AQA Geography A-Level

3.2.3: Contemporary Urban Environments
## Essential Notes

Urbanisation

Urbanisation is the **growth in the proportion of a country living in urban areas**. People are moving to urban areas all over the world but **most of the population in richer countries** already live in **urban areas**.

More than **50% of the world's population** currently live in urban areas (**3.4 billion people**) and more than **80% of the UK population** live in urban areas.
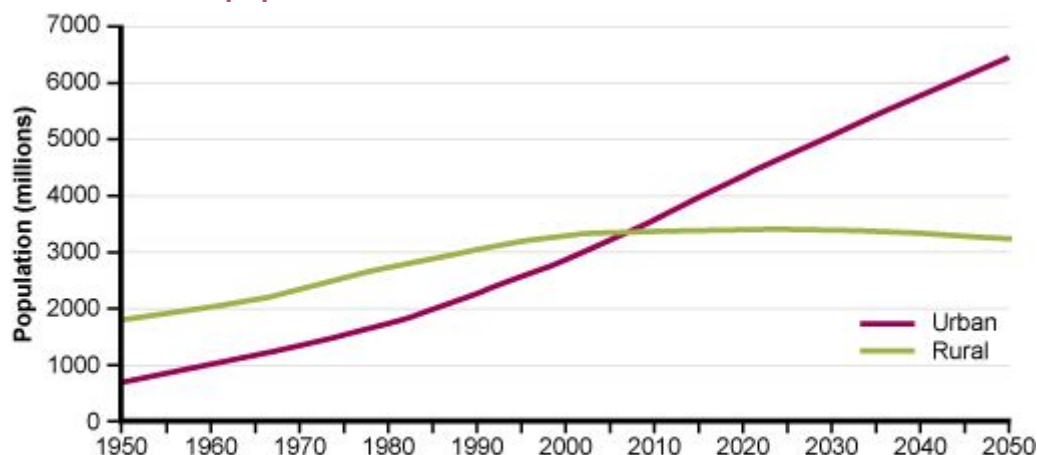
Urbanisation is happening **faster in poorer countries** as more are moving for **better work and health opportunities** which are available in cities.

Since 1950, the **rate of urbanisation** has grown for both richer and poorer countries but the rate has been **twice as great** in poorer countries than richer countries. **25% of Bangladesh** currently live in urban areas.
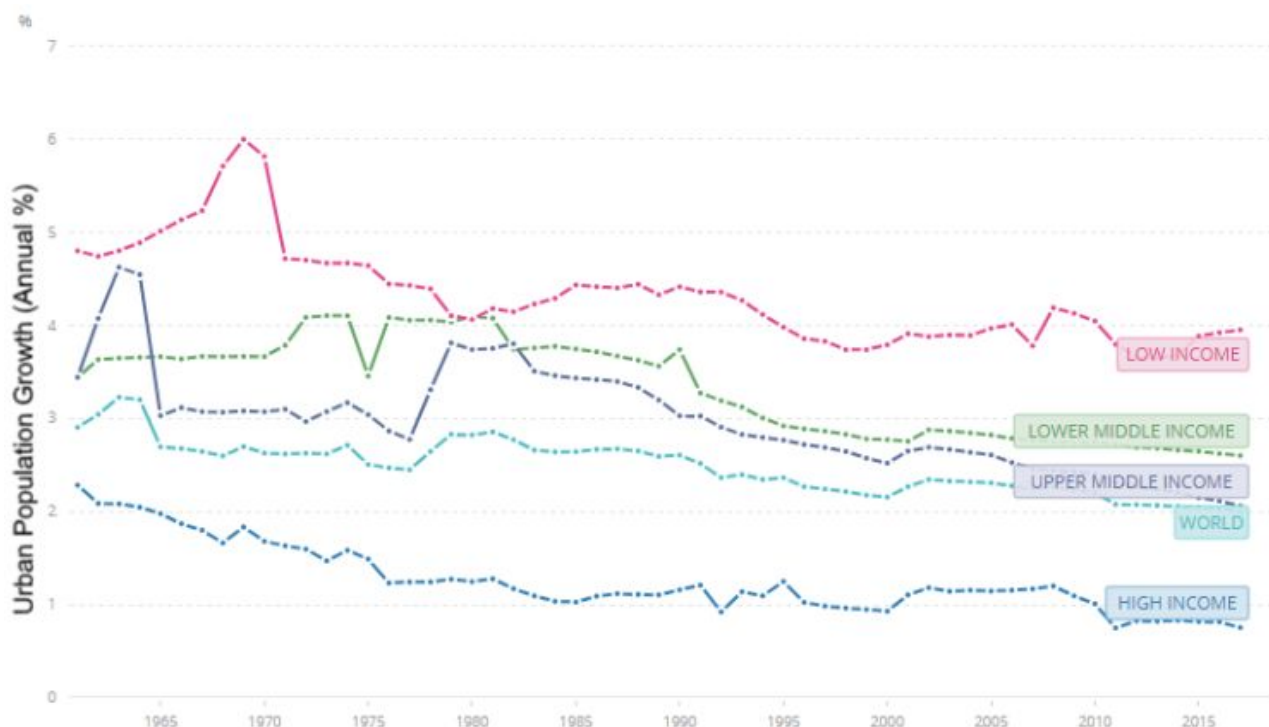
Do more people live in urban or rural areas?, 2019

