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# KIRKGATE COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT AREA

Michael Gall

## List of Abbreviations

|      |                                          |
|------|------------------------------------------|
| CDA  | Comprehensive Development Area.          |
| CPO  | Compulsory Purchase Order                |
| ECA  | Edinburgh City Archive.                  |
| MREC | The Murrayfield Real Estate Company Ltd. |
| TCF  | Edinburgh City Archive Town Clerk Files. |
| TPO  | Town Planning Officer.                   |

Town planning is a concept that has existed for centuries, and during the Second World War the concept of comprehensive planning became established government practice in Britain. Comprehensive planning and redevelopment of entire communities derived from this as changes in legislation in the post-war period saw the concept applied in many areas of the country. The designation of an area deemed to require total redevelopment as a Comprehensive Development Area (CDA) conferred a special status upon that area and gave the local authority greatly increased powers of decree over land appropriation and development.<sup>1</sup>

This article examines that process and its results as it was applied to central Leith. Its focus will be on the Kirkgate and the area immediately surrounding it. The aim of the piece is to attempt to define the reasons behind Leith's designation as a CDA and to shed some light on the process and its effects on both the built environment and the community of the Kirkgate area. It will draw conclusions as to how far the scheme can be considered to have been a success and will cite specific examples to support them.

To do this, archived local authority documents relating to the Leith CDA, and some contemporary or near-contemporary publications covering CDA designation and implementation have been used. Secondary literature on comprehensive development is

sparse, but it has been cited where possible. The bulk of the sources used are drawn from Edinburgh City Council's Archive collection of Town Clerk files, with some supporting evidence drawn from Corporation minute books and from contemporary publications.

The Kirkgate was central Leith's main shopping street and the heart of the community.<sup>2</sup> In the 1950s it was designated a part of the Leith Citadel and Central Comprehensive Development Area, which resulted in the almost complete demolition of the street. In its place were built a shopping centre and new Corporation housing for rental.

The CDA was an instrument of town planning which had its roots in the years between the wars. In Britain, this period was one of ad-hoc urban development. Local authorities were empowered to prevent unwanted building, but both excessive bureaucracy and the cost of compensating landowners for their potential losses in such cases generally prevented them from doing so. Equally, the local authorities could embark upon large-scale developments themselves, but no legislation obliged them to do so. There was, therefore, no statutory mechanism for preventing extensive development of industry or housing being pursued without the provision of adequate amenities to accompany it.<sup>3</sup>

The Barlow Report of 1940 recommended that the principle of pro-active planning should be adopted



Fig. 1. Kirkgate, looking North from Trinity House, c. 1920. One can see this was a bustling street. Photographer unknown. Capital Collections <https://www.capitalcollections.org.uk>

as national policy.<sup>4</sup> Comprehensive planning was the preferred approach due to the stresses imposed on various aspects of a community's infrastructure by uncoordinated development of other aspects of community amenity. In other words, if one introduces more housing to an area, one will consequently require more school places, more roads and services, increased public transport provision, and so on. Congested urban areas were to be redeveloped, and industry encouraged to move away from these areas.<sup>5</sup>

The experience of war engendered demands from the public and politicians alike that post-war Britain should be a new society, an improvement on what had gone before.<sup>6</sup> This included the improvement of the urban environment and, according to Barlow, planning was key to realising that ambition. This new approach was given legislative form in Scotland by the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act of 1947. Part of this Act placed an obligation upon local authorities to produce a plan for the development of

their area.<sup>7</sup> The Corporation of Edinburgh's survey report and development plan was published in 1953 and contained reports of surveys on population, industry, traffic, commerce and housing, amongst others. Leith was singled out as the most densely populated area of the city.<sup>8</sup> It was described as one of two major industrial areas, with concentrations of mixed residential and industrial buildings.<sup>9</sup>

Traffic congestion was not shown to be of significant concern in Leith, although the figures cited are from a survey of 1946, when petrol rationing was still in force. Similarly, there was not a particularly high incidence of traffic accidents in Leith, although concerns were expressed at the number of accidents in the city of Edinburgh overall.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, a diagram included in the report suggests that accidents had declined in Leith over the period 1937- 1951.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, increased road traffic and congestion were cited as a cause for concern. The stated increase in traffic was around 50% for 1946-51, and numbers





Fig. 2. The same view in 1975. All of the original street is gone, replaced by high-density, high-rise housing with no shops to speak of. Photographer unknown. Capital Collections <https://www.capitalcollections.org.uk>

were expected to rise by a further 100% by 1970.<sup>12</sup> The suggested solution to the perceived societal threat of increasing numbers of traffic accidents was borrowed from Germany, where the segregation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic appeared to have reduced accidents by 32% in the face of a 34% increase in vehicle numbers.<sup>13</sup> Such segregation became one of the central tenets supporting the CDA designation of Leith. A Corporation memo reads: ‘The present properties form an area of bad layout and obsolete development ... no segregation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic ... and [no] possibilities of an improved environment.’<sup>14</sup> The comments regarding the environment refer to the influential Buchanan report of 1963, which related the quality of the environment both to traffic congestion and the physical segregation of pedestrians and vehicles.<sup>15</sup>

Housing was also an issue in Leith. Houses here were generally smaller and more crowded than in many other areas of the city, with 50.5% of households

in central Leith living in homes of only two rooms.<sup>16</sup> Architect Richard Moira, commenting in 1947 on a report produced by Sir Patrick Abercrombie to serve as a guide to the Town Planning Committee in drawing up their Development Plan, notes that there was a tendency towards larger family size in the industrial areas (including Leith). He further points out that of 15,720 houses in Leith, only 5,106 were considered to have normal sanitary facilities, and that most of these were rented, also stating that rent levels for working class homes were so low that there was little or no incentive for landlords to provide decent facilities. Moira claims that his figures were verified by Edinburgh Corporation’s Town Planning Department.<sup>17</sup>

The development plan cites sub-standard housing as ranging from Class A to Class C. Class A had an internal bathroom with no windows, a small scullery, and hot water available only from a cooking range. Class B had no separate bathroom, did have a WC

and sink, but in many cases had no hot water supply. Class C had no bathroom, used a WC common to other houses, and were described as 'borderline unfit'.<sup>18</sup> Referring to the concentration of mixed residential and industrial buildings in Leith, Moira goes on to say that:

The inseparable nature of industrial and social factors becomes obvious in the case of Leith ... where heavy industrialisation is accompanied by overcrowding and bad housing conditions; these areas of over-concentration have, in fact, become areas of disease that must seriously affect the social stability of the city.

