



Change and Conflict on the Rural Urban Fringe

This Factsheet examines changing landuse patterns on the **rural -urban fringe**. It outlines the nature of rural urban fringe areas, and the pressures on them, using Newcastle upon Tyne's rural -urban fringe as an example of recent change, conflict and resolution of problems. The area around Gosforth on the northern edge of the city of Newcastle will be examined in depth. Newcastle is one of the five Unitary authorities making up Tyne and Wear (Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Gateshead and Sunderland). (see map in Case Study 1.) There are development pressures from both house builders and industry.

What is the rural-urban fringe?

There is no single accepted definition. The Countryside Agency classifies 10% of England's land area as urban fringe. Fig 1 expands on some of the commonly used terms.

Exam Hint: Using an OS Map showing a rural-urban fringe area you are familiar with, see if you can identify areas that fit the definitions in Fig 1. Assess which terms best describe different areas on the map.

Fig 1: Definitions

Rural-Urban Continuum	The gradual change from highly urban, commercial landuses in a CBD, through residential inner and outer suburbs, to mixed urban / rural landuse on the urban fringe and beyond to rural areas. Generally building and population density decrease toward rural areas.
Urban 'Shadow'	This term recognises an area of marginal (low value) landuse surrounding suburban areas. It suggests a difficult area to manage and plan, with conflicts arising between landuses (farming, recreation, landfill, transport developments).
Urban Edge	The edge of a city. It should be thought of as a zone of transition rather than a clear rural / urban boundary. It is the area in which urban sprawl occurs. These areas are sometimes referred to as periurban .
Edge City / Exurbs	The development of new commercial centres (Edge City) and suburbs (exurbs) on rural land close to a central city. Both reflect large scale counter-urbanisation and decentralisation of commerce, industry and people.
Rural -Urban Fringe (RUF)	Typically a zone of expansion, growth and change where rural and recreational landuse is increasingly urbanised by new housing, road-building, retail parks and industrial estates. One suggested definition is that at least 25% of workers in the RUF commute to the urban area to work.

Fig 2 shows a transect line across Newcastle from the CBD ward of West City, north through the suburbs, rural-urban fringe and out to a rural ward, Stannington (this is actually part of Northumberland, not Newcastle City). **The wards named on Fig 2 can be found on Fig 3 in Case Study 1.**

Fig 2: Key Socio-Economic statistics for 8 wards (Source: 2001 Census):

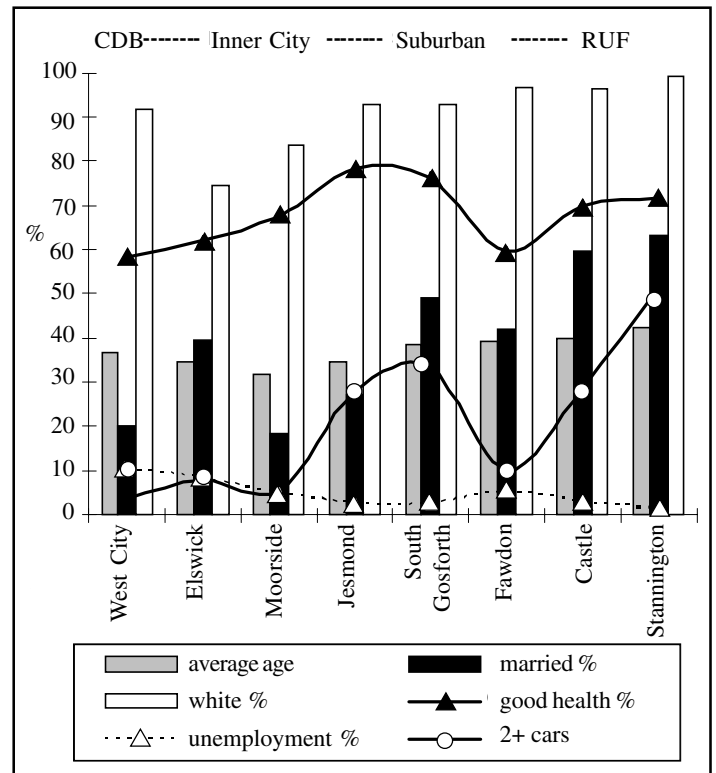


Fig 2 shows that **quality of life** is high in the rural ward of Stannington with over 50% of households owning 2 or more cars and very low unemployment. Health is not as good as in the affluent suburbs of South Gosforth and Jesmond. This reflects an older population with many retired people. Average age decreases towards the city centre and is lowest where student population (Jesmond) and immigrant population (Elswick) is highest. The three innermost wards tend to be characterised by the highest unemployment, lowest car ownership and fewest people having good health. These statistics show us that there are clear differences between the types of people and households across a city.

