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Popular planning: Coin Street, London

Popular planning is planning by local communities in their own neighbourhoods. It involves both the formulation of planning proposals and their implementation by local community organizations. This rests on dose collaboration between the community and the local planning authority, which has to be persuaded to adopt the popular plan as official policy. But the essence of popular planning is that local residents retain a high degree of direct control over the whole process.

For our case study of popular planning we have chosen to look at a small area of Central London known as Coin Street, which was the scene of a protracted fight between a major developer and a local community. In 1984 this struggle culminated in what has been described as 'one of the most extraordinary victories ever by a community group' (Cowan 1986, p. 6), when local residents gained control of the site and began to implement their own development scheme, since when many of the community's plans have been realized. In itself this makes Coin Street a classic case of popular planning, since few such plans have ever got this far—it may indeed come to be seen as 'the' classic case.

Coin Street and Waterloo

The area known as Coin Street is situated on the South Bank of the Thames in London, near the National Theatre (Figure 5.1). It consists of a string of sites, some 13 acres in area, lying mainly between Upper Ground and Stamford Street, which stretch from Waterloo Road through to the Thames at Stamford Wharf, with its famous 'OXO' tower. Like much of the South Bank, it has long remained

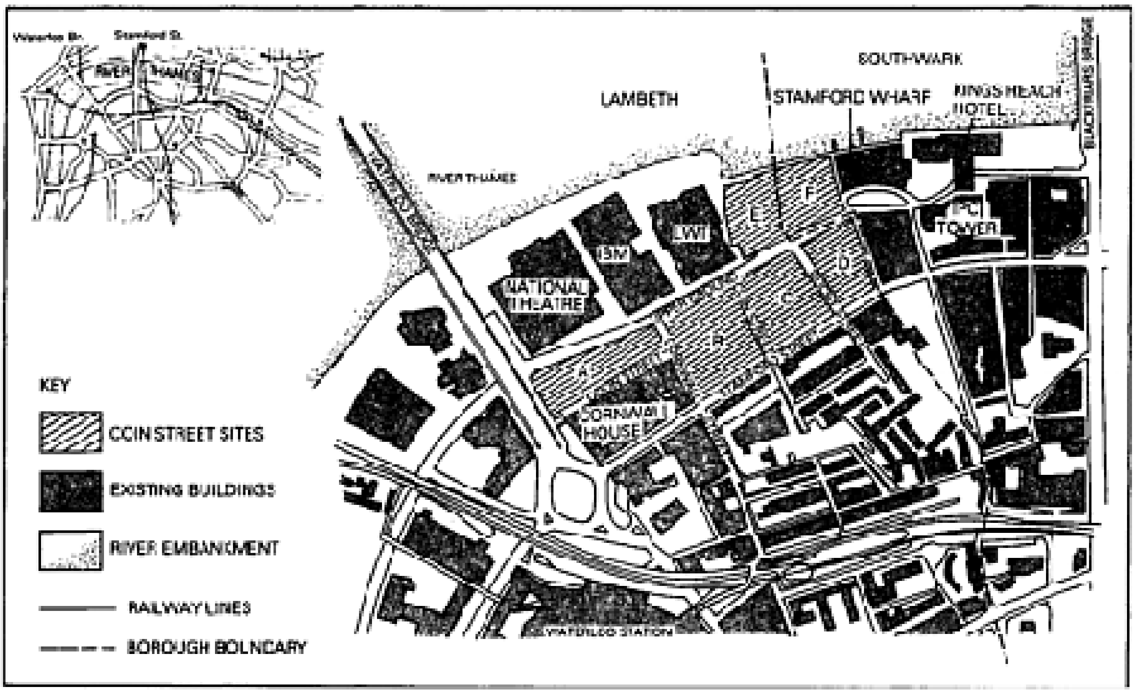

Figure 5.1 Map of the Coin Street area, showing places referred to in the case study

on the periphery of London's major land and property markets and can justifiably be described as a marginal area in economic terms. Before redevelopment began in 1986, most of the Coin Street area had been vacant for many years. The few remaining buildings were largely abandoned and the open land was used for temporary car parks. About half of the area was owned by the GLC, having been acquired by the London County Council (LCC) in 1953. Most of the remainder, including Stamford Wharf and the Eldorado Cold Store, was owned by the Vestey family through various companies, either freehold or on LCC/GLC leases. When this story began Coin Street represented one of the largest remaining undeveloped areas in Central London.

The Coin Street sites straddle the boundary between the London Boroughs of Southwark and Lambeth, falling mostly in the latter. The area forms part of the neighbourhood known as Waterloo which, like several other neighbourhoods in Central London, grew up around the station, completed in 1848. The main residential areas of Waterloo lie to the east and south of the station and comprise tenanted estates of the former GLC, the London Borough of Lambeth, the Peabody Trust and the Church Commissioners. Much of this housing was built on redevelopment sites between the wars, so little of the 19-century stock remains. Where there are Victorian and Georgian terraced houses these have attracted middle-class owner-occupiers. There is some local industry, particularly printing and distribution, mostly in small firms located under the arches of the elevated Waterloo and Charing Cross railway lines. Most residents of Waterloo work locally or in nearby parts of Central London and there are local shopping centres at Lower Marsh and The Cut. The Waterloo District Plan (London Borough of Lambeth 1977) remarks on the strong feeling of community among the remaining local population, down by half since 1961 to about 5000 in 1981. It is in the main a low-income, working-class community, with relatively high proportions of unskilled and semi-skilled workers and elderly households, not untypical of many inner-city areas today.

