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## **WYTHENSHAW**

Manchester's Municipal Garden City

James Hopkins and Michael Hebbert

One of the sorrier chapters in recent British housing history has been the steep decline of garden suburbs built by councils in the early twentieth century in a spirit of social and environmental idealism. Anne Power of the London School of Economics was one of the first British researchers to reveal the extent of neighborhood decline in these low-density council estates. A surprising number of the “estates on the edge” in her book of that title (Power 1997) were suburban—thus on the edge in a physical as well as a metaphorical sense. Martin Crookston’s study of the characteristic problems of these cottage estates shows how heritage awareness may help them to meet the challenges of change. His study, with a title *Garden Suburbs of Tomorrow?* that deliberately echoes Ebenezer Howard’s work, shows how the historical legacy of these estates might be harnessed to the urgent task of urban renewal (Crookston 2014). Here we follow the challenges of heritage, preservation, and change in just such a setting, perhaps the most iconic of Britain’s cottage estates, Wythenshawe.

## **Conception of a Garden City**

Wythenshawe is Manchester's very own garden city, created by the municipality in response to the housing problem as it existed in the early twentieth century: there was no longer the human degradation witnessed by Friedrich Engels in 1844, but rather a confinement of working-class families to an unalleviated mineral landscape of stone-flagged streets and cramped brick and slate terraces, heated by coal fires and punctuated by the giant smokestacks of coal-burning factory boilers, depositing carbon at a rate of three hundred tons per square mile: people lived in the “classic slum” of Robert Roberts (1971), the “dirty old town” of Ewan McColl (Engels 1993; Thompson 1970). By the measure of occupants per room, the Manchester conurbation had lower overcrowding rates than Glasgow or the East End of London, but nothing could match the sheer scale of its repetitive terraced housing (Harrison 1981; Williams 1996).

Already before World War I, social housing providers had experimented around Manchester at Burnage Garden Village (1910), Blackley Estate (1911), and Chorltonville (1911) with accommodation in a radically different cottage-and-garden style. The 1919 Addison Act normalized this dwelling type and established a national subsidy framework for large-scale municipal construction on greenfield sites. Manchester Corporation became a major social housing provider and within twenty years was outstripping private provision two to one (Kay 1993).

The core municipality of the Manchester conurbation was more tightly bounded than its counterparts in Leeds, Liverpool, or Birmingham. Fully urbanized neighbours blocked any possibility of growth to the west, north, east, and southeast. Obligated to look outside its limits for building land, Manchester was amenable to the garden city doctrine that improved housing should be built in freestanding settlements rather than suburban extensions. Rural

Cheshire, to the southwest, had been favored since the early nineteenth century as premier commuter country for successful Manchester businessmen. Upwind of the conurbation, Cheshire's smokeless atmosphere and unimpeded solar radiation meant a drier climate and temperatures two to three degrees above the city average. Wythenshawe had already been selected as the site for Manchester's tuberculosis hospital in 1902. In 1920 Patrick Abercrombie was commissioned by the Manchester Corporation to report on the feasibility of developing a garden city beyond the municipal limits on the rural Tatton Estate south of the River Mersey. He recommended the purchase of 4,500 acres and expressed his hope that it would become "a model community for the whole country" (Abercrombie 1920, 9). Despite local objection and strenuous opposition from Cheshire County Council, Manchester acquired most of the land in 1926 and incorporated it under an Extension Act of 1930 (Simon 1926).

The driving forces behind this project were the engineering industrialist and local politician Ernest Simon and his wife, Shena, who was a sister of the Fabian cofounder of the London School of Economics, Beatrice Webb. Simon was one of the last generation of British business leaders to make local government their political arena. As a member of Manchester Corporation from 1911 and as its Lord Mayor from 1921, he was both a powerful spokesman for the Mancunian interest and an articulate spokesman for local democracy as a whole. He applied a keen problem-solving approach to Manchester's coal-smoke pollution, substandard housing, and dismal public health record. As a pragmatic Liberal, he believed city corporations should become large-scale providers of affordable working-class housing, following the latest principles of hygienic design and using municipal procurement and direct labor to achieve economies of scale (Hughes and Hunt 1992; Olechnowicz 2000; Redford 1940; Stocks 1963). The Simons were enthusiastic believers in town planning and demonstrated their personal commitment to the garden city project by purchasing 250 acres of the Wythenshawe estate

from the Tatton family in 1926 and presenting it, without conditions, to the city. Shena Simon served on the Wythenshawe Estate Special Planning Committee from its inception in 1926, and she was its chair from 1931 to 1933 (Miller 1992).