Share of the population which live in urban versus rural areas. Here, 'majority urban' indicates more than 50 percent of the population live in urban centres; 'majority rural' indicates less than 50 percent. Urban populations are defined based on the definition of urban areas by national statistical offices. This is based on estimates to 2016, combined with UN projections to 2050.

Our World in Data

| No data | Majority rural | Majority urban |

(Source: https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization)
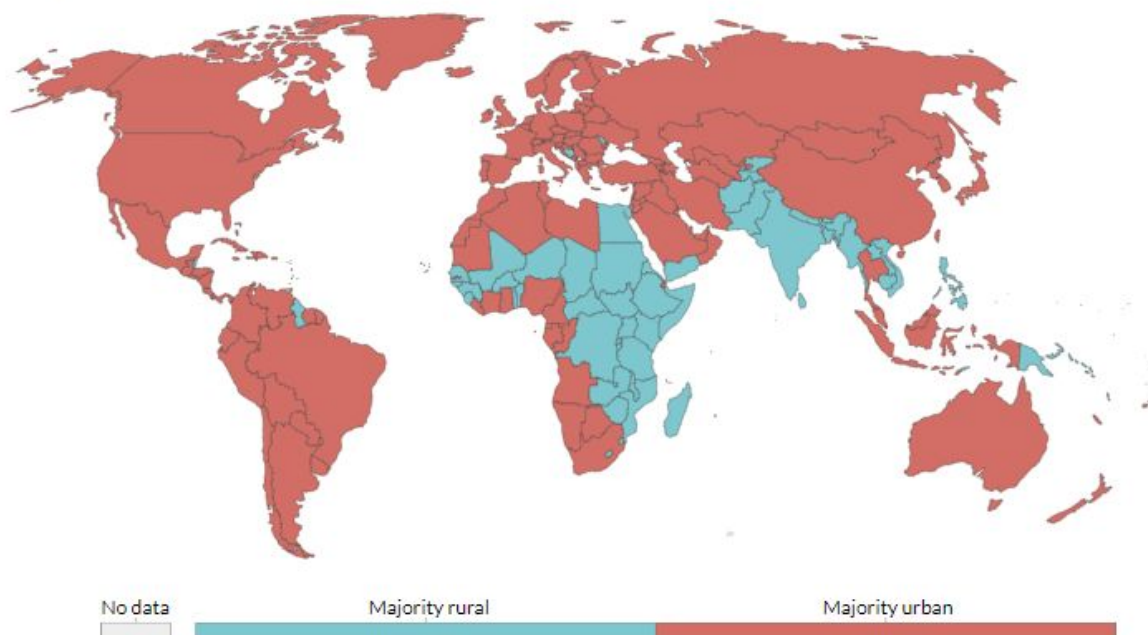
The **proportion living in urban areas is less in Low Income Countries than that of richer countries**.

