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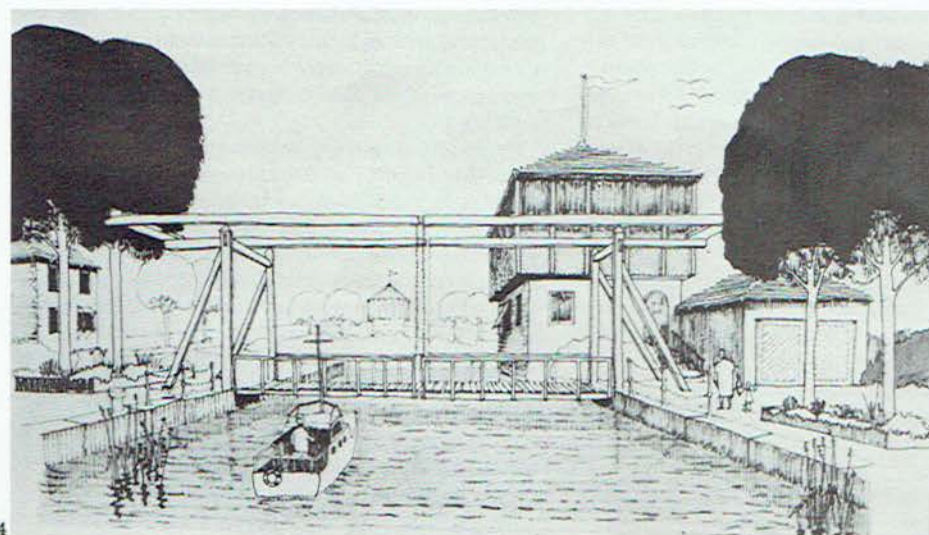
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*Co-operative development calls for a new relationship between architect and local community. Here, Nick Wates summarises some of the major initiatives in the field and he argues that unless architects get directly to grips with the environmental problems of ordinary citizens, they will become an obsolete and irrelevant profession.*

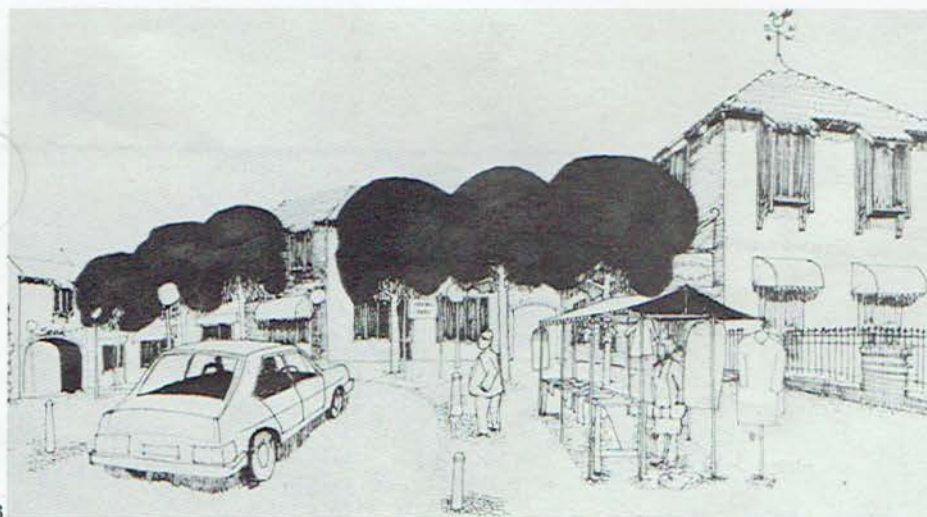
# CO-OP CONSOLIDATION



1, 2, completed co-op scheme at Hesketh Street, Liverpool. (Architects: Innis Wilkin Ainsley Common; managing agency: Co-operative Development Services.)  
3, members of Thirlmere co-op on site with architects from Merseyside Improved Houses.  
4, 5, 6, the Eldonian Housing Association's competition entry for their new 'village', with 145 homes and other facilities. (Architects: Wilkinson Hindle & Partners; job architect: Bill Hallsall; agency: Merseyside Improved Houses.)



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In January this year 145 working-class Liverpool families living in tenements described as amongst the worst housing conditions in Europe heard that they were to receive £6.5 million of central government money to enable them to build new homes. It was a historic victory, both for them and for community architecture. Because the money will be paid not to the City Council or to professionals to build houses on their behalf, but to the families themselves organised collectively into the Eldonian Housing Association.

