

Some thoughts on urban growth. Quo Vadis Edinburgh?

Summary. The stroll around Edinburgh passes through markedly different socio-economic districts. One of Edinburgh's great attractions is that socio-geographically it is quite different to that of most cities (see maps in Appendix A). Its distinctive geographic pattern – of wealthy areas admixed (cheek-by-jowl) amongst more deprived zones – forms a recurring feature of this 35-km walk. All cities are expanding, and as they do urban sprawl – low-density urban development outside the urban core – resulting from shifts to ever more automobile-dependent living leads to new, difficult challenges. Cities have choices about their future. Various tactics and strategies for reducing the negative effects of sprawl exist. Quo Vadis Edinburgh?

Edinburgh. The population of the City of Edinburgh currently stands at almost ½ million. This comprises 9% of the Scottish total - the second largest local authority population in Scotland (after Glasgow). As the city has prospered in recent years, so has its population grown and altered in composition. Notable trends include an influx of migrants from the rest of the UK and from overseas, a growing proportion of young adults, and a steady rise in the number of small households and cars. The rate of household formation has been well above the rate of population growth - a trend which shows no signs of abating. Edinburgh requirement is 30,000 new houses in the period 2009 – 2024, to be delivered through multi-million pound funding packages. Sadly additional Green Belt land has recently been freed for these massive housing developments, in one of the largest land releases of modern times.

Urban planning and suburban growth. While urban growth is not a new phenomenon, or unique to Edinburgh, the scale of recent and projected growth in Edinburgh is quite remarkable. On the longer time-scale, the history of urban planning in Edinburgh has followed many main-stream trends and fashions. For example modern urban planning dates from 1755 in Lisbon (after the Great Lisbon Earthquake).



Early years. In Edinburgh modern urban planning dates from January 1766 with the layout for James Craig's New Town - Edinburgh's new suburb - which became a global landmark in urban design and an international canvas to show off the Scottish Enlightenment. Villa and tenement building followed on the then southern and northern fringes (Marchmont, Comely Bank, Trinity). During the 1880s, agriculture was in a structural crisis, with poor harvests and declining agricultural rents. Many of the rural population consequently moved to the cities. As they did so, an increasing number of businesses set up, that resulted in many residential buildings being converted to factories. Commuting was expensive, and steam railways and trams meant that travel to work was slow. Together with a surplus of births over deaths, this led to a housing crisis and an inadequate supply of housing forced people to live in city slums.

The start of urban sprawl. In the period between the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the First World War, urban sprawl intensified - the implementation of public transport systems, especially electric

trams and motor buses, had a profound impact on urban growth and suburbanization; along with on-going slum clearance. In response to this new urban landscape and continuing concerns over public health and welfare, social reformers began to look for solutions to the ills of much of the urban environment. This was context in which Sir Ebenezer Howard founded the Garden City (1898). Garden Cities were intended to be planned, self-contained communities surrounded by "greenbelts" (parks), containing proportionate areas of residences, industry, and agriculture. The Garden City movement proved to be the precursor to state involvement in new community building. After the First World War there was almost no resumption of private sector tenement building, so that new housing for owner occupation between the wars in Edinburgh was mainly bungalows – more urban sprawl and car dependency. However, in Edinburgh a partial version of the Garden City was enacted when, in 1957, the Edinburgh Green Belt became a designated area to control urban growth, protect farmland and to conserve the setting of the city. Elsewhere, in the 1920s, ideas of modernism began to surface in urban planning. Modernism was based on the ideas of Le Corbusier and the use of new skyscraper-building techniques. The modernist city stood for the elimination of disorder, congestion, and the small scale, replacing them with pre-planned and widely spaced freeways and tower blocks.

Post-war housing and new towns. Throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, Scotland's housing had been seriously inadequate. Slum dwellings in the cities were appalling. The problem was most acute in Glasgow, Scotland's biggest city. By 1945, the long-term problems of overcrowding, poor hygiene, and damp were made worse by war damage. Urgent action was needed. Following the election in 1945 of a Labour government local authorities were given wide-ranging powers. Slum-clearance schemes began. Before the war newer green-belt suburbs had spread to the edge of big cities. Places like Pollok, Mosspark in Glasgow; Pilton and Sighthill in Edinburgh were built. Now, in the late 1940s and early 50s vast municipal schemes were added to these; Drumchapel, Easterhouse in Glasgow; Muirhouse, Craigmillar, Niddrie in Edinburgh. Nevertheless as late as 1964 Harold Wilson pronounced Edinburgh's slums the worst he had ever seen. The late 1960s proved a watershed as the problems of overcrowding and poor amenities were largely solved by the construction of massive housing estates and high rise buildings. However, yesterday's solutions have become today's problems as disenchantment with the mass housing estates has set in. In addition five Scottish New Towns East Kilbride (1949), Glenrothes (1948), Cumbernauld (1956), Livingston (1962) and Irvine (1966) were created. These too had varying degrees of success. In central Edinburgh the hugely influential Buchanan Report (1971) proposed a motorway that would have cut through the heart of the historic centre. After a fierce battle this was never built, and Edinburgh fortunately escaped the fate of many other cities where the Buchanan's choice, and an ever expanding car-owning society led to major urban road building and to radical (generally environmentally unfriendly) solutions.

