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The London Regional Reconstruction Committee: architects, exhibitions, and post-war visions for replanning

Peter J Larkham

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Abstract

The communication of planning ideas in the peak period of post-war reconstruction is being more intensively studied, and there is now ample evidence of extensive efforts at public information, if not full participation in planning decision-making. This paper explores these issues through the efforts of the RIBA's London Region Reconstruction Committee, its short pamphlet describing its plan – much less sophisticated than many contemporaneously published plans – and a significant public exhibition held at the National Gallery. The exhibition is subject to detailed discussion through the fortuitous survival of a set of professional photographs of many of the exhibition boards.

This was an 'unofficial' plan, responding to contemporary professional concepts and produced by well-informed and well-connected professionals, and exhibited in one of the most elite, yet accessible, venues in the capital. The LRRC meant well, but unfortunately its efforts did not live up to its aspirations: this was a poorly-resourced plan and exhibition. It contributed little to the official replanning and rebuilding of London, but the photographs allow an unusually-detailed exploration of the means of communicating such complex planning issues to a wider public at this time.

Key words: *RIBA London Regional Reconstruction Committee, London, post-war reconstruction planning, planning history*



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The RIBA and its Reconstruction Committee

Immediately following the main London Blitz, the Royal Institute of British Architects established its position in relation to the opportunities offered by the extensive damage for post-war replanning and rebuilding. In March 1941 its War Executive Committee submitted a memorandum to Lord Reith, the Minister for Works and Buildings, stating explicitly that the Institute “ – and it alone – “ was able to contribute “in a comprehensive and representative way” because

“The training and practical experience of the qualified architect bring him into contact not only with the design of buildings, but with major and ancillary problems connected with it. Town planning, transport, planning for industry, housing, finance, legal questions, organisation and administration of projects of construction are all matters which become daily familiar to architects with extensive practices. For the practice of architecture to-day is not confined solely to plan and elevation ...” (*Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 1941, p. 74).

The emerging profession of town planning was thus ignored.¹ This was a complicated position as not only were the vast majority of those most engaged with replanning initially trained as architects, most notably Patrick Abercrombie, but they were a product of a particular form of architectural training – the Liverpool School of Architecture and its Civic Design offshoot, led by Charles Reilly. Abercrombie was a product of this, and took its approach with him to the University of London and into his planning practice.

A result of this ministerial approach was that the RIBA President was invited by Lord Reith to serve on a Consultative Panel on Physical Planning within the Ministry of Works and Buildings.² The RIBA also set up a Reconstruction Committee, with a substantial membership, many of whom were later personally involved in producing reconstruction plans.³ It first met on 21 May 1941. A key function was to liaise with

¹ In subsequent years this claim for sole ability to replan was challenged, not only by town planners, but most strongly by municipal surveyors; see *Structural Engineer* (1942), for example.

² The Consultative Panel members were: Professor P. Abercrombie (FRIBA), W.H. Ansell (PRIBA), Lord Balfour of Burleigh, Sir Montague Barlow, Sir Walter Citrine, Sir George Etherton, W.H. Gaunt, T.W. Haward, Mrs L. Hitchens, F.R. Hiorns (FRIBA), L.H. Keay (FRIBA), T. Alwyn Lloyd (FRIBA), Sir Miles Mitchell, R.L. Moon, F.J. Osborn, D.A. Radley, Professor L. Dudley Stamp, G.W. Thomson, Sir Cecil Weir, Sir William Whyte and T.G. Wilson. The following Ministry staff were appointed: H.G. Vincent (Principal Private Secretary), H.C. Bradshaw (FRIBA, RFAC Secretary), J. Dower (ARIBA), and Professor W.G. Holford (ARIBA) (*Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* April 1941, p. 92).

³ The Committee’s original membership was W.H. Ansell (PRIBA), M. Waterhouse, L.S.

the 'Allied Societies'. These seem somewhat nebulous, but would include the Architectural Association; the Royal Academy Planning Committee was thanked; and the Committee itself had links with the Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS).

The Reconstruction Committee quickly produced a series of interim reports (Table 1), although the Minutes of its meetings (in the Godfrey Samuel papers, SaG/100/3, RIBA Archives, Victoria and Albert Museum) are scanty and dominated by procedural issues. It also set up a series of Regional Reconstruction Committees; again details of these are elusive, and that for the London Region – the focus of this paper – is the best known.

Table 1: RIBA Reconstruction Committee Interim Reports (archived in RIBA Archives, RIBA/Env)

1. *Planning and Amenities* [noted in *RIBA Journal* September 1941, p. 187]
2. *War-time housing* [noted in *RIBA Journal* September 1941, p. 188]
3. *Building legislation – structural* [noted in *RIBA Journal* November 1941] with Supplement *The rationalisation of building legislation* [noted in *RIBA Journal* February 1942, pp. 58-62, 64 with report no. 5]
4. *Reconstruction and the architectural profession* [noted in *RIBA Journal* December 1941, pp. 21-23]
5. *Legislation affecting town and country planning* [noted in *RIBA Journal* February 1942, pp. 58-62, 64 with report no. 3]
6. *The capacities of the building industry in relation to reconstruction* [noted in *RIBA Journal* March 1943, p. 109]
7. *The rationalisation of building legislation (second report)* [noted in *RIBA Journal* April 1943, pp. 139-140]
8. *Town and country planning* [noted in *RIBA Journal* August 1945, pp. 295-299]

First general statement of conclusions [reprinted in *RIBA Journal* August 1942]

The Committee's main ideas are summarised in its 'First general statement of conclusions' (RIBA Reconstruction Committee, 1942). It discussed the need for a 'national plan' for reconstruction; the legislation necessary, the need for reorganising and expanding the building industry, problems of finance, and the need for decentralisation and new towns. It stated categorically that "all land, without exception, should be publicly *controlled* whether it is to be publicly or privately *owned*" (original emphasis).

It is worth noting that the work of the RIBA Reconstruction Committee as a whole was apparently held in low regard by the Ministry, with its interim report on legislation being described as "seems a completely useless document that will get, perhaps, a lot of publicity. No doubt it would be very nice for architects ... if all the matters that

Sullivan, W. Dougill, J. Hill, Miss J.G. Ledebor, E. Maufe, S.C. Ramsey, H. Robertson, R. Squire, W.H. Thompson, P. Abercrombie, T.A.D. Braddell, D.L. Bridgwater, A.C. Bunch, H.C. Bradshaw, W.R. Davidge, J.D. Fletcher, J.H. Forshaw, E. Maxwell Fry, H.S. Goodhart-Rendell, S. Hamp, F.R. Hiorns, C. Holden, G.A. Jellicoe, H.V. Lanchester, J. Leathart, H. Lidbetter, J.L. Martin, B. Peake, C.H. Reilly, A.E. Richardson, D. Roth, G. Samuel, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, R.H. Sheppard, J.A. Slater, C.G. Soutar, J.N. Summerson, T.S. Tait, R. Tubbs, A.H. Verstage and F.R.S. Yorke (*Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* April 1941, p. 92).

touch on building ... could be centred on and arranged to suit their convenience” (memo to Mr Hearder, 7 November 1941, National Archives (hereafter NA) HLG 102/33). “Everything of value in the present report is to be found, and found more amply documented, in the report on the Departmental Committee of Building Byelaws presented in 1918 ... “ (memo from A. Shelley to Mr Symon and Mr Yates, 11 November 1941, NA HLG 102/33). These views, strongly critical of non-Ministry individuals and activities, and prioritising internal civil service approaches, are typical (Larkham, 2011).

By mid-1943 the Reconstruction Committee had been wound up. One of its final recommendations was “That a central advisory committee be appointed to coordinate any proposals of the Allied Societies in extending the work of the LRRC ... That in view of the experience gained by the LRRC they should be invited to serve as the Central Advisory Committee” (Minutes, 26/5/43, Godfrey Samuel papers, SaG/100/3, RIBA Archives, Victoria and Albert Museum). A new Reconstruction Committee was appointed, and its role was “to consider and report to the Council on all matters relating to the post-war reconstruction and planning which may result from the work of the original Reconstruction Committee and to maintain liaison between the RIBA and the Regional Reconstruction Committees” (*Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* July 1943, p. 194: this was distinct from the Town and Country Planning Committee).⁴

The RIBA London Region Reconstruction Committee

The London Region Reconstruction Committee and its proposals has been the subject of academic attention (Marmaras and Sutcliffe, 1994) yet still little is known about it. The first meeting was held on 24 July 1941. Its membership was varied and eminent, demonstrating strong links particularly between the RIBA and Architectural Association (Table 2). It was funded in part by a grant from the Leverhulme Trust. The “London region” was that officially delineated as Civil Defence Region no. 5, containing about 850 square miles and a population of about 8.5 million (Figure 1) (LRRC, 1943a, pp. 6-7).

