Influence of public health and safety matters in the city

Towns are and were always associated with trade and power[R1]. Although towns as well as humans have to develop. They were formed and shaped by numbers of various factors. This essay would show how have public health and safety matters in the past influenced the invention of the city?

One of the very first and obvious that come to mind are strict British fire regulations, clearly and rightly linked by most to the Great Fire of London. In its history London as a city had great amounts of fires in its account. One of first severe recorded fires of London happened in 1135. It put down most of the city between St Paul's and St Clement Danes in Westminster as well as famous London Bridge. " Little wonder London suffered from fires: housing and commercial premises existed together; a Norman law banned house fires after dark, but was probably ignored; buildings were largely made of wood and thatch; and no organised fire brigade existed."(*The 12th of July 1212 AD, Great Fire of London 1212* , n. d.). It took well over 70 years and another huge fire, on 12th July 1212. This fire and figure of 3000 deaths, still appears in the Guinness Book of Records, even though perhaps exaggerated. Those fires caused people to consider about building rules. In effect ' legislations' as well as methods to abide them were introduced. Primitive and very first form of fire protection was something as simple as banning thatched roofs in entire London. By its first mayor Henry Fitzailwin. He also signed a document saying: " Complaints about building nuisances could be brought by one neighbour against another. The mayor and aldermen settled such cases in a court called the Assize of Nuisance". Judgements were advised by appointed masons and carpenters. (*History of Building Regulations in the British Isles* , 2014)

Other British cities started follow London's lead. The actual turning point in building history was fire of 1666.[R2]Fire known as the Great Fire of London started in the bakery on Pudding Lane and very soon started spreading west reaching beyond Roman city walls. On 4th September wind direction changed, it headed and almost reached the Tower of London. During the firefighting process " King Charles II personally helped fight the fire. He lifted buckets of water and threw money to reward people who stayed to fight the flames."(*Museum of London – Frequently asked questions* , n. d.) Quenching the fire is considered to have been successful due two factors: the strong east winds died down, and the Tower of London garrison used gunpowder to create firebreaks, and stop further spread eastward. (*Great Fire of London – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia* , n. d.). It's believed that as a consequence of this fire 80% of capital was burned to the ground. Inevitably disaster of this scale couldn't happen again. Therefore London Rebuilding Act of 1667 was introduced.[R3]

This document created foundations of city/master planning as well as some other areas of modern building regulations. Was the very first to specify how city planning was to be regulated (i. e. Certain streets need to be wider depending on intensity and purpose of use). It was describing what matters and how they should be resolved by judges. Also specifying thickness and location of walls, including party walls. It introduced the idea of the commission designing cityscape as well as commission to approve location and shape, as well as materials used in new buildings. All buildings from that point onwards were to be built of brick or stone. It also regulated minor issues like precipitation management, maximum overhangs, which

previously were making already narrow streets even narrower and tighter. That was introduction to the idea of more pleasant cities, even though done for practical reasons. Some more health and safety rules were issued.[R4]

Even though this law was extremely precise for that time. It was written by local government of London and was to be obeyed only during rebuilding of the city. As effect of that British Isles were left without public law. In 1898 Ebenezer Howard initiated " The Garden City Movement". Garden cities were designed and intended to be self-contained, self-sufficient communities. Separated and surrounded by tracks of open, green areas. Taking inspiration and trying to make a utopian dream of Sir Thomas More come truth. Howard's idealise garden city was using clear zoning system. Keeping residential and industrial development areas separate, allowed " smokeless" idea of the city to develop. They would be populated by 32000 people on around 6000 acres (2400 ha). Planned in concentric circles, when fully populated another garden city would develop nearby. Several of these would be clustered ' orbiting' around the central city (populated by 50000 people).

