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## Reclaiming the 'Public' Lands: Community Conflict and Rural Gentrification

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# **Reclaiming the ‘Public’ Lands: Community Conflict and Rural Gentrification**

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## **Abstract**

The current aspirations of the British coalition government to sell-off publicly-owned land and building assets to facilitate new housing development, raise capital, and engage local communities is an emotive issue. Why 'public' assets are relinquished, and how land and buildings are redeveloped by private sector organisations can stimulate conflicts/resistance within local communities. Using the case study of Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, this paper explores how a local community group opposed the proposed development of a local authority-owned 'car park' on the premise that it was 'out of place' in the rural small town, and more congruous with a large urban setting. As the disposal of public land and buildings is more widely taken-up, it is possible that similar NIMBY protests may become more pronounced and spatially diffused in the UK as the make-up of local places is transformed.

Keywords: rural change, rural housing, NIMBY, rural gentrifiers, resistance

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## **1.0 Introduction**

The British coalition government is seeking to spark new-build housing developments on unused publicly-owned land and buildings (estimated at 1.2 million homes), and raise much-needed capital by disposing of assets valued at £250bn (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012). This unprecedented transfer of public lands to the private sector is likely to reconfigure the supply of land and buildings that are available for redevelopment in many local places, and possibly lead to the transformation of social, economic, cultural and physical characteristics in some local places. As new homes are built on public land this may lead to the recomposition of some local population structures and demographic characteristics.

Under the new Community Right – ‘the Right to Reclaim Land’ - the public are able to access a 'one-stop shop' that identifies empty land and buildings, and have the right to request that these are brought back into use via sales to private developers. As a starting point, the Homes and Communities Agency published a list of their land and property assets (16,000 hectares) in 2011. Also influential is the report of All-Party Parliamentary Urban Development Group (APUDG) 'Unleashing Growth: How Public Sector Property Can Drive Economic Development'. This provides a review of how the disposal of local authority assets is currently hindered, and how planning legislation can be revised to foster the involvement of private sector organisations in redeveloping underused public lands.

Described by the Housing Minister as ‘the state-sponsored decline of local communities’, redeveloping underused public land in this way will, it is proclaimed, allow ‘Local people, working alone or with their communities... to come together to build the homes, shops and business the area needs’ (see Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012). Yet, as local

authorities dispose of 'public' assets to private sector developers, it would appear that conflicts within local communities and resistance from well-organised groups are emerging. There is evidence of local community groups contesting/opposing how land and buildings are reconfigured by private sector developers; often perceived to be transforming the qualities of local places. These processes of conflict and resistance provide a lens to explore contemporary forms of neighbourhood change (Savage 2012), social exclusion (Dorling, 2009), and the salience of concepts such as NIMBY-'ism' (Hubbard, 2006) and gentrification (Lees, 2011).

To explore these issues, this paper focuses on the case study of the Garden Street car park development in Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire. Hebden Bridge is a small rural town, surrounded by gentrified villages and moor tops, where processes of rural gentrification are deeply entrenched. The main aims of the paper are two fold. First, the paper seeks to explore how and why rural gentrifier populations resist proposals for new-build developments that have wider social and cultural meaning as being congruous with urban places, and how such developments are represented as 'being out of place' in the rural context. Second, the paper considers the salience of conceptualising the resistance of rural gentrifiers to 'urban-looking' new developments as a contemporary expression of NIMBY'ism.

The paper is divided into six sections. The next section briefly describes the methods. Section 3 presents the case study of Hebden Bridge and outlines a new phase in the process of gentrification within the locality. Sections 4 and 5 focus on the example of the proposed development on the Garden Street car park, and consider the salience of contentions of NIMBY'ism in relation to the actions of a local action group contesting the new development. The final section makes some concluding remarks.

## **2.0 Methods**

A two-fold methodology was adopted for the research. First, content analyses of local newspapers (the Hebden Bridge Times (HBT) and the Halifax Courier) were undertaken to contextualise the development proposal. Articles published between 2005 and 2010 were searched on web-based archives using the term 'Garden Street'. Second, coding and analyses of web-based blogs (on the HebWeb Discussion Forum) relating to the Garden Street development proposal on the Hebden Bridge community website (Hebdenbridge.co.uk), during 4 June 2007 to 20 September 2008, was undertaken using the principles of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Of course, there are many issues of bias and ethical considerations using such sources for data gathering and analyses, and these are fully acknowledged (Hookway, 2008). Pseudonyms were used for bloggers. Initially, it was intended to undertake semi-structured interviews with leading institutional actors and local residents for the research project, but the volatile nature of the exchanges between local groups with different vested interests in the proposal precluded entry into the location, given the sensitivity of the issues under investigation. An extreme expression of the emotive sentiments included allegations of the issuing of 'death threats' to the developers (Architects Journal, 2008).