As well as having its local community, Waterloo is a part of Central London. It includes major office complexes, such as County Hall and the Shell Centre, St Thomas's Hospital, Lambeth Palace and the South Bank arts complex—the Festival Hall, the Hayward Gallery and the National Theatre. Waterloo Station itself is a dominant feature, covering some seven acres. Consequently, most people who work in and visit Waterloo come from outside the area. Although this gives Waterloo its attractive metropolitan character, it is the tension between the needs of local residents and the demands of outside interests which underlies the main planning conflicts in its recent history.

The initial conflict

The background to the popular plan for Coin Street can be found in a basic conflict over the future of Waterloo which came to a head in the 1970s. The conflict was between a future as part of the commercial expansion of Central London, through the speculative development of offices and hotels, and a future for the local community in the form of social rented housing and local employment and amenities. Before the 1970s, attempts to encourage commercial development in the area had been largely unsuccessful. In 1955 the South Bank was designated a Comprehensive Development Area (CDA), covering all of the Waterloo district between the railways and the Thames, and including about a quarter of the area's housing south of Stamford Street. Although the CDA was zoned for 'central area' uses, Waterloo was hardly touched by the office building boom of the late 1950s. London's Initial Development Plan of 1962 zoned the area for 'West End' uses, but again little new development occurred. It was not until the Greater London Development Plan of 1969 identified the South Bank as one of several 'preferred locations' for offices that any interest in redevelopment was stimulated.

The early 1970s saw the first commercial developments around Coin Street, but even in the midst of London's second major office boom, very little of this was speculative. The King's Reach hotel was built as a speculative venture but never completed, because its intended operator went into receivership (although the building was later converted into offices). However, there was further speculative interest in some of the Coin Street sites, and in 1971 the Heron Corporation was granted planning permission for an hotel on the site behind the National Theatre.

The same period saw the first organized responses from the local community. It appears that what first stirred the residents of Waterloo was a proposal to extend the Imperial War Museum into the adjacent public park. A welfare rights stall in the local market had identified various problems in the area, including a shortage of open space and play facilities. The extension to the museum would have taken up some of the existing open space, and so a campaign was launched to oppose it. This issue became a focus for community action and led to the formation in 1972 of the Waterloo Community Development Group (WCDG). The success of the campaign in stopping the museum extension inspired the WCDG to embark on the major step of developing a planning strategy for the Waterloo area.

Preparing a local plan

Commencing in 1973, the WCDG organized a series of public meetings and invited councillors and planners from the London Borough of Lambeth. The meetings discussed a wide range of local issues, including the changing types of shops related to new office developments, the closure of schools as the resident population declined and aged, and the shortage of low-cost housing. Housing seemed to hold the key, since it was needed to bring families back to the area and thus regenerate the demand for schools and shops, and Coin Street offered some obvious sites.

The GLC, which was the planning authority for the South Bank CDA, came under Labour control in 1973, and a similar series of meetings was held with GLC councillors and planning officers. As a result of the public meetings, both Lambeth and the GLC prepared independent reports on planning options for their respective areas of responsibility—Waterloo and the wider South Bank area. The reports offered a choice between private-sector office development with negotiated planning gains, public-sector housing development for local needs, or combinations of the two. In Lambeth the planners, like their colleagues in neighbouring Southwark, tended to favour office development in riverside areas, but the public's preference was for housing. Lambeth's politicians, unlike their Southwark counterparts, accepted this for most of Waterloo and it became the basis of the Borough's *Waterloo draft planning strategy,* adopted by the council in 1975 (London Borough of Lambeth 1975). The GLC adopted a similar policy in 1976, and this was published as *The future of the South Bank* (GLC 1976).

Lambeth was further persuaded by the WCDG to prepare a statutory local plan for Waterloo on the basis of the *Draft planning strategy,* and in 1977 the *Waterloo district plan* became the first local plan to be officially adopted in London (London Borough of Lambeth 1977). As a result Lambeth regained official responsibility for the Coin Street area from the GLC. Although not quite a popular plan, the *Waterloo district plan* 'bore the stamp of strong local approval and virtually no dissent' (Self 1979), following widespread public consultation. It included a policy of severe restraint on further office development and earmarked most of the Coin Street sites for housing and a public park.

The mid-1970s, the period during which these planning strategies were being prepared, was a time of retrenchment for the property development industry in London. The oil crisis of 1973/4, with its dramatic effects on interest rates and inflation, resulted in the virtual collapse of the speculative property market and the failure of several smaller banks (Rees & Lambert 1985). At Coin Street, the fate of the King's Reach hotel was only typical of other Central London developments, including the notorious Centrepoint office block, which remained unoccupied for years. Further interest in commercial development at Coin Street therefore subsided. The GLC broke off negotiations with the Heron Corporation and pressed ahead with the design of a housing scheme. In February 1977, the GLC gave scheme approval for some 200 dwellings on the two available sites in its ownership, the first stage of a plan to develop the whole Coin Street area for housing and open space.

