

Exploring the links between the quality  
of public space, well-being and health

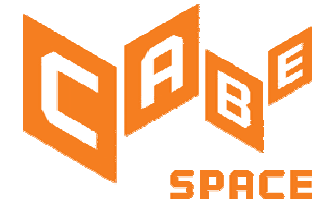
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Commission for Architecture  
and the Built Environment

The government's advisor  
on architecture, urban design  
and public space

# Exploring the links between the quality of public space, well-being and health

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- **Introduction to CABE and what do we mean by good quality public spaces?**
- **Barriers to proving the value of public spaces?**
- **Quality of existing evidence base?**
- **CABE's work to improve the evidence base:**
  - **Research on links between quality public space and physical activity**
  - **Scoping the links between quality of life issues and quality of public space**

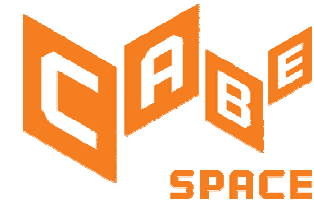


**The government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space.**

A young girl with long brown hair, wearing a pink patterned t-shirt and dark shorts, is running barefoot on a lush green lawn. She has her arms raised and a joyful expression. In the background, many other people are sitting on blankets on the grass, and a dense line of trees separates the park from a city skyline with various skyscrapers under a clear sky.

**Public spaces defined as those spaces that are publicly accessible e.g. parks, squares, streets, play areas and civic spaces**

