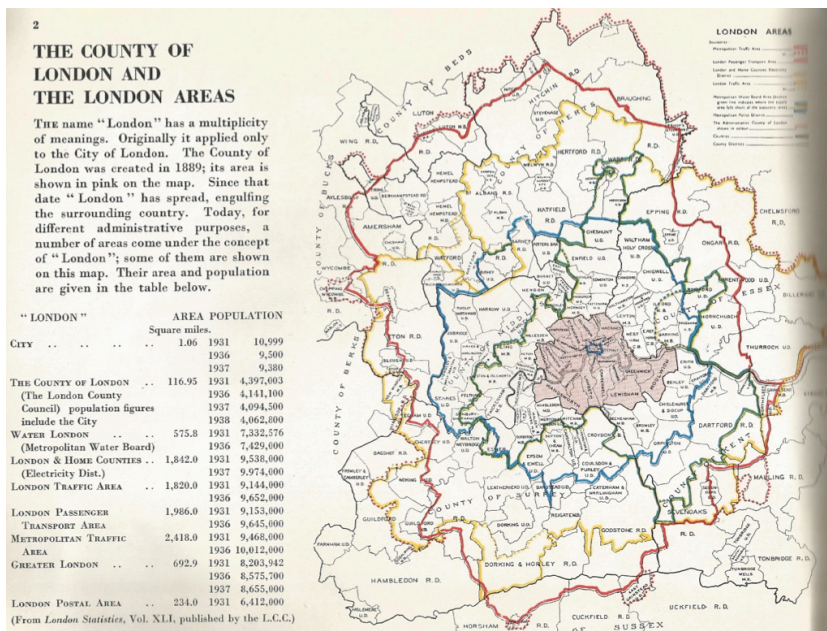


In considering the nature of the County of London Plan and the propositions it set out, we must also appreciate how this was a Plan to be implemented; and that planning implies not only orchestration of urban fabric, but also that of the architects to implement such changes.

This paper will argue that whilst the County of London Plan proposed a networked system of neighbourhoods to better reform the fabric of London, it also demanded a networked system of practice to deliver it, as subsequently embodied in the working practices of the London County Council Architect's Department. Both the Plan and its delivery established parallels in autonomy and interconnectedness, which enabled the architecture and the architects to be individually responsive whilst operating at a larger scale.

In the proposition of the County of London Plan, therefore, the image of the city was to become a reflection of the Department which created it.

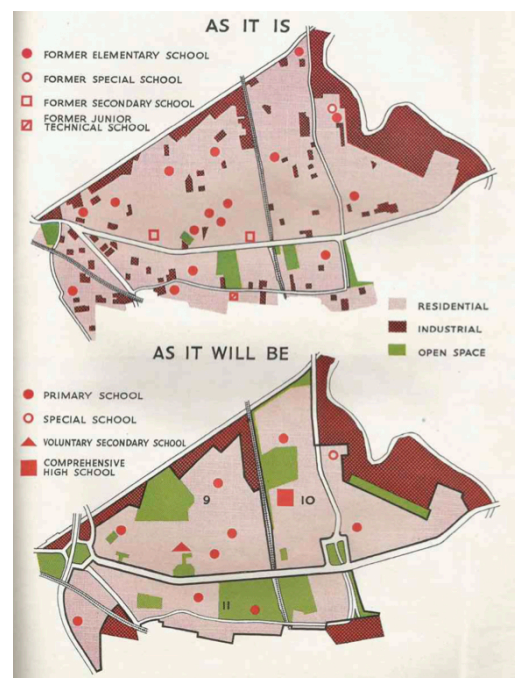
London Jackson, W. Eric. 1951. *The Youngest County*. London County Council.



The Five Giant Evils set out by William Beveridge's 1942 publication¹ - of squalor, ignorance, want, idleness, and disease - each had a root cause in the spatial environment of London, the unplanned and uncoordinated sprawl of which had by this stage engulfed the County, and transgressed various jurisdictional, legislative, and geographic boundaries. The result was a lack of connectivity and a piecemeal aggregational collage of infrastructure and inhabitation, which historically had resulted in plague, fire, overcrowding, industrial obsolescence, and inefficiency.

