

TOWN PLANNING

Raymond Unwin *

La intervención de Unwin, entonces arquitecto de la Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust, en el congreso de casas baratas de Londres (1907) se centró en los problemas de gestión asociados al planeamiento urbano. Más concretamente, refiriéndose al caso británico, insistiría en que, para que una política urbanística fuese exitosa, era preciso, por un lado, que la administración local pudiese comprar suelo en términos razonables y tuviese capacidad para establecer límites de densidad edificatoria y, por otro, que se adoptasen medidas en el sentido de introducir cierta flexibilidad o discrecionalidad en la administración de los reglamentos edificatorios. Recordaría además que el town planning, al contrario que el site planning, debe guiarse en todo momento por el interés común, satisfacer los requerimientos de uso y comodidad (convenience) tanto como otros de orden estético (en línea con el pintoresquismo: street picture) y delimitar las áreas de crecimiento. Finalmente, dedicará varios párrafos (muy didácticos, dicho sea de paso) a discutir límites, alcance y complementariedad de town planning y site planning.

MR. RAYMOND UNWIN said: -The first necessity for any successful policy of town planning and town development is that the Municipality shall have untrammelled powers for land purchase on reasonable terms. Anybody who has had to do with the development of land must realise that without the power of land purchase, town planning would lead to such scheming and lobbying on behalf of private interests, would encourage such speculation, and give such temptations to the biassing of officials, owing to the enormous increase that will sometimes be made in the value of land caused by the diversion through it of main lines of traffic, that it is only by giving to the Municipality the power to purchase such tracts of land that effective check can be put upon these speculations.

Secondly, there must be power given to the Municipality to limit the number of houses and the amount of building to be put upon any area of ground. This of itself would greatly check the sudden and extreme increase in the values of land, and without it the Municipality would be powerless to prevent the growing up of new overcrowded areas.

* UNWIN, Raymond.- "Town planning", en *Report of the VIII^{me} Congrès International des Habitations a Bon Marché, held in London, August, 1907*. London: National Housing Reform Council, [1907]. Londres, Agosto, 1907. En este caso se trata de la edición inglesa que se conserva en la Bibliothèque du Musée Social de París con la signatura 7414 (N. del E.).

Thirdly, if the municipality is to undertake to regulate in a rational way the growth of towns, and to plan out the future developments, it is absolutely necessary that some means should be found of introducing flexibility or discretion in the administration of the by-laws, or regulations, necessary for this end. The English law at present is that when once a Municipality has adopted a set of by-laws, it has no power or discretion to remit or vary any of the rules. It is not in the power of man to conceive a set of by-laws dealing with all the questions arising in town development, which shall be so framed as to be reasonable in all circumstances; and some power of discretion to vary their by-laws where the circumstances seem to require it must either be given to the local authorities themselves or some body or bodies must be created as a Court of Appeal, who shall have power to decide on their merits any cases in which some variation is thought desirable.

In the first instance, at any rate, it will also be necessary that some body or bodies shall have powers to supervise and guide the work of the local authorities in this matter of town planning and development. The consideration of the subject is comparatively new in England; the number of those who have studied the matter, and would be competent to deal with it, is small; and in the early days, at any rate, some supervision of the local authorities in this direction should be secured. Probably the same body or bodies could perform both these functions.

Town planning and site planning, though one subject and mutually interdependent, nevertheless form two divisions of the subject, which must not be confused, and which in most cases will need to be dealt with separately. The main difference arises from the fact that in town planning proper what may be called the common interests of the whole community so vastly outweigh in importance the individual interests of the building owners that they can only be properly safeguarded by taking the work out of the hands of the individual owner and putting it into the hands of the community.

The question which will determine town planning, such as the main lines of communication from point to point, the general contours of the ground, main drainage lines, and last, but by no means least, the preparation of a fine scheme of architectural effect in the whole town, are all matters in which it is the common interest of the whole that must prevail, and that must inspire the work if they are to have proper consideration.