Its formal terms of reference were:

“To consider and formulate the policy of the RIBA and its Allied Societies on the subject of post-war reconstruction and planning in its widest aspect.
To work in co-operation with the Regional Committees appointed jointly by the Allied Societies and in co-operation with the Reconstruction Committee of the RIBA.
To cover the London Region on the same lines as the other Regional Committees set up jointly by the Allied Societies.
To report to the Council of the RIBA through the Reconstruction Committee” (LRRC, 1943a, p. 4)

What is still hidden, though, is the precise nature and extent of the LRRC’s activities. How did the great and the good amongst its membership manage to acquire and

⁴ The revised committee’s members were the RIBA President, Secretary and Treasurer *ex officio*, *W.H. Ansell (PPRIBA)* C.H. Aslin, *H.C. Bradshaw*, *A.C. Bunch*, F. Gibberd, *C. Holden*, T.C. Howitt, A.W. Kenyon, *J.L. Martin*, A.H. Moberly, T.G. Scott, *J.A. Slater*, *R. Tubbs* and A. Scott (Ministry of Health ‘observer’) [members of the original committee are shown in italics to emphasise the continuity between the committees] (*Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* July 1943, p. 194).

Table 2: LRRC membership (from LRRC, 1943a, p. 4)⁵

Arthur W. Kenyon FRIBA; MTPI President, AA (Chairman)
Stanley Hamp FRIBA; Past President, AA; Past Vice President, RIBA
(Deputy Chairman)
S. Rowland Pierce FRIBA (Joint Hon. Secretary)
Verner O. Rees FRIBA; Past President, AA (Joint Hon. Secretary)
Henry V. Ashley FRIBA; Past Vice President, RIBA
Robert Atkinson FRIBA
Henry Braddock ARIBA (from March 1942)
J. Murray Easton FRIBA; Past President, AA
W. Curtis Green RA FRIBA; Past President, AA; Past Vice President,
RIBA
Frederick R. Hiorns FSA FRIBA MTPI
Charles Holden FRIBA MTPI
H.V. Lanchester FRIBA MTPI
A. Brian O'Rorke FRIBA (to March 1942)

analyse appropriate data, and produce reports and recommendations? What options were considered and discarded? All we know from the Second Report is that

“it has not been thought necessary to include records of many discussions, interviews, conferences that have contributed to the draft as it now stands; nor have the many preliminary drawings and analytical diagrams of the early stages of the work been included ... this work, this long preparatory process, must be accepted and taken as the background of many decisions and recommendations” (LRRC, 1943a, p. 50).

Unfortunately, therefore, the details of working and decision-making for the LRRC remain obscure, and consideration of its activities and impacts must rest on its outputs. Marmaras and Sutcliffe (1994, p. 443) suggest that there was consultation with RIBA branches and members, as well as the (unspecified) “allied societies” but that “this consultative, almost delphic, procedure conformed to the wartime spirit of democracy, but behind it lay a desire to keep architects occupied and in touch at a time when the war had greatly restricted their professional work”.

The LRRC's First Interim Report⁶ began with the statement that “London is less the product of considered planning than any other capital city in the world”, and discussed its future planning under a series of assumptions about the “continuance and improvement” of the city and regional functions and facilities. A green belt was desirable, as was further decentralisation. Transport improvement was highlighted, as was “the re-grouping of sites, and such other measures as will facilitate the better development of street architecture”. This unassuming statement has wide implications for land redistribution and ownership, far beyond simple ‘street architecture’.

⁵ Strangely, the initial note on the LRRC's 1943 exhibition (*Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* May 1943, p. 159) suggests that membership “consists of 12 members from the RIBA and 12 from the Architectural Association”, contradicting the LRRC's own published list reproduced as Table 2.

⁶ No copy yet traced; the quote is from the extract in LRRC, 1943a, pp. 14-16.

However, building on the special pleading for the status of architects already noted, it is significant that an Addendum to the LRRC's First Interim Report reinforced the Committee's view:

- "1. The training and experience of many Architects qualify them to deal with town, regional and county planning.
2. No Town Planning Officer should be appointed who has not been trained as an Architect.
3. When a planning consultant is appointed, he should be a qualified Architect, and it is desirable that he should be connected with the scheme throughout the period of its development.
4. Where experts on special subjects are required, they should act as advisers to the Architects in control of the scheme" (Godfrey Samuel papers, SaG/100/3, RIBA Archives, Victoria and Albert Museum).

The final ideas of the LRRC were circulated via its Second Report, a small-format 52-page booklet published in May 1943 (LRRC, 1943a) at a cost of two shillings. In comparison with many plan publications, even its strict contemporaries, this was a difficult document, not for a wider public readership. Its 54 closely-printed pages contained only 10 line drawings which, although clear, were not of the professional standard of many other published plans. There were no colour visualisations, whereas other plans used some of the best-known architectural illustrators of the day, and colour printing (despite wartime rationing) to convey their message effectively to as wide a readership as possible (Larkham, 1997; 2007).

The LRRC's ideas

The LRRC's ideas are given in its Second Report (LRRC, 1943a) and largely reproduced in the RIBA exhibition review (*Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* 1943a, 1943b). They have been discussed by Marmaras and Sutcliffe (1994, pp. 443-448). They merit brief consideration before discussion of the effectiveness of their presentation.

Transportation

Transportation was a major consideration (LRRC, 1943a, Part IV). The LRRC assumed that the main railway system would be retained on much the same lines as then existed. However, within London two rail loops were suggested, with rationalisation of the main terminus stations on the new passenger-only inner loop. Immediately north of the Northern Station (Euston) would be a market area encircled by a rail loop. The outer loop, principally for bulk freight, would use existing lines with the exception of a new eastern Thames crossing. Outer suburban lines (12/15 to 30 miles) should be electrified. Inner suburban lines were scarcely mentioned. Outer suburban trains would not stop at intermediate (inner, ie 3/4 to 12/15 mile) stations.

Air transport was considered, and it was felt that considerable (although in detail unforeseeable) expansion would be likely. Rotor aircraft were considered although no specific provision was made, as this was "too hypothetical for definite planning" (p. 26). Elevated central landing sites were examined but found impractical. However a new 'inner' airport was identified, immediately north of the Isle of Dogs, to be provided with six runways, although at 6,000 feet these were fairly short (Figure 2) but this was not to be for major intercontinental traffic. It would have warehousing shared with the restructured docks. Road and rail (apparently tube) links were

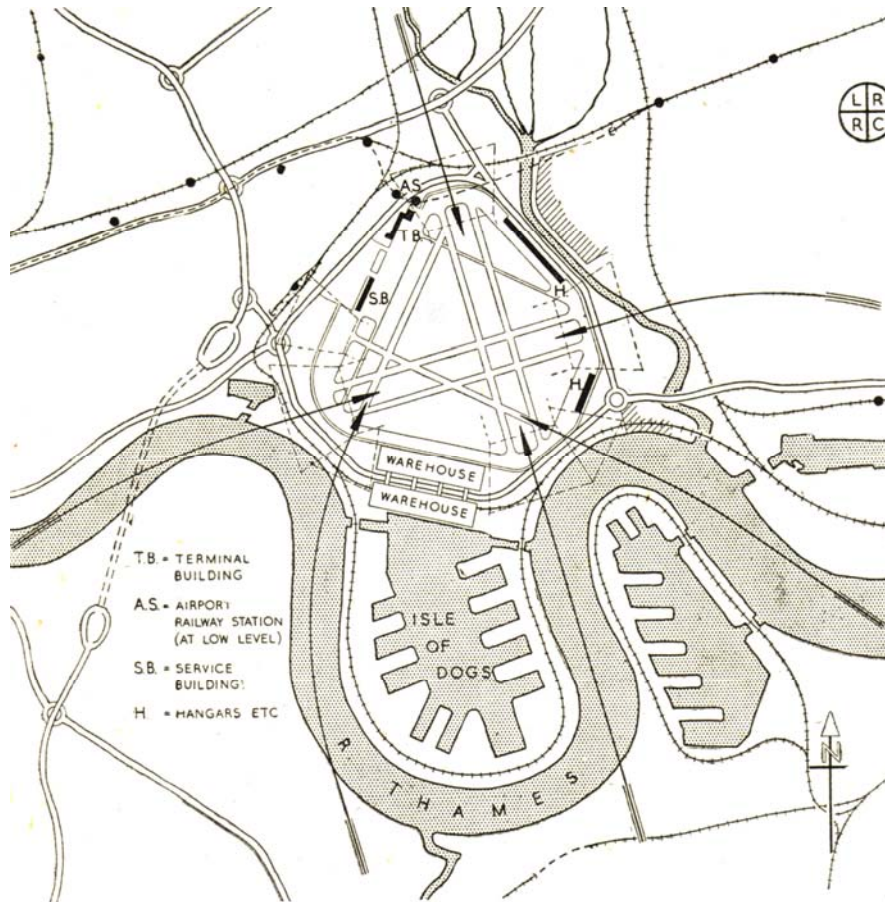


Figure 2. Proposed inner airport: note also the restructured docks (LRRC, 1943a, p. 29).

planned. Other sites for long-distance airports were discussed, at Heston and Fairlop; land for such a purpose had been acquired before the war by both central government and the City of London.