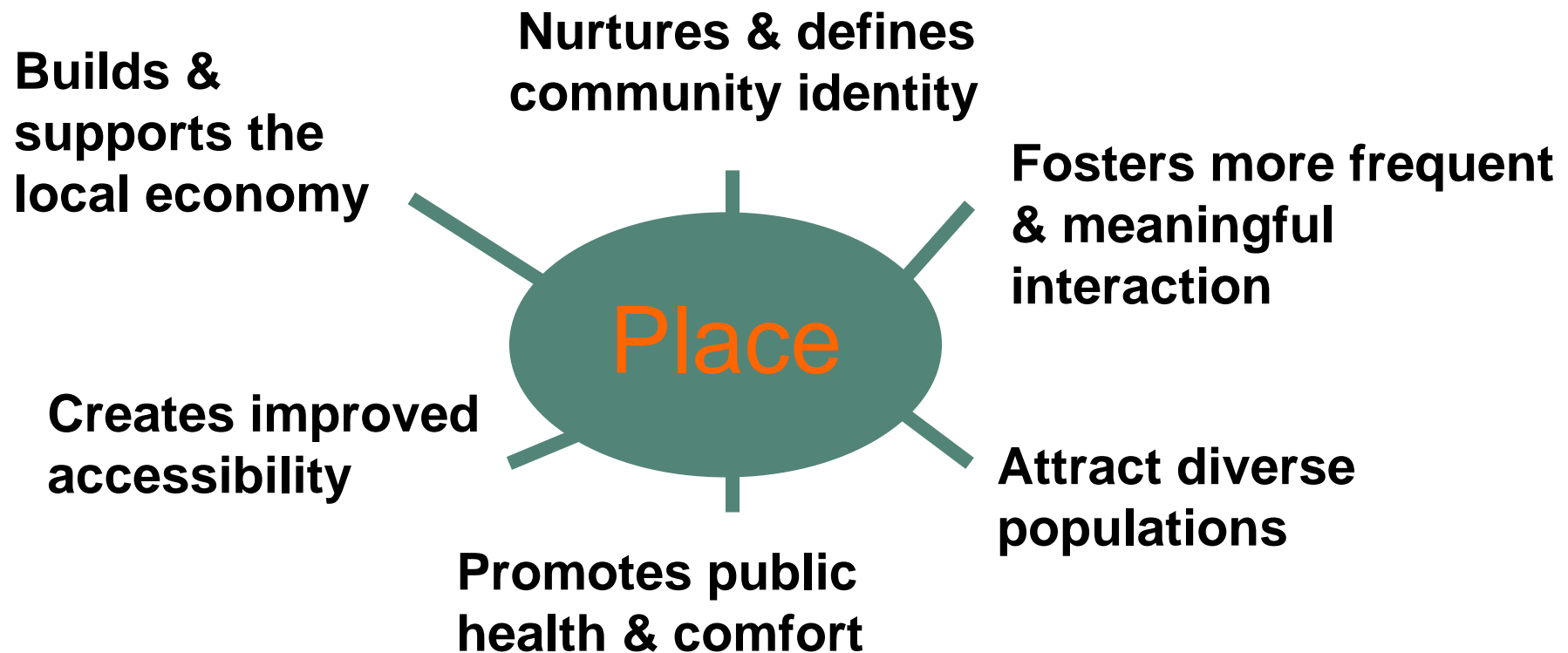
# Aspirations for public space



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- 1. **Clean:** a clean and well cared-for place
  - 2. **Accessible:** a place that is easy to get to and move through
  - 3. **Attractive:** a visually pleasing place
  - 4. **Comfortable:** somewhere that is pleasant to spend time in
  - 5. **Inclusive:** a place that is welcoming to all
  - 6. **Vital and viable:** a place that is well used in relation to its predominant function(s)
  - 7. **Functional:** a place that functions well at all times
  - 8. **Distinctive:** somewhere that makes the most of its character
  - 9. **Safe and secure:** somewhere that feels safe from harm
  - 10 **Robust:** a place that stands up well to the pressures of everyday use

## The Benefits of Good Places?

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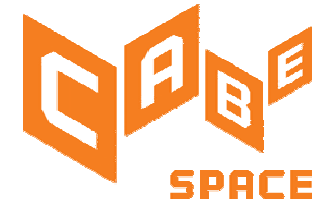


Slide from Project for Public Spaces

[www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org)

## Proving the value of quality of public space: barriers

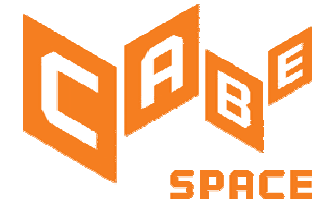
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- **No single, national indicator or dataset on quality**
- **Cleanliness or maintenance information only**
- **No dataset of public space quantity**
- **Deciding specific bundles of characteristics**
- **Combination of objective and subjective indicators**
- **How isolate the impact of public space?**
- **Measurability and data availability driving definitions of quality of life and quality of public space**