The victory is given added poignancy by the news that Labour-controlled Liverpool City Council has threatened to oppose granting planning permission for the scheme (fortunately, a move that is bound to be overturned by the government on appeal).

The Council does not object to the Eldonian families having new homes. Far from it. Housebuilding is one of the Council's main objectives and under any system of priorities the Eldonians would come at the top of the list. But the Council believes that any new homes in the city should be provided by itself. It resents being bypassed by the government and thinks that the £6.5 million should have been paid into its own coffers to assist with its planned £350 million municipal housebuilding programme. Under this programme, similar to those pursued by housing authorities throughout the world, housing is designed by architects who have no contact whatsoever with future occupants, whose first contact with it is being handed a key to the front door. Where it is located, how it is laid out, what it looks like, who lives next door and how it is repaired and managed are matters, thinks the Council, to be decided by elected representatives. With typically wry humour the Eldonians comment that the Council's motto should be 'When we want your opinion, we will give it to you'. They are determined to have no part of it.

For they can see the painful results of such programmes all around them: the destruction of communities, alienation, vandalism and waiting for months, if not years, to get the most basic repairs done. Less than a mile away housing built by the Council only eight years ago is being demolished because it is hated by its occupants and impossible to manage. One-third of the Council's 75 000 properties are classified as 'hard to let'.

They have also seen that there is an alternative. In the last 10 years a totally new way of building housing with public money has been pioneered in Liverpool. Families due for rehousing form themselves into groups of between 20 and 150 and register as housing co-operatives. They then select and employ architects and other professionals, and with them design their new homes from scratch. And when completed, they are responsible for managing them.

Simple and obvious, but a breakthrough. Because unlike virtually all previous attempts to allow future



7. housing at Byker, Newcastle, designed by Ralph Erskine. It was the first comprehensive redevelopment scheme in the country to have a permanent on-site architect's office and to involve council tenants in design.



8. the Prince of Wales visiting Rod Hackney's pioneering self-help rehabilitation scheme in Black Road, Macclesfield in February this year. 9. Rod Hackney with residents of Black Road No 2 Job, or community. The architect for the scheme was Ian Finlay, now Chairman of the RIBA's Community Architecture Group.

10, 11. self-build housing in Lewisham, London. The timber-framed system was designed by architect Walter Segal to simplify construction and keep costs down, thereby making self-build an option for all, regardless of income. Only bureaucratic obstruction has prevented the system from becoming widespread.

occupants to participate, the Liverpool co-op members are firmly in control. Subject only to planning and building regulations (admittedly restrictive) and overall financial limits, they choose the layout, the form of the houses and the materials.

Despite immense political and bureaucratic obstruction, 800 families in 17 co-ops have obtained—or are in the process of obtaining—homes in this way. And the results are clear. While not visually stunning to those obsessed by style, the housing is of better quality than that provided by conventional methods with the same cost limits. More importantly, it works for the occupants and for the community as a whole. People take pride in their homes. There is no vandalism or litter. Doors can be left unlocked without fear of burglary (unheard of on a council estate). Repairs are done promptly. As Alan Hoyte, chairman of the Hesketh Street Co-op said: 'We've proved to the council and government and anybody else listening, that if people are given the reins, get the right help and are committed they can come up with a really excellent viable housing scheme that people want to live in.'

The Liverpool co-ops are living proof of the central tenet of community architecture; that the environment works better if the people who inhabit it are involved in creating and managing it. And, as proved by the recent government intervention, they have succeeded where so many others have failed in bringing the message home to those in power. That the co-ops emerged from the same demoralised and alienated communities in the Toxteth district of Liverpool that shocked the world's television viewers by rioting for days on end in 1982 is a message that has not been lost. A steady stream of sceptical dignitaries—including ministers and the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher—have trekked up to Liverpool to see for themselves, only to return utterly converted. In the last two years the co-ops have gained the unqualified support of all shades of the British political and professional spectrum, including the RIBA, the churches, the left-wing Tribune Group, the Liberal, Labour and Conservative parties.

The crowning triumph was on 31 May 1984 when, in a historic speech at a gala evening at Hampton Court to celebrate the RIBA's 150th anniversary, the Prince of Wales added his weight. While lambasting the work of the profession in general, stating for instance that 'some

(read many) architects and planners have consistently ignored the feelings and wishes of the mass of ordinary people in this country', he picked out community architecture as one of the few bright spots. The speech outraged most of the architectural profession, but it was a watershed for community architecture in Britain. Until then the movement had consisted of hundreds of isolated projects in which users were involved, to varied extent, in the design process (for instance Ralph Erskine's housing at Byker in Newcastle, ASSIST's rehabilitation of tenements in Glasgow, Rod Hackney's self-help general improvement schemes in Macclesfield, Water Segal's self-build housing in Lewisham). But, while frequently successful in their own terms, their significance was not grasped by the public and they were regarded with suspicion by the establishment.

