

NEW TOWNS IN AN OLD COUNTRY

A STORY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN MILTON KEYNES

CONTENT

FOREWORD

1. EARLY YEARS page 5
Tunbridge Wells, Medway Towns and Risca
2. EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF GARDEN CITIES page 17
3. ORIGIN OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN NEW TOWNS page 21
Harlow, Hatfield and the Needs of New Communities
4. EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN MILTON KEYNES
MASTER PLAN page 28
5. MY STORY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT page 32
6. NORTH BUCKS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES page 40
Character, Buckingham County Council and Local Authorities
7. NATIONAL EVENTS AND INTERNAL FACTIONS page 44
Oil crisis 1973, Miners Strike 1974, Drought 1975/6, Government Review of New towns 1976, End of New Towns 1979, Modernism versus Common Sense
8. SOCIAL ISSUES AND HOUSING page 49
Neighbourhood, Activity Centres, Housing lay-out, Social Mix/Balance and Density
9. FOUR OTHER SOCIAL ISSUES page 56
Public Participation, Monitoring and Evaluation, Women's Role, Immigration'
10. COMMUNITY AND ASSOCIATION page 60
11. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT EXECUTIVE page 68
12. FINANCE FOR THE SDE PROGRAMME 72
Major and Minor Amenity Funds, Grants and Consultation
13. CLIENT ROLE 74
14. LOCAL, DISTRICT AND CENTRAL SOCIAL AMENITIES page 76
Neighbourhood, District, Centre and New uses for old buildings
15. AREAS OF SDE RESPONSIBILITIES page 82
Liaison, Leisure and Recreation, Special Needs and New Town Blues, Information-Advice-Counselling, and Heritage
16. VOLUNTARY SECTOR page 99
Council of Voluntary Organisations, Working Party for Funding the VS and Milton Keynes Community Foundation
17. DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS page 105
Future role-Flexible hegemony-Telford and MK-Oxford/Cambridge Corridor-Old Country
18. CONCLUSIONS page 108
Social consciousness-Vacuum-Opportunity-Local Government Unitary, Town and Parish-Suffolk Integration of Newcomers-Migration-Whose City?

AFTERWORD

FOREWORD

Wheeled in a pushchair up a plank into a new house, in a new street, built on recent farm land, was my introduction to new build on old land in December 1935 when I was two and a half years old. My mother Ida, my older sister Jean and I moved from Tunbridge Wells to Rochester after the death of my father in September. My mother needed to start a new life, a not unusual reason for some people to move to new towns. The estate of basic similar houses was built on long, treeless, monotonous roads between the ancient routes from Rochester and Chatham to Maidstone. These main roads were fringed by a varied mix of large and medium sized private houses occupied by professionals; a contrast to the residents of the smaller new houses, the basic cheapest model, two rooms-up, two-down, where we lived. The occupants here were mainly the more skilled working class. These houses were built in a period in the UK marked by the virtual absence of council houses for rent and dependence on for sale developers. It is calculated that 3 million houses for sale were built in the UK in this period. Residents of this mixed socio/economic neighbourhood numbered about 4000, a size not unlike the population of a Milton Keynes grid square.

The three of us shared the large front bedroom and the small back bedroom was occupied by a succession of lodgers; I remember two of them, one a fireman and the other worked in the aircraft building industry at Shorts on the Rochester esplanade where it was established in 1914. Sunderland and Empire sea-planes and the Stirling bomber were built here. Ida's sister Alice and her husband Buck Taylor, who lived in Chatham, had helped in the decision and practicalities of moving. This early experience was the forerunner to the main theme of my working life in new towns. From 1959 to the present I have lived in what were the designated areas of new towns. My life's work has been to assist in the settling in process and the provision of services and amenities that were needed.

I use 'new towns' in the broadest sense; all towns have been 'new' at one time. 'Old Country' covers their establishment in the UK from Anglo-Saxon times; Alfred the Great's defensive settlements with some autonomy, 'burhs' (boroughs) like Oxford, to the 20th century programme in the UK post WW2. 'New town' is also often used to describe a substantial area extending an existing settlement; Edinburgh, founded by David I in the late 14th century, has the famous Georgian New Town added four hundred years later. Sometimes similar expansion took place without the epithet but came into existence for the same reasons; these were the needs of the economy, communication, transport, health, recreation, defence and industrial growth; these settlements illustrate our national history.

