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The Hailsham Report and the Origins of Washington New Town

This chapter will examine the effects the Hailsham Report had on the new towns. The first part investigates the regional context of the report, especially those parts of it that affected the towns. The second section assesses how Aycliffe and Peterlee benefited from the report's conclusions as both assumed enhanced roles within the regional growth zone. The third part examines how Washington New Town came into existence and analyses some of the effects it had on the region's other new towns. The chapter concludes by assessing the initial impact the report had on the region and the new towns.

i) The report promises a better future for the North East

1963 was a year of great significance for the North East's new towns. The government's White Paper, *The North East: A Programme For Change* (the Hailsham Report) was published which decisively raised the profile of the region's existing new towns. A further consequence of the report was that the government announced plans for another new town to be created in the region. Not since the Barlow Report, and the legislation that followed it during the 1940s, had so much government attention been focused upon the North East.

The report was an attempt to revitalise the region's industrial base, as well as improving its environment sufficiently to arrest the continuing flow of migrants from the region.¹ The 1940s legislation had directed manufacturing industry to areas in the North East at the expense of more prosperous parts of the country: for ten years after the war, the region's employment and productivity levels more or less matched the South East and the Midlands.² The industrial decline of the North East since the mid-1950s, however, was of much concern: the unabated deterioration

¹ *The North East: A Programme for Regional Development and Growth* (Cmd.2206) 1963, p. 5. (Hereafter, Hailsham Report).

² See, for example, National Economic Development Council, *Conditions Favourable to Faster Growth* (1963), pp. 3-5.

of the region's traditional industries; the salience of oil over coal as the major source of energy in the western world; the dearth of research and development establishments, and concomitant lack of research professionals; the inadequacy of the region's home-grown manufacturing industries – all had contributed to dissipation of the industrial revival achieved in the region in the ten years following the war.



Fig. 14: Lord Hailsham

Policies favouring the regions were also held in abeyance by successive governments. During the 1950s, successive Conservative governments displayed little enthusiasm for regional policies. The amount of new government-financed factory building in the North East fell from 9.4 million square feet between 1946 and 1949 to 1.1 million square feet between 1951 and 1954. For some commentators the reason for this was that the government was generally satisfied that the strength of the region's staple industries would negate the need for any substantial intervention. However, the relatively sudden collapse of the coal and shipbuilding industries after 1956 caught it by

surprise; thereafter it attempted to hastily create some form of rescue package for the region culminating in the 1963 Hailsham Report.³

The report promised to have at least the same impact on the region as the earlier legislation. Hailsham accepted the need to create viable employment opportunities, but also saw a real need to revitalise the region's whole infrastructure if it was to bear comparison with other more prosperous parts of the UK and Europe.⁴ It was clear, however, that the region's long-standing but outdated primary industries would be unable to sustain the sort of economic regeneration necessary for it to be able to compete effectively.⁵ Between 1959 and 1963, its traditional industrial sector had shed 32,920 male jobs. Although the impact had been cushioned by an increase of 24,610 female jobs, it still meant a net employment deficit of 8,300 jobs in only four years.⁶ In contrast to the local employment legislation of the previous three-to-four years,⁷ however, government action was directed, not necessarily to unemployment 'blackspots' where aid depended upon the vicissitudes of the local unemployment statistics in a particular district at any given time; rather it was concentrated on that part of the region which had the most favourable conditions for self-sustaining economic growth over a much longer period of time.⁸

A growth zone consisting roughly of Tyneside, Teesside and that part of County Durham situated between the Great North Road and the coast was established into which nearly all public service investment was deployed.⁹ For those areas fortunate enough to be located within the zone, government financial assistance was increased from £55 million in 1962/63 (or about 5.5 per cent

³ See, for example, G. McCrone, *Regional Policy in Britain* (1969), p. 116; D. W. Parsons, *The Political Economy of British Regional Policy* (1986), pp. 136-41.

⁴ McCrone, *Regional Policy*, p. 120. The whole question of economic growth was at the time receiving much greater attention than ever before, in part because of the country as a whole's low rate of growth compared with other European countries.

⁵ In 1962, 34 per cent of male jobs in the region still depended on coal mining, shipbuilding, chemicals and metal manufacture compared with only twelve per cent in Britain as a whole.

⁶ Bowden, 'Problems and policies', p. 25. Between 1958 and 1973, 117,000 jobs disappeared in mining in the region, 25,000 in shipbuilding and 13,000 in metal manufacture. For an overall view of the decline in the region's industries see J. B. Goddard, *The Economic Development of Older Industrial Areas: The Case of the Northern Region of England* (Newcastle, 1983).

⁷ See above, p. 72.

⁸ *Hailsham Report*, p. 6.

⁹ See, for example, McCrone, *Regional Policy*, p. 120.

of total public service investment in Great Britain), to close on £80 million in 1963/64, and to an expected £90 million in 1964/65.¹⁰ Also, in order to encourage the expansion and modernisation of industrial facilities, various grants were created for acquiring and installing plant and machinery, while expenditure on new machinery was written off altogether. Since the areas industrialists could select to install their factories was of a much wider scope than before, furthermore, they were given much more choice in which to find the types of labour best suited to their particular needs.

Hailsham was anxious that the report's recommendations were implemented at regional level.¹¹ Despite the massive injection of capital into the North East during the 1940s, implementation of regional policy still remained within the compass of a few Whitehall departments: there remained no adequate focal point at which efforts could be coordinated regionally on the spot. Those departments which did retain regional offices maintained few lateral contacts with one another; in turn, their relations with local authorities were characterised more by hostility than cooperation. Hailsham's solution was to create a miniature Whitehall in the region, whereby the representatives of a number of departments and local authorities could be combined into a single team thus ensuring the exchange of information and ideas within a single organisation.¹²

ii) Aycliffe and Peterlee: pivotal roles in the North East growth zone

Peterlee and Aycliffe were major beneficiaries of the new legislation: both were within the growth zone, and expected to play central roles within their respective areas. Their economic standing was further bolstered in April 1963 when the government decided to merge their corporation boards so that henceforth a joint management board controlled both towns. As well as bestowing them with extra financial influence, the decision enabled both towns to benefit from a useful exchange of

¹⁰ *Hailsham Report*, p. 7

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 40.

¹² Philipson, *Swords*, p. 154.

information and experience.¹³ Not everyone agreed with the decision, however. Peterlee Labour party objected that there would be even more of a democratic deficit in the towns, as those in charge inevitably became less approachable to their residents.¹⁴

In South-West Durham, the Darlington/Aycliffe corridor was chosen by Hailsham as the most favourable location for industrial expansion, despite the government's refusal in 1962 to prioritise Aycliffe for industry in the sub-region.¹⁵ Whilst the marked deterioration in employment in neighbouring localities during the early 1960s was partly responsible for the change of attitude,¹⁶ fears about future job losses as a result of continuing contraction in coal mining in the area and the impending closure of the railway workshops at Darlington with the loss of 3,400 jobs, had also led people to worry that there would be a return to the desperate unemployment situation of the inter-war years.¹⁷ Between 1961 and 1963 unemployment in the area had persistently been above the national average: it reached a record high of 4.8 per cent in February 1963, exactly double the national figure.

To counter these concerns, Hailsham recommended that as a pivotal growth point in the area, Aycliffe's potential population should be increased to 45,000, which would allow the town to attract people from West Durham where the economic prospects were far less encouraging.¹⁸ This was also largely in accord with Durham County Council's development plan, which in 1962 had itself suggested a population of 35,000 at Aycliffe.¹⁹ At the same time, the Board of Trade, increasingly alarmed at the contraction of coal mining in the area, where the number of employed miners declined from 48,600 in 1958 to 34,200 in February 1963, stated that it was willing to

¹³ NT/Ay/1/1/24 ADC, BM, 2 July 1964; *NE*, 10 Jan 1963. The only other new towns which had a joint corporation at the time were Welwyn and Hatfield in Hertfordshire.

¹⁴ *NE*, 10 Jan 1963.

¹⁵ *Hailsham Report*, p. 26. Also, see above, p. 73.

¹⁶ For a while during the early 1960s, unemployment in Aycliffe was running at twice the national average. See, for example, Bowden, 'Newton Aycliffe', p. 110.

¹⁷ By the end of 1963 there were only 124 collieries in production in Northumberland and Durham compared with 174 five years previously. On the contraction of coal in the region following the 1957 coal crisis see Bowden, 'Problems and policies' p. 20.

¹⁸ ADC, *Master Plan Report for the Expansion of Newton Aycliffe to a Population of 45,000* (May, 1967), p. 4.

¹⁹ NT/Ay/1/1/23 ADC, BM, 11 Oct 1962.

increase the capacity of Aycliffe's trading estate. Hailsham recommended that Aycliffe's trading estate, although already the place of work for 5,000 workers in early 1963 should be more intensively developed and so provide work for at least double that number.²⁰ Although it would entail a considerable effort to attract industry in sufficient quantities to justify such a bold proposition, his recommendations became more achievable with the arrival on the estate in early 1963 of GEC Telecommunications in a 50,000 square feet government-backed factory. The company, which initially provided work for 1,500 skilled and semi-skilled workers, had the option of increasing this number substantially as business developed.²¹

In early 1963 the unemployment situation in Peterlee was even more serious than at Aycliffe. By February there were still only three factories established on the industrial estate with 1,300 employees, over a thousand of them women. At the beginning of January 1963 Peterlee had the lowest number of people working of any new town in the country.²² Moreover, the closure of Wingate colliery in August 1962, with the loss of 860 jobs, and the liquidation of the Norwegian firm, Waage Wool, in November, despite substantial assistance from the Board of Trade, added considerably to the number already unemployed.²³

Despite Wingate's closure, the NCB stated in 1963 that East Durham's remaining pits were secure for the foreseeable future. The volume of coal produced actually rose between 1960 and 1963; but it was a rise due to improved technological extraction methods and the Coal Board's rationalisation programme, rather than increased manpower. In reality, the number of men employed in the district's pits fell by almost 2,000 during these years.²⁴ There was therefore a real need for further industrial activity in Peterlee, above all, to help combat the worsening unemployment situation, which reached 6.5 per cent in February 1963. However, the problem of

²⁰ *Hailsham Report*, pp. 18-19

²¹ ADC, 1964 AR, p. 12.

²² SE, 11 Jan 1963. The new towns with the most industrial workers were Cwbran with 18,645 and Stevenage with 17,900.

²³ Robinson, 'Peterlee', p. 211.

²⁴ In the new town itself the percentage of households engaged in coal mining fell from 44.6 per cent in 1955 to 12.6 per cent in 1970.

attracting industry to the new town was the same as it had been in 1948: lack of stable ground upon which to build factories, and the poor state of the area's roads which were totally unsuited to the needs of modern industrial transportation.

Although promises had been made in 1948 that the A19 road to the west of the new town between Sheraton Road End, near Hartlepool, and Cold Hesledon, near Sunderland, would be raised to dual carriageway standard, by 1962 very little work had actually been done. In the House of Commons, meanwhile, Shinwell also requested that the Ministry consider improvements. Despite these pleas, the Ministry decided not to make any improvements, further stating that it would not even reconsider the matter for at least another four years.

After 1963, however, the new town's prospects became much more encouraging. Despite the government's reluctance to intervene to aid Peterlee, Hailsham recognised that its obvious lack of industry and the shocking state of the A19 were such that only urgent government attention could remedy the situation. What was required, the report stated, was the introduction into the new town of a wider range of enterprises than had hitherto been the case. The lifting of the prohibition on jobs for women only in the town was recommended, as was the building of more advance factories.²⁵ Perhaps the most important recommendations were the provision of 90 acres of additional serviced industrial land free from subsidence, situated to the west of the A19 near to Shotton Colliery,²⁶ and the absolute necessity of improvements to the A19.²⁷

Although policies aimed at creating conditions conducive to modernisation and diversification of the North East's industrial base were crucial to its future prospects, it was clear that it was not only industry that needed to perform more competently: its whole environment was in desperate need of renewal, principally to ensure that the scale and quality of public services and facilities matched the needs of modern society. Only by doing this, the report contended, could conditions be

²⁵ Philipson, *Swords*, p. 165.

²⁶ PDC, *1964 AR*, p. 249.

²⁷ *Hailsham Report*, p. 26.

created which were favourable to the recruitment and retention of professional and skilled workers who would otherwise seek employment in other parts of the country:

The need for diversification extends to the quality of life. A region can attract and hold the professional, technical and other skilled people on whom modern industrial development increasingly depends only if its general environment and society can bear comparisons with the living conditions in other parts of the country.²⁸

In order to facilitate this the report recommended the clearance of unsightly industrial waste so that urban areas could be made more appealing to potential industrialists and professional workers. The region's housing stock was of particular concern. In the mid-1960s about 50 per cent had been built before 1914, and many houses were located near unsightly pitheads. Hailsham therefore recommended that the region's house-building programme be increased from 18,000 houses per year – the number built in 1962 – to more than 25,000 per year.²⁹ Furthermore, the new towns were pivotal to the success of the whole programme. Both towns' new and expanded roles as employment centres meant that parallel house-building programmes would be needed to cater for the expected number of new workers.

It was anticipated that the expected escalation in the number of workers in Aycliffe would involve a building programme of at least 400 houses per year, increasing to 693 houses per year after 1967 if the enlarged population target of 45,000 was to be realised.³⁰ For the corporation, however, such a number of houses in a single year was a task it had yet to achieve: over the preceding five years it had never built more than 270 houses per year, even when its direct labour department was working to full capacity.³¹

Whilst Hailsham did not envisage the need for such a dramatic increase in Peterlee's population target, the town was still nevertheless expected to provide considerably more houses for the expected increase in the numbers of workers on the estates to the west of the A19. One way the

²⁸ Ibid, p. 15.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 6.

³⁰ ADC, *Master Plan Report*, p. 39; NT/Ay/1/1/24 ADC BM, 5 Dec 1963.

³¹ ADC, *1964 AR*, pp. 5-6.

shortfall in houses could be met, the report argued, was by a far wider use of industrialised building techniques than was the case in the early 1960s.

iii) The birth of Washington New Town

Of all the recommendations that arose from the Hailsham Report, the most momentous for the region as a whole was the one that led to the government announcement in September 1963 that a further new town was to be created at Washington in the north-west part of County Durham.³² For county and district officials the announcement to build at Washington was what they had been urging government to do for many years. In 1961 Durham County Council, concerned about the district's pits closing, had proposed that a designation order to expand Washington be issued.³³ At that time the authority considered that the only factors which needed to be resolved were whether the new town should be developed under the New Towns Act of 1946, or the Town Development Act of 1952, which left matters largely under the aegis of the area's local authorities.³⁴

And yet, when the announcement was made in 1963 it still took many people by surprise. Hailsham's cabinet colleague, the Housing Minister, Sir Keith Joseph, had flatly refused the county and district councils' request for a new town at Washington not more than eight months prior to the report's publication, stating at the time that any prospective building in the area would only add to an already heavily populated part of the region.³⁵ Joseph was vigorously supported at the time by Sunderland Borough Council, which objected that a new town so close to Tyneside and Sunderland would unnecessarily compress development in the Tyne/Wear area. It would also have compromised its own plans to develop nearby Silkworth as a population overspill area, as well as prejudiced its own plans to expand Sunderland airport at Usworth. In contrast to the region's other

³² *Hailsham Report*, p. 27.

³³ Hole et al, *Washington*, p. 4.

³⁴ Holley, *Quicker*, p. 4

³⁵ *NE*, 11 Nov 1963. To the north of the proposed new town's boundaries and those of Gateshead was only 700 yards; to the east, Sunderland was only 2,000-3,000 yards away, while to the west, Chester-le-Street was less than 500 yards from Washington's designated area.

two new towns, furthermore, which were essentially ‘greenfield’ developments, at Washington the proposed designation area already contained more than 18,000 people.

Despite these objections, Hailsham argued that development at Washington was essential to stimulate faster progress of the region’s industrial base, and in raising the scale and quality of its urban development generally. Also, because of its location relative to the Tyneside/Wearside urban complex, Washington, more than any other new town outside of London was firmly integrated into its regional role.³⁶ Strategically, the proposed designated area was situated in an ideal location: to the west it adjoined the Birtley by-pass on the A1 motorway; to the east it was within easy reach of the A19 and the Tyne Tunnel.³⁷ Moreover, the area had ample land for both residential and industrial purposes, an important consideration as such land free from the effects of subsidence was in short supply in that part of County Durham.



Fig. 15: Washington within Tyne and Wear

From the beginning, moreover, Washington’s designation was contingent on entirely different factors than the county’s existing new towns. In both Aycliffe and Peterlee, the emphasis had been

³⁶ HLG/115/695 WDC, Master Plan – Research Comments, March 1967.

³⁷ WDC, *Master Plan and Report* (1967), p. 11.

on creating self-contained communities, which were, to a large degree, self-sufficient entities serving their own housing and employment needs. The professed aim of both towns' corporations, at least during their early years, was therefore to control both residential and employment needs within the strict perimeters of both towns' designated areas.³⁸ Both had also been designed in an era of very low levels of car ownership. The condition of the roads did not therefore assume the importance that they did in Washington.³⁹

For the new towns created in the 1960s the underlying priority was to distance themselves from the determinism of the traditional neighbourhood unit whilst, at the same time, acting as catalysts for economic growth and urban regeneration within a much wider regional strategy.⁴⁰ Because of its proximity to already substantial centres of population (and employment), it was perhaps inevitable that Washington would become part of a wider labour market, and that a flow of workers to and from the town was to be expected.⁴¹ Furthermore, rather than continuing to maintain a distance between Tyneside and Wearside, Hailsham hoped that one of the effects of Washington's construction would be to link the two conurbations, thereby increasing the size of potential markets and giving prospective employers a wider pool of labour from which to draw upon; at the same time, making increased specialisation possible.⁴²

This was a very important consideration. In 1959 more than half of Washington's workforce was employed at the area's four pits. As they all were not expected to be operational within a few years, mobilisation of its labour force and commuting became inevitable. For the town's planners, the assumption was that whilst its workers would find employment in other areas, it was accepted –

³⁸ Schaffer, *The New Town Story*, p. 120.

³⁹ However, Aycliffe's expansion was assisted by research from an expert on traffic problems in Britain's towns. See, for example, *Northern Despatch*, 11 Feb 1964. By 1975 though, capital expenditure on roads in Washington was nearly £2.5 million. In Peterlee and Aycliffe combined it was a little over £500,000.

⁴⁰ On the diminishing emphasis upon neighbourhood units during the late 1950s and early 1960s see A. A. Ogilvy, 'The self-contained new town: employment and population', *Town Planning Review*, 39 (1968), pp. 38-54; Clapson, *Invincible*, p. 49, 167. On the new towns constituting part of a regional framework see WDC, *Master Plan*, p. 10.

⁴¹ Hole et al, *Washington*, p. 9.

⁴² *Hailsham Report*, p. 29; T/WRO NA (Not Archived), WDC, Master Plan Proposals.

even welcomed – that a high percentage of jobs created in Washington would go to workers living outside the town.⁴³ The idea that a labour force was precluded from looking beyond the limited employment opportunities in a small town, moreover, was at odds with the prevailing economists' views that labour mobility encouraged a more efficient use of available skills. These assumptions were premised, however, on a large increase in the number of the region's working population possessing cars in the future; and a major improvement in its roads.⁴⁴ In 1964 it was clear that in both cases, a dramatic transformation in the travelling habits of Washington's population would have to occur for this to be realised.

In 1964 Washington's surrounding district contained only one major road (A184), which connected Sunderland and Gateshead and ran north of the designated area. This was sufficient for the number of car users in the district: whilst nationally 46 per cent of households owned a car, in Washington's mining communities the number was barely 30 per cent.⁴⁵ Implicit within the planners' image of the new town, however, was that commuting would be to a much greater degree by motor cars. In 1966 the master plan predicted that by 1976 there would be more than 16,000 cars in the new town; by 1981, 22,750; and by the year 2000, more than 36,000.⁴⁶ For the town's planners, far from this being a development to be faced with apprehension, the anticipated major rise in the numbers of car users in the new town was to be celebrated:

The rapid growth of private car-ownership has enormously increased the ability of individuals to move about freely. It is this that makes possession of a car such an attraction. The general public value this freedom highly and are prepared to pay a high price for it. [Such a] new found freedom can only be exercised if an adequate road network is available.⁴⁷

Therefore, the road system within the new town was to be as integral to its development as the attraction of industry and the housing of its residents; in fact, all three factors for the planners were inextricably intertwined.

⁴³ WDC, *Master Plan*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ *Washington New Town Review*, 1 (Summer 1968).

⁴⁵ Hole et al, *Washington*, p. 66.

⁴⁶ WDC, *Master Plan*, p. 20.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 22.

Proposals for the road system centred around a network of high-capacity primary roads, connecting at the perimeter of the town with surrounding regional and local roads. Where elements in the primary network crossed one another, it was envisaged that grade-separated interchanges would help to facilitate a smooth, uninterrupted flow of traffic.⁴⁸ Also included in the network were secondary roads, the purpose of which were to collect and distribute traffic between the nodes and the areas they were meant to serve.⁴⁹ They passed through industrial areas and the town's residential districts. For the corporation, the road system would not only transform the way towns in the North East coped with traffic, it would be the envy of the whole world:

By constructing a road system that is based on a primary network of urban motorways capable of carrying the ultimate anticipated traffic volumes and of distributing the traffic generating activities evenly throughout the town, Washington New Town will set a pattern that is likely to be adopted by the rest of the world ... The inhabitants of Washington are fortunate in that whilst other towns wrestle with the problem of traffic congestion, they will be the first to enjoy a road network without equal.⁵⁰

An important objective of the network, furthermore, was that it should be easily comprehensible. Ostensibly, road users were meant to build up in their minds a simple picture of the town. The interchanges linking the major roads were numbered, and direction signs at each interchange indicating the town's various areas were designed using the four cardinal points of the compass. To further aid potential road users, the use of colours peculiar to each separate area of the town featured on all direction signs and street names.⁵¹

Not everyone was as enthusiastic about the road system as the corporation was, however. Visitors frequently complained about the complexity of the interchanges and the bewildering array of inter-connections. For one Washington resident, the road system was extremely difficult to comprehend for the town's own residents, never mind visitors:

⁴⁸ T/88/1 WDC BM, 28 March 1966.

⁴⁹ *NE*, 19 Jan 1965.

⁵⁰ *Washington New Town Review*, (Winter 1968).

⁵¹ T/88/2 WDC, BM, 3 July 1967. At a visit to the new town by the Minister of Transport, Barbara Castle, monorail and hovercraft services were suggested as an aid to Washington's transport users, but these ideas never came to fruition. See, for example, HLG/115/695 WDC, Master Plan – Formal Submission, 20 Aug 1966.

That is another crazy system, these inter-connections. It is alright for the people who live here and eventually get to know the inter-changes, but for people who come to visit us, it takes them hours to find us for they don't understand this inter-connection system ... I think this Americanisation is too great, this inter-change business. Wouldn't it be just as simple for Albany, Blackfell or whatever?⁵²

Along with the planned transformation of the district's roads, Washington's housing, too, was about to undergo radical changes. At the time of designation, residential development consisted of little more than a series of settlements loosely strung together.⁵³ Also, a lack of adequate housing, both in quantity and quality in the district not only added to its general unattractiveness but was also perceived as a major reason for the absence of many professional and managerial workers in the sub-region.⁵⁴ In the northern part of the town, miners' cottages built during the late 19th century and associated with Usworth colliery were situated alongside local authority-owned estates built mainly during the inter-war years. Washington village was comprised, for the most part, of miners from Glebe colliery's houses, whilst the majority of houses in Columbia had been constructed more than 40 years prior to designation and were primarily for workers at Cook's iron foundry.



Fig. 16: Housing at Albany in the late 1950s with pit heap in the background.

⁵² Washington resident, quoted in Hudson and Johnson, 'New Towns', p. 265.

⁵³ J. W. House, *Industrial Britain: The North East* (Newton Abbot, 1969), p. 44.

⁵⁴ Hole et al, *Washington*, p. 22.

From the beginning, the corporation decided to retain these settlements more or less in their existing form, demolish the most uninhabitable housing and add to the stock of houses until they were the size of small villages. At the same time, entirely new residential areas were planned, also in village form. When the town was completed, it was intended that it would be composed of a series of 18 villages, each with its own name and identity and a consistent character of its own. The corporation's research indicated that in order to inculcate a sense of community among residents in each village, the optimum number of houses each should contain ought to be about 1,350, which would house a population of approximately 4,500. In all, around 1,650 families would be housed in each village, but in such a way that they could interact harmoniously. This was because in each cluster of villages, two sub-divisions were identified allowing for the maximum amount of social interaction: the 'group' and the 'place'.⁵⁵

The 'group' was, in effect, a collection of houses within a particular village, arranged in such a manner that would allow between 20 and 50 families to come into regular contact with one another and so, it was hoped, aid in the formation of residential harmony by facilitating a variety of overlapping social relationships. The 'place' was a larger 'grouping' of about 200 to 600 families from up to three separate villages, which would overlap with assorted other 'places' and would assist in promoting social intercourse within the communities of different villages at various levels. To further strengthen the significance of the 'place', the master plan made provision for local centres, initially to include the villages of Fatfield and Harraton, which would incorporate clubs, community facilities, a health centre and a larger range of shops than would be appropriate for a village centre. The placing of such centres would, the corporation believed, allow 80 per cent of the town's population to be no more than three quarters of a mile from an axis of inter-community activity.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ WDC, *Master Plan*, p. 68.

⁵⁶ Holley, *Quicker*, p. 13.

In one crucial respect, the promotion of the 'group' and the 'place' was an implicit rejection of the neighbourhood concept so vigorously pursued in the mark one new towns. Since the creation of Cumbernauld New Town during the mid-1950s, neighbourhoods, of the types favoured in Aycliffe, had been abandoned, criticised as being too small to support their own cultural and social activities, but too independent to encourage activities at a town level. By designating 'groups' and 'places', the Washington Development Corporation believed it had obviated such problems by creating multiple overlapping communities, all the members of which conscious, however, of belonging to a greater whole: the new town itself in its entirety. Even so, there were fears from some commentators that, instead of a harmony of interests being created between separate but linked communities, a form of inter-village antagonism would develop where sectional concerns would overrule any sense of loyalty to the town as a whole.⁵⁷

The quality of housing in Washington, both in design and construction, was also intended to be of a superior standard than in the county's earlier new towns, whose housing corporation member, Mrs D. Palmer, described as clinical and unattractive in appearance. She further stated that if Washington was not to emulate Peterlee and Aycliffe then much more variety was needed.⁵⁸ Another complaint levelled at both the earlier new towns was that their houses had a distinct lack of living space within them. In contrast, at Washington, the corporation aimed to build at 5-10 per cent above recommended space standards in all houses.⁵⁹ There was also to be a much higher proportion of four-bedroom houses. This was to enable growing families to have more room, and to provide spare rooms for visitors.⁶⁰

Perhaps the biggest departure from the earlier new towns was the aim in Washington to build a much higher proportion of privately owned houses. In both Aycliffe and Peterlee, the amount of owner-occupiers had never reached more than eight per cent of the total housing stock. However,

⁵⁷ See, for example, *New Society*, 12 Jan 1967.

⁵⁸ T/88/1 WDC, BM, 3 Oct 1966.

⁵⁹ T/88/1 WDC BM, 5 Sept 1966.

⁶⁰ WDC, *Master Plan*, pp. 74-76.

by the early 1960s, there were doubts that corporations could attract key workers and higher-income groups except by building better quality, and for the most part, owner-occupied housing.⁶¹ It was also recognition that a lack of housing suitable for all income groups had been a major obstacle to the formation of socially balanced communities in the towns. This in turn had led commentators to associate towns such as Peterlee with poor schools and facilities, and a perpetuation of under-privilege.⁶² To counter this, at Washington it was intended that there was to be an almost equal division between rented and owner-occupied housing. In order that higher-income groups would have accommodation readily available, certain areas, mainly to the periphery of each village, were allotted for private housing.⁶³

Research suggested that 200-300 houses developed at four to the acre would accommodate the number of potential owner-occupiers. It soon became apparent, however, that providing the price was competitive, a ready sale of up to 400 dwellings per year could be possible. This would bring the overall percentage of privately owned housing to between 30-40 per cent by the early 1980s.⁶⁴

At the other end of the market, in housing developments towards the centre of each village, densities of up to 16 houses and 120-140 people to the acre was the norm.⁶⁵ Unlike in Peterlee and Aycliffe, where a high proportion of such dwellings were flats or maisonettes, at Washington, proposed building was mainly at ground level: multi-storey development, according to the master plan, could only be justified where there was a shortage of land, which was not a pressing problem.⁶⁶

The corporation was also eager to distance itself from the earlier new towns with the siting of its industrial areas. 'The new towns of the past have made the mistake of having only one industrial estate', the corporation's chairman James Steel argued in November 1964, 'and once you have got

⁶¹ See, for example, Heraud, 'Social class', p. 42.

⁶² Hudson and Johnson, 'New Towns', p. 190.

⁶³ WDC, *Master Plan*, p. 71.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 50.

⁶⁵ HLG/115/695 H. L. Hellier (Ministry of Labour) to J. Earl (HL/G), 17 Feb 1967).

⁶⁶ T/88/2 WDC, BM, 4 Sept 1967.

20,000 or 30,000 people travelling to and from one place you get a tremendous traffic problem'.⁶⁷

To counter this, the corporation planned to create a number of industrial areas so that workers would only have to travel short distances to their places of employment.

Hailsham was also eager to stress that high-quality roads, better situated industrial provision and improved housing in the district needed to be matched by a first-rate town centre in the new town. The planners' overriding desire was that Washington's central area would not only serve as a focal point for the its population, but would act as a catalyst in unifying all of the disparate villages, 'groups' and 'places', and help the town to become a coherent whole. In contrast to the design of Peterlee and Aycliffe, where their respective town centres were viewed as little more than subsequent appendages to planned residential areas, Washington's central area was unequivocally intrinsic to the town as a whole.

The central area was designed to incorporate the main shopping centre, the administrative centre and a sports stadium which would serve the whole of the town. These were grouped together near the centre. The main shopping area, which was planned to be constructed from 1971, according to the corporation, would be unlike any shopping complex yet seen in the North East. Inspiration for it was derived not only from outstanding shopping precincts in the UK, but from throughout the world: the Elbe centre in West Germany, the Yorkdale centre in Toronto and a design from Denmark with its innovative use of timber and glass, were just three examples considered. To add to the town centre's aesthetic appeal, although allowance was made for some tower blocks and other high-rise buildings up to a maximum height of 150 feet because of airport restrictions, they had significance and planned as a focal point which would not be detracted from by later building.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *SE*, 24 Nov 1964.

⁶⁸ T/88/3 WDC, BM, 1 April 1968.

The corporation's remit then, as it saw it, was to 'revive general public confidence in living in a city and in a town',⁶⁹ whilst, at the same time, creating as functional yet attractive a town as could be managed with the resources available to it. If it succeeded, the corporation believed it would 'raise the standards of urban design throughout the region and provide a town suitable for the next century'.⁷⁰ There still remained one important issue which needed to be dealt with, however: the numbers and types of people who would be migrating to the new town.

During the 1950s and early 1960s Washington had been steadily attracting migrants, albeit on a small scale. Most were from the heavily populated areas of Tyneside, which largely corresponded to national trends: in a reversal of 19th century demographic movements, the great conurbations now began losing population to the peripheries. However, despite these additions to the town's population and a much higher rate of natural increase than in most other parts of the country, the overall population increased by only 3.7 per cent between 1951 and 1961. The primary reason for such a small increase was lack of employment opportunities and poor housing. A large number of the town's inhabitants were also leaving as others were arriving. As was the case in other parts of the region, moreover, most people leaving the area were the younger and more skilled sections of the community, leaving behind in their wake the poorer and more elderly members.

One of the principal barometers of Washington's success, therefore, was whether it was able to stem outward migration. To this end, the corporation hoped that the provision of adequate and varied job opportunities, better quality housing and a better urban environment would 'make it attractive to many who might otherwise move out of the region'.⁷¹ But to create a town of the magnitude planned, merely persuading those workers who would otherwise have left the region to settle in Washington would not be enough: the new town needed to be so attractive as to induce a large number of people to consider living in the new town who would in other circumstances not have contemplated such an option.

⁶⁹ DC/WS/1/7 WDC, BM, 5 Nov 1970.

⁷⁰ T/88/1 WDC, BM, 5 Sep 1966.

⁷¹ T/WRO (NA) F. S. Garwood (H/LG) to Holley, 12 Feb 1966.

Initially, the town was intended to re-house a large proportion of the planned overspill population of the boroughs of Sunderland, South Shields and Gateshead. The Durham County Development Plan of the early 1950s calculated that Sunderland and South Shields would exhaust their available housing land well before 1971.⁷² The decision to send these boroughs' overspill to Washington was radically altered, however, when the Ministry of Housing and Local Government decided in 1964 to build a township at Silksworth to cater for Sunderland's housing needs.⁷³ The Actuary General's projections concerning the age structure of Gateshead borough's population, furthermore, predicted a reduction in its natural growth rate for 1971 and 1981, and therefore, the planned overspill. The release of land by the NCB for housing purposes in Gateshead, and an upward revision of residential densities in the borough further reduced the likely overspill.⁷⁴

Provisions in the 1967 Housing Subsidies Act allowed for the Ministry to designate a local authority as a sending authority to a new town, whereby the latter would recover a contribution from the local authority once the allocation of a house to a former council-housed tenant had been effected, thereby relieving the local authority of its housing obligation.⁷⁵ In March 1968 the Ministry sent letters to all of Tyneside and Wearside's local authorities informing them that they were to be designated as sending authorities to Washington, as well as Aycliffe and Peterlee.⁷⁶ In February 1969 the Ministry was informed, however, that the local authorities concerned had already been designated as sending authorities to the expanding towns of Killingworth and

⁷² *Durham County Development Plan*, p. 113.

⁷³ HLG/116/388 G. R. Coles to R. Metcalfe (Ministry of Housing and Local Government). (Hereafter HL/G), 4 March 1967; *Northern Architect* 6 (March 1967), pp. 777-789; T/WRO (NA) Washington New Town, Consultant's Interim Report. The intention in the Hailsham Report was that some 15,000 people from Sunderland and 45,000 from Tyneside would be re-housed in Washington.

⁷⁴ WDC, *Master Plan*, p. 39.

⁷⁵ HLG/116/388 A. Leavett (HL/G) to Holley, 14 Aug 1967.

⁷⁶ HLG/116/388 Marshall to Coles, 25 March 1968.

Cramlington, near Newcastle.⁷⁷ All of the local authorities canvassed, moreover, strongly objected to being forced to send their respective populations to Washington (or Aycliffe and/or Peterlee).⁷⁸

Under such circumstances, the attraction of voluntary migrants to Washington became more of a pressing issue.⁷⁹ But again, persuading people to move to the town of their own volition was not a straightforward task. As had been the case with the creation of Aycliffe and Peterlee, those families living in the worst housing conditions were effectively precluded from moving: they tended to have lower incomes and so would unlikely to have been able to afford the rents charged in Washington. Also, because they paid subsidised rents and had security of tenure, tenants of private landlords and those families already established in local authority housing were unlikely to forego these advantages. The immobility of people buying their own houses also, in most cases, prevented them from moving.

It was therefore inevitable that Washington would contain a large proportion of young couples and their families, at least during the town's formation period. This was of course the case with both the earlier new towns; but unlike these towns, the corporation had a strategy to counteract the perceived difficulties of such a youthful population: the phasing the construction of social and community based projects so that, as each age cohort reached the appropriate time for the use of such facilities and amenities, they would be readily available.

The corporation was, however, very eager to see that Washington did not contain only one class of workers, and lower-paid manual workers at that – a criticism which had often been levelled at the county's earlier new towns, where managers and professionals constituted only a small fraction of their overall populations. In Peterlee especially, the concentration of such a large proportion of lower-paid manual workers had arguably given rise to a perpetuation of deprivation, which had made the town unattractive to potential migrants of the higher socio-economic groups. It had often

⁷⁷ HLG/116/388 G. D. Duke (HL/G) to Coles, 26 Feb 1969.

⁷⁸ See, for example, HLG/116/388 Wallsend town clerk to Marshall, 22 March 1969. The clerk stated that Walsend was certainly not an overspill area, especially considering that the town was losing population at the rate of 1,000 per annum.

⁷⁹ HLG/116/388 Holley to R. S. Young (clerk of South Shields Borough Council), 30 March 1967.

been suggested, moreover, that a contributory factor for Aycliffe's apparent malaise had been the linkage of jobs with houses, so that the socio-economic status of incoming migrants mirrored the type of employment expansion which was occurring in the town which, for the most part, consisted of factories employing lower-skilled manual workers.

