

# DESIGN CODE GUIDANCE - RELEVANCE FOR PRACTICE

## The issue

In March 2025, [Design Codes for Health and Wellbeing](#) was published to fill an important gap in guidance on principles that should be incorporated in health-focused built environments. The publication is a key resource for planning and health authorities, investment funds and developers seeking to embed healthy ways of life in diverse local place settings and contexts.

This briefing sets out the context and strengths for real estate investment funders.

**Innovative real estate investment funders managing major assets worldwide want to know what healthy development looks like on the ground.**

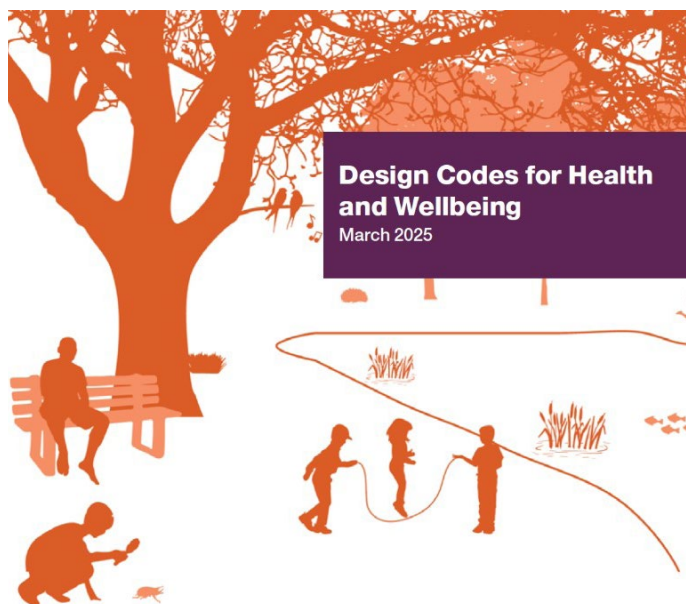
In-depth interviews and asset management case study analysis using a Health Appraisal for Urban System (HAUS) economic valuation tool developed for TRUUD by economists at the University of Bath, have brought to the fore the importance of multi-actor responsible urban development governance, including:

- The importance of financing and designing spaces external to individual properties for blending green and blue environments, vegetation and wildlife for community health creation.
- The opportunities presented by large-scale phased development for mixing uses that support public realm health value creation along with commercial viability.
- The implications of merged investment and development business models and long asset holding periods for custodial control, stewardship and access to long-term financing streams necessary for future-proofing healthy

places.

- The importance of collaborative public health, planning and real estate actor practices to manage cross-boundary challenges to health such as vertical and horizontal transfers of pollutants associated with unhealthy traffic flows.
- The need to build trust relations focusing on government, real estate investor and community shared objectives.

As illustrated by the application of the HAUS model in TRUUD, monetising health costs can facilitate a single-minded overarching institutional governance focus on health delivery that is financially viable and sustainable in terms of time resource and deliverability.



University consortium



## Timing

The publication of the new Design Codes guidance is especially timely in the face of currently evolving government pro-development policy landscapes involving public and private sector actors:

- The new growth focused [National Planning Policy Framework](#).
- The proposed introduction of a new national scheme of planning permissions delegation with the intention of speeding up decision-making.
- The extension of the present subnational system of devolution in England by replacing the current two-tier local government system.
- Major resourcing challenges faced by public sector planning reported in a recent Royal Town Planning Institute survey (The Planner, May/June 2025, pp. 5-8).
- The roll-out of developable land designated as White Belt within established protected Green Belt areas, and 'next generation' new towns.
- Proposed Government intervention in pension fund management decision-making to increase investment in the UK.

## Aid for collaboration

Design coding that embeds health principles in placemaking reflecting local needs and inequalities [will be essential in the implementation of Planning and Infrastructure Bill Strategic Plans](#) at the core of the reformed UK planning system.

Coordinated public health informed sub-national planning, investment and development decisions can connect local places with major international investment streams in ways that help support vibrant communities and places, and work to mitigate health spatial inequalities.

Development changes must reflect community contexts and place attachments and be based on calibrated, granular level data to ensure that spatial and infrastructure priorities underpin sustainable and spatially equitable growth.

This is why a one-size fits all top-down national design coding framework would fly in the face of a creative, flexible and consensual approaches needed to create meaningful places.

The new guidance points the way to how collaboration between professional experts in the public health, planning and real estate spheres could ensure that the delivery of development outcomes is fitted to community health and wellbeing needs.

Collaborative action built on public-private sector trust relations and respect for complementary experience-based knowledges in the design coding process can support the attainment of shared sustainable development objectives. For this to happen, there is a need to build trust around health-aware placemaking that creates a sense of community, place memory, and belonging.

It is hoped that the Design Codes for Health and Wellbeing guidance will inspire health and planning authorities to join forces with private sector actors in improving the way placemaking works to promote sustainable societal health and wellbeing.

## About the Guidance

The guidance was published in March 2025 by the Quality of Life Foundation in partnership with Tibbalds, the Town and Country Planning Association, TRUUD and Henley Business School.

## Contribution from TRUUD

Drawing on her academic-practitioner background in the TRUUD research, Professor Kathy Pain has investigated how decision-making in the complex network of actors in the urban (re)production process might abate the rise of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) that are causes of human suffering, inability to lead active lives and costs to the economy.

## About Truud

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

## Contact the author

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