

Deflecting Development: competing pressures on urban green space

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Every opportunity should be made to bring vacant land in built up areas back into use for industrial development and other purposes, making the best use of available grant assistance. (Leeds City Council 1993a, p. 5)

Policy statements such as the above, taken from the Leeds Unitary Development Plan, at first glance seem to be eminently sensible in deciding the development future of areas of vacant land. Not only can development be focused on land that is not otherwise contributing to productivity in urban areas, but also the development process itself may actually produce financial benefits in the guise of grants and increased employment opportunities. However, in reality the development process is not so clear and simple. Much of the land that is vacant is simply not land awaiting development but land that has value to the community in its existing form as open space. One of the central concerns of land-use planning is to determine the future of vacant land and in doing so to reconcile the often conflicting requirements of environmental protection and providing land for development. It is a process fraught with problems, not least in that the community often has a strong self-interest in the retention of vacant land as accessible open space. Development has to be located somewhere: the question for the local planning authority is where? Following from this, a major policy concern is: how can locally acceptable development plans be achieved?

This paper examines the process of decision making as it affects large areas of vacant land. It poses the question of how local authorities can best work with the community to enhance the process of decision making as it pertains to areas with significant environmental and developmental potential. Redevelopment programmes will impact on the local community, particularly where they address areas with derelict industrial land, existing industrial land and open space. Such programmes will, inevitably, need to take into account the potential for conflicts of interest which are likely to arise from any associated economic and environmental proposals.

Two areas in Leeds, both of which have been the focus of redevelopment programmes, have been selected for detailed examination. The first is the Lower Aire Valley. The Lower Aire Valley is predominantly open space which has been devastated by many years of open-cast mining, and has recently been the focus of attention in the Lower Aire Valley Environmental Improvement Strategy (Leeds City Council, 1993b). The other area, known as Kirkstall Valley,

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is a wedge of green space, approximately two miles from the city centre. Kirkstall Valley over the last eight years has been the focus of several large-scale development applications, most of which have been successfully opposed by vibrant active local opposition. The two areas demonstrate the issues posed by redevelopment, the protection and enhancement of existing green space, and community participation in decisions concerning redevelopment. The community issues are particularly complex, and raise questions of conflicts of interest between large-scale developers and local communities, between environmental and economic interests and between the needs of the immediate community and the perceived needs of the larger community. Lessons are drawn from the Leeds experience to identify ways in which environmentally valuable, vacant land can be protected and the decision-making process improved, such that consensus rather than conflict characterises relations between planning authorities and local communities in determining redevelopment programmes.

Greener Cities

The protection and conservation of green space in urban areas is a growing concern for land-use planners. Cities such as Leeds have produced strategies to reflect this growing awareness of the need to protect open space. In Leeds over the last three years, the local authority has produced the Nature Conservation Strategy (Leeds City Council, 1992a), the Leeds Green Strategy (Leeds City Council, 1992b), the Draft Countryside Strategy (Leeds City Council, 1994), and the Lower Aire Valley Environmental Strategy. In addition, Leeds has several environmental agencies and initiatives such as the Forest of Leeds, the Five Villages Project, an active Groundwork Trust and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers. For politicians as well as officers the environment seems to be high on the agenda as reflected in the city being awarded Environment City status in 1993. Yet, despite these environmental support mechanisms, Leeds faces problems familiar to many UK metropolitan authorities. The most significant of these problems is how to achieve a balance between the need to promote economic regeneration, which necessitates the development of land, and the conservation of environmentally valuable land.

Locational Politics

The location of development is arguably the key concern of land-use planning. It is also frequently the focus of conflicts of interest. The Development Plan process can act as a catalyst in bringing to the fore these conflicts of interest. The UDP Report of publicity and consultation states that the UDP generated 3904 written responses, 83% of which were from members of the public, where, "the general response was clearly a universal opposition to the principle of development within the immediate vicinity of residents" (Leeds City Council, 1993a, p. 13). Locational conflict has been a long-standing planning issue. Locational analysis and its relevance for local communities has been a major focus of concern, with particular concern being expressed in the 1970s (Cox, 1979). Associated with this was the analysis of the process of neighbourhood activism as 'politics of the turf'. In their analysis of activist behaviour Cox & McCarthy

concluded that neighbourhood activism was a response to the particularities of the urban development process as it occurs within advanced capitalism (1982, p. 209). Certainly, the issue of development continues to be related to issues of economic advancement and market forces. The scale of the development and its economic potential can be particularly significant, with the forces supporting and opposing the development becoming polarised, reducing the possibilities for negotiation and consensus, and increasing the potential for conflict. Large-scale developments, especially where they can negatively influence local communities, have to be negotiated with considerable diplomacy on the part of the planning authority, if conflict is to be reduced or avoided.