In Washington, it was hoped that the operation of an open immigration policy would produce a different social balance of immigrants. Also, the corporation felt that by encouraging a thriving home ownership programme, a 'migratory elite' consisting of people with managerial and professional skills from other parts of Britain would be tempted to move north. In an area where the indigenous population at the time of designation was largely made up of manual workers, it was hoped that an influx of higher socio-economic groups would have the effect of broadening the perspective of both sections of the population.

iv) Hailsham: a mixed reception in the region

The Hailsham Report certainly had far-reaching consequences for the North East. For one newspaper in the region, it was 'a bold and imaginative attempt not only to remove the basic causes of recurring unemployment, but to rid the North East of its unfair but widely-believed reputation as an industrial no man's land'.⁸⁰ Hailsham (and the Conservative party) had their detractors, however. On the omission from the growth zone of large parts of West Durham, Douglas Jay, for the Labour party, described the report as 'an indefensible policy that cannot possibly be followed or maintained for very long' The right policy, he claimed, was to schedule one development area covering the whole industrial complex of the region.⁸¹ J. Boyden, MP for Bishop Auckland, went further: he claimed that the report was as amateurish a document as had ever been published by a government department. He argued that the social implication of the plan was to crowd the working population into the edges of the Tyneside and Teesside conurbations, while the executives lived in

⁸⁰ *SE*, 14 Nov 1963.

⁸¹ *HC Debs*, 685, c.1005, 3 Dec 1963.

the peripheral, less congested and polluted areas.⁸² Some trades union leaders, moreover, claimed that the report was an anti-climax, and did not go far enough in addressing the region's acute economic difficulties.⁸³

What cannot be denied, however, was that the report heralded a genuine change in fortunes for the region's new towns. Aycliffe benefited enormously from its inclusion in the growth zone as the increase in the number of employees on the trading estate after 1963 attested. The improvements to the roads surrounding Peterlee and the extension of the industrial area would probably not have occurred had it not have been for Hailsham's recommendations, moreover. Furthermore, the creation of Washington new town in the form that it eventually took would probably not have happened had it not been for Hailsham's interventions.

However, despite the unity of policy directed towards the three new towns, already in 1964 there were subtle yet noticeable differences in the way the new towns benefited from the report's proposals, as well as the way they reacted and compared themselves to each other. The next three chapters will assess how these differences were manifested in corporation, local authority and government policy and whether the recommendations of the report were fully implemented, or if not, whether they had any bearing on the new towns and their attitudes to each other.

⁸² *Durham County Advertiser*, 15 Nov 1963.

⁸³ *NE*, 15 Nov 1963.

Politics in the New Towns

This chapter considers political developments in the new towns up until the corporations' dissolutions in 1988. The first part assesses the effects of Hailsham's recommendation that the population target figure be increased in Aycliffe and the reaction of South-West Durham's local authorities to it. It also analyses Peterlee Development Corporation's attempts to finally make the town the focal point for the district, primarily by increasing the size of its town centre. The second part investigates the effects of local councillors in all three towns to gain more representation on the corporation boards and the latter's attempts to thwart them. The third part assesses the political situation in the towns during the 1970s, which was relatively peaceful in Aycliffe and Peterlee. However, boundary changes in Washington's surrounding area and criticism from other councils in the sub-region meant that relations between the corporation and local councils in Tyne and Wear were not harmonious. Part four analyses the climax of the corporations' roles in the towns and the concomitant difficulties arising from their dissolutions.

i) Aycliffe's and Peterlee's boards united and ready for the challenge

Although the Hailsham Report had its critics, it had a profound influence on the way the new towns were administrated and viewed by other authorities. Hailsham was also unequivocal in his belief that the towns had a major role to play, not just in housing and the attraction of industry, but also in raising the region's quality of life. Although the Conservatives were defeated at the 1964 general election the new Labour government was every bit as committed to the development of integrated regional policies.¹ It was also more

¹ Aldridge, *The British New Towns*, p. 65.

congenial towards development corporations, which it viewed as an important part of the welfare state.²

In 1963 it seemed pragmatic and cost-effective in the circumstances to unite the boards of Aycliffe and Peterlee – the two smallest new towns in the country. Sir Keith Joseph reckoned that, although it would not automatically lead to harmonisation of their general interests – for legal and accounting purposes they retained their separate identities – an amalgamation might enable both boards to benefit from an exchange of ideas and personnel:

The question is, whether, given that the new towns share a general manager and other chief officers, it will be sensible to now have a common board. I cannot help thinking that it would. Members would, I believe, learn a good deal by having to think about the successes and failures of two different towns. Meanwhile, from the staffing point of view, a more thorough amalgamation might well, I would think, lead to easier working and perhaps some economies.³

Not everyone in the two towns was as enthusiastic about the idea as Joseph appeared to be, though. Up until 1963, only two other new towns' boards – Hatfield and Welwyn – had gone down a similar path, with mixed success in both towns.⁴ In Peterlee, where throughout its history mistrust of corporation decisions had been the norm, the proposal to unite the two boards was received with a certain amount of scepticism. The secretary of the Labour party, stated: 'If this means that the control of Peterlee is going to be even more remote than it is at present, there may well be objections'.⁵

In Aycliffe, the reconstitution of the two boards was complicated by its occurrence just at the time when decisions to extend its designated area were being made. As was the case in 1948, South-West Durham's local authorities were unhappy about proposals to increase the target population;⁶ even less so when they learned about them through newspaper reports.⁷

² *Ibid*, p. 124.

³ *NDM*, 4 Jan 1963.

⁴ See, for example, *NE*, 10 Jan 1963.

⁵ *NE*, 12 Jan 1963.

⁶ *ADC, 1967 Master Plan Report*, p. 4.

⁷ Philipson, *Swords*, pp. 159-160

In October 1962 a meeting was convened by Shildon UDC at which it was decided to send a deputation to the county council to protest in the strongest possible terms about the proposals. Of all the aggrieved local authorities in 1962 Shildon was perhaps the most justified in venting its discontent. It had reluctantly agreed to the loss of 140 acres of its district in 1948: the new proposals meant that a further 700 acres would be lost to Aycliffe, a development which, the council claimed, would seriously affect the way the district was administrated.⁸

However, the county council delayed meeting the deputation for three weeks, by which time its planning committee's recommendations for Aycliffe had already been passed. On discovering this, when the local authorities and the county council met on 20 November, the meeting was marked by hostility from the outset, the majority of it directed against chairman of the county council, Andrew Cunningham.⁹ Spennymoor UDC's representative claimed that the meeting was characterised by 'three hours of argument, at times bitter and occasionally fierce. Almost every paragraph of the planning officer's report was attacked and criticised exhaustively'.¹⁰ The county council maintained that ministerial pressure for a quick decision on Aycliffe had largely been responsible for the haste. In any case, as Cunningham made clear, the county council was not statutorily obliged to consult the local authorities: 'We cannot administrate by constant plebiscite', he stated, adding that, 'In matters of policy the county council could not be inhibited by sectional interests when it was necessary to think in terms of the county as a whole'.¹¹ The Ministry of Housing and Local Government, moreover, was equally unwilling to placate the authorities: they were told that

⁸ P. J. Bowden, 'Newton Aycliffe: A Study of a New Town' (Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, 1968), p. 113.

⁹ *NE*, 21 Nov 1962.

¹⁰ *NE*, 23 Nov 1962.

¹¹ *NE*, 21 Nov 1962.

they could air their grievances, along with anyone else at a public local inquiry, which would follow the publication of the draft designation order.¹²

The corporation, meanwhile, hoped that if the draft master plan could be produced and presented to the local authorities at as early a date as possible, it would give all parties involved an opportunity to consider any possible alterations and still have allowed time for them to be considered in the final plan. In June 1964 Williams stated that he was confident that the finalised master plan would in fact be ready by August at the latest, and that building work on the extension would begin by October or November.¹³ His optimism was to prove misguided, however: six years later the issue had still not been resolved.

It seemed that, despite the Ministry's agreement to the extension, other government departments were not as convinced. The agreement of the Ministry of Transport and the county surveyor regarding the major road linking the proposed expanded part of the town with the industrial estate proved hard to obtain, primarily because of a difference in opinion as to the potential employment capacity of the trading estate.¹⁴ Despite assurances from the Board of Trade in 1962, moreover, as to the benefits of an increased industrial area in Aycliffe, it remained unconvinced about the employment potential envisaged by the corporation. Most of all, it feared that in an area where there was already a shortage of skilled workers in certain types of industry, the creation of more factories would exacerbate the problem further. One result of this was that the draft master plan was not published until October 1965.¹⁵

At the three-day public local inquiry following the publication of the plan, it was clear that the delays had not assuaged the authority's views; if anything, their resolve had been stiffened. The village of Middridge, the only population centre of any note in the proposed

¹² *NE*, 4 Dec 1962.

¹³ *ADC, 1964 AR*, p. 6.

¹⁴ See, for example, *ADC, 1965 AR*, p. 5.

¹⁵ *ADC, 1967 Master Plan Report*, p. 6.

master plan happened to be within the jurisdiction of Shildon UDC, which claimed that it would seriously affect its own development plans, including the redevelopment of the village as a middle-class residential area.¹⁶ Spennymoor UDC, moreover, objected to any substantial population build-up in Aycliffe or to an increase in its industrial area, which would, the council argued, inevitably be at the expense of existing centres in the district.¹⁷ The objections were to no avail, however. On 15 February 1967 the draft master plan and report was published, but again there were objections – this time it was the way the town centre area was to be developed.

The plans, which recommended the setting up of a new centre linked to the existing centre by a walkway, would have in effect meant the town consisting of two shopping centres situated half a mile from each other.¹⁸ This was totally unacceptable to most of the shop owners in the existing town centre. Their chief complaint was that the two centres would be too far apart for shoppers to use on one shopping expedition, especially if they had to push prams or trolleys. In what was perceived as a blatant attack on the corporation's competence, a group of tradesmen commissioned their own town planner, whose report asserted that any proposed additional commercial centre in the town would inevitably stagnate future takings in the existing centre.¹⁹

The corporation's response, although it led to further delays in starting work on its construction, was to re-draft another plan, one that entirely transformed the emphasis and form of the central area. In it the existing centre remained as the commercial area of the town, whilst the new site, at which the civic buildings, office accommodation, magistrate's court and police station were situated, served primarily as the administrative and

¹⁶ *Auckland Chronicle*, 21 Oct 1965.

¹⁷ Bowden, 'Newton Aycliffe', p. 118.

¹⁸ ADC, *1967 Master Plan Report*, p. 12.

¹⁹ *NE*, 1 April 1965.

recreational focal point.²⁰ Although in the end the new proposals were far more expensive than the original plans – site development plans for the new centre alone were more than £1,600,000 – they were much more in accord with the wishes of the traders.²¹ The master plan was finally approved in April 1968 and work was started on the expanded town a few months later.²²

In Peterlee, too, the shape and layout of the town centre occupied much of the corporation's time during the 1960s. Up until 1962 the centre consisted of no more than 20 shops, many of which remained unlet for long periods. Following the Hailsham Report's publication improvements assumed a higher priority; the corporation realised that if the town was to fulfil its role as a major regional sub-centre, the town centre would need to be extensively redeveloped.²³

A new design (the seventh since the new town's inception), by Roy Gazzard, the corporation's consultant architect, reconstructed the town centre as a two-level, pedestrianised precinct.²⁴ Although historically the principle of two-level shopping centres had not been widely accepted in the North East, the corporation was convinced that in time it would become more popular and could have the effect of attracting more people to the centre.²⁵

²⁰ Philipson, *Swords*, p. 207.

²¹ ADC, *1967 AR*, p. 6.

²² NT/Ay/1/1/24 ADC, BM, 2 May 1968.

²³ See, for example, PDC, *Master Plan*, p. 25. Williams wrote that the aim was to make Peterlee a 'sub-regional centre and the town centre would reflect this aim'

²⁴ *NDM*, 21 Nov 1963.

²⁵ PDC, *1970 AR*, p. 324.



Fig. 17: Peterlee town centre taken from the same position in 1959 and 1976.

The corporation was also eager that Peterlee's enhanced role in the district should be augmented by the introduction of some form of entertainments centre. When the new town was designated in 1948 a directive was that it should act as a focal point for the surrounding district's population; an important way that this could be realised, it was felt, was the provision, at as early a time as possible, of an entertainments centre where the people of Easington district could congregate and amuse themselves. However, by the mid-1960s, no such centre had materialised. This had led many local commentators to conflate the lack of centralised entertainments provision with the apparent absence of social cohesion in the town. Without a central focus, it was claimed, it would always be difficult to create socially-balanced communities in the district.

The problem the corporation faced was illustrated by the fact that a survey into the activities of young people in the town discovered that nearly 70 per cent of teenagers visited the cinema at least four times a month. Also, when asked to list in order of priority the activities in which they would like to take part in, ten-pin bowling, closely followed by swimming baths came top. However, they were compelled to travel to Sunderland or

Durham for these activities, both of which were more than ten miles from Peterlee.²⁶ It was therefore welcomed by all sections of East Durham's population when the corporation announced in 1964 that it intended to build an entertainments centre in the town centre, which would include among other things, indoor shopping facilities, a bowling alley, twin cinemas, amusement arcades, and other facilities consistent with the town's supposed role as a major sub-regional centre.²⁷ Shearer Estates, a company which specialised in the construction of family entertainments centres was commissioned to build the centre, and work was expected to start on the project in early 1965.²⁸

In July 1965, however, the corporation received a Ministry circular requesting that corporations throughout the country curtail all unnecessary expenditure in an effort to eliminate the balance of payments deficit and to maintain the strength of Sterling.²⁹ Any capital expenditure not associated with house building and/or industrial projects was to be postponed or even cancelled altogether.³⁰ Following several appeals, however, the Ministry gave special dispensation for the entertainments centre to be approved. Again, plans were set in motion. In October, however, Shearer Estates pulled out of the project: it claimed it was having difficulty in obtaining a mortgage to finance the centre due to the worsening financial situation.³¹ The only option left, it seemed, was for the corporation, despite it having no expertise in this field, to build the centre itself, albeit on a much reduced scale.³² Moreover, it was a full three years before building work was started, by which time expenditure was further constrained by a fresh balance of payments crisis, including devaluation of Sterling.

²⁶ Easington Committee for Education, *An Inquiry into the Leisure Time Activities of Young People in Peterlee* (Easington, 1966), pp. 20-22.

²⁷ NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 2 Sept 1965.

²⁸ PDC, 1965 AR, p. 256.

²⁹ P. Hennessy, *Muddling Through: Power, Politics and the Quality of Government in Post-War Britain* (1996), p. 267.

³⁰ H. Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-70* (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 185; Min HL/G, Circular to Development Corporations, 19 Aug 1965.

³¹ NT/Pe/1/4/11 PDC, GMR, 3 Oct 1965.

³² NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 2 Feb 1967.

The situation became more complicated in 1968 when the chairman of the corporation since 1957 (and of Aycliffe since 1963) was removed from the board. Colonel Peile had achieved moderate success during his time as chairman. An inflexible and austere man, to some he lacked the creative drive which was badly needed after 1963.³³ His appointment in April 1957 had been keenly contested by the district council: one councillor claimed that the likelihood was that his only visits to Peterlee would be when there were corporation meetings.³⁴ His replacement as chairman was a former leader of Newcastle City Council – T. Dan Smith.

As leader of Newcastle Council from 1958, Smith played a pivotal role in its slum clearance and city centre redevelopment programme. In 1962 he was named 'Man of the Year' by the *Architect's Journal*, and by the mid-1960s had become chairman of the North East Planning Council and a member of the Royal Commission on Local Government. Despite initial misgivings by senior Ministry officials, including Frank Schaffer, regarding his appointment,³⁵ from 1962 to 1968 Smith's public relations firm had vigorously fostered the image of both Aycliffe and Peterlee in the press and media.³⁶ Although his appointment with the corporation covered both press relations and industrial coverage, when the latter part was terminated in 1966 he continued to press the claims of the towns.³⁷ Harold Wilson's appointment of Smith as chairman of the corporation in September 1968 was viewed, therefore, by the majority of its members as the inauguration of a more prosperous future for both towns.³⁸ Initially, these views were well-founded. By 1970 with Smith at the helm Peterlee was set to become a major scientific research and development centre in the

³³ See, for example, Philipson, *Swords*, p. 167.

³⁴ *SE*, 5 April 1957.

³⁵ See, for example, HLG/115/995 R. N. Winter (DoE) to S. W. Gilbert (DoE), 14 Aug 1972.

³⁶ Smith's fee for his work in Peterlee was at £10,000 per year after 1962 larger than the annual cost of rent rebates in the town. This was even more remarkable considering that he was new to the business. See, for example, HLG/115/995 Implications of the Poulson Case, 10, April 1974.

³⁷ NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 1 June 1967.

³⁸ NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 3 Sept 1968.

region – the American computer firm, IBM, became established in 1969, and a science and technology park was planned for the Oakerside area of the town.

But, as arrangements for the park were being finalised, Smith resigned.³⁹ In March 1970 he was charged by the police with bribing a London councillor in order to obtain a contract. Although he was later found not guilty of the charge, he did not return to the corporation. In 1974 he was convicted of conspiracy and corruption and was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. It was later discovered that prior to taking up his position at Peterlee, Smith had been involved in obtaining housing contracts in the new towns with the full knowledge that the housing firm had been involved in a complex scandal in Newcastle. Andrew Cunningham, the former chairman of Durham County Council, who had become a member of Aycliffe and Peterlee's board in 1965,⁴⁰ and J. G. Poulson, an architect who had been commissioned to build an arts centre in Peterlee,⁴¹ were also implicated with Smith and received five and seven year sentences respectively. The corporation's chief administrative officer, Ken Allan, who had started his employment with Peterlee Development Corporation a month after Smith's firm had won the public relations contract and had undertaken part-time work for Smith, was also implicated but eventually cleared of any wrongdoing.⁴²

ii) Changing priorities, but still the same old political problems

In both Aycliffe and Peterlee, disquiet among the towns' local officials because of lack of local representation on the corporation board continued unabated throughout the early 1960s. As in the previous decade, however, the Ministry flatly refused demands for more local representation. Joseph succinctly encapsulated his party's unmitigated distrust of local

³⁹ NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 5 Feb 1970.

⁴⁰ *Daily Express*, 25 Aug 1972. Cunningham, apart from being a former chairman of the county council was also chair of Durham Police Authority, the North East Regional Airports Committee and the Northern Regional Council of the Labour party.

⁴¹ HLG/115/995 Gilbert to W. Fairclough (DoE), 27 Sept 1972.

⁴² HLG/115/995 Gilbert to Winter, 9 Aug 1972; NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, Special Meeting, 17 Aug 1972.

participation when, following yet another request in 1963 for more local officials on the board at Peterlee, he replied: 'I do not think that we operate that way. The board has the special expertise required for the building of a new community. Local representation is taken into account'.⁴³ Hopes were raised with Labour's victory in 1964, but even this did not seem to herald a major change in policy. In January 1965 of the seven members of the joint board, most lived a considerable distance from either of the towns; only one member (Robert Taylor) actually had his home in one of them,⁴⁴ whilst only two were also local authority members.⁴⁵

In Aycliffe, even attempts by local councillors to consult with the corporation were deemed by the latter to be inimical to the way it did business. A request by Aycliffe Parish Council for a joint consultative committee was met with the reply that the Minister of Housing and Local Government charged the corporation with civic duties and consultation with local authorities was as a result proscribed.⁴⁶ It was not only local officials that were concerned about a perceived lack of representation, moreover. In 1968 a survey of four new towns discovered that with 46 per cent, Aycliffe had the highest proportion of residents who thought that the local council, because it was a more democratic form of control and that it would be more responsive to local needs, ought to take over the future ownership of the town's housing.⁴⁷ For one local newspaper the corporation's apparently overly autocratic attitude was totally unacceptable. An editorial in the *Northern Echo* stated that the corporation was 'an island unto itself: an unobserved, unexplored island, where events are surrounded in secrecy, except when someone chooses to make an announcement to the

⁴³ *NDM*, 12 Nov 1963.

⁴⁴ *Peterlee and District Post*, 8 April 1965.

⁴⁵ *NE*, 28 Jan 1965.

⁴⁶ *NE*, 1 Oct 1965.

⁴⁷ J. B. Cullingworth and V. Karn, *The Future Ownership and Management of Housing in the New Towns* (1968), pp. 62-63.

outside world'.⁴⁸ The decision not to consult with the local council led some local officials and residents to call for the corporation to be abolished altogether and for the council itself to run the town.

Perhaps, predictably, the corporation was not altogether appreciative of such a request. In December 1965 it withdrew its support for the parish council's attempts to gain urban district status.⁴⁹ Williams claimed that the corporation did not wish to jeopardise its relationship with the district council, arguing that: 'We are government agents doing a development job and while we are interested in the democratic expression of the asset we have created, it is not our business to enter into controversy'.⁵⁰ This was not Williams' or the board's viewpoint a few years earlier, however. At that time, Williams welcomed Aycliffe and Peterlee Parish Councils' applications for urban status claiming that they were proof of the spirit of civic pride which was being generated in the towns, and was only too willing to offer his and the board's unalloyed support for the towns' councillors in their efforts to acquire urban status, despite incurring the displeasure of Darlington and Easington district councils.⁵¹

Its intransigence was to prove counter productive, however. Public pressure on the government to compel corporations to be more responsive to local needs started to become more incessant during the mid-1960s. An article in the *Architects' Journal* in November 1964 seemed to encapsulate the public mood when it stated that it was 'time for the Minister of Housing and Local Government to make a reassessment to ensure that our development corporations become more democratic in form, as well as those appointed to them to

⁴⁸ *NE*, 26 Jan 1965.

⁴⁹ *NE*, 1 Oct 1965; NT/Ay/1/1/24 ADC, BM, 4 Nov 1965.

⁵⁰ *Auckland Chronicle*, 9 Dec 1965.

⁵¹ See, for example, *SE*, 18 June 1955; *NDM* 5 Feb 1962; ADC, 1962 *AR*, p. 7. During the 1950s, both Harlow and Crawley had become urban districts in their own right. For Williams, not fighting for similar privileges in Aycliffe and Peterlee would have meant that the towns' residents were 'mortgaging their future in physical terms and throwing [their] civic identity into the maelstrom of boundary fights in the future'.

become more democratic in nature'.⁵² In response to this, and other complaints nationally, the Labour party promised to abolish the New Towns Commission, which the new Housing Minister, Richard Crossman, described as a 'temporary form of Government of which we do not approve'.⁵³ He was equally unwavering in his conviction that local officials' viewpoints should be given more prominence in the new towns. At a conference in Ipswich in 1965, he stressed: 'I am making sure from the beginning that the relationship between corporation and local authority should be one not of domination but of full and equal partnership'.⁵⁴ The 1965 New Towns Act also stipulated that when making new appointments, corporation boards were to secure the services of one or more persons 'resident in or having special knowledge of the locality in which the new town is situated'.⁵⁵

At Aycliffe and Peterlee, the first evidence of this new way of operating occurred in March 1965 when Councillor Donald Vickers, vice-chairman of Darlington RDC, was appointed to the corporation board, to be followed soon after by Andrew Cunningham.⁵⁶ For the former, his appointment would hopefully lead to 'a greater liaison between the corporation and the local council', adding that it was 'a good thing to have a member of the corporation living in the town who can be approached over any difficulties that residents may have'.⁵⁷ In all, Crossman instructed that three of the four new members of the joint board should be members of a local authority in one of the new town areas. According to the *Northern Echo*, this was a positive development: 'Not only would they [local councillors] be able to represent the voice of their local electors', it wrote in its March editorial, 'but their

⁵² *Architects Journal*, 25 Nov 1964.

⁵³ *HC Debs*, 729, c. 1276, 14 June 1966.

⁵⁴ Richard Crossman, Speaking at Ipswich in 1965. Quoted in Schäffer, *New Town Story*, p. 58.

⁵⁵ *NE*, 15 March 1955.

⁵⁶ *NE*, 13 March 1965.

⁵⁷ *NE*, 2 March 1965.

presence on the joint board would involve the local authorities more closely in the building of the new towns'.⁵⁸

In Aycliffe, the assertiveness of local officials in the district was manifested in renewed efforts to gain urban status; more so following the Hailsham Report's publication. For one parish councillor the dramatic changes in the town which, he claimed, would inevitably arise as a result of the report needed to be reflected in an enhanced status for the town's representatives:

All members of this council must realise the effect the Hailsham Report will have on this parish and council. The intended increase in the size of the new town will mean a tremendous increase in the responsibilities of this council. We cannot properly shoulder these responsibilities until we have increased authority.⁵⁹

Darlington RDC's reaction to this suggestion was predictably hostile: the loss of Aycliffe, which was far and away the district's most profitable rate-generator, would have diminished the district council's financial strength immeasurably.⁶⁰ For one councillor the town's attempts to gain urban status was indicative of its desire to 'feather its own nest' at the expense of other parts of the district:

Are we not to behave as human beings ought and spread the wealth in the district to those who most need it? No person or body has a moral right to say 'we will take all and leave the rest with nothing'.⁶¹

In an attempt to pacify Aycliffe's officials, the district council did offer to increase the town's representation on the council – its existing four wards were split to make a fifth. In all the new arrangement meant that the town secured a total of fifteen seats on the district council.⁶² Whilst the town's parish councillors were not entirely happy with this compromise, realistically, once the corporation withdrew its support for urban status in 1965, it was the best outcome they could hope to achieve.

⁵⁸ *NE*, 15 March 1965.

⁵⁹ *NE*, 28 Nov 1963.

⁶⁰ In 1965, despite the parish of Newton Aycliffe accounting for about two thirds of the population and revenue of Darlington Rural District, the town only contributed a third of members on the district council.

⁶¹ *Auckland Chronicle*, 26 April 1962.

⁶² *NE*, 3 May 1966.

If the parish council felt aggrieved with the district council and the corporation at what it perceived was a flagrant lack of support, it felt equally annoyed with the latter when in 1964 the corporation requested some land back in the new town it had previously sold to the council. The land, at the Stephenson Way end of Woodham Burn, had been subsequently converted into parkland at the cost of several thousands of pounds. In April 1964 the corporation decided it needed to re-acquire the land which, it claimed, was crucial to the proposed extension of the town centre. When the two authorities met on 15 April, however, the council refused to sell back the land. 'I have never heard a piece of such confounded cheek', was how one council member viewed the corporation's request.⁶³ Nevertheless, following a meeting with Williams, the council relented. Although it is not entirely clear why, there were strong rumours in the town and in the press at the time that it was because of intensive coercion, not only from the corporation, but also from the county council.⁶⁴

In their own efforts to gain urban status for Peterlee, it seemed that the town's representatives were one step ahead of their counterparts at Aycliffe. Throughout the 1950s the parish and district councils had endured a stormy relationship; there was nothing to suggest that things would change in the 1960s. In 1962 Peterlee's Labour party district councillors (which meant all of Peterlee's district councillors) had the whip removed, which barred them from meetings of the Labour group on the council.⁶⁵ In part, this was because they had been campaigning for the right to manage Peterlee's schools – historically a function of Easington RDC. At the same time, the district council was displeased at the parish's ongoing attempts to gain urban status.⁶⁶ Considering that in 1962 the town was

⁶³ *Northern Despatch*, 16 April 1964.

⁶⁴ *NE*, 24 April 1964; *Auckland Chronicle*, 7 May 1964.

⁶⁵ *SE*, 7 July 1962.

⁶⁶ See, for example, DCRO RD/Ea/32 ERDC, Minutes 24 Jan 1962.

nearly fifteen years old, acquiring urban status was, according to one Peterlee councillor, 'a logical step in the development of Peterlee as a town with its own entity'.⁶⁷

It is true that the bestowal of urban powers in Peterlee would have secured more adequate local government representation for its residents which, the parish council claimed, would have allowed the community as a whole to control its own financial resources and to use them to provide services and amenities on a much wider and varied scale than was the case while the district council had control of the town. It was also more in line with the Reith Committee's recommendations which advised that once established, all new towns 'should be created a separate civil parish and urban district powers should be granted in due course'.⁶⁸

In February 1962 in collaboration with the corporation, plans were unveiled for a town hall, costing more than £40,000 in anticipation of Peterlee becoming an urban district. A site in the town centre was earmarked for the municipal buildings, offices and council suite.⁶⁹ When they heard of the plans Easington district councillors were less than impressed, however, especially as the district was itself contemplating applying for urban status and the first they had heard of the scheme was in the local press.⁷⁰ For the district council's clerk, Peterlee's attempt to gain urban status was in direct violation for the establishment of the new town in the first place:

The intention of [Easington] Rural District Council when the new town was designated, and indeed its present intentions, were that the new town of Peterlee should be the centralised development point of the Easington rural district area. It was certainly never contemplated or envisaged that, having attracted the population from within the district, that it should divorce itself from the present population area.⁷¹

Ultimately, as was the case with Aycliffe, Peterlee's demands for urban status were rejected by the county council. The plans for the town hall complex, although at an advanced stage

⁶⁷ *NDM*, 16 Jan 1962.

⁶⁸ Reith Committee, *2nd Interim Report*, p. 19.

⁶⁹ *SE*, 22 Feb 1962.

⁷⁰ *NE*, 20 June 1963.

⁷¹ *SE*, 25 Jan 1962.

were abandoned, which was extremely embarrassing, not only politically but also financially, for both the parish council and the corporation.⁷²

Along with disputes with the parish councils, conflict between the three corporations and their district and county councils was also an ever-present feature during the 1960s and 1970s. In Washington, at the time of its designation in 1964, most of the proposed town was situated within the jurisdiction of Washington UDC. There was, however, a large tract of land to the south-west of the designated area within Chester-le-Street's boundaries, and a smaller portion of mostly undeveloped land to the south controlled by Houghton-le-Spring District Council. Well aware of the difficulties that were created in Aycliffe when more than one local authority controlled the town during the late 1940s, Washington Development Corporation attempted at the earliest possible date to apply for single authority status to cover the whole of the designated area.

As might be expected, Washington UDC agreed to the corporation's suggestion as it would have been the major beneficiary of any changes.⁷³ For its part, the corporation was also content that the council should become its controlling authority. Apart from it overseeing by far the greatest amount of land in the new town, the council was anxious to inculcate a good working relationship with the corporation. In October 1965 it agreed to the corporation taking over the second stage of a large council housing scheme at Edith Avenue for an additional 250 houses. In return, the corporation resolved that in the event of the need for further local authority housing in the new town, it would make land available to the council.⁷⁴ The two bodies also agreed to coordinate their housing waiting lists. In 1967 the council's waiting list contained 900 names; the corporation's list 400. It was agreed that the coordination of the two lists would not only be more administratively efficient, it would also

⁷² See, for example, NT/Pe/1/4/12 PDC, GMR, 25 Oct 1965. The Architects' and Consultants' fees alone for the town hall amounted to nearly £3,000.

⁷³ See, for example, T/WRO UD/WS/1/35 Washington Urban District Council (WUDC), Minutes, 12 April 1966.

⁷⁴ T/88/1 WDC, BM, 20 Dec 1965.

greatly benefit prospective newcomers to the town by ensuring that they only had a single office to apply to.⁷⁵

However, when the authorities met in July 1966, Chester-le-Street and Houghton-le-Spring district councils flatly refused to relinquish any part of their respective areas. The meeting therefore ended as it had begun, with all three authorities claiming jurisdiction over separate parts of the town.⁷⁶ However, a liaison committee was set up which included two members of Washington and Chester-le-Street district councils and one member from Houghton. Its objective was to ensure that the 'problems which arose from the development of the new town as they affected the three district councils were fully considered and the best efforts of all parties were directed to their solution'.⁷⁷ The committee's first meeting was scheduled for March 1967 and was to meet at six monthly intervals thereafter. By the committee's eleventh meeting in July 1969, however, there had been no attendances from representatives of Chester-le-Street RDC.⁷⁸

Discord between Chester-le-Street and the corporation was also in evidence in 1966 when the former refused to renew the sewerage system in its section of the designated area. In March 1966 Washington UDC appointed a consulting engineer to prepare a scheme for sewage disposal works in the new town. Following his investigations, he found that the portion of land lying within Chester-le-Street had only a rudimentary drainage system, but the authority refused proposals for new sewerage works in the area.⁷⁹ Relations between the corporation and Houghton-le-Spring also deteriorated in June 1968 when the corporation refused financial assistance with the costs of a recreation ground the council was planning to

⁷⁵ T/WRO UD/WS/18 WDC/WUDC, Joint Housing Working Committee, 20 March 1967. There were some minor disagreements between the corporation and the council. In July 1968, the corporation disputed whether rates should be levied on the town's social centres. James Steel argued that the centres were not in a similar category to other institutions in that they provided an amenity which, if not provided by the corporation, would have to be provided by the local authority.

⁷⁶ T/88/1 WDC, BM, 4 July 1966.

⁷⁷ T/88/1 WDC, BM, 27 July 1966.

⁷⁸ T/WRO UD/WS/18 WDC/WUDC Joint Housing Working Committee, 7 July 1969.

⁷⁹ WDC, 1966 AR, p. 393.

build in its section of the designated area. The corporation maintained that the recreation area was on the very southern edge of the designated area and mainly intended to serve residents of the Houghton area who lived outside the new town.⁸⁰

Although relations between the corporation and the town's surrounding local authorities in Aycliffe had never been harmonious, the late 1960s and 1970s were a period of relative cordiality. In 1965 the corporation and Darlington RDC collaborated in a scheme to convert the new town into a smoke control area.⁸¹ In all, the fireplaces in about 4,500 houses needed to be converted from burning 'soft coke' to 'hard coke'. At a cost of £50 per house, it meant that more than £250,000 needed to be found to implement the conversions.⁸² The government agreed to bear some of the costs, but the corporation and the district council were required to find most of the money. Aycliffe's residents benefited ultimately, however. Hard coke proved to be more efficient than the softer version – where it would cost nearly fourteen shillings per week to produce a certain amount of heat in the old fires, the new coke fire would produce the same amount of heat for nine shillings.⁸³

In Middridge village, too, despite fierce condemnation of the corporation from Shildon UDC prior to the village becoming part of the new town's extension programme, a compromise was reached which left none of the parties involved overly dissatisfied. Following the Minister's approval of the town's extension in April 1968, the corporation obtained a compulsory purchase order to incorporate Middridge into the designated area. To Shildon's credit, however, once the order was passed, the council immediately established a working consultative programme with the corporation. Both parties agreed that it was essential that any design proposals should aim to retain the basic physical form and simplicity of the village whilst, at the same time, provide new residential accommodation of

⁸⁰ T/88/2 WDC, BM, 10 June 1968.

⁸¹ *Northern Despatch*, 18 Sept 1965.

⁸² *Auckland Chronicle*, 11 Feb 1965.

⁸³ ADC, 1965 AR, p. 7.

a high standard. To further consolidate their good relationship, both authorities worked together on the project: the corporation undertook the development of Southside, Middridge, whilst Shildon started work at Northside.⁸⁴

In 1970, moreover, the corporation announced that in conjunction with Darlington RDC, it planned to erect a sports and recreation centre in the town. For many people, such an amenity was long overdue; of all the new towns designated following the war, only it and Peterlee were without a central sports and recreation centre. However, both the council and the corporation were not content to build just a sports and social centre: swimming baths, banqueting facilities, twin cinemas, an arts centre, theatre and shopping areas were also integral parts of the scheme. At a cost of nearly £450,000, of which the corporation's contribution was £100,000, the scheme was unequivocally the most expensive single amenity thus far attempted at Aycliffe.⁸⁵ In 1971, however, Darlington announced that it was having difficulties in raising the necessary finance for the project.⁸⁶ Although it eventually raised enough money for the sports centre and swimming baths, it could not afford the extra costs of building the cinemas, shops, theatre or arts facilities. As a result, these facilities were discarded from the plans.

A unity of purpose also pervaded Peterlee Development Corporation and Easington RDC's working relationship during the late 1960s and 1970s; more so following Crossman's instruction for more collaboration. One outcome arising from a meeting of the liaison committee in May 1966 was an agreement in which the council operated a test scheme for the maintenance of corporation houses in Peterlee.⁸⁷ By pooling the two bodies' resources, it was hoped that a common housing maintenance service, initially to include around 500

⁸⁴ NT/Ay/1/1/24 ADC, BM, 1 July 1971.

⁸⁵ ADC, 1973 AR, p. 6.

⁸⁶ NT/Ay/1/1/25 ADC, BM, 4 Feb 1971.

⁸⁷ See, for example, NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 6 July 1967.

houses, would lead to greater efficiency.⁸⁸ Although the scheme was discontinued in 1969 because of the corporation's desire to reorganise its own maintenance department, the scheme established a guideline to how the two authorities could satisfactorily work together in the future.

