Contents: Urban Cabaret special edition, including route map and timetables; Council Housing Stock Transfer; Govanhill Pool Protest; Housing Design; Urban Fiction; G.L.A.S. manifesto
This first issue of *glaspaper* comes free in conjunction with ‘Urban Cabaret’, a citywide event in Glasgow that aims to highlight spatial inequality and injustice, champion social struggles centred around buildings and the environment, and highlight ideas which promote a rethinking of how we could make buildings and cities in more cooperative ways for the benefit of all who use them.

Also featured in this issue are special reports on two of the highest profile building struggles in Glasgow’s recent history. Both the local fight to save Govanhill Pool from closure and the city council’s proposed housing stock transfer illustrate the relentless privatisation of land, building stock and public space. Encouragingly they also highlight the growing resistance to urban developments made in the name of progress which in reality undermine the notion of a city as a site of solidarity, interdependence and communality.

The presentation of a competition entry by GLAS displays a complete rethink of the way in which we consider housing as private property for individual consumption. ‘Old-Glasgow Themepark’ is a fictious report on the development of an essential Glasgow as a major entertainment and shopping attraction reflecting on the increasingly monofunctional appearance of our inner cities as places of consumption and representation of a past-perfected history.

If you would like ‘Urban Cabaret’ to visit your neighbourhood or have views on what is contained in *glaspaper* please contact us by mail, phone or visiting www.glas-collective.com
GLAS is a co-operative of architects, teachers, writers and urban activists

GLAS is committed to fighting all manifestations of socio-spatial inequality, exploitation and deprivation

GLAS produces multi-media critical works and design ideas that promote a radical social and political rethinking of how we make and experience buildings and cities

GLAS is engaged in a critique of the capitalist production and use of the built environment

GLAS is committed to the dissemination of its ideas to as wide an audience as possible, exploring a broad range of communication techniques

GLAS aims to offer free professional advice and assistance to individuals and social groups engaged in struggles to transform their environment

GLAS is organised around the political principles of temporary existence and of collective self management and ownership of assets and ideas
Urban Cabaret and GLAS are there to denounce specific contradictions and injustices in our city. This includes the privatisation of space, the surveillance of the public realm, the tyranny of retail, the manifestations of gender, racial and class discrimination, the ownership and control of the city itself and the means of producing it.

Urban Cabaret is here to show others within and without the architectural profession that things can be done differently. The dearth of laissez-faire attitude to the current system of building production which leads many of our peers to say "that's just the way of the real world, we have to do what we can to make it nicer" will no longer be credible or acceptable.

Urban Cabaret offers 'ways of seeing' which will encourage individuals and social groups to interpret their own surroundings within the context of the political and economic forces which shape modern landscapes.

Urban Cabaret and GLAS are there to denote specific contradictions and injustices in our city. This includes the privatisation of space, the surveillance of the public realm, the tyranny of retail, the manifestations of gender, racial and class discrimination, the ownership and control of the city itself and the means of producing it.

Urban Cabaret challenges the glaring contradictions and inequalities which exists within the built environment of our cities in general and of Glasgow in particular. As the city centre becomes increasingly geared towards tourist and shopping revenue large sections of the population living on the physical and spatial periphery find themselves excluded from modern city life.

Urban Cabaret offers a long overdue antidote to the scarcity of ambition shown by those who claim to speak on the citizens behalf.

Urban Cabaret offers ways of seeing which will encourage individuals and social groups to interpret their own surroundings within the context of the political and economic forces which shape modern landscapes.

Urban Cabaret challenges the glaring contradictions and inequalities which exists within the built environment of our cities in general and of Glasgow in particular.

Urban Cabaret is here to show others within and without the architectural profession that things can be done differently. The dearth of laissez-faire attitude to the current system of building production which leads many of our peers to say "that's just the way of the real world, we have to do what we can to make it nicer" will no longer be credible or acceptable.