Wythenshawe was an intentionally and boldly iconic project, commissioned from the leading practitioner in the field, Barry Parker. His joint practice with Sir Raymond Unwin designed New Earswick, Letchworth Garden City, and Hampstead Garden Suburb. While Unwin became a civil servant after World War I, shifting his attention to regional planning and housing-policy work (Miller 2004), Parker continued at the drawing board, designing the Jardim América suburb in São Paulo, Brazil (1917–19) and numerous British municipal housing schemes, Wythenshawe being the largest and boldest. He served as its consultant planner between 1927 and 1941 and was given significant freedom in its design. His plan required an area of 5,500 acres—necessitating additional purchases by the Corporation—of which over a thousand would constitute a greenbelt, permanent agriculture, and open parkland. The plan spanned the three ancient parishes of Baguley, Northenden, and North Etchells and would accommodate 107,000 residents in 25,000 homes, employed in two industrial zones (Rodgers 1986).

Two unique features of the project were its municipal genesis and its scale, “perhaps the most ambitious programme of civic restructuring that any British city has ever undertaken” (Rodgers 1986: 44). Other cities were building suburban estates, some very large, but here the intention was different: the model community would be self-contained, with its own employment base and services. In contrast to the single tenure of the London County Council's vast out-county estates, Manchester wanted to emulate the social mix of Letchworth and Welwyn. A fifth of the housing was intended for owner-occupation. It was the first time that the garden city formula had been applied by a local government. The

project would be able to draw on Manchester Corporation's borrowing powers and the increment on the land would return to the community, as Ebenezer Howard intended. In addition, the Corporation could, in principle, lay down the infrastructure of local services and amenities in logical sequence (MacDonald 2002).

The design showed Parker's familiarity with the latest American planning principles (Stern et al. 2013). Parker followed Frederick Law Olmsted's use of parkways as distributor roads to residential areas, linking them to local parks. The Princess Parkway was an arterial link to Manchester while the Western Parkway circled the edge of the town, defining its outer boundary. Instead of the incessant intersections and stop-lines of the Mancunian street grid, Wythenshawe had clover-leaf intersections (England's first) or roundabouts, and its roads curved in subtle response to landscape and topography. There would be no shabby ribbon development—housing was to be set back at least 150 feet from the main thoroughfares behind wide verges graced by mature trees.

Walter Creese shows how carefully Parker applied Clarence Perry's neighborhood unit principle (Creese 1966). His plan was based on ten primary school and shopping clusters, each serving a half-mile radial catchment. Housing was shaped around small greens or in varied polygonal patterns with inner culs-de-sac to achieve a Radburn-style level of pedestrian protection. Arts and Crafts ideals were evident in the fine detailing and specification of the dwellings, while the indoor toilets, bathrooms with hot and cold running water, and modern kitchens expressed a progressive ideal of gender relations, offering the woman "a clean, well-planned home, which will be her palace—so well and wisely planned that her labour will be lightened and her strength and intelligence reserved for wider interests" (*Woman's Outlook* 1934). True to its name, the garden city gave every family space at the front and a back garden at least thirty feet long. Housing densities of between four and twelve houses per acre marked

an extraordinary contrast with the characteristic forty to fifty homes per acre of inner Manchester (Macfadayen 1933). Shena Simon took great interest in the practical and aesthetic details of the project, with the aim that working-class families should live in homes that were “as healthy as . . . the mansion of a millionaire” (Olechnowicz 2000).

So Parker's plan built on Wythenshawe's salubrious reputation. The industrial area was designated a smoke-free zone, one of the first in the country. The tuberculosis sanatorium would become the nucleus of an extended hospital quarter. The cottages and handsome farmhouses of the former bucolic landscape were preserved, along with many of its mature trees. The buildings and parks of the area's three ancient manor houses—Peel Hall, Baguley Hall, and Wythenshawe Hall—were retained as urban amenities, skilfully framed by parkways and avenues to emphasize continuity with the rural past (Deakin 1989; Dougill 1935; Kay 1993; Manchester and Salford Better Housing Council 1935).

