

Cities, towns and greenspace

Scotland's cities and towns should be healthy, attractive and economically successful places to live, work and visit.



Summary

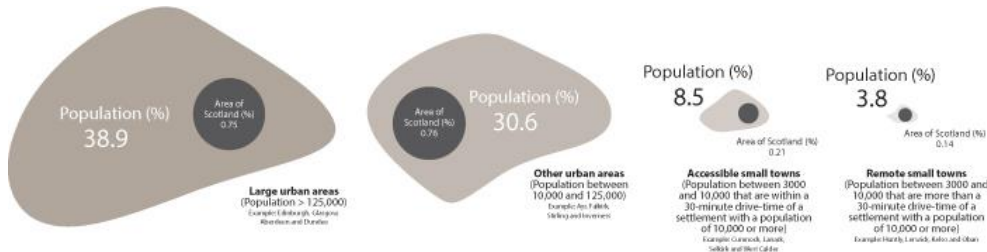
Successful, thriving and sustainable cities and towns play a key role in the lives of most people in Scotland. Services, employment and leisure activities make up the character and role of a place. As key contributors to the national economy, the prosperity and well-being of towns and cities is vital to Scotland becoming a more successful country. The majority are generally good places to live, with 90% of people rating their neighbourhood as good or fairly good. However, there are still significant issues in some deprived areas, related to population pressures and a legacy of poor housing and inadequate infrastructure and amenities.

Introduction

Scotland's settlement pattern is strongly influenced by its distinctive geography. The urban environment is based on the pattern of burgh settlement begun in the 12th century, which was modified by industrialisation and the depopulation of rural areas in the 18th and 19th centuries. Late 20th-century de-industrialisation and subsequent developments have further defined our cities and towns. Most of the population is now distributed between six relatively small cities and a range of medium-sized and small towns. The [2009–2010 Urban Rural Classification](#) defines these areas as in Figure 1.

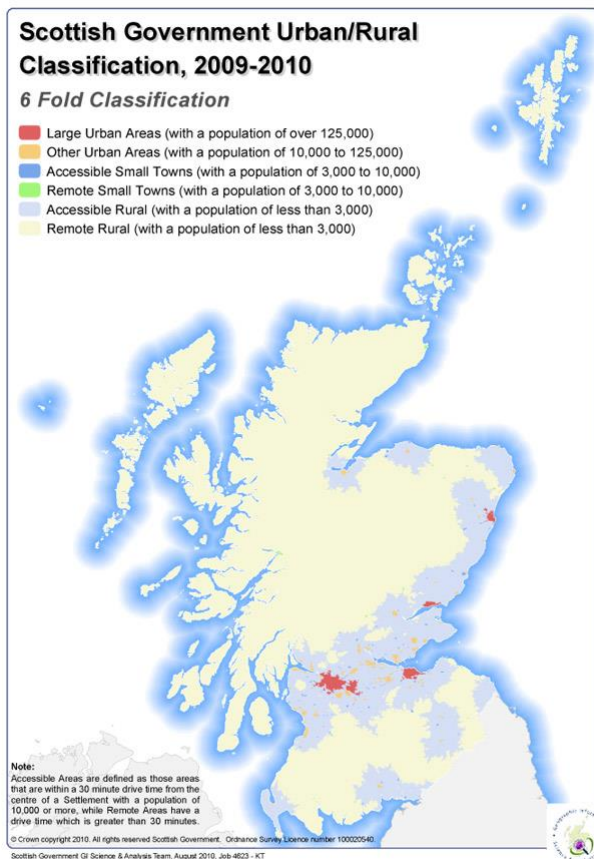


Figure 1: Distribution of population in Scotland



There are only four large urban areas in Scotland: Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee. These cities are home to approximately 40% of our population. Almost another 40% live in settlements of between 3000 and 125,000 people, with the remaining 20% living in more remote and smaller settlements. In Scotland, most cities and towns are located in the Central Belt (the area around and between Edinburgh and Glasgow). Consequently, the majority of Scotland's population is concentrated in this area. So, although parts of Scotland are highly urbanised, overall it has a low population density, with urban settlements taking up less than 3% of the land area. Figure 2 shows where Scotland's population lives.

Figure 2: Urban/rural classification for Scotland



Source and clearer zoomable map available:
www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/933/0103172.pdf.

