

# The needs of new communities

A report on social provision in new and  
expanding communities

Prepared by a Sub-Committee of the Central Housing Advisory  
Committee

*CHAPTER 4*

*THE NEEDS OF NEW COMMUNITIES*  
*EDUCATION - PP 34-45*

*WITH PERMISSION*  
*BRITISH INFORMATION SERVICES*  
*2/71*

London Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1967

Reprinted 1968

### **Day nurseries and nursery schools**

**119** We discuss day nurseries and nursery schools together since, although the first is a 'health' service and the latter an 'educational' service, they both cater, though to a differing extent, for the pre-school child. The 'health' service started during the second world war with wartime nurseries. Following the war a Ministry of Health Circular (No. 221/1945) stated that general provision for children under

five was to be made by nursery schools (i.e. under the Ministry of Education). Day nurseries were to be regarded as a supplementary service for the special needs of those children whose mothers were 'incapable for some good reason of undertaking the full care of their children'. In practice, there have been few nursery schools to supplement because the limited educational resources have been concentrated on providing for children of statutory school age and beyond.

**120** It would be going far beyond our terms of reference to discuss all the relevant issues here, and in any case at the time of writing the Central Advisory Council on Education (the Plowden Committee) were undertaking a comprehensive review of the educational needs of children under five. We feel bound, however, to comment because on no other issue was the evidence submitted to us so clear and overwhelming as on the need for a greatly expanded provision for this age-group.

**121** There are several reasons for this. First the composition of the population of new communities is such that even a normal proportionate demand would give rise to a large absolute demand. Secondly, since many families are separated from their relatives and friends there is less chance for mothers to entrust their children to the care of someone whom they know and trust. Thirdly the financial strains on a young family building a new home can necessitate the mother going out to work. Finally, even if there is no such necessity many mothers wish to go out to work part-time for the companionship and social satisfaction which this affords.

**122** These are 'community' rather than 'educational' arguments for nursery provision, but we note from the evidence submitted to us by the Department of Education and Science that their policy is to approve new nursery schools 'when they are likely to make it possible for married women who have been trained as teachers to return to the profession but not otherwise'.

**123** The policy of the Ministry of Health is to agree to the building of new day nurseries where over fifty per cent of the places will be used by children with special needs or where there are special local difficulties and slightly less than fifty per cent of the places will be so used.

**124** *Though we cannot anticipate the Plowden Committee's recommendations we urge that when policy is reviewed in the light of these recommendations consideration should be given to the special needs of new communities.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Plowden Committee have now reported and have recommended that 'there should be a large expansion of nursery education'. They also maintain that 'the planning of accommodation for nursery groups should become as much a commonplace in the development of new areas as that of other community facilities'; and that 'until enough maintained places are available local education authorities should be given power and should be encouraged to give financial and other assistance to non-profit making associations which, in their opinion, fill a need they cannot meet'. For a full account (including the arguments for part-time nursery education, and the role of day nurseries) see Chapter 9 of the Report, *Children and their Primary Schools*, Volume 1, HMSO, 1967.



**125** Private nurseries and play groups have increased greatly in recent years and local authorities can assist by way of the provision of sites and buildings. Where the organisation concerned is a voluntary body some local authorities have been able to go further and give direct financial assistance. In many areas groups of housewives have formed pre-school play groups and we believe there is considerable scope for more voluntary activity the need for more provision is urgent and action should not be delayed for any re-appraisal of policy which may follow the Plowden Report. *We recommend that local authorities of expanding towns should review the provision for pre-school children in their areas and assess what further provision can be made within the constraints of current policy either by themselves or by voluntary bodies.* This recommendation is relevant also to authorities who fall outside the scope of our inquiry.

## Education

**126** All expanding areas face difficulties in meeting the demand for school places. They must forecast the number of school age children who can be expected; match the school-building programme with the housing development; and ensure that the provision will meet future as well as immediate needs.