## Proving the links between public space quality, well-being and health: State of evidence base?

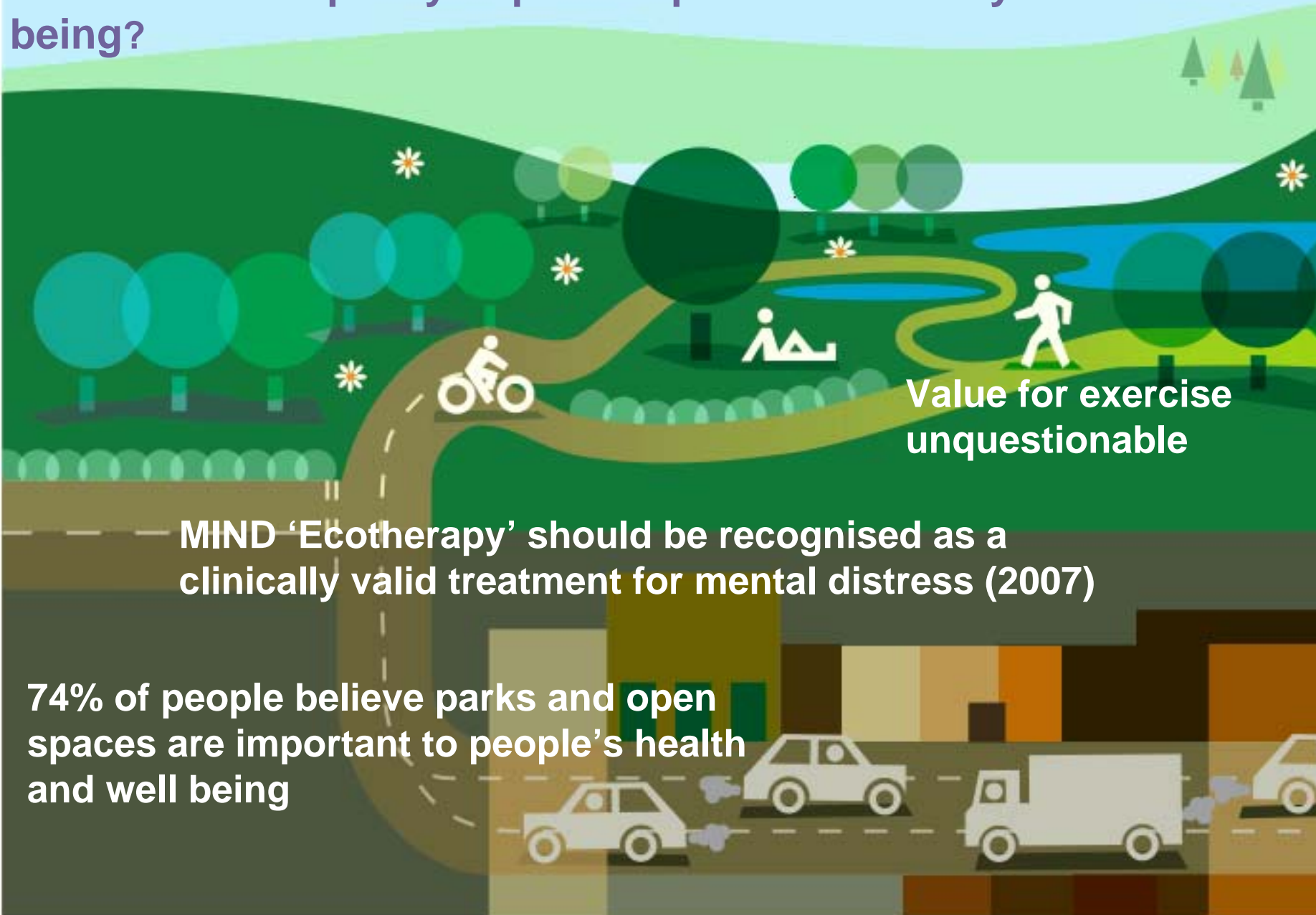
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- **Overall, research presents a clear positive relationship between green space, well-being and health.**
- **BUT: evidence base as a whole is highly variable**
  - **Self – reported data limiting value**
  - **Findings can't support cause and effect, correlations only**
  - **Limited use of objective measurements in physical exercise studies**
  - **Findings not transferable outside specific study context**

**(Source: Greenspace Scotland commissioned critical literature reviews 2007 and 2008)**

## Links between quality of public space and healthy well being?



Value for exercise  
unquestionable

MIND 'Ecotherapy' should be recognised as a  
clinically valid treatment for mental distress (2007)

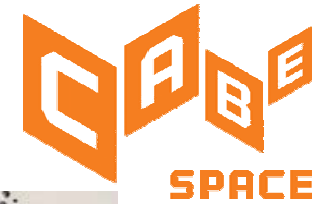
74% of people believe parks and open  
spaces are important to people's health  
and well being

