# Building Better Building Beautiful – what does it mean?
## Nicholas Boys Smith - Create Streets

1. *Good design is not subjective:* there are very clear themes in the types of places that empirically algin with health, happiness, prosperity and social-connectedness

2. *Building beautifully:* what was the thinking in the 2020 Building Better Building Beautiful report and why (I hope!) it matters....

3. *Make it visual:* what role can design codes play in creating better places? What makes for good and bad design codes?

4. Office for Place: what has it said publicly?
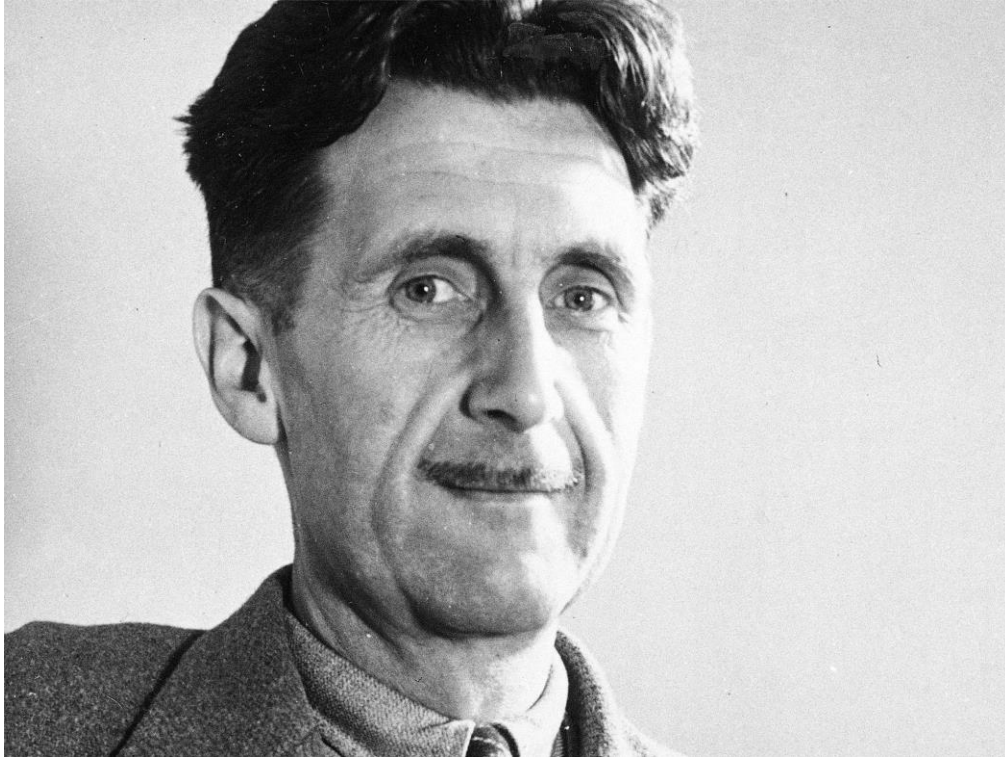
# Towards an Urban Renaissance?
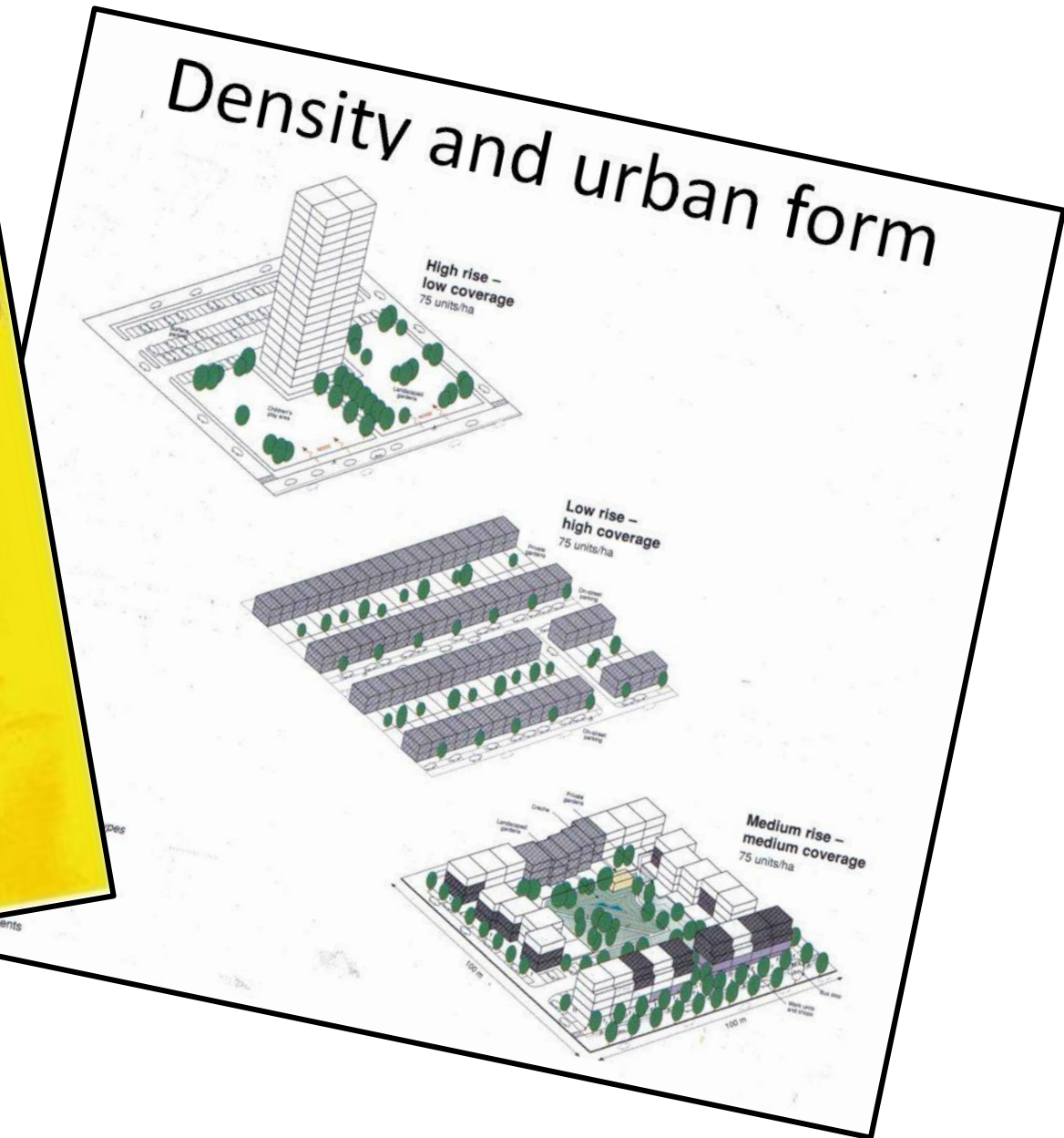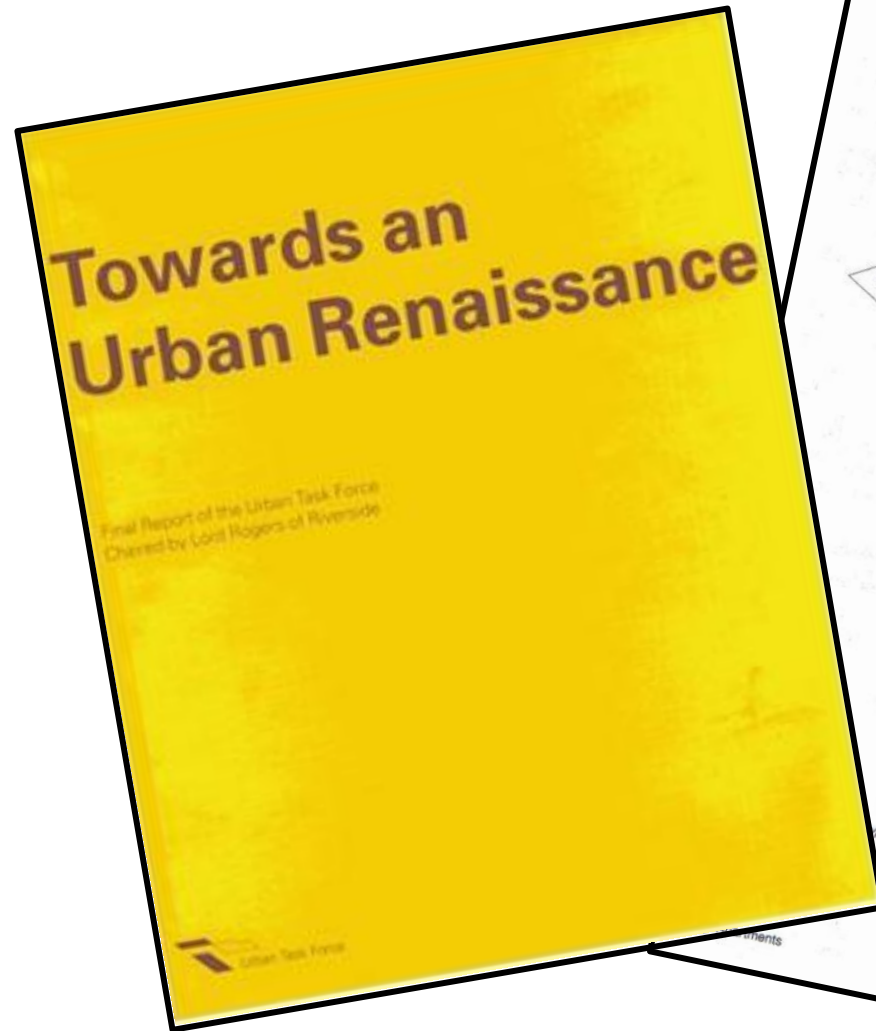
# Garden suburbs are consistently popular…



- 61% - 75% preference detached homes (2013 Europe wide survey)

- (9 out of 14 studies houses vs. flats)

- Space, personal greenery (OECD housing metrics)

- Multiple studies find that many people can be happier in suburbs

5

# … because people need their own space and autonomy

"…even when they are communal are not official – the pub, the back garden, the fireside and the 'nice cup of tea' "

George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn*

# Your environment can affect…

How happy you are

How active you are

How many neighbours you know

How stressed and anxious you feel

How much you fear crime (or might suffer from it)

How proud you are of your neighbourhood

How likely you are to suffer from inflammatory diseases

How healthy your diet is

How likely you are to suffer from an air quality related disease

How well you sleep

# Are very low density suburbs good for you or the planet?

Every 10 mins commuting cuts community involvement by 10%

Doubling neighbourhood density reduces accidents by 5%

Correlations with blood pressure, frustration and divorce

# Green is good for you 'little and often'

## Green is good for you…

- Famous study by Roger Ulrich, showed patients recover better with view of natural scene
- 9 studies correlate vegetation with lower levels of crime & expected crime.
- Communal gardens & actually gardening can be associated with higher happiness, wellbeing
- View of greenery gives 5-30% more value (above all over water or when rare)
- Studies link street trees with reduction in speed and crashes, improvement of air quality and of both mental and physical health

## … except when it isn't

- 8 studies that associate levels of greenery with higher fear and more fear of crime – specifically with denser vegetation. One study does correlate with higher crime

- Beyond 2-3 blocks people visit parks far less. (US)

- Focus groups suggest preference for personal space vs communal

- Some popular & complex have unsustainable running costs

- Health correlates most with "scenicness" (sic) rather than greenery.