Development of Vacant Land

Writing in the *Architects Journal* in 1988, Nicholson lamented that, “The current ruling ideology very much favours the blindness of the market place to any idea of vision based on a more civic philosophy” (1988, p. 35). Where land has both economic and environmental values, conflict can easily occur. Undoubtedly, the market-orientated economic philosophy of the 1980s and the 1990s has been influential in the deregulatory thrust of reductions in UK planning powers—a thrust that attempted to return more decision making to the unfettered rigours of market economics. One significant recent development trend has been the focusing of development attention on vacant land. It is a refocusing that has been prompted by a combination of city centre de-industrialisation and falling land prices in some areas, growing commercial and residential pressures, continuing green-belt restrictions, and private sector-orientated redevelopment grants. In many urban areas land that had been vacant, often for decades, was suddenly targeted for development, it was almost as if there was, “pressure to eradicate all ‘waiting’ space in towns” (Worpole, 1992, p. 27). However, much of this ‘waiting’ space contains vibrant natural habitat, which, by its very lack of interference from outside agents, may well develop in ways best suited to its locality, for example, disused railway corridors and quarries, flooded mining areas, abandoned allotments and railyards. Most of these land-use types occur in the Lower Aire and Kirkstall Valleys.

Peripheral or Inner Urban Locations?

Put at their simplest, development pressures are usually strongest in two areas: the expanding urban periphery and the already urbanised central area. The periphery, particularly where there is a greenbelt designation, has benefited from the support of strong preservation policies. This support has come from both central government (DoE, 1988), and from local government. The Leeds UDP for example states, “inside a green belt, approval should not be given, except in very special circumstances” (1993, p. 21). In addition, green belt policy is strongly supported by the general public: 12% of the written responses to the Leeds UDP were concerned with the loss of green belt. Parallel to the support for the retention of green belt is the often expressed support for the reuse and development of surplus vacant land. The Council of Europe recommends that

local authorities should give particular consideration to the reuse of derelict land (1986, para. 2,2). In the UK the use of derelict land has been widely promoted and grants have been made available for that purpose. More recently the sustainable development issue has added fuel to the debate in that it supports the containment of the city and thus, by implication, the protection of the periphery (see Breheny & Rookwood, 1993; and Elkin *et al.*, 1991 on the compact city debate).

The decision regarding where development should be located is further complicated by consideration of the situation within the urban fabric, particularly within inner-city areas. Ward (1989) argues that the decentralisation of industry, population and other activities from the central areas to the periphery has created hitherto unknown opportunities to create more positive urban environments, hence the title of his book *Welcome Thinner Cities*. Studies by Harrison & Burgess (1987) and latterly Box & Harrison (1994) have demonstrated the significance of accessible local 'wildspace' for urban residents, in that people, "regardless of social class, income or residence gained great pleasure from the natural world, particularly as it impinged on their daily life" (Harrison and Burgess, 1987). The question then is, given these alternative and sometimes contrasting views, how can reasoned and acceptable locational decisions be made?

Community Involvement in Locational Decision Making

Public participation is now an accepted part of the planning process, but despite this acceptability it continues to be one of the most controversial areas of planning work. In 1968 the Planning Act made public participation a statutory requirement in the preparation of development plans, enshrining in statute the right of the public to be consulted. One factor that was given relatively little attention though, despite being raised by the Seebhom Committee of 1968, was that, "The participants may wish to pursue policies directly at variance with the ideas of local authorities" (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1994, p. 253), or at variance with the local Development Corporation, as has happened in the Kirkstall Valley. Effective community involvement necessitates empowerment in what can be a very radical process. It means that the power to make decisions becomes the prerogative of the community rather than the professionals, in particular "giving local people power means that they are no longer operating solely in the domain of professional guidelines which tend to be oriented towards the middle class" (Burns, 1990, p. 208). The next section draws from the Leeds experience, examining the issues surrounding the redevelopment of the Lower Aire and Kirkstall Valleys.

