



# **Bracknell and Its New Town Heritage**

**Background Paper to  
Submission Core Strategy  
Development Plan Document**

**September 2006**

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## **1 Background**

1 After the Second World War, Great Britain was faced with the task of restoring her war torn cities. Many cities suffered from collapse of the industrial economy and infrastructure, derelict and dilapidated homes and acute housing shortages. The restoration of the nation's war torn cities provided an opportunity for improving urban conditions on a grand scale. New Towns were seen as an important element in this strategy: as they aimed to improve living and working conditions both in damaged areas and in wholly new settlements.

2 However, plans for out of city developments far preceded the needs of post-war Britain. The idea of building New Towns had been discussed for many years with most writers tracing its inception to Ebenezer Howard and his pioneer garden city movement or even earlier to the ideas of Buckingham and others (Ogilvy, 1975).

3 One of the earliest attempts to plan and build a settlement was carried out by Sir Christopher Wren and John Evelyn who helped in the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666. Many of the New Towns around the world had already been built by the time the plan for the New Towns in post-war Britain was accepted; from Richelieu and Rennes in 17th and 18th Century France to New Delhi in post-World War One India.

4 The New Towns have become part of an accepted English tradition - created by Ebenezer Howard in about 1906 and carried on by the Town and Country Planning Association – of spacious residential areas, garden cities (two of which were built to the north of London: Letchworth and Welwyn). Howard's book "Garden Cities of Tomorrow" has been quoted and recognised by many as one of the early influences on town and urban planning (See figure 1 below).

5 At the turn of the century, an ever increasing amount of people wanted urban planning to take a new direction. The inner city areas had become over industrialized and were becoming smog-filled areas ridden with disease due to the poor levels of sanitation provided (Crawley Online, 1997). People became considerably discontented with the environs in which they lived, and desired a more rural home with less industry. These years brought much building too; by 1939, one third of all housing had been built since the end of World War One in 1918. It seemed to some that Britain was fast becoming a 'concrete jungle' (ibid.).

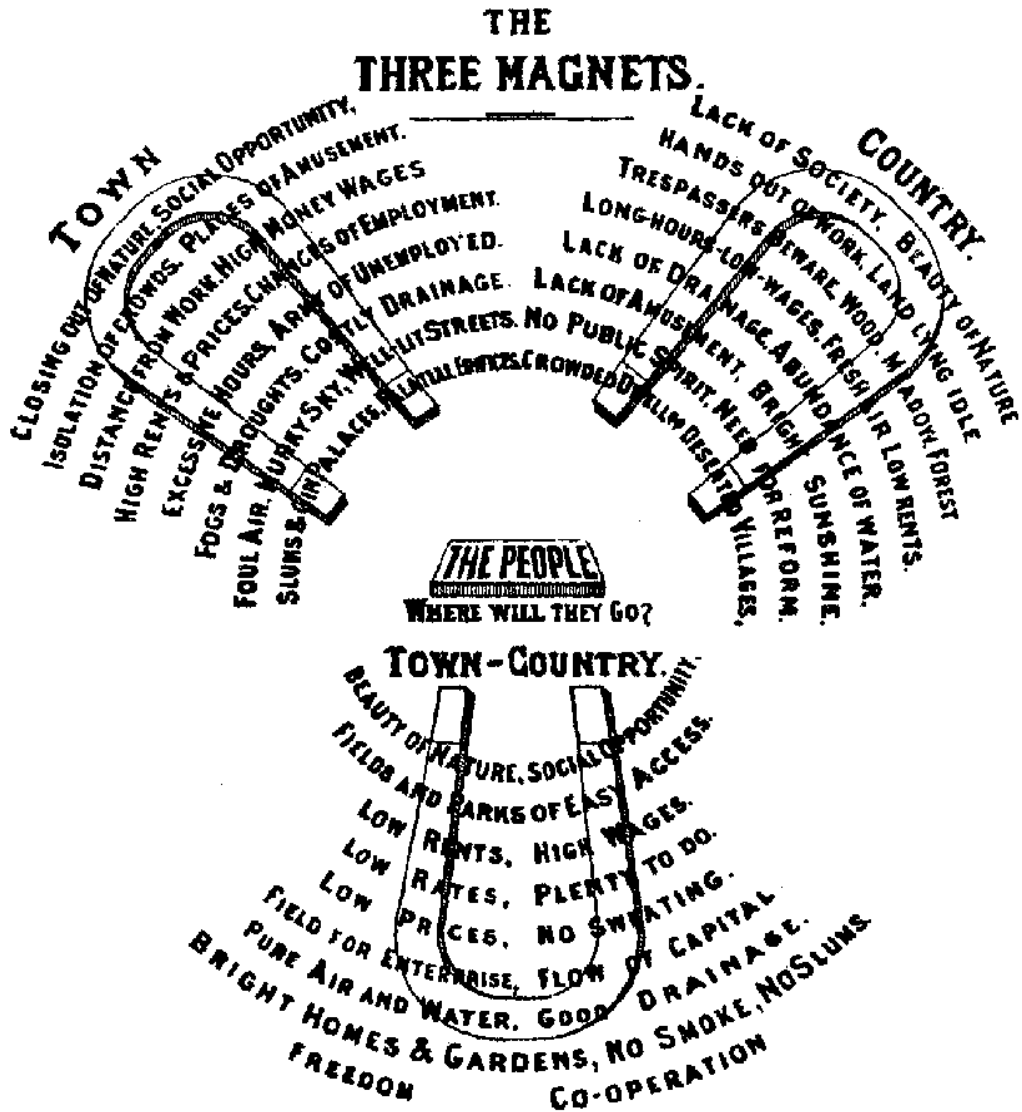


Figure 1: Ebenezer Howard's 'Three Magnets' *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898)

6 Further evidence that New Towns had been considered before the Second World War is seen in the fact that in the 1920s the government began to look into the need for further development in the highly industrialised region of South Wales. As time went on, proof began to emerge that people wanted to see more New Town type settlements. In 1941, an inquiry by Mass-observation<sup>1</sup> suggested that people living in the newly created establishments of Letchworth and Bourneville<sup>2</sup>, were happier with their homes than those living in other areas such as London, Birmingham and Portsmouth. Their only complaints related to the lack of the social interaction they had become used to in the urban areas.

7 The influence of the war on New Town thinking cannot however be understated. The aftermath of war brought increasing calls for a dispersion of the population from the big cities. Many people had seen the German Luftwaffe blitz

<sup>1</sup> Mass Observation; People's homes; John Murray; 1940

<sup>2</sup> Bourneville is a small town designed at the end of the nineteenth Century to house workers at a Cadbury's plant near Birmingham

London and other cities during the middle years of the Second World War. It was suggested that a dissipation of the population would mean least costly damage, both emotionally and economically. By the end of the Second World War in 1945, the housing problem had reached crisis level, with some 475,000 houses nationwide and 27,600 in London alone being declared seriously damaged or uninhabitable<sup>3</sup>. Air raids destroyed vast numbers of houses and places of work, especially in London.

8 The Second World War thus added to a growing need for more housing and created an opportunity for a solution. Millions of people had moved away from their homes to seek safety away from the major cities. When the war finally ended, there were huge demands for both jobs and housing, especially in London (Bracknell Development Corporation, 1981). In the Greater London Plan 1944, Sir Patrick Abercrombie recommended that a large part of this demand should be met by the establishment of ten satellite towns (Bracknell Development Corporation, 1981).

