



Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-informed policy and law-making within Northern Ireland



The Spatial Context of Anti-Social Behaviour in Housing: An Under-Examined Dimension of Policy Scrutiny

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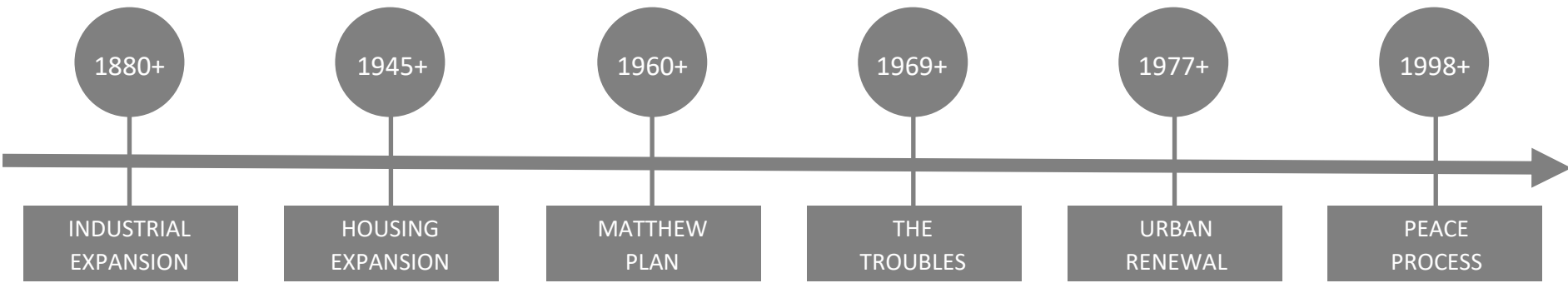
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17 June 2026

Consultation Outcome Report

Proposals to amend the legislation to help
tackle Anti-Social Behaviour in Housing

March 2025



The Origins of Contemporary Housing Environments



29.4. NIHT's Rathcoole Development 14 (four 15-storey Sectra blocks); photographed under construction in 1965.





29.2. High flats in the Belfast suburbs: two 15-storey blocks built at Rushpark for NIHT in 1963–5 by F. B. McKee. Photographed in 1988.



29.3. Belfast Corporation's Mount Vernon Estate Extension development: one 13-storey and one 11-storey block built in 1963–5 by Unit. Photographed in 1965. (*Belfast Newsletter*)

29.5. Prototype two-storey Sectra terraces built by NIHT at Monkstown, Newtownabbey: photographed following completion in 1970. The dwellings, each one Sectra tunnel wide, were timber-clad (the ground floor being coated with SBD Stonepaint). (*Belfast Newsletter*)





28.2. The continuing terrace tradition in Northern Ireland: Easiform three-bedroom houses built by Laing for Carrickfergus Borough Council at Woodburn Road in 1966–9; photographed in 1967. (Belfast Newsletter)

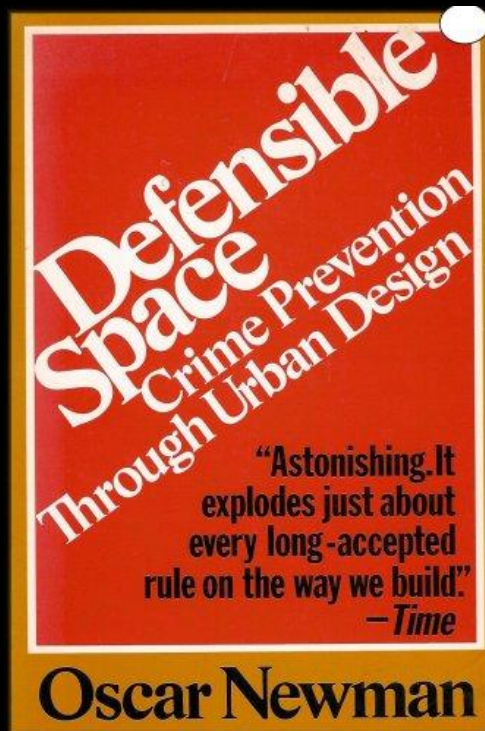




FIG. 6. Pruitt-Igoe, St. Louis, Missouri. View of vandalism to windows of public access galleries serving upper levels of the buildings. (Photo by Bob Williams)

