# How We Forget about the "Environment": The United Kingdom's Department of Environment, 1970

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## I. Introduction

Marsham Street, Westminster, is not a remarkable area in central London: it is a narrow street mostly consisting of brick buildings from the 1920s, a church, and a few multi-story residential blocks completed in the early 2000s. This type of fragmented urbanscape engendered by piecemeal redevelopment can be found throughout central London, a city that is known for the absence of major urban planning interventions in its modern history.[1] If one looks carefully, however, on one side of Marsham Street there is a sign for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Home Office, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. These government departments determine everyday life in the U.K.: the Home Office decides who is deemed part of the country's population, while the other two departments shape the daily environments.

**1** Michael Hebbert, *London: More by Fortune than Design* (London, 1998)

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This government building, also known as 2 Marsham Street, is barely distinguishable from its surroundings. (See figure 1.) The most noticeable architectural intervention is the extensive use of louvres on the façade for reducing energy emission and consumption. Alongside the well-designed landscape features, these elements supposedly signifying care for the environment.[2] In addition to government offices, the 2 Marsham Street development includes shops, affordable housing, and a nursery. The architect, Terry Farrell, introduced small passageways between the government offices to create a more democratic and transparent look. This hodgepodge design can be attributed to the fact that the development is a result of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) mechanism introduced by the United Kingdom's government in the 1990s.[3] The private sector was incentivized to fund public sector buildings and infrastructure. For 2 Marsham Street, the design was created with the assumption that a private developer might later take over the buildings if the government agencies decided to move out. In other words, the government agencies that shape the environments of the U.K. are housed in an architecture that they barely control themselves.

The current physical manifestation of these government departments is noticeably different from its predecessor. In November 1970, the British government established the Department of the Environment (DoE) through a merger of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG), the Ministry of Transport (MoT), and the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works (MPBW).[4] The creation of the DoE was significant because it was supposedly the world's first central governmental environmental department, predating the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of the United States by a few weeks.[5] The DoE was a direct result of the reorganization of the British civil service following the recommendations of the report of the Fulton Committee (1966–1968).[6] Its creation has therefore been examined in studies on British political science and history.[7]

**2** "Home Office to move to £311m complex," *The Guardian* (UK), March 26, 2002, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/mar/26/immigrationpolicy.

**3** "Ugly sisters facelift tightens PFI spreads with triple-A secured bonds via Barclays and RBC," *Euroweek* (22 March 2002): 65.

**4** The Secretary of State for the Environment Order 1970 (1970, No. 1681). Available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1970/1681/made.

**5** The planning for the EPA started in 1969 but the Agency was formally established on 4 December 1970. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "The Guardian: Origins of the EPA," *EPA Historical Publication* 1 (Spring 1992), https://www.epa.gov/archive/epa/aboutepa/guardian-origins-epa.html.

**6** *The Civil Service Report of the Committee 1966-68*, United Kingdom Command Papers, Cmnd. 3638; Geoffrey K. Fry, *Reforming the Civil Services: The Fulton Committee on the British Home Civil Service of 1966–1968* (London, 1993).

**7** Paul Draper, *Creation of the D.O.E.* (London, 1977).

**Figure 1.** Current government office building on the 2 Marsham Street site, London, designed by architect Terry Farrell; photographed by the author, October 2024.

At the time of its founding, the physical presence of the DoE reflected its significance: in 1971, the DoE moved into its new headquarters on Marsham Street. The Marsham Street Towers, as the original headquarters was often called, consisted of three 200-foot high-rise blocks connected by a four-story podium (see figure 2). The Marsham Street Towers were designed by Eric Bedford, the then–Chief Architect of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, who became known most notably for his design of the Post Office Tower in central London (later the BT Tower).[8] The Marsham Street Towers bore the hallmarks of postwar architectural modernism: they were reinforced concrete structures in the form of linear slab blocks, completed with concrete mullions and repetitive windows that further accentuated the scale of the building and the bureaucracy it contained.[9] Almost as soon as they were completed, the Towers drew fierce criticism, including a review describing the building as "a crude piling up of accommodation." The irony that the DoE, which oversaw research, standards, policies, and other decisions about the built environment, was housed in "the most inappropriate building in London," was not lost on journalists, historians, and former

**8** Paul Lewis, "Eric Bedford, Who Changed London's Skyline, Dies at 91," *New York Times,* 31 August 2001.

**9** H.E. Mills, "Government Offices, Horseferry Road, London SW1," *The Structural Engineer* (October 1967), 337-349.

**Figure 2.** Photo of the Marsham Street Towers in 1974. There are very few pictures that captured all three towers because the street is too narrow. RIBA Photo Collection. Photographed by Bill Toomey. Reproduced by permission.

government officials.[10] Architectural historian Elain Harwood, for example, observed that "Marsham Street had been violently disliked by a series of environment secretaries" and was unpopular among its occupants, too.[11] The Marsham Street Towers, which gained the nickname "the Three Ugly Sisters," remained the DoE's headquarters until 1997 and were later demolished in 2002.[12]

The original intentions behind the creation of the DoE, alongside the demolished Marsham Street Towers, are now mostly forgotten in British environmental debates. Pollution reduction and ecological protection, which are the current Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' prime concerns, were not high priorities in 1970. Instead, the original purpose of the DoE can perhaps be better described as improving life in the U.K. through the environment. This purpose was articulated in "The Reorganisation of Central Government," the 1970 white paper announcing the creation of the DoE:

> It is increasingly accepted that maintaining a decent environment, improving people's living conditions and providing adequate transport facilities all come together in the planning of development. These are among the main functions of local authorities and are having an ever-increasing impact on ordinary

**10** David Rock, "The Architecture of Compromise," *Built Environment* 1 (1972): 448–453, 451.

**11** Elain Harwood, Susie Barson, and Emily Cole, "Tall Buildings: Aspects of Their Development and Character in England," English Heritage Historical Analysis & Research Team Reports and Papers 59 (London, 2002), 81.

**12** Matthew Richard, "Bye Bye Blunder," *Building*, 17 May 2002, https://www.building.co.uk/focus/bye-bye-blunder/1018420.article.

