Organisation: Design Council

Bidder: Rachel Toms

**Design Council bid for £5,000 research project**

**About us**

The [Design Council](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/) is an enterprising charity working to improve people's lives through the strategic use of design. In 2011, we merged with [CABE](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110118095356/http:/www.cabe.org.uk/news/sustainable-places-launched); together we now champion design-led innovation to stimulate business growth, transform public services and improve places and cities.

Through our [Cities Programme](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/design-support-cities-local-authorities) we help local authorities, developers and designers create buildings, public spaces and neighbourhoods that boost local prosperity, benefit society and improve the natural environment. We provide independent, expert advice on built environment programmes, policies and projects.

We offer the expertise of [400 Built Environment Experts](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/guide/guide-our-built-environment-experts-bees) to fee-paying clients at below-market rates, based on our charitable status, our social purpose and our record of advocacy and support. We provide policy advice and insight to government and collaborate with public bodies including NHS England and Public Health England.

**The topic: healthy place-making**

In the UK, preventable diseases generate unacceptable and unsustainable social and economic costs; deprived communities are [affected disproportionately](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=6&ved=0ahUKEwje6sGzmtDQAhUBCsAKHSwUBSsQFgg4MAU&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.instituteofhealthequity.org%2Fprojects%2Ffair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review%2Ffair-society-healthy-lives-executive-summary.pdf&usg=AFQjCNETDkuZm1sqeGyhqWqu8uSWRdBK5A&sig2=MFpR2AyoiIpAKHQ4nIlpag). The imperative to reduce preventable diseases is a [top priority](https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/5yfv-web.pdf) for the NHS.

Underpinned by [evidence](http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/built-environment-committee/built-environment/written/22901.html), there is now widespread recognition that a significant contributor to preventable diseases such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes, and to loneliness and poor mental health, is the built environment.

Our [Active by Design](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/active-design) programme champions healthy place-making.  This means tackling preventable disease by shaping the built environment so that healthy activities are integral to people’s everyday lives.

Based on the evidence, we identify a healthy place as a neighbourhood that is:

* Compact
* Mixed-use
* Highly walkable
* Free from pollution

These characteristics are in line with established principles of good urbanism, which also supports environmental sustainability, social equity and resilience.

Through our work on development and regeneration projects across the country, we see that despite the evidence, standard practice is to create or transform places in ways that often work against good health outcomes. In schemes to meet housing demand or enable businesses to grow, car-orientated environments and low-density sprawl or hostile towers often predominate. These places often contribute, in one or more ways, to sedentary lifestyles, consumption of unhealthy food, poor social contact, limited contact with nature and/or exposure to pollution.

**Our research proposal**

We are interested in changing the professionals’ behaviour to enable the creation of healthier places. Our research question is:

Why do built environment professionals – architects, urban designers, highway engineers, town planners and others – create places that contribute to preventable disease and early death, despite the evidence?

We are open about the methodology used to answer this but recognise that to generate a robust evidence base we will need a representative sample of professionals.

We wish to use the research findings to:

* Lead a collaboration with other relevant organisations to initiate a fundamental shift in place-making in the UK;
* Develop tools to influence and support the key people (as identified by the research) to create healthier places, in the most effective way;
* Road-test the tools by working with our existing network/clients to create healthier places.