### **Development: The Prewar Phase**

House building began in 1932 and progressed quickly. By 1934 the preexisting population of approximately 5,500 had increased to 25,000, greater than the Letchworth and Welwyn garden cities combined. By the outbreak of World War II, Wythenshawe contained a third of the city's entire stock of social housing. The first new churches had been built, providing a striking architectural focus. Progress was slower on the industrial sites intended as the primary source of local employment, not least because the smoke-control policy limited them to light industry. At the outbreak of World War II, Wythenshawe had attracted only seventeen plants. So the majority of residents commuted out to work; two-thirds went to the Trafford Park Estate alongside the Manchester Ship Canal. That was an awkward journey, but so was

access to central Manchester's labor market, because the Corporation trams did not reach past Withington, some four miles north, and buses did not circulate the vast estate. The two existing railway stations—Northenden and Baguley—were on the east-west line between Stockport and Altrincham but offered no direct connection to Manchester (Hughes and Hunt 1992; Interview 4).

Wythenshawe homes were set at the highest band of municipal rents, restricting them to skilled workers in regular employment. The Corporation applied strict eligibility criteria and a postoccupancy inspection system to weed out tenants with "slum habits." The aspirational blue-collar families who populated the garden city seem to have judged that—on balance—home comforts and a fine landscape setting made up for the various disadvantages of life on the periphery. A 1935 survey found 90 percent of residents to be happy: some positively reveled in their quasi-rural lifestyle by "playing on the parkway, making dens in the bushes and hiding amongst all the lovely blossom trees" (Interview 4). The housing design had created possibilities of privacy unimaginable in dense terraced streets. In their cottage-style homes with gated and hedged gardens, Wythenshawe's pioneers discovered a family-centered lifestyle hitherto enjoyed only by the bourgeoisie. When men returned home from work, the front door was shut for a night beside the fire (Hughes and Hunt 1992; Interview 4; Interview 5; Manchester and Salford Better Housing Council 1935).



Figure 14.1 Pioneers in Wythenshawe (1938)

*Courtesy Manchester Libraries, Information and Archives, Manchester City Council*

The rigors of the early years encouraged solidarity and collective action. The early pioneer settlers found themselves living without basic roads and sewers. Trips to shops, pubs, cinemas, and medical services involved long walks to Northenden or Gatley over fields or unmade roads (Figure 14.2). The early comers mobilized to protest about the lack of facilities and transport, especially when, in 1934, the Council sought to increase rents that were already the highest in the conurbation. In a spirit of resilience, the new Wythenshavians realized Parker's vision of a self-reliant community: neighborhood associations, sports clubs, and church groups flourished as residents entertained, educated, fed, and cared for themselves. An old farm became the home of the Residents' Association and offered guidance and tools for vegetable growing, while men's clubs, women's guilds, and lads' clubs used whatever land and equipment they could.





Figure 14.2 Hall Lane, Baguley (1945)

*Courtesy Manchester Libraries, Information and Archives, Manchester City Council*

As a founder of the Association for Education in Citizenship and a leading light in the National Council of Social Service, Sir Ernest Simon had a keen interest in grassroots organization, which he saw as a school of citizenship and a bulwark against fascism. Initially he nurtured grassroots activities in Wythenshawe, but he became concerned that the garden city had developed into a one-class estate, lacking in social leadership. Andrzej Olechnowicz

has provided a wry account of the ambivalence of Ernest and Shena Simon as champions of participatory democracy vis-à-vis its expression in their own Wythenshawe. Residents' demands for a greater say in decision making—"home rule" for Wythenshawe—were sternly declined (Olechnowicz 2000).

