

NEIGHBOURHOOD OPPORTUNITY

AN EQUATION WITH VANDALISM, DELINQUENCY AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE

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Today, when local authorities are looking as closely as they have ever done at their priorities, it is also being appreciated in many areas of the country that for one reason or another there has been a dramatic failure to meet community need, particularly in the urban neighbourhood situation. Perhaps the recent suggestion to redeploy New Town programmed resources to the inner cities is full recognition of the fact.

To equate leisure services with the living environment beyond the home, with vandalism and delinquency expenditure levels, and to gain a greater share of the corporate budget for leisure services, has been the difficult dilemma for officers and elected members in recent years.

When we examine, therefore, the facility starved neighbourhoods in Britain, it is not surprising that there has been a general lack of appreciation of the very special disciplines and qualities required for successful community management, particularly in terms of generating the widest possible range of valid opportunity.

A study of the social structure in most conurbations will reveal a situation where the recreation and amenity component has not been central to the planning process, but merely a land-use exercise measured against out-of-date standards. We find ourselves in 1976, therefore, in a situation where the structure of society is crumbling in many neighbourhoods and where boredom dominates the scene, so creating a platform for all the social problems of high and escalating

vandalism and delinquency levels. Consequently, there has been no opportunity whatsoever to involve the community in the development or management stage—the key to creating the vital sense of belonging which must be generated if there is going to be any social stability at all.

What has been tragic, and certainly inexcusable, is that ten years have gone since the progressive authorities in the field first began to implement the recommendations of the joint MHLG/DES Circular and harness the economic advantages of integrated neighbourhood social and community development—nevermind the dramatic social gains possible, **given sound community management**. The situation is all the more tragic when we remember that monitoring of recreation response at the time indicated a marked demand for neighbourhood facilities, where a multi-interest programme theme could be generated; one which could cut across the artificial boundaries of the Arts, cultural and physical recreation situation, supported by a sound social theme. Studies also indicated that well over 50% of all recreation demand was for the indoor situation, and one did not need to be a meteorologist in Britain to accept that fact!

In the mid 60's we were also being informed that the three major problems for civilisation in the 80's would be population, pollution and leisure, in that order. For many local authorities, therefore, there has been a premature arrival of the future, as the attitudes of society towards living environment priorities has by-passed the approach of many local authorities. Why?—Because (1) we have failed to plan for people; (2) we have failed to develop a system in this country, whatever we say about local government reorganisation, which would link the tiers of local government and cut across the traditional roles of separate departments; (3) recognise the demands of successful community management; and (4) perhaps above all, create planning and management structures which would allow the community to be involved in the development process in a manner which would generate the appropriate social climate.

If we accept that given sound community management the only disadvantage for the education

service within any joint scheme is the loss of autonomy on site; that the gains represent better schools, better community facilities, as well as dramatic opportunities for community orientated education—then in the future we must have a structure whereby we can harness the education, housing and recreation resources within a composite planning approach geared to meeting community need. Crucial within this will be an acceptance that schools today are, in embryo form, the leisure centres so badly required in many neighbourhoods. It should not be a question, therefore, of education or housing priority areas, but living environment priority areas. The Maud Report on Local Government Reorganisation, paragraph 322, summed up the limitations of the separatist approach. (Reference 1)

What we are really saying is that a neighbourhood application to the living, working and leisure environment at planning stage, as outlined by Jim Russell, together with a structure developed to harness all available resources of local government, as detailed by Alan Thomas, can generate a situation where many social planning goals can be achieved. Perhaps Francis Gladstone hit the nail on the head in his 'Politics of Planning', where he stated that we have allowed "the urban users to dominate the approach to community need, not the urban needers. We must lay bare the terrible things done to people in the name of planning."

Community Management:

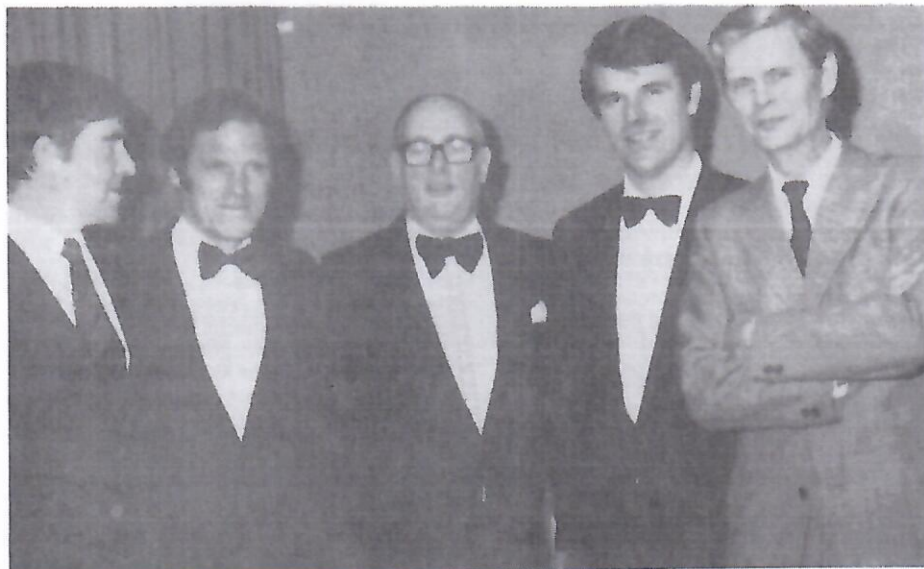
The realisation in Torfaen of a great deal of the constituent authorities social planning in the early 70's has been of considerable significance in many quarters, and is detailed in respect of philosophy, facility development and management structures in the Torfaen Brochure.