Moira's comment regarding social stability is significant as it may be indicative of a more general attitude among the local professional (and therefore decision-making) classes of an underlying distaste for the community of central Leith as it existed then. There is no explicit suggestion that this affected the decision to define much of Leith as a CDA, but these comments are indicative of a dissatisfaction with having 'low society' on the metaphorical doorstep of a city that prided itself on its attraction to tourists. The 1953 report makes the point that as many tourists visited Edinburgh in 1951 as normally shopped in the city, which demonstrates the Corporation's awareness of the importance of tourism to both the city's image and income.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the recently premiered Edinburgh International Festival meant that Edinburgh was attracting the world's attention, and the city administration was conscious of living up to these recently heightened expectations.<sup>20</sup>

This may seem to be spurious reasoning. However the 1953 report makes further comment regarding the existence of Leith as a 'complete community', self-contained with 'a strong local tradition and history', and centred around its shopping area.<sup>21</sup> When one sets this alongside an article, published in the *Town Planning Review* in 1959, reviewing a study into the social effects of planned rehousing which noted the distress inflicted upon such a 'culturally homogenous group' by the relocation forced by CDA imposition, one might be forgiven for feeling that the deliberate planning out of existence of a morally embarrassing area of town was part of the motivation for the plan.<sup>22</sup> In fact, Edinburgh's Lord Provost referred to community protests in exactly that vein at the stone-laying ceremony in 1966, saying '... We were approached by sundry committees deploring the apparent destruction of community life and community centres of all kinds ...'.<sup>23</sup>

In any case, there is no definite record of the intended results of the Leith CDA. For other proposed CDAs within Edinburgh, one can find the survey report written statements, which clearly state the reasons for their designation as CDAs (Tollcross, St. James Square, High Street, and others), but not for Leith.<sup>24</sup> This report must have existed, as to produce it was a statutory requirement, but it appears to have been lost from what is otherwise a fairly comprehensive archive.<sup>25</sup> The search for the CDA survey report written statement as part of this project has taken in the City of Edinburgh Council Archive and Planning Archive, the National Library of Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland, the City of Edinburgh Libraries, The University of Edinburgh Libraries (which hold reports for other CDAs), and an extensive online search. There appears to be, however, no trace of this document. Consequently, one is forced to derive the Corporation's motivation from the snippets of information and comment that have been preserved and by interpreting the actions of the people involved.

What can be said with absolute certainty is that the replacement of 'obsolete' homes and shops, and the segregation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic was central to the stated intentions of the Corporation, and in 1951, the Kirkgate was first mooted as a 'might include' in the Leith CDA. The Town Planning Officer (TPO) was authorised to prepare a draft development plan on the basis of his preliminary report.<sup>26</sup> At the time of the stone-laying ceremony in 1966, the Lord Provost of Edinburgh stated that 'The grand problem of Leith was the bad planning of yesteryear – the *mixed* development.'<sup>27</sup> In the interim, Acts of 1956 and 1961 had increased subsidies for both slum-clearance and redevelopment by local authorities.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the Secretary of State for Scotland actively encouraged comprehensive planning in the wake of the 1947 Act.<sup>29</sup>

Were there slums in the Kirkgate? A memo from the city's Medical Officer of Health to the TPO from August 1959 states that there were 'practically no unfit houses in areas 1, 2, and 3 of Citadel and Central Leith Comprehensive Development Area', which included the Kirkgate.<sup>30</sup> However, by February 1960, the Corporation minute books state that 'Prior to the acquisition of properties, the Medical Officer of Health reported 320 houses in the Leith Central and Citadel area as being unfit for human habitation and

not capable at reasonable expense of being considered so fit.<sup>31</sup> The Corporation had them officially declared unfit.<sup>32</sup> This recalls comments, admittedly from some years after this, where 92% of residents of properties on the south side of Edinburgh which had been declared unfit wanted to remain in their homes as they were found.<sup>33</sup> Most of those buildings were not demolished and are currently occupied and in good condition. In fact, many so-called 'slums' were considered quite respectable homes for their time.<sup>34</sup>

One is therefore forced, again, to question the motivation of the Corporation in proceeding with this aspect of the Leith CDA. Did these houses stand in the way of a larger plan for redevelopment? Was it that, while increased funding was available from central government, the Corporation wanted to take advantage of that? Certainly, this appears to be a very rapid deterioration of these properties, and one is left wondering why the city authority was willing to destroy 320 apparently perfectly good homes, dispersing a long-established community in the process.

One may remember that when Leith was subsumed into the Burgh of Edinburgh in 1920, by far the majority of Leithers voted against the move.<sup>35</sup> The town had always considered itself as a quite separate community to Edinburgh. A former resident's comment that 'a visit to Leith in the 1950s was a visit to another town ... the Kirkgate ... was a really fascinating place ... there were shops there that did not seem to exist in Edinburgh' provides some insight into the distinction.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, one Leith minister, when asked by the House of Lords Select Committee considering Edinburgh's boundaries extension what his parishioners thought of the amalgamation, replied 'they dislike it enthusiastically'.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the city's dirty laundry was aired in public, no doubt to the chagrin of the Corporation. If one juxtaposes these facts with the statement from the 1953 Edinburgh Development Plan which, referring to community areas including Leith, reads 'The social grouping in such districts may be said to depend upon mutual interests arising from employment or leisure or the promotion of local amenities', one might begin to believe that there was active antipathy between these quite different communities.<sup>38</sup> The comments of the Lord Provost in his speech at the opening ceremony of the redeveloped shopping centre, 'I ... hope ... that the years of foolish bitterness between

Leith and Edinburgh are now finally at an end', make it clear that this was in fact the case.<sup>39</sup> Given these circumstances, one might again propound the view that the removal of the old Kirkgate was in part intended to remove the heart of this tight-knit community, which was apparently such a difficult neighbour to the City of Edinburgh. The Corporation certainly applied a heavy-handed approach, which raises questions regarding its motives.

Illustrative of that approach, an archived note to the effect that a property at 59 Kirkgate (now number 1, New Kirkgate) which was acquired by the Corporation in 1965 having been declared sub-standard due to having 'an old high flush WC, no hot water, and no bath or shower' was sold by the Corporation to a Mr Scott in 1972.<sup>40</sup> A memo from the Estates Surveyor to the Town Clerk then states 'perhaps you could also advise Mr Scott of the procedure of application for an improvement grant.'<sup>41</sup> This is unsettling, as the implication is that as part of the CDA procedure, the Corporation not only declared homes unfit on dubious grounds and had them demolished, displacing the tenants and owners and dispersing the existing community, but did so when finance was available to have them brought up to standard. An article published in the *Town Planning Review* in 1959 states that 'To raise housing standards by the provision of standard amenities, standard grants, limited to ½ of the cost incurred, are payable by the local authority to owners or occupiers who carry out such improvements.'<sup>42</sup> Corporation officials were not keen, though. In a memo included in the archive, the Corporation Sanitary Inspector states that one property requires only a second sink and a wash-hand basin to bring it up to standard, cost £115. This amount does not seem much when compared to the price of demolishing one property and building another, but the Town Clerk's response of 'where is the money coming from?' (handwritten on the memo) speaks volumes.<sup>43</sup>

