WHAT KIND OF HOMES DO PEOPLE WANT?

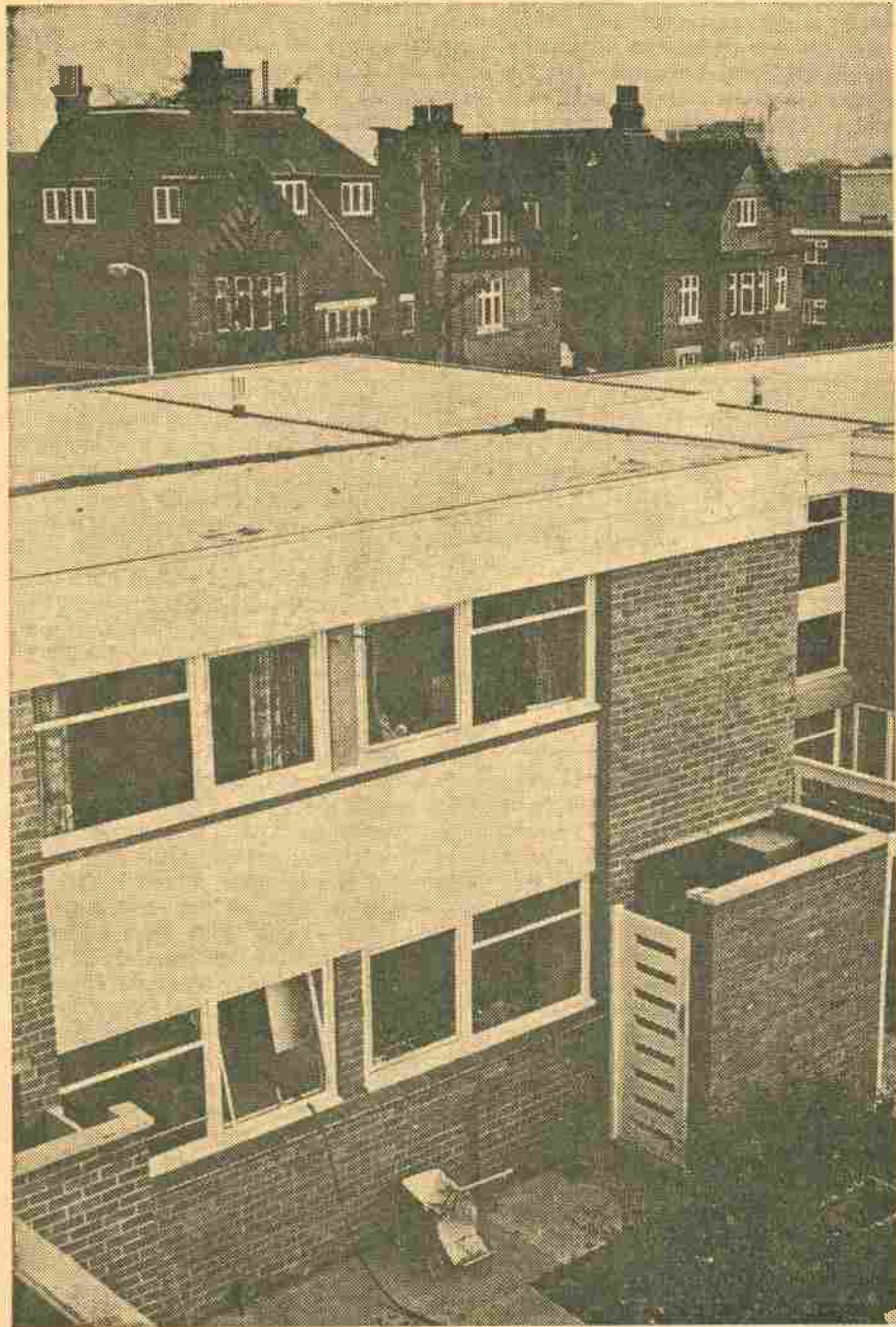
Richard Crossman is about to produce his national housing plan for 500,000 new homes a year by 1970. Plan or no, private builders and councils are going ahead on new estates. What they build too seldom meets people's requirements

John Barr; pictures by Tom Picton

Houses for people—1

By nightfall today another 1,000 families will have moved into new homes. Five years from today, if Richard Crossman's national housing plan is realised, about 1,400 new homes will be occupied each day of the year, half of them by owner-occupiers, half by council tenants. At this rate, by 1970 we may have built seven million new homes since the end of the war. How many of these seven million are now or will be *homes,* not simply "houses" or, even more chilling, "rateable dwelling units"?

