



Fact sheets on Britain

Town and Country Planning

Britain is one of the most densely populated areas in the world: it is essential, therefore, to plan land use nationally to ensure a satisfactory distribution of employment and population, to provide for continuing urban renewal, to build new towns and to preserve the amenities of the countryside.

The Framework of Planning

Although the first planning legislation was passed in 1909, the modern system of town and country planning derives from ideas that were first expressed in the 1940s, during and immediately after the second world war. In 1947 two comprehensive Town and Country Planning Acts (one for England and Wales and one for Scotland) imposed compulsory planning duties on all local planning authorities (in England and Wales, the councils of counties and county boroughs, the London authorities and in some areas joint planning boards; and in Scotland, the councils of counties, large burghs and two small burghs) and gave them extensive powers to acquire and develop land for planning purposes. The Acts also established a centralised planning structure under which the Minister of Housing and Local Government and the Secretary of State for Scotland (and since 1965 the Secretary of State for Wales) had the duty of approving all development plans and making decisions on appeals against development control decisions. Over the past few years the increase in population, leading to a demand for more and better housing, and the growth in the volume of motor traffic, with its effects on the structure of towns and on the countryside, have placed strain on the planning system.

New legislation is, therefore, being introduced under which the appropriate Ministers will be responsible for approving the broad planning strategy for counties and major towns in England and Wales but the responsibility for implementing the strategy in local plans within these areas will devolve on the local planning authorities. Similar legislation is to be introduced for Scotland. Proposals for changes in the administration of planning in Northern Ireland include the establishment of a Central Development Office, to be responsible for the region's plan and the control of develop-

ment. Care is to be taken to ensure that members of the public can continue to make representations about planning proposals and decisions at all stages.

During the 1960s machinery for planning on a regional basis has been set up by the Government and detailed studies of various regions of Britain have been made (see Fact Sheet D/1 *Regional Development Policies*). Industrial development in Great Britain is influenced by government financial incentives and controlled by a system of development certificates operated by the Board of Trade to relieve pressure on areas where there is congestion, particularly in the south-east region and the Midlands, and to encourage growth in other less prosperous areas. There is also special control of office building in the south-east region and the Midlands. The Board of Trade has powers to define the areas where development is needed and assist it by grants, loans and the provision of factories.

Special Features

Particular forms of development include new towns and national parks. New towns, which may be designated under the New Towns Acts 1965 and 1968 by the responsible Ministers in Great Britain, are developed by specially appointed corporations. As new towns in England and Wales reach the end of the development stage they become the responsibility of the New Towns Commission, set up in 1959 to supervise the final stages of their growth (see Fact Sheet C/8 *New Towns*).

National parks (in England and Wales only) are designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 by the Ministers on the recommendation of the National Parks Commission. The parks are administered by representatives of the local authorities and central departments, the land and property upon them remaining in private ownership. A Countryside Commission is to be set up to replace and extend the work of the National Parks Commission in the face of demands for additional facilities for leisure-time activities from a rising and increasingly mobile population. For example, local authorities will be encouraged to create country parks within easy reach of towns to relieve pressure on the national parks. Under the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 similar proposals were introduced for Scotland.

The New Towns Act (Northern Ireland) 1965 provides the machinery for the development of new towns and may also be applied to the expansion of existing ones. Under the Amenity Lands Act (Northern Ireland) 1965 the Ministry of Development is able to acquire or control areas of natural beauty or amenity.

Achievements

Twenty-six new towns have been or are being established in Great Britain: twenty-one in England and Wales and five in Scotland. More than 800,000 people now live in them. As well as houses, flats, factories and schools and all the necessary modern domestic and industrial services, the new towns have provided health centres and libraries; open spaces, including parks and playing fields for recreation; and public buildings, such as the town hall and law courts. It is considered important to develop a balanced community within the towns by encouraging such developments as office employment and the provision of houses for sale and accommodation for second generation families and the elderly. In Northern Ireland a new city is being created and two existing towns are designated for expansion.

Plans for further new towns and large areas of expansion are under consideration. They are needed primarily to provide for population from the large industrial cities: it is estimated, for example, that one million Londoners will need to be housed outside London by 1981.

The transfer of population from congested industrial towns in Great Britain to other areas suitable for expansion where employment is provided, has also taken place under the Town Development Act 1952 and the Housing and Town Development (Scotland) Act 1957. The large cities make bilateral agreements with local

authorities wishing to expand, and help to provide the homes and other building required. Both authorities contribute to the cost. Schemes have been approved for providing some 160,000 homes in this way.

Ten national parks (covering 5,260 sq. miles—13,600 sq. kilometres) and 23 'areas of outstanding natural beauty' (covering more than 3,800 sq. miles—9,850 sq. kilometres) have been established. Measures to improve the landscape and promote enjoyment of the areas for the public include the provision of camping sites and information centres. Ten long-distance routes (nearly 1,300 miles—2,100 kilometres) have also been approved as continuous rights of way through countryside of scenic beauty; the establishment of further routes is under review. Seven forest parks have been formed by the Forestry Commission in Great Britain. Five 'areas of outstanding natural beauty' have been designated in Northern Ireland. There are also two forest parks there.

One hundred and twenty-four national nature reserves (covering an area of 257,250 acres—104,106 hectares) are managed by the Nature Conservancy. Thirteen forest nature reserves have also been set up.

In many towns the redevelopment of outworn areas, particularly those near town centres, has made considerable progress. The Buchanan Report (*Traffic in Towns*, HMSO, 1963, 50s.), which assessed the conflicting demands of traffic and environmental standards, has influenced many of the recent development plans.

Measures have also been taken, under various Acts of Parliament, to preserve historic buildings, to secure the restoration of land disturbed by mineral workings, to protect trees and woodland and to control advertisement displays.

Prepared by Reference Division,
Central Office of Information, London.