NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

FACULTY OF FINE ART, SCULPTURE DEPARTMENT

AVONBEG: A STUDY OF A PUBLIC HOUSING SCHEME AND ITS RENOVATION

By

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INTRODUCTION

"Nobody could call Tallaght a pretty village,... always somehow to be in that perpetual state of 'being improved', various road works and construction are much a part of the scenery as the large areas of wasteland between its numerous housing estates." (Heather Brett in Bolger (ed.), 1991, p 143)

The object of this study is a public housing estate which was built in Tallaght in the 1970s and partially renovated in the 1990s. It is proposed, as the principal aim, to articulate issues - architectural, social, planning, urban - involved in this renovation and to make connections between them, in the process revealing areas of conflict and overlapping concerns. For the purposes of this study the term "public" housing refers to housing built by the State while "social" housing refers to collaborative housing by voluntary agencies. The research undertaken is gathered from various sources including interviews, reports, architectural plans and personal site visits. The conclusion will be presented as a set of notes which indicate further, critical avenues of inquiry based on this study.

FIG. 1a: Avonbeg estate - the original blocks of flats

FIG 1b: The renovation - Avonbeg Court (1989-'90)

FIG 1c: The renovation - Avonbeg Gardens (1992)

1.

THE AVONBEG HOUSING ESTATE

The original housing scheme

The Avonbeg estate is a public housing scheme built by Dublin Corporation in the early 1970s in the suburb of Tallaght, County Dublin [FIG. 1a].

The project - consisting of a row of 14 flat-roofed blocks of apartments, 3 storeys in height - was characteristic of the low-cost, mass housing developments of the 1970s built by the State and operated through the local authorities. This was a time of a severe housing crisis in Ireland. As the level of Irish immigration exceeded that of emigration (a reversal of previous trends), a steadily increasing population in Dublin combined with political pressure to create an urgent demand for housing. The outcome was an active public housing programme resulting in large, peripheral developments which were built rapidly and accompanied by re-location of groups of people from areas of the inner city to the suburbs, such as Tallaght.

The Avonbeg buildings were constructed using cheap materials to minimum standards and are deficient with respect to current Building Regulations (set by the Department of Environment) which have more stringent requirements for the insulation and fire protection of dwellings. The original flats were built of single-leaf (215 mm thick) concrete blockwork walls and floors of cast "in-situ" concrete slabs. The walls were rendered externally and internally they were dry-lined (a panel system which combines plasterboard and a thin layer of insulation). The flat roofs,

which were asphalted but uninsulated, support the water storage tanks, clearly visible on the roofs of the flats - most of which exist today, structurally unmodified and in deteriorated conditions.

The buildings indicate front/public and rear/private aspects in their planning. The front facades are south facing and display balcony railings of the living rooms. At the rear are located the private entrances and staircases for the residents, as well as car-parking. The original accommodation is typically comprised of 1-bedroom flats of approximately 45 m^2 in area, arranged two on each floor on either side of a central, open stairwell [FIG. 2].

The estate is situated on the edge of a vast tract of land. This area of grass, which has remained undeveloped, separates various strips of suburban housing, predominantly, 2-storey family dwellings with pitched roofs and front and back gardens. At the east end of the estate is St. Colmcille's School, beneath the dominating profile of an electrical pylon. To the west, off St. Dominick's Road, are the local shops, a boxing club, a health centre and St. Dominick's Church [FIG. 3].

The original buildings are architecturally undistinguished but, nevertheless, embody principles of modernism in their design. They recall the modernist solution for mass housing, the tower block set in a park, which in Ireland is epitomised by the Ballymun project (1966 - 1969). In the Avonbeg flats each level of accommodation is identical in layout and structure and is articulated as such, to be truncated abruptly at the roof. The buildings' setting on the ground is without mediation. One striking feature of these flats is the way they appear to have been dropped in from the sky. In

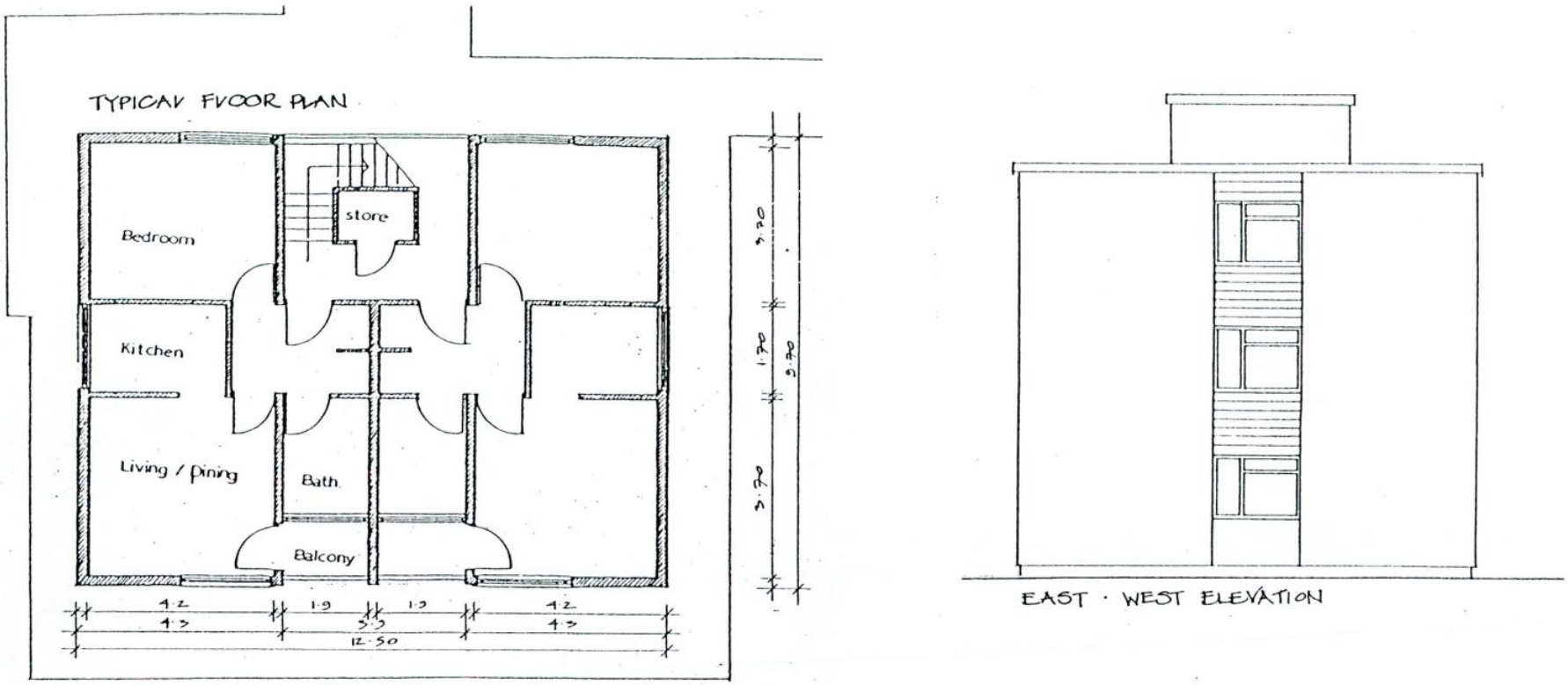
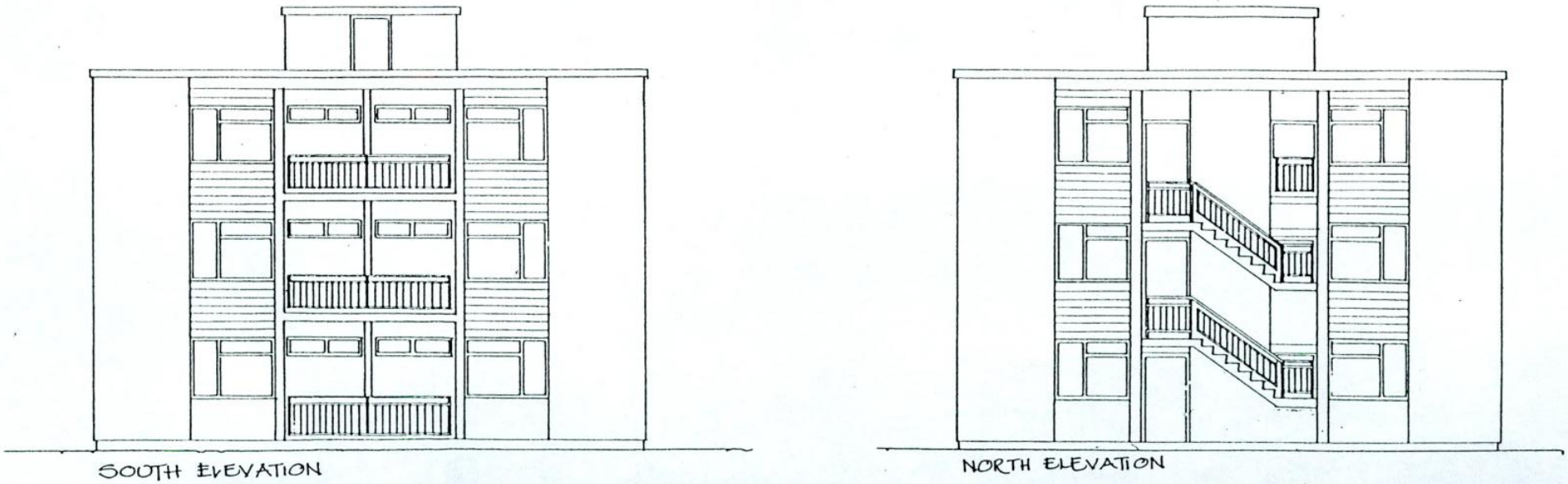


FIG. 2: Plans and Elevations of the existing Avonbeg flats (Gerry Cahill Architects)



