+++ Modern UK planning - Sir Peter Hall

I have taken Sir Peter Hall (an important town planner, particularly in the 1990's) as an example of modern town planning in the UK. He had immense knowledge and had concern for good neighbourhoods, inequality and climate change**.**

++ A concern for fairness

Peter Hall recognised that the effect of planning policies containing urban growth was to increase the cost of housing for the less affluent. In *The Social Costs of Smart Growth*, Wndell Cox wrote:

> "Soaring" land and house prices "certainly represent the biggest single failure" of smart growth, which has contributed to an increase in prices that is unprecedented in history. ... this observation was made by one of the world's leading urbanologists, Sir Peter Hall, in a classic work 40 years ago.
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> Peter Hall says that the "less affluent house-owner ... has paid the greatest price for (urban) containment" (Note 5). He continues: "there can be little doubt about the identity of the group that has got the poorest bargain. It is the really depressed class in the housing market: the poorer members of the privately-rented housing sector."
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> **The Social Costs of Smart Growth** (2011), Wendell Cox

++ Sociable Cities

Sir Peter Hall embraced the concerns of modern town planning, which now include climate change and what to do about mass car ownership.

He also embraced economic growth: He invented the idea of Enterprise Zones, where taxes are waived and development highly subsidized. Because the cost of doing business is lower, these zones can generate growth, and spread wealth to poorer areas. They are now word wide.

In his book *Sociable Cities,* The 21st-Century Reinvention of the Garden City, written with Colin Ward, he proposed "sustainable development" in strings of "sociable cities" centred around transport corridors with good rail transport. These cities were modernised versions of Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities - but they would have to cope with the mass car ownership that changed density patterns and prevented the walkable cities envisaged by Howard.

Hall was aware of the damage that private car ownership does to urban life and supported ways of limiting the damage. Based on government research, he believed car use could be limited by giving preferential access to public transport, pedestrianisation, restricting car use, even by "undergrounding" cars.

Hall admired Howard's vision (and became President of the Town and Country Planning

Association that Howard founded) but his updated vision lacked the clarity of Howard's idea. Perhaps modifying the Garden City idea by making space for cars was doomed because it was complicated, messy and destroyed the original idea of a walkable city: He was dealing with a more complex problem.

Hall's *Sociable Cities* had a chapter *The Quest for Sustainability*, showing his concern for the environment. This became stronger in his later book, *Good Cities, Better Lives: How Europe Discovered the Lost Art of Urbanism*. Here he noted that mainland Europe had set new standards of high-quality sustainable urban development - in Germany, the Netherlands, France and Scandinavia. He suggested ways in which the UK and could do the same.

++ Sir Peter and Verbaun, Freiberg

SIr Peter's key example was Freiberg, Germany, especially the district of Verbaun, where transport has a lower impact on lifstyle because of a modern tram network and lower car use.
In Life without cars in Vauban, Kaid Benfield wrote

> Street parking, driveways and home garages are generally forbidden in this experimental new district on the outskirts of Freiburg, near the Swiss border. Vauban's streets are completely 'car-free' - except the main thoroughfare, where the tram to downtown Freiburg runs, and a few streets on one edge of the community. Car ownership is allowed, but there are only two places to park - large garages at the edge of the development, where a car-owner buys a space, for $40,000, along with a home.

However, Vauban is affluent. In *Nearly Car Free*, Martin Specht of the New York Times reported:

> Vauban, Germany, is an affluent new suburban community that differs from traditional suburbs in many respects. The most important difference is that cars are forbidden on most of Vauban's streets, and houses cannot have driveways or garages...
>
> Many people move to Vauban not for environmental reasons, but because they feel that a car-free environment is far better for children. Indeed, children are everywhere! With no cars on the streets, many residents call Vauban a children's paradise, where youngsters wander from a young age in safety.
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> *Nearly Car Free*, New York Times, May 2009

It should be noted that many Verbaun residents still have cars, even if they are banished to the edge of the development. *A survey in 2000* "found car ownership surprisingly high at 54%". Vaubaun is not car free.