- Consideration must be given to relationship with rest of built environment.

**Streets trees are associated with more walking, fewer accidents, slower cars, cleaner air and better residents' health**

CREATE streets

# Streets with lots of cars….

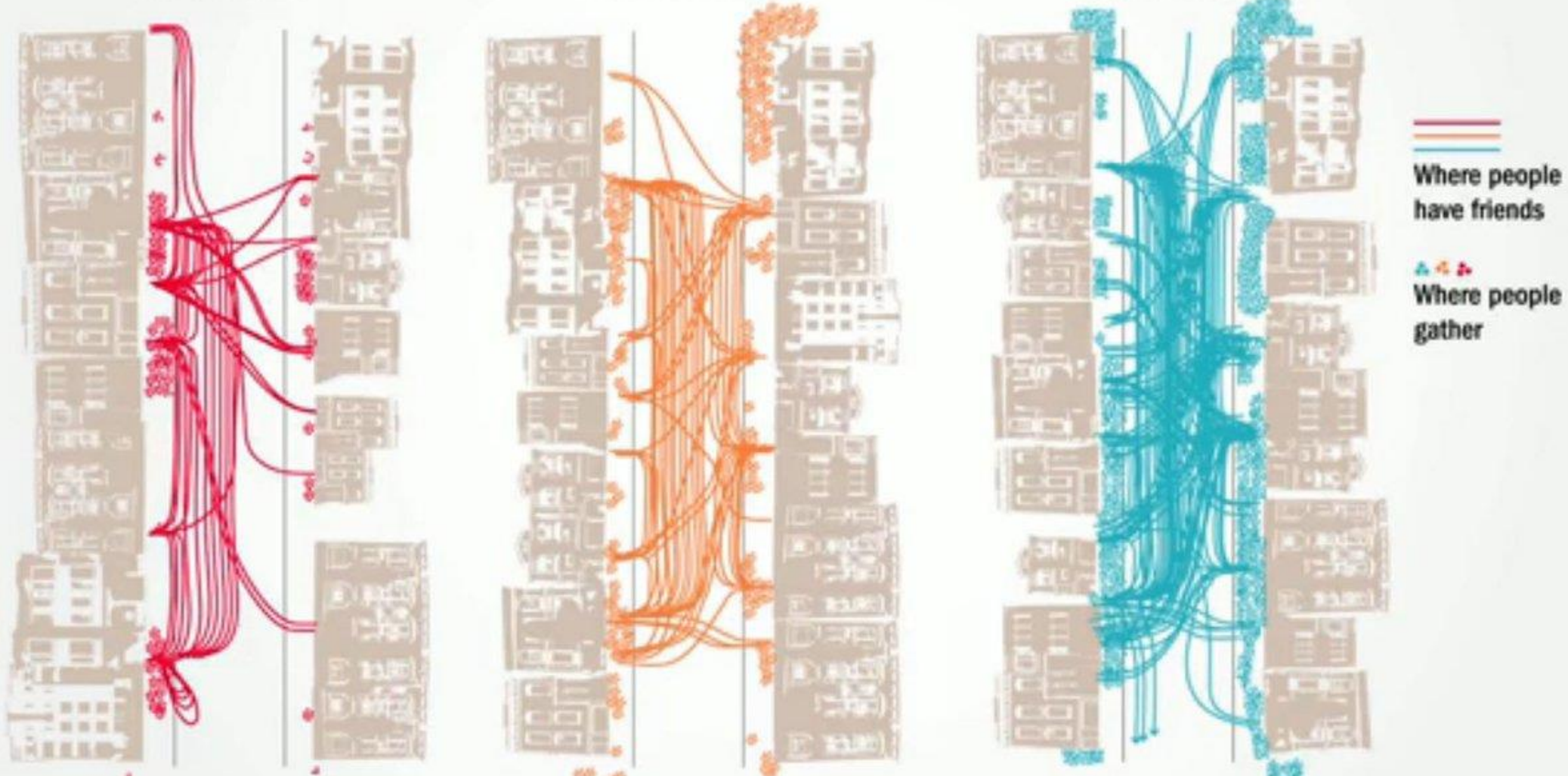| | 'Heavy' Street | 'Moderate' Street | 'Light' Street |
|---|---|---|---|
| Vehicles per 24 hours | 15,750 | 8,700 | 2,000 |
| % renters | 92% | 67% | 50% |
| Mean length of residence (years) | 8.0 | 9.2 | 16.3 |
| Friends per person (on street) | 0.9 | 1.3 | 3.0 |
| Acquaintances per person (on street) | 3.1 | 4.1 | 6.3 |
| Friendships 'across the street' | Few | Some | Many |

Social Interactions on Three Streets - Neighboring and Visiting

# Modest front gardens are good for knowing your neighbours...



- A Copenhagen study of two parallel streets (one with and one without front gardens) found **twelve times as much neighbourly activity in the street with front gardens versus the one without**

- Another Copenhagen study found that **35% more people used outdoor areas with front gardens than those without**

- An Australian study of similar streets in a neighbourhood found that **69% of neighbourly interactions took place in or adjacent to the modest front gardens**

Source: *Heart in the Right Street*, Jan Gehl.
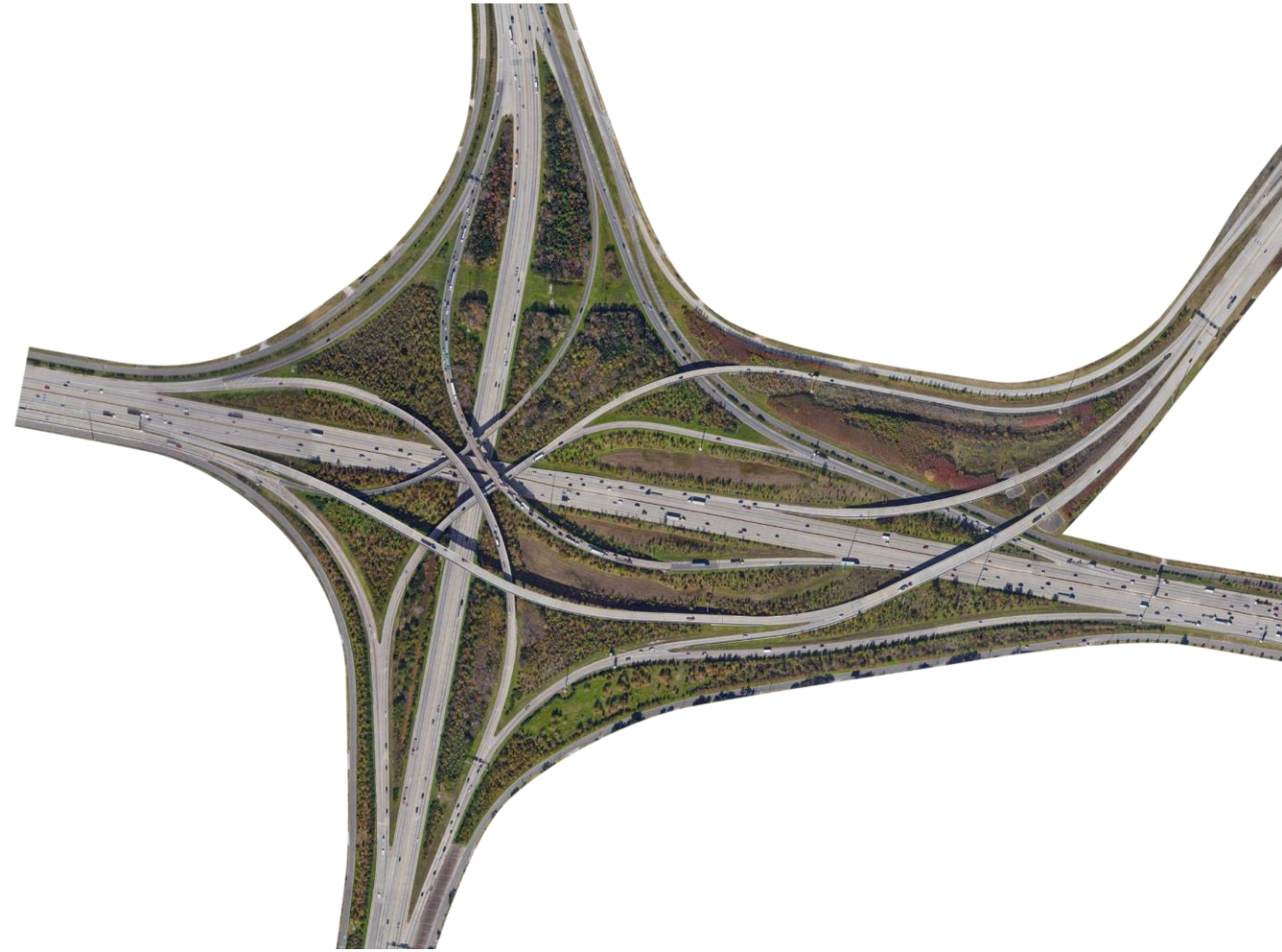
# Gentle density trades off the advantages of propinquity and space



