



Private profit, public interest and land use planning—A conflict interpretation of residential development pressure in Glasgow's rural–urban fringe

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ABSTRACT

This longitudinal case study of residential development pressure in a village in Glasgow's urban fringe provides detailed insight into the different perspectives of key public, private and community interest groups, and exemplifies the conflict resolution process in this environment in the context of the new post-2006 planning system in Scotland. The paper is organised into six main parts. In part 1 the major actors in the residential development process are identified with specific attention focused on the house-builder and the local planner. In part 2 the post-2006 development planning and development management process in Scotland is explained in order to establish the legislative and procedural context for the case study. Part 3 provides a review of urban growth in the Glasgow metropolitan region. Part 4 sets the case study in local context by providing representative examples of development pressure and conflict resolution in the District. Part 5 comprises detailed examination of conflict over pressure for residential development in the village of Torrance from 1971 to the present day. This in depth analysis illuminates the main actors, agents and arguments involved in the conflict resolution process; explains the rationale for decisions reached on residential development in the village; and affords insight into contemporary debate over house-building in the metropolitan fringe around Scotland's cities. Finally, some conclusions are presented on the issues of fairness and sustainability in the land use planning system and the on-going conflict between private profit and public interest in the production of the built environment around the edge of Britain's cities.

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Introduction

Conflict over the use of land is an inherent characteristic of capitalist urban development. In the particular context of the metropolitan fringe the centrifugal pressures emanating from nearby towns and cities has transformed the rural environment on the periphery of many of Britain's cities into a battle ground in which a variety of land uses compete for dominance. Some of the most significant conflicts in the metropolitan fringe are related to pressure for residential development. This brings into opposition forces of private profit in the form of house-builders and other pro-growth interests, and public interest in the shape of local communities seeking to resist further development. The planning system is tasked with mediating this conflict and producing an outcome that satisfies defined goals. Fundamentally however, as the recent statement on Scottish planning acknowledged, while 'the planning system has a critical balancing role to play when competing interests emerge in the consideration of future development, it is essential to recognise that planning issues, by their very nature,

will often bring differing interests into opposition and disagreement and the resolution of these issues will inevitably disappoint some parties' (Scottish Government, 2010, p. 2 emphasis added).

The present research into contested residential development in a village in the rural–urban fringe seeks to illuminate the nature of this conflict by means of a detailed longitudinal case study of development pressure in the village of Torrance which is situated in the metropolitan green belt surrounding Glasgow. The paper is organised into six main parts. In the first, the principal actors in the residential development process are introduced with specific attention focused on the house-builder and the local planner. In part 2 the post-2006 development planning and development management process in Scotland is explained to establish the legislative and procedural context for the case study. Part 3 provides a review of urban growth trends in the Glasgow metropolitan region. Part 4 sets the case study in local context by providing representative examples of development pressure and conflict resolution in the District. Part 5 comprises a detailed longitudinal examination of the conflict over pressure for residential development in the village of Torrance from 1971 to the present day. This in depth analysis illuminates the main actors, agents and arguments involved in the conflict resolution process; explains the rationale for decisions reached on residential development in the village; and

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affords insight into the general debate over house-building in the metropolitan fringe. Finally, a number of conclusions are presented in relation to issues of fairness and sustainability in the Scottish land use planning system, and the on-going conflict between private profit and public interest in the production of the built environment around the edge of Britain's cities.

Principal agents in the residential development process

There is now sufficient empirical evidence (Clawson, 1971; Baerwald, 1981; Fleming, 1984; Goodchild and Munton, 1985; Short et al., 1986; Shucksmith, 1990; Farthing, 1995; Hull, 1997; Gallent et al., 2006; Radcliffe et al., 2009) to identify the major actors in the production of the built environment. In brief, the principal agents include:

- (a) rural producers—essentially landowners who are primarily concerned with the productive capability of their land, the most obvious group being farmers;
- (b) speculators—they may own land that is still in productive use but their basic interest lies in its appreciating value. Their decisions are based on factors such as depreciation rates, capital gains tax rates and the comparative viability of alternative investment opportunities;
- (c) builder-developers—install basic infrastructure and utilities on the site and construct and sell houses on the prepared lots;
- (d) households—can be either potential house purchasers or existing residents. Both groups are motivated by the same factors, i.e., the functional utility of the house as a place to live, and improvement or at least maintenance of the financial investment represented by their property. However, for existing residents these considerations may underlie an anti-growth stance;
- (e) estate agents—purvey information between house buyers and sellers. As their rewards come from commissions charged on each land transaction completed, estate agents have a vested interest in promoting residential development and land transfers;
- (f) financiers—provide the capital necessary to the development process. Their decisions are based on a combined desire to obtain the highest possible rate of return on loans and minimise or avoid risk;
- (g) other facilitators—other professionals involved in the development process include lawyers who represent clients in disputes and consultants who advise the various actors;
- (h) pressure groups—can be national organisations pursuing general policies (such as countryside conservation or the House (now Home) Builders Federation) or local community councils and residents associations mobilised in support of a particular issue;
- (i) government—all governments influence the process of urban development although the level of involvement varies. The state – central and local government – exercises both a direct (e.g., planning regulations) and indirect (e.g., taxation policy) influence on urban form. As we shall see in the case study which follows, the influence of the state permeates issues of land use conflict in the U.K. In the context of power and conflict in the urban fringe particular importance attaches to the relationship between central and local government and, specifically, the degree of autonomy of the latter.

While the relative importance of these different agents in the production of the built environment is primarily a function of the socio-political structure of the state, the significance of each also varies with local context. (The suite of actors of particular

relevance to the urban development process in Scotland is indicated in Fig. 1) Two of the main protagonists in the debate over residential development in the metropolitan fringe are the house-builders and the planners, each of which seek to pursue particular objectives.

The House-builders

The structure and operation of the UK house-building industry has been detailed elsewhere (see for example, Ball, 1996; Wellings, 2006; Calcutt, 2007; Goodier and Pan, 2010). Here we are particularly concerned with the motives underlying the behavior of developers (Pacione, 1990a). The residential builder must progress through several stages in the production of the built environment. These involve land search and assembly; development design and application for planning permission; housing construction; and marketing and selling. The first two stages are often most problematic and it is at these points that house-builders and the planning system come into direct conflict.

A primary concern of builders is to ensure that an adequate supply of land is always available. Because of different interpretations of what is meant by an adequate land supply house-builders have become 'one of the major adversaries of the planning system' (Rydin, 1986, p. 28). The debate over land availability has intensified since the early 1970s with, in general, builder-developers arguing that the planning-system restricts their ability to obtain a basic factor of production and that development controls inflate the price of land and, therefore, of houses. The main building pressure group, the Home Builders Federation, has extended the argument on behalf of its members to contend that planners are frustrating households' home-ownership ambitions and threatening the livelihood of small builders, as well as hindering labour mobility and thereby hampering economic regeneration (House Builders Federation, 1985; Home Builders Federation, 2002, 2007). The width of the gulf between builders and planners over the adequacy of housing land reflects their different motives. The goal of the planning system is to ensure the orderly release of building sites within an approved policy framework. In deciding on a regional and sub-regional housing allocation, structure plans take account of a wide range of demographic, social, economic and environmental factors. Estimates of future demand for housing are based on national and regional forecasts of population change, local studies of household formation, vacancy rates, and the net effect of improvement and rehabilitation programs. The intraregional distribution of the total amount of housing land required will reflect the importance attached to growth or restraint in different localities. The capacity of existing infrastructure networks and the cost of necessary improvements will be taken into account, as well as the need to protect agricultural land, high quality landscapes and historic settlements. In contrast to this long term strategic viewpoint, the chief aim of house-builders is to ensure a regular supply of land for development and to realise a profit. An adequate land bank is essential to maintain continuity of production. Planners and developers also diverge on the best geographical location for new residential development, the former generally favouring brownfield sites within the existing urban envelope, and the latter preferring greenfield sites which they regard as more marketable. The issue of the marketability of individual sites lies at the crux of the conflict between developers and planners. As empirical surveys of several English metropolitan areas have shown, in gross regional terms there is no shortage of land for building (House Builders Federation, 1981; Department of the Environment, 1978; West Midlands Forum of County Councils, 1982; Barker, 2004; Bibby, 2009). The point at issue concerns the suitability of different sites and, as we shall see, this debate occurs most fiercely at the local level.

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