The proposals set out by the authors of the 1943 County of London Plan were not just responding to the social, economic and political climate as they found it, but instead formed a contributory proposition for its reformation. Their intention was not just to replace old buildings with new, but to reconsider the social ideology of the County as a microcosm for how the nation might be reimagined. In doing so, the Plan's creation shifted its author's agency from a reactive to proactive position.

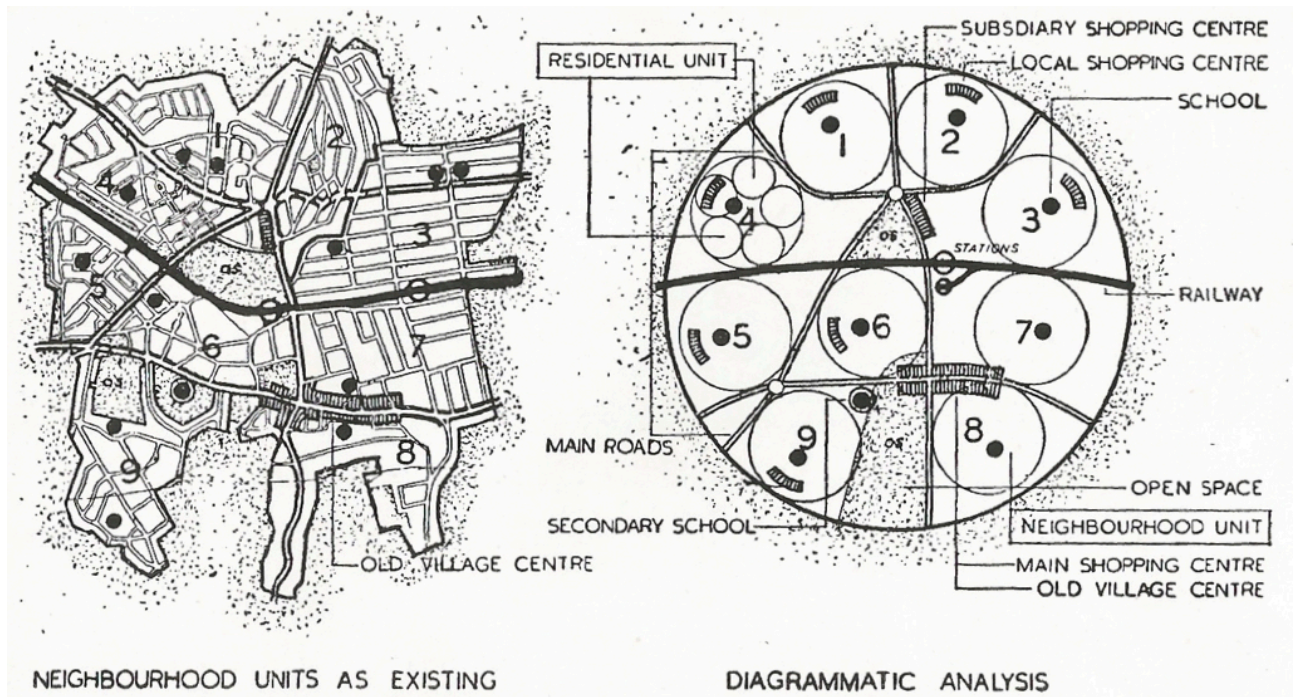
Whilst the intentions of the Plan are often misconstrued as stemming from the necessity of "rebuilding" after the Second World War, the desire to address these issues was preexisting. War had both necessitated and made possible the redevelopment of the material needs of the County with a



Forshaw, J. H., and Patrick Abercrombie. 1943. *County of London Plan*. First Edition. St Martin's Street, London: Macmillan.