One is, of course, assuming that the TPO of the Edinburgh Corporation had read the *Town Planning Review*, but archived documents indicate that he was quite ahead of his time in many respects and so one may argue that it is reasonable to make such an assumption.<sup>44</sup> In mitigation, a comment from Ronnie Cramond, a former senior administrator in the Scottish Development Department is enlightening. He states that, in relation to the mass demolition of tenement

buildings in the 1950s and 60s, 'for any Government Minister or councillor to have advocated caution or delay ... would have been political suicide'.<sup>45</sup> There had also been a local press campaign in Edinburgh to highlight the problem of slums, which resulted in a scathing BBC 'Panorama' programme.<sup>46</sup> The subject was also raised in Parliament.<sup>47</sup> The replacement of old housing stock was, therefore, a national political priority. In such circumstances it is perhaps understandable that housing might become the focus of Corporation attention, but one could argue that the result was either a gross over-reaction by that administration or a piece of rank opportunism which just happened to allow the settling of old scores.

In the case of commercial premises, there are also grounds for believing that the claims of obsolescence by the Corporation were somewhat premature. A letter of objection to the CDA plans by the managing director of Timpson's shoe repairs stated that many of the Kirkgate's properties 'still have a useful life' in 'large blocks'.<sup>48</sup> The Town Clerk's response was to recommend the Secretary of State to reject that objection on grounds that:

It is in the interests of proper planning that ... redevelopment should be undertaken now ... Inclusion of properties fronting the Kirkgate will produce a more comprehensive shopping centre development than could be achieved otherwise ... Individual redevelopments of isolated properties would not be satisfactory.<sup>49</sup>

This statement strongly suggests that the Corporation had decided that there would be a redevelopment of the area, and that the fact that the existing buildings were in use and apparently in reasonable condition was not going to stand in the way. The controversy does not end there. In 1971, one Councillor Boyack raised a motion to 'examine the proposition of preserving ... the Shore, Leith ...'.<sup>50</sup> The City Architect responded to this motion in 1972, providing a report which states that 'many of these buildings which remain are either derelict or near derelict'. However, the same report goes on to describe the same buildings as 'tenement properties with shops ... in fairly reasonable condition with modern amenities'.<sup>51</sup> Here, that Corporation official, in his official report, clearly demonstrates incoherence in his descriptions of these properties. One therefore must ask just how well-founded were the opinions of Corporation officials on the condition of the Kirkgate area, and if the street and its amenities could not have been preserved.

Traffic congestion and obsolete street layout were further reasons for redevelopment stated in the 1953 plan. Minutes of the Planning Committee from 1949 state that the whole of central Leith should be re-developed 'for the purpose of dealing satisfactorily with conditions of bad road layout and obsolete development'.<sup>52</sup> In 1956, the Corporation had imposed a one-way traffic system on the area. Council minutes note that this was due to increased traffic congestion in all streets in the Kirkgate area, resulting from the high numbers of commercial firms and lorries.<sup>53</sup> So it is clear that, at least according to the Corporation, there were problems with congestion and therefore, by Buchanan's standards, environmental shortcomings. The 1962-63 minute books refer to the 'central area traffic plan' for the entire city.<sup>54</sup> Also, a memo from the TPO to the Town Clerk states: 'I am of the opinion that ... in the interests of road safety ... the block contained by Henderson Street, Tolbooth Wynd, Constitution Street and Great Junction Street [should be] a 'super-block' [with limited vehicular access]. The Kirkgate should remain principally as a pedestrian route.'<sup>55</sup>

This is interesting on two levels. Firstly, it demonstrates that traffic conditions were an overall concern, and to some extent clarifies the intentions of the Corporation in relation to replanning the road layout of the area. Of further significance is the reference to a super-block with limited vehicular access. This is an idea propounded in the Buchanan Report, but that was published three years after this memo was sent. There may have been some reference in these comments to a paper published by Sir Patrick Abercrombie in 1935 in the *Town Planning Review*, or the TPO may have discussed this with Abercrombie during his preparation of the 1953 Development Plan.<sup>56</sup> Either way, it certainly demonstrates, as suggested above, that the TPO was indeed cognisant of contemporary thinking in his field and would therefore have been fully aware of the potential effects of his other decisions on the community.

So, safety concerns and the segregation of pedestrians from traffic were a significant stated reason for the decision to develop this area. A note to the Lord Provost in relation to the stone-laying ceremony refers to 'pedestrian-vehicle segregation' and the intention that 'shoppers will be able to stroll around the shops, free from traffic' and 'park their cars at first floor level' as particular innovations of



the scheme.<sup>57</sup> Sceptics might point here to the fact that it was in the Princes Street area of Edinburgh that traffic posed the greatest danger, at least according to the 1953 Plan.<sup>58</sup> They might suggest that this was in fact a red herring, and that Leith did not actually require replanning due to traffic congestion. They might even point out that car ownership in Leith at that time was only around one in eleven. On the other hand, the Minister for Transport in 1963 was a great supporter of the car, and advocated the large-scale replanning of towns to accommodate it. He also openly encouraged the Town Planning Institute's members in dictating to the population how they should use their townscapes.<sup>59</sup>

So, the Leith Central and Citadel CDA, of which the Kirkgate was a part, was conceived as a result of the new doctrine of comprehensive planning expounded in the Barlow Report. The reasons that Leith was chosen for this treatment are obscure, but the records do allow one to suggest possible motivations. These range from the post-war socio-political movement for the improvement of conditions for ordinary people by providing them with 'better' housing and a cleaner, safer environment, through a vaguely sinister desire to 'clean up' this area of Edinburgh, founded on moral judgements, the perceived slighting of the city by its neighbour, and the requirements of the tourist trade, to a response to political pressure, the rise of the motor car, and the perceived requirement to alleviate congestion. The statutory obligation to 'improve' the urban environment and the wide-ranging new powers conferred by post-war legislation were central to the Corporation's plan and allowed it the freedom to act as it saw fit.