narrow dictates of investment economics. Once built, they prove dangerous to live in and costly to maintain. The economic argument which led to their initial construction is reversed exactly. Their cost of operation is surpassed only by the social costs borne by the inhabitants. High-rise apartment developments are a new genre, with us little more than a hundred years. As a means for housing low- and middle-income American families, most date back to the early fifties. They are not the result of a careful application of the knowledge employed in housing the few, transferred to the problems of housing the many. Their form evolved in response to pressures for higher densities, with no reference to previous traditions and no attempt at understanding the range of need to be answered in human habitat. Beyond an occasionally successful composition, there is little evidence of any genius and now, in this period of high crime rates, they have become containers for the victimization of their inhabitants. This book presents an alternative—housing of medium density which through its physical design enables residents to control their living environment rather than become its victims.

Defensible space design returns to the productive use of residents the public areas beyond the doors of individual apartments: the hallways, lobbies, grounds, and surrounding streets—areas which are now beyond the control of inhabitants. Four elements of physical design, acting both individually and in concert, contribute to the creation of secure environments.

DEFENSIBLE SPACE 9

① The territorial definition of space in developments reflecting the areas of influence of the inhabitants. This works by subdividing the residential environment into zones toward which adjacent residents easily adopt proprietary attitudes.

② The positioning of apartment windows to allow residents to naturally survey the exterior and interior public areas of their living environment.

③ The adoption of building forms and idioms which avoid the stigma of peculiarity that allows others to perceive the vulnerability and isolation of the inhabitants.

④ The enhancement of safety by locating residential developments in functionally sympathetic urban areas immediately adjacent to activities that do not provide continued threat.

Defensible space can be made to operate in an evolving hierarchy from level to level in the collective human habitat—to extend from apartment to street. It is a technique applicable to low-density row-house groupings as well as to developments composed of high-rise apartment buildings. The small cluster of apartments at each floor of a multi-story building is the first level beyond the apartment unit where occupants can be made to extend the realm of their homes and responsibilities. The

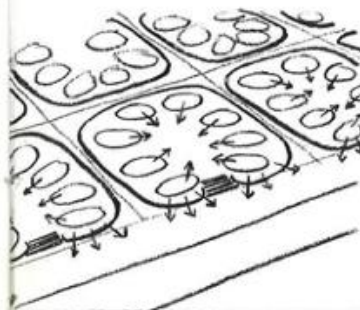
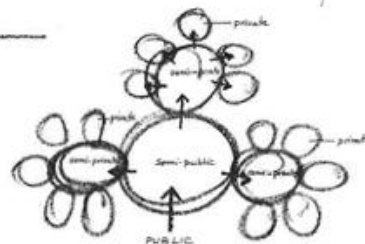
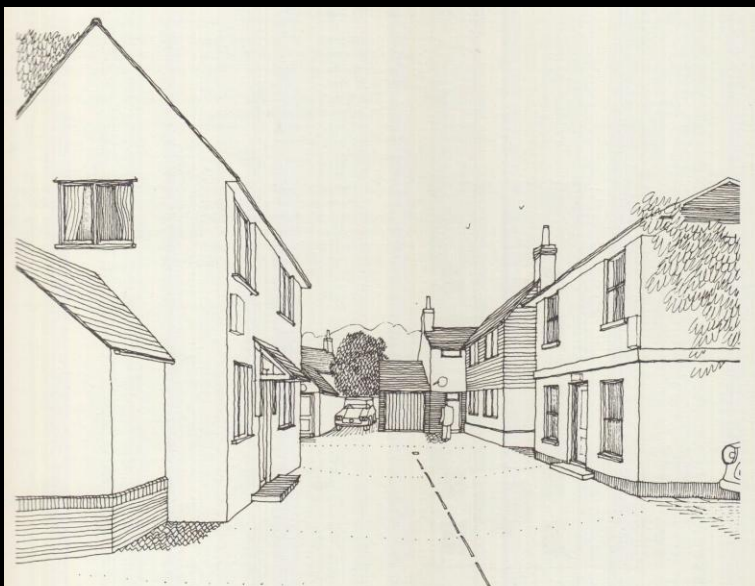


FIG. 7. Defensible Space. Schematic sketch illustrating territorial definition reinforced with surveillance opportunities (arrows).

