



# Science for Environment Policy

## Surveyed professionals feel local authorities should have more influence in urban density

**Density in the urban environment** can encompass a multitude of factors such as population or dwelling density or the density of green areas. A new study surveyed professionals regarding how decisions on urban density are made, and has revealed that many feel that developers make most of these decisions, but that local authority planners should have more influence.

**Although density is a key element in designing sustainable cities**, there is a lack of information about how individuals who influence [urban](#) development consider density in its different forms. In this study, researchers conducted an online survey of professionals who work in the built-environment sector to gain more insight into these issues.

A total of 129 people, mainly from the UK, responded to the survey. More than half of the respondents were town planners, but other professionals included urban designers, [transport](#) planners and academics, amongst others.

In general, the respondents agreed that the efficient [use of land](#), an increased return on investment and greater use of public transport were the main reasons for increasing density in cities. However, specification of 'high density' was not always clear, for example, respondents differed widely with respect to what they felt constituted high, medium or low density of dwellings.

The majority of respondents (88%) thought that developers were responsible for most of the decisions about density in practice. However, 87% believed that it was local authority policy planners who should be making the majority of these decisions. These findings suggest that developers currently have too much influence and local authorities and other professionals such as urban designers, architects and councillors on planning committees should have a more significant input to density-related decisions.

Most respondents felt that it was important to make density-related decisions at early stages of their work. When asked what resources they used in making decisions about density, the majority of respondents (90%) listed planning policy as the most commonly used resource, followed by guidelines and standards. In addition, respondents relied on past experiences, and, to a lesser extent, colleagues' advice. They also said that knowledge of the local context was extremely useful. This reveals that both formal (e.g. planning policies) and informal resources (e.g. local knowledge) aid decision makers with density-related issues.

The researchers conclude that density-related issues should be taken into account at the early stages of design and planning, and there should be effective collaboration among all stakeholders regarding density decisions. These decisions should not only pertain to population and dwelling density, but to other forms of density as well, such as the density of [natural](#) (e.g. rivers) and mobile (e.g. trains) features within cities that impact urban environments, social practices and behaviour patterns. Furthermore, developers should not make decisions in isolation and an increased influence of local authorities would be welcomed by professionals.



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