Complete Communities or Dormitory Towns? Case Studies in Interwar Housing at Welwyn Garden City, Becontree and St Helier

Housing has always been a paramount issue; in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century attempts were made to revolutionise the problem of poor quality houses and the accompanying poor quality of life. This was set against the backdrop of the industrial expansion of the urban metropolis; with possible solutions moving towards decentralisation of the most overpopulated areas. Arguably the most significant steps to remedy the housing issue were made in the interwar period with the development of the second Garden City at Welwyn and the London County Council out of county estates. This thesis focuses on the development of community at the three developments chosen as case studies: Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire and the Becontree Estate in Essex and the St. Helier Estate in Surrey. Key points of analysis were identified and investigated using a range of sources in order to come to a just conclusion. It was found that community values developed substantially over the early stages of growth, not without some examples of friction between existing and new residents. The development of public facilities such as churches, schools, public houses, community centres aided the progression of core community values through all three case studies. The development of these community hubs supported the progression of civic cohesion and pride, thus making the residents feel comfortable in their new surroundings and part of something bigger than themselves. These interwar developments paved the way for the post war New Towns and also international attempts at modernised towns and Garden Cities, with the latter making a twentieth century resurgence. Yet despite their profound legacy, it was found that dormitory town status was inevitable. Lack of employment for all drove residents to the cities, in the circumstances of all three case studies: London.

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Howard's garden city concept combined the town and country in order to provide the working class an alternative to working on farms or 'crowded, unhealthy cities'.[2] To build a garden city, Howard needed money to buy land. He decided to get funding from "gentlemen of responsible position and undoubted probity and honour".[3] He founded the Garden Cities Association (later known as the Town and Country Planning Association or TCPA), which created First Garden City, Ltd. in 1899 to create the garden city of Letchworth.[4] However, these donors would collect interest on their investment if the garden... The Welwyn Garden City Corporation was formed to oversee the construction. At Welwyn Garden City a man's house will be near his work in a pure and healthy atmosphere. He will have time and energy after his work is done for leisure and recreation'. 2. These first new towns proved very controversial and they were often opposed vehemently by local people. In the case of the first one, Stevenage, the visiting Minister, Lewis Silkin had his car tyres let down and sand was put in his petrol tank. And on one December night in 1946, someone changed the station name plates to Silkingrad. Nevertheless, eight new towns were built and their population targets were later increased significantly, well beyond the average of 50,000 level proposed by Abercrombie. Welwyn Garden City is a new town developed in the 1920s. It is close to London for commuters, but there is also lots to do in the town itself. Settled by the Romans, it has the remains of a fine villa complete with elaborate bath house. One of the local attractions is the Welwyn railway viaduct which has 40 arches and stretches for 475 metres (1,560 feet). It is 30 metres (100 feet) high and was opened by Queen Victoria in 1850. It is said that she was so frightened by its height that she refused to venture across it! Present Day Welwyn Garden City. Welwyn Garden City has a neo-Georgian town centre with residential and industrial estates laid out along tree-lined avenues, in keeping with its name. Older homes are on the west side of