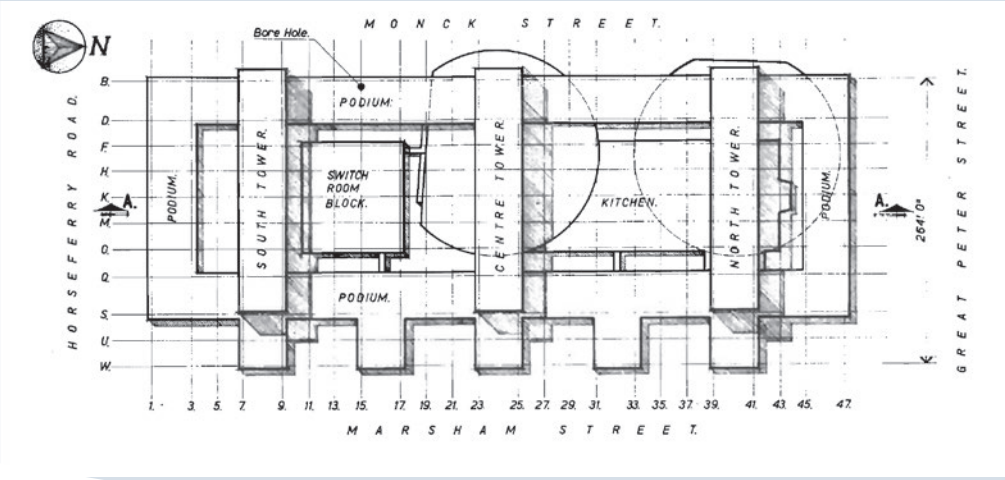



**Figure 3.** Roof plan of the Marsham Street Towers showing the towers and the podium. From: *The Structural Engineer* 45 (October 1967), 337.

> people, in town and country and especially in and around the large urban areas. Because these functions interact, and because they give rise to acute and conflicting requirements, a new form of organisation is needed at the centre of the administrative system . . . the new department will be responsible for the whole range of functions which affect people's living environment.[13]

In this effort, the white paper explained, a new "super" department would be created through the merger of the Ministries of Housing and Local Government (MHLG), Public Buildings and Works (MPBW), and Transport (MoT). These three ministries could broadly be described as the governmental agencies that directly intervened in the built environment in the U.K., through the planning, construction and management of buildings, infrastructure, and also entire towns and cities.[14] In this paper, we will grapple with different articulations of the environment and their supposed effects on the population. What was the British government's environmental agenda in 1970? How does the vision become forgotten?

We approach these questions by focusing on the construction and representation of the DoE in its early years. By centering the Marsham Street Towers, we will parse out the roles played by architecture and urban planning, which may shed more light on the British government's ability, or lack thereof, to use the environment to shape human behavior. Then, we will examine the DoE's attempts to represent itself as an institution and the difficulties it encountered. In each part

**13** *The Reorganisation of Central Government.* United Kingdom Command Papers, cmnd 4506. Draper, *Creation of the D.O.E.*, 8-9.

**14** It is important to note that the DoE's remit varied across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. We will refer to "the United Kingdom" for simplicity, while aware there are details that we cannot address within the scope of this paper.

of this paper, we consider how the making and unmaking of knowledge about the environment, the civil service government bureaucracy, and the DoE destabilized one another. Through this triangulation, we hope to comprehend the reasons behind, and the implications of, the current obscurity of the original articulation of the meaning of "the environment" in the creation of the DoE.

## II. The Architecture of the Environment

As an architectural historian, I am interested in definitions of the environment because modern architectural and urban theories have been shaped by competing narratives about the environment. The use of the environment and nature to justify the beauty and value of architecture can be traced back to the nineteenth century, through theorists including John Ruskin.[15] In the early twentieth century, the importance of controlling the environment was reinstated by Patrick Geddes, who incorporated biological ideas in his sociological and town planning research.[16] Scholars have shown that the ways British planners, conservationists and governmental officials shaped towns and cities, in different parts of the world, drew from concepts defined as "ecologies" and "ecosystems."[17] Later, in the second half of the 20th century, mobilizations for environmental protection, pollution reductions, and conservation established the environment as a primary concern in architecture and urban design. In turn, buildings, infrastructure, and urban interventions modify the environment, and even unrealized architectural proposals can shape perceptions of the environment. Architectural design and research acknowledge the fluidity of the concepts of the environments: environments are relative to what they environ.[18]

In British architectural history, the political nature of the creation and management of the built environment has been well examined. For example, there are ample studies on the instrumental role played by the Ministry of Housing and

**15** John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849; London, 1989)

**16** Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London, 1990).

**17** Peder Anker, *Imperial Ecology: Environment Order in the British Empire, 1895–1945* (Cambridge, MA, 2018); Simone Schleper, *Planning for the Planet: Environmental Expertise and the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 1960–1980* (New York, 2019).

**18** Necdet Teymur, *The Environmental Discourse* (London, 1982).

Local Government in twentieth-century British architecture and urbanism.[19] There are also investigations into the works of local authorities like the London County Council or semi-independent organizations such as the Building Research Station.[20] Both the local councils and research institutes would later be incorporated within the DoE. Scholarship on preeminent British architects has often touched upon their roles as agents of the state, particularly during and after the First and Second World Wars and in the (former) colonies.[21] These complex relationships suggested that not only architecture is governed by policies; but public opinion, scientific discovery and professional expertise also influenced the ways the government envisaged places and spaces.[22] Existing studies have revealed there were competing environmental articulations leading up to the creation of the DoE. For example, in the late 1950s, a group of prominent architect-planners positioned themselves as "the Environmentalists" in their effort to frame urban renewal debates.[23] The label of the environment, in this effort, was to review and improve on the wholesale demolition-and-rebuild approach commonly employed during post-war reconstruction.[24] Then, in the early 1960s, the publication of the influential *Traffic in Towns* report, shed more light on the complexity of the urban environment.[25] *Traffic in Towns* highlighted the economic, social, and demographic implications of the increased presence of motor vehicles. The report called

**19** John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing* (London, 2018); Otto Saumarez Smith, "Central Government and Town-Centre Redevelopment in Britain," *The Historical Journal* 58 (2015): 217–244. Another often-cited example is the published diary of Richard Crossman, the Secretary of the State of Housing and Local Government which bears significant insight into Harold Wilson's government: Richard Crossman, *The Crossman Diaries* (London, 1991).

**20** Anthony Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture: A History of Modern Architecture in Britain* (Toronto, 1970), 166–180; Mark Swenarton, "Breeze Blocks and Bolshevism: Housing Policy and the Origins of the Building Research Station 1917-21," *Construction History* 21 (2005): 69–80.

**21** Gordon Cherry and Leith Penny, *Holford: A Study in Architecture, Planning and Civic Design* (London, 1986); Iain Jackson, "Tropical Architecture and the West Indies: From Military Advances and Tropical Medicine to Robert Gardner-Medwin and the Networks of Tropical Modernism," *Journal of Architecture* 22 (2017): 710–738.

**22** Aggregate, *Governing by Design: Architecture, Economy, and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh, 2012).

**23** Lionel Brett, "The Environmentalists," *Architectural Review*, May 1959, 303–305.

**24** John R. Gold, "A SPUR to Action? The Society for the Promotion of Urban Renewal, 'Anti-Scatter' and the Crisis of City Reconstruction, 1957–1963," *Planning Perspectives* 27 (2012): 199–223.