In December 1966, moreover, they agreed, for the first time since the new town's designation, to a transfer of land. The corporation took conveyance of 11.5 acres of land from the council, which was used ostensibly as an extension to the industrial estate and, in turn, transferred an area of 6.8 acres of land, situated to the east of Eden Lane playing fields, which the council used for housing purposes.⁸⁹ There were problems, however. First, they could not agree on which authority's regulations should be applicable in the portion of land sold to the council. An example was the use of outside television aerials in Peterlee. The corporation ruled in 1966 that all outside aerials should be forbidden in the town; in Easington district aerials were permitted.⁹⁰ Also, as in Aycliffe, Easington RDC wished to make the new town a smoke control zone. However, it could not consent to the corporation's request that gas heating appliances be installed in the area: although gas was cheaper, many miners past and present were entitled to supplies of concessionary coal.⁹¹

Despite these differences, overall it seemed that animosity was now turning to mutual respect. Further evidence was the growing number of local authority members on the board. From 1966 to the mid-1970s far from it being almost devoid of local officials, local councillors became increasingly more influential in the town's affairs.⁹² In December 1969, moreover, the corporation acceded to the council's request for more representation on the liaison committee. The changing relationship between the corporation and the councils had

⁸⁸ PDC, 1967 AR, p. 238.

⁸⁹ NT/Pe/1/4/13 PDC, GMR, 1 Dec 1966.

⁹⁰ NT/Pe/1/4/13 PDC, GMR, 6 April 1967.

⁹¹ NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 6 April 1967.

⁹² In 1973 William Horsfield, leader of the parish council joined the board, as did Charles Short, leader of the district council, in 1977.

turned around to such an extent that in 1976 the corporation wrote in its annual report: 'In liaison matters, Peterlee and Aycliffe are closer to the partnership new towns than in other parts of the country, both in their method of operation, and in having a substantial number of local authority members on the board'.⁹³

iii) Political stability at Aycliffe and Peterlee but problems at Washington

For the corporations themselves, their changing relationship with local authorities coincided with political and economic changes that were occurring both regionally and nationally from the late-1960s onwards. By 1970 it was clear that Washington was beginning to fulfil the role the planners envisaged for it. Despite a raft of government directives during the 1960s to curtail all unnecessary recruitment, the corporation's staff had grown to 298, with more than a hundred employed in the architecture and planning department alone. In the same year, Washington Galleries, the town's central shopping area was opened, and the corporation announced plans to dam the river at Fatfield to create a flooded area suitable for water sports.⁹⁴ In 1972, in conjunction with Radio Durham, the corporation even provided a new broadcasting studio in the town, which was officially opened by the mayor of Washington DC in a radio link with James Steel.⁹⁵ Overall, it appeared that the 1970s promised to be a decade of great achievement for the corporation.

Events conspired to disrupt its plans, however. In 1970 the Labour government was defeated by the Conservatives who, on the whole, were less committed to public investment, and less sympathetic to the new towns in general. Insufficient government expenditure on Washington's infrastructure after 1970 thus seriously hampered potential commercial and industrial investment. In addition, the alarming rise in inflation and interest rates after 1970,

⁹³ PDC, *1976 AR*, p. 275.

⁹⁴ Holley, *Quicker*, p. 86.

⁹⁵ WDC, *1972 AR*, p. 623.

seriously affected the development of Washington. Development corporations borrowed from central government for 60 years at prevailing rates of interest. Having spent the money they had borrowed from the same source to pay the interest, the corporations built up an accumulated deficit, which only decreased once the net annual revenue outweighed capital repayments and interest charges. Much of the financial success or failure of a corporation, therefore, depended upon how its initial borrowing fitted into the inflation cycle.

In one respect, the corporation was fortunate in that much of the town's initial infrastructure – roads, housing, industrial estates – were constructed during the 1960s when interest rates were relatively low. However, interest rates on money borrowed by the corporation rose rapidly during the early 1970s, reaching more than 12.5 per cent by 1974. Consequently, costs on housing, commercial ventures and social capital were significantly cut back.⁹⁶ Plans for a community hospital, linked to the town's central health centre were also cancelled because of a lack of funds, as was the proposed riverside park and barrage at Fatfield. Although the corporation obtained £100,000 from its major amenity fund for the facility, it fell far short of the £450,000 required. At the same time it proved impossible for Sunderland Borough Council to raise the extra finance needed for the project. As a result, the corporation was forced to abandon the barrage and plan instead for the park only;⁹⁷ at the same time the £100,000 acquired for the barrage was lost to the corporation.⁹⁸

The disruption to its development plans was made even more serious by the fact that it occurred at a time when a reorganisation of the region's local authority boundaries was being proposed. Prior to the Maud Report's findings on changes to local authority boundaries in 1970 the corporation was of the opinion that its interest would be best served by maintaining its well-established connections with Washington UDC and Durham County Council. If this outcome could not be achieved, the next best solution, the corporation

⁹⁶ Holley, *Quicker*, pp. 145-146.

⁹⁷ WDC, *1974 AR*, p. 487.

⁹⁸ DC/WS/1/12 WDC, BM, 3 Nov 1975.

maintained, would be for the new town to be closely linked with Sunderland Borough Council, of which its relationship had always been amicable.⁹⁹ In the event, Washington UDC was abolished and the new town was placed within a new metropolitan area composed of Tyneside and Wearside. Although this was not the outcome hoped for, it could have been much worse: the designated area of the new town was not altered, which had been the concern of some board members. Also, the reforms ensured that Washington came under the jurisdiction of only one local authority, so that the corporation was not henceforth handicapped, as it had hitherto been, by having to deal with three separate local authorities below the county authority level.¹⁰⁰

An unforeseen consequence of the boundary changes, however, was the altered dynamic of the board. Prior to reorganisation, local authority members (of which some were Durham county councillors) all lived within or close to the town. Once Washington district was incorporated into Sunderland Borough in the new county of Tyne and Wear, however, the loyalty of members built up over many years was suddenly disrupted. It became clear to some commentators, that county and district officials looked at issues less from Washington's residents' point of view but rather from their own council's perspective.¹⁰¹ An example of this was the liaison committee. Although it continued to operate for a short while following the boundary changes, it eventually lapsed, ostensibly because of a conspicuous lack of support from some members of Tyne and Wear County Council. The corporation quickly realised that not only were some of the town's neighbouring councils in Tyne and Wear less enthusiastic than their predecessors about Washington's continuing development, some of them were openly hostile.

Tacit disapproval towards Washington turned into open enmity in 1972 when the corporation received an objection from Jarrow Borough Council to its proposals to extend

⁹⁹ DC/WS/1/7 WDC, BM, 1 June 1970.

¹⁰⁰ DC/WS/1/8 WDC, BM, 7 July 1971.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Holley, *Quicker*, p. 175.

the designated area for industrial purposes.¹⁰² Jarrow claimed that sites were available in its own borough, and that any extension to Washington's programme would be to the detriment of the region's workers, as public transport facilities to the new town were poor. It became increasingly clear, furthermore, that Jarrow was not alone in its condemnation of Washington. By the mid-1970s Gateshead, Newcastle and South Tyneside councils were all attributing the exodus of people and jobs from their areas to the growth of the town.¹⁰³ In response, Tyne and Wear County Council directed that Washington's housing and industrial programmes be restricted. By doing so, it hoped, population movements away from the traditional urban areas might be arrested and industry would thus be encouraged to return. For the corporation, however, this was tantamount to a direct threat to the new town's continuing role as a focus for industrial and housing regeneration within a regional strategy which, after all, had been its original purpose. In addition, over the preceding fifteen years, jobs transferred to the new town from its surrounding area were only a minority of those established in the town.¹⁰⁴ Despite this, the corporation still attempted to retain conciliatory relations with its neighbours. 'An important task which lies ahead', James Steel emphasised at a board meeting on Washington's future, 'is to convince the new local authorities to regard Washington as their showpiece rather than their rival'.¹⁰⁵

In November 1977 a meeting, which turned out to be of some significance for the new town's future, was convened at Sunderland council chambers. Along with members of the corporation, the meeting was attended by representatives from the Department of Environment, Tyne and Wear County Council, Sunderland Borough Council, the metropolitan councils of Gateshead, Newcastle, South Tyneside, as well as Giles Radice, MP for Chester-le-Street. The metropolitan councillors, for the most part, reiterated their

¹⁰² DC/WS/1/9 WDC, BM, 6 March 1972.

¹⁰³ DC/WS/1/13 WDC, BM, 4 Oct 1976.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, WDC 1977 AR, p. 234; U. Wannop, 'New towns', in B. Cullingworth (ed), *British Planning: Fifty Years of Urban and Regional Policy* (1999), p. 222.

¹⁰⁵ T/WRO (NA) Washington Master Plan Review, 3 Dec 1973.

demand that industrial and housing development in Washington be severely restricted. However, Sunderland's representatives stated emphatically that they supported the corporation's programme, and further pointed out that the new town's housing programme was linked to their own. It was therefore of no concern to any other authority in the region.¹⁰⁶ Ultimately Sunderland's support seemed to tip the balance in favour of the corporation. Representatives from the Department of the Environment gave assurances that until details about the Washington's dissolution were made known, there would be no curtailment of the corporation's ongoing development programme.

In Aycliffe and Peterlee, the early-1970s was also a period of profound change. In November 1971 Dennis Stevenson replaced T. Dan Smith as chairman.¹⁰⁷ Appointed by Environment Minister, Peter Walker, who had been very impressed with his research skills, Stevenson, at 26, was far and away the youngest development corporation chairman in the country – so much so that an official at the department questioned whether Stevenson's resume had mistakenly got the six and two the wrong way round. His appointment was resented in some quarters though, especially by councillors from Aycliffe, who claimed that the job ought to have gone to someone with an intimate knowledge of the North East.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, when he took up his appointment, the fortunes of both corporations were at a low ebb. The scandal surrounding Smith had reflected unfavourably on the image of the towns. Despite the signs of a better industrial future in the towns promised in the 1960s, by the early-1970s their industrial outlook could only be described as moderate at best. The period was also characterised by rapidly increasing unemployment, which was especially pronounced in Peterlee after 1973 with the closure of Shotton colliery.

¹⁰⁶ Holley, *Quicker*, p. 187.

¹⁰⁷ NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 2 Dec 1971.

¹⁰⁸ *NE*, 12 Nov 1971.



Fig. 18: A 'youthful' Dennis Stevenson at Aycliffe in 1971.

In some ways, Stevenson's job was made more difficult in 1973 with the retirement of Williams as general manager.¹⁰⁹ He had been with Peterlee Development Corporation since its inception in 1948, and with Aycliffe since 1953. A very able and intelligent man – T. Dan Smith described him as one of the most intelligent men in Britain – Williams' forthright manner and personality had on many occasions procured favours for both towns from the Ministry. As an advisor to the Hailsham Committee, he was undoubtedly influential in acquiring Ministry approval for increased industrial activity in both towns, and the extensive improvements to the main roads which by-passed them. He was, at the same time, equally involved in the day-to-day running of the new towns. When driving about the towns he would routinely check tenants' gardens and hand out warnings of eviction if their gardens appeared unkempt, or if tenants' washing was hung out in the front garden rather than the back where it was supposed to be. On the other hand, Williams was, according to the Ministry, a difficult man to talk to and unwilling to countenance other people's ideas if they in any way contradicted his own.¹¹⁰ His replacement as general manager was Gary

¹⁰⁹ ADC, 1974 AR, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, HLG/115/854 J. A. L. Barber (DoE) to Sir Idwal Pugh (Permanent Secretary DoE), 14 May 1973.

Philipson, a former secretary to the New Towns Commission who, upon taking up his appointment in Peterlee and Aycliffe in November 1973 received not only an immediate increase in salary of £250 per annum, but also a change in title to that of chief executive.¹¹¹

Despite Stephenson and Philipson's appointments, the economic downturn after 1970 acutely hampered the extent to which any tangible success could be achieved. Even so, the best efforts of both boards were not helped by continual national and local government resistance to their proposals. In Peterlee, the corporation had repeatedly stressed to the Ministry and county council that long-awaited improvements to the A19 road, welcome as they undoubtedly were in the district after 1965, would only prove an unmitigated success if the road was linked to the A1(M) road which ran alongside Durham, and on which the bulk of freight and goods in the region were transported.¹¹² In October 1971 Durham County Council highways and bridges committee announced that a link between the two roads was likely to be included in a programme for principal roads, with 1975 the most likely date for construction.¹¹³ In May 1972, however, the corporation was told that due to the worsening economic situation the road was not likely to be considered in the roads programme until the end of the decade at the earliest.¹¹⁴

In Aycliffe, the 1970s began on an optimistic note. In July 1970 an exhibition of a model of the proposed new town centre was held in Churchill House, and overall it appeared to be well received by the general public. By 1972 phase one of the town centre complex comprising shops at ground level and first floor level, and office space at second floor level had been completed and all accommodation had been let.¹¹⁵ Moreover, in April 1973, the corporation made great strides in its attempt to control the town's industrial destiny by acquiring Aycliffe industrial estate. The purchase from English Industrial Estates

¹¹¹ NT/Ay/1/1/25 ADC, BM, 1 Nov 1973.

¹¹² See, for example, *NDM*, 3 June 1965.

¹¹³ PDC, 1972 *AR*, p. 361.

¹¹⁴ NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 1 June 1972.

¹¹⁵ ADC, 1972 *AR*, p. 3.

Corporation meant that for the first time in its history the corporation could direct industrial policy in the new town.

iv) The life of the corporations comes to an end

It was also during the mid-1970s that the dissolution of the development corporations began to be discussed in earnest. The last time that dissolution had been formally considered was during the 1950s New Town Commission debates in Parliament. Then the obvious need for the majority of the corporations to continue their housing and industrial programmes was accepted with almost universal equanimity. By the mid-1970s, however, there had been a change in the way government viewed the towns: they and the programme that originally produced them began to appear as an anachronism, derived from a time and political mind-set which had very little relevance to contemporary Britain.

In 1976, Environment Minister, Peter Shore, effectively switched attention and resources away from the new towns and suburban areas, and back towards traditional urban centres, especially Britain's inner-city areas. The latter had, to a large extent, degenerated into a blight on the urban landscape since the war, due in no small measure to a concerted lack of funds and resources.¹¹⁶ For some new town stalwarts, however, Shore's actions were seen as a flagrant attempt to give the inner cities 'a status commensurate with the voting power of its numerous inhabitants'.¹¹⁷ This may indeed have been the case; whatever the reason, though, the role of the corporations never recovered their former standing, and their dissolution became almost a formality.

In the North East, the changed priorities were translated into a sizeable reduction in funds allotted to the towns. In Washington, the town's capital allocation of £11 million in 1977 was £3.5 million less than what was allocated in 1975/76, which made delays in the town's

¹¹⁶ Cherry, *The Politics*, p. 53.

¹¹⁷ Holley, *Quicker*, p. 169.

completion inevitable.¹¹⁸ Money approved by the Minister for housing purposes in Aycliffe in 1975/76 was drastically reduced from £2.676 million requested by the corporation to £1.5 million actually approved. On other local expenditure, the corporation requested £6.137 million, but received only £4.080 million. Cuts in expenditure in 1976/77 were even more severe: the corporation was informed by the Ministry to expect to receive up to 40 per cent less capital than it had received in 1976.¹¹⁹

The Conservative party victory at the 1979 general election further strengthened government resolve to disencumber the state of the development corporations and other ‘quangos’, which the new Environment Minister, Michael Heseltine, judged were a constituent part of a national planning apparatus which had historically proved costly, wasteful and inefficient.¹²⁰ At a corporation chairmen’s conference in October 1980, Heseltine, although initially appearing to assuage their doubts about the government’s proposed policies, confirmed the chairmen’s worst fears when he explained that, as a result of future policy regarding the re-vitalisation of the dilapidated inner city areas, the new towns would have to rely to a large extent on finding private funds.¹²¹

For their part, the region’s corporations accepted without demur that their life was approaching its end, and gave categorical assurances that they would assist in the transfer of the towns to their successors. In January 1976 Washington’s corporation board advised the Ministry that it did not envisage any ‘special difficulties in reaching agreement with the local authority’ when the time came to transfer the new town’s housing and related assets to Sunderland Borough Council.¹²² In February the corporation issued a press release stating that ‘unless unforeseen circumstances arise the corporation’s present objectives are likely to

¹¹⁸ WDC, *1978 AR*, p. 464.

¹¹⁹ A casualty of the cuts was the link road at Peterlee linking the A.19 to the A1(M). See, for example, PDC, *1977 AR*, p. 276.

¹²⁰ See, for example, T/WRO (NA), Department of the Environment (DoE), Press Notice, 17 Sept 1979; Ward, *New Town*, p. 92.

¹²¹ NT/Ay/1/1/26 ADC, BM, 9 Oct 1980.

¹²² WDC, *1976 AR*, p. 473.

be achieved by 1980 or thereabouts'.¹²³ All that it asked was that the transfer was considered well in advance so that arrangements could be examined with due regard to its own programme. The council responded in March 1976 that it agreed in principle to the transfer, and to the establishment of a working party consisting of both authorities' senior officials to consider the various implications involved. It seemed that the transfer programme would go ahead without any undue complications. This could not be further from the truth, however: what followed was a lengthy period of mutual acrimony, accusations, counter-accusations and stand off before, reluctantly, the borough council agreed to the transfer.

In both Aycliffe and Peterlee, on Shore's instructions, preparations were made for the transfer of housing and related assets to Sedgefield and Easington district councils on 1 April 1978, with June 1980 the date set for the intended dissolution of both corporations.¹²⁴ Unlike what happened at Washington, the transfers passed over relatively harmoniously, so much so that the Ministry commended the corporations and the district councils for the 'excellent cooperation between the [authorities] at all levels'.¹²⁵ For the corporations and their staff the news of the proposed dissolutions ended uncertainty once and for all about the future; a drawback was that there were problems with staff retention. Both corporations were disappointed with the Ministry's decision to offer the staff which remained with them until dissolution less attractive redundancy packages than those who left prior to dissolution.¹²⁶ Consequently, the corporations were left in the invidious position of trying to maintain staff numbers and morale at a sufficiently high level to permit day-to-day development to proceed, while accepting that it would be more financially advantageous for their best officers to find employment elsewhere.

¹²³ HLG/115/1022 WDC, Press Release, 3 Feb 1976.

¹²⁴ In 1974, with the local government changes, Sedgefield District Council became the controlling local authority in Aycliffe.

¹²⁵ DC/WS/1/21 WDC, BM, 30 April 1984.

¹²⁶ NT/Pe/1/1/8 PDC, BM, 2 Nov 1978.

In June 1980, following strong representations from their chairmen, Heseltine announced in Parliament that the life of the corporations was to be extended to December 1985. However, henceforth their emphasis was away from planning, designing, building and social development. Their new remit, the Ministry emphasised, was almost exclusively the acquisition of new industry. On granting their extension, the Ministry also imposed stipulations about staff numbers in the new towns. Washington Development Corporation lost 74 staff in 1981 alone.¹²⁷ The corporation in Aycliffe and Peterlee claimed that it was operating with a smaller permanent staff than any other English new town. This, it claimed was no mean achievement considering the problems associated with running two new towns 20 miles apart.¹²⁸ Reductions in recruitment on a five-year cycle, moreover, was one condition designed to result in a minimal staff of less than 40 on dissolution day, thereby easing both the process of dissolution and staff uncertainties about the future.

In the midst of the negotiations, Peterlee and Aycliffe lost the services of Stevenson. His replacement as chairman at Aycliffe and Peterlee was Michael Straker, himself a successful businessman. In many ways, Straker's period in charge of the corporations was parlous in the extreme. Uncertainty about the future among the corporation's staff led to an inability to recruit the best people to steer the new towns in the right direction during their remaining years. However, in June 1985 the board was informed that the life of the corporations was to be extended for a further period of three years. Aycliffe and Peterlee's boards were united into a single entity, moreover.¹²⁹ The economic recession during the early to mid-1980s had a major influence, as did the support for the corporations from a

¹²⁷ WDC, *1981 AR*, p. 496; G. McLelland, *Washington*, p. 9. As early as March 1983, out of 41 staff in the housing department, nine were temporary, six were on secondment from Sunderland Borough Council and only 26 were permanent, 16 of who had definite jobs with the borough council awaiting them after transfer, whilst ten did not.

¹²⁸ PDC, *1983 AR*, p. 227.

¹²⁹ See, for example, ADC, *1986 AR*, p. 3. The order to unite the two boards came into effect on 1 July 1985. The functions of Peterlee Development Corporation were transferred to Aycliffe Development Corporation, dissolving the former and re-naming the latter the Aycliffe and Peterlee Development Corporation.

growing number of local authorities and institutions in the region. Perhaps most surprising of all, considering their habitual denunciation of their activities, all three new towns' surrounding local authorities voiced their unwavering support for the work done by the corporations, and for the continuation of their roles as generators of employment. Even the region's trade unions, including NALGO, which had never been wholehearted supporters of the corporations and their perceived democratic deficit, called in 1985 for a 'reasonable extension' of five years for the two boards.¹³⁰ Cross-party support from the region's MPs, furthermore, was additional evidence that the corporations' role in attracting industry should be safeguarded.¹³¹

In May 1986 at a meeting at Whitehall, attended by Lord Elton, Housing and Construction Minister, Straker, McLelland, and the corporations' two managing directors, outlined their case for continuing their role after 1988.¹³² Despite receiving support from the Minister, it was clear that he would not countenance further extension. Accordingly, the request for extension was rejected, and the government announced in May 1987, that the region's development corporations would cease operating on 1 December 1988.¹³³

v) The same old political problems?

In many ways, politically the post-1963 years were almost a continuation of the same problems that had affected the towns since their inceptions. The calls for more representation on the corporation boards were as familiar as the corporation's reasons for not consenting to the requests. Similarly, demands by local councillors in both Aycliffe and Peterlee that the new towns be constituted as urban districts in their own right had been an

¹³⁰ DC/WS/1/22 WDC, Special Meeting, 18 March 1985.

¹³¹ See, for example, T/WRO DC/WS/1/22 WDC, BM, 7 Jan 1985; G. McClelland, *Washington: Over and Out: The Story of Washington New Town, 1983-88* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 17.

¹³² DC/WS/1/23 WDC, BM, 9 June 1986.

¹³³ See, for example, NT/AP/1/1/1 A+PDC, BM, 15 May 1987.

ongoing issue since at least the mid-1950s. The size and perceived importance of all three towns' central areas was also a common preoccupation for the corporations.

Washington Development Corporation also experienced almost identical problems to those that which occurred in Aycliffe during the late 1940s when the town found itself within the jurisdiction of three separate local authorities. Aycliffe and Washington also suffered similar fates when the 1974 boundary changes meant that both towns found themselves within different administrative districts than prior to the changes. Moreover, all three towns were affected when the government switched its attention from the new towns to the inner-city areas during the mid-1970s.

However, the similarity of the experience faced in the towns belies the significant differences behind them. Aycliffe Development Corporation's concern with the size of the town's central area was a consequence of the decision to substantially increase the size of the town. The desire to develop Peterlee's central area to become the focal central area for the whole district was, in effect, an admission by the corporation that it had hitherto failed in this objective. On the other hand, Washington Development Corporation's anxiety about how the central area was meant to fit in with the development of the town as a whole was recognition that Aycliffe's and Peterlee's mistakes would not be repeated.

The results of the 1974 boundary changes were also much kinder to Aycliffe than they were to Washington. The former only changed district, and on the whole Sedgefield District Council was just as supportive of the town as Darlington RDC had been. Washington, on the other hand, not only became part of another district, it became part of an entirely new administrative county, the officials of which were arguably not as favourably disposed toward the new town as Durham County Council had been. Finally, although the dissolution of all three corporations was announced at the same time, it was clear that Washington fared

much better than the other two towns with regards to capital expenditure received from the government.

Industrial Developments in the New Towns, 1963-88

This chapter will examine how industrially the new towns initially benefited post-Hailsham as all three were included within the Board of Trade's 'Growth Zone', whereby industry and government resources were directed to the zones. Aycliffe and Peterlee were subsequently undermined as industrial centres, however, as the Board prioritised Washington whilst, at the same time, it reverted back to its earlier policy of targeting resources to areas of high unemployment. The first section outlines the local and national context in which the corporations operated in from 1963 to the corporations' dissolutions in 1988. Part two analyses the extremely impressive revival in the industrial fortunes of both Aycliffe and Peterlee following the Hailsham Report's publication. The third section explains how both towns suffered as a result of Washington being the only new town in the region to acquire Special Development Area status. The fourth part of the chapter shows how during the 1970s all three towns defied national economic trends and began to realise the objectives set for them by becoming the industrial focal points for their respective sub-regions. Part five assesses the ending of the corporations' roles as providers of industry in the new towns and the complications that arose as the towns were transferred to other agencies.

i) The national and regional industrial context and the new towns

The publication of the Hailsham Report in November 1963 was followed by the Labour party general election victory in June 1964. Both of these events augured well for the region and the new towns. Hailsham recommended that the towns should become the primary industrial centres for their sub-regions, whilst the Labour party promised to prioritise the

regions in industrial terms and incorporate them into the party's plans for a 'white hot industrial revolution' in Britain.¹

This increased public expenditure in the northern region, aided by the government's advance factory programme after 1963, greatly enhanced the towns' and the region's manufacturing base: from being well below the national average – 23.8 per cent compared with 40.1 per cent nationally in 1951 – manufacturing increased in the North East during the 1960s while it decreased nationally.² The increase also went some way to counter the ongoing decline in the region's traditional industries. Even though as late as 1962, 34 per cent of male jobs in the region were in mining, shipbuilding and heavy engineering – in County Durham, mining alone accounted for 16 per cent of male employment (four times the national figure) – staple industries in the North East were unlikely to add significantly to employment opportunities.³ In mining, the paradox was that a record amount of coal was produced in the region during the 1960s, with East Durham's mines leading the way. Improved technology rather than increased manpower was the reason why, however.⁴ Between 1959 and 1974, of 170,000 jobs lost in the region's traditional staple industries, 113,000 were in mining; 35,000 of these were in County Durham alone.⁵

In 1965 the NCB announced an accelerated programme of pit closures in the region. Of 110 collieries, 51 were classified as likely to close within five years. The number of miners fell from 90,000 in December 1965 to 73,000 in November 1967. For those areas most affected (of which North-West Durham was one), the Board of Trade introduced special measures over and above those available for development areas including extra inducements to persuade industry to relocate.

¹ Northern Regional Strategy Team, *Growth and Structural Change in the Economy of the Northern Region Since 1952* (Newcastle, 1976), p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³ See, for example, Hudson and Johnson, 'New Towns', p. 43.

⁴ NCB, *1965 Report and Accounts* (1966), pp. 21-23.

⁵ *Sunday Times*, 2 Sept 1975.

During the early 1970s the rate of arrival of new manufacturing industry fell sharply. Even so, the region's new towns were to some extent insulated from the economic difficulties pervading the country: all three suffered less than their surrounding areas, much to the consternation of the region's local authorities.

The early 1980s for the towns were characterised by unemployment and economic hardship due, in no small part, to the national economic recession after 1980. Nationally, unemployment breached the 3 million mark for the first time. The North East's outdated heavy industry was still very much a part of its industrial complexion so was thus particularly susceptible to the downturn in the economy. There were also an inordinate amount of branch factories and subsidiaries of firms whose head office was based elsewhere. Historically the latter were usually the first to close when the national economy began to experience difficulties.

ii) Post-Hailsham: a promising start for all three new towns

Hailsham's recommendation that Aycliffe should be an essential part of the growth zone had a dramatic and immediate effect. As late as March 1962 the government and officials in the sub-region had still not altered their view that Aycliffe's progress had been at the expense of South-West Durham's traditional employment centres, nor that the new town continued to be a 'menace to the future of urban and rural areas nearby'.⁶ It appeared that no district council within a ten-mile radius of the town supported further development of its industrial site.

However, a few months later, official opinion had changed. In July 1962, following an eight-hour debate in Parliament on the North East's worsening employment situation, the government concluded that only the further development of Aycliffe's trading estate would

⁶ *Northern Despatch*, 25 March 1962.

provide the solution to some of the sub-region's industrial problems.⁷ The swift change of heart was in no small part due to a realisation that the marked deterioration in the district's economic circumstances, notably a sudden and rapid increase in unemployment, necessitated a revised strategy.⁸ Furthermore, over the next few years it was expected that more than 4,000 miners were to lose their jobs through additional colliery closures planned for the area; and that the proposed run down of the large railway workshops at Darlington and Shildon would inevitably lead to the loss of another 3,000 to 4,000 jobs.⁹ It was not clear, however, whether growth at Aycliffe to compensate for these developments would be acceptable locally.

Employment in the New Towns 1963-1988

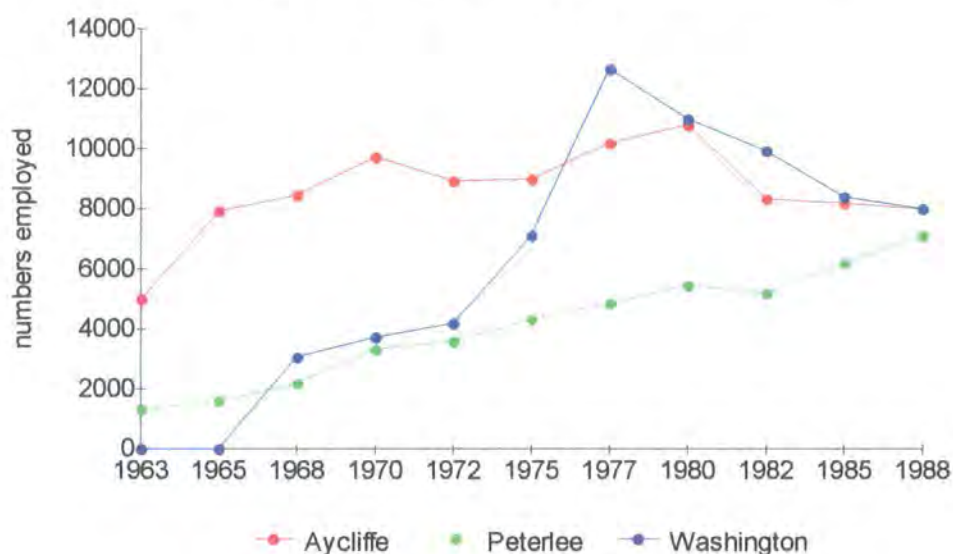


Fig. 19: Employment numbers in the new towns, 1963-88

The town received a massive boost in November 1962 when a survey of firms discovered that 70 per cent of companies established in South-West Durham since the war would not have done so had it not been for the existence of the new town.¹⁰ Once the county council had publicly backed further expansion in early 1963, moreover, followed soon by

⁷ *HC Debs*, 663, c. 1129-1214, 23 July 1962.

⁸ Bowden, 'Newton Aycliffe', p. 113.

⁹ *Northern Despatch*, 24 July 1962.

¹⁰ See, for example, Bowden, 'Newton Aycliffe', p. 111.

Hailsham's support, the possibility that Aycliffe would become the central focus for industry in the district became much more of a viable proposition.

Nevertheless, despite the support, no one at the time could have predicted the phenomenal transformation that would occur on the estate over the next eight-to-ten years. As Figure 19 demonstrates, in just twelve months following Hailsham, the number of workers in Aycliffe increased by nearly 40 per cent, much of it due to 290,000 square feet of additional factory space provided on the estate which enabled ten new firms to re-locate to the town.¹¹ In 1964 the Board of Trade confidently expected that employment would be increased by a further 2,000 workers during the following twelve months.¹² Additional factory space created through the corporation's ongoing demolition of obsolete ex-Royal Ordnance Factories led J. Sylph, the trading estate's district manager, to predict that up to 20,000 workers could be employed on the estate if it was fully occupied.¹³ By 1973, at a time when male unemployment was rapidly approaching double figures in other parts of the region, in Aycliffe it was only 1.6 per cent.¹⁴

Much of the credit was undoubtedly due to the Board of Trade's stricter policy towards industrial development certificates for new industry after 1964.¹⁵ Moreover, since the war the town had acquired an international reputation as a centre for motor manufacturing, chemical industries and light engineering. When firms in these industries were directed to the northern region, Aycliffe was the desired choice for many of them. Government assistance in encouraging international firms to establish branch factories in the North East also benefited the town. In 1966 eleven of the 63 manufacturing establishments on the estate were offshoots or subsidiaries of American, German or Swedish companies. In all, firms

¹¹ ADC, *1964 AR*, p. 12.

¹² *Evening Gazette*, 12 Nov 1964.

¹³ ADC, *Master Plan Report for the Expansion of Newton Aycliffe to a Population of 45,000* (May, 1967), p. 7.

¹⁴ See, for example, Hudson and Johnson, 'New Towns', p. 161; Thomas, *Aycliffe to Cumbernauld*, p. 62. In all, employment in Aycliffe nearly doubled in comparison to the previous decade.

¹⁵ McCrone, *Regional Policy*, p. 129; A. E. Homans, 'Restriction of industrial expansion in South East England', *Oxford Economic Papers* 16 (July 1964), pp. 192-194.

from these countries provided almost a third of the total manufacturing employment on the estate during the mid-1960s.¹⁶

The estate's managers were also heartened by the exceptional growth of many locally-established firms. A consequence of this was that, as well as the attraction of large national and international businesses, smaller, weaker firms, many of them based in the old ex-ROF factories, were sidelined; several folded or left the estate altogether.¹⁷ As larger premises built for the bigger concerns replaced them the estate became more attractive to established firms in growth industries. Historically, the larger engineering and electrical goods firms – which after 1963 were responsible for the majority of output on the estate – had the lowest proportion of vacated factories; they also experienced the smallest number of redundancies (less than five per cent between 1948 and 1964). Moreover, as these two industrial groups together accounted for almost 57 per cent of total employment on the estate after 1963, their integration into the local economy was fundamental to the economic development of the district as a whole.

The profusion of light engineering firms in Aycliffe post-Hailsham also greatly increased the proportion of male employment to 70 per cent in 1965.¹⁸ This was encouraging because in Board of Trade-owned industrial estates in the rest of the region, the bias of employment was more towards women. What was even more impressive was that jobs created in Aycliffe were generally better paid than the highest-earning jobs for men in equivalent occupations. Whilst the highest earning miners in the region were earning £33.3s per week during the early 1970s the electrical engineer at Aycliffe earned on average more than £43.¹⁹ At less than two per cent during the 1960s and early 1970s male unemployment was also substantially below the average for the region.

¹⁶ Philipson, *Swords*, p. 197.

¹⁷ Bowden, *Newton Aycliffe*, p. 134.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 137.

¹⁹ NEAS, 'New Towns in North East England Vol. 2' (NEAS, 1977), p. 57.

In Peterlee, the Hailsham report was even more crucial to its continuing industrial welfare. In November 1963, shortly after the report was published, Sir Keith Joseph stated that at least 20,000 jobs over and above those in mining were necessary by 1980 to check migration from the area; and that more than half of these jobs would be needed by 1970.²⁰ The corporation was quick to seize upon the possibilities that the report generated, moreover. In July 1964 it appointed a chief administration officer, whose duty was principally to 'encourage the growth of industrial development at Peterlee and Aycliffe'. Also, to meet the town's proposed rapid industrial development, a trades' council and a manufacturers' association were formed.²¹ In July 1965 the corporation targeted firms looking for suitable expansion areas by issuing a 'glossy brochure', in which it claimed that within the following ten years, work would be required for more than 12,000 people on the industrial estate, with more than 7,000 jobs earmarked for men.²²

As the 1960s progressed Peterlee also began to reflect the reduced role mining was playing in the area. By 1973 less than 15.8 per cent of men in the town worked in mining compared with 60 per cent at the time of its designation. It was thus essential that any new manufacturing industry attracted countered the employment deficit in mining. The attraction of 15 firms during the 1960s did help; they were mostly opportunities for women, however. Textile and clothing manufacturers still made up the bulk of firms after 1963. By 1966 of the three companies on the estate employing more than 500 workers, two of them were clothing manufacturers, the vast majority of the jobs for women.²³

Whilst the arrival of women's employment was welcomed, if for no other reason than it provided work for a section of the population that was hitherto denied it, there were misgivings. For some, the sheer quantity of largely unskilled employment directed at women

²⁰ *NDM*, 21 Nov 1963.

²¹ *SE*, 22 Aug 1964.

²² *NDM*, 6 July 1965.