The first phase of the Coin Street story underlines its relatively marginal position in the London property market. Commercial land uses were barely established on this part of the South Bank, with the exception of a few purpose-built complexes such as the London Weekend Television building and the International Publishing Corporation tower at King's Reach. Speculative property development had been tried on a small scale and had largely failed, and so remaining speculative interest appeared to have died away. Without very much effort, the field seemed open for the GLC to fulfil the objectives of the local plan and build housing for rent on some low-value redevelopment sites which it already owned. And this might well have been the end of the story: as *Coin Street News* put it:

> People would by now be living on Coin Street again had a new Tory GLC administration not axed the housing scheme and backed plans for a massive hotel and office project put forward by the Heron Corporation and Lord Vestey's Commercial Properties. (September 1984)

Property developers and popular planners

The election of a Conservative administration to the GLC in May 1977, under the leadership of Horace Cutler, heralded a new phase of property speculation at Coin Street, as in other parts of Central London. The respite of the mid-1970s had seen steady progress towards community goals—preparation of the anti-office local plan and the GLC housing scheme. But after toying with the idea of housing for sale, the new politicians at the GLC scrapped the housing scheme and, by expressing support for 'appropriate mixed developments' at Coin Street (Sudjic & Wood 1981), effectively declared their intention, as the major landowners, of ignoring the *Waterloo district plan.* This prompted Harry Dobin, a director of Heron, to declare: 'With the change of control at the GLC we thought we would get our plans out and dust them off (*Tribune* 1 June 1979).

Political support for commercial development at Coin Street came not only from the predictable quarter of the Conservative GLC but from the less predictable minority Labour government. As Secretary of State for the Environment, Peter Shore contrived in August 1978 both to confirm the statutory status of the *Waterloo district plan* with its pro-housing, anti-office policies; and simultaneously to grant speculative office development permits to the Heron Corporation and the Vestey company, Commercial Properties, for over a million square feet of offices and a skyscraper hotel on the Coin Street sites. Since this positively invited planning applications contrary to Lambeth's declared policies, in the view of one commentator Shore had 'sold the pass' on the local community (Self 1979).

The community, however, was not standing still. In 1976, the large number of community groups in the area, including the WCDG, had formed an umbrella organization, the Association of Waterloo Groups (AWG), which was recognized by Lambeth as a neighbourhood council. The election of the Tory GLC prompted the formation of an active campaign group, the Coin Street Action Group (CSAG), to oppose the hotel/office proposals and promote housing and open space. Lambeth took over a version of the GLC scheme for Coin Street, consisting of 251, mainly low-rise, dwellings, to which it added schemes for the other two sites within the Borough boundary, and applied for a compulsory purchase order to acquire the sites from the GLC. The CSAG, however, was not satisfied that this scheme met the wishes of the local community and decided to prepare its own scheme for 360 low-rise dwellings, a riverside walk and park, shops and other facilities for all eight Coin Street sites, including those in Southwark.

In the confusion of competing and conflicting development proposals now seeking planning permission at Coin Street, in October 1978 the Secretary of State called-in all the applications for his consideration at a public inquiry. Even between this announcement and the start of the inquiry further proposals came forward. These included the community scheme, just mentioned; Heron's plans for an even taller skyscraper hotel—at 458 ft, potentially the tallest in Europe; London Weekend Television's application to extend its existing premises; and a third major mixed development proposal hurriedly tabled by a newcomer, Greycoat London Estates Limited (Greycoats). All of these applications were called-in for consideration at the inquiry, which opened on 22 May 1979.

The popular plan for Coin Street emerged out of a complex sequence of events over the next few years. The first public inquiry extended over 64 days and concluded in November 1979, Described by *The Times* (10 September 1984) as 'one of the longest, costliest and most important and confused planning inquiries ever held in Britain', perhaps its main achievement was to narrow the field and sharpen the conflicts. On the developers' side, Greycoats came out much the strongest contender. During the course of the inquiry, Greycoats submitted a revised scheme for the whole Coin Street area, designed by the international architect Richard Rogers. When it also acquired the freehold of the Boots factory and other leaseholds for around £2 million, Heron pulled out, leaving its partner, Commercial Properties, 'rather high and dry' (Milne 1979).

The community's development scheme for Coin Street was prepared by the CSAG. The Action Group worked by dividing its tasks among a large number of subgroups and calling on whatever sources of professional and technical help it could muster. These included the architect of the original GLC housing scheme; a worker in a local housing co-operative; lawyers attached to local law projects; a planner in Southwark; Shelter Housing Aid Centre; the Society for Co-operative Dwellings; and many other individuals. Publicity and public relations were central to their strategy: the Action Group produced a four-weekly bulletin and an occasional newspaper *(Coin Street News),* issued press releases, and organized exhibitions, a tape-slide show, street theatre and social events.

The community case was presented at the inquiry in a number of different ways. The formal planning application was submitted by the AWG, represented by a lawyer. Formal presentations of evidence in support of the community scheme were therefore made under the auspices of the AWG (hence it was generally known as 'the AWG scheme'). In making its case, the AWG was able to draw on a wide range of professionals and experts, including many of those who had helped in the preparation of the scheme. It also presented a unique analysis of supply and demand in the office market in Central London, commissioned from a planning consultant, in order to challenge the office location policy of the GLDP and to demonstrate that no more offices were needed. In parallel with the official proceedings the CSAG ran an action campaign, including a petition, publicity and demonstrations. Three or four people from the community groups also attended the inquiry full-time.