9 The key to the Greater London Plan was the movement of people away from the central London areas into the newly built areas, which were called the New Towns. The main proposals of the Greater London Plan focused on zoning based on a system of concentric rings. With the first/inner ring corresponding to the central built up area; the second being formed by the suburbs; the third formed by majority of the land defined by the Green Belt Act of 1938 (mostly agricultural land at the time) and the less identifiable fourth ring which would absorb the section of the London population dispersed from the centre. It was in this fourth zone that the New Towns would be built. This zone stretched out from the centre of London out to Brentwood and Billericay in Essex, Luton in Bedford, High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, Sevenoaks in Kent and Farnham in Surrey. The idea was to maintain a green belt around existing built up areas while the New Towns would be sited in a ring beyond the green belt.

10 The 1944 Abercrombie Plan, with its concentric pattern, was based on the assumption, justifiable at the time, of the stabilisation of the population of the built up area. Its main aim was to ensure the dispersal of the population by the creation of moderate-sized New Towns (with populations of about 50,000) comparable to the Garden Cities envisaged by Ebenezer Howard in the early days of the century.

## **2 The New Towns Concept**

11 Great Britain was the only country to adopt special legislation for the development of New Towns (Merlin, 1971). New Town policy was shaped by several inquiries, the most famous being those associated with Ebenezer Howard's garden City Project, the Barlow, Scott and Uthwatt Committees and Abercrombie's Greater London Plan.

12 As mentioned above, the principle of New Towns was based on the ideals developed earlier in the century by Ebenezer Howard's garden city movement and the Greater London Plan, which sought to create better environments for people away from the smog and cramped conditions in inner urban areas. New towns were developed by establishing neighbourhoods with their own identities, so that the people moving in would have a better chance of feeling at home and belonging and so that they wouldn't have to travel far to reach the basic services such as schools, health care and shops.

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<sup>3</sup> Cherry, Gordon E.; Cities and plans - the shaping of urban Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth Centuries; Edward Arnold; 1988

13 The New Towns were created in a number of phases. The first generation, between 1946 and 1951, concentrated on the relieving the housing, employment and other social pressures of major cities, especially London (Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions, 2002). Of the first 11 new towns designated by Government during this period, eight were satellites around London<sup>4</sup>. However, a number of new towns had a wider remit. For example, Dawley (later renamed Telford) aimed to attract new manufacturing and service firms from the rest of Britain and from the rest of the world, not simply from their nearby "parent cities". The 1960s new towns, including Milton Keynes, were also set up to deal with rapid population growth and meet anticipated housing need and housing demand forecast for all the country's major urban regions — and most especially for the South East region, centred on London. At this time, new towns took a significant new approach as three large, long-established towns — Peterborough, Northampton and Warrington — were also designated for large-scale and rapid expansion under the New Towns Act (Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions, 2002).

14 The Reith Committee was set up to advise on how New Towns should be promoted. The Committee's recommendations (summarised below) were very specific, including principles about what constituted self-contained and balanced communities and ranges for the ideal size of a New Town. The New Towns Act 1946 received royal assent just a week after the Committee's final report was published. The purpose of the Act was to consolidate the legislation relating to New Towns. With the enabling legislation in place, 14 New Towns were designated between 1946 and 1950. Eight were around London and a further six in regional development areas in Northamptonshire, County Durham, Southern Scotland and South Wales. A further 13 were designated between 1961 and 1970 (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2005).

***Key recommendations of the New Towns Committee Report (1945):***

- New Towns should be located sufficiently far from their mother city at least 40 km from London and 20 km from other metropolises;
- They should have a target population of 20,000 to 60,000 inhabitants;
- They should feature predominately single-family housing, at low densities;
- They should be built, as far as possible, on quality greenfield sites, but outside areas of exceptional natural beauty, which had to be preserved;
- A green belt should be created around the New Towns;
- Housing should be organised in neighbourhood units around a primary and nursery school, a pub and shops selling staple goods, and a meeting-room for clubs and voluntary groups to meet;

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<sup>4</sup> Basildon, Bracknell, Crawley, Harlow, Hatfield, Hemel Hempstead, Stevenage, Welwyn Garden City.

- The New Towns should seek to attract a balance of all socio-economic groups;
- In order to be self-contained, the Development Corporation must offer every business moving into the new town one housing unit for each job created.

### **3 Development Corporations**

15 These recommendations inspired the New Town Act of 1946 which created the administrative and financial framework for the development of Britain's new towns. As part of this process, New Towns Development Corporations (NTDC) were set up to administer the planning and creation of New Towns wherever it was in the public interest. Development Corporations were Government sponsored bodies set up for each new town, with special powers to discharge its remit of securing the laying out and development of the new town. The original funding for New Town development came from central funds, and was intended to be repaid as a loan. Each Development Corporation was to be wound up once it had fulfilled its remit.

16 The 1946 New Towns Act envisaged that, as the towns grew, the Development Corporations would eventually transfer any remaining assets to the local authorities in whose administrative areas they were located. Eventually, government decided to create the Commission for New Towns (CNT) which, from 1961, was responsible for managing and disposing of the land and property assets of the then defunct Development Corporation in order to continue to fund development across the whole country. Generally, a Development Corporation's assets were passed on to the residual body, the Commission for the New Towns, and its liabilities were passed on to the local authority. Where assets were vested in local authorities, there were usually "claw-back" arrangements.

17 By May 1999 CNT merged with the corporate functions of the Urban Regeneration Agency (URA) to create English Partnerships, the government's national regeneration agency (English Partnerships, 2004).

#### ***Key Features of the New Towns***

- The New Towns were developed along the lines proposed by Howard and the Reith Committee;
- The underlying principle was to create towns where people had access to core infrastructure such as schools, health facilities and shops. This was based on two fundamental ideas;
  - Self containment
  - The creation of balanced communities - a mix of people of different ages, household types and incomes in a healthy environment.

18 To realize this aim of "self containment" within the New Towns, they aimed to provide facilities for people to work, live and socialise within each New Town. It was hoped that, with the right mix of housing, tenures and community facilities, a "socially homogeneous community" would be created.

19 The first step towards achieving these aims was to calculate the amount of land that needed to sustain the target population. This was followed by the economic process of managing and guiding development, particularly employment.

20 According to the Reith Committee there could be two types of New Towns; those built in an area of scattered rural population and major extensions of existing small towns with their optimum size population being between 20,000 and 60,000 (Interim Report). In total, 21 New Towns were created in England between 1946 and 1970 (English Partnerships, 2004). One of these was Bracknell New Town, to help alleviate the housing crisis in West London.

21 The fortunes of each of the New Towns have varied considerably since designation. The extent to which they succeeded in meeting their original objectives has also varied. In many quarters New Towns have been held up as an international exemplar of planning policy, and at the same time criticised (see below) as being the antithesis of sustainable communities (IPPR, 2005). This paper aims to highlight the successes and failures of Bracknell as part of its New Towns heritage, and the lessons that they provide for her future.