Implementation of CDA plans varied from one local authority to another. In Edinburgh, the plans were carried through by contracting one private company to act as consultants and another to act as developer. According to a Corporation press release, 'The partnership between the Corporation and Murrayfield Real Estate Company is ... where the powers of the Corporation and the expertise of private enterprise are being realised in practical terms.'<sup>60</sup> In fact, the Town Clerk viewed such an arrangement as the only practical way of securing commercial redevelopment on a large scale.<sup>61</sup> The consultants were a firm of surveyors and estate agents, Donaldson & Sons of Jermyn Street, London.<sup>62</sup>

The Murrayfield Real Estate Company, Ltd (MREC) was a development company which already had experience of this sort of work, having been responsible for the controversial Overgate project in Dundee.<sup>63</sup> The Overgate project, the first of its kind in Scotland, was similar to the Kirkgate scheme in that it involved the demolition of an historic street and its replacement with 'improved facilities'. Both were so-called 'package deals' of the sort promoted by the Emmerson Report in 1962.<sup>64</sup> A letter from the Depute Town Clerk to MREC confirms this.<sup>65</sup> These deals offered a combined planning, design and construction service to local councils keen to develop, and were widely used at the time.<sup>66</sup>

The relationship between the Corporation, MREC and Donaldson's ought to have been an impartial one, allowing the Corporation to receive objective advice and assistance from their consultants. In fact, MREC were paying all of the Corporation's legal fees.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, a letter from the Depute Town Clerk to Donaldson's states that no public disclosure of the terms of the agreement with MREC was to be made.<sup>68</sup> Thus questions are raised about the integrity and objectivity of the project's administration from the point that MREC became involved, and the Town Clerk's insistence on secrecy compounds the issues. There are no documents with which to support an allegation of actual wrongdoing on the part of any of the actors, but the existing documents raise doubts about both the impartiality of any advice provided to the Corporation and the level of complicity of local officials in that arrangement.

The original Corporation plan was for 73 shops, three recreation halls, one residential tower and a public house.<sup>69</sup> This was to replace existing amenities quoted as 'the existence in 1953 of 76 shops and 7 licensed premises in the Kirkgate and Laurie Street'.<sup>70</sup> This figure, however, disregards any businesses that existed in St Anthony St, St Anthony Place, St Anthony Lane, St Andrew St, Tolbooth Wynd, Coatfield Lane, Old Sugarhouse Close, Storrie's Alley, Weir's Close and Brickwork Close, most of the original buildings of which were also demolished to make way for the new development. Maps of the area from 1953 and 1954 show several properties fronting these side streets which are likely to have had a commercial use.<sup>71</sup> Photographs show this to have been the case, but these businesses were apparently not considered in the Corporation's plans.<sup>72</sup> Equally,



the figure of seven licensed premises quoted by the TPO relates only to the Kirkgate and Laurie St, but a memo from the same office states that, when the Leith Central and Citadel CDA was approved in 1959, there were 32 public houses in the area covered by it.<sup>73</sup> It stands to reason that some of these were in other streets demolished as part of the Kirkgate redevelopment. Such a large discrepancy may lead one to the conclusion that the city authorities wished to reduce the number of public houses in the area.

The package deal proposed by MREC, and accepted by the Corporation, was to build 41 shops, including a supermarket, an extension to Woolworth's existing store, 176 car spaces, a community centre, and the residential tower block.<sup>74</sup> This was a considerable reduction from the original specification, and the community centre was only added as a result of an objection, by Leith Rotary Club, to the lack of any community facilities in the original MREC proposal.<sup>75</sup> Equally, the inclusion of so many car parking spaces, while in line with the Corporation's own predictions on car ownership citywide, was at odds with the local statistics on car ownership.

The lack of provision for any public house in the new development is significant, particularly given the existence of so many in the area beforehand. The average number of pubs per population for the city as a whole was 1:1,560 and, with a static population of around 7,000 in the Leith Central and Citadel area, the existing number allowed for one pub per 218 persons, which might, by today's standards, seem to be a few too many.<sup>76</sup> However, the fact that the area contained the port facility for Edinburgh would have added to the area a considerable transient population who would also have used these facilities.<sup>77</sup> There also exists anecdotal evidence of the area drawing in weekend revellers from outlying areas. Either way, the forced removal of such a significant number of social venues must have altered the character of the area. There was a proposal to include two pubs in the development, but this was never done, and the permanent removal of so many indicates a considerable reduction of public amenities as a result of the CDA.<sup>78</sup>

The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act of 1947 provided for expedited means of acquisition of properties to be cleared for redevelopment. Any land that lay within a CDA could be assigned for compulsory purchase.<sup>79</sup> Some properties were offered up voluntarily, for example, that belonging to a Mr

H W Guthrie, who offered his shop premises at 47 Kirkgate for sale to the Corporation for the price of the property alone. He did not expect compensation for his business and was aware of the CDA plans.<sup>80</sup> This represents an acquisition in advance of the commencement of the Kirkgate CDA works, but appears to be unusual in that respect, in that it is the only instance of its kind recorded in the files.

The majority of affected properties were compulsorily purchased. Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) were invoked under Part 3 of the Act, using 'declaration of unfitness' orders as the reason for the CPO, and also under the Housing (Scotland) Acts of 1950 and 1959.<sup>81</sup> The 1960–61 minute book refers to one unfitness order as having to be withdrawn due to a lack of supporting legislation. Instead, those 320 houses were declared unfit under separate orders.<sup>82</sup> Another states that CPOs were widely applied to the Leith Citadel and Central CDA so as to 'prevent undue delay'.<sup>83</sup> This suggests that the Corporation intended to proceed with this plan, whatever the difficulties or objections, as do further entries in the files such as 'Although the proprietors have expressed their willingness to sell this must be in the light of the current circumstances ... suggesting that compulsory purchase might be used failing agreement', and despite 'negotiations ... coming on fairly well in regard to the remaining properties, particularly shops ... I think that we should put in hand compulsory purchase orders and ... these should now be drafted'.<sup>84</sup> The minute books also note how CPOs were used so as to 'obviate any difficulties in acquisition'.<sup>85</sup> The minute books are, characteristically, no more detailed in their description than that, but this apparently indiscriminate use of CPOs, sometimes without proper legal entitlement, appears to indicate the use of 'strong-arm' tactics by the Corporation. One might be forgiven for concluding that there were refusals to sell here for which records were not kept by the Corporation, so they used their new powers instead: but the reasons for invoking CPO powers were not archived in every case.

