

# Partitioning creates new kind of apartheid

Don't let's create dangerous partitioning.

Them and Us: is that the world we want? Is that how we see our communities developing in Richmond upon Thames and Hounslow?

Do we view "us" as caring, clean living, law abiding citizens, living in well appointed apartment blocks and gracious homes and "them" as the potential criminals, inhabiting neglected tracts, overcrowded flats, ugly estates and tower blocks where they should be encouraged to remain?

Do we categorise "them" as responsible for vandalism and burglary and muggings, who drop litter and get drunk and "us" as the stable, sober and careful who bring wealth and prosperity and maintain the high standards of middle England?

This seems to be the thinking as developers vie to create more "safe"

ghettos for the affluent - pensioners villages, private housing, complexes and gated estates.

Thankfully, there have been relatively few secured sectors showing their snug faces in this patch - but some have crept in - and others are waiting in the shadows.

One was permitted in the Retreat just off Richmond Green (which replaced the historic building that housed the reference library and was open to all) and the ostentatious apartments that went on the ice rink site in East Twickenham (again formerly a very public space) does its best to keep strangers at bay.

In old Isleworth, no less than three sets of homes, built within sight of each other on the crest of the Duke of Northumberland and the Thames Rivers resound to the hollow clang of chrome.

Governments have strived for decades to

get public access to all the canals and river navigable. This puts the clock back.

You are more likely to have a cohesive and contented citizenry when the affluent share the comforts their wealth brings with the poor. A fine example is fruit gardens - which are well cared for because they are in private ownership but which all can walk past and enjoy.

Trees, shrubs, flowers and well cut lawns help keep the air fresh and the oxygen circulating. They give a feeling of open space and well-being, not only to those who own them but to those who pass by. We have many of these throughout our leafier regions.

Despite the absurd trend to use gravel, shingle or pebbles (which would be more appropriate on a Cornish beach) to cauterise a precious patch of city earth, gardens in both boroughs tend to be

verdant sanctums - which help combat the coercive pollution that is pumped out by cars and planes. Better a shrub or two and a few weeds than sanitised paving!

Residents' associations and amenity groups organise competitions which raise standards and offer incentives to foster green thinking. But once you put bar around gardens - communal or private - you are destroying one of the civilising influences of urban life.

How nice it has been in recent years to see more and more high street lamp posts carrying flower baskets and pubs and restaurants bedecked with geraniums, lobelia, trailing carnations and holly ivy.

There are more plant troughs in the streets thanks to enlightened local authorities and generous traders. Let us build on that.

To allow new developments to designate

their roads as private and exclude all but residents from their hallowed walkways is a retrograde step, divisive and dangerous. Far from making confines safer, it sends out signals to the disenfranchised young that there are rich pickings to be had by scaling a wall or fence.

Partitioning creates a new kind of apartheid - separating the haves from the have nots.

The misguided rich may buy themselves a fortified precinct where a green zone will keep them snug - but the less fortunate feel resentful and excluded.

In fact, a retreat from the real world into the Kingdoms of "them and us" makes life outside the "gates" more hazardous and more forbidding.

Richmond upon Thames and Hounslow councils should discourage this wherever they can.