### **Development: The Postwar Phase**

Wythenshawe was half-built at the outbreak of World War II. Signing off from the project in 1941, Parker declared it to be the premier example of an actually existing garden city. War production boosted local investment in light industry and manufacturing, filling much of Sharston's 110-acre industrial estate. The magnificent municipal transport depot, completed in 1939, with space for 100 double-decker buses beneath its 165-foot-span barrel-vaults, became a bomber factory. Other construction paused during hostilities, but the mid-forties mood was optimistic. The *City of Manchester Plan* of 1945 included a survey finding that 93 percent of Wythenshavians considered themselves happy, and it took the garden city as the benchmark against which all future neighborhood reconstruction should be measured (Nicholas 1945). Despite pressure for emergency building at high densities, the postwar plan kept faith with Parker's vision, improving the rail link, increasing the industrial land allocation, and relocating the future civic center, envisaged as a Beaux-Arts set-piece of public architecture amid an expanse of lawns and formal shrubbery. The council's vision was reaffirmed in *Wythenshawe: Plan and Reality* (1953), which compared the garden city to the new wave of state-funded New Towns and increased its target population from 80,000 to 100,000 (Deakin 1989; Hughes and Hunt 1992).



Figure 14.3 Postwar flats on a cul-de-sac (1955)

*Courtesy Manchester Libraries, Information and Archives, Manchester City Council*

In reality, austerity thwarted the intentions of the postwar plans, and the requirements of the 1946 Housing Act brought significant shifts. The year 1946 saw 1,900 building starts, a high production rate that was to continue over the next two decades. Various forms of prefabricated steel-framed and concrete houses were introduced, with open-plan fronts instead of private gated gardens; Parker's density limits were relaxed as the cottage provision gave way to denser typologies: first, walk-up flats and maisonettes and then tower blocks. The inflow of new residents became more intense as Manchester's large-scale slum clearance developed momentum. Unlike the closely vetted pioneers and immediate postwar incomers, slum clearance tenants were allocated to housing en masse. The translation was not easy: the pioneers were keen to differentiate themselves from the incoming welfare tenants, who in their turn complained that the early settlers were "nowt but a load of snobs" (Hartwell 2002, 91; Hughes and Hunt 1992, 90).

In 1964, Wythenshawe's population hit its maximum of 100,000 and house building began to slow. Thirty years after the start of construction, attention turned at last to the creation of a civic centre. Parker's original design, relocated and modified in 1945, took eventual shape as a 1960s megastructure. Designed by the city architect and constructed between 1969 and 1971, it was described in Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's *Buildings of England* series as "nothing special" (Hartwell et al. 2004, 91, 492). The centre was named "the Forum" and it incorporated a retail complex and multi-storey car park with a library and arts centre, the first of its kind in the Manchester area. For a while the new centre offered a remarkable cultural program, attracting international performers and a wide catchment audience. But the size and social profile of Wythenshawe was a challenge: it was still being run as a housing estate by top-down management. The rector of Benchill spoke of it as "the opposite of community" (Deakin 1989, 158). The Residents' Association continued to call for home rule, arguing that they had a larger population than most self-administering towns yet less say than other Manchester neighbourhoods. The establishment of a consultative committee on matters such as planning applications did not allay the grievance.

Then the community was hit by a cruel physical intrusion. England's spinal M6 motorway had opened in 1965, and its M56 spur to Manchester passed close by the city's fast-growing international airport. The once elegant Princess Parkway was transformed into a heavily trafficked arterial freeway. Its construction in 1969–71 ripped up fifty thousand trees and shrubs, obliterated the carefully designed connections among the neighborhoods and the Olmstedian parkway landscape, and severed the east from the west. Worse, this process was repeated when a second motorway, the orbital M60, was built along the Mersey Valley between Wythenshawe and Manchester, cutting off minor roads and leaving the Northenden neighborhood as a giant traffic island accessible for pedestrians only by subway. And despite

all the visual, sonic, and atmospheric intrusion of transport infrastructure, local transportation remained poor—the only railway station closed in 1965, and bus travel into Manchester still was a fifty-minute journey (Deakin 1989, 145–46).



Figure 14.4 Princess Parkway before (1960) and during (1970) conversion to a motorway

*Courtesy Manchester Libraries, Information and Archives, Manchester City Council*

The physical quartering of Wythenshawe by highway infrastructure reinforced a process of differentiation already evident in the housing sector (Figure 14.5). Some of the ten neighborhoods were becoming notorious. Derick Deakin describes worsening problems of petty crime, rubbish dumping and vandalism, housing voids, and internecine tensions (Deakin 1989, 145–46). The city faced requests for barriers and gates to stop criminal access between Wythenshawe and neighboring Gatley. The introduction in 1980 of tenants' right-to-buy

accelerated the polarization between owner-occupied and social rented areas. Rent arrears and evictions led to vacancies and boarded properties in one area, while extensions and new porches were added in another (Interview 4; Interview 5).



