



Place Value & the Ladder of Place Quality

A Place Alliance Report

Place Alliance brings together ideas and evidence on the value of place quality and its governance. It encourages collaboration between organisations and individuals who share a belief that the quality of the built environment matters and has a profound influence on people's lives.

We share knowledge and support each other to demand and realise buildings, streets and spaces that enhance the quality of life for all.

placealliance.org.uk/

Design Network consists of eight not-for-profit organisations that promote better and more sustainable places to stimulate economic growth. We are dedicated to supporting and inspiring England's built-environment professionals to create great spaces and places.

designnetwork.org.uk/

Place Value & the Ladder of Place Quality

A Place Alliance Report

The types of places we inhabit have a profound impact on health, society, the economy and the environment. This report distils 271 empirical research studies to uncover the truth about the qualities of the built environment that are good for us and deliver place value.

The Ladder of Place Quality is a simple tool for decision-makers to use when considering:
are we making a great place?

The robust evidence that underpins this report draws from a vast range of academic studies. For convenience we have collected all the underpinning research together in one place in an open-source website that is continually updated with new empirical evidence:

www.place-value-wiki.net

More information about the evidence can be found on pages 26–27.

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Place Value

The urban places that most of us inhabit are both physical and social, made up of buildings, streets, spaces and landscape, various land uses and a community of users.

In recent years the evidence base that links better place design with value has grown significantly. The evidence indicates that high-quality places add value in regard to health, social, economic and environmental outcomes.

The sum of these outcomes = place value.

As planners, developers, architects or decision-makers, we can improve the built environment to enhance place value.

1 Place Value

Place value reflects the idea that any development generates a set of complex but inter-related outcomes, which are in turn passed on to those with a stake in the place – the residents and the wider community, investors and developers, workers, business owners, public authorities and so forth.

Though ideas of value have been most comprehensively developed in the field of economics, economic value is only one way of defining and measuring value. Through measuring place value, we can understand the degree to which an intervention in the built environment affects, either positively or negatively, different public policy goals.

Place value is generated by places that enable users to sustain healthy, socially rich, economically productive lifestyles with minimal environmental impact.

The degree to which environments deliver place value – thereby facilitating

key public policy goals – reveals the characteristics that we should seek to replicate in order to generate high place quality in the future. In this way place quality and place value are inter-linked in a virtuous loop in which quality dictates value and value defines quality.

This report outlines, first, the sorts of value that a better-designed local built environment can deliver, and second, the qualities in the built environment that deliver value in regard to enhanced health outcomes, greater societal wellbeing, economic success and environmental sustainability.

In other words: this report uncovers the qualities of the built environment that are good for us and those that are not.

1.1 Why Place Quality Matters

This report is immediately useful for built environment decision-makers as research on the benefits of place quality is gathered together under four 'big ticket' policy arenas that directly impact on the daily lives of citizens: health, society, economy and environment.

