A Design For Life.

Integrating health and wellbeing into design and development.

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About this report

The places where we live and work have a significant impact on our health and wellbeing. Whether or not we are aware, they – and their design – affect what we do, how we do it, and how we feel. Despite this, an understanding of these effects is yet to translate itself coherently to the way that we plan and design our cities. This report defines the value of this opportunity, and identifies a way to put health and wellbeing at the heart of all UK development.

Acknowledgements

4 Kingdom Street

About
WPI Economics

WPI Economics provided the modelling used in this report. WPI Economics is a specialist economics and public policy consultancy. We provide a range of public, private and charitable clients with research, modelling and advice to influence and deliver better outcomes through improved public policy design and delivery. We work with a range of organisations - from FTSE 100/250 companies to SMEs and charities, and Central and Local Government.

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Foreword:
Chris Grigg, Chief Executive British Land.

Every year, 1 in 4 people living in the UK will experience a mental health problem. That's an incredible 16 million people, suffering from a range of problems including depression and anxiety. Not only does poor mental health place a huge burden on the individual sufferer and their family, it has a knock on impact on society and the economy.

According to a recent government review, poor mental health contributes to between £33billion and £42billion of lost costs to employers every year. People affected are less productive, take more time off work and some have to quit work altogether. The cost of poor mental health to the government is also substantial. People who are unable to work rely more on benefits, they produce less tax revenue and will need to increasingly use the NHS.
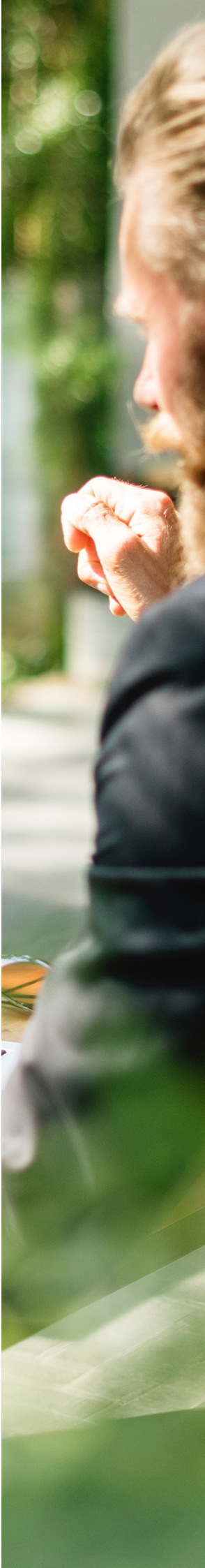
But why is a property CEO talking about mental health?

The cities where we spend our lives significantly impact our mental health and wellbeing - how you are feeling and how well you can cope with day-to-day life. A recent study found that people living in urban spaces can have a 40% higher risk of depression, and a 20% higher risk of anxiety, in addition to more loneliness, isolation and stress. Whether we are aware of it or not, the way urban environments are designed affects how we feel and what we do.

We take our surroundings for granted, yet they uniquely influence every decision we make. From how we travel to work to whether we socialise, from how safe we feel and our openness to new ideas, to how healthy we are. And over time, this quiet influence impacts our wellbeing. But, just as poor design stimulates habits and actions that harm us, good urban design can help us become happier, calmer, more sociable and, ultimately, live more fulfilling lives.

There are already great examples of the power of good urban design.

In New York, authorities repurposed a disused railway into a one-and-a-half mile long urban walkway and park for people to enjoy. The Highline project has stimulated the development of surrounding neighbourhoods and now attracts 5 million visitors every year.

The Mayor of London has recognised the value of well-designed places in his 'Good Growth by Design' programme which seeks to use design to accommodate positively the growth in the capital's population.

At Paddington Central, we've invested £10 million transforming previously sterile stretches between the buildings into varied and delightful green spaces with cycle routes, sociable pockets of outdoor seating and mature trees as well as an engaging digital art installation, installed as a tribute to local computer scientist Alan Turing. These measures have transformed the public space, creating areas where people from across the campus now connect and spend time.

Research shows that putting good design at the heart of urban development could lead to substantial improvement in peoples' mental health. This would result in substantial economic rewards. Analysis in this study being published tomorrow shows that better designed urban environments could improve personal wellbeing and reduce reliance on Government services, potentially leading to a £15 billion boost to the economy by 2050.

Small changes to existing policies governing the built environment could help us realise this opportunity. One example: by updating its vision for Enterprise Zones to pair the economic benefits that come from business rate retention with funding for social infrastructure, policymakers would help create areas where people want to live and thrive as well as work and do business. This change would enable developers and Government to collaborate, fast-tracking regeneration in an area, conditional on investment and design that contributes to community resilience and wellbeing.

