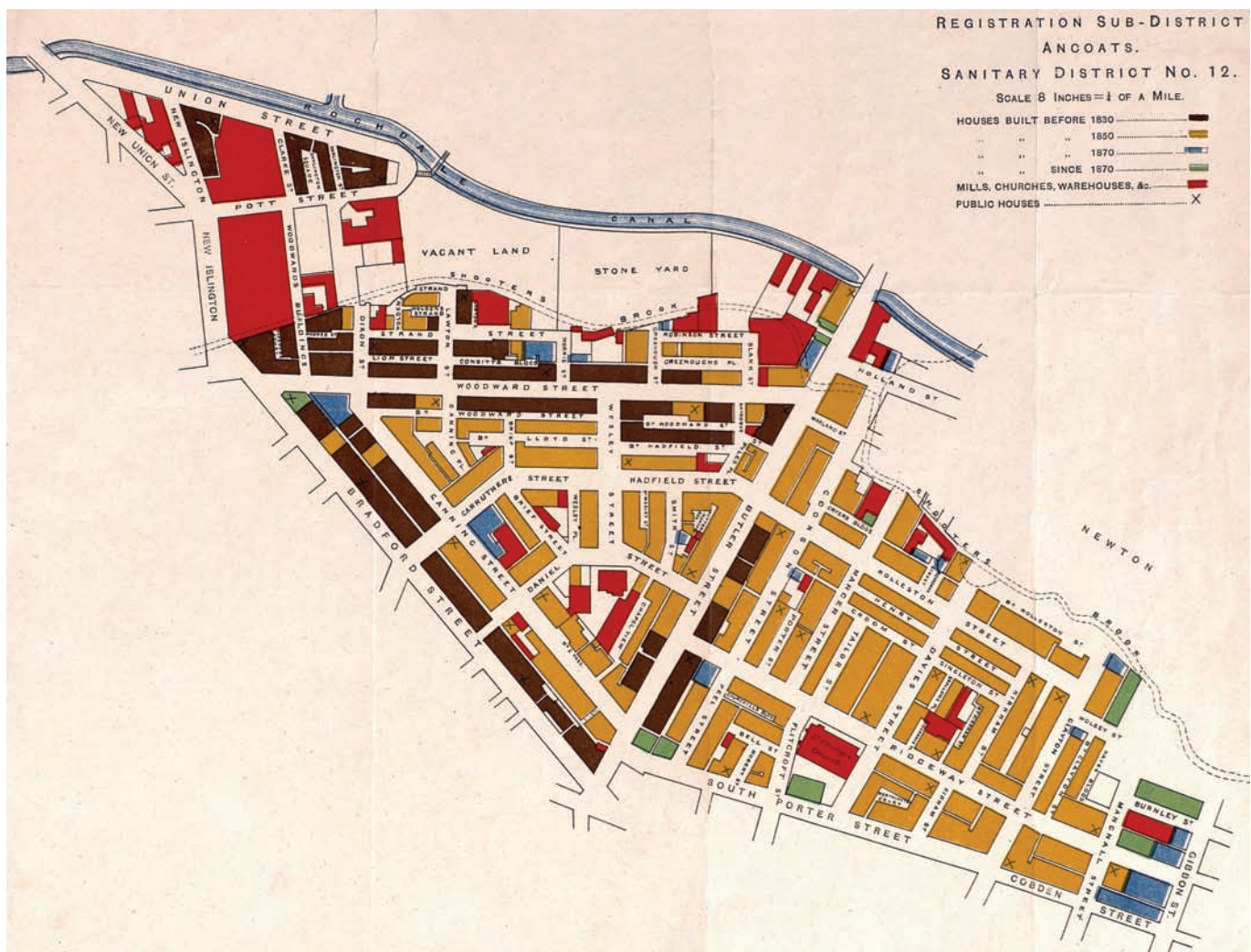


Figure 1: An example of the results of Richard Bastow's sanitary survey of central Manchester. These large-scale land-use maps provide a useful record of the age of housing in four-classes which can be read as a proxy measure for quality. Also shown are street widths, commercial and industrial property, the location of public houses and some details on water courses. The maps were published in batches for different census districts from 1881-86 in the Medical Officer of Health Reports. (Source: Author scan from original map published in the Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for Manchester, 1884.)

Manchester's legacy of unplanned industrial development, and large areas of poor quality housing that continued to blight the lives of thousands of its citizens, are discussed.

Sanitary reforms and the garden suburbs

During most of the nineteenth century, urban development in Manchester had been largely unplanned and housing provision was left to the vagaries of private interests and profit motives. Towards the end of the Victorian era, efforts were made to document the scale of the problem and

to direct improvements to the most grossly failing properties. By the 1890s the City Corporation had some powers over housing standards and public health legislation. They also built the first council funded housing in the form of the Victoria Building, a five-storey tenement block on Oldham Road.

Early in the twentieth century there was more pressure for public authorities to take a more active role in determining the shape of the city through land-use zoning, and to intervene more assertively in improving housing and ameliorating

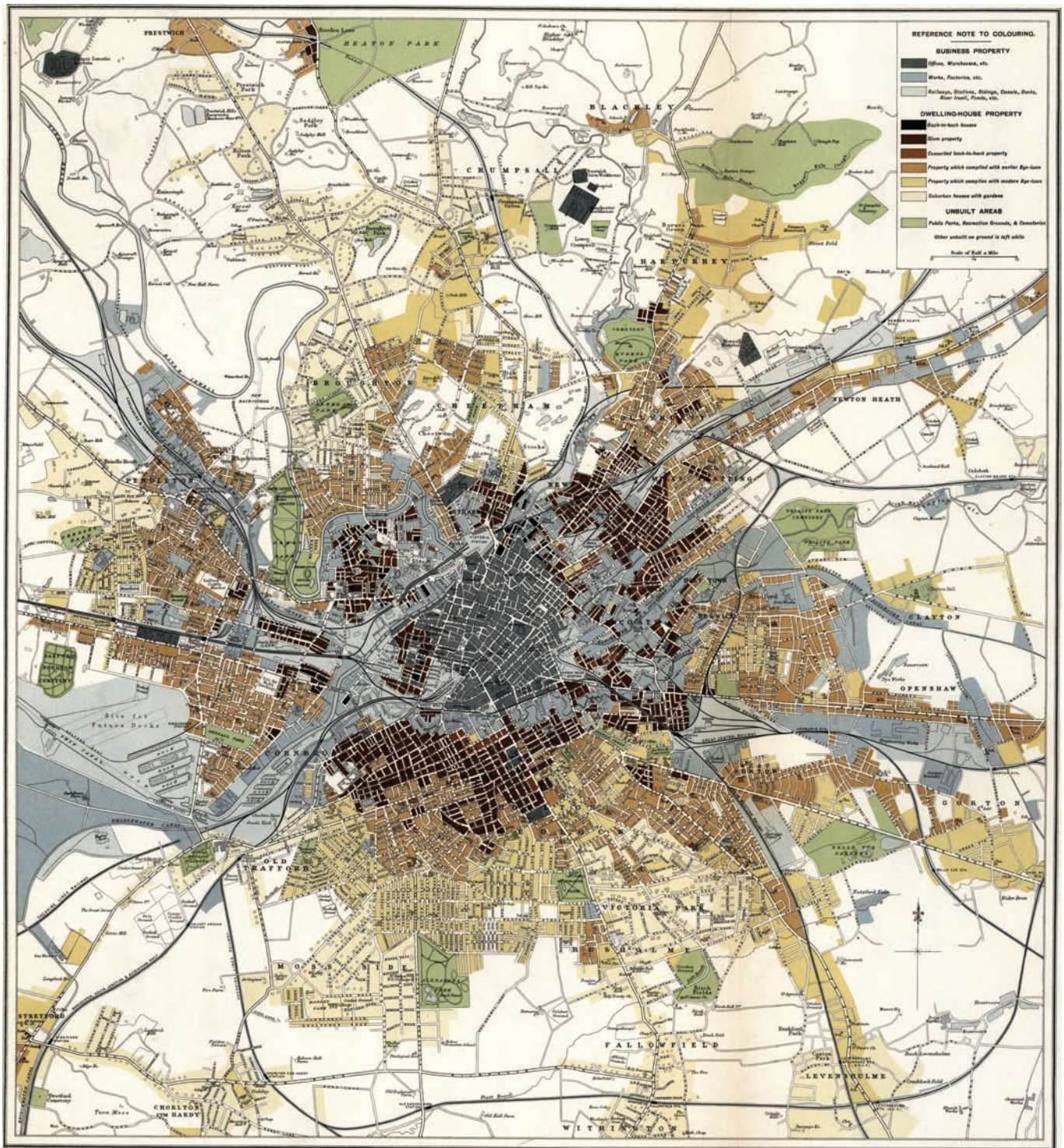


Figure 2a, b: The excellent cartographic snapshot of the state of housing across Manchester and Salford at the turn of the century. It was expertly drawn by John Bartholomew & Co in Edinburgh and based on primary survey data from Citizens' Association of Manchester, a sample of which for Ancoats is shown overleaf. (Source: Author scans from Marr, 1904.)