## **3.0 The Case Study of Hebden Bridge**

Within national media and academic discourses, Hebden Bridge has gained notoriety as one of the bastions of rural gentrification (Phillips, 2010). Smith and Phillips (2001) demonstrate how regional-specific rural qualities have been superimposed since the early 1970s, via tree-planting and stone-cleaning

schemes, and an active local civic trust to protect and conserve the heritage and history of its Pennine agricultural and industrial past. Nationally, Hebden Bridge is dubbed in various ways to reflect its standing as the preserve of affluent rural gentrifiers, many of whom have a predilection for alternative lifestyles, ways of living and living arrangements, and the consumption of greentrified Pennine rurality (Smith, 2002). Terms with connotations of gentrification include: 'the yuppie centre of the north', 'Yorkshire's Islington', 'The Hampstead of the North', 'West Yorkshire's answer to Stoke Newington in London' (The Times, 11/04/08), and, to encapsulate the growing lesbian population, 'The Sapphic capital of Britain' (Smith & Holt, 2005). Integral to many of these representations of the former textile mill town is the Pennine rurality of Hebden Bridge, promoted as the 'Pennine Centre', and for its 'creative' population (See Plate 1).

*Plate 1:* Hebden Bridge.



Source: Author

By contrast to other former textile towns in the Calder Valley (e.g. Sowerby Bridge), new-build developments have been limited in Hebden Bridge, with a prevalence for the rehabilitation and conversion of mills, cottages and industrial worker terraced housing (known locally as 'double-decker' housing). Since the mid-1970s, it is fair to say that processes of rural gentrification in Hebden Bridge have continued unabated, well-organised and powerful movements have come to fore to resist many new-build development proposals. As one blogger contended:

Because Hebden Bridge has for some years been a magnet for opportunist developers, its residents have become more skilled than most at distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable projects. (BG, 23 April 2008).

Against this backdrop, over the last few years there is evidence to suggest that a new trend has emerged in the processes of gentrification within Hebden Bridge. The production and supply of one and two bedroom flats and

apartments has increased, predominantly involving the conversion of former textile mill and industrial premises; akin to developments in waterfront sites in some urban inner city locations (see Davidson & Lees, 2010). As two bloggers intimated on the HebWeb Discussion Forum:

In the past few years, in Albert Street alone, we've had the conversions of the Carlton Hotel, Albion Mill (now The Crofts), and Croft Mill.... Planning permission has already been granted for 36 units in Walkley's [Mill], and 54 units in King Street, Mytholm (the old Mytholm Works site). (SJ, 30 January 2008).

Hebden Bridge is home to many recent developments; Mayroyd Mill, Hebble End, Pecket Well Mill, Melbourne Street and the forthcoming 58 dwellings on the former Mytholm Mill site being the major ones. (GJ, 24 April 2008).

Concerned about the scale of these conversions, and the intention of Calderdale Council to sell-off council-owned sites for new-build developments, an 'Anti-Gentrification' demo was organized in Hebden Bridge in February 2004. This event begs some interesting questions about social relations in gentrified places where the processes have matured and become deep-rooted, and, intriguingly, how gentrifiers themselves seek to resist further rounds of gentrification.

#### **4.0 The Garden Street Car Park**

This is possibly the biggest development in the town's history. It deserves more time for consultation, discussion and debate. (JM, 25 January 2008)

In July 2004, and, in part, triggered by the Upper Calder Valley Rural Renaissance programme (funded by the Regional Development Agency, Yorkshire Forward), Calderdale Council established a national competition for the submission of development proposals to regenerate the council-owned, Garden Street car park (See Plate 2). A relatively large, central space within Hebden Bridge town centre, Garden Street car park was the former site of 70 terraced houses, that were demolished during slum clearance programmes of the late 1950s (Smith, 1998). For a variety of political, social and economic factors, to date, the site has not been redeveloped.