²³ *NDM*, 6 Aug 1965.

prevented the establishment of male employment. Also, on average, women's take home pay still lagged way behind men's, which prompted a local official to demand that henceforth potential industrialists should be told that Peterlee was not 'a reservoir of cheap labour', with another adding that she hoped any new factories arriving in the new town would be for heavy industry and 'not just penny farthing industry such as they are bringing now'.²⁴

However, the two factors which had consistently prevented the introduction of heavy industry from arriving at Peterlee – poor quality roads and a lack of stable ground – were, thanks to Hailsham, about to be addressed.²⁵ Improvements to the region's roads became a priority after 1963. Expenditure on trunk roads and motorways rose from £6.02 million in 1962, to a peak of £37.7 million in 1969. Investment in roads between 1969 and 1971, in fact, exceeded that in new housing in the northern region. In May 1964 work was begun on improvements to the A19 road between Sheraton and Sunderland.²⁶

The government decision to extend the industrial area also appeared to herald a more encouraging industrial future for the town. The corporation actually began to receive enquiries from firms requiring predominantly male workforces. In 1966 it boasted that for the first time in its history more jobs had been created for men than for women. In its annual report the corporation stated that: 'The level and quality of the enquiries now coming forward encourages the view that there will be early achievement of a balanced industrial estate catering not only for the employment needs of the new town, but also making a significant contribution for the area generally'.²⁷

²⁴ *NDM*, 17 Dec 1963.

²⁵ *Hailsham Report*, p. 14.

²⁶ *NDM*, 15 May 1964.

²⁷ *PDC, 1966 AR*, p. 240.



Fig. 20: Advance factories being erected to the west of the A19 at Peterlee.

The corporation was also encouraged by the success of its smaller workshop units after 1963. The units of approximately 1,000 and 2,000 square feet in size were found to be very popular with start-up businesses and firms which required temporary accommodation while bigger premises were being built. For Williams, they represented the backbone of British industry, and that Peterlee was merely a modern-day equivalent of what had made the country so prosperous during the late-19th century:

The small back street factory of an older industrial period with its complex of inter-dependent small factories is the backbone of the buoyant and restless prosperity of the Birmingham region. In Peterlee, the small man may see an inspiration in this economic pattern but enjoy, at the same time, in a good environment, a medium, low-rented small factory, which can be readily expanded from 1,000 sq ft to 4,000 sq ft.²⁸

And, although the units employed on average less than fifteen workers, more than 90 per cent of them were males.

As well as transforming the industrial fortunes of both Peterlee and Newton Aycliffe, Hailsham's recommendation that a new town be built at Washington helped to revivify North-West Durham's industrial landscape. Indeed, the new town's designation in 1964 was very timely: the 1950s and early 1960s were not the most economically auspicious times for the

²⁸ *NE*, 10 June 1964.

Washington area. Uncertainty about how long the district's mines would remain working, and a lack of investment in new industries to replace them once they closed, was instrumental in contributing to the area's gloomy outlook.²⁹ From the mid-1950s Washington suffered almost continuous depopulation. Yet census reports indicated that its population remained more or less constant during the period. What was happening, in fact, was that as people moved away from the area looking for work, they were replaced by workers, mainly from the Tyneside conurbation, who were prepared to travel daily back to Tyneside to work. Thus between 1961 and 1968, although the number of employees in the town rose by 1,500, those working within Washington decreased by 1,094. The plain truth was that Washington was rapidly becoming a commuter town: people generally moved to Washington to escape the grime and squalor of the inner-city areas but did not expect to find work there.

Not that incoming migrants would have found work there even if they had wished to. Even before the influx of new inhabitants in Washington, jobs in the town numbered less than the resident workforce; and from 1961 until its designation the gap was widening exponentially. North-West Durham was therefore in desperate need of industry, not only to help curb the alarming number of outgoing migrants, but also to provide employment for its existing population, many of whom were travelling daily to find work in other parts of the region.

For Hailsham, however, the provision of large amounts of industry was not enough: it needed to be a more diverse range. It was clear though that there was a scarcity of suitable locations in the region free from the effects of mining subsidence. Of the existing industrial land in the North-West Durham and Sunderland areas, the Pallion and Bede estates were almost full. There still remained some 160 acres of land in Team Valley, near Gateshead, but not all of it was sufficiently stable for the industrial purposes Hailsham had in mind.

Washington was one of the few areas in the whole of the region that could accommodate the

²⁹ WDC, *Master Plan*, p. 52.

newer, lighter industries. Following the town's designation, detailed surveys revealed that as well as its existing 320 acres of industrial land, a further 445 acres could be converted into new sites. In all, eleven new sites were proposed, varying in size from 25 to 70 acres.³⁰

In October 1966 Housing Minister, Anthony Greenwood, laid the foundation stone of the first of the new estates. Thereafter the town attracted a rapid build up of jobs. However, the combined workforce of the firms on the estates was still insufficient to provide work for all the economically active people in the town requiring work, and for the first five years construction workers numbered more than employees. It was not until 1970 that the combined industrial estates had attracted 1,000 workers.³¹ Considering that by the time the town was completed the corporation expected that nearly 35,000 workers would be employed on the estates, it could not be denied that this was a disappointing early start to the creation of employment.

The attraction of manufacturing industry assumed more urgency with the announcement during the mid-1960s of major pit closures. At the time of its designation, more than a third of Washington's working population was actively employed in the district's pits. However, in early 1966 Harraton colliery closed followed in mid-1968 by Washington 'F' colliery and Glebe colliery during the early 1970s. A considerable number of jobs therefore needed to be created just to meet redundant miners' requirements. The bankruptcy of Cook's ironworks in 1969 with 400 redundancies, and 300 jobs lost at Newall's chemicals in 1970, added to the need for replacement employment.

The corporation's response was to redouble its efforts. James Steel ordered that all industrial areas were to be opened up as quickly as possible by the provision of access roads. In addition, in an attempt to remain competitive, rentals for new factories were kept as low as the market would allow. Some firms were offered a concession of a quarter's rent

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 52-53.

³¹ Hole et al, *Washington*, p. 38.

remission during their 'settling in' period.³² Also, in an effort to attract firms from outside the region, publicity expenditure was increased. A six-foot back illuminated poster extolling the benefits of the town was erected in the European and domestic departure lounge at London airport.³³ Advertising posters were also placed in all British Rail mainline termini, with a particular emphasis on business and commuter stations in the South East and the West Midlands.³⁴

Even once it had tempted prospective companies to move north, however, it appeared that factors beyond the corporation's control occasionally transpired to hamper its efforts. Norton Villiers, an engineering firm from London was anxious to acquire an advance factory at Washington. Following visits by the company's directors difficulties arose. When it heard about Norton's proposed move, Greater London Council (GLC) attempted to block any deal by insisting that payment of compensation to the firm was conditional upon it only moving to a London overspill area. Although the GLC's stance contravened national policy – the corporation stated as much to the Board of Trade – its position was allowed to stand.

For T. Dan Smith, as chairman of the North East Planning Council, it typified the government's reluctance to enforce its industrial policy with regards to the region's new towns. In a December 1967 letter to Peter Shore, Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, Smith argued that the region faced a loss of about 30,000 coalmining jobs by 1971. This was on top of existing unemployment of over 51,000. Therefore, much more positive action to favour the North East at the expense of more affluent areas needed to be taken to redress the situation:

Much more intensive efforts must be made to bring industry from London to the North East. At present the GLC is negotiating with some 2,000 firms in London over possible moves to new sites – all presumably in new and expanded towns in the South

³² T/88/2 WDC, BM, 6 Feb 1967.

³³ T/88/1 WDC, BM, 29 March 1966.

³⁴ T/88/3 WDC, BM, 8 Jan 1968.

or in London itself. We must have comparable effort put into moving industry by similar means to the development areas.³⁵

Smith was further angered when a report from the South East Planning Council called for certain modifications to the IDC policy to enable firms to move even more easily in the South East's overspill areas.³⁶

The corporation received a huge boost in May 1967, however, when a portion of land in the south-west corner of the designated area controlled by Chester-le-Street UDC, was re-scheduled by the Board of Trade as a Special Development Area (SDA). Because, along with Aycliffe and Peterlee, Washington had been designated as an ordinary development area within the North East growth zone, it had been able to offer potential industrialists grants of up to 25 per cent towards factory building (raised to 30 per cent in 1966 through the Industrial Development Act), and rent-free periods of up to two years.³⁷ From 1967, because it came under the SDA schedule, President of the Board of Trade, Anthony Crosland, announced that the corporation could henceforth offer firms 45 per cent grants towards the erection of factories; tax relief concessions, capital grants, training grants, and rent-free periods of up to five years were also made available, a development which gave the new town an obvious competitive advantage over its industrial rivals.³⁸

There was one drawback: only a small portion of the designated area was eligible for the privileges. The criteria was based on employment exchange statistics and, as Chester-le-Street's figures were particularly high due to a spate of pit closures in the area, only that portion of land that the authority controlled was granted SDA status.³⁹ It was anomalous that Sunderland (in whose boundaries most of the new town was situated) had the largest numbers of unemployed in the northern region but was not granted SDA status, an anomaly

³⁵ NA EW/7/1171 T. Dan Smith to Peter Shore, 1 Dec 1967. See also *HC Debs*, 754, c. 615-620, 16 Nov 1967.

³⁶ NA EW/7/1171 Smith to Shore, 1 Dec 1967

³⁷ Min HL/G, New Town Circular 23 (January 1967).

³⁸ See, for example, McCrone, *Regional Policy*, p. 128.

³⁹ HLG/116/362 J. Whitehouse (BoT) to J. D. W. Janes (H/LG), 8 March 1968.

which Steel pointed out to the Ministry on many occasions, but to no avail.⁴⁰ There was thus only one option left open to the corporation: try to get as much industry as possible into the section of land that was eligible for SDA status. Estates in the southern area of the town such as Crowther and Wear (which was not originally planned to be created until 1972) were developed and opened for business much sooner than was scheduled in the master plan. Others already in operation like Parsons were extended considerably.⁴¹

The corporation's actions proved decisive.⁴² Within two years the town had attracted more than 30 firms. Whilst this was extremely encouraging, the fact that the majority of the firms planned to have mainly male skilled and semi-skilled workers workforces was just as important. With over 30,000 people unemployed in the adjoining area – the vast majority of them men – it was essential for the region as a whole that Washington's success in attracting new industry should continue.⁴³

iii) Washington forges ahead: Aycliffe and Peterlee left in its wake

In industrial terms, the growth of Washington after 1967 had serious consequences for Peterlee's attempts to build up its own economic base. Geographically Washington was more favourably situated: the town was on the edge of the Tyneside conurbation and so was nearer to the North East's primary markets; its easy access to the region's major road network was also a key selling point for potential industrialists. Most important of all, its inclusion in the SDA schedule meant that the town had a considerable competitive advantage over its industrial rivals.

⁴⁰ See, for example, T/WRO T/88/3 WDC, James Steel to Ministry H/LG, 6 May 1968.

⁴¹ WDC, 1969 AR, p. 503.

⁴² See, for example, NA EW/7/1171 Department of Economic Affairs, Northern Region Key Statistics (December 1967). The Special Development Area privileges were reinforced in September 1967 by the introduction of a new Regional Employment Premium which led to an extra £28 million in government assistance in the region.

⁴³ *Washington New Town Review* (Autumn 1969).

Until 1967 as a development area growth point, Peterlee's attempts to attract industry, whilst they were not spectacular, were a steady improvement on the pre-Hailsham years. Allowing Washington SDA status – but not Peterlee or Aycliffe – was in effect an abandonment of the growth point principles embodied in the Hailsham Report, and a return to the old 'blackspots' approach exemplified in the earlier legislation, whereby the Board of Trade 'pepper-potted' factories in individual locations in response to unemployment.⁴⁴ Moreover, the growth of Washington meant that the amount of government capital attracted to the two older towns was much reduced in comparison. As a result, after 1967 Peterlee once again struggled to attract much industry of note.⁴⁵ By the end of 1969 the combined total of workers on the industrial estate was only 3,402, of which 2,163 were women. Considering Joseph's comments in 1962 that by 1970 at least 7,000 jobs were needed on the estate, securing less than half that number was obviously very disappointing.

The situation was further exacerbated with the closure of pits near to Peterlee after 1967. Joseph had identified this as a primary reason for a major growth in employment in the town. In late 1967 such a scenario occurred. Deaf Hill colliery closed, to be followed in 1968 by Trimdon and Wheatley Hill collieries, all of which were within a few miles of Peterlee.⁴⁶ The corporation was understandably confident, therefore, that as was the case at Washington, major pit closures so close to the town would lead to it being granted Special Development Area status.⁴⁷ This was not to be the case. Despite warnings from some officials at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government that the Peterlee employment exchange area could breach the eight per cent male unemployment level eligible for SDA status by 1970,⁴⁸ the Board of Trade refused the new town's claims. The simple fact was that

⁴⁴ McCrone, *Regional Policy*, p. 128

⁴⁵ *NE*, 16 July 1970. The corporation claimed that one firm, which originally planned to go to the new town but had then decided to go to a SDA area, to saved £600,000 by doing so.

⁴⁶ PDC, *1968 AR*, p 267.

⁴⁷ See, for example, HLG/116/362 Williams to G. R. Coles (H/LG), 3 Jan 1968.

⁴⁸ HLG/116/362 J. Earl to R. Metcalfe (Northern Regional Office), 5 Jan 1968.

when research into eligibility was taking place, despite Easington district's initial inclusion, and that there were more unemployed males in Peterlee than in Houghton,⁴⁹ the district was subsequently excluded because the Ministry wanted to keep the SDA privileges to a minimum.⁵⁰ Peterlee was not allowed SDA status until 1971 by which time it had fallen far behind Washington as an industrial location.⁵¹ As far as the corporation was concerned, Peterlee's exclusion was directly responsible for the rapid increase in male unemployment in the town, which in 1970 reached 10.5 per cent – more than twice the national average:

Despite the environmental advantages that can be offered by establishment in the new town, it will be clearly seen that these do not outweigh the greater financial inducements offered to an industrialist moving into an area designated as a Special Development Area ... Whilst [the corporation] has to operate with this disadvantage there is little prospect in the immediate future of any improvement in the local unemployment situation.⁵²

The negative effect was almost immediate, moreover. Firms which had previously shown interest in Peterlee suddenly switched their attention north to Washington.⁵³ The lack of jobs for men became so serious that one local newspaper claimed that Peterlee was proving to be the town 'where men build factories for women to work in', adding that the only means by which men could find work in the town was when another new factory for women was needed.⁵⁴

As might be expected in such circumstances, the outward migration problems that had bedevilled the district during the 1950s began to resurface. Many miners left the area altogether to seek work in more productive pits in other regions. Others remained in the town, but were compelled to travel ever further to find work. A survey of residents in 1971 discovered that only thirteen per cent said that they worked in Peterlee. In Aycliffe, 37 per cent of its residents said the same. Moreover, in South-West Durham there had been a net

⁴⁹ HLG/116/362 K. Allan (PDC) to R. Wood (Regional Director, Ministry of Technology), 6 May 1970.

⁵⁰ HLG/116/362 Metcalfe to Earl, 10 Jan 1968.

⁵¹ Robinson, 'Some aspects', p. 52.

⁵² PDC, 1970 AR, p. 327.

⁵³ NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 4 June 1970.

⁵⁴ NE, 13 Sept 1968.

increase of more than 4,000 jobs between 1961 and 1971; in Peterlee's district there had been a net decrease of more than 5,000.⁵⁵ More than four times more people in Peterlee were also travelling more than 30 minutes to their place of work than in Aycliffe.⁵⁶ It was perhaps not surprising, therefore, that when asked how successful the new town was in attracting industry, a mere twelve per cent of Peterlee's residents agreed that this was the case. This was in marked contrast to Washington, where 48 per cent of residents said that their town was successful in this respect.⁵⁷

A further problem for the corporation, one that had the potential to completely disrupt its industrial plans, was that from 1966 increases in output by firms and the provision of additional jobs began not to correspond.⁵⁸ Up to 1966 output growth and employment (especially for males) in manufacturing were closely linked: demand for men was increasing and firms could be more easily attracted to areas of relatively high unemployment. From 1966 to 1973, however, largely because of technological advances, increases in output ceased to provide additional jobs for men, and in many cases, a general decline in labour intensity in inverse proportion to the capital employed was experienced by firms on the estate.⁵⁹ In 1968 despite 130,000 square feet of new factory space being occupied by firms at Peterlee, there was actually a slight decrease in the number of jobs created on the estate.⁶⁰ When added to the sharp contraction in mining and the resultant high level of redundancies – and the likelihood that at least 7,000 more men would become redundant in the near future – it was clear that a major programme to provide jobs for men was of prime importance. For Williams, however, jobs to replace ones lost in the ailing collieries had to be connected to

⁵⁵ DCC, *Structure Plan*, p. 12.

⁵⁶ NEAS, *New Towns Vol. 2*, p. 62.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵⁸ NT/Pe/1/4/13 PDC, Williams to Wood, 13 July 1966.

⁵⁹ See, for example, R. Ralwell and W. Zegfeld, *Industrial Innovation and Public Policy: Preparing for the 1980s and 1990s* (1981), pp. 52-54.

⁶⁰ PDC, *1968 AR*, p. 272.

more modern technological industries. He claimed that the new towns were ideally placed to accommodate such a development:

The new towns of the North are growth points within the regional economy ... the region has been concerned with the introduction of new employment opportunities to take up redundancies created by the decline of basic industries. The success of the new towns will therefore be judged by their ability to attract industries that are concerned with technological innovation.⁶¹

Industrial land suitable for development and which could provide the numbers of jobs required was in short supply, however. Of the 160 acres of land used for industry at Peterlee, there remained less than 60 acres as yet uncommitted.⁶² It was clear to the corporation and local newspapers, that if the town was not to become 'an overgrown housing estate', the only way to provide the numbers of jobs required in future was to acquire extra land.⁶³ The corporation estimated that about 260 acres of additional land would be needed: enough to attract the newer industries connected with technological innovations such as aircraft components, nuclear power, computers, electronics and pharmaceutical products.⁶⁴ Whilst these types of firms tended to employ fewer workers, they were more likely to outlive some of the less stable industries attracted to the new town in the past.⁶⁵

In addition, the corporation laid great stress in making the town a regional centre for companies specialising in research and development. Historically, a genuine commitment to research and development in the North East had been much less conspicuous than in other parts of the country.⁶⁶ This could be seen by the number of companies in the region. In the late 1960s, of the 46 centres specialising in research in Britain, 43 of them were south of Leeds. There was only one such organisation based in the North East – a company connected with shipbuilding based at Wallsend. Industrialists and politicians alike viewed this as a

⁶¹ A. V. Williams, *Peterlee and the New Technology* (Newcastle, 1969), p. 5.

⁶² NT/Pe/1/4/13 PDC, GMR, 1 Feb 1968.

⁶³ *Peterlee and District Post*, 6 May 1965.

⁶⁴ NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 4 April 1968.

⁶⁵ PDC, 1970 AR, p. 335.

⁶⁶ A. T. Thwaites, R. Oakley and P. Nash, *Industrial Innovation and Regional Economic Development* (Newcastle, 1981), p. 12.

major cause of the region's lack of competitiveness.⁶⁷ For the North East Planning Council, industries that failed to innovate or were unable to introduce new and improved products, were more likely to be superseded by their industrial competitors. It stated that the long-term solution was 'to increase the amount of basic research done within the region by universities and other laboratories under industrial sponsorship', adding that if the region's industry was to keep up with national production 'it should be planning now for the products of the 1970s'.⁶⁸

Part of the problem, however, had been a general reluctance by scientists and other research and development professionals to move north; the South East had traditionally been the location where they felt most content to work. The corporation's solution to this problem was to create an area in Peterlee devoted exclusively to research and development, one which, the corporation hoped, would be sufficiently attractive to tempt research and development scientists to move to the town.⁶⁹ Williams had in mind Stanford University, in America, where its campus acted as a magnet for science-based technology.⁷⁰ An advisory committee which included significant regional representation drawn from Durham and Newcastle universities as well as the region's polytechnics, industry and central government was established in 1968, to advise and assist the development of the centre.

The hope was that once the park was established, research organisations and research-orientated manufacturing companies would be able to provide the main research requirements for industry. In 1968 the corporation received county council and government approval in principle for the science centre which led to expectations that a government-sponsored transport and environmental training centre would be established in the town, especially as the region's universities recommended that Peterlee would be the ideal location

⁶⁷ Labour Party, *Science and the Future of Britain* (1961), pp. 33-34.

⁶⁸ Northern Economic Planning Council, *The Challenge of the Changing North* (Newcastle, 1966), p. 3.

⁶⁹ PDC, *1969 AR*, p. 299.

⁷⁰ A. V. Williams, *The Durham New towns in the Future* (Newcastle, 1969), pp. 3-6.

for the centre;⁷¹ it would also, they suggested, go a long way to establishing its credibility as the science centre for the region.⁷² Also considered was the feasibility of establishing an environmental/technology institute in the park which would focus on problems that were common to the North East, thus placing the town and the centre into a regional context.⁷³ Its geographical location had definite advantages in this respect; it was readily accessible to all of the region's urban centres and was roughly equidistant from Newcastle in the north of the region and Middlesbrough in the south.⁷⁴

The centre became an altogether more likely proposition when Smith was appointed chairman in September 1968. As chairman of the Northern Economic Planning Council from 1965, Smith had argued that the region's outdated industrial structure, with its emphasis on heavy industry urgently needed to be overhauled and replaced by more modern, scientific-based concerns, thus precipitating a 'white-hot technological revolution' in the North East's industrial structure.⁷⁵ His appointment at Peterlee, as he saw it, was an opportunity to put some of his ideas into practice and turn the town into a centre of 21st century excellence and a showpiece which would demonstrate the region's revival.⁷⁶

In November 1968 the American computer firm, IBM, agreed to establish a research and development unit at Peterlee. Initially, the firm located 20 specialists in the unit.⁷⁷ It made a commitment, moreover, that, providing the corporation received government support for the scheme, it would substantially increase the size of the project once the science centre became fully established.⁷⁸ Through IBM's involvement eventually, it was hoped, the region's universities and polytechnics would establish their own centres at Peterlee, thereby

⁷¹ NT/Pe/1/1/6 DCC to PDC, 7 Nov 1968.

⁷² NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 5 Sept 1968.

⁷³ *The Journal*, 24 April 1968.

⁷⁴ *NE*, 24 Sept 1968.

⁷⁵ Robinson, 'Some aspects,' p. 57.

⁷⁶ T. Dan Smith, *An Autobiography* (Newcastle, 1970), p. 130.

⁷⁷ PDC, 1969 AR, p. 299.

⁷⁸ NT/Pe/1/4/14 PDC, Williams to Ministry H/LG, 1 May 1969.

facilitating an interchange of different projects and personnel involved in the research base and industrial production.⁷⁹ ‘In this way’, the corporation wrote in its 1969 annual report, ‘relationships can be established between the centres of technological education, technological industry and research activity at working level’.⁸⁰ For Smith, though, the Peterlee project was to be much more than merely the interrelationship of the various constituent parts in the scheme; his vision was to make the new town the exemplar for a new way for people to organise their lives:

We intend that the universities, existing industry in this region and the country should combine to make sure this research centre will go down in the history of the North East as the beginning of the new period when we moved into the scientific and technological era ... We are out to create a brand new total environment and a new way of living. Peterlee represents the marriage of an idea with a physical possibility.⁸¹

At the same time, both the corporation and IBM were well aware that to attract a higher calibre of scientist and professional worker to Peterlee, amenities and facilities would have to be provided to create an environment where such workers would be content to work and live. For T. P. Rogers, IBM’s British representative, the creation of a technological environment at Peterlee and the creation of an environment appropriate for top-class professionals to work and play were mutually inseparable:

This [Peterlee] project to create in the North East a community based on a design for life in the 1980s, with well-educated people, primarily drawing their livelihood from advanced technology, and using the fruits of advanced technology to provide themselves with a balanced and meaningful life in attractive surroundings ... this dream of a science city demands the full involvement of science and technology, on the one hand, of the arts, including entertainment and sport, and with a complete interaction and integration of activities in the field of industry, education and public service.⁸²

⁷⁹ HLG/1065 PDC, Proposed Research and Development Project, 10 July 1968.

⁸⁰ PDC, 1969 AR, p. 301.

⁸¹ *The Journal*, 30 April 1969.

⁸² NT/Pe/14/14 T. P. Rogers, Newcastle Computer Sciences Seminar Paper, 2 Oct 1969.

In early 1969 Smith sought the advice of the Northern Arts Association on how to cater for scientists and professionals in their leisure time: he was advised that a good arts theatre in the town was essential.⁸³

Later that year the architect, J. G. Poulson, was commissioned to draw up plans for an entertainment and arts centre in the town consisting of a swimming pool, sports hall, theatres, visual arts and science pavilions, an exhibition hall, film theatre and planetarium.⁸⁴ This was not Poulson's first involvement in Peterlee: in 1965 his firm had designed a small shopping centre in the south-west area of the town. He also had contracts at Aycliffe, including the Elmfield site built after 1967. The contract for the proposed arts and sports facilities in Peterlee (largely gained through corporation support from Smith and Alderman Cunningham) was, however, a much bigger and more expensive undertaking and enabled Poulson to get a foothold in the town.⁸⁵

However, as had been the case so many times in the new town's history, events conspired to confound expectations. Smith's arrest on fraud and corruption charges, and subsequent conviction, followed by the arrest and conviction of Poulson and Cunningham, seemed to signal difficult times for the science centre. Furthermore, although approval had been assured in principle from the Labour government, in reality its support for the scheme was lukewarm at best. Ministry of Housing and Local government official, J. E. MacColl, for one, questioned whether IBM, who after all were in competition with British computer firms, should be allowed to entrench itself in Britain.⁸⁶ He also feared that the corporation might be regarded as trying 'to establish a community of long-haired, master-race scientists' in the town.⁸⁷ There was also reluctance from other departments to get involved in the project. The Board of Trade doubted whether many of its industrial concerns, particularly those in

⁸³ NT/Pe/1/4/14 PDC, GMR, 27 June 1969.

⁸⁴ NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 4 Dec 1969.

⁸⁵ NT/Pe/1/4/14 PDC, GMR, 2 Aug 1969.

⁸⁶ HLG/115/1065 J. E. MacColl, Report to the Ministry Housing and Local Government, 15 Oct 1968.

⁸⁷ HLG/115/1065 Visit of J. E. MacColl and R. Marshall to Peterlee, 9 Oct 1968.

consumer goods and raw materials, would be interested in the scheme. Similarly, the Ministry of Technology stated that government-supported research establishments would probably not be willing to move their operations to the North East.⁸⁸ Labour's defeat at the 1970 election, furthermore, meant that the corporation had to convince a whole new set of politicians of the viability of the project.

Despite these setbacks, the corporation was still optimistic that the incoming Conservative government would be as supportive of the scheme as the previous government. Whilst in opposition leading members of the shadow cabinet had offered their provisional support for the science centre. Once in power though, they showed even less enthusiasm for Peterlee's objectives than their predecessors. The transport and environment training centre, which had been so enthusiastically championed for Peterlee by the region's universities was in 1972 awarded instead to Bristol University.⁸⁹ This was a bitter blow for the corporation, not only because it meant the loss of a prestigious training facility, the loss of the centre also adversely affected its relationship with IBM, which had always stipulated that any further developments it might make in Peterlee hinged on whether the corporation could attract government assistance.⁹⁰ When little government aid materialised, the firm withheld from moving to larger premises in the Oakerside area of the town. In 1978, the company shut down its operations in Peterlee altogether.⁹¹

If Peterlee's success in attracting industry was moderate at best post-Hailsham, Aycliffe's was spectacular. During 1964 employment grew by more than 40 per cent. The Board of Trade also promised that a large number of the 5,000 jobs planned for Teesside during the

⁸⁸ HLG/115/1065 Department of Economic affairs, Official Committee on Environmental Planning, 22 Nov 1968.

⁸⁹ NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 7 Sept 1972.

⁹⁰ HLG/115/853 Northern Region Planning Council to Peter Walker (Minister for the Environment), 13 July 1972.

⁹¹ NT/Pe/1/1/8 PDC, BM, 2 Nov 1978.

next two years would be directed to Aycliffe.⁹² More encouraging was the number of male workers on the estate. In 1965, Aycliffe accounted for almost fifteen per cent of male workers on government estates throughout the whole region.⁹³ It seemed as though its success in attracting industry would continue indefinitely. This was not to be the case, however.

To a certain extent, Aycliffe became a victim of its own success. The corporation realised as early as mid-1964 that continued prosperity on the estate depended largely on the ability of industrialists to recruit skilled workers. To help alleviate the problem the corporation, and the town's industrialists, called for the establishment of a local Board of Trade-financed training centre to help re-train redundant miners and workers in other declining industries to meet the shortage of skilled craftsmen.⁹⁴ And yet, three years after the Hailsham Report's publication, the numbers of skilled workers required – especially skilled metal workers – remained in short supply. One newspaper claimed in 1966 that workers serving apprenticeships in the town often had more than half a dozen jobs to choose from once they were time served.⁹⁵ In effect, measures to counter unemployment in the sub-region had quite literally been 'oversolved'.

In early 1965 employers began to express concerns that the shortage of workers was forcing wages 'sky high'.⁹⁶ What was of more concern to Hailsham, who was unequivocal in his desire that there needed to be a massive expansion in training in the region to meet increased job opportunities, and academics such as Dr Peter Bowden from Durham University, who completed a year's research in Aycliffe in 1965, was that facilities to

⁹² Bowden, 'Regional problems', p. 35.

⁹³ Bowden, 'Newton Aycliffe', p. 138.

⁹⁴ ADC, 1965 AR, p. 13; *Evening Gazette*, 24 March 1965.

⁹⁵ *Auckland Chronicle*, 25 Aug 1966.

⁹⁶ *Evening Gazette*, 11 Feb 1965.

remedy the situation were totally absent throughout the whole district.⁹⁷ ‘Aycliffe is in a worse position than Tyneside and other regional centres’, Bowden wrote:

since these at least have the necessary facilities for the training of skilled labour, even though these facilities may still be geared to the needs of declining industries. At Aycliffe, there is not even a grammar school, much less a technical college.⁹⁸

Employers argued that in the absence of such facilities, they were forced to recruit workers from outside the region or develop their own ‘in-house’ training programmes, both of which added to running costs.

The Board of Trade’s response was to stop the influx of new firms arriving at Aycliffe. Instead, from mid-1965 it began prioritising other areas in the sub-region and beyond. Between 1966 and 1973, the Board of Trade directed 38 firms to Washington which benefited most from the situation; during the same period Aycliffe attracted a mere seven government-directed firms. Even within South-West Durham, Bishop Auckland – previously excluded from the growth zone – was the beneficiary of eleven Board of Trade-directed firms between 1966 and 1973.⁹⁹ All of these developments had an obvious impact on the corporation’s activities, occurring as they did at a time when the new town’s extension to a population of 45,000 was being finalised. Slow industrial expansion led to a decrease in the numbers working on the trading estate and increased commuting. At the same time, the corporation’s plans for extending the town were dependent upon industrial growth. The fact was, however, that it could do little to influence proceedings because it still did not control industry on the estate. It was therefore of surprise to very few people in the sub-region when, like Peterlee, Aycliffe (but significantly not Shildon and West Auckland in South-West Durham) was excluded from the Special Development Area schedule in 1967.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ *Hailsham Report*, p. 30.

⁹⁸ *Evening Gazette*, 3 March 1965.

⁹⁹ NEAS, *New Towns* Vol. 2, p. 49.

¹⁰⁰ ADC, *1967 AR*, p. 11.

Also of concern was that government assistance in Aycliffe did not create a sufficiently strong economy in the sub-region to compete with other regions or internationally. The production only branch plants so vigorously coveted by the Board of Trade were not the panacea it had hoped they would be. Factory managers were found to have very little autonomy over purchasing or investment decisions. A consequence was that many firms on the estate were manufacturing products that were vulnerable to the introduction of new technologies both nationally, but more especially abroad, where companies with lower labour costs were able to undercut firms at Aycliffe.¹⁰¹

A further problem was the inordinately large number of small locally-owned firms on the estate. Because of the decline in the region's staple industries, government increasingly focused attention on the development of indigenous industries. In Aycliffe, at the end of 1966 approximately four fifths of companies on the estate employed fewer than 100 workers; two thirds employed fewer than 50.¹⁰² Most catered primarily for local markets, which were considerably less buoyant than those in more prosperous regions. Moreover, as the smaller firms on the estate tended to feel financial repercussions more than the larger undertakings they had less financial latitude in which to operate.¹⁰³ It was also the case, as Storey discovered, that most new firms established in the region between 1963 and 1973 started small, and if they did not fold, remained small: only one in every 200 small firms had more than 100 employees ten years later.¹⁰⁴ The experience of the 1960s also suggested that the more successful a locally-owned company was, the more likely it would be acquired by larger firms based outside the region.¹⁰⁵

The rents charged for factories, according to traders on the estate, were also inhibiting enterprise. In March 1970, D. H. L. Waiter, chairman of Aycliffe and District Traders'

¹⁰¹ Goddard, *The Economic Development*, p. 7.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 9.

¹⁰³ Bowden, 'Newton Aycliffe', p. 135.

¹⁰⁴ D. J. Storey, *Entrepreneurship and the Small Firm* (1982), p. 78.

¹⁰⁵ Goddard, *The Economic Development*, p. 4.

Association, claimed that rents of redundant ordinance factories with poor construction and installation features were more than three and a half times the amount charged in the late 1940s. Also, land rentals were 50 per cent more than comparable costs in Darlington.¹⁰⁶ The cumulative effect was that by 1970 employment on the trading estate had literally stagnated.¹⁰⁷

A solution to the problem, according to the corporation, was for the industrial estate to come under its own control. The difficulty with its arrangement with English Industrial Estates Corporation (EIEC), the Board of Trade's agents, was that EIEC did not only administer the estate at Aycliffe, it also oversaw estates throughout the country from Berwick to Lands End.¹⁰⁸ The corporation's grievance was that while EIEC had so many other undertakings to supervise, it could not possibly give Aycliffe the priority the town increasingly needed. In 1971 the corporation obtained the support of David Reed, MP for Sedgefield, who raised an adjournment debate in Parliament.¹⁰⁹ On 1 April 1973, the estate finally came under corporation control. Henceforth, it claimed, Aycliffe would 'control its own industrial destiny'.¹¹⁰ On 1 January 1974, the corporation acquired a further 566 acres for industrial purposes, which firmly reflected its assumption of responsibility on the estate.¹¹¹

iv) The 1970s: surprisingly productive for all three towns

Despite the tumultuous economic problems in Britain during the 1970s, it was a period of sustained growth for all three North East new towns.¹¹² In Washington, such was the

¹⁰⁶ NA FK/1/22 D. H. L. Waiter to R. Stewart (North East Planning Board), 14 March 1970.

¹⁰⁷ NA FK/1/22 Waiter to Tom Urwin MP (Minister responsible for the North), 14 Oct 1969; *Northern Despatch*, 21 Jan 1970.

¹⁰⁸ Philipson, *Swords*, p. 198.

¹⁰⁹ NT/Ay/1/1/25 ADC, BM, 3 June 1971.

¹¹⁰ NT/Ay/1/1/25 ADC, BM, 5 April 1973.

¹¹¹ ADC, *1974 AR*, p. 5.

¹¹² Northern Regional Strategy Team, *Growth and Structural Change*, p. 11.

corporation's initial success in attracting industry, it quickly realised that changes to the master plan would be required to accommodate the volume of industrial concerns still wishing to locate in the town. It was thus clear by 1969 that the 765 acres originally devoted to industry would not suffice. As had occurred at Peterlee, most of the firms arriving at Washington after 1966 expected to employ comparatively small numbers of operatives; indeed, only thirteen per cent of firms employed more than 100 workers after 1970.

The corporation's solution to this logistical dilemma was to extend the estates, even if it meant altering projects originally planned for the areas. A comprehensive school was sacrificed to enable Wear estate to be extended by 54 acres.¹¹³ Also, a crematorium site, originally devoted to an area adjacent to Stephenson estate, was instead turned into an extension of the estate.¹¹⁴ Even with these measures, the corporation still had great difficulty in accommodating firms. In mid-1969 the decision was taken to discontinue advertising for industry, and instead to target only those growth industries that had security of jobs, high wages and which could bring national and international prestige to the town.¹¹⁵ Thus, a firm manufacturing potato crisps, which wished to move into a 22,000 square feet factory was informed that it would not be allowed to because it did not meet the requirements of the corporation's new industrial strategy.¹¹⁶

For a time the policy worked. It proved to be short-lived, however. In February 1971 the Board of Trade announced that the whole of the designated area was to come within the SDA schedule: within weeks the number of enquiries from firms increased dramatically.¹¹⁷ Thirty companies moved to Washington in 1972 alone, which provided a further 1,100 jobs. By the end of the year, the corporation reported that since designation, more than 100

¹¹³ T/WRO (NA) Master Plan Proposals, 1 Feb 1971.

¹¹⁴ T/WRO (NA) Washington New Town Strategy Report, 21 May 1971.

¹¹⁵ T/88/3 WDC, BM, 14 March 1969.

¹¹⁶ Significantly, in a 1975 survey Washington had twice as many people employed in growth industries than Peterlee. See, for example, R. Hudson and M. R. D. Johnson, 'Industry and Employment in Durham New Towns' (NEAS, 1975), p. 8.