[R5]" The Garden City Association set itself the ambitious task of developing a first garden city. Work on the chosen site at Letchworth began in 1903 and by 1914 it housed 9, 000 inhabitants."(*The birth of town planning – UK Parliament* , n. d.) Letchworth was very innovative and successful, it populated 33500 people. It was possibly impractical to use concentric plan, although principles were kept. Letchworth introduced roundabout (1909) and was very first example of ' green belt'. This project didn't require authorising legislations, although it was inspirational to " garden suburbs". These were first introduced in Hampstead. Endorsed by Parliament in 1906, in what has

been called " Hampstead Garden Suburb Act[R6]". This document legislated that distance between the two houses on opposite sides of the road, were to be not less than 50 feet (15. 24m) apart. And that there should be no more than 8 houses per acre (4046. 9m2).[R7]

' Back-to-back' houses, so popular in industrial Victorian developments. During the industrial revolution " great influx of workers and their families into the rapidly industrialised towns during the 1800's, this number increased massively and the problems of over-population became disastrous"(*Public Health – History of medicine* , n. d.). This was revealed by the report of Liverpool's first medical officer of health (Dr Duncan). It stated that – third of the city's population lived on earth floored cellars of back to back houses. (*The birth of town planning – UK Parliament* , n. d.) Without any ventilation and sanitation with as many as 16 people living in one room, these were surely not what those cellars were designed for and what they could withstand. They were made illegal in 1909 due to Housing and Town Planning Act, as there was concern that it could be the starter of the new chain reaction effect of plague for example similar in effect to London's Great Fire.[R8]

Letchworth and Hampstead was the main inspiration for that 1909 Act. It also took inspiration of garden city movement principles. Not a surprise that the Garden City Association actively lobbied for it. This also encouraged to use ' Garden City' principles. Leading the way to the more enjoyable urban environment and more flexibility in terms of design. This act obligated local authorities to use town planning, and control building standards. Specified the job of local governments on what they can and can't do. The new law

formed the guide on how to plan cities and how to build safely. It also specified land law, how and where working class housing should be built. Also, considering health and safety of citizens and future residents, which could be named as a form of sustainable design.[R9]

As earlier mentioned planning law has been changing and adapting for past years. Even though fire regulations in the UK are possibly one of the strictest in Europe. As statistics show there is a lot of improvement to be made. World of planning needs people like Ebenezer Howard, idealist and dreamers that design, plan and improve urban and world environment – in effect making world more enjoyable. In modern cities main perplexity are sustainability and public health. It's not easy to decrease obesity and other so called civilization diseases. The rate of these could be lowered by eliminating factors that do or may cause it. The main ones being: lack of physical activity, unnatural/unhealthy diet, polluted air and some more (*Diseases of modern civilisation — Frank Fenner Foundation* , n. d.). These may and should be considered at design stage. To improve physical activity. It's necessary to increase the amount of public transport used, as well as increase amount of playgrounds. Enhancing physical activity from early years, followed by footpaths, parks or other green areas. Obviously there is very little designer or architect can do about human diet. Nevertheless, what could be done is to design green markets into town scape. These would make fresh, naturally grown, healthy fruits/vegetables effortlessly accessible. Another in theory inaccessible area for urban planners is air pollution, as we can't actively decrease pollution. Already Ebenezer Howard has suggested to use town zoning to move industrial expansion out on the peripheries of

towns. In the long term this would decrease the amount of polluted air in towns, by distributing it more evenly across open areas, and most likely lower the urban island effect.

All of those examples show how past events were effecting town planning. It proves that there is a set of ingredients and stimuli. They all effect planning law and planning methods. Urban environment is always changing and it is hard to design it well. This is why there are groups of urban planners, architects, designers and others working to improve the design of towns. This has been changing for hundreds, or even thousands of years, and they would be. Changes are inevitable, what is now countryside in 10 years, or even less could be new suburbs. This should stimulate designers and visionaries to improve inner urban scape, resolve current and anticipate future issues and address them today.

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[R1]Emersion of towns

[R2]Fire of 1135 and predominantly 1212

[R3]Great fire of London

[R4]London rebuilding act

[R5]The garden city movement

[R6]http://www. hgs. org. uk/history/h00012000. html

[R7]Letchworth and Hampstead Garden Suburb Act

[R8]Back to back houses and their banister

[R9]A bit about 1909 act