Urban Cabaret is here to show others within and without the architectural profession that things can be done differently. The dearth of laissez-faire attitude to the current system of building production which leads many of our peers to say "that's just the way of the real world, we have to do what we can to make it nicer" will no longer be credible or acceptable.

Urban Cabaret uses the Piaggio APE van as a vehicle for contact and to disseminate our ideas in the form of exhibition displays, the distribution of the GLASpaper and discussions.

Urban Cabaret places a bright red arrow next to the causes and consequences of inequality, segregation and repression within the city.

Through the production and free distribution of the glaspaper GLAS and Urban Cabaret try to focus the attention on such issues as the cities housing crisis, city centre exclusion and public consultation processes.
**PIT STOPs** will happen in local neighbourhoods as well as in prominent city centre locations. Here Urban Cabaret wants to invite you to look at our mounted exhibition, engage in a discussion or simply offer you a cup of tea. Our Urban Cabaret activists will distribute free copies of *glas paper*.

Pit Stops include:
City Chambers 15.09. 10.00h ; Glasgow Cathedral 15.09. 13.00h ; George Square 16.09. 9.00h ; SECC 16.09. 17.00h ; Ikea Brahead 20.09. 10.00h ; Southern General Hospital 20.09. 15.00h ; Scotstoun Leisure Centre 20.09. 17.00h ; Pollokshaws Shopping Hub 21.09. 10.00h ; Pollok Shopping Centre 21.09. 14.00h ; Partick Train Station 22.09. 10.00h ; Botanical Gardens 22.09. 12.00h ; Buchanan Bus Station 23.09. 10.00h ; St. Enoch Square 23.09. 17.00h ; Possilpark Kwik-Save 29.09. 12.00h ; Possilpark Bardowie Street 29.09. 15.00h.

**URBAN HITs** are short staged events around or at a specific building that is either a cause or manifestation of the spatial and social inequality of our city. The settings will be formed by the Ape van, banners, sound and the Urban Cabaret activists.

Urban Hits include:
High Court of Justiciary 15.09. 12.00h ; Cowcaddens Fire Station 15.09. 15.00h ; Tron Theatre 16.09. 11.00h ; The Lighthouse 16.09. 15.00h ; Braehead Shopping Centre 20.09. 12.00h ; Pollokshaws Burgh Hall 21.09. 12.00h ; Priesbill closed Community Centre 21.09.

**DRIVE BYs** will be more or less random events. The Ape van on the move, a literal mobile exhibition. Some of the drive bys will be sound supported, others may use a projector to transform the immediate surrounding that is passing by.

Drive Bys include:
Central Station 15.09. 19.00h ; St. Enoch Car Park 16.09. 13.00h ; Pollok Golf Club House 21.09. 13.00h ; Hyndland Underground Station 22.09. 11.00h ; Kelvin Grove Museum 22.09. 17.00h ; Buchanan Galleries 23.09. 12.00h ; Possilpark Gala Bingo 29.09. 17.00h.

**PROJECTIONS** illuminate the city at night by writing Urban Cabaret's messages on the surfaces of the city.

Projections include:
City Chambers 15.09. 22.00h ; Club MEDIA 16.09. 22.00h ; The Arches 21.09. 22.00h ; Divine - Glasgow School of Art 22.09. 22.00h ; Club t.b.c. 23.09. 21.00h ; Club t.b.c. 29.09. 21.00h.
Watch out for Urban Cabaret! From the 15th of September onwards GLAS will visit for two weeks the City of Glasgow with Urban Cabaret and stage a series of different events according to space, time and occasion.

It is in the nature of Urban Cabaret that its timetable might be extended as Urban Cabaret wants to react promptly to the needs expressed by communities, groups and individuals that it will encounter on its journey. If you want to find out more about Urban Cabaret just come to the places which are indicated on the timetables or watch out for a little bright red three wheeler van that will drive through the city. An up to date documentation and any complimentary events will be shown on the web page www.glas-collective.com.