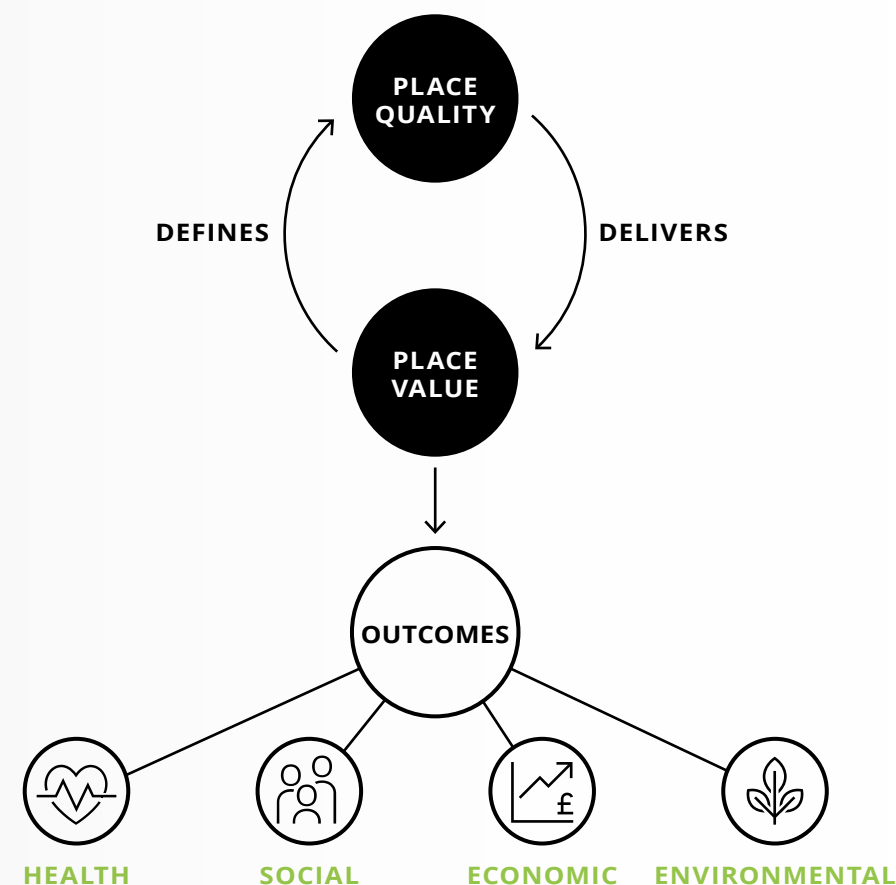
Given that a higher-quality built environment adds value in and across these policy arenas, it follows that an intelligent approach to public policy should have a clear place quality dimension at its heart.

The qualities that generate place value are well understood and can be delivered using various tools of design governance: notably in Local Plan policy, urban design frameworks, design codes and through design review. Despite this, we consistently fail to do so.

Given the impact of place quality on all aspects of daily life, policy-makers, developers and built environment professionals should make the pursuit of a high-quality built environment a top priority.

THE VIRTUOUS LOOP OF
PLACE QUALITY AND VALUE

OUTCOMES: 'BIG TICKET'
POLICY ARENAS



1.2 Health Outcomes

Place value enhances **health outcomes**. The way places are designed plays a major role in delivering place value through a wide range of positive health benefits.



Better physical health

Lower obesity, less type two diabetes, lower blood pressure, reduced heart disease, lower rates of asthma and respiratory disease, and faster recovery from illness and from fatigue

Better mental health

Less stress and more psychological restfulness, reduced depression, anxiety and anger, and reduced psychosis

Better general fitness

Increased walking (for both travel and recreation), increased exercise, sport and recreation, and more cycling

Greater daily comfort

Reduced air pollution, heat stress, traffic noise, poor sanitation, and reduced exposure of lower socio-economic groups to the effects of debilitating neighbourhoods

Enhanced quality of life

Increased sense of emotional wellbeing and satisfaction, greater happiness, reduced fear, and higher energy levels

1.3 Social Outcomes

The way places are shaped has a major impact on delivering place value through **social benefits** that range from a greater sense of safety to increased happiness.



Fewer accidents

Reduced collisions and casualties on the road, and reduced fear of accidents

Social integration

Reduced stratification and greater integration of social groups, and larger social networks locally, with stronger social support

Lower rates of crime

Reduced burglary from homes, lower street crime, less fear of crime, and stronger perceptions of safety

Better educational outcomes

Increased child independence and positive play behaviours, and enhanced learning and educational achievement

Enhanced street-level vitality and sociability

A richer public life, enhanced social interaction, and greater longevity of use in urban streets and spaces

Stronger civic pride

An increased sense of pride, local morale, social resilience, community life, and enhanced social and political engagement

Greater inclusiveness

Enhanced use of the city by marginalised and socio-economically disadvantaged groups, greater female empowerment, and acceptance of cultural and social difference

More enabling environments

For citizens of older age and/or with disabilities

1.4 Economic Outcomes

Strong private and public **economic benefits** result from place quality; however, caution is required as certain outcomes may not always be desirable, such as rising property values.