Residents Verbaun are affluent and have well built, well insulated houses. Their heating bills - and associated carbon emissions are low. However, like much similar housing they may not be low carbon in their construction.

++ Sir Peter and BedZED

In 2008, I attended a presentation by Sir Peter Hall at University College, London. After giving examples European practice, including Freiberg. He gave the example of the 'sustainable' Beddington Zero Energy Development (BedZed) in south west London:

By Tom Chance from Peckham (flickr: BedZED)
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via Wikimedia Commons

I asked him about BedZED, pointing out that for a 100 square metre flat that the carbon emissions from construction were estimated at 67.5 tonnes CO2e. (That's very large considering the total personal remaining carbon budget for 1.5°C has been estimated at 64 tonnes CO2e - see *Appendix, Climate is worse than they say*).

Sir Peter didn't believe me but he did agree to follow this up with an email exchange. The fact that I'm reporting this may prepare the reader to the fact that the follow up emails showed I was right and he was wrong.

Although billed as sustainable BedZED had high embodied carbon, perhaps a bit less than developments by volume house builders. *A report by the developers, BioRegional* says:

> The total embodied CO2 of BedZED is 675kg/m2, whilst typical volume house builders build to 600-800kg/m2."

BedZED has been *described by its developers*, Bioregional, as "the UK's first major sustainable community" also claiming:

> Major energy savings and lower bills, abundant green space, a friendly community and continued above-market sale prices keep the iconic BedZED village in South London an inspiration for zero-carbon homes worldwide.

It's high embodied carbon has been largely forgotten. The Wikipedia entry I made pointing out the problem of emissions caused by construction in building BedZED has been removed.

BedZED "comprises 82 homes and 2,500m2 of commercial or live/work space". It was designed with 92 car parking spaces. It is not a car-free development although the developers have aimed

at lowering car use but a look on Google's Street View at Helios Road, London shows plenty of cars parked.

Despite Bioregional's publication, *BedZED: Toolkit Part II A practical guide to producing affordable carbon neutral developments*, homes in BedZED are not for the poor. They now sell in the £300,000 to £400,000+ range but those high prices are buoyed by the shortage of housing not the cost of construction.

However, they have lower energy bills if you can afford the mortgage. Bio regional have noted:

> Thermal inertia is used to keep internal conditions comfortable. Dense concrete blockwork and concrete floor slabs provide thermal mass that absorbs heat during warm periods and releases heat at cooler times.

Generally there is a lower emphasis on emissions from housing construction as opposed to emissions from housing use. The emissions from use are accompanied by energy bills but those from construction are long forgotten.

The instinct of UK Government is to boast about climate friendly actions, such as reductions in carbon emissions - mostly from the dash-for-gas (See *Appendix, Downplaying Climate Change*). It also downplays other sources of emissions like the emissions from building construction, the embodied carbon.

The privatised Building Research Establishment, *The BRE Group*, now to take embodied carbon a bit more seriously in *their BREEAM methodology*: "This will help demonstrate to stakeholders that embodied carbon is fully accounted for in BREEAM". However, in 2008/9, when I was trying to persuade York Council to take embodied carbon seriously, a director of the BRE Group admitted BREEM didn't actuallt estimate replied to my email:

> BREEAM does not put an absolute value on the embodied carbon, it's true. Partly because the science behind the process is still open to debate. It aims to provide a relative assessment, and gives credit to those buildings which choose the lowest impact solutions out of the available options...

Perhaps the pre-privatisation Building Research Establishment would have been quicker off the mark than the privatised BRE Group, which depends on selling assessments to customers. Have they joined the UK Government in its business friendly approach?

++Modern town planning

I have taken the eminent Sir Peter Hall as an exemplar of modern town planning in the UK. He had many of the right concerns but was unable to accept three truths:

1. Climate change is much, much worse than has been conventionally admitted.
2. Mass car ownership is incompatible with saving the climate.
3. For poorer people without cars, car free living is much pleasanter and cheaper.

Sir Peter, like most modern town planners, was trying to square an impossible circle.