Crucially, the site of the car park is located within the wider Hebden Bridge Conservation Area, which according to the Policy BE18 of the Calderdale Unitary Development Plan (UDP) engenders the principal definition of 'character of appearance':

Today, Hebden Bridge encapsulates the spirit of a 19th-century town, having high-quality buildings and public spaces with a nucleus of even older buildings, in St George's Square, by the original river crossing. The Victorian architecture reflects its vigorous industrial history and civic pride and the overall consistency of its buildings and their setting: the stone terraces, the unaltered town centre, the river, the canal and mills, form a coherent townscape of great character.... The narrowness of the valleys has led to an attractive clustering of buildings, particularly houses, which cling precariously to the hillsides in terraces with 'under and over' dwellings built one on top of the other. The boundary of the Conservation Area includes the town centre

and surrounding housing areas, along with adjoining open land, which provides an attractive setting (Calderdale Council, 2005: 2).

*Plate 2: The Garden Street car park.*



Source: Author

Part of the Council's development brief issued in 2004, perhaps not surprisingly, stated that the new development should be: 'both traditional and contemporary, dramatic and modern' (Halifax Courier, 15/1/08). In October 2005, a local-based architectural practice, Studio Baard, were selected to redevelop the site 'for its imaginative scheme', in partnership with Hebden Royd Developments LLP; a company established in 2005 with the remit of developing the site. One of the Directors, David Fletcher, has been a key agent of change in Hebden Bridge since the early 1960s (Smith & Phillips, 2001).

Self-defined as: sharing 'the community's passion to preserve the town's character and heritage, whilst safeguarding its future prosperity, for the good of residents and businesses', Studio Baard claimed that the development was key to: 'helping to shape the future of Hebden Bridge' (Studio Baard, 1/9/08). Promoting the virtues of the development, Studio Baard claimed:

The design is inspired by local buildings and styles in terms of materials, shapes and sizes... Height, scale and choice of weathered stone materials are important to ensure that the buildings fit in, rather than jar as some recent buildings in the town do. Our ambition is to insert these new buildings to appear to the casual viewer as though they have always been there but, on closer inspection, are clearly of their time (quoted in *The Times*, 11/04/08).

The £12.4 million development of 7,400 sq. metres, proposed to erect five blocks of flats (4-7 storeys) comprising 48 residential properties (24 one/two bedroom apartments and 24 houses), and 160 car parking spaces (110 for public use) including a state of the art car stacking system (80 car parking spaces underground). Eight small retail units and eight starter enterprise units were included in the mixed-use development.

Fuelled, in particular, by concerns that the housing development would increase the use of private vehicles, congestion, air pollution and the need for more car parking, the local community protested against the development proposal. Underlying this sentiment were also anxieties about higher population densities in the town centre, and of the changing nature of the structure of the housing market and local population. As one local resident suggested in a letter to the Halifax Courier (10/3/08):

The old mills have been converted into apartments, increasing the number of residents... Hebden Bridge does not need even more luxury apartments.

In Hebden Bridge, local protest to the development was co-ordinated by the Garden Street Action Group, formed by approximately 50 local residents to specifically contest the development proposals. Resistance to the proposals was circulated in a high-profile way in the national media. The Times (11/4/08) noted how 'Hebden Bridge fights the developers', and expressed that: 'There's trouble in the Yorkshire mill town as locals oppose a radical new plan'. Subsequently, The Independent (28/9/08) described the 'The Battle of Hebden Bridge', outlining the distinction between 'want[ing] to fix Hebden Bridge in the amber of a frozen history' and those asserting that '21st-century architecture can re-energise the Victorian mill town known as Trouser town'. Aligned with the latter, Studio Baard responded:

Change brings protest... Some want to see the version of Hebden Bridge, which inspired them to live here, remain untouched. But they are not the only ones who love the town. We do too. And if it is to continue to be attractive to newcomers – change is a necessity'.

The high level of local resistance to the development, including a total of 3,399 (1,114 from residents of Hebden Bridge) written objections to the development, in conjunction with the lobbying of local politicians and councillors, was influential in Calderdale Council's rejection of planning permission on the grounds that the 'site is not suited to a dramatic statement or a design that consciously seeks to draw attention to itself – it will dominate its immediate surroundings and will impact markedly on longer views across the valley' (quoted in HBT, 28/4/09). The developers appealed against this decision, and a public inquiry was held during April 2009. Evidence presented at the inquiry by the Garden Street Action Group (2009) reiterated the opinion that:

The scale of the development is excessive in size, volume and extent, and is also 'out of scale' with the vernacular and designated character of the town; represents an over-intensification of the site, leading to cramped internal layout; and a loss of openness. I conclude also that the proposed design may be inappropriate, and more suited to a larger urban setting than a small market town.