In July 1980 all the applications were refused by the new Conservative Environment Secretary, Michael Heseltine, who described the office proposals as 'massive and over-dominant', while criticizing the housing proposals because they 'failed to exploit the employment potential of the sites' (*Journal of Planning and Environment Law* 1983). Instead, he called for a mixed development which would combine housing and employment. Heseltine appeared to be defining a new planning policy for the area which incorporated elements from both the GLDP and the Waterloo District Plan but deviated significantly from both. In effect, he had thrown out a challenge to each set of developers, Greycoats and the AWG, to come back with comprehensive schemes which met the revised criteria.

Greycoats responded by joining forces with jilted Commercial Properties, to form Greycoat Commercial Estates Limited (for brevity, we will continue to refer to this company as Greycoats). This consolidated the private landholdings in the area, giving the new company control over about half the sites through a mix of freeholds and leaseholds. A revised scheme was published in March 1980 and submitted for planning approval in December. It consisted of a string of cluster blocks of varying height, linked by a glazed pedestrian mall and connected to a new Thames footbridge. Described by the architect as 'an open-ended flexible infrastructure capable of fostering a wide range of local and metropolitan activities' (Richard Rogers & Partners 1981, p. 52), the concept was much praised in the architectural press, while others nicknamed it 'The Dinosaur' and 'The Berlin Wall'. It amounted to a million square feet of offices (slightly less than the earlier version), housing, shopping, light industrial workshops and other facilities, including public open space. Almost immediately it was called-in and a second public inquiry became inevitable.

The AWG's revised proposal for a mixed development, comprising 400 dwellings, managed workshops, shopping and other facilities, and public open space, appeared early in 1980. It goes without saying that while both schemes included apparently similar elements, they represented radically different approaches to the development. The Greycoats scheme was a purely commercial venture which offered some social amenities as a planning gain, and was based on conventional institutional sources of funding. The AWG scheme was a thoroughgoing community project, which would provide low-rent housing for local people in need, funded either by the local authorities or a co-operative housing association; the managed workshops were mainly for light industrial uses, and were intended to extend the range of employment opportunities in Inner London; the shops would include a supermarket to supplement existing local facilities. The only common feature was public open space on the waterfront, and even here the two developments would have been unlikely to appeal to the same groups of users. There was no compromise between such diametrically opposed types of development, and it looked as if a conflict was about to become a battle.

When the second Coin Street inquiry opened on 7 April 1981, it was indeed 'amid scenes reminiscent of the worst motorway inquiries of the 70s' (*Building Design* 10 April

1981). The protestors, mainly local residents, were incensed that the AWG scheme was not on the agenda, and that the inquiry should be starting before the May elections for the GLC, when a Labour victory was (correctly) anticipated. The result was an adjournment until June and the inclusion of the AWG scheme to be examined alongside Greycoats' proposals. After a further adjournment on a technicality had again postponed the start of the inquiry until September, it ran for 88 days and closed in March 1982.

In the interval between the publication of the revised development schemes and the much-delayed start of the inquiry, two events, both involving the GLC, significantly changed the balance of forces in the field. The first was a deal concluded between the outgoing Tory GLC and Greycoats, in the form of a conditional Agreement for Sale which gave Greycoats an option to acquire all the GLC's freehold interests at Coin Street on condition that it secured all necessary planning and other permissions within three years. Greycoats maintained that this controversial deal was purely a commercial decision, to give them sufficient basis on which to proceed with their development. The GLC imposed restrictive conditions on the deal, in an attempt to ensure that the site was in fact developed, but GLC officers were clearly unhappy about making this agreement prior to the granting of detailed planning permission (GLC 1981a). It is hard to avoid the inference that the land deal was a political manoeuvre designed to prevent the successor administration at the GLC from blocking Greycoats' plans.

Whatever interpretation is put on it, the land deal neatly anticipated the second important event, namely the Labour victory at the GLC elections just mentioned, and the new administration's immediate decision to back the AWG scheme for Coin Street. By July the GLC had published a statement of its new policy, *The future of the South Bank wider area* (GLC 1981b). This aimed 'to limit the expansion of Central London activities into the South Bank. Housing should be the major land use with other supporting activities, such as industry.' Office development was to be restricted to sites specified in approved local plans, such as the *Waterloo district plan.* The new administration at the GLC also provided more practical support for the AWG, which suddenly found its resources boosted by the full-time secondment of an architect and almost unlimited use of copying and printing facilities.

As these moves imply, one of the first priorities of the new administration at the GLC was to protect all the working-class communities in Central and Inner London from the blighting effects of commercial development pressures. From July 1981 the Council began to set out its Community Areas Policy, Building on the South Bank initiative, this policy aimed to resist commercial development and gentrification in the old neighbourhoods surrounding the City and the West End, and to promote rented housing, community facilities and local employment, drawing for funds on the GLC's development programme. The areas covered by the policy ranged from Hammersmith to Spitalfields, and from King's Cross to Battersea. The South Bank, including Coin Street, was therefore defined as a Community Area and selected for funding from 1982/3 (GLC 1985a).

