

Adapting to an urban future

Fact sheet: What can we learn from 'Cities of the Future'?

More than half of the world's population live in urban areas. With this number rising daily there are increasing pressures facing our towns and cities. The consequences of rapid urbanisation are frequently cited as overcrowding, traffic congestion, waste management issues and lack of green spaces, all of which result in high CO² emissions.

The answer is thought to be in sustainability. Sustainable development of cities is a way of developing cities for the future so that they can be healthy, thriving places that will have minimal negative environmental and social impact. In fact, the more sustainable a city is the more likely it is to be a desirable place to live. The 'top' 5 sustainable cities regularly feature highly on quality of life and liveable cities lists.

It is widely accepted that sustainable development of our cities should be the key driver for change so that cities can accommodate the growing number of inhabitants without having a detrimental effect on the physical, economic, environmental and social landscapes of the city. Many cities today are trying to plan for the future and implement longer term strategies to cope with population growth and the longevity of the city, however there are some cities that are well ahead of the game. The 'top' 5 of Vancouver, San Francisco, Oslo, Curitiba and Copenhagen are considered to be the leaders in sustainability and many other cities are now looking at how they have achieved this.

Why are these cities sustainable?

Vancouver, Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aim to be 'greenest' city in the world by 2020. • Lowest carbon emissions per capita of any city in North America. • 248 miles of bike lane • Strict building codes, all new buildings must be carbon neutral. • Plan to develop electric vehicle infrastructure.
San Francisco, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See sustainability as an attraction for visitors. • Recycles 77% of waste. • 20% of land area is for green space. • Electric vehicle capital of US with 160 public charging stations set to increase. • No plastic bags or containers used in shops.
Oslo, Norway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% of all heating is from renewable sources, mainly bio-methane from waste. • Car and bike sharing schemes. Electric vehicle scheme is very successful. • 1700 electric vehicles on the road- free parking, no tolls, access to reserved public transport lanes. • Aims to cut carbon emissions by another 50% by 2030.
Curitiba, Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The only city from a developing country on the list. • Highly acclaimed long term urban development plan conceived in 1970's. • Efficient public transport system for 2.3 million daily users. • Increased green space from 1m² per person to 52m². • 90% of residents recycle at least 2/3 of daily waste.
Copenhagen, Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bike capital of the world with 36% of commuters cycling to work/ school. Plans to increase to 50% by 2015. • 217 miles of bike lane with another 43 miles planned. • Wind power provides 19% energy supply. • Goal to be carbon neutral by 2025.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Green roof building policy, all new buildings must have an element of vegetation.• 'Pocket parks' being developed so that by 2015 90% of residents will live within a 15 minute walk of green space. |
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These cities are at the forefront of sustainable development and see their environmental credentials as vital, not only for their city's inhabitants but also for their reputation. Increasingly business and investors want to locate in these cities which are desirable to live and work in so the sustainable policies are not limiting economic development but in fact stimulating it.

So what can we learn from these cities?

In the UK there is a general feeling that more environmentally friendly practices should be followed and 'green' issues are increasingly part of our politics. The government do have a sustainable cities programme, however we are behind the world leaders in our current policies and planning.

Examples of existing schemes in the UK:

- Bike hire scheme in London. <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/roadusers/cycling/15150.aspx>
- Public transport Metrolink in Manchester. <http://www.metrolink.co.uk/>
- BedZed Sustainable community development <http://www.zedfactory.com/>
- The London 2012 Olympics aim to be the 'greenest' games ever and it also provides an opportunity for sustainable legacy.
<http://www.london2012.com/sustainability>

UK cities still have a long way to go to achieve the sustainability accolades of our top 5. But it could be possible...

Think about your local urban area, how would you create a sustainable city?

Solutions are often best when they are targeted to specific areas depending on the characteristics of that area.

What would you advise?

How can the ideas become a reality?

Who should fund your ideas? Public or private finance?

What are the limitations? In the short term and long term.

What are the implications from climate change in the future?

Is public support an issue?

Can a city ever really be carbon neutral?