District No. 1—in Ancoats.

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	Head of Household, Occupation, and Earnings Stated.	Supplementary Earners, Occupation, and Earnings Stated.	LODGERS.		TOTAL OCCUPANTS.		No. of Rooms.	Rent.	CONDITION OF THE HOUSE.						OFFICERS.			WATER.		Is there a Yard?	NOTES AND REMARKS.
			Male.	Female.	Adults.	Children under 14.			In Good Repair?	Clean?	Damp?	Dark?	Do all Windows Open?	Kind.	Clean?	No. of Rooms Sharing.	Has House its own Tap?	If not, House sharing one tap.			
1	Striker, 20/- (?)	STREET.	—	—	1	2	2	3/6	no	yes	yes	no	yes	P.C.	fair	4	yes	—	no	Back-to-back house, end of row. Entry beside it. Ceilings and walls very damp and cracked.	
8	Moulder, 40/- (?)	—	—	—	2	6	4	4/9	no	yes	yes	no	yes	Midden Privy	no	1	yes	—	yes	Smells from privy and drains. Tenant said sanitary authorities were putting pressure on landlord to repair house.	
13	Labourer, 19/-	—	—	—	4	4	4	4/6	yes	yes	no	no	yes	W.C.	yes	1	yes	—	yes	Daughter of tenant and four children temporary residents.	
18	Labourer, 22/-	—	—	—	2	2	4	4/-	no	no	yes	yes	yes	Midden Privy	no	1	yes	—	yes	House dark, owing to small windows. Closet very old and tumble-down. One room is not used.	
26	Market man, 35/- (?)	—	1	—	3	2	4	5/-	no	yes	yes	no	yes	W.C.	yes	2	yes	—	yes	Walls damp. Yard shared by two houses.	
29	Carter, 22/-	Three sons and two daughters work. STREET.	—	—	7	3	5 & Sc	5/6	yes	yes	no	no	yes	P.C.	yes	1	yes	—	yes		
2	Labourer, 20/-	STREET. Daughter, toffee factory, 4/-	—	—	3	6	4	5/6	yes	yes	no	no	yes	W.C.	yes	1	yes	—	yes		
4	Baker, 26/-	—	—	—	2	1	2 & Sc	4/-	yes	yes	no	no	yes	W.C.	yes	1	yes	—	yes		
8	Wife of soldier	—	—	—	1	5	2 & Sc	4/-	yes	no	no	no	yes	W.C.	yes	1	yes	—	yes	Husband at Gibraltar. Wife allowed 1s. 11d. per w'k day. Six sleepers in bedroom of 803 cub. ft.	
9	Widow, sewing, 3/-	Daughter, takes in washing, 5/6, son, "nipper," 6/-	—	—	3	4	4	4/3	no	no	yes	no	no	W.C.	no	1	yes	—	yes	House very dirty, and damp from continuous washing going on in house. Water standing in yard.	
5	Labourer, 18/-	STREET.	—	—	2	1	3 & Sc	4/3½	yes	yes	no	no	yes	W.C.	yes	2	yes	—	no	Extra ½d. on rent is charged for cleaning closets weekly.	
2	Glass-mould maker	—	—	—	2	—	2	3/3	no	no	no	no	no	P.C.	no	2	no	8	no	Back-to-back house. Four closets for eight houses. Tenants say they prefer two-roomed house, as there is less house-work.	
10	Shop-keeper	Daughter, millhand 6/-	—	—	3	1	3	3/6	no	no	no	no	no	P.C.	no	2	no	8	no	Extra bedroom over closets. Closets very dirty. Ashes spilt all over seats.	
22	Waterman, 25/-	—	—	—	2	2	2	4/6	no	yes	yes	no	yes	W.C.	yes	1	yes	—	yes	Kitchen damp.	
27	Pavior, 30/-	—	—	—	2	1	2	3/6	no	no	?	?	no	P.C.	no	3	no	8	no		
28	Warehouseman	—	1	—	3	4	3 & Sc	5/-	yes	yes	no	no	yes	W.C.	yes	1	yes	—	yes		
6	Mill hand, 26/-	STREET. Daughter, millhand pays 10/-, daughter, ditto, pays 7/4 son, warehouseman, 11/-	—	—	5	4	4 & Sc	5/3	no	yes	yes	no	yes	P.C.	fair	1	yes	—	yes	Smells from drains. Walls and ceilings damp and crumbling.	
10	Sawyer, 21/-	—	—	—	2	1	2	4/-	yes	yes	no	no	yes	P.C.	no	6	no	7	no	Back-to-back house. Closet filthy and unusable.	
22	— out of work	—	—	—	2	5	2	3/9	no	yes	no	no	yes	P.C.	no	3	yes	—	no	Back-to-back house. Entry, where closets are, smells badly. Refuse and dirty water are thrown there.	
24	Labourer, 24/-	Son, in office, 10/- Daughter, in mill, 9/-, Daughter, in mill, 6/-	—	—	5	6	4 & Sc	6/-	yes	yes	no	no	yes	P.C.	fair	1	yes	—	yes	House has a cellar.	
11	Moulder, 40/- (?)	STREET.	1	—	3	3	4	5/6	yes	yes	no	no	yes	W.C.	yes	1	yes	—	yes		
12	Chip seller, 3/-	—	—	—	1	—	3	2/9	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	P.C.	no	6	no	6	no	Second bedroom over closets, and smell comes through floor. House in very bad repair.	
16	Flannellette raiser, 18/-	—	—	—	2	2	2	2/9	no	yes	yes	no	no	P.C.	no	6	no	6	no	Bedroom cold, damp, and vermin-infected. Smells badly. Family lives and sleeps in one room.	
6	Moulder, out of work	TERRACE.	—	—	2	1	2	2/9	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	W.C.	yes	1	yes	—	yes	Living room dark, owing to nearness of a hoarding. Yard shared with next house.	
1	Widow, aged	STREET. Son, card cutter, 8/- to 9/-	—	—	2	—	2	3/3	no	yes	no	no	no	W.C.	no	3	yes	—	no		
6	Labourer, 21/-	Wife, weaver, 11/- to 12/-	—	—	2	—	3 & Sc	4/-	yes	yes	no	no	yes	W.C.	yes	1	yes	—	yes	Scullery window fixed.	
13	Labourer, out of work	STREET.	—	—	2	5	4	3/9	no	no	yes	yes	yes	P.C.	yes	1	yes	—	yes	Very bad repair: roof defective, and both bedrooms very damp. House generally dirty and dismal. Tenant says it has been cleaned once by landlord in past twelve years.	
26	Labourer, 21/-	Daughter, mill hand 6/-	—	—	2	5	4	5/-	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	W.C.	yes	1	yes	—	yes	Roof in bad condition; lets water through.	
3	Printers' cutter, 24/-	STREET.	—	—	2	4	4	5/3	yes	yes	no	no	yes	P.C.	fair	1	yes	—	yes		
9	Cart sheet maker, 24/-	Two sons, 10/-	—	—	4	5	4	6/-	no	no	yes	no	yes	W.C.	yes	1	yes	—	yes	Overcrowded house. Seven sleepers in one bedroom. Bedrooms very dirty and unwholesome in appearance. Tenant lived in street 30 years.	
13	Charwoman	Son, "nipper," 7/- Daughter, mill, 10/-	—	—	3	6	5	6/-	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	W.C.	yes	1	yes	—	yes	House lately altered and rent raised. Kitchen so built that half is in darkness. United income of family makes about £1 per week, out of which 6s. is paid for rent.	
16	Labourer, 18/-	—	—	—	2	1	2	3/6	yes	yes	no	no	yes	P.C.	no	4	yes	—	no	Back-to-back house.	
22	Labourer, 23/- (?)	—	—	—	2	2	4 & Sc	5/2	no	fair	yes	no	yes	P.C.	no	1	yes	—	yes	Scullery walls all but falling in; rain comes through on stairs, and front bedroom is damp.	
29	Labourer, 18/-	—	—	—	2	—	2	4/-	no	no	yes	no	yes	W.C.	yes	2	yes	—	yes	Yard shared by two houses.	
32	Joiner, out of work	Son, Ry. servant, pays 11/-, son, umbrella maker, pays 7/9, d't'r pays 9/6	—	—	5	5	4 & Sc	5/6	no	yes	no	no	yes	P.C.	fair	1	yes	—	yes	Kitchen floor very weak and shaky. Five sleepers in one bedroom, four in another. One person sleeps in the living room.	
8	Widow, washer-woman occasionally	STREET. Son, labourer, 21/- Son, labourer, 7/-	—	—	3	—	2	3/6	yes	yes	no	?	yes	P.C.	yes	1	yes	—	no	Back-to-back house with cellar. Mother and two sons sleep in bedroom.	
11	Journeymen painter, out of work	Daughter, shirt-maker, 8/-, daughter, doubler, 7/-	—	—	4	1	3	3/9	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	P.C.	yes	1	no	—	no	Back-to-back house, the second bedroom being partly over closet.	