Kirkstall Valley

Kirkstall Valley is a steep-sided, wide-bottomed valley carved out by the River Aire as it flows towards Leeds city centre. The valley is bordered by the densely populated communities of Kirkstall, Burley and Armley and lies within sight of Leeds city centre. The Valley contains sites of local historical interest and of

interest for nature conservation. In 1988, 164 ha of the valley came under the control of the Leeds Development Corporation (LDC). Local anger at the over-intensive redevelopment plans led to the formation of the Kirkstall Valley Campaign (KVC). Six years later the campaign is still going strong, fighting the latest large-scale development plans in the valley. At the time of writing, the campaign is seeking judicial review of development decisions made by the LDC before it was disbanded in March 1995. This review concerns planning permission given for a large scale retail development that will affect a 10 ha area of the valley.

The valley is a mixed area. The valley floor is predominantly open space and includes the Leed–Liverpool canal, a site of special scientific interest (SSSI), the river Aire, allotments and market gardens, inaccessible natural islands, sports pitches and areas of open space characterised by naturally regenerating grassland, woodland and wetland habitat. Also present are some industrial and commercial premises, two old mills (listed buildings), electricity transformers, a railway line and several areas of derelict land. In addition to its visual amenity the valley is used for walking, canoeing, fishing, tending the allotments, and is used by the Kirkstall Valley Rangers for environmental education. The valley is surrounded on its west and east slopes by residential areas, some being characterised by high-density terraced housing.

The key actors in the development process in Kirkstall are the City Council, the Kirkstall Valley Campaign and the LDC, the Urban Development Corporation for Leeds, which operated in the period 1988–95 (to the end of March) with a remit to maximise the developmental potential of this strategically located area. The LDC during its seven years of operation was the planning authority for the valley, taking over the role of the local planning authority. A significant difference between the *modus operandi* of the development corporations and those of the local planning authorities (LPAs) was that as non-elected bodies development corporations were less accountable to, and usually less influenced by, local community opinion. Though the LDC was aware of environmental considerations, these inevitably played a secondary role when in direct competition with the LDC's chief aim of economic regeneration. The limited life span of the LDC and the need to show rapid results did not accord with the aim of environmental protection and enhancement, which tends to be long term and produces little in the way of revenue.

The second of the major players is the KVC, comprising 500 individual members and 20 affiliated community groups, together with the support of a wide range of individuals including local councillors, university academics, and various green groups in the city. Since its inception the campaign has opposed (usually successfully), a number of developments, the first of these was a massive redevelopment scheme proposed by Mountleigh 1988 (which incorporated a locally much derided dinosaur theme park). The scheme was initially proposed whilst Kirkstall Valley was under the control of the city council, and was subsequently inherited by the LDC. Ensuing proposals also opposed by KVC included an M621 link road, a major student accommodation proposal with drive-through fast-food outlet, and most recently and unsuccessfully the Berkshire Plan for a superstore and associated highway expansion. The campaign

does not oppose development *per se*, indeed its own Kirkstall Valley Development Plan (Kirkstall Valley Campaign, 1990) included residential, commercial, industrial and leisure uses on the less environmentally sensitive parts of the site. The plan incorporated ideas put forward during a 'Planning for Real' weekend held in the Valley.

The process of decision making in the valley has generally been one of confrontation, invariably of the type where a development was proposed by the Leeds Development Corporation and the KVC reacted. The campaign felt threatened by the activities, in particular of the LDC, in that, decisions were made at meetings to which the public were not necessarily invited, only partial information on developments was available, decisions were made to suit the time-scale of the decision makers not the community, and the Campaign on occasion suffered from a lack of resources necessary to support its case adequately. Over the years the KVC has become a respected and well-known local pressure group (it has received national acclaim), yet it feels that it is a very unequal partner in the development game. Since the demise of the LDC in March 1995, the valley has reverted to the control of the local planning authority. Latterly, the campaign has built up a mutually responsive relationship with the LPA, who are currently discussing the possibility of creating a Community Development Trust in the valley with KVC as key initiators.

Lower Aire Valley

The Lower Aire Valley provides an interesting geographical contrast with the Kirkstall Valley. The Aire Valley stretches from the industrial heartland of Leeds out through the green belt to the mining settlements of Methley and Allerton Bywater. The valley has a long history of both deep and open-cast mining. The aim for the valley as stated in the Lower Aire Valley Environmental Improvement Strategy is to provide, "an exciting and imaginative vision whereby decades of industrial dereliction will be transformed into an improved landscape with areas for recreation and nature conservation". The valley has some extremely valuable natural habitat including wetlands of regional and possibly national importance, woodland and traditional agricultural landscapes, and includes a mill museum and an environmental education centre. The valley is traversed by the Leeds Country Way, the Trans-Pennine Trail and is used for fishing, cycling, bird watching, pleasure boating and various other forms of informal recreation. The larger part of the valley is designated as green belt. Agriculture, mining and industry remain the key economic activities in the valley. Unlike Kirkstall, the Lower Aire Valley serves no easily identifiable local community, although it is bordered by several residential areas.