On 28 May 2009, the Planning Inspector rejected the appeal for planning permission, stating: "the overall massing and scale of two blocks would be visually dominant and unacceptably harmful to the character and ambience of the locale" (quoted in Halifax Courier, 28/5/09). Calderdale Council's Development agreement with the developers was terminated on 23 June 2009 based on the premise that: "it is obvious people in Hebden Bridge don't want what was being proposed" (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder, cited in Halifax Courier, 9/6/09). Nevertheless, the redevelopment of the car park

site continues to cause conflict, with developers provocatively stating:

The plans for development of the Garden Street car park will not go away... someone else, sometime soon, will come up with another plan – and next time it might be about profit, with little regard for the town, its heritage or its people (quoted in HBT, 10/11/08).

This is an important point since other local residents are critical of the Garden Street Action Group, claiming that the organization furthers the long-running trend of NIMBY'ism within Hebden Bridge. Typical comments that illustrate this point include:

I hope that the good people of Hebden who are protesting against this proposed scheme are aware of how they, and therefore the town, are perceived by outsiders. Having spent 7 of the last ten years living in Hebden I despair of their negativity towards any proposed development in the town. I am sure they have all heard of Nimbyism but they have become a national example of taking this principle to ridiculous extremes. (SL, 23 April 2008)

Or, as one local resident contended:

I find the actions of the 'Garden Street Action Group' dictatorial and oppressive. They are a non elected group who say they speak for the majority. I look forward to the development of Garden Street, to improve Hebden Bridge. (HO, 30 September 2008).

Indeed, it is important to note that there was a relatively strong counter-voice that was articulated on HebWed Discussion forum, which espoused the progressive, 'modern' virtues of the proposed development:

Some people may well argue, and have, that what the town needs is a jolly good dose of 'brutal modernism'. That's an aesthetic judgement that individuals will make one way or the other. (CJ, 4 July 2008).

I am not against modern architecture and prefer it over the 'retro look' Victorian buildings that are going up everywhere these days. We have to look at our current world for inspiration and not at the past. (WP, 9 July 2008).

Clearly, this juncture between opponents and advocates of the proposed development points to Woods' (1997) conceptualization of local rural populations with inherent differences and conflicts. In the next section, the salience of pejorative charges of NIMBY'ism explored via an analysis of the web-based blogs on the specific issue of the development proposal.

## 5.0 NIMBY Protest or Guardians of Gentrified Rurality?

Not only will I have my **nice green view** of the canal, park and Fairfield hillside completely blocked by a large building directly to the front of my house, but I will also no longer be able to watch the sunset at the other side of my house either because of another seven storey building a few yards away erected by Mr Fletcher and friends. No sorry, **not-in-my-back-yard** thanks. (WL, 30 April 2008, *emphases added*).

In a study of the social conflicts associated with proposals for an asylum centre



in a rural place, and a subsequent repost to Wolsink (2006), Hubbard (2005, 2006) argues that the term NIMBY'ism can be effectively used to characterise community opposition to a development (or other change) that is viewed as 'being in the wrong place', as opposed to broader assertions that such developments should not take place at all.

Arguably, this point has some resonance with the opposition of the Garden Street Action Group to the proposal; with the most commonly cited reason for opposition being that the size and scale of the proposed development was inappropriate for the rural context of Hebden Bridge:

This development looks completely out of place in Hebden Bridge. (WP, 9 July 2008).

They are completely contrary to the scale and character of the town. (HP, 10 September 2008).

Many bloggers also iterated the latter point, in conjunction with assertions that the development would not be 'out of place' in a large urban setting, for example:

Personally, I think these buildings might work well and make a positive architecture contribution if located in London, Manchester or Leeds. The issue for us though is whether buildings of such size and design fit into this location: the small scale of the Hebden Bridge Conservation Area? (CJ, 4 July 2008).

In a big city perhaps, or even student accommodation on a campus, but in a town such as Hebden Bridge never. (GM, 7 July 2008).