**127** Though all new communities tend to have a large number of children of school age the actual proportion may differ markedly between different schemes. As an illustration of the range, in four new communities the proportion of the incoming population who were under the age of five ranged from 15.5 per cent to 23.0 per cent; the five to under-fifteen group ranged from 15.7 per cent to 40.5 per cent. In established communities school places are being provided on a basis of a birth rate of 18 per thousand. The evidence from Hertfordshire County Council noted that their experience had led them to revise the provision of school places in new towns on a basis of a birth rate which it was thought would ultimately level out at about 22 per thousand. Some of the figures supplied to us by Hertfordshire County Council are reproduced below. They relate to five neighbourhood areas in Hemel Hempstead.

	1960	1961	1962	1963
Adeyfield	25.6	24.8	25.1	25.7
Bennetts End	33.3	26.9	25.9	24.0
Chaulden	39.7	44.1	40.8	37.1
Warners End	27.7	40.1	38.4	36.1
Gadebridge	31.1	29.9	29.0	36.3
Total for town	32.6	30.2	29.9	30.1
National average	17.5	17.7	18.3	18.2

It is clear that a continuous check must be kept on demographic trends in new areas, so that authorities know in good time for what they have to provide.

**128** Some part of the 'bulge' problem can be met by expedients such as temporary classrooms though these can lead to problems. For instance, temporary classrooms are usually erected on hard playing areas or on playingfields and therefore the total amount of space available is reduced though the number of children who share these limited facilities is increased. A further disadvantage is that they may lead to excessive use of specialist classrooms which may in turn lead to a serious drop in educational quality. Moreover cloakrooms, toilets and diningrooms will have to be used by more children than they were designed for.

**129** Temporary classrooms may avoid the problem of overproviding with school places. The evidence we have received suggests that overprovision is unlikely to happen in practice except in very rapidly expanding areas. We note that in the new towns at least a comparatively high level of demand has continued. Our own view is that the problem can be met by better forward planning and a better population balance, e.g. by the intake of old people. Above all, provision should be related to local needs rather than to national averages.

**130** In some areas a considerable number of children will require denominational schools. It is important that this need should be anticipated and that consultations be made with the appropriate authorities.

### **Further education and recreation**

**131** The wider educational and recreational needs of a new community are of vital importance. These needs imply larger catchment areas which in turn may require a sub-regional or regional approach. The *Education Act, 1944* places on local education authorities the *duty* of securing the provision of facilities for the further education of persons over school-leaving age, and for the leisure-time occupation of such persons in organised cultural, training and recreative activities as are suited to their requirements. They are also required by the Act to secure that the facilities for primary, secondary and further education include adequate facilities for recreation and social and physical training, and for that purpose they have power to provide camps, holiday classes, playing fields, play centres, gymnasias, swimming baths, etc. They can also co-operate with voluntary societies or bodies whose objects include the provision of similar facilities. (Other statutory powers under which various amenities can be provided or contributions made to voluntary bodies are listed in Appendix C).

132 With this abundance of powers, and with enterprise and initiative on the part of the local authorities, the scope for providing a new community with an extensive range of educational and recreational facilities is clearly very great, though as we show in Chapter 6 the restrictions imposed by finance are severe.

133 Though there are large numbers of young married people and young children there are relatively few in the older teenage group at the start of an expansion scheme. This situation lasts for only a comparatively short time: the 'bulge' of young children begins to form a 'bulge' of school-leavers after some ten or fifteen years. This is not a long time to build up the scale of services which will be required, particularly since the basis on which the expanded services must develop is likely to be a small one. As the report on *The Needs of Youth in Stevenage*<sup>1</sup> pointed out:

'We conclude, then, provision for youth in Stevenage is doubtfully adequate to its existing needs, and certainly inadequate as a basis of expansion on a scale commensurate with the spectacular increase in the young population. In a new community, which must bear the shock of continuing large-scale immigration during a period when its own physical environment is still in process of formation, this situation holds grave dangers. These might express themselves in the loss and wastage of much that is best in the youth: and in the degradation of what is worst. 'We have no gangs now', a witness told us, 'but I greatly fear that we may have them'. Our investigations have shown this fear to be widely entertained'.

