

**Examine the causes of urban sprawl and assess the effectiveness of strategies to contain it (60)**

Urban sprawl is one of the key planning issues today. It consists of low density settlement extending beyond the boundaries of built up areas. Also it involves high dependence on private automobiles and is often the result of poorly planned or unplanned development. While urban sprawl is linked to population growth, it is also caused by falling household sizes, increased demand for low density living, lower land prices in peripheral areas and a desire to escape from cities because of crime and pollution. There are number of forms of urban sprawl that can take place, the three main patterns are low density sprawl, ribbon sprawl and leap frog development. Each type of sprawl is often caused by the same core problems, all of which resulting in consequential effects. There are numerous reasons as to why urban sprawl occurs, however a significant point when it became apparent was after World War 2. At this time people started moving from the cities to the countryside. Living in suburbia signified a better, healthier lifestyle. The land in the areas people were moving to was cheap and there was plenty of it, and government incentives and subsidies helped families realize their dream of a better life.

As times have moved on the issues of urban sprawl have continued, caused by a variety of factors. To begin with the increasing demand for housing plays a large part in urban sprawl, with more people buying houses and living with fewer people, houses are in demand more than ever. This coupled with the quality of the inner city environment causes people to want to move out of the inner city into suburban areas, hence urban sprawl. A further cause for urban sprawl is the demand for low density housing, people have increasing wants for higher living standards and want to get as much as they can for their money, therefore this can be achieved more easily by moving out of the densely populated city centre's to suburban areas where they can have more space and land. Additionally the demographic structure and household changes may impact upon urban sprawl. Changes in age structure, social structure of the population and household type and structure may all affect location preferences of households. Lastly, lifestyle and behaviour can have a significant effect on urban sprawl. Changes in lifestyle, for instance increases in leisure time and disposable incomes may lead to people to want to live in an environment to suit this type of lifestyle and often suburban areas can meet these needs.

Although there are several causes that encourage urban sprawl there are a number of strategies that have been implemented in order to try and contain it. The solutions can be based on three main approaches. Firstly, designating areas where no development is

allowed, secondly channeling urban growth to selected towns and cities and lastly increasing urban residential densities and attracting residents back to the city. One policy that can be implemented is urban growth boundaries or green belts. This aims to restrict the physical sprawl. This is illustrated by Portland Oregon in the USA where an urban growth boundary surrounds Portland and twenty three nearby small settlements. The green belt protects the attractive rural landscapes of the Willamette Valley and helps invigorate the inner city. Portland managed to accommodate a 0% growth in population by increasing the built up area by only 2 % between 1970 and 2000. However, while Portland has been successful in using this strategy so far, the city is beginning to run out of land. Consequently, house prices are rising rapidly, 15.6% between 1983 and 1996 compared with 1.8 % for the whole country. In order to find affordable housing people are being forced to move further away to the adjacent city of Vancouver.

Another method which has been used in Minneapolis is revitalization of the city centre. This aims to attract people back to the city by providing good quality services and making them convenient and easy to use. In turn relieving pressures on suburban areas and thus decreasing urban sprawl. Switching transport investment from intercity highways to city transport schemes is another way in which urban sprawl can be minimized. By doing this cities can be made more attractive and manageable for people to access and use. The US government rejected plans for a highway near Salt Lake City in order to try and put more financial support into city transport schemes. New towns are another scheme implemented in a number of areas in order to tackle urban growth and manage urban sprawl. In Cairo to try and alleviate urban sprawl, protect scarce farmland and provide better living conditions for the residents of the cities overcrowded districts, the Egyptian government began planning a series of new settlements around Cairo in the 1970's. Various settlements were developed, located in five growth corridors; while Cairo itself was surrounded by a ring road to prevent outward expansion. Although some of the settlements were successful at attracting businesses, they were less triumphant at gaining residents. The majority of workers continued to live in Cairo and commute to the New Towns. In this case the success was variable and proved ineffective as the towns diminished due to water shortages and poor public transport.

Lastly, an alternative to urban sprawl is the greater use of land and buildings in existing built-up areas, this can take two forms, conversion of unused buildings into new homes or development on Brownfield land. Brownfield land consists of areas previously used for industry or commercial activity which are now derelict or unused. England has over 57000 ha of previously developed and unused land in cities. In Glasgow, for example, 12 % of land is classified as derelict. Although this appears to be

a viable solution to urban sprawl there are problems that occur. Brownfield sites have many limitations for planners and developers and are often contaminated with industrial chemicals or waste from factories and power stations. An example of a Brownfield development is Barking Reach on the banks of the River Thames in inner London. In order to make this site suitable for development of houses, offices and schools, developers had to bury overhead power cables, remove ash from three power stations, and reclaim marshland by raising the ground level.

Overall, although there are many causes that result in urban sprawl there appear to be many solutions available in order to contain or even solve the issue. However, the effectiveness of these solutions is variable. For instance although in the short-term Portland, Oregon has been effective it is now having to deal with a number of consequential issues which makes the long-term effectiveness of the project to be questionable. As for Cairo, it is evident that the initial plans and ideas were sufficient but the financial support and economic stability were not there in order to make the development successful. For urban sprawl to be effectively managed or even solved a combination of suitable strategies need to be planned, implemented and contained in order for it to be sustained and therefore a success.