The planning framework

To understand the changing rural-urban fringe today, we need to briefly examine the history of planning in the UK. **The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act** brought in the system of **Planning Permission** which is designed to control development. Local Councils also had to draw-up **Development Plans** which outlined how areas would develop in a planned way. For urban areas these are now called **Unitary Development Plans**. The 1947 Act ushered in many new planning developments which are still with us today:

- Greenbelts** – areas of open, rural or semi-rural land surrounding major urban areas. Greenbelts restrict urban sprawl by **containing** urban areas. In 1997 there were 1.65 million hectares of greenbelt in England.
- New Towns** – these were designed to provide new land for housing and industry beyond the greenbelt, allowing growth but preventing sprawl by creating **self contained** new and expanded towns. Over 2 million people in the UK live in new or expanded towns.
- National Parks** – areas of high landscape and cultural value which are protected from inappropriate development. The National Parks in England and Wales cover over 14,000 square km.

Case Study 1: Population Change in Newcastle

Population in Newcastle has fallen in recent decades. There are many reasons for this including **deindustrialisation**, bringing a loss of jobs and opportunities and migration out of the region. Newcastle's total population has fallen from 275,000 in 1991 to 259,000 at the 2001 Census.

Within Newcastle there has been a considerable movement of people from the central urban areas to more rural-urban fringe areas, as Fig 3 illustrates for the period 1971-1998.

At city level, the pattern of movement is complicated by factors specific to particular wards. These are explained on Fig 3.