If you would like Urban Cabaret to visit your neighbourhood please speak to us when you see us in the streets or contact GLAS by phone, mail or by visiting our web page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.09.2001</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>17.30h</td>
<td>The Lighthouse, START....................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.09.2001</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>9.00h</td>
<td>Pollokshaws, Shopping Hub..................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pollokshaws Burgh Hall.......................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pollok Golf Club House.....................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pollok Shopping Centre.....................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priesthill, Closed Community Centre..............................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Arches.....................................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.09.2001</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>10.00h</td>
<td>City Chambers..................................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High Court of Justiciary...................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Glasgow Cathedral.............................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cowcaddens Fire Station....................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Central Station................................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>City Chambers..................................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.09.2001</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>10.00h</td>
<td>Partick Train Station........................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hyndland Underground........................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Botanic Gardens...............................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Charing Cross..................................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kelvingrove Museum..........................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BBC, BT Scottish Ensemble Concert................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Divine, Glasgow School of Art.......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.09.2001</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>11.00h</td>
<td>Sighthill, U-save.............................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SECC, Scottish Retailing Show.......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.09.2001</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>10.00h</td>
<td>Possilpark, Saracen FC......................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possilpark, Kwik-save......................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possilpark, Bardowie Street hub....................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.09.2001</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>14.00h</td>
<td>George Square, FINISH.................................................................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CITY HOUSING REFERENCE
ENTERS FINAL STAGES

This November council house tenants in Glasgow shall be asked to vote for the complete transfer of housing stock from their current landlord, Glasgow City Council, to a new organisation – the Glasgow Housing Association (GHA).

Despite millions of pounds having already been spent by the Scottish Executive and the city council on consultants and surveys, a significant number of tenants say they haven’t as yet heard anything of the proposed transfer and many more claim to know very little about its implications. If successful, Glasgow will go down in history as being at the forefront of the national government’s programme to dispose of the state’s entire housing stock and with it, its acknowledged responsibility to provide quality housing for the masses.

The proposals are presented by the state as the only way of resolving the city’s massive housing debt (currently standing at £900m or £5,000 for every council house) and of securing the necessary investment required to bring the stock up to a satisfactory standard. If these plans go ahead, the Glasgow Housing Association says it will spend an average of £1,600 per year on each house for the next ten years. In opposition to the plans and to Scottish trade unions and the tenant run organisation – ‘Glasgow Campaign to Defend Council Housing’. They argue that the proposals represent the effective privatisation of the council’s housing stock. Furthermore they offer ways in which the debt and investment issues could be resolved whilst keeping the stock in the public sector under democratic control.

Whilst no one would dispute that major changes are required to address the many problems facing local authority landlords, the idea that the government’s proposed stock transfer represents the only option is preposterous. Drastic cuts in social housing investment, coupled with restrictions on local councils to use the proceeds from the previous sale of housing stock to individual buyers under the ‘Right to Buy’ scheme have left many council tenants living in houses which damage their physical and mental health. The city council shall most probably get a ‘yes’ vote in the stock transfer referendum because the options being offered to tenants boil down to a choice between continuing to live in what are often squalid conditions or gratefully accepting the promised ten year investment programme which might result in their houses being brought up to the minimum standards of heat insulation and made wind and water tight. Nobody appears to be asking why it is that one of the world’s richest nations has failed to provide its citizens with high quality housing located in well serviced cities and towns which enrich the lives of all those who live in them.

The stock transfer plans lie in a long line of hard and soft privatisations which has seen the provision of energy, communications, transport and now healthcare and education effectively removed from the list of services which were regarded as vital public assets which should be collectively owned to guarantee universal access. Now, after nearly one hundred years when the consensus had been that the state should provide significant levels of housing for ordinary citizens, we are returning to a position where only those deemed able to provide for themselves; the homeless, those with severe mental and physical disabilities and the poorest senior citizens shall merit the support and sympathy of the community.