There were certainly objections, and there are grounds for criticising the Corporation's handling of them. Timpson's objection is noted above. However, the fact that Timpson's wrote to Donaldson & Sons offering to withdraw their objection if they were offered a 99-year lease in the new development does demonstrate an ulterior motive on their part.<sup>86</sup>

Nonetheless, the Town Clerk's response to that letter; 'our main concern is to get their objection withdrawn as quickly as possible' shows both an urgency to the machinations of the Corporation and a possible desire to avoid the public enquiries which may result from such objections.<sup>87</sup> Writing only a few years later, Hart noted that public enquiries did not generally 'encourage constructive public comment' and that the publicity generated by such an enquiry 'might only encourage greater objections'.<sup>88</sup> The Corporation evidently thought so. Timpson's, however, were not the only objectors to the scheme, and it appears that they received preferential treatment, finally settling for £750 in compensation and a unit in the new development.<sup>89</sup>

Other objectors, such as Mr Richardson, whose local dairy business at 82 Kirkgate did not even appear in the Corporation's internal list of businesses to be displaced by the development, submitted a claim in 1963 for compensation for loss of goodwill. He was paid £140 for loss of profit, in 1965.<sup>90</sup> There was also the case of Mr Sneath, who ran a bakery from 68 Kirkgate. This was a prime site, being almost adjacent to the junction with Great Junction Street, Duke Street and Leith Walk. He was paid £700 'as an *ex-gratia* payment toward financial loss estimated by him at £996.41 in consequence of the Corporation's compulsory purchase of 68 Kirkgate'.<sup>91</sup> However, his initial claim against the Corporation was in November 1965, and the payment from the Corporation was made in December 1973. One has to wonder how much this payment was worth in real terms to Mr Sneath, given that, in the interim, UK currency had devalued. Also, the stipulation that this was an *ex-gratia* payment was, and is, a commonly used device for the avoidance of setting a precedent in such cases, the payee being in the position of either accepting or risking getting nothing at all. Some may describe this as sharp practice. A memo from the City Chamberlain to the Town Clerk warned against setting precedents for such payments.<sup>92</sup>

There are too many letters of objection in the Town Clerk files to list them all, but the rule of thumb appears to be that only if one operated a large company or employed a lawyer (like Timpson's or Mr Sneath, respectively), would one have had a chance of some compensation. There is, for example, no record of any compensation being paid to Mr John Robertson, who claimed £6,000 for lost business and loss of goodwill at his shop at 43 Kirkgate.<sup>93</sup>

These cases highlight another problem with the CDA for local businesses: that of affordability. As can be deduced from the offer made to Timpson's regarding a lease in the new development, typical rentals cost over £1,000 per annum.<sup>94</sup> This effectively priced local small businesses, all of whom saw their premises demolished to make way for the new development, out of the locality. For example, when Mr Richardson presented his accounts to the Corporation in support of his compensation claim, he was paying £55 17s 9d in annual rent from a net profit of £ 546 15s 9d.<sup>95</sup> Clearly, there was no way that he could afford to take on one of the new retail units, and he could hardly move his business to a different area and expect it to continue to thrive. Mr Sneath's solicitors wrote to the Corporation in 1965, making the same point.<sup>96</sup>

There were many other businesses in the Kirkgate facing disruption to their trade as a result of this CDA. A letter from Polson and Smart, Drapers & Outfitters, complains of disruption of business due to street closures.<sup>97</sup> Another from Merchant Facilities (Glasgow) Ltd. Made a similar point.<sup>98</sup> In 1966, a local hairdresser wrote to the Town Clerk, referring to vandals having broken into vacated flats above her premises (which were CPO'd on 9 July 1963, but had been left derelict) and broken the water main. Mrs White stated that her business was threatened with closure due to the water ingress. She also pointed out that she would not be able to afford the rents on any of the new units, and requested information on alternative accommodation.<sup>99</sup> The response from the City Chamberlain was short and to the point, stating simply that there were no shops available in the area.<sup>100</sup> Presumably this was because they were all due for demolition. Mrs White's is far from being an isolated case. A Miss Esther Black, proprietor of a shop at 81 Kirkgate (which is also absent from the Corporation list of displaced traders) wrote to the Corporation asking about premises in the new development and about continuity of trading. The Town Clerk's reply that 'existing traders in the area would have first offer of leasing', but that he 'cannot comment on continuity' is significant.<sup>101</sup> There appeared to be some measure of concern, for Timpson's were assured that efforts would be made to ensure their continuity of trading, but neither Miss Black nor Mrs White were.

The Corporation had sent a letter to local businesses in 1960 stating that 'no guarantee can

be given ... to any business concern' regarding remaining in the area after development.<sup>102</sup> However, as the Corporation did not have a complete list of local traders, we can assume that this notice was not as fully circulated as it could have been.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, the mere giving of notice of such a large-scale development would not in any way have reduced the disruption and inconvenience to the community as a whole. In fact, an internal memo made it clear that the Corporation was quite aware of the fact that their development would cause 'disturbance to traders'.<sup>104</sup> If the improvement of the community was as much their concern as the Corporation claimed, then one might suggest that greater efforts might have been made to ensure its continuing coherence. There are many more documents in the archive relating to similar cases. The number of these cases, and the Corporation's often curt responses to traders' enquiries, indicate that the Corporation, or individuals within it, gave scant consideration to the lives of those who lived and worked in the area, despite knowing that considerable disruption would be caused by their scheme.

The litany of loss continues. A 1963 letter from the solicitor representing Parker's Stores, a local chain of small department stores, complains of a break-in through the ceiling of the shop from flats above left derelict due to CPOs. The letter states that 'on account of the repeated burglaries from the vacated houses above they have been forced to remove forthwith'.<sup>105</sup> Given that the Corporation had CPO'd the whole building in 1962, they were, as with the other cases, legally responsible for ensuring its security when Parker's wrote to them.<sup>106</sup> One is therefore given to wonder if they were just 'encouraging' local traders to leave by either neglecting their responsibilities in that regard, or by pushing the limits of the law in regard to CPOs. A letter from the local MP, one Michael Clark Hutchison, Esq, confirms that this is his opinion of the matter.<sup>107</sup> Equally, notes of a public enquiry in response to an objection by a Mrs Sanderson, who blamed the poor state of her property in Henderson Gardens on CPOs, show that the Recorder of the enquiry decided in favour of Mrs Sanderson on the basis that the Corporation had not shown a proper legal necessity for imposing CPOs.<sup>108</sup> This provides further evidence of the Corporation overstepping their legal remit in regard to CPOs during this development.

The planning department was understaffed at this point, and the legal framework under which these CPOs are allowed was both new and extremely complex.<sup>109</sup> The combination of these two factors could be cited as mitigation if it were not for the evidence from a precognition hearing for the enquiry in which the TPO states:

I consider that the preservation of the buildings within a redevelopment scheme would be contrary to the purposes of the Citadel and Central Leith Comprehensive Development Area ... that the inclusion of these sites within the redevelopment scheme is necessary to secure the maximum and most suitable use for the area.<sup>110</sup>

The obvious questions here relate to who is best placed to decide what defines the 'maximum and most suitable use for the area' and what the actual purpose of declaring the area a CDA was. The high-handed tone of these comments, also evident in previously cited instances, leaves one feeling that the Corporation was simply foisting its own (or MREC's) idea as to what the area should be used for, and what facilities it ought to have, upon the citizens of Leith, without having consulted them. Again, a little mitigation is called for here. Cllr Cramond's comments regarding local political pressure to develop bear repeating, as do the points regarding the prominence of planning as a totem within the wider political psyche. However, the imposition of a vision in concrete upon a large and long-established community, apparently without consultation, which bore little or no resemblance in either content or spirit to what went before, and invoking the law to force acquiescence, may require a little more mitigation than that.