Of course, mental illness and wellbeing are complex, multi-faceted issues, which don't lend themselves to single policy solutions, but rather to widespread system and cultural change.

A better built environment is not a replacement for better mental health services or improved public health programmes, but it could be a powerful complement. At the least, it would mean mitigating issues which impact mental health, and at best it could play an important role in helping address some of the most pressing policy issues of our time: loneliness, stress and low productivity.

And with 46 million people in the UK now living in urban environments, the cumulative impact of designing for life could be immense, for us and for future generations.

Executive Summary

Better designed cities could save our society and the UK economy an estimated £15.3bn by 2050 – and make us all happier and healthier.

This report quantifies, for the first time, the potential economic benefits of designing places for mental wellbeing. It also outlines a route map for putting health and wellbeing at the heart of development.

The analysis was carried out by WPI Economics and commissioned by British Land. It builds on earlier research and good practice by leading organisations.

How the world around us affects our health and wellbeing

Whether we are aware of it or not, the spaces where we live, work or simply spend time have a significant impact on our health and wellbeing – for better and for worse. Research shows that places affect:

- How we feel, e.g. blank walls, sharp angles and traffic noise all trigger stress responses[1].
- How we behave, e.g. people exposed to nature in cities tend to be more generous and helpful[2].
- How much physical activity we get, e.g. people walk three times as far along streets lined with small shops than through car parks[3].

Anyone who has spent time in a busy city will be familiar with how the senses can feel overloaded with sights, sounds and smells, dense buildings and crowds of people. These overwhelming stimuli can both contribute to excessive stress and poorer mental health, and encourage people to withdraw into their private spaces, rejecting the social connections that are so important to wellbeing.

If urban environments are currently part of the problem, they can also be a powerful part of the solution.

The power of placemaking to improve health and happiness

There is an increasing body of research exploring how better designed spaces could contribute positively to mental and physical health. Opportunities include:

- Introducing more communal seating and recreational areas encourages social interaction and relationships, one of the most powerful drivers of human health[4].

- Planting abundant greenery opens up opportunities for people to encounter nature during their daily lives, which studies show boosts wellbeing and productivity[5].
- Improving walkways and cycle facilities empowers people to live more active lifestyles, which is critical to health, happiness and productivity[6].
- Making people feel safe and secure through good design of roads, walkways, street lighting, landmarks and wayfinding, so that low-level threats don't trigger the 'fight or flight' response[7].

It is clear that urban design has a vital role to play in promoting wellbeing, alongside health services and public health programmes.

The size of the opportunity

In 2011 untreated mental health disorders were responsible for an estimated 13% of the world's disease burden, and it was predicted that by 2030 depression would be the leading cause of long-term disability globally.[8] This issue is at its most intense in urban environments, with city dwellers experiencing an almost 40% higher risk of depression, a 20% higher risk of anxiety and double the risk of schizophrenia, compared to people living in the countryside.[9]

Good design has a clear role to play in tackling this issue and reducing the impacts of common mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety. To understand the potential scale of benefits to individuals and society that could stem from this, WPI Economics has modelled the economic impact of a 1% drop in common mental health issues, that could come as a result of good design.

	Annual gains 2030	Annual gains 2050	Total gains by 2050
Government Public purse savings	£73.8m	£239.7m	£3.6bn
Economy Productivity gains	£110.6m	£359.1m	£5.4bn
Employers Productivity gains	£129.4m	£420.2m	£6.3bn

Methodology summary

Data is drawn from the NHS Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey, Stephenson / Farmer Review, Office for National Statistics and Housing Associations Charitable Trust.

The economic impact numbers are large, but they are also cautious, based on:

- The amount of people living in predominantly urban areas, and population projections.
- The incidence of mental health issues only (better design would also benefit physical health).
- A conservative estimate of a 1% drop in mental health issues (some studies suggest design delivers greater improvements[10]).
- An assumed redevelopment cycle of 30 years, beginning in 2020.

The gift that keeps on giving

Good design is the gift that keeps on giving. If we create positive, green, friendly, active and attractive places, people often continue to benefit for years to come.

What's more, better designed spaces do not necessarily cost more than poorly designed ones. Our cities are constantly going through renewal, as areas become dilapidated or are redeveloped as people's preferences change. In many instances, putting health and wellbeing at the heart of every development opportunity does not require major additional investment, rather a different approach.

