

Moor Pool Residents Association.

An Alternative Way

Forward?

The Moor Pool Estate
Harborne
Birmingham.

A little history.

As Chairman of the Housing Committee of Birmingham City Council, John Nettlefold took a stance against slum clearance and municipal house building, and instead repaired unsanitary houses in the city centre under Part II of the Housing of Working Classes Act, 1890. At the same time, Nettlefold advocated the introduction of a German-style town extension plan under the influence of T.C. Horsfall's book and from his own experience from visits to German towns. In the report to the city council in 1906, Nettlefold proposed town planning and municipal land purchase in the suburbs to prevent the creation of future slums. Enthused by what they had seen, the Housing Committee recommended that there should be powers to control development in new areas to ensure a better distribution of houses and provision of roads, and to buy land in the suburbs where private enterprise could be encouraged to build working men's houses at moderate rents. In moving in this direction, Birmingham was emerging as one of the first British local authorities to espouse Town Planning ideas which have since been taken as basic principles influencing the type and direction of development. It was Nettlefold who popularised the term 'town planning' in Britain. Thus Nettlefold, in collaboration with the garden city movement, played a unique role in the British town planning movement until the enactment of the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909.

Nettlefold intent on proving that these radical ideas for town planning could work, took up an option on 36 and subsequently a further 18 acres of land to the north of Harborne. A Committee was set up for the formation of a Society on Co-partnership lines which became Harborne Tenants Ltd. The company was founded to promote the erection, co-operative ownership and administration of houses on the lands at Moor Pool. Substantially built houses would be built and let at ordinary rents to pay a moderate amount of interest on the capital and to divide the surplus profits after expenses amongst the tenant members in proportion to the rents paid by them. Profits would be divided in shares.

As an example of community planning in Birmingham, Moor Pool was indeed radical. It contrasted starkly with the back-to-back housing within the City.

The Harborne Tenants Ltd is an illustration of a garden suburb undertaking on a small scale and it was prophesied that in three years it would come to bankruptcy. Instead it was in precisely three years that it won financial success. There are 2 important points I would ask you to bear in mind.

Firstly Moor Pool is an almost complete example of the original Estate. Harborne Tenants despite what must have been considerable cost in maintaining the tenanted properties kept the Estate remarkably intact. English Heritage (Michael Taylor) said: *'There appears to be every reason to regard Moor Pool as very significant historically and architecturally on at least a regional level. Kim (Auston) called it an 'exceptional survival'.*

Secondly, we have come full circle. Many of the values put forward by Nettlefold are now considered significant features of ecological and sustainable communities. No one is suggesting we should now be building arts and craft style house in new communities elsewhere. The Town and Country Planning Association however does think there are important lessons to be learned from garden suburbs such as Moor Pool and cities such as Welwyn.

So, you have an important example of British social architecture in your possession. You can't take a classic car and bolt in a modern engine without compromising its integrity and importance. Moor Pool's greatest value is its community and what has forged it. This comes from the open spaces, the clubs and community facilities. These are the examples that need to be maintained and demonstrated as examples elsewhere.

We ask you to seriously consider whether the returns for building a very limited number of house outweigh the possibility of a financial return by selling these areas to a Trust; the positive publicity you would generate by working in partnership with us and the opportunity to divest yourself of the long term responsibility to manage skittle alleys, bowling greens, a hall which needs serious investment and allotments which have been allowed to seriously deteriorate. And of course you have unfortunately acquired a piece of architectural history for which you are the custodians and bear responsibility for its future.

You have an opportunity to set in motion an exit strategy which, if we work together, can reflect extremely positively on Grainger. When approaching other developments you will be able to demonstrate a successful involvement with a classic example of a British architectural period rather than a sorry tale of pensioners, allotment holders and residents fighting to save their valued community. You would be wrong, if you think the only ones who are fighting this battle are those who live near the development. Grainger will find it hard to justify bulldozing

allotments whatever 'compensation' you believe you have put in place, even if this act is carried out by some unsuspecting developer who purchases the land.

To give you a flavour of the possibilities that exists and what we could achieve together I have enclosed some pictures and commentary. I do not expect any commitment on your visit today, but I hope these ideas will give food for thought and encourage you to explore matters further with us.



Site B is a potential area for an enclosed community garden.

Moor Pool lacks an open space suitable for open air events or gatherings. This was apparent at last years Moor Pool Festival. The Tennis Courts and Bowling Green are unsuitable for large numbers of people to walk on them without causing damage. Site B has the potential to be developed as a communal garden. If the Valley Site allotments are restored, Site B could be turned to this use. It would be important to ensure its proper use and security.