**25** Colin Buchanan and Geoffrey Crowther, *Traffic in Towns: A Study of the Long Term Problems of Traffic in Urban Areas* (London, 1963).

for more sophisticated methods in forecasting, planning, and controlling the ways people moved around. In other words, at the time the term "environment" was commonly associated with the concerns for urban renewal and vehicular mobility, both which could be understood as reactions towards challenges brought by urbanization and modernization in postwar Britain. Following a series of governmental interventions in research and higher education, the term "environment" was then used to suggest the disciplines of architecture, town planning, and construction were adopting a more scientific approach. For example, a proposal for a Research Council of the Built Environment was put forward by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in 1964.[26] Although this proposal was rejected, a semi-independent research institute called the Centre for Environmental Studies was established in 1967, with a focus on research into regional planning and large-scale urban modeling.[27] Various architectural schools in universities were also restructured or renamed as schools of the Built Environment or Environmental Studies in the 1970s.

Despite these ongoing explorations, the concept of the "environment" created substantial confusion during the establishment of the DoE. The 1970 "The Reorganisation of Central Government" white paper, for instance, stated the potential benefits of the merger of different ministries but did not explain why "Environment" was the title under which the three ministries coalesced. Various DoE documents from the first years of its creation highlight this absence. For example, a 1971 pamphlet for new employees began by asking "The Department of the Environment. What sort of creation is it?" The draft pamphlet stated "Having an organisation named the Department of the Environment does not give much indication of its objectives and scopes."[28] Although these statements were removed from the final version of the pamphlet, they nonetheless reflected the confusion among the DoE staff. For example, in 1971, civil servant J. A. L. Gunn, who was tasked with reviewing the DoE's achievements in its first year, argued

**26** RIBA, "Research into Problems of Planning and Construction: RIBA Statement," *RIBA Journal*, March 1964, 112.

**27** Juliana Yat Shun Kei, *Inventing the Built Environment* (London, 2024), 104–120.

**28** "Draft: The Department of the Environment: An Introductory Pamphlet for New Entrants," June 1971, AT 1/81, The National Archives (Kew, UK), hereafter abbreviated TNA. Archival sources from the National Archives of the United Kingdom cited in this paper include records of the Department of the Environment (designated AT), the Department of Economic Affairs (EW), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (HLG).

that one of the major challenges in his work was to determine the remit of the department's mission. Gunn stated that one could take a "narrow" view of the government's intervention in the environment, which was to "palliate or prevent things that are obnoxious to the sense." Alternatively, one could employ a "broad" definition considering the DoE's control over "the whole ambience in which our fellow citizens live, work, move and enjoy themselves."[29] The "Reorganisation" white paper that announced the creation of the DoE seemed to lean towards the "broad" definition, proposing that the Department would mobilize planning and the built environment to improve the life of the country's population. In Gunn's terms, we may also argue that the current U.K. government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' portfolio, focusing on pollution reduction and ecological protection, may in fact be interpreted as a narrowing of the government's environmental mission.

To consider how the U.K. government jettisoned the "broad" definition of the DoE's agenda, I build on social anthropologist Mary Douglas' study into how institutions "forget." In her critique of the functionalist approach, Douglas observed that institutions and disciplines discarded and then forgot aims and goals, sometimes simply because of distractions.[30] "Institutions," she explained, "create shadowed places in which nothing can be seen, and no question asked. They make other areas show finely discriminated detail, which is closely scrutinized and ordered."[31] At stake is that the forgotten things might also create and reinforce order and discipline. Douglas' argument is particularly useful for my analysis, which considers the DoE both as a bureaucracy and as the creator of knowledge about the environment. We should note that the environment is by nature a relative concept – it depends on what it environs. To put it bluntly, the environment of an individual is different from the environment of the individual in a group. The environment changes as one moves and when time passes. The shifts in the environment, importantly,

**29** J. A. L. Gunn to IP Bancroft, "The Environmental Function," memorandum, 14 April 1971, AT 1/121, TNA.

**30** Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (Syracuse, NY, 1986), 81–90.

**31** Douglas, *How Institutions Think,* 69–70.

may also engender transformations in what it environs. We therefore have to confront the unstable nature of the notion of "the environment" while trying to retrieve the original intentions in the creation of the DoE.

Before moving further, it is worth highlighting that most of the staff working in the DoE were civil servants, a term first devised to distinguish civilian employees from military personnel working for the U.K. government. By the nineteenth century, the "civil service" was introduced to refer to the non-political officers of the central government.[32] It has been associated with the permanent employees of the government, too. However, the civil service, just like the environment, should be understood as an institution that is open to interpretation. The DoE was established following the recommendation of the Fulton Committee on the Civil Service (1966–1968).[33] The Committee reassessed the expansion in civil services staffing and organization after the Second World War. Its final report suggested that combining ministries with similar portfolios could increase efficiency and eventually reduce the size of the civil services. The 1970 white paper announcing the creation of the DoE, whose full title was *The Reorganisation of Central Government*, stated explicitly that "government has been attempting to do much." It argued that, in the government's view, this situation had exerted undue burdens on industry and the United Kingdom's population at large. The reform, they envisioned, would redefine "the proper sphere of government in a free society."[34] In other words, the establishment of the DoE was also part of a redefinition of governmental functions, alongside a new articulation of "the environment."[35] The planning and execution of these reforms was carried out by both the Labour (1964-1970) and Conservative-led (1970-1974) government, indicating cross-party interests in the matter. Also worth noting is that this redefinition of the civil services happened at a time when economic downturns and slow growth had prompted the U.K. government to reconsider the postwar welfare state. At the time, the U.K.'s geo-political

**32** Gavin Drewry and Tony Butcher, *The Civil Service Today* (Oxford, 1988), 13.

**33** *The Civil Service Report of the Committee 1966-68*, Cmnd. 3638; Fry, *Reforming the Civil Services*.

**34** *The Reorganisation of Central Government*, Cmnd. 4506, p. 3.

**35** Hennessy, *Whitehall* (London, 1989), 222.

importance was shrinking as a result of decolonization and high Cold-War tension.[36] Therefore, when we consider how the DoE forgot about its earlier agenda, we will also look for the context in which these environmental debates unraveled, and how they manifested in the physical realities in the U.K.

One of the immediate contradictions in the creation of the DoE was that despite the rhetoric about "less government," the reorganization did not lead to an immediate reduction in the number of civil servants affiliated with the DoE. Moreover, although there were notable overlaps among the three ministries' portfolios, in the first years of the DoE, there were few substantial changes in their duties. (See table 1.) The three ministries were simply renamed "wings" and maintained their physical separation when they moved into the Marsham Street Towers in 1971.[37] One may even argue that the merger drew more attention to the bulk of the government, as witnessed by colloquial references to the Secretary of State of the Environment as an "overlord" – a senior minister who oversaw several departments.[38] This bulk also manifested itself physically in the skyline of London through Marsham Street Towers' dominating presence in the neighborhood. Because the three 200-foot buildings stood only half a mile away from the Palace of Westminster and other significant historic buildings along the Millbank of the River Thames, the rectangular and repetitive massing of the Towers contrasted strongly with the historical skyline of central London. Up close, the four-story podium occupied the full extent of the site and thus had an overwhelming presence in an area mostly made up of small streets and four to five-story buildings. The Marsham Street Towers created a perplexing urban experience: because of the narrow streets, the towers were in fact largely obscured from pedestrians' view. (See figure 3.) Hence, despite their height and importance, the Marsham Street Towers were not widely regarded as a landmark in London. In short, the Marsham Street Towers hardly created or projected an appealing built environment in central London.