### **Comparison of the New Towns and Sustainable Communities**

<b>NEW TOWNS</b>	<b>SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES</b>
<b>Similarities</b>	
Objectives to increase housing supply, relieve housing pressures in overcrowded urban areas and provide good quality housing and specific industrial locations.	Objective to achieve a 'step-change' in housing supply and accommodate economic growth.
A national programme, although not fully joined-up with regional policy, part of wider housing growth targets.	Part of a national strategy, with distinct regional objectives
<b>Differences</b>	
Developed mostly on greenfield sites.	Emphasis on brownfield development.
Low density	Medium to high density
Intended to be self-contained communities.	Integrated with existing communities.
Initial focus on decentralization of people and jobs away from London.	Accommodating household and economic growth across three regions, alongside significant growth within London
Public sector led development.	Public/Private partnership approach to development
The total target population increase for the English New Towns was over 1,500,000.	Target increase in the number of homes in the Growth Areas is for over 200,000 homes by 2016.

**Source: (IPPR, 2005).**

## **4 The Role of Bracknell Development Corporation**

22 Bracknell Development Corporation was set up in 1949 to guide development. Initially, 860 acres of land were designated for development and a target population of 25,000 proposed. The first annual report stated:

"The task before the Corporation is to build up a self-contained country town combining the amenities of town life with the advantages of the country. Instead of

the isolation and congestion of a big city or the daily rush to London in the morning and back in the evening to home and family, the residents of Bracknell will have home, work and friends, with facilities for shopping, education and social and cultural needs all within easy reach, and with opportunities for open air recreation in the countryside around them. The town is to be designated as a balanced and complete community and not as a dormitory of London. It will have its full quota of industry and there will be a generous allowance of open space for both recreation and amenity purposes. Increasing numbers of the population of the congested areas of greater London will thus achieve the homes and the opportunities for home life which are their right". (Bracknell Development Corporation, 1951)

23 To further this general statement of aims, more specific policies were adopted on:

- The Land: - There were two ways in which land could be developed. The first involved the Development Corporation purchasing the land, selling or leasing it to someone capable of building in appropriate development after all the basic infrastructure had already been put in. The second involved the landowner carrying out the whole process unassisted. The former was the most preferred by the Development Corporation;
- Picking the Team: - The Corporation decided at the early stages of inception that all aspects of the development of Bracknell New Town, including its planning, would be carried out by its own staff;
- Building on Tradition: - The Corporation was very sceptical of using new and untried building methods, designs and materials. There were three reasons behind this. Firstly, they were conscious of the fact that the main source of funding was public money and were determined to make use of it judiciously. Secondly, there was a great desire to attract Londoners to live in Bracknell. This persuasion would become more difficult if the houses in Bracknell were radically different to what they were used to. Finally, the Corporation was well aware that local fears would be soothed if the first houses built were to strike a traditional note;
- The employment target: - The original estimate was for factories to provide jobs for 6,000 people in the New Town. This did not however imply that only 6,000 of the 25,000 estimated population would have jobs but it was envisaged that as the town grew, existing businesses would expand in response to the increasing population and therefore take on more staff;
- The population target: - The Corporation had doubted that the estimated population (25,000) would allow for Bracknell New Town to become a sound economic unit;
- The neighbourhood Idea: - As stated in the earlier paragraphs of this report, New Towns were built on a neighbourhood principle. This meant that as each housing area grew, it would be provided with shops, a pub and one or more primary schools. There would also be sites for churches. The aim was to enable people satisfy many of their daily needs without going to far away from home and with corresponding reductions in visits to the town centre. This idea seemed to have settled in well with the

new residents who when moving homes would refuse to move to a different neighbourhood. (Bracknell Development Corporation, 1981).

- Making Bracknell Beautiful: - This was to be achieved by according high importance to landscape issues.

## 5 Bracknell New Town

24 Bracknell was designated as the last of the London ring of New Towns in June 1949 in order to relieve the over crowded districts of West London. Initially, the creation of a New Town at White Waltham, some five miles north of Bracknell, was considered but the site was abandoned because of the high agricultural quality of the land and the fact that an airfield was already established over the area. Bracknell, about five miles to the south of White Waltham, was chosen instead (Turok, 1989).

25 Situated about thirty miles west of Central London and ten miles east of Reading, at its time of designation the small Victorian market town of Bracknell had a population of about 5,000 and the original target was set for a total of 25000 people. In the early 1960s, though, the designated area was expanded so that the town could make a greater contribution towards the decentralisation of London and the target population was increased to 55,000-60,000. The town was best known for its quality brick making industry and good road communication since it was situated at the cross roads of London-Ascot-Reading road and the road from the south coast via Bagshot, Henley and Oxford to the Midlands, by-passing London.

26 Bracknell was built according to the neighbourhood principle. At the heart of each neighbourhood was a neighbourhood centre with a parade of shops, primary school, community centre, a pub and, in some instances, a church. The neighbourhood varied in size from 3000 to 9000. Bracknell continued to add neighbourhoods over a period of around 30 years. Pedestrianisation was a key idea, as was the construction of ring roads and the segregation of industrial areas from residential areas.

27 Initially, in the absence of a Master Plan, the Development Corporation directed its officers to prepare a three year programme for developing Bracknell. This three year programme was approved by the Corporation in 1952.

28 The Corporation divided the first designated area into four neighbourhoods (Priestwood, Easthampstead, Bullbrook and Harmans Water), two industrial areas (Western and Eastern Industrial Areas), the town centre and one area for larger housing development (Wick Hill). The following table details the order in which the Bracknell New Town neighbourhoods were commenced.

	Neighbourhood Centres	Year Built
1	Priestwood	1951
2	Easthampstead	1957
3	Bullbrook	1957
4	Harmans Water	1961
5	Wildridings	1967
6	Great Hollands	1967
7	Hanworth	1971
8	Birch Hill	1974
9	Crown Wood	1977

29 The development of the New Town passed through five main phases.

#### **Phase One: 1949-1954**

30 This period was characterised by its slow pace. It took five years for the Development Corporation to prepare a Master Plan of the town's layout and for the land use zoning to be drawn up and approved. Progress in the construction of housing was also hampered by shortages of building labour and restrictions in the supply of building material imposed by the Ministry of Supply. The development of industry was hindered by the number of firms showing interest in moving to Bracknell yet the inability of those firms that were keen to move to get Industrial Development Certificates (IDC) and building licences and by the slow progress in house construction. The development of social amenities and shopping facilities was limited by financial restrictions on the Bracknell Development Corporation. The Corporation's frustration at these hindrances can be seen in the following statement:

*"The Corporation has done all in their power to get their industry from the linked areas. Unfortunately the restrictions in the national interest on the building of new factories have been such that the Corporation have had to make their choice from firms anywhere in the London and Greater London area who have been able to get their IDC and building licence, rather than from the linked areas alone. This has inevitably meant that house building by the Corporation will not provide that direct relief to the housing lists of the linked boroughs and urban district councils for which the latter was hoping" (BDC, 1952).*

#### **Phase Two: 1955-1959**

31 During this period development of industry proceeded more quickly, mainly through the expansion of establishments that opened in 1954-55. More than twice the industrial floor space was completed and three times as many houses were built (Turok, 1989). Previous obstacles like IDCs and building licences had been relaxed and abolished respectively and strong interest emerged from firms wanting to move to Bracknell. As a result of the change in legislation, the demand for factory sites from firms leaving London became strong and most of the new employment was concerned with light engineering and electrical goods. The main constraints during this phase related to the amount of land available within the designated area and the slow progress in house construction.

#### **Phase Three: 1960s**

32 During this period industrial growth had slowed down and the rate of housing construction had caught up and several large offices were built. The town centre was also begun to provide more substantial shopping facilities. A significant event during this period was the expansion of the designated area of the New Town in 1962. The expansion of Bracknell appealed to a range of interests. It was attractive to existing firms wanting more housing to help recruitment and to new firms trying to decentralise from London.

