

BAYSTON HILL - A CASE STUDY OF VILLAGE SUBURBANISATION

Introduction

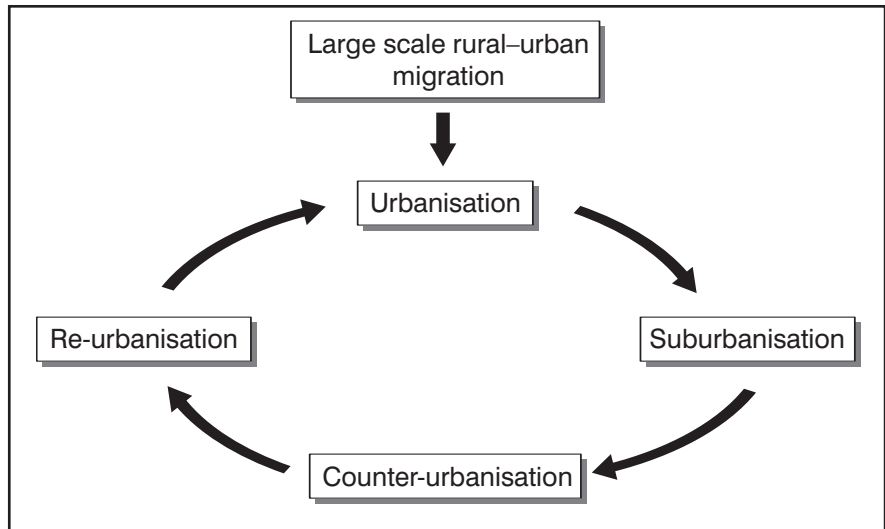
During the second half of the 20th century, many towns and cities in MEDCs experienced widespread **counterurbanisation**, part of the cycle of urbanisation. Counterurbanisation is defined as the movement of an urban population away from cities and large towns to small towns or villages in the surrounding areas in order to achieve a perceived improvement in their quality of life. This movement was started by wealthier families who bought houses in villages, often on a large plot, and commuted back to the town/city for work. However, from the 1960s in the UK many villages near large towns were increased in size by the building of large (when compared to the scale of the original village) housing estates. People, mainly families, wanted houses with larger gardens, and often houses on these village estates were cheaper than comparable houses in the nearby towns. This influx of new residents often changed the character of such villages and put severe strain on the infrastructure such as schools and access roads.

Figure 2 shows a model of the morphology of a suburbanised village - a village that is close to a large town, in or near the rural-urban fringe, which has experienced a rapid rise in population. Such a village is Bayston Hill in Shropshire, a suburbanised village 4.8km south of the county town of Shrewsbury. It (along with several others) lays claim to being the largest urban village in England, with a population of about 5500 in 2007.

History of Bayston Hill until 1960

The village of Bayston Hill developed at a gap in a ridge which leads from the North Shropshire Plain towards the South Shropshire Hills. Most of the surrounding landscape today is farmland and for much of the village's existence, it was agriculture that provided the majority of employment in the village. There is evidence of very early settlement in the area, and there is an Iron Age hill fort at the Burgs (Figure 4), which guarded the ancient routeway from the hills onto

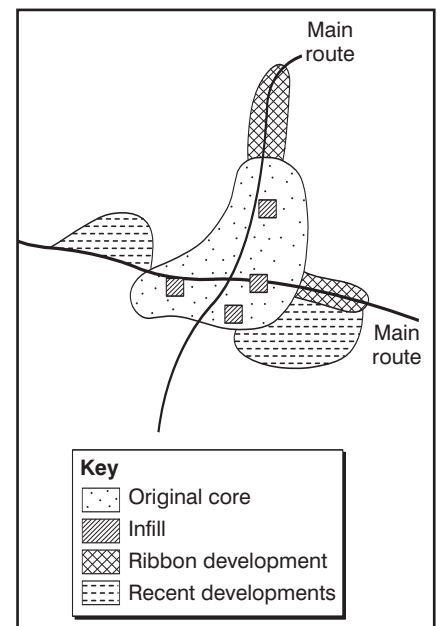
Figure 1: The cycle of urbanisation



the plain. From Norman times most of the village area was the Forest of Lythwood, but by the 18th century much had been cleared. Lythwood Hall, built in 1782, was the centre of the Lythwood estate which was largely agricultural.

