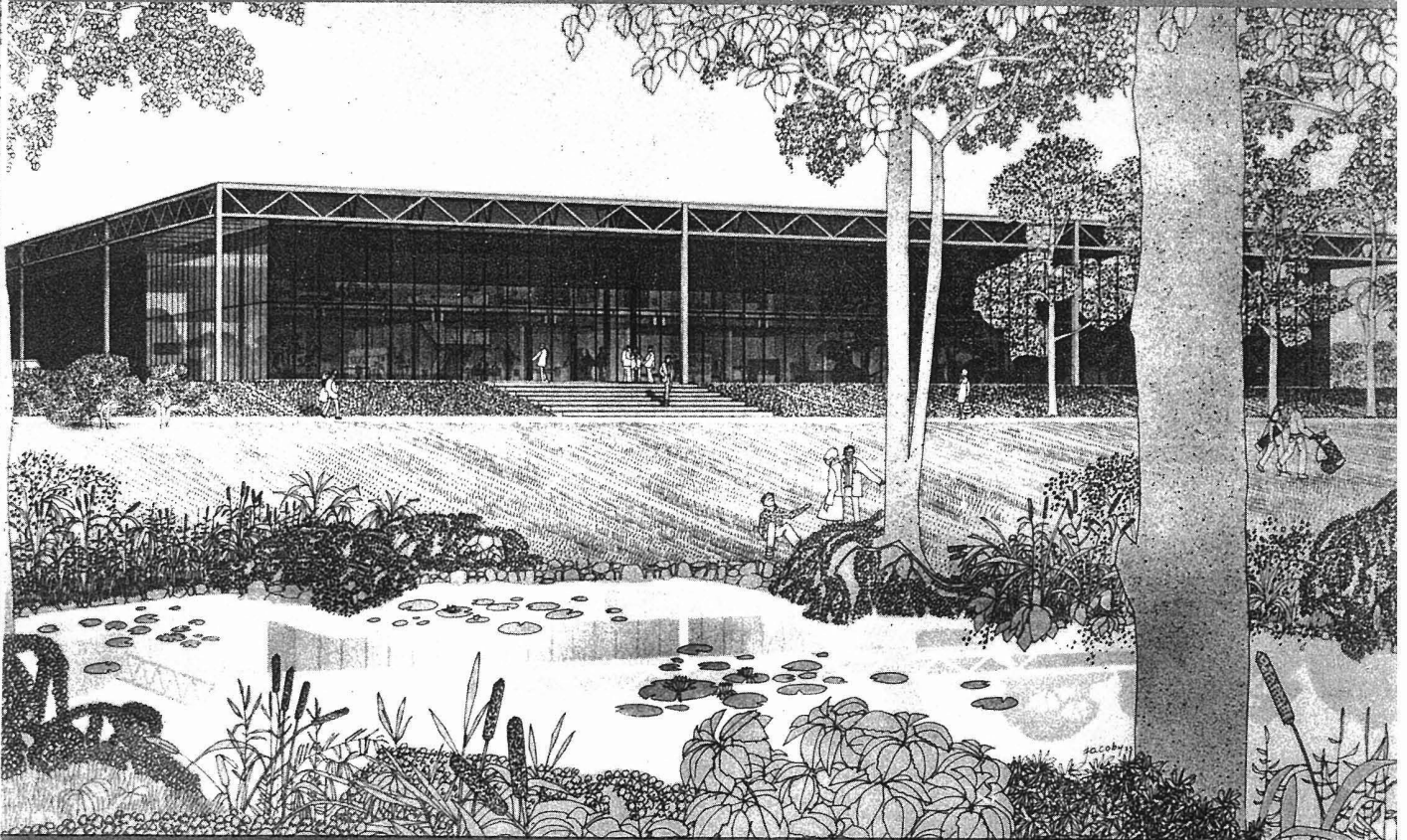


# NEW TOWNS

Their Origins, Achievements and Progress



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# 14 *Stevenage*

In the first interim report of the New Towns Committee of March 1946 reference was made to Stevenage, one of the satellite towns proposed by Sir Patrick Abercrombie, and it was suggested that, as a matter of urgency, an agency should be chosen for this town in advance of legislation. A draft charter for a corporation for Stevenage was drawn up for the committee by the Treasury Solicitor. However, following the second and final reports of the committee, the New Towns Act, 1946, provided necessary powers for establishing corporations to develop new towns.

Stevenage, 'as a matter of urgency', thus became the first new town to be designated—on 11 November 1946.

During the thirties the Stevenage Urban District Council had favoured plans for permitting the development of the existing small town from its population of 6500 to about 30 000, and during the war officials of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning had been sketching plans for Stevenage as a possible prototype of future new towns. It was thus ripe for development of this kind. In the Greater London Plan Abercrombie had pointed out that the site is 'excellently located for transport', that it 'is tending to develop industrially' and that there is 'ample land for industry on the west side of the railway'. He suggested that 'expansion should take place mainly on the east of the present town, leaving an area on the west of the railway for industry, where it is undesirable to have residential development'(14.1).

The site selected, of 6100 acres (2470 ha), included the Urban District of Stevenage, and parts of the Rural Districts of Hitchin and Hertford. The town centre is about 30 miles (50 km) from the centre of London, on the North-Eastern Region main railway line from King's Cross to the north, and on the Great North Road. The country is undulating, with a general slope towards the south-west, which makes it a good site for a town. Fairlands Valley which runs across the centre of the site from north to south in the original plan was to be preserved. It is now being developed by the borough council as the town's main park and amenity area which includes a boating lake about  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a mile (0.5 km) long.

With the reorganization of Local Government in 1974 the Stevenage District Council corresponds in area to that of the new town.

