

edited by
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Planning
Books

LAND POLICY

John Ratcliffe
Hutchinson Built
Environment Series.
£3.75 (h/b) £1.95 (p/b).
128pp.

The aim of this book is to explore the nature of land in society and the problem of community land values. John Ratcliffe brings to this topical issue his experience of teaching RICS/RTPI students as a principal lecturer in Estate Management at the Polytechnic of Central London. The introductory chapters examine the basis of land values, their creation and relation to land tenure and the property market. This theme is continued through a historical review of the compensation and betterment problem and the numerous solutions which have been advocated, both in theory and in practice, culminating in the Community Land legislation.

The last three chapters set out the author's own views on the current and future role of planning and development, together with an assessment of partnership arrangements between the public and private sectors.

As an introductory text the book gives a comprehensive survey of the problems arising from planning decisions and their effect (positive and negative) on land values. The discussion of alternative solutions (for example land nationalisation, expropriation of development values) could well have been expanded to bring out more clearly the underlying principles and problems. The treatment of overseas experience would have been more useful had it gone into greater detail on the impact and effectiveness of solutions currently in

use, and the lessons to be drawn for British practice.

In the closing chapters Ratcliffe's own views on the cleavage between planning and development become clearer and many will welcome his concern over the level of resources being devoted to structure plans. Whilst accepting the need for some form of overall policy framework, he argues for a system which is more immediate, flexible, and goal-explicit with a problem orientated programme. Allied to this would be a greater emphasis on local plans designed to solve practical problems at the community scale. Ratcliffe feels that local planning provides a ready basis for problem identification and analysis, together with the ability to construct action programmes with a realistic financial programme. Such local plans would he argues allow greater public participation; create a milieu more amenable to better civic design; allow resources and priorities to be more easily established; provide a basis for development control; encourage private initiative; and through emerging measures of performance, would increase the accountability of the planning profession. This concern with local plans displays a need for planners to be far more concerned with the problems of implementation than hitherto, a factor which is particularly relevant in the light of the Community Land Act. The various suggestions as to partnership arrangements are therefore to be welcomed and it is to be hoped that John Ratcliffe's views on this important topic will become more widely known.

Tony Bowhill.

THE BATTLE FOR TOLMERS SQUARE

Nick Wates
Routledge & Kegan Paul
232pp £2.95 (p/b)

Tolmers Square hit the headlines very suddenly three years ago, and then disappeared equally suddenly, having popularised a new planning concept - "planning benefit" - and launched the Furies against property speculation. Its meteoric notoriety is perhaps a pity because this sordid saga has been running since 1957, and is not finished yet. Nick Wates has provided a thorough but very readable history of the Tolmers Square

since 1957, and he has also produced a book about planning that actually looks interesting as well. This feat has been achieved by a generous provision of photographs and very clear maps and diagrams. It is worth study just for its presentation alone.

The main reason for reading this book is because Tolmers Square is a microcosm of much of our inner cities today. A well-documented case-study such as this demonstrates more convincingly than a theoretical treatise how the conflicting forces that shape our cities frequently produce decaying houses, vacant sites, empty offices, and brand new slums. Reading through the book

URBAN ECONOMICS. THEORY AND POLICY.
K.J. Button.
Macmillan. £10.00 (h/b)
£3.95 (p/b). 209pp plus
index.

While lecturing on the subject, the author felt that there was a need for an introductory textbook covering urban economics problems in this country. The aim of his book is therefore to provide easy access for students to the basic economic concept in urban studies, and to review current policy debates.

The author of such an introductory work must resolve the need for a clear, concise exposition of his subject with the need for full explanation. The difficulties are compounded in this case by the difficulty in defining the scope of the subject. Though this problem is pointed out very early on, one feels that Mr. Button does not fully come to terms with it. Nevertheless, the book is well and clearly organised, each chapter having explicit paragraph headings and a reference list. In addition it can be divided into three sections dealing with:

- (i) Urban micro economics (economics of geographical concentration-including a good summary of agglomeration economies, intra urban location and land use and urban labour market.)
- (ii) Various urban economic problems (Theory of city size and spacing, The urban environment, transport, housing).
- (iii) Involvement of local government in urban affairs.

suggested to me that there are no villains in the plot, just selfish developers, complacent planners, unimaginative and hidebound civil servants, and an apathetic majority of the public. The real tragedy is the refusal to recognise the impasse that so often results when land is regarded both as the site for necessary vital activities, and a legitimate means of maximising private profits. But perhaps you are already convinced of this—having, like me, come to a similar conclusion from parallel problems in your own area. You may still find Nick Wate's pertinent analysis of the other lesson to be learnt from this sorry story, e.g. why

Because of its tight organisation, it is a book through which it is easy to find one's way, and it generally introduces well those areas of knowledge which it seeks to. However, one feels that it would have benefitted from the illustration of certain points by example, and this is particularly the case in the chapter on the Urban Transport Problem where a fuller more detailed

In BOOKS two weeks ago a paragraph from "The Local amenity movement" was put into "Canning Towns Declining Community Income" and vice versa. Many apologies to the reviewers concerned.

treatment would have been justified. This shortcoming is more than compensated for though by the final two chapters which consider the urban public economy and urban planning and which are particularly valuable for putting urban economics, in a realistic practical context, though the use of GLDP and Layfield as examples of planning was perhaps unfortunate.

Mr. Button does point out the inadequacies of the various applications of economic theory and techniques to the urban situation, though again one is aware of the constraint of brevity within which he had to work. In some cases the positive points seem to get a little lost, and one is left with a slightly negative impression. Despite this, the overall impression is of a book which has been thoughtfully put together and which does for a useful introduction to the subject. It would be particularly appropriate for the student of economics wanting some idea of how the city operates, and for the student of planning wanting some idea of how economics can be applied to the city. It is a book which stimulates thought, and which directs further independent reading quite well by means of the listed references; As a book to supplement a lecture course where further direction and analysis can be given, it would be well worth referring to, and one suspects that it will rarely remain on library shelves for very long.

Andrew Green.

the Claudius offer failed, the limitations to effective community action, and the irrelevance of the Community Land Act, well worth pondering.

Richard Adam.