



HOME ON A HILSIDE

Your apartment is on the outer slope of a hollow pyramid.
Because you're on a slope, your front terrace is open to the sky.
Don't be fooled by all the greenery – you have a fabulous, uninterrupted view.

The building is surrounded by a belt of parkland,
then, further out, local market gardens for fresh fruit and veg.

And inside... a few steps away...
shops, offices, restaurants, cultural and recreational facilities.

And compared to a regular, on-the-ground town of similar population,
with its miles of roads to keep up and underground pipes to break,
the town's "overheads" are pretty small.

Why not stop by for a visit?

Welcome to our Guided Tour

The low-floor railcar

moves smoothly through the countryside, sharing with walkers and cyclists one of Britain's many disused railway lines, now brought back into service. The seats are comfortable, the windows large. The vehicle is powered by a hybrid natural-gas/electric engine for minimal pollution and fuel usage, the latter further improved by the ability to benefit from regenerative braking. The train is one of several radial lines connecting villages with towns and ultimately with its central city. The stations themselves are generally in the form of a quadrangle, the station platform being on one side of a piazza-like square which with its café, convenience store, post office and perhaps a few hotel rooms forms the hub of the village, new residential development having been concentrated around the station.

The train is presently approaching one of the new hilltowns, but there is little sign of habitation or commercial activity. Where is the town, the rows of suburban houses, the edge-of-town shopping malls? Front-seat passengers see only a green, pyramid-shaped hill some 300 feet high. Only the glass pyramid glinting in the sun at its top dramatically signals habitation, rather like the tall cathedral spire of an old English market town.

The style of this hilltown is deliberately “organic”, its slopes planted with trees and plant life so that it always molds into the natural habitat as unobtrusively as possible. And yet this particular pyramid hilltown is home to some 10,000 inhabitants.

Despite its deceptive covering of greenery this gently sloping hill is not a creation of Nature but a complete, self-contained town built as an artificial hill, its outer slopes covered with terraced garden homes, with shops, manufacturing and processing plants and a full range of cultural facilities contained within its structure. Nor is it a small construction. The “hill” is half a mile wide at its base and inside the hollow centre is a huge atrium 1200 feet across, lit by natural light through the pyramid glass roof at its apex.

The train now dives underground so as not to intrude on the town's views and surrounding park amenities. The tunnel is not dull or boring however, for the natural surface has been cut smooth from the natural rock and finished to a high polish then stabilized with a clear diamond-crystal lining which enhances the beauty of the original natural veins and patterns. The tunnel is softly and evenly illuminated as the vehicle passes through, often with some special geological feature highlighted.

The train draws into a platform, situated in fact one level below the central atrium or core of the hilltown. Glass elevators in the centre of the platform take passengers up to the “town centre”, the Atrium Concourse.

The hilltown concept

is compact; it occupies a small “footprint”, its greenery-covered slopes make a minimal impact on the surrounding countryside, the immediate proximity of home and commercial facilities requires zero transportation, and its energy-usage represents only a fraction of that consumed by a spread-out town of similar population. But its advantages go much farther than technical or environmental statistics. The hillside home can provide every resident with three features dear to the hearts of Estate Agents: privacy, an uninterrupted countryside view, and vertical airspace for a garden terrace.

Privacy and peace are assured by the basic layout of homes and method of access, which places street passageways behind, rather than in front of the individual hillside residences. There are indeed a few outside “ring” walkways where people can take a stroll and enjoy the views, and some residents choose to live facing these outer walkways. But the majority enjoy their own unobstructed, totally private terrace and view, with their indoor access “street” behind them.

Once inside their homes, residents have complete frontal privacy, with privacy between next-door neighbours on the garden-terraces assured by planted sloping dividing walls on either side.

The second essential in a home, enjoyed by all hilltown residents, is the unobstructed view from their hillside garden terraces over miles of countryside, with its rolling hills and streams, clumps of woodland, and perhaps just the occasional glimpse of a village church spire or farm house.

The third essential is vertical airspace. The slopes of the artificial hills provide for every home a terrace garden open to the sky – as opposed to a high-rise apartment balcony which is open only to the front and perhaps the sides, with vertigo-views to the ground below! The generously-sized terraces are warm and sheltered miniature gardens, ideal for relaxing or for warm summer evening meals.

