

The end of cities?

A Today, around half of the world's population, over three billion people, live in cities. As countries in the developing world become industrialized, more people move to these urban centres every day. However, some demographers are predicting that the global energy crisis might mean the end for the world's major cities.

B During the late 18th century, the western world entered an industrial age, with a transition from an economy based on ¹**manual labour** and farming to one centred on machine-based manufacturing. Mechanical farming techniques meant fewer labourers were needed to work in rural areas and vast numbers of people moved from villages to the cities. By 1900, cities like London and New York had evolved into ²**mega-urbanisms** with populations of millions. Around the same time, electrical power was making it possible for large numbers of people to live in tall city-centre tower blocks with lifts. Over the following decades, low petrol prices made it cheap and practical for most of us to own cars. This in turn meant families could now move out to bigger homes on the cities' edges, and could easily drive into the centre for anything they needed. As transport was no longer a problem, cities grew larger and were zoned according to activity, such as out-of-town shopping areas, the central business district and industrial areas.

C Now some geographers are saying that the fuel shortages we face in the years ahead could

eventually stop or reverse the trend of urban growth, resulting in a slow death of our cities, especially if we don't find suitable alternative energies. As we run out of petrol and its price increases, ³**commuting** into cities for work will become unaffordable. This means houses in the ⁴**suburbs** will lose their value, and these outskirts will begin to contract. Another result of an energy crisis could be a reduction in industrial activity and mechanized farming, which relies on electricity and oil. This could eventually result in us having to grow food closer to home, on a smaller scale, requiring more human and even animal labour. All this could cause a huge ⁵**demographic shift**, with people moving from big cities back to the countryside for the first time in 200 years.

D Of course, this is very unlikely to happen, but even if our cities don't disappear, they may become smaller, with more people living and working right in their centres. Heavy industry may also move back towards more central waterfront locations, with an increased reliance on sail*-powered water transport of goods. Only time will tell if this picture of the future is accurate, but it does warn us that now more than ever we need to consider the importance of investing in alternative energies and conserving the fuel we have left.

***sail**: a piece of fabric that uses the wind's power to move a boat

1 Choose the best answer according to the text.

- 1 Cities are currently ...
 - a shrinking.
 - b smaller than in the 18th century.
 - c expanding.
 - d home to 30% of the world's population.
- 2 During the industrial revolution ...
 - a everyone lived in skyscrapers.
 - b most people had cars.
 - c the amount of people living in the countryside increased.
 - d cities became more densely populated.
- 3 The suburbs ...
 - a will disappear in the future.
 - b may become a cheaper place to live in the future.
 - c may become a more expensive place to live because it will be unaffordable to travel to them.
 - d may become a more expensive place to live because house prices will rise.

2 Match words 1–5 in the text with definitions a–e.

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|--------------------------|---|---|
| ☐ | a | work that is done without the use of modern machines |
| ☐ | b | the act of travelling into a town or city every day to work |
| ☐ | c | residential districts immediately outside a city |
| ☐ | d | a large-scale change in the population |
| ☐ | e | very large cities |

3 Find words in the text that mean the same as ...

- 1 referring to an economy that is based on industry and other mechanized activity. _____
- 2 people who study social statistics. _____
- 3 tall buildings used for housing. _____
- 4 the area surrounding a town or city. _____
- 5 industry which relies on the use of large-scale, expensive machinery. _____