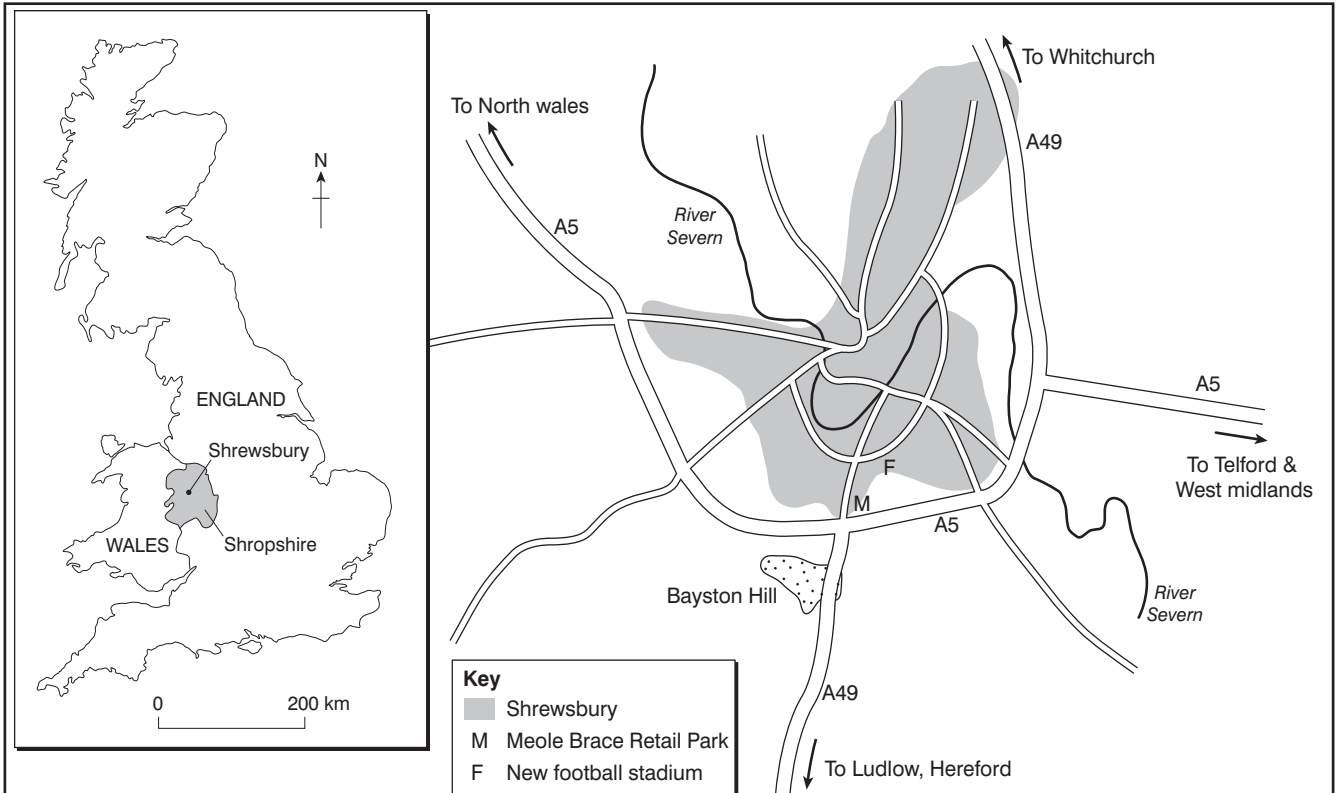
The Common, of which there is only a small remnant on the eastern side of the village, extended along both sides of Lyth Hill and Lythwood Roads. This remnant now forms the heart of the old village but it is separated from the majority of today's settlement by the main trunk road, the A49 (Figure 4). The village of today began as a squatter settlement by landless peasants who started farming the common land in the 18th century. In the 19th century there was some migration as men came to work in local coal mines, limestone quarries and in the rope works. Later, in 1844, a church was built adjacent to the eastern common and this was joined four years later by a school for the poor children of the parish. These buildings still exist although they now have a residential use. In the 1901 census the population of the village was 870, and it only began to increase in the late 1950s. During the first half of the 20th century many individual houses were built along Lyth Hill Road, along the line of the old common. Rural council houses were also built along Landsdowne Road to house farm workers and others

Figure 2: Model of a suburbanised village (after Hudson)



working in the countryside. The old school was used until 1956, when it moved to new premises in Longmeadow Road. Up until the 1960s the life of the village centred around the church and the school on the Common, with a few houses along the A49 including public houses to serve travellers on the main route south to Hereford via Church Stretton. Figure 4 shows a small village whose core, including most of its services, was to the east of the A49.

