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Although our research has shown the complexity of making cities more sustainable, it also identified many trade-offs and a number of potential ways of getting there. The important point is to approach the problems in an inclusive and integrated way, to work in partnership across boundaries and disciplines, and tackle the issues of social, economic and environmental sustainability in an imaginative way
Professor Mike Jenks, CityForm consortium

DIMENSIONS OF THE SUSTAINABLE CITY

Are more compact, higher density and mixed use urban forms more environmentally sound, more efficient for transport, more economically viable and more socially beneficial? Following five years of detailed analysis across five UK cities, the CityForm consortium came up with rather surprising insights. By [Juliana O'Rourke](#)

With sustainable urban development now a national priority, this brief summary of a complex and inter-relating series of outputs and outcomes offers food for thought on how planners, designers, decision-makers and policymakers can support moves to more sustainable and socially equitable living.

'There is an increasingly intense debate in policy and practice about sustainability, and a key issue is to what extent the adaptation of the physical form of cities and the way people live in them and travel around them can improve it,' say Mike Jenks and Colin Jones, editors of *Dimensions of the Sustainable City*, a book discussing the CityForm project findings. The consortium's insights are a key output to emerge from the EPSRC-funded Sustainable Urban Environment (SUE) programme. Compact city arguments have, they say, become attractive to governments in recent years and sustainability policies have focused on increasing the density of urban development, improving public transport, ensuring a mix of uses and containing sprawl. Yet, they add, 'despite this widespread adoption of these policies, the evidence base supporting them is very limited.'

While noting that the analysis and 'measurement' of urban form, along with the concept of sustainability, remain elusive concepts that are widely open to interpretation, the project outcomes suggest that despite apparent simplifications of policy, the concept of urban sustainability has become increasingly

complex. A range of what the editors term 'contradictions and complementarities' – social acceptability, environmental concerns and economic viability – seek priority on the policy agenda. 'The planner's challenging task is to address and resolve the tensions from this triangle of potential conflicts,' suggest Jenks and Jones.

For the parameters of this project, urban form was characterised in terms of five elements – the pattern of land use, accessibility defined by transport infrastructure, density, housing/building characteristics and urban layout. Each of these, to a degree, overlap and it is difficult to completely isolate individual components. The core research was based on five UK cities: case studies comprising neighbourhoods located in the inner, middle and outer city zones were produced. The editors noted that the spatial structure of each of the five cities demonstrated a strong relationship between physical urban form and socio-economic demographic characteristics.

'Elements of urban form are intertwined, and so are the key domains or pillars of urban sustainability; namely social, environmental and economic sustainability. The aim of this project was to identify the optimum urban form solutions that would be socially beneficial, economically viable, environmentally sound and support an efficient transport system,' says Dr Shibu Raman, a member of the CityForm consortium.