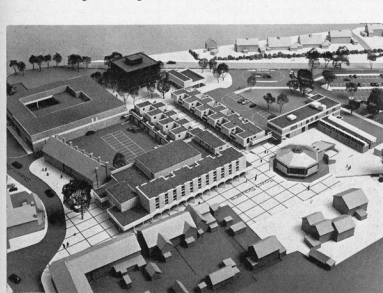


town-should-be-a-playground' approach to streets was demonstrated in a design for a concert hall, shopping centre, parking garage development in Utrecht.

Finally he showed a planning scheme for a settlement of 10 000 people in some open landscape at Steenbrugge where only 50 people live now. The scheme is to be uncompromising in preserving all the existing elements of the landscape—dirt roads, trees, farmhouses, contours—and in providing only one-family ground-level houses, no flats. Rather than bulldoze the site flat and start anew, his approach was to see the settlement as a 'thick coat of paint' over the existing and otherwise unchanged site.

Hermann Hertzberger's themes are not new but made good stirring stuff for



## NAÏSEA

### A town with a future?

'A development of major regional importance and national significance . . . with shopping and administrative centre . . . in a carefully planned environment . . . designed after . . . detailed study of all social and economic factors . . . which revealed that the typical family here . . . is ahead of the rest of Britain in its spending power, shopping habits, and style of living' is the new town at Naïsa, Somerset, enthusiastically described by the developers (Cophall Holdings Ltd) in their brochure and press notices. In a short comment all these claims cannot be examined, but it may be appropriate to look at (1) the regional significance and (2) the carefully planned environment which is predicted. To assess Naïsa's local or wider significance in the development pattern of the Bristol region is not easy. The Severn-side Study, which will presumably outline local policies, is not yet available, and balanced growth is harder to achieve under separate planning authorities for Somerset, Gloucester, and Bristol. The latter would be Bristol the centre of

students. His vivid illustrations and uninhibited admissions of incompetence, sentimentality, joy, agony, were a welcome change at the RIBA.

Nevertheless, he was sometimes a little incoherent and not only because of his imperfect English. Random generalisations are likely to be as false as often as they are true. 'Architects were hired by rich people to make palaces, pyramids, cathedrals and office buildings. People made their own homes. 'If architects can only design in an 'alienated' way then the solution is to hand the people the tools to make their own 'familiar environments'. This is throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The illustrations of his own designs show that he is not really going to do that.

PETER SCHER

**1** Naïsa town centre proposals; model from north-east showing arranged shops with flats and maisonettes over, huge areas of parking behind (with access from ring road visible in distance), octagonal library, and health centre closing far corner of town square. Black building contains showroom and offices. **Future expansion is planned north and eastward**  
**2** Part of south-west region (broken outline) with Bristol/Bath green belt (tone) and three Severn-side towns named for expansion in report of South-west Economic Planning Council

this seems one of the few parts of north Somerset acceptable in broad terms; there is already a settlement here, much of the surrounding country is green belt or of local landscape significance, and many other parts of the county are, for various reasons, unsuitable for building. In serious terms the new town as a district centre to serve a population . . . predicted to expand to over 230 000 within an approximately 10-mile radius by 1981 . . . the developers seem to envisage a Severn city; this figure must surely include a section of the populations of Bristol and Weston. 'A carefully planned environment' is a suitably all-embracing term for the work proposed—and the first stage well under way on the site. It needs to be assessed in relation to the existing Naïsa. Physical comfort of the inhabitants can be ensured fairly easily, given the right expenditure and adequate expenditure on buildings and their surroundings. Much more difficult is to make an environment to satisfy eye and soul as well.

The first stage of the development impinges closely on the 'heart' of old Naïsa—such as it was. The town, in fact, was a loose assemblage of buildings arranged as though peppered from above. Houses were normally of grey rubble stone or rendered masonry, techniques characteristic of Somerset. Renderings in white or grey predominated, and brick was used very sparingly until the first wave of post-war housing. The mushrooming housing estates now

occupied or under construction use brick and tile in the basic 'new town' styles of the '50s and '60s (there is no hint of the '70s so far). The developers say that they made trials . . . to decide the most practical and aesthetically pleasing facade . . .; their selection appears to have been made without reference to the historic place. Perhaps they assumed that their own buildings were to set the norm, and that the rest would follow as the old Naïsa was gradually eliminated. This may be reasonable, but it is questionable whether the building form and layout would also be changed, as well as the texture and colour of the past (particularly when rendered block-work, or suitably treated concrete so successfully blend with the Somerset vernacular).

The new layout is strictly rectilinear, marching heavily-footedly across the irregular country lanes of Naïsa. The chunky form of the shops in the Mall (with six-ton window boxes 'probably the biggest ever made') look, with their vertical window strips and segmental-arched colonnade, contrived and dated. The octagonal library does provide welcome variation from the predominant squareness and, with the adjacent health centre, promises distinction; both buildings have been designed in the office of the Somerset county architect in conjunction with the developers' architects, Gallanough & Partners.

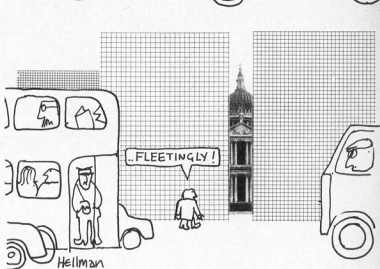
Two large parking areas are sited in the 'backs' immediately adjacent to the shops, and it will be interesting to see whether these backs are better considered than usual—the appalling mess at the Quakers' Friars' in Bristol, or in the centres of the post-war blocks at Canterbury show what to avoid. It is additionally important in this Naïsa development that there should be no 'front and back' complex, since the upper storeys of some of the shops will carry flats and maisonettes—a very sensible provision to try to overcome night-time death at the centre. The retention of some existing trees will not in itself create a particularly good quality planned environment' for the atypical family, rich in possessions and culture, which is expected to take over here. Will six-ton window boxes, and proximity of a motorway leading eventually to the playgrounds of the west, sufficiently compensate for large areas of asphalt and motor cars? **PATRICK BROWN**

\*A historic building, 'originally owned by the Blackfriars, later taken over by the Quakers.

## FUTURE EVENTS

**The architect and building contract:** seminar at the RIBA, Speaker George Stringer. Details from management advisory office, RIBA, 66 Portland Place, London, W1N 4AD. 20 and 21 APRIL

**Builder's Benevolent Institution:** annual dinner at the Dorchester, London. Guest of honour: Rt Hon Dr Horace King. Tickets £40.20 from Secretary, 47 Bedford



Square, London, WC1B 3DQ. 21 APRIL

**Principles and practice of transport planning:** course for engineers and planners in public and private practice, at Salford University. Details from registrar, University, Peel Park, Salford, M5 4WT. 3 to 7 MAY

**Conservation in action:** Civic Trust conference for government officials, MPs, bus, local chambers of trade and commerce, and the professions, at Royal Festival Hall, London. Opening speaker Peter Walker. Details from Civic Trust, 17 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1. 6 and 7 MAY