

# CITY2040

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**The pressures on UK cities**  
An opportunity for change

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Executive Summary



## The pressures on UK cities: an opportunity for change

**Successful cities can be characterised as places of exchange and human interaction. They are centres for trade; cultural melting pots offering something for everyone, fostering innovation through proximity and cross-pollination of ideas. UK cities currently account for around 60% of the country's economic output and have been the dominant focus of population growth. The Covid-19 pandemic has sharpened focus on the profound influence of cities: placing them in a less favourable light; revealing risks to living cheek by jowl and brutally exposing how cities fail the most vulnerable in society.**

Cities are remarkable engines of re-invention, with long traditions of transformation in response to public health crises. This ability to innovate will also ensure the future success of cities as the biggest contributors to climate change and the bearers of some of its worst impacts.

Understanding the key trends in urbanisation that are likely to unfold over the coming years is crucial to ensuring that cities remain inhabitable, appealing and that national climate and ecological targets are met.

## About this research

**This study outlines a vision for a thriving future City of 2040 and considers what needs to happen, in terms of urban planning, government policy and investment strategy, in order for us to get there. The specific objectives of the report aim to assist policy makers by setting out a shared vision for UK cities in 2040 and recommending a series of problem-solving approaches to support well-integrated city making with lasting benefits.**

Over 600 experts participated in six challenging debates. These included a diverse range of city stakeholders, senior built environment professionals from both private and public spheres and prominent academic theorists.

The findings of these sessions identified a consensus view on a vision for the 2040 City, highlighting key opportunities, barriers for planning and investment policies, and crucial directions for the strategic design and development of UK cities from the ground up.

## Key themes

**The report focuses on four key themes, through which current and future socio-economic and environmental conditions are explored.**

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### **A. Equity and exchange**

How can future cities accommodate opportunities for change, inclusion and greater equity?

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### **C. Clustering and proximity**

Will UK cities continue to follow a centralised 'wheel and spoke' model, or will the rise of the digital economy bring a renaissance in local growth?

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### **B. Public and private land: Access and use**

How should the funding and governance of urban public spaces evolve to ensure the survival of their character, openness and crucial civic functions?

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### **D. The impact of clean air**

Can cities reverse urban climate change impacts by abandoning silo-thinking in favour of a joined-up approach to sustainable design?

## A vision for City 2040

The outcome of the online debates informed a collective vision for City 2040, summarised below:

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### The future city will become a balanced multi-hub system:

- UK cities can be transformed into a network of local hubs, with a more even spread of population density, commerce, social and cultural facilities and infrastructure provision.
- This does not herald the end of the ‘centre’ or of central business districts (CBDs), but rather envisages an intensification of local centres, with their own characteristics and strong identities.

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### The future city will be hybrid and uncertain – so it should be flexible and complex:

- Cities will increasingly represent a mix of digital and physical commercial realms.
- The future city, will develop a stronger civic infrastructure that better supports new mobile work economy
- There are opportunities for growth and greater equity through creating a sustainable mix of ‘meanwhile’ and ‘permanent’ uses.

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**The future city should embrace health-driven and inclusive planning of urban space by:**

- Strengthening civic rights through improving the accessibility and quality of the public realm.
- Re-investing in the design and stewardship of urban green space.

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**The future city should harness the opportunity of clean air and reverse urban climate change impacts by:**

- Abandoning silo-thinking in favour of agile modes of collaboration.
- Freeing up to 10% of total urban areas as extra amenity space.
- Doubling urban greening and materially reducing road space.
- Adopting circular economy principles in design and construction.
- Facilitating meaningful civic engagement in support of change.





## Summary Conclusions

**It became clear from the six evidence-based sessions on City 2040 that 2020–21 is a moment of opportunity for massive, global change in urban planning. Cities will undoubtedly recover from the impact of Covid-19, but they will do so in ways that will not be the same post- as pre-pandemic. In particular, work patterns have altered dramatically and probably permanently, affecting both daily attendance at formal places of work, the way people choose to meet and liaise and their use of local neighbourhoods. It seems inevitable that this fundamental shift in work will have impacts on the built environment.**

This report finds that though there is great potential for growth, this must take place across the board, focusing on social and environmental improvements, and be implemented in a way that generates more than straightforward economic payback.

Private capital will remain an essential ingredient for success, but with new metrics for gauging the success and sustainability of financial investment, the city as a living, breathing entity will be encouraged to develop in rich and multi-faceted ways.

TaylorWessing

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