Since the terraces are sheltered, residents are able to grow plants and flowers that are even more exotic than those in the surrounding parks or public gardens. Terraces are generally paved in varied finishes and colours simulating natural stone, with ample space for seating and dining; large terracotta plant pots containing flowers or perhaps small fruiting trees will often be arranged on the paved surface, with more permanent flower beds built-in along the side walls.

There is always a low earth-bed at the front of the terrace where people grow small bushes, flowers and lots of trailing greenery. This planting at the front of the terrace helps to “camouflage” the building and blend it into the environment.

At the rear of the home, where there is no natural light other than that piped down through "light-tubes" from the divider wall cavities, sound-insulated rooms offer ample workspace which many people use for constructive hobbies. Since these areas are at the back of the apartment, some people like to have windows looking onto the interior “street”. These are usually craftspeople like sculptors, artists, or musical instrument-makers. Passers-by can watch the work in progress or perhaps see a small display of the items crafted.

Life in a hilltown

community has many advantages. Complete privacy can be enjoyed yet with total proximity of services. Heating and hot water are efficiently supplied from central facilities without the need for costly transmission, chutes in kitchens avoid the need to dump garbage, food can be prepared at home of course, or residents can “call down” to the extensive food preparation services in the large central kitchens for “autodelivery” of anything from cleaned and prepared fruits to complete dishes ready-to-eat in a variety of different styles.

Whether for individual personal use or family group entertainment, a vast catalogue of documentaries, feature films, and recorded music from the past as well as new compositions, can be selected through home video terminals; samples can be viewed or heard, and a chosen performance “ordered” for immediate viewing.

Most of the numerous cultural and entertainment activities taking place in the hilltown’s interior theatres and concert halls, performance and lecture rooms can also be accessed in the home through cable vision. Public lectures and performances tend to be fairly well attended since every home is within a few minutes' walking distance of central facilities.

While a completely private home is generally preferred, there are those who like a little more social contact. Their choice might be a home facing onto one of the two or three Promenades which run around the outside of the hilltown, so they can “potter about” in their front gardens and exchange greetings with passers-by.

Others might go for an area known locally as “The Quarry”. Here, a section of the hillside has been removed – just like a quarry in fact. This forms a little square, the “quarry floor”, which is flanked and overlooked by four or five vertical stories of single room apartments with balconies.

The quarry apartments are popular with people living alone; some will be youngsters experiencing a new-found independence, others perhaps older people who no longer have a family around them.

The Quarry's own little square is treated almost like a private club by its surrounding residents. They can peer over their balconies or call down to see if anyone wants a game of chess; the square's flower beds are tended by a couple of local residents; and the café with its outside tables serves most of the residents as a communal dining/living or clubroom. Here they chat, check the news, have a meal or a snack. The wide variety of ages makes for lively conversation, and from time to time a "stranger" happens upon this little neighbourhood square and is always made welcome. Indeed it is surprising how many "secret" corners and alleyways there are in this hilltown, both inside and out.

All hilltown homes are leased at low rates from the Community Corporation which oversaw the planning and construction of the hilltown and which has subsequent responsibility for its maintenance, though the work itself is usually undertaken under competitive contract by specialized firms. The highest standards of cleanliness and general maintenance both inside the hilltown's public areas and in the surrounding parkland can always be expected.

Privacy, a view, and vertical airspace:

these are the requirements of a perfect home, features offered by virtually every one of the hillside apartments. But in addition to the requirements for the home itself, humans also have a social side: we need contact with others for work, trade, culture, entertainment, and simple conversation. And if these facilities are to be of any practical use they must be closely and conveniently to hand: a few moments' walk or ride away, not half-an-hour's stop-go drive through polluted air on a crowded road with parking problems at the end of it! Here again the hilltown scores on pure convenience, with all its commercial, professional, and recreational facilities concentrated right there in the hillside's interior core.

Indeed with such a wealth of attractive facilities so readily available, residents find that less time is now spent in the home itself, mainly because there is so much going on around it. The numerous facilities inside the hilltown in and around the Atrium, the roof top promenade areas and the beckoning countryside provide plenty of incentive to be "out and about".

The highly compact nature of the hilltown's design and its consequently small "footprint", space can be devoted around the hilltown for market gardening (pick your own fruits and vegs!), formal and informal parkland, recreational facilities for young and less-young, walking-jogging-cycling tracks and so on. Indeed the immediate countryside offers a thoughtfully planned selection of facilities.