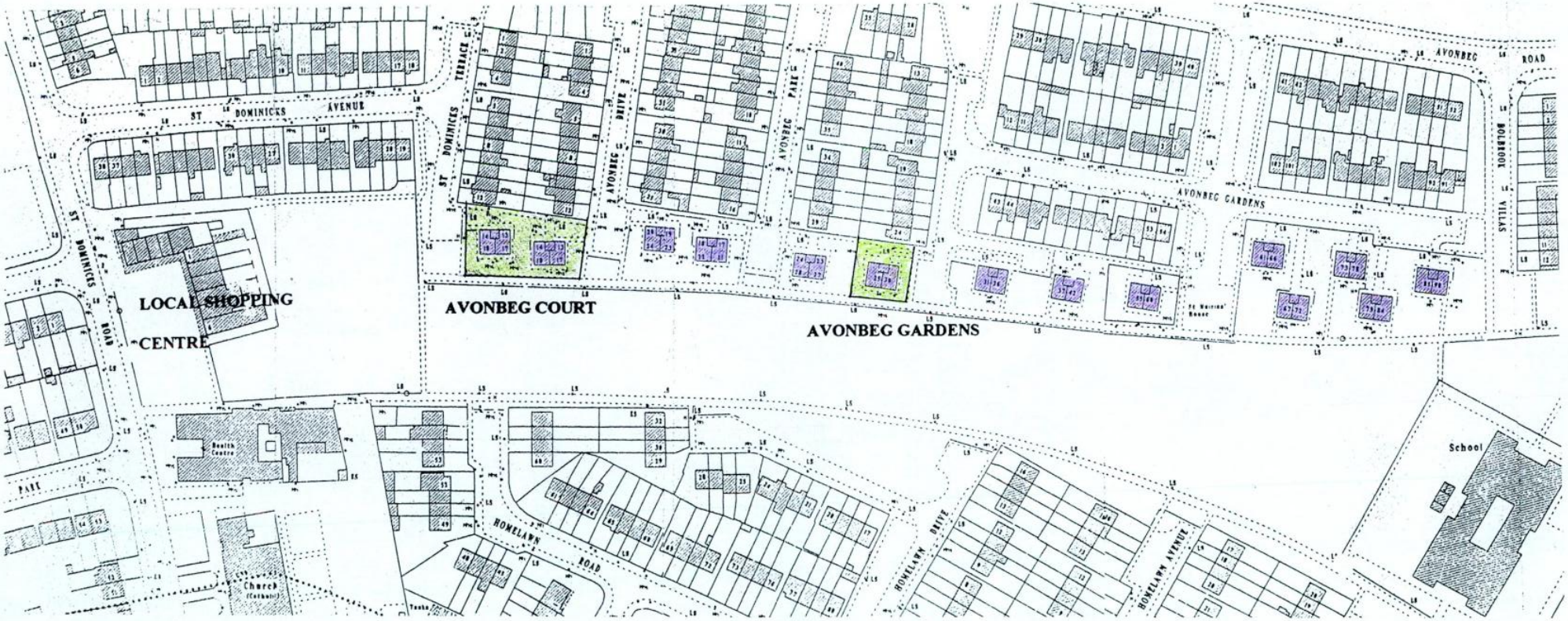


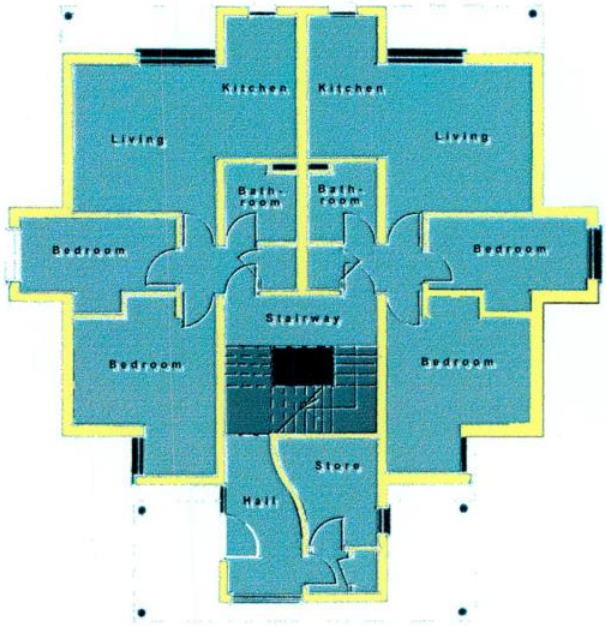
FIG. 3: Site Plan of the Avonbeg Estate Scale 1: 2,500

this sense the buildings carry with them the implication that they can function independently of their location and be situated anywhere.

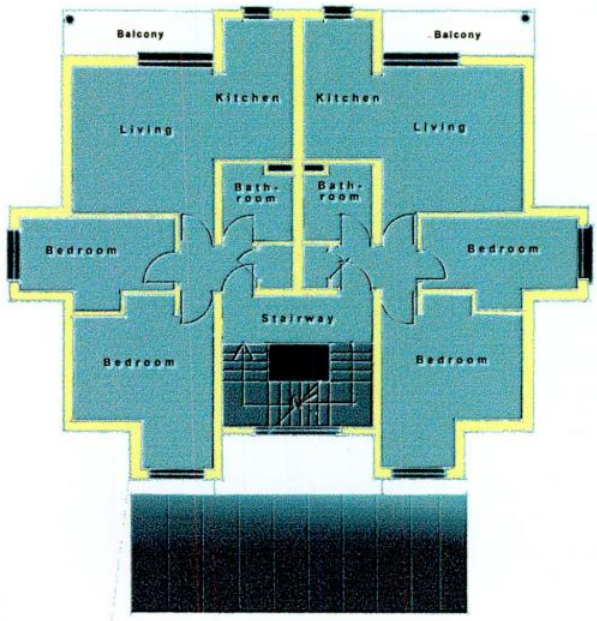
The renovation

A major renovation of three of the Avonbeg flats was carried out in the early '90s. This was a collaborative project involving Dublin Corporation, NABCo (National Agency for Building Cooperatives) and the architect, Gerry Cahill. Avonbeg Court (blocks 1a and 1b) was renovated in 1989-'90 and cost £ 400,000. Avonbeg Gardens, renovated in 1992, cost £240,000 . NABCo is a voluntary housing agency with a registered charitable status which has been in operation for twenty-five years. NABCo works in liaison with the Department of Environment who provide funding in the way of capital grants and subsidies, approve and allocate sites for building (unless they are donated to NABCo) and make available the housing lists from which the agency's tenants are selected.

The design of the Avonbeg projects evolved through a process of consultation, in several stages. The architect's initial inspection of the flats identified serious deficiencies with respect to the current Building Regulations and a set of measures to upgrade the buildings was proposed. These included the provision of higher insulation standards to the walls, the floors and the roofs of the flats, improved accessibility for disabled people and modification with regard to fire and safety. The massing of the blocks and their new pitched roofs effect the transformation of the modernist blocks.



Ground Floor Plan



First and Second Floor Plan

North

FIG. 4: Avonbeg Gardens: Floor Plans (Gerry Cahill Architects)

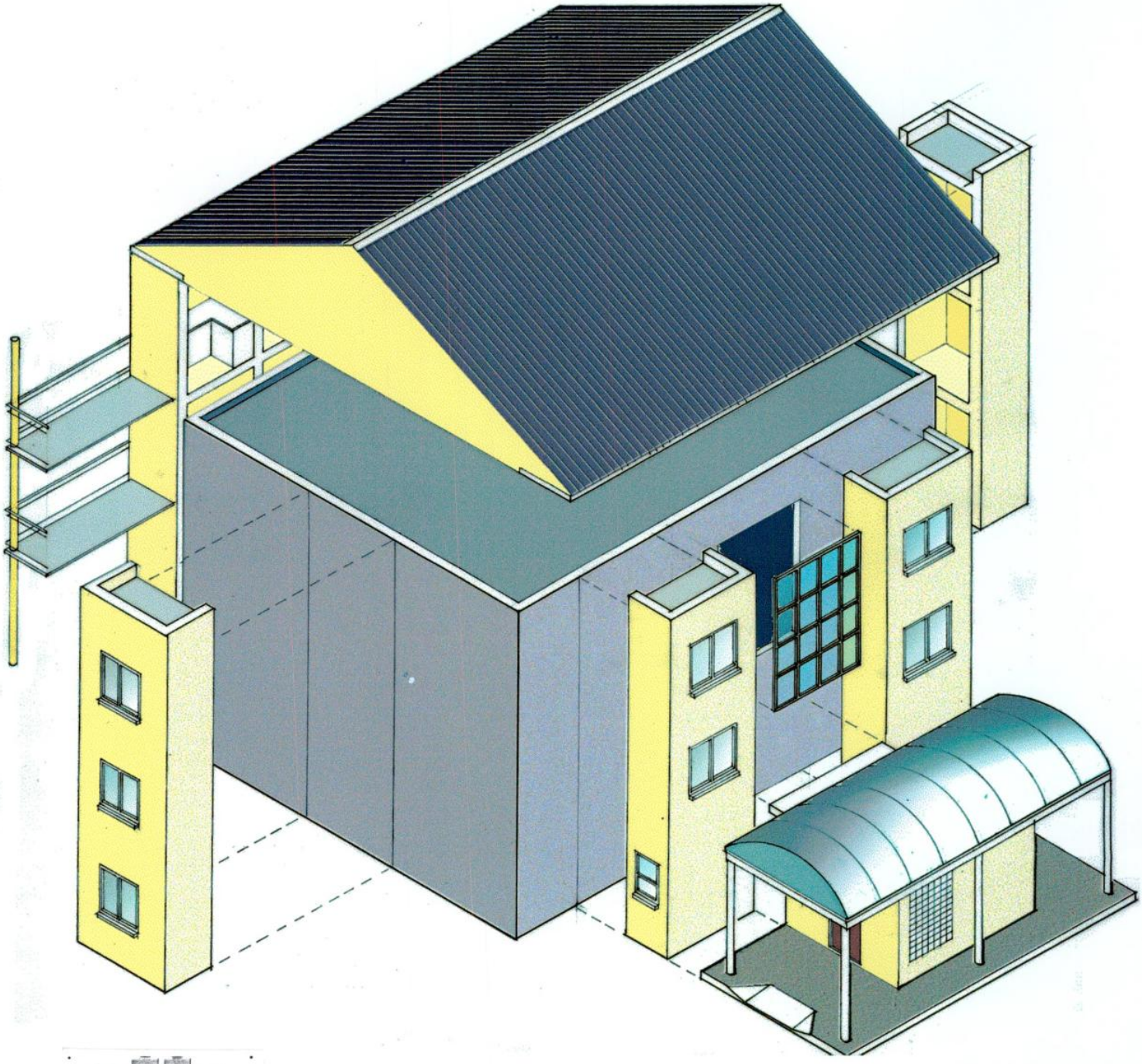


FIG. 5: Avonbeg Gardens: Sketch showing the elements of the new scheme as extensions to the existing block.