Homes are for people. Even the most blinkered local authority or profit-hungry speculative builder does not contest that. But it is a point so obvious it is often ignored. Are we building the homes that people really want? Are we building the homes that are not only right for people today but for people ten, 20 or more years from today? In short, do we know what we are doing?



There are signs that too frequently we don't. Groping and guesswork, sometimes brilliantly right and sometimes distressingly wrong, characterise the work of that minority of planners and architects and builders who have imagination and who care. They try to create the homes that they think people want. The unimaginative and the don't-care majority whose products are a pox on the face of this country do not grope or guess. They have the smugness of the truly ignorant. They do not *think* they know what people want, they are sure they know: the two-storey, three-bedroom semi or terrace box in a long row on a long straight street, small garden to front and rear: the "standard article," as unconcerned developers call it.

But the people who live in houses are not "standard articles." Increasingly, in this overcrowded, underhoused, land-short and land-dear island they will have to live *en masse* on housing estates or what private builders like to call "residential developments." But a community of dwellings does not mean a uniformity of needs, demands, aspirations. The makers of things other than houses have long realised this. They have brought market research to bear; they have troubled themselves to find out what people really want; they have then satisfied those wants. They please the "average" buyer. They must. But they don't ignore all the others.

If they must bring out their products in 20 different colours or 20 different flavours, they do so. They offer choice, because they know that is what people want. It is, then, ironic that we know much more about people's frivolous wants than about their very serious ones. It is disgraceful that we know more about the kinds of frozen peas, washing powders and cosmetics that people want than we do about the kinds of homes they want.

Millions too late

To say that more research is needed is at once self-evident and hackneyed. It is possible to point to the dearth of existing research on the kind of housing people want. It is possible to note how seldom local authorities and spec builders use any research at all. It is possible to accuse the Ministry of Housing and Local Government for not seriously starting social research until five years ago—millions of homes too late. But none of these complaints is good enough. Some valuable evidence and opinions do exist, and answers must be sought.

If you ask planners and architects, builders and sociologists what kind of housing people want, you get speculations often with a certain uncomfortable flippancy about them: "People want something—or almost anything—other than what they have"; "Everyone wants a detached house with a quarter acre of private garden in a nice neighbourhood"; "People have such low wants; that's why they get such bad houses"; "There are as many answers as there are people; everyone's an expert on housing because everyone lives in a house." But perhaps the most frequent answer is simply "People just don't know; they've got to be educated to know."

There is some truth in all these answers. Human wants are often low; to the slum dweller moving to a new estate, running hot water may mean so much he cares little about anything else. People who know what they want are frequently inarticulate. Others are articulate to the point of fussiness: a house is

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If, then, there are no precise answers (for housing is too human a problem to be precise), it is still possible to outline broadly what most people who today or tomorrow move to a new home on a housing estate are seeking.

They want a sufficient but not suffocating degree of privacy. They want attractively designed homes in an attractive setting, whether urban, suburban or rural. They want play space for their children and they want gardens for themselves, whether private or communal. They want a solution for their motor cars that is convenient for them but not a danger for their children. They want to be part of a real and close community, conveniently near shops, pubs and other amenities; but they do not necessarily want to live "on top of each other," either figuratively or literally. They want homes that are warm and free from upsetting noise. Most of all, they want homes that are large enough and flexible enough to satisfy their changing needs not only today but 20 years or more from today.

How much privacy?

It may be agreed that all people desire a certain degree of privacy, but how much do they really want? Do they in fact need as much as they think they do? How much privacy can be preserved when housing densities are high? How high need densities be?

Many knowledgeable planners and architects groan at the very word "density" and scoff at the traditional ideas of "privacy." They consider the argument barren and old hat. But when pressed, they invariably turn out to be "high density men." They simply consider that the argument has long been settled, that pressures of population and economics make high densities and therefore a certain infringement of privacy self-evident. But the argument hasn't been settled, if only because those tiresome old words "privacy" and "density" are really a kind of shorthand for two much larger issues: how people want to live and how they have to live.