## **Outline Plan**

As early as 1946 a draft Master Plan was prepared by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, which provided the basis for subsequent plans. Revisions were made up to its final adoption in 1950, and they continue to be made, but in broad principle the

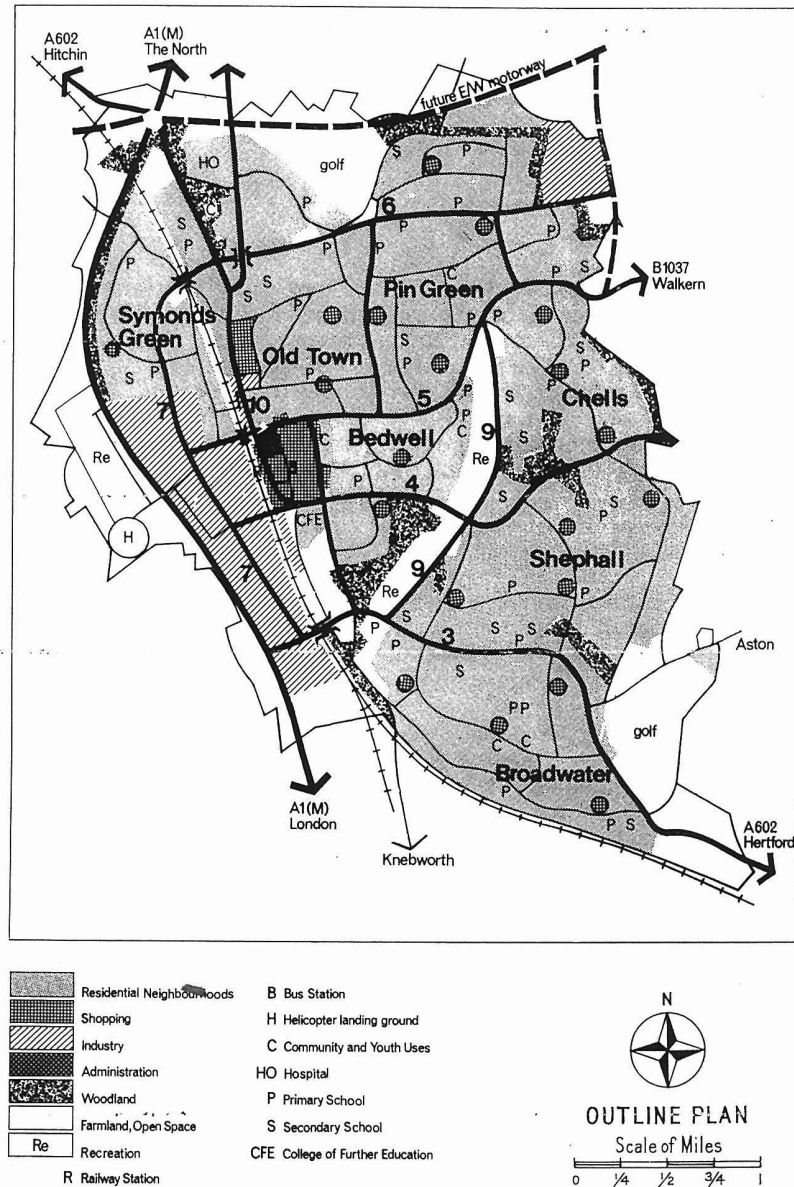


Figure 14.1 Stevenage – outline plan

adopted plan has been the guide in building the town. As an example of the planning of a satellite town, Abercrombie prepared, in accordance with the general principles he advocated, an outline plan for Ongar (Essex)(14.2) with a population of 60 000, divided into 6 neighbourhoods of about 10 000 each, and in the plan for Stevenage this approximate size of the town and of the neighbourhoods is adopted. The town centre is placed south of old Stevenage and the neighbourhoods are grouped in a semi-circle round this centre, old Stevenage (1) with extensions to the east forming one neighbourhood to the north, then Bedwell (2) immediately to the east of the centre, Pin Green to the north east (6), with Chells (5) further to the east and Shephall (4) and Broadwater (3) to the south-east. (The numbers indicate the order of building.) Fairlands Valley separates Bedwell and Pin Green to the west from Chells, Shephall and Broadwater to the east (see plan). Each neighbourhood was originally planned with 2 primary schools, 8 secondary schools being conveniently spaced throughout the town. Owing to the increase in maximum population most neighbourhoods will require 3 primary schools while the number of secondary schools has been increased to 12. A County College of Further Education is situated near the town centre. Each neighbourhood has a shopping centre, where in many cases sites are provided for a church and a public house; and there are a few additional groups of shops in parts of the neighbourhoods away from the centres. Community centres are also provided in some of the neighbourhoods. All the principal town roads run between the neighbourhoods so that young children attending primary schools need not cross these roads. The plan shows a diversion of the Great North Road (the A1 Motorway) to the west of the industrial area.

Part of the green belt is included within the boundary of the designated area, on the north, south-east and west; and it is hoped and expected that open country areas beyond the boundary will be preserved as such so that the town will enjoy a green belt of at least 3 miles (5 km) wide.

The plan prompts certain criticisms, and it is doubtful whether it can be considered as good as some of the other plans for new towns. In one widely accepted theory the size of a neighbourhood should be governed by the capacity of a primary school, but in Stevenage each neighbourhood has 2 or 3 primary schools. If the neighbourhoods had been half the size, each would support 1 school, while it would have obviated the necessity of having the small groups of shops in addition to those in the neighbourhood centres as these would have been adequate for smaller neighbourhoods as at Crawley. Another point of criticism is the placing of the town centre. This criticism was made by the Stevenage Urban District Council at the master plan inquiry in October 1949. The objection to the location of the centre, an objection which the explanations of the original draft plan do not meet, is that it is too far from the outlying parts of the town. It is, for example, 2 miles (3.25 km) from the eastern areas of Broadwater, Shephall and Chells, which may be thought too far for a town of 60 000. As the District Council Surveyor said at the inquiry, 33 000 persons would live beyond 1½ miles (2 km), 10 000 beyond 1¼ miles (2.8 km). The council suggested a site further east on higher ground, more in the geographical centre. If the centre had been where the neighbourhood centre of Bedwell is located it would have reduced by more than a ½ mile (0.8 km) the distance to the outskirts. On the other hand, the situation of the town centre places it near the railway where a new station has been built, and it is easily accessible from the industrial area, but these considerations are surely less important than the convenience of the majority for whom the town is built.



One criticism frequently made which, we think, has not the same validity, is that it lacks compactness—that there is too much sprawl. This is accentuated by Fairlands Valley running through the town. But this generous use of land and mixing of trees and grass with houses helps to make life pleasant, and Fairlands Valley brings a stretch of very pleasant country right into the town. The opposition of many residents to the later proposal to build on it is significant. It confirms that there is a popular liking for the sense of constant contact with the natural world.

