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PLANNING FOR INDUSTRY

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Noise is undoubtedly a major environmental problem. Circular 10/73 issued from the Department of the Environment draws attention to the problems created by industrial premises. I feel the Circular does set down good common sense guidelines for local planning authorities to adopt when dealing with planning applications for new industrial developments.

A local planning authority will have to balance the noise issues with the competing and conflicting objectives of :

1. The national need for a strong economic industrial base.
2. The need to create and retain jobs.
3. To meet the locational site requirements or any special needs of an industrial organisation.
4. To recognise that many small firms do have special requirements, do have cash flow problems, can ill afford heavy expenditure if they are to survive - indeed, it is worth noting that in the Greater Manchester area since 1952 180,000 jobs were lost.

I believe that the local planning authorities have on the whole dealt with the difficult problem of noise from new industrial premises with both sensitivity and intelligent application of the guidelines set down in the Circular.

In any event, today's society is far more informed on potential environmental impacts. Both the media and TV allocate time and space to this subject. The general public is consulted in such matters far better than it used to be and is far more capable of organising pressure groups to make local authorities look very closely at the reasons and logic behind the decisions to be taken. Indeed, I think it is fair to say that industrialists themselves are very well aware and sensitive to the potential problems they may create.

However, the Circular only deals with new proposals; new applications. I believe the real problem is our inheritance of the consequences of the Industrial Revolution and the environmental impact of major industrial areas mixed cheek by jowl with housing and social infrastructure. Besides noise there are many other environmental issues in areas where the density of people is highest, the effect greatest and their ability to do anything about it the least. I refer, of course, to the national problem of the inner areas of our conurbations and the clear need to do something about it.

Thus the remainder of my lecture will be on slides illustrating an experiment in Rochdale based on the approach of an Industrial Improvement Area philosophy.

This will be based on the following theme.

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The environmental, social and economic decline of the inner areas of our major industrial cities have been studied in depth. Solutions to the problems are, however, more elusive. The characteristic problems include:

1. Pre-1914 buildings and communications including inefficient roads, access, car and lorry facilities.
2. An unattractive employment and residential environment, especially for the higher skilled, and residents nearby disturbed by industrial and traffic noise.
3. Adverse effect of outdated physical assets and facilities on the efficiency of industrial firms.
4. Derelict land, which spreads as buildings finish their economic or structural use.
5. A conflict of community and industrial interests in the need to control the worst effects of environmental noise, pollution and transport for example, and relatively high costs of effective control.
6. A self-generating process of decline and loss of confidence in the area, with consequential increase in social problems including unemployment and vandalism.
7. Many of the firms remaining in the inner urban area may well be those with limited resources or growth potential who have not been attracted to the relatively higher cost industrial development areas and estates which have been actively promoted, but need to survive.

The problems are inter-related and complex:

- environmental, industrial and social problems are inter-related and call for a total approach
- private sector companies and individuals are likely to invest their own money in an area only if they have confidence in the area as a suitable place in which to work and/or live
- past policies have directed industrial, housing and communications investment towards new towns, city centre precincts and transportation developments, perimeter industrial sites and major inter-city links - and therefore away from the older urban areas and their deteriorated industrial and housing stock, with subsequent worsening in extent and depth of the dereliction
- the large-scale grand design approach is not likely to provide an answer, especially in view of the many locations involved and:
 - the shortage of money, public and also private bearing in mind the preponderance of relatively small business undertakings remaining in many inner urban areas
 - the large number of decisions, often involving many individuals and small parcels of land
 - the shortage of time

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The Rochdale Approach

A recognition of these problems in Rochdale, and the existence of specific areas which were experiencing continued deterioration in industrial, social and environmental conditions, led to the investigation and action programme for creating the first General Improvement Area (Industry).

The initial appraisal concluded that:-

1. Past local planning involvement had been wholly confined to the clearance of unfit and sub-standard housing and little to subsequent development; nor had practical consideration been given to the development of local industry and its needs, although this industry was important to the local economy.
2. Even in relatively small areas there were complicated land use patterns with some incompatibility in uses, problems of access and conflict between industrial and residential traffic.
3. The identification of initiating what are available to local activity at Crawford Street.

The basic aims of the GIA (Industry) which was subsequently initiated were:-

- a. to promote improvements in existing industrial stock and in the environment of adjacent residential areas by reducing noise, landscaping, urban cosmetics and traffic surgery
- b. to secure an increase in physical efficiency which would facilitate better operating conditions for the firms in the area
- c. to stimulate more confidence in the area and a more creative approach to local business development
- d. to identify administrative or statutory constraints on such improvements
- e. to save existing and create more jobs

The strategy adopted combined practical and relatively quick-acting measures including:-

- i incremental renewal in progressive small-scale steps
- ii an approach to improved land use which included pedestrian/open space design, traffic management and a flexible response to the need for pragmatic planning based on detailed knowledge of the local issues on the ground, rather than on office-based planning
- iii encouraging participation and self-help on the part of the interested parties, especially the local industrialists, identifying a sense of community responsibility to the various interests in the area

The detailed steps and initial results were documented in "Industrial Obsolescence: The Rochdale Approach". An evaluation of the results, during 1977 and prospective further results, remains to be made.

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Benefits to Date

The main achievements are in the areas of:-

- improvement in environmental conditions and plans including derelict land, buildings and waterways, and in land use and traffic management
- the use of "job creation" resources for projects of social value, associated with some reductions in vandalism
- the involvement of interested parties in a "total approach"
- the apparent progress in encouraging private owners and developers to invest in improvement in industrial buildings, access facilities and noise barriers.

It is important now to determine not only in what way these benefits are measurable in terms of return on the investment, but also whether they have laid the base for securing continuing measurable benefits in the reasonably near future.

The Need for Evaluation of Achievements

It is clearly too early to reach a firm conclusion on the cost/effectiveness of the approach and especially on its possible extension on a wider scale elsewhere.

The questions, in broad terms, which first need to be answered in some detail include:-

1. What are the resources - public and private - which have been invested in specific projects and what are:
 - the overall benefits to date of each investment package
 - the likely further benefits ?
2. What are the economic benefits in terms of:-
 - the specific projects and related investments
 - improved survival prospects of individual firms
 - improved cost efficiency
 - improved productivity
 - improved growth prospects
 - job preservation
 - future job growth prospects
 - possible additional firms being attracted to the area
 - reduction of noise
 - improvement in the environment ?
3. Has there been an increase in confidence and has the downwards "spiral" been reversed ?
4. Are the physical, environmental and human benefits in terms of participation and increased confidence likely to be lasting ones; could they be used elsewhere and is there need for further legislation and grants to help solve the problem ?