¹ Beveridge, Sir William. 1942. "Social Insurance and Allied Services." HMSO

pressing urgency, and had instilled a willingness to reappropriate skills and technologies from wartime use for peacetime building. The pause in construction, and the necessity for widescale building enabled a new programmatic intention to be evolved through the necessary bureaucratic hierarchies, for implementation once the war had ended. This offered an opportunity for the application of radicality, from which propositions were able to be formulated as a coherent and comprehensive approach, rather than the piecemeal implementation which might otherwise have been adopted, in conformity with previously accepted patterns of operation. As Robert Furneaux Jordan put it, the Plan acted as both an ideologic "esquisse" and a "brief" for future development,² which set out an ethos for a much more ingenious approach to collaboration and coordination than those which preceded it.



Forshaw, J. H., and Patrick Abercrombie. 1943. *County of London Plan*. First Edition. St Martin's Street, London: Macmillan.

NODES and NETWORKS

One of the central tenets of the Plan was for the provision of housing. This was urgently required, not only to replace war damaged buildings, but also to enable the eradication of the slum dwellings which were rife in the County before the War, and to accommodate the forthcoming baby boom. But, the proposals of the Plan did not consider the provision of WHERE to live in isolation from HOW to live.

Abercrombie and Forshaw recognised that future development was not sustainable to be conceived as concentric around one central urban nucleus, as it would likely fall foul of the surrounding sprawl in the same way that the pre- and inter-war situation had. Instead, they proposed a series of smaller centres, complete Neighbourhood Units, building on the historic precedent of Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities. These could then be developed incrementally, their designs imbued with the foresight to address the urgency of housing provision without compromising on the long-term intentions for community building, a strategy addressing their intentions for both "immediate provision and future possibilities".³ These units would then be interconnected with others through the means of a revised infrastructure plan, coordinated

² Furneaux Jordan, R. 1956. "LCC New Standards in Official Architecture." *Architectural Review*, November 1956.

³ Forshaw, J. H., and Patrick Abercrombie. 1943. *County of London Plan*. First Edition. St Martin's Street, London: Macmillan.

by the Planning Division into what the authors termed a “highly organised and inter-related system of communities.”⁴

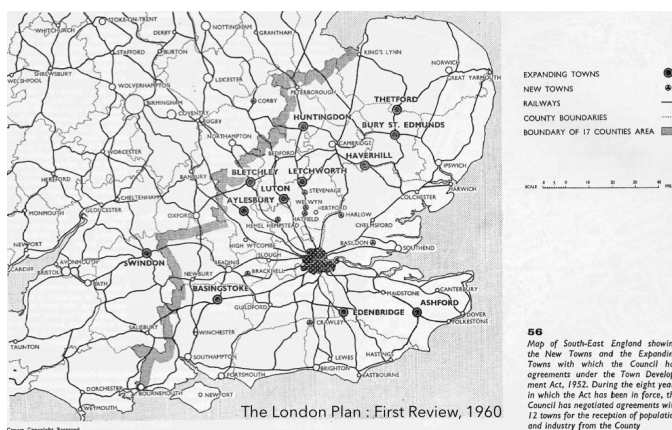
These neighbourhoods were intended as self-contained entities for 6 000-10 000 residents, within which all the residents’ day-to-day needs would be provided. Facilities included retail provision, schools, social areas and housing to cater for a broad spectrum of ages and family types in the community. The provision of social space where residents would be able to intermingle and form cohesive interpersonal relationships was deemed key to the success of the Plan’s aims. It was intended that the introspective nature of plan of the Neighbourhood Units would induce familiarity between residents, through which community bonds would be built.

This neighbourliness on the scale of the locally autonomous unit needed to operate successfully individually, but still relate to the overall structure of the county, forming a contributory facets of a plan for the whole county, rather than solving its own problems in geographic and typological isolation.

ACTS and ACTIONS

The County of London Plan was instrumental in setting the aspiration for the future reformation of London. Though as Robert Furneaux Jordan noted, there was a necessity for “keeping plates spinning” to avoid the resulting Development Plan becoming a “dead letter”.⁵ After all, the Plan was only a brief - it requires material implementation, and the architects were tasked not only to dream but to deliver. Translation of the Plan’s propositions from aspiration into architecture required consideration not only for the urban fabric, but for the County’s economic, infrastructural, and operational structures - the physical and the legislative, the societal and the bureaucratic - even identifying where such connectivity was not yet in place.