Arterial roads would be planned nationally, would make 'ample provision for future expansion' (p. 17) and would run through open space 'parkways'. Access to such roads would be through a limited number of major junctions ('fly-over roundabouts' and clover-leaf junctions). The parkways would reinforce the 'barrier' nature of such routes, containing sprawl, limiting accidents, and providing "protection of amenity" for adjoining areas (p. 19). The undesirability of ribbon development related to main roads was emphasised through the citing of extracts of a 1924 report.⁷

"The reconstitution of urban areas" (p. 30)

The network of transport links provided deliberate barriers, thus subdividing the region into areas "planned to provide for re-centralised urban areas ... [which] would

⁷ This was the *First Report of the Greater London Regional Planning Committee*, chaired by the architectural historian Sir Banister Fletcher and with Sir Raymond Unwin as Technical Advisor. "It can only be regretted that a culmination was not reached by the preparation of a physical plan for the Region" (p. 21, footnote). The LRRC (1943a, pp. 21 and 52) give its date as 1924 and 1928 but copies are dated December 1929.

be self-contained communities” (p. 30). This was a deliberate attempt to reinforce and, where necessary, to re-create local character, pride and “conscious civic life” (p. 31) which, it was suggested, had both “been lost in the sprawl of London’s building” but simultaneously had evidently survived via local responses to bombing (p. 31). Again, the Greater London Regional Planning Committee report (1929) was cited in a further fulmination against “haphazard development” and the “unregulated right to build anywhere ... [which] is quite inconsistent with any system of planning” (p. 31).

Local services, including hospitals, schools, recreational facilities and local administration would be reorganised and relocated within the new “reconstituted” urban areas. While light industry and other employment would equally be redistributed in such new communities, “heavy industries or noxious trades must also be planned and located correctly” (p. 32); but how was not discussed. Specific mention was made of new buildings and facilities having to relate to the “architectural character, whether old or new, of each neighbourhood” (p. 32).

For residential districts, it was felt important to mix social classes and building types.

“Within any given living area all types of person should be able to find accommodation suited to his or her needs; single or semi-detached houses with varying sizes of garden, terrace houses, flats varying in accommodation, maisonettes, hostels and so on, become, therefore, the detail factors of planning in a living area. It is visualised, moreover that the architectural problems of planning and grouping will be greatly assisted by this method; monotony of appearance and layout will be largely defeated ... “ (p. 32).

In this section, it was the Greater London Regional Planning Committee’s 1933 *Second Report* that was extensively cited in favour of segregating residential and other land uses, while mixing social classes. Segregation of uses allowed segregation of traffic, while the mixing of unsuitable land uses caused “depreciation over wide areas” (p. 33).

Residential planning brought questions of density of occupation, and using Ministry of Health standards and bye-laws, and 1931 Census and 1939 estimated population figures, the LRRC produced calculations for a test area of appropriate residential densities, and a plan of the reconstituted test area, segregated by land use and separated by barriers of open spaces and axes of movement (Appendix 1; Figure 3). This implied much restructuring; but

“from examination of many built-up areas the LRRC have concluded that much land is wasted and is unproductive ... streets are often too numerous and many might be closed with distinct advantage to local planning ... large numbers of streets are too wide ..” (p. 37)

Overall, the vision proposed a gradation of acceptable residential densities around London, from 110-160 per acre around the core of the City, to 0-20 for the largest belt inside the proposed outer orbital road (Figure 4). Much of this redistribution – of people, industry and built-up area – was explicitly to create considerable additional open space; and it was recognised that this would be a long-term issue especially where existing built-up areas would eventually be demolished (pp. 40-42).

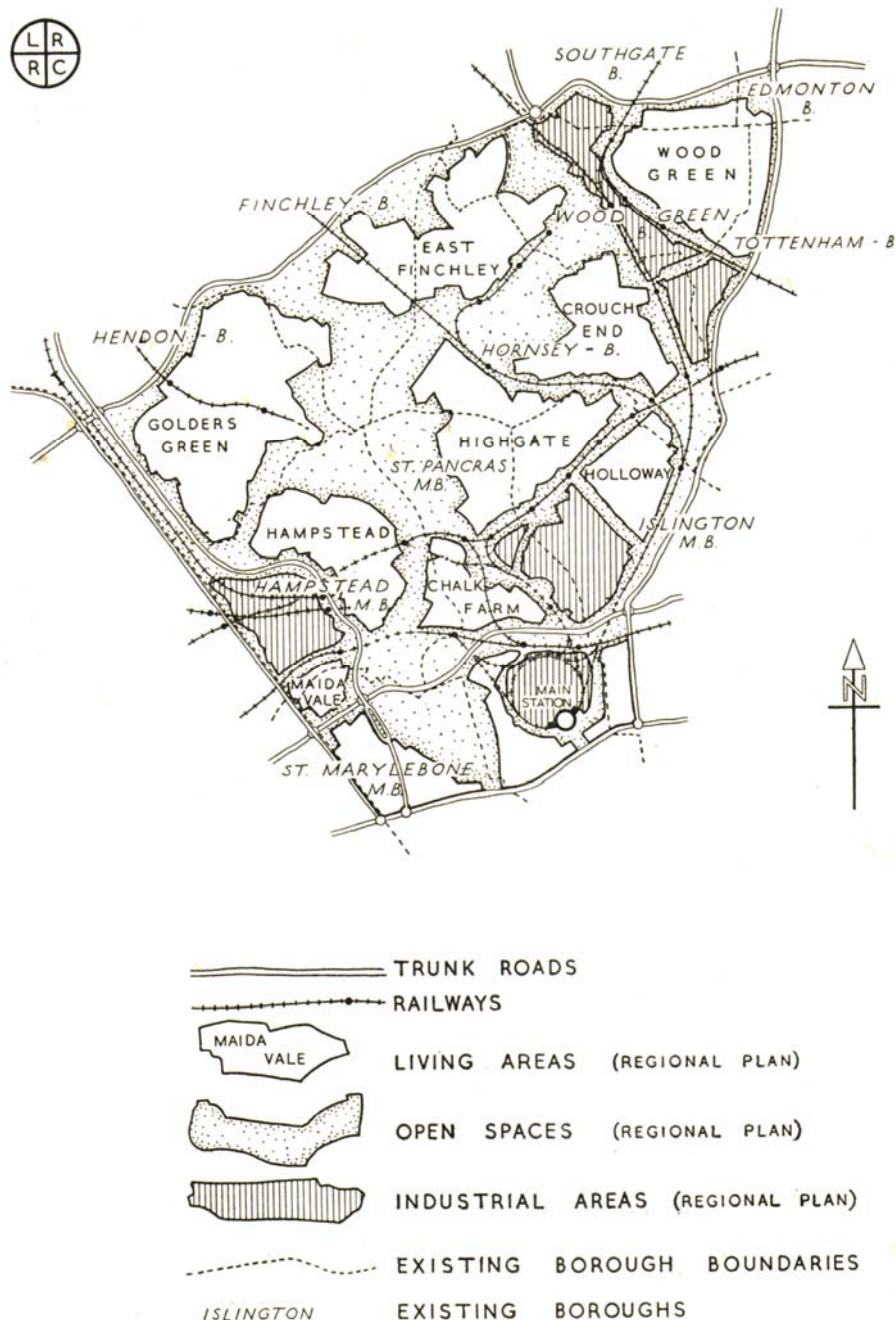


Figure 3. "Test area" as replanned (LRRRC, 1943a, p. 36).

Other issues

The plan considered, albeit briefly, a range of other issues including industry, infrastructure including advocating district-wide heating and hot water), markets, docks and 'historical features and natural character'. In terms of industrial location the proposals already discussed imply considerable relocation and zoning; and the LRRRC was supportive of the development of new industrial estates which "can be planned and designed without violent ugliness or crude congestions" (pp. 42-43). As for historical features, this section (Part VII, pp. 46-7) reiterated the point that the 'reconstitution' process should of necessity preserve area character, including the buildings and street layouts of "old centres". Yet "not all old things are worth