134 The problem is how to sow and foster the seeds of growth in order that a rapid and durable expansion can take place on the large scale which will be required as the youth in the new community increases. This requires careful planning as well as coping with the difficulty of attracting youth leaders from a population whose adult members are heavily preoccupied with family and home commitments and whose freedom and leisure to undertake voluntary work are thus restricted.

135 A new community has both an exceptional need and an exceptional opportunity of starting almost if not completely from scratch. But the very newness also constitutes a major element in the exceptional need. The Albermarle Report<sup>2</sup>, in speaking of 'the young people enjoying the first-class housing, schools and shops' in new communities pinpoints the problem:

'Homes are more attractive, but beyond, nearly all are strangers. The street corners are quiet and uninviting with their searching sodium lamps, and their lack of familiar lights and smells. It is all houses or flats, perhaps occasionally a pub or church, but rarely a coffee bar or a place provided for young people to meet. The present generation of teenagers, the first in these towns and areas, is cut off from

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<sup>1</sup> *The Needs of Youth in Stevenage: A Report to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation*, published by the Foundation, 1959.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education, *The Youth Service in England and Wales*, Cmd. 929, HMSO, 1960, p.20.



the traditional forms of face-to-face social education in the long-established neighbourhoods.

It is hardly surprising that many young people get out of these areas where boredom reigns, as quickly and as often as they can. They make for the nearest established town or simply the nearest main road where they can race up and down on their motorbikes'.

**136** The Albermarle Report<sup>1</sup> has much useful advice on how the youth service can (at the local as well as the national level) develop in response to contemporary needs. We draw attention to their concern for the problem in new communities:

'New schools and new housing are setting the standard of physical provision; television too plays a part in accustoming young people to attractive surroundings. Commercial interests recognise this and woo the teenager with plush and chromium. The lesson for the Youth Service, whether voluntary or statutory, is plain. It needs to take account of the worthy desire young people have for a bright and gay background, a desire they express in their choice of colourful and unconventional clothes.

'We hope to see a number of specially designed youth centres built, particularly in areas such as new towns and housing estates which by their nature are lacking in other available premises. Such buildings can provide unrivalled opportunities for drawing in the unattached and for the formation and meeting of informal groups. Ideally they should contain, in addition to the coffee bar and the larger rooms for dancing and games, a number of small rooms for the use of such groups . . . . Inevitably the provision of youth centres will be costly, but in one way they are economical: they give an opportunity to make the most effective use of first-class leadership—without which, indeed, their potential can never be achieved'.

**137** A discussion of the needs of youth brings us to the subject of sport. This has been dealt with extensively in recent reports, particularly that of the Wolfenden Committee<sup>2</sup>. A wider range of grants under the *Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937* is now available to voluntary bodies, and local authorities have been urged to use their powers to make adequate provision for sport and recreation. A joint circular of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and the Department of Education and Science has pointed to the need for collaboration between local authorities, voluntary organisations and other agencies, in improving and extending facilities for sport and physical recreation. A Sports Council has been established at the Department of Education and Science and eleven Regional Sports Councils have been set up—nine in England, one in Wales and one in Scotland, consisting principally of representatives of local authorities though with members of voluntary organisations. These Regional Councils have been asked to survey their areas and to assess the adequacy of existing facilities. Local authorities have been urged to review their administrative machinery 'with the aim of facilitating

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education, *The Youth Service in England and Wales*, Cmd. 929, HMSO, 1960, p.20.

<sup>2</sup> Sport and the Community, Central Council of Physical Recreation, 1960.

the development of a community policy for provision for recreation as a whole'<sup>1</sup>.

**138** This is an area in which there is a bewildering number of organisations. Administrative co-ordination is therefore of vital importance. Because the need for planning and co-ordination in all aspects of town development is so great we offer some guide lines on these subjects in the following chapter. Here we are concerned with the important issue of standards of provision.