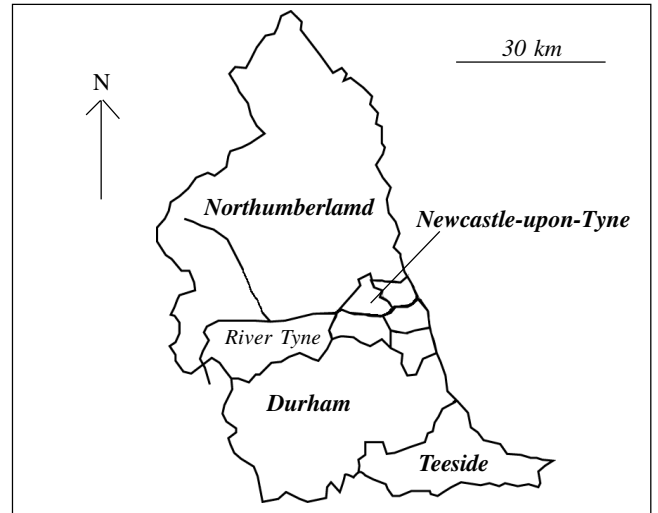
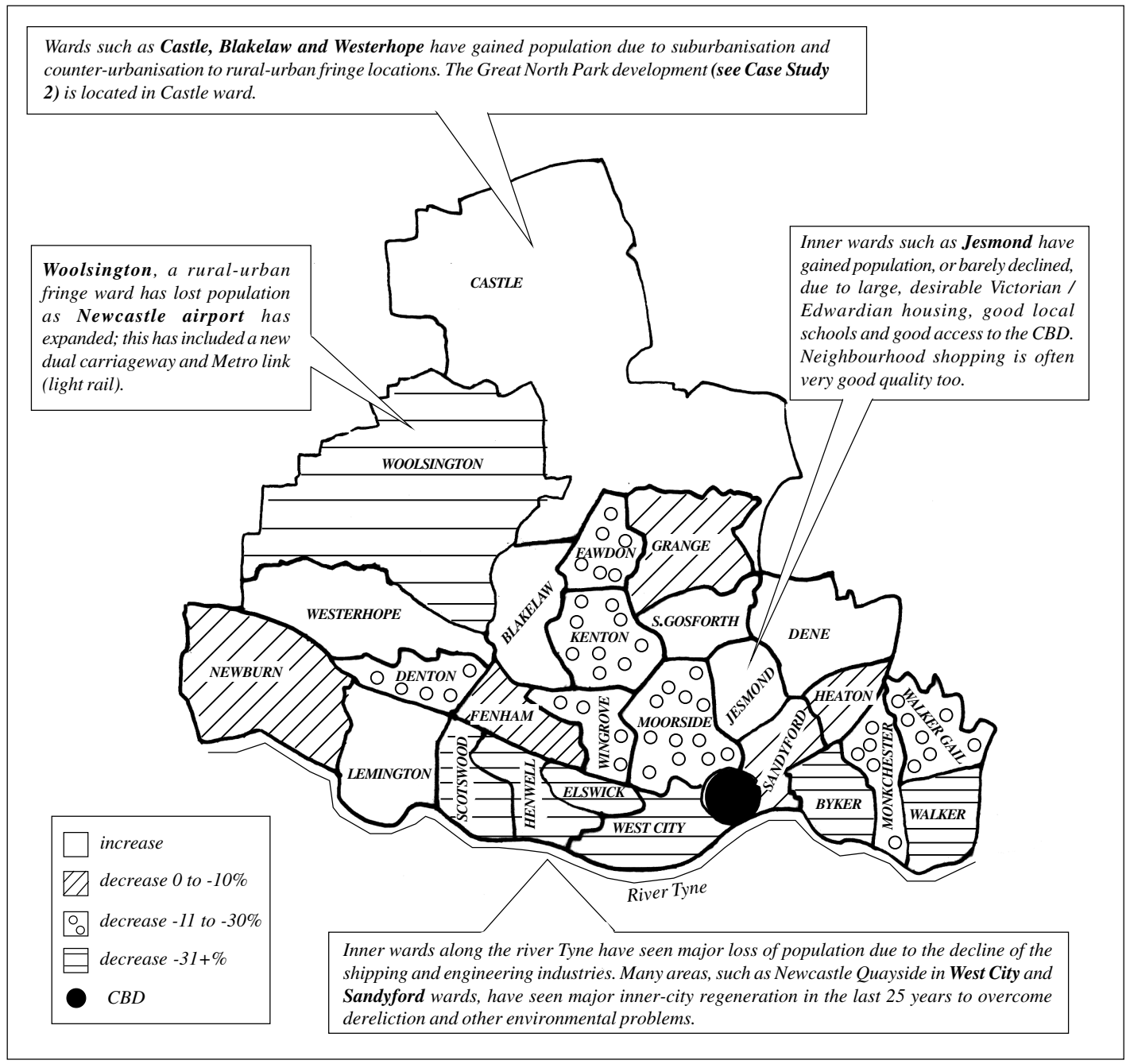


Fig 3 Population Change by ward, 1971 - 1998



In the 1950s and 1960s planning focussed on the building of new and expanded towns, plus renewing the housing stock through slum clearance in cities. By the 1970s attention turned to the UK's declining inner city areas. The New Towns programme ceased, and development focused on the **regeneration of inner city areas**. Fig 4 briefly outlines some key policies that were developed.

Fig 4. Inner City policy

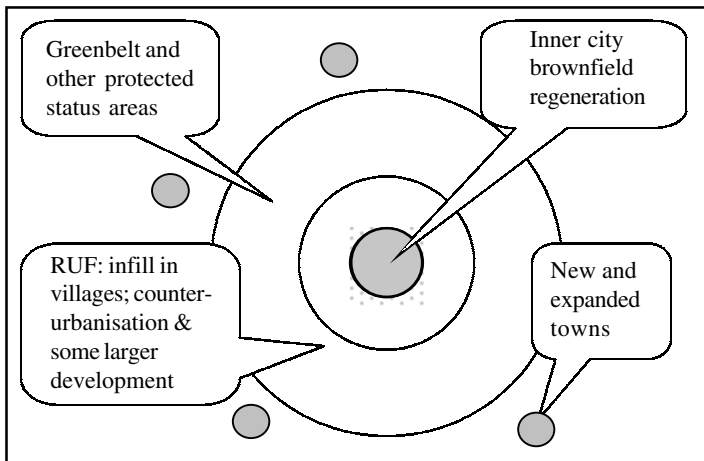
Policy	Date	Description
Urban Development Corporations (UDCs)	1981-1998	Regeneration of large areas of inner cities by a Development Corporation.
City Challenge	1993-2000	Renewal and regeneration of urban communities.
Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)	1994-	Renewal of neighbourhoods by tackling unemployment, housing, crime and environmental problems.

Exam Hint: If you are examining a new development for your AS or A2 coursework, visit www.planningportal.gov.uk to view the relevant Unitary Development Plan online. Many Councils also publish Planning Permission details online too, for instance at www.newcastle.gov.uk. Both resources could provide useful secondary data for coursework.

Pressures on the rural-urban fringe

Planning policy has focussed on containing urban areas to prevent sprawl, whilst developing new towns and regenerating inner cities to provide new areas for industry, housing and commerce. These policies have often overlooked the rural-urban fringe which lies in a 'gap' between areas of development, as is shown in Fig 5.

Fig 5. The rural-urban fringe in relation to planning policy



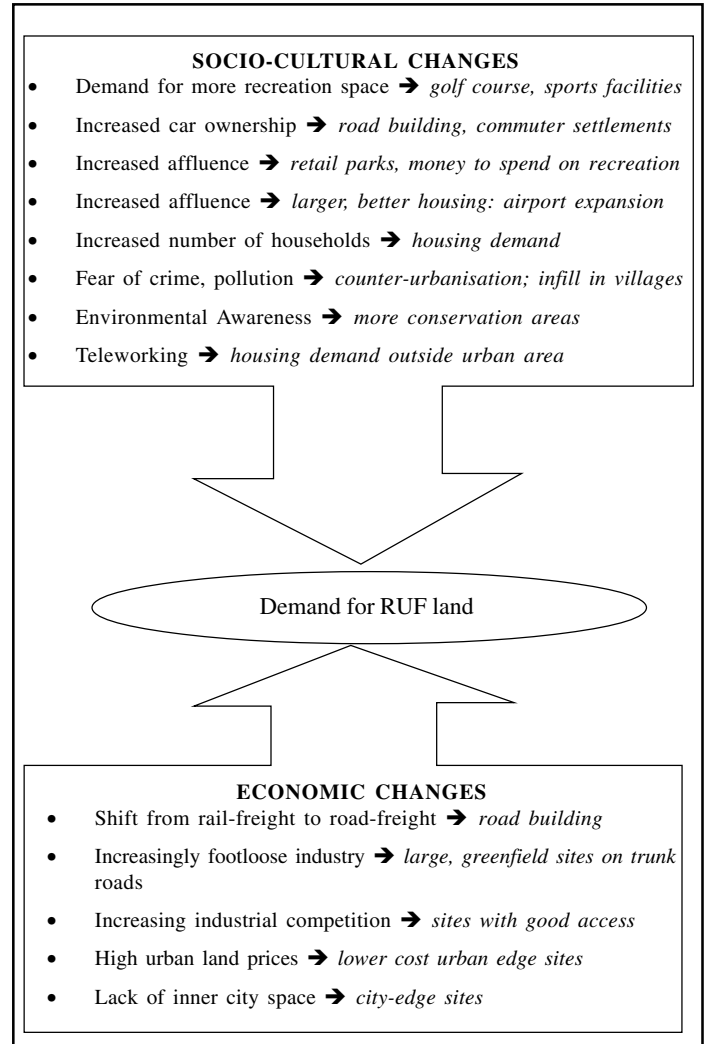
Many rural-urban fringe areas have a range of 'protected' areas designed to conserve them. Around Newcastle these include:

- A Greenbelt, restricting development.
- Areas of exceptional landscape value (often farmland, woodland or other green areas)
- Country parks – for recreational use.
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Nature Conservation and Local Conservation sites, Nature Reserves.
- Designated Wildlife Corridors

This restricts development as gaining planning permission to develop any of these areas is difficult. These protected areas prevent **urban sprawl** and endless **suburbanisation** at the urban edge.