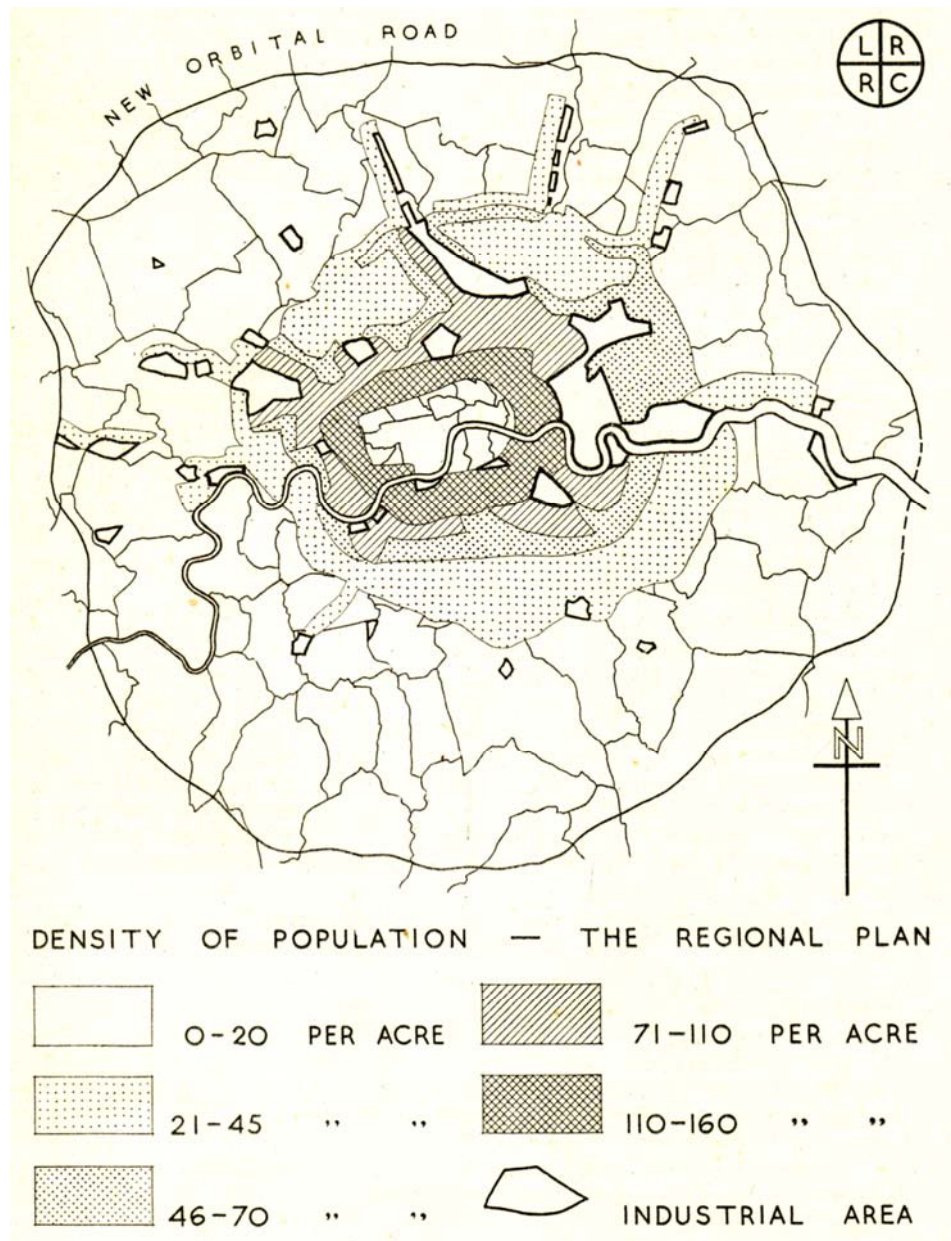


Figure 4: Proposed densities for the London region (LRRC, 1943a, p. 39)

preserving”: their retention should be selective and “not approached from a purely antiquarian or collector’s attitude of mind”. Further, some locations “can be improved for the better display of intrinsic characters” (p. 46). The final proposals (p. 47) returned to the issue of a green belt to contain further spread, mentioning the need for “the location and proper provision of planned satellite towns” to decentralise population, industry, services and amenities from the metropolis itself.

The final three pages of the report set a further research agenda, stress the interim nature of the proposals, and rather polemically highlight the absolute need for action: “there can be no place in the Councils of Peace for the timid, the disinterested or the obstructionist; these are not tolerated in war, must we allow peace and reconstruction to be so guided?” (p. 51).

The LRRC exhibition

The exhibition was held at the National Gallery from 31 May 1943.⁸ It was accompanied by a fold-out leaflet (LRRC, 1943b) and was reviewed – or, following the custom of the day, described uncritically) in professional journals (*Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* 1943a, 1943b).⁹ In the case of this exhibition, the rare survival of a box of 35 record-quality photographs, now in the author's possession,¹⁰ of some of the exhibition boards allows a much more detailed consideration of the focus and content of the exhibition, and thus how it was communicated graphically, than is usually possible. However these are black-and-white photographs, and it is impossible now to assess the impact of colour in these displays although the tones of some prints strongly imply some use of colour.

The exhibition was held in one main room and some annexes. The layout of the eight main sections was not wholly logical (neither chronological nor in order of area scale) and thus there was no easy, logical flow for visitors to move around the displays (Figure 5), as there was elsewhere with, for example, the red footprints on the floor of the 1944 Sydney Housing Exhibition (Ministry of Post-War Reconstruction (Australia), 1944). The largest room held a 'diagram model of the region' at its centre, although no photographs of this are known.

For the section "Some first principles illustrated" "B" on Figure 5), to the right of the main entrance and thus probably the first section to which many would turn, photographs of seven panels survive. These are:

- The existing barriers – crossing canals and other linear features causes bottlenecks.
- The new barriers – the new trunk roads, which would need to be crossed by bridges, tunnels and controlled crossings.
- Planned entrances to trunk roads – major roundabout junctions.
- The parkways – the principle of trunk roads in 'green ways'.
- The industrial areas – segregation from residential areas.
- Transport services integration of all modes necessary.

The portrait-format panels are horizontally split into two equal parts, with an upper text box statement of the issue, and a lower illustration. As with most of these panels the text is primarily produced through capitalized mapping-pen stencils. This was a low-cost solution, but one not necessarily producing a high-quality impression, and the use of all capitals is not necessarily easy to read. The illustrations are simple and quite effective but, reproduced in monochrome, are not striking. Yet some of the

⁸ It followed, at the same venue, a well-received and profusely-illustrated (over 300 photographs and diagrams) RIBA exhibition "Rebuilding Britain" held in March/April 1943 (*Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* February 1943, pp. 75-76).

⁹ See also Gibbon (1943) writing in the *Architect and Building News*; *Architects' Journal*, June 10, 1943, pp. 379-384; *Architecture Illustrated*, May 1943, pp. 49-61; *Builder*, June 4, 1943, pp. 491-496; *Country Life*, June 11, 1943, pp. 1060-1061; *National Builder*, June 1943, pp. 170-173.

¹⁰ These are professional record photographs, with the studio stamp of Sydney W. Newbery of London SW9 and a carefully-inked title on the reverse of each print. There is no distortion and so the boards were most probably photographed in the studio. There is no indication of the client; the photographs were purchased from the specialist dealer Peter Inch, contained in a contemporary 6.5 x 8.5-inch photographic paper box; and Peter Inch has no record of from whom they were obtained.

- A DIAGRAM MODEL OF THE REGION
- B THE REGIONAL PLAN IN OUTLINE
which is developed in the :—
- C DETAIL ORDNANCE MAPS OF THE
REGION
- D SOME FIRST PRINCIPLES ILLUSTRATED
- E DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL PLANNING
- F THE RAILWAYS OF THE REGION, ETC.
- G A PLAN FOR CENTRAL LONDON
- H EXTENSION OF PLANNING: THE
SOUTH-EASTERN REGION
- J HISTORICAL MAPS AND PLANS

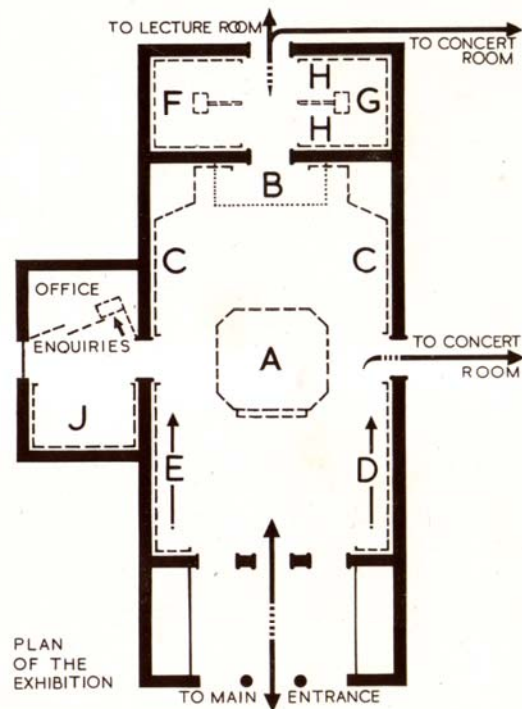


Figure 5: Exhibition layout and main sections (LRRC, 1943b).

images themselves are memorable, for example the use of traffic flowing into and out of bottles to illustrate bottlenecks (board 1) (Figure 6).

A further set of seven panels survive (originally eight), in the same format, appears to relate to “Development of local planning” (“E” on Figure 5), to the left of the entrance – although they are captioned on the reverse of the prints “an imaginary area developed”. The lower section of each panel is based on a map of this fictional area on which are superimposed responses to the issues discussed in the upper section of the board. Hence, for visitors not used to cartographic representations, the ‘ideas’ are given clear diagrammatic representation, in most cases linked to specific streets and districts. Clearly, from the tone of the photographs, many of the original maps used colour. Interestingly given the date of the display, planning was directly linked to military activity, as the board titles show (the first board is missing):

- Trying to regulate the growth
- War ‘civil defence’
- Post war ‘civil defence’
- Local area as part of a co-ordinated plan
- The planning area’s problems
- The planning area makes its plans
- Effort • sacrifice • vision

Planning being considered as ‘civil defence’ is an interesting concept, with the map representing layers of organization (regional, sub-regional, area, departmental). The explicit rhetoric of “effort • sacrifice • vision” on a board quoting both Milton and the Uthwatt report again referred to the wartime experience. This is clearly something to which every exhibition visitor could relate. Each of these boards carried a quotation