Figure 2b.

the suffering of the people in dreadful slums. The concerted efforts of social reformers to improve the housing of the poor were expressed most powerfully in cartographic form by The Citizens' Association of Manchester in 1904. The work of Thomas Marr and colleagues displayed the geographical pattern of housing conditions on a street-by-street basis. A thematic colour coding method was employed, with black representing the worst back-to-back housing; light beige indicated the best areas – suburban homes with

gardens. The most significant aspect of the map is the delineation of a belt of slums that almost completely encircled the commercial core of the city.

In many respects Marr's 1904 map is the best available representation of the social geography of Manchester and Salford as a Victorian urban metropolis. At the start of the twentieth century, Manchester was still a compact city, with a considerable amount of open and unbuilt land within three or four miles of the Town Hall. The

continuous urbanised areas only extended south down Wilmslow Road as far as Victoria Park and Dickenson Road, with Fallowfield still largely open fields, and Chorlton-cum-Hardy and Withington remaining distinct villages.

Government legislation, including the 1909 Housing Act, enabled local authorities to intervene more significantly in residential planning and to build their own council homes. The 1919 Housing Act put greater onus on local authorities, with responsibility to tackle areas of poor housing. Innovative attempts to provide decent homes were put forward by socially-minded architect-developers who sought to apply the ideas of the

Garden Suburb movement to Manchester. In south Manchester, a large garden suburb (Chorltonville) was completed in 1911. The designs of the 270 homes, mostly 4 bed semi-detached cottages, drew upon the Arts and Craft Movement.

Interwar housing solutions: the Wythenshawe estate and building of multi-storey flats

While privately developed schemes like the Chorltonville garden suburb style estate were socially-minded, they were small-scale schemes and tended to house lower middle class white

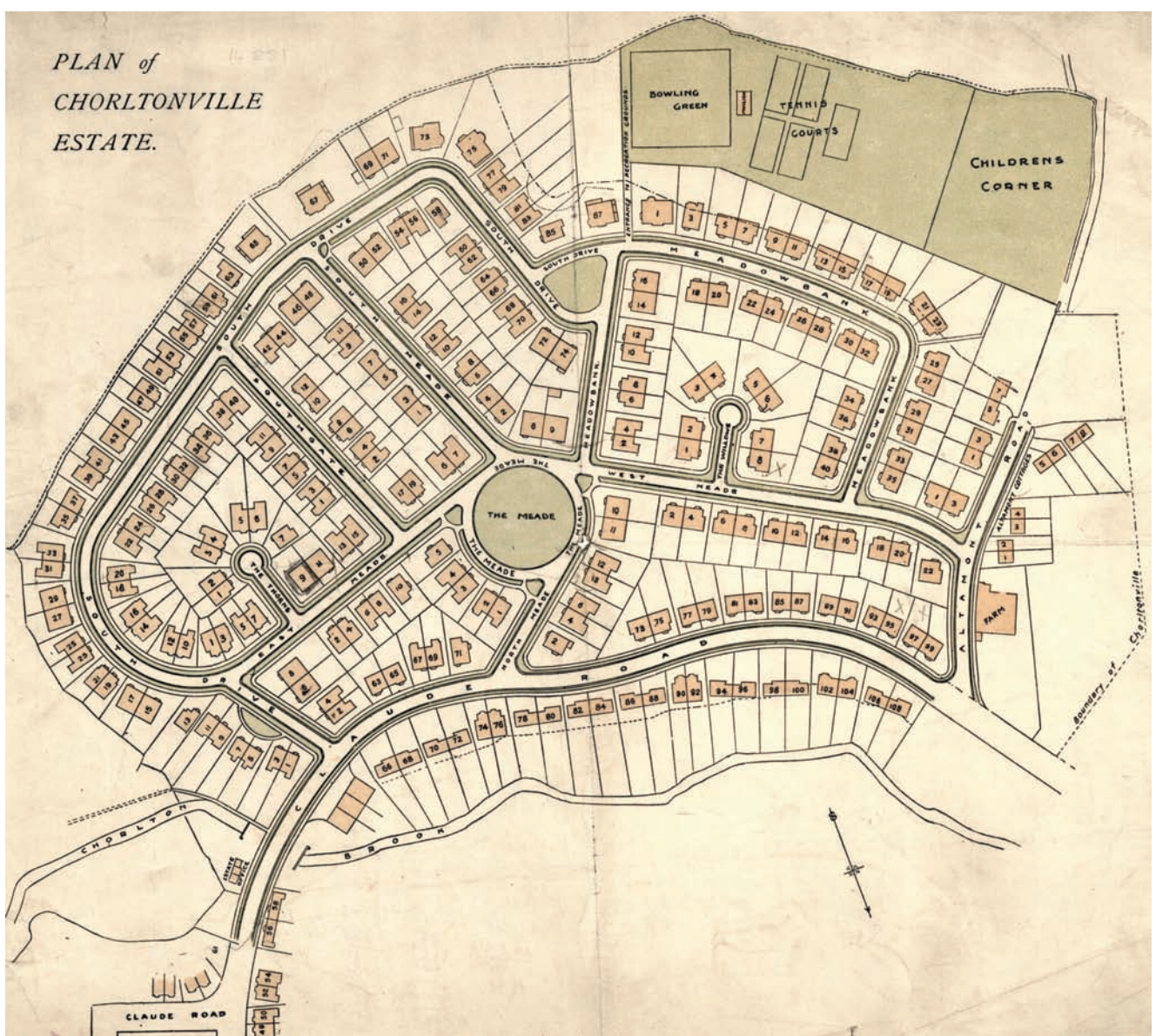


Figure 3a: An original configuration plan for Chorltonville delineating the gently curving avenues of semi-detached homes with their generous gardens. The estate was to be orientated around The Meade, echoing a traditional village green. (Source: Author scan, courtesy of Manchester City Archives.)



Figure 3b: Photograph of the typical streetscape and house design in Chorltonville. (Source: Author's collection.)

collar workers. They had a negligible impact on the wider landscape of poor housing across Manchester and the continuing insanitary conditions suffered by tens of thousands of lower income families. By the 1920s, tackling the slums through a council rehousing programme faced a serious problem: the shortage of land for building large numbers of new dwellings at low density within Manchester itself. The answer was to obtain land beyond the municipal borders for development, and also to build within the city at higher densities.

Municipal ambitions from the mid-1920s were to construct a completely new town on hundreds of hectares of land to the south of Manchester's existing border. The Wythenshawe estate was purchased from the Tatton family by Manchester City Council in 1926. The long-term goal was to house upwards of 100,000 people at Wythenshawe. The objective was that it would become a self-contained satellite town adjacent to, but separate from, Manchester; the housing would be surrounded by a green belt of agricultural land. The town was knitted together by major roads in the form of American-style parkways with wide planted verges containing separate pedestrian footpaths. Socially the aim was to take working families from overcrowded inner neighbourhood

slums to the edge of the city where they would enjoy much better lives amongst green space and fresh air. Initially, the land was under the jurisdiction of Cheshire County Council and was not formally incorporated into Manchester City Council boundaries until 1931.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, the Wythenshawe estate contained over a third of Manchester City Council's interwar social housing stock, providing homes for over 35,000 people. However, the distance from the city centre, coupled with inadequate local facilities, meant that some residents felt a sense of dislocation and even isolation. Through the 1930s, the corporation also was attempting some higher density residential development on much smaller inner city sites. The council followed a continental model of three or four-storey blocks of walk-up flats that represented for Manchester the beginnings of experiments in large block solutions based on influential Modernist architectural thinking. The most interesting example in architectural design terms was Kennet House, a visually striking elliptically shaped block of 181 two bedroom flats, built on a small plot off Smedley Lane in Cheetham Hill.