Detached    Semi-detached    Terrace    Mid-rise    Tower block

GENTLE DENSITY
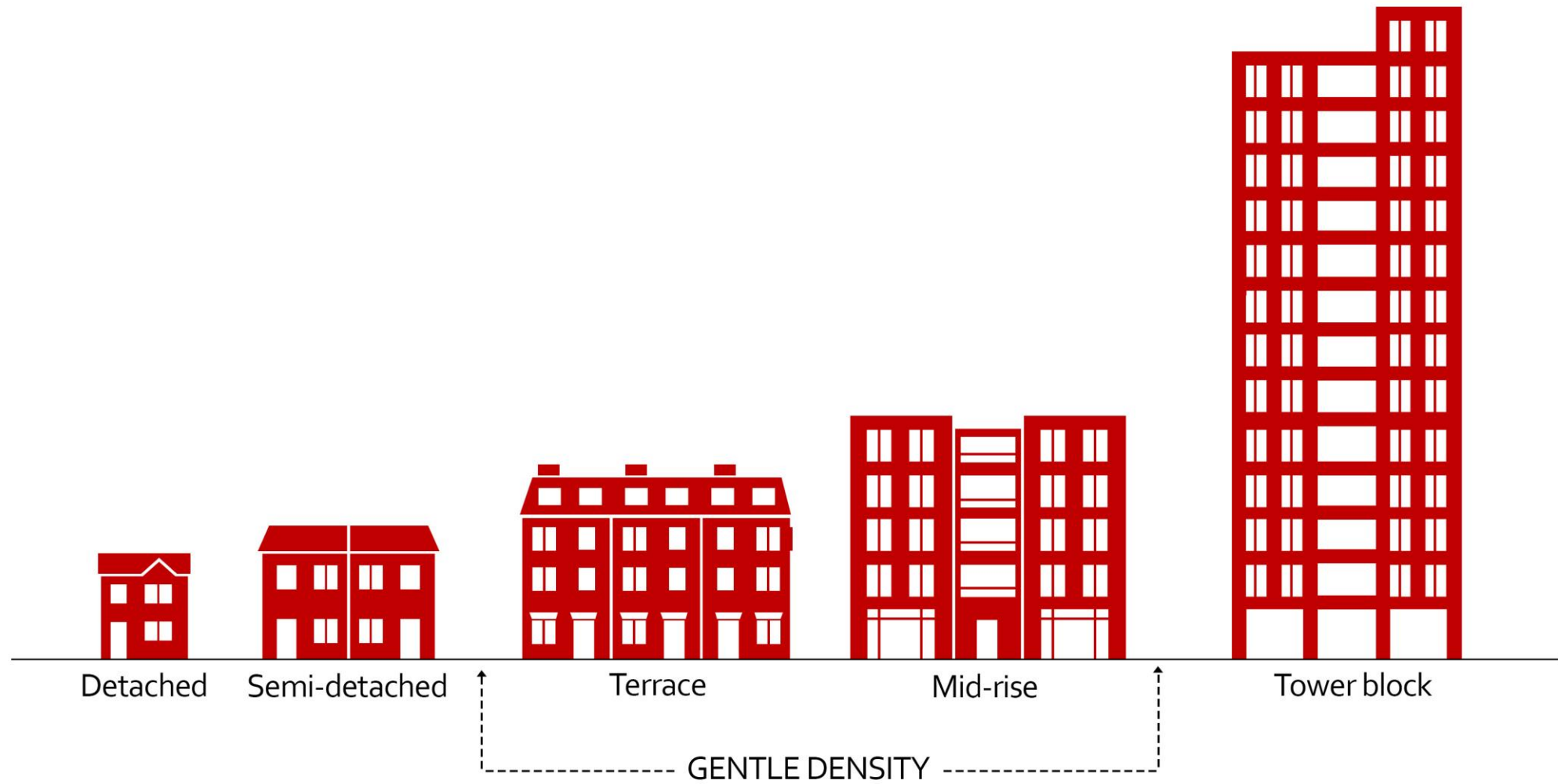
# Traditional block patterns are associated with lower crime



- Clear blocks & fronts
- Mews
- Lower crime (Perth & London studies)
- Less traffic
- More walkable
- More useable green space

Source: Create Streets Research, Savills

# Facades impact behaviour...



## Volunteers posed as lost tourists by both

10% offered to help
7% offered their phone
4% led to destination

2.2% offered to help
1% offered their phone
1% led to destination

# Colour improves mood

## Survey of 899 people in 4 countries



Effects of colour on mood.
Ratings from 1 (negative) to 4 (positive)

Some colour
Neutral
No colour

2.6   2.7   2.8   2.9   3.0   3.1

■ December   ■ September   ■ June   ■ April   ■ February

Source: Create Streets, *Of Streets and Squares*
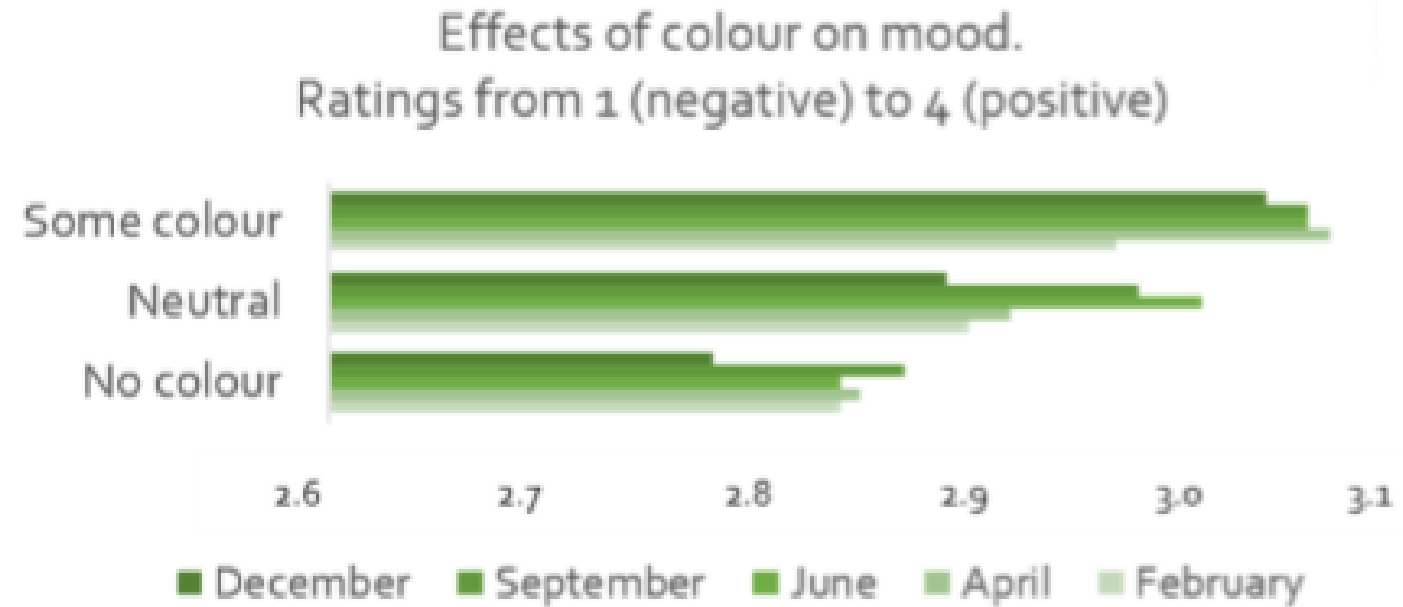
# People prefer symmetry or near symmetry

**2006 Survey of 40 students**



Average ratings
(on a scale 1 to 10, where 1 is 'least attractive'
and 10 is 'most attractive')

Results from survey on symmetrical/asymmetrical images.
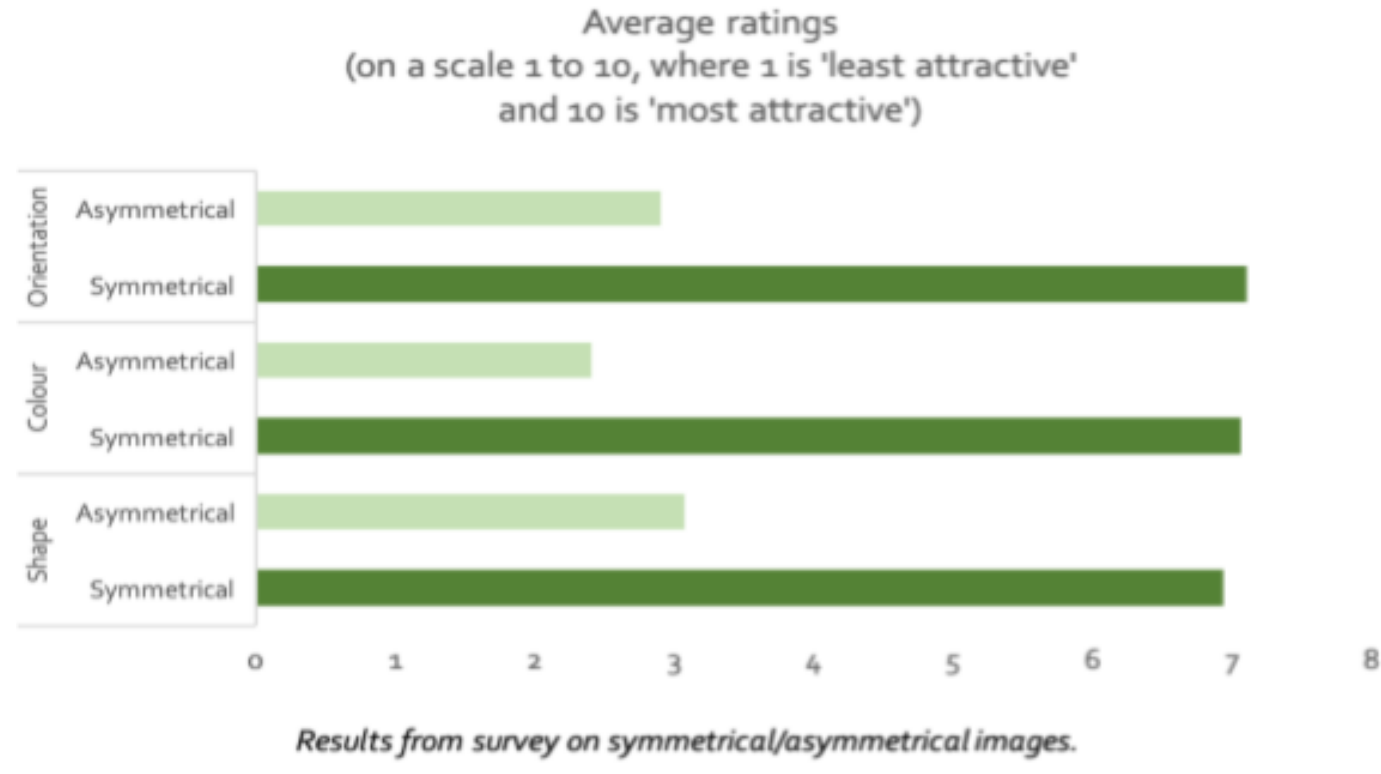
Mixed use areas which combine retail, residential and commercial uses have more walking, cleaner air and fewer and shorter car journeys
(*LEED-ND Core Committee Report, 2006*)