The accommodation was revised to give a variety of layouts. Avonbeg Court has two 1-bedroom apartments on the ground floor and four bedsits on the floors above. A separate single-storey building between blocks 1a and 1b contains a laundry and a meeting room shared by its tenants. In the later scheme, Avonbeg Gardens, increased funds enabled the provision of six 2-bedroom apartments. The additional bedrooms are incorporated in bays on the sides of the building. The kitchens are relocated to the front in the revised layouts, opening onto the living/ dining rooms and benefitting from the southerly aspect. The staircases at the rear have been rebuilt, enclosed in glazed lobbies and provided with entry-phone systems [FIGs 4 & 5].

The front and rear, public and private, aspects of the buildings are given greater emphases and definition [FIGs 1b & 1c]. Generous balconies extend across the south facades, facing the open area of grass, in expectation, perhaps, of a park. The areas immediately around the buildings have been secured for private gardens and delineated by boundary walls of rendered blockwork, 1.8 m high, lowered at the corners to permit side-long views. Metal gates at the rear allow private access for the tenants and for cars. In Avonbeg Court trees have been planted by the tenants on the perimeter of the south wall to provide further screening.

A walk around the estate brings other factors to notice. The newly refurbished Avonbeg flats are visually distinctive and have the appearance of being looked after, setting them apart from their neighbours. A metal security fence has recently been erected at the path in front of the blocks of flats (which is the route to the St. Dominick's Road shops), separating the estate from the open tract of land.

FIG. 6a: Above : View of Avonbeg estate along path; Below: view of south facade of Avonbeg Gardens (Gerry Cahill Architects).

FIG. 6b: Views of the estate

FIG. 6c: Above : south facing balconies; Below : Staircase at rear.

The original buildings, surrounded by patches of grass and tarmacadam, have security grilles across windows at the ground level. Here the boundaries are strengthened at the facades of the building. One of these buildings, which is boarded up, is particularly jarring in its extreme neglect, showing signs of fire damage and vandalism [FIGs. 6a, b & c].

Design intentions & future proposals

The renovated Avonbeg flats are self-contained projects; they are also part of an overall design proposal for the Avonbeg area presented by Gerry Cahill in June '95. This proposal reflects the architect's experience and views on housing and urbanity, as Cahill explains, referring to his previous social housing projects in Basin Street and Allingham Street (quoted in "Designing good homes...", The Irish Times, 3.4.'97) :

> What we're trying to do is to make an edge to a street, with a front and back, private and public areas, front doors opening on to the street to support it, and at the same time, to give people a sense that they belong to a community and they're in a world where their children can play safely.

The proposal for the Avonbeg estate calls for an increased density of housing and the defining of streets, paths and car-parking within an integrated landscaping scheme. The rest of the Avonbeg flats will be similarly refurbished and the surrounding spaces claimed for private, enclosed gardens. The open land is to be landscaped as a park with facilities such as a football pitch and children's play areas. A new street along the front of the estate will be complemented on the opposite side

of the park in a layout of a similar street and new, 2-storey housing with front entrances and outlook to the park.

A recent interview with the planning authority reveals further details (Interview, Eddie Conroy, S.D.C.C., 19.6.'98). New 2- and 3-storey buildings are to be constructed in between the Avonbeg flats to form "a terrace of urban towers"; this renewal is to take place gradually. A variety of 1-,2- and 3-bedroom apartments are planned to accommodate a mixture of tenants - young couples and families, single people and the elderly. The new layout combines maisonette flats on the two upper levels entered from the south, with ground floor flats (with facilities for the disabled) entered, as at present, from the rear.

Clear definitions of private and public areas and careful positioning of windows and entrances, for example, would enable a measure of control over the open, public spaces, regarded as problematic in their absence of supervision and maintenance. It is envisaged that a greater sense of security and an increased density and diversity of people would encourage activity and revitalise the locality.

Urban themes : the street and the park

The traditional street is a key element and " the generator of diversity " in the city, argues Gerry Cahill in his publication, Back to the Streets (Cahill, 1980, p 28). Written out of a concern for the deterioration of the inner city of Dublin and its declining population, Cahill urges planners and architects to go " back to the streets" in order to reassess and formulate new proposals for urban renewal.

These views, which endorse a traditional pattern of urban development, are supported by the writings of Rob Krier, Kevin Lynch and Jane Jacobs, and currently revived in the Tallaght Town Centre 2000 Plan.

This evocation of urbanity is directly opposed to the theories of Le Corbusier as described by his utopian cities, Une Ville Contemporaine (1920s) and Une Ville Radieuse (1930s), and promoted by C.I.A.M. (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) between 1933 and '44. As a solution to congested, insanitary urban conditions, Le Corbusier proposed a city plan that was ordered by Cartesian principles with a rationalised system of vehicular traffic and characterised by an urban scale and density of building. In the use of separated city functions, such as residential, commercial and so on, and in the protected areas of countryside with the proclaimed virtues of sunlight, space and air, available to all, Le Corbusier's vision echoes his earlier influence, the garden city [FIG. 7a].

Jane Jacobs takes the urban context as instructive in revealing that the way cities really function is far removed from urban planning strategies, which are rooted in utopianism, namely, the garden city, the City Beautiful and Decentrist movements, and in anti-urban reactions (Jacobs, 1994, pp 26 - 35). Any new interventions, she writes, need to recognise the complexity and interdependency of the city, which responds on a local level to gradual changes and sometimes, surprisingly, is able to extricate itself from the severest conditions - the process of "unslumming".

The park, transplanted from the nineteenth century urban context, appears as a central feature in the garden city ideal. The Victorian public park, which spurred an

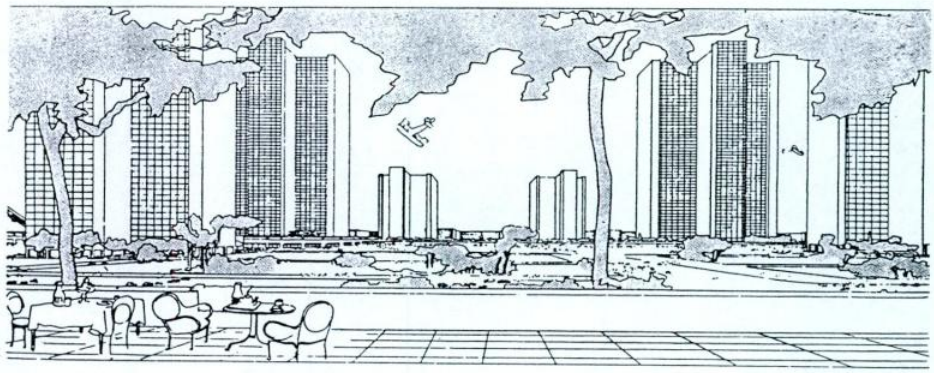


FIG. 7a: Une Ville contemporaine (Le Corbusier); Sketch of the city centre showing high-rise offices.

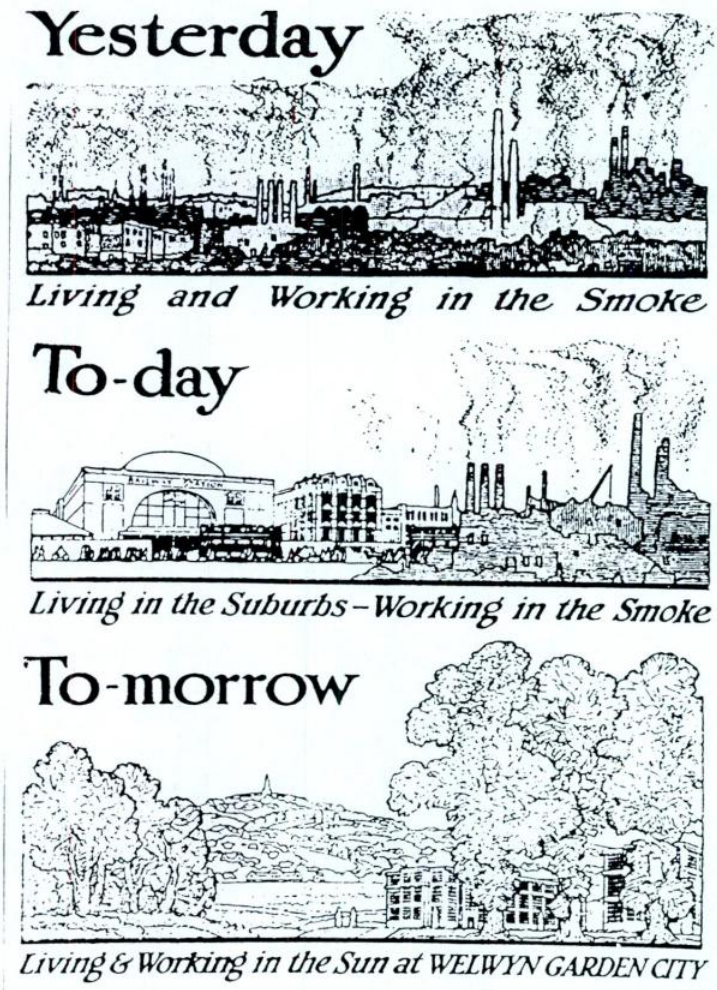


FIG. 7b. Publicity poster for Welwyn Garden City.

enthusiasm for horticultural and garden design, was seen as an oasis within the city and a respite from the problems of urban living. It was perceived as beneficial to health and morally educational, permitting a mixing of social classes within specified codes of conduct.

Jacobs points out that the park, employed in designs of housing schemes with the assumption that it will be beneficial to the neighbourhood, has, in fact, often failed to do so. She comments on the uncritical acceptance of its value and maintains that, "(p)arks are not automatically anything, and least of all are these volatile elements stabilizers of values or of their neighbourhoods and districts." (Jacobs, 1994, p 101) Based on observation and a comparison of parks in various parts of the city, Jacobs finds that each park discloses its own characteristics and patterns of use. Those that are considered unsafe and unpopular are disturbing in their wasted potential and are avoided, affecting the adjoining streets. The edges of parks are particularly revealing, reflecting the stability and popularity of the locality. The most successful parks, she writes, exhibit social diversity and a variety of uses and schedules. They are supported by their neighbourhoods, in turn, helping to "knit" together the area.