It is usually **young people** who move to cities to find work. These people have **children in the cities** which increases the proportion of the population living in urban areas.

Urban areas have **better healthcare**, service **accessibility** and **life expectancy**. As life expectancy is **higher**, the proportion of people living in urban areas is **increased**.

Suburbanisation is the **outward growth** of **urban development** where people move to the **suburbs**. The suburbs are the **outlying areas of the city** which are close enough to the central business district so accessible by **commuters**. They are usually predominantly **residential areas**.

Counter-urbanisation is when **large numbers of people** move **from urban areas** into **surrounding countryside or rural areas**. This is largely a **demographic** and **social process**.

Urban growth is facilitated by **economic, social, technological, political and demographic processes**. These processes provide **incentives**, encouraging people to **move to urban areas**. For instance, the greater exposure to **new technologies**, **cultures** and **job opportunities** may entice people to move to cities for a **better quality of life**.

Megacities

Urbanisation has resulted in the **growth of megacities** which are **metropolitan areas** with a total population greater than **ten million people.** In 2015, there were **35 megacities in the world**; the largest being **Tokyo, Delhi, Mumbai and Mexico City** to name a few.

Along with world cities, such as **London and New York City** (which have populations under 10 million), megacities have an important role in **global and regional economies** as they have **large markets** and are **central businesses districts** involving the world.

Cities also face **urban change over time**, such as **deindustrialisation**, **decentralisation** and the risks of **service economies**. Often, this leads to **urban policies** and **regeneration** schemes, which has been happening in Britain since 1979.

For instance, after businesses moved away from the London Docklands, it became a **derelict** site, After **regeneration** and **gentrification**, it has become a **business hotspot**, attracting professionals and businesses.
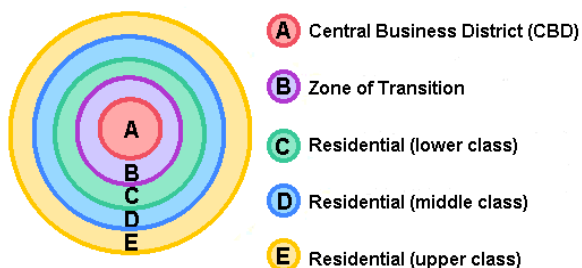
Urban Forms and Issues

Urban forms are the **physical characteristics** that make up **built areas**, including the **shape, size, density and configuration of settlements**.

When a city grows at a **manageable rate**, considered to be **1% annually, the infrastructure can keep pace** with the **growing demands of the population**. However, with **megacities**, necessities such as **public transportation**, **sewer systems**, **water facilities**, **healthcare** and **education** become strained as the **population density is too great to be managed**.

Without **proper facilities**, low income urban residents are forced to **create their own provisions with the available resources**. This leads to a rise in **squatter settlements**, **poor health** and poor **sanitation**. Additionally, urban growth may lead to **urban sprawl** which creates wider urban areas, forcing more places to become **overcrowded** and a reduction of countryside.

Burgess Concentric Ring Model

- **A** Central Business District (CBD)
- **B** Zone of Transition
- **C** Residential (lower class)
- **D** Residential (middle class)
- **E** Residential (upper class)

The spatial patterns of land use in urban areas are said to follow **The Burgess Model**. This model claims that the centre of the city (CBD: **Central Business District**) is where **commercial businesses and international exchanges** occur.

The next two rings are the inner city which has a mix of **poor housing** and older **industrial buildings**. The inner city is often deprived but can have newly built housing/industry where land has been **regenerated**.