# Does beauty matter for health?

- UK survey of 1.5 million ratings of 212,000 images

- More 'scenic' places correlated with better health

- Correlated better than the amount of greenery

# Lessons from a study of every sale in London in 2016

## Sales premiums associated with different components

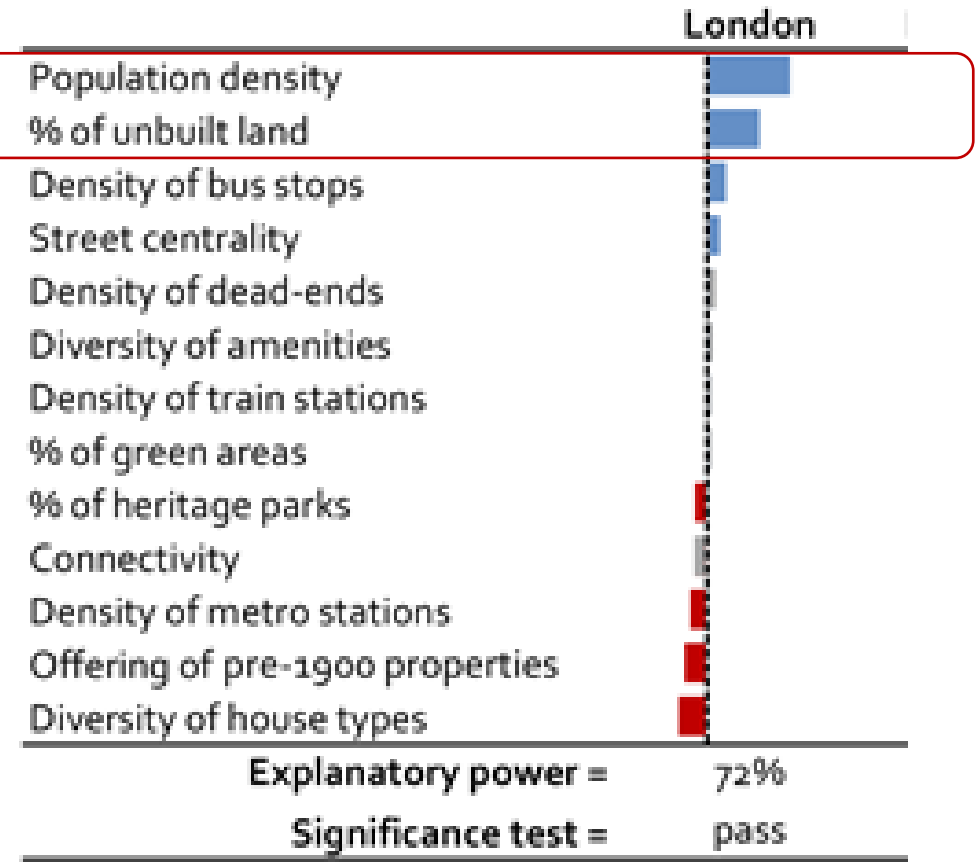| variable | London |
|---|---|
| House type detached [C] | 70,789 |
| House type semi-detached [C] | 60,545 |
| Offering of pre-1900 properties | 58,397 |
| Intersection density | 57,556 |
| Avg. no. bedrooms [C] | 55,518 |
| Prox. to closest her. park | 51,004 |
| Prox. to closest listed building | 49,767 |
| Freehold or leasehold [C] | 48,469 |
| House type terraced [C] | 41,312 |
| Prox. to closest metro station | 37,879 |
| % of all green areas | 22,607 |
| Diversity of transport modes | 17,547 |
| Prox. to closest forest | 15,514 |
| New build [C] | 8,795 |
| Connectivity | 8,427 |
| Diversity of amenities | 675 |
| Population density (OA) | -3,438 |
| Street centrality | -5,024 |
| Prox. to closest bus stop | -5,418 |
| Prox. to closest park | -6,281 |
| Prox. to closest rail station | -12,553 |
| Prox. to closest rec. ground | -20,436 |

The heritage premium is up to **seven times** greater than the new build premium in London

## Index of Multiple deprivation associations

| | London |
|---|---|
| Population density | |
| % of unbuilt land | |
| Density of bus stops | |
| Street centrality | |
| Density of dead-ends | |
| Diversity of amenities | |
| Density of train stations | |
| % of green areas | |
| % of heritage parks | |
| Connectivity | |
| Density of metro stations | |
| Offering of pre-1900 properties | |
| Diversity of house types | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Explanatory power = | 72% |
| Significance test = | pass |

- Areas of high population and low ground coverage are significantly associated with higher deprivation

Source: Create Streets, *Beyond Location*

CREATE streets

# Predictors of place quality - we took transects in 6 cities

**Place beauty analysis – base on 1.5 million ratings of >212,000 images**





Source: *Of Streets and Squares*

# Predictors of place quality

**Place beauty analysis – base on 1.5 million ratings of >212,000 images**
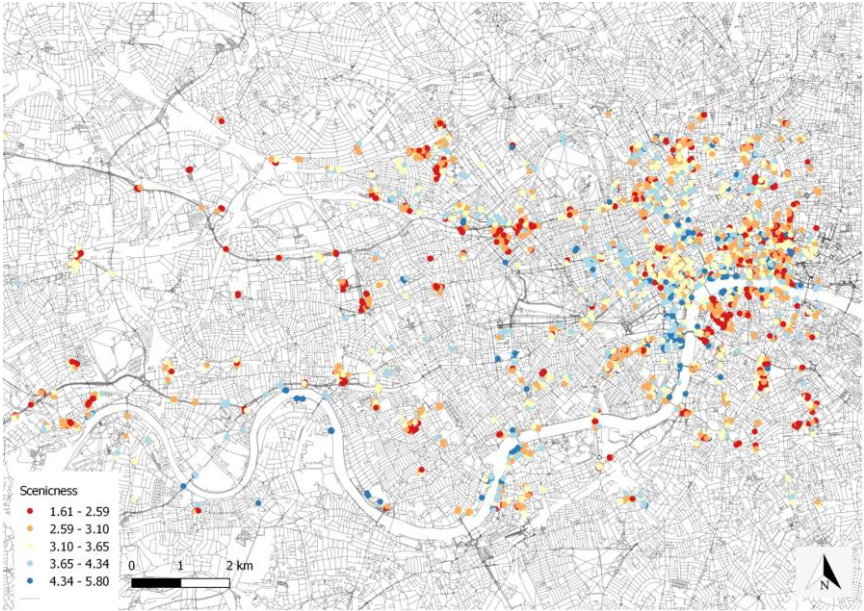


London: predictors of 'scenicness'

Source: *Of Streets and Squares*
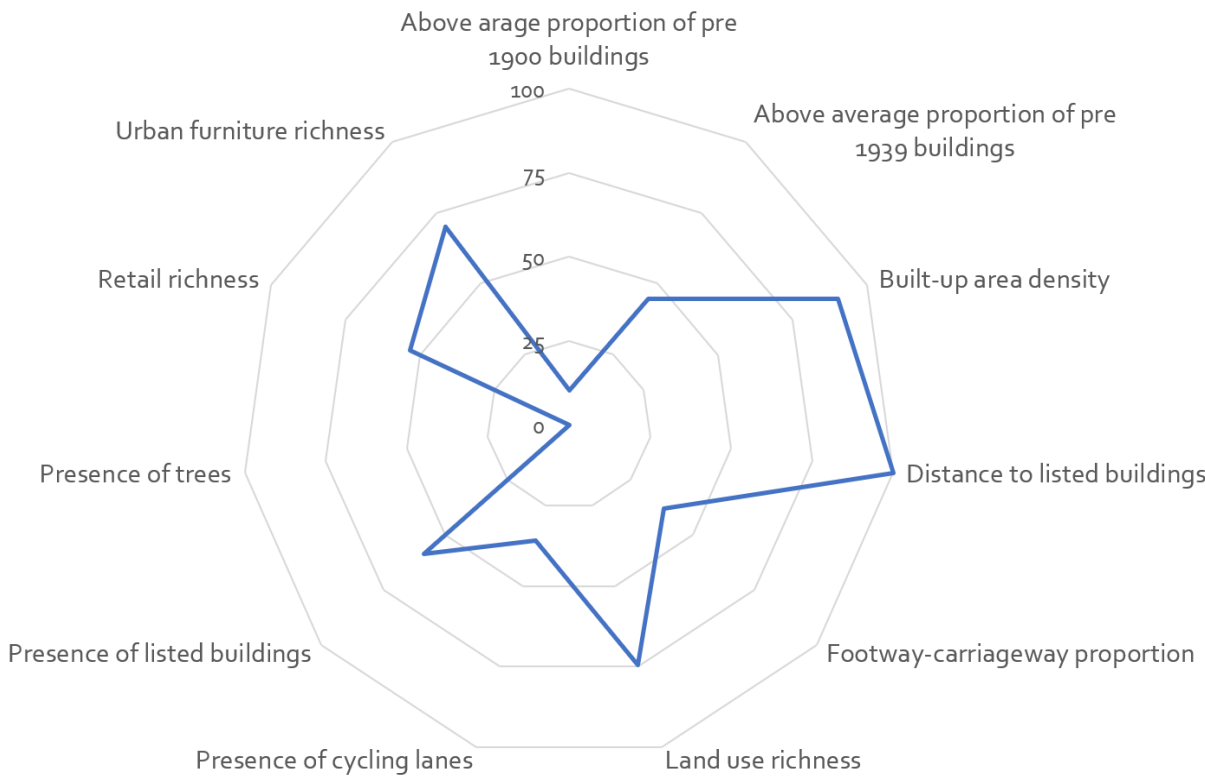
# Main predictors of popular places in London

**Place beauty analysis – base on 1.5 million ratings of >212,000 images**

- Distance to a listed building
- High built up area density
- Richness of land use
- Richness of urban furniture
- Immediate presence of a listed building
- Richness of commercial activities
- Average proportion of pre-1939 buildings
- Proportion of pavement vs carriageway

Source: *Of Streets and Squares*

# London's least popular places

**Place beauty analysis – base on 1.5 million ratings of >212,000 images**



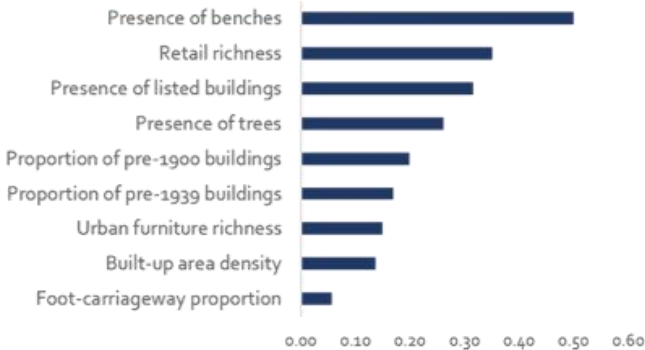Score: 2.5

Score: 3.3

Score: 2.2

Score: 2.2

Score: 2.5

Score: 3.7

*Examples of low scoring places with a high number of trees.*

Source: *Of Streets and Squares*

# London's most popular places

**Place beauty analysis – base on 1.5 million ratings of >212,000 images**



Source: *Of Streets and Squares*
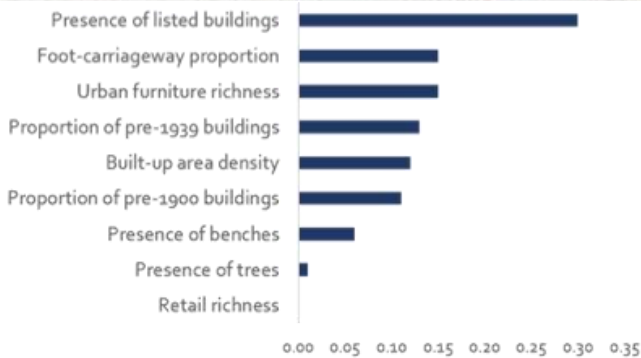
# Popular design increases value

## Design & value, 2016 Dutch study
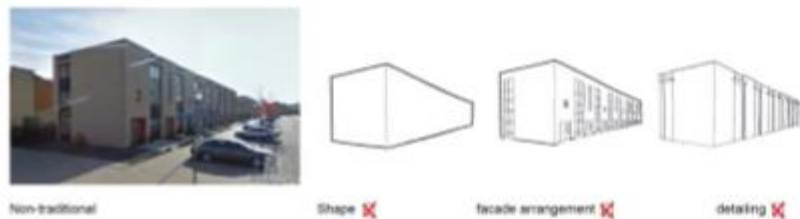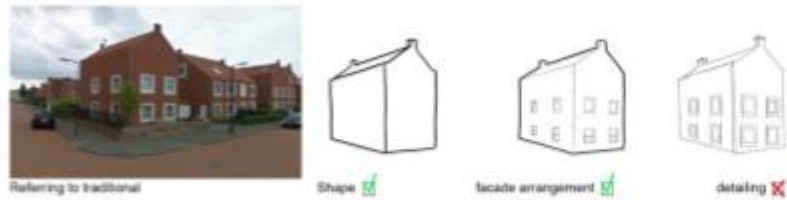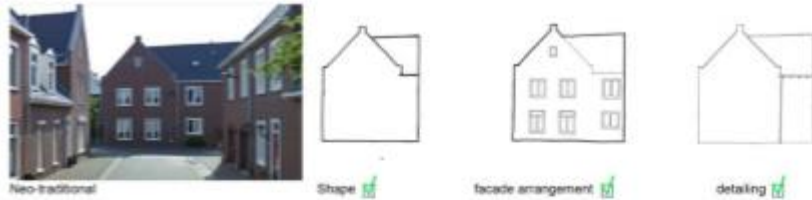


Source: Google Street View, edition authors.