The community victory

The second Coin Street inquiry ranged over much the same ground as the first one, with both the AWG and Greycoats claiming that their proposals conformed with statutory planning policies for the area and with Heseltine's demand for suitable mixed development. The Secretary of State's decision was announced in December, just before his departure for the Ministry of Defence, and granted outline planning permission to both Greycoats and the AWG. The decision letter explained that both schemes were acceptable as comprehensive, mixed developments. This seemingly even-handed decision was widely seen to favour Greycoats, since it appeared to raise the value of the land beyond what the GLC could reasonably pay for housing and industry. But, undaunted, the AWG, under the headline 'Full Speed Ahead!', boldly announced its intention 'to start construction on site towards the end of 1984' (*Coin Street News* April 1983).

Greycoats' three-year purchase option had just over a year to run and it still needed road closure agreements and permission to demolish the Stamford Wharf building, since 1983 in a declared Conservation Area. Meanwhile the GLC, the London Boroughs of Lambeth and South wark and the AWG jointly went to the High Court in an attempt to have Greycoats' planning permission quashed. Their contention was that the Secretary of State had acted improperly, in particular by failing to consider the supply and demand for offices, the provisions of the statutory local plan and the policies of the local planning authorities, of which all three now backed the AWG. Rejecting these arguments, Mr Justice Stephen Brown ruled in July that:

> the issue was not a question of 'housing against offices'; it was a question of whether the application proposals achieved an acceptable balance of a mixture of uses set in an appropriate architectural context, in accordance with the Minister's stated policy. (*Journal of Planning and Environment Law* 1983, p. 797)

An appeal to the Court of Appeal in December was similarly dismissed and a petition to the House of Lords was rejected, leaving Greycoats' planning permission intact but with the deadline on its purchase option rapidly approaching.

February 1984 saw the inquiry into the road closures required by the Greycoats scheme, actively opposed by the AWG and all three planning authorities, along with some 400 other individuals and groups, including King's Reach Developments. But no sooner did the inquiry close than Greycoats made a dramatic move:

> With its option on the GLC-owned land about to expire, no funding or tenants for its wall of offices, and demoralised by the persistent opposition to its scheme, Greycoat Commercial Estates and associated companies finally admitted defeat and sold their land interests to the GLC on 29 March 1984. (*Coin Street News* September 1984)

Greycoats appear in the end to have endorsed the view proclaimed on a banner strung across Stamford Wharf, that this was 'A Community Victory'. The developers were defeated by the combination of an extraordinarily effective local campaign and the considerable muscle of the GLC. In addition to failing to obtain all the necessary permissions to force the GLC to sell the rest of the site, notably consent to demolish

Stamford Wharf itself, Greycoats realized that it would face community opposition all the way. The CSAG had threatened to organize further action, even a union Green Ban, which could seriously hamper the development. Greycoats did consider holding on to the site and blocking the AWG scheme but decided instead to sell up and concentrate its efforts in other, less contentious parts of Central London.

In fact, the developer's position had always looked rather precarious. Greycoats was only prepared to start construction once the offices had been pre-let, ideally with one tenant for each of the eight linked blocks of the scheme. As events dragged on into 1984, it was observed that the developer 'still has no firm potential tenants and, even more critically, no sign of major sources of development investment' (Milne 1984). Greycoats' change of heart was probably not uninfluenced by the start on site of the St Martin's Group development at Hay's Wharf, and by the fact that the company had recently secured two other major development projects in Central London. It sold its interests in the Boots site, Stamford and Nelson's wharves, and other smaller sites (amounting in total to some 6.5 acres) for £2.7 million.

George Nicholson, chair of the GLC Planning Committee, summed up the sense of euphoria which now came over the local campaigners:

> This is a landmark. It's the culmination of a long and determined battle by local people. The development we shall now see on this important London site is the people's plan—planning for the people and by the people. (GLC 1985a, p. 12)

Implementing the popular plan

With the whole of Coin Street in GLC freehold ownership, the AWG found itself in the spring of 1984 on the brink of realizing its popular plan. Although the tables appeared to have turned quite suddenly in its favour, the AWG and the GLC had been working for some time on a contingency plan. In 1983 a Joint Advisory Committee was formed, consisting of representatives from the GLC, the Boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark, and the AWG, with the aim of progressing the outline planning permission granted to the community scheme. There was an initial disagreement over who should act as overall developer. The GLC proposed that it should have this role, bringing in the Boroughs under joint committee and financing arrangements. Lambeth, in spite of its serious conflict with central government over spending levels and ratecapping, proposed that it should buy the sites and manage the development itself. However, neither of these arrangements was satisfactory to the AWG. It did not regard GLC ownership of the sites as secure, given the authority's imminent demise, while Lambeth councillors were fighting the government over ratecapping, and in any case were known to be opposed to co-operatives and wanted to develop conventional council housing. Drawing on grass-roots support in the Labour Party, the AWG was able to block both of these plans and take on the development role itself.

In December 1983, with the withdrawal of Greycoats looking more and more likely, it began the process of setting up a non-profit limited company to purchase the sites from the GLC once it had control of all the freeholds. In order to achieve a site valuation which the community group could afford, the GLC imposed restrictive covenants on the freeholds, effectively limiting the use of the land to the AWG scheme. By this means it was able to sell all the freeholds at an agreed value of £750 000 to the new company, Coin Street Community Builders (CSCB), formed jointly by members of the AWG and the North Southwark Community Development Group, in June 1984. CSCB financed the purchase with the aid of two mortgages, one from the GLC and one from the Greater London Enterprise Board, the repayments being covered by temporary income from car parks and advertising hoardings. The ownership of the freeholds and the income they generated gave CSCB the advantage of independence. It was able to employ five full-time workers; a company secretary and officers responsible for finance, housing and social facilities, commercial development and administration. A sixth full-time worker, an information officer, was funded by a small grant from Lambeth and Southwark.