Access to the ‘great outdoors’ could not be simpler for the hilltown residents. Periodic breaks in the housing units allow for public top-to-bottom walkways winding through treed and landscaped slopes. Or for quicker access the sloping elevators terminate at the base of the hilltown permitting direct walk-out into the surrounding parkland. By its very nature and concept, this is a very compact town; there is no suburban sprawl gradually eating its way across those ‘greenfield sites’ so much beloved of developers! This hilltown resembles the old fortified towns of medieval times: town on one side of the city wall, open country on the other!

The extensive park area immediately surrounding the hilltown is laid out semi-formally for quiet relaxation, where people can be seen strolling along the paths enjoying the trees, the green grass and profusion of colourful scented flowers. In one area several rows of chairs are grouped in front of an old-style Victorian bandstand screened by trees at its rear. An announcement states that a local youth orchestra will perform “for your pleasure” during the afternoon. A stroll can often lead to a small pavilion, perhaps offering a café, sport facility or garden and plant centre.

At its outer edges the semi-cultivated and formally planned Town Park gives way to wedges of informal parkland alternating with market-gardening agriculture. There is quite a choice of footpaths leading off into the “real” countryside, each one having a small signpost showing its destination, distance and walking time; some of the paths are designed as circular routes, again with walking times given for the circuit. Walking has become a favourite leisure activity with residents, particularly as there is so much beautiful countryside to enjoy right on one's doorstep. A popular outing is to walk to the next village or scenic spot, perhaps enjoy some light refreshment then return home by one of the new Rural Lines that fan out from the hilltown.

The Atrium which forms the centre

of the hollow artificial hill is close at hand and offers many and varied facilities, with sunlight streaming in from its glass pyramid 300 feet above. This is the place to see and be seen, to enjoy the ever-changing parade of people, to make new friends or meet old ones, to read or relax, enjoy some light refreshment, work on a laptop computer, or play some table game with anyone who's interested (an ancient form of Chinese chess has recently been resurrected and is currently very popular here).

One can take a leisurely stroll around the perimeter, pausing to watch the passing scene in one of the many sidewalk cafés or benches set in alcoves among flowering bushes. The beautifully tiled floors and surfaces, alcoves with small sitting areas surrounded by scented flowering bushes and the many small ornamental fountains recall some ancient Moorish palace.

This is the hub of community life. The numerous small cafés and meeting areas are used as they were in the traditional coffee houses of central European capitals – places to sit for as long as you feel inclined, places to work, to read, to meet friends old and new, to play chess... the list is endless.

Tropical greenery and flowers abound, apparently thriving in the warm and slightly humid climate which is carefully monitored and controlled to resemble as nearly as possible what the technicians fancifully, though quite seriously refer to as “nature’s own sweet breath”!

Around the Atrium periphery are numerous attractive counters dispensing a great variety of pastry and baked goods, fruit, fresh fruit juices and hot drinks, which people collect on trays then take over to one of the eating areas where elegant white tables and chairs are set under palm, mango and other tropical trees, perhaps grouped around a turquoise-tiled pool with its own small fountain.

Along the ground and second level galleries surrounding the concourse are the shopping areas, each area specializing in the sale of different categories of goods such as food, clothing and household articles. The shops are thoughtfully and attractively laid out as pleasing display areas, showing off demonstration items of the complete range of goods available in settings similar to those in which they will be used. Customers can test equipment and appliances, try on garments, and make their selections.

Their chosen items are then ordered by programming a hand held computer notepad and passing a personal credit card over its surface which enters their name, address and account code. The goods are then immediately dispatched to the customer's home from automated warehouses deep in the pyramid's internal industrial areas by automated goods delivery, the cost being directly debited from the customer's personal bank account.

The warehouse computer, like those in other towns and cities, is in direct contact with the computers of supplier factories, so the factories are continuously informed as to sales movements. Providing that there are no design changes and that the product remains current, re-orders can be scheduled automatically.

There are the usual supermarkets of course, though in keeping with the “environmentally friendly” spirit of the hilltown, much use is made of bulk food dispensers and returnable containers; household needs from cleaning materials to dry or preserved food products such as nuts and grains are selected from rows of automated dispensers.

A shopper wanting some flour for home-baking will select the bin containing the chosen grains, program an indicator panel, and the grain will be ground to individual requirements in the quantity desired. The finished product is then dispensed into a small returnable container which is automatically labeled and coded with contents, ingredients, weight and price.

When all the desired goods have been selected the customer passes a credit card and the coded packages over a scanner, then places the purchases into a container which is coded for immediate, automated home delivery.