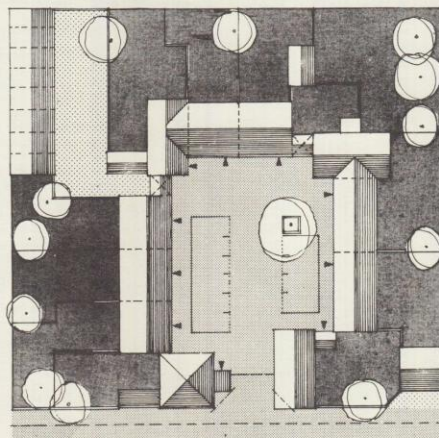
FIG. 8. Hierarchy of Defensible Space. Schematic diagram illustrating evolving hierarchy of defensible space from public to private. Arrows indicate entries at different levels of the hierarchy.



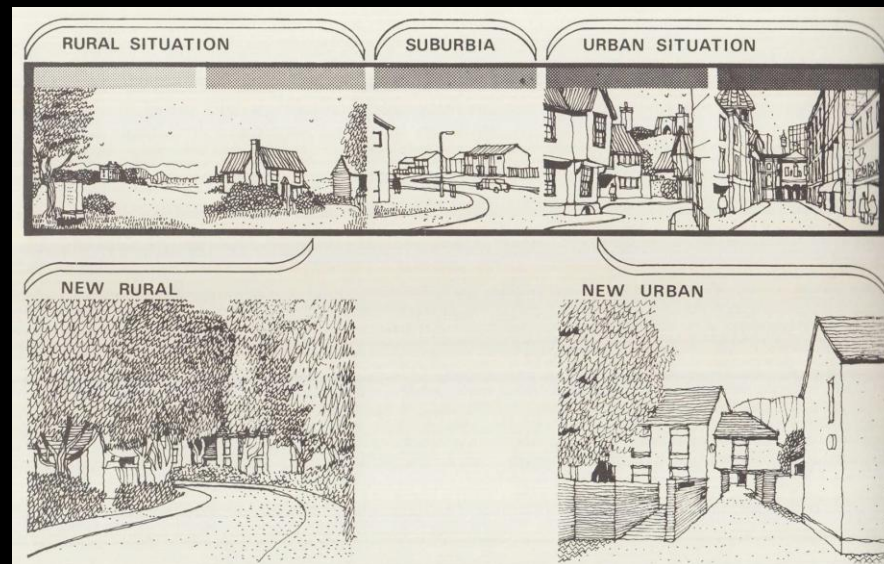
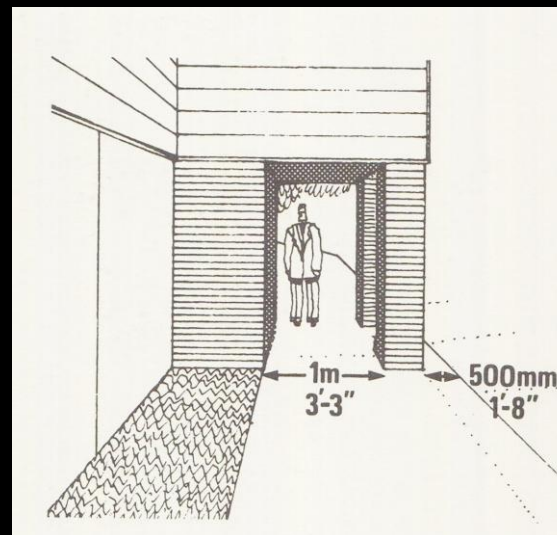


