



# Suburbanisation

The suburbs are the outlying areas of a city which remain close enough to the city centre to be accessible by commuters. The suburbs are predominantly residential in nature, but in Britain the suburbs have carefully developed a sense of rurality - their design gives great emphasis to gardens and to tree-lined avenues, for example. This Factsheet will review the reason for the rapid growth in suburbs in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Britain and will consider the consequences of this process, both for the inner cities and the fringes of British cities.

### Historical development of the suburbs

The period 1800 - 1900 saw very rapid industrial urbanisation. Industry outbid all other potential users of land around the commercial city centre and, since such industry needed a large and local labour force, rapid and largely unplanned housing estates were built around the industry. Much of this housing was very poor with few, if any, services such as street lighting and sanitation. Some of these areas quickly became no-go areas for the wealthier middle classes. It was the very rapid development of such industrial housing that stimulated the middle classes to begin to move away from the city centre into the suburbs. The suburbs continued to grow extremely rapidly in all British cities in the inter-war and post-war period.

Over the last 30 years, the population of all large UK cities has decreased (Table 1) and despite the fact that by 2010 the UK population is expected to increase by about two million people, the population of the inner cities is expected to continue to fall.

**Table 1. Population Change in UK cities (percentage) 1970-1990**

City	1970-1980	1980-1990
London	-3.1	-1.1
Birmingham	-1.2	-0.7
Glasgow	-4.3	-1.1

Traditionally, people have moved away from the city centre for economic, social and environmental reasons and frequently all three are inter-connected.

De-industrialisation of Britain's manufacturing base rapidly made millions of young and middle-aged males unemployed and, in terms of their narrow and redundant skills, many were unemployable without extensive training. Thus, in cities such as **Coventry**, 40,000 manufacturing workers were made unemployed over a four year period (1978-1982). Indeed, between 1960 and 1980, every major city in the UK lost between 25% and 50% of its manufacturing jobs.

Although thousands of new jobs were created in the producer and service sectors (Table 2), the numbers were never enough to compensate and, in any case, unemployed manufacturing workers rarely had the skills to successfully compete for the new service sector jobs. Thus, urban unemployment rose, old industrial factories closed, dereliction increased and decentralisation of the population accelerated. Between 1951 and 1981, the eleven largest UK cities lost 31% of their population. The migrants to the suburbs tended to be the young and middle-aged, mobile, affluent, skilled manual workers and professionals. This left behind the young unskilled, elderly and those who lacked the financial reserves or

transport to be able to move. The suburbs also grew because of the perceived social problems of the city centre. The inner city exhibits higher crime rates and is often perceived to have poor schools and poor health provision. Although there was no evidence of a **causal** relationship between unemployment and crime, the common perception was that the threat of assault, vandalism and property based theft were linked to rising unemployment and the suburbs were seen as greener, cleaner and safer.

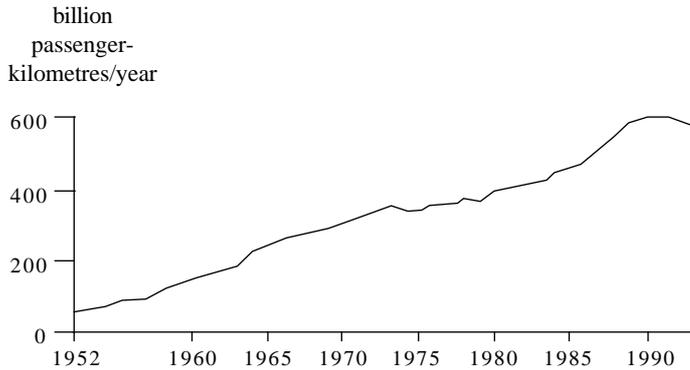
**Table 2. The changing nature of employment in British cities (Percentage change)**

	Cardiff	B'ham	Leeds	Glasgow
Engineering	-12.2	-37.8	-26.2	-45.4
Other manufacturing	-3.7	-19.8	-26.9	-40.8
Construction	-24.4	-10.0	-14.0	-15.0
Producer services	+53.4	+33.0	+54.1	+22.0
Personal services	+13.0	+22.2	+19.3	+4.6

Suburbanisation of the population went hand in hand with suburbanisation of industry and jobs. All forms of industry faced serious problems in the inner city as office booms - for example in the 1960s and 1970s - caused land prices and rents to rapidly increase. This often made it economically sensible to sell off industrial sites in the city centre for redevelopment. In addition, many businesses and industrial units became bankrupt or chose to relocate to the suburbs to reduce costs, to provide space for expansion, to escape congestion, to seek more attractive landscapes, to attract workers or to impress clients. Thus, the suburbs provided cheaper, larger sites, access to the motorway network and a relatively cheap, flexible, educated, non-unionised and increasingly female workforce.

