

Health and Wellbeing in all Places: a collaborative roundtable with actions for the next five years



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Foreword



“

...it is abundantly clear that a paradigm shift is needed...

”

Rebecca Britton, Regional Director of Communities, Communications and Partnerships, Urban&Civic

As we navigate the complex landscape of urban development, it becomes increasingly apparent that our built environment plays a profound role in shaping our health and wellbeing. At Urban&Civic, we are steadfast in our commitment to ensuring that our developments not only meet the needs of residents but also foster thriving, inclusive communities where individuals can flourish.

We were therefore pleased to sponsor the Quality of Life Foundation's roundtable 'Health and wellbeing in all places', bringing together a diverse array of stakeholders united by a shared vision of creating healthier, more resilient communities. At the heart of our discussions was a recognition of the urgent need for collaborative action to address the multifaceted challenges facing our neighbourhoods.

As we reflect on the insights gleaned from our deliberations, it is abundantly clear that a paradigm shift is needed - a shift towards a more holistic approach that places health and wellbeing at the centre of design and planning, as well as the delivery and long term management of places and spaces. This requires not just reimagining our buildings and public spaces, and the ways we get about, but re-evaluating the policies that underpin them and energising the partners that deliver them.

In the pages that follow, you will find a synthesis of our discussions, key takeaways, and actionable recommendations for the road ahead. We invite you to join us on this journey as we strive to create places that not only meet our needs but enhance our collective wellbeing.

Introduction



Since the Quality of Life Foundation's inception in 2019, we have been working with others to focus industry and government on longer term outcomes for individuals and communities through advocacy, research and the provision of services. In that time, the Covid-19 pandemic reminded everyone just how important where they live is to their physical, social and psychological health and wellbeing, and some progress has been made against our agenda.

But the pace of change in industry and government, both locally and nationally, has been tortuously slow, and updates to the National Planning Policy Framework and passing of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act have proved huge missed opportunities in centring a health-and-wellbeing agenda.

The fact that health inequalities exist, are unfair and preventable are truths that remain unpalatable, but colleagues in public health who are seeking to address those inequalities are, too often, ignored. There is the risk that the legacy of the past will continue for years to come, played out in housing shortages, poorly designed and unsustainable homes and neighbourhoods, rising rents, shortages in capacity and resourcing and, overall, poorer health and wellbeing outcomes for all. But we are on the cusp of a general election, and with it the potential for a change in direction.

This roundtable brought together organisations with a role to play in addressing the polycrisis encompassing housing, health and wellbeing, and climate change. Our hope in convening the event was that we might provide greater collective clarity, purpose and impact over the next five years. We wanted to inject a dose of optimism, looking at how we might work together to create positive change.

We brought together organisations with differing priorities and approaches, so that we could learn from one another, look beyond the boundaries of individual organisational mandates, and explore how our diverse approaches and skills can converge towards a common purpose: to create better outcomes for all. The list of attendees was not exhaustive, and since holding the event we have heard from other organisations who want to be involved. All our work is collaborative, and we would welcome your input if you feel you have something to contribute.

We're grateful to the master developer, Urban&Civic, for sponsoring this event, enabling it to happen. Doing so has really underscored the importance of cross-sector collaboration as we seek the systemic changes needed to ensure homes and neighbourhoods really do deliver for health and wellbeing.

Who attended?



Quality of Life Foundation

The Quality of Life Foundation is a charity that helps local communities, professionals and policy makers to plan, design, create and care for homes and neighbourhoods in ways that will benefit people's health and wellbeing in the long term.

Attendee: Matthew Morgan, Director



The Health Foundation

We are an independent charitable organisation working to build a healthier UK. Everyone has a stake and a part to play in improving our health. By working together, we can build a healthier society.

Attendee: Gwen Nightingale, Assistant Director, Healthy Lives (Chair)



Sport England

Sport England is an arm's length body of government responsible for growing and developing grassroots sport and getting people more active across England.

Attendee: Nick Evans, Head of Planning



Impact on Urban Health

At Impact on Urban Health, we explore how living in cities impacts on people's health and test solutions to complex health issues. While we focus our efforts on Lambeth and Southwark and work in areas that experience the widest health inequalities, we seek to generate evidence and learning that can benefit people in cities across the UK and around the world. Through our work, we challenge health inequalities and help urban areas become healthier places for everyone to live..