The local community now owned 13 acres of Central London and, true to its ambitious prediction, the AWG actually had its project on site before the end of 1984, as demolition of the Boots building began, shortly followed by demolition of the Eldorado Cold Store. The scheme fell into three distinct parts with different problems of implementation: the housing, the river wall and walk and other public open space, and the other land uses (industry, shopping and leisure). The intention was to develop and manage the housing through co-operative housing associations. To achieve this, the housing sites were initially sold to the Society for Co-operative Dwellings (SCD), at the nominal value of £1, which acted as development agent while CSCB set up new primary and secondary housing co-ops. A mortgage was raised from Lambeth and Southwark Boroughs to finance the first scheme on Site C (Fig. 5.1). A final design was prepared, granted detailed planning permission by Lambeth and scheme approval by the DoE, and the first houses commenced on site in June 1986. It consisted of three-storey, six-person houses for families, including two eight-person units, and mostly with gardens.

The detailed arrangements for the development were complicated but critical to the future of this controversial scheme. The freeholds of all the housing sites were transferred to a new secondary housing co-operative, called Axle, and the lease for the first scheme to a primary co-operative, Mulberry. Apart from conforming with CSCB's co-operative principles, this form of ownership and management carried added advantages. For one thing it was exempt from the 'right to buy' under the 1980 Housing Act. If the housing had been developed by a local authority or conventional housing association, tenants would have had the right to purchase their own houses or flats at a discount, so taking them out of social ownership and beyond the means of households in need. It was also calculated to minimize the risk of the government finding some way to intervene and force the sale of the sites for commercial development.

AWG's planning permission required the construction of a new river wall and extension to the riverside walk before any buildings could be occupied. The GLC undertook to do this, together with the development of Sites D and F1 as public open space (Fig. 5.1), at an estimated cost of £4.5 million (GLC 1983). This also commenced in June 1986 on the basis of £2 million of forward funding from the GLC, agreed with the government prior to the authority's demise in April of that year. The successor to the GLC, the London Residuary Body (LRB), was unable to evade this financial commitment and the new walkway was opened in the autumn of 1987.

The other elements in the outline planning permission were 126 000 sq. ft of light industrial workshops and 67 000 sq. ft of shopping and leisure facilities, including a restaurant and museum in the restored Stamford Wharf building. Various sources of funding were explored for the estimated £6.75 million construction costs, in the public and private sectors (GLC 1983). Although it was operated as a charitable trust, the wharf was costing money to maintain and generating no income, so it was selected for the second phase of the development. In 1986 CSCB invited proposals for the use of the lower floors of the wharf, to supplement the 75 flats planned for the upper floors. Offices and luxury flats were ruled out, and tenders were invited to include workshops and a museum. Out of some 85 proposals two were shortlisted, one a children's museum, similar to the Halifax 'Eureka' project, and the other a Museum of the Thames. Both proposals came with independent development finance. At the same time one of the later housing sites in the programme (site E, Fig. 5.1) was designated for a temporary crafts market and workshops, modelled on Camden Lock. This left the greatest challenge for the co-operative developers in the planned third phase of the development, the managed workshops on the site behind the National Theatre. The scheme which they envisaged had implications for rent levels, lettings policy and training provision which were unlikely to be acceptable to a conventional institutional investor. Possible sources of finance included large private companies such as Shell or BAT, which had funded small, start-up workshops elsewhere, and the Greater London Enterprise Board. But, whatever the problems, CSCB was confident of its ability to realize the project and looked in a strong position to do so.

Popular planning as a planning style

Coin Street stands as a classic example of popular planning in the 1980s. There have been other cases of successful community opposition to major development schemes and a handful of local plans prepared in full consultation with local residents. The *Covent Garden action area plan* (GLC 1977), approved in 1977, which was largely based on a document prepared by local community groups, was perhaps the first example of a popular plan, but since then the community has not played a major role in its implementation. The *People's plan for the Royal Docks* (Newham Docklands Forum 1983), although it was a full local plan drawn up by Newham residents, only really stood as a statement of opposition to the LDDC and the STOLport proposal. But at Coin Street community involvement has passed through all the stages, from opposition through consultation and active participation, to the implementation of large-scale development within the framework of a popular plan. The Coin Street case study therefore provides unique insights into the processes of popular planning, its strengths and weaknesses, and its conflicts and tensions.

Institutional arrangements

The characteristic organizational form of popular planning is the community forum. The Skeffington report of 1969 first advocated the setting up of community forums for consultation with local residents in the preparation of local plans. One of the first was created in Covent Garden in 1973 as a ‘representative’ body, with members elected from among local residents, workers and property owners (Christensen 1979). In 1974 the Docklands Forum was created as an ‘umbrella’ organization for local community and interest groups (see Ch. 6). More recently, Sheffield set up a number of forums for consultation on its city centre plan (Alty & Darke 1987).