If the placing of the town centre can be criticized, there is little to criticize in the plan for the centre itself, which is excellent in every way. Here the desirable ideal of grouping shops in a pedestrian precinct with bus station and car parks close by has been realized. It is one of the finest of modern town centres and will be described in some detail later.

The location of the main industrial area west of the railway (with railway sidings for many factories) and east of the new Great North Road met with some opposition, chiefly because, as originally planned, it meant the demolition of over 100 houses at the northern end of the site. The Urban District Council suggested that the industrial area should stop south of the residential development in Fairview Road, and proposed an alternative site north-east of the town. The disadvantage of such a site was mainly of poor transport access: no railway and no main roads. Although there is natural sympathy with people having to be turned out of their homes—not, however, without being offered other and often better accommodation—it would have been unwise to allow this to spoil what is a very good location for an industrial area, having the advantages of proximity to the railway and the Great North Road, and easy access to the town centre, while being admirably suited for the purpose. However, a compromise was later reached by which Fairview Road remains a residential area on the eastern outskirts of the industrial area and the extensive demolition of houses was thus avoided, while some new residential development has actually taken place there.

In June 1958 the development corporation was asked to prepare a new master plan for an increase of population to 80 000. In July 1962, just before this plan was ready for submission, the Minister asked the corporation to examine the feasibility of a larger expansion to about 150 000. In January 1963 the corporation submitted a report by its Chief Architect and Planner, Leonard G. Vincent, dealing with the technical practicability of such an expansion. In this report it was stated that 'an ultimate population of 130 000 to 140 000 is thought to be more desirable than 150 000 so as to keep all parts of the town within a 2-mile (3 km) radius of the centre, to use the A600 as the westward boundary, and to preserve the green belt between Hitchin and Stevenage'.

In October 1964 a Draft Designation Order was made for a further area of some 1500 acres (650 ha), mostly west of the A1 Motorway. A public inquiry followed at which there was much opposition to the proposed expansion. In April 1965 the Minister decided not to proceed with the proposed expansion, but to extend the designated area by 100 acres (40 ha) on the north-east. The corporation then continued with its preparation of the new master plan. This was duly submitted and approved in June 1967 for a population by intake up to 80 000 with a further increase by natural growth.

The extensions are in 12 areas, mostly on the periphery. The largest are two new neighbourhoods: St Nicholas in the north-east, Simons Green in the north-west, between the railway and the motorway and north of the principal industrial area. Other fairly large extensions are south of Broadwater and east of Shephall. An additional industrial area is sited on the 100 acre (40 ha) extension in the north-east.

The implementation of the 1966 plan was well advanced in 1972. The Secretary of State for the Environment then asked the corporation to consider an extension of the designated area by as much as 3000–4000 acres (1200–1600 ha). In January 1973 the corporation published a preliminary report in which five alternative ways of expanding the town were given, and invited the people of Stevenage to express their views—a useful exercise in public participation. Following this the corporation submitted its proposals to the Secretary of State in April 1973, which involved an extension of 3600 acres (1460 ha), about half of the existing area, mainly to the west, but also a little to the north and east. This major expansion to the west would have meant that nearly a third of the town would be divided from the rest by the A1 Motorway and the railway, a most unsatisfactory example of planning.

In this exercise in public participation it was found that the great majority who responded to the questionnaire on the subject were against expansion: 1593 living in Stevenage and 1068 living in surrounding areas. Those who supported expansion numbered 212 inside and 41 outside. Those who expressed no view either way were 1823 inside and 422 outside. If this expansion had been agreed it would have meant a maximum population of 150 000 instead of the 105 000 in the 1966 plan.

Fortunately the Secretary of State decided in January 1974 not to proceed with this big extension, but to extend on a smaller scale, and this was confirmed after a change of Government when the request was made to the corporation for proposals for an additional 1000 acres (405 ha) to serve local needs until about 1990. In September 1974 the corporation published a preliminary report and invited public comment, and in January 1975 the full report of recommendations was published. The proposals were for an additional 1079 acres (437 ha) but 385 acres (156 ha) of undeveloped land to the west could be released within the boundary meaning an addition of 695 acres (281 ha).

Following further discussions with public authorities, local organizations and individuals and officers of government departments, the corporation submitted to the Secretary of State, in April 1975, lower minimum option growth proposals for an expansion which showed a gross land requirement of 1154 acres (481 ha) (made up of 865 acres (360 ha) of additional land and 289 acres (121 ha) of land within the present designated area). It was still prepared to release the 385 acres (160 ha) of undeveloped land to the west from the designated area, giving a net additional land requirement of 480 acres (200 ha) in the north and east.

A public inquiry into the proposals was held in April 1976, and the corporation was supported by the Stevenage Borough Council and the Stevenage and District Industrial Employees Group. Those opposing the proposals included the Hertfordshire County Council, North Herts District Council, East Herts District Council, Hertfordshire Society, National Farmers Union and several adjacent parish councils and local amenity groups. In his statement on new towns in the House of Commons on 28 April 1977, Peter Shore, Secretary of State for the Environment, said that he had decided not to make an extension order for Stevenage.

## Building the Town

In the early years, progress in building was very slow; the first houses were not begun until September 1949, nearly 3 years after designation. The main reason for this was the local opposition to the new town. Similar opposition occurred at Crawley and



Hemel Hempstead, designated a few months later, but it was particularly strong at Stevenage, and delayed the start of construction.

A public inquiry was, of course, held before the designation order was made. Although the Urban District Council voted in favour of supporting the enterprise, three residents representing the Residents' Protection Association and the local branch of the National Farmers' Union brought a High Court action to have the designation order annulled on the grounds that the objections at the public inquiry had not been fairly considered. Heard in February 1947, the action was successful, but the decision was reversed in the Court of Appeal in March, and this was upheld in the House of Lords in July. The litigation meant delay in the preparation of detailed plans, because not a great deal could be done in the atmosphere of uncertainty occasioned by the first successful opposition in the High Court. Looking back on a case where the interests of the few were opposed to those of the many, it may be questioned whether the opposition could not have been handled with more persuasiveness and diplomacy by the Minister of Town and Country Planning. Nobody likes to be told that they are going to have the town whether they like it or not.

