



# Improving the conversation with real estate for healthier urban planning

## The issue

The need and potential for urban development and planning to combat the rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as obesity, hypertension, diabetes and mental depression and spatial health inequities, is clear. In the system of English devolved subnational governance, local planning authorities have substantial powers to control and influence the location, use, height, form, and density of development and the deployment of real estate investment capital in cities.

Many combined and local authorities in England are introducing policy initiatives to reduce car use, improve air and environmental quality, and encourage walking and cycling. But how effective is urban planning in working with the UK-based international real estate sector in NCD prevention?

## Our response

We are responding to:

- Confront identified barriers to pro-health urban development and planning decision outcomes.
- Link robust evidence for the evaluation of the health and social benefits of urban investment and development projects to real estate and planning practitioners.
- Promote the incorporation of health and wellbeing data alongside environmental, social and governance (ESG) data, in real estate investment appraisal.
- Further the inclusion of health elements in the application of national design code guidance in local plans and development decisions, local economic strategies, local authority services social valuation, and private sector investment funding and development strategies.



### Local authority partners



### University consortium





## The evidence

Our research provides evidence from 21 in-depth interviews and wide consultation with senior UK-based real estate actors. The senior professionals in major agencies, investment banks, funds and trusts illustrated that:

- There is strong shareholder, investor, property owner and tenant pressure for socially responsible urban real estate investment and development.
- Urban health and wellbeing have become a real estate commercial priority.
- The real estate finance and investment industry wants to act on healthier cities.
- Local government health information available to real estate enquirers is not very helpful in development terms.

## The policy problem

Our research finds:

- A current lack of recognition of the compatibility of public and private sector urban development health and wellbeing interests and objectives.
- A need for a more coordinated vertical and horizontal public sector decision-making approach to healthy development planning and delivery across departments and budgets.
- A deficit in robust health and well-being data to guide pro-health real estate investment and planning decision-making.

## Policy recommendations

The research indicates that the perception of property investment as solely motivated by profit-making requires revision to recognise the capacity of and appetite for real estate to promote healthy urban development and urban realm social value. Recognising shared public-private sector interests in and objectives for healthy urban development could help to assist public sector decision coordination and outcome effectiveness.

The next phase of our research is providing the tools to encourage public-private sector collaboration for optimal urban health outcomes: <https://truud.ac.uk/real-estate-investment/> and helping real estate to play its role.

## About Truud

Tackling the Root causes Upstream of Unhealthy Urban Development' (TRUUD) is a 5-year, £6.7m research project that aims to design policy interventions to support the development of healthier urban environments. Our research seeks to promote a fundamental shift in thinking about how to prioritise healthy urban development. We are funded by the UK Prevention Research Partnership.

## Contact the author

This briefing by [Kathy Pain](#), Professor of Real Estate Development at the University of Reading, is complemented by a series of papers published in a Built Environment special issue on [Urban Planning and Public Health \(June 2023\)](#) co-edited by TRUUD academics Cecilia Wong, Kathy Pain, Heeseo Rain Kwon and Caglar Koksall.