The success of town planning depends, first, on satisfying the requirements of use and convenience, finding the most absolutely serviceable and helpful expression in the town plan of the citizens' life, with its needs and pleasures, and on doing this in such a way as to create out of these needs a plan that shall afford due architectural possibilities; providing for dignity and stateliness where these are desirable; providing for that degree of order and symmetry in the plan, which shall enable the stranger to grasp the general life of

the town; providing also for picturesqueness and charm where these are appropriate.

In making the plan, the architect must all the time have in his mind what Mr. Lutyens has well called the street picture which will arise from it, its frame or setting and its vista closed with fine symmetrical terminal feature, or with picturesque groups of buildings, or leading up to some open view towards sea, sky, or distant country, which may sometimes be more charming than any closed vista. These effects are beyond the power, even if they were sufficiently within the interest, of individual owners of plots of land to provide for, and must all therefore be provided for by the town planner.

Moreover, it must be the province of the town planner to arrange for the limitation and definition of areas. We have all realised the charm of the small old-world walled town, the avoidance of ragged edges and limitless size. Much of this may be due to the old wall, which we cannot reproduce; but it should be our first aim to define areas of growth, to limit them and mark them off by belts of parkland, woodland, meadows, or glades, which shall not only take the place of the old wall as boundary, but shall serve as breathing places, and pleasant ways for those who pass to and fro* about the town. An important matter, too, is the arrangement of street junctions and corners so that they may not only be convenient for traffic, but may lend themselves to good architectural treatment, a point rendered specially difficult by certain of our English by-laws. The town planner may also do much to arrange for the due admixture of different classes which is so necessary for healthy town or suburban life. This is a point to which special attention is being given in the Hampstead Garden Suburb, where the available land is being allotted in due proportion to all the different classes of houses, from small cottages to large mansions. Mrs. Barnett always insists specially on this.

It is difficult to draw any line between town planning and site planning, or to define where one must end and the other must begin, for the town planner must have absolute power to regulate the line of frontage, the height and position, and sometimes even the general character of the buildings along the frontages of the main roadways which he lays down; otherwise the individual owner may destroy utterly the street picture which the town planner has sought to create. The more town planning can be made to include site planning, the more the man who is laying out the roads and streets can consider the sites and the buildings adjacent to those streets, the better the result will be. When the time comes to plan the smaller and less important roads, roads which are required to open up given areas of land for building purposes, but which only in a quite secondary way will serve as lines of traffic, then we come into the region of what may properly be called site planning; and here it is absolutely essential for a successful result that the individual building, the individual house and cottage, should receive much

* From (N. del E.).

thought and attention while the road is being planned; and it is this fact which gives such great importance and value to all schemes of Municipal building or co-operative building by societies of public utility, as, for example, the Tenants' Societies in England, and by other voluntary associations such as are developing the Garden City at Letchworth and suburbs, such as that at Hampstead, which render the comprehensive dealing with sites possible.

Only by planning these building streets and the houses which shall front on to them together, can such considerations as providing the proper aspects for all the houses, for giving them the most pleasant and open outlook from their windows, be secured, at the same time that something in the way of a street picture is developed, and only thus can one arrange for the greens and common gardens or tennis lawns which may help so much in the effect. Very much may be done by wise regulation and guidance in cases where the streets must be laid out by one authority, and the buildings be erected independently; but when it comes to site planning, the ideal condition is only reached when the same mind that works out the street line and the street picture, at the same time works out the position of every house and the aspect, as well as the outlook, which every house will obtain. When an opportunity occurs for planning such as this, it has been my experience that it is of the greatest advantage to be able to work, as it were, backwards and forwards, thinking first of the street lines and street pictures; secondly, of the general line of the buildings, their aspects and their outlooks, falling back, if necessary, and modifying the street line or street picture to suit these, and finally again returning to the plans of buildings themselves, and working them out in greater detail. It is only by some such method of site planning that it is possible when building large numbers of small houses to secure to each that individuality of treatment which is given to the larger detached house, and which is so necessary if our cottages are all to enjoy, as we now realise they should enjoy, not only healthy surroundings but sunny aspects for all their living rooms and a pleasant outlook from their windows.