

# Book Review:

## Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing

**Boughton, J. (2018).**  
Brooklyn, NY: Verso. 330pp.

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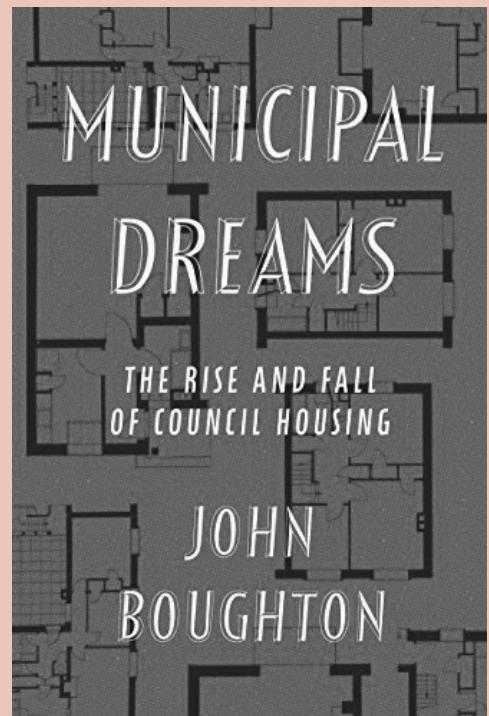
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Received 28 Sep 2019; Revised 7 Oct 2019; Accepted 6 Dec 2019

Print-ISSN: 2228-9135, Electronic-ISSN: 2258-9194, doi: 10.14456/built.2019.16

### Introduction and contribution

The topic of social housing becomes revision again when the Grenfell housing in UK was fired because of using dangerously combustible cladding. This makes residents who are inattention to indict a model of social housing management, returns to question about the model of investment such as Public-private partnership (PPP) of social housing. The Grenfell Tower can be an apparent case that reflects public state's flaws as well as failure of private sector. This book focuses on dynamics and ideas that produced multi-storey living and drawbacks of development of social housing through chronological telling. That brings audiences have better understanding of story, cause, consequence of social housing. It reflects advantages and disadvantages of social housing in term of physical environment of living and management, and creates empathy on social housing' objectives to be a good lesson learn for future housing development.



## Book's components

Early chapters of this book compose to recount the ideals which inspired and informed the great program of council house buildings which transformed our country overwhelmingly to the 1980s. The necessity of social housing is ancient period that derived from prevalence of slum in city in Victorian that made troubles of disease-ridden, criminal. Furthermore, mission of democratic state is to response the quality of living, slum was ended and replaced by council homes in 1890s. This became aspirational housing which expressed duty to house its people decently of state under limitation of public investment. Later chapters discuss about second transformation which has seen council housing and its community marginalized and dishonored. Since 1980s, local authority and administration have apparently run housing, influencing to management revolution. Currently, social housing has turned its role to be owned/managed as social – landlord in terms of usually housing associations.

## By chapters

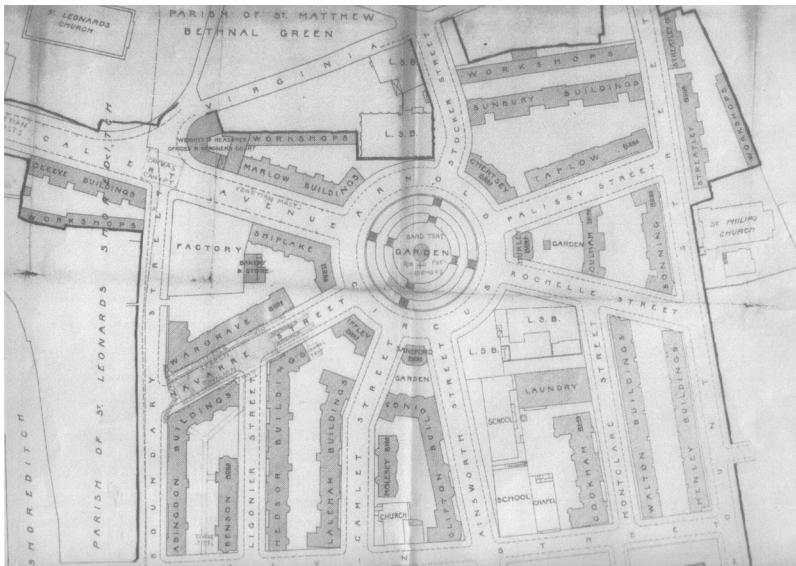
Each chapter presents on the origin and transformation of social housing. These changes can reflect condition, citizen's views, roles of state, necessity of social housing in each period in context of Britain. The brief of contents has described as follow;

**Chapter 1** illustrates the origination of social housing in UK, including causes and effects of management model. The world's first industrial revolution derived urban proletariat caused to sanitary problems, state needed to establish Sanitary Act (1842) and Public Health Act (1848). Council had duties on quality of living for residents who lived in housing estate. In 1866 Laboring classes Dwelling Act was launched to give power for state to buy the lands, construct, and develop housing for working-class.