All rights reserved Ye Old Valley A. Hall Home Tenants, May, '09. [Bradshaw's, Harbarn

In 1909, the area was briefly used for the May Day Festivities. We would be keen to work with the adjacent Moor Pool Tennis Club with the possibility of creating a new clubhouse with deck area for occasional outdoor theatre by the Moor Pool Players.



Site A, Allotment restoration proposal.

The Valley Site was originally all allotments and part of an open space leading from the east of the Estate all the way to the Hall at the centre. This is why it is so significant. These allotments led down from the backs of gardens to the stream which flowed down the centre and which is one of the reasons for the frequent flooding. From Carless Avenue to the bottom of the Valley Site there are many instances of underground springs and wet land

exacerbated by the road system which channels water towards these areas. Not only would restoration of allotments be of great value but natural flood alleviation would be incorporated.



Moor Pool’s threatened allotments.

Despite what has been stated, the majority of Site A’s allotments were not overgrown and continue to be used. The soil and location are extremely good and one resident is able to grow grapes in profusion on the south facing side. The suggestion that these allotments can be excavated, have hedges removed and the new Suds drainage system be easily maintained in the future without permanent consequences is quite wrong.



Moor Pool’s threatened allotments and hedges.



Moor Pools threatened allotments.



Overlooking Site A.



Another threatened allotment.



Site A Flooding.

We are committed to restoration of the Estate. Through our Moor Pool in Bloom project many residents have already formed work parties to clear areas which have fallen into disrepair under your management. This will continue and this year we will be entering Britain in Bloom. This is to the credit of the work carried out by residents not Grainger. We intend to continue our programme with a further entry next year and beyond and we think that Moor Pool's special nature can only work in our favour. It is a great opportunity for Grainger to partner with us. That is a better way forward than having to apologise for the permanent scar on Moor Pool's landscape which the Valley Site development will be.

Lastly there is the Builders Yard. Harborne Tenants not only managed but maintained the Estate with their own employees based at the Builders Yard. This was built to serve the Estate. It is a basically sound building and any prospect of demolition would be vigorously opposed. In any case Grainger have given assurances that there is no intention to develop in this area. We propose that this building is turned into a satellite 'outdoor' classroom as a cross curricular education resource for Station Road Junior School, the local community and any other schools that may wish to use it. The 'classroom' will be located in a refurbished Builders Yard Offices. Station Road Junior school has negligible green space and this is an opportunity to provide a resource which will not just to help deliver the national curriculum, but also educate children (and adults) about their environment and how they can help safeguard it for future generations. Station Road Junior School is only a short walking distance away and the adjacent ground could be cleared for allotment use and outdoor projects. The classroom could also be used for meeting purposes. Such use has the support of the school and would be highly likely to attract grant funding – to a charitable body. With

little support required other than co-operation from yourselves you would benefit from a very PR friendly project.



The Builders Yard.

The only way a Trust which can take over the community facilities of Moor Pool can be considered is if the restoration ideas put forward for the Estate are attractive to grant bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund. These have to be of lasting benefit so that revenue income is possible too.

Only a Trust formed to benefit the people of Moor Pool would want to take over the community facilities. Suggestions by Tim Nicholson that the Moor Pool Hall might be converted to residential use are a non starter.

We have made several attempts to start this dialogue before. It is the residents who have secured substantial funding towards a viability study for a trust which Grainger have not supported financially.

I suggest then that despite our differences there is opportunity to work together for our mutual benefit. I hope you and your colleagues will give serious thought to what can be achieved and whether for both parties this alternative way forward is the better way forward.

Rob Sutton.

Chair Moor Pool Residents Association.



And finally.

In his opening address at the sod cutting ceremony on the 26th October 1907, Dr William Gore said:

"They were perfectly conscious that the housing problem lay at the very root of social reform. There must be better houses, more room, more gardens and more open spaces for the children. The Harborne Tenants aspired to provide houses under these conditions within the means of workmen and artisans.....These houses were to be suitable for bringing up healthy children and healthy men and women. It would be an example of town-planning.....They had set an example of what could be done in the way of town planning on a voluntary basis. They were going to make an Edgbaston for the less wealthy class on that spot".

Mr Henry Vivian, M.P. Chairman of Co Partnership Tenants Ltd said

"They would watch this experiment in Birmingham with interest for it would have its influence all over this great district."

The Right Hon William Kenrick had the following comment:

"They wanted the City Councillors and urban district councils to have the power to say to building speculators:' "You shall not crowd houses irrespective of decency and the health of the children and the inhabitants of the houses."