Small changes can also have large effects. As an example, successive waves of policy changes have transformed Melbourne's disused 'laneways' into thriving pedestrian streets that have helped revitalise the city centre.

Our vision

Imagine a future where you...

- Experience greenery, fragrant flora and open spaces as part of your daily life.
- Feel safe, happy and healthy, away from traffic congestion and pollution.
- Enjoy a more active lifestyle – walking, cycling, running and taking part in sports activities.
- Find urban living pleasurable and not anxiety inducing.
- Feel part of a community, meeting friends and making new ones in attractive social spaces.

Intuitively we can all see the benefits of a world like this. This study has put an economic value on it and identified a way to put health and wellbeing at the heart of development.

Call to action

We want this study to provide a useful addition to wider research about the role of urban design in promoting health and wellbeing. More importantly, we hope that it inspires new partnerships, discussions and initiatives to help unlock the tremendous potential for cities to actively improve lives.

Opportunities include:

- Government, communities, developers, businesses and individuals collaborating to put mental health at the heart of every development.
- All parties learning and expanding on the pockets of good practise that are already happening around the UK and globally. Some of these are highlighted below.
- Government empowering local innovations and sharing learnings, encouraging successful large-scale regeneration.

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Introduction

Integrating health and wellbeing into design and development

The cities where we live and work have a significant impact on our health and wellbeing, whether or not we are conscious of it. Our surroundings and their design affect what we do, how we do it and how we feel – for better and for worse. There are a huge range of factors that are amplified or minimised by the design features of our places and spaces, such as whether we choose to take the stairs or the lift, how stressed we feel and even the friendliness of our neighbours.

Research shows that wellbeing – by which we mean a positive physical and mental state – can be strongly influenced by the built environment. Evidence from fields such as public health research, neuroscience, behavioural psychology and environmental psychology has all drawn the same conclusion: the design of our built environment matters.

This work is contributing to a wider recognition of the power of urban design. For example, Bloomberg Philanthropies has funded work focusing on well-designed cities as "catalysts for urban transformation"[11] and in the UK the charity 'Happy City' is working to identify the positive elements of design in several cities.

The benefits of changing our approach to the design of urban environments are substantial, improving not only the lives of millions of individuals but also the wider economy and Government spending.

We have calculated that, even with modest impacts, designing for wellbeing could result in a £3.6bn saving for Government on health and welfare spend by 2050 – often at little extra cost. The economy could see a productivity increase of around £5.4bn, and UK businesses could save £6.3bn's worth of output otherwise lost through employee absence.

All in all, spaces designed with health and wellbeing in mind could save our society and the UK economy an estimated £15.3bn by 2050. And if taken forward in earnest, the benefits could be well in excess of this.

These sums illustrate the clear socio-economic case for Government, communities, developers, businesses and individuals to start making our cities healthy by design, whilst helping us all to be healthier and happier individuals.

Our urban surroundings can be harnessed as a powerful part of the solution to the UK's pressing health and wellbeing challenges, particularly as our population ages.

What?
The effects of the built environment on our health and wellbeing

Whether we are aware of it or not, the urban environments in which we spend our time have a significant impact on our health and wellbeing. Places can be designed to promote activity over sedentary choices, feelings of security over fear, calm over stress and openness over hostility. With eight in ten of the UK population living in urban environments, their design is a powerful tool through which to wield positive influence, facilitating good physical and mental health.

To take three major examples, placemaking and the built environment can influence:

1. our levels of physical activity
2. the quality of the air that we breathe
3. the state of our mental health

Placemaking, physical activity and exercise

The built environment has a critical role to play in making physical activity easier, cheaper, and more appealing.[12] The public health benefits of increased levels of physical activity are extensive, leading to improvements in mental health and wellbeing as well as physical fitness.[13]

Design can, for example, support more pedestrian-friendly infrastructure[14,15], and make stairs or ramps central, appealing features of spaces alongside escalators and lifts.[16,17,18]

More generally, design features have been shown to promote health and wellbeing across public areas. For example, in urban park design, factors such as effective signage, high quality horticulture and well-designed playgrounds and trails can all add significant value and have been found to promote the health and wellbeing of users.[19] These principles can be applied to other public areas within the urban built environment, from canal paths to urban streets.