Previous reports such as those developed by the Ullswater Commission and Edwin Lutyens’ Road Plan for London were considered too narrow in scope, as it was realised that the issues they addressed could not be remedied individually, and instead required an interconnected approach to their proposals. The necessary adaptations to infrastructure, utilities, transport, housing provision, industry and recreational spaces could not have been undertaken successfully at a smaller scale, and required greater freedom in considering land beyond individual Borough’s – and in the case of the proposals for New Towns and residential schools, even the County’s – limits.



The LCC was uniquely placed to deliver these objectives - being large enough to encompass the necessary architectural manpower to address the numbers required, but also imbued with the authority through the powers of local government and planning to deliver them in unison, empowered by the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. It did so through transgressing boundaries - professionally and geographically - and in considering the administrative delivery as integral to the design intentions.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

Marks, Stanley C. 1960. The Changing Face of London.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0y6UOWwrtU>



Functioning as a turning point, the Plan instigated shifts in the bureaucratic processes within the Council, which instigated typological change in the architecture produced as a result. Its propositions defined not only the legislative measures required of the governmental position, but also the operational structures necessary in order to deliver the aspirations it contained, including those which reached beyond the Architect's Department itself.

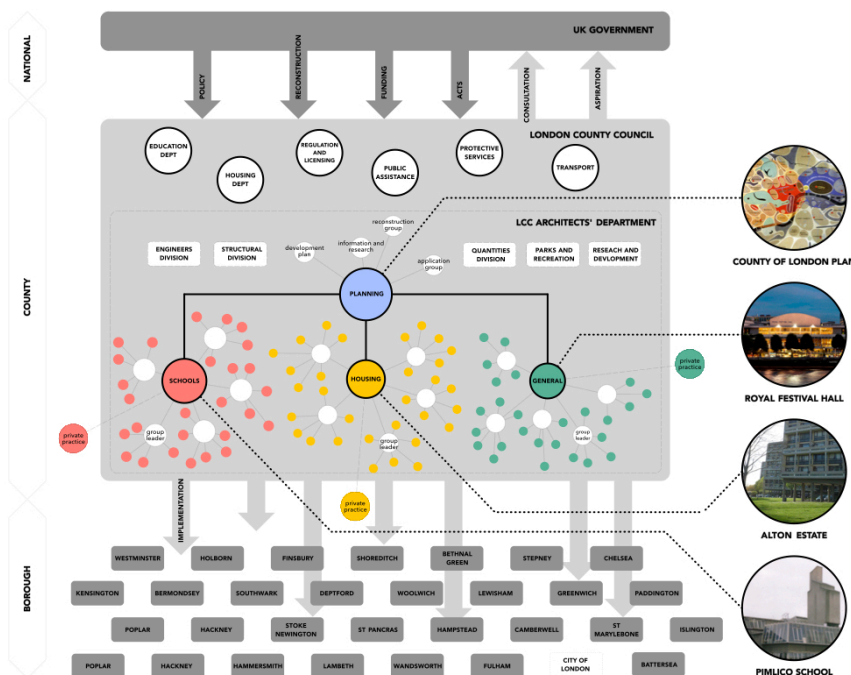
The multifaceted nature of the term *architecture* is a lynch pin in these proposals, since it concerns not only architecture in terms of buildings, and their manifestation and

disposition, but also architecture as practice, and the strategic processes through which these were orchestrated.

The remedy for urban sprawl which the Plan set out, and the means by which this would be addressed were a mirror to each other; both linked by the work and practices of John Henry Forshaw.

Following on from his work considering how London could be reconfigured to work more efficiently through renetworking and addressing functional deficiencies, Forshaw also sought to remedy similar concerns in his restructuring of the Department in 1944.

Forshaw's previous experience was able to inform this restructuring, since he had run the architectural Department of the Miners' Welfare Commission prior to his appointment to the LCC in July 1939. The working practices established there assigned each job to be run by a senior assistant supported by a small team, which was noted by Summerson as being "an arrangement very different from the usual haphazard distribution of hack-work among 'temporary' employees [with] responsibility to the chief for all designs."⁶



The LCC Architect's Department had previously operated hierarchical lines of reporting, under the control of those higher up, as was common for Civil Service employment. Yet with the Department expanding beyond its original extents - mirroring the sprawling expansion of the County itself - this became unsustainable: In the mid-1950s, 585 architects were working in the LCC's Architect's Department, with a support staff of around twice this number.