The civil engineering works—roads, water supply and other public services—are among the first things to be provided in building a new town, and some progress had been made with these in 1948 to 1950, and by 1952 the first new neighbourhood, together with the additions to old Stevenage, were well under way. By the end of 1956 Bedwell was nearing completion, Broadwater was about two-thirds completed, Shephall about a third, a start had been made on the town centre, and many factories had been built. By the end of 1962 these neighbourhoods and much of the town centre had been completed, and about a half of Chells had been built.

Being designed to receive industry and population from London in conformity with the policy of dispersal, while the housing is for those working in the town, it was necessary to synchronize factory building as closely as possible with housing, and keep the former a little ahead of the latter. This was for the most part accomplished, except for one period when industry lagged a little behind, and it was necessary to allow one or two firms to come from other parts of the country to maintain the balance.

After the slow start in house building satisfactory progress was made. The first houses were completed in 1950, and by the end of 1952 some 1070 had been built; 806 in 1953, and for several years at least 1000 houses were completed annually. Later, due to uncertainty regarding the maximum size, the number dropped to about 600 in 1963 and 1964, to rise to about 850 in 1965, 1100 in 1966, and 750 in 1967.

In 1968 there was a drop to about 500, to rise again to about 900 in 1969. This high level was maintained in 1970 and 1971 when over 1000 were built each year. About 870 were completed in 1972 to drop in 1973 to 300 and 375 in 1974. In 1975 563 were completed and in 1976 500. Altogether a total of 22 700 houses had been completed since designation up to the end of 1976 of which 19 768 have been provided by the development corporation, 1277 by the local authority and 1725 by private enterprise.

## Housing and Residential Areas

The majority of houses provided at Stevenage have been of the 2-storey type, although there is a conspicuous minority of other types. The 2-storey unit has been built to many different designs so as to give variety, but they may be classified broadly as having

mainly 3 or 2 bedrooms, and of 3 basic types, largely determined by orientation; that with north aspect in which the kitchen and bathroom are in the front with the living rooms and main bedrooms facing south towards the garden; that with the south aspect in which living rooms and main bedrooms are in the front and the kitchen and bathroom at the back; and that in which the houses face east and west and are provided with a through living room with windows front and back. There are many plan variations on these basic types and a considerable variation in elevational treatment where different materials are juxtaposed. Bricks of various hues are related to cement rendering of different colours and to panels of painted boards and sometimes of natural timber. Variety is also secured in the designs of the entrances.

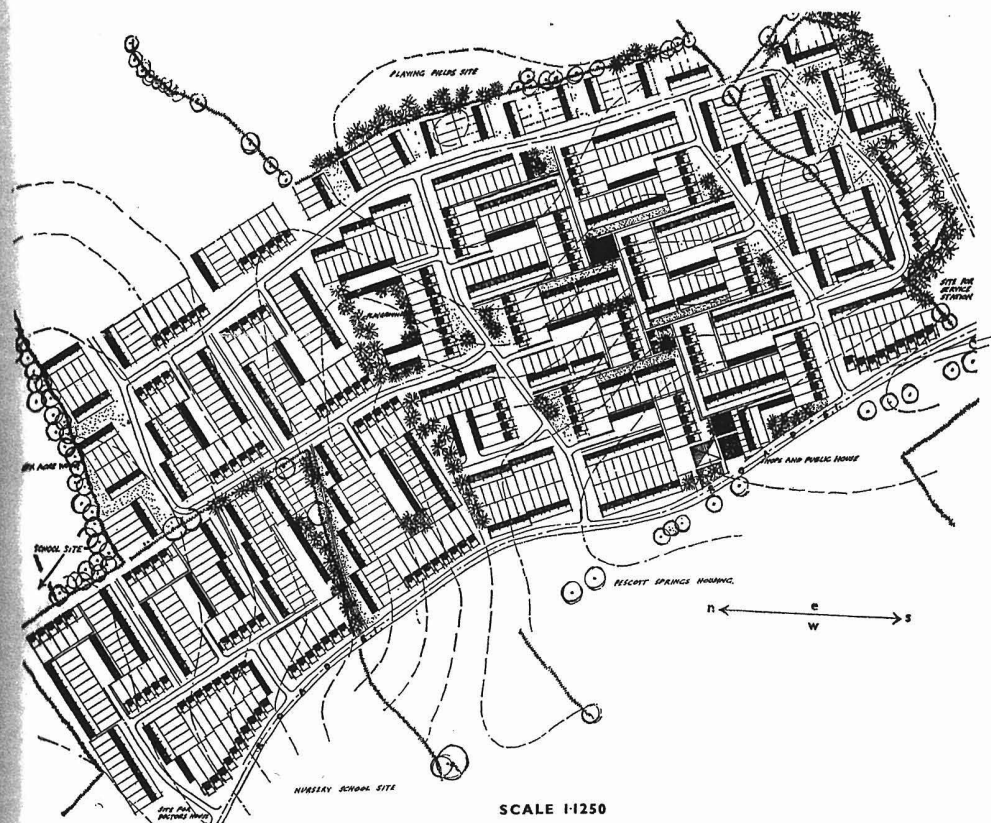


Figure 14.2 Elm Green residential area in the Chells neighbourhood. Culs-de-sac run into the areas at the backs of houses many of which face onto pedestrian ways, a partial adaptation of the Radburn layout.

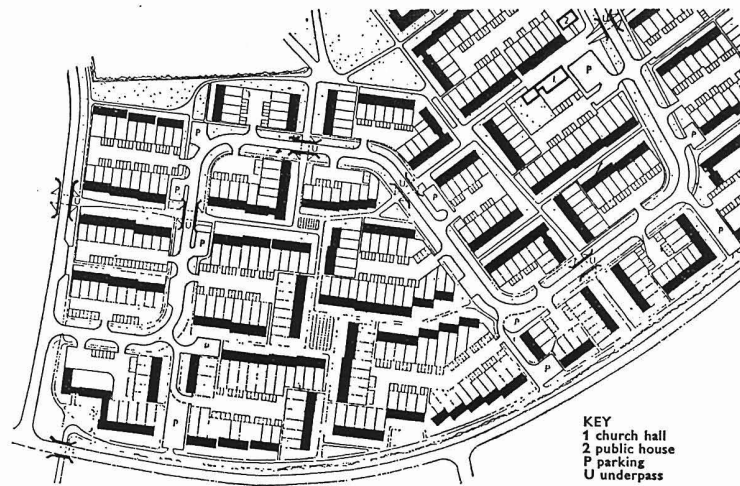


Figure 14.3 Part of the Pin Green residential area. A feature of this layout, like that at Elm Green, is the cul-de-sac with garages at the rear of houses which in many cases face onto pedestrian ways.