Architect Eric Lyons, who designs Span's private developments, sums up the question this way: "People want privacy, but not isolation." Builder Neil Wates says that today two of the three biggest problems he has to contend with are privacy and high density (the motor car is the third). The solution advanced by both Span and Wates is the low-rise, high-density communal estate whose architectural cunningness often preserves a remarkable amount of privacy. But is enough preserved? One resident on a Span estate near London condemned the lack of privacy; another told me "It's life in a goldfish bowl." A current study of middle class private housing estates in the Dulwich area by the Institute for Social Research supports these complaints. Many residents felt their homes were "not private enough" and "you can't go into the garden without being overlooked."

Yet an attitude survey of Wates communal estates now being undertaken by Research Services Limited, while finding the "stereotyped objection" that "privacy will be seriously prejudiced and this goes against the national character," has concluded that such estates have "substantial attractions" which on balance more than cancel out this objection.

Wyndham Thomas, director of the Town and Country Planning Association, acknowledges that people may today be willing to settle for, say, smaller gardens—"but they want no less privacy than ever." Architect Oliver Cox, though he considers "relatively high density economically and socially desirable," also considers that one of the architect's principal jobs is to try through design to reduce conflicts. Lack of privacy, he says, is a conflict point: "The pious social objectives of the housing estates in early New Towns met with disaster because the manager's wife did not want to be seen by the wife of the factory hand in the next terrace."

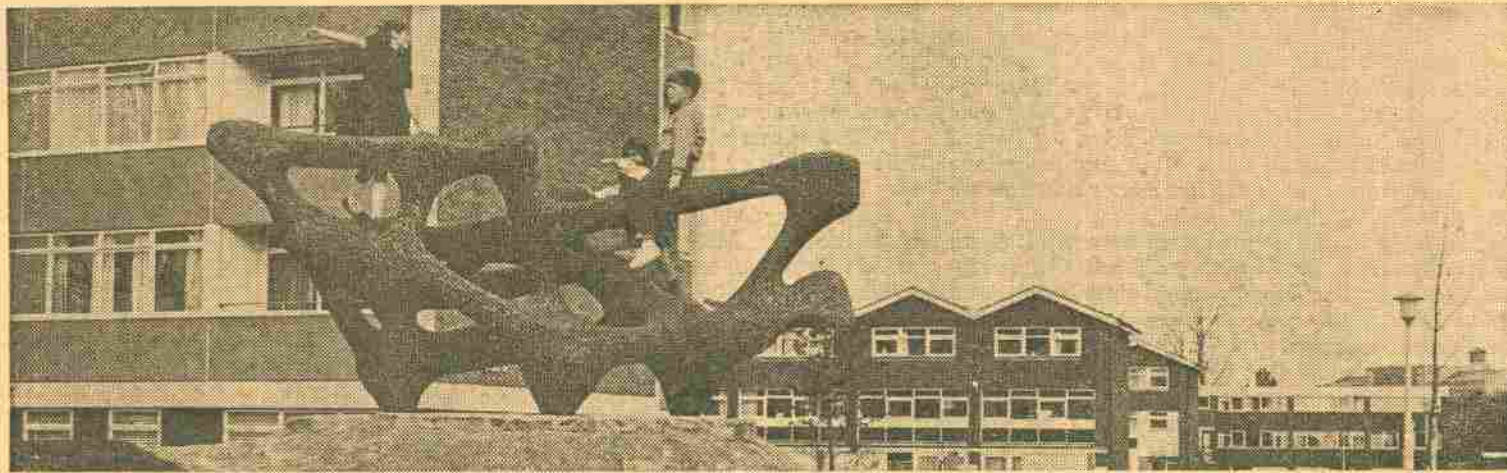
But surveys conducted by the sociological research section of the Ministry of Housing suggest that privacy knows no socio-economic bounds. In an unpublished study of 59 households on a new housing estate in Sheffield, the ministry found that most tenants wanted more privacy. In another ministry survey, "overlooking" and "lack of privacy" were cited by dissatisfied ground floor residents on council estates in Liverpool, Leeds and London.

