

About the Commission on Future Urban Living

The fifth Birmingham Policy Commission is exploring the case for and against cities being the most appropriate means for accommodating changing populations, demographics and societal needs within a UK context.

Background

There is currently considerable interest in 'future cities', with many initiatives aiming to shine some light on what our future cities might look like.

Examples of current initiatives include:

- Urban Futures considers whether our urban designs will continue to function into the far future by testing them in 4 diverse, extreme yet plausible, futures.
- Liveable Cities is envisioning future cities in terms of low-carbon, resource secure living where well-being is prioritised, and then backcasting to identify the radical engineering needed to get there.
- The Institution of Civil Engineers published Engineering to Live Within Planetary Boundaries: Civil Engineering Research Needs and has established a Futures Group alongside initiatives to identify the needs for the construction industry on different time horizons (2025, 2050).
- Technology Strategy Board awarded £25m for a Future Cities Demonstrator to Glasgow in a competition to "show how the city's multiple systems will be integrated", while the Future Cities Catapult will be based in London to enable development of "products and services for the cities of the future".

These initiatives support the goals of sustainability (not compromising future generations in meeting their own needs) and resilience (continuing to function in the face of change), and all have an underlying imperative of investing wisely today. This is particularly important for civil engineers, since design lives for infrastructure schemes of 50-100 years are common, while operational lives extend well beyond such timescales (e.g. London's water pipes and sewers).

Once constructed these infrastructures serve to shape our activities for decades to come unless major technology shifts dictate otherwise or resources become limited.

It is stated that, internationally, populations will rise and the vast majority of people will live in cities. However each city has its own context: it developed for a number of reasons, many of which may no longer be relevant. Overlaying massive population expansions onto these contexts might or might not produce successful outcomes.

Commission on Future Urban Living

The fifth Policy Commission will explore the case for and against cities as the centres of population growth in the future, i.e. challenging the ideas that 70% of the world's population should live in cities, and that the tendency should be towards megacities. Are cities still as relevant in a very rapidly changing world where new paradigms for trade, communication, manufacturing, food production and consumption, and work are changing our understanding of our urban environments. Is the growing concentration of the world's population a potential enabler, or inhibitor, of dealing with the world's problems?

Urbanisation presents us with a wealth of new opportunities and huge challenges. It has the potential to further economic development and innovation, but also threatens to exacerbate key global problems, including resource depletion, climate change and inequalities. The Commission will explore whether there is a more sustainable alternative to cities for future urban living.

The Policy Commissions comprise a Chair and Academic Lead, together with a team of expert Commissioners who meet regularly throughout the Commission to refine the themes, take and deliberate evidence and to agree and write the final output for the Commission.

The Future Urban Living Commission is chaired by Lord Shipley of Gosforth and is led academically by Professor Chris Rogers, Professor of Geotechnical Engineering and Director of the Birmingham Centre for Resilience Research and Education at the University of Birmingham. The Commission team comprises experts drawn from the public, private and policy sector. Further details about the Commissioners are available [here \(http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/impact/policy-commissions/future-urban-living/Commissioners.aspx\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/impact/policy-commissions/future-urban-living/Commissioners.aspx).