One of the first parts to be built was Stony Hall immediately south of old Stevenage and a little north-east of the town centre. It represents an experiment in high density development and includes blocks of 3- and 4-storey flats, and one 7-storey block of 54 flats, making a total of 103 flats. The building of the tall block, especially at so early a stage, has since been recognized as a mistake. Probably the motive was to have a small proportion of flats near the town centre. Designed for middle-class tenants, they did not prove very acceptable to the workers who first came to the new town, whose natural reaction was that there are plenty of tall blocks of flats in London in the midst of all the recreations of life the metropolis provides. If they were merely to get the same thing at Stevenage they might as well stay in London. That also was the reaction of people going to East Kilbride when confronted with the prospect of living in flats there. In its report for 1952 the Stevenage Development Corporation admitted 'that this project has been undertaken too early in the general development plan in relation to the demand for accommodation by middle-class tenants, and that the flats are perhaps of too urban a character for a town such as Stevenage surrounded by open country', although it was anticipated that they would be let as fast as they were completed. It actually took over 3 years for all the flats to be let. And it is interesting that, as late as 1961, some newcomers on the waiting list had to qualify for family houses by consenting temporarily to live in flats that the corporation found it difficult to let.

In a booklet on building Stevenage published by the development corporation in 1954 it is stated that:

'Almost every person coming to live in a new house at Stevenage, which is after all a country town, wants at least a small patch of garden to make the country seem yet a



Figure 14.4 View of footpath and houses at Sishes End in Pin Green neighbourhood, showing open spaces and variety of architectural design.

little closer. Discussion with representatives of the Stevenage Residents' Federation has shown that few wish to have a flat as a home and still fewer to live in a high building in spite of concentrated design and luxury amenities. They have expressed their desire to get away from communal staircases, balconies or landings, and to have a house with its own front door.'

Stony Hall is perhaps the least satisfactory housing development in Stevenage; it does not escape a touch of the dreariness of much industrial and municipal housing. A far pleasanter area is that of Whomerley in Bedwell which was the first neighbourhood to be completed. Here the layout is of an irregular character consisting of curved roads with the spaces at the backs of the houses formed into common gardens like village greens, linked with each other by footpaths. The estate merges into the woodland area from which it derives its name, and many of the trees are retained among the houses. Some of the road patterns may be likened to tree branches from a main stem, and the value of this is that there is no through-traffic. One of the simpler examples is the pattern of branches in Shephall, south of Hydeau Way. There is a centre stem with 4 branches, one of which connects with a short road linked with the main one. Another arrangement is a series of culs-de-sac running off a curved road like Peartree Way, some of the culs-de-sac being secondary branches. The contours of the undulating site contribute to the character of the layouts. The houses are rarely sited parallel with the roadway, there is generally considerable variation in alignment, and the space between the roadway and the houses widens and narrows in a variety of shapes.

In Elm Green in the Chells neighbourhood and in Fairlands in the Pin Green neighbourhood, completed in 1966, a modified form of the Radburn layout has been followed. Its principles are described more fully in the chapter on Basildon which was

the first new town to adopt this form of layout. The idea is roughly that houses are arranged on three or four sides of a rectangle; three of these face outwards to pedestrian ways and squares and a road runs into the centre of the area at the rear of the houses where garages are provided. The Elm Green estate is a long rectangular site between two roads linked by transverse roads, and from these roads the culs-de-sac run into the central areas at the backs of the houses, the majority of which face on pedestrian ways between the fronts of houses. It can be appreciated that such layouts conduce to quiet, privacy and safety, while being aesthetically very pleasant.

In Sishes End, a residential district of Pin Green, a series of greens or squares are partially enclosed by attractively designed houses, some terraced, some in an echelon sequence. Footpaths run through the greens and continue in a network between the houses. Mature trees that have been preserved and sizeable planted trees enhance the general effect.

## Neighbourhood Centres

With neighbourhoods as large as about 10 000 one shopping centre would mean insufficient ease of access to the food shop for many residents, so at Stevenage, in addition to the principal neighbourhood centres, there are a few sub-centres. In Bedwell there is a large centre due east of the town centre and midway between two major roads running east-west, while there is a small sub-centre to the south of the neighbourhood at Monkswood. At Broadwater, in the extreme south-east, the next



Figure 14.5 Fairlands sub-centre with six shops and the 'King Pin' public house.

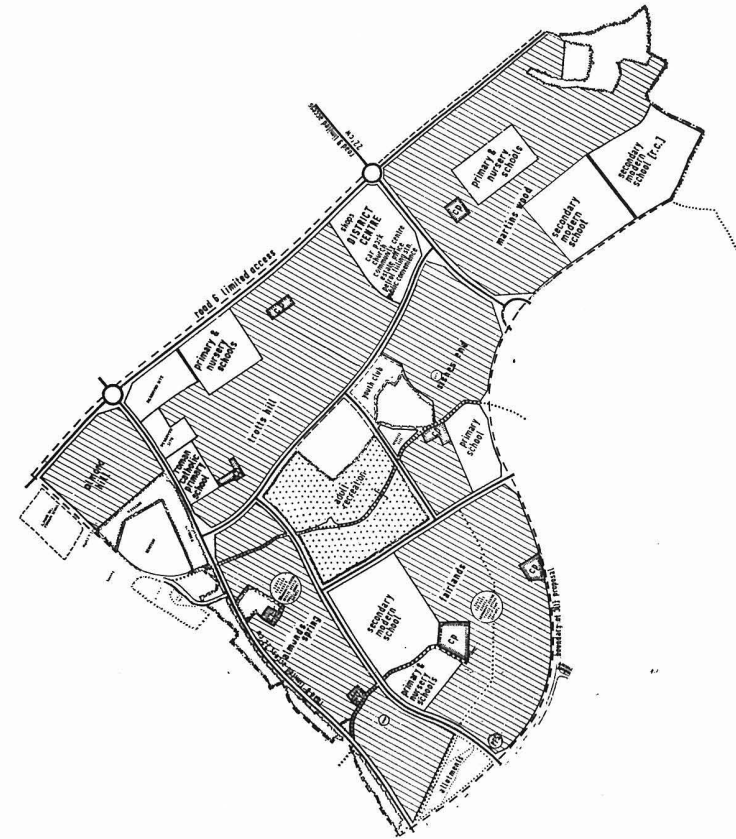


Figure 14.6 Plan of Pin Green neighbourhood in the north-east, the last and largest to be developed.