**36** Peter Hennessy, *Winds of Change: Britain in the Early Sixties* (London, 2019), 21.

**37** Pamphlet on Work of DOE. AT 1/81. TNA.

**38** Draper, *Creation of the D.O.E.*, 1.

**Mapping of the Portfolios of the DoE and the Three Preceding Ministries**

| DoE | Ministry of Housing and Local Government | Ministry of Transport | Ministry of Public Buildings and Works |
|---|---|---|---|
| Transport Industries | Land Use Planning | Transport Planning | |
| Local Government and Development | Housing policy and programmes + Land use planning | | |
| Housing and Construction | Housing policy and programmes | | Construction industry sponsorship |
| [Environmental Protection] | [Protection of the environment] | [Major public sector land use development] | [Major public sector land use development] |

**Table 1.** Table produced from text in Paul Draper, *Creation of the D.O.E.* (London: 1977), 5.

However, we need to contextualize the Marsham Street Towers' reputation within the changing attitude towards postwar architectural modernism at the time.[39] The design and construction of the buildings between 1962 and 1971 occurred at a pivotal moment in architectural history in the U.K. The mid- to late-1960s were the highwater mark of modernist high-rise construction. In the mid-1960s, the completion of notable modernist commercial buildings such as New Zealand House (1963) and Space House (1965) in central London, as well as the Bull Ring in Birmingham (1964), seemed to suggest a paradigm shift in the urban environment. These constructions reflected the real estate market's boom-and-bust cycle between the late 1960s and 1970s. The fact that the volatility of the market was largely found in commercial real estate – which many were built in the modernist style – in turn tainted the public valuation of modernist towers.[40] In 1968, the partial collapse of Ronan Point, a high-rise council block following a gas leak, ignited further opposition towards modernist standardized construction.[41] By the time the DoE moved into the Marsham Street Towers, not only did the skyscrapers no longer convey a forward-looking image; they provoked skepticism about the government's ability to control construction safety, building standards, and the real estate market's adverse effect on the built environment.

**39** Hardwood, Barson, and Cole, "Tall Buildings," 84.

**40** David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain: 1957–1962* (London, 2014), 633-647.

**41** Holly Smith, "The Ronan Point Scandal: Architecture, Crisis and Possibility in British Social Democracy, 1968-93," *Modern British History* 34 (2023): 805-834.

In the postwar context, modernist architectural and urban design had been presented as an integral part of the emerging welfare state. Postwar new towns, public housing, schools, and community amenities were often planned and constructed according to modernist principles. This approach could be attributed to a myriad of causes: architects' and planners' aspirations, international influences, and the parallel pursuit of the modernization and industrialization of the construction and building industries.[42] The rapid growth in the demand and provision of transportation also lent weight to the popularization of modernist architecture and planning.[43] However, in the 1960s, modernist architecture became a visible scapegoat for disappointment with the postwar welfare state. In some cases, modernist design did create alienating and repetitive environments; yet as historian Guy Ortolano and others have suggested, some of the critiques of modernist planning and architecture might be attributed to inevitable issues in large-scale development.[44] New towns took time to become populated and well-run places. It is also not uncommon for newly completed buildings to require additional building work and maintenance, regardless of their style. However, in the mid and late 1960s, because there were so many towns and buildings being built and completed, there seemed to be endless issues associated with modernist planning, design, and construction.[45] The assessment of the architecture of the Marsham Street Towers can thus be attributed to the disappointments with the design and construction carried out by the DoE and its predecessors.

Architectural historians have also made a comparison between the Marsham Street Towers with an unrealized scheme for Whitehall, the historic seat of the United Kingdom central government, which was developed at around the same time.[46] Located less than a mile apart, the two schemes represented two notably different approaches to modern government architecture. The Whitehall scheme was designed by renowned architect-planner Leslie Martin, known for his

**42** Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete, and Dirk van den Heuvel, ed., *Architecture and the Welfare State* (London, 2015); Adrian Forty, "Being or Nothingness: Private Experience and Public Architecture in Post-War Britain," *Architectural History* 38 (1995): 25–35.

**43** Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London, 1980), 262–280.

**44** Guy Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress: From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism through an English New Town* (Cambridge, UK, 2019).

**45** Peter Mandler, "New Towns for Old: The Fate of the Town," in *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945–1964,* ed. Becky Conekin and Frank Mort (London, 1998), 208-227.

**46** James Dunnett, "Let's Demolish Whitehall," *Architectural Review,* 24 February 2014, https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/books/lets-demolish-whitehall.

leadership in advanced architecture research.[47] Although Martin's scheme was not realized, it remained an important manifestation of the "science and socialism" vision in 1960s U.K. The project design coincided with Prime Minister Harold Wilson's call to "harness socialism to science to lead to a Britain that is going to be forged in the white heat of scientific revolution."[48] Part of Wilson's "science and socialism" vision was to strengthen the importance of centralized planning, through incorporating advanced research and technological development.[49] Martin's Whitehall commission was first made by the previous government under Conservative leadership, but its design period spanned across Wilson's term. Its association with Wilson's "science and socialism" vision perhaps had little to do with the scheme or the architects' political outlook. Instead, such an assessment should be attributed to Martin's research-driven and experimental approach, presenting architectural design as a scientific endeavor. The design was derived from typological and geometrical experimentation: the proposed buildings carried forward the courtyard configurations of the existing surrounding structures. The buildings were stacked on top and interlocked with each other, forming a sort of a concrete lattice across the site. Martin argued that governmental departments should be able to expand and change more readily through the flexibility provided by the large, interconnecting floorplans in the mat building.