If current plans to transfer the ownership of council housing guarantee a dramatic increase in both the quality and management of the stock for the benefit of tenants and housing workers, the arguments of those who stand in ideological opposition to the process could be easily overcome by the self-advocates. So why are the council, with the vociferous support of the Scottish Executive having such difficulty in convincing tenants of the merits of their scheme? Essentially there are four major ifs and buts which the council have not been able to satisfactorily address; scepticism about the extent of actual improvements to the building stock and whether this will lead to rent increases, a lack of belief that the council will get it right this time, an erosion of democratic accountability on the part of the new landlords and the public’s previous experiences of privatisation.

Building Improvements

Whilst £16,000 per house over ten years sounds like a major investment, it represents the cost of a new conservatory and loft conversion. In reality it will probably result in central heating, double-glazing, a cosmetic makeover and little else. Crucially the houses themselves shall remain in deprived peripheral estates with poor infrastructure and amenity. At least as important as this are the fragile improvements in the way in which day to day maintenance and repair is provided for housing tenants in rented accommodation. The council’s ‘Appointment Based Repair Service’ run by the Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) is generally viewed as a successful and responsive scheme which is able to react quickly to maintenance needs. After stock transfer this is likely to be replaced by a fragmented system with ‘lowest bid’ private sector contractors carrying out the work. As with privatisations in the health and education sectors this invariably leads to a poorer service being delivered and substantially worse pay and conditions for those staff transferred out of the public sector. Similarly the stream of skilled workers which the DLO (the countries largest employer of apprentices) has historically trained and provided for the wider construction industry will inevitably dry up. The consequences of this will be a further erosion of the construction industry skills base resulting in deterioration in building quality and workmanship.

Democratic Controls

Local authority landlords clearly do not get it right all the time. Indeed their cronynism and corruption during the major post-war council house building programmes are often blamed for the problems facing residents in high rise blocks and peripheral schemes today. However for all their faults, they often displayed heroic vision, ambition and a commitment to improving the environment and welfare of the entire population. They were also democratically accountable to those living in council housing. The semantic slight of hand which sees the government describe their plans as a transfer from ‘local authority to community ownership’ will be cruelly exposed when tenant after tenant finds their local councillor unable to do anything about future rent rises and poor service delivery.

Legacy of Privatisation

Predictably there is growing concern that the housing stock will be dramatically undervalued by the consultants and effectively given away to the new landlords. Previous examples of privatisation, including British Rail and the energy utilities would suggest that this is a not a possibility but a racing certainty. Post-privatisation the priorities shall be based around bottom line accounting and not the wider social needs of the community.

Offering this choice to council tenants denies them a range of options for change which could provide the same if not higher levels of investment by clearing the councils debt without the prerequisite sell-off and improve localised management and development decision making whilst keeping their houses in public ownership as a substantial asset for future generations. The government must not be allowed to use this ‘damned if you do; damned if you don’t’ referendum to effectively abandon a long-standing commitment to public sector housing. The long running political crusade by neo-liberals of all persuasions to reduce the public sector role in housing provision by encouraging more and more people to buy their own homes has not equitably increased individual wealth nor improved the nations building stock or housing standards. If anything it has ghettoised those living in socially rented housing and strangled the communal aspirations of millions who see owning their own home as a goal to be achieved above all others. That some of the wealthiest countries in Europe have strong traditions of social renting goes unmentioned. Similarly plans to transform our cities and the ways in which we live in them are not discussed or are couched in the unambiguous language of market pressures. It is time to demand decent affordable housing for everyone and reject plans to patch up the system of housing apartheid which shames our society.
Cranford