33 During the 1960s, Bracknell's character changed considerably from a minor settlement with a small town centre and a narrow industrial base to a more substantial town with a wider range of economic functions and activities.

#### **Phase Four: 1970s**

34 During the 70's, Bracknell's rapid growth continued and more physical development took place than in the 1960's. More emphasis was given to attracting private investment and as wider circumstances changed the future of the Corporation itself became uncertain. In 1977 a decision was made to set a date for the winding up of the Corporation and gave the following government the opportunity to take the proceed a stage further and privatise its assets.

#### **Phase Five: 1980s onwards**

35 This phase was characterised generally by the disposal of the BDC's assets. By March 1982 when the Bracknell Development Corporation was "wound up", properties had been sold for a total of £57m. Sales continued at a slower rate when the New Towns Commission took over responsibility. By March 1986, a further £41m had been raised, making Bracknell the most profitable of all the New Towns (National Audit Office, 1986).

36 Since the Development Corporation was wound up, Bracknell town has been expanded again on the neighbourhood principle into the adjoining Parishes of Winkfield, Binfield and Warfield under the aegis of the Eastern Bracknell Local Plan (Forest Park, The Warren and Martins Heron) and the North Bracknell Local Plan (Temple Park, Quelm Park and Whitegrove).

37 As a result of the Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan, there are proposals for the regeneration of Bracknell town centre, mixed development based on the neighbourhood principle at Peacock Farm to the west of Bracknell town and for housing development at the Staff College, Broad Lane to the south of Bracknell town centre. The Bracknell Forest Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy and Site Allocations Development Plan Documents are seeking to direct future development in Bracknell Forest Borough to the year 2026. It is likely that the majority of the additional necessary development will be accommodated within existing settlements but a large urban extension is proposed to the north of Quelm Park and Whitegrove, linked to services and facilities located within the adjoining, existing neighbourhood centre.

#### ***Key characteristics of Bracknell New Town***

- The motto of the Development Corporation was "Home, Industry, Leisure" indicating that the concern was to develop a total community, not just a series of housing estates;
- The original Mater Plan, approved following the expansion of the designated area, consisted of nine neighbourhood centres<sup>5</sup>, three industrial areas<sup>6</sup> and an enlargement of the old town centre to form a traffic free shopping centre;
- The foundation of the new town was based on the neighbourhood principle, i.e. people settle and develop a community spirit more easily in a smaller area. Each neighbourhood had on average a population of 5500 people surrounded by a local shopping centre, a primary school, church, public house and community centre;

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<sup>5</sup> Priestwood, Bullbrook, Wildridings, Easthampstead, Harmans Water, Great Hollands, Hanworth, Birch Hill and Crown Wood.

<sup>6</sup> Western industrial area, Eastern industrial area and Southern industrial area.

- The provision of social facilities was kept commensurate with the rate of population increase;
- All the neighbourhoods were not alike and the differences between them were often a reflection of some of the changes that had taken place in town planning over the last 30 years as well as social, economic and political changes;
- The neighbourhoods of Priestwood, Bullbrook, Easthampstead and Harmans water were laid out on traditional lines, while in the newer neighbourhoods the Radburn principle<sup>7</sup> had been adopted resulting in the segregation of traffic and pedestrians;
- Indicative of the emphasis given to private transport in the 1960's, the road pattern was designed for the unrestrained use of the private car, with separate pedestrian and cycle routes;
- With regard to industrial development, the Corporation's aim was to establish a wide range of types and levels of jobs. For a variety of reasons it was found relatively easy to attract firms into the New Town. Some well known firms that relocated to Bracknell New Town include: Racal (1950), Ferranti (1963), International Computers Limited (1971), and 3M (1977);
- Great importance was attached to the value of open spaces, trees and shrubs.

## **6 The Outcomes and Impacts of Bracknell New Town**

38 The detailed planning of Bracknell New Town was to result in several immediate advantages. The factories and schools, for example, which had been built in careful relation to the housing, so that the distance from a worker's house to their place of work was not normally more than a mile. Furthermore, no child of up to 11 years would had to cross a main road on the way to school. New shops were also built to supplement existing shopping facilities, with the aim to ensure the greatest possible range of goods at competitive prices within easy walking distances. In the case of leisure facilities, there was already one cinema in the town and a site for another had been reserved. In addition, the good transport links between Bracknell and adjacent towns (for example, Reading) made it easy for people to travel outside for a variety of attractions.

39 Bracknell Town Centre was developed as part of the New Town, The centre is now outdated and does not provide for the needs of modern retailing, offers no evening economy and only a limited mix of uses. There is a need to improve the quality and vitality of Bracknell Town Centre so that it meets the needs of the local population.

40 There is some dispute as to the success of the New Town as the following article shows: "Bracknell residents in the 1960s enjoyed good quality housing and amenities across the income range, a spacious and green environment (to contrast the high-rise blocks in the large cities), and, schools and community centres were linked to well-defined neighbourhoods close to the new emerging industries.

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<sup>7</sup> the separation of traffic by mode, such that the pedestrian path system does not cross any major roads at grade. This resulted in the creation of "superblocks," which are largely residential.

However, since the 1960s employment has changed from manufacturing to distribution, research and service industry, with particular emphasis on the computing industry. By the 1990s Bracknell was claiming to be the Leisure Centre of the South-East but despite a Water World and a 10-screen cinema this claim was not borne-out by a town starved of investment since its construction. Today, Bracknell is suffering like many other new towns from crumbling infrastructure, crime, empty shops and vacant office blocks” (Geography in the News, August 2003). This may not be entirely correct, as crime rates in Bracknell as a whole are lower than the national average (Bracknell Forest Borough Fact Pack, 2005).

41 It is therefore extremely difficult to provide a definitive statement as to the success of the New Town, because such an exercise relies on weighing a number of objectives.

42 To help to evaluate the outcomes and impact of the Bracknell New Town, the following issues will be examined:

- The physical and social changes that have occurred since the town was designated; and
- The changes that may be attributed to the BDC

#### **Physical Changes:**

43 In a physical sense the development of Bracknell can be considered a qualified success (Turok, 1989). This may be a reflection on the objectives set out by the BDC (for example making Bracknell beautiful).

44 A steady rate of growth was achieved and most parts of the town are generally considered attractive. This is partly because the New Town itself is set in an area with diverse countryside and Green Belt environment that includes large tracts of open and wooded countryside such as Windsor Great Park and Bramshill Forest, Crowthorne Woods and Swinley Forest. Today Bracknell has a wealth of attractive and accessible countryside. Approximately 30% of the Borough has been designated of International, National or local wildlife value including 10 Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Furthermore, most residential areas were carefully planned and laid out to make the most of the existing trees and landscape. This and much more led to Bracknell’s claim in the 1990’s to be the “leisure centre of the South East” (The Times, October 1996).

45 One of Bracknell’s great successes has been its landscaping (BDC, 1981). Soon after the New Town had been established the landscape consultant prepared a survey of the entire area, with a more detailed survey of the trees in the western half of the town and as many as possible were protected. Members of the board realised the importance of landscaping from the start, and with great foresight the Corporation had decided that 1% of the development value of each development area would be allocated for landscaping. One of the reasons behind the success of the BDC landscaping policy was that the Corporation did not wait until huge housing estates were completed before starting on the landscaping work. Instead, the gardeners followed close on the heels of the builders, sowing and planting as each small batch of houses was finished.