They found that the essential of working-class housing was finance. In the same period, the Act allowed local authorities to set preferential rate for Public works loan commissions. This was the first government subsidy for public housing and guaranteed return 5% for private housing company. This benefited for investor which received profits as well as philanthropy. However, council housing that constructed by company was unpopular because their styles looked similar to barracks, strictly condition, and high rent rate. In 1900 Britain's first council estate was the Boundary Estate that built for working-class which located in the Old Nichol district (**Figure 1**). The Old Nichol was home to around 5,000 people and was known as one of the poorest and most overcrowded slum areas in London. In the late 1880s, council started on clearing the Old Nichol, and replaced by The Boundary Street Estate in 1897. The design scheme for the Boundary Street Estate (**Figure 2**) was far removed from the usual housing for the poor. Four-storey mansion blocks of varying size were to be built, tree lined streets radiating from a central garden, with shops, a laundry and workshops for residents, with the existing schools and churches included within the plan. It would be a model development providing all that the residents would need.

**Figure 1.** A Street in The Nichol, 1890 (source: Boundary Community Launderette Company, 2014)





**Figure 2.** 'The Boundary Street Scheme' – 1900 Map © Metropolitan Archives (source: (Boundary Community Launderette Company, 2014)



**Figure 3. Cottage suburbs, Hammersmith, LCC, Pre-1914 (source: Boughton, 2018)**

London County Council (LCC) was established in 1890 that aimed to build social housing according to Working-class Act. LCC had collaborated with architects which the finest estate was pre-war scheme; The Old Oak ([Figure 3](#)) in East Acton (1906-1927) the architect who contributed most to the designs was Sir Archibald Sinclair. This estate introduced two design features new to social housing. Today, the estate becomes a conservation area because of its design features – ‘wooden mullioned window frames, brick façades, pitched and gabled roofs, small dormers and paneled doors’ – and landscaping details are etched in the planners’ guidelines. The LCC also built council homes over 10,000 before 1914 which were less architecturally distinguished and broadly in London. It seemed that cottage suburbs could generous response to working-class housing needs, but pressures of space and affordability seemed to compel the tenement as feasible solution. The Great War (1914-1918) created a housing crisis among a working-class that it both needed and feared. This forced a new, larger and far more generous state operation to manage housing.

**Chapter 2** (1919-1939): During the Interwar period, the local middle classes had been anxious of LCC estate about its reflection as the poor even in the new estate. Moreover, the value of property in suburb seemed to decrease because the estate was similar to working-class district. Nevertheless, over 1.1 million council homes were built in the twenty years following 1919, that enormously improved quality of life of working-class. For example, The Dover House (1920) is one of a number of important LCC cottage estates inspired by the Garden city movement and the pioneering town planning of Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin. Houses on the Dover House were designed in groups that overlooked or had access to open space, and the estate was laid out with cul-de-sacs, generous verges, street trees and front privet hedging, as well as communal

green spaces, the largest of which is The Pleasance Open Space. The Dover House was begun when the state both insisted on the highest standards and provided the money to meet them. Elementary School at Huntingfield Road, opened in March 1925 (closed in 1993), would be another key institution, especially when – in its early years – the Estate was home to so many young families. The landscape of Britain was transformed in this interwar period, especially the growth of suburban. Moreover, outside London also had built enormously the new council homes over 120,000 houses and rural districts in England had built 159,000 council houses by 1939. That meant 27% of the town's population lived in council homes. However, council housing reached a critical mass, especially in the large cottage suburbs, some tenants missed the neighborliness of their former inner-city homes. These made 'Community' became a paradoxically conceptualized, containing both a nostalgia of slum life and improving agenda of working-class.

**Chapter 3** (1940-1951): Between 1941 and 1944 (World War II) the city suffered 59 bombing attacks in all; the most heavily damaged city in the country. The City Council agreed to generate comprehensive redevelopment scheme for the city by Plymouth's post-war planning. The first editor of the pioneering Town Planning Review from 1935 to 1946. The Plan guided housing that was no necessity to house anyone in lofty blocks of flats and it considered new development on broadly garden suburb area. Furthermore, the neighborhood unit had been dominated as a district of between 6,000 to 8,000 people formed around the catchment areas of schools, a center comprising a church, a library, a cinema, a restaurant, café or hotel, a public laundry, a health clinic, and a community building. The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act consisted radical element was the 'Development Charge', effectively a tax paid by developers amounting to the whole of difference between land's previous worth and its value following redevelopment. This intended to assure that the land increased in value as a result of council's planning decisions that accrued to the community rather than to private interest. The first wave of New Town was emerged in the later 1940s, eleven New Towns were designated in the first program of construction initiated by the 1946 New Towns Act. They embody much of the social idealism of this post-war era, hopes for greater mixing between classes. As the influences of leading modernist architects (Sir Frederick Ernest Gibberd) to develop some of the New Town's housing schemes, Britain's first residential high-rise block, The Lawn (Figure 4), was built in 1951 in Harlow New Town. Further population growth forced the creation of a second generation of New Towns in 1960s.