However, in the middle of the decade there still was the fundamental issue of density, overcrowding and the unplanned nature of Victorian

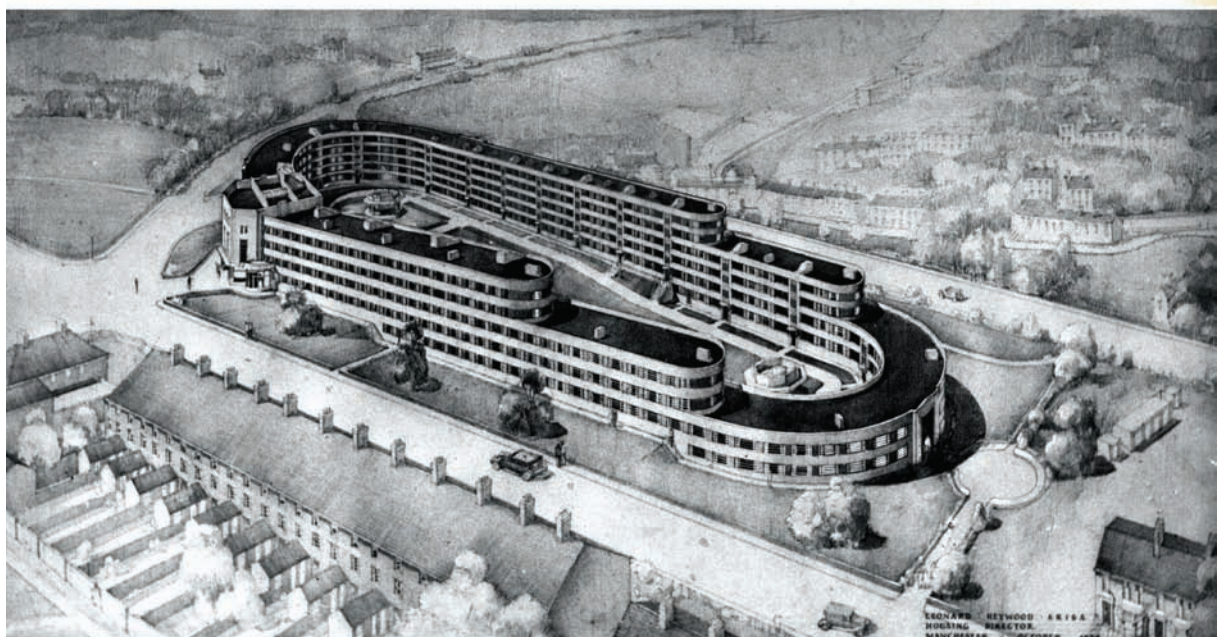
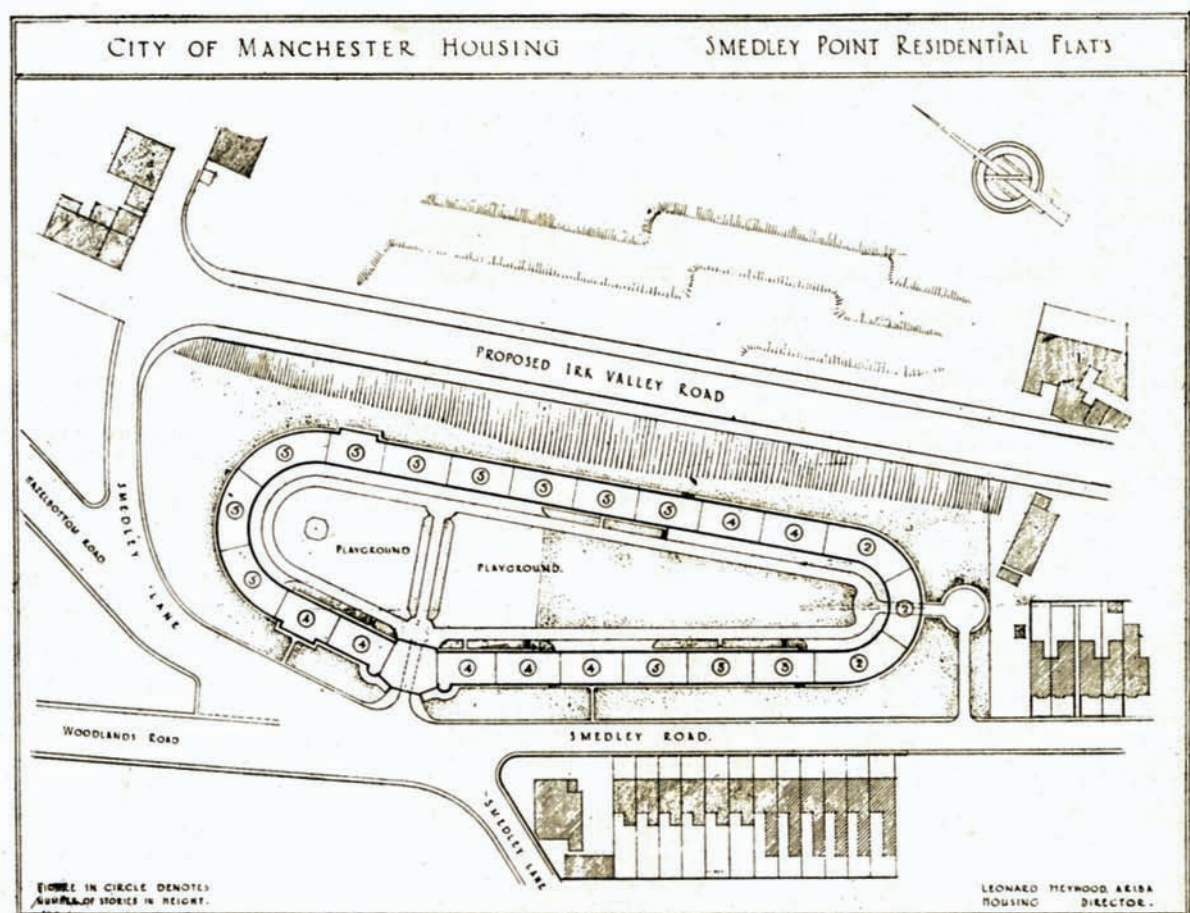


Figure 4: (Top) A general arrangement plan for Kennet House, initially known as Smedley Point flats (Source: Author scan from "Kennet House, Manchester", *The Architect & Building News*, 20 September 1935, p. 326). (Bottom) A perspective architectural sketch showing how the height stepped from two to five storeys according to the sloping contour of the underlying terrain of the Irk Valley. A generously proportioned interior courtyard was landscaped for recreation and provided a children's play area. (Source: Manchester Local Image Collection, ref. M08413, courtesy of the Manchester City Archives.)

era housing across the city. The problems and offered solutions were summarised powerfully through maps drawn by architect-planner Max Tetlow. The spatial pattern of poor housing in 1935 was little different to that mapped by Marr some thirty years earlier.

The 1945 *City of Manchester Plan* and housing in the post-war decade

In the immediate post-war years, there was a great urgency to replace bombed homes and to rehouse working people and returning service personnel. Better housing and wider environmental

improvements through town planning were central to the agenda embarked upon by the Attlee government. Actually, the peak years of construction of new homes nationally were during the Macmillan Conservative government, with a high point reached in 1954 when some 350,000 dwellings were completed.

In the *City of Manchester Plan* (1945), it was asked if Manchester was prepared to give the country a bold lead “by adopting standards of reconstruction that will secure to every citizen the enjoyment of fresh air, of a reasonable ration of daylight, and of some relief from the barren bleakness of bricks and mortar”. In the 1945 Plan,