As with most other countries, cities are the major focus of economic and social activity, higher education and retailing, providing a range of services for the surrounding area. People commute to cities to work on a daily basis, often from towns as far as 40 or 50 miles away. The social and shopping opportunities in cities also attract weekly and monthly trips from a larger catchment area. Cities are therefore vitally important to surrounding towns. These smaller towns also provide housing and services and attract their own flow of workers and shoppers from surrounding areas.

Greenspaces are the 'green lungs' of our cities and towns; vegetated land or areas of water used for informal recreation – such as parks, canals and woodland. These are an important component of the urban environment, contributing to the 'sense of place' and positively influencing people's quality of life.

Description of cities, towns and greenspace



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The character of cities and towns varies considerably across Scotland; each place has its own unique character, which is affected by a number of factors including size, location, climate, underlying geography, layout, building materials and architectural styles. The challenges facing a city or town are specific to each locality. These challenges can be complex, are often inter-related and need to be considered in the context of a place's history and relationship with the surrounding area.

Some places have suffered a loss of vitality in recent times as a result of the decline of traditional industries and changing patterns of retailing. Resultant loss of jobs and the associated sense of shared purpose and identity can seriously affect a town, and the quality of life of its residents.

Areas reliant on a narrow range of businesses and industry have found themselves particularly vulnerable to economic change. Examples include some former mining towns, steel towns, mill towns and fishing ports. In some areas the loss of jobs caused by the closure of the main employer has not been compensated for by significant new employment opportunities.

Assessing the condition of Scottish towns and cities is very difficult as each place is affected by different factors. Places that are most successful and popular are generally those that:

- include a range of employment, residential, cultural, entertainment and leisure facilities;
- have a thriving local population who feel part of a positive community where quality of life is regarded as good;
- are highly accessible by a range of types of transport;
- have an attractive amenity in terms of the built environment, with clean and safe streets, public and greenspaces;
- have communities with the vision and ability to build on their assets, overcome problems, adapt to market and community needs, and deliver improvements.

It is clear that people's satisfaction with their neighbourhoods has an important influence on the overall quality of their lives. The [Scottish Household Survey](#) confirms that, in Scotland as a whole, over 90% of adults rate their neighbourhood as either very good or fairly good. However, in the most deprived areas, this falls to 78%.

The [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#) takes into account 38 different indicators relating to income, employment, health, education, skills and training, housing, access and crime. This index provides a comprehensive picture of relative deprivation across Scotland. It identifies small areas with high levels of deprivation across all of Scotland, many being areas where employment and opportunities are low.

The [Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics](#) website provides a valuable resource on health, education, poverty, unemployment, housing, population, crime and social/community issues at a neighbourhood level. The site includes a number of indicators specific to the built environment. These are: Area of Derelict Land; Proximity to Derelict Sites; Percentage Derelict; Area of Vacant Land; Carbon Dioxide Emission Estimates; Dwellings in Flood Risk Areas; Proximity to a SPRI site; Physical Environment Indicators; and Waste.

The [Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey](#) quantifies land that is not used for the purposes for which it is held and is viewed as an appropriate site for development (vacant land), and land that has been so damaged by development that it is incapable of development for beneficial use without rehabilitation (derelict land). The survey shows that:

- in 2010 there were 10,771 ha of derelict and urban vacant land, of which 76% was classified as derelict and 24% as urban vacant land;
- 29.8% of Scotland's population lives within 500 m of derelict land, with 56.2% living with 1km.

The [Scottish Household Survey](#) also identifies issues that prevent people from enjoying living in a particular area. These are mainly behavioural, for example litter, noisy neighbours and anti-social behaviour, with 24.4% of people saying litter is a problem in their area and 11.3% saying vandalism, graffiti and damage to property is common. More information on these issues can be found in the [Noise, light and odour](#) topic.

It is not possible to comment on whether urban areas are becoming better places to live because every urban place is different and, in cities, some areas may be improving while others are getting worse.

Greenspaces are described as places that 'bring the countryside into towns and cities'. [Greenspace Scotland](#) have led a programme (working with local authorities and supported by SNH and Scottish government) to map and categorise all urban greenspaces. A national greenspace [dataset](#) covering [urban greenspace](#) in all 32 local authorities is available as an [interactive map](#).

The second [State of Scotland's Greenspace](#) report (published in February 2012), described for the first time the extent and type of urban greenspace in all 32 local authority areas. Key findings include:

- the total area of greenspace in urban Scotland is 1,090 square km, this equates to 24 ha of greenspace per 1,000 people (equivalent to the area of a tennis court per person!);
- 39% of greenspace is classified as private gardens;
- 22% is classified as natural and semi-natural greenspace;
- public parks and gardens, amenity greenspace and sports areas account for 8%, 16% and 10% of greenspace respectively.

