

## CONFERENCE: HOUSING – A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Architecture\_MPS; Liverpool University; Liverpool John Moores University  
Liverpool: 08—09 April, 2015

# ALTERNATIVE THIRD WAVE HOUSING FUTURES

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

#### **A DEFINITION OF COOPERATION.**

"Cooperation means concert for the diffusion of wealth. It leaves nobody out who helps to produce it. It touches no mans fortune. It seeks no plunder. It causes no disturbance in society....It contemplates no violence. It subverts no order...It accepts no gift nor asks now favour. It keeps no terms with the idle and it will break no faith with the industrious.... It means self help. Self independence and such share of the common competence as labour shall earn or thought can win....."  
George Jacon Holyoake, 1885.

Brass Rubbing of a monument to cooperation found in the Seward Park Social Housing Project, New York City.

#### **PART ONE:**

This paper considers the urban and historical circumstances in which housing cooperatives developed democratic approaches to creative urban design in Inner City Liverpool. The cooperative housing movement in Britain has deep historical foundations and in the 1960s cooperatives had a significant role in spatial design and social housing procurement in the City. In 1972 John Turner, working in The South American Flavellas, famously said "Housing is a Verb" and the focus turned towards process over product. Nicholas Harbracken published "Support Systems" and Sherry Arnstein revealed the influential "Ladder of Citizen Participation". There were new groupings of architects, residents and activists who were prepared to work with people in generating ways of community design through creative Participation.

Democratic and cooperative dwelling design represented a form of creative self help, mutual support and co-education which was close to Colin Ward's (1974) self organising societies. Today we might call it "co-production". The Liverpool housing cooperatives are an important example of user controlled, self educated and active democratic society, with implications for future social housing design.

In 1987 there were 37 housing cooperatives, owning or designing 2000 dwellings in Liverpool. The development of the first new housing cooperative is well described in "The Weller Way" which is the cooperatives own account of their seminal project. The Cooperative Development Services (CDS) booklet "Building Democracies 1984-1987" presents a full account of both the history of the movement and more recent developments.

Retrospectively, we can see that the Liverpool cooperatives are significant examples of working class democratic and creative organisations that set out to meet dwelling needs in deprived inner city

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neighbourhoods. Many were family based and some met the specific needs of the elderly. One housing cooperative served the needs of the black elderly.

These dwelling cooperatives had their origins in The SNAP (Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project) in 1969. SNAP helped groups of residents to set up cooperative associations to improve housing in the Toxteth area of Liverpool. Their objective was to control and manage the modernisation of existing terraced housing and Liverpool's first cooperative was called The Granby Housing Cooperative which was serviced by Neighbourhood Housing Services (NHS).

Weller Streets were the most progressive group of private tenants and they built 61 family houses and flats in 1982. Hesketh Street was the second housing cooperative. Overall, at their peak 19 to 150 houses, on different sites were built. However, a Militant City Council took control of Portland Gardens Cooperative and effectively "municipalised" the group of residents. This was a highly charged time for housing development in the City. The words "cooperative" were struck out from sign boards effectively air brushing democratic creativity. Some cooperatives had re-cause to take legal action to protect their projects; for everybody involved this was a low point in the history of social housing in Liverpool.

The cooperative philosophy was "Professionals on tap not on top". To enable large groups of to collectively design their dwellings it was necessary to develop various participatory design techniques. This is because the cooperatives demanded a controlling influence on the urban design and interior design. A variety ways of working evolved including cardboard model making, creative drawing and visits to housing and landscaping projects. These techniques were developed in response to each unique cooperative; organisation, size, personality, nature and context of the site. The variety of the various solutions is an indication of the responsive nature of the design process.

The various design techniques were not arbitrarily applied to an inspecting group of people but rather they evolved in group discussions. These techniques represent useful ways of communicating and developing creative ideas and as design tools they enabled the cooperatives to be in control and determine their own dwelling and urban design.