A three bedroom detached family home

Security brick walls between adjoining properties
High level security fencing with vertical emphasis
Garden with walls and hedges at waist height to aid surveillance
Thorny shrubs planted beneath some fences to reduce access potential
Gravel under windows to alert movement
Reinforced steel front door with dead locks
Bullet proof glazing on all windows
High level security windows
High level security lighting
No rear lanes to reduce security risks

We strive to make each home and development as varied and interesting as possible. This means that individual properties will vary from illustrations and information given.

by Jason Bell
Despite the efforts of local activists and visionary architect/planners during the 20th Century, economically deprived urban areas across the United Kingdom continue to face many of the social problems seen in Tower Hamlets today. Delivering another ‘innovative’ housing development only to see it fail as a result of mismanagement, under investment or gentrification would be a tragedy. Instead ideas, strangely absent from contemporary discourses on the nation’s housing crisis, must be firmly re-established as viable options for consideration by local communities striving to change their neighbourhoods for the better. These would include social ownership of land and the means of building production, truly co-operative forms of self-management and community ownership of local services and infrastructures.
Invited to devise an ‘innovative’ housing solution for Tower Hamlets, a deprived area of East London, GLAS proposed a complete rethink of the way we consider housing as private property for individual consumption. As long as housing is horse traded in estate agents windows, spiralling costs will leave large groups in society with no option but to resist the status quo and seek alternative ways of living.

at present marginalised and hidden, the passions and pursuits of senior citizens shall become central structures of city life. Face to face, ‘non-productive’ conversation, creative endeavour and earning for its own sake, passing time rather than running out of time.

vertical living + cooperative action + equitable distribution of resources = maximisation of urban potential

Early start at newsstand to collect papers for delivery. Takes bike out public lockers and heads off on the cycle route to school. Returns from school to go to football training at the local pitch. Meets up with friends and goes into the tele-station for a look at the latest text downloads.

making exchange work for the community

HOME AS SEQUENCE OF SPACES
OLD GLASGOW theme park - a milestone in history and entertainment!

After almost two years in operation, the officials of ‘Old Glasgow’, a theme park right in the heart of Glasgow, report that visitor numbers are still rising. The resort is a 48-hectare (120-acre) development within the inner core of the city, which has established itself as one of Europe’s most popular theme parks since it opened in late 1999, in the same year when Glasgow celebrated ‘UK City of Architecture and Design’.

At great expense, the two year old park seeks to offer the ultimate escape from grim urban reality.

The Bruce Plan

In 1945, Robert Bruce, Glasgow’s Master of Works and City Engineer, published the famous ‘Bruce Report’. He and his planning team had developed a strategy for the complete deconstruction of the then existing city centre in order to create a new ‘healthy and beautiful city’. The whole of the city centre had been eradicated by the end of 1947. A new road and transport system was introduced, including a ring road around the new city centre. Space for housing, commercial and industrial developments as well as open spaces were distributed on the empty land. This plan was built upon radical modernist planning ideology and executed ruthlessly. Ideas that anywhere else in Europe had remained on the planners drawing boards became reality in Glasgow.

The New Perspective

As tourism to historic sites and cities became a major industry during the 1990s, the idea of an architectural theme park was born. A heritage theme park, displaying Glasgow’s historic past, its buildings and monuments that had been demolished in order to execute the Bruce Plan. The theme park ‘Old Glasgow’ takes over the spatial heart of the city.

“It is an urban experience within an urban surrounding” says one of the designers of Old Glasgow.

Arranged around the city’s former main square, George Square, the highlights of Glasgow’s architectural history form the centrepiece of the theme park.

In the former Central Station building, located at the southwest corner of the square, visitors can now marvel at the Highlands without having to go any further north than Glasgow. In this Highland Experience Park they can walk along beautiful Lochs and through spectacular Glens, visit some of Scotland’s most impressive castles and get the best of the countryside. Facing east on to George Square, the former School of Art is a magnificent Art Noveau building which is probably the most famous building in Glasgow and one of the most famous in the world. Today, this building houses the visitor information on the ground floor and on the two floors above, the most comprehensive archive on Charles Rennie Mackintosh in the world.