As a result, many suburban families have both adults in skilled or professional work. This has further increased the **affluence** of the suburbs in comparison to the city centres. It is ironic then, that initially the development of the suburbs occurred as a result of industrial growth in the heart of the cities and that between 1960 and 1990 it was the process of de-industrialisation of those cities which further accelerated suburbanisation. Simultaneously, there have been advances in the development of mass transport systems which have allowed people to live much further from their workplace in the city centre. Continuing improvement to A-roads, the development of urban motorways and the huge increase in the ownership and use of private cars (Fig 1) has made commuting a way of life for millions of people who work in the city but who live in the suburbs or in dormitory villages.

**Fig 1. Growth in surface transport: movement of people by car 1952-93**



The suburbs, then, can easily be differentiated from inner city areas. The suburbs have an older, healthier, wealthier and more self-sufficient population and are more likely to own their own home and be in employment (Table 3).

**Table 3. The inner city and the suburbs**

	Inner city	Suburbs
Population under 5 years of age	7%	6%
Population over retirement age	17%	22%
Births to lone parents	21%	7%
Percentage of population of ethnic minority origin	8%	3%
Standardised mortality ratio	107	89
Percentage of population receiving housing benefit	27	11
Percentage of homes owner occupied	51	68
Notifiable crimes/1000 population	112	72
Unemployment rate	9.5	3.9

**Are All Suburbs the Same?**

Although suburbs are mainly residential and populated by middle class and skilled working class, suburbs in different cities and even the suburbs of any one city may be very varied as the result of their different physical settings, the influence of the planners and individual architects involved and because they may well have developed at different times.

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, suburbs have grown in phases which very often reflect the changing profitability of building houses. During periods where land prices have fallen, average plot sizes have often increased and housing densities have decreased. Non-residential, institutional buildings have been incorporated and more extensive recreational facilities, such as playing fields have been developed. Suburban areas of this type are known as **fringe belts**. Conversely, when land prices have risen steeply, new suburban houses and plots have tended to be smaller and housing densities have increased. Suburban house building has also been strongly influenced by transport innovations - continuing improvements of arterial routes to the city centre, the development of underground railways, tram lines, etc. have all influenced the pace and style of suburban development around and along them. All of these factors mean that suburbs may actually be quite varied in their size and type of housing.

*Exam Hint - Candidates frequently write as if all suburbs in British cities are identical. Good candidates will appreciate the influence of planners, transport routes and fluctuating land values.*

**Consequences of Suburbanisation**

The consequences of suburbanisation are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4. Consequences of Suburbanisation**

Inner City	Suburbs	City as a whole
<p>Suburbanisation of jobs leads to decreased employment opportunities, leading to increased unemployment, increasing poverty</p> <p>Increased vacant and derelict buildings may be dangerous and/or unsightly and may deter new inward investment</p> <p>Decreasing need for high-rise, high-density housing leading to clearance and replacement by low-rise, low-density housing</p> <p>Increased industrial and residential clearance for improved communication networks, e.g. bus and tram termini</p> <p>Increased opportunity for environmental improvement of derelict land to create recreational open spaces</p>	<p>Increasing price of land</p> <p>Increasing pressure on Green Belt</p> <p>Increase in number of suburb to suburb and suburb to city commuters and therefore increased congestion and air pollution</p> <p>Increasing demand for recreational facilities such as golf courses</p> <p>Increasing demand for retailing, e.g. retail parks, DIY centres</p> <p>Increasing employment opportunities in offices and shops</p> <p>Suburbanisation of outlying villages leads to loss of village character/community/school places for locals, increasing house prices and inability of young locals to afford to remain in village</p>	<p>Greater polarisation between the suburbs and the inner city in terms of class, ethnic group, affluence, education, employment and mobility</p> <p>Increasing employment decentralisation.</p> <p>Increase in outer city traffic</p> <p>Increase in air pollution</p> <p>Increase in size of city as demand for low density housing increases</p>

**Recent Changes in the Suburbs**

Over the last 15 years, there have been three major developments in the suburbs:

1. Increasing conversion of single unit dwellings to multiple unit dwellings, eg. flats for commuters.
2. Infilling of vacant land - often large gardens of detached residences - and construction of smaller dwellings and flats. This is likely to be

accelerated further by the government's recent demands for millions of new homes to be constructed on brown field sites and within the established conurbation.

3. The continuing outward expansion of the suburban fringe into the Green belt. At present there are 30 outstanding planning applications for major residential development in areas of the Green belt - these will feature as a case study Factsheet.