Post-modernism. By the early 1970s, many planners felt that modernism's clean lines and lack of human scale sapped vitality from the community, blaming them for high crime rates and social problems. That is, there has been recognition that many peripheral estates exhibited the same characteristics of economic and social despair that previously attracted political attention to the inner cities. The problems were both structural and locational. Structural problems included under-investment and high levels of redundancy and unemployment. Locational problems refer to the poor standards of service provision and, more importantly, the difficulties of accessibility experienced by many of the residents. Subsequently many modernist developments have been demolished and replaced by other housing types. Rather than attempting to eliminate all disorder, planning nowadays concentrates on individualism and diversity; this is the post-modernist era. Currently, in some countries, declining satisfaction with the urban environment is leading to suburbanization – with migration to smaller towns and rural areas (the so-called "urban exodus"). This type of integrated regional planning can bring benefits to larger city regions; help to reduce congestion along transport routes and the wastage of energy of excessive commuting. Will Edinburgh eventually follow suit?

Today. Presently house building in Edinburgh is at an all-time high. Hopefully the re-use of brownfield land is likely to continue, with 90% of Edinburgh's new housing supply being programmed on such sites (e.g. the £4.5 billion Leith Docks and Western Harbour project). However, the recently adopted Rural West Edinburgh Local Plan identified several large greenfield sites for housing (Maybury, Cammo). Many of these were disputed by local action groups. Inevitably their views have been overruled, and we are witnessing a new wave of Green Belt destruction around Edinburgh.

Edinburgh's legacy encompasses many classic urban settings. Old & New Towns, Grid plan, Bungalow land, Old Industry, Lindblom's incremental "muddling through" of the 1950s and early 1960s, Modernism (and its tower-blocks), Urban Renewal (new "low-rise" housing, Dock-lands), and Regional Planning (The South East Wedge – the current joint venture, between Midlothian and The City of Edinburgh Council). Edinburgh has to deliver its share of the 107,500 new homes which the Scottish Government believes are needed in South-East Scotland.

The future. South East Edinburgh is expected to experience major change over the next five to seven years. These include housing development at Greendykes, mixed use regeneration at Craigmillar, two sites along the Burdiehouse corridor, three sites along the Gilmerton corridor and two sites at Newcraighall. Also Shawfair – the future £500M new town on the edge of Edinburgh. A 350-acre community with 4,800 new homes and 15,000 people. The first phase, Shawfair Park, was completed in 2008, alongside the Sheriffhall park-and-ride. Also (biggest of all) is West Edinburgh – a 650 acre, £1-billion site (all along the canal beyond Heriot-Watt, towards Ratho) on land controlled by former Rangers owner David Murray.

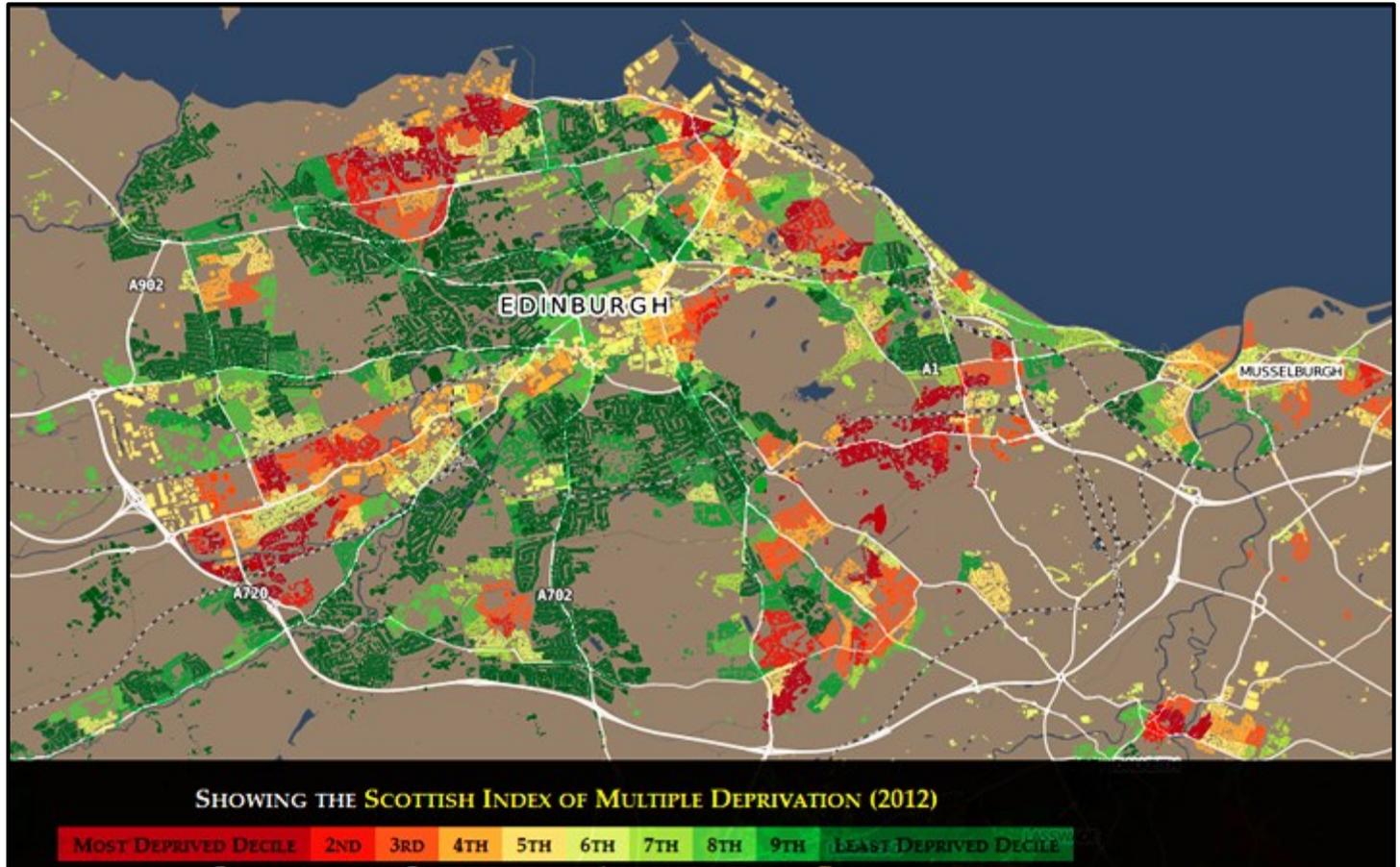


Fig 1. Red: future development areas

A personal view. Urban sprawl is the antithesis of progressive urbanism. This uncontrolled spread of cheap, haphazard housing threatens the future of entire regions. Paradoxically, urban sprawl (and its negative effects - increased traffic, increased pollution, demise of community and family owned businesses as they are replaced by large retail stores, environmental degradation) often result from a city's prosperity. The economy booms, jobs are created, people move to urban areas to enjoy the prosperity. But the build-out puts their enjoyment of life at risk. There is certainly no easy remedy. It's a constant tug-of-war for government to combat the issue of urban sprawl while trying to meet the growing needs of new housing and commercial development. A return to a more compact way of development "a new urbanism" is needed. In short, build up instead of out. Revitalize the existing urban centre and docks. Convert existing housing to multi-family dwellings. Create mixed-use development by combining residential areas with places of employment and commerce, and hence reduce traffic and pollution. Encourage alternative transportation. As Ramblers we need to encourage the creation of walkable communities.

Appendix: Map of Scotland's Deprivation

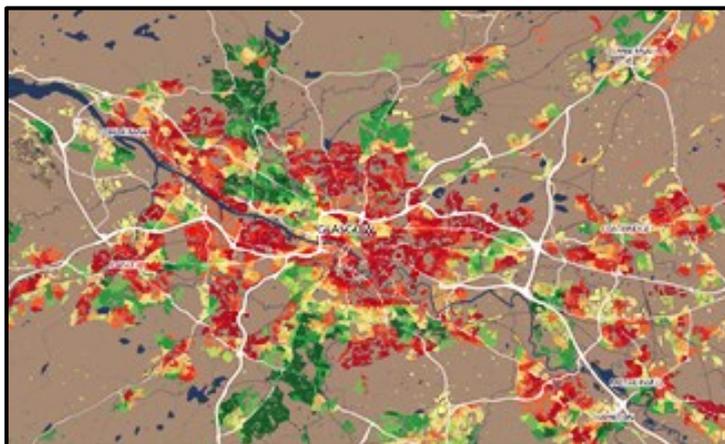
Edinburgh is socio-geographically markedly different to most cities. Eg Newcastle, Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, London, Glasgow with their deprived city centres, and bull's-eye deprivation structure, as opposed to Edinburgh's 'inverted' patchwork quilt layout. Cheek-by-jowl are very wealthy areas with some of the most deprived: Muirhouse/Barnton; Duddingston/Craigmillar; Juniper Green/Wester Hailes.



The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is the Scottish Government's official tool for identifying those places suffering from deprivation. It incorporates seven different aspects of deprivation: Employment, Income, Health, (Education, Skills, & Training), Geographic Access to Services, Crime, Housing. The index divides Scotland into more than 6500 small areas of population or "datazones".

Edinburgh's tally of deprived datazones has fallen since 2009, suggesting there has been some success in tackling the most acute need in the city. The majority of Scotland's most deprived areas are in Glasgow, Paisley, North Lanarkshire and the Fyfe coalfield.

GLASGOW



BIRMINGHAM