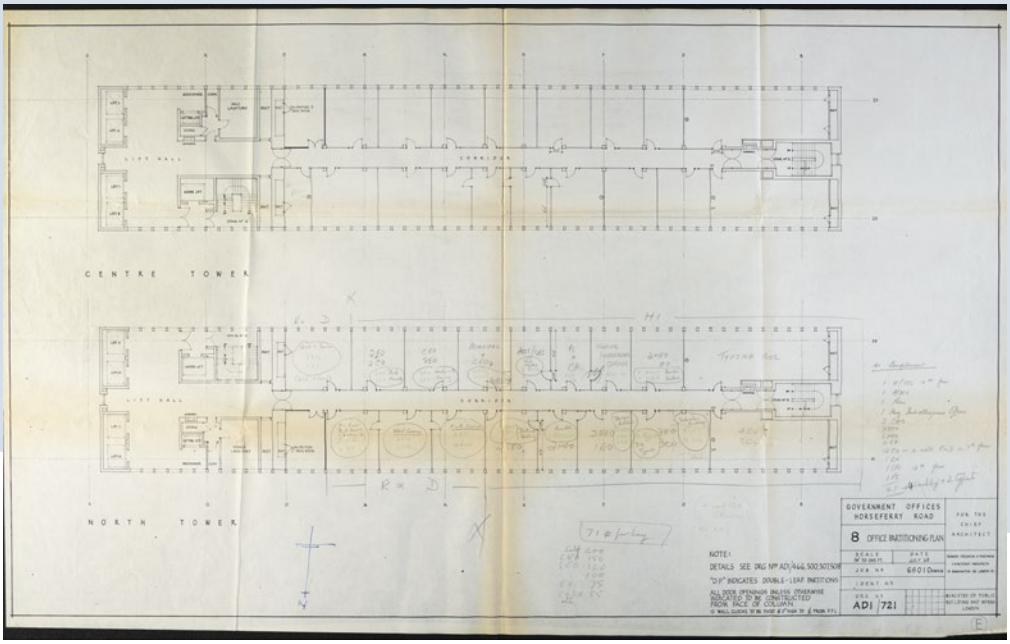
With hindsight, Martin's concern for flexibility was not misplaced: the small floorplates and rigid column grid of the Marsham Street Towers created significant problems for the DoE. For example, the department struggled to fit a large meeting table in the boardroom designated at the top of the north tower. (See figure 4.) The original intent of having a meeting room high up in the building for the enjoyment of the panorama of London did not work in reality because of the slow elevators as well as security and privacy concerns.[50] Moreover, unlike the Whitehall scheme, which was conceived as architectural

**47** Adam Sharr and Stephen Thornton, *Demolishing Whitehall: Leslie Martin, Harold Wilson, and the Architecture of the White Heat* (Farnham, UK, 2013).

**48** Kynaston, *Modernity Britain*, 336; Harold Wilson, "Extract from the 1963 Scarborough Conference," 1963. British Library Sound and Vision Blog. https://blogs.bl.uk/sound-and-vision/2023/10/recording-of-the-week-harold-wilsons-1963-pledge-to-harness-the-white-heat-of-a-scientific-revolutio.html

**49** Glen O'Hara, *From Dreams to Disillusionment: Economic and Social Planning in 1960s Britain* (Basingstoke, UK, 2007).

**50** "New Crown Offices, Horseferry Road," HLG 124/113, TNA.




research into how central government should be organized, the Marsham Street Towers signified a top-down and dated approach to the built environment. The rigid and deterministic outlook of the Towers obscured the fact that the DoE was overseeing a significant portfolio of interdisciplinary research, especially after the closure of the Ministry of Technology.[51] In contrast, although the Whitehall plan was not realized, it was deemed a manifestation of the forward-looking ethos of 1960s Britain in the eyes of architectural historians.[52]

The fate of Martin's Whitehall plan and the reputation of the Marsham Street Towers was both shaped by a competing environmental narrative that was emerging at the time. In the mid- and late 1960s, architectural and urban preservation was an issue that was drawing significant attention among the public, professionals, and politicians in the U.K. In part, the interest in the maintenance of old structures could be seen as a reaction against the demolish-and-rebuild approach commonly found in postwar reconstruction projects. Self-proclaimed "environmentalist" architectural professionals championed the incorporation of building rehabilitation and conservation as part of urban renewal and redevelopment.[53] Moreover, building preservation intersected with other political issues such as mobilizations for the rights of squatters, migrants, and workers; and with the policy question whether the

**Figure 4.** Typical floor plan (1968) of the Marsham Street Towers for the allocation of workspaces, showing the narrow column grid and room division. Source: "Allocation of space: standards for staff entitlement and positioning of strategic branches" (dated 1969), HLG 124/117, The National Archives of the UK (TNA), London.

**51** "DoE: Reiners Moves Up," *The Architects' Journal,* 28 July 1971, 184.

**52** Dunnett, "Let's Demolish Whitehall."

**53** Brett, "The Environmentalists"; Gold, "A SPUR to Action?"

government should subsidize owners of historic buildings to maintain their ageing properties.[54] These concerns elevated preservation to a matter that garnered wide-spread support. Martin's Whitehall Plan was delayed and eventually canceled in part because of opposition from preservation groups.

Meanwhile, it was ironic that the DoE – which inherited and expanded the architectural preservation portfolio from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government – was housed in a structure that demonstrated blatant disregard for its surrounding contexts. However, one could argue that the Marsham Street Towers were the victims of the arbitrariness of the planning system in the United Kingdom, too. Buildings on the Marsham Street site required approval from the Royal Fine Arts Commission, which evaluated the visual coherence of buildings and environmental interventions in central London. When a proposal for a governmental building was first made in the 1950s, the architect Robert Atkinson proposed a mid-rise courtyard structure with a pyramidal massing that would visually reduce the height of the building. The proposed design shared the same scale as nineteenth and early twentieth-century buildings around the site and would likely have been constructed with similar materials. But the Royal Fine Arts Commission disliked the bulkiness of the proposal and suggested that "a vertical character of a group such as the Rockefeller Centre" would be more suitable for the site.[55] Therefore, this earlier recommendation from the Royal Fine Arts Commission, which became part of the conditions for planning approval, directly shaped the final design of the Marsham Street Towers.

The issues encountered by the Marsham Street Towers and the Whitehall Plan also shed new light on the difficulties in examining how the government used the built environment to manage the population. In both schemes, we find different articulations of how architecture would be a driver for modernization, either urbanistically, technologically, or politically. The design had to respond to contemporary debates and to the complex

**54** Wayland Kennet, *Preservation* (London: 1972); Theo Crosby, *How to Play the Environment Game* (London, 1973).

**55** "Letter from the Royal Fine Arts Commission," 14 November 1950, HLG 79/979, TNA.

conditions found in the building's physical context. Moreover, the architect-planners also had to consider the layers of policies, standards, and controls implemented by previous governments and authorities. In other words, in envisioning how the environment could be mobilized to shape human behavior, the government would have to account for the time needed for the design and construction. As the Marsham Street Towers show, by the time such a process was completed, the building might express a dated vision. These two government headquarters designs can be understood as microcosm of the issues at stake in shaping and managing the built environment.

## III. Department of ___

Looking at the Marsham Street Towers more closely, contradictions between the physical condition of the building and the government's environmental vision come to the fore. In addition to the overlaps in their portfolios, another aspect of merging Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Ministry of Public Buildings and Works and Ministry of Transport in the Marsham Street Towers was that they were the three ministries with the most dire need for office space in London.[56] The Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, for example, had serious overcrowding issues, while the staff of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government was scattered in no less than 13 buildings across the city.[57] But the overlap in portfolios and their respective tasks also became a source of tension. Even during the planning stage of the Marsham Street Towers, correspondence among officers described the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and Ministry of Public Buildings and Works as "ill-matched bedfellows." Disputes about who could claim which tower, who controlled the main telephone line, and how to communicate among each other erupted almost immediately.[58] There were also fierce debates about the allocation of the towers. Because of the tight urban site and complicated underground conditions, the entrances and exits of the Marsham Street Towers were concentrated on the

**56** "The organization of MHLG and its interface with MoT," AT 1/4, TNA.

**57** "Letter from W. Dawson 'Horseferry Building,'" 12 November 1965, HLG 124/114, TNA; SWC Philips to K. Newis, 15 August 1964, HLG 124/113, TNA.