Marshall Berman, while noting the influence of Jacobs work in the United States, suggests that its impact is in arguing that what gives vitality and dynamism to urban life is precisely the "moving chaos" of the nineteenth century city that twentieth century modernism has tried to efface (Berman, 1983, pp 170 - 171). If the theme of nineteenth century urbanism is the boulevard, then the twentieth century's is the highway, states Berman (Berman, 1983, p 165). In the dialectic of

modernism, the boulevard, characterised by Baudelaire as pervaded by contingent, ephemeral experiences and thousands of floating existences, is disrupted by the highway, reserved for the automobile.

The streets of the twentieth century are far more segregated, protected and regulated than the boulevards of Baudelaire's time, as are its inhabitants, writes Berman; " in fact, for most of our century urban spaces have been systematically designed and organized to ensure that collisions and confrontations will not take place here." (Berman, 1983, p 165)

* * *

The Avonbeg project is situated within the contexts of public housing in Ireland and the development of Tallaght, through suburbanisation, which will be examined in the following chapters. The Avonbeg renovations, as collaborative projects involving the voluntary sector, bring to the forefront an issue which is presently being broached, of the participation of the users in the design/planning process. The process of urbanisation and recurring themes - suburban/urban, public/private, the street and the square - are identified as of critical interest; these will be additionally pursued through this study.

2.

PUBLIC HOUSING IN IRELAND

A brief overview

The government acting through Dublin Corporation and the local authorities has built almost all of the public housing in Ireland. Important exceptions are the houses built by the philanthropic trusts, The Artisans' Dwelling Company and The Guinness Trust, before World War 1 and, more recently, the ongoing contribution of the voluntary housing sector.

The history of housing policy in Ireland, which dates from the Act of Union with Britain in 1801, has been dominated by the urban centre of Dublin. The fluctuation of its population with emigration, migration from rural areas and returning immigration, and also experiences of poverty and economic hardship, have greatly affected living conditions and need for housing. Governmental policies and strategies in response to housing crises have influenced the tenure and types of housing as well as the concentration of development in different areas, in turn creating further pressures.

Through the nineteenth century the majority of Dublin's population lived in conditions of poverty in tenement buildings, the former Georgian homes of the wealthier classes who had moved to the outskirts or emigrated. The early legislation of Dublin Corporation was aimed at improving sanitation and overcrowding, but was ineffective and rarely implemented (King, 1990, p 21& p 23). The Artisans' and

Labourers' Dwellings Improvement Act (1875), or Cross Act, allowed the Corporation to make compulsory purchase of slum properties paying substantial compensation to its landlords. This proved to be financially undermining, particularly with the obligation to rehouse the displaced tenants. Dublin Corporation's earliest housing schemes included flats in the inner city, in Barrack Street, renamed Benburb Street (1883), and Blackhall Place (1894-5), with some peripheral cottage developments in Clontarf and Inchicore after 1900.

A central issue to the Nationalist Irish Government was the ownership of land. In its housing programme of the 1920s a sum of £ 1 million was allocated to urban housing with additional grants to promote rural, agricultural development and owner-occupation. The Housing Act (1931), incorporating large-scale slum clearance measures, was passed with the declaration to build two flats in the inner city for every cottage on the outskirts.

A foremost debate of the time was the option of building low-density, suburban type of housing based on the garden city ideal, as an alternative to blocks of flats in the inner city. The garden city movement had been prominent at the turn of the 20th century, giving rise to new towns such as Letchworth (1903) and Welwyn (1920) in England [FIG. 7b]. Its aim was to combine the perceived benefits of city and country in a model which was decentralised and self-sufficient. A system of zoned uses was proposed - residential, industrial, recreational, and so on - and a lower density of housing with larger, private gardens. Ownership and management of land was to be on a communal basis.

In Ireland, garden suburb design was promoted by the Housing and Town Planning Association (founded in 1911) and by Patrick Geddes and Raymond Unwin, who were advisors to the planning authorities in the '20s. It also received strong political support from those who were opposed to urbanisation. The Nationalist movement's construction of an Irish identity was rooted in a vision of rural, agricultural Ireland. Dublin was not favoured by its association with urban slums and poverty, nor with its former status as a colonial capital. In spite of views that argued for building in urban densities within the city, a policy of suburban, peripheral development was implemented. The standards set in Britain by the Tudor Walters Report (1918) were adopted, which recommended a density of 12 houses per acre and that housing be of a 2-storey, semi-detached design and a minimum width of 70 feet (21 metres) apart. About 25,000 local authority dwellings were built between 1927 and 1940, mostly on the peripheries, such as in Marino (Dublin's first garden suburb) and Crumlin.

After World War 2 there was a decline in the population due to a high level of emigration which continued until the 1960s. This made the housing situation seem less urgent, although overcrowding and the lack of basic amenities such as bathrooms were serious problems. House building after the Wars was characterised by suburbanisation and a concomitant increase in local authority building. Between 1940 and 1960 the pattern of tenure in Ireland showed a marked change. By 1960 local authority renting had increased to 20 % of the housing stock, private renting had almost halved to 17 %, while owner-occupation, which was rapidly increasing, comprised 60 % of the stock. A comparison with figures for 1990 shows the prevalence of owner-occupation, which has continued to be officially promoted, at

78 % of the housing stock, while local authority renting comprised 13 %, and private renting , 9 % of the stock (Power, 1993, p 363).

The Consolidated Housing Act (1966) was the basis of housing policies until the late '80s. It gave the local authorities the additional responsibility of assessing Housing Needs (Section 53) that were to be released with Development Plans, published every five years.

The Ballymun housing estate, located near Dublin Airport, was built by the National Building Agency which was established in 1961 to enable the local authorities to build on a large scale. The collapse of Georgian tenement buildings in Fenian Street in 1963, causing death and injury, led to the demolition of over one thousand tenement buildings in the city that were deemed to be structurally unsafe. The resulting increase in the waiting lists made the radical design of a high-rise scheme, particularly as it was employed elsewhere in Europe, seem to be an appropriate solution. The Ballymun project, identified by its seven 15-storey towers, provided about 3,000 dwellings, mainly flats. The ensuing problems of isolation and transience experienced by the tenants and persistent problems of poor management and maintenance have gained it an unfavourable reputation. Since the 1980s, however, initiatives such as Ballymun Community Projects have made some improvements to the estate.

At present an extensive renewal of the estate is being formulated by Ballymun Regeneration Ltd., in which the Ballymun towers are to be demolished and replaced with low-density housing. Local residents and several architectural firms

are involved in the consultation process. As Frank McDonald reports, the discussions have highlighted some differences. Many of the residents, deterred by the experience of living in the Ballymun flats, favour a suburban design of housing. They are yet to be convinced that in some designs, proposing higher densities of 16 - 20 housing units/acre, it is possible to achieve privacy and that communal spaces will be secure and properly maintained. ("Suburbia revisited...", The Irish Times, 3.12.98).

The 1970s saw the largest amount of public housing - about 57,000 units - built by the local authorities. These housing estates were characterised by low-rise buildings which were built on the outskirts where land was cheaper and available, such as in Darndale and Cherry Orchard. They were constructed using inexpensive materials (with a limited life-span) and mass production techniques. Local authority rates were abolished in 1973 making housing fully funded by central government, which had the tendency to weaken the decision-making and administrative faculties of the local authorities. Although the output was high, increased incentives for owner-occupation led to over 200,000 dwellings being sold, resulting in an overall decline of the local authority housing stock in the '70s.

Three major new town developments led by the local authorities were begun in Tallaght (8,000 housing units), Lucan/Clondalkin (7,000 units) and Blanchardstown (3,300 units), based on the Myles Wright Reports (1964 - '67). Wright's proposals were underpinned by the garden city ideal and referred to Patrick Abercrombie's earlier masterplan of 1914 for Dublin, which envisaged the development of satellite towns around Dublin, separated by a "green belt" of agricultural land. The development of Tallaght in particular, however, was hindered

by its isolation, economic instability and poor amenities; this will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Several new measures were introduced in the 1980s which included grants for renovation, further incentives for owner-occupation and expansion in the voluntary housing and private renting sectors. The Housing Act (1988) prioritised the homeless who were included on the waiting lists for the first time.

A controversial policy was the £ 5,000 Surrender Grant which was introduced in October 1984 but withdrawn in March 1987 due to its unpopularity. Its aim was to encourage eligible local authority tenants to buy property in the private sector and make available the vacated dwellings to those on the waiting lists. This policy had serious consequences, increasing the vulnerability of disadvantaged areas. About one out of twelve local authority tenants took up this grant, mainly in the problematic estates, leaving the promptly vacated dwellings exposed to vandalism and criminal activity (Power, 1993, p 345).

The effect of this policy in Tallaght was such that by 1988 about 168 properties had been surrendered, mostly in West Tallaght, resulting in over 1,000 families moving out of local authority houses in two and a half years. Those who had left tended to have been more active in the community and have more secure employment. This had a destabilising effect on the estates by increasing levels of unemployment, dependency on Social Welfare, and reinforcing their unfavourable reputations (Tallaght Welfare Society, 1988, pp 10-11, & Ronayne & Duggan, 1990, pp 58-59).

Inner city renewal

The impact of sustained suburbanisation on the inner city of Dublin (bounded by the Royal Canal, North Circular Road and the Grand Canal) was highlighted in the late '80s. The resulting depletion of the inner city population and the physical deterioration of areas of the city were brought to attention by the Dublin Crisis Conference in 1986 and the writings of Dierdre O'Connor (1979), Gerry Cahill (1980) and Frank Mcdonald (1989). The figures given at the time indicate the extent of the situation; the population of the inner city since the mid-'30s had reduced to 50.5% by 1971. A paradoxical situation had arisen where there was a great number of derelict buildings, yet 30 % of the population were living in overcrowded conditions (Cahill, 1980, p 8).