On balance, perhaps the nearest thing to a satisfying answer to the complex question of how much privacy people want is that advanced by Richard MacCormac and Peter Willmott after revisiting the Radburn-style estate of Chells, Stevenage, last year: "Privacy is not an absolute; the designer's task is to strike the right balance. Nobody wants to be completely open to the gaze of others; but at the same time complete seclusion is not wanted by most people, and if more visual privacy is bought at the expense of other things, such as sun and a view, then it is not necessarily attractive."

There is no doubt that most owner-occupiers on private estates value highly the designs and settings

What kind of homes do people want?

Pictured left is a typical house on the Grange Estate, Ealing, a Wates private development. In the background are the more conventional housing shapes of suburbia. Below is part of the GLC's massive Warwick Estate rising from the slums and bomb sites of Paddington.



Children on the Ealing estate in their specially designed play area.

of their homes. A Gallup survey for Wates covering six estates, including those of competitors, found that high among the "most important facors when deciding on this place" were "liked the look of it" (60 per cent) and "layout/appearance of the estate" (36 per cent). Four out of five of the 588 householders interviewed said that architectural design does matter.

But it is often assumed that council tenants are blind to aesthetic design and to their immediate surroundings. Again, surveys would appear to undermine this assumption. John Greve's study of residents at Bournville found that the most frequent reason given for wanting to move was to find "a nicer neighbourhood." In the ministry study of council estates in London, Leeds and Liverpool, 23 per cent on the Ebor Gardens estate in Leeds and 21 per cent on the Loughborough estate in Lambeth praised the appearance of the estate as an important contribution to their contentment. None of the respondents on the Everton Heights estate in Liverpool liked the estate's appearance. Significantly, two fifths on the Liverpool estate rated themselves "rather dissatisfied," compared with one sixth in London and only one tenth in Leeds.

More than two families out of five in Britain contain children under 16. For them, safe and well-planned play space is a major wish.

Life in high blocks aggravates the problem. Mrs Joan Maizels's Rowntree Trust study of 200 families with children aged 2 to 5 living in high blocks in twelve London estates noted how frequently mothers felt their children were deprived of mixing with their peers. Estimates of the proportion of small children in high blocks who never get out to play with other children run as high as 75 per cent.

The ministry survey of the Liverpool estate found that the main grievance felt by 37 per cent of the sample was "unsatisfactory arrangements for play"; 41 of 53 housewives interviewed would have preferred houses or bungalows to high blocks mainly because "it would be better for the children."

In Leeds, 27 of 41 high block residents and in London 43 of 60 also wanted to move. But in their cases the main reason was to have a garden. Other ministry sociological studies in West Ham concluded that most people wanted gardens; many would be satisfied with small gardens, but not too small for hanging out clothes or for sitting in. The desire for a garden is almost universal.

In a section of the GLC Brandon estate, where each terrace house has a semi-private garden, separated from neighbours only by chain link fencing, the housewives I spoke to seemed well satisfied. They did not particularly want high walls or hedges, but they agreed they would be unhappy with no garden at all.

The Gallup survey for Wates found that of the total sample, 26 per cent wanted their own private plot plus a communal landscaped garden. But 35 per cent wanted a communally managed garden only. The current Research Services survey of four Wates estates has found that a majority of the 33 respondents feel a small patio and absence of a large garden a positive advantage.

Eric Lyons believes that "a garden, but no gardening" is everyone's dream. The fashion is certainly against private gardens. The planner or architect who favours them is liable to be labelled (as was one recently) "a greenery-vergery, Welwyn-type man." Welwyn has become a synonym for Neanderthal. Private gardens may be out of vogue, but there is no conclusive proof as yet that most Englishmen no longer want them.

Yet the garden has been brutally termed "a relic of the pedestrian age," the conclusion being that gardens are incompatible with motor cars, that in urban concentrations at least, we can't have both. Even so, there is no doubt that today's housing estate dweller (who most probably will want a small private garden) also wants adequate provision made for the motor car that in more than one case in three he is likely to own. The Road Research Laboratory has estimated that by 1980 there will be, on average, one car per household. Most enlightened housing schemes today allow one garage for each home. But other things are frequently sacrificed. In attacking the town expansion scheme in Ashford, Kent, economist Robin Best contends: "The car has got the better of it . . . the greater space allocated to cars (garages and offstreet parking) is simply subtracted from the area of dwellings and their curtilages."