neighbourhood to be completed, the principal centre is in the south at Marymead, the part farthest from the town centre, while others are east of the neighbourhood at Longmeadow, and west of it at Roebuck. This principle of placing the chief neighbourhood centre in the more remote area is also followed at Shephall, which is in the eastern part of the neighbourhood at Half Hyde, with 2 smaller groups of shops, of 6 at Hydean Way, to the west, and 4 at Bandle Hill, to the north.

These neighbourhood centres generally follow a pattern similar to that found at Crawley and other new towns, of keeping the shops on one side of the thoroughfare, often arranged on two sides of a triangle, or three sides of a square, with a spacious area for pedestrians, and a church at one end and a public house at the other. That at Bedwell North has a row of 4 shops and a public house, 'The Gamekeeper', on the east side of the square, 7 shops on the north side, with an extensive paved forecourt,



several trees, and a telephone exchange further to the west beyond the road, while a church occupies a site south of the road. The shops have service areas and garages at the back, and flats over making 3-storey buildings, tall enough to give a pleasant scale and sense of enclosure. In the Marymead centre at Broadwater the shops are similarly arranged, with the public house, 'The Man in the Moon', in the same position as at the Bedwell centre, while a church occupies the west side of the area. The paved forecourt is not so extensive as at Bedwell, the traffic comes closer to the shops, and the general aspect is not quite so agreeable.

One of the largest neighbourhood centres is that at Half Hyde in Shephall, which has as many as 33 shops. On three sides of the central square, which is half for vehicles and half for pedestrians, there are rows of shops. This square faces east, and off to the south is a pedestrian way flanked by shops, and at the rear of the long line of shops on the west side is a service way which swings round on the north side, where there is another row of shops. Most of the shops have flats above in 3-storey buildings and opposite the square on the further side of the road is a tall 5-storey block. Height, which is complained of as being difficult to obtain in new town architecture, is here secured, and again a sense of enclosure is obtained. It is ingeniously planned.

Pin Green, in the north-east, is the last and largest neighbourhood, with an eventual population of over 20 000. The district centre to serve this population, called 'The Oval' largely completed by 1975 is the largest in the town outside the main centre. It consists of pedestrian ways faced by shops, offices, old people's home, a public house and social complex, included in which is a community centre and an ecumenical church shared by Anglicans, Methodists and Catholics. There are car parks at the rear of shops and under offices. A library and another office block are planned additions.

The Fairlands sub-centre, completed in 1965, consists of 6 shops, with the 'King Pin' public house at one end and a community hall at the other, enclosing on three sides a paved pedestrian area connected with the footpath system of the neighbourhood. There is, of course, rear vehicular access to the shops.

## The Town Centre

The town centre at Stevenage is internationally famous mainly because it is the first centre of a modern town with a completely pedestrian precinct. A foreign architect has remarked that if you have seen Coventry and Stevenage you have seen the best contributions to urban planning that England has made since the war. The precinctual area at Coventry is probably about the same size as that at Stevenage, but being only part of the centre of a much larger city it is obviously not so complete.

By the end of 1967 much of the centre was finished, including the middle portion with the shops. It is a rectangular area bounded by roads consisting of a long central pedestrian way, named Queensway, running north-south, from which two other pedestrian ways branch eastward, and a small town square opens westward and connects with a bus station. All the ways are lined with shops, in 2-storey and 3-storey buildings, and a continuous canopy above the shops not only affords protection to pedestrians in bad weather, but is a unifying motif in the ensemble which permits individuality in shop fronts without destroying the general architectural harmony. In the centre of the town square there is a pool with an insignificant fountain and a very ugly clock tower rising from it. The square is not large and a desirable sense of space is

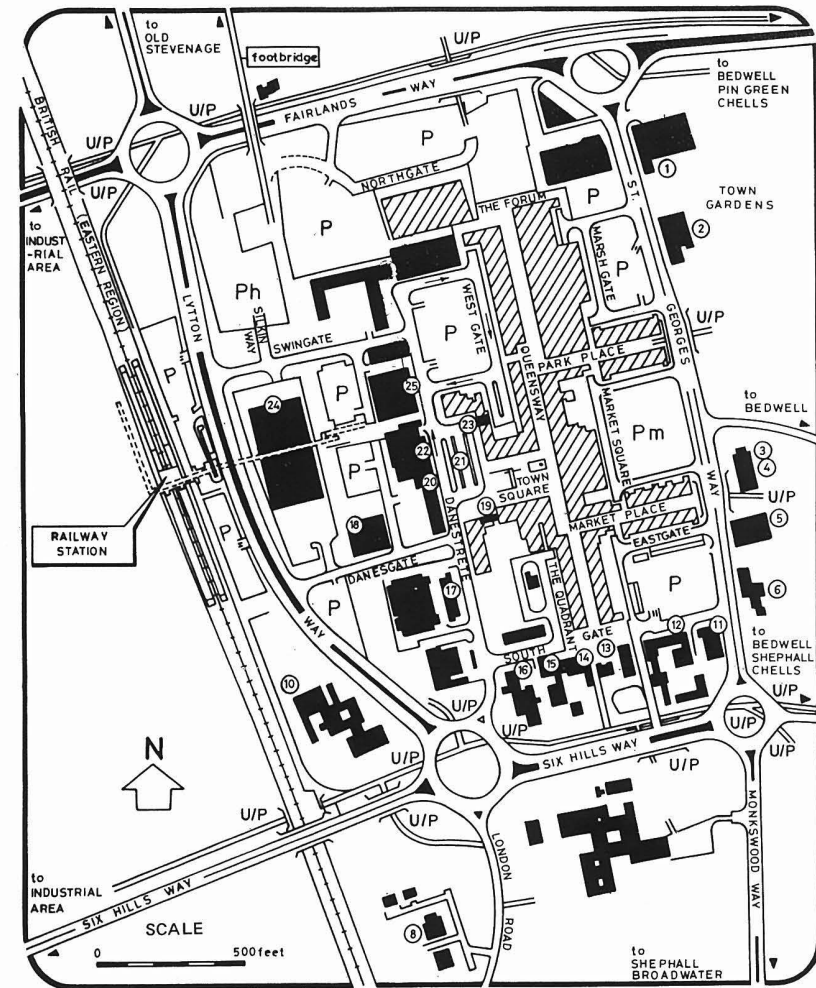


Figure 14.7 Town centre plan.