### **PART TWO:**

In part two, we discuss how the Housing Cooperatives have come to influence later approaches to social housing design. It is over thirty years since the development of the unique cooperatives. In that time, The Eldonians have seen their own rebirth of Liverpool, The World Heritage Site was declared, Liverpool was European Capital of Culture and Liverpool One changed the retail fortunes of the City. Peel Holdings have released plans for Liverpool Waters and A Deep Water Dock is under construction at Liverpool Two. Despite all this progress, large areas of the inner city remains dormant and a reflection of further urban shrinkage.

To revisit the housing cooperative experience and to re-evaluate the contemporary relevance of the model as a potential component of future housing policy, we must start by examining the background of the times and the circumstances of the birth of the movement in Liverpool in more detail.

The housing cooperatives in Liverpool and elsewhere owe their genesis to a number of key circumstances of the time.

#### **Firstly there was a Need**

Communities in Liverpool in the 60s and 70s were living in neighbourhoods which were characterised as 'slums' - very poor housing conditions which included outside toilets, no amenity space, proper kitchens or bathrooms. Previous waves of slum clearance, which had moved people to overspill estates and new towns, had scattered communities removing the pillars of family and community

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support and causing heartbreak. In the words of the song; *'Don't want to go to Kirkby, don't want to go to Speke, don't want to go from all I know in Back Buchanan Street'*.

Communities had been split, not only through slum clearance, but through major infrastructure projects such as the construction of the Mersey Tunnel and the Inner Ring Road.

*'Cathy Come Home'* a TV film by Ken Loach (1966) had created a national reaction to the problems of homelessness in the inner city and led to the creation of Shelter, a national charity. Shelter set up SNAP (Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project), the first neighbourhood based action project in the UK. SNAP was based in an old police station in the Granby Triangle in south Liverpool and began work to try to regenerate the neighbourhood using improvement grants, adding bathrooms and kitchens to small terraced houses and improving the fabric of the properties and the neighbourhoods. This work was later taken over by housing associations who took over portfolios of properties from slum landlords and began improving them within the newly designated Housing Action Areas.

The first housing cooperative in the country was Granby Housing Cooperative, set up to renovate Victorian terraced properties in the Granby Triangle in Liverpool 8. Some neighbourhoods, including the Weller Streets, were acknowledged to be 'too far gone' to be improved. The threat of demolition brought communities together. Liverpool has always had strong communities held together by bonds of family and friends but also by mutual support in the face of economic pressures.

The need was clear; new housing to modern standards but for the community, keeping the bonds and relationships intact while replacing the housing and the neighbourhood.

### **Secondly, Help was at Hand**

The housing associations in particular Cooperative Development Services, built on the culture of working in neighbourhoods for communities and, powered by highly motivated individuals, wanted to help the communities and to lead the process of urban renewal from a community base. They were supported by architects and other professionals who were keen to try new approaches. The background was that overspill estates were perceived to be failing and post war confidence in Modernism had taken a knock following the collapse of Ronan Point and other disasters. The professionals were keen to explore new approaches to the problem in different ways.

### **Thirdly the Finance could be Achieved**

The Reg Freeson Housing Act had identified funding for housing cooperatives. The Housing Corporation could allocate housing association grants to approved projects. CDS and later MIH wanted to facilitate the funding opportunities through helping to set up and provide services to housing cooperatives. The coops and particularly the Eldonians, had to 'fight' for their housing futures and to negotiate a seemingly endless series of hurdles: registration as a housing association, acquiring sites, planning permission and funding. They also had to deal with their internal dynamics - issues of leadership and of decision making, which had to be seen to be democratic and fair to all the members. There were many frustrations and resistance from some quarters to the coop ideas, but key priorities emerged:

1. We want to keep the community together
2. We want to be involved in the design of the houses
3. We want to be in control of the management and the process.

