# How 16 visionary city projects succumbed to abandonment and decay



Throughout history, urban planners and visionaries have sought to build ideal cities designed to address the needs of their time and anticipate future growth. However, many of these ambitious urban projects ultimately faced decline, abandonment, or deterioration, failing to live up to their initial promise. Here is a comprehensive overview of 16 such visionary cities from around the world, each with a unique story of rise and fall.

Ordos Kangbashi in Inner Mongolia, China, represents one of the most ambitious city projects of the 21st century. Completed in 2010 to house over a million people, the city featured striking modern architecture and expansive boulevards. Following an economic bubble burst, the inflated housing market prevented residents from moving in, turning Ordos Kangbashi into the world’s largest ghost town. While some population growth has occurred, vast areas remain empty and fall into disrepair.

Pripyat, built in 1970 in the Soviet Union to house workers of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, was once an urban showcase of Soviet planning with cultural facilities and modern apartments. The 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster swiftly transformed the city into a radioactive ghost town. Today, nature overtakes the deserted streets and buildings, with wildlife roaming freely through what was home to around 50,000 people.

California City in the Mojave Desert was envisioned in 1958 as a sprawling metropolis to rival Los Angeles, laid out with extensive street grids and infrastructure by developer Nat Mendelsohn. Despite these elaborate plans, the city never developed as expected, leaving a desert expanse marked by empty streets visible from space.

Japan’s Hashima Island, also known as Battleship Island, was a coal mining hub with the world’s first concrete high-rise apartments and once the most densely populated place on Earth. The switch from coal to petroleum in the 1960s led to economic collapse, and by 1974 the island was abandoned, its concrete structures now deteriorating amid encroaching sea and saltwater.

In Cyprus, Varosha was a luxurious Mediterranean resort known for cutting-edge hotels and celebrity visitors including Elizabeth Taylor and Brigitte Bardot. The 1974 Turkish invasion resulted in the city's sudden abandonment. For nearly 50 years, high-rise hotels and apartments have stood empty, preserved in political stasis with furniture from the 1970s left to gather dust.

Myanmar’s Naypyidaw, established in the early 2000s as the country’s new capital, was built on a grand scale with massive government complexes and wide highways. Despite billions spent, the city remains substantially underpopulated, with many districts largely unused while government workers from Yangon occupy limited areas.

Fordlandia in the Amazon rainforest, created by Henry Ford in the 1920s as an industrial utopia for rubber plantation workers, combined modern American housing and facilities. The project failed when workers rejected strict conditions and rubber crops fell ill. The abandoned town is now reclaimed by jungle vegetation.

Thames Town near Shanghai is a replica of an English market town, built to house 10,000 residents with cobblestone streets and Victorian-style homes. High costs discouraged inhabitants, and today it mainly serves as a wedding photography location and tourist attraction while its buildings slowly decline.

Akranes in Iceland, once a prosperous fishing town modernised mid-20th century, suffered economic collapse in the 1980s and 1990s due to fishing quotas and industry shifts. Its advanced infrastructure stands deserted, with factories and facilities rusting along the coast.

Eko Atlantic, adjacent to Lagos, Nigeria, was conceived as an African counterpart to Dubai with cutting-edge sustainable urban design on land reclaimed from the Atlantic Ocean. Funding delays, construction halts and concerns about sea levels have left much of the site incomplete or vacant, with empty towers and unfinished streets vulnerable to erosion.

North Wilkesboro in North Carolina was a model of American industrial modernism, featuring innovative factories and one of the earliest NASCAR speedways. Overseas relocation of manufacturing led to decline in the late 20th century, leaving the speedway unused and downtown buildings deserted until recent efforts at revitalisation began.

Linfen in China was transformed during the industrial boom into a city filled with high-rise buildings. However, it gained notoriety as one of the world's most polluted cities. Acid rain and particulate pollution hastened structural decay as environmental damage dwarfed industrial ambition.

Trujillo New Town in Spain emerged during the 1960s under Franco’s plans for rural modernisation with contemporary architecture and agricultural innovation. The project was abandoned halfway due to lack of funds, leaving partially built concrete structures gradually being overtaken by nature.

Nova Cidade de Kilamba on the outskirts of Luanda, Angola, built by Chinese developers to house 500,000 residents, stood largely empty initially due to affordability issues. Though occupancy has since improved, many buildings show signs of deterioration soon after construction.

Norilsk in Russia was designed as an Arctic industrial city with innovative cold-climate architecture. It is now among the world’s most polluted cities, with smelting operations coating buildings in black and severely limiting life expectancy. Soviet-era apartments decline rapidly in the harsh environment as acid rain has devastated the surrounding landscape.

Adamstown, near Dublin, Ireland, was developed during the economic boom as a self-contained township featuring ultramodern amenities and sustainability elements. The 2008 financial crisis halted construction mid-development, leaving residents in a partly finished community amid unfinished infrastructure.

Collectively, these cities illustrate the challenges of combining visionary urban planning with economic viability and sustainable community development. Economic shifts, environmental factors, political upheaval and changing social conditions have all influenced the trajectories of these ambitious urban projects, leaving behind varied legacies of infrastructure, decay, and adaptation. The stories of these cities provide insight into the complexities of designing futures that can withstand unforeseen challenges.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ecns.cn/feature/2011/10-18/3090.shtml> - This article discusses the rapid construction and subsequent decline of Ordos Kangbashi, highlighting the property bubble and the resulting ghost town status.
2. <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-06/10/content_9958431.htm> - This piece provides insights into the economic challenges faced by Ordos Kangbashi, including soaring property prices and the city's transformation into a ghost town.
3. <https://time.com/4306694/chernobly-30-american-physicist/> - This article recounts the experiences of an American physicist visiting the Chernobyl disaster site, emphasizing the transformation of Pripyat into a radioactive ghost town.
4. <https://time.com/3611917/drone-footage-chernobyl/> - This piece features drone footage capturing the deserted state of Pripyat, illustrating the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster and its status as a ghost town.
5. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2016/04/19/an-update-on-chinas-largest-ghost-city-what-ordos-kangbashi-is-like-today/> - This article provides an update on Ordos Kangbashi, discussing its initial development, subsequent decline, and current status as a ghost town.
6. <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-06/10/content_9958431.htm> - This article discusses the rapid construction and subsequent decline of Ordos Kangbashi, highlighting the property bubble and the resulting ghost town status.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMigwFBVV95cUxOTEpBU0g2MXlLVnRSZzlYSG1LaGpCejNHRU9VblpjeTc3OURJV3RYZnlOQ3NyakM5X2lrZk9jaFFGNTA2REZmUWNpbVRjTjJkcmV4RnlrMnJEdEFJSG9FVFdIZVR6aXBhLXlxTy0zMFFpcndJa05BQ0FiUVZXMVJFcE5xSQ?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data