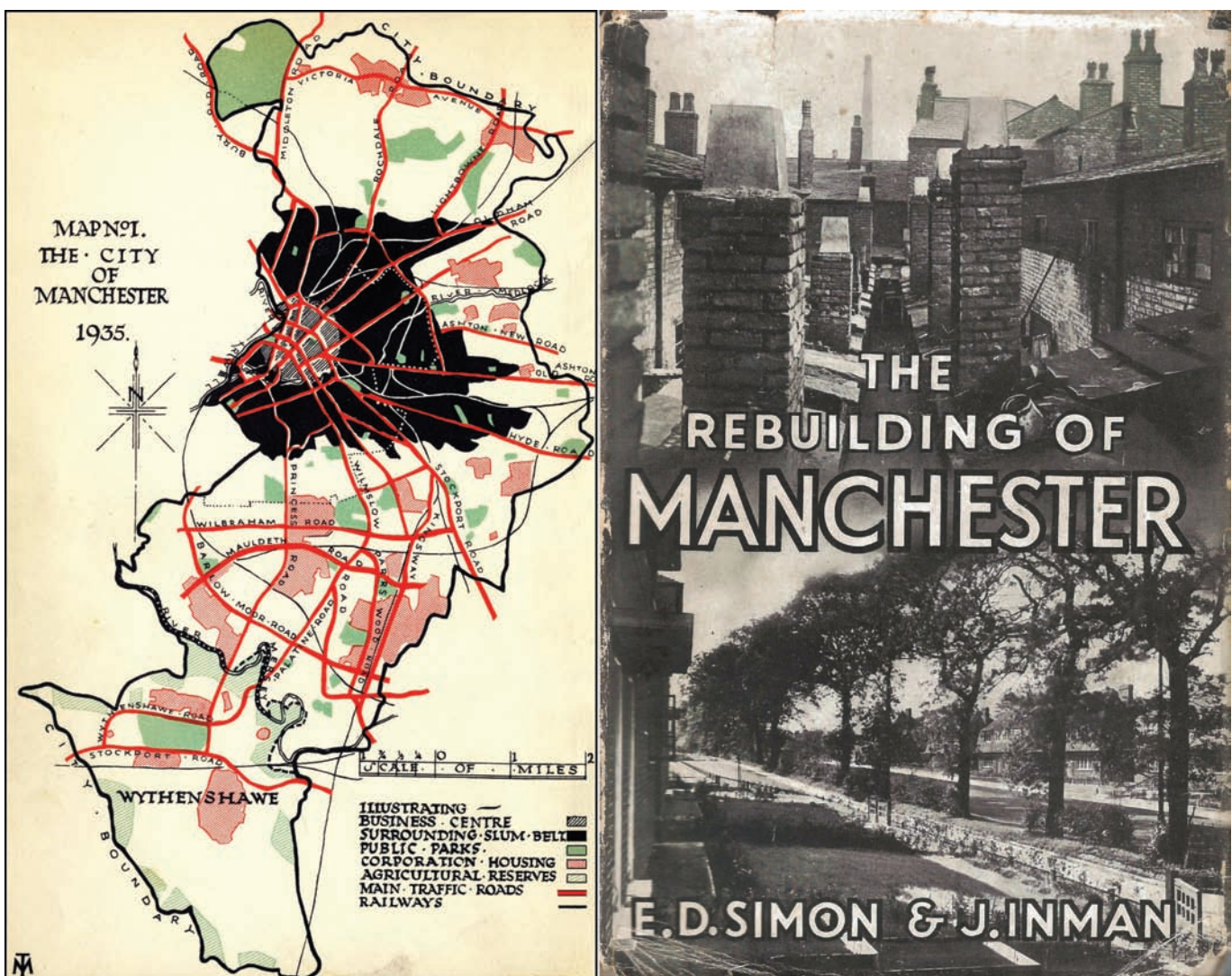


Figure 5: An example of the cartographic evidence presented by Simon and Inman’s 1935 call-to-arms, *The Rebuilding of Manchester*, and the evocative illustration from the book’s front cover, contrasting a narrow back alley of poor terraced housing with the wide tree-lined streets of Wythenshawe. (Source: Map scanned by author, book cover scan courtesy of David Kaiserman.)

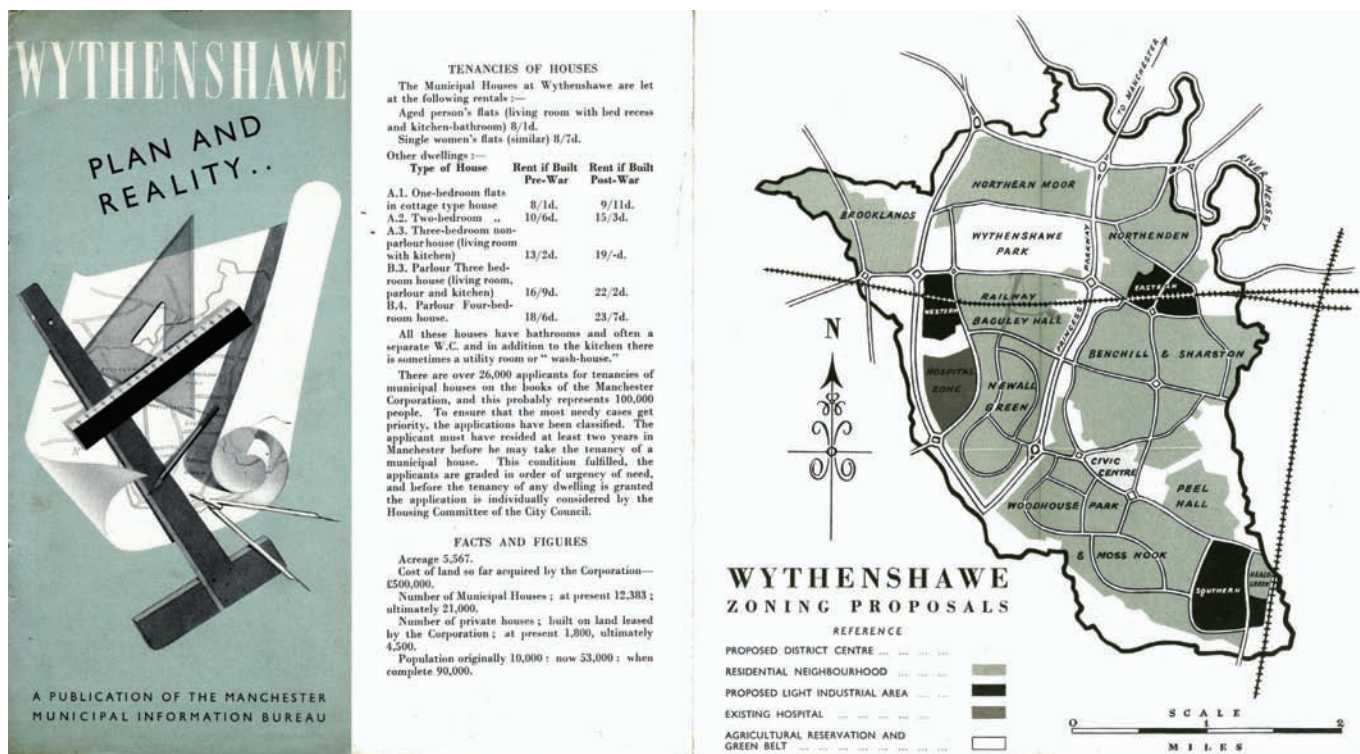


Figure 6: One side of a small information leaflet on Wythenshawe from c.1953 with a zoning map of the estate and details of the available types of homes and their rental costs. The verso sets out the virtues of the life on the estate with its promise of garden city atmosphere represented in photographs. (Source: Author scan, courtesy of Manchester City Archives.)

the residential population of Hulme would have to shrink by more than half and over 50,000 people would have to leave. Where would they go?

One of the major destinations would be the Wythenshawe estate, which saw the resumption of large scale house-building soon after the war. There, the low density of housing development generally was maintained. Of the approximately 5,500 acres of the Wythenshawe estate, around 3,000 acres would be built upon for housing by the 1950s, with a generous allocation of around 1,000 acres for open spaces, including a 250 acre public park and a golf course. By the 1950s, there were concerted efforts to bring light manufacturing and warehousing to Wythenshawe, but the area struggled to attract businesses despite advantages of space for new low-rise factory development and access to the trunk road network and the expanding airport.

The Council's slum clearance efforts were constrained into the 1950s by a continuing

shortage of sites in the city itself. Yet remorseless pressure meant that much residential expansion by Manchester council, and also by private developers, did occur on open agricultural land beyond the established urban core during the post-war decades.

The double condition of planned residential decentralisation from slum clearances accompanied by middle-class suburbanisation facilitated by car-based commuting created significantly more urban sprawl and Manchester/Salford grew markedly at its fringes, particularly in the 1960s. What had been separate towns around Manchester and Salford merged as housing development spread along major road axes and sprawled into intervening open agricultural land. Despite efforts to impose a 'green belt', many villages and smaller settlements of south-east Lancashire and north east Cheshire were engulfed into the greater Manchester conurbation.

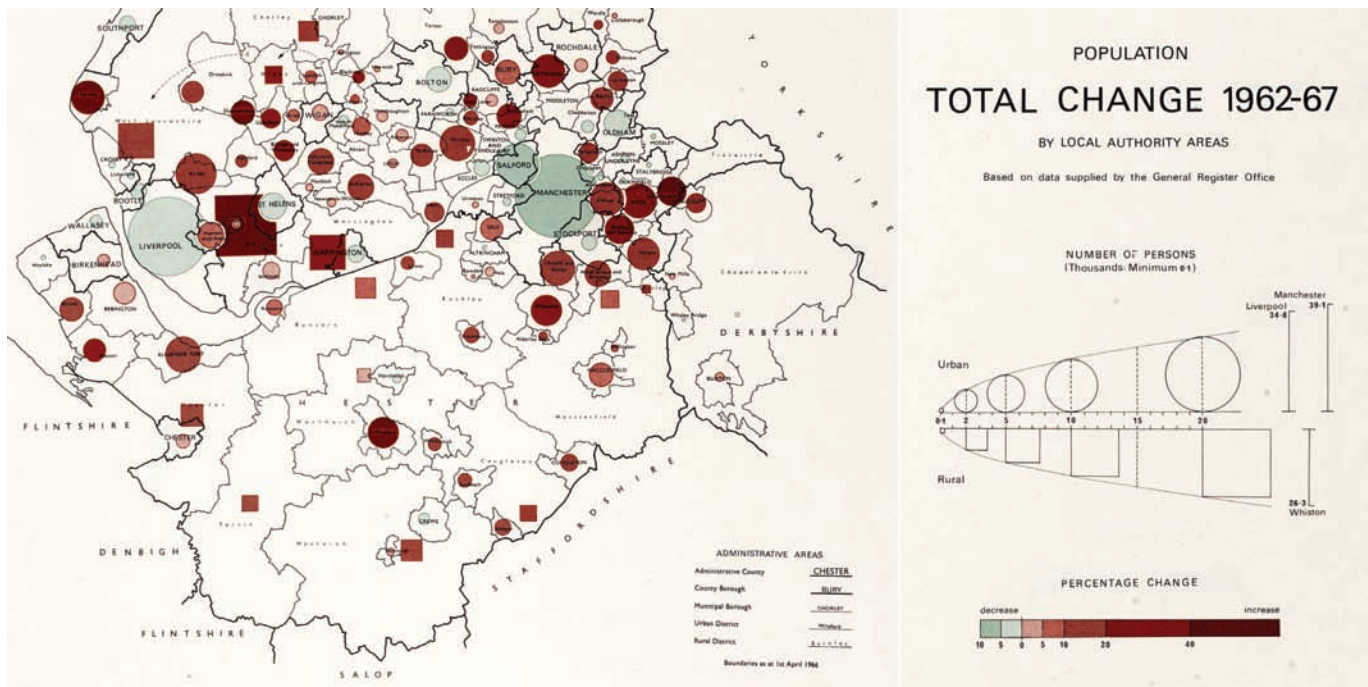


Figure 7: The scale and spatial distribution of population de-concentration across south Lancashire and north Cheshire region during a five year period in the middle of the 1960s. Manchester and Salford saw significant declines in their residential population during this period (represented by large green circles). There was a corresponding pattern of increasing population in many surrounding areas (represented by red circles). Noteworthy growth, spurred primarily by publicly funded social housing schemes, was evident in Heywood, Hyde and Wilmslow. (Source: Author extract from the North West Regional Atlas, c.1971. Ministry of Housing and Local Government, North West Regional Office.)