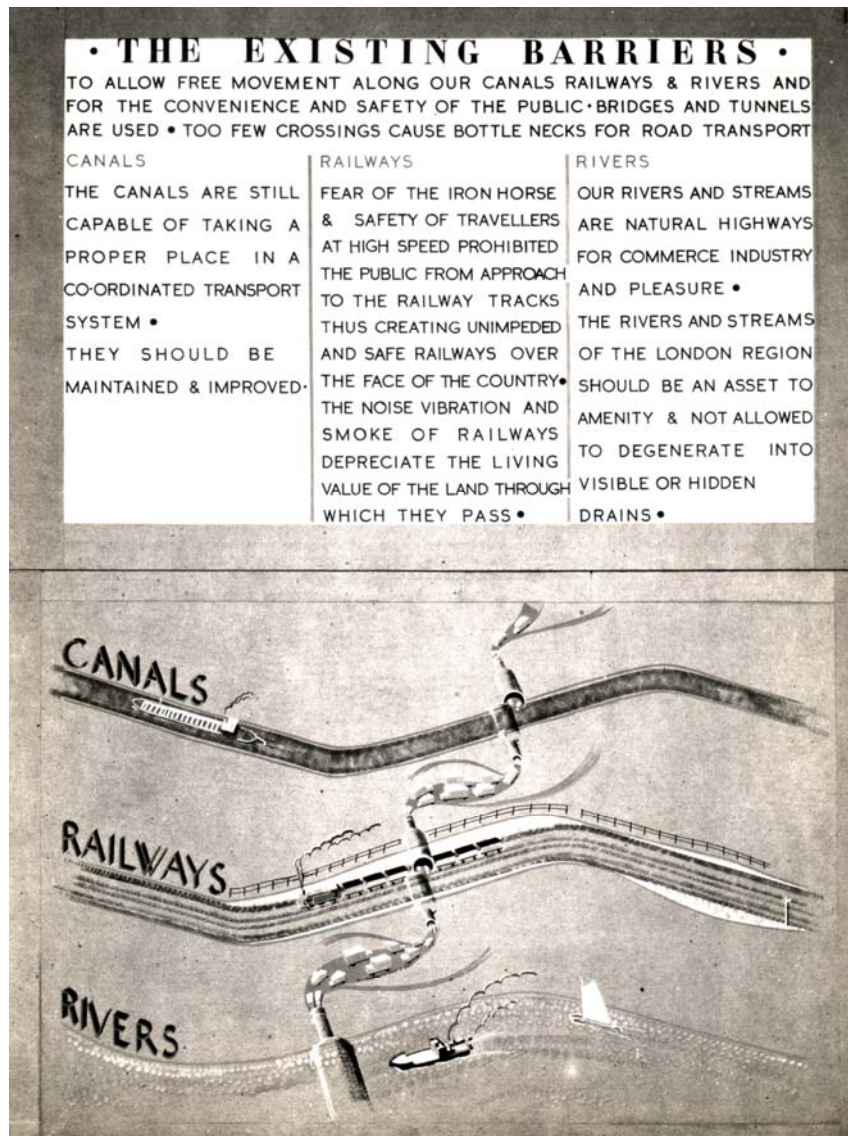


Figure 6: "The existing barriers" display board (from photograph set)

prominently underneath the title, and the choice of quoted authors and quotations is also instructive. Apart from Milton (already mentioned) there were key wartime leaders (Churchill and Roosevelt) and planning reports (Scott and Uthwatt), a planner/architect (Unwin) and, heading the "war 'civil defence'" board, a less-recognisable author but a quotation clearly relating to the 1666 Great Fire – a parallel made many times in the 1940s. Finally, the map on the last board in this series raised the time dimension of planning. Achievement of the vision for planning would take time, with "first moves deal[ing] with slum clearance and war damaged areas ... [and] further moves based on periodic schedules of property classified by age and use" (Figure 7). But understanding this required a close reading.

These two substantial introductory sections provide a crash course in the rationale and need for planning, and in how planning could be done; albeit at the scale of a fairly small and fictitious area delimited by fields and railway lines. The systematic visitor might then proceed to view the large central model, perhaps with a diversion to the anteroom display of historical maps and plans. Beyond the model on each side ("C" in Figure 5) were detailed maps of the London region, while centrally placed at

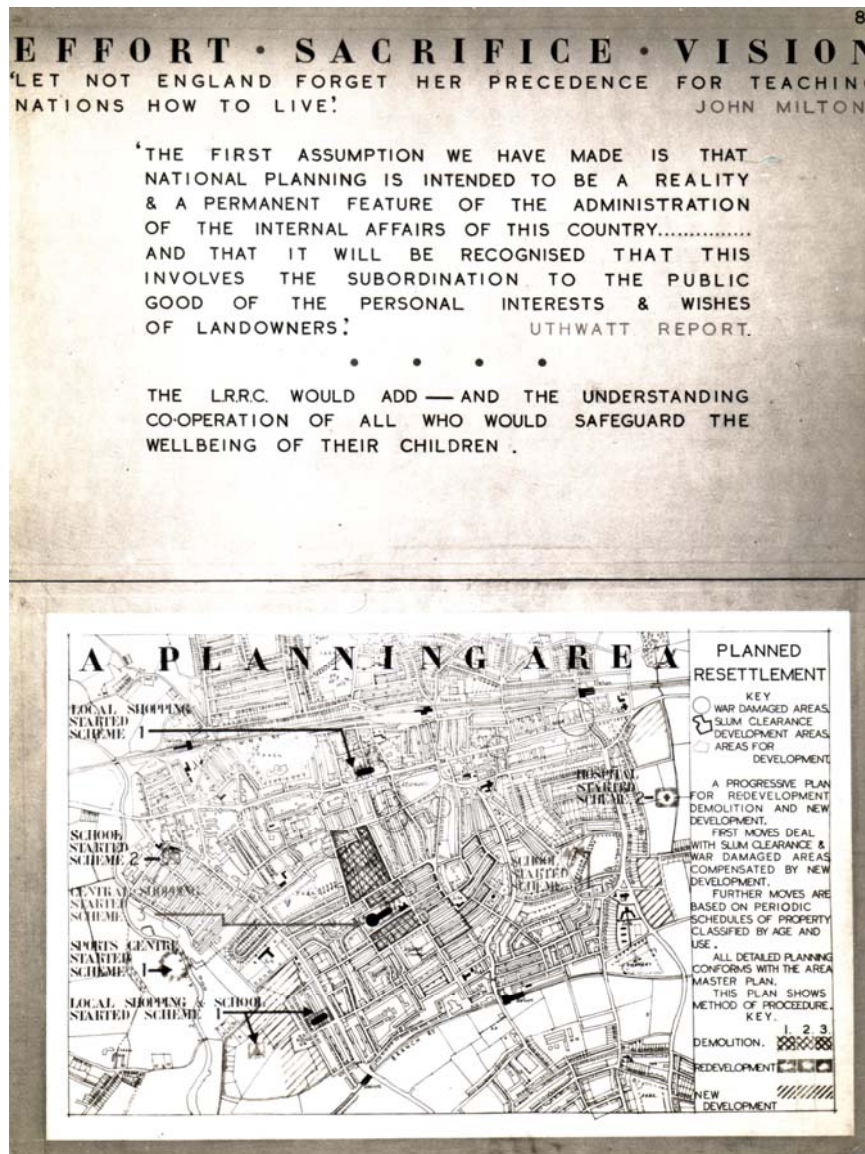


Figure 7: “Effort • sacrifice • vision” display board (from photograph set). Compare with the depiction of the sample – real – area in the report itself (Figure 3).

the rear of the room was “the regional plan in outline” (“B” in Figure 5). It would make sense to view this first, because its proposals were then developed in detail on the flanking larger-scale maps.

“The regional plan in outline” probably focused on a large-scale map of the London region, created in 12 sections, probably with some use of colour. This showed the plan’s overall proposals, with the restructuring of urban areas, their separation by green corridors of movement, and pockets of industry (Figure 8). At the scale of the conurbation – with which perhaps few visitors were used to think – the overall impression is of fragmentation.

The fragmentation of the proposed urban form is emphasized through two other photographs of maps, “London as it is” and “The effects of a regional plan” (Figure 9a, 9b). The former shows the unrelieved solid shading of high-density urbanism, the latter the cutting-through of corridors and breaking-up of built-up areas. However, it is unclear where these fitted within the exhibition structure.



Figure 8: The overall impact of the LRRRC proposals as a large-format composite plan (from photograph set). This is the only one of the set which shows some distortion, having apparently been photographed as part of the display.

The 12 sections of the main map were then shown in greater detail, superimposed on to the Ordnance Survey six-inch sheets. Four such sheets comprised one of the 12 sections and thus this section of the display would take up considerable space. Figure 10 shows one of these sections, with Euston and the proposed ring of rails surrounding a market area just right and below centre. The detail of new road alignments and junction positioning is clear – perhaps the most immediately striking feature – and the wash layered over the OS base equally clearly shows the scale of clearance needed for these routes and corridors. One artist's impression survives, an aerial perspective of a major trunk road/rail corridor and intersection (between Hendon and Neasden, top left of Figure 10). Although very quick and crude in comparison with perspectives in other published plans, this very effectively shows the impact of the LRRC's restructuring, and the extent of land to be taken up with these corridors was substantial, despite the clear functional logic of bringing together interchanges and transportation routes (Figure 11).