For the professionals involved there was a tremendous commitment required but also a prime need to build trust with groups who had always viewed the 'Corpy' and professionals with distrust. Quickly, approaches were evolved to tackle involvement; hands-on modeling techniques based on 'game theory' were used to explore alternative layouts, and visits to other schemes were arranged to explore ideas. There was a strong educative process at work both in terms of design development and management –

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and the design process was used as a social catalyst and visionary ‘tool’ to motivate and consolidate the coop groups as well as to enable and facilitate the projects.



*The Weller Street Housing Cooperative design committee working in participation with their architect Bill Halsall*



*Weller Street One of the completed courtyards. The final scheme consisted of a series of interlocking courtyards. All of the living rooms and gardens had to face south so that all members would get an equal share of the sun.*

In Liverpool, this all took place against a background of decline in the economy and the population. The early enthusiasm of the sixties, '*City of Change and Challenge*' became a very big challenge, and more of a major change than anyone could have anticipated, as a significant part of the city's industrial base collapsed. These effects were particularly felt in north Liverpool, still struggling today from the failure of many of the traditional dock related industries. The tenement clearance programme of the early 80s led directly to the role of the Eldonians in regenerating the Vauxhall area.

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In the first instance communities from the Portland Gardens and Hopwood and Ashfield blocks were assisted to form housing cooperatives and to develop a series of sites to the east of Vauxhall Road. The residents of Eldon Street, in a later phase, looked to developing the former Tate and Lyle site, where many of them had worked before its closure.

The politics of this period became extremely polarised between a Thatcherite government pursuing extreme monetarist policies and a militant tendency run council, elected in 1983, with an extreme left wing agenda. The militants saw the coops as being elitist and self-selecting and embarked on a large scale programme to build 5,000 new council houses. The coops were to be scrapped but were eventually 'municipalised'. The Eldonians were in the 'eye of the storm', battling the government for land and money and the council for planning approval.

Through this period the designs for the Eldonian Village evolved step by step. A model of the new housing layout evolved through many long model making sessions and design meetings. It was based on a series of informal courtyards off a more formal curving avenue. All the spaces were overlooked to enhance safety and security. Individually designed houses were pre-allocated and plotted. Layers of detailed choice involved exterior appearance, interior layout, kitchens, bathrooms, staircases, landscaping, gates and external materials. Over three years of struggle to acquire the land, and to achieve planning approval, the process of design continued, assisting the community to hang together and to believe in their 'dream'.

Eventually, planning permission was achieved through a public enquiry. The Eldonians avoided 'municipalisation' because they were building on government controlled land.

The scheme developed a strong sense of place and identity, and pride of the coop members. All members of the community were designed for, including bungalows, for elderly care; and disabilities were catered for and integrated into the scheme. The overall environment was enriched through individual contributions and shared decision making. A second phase continued in this tradition including canal-side housing, the Village Hall, offices and sports facilities.

The Eldonian agenda was more than just housing, they wanted to control every aspect of their lives and the bigger plan, as outlined in the 1982 Ideas Competition (entitled – '*The Self Regenerating Community*'), included 3 'planks':

- Housing
- Environment
- Employment.

The Eldonian ambition was always bigger than to form a housing coop - this was to be community-led regeneration and sustainable development on a big scale.



*The Eldonians Village model evolved over many months with the involvement of design committees and members.*

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*Eldonians members on a site visit check out their plans*

### **The Legacy**

The heritage of the Eldonian project has been to consolidate a strong cohesive community in an attractive convivial environment conducive to community life. Crime is low; the village feels safe and secure. The Eldonians have attracted investment and development into this neighbourhood of the city. The design has influenced the progress of standards in housing nationally, in particular ‘Secure by Design’ and ‘Lifetime Homes’ standards, and supported thinking about sustainable communities and community engagement, as well as the role communities can play in regeneration.

The planning system has also been influenced. Community and stakeholder engagement is now required as standard and the approach and techniques of community involvement have entered into general practice.