In 1993 the Lower Aire Valley Environmental Strategy was published. It was commissioned by a partnership between Leeds City Council, British Coal and the Countryside Commission, the key players in the Strategy Steering Group (SSG). The steering group liaises and works closely with other local groups, agencies and initiatives, e.g. Groundwork Trust, the Swillington Ings Bird group and the Five Villages Project (a coalfield community environmental initiative). The strategy has received strong support from the council members and from the

local community. In 1993 Eye on the Aire directed its attention towards the Lower Aire Valley. Eye on the Aire is a voluntary organisation which was set up in 1988, during the European Year of the Environment, to promote environmental improvement of the river. It was initially part funded through the City Council's urban programme, acting as an umbrella body for over 30 voluntary organisations, and is affiliated to organisations and firms in both the public and private sector. The strategy steering group has worked with, and benefited from, Eye's contact with local groups and organisations. Eye organised two one-day conferences in the locality to promote the exchange of ideas on the strategy. A report of the days' deliberations has been circulated to all participants and local groups for comments. These comments will be taken on board by Eye in producing their Draft Management Plan, which will then be considered by the SSG, with the recommendations fed into the final plan.

Given the stark contrast between the comparative experiences in two areas of the city it is necessary to ask why there has been such a difference, not only in the decision-making process but also in the outcome? Kirkstall has successfully achieved its nature reserve but parts of the valley remain under threat; part of the Site of Special Scientific Interest has been developed as a boat yard, where oil spills have been noted and unsightly developments adjacent to the canal basin have occurred. The central question which needs to be addressed is why has the decision-making process, particularly as regards the community experience, worked out so differently, even within the same local authority area?

Environmental Decision Making: a comparative analysis

Timing

The Kirkstall Valley development 'battle' has its origins in the 1988 establishment of the Leeds Development Corporation and city council-backed proposal by Mountleigh for wholesale development of the valley. Though the green movement was gaining ground in the 1980s, the economic star was in the ascendancy, with the stress being on redevelopment and employment generation. The idea that the Kirkstall Valley represented a major development opportunity was firmly entrenched in the minds of the economic power holders by this stage, and indeed it remains an idea that has lost very little of its hold in the ensuing decade. Conversely, the Lower Aire Strategy was conceived in the early 1990s, benefiting from a political and planning climate in which issues of urban greening and sustainable development were high on the agenda. Further, in pursuing environmental city status (achieved in 1992), the council were particularly keen to develop opportunities to enhance their green credentials.

Strategic Overview

A fundamental difference in approach to the development process is evident in the two areas. One of the great strengths of the Lower Aire Valley Strategy is that it incorporates strategic planning, not only in a geographical sense but also with regard to recognising social, economic and environmental land use in the

valley. By way of contrast, in Kirkstall development planning has been undertaken in a piecemeal and opportunistic fashion, with little regard for broader environmental considerations or local community aspirations and surrounding land uses. The presence of the LDC, with its remit to develop only a very specific part of the valley and its limited life span, has been instrumental in forestalling the adoption of long-term strategic planning. Its focus has been on reaching short-term, measurable targets, or 'outcomes'.

Open Space Policy

Whilst both valleys possess areas specifically designated as nature conservation sites, e.g. SSSIs, the significant difference lies in the overall area designation. In the Unitary Development Plan, the dominant designation in the Kirkstall Valley is that of green corridor, a designation of limited value with regard to protection from development. Such a designation, however, is a significant advance as previously Kirkstall Valley had no overall green-space designation. The Lower Aire Valley, conversely, is predominantly green belt, which is one of the most entrenched and respected of the planning system's land-use protection mechanisms. Where development proposals have been put forward for the Lower Aire Valley these have generally been located on derelict land or on land with a recent history of industrial use, they have not been proposed for land that has existing green-space value.