Attendee: Carmen Sumadiwiria, Policy and Influencing Manager



Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA)

The TCPA's mission is to challenge, inspire and support people to create healthy, sustainable and resilient places that are fair for everyone.

Attendee: Julia Thrift, Director, Healthy Places



Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (HACT)

HACT is well known across housing and health for being a trusted independent body, providing quality evaluation, evidence, and recommendation. We are experienced in carrying out strategic reviews, stakeholder and market engagement, and supporting organisational approaches to housing and health partnerships, whilst being a key partner in the delivery of the Government's MoU between Housing and Health..

Attendee: Sarah Parsons, Health and Research Lead



Centre for Thriving Places

Centre for Thriving Places is a globally recognised leader in wellbeing economy measurement, policy and support for local areas. We specialise in understanding the conditions that enable people and places to thrive, and supporting place-based actors to use robust research methodologies and evidence-based measurement tools that to reshape their systems, re-organise resources and deliver thriving and resilient local economies that works for everyone.

Attendee: Rachel Laurence, Deputy Chief Executive



Tackling the Root causes Upstream of Unhealthy Urban Development (TRUUD)

TRUUD is a research programme to help change the way urban places are planned and developed for improved health and reduced health inequalities.

Attendees: Daniel Black, Programme

Dr Geoff Bates, Research Associate



Sustrans

We work for and with communities, helping them come to life by walking, wheeling and cycling. We campaign to create healthier places and happier lives for everyone.

Attendee: Rachel Toms, Director of Urbanism



Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)

The RTPI champions the power of planning in creating sustainable, prosperous places and vibrant communities. We have over 27,000 members in the private, public, academic and voluntary sectors. Using our expertise and research we bring evidence and thought leadership to shape planning policies and thinking, putting the profession at the heart of society's big debates. We set the standards of planning education and professional behaviour that give our members, wherever they work in the world, a unique ability to meet complex economic, social, environmental and cultural challenges.

Attendee: Richard Blythe, Head of Policy, Practice and Research



Centre for Ageing Better

Centre for Ageing Better is an independent charitable foundation, pioneering ways to make ageing better a reality for everyone.

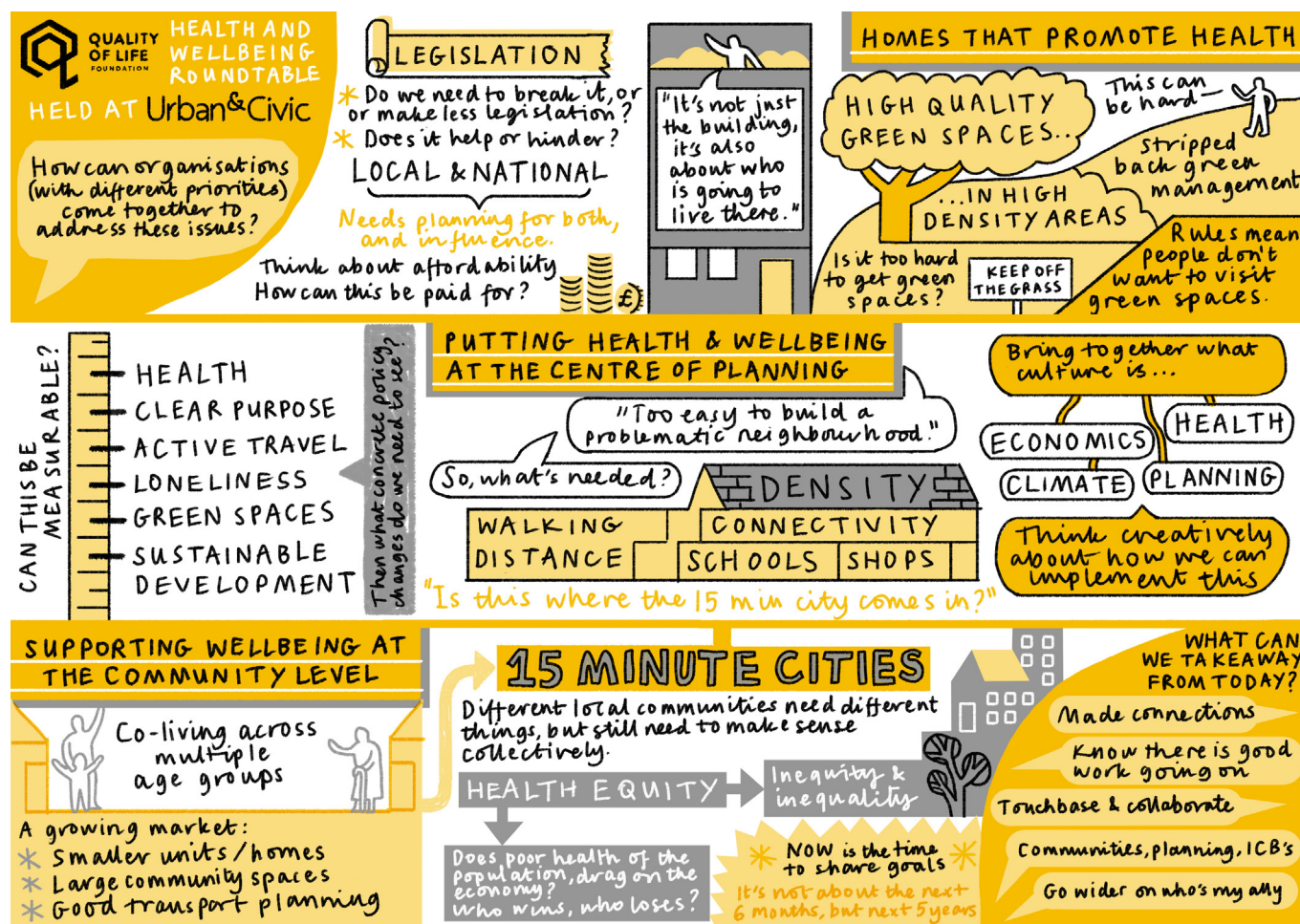
Attendee: Millie Brown, Senior Evidence Manager