This also means that land values are low **unless** planning permission is granted when the land value can increase tenfold or more. Given the development of new and expanded towns, plus major regeneration in the inner city it is at first glance difficult to see why pressure on the rural-urban fringe is so great. To understand the pressures, we need to examine a range of social, cultural and economic changes that have led to pressure to develop on the rural-urban fringe. These changes are summarised in Fig 6.

Fig 6. Changes causing demand for land on the RUF



These pressures become all the more obvious when we begin to examine the popularity of areas surrounding a city like Newcastle. **Case Study 1** relates population change in Newcastle to housing demand and pressure on rural-urban fringe locations.

Newcastle Great Park (initially known as the Northern Development Area) was first proposed in 1998 and was adopted as part of the Newcastle Unitary Development plan. In August 1998 a planning application for the development was made. This was withdrawn, largely due to environmental objections by the Council for the Protection Rural England (CPRE) and others. A second planning application was eventually approved by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in 1999. The planned developments at Newcastle Great Park, plus wider developments on the northern edge of Newcastle are shown in detail in **Case Study 2**.

Case Study 2: Landuse change on the northern edge of Newcastle

The annotated map below identifies and explains recent and planned changes to landuse on the northern edge of Newcastle. Within the last 15 years, since the construction of the A1 Western Bypass, large areas of land have been developed for housing, retail and industrial uses. The area has seen significant suburbanisation, and large areas of farmland and now greenbelt have been developed. Much of the remaining greenspace consists of golf courses, sports grounds and other recreational spaces. Garden Centres are a common feature, as are pubs.

The key attraction of this part of Newcastle is **access**. The international airport is minutes away by car, bus, taxi and metro link. The A1 western bypass provides excellent road access within Tyneside and beyond.

Newcastle Great Park is an 484 hectare site formerly greenbelt land. Key features are:

- 2500 new houses over 15 years
- Up to 500 new small / medium businesses
- £800 million total investment
- New shops and schools
- Major new roads linking directly to A1.

Industrial Park focussed around 375,000 sq. ft Sage HQ currently being constructed.

The A1 Western Bypass opened in 1990. This re-routed traffic from the city centre to the western fringes, and at the same time made this area a desirable location.