The decline of the inner city was primarily attributed to suburbanisation, facilitated by slum clearance programmes. Frank Mcdonald points out a number of other, contributory factors. Earlier policies of rezoning within the city, involving changes from residential to commercial uses under the Planning Act (1963), resulted in a depletion of the housing stock and in environments which supported little activity after office-hours. Negative perceptions about urban living, reflecting class prejudices, had led to a neglect of certain parts of the city, such as the Northside. Mcdonald writes, "...the suburbs might even be seen as a purgatorial half-way house between the hell of city life and the heavenly ideal of so many of Ireland's *nouveau riche* - a Southfork-style *palazzo* plonked in the middle of the countryside." (Mcdonald, 1989, p 17).

The Dublin City Development Plan (1980) had maintained a policy of house building in Dublin County followed by decisions to site facilities such as schools and shopping centres in suburban locations, contributing to the migration of population to the suburbs. This policy was the response of Dublin Corporation to the substantial housing demand, the unavailability of suitable land in the city and difficulties in purchasing sites (Walsh, 1989, pp 56 - 57). Problems that became apparent soon after the Ballymun estate was built and the official decision made in 1973 to cease the building of socially segregated, blocks of flats assured the continuation of suburban development until the late '80s.

By 1986 there was a recognition of the urgent need to repair and retain the residential element in the inner city, supported by the Dublin City Development Plan (1987) and the Urban Renewal Act (1986). The housing output of Dublin Corporation had dropped from 7,700 units/year in the early '70s to 1,500 units/year in the early '80s, allowing a flexibility to concentrate on urban renewal and rehabilitation schemes. Tax incentives under the Urban Renewal Act (1986), applying mainly to housing, encouraged developers to build in designated areas and on derelict sites in the city. The present "integrated area plans" place a responsibility on local authorities to consider broader issues such as the impact of development on the community and people who were "outside the rising tide of economic progress". (Eddie Conroy, S.D.C.C., 19.6.'98). Architects from the private sector have been increasingly involved in inner city housing schemes, such as in City Quay and in Temple Bar, while private developers have predominantly provided apartments and houses for people in the higher income brackets.

The present-day context

In the current economic climate of the 1990s, property prices and rents in Dublin have escalated and the demand for housing has risen sharply, indicating another housing crisis. As one article reports, the numbers of people on the housing waiting lists have dramatically increased to include those who previously could have afforded their own homes (Priced out...", The Irish Times, 27.10.'98). Quoted here is Sister Stanislaus Kennedy of the charitable housing agency, Focus Ireland, who sees an urgent need to address the provision of housing across all sectors, in particular, for people on the lowest incomes.

A Plan for Social Housing , prepared by the Department of Environment in 1991 and updated in 1995, sets the present target for the provision of public/social housing at 7,000 units/year. Confirming previous decisions, no more mass housing schemes or large-scale housing developments will be supported. Instead, smaller housing schemes which are integrated into their context will be preferred, as well as infill schemes and options of renovating and extending existing dwellings. Home ownership, "the preference of the vast majority of the population" (D.O.E., 1991, p 22), will be further promoted by financial aids such as mortgage allowances and shared ownership schemes.

The role and responsibilities of the local authorities have been extended. The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (1992) requires the local authorities to prepare a statement of their strategy to mitigate social segregation and give greater attention to the design and location of projects. A major concern in recent years has

been the need to manage and monitor the housing estates. The local authority has the responsibility to devise strategies and provide information courses for the management of the estates, based on their knowledge of local needs and issues. This would necessitate the participation of tenants and enlisting the experience of the voluntary housing sector.

The contribution of the voluntary housing sector since the 1970s has been small, about 0.5 % of the housing stock, although this has increased from the late '80s to the present output of 500 units a year and above. Two financial schemes have been available since 1984 to the voluntary housing sector. These are, Capital Assistance, which is a non-repayable loan aimed at particularly needy groups, such as the elderly and the homeless, and Rental Subsidy, under which an ongoing subsidy is paid with respect to each, eligible household in voluntary housing accommodation. As stated in A Plan for Social Housing , the amounts of financial aid under these schemes have been increased. The need for halting sites for travelling people and provisions for the homeless are identified as requiring particular consideration. An allowance for communal facilities is included in response to the demand for them by the voluntary agencies.

A comparative study of mass housing estates in five European countries, including the Ballymun project, was undertaken by Anne Power in 1997. Power writes that her work was made more urgent due to an escalation of social and racial conflicts on the edges of the cities, reflecting an increasing gap between the affluent and the unemployed in Europe. The aim of her study was to find new solutions and strategies to the common problems experienced. Ireland is distinguished by

simultaneously having the highest rate of owner-occupation (80 %) and the most marginalised estates, but also, a great number of self-help groups providing local support.

Power states that, "(e)ssentially, the successful workings of cities are about the successful management of neighbourhoods and *vice versa.*" (Power, 1997, p 391). In conclusion she calls for strategies for renewal comprised of a variety of approaches with a local emphasis, involving local residents as well as the larger community. An important aspect would be the management and supervision of shared spaces.

The role of the government in continuing to provide public housing is affirmed. As Power points out, this is contradictory to some aspects of present housing policies which increasingly encourage privatisation and attempt to reduce dependency on social welfare. Housing associations, and the system of living in apartments managed by a private landlord, common in some of the European countries, are not established in Ireland. Power's conclusion would suggest that voluntary agencies, who have a limited role at present, and local, communal organisations have a greater and valuable contribution to make.

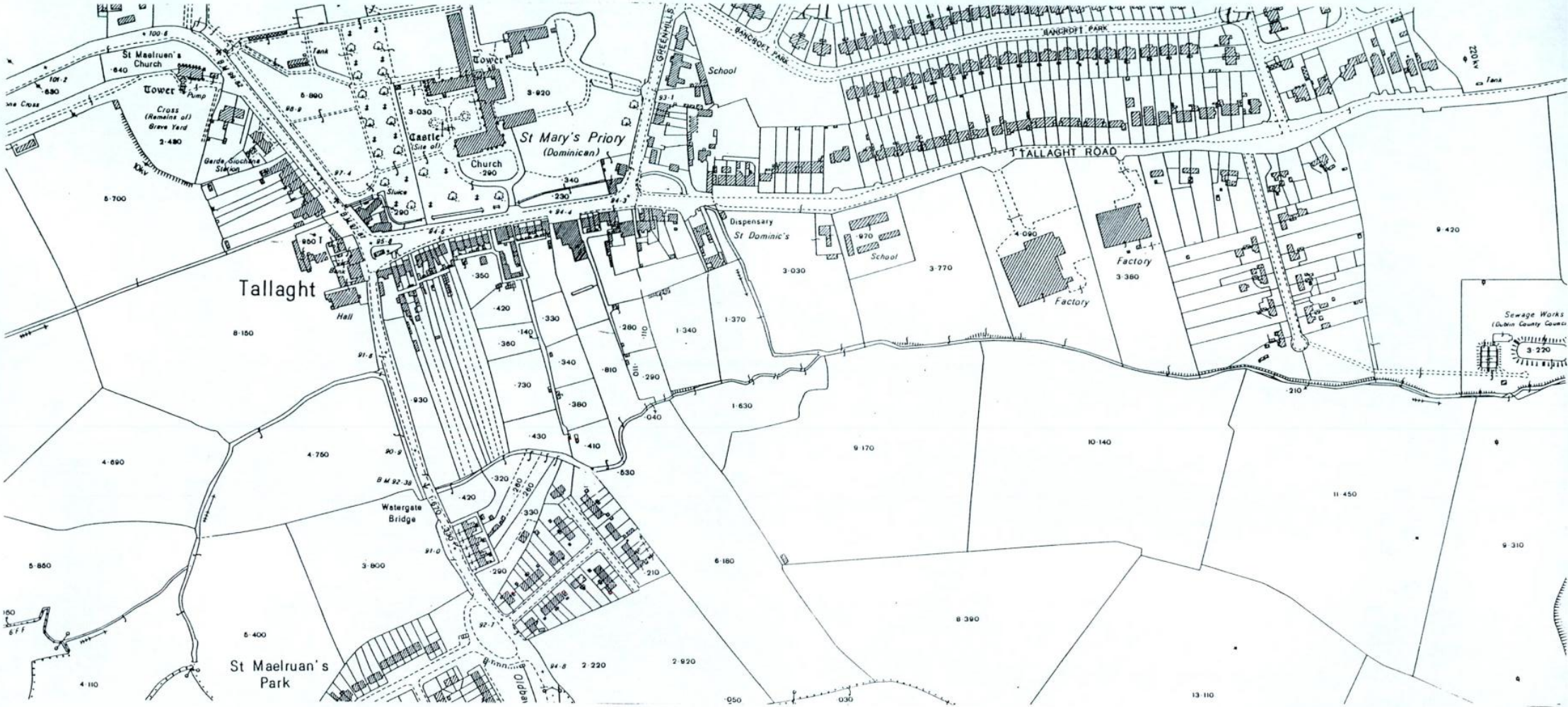


FIG. 8: (Part) County development map (1968-'69). Scale 1: 5,000

3.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TALLAGHT

Early development

Tallaght derives its name from the Gaelic "Taimhleacht", meaning the plague memorial, referring to the place of burial of a prehistoric settlement, the victims of an epidemic. The old Village, the site of St.Maelruan's Church and St. Mary's Priory, marks the foundation of the Abbey of St.Maelruan in the eighth century. Here, too, Tallaght Castle stood for over four hundred years until it was demolished and rebuilt as an archiepiscopal country residence, in use until 1821. Traces of these former buildings are retained in the Priory which incorporates part of the Castle's tower, and in the Garden in which it stands, distinguished by a group of mature trees. The steam railway from Dublin to Blessington was in operation between 1888 and 1932. Its impact is described by W. St. John Joyce in 1912 and related in a recent article ("Tallaght's Eighth Century Roots", Irish Independent 1.12.89) with reference to the Light Rail Transit (LRT) proposed from Tallaght to Dublin, but not yet under way. St. John Joyce refers to the relative isolation of the area until the revival of economic prosperity that came with its accessibility to visitors from Dublin.

Until the mid-'60s the population of Tallaght was around 2,500. Its centre was the Village, surrounded by agricultural land [FIG. 8]. Since the early 1970s the growth and development of Tallaght has been without precedent in Ireland. The population of Tallaght increased by 800% , from 6,174 in 1971 to 56,608 in 1981;

today it is about 74,000. The map of Tallaght has been transformed by the addition of suburban housing and the Tallaght By-Pass, which has the effect of making a north/south division. The Avonbeg estate is to the south in a triangle of land between the By-Pass and the River Dodder [FIGs. 9 & 10]. The commencement of the town centre development in the late '80s marks current intentions for the urbanisation of Tallaght, outlined in the Tallaght Town Centre 2000 Plan [FIG. 11].

