

Thursday 13 March 2014 - Session Two - Paper Three

### 'The Regeneration of Hutchesontown 'B': The role of inventorisation in area assessment'

by Katherine Atkinson (Digitisation Heritage Specialist, RCAHMS)

**D**escribed by a local resident as once being the 'Bermuda Triangle of trouble', Glasgow's Hutchesontown 'B' estate has undergone a dramatic social and physical transformation over the past fifty years. Designed by Robert Matthew as part of one of Glasgow's first Comprehensive Development Areas (CDAs), the estate became home to hundreds of residents displaced from the deteriorating tenements. The research discussed in this paper was in support of my master's dissertation, which looked into the effects of the recent 2007-2011 regeneration in the Hutchesontown 'B' estate. Throughout the research stage of the project, information was collected to form a catalogue of contrasting perspectives from local residents, housing association employees and the general public on the outcome of the regeneration.

#### THE RISE AND FALL OF THE HIGH RISE

Elected at the end of the Second World War, Britain's Labour government came in to power facing an unprecedented housing crisis. With dozens of cities

across the UK devastated by blitz bombing, it was estimated that around 200,000 homes had been destroyed and over three and a half million damaged.<sup>1</sup> Like many other cities, Glasgow faced an overwhelming rise in population which could not be supported by its ageing and unfit housing stock. By the 1950s, there was a scarcity of land available in the city for large-scale housing developments.<sup>2</sup> The 'Clyde Development Plan' of 1951 designated 29 areas for redevelopment.<sup>3</sup> In each of these development areas, which varied in size from 25 to 270 acres and in population from 4,000 to 40,000; it was proposed that high-rise developments would replace the endless streets of slum tenement housing and cure the problems caused by the growth in population.<sup>4,5</sup>

The Gorbals area of the city was one of the largest areas earmarked for housing redevelopment. Most buildings in the Gorbals area were built between 1850 and 1890 and were largely constructed in an extensive grid pattern.<sup>6</sup> Like elsewhere in Britain after the Second World War, the Gorbals underwent a period of unprecedented population growth. Slum



**Figure 1:** Hutchesontown 'B' mid-construction. Remnants of tenement housing can still be seen standing to the right of the image. (David Hogg, "Crown Street Regeneration Project." Lecture, NGH, Glasgow, August, 2008.)

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conditions in working class neighbourhoods across the UK had also reached breaking point, with overcrowding leading to disease and high mortality rates.<sup>7</sup> Of 7.5 thousand homes in the Gorbals, 34.3% suffered from overcrowding and 97.3% were deemed unsanitary.<sup>8,9</sup>

As the first of the sites to face redevelopment, the Hutchesontown area of the Gorbals was an 111 acre site, designated as a CDA by the Secretary of State for Scotland in February 1957.<sup>10,11</sup> Situated to the South of the River Clyde, 97,000 new homes were to be built on the Hutchesontown site between 1960 and 1980.<sup>12</sup> With a shattered economy and a general shortage of traditional materials after the war, the construction industry had to adopt new wartime technologies to create housing.<sup>13</sup> A mass-manufacturing component based sector soon developed which significantly accelerated construction.<sup>14</sup>

Hutchesontown 'B', was an area designed by iconic architect Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall & Partners and A. G. Jury, city architect and director of planning.<sup>15</sup> The buildings were approved in 1958 and built between November 1959 and November 1962.<sup>16</sup> The site was surrounded by a mixture of residential and industrial areas, and was on the northern edge of the CDA.<sup>17</sup> The complex contained 308 flats in four 17 storey blocks, surrounded by sixty-five flats and maisonettes in three and four storey blocks, as seen in figure 1.

In 1971, sociologist Pear Jephcott conducted a survey of 692 high-rise homes across Glasgow. The survey concluded that across the city 91% of inhabitants questioned were satisfied with their homes, and 86% of them planned to stay in them long-term.<sup>18</sup> Whilst high-rises were a great success from the offset, they soon lost popularity, with overall satisfaction declining with length of residence.<sup>19</sup>

Margaret Thatcher's 'Right to Buy' policy removed the majority homes from the rental market in the 1980s in what was a primarily rental based economy.<sup>20</sup> With a narrowing supply of rental accommodation, high rise flats often became a last choice destination for many people.<sup>21</sup> This resulted in a succession of transient populations, with some flats being rented out more than three times in the space of a year in the Hutchesontown B estate.<sup>22</sup> A combination of economic decline, problems related to youth crime and a community of primarily single men suffering from alcohol dependencies led to a rapidly deteriorating

environment.

With troubled estates seen as a drain on council finances and resources, many local authorities are faced with the decision of whether to demolish or regenerate them. In Scotland, demolition of high-rise flats is almost a monthly ritual, with blocks being taken down on a regular basis to the entertainment of crowds of onlookers.