The fourth ring represents the **suburbs** which is **residential housing**, often being **cheaper** than within the central business district. In the UK and USA, **middle-class families** tend to locate in the suburbs as the **environment is cleaner and safer** than the central city.

The **final ring** represents the **rural-urban fringe** which is the **edge of a city** where there are both urban and rural land uses.

Urbanisation and Inequalities

Urbanisation creates **economic inequality**, **social segregation** and **cultural diversity** which may lead to a rise in **racism, hate crime and abuse** but this varies globally.

Ethnic segregation is closely related to **economic indicators**, such as **income and employment**, and **social indicators** such as **health, crime and education**. Segregation then leads **stereotypes** to form which creates bias and injustice within society.

Diverse living spaces in urban areas have **social characteristics** that **reflect ethnicity** and **culture**. **Segregation** and other inequalities can be prevented by **creating awareness** and facilitating the needs of those who have been **marginalised** within urban areas.

For example, **Aik Saath** (meaning 'as one/ side by side' in Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu) in Slough is a **charity** focused on **integrating people** from 'all communities, faiths and backgrounds to encourage conflict resolution and community cohesion'.This is achieved through **training**, **campaigns** and **projects.**

The charity was set up to **stop gang violence** and **hate crime** amongst young people from **Asian** backgrounds. The charity works in **schools**, **colleges**, **universities** and **local events** to reach a wide audience and create a social identity.

Additional social problems in urban areas include a **shortage of good quality housing**, **run down** CBDs and **traffic congestion**. These issues can be fixed through **urban renewal schemes**, the creation of new towns, such as Milton Keynes which was made in the 1970s, relocation incentives and congestion charges.

Urban Climate and Drainage

Urban climate refers to **climatic conditions** within urban areas which differ from neighbouring rural areas.

Urban Heat Island Profile
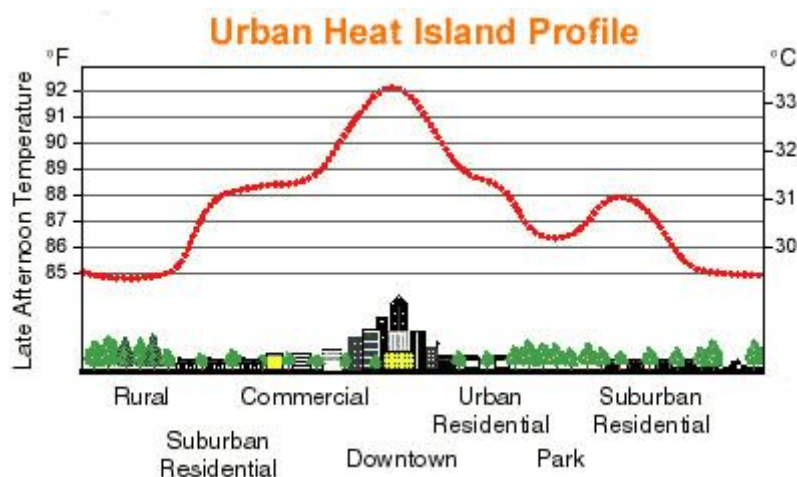
Urbanisation **changes the form of the landscape** and consequently produces changes in an area's air quality.

Surfaces that were **permeable become impermeable** and dry due to **urbanisation**. Urbanisation leads to a **growth in impermeable surfaces** due to the **development of infrastructure**, **roads** and **pavements**.