Property uplift in the residential sector

Influenced by access to views, trees, open space, lower pollution, mixed use, walkability, neighbourhood character, access to public transport, external appearance, public realm quality, connectivity, and vitality

Property uplift in the retail sector and reduced vacancy

Influenced by urban greenery, walkability, public realm quality, external appearance, street connectivity and frontage continuity; all leading to increased retail viability

More viable investments and extended regeneration benefits

Making investment more attractive, enhancing competitiveness through differentiation and strengthening community support for development

Higher local tax take

Through attracting new development and generating a greater willingness to pay for place services from businesses and communities

Reduced public expenditure

Through reduced capital and maintenance costs for roads infrastructure, reduced public realm maintenance and management (including security) costs, support for the historic built environment and urban regeneration, lower crime and policing costs, and reduced health and social care expenditure (due to reduced levels of medication, prescriptions and hospitalisation)

Lower costs of living

Through lower car use and public transport costs (more viable, cost-effective public transport), lower costs for health insurance, reduced energy consumption, and smaller carbon footprints (from transport, infrastructure and buildings)

Higher productivity

More efficient property and more productive workers, easier recruitment of employees, enabling of higher-density development and more efficient land use, greater adaptability of buildings and spaces over time, and avoiding the unnecessary costs associated with bad design that needs to be retrofitted or demolished

1.5 Environmental Outcomes

Place design can reduce **environmental impact**, which further reinforces the health, social and economic outcomes gained from high-quality places.



Reduced energy use and carbon emissions

Through the creation of urban forms that need less heating and cooling and require less private vehicle travel

Adaptive reuse

Buildings, spaces and urban infrastructure that is adaptable over time and more able to support the changing needs of society

A viable local exchange network

With local facilities, amenities and employment opportunities reducing the need to travel further to access services, while supporting local economic and social resilience

Reduced heat stress and enhanced thermal comfort

Particularly for pedestrians through greening and shading in urban areas

Reduced waste

Through decreased demand for construction materials and reductions in construction waste

Reduced pollution

Including atmospheric pollution and noise pollution, further reinforcing health and wellbeing benefits

Greater resilience

Through accommodating and managing hydrological cycles and working with – rather than against – natural phenomena

Ecological diversity

Through supporting a greater diversity of species and a greener built environment

The Ladder of Place Quality

Place quality can be envisaged as a 'ladder' which climbs from the qualities of places that should be avoided, because they undermine place value, to specific qualities that should be encouraged because they deliver value.

The characteristics have been compiled based on a systematic review of 271 international studies that linked aspects of quality with aspects of value (see pages 26–27).

Though many of the studies focused on narrow aspects of place quality and value, the results can be successfully aggregated. They reveal specific place qualities that have positive or negative outcomes on place value. Correspondingly, there is either strong or less conclusive evidence to support these claims, and we have categorised the ladder in these terms.

The Ladder of Place Quality

THE FOUR STEPS OF
THE LADDER



AVOID

The starting point of the ladder features qualities that should be avoided at all costs when designing new developments, due to negative health, social, economic and environmental impacts.

Very strong evidence of negative outcomes



BEWARE

This level includes categories of place qualities about which evidence on outcomes is still inconclusive, and where we should beware not to be too prescriptive in policy and guidance as a result.

Association not yet definitive



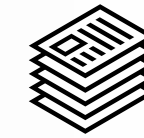
ORGANISING
PLACE QUALITIES



POSITIVE
OUTCOMES



NEGATIVE
OUTCOMES



STRONG
SUPPORTING
EVIDENCE



WEAK OR
INCONCLUSIVE
EVIDENCE

ASPIRE

Here we include place qualities that are strongly associated with positive outcomes of all types, which built environment policy and development-related decision-making should aspire to include.