Indeed, concerns about the size and scale of the new development were central to an exchange in the local press between one of the development team (David Fletcher) and Garden Street Action Group (Halifax Courier, 31/10/08). In 'an open letter to the people of Hebden Bridge', David Fletcher asserted that: "Towns never stand still. They either attract investment and regenerate or they decline and move down the 'pecking order'". In a retort, Anthony Rae, the principal spokesperson for the Garden Street Action Group, countered: "our small town needs to recognize the constraints and value of its smallness", juxtaposing this view with the developers that the: "small town must get bigger just to survive".

Another central plank of Hubbard's (2006, p. 93) thesis is that NIMBY protests inherently involve a duplicitous nature, with campaigners often justifying their actions 'in terms of environmental and residential amenity' in order to subvert questions of social otherness from the realms of conflict. Analyses of the blogs suggested that this dynamic is inherent in the opposition to the proposal, with the recomposition of the local gentrifier population being an implicit factor. Many bloggers noted that the development may induce the in-migration of a different type of affluent, young single, or cohabiting gentrifiers, with ideologies, beliefs and lifestyles that diverge from the socio-cultural structures of Hebden Bridge:

These apartments will not be cheap and, in fact, there is no provision in the plans for affordable housing. Most employment within Hebden Bridge is in the service sector, which, statistically, is lower paid than average. The statistical likelihood therefore, of someone buying an apartment, that works in Hebden Bridge and doesn't own a car is low.

In fact, residents are extremely likely to commute and own at least one car. (GJ, 14 February 2008).

A key factor here was that the proposed development did not address the wider issue of the lack of affordable housing in Hebden Bridge, and hence the opposition connects to the anti-gentrification demo that had been held in the town:

The town must surely be at capacity with apartments and as has been pointed out by many, the ones planned for the development are most definitely not in the affordable housing bracket if we are appealing to residents who desire swimming pools! (SJ, 30 January 2008).

Other bloggers expressed these sentiments by articulating their concerns about the over-supply of luxury flats, and the possibility of vacant properties within Hebden Bridge:

Well, the way I see it is this. Lets pick a nice "newsworthy" and "popular" "quirky" town and then build blocks of "flats" with "parking access for residents and visitors" (call the "flats" "luxury apartments") - which then become "lets" which then remain empty. (KC, 22 January 2008).

Flats? Predominantly one and two bedroomed apartments which simply aren't needed - just look at the developments in Leeds and other areas grinding to a halt because of lack of demand. (HA, 25 August 2008).

In line with Hubbard (2006), many bloggers also justified their opposition to the development 'in terms of environmental and residential amenity', often remarking that the nature of the development was not appropriate for a rural small town. As one blogger commented:

I feel strongly that this development must not proceed. It strikes me as completely unsuitable... The visual aspect is, admittedly, subjective. No doubt its 'Salford Quays' yuppie design will appeal to some, and that is their opinion, to which they are entitled. However, the vast majority of people I know and have asked, think it to be anachronistic, out of place and far, far too large. (GR, 29 January 2008).

Other bloggers used evocative metaphors, such as commenting that the proposed development resembles a: "modern earthquake-affected Dubai-type building stuck in the middle of Hebden Bridge" (SP, 4 July 2008). Key here was the critique of the imposition of a blueprint of urban regeneration within Hebden Bridge, noting that this would undermine the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the landscape of Hebden Bridge (e.g. 'double-decker' housing):

Don't let this town go the way so many other identikit towns, once distinctive and characterful, now just vacuous, bland and dull. And before any tells me, I am not looking to preserve some twee olde worlde stuck-in-aspic theme town - I just wonder if shoehorning a huge, glass mixed use tower into the town centre is necessary. (GR, 29 January 2008).

For many bloggers, the design and aesthetics of the proposed development were thus deemed to be inappropriate for Hebden Bridge; dubbed by the national media as 'wonky houses'. Typical comments which concur with Hubbard's (2005) finding that the proposed asylum centre in his case study

was 'inappropriate and incongruous', include:

I don't think this is good design. Looks a bit like a mis-shapen loaf of bread or a jelly that's gone wrong. I hate the way it looms and sags over Commercial Street, incidentally nicking that nice bit of grass verge. I'm told it is meant to combine tradition with modernity. What that seems to mean is that you can bung any rubbish building up, put a bit of stone facing on it as a sop to the traditionalists, and hope to get away with it. (HA, 25 January 2008).

Act now rather than bemoan the ugly crooked buildings once they are half built! (SP, 4 July 2008).

What an absolutely hideous monstrosity it is! I'm all for the site being developed - be that housing, commercial, car-parking or whatever combination of the above - but must it look so ugly?! It has all the appeal of a sci-fi dystopian future. (MH, 9 July 2008).