The uncertainty regarding continuity during the development was not limited to businesses. A letter from a local church to the Corporation states that a significant number of local children normally attended their halls to participate in various activities. The letter describes how the application of the CDA, overall, was disrupting the attendance of these children at their clubs and societies, and that it was also 'depressing' for the community in general.<sup>111</sup> Clearly, then, the process of CDA implementation was disruptive to the lives of individuals, local trade, and to the greater community.

Housing, too, was a contentious issue, particularly the relocation of displaced tenants. A memo from the Chief Sanitary Inspector to the Town Clerk states that 'It has hitherto been the policy of the Corporation to rehouse all tenants resident in a redevelopment area

before the passing of the Declaration of Unfitness Order as laid down in the statutory procedure.<sup>112</sup> In the case of the Kirkgate this was clearly not done, as the CPOs applied to residential properties were based on unfitness orders for inhabited homes, and many owners and tenants remained after their properties had been CPO'd.<sup>113</sup> One wonders at the change of tack in this case. A motion *was* remitted by Cllrs Scott and Mrs Ross in 1962 to consider prioritising housing allocations in the local area to those displaced by development to avoid the disintegration of community life.<sup>114</sup> There was, then, an awareness within the Corporation that the redevelopment of the area on such a scale could be detrimental to this well-established and cohesive community. However, the Corporation's plan to rehouse tenants was not even finalised by October 1965, despite CPOs having been issued five years before that.

The TPO suggested building replacement homes at Leith Fort, Warriston, Goldenacre and Telford Road.<sup>115</sup> Unfortunately, while Leith Fort could be considered local, the other areas could not, as they lie some miles distant. So, despite the Corporation discussing the options for rehousing over a twelve-year period prior to commencement of the CDA, their plans were not viable by the time that demolitions had begun. A letter from the Town Clerk to solicitors acting for a Mr Thomas Taylor states that '... to rehouse your client ... might quite well prolong beyond 28th February 1962 ... the Corporation could not of course agree to delay their development ... on this account.'<sup>116</sup> This suggests that the Corporation were quite willing to cajole people into agreeing their terms by the implication that their properties would be taken and pulled down without their consent. It also further demonstrates that the Corporation had, at this point, no clear plans for the rehousing of the many displaced persons created by this CDA.

The question as to whether displaced residents were rehoused locally is addressed by another letter to Mr Taylor's solicitors, which states that Mr Taylor would be rehoused on Craigentenny Road, which, also, is quite far removed from Leith.<sup>117</sup> One can therefore state that the displaced community of Leith was being dispersed across quite a wide area, rather than allowing it to keep some of its coherence by being rehoused closer to its original locality. Moreover, in a letter to the Town Clerk in November 1962, some nine months after their self-imposed

deadline, it is stated that the Corporation had not yet compensated Mr Taylor for his property in Leith.<sup>118</sup> This again demonstrates a lack of a coherent structure of administration within the Corporation for dealing with these issues, at least on such a scale as implied by the comprehensive redevelopment of such a large area. This letter is not the only one in the Town Clerk Files indicating the Corporation's failure to properly compensate CPO'd residents.

There is further evidence of a heavy-handed approach by the Corporation in another letter to the Town Clerk concerning a dispute over solum and mineral rights. Referring to enforcement of a CPO *in response to* this dispute, the letter states 'We could hardly credit that for the sum of say £8 or £9 the Town would go to the trouble and expense of going through statutory procedures.'<sup>119</sup> This clearly demonstrates both the Corporation's willingness to invoke the full force of the new laws to brush aside relatively minor inconveniences to their plans, and a lack of willingness to consider others' property rights, should they stand in the way.

Apart from the fact that the Corporation, or individuals within it, were playing fast and loose with the law in order to impose their own version of improvement on the area, other factors bear consideration. Published government guidelines on CDAs stated that 'the authority must carry local public opinion with them if their policy of renewal is to succeed'.<sup>120</sup> The volume of objections suggests that this was not the case in Leith. Equally, the guidelines stated that 'they [the Local Authority] should seek the greatest possible measure of public interest and involvement in the plan' and that 'The aim should be to obtain the widest possible measure of public support for the plan in its formative stages'.<sup>121</sup> The evidence of the enquiry, called only in response to a complaint by a member of the local community with financial interests in the area, suggest that the Corporation did no such thing. There is no evidence in the archives of any thorough *public* consultation applied to the Citadel and Central Leith CDA before the procedure commenced, despite protestations to the contrary by the Lord Provost.<sup>122</sup> In contrast, sizeable public relations brochures were prepared and published for subsequent schemes such as the proposed Southside and University CDAs. Indeed, a letter from the Depute Town Clerk to the Department of Health in 1960 states that 'it is still considered that ... public enquiry was largely unnecessary.'<sup>123</sup>



Granted, the guidelines to which I refer were published in 1962, but the point remains that one would expect a local authority, if dealing with a community whose respect it valued, would allow for some sort of public consultation on its plans for that community's locality if it was doing so for the benefit of the community's citizens, as publicly stated at the time. The Corporation already had experience of such comprehensive developments from its activities in the Dumbiedykes area of the city, as did MREC from their Dundee project. One cannot, therefore, claim that these omissions result from a lack of experience.

The TPO's statement, quoted above, regarding the purposes of proceeding with the CDA raises further questions as to exactly what those purposes were. Increasingly, having studied the Corporation files, and in the absence of either a written statement of intent or a survey report for this CDA, one gains the impression that an element of what might be called social cleansing was behind the decision to proceed with this development. Several anecdotal comments suggest that there may have been aspects of the Kirkgate's character which the City Fathers may have found less than appealing. For example, 'The Kirkgate was terrible on a Saturday night ... terrible with drunk women and men.' and 'On a Saturday night there was an awful lot of drunkenness and there was a lot of fightin' too ...'.<sup>124</sup>

The huge reduction of the number of licensed premises of all sorts, the indifference implied by the deficient nature of the lists of homes and businesses to be 'planned out' of the area, the forcing through of CPOs, and the fact that it was in the central, most vibrant area of Leith that this scheme was put into effect could easily lead the cynic to the suspicion that Edinburgh Corporation did not appreciate the particular type of social vibrancy that Leith offered and wished to act to remove it. In fact, the Corporation's terms of lease prohibited any parts of the new development to be used for 'Roundabouts, Shooting Galleries, Pin Tables, Amusement Arcades, swings, games, lotteries or competitions or any similar purpose', and also 'any other purpose which the Corporation may reasonably consider to be detrimental to the amenity of the area'.<sup>125</sup> This confirms that Edinburgh Corporation intended to dictate the future character of the redeveloped area in its own terms.