Figure 3: Location of Bayston Hill



Post-1960

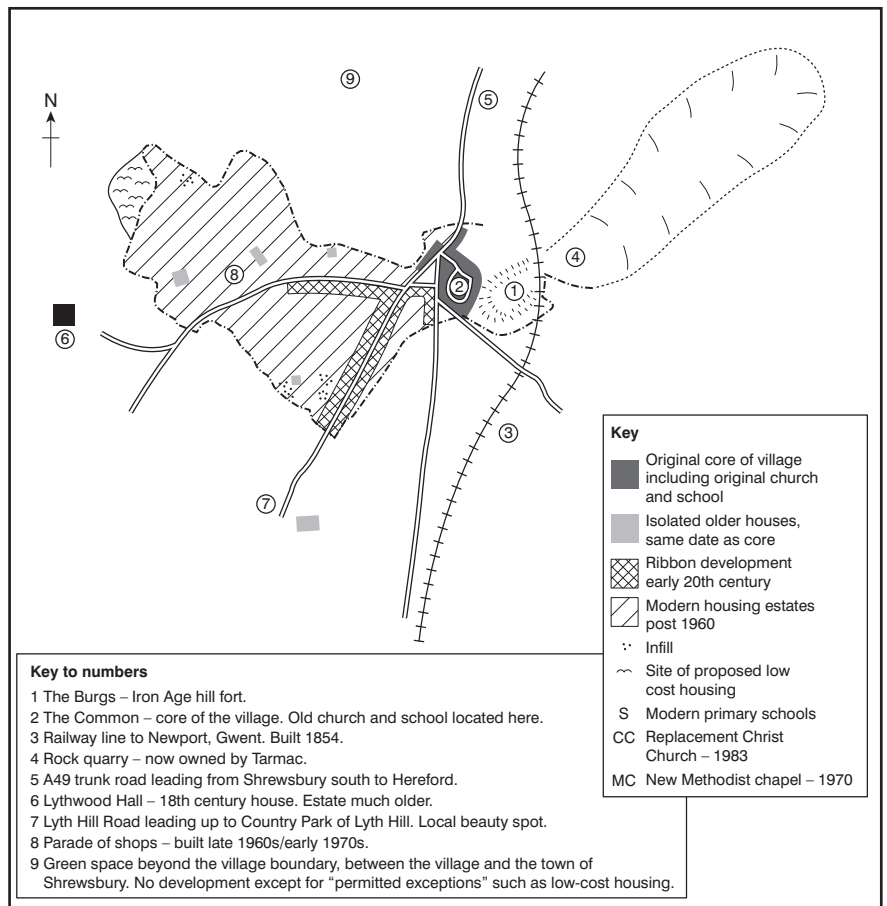
In 1961 limits to the development of Bayston Hill were decided by the local authority, but these limits allowed for the building of 1870 houses on greenfield land, a decision that would dramatically change the village. 1520 of these new homes had been constructed by 1971, set on large, relatively uniform estates. The new developments were to the west of the A49 and so the centre of gravity of the village began to move away from the old core around the common. Most of the houses were semi-detached three-bedroom homes for families, along with a range of larger detached houses, built using standard bricks and not local materials. Young couples and families were attracted to the new housing as the village was convenient for working in Shrewsbury and also there were good communication links to Telford and the West Midlands. The character of the village changed with this huge influx of people, most of whom did not know each other. A second primary school was built and for the first time not all the children of the village were educated together. A parade of shops was eventually built to serve the new community, to be joined later by a branch library. In 1983 Christ Church moved onto church-owned land within the new estates. In 1961 the population was

under 2000 but by 1971 it had risen dramatically to 5345. One long-term resident stated at this time that ‘We’ve been invaded!’

Employment in the village

Places of employment within the village include the Tarmac quarries, where 45 people are employed but

Figure 4: Sketch map showing morphology of Bayston Hill



only eight of them are from the village itself. Apart from serving in the shops and takeaways, there are jobs within a large accountancy firm, the local garage, an architect's office, the doctor's and dental surgeries, two car dealerships and two building firms. However, from Figure 6, it can be seen that most people (37%) travel between 2 and 5km for work, which usually means Shrewsbury. Over 75% of people work outside the village area, which has grown markedly since the 19th century.