Also looking onto the Square is St. Vincent Street Church, originally designed by Alexander ‘Greek’ Thomson, the greatest architect of Victorian Glasgow. He incorporated the architecture of the ancient Greeks into a style which he made truly his own, from the intricate designs of the church to the elaborate ornamentation of Holmwood House, which can be visited in Old Glasgow.

As a very important part of Glasgow’s past, the shipbuilding and its history are to be found in Glasgow Harbour. Located in the southern part of Old Glasgow, visitors can experience a 1:2 model of the ‘Queen Elizabeth’, one of the biggest ships ever built in Glasgow’s Prince’s Dock.

It houses the Museum of Ships, the largest and most unique collection of ship models, that were built on the Clyde. Other attractions include merchant houses, market buildings, a landscape garden at the northern end of the theme park, and two years, the City Council expects to add another 8m to 10m visitors a year. With an average purchase of food and merchandise at £117 per person and an additional £23 spent on entrance fees for merchandise, this will mean big money. It will also create 5,500 new jobs, involved with the researching, planning and building of the new buildings and another 1,500 once the extension is finished. Both, the extension of the theme park and the creation of 7,000 new jobs in total, are also seen as vital by the City Council for Glasgow’s bid as “UK City of History and Tourism” in the year 2005.

Tatjana Schneider
Tuesday 7th August 2001. Employing more than 250 police and sheriff officers, Glasgow City Council forcibly evicted local protestors from the Calder Street swimming pool on the city’s south side, determined to enforce the closure of the community facility which had been ordered following the construction of a new leisure complex in the Gorbals district – a 30 minute walk from Calder Street.

Smashing Windows

Arriving at dawn with only a modest presence on the 140-day-old picket, officers of the state forced their way into the building, smashing windows and fixtures. As the day progressed, local residents and fellow Glaswegians from neighbouring districts gathered in solidarity to convey their outrage at the behaviour of the local state and its servants in disregarding and patronising the views and wishes of the community in Govanhill.

Tension and anger rose throughout the course of the day as a standoff developed between protestors who had peace-fully occupied the building for several months and the police who were drafted into the area from across the region, several of whom confessed to those on the picket line “that they had no idea what the protest was about.” Under a barrage of eggs and fruit and with council officials and sheriff's officers unable to leave the pool without confronting the crowd, the decision was taken to use further force to clear the street of protestors. By 11pm the area had been secured.

A day in which the full force of the local state (including mounted police, helicopters and the provocative use of police camera crews) had been deployed to crush a local campaign which demanded nothing more than the preservation of a vital local amenity run for the benefit of the entire community.

Despite some 24,000 petition signatures reinforced by the unquestionable resilience of those who occupied the building for 140 days, the city council refused time and again to meet with the campaign organisers to discuss a possible compromise. The council’s position became so entrenched that they even had the temerity to suggest that the protestors themselves were obstructing the council from seeking a new community use for the building. Astonishingly, the planned feasibility study to determine what use may be found for a drained public swimming pool was from the outset to discount the possibility of retaining the pool as a publicly funded community resource. Like seeking solutions to the city’s home-less crisis and not considering building houses.

Both sides of this struggle have presented clear arguments that are worth examining. The council makes its case in three stages. First, new leisure facilities have been built at the Gorbals and at Bellahouston. The Gorbals facility, being the nearest to Calder Street is in their opinion capable of providing the community in Govanhill with a replacement pool. That this facility is a considerable distance from the existing pool, preventing a sizable social group from attending is presented as a necessary consequence of progress. That rivalries between young people in the two areas have existed for generations is conveniently ignored. Whilst the Calder Street pool, built at a human scale, forms part of a high density urban area which contributes to a lively pedestrian-friendly street life, the new Gorbals facility is based on an out-of-town, car dependent model which most forward thinking planners are now questioning.