Into the 1960s and the era of wholesale urban renewal

Into the 1960s, patterns of demography and housing development were tied into the longer story of economic decline and social change across the North West. Manchester was going through the socially painful process of economic restructuring, switching from a labour market based primarily on commerce around the textile industry, manufacturing and engineering, to one in which the services sector dominated.

The socio-economic makeup of Manchester was significantly affected by mass immigration from Commonwealth countries into inner city residential neighbourhoods, the growth in female labour market participation and changing family structures, coupled with the beginnings of

significant deindustrialisation. The shape of the city and wider region was also impacted by plans from central government for new towns and large-scale expansion of some existing towns, along with facilitating a larger number of municipally managed overspill estates to be built.

The development of Wythenshawe with its small scale cottages in a 'garden city' landscape favoured in the 1950s gave way to larger and more quickly developed public housing provision on overspill estates, often sited some distance from Manchester, and in semi-rural contexts such as at Hyde, Heywood and Longdendale. Many of the 1960s overspill estates suffered significant deprivation and associated problems of anti-social behaviour and criminality.

One of the largest schemes was on a 480 acre greenfield site: at a cost of about £10m, more than

4,000 dwellings were built on the Hattersley estate in the early 1960s, providing new homes to over 12,000 people. The presence of rows and rows of new homes, some low-rise flats and several squat tower blocks against the backdrop of Peak District hills was a disconcerting juxtaposition. Much of the blame for subsequent social problems lies with the process of property allocation. Where whole streets could have been transferred to rows in Hattersley, households were moved piecemeal; near neighbours and close friends often found themselves on opposite sides of the estate. Families were moved physically but remained poor and found themselves in an area with few employment opportunities. The sense of social and economic isolation was compounded by weak transport links: it took nearly twenty years for a train station to be built on the line running into central Manchester.

In the late 1960s, Manchester still had major housing problems. A more ambitious approach

was needed to tackle the slums, involving principles of comprehensive urban renewal as opposed to piecemeal clearances and small-scale rebuilding. Long established residential areas on the periphery of the city centre were designated 'Action Areas' where 'slum' clearances were to be enacted. The renewal of Hulme and sweeping away of Stretford Road were prominent in the cultural and cognitive landscape of inner Manchester in the mid-1960s.

By the late 1960s, the Council had begun to experiment with large deck-access public housing using industrial 'systems building' approaches. These were being promoted nationally as the most efficient solutions for urban renewal. The result was 'megastructure' housing blocks such as the Hulme 5 development (known as the Crescents) and the large multi-level estates in Harpurhey, Longsight (which became known as 'Fort Ardwick') and Beswick (the Wellington Street scheme). These large-scale systems-built

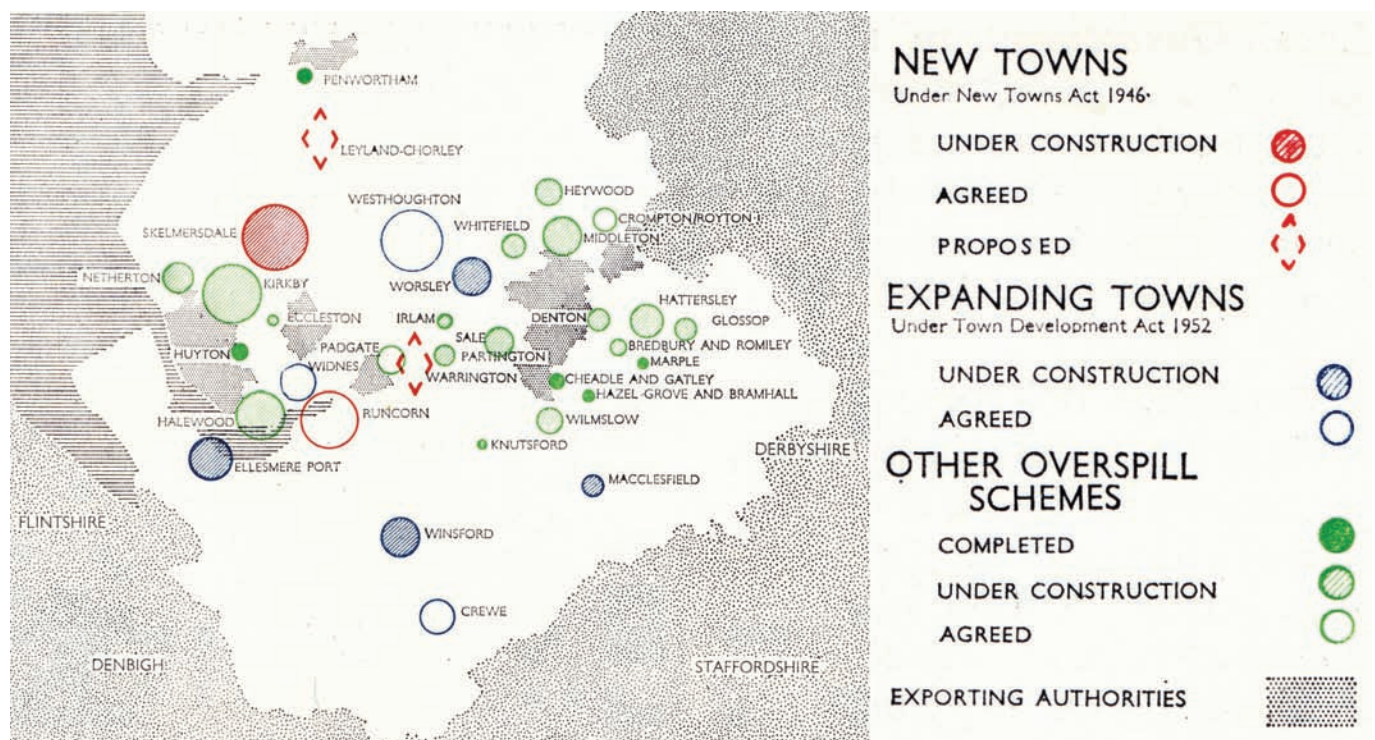


Figure 8: The range of population dispersal solutions planned in early 1960s for the region to deal with the large-scale housing problems, particular relating to Manchester and Liverpool. (Source: Author extract from *The North West: A Regional Study* (Department of Economic Affairs, HMSO, 1965), figure 26, p. 82.)



Figure 9: The outline plan for the Hattersley overspill estate detailing the arrangement of family homes primarily clustered into courts and aligned along short cul-de-sacs. The new schools, shops and community facilities, shown in blue, were positioned on the main circular distribution road. Several original wooded valleys were to be retained, more for financial expediency than aesthetic value. The surrounding existing rural landscape can also be discerned. The route of the Sheffield to Manchester railway runs through the bottom left quadrant of the map. (Source: Author scan. Courtesy of Manchester City Archives, Engineers Microcard Collection, ref. 5460/-/12.)

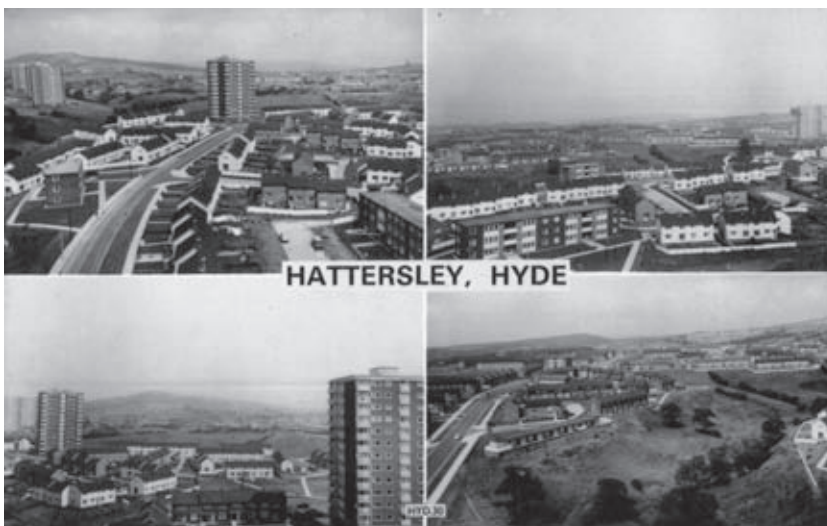


Figure 10: Views of the different sizes and styles of social housing built on the Hattersley estate, including several thirteen storey blocks of flats. The photographs also indicate the nature of the wider landscape with the backdrop of the hills of the Longdendale valley. (Source: Author scan of undated postcard.)