While ideas about design have evolved over time and higher densities would now be promoted in urban renewal, the sustainability of the Eldonian Village has been demonstrated through success including the award of a World Habitat Award in 2004. Of course the wider economic issues must be tackled on a bigger scale, at least regionally, for bigger impacts to be felt at a neighbourhood level but communities have shown that they can take a role in this and ensure that the benefits of economic investment are shared. A strong entrepreneurial spirit has been demonstrated by the Eldonians and they continue to pursue their ambitions.

The question inevitably arises - is the Eldonian project replicable - but would we really want to replicate the circumstances of its birth? In the current environment should people need to fight for a house?

Many of the problems of poor quality housing persist. In Anfield and Granby the problems of decline are still being tackled and there are many estates in many parts of the UK where communities are under threat and housing conditions are very poor. Perhaps the type of working class community represented by the Eldonians, where everyone lived, worked and socialised together with strong family and religious ties holding everything together does not exist in the same way and the strong cohesiveness of the Eldonians is unique. However, there are other types of communities and HLP have worked with many different groups in different parts of the UK over many years.

An important part of the legacy of this era is demonstrated by the way in which the approaches and techniques developed by architects such as HLP, working within the housing cooperative movement have entered the mainstream and been disseminated and utilised in different contexts and scales. HLP has used design participatory techniques in large scale masterplanning projects to build consensus around 'shared vision' bringing together different, even conflicting interests, around consensus based plans and strategies for regeneration.

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While these plans may not always be community-led in the way that the Eldonian Village was they are certainly community based and community 'buy in' is regarded as a key determinant of viability, deliverability and sustainability by clients and planners. This field of work has acquired its own terminology, eg capacity building, stakeholder engagement etc, and can unfortunately be viewed as an unwelcome but necessary 'add on' to projects, rather than as an inherent part of the design process. It can also be seen legitimately as a kind of 'market research' in a housing industry not overly given to researching 'core products' with its customers. At HLP design participation comes naturally as part of 'process design' and communities are treated as partners in redevelopment and regeneration projects. The participatory model has also been used successfully to achieve a range of different project types including, health and education buildings, public realm and park designs - even a railway station. In all instances the views of the public have influenced the final design and improved its responsiveness to context, social effectiveness and long term sustainability.



***Chinatown Masterplan & Chinese Arch, Liverpool*** HLP's work with the Chinese community in producing a masterplan and themed public realm design culminated in the construction of Liverpool's Chinese Ceremonial Arch. Now a major landmark and tourist attraction for the city, the Arch is a result of Liverpool's twinning with Shanghai. HLP's role included project management of the process as well as design of the public realm setting. HLP arranged for a team of artists and craftsmen to come to Liverpool from Shanghai and integrated the design through close attention to materials, colours and orientation in accordance with Feng Shui principles.

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**Sunderland Arc 'Event in a Tent'** In Sunderland, HLP was appointed to carry out one of the largest community visioning programmes ever undertaken in the UK, covering a population of 65,000 people. A series of community planning events were carried out in eleven neighbourhoods within a fast-track programme of five months. The events were supplemented by numerous focus groups, meetings and community workshops, as well as liaison with key stakeholders. The programme provided a platform of public opinion to form the basis to develop a regeneration strategy for Sunderland ARC and a clear agenda for action with identified strategies and programmes.



**Olive Mount Gardens** is a new modern linear park forming the centrepiece of the Olive Mount development and linking the elements of the project. The design creates a distinctive themed environment, based on the symbolism of a river-like journey through life. The gardens comprise five transitional spaces enhanced by high-quality planting, hard landscape and sculpture. The design develops its theme through integration of carefully chosen materials and art installations, and the experience of individual gardens such as the sensory garden

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*and the memorial garden. Extensive community engagement and design participation was carried out to accommodate the requirements of various resident groups living around the gardens and to reconcile different interests into a unifying 'vision'*



**Cleadon Park** was a problematic inter-war local authority housing estate in South Tyneside. HLP has been involved in the redevelopment of the estate for many years, initially drawing up a bold and ambitious masterplan through consultation with the community. HLP proposed a new model approach to design which embraces government agendas on density, is based on Home Zone principles, and a seamless approach to tenure. The design creates a visually rich and integrated environment, enhancing value and community ownership. The early phases are now complete. Cleadon Park has been recognised as an exemplar regeneration model.



