

schools (Figures 12.30 and 12.32, pages 667–668). People continue to move to the suburbs because of their desire for a quieter, less congested and less polluted environment. Suburbs are perceived as relatively crime-free environments and they also demonstrate other key benefits of the rural–urban fringe, such as woodlands and parks, golf courses and playing fields. Many are now well-established housing areas, highly sought after in the property market.

The negative effects of suburbanisation relate to urban sprawl and the environmental impacts of this process, discussed earlier. However, suburbanisation can also lead to:

- increasing social segregation within cities as the wealthy move out to the suburbs (for example, from inner London to Richmond) or gather in wealthy enclaves, such as Belgravia. The poor remain in the inner city
- diversion of funding away from inner city areas to the suburbs to pay for new infrastructure and services.

Counter-urbanisation: characteristics, causes and effects

Counter-urbanisation is the migration of people from major urban areas to smaller urban settlements and rural areas. Counter-urbanisation does not lead to suburban growth, but to growth in rural areas beyond the main city. The difference between rural and urban areas is reduced as a consequence of this movement.

A number of factors have caused the growth of counter-urbanisation. One is that people want to escape from the air pollution, dirt and crime of the urban environment. They aspire to the ‘rural idyll’ – what they see as the pleasant, quiet and clean environment of the countryside, where land and house prices are cheaper. Car ownership and greater affluence allow people to commute to work from such areas. Indeed, many employers have also moved out of cities. Improvements in technology have allowed more freedom of location. The spread of broadband and high-speed internet access means that someone working from a home computer can now access the same global system as a person in an office block in the centre of a city.

At the same time there has been a rising demand for second homes and earlier retirement. The former is a direct consequence of rising levels of affluence. Alongside this is the need for rural areas to attract income. Agriculture has faced economic difficulties

and one straightforward way for farmers to raise money is to sell unwanted land and buildings.

Counter-urbanisation affects the layout of rural settlements. Modern housing estates are built on the edges of small settlements, and small industrial units on the main roads leading into the settlement. Former open areas are built on, old properties and some agricultural buildings are converted and modernised.

As with gentrified areas in inner cities, there may be tension between the newcomers and the locals. One of the main areas of conflict is that, despite the influx of new people, local services often close down. Bus services to many rural communities have disappeared, schools and post offices have closed, and churches have closed as parishes are amalgamated into larger units. The main reason for these changes is that the newcomers have the wealth and the mobility to continue to use the urban services some distance away.

The evidence for counter-urbanisation in an area includes:

- an increase in the use of a commuter railway station in the area, including car parking for commuters
- increased value of houses in the area
- the construction of more executive housing in the area, often on newly designated building land, following the demolition of old properties
- conversions of former farm buildings to exclusive residences.

Counter-urbanisation is one of a number of processes contributing to social and demographic change in rural settlements, sometimes referred to as the rural turnaround. This may include:

- the out-migration of young village-born adults seeking education and employment opportunities elsewhere
- the decline of the elderly village-born population, through deaths
- the in-migration of young to middle-aged married couples or families with young children
- the in-migration of younger, more affluent people, which results in increased house prices.

These changes do not take place uniformly within all rural settlements. There are considerable variations between and within parishes. The ones with the most change are key settlements that have a range of basic