**139** The first point which must be made is that standards can be put forward only as a guide. As a *Technical Memorandum*<sup>2</sup> of the Department of Education and Science has pointed out :

'By their nature they are no more than generalised statements of minimum requirements based on conditions that are normally and locally applicable but are not universally so. They are useful as a starting point in the assessment of demand and as a check to conclusions, but they can mislead if they are accepted uncritically and applied indiscriminately'.

**140** The National Playing Fields Association recommend at least six acres of land per 1,000 population for playing space and at least one acre for parks and public gardens. This provision excludes private open space not available to the public, full-length golf courses and school playing fields. Minimum standards for schools sites are laid down in statutory regulations,<sup>3</sup> but school playing fields are not generally open to the public.

**141** The N.P.F.A. standard is expressed in relation to the population of an area as a whole.<sup>4</sup> When the standard was first recommended in 1925 about a half of the national population were between the ages of 10 and 40 years when active games are mostly played. Of the '500 per thousand' between these ages it was assumed that probably 150 did not desire to play games or were prevented from doing so by physical infirmity, while a further 150 would be attending schools or colleges with their own recreational provisions during school hours and terms. Thus (excluding the holiday requirements of those attending schools or colleges) approximately 200 in every thousand remained who were neither too young nor too old for organised games and other outdoor recreation. Six acres of land, provided it is of suitable shape and reasonably level, will only just accommodate one senior football pitch, one junior or hockey pitch, one cricket table, one three-rink bowling green, two tennis courts, plus room for a small children's playground of about half an acre, and a pavilion.

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<sup>1</sup> *Provision of Facilities for Sport*, Ministry of Housing and Local Government Circular No. 49/64; Department of Education and Science Circular No. 11/64, HMSO, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> *Provision for Sport and Recreation*, Sports Council Memorandum 1965.

<sup>3</sup> *Open Spaces*, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Technical Memorandum No. 6, MHLG, 1956.

<sup>4</sup> The following is reproduced from the 1955 Memorandum of the NPFA on *Standard of Playing Space*.



**142** According to paragraph 211 of the Final Report<sup>1</sup> of the New Town's Committee 'It is essential, therefore, that adequate open spaces be provided in the town plan. The total amount should not be at a lower rate than about ten acres per 1,000 population, apart from school playing fields.....'.

**143** The N.P.F.A. consider their standard of 6 acres is still the minimum requirement even though the number of persons in the 10-40 age group is now 400 per 1,000. In new communities the number will be much higher than 400. The implications are therefore that the standard of provision should be higher as well as subject to constant review<sup>2</sup>. Of course what is required will vary according to local circumstances.

**144** The evidence which we have received suggests that an adequate recreational programme which takes into account future leisure-time needs is bound to appear lavish and unrealistic to some. Whereas road traffic engineers can call upon statistical techniques to show the extent of future needs there is no similar technique yet available to produce accurate forecasts of future social needs. Certain revised standards for some leisure activities are gradually emerging (e.g. for swimming-baths, advice on which can be obtained from Ministry of Housing and Local Government's Sports Officer). But generally speaking there is a shortage of advice on which those responsible for the planning of new communities can draw. We feel bound therefore to draw attention to the pressures building up everywhere for new guide lines in the light of the increased mobility of the population and the vastly increased interest in all forms of leisure activities.

**145** In view of the guidance which we anticipate is to be forthcoming from the central government departments we have not felt it appropriate for us to attempt to duplicate the work which is being carried out elsewhere. *We urge that, when the necessary work has been done to allow guidelines to be prepared, particular consideration should be given to the special needs of new communities.*

**146** We also wish to comment on the scale of provision and the particular needs of young children. Opportunities for play are essential for the normal growth and development of a child. 'Our children from their earliest years must take part in all the more lawful forms of play, for if they are not surrounded with such an atmosphere they can never grow up to be well conducted and virtuous citizens.'<sup>3</sup> There are various theories about why it is so important for children to play, but there appears to be agreement among educationalists that through such spontaneous activity children acquire not only

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<sup>1</sup> Comd. 6876, HMSO.