Positive design interventions include:

- Incentivizing signage for vendors of healthy food choices to ensure that healthy food and services are available within walking distance
- Nudging people from driving to active modes of transport with good walking, cycling and running facilities
- Increasing street connectivity and providing a variety of walking routes to prioritise and incentivise active mobility such as pedestrians, cycling and transit
- Providing access to drinking water, toilets and shelter from weather[20]

Case study:
London's Mini-Hollands

As part of the Mayor of London's Healthy Streets Agenda[1], three outer London boroughs (Enfield, Kingston and Waltham Forest) were awarded £30m each to develop a network of cycle routes. These programs aim to increase the number of bike journeys by making cycling safer and more convenient.

Features include segregated cycle routes, improved parking facilities, redeveloping key areas such as stations and town centres and other measures to promote cycling in residential areas and low-traffic neighbourhoods. To complement these improvements and encourage people to get on their bikes, the boroughs are also running support programmes such as bicycle training courses and maintenance sessions.[1]

Initial results from the scheme are promising: those living in areas where substantial changes have been made are 24% more likely to have done some cycling in the previous week compared to those in areas without improvements. There were positive changes in views about local environments.[2]

Case study sources:

1. https://tfl.gov.uk/travel-information/improvements-and-projects/cycle-mini-hollands
2. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0965856417314866

Placemaking and air quality

The quality of the air that we breathe affects us mentally and physically. Enhanced air quality has been linked to improved cognitive functioning[21] and a reduction in air pollution levels reduces the burden of disease from stroke, heart disease, lung cancer and both chronic and acute respiratory diseases like asthma.[22]

Design has the potential to both reduce polluting behaviour and lower exposure to existing pollution. In a Crown Estate study of the Regent Street Public Realm in London, an impact assessment suggested that public realm improvements together with measures to reduce commercial transport reduced carbon dioxide in the air by 15-20 tonnes a year and improved traffic flow, reducing air and noise pollution.[23]

Greenery acts both as a barrier and a counterbalance to air pollution.[24] Green spaces in urban areas are associated with a range of benefits including reduced cognitive fatigue,[25] stress and headaches, and better healing, cardiovascular health, blood pressure and mental wellbeing.

Positive design interventions include:

- Developing off-road walking routes, greenery and planting and green walls
- Creating facilities with visible energy metering and water usage systems to encourage and reward small-footprint behaviour
- Providing a range of locations in which to linger to minimize exposure to noise pollution
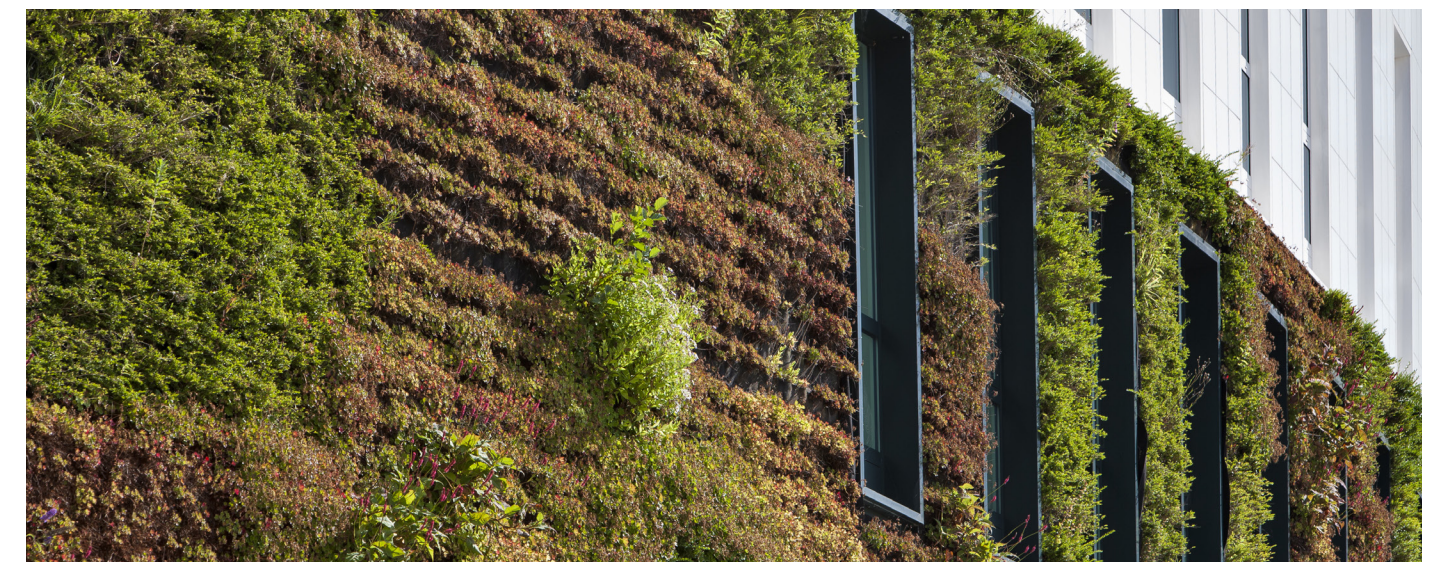
Placemaking and mental health

