

self-sufficient and having its own integrity. A number of architects were also making a similar point:

In all great epochs of history the existence of standards – that is the conscious adoption of type forms – has been the criterion of a polite and well-ordered society; for it is a commonplace that repetition of the same things for the same purposes exercises a settling and civilising influence on men’s minds. . . . The uniformity of the cells whose multiplication by street forms and still larger units of the city therefore calls for formal expression. (Gropius, 1935)

In *Homes for the People*, there is a summary of the principles of neighbourhood planning as they were envisaged for London and the early British new towns:

A neighbourhood is formed naturally from the daily occupations of people, the distance it is convenient for a housewife to walk to do her daily shopping and, particularly, the distance it is convenient for a child to walk to school. He should not have a long walk and he should not have to cross a main traffic road. The planning of a neighbourhood unit starts from that. In the proposals of the County of London Plan the Neighbourhood unit is the area that can be served by one elementary school and it works out at from 6000 to 10 000 inhabitants. Grouped centrally near the school are the local shopping centre and such community buildings as a clinic, or a communal restaurant. There is no through traffic in the neighbourhood unit: it skirts it, along one of the main roads. (Boyd *et al.*, 1945)

Harlow, designed by Gibberd, is one of the early new towns in Britain which employed the neighbourhood as a structuring concept for urban form.

Gibberd, in a number of places, outlines his prescription for a well-designed neighbourhood. The following quotations outline some of his views on this topic:

The first aesthetic problem in the design of the neighbourhood is how to give the area its own physical identity, how, in fact, to make it a place with its own character, distinct from that of other places. . . . The size of any particular neighbourhood is limited by the need to have all the social services . . . within easy walking distance of any home. . . . The population generally taken by English planners is from five to twelve thousand people, because between those numbers it is possible to provide the majority of communal facilities which help to bring people together and engender a community spirit. (Gibberd, 1955)

The important design requirements of the neighbourhood, as proposed in the early British new towns are: a physical extent determined by a 10- to 15-minute walking distance from the furthest home to the school at the centre; a population which supports a junior school and a number of community facilities including a local shopping centre; a clearly defined boundary employing landscape to reinforce that boundary where possible; an architectural treatment which distinguishes it from other adjacent neighbourhoods; a definite centre; and the elimination of through traffic by arranging the major roads at the periphery of the neighbourhood.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND ITS CRITICS

A high point of British new town planning in the twentieth century was the report on the

plan for Hook (Bennett *et al.*, 1961). The study for a further new town for London, which was never implemented, returned to first principles in an attempt to discover the critical parameters in the design of an urban centre for 100 000 people. The concept of the neighbourhood was not supported by the study group and was not used to structure the new town. The neighbourhood was faulted for a number of reasons: it was thought to be over-simplified, not representing the richness of the real world of social interactions; it was also thought to lead to a dispersed urban form which did not lend itself to effective public transport. The last two criticisms relate more to the way in which the neighbourhood concept had been implemented, with large swathes of landscape between them, than to the concept itself. As for the first criticism, the neighbourhood was not conceived as a device to replace the natural process involved in the development of communities, but as a method for structuring the physical form of cities.

The plan for Hook, while aiming at urbanity, also aimed to accommodate the motor car. Further aims included maintaining a contrast between town and country and the promotion of a balanced community. The plan allowed for one car per household plus visitors' cars at the rate of a half-car per household. The accommodation of the motor car was to be achieved in such a way that the pedestrian took precedence. The town form evolved for Hook, in itself is of great interest to the student of planning and urban design, but it is the calculation of the spatial needs of the town which is an important consideration for those interested in sustainable development (Figures 8.4–8.6). The total area of the town was calculated in two main parts. The non-residential use was



Figure 8.4 Hook (Bennett *et al.*, 1961)

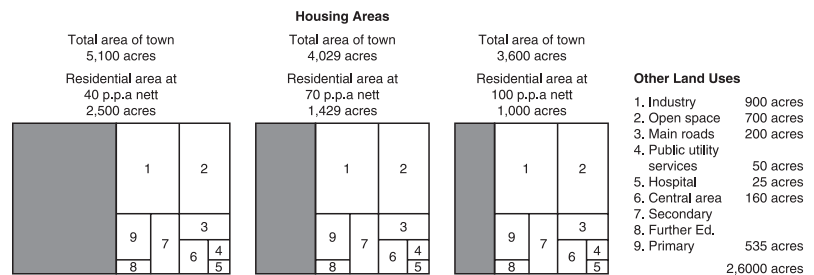


Figure 8.5 Hook (Bennett *et al.*, 1961)

considered to be a fixed amount which for 100 000 people was calculated as 2600 acres. The residential area ranged from 3600 acres at a density of 100 persons per acre to 5100 acres at 40 persons per acre. Figure 8.5 shows how a decision about residential

Figure 8.6 Hook (Bennett *et al.*, 1961)