**Anfield and Breckfield** have a high profile connection with Liverpool Football Club but the neighbourhood has suffered from long term decline and now requires a major stimulus to promote transformational regeneration. The Masterplan responds to the local issues through the creation of a hierarchy of Boulevards, Avenues and Streets which will provide a robust

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*framework for redevelopment. Our proposals increase permeability and legibility and impose a new scale, appropriate to the neighbourhood's importance as a much visited part of the city. A clear landscape structure underpins the plan and links the new residential neighbourhood through a network of green spaces and parks. The plan also enhances the setting of key heritage buildings which are to remain. The proposals for the redevelopment of LFC are integrated into the Masterplan and the impacts of match day traffic and pedestrian movement have been tackled through a well considered movement strategy within the Masterplan. The Anfield and Breckfield Masterplan and Design Code were developed in consultation with the community and stakeholders and were approved by L.C.C. Later phases have been redesigned to renovate terraced housing adjacent to LFC with imaginative conversions and integrated open space proposals.*



### **Stockbridge Village Masterplan, Knowsley**

*Stockbridge Village is a peripheral estate which demonstrates a range of physical, social and economic issues including high reliance on benefits, and a history of anti-social behaviour, compounding its isolation and poor image. HLP tackled the challenge of producing a masterplan and community vision by developing a 'transitional' philosophy towards sustainable development. A model for a sustainable community was used to develop a flexible, multi-stranded, joined-up regeneration strategy. Building on the assets of a strong community and land availability, the plan describes a range of interventions which can be achieved through multi-agency collaboration and community enterprise over a twenty year period. As a core element of the process of preparing the plan, HLP undertook extensive and in-depth consultation with the community including working with local schools and residents groups. The centre piece of the consultation strategy was a road-show with exhibitions, models and videos which toured all parts of the neighbourhood. Outputs from all strands of consultation including web based surveys, provided a strong basis of support for the plan from community and stakeholders.*

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### **The Housing Coop Movement in Liverpool**

The Housing Movement and the Housing Cooperative Movement were national in scope. So why did the idea find such fertile ground in Liverpool in the 70s and 80s?

Liverpool had its strong traditional communities, people housed together in dense terraced streets or in crowded tenements, but who also worked together in the dock related industries of a port city. The communities were resilient, enterprising and independent minded. Women traditionally played an important role, not just socially but economically, when the men could be away at sea or unemployed for long periods.

The coop idea spread through pubs and wash houses as much as through the housing associations. The drive to keep communities together while the redevelopment of poor quality housing areas progressed was a key motivation. The parallels between the experiences of the community of Stockbridge Village for example, re-housed in the 60s and 70s from various parts of the city and the coop communities are quite stark. In Stockbridge, fractured communities have struggled through riots, high crime levels and economic deprivation with a prevailing sense of isolation, even invisibility. In 2012 there was something like 40% benefit reliance in spite of many initiatives, investment programmes and everyone's efforts over the years. While the coops have also suffered economically through the recession, they have retained the advantages of mutual community support and accessible city living.

Liverpool also had the professionals and organisations ready and able to help. The 80s and early 90s were a very dark period for Liverpool and Merseyside and the coops provided a life-raft and anchor for some communities and families.

The next question is, why did the Housing Cooperative Movement not continue to grow and develop? Obviously the effect of the Militant Tendency didn't help, but this was a brief interlude. Of course, in a sense, the movement didn't stop. The coops and in particular the Eldonians (now a community based housing association) have carried on their work and managed their own affairs. In the Eldonians case there has been a continuing drive to carry on a development role. Critically there is a factor of scale. At the time of the Eldonian's inception the prevailing wisdom was that coops should be small – say 40 families, to work cohesively as a group.