Figure 14.5 Wythenshawe in 1955 and 2005

Copyright Ordnance Survey [maps redrawn by UoM Cartographic Unit in published version]

Despite its location in the desirable commuter belt and surrounded by the prosperous suburbs of Sale, Didsbury, Gatley, and Altrincham, Wythenshawe's population fell by a third between the 1971 and 2001 censuses (Manchester City Council 1985, 2008; Office for National Statistics, 1971, 2001). Significantly, it was no longer described as a garden city. It had become a “problem estate”—iconic for all the wrong reasons.

### The Endless Housing Estate

Sir Peter Hall's widely read *Cities of Tomorrow* combined an account of Wythenshawe's development with observations of present-day graffiti and vandalism: “Manchester has not dealt kindly with its masterpiece. . . . The place looks down-at-heel in that distinctively English

way, as if the city has given up on it” (Hall 2002, 115). Another great contemporary geographer, Doreen Massey, grew up in the garden city and wrote perceptively of how “that open spaciousness of the fresh air can be closed down in a myriad of daily ways”—the cracked curbstone, the vandalized bowling green, the security grill on the kitchen window (Massey 2001, 464). The sense of poverty was more marked in the context of a buoyant local labor market of more than 52,000 jobs—20,000 at Manchester Airport, 5,000 at Wythenshawe Hospital, and others with Microsoft, Shell, Virgin Media, and the soapmaker PZ Cussons. Wythenshawe residents came to have one of the lowest economic activity rates in the city-region, with half of those of working age receiving an incapacity benefit. Four of the neighborhoods were ranked in the top 1 percent most deprived nationally, with high rates of gun, knife, and drug crime (Manchester City Council 2009). A former resident reflected, “I’d never want to go back. There are such a lot of problems because there are problem families everywhere, because drug abuse is so rife. I just tend to think that they sort of gather in places like Wythenshawe” (Interview 2).

Most cities have estates with such a profile, but Wythenshawe's notoriety became iconic, just like the everyday environment of Mancunian working-class terraces in the long-running Granada TV Studios soap opera *Coronation Street*. In the blackly comic television series *Shameless*, first aired in 2004, a motley cast of chavs, slags, scallies, hoodies, and layabouts pursued their chaotic lives on the “Chatsworth Estate.” Filmed on outdoor location in Wythenshawe, *Shameless*'s irreverent characters reinforced every stereotype of the Wythenshavian: their families were dysfunctional and their alcohol and drug abuse was funded by welfare and crime. The estate's media profile was inadvertently reinforced by the Conservative leader David Cameron, who visited in February 2007 and was caught on camera with a hooded teenager making a gun sign behind his head. Boasting of his criminal exploits



on television news, seventeen-year-old Ryan Florence immediately became “the nation's most notorious hoodie” (*Manchester Evening News* 2007).



Figure 14.6 David Cameron and “the nations most notorious hoodie”, February 2007

*Courtesy Press Association*

The “Cameron ‘gun’ teenager” photograph was a front-page story in the national press and was picked up internationally. The *New York Times* used it to illustrate why Britain had come at the bottom of a UNICEF league table of industrialized nations: this “endless housing estate” epitomized the failed social order of feckless youngsters betrayed by “absent fathers, the mothers on welfare, the drugs, the arrests, the incarcerations, the wearying inevitability of it all.” As one teenager summarized, “When you live in Wythenshawe, you don’t expect any better” (Lyll 2007).

The affair even took a royal dimension. In 2009 the Duchess of York made an ill-judged television documentary on youth unemployment and disaffection. Entitled *Duchess on the Estate*, it involved a visit to open a community center at Northern Moor. She interviewed locals and was shocked: “I knew it was bad but I didn’t realize they are proud of their disgraceful behavior. . . . Young people go out with their mobile telephones and their knives now. . . . Literally, you can’t get some young people to do joined up writing, let alone joined



up sentences.” The encounter did nothing for her reputation or for Wythenshawe's either (BBC News 2009; Greer 2009; Wylie 2009a, 2009b). Of course, that reputation was an unfair representation of the everyday reality of life for many Wythenshawe residents and businesses. But iconicity is not about fairness.