So, the physical application of the Corporation's development plan for Leith was the cause of considerable disruption to the community there. The new planning laws, particularly CPOs, were applied ruthlessly, and in some cases unlawfully. People had their homes and businesses bought from under them, often with little or no compensation for the loss of goodwill built up over years. Livelihoods were lost or displaced due to being priced out of the only commercial rental market left on the street after the new development. Buildings that were compulsorily purchased were left derelict and unsecured by the Corporation, leading to crime and further blight on the locality. Community activities were disrupted and amenities destroyed, and the population of this ancient and close-knit community was largely dispersed, apparently as a result of a lack of proper planning on the part of the Corporation. All these facts ring particularly hollow, since the legislation which was invoked to facilitate it was intended to promote proper planning for the comprehensive improvement of communities.

When the New Kirkgate Centre (the name of the commercial section of the new development) was opened in June 1967, six of the total of forty shop units were unlet and vacant.<sup>126</sup> This blighted situation persisted, more on than off, for decades.<sup>127</sup> Only ten of the forty businesses with leases in the New Kirkgate had been trading in the old Kirkgate, and only four of them were small traders, all the rest being branches of larger, national concerns.<sup>128</sup> The community of small local businesses which had thrived in and around the old Kirkgate was gone. An area offering a variety of goods and services at different levels of price and quality, situated in the social centre of the community, was changed almost beyond recognition. There were no venues for socialising, and in place of the variety of unusual shops described by Mr Suddon, Leith was provided with hire-purchase electrical stores, a single newsagent's chain, and a selection of nationally available outlets which the residents could, anyway, have found within walking distance of the old Kirkgate.

The local community was none too enamoured of the new centre. A letter from Leith Chambers of Commerce states that their members expressed displeasure at several aspects of the project overall. These included the time taken to complete the project, the appearance of the new shopping centre

as compared to the buildings surrounding it, the inconvenience to which traders had been put by the development and the 'low standard of workmanship' in the new buildings.<sup>129</sup> Even the man who claims responsibility for the scheme has since stated that 'there's a lot wrong with the New Kirkgate – it's not got the same kind of community spirit'<sup>130</sup>

Clearly, then, this project did not meet with the universal approval suggested in the Lord Provost's opening ceremony speech. A letter from the TPO to the Town Clerk agrees with the comments regarding the appearance of the shopping centre, and states that the developers should be made aware of the shortcomings of New Kirkgate before starting work on the St James Square development.<sup>131</sup> This comment itself raises questions, as one might have expected, that a new developer would have been found following the shortcomings of MREC as demonstrated by the Kirkgate project. Another letter, from the Depute Town Clerk to his immediate superior, refers to a recent meeting with tenants of the new shopping centre and states that they are not at all happy with the new building.<sup>132</sup> Either way, one can conclude from the comments regarding the St James development that the Leith CDA was experimental. The Corporation could be accused of trying new ideas out on a less respectable and less visible part of the city before using them in more central areas. This may have been one reason that public consultation was so strenuously avoided. The New Kirkgate Centre was, therefore, a shabby affair.

MREC went into liquidation in 1969 due to 'internal restructuring' of their parent company, Land Securities Ltd. This left the New Kirkgate in the charge of another company, Ravenseft Ltd, described by Land Securities as being responsible for all of their properties in Scotland.<sup>133</sup> Whether this turn of events was planned for in advance by MREC is not known, but it was clearly a cause of surprise and confusion to the Corporation's consultants, Donaldson's.<sup>134</sup> There are questions to be asked regarding the probity of MREC's assertions, because, only three weeks earlier, MREC had written to Donaldson's suggesting that they might be forced to liquidate due to a lack of progress on Phase II of the project and as a result of the continuing finishing issues in the shopping precinct. Nothing is mentioned about restructuring.<sup>135</sup> Again, there are no documents in the archive which can be cited to support any allegations of wrongdoing

in this regard, but one is left feeling that something was not quite right, and that questions remain about both MREC's conduct and Corporation complicity in that. In fact, the transfer of oversight responsibilities was held up due to MREC's non-completion of contracted works on the project.<sup>136</sup>

A lack of proper attention to detail was a recurring feature of the project, and the area comprising the designated CDA continued to contain derelict and ruinous buildings such as one on the corner of Commercial Street and what remained of Laurie Street, which was still there in 1974.<sup>137</sup> This was supposed to have been a site for public toilet facilities.<sup>138</sup> There had been WCs and a cloakroom at 51 Kirkgate, and the fact that both the Corporation and MREC altogether failed to consider replacing these until 1974, eight years after the centre opened, is, to say the least, indicative of a lack of concern for the community on the part of both parties.<sup>139</sup>

The absence of proper oversight for the Centre is similarly indicated by a minute of a meeting of Leith New Kirkgate Tenants' Association and Leith Chamber of Commerce in 1973. This meeting heard concerns over the 'dilapidated state of the shopping precinct'. The multitude of issues raised included water damage, no run-aways from gutters, canopies falling apart, faulty electrical fittings, continued billing for repairs despite these faults, the fact that there was no Superintendent for the shopping centre, inadequate rubbish collection, and inadequate provision of litter bins.<sup>140</sup> Leith Chamber of Commerce made similar complaints and a letter to the Council signed by eighteen local business managers, making it clear that these issues had not still been addressed some seven months later (note that in the intervening period there was a national reorganisation of local authorities, hence 'Council' instead of 'Corporation').<sup>141</sup> Equally, a letter from the City Architect to the Town Clerk in the same year 'agrees that the whole scheme is badly designed and poorly finished'.<sup>142</sup>

This situation continued for many years, as indicated by a 1977 internal Council letter which states '... in view of the continual reluctance or inability of Ravenseft ... to carry out their contractual maintenance obligations ... steps [should] now be taken to invoke punitive clauses in the lease.'<sup>143</sup> Another internal memo from the same year states that 'It is quite depressing to shop in this area.'<sup>144</sup> Five years later, a letter from Leith Community

Association to the Council complains that 'there have been complaints about the unclean state of the shopping centre.'<sup>145</sup>

The CDA, then, can be (and was) considered to have been a relative failure in terms of providing improved commercial facilities and a better environment for shoppers. In terms of housing, things were not much better. The issues regarding the rehousing of displaced tenants during the construction period have already been discussed, and they were still extant years after the CDA was completed, as demonstrated by a letter from the secretary of Central Leith Labour Party to the Council in 1971. The secretary refers to 'the deplorable record of Corporation house building in recent years ... concerned by the lack of urgency ... in planning immediate rebuilding in Leith'.<sup>146</sup> Only a few months before, the City Architect had reported that 'gap sites will be required to remain until adjoining areas can be added' and that 'There has been a considerable reduction in the population of Leith in recent years mainly as a result of closing down of properties considered as falling below the tolerable standard.'<sup>147</sup> Clearly, then, this CDA resulted in a reduction in the number of homes and the dispersal of the community.

