

13 th Nov 1969

New Society

Dear Sir,

I enclose a note which you may like to use.

Participation in Sheffield post Skeffington.

Just how is a city like Sheffield getting to grips with the recommendations of the Skeffington Report. Leaving aside the controversy surrounding the new theatre and the tardy public meeting called, as we now know, to defend proposals already confirmed-(just the kind of P.R. job that many feared would be the practical effect of Skeffington-), there are two contrasting exercises in participation being carried on in the City at the moment.

In Darnall, an area of mainly 19th century terraced housing to the east of the City, the Corporation ~~has~~ had local scouts deliver thousands of leaflets, (they call it 'a glossy brochure' in the local ~~news~~ paper), one to each household, explaining its redevelopment proposals for the area, and asking for comments on the open ended questionnaire that accompanied the leaflet. To complement this, one public meeting was planned, but in fact two held because 300 people couldn't get into the first one, to explain the proposals further and to set up an action group of residents to negotiate with the Corporation. At the two meetings the audience certainly asked the right questions, disputing the Corporation's basic assumptions, for instance, that most of the houses in the area would have to be knocked down, rather than accepting what the Corporation presumably saw as their proper task, that of making minor adjustments.

But in some ways more important than this, the meetings got councillors talking to the public in large numbers for the first time since 1945. And it showed just how obsolete were some of their ideas about what the public wanted. It shook some of them out of the belief that progress was simply the decanting of people out of old houses and into new; that the old were simply slums and the new simply wonderful. The Labour councillor that talked of peoples houses as slums, got shouted at. That he or his colleagues were brought up in slums didn't wash. In the end the chairman of the Town Planning Committee was able to extricate them all from a difficult position by claiming that he, like they, the audience had lived ~~lived~~ in houses that was a slum from without but not from within.

More substantially, the Corporation can be criticised for the timing of its move towards participation in this area. The dialogue between people and planners has started at a very late stage in the planning process, which means that it is difficult for people to make the connexion

the connexion between the proposals as a whole and the future of their particular house, the thing that is uppermost in ~~their~~ their minds. At the other end of the City, Walkley Action Group, working in a better area of housing, though still one sheduled for redevelopment, have emphasised for some time that any plan for the future of the area must take into account not ^{only} the views of residents on general aspects of the area, but also their opinions about the house they presently live in. To this end, the Group together with the University Shelter Group are carrying out a survey of nearly 3000 households in the Walkley area of the City. From the survey they hope to construct a 'Wishes Map'. This idea, borrowed from a similar group in the Saint Annes Well area of Notting ham, means simply that peoples opinions are registered on a large scale map of the area. For example one colour will be used to mark in those houses where the residents want to stay, and another colour will be used to show t those houses where residents want to move. This information will, ^{then} it is hoped, be treated ~~then~~, as part of the data upon which any redevelopment proposals ~~should be~~ based. If, for instance, roads need to be changed, they should, as far as possible, go around those houses which are in good or improvable condition, and most importantly, ^{what} people want to stay.

Yours sincerely
Geoffrey Green.

NEWSOCIETY

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THE EDITOR THANKS YOU FOR LETTING HIM
SEE YOUR ARTICLE, BUT IS SORRY THAT HE
CANNOT USE IT IN NEW SOCIETY