### **Myth-Busting and Recovery**

Wythenshawe belongs to Manchester, and Manchester has led the way among older industrial cities in positive urban regeneration and civic boosterism. A long-established system of partnerships with the private sector has earned it a reputation as a city that can “make it happen” (Hebbert 2010).

As statistical indicators tracked the decline of Wythenshawe, regeneration policy kicked in (Manchester City Council 2004). The decade from 1998 onward saw more than £800 million of special funding invested in the area's hospitals and health programs, recreation facilities, schools and education, police, and transport. The Forum was gated to prevent nocturnal vandalism, and the civic center was branded and relaunched as Wythenshawe Town Centre. A symbolic new greenway for cyclists and walkers provides, for the first time, a direct link between the Forum and Manchester Airport, and a new line on Manchester's tram (streetcar) network between the city and airport via Wythenshawe opened in November 2014, forging the link that Parker had always envisaged. A new Enterprise Zone was created in March 2011 in and around the airport, offering discounted business rates, simplified planning rules, and super-fast broadband (Drivers Jonas Deloitte 2011; see Plate 18). The volume of international cargo is being expanded, with space allocations to “broaden the airport's appeal to first and second tier logistics operations and compete more effectively in the Value Added

Logistics (VAL) sector (Drivers Jonas Deloitte 2011, 2).” The horseshoe-shaped perimeter, which Parker laid out as a greenbelt melding the garden city into a rural landscape, has been reconfigured as an employment zone for high-end technology, research and development, training, and headquarter functions. Wythenshawe’s strategic regeneration plan seeks to connect it and allow it to benefit from the prosperity and economic dynamism of the communities that surround it in South Manchester (Manchester City Council 2004). The beginning of the twenty-first century saw a reversal to Wythenshawe’s population decline: mid-2013 estimates showed Wythenshawe’s population at 74,600, up from 66,062 in the 2001 census (Office for National Statistics 2001, 2011, 2013).

Meanwhile, a branding and marketing campaign has been launched to address Wythenshawe's reputational problems. *Real Lives—Wythenshawe* is sponsored by a partnership of Manchester City Council, Parkway Green and Willow Park Housing Trusts, St. Modwen, Marketing Manchester, and the Forum Trust. In an attempt to dispel misconceptions and “build a community feel where residents feel safe and engaged,” the advertisements feature the interests and activities of local residents, emphasizing the tradition of self-organization and community association left to Wythenshawe by its early pioneers. They play on Wythenshawe's location at the affluent end of town, sprinkling the stardust of the “south Manchester effect.” And crucially, the campaign invokes the garden city element of Wythenshawe’s heritage: its lower population density compared with Manchester’s average (24.9 people per hectare compared with Manchester’s 39.1), its higher-than-English-average tree coverage (15.3 percent), a park of 270 acres, a community farm, and three hundred allotments and homes with gardens.

The marketing vision appeals directly to the planning origins of Wythenshawe, offering its rebirth as “Manchester’s ‘Garden City’—a distinctive part of the City of

Manchester characterised by a unique environment and a new dynamic of growth and development the idea brings together the positive aspects of housing and green space (Garden) with the sense of growth and change in the economy” (Manchester City Council 2008). Wythenshawe’s heritage-led revival could best be described as a work in progress. So far, the lead has come from branding and public relations teams capitalizing on the suburb’s most obvious selling point: its greenspace and tree cover. The ancient freestanding trees and mature woodlands that were artfully protected within Parker’s original plan are indeed a remarkable endowment, and good work is now being done to protect them by the nonprofit Red Rose Forest in partnership with the city council and residents’ groups. Preservation of architectural heritage is more problematic. The garden city encompassed an extraordinary range of structures, including the mid-fourteenth-century timber-framed hall at Baguley, the fifteenth-century parish church of St. Wilfred Northenden, the great manor house built at Wythenshawe by Robert Tatton around 1540 that was his descendants’ home for six centuries, a handsome red-brick farmhouse at Newall Green Baguley carrying the date 1594 upon its lintel, the eighteenth-century Moor Farm with its seventeenth-century outbuildings, and the classically detailed Sharston Mount farmhouse dating from 1800. Though all these monuments have statutory protection—they are “listed buildings” in British parlance—several have suffered neglect or vandalism, the difficulties of location being aggravated by inadequate stewardship on the part of Manchester City Council. Their best hope lies in grassroots mobilization such as from the Friends of Wythenshawe Hall, who have reopened the hall to the public and brought it back to life since the group formed in 2012.

