

GRAHAM LENG-WARD

This is a remarkably resilient council housing estate, built in 1933 after the 'Housing Act 1930' made it easier for local authorities to clear slum areas, and obliging them to re-home the tenants of such areas in more suitable accommodation.

The Ashford Estate was the first such scheme in Birmingham, built on the site of the former Ashted Barracks between Barrack Street and Windsor Street. It is still going, but will it get to its 100th anniversary given its inner city location with new high rise developments springing up around it?

Alan Murie suggested three different types of council estates in his book 'Decline and Response? Lifecycle Change and Housing Estates in Birmingham, England' :

- Estates that were 'built to fail' - flawed by their scale, design, construction and layout.
- Estates that were 'failed by management' - preventing appropriate responses to problems and challenges associated with economic and social change.
- Estates that were potentially 'resilient' - where locational and other factors sustained demand.

The lay-out of Ashcroft Estate is interesting with 175 maisonettes laid out in two-storey blocks surrounding six central courts (Photo 1). The families who were rehoused on the Ashcroft Estate mainly came from the slum clearance areas around Summer Lane in Newtown, and the distinctive lay-out of the estate was an attempt to foster the development of close-knit communities such as the ones the newcomers had left.

The idea of having a community hall in which residents could take part in spiritual, educational and social activities in new housing estates was put forward by local Quakers, namely their Special Committee on Housing (Warwickshire North Monthly Meeting) around 1930. Ashcroft Estate had such a hall with a pyramidal roof and surrounded by beautiful trees and bushes (Photo 10).

Today the estate is fully occupied with 80% of the maisonettes reserved for those over the age of 50, the rest for families. The residents I spoke to seem generally content and the central

grass and tree lined courts provide a peaceful refuge away from the busyness of the city. However once you walk out of the estate towards Lawley-Middleway and Curzon Circle there is a chaotic mix of cars, trucks, container and recycling freight on these roads (Photo 2).

Ashcroft Estate's survival is helped by it being locally listed by Birmingham City Council. This means that it has been designated an important part of Birmingham's heritage due to its architectural and historic significance.

Getting planning permission from the council for new developments immediately adjacent to the estate may require the provision of funding to help the estate's residents in some way. An example being the recent building of the four storey Birmingham Ormiston Academy for students aged 11-18 on Barrack Street. Planning permission required the provision of funding for a resident permit parking scheme in Barrack Street for Ashford Estate residents, and the creation of zones for picking up and dropping off pupils at the start and end of the school day. Sometimes new developments do incidentally provide useful services for the estate residents. For example there is a COOP convenience store on the ground floor of the University student residences on Lawley-Middleway.

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