**58** See S.H. Godsell to S.W.C. Philips," 12 April 1965, and other files in HLG 124/113, TNA.

south side towards Horseferry Road.[59] The three ministries all claimed that their staff had responsibilities for the physical environment outside of the towers and fought over the occupation of the South Tower.[60] Moreover, since each of the former ministries occupied a separate tower, the merger at Marsham Street still did not dramatically enhance their collaboration. Civil servants working there complained about the long corridors and slow elevators, all of which resulted in long circulation and waiting times.[61] The discontent in the Marsham Street Towers seems particularly jarring considering that the DoE positioned itself as "the Department most concerned with improving the quality of living in our country. The happiness of each individual family will be very much affected by our decisions and by our actions."[62]

However, these day-to-day skirmishes could hardly account for the unraveling of the environmental vision behind the creation of the DoE. In fact, one might argue that by the time the Department occupied the Marsham Street Towers, this vision had already been jettisoned. In late 1969, when the potential reorganization of the civil services was first mooted, civil servants envisioned that the merger would result in a "Department for Local Government and Planning," or "Department for Local Government and Environmental Planning."[63] The insertion of the term "Planning" in the 1960s is worthy of highlighting. Since the closure of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning in 1951, there was a view among architect-planners, academics, and political figures that the government had overlooked the importance of physical planning in promoting regional and national developments.[64] By the early 1960s, the comparatively slow economic growth in the U.K., in comparison to other European countries, led to renewed interest in national and regional planning. In response, the Conservative government led by Harold Macmillan established the National Economic Development Council (NEDC) in 1962. When Labour came into power in 1964, they created the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), as well as several

**59** The Marsham Street site was once a nineteenth-century gas work plant which left behind two large holes in the ground. The holes were subsequently reinforced with 12-foot-thick concrete walls for military purposes, known as the North and South Rotundas. The podium was designed to cover these underground structures. As a result, there was a severe limitation on ground-floor access.

**60** "Notes of Staff Side's deputation," 28 March 1963, HLG 124/113, TNA.

**61** Hardwood, Barson, and Cole, "Tall Buildings," 80-85.

**62** Draper, *Creation of the D.O.E.*, 120–121, citing Peter Walker, "Secretary of State's Message," Department of the Environment, 12 November 1970.

**63** "Background to the Changes in Ministerial and Departmental Responsibility," AT 1/2, TNA.

**64** F. J. McCulloch, ed., *Land Use in an Urban Environment: A General View of Town and Country Planning* (Liverpool, 1961).

regional Economic Planning Boards, to draw up specific plans for implementing economic and physical planning at both the national and regional levels.[65]

Within the Department of Economic Affairs, "Environment Groups" made up part of the regional Economic Planning Boards, mostly comprised of architects and town planning experts to work out housing, urban renewal, and urban planning matters with regional and national development in mind.[66] The "Environment Group" focused on identifying physical planning issues that might require specific accommodations in the existing governmental organization, such as the integration of education provisions in economic and physical planning.[67] For example, the location of schools would affect the ways families lived and moved around, thus affect housing, transport, and economic activities of an area. Similarly, the balance between work and leisure, for the "Environment Group," required cross-departmental efforts. In other words, in the years leading up to the creation of the DoE, the environment was conceived as a signifier for a more holistic approach towards economic and physical planning. Although there were multiple iterations of the naming of the new Department throughout 1969 and 1970, one of the consistent frameworks was to use the "environment" to reinforce "planning."[68]

In the end, however, the actions of the Department of Economic Affairs were crippled by political skirmishes, economic downturns, and the government's lack of financial commitment to large-scale industrial and population mobilization.[69] The Department of Economic Affairs and its affiliated organizations were disbanded in 1969. The former Department of Economic Affairs staff were transferred to Ministry of Housing and Local Government. In part, this incorporation could be attributed to Ministry of Housing and Local Government's experience in New Town and housing construction, which had engendered notable population and industrial movements in the postwar era. In 1970, the Department of

**65** O'Hara, *From Dreams to Disillusionment*.

**66** "North West Economic Planning Board – Environment Group," 22 January 1968, EW 11/152, TNA.

**67** F. Kendall to J. Goldberg, 28 August 1968, EW 11/152, TNA.

**68** See files in AT 1/20, TNA.

**69** O'Hara, *From Dreams to Disillusionment*.

Economic Affairs was subsequently absorbed within the DoE.[70] In fact, during the establishment of the DoE, the dissolution of the Department of Economic Affairs and the planning boards was one of the most substantial changes to staff organization. In other words, when the three ministries merged and moved into the Marsham Street Towers, the environmental mission around which they were supposed to coalesce had already been modified. The goal of introducing more comprehensive planning, through inter-departmental interdisciplinary collaborations, was no longer a priority. Then, staff within the Marsham Street Towers were tasked to undermine the institutions that executed the planning efforts. For example, in 1972, the DoE introduced the Local Government Act, which resulted in the reduction of the number of local authorities (the smallest unit of government in the United Kingdom) by more than two-thirds.[71] Although the prime justification of this change was to reduce the sphere of government, in effect, it greatly hindered the mechanism for national and regional planning that had been articulated in the previous decade.

We can further reflect on the meaning of the "environment" in the DoE through the history of the ministries it inherited. In 1968, Dame Evelyn Sharp wrote a history of MHLG, which she headed as permanent secretary between 1955 and 1966.[72] In the book, Sharp traced the history of MHLG back to the earlier part of the twentieth century, when the Ministry of Health had been responsible for matters related to both public and personal health. The Ministry of Health oversaw issues ranging from population control, housing, and town planning to the National Health Service (NHS). Specific environmental controls such as building development rights and the management of waterways and sewage were part of the Ministry of Health's portfolio as well. Then, in 1943, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning was created to manage the immense task of postwar reconstruction.[73] In 1951, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning was replaced by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. The names of each

**70** Draper, *Creation of the D.O.E.*, 4.

**71** G. W. Jones, "The Local Government Act and the Redcliff-Maud Commission," *The Political Quarterly* 4 (1974): 154–166.

**72** Kevin Theakston, "Evelyn Sharp (1903–85)," *Contemporary Record* 7 (1993): 132–148.

**73** W. S. Morrison, "The Work and Establishment of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 11 (1945): 5–9.

of these previous ministries reflected the specific commitments of the U.K. government to its population. For example, in the 1940s, the name of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning highlighted the potential significance of town planning for industrial and resource planning during and after the Second World War. In the postwar period, the expansion of public housing and new town programs was reflected in the naming of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. To put it more straightforwardly, each of the previous ministries named what the government could tangibly provide for the population: health, housing, or the effort of town and country planning.