Opposition to such high-rise demolition generally comes from individuals who enjoy high-rise living, as well as groups who fear the breakup of their communities through a demolition and redevelopment programme.<sup>23</sup> Some energetic and visionary architects and property developers have also seen merit in the ageing structures. With upgrade of the common areas, the introduction of concierge, improved security and a freshened up appearance, high-rise estates can provide desirable homes.<sup>24</sup> This use of such techniques is best seen in London's famous Trellick Tower and Sheffield's award winning Park Hill, while increasingly more Scottish estates are choosing regeneration.

### REGENERATION AS A SECOND CHANCE

In March 2003, ownership of Hutchesontown 'B' passed from Glasgow City Council to Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) and the area was renamed the 'Riverside Estate'. With economic and social decline in the Gorbals area, a set of proposals were made in 2004 for a £16.5 million regeneration of the estate. Riverside had the benefit of having a lower rate of turnover than neighbouring high-rise developments, close proximity to the city centre, a view over Glasgow Green and lower population density than other estates. The proposals for the estate included the replacement of kitchens and bathrooms, new central heating systems, rewiring, improved security measures, insulation and cladding of the exterior and an extensive landscaping programme.

When the GHA first examined the area, they planned to connect it as an entire unit, tying the low rise blocks to the high-rise in attempts at creating a more solid community. At the time, GHA were working by elements rather than comprehensive packages. This approach was, however, deemed inappropriate for Riverside, and it was decided that the work would be carried out in elements so that it appeared as a

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package, with interior work and externals completed at the same time, and landscaping shortly after.<sup>25</sup> In November 2010 ownership was transferred once again from GHA to the New Gorbals Housing Association (NGHA) in a process known as Second Stage Transfer, with 93.27% of inhabitants in favour of the transfer. At this stage, the NGHA took the reins of the project, and were instrumental in the completion of the environmental works.

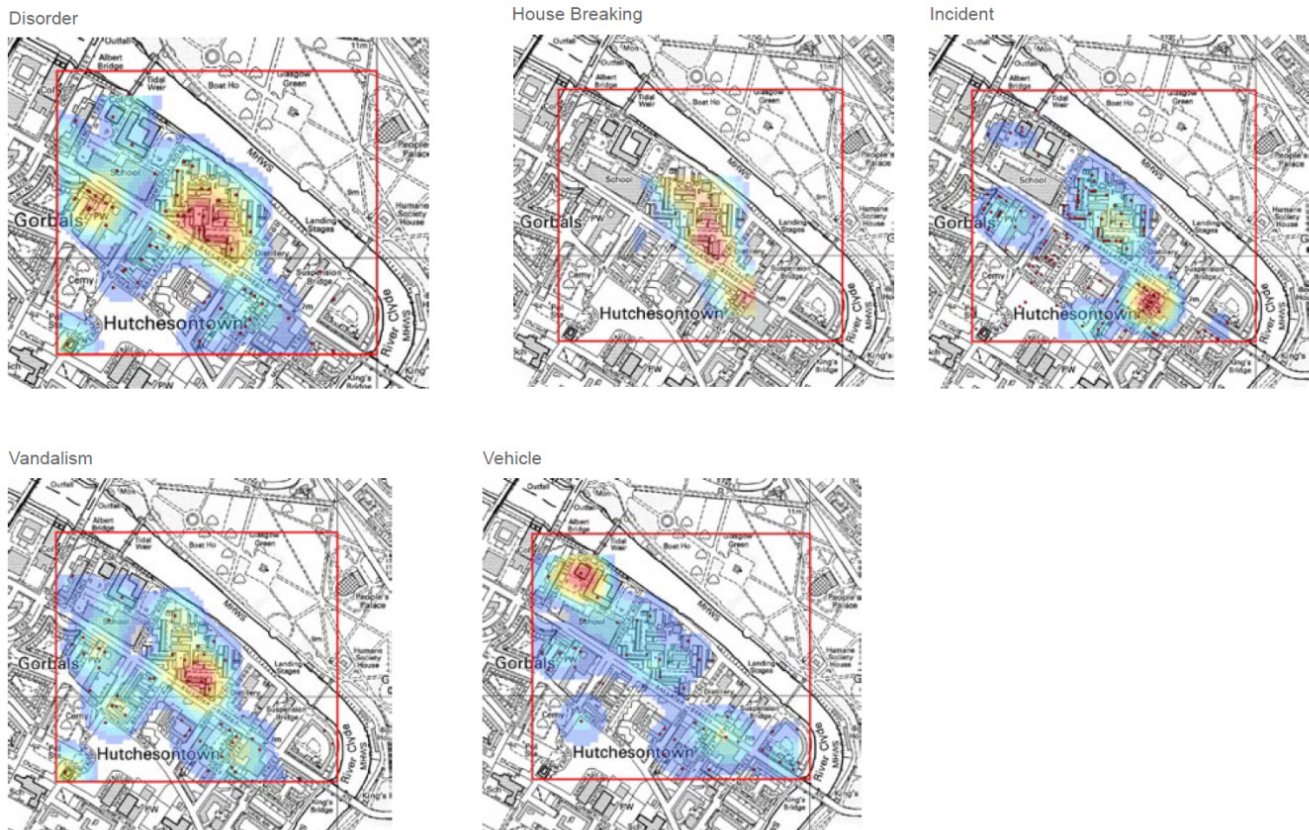
#### INVENTORISATION THROUGH SOCIAL RESEARCH