**Chapter 4** (1945-1956): The Mackworth Estate in Derby, an industrial town, is a good example of the more ambitious of the new suburban council estates built after World War Two. The Estate was to be developed as a residential neighborhood in 1948. It was an unusually ambitious scheme with its plentiful land, strategic industries and energetic Housing Committee, was well-placed to receive a sympathetic hearing from the Ministry of Health and Housing. The plan was approved and construction began in 1950. This focused on neighborhoods that infrastructure supported community. The estate's main shopping center was opened in 1959, there was a newly fashionable idea of mixed development. Over 500 homes were built for private sale and private leased hold. This seem council homes built the estate for general needs for a range of the population. By the end of war, it was not only the ideas of neighborhood unit and mixed development, but the Housing Manual in 1953 also gained considerable elements of the separation of cars and pedestrians by a system of cul-de-sacs, feeder roads and walkways along, pioneered by a town for the motor age. Although mixed development seems to be a practical response to the reality of post-war housing needs, its incorporation of high-rise had the unexpected consequence of licensing the multi-storey point and slab blocks which would come to dominate. After the Lawn in Harlow, LCC built its own first high-rise block in Southfields, the Oatland Court (compact, eleven storeys, with one of those plans). This was architect-led innovation by LCC's architect's department with foremost architectural practice in the world. In 1947, Britain faced the fuel balance of payments crises which followed forced a new focus on industrial reconstruction at the expense of social program. Ministry of Housing and Local Government decided to reduce council housing quality, were remarked by reduced space standards. This policy reflected an ideological shift as any necessary practical adjustment. In 1956, Housing Subsidies Act (1967) which abolished completely the general needs subsidy, requiring that new council housing be reserved to the elderly or those displaced by slum clearance. The new grant regime paid more the higher council built.

**Chapter 5** (1956-1968): The idea of mixed development in New Town had been further, for example, the Castle Vale in Birmingham (1964-1969). They consisted of a strange hybrid: a predominantly suburban low-rise estate (two-storey housing and four-storey flats) and sixteen-storey blocks. There was interrogatory about appropriation between scale of housing and its location between the council's Public Works Department and the City's Architect. The clearance of slum housing in the city seemed



**Figure 4.** The Lawn in Harlow New Town, 1951 (source: RIBA Architecture, 1951)

incontrovertibly to demand multi-storey replacement. This Council's misunderstanding about building blocks on the city fringes was the fullest advantage and increase overall density of population without destroying its open character. In fact, it's opened character of the space that encircled the blocks, required to avoid problems of shadowing and overlooking. The necessity of increasing Birmingham's high-rise flats were: (1) subsidy for tenants' high-rise blocks (2) lacking houses caused by stopping New Town projects outside the city. However, council housing had learnt various aspects of council housing development with its crediting of some forms and techniques of mass housing, system-built construction, and also the mechanism for redevelopment areas.

**Chapter 6** (1968-1979): In this period, architects broadly discussed on a solution to the problems of twentieth-century living which would be the equivalent in quality. Design approach of housing were designed to promote 'community' by using 'street in the sky': deck access entry to homes and walkways joining the blocks offered the social advantage of neighbors. Inside the estate 'pedestrian way' was transformed the busy road. In 1965, the city planners

were confident to create entirely new communities and to provide surroundings which would be made happier lives of people. Meanwhile, there were unfavorable consequences of these estate design: (1) the block's system-construction had less attention on structural components, service, other hazard of open site, poorly assembling, the abandonment of plans for gas-fired heating, but subjected to manufactured condition, (2) the estate never reached those optimistic artists' impressions because its open spaces remained formless and bleak, (3) the street life were absent, (4) the communal spaces for enhance community turned to crime problem and antisocial behavior increased. However, more successful council large-scale schemes were Dawson's Height in East Dulwich in 1972, the estate located on the hilltop and used slab blocks that unrelated to surrounding with load-bearing wall of brickwork and reinforce concrete. The blocks were composed in dramatic ziggurat-style and applied warm brick outer texture which created more humane than the mass housing projects of the 1960s. Because a densely packed district of terraced housing was increasing in Byker area of Newcastle, a prototype working-class community flats were created: single-storey flats upstairs and downstairs in two-storey terraces. Byker's residents agreed to rehouse where they lived and with neighbors. The famous Byker Wall was built according to tenants' agreement as a barrier to North Sea wind and noise and pollution of major roads. It combined multi-materials and textured and colored façade of brick, wood, and plastic. These reflected the power of community to rehabilitate their houses. Housing design was deflected from the modernism and more clearly related to its surroundings.