<sup>2</sup> Scales of provision are being reviewed by a 'Standards of Provision' Committee of the Sports Council in the light of present day trends and demands and a report will be published in 1967.

<sup>3</sup> Plato: The Republic.

skills but 'imagination, self-reliance, self-control, and the capacity to co-operate with others.'<sup>1</sup>

147 Even with improved standards of space in the home there is seldom a room available in which children can play without interruption. The gardens of new and expanding town houses are frequently small, and the more pride is taken in them, the less likely are they to be a place where children can play freely.

148 Parents therefore are dependent in the main on other resources, such as the school, park or recreation ground, for their children's play. There is scope for experiment in this provision. Experience suggests that there is a need for local playgrounds preferably with supervision, storage space and playroom. Informal play spaces are needed within housing groups and an arrangement which has been successfully adopted in some instances is a grouping of houses with their private gardens opening onto the communal space in which children can play in complete safety. Sometimes it is possible to leave a piece of ground as a natural playground with trees and shrubs which the children will make their own.

149 There are three new trends in the provision of play facilities. Whilst swings, slides and other mechanical equipment are still popular with children, attempts are now made to fit these into the landscape instead of placing them on a flat, hard surface. Slides can be let into a bank, and children can climb artificial hills made from excavated materials left on the building site.

150 Secondly, there is a growing recognition that children very quickly tire of fixed equipment, and if they are to be absorbed for long periods they need opportunities for imaginative games, to use sand, water and earth, to build camps, light fires, make things with their hands, and have access to wood and nails, paint and clay.

151 Thirdly, there is the recognition that such things are possible only if there are friendly adults to supervise (but not organise) these activities, and to be responsible for the equipment. A trained play leader knows how to encourage and help a child who may not be getting sufficient encouragement at home.

152 From all this it will be appreciated that play space whether to be supervised or not must be planned as an integral part of the design. This applies equally to public and private enterprise housing developments. Since there are opportunities in a new area to plan for leisure-time activities as a whole, including those for children of school age and under, it is very important that the appropriate local authorities and other bodies should be consulted so that their views may be known and their needs incorporated from the start.

153 In high density building it is essential to have a minimum stan-

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<sup>1</sup> D. E. M. Gardner: International Council for Children's Play Report 1960.

dard of play space, and the Parker Morris Committee<sup>1</sup> suggested a standard which can be roughly calculated as  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre per 1,000 of the population but doubt is thrown on the adequacy of this standard by a new study<sup>2</sup>. In low density areas it is possible to have a much more generous standard. The number of children, however, who can play happily together in one play area will depend more on the design, layout, equipment and supervision than on the amount of space. A reasonable size for a supervised play space might be  $\frac{3}{4}$ –1½ acres.

*154 We think that a much deeper study than we have been able to undertake is needed of the issues involved here. We recommend that this should be considered by the Minister of Housing and Local Government and the Secretary of State for Education and Science.*

### **Shared recreational facilities**

**155** Secondary schools in particular can make a very important contribution to the facilities of a new community. (In primary schools the scale of the furniture and equipment limits the scope for their use by adults). It has been common for the halls of conventionally designed secondary schools to be used by the adult community during the evenings for meeting and musical and dramatic performances. Other teaching accommodation is often used by evening institutes. In some areas schools have been the only buildings available for communal use.

**156** While a great deal can be done within schools which have been designed solely with the needs of pupils in mind, much more would be possible if schools were designed from the outset for the joint use of both school children and the adult community (with of course due regard to the necessary safeguards). Development along these lines has been commended to local authorities in a joint circular of the Department of Education and Science and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government<sup>3</sup> and also in building bulletins issued by the former. While there are indications that a trend in this direction is developing there are still few examples on the ground.