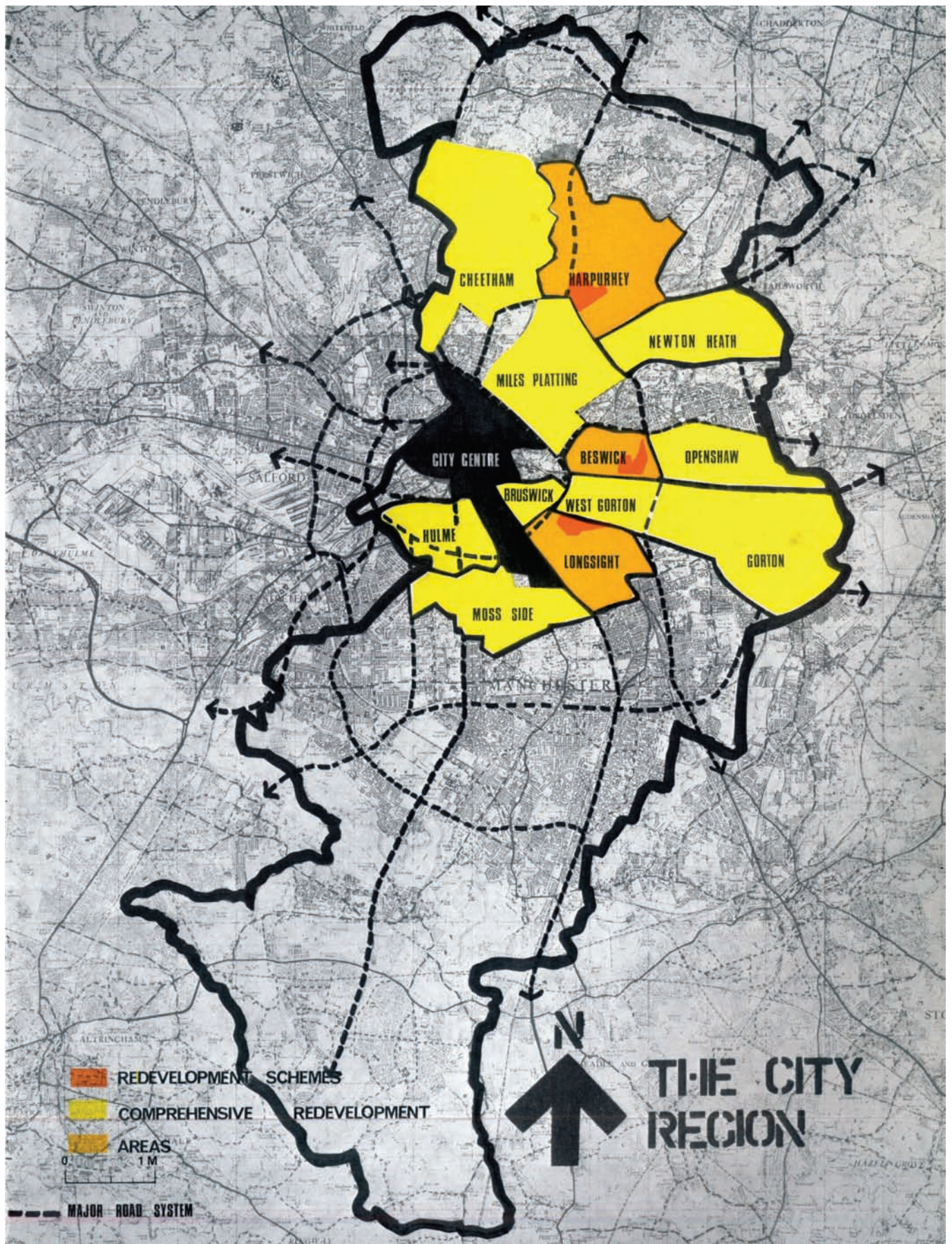


Figure 11: Zoning map indicating the scale of residential redevelopment across a large swathe of Manchester's inner neighbourhoods in the late 1960s. (Source: Author scan from Urban Renewal Manchester. Housing Development Group, Manchester Corporation Housing Committee, 1967, p. 3.)

Figure 12: A typical terrace of working class homes, long blanketed in dark soot from factory chimneys and domestic coal fires, in the area of the Wellington Street clearance. The photographer T. Brooks captured the scene in 1964, a few years before demolition was enacted by the City Corporation. Tyrol Street would disappear completely although a Tyrol Walk did reappear in the midst of the new scheme. (Source: Manchester Local Image Collection, ref. m37611.)



Figure 13: The herringbone grid of streets in Beswick as surveyed by the Planning Department in preparation for clearance in the mid-1960s. The area shaded red was condemned and subject to CPO. The road pattern would be swept away to provide blank canvas for construction of a large new housing estate. (Source: Manchester City Archives, City Engineers microcards, ref. 5871/1/2.)

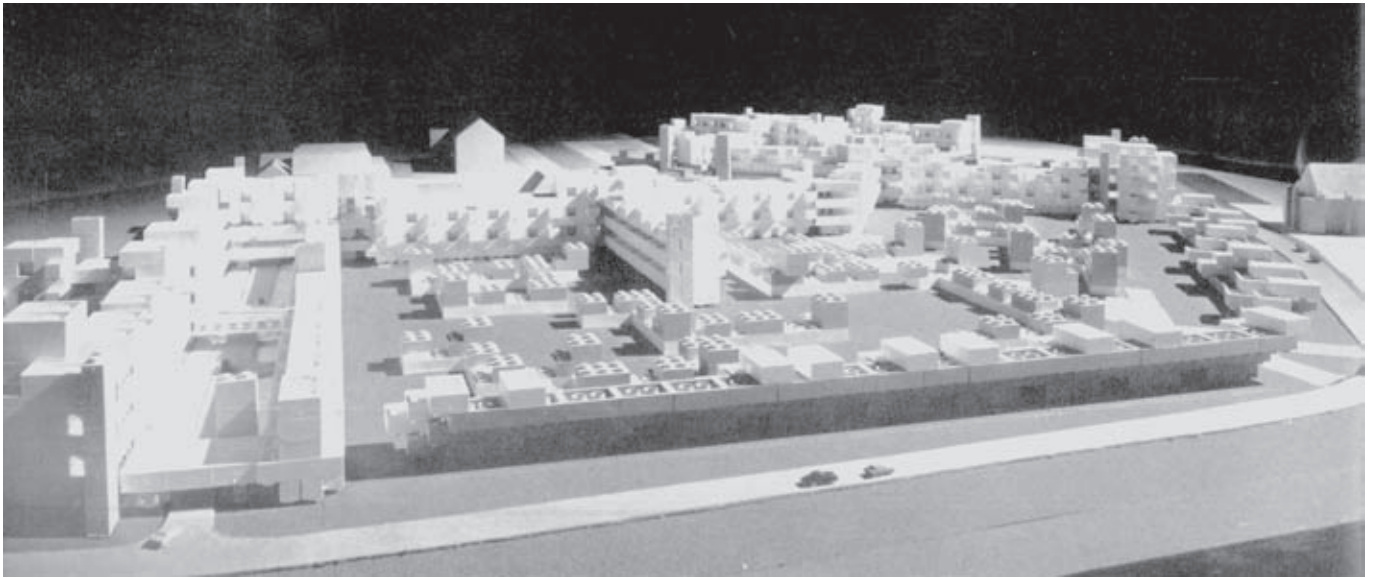


Figure 14: A model made out of Lego bricks used to display the design concept for the deck access housing scheme at Wellington Street, Beswick. When completed, this multi-level residential complex would quickly be branded 'Fort Beswick' and the appearance of the estate in this image perhaps explains partly why this undesirable nickname came to be applied. (Source: Author scan from Urban Renewal Manchester (Housing Development Group, Manchester Corporation Housing Committee), 1967, p. 25.)

schemes suffered from a combination of physical construction faults and socio-economic problems exacerbated by poor management.

The late 1960s and the systems-built housing estates: a case study of the Wellington Street scheme, aka 'Fort Beswick'

"Before 1964 almost all the houses were pre-First World War terraced houses, row upon row, and street upon street with little open space and limited facilities. Few had the basic amenities of bath, toilet and hot and cold running water." (Brian Parnell, 1979 *Beswick Ward Area Information* (City of Manchester), p. 10)

In the mid-1960s, Beswick was slated for comprehensive renewal: some 34 acres of terraced streets containing over 1,200 houses, more than a hundred shops and ten pubs would be subject to clearance. Demolition was completed in 1967. The replacement multi-storey deck-access flats were, in design, reminiscent of children's building blocks. Today the architectural models of the estate

seem to encapsulate the technocratic thinking of the 1960s that was about maximising the use of space and mechanistically stacking boxes together without much thought for how the result would feel for real people.

