Once constructed, these networks would effectively cut the suburbs into sectors, giving each the chance to find its own identity. If this process can become a powerful tool reforming the suburbs, a growing awareness of the character of many of our city centres may help us to refashion them as the core of a cluster of suburbs, each with their own subordinate identities.

In the smaller, free-standing, towns there is still time to set limits to their growth. These limits would be drawn where it became necessary to sipon off growth into new settlements to prevent the town’s image from being destroyed. New housing naturally added at the periphery, however well designed at the detailed level, must inevitably erode the legibility of the total image. Decisions on the extent of the residential areas (the number of people living in the town) in relation to the town centre are crucial to the whole question of local identity. Of course some towns will have to expand; growth cannot be confined entirely to new towns, but those that are chosen must be capable visually of absorbing change. And the opportunity to recreate anew the identity of such towns must be firmly grasped.

Apart from visual criteria, there are other advantages in setting limits to growth in certain existing settlements. In traffic terms the greater the number of people the more vehicular trips that will be made, and the larger and wider the roads to carry them will have to become. Consequently the economic costs of expanding such towns will be heavy.

If the aim is to maintain the identity and coherence of individual settlements, the starting point must be an assessment of the visual effect of housing expansion at the regional level. The ability of towns to accept growth in relation to their visual and social identities is seldom, if ever, considered at any stage. Change and conservation can only go hand in hand if the process is conscious and planned. Thus, a visual survey is essential, at regional level, to discover the aesthetic constraints and opportunities of existing settlements and to assess their capabilities for housing expansion.

14 Territoriality and tradition: hillside and valley. 14 and 15 provide old towns with their physical context, defining their boundaries and establishing their urban form.

IN THE TOWNSCAPE

In an old town like Blundford (25, from the south; 26, from the north) spires and towers and the gradual build-up of scale towards the centre draw the eye inwards, intensifying the sense of a community gravitating towards the centre. By contrast Blundford (as here at Cranberry) is vast and the centre far more open. And housing areas, if planned retrospectively, 26, can seem to form their backs on the centre. Some have their vitality diffused by large open spaces that are little more than expanded residential gardens. In a town like Blundford the urban spaces, 26, are part of the town centre; development elsewhere is in streets form. By contrast Cranberry, as so far built, has open space, 25, separating the centre from the rest of the town. The form-giving radial road-patterns of the past are giving way to roads bypassing the town centre. Contrast the dramatic entrance by car to Cranberry’s towns centre along the spine road, 26, with the pedestrian access, 25; but the presence of the hill always adds the day—you know the centre is at the top, 25.