

“Conserving 20th century Landscapes: The Twentieth Century Society’s Role”

Catherine Croft
(Director, Twentieth Century Society)

The statutory role of the 20th century is not best suited to alerting us of threats to landscapes, nor does it encourage us to take a holistic view of structures as forming part of wider landscapes.

- As a national amenity society, we are consulted on listed building consent applications for demolition of post 1914 buildings in England.
- Local Authorities have no duty to inform us of any of the following: Conservation area designations/ demolitions; Applications affecting the setting of listed buildings; post 1914 parks and gardens; structures not yet considered for listing; and scheduled ancient monument consent.

Recent Twentieth Century Society cases have included examples of all of the following, all of which have a clear landscape dimension:

- A nuclear power station
- Motorway bridges
- A prefab estate
- Post war housing estates
- A commercial office development
- A holiday village

It seems obvious that this trend will continue and that potential future 20th century cases will include more examples of these sorts of features/landscapes and many more which are likely to be even more controversial and challenging.

- out of town office park
- out of town supermarket
- outsider art landscape
- 1960s heritage interpretation

The following examples of these were briefly discussed.

A NUCLEAR POWER STATION

Trawsfynydd Nuclear Power Station by Basil Spence and Sylvia Crowe

Now decommissioned, this has been recently considered for listing by CADW and turned down. It is now proposed to lower the exterior walls and bury the reactor creating two artificial hills. Although the presence of this structure in the historic landscape has a similar impact to a mediaeval castle, this literal ‘power house’ of the 20th century is not acceptable as a sublime landscape feature, and there is strong pressure to erase this chapter of our recent past.

A PREFAB ESTATE

The Excalibur Estate in Catford south-east London. The Twentieth Century Society supported the request for the listing of the entire estate in 2008, but only six of the residences were selected. It also backed proposals to create a conservation area, but the local authority who are backing the redevelopment of the site were not surprisingly not willing to designate this. This is certainly an example of a 'heritage asset' where the whole is more than the sum of the parts (or certainly than six parts), and the Estate was unusual in that rather than positioning the prefabs spread out so that they defined plots for later permanent development, they were compressed to fit the maximum number on the site whilst still allowing for good orientation and access routes.

POST WAR HOUSING ESTATES

The Alexandra Road estate, Camden, London; the Bishopsfield Estate, Harlow; and the Barbican Estate, City of London. At Alexandra Road, plans to redevelop the integral park have faced opposition from some residents, and in fact many of the hard landscaping features are specifically covered by the Grade II* listing. Bishopsfield Estate is an example of a development where the relationships between a formal piazza, fingers of countryside penetrating between blocks, and private courtyard gardens are crucial to the concept. It has been proposed for listing, and has an active residents group who support this. At the Barbican there are proposals to make changes to the

landscaping, including the raised seating blocks topped with historic tomb stone slabs, which were part of the original design.

A COMMERCIAL OFFICE DEVELOPMENT

The Broadgate Development, City of London. This 1980s Post Modern development has been put forward both for conservation area designation and listing. It is the relationship of buildings to open spaces, many of which have high quality sculpture that is most remarkable.

A HOLIDAY VILLAGE

Portmeirion by Clough Williams Ellis (1921-1975). After some years of partial neglect and use of inappropriate repair materials, Portmeirion is now very well cared for and extremely popular.

Possible examples of **specific future cases** shown included Stockley Park, an office park with a good mix of high quality architecture and sculpture, out of town superstores (ubiquitous and unloved, but certainly typical of recent decades and a testament to many facets of recent social and economic history); the cleared landscape created in the 1960s around Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford and Kevin Duffy's extraordinary Rectory Nurseries near Wigan - an ever growing collection of miniature half timbered facades.

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Finally the paper made a plea for consideration of the evidence of everyday amateur landscaping skills, showing a set of cigarette card images of crazy paving techniques, and suggested that behind the current unease about the conservation of 20th century landscapes lies a horror of many schemes never realised (such as housing on coastal farmland at Newhaven and Clough Williams Ellis's 1931 scheme for the development of Bulstrode Park Gerrards Cross Buckinghamshire, for housing. This combined with our uneasy relationship to the beauty of decayed concrete structures, means that the conservation of 20th century landscapes is still contested.