The "environment," by contrast, was a more elusive concept. One might consider the environment, in comparison to planning or local authorities, as something that can exist regardless of the government's efforts. Sharp expressed such a view, stating that she considered "environment" a "horrible word."[74] This brief recollection of the names of the ministries reveals the government's shifting approach towards its population: first moving from an effort to improve the health of individuals to an emphasis on creating and managing places and spaces for individuals and groups. The subsequent rebranding of the ministry as focused on the "environment," in comparison, put forward a less deterministic and paternalistic approach. But it also steered away from the specific commitments made through the previous ministries. We can situate this turn toward the environment in the political context of redefining the sphere of the government. Unlike health, housing or planning, all of which denote particular tasks, the "environment" can be conceptualized as a "sphere" that might contract or expand in relationship to its center.

The relative nature of the environment created confusion and difficulties during the establishment of the DoE, when the new Department tried to signify its presence in the physical environment. Soon after its creation, the DoE launched an unusual "corporate identity" campaign.[75] Within the DoE,

**74** Evelyn Sharp, *Ministry of Housing and Local Government* (London, 1969), 11.

**75** D. R. Serpell to Michael Cary, 25 March 1971, AT 1/38, TNA.

this was executed through the publication of a newsletter that circulated among employees. This newsletter was to facilitate communication among the far-flung parts of the DoE: in addition to the several thousand civil servants in the Marsham Street Towers, there were also various regional offices and research institutions affiliated with it.[76] Influenced by the marketing and advertising ethos of the 1970s, the DoE spent substantial energy exploring the "semiotics" of the environment, including creating a logo and "in-house" style for its publications and letters.[77]

The attempt to create a letterhead for the DoE gradually snowballed into signifying the whole of the government's presence and interventions in the physical world. In a narrow sense, the DoE needed to create a logo and a letterhead to replace those of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Public Buildings and Works. However, in a broad sense, the DoE wanted to showcase the institutions – which were supposed to epitomize the new type of civil service organization – to the public. Due to the merger of the three ministries, the DoE inherited a substantial part of the United Kingdom's environment: from the offices and buildings of local authorities, housing, historic monuments, and highways to vehicles and barges owned by the Ministry of Transport. Their branding exercise was supposed to include uniforms, badges, and flags for DoE outposts across the country. This "corporate identity" campaign soon became an all-encompassing effort. Since, as part of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works' portfolio, the DoE took over the management of most of the offices and facilities of the UK's central government (see figure 5), the DoE would have to put their new departmental logo and signs on these governmental buildings, which would inevitably create confusion.[78] Ideas were therefore mooted that the DoE should oversee the design of logos and signs for the other governmental ministries and agencies to enhance visual clarity and coherence.

**76** Draper, *Creation of the D.O.E.*, 98.

**77** M. Mendoza to G.R. Young, 12 January 1971, AT 1/38, TNA.

**78** Ibid.

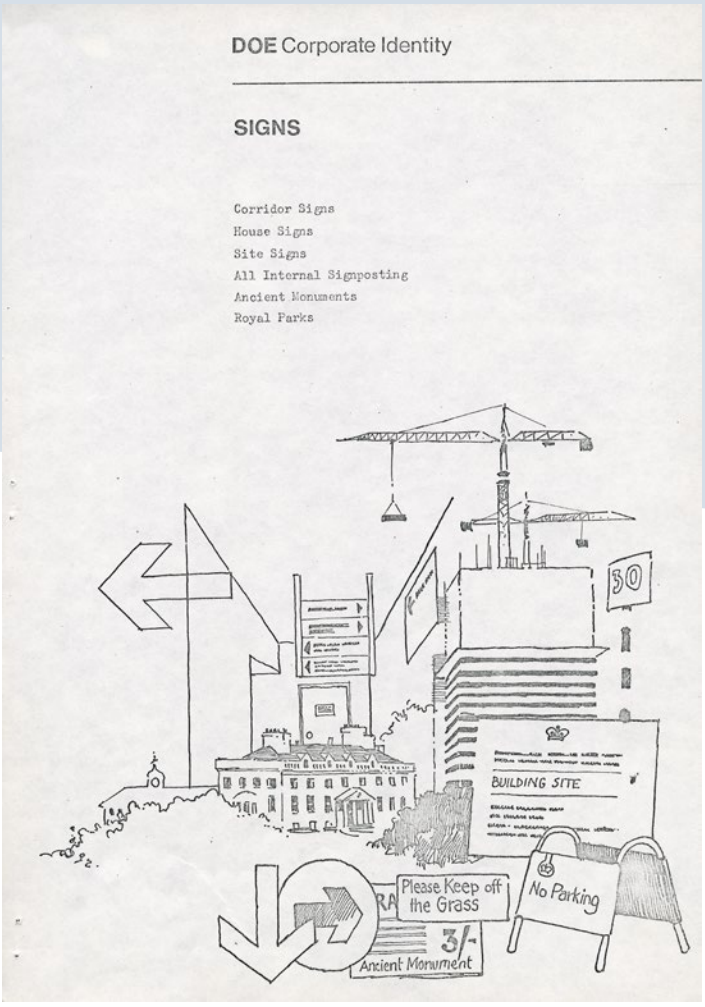



**Figure 5.** Diagram showing part of the "corporate identity" campaign of the DoE, showing the various type of signs that would have to be labelled, dated January 1971. Source: "Corporate Identity for Department of the Environment: proposals for Department of the Environment signs and symbols" (dated 1970-71), AT 1/38, The National Archives of the UK (TNA), London.

The debates regarding the scope of the DoE's "corporate identity" exercise lasted more than two years. By then, the DoE recognized that the public would have been familiar with the organization and canceled the campaign. This skirmish about "corporate identity" was not a paramount matter to the DoE but it reflected that, with the planning vision abandoned, the DoE struggled to identify its priority on the environment. It highlighted the complexities and contradictions in signifying the government machine that dealt with the physical environment. The DoE wanted to declare their presence in the U.K. environment. However, signposting many buildings, roadways, vehicles and open spaces across the country with the convoluted label of the "environment" contradict the call for reducing the "sphere" of the government. In short, the DoE was entrapped by its seemingly all-encompassing title.