Good evidence of positive outcomes

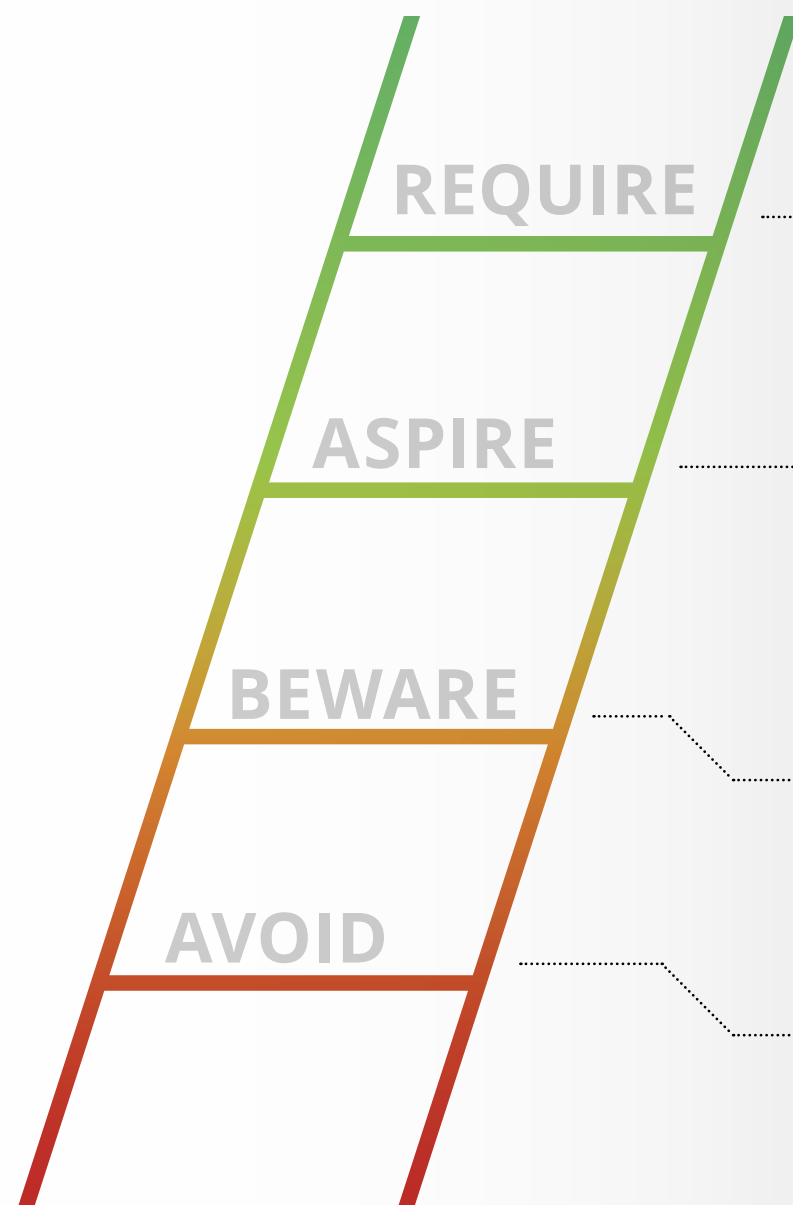


REQUIRE

There are a limited number of qualities that the evidence confirms are fundamental to a high-quality built environment which should be required in new development as a means to maximise place value through good design.