Many bloggers drew upon the imagery of other rural places to strengthen their reasoning for opposing the proposed development:

We may need to respect the vision of the Victorian founders of this town. Imagine this building in the little seaside towns you go to for a holiday or in the villages you pass through on a jaunt through the peak district, the Dales. If visitors come to see anything in Hebden Bridge they come to see the two up two down houses - not the hope they don't fall down houses. (yes they just look wonky!). (SP, 4 July 2008).

If this was being proposed in other Dales villages they would not get past first base - Hebden Bridge will suffer as a result of this development - in the short (ish) term whilst the 2-3 years of building takes place and in the long term when the apartments etc. remain empty. Look at the development across from Riverside School - many of those apartments are still empty and unfinished - further along the canal towards Todmorden another conversion contains empty apartments. Enough Said !! (AK, 9 September 2008).

Overall, analyses of the blogs illustrate the duplicitous nature of an expression of NIMBY'ism within Hebden Bridge. The well-organised resistance to the proposal can be interpreted as an expression of rural gentrifiers opposing a development that was perceived as being 'out of place' in their rural back-yard; exemplified in an evocative way by the quote presented at the beginning of this paper.

## **6.0 Discussion**

Hubbard (2006) proclaims that, as social scientists, it is our role 'to trace how NIMBY protests bring particular spatial formations into being, creating new spaces of identity and belonging in the process' (p. 94). This paper extends this view of NIMBY social movements by highlighting how well-organised opposition to development proposals can also be an influential factor in the reproduction of enduring spatial formations, and well-defined spaces of identity and belonging. Using the case study of Hebden Bridge, the connections between gentrification and NIMBY protests have been exposed; a relation which, to date, has tended to be under-researched within studies of

(rural) gentrification. It would appear that deep-rooted, gentrified place-specific, architectural and building codes styles, designs and selective building materials are also being maintained in Hebden Bridge by restrictive planning frameworks and mechanisms.

These links point to a structured political coherence and set of regulations that thus maintain the rural gentrified landscape of Hebden Bridge. Participation in local political decision-making and lobbying of politicians and other leading institutional actors is important here for protecting and conserving distinctive constituents of rurality (i.e. housing) (See Cloke & Goodwin, 1992), viewed by some residents as pivotal to their commodified, exclusive rural lifestyles and residence. Of course, this is not surprising given the allure of vernacular architectural styles and aesthetics, and the appeal of distinctive residential properties (Smith, 2007), are often key motives in the migration decision-making processes of gentrifiers. In the rural context, studies reveal how rural properties are often recommodified and revalorised, via the rehabilitation, upgrading, or conversion of agricultural (e.g. farmsteads, barns, outbuildings, sheds) or rural industrial properties (e.g. cottages, water mills) in distinctive ways, particularly during the early phases of the transformation of rural built environments (Phillips, 2002; 2005; 2007).

Viewed by some residents as potentially undermining such socially-constructed representations of gentrified rurality; the NIMBY protests are expressive of gentrifiers' politicising their opposition to the contradictory characteristics of the development proposal. Put simply, Garden Street development was perceived by some residents as being 'out of place', and indeed, this was the basis of the Planning Inspector's decision to uphold the refusal of planning permission. In recent academic scholarship, examinations of socio-cultural and economic processes linked to exclusion society have tended to focus on the delineation of particular social groups as being 'out of place'. There are numerous studies of how some places are cleansed and purified of so-called deviant social groups (e.g. MacLeod, 2002), which run counter to the hegemonic constructions of places. In gentrified places, such processes usually involve the displacement and exclusion of low-income social groups and opposition to the development of low-cost affordable housing. This paper suggests that this perspective could be usefully extended to consider how some landscapes, with social and cultural meanings of rurality, are cleansed and purified of new developments or conversions to existing buildings that are interpreted as being incongruous to the specific representation of rurality. In this way, the paper is emblematic of 'the politics of the rural', expressed by 'the centrality of the meaning and regulation of rurality itself as the primary focus of conflict and debate' (Woods, 2006: 579).

In conclusion, it can be argued that there is merit to consider how distinctive materialities of rural (and urban) places may be prohibited and resisted in a collective way by in situ gentrifiers to protect and reproduce highly-prized social constructions of rurality. This theme is likely to gain momentum as more and more rural places are reconfigured by the quest to sell off 'public lands' in the future.

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