Finance

The financial aspect is a fascinating one as it can both support and undermine environmental progress. Lack of finance is a major constraint for community groups. The Leeds Development Corporation has a government grant of £51.5 million and private sector investment of £317 million (LDC, 1994). Compare this with the financial 'well being' of the KVC, dependent on public donations (membership costs £1.00), and members' donation of their free time. In October 1993 a concert was held by the rock guitarist Mark Knopfler and Brendan Croker, with the proceeds of £10 000 donated to the KVC, giving it the financial security it hitherto lacked. Whereas in Kirkstall the community had to mobilise its own defence of the environment, in the Lower Aire Valley various grants have been made available to support environmental improvements. British Coal has made available a community benefit fund of £700 000. Groundwork Trust, The Five Villages Project and other grant-funded agencies are active in the area. The council is submitting a bid for funding under the European-funded RECHAR programme, a bid that specifically targets environmental enhancement.

Support

The Kirkstall Valley Campaign has received support from a number of sources other than the local community, including support from two local universities, the Royal Institute of British Architects, local councillors, schools, environmental groups, and in certain cases from the local authority itself. Whilst

co-operative working may be characteristic within the KVC this was not the case between KVC and the planning authority, namely the LDC. Towards the end of its life the LDC did become more open in its dealings with the community, encouraging greater levels of dialogue. Whether such dialogue could ever have resulted in consensus is debatable given the entrenched views and positions of the LDC and KVC. By contrast, the Lower Aire Valley Strategy has the backing and support of the council members, local government officers (primarily the Planning Department) and the voluntary sector. The Council recognises and has used the expertise and networks of Eye to access the various local interest groups. The situation in the Lower Aire Valley is not one of complete mutual support, indeed there is much antagonism to the activities of British Coal in the valley. Nonetheless, the various partners have demonstrated a willingness to compromise and consult. This willingness is obviously edged with pragmatism in that, given the immense power and resources of British Coal, opposition to their developments is likely to meet with little success, whereas by adopting a more conciliatory approach certain environmental improvements can be realised.

Power

Power relations underpin all decision-making processes. In Kirkstall, despite the size and breadth of support that the campaign has gathered, power relations remain essentially unequal. The LDC could in effect take decisions unilaterally without consulting the community, although in practice a limited amount of consultation was undertaken. There is no requirement for the developers to undertake any social impact analysis, or even any environmental impact analysis (except for developments specifically listed under European Directive, 85/337) of their development proposals. Although the LDC had to work within the normal legislation covering planning authorities, its non-elected character meant that it was not under the same pressure to be sensitive to public opinion as a local government planning authority would be. In the Lower Aire Valley power has never been the preserve of any one developer or development agency: the idea of partnerships has been integral to the development process. Whilst it would be an overstatement to say that the community and voluntary sector have been equal players, they have been consulted and given opportunities to have an input into the final plan, and they have direct access to key players in the decision-making process.

Environmental Decision Making: a way forward

Locational decision making remains an intractable problem area in land-use planning, as any reading of local and national news will indicate. The 'turf politics' debate and its associated concern with neighbourhood activism was of vital importance for an influential caucus of planners and geographers in the early 1970s and early 1980s as evidenced in the writings of noted academics such as Castells (1978); Cox (1979); Cox & Johnston (1982); Gibson (1979); and Pahl (1975). Nearly 20 years later, some of the central problems that they identified and addressed are still prevalent in society and taxing those involved

in land-use planning. Issues such as neighbourhood activism, turf politics, the communication gap between the decision makers and the affected community, grass roots participation, and the empowerment of the marginalised and disenfranchised are as critical in the 1990s as they were in the 1970s. Kirkstall Valley has all the classic characteristics of the 'turf wars' identified by Cox & McCarthy (1982). What is required now is to build on the existing body of work on locational analysis and decision making and take it forward in a way that is pertinent to the land-use process in the 1990s. Possible improvements include:

- *A holistic approach*: Sustainable development provides a unifying concept for addressing the issue of open space development in a holistic and strategic way. Greening strategies are a central tenet of the sustainable development debate, as is the concept of participation. In addition local authorities are obliged under the terms of the Earth Summit at Rio in 1992 to produce a Local Agenda 21 by 1996. Agenda 21 prioritises the role of the community in decision making and in developing the local agenda for sustainable development.
- *Green-space protection*: Significant progress has been made in the last 10 years in protecting areas that have notable value for nature conservation. But what about sites such as those of the Kirkstall Valley which lack any strong overall protection mechanism and, as a whole, do not meet the standards required to be designated as a nature conservation area? Naturally regenerating open space, particularly where it has amenity value, needs to be recognised and protected in the same way that more formally designated open space is. Standards for natural open space can and should be developed, possibly in the same way as standards have been developed by the National Playing Fields Association for the provision of outdoor playing space. Further, it is vital that where protection mechanisms are in place they are effective. There is no point in designating an area as a green corridor, or special landscape area, if there are no strong protection policies attached.
- *Green belt*: There is a need to re-examine the criteria for designating an area as green belt. Whilst the Lower Aire Valley has undoubtedly benefited from its green-belt designation, and few would wish to see the designation removed, the designation itself does raise some questions. Why is it that areas of the valley that have been and continue to be decimated by open-cast mining activities, and have no amenity, ecological or other current environmental value, fall within the green-belt designation and continue to be protected by one of the strongest of planning protection mechanisms?
- *Urban form*: A holistic approach to the evaluation of urban form is required. Large areas of open space need to be assessed with regard not only to their immediate environs but with regard to their significance to the totality of the urban area. The issue of urban form is a complex one. Land will be required for development. There is no ideal urban form, the arguments both for and against a compact city form or a decentralised city form and the role of green-space within the urban area need to be assessed (see Breheny, 1992).
- *Community participation*: Community participation remains a perplexing issue for planners. Public participation is enshrined in planning legislation and

guidance, yet both planners and the public rarely feel that successful participation has been achieved. The questions of empowerment, representativeness, divergence of interests (even within the same community) and communication continue to be problematic for the profession. Yet collective creativity remains one of the greatest resources available to any decision makers: the issue is, how best to harness this creativity? The Kirkstall Valley Peoples' Plan, based on the Planning for Real approach, and the day conferences convened by Eye on the Aire are two local examples. Other possibilities include: the use of social impact assessments in the same way that environmental impact assessments are used to assess new developments (see Short, 1989, p.103); the development of more effective community participation programmes, possibly along the lines of the community development councils and trusts as suggested by Ravetz (1990); the greater and more equitable access of all parties to information. The European Directive *Freedom of Access to Environmental Information 1992* represents a useful tool in this regard. Leeds City Council is encouraging the Kirkstall Valley Campaign to develop proposals for a Community Development Trust for the area. The creation and greater use of partnerships in decision making is also worthy of consideration. The Lower Aire Valley in particular shows some of the advantages that can be gained from partnership working. The DoE (1994) publication, *Partnerships in Practice: partnerships for change* provides a useful analysis of the potential role of partnerships and guidance on achieving successful partnerships.

- *The planning system:* Land-use decision making takes place within the context of the planning system. Changes in the planning system are long overdue, particularly in the realm of public participation. There is a need to move away from the predominantly adversarial approach to decision making that often dominates, particularly in appeals and Public Inquiry procedures. Such procedures are far removed from realising Abercrombie's assertion that; "the community should dominate in the process of plan making" (in Nicholson, 1988, p. 35). Planners are, however, hampered by the restrictions placed on them to focus their activities on 'land-use planning matters', when such matters patently occur within social, economic, political and historical contexts, which they ignore at their peril. Whilst there is no easy answer to the planners' dilemma, sustainability and the move towards a more corporate approach to working in local authorities can be advantageous in this regard.

Concluding Comment

Large areas of open space are particularly problematic in environmental decision making. These areas incorporate issues of strategic planning, green-space policy, community participation, and the economic development versus environmental protection conflict. Large areas of open space located within, or adjoining, the urban area inevitably possess significant development potential. Protection should not be primarily dependent on whether the area benefits from green-belt designation. This paper questions the rationale used in some cases to designate green-belt areas. The green-belt designation remains one of the strongest environmental protection mechanisms, and as such should be used only when it

is necessary to protect areas with particularly valuable environments, not as a blanket designation covering large areas regardless of the quality of that area. Decision making concerning large areas of open space is never going to be easy. The two case studies demonstrate the destructiveness that can occur where conflict and opposition between the decision makers and the local community predominates, and conversely the benefits that can accrue where consensus working within and between interest groups prevails. It is easy to be oversimplistic and see the selected case studies in terms of the mutually exclusive categories of success or failure, conflict or consensus, in reality, elements of both inevitably occur. Benefits both to the community and to the Leeds Development Corporation have occurred in the Kirkstall Valley, but far more positive outcomes could be achieved by consensus working, perhaps along the lines suggested by the Community Development Trust proposal, and a more rational appraisal of open space protection mechanisms. The Lower Aire Valley, with its emphasis on partnerships and co-operative working, is an indication of the more progressive path that environmental decision making could take in future.

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