Very strong evidence of positive outcomes





PLACE QUALITIES SUMMARISED

Very strong
evidence
of positive
outcomes



- ☐ Greenness
- ☐ Mix of uses
- ☐ Low levels of traffic
- ☐ Walkability
- ☐ Bikeability
- ☐ Compact and coherent pattern of development
- ☐ Public transport connectivity

Good evidence
of positive
outcomes



- ☐ Visual permeability
- ☐ Sense of place
- ☐ Pedestrian scale
- ☐ Façade continuity
- ☐ Natural surveillance
- ☐ Street-level activity
- ☐ Good street lighting
- ☐ Denser street network
- ☐ Low traffic speeds
- ☐ Low neighbourhood noise
- ☐ Attractive and comfortable public spaces
- ☐ Social public / private threshold features
- ☐ Integration of built heritage
- ☐ Integration of natural features and ecosystem
- ☐ Architectural quality (beauty)

Association
not yet definitive



- ☐ Particular architectural styles
- ☐ Higher- versus lower-density development
- ☐ Extreme densities
- ☐ High-rise living
- ☐ Street length and connectivity
- ☐ Cul-de-sacs
- ☐ Vehicle/ pedestrian separation
- ☐ Shared spaces
- ☐ Proximity of retail to residential properties

Very strong
evidence of
negative
outcomes



- ☐ Car-dependent and extensive suburbanisation
- ☐ Absence of local green space
- ☐ Rear parking courts and segregated areas
- ☐ Poor maintenance and dilapidation
- ☐ Overcrowding
- ☐ Presence of too many fast-food stores
- ☐ Roads with higher traffic loads and speeds
- ☐ Wider carriage-way widths
- ☐ Roads that are elevated

EXPANDED DESCRIPTIONS OVERLEAF

2.1 Avoid

These qualities should be avoided at all costs when shaping the built environment due to strong negative associations with place value.



- 1 **Car-dependent** and extensive forms of single-use suburbanisation
 - 2 Relentlessly **hard urban space** with an absence of local green space
 - 3 **Too much very local permeability** (connectivity) in the pedestrian path network (e.g. unsurveilled back alleys and routes)
 - 4 The presence of **rear parking courts** and other poorly overlooked or segregated areas
 - 5 **Poor maintenance and dilapidation** (including of green spaces)
 - 6 A **sense of overcrowding** in residential buildings and estates
 - 7 Presence in close proximity to homes of **too many unhealthy food options**
 - 8 Presence of roads with **higher traffic loads and speeds**, wider carriage-way widths that are elevated or which otherwise cause severance in the local built environment
- Through formal tools of design governance (such as planning policy, zoning, street adoption powers or the use of design codes) these tangible and measurable qualities are easily avoided.

REAR PARKING COURT



CAR-DEPENDENT DEVELOPMENT



2.2 Beware

We should be cautious of being too rigid regarding the following qualities as there is conflicting or insufficient evidence about their impact on place value.



- 1 **Particular architectural styles** (the evidence does not clearly show superiority of any one architectural style over others)
 - 2 **Higher- versus lower-density development** (there is conflicting evidence linking both higher- and lower-density living to health outcomes, sociability and perceptions of crime and safety)
 - 3 **Extreme densities** (there is conflicting evidence relating extreme densities to carbon reduction, social welfare and ecological richness)
 - 4 **High-rise living** (the evidence is unclear regarding the social impact of living in high-rise buildings, although it does seem unsuitable for families with children)
 - 5 **Street length and pedestrian connectivity** (the health and crime evidence diverges on the relative benefits and drawbacks of longer versus shorter streets and on how connected street networks need to be)
 - 6 **Cul-de-sacs** (there is conflicting evidence on the impact of using cul-de-sacs on crime and safety, property value, sociability and children's play)
 - 7 **Separating vehicle and pedestrian routes** through urban areas (the evidence is weak and conflicting regarding pedestrian safety outcomes)
 - 8 Use of **shared spaces** (there is conflicting evidence relating use of shared spaces – spaces shared by vehicles and pedestrians – to levels of both actual and perceived safety)
 - 9 **Proximity of retail to residential properties** (there are divergences within the economic evidence base on the relative size and impact of negative externalities related to living in extreme proximity to retail)
- It is generally best to avoid being too prescriptive in policy or guidance regarding the above qualities, as more research is required to fully understand the impact of the beware place qualities.

