

A Word With Planners

LAND - VALUE MAPS ARE NEEDED

A CHARTERED SURVEYOR who has always accepted "the idea that wealth in land created by the community should belong to the community" presented an interesting paper at the planners' conference in St. Andrews last month. He is Mr. Bryan Anstey, B.Sc., F.R.I.C.S., F.A.I., F.I.A.S., well known for his work in connection with the City's Barbican redevelopment scheme. His theme was the problem which land values pose for planners. They needed to know not only the pattern of distribution of land values at any moment, but what it was before certain changes occurred, and to be able to forecast, and check, changes in values arising from planning.

Even in the most simple cases, land values constantly present planners with problems. "There may be certain obvious needs, certain obvious sores, an area of bad housing, a traffic snarl, a growing demand for factory accommodation. At once troubles start which involve land values. The bad housing—shall a plan be made for rehousing in that area or elsewhere? The cost of land elsewhere must be considered. How to unravel the traffic snarl? Shall we demolish the corners of the cross-roads, including the Banks which stand at those corners, or construct a by-pass? Immediately we have to consider, comparatively, the land costs, and wonder whether there is any way of recouping the immediate expenditure. But planners are groping. True, they have the District Valuer, or the Borough Valuer or the County Valuer, as the case may be, to whom they can turn, but what has he got? He only has a number of unrelated statistics—except in a very few cases where he may have been fortunate enough to have acquired already a fairly large number of properties so that a value pattern for that particular area emerges willy-nilly."

Planners needed value contour maps showing the distribution of land values by means of *isovals*. "Isovals are lines drawn upon a value contour map through points of equal land value and they delimit zones in which the land value lies between those values indicated by the bounding isovals. The isovals can be drawn at such intervals as may be convenient." Practicing valuers, though inclined to be sceptical, could produce such maps without great difficulty. "The best way of enlisting their support and demonstrating the practicability of the idea is to draw a supposed value contour map of an area with which they are intimately familiar. It usually is not more than five minutes before they start correcting the position of your isovals for you."

Such a map would reveal the reason, if there was one, why a land price in a particular area was higher than its neighbours. Planners would be able to forecast, and measure subsequently, the effects on land values of planning changes. Mr. Anstey produced such a map for

central Hendon ten years ago and similar maps of two areas in the City had been published in *Planning Outlook*, Vol. III No. 3, 1955.

This is a constructive proposal, supported by sound argument, and addressed to an important section of present society. But why should only planners have so useful a tool? Land value maps such as those periodically published in Denmark* should be published for use primarily by the revenue and rating authorities, and be publicly available. They would be no less useful to planners than those Mr. Anstey favours and would be immensely helpful to everyone in the property world. Homeseekers would find them most useful. Legislation to tax and rate land values would be readily secured once such maps were generally available: to organise an irresistible popular demand for reform would be child's play. That, of course, is why such maps are not printed!



MR. ANSTEY'S proposed method for restoring the land to the people by a form of nationalisation is open to grave objection. It would vest the State—and planners—with unlimited power. *Prima facie* it would be discriminatory in its incidence.

Mr. Anstey said: "Land essentially belongs to the Community for it is by his membership of a community that a man's title is protected. In *due course*, therefore, ownership of the land should revert to the Community—after a period during which the tenure owner can use it, can improve it and can himself profit by his improvement—and the revision should not be so sudden as to cause a rush of blood to planners' heads. The length of the tenure can be adjusted to suit the genuine needs of planning. The certainty of ultimate reversion gives planners their security; they need not shorten the term until they are genuinely sure of their plans and of the community's needs. Moreover, they can keep their compensation at a minimum by judicious timing of their purchase and regrant of tenures. They need not wait until their plans (or others') have matured and raised market prices against them, but neither need they purchase now and leave land derelict for 30 years (as Brighton Council, for example, were recently complaining they had had to do). Incidentally, the operation of transference of all *reversionary* values to the Community could be made as painless as the great Tithe Reform, and its assessment would pose no problem for valuers though it would present them with a certain amount of work."

DANISH LAND VALUE MAPS. A few atlases are available (Price 2s. 6d. each) from our offices. Also available: Single sheet facsimile reproduction of central section of Copenhagen Map (1950 valuation) with explanation. Price 3d.