**Chapter 7** (1979-1991): Since 1979, Margaret Thatcher became prime minister and represented a watershed in British social and political history as well as council housing development. She believed in the efficacy of a housing free market with minimum regulation and maximum

consumers choice. Right to Buy policy had returned from 1920s but became 1980 Housing Act. The Act gave all council tenants who rented for three years or more the right to buy their homes. They extended the Right to Buy for two years' standing in 1984 and increased maximum discount, as the results, over 1.8 million council houses were sold by 1997. Right to Buy seemed to be impossible to those who lost jobs and could not meet mortgage repayment, while some tenants could create more value on the open market. This also argued the new owner-occupiers, then increasingly troubled council estates. The result was to highlight the deteriorating conditions of remaining council tenants. Moreover, Right to Buy also contributed to social polarization and the concentration of poorer residents. In 1980s, ideas of modern urban planning were argued in terms of literature and academic aspects by famous urban planners and architects, such as Jane Jacobs, Oscar Newman, and Charles Jencks. They considered public housing design that influenced on inhibit crime, antisocial behavior, less sense of ownership, and no responsibility over semi-public spaces. The ancient council estates were criticized on 'street in the sky' which crime may occur more frequently than elsewhere, the large blocks of flats experienced greater problems of vandalism than smaller one. Housing Action Trusts (HATs) in 1988 aimed to repair and modernize housing stock, and to improve the living conditions and general environment as council ownership and management.

**Chapter 8** (1991-1997): At the beginning of this period, Conservative government was a spearhead of City Challenge program which was a formalized and strengthen economic regeneration and emphasized 'partnership' (linking between local councils and local businesses, and close collaboration with education and training providers). This idea could improve working-class and would be no return to traditional manufacturing employment in the past. The Council Challenge funding was successful in 1992 by another three-war partnership of housing department, housing association, and tenants. They attempted to create a new neighborhood with the feel of a more traditional urban community. In 1994, the New Labor came as the new government, they seemed to agree that housing associations were better and more responsive. Six years later, the proportion of non-economically active head of households and unintentionally homeless had expanded. Further, the design and build problems became unpopular estate, as well as far differences of previous residents and

newcomers. The social problems of many council estate significantly caused by minority of residents. The social exclusion agenda was focused on rescuing its marginalized communities in order to integrate them into the new amongst highly competitive globalized economy.

**Chapter 9** (1997-2010): The new government's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was established in 1997 to reduce social exclusion by producing link-up solutions and problems. The New Deal for Communities (NDC) program launched in 1998. NDC offered housing regeneration that leveraged from other public, private and voluntary sector sources. In a case of the estate had to undertake multiple deprivation, the home estate could be demolished some existing houses and transfer council tenancies in social rented property to newly formed Housing Association. The Decent Homes Programme produced practical objectives improved the lives of millions and the most directly beneficial. This Decent Home Standard (2000-2010) required all homes to be in a reasonable state of repair and to enjoy reasonably modern facilities and services; a kitchen with an adequate size and layout, an appropriately located bathroom and toilet, adequate noise and thermal isolation, adequate size and layout of common areas in blocks of flats. In 2002, the regeneration strategy had upgraded council housing redevelopment because of dilapidation. Former council homes on estate would be demolished and reconstructed, then some homes were to be built by private developers for sale. The tenure mix of the estate would shift from socially rented to privately owned. This gave economic primacy to the market and its disciplines, which privileged private finance and the profit motive over public investment.

**Chapter 10** (2010 to present): Since 2010, a conception of welfare for social housing that catered only for the very poorest with additional on short-term hospital basis. The welfare has been attempted to end lifetime security of tenure for those living in social housing. In 2015, all registered providers of social housing reduce rents by 1% annually because of high expense of renters. In 2017, a housing crisis remains in various form across the country. The national and local state should tackle that crisis. The form and nature of council housing has been for problem solving in our unequal society but aggravate by the politics which reflect it. The failure of the free market to provide good and affordable homes remains that is why we need to revisit both the past contribution of public housing and its current essentials.

In conclusion, the social housing requires (1) regulation and oversight protect us from commercially driven agenda (2) safe, secure, affordable housing for all that market never will (3) idealism of social housing is determination to improve equally quality of life of people.

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