The development of Tallaght is based on the County Development Plan (1972) , which adopted the recommendations of the Myles Wright Reports (1964 - 1967) in its proposal for three "new towns", each with a projected population of 100,000. As recommended by Wright, the new town was to be largely self-sufficient, having "employment for most of its working population, a shopping centre and other facilities that would meet ordinary weekly needs." (quoted in Ward & Bannon, 1988, p 5) Within Tallaght, 4,500 acres of land were set aside for development of which 3,200 were allocated for residential use, to the suggested densities of garden suburb design. The provision of housing was based on the "neighbourhood unit", to accommodate 5,000 persons and include schools, a youth centre, a church and a park.

The short-comings and attendant problems of the early development were acknowledged in the County Development Plan (1983) and examined in a selected number of reports [Tallaght Welfare Society (1988), Ward & Bannon (1988), and Ronayne & Duggan (1990)]. These reports also assess the social and economic implications of the expected town centre development and make specific recommendations for further housing and planning policies. A lack of facilities, such

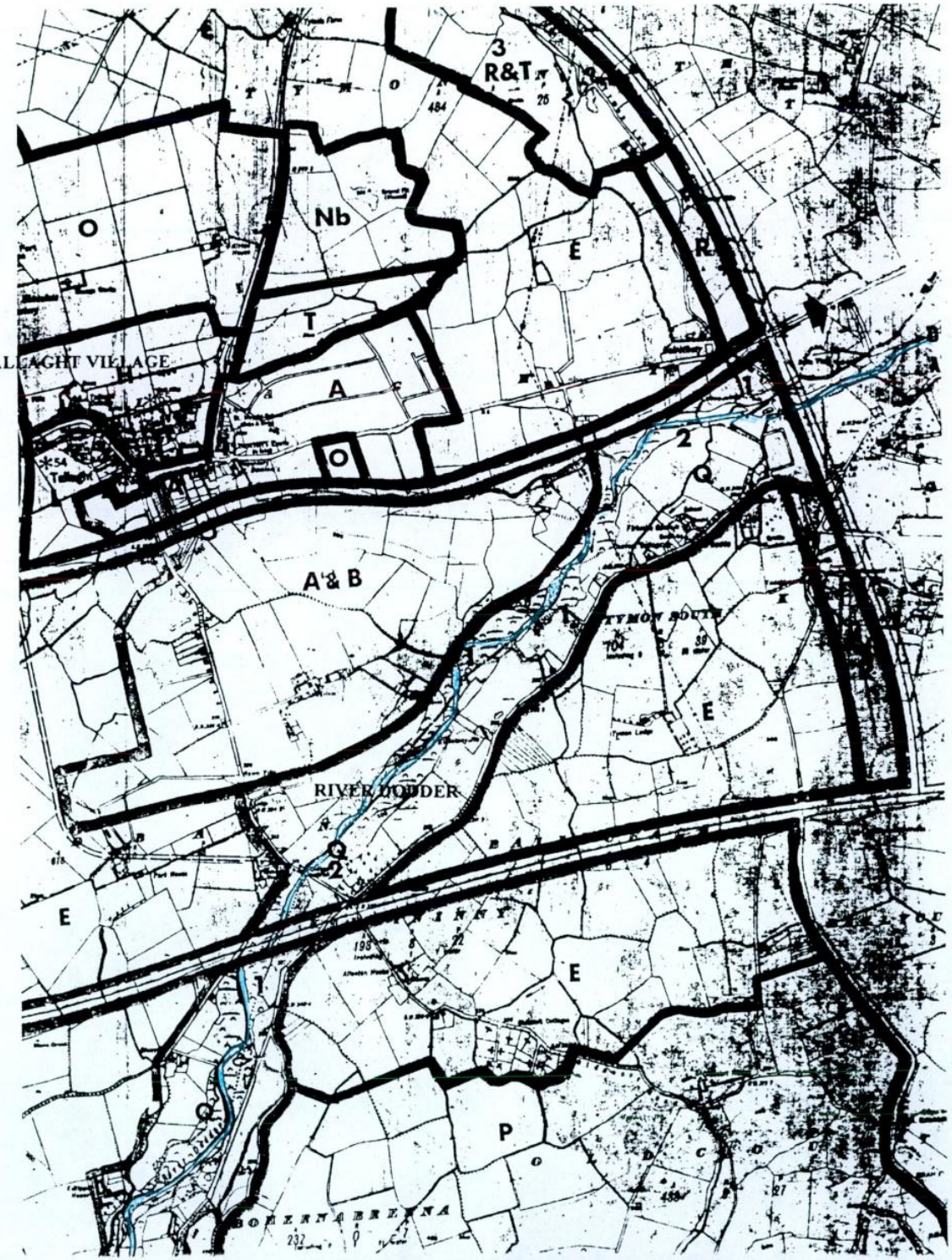


FIG. 9: (Part) County development map (1972)

showing the proposed Tallaght By-Pass.

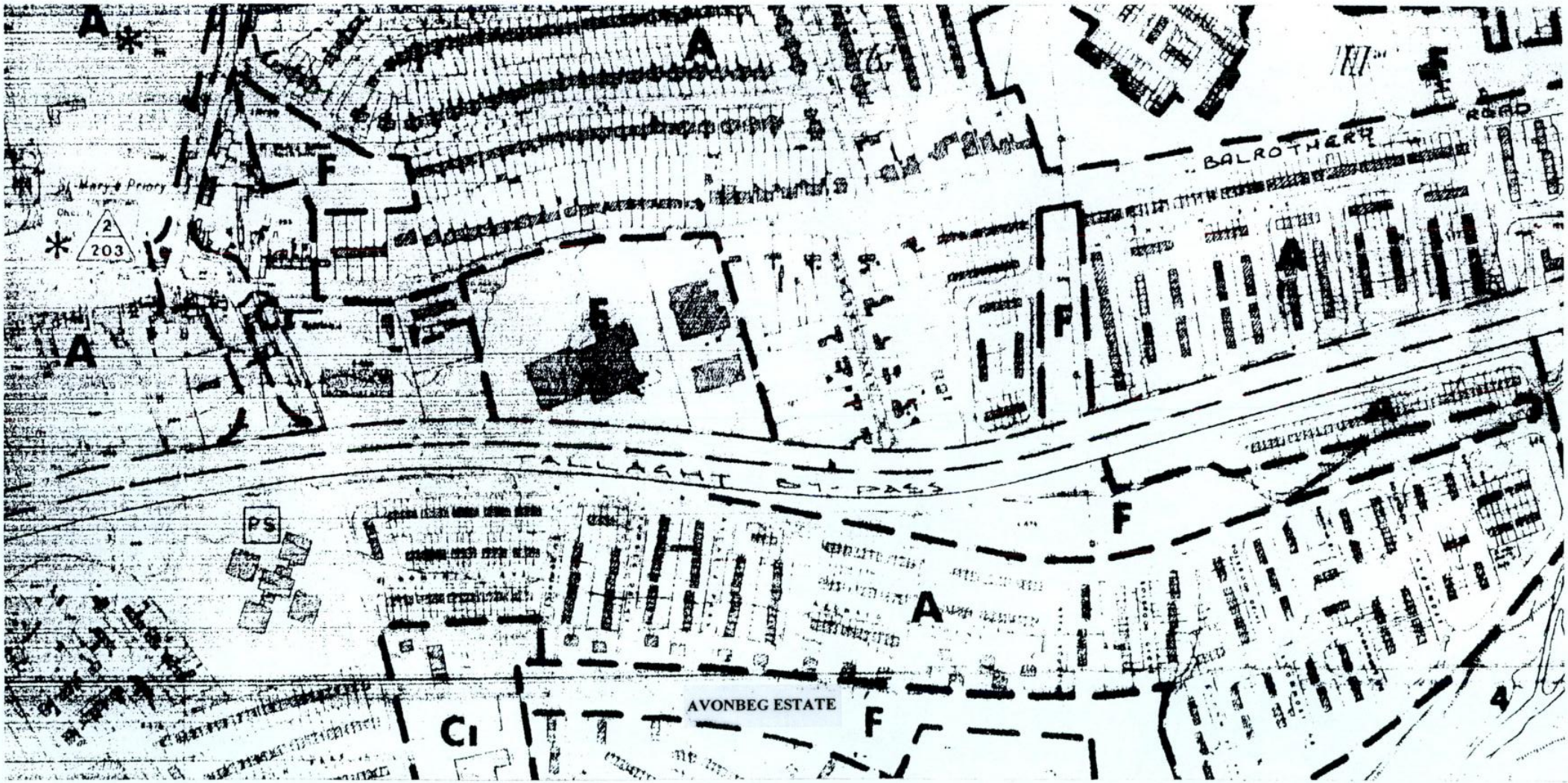


FIG. 10: (Part) County development map (1983) showing zoning areas:

A: Residential, C1: protection/ improvement of town & village centre facilities, E: Industrial, F: Open space/ recreational