SHARED SPACE



HIGH-RISE LIVING



2.3 Aspire

The next set of qualities have a positive impact on place value, and we should aspire to include these qualities in the built environment.



- 1 **Visual permeability** (being able to see into and through a space)
- 2 **Sense of place** (distinctive sense of local character)
- 3 **Pedestrian scale** (design of streets and buildings are clearly oriented to the scale of the pedestrian)
- 4 **Façade continuity** (façades form a continuous and coherent street wall)
- 5 **Natural surveillance** (the creation of space that is well overlooked by surrounding buildings)
- 6 Presence of **street-level activity**
- 7 Good **street lighting** (where streets are well lit to improve street safety, but not over-illuminated, thus creating light pollution)
- 8 A **denser street network** (avoiding large urban blocks in favour of smaller ones)
- 9 Low vehicular **traffic speeds**
- 10 **Low neighbourhood noise**
- 11 Presence of **public spaces** that are attractive, welcoming, comfortable and adaptable
- 12 A positive, **sociable threshold between public and private spaces** (such as front gardens, porches and external seating areas)
- 13 Retention and integration of **built heritage** into new development
- 14 **Natural features** and a **diverse ecosystem** integrated throughout the built environment
- 15 **Architectural quality and beauty** in the built environment

Though some of these qualities (such as façade continuity or traffic speeds) are universally applicable, many require more careful interpretation that is tailored to fit local circumstances. This can be achieved through informal tools of design governance such as design reviews or design guidance.

ATTRACTIVE PUBLIC SPACES



FAÇADE CONTINUITY



2.4 Require

The final set of qualities have very strong positive impact on place value and should therefore be required in the built environment.



- 1

Greenness in the built environment (notably the presence of trees and grass, water, and high-quality open space)
- 2

A mix of uses (diversity of land uses within a neighbourhood)
- 3

Low levels of vehicular traffic
- 4

Pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly design (including well-connected, safe pedestrian paths and bicycle routes passing through a high-quality local public realm)
- 5

Use of more **compact patterns of development** (that are well connected, less sprawling and not fragmented from other urban areas)
- 6

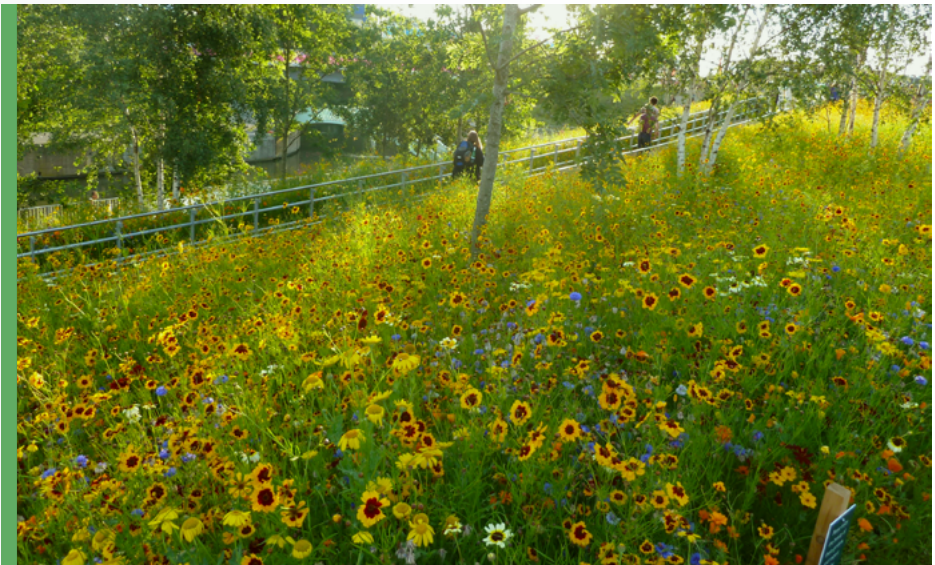
Convenient connection to a public transport network

Only qualities exhibiting the strongest evidence that they improve everyday wellbeing and strongly enhance place value have been included in the require list, making them absolutely essential to the design of the built environment. As this list only includes the absolute essentials – which tend also to be very tangible and objective and therefore measurable – these qualities can be required through the formal tools of design governance (such as in planning policy, zoning, street adoption powers or through the use of design codes).