Source: Google Street View, edition authors.

- 60,000 housing transactions from 1995-2014
- Vinex programme of walkable town extensions
- Pure neo-traditional sold a value premium of 15%
- Houses which referred to traditional design sold at premium of 5%
- Not a reflection of higher incomes of residents
- 2% discount when more supply – economics trumps place effect ?

Source: Create Streets Research

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# Polls and focus groups told us new places should be better

**63%** felt beauty should be an aim of planning

**86%** felt that "beauty is important"

**87%** felt that good design helped promote new development

# UCL / Place Alliance found that 75% of development was mediocre or poor



7% Very Good
19% Good
54% Mediocre
19% Poor
1% Very Poor
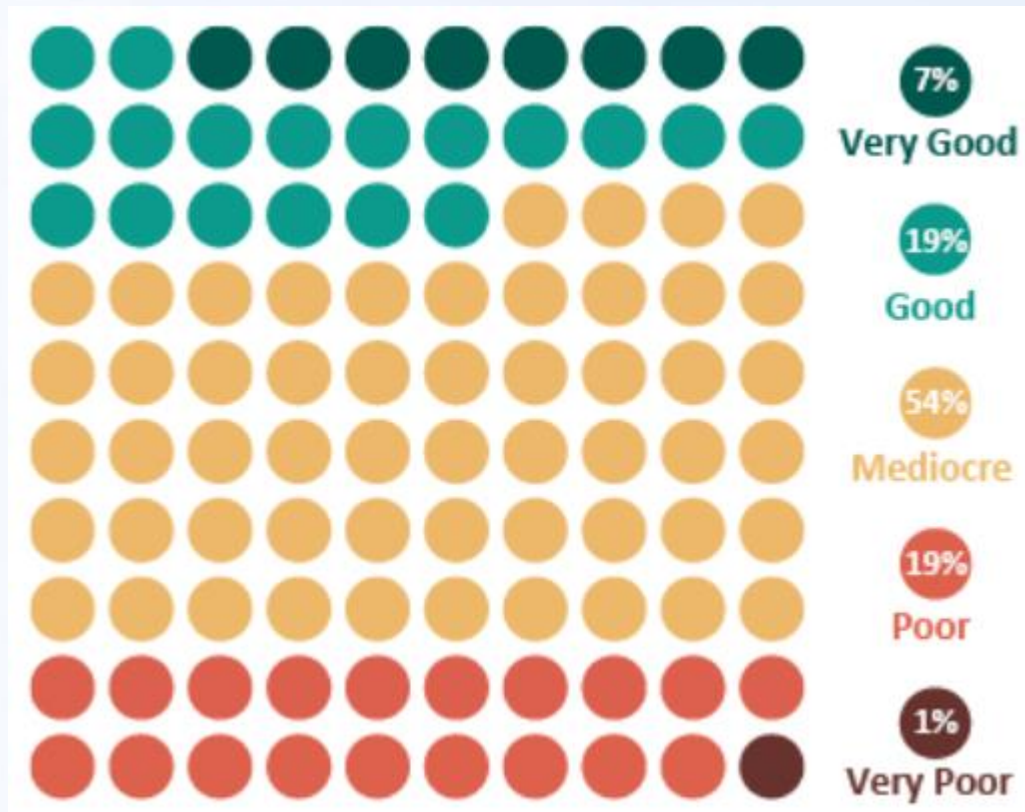
- A small improvement
- But new housing design is overwhelmingly 'mediocre' or 'poor'
- Many schemes should have been refused
- The potential exists for good design everywhere
- Very patchy practice
- Resident satisfaction contrasts with community dissatisfaction

**Unaffordable housing is enhancing generational inequality on a seismic scale with immense political ramifications**



> *"you cannot ask men to stand on their own two feet if you give them no ground to stand on"*
>
> *Iain MacLeod*

# The UK is not discrepant in credit rates, socially-rented homes or empty homes

| Country | Empty Homes per hundred people | Homes Socially rented %[8] | Credit rate %[9] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ireland | 8.7 | 7 | 0 |
| Spain | 7.3 | 2.5 | 0 |
| Portugal | 7.0 | 4 | 0 |
| Italy | 4.5 | 5 | 0 |
| France | 3.7 | 18.9 | 0 |
| Greece | 2.8 | 0 | 0 |
| Germany | 2.2 | 12 | 0 |
| UK | 1.1 | 18 (8)[10] | 0.75 |
| Finland | 5.5 | 15 | 0 |
| Netherlands | 2.5 | 35 | 0 |
| Austria | NA | 23 | 0 |
| Denmark | NA | 20 | -0.65 |
| Belgium | NA | 6 | 0 |
| Average | 3.7 | 11.9 | 0 |

# The UK has fewer homes per household

| Country | Homes per inhabitant | People per home | Homes per household |
|---|---|---|---|
| Greece | 0.59 | 1.7 | 1.46 |
| Portugal | 0.556 | 1.8 | 1.45 |
| Austria | 0.555 | 1.8 | 1.17 |
| Spain | 0.538 | 1.9 | 1.37 |
| Finland | 0.534 | 1.9 | 1.00 |
| Denmark | 0.491 | 2.0 | 1.19 |
| Belgium | 0.473 | 2.1 | 1.13 |
| Ireland | 0.440 | 2.3 | 1.18 |
| UK | 0.437 | 2.3 | 0.99 |
| Netherlands | 0.429 | 2.3 | 1.00 |
| France | 0.423 | 2.4 | 1.18 |
| Luxembourg | 0.406 | 2.5 | 0.97 |
| Poland | 0.360 | 2.8 | 0.99 |
| Average[16] | 0.492 | 2.0 | 1.12 |

# The English Planning system is strange

| Country | Link to policy instruments | Exceptions to the plan? |
|---|---|---|
| Austria | • 'Application must be in compliance with binding plans & regulations' | • 'Only very limited flexibility to vary from the plan' |
| Belgium | • 'Application must be in compliance with binding plans & regulations' | • 'Only when not in conflict with the plan principles' |
| Denmark | • 'Application must be in compliance with binding plans & regulations' | • 'There is only very limited flexibility to vary from the plan' |
| France | • 'The application must conform with the POS' | • 'There is only very limited flexibility to vary from the plan' |
| Germany | • 'The application must conform with the B-plan' | • 'Exemptions from the provisions of a B-plan may be allowed in certain circumstances' |
| Greece | • 'Decision should not infringe provisions of town plans' | • 'For areas covered by town plans there is only very limited flexibility to vary from the plan' |
| Ireland | • 'The Plan is binding' | • 'Flexibility to vary from the plan through the material contravention process' |
| Luxembourg | • 'Application must be in compliance with binding plans & regulations' | • 'No Exceptions to the plan' |
| Netherlands | • 'Application must be in compliance with binding plans & regulations' | • 'Departures from the plan are allowed in some circumstances' |
| Portugal | • 'Application must be in compliance with binding plans & regulations' | • 'Minor changes that do not conflict with the plan's principles' |
| Spain | • 'The application must be in compliance with binding plans and regulations or the old plan modified' | • 'Only for state public works, in case of exceptional public interest' |
| UK | • **'The plan is not binding, but is the primary consideration in determining an application. Each application is considered on its merit.'** | • **'Departures are allowed if other material considerations justify this, but they are subject to a special procedure.'** |