Although they vary in their style and range of activities, community forums have played a major role in planning consultation, acting as a focal point for a number of community groups and bringing them into the planning process. However, as an institutional form the community forum has some limitations. It exists essentially as a focus of communication between, on one side, the diverse social groups which form the community and, on the other side, the local authority. As such, the forum tends to be trapped in a ‘consultative’ role, invited to respond to local authority proposals but not expected to have any of its own. In trying to be representative it is not well placed to make positive decisions and move into active campaigning and real participation. In Covent Garden, this led to a split between the Forum and the Action Group, with the latter breaking away to engage in a more active campaign of positive planning. The Docklands Forum, although it has become a more active body since the designation of the LDDC, has also had campaign groups, such as the Joint Docklands Action Group, form around it. Generally, Skeffington-type consultative groups have suffered the fate of incorporation into local authority procedures, unable to take an independent critical line.

Significantly, Coin Street did not start with a Skeffington-type forum, set up by the local authorities for formal consultation with ‘the public’. The initiative for a forum appears to have come instead from within the community, which put pressure on the local authorities (principally Lambeth and the GLC) to engage in consultation. The North Lambeth Multi-Services Group first identified local needs and opposed the War Museum extension, leading in 1972 to the formation of the Waterloo Community Development Group. This group, which paralleled another in the adjacent borough of Southwark (North Southwark Community Development Group), then became the main ‘forum’ for consultation on planning policy. At that stage it seems to have adopted a role similar to that of other community forums, receiving and commenting on the local authorities’ documents and proposals. This group, then, carried the process of popular planning through the stages of opposition and consultation.

The formation of the Association of Waterloo Groups in 1976 was a further significant step. The AWG was established as an umbrella organization, with some 32 affiliated groups including the WCDG. While it took over the role of consultative ‘forum’, the Coin Street Action Group was set up specifically to fight the new commercial development proposals then emerging. It is interesting that many of the same people were actively involved in WCDG, AWG and CSAG, but that the different groups were used for different purposes. The AWG generally took on the mantle of the formal or quasi-official community group. We have seen how it presented the community case at the public inquiries, through a lawyer, and submitted planning applications for community proposals. The CSAG, on the other hand, was the activist wing, staging demonstrations and publicity events. The separation of these two organizations helped to maintain both the legitimacy of the AWG, in its relations with local authorities and formal planning procedures, and the independent voice of the CSAG. This tactic helped to sustain the impetus and dynamism of the active participation stage of the popular plan, leading to the relatively successful outcome of the 1981 inquiry.

Almost immediately after the AWG scheme was granted planning permission, along with the Greycoats scheme, a new phase of popular planning stimulated a further realignment of the community groups and their relationship with the local authorities. Initially, implementation depended on a closer relationship with these authorities (Lambeth, Southwark and the GLC) which would be the main sources of initial funding as well as the statutory planning authorities for detailed planning permissions. The authorities formed a member-level Joint Advisory Committee (initially within the GLC but later transferred to Lambeth), including representatives of the AWG, 'to co-ordinate and progress the proposals for the Coin Street site'. The committee worked on contingency plans for implementing the AWG scheme and tried to resolve the question of who should have overall responsibility for the development. As we have seen, the AWG won this important political skirmish, with the result that Coin Street Community Builders took over the freeholds of the development sites. In its turn, CSCB helped to set up a new consultative body, the Coin Street Development Group, to involve the community in the detailed implementation of the scheme, and established a series of primary and secondary co-operatives to develop the housing sites.

This rather convoluted history of community organization in the Coin Street case study shows that it is almost impossible to generalize about the institutional form of popular planning. The community forum advocated by Skeffington was never wholly successful, except as a consensual consultative body. At Coin Street, community activists demonstrated a rather sophisticated understanding of the roles of different kinds of community groups, which could represent various degrees of formality and informality, participation and opposition, in changing circumstances. They were aware both of the need for a formal relationship with the local authorities and of the dangers of political incorporation, and adopted what might be described as a'horses for courses' approach to organization. Popular planning may well depend on this kind of organizational flexibility, based on a formally recognized umbrella organization such as the AWG but able to diversify and reform into a range of more specialized groups at different stages in the process.

Politics and decision-making

The Coin Street case involved a large number of interest groups, each having different kinds and degrees of power and each pursuing different objectives for the development of the area. Decisions came out of a shifting pattern of alliances, with groups forming and dissolving, and with frequent changes of political leadership in the respective public authorities. This form of decision-making can be described as 'imperfect pluralism', since not every interest is equally organized or represented, and decisions tend to be unpredictable and pragmatic. The eventual outcome of the events at Coin Street was not only unpredicted but regularly dismissed as unachievable, even by sympathetic commentators. The case illustrates a rather confused struggle for power in a situation where no one group, in the public or the private sector, held the upper hand for very long.

The idea of pluralism, however 'imperfect', suggests a political process to which all interests have access and no one is systematically excluded. In the case of popular planning, the obvious question is just how 'popular' is it? The apparent degree of pluralism suggested by the large number of community organizations involved at various stages may be exaggerated. Since many of the same people regularly reappear in different roles in different groups, it would seem that the community interest was being articulated by a fairly small group of activists. In spite of the large number of organizations in the area, a social survey in 1974 reported that only 6% of a random sample of local residents attended tenants' or residents' associations and 7% attended community associations (London Borough of Lambeth 1977, p. 19).

