

Figure 5.25 Millgate, Newark, entrance to the site.



21.²⁶ It is proposed here to illustrate in greater detail some of the techniques which enable people to take part actively in the design process. A case study from Newark, Nottinghamshire, is used to discuss the techniques of participation.

The impetus for the project in Newark came from Mark Vidal-Hall, the Vicar of Chellaston in Derbyshire. He maintained that architects and planners were quite wrong in the methods they use to create communities. His criticism was that as professionals involved in the building industry we placed too much emphasis on physical structures: in effect we were starting from the wrong place. By designing and building the physical structures and then expecting people to move into those structures and form a community we were 'putting the cart before the horse'. His thesis involved a reversal of this process. Vidal-Hall suggested that 'community building' should be completed before the design and construction phase. Adopting this approach means that the group meets, forms a

community, then the group decides the shape of the physical structures necessary to house the community and to meet its needs and fulfil its aspirations. With this elegant idea in mind the Newark experiment was set in motion. The Nottingham Community Housing Association who had been commissioned to build about twenty-five homes on a small site of under one hectare agreed to work on this experiment with the Projects Unit of The Institute of Planning Studies of the University of Nottingham (Figures 5.25 and 5.26).

A description of the project was placed in the local paper with an invitation to a public meeting for families wishing to design their own homes. About fifty families arrived at the meeting from which twenty-five families fitting the requirements of this type of social housing and who were keen to participate were selected. The families ranged from young single people, young married couples, a single-parent family, married couples with older children, and retired single people. The range of