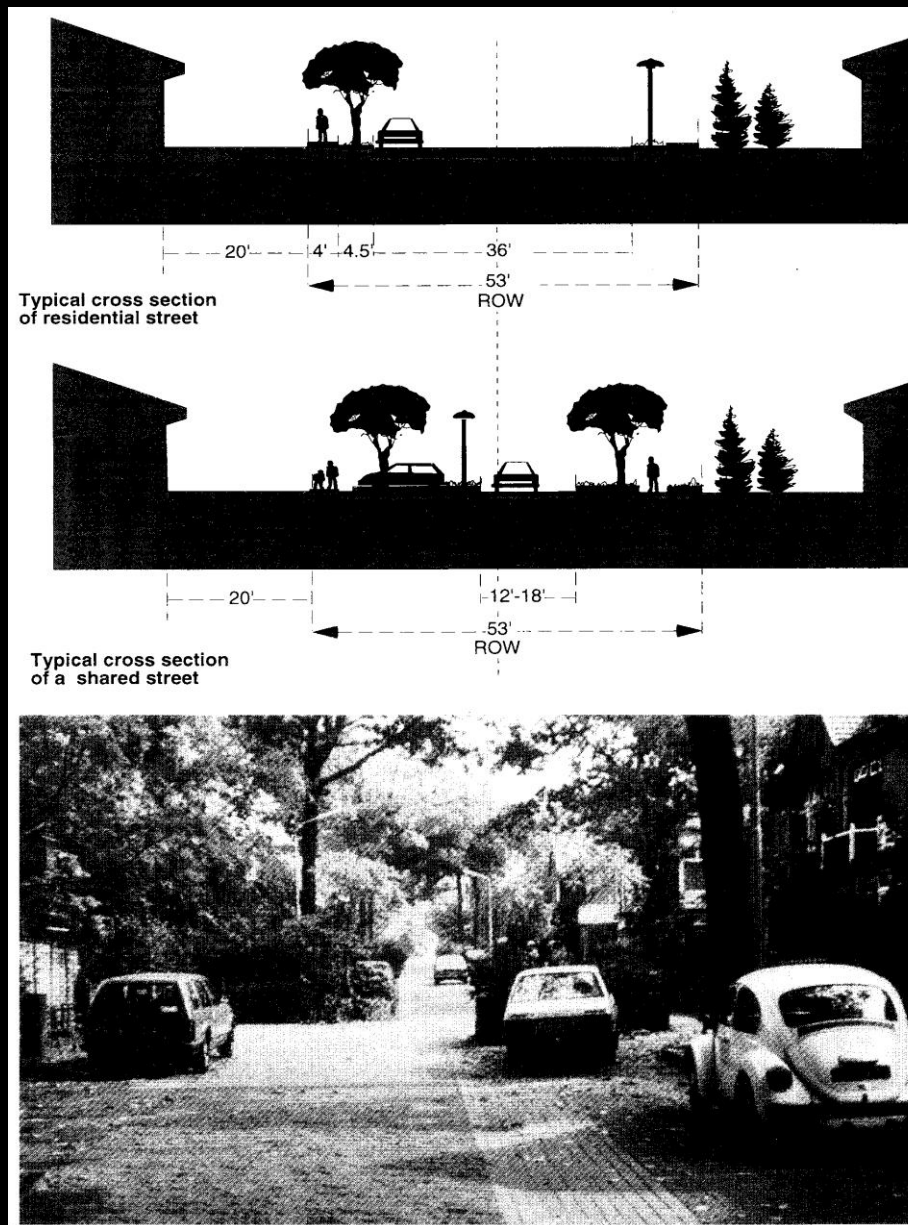
4.151 d Sketch of mews court (see Fig.4.151c)

KEY
P Parking
G Garage
△ Front door
→ Main prospect
— 2m. wall
Minimum highway area required in court
Private zone
Public zone
Adopted highway in public zone



4.151 e Mews court (square)





(Ben-Joseph, 1995)

TCR. 10:00:28:19*









Pre-Redevelopment

- High Permeability
- Open-Ended Spaces
- Interconnected Streets
- No ownership



Post-Redevelopment

- Reduced Permeability
- Enclosed Residential Spaces
- Territorial Definition
- Passive Surveillance



Areas for Policy Scrutiny: **Visibility**



Areas for Policy Scrutiny: Responsibility



Areas for Policy Scrutiny: **Territoriality**



Areas for Policy Scrutiny: **Evidence**



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