

PLANNING ISSUES IN TODAY'S MEDC CITIES

Cities throughout the more economically developed parts of the world continue to face many challenges. Most MEDCs have a highly urbanised population. In Britain, for example, approximately 80% of the population live on less than 10% of the land area, and the 10 most populated urban areas are home to about a third of the population. Immigration, as well as population growth and social changes, have led to increasing pressures on inner city areas and growing demand for housing. Infrastructure, including transport systems, waste disposal and water supply, is being stretched to its limits. In turn this leads to numerous environmental pressures and threatens the viability of cities as safe and healthy places to live. In a few extreme cases, cities need to find a completely new economic structure following the rapid decline of an industrial base that has lasted for many decades.

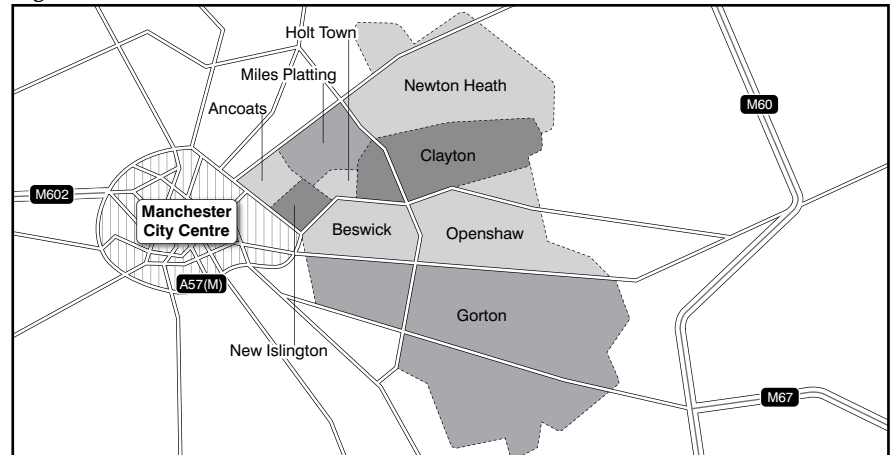
Urban planning (including city and town planning) is a technical and political process concerned with the control of the use of land and design of the urban environment, including transportation networks, to guide and ensure the orderly development of settlements and communities.

Reurbanisation and regeneration in Manchester

East Manchester (Figure 1) was once at the heart of the manufacturing industry on which the city's wealth was based. Since the early 1970s, east Manchester has experienced extensive social, economic and physical decline, industrial activities have contracted and in many cases disappeared. Vacant houses, under-used open spaces and poor-quality industrial sites had become characteristics of the area. By the 1990s parts of east Manchester were recognised as among the most deprived areas in the country (Figure 2). It was recognised at the national and regional levels as being in need of comprehensive regeneration.

East Manchester was designated a regeneration area in 1996 to reverse the decline over the past generation caused by the collapse of

Figure 1: East Manchester



Source: <http://www.east-manchester.com/living/>

manufacturing jobs. It is the largest regeneration area within the UK with an area of 1100 ha. To support and co-ordinate this activity, New East Manchester Ltd (NEML) has been formed, as a public/private sector company. NEML's aim is to secure the successful regeneration of the area and its sustainability into the future. The strategy has a number of key elements.

Sportcity

Sportcity is located in the centre of East Manchester, and comprises a cluster of international sporting facilities, including the new City of Manchester Stadium. The other

Figure 2: Indicators of decline in East Manchester

- 13% population loss in 1990s
- 20% vacant properties, negative equity
- 52% households receive benefit
- low skills base
- high crime
- poor health
- poor community and retail facilities
- collapse in housing market

related facilities will include leisure, retail and hotel uses, and future potential for other commercial uses. It also includes a district centre

Figure 3: Sportcity – City of Manchester Stadium (left)



Source: Wikimedia Commons

Figure 4: Indicators of decline in Pittsburgh

Population Changes in Pittsburgh							
Indicator	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Total Population	676,806	604,334	520,117	423,938	369,879	334,563	305,704
Density (sq. mile)	12,487	11,171	9,422	7,652	6,653	6,019	5,636
Change %	1%	-11%	-14%	-18%	-13%	-10%	-9%
MSA Population	2,213,136	2,405,435	2,401,362	2,218,870	2,056,705	2,431,087	2,356,285
Black Population %	12.2%	16.6%	20.1%	24%	25.7%	28.7%	26.1%

Sources: US Census Bureau; adapted from Crowley 2010; Trotter & Day 2010

Economic Changes in Pittsburgh							
Indicator	1970	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2009
Personal Income Per Capita (2009)	\$22,388	\$27,335	\$28,392	\$31,789	\$33,006	\$38,509	\$42,298
Manufacturing Jobs	311,148	273,050	171,599	151,433	140,450	144,448	92,371

Source: US Chamber of Commerce
(MSA = Metropolitan Statistical Area)

which will consolidate and improve existing shopping provision across East Manchester. It will provide shopping facilities to meet the needs of existing and new residents which, combined with other initiatives, will draw investment and spending into the area. High-quality shopping provision is an essential component in the creation of a sustainable community.