# London house types following the 1667, 1707 and 1774 Acts
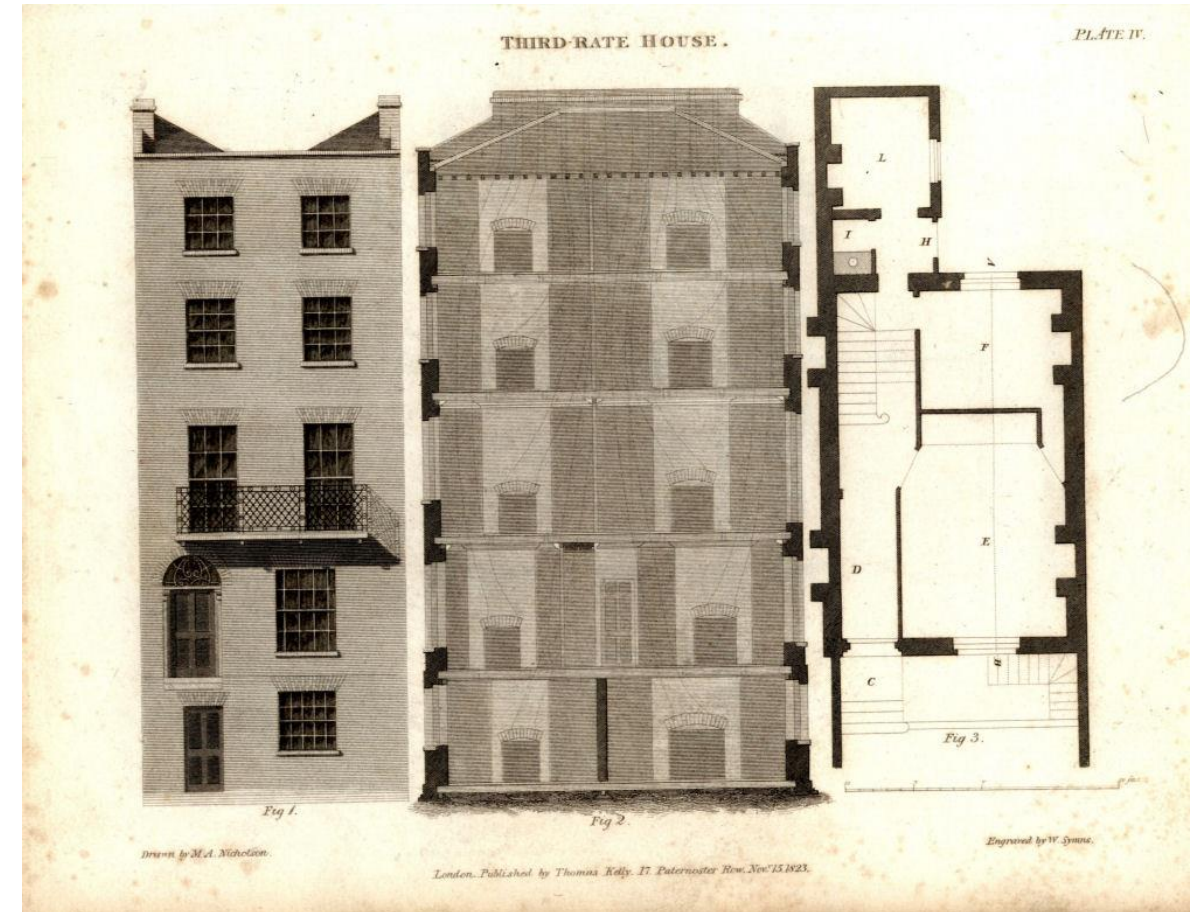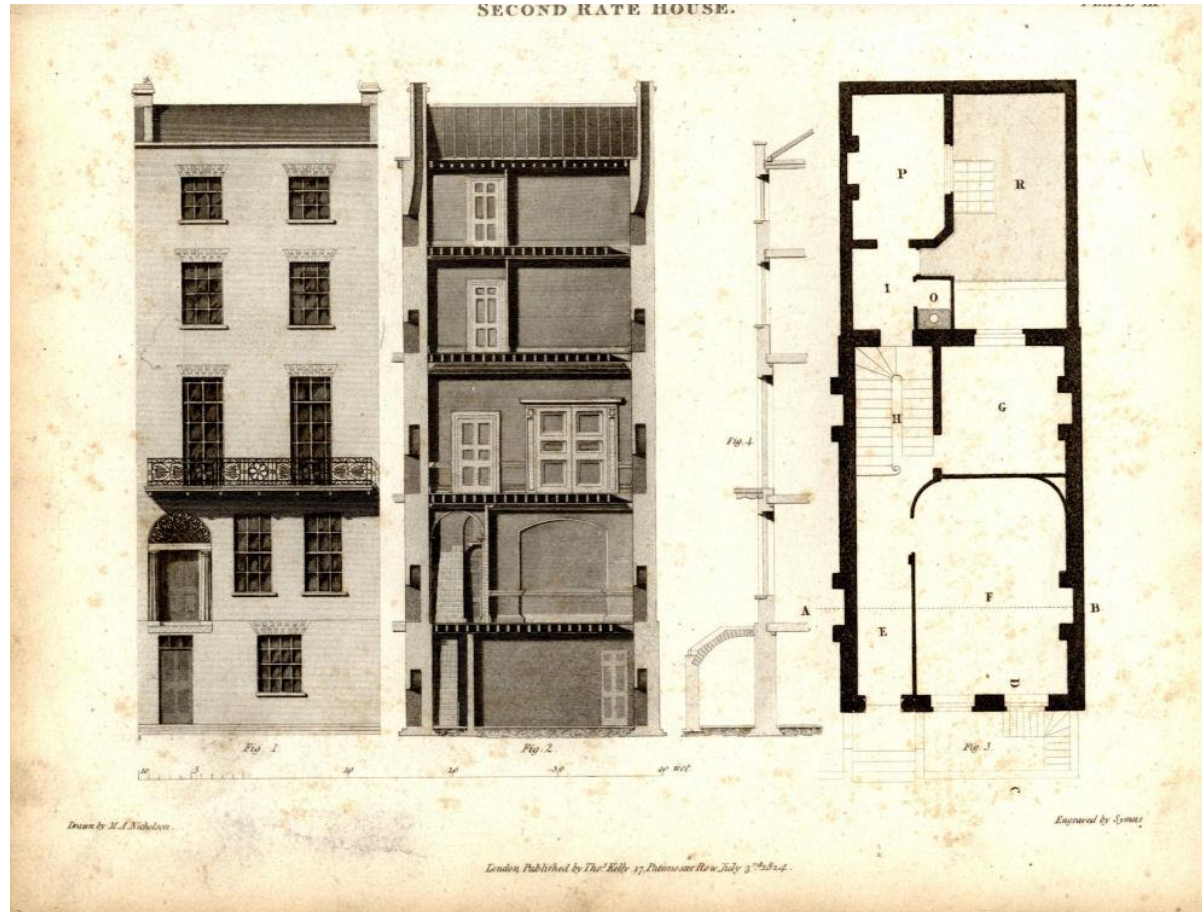
# Self-build catalogue in Sweden



Entréfasad



Gårdsfasad



Gavelfasad

# The proportion of SME and self-build in the UK is very low in comparative terms
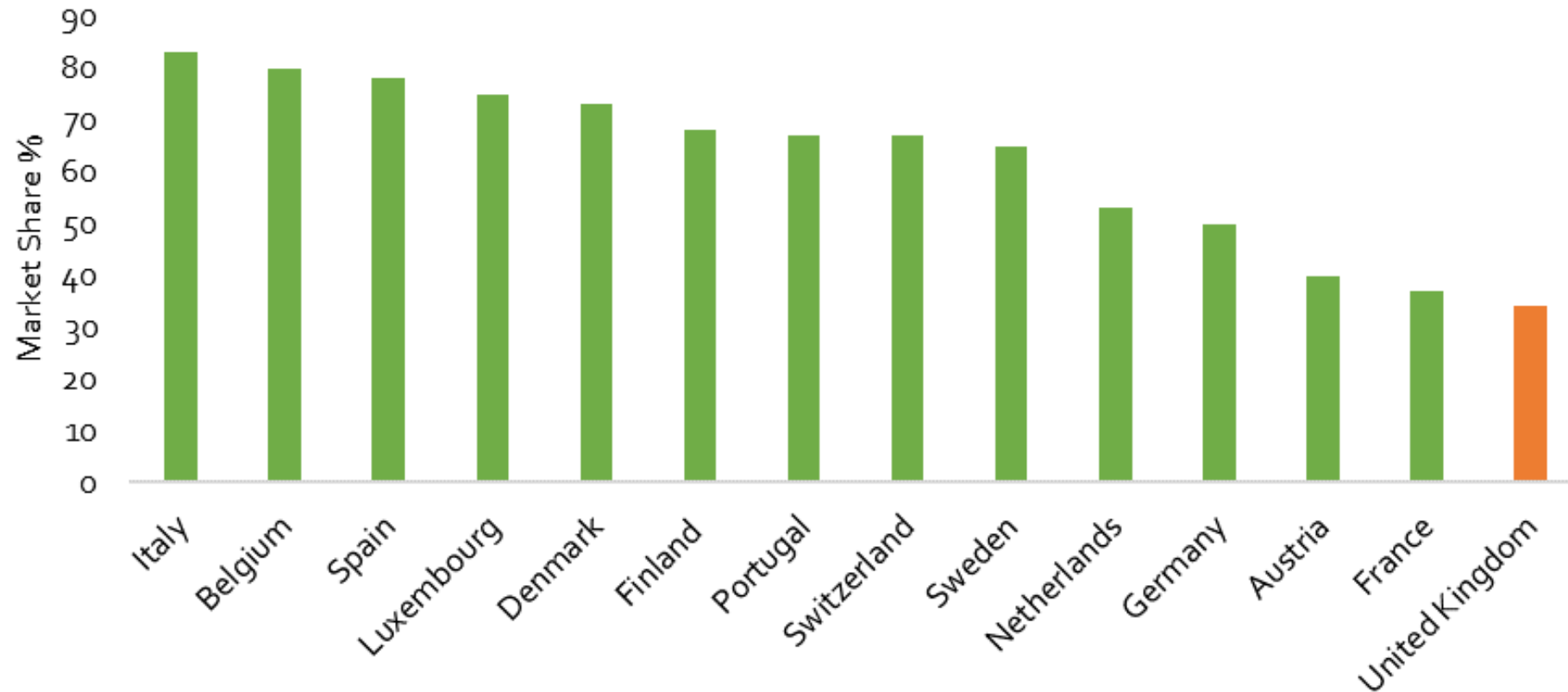


SME, self-build and custom build in UK compared to Europe, Eurostat

# Octavia Hill: "we all want beauty for the refreshment of our souls"

# What should be done?

Planning: create a predictable level playing field

Nature: re-green our towns and cities

Neighbourhoods: create places not just houses

Stewardship: incentivise responsibility to the future

Regeneration: end the scandal of 'left-behind' places

Education & skills: promote a wider understanding of placemaking

Communities: bring the democracy forward

Management: value planning, count happiness, procure properly

Creating Space for Beauty

Ask for Beauty

Refuse Ugliness

Promote Stewardship

Planning

Neighbourhoods

Regeneration

Communities

Management

Education

Stewardship

Nature

# Planning: Create a predictable level playing field

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** Ask for Beauty | | **6** Use form-based codes | |
| **2** Expect 'net gain' | | **7** Localise the National Design Code | |
| **3** Say no to ugliness | | **8** Require development rights to have standards | |
| **4** Discover beauty locally | | **9** Permit a fast track for beauty | |
| **5** Masterplan | | **10** Ensure enforcement | |
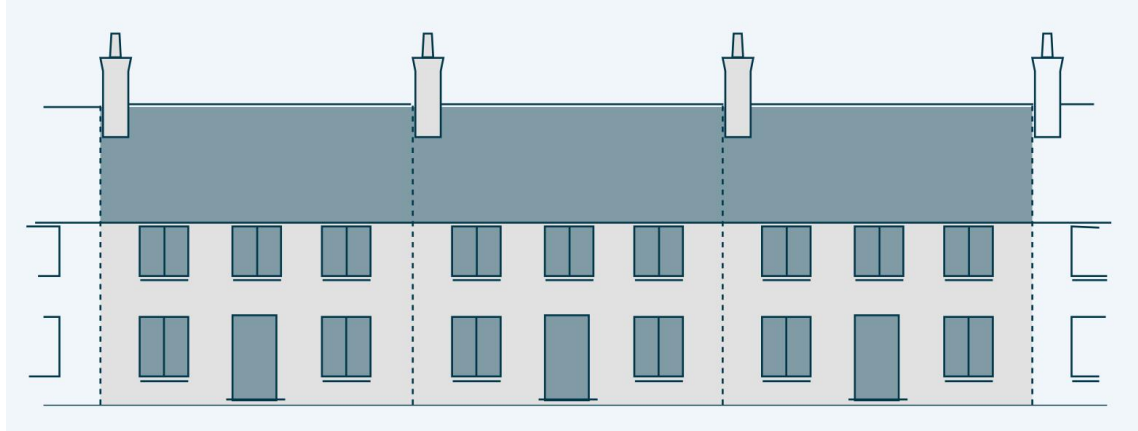
**Communities: Bring the democracy forward**

**1** Ensure wide public engagement

**2** Move public engagement to digital

**3** Empower communities

**4** Permit intensification

# Stewardship: Incentivise responsibility to the future

**1** Create a 'stewardship kitemark'

**2** Provide access to a Patient Capital Fund

**3** Create a level tax playing field

**4** Support the right development

**5** End the disincentive to public sector involvement in stewardship

# Management: Value planning, count happiness, procure properly

1. Streamline planning

2. Limit length of planning applications

3. Support centres of excellent

4. Count happiness and productivity

5. Value design and price

6. Review Homes England's remit

7. Master developer role for Homes England

8. Re-discover civic pride in architecture

# Changes to NPPF and response to *Living with Beauty*

- After the consultation period, *the* draft changes to the NPPF were released alongside a full response to the recommendations from the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's stating the recommendations which they would be taking forward. These include:

  - making beauty and placemaking a strategic policy

  - putting an emphasis on approving good design as well as refusing poor quality schemes

  - asking local planning authorities to produce their own design codes

  - asking for new streets to be tree-lined

  - improving biodiversity net gain and access to nature through design

- The changed also place more emphasis on the use of design codes

- The full response can be found here.
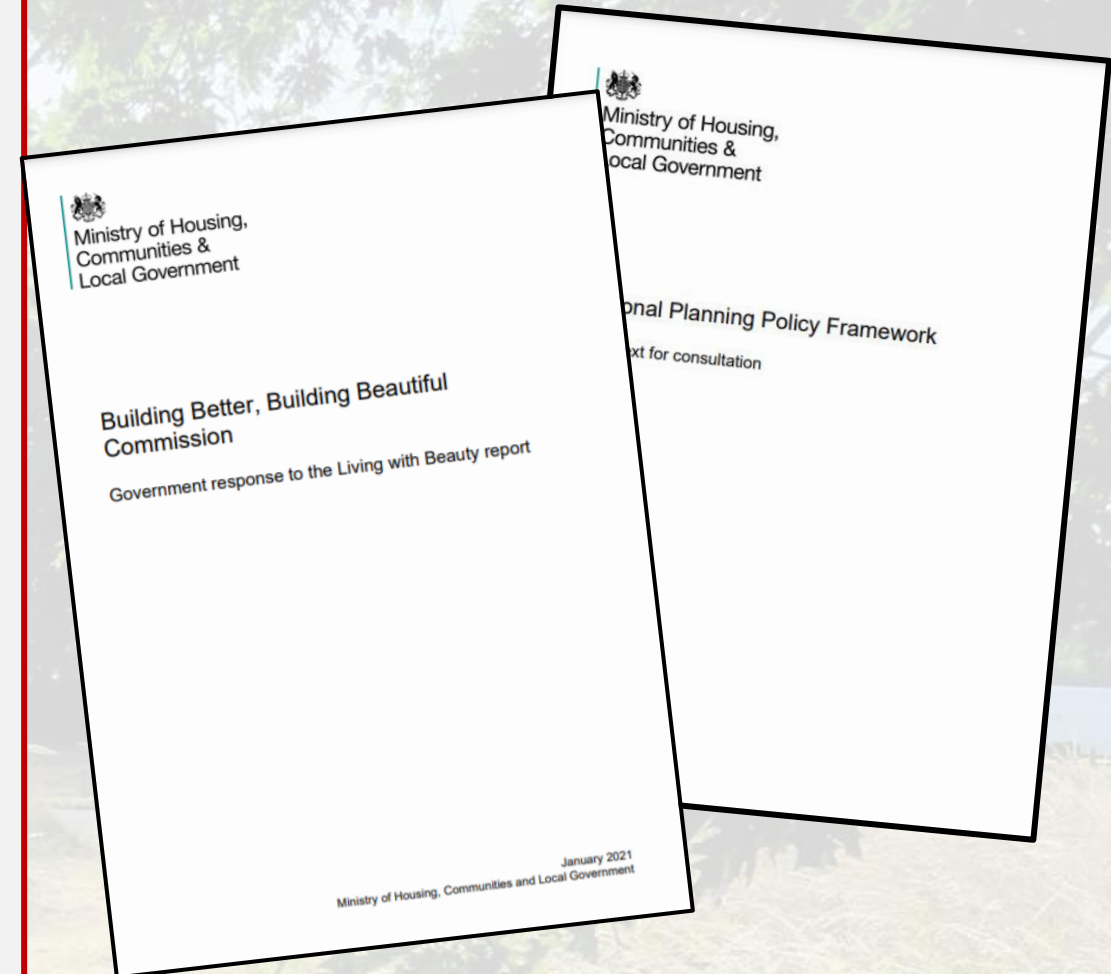
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# The National Model Design Code

- Created as part of the revised suite of planning practice guidance and released in **January 2021** (to be read and used together with the NDG and NPPF)

- Actually a process for creating them not a code

- The purpose is to make it easier and simpler for local authorities to create successful design codes for their area

- Design codes are a great tool to help local authorities create better places and to encourage smaller house builders

- It was co-created by MHCLG and Urbed, an urban design practice in Manchester

- Here is a quick 2 minute introduction from Andy Von Bradsky, the Head of Architecture at MHCLG…



**National Model Design Code**

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

# 1. Always set out the vision, principles and aims of the document at the beginning

- This will frame the rationale for the document.

- This is often set out in the local plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)

- A good example of where this has been done is the Nanslededn Design code, Newquay.

2. **Use simple clear and concise language throughout – coding with things developers 'must do', 'should do' and 'could do'**

- We recommend using simple language and clear 'coding' to differentiate which things 'must' be included, 'should' be included or 'can' be included.

- Set this coding out at the beginning of the document to make it easy to read.

  - **MUST**: Mandatory design practices; developments that do not abide by them will not be permitted.

  - **SHOULD**: Design practices which are strongly encouraged due to the benefit that it will have on the neighbourhood, except in situations where the design practice cannot be applied for specific reasons.

  - **CAN**: Design practices which are recommended but whose absence will not drastically affect the overall quality of the development.

- This is so that the document is easy to read and accessible to all users

*Building height and mass*
Building heights must respect the surrounding heights, and must not create overlooking or impede access to natural light. Developments should not be more than five storeys and should have a setback on the fifth storey. In the Brooks, buildings can be up to six storeys in height. On Castle Road, buildings must not exceed three storeys. On Luton Road, buildings should not exceed four storeys, except for the area between Castle Road and Luton Primary School, where they should not exceed three stories. Figure 23 highlights acceptable building heights in different areas of the neighbourhood. Bay widths should not surpass 6 meters except in cases where an increase in width can be justified.
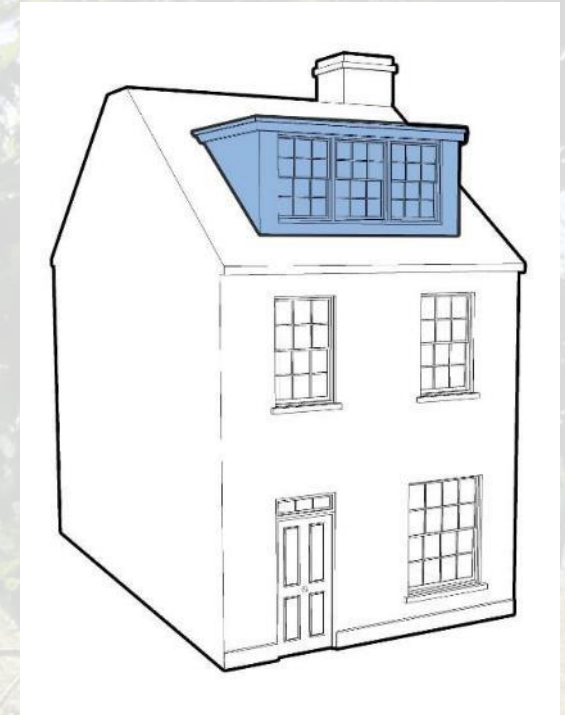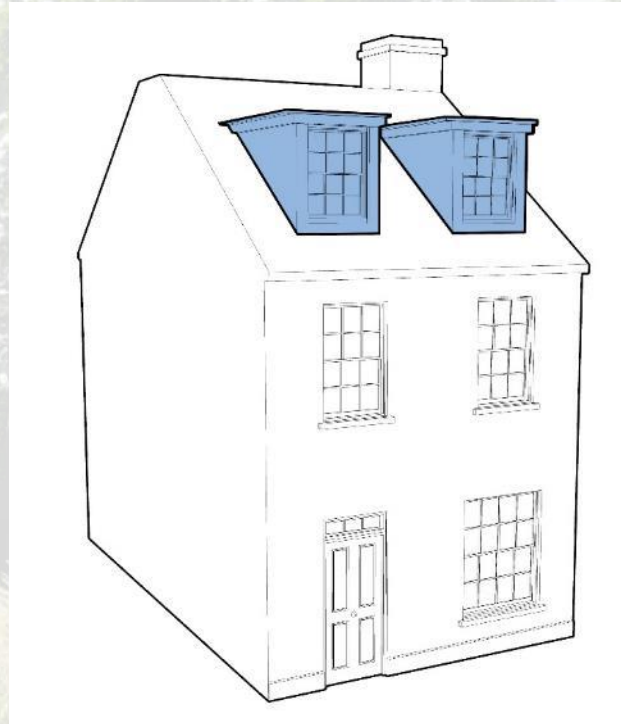
3. Underpinned by the evidence and research on what makes for happy, healthy, popular and sustainable places



**Gentle density is your friend**

Open spaces should be 50-100 metres wide

The best and most beautiful streets and squares are typically in areas of 'gentle density', half way between the extremes of tower blocks and extended suburbia. Buildings that are 3-7 storeys high, built up space that is 45-65% of the total area, and blocks between 50-150 metres long are normally best.

**Greenery - little and often**

- Plant trees 8-15m apart
- 5-15% of land should be public gardens

People like being in green places. Urban greenery is associated with higher physical & mental wellbeing, as long as it is used. You can maximise this by planting street trees, interweaving green spaces into streets and squares. However, greenery on its own is not enough. Squares can be popular places without a blade of grass in sight.

**Mix it up!**

60% of people prefer to live in a mixed use neighbourhood

Places with a textured mix of different land uses, and active façades, are nearly always more successful. They attract more people and generate more diverse and engaging environments. They can work for longer portions of the day by mixing people at work, lunch, home and play.

**Edges attract and protect**

80% of people prefer to sit facing a court

The edges of streets and squares attract us. This is partly lived experience (it is where we are used to pavements going, even when a street is pedestrianised). But it is also sensory. There is more to look at (shop fronts, cafés) and (in a square) edges allow us to step back and either watch the world go past, or sample the space.

**Structured benches and statues**

6-10% of squares should be seating

Where seating is matters. Horizontal infrastructure, with a bit of structure, helps humans play the right roles: benches that face a fountain; an arcade that faces a square, with a statue or a podium in it. You should not 'bench wash' an ugly and windy chasm or art wash on a traffic island. Most people will avoid them.

**Beauty really matters**

Protected buildings improve perception of place by 19%

The most popular places with 70-90% of the population have a strong sense of place and could not be anywhere. They have active facades that 'live' and have variety in pattern. These developments also tend to be more long lasting and resilient. Their organised complexity attracts, interests and reassures.

**Human scale enclosure**

Height to width ratio from 1:0.85 to 1:1.5

Most people like to spend time in places that are enclosed and human scale, without feeling too closed off. There is a necessary moment for views that open up as you round a corner, for grand vistas, for open parks, but many of the most popular streets surrounding and linking such views are surprisingly human-scale.