Mental health is determined by multiple factors and the impact of the urban environment on mental health is complex as "city living may increase some forms of psychosis and mood disorders, drug addiction, and some people's unhappiness, but tends to reduce dementia, alcohol abuse and suicide rates."[26] And across all environments, whether urban or rural, loneliness affects people both physically and mentally. Lacking social connections is as comparable a risk factor for early death as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and is worse for us than well-known risk factors such as obesity and physical inactivity.[27] The design of a city cannot provide a supportive friendship group, but it can help to strengthen social relationships.[28]

In addition to the public realm, it is important to consider building interiors, given that many people in Europe spend 90% of their time indoors.[29] Good mental health and wellbeing at work has been shown to decrease absenteeism, increase workplace satisfaction and, overall, boost productivity (see case study on next page).[30]

Examples of research on the importance of good workplace design

A study by Deloitte to support the Farmer / Stevenson review noted where investments had been made to improve mental health there had been a "consistently positive return on investment."[1]

Evidence suggests that investment in design within a workplace can deliver positive outcomes to businesses. A 2002 poll found that 77% of people agreed that they worked more productively in well-designed offices,[2] and both positive influences such as more light,[3] and negative ones such as noise pollution[4] have been shown to affect productivity.

Companies have control over the design of working environments. In recent years there have been several examples of places designed with employees' needs in mind. The regeneration of Plantronics's offices in Swindon has been credited with cutting absenteeism from 12.7% to 3.5% and increasing workplace satisfaction from 61% to 85%.[5]

Other refurbishments and redesigns, including those of British Land's York House headquarters, have been found to have significant positive effects – such as increased proportions of staff reporting that the environment enables them to work productively and supports their wellbeing.[6]

Box Sources:

1. Hampson. E, et. al., (2017), 'Mental health and employers: the case for investment - Supporting study for the Independent Review', Deloitte Monitor. Available at https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/public-sector/articles/mental-health-employers-review.html

2. MORI (2002) Public attitudes towards architecture and the built environment. Research carried out by the MORI Social Research Institute for CABE.

3. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/urban-expeditions/green-buildings/surprising-ways-green-buildings-improve-health-sustainability/

4. https://economics.mit.edu/files/13747

5. http://www.worldgbc.org/sites/default/files/bp-resource/Case_Study_-_Plantronics.pdf

6. http://www.britishland.com/sustainability/blogs/articles/2015/a-world-of-wellbeing-at-our-fingertips

York House ©MoreySmith

There is a clear complementary role for improved design and planning in supporting good mental health and wellbeing; creating places that minimise excessive stress responses, promote feelings of safety and security, encourage community interaction and increase productivity and happiness at work.

Positive design interventions include:

- Communal and recreational areas to encourage human interaction
- Designing well-lit spaces with good visibility that are easy to navigate
- Integrated natural features such as plants, trees and grass within and outside buildings
- Minimised noise pollution

All of these features can add value, but quite how important they can be to mental health is sometimes overlooked in design.

Placemaking and community

Community involvement leads to higher levels of wellbeing. Where residents have the confidence to exercise agency over local circumstances, they can influence decisions affecting their neighbourhood and have more regular contact with their neighbours.[31,32]

This inevitably results in variation of the physical features that make for a 'good' place. For example, studies of New York City have shown that residents and non-residents have different reactions to certain façades. 'Good' design and placemaking practice must, ultimately, be bespoke to its users.

These interventions do not need to be expensive. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has noted how "small, cost-effective improvements such as market squares or statues can be made to enhance public spaces simply by breaking up monotony", creating places of unexpected entertainment and attraction.[33]

Environments that not only cater to the current needs of their users but can respond through technology as these evolve are now possible and help their users to build a greater sense of meaning and belonging.[34]

Positive design interventions include:

- Offering unfinished exterior areas for community members to landscape and garden, allowing people to put their stamp on a place
- Finding ways for people to get involved in the programming of and care for public places and amenities, creating stewardship opportunities
- Encouraging self and community-expression through the support of spaces like artist studios and workrooms with public access
- Develop seasonal activities to enliven spaces and draw people together, enabling individual and collective acts of creativity and spontaneous activity[35]

Case Study
The redevelopment of Detroit's Campus Martius

Detroit's Campus Martius Square was designed and redeveloped in 2004 from a major traffic and road system into a public square of 1.6 acres. It was designed to be multi-functional, allowing it to host events, local businesses, and foster a feeling of safety for residents. Key design features included:

- Preserving and showcasing historically and culturally important buildings;
- Involving the local community and providing the opportunities to shape and safeguard the space;
- Permitting the local community to alter the space and shape its character to suit their needs;
- Engaging the community in the design and implementation of the redevelopment.