Garages or street parking?

The TCPA survey *Housing in Britain* questions the 1:1 car/garage ratio and suggests that a garage is more wasteful of space than street parking. Yet many householders, such as both the Span residents and car-owning council tenants I spoke to, praise garages for eliminating the litter of cars on the street, dominating the landscape. Span residents praised the development's firm offstreet rules.

Whether it is garage or street parking or carports (which Neil Wates among others feels may be the solution), most people want their cars conveniently near their homes, so long as to do so does not create a safety hazard for children. The garage court is sometimes advanced as a compromise. But one structural engineer at the Building Research Station is convinced that "people want their garages in the curtilages of their homes; the drives can serve as parking for visitors, or for second cars. Garage courts are often an eye sore, too far away from the houses and people then leave their cars in the streets anyway."

Perhaps too much has been made by sociologists of the average man's longing to belong to a close community and of his miseries when transplanted from, say, a matey urban slum to a new and unmatey suburban housing estate. Yet there is no doubt that many housing estates have been failures simply because they have failed to create any real sense of community. Labyrinths of culs-de-sac and almost endless streets lead nowhere; shops and pubs and betting shops are not within easy reach, or if they are all in a too neat antiseptic little row; the street is no longer a meeting place. As Stanley Alderson has noted, some of the young postwar architects as well

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Children improvise their own play area as the Warwick Estate nears completion.

as most of the postwar sociologists have recognised these failures and set out to recreate slum-life mateyness at all levels of society: the private middle class estates as well as the council estate.

Mrs Rona Rumney, a Span communal estate resident at Blackheath, believes: "We have all the advantages without the disadvantages of a working class district. The estate has achieved a high degree of neighbourliness. We can go next door for the proverbial cup of sugar; and we do."

The ministry's 1960 housing survey found that 54 per cent of families trying to move in London would consider a high flat, but only 25 per cent in the rest of England and Wales. It is clear that most people do not prefer literally living on top of each other, yet they are often willing to do so in order to remain in a community that is familiar, to which they belong. A conclusion of the ministry's unpublished *Families at High Density* survey is that "very few wanted to move out of the centre of the city; and the relation of home to work, entertainment, shopping centres and the residences of relatives and friends seemed generally more important than the relation of home to ground level."

Only 7 per cent of British homes today have full or partial central heating. Too many substandard homes are still being built in which noise—inside, from outside, or both—is a real problem to the people who live in them. People want—and, when they have the choice, are increasingly coming to demand—homes that are insulated against both cold and noise. In the Gallup survey of private developments, 22 per cent said they chose a new rather than old house because it would be warmer; 40 per cent considered the provision of central heating a vital factor in choosing which new house.

In the same survey, two out of three owners were satisfied with the sound-proofing, but the figure for occupants of high flats dropped to one in two. Nearly 10 per cent said they could hear through walls, 16 per cent through ceilings (37 per cent in high flats), 9 per cent through both walls and ceilings. The ministry study of high blocks found that noise, especially from neighbours, was a serious problem. Oliver Cox considers heating one of the major "pinch-points" in building today. The Parker Morris report called for "greater attention to sound insulation." Everyone who lives in new homes would agree with both of them.

Most of all, people want homes that are large enough and flexible enough to meet their needs today and anticipate their needs tomorrow. Even in the Gallup survey of private homes of generally high standard, two out of three residents said they would make changes in purchasing a similar property again: 16 per cent would have more rooms, 21 per cent an additional WC, 11 per cent a bigger kitchen. In other words, space. The study of the Bournville estate showed the highest dissatisfaction in the 25-34 age group—young marrieds who were trying to find more space for their families. However, Ruth Glass of the Centre for Urban Studies reminds us that homes can sometimes be too large as well as too small. This is true, but the trouble is the same in both cases; inflexibility or, as Mrs Glass puts it, "too much uniformity in housing, far too many allegedly 'average' houses."