⁶ Summerson, John. 1942. "Bread & Butter and Architecture." *Horizon*, October, 233-43.

The sprawling mass of architects employed within the council were proposed by Forshaw to adopt a system of Group Working, establishing networks and nodes which paralleled the interconnected neighbourhoods outlined in the Plan. This structure organised the architects into a series of smaller, more cohesive units, between which networks of communication were established to coordinate their architectural propositions as part of a greater whole. There was contractual provision for leisure, and the intention to establish a sense of camaraderie and interpersonal, introspective identity through their small scale, with communicative infrastructure to ensure these individual units remained part of a well connected, coherent whole. In this manner, proposition and implementation were interdependent.

Such restructuring - later expanded by Robert Matthew, and restructured again under Hubert Bennett and Leslie Martin in 1956 - was necessary to enable overall coherency, yet it was intended to do so without constraining the central tenet of architectural work undertaken at LCC; for non-standard, explorational architecture which was able to respond to the local context and changing approaches to tectonics, social issues and - in the case of the schools programme - educational edicts. As for the neighbourhoods, these groups were to operate as individual and autonomous units, yet be closely interrelated to the greater whole.



The Group Working strategy gave a sense of overall coherency to the Department, establishing both the architects' spatial disposition as well as how they would communicate with each other. It also engendered a greater degree of autonomy to each sub-set, who were further removed from the central points of control. In turn, this instilled a sense of freedom - architecturally and programmatically - within which to operate in fulfilling the requirements of the Plan.

Group Leaders led individual architects in core units (or teams) of 12-16, a number deemed "the most that could be managed by a senior architect",⁷ each

operating akin to a small design office. "Streams" of communication were established between the Group Leaders and the heads of each Division, who would then meet together each week with the Chief architect to provide an administrative and architectural overview of the work being undertaken.

This enabled an awareness of the interrelation of the many tentacles of implementation, as well as better informing the financial parameters and necessary distribution of materials - particularly pertinent due to the steel shortages post-war. As for the Plan's proposals for how the burgeoning population would live, work and be educated, this structure was intended to cater for both "immediate provision and future possibilities",⁸ establishing an operational structure which could expand with later demand without affecting the overall workings of the system.

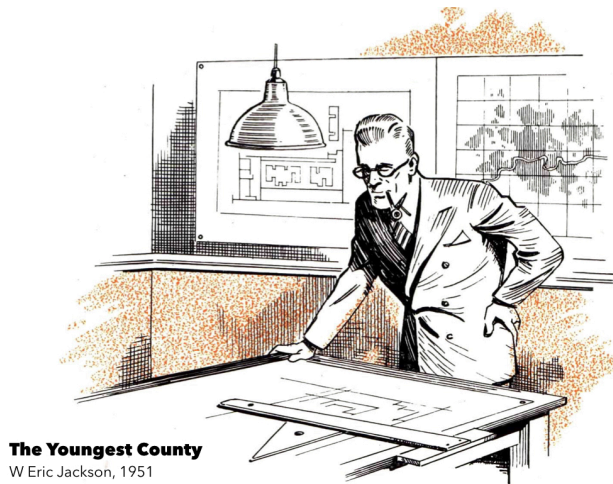
While the size and nature of the Department could have proven oppressive, it instead empowered its employees. The series of decreasing scales employed by Forshaw established a meditative relationship between individual and collective agendas, enabling employees to maintain a certain degree of autonomy, whilst the architecture produced as a result was to be - in the words of Terry Farrell - "anonymous, economic and collaborative yet at the same time highly artistic and of real value to society".⁹

⁷ Summerson, John. 1942. "Bread & Butter and Architecture." *Horizon*, October, 233-43.