The Eldonians have a much larger housing stock which enables them to operate independently. Although their project was criticised at the beginning for being too big, (Phase I was 145 properties, Phase II was 150 properties), in fact this critical mass has been the key to being able to employ their own management staff, to develop a significant rent pool and an extensive waiting list.

The Housing Cooperative Movement then, by no means 'died out', but it did not become again a central part of the Council's policy or the Government's housing agenda.

In the meantime, the housing associations have also changed. In the 70s they formed part of a wider 'housing movement'. Through the 80s the focus changed to being housing businesses, taking over the traditional role of the local authorities for social housing provision. Housing grants have been successively reduced, requiring associations to borrow against their own assets. This trend makes the housing cooperative option less attractive to the associations and more risky. Tenant management coops were tried, providing the advantages of coops but without ownership of the houses by the coop. As the management responsibility of social rented housing stock has generally changed, from being led by local authorities with restricted borrowing powers, management of rented housing has generally improved. 'Decent Homes Standards' have been widely achieved and issues such as fuel poverty tackled, removing some of the urgency and motivation.

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### PART THREE:

#### **So what could the housing cooperative model offer in the context of the current housing crisis?**

The current crisis is generally described in terms of:-

- Not enough new houses are being built each year;
- Lack of available land;
- House values are too high so that the younger generation can't afford to get on the housing ladder;
- The planning system is too slow and restrictive.

This definition identifies very real problems, but is very focused on the issues of London and the south east and other cities with rapidly expanding populations and economies.

In the midlands and north there are different dimensions to the problem, eg

- The cost/value 'squeeze' producing lowest common denominator solutions
- A low wage economy means that many people are unlikely to be able to afford to buy
- An aging population
- Low occupancy and small household sizes (the 'bedroom tax' penalises tenants who live in larger properties, while there is an inadequate supply of smaller ones, driving single people into the private rented sector) and houses of multiple occupation
- Poor conditions still in many neighbourhoods and estates
- Homelessness
- Repossession (owners who can't keep up their mortgage repayments)
- Empty homes and poor conditions of repair in the private sector.

What could the housing coop / community based housing associations model offer today?

- Good quality housing and environment at reasonable rent
- Safety and security of a supportive community
- Stability and self-confidence
- Long term sustainability – socially and environmentally
- Supporting people to work and contribute to the local economy
- Self determination – getting it right for members of the community, reducing dependency on services, particularly for the elderly and for young people (because the coops generally provide a community mix and good accessibility)
- Reinvestment in improvements and repairs
- Capacity building and social capital
- Community stability and mutual support.

However, there may be downsides because of the membership structure of the housing cooperatives and this needs closer study. For example:-

- The model generally used (par value) may reduce social mobility and people's individual capacity to build up personal equity in their housing
- The stability of the membership, while contributing to cohesiveness may also be restrictive to people's movement or the development of a wider social mix
- All the issues associated with an ageing population, as the original members get older.

The proposition that emerges is that the housing cooperative model still has much to offer in an economy where it is unlikely that everyone can aspire to home ownership and the burden of home ownership itself on the wider economy may also have negative effects without a flexible, multi-stranded, national housing policy.

The coop experience should be revisited. Can some of the downsides be addressed by exploring equity building and equity sharing models, promoting easier mobility for the members?

Can comparisons be made with other European countries' experience where the cooperative sector is bigger? Are there more lessons to learn?

While the house building market continues to be dominated at a national level by the house builders and the banks, there must be an opportunity for initiatives which generate community autonomy and

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cohesiveness and which are more sustainable, viable and cost effective in the long term. Housing cooperatives can play a role satisfying housing and community needs as a key priority, rather than leaving it all to big business, driving ever higher house prices and making home ownership unobtainable by a large section of the population.

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