¹¹⁷ DC/WS/1/8 WDC, BM, 8 March 1971.

industrial concerns had located to the town.¹¹⁸ For Stephen Holley and the rest of the corporation board it was important that this should remain the case. Substantial unemployment in the town's surrounding area meant that it was imperative that the quest for more employment should continue. What was more, many of the jobs being created on the estates were merely replacements for those lost through pit closures and the closure of the iron works.

The Tyne and Wear Strategy plan's proposals to counteract unemployment in the sub-region was to increase the amount of land allocated for industry south of the Tyne, even if it meant encroaching into green belt land. The corporation concurred wholeheartedly with the plan's analysis but saw no reason why Washington should not be the main provider for additional employment. It claimed that by extending the town's designated area, its proposed population could be increased from 70,000 to around 96,000. The employment target could then be expanded from its existing target of 38,000 to about 48,000, which would have gone a long way to meeting the sub-region's employment deficit.¹¹⁹ On a visit to the new town in 1971, moreover, Housing Minister, Julian Amery offered the government's support, stating that Washington should 'continue to play an important part in national and regional strategies, both for the relief of congestion in the conurbation and in the stimulation of economic growth'.¹²⁰ However, despite the coherence of Washington's case, it attracted little support from the area's local authorities, many of who were opposed to what they perceived as the corporation's flagrant attempts to attract industry at the expense of their own areas.¹²¹ For the corporation this was an opportunity lost: the procurement of jobs in the South Tyneside area had reached an all time high during the early 1970s due mainly, it claimed, to the existence of the new town.

¹¹⁸ DC/WS/1/9 WDC, BM, 11 Dec 1972.

¹¹⁹ T/WRO (NA), Master Plan Review, 3 Dec 1973.

¹²⁰ HLG/116/649 WDC, Ministerial Visit to the New Town, 19 March 1971.

¹²¹ HLG/115/1022 The Future of Washington New Town, Meeting at Regional Office, 9 Nov 1976; M. J. C. Faulkner (H/LG Regional Office) to W. Hayward (H/LG), 4 April 1977.

It was not only the corporation's ability to attract manufacturing industry that had bolstered the sub-region's employment prospects: its capacity to attract service industry to the new town was also important. In the late 1940s the Reith Committee had emphasised the need for a range of manufacturing and service industries in each new town, principally as a hedge against economic depression.¹²² For most of the mark one new towns, however, manufacturing industry assumed the most importance, largely because of the need at the time to produce goods for export. Historically, moreover, firms employing a preponderance of office staff had generally preferred to locate in cities rather than small towns.¹²³ In the later-designated towns, the need for export-led industrial programmes was less of a priority: the ultimate integration of both manufacturing and service industries in roughly equal measures was therefore stipulated from the outset. At Washington, the master plan envisaged that by 1981 around 57 per cent of employment in the town would be within the service industry sector. Furthermore, the section of the population that benefited the most from the major expansion in office space was undoubtedly the area's women. Female jobs in the new town rose from 20 per cent to 32 per cent, the wages of which helped many families to pay Washington's higher rents.¹²⁴

Both Aycliffe and Peterlee also confounded national economic trends and got industrially stronger as the 1970s progressed. At Aycliffe, the corporation's acquisition of the industrial estate had an almost immediate effect. In April 1974 manufacturing firms on the estate provided more than 500 jobs: it was the first time there had been a net job increase since the beginning of the decade. In its 1975 annual report, the corporation claimed that the worsening national economic situation had had relatively little effect on the pace of development, and that the number of firms on the estate that were expanding, as well as the amount of enquiries from new firms wishing to locate to Aycliffe, had increased

¹²² Reith Committee, *Second Interim Report*, p. 5.

¹²³ Wannop, 'New towns', p. 222.

¹²⁴ R. Hudson, *Women and Work: A Study of Washington New Town* (Durham, 1980), p. 6.

considerably. Moreover, in 1976 the majority of newly-arriving firms expected to employ large numbers of men, which boosted their number to a record high of 6,837 (three times the number working at Peterlee).

Peterlee's industrial fortunes also took a turn for the better during the 1970s due, in no small part, to the corporation's more professional approach to employment generation. In 1977 it reported that more than 500 jobs had been attracted – a remarkable feat considering that unemployment was soaring in East Durham as a whole at the time. What was more impressive was that it occurred when textile and clothing manufacturers on the estate were making hundreds of workers redundant.



Fig. 21: Peterlee advertising on London bus, 1977.

In 1977, in cooperation with Aycliffe and Washington, Peterlee set up an office in the World Trade Centre at St Katherine's Dock in London. At the same time, a publicity campaign in London, most notably on London buses began to bear results.¹²⁵ With assistance from the regional policy research unit at Durham University, moreover, the corporation began sending individual mail shots to firms in America, Scandinavia, West Germany and Japan, as well as the UK. Perhaps the corporation's most impressive result was persuading

¹²⁵ PDC, 1978 AR, p. 271.

the major Japanese firm, NSK, to locate its European plant at Peterlee. The firm, which manufactured ball bearings for the motor industry was in 1975 the first Japanese firm to erect a factory in Europe. It quickly became a major employer on the estate.¹²⁶

v) The corporations' industrial roles come to an end

The success of the three new towns in attracting industry was recognised in September 1978 when Peter Shore, despite declaring that the inner cities should be given extra priority, postponed the proposed dissolution of the corporations, in order that the skills that were enabling the new towns to continue to attract new employment were kept together.¹²⁷ For Stevenson, this represented 'as good a guarantee for continuing in the foreseeable future as anyone could expect'.¹²⁸ As well as helping to end the uncertainty about the future of the corporations, the announcement meant that a longer-term programme of industrial development could be pursued.

In Aycliffe, rising unemployment in the sub-region failed to affect industrial progress in the new town. In 1980, the corporation reported a net gain of 623 jobs, the largest increase in employment in a single year thus far recorded. In all, 19 new companies moved to the town during the year, three of them with an employment potential of over 500. Interest in Aycliffe as an industrial location was at such a high level at the beginning of the decade that only lack of space prevented more industry from arriving.

At Peterlee, too, the new decade promised to be one of continued industrial progress. The county council's 1979 structure plan proposed that Peterlee should continue to be the main centre for the provision of new industry in East Durham.¹²⁹ In 1980 a record 25 companies were attracted to the new town, with the corporation reporting a net gain of 315 jobs created

¹²⁶ PDC, *1975 AR*, p. 277.

¹²⁷ DC/WS/1/9 WDC, BM, 4 Dec 1978.

¹²⁸ HLG/115/853 Dennis Stevenson to Peter Shore, 25 Sept 1978.

¹²⁹ DCC, *Structure Plan*, p. 7.

during the year; this despite the closures of two of the major firms on the estate and the reduction in employment of another. A survey conducted by Durham County Council and Easington and Sedgfield councils seemed to endorse the two new towns' job-creating roles: between 1977 and 1981, Peterlee and Aycliffe had been responsible for providing over 60 per cent of manufacturing jobs in the whole of the county.¹³⁰

In Washington, the 1980s promised to be even more encouraging. In 1980, 51 new firms with potential employment of more than 600 workers were attracted. By the end of the year, the total number of jobs created in the town since its inception had increased to 22,611.¹³¹ The corporation was thus well on its way to reaching its target employment figure of 25,000 by 1985. In November, Environment Minister, Michael Heseltine, announced that the life of the corporations was to be further extended to the end of 1985. The industrial success of the three new towns was assured, it seemed – until the mid-1980s at least. Such confidence was misguided, however. Within months of Heseltine's decision, all three new towns suffered a massive depletion of their industrial bases, together with a concomitant decrease in employment.

During the early 1980s the national recession led to an acute economic downturn in the new towns. At Aycliffe, the corporation predicted as early as February 1980 that an industrial recession was a probability. Stevenson ordered that contact with local companies be maintained, especially subsidiaries, to help cushion the financial blow that was bound to affect them when the economy contracted.¹³² Its plight was not helped when in August 1980 the Ministry downgraded the new town from Development Area status to Intermediary level. The new town, it seemed had once again become a victim of its own success.¹³³ Within

¹³⁰ See, for example, NT/Ay/1/1/26 ADC, BM, 1 July 1982.

¹³¹ WDC, 1980 AR, p. 528.

¹³² NT/Ay/1/1/26 ADC, BM, 7 Feb 1980.

¹³³ ADC, 1981 AR, p. 4.

months the corporation was reporting that the decision had had an extremely detrimental effect on its attempts to procure industry.

In late 1981 employment levels on the estate were the lowest since the corporation took over its management in 1973.¹³⁴ The corporation was dealt a further blow when British Rail announced it was finally about to close its workshops at Shildon. Although it did not affect the new town directly, it had major repercussions for its industrial welfare. Many firms at Aycliffe were reliant on Shildon's continuation, whilst scores of the town's residents also worked at the workshops.¹³⁵

Peterlee's experience of the recession, though significant, was less severe than Aycliffe's. Despite the closure of several major companies during the year, together with an increase in unemployment in the Peterlee travel-to-work area from 16 per cent to 19 per cent, there was a reduction in employment of only 496. Unlike Aycliffe, Peterlee retained its Development Area status. In 1983, moreover, the letting rate increased by almost 63 per cent compared with the previous year.¹³⁶ Peterlee's industrial record was all the more impressive considering that in 1981, Hartlepool, its industrial neighbour, was designated as an enterprise zone, which meant that it could offer far greater financial inducements to incoming industry than Peterlee could, even with its Development Area privileges.¹³⁷

If Peterlee escaped the worst effects of the recession relatively undamaged the same cannot be said of Washington. Between 1979 and 1981 employment fell from 22,500 to 18,500.¹³⁸ In March 1981 the number of manufacturing jobs attracted to the town since its inception had dropped by over 36 per cent.¹³⁹ Part of the problem was that, like Aycliffe, the majority of factories on the estates were subsidiaries of firms based elsewhere and so were

¹³⁴ ADC, 1982 AR, p. 3.

¹³⁵ NT/Ay/1/1/26 ADC, BM, 6 May 1982.

¹³⁶ PDC, 1983 AR, p. 228.

¹³⁷ NT/Pe/1/1/9 PDC, BM, 13 May 1981.

¹³⁸ DC/WS/1/18 WDC, BM, 6 April 1981.

¹³⁹ WDC, 1981 AR, p. 496.

susceptible to closure once the economy nose-dived. Some, including RCA, Rotaprint and Midland Electrical Engineering, closed down their operations at Washington altogether. Others downsized but declared hundreds of redundancies. However, it would be easy to point to the preponderance of subsidiaries as the only explanation for Washington's industrial troubles. For one thing, it was not only Washington that was affected in the sub-region: within a few miles of the new town there was a massive stock of empty factories which ran into several million square feet. Many of the closures at Washington were not branch factories, moreover: a large number of them were locally-owned companies that were forced out of business when the economy plunged.

A second, equally plausible reason for Washington's difficulties was that it (and the region as a whole) did not contain enough new high-tech industries, which could have helped it withstand the economic crisis. In June 1980 the corporation was informed by Nippon Electric Co, manufacturers of integrated circuits, that despite assurances that it would consider moving to Washington, decided instead to move to either Dublin or Livingstone in Scotland, principally because both these areas contained an existing 'micro-electronics background'.¹⁴⁰ Apart from the potential loss of over 1,000 jobs, Nippon's decision illustrated to the corporation that unlike Dublin, the North East lacked equivalent training programmes; unless this was addressed, the corporation stated, the region would struggle to regain its industrial competitiveness.¹⁴¹ As Holley argued in 1980: 'We should train people in the area for the industry of the future not of the past'.¹⁴²

For a number of board members, among them chairman, Grigor McLelland, a further problem at Washington was the industrial relations climate during the 1970s and early 1980s. In 1979 McLelland produced evidence that several potential investors from abroad, including the American company, General Motors, had decided to invest elsewhere in

¹⁴⁰ WDC, 1985 AR, p. 379.

¹⁴¹ DC/WS/1/17 WDC, BM, 9 June 1980.

¹⁴² *The Journal*, 30 June 1980.

Europe, in part because of the number of industrial disputes in Britain. It was agreed, therefore, that it would be helpful if the trade unions could be persuaded to negotiate job agreements in the town familiar to potential American investors.¹⁴³

The high unemployment in the town was also cited as a disincentive by potential firms. In March 1982 male unemployment had increased by 22 per cent from the previous year; the number of unemployed young people had increased by 84 per cent.¹⁴⁴ In some ways this was inevitable. The ease of commuting between Washington and other parts of the Tyne and Wear conurbation meant that the rate of unemployment in the town could not be isolated from that in adjacent districts, where during the early 1980s it was amongst the highest in mainland Britain.¹⁴⁵

From mid-1982 the town's industrial fortunes began to slowly improve. By the end of the year, a net total of 67 jobs had been created. Although it was a paltry number compared with the extraordinary amount of employment created on the estates during the 1970s, it still signified that industrial recovery was possible. By 1984 the town was well on the way to regaining the level of employment lost during the recession. In Tyne and Wear as a whole more than 8,000 jobs were lost during the year, so it was gratifying for the corporation to report that during the same period more than 1,700 jobs had been created on its estates, even though 527 jobs were lost in the year. The corporation also took consolation from the fact that the majority of the jobs lost were from pre-designation indigenous industries and not in new companies. Altogether, all but 150 of the 5,000 jobs in mining and manufacture at the time of designation had gone: the vast majority of the 20,151 jobs in the town had therefore been created in the 20 years since designation.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ DC/WS/1/16 WDC, BM, 5 Feb 1979.

¹⁴⁴ WDC, *1982 AR*, p. 406.

¹⁴⁵ McClelland, *Washington*, p. 1.

¹⁴⁶ WDC, *1985 AR*, p. 380.

By far the corporation's single biggest achievement was the attraction of the giant Japanese car firm, Nissan. In January 1981 the company announced that it was seeking a site for a major car plant in Britain.¹⁴⁷ Bob Tilmouth, who replaced Holley as general manager in 1981, considered that a portion of land to the east of the designated area would be an ideal location.¹⁴⁸ The area was flat and stable and, although a part of it was still in use as a Sunderland Borough Council municipal airport, it was used only very occasionally. In addition, a ready availability of skilled labour ensured that Washington would be favourably positioned when submissions were initiated.

In March, the corporation learnt that authorities from South Wales, North Wales, Humberside and Teesside had also put together packages to attract Nissan. Washington's competitors were also within assisted development districts and so qualified for regional development grants. Like Washington, however, none of them were situated in existing automobile manufacturing areas. In 1984 Nissan reduced the competition to two areas: Washington and Shotton, in North Wales.¹⁴⁹ Although the former did have lower site costs, it seemed that its opportunity had gone when it became known that transport costs would be £3-4 million more expensive in the North East than in North Wales.¹⁵⁰ For Nissan, however, transport costs were not the deciding factor. The lower site costs at Washington plus the corporation and the borough council's willingness to accommodate the firm were ultimately the decisive reasons for its decision to build its plant in the North East.¹⁵¹ On 7 November 1984 the first stone was laid at the Nissan factory. In the first phase of operations, the company intended to employ around 500 workers and promised to be in operation by mid-1986. The factory was subsequently extended in 1988 to produce 100,000 cars per year, with a workforce of 4,000.

¹⁴⁷ DC/WS/1/18 WDC, BM, 12 Jan 1981.

¹⁴⁸ McClelland, *Washington*, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ DC/WS/1/21 WDC, BM, 12 Nov 1984.

¹⁵⁰ McClelland, *Washington*, p. 3.

¹⁵¹ WDC, 1984 AR, p. 369.

At Peterlee, the recession continued to have little effect on the corporation's attempts to attract jobs. In 1983 the letting rate increased by almost 63 per cent. The following year the corporation announced a 19 per cent increase in employment. It seemed as though its goal of creating 5,000 new jobs at Peterlee by the end of 1985 was becoming a distinct possibility. And, although the 5,000 figure was 2,000 lower than the 7,000 jobs it was confidently expecting to create by 1985 in 1979¹⁵² (and 7,000 lower than it stated it would achieve in 1975),¹⁵³ it was still a bold claim considering that other new towns were actually losing jobs during the recession. Only Redditch New Town experienced a greater reduction in its unemployment rate in 1984.¹⁵⁴ More impressively, the jobs were created despite a disturbing rise in unemployment from 16 per cent to 21.6 per cent in the Peterlee travel-to-work area between 1982 and 1985 (at least one village near to the town had a male unemployment rate of 40 per cent). Also, with further uncertainty about the prospect of job losses in the coal industry, Peterlee's role as a provider of employment was vital to the well-being of the area.¹⁵⁵

Of the three towns, Aycliffe came out of the recession faring the least well. Despite attracting 18 new firms to the estate in 1984, as well as major expansions by other major companies, which combined created 614 new jobs, net employment increased only marginally. Significant job losses in electrical engineering and chemical firms, as well as the motor industry, conspired to cancel out the gains. In its annual report, the corporation described its experience at this time as 'running hard to stand still'.¹⁵⁶

The situation improved slightly when the town finally regained its Development Area status in November 1984. By March 1985, however, there were only 8,100 people employed at Aycliffe, which was almost 2,000 workers less than during the 1970s and more than 7,000

¹⁵² See PDC, *1979 AR*, p. 322.

¹⁵³ Hudson and Johnson, 'Industry and Employment', p. 12.

¹⁵⁴ PDC, *1984 AR*, p. 214.

¹⁵⁵ NT/AP/1/1/1 A + PDC, BM, 8 Jan 1987.

¹⁵⁶ ADC, *1984 AR*, p. 3

short of the minimum number which the 1965 master plan for the new town's extension hoped would be employed in the town

For all three towns, industrial enquiries and responses to them were naturally limited because of the prospective dissolution of the corporations in 1985. Moreover, the corporations themselves could do little to assuage firms' fears because of their impending non-existence after 1985. On the whole, it was a very frustrating time for anyone concerned with the towns. In 1984 unemployment was still at an alarmingly high level; and more than 8,000 people left the region altogether, most of them due to a lack of employment opportunities. If anything, the need for the retention of the corporations was even more urgent than it had been in 1963 when the Hailsham Report was published. Then male unemployment in the region was 4.5 per cent; 20 years later it had reached 21.8 per cent.¹⁵⁷

Despite appeals for their continuation, however, the Department of the Environment informed the corporations in May 1984 that it proposed to maintain the wind-up date at the end of 1985, and that their assets were to be passed on to English Estates and the Commission for the New Towns. This was wholly unacceptable to both corporation boards, which argued that not only had there been very little consultation between the Ministry and the boards before the wind up decision had been made, but the division of their functions between a number of different agencies was antithetical to everything they had striven for.¹⁵⁸ In June 1984 the corporations gained support for their continuation from the CBI, their respective local authorities and MPs from all parties from throughout the northern region. In July, the corporations put their case to Lord Bellwin, Minister for Local Government who, during a visit to the region, confessed that he was surprised at the breadth and strength of feeling in the North East, which favoured retention of the corporations in a job procurement capacity. On 1 August, Straker, McLelland, the chief executives of the two corporations, as

¹⁵⁷ WDC, *1983 AR*, p. 375.

¹⁵⁸ McClelland, *Washington*, p. 17.

well as local MPs and councillors, attended a further meeting with Patrick Jenkin, Environment Secretary. This meeting proved to be decisive. In March 1985, the Department reversed its earlier decision and granted both corporations an extension until the end of 1988.

In Washington, industrial enquiries increased dramatically. In 1986 the corporation let more factory floor space than ever before. There was also a concomitant increase of 962 in the number of workers; and over two thirds of the increase was in manufacturing. The increase was in sharp contrast to the situation in the northern region as a whole where the total number of jobs fell by a further 6,000 during the year.

Washington also generated substantial indirect employment as a result of Nissan's presence. In all, seven major Japanese companies – not all of them directly connected with Nissan as component suppliers – ranging from radios to electronics and white goods had become established on the estates by 1986. Moreover, within a year of it becoming established in Washington in 1991, a British firm, Alfas Industries, a sealant company, had sold over 100,000 metres of sealant tape to Nissan.¹⁵⁹

The Ministry's decision was also accompanied by profound changes at Peterlee and Aycliffe. On 1 July 1985 as part of the agreement to postpone the demise of the corporations, Aycliffe and Peterlee were united into a single business entity; Peterlee's functions were dissolved and transferred to Aycliffe, renaming the new body Aycliffe and Peterlee Development Corporation. As with Washington, the news that the life of the corporation was to be prolonged helped to reinvigorate industrial interest in the towns. A total of 703 jobs were created at Aycliffe in 38 new factories in 1986. At Peterlee, there were 19 new arrivals, which provided nearly 340 jobs. Even allowing for job losses at Peterlee due to the ongoing contraction of the textile and clothing industries, nearly 550 additional jobs were created

¹⁵⁹ *SE*, 15 April 1991.

during the year. Altogether, nearly 1,100 more people were in work in the town than at the same stage in 1984, a 19 per cent increase in jobs gained in only two years.

The good times for the towns did not last for long, however. When the Department of the Environment agreed to the corporations' extension in 1985, in return, they were forced to accept considerable cuts to their budgets, linked to equally substantial staff cuts, with the prospect of limited capital spending in future years. At Washington, the cuts meant that not only was there no approval on the corporation's future programme of employment generation, it would have the resources to erect only the minimum amount of factory space to maintain its existing factory stock.¹⁶⁰ In 1986, despite the corporation possessing its own funds for factory building, the Ministry approved only 50,000 square feet of factory space – less than six week's supply at the peak lettings rate. As a result, lettings plummeted, virtually to zero.¹⁶¹ For the corporation, the limitations imposed by the Department effectively thwarted its ability to attract industry to the new town altogether:

The corporation board have considerable anxiety about the possible absence of Treasury funding for the construction of urgently needed medium and large advance factories. By mid-1986, there will be no units available in Washington which are larger than 750 sq metres ... A consequence of this interruption in our building programme is that new lettings for 1986/87 and jobs generated thereby are bound to be well below and possibly only half of those achieved in 1985/86.¹⁶²

Its protests were to no avail: in 1987 the town ran out of new factories altogether.

Environment Minister, Nicholas Ridley, moreover, confirmed that there would be no funding for factory building in 1988. He did suggest that the corporation approach English Estates about building the accommodation required. But when approached, English Estates claimed that it had had no correspondence from the Ministry about such a proposal. It also said that

¹⁶⁰ McClelland, *Washington*, p. 16.

¹⁶¹ See, for example, DC/WS/1/23 WDC, BM, 10 Feb 1986.

¹⁶² WDC, *1986 AR*, p. 281.

its funds were limited, and would have other priorities for factory building in any case, particularly in urban development areas.¹⁶³

It was a similar picture in Aycliffe and Peterlee. Even before the decision to extend the lives of the corporations in 1985, the corporations expressed concern about the lack of approval for certain sizes of factory units. Once the decision to extend their life was made there was further concern that, despite assurances from the Ministry that the new towns would have parity with Washington, at £4.4 million, the latter's capital allocation was more than double that of both Aycliffe and Peterlee's combined capital spending of £1.8 million. The Department did attempt to assuage them by promising that additional funds for 'reserve' items would be looked upon favourably. But, as their name implied reserve items were not always certain of achievement, and reliance would have to be placed on the Ministry's willingness to review the situation sympathetically.¹⁶⁴ In any event, the corporation received very little assistance from the Ministry in its quest to obtain funds.¹⁶⁵

At the same time the corporations also had to contend with their impending dissolution and the potential effect it would have on the procurement of industry. Unlike in Scotland, no single agencies existed in the region that could develop and market the new towns as effectively as the existing arrangements.¹⁶⁶ The Commission for the New Towns was London-based and would therefore have difficulty in 'commanding confidence or recognising the regional dimension'.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, it was essentially a property realisation agency; what was needed was not realisation but development in the interest of jobs. There were also reservations about English Estates. Whilst the agency had had some success in building development, it continued to fail in the key area of job creation. In December 1986,

¹⁶³ McClelland, *Washington*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁴ NT/Pe/1/1/9 PDC, BM, 3 May 1985.

¹⁶⁵ NT/AP/1/1/1 A + PDC, BM, 7 Feb 1986.

¹⁶⁶ NT/AP/1/1/1 A + PDC, BM, 1 May 1986. The former Trade and Industry Secretary, Leon Brittan, called in 1987 for a development agency to be set up in the region, principally to help narrow the gap between the North East and the South. See, for example, *The Journal* 15 Jan 1987.

¹⁶⁷ McLelland, *Washington*, p. 18.

however, new Environment Minister, John Patten, reiterated the government's view that the corporation's tenure in charge of the new towns would end on 31 March 1988. It was decided that residual assets would pass to the Commission for the New Towns and that English Estates would be able to buy the industrial assets.¹⁶⁸

vi) The new towns' industrial performances: a mixed record

As pivotal parts of the North East growth zone, all three new towns greatly benefited as a result of the Hailsham Report. However, the degree to which each profited from the report was contingent upon a number of variables.

Aycliffe initially performed well after 1963: it had gained a reputation as a centre of motoring and light engineering which enabled the town to capitalise on renewed efforts by the Board of Trade to direct industry to the North East. It could not sustain its favourable position in the region, however. The lack of skilled workers in the area together with ongoing uncertainties surrounding the proposed size of the town combined to prevent it from realising its industrial potential. By the time these problems were addressed, the Board of Trade was directing industry elsewhere in the region (most notably to Washington).

Compared to what occurred before, the years after 1963 were very propitious for Peterlee. This was perhaps not so surprising, however. Between 1948 and 1963 no other new town in the country had attracted as little industry. Nevertheless, the improvements to the town's surrounding roads and the creation of more industrial land ensured that it could at last begin to address the chronic shortage of employment in the district. However, the steady increase in industry arriving was abruptly halted once it became known that the town was not included in the Board of Trade's Special Development Area schedule. Despite innovative attempts by the corporation to remedy the situation, including the re-branding of the town as

¹⁶⁸ DC/WS/1/23 WDC, BM, 16 May 1988.

a world-class research and development centre, Peterlee's location, its negligible history as an industrial centre and lack of official support for the corporation's aims combined to ensure that it did not come to fruition.

In part, Peterlee's difficulties were a consequence of Washington's phenomenal rise as an industrial force. The latter's location at the heart of the Tyne and Wear conurbations assured the town of its hegemonic position in the region. Its inclusion in the SDA schedule, moreover, further guaranteed that Washington would be unrivalled as a new industrial centre in the North East. It was significant that, despite the loss of nearly 40 per cent of the employment created in the town during the national economic recession during the early 1980s, Washington still had twice as much employment as Aycliffe and Peterlee combined.

Housing Developments in the New Towns, 1963-88

This chapter will show first, how the three new towns attempted to meet the challenge set by Hailsham by substantially increasing their housing programmes.¹ The second part deals with the rent increases imposed in the towns during the 1960s and the affect they had on the towns' residents. Part three assesses attempts by the corporations and government to increase owner-occupation in the new towns, which became more widely accepted during the 1960s as an inevitable consequence of increased affluence.² The fourth part investigates how the communities in the towns were affected by the different types of tenure which occurred in the new towns from the mid-1960s onwards. The final part assesses the conclusion of the corporations' roles as housing providers following the government's decision during the mid-1970s to transfer housing to the towns' respective local authorities.

i) A faster method of building

The changed emphasis on industrial development in the new towns post-Hailsham was mirrored by a transformation in the region's built environment, of which the new towns played a significant role. For Hailsham future housing policy in the region and the attraction of industry were inextricable parts of the same programme.³ In 1963 more than half of the region's 950,000 housing stock had been built before 1914, much of it in the 19th century. Of these, 37,000 were classified as slums.⁴ In County Durham, moreover, every fourth house still had no internal bath, every fifth no hot water, and there were still 19,751 houses without an inside toilet.⁵ It was a similar story in Washington prior to

¹ Min HL/G, New Town Circular 58 (February 1968).

² Aldridge, *The British New Towns*, p. 126.

³ *Hailsham Report*, p. 15.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 24.

⁵ DCRO F/22 1961 *Census (County Durham)*, p. viii; *NE*, 15 Dec 1963.

designation. In 1963 its landscape was largely comprised of slag heaps, derelict land and an appreciable amount of obsolete housing.⁶

For Hailsham such conditions were not only obstacles to the creation of a pleasant environment in which to live; they were fundamentally responsible for the continued migration from the North East of many thousands of its population. Of the 63,000 people that left the region between 1951 and 1961, many cited the lack of decent housing as a major reason. At the same time, the attraction of highly-qualified key workers, a large number of whom were desperately needed to re-invigorate the region's industrial development, was made all the more difficult due to inferior housing. 'Quite apart from the social needs, a faster rate of building is needed in the North East for sound economic reasons', Hailsham wrote in 1963, 'By making the region a better place to live it should enhance its power to retain, or attract, the confidence of the people, especially key workers of all grades, necessary for expanding enterprise'.⁷ He decided that a radical house-building programme was the only solution: the aim was to reach an annual building rate of 25,000 as quickly as possible. To this end, the new towns were expected to provide a significant number of the new houses.⁸

In Aycliffe, Hailsham's proposal that the target population should be increased from 20,000 to 45,000 by 1974 entailed a major growth in the corporation's house-building programme.⁹ And, although his suggestions were wholeheartedly welcomed by the majority of corporation board members, there were some reservations about whether existing building resources in the sub-region could meet the objective of completing the town within the time span he believed possible. In its 1964 annual report the corporation stated: 'Owing to the increased demands made on the building industry in the North East

⁶ WDC, *Master Plan*, p. 12.

⁷ *Hailsham Report*, p. 16.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 25-26.

⁹ See Bowden, 'Newton Aycliffe', p. 116.

by the government's proposals for revitalising the region, it is doubtful whether existing resources could meet the programme envisaged by the corporation of completing the town within ten to twelve years'.¹⁰ Such concerns were also expressed by the area's local authorities at a public enquiry into the proposals in November 1967. Most officials at the enquiry declared their opposition to the time-scale of Hailsham's proposals and the effect they would have on the sub-region's own building programmes:

The essence of the councils' objections is the rate of growth and how the population should be built up to 45,000. A much longer period should be considered in encouraging migration from the southern area of the county. The development corporation is trying to build it up at too early a date and are being unrealistic in its proposals.¹¹

Nevertheless, plans to expand the town in the time-scale recommended were given Ministry approval in April 1968, and building of the new houses commenced in the summer of that year.

In Washington, such was the lack of adequate housing – both in quantity and quality – at the time of its designation, the corporation started on its housing programme before the master plan was even published. In 1964 there were 6,750 dwellings in the town; the master plan envisaged the construction of 20,200 more houses. Of this total, 2,625 houses were required to replace existing ones, giving a net addition of 17,575, bringing the total housing stock to 24,325. An early start was therefore essential if the corporation was to fulfil its pledge of accommodating an 80,000 population in ten-to-fifteen years.¹²

In 1966 the corporation agreed to take over a Washington UDC housing project at Edith Avenue, which was eventually incorporated into Sulgrave Village.¹³ In return, the corporation consented to a proportion of the houses being made available for people on the

¹⁰ ADC, 1964 AR, p. 5.

¹¹ *Auckland Chronicle*, 2 Nov 1967.

¹² Holley, *Quicker*, p. 68.

¹³ T/WRO UD/WS/1/35 WUDC, Minutes, 2 Nov 1965.

council's waiting list.¹⁴ The housing scheme, it promised, would be unlike any other housing project yet attempted in the area. To provide more variety, different types and colours of bricks was a feature of the houses. The housing groups were generally in terraced form, linked by attractive landscaped footpaths, leading to communal facilities and an inter-village walkway system. The plans also provided for 100 per cent garaging or parking space, with an additional 75 per cent car space per house for visitors and second cars. The most impressive feature of the 250 houses built on the estate was that they were built with five to ten per cent more living room than Parker Morris recommendations.¹⁵

In 1967 the corporation unveiled plans for a 250-house project at Barmston village, a green field site which, it claimed, would perfectly demonstrate the ambitious principles of the master plan. The village designed by the noted consultant planner, Llewellyn Davis, as well as containing a whole host of superior features hitherto unheard of in British social housing, was the first place in Britain to have linkage to a co-axial combined communication system to supply television signals.¹⁶ In Donwell village, a certain number of the houses were furnished by the superior shopping outlets, Bainbridge of Newcastle and Binns of Sunderland.¹⁷

A district heating scheme to cover most new villages in the town was also planned.¹⁸ In October 1968 approval was given to the appointment of Oscar Faber as consultant.¹⁹ Faber, who had previously been commissioned as consultant at Aycliffe's ill-fated district heating scheme during the early 1950s,²⁰ reported that technology had advanced to such an extent

¹⁴ T/WRO T/88/1 WDC, BM, 20 Dec 1965.

¹⁵ In 1959, the Ministry of Housing appointed a committee under Sir Parker Morris to investigate how houses built in Britain could be improved. The report *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (1961) concluded that new houses needed to contain much more living space than pre-war houses. To build at five to ten per cent above these recommendations was thus a bold step for the corporation to undertake in 1966.

¹⁶ Holley, *Quicker*, p. 70; *Washington New Town Review* (Winter 1968/69).

¹⁷ WDC, 1968 AR, p. 435.

¹⁸ T/88/1 WDC, BM, 7 June 1966.

¹⁹ T/88/3 WDC, BM, 7 Oct 1966.

²⁰ See above, pp. 94-96.

during the intervening years that a scheme to cover most of the town was feasible. At Edith Avenue it was agreed that some of the houses could be heated using the existing NCB boiler house. At Sulgrave village, Associated Heat Service produced a district heating scheme at a cost of £47,000. At Glebe and Albany, terms had been agreed to provide block heating.

In Peterlee, the corporation believed that through the use of the 'Skarne' system of building developed in Sweden it had found a way of building without the need for excessive amounts of materials or large numbers of skilled workers. The system cut out the onerous brick-by-brick construction on a building site and replaced it with factory-made pre-cast concrete elements. The prepared units were then taken to the building site and erected with the help of cranes, thus eliminating the need for complicated scaffolding. Building supplies such as doors and fittings were delivered to a central warehouse, where they were made up into packages and delivered to site.²¹ The end result was a considerable saving in time, building materials and labour. In all, a four-story block of houses containing 20 apartments could be erected in about 20 days, and the total house completed and finished within two months.²²

In 1964 Crudens of Musselburgh, the British licensees of the system opened a factory in the new town which was specifically designed to manufacture components – the first industrialised factory in a new town in the country.²³ In November 1965 Housing Minister, Richard Crossman, opened the 5,000th house built in the new town since designation, which happened to be a Skarne-constructed house. Overall, Crossman expressed his satisfaction both with the design and quality of the house,²⁴ and affirmed his desire that

²¹ NT/Pe/1/4/11 PDC, GMR, 4 May 1963.

²² NT/Pe/1/1/3 PDC, BM, 2 April 1964.

²³ PDC, 1965 AR, p. 250.

²⁴ PDC, 1966 AR, p. 235.

industrialised methods of building ought to be encouraged.²⁵ By 1967, 42 per cent of all housing in British new towns was by such methods of building.²⁶

For Aycliffe Development Corporation, the introduction of the new system was particularly welcomed: it helped considerably to keep costs lower in its attempts to expand the town during the 1960s. 'The upward spiral of building costs and its reflection in the increased level of house rents has caused the corporation much concern', it wrote in its 1965 annual report 'it is hoped that the extensive use of the industrialised method of house building will help to stabilise building costs'.²⁷ The assumption was that the new system would lead to a steady increase in the number of houses built annually until a completion rate of 600 houses per year was achieved by 1969.²⁸



Fig. 22: Industrialised-built housing in Aycliffe

In Washington, a 540-house Taylor Woodrow system was built at Blackfell village in 1967. It was agreed, however, that preference in the scheme be given to the use of concrete

²⁵ Min HL/G, New Town Circular 2 (December 1965).

²⁶ Schaffer, *The New Town Story*, p. 109.

²⁷ ADC, 1965 AR, p. 6.

²⁸ See for example NA EW/7/1171 Department of Economic Affairs, Northern Region Key Statistics (December 1967). In 1967 the number of houses built in the region reached record levels, mainly as a result of the introduction of industrialised methods. See also NT/Ay/1/1/24 ADC, BM, 6 Feb 1964.

and timber for external finishes.²⁹ The use of newer materials such as asbestos was also limited until fully proven.