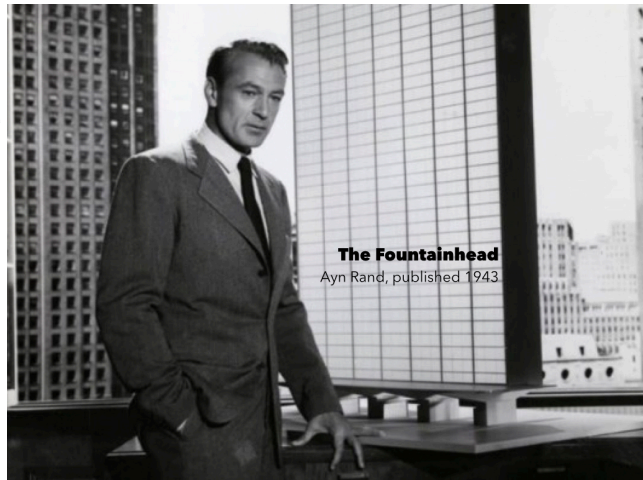
⁸ Forshaw, J. H., and Patrick Abercrombie. 1943. *County of London Plan*. First Edition. St Martin's Street, London: Macmillan.

⁹ Farrell, Terry. *Place: A Story of Modelmaking, Menageries and Paper Rounds: Terry Farrell - Life and Work - Early Years to 1981*. London: Laurence King, 2004. Terry Farrell was himself an employee of the Department in the Special Works Division for 6 months in 1961.

In contrast to the seeming homogeneity and anonymity of the Department, and the spirit of collaboration at its heart, this autonomy also served to create a large number of what are frequently referred to as Prima Donnas - a mindset more applicable to the heroism and objectivism of the *pantocrator* individual in Ayn Rand's novel *The Fountainhead*, which had been published the same year as the Plan.



The Youngest County
W Eric Jackson, 1951



The Department had gained renown for facilitating architectural freedom and the ability to deliver architecturally and financially significant schemes, which had drawn a series of strong personalities to the Department. Whilst ostensibly each scheme was anonymous in authorship, an internal sense of competition was forged by the employees' awareness of their own privileged position and expertise. In comparison to the teamwork contemporarily evident in the Hertfordshire Architects' Department, the autonomy created at LCC meant that often "groups consisted of individual architects trying to produce the avant-garde on a competitive basis."¹⁰ Though operating in a Bureaucratic environment, the practices at LCC enabled the architects to work with a sense of individual genius and radicality, usually unassociated with such a position.

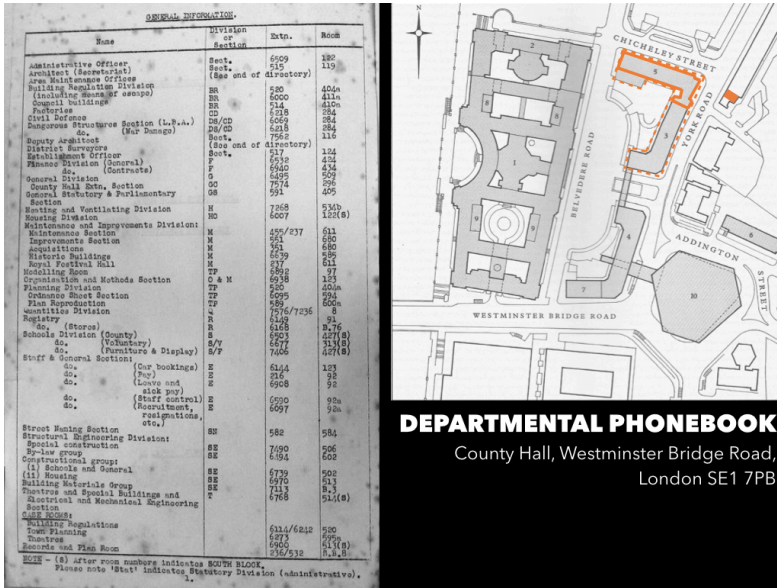
The innovative nature of their proposals was facilitated not only through the Group Working strategy, but through establishing connectivity beyond realms of the profession, and also department.