This has clearly been successful in revitalizing the area. The Project for Public Spaces has highlighted a number of positive developments that have stemmed from this redevelopment, including the decision of major employers to move into offices near the parks, a further chain of investment into the area, and the hosting of major public events in and around the square.

Case study sources:

- British Land & Happy City, (2015), 'Seven Wellbeing Principles to guide placemaking practice – Evidence-based card deck', British Land.
- https://www.pps.org/projects/campusmartius

Why?
The true value of good design

The commercial case for good design

The design of the built environment plays a critical role in determining the value of a place. Successful places are more frequently used, and this increase in demand translates to a rise in commercial value.

Designing such places requires an understanding of what makes people feel good in a space, and the powerful way in which this encourages repeated use. The place only needs to be designed and built once, but its positive impact lasts for as long as it is well maintained.

Paddington Central

The size of the opportunity

It is well established that individuals, employers, Government spending and the UK economy are all significantly impacted by poor mental health and wellbeing, and that design can influence those mental health and wellbeing outcomes.[36]

If places are designed with health and wellbeing in mind, we all stand to gain by a significant sum. The scale of the potential economic benefits from a relatively modest positive impact on common mental health disorders is shown in the below tables; annual figures refer to the benefit in a given year, and cumulative figures refer to the total value of benefits delivered across all previous years.

	Annual gains 2030	Annual gains 2050	Total gains by 2050
Government Public purse savings	£73.8m	£239.7m	£3.6bn
Economy Productivity gains	£110.6m	£359.1m	£5.4bn
Employers Productivity gains	£129.4m	£420.2m	£6.3bn

Source: WPI Economics modelling of data from ONS, Farmer/Stevenson Review, and HACT wellbeing evaluator (2018). Assumes 1% fall in CMDs in urban areas are driven by good design over a 30-year period.

These benefits are substantial, but primarily focus on external benefits. However, individuals also stand to benefit from improved wellbeing, with an estimated annual wellbeing gain of £3.1bn by 2050.

Methodology summary

Data is drawn from the NHS Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey, Stevenson/Farmer Review, Office for National Statistics and Housing Associations Charitable Trust.
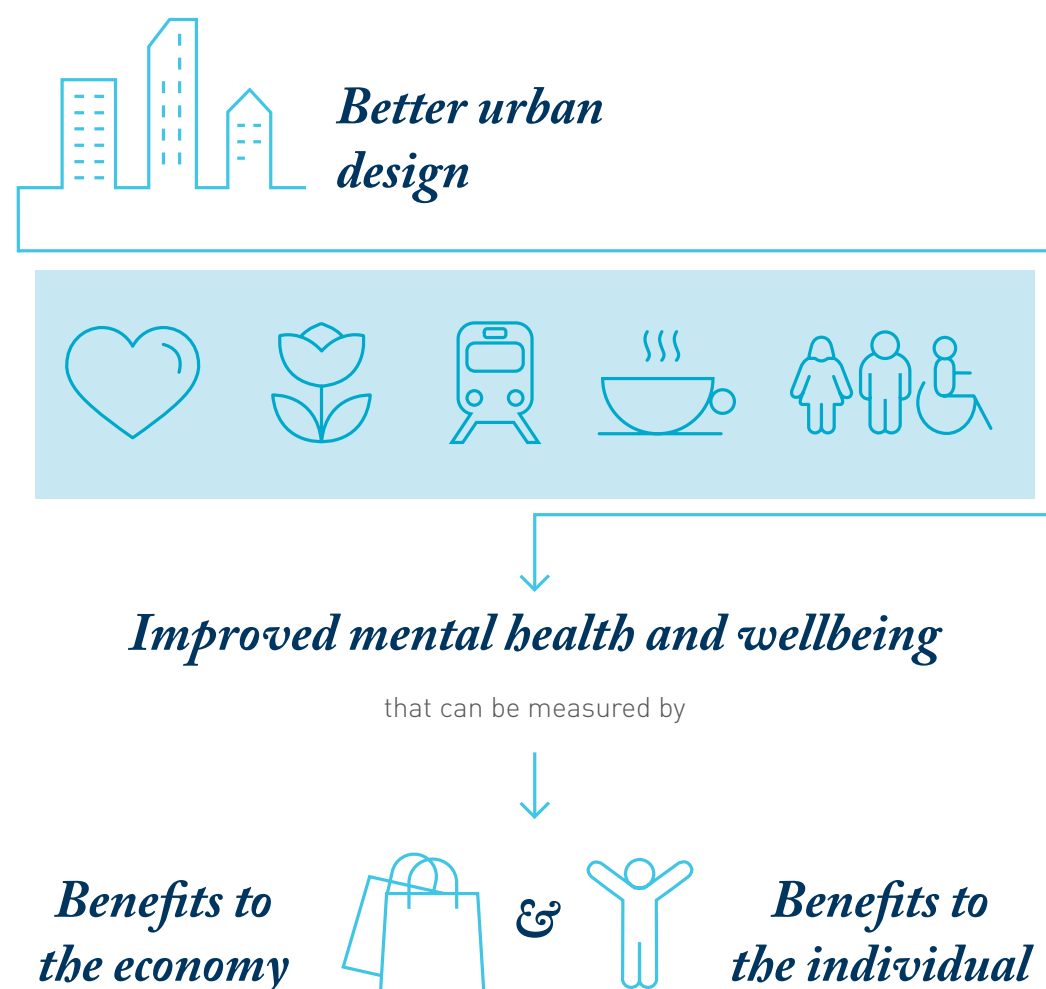
The economic impact numbers are large, but they are also cautious, based on:

- The amount of people living in predominantly urban areas, and population projections.
- The incidence of mental health issues only (better design would also benefit physical health).
- A 1% drop in mental health issues (some studies suggest design delivers greater improvements)[37].
- An assumed redevelopment cycle of 30 years, beginning in 2020.

By only studying the economic impacts of improvements in mental health, drawing on data from the Farmer/Stevenson review, we can avoid double counting these benefits. This approach reflects both the limited data available, and the fact that other elements such as improved physical activity will also feed into the assumed intervention.

Our framework to account for the different impacts of better design is displayed overleaf. Instead of including each impact individually, which would risk double-counting their impact, we have instead considered them as constituent parts of better urban design. We then estimate the effect that this will have on improved mental health and wellbeing, as measured by benefits to both individuals and the economy.

The framework displaying the impact of the built environment on mental health and associated savings.

	Healthy places	Places of delight	Places of ease	Social places	Inclusive places
	• Air and noise pollution • Physical activity	• Biophilia • Aesthetics • Comfort • Open space	• Transport • Mono-functionalism • Accessibility • Signage	• Socialising • Volunteering • Vibrancy • Resilience	• Representation • Community agency • Non-exclusionary

The opportunity for London

Table: Estimated London benefits of better design (2030 and 2040)

	2030		2040	
	Annual	Cumulative	Annual	Cumulative
Governement cost savings	£15.2m	£88.5m	£31.7m	£329.3m
Productivity gains	£22.8m	£132.6m	£47.5m	£493.3m
Recovered lost output	£26.7m	£155.2m	£55.6m	£577.2m

Source: WPI Economics modelling of data from ONS, Farmer/Stevenson Review, and HACT wellbeing evaluator (2018).

Data limitations mean that we were unable to make estimated benefits up to the year 2050, but the findings suggest that by 2040 improvements in design in London could cumulatively save the Government approximately £329m in reduced health and welfare costs, benefit the UK economy by approximately £493m, and result in an estimated £577m worth of recovered output for UK employers. It is likely that these benefits would grow further from 2040-2050.

The opportunity for Scotland

Table: Estimated Scotland benefits of better design (2030 and 2050)

	2030		2050	
	Annual	Cumulative	Annual	Cumulative
Governement cost savings	£6.1m	£35.8m	£19.2m	£290.9m
Productivity gains	£9.1m	£53.6m	£28.8m	£435.8m
Recovered lost output	£10.7m	£62.7m	£33.7m	£509.9m

Source: WPI Economics modelling of data from ONS, Farmer/Stevenson Review, and HACT wellbeing evaluator (2018).

Although these sums are relatively small, they demonstrate that there are significant benefits to be had by applying existing academic and practical knowledge about wellbeing and the built environment to placemaking. This is in addition to the qualitative benefits of supporting better mental health in millions of individuals.

How?
Urban Wellbeing Zones

According to the Design Council, the main barriers to healthy placemaking are the requirements or expectations of developers.[38] The development industry understands how to design well, but among competing stakeholder priorities it is often sacrificed. That is where the Government can assist.