A wide range of evidence was accumulated throughout the dissertation. The research involved three separate interviews with a resident, a member of concierge and a housing manager to gain a broad understanding of the effects the regeneration has had on those involved. The comparison and analysis of photography of before and after the completion of the project was also used to help comprehend the physical transformation. A short interview with members of the general public was

also held to gauge opinions of those not involved in the regeneration. Through this assessment, an inventory of contrasting evidence was developed to aid in the analysis of the regeneration project.

A number of issues arose during the research stage of the project. Originally intending to conduct a focus group with multiple long term residents to spark conversation and debate about the changes which had occurred, a number of activities had been arranged to help direct the proceedings. On the day, however, the housing association revealed that they had only been able to find one volunteer who had lived in the estate long enough to have witnessed the changes. Despite this change to the plan, it was decided that the focus group activities would still be used.

A series of different topics were discussed with all participants, including alterations to the buildings themselves, to the landscaping and to the security of the site. In the original study which was completed for the regeneration project, a series of maps showing the distribution of



**Figure 2:** These diagrams help to illustrate the focus of various forms of crime in the Hutchesontown 'B'; area prior to regeneration. (Mike Hyatt Landscape Architects, *Riverside Gorbals Environmental Action Plan*. Glasgow, 2004.)



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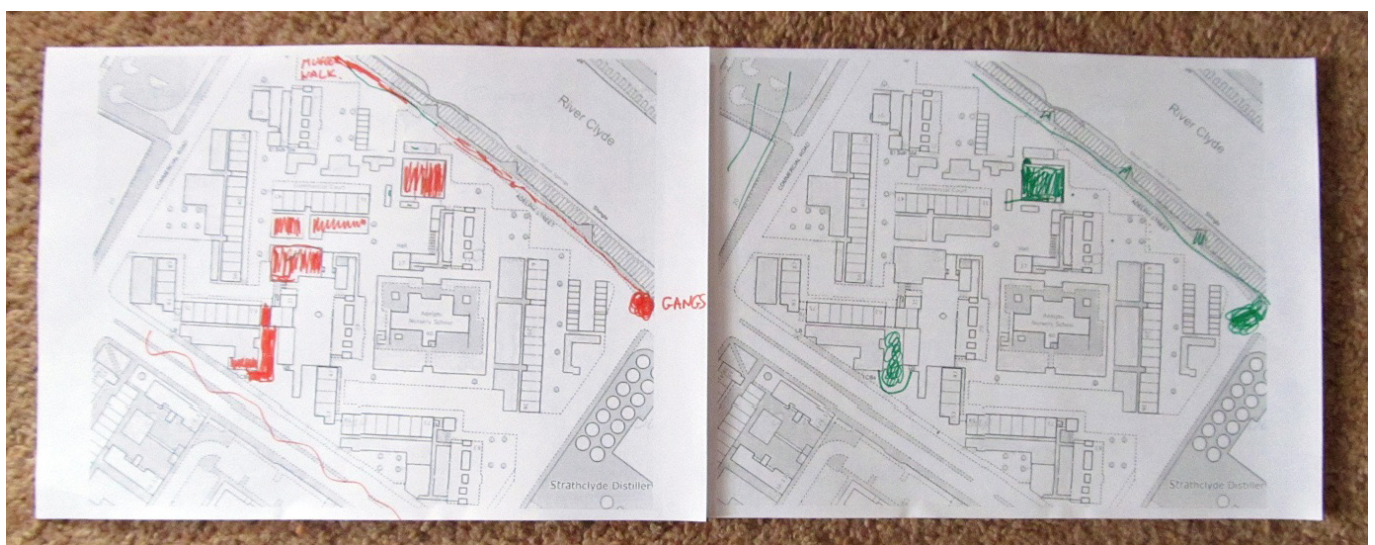
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various types of crime were produced (see figure 2).<sup>26</sup> They demonstrate how crime in the estate largely consisted of vandalism and disorder, while other crime took place outside of the site. With these maps in mind, an attempt was made to create similar information, showing the problem areas before and after regeneration. By asking the resident to draw in red these areas before regeneration and green the areas after regeneration, the reasons why they are prone to crime were assessed (see figure 3). It was discussed how the introduction of private gardens, play areas and landscaping has drawn crime out of the heart of the estate and has helped reduce incidents. With a 24% decrease in crime in the area between 2007 and 2011; according to the resident, the only major problem area which still exists is the pub on the northern edge of the site.<sup>27,28</sup> A cause for alcohol related crime and disorder at the centre of the estate; the resident stated that 'apart from the hardened drinkers who go to the pub, I think the majority of people would like to see it blown off the face of the earth.'<sup>29</sup>