The ministry survey at West Ham found a strong desire among residents for the flexibility offered by two rather than only one living space. The ministry also found there was a need for partitions, especially to divide bedrooms as children grew older.

Experiments with open-plan design have not on balance been popular; it is difficult, for example, for adults to watch TV and teenagers to study at the same time.

The three-bedroom box

The two-storey, three-bedroom box that proliferates in Britain is right for many people at some time in their lives, but it is seldom flexible enough to meet their changing needs at all times. This is particularly the case when people grow old. Studies of the housing needs of elderly people have, however, produced contradictory results. A survey of old people in Chatham showed that two thirds felt the generations did not mix, but the other third preferred living near children. Julia Chesler's recent survey for the Institute for Social Research of the Abbey estate in southeast London found that though old people might tolerate their own grandchildren, they were less willing to put up with other people's children. A ministry sociological study of six schemes of grouped flats for old people found that 75 per cent preferred the ground floor, but other surveys have suggested that a high block with lifts is preferable. Old people are no more identical in their wants than younger ones.

Thus any discussion of the kind of homes people want reverts repeatedly and finally to the issue of choice. Social worker Audrey Harvey says: "If you were to ask housing officers they would probably tell you most people are getting fantastically choosey . . . I think it would be much nearer the truth to say that the choice they get is much too limited."

The answer to this problem is more than a matter of building more homes more rapidly. It is a question too of building a far greater variety of homes: for single people, for old people, for childless couples, for small and for large families, for couples when their children have grown up and left home. Professor David Donnison, discussing the results of the British Market Research Bureau survey for the Rowntree Trust Housing Study, concludes that "the variety of human needs is not matched by a similar variety of housing."

The Ministry of Housing, the GLC and some other enlightened local authorities, the more responsible speculative builders have made a start on providing varied and flexible homes. But only a start. The design of housing estates, both public and private, has been improving since the early 1960s. But not quickly enough. Amid the dreary and sterile landscape of most postwar housing is the occasional estate of homes that are good to look at and good to live in. But still too few of them. We are still a long way from providing enough of the kind of homes that people really want.

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At the heart of the Rhodesian would fare under majority ru have

A few years ago it was the proble minority in Kenya which were urg the turn of the Rhodesians. They minority and the difficulties are greater, but the experience of Kenya nent piece of real evidence on what the Europeans under majority rule.

Kenya, like Rhodesia, was a settl tween 1900 and 1920 about 12,000 land in the highlands, mostly over settled and the foundations of the laid down. The prosperous calm of t was abruptly broken by the outbre Mau" fighting from the Kikuyu, tribes. As military measures restored rupted development was taken u vigour in an astonishing outburst ment in 1957-59 which made the sub of confidence all the more alarming.

The constitutional conference h House in January and February 196 policy of self-rule and rapid indepen Europeans, especially those born in had settled a lifetime in the country their homeland, this was their dark doned by kith and kin, a sacrifice politics, they tended the refugees and awaited their turn. Stage by was implemented and as the anticipa tinued to be absent, the fearful b again.

Following independence, proclaim ber 1963, there have been many c mutiny was quickly suppressed wit the elaborate regional constitution tribal fears has been abolished and tion party has liquidated itself. Th an East African federation are no politics and some of the excitemen to more mundane preoccupations ment, the harvest, investment and th ments. Some Europeans come, rath many remain. How many are they fare?

There are now around 40,000 Eur with 60,000 in 1960. In previous yea

EUROPEAN POPULATION OF KENYA

	mid-year estimate	"permanent" immigration	emig
1959	60,000	4,681	3,
1960	61,000	3,628	3,
1961	59,000	3,204	6,
1962	56,000	3,956	8,
1963	53,000	3,789	8,
1964	49,000	3,500	6,
1965	41,000		

Source: Kenya Statistical Abstract.

an excess of immigration over emig 1960 there has been a continued out shows. This has also been the exp bouring Uganda and Tanganyika, al are smaller and the true "settler" nity less significant.

The "out" and the "in" flow has nationality. In 1963, there was a *n* British nationals of 3,988, by South and by nationals of the "British Co 331. This contrasted with a *net* American, Dutch and German nati pean community is becoming