By giving it Royal endorsement, Prince Charles at a stroke gave the whole community architecture movement the respectability and credibility it had so badly needed to really take off. As Rod Hackney, the movement's most able politician, commented: 'It was dynamite. Suddenly, the future king has come along and said that the way to work isn't the Modern Movement, isn't the way most architects are working, but is the way community architects work. That means that the image of community architecture has suddenly leap-frogged over a lot of establishment figures who have been opposing it.'

The effects are already becoming apparent. Although it is less than 10 years since the term community architecture was first coined in Britain, not a week now goes by without it being referred to at least in the architectural press. Projects in the field—like the Eldonian housing co-operative in Liverpool—are finding it easier to get funding. Hundreds of private architects claim to be doing it, local authorities have started advertising posts for it and politicians and the public say they want it. At the beginning of the year the RIBA set up a special presidential committee on the subject to boost work already being done by the Institute's regular community architecture group which has been established for several years.

The growth and recognition of community architecture in Britain is paralleled by similar activity throughout the world, albeit with different labels. In the United States, for instance, it is known as 'process' or 'social'







12, Barnes Church, London. In evolving the design, Edward Cullinan Architects held over 100 meetings with parishioners, including four public meetings attended by over 300 people and 80 with the Parish Rebuilding Committee. Cullinan was described by the Prince of Wales as 'a man after my own heart'.

13, 15, scheme for saving a nineteenth-century canal-side warehouse in London's East End, due for demolition for a park extension, and its conversion to an arts centre run by a community trust. The project was initiated by architect Ben Derbyshire of Hunt Thompson Associates who lives nearby. He mobilised local support by leafleting, organising public meetings and carrying out a survey funded by the RIBA's Community Projects Fund.

14, Lea View Estate, Hackney, London, where architects Hunt Thompson established a site office and worked closely with tenants to evolve a scheme for transforming a run-down estate of 1939 council flats. As well as being physically improved and restructured (with new external lift tower, for instance), vandalism, muggings and crime, previously rampant, have been virtually eliminated and there is a new sense of community spirit. 16, decoration of a wall as part of a landscaping scheme by the Free Form Arts Trust at Daubeny Road in London. The project was devised and designed with families from adjacent houses and local tenants' associations. The mosaics were made mainly by local children and adults. Together with its sister organisation, Cultural Partnership, the Trust has pioneered the involvement of artists in environmental projects and shown that community architecture is not the preserve of architects alone. Hackney Grove Garden, London, also by Free Form (see frontispiece, p22) was created from a derelict Council-owned site on the initiative of local voluntary groups.

architecture. Just as the British inner-city riots in 1982 boosted interest in community architecture, so the American cities in flames during the civil rights movement of the late 1960s led to the rapid spread of advocacy planning and the establishment of a network of community design centres. It was also the spur for the American Institute of Architects' R/UDAT (Regional/Urban Design Assistance Teams) programme whereby teams of experts go into cities for an intensive 'brains trust' session to stimulate understanding and resolution of environmental problems.

On the European continent such activity is less widespread than in Britain, but we have seen numerous projects. For instance the development of flexible housing systems designed to encourage user participation by John Habraken and the Stichting Architecten Research (SAR) in Eindhoven; the 'Free City' of Copenhagen; Lucien Kroll's anarchitecture at the University of Louvain in Belgium; the restoration and revitalisation of Bologna, Italy, based on participation at every level; the Ambulatory Support to Local Residents programme for rebuilding shanty towns in Portugal; the self-help rehabilitation of Kreuzberg in Berlin.

Most revealing are the parallels with developments in the third world: the work of John F. C. Turner and others which has led to widespread acceptance of the sense in providing technical assistance to shanty town dwellers to enable them to upgrade their settlements rather than tearing them down; the 'barefoot' architects in Indonesia and China who go to work and live in the villages, helping the inhabitants to make improvements there rather than joining the drift to the cities; the microbrigades in Cuba; Christopher Alexander's self-build cluster housing at Mexicali in Mexico\*.

The full extent of international interest in community architecture was demonstrated by the response to the International Union of Architects' (UIA) 1983 international competition for architecture. Its theme: 'The architect as enabler' was itself evidence of a change in perception from the architect's traditional role as provider. The brief was to design methods and procedures which enable people to participate directly in the design and building of their own homes and neighbourhoods. 186 entries were received from 44 countries ranging from Argentina to Thailand and from Lithuania to the United States.