NGP Newcastle Great Park

Urban Park

Urban in 1980

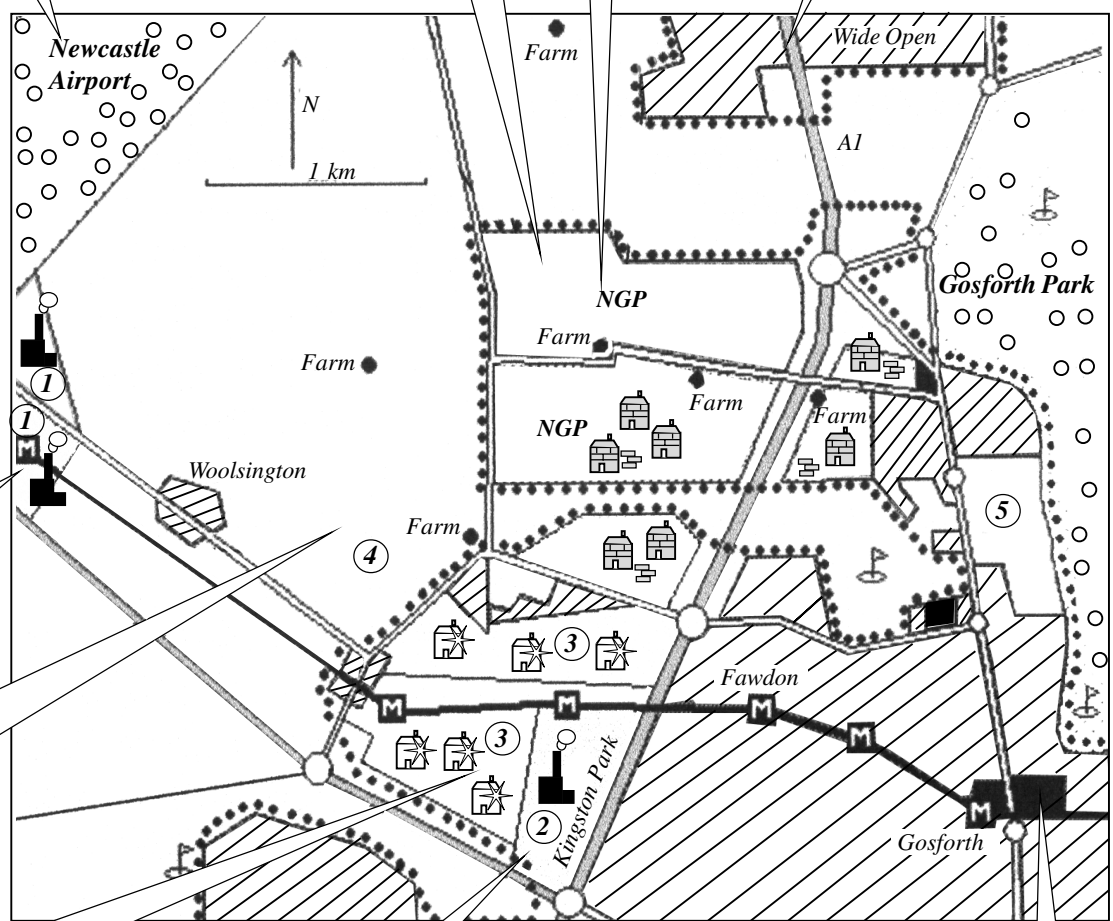
Brownfield Site

Green belt

Housing Development

New Housing

Industry



Area 1 - Industrial estate adjacent to international airport, Metro station and A696 link to A1.

Area 4: Redevelopment of Newcastle Falcons rugby ground at Kingston Park. This major sporting venue increases traffic on match days.

Area 3: Suburban housing development completed in the 1980s and 1990s

Area 2: Major retail and industrial development at Kingston Park including:
TA Centre, Tesco Extra, Boots, Next, Mothercare, Currys, PC World, Comet, Homebase, Smaller retail units, 2 Hotels, MacDonaldis, Industrial Estate

Another feature of this area is redevelopment on brownfield sites. This may seem strange in a suburban / RUF location but not when the value of land is high, and demand for housing strong. The 4 housebuilders in the Great North Park (Persimmon, Charles Church, Bryant and Barratt) won planning permission partly due to a pledge to build 2 houses on brownfield sites in Newcastle for every 1 built on greenfield land in the Great North Park. The 4 brownfield sites on the map area include 3 new housing sites (formerly a garage, TA centre and government offices) and an ASDA store.

Conflicts and resolutions

According to the National Farmers Union (NFU), the rural-urban fringe is a place of conflict. An NFU survey of 2000 farmers in this zone revealed that:

- 67% were affected by fly tipping
- 48% had experienced vandalism on their farm
- 43% had experienced joy riders on their farm
- 33% had dealt with illegal camping

(source: NFU Rural News, Oct. 2002)

Clearly the proximity of some rural areas to urban areas leads to their abuse and environmental degradation. Add to this the problem of urban sprawl, patchy infill development in commuter villages plus some marginal landuses like landfill then it is no wonder that some organisations have suggested new strategies for the rural urban-fringe. Some suggestions are:

1. **Urban Fringe Development Corporations** – these would co-ordinate planning, recreation, development and environmental protection in the rural-urban fringe in a similar way that Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) co-ordinated regeneration of the inner cities.
2. **Enhanced environmental protection;** such as an extension of the Countryside Agency’s community forests programme. This would increase recreation in the RUF but also provide economic opportunities to farmers and small businesses.
3. **Development:** this is the Newcastle Great Park option; land that is underused is developed to provide housing, jobs and new infrastructure.

