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Suburbs: Brown is starving us into inner-city blight

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FOR decades, a move to the suburbs has meant an escape from the annoyances of urban life -graffiti, menacing gangs and potholed streets.

Now Gordon Brown is being accused of starving the suburbs of more than Pounds 1 billion a year so that problems that blight inner cities are beginning to invade the outskirts.

The leaders of Britain's suburbia will this week publish a dossier that shows how the suburbs are suffering, from Solihull to Stockport. Roads are crumbling, recycling schemes are on hold and care for the elderly is being cut back.

Council leaders -led by **Leo Boland**, chief executive of the London borough of Barnet -will warn that Whitehall has become "blind" to "the home of aspirational Britain" where 84% of us live.

They will say that hundreds of millions in taxes collected in suburban boroughs are being unfairly channelled into achieving an "urban renaissance" in city centres.

An Ipsos Mori poll of residents in 30 English suburbs shows they are less satisfied than city dwellers with the quality of parks and the cleanliness of streets. They are more afraid of vandalism, graffiti and gangs of teenagers and suffer more burglaries than the national average.

James Burnham, 52, a securities lender in the City who recently moved to East Finchley, north London, is dismayed. "A lot of the streets around here need to be better maintained," he said. "It infuriates me that we pay so much council tax, yet have to put up with shoddiness like that. Last week the car hit a pothole in the road and it badly damaged the tyre."

Boland, who is leading the campaign for a better deal said: "There is a gap in social and urban policy which is blind to suburbia. Money is pumped into cities while the suburbs are left to get along by themselves."

The campaign will be launched with a report into the 30 English suburbs surveyed and comes ahead of the comprehensive spending review this autumn in which Alistair Darling, the chancellor, will set funding levels for local authorities for three years.

The councils in the report paid Pounds 605m more in business rates to central government than they received back in the financial year 2006-07. Only four received more than they put in. The disparity could rise to substantially more than Pounds 1 billion across all suburbs.

"We have gone too far in the redistribution of taxes," said Dominic Campbell, the campaign manager for the suburbs. "They are starting to struggle to provide the basic services."

Solihull borough council said this weekend that it cannot afford to extend kerbside recycling to plastics, glass and metal because central government took Pounds 50m of its business rate income.

"The city of Birmingham next door just doesn't have this problem," said Ken Meeson, the council's Conservative leader.

The Department for Communities and Local Government rejected the campaign to review local government finance.

"Quality of life and services have improved across all areas, including the suburbs, since 1997," said a spokesman.

How money has gone to inner-cities [www.timesonline .](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/politics)
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