The representativeness of those involved has been an issue for the AWG and its offshoots. In a briefing note for local councillors the CSCB commented that the management committee of the first housing co-operative, Mulberry:

> is composed of six men and six women. They broadly represent the social make-up of the local community: two are printers, two retired, two unemployed, one is a teacher, one a receptionist, one a docker, one an administrator, one a housing advisor and one works full-time at Coin Street. (Coin Street Community Builders 1986, p. 10)

It was also reported that positive action was being taken to recruit a black committee member. However, while the sex, race and class of community representatives are undeniably important for their credibility and legitimacy, it goes without saying that they are no guarantee of socially progressive attitudes. Rather, what stands out in the case study is the consistent efforts of the AWG and other groups to achieve both wide participation and popular control, for example in their insistence on developing the housing as mutual co-operatives. The representativeness of the community groups is ultimately reflected in their consistent aims and achievements, which were always to do with the needs of the mainly working-class residents of Waterloo and the surrounding area.

The local authorities, with wider constituencies to serve, never had the same single-minded commitment to meeting such local needs. Through the mid-1970s, Lambeth and the GLC under Labour control supported community goals and planned to build council housing on some of the Coin Street sites. Southwark remained in favour of office development on Thames-side sites until 1982 when a new council was elected that was more sympathetic to local communities. Under Conservative control from 1977 to 1981, the GLC actively promoted office development. But after 1981 it was the Labour GLC which became the principal ally of the local community, much more committed to their cause than even Lambeth. (It was only after most Lambeth councillors were disqualified from office and a new council elected in 1986 that the authority came to support the idea of housing co-operatives, for example, and then rather tentatively.) The eventual success of the popular plan for Coin Street was uniquely due to the support and intervention of Ken Livingstone's administration at the GLC. Its Community Areas Policy established the principle of defending local communities in Central and inner London against the threat of commercial development and gentrification. This policy was later incorporated in proposed alterations to the GLDP which were submitted to the Secretary of State but never approved (GLC 1984b). Nevertheless, it led to the funding of many small projects through the GLC's development programme, including some housing schemes. The Coin Street project received considerable assistance and effectively became the flagship of Community Areas Policy, a major rebuff to a large commercial developer and a demonstration of what could be achieved, apparently against all the odds. It was also, of course, one of the GLC's grandest swansongs.

Conflicts and tensions in popular planning

Although it might appear to be a consensual process within the community, popular planning also generates conflicts and tensions. Generally, the wider the involvement in decision-making, the more potentially conflicting needs will be identified. At Coin Street there seems to have been a remarkably consistent view within the local community of what was needed. When a few of the Lambeth sites were being considered in the early 1970s, the consensus was for housing, principally houses with gardens. When the idea of a larger scheme emerged during the public inquiries, open space, workshops and social amenities were added to the original housing proposal. The community itself does not therefore seem to have been in conflict over what to do with Coin Street. But conflicting demands have arisen in the sense of who should benefit from the popular plan and who should control its implementation.

The key tension at Coin Street emerged in the relationship of the community organizations with the local planning authorities. At various times and with various authorities this was a straight conflict of directly opposed aims; for example, with the Tory GLC and to a slightly lesser extent with Southwark before 1982. But even where the community and the local authority appeared to share the same goals, tensions emerged. The first housing scheme at Coin Street was funded jointly by Lambeth and Southwark, out of their Housing Investment Programme allocations. Although 90% of these loans would be repaid on completion of the scheme, through a Housing Association Grant, Lambeth insisted on 100% nomination of the initial tenancies from its own waiting list. To some extent this was an issue of who should benefit, the residents of Waterloo who had fought for ten years or people from other parts of Lambeth who might be in objectively greater housing need. It has been suggested that racial tensions were also involved, which the National Front attempted to exploit; Waterloo is a mainly white area and Lambeth had a policy of allocating at least 30% of new housing to black people (*City Limits* 29 March—4 April 1985). The CSCB conceded the principle of nomination for the first scheme, but in order to be able to set up a mutual co-operative among the new tenants it insisted on nominations being made six months in advance of occupation and a full co-operative training programme.

The fact that at Coin Street the community has become the developer puts it in a unique relation to the planning authorities, and yet it is a position which is not dissimilar to that of any commercial developer. On the one hand the community owns the land and has an outline planning permission, but on the other hand it still needs detailed permissions and, perhaps more significantly, financial support from the authorities. Where commercial developers might only need publicly provided infrastructure, CSCB needs more direct help in the form of housing loans and the provision of social facilities. Some of the Coin Street development will be independently financed, like a commercial development, but there will always be an element of dependence on the local authorities and therefore tension over policy decisions. This would seem to be an inevitable characteristic of popular planning.

A further tension can be seen in the Coin Street case which is also characteristic of popular planning generally, and that is the question of the longer-term future of the plan. National government policies have been stacked against popular planning since 1979, if not before. The increased emphasis on market criteria in development control decisions, the 'right to buy' social rented housing, and the abolition of the GLC all worked to the disadvantage of the AWG scheme. Highly conscious of this problem, the AWG sought to maximize its independence and therefore control over the implementation of the scheme, with remarkable success. It also stuck firmly to the principle of housing co-operatives, which fall outside the 'right to buy'. In fact, the future of Coin Street looks reasonably secure at the time of writing (1987). Interest in speculative office development has waned on the South Bank, with the construction of London Bridge City in North Southwark and the shift of attention to Docklands and Canary Wharf. For the time being, the pressure is off and CSCB is able to get on with the development.