

## Planning and development of Cardiff

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### Introduction

Imagine that you are asked to plan the development of a city over the next 15 years. You will need to anticipate changes in population, as well as what that population will need in terms of housing, employment opportunities and health and education facilities. And what if some of these different needs are in conflict? The pressure to develop more housing and accommodate jobs may mean that some difficult decisions have to be made about releasing greenfield land as the city grows. And what if your city is not growing but is in a process of decline? How will you then go about planning your city? Planning a city means looking to its future, but planning a city can also be constrained by the ideas and plans of the past. This case study explores how politicians and urban planners have thought about the development of Cardiff in the past, and looks to some of the challenges they will face in the future. The main research question addressed by the case study is:

‘What are the key ideas that have shaped the planning and development of the city of Cardiff during the second half of the Twentieth Century?’

The history of different ideas about how a particular town or city should develop can be identified by reading historic plans from different periods. Exploring this history helps us to understand how various forms of development – suburban housing growth, out-of-town retailing, industrial parks, inner city regeneration, transport infrastructure – have been managed at different times. We can explore and learn how the different parts of the jigsaw of the city have been put together over time. We can also identify when there have been significant shifts in how people have planned the city, as well as evaluate the success or failure of different plans.

This case study is part of a wider project exploring various aspects of Cardiff’s development – from transport, housing and urban design to sustainability, culture and the economy (Hooper and Punter, 2006). The case study is based on archival research and documentary analysis of plans and supporting documents, as well as interviews with people who have been involved in the planning of Cardiff since the 1960s. It complements other material specifically targeted at geography students on Cardiff’s development (Thomas, 2003).

### Findings

#### Cardiff – a distinctive spatial structure

Cities represent a mix of different periods of history and development that leave their distinctive mark on the structure and layout of a city. Cardiff remained a small settlement until the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was subsequently transformed into a ‘coal metropolis’ through the export of coal from the south Wales valleys. Cardiff expanded significantly in a short space of time. The rail infrastructure necessary for the export of coal – and the expansion of Cardiff’s residential



areas – left a distinctive pattern to the city. The city has been described as ‘fan-like’ or similar to a ‘hand and fingers’ layout, with development spreading outwards from the city centre and docks area. The physical geography of the city has also shaped the growth of Cardiff – and some now argue that the physical geography of the city now limits its future development and growth. Planners continue to be faced with difficult choices about how much growth is required and where to locate new development.

#### The growth of the city since 1970

Cardiff was in the late 1960s expected to continue to grow significantly and become a city of 500,000 population by the end of the twentieth century. Planners had to develop different models of how the city could grow to accommodate the extra population. The model that was considered attractive was one of ‘close peripheral expansion’. This meant locating new residential development at the edge of the existing city and distributing this across or around Cardiff. This is the pattern of development that has taken place in the last 40 years. The difficulty with this model of growth is that it makes it difficult to accommodate new rail infrastructure to serve the city and increases dependency on private car use. This explains some of Cardiff’s pressing traffic issues that exist today.

In the 1970s, Cardiff was experiencing a stagnant or declining population. Inner urban areas were experiencing population loss and the clearance of ‘slums’. At the same time, Cardiff’s suburbs were expanding with new residential development. The city was ‘hollowing out’ as it experienced counter-urbanisation. This was further encouraged by the building of new roads infrastructure – the new motorway to the north of the city and a ‘peripheral distributor road’ linking the motorway to the declining docks. These new roads opened up new spaces for development at the edge of the city for special employment use. The city was presented with a new set of challenges – how to attract investment and employment to strategic sites at new road interchanges while also protecting the city centre and encouraging regeneration of the docks.

These issues persisted into the 1980s when Cardiff – like many other British cities – faced the challenge of inner city regeneration and economic restructuring.

The period since the early 1990s has seen Cardiff undergo a transformation. Comprehensive regeneration of the city's former docklands – now known as Cardiff Bay – has taken place. This has released some of the pressure to develop Greenfield sites for housing at the edges of the city and also resulted in a series of mixed-use developments in the waterfront area of the city. Redevelopment of parts of the city centre has also taken place, with many new facilities and attractions designed to create a 'European capital'. The city centre skyline has also changed with a series of high-rise developments.

### Where next?

Recent population projections identify that Cardiff is expected to expand significantly in the next two decades. It is likely that significant allocations of Greenfield land will be required to provide for the level of housing that is needed. There are also proposals to release strategic sites for economic development. The city's growth is likely to raise earlier concerns that the city has nowhere to grow and that its surrounding countryside will be subject to additional pressure for development. It also poses risks to Cardiff's character as a small, compact and green city.

### Recommendations

The research on Cardiff's planning and development over the past half century leads to the following recommendations:

- The City needs a plan that looks forward beyond the next 10-15 years to set out a strategic, longer-term vision for the development of the city and how future growth can be accommodated.
- The City needs to explore how it can build in more sustainable transport infrastructure to reduce traffic congestion and dependency on use of the private car.
- The City needs to ensure that any new communities built on the periphery of the city on greenfield sites are as sustainable as possible.

### Conclusions

- Each city has a distinctive pattern of development that is shaped by historical patterns of growth. This shapes the further development of the city. Planners try and shape the growth of cities by preparing development plans.
- Cardiff's pattern of development has been one of trying to regenerate older parts of the city while also opening up opportunities for new development at its periphery and at strategic sites along the roads network.
- There continues to be significant pressure for development in Cardiff over the next twenty years. There is a requirement to identify Greenfield sites for new residential development and this is expected to be controversial and opposed by some existing communities across Cardiff.

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### References

- Hooper, A. and Punter, J. (eds.) 2006. Capital Cardiff, 1975-2020. Regeneration, Competitiveness, and the Urban Environment. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Thomas, H. 2003. Discovering Cities: Cardiff. Sheffield: The Geographical Association.

### Further information

- Visit [www.cardiff.gov.uk](http://www.cardiff.gov.uk) and search for 'Local Development Plan' to find out the Council's plans and ideas for how the city will develop in the period to 2026. You can explore and evaluate whether these ideas continue with or break from past ideas of how the city should develop. The website also includes background papers that provide statistical data on Cardiff's development, including expected changes in population.
- Peter Finch also provides a creative, lively and engaging account of the changes in Cardiff from the perspective of a long-standing resident of the city at [www.peterfinch.co.uk/cardiff.htm](http://www.peterfinch.co.uk/cardiff.htm)