It became apparent over time, however, that the Skarne-built houses had design deficiencies which, rather than contributing to a quicker completion rate, actually caused a reduction in the rate of completions.³⁰ They were also less robustly built than was first thought. Much of the Crudens housing stock, particularly in the Howletch and Sunny Blunts areas of Peterlee, and Williamfield area of Aycliffe, was poorly finished and was shown to be neither rain proof nor draught proof.³¹ Instructions were issued in 1969 that no further houses were to be accepted by the corporations until extensive remedial work had been carried out.³² The building materials on the houses were also found to be entirely inadequate, so much so that the NCB refused its earlier compensatory agreement with Peterlee Development Corporation with regards to housing subsidence on the grounds that the mortar used by Crudens on the houses did not comply with the specifications originally agreed to.³³

The houses also proved more expensive to heat than was first contemplated. For one Peterlee tenant heating bills were nearly double the 18 shillings per week first quoted, which had left her financially distressed as a result:

The cost of running these [Skarne] houses is beyond our means. The majority of tenants will have to request alternative accommodation, although they are reluctant to do so. We ask that something be done to ease the situation, as at the moment it is giving rise to great anxiety and unrest. Only Paul Gettys can afford these bills.³⁴

The introduction of cost yardsticks under the 1967 Housing Subsidies Act created further problems as the houses were found to be costing ten per cent more to construct than

²⁹ T/88/2 WDC, BM, 3 April 1967.

³⁰ See for example Robinson, 'Peterlee', p. 114.

³¹ *Peterlee Chronicle*, 7 May 1976.

³² NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 3 April 1969. See also PDC, *1970 AR*, p. 325.

³³ NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 4 Sept 1969. The sudden collapse of an industrially-built tower block in Ronan Point in London in 1968, due to a gas explosion also gave rise to much concern about the safety of such buildings. See for example J. Stevenson, 'The Jerusalem that failed? The rebuilding of post-war Britain', in T. Gourvish and A. O'Day (eds), *Britain Since 1945* (Basingstoke, 1991), p. 105.

³⁴ *Peterlee Post*, 8 April 1965. See also *NDM*, 7 March 1965.

the yardstick limit. In 1968 the government's auditor-general appeared to confirm this when he discovered that the average cost per house in two new town estates was in excess of £200 than by traditional building.³⁵ This also appeared to be the case in Easington district, where rents of comparable traditionally-built houses were found to be half those of the industrially built houses in the new town.³⁶ These findings were enough for the corporations in all three new towns to reconsider their housing policies. In 1970 the Crudens factory closed down altogether.

A feature common to the houses, furthermore, was their disproportionately high maintenance costs.³⁷ In Peterlee, upon taking control of the corporation in 1971, Dennis Stevenson quickly recognised that an effective repair and maintenance programme would be necessary to maintain the housing stock at even the most rudimentary level. In 1974 the corporation initiated a five-year remedial programme;³⁸ but in 1975 alone, the maintenance department had undertaken 23,347 repairs. By 1976 approximately half of the corporation's rent income was spent on repairs.³⁹ Moreover, the average annual repairs expenditure on housing was about £103 against a national average for housing authorities of £62. A government directive issued in March 1975 to hold their level of expenditure to the same amount per dwelling in 1974 further exacerbated the difficulties.⁴⁰ It got even worse in September 1977 when, following a severe storm, more than 2,300 cases of water penetration were reported.⁴¹ It came as a surprise to few people, therefore, that in a NEAS survey, considerably more tenants in Aycliffe and Peterlee answered that their houses were

³⁵ Schaffer, *The New Town Story*, p. 109.

³⁶ HLG/115/1065 MacColl to Marshall, 9 Jan 1968.

³⁷ See for example NT/Ay/1/1/24 ADC, BM, 1 July 1965.

³⁸ *Peterlee Chronicle*, 29 Nov 1974.

³⁹ PDC, 1976 AR, p. 277.

⁴⁰ DoE, New Town Circular 387 (March 1975).

⁴¹ PDC, 1977 AR, p. 274.

not of high quality than tenants in Washington, whose housing programme was not fully operational when industrialised housing systems were halted in the towns.⁴²

However, Washington had its own housing problems. In 1968 the corporation was informed by the Ministry that its plans to construct housing five to ten per cent above Parker Morris recommendations contravened housing cost yardstick guidelines.⁴³ For Llewellyn Davis, however, the Ministry's directives were totally unacceptable: they would, he claimed, not only lead to a reduction in design and quality, there was the further danger of unbalanced communities being created when economic rather than socially-desirable criteria were used when determining house types.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, a number of housing schemes were modified or scrapped altogether. In 1970 the corporation was informed that terraced housing built on a radius at Barmston would place the design outside yardstick approvals.⁴⁵ It also reluctantly agreed not to provide wall cupboards, double-glazing and full central heating on Barmston housing estates began in 1968.⁴⁶ In 1972 a strike by the building trades brought the new town's housing programme to a halt altogether. Even once it had ended a shortage of bricks prevented builders from continuing where they had left off.⁴⁷ A direct consequence was that houses completed the following year were in short supply; even key workers found great difficulty in obtaining a house.⁴⁸

As with Peterlee and Aycliffe, Washington also had its fair share of complaints from tenants about the appearance and condition of the housing. At Edith Avenue, the district council had been reluctant to endorse the corporation's innovative proposals for the housing scheme, so much so that it temporarily refused the corporation's builders access to

⁴² NEAS, 'New Towns Vol. 2', p. 98.

⁴³ Hole et al, *Washington*, p. 52.

⁴⁴ T/WRO T/88/3 WDC, BM, 10 June 1968.

⁴⁵ DC/WS/1/7 WDC, BM, 1 June 1970.

⁴⁶ T/88/3 WDC, BM, 9 Sept 1968.

⁴⁷ DC/WS/1/9 WDC, BM, 10 July 1972.

⁴⁸ WDC, 1973 AR, p. 631. See also *Washington Echo*, 27 March 1973.

the site.⁴⁹ In 1970, moreover, a large number of tenants criticised the Llewellyn Davis-designed houses, many arguing that they preferred the traditional external appearance of the houses from where they had come from.

The way the houses were constructed also attracted quite a lot of dissatisfaction. At Glebe village many of the houses suffered from water penetration. One member of the corporation board referred in particular to a type of frost-coating on outside walls where dampness was penetrating into dwellings. He also complained about the delay between tenants' grievances being received by the corporation and the remedial work being carried.⁵⁰ The heating system installed into Glebe's houses also caused much discontent. At Barmston village, residents organised a petition to complain about the inadequacy of the electrical central heating system. Some tenants had been asked to pay £9 per week for a heating system that was not producing heat at the required time.⁵¹ Also of significance was that, despite the corporation insisting in the master plan that through the judicious way it had sited its housing developments, it had discovered the best form of community interaction in attractive surroundings, in a survey of the three new towns, Washington's residents rated the area in their immediate vicinity as the least successful in this respect.⁵²

ii) The perennial problem of rent increases in the towns

Campaigns by residents in Aycliffe and Peterlee, as well as Washington, were not uncommon during the 1960s, not only to protest against the state of their houses, but also the cost in rents they were compelled to pay to live in them. In the earlier-designated towns, there were three rent rises between 1963 and 1969, the first being the most severe. In 1963, on average, weekly rents were increased in Peterlee by six shillings and

⁴⁹ Holley, *Quicker*, p. 69.

⁵⁰ DC/WS/1/13 WDC, BM, 10 Jan 1977.

⁵¹ DC/WS/1/13 WDC, BM, 4 July 1977.

⁵² NEAS, 'New Towns Vol. 2', p. 96.

sixpence.⁵³ Compared to an average rise of three shillings and six pence in 1960, the latter increase obviously had more of an impact on tenants. It was noted by Thorntree Gill residents that their rents had increased by 78 per cent between 1952 and 1963. At the same time, rents for council houses in nearby villages continued to be much cheaper. Tenants were further enraged when they learned that their rents were on average double those of equivalent houses in Glenrothes New Town in Scotland, despite both towns having the similar original function of catering for scattered mining communities.⁵⁴

This was because unlike in England, economic rents were not charged in Scotland. For Peterlee's political parties and the newly-formed Rent and Ratepayers' Association, the latest increase was a step too far. The Labour party demanded that the corporation board be sacked and its accounts opened to public scrutiny.⁵⁵ When this did not happen, it urged the town's residents not to pay the extra charges, at least until party members could make representations to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. What was equally galling was that the earnings differential between the southern and northern new towns did not lead to special consideration given to the latter with regards to housing subsidies.⁵⁶ The parish council also pointed out that unlike towns where the high level of wage earning in a variety of industries could compensate for the charging of economic rents, in Peterlee, which lacked a concentration of industry, the charging of high rents laid a heavy burden on residents.⁵⁷

Aycliffe had its own rent controversy the following year. In February 1964 average weekly rent rises of three shillings and sixpence signalled a storm of protests.⁵⁸ What disturbed one local councillor was that the corporation's general account had shown a large

⁵³ *NDM*, 9 Feb 1963.

⁵⁴ *NDM*, 27 March 1963.

⁵⁵ *PPC*, Minutes, 8 Feb 1963. See also *NDM*, 14 Feb 1963.

⁵⁶ *PDC*, 1966 *AR*, p. 251.

⁵⁷ *NT/Pe/1/4/11 E. Neat* (clerk of *PPC*) to Williams, 1 March 1963.

⁵⁸ *ADC*, 1964 *AR*, p. 8.

surplus the previous year, yet when the corporation at Peterlee had shown a great loss during the same period, rents had not increased in the town.⁵⁹ On top of this, in Aycliffe the corporation decided to arrange for Rediffusion to install its television service in every rented dwelling in the town without consulting residents. As a result, rents were increased by a further one shilling and three pence, whether the tenant wished to use Rediffusion's service or not.⁶⁰

Washington's rents, as might be expected from a town with only relatively new houses, were considerably higher than those charged in its surrounding area. In its 1967 annual report the corporation argued that, despite the level of subsidies proposed in the 1967 Housing Subsidies Bill,⁶¹ the rents charged would continue to be well above those prevailing in the region but that it would be ultimately 'justified financially as well as socially, but during the early years heavy deficiencies are inevitable'.⁶²

Of equal concern to the corporations was the alarming rise in housing repairs and maintenance costs, which added considerably to their housing revenue accounts. In Peterlee between 1963 and 1964 the costs rose from £14,000 to £20,000. The amount permitted by government to cover them, however, remained at £14 per house.⁶³ As a result, by 1965 the overdrawn balance on the account had reached £56,000. For Williams, the amount allowed for repairs in Peterlee was entirely unrealistic because the corporation had faced particularly challenging problems when attempting to construct the new town on land near an active coal extraction site. A higher standard of maintenance was thus vital if the corporation was to allay tenants' fears. As rents were appreciably higher than those charged by local authorities, furthermore, Peterlee's tenants were quicker to demand repairs, especially internal repairs.

⁵⁹ *Auckland Chronicle*, 2 April 1964.

⁶⁰ *NE*, 24 Sept 1964.

⁶¹ Min HL/G, New Town Circular 30 (March 1967).

⁶² WDC, 1967 AR, p. 404.

⁶³ NT/Pe/1/4/11 Winter and Co (Auditors) to Williams, 6 July 1964.

The corporation's solution was to transfer some of the costs to the tenants themselves.⁶⁴ Williams suggested that if tenants tackled some of the minor day-to-day repairs it would help reduce maintenance costs, and would greatly aid the maintenance department by freeing it up to do more essential jobs. Residents were not overly impressed, however. A survey revealed that of four new towns, Aycliffe with 61 per cent had the highest number of residents who were dissatisfied with the management of repairs and the time workmen took to execute them.⁶⁵ In Peterlee, moreover, the Rent and Ratepayers' Association argued that rents were far higher than in the town's surrounding area, where tenants were not compelled to pay for their own repairs. The Association therefore recommended that tenants in both towns resist the corporation's suggestions. In 1967 the Association went further when it put up a candidate in the county council elections. Campaigning on a platform of lower rents the Association member actually beat the incumbent Labour party county councillor.⁶⁶

For those families not in well-paid employment the rent rises undoubtedly contributed to economic hardship. The number arrears increased considerably in both Aycliffe and Peterlee; as did the number of evictions. An example in Peterlee occurred in August 1963 when the corporation evicted a family of ten. J. Ganning, an unemployed sea coal gatherer, had been advised to seek assistance from Easington RDC, but it refused to help. 'Things just seemed to get on top of us', he stated following his family's eviction, 'and we got into arrears. We did not want to come to Peterlee in the first place because the rents were too high, but we were living in condemned property and had to move'.⁶⁷ In 1969 the problem got so bad that the corporation was forced to change its policy of recovering arrears

⁶⁴ NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 7 Oct 1965; *Northern Despatch*, 1 March 1965; *Auckland Chronicle*, 4 March 1965.

⁶⁵ Cullingworth and Karn, *The Ownership*, p. 75.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Robinson, 'Peterlee', p. 69.

⁶⁷ *SE*, 1 Aug 1963.

through the county courts because it required constant supervision and the costs involved were becoming too expensive.

In 1967 following heavy criticism from Richard Crossman of housing authorities that did not have rent rebate schemes in place, the government introduced a series of measures to help lower-paid families remain in the towns. Using evidence from the Institute of Municipal Treasurers, he claimed that in 1965 out of every five housing authorities in England and Wales, only two had rent relief schemes at all. Furthermore, about three in ten tenants with annual household incomes of £500 or less were paying more than a fifth of their incomes on rent. Nearly 98 per cent of those on £1,000 per year were paying less than a tenth of their income on rent. For Crossman, this was not only morally indefensible: it was thoroughly bad housing management.⁶⁸ He further maintained that the government paid subsidies to housing authorities, which in 1966 were running at the rate of nearly £80m in England alone, but authorities were in general taking advantage of the scheme to keep the general level of rents at a low level. They should, he argued, rather be used to reduce the burden of rent upon those in the lower income groups:

Subsidies should not be used wholly, or even mainly, to keep general rent levels low. Help for those who most need it can be given only if the subsidies are in large part used to provide rebates for tenants whose means are small.⁶⁹

In 1968 a new rent rebate scheme was introduced. In effect, it replaced the corporations' own rebate schemes put into practice during the early 1960s.

In Peterlee, the corporation's revised rebate scheme went into operation in August of 1968. In the first six months, of the town's 5,700 tenants, the total number of applications for rebate was only 783. Out of this number 135 applications were granted, or 2.4 per cent of the total number of tenants. In Aycliffe, the total number of successful applications was even less: up to September 1969 of 275 applications, only 66 were granted. The total cost

⁶⁸ Min HL/G, New Town Circular 13 (August 1966).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

to the corporation in 1968 was therefore not the £13,000 as was first anticipated, but the much lower sum of £800.

The reason for this was quite simple: Crossman's benchmark figure of £10 per week for a household eligible for rebate in the towns was lower than the vast majority of tenants, which for the most part were comprised of higher-earning skilled and semi-skilled workers, were earning.⁷⁰ Tenants in local authority housing, on the other hand, were more likely to be earning less than the £10 threshold for rent relief. However, this still meant that lower-paid workers in the new towns were still paying a higher proportion of their wages than higher earners: an anomaly not lost on officials at the Ministry.⁷¹

In 1971 the Conservative government attempted to standardise the rents all housing authorities charged by introducing a 'fair rents' policy, whereby discrepancies between housing authorities would be eradicated once and for all. The following year's Housing Finance Act was thus a deliberate departure from the earlier 'realistic rents' approach: freedom to set rents was removed and a national rent rebate scheme became mandatory on all authorities.⁷² In Peterlee, the fair rents policy meant that on average rents were increased by 50 pence per week.⁷³ A consequence of the arrangement, however, was that corporations' financial roles changed overnight from being the arbiters between the town and government to being merely government agents.⁷⁴ On the other hand, the fair rents policy helped to reduce the disparity in rents charged in the new towns and their surrounding areas. In Washington, the corporation discovered that the rents it charged were already at or above the level of fair rent assessment. Taking rebates into account meant that many tenants in the town paid less than before the Act's introduction.

⁷⁰ See for example T/88/2 WDC, BM, 6 Nov 1967.

⁷¹ R. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister Vol. 1* (1975), pp. 619-620.

⁷² DoE, New Town Circular 264 (August 1972).

⁷³ NT/Pe/1/1/6 PDC, BM, 2 Dec 1971.

⁷⁴ Ward, *New Town*, p. 91.

In 1975, however, the incoming Labour government abolished the fair rents system and restored the right of local authorities to charge 'reasonable rents'.⁷⁵ The change was not without its critics. In Washington, the policy led to a 'further element of uncertainty', as the rent differential between what the corporation and local authorities charged once more widened.⁷⁶ Moreover, in 1976 Sedgefield District Council expressed its concern at the apparent anomaly between rents to be implemented by it and increases imposed in Aycliffe. The council's concerns were not without foundation. It was in the process of taking control of the new town's housing stock. Rent differentials between the two housing authorities had the effect of adding uncertainty to an already complicated situation.

iii) The drive for more owner-occupation

It was not only in the new towns' rented sector where great changes occurred after 1963: the post-Hailsham period was also a time of real inroads into the towns' private housing market. Although traditionally, at 22 per cent compared to a national figure of 42 per cent, the North East had a smaller proportion of owner-occupiers than any other region, and that its house prices had shown the lowest proportionate increase in Britain in the five years up to 1964, Hailsham hoped that a growth in home-ownership would help to modernise its housing stock.

Moreover, it was the new towns that were to lead the way. For the Town and Country Planning Association, apart from the obvious benefits to the Exchequer of not having to bear the cost of public housing, a greater proportion of owner-occupiers in the new towns was viewed as a logical consequence of increased household affluence and consistent with modern approaches to housing:

⁷⁵ DoE, New Town Circular 399 (May 1975).

⁷⁶ Hole et al, *Washington*, p. 52.

There is a *prima facie* case for permitting private enterprise a greater hand in development in the future, since there has been comparatively little private house building in most of the new towns so far. There are also financial objections to continuing to add to the already large numbers of subsidised houses in these towns ... In many towns there is a rising local demand for house ownership and it is most important that this should be met.⁷⁷

It further suggested that development corporations should be directed to sell land for private enterprise housing to accommodate the expected demand.

The 'modernisers' were helped by the Labour government after 1964, which claimed it was promoting increased owner-occupation in the new towns in response to a concern which had been growing throughout the decade: that they were losing higher-earning households due to lack of home ownership, so that the creation of balanced communities continued to be a problem for development corporations.⁷⁸ An additional concern was that housing ownership and management in the new towns was almost a corporation monopoly. In 1965 Crossman suggested that new forms of decentralised housing policies should be formulated to fit the new types of communities thought desirable in the towns. He further proposed that in order to facilitate more private development, an owner-occupation target of 50 per cent was to be achieved as quickly as possible in new towns designated since 1961; towns designated prior to this date were allowed longer, but were still expected to effectuate the ratio within ten years.⁷⁹

In Peterlee, achieving anywhere near 50 per cent owner-occupation within this time scale would prove almost impossible.⁸⁰ Prior to the Hailsham Report's publication, a mere 1.1 per cent of residents owned their homes; in all 97 per cent of tenants rented from the corporation. By 1965 the situation had not altered to any great extent. With only 60 houses out of a total housing stock of more than 5,000, Peterlee's private housing total was the lowest of any new town in England and Wales, and certainly lower than Crawley, in

⁷⁷ *NE*, 30 Sept 1964.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Cullingworth and Karn, *The Ownership*, p. 4.

⁷⁹ Min HL/G, New Town Circular 43 (August 1967).

⁸⁰ PDC, *1968 AR*, p. 266.

Sussex, where more than 48 per cent of residents were owner-occupiers. In part, the lack stemmed from the timing of Peterlee's designation. Because it was erected on almost entirely green field land, there was not an already existing stock of privately-owned housing in the area, as was the case with most other new towns designated following the war.

At the beginning of the 1960s the corporation and a speculative builder did erect a small number of private houses in scenic locations overlooking Castle Eden dene in the south-eastern part of the town.⁸¹ It had the effect, however, of creating enclaves of privately-owned housing well away from the rented estates surrounding it. In part, this was deliberate corporation policy: it was felt that neither house owners nor speculative builders would be attracted to sites too near the corporation-rented estates. Indeed, in order to provide as great a degree of segregation as possible fences, walls and trees were erected around the private estate, which helped to keep the two groups of residents away from each other.⁸² Although the policy was partially successful in achieving what it set out to do, it was still a complete contravention of the original new towns philosophy. The thought that better off members of the community would wish to segregate themselves from other sections of the population would, as Heraud stated, have 'increased further class differences and social segregation in the towns' and have therefore been contrary to what the New Towns Committee was attempting to achieve.⁸³

In 1968 further sites within the town were made available for private development in anticipation of the science centre proposals being approved. Ironically, it was the failure of the science centre project that precipitated the biggest private housing development ever attempted in the town. Following IBM's departure in 1976, the land earmarked for the science centre was instead used to build new housing estates. The first 1000-house

⁸¹ See, for example, PDC, *1964 AR*, p. 252.

⁸² Robinson, 'Peterlee', p. 174.

⁸³ Heraud, 'Social class', pp. 48-49.

development at Oakerside not only increased Peterlee's private housing stock considerably, but according to some commentators, it also went a long way towards creating the social balance which the town was lacking for so many years.⁸⁴

In South-West Durham, Aycliffe Development Corporation too experienced great difficulties in persuading private developers to build in the town during the 1960s. In 1963 at three per cent, the number of owner-occupiers was only marginally higher than in Peterlee. Part of the problem was that contractors were reluctant to commit to such a small town. Once the revised plan for its expansion was given government approval in 1968, however, a number of sites were reserved for owner-occupiers. Work began during the year on the development of approximately 25 acres of land at School Aycliffe and a similar amount of land at Horndale for the construction of individually-designed dwellings. Woodham Burn estate benefited through its proximity to the town's golf course which was opened in 1972. House prices rose on average by over 15 per cent once the course became established.

The increased popularity of owning a house in Aycliffe can be explained partly by the general rise in wages as the industrial estate grew during the 1960s. Another explanation though was the almost complete lack of private housing anywhere else in the sub-region. At only 1.6 private dwellings to a thousand population in South-West Durham between 1962 and 1972, Aycliffe's immediate surrounding area was among the least privately developed districts in the whole of Britain. By 1974 the proportion of owner-occupiers had risen to 18 per cent, which represented half of the entire sub-region's private housing stock.⁸⁵

In Washington, as well as it being expected to achieve 50 per cent owner-occupation, at least two-thirds of new houses were to be constructed by private developers and not, as had

⁸⁴ See, for example, Philipson, *Swords*, p. 241.

⁸⁵ ADC, 1975 AR, p. 8.

been the case prior to 1968, by the use of the corporation's own housing departments.⁸⁶ This was in complete variance to the corporation's own housing intentions, however, which was to build a small number of houses for sale to executives. It envisaged that by 1980 between 30 and 38 per cent of the town at the most would consist of privately-owned houses.⁸⁷ There was certainly no intention to build complete villages of owner-occupiers, a suggestion put to the corporation by Ministry officials in 1968.⁸⁸ The master plan also stipulated that, especially during the town's early years, no land was to be made available to speculative builders because of fears that it would delay the construction of villages and, more importantly, would not be compatible with the corporation's objective of raising housing standards in the region.⁸⁹ It was also felt that private builders would not be able to comply with landscaping requirements nor would they be able to provide amenities in the villages hitherto provided by the corporation.⁹⁰ After May 1971, however, the Conservative government exerted further pressure on corporations by urging them to dispose of land on a freehold basis and so remove restrictions on private developments altogether. At the same time, corporations were discouraged from building at all, except in unusual cases where the market could not accommodate housing contracts.⁹¹

Despite successive governments' exhortations, however, the plain fact was that private contractors were wary of building in the towns. Washington's surrounding district had an additional problem in that it contained a far lower proportion of owner-occupied housing, especially houses sufficiently attractive to tempt higher-paid professionals to move to the area, than many other districts in the region. In this respect, the district differed from the

⁸⁶ Min HL/G, New Town Circular 86 (December 1968).

⁸⁷ T/88/1 WDC, BM, 20 Dec 1965; DC/WS/1/7 WDC, BM, 7 Dec 1970. For Llewellyn Davis, it was clear that there would have to be a change in the way mortgages were structured or a large injection of office employment into the town for anything like a 50 per cent owner-occupier/rental division to occur.

⁸⁸ T/88/3 WDC, BM, 10 June 1968.

⁸⁹ T/88/1 WDC, BM, 7 Feb 1966; DC/WS/1/8 WDC, BM, 7 June 1971.

⁹⁰ T/88/2 WDC, BM, 5 June 1967.

⁹¹ DoE, New Town Circular 206 (July 1971).

sub-regional pattern.⁹² Traditionally, the peripheral areas of the Tyneside conurbation had contained the highest proportion of privately-owned housing developments. In Castle Ward, north of Newcastle, the proportion was 46 per cent, in Gosforth, 50 per cent. By contrast, in Washington, prior to designation, the figure was a mere 23 per cent.⁹³ With its active and disused coalmines, slag heaps and derelict land, Washington was simply not sufficiently attractive as a site for professional and managerial workers.⁹⁴

Furthermore, private housing proved to be less attractive to potential buyers than the corporation hoped. In 1970 the corporation reported financial losses on all four sites offering private housing in Blackfell village.⁹⁵ It was clear that the much cheaper rents in the region were deterring many potential buyers. In response the government directed that private housing was to be offered to less affluent workers (those earning around £25 per week). In 1968, in an attempt to reduce costs, Parker Morris standards were removed from private housing developments altogether.⁹⁶ One hundred per cent mortgages also became an option for the less affluent although there were concerns that repayments would be more expensive as a result.

The measures seemed to work. By 1972 ten different building contractors were operating on 15 sites. 1,300 private houses were built during this period, 90 per cent of them in the budget price range. However, for some commentators the move to cheaper houses led to a decline in standards. In 1971 Llewellyn Davis stated that the policy had prevented the improvement in housing standards which he and the corporation board had hoped for.⁹⁷ The main dilemma was that controlling private development proved very problematical and that standards were clearly not being maintained. There was also the

⁹² WDC, *Master Plan*, p. 48.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ See, for example, Hole et al, *Washington*, p. 22.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁹⁶ Min HL/G, New Town Circular 86 (November 1968).

⁹⁷ DC/WS/1/8 WDC, BM, 7 June 1971; WDC, *Master Plan*, p. 12.

related difficulty of programming future development with such a large proportion of construction by private contractors. When the national economy experienced problems in the mid-1970s, moreover, fewer contractors tendered. In 1974 only one indicated an interest in submitting a tender for the construction of 93 dwellings at Concord.⁹⁸ It was a similar story at Albany, where only three contractors declared an interest.

Another way of increasing the ratio of owner-occupiers to rented housing considered by the Ministry was to allow tenants to purchase their houses from the corporations. In 1966 the noted housing specialists J. B. Cullingworth and V. Karn, following extensive research in various new towns, including Aycliffe, concluded that there was an overwhelming desire among new town residents to own their own corporation houses, and that under the right sort of conditions many would do so.

Both Peterlee and Aycliffe were quick to capitalise on the report's main findings. The corporations had been concerned for some time that people were leaving the towns simply because of a lack of houses to buy. Evidence had shown, furthermore, that owner-occupiers tended to settle in a town for longer than tenants who rented; this was because the former had 'more of a stake in the town's development', which was translated into a corresponding rise in civic interest.⁹⁹ A survey conducted in Aycliffe, found that 15 per cent of development corporation-housed tenants said that they were likely to move from the town during the following year compared to only nine per cent of owner-occupiers, despite the fact that the majority of the latter were in the potentially more mobile professional and intermediate classes.¹⁰⁰

In 1968 both corporations issued a comprehensive brochure, *Own Your Own Home*, outlining the advantages of house purchase which was delivered to all tenants in the towns.

⁹⁸ DC/WS/1/11 WDC, BM, 4 March 1974.

⁹⁹ Cullingworth and Karn, *The Ownership*, pp. 111-112.

¹⁰⁰ V. A. Karn, *Aycliffe Housing Survey: A Study of Housing in a New Town* (Birmingham, 1970), p. 44.

To achieve optimum effect the brochure was issued at the same time as prospective rent rises were announced.¹⁰¹ In Peterlee, in an attempt to allay tenant's fears about difficulties they may encounter when trying to re-sell their houses, the corporation gained ministerial permission to re-purchase any house sold up to five years from the point of sale.¹⁰² To further tempt potential house owners, in May 1968 corporations were allowed to offer discounts depending on the length of time tenants had resided in the towns. Also, the rules governing the construction of rented housing, whereby they were expected to meet Parker Morris criteria were not so stringently applied to houses that were expected to be sold at a later date. This had the effect of reducing the difference between weekly rents and mortgages, thereby making buying a more attractive proposition.¹⁰³

Despite such incentives, tenants were still slow to take advantage of the offers. In Peterlee, only 20 houses had been sold by the end of 1969. It was a similar story in Aycliffe, where 17 houses were sold. Unfortunately, the introduction of the housing scheme coincided with a rapid rise in the rate of interest on mortgages, which was itself a consequence of the national balance of payments crisis during 1967 culminating in the devaluation of Sterling in November 1967.¹⁰⁴

In Aycliffe, although this had the result of dampening potential interest, it still ought not to have affected tenants' decisions to buy to any great extent. The average net income of corporation-housed tenants was more than £2 per week higher than the average income for England and Wales as a whole. What was striking in Aycliffe, moreover, was the large proportion of owner-occupiers who had bought the comparatively expensive four or more bedroom houses. The average privately-owned house in Aycliffe was, in fact, substantially

¹⁰¹ NT/Pe/1/1/5 PDC, BM, 5 Oct 1968.

¹⁰² PDC, 1967 AR, p. 238.

¹⁰³ NT/Ay/1/5/4 Chief Housing Officer (A + PDC) to Williams, 9 Jan 1969.

¹⁰⁴ For an outline of the effects of devaluation on housing see Malpas and Murie, *Housing Policy* p. 67.

larger than owner-occupied houses built in Britain between 1961 and 1966.¹⁰⁵

Cullingworth and Karn thus hypothesised that the extent of owner-occupation in Aycliffe should have been more than 54 per cent if each income group who owned houses nationally did the same in the new town.¹⁰⁶ From this they concluded that the potential demand for owner-occupation was held back by the level of house prices. Nearly all houses built in the new town were relatively new and more expensive to construct than housing in older towns.¹⁰⁷ Also, unlike established towns, Aycliffe lacked a supply of low-cost houses for sale. The minimum at which it was possible to buy a house in the town in 1966 was generally above £4,000, whereas in the UK as a whole, 61 per cent of the mortgages granted that year were on houses costing less than this. A consequence of this in Aycliffe was that well over a third of tenants who would have otherwise considered buying their houses were unable to do so because they could not obtain a mortgage or raise the deposit. The cost would therefore need to have been reduced considerably to fall within the price range of the majority of Aycliffe's potential house buyers.

Nevertheless, the thought of buying their corporation house remained an anathema for many of Aycliffe's tenants, even for higher-earning residents on £25 per week or more, who could have comfortably afforded to buy. Although a small proportion claimed that they did not intend to stay in Aycliffe and would therefore not wish to buy a house in the town whatever the cost, almost half stated that the poor construction or design of the houses deterred them from wanting to buy.

Furthermore, ambiguities in the Ministry's criteria of just who qualified for discount unquestionably deterred many tenants from buying. In April 1968 Peterlee Development Corporation agreed a formula which would allow sitting tenants to receive discounts from 2.5 per cent to 10 per cent depending on how long they had resided in the house.

¹⁰⁵ Karn, *Aycliffe*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Cullingworth and Karn, *The Ownership*, p. 139.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 140.

Allowances were also to be granted to any tenant who wished to purchase a house in the town other than the one in which they resided. However, the corporation was informed by the Ministry that sales to sitting tenants were not to be the subject of discount on market price. It reasoned that in the interest of good estate management the corporation ought to restrict sales of its rented stock to particular estates only; it would thus, according to the criteria, be inequitable to allow tenants to buy the house in which they were already renting to receive a financial concession denied to tenants who could only purchase by moving house. Furthermore, to allow sitting tenants concessions was bound to encourage them to purchase their existing houses rather than buy a newer house in the town, which could have released the older, cheaper houses for re-letting. If the resulting sales were predominantly of older houses that earned a surplus for the housing revenue account the effect would have meant an increase in rents for remaining tenants.

However, the Ministry's position put an unbearable strain on attempts to sell houses in the town. Williams argued that a 50/50 balance between rented and private sector housing and, by extension, the creation of balanced communities in Peterlee could never be attained unless the corporation was given more latitude when selling to sitting tenants:

The corporation is much concerned that it should not be allowed to make any concessions to sitting tenants, especially as the percentage of owner-occupiers in the town falls woefully short of what is considered to be the desirable balance of owner-occupation to rented stock. In the absence of any considerable financial incentive to purchase, it does seem that we are in grave danger of being permanently saddled with the serious imbalance that now exists. My board recognises that there may be some slight danger as envisaged by your letter, but I would have thought that one would have to reconcile the fact that it would be expected that there would have to be some sales of older houses unless one was prepared to create a one-class community in certain areas. There is opinion that there is scope in the new town for substantial disposal in all parts of the town without it being prejudiced to an overall situation. The corporation has indicated the deep resistance that is shown to house purchase generally in these areas, and it is convinced that until such time as we create a market conducive to elimination of this resistance we shall not make any marked progress in the field of purchase.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ NT/Pe/1/4/13 Williams to Min HL/G, 19 July 1968.

The protestations did not have the desired effect, however. In August 1968 the Ministry reaffirmed its wish that discounts ought not to be granted to sitting tenants. It was clear that even though there were anomalies in its policy, the Labour government, despite its earlier support for house sales in the new towns, was not overly enthusiastic about selling rented housing built with exchequer funds.

There was more reason for optimism when the Conservative party won the 1970 general election. Instinctively Conservatives was less averse to the sale of rented housing in the new towns, whether they were built with exchequer money or not. In November 1970 the government announced that any sitting tenants who wished to purchase a house in the towns would be entitled to a discount of up to 20 per cent.¹⁰⁹ In August 1971 the Ministry extended the scheme to include tenants wishing to buy any houses in the towns¹¹⁰

There were a few problems with the scheme, nonetheless. In May 1972 Aycliffe Development Corporation reported cases where tenants had requested transfers to other properties in more desirable parts of the town with a view to purchasing them. Once the transfer had been affected, however, on occasions the tenants then declined to purchase the house. In an attempt to counter this, the corporation demanded that such tenants paid a deposit of £25 'in consideration of the transfer which would be credited against the purchase price of the property in the event of that purchase proceeding', which would be retained by the corporation in the event that the negotiations were not proceeded with.¹¹¹

The scheme did have an effect, however, albeit not on the scale hoped for by the corporations. Between 1970 and 1974 a total of 2,032 enquiries were received in Aycliffe; altogether 970 tenants chose to buy a rented house in the town. It had such a considerable impact on the corporation's finances that to pay for capital works of over £1.5 million, it

¹⁰⁹ NT/Ay/1/1/25 ADC, BM, 1 Oct 1970.

¹¹⁰ DoE, New Town Circular 179 (August 1971).

¹¹¹ NT/Ay/1/1/25 ADC, BM, 4 May 1972.

was only necessary to borrow £30,000.¹¹² In Peterlee, too, potential buyers showed a lively interest in the town's rented stock. In 1971 all houses were made available for sale. 'People are realising', the corporation wrote in its 1972 annual report, 'that Peterlee is a prestigious place in which to live, not merely in rented houses but in their own houses, which gives them a stake in the further development and prosperity of the town'. It added that 'if the present level of interest can be maintained, and the corporation see no reason why it should not, then an appreciable increase in owner-occupation can be expected over the next two or three years'.¹¹³ Williams' optimism was somewhat misplaced, however: by 1978, the percentage of owner-occupiers in Peterlee was only 11.3 per cent – still by far the lowest of any new town in the country.¹¹⁴

In Washington, the outlook was even less certain. Despite the 20 per cent discount offered to tenants, the cost of the houses was still well above their market value. The dilemma for the corporation was that all property built in the town was obviously still new: most of it was also built to Parker Morris standards (with an additional ten per cent room space in many cases).¹¹⁵ In addition, most of the housing stock was constructed during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when interest rates on money borrowed were much higher than during the 1950s and early 1960s when the region's other towns' were created. Although the possibility of purchasing rented houses was widely advertised, few tenants even enquired. In 1973 when the region's other new towns were selling their peak numbers of rented houses (especially once the switch from a general housing subsidy to a selective household subsidy came into effect, which increased the rents for many households), the corporation in Washington sold a total of 25 houses.¹¹⁶ A NEAS survey confirmed this

¹¹² ADC, 1973 AR, p. 8.

¹¹³ PDC, 1972 AR, p. 364.

¹¹⁴ Aldridge, *British New Towns*, p. 101.

¹¹⁵ T/88/1 WDC, BM, 20 Dec 1965; WDC, 1967 AR, p. 401. See also Hole et al, *Washington*, p. 52.