Scale 1: 5,000

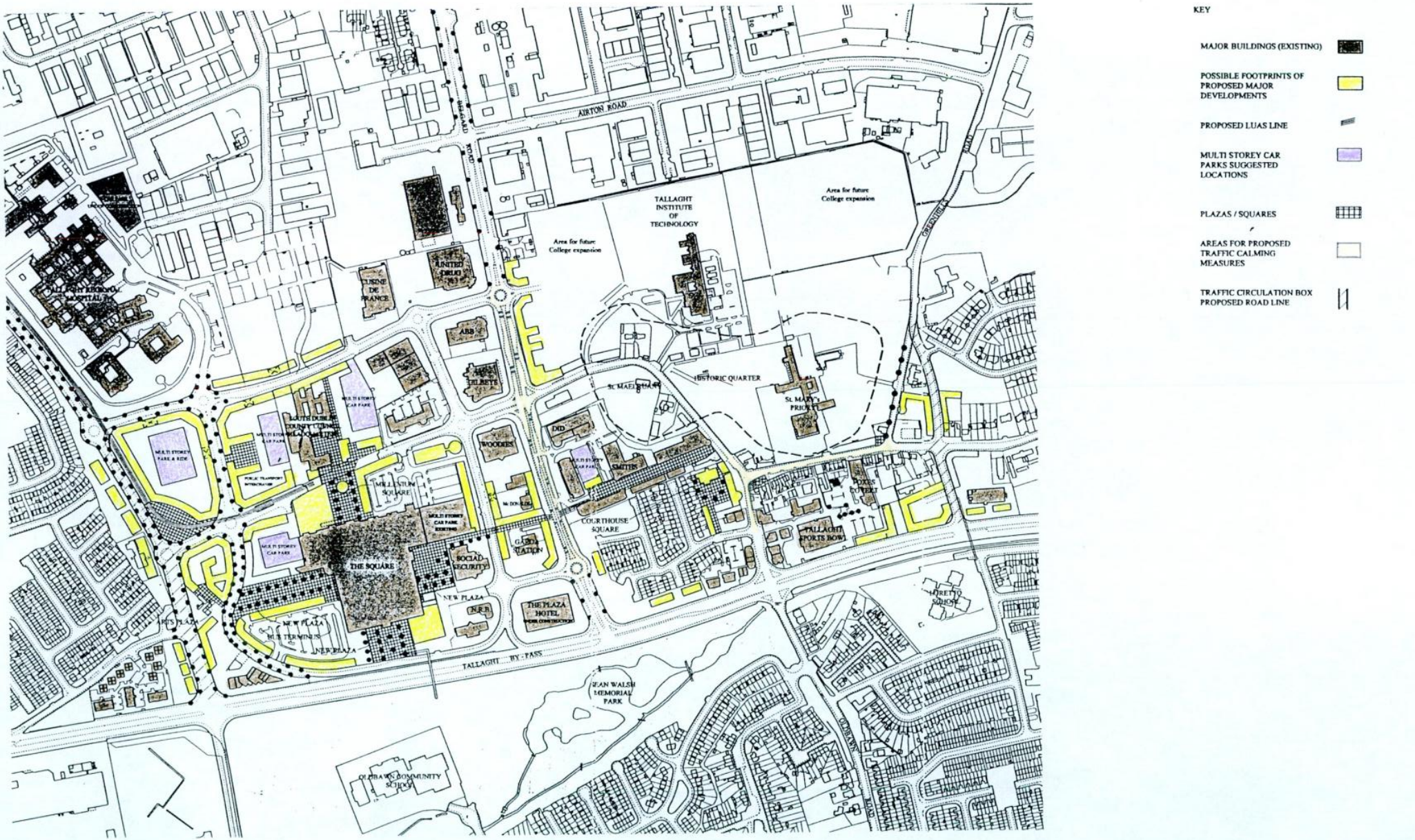


FIG. 11: Outline Plan of the proposed Tallaght Town Centre (S.D.C.C. 1998)

as a shopping centre and a higher educational institution, and the inadequacy of the transport system were noted. The absence of a central coordinating authority (the present South Dublin County Council was not established until 1994) as well as restrictive finances undermined the provision of these basic facilities.

The demographic profile of Tallaght is unique in comparison with national statistics, in its high percentage of young people and young families. While the pattern is not uniform within Tallaght, varying with the location and household structure, its implication for education, leisure facilities and employment is critical. This point is emphasised in the reports mentioned above and restated in the County (Draft) Development Plan (1998).

A study of house building in Tallaght shows how an identification of location with certain types of dwelling and social grouping has become apparent from the outset (Tallaght Welfare Society, 1988, pp 7 - 9, & Ronayne & Duggan, 1990, pp 55 - 58). Initially, house construction was by both the private sector and the local authorities (Dublin Corporation and Dublin County Council). The public housing programme was aimed at alleviating the housing crisis and was accompanied by the rehousing of local authority tenants from declining areas of the inner city as well as those on the waiting lists (mainly, young families) in the new estates. Private house building provided inexpensive homes for the first-time buyer. This constituted much of the earlier development, which was located in the south and east of the old Village. With the recession private building abated, but the local authorities continued to build until the late '80s in the more isolated areas to the west of Tallaght.

Housing estates have tended to be either exclusively public or private, the latter generally being older, having more attractive settings and better amenities. In West Tallaght, for example, where there is a high proportion of local authority housing, a polarisation of public and private housing has been reinforced by an east/west division. A "concentration of disadvantage" has occurred in certain housing estates in areas which are further marginalised by a high level of unemployment, low resources and a visually poor environment.

The Square

The Square, the first phase in the development of the town centre of Tallaght, was opened in October 1990 after a series of lengthy delays. The project cost £ 40 million and was developed jointly by Monarch Properties Ltd. and GRE Properties Ltd. The completed project is a shopping complex of 56,000 m^2 in area, including major department stores, cafes and a multi-screen cinema.

The Square provided the long-awaited shopping facilities for Tallaght; however, it was intended to serve the wider region which necessitated extensive car-parking facilities. It was expected that the Square would provide employment opportunities and attract further development and investment, including tourism. It is regarded as a landmark of Tallaght, identified in the Press by its pyramid roof silhouetted in the sunset.

The design is of an inwardly orientated, enclosed block with an irregular plan. There are four main entrances positioned on three levels, monitored by security

guards and surveillance cameras. The shops are approached from internal galleries arranged around a central atrium which is capped by the pyramid roof of glass and steel. The design of the interior space suggests an outdoor environment; a visual and aural experience provided by the waterfall feature, the rock pools, the plants and the seating on the terraces overlooking the central space [FIGs. 12 & 13].

Critiques of the design of the Square vary widely in assessing its success in establishing a sense of place. One review declares that the Square has delivered Tallaght from " the despair of its 'placelessness' " ("The Square/ critique", Irish Architect, Jan/Feb 1991, p 30) by its design of a lively and complex internal public space and the unifying symbol of the pyramid roof. Conversely, a current architectural guide to Dublin points out a failure to address its context, of turning its back to the streets: " Its blank elevations show that this building is not concerned with the city or shaping urban space, it is about creating a fantasy world where the sun always shines, the palm trees sway in the breeze, and you can forget that Tallaght exists." (Brady & Mallalieu, 1997, p 288).

The Square has an ambivalent relationship to its geographical location and also to its immediate surroundings. The impression once inside is of a public space outside, but the actual out-of-doors - the buildings, roads and mountains - are out of sight. While the interior might suggest an atmosphere of a crowded urban street with diverse activities, the roads around present a stark contrast, supporting little pedestrian activity, its pavements bounded by security fencing of, mainly, privately owned, commercial buildings. In a shopping centre in the city, such as the Ilac Centre in Dublin, the internal walkways reinforce routes and connections to streets

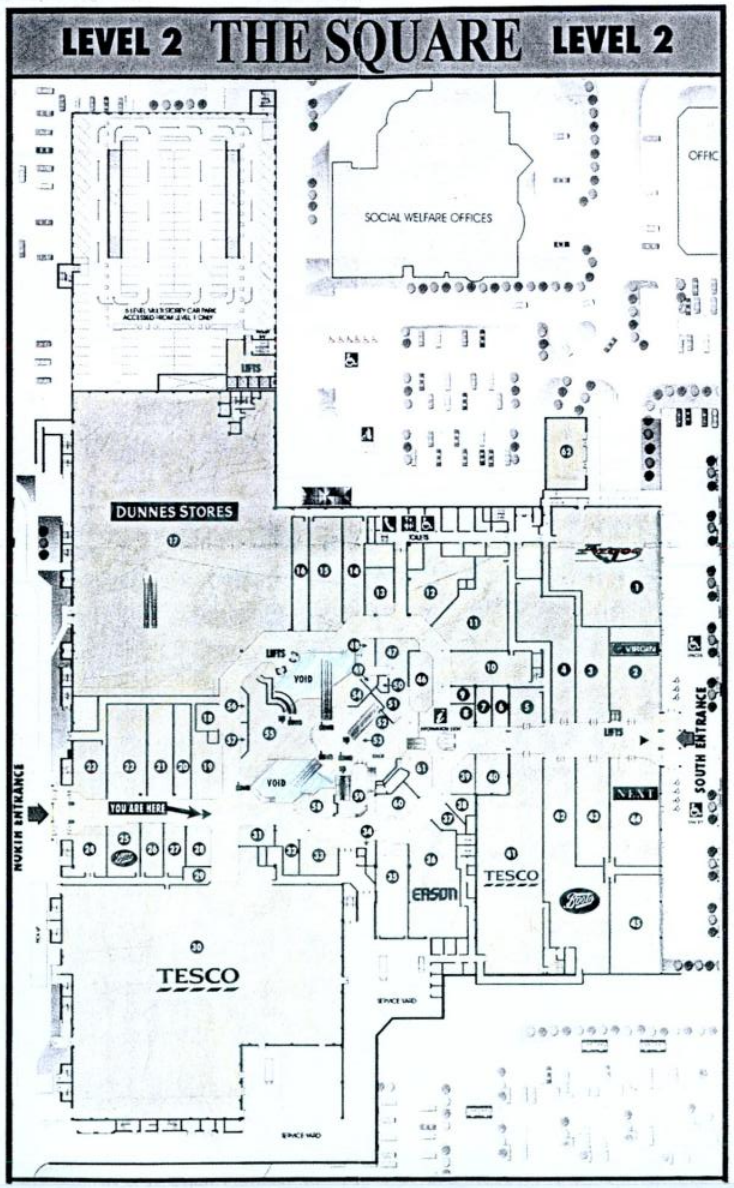


FIG. 12: Floor Plan of Level 2 of the Square (the Shopping Guide)

FIG. 13: Interior views of the atrium of the Square

and buildings outside. For the isolated shopping centre in the suburban context, these connections are not (yet) in place.

The building of the Square, together with tax incentives under the Urban Renewal Act (1986), available until recently, have facilitated further development. This includes recent projects such as the Institute of Technology and the Regional Hospital as well as transport links, the M 50 motorway and the bus system which extends from Dublin city centre to its terminus at the Square. Its general popularity is confirmed by a resident on the Avonbeg estate who emphasises that "everybody uses the Square", but she has reservations herself, finding it increasingly busy and "a parking nightmare". The local Dominick Road shops have since increased their prices and, apparently, are no longer a cheap option.