To return to the question posed by this special issue: how does the government use the environment to shape human behavior? The DoE, as the first central governmental agency with an environmental profile, raises the fundamental question of whether the government can define what the environment is. The DoE inherited portfolios from former ministries that, regardless of their achievements, indicated clearly the means the government employed to manage the population: health, housing, planning, transport, public works and local governments. The creation of the DoE, one may argue, hinted at a withdrawal of the U.K. government's interventions in the physical environment, which was also reflected in the dismantling of the Department of Economic Affairs and the contraction of local authorities in 1972. By the late 1970s, further cutbacks of the local governments were introduced during Margaret Thatcher's prime ministership. Historian Peter Hennessey has highlighted the effects of this consequential policy. The U.K. central government had been relying upon the local authorities to carry out their environmental planning initiatives, such as new towns and housing developments.[79] The weakening of the local authorities, therefore, sabotaged the U.K. government's ability to intervene in the built environment. The physical separation of and administrative tensions among the three "wings" also set the scene for the DoE's ebbing, including the separation of the Ministry of Transport from the DoE in 1976. By the early 1980s, although the Marsham Street Towers remained a dominant presence in its immediate surroundings, the larger area around Victoria to the west was transformed by new corporate headquarters, media companies, and commercial skyscrapers, reflecting a major shift in the control of the built environment. Since the 1990s, various initiatives have been made to redevelop the Marsham Street Towers, all with the incentive of transferring control of the site from the government to private enterprises. Today, not only is the DoE housed in a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) development, but the project has also been refinanced as bonds through capital funds. In other words, investors can purchase a stake in

**79** Hennessy, *Whitehall*, 439.

the government building.[80] Although the private fund and the bond are highly monitored, this mechanism reflects the drastic changes in the sphere of the United Kingdom government in the last half-century. As an institution, it turned itself into a "shadowy place" that can be hardly identified in the physical environment, and the financial market.

By studying the establishment of the DoE, we are imbued with the elusive nature of the environment. I was first drawn to the establishment of the DoE because it coincided with the boom of international environmental protection efforts. Following the creation of the DoE, the U.K. government created the Royal Commission on Environmental Protection in 1970.[81] This establishment partly explained why pollution control and conservation were not set as a designated division within the DoE. In the DoE, environmental protection did not constitute an independent division; instead, it was one of the matters that was directly overseen by the Minister (also known of the Secretary of the State)and required collaboration among the three wings. In fact, environmental protection issues remained a muddled issue in the first years of the DoE's history. Internal documents, for example, identified issues with the arrangement, including the "inevitable disjointedness of the organisational machinery" and the overburdening of senior staff.

Within the DoE, participation in international environmental protection collaboration had been regarded as "a distraction."[82] Before the DoE was established, the U.K. government had already started preparations for the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. The Conference, held in Stockholm, was a high-profile summit that presented environmental protection as a crucial matter for human survival and evolution. The DoE's concern was partially justified: archival documents reveal that much of the discussions in preparation for the UN Human Environment Conference were about Cold War politics such as how to ensure participation from both East and West Germany.[83] These were matters

**80** "Ugly Sisters Facelift," 65.

**81** Susan Owen, *Knowledge, Policy and Expertise: The UK Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution 1970–2011*. (Oxford, UK, 2015).

**82** "Review of the Organisation for Environmental Protection, Note for the Secretary," AT 1/126, TNA.

**83** See documents in FCO 61/559 and FCO 26/603, TNA.

of the environment that were in fact within the remit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and other agencies.

The DoE's involvement in the Human Environment Conference indicated how its environmental planning vision became further obscured. In the early stage of conference preparations, the DoE's steering committee articulated several types of environmental issues, including the physical environment (referring to pollution control and conservation) and the social environment (including urbanization as well as the social consequences of technological innovation and population growth).[84] Concerns for the psychological environment were mooted, too.[85] This framing carried forward the environmental intentions of the DoE, which encapsulated the multitude of issues related to the physical conditions in towns and cities. The DoE also directed an in-house research and exhibition team to support these efforts.

These environmental framings were well illustrated in the DoE publication representing the United Kingdom's contribution to the conference. The publication, entitled *How Do You Want to Live?*, documented how people living in different parts of the country perceived, modified, and reacted to their environment.[86] The publication invited influential figures in planning, conservation, education, traffic, recreation, as well as industry and commerce to contribute their views. The book's epilogue was written by Max Nicholson, a conservationist who had been known since the 1930s as a leading figure in championing national planning in the United Kingdom.[87] In short, the content and structure of *How to You Want to Live?* still reflected the interests in planning that remained within the DoE. However, as the preparations continued, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other agencies worried that the focus on the reciprocal relationship between the population and urban environment was too specific to the context of the United Kingdom. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office lobbed several letters at the DoE demanding the removal of issues such as housing and industrial development,

**84** "Draft Office Circular: Problems of the Human Environment," 20 October 1969, FCO 61/559, TNA.

**85** "Steering Committee Notes, 2–12 Sept 1969," FCO 61/559, TNA.

**86** U.K. Department of the Environment, *How Do You Want to Live? A Report on the Human Habitat* (London, 1972).

**87** Max Nicholson, "A National Plan for Great Britain," *The Week-end Review*, 14 February 1931.

economic and social planning, and public administration.[88] The Foreign and Commonwealth Office further suggested that they should focus on the potential of science and technology for solving physical and natural environmental crises shared by all humankind.

These communications between the DoE and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office offer more insight into how the socio-economic function of the environment was displaced. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's advice highlights another contradiction in how to define the sphere of the government, as well as the environment. The DoE's public opinion research, by centering the communities and citizens, could potentially lead to the exclusion and omission of groups and individuals. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's approach, focusing on science and technology, seemed to aspire to an environmental vision that would be universal for humankind. The conflict between the DoE and Foreign and Commonwealth Office positions leads us back to the dilemma of creating an environmental administration: how to define the "narrow" or "broad" scope of the institution. For the DoE, pollution control, natural conservation and other ecological measures were a "narrow" approach because they did not often interact with significant socio-economic matters in the built environment. But for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, these were "broad" matters that concerned international collaborations and affected populations beyond the United Kingdom. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's emphasis brought forth more potential conflicts: the measure of success for bureaucracy is inevitably anthropocentric, but efforts in ecological protection usually call for more care for other species, and thus can go against the grain of bureaucracy.[89]

How to consider the environment as an institution in relation to the climate crisis is beyond the scope of this paper. Our analysis ends with the displacement of the DoE's environmental vision. We have examined the U.K. government's

**88** "Note by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office," 22 July 1969, FCO 61/559, TNA.

**89** Maarten A. Hajer, *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernisation and the Policy Process* (Oxford, UK, 1995).

national planning imperatives – including built environment research, planning and design – that were intended to enhance the productivity of the country's population and industry. The merger of the ministries and their move into the Marsham Street Towers were intended to demonstrate that civil services could be modernized and rendered more efficient. Ironically, however, the Towers actually illustrated the difficulties involved in utilizing architecture and town planning to shape human behavior. In addition to the time and professional expertise required to execute these visions, the Marsham Street Towers project also faced the challenges of changing political priorities. The buildings remind us of the importance of context: they were not unequivocally terrible architecture but they were completed at a time when disapproval of architectural modernism ran high. Moreover, its design, unlike Martin's Whitehall Plan, did not project the confidence that the government could employ architecture and urban design to engender political and behavioral change. The malleable and potentially confusing nature of the concept of the "environment" created further tensions with the Department. The DoE's "corporate identity" campaign and its struggles over how to present "the environment" at the 1972 Human Environment conference demonstrate how the department was, in fact, paralyzed by the notion of the environmental. In sum, this paper shows that when governments seek to use the environment to shape behavior, they ought to know what the environment is first.

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