



Housing – A Critical Perspective.

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Abstract / Initial Proposal Form:

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- 3. Author(s) Name:** Dominic Wilkinson
- 4. University or Company Affiliation:** Liverpool John Moores University

5. Abstract (300 words):

From the point at which the Local Labour Party dominated by the Militant Tendency gained overall control of Liverpool City Council in the May 1983 local elections, their policies of 'No cuts in jobs and services, and building council houses' could be implemented with gusto. One of their first actions was to establish an Urban Regeneration Strategy with a budget of £100Million and plans to replace tower blocks and tenements with 5000 council houses (Belchem 2006). The form of this housing was clear, the new estates were to be two storey semi-detached houses with front and back gardens, and they would be designed by the local authority under direction of the City Architect James Robb. The rationale, apart from an obvious reaction against the failings of the tower and maisonette schemes from the 1960's and 1970's, was according to more than one city councillor that "if it is good enough for the middle classes is good enough for the working classes".

The location for these new houses, the inner districts and particularly the 1930's local authority walk-up tenements designed by Lancelot Keay and John Hughes. These tenements whilst popular with residents were by the 1980's in need of investment but critically they were all in local authority ownership and would allow a 'quick win' in implementing the new policies. That the suburban forms proposed would reduce densities and sit uncomfortably with their inner city locations did not concern the politicians or for that matter the City Architect. James Robb, was keenly aware of the powerful role played by his predecessor Ronald Bradbury, who as city Architect and Director of Housing and been responsible for implementation of the 1966 Housing plan which proposed the demolition of 36% of the cities homes (Couch, Fowles & Karecha, 2009), and saw the opportunity for his chance to make his impact. The year prior to Labour gaining full control of the City Council, Robb had won an architectural competition sponsored by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Heseltine, for Vauxhall, a deprived area of North Liverpool. The solution, enclaves of suburban semi-detached houses arranged around cul-de-sacs, turning their backs upon the 'hostile' environment of the inner city.

This new form, not urban, nor genuinely suburban, was to become the de-facto solution for council housing and housing associations throughout the city during the 1980's, surviving long after Robb's departure through early retirement in 1987; supplementary Planning Documents in the city would continue to forbid terraces of more than three units for new build housing well into the 1990's.

This presentation will examine the form of these new council houses, their relationship to policy within the City Council at the time and the lessons that can be drawn for a new housing crisis in another time of austerity.

7. Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

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Dominic Wilkinson is an Architect, Urban Designer and Senior Lecturer in Architecture at Liverpool John Moores University. Upon graduation, as project architect for the Dove Street housing scheme, he was responsible for the implementation of the last Council housing produced in Liverpool. Competition wins for European sites in the Netherlands and award winning regeneration projects in Liverpool have been combined with teaching posts and research at Manchester University, Liverpool University and currently Liverpool John Moores University. As year coordinator for the final year Masters in Architecture programme at LJMU he has been responsible for the introduction of research focussed studio projects examining urban regeneration proposals in second tier European port cities. Previous research projects have included contributions to

Shrinking Cities, and conference papers on the policy implications of PPG3 upon the morphology of speculative housing in the UK. He is currently working on books on the renowned Liverpool church architect, F. X. Velarde, and Modernist houses of Merseyside.