Key discussion points

We discussed three themes covering the various priorities that the participating organisations are working on:

1. Homes that promote health (physical structure).
2. Putting health and wellbeing at the centre of planning (e.g. access to green space, enabling active travel etc).
3. Supporting wellbeing at the community level (e.g. access to community initiatives to support on mental health, loneliness, cost of living etc.).

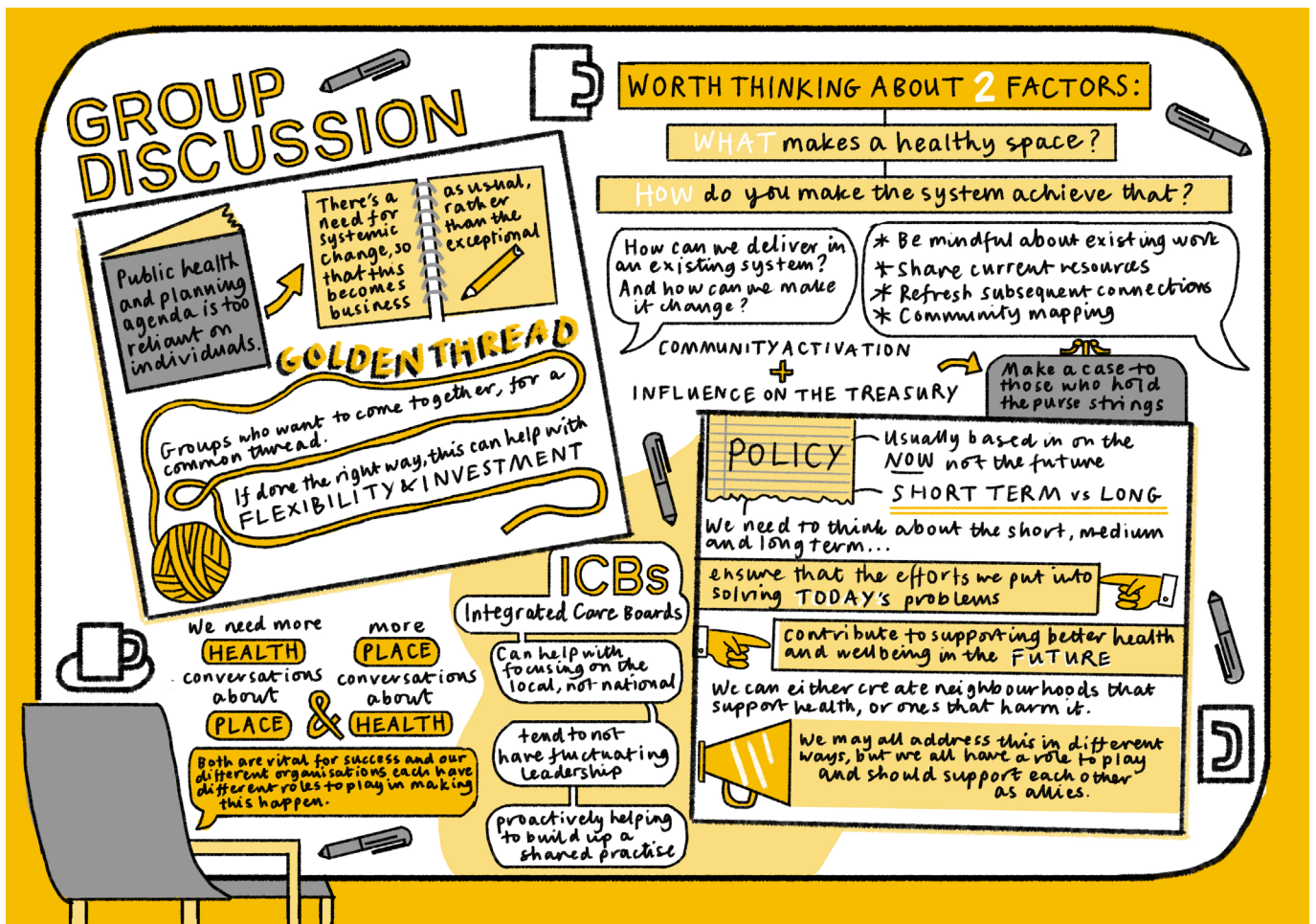
The discussions are summarised below:



Key takeaways

Our key takeaways from the discussion were:

1. We can either create neighbourhoods that support health, or ones that harm it. The organisations in the room - and those working in this space - all address this in different ways, but we all have a role to play and should support each other as allies.
2. The public health/planning agenda is too reliant on individual champions in individual organisations. The over-reliance in driving this agenda on key individuals in local authorities or elsewhere presents a huge risk to the work being dropped with a change in staffing. There's a need for systemic change so that the work to ensure that planning delivers for public health becomes business-as-usual rather than exceptional.
3. We need more 'health' in conversations about place. And we need more 'place' in conversations about health. Both are vital for success and our different organisations each have different roles to play in making this happen.
4. We need to think about the short, medium and long term. It's essential that we don't just focus on addressing immediate issues; we must ensure that the efforts we put into solving today's problems also contribute to supporting better health and wellbeing in the future.



Broader recommendations



Based on the discussion and key takeaways, we can make recommendations to the wider sector and policymakers, so that we can really make progress on bringing health and wellbeing to all places:

- **Prioritise health equity and outcomes for all in policy and funding frameworks to drive systems level change.** As discussed by participants, focusing on health equity moves us away from measuring averages, which risk neglecting disadvantaged people. Ensuring that policy and funding frameworks prioritise health equity would incentivise consideration of impacts on all socioeconomic levels.
- **Increase flexibility in investment approaches to empower local solutions and community buy-in on health issues.** Rigid funding streams were seen as barriers to joined-up working. More adaptable approaches would empower collaborative, community-led solutions that are appropriate within different contexts, and would help shift the focus from short-term crisis response to long-term prevention.
- **Integrate health more proactively into spatial planning policy and development processes to embed wellbeing from the start.** Silos between sectors were identified as an ongoing challenge. Strategically embedding health considerations from the start of planning processes, through mechanisms like an updated National Planning Policy Framework or local planning policies, would help address social determinants and prevent future inequalities.
- **Strengthen collaboration between health, housing, and community sectors to address interconnected challenges through shared initiatives and pooled resources.** No single group can address the interconnected issues alone. Participants saw value in cross-sector partnerships that draw on diverse expertise, resources and networks to achieve goals like reducing health inequalities.

Our next steps

At the Quality of Life Foundation, we're planning to take positive steps following the conversations we had on the day. Reflecting the key takeaways, we will:

- Provide a space for organisations with a shared interest in the intersection between health and wellbeing and place to converse, share ideas, update each other and collaborate
- Work with other organisations to make the case to increase the prominence of health in the National Planning Policy Framework
- Ensure our Associates Network encourages those from 'health' into conversations about 'place', and those who work in 'place' to join conversations about 'health'



If you share our vision of a housing system that improves people's health and wellbeing over the long term, get in touch.

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Let's build quality of life together.

With thanks to our supporter - Urban&Civic:

