

quality of life, lower density suburbs appear more popular. ‘These aspects of the social dimension challenge the “compact city” orthodoxy, but there are some counterbalancing benefits of compactness in the equity aspect of social sustainability, particularly access to services,’ say the editors. Social interaction fares best at medium densities, while some aspects, for example community participation, are neutral. The editors also note that housing tenure and the social composition of neighbourhoods influence these indicators: ‘the disadvantages of compactness are more marginal once socio-demographic characteristics of residents are controlled for’.

Poverty is often more important than urban form – who lives where, and whether they are able to choose where they live, matters. However, accessibility to key services such as supermarkets within the neighbourhood is identified as important for certain groups of residents such as the unemployed, older people and young families, and plays a significant role in social and community life

For open space usage, perceptions of safety are crucial, but management solutions can be complex, and problematic in, for example, shared communal gardens and spaces in higher density flats.

ENVIRONMENT: ENERGY USE

Cities use great amounts of energy: policies tend to focus on adapting existing housing stock to improve energy conservation and promoting carbon neutral new housing. CityForm explored the issues of domestic energy and its influence on housing type and built form. The analysis found only a weak relationship with built urban form: residential energy use appears to be linked more closely to the level of occupancy within a home and type of appliances used than house type. There is also a slight suggestion that the organisation of a city’s economy and urban form in shaping commuting may impact on energy consumption via home working.

Lifestyles and demographics influence energy consumption more than building type, and urban form is of only marginal importance: connection with urban form is an indirect association with occupancy (particularly number of bedrooms) – the smaller the house the less energy used, and the smaller the house the more likely it is to be part of a higher density urban form.



The analysis suggests that there are opportunities for policies designed to improve the environmental and ecological performance of urban areas for any given level of urban density, as frequently happens in Holland