46 Overall many have commented on the rich physical diversity of Bracknell New Town. Osborn and Whittick, 1977, are quoted as saying “aesthetically Bracknell is one of the most attractive New Towns”. However, it would be wrong to assume that

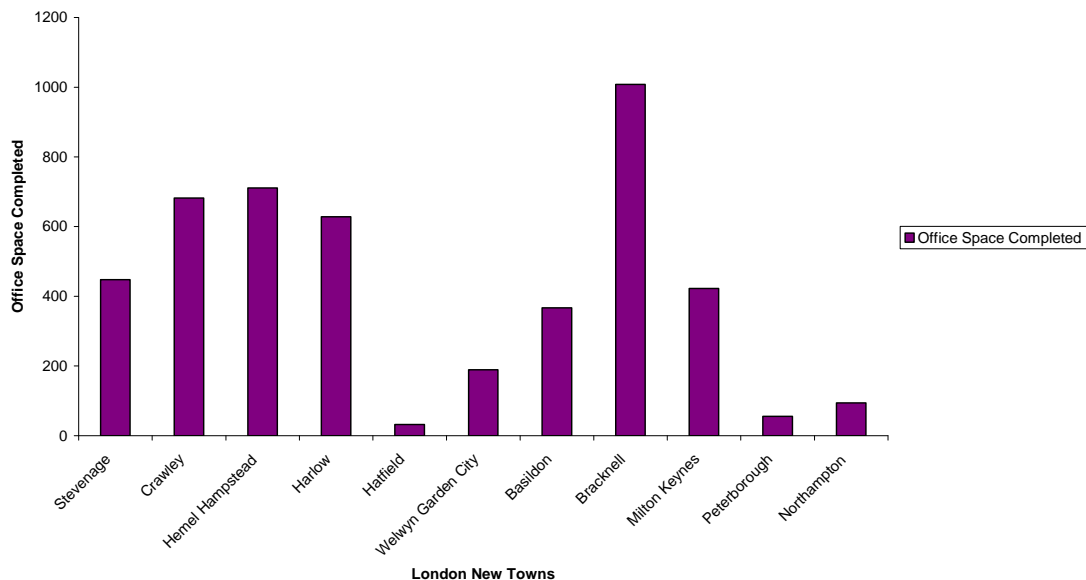
these sentiments are shared by everyone. For example, in a 2003 article, the Guardian refers to Bracknell as a “poor imitation of the enduring garden city at Letchworth” (The Guardian, July 2003).

47 In addition, the town centre has been described as “dismal, a ghost town in parts with cracking pavements and crumbling concrete” (The Guardian, July 2003). Indeed, Bracknell town centre has suffered from physical and economic decline with shoppers travelling elsewhere and a general sense of disappointment and lack of sense of place among residents. The regeneration and redevelopment of Bracknell Town Centre is an ongoing objective which seeks to revitalise the heart of Bracknell, creating a more enjoyable and sustainable place to live, work, shop and socialise.

48 Other forms of development monitored by the BDC were housing, industry and offices. Housing was a key element for the BDC and it was essential that a steady rate of construction was maintained. The Corporation had 4 standards to which housing was built; standard I being the minimum considered desirable in a New Town, standard II being houses with slightly larger rooms and slightly better finish, whilst standard III and IV were detached houses with garages and sites between ¼ and ½ acres of land. By March 1982, the Development Corporation had built 12,235 houses for letting and 882 for sale.

49 The Development Corporation put in a lot of effort in attracting firms from London into the New Town, so much so that by 1974 Bracknell New Town had the highest amount of office development than any other London New Town. In total, by the time it was wound up in 1982 the Bracknell Development Corporation had built over 300,000m<sup>2</sup> of industrial floor space for let and over 130,000m<sup>2</sup> commercial floor space in the district.

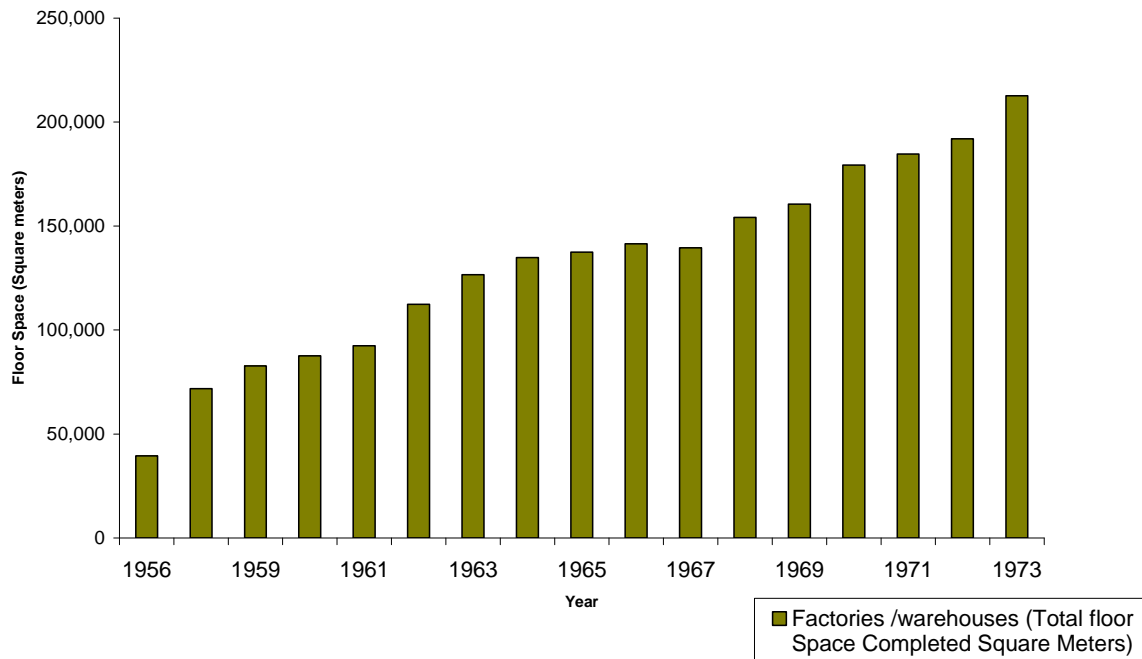
Figure 2: Office Development in London New Towns at 30/9/1974



50 To summarise the development of Bracknell can be considered a qualified success in physical terms. This may be seen in the overall landscape and rich diversity of the town. Today, Bracknell New Town can boast of being situated within a Borough with a strong countryside and open space heritage. The present Local Plan standard of 4.3 hectares of open space of public value per 1000 population,

which is applied throughout the Borough, is one of the highest in the country and owns its origin to the landscape requirements of the Development Corporation.