There were houses built in the area formerly occupied by the north end of the Kirkgate and Cables Wynd. These were a combination of low-rise units and a high-rise slab block, all of which are still standing. A few small industrial units were included in that part of the development, but no shops of any variety, and no lodging houses, bars or restaurants. The entire character of the area was completely altered by the CDA, with a preponderance of concrete everywhere one looks and no recreational amenities. All of the residential property in the CDA was now Corporation property, which gave the Corporation a monopoly of the rented housing market in that area. This recalls a memo from the Town Clerk to the Scottish Development Department, written in 1964, which states that 'Comprehensive development [is] considered to be a good property investment for the Corporation.'<sup>148</sup> Perhaps that was another point of the exercise.

The new houses in this area were the embodiment of modernism. Looking at them now, the modernist ideal of self-contained residential areas with a maximum of access to air and natural light seems to have been achieved.<sup>149</sup> Including the Kirkgate House

point block, there are 273 houses, but the first to be built, a block of twenty, are long-term derelict, and the area today features in the first and second deciles of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, making it amongst the most deprived areas of the country.<sup>150</sup> It may be that this would have been the case anyway, but one of the stated aims of this CDA was to alleviate precisely such problems.

The continuing blight on the area, exemplified by the City Architect's report, is demonstrative of the overall failure of the CDA to achieve its objectives. Further proof of this failure is given by the fact that in 1971 the Council launched a 'Public Participation Exercise for the improvement of Leith' called 'Tomorrow's Leith'.<sup>151</sup> This took the form of a questionnaire and an exhibition. 271 completed questionnaires were returned, 70 comments were collected from the exhibition to showcase the various plans proposed, and 183 people were interviewed at that exhibition. This is hardly a comprehensive poll, but the overall preference, although not by a clear majority, was for the option to 'modernise substandard housing areas and build more houses'.<sup>152</sup> The fact that there was an option included which involved modernising older housing stock, rather than the wholesale demolition inherent in the CDA, appears to indicate an acceptance by the local authority that their initial approach was flawed.

The local preference for more housing came a close second to an option to 'improve the appearance and preserve the character of Leith', which had also been one of the central intentions of the comprehensive development plan.<sup>153</sup> This suggests that the plan was, in the eyes of the community at least, a failure in that regard. The option 'to rearrange road layouts so that lorries and heavy vehicles do not pass through' was only the fourth most popular option of six.<sup>154</sup> This is also significant. It could be interpreted to suggest that the pedestrianisation of the centre of Leith by implementation of the CDA plan had so improved things that the traffic problem had been reduced to a level that decreased its significance to the local population. On the other hand, one could suggest that traffic was not perceived as a significant problem by locals, as it was by the City planners. That would support the view that the CDA had been forced upon the citizens of Leith against their wishes and for reasons with which they did not agree.

Either way, 'Tomorrow's Leith' cites the major



KIRKGATE COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT AREA



Fig. 3. This map from 1953 shows the Kirkgate before demolition. The number and density of properties there and in connecting streets and lanes indicates a busy, vibrant community. Ordnance Survey, 1:1250 Plan (1953). Used with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

problems facing Leith in 1971 as decreasing population, substandard, overcrowded and poor structural conditions of the housing stock, inadequate open spaces, a high level of accidents due to poor road layout, and mixed industrial and residential uses. Given that these are the problems cited in the 1953 survey report and development plan, which the Leith Citadel and Central CDA was intended to alleviate, one might be justified in suggesting that the whole thing, which caused massive disruption over an extended period and displaced a significant number of established local traders and even more residents, was a failure in every respect. It eradicated what had, for centuries, been the heart of the community and replaced it with less, both in terms of variety and quality, in the way of commercial, residential, and



Fig. 4. This map, from 1968, shows how the whole area was significantly cleared of shops and entertainments to make way for the huge Corporation housing project. The new shopping centre is just out of frame to the bottom left. Ordnance Survey, 1:1250 Plan (1968). Used with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

recreational amenities, and resulted in a Corporation monopoly of the provision of all these amenities until almost the end of the century. It is this monopoly on housing rentals and the concomitant increase in revenue that can be considered the sole successful intended result of CDA designation for this area, even though it was never a *publicly* stated aim.

The Kirkgate was the historic centre of Leith life and society. Comprehensive Development Area status was applied to the redevelopment of the area under post-war legislation designed to make it easier for local authorities to properly plan for improved urban environments, but it was done without open consultation. The stated reasons for designating this particular area as a CDA were to reduce congestion and improve traffic flow, and to improve the general



environment and housing standards. However, there is at least circumstantial evidence to suggest that the move may also have been a result of political pressure to 'improve' the conditions of the lower classes, allied with perceptions of unhealthy and perhaps immoral societal influences which required 'correction by planning'. That evidence also suggests that there may have existed within the Corporation a desire to undermine the cohesion of a community which, historically, had often been at odds with the City of Edinburgh and its institutions. The Corporation also saw, and took, the whole scheme as an opportunity for long-term property investment.

The actual implementation process resulted in the dislocation and dispersal of large sections of the existing community. This was achieved by the blanket application of the new powers of compulsory purchase, sometimes under false pretences and/or duress, and involving a questionable relationship between developer and Corporation. Local businesses and residents alike were subject to arbitrary removal and the local authority frequently failed to protect individuals' property and livelihoods during the process, or to take notice of their wishes if they conflicted with those of the Corporation. Many established businesses were completely overlooked by the Corporation during the preparation of their

plans, suggesting poor or negligent overall planning. Moreover, the authority failed either to arrange properly for the relocation of residents or to attempt to ensure continuity of all manner of community activities during the process. Provision of basic requirements such as public sanitary facilities was completely overlooked.

The result was that the centre of a centuries-old community was demolished to make way for a planner's dream of clean lines and open spaces. The traditional shopping and recreational area of the town was destroyed and replaced with something that was, arguably, less in every respect. The selection and variety of shops was markedly reduced, the number of venues available for community and leisure activities was decimated, and many livelihoods were lost. The stated intentions of improving the quality of both local housing and the local environment was, by modern measures, not achieved, and the area continues to suffer the sort of social problems that the CDA was supposedly intended to address. There is also a significant body of circumstantial evidence to suggest that the scheme was a social experiment, and one which may have been carried out with the intention of diminishing the social cohesion of a community which was historically hostile to their latter-day municipal suzerain.

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