Newcastle Great Park, as initially planned, caused uproar from groups such as the CPRE. Clearly, perceived economic gains (8000 new jobs over 10 years) and social gains (2500 new homes, plus new schools) were outweighed by environmental losses (principally a large area of greenbelt) in the eyes of some. The second version, which is currently being completed, was ‘sold’ on the basis that it would be ‘sustainable’. Elements of the plan that could be described as ‘green’ are:

- The ‘1 for 2’ scheme, whereby the Great North Park house builders have pledged to build 2 homes on brownfield land for every one built on greenfield land.
- 50% of the land removed from the Greenbelt will actually become parkland, with a full-time ranger employed.
- 25 miles of paths and cycle ways, plus dedicated bus routes (no location will be more than 400m from a bus stop) will encourage alternative forms of transport.
- A Park & Ride facility.
- 2 new primary schools, pubs and shops will reduce the need to travel outside the Park area.
- Long-term it is planned to link the Great North Park to the Tyne & Wear Metro system, to further reduce car use.
- Some homes are being built with innovative new energy technologies, such as solar panels.
- Newcastle Great Park is included in the city wide domestic waste recycling scheme which is part of the city’s ‘CarbonNeutral Newcastle’ initiative to become the world’s first carbon neutral city.

Conclusion

The demand for large, comfortable homes and footloose industrial locations can often make low value land into very high value land. Developments on the northern edge of Newcastle show how protected, greenbelt land can be released for development if the development is seen as regionally important. With Newcastle Great Park planners and government have signalled that economic and housing development are more important than conserving RUF greenspace. Clearly, such a strategy is likely to please house builders and industry, but not environmentalists and existing residents. This type of development can be made more sustainable by adopting ‘green’ planning and this may reduce conflict. Many might fear that having developed on the greenbelt once, it will be easier to do so in the future. The proximity of rural-urban fringe locations to major urban areas can lead to their abuse and marginalisation. Innovative, sustainable strategies are required to ensure the RUF does not fall into a planning vacuum between town and country.

References:

Newcastle upon Tyne Unitary Development Plan, 1998
 Town & Country Planning in the UK, Cullingworth & Nadin, 2002 (Routledge)
 www.newcastle.gov.uk
 www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk
 www.planningportal.gov.uk
 www.countryside.gov.uk
 www.nfucountryside.org.uk

Questions:

- (a) **What is meant by the term rural-urban fringe? (2 marks)**
 A landuse zone on the edge of an urban area, where rural and recreational land is increasingly urbanised through suburbanisation, infill and the development of new retail and industrial parks. It is a zone of mixed urban and rural landuse prone to rapid change.
- (b) **Suggest reasons for population and service growth in the rural-urban fringe. (4 marks)**
 People are attracted to the RUF by open space, large, low density homes and increasingly good access via ring-roads and radial routes. These pull factors cause an influx of counter-urbanising commuters and retirees wishing to escape congested, expensive and crowded cities (push factors). Increasingly supermarkets and DIY stores locate in the RUF providing people with easy access to services. Industrial and science parks also locate here, and these attract people who wish to live close to their work. These decentralising industries and services are attracted by large, accessible low cost sites which are unavailable in inner urban locations.
- (c) **Examine the consequences of development in the rural urban fringe. (10 marks)**
 The command word ‘examine’ means take a detailed look at, and this suggests you should use examples and case studies. ‘Consequences’ could be both positive and negative, and as geographers, you should immediately be thinking of social, economic and environmental consequences. A good place to begin would be by defining ‘rural-urban fringe’ and introducing an example such as the Great North Park. By structuring your answer you will ensure you provide a balanced view. Some ideas are suggested in the table below:

☹ ENVIRONMENTAL Loss of greenbelt land and open, recreational space to new roads, houses and industry. Increase in commuting and pollution.	☺ <i>Creation of areas of recreation within new developments.</i>
☹ SOCIAL Conflict generated between people; farmers –v- developers, existing residents and environmentalists –v- local council planners and government.	☺ <i>New homes; increase in local housing supply; development of new schools and services.</i>
☹ ECONOMIC Possible loss of jobs in inner urban areas as industry and services decentralise to RUF locations.	☺ <i>Creation of new jobs in efficient, accessible locations. Inward investment.</i>

Acknowledgements; This Factsheet was researched and written by Cameron Dunn who lectures at Tynemouth College. Curriculum Press, Bank House, 105 King Street, Wellington, Shropshire, TF1 1NU. Geopress Factsheets may be copied free of charge by teaching staff or students, provided that their school is a registered subscriber. No part of these Factsheets may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any other form or by any other means, without the prior permission of the publisher. ISSN 1351-5136