The examples I use are based upon my own life and experience and are therefore biographical and not an analysis of historic new town development. Before I went to grammar school in 1944 in the middle of Rochester I had no sense of history. The history teacher, Mrs Christine Ratcliffe, taught us making use of the buildings and remains around the school. The 1951 Inspector's report on the school, the first since 1921, wrote that the teaching was dedicated but not inspired except for history. It was this experience that inspired my lifelong interest in the places where I have lived and which I have researched in my retirement. These accounts include general factors in new development which also are occurring in MK; not least the factors affecting their future growth and prosperity or decline. Social development is generally used in a variety of specific contexts. In the context of new town development, it means the process by which essential, useful and desirable amenities

and services are provided when they are needed and resources are available to encourage and support people to provide themselves with the means to build opportunities in buildings, services and activities to fulfil their lives. In the past many people have moved together as groups or been forced to move for a variety of reasons and relied on their existing ways of life, culture, beliefs and relationships to sustain themselves. Increasingly in modern times people move for personal reasons and not in groups and find themselves living among complete strangers. Because we are social animals most of us have the skills to relate to each other and to find where we can belong when we move; searching for a sense of attachment or community. Hannah Arendt in her 1951 book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* claims that this form of tyranny arose in the 20th century from the displacement, loneliness and loss of identity from which people sought a solution in an exclusive uniform membership rejecting those who did not conform to it and obeying an authoritarian leader. Others on the move have found association with people in a variety of activities, causes and interests, many of which exist in the wider nation and region from which they come. The new locality can encourage active residents to work together to create new enterprises.

SD in a new town context needs some explaining as I have tried to do in the preceding paragraph. The role of doing SD does not exist in any professional sense although individuals working in a unit or department often were qualified in specific areas. The role of SDO from the beginning was filled by individuals from a varied background and experience. Their experience provided them with a motivation to assist people in the process of settling into new towns. I have attempted to explain my own experience over a long period during which my Christian belief evaporated. I have had to search for a meaning which gives some purpose to what I have tried to do. It is a quest in a constantly changing world without a resolution. Question without an answer, the search is all there is. I hope that I have not been too indulgent in describing my own search.

In large newly built housing areas, everybody is a stranger and there are no organisations to belong to and sometimes no places to meet. The cost of moving and improving their circumstances requires people to earn sufficient income to do so. Time and energy are not always available for more altruistic interests. Unfortunately, in the class-conscious UK there is also pressure on new residents to show off their status and live beyond their means; 'window to window not face-to-face'. Social development for a brief early period is the process by which other resources are used to fill the gap before mutual aid can take over. The Voluntary Sector (VS) is a vital component of our social life and therefore SD includes the function of responding to and stimulating the potential for self-help that exists in people for a broad range of interests at the neighbourhood and town level.

The large new housing areas post WW2 to replace the millions of homes destroyed or damaged concentrated on the houses and not what was needed outside the home. The New Town Act of 1946 showed a little concern about social needs but was rather inclined to believe they would be met by local councils and others. There was also a tendency to know what was good for people. Social development grew out of the ideas and initiatives of the first corporations. Their objective was to ensure residents had the means and the opportunities to do things for themselves with the support of the new model services of the Welfare State. The eight initial corporations decided unilaterally what kind of staff were needed to carry out this work of development; liaison, social relations, information, amenities and eventually the term social development was adopted by most corporations and the government department issued guidelines.

Social Development is used in the following ways. Social Development is the process and is SD. The Social Development Executive (SDE) appeared in Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) both as a Unit within larger departments and eventually as an independent directorate. SDE covers its role and what it did from 1968 - 1988. It was managed by a Social Development Officer (SDO) which I use although I was the Manager in 1972 and the Director from 1978. The Social Development Programme (SDP) is how the Milton Keynes Master Plan (MKMP) described what it would do after statutory providers were unable to commit themselves to a definite programme of action apart from providing schools. Some commentators, Meryl Aldridge, for example, author of *The British New Towns 1979*, use Plan instead of Programme.

The individuals referred to in this book are given their full title and first name when they appear initially and subsequently are identified by their surname only.