Their position within local government empowered them in ways higher or lower strata would not have been able. As Larkham and Adams note¹¹ the aspirations of the Local Authority level surveyors and engineers charged with addressing similar issues were constrained by the extents of their expertise, concentrating instead on solving quantitative road and drainage networks, rather than addressing the complex and less practical aspects of social cohesion and aesthetics which would contribute to a qualitative experience.

For the LCC's Architect's Department, their economic position within local governmental structures offered financial support and the commodity of time to develop the Plan during wartime, when private practices were unable to self-fund in such a manner. Their political position also facilitated the direct proposition of the legislative powers required to apply their intentions. Furthermore, their social positioning away from the generalities of national government enabled them to conduct research "on the ground" which was extensive in breadth and intensive in resource requirements.

¹⁰ Classey, Eric. 2008. "The Architecture of the Urban School: London's Comprehensive Schools 1945-1986". PhD, University of East London. P.91

¹¹ Larkham, Peter J, and David Adams. 2011. "The Post-War Reconstruction Planning of London: A Wider Perspective." *Centre for Environment and Society Research*, Working Paper series no. 8.



Such experimental propositions transgressing architectural reimits required the support of the resources provided in the LCC's base at County Hall - which included the expertise of the Quantity Surveyor's Department, study of local area calling upon bomb damage survey maps compiled by the Council and research undertaken by the Survey of London.

They also had access to and the services of Margaret Willis, a sociologist employed within the Architect's Department at County Hall. The Department was uniquely placed to tackle such issues since they were able to provide the expertise in

implementation and feedback to develop social and planning research, which would influence transport and housing provision (and the subsidy of both), land ownership, construction and the creation of community infrastructure, despite the differing views of the alternately presiding Conservative and Labour Councils under which they ostensibly worked.

The remit of the Department - in terms of both their work and their employees - was vast, demanding extraordinary mechanisms to be in place to ensure the processes of systemic, integrated coherency, symptomatic of the design practices of what Henry-Russell Hitchcock termed an "architecture of bureaucracy".¹² Yet far from producing the unartistic, mechanistic architecture Hitchcock associated with such a practice, the group size within this system enabled the Council's architects to be ingenious in their approaches. The result was more akin to that envisioned by William Morris, of each "one doing this work, one that, but all harmoniously...they work not like ants or machines, but like men."¹³

The Plan built an infrastructural network for the disposition of the County's requirements, whilst the Group Working strategy enabled systems of communication and coordination to inform the working practices of the potentially unwieldy employment base of the Department, mediating between the genius of the individual and the bureaucratic nature of the Plan. Whilst Hitchcock deemed it necessary to segregate these two group approaches, the LCC saw the necessity to straddle this line, programmatically and professionally.

CONCLUSION

The aspirations of the Plan in rewiring the urban fabric of London considered not just what was produced, but how they would produce it, the two being necessarily intertwined. 75 years after its publication, it's pertinent to reflect that the means by which we propose to construct our neighbourhoods would benefit from the same consideration in how we construct the forms of practice to deliver them, to consider architecture as practice informing architecture as building - and vice versa. The boundaries and bonds we construct for our neighbourhoods are not just in bricks and mortar.

¹² Hitchcock, Henry-Russell. 1947. "The Architecture of Bureaucracy and the Architecture of Genius." *Architectural Review*, January, 3-6.

¹³ P. 39 Saint, Andrew. 1985. *The Image of the Architect*. Yale University Press.

This was not a Plan developed by bureaucrats, nor by architects, but by bureaucratic architects. It straddled between top level governmental intention and the tectonic scale of local architectural implementation, intended to establish a greater sense of coherency than previous isolated top-down or bottom-up plans were able to achieve. It proposed a radical approach to systemic thinking, which transgressed previous boundaries of the profession with its inclusive nature of considerations, which adopted a both/and rather than either/or strategy.

Ironically for an urban diagram which appears to delineate each area so distinctly, this was a Plan without borders, in proposition and implementation.



Forshaw, J. H., and Patrick Abercrombie. 1943. *County of London Plan*. First Edition. St. Martin's Street, London: Macmillan.