1. Swimming Pool; 2. Bowes Lyon House; 3. St. Georges Church; 4. Manulife (S.B.C.); 5. Fire and Ambulance Brigade; 6. College of Further Education; 8. Women's Royal Voluntary Services; 9. Police;
10. Southgate House (S.B.C.); 11. Health Centre; 12. Central Library; 13. Health Centre; 14. Museum;
15. Bus Enquiries; 16. Law Courts; 17. Post Office; 18. Daneshill House (S.D.C.); 19. Bus Station;
20. Family Centre; 21. Arts and Sports Centre (this is a little further west on Lytton Way); 22. Swinggate House (S.D.C. Head Office); 23. Brickdale House; 24. Hotel; 25. Cinema.

P Car Park; Pm Multi-Storey Car Park/Market; Ph Heavy Vehicle & Car Park; U/p Underpass; Cross-hatching: Pedestrian Shopping Centre.

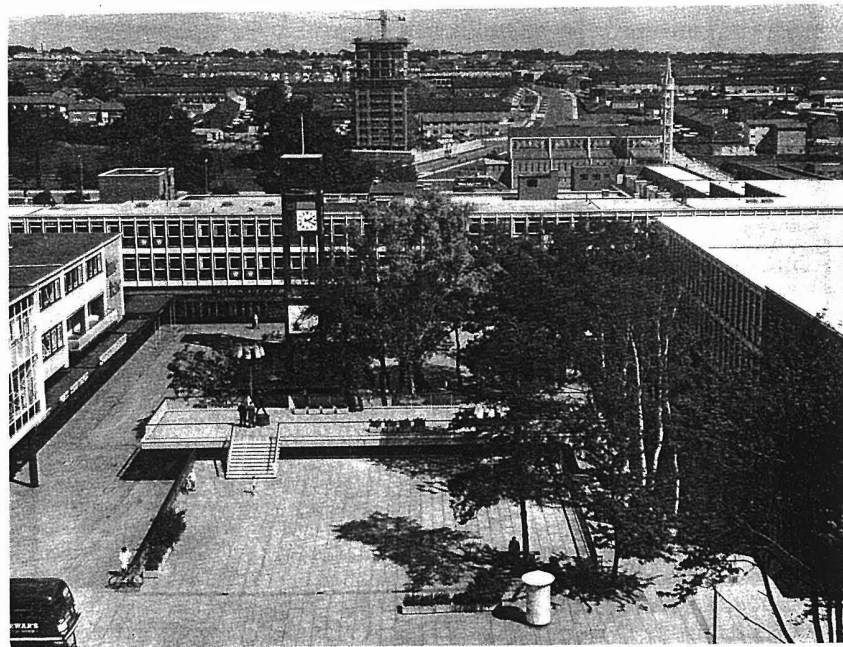


Figure 14.8 Main square in town centre with pool and clock tower.

diminished by these features. It would have been far better if the clock tower at least had not been there. Dividing the square from the bus station is a raised terrace, a feature of which is a bronze sculpture of a mother playing with her child, a vigorous and rhythmical work by Franta Belsky. Such are differences of taste, however, that there are some who like the clock tower and care little for the sculpture. Service roads coming behind the shops branch from the periphery road.

At the north end of the square, central with Queensway, is a site allocated for town hall, municipal buildings and offices. To the west, near Danestrete are further offices, a dance hall and bowling centre. A Leisure Centre complex including a sports hall and a theatre, has been built off Lytton Way. On the east side beyond St George's Way there is the very interesting Parish Church of St George, completed in 1960 to the designs of Lord Mottistone, which has an interesting construction of concrete parabolic arches, and a tall campanile of original design. Also on the east side are sites for further offices, a park area and swimming pool. South of this is a youth centre completed in 1965 which is briefly described under social aspect. To the south beyond Six Hills Way is the College of Further Education. A new railway station has been built west of the centre, which is linked with the bus station in Danestrete by an overhead walkway which passes through the new Leisure Centre.

If there is one regret about so excellent a centre it is that the town square is not more spacious. It is good to have some sense of enclosure, but that should be combined with

a sense of space. These two qualities are obtained in the centres at Crawley and Harlow, but not at Stevenage. Still, it is good to see the idea of the pedestrian precinct so completely realized in the face of much opposition.

## The Industrial Area

In addition to the main industrial area of Grunnels Wood to the west of the town, there is the smaller industrial estate in the north-east. The flow of industry to Stevenage has been generally satisfactory so that the building of factories has been a little ahead of houses, although there have been times when the development corporation wished that the flow was a little quicker. As in other new towns, the balance of industry is constantly being adjusted with a view to future stability.

In 1966 there began a planned slowdown of industrial intake, to avoid the danger of an excess of employment in relation to the planned population.

The first factory built by the development corporation was that for the Bay Tree Press in Caxton Way, completed in 1952. Some firms for which factories were built, or who built their own in this new industrial estate, were already established in Stevenage, among them being George W. King Ltd and W. H. Sanders (Electronics) Ltd.

Many firms representing a variety of industries have come to Stevenage, among the larger being Amoco International Laboratories Ltd; Associated Bowater Industries Ltd; British Aircraft Corporation Ltd; British Visqueen Ltd; Ether Ltd; Flexile Metal Co. Ltd; the Furniture Industries Research Association; Hawker Siddeley Dynamics Ltd; Hilmor Ltd; International Computers & Tabulators Ltd; International Exhibition Co-operative Wine Society Ltd; John Lewis & Co. Ltd; Kodak Ltd; Mentmore Manufacturing Co. Ltd; Shunic Ltd; and Taylor Instrument Companies (Europe) Ltd.