Of the architectural legacy of the twentieth-century garden city, only a handful of iconic buildings are listed: the Assembly Hall of Jehovah’s Witnesses, originally designed

as an Art Deco cinema in 1933 by Charles Hartley; the 1938 Church of St. Luke the Physician; N. F. Cachemaille-Day's breathtaking church of St. Michael and All Angels, of 1937; the 1939 bus garage in Sharston, with its innovative shell-concrete barrel vaults; and a virtuoso design of 1964, G. G. Pace's William Temple Memorial Church. Reporting on a tour of these sights for the *Guardian* newspaper, Owen Hatherley (2012) commented that they had not seen Wythenshawe itself—Parker's vast exercise in residential design. Despite its significance in planning history, most of the garden city has no preservation policy. Northenden is the only part to be designated as a Conservation Area, a status reinforced by the establishment of a Northenden Neighbourhood Forum with planning powers. Elsewhere the chief preservative of the scale and architectural character of the cottage estate has been its residents' relative poverty. One thing is sure, however: as the area's fortunes improve, it will face new challenges of change, and a more assertive policy for heritage preservation will be needed.

## **Conclusion**

Wythenshawe earns a special place in town planning history as the largest garden city built by municipal enterprise. That genesis was its undoing. It took shape as a semidetached suburb of (mostly) council housing subject to the shifts in allocation rules and design standards. Its peripheral situation gave it neither the standing of a satellite town nor proper connectedness to the city's employment and amenities. Treated as a city ward, and without a civic center to give a focus for the first thirty-nine years, it never developed an identity to match its size. It seemed a place on the edge, protruded into the Cheshire countryside. Resident interviews defined Wythenshawe in terms of peripherality: "I would say Manchester was the . . . you

know, the centre, and we're a suburb of Manchester"—one felt it was best described as Manchester's "overspill" (Interview 2; Interview 5).

It is in this context that Parker's garden city is being revalorized. Lost in middle age to a vast and fractured housing estate, its regeneration returns to the tangible assets of the Arts and Crafts design, with its retained woodland, gardens, allotments, and out-of-town ambience. As Massey writes, it is "green and spacious still: the clarity of the air, the freshness of the (constant) breeze still strike me each time I arrive" (2001, 465). Passengers landing from international flights at Manchester Airport are greeted by the heartwarming *Real Lives* images of Wythenshawe folk growing geraniums, displaying prize vegetables, tending allotments, buying fresh fish, walking the whippets, adjusting the pony's cheek-straps and a horse looking over a stable door at Wythenshawe Hall:

It's the kind of place where you can put down roots. Family homes with gardens and easy access to both city centre and countryside, plus a huge investment in new schools and community facilities, make Wythenshawe a good place to live. . . . Wythenshawe is Manchester's original Garden City—built on the principles of being "close to town and country," and this remains true today: only seven miles from Manchester's City Centre but surrounded by South Manchester's most affluent suburbs and directly linked to the Cheshire countryside . . . Wythenshawe is one of Manchester's greenest places—with mature tree lined roads, parks, allotments and gardens, it's a place where you can breathe. . . . Wythenshawe is proud of its community values, whether it's saying hello over the garden fence or over 100 community groups and clubs (Manchester City Council 2009).

Today's publicity campaign for a distressed suburb appeals back to its original garden city vision. There's life in the old icon yet.



Figure 14.7 Wythenshawe *Real Lives* campaign

*Courtesy Real Lives Campaign, photographic credit Gavin Perry*

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## **Interviews**

- Interview 1. 2011. Interview with former female resident of Wythenshawe by James Hopkins (July 31).
- Interview 2. 2011. Interview with former female resident of Wythenshawe by James Hopkins (July 31).
- Interview 3. 2011. Interview with former female resident of Wythenshawe by James Hopkins (June 15).

Interview 4. 2011. Interview with female resident of Wythenshawe by James Hopkins (November 16).

Interview 5. 2011. Interview with former female resident of Wythenshawe by James Hopkins (November 16).