The type of Greenspace available varies considerably between between local authorities.

It is intended that the State of Scotland's Greenspace Reports will be produced biennially.

People's use of and attitudes towards greenspace are important in determining whether the full range of their social, economic and health benefits is realised. Greenspace Scotland's biennial [greenspace use and attitude surveys](#) of 1,000 urban Scots provide trend data starting from 2004 on use and attitudes to greenspace.

The most recent survey (2011) shows that people are using urban greenspaces less often than in previous years. The number of people using their local greenspace at least once a week rose steadily from 49 % in 2004 to 63 % in 2009. However, by 2011, this number had fallen to 54 %. This decline was coupled with lower ratings of greenspaces as good places for play, physical activity and relaxation. In the 2011 survey:

- 54% of respondents use their local greenspace once a week or more often, down from 63% in 2009;
- those in the 35–44-year age range are most likely to use local greenspaces;
- 48% of those polled can walk to their local green space within 5 minutes.

Nature and wildlife do not belong solely in the countryside. Urban areas, and particularly the greenspaces within them, contain a wide range of habitats valuable for many plants and animals – something that is often forgotten – and for many people this is the only nature they will see on a daily basis. Biodiversity enhances the quality of life for urban residents through making local landscape more interesting and diverse, providing opportunities for recreation, health benefits and natural services of flood control, pollution filtering and noise reduction.

Pressures affecting cities, towns and greenspace



The built environment must continuously adapt to meet changing economic, social and environmental challenges. There are a variety of pressures on the built environment, key pressures are discussed below.

Population growth and change

Scotland's estimated population of 5,222,100 (mid-2010) is the highest since 1977, and the [population is predicted to continue to grow](#) as a result of higher birth rates, longer life expectancy and immigration. The increase in the number of individuals, along with the trend towards single-occupancy houses, is putting pressure on both housing and infrastructure; population projections suggest a net [increase of over 200,000 households](#) in Scotland by 2020. It is estimated that each year 20,000 homes will need to be built just to accommodate this growth in households.

This need for housing will result in pressure to develop greenfield sites.

Business sector

The needs and requirements of businesses change, and empty offices and shops are an increasing burden on the high street and in other retailing centres. The urban environment needs to adjust to meet these changing requirements.

Climate change

Climate change is very likely to affect our built environment:

- the expected hotter drier summers and milder wetter winters are likely to result in new pests and the spread of insect infestations;
- the expected increased frequency and intensity of extreme precipitation events is likely to result in more flooding, damaging buildings and houses; although there may be positive aspects for the built environment in the provision of more greenspace set aside to mitigate flooding;
- likely increases in sea level and coastal erosion may impact on coastal settlements;
- initiatives to encourage more active travel (to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions) could have positive benefits for air quality in the built environment.

Transport

The growing economy and changing society has led to changes in the journeys we make and the way they are made. These changes have resulted in an increased reliance on cars, mirrored by a reduction in walking and cycling. These trends, unchecked, are expected to continue and in recent years we have seen road traffic in some areas become a problem for the built environment, for public health, and for the economy.

Road traffic, through [air pollution](#) and [noise pollution](#), is a major factor in adversely affecting [public health and quality of life](#).

Air quality

There are a number of air pollution hotspots in some urban areas, which adversely affect people's health and quality of life. [Air quality](#) issues can also damage buildings and can have economic implications.

Waste and litter

[Waste](#) is produced by households, commerce and industry. Waste collection and disposal can pose problems in towns and cities, with issues of storage and effective collection. The [2010 Scottish Household Survey](#) reported that around 25% of adults thought that litter was a problem in their neighbourhood, with 23% highlighting animal [nuisance](#) such as dog fouling as a very or fairly common problem. These issues are of particular concern in urban environments. [Flytipping](#) also poses problems; preventing and removing flytipped waste can place a heavy financial burden on local authorities and private landowners.

Industrial legacy

Across Scotland, particularly in parts of the Lowlands, (especially West Central Scotland), the closure of manufacturing industries (such as steel works) has left degraded landscapes, poor-quality environments and significant areas of vacant and derelict land, some contaminated by pollutants. The [Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey](#) reported that, across Scotland, 10,771 ha of urban land is classed as vacant or derelict.