Moving somehow behind the regional map, the visitor entered the final sections of the exhibition, in two further anterooms. On the left was a section devoted to railways and perhaps other transportation. The surviving rail diagram (Figure 12) shows a great deal of consideration not just for location of facilities (indeed it is not clear which are existing, and which new, lines) but also for service design and scheduling.

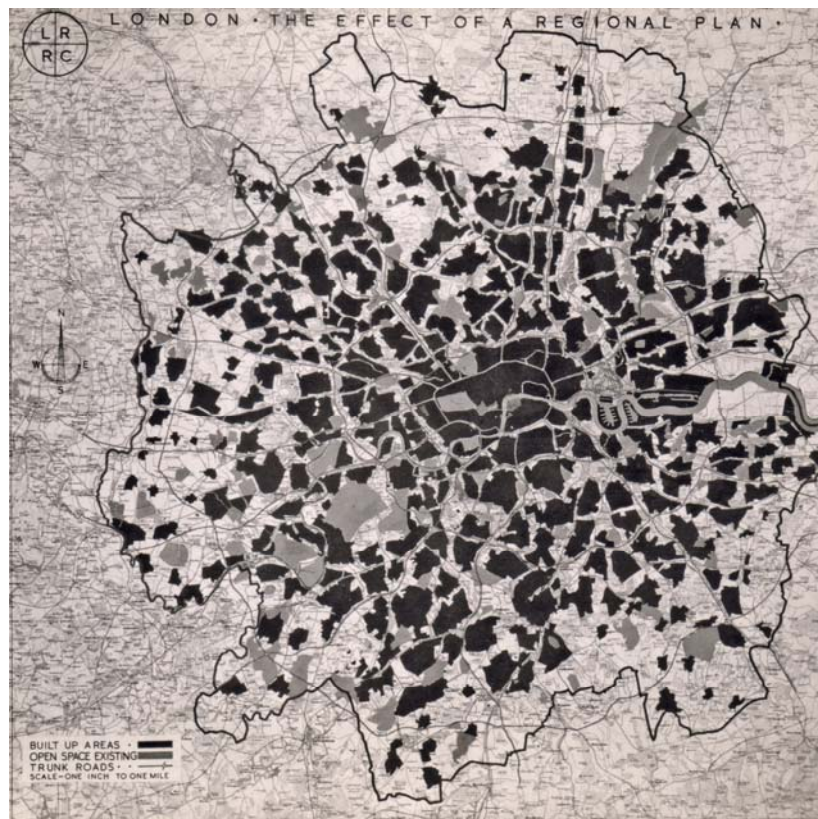
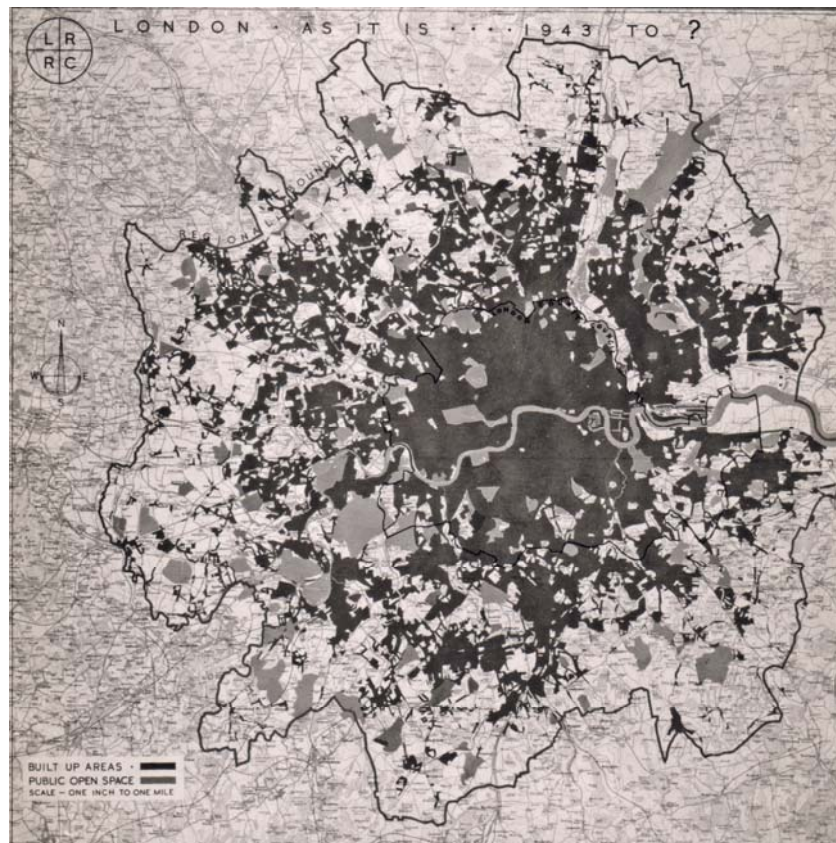


Figure 9: (a) “London as it is”; (b) “The effect of a regional plan” (from photograph set). Location within the exhibition is unclear though they bear the LRRC logo and are clearly part of the set. Compare Figure 9b with Figure 8.

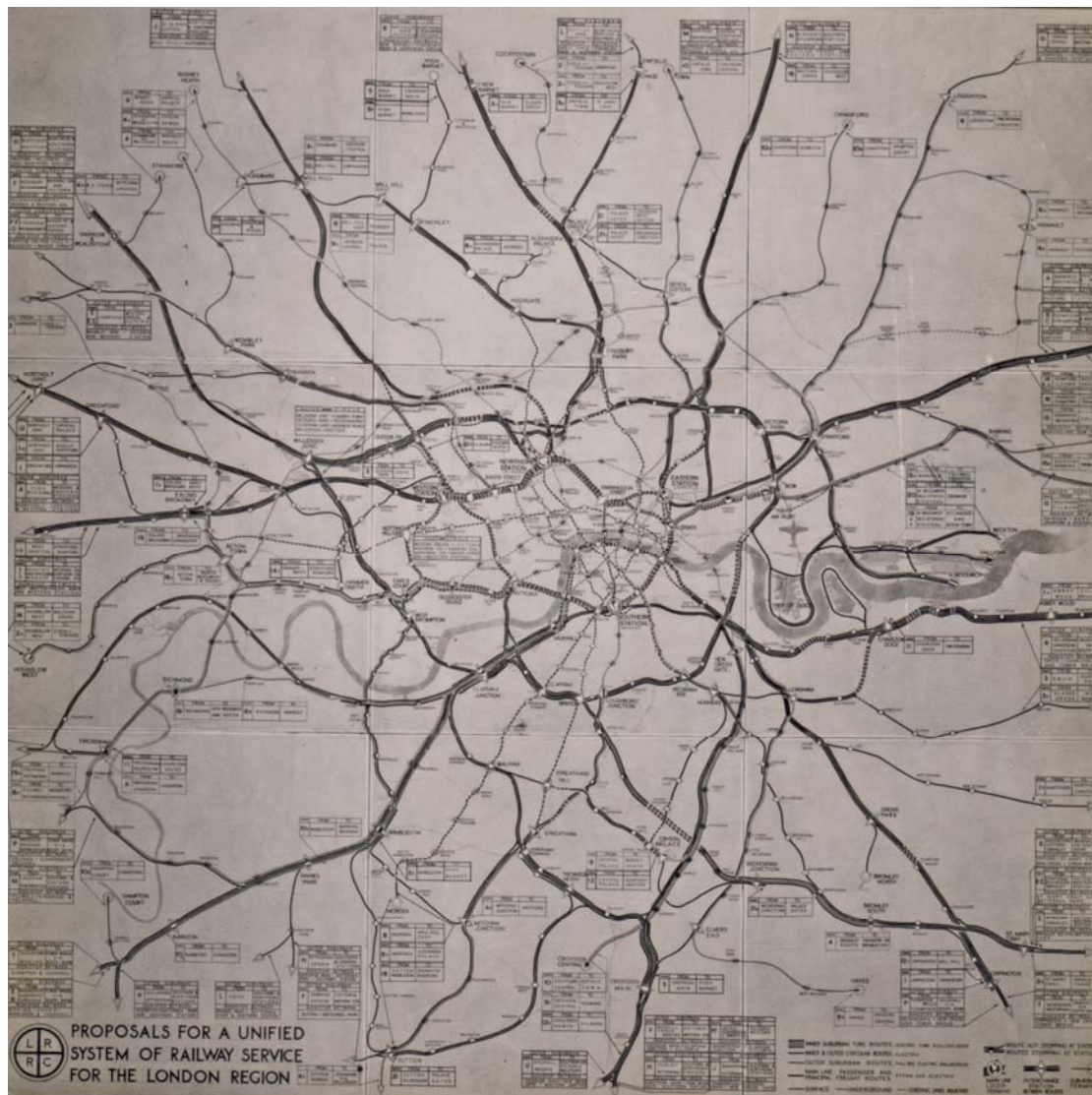


Figure 12: Diagram of rail system and services (from photograph set).

Symbols at stations show stopping and through services. Although again not identified here, implementation of this complex pattern would imply a great deal of line restructuring and perhaps widening of existing route alignments to permit additional rails.

That this section may have covered other transport elements is implied by the survival of another image, of the proposed local airport. This is very different in style, with very stylized hand lettering located in the wide margins of the illustration.