Many factories have been built with a view to later expansion, and in several cases extensions have already been made. The area gives the impression of a spacious layout, while the undulating ground, the variety in the design of factories, and their different heights, give an agreeable feeling of diversity. The diversity is apparent also in the kinds of industry, offering a good variety of employment. Since designation to the end of 1974, 36 new factories had been built in the Grunnels Wood area, 14 firms occupied unit factories built by the development corporation, while there were 27 service industry premises, 4 research laboratories and a training centre. In the Pin Green industrial estate to the north-east 5 new factories have been built and 15 firms have occupied unit factories. About 21 500 are employed in the two industrial areas.

## A Transport Experiment

The projected increase of population to 105 000 provided in the 1966 master plan, means more people travelling to work from the residential areas to the workplaces involving an increasing number of private cars. It was calculated therefore, that at several main road intersections traffic would become overloaded in the mornings and evenings during work/home journeys.

It was estimated that to meet the resulting need grade-separated roadworks would be required which would cost £4½ millions at 1966 prices. It was decided to investigate saving part or all the cost of such work by encouraging a transfer of workers from cars to buses, and Nathaniel Lichfield and Associates were commissioned by the corporation to make a cost-benefit analysis. They reported that an improved bus service might

be a means of effecting the change and suggested experiment. It was, therefore, agreed with London Country Buses that a suitable bus service should be provided to the Chells neighbourhood, and this was started in May 1971 and introduced in stages. At first a 7½ minute service by superbuss, as it was called, was introduced, which was later improved to a 5 minute service.

The response of the public exceeded all expectations. Weekly ridership in May 1971 was 17 300. After 3½ years, in the month of October, the average weekly ridership was 48 152. A survey was conducted in June/July 1974 covering 1851 of the 3000 households in Chells, and the changed mode of travel to work was:

	Working in Town Centre or Ind. Area		Working elsewhere		All Workers	
Driver	32%	(42)	51%	(46)	40%	(43)
Car passenger	14%	(24)	12%	(15)	13%	(20)
Superbus	48%	(20)	13%	(6)	33%	(14)
Other	6%	(14)	24%	(33)	14%	(23)

(the percentages for 1971 are shown in brackets)

## The Social Aspect

The majority of people coming to the new towns are young married couples, sometimes with small children, who have acquired a house because their employment has been moved to the industrial area. There is also a proportion of single persons who have moved with their jobs and who live in flats or lodgings. One of the chief tasks in the social building of a new town is to provide opportunities for the full life. Many of the young couples are busy creating a home, and this itself is an absorbing occupation.

Many have been uprooted from a congested environment in the inner suburbs of London where they have occupied a few rooms in an old house or tenement block. They are generally quick to realize that the change to a house with a garden all their own, spaciouly situated, with trees and the rolling country not far away, is an exhilarating change for the better. But in their old home they were in the midst of friends and acquaintances, and were, in a sense, members of a clan from which they have been taken, and with all the advantages of the change they often at first have a feeling of isolation and of loneliness.

From available evidence provided by competent observers it is fair to conclude that the inhabitants of the new towns have settled down remarkably well. It is in part due to the prosperity that the country enjoyed during the period of building. The people have had well-paid regular jobs in the factories and this was conducive to producing a feeling of contentment. It has enabled them to furnish their homes well, to acquire television, cars, and domestic gadgets, so that many who came as habitual grouchers were transformed into contented citizens in a few years. Another expression of this change is an increased interest in family life, and parents seem particularly anxious that their children should be well educated. One headmaster at Stevenage has commented that children stay at school longer than in most industrial towns, and that the number who remain beyond 15 is four times the national average.

The homes, jobs and schools have contributed to what may be regarded as a

satisfactory social state, but what of recreation and cultural interests outside the home?—for sometimes a man and his wife want to get out and mix with other people in the town, a desire present with single persons from the start.

As in all the new towns there are numerous clubs and societies representing a wide variety of interests, some of which are organized by the various churches, and some by interested groups of individuals. There are dramatic societies, art clubs, horticultural and gardening societies, political groups, sports clubs for almost every sport, numerous women's and youth organizations: in fact several such organizations for those wishing to join. There is, however, a deficiency of premises for such activities; there are, it is true, community centre buildings at Old Town, Pin Green, Broadwater, Bedwell, Chells and Shephall, but the provision of adequate premises both in the centre and in the neighbourhoods has been slow.

There are many, however, who do not wish to find their recreation always with clubs and societies, and look rather to the chat in the pub or coffee bar, or for dance halls, concerts, cinemas or theatres such as are easily found in London. These have gradually been provided. In the town centre the 'Locarno' dance hall for 2200 was completed in 1961, and an American-style bowling hall in 1962. County buildings occupy the south of the town centre of which the Library, Health Centre, Police Station and Geriatric Out-patient Clinic have been completed. There is a twin-auditorium cinema above a large Tesco supermarket in the town centre, while there is a pub and café in each neighbourhood. A good multi-purpose hall which could be used as a theatre, concert hall and for large meetings was needed. However, in 1976 the Borough Council completed an arts/sports centre complex including a theatre. A hall in the College of Further Education is also widely used by the dramatic, musical and cultural associations. A hall is also provided when the Borough Council builds its offices. A youth centre was built in 1965. Situated, as previously mentioned, in St George's Way, it was provided by the Stevenage Youth Trust with grants from the Ministry of Education, the County and UD Councils, and the development corporation. It is named 'Bowes Lyon House' in memory of Sir David Bowes Lyon who was the first chairman of the Stevenage Youth Trust.

The building for 2000 young people consists of a large open plan area for a variety of uses, which can be sub-divided by movable partitions as needs arise. A lecture room, small theatre, lounges, coffee bar, and club rooms are on the first floor which is surrounded by an open gallery for promenading, sitting and talking. The centre attracts a large number of young people from the town and surrounding districts, and is generally admired by visitors.

## References and Notes

- 14.1 PATRICK ABERCROMBIE, *Greater London Plan 1944* (London 1945) para. 420.
- 14.2 *Greater London Plan op. cit.*, pp. 169, 171—plan and perspectives.