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For instance, if the City of London's current building policy is maintained for another decade, the Square Mile will have to accommodate over 1,200,000 office workers. In a comparable square mile of the densest central Paris not more than 75,000 persons live and work. The City of London, however, is no exception when it comes to urban legislation running amok; thus the 'Loop' area of central Chicago is legislated to hold the equivalent of the United States' entire office capacity; and in 1935 New York City's density codes could have accommodated the entire world population at that time.

It is all too easily forgotten that our cities are transformed by conscious political decisions determining the nature and zoning of uses, the densities of buildings and population, and ultimately urban form, meaning and appearance. The catastrophic state of great parts of our environment is thus a plastic expression of the extent to which urban politics are now dominated by factional interests to the disadvantage of the common good ... 

In order to fully appreciate the dimension of Prince Charles' challenge to the planners and no longer be cowed into submission by specialist jargon, it is imperative for every responsible citizen to become familiar with some basic notions of town-building. I hope you will bear with me for a moment.

- Urban land is subdivided into *aedificandi* areas (site or plot areas) and *non-aedificandi* areas (urban space; streets, squares, parks, etc.).
- In great historic areas (such as old Paternoster or Covent Garden) *non-aedificandi* areas occupy around thirty percent, and *aedificandi* areas around seventy percent of the total urban land.
- Plot ratio is the amount of gross floor space in a building expressed as a multiple of its plot area, for example: 1:1 (one over one), 3:1 (three over one), etc.
- Traditionally plot ratio, as the name states, only applies to the actual plot area, excluding public urban space in front or around it.
- Recently, it has become a semi-official custom in certain town halls to include in plot ratio calculations not just the plot area but also the *non-aedificandi* areas in front or around them, thus increasing the permissible floor areas by around thirty percent.
- This has come about for two reasons.
  1. First, single developers or consortia have been acquiring plots of land exceeding the size of conventional urban lots or blocks.
  2. Second, town halls are no longer assuming responsibility for master-planning urban areas; i.e. no longer defining the precise ratio between *aedificandi* and *non-aedificandi* areas, but leaving that job more or less to the discretion and good will of the developers and their architects. This is the case in the Docklands, Spitalfields, Broadgate, Paternoster, etc.
- The hyping up of densities is caused by a variety of reasons: at times by the greed of developers and bankrupt authorities, at others by the simple will of a developer to remain competitive.
- Office developments bring in the highest rents and rate revenues, thus allying developers and authorities in the common pursuit of profit. Local resistance to giant overdevelopment is in most cases appeased by throwing in a bit of low-income housing, a day-care, the restoration of this or that historic remnant, etc. ...

There thus exists a de facto collusion between town halls and developers to work against better knowledge and not in the interest of the common good. The new Paternoster redevelopment is a case in point. The Paternoster Consortium site measures 17,400m² (1.74 hectares). Before its Victorian and post-war redevelopment this historic area comprised fourteen urban blocks, over a mile of streets, passages, alleys, lanes, and a major square. The ratio of *aedificandi* to *non-aedificandi* areas was approximately seventy percent to thirty percent, or 12,000m² (of plot areas) to 5,400m² (of public spaces). The total built-up floor area was approximately 38,000m², realizing a plot ratio of 3.2 over 1 (the quality of that environment can still be appreciated around Carter Lane south of St. Paul's Cathedral).

The Victorian redevelopment of the Paternoster site had a density of around 5 over 1, comprising approximately 60,000m² of floor space. Paradoxically, the present high-rise development on the consortium area has no more than 38,000m² of floor area, corresponding to the density of the 3-4 floor pre-Victorian fabric, and realizing a plot ratio of 3.2:1. The currently permissible plot ratio of 5:1 allows us to build no more than 60,000m² of floor space (or 5 x 12,000m²); even a hyped-up density would only allow (5 x 17,400m²) or 87,000m².

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http://zakuski.utsa.edu/krier/godssave.html
Enter Paternoster Consortium Ltd. They ask in their competition brief for 114,000m$^2$ (100,000m$^2$ office plus 14,000m$^2$ retail) minimum gross floor area to be packed onto the consortium site, representing an actual plot ratio of 9.5:1, or a ninety percent increase over the permissible floor space! One competitor adds to this bulk a considerable amount of below-ground floor area which, according to city regulations, need not be added to plot-ratio calculations!!!

The problem of fitting the excessive amount of floor area onto a limited site is further aggravated by the 36m height limit (corresponding to the upper balustrade of the Cathedral nave). Whichever way the six star architects struggle to pack the stuff, they are on one hand left with a maximum number of oppressively low and monotonous floor spaces and on the other with an excruciatingly small quantity of public urban space, 3-5m narrow and 36m high alleys and passages euphemistically called Gallerias and Atria. They make Victorian streets look positively spacious, which is all the more ironic as one of the competitors castigated on the BBC the oppressive conditions in Victorian Paternoster. The monotony of the brief becomes self-explanatory as only offices and shopping can possibly be packed so tight with so little air and space in between.

All this work has indeed little to do with the proper meaning of master-planning; it is but slavish and subordinate to short-sighted pressures and greed. In all great cities the plot ratio of 3:1 was hardly ever exceeded. This density is comfortably reached by buildings not exceeding five floors, allowing for private and public gardens, generous public spaces, well-lit and beautifully proportioned streets and squares.

Only in the nineteenth century were densities in central areas pushed up to 5:1 or even 6:1. It is these excessive densities which cause gardens to be built over, valuable historic buildings to be almost invariably replaced by bigger structures of a lesser quality and streets to become noisy and gloomy canyons. As a result inner cities are now horrendously congested, enforcing a mass exodus towards the suburbs and transforming historic centers into administrative and commercial single-use zones. Once the authorities allow utilitarian building speculation to break through the 3:1 plot ratio and the 4-5 floor height limit, the inevitable outcome is that land values literally go through the ceiling, bringing in turn pressure for ever higher plot ratios. Domine dirige nos (God guide us) is the city's pious motto. It is hard to escape the impression that it should more correctly say Pecunia nos dominat (Money rules us).

This is why the Prince of Wales is right to object to the brief, and doubly right for blaming the architects who out of ignorance or timidity have done nothing to object to a positively ignoble brief. Listening to them on the BBC they told us that it is neither developers nor politicians nor indeed architects who shape our cities, that instead irresistible market forces are at work which it would be as futile to resist as objecting to rain or sun. The Prince's message is instead one of freedom, affirming that it is we who shape our cities; that we are free to choose what cities we build and how we build and use them.

The Reconstruction of the St. Paul's precinct will, more than any other building operation in the United Kingdom, become symbolic for the civic values which our society upholds or rejects. But with the lone exception of John Simpson's first project the competition entries are nothing more than architectural expressions of short-term interests.

If Paternoster Square is to become more than just another office precinct, it must be conceived from the start as a complex piece of urban fabric of an optimum (not maximum) brief, density, height, form and appearance.

Instead of implementing and encouraging the functional zoning of cities, authorities should promote and enforce the correct mix of urban uses; they should not limit the height of buildings but limit the number of floors, to an absolute maximum of five storeys; they should not allow plot ratios anywhere to exceed 3:1.

The responsibility lies primarily with the authorities who write the regulations and set the criteria. Designers and developers will only act responsibly when legislation requires and expects them to do so.