Nothing survives from the section considering the extension of planning to the wider south-eastern region ("H" in Figure 5), and only a single image (Figure 13) that could be linked to central London ("G" in Figure 5). This is a sketch representation, in essence a simplification of the OS overlay of the larger-scale section (Figure 10). The message of the restructured central area is more clear because the existing plan form is not visible. The alignments of the proposed inner and outer ring roads are strikingly clear, with the latter running in a cleared 'green way'. There would be a "national exhibition park" on a wholly cleared south bank of the Thames, and – although less obvious – clearance around the boundary of the City itself. A few

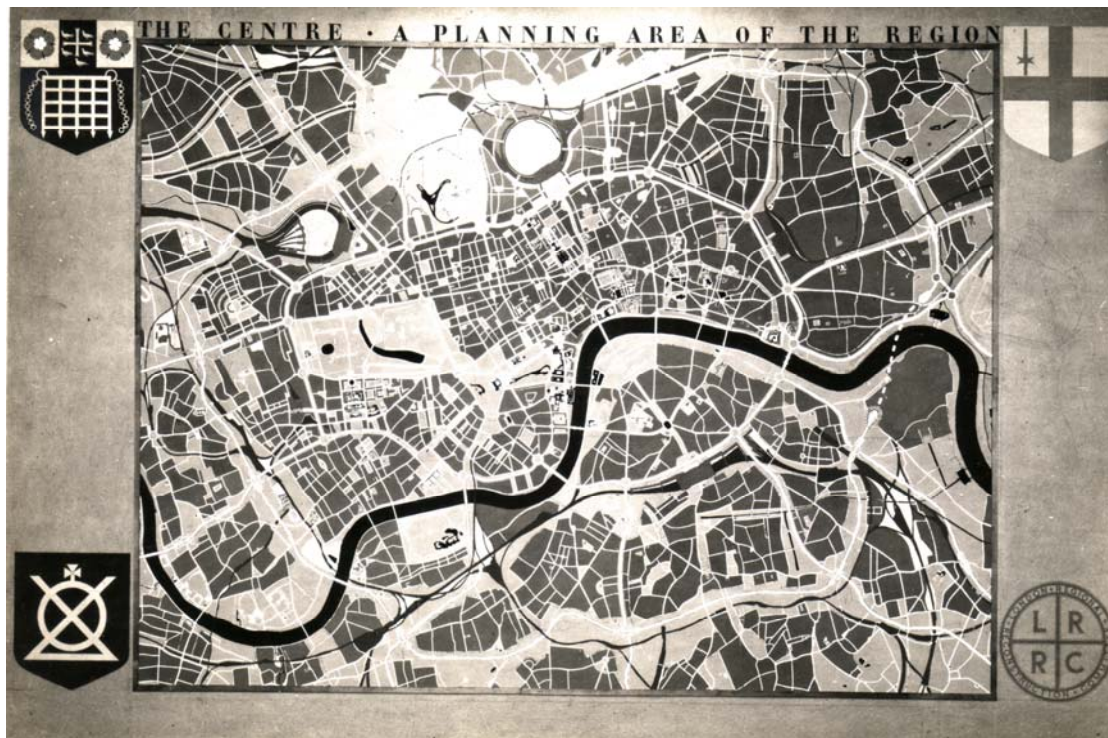


Figure 13: Central area plan (from photograph set).

opportunities were seized for road realignments, especially south of the Thames, but on the whole inner London was to be spared the restructuring of middle and outer London, despite the evident need to rebuild the extensively bomb-damaged areas.

The LRRC ideas and the wider issue of London's replanning

The LRRC proposals were, clearly, reacting to current major themes in planning; some driven by wartime experience (the concern for lower density and, especially, decentralisation as a defence against bombing); some from overseas experience (the major roads in "green ways" or, in US terms, "parkways") and some from inter-war ideas (the green belt). It clearly drew on existing reports on London, its problems and potential solutions, citing specifically the Greater London Regional Planning Committee reports (1929, 1933) and the Bressey-Lutyens report on Greater London roads (Ministry of Transport, 1938). Some might argue that little was new.

However, the working-out of the implications of all of these issues at the scale of Greater London – rather than for other much smaller towns and cities, as was being done at much the same time although most were published 2-3 years later – was new. So was the explicit combining of modes of transport, including the inner new airport. Interestingly, at the city-wide scale the newly-reshaped communities isolated by the traffic routes (Figure 9b) bear a strong relationship to the well-known "egg diagram" of the Forshaw and Abercrombie *County of London Plan* (1943). This was a novel concept and diagrammatic representation of 'social and functional areas' – known irreverently to civil servants as the 'egg diagram' the key graphic representation of this concept came rather late in the proceedings, disrupting publication and exhibition (memo, Harry Stewart to Sir Stephen Tallents, 8 February 1945, HLG 104/3). Although Abercrombie was not directly involved with the LRRC work, Marmaras and Sutcliffe (1994, p. 444) do suggest that he "became an

increasingly important source of information ... at the same time, he appears to have influenced the committee's proposals, though without dominating or directing them".

In fact timing and concurrent events were key issues for the LRRC and the reception of its proposals. While clearly more sophisticated and integrated, and especially drawing much more heavily on sound planning principles than *beaux-arts* or Modernist architectural ideas (see Larkham and Adams, 2011 for a discussion of others falling into these categories) the LRRC plan was overwhelmed by yet more sophisticated, and much better-resourced, work on the London region (Abercrombie, 1945), County of London (Forshaw and Abercrombie, 1943) and City of London (Holden and Holford, 1946).

Abercrombie produced clear and detailed plans, based on large-scale data collection and analysis, which is more explicit in the much larger publications than was the research effort of the LRRC. Indeed one review of the *County of London Plan* noted its advantageous use of "a mass of statistical and research data available from official sources ...this fact is important to bear in mind when inevitable comparisons are made with previously-produced plans" (specifically this reviewer mentions those of the LRRC and Royal Academy) (*Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 1943c, p. 195). However, it has been suggested that such use of facts and standards "was highly selective to the point of absurdity" (Higgott, 2007, p. 80). Abercrombie's plans were conceptually powerful, clearly articulating, for example, rings of movement and population density than did the LRRC; but the LRRC's maps were, perhaps, more clearly grounded in local realities than some of Abercrombie's more abstract concepts (the 'egg diagram' as compared with the LRRC overview (Figure 8), for example).

The layering of these officially-commissioned London plans for region, county and City was produced with some interplay (obviously in two because of Abercrombie's personal involvement; he was also very well known to Holford). Yet there was no coherent wider strategy, no true integration of planning at these varying scales, and relevant legislation was only just being debated in 1943-44. Together these plans produced a significant visualisation of urban form at a regional scale with a strategic perspective being afforded to issues surrounding population, employment and transportation. Importantly, perhaps, this visualisation is distinct from the other London plans, particularly in its comprehensiveness, its commitment to a broad strategy, the analytical techniques applied in the inception of Abercrombie's plans, and the synthesis involved for their formation - all of which paved the way for planning at a metropolitan scale (Larkham and Adams, 2011).

The relationship of the LRRC proposals with other unofficial visions has also been explored (Marmaras and Sutcliffe, 1994; Larkham and Adams, 2011). Some of these were radical and impracticable (the MARS plan; see also Gold, 1995) although a sub-regional vision was produced; others were smaller-scale and focused on inappropriate detail (the Royal Academy plans). However, it was the very multiplicity and layering of alternative visions that was likely to confuse the public.

The LRRC plan occasionally resurfaces, usually generating critical comment. The most recent view, focusing on the perceived impracticality of the inner airport, also highlighted a strongly negative response to the expressed values of the LRRC: it was "chilling" that during the devastation of wartime "architects and town planners could still be writing phrases such as 'Our future effort must be fearless, it must not allow obstacles to blot out our vision of the future' " (TPlautus, 2010). The language and ethos of planning, even if written by architects, can easily be divisive.

Discussion and conclusions

The LRRC meant well, but unfortunately its efforts did not live up to its aspirations: “money, labour, sympathetic interest and all required for the extension of study and research and to ensure that what has so far been done shall not be consigned to dusty pigeon-homes” (LRRC, 1943a, p. 49). In particular, the commissioning, at the highest level, of Abercrombie for the two official largest-scale plans, and Ministerial insistence on commissioning consultants to prepare a plan for the City (Hasegawa, 1999) led to the under-funded LRRC efforts being overtaken even as they were under way. Inevitably, therefore, they lacked influence and have been under-regarded in wider views of reconstruction planning and of London planning (Larkham and Adams, 2011). It is interesting, especially in the light of the RIBA’s special pleading for the pre-eminence of architects in reconstruction planning, to see the RIBA President’s view of the LRRC and *County of London* plans: their common features “are all the outcome of independent thought arriving at a logical conclusion” (Thomas, 1943). Similarly, there is an element of special pleading by the Editor of the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* in first responding to publication of the *County of London Plan*:

“The presence of the official plan in no way makes the LRRC and the other unofficial plans useless: in fact, comparison of official and unofficial schemes will reveal that there are many points even now in which the contribution of the unofficial planners can have a stimulating effect of incalculable value. Of these none is more important than the existence of the bold LRRC Railway Schemes, which fill what some will consider a gap in the official scheme” (*Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* July 1943, p. 193).