**Figure 3: Total Factory/Warehouse Floor Space Completed**

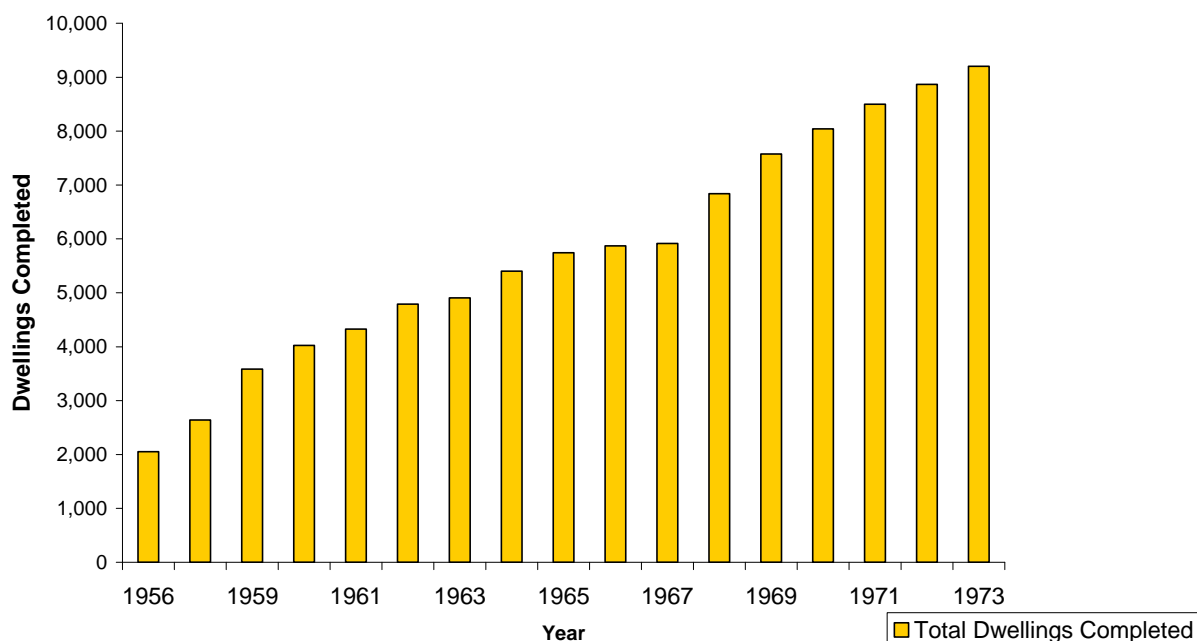


51 In addition to the high biodiversity value that results from the Borough’s countryside landscape there is also the considerable socio-economic value that results from its attractiveness as a place to live and work. Today Bracknell Forest has attracted many high-tech organisations to Bracknell town and its environs including Hewlett Packard, Siemens, Honeywell, Fujitsu, Dell, Novell and Cable and Wireless. Other world class multinational organisations who have chosen Bracknell town as their home include Panasonic, BMW, Boehringer-Ingelheim, Waitrose and 3M. Institutions of repute such as Sandhurst Military Academy, Broadmoor Hospital and the Transport Research Laboratory are also all based in the Borough.

### Social Changes

52 The Development Corporation aimed to create a socially balanced and self contained community. It’s strategy for achieving this was to attract varied and socially diverse migrants from London, housing them in neighbourhoods which would be well serviced by social infrastructure and create a ‘sense of community and place’ among them. This aim was closely linked to the intentions of the New Towns Act. New Towns were intended to contribute directly to the relief of congestion and housing shortages in London. However, research has shown that New Towns did little to alleviate the situation (Fields and Croft, 1977; Heraud, 1966). These studies base their findings around two main points. Firstly, that a much smaller proportion of New Town migrants came from areas of housing stress in London and secondly, that households with the greatest housing need, corresponding closely to the poor and less skilled, were greatly under represented in the New Towns.

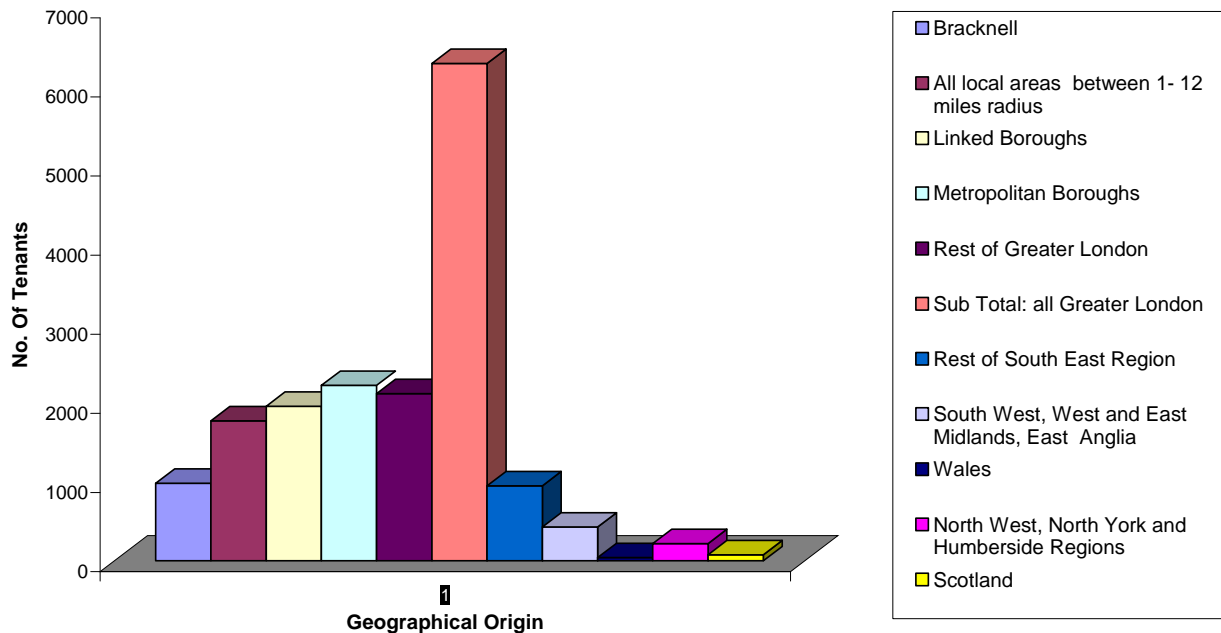
Figure 4: Total Dwellings Completed



53 One of the main reasons behind this was the link between employment provision and the allocation of New Town housing. For example, firms moving to the New Towns tended to provide a larger proportion of skilled and white collar jobs and thus tended to reserve their housing allocations for people with skills in short supply. This had the knock on effect on those with more serious housing problems having less of a chance in gaining access to New Town Housing because they were either poor and unskilled or could not afford to pay for New Town rents (Turok, 1989). In 1953 the Industrial Selection Scheme was introduced with the aim of 'fine tuning' the link between housing allocation and employment provision. The Scheme involved a complicated link between London Local Authorities waiting lists and the allocations scheme of the New Town, via the Local Labour exchange or an employer. The only way to be allocated a home in a New Town was to already have a job with an employer relocating there, or to apply for a job with an employer already located there. This meant that when an employer was seeking to recruit, the local labour exchange would contact those local authorities to see if they had anyone with the appropriate skills on their waiting list. These people would then be offered the opportunity to apply for the job, with the successful candidate becoming eligible for a home in the New Town.

54 Given the complexity of the scheme and the fact that this was the only route for people in need in London to access housing in the New Towns, it was not surprising that the New Towns provided such little relief to those suffering most from the housing shortage. The scheme continued into the 1970s, although it changed its name to the New and Expanded Towns Scheme. Increasingly employers by-passed this bureaucratic process for recruiting employees. In fact, only 10% of all New Town Migrants from London went through the Scheme and by 1964 only 9% of families coming to Bracknell from London had gone through it (BDC Board Meeting 168, 1965). The scheme failed both as a means of selecting tenants and as a route for people in need of access to homes in the New Towns. Most of the residents obtained jobs with New Towns employers through other routes and where then allocated a home at the employers request (IPPR, 2005).