The answer to the 'how' question lies within the enhancement of an existing policy proposal: Enterprise Zones.

Currently, Enterprise Zones have an economic focus. They support benefits such as business rate discounting, simplified local authority planning procedures, and for business rate growth to be kept by local authorities.[39] These measures were introduced to "reflect the Government's commitment to long-term economic growth", and to "enable Local Enterprise Partnerships to reinvest in site development and other local initiatives, such as workforce skills development".[40]

But economic performance is only one facet of making an area prosperous. In the longer term, Enterprise Zones could become Urban Wellbeing Zones to reflect the importance of wider factors in prosperity, and, in particular, the importance of design.

These zones would kick-start regeneration through a fast-track planning approval system, in return for investment that supports socially beneficial outcomes, like improved mental or physical health, alongside sustainable economic growth (by, for example, supporting businesses and local investment). In turn, these locations would be more attractive places to both live and work and enable the co-ordination of planning across the range of areas needed to create truly successful urban spaces, including transport links, housing, social spaces, and green space.

Urban Wellbeing Zones: Enterprise Zones with mental health and wellbeing at their heart

A UK-wide strategy for improving wellbeing through design, integrated into existing frameworks and in partnership with the private sector to create, incentivize and implement beneficial urban design.

As part of plans in England for local areas to be able to retain 100% of business rates, the Local Government Finance Bill 2016/17 had allowed for local areas to come together to form a new set of Enterprise Zones, with the intention of promoting regeneration and economic development. However, these plans were shelved when the Bill fell once the 2017 General Election was called.

In a number of other areas included in the Bill, Government subsequently introduced individual pieces of legislation. In England, this represents a real opportunity to go further and give local areas the powers needed to develop Urban Wellbeing Zones. In Scotland, we would welcome a dialogue as to how the existing policy of Enterprise Areas could be enhanced to incorporate considerations around mental health and wellbeing and to deliver wider benefits across all business sectors.

The criteria for establishing a Urban Wellbeing Zone would explicitly ensure that mental health and wellbeing were a central focus of the plans; creating areas that people don't just want to work and do business in – where they also live and prosper.

One major advantage of the Urban Wellbeing Zone would be the power to retain business rates growth in the local area and leverage tax increment finance. Combined with existing powers to introduce Business Improvement Districts and / or business rate supplements, this could provide vital finance to invest in social infrastructure.

In England, to build on this baseline and make these zones a real success, the Government could also consider giving local areas a range of extra powers. This could be based on the evolving experience of powers provided to Metro Mayors to establish Mayoral Development Corporations (MDC) and, more widely, the recent move to establish New Town Development Corporations (NTDC). These corporations tend to have a range of planning powers, including the ability to make compulsory purchases and to fast-track planning applications and the responsibility for developing master plans.

Urban Wellbeing Zones could build on this approach by adopting the same principles where a commitment is made to regenerate or develop an area with health and wellbeing at the heart of the project. As well as ensuring that development was focussed on mental health and wellbeing, alongside growth, this would provide greater control, certainty and speed of decision making over planning decisions within the designated area. In Scotland, the passage and implementation of the new Planning (Scotland) Bill should offer further opportunities to debate the potential benefits of placing health and wellbeing at the heart of the future approach to local development and regeneration.

As with MDCs and NTDCs, there would be a major opportunity to partner with local transport authorities, developers and existing residents and businesses to ensure that the approach is successful.

Conclusion

The built environment can be a positive force in improving happiness, health and wellbeing. If these factors were put at the heart of urban design in every community across the UK, the positive impact would be considerable, resulting in better quality of life for millions of people, lower public spending and greater productivity. This is a powerful tool, with even modest changes potentially unlocking up to £15.3bn of financial benefits within a generation.

In quantifying this benefit, we want to stimulate discussion, collaboration and new thinking that results in excellent design becoming mainstream in UK urban environments. We have identified Enterprise Zones as the starting point from which we can change our national mindset regarding the importance of design, but success relies on expanding their purpose to encompass health and wellbeing, which can only be achieved with clear support from the public sector.

Government, together with the communities, businesses and individuals wishing to tackle poor mental health, could achieve a powerful and lasting legacy through the promotion of Enterprise Zones into Urban Wellbeing Zones: areas that not only stimulate positive economic activity but improve quality of life and opportunities for successive generations.

Over two thirds of us now live in urban environments.[41] Using this network of zones, we can ensure best practice is shared and spread across the UK, improving future prospects for everyone.

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