In terms of the communication of the LRRC’s ideas for replanning, which were basically sound and reflected contemporary principles and practices, the survival of the exhibition board photographs unusually allows a detailed assessment of effectiveness. This relates to emerging concerns for the visual representation of planning (Söderström, 1996), especially in such reconstruction plans, whether printed or exhibited (Larkham, 1997, 2007; Perkins and Dodge, 2012).

There is clear demonstration of the expenditure of much time, effort and resources during wartime, when all were scarce. The results were clean and clear (although the use of capitals throughout, and especially the smaller sizes, was less easy to read, and this has long been known: Tinker and Paterson, 1946; Wheildon, 1995) but the material was plainly produced by hand and, therefore, appeared less ‘finished’ and ‘professional’ than was the case with some other exhibitions of the period. There are none of “the nuanced clues as to the appropriate reading activity” that more sophisticated graphical and typographical presentations permit: subtleties of emphasis, significance etc. (Waller, 1987). Yet, despite some support from the Leverhulme Trust, this was not a generously-funded proposal supported by the municipality for which the plans were officially proposed; and under these circumstances, the communication of planning and proposals was generally effective.

The introductions to basic principles of effective planning, and their working-out on maps of a fictitious small area, should have appropriately conveyed complex messages to a non-technical viewer. The balance of text and illustrations – from ‘cartoons’ to maps – is usually effective, and there are few large blocks of text to baffle the visitor. The ‘appreciation gap’ between professionals and laypeople (Hubbard, 1994; see also Söderström, 1996) is likely to have been in part bridged by approachable and familiar imagery: for images are important in conveying planning messages, they are “the glue holding policy together” (Faludi, 1996, p. 93). What is

likely to have been less successful, though, is the message of planning at the wider, sub-regional, scale. The smaller, local, implications are more clear (even if on a fictional example). On the scale of the London region, there seems to have been less explanation of the bases for decisions and locations.

The cartography is probably the most significant part of this exhibition, at least as far as the surviving photographs demonstrate. Urban cartographic representation was becoming more familiar to a wider public from the nineteenth into the twentieth century (cf Dobraszczyk, 2012) and yet it is widely recognised that the urban geometric representation, with all features “presented simultaneously in an abstracted space with no fixed viewpoint” (Nead, 2001, p. 22) differs considerably from the experiential ground-level view (long demonstrated in ‘mental mapping’; Gould and White, 1986 but see also the provocative comment by Axelsen and Jones, 1987).

While the cartographic representations in this exhibition were unsophisticated because of the limitations of resources, their approach appears consistent with other reconstruction plans; and it is useful to relate this to more recent work on the use of maps by planners, where it is suggested that larger scales offer more precise, scientific views but smaller scales are more impressionistic (Dühr, 2004). This is plainly the case here, and the layering of the plan concepts on to the six-inch Ordnance Survey sheets does create a suggestion of precision. Perhaps, too, this leads to an implication of fixed intentions (the argument that mapping presents ‘immutable representations of the world’ (Pickles, 2004). “They propose, fix and, by coding space, establish an agenda ... planning maps of the city become statements of fact, instead of authored, positioned opinions about potential futures, produced by a governing civic class” (Perkins and Dodge, 2012). A further key point is that, while in other reconstruction plans and exhibitions, there is (carto)graphic portrayal of *evidence*, which as “incontrovertible visual evidence can be seductive and draw in readers” (Perkins and Dodge, 2012, their emphasis) the surviving LRRC images do not portray *evidence* but rather the focus is on the *proposals*. Certainly, and unlike many exhibitions of ‘official’ plans, there is no suggestion that visitors’ views were sought – although there is little evidence for those other exhibitions that views, once obtained, were acted upon (Larkham and Lilley, 2012)!

Another potential problem with the exhibition was in its layout, the apparent flow of ideas, rather than in how they were conveyed in text and graphics. The exhibition layout implies a rather complex, non-linear flow; with, in particular, the historical elements tucked away with the office and inquiry desk. The large-scale detail maps flanked, rather than followed, a central regional map; although the centrality of this map, and the large model, facing the entrance, would have been powerful.

So this was an unofficial plan, responding to contemporary professional concepts and produced by well-informed and well-connected professionals, and exhibited in one of the most elite, yet accessible, venues in the capital. The messages were clear and, on the whole, powerful and effective. Yet perhaps the very venue itself was offputting to many, outside the social elite who would otherwise visit the National Gallery. The message of the dominating cartography was of fixed proposals, rather than of suggestions on which responses were sought.

And, in the end, the LRRC plan did remain in dusty pigeon-holes, overtaken – despite its own problems and shortcomings – by the ascendant Abercrombie vision of the London region. Yet the plan resurfaces occasionally, usually to critical comment

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Appendix 1: Density tables (LRRC, 1943a, Figures 7 and 8).

BOROUGH Met. B. = Metropolitan Borough. M.B. = Municipal Borough. U.D. = Urban District.	Percentage of Gross Acreage of Borough in Test Area.	Acreage of each Borough within test Area. (Including Open Space, Inland Water, etc.)	Acreage of Public Open Space in portion of Borough within Test Area (see note).	Total Acreage of Developed and Develop- able Land within Test Area.	Percentage Increase (+) or Decrease (-) in Population in Borough (1921-1931).	Population in Portion of Borough within Test Area (1931 Census).	Estimated Population in Portion of Borough in Test Area (1939).	Average Population Density per acre of Building Land in Test Area† (see Note).	NOTES.
									* Public Open Space includes : (a) All Parks, Recreation Grounds, etc. administered by Local Authorities L.C.C., or Government ; (b) Common land ; (c) Land owned and maintained by National Trust. † Building land includes all land developed or undeveloped including roads, railways, indus- trial sites, etc., with the excep- tion of that enumerated above under Public Open Space.
Wood Green M.B.	100	1,607	339.7	1,267.3	+ 6.9	54,308	57,294	42.94	
Hornsey M.B.	100	2,872	338.2	2,533.8	+ 8.9	95,415	102,093	36.47	
St. Pancras Met. B.	100	2,694	506.4	2,187.6	- 6.3	198,133	188,226	90.55	
Hampstead Met. B.	100	2,265	335.2	1,929.8	+ 3.2	88,947	91,615	45.26	
Islington Met. B.	44	1,481	9	1,472	- 2.7	141,598	137,677	96.19	
Marylebone Met. B.	65	961	339	622	- 6.3	38,250	35,958	61.49	
Finchley M.B.	38	1,313	113.6	1,199.4	+ 26.8	22,462	27,187	18.71	
Hendon M.B.	22	2,329	37	2,292	+ 100.9	25,440	33,920	11.6	
Friern Barnet U.D.	12	164	5.7	158.3	+ 32.6	2,726	3,436	17.26	
Tottenham M.B.	10	295	21	274	+ 7.6	15,767	16,945	57.53	
Southgate M.B.	9	320	20	300	+ 41.8	5,046	6,728	16.82	
Edmonton M.B.	3	105	10	95	+ 16.2	2,330	2,630	24.52	
	—	16,406	2,074.8	14,331.2	—	690,422	703,609	43.28	
<div>TABLE 'A' EXISTING BOROUGHES</div>									

NEW RESIDENTIAL AREA.	Local Authority contained in New Residential Area.	Area of New Residential Areas (excluding Industrial Sites and Open Space).	Total Area of New Residential Areas within Test Area.	Total Area of all Land Scheduled for Building in Test Area.	Total Area of Open Space within Test Area.	Average Density per Acre in Residential Areas.	Total Population within Test Area.	Rehousing Total Population Within Test Area (1939) in New Residential Areas.		Population Density per acre of Building Land, including Industrial Sites, (See note).	NOTES.
								Average Density Per Acre of Residential Area.	Population in Each Residential Area.		
East Finchley ..	Wood Green (part) Friern Barnet Hornsey Finchley	1,115	Tufnell Park Area 575			99.59	111,043				* Building Land includes Areas Scheduled for Residential Use and Industrial Sites.
Wood Green ..	Tottenham (part) Wood Green Southgate Edmonton	985				99.59	98,096				
Highgate ..	St. Pancras (part) Islington Hornsey	1,000	Wood Green and Hornsey Area 515			99.59	99,590				† Open Space includes Land immunised from further Development or to be reclaimed from existing Development and converted to Agricultural Use, Afforestation or Public Open Space.
Golders Green ..	Hendon (part) Finchley	1,285				99.59	127,973				
Holloway ..	Islington (part) Hornsey	405	West Hampstead Area 359			99.59	40,334				
Chalk Farm ..	St. Pancras (part) Hampstead	270				99.59	26,889				
St. John's Wood and St. Pancras	St. Pancras (part) Willesden Marylebone	690				99.59	68,717				c.f. Col. 5, Table "A."
Hampstead ..	Hampstead (part)	620	King's Cross Station Area 460			99.59	61,715				‡ c.f. Figure at bottom of Col. 8, Table "A."
Crouch End ..	Hornsey (part)	695				99.59	69,215				
		7,065	1,909	8,974 —see note	7,532	99.59	703,572† —see note			78.4	
TABLE 'B'											
NEW URBAN AREAS											