Fresh fruit can be picked or collected personally in the surrounding market gardens; but for convenience many prefer to make a selection from the varied and colourful market stands gathered together along one side of the atrium concourse, where fresh produce is brought in from the town's agricultural areas several times each day for maximum freshness.

In the higher galleries overlooking the central atrium

are the cultural areas and facilities: concert halls, theatres, and many meeting rooms large and small. Performances in the various theatres and activity spaces vary considerably, from old style operas to contemporary works. Many productions are “recordings” projected in multi-dimensional form. Others may feature live performances by local amateurs, providing an outlet for local amateur talent, very popular with participants and audiences alike. Professionalism in performance is important, but equally important is that both performers and audience should enjoy the show.

The act of musical performance is also enjoyed in its own right, and in the many smaller rooms and performance spaces music students can invite a few friends or the public to a short performance. Or perhaps someone will be reading poetry, others might be giving talks... there is always something going on and the variety is almost endless.

Any event can be experienced either in the central theatres where they are taking place, or accessed live from people's homes relayed onto their video screens. A real-time 'notice board' in the form of a central databank details the enormous variety of events and activities on offer together with their times and locations.

A significant factor concerning the use of urban space is that of cost. Traditionally, land is bought and sold as an ‘investment’. When a town or city grows in attraction and population, land and property owners are able to ask higher and ever higher prices and rents, so the fate of the city is already sealed.

As prices have moved up in the old European cities the familiar meeting places, the cafés where people had been congregating, chatting, and reading the papers for centuries have gradually become more expensive and many have been forced out of business. In the hilltown however, the use of urban space is priced only to reflect the capital write-off and maintenance costs, remaining both reasonable and stable. It is thanks to this policy that residents can enjoy the many facilities which provide great pleasure while yielding relatively little profit.

High above the Atrium Concourse

where the glass pyramid-shaped roof-dome meets the main hill structure, the rooftop 'Sky Walk' runs right around the 600-foot baseline of the glass domelight, both on the inside and outside, offering magnificent views out across the surrounding countryside or down upon the lively scene of the Atrium below. These lofty heights are reached by several vertical Atrium elevators of totally transparent construction, their stately progress as they gently rise and fall giving an added dimension of movement in the interior concourse.

The internal base areas beneath the Atrium which are devoid of daylight are occupied by the various support services: waste reprocessing, water heating, air pumping and extraction machinery. Since many manufacturing processes can be partially or even fully automated, the computer-controlled production machinery also occupies the non-daylighted areas. The operators who control and monitor the machines work remotely from stations overlooking the central Atrium, enjoying the natural daylight which filters down from the glass pyramid domelight, or from control rooms on the town's exterior north face.

All service and production areas are open to public viewing. Where automated machinery is in operation special transparent viewing passages and galleries are provided. Most people like to understand and appreciate the "behind-the-scenes" operations of their town, and throughout the production, processing and warehouse areas people of all ages can be found viewing everything from effluent purification to maintenance of the transit vehicles. Explanatory commentaries are always provided, with a personal chat for anyone who shows a particular interest. Parties of schoolchildren can view the many "hidden" facilities which they take for granted in their homes, from water heating to the treatment of sewage which produces part fertilizer, part methane gas.

A totally segregated internal goods transport system known as the 'autodelivery' serves the entire hilltown through its own network of small-bore tunnels and lifts. The system uses 4-foot wide by 3-foot high containers propelled by linear-induction coils and supported by magnetic levitation. Destinations are bar-coded and containers are routed automatically through computer-controlled junctions for direct delivery to homes, shops, warehouses and production areas.

This is a town which lacks the burdens of miles of tarmac roads, with their demands of public lighting, storm drainage, water, sewage and electricity lines, all of which impose their high costs of maintenance upon the residents of normal "sprawl" towns and cities. Nor does the hilltown come to a standstill during severe winter snows, nor suffer problems of frozen pipes and power outages.

All of the Hilltown's services, electric and communication cables, water, sewage etc are located in accessible ducts for ease of inspection and maintenance. So life goes on in all weathers, and the town's overall maintenance charges or taxes are almost negligible compared with those for other towns and cities, despite the high standards of environmental facilities both inside and in the surrounding parkland.

Here, in this hilltown, residents enjoy privacy, views, open terraces, commercial and entertainment facilities on their doorstep, surrounding countryside for recreation, and considerable savings in their basic services... all these benefits and more while minimizing the land-area footprint and energy consumption, eliminating the need for transport between homes, shops and work. "Environmentalism" never had it so good!