¹¹⁶ WDC, 1974 AR, p. 485.

when it discovered that of the three towns, even though Washington's residents were the most complimentary about housing in the new town, they were least likely to buy.¹¹⁷

iv) A different type of community

The changes in the types of houses and the forms of tenure after 1963 contributed enormously to an alteration in the types of communities formed in the towns. The rent rises in the towns between 1963 and 1969 unquestionably contributed to a resumption of outward migration. Along with a lack of houses to purchase, in fact, the major reason repeatedly offered by families wishing to leave the towns – 3,838 in Aycliffe between 1966 and 1972 and 4,610 in Peterlee – was the alarming rise in the cost of renting their houses.¹¹⁸

A corollary of this was that housing pressures decreased in the towns' nearby villages. In Peterlee, the inflow of households from its surrounding pit villages decreased considerably from 70 per cent in 1959 to less than 36 per cent in 1968.¹¹⁹ This was partly attributed to an improvement in housing conditions in the villages as a result of the district council's renewed efforts after 1963 to minimise the effects of slum clearances.¹²⁰ It was surely no coincidence, however, that the greatest number of families moving from the towns occurred in the immediate aftermath of the rent rises, especially in 1963 and 1968. And, although most of Peterlee's intake still came from within County Durham, albeit from other areas of the county, overall their reasons for arriving in the town were different from former arrivals. Research by NEAS showed that most of the later intake arrived primarily to take advantage of the availability of housing in Peterlee and not, as was the case previously, to settle long-term in the town. Figures also suggested that those families

¹¹⁷ NEAS, 'New Towns Vol. 2', pp. 98-100.

¹¹⁸ M. R. D. Johnson and R. Hudson, 'Housing in Durham New Towns' (NEAS, 1975), p. 12.

¹¹⁹ Robinson, 'Some aspects' p. 3.

¹²⁰ Robinson, 'Peterlee', p. 130.

moving to Peterlee from further afield moved out at a far more rapid rate than the earlier arrivals.¹²¹ Such was the turnover rate one local newspaper labelled the new town a 'transit camp', at the same time implying that an appropriate symbol for the town would be a removal van.¹²²

A further effect of the rent rises was that population movements within the towns became less frequent. Local people on lower incomes invariably sought cheaper houses in the older parts of the towns: demand from locals for the newer more expensive houses almost disappeared entirely. It was also clear, however, that the corporations' own housing policies ensured that population movements in the towns were deliberately controlled. In Peterlee, even up to the mid-1970s the older housing estates such as Eden Hill, which were generally regarded as the worst places to live in the town,¹²³ were still mostly comprised of lower-paid manual workers who were former Easington district residents and their descendents, whilst the newer estates in the western part of the town largely contained key workers and more affluent migrants from other parts of the county.¹²⁴ The rents of houses on the more recently-built estates were usually more expensive: they were also constructed to Parker Morris standards and had central heating throughout, whilst the houses built earlier mostly had open coal fires. How the tenants perceived the houses was also telling. In a survey more than 36 per cent of tenants in the older estates rated their house as average or bad against only four per cent in the newer estates.¹²⁵

¹²¹ In 1966, 65 per cent of tenants terminating had stayed in the new town for less than three years. See, for example, Robinson, 'Peterlee', p. 146.

¹²² *NE*, 29 Nov 1963. During the year more than a quarter of Peterlee's population had moved. Research in 1975 discovered, moreover, that of the three new towns, Peterlee had the fewest number of respondents that had lived at only one address. See, NEAS, 'New Towns Vol. 2', p. 89. See also Johnson and Hudson, 'Housing', p. 6.

¹²³ NEAS, 'New Towns Vol. 2', p. 156.

¹²⁴ Hudson and Johnson, 'New Towns', p. 203.

¹²⁵ NEAS, 'New Towns Vol. 2', p. 132. The percentage of immigrants in each ward who were living in Easington district before moving to Peterlee was 70 per cent in Eden Hill but less than 30 per cent in the newer estate of Howlatch.

It was also apparent, moreover, that through the use of housing allocation policies the corporation intentionally sought to maintain and reinforce the town's social character. Transfers were not normally granted between wards, for example, if they resulted in an increased rent rebate. Considering that the older wards contained the cheapest rents and the highest number of rebates, this effectively constrained moves within the town. Population movements were thus limited to within wards, especially in Eden Hill, where 71 per cent of those families that moved had previously lived in another part of the ward; in the newer Howletch estate the same could be said for only 25 per cent of families.

The overall effect of the rent rises and allocation policies was that fewer people applied to live in the towns. In Peterlee, total outstanding applications for houses fell from 1,270 in 1960 to only 706 in 1964. As Robinson commented: 'Demand was so slack at times that routine applications (i.e. local families in employment) would not actually have to wait for a house, and could even specify the exact type of house and location they required'.¹²⁶ Demand recovered slightly during the late 1960s, partly because the corporation's promised 'accelerated building programme' was only partially successful. By 1969, however, the housing waiting list had again shortened considerably. Peterlee's housing officer predicted that there might even be 500 houses in excess of demand during the 1970s.

Despite shortening housing lists there was one section of the population that never took up residence in the new towns in any great numbers – ethnic minorities. In 1969 the Race Relations Board, in a letter to Washington Development Corporation argued that the new towns were ideally placed for experiments in race relations. However, the corporation rejected the proposal arguing that the allocation of houses should be based on housing need

¹²⁶ Robinson, 'Some aspects', p. 28.

without distinction to the country of origin of the applicant.¹²⁷ It decided in 1972, moreover, that despite pleas from the Ugandan Resettlement Board (URB) to provide houses for Ugandan refugees, not to do so principally, the corporation argued, because there were no established Asian groups in the area.¹²⁸ Following further pressure from the URB, which argued that the towns, with large housing programmes financed by public funds, were in a better position to accept some refugees than other towns, the corporation reluctantly agreed to provide homes for two families. That any refugees at all should be allocated houses in Washington was still virulently opposed by Washington UDC, however. It felt that tenants of sub-standard properties in Washington should be given priority before 'consideration [is] given to Asians', adding that there had been problems before when the corporation had given priority to 'imported families'.¹²⁹ It was a similar story in Aycliffe and Peterlee, where the corporations accepted the absolute minimum number of refugees that they could feasibly get away with.

As might be expected, the corporations' attempts to increase the amount of privately-owned housing also had a profound effect on the character and dynamic of the towns' communities. Aycliffe Development Corporation ensured that expansion was accompanied by the development of a number of low-density residential areas which would, it hoped, prove to be attractive to professional and intermediate groups.¹³⁰ The strategy seemed to work: the availability of houses to purchase attracted a section of the better-paid working class, as well as professionals and managerial staff, who would not normally have considered living in a new town. These new arrivals were also younger and better educated than the bulk of the workers who had resided in the town up until then. By 1973 Aycliffe

¹²⁷ T/88/3 WDC, BM, 13 March 1969.

¹²⁸ DC/WS/1/9 WDC, BM, 4 Sept 1972.

¹²⁹ DC/WS/1/9 WDC, BM, 2 Oct 1972.

¹³⁰ ADC, *1967 Master Plan Report*, p. 10.

had as a percentage three times as many professional, managerial and skilled manual workers as Sedgefield district as a whole, and nearly twice as many as County Durham.¹³¹

Prior to Washington's designation the outward migration of younger workers had left the area relatively devoid of employees in the 25-34 age groups. The introduction of jobs and quality housing thus helped to mitigate their further loss. By 1972 in fact more than 68 per cent of owner-occupiers in the town were white-collar employees aged 35 and younger.¹³² As Hole noted, inward migration to the town, partly as a result of increased owner-occupation, meant that Washington 'changed from a town with an exceptionally low proportion of white-collar workers to one that was not far below the country as a whole'.¹³³

For the corporations the arrival of such workers was welcome for a number of reasons. Economically, higher-paid workers represented a higher spending elite. The introduction of private housing was paralleled by an increase in car ownership, as well as telephones, refrigerators and other modern appliances. In Washington, households owning cars increased from 30 to 44 per cent between 1966 and 1972. At the other end of the scale, car ownership among local authority-housed residents changed very little during the same period.

A feature of the towns, moreover, was how heterogeneous their communities became. In 1970 more than a third of Washington's population had still lived all their lives in the town.¹³⁴ Most of them had therefore identified with the locality as it was before the new town's designation. For the corporation, this sizeable minority had the potential to be beneficial to harmonious relations in the town; it could also have caused much unrest. On the one hand, an existing nucleus in the town acted as a buffer against the alienation felt by

¹³¹ R. Hudson and M. Johnson, 'Attitudes Towards and Images of Some Towns in County Durham' (NEAS, 1974), p. 5.

¹³² HLG/115/1020 *Strategic Plan for the Northern Region* (1977), p. 23.

¹³³ Hole et al, *Washington*, p. 63.

¹³⁴ In 1972, 40 per cent of all household heads were born within the town's designated area. See, for example, T/WRO (NA) Washington Household Census (September 1972).

new communities that had literally been 'thrown together', as had initially been the case at Aycliffe and Peterlee. In Washington, therefore, an existing community with the potential for social stability helped to mitigate the worst excesses associated with the formation of a new community.¹³⁵

On the other hand, the strength of community feeling could just as easily have acted as a disruptive force. As had been the case with the close-knit communities that surrounded Aycliffe and Peterlee, Washington's existing communities could have resisted the changes that were occurring, and even have resented them if outsiders had challenged the lifestyle and values to which they had become accustomed. In effect, Washington's existing population was confronted by the arrival of large numbers of people who had alternative views on the types of communities which should be formed; and had experience of different types of housing, wage levels, educational opportunities, and social customs from those found in the North East.¹³⁶

What actually transpired in Washington (and to a lesser extent in Aycliffe and Peterlee) was neither confrontation nor social mixing, but rather a kind of *modus vivendi* occurred where, for the most part, existing communities and new arrivals went about their daily lives without resentment towards each other, but nor did they socially interact to any great extent. It appeared that in all three towns, there was a coalition of sorts between owner-occupiers and higher-paid workers who tended to live in the newly-built private housing and the more expensive rented estates. They came into contact with lower-paid manual workers only on rare occasions. For one thing, the two types of communities generally originated from markedly different geographical areas and at different times. In Peterlee,

¹³⁵ Ibid. In 1972, 53.6 per cent of heads of households in the older parts of the town had been born within the designated area, whereas only 17.6 per cent of heads of households in post-designation owner-occupied housing were born in close proximity to Washington.

¹³⁶ Hole et al, *Washington*, p. 75; *New Society*, 12 Jan 1967. The paper argued that the effect newcomers would have on an inward-facing old mining community would be the creation of an inter-village class system with miners and ex-miners on the bottom and skilled workers and management on the top.

new arrivals from outside the district tended to be non-manual workers who tended to gravitate to the town's newer western estates, and whilst their presence added to changes in the occupational complexion of the town and to a narrow definition of social balance, it did little to foster social mixing. Similarly, in Aycliffe, only a fifth of tenants in the older rented estates came from areas beyond County Durham. The proportion of owner-occupiers who arrived from further afield was half.¹³⁷

The parts of the towns each section of the community lived in were also usually very clearly delineated. In Peterlee, the differences in architecture and design between the older, more deprived areas in the eastern part of the town, and the more modern housing in the western areas could leave no one in any doubt as to which part of town they had found themselves in. Eden Hill had a far greater number of families where one or more of the family members was unemployed, and much lower levels of car ownership than other areas in the town. The estate was also a notorious crime blackspot: one newspaper labelled it as the 'worst crime-ridden part of the whole of Easington district'.¹³⁸ On the town's newer estates, there were far fewer instances of crime and a fraction of unemployed households.

In Washington, the dissimilarities between its existing communities and more recent arrivals were even more noticeable. In 1968 the corporation conducted the first of what became a series of household surveys. What it discovered was a polarity in the ways newly arriving households in Donwell village, and the already established population lived their daily lives. Households that rented from the district council had nearly seven times as many unemployed members as their counterparts in the newer estates at Donwell; the former also had nearly four times the number of households where the main breadwinner

¹³⁷ Karn, *Aycliffe Housing Survey*, p. 5.

¹³⁸ *Hartlepool Mail*, 18 March 1991.

was retired. Moreover, Donwell contained nearly six times the professional workers as the Washington UDC rented households.¹³⁹

As in Peterlee, the types of houses in which the two sections of the community resided also reflected the different ways of life each experienced. In Donwell, more than 24 per cent of houses were four-bedroom dwellings; in council rented houses the corresponding figure was less than two per cent. Also, more than 30 per cent of local authority houses still had an outside toilet in 1969, whereas in Donwell, 95 per cent of houses had two inside toilets. The disparity in car ownership between the two parts of the community was also very evident. Less than a third of local authority and pre-designation households owned cars, whilst more than two-thirds of Donwell's households had access to at least one car. Not surprisingly, 70.5 per cent of Washington UDC rented houses had no garage, which was more than twice the figure of Donwell's houses.¹⁴⁰

Despite such divergence in lifestyles, it was still expected that there was one spot in which the different groups could acquaint themselves with each other: the town's main shopping area. But, once again, this appeared not to be the case. The corner shop was the preferred place for the majority of local authority-rented households when buying their daily bread whereas only 15.5 per cent of Donwell households bought there. In addition, twice as many Donwell residents did their weekly shopping at Newcastle as local authority households. Three times as many of the former also travelled by car to do their shopping at New Washington as the latter.¹⁴¹

Given such a contrast in lifestyles in the towns, it was not surprising that there should be a variation in attitudes between the different sections of the communities to family, friends and to each other. In Washington, nearly 80 per cent of unskilled manual workers living in the local authority houses had relatives residing in the town; less than 25 per cent of

¹³⁹ T/WRO UD/WS/45/19 Washington Household Census (October 1968).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ T/WRO UD/WS/6 Washington Household Census (September 1969).

professional and managerial workers living in the new villages could claim the same.

Whilst this was not unexpected – professionals were more likely to be key workers who had travelled further to live and work in the town – it meant that members from this group were far less likely to have a family network for support. Manual workers were also more likely to have known their friends for longer and to have seen them more frequently. They also saw their friends in a public house or a club whilst professional workers usually visited their friends in each other's houses. It was a similar story in Aycliffe and Peterlee, where about half of respondents in a NEAS survey said that they had no close relatives living in the towns. The percentage in this group was even higher in the towns' newer estates containing the largest number of key workers.

In general, it was residents in the towns' older areas which claimed that community spirit was exclusive to their particular section of town. In both Peterlee and Aycliffe, less than a third of respondents said that their neighbours helped each other out, whilst more than 45 per cent said that their neighbours 'kept themselves to themselves'. In Washington it was slightly different: more than 53 per cent of respondents claimed that their neighbours regularly helped each other out.¹⁴² In addition, whereas in Aycliffe and Peterlee only 23.5 per cent and twelve per cent respectively said that local people had got together to tackle a problem facing their part of town, in Washington it was 66 per cent.¹⁴³ Although this survey did not distinguish between 'old' and 'new' Washington, it was much more likely that the higher percentage of neighbours willing to help each other out was due to the fact that Washington had an existing community when the town was designated, while Peterlee and Aycliffe did not. 'Old' Washington residents were therefore far more likely to 'characterise their local area as having community spirit', whilst denigrating the newer parts of the town for their lack of it. All the same, it must have been a blow to the

¹⁴² NEAS, 'New Towns Vol. 2', p. 148.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 148.

corporation to hear this. One of its first objectives, according to the master plan, was to 'ensure that [Washington] can be established as a balanced community, offering its population a sense of belonging to a town with its own character and quality'.¹⁴⁴ If the residents of 'old' Washington were to go by, the town had clearly failed in this function.

Significantly, the areas in the towns that claimed to have the highest level of community spirit were the ones with the greatest number of elderly people. The older sections of Washington contained nearly a third of households with its head aged 65 or older, whereas only 1.6 per cent of the heads of post-designation owner-occupiers were retired.¹⁴⁵ However, despite previous efforts to attract older members of the population, in part to instil a greater sense of community spirit into the towns, the towns' newer estates were relatively devoid of this section of the community during the 1960s.¹⁴⁶

For the most part, moreover, the corporations' housing policies tended to reinforce this. In Aycliffe, a local newspaper discovered in 1965 that purpose-built houses, suitably adapted for elderly or handicapped residents were in fact being occupied by able-bodied corporation officials;¹⁴⁷ this despite occurring at a time when the corporation admitted that the demand for such dwellings massively outstripped supply.¹⁴⁸ Perhaps the main charge that could be levelled at the corporations in all three towns, was that despite local and national directives urging them to attract more elderly people into the towns,¹⁴⁹ by 1980, residents aged over 50 still accounted for less than 18 per cent of their total populations.

¹⁴⁴ WDC, *Master Plan*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁵ T/WRO (NA) Washington Household Census (September 1972).

¹⁴⁶ See for example *NDM*, 30 Sept 1965. Bungalows and flats suitable for old people accounted for only eight per cent of Peterlee's housing stock in 1965.

¹⁴⁷ *NE*, 3 July 1964.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, NT/Ay/1/1/24 ADC, BM, 4 March 1965.

¹⁴⁹ See, for example, DCC, *Structure Plan*, p. 6. The plan explicitly stated that all housing authorities in the county were to make housing for people with special needs and/or the elderly a priority.

As a consequence, the towns continued to be populated by a relatively youthful demographic.¹⁵⁰ In part, this was due to an excess supply of houses over demand in the towns. The ready availability of a house during the 1960s enabled many young couples in nearby villages to move to the new towns at the time of or soon after marriage, whereas before then they would usually have had to wait, sometimes many years to obtain a house. In 1966 of Peterlee's 18,000 inhabitants, more than 1,800 were young people aged 14-20.¹⁵¹ Significantly, a 1966 Easington Committee for Education survey discovered that three quarters of 20-year old girls who took part were married and half the 19-year old girls were either married or engaged to be married.¹⁵²

All of this had major implications for the corporations: the size of the potential workforce, the demand for school places, and the provision of services – were all dependent upon the age structure of the towns' inhabitants. As the corporations were aware, historically problems arose when the age structure of a town was so disproportionately imbalanced in favour of one age group. With the movement of each peak through the whole age cycle, a bulge was first felt in primary schools, then in secondary education, and eventually on teenage facilities and employment prospects.¹⁵³ If standards were to be maintained throughout the cycle, facilities tended to become underused since their provision needed to be geared to peak demands. It thus followed that

¹⁵⁰ In 1961, 17.2 per cent of Peterlee's population was aged 40 or over against 44.2 per cent for Britain as a whole. See, for example, DCRO F/22 1961 Census (*County Durham*), p. 19.

¹⁵¹ Easington Committee for Education, *An Inquiry into the Leisure time Activities of Young People in Peterlee* (1966), p. 3.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 6. See also DCRO F/22 1961 Census (*County Durham*), p. 21. In 1961 Easington district had a higher proportion of married males and females aged under 24 than any other district in the county. In Washington, moreover, in 1972 the proportion of single men aged between 25 and 75 who were owner-occupiers was only 1.3 per cent of the town's total population which indicated that in Washington too, the town contained a large percentage of young married couples. See, for example, T/WRO (NA) Washington Household Census (September 1972).

¹⁵³ See, for example, NT/Pe/1/4/11 PDC, GMR, 3 Jan 1963.

a greater provision of communal facilities was required in towns with an unbalanced age structure.¹⁵⁴

Another dilemma common to all three corporations was how to combat the ever increasing vandalism problem. In 1964 gangs of youths in Aycliffe were identified by the local press as wreaking havoc near the town centre.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, in Peterlee, young people were blamed in 1965 for uprooting hundreds of trees that had been planted next to the new A19 road. In 1970 it was reported that despite the new town containing a population of 25,000 it had experienced the same level of reported vandalism as Roker, in Sunderland, which had nearly three times Peterlee's population.¹⁵⁶ A report carried out in Washington in 1972, moreover, highlighted the extent of property damage. 28.3 per cent of the total attacks on property in the whole of the town occurred in Donwell, which had the greatest concentration of 10-20 year olds. Between January 1970 and October 1971, as well as 53 broken windows, vandals were responsible for 44 other attacks on houses, 16 attacks on schools along with more than 50 further attacks on garage doors, drain pipes and the exteriors of houses and schools. Youths in Washington village, which contained the smallest proportion of 10-20 year olds, accounted for only 4.7 per cent of the entire town's total acts of vandalism.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ WDC, *Master Plan*, p. 43.

¹⁵⁵ *Auckland Chronicle*, 19 March 1964. See also *Auckland Chronicle*, 19 August 1965.

¹⁵⁶ WDC, *Vandalism: A Study of Washington New Town* (1972), p. 14.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 9-12.



Fig. 23: Youths at Donwell subway

Some commentators have stressed that the problem was attributed to a lack of employment opportunities created for school leavers, which had left many young people with little to do but roam the streets and on many occasions get into trouble with the police. Another factor, however, was the distinct lack of facilities for young people, largely as a result of the miscalculations by the corporations over the number of youths there would be at any given time.¹⁵⁸ In 1966 a youth club was provided in Peterlee town centre at a cost of £45,000. Within weeks of its construction more than 500 young people had become members; 300 more were placed on a waiting list. In all 41 per cent of adolescents in the new town were members of youth organisations compared to a national average of 35 per cent.¹⁵⁹ Hopes were high that the proposed ten-pin bowling alley and cinema complex planned for 1966 would provide entertainment for the town's youth, but when negotiations for the complex collapsed in 1965, they were once again left with very few forms of entertainment.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Philipson, *Swords*, p. 214.

¹⁵⁹ *Peterlee Post*, 20 May 1965.

¹⁶⁰ Easington Committee for Education, *An Inquiry*, p. 5.

Significantly, in Washington it was the layout of the town that attracted the most criticism. The village concept, much enthused about by the corporation in 1964 helped to instil a sense of community awareness within each particular village; but it also created a form of sectarianism. A 1972 community survey discovered that youngsters from one village were fearful of visiting other villages in case they were attacked. One youth aged 16 from Blackfell village stated that he could not leave it at night in case he 'got jumped on by gangs of skinheads from other villages'.¹⁶¹ As a result, the village centres were very rarely used for the purposes they were built for. A girl from Barmston village complained that activities in Washington as a whole were seldomly supported by youngsters from the whole of the town:

Take the hall at Barmston. It's not used every night of the week. There could be some good dances down there. But then if there was there'd only be people from Barmston and Brady Square there – they're well in together – but you couldn't go if you were from Washington village.¹⁶²

Another young boy complained about the lack of playing fields in the town, which should, he claimed, have been provided instead of the village greens which, whilst they looked attractive, were not allowed to be played on. A further youngster also railed against the lack of provision of cycle routes in the town. He claimed that he was forced to ride to his destination on footpaths and on the town's motorway system.¹⁶³

Another major effect of a large percentage of younger people in the towns was the excessive amount of reported mental health problems. A social services report from 1976 revealed that Washington contained an inordinate number of such cases. The report's authors found this surprising because in many other ways the town was a healthy place to live. There were no slum dwellings and the houses had good sanitation with adequate

¹⁶¹ T/WRO (NA) Washington Community Survey, 6 Sept 1978.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ When research was undertaken by the planners into the master plan proposals, they felt unease at the prospect that cyclists would not be permitted to use the paths. See for example HLG 115/695 J. S Berry (Ministry of Transport) to Earl, 31 May 1967.

amounts of air and light.¹⁶⁴ The town also fared well in comparison to Sunderland Borough as a whole with regards to mortality rates, including infant mortality. However, the average demand for GP services in Washington was 50 per cent higher than in Sunderland. A social services team leader also confirmed that in 1976 more than 25 per cent of all non-accidental injuries to small children in Sunderland's entire borough occurred in Washington. There were also a relatively high number of care orders made on children because their parents were unable to look after them. Six such orders were made on children in the new town in 1976, compared to only fourteen in the whole of Sunderland.¹⁶⁵

One explanation was that people moving to the towns, especially younger people were temporarily disorientated, particularly if they had come from a close-knit community.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, they frequently already had problems where they lived, but believed that a new environment would affect a cure (which it rarely did). The design of the towns was also questioned. When Washington was created, it was hoped that the village concept would help to integrate different communities arriving in the town. Instead, the design of the dwellings and the villages themselves exacerbated the depression already felt by some new residents. They claimed that houses in the villages were constructed so that there was very little communication between people. One way to remedy this, according to one commentator, was to allow a female architect to design a village and its houses. He suggested that 'whilst males generally thought of how best to utilise space, females were better at considering the family'.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ T/WRO (NA) Review of Washington from a Socio-Medical Standpoint, 6 Sept 1978.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ On the value of social networks in the North East see C. Taylor and A. R. Townshend, 'The local "sense of place" as evidenced in the North East of England', *Urban Studies* 13 (1976), p. 134.

¹⁶⁷ T/WRO (NA) Review of Washington.

v) The corporations' roles as providers of housing comes to an end

In a way, whom the corporations hired as architects became academic: within a few years, their role as providers of housing was terminated anyway. Peterlee Development Corporation's last building project was completed in 1977. After that small infill schemes were the only remaining means of increasing the housing stock.¹⁶⁸ In April 1978 Peterlee and Aycliffe became two of the first new towns in the country to transfer the ownership and future supply of their housing stock to local authorities when they passed over their housing functions to Sedgefield and Easington district councils respectively.¹⁶⁹



Fig. 24: Aycliffe at the time of dissolution.

On the whole, the transfers went reasonably well,¹⁷⁰ although in Aycliffe there was some concern among councillors in Sedgefield and Shildon at the apparent anomaly between rent increases implemented by their authorities and those imposed by the corporation prior to the transfer taking effect.¹⁷¹ There was also some apprehension about the financial burden to be assumed by the local authority. Compared to profitable towns

¹⁶⁸ PDC, 1976 AR, p. 275.

¹⁶⁹ Philipson, *Swords*, p. 233.

¹⁷⁰ NT/Pe/1/1/8 PDC, BM, 12 Jan 1978. Peterlee Development Corporation remarked that with regard to the transfer assets in the town there had been excellent cooperation between it and the district council at all levels.

¹⁷¹ NT/Ay/1/1/25 ADC, BM, 11 March 1976.

such as Harlow, Aycliffe bequeathed a heavy financial burden. Its classification as a first generation town when for all practical purposes it was second generation because of all the housing development yet to take place also concerned the corporation.¹⁷² The latter was also fearful that Sedgefield would not ensure that there was a sufficient supply of housing to support employment growth in the town.¹⁷³ However, the corporation's own accomplishments in this regard were hardly praiseworthy: it had built on average a mere 264 houses per year in the town compared to the 800-1000 per year it had intended to build after 1964.

In Peterlee too, problems arose with Easington District Council over the state of the town's housing, which in 1979 led the council to request that the Department of the Environment receive a deputation to discuss the problems. A report on design and structural faults in 7,000 corporation-built houses estimated that repairs would cost about £40 million – the biggest claim for any new town in the country.¹⁷⁴ It was, moreover, cold comfort to those unfortunate people who had previously bought their homes. They suddenly found themselves living in sub-standard houses once repairs to the rented housing stock subsequently transferred to the council were carried out.

If Peterlee and Aycliffe's housing transfer was conducted relatively harmoniously, the same could not be said of Washington's. Disastrous would, in fact, be a more appropriate way to describe its housing and related assets transfer. And yet initially the transfer to Sunderland Borough Council proceeded quite amicably. In 1975 the Department of the Environment stated that housing transfer would only apply to new towns which were at least fifteen years old, which obviously did not include Washington. It added that it could be another ten years before Sunderland Borough Council took over rented housing in the

¹⁷² NT/Ay/1/1/25 ADC, BM, 5 June 1975.

¹⁷³ NT/Ay/1/1/26 ADC, BM, 14 Dec 1978.

¹⁷⁴ *Hartlepool Mail*, 22 April 1981.

town.¹⁷⁵ Despite this in January 1976 the corporation stated that it was content that its housing role was almost completed and that it foresaw no difficulties in reaching agreement with the local authority for a handover of its housing on 1 April 1980.¹⁷⁶ Despite some concerns about the short time-scale in which the corporation claimed it would finish its housing programme,¹⁷⁷ the council also agreed to the transfer, and recommended that a working party consisting of senior officers from both authorities be established to consider the various implications involved. As the target date for transfer approached, there seemed to be no possible obstacles to a smooth and cordial handover.¹⁷⁸ In September 1978 it was agreed that there was to be an amalgamation of the two authorities' housing waiting lists to take effect from April 1979. To help ease the transfer process, a large number of the corporation's staff were appointed to an expanded housing department at Sunderland.¹⁷⁹

In 1980, however, the whole process went horrendously wrong. There were many reasons for this, with different commentators attaching varying degrees of importance to each. All are agreed though that the Conservative's election victory in 1979 immensely affected the housing transfer. In May, Michael Heseltine directed that new town corporations introduce more generous discounts to tenants wishing to buy their houses.¹⁸⁰ Washington Development Corporation, anxious about the effects such a directive would have on the housing transfer, requested that a dispensation from the arrangement be made, at least until after the transfer, by which time Sunderland Borough Council would be the town's controlling housing authority.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, the corporation claimed that should

¹⁷⁵ *The Journal*, 11 Dec 1975; *SE*, 11 Dec 1975.

¹⁷⁶ HLG/115/1022 Pryce (DoE) to Barber (Treasury), 27 Jan 1976; HLG/115/1022 Holley to L. A. Bloom (SBC), 4 Feb 1976; Holley, *Quicker*, p. 170.

¹⁷⁷ See for example HLG/115/1022 E. Davis (DoE) to D. W. Hayward (DoE), 27 Feb 1976. To have completed its housing programme by 1980, the corporation would have needed to build 1,500 houses per year from 1976 onwards. In previous years, however, house completions had exceeded 1,000 in three years only.

¹⁷⁸ T/WRO DC/WS/1/1/16 SBC to WDC, 28 Feb 1979.

¹⁷⁹ DC/WS/1/1/15 WDC, BM, 4 Sept 1978.

¹⁸⁰ Holley, *Quicker*, p. 170.

¹⁸¹ DC/WS/1/1/16 WDC, BM, 14 May 1979.

the transfer go ahead there would be a legal doubt about the validity of sales without the agreement of the council.¹⁸² Despite such concerns the Department ordered that the sale of housing was to take precedence over the transfer scheme.¹⁸³ The corporation requested that urgent discussions should be held with the council to ascertain its views on the matter.¹⁸⁴ Such discussions were not necessary though: the corporation was well aware that historically the sale of housing to sitting tenants was anathema to the council, which in 1978 expressed its displeasure when the corporation attempted to resume its right-to-buy programme stating that:

This council believes the time to resume the sale of homes to sitting tenants who wish to buy is when such a policy would not affect the housing of people who want or need rented accommodation ... at present the borough is still an area of housing distress.¹⁸⁵

In July 1979 the council announced that unless the sale of houses to sitting tenants in Washington was stopped it would suspend consultations with the corporation altogether.¹⁸⁶ The local authority members on the corporation board, councillors Sleightholme and Slater, also expressed their unease at the damage that would accrue between the two authorities if the sale of corporation houses was to go ahead. Because of this the corporation resolved that the sale of houses to tenants be suspended until the transfer was approved by the Secretary of State.¹⁸⁷ At the next board meeting in September, however, following further directives from the Ministry, the two councillors' appointments with the corporation were terminated. Significantly, the corporation also agreed that the sale of its housing to tenants was to be resumed, superseding its July decision.¹⁸⁸ To aggravate the situation further, the Department of Environment insisted that the corporation implement a

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ T/WRO DC/WS/1/1/16 G. Finsberg (DoE) to WDC, 1 June 1979.

¹⁸⁴ DC/WS/1/1/16 WDC, BM, 4 June 1979.

¹⁸⁵ T/WRO DC/WS/1/1/15 SBC to WDC, 5 June 1978.

¹⁸⁶ DC/WS/1/1/16 WDC, BM, 2 July 1979.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ DC/WS/1/1/16 WDC, BM, 3 Sept 1979.

series of rent rises in the town, which greatly increased the disparity between Washington's and the rest of Sunderland Borough's rent charges.¹⁸⁹

In July 1981 following a visit to the town by G. Finsberg, parliamentary under secretary to Heseltine, detailed negotiations were re-opened; a target date of April 1983 was provisionally suggested for the transfer.¹⁹⁰ In February 1982, however, the Ministry directed that the corporation implement a further rent increase of £2.50, leading to an even greater disparity in the rents charged by the two authorities. The council was also aggrieved at what it claimed were unacceptable financial arrangements offered to it to take over Washington's housing stock. The Department of Environment had within its powers the facility to offer a local authority a discretionary grant payable under Section 10 of the 1977 Housing Act, to relieve the financial burden of the transfer of housing on the local authority concerned. The Minister decided that the grant would not be applicable to Washington, however. As the town was not considered to be a first generation new town it was considered that its housing stock was sufficiently new for it not to need financial aid to bring it up to a decent standard prior to transfer.¹⁹¹ However, the council argued that the extent of the rate burden, which would fall on Sunderland's rate payers under the financial arrangements, did in fact justify financial aid. It argued that much of Washington's housing stock was sub-standard, which would require much financial assistance in future years.¹⁹² Its director of housing went further: he stated that the council would need to ascertain that the housing stock the council would inherit was not a 'Peterlee' situation before a transfer could take place.¹⁹³ There was also disquiet about the town's district heating scheme. Few

¹⁸⁹ DC/WS/1/1/17 WDC, BM, 10 March 1980.

¹⁹⁰ DC/WS/1/1/17 WDC, BM, 13 July 1981.

¹⁹¹ This had been known since February 1978, however. See, for example, T/WRO DC/WS/1/1/15 DoE to WDC, 6 Feb 1978.

¹⁹² T/WRO (NA) D. Eden (DoE) to WDC, 21 Aug 1981.

¹⁹³ T/WRO (NA) Housing Transfer Meeting between SBC and WDC, 25 Nov 1983. In many cases, local authorities refused to accept housing assets transferred to them because of a perceived failure in maintenance. See, for example, Ward, *New Town*, p. 103.

councillors believed that it was either efficient or cost effective. The overall result was that the transfer was further delayed.¹⁹⁴

In November 1984 more obstacles came to light. A survey by the council of 180 houses Barmston, Donwell and Blackfell discovered that almost 20 per cent had a sufficiently high sulphate content to seriously affect their concrete structures and would require further analysis.¹⁹⁵ The cumulative effect was that rented housing stock was not transferred to Sunderland until January 1986: six years later than first hoped for by the corporation and a full ten years after correspondence and negotiations between it and the council had begun.¹⁹⁶

vi) The corporations' housing challenges: similarities and contrasts

The corporations in all three towns faced a similar challenge after 1963 – the rapid construction of houses to meet the requirements of modern industry. The development of industrialised methods of building during the early 1960s was therefore timely. The rent increases during the 1960s and early 1970s also affected the corporations' housing plans to a large extent, as did Crossman's directive in 1965 that owner-occupation was to play a more prominent role in their housing programmes.

However, the degree to which each town was affected by these developments was contingent upon a number of factors. Because it was not designated until 1964, by which time its housing programme was not fully operational, Washington was not affected to the extent that Peterlee and Aycliffe were by the negative aspects of industrially-built houses. Both Aycliffe and Peterlee Development Corporations were faced with tremendous problems of repairs and maintenance to the houses that, but for the understanding of

¹⁹⁴ T/WRO (NA) G. P Key (Chief Executive SBC) to A. S. Gordon (DoE), 1 Dec 1983.

¹⁹⁵ McClelland, *Washington*, p. 10.

¹⁹⁶ WDC, *1986 AR*, p. 281.

Sedgefield and Easington district councils, could have been extremely embarrassing to the government and the corporations.

Moreover, although the tenants in all three towns were subjected to steep rent rises during the 1960s and early 1970s, the timing of Washington's designation had more of an effect on its residents than in the other towns. Building costs were more expensive and the rents charged reflected this. In all three towns the dearer rents had a large impact on the types of communities that were created in the towns, as well as the area in the towns its inhabitants resided.

Finally, as a more recently-designated town, Washington was expected to achieve a 50/50 ratio of owner-occupied to rented houses relatively quickly. This had major repercussions on the standard of building as well as the communities that were formed in the town.