Secondly the council argue that they plan to explore a new community use for the Calder Street building. Could this process not have been undertaken while the pool was still in use? Applying the capitalist accountant’s balance sheet, value for money rationale will inevitably lead to the privatisation of the building and land. The social and health benefits of retaining the pool and expanding upon its range of services can now be easily ignored as the building has been reduced to an empty shell.

Forced Eviction

Finally the apologists’ favourite rallying cry (also a favourite of Tony Blair’s) is wheeled out to defend the closure – “that the council has many difficult decisions to make, and that the financial cake isn’t big enough to meet everyone’s demands”. Perhaps, but why can’t the council leaders explain to the electorate what these choices are so that we can all decide whether they have made the right decisions? After all they decided to spend tens of thousands of pounds policing the pool occupation and the subsequent forced eviction of protestors, they decided to use public money to promote Glasgow as the city of call cen-

tres, providing thousands of short term, low skilled and alienating jobs and they have awarded private developers multi-million pound grants to turn city centre buildings such as the George Square post office into luxury flats and hotels which exacerbate the city’s social and class apartheid by turning the centre of Glasgow into a metropolitan themepark for those who can afford the entry fees.

For their part the protestors haven’t merely demanded that the status quo be retained, with the Calder Street site being kept as a public swimming pool, rather they have proposed imaginative extensions of its remit as a healthy living centre. As long as this option remains off the agenda for the consultants employed to carry out the council’s feasibility study and whilst the local community hasn’t the resources to undertake a study of its own, the council can dismiss these ideas as impractical and non cost effective. Protestors have also called for the resignation of the council leader – Charlie Gordon, more as a gesture of outrage than a proposal likely to affect the future of the pool. Other demands for dialogue between the council and the local community have long since been over-ridden by the council’s intransigence.

Protest Continues

Whilst the protest continues, the short-term future of the Calder Street pool appears bleak. Anyone who doubted the power of the state and the ability of the local authority to use it to completely suppress and bypass the democratic will of local communities should have learned a salutary lesson at Govanhill. That is not to say that the occupation and protest has failed and should not continue. Quite the opposite – it must be supported, expanded and form links with similar struggles throughout the city and beyond. If it does not achieve this, nor begin to shape a set of proposals, which can convince a broader audience of the need to reconsider the way in which we provide and organise local services, it shall peter out and become another noble chapter in the history of class struggles. Engaging in single-issue demonstrations and campaigns whilst failing to promote the wider social changes that need to be implemented has been described as playing chess without a chessboard.

This episode has demonstrated the absolute failure of the present system of local government to react to local needs and deliver an environment and services, which meet the expectations of the citizenry. Participation in local politics has been reduced to little more than the paying of taxes in return for the ever-diminishing expectation of delivery of a range of essential services.

As a result of misjudgement and arrogance on the council’s part the local community in Govanhill have discovered that the natural unit of effective political engagement is the neighbour-hood or urban district. At that scale individuals begin to see the value of collective action and a sharing of responsibility and resources.

Calling for the replacement of one set of patriarchal governors (they don’t refer to themselves as the City Fathers for nothing) with another who might just offer the odd concession is as mistak-en as those anti-globalisation protestors who call for multinational corporations to become kinder. Instead we should demand popular self-management of the community by free citizens. Individual communities like the one in Govanhill owning and managing buildings and distributing services according to need through popular assemblies interlinked with similar bodies throughout the city.

As the rush towards the privatisation of almost all our built assets whether through closures or PFI schemes intensifies, the number of localised protests to defend public space shall inevitably multiply. It is imperative that these movements, whilst allowing each other autonomy of action, develop a coherent set of proposals for wider social change, which can offer the whole of society the opportunity to engage effectively in the political process.