From this worldwide surge of activity some tentative conclusions are beginning to emerge; first: the core community architecture principle—that the environment works better if the people who inhabit it are involved in creating and managing it—applies not only to housing, as initially thought, but to the workplace, to schools, parks, sports centres and other public facilities, to the street, the neighbourhood and indeed the entire city. Not only is the environment created of a higher quality physically, representing better value for money, but the process of involvement can itself create employment, leads to more stable and self-sufficient communities and to more content and confident citizens.

Second: that for such a process to work there has to be a fundamental change in the professional's role. Not just from being an expert dispensing wisdom and solutions ('I'm the professional, I know') to Donald Schön's reflective practitioner ('I'll listen to you and reflect on it'). But to that of an enabler, assisting people in their own homes and neighbourhoods to understand their problems and devising solutions to help them solve them. The 'us' and 'them' has to dissolve into a 'we'. The architect's role is thus extended to include not only physical design, but the design of the economic, social and organisational framework within which development takes place. All this involves new skills and tools which are not taught at architecture schools and, above all, it requires a change of attitude away from the elitist vision of the architect as team leader to that of mediator and active participant in a team.

Third: that community architecture is not in any sense

anti-design. It may well herald the end of much of the monumental, style-conscious, eye-catching architecture that has dominated the pages of this and other magazines because the gatekeepers of success became no longer panels of architects who give awards, or magazine editors in search of titillating visual images, but the users of the buildings themselves. 'Good design' therefore becomes that which works well, is of human scale, is recognisable and understandable and which 'looks good' to its users. But this needn't rule out 'firmness, commodity and delight' in design as the work of the Free Form Arts Trust in London or Lucien Kroll shows. Architects like Kroll and Hackney actually argue that their architecture becomes richer the more they involve users.

#### Power to the local

Finally it is becoming clear that while community architecture requires a radical change in the power relationships of development, it transcends traditional left/right politics. It is supported by political parties across the entire spectrum. What it does require is an understanding—arguably growing throughout the world—of the complementary nature of power at different levels; an understanding of what John Turner calls the 'third system'. In policy terms it requires a massive change in institutional thinking so that, as with the Liverpool co-ops, resources go more directly to the local level. It requires a change-over from supply to support systems, often cutting out a middle tier of bureaucracy.

After a decade of isolated experimentation, community architecture is moving into a new phase of consolidation. Lessons are being disseminated and supportive organisational infrastructure developed. In Britain the last few years has seen the formation and steady growth of both the RIBA's Community Architecture Group channelling government money to voluntary groups so that they can employ architects, and the Association of Community Technical Aid Centres (ACTAC) which promotes and coordinates centres where architects and other professionals provide free advice to voluntary and community groups. The Royal Town Planning Institute and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors both have extensive and growing aid networks. New programmes are being developed in schools of architecture and elsewhere to teach the skills needed. The RIBA this summer is launching an anglicised version of the American R/UDAT programme. It is also planning to make a renewed effort—possibly jointly with other professions—to establish a National Aid Fund for the environment so that environmental aid can be as freely and easily available to the public as medical and legal aid already are.

The big date in the community architecture calendar is 1987, the United Nations' International Year of the Homeless, which is seen by many as an opportunity to open up the issues to a wider public. Increasing public understanding of environmental issues is the heart of the matter. In times of prosperity such understanding can be seen as a luxury. In the present economic decline it is essential. Particularly in the decaying industrial cities of the western world, unless citizens begin to learn how to reshape them and get the help they need to do so, they are destined to become imprisoned in a sea of increasingly neglected concrete and brick which bears less and less relationship to their needs.

And unless architects begin to get to grips with solving the environmental problems of ordinary citizens they will become an irrelevant if not obsolete profession. Community architecture is not an option but a necessity. Ultimately community architecture is about creating an architecture for democracy with a new appreciation of the importance of scale. Architecture by remote control cannot be afforded and has been shown to fail even when democratically controlled through the ballot box. The key to the future must be obtaining a symbiotic relationship between the users of the environment and those with technical know-how.

Nick Wates and Charles Kneivitt are writing a book *Community Architecture: how people can shape their own environment* which will be published by Penguin Books next year. Readers who have first-hand experience of community architecture projects are asked to write to Nick Wates, 5 Dryden Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 9NW.

\* For fascinating accounts of many of these projects see *The Scope of Social Architecture* edited by Richard Hatch, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1984, £44.20.