But the Council also recognised that however well it had harnessed resources in the housing, education and recreation sectors, sound community management in the future would have to be paid for and quantified in respect of rateable expenditure against the social planning goals within the overall philosophy. The Council recognised at an early date that leisure services within the local authority sector was a comparatively new development and in terms of marketing, programmes, generating community opportunity and in respect of community involvement, a different discipline entirely from most traditional local authority services. Within this concept, it was considered important that the management should be geared to the needs of the whole community, and, perhaps more important, to a degree where there would be community involvement in the management process and where there would be an opportunity in the future to equate investment in leisure services with the stability of social structures in most neighbourhoods.

Several principles had to be established at the outset:—

1. It was considered important to ensure that the various facilities, particularly the programme of the multi-interest centres, generated the widest possible role in terms of community use, with particular emphasis being placed on avoiding a narrow "sports centre" or "tracksuit" image. In short, centres have become the hub of community life, with a programme designed to provide as many cultural, recreation and social situations as possible.
2. Within the overall philosophy, it was vital to create and maintain a programme gener-

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ARM National Seminar. Left to right—Brian Allinson, President IBM, Jimmy Munn, Denis Howell, PC, MP, Roger Quinton, Les Davies, Chairman IRM.

The Manager, together with his duty officer team must, therefore, express and develop the community service philosophy of the appropriate Leisure Department and Committee, a function that must be supported by the Chief Leisure

A further community development resulting from the participation levels has been the recent creation of the Cwmbran Grant Aid Committee, comprising representatives of the Borough Council, Cwmbran Town Council and the Federation of Community Associations. The Committee is financed on a partnership basis by the two authorities, in a manner which allows the Federation of Community Associations

The service, therefore, in the neighbourhood



sector. How long do we stand and watch younger generations being media-bombarded with sex and violence? We are courting disaster if we allow the baser side of man to be encouraged; man's humanity consists of a thin crust only—the crust of culture and civilisation which the best representatives of mankind have through the ages had to strengthen; a crust which cracks with alarming ease, unfortunately, to release the violence and oppression which we, at this moment, witness all over the world—neighbourhoods, and even cities, where boredom dominates the scene, and where violence and killing are a way of life.

In terms of achieving stable community structures, local authorities, therefore have a straight choice—either in treating leisure services as a low priority frill on the budget, within an environment where boredom dominates the scene beyond the home and is surrounded by a crumbling social structure, or alternatively by making a positive commitment to harnessing resources at all levels of local government, in a manner geared to the creation of valid opportunity within a full recognition of the disciplines and needs for sound community management. Certainly, time is running out, and perhaps in some urban areas it is now too late.

Reference '1'

"322. Education is, indeed, the cuckoo in the local government nest. In origin extraneous, in appetite voracious, it requites its foster-parents' tireless devotion with a less than filial display of family feeling. Yet even the cuckoo does not demand that the nest in which it chooses to lay its egg shall be designed to suit its offspring rather than the hedge-sparrow's, solely on the ground that its offspring will be consuming most of their food."

Reference '2'

Torfaen Borough Council—Recreation & Leisure Department

Relevant Facts and Figures

Population 93,000.

Various Sections of the Department are responsible for five Leisure Centres (two jointly planned with Gwent County Council), one Theatre, ten Community Centres, vast Parks and Outdoor Recreation Sections, together with Museum and Heritage Services.

Number of Users of all Facilities within the Borough 1975/76. approx. 2 million

Number of Users of all Leisure Centres within the Borough. 1.4 million

Number of Users of Pontypool Leisure Centre during the same period. .5 million

Pontypool Management Costs. £150,000 = 1p rate

Cost of managing ten Community Halls — ½p rate — 100,000 playgroup places per annum, with programmes varying from Luncheon Clubs to Open University.

80% to 87% of users are Torfaen based.

Socio-economic response equates with that of the appropriate neighbourhood.

Total rate support, including standing and management costs, equivalent to 12p rate (approximately 50% of district rate).