During the interview, the resident was asked to place feature cards under categories marked 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' and discuss each in detail, as seen in figure 4. By asking him to make a decision on each card, a discussion was instigated and he was persuaded to give reasons for his final decision. He found that most of the landscaping work had been an

improvement to what the area was like before, but was unhappy that the previously communal green areas had been converted into private gardens for maisonette inhabitants. Cards relating to the interior work were mainly placed in the 'unsuccessful' pile as he did not consider the work to be of a high enough standard. What was interesting, however, was that he thought that what he termed the 'new windows' had failed to insulate the flats and that 5mm gaps in them were allowing cold air to enter the building.<sup>30</sup> After much confusion over this it became apparent that rather than talking about the new insulated windows, which are yet to be installed, the resident was in fact discussing the new balcony enclosure systems. These enclosures were designed to block winds and provide a sense of privacy. This lack of understanding of basic design principles were reminiscent of stories from when the flats were first opened in 1962 of residents moving in and immediately painting the intentionally exposed hardwood which they presumed to have been left unfinished!<sup>31</sup> It also stressed the importance of attaining a balanced range of perspectives to better understand the issues at hand.

One of the most blatant demonstrations of both physical and social transformation within the Hutchesontown 'B' site was through the use of photography. Personal photographs, taken as part of the project, could be compared to images from before works commenced. The most noticeable change which could be seen through photographic comparison was



**Figure 3:** These maps show the areas which the resident who was interviewed perceived as being 'trouble areas' before and after the regeneration project. The areas of before can be seen in red, while the after areas are shown in green. (Resident, Interviewed by Katherine Atkinson, Glasgow, July 24th, 2013.)

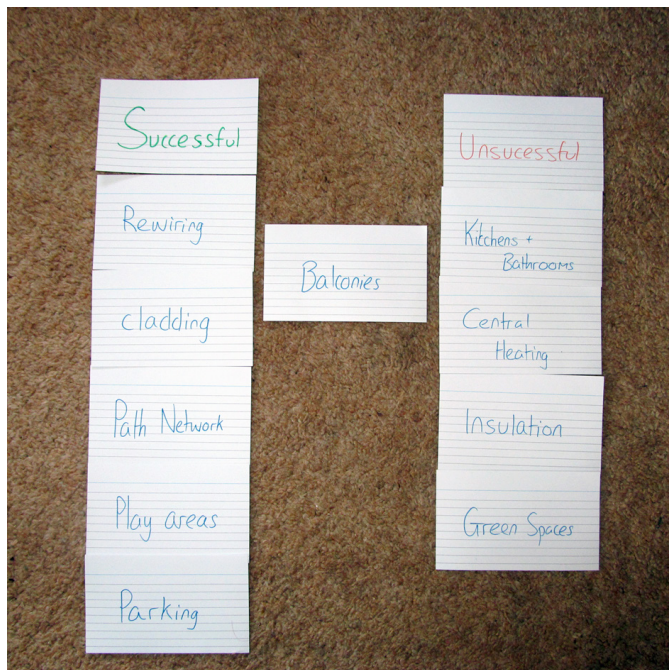
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that of the estate's play area, as seen in figures 5 and 6. Before regeneration the area suffered from broken or rusting facilities, glass and even used needles.<sup>32</sup> After the works were completed safer equipment was introduced, including new football and basketball courts. On both visits to the site, the play areas were in use by local children, with a football tournament being held on one occasion.



**Figure 4:** These feature cards were used to direct discussion and persuade the resident to come to a conclusion on the success of each individual element of the regeneration project. (Resident, Interviewed by Katherine Atkinson, Glasgow, July 24th, 2013.)



**Figure 5:** The play area in Hutchesontown 'B' before regeneration. (Mike Hyatt Landscape Architects, *Riverside Gorbals Environmental Action Plan*. Glasgow, 2004.)



**Figure 6:** After the completion of the landscaping works, the play area became safer and better used (Personal Image).