One article describes the impact on the value of houses in Tallaght (" House prices soar...", The Sunday Times, 12.10.'97). Between 1994 and 1997, house prices in certain areas increased by about 65%, with a further rise of 15-20 % expected by the end of 1998. A 3- bedroom, semi-detached house which would have cost £ 30,000 in 1988 would now be purchased for £ 85,000 and above. Within Tallaght, however, the prices vary dramatically depending on the desirability of the location. For the many young, first-time buyers, properties commanding the highest prices, such as those in Old Bawn or Kingswood Heights, might not be an option. Instead, they might have to look to Jobstown or Killinarden, where a local authority house can be purchased for around £ 35,000.

The conclusions of one of the reports (Ronayne & Duggan, 1990), regarding the potential for employment of the town centre development, still has a resonance today. It estimates that 1,300 jobs would be made available of which two thirds would be held by local workers (the figure given by the County Council is more optimistic, at around 5,800 in 1995). Most of these positions were likely to be part-time, a sector mainly filled by women. While welcoming employment opportunities that would arise as further investment and development is attracted to the area, the report points out that unless there are measures to ensure that the benefits of the development are evenly distributed, present social and geographical distinctions are likely to be reinforced. Moreover, the scale of development is inadequate to meet the level of needs: "To put the point concretely, the equivalent in employment terms of a Town Centre would need to be developed each year to cater for the numbers entering the labour market each year." (Ronayne & Duggan, 1990, p 101)

Tallaght 2000

The South Dublin (Draft) Development Plan (1998) has both regional and local emphases, enabling the participation of local communities in the development of their areas. Excessive suburbanisation is discouraged and higher, urban densities are recommended, with additional objectives of preserving natural features and "green belts" and promoting public transportation. Under European Union directives, disadvantaged areas will be identified for renewal with the help of "cross-sectoral partnerships" involving public, private and voluntary agencies (S. D. Draft Development Plan, 1998, p 23). The aim of the URBAN initiative is to improve the standard of living in disadvantaged areas. It provides a limited fund of £ 2.5 million

to facilitate pilot projects in selected areas, including Brookfield, Fettercairn and Avonbeg.

A new urban centre is envisioned in the Tallaght Town Centre 2000 Plan, put forward by a team comprised of South Dublin County Council, South Dublin Chamber of Commerce and others. The proposal sees the formation of urban streets and public squares, with the Square being at the centre of a "civic core" [FIG. 11].

The initial, low density type of development followed the guidelines in the County Development Plan (1979) and was superseded by the County Development Plan (1993) (Objective D), permitting mixed-use development, combining retail, leisure and commercial activities with uses at different times of the day. As the brief states, the new framework is seen as a necessary progression now that a certain level of development has been reached.

Thirty-six sites in the designated town centre have been allocated for potential development by private developers, either through the independent submission of plans or in partnership with the County Council, in accordance with planning guidelines. Although the main incentives for mixed-use development is concentrated in the centre, other areas have been zoned as sites of special interest, such as the Historic Quarter around St. Maelruan's Church and the Arts Plaza, incorporating the present Tallaght Community Arts Centre.

Tallaght 2000 intends to replace the existing "individual lot" type of building that is set well within its boundary walls and surrounded by surface car-parking. The

brief states that this type of development has been not only "wasteful of Town Centre land" but also, "has given rise to a centre with a reduced level of contact between people".

The provision of a residential element and public outdoor spaces in the centre are seen as essential in encouraging activity as well as providing a measure of security, features critical to the success of the scheme. New streets are to be of two kinds - high streets and tree-lined civic streets, such as along Old Blessington Road. A higher, urban density of building is proposed, of 4- to 5-storeys, with a continuous street frontage and mixed-use activities at street level.

A key measure in the creation of a pedestrian-orientated centre is to re-route the traffic around the perimeter of the town centre and to replace surface car-parking with multi-storey car-parks in sites designated by the County Council.

The major public space of Tallaght, the Millennium Square, will be located between the north edge of the Square and the County Council offices; its design is to be the outcome of an architectural competition. A new Public Transport Interchange is proposed here, at the termini of the bus routes and the LRT line. Also being considered is a telecommunications tower incorporating a restaurant with a panoramic view.

* * *

It is envisaged that an urban centre of streets and public squares would in itself generate diversity and a greater level of contact between people, reversing the physical impact of previous decisions, the "individual lot" or the isolated block development. The character of the streets and public squares, in particular the Millennium Square, is dependent upon public interest and informal activity. The juxtaposition of the Millennium Square with the Square (with its internal streets and public space) presents a curious conflict of intentions, reviving the dialectic theme of Berman's raised in Chapter 1. The inward-looking plan of the Square and its high level of security (a familiar arrangement in the main shopping streets in the centre of Dublin), which functions to be protective and exclusive, collides with a vision of a pre-modern, urban square as a gathering place of diverse peoples and activities. The urban context which is missing from the floor plans of the Square is to be put in place with a simulated urbanity only to highlight a present-day anxiety - the loss of connection between peoples.

Although a social mix of people is considered desirable, its application in the town centre is likely to be restricted by the higher values and desirability of the central location, favouring private development. Unless there are specific incentives to include some public and voluntary sector housing, certain disadvantaged groups are likely, again, to be precluded from the picture and assigned to marginal sites. In the development of the Docklands in Dublin, an area which already has a significant proportion of public housing, the present debates indicate some of the concerns. Private developers would rather see a much lower proportion of public housing in the proposals than the 20 % stipulated by Dublin Corporation. It is argued that not only would mixed private and public/social housing schemes discourage potential

buyers and developers but also that, "integration does not work in reality". Alternatively, social housing schemes with shared ownership on separate sites are suggested as pilot projects. ("20 per cent social housing...", The Irish Times, 23.4.'98)

FIG. 14: Rear view of Avonbeg Court

□ Avonbeg Gardens, Tallaght: three flat-roofed blocks have been transformed into virtual villas

FIG. 15. "Virtual Villa" (The Irish Times, 3.4.'97)

4.

CRITIQUE & CONCLUSION

The Avonbeg housing project - the original scheme and the renovations - has been introduced and described in Chapter 1 and located within its broader contexts. Recurring themes of urbanity, which resurface in the proposals for Tallaght's town centre, have been explored. In Chapters 2 and 3 we have seen how public/social housing has depended on and been affected by governmental housing policies. Complex relationships have been traced between housing policies, building types and their location, economic and social pressures. Suburbanity and urbanity are not discrete alternatives, but are shown as being interdependent.

Within Tallaght, a pattern of uneven development emerges where the impact of consequent decisions (which is reflected on several levels, from the planning of the town centre and the layout of housing to the individual building) neither neatly erase nor replace previous decisions, but rather, collide with, are pieced together and juxtaposed with one another. This is exemplified in the placing of the Millennium Square next to the Square, and in the Avonbeg renovations which do not efface the older, modernist blocks but incorporate and conceal them in their structure.

Referred to as "virtual villa", Avonbeg Gardens is shown beside one of the original flats in a photographic image indicating a "before and after" transformation ("Designing good homes..", The Irish Times, 3.4.'97) [FIG. 15]. The renovated buildings (which are not merely superficial makeovers) are "virtually" transformed by the addition of bays and balconies and also by the pitched roofs which have the

effect of making the flats next to them seem incomplete. This sense of incompleteness is clarified in recalling that in the ideal prototype of these flats (Le Corbusier's mass housing unit) the flat roofs were intended to be functional, providing recreational and communal facilities. It would appear that the Avonbeg renovations, although working as independent units, are also incomplete in that they await a similar refurbishment to the other flats, the streets and the park, to make whole the picture.

The negative associations of living at an unpopular address, such as on a particular housing estate, or even a block within an estate, have not only been disadvantageous to its residents but also inhibit a more constructive approach to addressing underlying problems. The Irish Times recently admitted being caught between the need to draw attention to these estates and the fear of further reinforcing this prejudice. Their interview with Anne Power points out that the emphasis and status attached to owner-occupation in Ireland, promoted by governmental policies, puts further pressure on those who cannot afford to buy their homes and who live in rented accommodation ("Estates on the Edge", The Irish Times website (features), 12.1.'98). An unexpected outcome of the Avonbeg renovations is that this negative perception is apparently reversed, giving rise to an optimism that similar, collaborative projects could be initiated in the locality.

The open land to the south of the Avonbeg estate is problematic to its residents, the planning authority, the designer as well as the gardai. Its perception as being unsafe and disorderly is reinforced by the occurrences of vandalism and drugs-related crime. A contributory factor is that issues of ownership and responsibilities

are unclear. It is neither public nor private space. The words used to describe it - wasteland, gap, no-man's-land - capture its ambiguity, its undetermined potential and function.

For the planning authority such tracts of land, which were left between various housing estates as they were built, are recurring problems in their absence of supervision and the reluctance of residents to assume responsibility for them. The designer sees the open space, left as it is, as aggravating the deterioration of the environment, affecting the surrounding buildings and streets and the ways in which they are used. The proposal to make it a park (described in Chapter 1), in conjunction with a revised layout of the housing, is an attempt to reverse this decline and to claim it for shared, public use.

The attempt to make distinct front and rear aspects of the design is not without confusion. In conceptual terms, the original blocks of flats, following modernist principles, were regarded as self-contained objects in space, independent of their context. An uncluttered open space (which, in the ideals of the garden city and Le Corbusier's rationalised city, is a park or nature, undisturbed) was required around the building for the purpose of light, air and also aesthetic appreciation. The facades were designed as a response to climatic orientation and internal planning, rather than to be part of an established street pattern or architecture. In the typical layout of nineteenth century housing the service entrances, bathrooms and the more private family spaces were located at the rear, while the front facades formed the public edge of the street. The proposals for the Avonbeg area attempt to restore these traditional hierarchies and to reinstate the importance of the street. Future plans for

the Avonbeg flats, in the introduction of new stairs and entrances, make an expressive attempt to revert activity and interest to the south edge. Significantly, the rear of Avonbeg Court, where the entrance is located, was referred to as the front by its users, while the south face, having the advantage of sunlight and, potentially, view, was regarded as the back, perhaps reflecting an aversion to the open land.

As a collaborative venture, the Avonbeg renovations are regarded by the parties involved as being successful. Some problems of inadequate sound insulation between flats and dampness were reported in Avonbeg Court, but its residents confirm a general satisfaction with the project. A tenants' committee is in contact with NABCo who keep the buildings regularly maintained. The prevailing concern is the condition of the surrounding, open spaces.

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