Conclusion

The creation of the North East new towns undoubtedly had an enormous effect on the industrial prospects and the urban landscape of the areas that surrounded them, as well as on the region as a whole. Whether the towns ultimately fulfilled the roles set for them by the original new town planners and benefited the districts that surrounded them, or, as *The Times* would claim in 1992, that they were a monument to a planning system that has passed and should not be mourned, will be explored in the conclusion.¹

The first section will assess whether decisions taken by successive governments altered the way the new towns developed. It will argue that whilst changes in governments and their chosen policies towards the new towns caused some problems within the towns, these were not serious enough to affect their development to any great extent; and in some respects there was sufficient equanimity between the political parties to counter any great deviation in policy. It will also explore whether the way the towns were administered had any effect on their ultimate trajectories. In particular it will argue that the geographical location of the towns, as well as the types of communities residing in them, had much bearing on political developments. The second part will consider whether the new towns fulfilled their roles as providers of industry, and especially whether they did so within a genuine regional framework. It will, above all, argue that the timing of their designations, especially in relation to the industrial history of the areas that surrounded them, hugely affected the way the towns developed. The third part argues that the state's attempt to create socially balanced new towns, so that they became a 'microcosm of British society' was ultimately flawed, and that the towns were only successfully able to meet the changes in state housing policy between 1948 and 1988 when local ideas and influences were considered. The final two sections raise the counterfactual questions of whether the directions the

¹ *The Times*, 24 Jan 1992.

new towns took would have been different had alternative decisions been taken at government level, and/or the localities of the towns had had different histories. The fourth part analyses whether earlier lessons were learnt and if the towns ultimately succeeded in the objectives set for them, whilst the fifth part enquires whether future new town programmes could learn from the histories of their predecessors.

i) The new towns' political dimension

The claim made by Cherry and others that the new towns suffered because of regular changes in governments accompanied by diverging policies on their best way forward is persuasive if it is assumed that generally Labour governments invested more in public-sector services than the Conservatives, who laid more emphasis upon the private sector (though in practice the positions were often reversed, depending whether they were in government office or not). Cherry's position becomes less sustainable, however, if one considers the general unanimity between the two main parties on many issues concerning the new towns. In spite of their concerns about the eventual handover of the town's assets, there was very little equivocation between the parties before 1945 over the need for a new town programme following the war. Both major parties were virtually unanimous that there needed to be some form of planned dispersal from the heavily overcrowded urban areas to outlying areas, and that new towns were the most favourable and humane way of achieving this. Moreover, despite the Labour party's general dislike for the Commission for the New Towns and its desire to replace it by 'a more democratic form in which the local authorities would play a far more direct and important role',² Labour governments did very little to alter the arrangement, with the result that none of the North East new towns came under municipal control at least until the late 1970s.

² *HC Debs*, 596, c. 910 (Nov 1965).

It is not clear whether if the towns had had a different form of administrative control (and/or different personalities controlling them) they would have turned out differently. It was very evident, however, that the complexion of the original corporation board in Peterlee did not foster harmonious working relations with its local councils. Monica Felton was unwilling to countenance any views that differed from her own. In Aycliffe, however, Beveridge was held in such high regard that some corporation board members wanted to call the new town Beverton or Ridgetown in honour of the new chairman.³ In many ways, though, both Felton and Beveridge's psychological outlook was very similar. Beveridge was just as autocratic as Felton when dealing with new town business and relations with the town's local authorities. According to accounts from corporation officials, everyone at planning meetings was made to stand. Beveridge even checked the size of officials' pencils before issuing them with fresh ones.⁴

That the two people chosen to chair the two corporations were temperamentally alike was no coincidence, however. Both were selected by the Ministry precisely because of their general outlook, which reflected those of the people in charge of the new town programme. Moreover, the composition of the corporation boards, which on the whole were the same kind of people that would otherwise become magistrates and justices of the peace, was meant to reflect the types of people that the town's inhabitants could look up to for guidance.

The problem in East Durham, especially, was that there was a much higher degree of animus precisely because of the types of local authorities and communities the corporation was dealing with. Easington district's close-knit villages were comprised almost entirely of miners and their families: new arrivals to the villages were usually met with mistrust and hostility.⁵ Moreover, self-sufficiency and a general antagonism towards outsiders had bred in Easington's communities a supreme confidence in their own mining traditions, as well as a kind of 'backs against the wall' militancy. The strength of the district's mining traditions was recognised by the

³ NT/Ay/1/1/1 ADC, BM, 1 Aug 1947.

⁴ Philipson, *Swords*, p. 123.

⁵ Clarke, *Farewell Squalor*, p. 4

Ministry of Town and Country Planning, which agreed to name many of Peterlee's early streets after prominent mining officials. It was unfortunate that the Ministry and the corporation were not as astute when dealing with the district council (which was almost to a man composed of ex-miners from the district).

The pits had been sunk much earlier in South-West Durham and were more or less exhausted by the end of the war. The district's communities were therefore not dominated by miners to the same extent as Easington. They were, furthermore, traditionally more socially heterogeneous than East Durham. In Easington there was virtually no middle-class element to speak of; in Darlington rural district, villages consisting of a mix of income groups and outlooks was generally the norm. When the Ministry announced the membership of the corporation board at Aycliffe, it reflected the social composition of its surrounding area. All three major political parties were represented on the board, which resulted in more harmonious relations when dealing with the district's local authorities. It was also reflected in the names of the town's early streets which, despite the district's own mining traditions, were named after the more nationally distinguished figures of Churchill, Lewis Silkin and Beveridge himself.

It was odd then that the corporation never became totally accepted by many of Aycliffe's inhabitants, who regularly called for its abolition and replacement by local authority control. Throughout the corporation's tenure in charge of the new town, many of Aycliffe's residents habitually stated in surveys that they disapproved of what Schaffer called the 'benevolent despotism' of the corporations.⁶ He claimed that as the corporation boards were not elected they had a greater obligation to the town's residents.⁷ Similarly, Holley argued that corporations provided 'an intimacy of management which [cannot] be exercised by central government and a continuity of purpose which is impracticable with local government'.⁸ This was different to people's perceptions, however. In all three towns, residents regularly complained about the

⁶ Schaffer, *The New Town Story*, p. 199.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 59.

⁸ Holley, *Quicker*, p. 195.

aloofness of the corporation boards. In a 1977 survey, less than five per cent of respondents replied that rent increases were the worst actions of the corporations: the largest numbers of malcontents in the towns, in fact, were those who complained that the corporations' biggest failings were that they were overly bureaucratic and remote.⁹ According to one former resident in Aycliffe, corporation board members, far from having the town's interest at heart, were self-serving and only looked after their own interests. This viewpoint was also very much in evidence with people who had witnessed corporation policies and actions at first hand. In Peterlee, two officers resigned from the corporation in 1975 on the grounds that the 'actions of the development corporation [were] fundamentally harmful and counter to the interests of the people in Peterlee', adding that the corporation was 'positively destructive of the quality of people's lives, and of their simple wishes and desires and thus their humanity'.¹⁰ According to former architect, W. J. Scott, board members in Aycliffe and Peterlee were in most cases not up to the task of running a new town, but were rather 'a self-seeking, title-hunting set of vested-interest humbugs', adding that 'many of the [board members] don't make a contribution but just sit there and say nothing and draw their fees'.¹¹ In 1986 the questionable practices of corporation officers attained new heights when it was discovered that the chief finance officer at Aycliffe and Peterlee had embezzled more than £250,000 from the corporation.¹²

It was not only ex-architects and officers who could see the deficiencies in board members, moreover. It seemed that even the corporation chairmen themselves were unsatisfied with the calibre of people the Ministry appointed to the boards. In Washington, James Steel described fellow board member, Mrs D. Palmer, as a regular 'thorn in the flesh',¹³ who was overly critical of corporation officials and other board members. In Aycliffe and Peterlee, Dennis Stevenson,

⁹ NEAS, 'New Towns Vol. 2', p. 184.

¹⁰ R. Morgan and D. Robinson, 'The future of the development corporation in Peterlee' (Aycliffe and Peterlee Development Corporations, 1975), p. 10.

¹¹ *NE*, 19 Dec 1964.

¹² NT/AP/1/1/1 A + PDC, Special Board Meeting, 26 Feb 1986.

¹³ HLG/116/649 James Steel meeting with V. Eyre (DoE), 29 March 1973.

upon taking up his appointment as chairman of the corporation in 1971, claimed that the towns' lack of planning objectives was due to the general manager, A. V. Williams, who was described as 'a difficult man to talk to', and who preferred to keep his ideas to himself and to thrust proposals at the Ministry at short notice.¹⁴

During the 1960s a lack of local authority members on the boards was addressed by Crossman, but again there were anomalies in the approach. The corporations still held their board meetings in secret, thus denying the general public and local authorities access to the results of decisions. As late as November 1975, Washington Development Corporation was defending its right to hold its board meetings in secret.¹⁵ Board members, furthermore, were selected not elected, so were therefore only de-selected if they incurred the disapproval of the Minister. In Washington's case, there were board members who had been selected because of their links with local councils which after the 1974 boundary changes no longer had any connection with the new town. The system also meant that newer local authority members, who might otherwise have been able to make a contribution, were unable to sit on the boards because they were already full of older local authority members. Steel recognised the anomalies in the system; he was also, for the most part, distrustful of councillors who were on the board. He had a poor opinion of board member, Alderman Allon, and considered that his replacement would be a good thing. Alderman Graham's appointment, meanwhile, had been made to 'stifle complaints' by Chester-le-Street District Council about its lack of representation on the board. Again, Steel considered that it would be better to get rid of this member. Steel rated Alderman Finnigan slightly higher than Graham, but claimed that he also contributed very little.¹⁶ The rancour was occasionally reciprocated, however. In February 1988 board members in Washington expressed strong dissent to the way McLelland had written certain chapters in his overview of the corporation's activities since becoming chairman. They thought that the fact that the author was

¹⁴ HLG/115/854 J. A. L. Barber (DoE) to Sir Idwal Pugh, 14 May 1973.

¹⁵ DC/WS/1/12 WDC, BM, 3 Nov 1975.

¹⁶ HLG/116/649 Steel meeting with Eyre, 29 March 1973.

the chairman of the corporation would inevitably mean that his at times controversial approach would be taken as reflecting the views of all members of the board.

Mistrust in the towns between and among elected officials, the corporations and the local population was also common. How it was manifested and the degree of enmity that existed in all three new towns was not always exhibited in a similar way, however. The pervasive militancy existing in East Durham ensured that conflict between the corporation and the area's local authorities and inhabitants regularly turned into downright hostility. Indeed, the standoff between the corporation and Easington Rural District Council between 1947 and 1950 was only the prelude to a series of heated disputes, each of which threatened to sever relations between the two authorities (three once the parish council became established in the town).

In 1961 the parish council complained that it had not even been consulted about the Queen and Prince Philip's proposed visit to Peterlee. (Neither, it appeared was C. W. Clarke, who complained bitterly that there would not even been a new town for the Queen to visit had it not been for him).¹⁷ For John Alderson, secretary of the parish council, it was further proof of the uncommunicative attitude of the corporation. 'Eventually this town will have a local authority with a higher standing than it has at present', he told reporters in May 1960, 'and we might get to know what is going on'.¹⁸ In March 1963 parish councillors called for the resignation of the entire corporation board following steep rent increases in the town and what they perceived was a poor response from the corporation when trying to justify the increases.¹⁹

Of the three towns, Peterlee attracted the greatest proportion of its population from its surrounding villages. It was not surprising then that the new town's inhabitants were just as radical as those in the district as a whole. Despite claims that the new town would engender a more politically diverse population – the Conservative party actually entered candidates in the

¹⁷ *Daily Express*, 25 May 1960.

¹⁸ *SE*, 24 May 1960.

¹⁹ *NE*, 4 March 1963.

1956 parish council elections²⁰ – the party was well beaten in all the seats they contested, and to date no Conservative candidate has ever won a seat in the new town.²¹ Peterlee, moreover, was one of the few places in the North East during the 1950s to have a thriving Fabian society, which regularly questioned corporation, and council proposals and policies.²²

In Aycliffe and Washington, relations between the corporations and the towns' local authorities and inhabitants were slightly more prosaic. This was arguably because both towns contained far fewer residents who had originated from the towns' surrounding areas and a considerably larger proportion of higher-income residents who were, on the whole, a force for stability, as well as being more supportive of the corporations.²³ Interestingly, the Conservatives actually won council seats in Aycliffe during the late 1950s, and in 1960 the party gained all four of the newly created district council places in Aycliffe.²⁴ In Washington, moreover, despite the corporation encountering similar problems as Aycliffe with regards to multiple local authorities claiming jurisdiction of the town, relations between the corporation and its local councils never attained the same heightened animosity that it did in Peterlee. Sunderland Borough Council even commented on the excellent relations between it and the corporation despite the problems associated with the protracted housing transfer between 1976 and 1986.²⁵

²⁰ In an address to Conservatives in Easington, for example, J. Simon, financial secretary to the Treasury suggested that the new communities being created in Peterlee gave 'great scope for Conservatism'. See for example *SE*, 24 Sept 1958.

²¹ *NDM*, 19 April 1956. The Conservatives fared even worse in 1958 than they did in 1956. Incidentally, in that year's election, Gilbert Lee, Peter Lee's grandson, came top of the polls. See, for example, *SE*, 10 May 1958.

²² *NE*, 26 May 1960.

²³ Up until the late 1970s, in fact, Aycliffe drew a third of its population from outside of the region, which was a higher figure than any other new town in the country.

²⁴ *NE*, 28 April 1960.

²⁵ DC/WS/1/21 WDC, BM, 30 April 1984.

ii) The new towns' industrial priorities

For a region like the North East, with its history of industrial decline throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the provision of industry in the region's new towns was always going to have a bearing on whether the towns succeeded or failed.

Despite desperate deprivation in South-West Durham during the inter-war years, Aycliffe was in a very good position to capitalise on the change in emphasis by the Board of Trade after the war.²⁶ As the sub-region's pits had been almost exhausted during the inter-war years, it qualified unreservedly in respect of government assistance. It was also fortunate in that there already existed millions of feet of factory space at the disused ordinance factories.

Peterlee's industrial origins were far less propitious. The district's mines had been sunk much later than in South-West Durham: its pits were not only unlikely to contract; it was far more likely that they would still be being mined at the end of the century. Under these circumstances, the Board of Trade was extremely loathed to permit any industry to be steered to East Durham which would compete with the mines for workers.²⁷

Both new towns suffered from a switch in the Board of Trade's emphasis from the new towns as growth points, to targeting particular unemployment blackspot areas, culminating in the 1960 Local Employment Act.²⁸ During the 1950s, the Board of Trade began decreasing the amount of industry going to Aycliffe and instead directed larger firms to West Durham, where unemployment was increasing at an alarming rate.²⁹ The Board of Trade's lack of attention in Peterlee ensured that there were only three factories operating in the town by 1961 with a combined workforce of 1,300, of which 80 per cent were women.

In 1963, however, the Hailsham Report was largely responsible for a return to a regional growth point's strategy, of which the new towns played a major role. The number of workers on

²⁶ Middleton, 'Unemployment in the North East', p. 25.

²⁷ Robinson, 'Peterlee', p. 95.

²⁸ *Midland Bank Review* (May 1964), p. 5.

²⁹ Bowden, 'Problems and policies', p. 29.

Aycliffe's trading estate almost doubled between 1963 and 1965. Unemployment diminished to such low levels that at 1.5 per cent it was consistently below the national average.³⁰ The major problem was finding skilled workers. The strength of the new town as a growth point, moreover, persuaded government to allow it to be expanded to a population of 45,000 so that it could meet the influx of workers. Hailsham was also largely responsible for the attraction of firms employing predominantly male workforces to Peterlee. The report stressed the desperate need for improved roads in the area, most notably to the A19. Hailsham also recommended that the amount of land for industry should be increased in the new town.

Washington's remit was to act as a catalyst between the Tyne and Wear conurbations: the town was therefore planned to a greater extent to be incorporated within a regional framework in its entirety. Washington quickly established itself as the premier industrial location outside of the region's major urban centres, moreover.³¹ Its master plan forecast that within 20 years employment would reach the 38,000 mark (a bold statement considering that Peterlee had attracted factories employing a mere 1,300 workers in its first 15 years). It also benefited in 1967 when a portion of the designated area was included in the Special Development Area schedule.

Washington's success was arguably at the expense of the region's other new towns, which did not achieve SDA status.³² Even though pits in close proximity to Peterlee were not expected to be working for much longer it was puzzling why it did not receive the privileges. By 1971 unemployment in the town had reached more than fourteen per cent.³³ The corporation pursued efforts to turn Peterlee into a centre for research and development and achieved promising early results. T. Dan Smith's appointment as chairman of the corporation, moreover, appeared to enhance the new town's credibility as a worldwide centre of excellence in computer

³⁰ Bowden, 'Newton Aycliffe', p. 142.

³¹ Hudson and Johnson, 'New Towns', p. 147.

³² PDC, *1967 AR*, p. 240.

³³ NEAS, 'New Towns Vol. 2', p. 66.

technology.³⁴ His arrest and subsequent imprisonment on fraud charges, however, was a huge blow to the project. Evidence suggested, furthermore, that efforts by the Board of Trade to direct research and development firms to Peterlee were only half-hearted.³⁵

Aycliffe was also not granted SDA status. And, even though government approval in principle for the town's expansion to accommodate the expected increase in industry was forthcoming, the long delay in actually gaining permission to build in the town convinced the Board of Trade to switch its emphasis to other parts of the region (most notably to Washington), when directing industry to the North East.³⁶ Much of the new industry that came to Aycliffe was comprised of branch factories, which were much more likely to leave the region at the first sign of economic difficulties.³⁷

The idea that the new towns became an integral part of the regional framework is also problematical. Inconsistencies in government policy in promoting the new towns as growth areas, but then depriving them of the industry that would enable them to fulfil their putative roles within the region, undoubtedly retarded the towns' industrial objectives. However, it was also clear that regional agencies were not always supportive of the new towns as growth points within the region. In 1966 the corporations in Aycliffe and Peterlee were perturbed to learn that publicity material from the North East Development Council, which was being sent to firms all over the world, contained no mention of the new towns whatsoever. During the 1970s and 1980s, moreover, all three corporations on separate occasions protested strongly about the lack of industry that was being steered to the towns via the NEDC; all three also questioned whether the fees they paid to the council were value for money and if they should continue paying them.

What was also clear was that in many cases the region's local authorities resented the prominence the new towns were receiving; also, that such prominence was at the expense of their

³⁴ Robinson, 'Some Aspects', p. 3.

³⁵ See for example, HLG/115/1065 J. MaColl (HL/G) to Peter Shore, 15 Oct 1968.

³⁶ ADC, 1969 AR, p. 11; Hudson and Johnson, 'New Towns', p. 15.

³⁷ Goddard, *The Economic Development*, pp. 7-8.

own industrial plans. In South-West Durham, Aycliffe was considered by nearby local authorities to be the 'cuckoo in the nest', which was sabotaging the rest of the sub-region's attempts to procure industry. This sentiment remained to a large degree until the corporation's dissolution in 1988. Antagonism towards Washington from South Tyneside's local authorities grew to such an extent that there were calls from the latter to arrest the new town's development altogether as a provider of industry and to prioritise their own areas instead.

To a large extent, this criticism was unfair. As Wannop argued, in many cases the new towns were actually more in competition among themselves for new industry.³⁸ Also, as Bowden stated, 70 per cent of firms established in Aycliffe would not have done so had it not been for the new town. It was also hard to disagree with McClelland when he asserted that the attraction to the North East of Nissan in 1984 was 'probably the biggest single positive achievement for [the region] since the war'.³⁹ It was equally apparent, though, that Nissan's arrival in Britain occurred not only through the tireless work the corporation and officers from Sunderland Borough Council to sell the town, but that the town itself was sufficiently attractive to Nissan's management for it to approve the venture. It was hugely ironic then that, in spite of the rancour directed to the new towns, the corporations received huge support in their industrial objectives from local authorities throughout the region just as they were being dissolved.

iii) Housing and the types of communities formed in the new towns

There was a strong ideological emphasis on housing policy in the 1946 New Towns Act, in the sense that following the war the new towns were intended to be not only self-contained and balanced communities, but were also expected to be the repositories of a new, bold type of lived experience in Britain.⁴⁰ At the same time, however, there was the more practical concern that

³⁸ Wannop, 'New Towns', pp. 221-222.

³⁹ McClelland, *Washington*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Reith Committee, *Final Report*, p. 6.

communities ought to be created that would be able to sustain the new priorities in industry.

From the beginning, moreover, there was a tension between the desire to create as far possible a 'microcosm of British society', on the one hand, and the aspiration that the new towns should become the blueprint for a new type of society on the other: one where the new art-loving, respectful being could hopefully become the exemplar for a type of life untainted by the sort of existence he had lived through before the war. As with most policies that were implemented from above without first having been mediated at local level they only achieved moderate success, if any at all.

The towns were expected to become socially-balanced communities in the sense that all income groups and ages were to be represented in them. However, for the most part, higher income workers were unwilling to live in close proximity to manual workers, and so either did not wish to move to the towns in the first place, or else quickly moved out once they discovered what life amongst the lower classes really entailed. Also, home ownership, which might have attracted more higher earners, accounted for less than five per cent in both Peterlee and Aycliffe combined until the late 1970s. Even once houses to buy were introduced in the towns, there was little evidence of a strategy to get the different classes living within the same estates. Peterlee's first entirely owner-occupied estate was set apart from rented estates. Similarly, in Aycliffe, space, streams and trees were utilised to segregate home owners from the rented housing estates. It had apparently been lost on the corporations that one of the major purposes of the towns in the first place was that miners and their families would have more contact with people from other professions and different backgrounds.

Even within the rented housing sector there were attempts to keep the lower-paid manual workers away from the more affluent skilled workers. In both Aycliffe and Peterlee, the corporations used rebate schemes to ensure that workers in the poorer sides of the towns were deterred from being re-housed in the newer parts of the towns where rents were usually much

higher. In spite of Washington's sizeable community at the time of the new town's designation, moreover, there was very little mixing between that section of the town's population and the mainly professional and technical workers, who had usually travelled from further afield and lived in the town's newer estates. It appeared, therefore, that not only had the original planners' dream of ensuring as far as possible that the new towns would consist of multi-class workers living side-by-side been abandoned, the segregation of workers with different incomes and lifestyles was actually being welcomed, even embraced.

There is also little evidence to suggest that such segregation was resented by any of the sections of the towns, even in Washington, which was planned from the start to contain a sizeable middle-class element. In all three towns, in fact, it was more the case that arrivals in the towns continued to go about their daily lives as they had before moving to the towns. Proof of this was the voting, shopping, drinking and cultural habits of each cohort of arrivals which, despite what Hudson and others assert, were in fact, not too dissimilar to their customs and practices prior to moving to the towns.⁴¹

One section of the population that was conspicuous by its absence was ethnic minorities. In fairness, County Durham had historically been devoid of a sizeable presence of non-white communities. There were occasions, however, when the new towns could have remedied this, but obstructionist tactics by the corporations and local authorities served to prevent minorities from arriving in the towns in any great numbers. As a result, the racial complexion of all three new towns remained predominantly white. The situation had not changed to any great extent by the time of the corporations' dissolutions.⁴² In 1961, a mere 0.9 per cent of Easington district's

⁴¹ See for example Robinson, 'Some aspects', p. 24.

⁴² Tyne and Wear Research and Information, *2001 Population and Household Characteristics* (Newcastle, 2004), p. 19.

population had been born outside the British Isles.⁴³ In 1991, the population of the district was still 99.3 per cent white.⁴⁴

The trajectory the new towns took via their housing developments was not only affected by vicissitudes in government policy, moreover: economics also played a pivotal role in the built environment in the towns as well as the types of people who resided in them. However, as with changes in government policy, more successful outcomes could have occurred had decisions to do with finance been reconciled with a local sense of place. In both Aycliffe and Peterlee, the rents charged by the corporations had a major effect on the types of households that could afford to live in the towns. The rents charged in the towns also had a determining influence on the new town planners' dreams of creating socially-balanced communities in the towns.

iv) The new towns: success or failure?

At the time of their respective designations the three new towns were expected to fulfil certain criteria. To what degree they were successful and whether there are any lessons to be learnt from their experiences is the subject of these final two sections.

In many ways, the towns were a response to a unique set of social, economic and political conditions. In this respect, they offered at least a partial answer to the post-war problem of gathering disparate communities into centralised urban areas to face the challenges of industry and the built environment that had historically bedevilled the region.

One of the most important challenges for the corporations was to help stem outward migration from the region. In this undertaking they were moderately successful. There is no doubt that Aycliffe was partly responsible for arresting the outward migration from South-West Durham, which accounted for the loss of nearly 20 per cent of the sub-region's population before

⁴³ County Durham, *1961 Census*, p. 26.

⁴⁴ County Durham, *1991 Census*, p. 17.

the war.⁴⁵ By the late 1960s the creation of attractive housing, accompanied by the arrival of a significant amount of industry in Aycliffe, meant that the sub-region became an importer of people rather than an exporter.⁴⁶ Peterlee's record on outward migration was not so impressive. More than 6,000 people left East Durham during the inter-war years.⁴⁷ By 1975 there were still more than 600 people per year leaving the district.⁴⁸ Washington was responsible for the arrival of a great number of higher income families to the region as a whole; the creation of the new town also helped to persuade a number of the existing population who would probably have migrated from the area to stay in the North East.

Whether the new towns raised the quality of life of its residents is also open to debate. The towns were expected to become the shopping, entertainment and recreational centres for their respective districts. Of the three towns, Peterlee's outcome depended upon whether it succeeded in becoming the central focal area for several of Easington district's scattered villages. In this respect the town was not a resounding success. Because of protracted negotiations with the NCB over land use in the town, as well as cuts in capital expenditure during the 1950s, it took a full ten years for a start to be made on the town centre. Frequent alterations to the design of the central area and the lack of a cinema or recognised entertainments centre, moreover, served to confirm for many people that the original plans did not conform to what was required. It could be argued that it is only since the dissolution of the corporation in 1988, and the siting of a large supermarket in the town centre, has Peterlee began to be viewed as the shopping area of choice for many of the district's households.

Like Peterlee, Aycliffe's attempts to provide amenities and facilities that would attract visitors to the town were greatly affected by the cuts in capital expenditure imposed on the corporations from the late 1940s onwards. Disputes with neighbouring local authorities over the ultimate size

⁴⁵ Middleton, 'Unemployment', p. 32.

⁴⁶ Philipson, *Swords*, p. 179.

⁴⁷ Clarke, *Farewell Squalor*, p. 52.

⁴⁸ Hudson and Johnson, 'Industry and Employment', p. 12.

of the town and its central area, moreover, ensured that the latter did not become as popular with the area's shoppers as the corporation hoped it would.

By the time Washington was designated in 1964, the priorities given to town centres in the new towns had changed: the centres were considered to be as integral to mark two new towns' design as housing. Consequently, from the beginning, Washington's central area was built with the intention of attracting people from throughout the sub-region and beyond. The increasing popularity of car travel when shopping also benefited the town. Customers, especially those who had arrived in Washington from outside of the area, were willing to travel to the town centre for their daily shopping needs rather than use the local shops in their own villages.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the road system in Washington, lauded so much by the corporation during the 1960s was found to be overly complicated. A 1977 survey found that nearly one in three Washington road users were dissatisfied with the road system.⁵⁰ It is also noticeable, moreover, that much new thinking on urban planning is now tending to reject the Washington model of extensive road use because of its potentially adverse effect on the environment. Much contemporary town planning literature is, in fact, being devoted to the self-containment model of the earlier-designated new towns, where industry and amenities were provided almost exclusively for the town's residents only, thus avoiding the need for as much travelling by motor cars.⁵¹

That the new towns affected the built environment within their sub-regions is not open to debate; but whether the impact they had was the effect that they were intended to have is open to question. Housing in the towns was always going to arouse strong emotions. On the whole, however, the standard of houses provided in the towns was not particularly good. The Pasmore-designed houses in Peterlee continued to attract much criticism right up to the corporation's dissolution. The industrially-built houses in all three towns attracted similar amounts of hostility

⁴⁹ DC/WS/1/9 WDC, BM, 12 Nov 1972.

⁵⁰ NEAS, 'New Towns Vol. 2', p. 119.

⁵¹ See, for example, *New Statesman*, 29 Jan 2007.

from residents. They were for the most part shoddily built, and in the long run, more expensive to construct than traditionally-built houses.

With a finite amount of labour and resources, building in the new towns also necessarily meant that the construction of houses elsewhere in the region was curtailed. Towns and villages in close proximity to Aycliffe following the war vigorously opposed the allocation of scarce building resources to the new town, at a time when they urgently needed to build houses in their own areas. Moreover, one of Peterlee's main functions was to create a better built environment for East Durham's mining communities than they had hitherto been accustomed to. However, the rents charged in the town, as well as local miners' attachment to their own particular village, led to the boycott of the town by many of the very people who were expected to be re-housed there. At the same time, the district council was prevented from providing houses in the villages to cater for miners' preferences.

In many respects, the provision of industry in the new towns was every bit as important as the provision of housing. Indeed, the fortunes of all three towns have been inextricably linked to how well they have attracted industry. However, of all the services the corporations provided, the provision of industry has been the one field in which they had the least control over or influence upon. Today, Aycliffe is generally regarded as the principal industrial area in South-West Durham, despite the vehemence directed at it from many of the local authorities in the sub-region throughout its history. Peterlee's industrial fortunes seemed to have matched its acceptance in the area. In many respects the town was Aycliffe's poor cousin in industrial terms: it has only been during the last two decades that it has finally become the central industrial centre for the district. In contrast to the other two towns, Washington, from the time of its designation, was clearly destined to become an industrial *tour de force*. The inclusion of the new town (but not Aycliffe and Peterlee) in the Special Development Area schedule after 1967 enabled the town to become firmly established as a provider of industry. The national economic recession after 1980 was

certainly a blow to the town; its recovery after 1983, however, once again re-invigorated the town's fortunes.

Whether the industrial advance of the three towns was to the benefit of the region as a whole is also open to question. The idea that the creation of the new towns would become part of a north-eastern industrial revival following the war was explicitly stated in the 1946 Distribution of Industry Act. The exclusion of the towns in the 1960 Local Employment Act, however, appeared to diminish their importance within the region. During the 1970s and 1980s the towns were viewed first with mistrust but then with respect by local authorities. The resentment directed towards first Aycliffe and then Washington by local officials in the North East, primarily because they were perceived as receiving the lion's share of industry, seemed to encapsulate the uneasy relationship between the corporations and local authorities since the towns' creations. It was ironic then, that when the corporations were fighting for extensions to their lives, it was the region's local authorities which were the most supportive of their continued role as providers of industry.

v) Can any lessons be learnt?

The question to be asked finally is: are there any lessons to be learnt from the experiences of the North East new towns? Although there is very little likelihood that there will be any further new towns built in the region in the near future, should there be a change in government policy, it may be the case that indeed there may be some lessons that could be transferable to any new urban initiatives.

One of the most important issues to be addressed would be what form of administrative body would control the towns.⁵² It was considered implausible that a sole local authority could create an entire new town in 1948: it is still probably the case today that it would be unlikely to have

⁵² Town is use here for purposes of convenience. New urban initiatives could, however, entail a cluster of towns within a region, or even a region-wide administrative organisation.

the expertise needed. Information gleaned from the new towns' experience, however, would suggest that any new form of urban corporation would need to forge partnerships with local organisations and community groups on a larger scale. Moreover, one of the most salient features of life in all three towns was the apparent uncooperative nature of the corporations: the situation was only ameliorated to any great degree when they were compelled to devolve some of their powers to partnership organisations in the form of consultative committees.

In any event, any new urban developments are much more likely to be financed by private capital than was the case with the new towns built in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵³ The experience of Washington's housing programmes during the late 1960s is a lesson to any project managers, however. A general lack of coordination among separate private developers and a reduction in standards in housing programmes caused much frustration among the corporation board and the town's planners. Furthermore, attempts by the Conservative government to create country towns financed ostensibly by private capital during the 1980s are a salutary lesson to future developers of the dangers of allowing untrammelled private enterprise too large a stake in urban development. Despite being championed by Mrs. Thatcher, a combination of local authority opposition, half-hearted commitment by private developers, and even resistance from within her own cabinet succeeded in destroying the programme within two years of its implementation.⁵⁴

Consideration also needs to be given to the composition of any future urban corporation boards. The mark one new towns especially suffered when the roles of the towns changed. Peterlee's original function was to become the recreational centre for Easington district. However, once the new town's remit was altered to become the industrial growth point of the district, it was clear that few of the corporation board members had the skills or the experience necessary for such an undertaking.⁵⁵ The limitations of the corporation were exposed even more

⁵³ Department for Communities and Local Government, *Transferable Lessons*, p. 3.

⁵⁴ See for example, S. V. Ward, 'Consortium Developments Limited and the failure of new country towns in Mrs. Thatcher's Britain', *Planning Perspectives* 20 (2005), pp. 329-331.

⁵⁵ Philipson, *Swords*, p. 71.

during the 1960s when the town was intended to be at the vanguard of the 'white hot industrial revolution'. It was obvious that some board members were hopelessly out of their depth.

One possible solution might be some form of collaboration between different urban corporations whereby information and expertise are shared. This happened with some success in Aycliffe and Peterlee, when after 1963 both towns shared the same board, as well as the functions of various officers. The same level of fraternity between corporations was not always in evidence, however. In 1968, Washington Development Corporation hired the services of an industrial consultant in the United States on the understanding that he did not work for any other development corporation or local authority in the region.⁵⁶ Washington has also been accused of being concerned only with its own interests. The corporation flatly refused to participate with representatives of Aycliffe and Peterlee at the closing ceremony of the London office during the 1980s, despite the office functioning to attract industry for all three towns. One newspaper claimed that the problem was that Washington was planned as 'a thing in itself', adding that it was not included in any regional or national plan.⁵⁷

The collaboration and coordination of different government departments involved with the new towns would also assist the corporations. A frequent complaint from the latter was that projects were all too often delayed, sometimes with extremely adverse results, when approval was given by one government department, only for another to object to the proposals necessitating a complete reassessment of the town's objectives. In 1975 the House of Commons Expenditure Committee was concerned to learn that development corporations had to press for public facilities across a range of government departments.⁵⁸ Perhaps a central advisory commission, which was recommended by the Reith Committee but never taken up, might help with the coordination of disparate government departments.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ T/88/3 WDC, BM, 1 July 1968.

⁵⁷ *Morning Star*, 9 Jan 1967.

⁵⁸ Wannop, 'New towns', p. 227.

⁵⁹ Schaffer, *The New Town Story*, p. 72; Rodwin, *The British New Towns Policy*, p. 58.

This study has also argued that it is essential that someone with extensive knowledge of the area in which the new town is to be situated should be able to make a contribution to decision-making, at the very least in an advisory capacity. Schaffer was satisfied that a good corporation chairman should be able to quickly gauge local opinion and traditions and accommodate them within corporation policy. However, as the study has consistently argued, communities are complex and nuanced structures: it takes someone with a broad knowledge of the town's surroundings to be able to interpret the feeling of existing communities and advise on how particular policies would affect the locality in its entirety.⁶⁰ Such a person would also be able to suggest ways of getting the support from existing communities for any new developments in their area. Had someone of this calibre been available to the corporations then some of the disastrous housing developments in the towns may have been avoided.

The study has also argued that it was a persistent failure of the corporations that nearby villages were deliberately snubbed and ignored. It has been claimed that Peterlee's surrounding villages suffered years of neglect due to the creation of the new town: that it was the wishes of local people in the area that the town was created in the first place makes it even more of a sad indictment on the town.⁶¹ Washington's communities, furthermore, did not benefit from its creation as much as they might have. Comparatively few of the new jobs or houses created in the town went to people already living in the area at the time of its designation.⁶² It was therefore a tribute to the people of Washington that there was little evidence of the hostility directed to new arrivals in the town from its existing population that there was in other British new towns.

One way in which the towns could have better served their existing communities was if a major amenity such as a hospital had been built, which would have attracted their areas' existing

⁶⁰ See for example Clapson, *Invincible*, p. 196. Clapson argued that alongside historians of planning and architecture, social historians have much to offer the debate on the development of new towns.

⁶¹ See, for example, *NE*, 17 Nov 1964. In 1965, moreover, the newspaper claimed that the creation of Peterlee had led to the villages in close proximity to the new town being 'deliberately murdered'. *NE*, 3 May 1965.

⁶² Hole et al, *Washington*, p. 124; Hudson and Johnson, 'Industry and Employment', p. 8.

communities to the towns.⁶³ The failure to do this in all three new towns meant that their planners missed an opportunity to integrate the area's existing and newly arriving populations. It was not only hospitals that were lacking in the towns, however: amenities and facilities of all descriptions that could have helped bind the disparate communities were sadly missing for whatever reason from the towns for many years.⁶⁴ It is therefore essential that any new settlements created in the region should incorporate amenities and facilities such as cinemas, play areas, libraries and shops from the beginning.

Finally, any new towns created in the region should not become the test beds for whatever social or cultural fads that are fashionable at the time of their designations.⁶⁵ There is no doubt that the new towns were victims of the post-war fervour to achieve bold social goals. In all three towns, but especially in the two earlier-designated towns, the assumption was that the creation of a particular type of built environment, and the introduction of people from various social backgrounds, would lead to changes in attitudes and lifestyles of the region's existing communities, and therefore, the kind of harmonious social relationships desired by the towns' planners. As Jung once famously observed, however, all truths eventually turn into paradoxes: any town planners attempting to create new urban settlements in the North East would do well to bear this in mind.

⁶³ See for example DC/WS/1/9 WDC, BM, 31 Jan 1972.

⁶⁴ Schaffer, *The New Town Story*, p. 163.

⁶⁵ Aldridge, *The British New Towns*, p. 29.

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