urban land will lead to a more sustainable pattern of settlement. However, without a corresponding policy on better, more strategic location of workplaces and related public transport investment, this housing policy will only lead to increased congestion and, particularly in urban areas, higher emissions of air pollutants. Falling rates of house building and rising prices have contributed to acute shortages of housing at prices that essential workers might afford. The Government has already been forced to build substantially more residential development on open land in Milton Keynes, Stansted and Ashford, only to face inevitable opposition from the rural protection lobby of south-east England (namely CPRE).[1] Some of their claims of the obliteration of beautiful countryside through needless development (CPRE, 2004b) are emotive to say the least. However, the belief that we should be making the city more compact in order to protect the natural environment arguably distorts the debate on how best to cater for increasing numbers of households and their changing lifestyles and livelihoods. The collapse of our traditional industries and the growth of financial and personal services as well as knowledge-based sectors of the economy all point to irrevocable changes in the way people live and what they demand from their living environments.

In this chapter, three key factors in the evolution of British cities will also be examined: the persistence of counter-urban dispersal, the need to regenerate cities and towns, and national environmental sustainability objectives. These three factors will be discussed in detail with reference to two case studies, Bristol and (to a lesser extent) Sheffield within the parameters of a sub-regional plan. Five key stages in the sub-regional plan will be outlined in the former case study, which will deal with the needs of the city and the region as a whole, as like the planning process as it relates to the sub-regional level.

## Persistent counter-urban dispersal

In the evolution of our cities and regions there are three strong but conflicting factors. The first is the persistent dispersal of housing, commerce and industry from major urban centres, which has been taking place since the Second World War (Clapson, 1998). There has also been a related shift into central and southern England from the rest of the UK. Two reports from the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), *The*

*People, Where Will They Work?* (Breheny, 1999) and *The People, Where Will They Go?* (Breheny and Hall, 1998) indicate how strong is the pull outwards and southwards from the metropolitan centres. The former ('Work') report concludes that:

> **. . . the immediate future will be like the recent past. Cities are likely to continue their relative and absolute declines . . . suburban and non-urban areas will continue to take the lion's share of new jobs in expanding sectors and occupations.**
>
> **Breheny, 1999, p. 221**

Research has shown that given the choice, most investors would prefer to build or buy property (including their homes) outside the major cities. This is reflected in the loss of half a million jobs in 20 of Britain's large cities while the rest of the country has gained 1.7 million jobs, more than three times this amount (Turok and Edge, 1999). The counter-argument that this preference is merely a reaction to the continued deterioration in many parts of the major cities has some validity. Most of the main problems identified by householders with their local area recorded in the Survey of English Housing relate to maintenance, including vandalism, litter and graffiti (cited by the Urban Task Force, 1999). However, the building on every potential urban site is likely to be counter-productive by adding to congestion on already overloaded roads and to already polluted areas.

Arguments against dispersal are also framed around the belief that it adds greatly to commuting, but a study of the central and southern shires in England (Green, 1997) showed that despite the incoming millions of people, long-distance commuting was largely restricted to those working in financial and transport services. Only 7.5% of people regularly travelled out of the shires to work in the metropolitan counties of London, the West Midlands and Avon (or beyond). This research examined 1991 commuting patterns, which indicated that nearly 90% of the total workforce lived within 18 miles of their workplace (and that 70% worked within 7.5 miles of home). Those supporters of concentration within existing urban areas also point out that a very high proportion of additional households will comprise single adults, some elderly surviving partners, others single or separated or divorced (with or without children), some of whom may (or may not) be satisfied by small dwellings in high-density city developments (for further discussion, see Urban Task Force, 1999).

However, advocates of the compact city tend to overlook the social circumstances underlying the movements of population