As well as **impacting water drainage**, the impermeable surfaces cause urban regions to become **warmer than their rural surroundings**, forming an 'island' of higher temperatures. This is called the **'urban heat island effect'**.
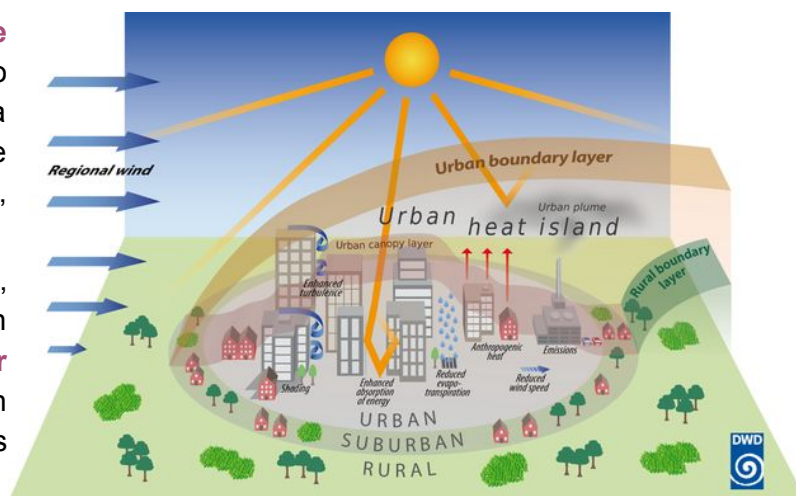
Urban structures are built to withstand **wind speeds and damage from precipitation**, particularly thunderstorms and hail storms.

Urban precipitation, surfaces and catchment characteristics vary from rural counterparts. As the darker surfaces of the city absorb heat energy, the warmer temperatures will mean there are **greater rates of evaporation**.

However, urbanisation can damage rivers and the water cycle through **contamination and pollution**. This can be solved through **water conservation** and **river restoration**, along with the development of **sustainable urban damage systems (SUDS)**.

It is the actions of key players, such as governments and local authorities, to develop and enforce these projects.

Urban Waste and Disposal

Urban physical waste is generated from **industrial and commercial activity** alongside **personal consumption**.

Urban areas often have a **consumerist culture** which traditionally does not promote **sustainability**, reuse and recycling. Additionally, many people excuse themselves from making sustainable choices as they feel they have **little input in improving the environment**.

Waste disposal is a serious problem due to:

- **Money: Poorer countries** cannot afford to dispose waste sustainably and **safely**, such as toxic waste which requires **special treatment.**

- **Infrastructure:** The lack of suitable infrastructure, i.e. the densely populated residential areas makes it difficult to carry out **large scale recycling schemes**.

- **Scale:** Waste disposal is a huge problem. **Landfills** are not large enough and **incineration** results in further pollution and waste.

Sustainable Urban Development

Sustainable living involves meeting the needs of today without **reducing** the ability of people in the future to meet their needs.

Urban areas have grown **unsustainably** and have a **large ecological footprint** due to the amount of **waste and pollution** emitted. Urban areas can however be managed sustainably through a range of **strategies and schemes**.

Sustainability has **numerous dimensions**. The four pillars are: **natural, physical, social and economic**. For a project to be sustainable it must address these pillars. For instance, a scheme to bridge inequalities will address social and economic sustainability, helping people in the short and long term.

Sustainable cities focus on the concept of **liveability**. This is the sum of factors that add up to a community's **quality of life**, including the natural and built environment, economic prosperity, social stability, educational opportunity and cultural, economic and recreation possibilities.

A city can become **sustainable** through:

- **Schemes** to **reduce waste** and safely **dispose** of it: Limiting waste sent to **landfills** and optimising **recycling** opportunities.

- Conserving **natural environments** and **historic buildings**: These are resources and if they get used up today, they will not be available for future generations. Historic buildings can be **restored** and natural environments can become **protected**.

- Building on **brownfield** sites: By using **derelict** sites, land is not wasted and greenfield sites can be protected. They can provide homes and eliminate **housing pressures**.

- Building **carbon-neutral homes**: For example, **BedZED** is a housing development in London which aims to be a carbon neutral project, saving energy for future generations.

- Creating an **efficient public transport system**: This will mean there are **fewer cars** on the road so **pollution is reduced.**