In the deck-access Wellington Street estate all structural elements were of concrete and were manufactured in centralised factories and trucked to the site, where the construction process was simply a matter of assembling standard parts in sequence, with wall panels slotting together and bolted into floors. Poor quality control and careless work on site were root causes of most of the subsequent problems.

The walkways were a significant architectural element in these 1960s deck-access estates and were optimistically conceived as 'streets-in-the-sky', but the decks failed to function as real streets. They became a source of anxiety around anti-social behaviour and fear of being mugged. Initial tenant dissatisfaction with the quality of the buildings and the provision of communal facilities quickly developed into serious disquiet over the

basic safety and security of the estate as a place to live. By the end of the 1970s, the estate had been labelled 'Fort Beswick'.

Like a number of other large scale 1960s housing schemes in Manchester, Fort Beswick suffered escalating social problems. The sheer scale of the blocks and their identikit, mono-chrome architecture fed into an oppressive sense of anonymity. In reality the visual look of the estate derived largely from cost savings in the design. Poor management and letting practice

by housing officials contributed to early social problems. Deindustrialisation eliminated many of the sources of steady blue-collar employment for social housing tenants; long-term male unemployment became the norm. In autumn 1981, the City Council decided to demolish Fort Beswick. A phased demolition of the estate commenced in November 1982 and new two-storey conventional homes were built in replacement of the 'streets-in-the-sky' blocks.

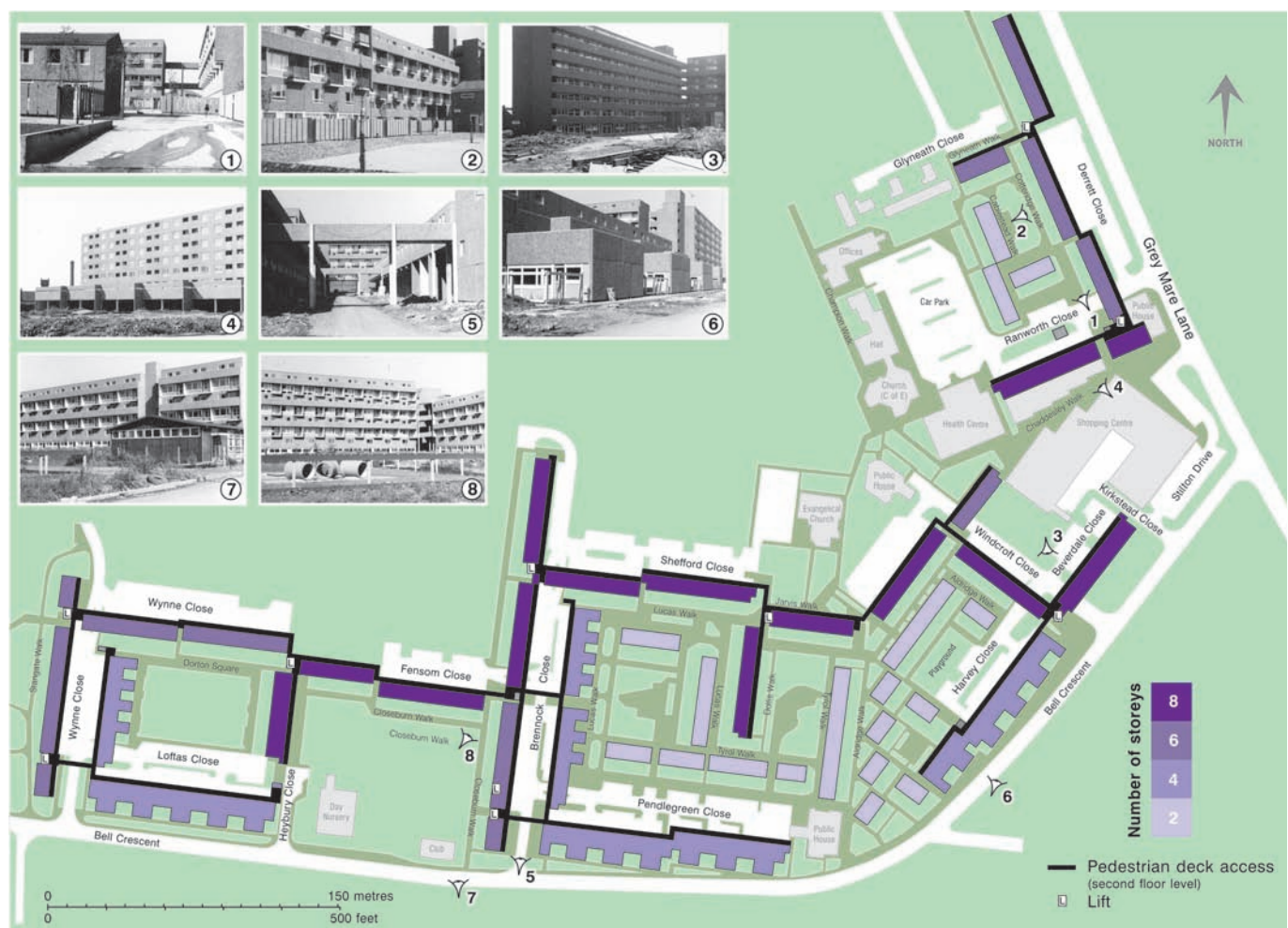


Figure 15: Analytical plan of the Wellington Street estate showing the number and distribution of blocks, colour-coded by their heights, plus upper level linkages and position of lifts. The inset photographs giving a sense of appearance of the buildings were taken in 1971 by H. Milligan soon after construction was completed. (Source: Author design, executed by Graham Bowden, University of Manchester cartographic unit. Original black and white photographs are from Manchester Local Image Collection, refs. M12518-526.)

Conclusions

While there were many good intentions underlying the municipal paternalism that drove forward social housing provision in Manchester through the twentieth century, there was also little or no consultation with people being rehoused. The rapid failure of the experiments in wholesale renewal, such as the Wellington Street estate, was realised by the mid-1970s, as evidenced by the introduction of housing action trusts that sought improvements to existing properties. The results of this change in policy can be seen in the survival of many streets of red brick terraces in Longsight and Moss Side that had been slated for clearance.

Many new challenges became evident in the decades after the 1970s. Where and how people live in Manchester continued to change. The selling off of council homes through the Thatcher reforms in the 1980s changed the nature of many municipal estates. Manchester also witnessed

the emergence of gentrified mills and a largely unexpected boom in city centre living from the 1990s onwards. Since the millennium there has been marked demographic regrowth across much of Manchester. Serious pressures in the housing market feature high on contemporary political agendas, both locally and nationally, with deep problems of high cost and affordability affecting many people. Overcrowding and poor quality housing, particularly in parts of the rental sector, is a significant problem. A growing number of tall apartment blocks are transforming the skyline of the city centre but there is ever stronger pressure of suburban sprawl as developers seek attractive plots of land in the green belt around Manchester and in the Cheshire plain to build many thousands of detached homes.

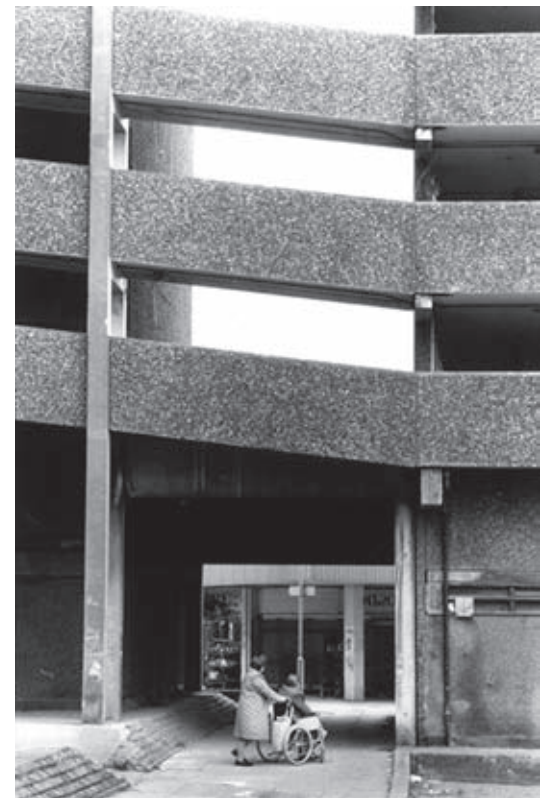


Figure 16a, b: Two views of Fort Beswick illustrating the characteristic look and feel of 1960s era deck-access housing. Undoubtedly the Wellington Street estate could look stark and forbidding, even on a sunny day. There was little in way of soft, 'natural' landscaping in a predominantly concrete environment and physical access could be a problem for the infirm and vulnerable. (Source: Courtesy of the Guardian Newspaper photographic archive; (left) Don McPhee, 1981 (right) Denis Thorpe, 1986).

Further reading

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