Services in the 21st century

As can be seen from Figure 7, there have been great changes in the services provided within the village over the years. Today the services continue to change. The two small banks have closed due to 'modernisation', and the wool and hardware shops have been replaced by an accountancy firm. One of the small grocery shops at the western edge of the village has closed and has been converted to residential use. The village now has three Chinese takeaways as well as a chip shop. The coming of the Meole Brace Retail Park along the A5, south of Shrewsbury, in the mid-1980s, with Sainsbury's as the anchor store, signalled a change for the shopping parade. Most villagers now carry out their major food shopping outside the village, although 97% still use local shops on a regular basis, with convenience being cited as the main reason. There is a Spar supermarket which offers a wide range of goods, although generally at higher prices than Sainsbury's 3km away. The greengrocer and the baker initially saw a large drop in trade when Sainsbury's opened, but both have since revived and many people again buy these goods locally.

The pubs in the village are well-supported, especially the older three which are situated along the A49. The Beeches pub was built within the westward expansion of the village in the early 1970s and is dominated by a large expanse of car park. The pubs offer quiz nights and some live entertainment. To the west of the village are the Stanley Parker Fields, a large recreational area including a fishing pool, community woodland, bike track, basketball and tennis courts and a bowling green. A more recent addition has been a skateboarding facility. These facilities were first developed in the 1980s as it

was realised that although the village was the size of a small town, there was very little for young people to do in the evenings after school without having to travel to Shrewsbury. This and other developments have enabled the village to feel like a separate community from Shrewsbury and not just a 'dormitory' settlement, where people only return home to sleep and play no part in the life of their local community.

Scout and Guide groups are run in a specially-built hall near the Glebelands open space near the new church. The Memorial Hall is situated near the A49 and was built as a village hall in commemoration of the villagers who died during World War One. It has been extended and refurbished on several occasions since and is the main community venue. Of the social and activity groups, 37% use the Memorial Hall, 17% use the church hall of Christ Church and 16% use the hall of the Methodist Church. However, 30% meet elsewhere, mainly in Shrewsbury.

There is a bus service to Shrewsbury every half hour which runs until late evening, but many people now choose to use the park and ride facility adjacent to the Sainsbury's store. In the 1980s the single exit from Bayston Hill onto the A49 was seen to be totally inadequate and there were long queues to leave the village during rush hours. A second exit, further north, was created at this time to relieve the pressure. Shrewsbury offers cinemas, a wide range of cultural and sporting activities and will soon offer a new riverside theatre. Many of Bayston Hill's residents enjoy using some of the village activities as well as those of Shrewsbury, but feel that the village is a separate settlement and not an outlying suburb of the town. However all children have to leave the village in order to attend secondary school, either in Meole Brace, a suburb of Shrewsbury, or Church Stretton a small town to the south. Medical facilities include the Beeches Medical Practice which serves most of the villagers plus an NHS dentist whose premises are on the shopping parade. There is a hospital 6km away on the outskirts of Shrewsbury.

The green space between the town and the village help maintain this feeling but it is this rural-urban fringe area that is coming under pressure.

Problems and challenges

In 1981 the villagers were asked about their concerns, and what emerged was that the village as a whole felt that development had been too sudden and on too large a scale. It was also felt that there were not enough facilities in order for a village the size of Bayston Hill to provide for its residents. Much has been done since then to create new, and upgrade old, facilities, especially those for young people. No further large development has been allowed and, with one notable exception, only infilling has been carried out since the 1980s. The Local Plan has created tightly drawn boundaries to encourage development within the county town of Shrewsbury, especially on brownfield sites. However the new A5 bypass around Shrewsbury has been built on the green land between the town and Bayston Hill. At the point where the A49 intersects with the A5 near the village there has been considerable retail development. There is a large Esso service station that also sells groceries, a Travelodge and an associated Little Chef as well as the well-established garden centre that has been on the site for over 30 years. It is felt that this will lead to more pressure for development on the green land between the A5 and the village as the need for housing in the county grows.

The village has the highest level of owner-occupancy (see Figure 6) in the county of Shropshire and has very few houses for rent. The village's population structure is ageing. Those young adults with families who moved in during the 1960s and 1970s have aged and remained in the village -the number of people over the age of 60 is increasing and a different balance of services will be required in the future.

