



Leadership Centre for local government



Cities, city-suburbs and exurbia

Joe Simpson





CUE

- Celebrate the past
- Understand the present
- Envisage the future





Semi-detached, suburban Mr Jones

Urban myths and suburban realities



“Suburbs are mono-class”

The Reality

- Some suburbs were always poor (think of the comprehensive redevelopment out from Manchester or Liverpool)
- Planning policy created significant social housing in most suburbs.
- Rising urban house prices have meant suburbs are often seen as the route out (and up)



“Suburbs are mono-cultural”

The Reality

- Ethnic groups have seen suburbs as the next step on the ladder, e.g. Barnet has a large concentration of Jews and Chinese, Harrow of Hindus, etc
- New migrants are now even locating first to suburbs, e.g. Koreans in New Malden
- The challenge is for this pattern to happen with the Pakistani communities



“Suburbs are residential”

The Reality

- Whilst cities emerged around heavy industries, much manufacturing was always suburban-based, i.e. cars
- There is a clear pattern of certain suburbs emerging as major economic centres in their own right (e.g. Barnet, Croydon, Uxbridge, Trafford, Cambridge, Solihull)
- Significant growth of creative industries in suburbs



“Suburbs are inherently anti- environmental”

The Reality

- Suburban development was predicated on the expansion of rail and tube networks
- Built around visions of greenness (the garden, parks, the green belt)
- They have clean and clear air (in contrast to city smog)



Suburbs are mono-political

The Reality

- Suburbs will be the key battleground of the next election
- Not just for Labour/Conservative marginals, but also for the Lib Dems
 - south-west London, south Manchester, Hornsey and Wood Green, York Outer, Leeds North West, Bristol West, Oxford West and Abingdon, Birmingham Yardley, Solihull, Brent Central
- For Labour/Conservative:
 - Harrow East, Battersea, Brentford and Isleworth, Brent North, Enfield North, Eltham, Mitcham and Morden, Finchley and Golders Green, Ealing Central and Acton, Feltham and Heston, Croydon Central, Birmingham Edgbaston, Bristol North West, Edinburgh South West, Plymouth Moor View, Brighton Kemptown





Urban hopes suburban challenges





Suburbs as economic powerhouses

- Can we make the city suburbs key places providing employment for inner city residents?

(This means using the underutilised public transport network)



Suburbs as places of home aspiration

- What is the potential to meet the housing crisis by creating sufficient new housing within the boundaries of existing city suburbs rather than sprawling further out?
- Can we recreate a new sense of city suburbs as centres of aspiration?



Suburbs as centres of environmental sustainability

- What are the 21st century solutions to commuting patterns that involve significant radial movement, and not just linear commuting?
- Can we create a mix of high and low density housing that enhances the suburban offer?



Suburbs as a public realm

- We have faced the challenges of modernising our city centres whose infrastructure now over 100 years old has been crumbling before our eyes
- As suburbs start to approach their centenary what funding model should be applied to do the equivalent?
- Ealing Brentham garden estate built in 1901





Two possible futures

- Maximise the potential of city suburbs

OR

- Exurbia





Exurbia

- Exurbanites turn inwards, towards their own communities and not towards the city
- Recreating the family norm (kids and pet)
- In the US, 78% of exurbanites live in a single family home
- Exurbanites “think rural” but “act suburban”
- Diversity



The Alternative

- Recognise that the key to a successful city is successful city suburbs
- Celebrating city suburbs is recognising that truth that Jane Jacobs told us so many years ago:

“

The chief function of a successful district is to mediate between the indispensable, but inherently politically powerless, street neighbourhoods, and the inherently powerful city as a whole.”





A change of paradigms?

The old paradigm

- Successful cities create successful city suburbs

The new paradigm

- Successful city suburbs sustain and underpin successful cities





A change of language?

- From suburbs to city suburbs
- And from suburban to metropolitan