**Figure 5: Geographical Origin of Tenants Housed between 1951 and 1968**



55 The above chart shows the geographic origin of Bracknell New Town migrants between 1951-1968. It suggests that the highest amount of immigrants came from Greater London with the least coming from the linked boroughs within those categories. This does not seem to differ from the overall picture which suggests that many New Towns attracted more migrants from outside their linked areas.

56 An important objective of the New Town policy was to provide relief to those areas in London with acute housing problems. It is therefore useful to understand whether the parts of Greater London from which most Bracknell immigrants moved were those with the greatest housing problems. The results from a study carried out by the Centre of Urban Studies, University College London in 1991, suggest that Bracknell New Town was wide of the mark in this respect. The study revealed that areas with the worst housing problems were usually within central and inner rings of conurbations while most new town migrants had come from areas further west (Westergaard, 1961). Therefore, it seems fair to suggest that Bracknell New Town had drawn its London migrants mainly from areas which supplied the New Town with most of its industry but where housing needs were not of great concern compared to other areas.

57 The second social objective was to create a self contained community. A necessary condition of self containment in labour market terms is sufficient local employment opportunities for the number of economically active residents. The table below compares the job:population ratios of different New Towns from 1951-1981 (where a ratio of 100 is equivalent to a perfect balance). It shows that Bracknell New Town was able to provide sufficient jobs for the expanding population and was not just a 'dormitory' for London or other New Towns. For example, compared to Basildon, Bracknell New Town seemed to exhibit a better job/population balance especially between 1951-1961.

### **Job:Population Ratios of the London New Towns 1951-1981**

<b>New Town</b>	<b>1951</b>	<b>1961</b>	<b>1971</b>	<b>1981</b>
Bracknell	108	115	108	101
Basildon	37	82	89	93
Crawley	112	101	113	98
Harlow	98	86	92	86
Hemel Hempstead	101	96	91	84
Stevenage	124	109	96	88
Welwyn Garden City	124	125	120	115

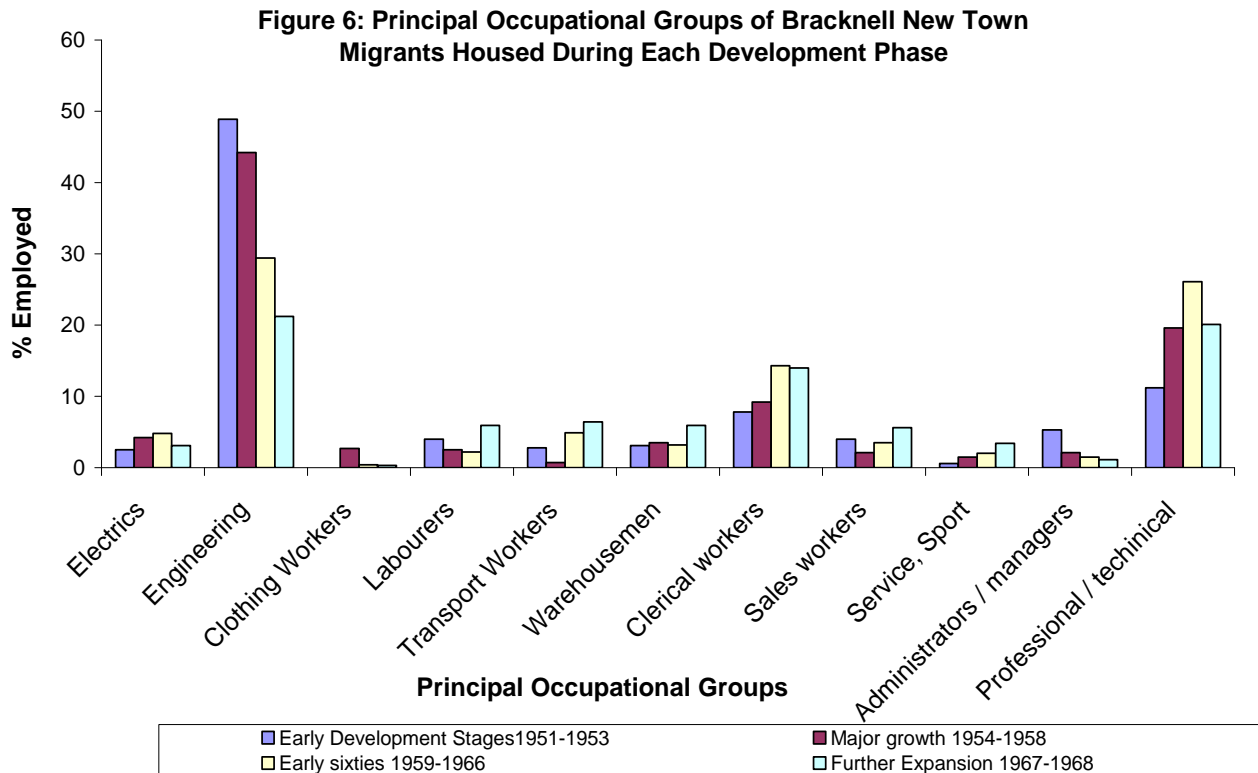
Source: Turok, 1989

58 The table also reflects the tendency for New Towns to become less self-contained over time, reflecting a long term national trend towards increased mobility and longer journeys to work (Turok, 1989).

59 New Towns were supposed to lead the way to a world of minimum auto-use, but as most commentators now agree, they ended up increasing and contributing to the overall amount of long distance commuting (Pennington 2002).

60 Another social objective of the BDC was to attract and create a socially balanced community. It has already been observed that most of the migrants were from areas where housing shortages were relatively low due to the high need for white collar jobs. This already suggests a slight imbalance in the socially balanced community which the BDC intended to create.

61 Nevertheless, to test whether the New Town had drawn migrants disproportionately from certain groups, a distinction has been made between male and female tenants. According to Ogilvy, 1975, most of the tenants in the New Town were men. The proportion of women tenants tended to be lowest, especially during the initial stages of the New Town development, only rising when tenants were housed for two small clothing firms employing mainly female labour and with the arrival of office staff. However, this may be indicative of the social trend prevalent during these times when men were considered to be the heads of household and would be the primary contact for signing forms, etc.



62 Migration to Bracknell was selective of different social groups at different stages of the town’s development. The figure below validates this claim.

63 In general, it seems that engineering, professional, and technical occupations were by far the most employed occupations regardless of the development period. Clothing workers (mainly women) were the lowest by far and were not even employed in the town until well into the second development stage. Furthermore, Bracknell New Town had more manual and skilled non-manual workers but fewer higher paid intermediate workers. This implies that the cross section of people moving to Bracknell have been biased towards the skilled working class.

64 Considering other dimensions of inequality provides further evidence of selectivity rather than balance in Bracknell’s social composition. According to the 1981 census, only 861 of the 48,681 residents (1.8%) were born in the New Commonwealth or Pakistan. This compared with 3% for England and Wales and 9.5% in Greater London. The reasons behind this may be due to issues of skill and occupation and suggests a degree of self-selection or discrimination in the migration process i.e. recruitment and housing allocation (Turok, 1989). Bracknell’s New Town population was predominatly white, young or middle aged and upwardly mobile (Turok, 1989).

65 In conclusion, it seems that Bracknell New Town did little to alleviate London’s housing problems and that migration patterns seemed to be characterised by skilled labour rather than an appropriate social mix, as was the Bracknell Development Corporation’s intention.