Allan Atlee
Last January, Glasgow City Council announced the closure of the 87-year-old Govanhill swimming pool, claiming it would cost £750,000 for basic repairs and £3.4 million to fully upgrade. The Council set a date for closure, 31st March 2001, despite a petition signed by 12,000 citizens protesting the decision. On the 21st of March 2001, to prevent the closure, a sit-in commenced that would last for 141 days. On Tuesday, 7 August 2001, the pool protestors were evicted.

Visiting the picket line in Calder Street one week after the eviction to speak with some of the protestors about their personal experiences, we began to discover how the protest has affected the life of the community in Govanhill, how it has changed their attitude towards politics and local democracy and what the future holds for the protest movement.

How did you become involved in the protest to Save Govanhill Pool?

Larry (staff nurse): I used to be a user of the pool. We were told a week before it was closing. We organised a sit-in from the sauna-crowd - we used to use the sauna every Wednesday. We took over the building on the 21st of March at 8.30 pm.

Fatima (artist): I used to come here for the women’s night. I can’t swim but I used to come to get for the aqua-aerobics classes. We took it over. We had meetings every Monday. It was somewhere for them to go, it was a working environment for them. The disabled groups used it as well and the new pools don’t cater for them as well.

In what ways has the protest brought the community together?

C: I have met so many people, you wouldn’t believe. People that I didn’t know were my neighbours and whom I hardly spoke to in the past. One example of what we’ve done is the garden in front of the pool. Before it was just a disused dumping ground. Volunteers got together and removed twenty bags of rubbish and needles. We painted the entire fence, planted flowers that were donated from local gardening businesses and built a wooden pegoda. There were street parties here, Sunday barbecues, a May feast, arts events. We have sing-songs every Wednesday night. It’s incredible, I have never seen a group like this, there are sub groups, there is a children committee, children are welcome at the public meetings.

What do you think will be the outcome of the council’s feasibility study? Did you approach the architects with your ideas?

F: It’s a really disparaging remark because it assumes that ordinary people can never fight for themselves. It shows how out of touch with the community the Council is. They’ve got no idea how angry people are here.

How do you feel the issue was dealt with in the media?

L: Our campaign has been too successful and too peaceful for the 140 days that we occupied the building. The Council and the police had to put a stop to that and make it look like we were thugs and that’s exactly what their tactics were, but it didn’t work.

What are the next steps planned for the protest?

C: The events of 7th of August have completely reinforced the united feeling amongst people. The move they made in sending us so many police has certainly not suppressed this communities spirit, it has doubled, tripled it.

A: We want to get as many community groups as possible together including refugees from Sighthill, people who have been affected by mobile phone masts placed on the end of their streets without any consultation. As many initiatives as we can get on board to basically force the Council to listen to us.

What do you think will be the outcome of the council’s feasibility study? Did you approach the architects with your visions about the future use of the building?

C: We approached EDAW, the consultants working with Page and Park Architects. We had a very positive three-hour meeting with them. Whether he was just speaking because we had occupation of the building or whether he took our view seriously or not has yet to be seen. I would like to think that he actually had an interest in knowing what was happening in the wider community and taking in the social aspects of urban planning and architecture, which is not considered enough in this country. Maybe the outcome of the feasibility study will just reflect what the Council wants and if it doesn’t, the Council may just abandon it and say: “Oh well, we don’t have to act on it.” To me it doesn’t hold a great deal of weight.

L: We let the Council do the feasibility study. We have insisted that maintaining the three pools is an option within the feasibility study, alongside that we want a healthy living centre. Govanhill needs something, youth groups need something, and the elderly need something like a drop-in centre. This building is massive; the potential in that building is unbelievable. We can only hope at the end of the day that some of our plans are in the feasibility study.

“The best ideas often come from within the community. They know the gaps and failures in services in their area. Service improvement and innovation come best in response to pressure from demanding, informed and confident consumers.”

GLAS invites you to place a bright red arrow next to the causes and consequences of inequality, repression and segregation within your city