At present it is unlikely that there will be further large-scale development in the village, as there is limited access (two junctions) onto the A49. What people are worried about is development by stealth. With the affordable housing being built outside the planning envelope and the suggestion that the retail area around the garden centre and the Esso garage may be extended and have its own junction onto the A5, along with the bypass now cutting through the green space between the two settlements, residents can see that it would be all too easy for future housing development to fill in the gap between Shrewsbury and Bayston Hill, and for it to cease to be a completely separate settlement.

Figure 5: Changes in service provision

1811	1843	1929	1971	1980s
General grocers	Church	3 public houses	2 primary schools	(new since 1970s)
Blacksmith	2 chapels	butcher	church	Post Office
Wheelwright	Post Office	Commercial dairy	2 chapels	Bakers
Painter and glazier	Blacksmith	Boot maker	2 small grocery shops	Bus
	Wheelwright	Jones' Garage	1 small supermarket	Library
	Butcher	Midwife	2 branch banks	
			(limited opening)	
	Shoemaker	Motor agent	4 public houses	garage
	Tailor	Grocer	2 butchers	surgery
	Beer Retailer	Post Office	greengrocers	playground
	3 Public Houses	2 building firms	2 hairdressers	
	Omni-bus proprietors	Carpenter	2 newspaper shops	
	Shop	Painter	Toy and wool shop	
		Shoemaker	Hardware shop	
		Church	2 building firms	
		2 chapels	Fish and chip shop	
		Village hall	Village hall	

Affordable housing

One development is being allowed outside the planning envelope on the western edge of the village. This has caused consternation amongst residents, but the development is for 14 houses in an affordable housing scheme, a need which residents had identified when questioned for the Village Plan (2006). A majority of residents (68%) thought that the village needed to attract more young families in order that services such as the schools could survive. However, although 28% said their children would probably have to leave the village due to a lack of affordable housing, 89% did not want any building beyond the village's present boundaries. The proposed development is to be allowed under the Rural Housing Exceptions legislation, which states that such legislation can be allowed if:

- The development is immediately adjoining the development boundary of the settlement.
- There is a proven local need.
- Occupation is by those with a declared need.
- It does not detract from the settlement in terms of scale or design.

The future

The village has a wide range of activities based within it, including an annual pantomime written and performed by the villagers. It has a successful free village magazine, and the Village Association arranges trips several times a year to places such as

Llandudno, Oxford, London and Leeds. Although the number of people born and bred in the village remains small, many of the newcomers settle in to village life and participate fully, even though the village is larger than many small towns! The village cannot provide much employment but it does more than just offer a dormitory for the workers of Shrewsbury. As sustainability becomes ever more important in urban planning, settlements such as Bayston Hill, within the rural-urban fringe but separate from its nearby large neighbour, offer a more rural way of living but yet with public transport access to work and the pleasures offered by a large town. The Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Joint Structure Plan 1996-2011 states: 'Most development shall take place in or on the edge of the principal growth areas of Telford and Shrewsbury.' Many people in villages around Shrewsbury, and the townspeople themselves, feel that a continuously outward growing urban settlement would not be best for any of the communities involved.

Figure 6: Bayston Hill Parish profile, based on 2001 census

Population: 5247
Number of households: 2103
23% of the population are aged 45-59. (Nationally 19%)
18.4% are aged over 65. (Nationally 16%)
Only 30% households have dependent children.
45% households own home outright. (Nationally 29%)
45% households own home with mortgage. (Nationally 38%)
21% are educated to at least first degree level. (Nationally 19.9%)
37% of residents who are employed travel between 2 and 5 km to work. (Shrewsbury- 4.8 km away)
23% of residents who are employed travel between 10 and over 60 km to work.
67% travel to work by car. (Nationally 55%)
33% of households have 2 cars. (Nationally 24%)
12% of households have no car. (Nationally 27%)
25% of residents are employed as managers or in professional occupations. (Nationally 26%)
14% work in associate professionals and technical occupations. (Nationally 14%)
54% housing is semi-detached. (Nationally 32%)
38% housing is detached. (Nationally 23%)

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the development of suburban villages in the rural-urban fringe?
2. What are the pressures in villages in the rural-urban fringe?
3. Using a named example, outline to what extent suburban (dormitory) villages are sustainable.
4. To what extent is Bayston Hill a typical suburbanised village?