## **7 The Constraints and Problems of New Towns and their implications for the future of Bracknell New Town**

66 In 2002, the Government commissioned an investigation into the problems and futures of New Towns. The following represents snapshots of an Inquiry held by the Urban Affairs Sub-Committee of the Transport, Local Government & the Regions Committee:

67 Although the creation of the New Towns was based essentially on the same founding principle there are major differences between these towns. One difference is the extent to which further growth is likely or desired. There are wide variations in the economic and social needs of the New Towns, but they almost all include areas of deprivation with high levels of unemployment and housing need. In those towns around London, there is a major need for affordable housing.

68 Generally speaking, Bracknell is an economically active town. The town's success as a principal growth centre within the Thames Valley has contributed to an exceptionally high economic activity rate which, at 77%, is significantly above the South East regional average. Unemployment is correspondingly very low in Bracknell Forest at around 1.4%, compared with 1.8% for the whole of Berkshire. Bracknell Forest is ranked 318<sup>th</sup> least deprived out of 354 authorities which means that there are only 35 other authorities that are better off than Bracknell Forest when measured by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. No parts of the Borough are in the 10% of most deprived Wards in the country, but many Wards are in the most prosperous 10%.

69 Despite these trends, there is a growing gap between the price of dwellings and the amount people can afford to pay. A contributing factor is the level of housing completions within the wider Borough. Over the last few years, there has been a decline in the number of new dwellings built in Bracknell Forest. Five of the last six years have yielded a return of less than 400 net new dwellings. For comparison, during the period 2006 to 2026, it has been assumed that the Borough Council's housing allocation will be of the order of 11000 dwellings, or over 500 dwellings per annum. Also, the Government's "Right-to-Buy" provisions have resulted in the sale of more council housing per annum than has been provided from new development as affordable housing. During the period April 1997 to March 2005, whilst 576 have been provided as affordable units, some 1428 dwellings have been sold under the General Consent and Right to Buy procedures.

70 The New Towns are no longer new. They now require huge new investment and redevelopment. According to the submission to the Inquiry from the New Towns Group of 10 local authorities, "most of the New Towns are economically dynamic areas, which have levered in significant business investment. They have also fulfilled an important social function, providing housing for many from blighted inner-city areas, generated jobs and provided recreational amenities." Despite this, it is important to note that much of the development was carried out well over 30 years ago and is now suffering from deterioration. Also, compared with present construction methods, many of the construction materials used for the New Town housing were experimental, non-standard and often poor quality, and in some areas now require wholesale replacement. Additionally, the infrastructure, the roads and sewers are now in need of substantial upgrading.

71 Furthermore the New Towns' town centres are often unattractive and, as a result, they are losing shoppers to nearby centres. At the centre of all the New Towns, a shopping centre has been developed to meet the needs of the surrounding

populations. Many have suffered from poor design and layout. Most are now out of date and as a result, residents are choosing to shop in other locations. Corby Council, for example, estimates that 73 per cent of disposable income is leaving the town. While in Bracknell Forest, it is estimated that for every £1 spent by residents of the Borough, 80 pence is spent outside. This represents a vast amount of finance, which if used within the town centre would result in prime regeneration. Bracknell Forest Council's own Select Committee has described the town's shopping centre "as an impersonal oblong concrete box.....the town centre, although pedestrianised is separated from the surrounding area by two ring roads giving a fortress effect" (Select Committee Report, 2002). The council has undertaken some environmental initiatives to tackle the problems but "the problems have to be addressed by plans to completely redevelop the centre. The Committee also pointed out that 80 per cent of those living within ten minutes drive of Bracknell centre chose to shop elsewhere (Select Committee Report, 2002).

72 The master plans drawn up for the New Towns proposed low density development with large amounts of open space, and housing was segregated from jobs, shopping and business services. While such densities represented good practice at the time, increasing populations and greater pressures to protect the green belt do not allow for low densities to be considered as sustainable options. Furthermore, low density development in the New Towns has created major problems; for example, excessive dependence on the car and poor bus services. This is a particular problem as New Towns were supposed to lead the way to a world of minimum auto-use, but most commentators now agree, ended up increasing the overall amount of long distance commuting (Pennington, 2002).

73 Car ownership in the Bracknell Borough is high, with 85% of households owning one or more cars (double the national average). This is reflected in a high level of, and demand for car usage and a relatively low demand for public transport with only 6% of residents travelling to work by public transport. The result of this trend can be seen in the traffic on the roads and congestion at particular times. Particular care will need to be taken if future development (especially increased densities) is not to result in further strain on the roads.

74 On the other hand the Town and Country Planning Association argue that the problem of car dependence and the resultant traffic congestion is not one particular to the New Towns. Rather they suspect that New Towns are especially well structured to adapt to more sustainable ways of life. Undoubtedly they are "laboratories" of the best professional and technical practice of their period, and their master planning features should be analysed and lessons to be learned should be widely promoted (TCPA, 2002). Furthermore, Local Transport Plans which set out integrated transport solutions will identify how local authorities in New Towns can achieve a shift to more sustainable forms of transport.

75 The New Towns Local Councils also have major neighbourhood management problems in the housing estates and local shopping centres which they inherited from the New Town Corporations. This is caused by the combination of the Radburn design principle and the fragmented ownership of property and land which was a result of right-to-buy sales and the 'fire' sales just before the corporations closed down. This has frequently produced neighbourhoods which are poorly maintained and perceived to be unsafe by residents. The poorly designed estate shopping centres tend to attract antisocial behaviour in areas with few social facilities. In Bracknell "isolated, dark and secluded footways between and behind properties have been problematic" (Select Committee Report, 2002). Government advice is that New Town Local Authorities should ensure that such issues are given consideration by the

local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (Governments Response to the Select Committee Report, 2002). In addition, the new Local Development Framework process, particularly the Core Strategy and Site Allocation Development Plan Documents, have a role to play in ensuring that future development are adequately designed to overcome these concerns.

## **8 Conclusions**

76 Fifty years since the designation of Bracknell New town, the vision for a country town of 25,000 people, relieved of the misery of slum housing, has moved on. Today Bracknell is an influential Berkshire town with a population over 100,000. It has outgrown its town centre and comprehensive town centre re-development and regeneration is currently being promoted. After its modest start in the austere post-war years, the New Town is thought by many to be a great achievement. While based on hindsight, there are now many criticisms of some of the New Towns, they have still played a crucial role in achieving and establishing new settlements in a very short time. The New Towns have provided houses, jobs and facilities for over two million people who have chosen to make their home there; this can only be viewed as a policy success.

77 The most obvious attribute of New Towns is that they are planned communities. Thought has been given to their purpose and objectives and the manner in which they are to be achieved. New Towns were designed using a neighbourhood principle, this ensured that employment, social infrastructure and services were located in close proximity to residents thereby facilitating comprehensive development. Today this policy is carried forward through the sustainable communities agenda to build balanced sustainable communities. These concepts of planning, comprehensiveness and growth were identified as being important in the consultation exercises undertaken early in the Local Development Framework preparation process should continue to be used to underpin future growth in Bracknell Forest.

78 With regard to the failings of New Towns, issues such as social cohesion, affordable housing, supportive infrastructure (for example; town centres, transport networks) were also identified in the consultation exercises which have been undertaken. If these concerns are not to be taken forward into the future they need to be “planned out” of future growth proposals for the Borough.

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