MIX OF USES



GREENNESS



Next steps...

- ❑ **Assess a place you know with the *ladder of place quality* to get a feel for how it works.**
- ❑ **Use the *ladder* to leverage better place qualities on a new scheme: as an architect, planner, councillor, developer or citizen.**
- ❑ **Reflect the REQUIRE and ASPIRE qualities in local policy and guidance**
- ❑ **Tell us what you think or send us a photo of your *ladder* checklist. We are listening.
@PlaceAllianceUK #PlaceQuality**
- ❑ **Dive deeper into the specific evidence and research that interests you:
www.place-value-wiki.net**

3

Final Reflections

Place quality is a basic necessity of urban life with deep impacts over time and across all socio-economic strata.

The qualities of successful places play an essential role in influencing positive health, social, economic and environmental outcomes. This is so important to our basic wellbeing that place quality should be the expectation of all.

Fortunately, it is also a field about which we know a good deal, including the essentials of what makes a good place, and how the way we shape places can add value. None of the constituent qualities of successful places are particularly unique, innovative, or remarkable in any way. They are easily achieved if we have the will to do so.

As the governance of design and place becomes an increasingly shared endeavour with critical inputs from public, private, third and community sectors, a common understanding of the importance of place quality is more necessary now than ever.

Ultimately, we can use the knowledge outlined in this report to advocate for high-quality places when making policy, project or investment decisions that affect the built environment, or we can ignore it and suffer the consequences. It is that simple!

4 The Evidence Explained

FILTERING THE EVIDENCE



In order to establish the current baseline of knowledge on the topics of place quality and place value, we conducted a systemic review focusing on a broad range of issues (as represented below), that link key qualities of place with a range of value outcomes.

The review revealed 13,700 relevant records for consideration, to which a series of inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to narrow the selection. The studies that were included were limited by scale and needed to be specifically ‘urban’ and ‘place’ focused. Studies that focused exclusively on the construction or internal spaces of buildings and those with only strategic relevance at the city-wide or regional scales were omitted. Studies also needed to be methodologically robust.

This process narrowed the final selection down to 271 empirical research studies: approximately 2% of the records originally identified.

While the evidence reviewed was international in origins, the review itself was restricted to English-language articles. Of the 271 studies, 38% derived from the USA and 34% from the UK. Other significant contributors to the evidence base included other European countries (notably The Netherlands), Australia, China, South Korea and Canada.

Studies were classified against the four related public-policy dimensions (health, society, economy and environment) and the various sub-categories below. Summaries of all the evidence can be found at www.place-value-wiki.net

TABLE OF SOURCE CATEGORIES

A Health	C Economy
A1 Greenness and physical health	C1 Property values and green space
A2 Greenness and psychological wellbeing	C2 Residential property values and urban design
A3 Place quality and mental health	C3 Commercial property values and urban design
A4 Walkability, active travel and related health	C4 Streets, public realm and economic value
A5 Place quality and physical health	C5 Economic development and regeneration
B Society	C6 Public spending (and savings)
B1 Street layout and crime	D Environment
B2 Environmental design and crime	D1 Urban form, density and energy use
B3 Street design and safety from collisions	D2 Transport, technology and carbon reduction
B4 Place quality and liveability	D3 Thermal comfort, cooling and pollution
B5 Urban vitality	D4 Ecology and resilience
B6 Inclusivity and social capital	
B7 Enabling environments	
B8 Place quality, play and learning	

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