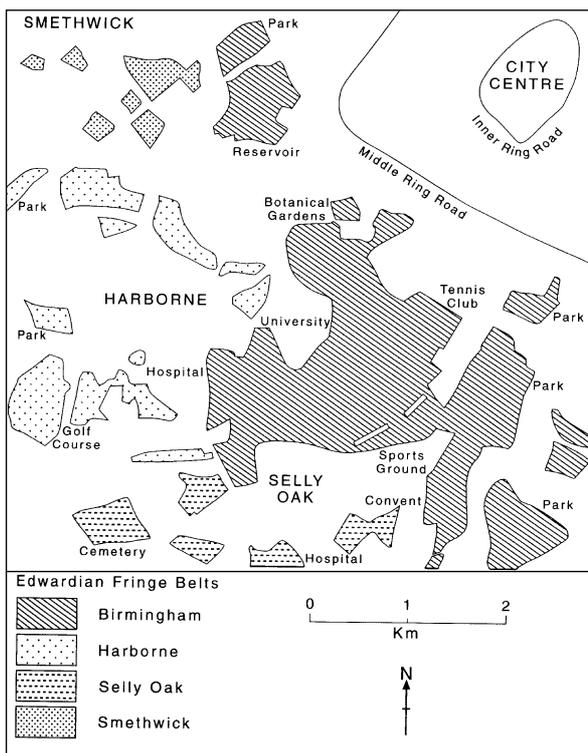
**Case Study: Surburbanisation in Birmingham**

Birmingham's first suburbs, comprising large, detached and semi-detached houses, began to develop at Edgbaston in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. These were followed by higher-density housing developments around the entire circumference of the city. In line with increasing national awareness that there was a link between people's health and the standard of their housing, Birmingham began to encourage development of lower density housing away from the inner city. Thus, **Bournville**, with tree-lined roads and picturesque houses with both front and back gardens was developed by Cadbury's for their workers, six kilometres south of the city centre and was greatly expanded from 1900 by the **Bournville Village Trust**. These and other **garden suburbs**, such as **Moor Pool Estate**, were in sharp contrast with the high-density terraced houses which had been developed over the preceding 20 years. However, both local authorities and private property builders became more cost conscious over the next 20 years and housing densities in the suburbs then began to reflect fluctuating land prices. Figure 3 shows the huge increase in suburban house building which occurred during the inter-war period. Much of this was intended for blue collar workers and was built by local authorities. It consisted of large, geometric estates made up of terraced and semi-detached housing. Often, little thought was given to services; the corner shops which had characterised suburban development before 1914 were forgotten and the residents of many of these new estates - usually wives left at home - became isolated during the day, giving rise to the phrase 'suburban neurosis'.

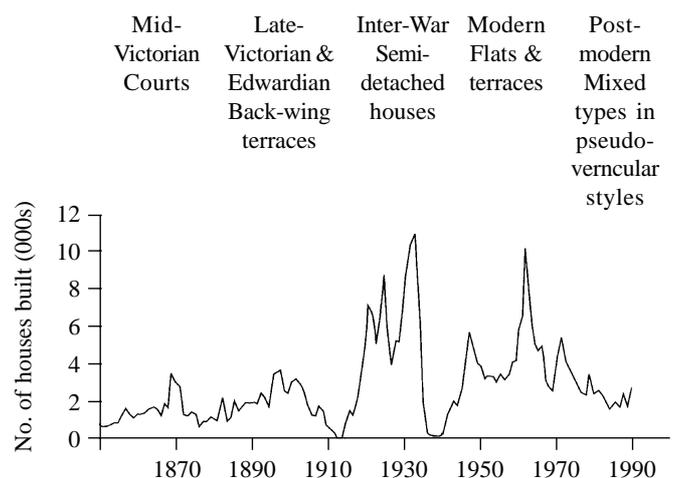
The outward spread of the suburbs was limited by the **Restriction of Ribbon Development Act (1935)** and, more importantly, by the **Green Belt policy**. Thus, since 1945, housing densities within many of Birmingham's suburbs have increased. This is in itself a reflection of the declining size of individual households and the greater affluence and mobility of young people. **Infilling** has been easiest, and has therefore occurred most frequently, in what were the lowest housing density areas. Often, the style of housing used for infilling has contrasted sharply with the houses around the area, resulting in very diverse estates. In addition, suburbs have changed as owners have attempted to improve their homes by, for example, adding side extensions to semi-detached houses and through the conversion of front gardens into car bays. Birmingham is a good example of a city which has experienced great fluctuations in its rate of outward expansion (Fig 2) Several clearly defined **fringe belts** - areas of low density housing characterised by public parks, golf courses and institutional buildings - can be identified. These fringe belts developed when land prices fell, thus allowing extensive land uses, such as parks and golf clubs, to be cheaply developed.

The **Edwardian fringe belt**, stretching continuously between the **Botanical Gardens** and **Cannon Hill Park**, includes **Edgbaston County Cricket Ground**, **Edgbaston Nature Centre**, golf and tennis clubs and the **University of Birmingham**. Now, this fringe belt is surrounded on all sides by high density housing and other forms of intensive land use.

**Fig 2. Edwardian fringe belts in south-west Birmingham**



**Fig 3. House-building fluctuations and predominant house types in Birmingham, 1856-1994**



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