

READING PASSAGE 3

Answer Questions 30-46, which are based on Reading Passage 3 on pages 9 and 10.

An Architectural Revolution

An expert on architectural history expresses his views on trends in urban planning

In the medieval period (5th–15th centuries), the towns and cities of Europe spread in a natural, organic and sometimes haphazard way, according to the social, economic and political needs of the people who lived there. Fortifying towns with high city walls for protection was essential, as was situating them on high ground, giving the residents advance knowledge of any attack. Houses were built from local materials with decorated doorways and windows, usually in a style that reflected a long-standing consensus about architecture. Shops, workshops, schools and communal buildings were inserted between the houses, and streets would converge on a square in the middle of the town where a church and marketplace together symbolised the forces that held the community together.

This traditional urban design continued for many centuries, but was disrupted in the early twentieth century in the United States, where the new 'zoning concept' was introduced. This involved the introduction of the 'downtown plus suburbs' template, in which the downtown area was a place dedicated entirely to commerce, and the residential suburbs were where people escaped to after work. Soon afterwards, when cars arrived on the scene, they smashed their way through the narrow streets of the towns and laid for themselves a carpet of tarmac into the surrounding countryside. The result has been an environmental, aesthetic and social disaster, which can continue unchecked in the US only because of the abundance of land there. Europeans, on the other hand, when faced with the suburbanisation of their ancient towns, tend to dedicate themselves to preventing it.

But the fight to retain the original character of European towns was complicated by two major events: the First World War of 1914–18 and the rise of the International Style in architecture in the 1920s. The two events were connected. Following the war, Europe experienced the first of many housing crises, as displaced populations and returning soldiers wanted to settle in cities that were already crowded. Meanwhile, the rural population took advantage of improved transport links and greater social mobility and began to migrate to the towns. It was also at this time that the architects of the innovative International Style, such as le Corbusier, celebrated clean, simple lines created out of concrete, steel and glass. The supporters of this new architectural style rapidly took over the architecture schools and the professional journals, and presented themselves as the only ones who could deal with a housing challenge on a scale that politicians had not encountered before.

The International Style started out as revolutionary, with its emphasis on simplicity and industrialised mass-production techniques. It arose from an admirable if rather idealistic desire to soften and blur the barriers between different countries after years of conflict. The style was considered universal because it had no association with any particular culture or nation, and by the 1950s it had become accepted as the only viable one for modern cities. However, by this time it had become less imaginative and varied. Endless demands for new buildings in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s meant that there was increasing reliance on a few standard templates, none of them particularly popular with local residents, and many



requiring the demolition of much-loved neighbourhoods with a long history.

The reconstruction and redevelopment of many British towns in the decades after the Second World War (1939–1945) involved not only the necessary widening of roads but also the destruction of the old fabric of rows of small houses and local shops, sloping roofs, alleyways and interesting little corners and quiet spots. All the colourful, distinctive features of individual urban areas were swept away and replaced with identical high-rise blocks and anonymous shopping malls, glass boxes and concrete squares, none of which had any cultural association with the places where they were built.

There is overwhelming evidence that bleak impersonal environments such as these can lead to depression, anxiety and feelings of isolation. The ideal is to have an environment that actively encourages people to come across one another in their local area. This means creating and sustaining a neighbourhood in which it is possible for residents to pass in the street, greet one another, and feel secure because they share a pleasant environment which is cared for reasonably well. Our sense of beauty is rooted in these feelings, and it is the principal reason why people fight to preserve the character of their local area.

So what new approach do urban planners need to take? Firstly, new architecture must be of a style which suits the aesthetics of the location and fits in well with the appearance of existing buildings, taking account of the ways in which buildings in that area have been constructed for hundreds of years. What matters as much as an aesthetically pleasing home is having neighbouring houses that conform to similar ideas about what is beautiful: ideally the design of all the buildings in an area should be based on similar architectural values. Fortunately, in many parts of the world there is now increasing pressure being exerted on urban planners and architects to shift their approach towards this ideal. Nowadays, coordinated campaigns against standard ways of building are so common that it has become difficult in some places to build anything new at all, let alone to build in the quantities required. But at least the appearance of a building, rather than just its function, has moved to the top of the agenda.



Questions 30 – 35

Do the following statements agree with the claims of the writer in Reading Passage 3?

In boxes 30-35 on your answer sheet, write

- YES** *if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer*
- NO** *if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer*
- NOT GIVEN** *if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this*

- 30** The growth of European towns in the medieval era had to follow strictly organised plans.
- 31** Ensuring the safety of inhabitants was a vital consideration in the design and location of medieval towns.
- 32** In medieval times, the challenges of transporting heavy goods over long distances made it necessary to build houses out of local materials.
- 33** The function of the central square of medieval towns represented two key aspects of urban society.
- 34** The early twentieth-century 'downtown plus suburbs' approach in the US had some advantages over traditional European urban design.
- 35** The advent of motorised transport had a positive effect on the layout of US towns.



Questions 36 – 40

Choose the correct letter, **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**.

Write the correct letter in boxes 36-40 on your answer sheet.

- 36** In the third paragraph, what do we learn about the International Style?
- A** It relied on building materials that were regarded as unattractive.
 - B** It became very fashionable only after an initially sceptical reaction.
 - C** It proposed a solution to the post-war shortage of accommodation.
 - D** It incorporated a few of the best features of traditional urban design.
- 37** In the fourth paragraph, the writer praises International Style architects for
- A** attempting to minimise cultural differences.
 - B** avoiding designs that were over-complicated.
 - C** challenging conservative attitudes to architecture.
 - D** making full use of modern technological advances.
- 38** The writer is critical of architects in the 1960s and 1970s because they
- A** consistently ignored the objections of local people.
 - B** based their designs on ideas that were impractical.
 - C** used only a limited number of very predictable forms.
 - D** wasted money by removing long-established districts.
- 39** What impact of trends in building style in post-war Britain does the writer mention?
- A** an increase in the range of construction techniques used
 - B** a significant expansion in the number of residential streets
 - C** the creation of areas where people could escape the traffic
 - D** the loss of architectural details that had made towns unique
- 40** In the sixth paragraph, the writer expresses the view that people should live in places which
- A** reflect universal aesthetic standards and values.
 - B** are generally easy to maintain in good condition.
 - C** can cope with major urban expansion if necessary.
 - D** are designed in a way that facilitates human contact.



Questions 41 – 46

Complete the summary using the list of words, **A-H**, below.

Write the correct letter, **A-H**, in boxes 41-46 on your answer sheet.

Taking a new approach to urban planning

New buildings should be in **41** with their location and they should be constructed using **42** As well as being attractive, homes should have a similar **43** to that of the surrounding properties. In addition, there should be certain **44** that a new building shares with older buildings in the area.

Fortunately, there is now often a considerable amount of **45** to the proposals of urban planners. Increasingly, people are realising that focusing purely on a building's **46** is undesirable, and that more importance should be attached to its appearance and cultural value.

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|------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| A visual appeal | B organised opposition | C sharp contrast |
| D basic function | E essential meaning | F relative harmony |
| G traditional methods | H underlying principles | |