**Walkability works**

Residential roads should be 20mph

...but does not quite mean maximising space to walk. Compact, walkable & 'bikeable' environments are good for you. People walk in them more and are healthier and happier. This in turn drives higher values. More walking is encouraged by engaging façades, regularly spaced trees, presence of resting places, and wide pavements.

## 4. Keep it short, visual and numerical

- Keeping the code as short as possible makes it easier to read and more accessible to users

- Pictures and drawings are an effective way of expressing what you are trying to say quickly and simply

- It prevents ambiguity – especially for members of the community and smaller developers

## 4. Keep it short, visual and numerical

After all it is all about the words and not the pictures....!

### Toronto restaurant renamed their burgers so they can be expensed to your job

**Mini Dry Erase Whiteboard**
(Diamond Chicken Burger) We relabeled our Diamond Chicken...
$11.00

**Wired Earphones with Mic**
(Emerald Veggie Burger) Been working through lunch or dinner?...
$10.00

**Ergonomic Aluminum Laptop Stand**
(Double Your Fortune) The Double Your Fortune is now a Laptop Stand...
$12.50

**Silicone Keyboard Cover**
(BYO Burger) Build your own burger – but make the boss pay. This...
$10.00

## 5. Find out what people really like. Engage wide AND deep

*Why?*

- The earlier you are to involve people the more likely they are to trust you

- It is important to let local people tell you about their place –often they will have local knowledge that no one else will

- It will also ensure that design codes reflect local aspirations

- Can help to develop a strong relationship and trust with local communities

*How?*

- We recommend engaging **wide and deep,** both with a wide range of people and in depth with a few

- **Engage using a range of tools** to ensure you are reaching a wide audience – combine **online mapping tools with in-person engagement**

- **Don't be afraid to ask simple questions!**

## 6. Co-create it with builders and local craftspeople

*Why?*

- This is very important as they know what the local build costs are to inform decision making

- They have knowledge on local materials

- They have information on supply chains

*How?*

- Invite them to charrettes and workshops – involve them in the work of creating codes

- Code for local vernaculars which can be manufactured locally – In Nansleden the use of Cornish slate and granite has created new jobs and secured the future of several local slate and granite quarries and businesses
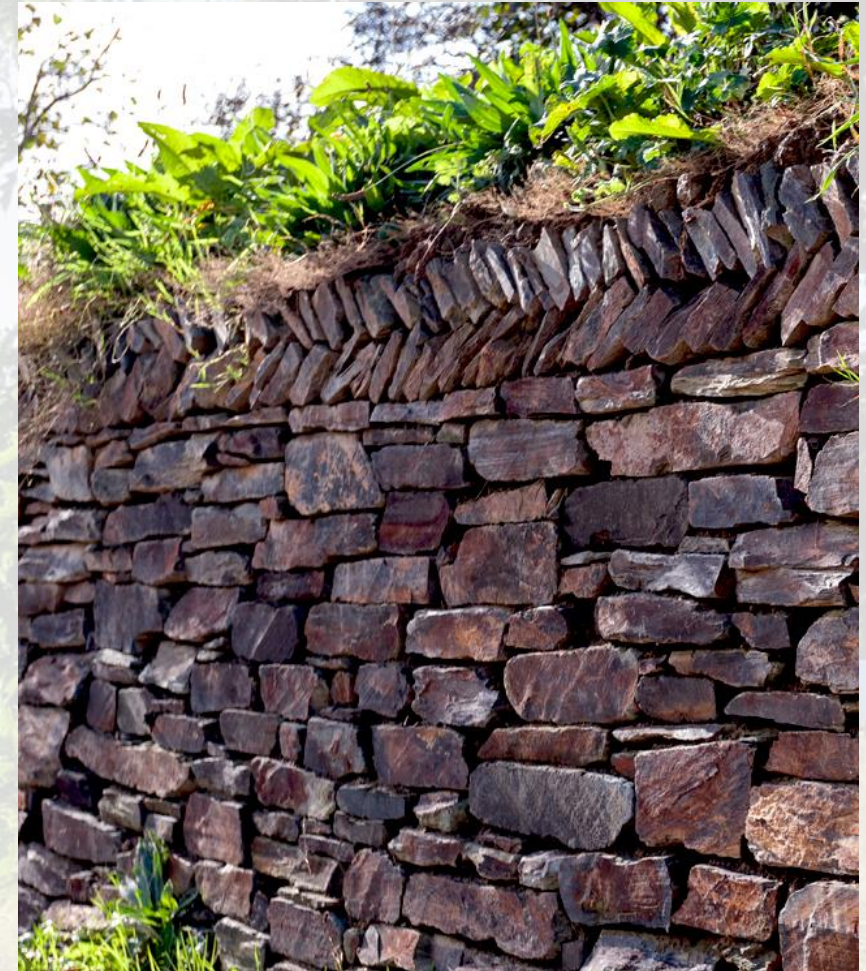
1. *Good design is not subjective:* there are very clear themes in the types of places that empirically algin with health, happiness, prosperity and social-connectedness

2. *Building beautifully:* what was the thinking in the 2020 Building Better Building Beautiful report and why (I hope!) it matters....

3. *Make it visual:* what role can design codes play in creating better places? What makes for good and bad design codes?

4. **Office for Place: what has it said publicly?**

Our ultimate purpose is to make it easier for all neighbourhood communities, wherever they may be, sustainably to require what they find beautiful and to refuse what they find ugly. Our vision is to:

- catalyse a fundamental change within and across all levels of government, the development industry, the planning system and society to support the creation and stewardship of popular, healthy, beautiful and sustainable places;

- help neighbourhoods, communities and public servants on their behalf routinely to ask for and to deliver both new places and manage existing places to be beautiful, popular, healthy and sustainable; and

- support with pragmatic expertise public sector planners and the British design and development industries to be the best 'place-makers' in the world aided by improving UK and international data on happiness, health, popularity and sustainability.

3,600 to 4,100
deaths estimate[d]
be attributabl[e]
human-made [PM]
& NO2, ann[...]

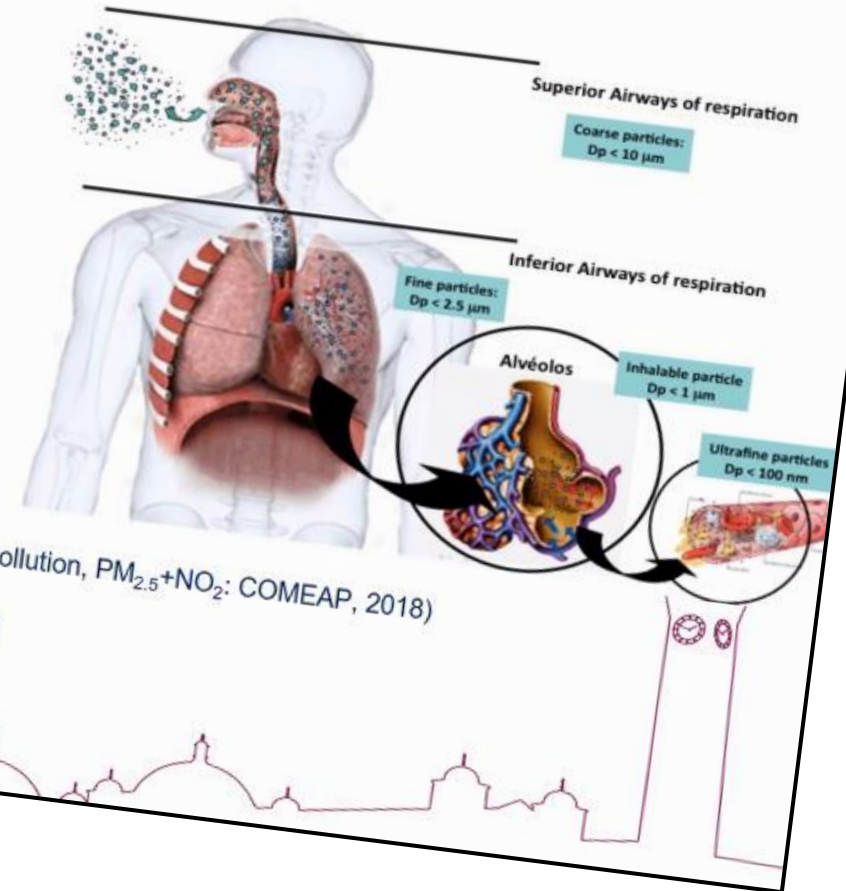Ella Kissi[...]
1st pers[on...]
have air p[...]
listed as a cause [of]
death.

## Key Air Pollutants: Health Effects

Nitrogen dioxide gas, $NO_2$
Breathing / respiratory impacts

Fine Particles – $PM_{2.5}$
Cardiovascular impacts
(Pregnancy, Cognitive function...)

UK: ca. 28-36,000 mortality burden (long-term air pollution, $PM_{2.5}+NO_2$: COMEAP, 2018)
Up to 6 months life expectancy loss

Superior Airways of respiration
Coarse particles: Dp < 10 µm
Inferior Airways of respiration
Fine particles: Dp < 2.5 µm
Alvéolos
Inhalable particle Dp < 1 µm
Ultrafine particles Dp < 100 nm

**2%** trust developers to act honestly on large developments

7% trust councils to make the right decision on large developments

Unclear quality asks from the planning system

House not places

Opposition to new homes

Despite support in principle, opposition ground to new development

Non level playing field from planning puts downward pressure on quality

High land costs and pressure on build costs

Constrained allocation of new homes

Insufficient new homes in the right place

**Office for Place**



Clear quality asks from planning system

Removal of unintended incentives for "next field" development model

Places not houses

Less opposition to new homes

More people see that development is likely to be a net improvement

A degree of speculation is removed from land prices

Fewer barriers to entry to SMEs, innovators and

Simple and predictable regulation

Democracy brought forward to plan-making

More sense of agency in design and placing of new places

Office for Place: five principles

Office for Place

Empirical

Empowering

Flexible

Networked

Digital

Office for Place: five activities

Office for Place

Researching

Supporting & Accrediting

Training

Celebrating

Advising
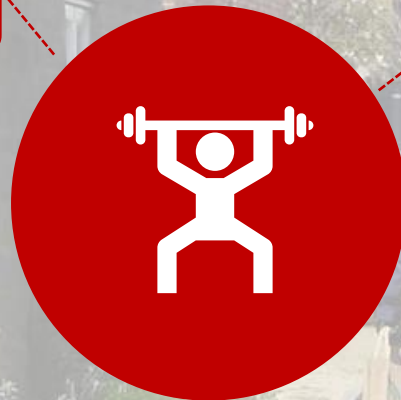
# Office for Place: Researching and Supporting

## Researching

1. We **asses** what evidence is needed.

2. We **measure** what people like & need & where they prosper.

3. We **map** skills and capacities of ((i) LPAs (ii) community & (iii) design network to inform our focus.

4. We **identify** lead responsibilities.

5. We **define** business model options.

## Supporting & Accrediting

1. We **pilot** design code creation.

2. We will **create and manage a Kite Mark** for excellence with KPIs for design codes.

3. We **write 'how to' templates** & guidance. We advise on how to run public ballots and visuals preference surveys.

4. We **share best practice** widely.

5. We **write job descriptions & KPIs** for place makers, strategic planners, highways officials and others.

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