**157** There is, of course, a financial problem here. Yet, though it is clearly more expensive to provide a school with facilities which can be used by the community as a whole, it is even more expensive in total to provide completely separate facilities.

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<sup>1</sup> *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, HMSO, 1961, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> *Children's Play on Housing Estates*, National Building Studies Research Paper No. 39, HMSO, 1966  
Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Circular 49/64; Department of Education and Science, Circular 11/64 *Provision of facilities for Sport*.



## Meeting places

**158** Meeting places can be provided under a variety of different powers. (See Appendix C). Though they will serve the needs of only a section of the community we view them not only as important places for individuals to meet one another but also as making valuable provision for a wide variety of organisations and groups with different interests.

**159** In expanding towns there are likely to be three levels of provision to be considered by those responsible for the initial planning: good central facilities of the large social centre variety, a community centre at the local level and the tenants' clubroom type of accommodation in the residential areas. In most small developments it is likely that only two of these levels will be required. Sites might also be left available for organisations who wish to provide their own specialist buildings.

**160** As far as timing is concerned the immediate need at the start of the development will be for a tenants' clubroom or a small local community centre which can be expanded or contracted if necessary at a later stage. Whether all three levels of provision will be necessary will depend on the size of the new development, the distance from the town centre and the adequacy of the existing social provision.

**161** We are reinforced in these views by the results of an enquiry by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government on *Meeting Places for Hire in New Towns*,<sup>1</sup> the main findings of which are summarised below.

The study covered ten of the well-established new towns and was aimed at providing an assessment of the amount, suitability and convenience of existing meeting places. A large proportion of the members of adult clubs and societies were found to come from all parts of the town, the exception being old people's clubs and about half the women's groups. In addition over 80 per cent of the more specialist activities like those related to sport, arts and culture, and hobbies draw some of their members from outside the town.

Many of the premises where rooms are hired by social organisations are primarily serving some other purpose or groups and bookings are accepted only when their own activities are not taking place. If conditions are attached to the letting or the building is designed for a specific purpose it may not be suitable environment for other groups. According to the Study the main need is therefore for large publicly-provided central premises not related to any neighbourhood, and specifically designed for its purpose and administered by a manager.

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<sup>1</sup> The study was carried out by Miss Margaret Willis of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. It has not been published.

To estimate the amount of type of provision required in local areas it is important to know the kind of groups that draw members from the immediate neighbourhood. Overwhelmingly, they are the activities and groups catering for children and young people like the Scouts, Guides, Boys Brigade etc., the clinics and welfare services, the Sunday Schools, the dancing and nursery classes, and a few youth groups which hire premises.

The other sections of the community which require local meeting places are the elderly particularly if they are without private transport and the mothers whose young children restrict them to the locality.

In the survey, each organisation was asked to choose the type of building in which they would prefer to meet. The self-contained hut was popular primarily with the children and youth groups, and secondly with women's organisations. A high proportion of old people's clubs said that they had no preference. Therefore, a robust building suitably designed for play and games with a kitchen and side rooms is suggested. Sound insulation is an important feature if the centre caters for a variety of activities at the same time.

An important aspect of design is that of *storage*. Many organisations said they would prefer to have exclusive accommodation in order to have adequate storage and be able to leave their equipment etc. Therefore plenty of store cupboards, even store rooms rented exclusively to each organisation, would increase satisfaction among groups using a communal centre.

Present hiring fees are very low ; 21 per cent of the social organisations in the Survey, which admittedly includes many youth groups, are not paying hiring fees at all and a further third are paying less than 10s. a meeting. Most organisations (three-quarters) do not appear able or willing to pay more, even for better accommodation. At the moment hiring fees are either subsidised (by the local education authority) or nominal by special arrangements with a church or voluntary body, or covered by a small weekly subscription paid by the members. Any future developments, therefore, need to be viewed against this financial background.

**162** We stress that the Survey relates to well-established new towns. Though the main need there (and possibly in the expanding towns which have made similar progress) is for central premises, the immediate need in a town just starting or in the early stages of expansion is for a local meeting place.