



**The
Hulme
Conference**

16 NOVEMBER 1985

**REPORT
OF THE
CONFERENCE**

**SYSTEM-BUILT &
TOWER BLOCK
HOUSING PROJECT
LIMITED**

THE SECOND HULME CONFERENCE

Report of the Conference held at Birley High School, Hulme,
Manchester on 16th November 1985

Published by the System-built and Tower Block
Housing Project Limited - February 1985

Registered Office: Town Hall, Manchester
Company Registration No: 1957097

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OPENING SESSION

Councillor John Nicholson Manchester's Housing Committee Chair, opened the Conference and welcomed delegates to Hulme.

He explained the background to the decision by an ad-hoc working party of tenants and councillors to convene the First Hulme Conference in February 1985 to discuss ways in which pressure could be brought to bear on Central Government to bring forward the demolition of deck access and system-built estates.

The February Conference passed the Hulme Declaration and decided to establish a project team to undertake research and campaigning work on behalf of local authorities and tenants of deck access and system-built dwellings. It had been hoped that it would have been possible to formally launch the project as a private limited company at this Conference. However, because of delays at Companies' House, the necessary legal notices could not be issued in time to enable the Conference formally to be the first Annual General Meeting of the new Company. The company was therefore to be established soon after the Conference with the present Working Party being re-formed as the management committee of the System-Built and Tower Block Housing Project Ltd.

Councillor Nicholson referred to the recent report on the state of the nation's housing which the Government had tried to suppress. This had confirmed the scale of the problem estimating that outstanding repairs totalled a staggering £20,000 million. The Government's response to this has been to suggest feasibility studies into the prospect of involving the private sector in the refurbishment of inner city housing in the pursuit of profit. Government Ministers have visited Manchester but are now avoiding meeting tenants and listening to their problems.

Councillor Nicholson read out a message of support for a successful Conference from Neil Kinnock and the following message from Jeff Rooker:-

"I am sorry I cannot be with you on 16th November. However I want to make it absolutely clear that as Shadow Housing Minister I send my full support to the Project. Such research and information resources will be of valuable help in both campaigning for change and also for the incoming Labour Government which is pledged, as you know, to make a serious attempt at tackling the crisis in housing, as we have said in our new policy document "Homes for the Future".

The involvement of tenants is a crucial part of the Project and I congratulate all those concerned in initiating this. There can be no solution unless people are able to have real control over their own homes and environment.

I wish the Conference every success and I hope you will keep me informed of the outcome".

Marilyn Steane (YDG Tenants Action Group and Hunslet Grange Tenants Association) read out the following message of support from County Councillor John Gunnell, the Leader of West Yorkshire County Council who was a founder member of the tenants' group which achieved the demolition of Hunslet Grange:-

"First let me congratulate your Working Party on carrying things forward to this Conference. I know that this in itself reflects the commitment of a number of people and a number of Authorities and I believe that the Project now has a firm future. Let me also apologise for my own absence today. I regret that County Council commitments have made it impossible for me to reach you by 2.00 pm as I had originally hoped.

"One of the most valuable experiences of my life is that of having lived for over 7½ years in Hunslet Grange Flats in Leeds. When I first became a Councillor I felt it was very important to live in my area, and Hunslet Grange like many other system-built housing projects was hard to let and easy to get into. From the day I moved in, people brought their problems to me and in a complex of over a thousand flats it is not surprising that they arrived every day. Problems arose from the structural condition of the flats, from the cost of electricity, financial and family problems resulting from living under tense conditions, problems arising from the loneliness and anonymity experienced by many. Most people who came to me wanted out, and as quickly as possible, but there were many other needs that also had to be met".

"After almost a year I put a six page questionnaire through every letterbox. The Housing Department told me I would do well if one in twenty was returned - in the end almost half of those in the flats replied and at the resulting public meeting I called the Hunslet Grange Tenants Association was formed to campaign for either radical improvement or demolition of the flats. We struggled a bit to start with but then forged the first links with similar Associations in the other Yorkshire Development Group housing projects. The impetus thus created was an important factor in our success in getting Leeds City Council to agree to demolition and our success led indirectly to this meeting which carries the campaign onto a wider base".

"I believe our message to housing authorities and to tenants' organisations is the importance of each seeing the other as partners - and not protagonists - in the development of public housing and public housing policies. It is the responsibility of housing authorities to look in detail at their system-built and tower block housing and to be really aware of the conditions under which people are living. Are these conditions adequate for those we are responsible to in 1985? Could the councillors and senior officers contemplate living there themselves? A detailed study is necessary to decide whether demolition or major improvement is the answer, but that work cannot be done in isolation from those who live within the estates. Tenants' associations have a vital role to play in making sure that the reality of problems they suffer are fully understood and in working with councillors and council officers to find solutions. Demolition, as a Council decision without tenant consultation, may well create more problems than it solves. Radical improvement cannot be carried through without full participation of all those whose homes are involved. We must insist on honest, constructive and thorough relationships between the local authority and its tenants".

"Inevitably under the present Government, solutions to the housing problems created in the 1960's and early 1970's are hard to pay for and are low on the list of national concerns. One of the jobs we must do is to make sure that the particular problems associated with system-built homes are recognised as a national issue. We must campaign not just for housing policies themselves, but for social security policies which take care of those with hugely expensive heating systems and give people a right to the heat necessary for tolerable living. There is much for this Company to achieve. I greatly regret my absence today but I am confident that there will be future opportunities to meet with you".

Sharon O'Callaghan (Clapton Park Tenants Association) testified to the Conference about the appalling condition and poor management of the tower blocks at Hackney Park. As a result of tenants' action, Hackney Borough Council

undertook a feasibility study to determine the cost of refurbishing the tower blocks. The cost of the work to one tower block at £4.5 million was equivalent to the cost of providing a new house for each tenant. With total housing investment resources of £30 million and a requirement for £25 million expenditure on the 5 tower blocks in Hackney Park alone, Hackney Borough Council does not have the resources to tackle the problems within its 84 tower blocks. Sharon O'Callaghan stressed the need for tenants and local authorities to work together to campaign for decent homes for everyone - if Mrs Thatcher can spend £400,000 on her retirement home, everyone should have a decent home.

Note: During the Opening Session some tenants from Hulme raised issues about consultation locally and the flow of information about the Project to tenants groups. It was agreed that these issues should be dealt with in the Workshops and in a special meeting at the end of the Conference