Consequences of a change in cities, towns and greenspace



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It is Scotland's densely populated areas that will have some of the greatest impacts on the environment. These areas of high population account for the greatest amount of domestic energy use and urban areas will contain the highest concentrations of commercial and industrial activities. They are also the source of most of our domestic and commercial waste and, as centres of interaction, are the major source of traffic.

A badly designed and unsustainable built environment impacts on a wide range of aspects of the environment:

- human health and quality of life;
- biodiversity;
- air quality;
- economic growth;
- development pressure on greenfield sites.

Response by society



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Changes to the built environment are inevitable as places continue to evolve to meet the needs of a changing society. Achieving a thriving and successful built environment can only happen if proactive policies are adopted that recognise the importance of everyone working together. This will include central and local government, the public, private and voluntary sectors, and also the people who live there.

Cities and towns need to be responsive to local needs and must strike the right balance between choice and sustainability in order to be competitive and attractive places. It is important that change is seen as an opportunity for improvement, for example by strengthening green infrastructure, enhancing greenspace provision and urban biodiversity, and contributing to the improvement of [water](#), [air](#) and [soil](#) quality.

Planning

Better urban environments can be achieved through better planning.

The land use planning system has a key role to play in deciding where future development should happen, so that changes to cities and towns are managed in a cohesive and considered way. This is to be achieved through:

- strategic development plans that set out a vision for the long-term development of Scotland's four major city regions and deal with region-wide issues such as housing and transport;
- local development plans that set out where most new developments will happen and policies that will guide decisions on planning applications.

[The National Planning Framework](#) (NPF 2) focuses strongly on priorities for the improvement of infrastructure to support long-term development, including transport, energy and drainage infrastructure as well as a need for a network of waste management facilities. It also focuses on the potential of places, highlighting economic and environmental opportunities throughout Scotland.

The policies in NPF2 will be taken forward by [34 planning authorities](#) and [five strategic development planning authorities](#). The plans prepared by these authorities should set out the challenges facing cities and towns in their areas and the policies to support opportunities for improvement and will be subject to strategic environmental assessment to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account.

Design

Good urban design is important because it produces places that function well, respond to changing needs and gives communities a sense of place and identity. [Better placemaking](#) identifies locally important features and develops the sense of place. Good placemaking recognises the importance of identity and builds on it to create new spaces, places and buildings for the future.

Cities review

[A review of Scotland's cities](#) was undertaken in 2003. This examined the condition of Scotland's cities and their potential contribution to the country's future. The review recognised the distinctive characters of each city and their important strategic role as drivers of economic activity. The Scottish government is taking forward an economic strategy for cities over the coming months to ensure that this role is preserved and expanded.

Most local authorities will have undertaken work in accordance with the policies in [Scottish planning policy](#), which implement the Scottish government's key policy objectives for city and town centres, tailoring their approach to meet particular local circumstances and community needs.

Buildings

New buildings will have to be designed to be more energy-efficient and able to cope with the effects of climate change.

Transport

[Scotland's National Transport Strategy](#) focuses on the need to provide an efficient, integrated and reliable transport network that successfully promotes economic growth, protection of the environment, health and social inclusion.

The Scottish Government has identified the three key issues that they believe will develop a world class transport system that meets the needs of everyone in Scotland, providing them with integrated, modern, reliable and environmentally efficient transport choices.

- improved journey times and connections - making it quicker, easier and more reliable for passengers to travel;
- reduced emissions - making sure that Scotland takes a lead in the future of sustainable transport;
- improved quality, accessibility and affordability - ensuring everyone across Scotland has high-quality public transport choices.

Regeneration

The [Scottish Government](#) launched a discussion in February 2011 to assess the key challenges and opportunities for regeneration in Scotland. They are committed to publishing a regeneration strategy in future. Regeneration can make an important contribution to growing Scotland's economy, creating jobs and prosperity, and improving the opportunities for Scotland's people.

Vacant and derelict land

The government wants to see vacant and derelict land brought back into productive use for housing, for economic purposes and to create attractive environments. Major land reclamation in former mining areas and projects such as the Central Scotland Forest and the restoration of the Forth and Clyde and Union Canals have improved the environment and opened up new opportunities for economic development and recreation.

Waste

More detail on the response to waste, litter and flytipping issues can be found in the topic on [noise, light and odour](#) and the [waste](#) topic.