Central Park

Central Park is composed of a number of key strategic development sites and provides the opportunity for a major high-quality business park. It will become one of the major employment areas in the region. It will provide a flexible range of buildings to service the life cycle of businesses, from incubators and start-up units to medium and larger flexible business space. It is well served by main roads, rail, the proposed Oldham/Rochdale Metrolink tramline, and has good access via Oldham Road to the M60 and Manchester International Airport.

Ancoats and New Islington

These areas lie to the north east of the city centre along the Rochdale and Ashton canals. They are home to a number of architecturally and historically very important derelict and under-used Georgian and Victorian warehouses and mill buildings, which the City Council plans to bring back into use by working closely with the private sector. In the Ancoats Conservation Area the aim is to create an urban village, combining a residential community with thriving businesses and commercial ventures. The success

of this programme will benefit the nearby community of Miles Platting, which currently contains most of the housing in the area.

Neighbouring Ancoats, and only minutes away from Manchester city centre, is New Islington. This area was characterised by unpopular low-rise, low-density local authority housing. New Islington is now being changed by a visionary scheme to develop not just a place to live, but a real and vibrant community. The developers, Urban Splash, with help from the architect Will Alsop, have come up with a grand plan for this swathe of land between the Rochdale and Ashton Canals, aiming to turn it into a beacon of what a modern urban community should be – the ideal ‘favourite neighbourhood’. Work is underway on plans that include new homes catering to the needs of different social groups, a new primary school and health centre, a new eco-park (a nature area with water, reed-beds, wildflower areas etc, all designed to attract wildlife) and a new city marina. The iconic Chips development (a new nine-storey block of 142 one-, two- and three-bedroom flats designed by Alsop Architects) has already become an architectural beacon for this part of the city, and the new marina and eco-park are currently under construction.

Projects like this are helping to meet an increasing demand for housing in Britain. They are also utilising brownfield land and by doing so are taking pressure away from greenfield sites in the countryside and on the rural/urban fringe.

Regenerating and rebranding Pittsburgh

We will look briefly at Pittsburgh in the United States as it provides another case study and is such an extreme example of ‘boom and bust’ in a city.

By the end of the 19th century Pittsburgh was one of the richest cities in the USA. At its core was steel manufacturing, but the city was also a hub for glass manufacturing, iron production, engineering and even oil. As a result of this industrial expansion the population had grown from 80,000 in 1850 to over a million by 1920. Its industrial base collapsed, however, after the Second World War. The population peaked in 1950 and this was followed by gradual decline. The city was left with a legacy of environmental destruction, poor infrastructure, lack of open space and businesses moving away. It also looked ugly, with dirty buildings and many poorly constructed homes that had been built for immigrant workers (Figure 4).

Pittsburgh is a city that has had to actively seek out a new identity, one that embraces its industrial heritage while at the same time forging a new future that is no longer dependent on steel. Since the early 1980s, the Pittsburgh region has emerged as a national model for brownfield development, with dozens of sites throughout Western Pennsylvania having been recycled for a variety of industrial,

Figure 5: South Side Works, Pittsburgh



Source: Wikimedia Commons

Figure 6: Sydney Monorail



Source: Wikimedia Commons. Photograph by Greg O'Beirne

residential, recreational and retail purposes.

South Side Works

In 1993 the city purchased the site of a former steel finishing mill. The site was contaminated with heavy concentrations of iron cyanide, metals, and some evidence of PCBs. Based on its experience in remediating PCBs from another site, Herr's Island, the Urban Redevelopment Authority removed these contaminants from this site.

Now called the South Side Works, this exciting mixed-use development is a much more sustainable part of the city. It includes entertainment, retailing

and offices, housing, plus research, development, and distribution activities. When fully completed, the total private investment in this project is expected to reach \$250 million and will create up to 5,400 jobs. Currently, the city receives almost \$3 million in annual real estate taxes and will eventually receive over \$8 million.

Transport in Sydney, Australia

Transport in urban areas presents a number of specific problems. The density of an urban environment increases traffic which in turn leads to problems of congestion, air pollution, higher accident rates

and the use of land for parking that would more profitably be used for other developments. This is not sustainable either in the context of the health and safety of inhabitants or for the success of businesses. Successful urban planning supported by good regional planning can bring benefits to a much wider area or city region. It can help to reduce congestion along transport routes and the waste of energy and time involved in excessive commuting.

