

Case Study: Stevenage

Stevenage was built as Britain's first 'New Town' in 1946, following the destruction of land and buildings in the Second World War. The new towns were designed as a ring of 'satellite' cities around London, which had suffered particularly from housing problems and overcrowding. The existing area, Old Stevenage, was transformed by being divided into six districts, each with their own facilities such as shops, schools and medical centres. A new district has since been added, as the population has risen to 75,000. Stevenage was also the first town in Britain to have a pedestrianized, traffic-free shopping area, a feature which has become commonplace in the contemporary city. The town is located in the midst of an active transport network, just 15 miles from London's orbital motorway and 20 minutes by train from the capital. It is famed for being the childhood home of author E.M Forster, and tourists flock to see the house on which the novel *Howards End* was based. It was also the setting of a number of films including *Boston Kickout*, and local residents are proud of its "dubious fame". More recently, a new Leisure Park has opened, which offers bars, clubs, fast food outlets and a multi-screen cinema, and there are a number of out-of-town retail parks which host the bigger shops and chain stores. This is complemented by the preservation of the Old Town area, in which traditional pubs provide a calmer atmosphere for those who want to relax. Traffic in Stevenage is controlled by roundabouts rather than traffic lights, and the use of pedal cycles is encouraged throughout the town.

Sources:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2q2/alabaster/A279650>

<http://www.englishpartnerships.co.uk/newtowns.htm>

Questions:

1. To what extent would you say that Stevenage embodies the 'urban way of life'?
2. How were the 'new towns' planned and designed as decentralized networks?
3. The transport system combines road and rail networks with cycle paths and pedestrianized areas. Does this make Stevenage a 'network community' or a 'garden city'?
4. How has the cultural restructuring of the town invited tourism and the consumption of images?
5. What do you think the class composition of Stevenage's population is, and where in the town might different social groups be concentrated?