Sydney is the largest city in Australia and, despite its image, suffers the perennial problem experienced by its counterparts all over the world – traffic. Sydney residents complain of daily traffic snarls that can gridlock parts of the city, the high cost of road tolls, routinely late trains and worsening air pollution from cars.

Money has been invested in new road projects and public transport developments. Sydney Harbour Tunnel, opened in 1992, has reduced traffic congestion in and out of the city centre. Cove Tunnel was completed ahead of schedule and now connects the M2 motorway at North Ryde with the Gore Hill Freeway at Artarmon. Since its opening in March 2007, studies have shown that the tunnel has had the desired effect of improving the flow between the Sydney CBD and the north-western suburbs in the Hills District and the northern parts of Western Sydney – some travel times have been cut by up to 17 minutes. Unfortunately, rather than encouraging people to use the new tunnel and avoid the streets, the opposite has happened. Most traffic still uses the CBD as a through route because the new tunnel is being sold as a luxury. The reason for this is that the tunnel project was handed over to a private developer/operator, and they want to make money. This is understandable, but it is not clear why the local government created the situation in the first place.

Commuter bus services account for about half of the public transport journeys taken in the city on weekdays. Just over a half of the trips are covered by the state company, the remainder by a large number of private-sector operators.

Passenger rail services in Greater Sydney are provided by City Rail.

The city does not have a metro system, but most suburban lines run through the city centre. In the years following 2000, CityRail's performance declined significantly. Despite public anger, the poor performance of Sydney's commuter rail system continued, regardless of the introduction of new timetables, the employment of more drivers and large infrastructure projects called the Clearways project.

Sydney once had the Southern Hemisphere's largest tram network. This was reduced in the 1950s and eventually closed in 1961. A short tramline linking Loftus station and the Royal National Park has operated since the 1990s as a museum and tourist attraction.

As part of the Darling Harbour development, an urban renewal project timed to coincide with Australia's bicentenary celebrations in 1988, a monorail line (Figure 6) was opened to link the harbourside's tourist attractions with the city centre. In 1997 a short light rail line was opened between Central and the Inner West parts of the city. There are plans to extend this to almost double the current system.

Sydney is of course famous for its harbour, and public transport includes the harbour ferries. Some links are important for commuters, but the overwhelming use is for tourists.

Sydney still suffers from traffic problems, but in many ways they are not as severe as other MEDC cities like London and Paris. Clearly there is a long way to go and any strategies will need investment and better management in the future.

Conclusion

Some planners argue that modern lifestyles use too many natural resources, polluting or destroying ecosystems, increasing social inequality, creating urban heat islands, and causing climate change. Many urban planners, therefore, advocate sustainable cities.

Sustainable development is a relatively recent concept. Sustainable urban development has been defined as 'development that improves the long-term social and ecological health of cities and towns' (Stephen Wheeler (1998) Planning Sustainable and Livable Cities). Wheeler suggests that a 'sustainable' city's features are:

- compact, efficient land use;
- less automobile use, yet better access;
- efficient resource use;
- less pollution and waste;
- the restoration of natural systems;
- good housing and living environments;
- a healthy social ecology;
- a sustainable economy;
- community participation and involvement; and
- preservation of local culture and wisdom.

We have seen from three examples that a great deal of urban change and living is not sustainable. It leads to all sorts of problems that threaten the safety of its inhabitants and the success of its commercial activities. There are exciting challenges facing those who want to shape the future of our urban areas.

Useful websites

Pittsburgh

<http://www.museumofthecity.org/exhibit/pittsburgh-responses-decline>
<http://www.pittsburghgreenstory.org/html/brownfields.html>

Manchester

<http://www.rudi.net/node/16772>
http://www.helm.org.uk/upload/pdf/Suburbs_HE.pdf
http://www.urbantaskforce.org/UTF_final_report.pdf
<http://www.localfutures.com/Assets/2241/state%20of%20the%20suburbs%20%282007%29.pdf>

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- 1 Use this website to find out more about what has been described as the world's first 'uburb': <http://www.rudi.net/node/16772>
- 2 (a) Use Microsoft Excel and appropriate graphs to plot the following data from Figure 4: total population, population change, manufacturing jobs.
 (b) Describe and explain what this data shows about demographic and economic change in Pittsburgh.
- 3 Use this website to find out more about some of the redevelopment schemes on brownfield sites in Pittsburgh: <http://www.pittsburghgreenstory.org/html/brownfields.html>.
- 4 The conclusions referred to other aspects of urban planning and design that have not been considered in this **Geofile**. You might like to explore some of these in your group.