# Features of public space not measured in national datasets

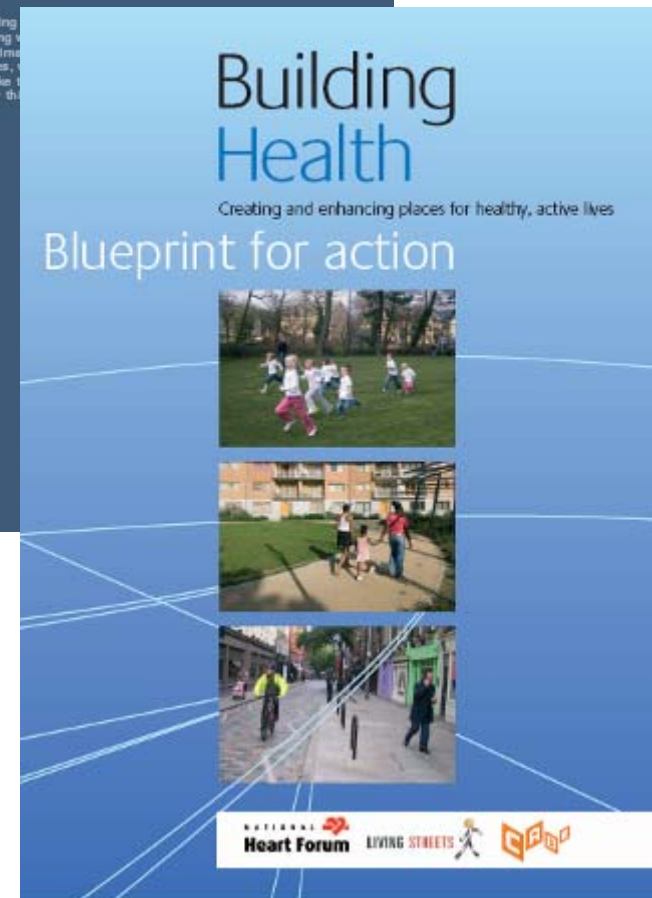


Type of feature of quality of public space	Feature
Condition/maintenance	Robust, Adaptable
Design	Well-designed, Legible Has sense of enclosure
User	Healthy Space for social interaction Fulfilling, Relaxing
Function	Community resource Vital and viable, Functional

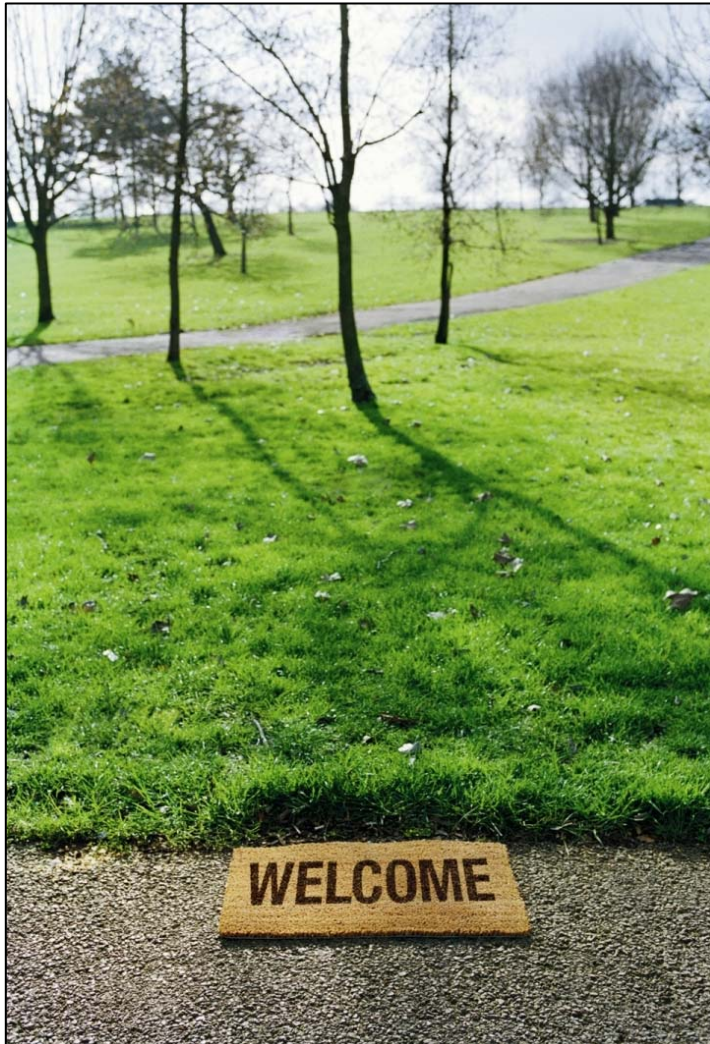
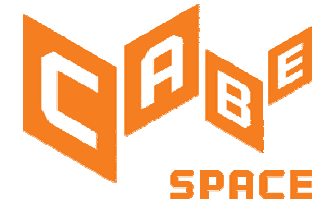
# CABE aims to develop this evidence base further



- Practical guidance *Building Health*
- *Physical Activity and the Built Environment* briefing
- Research on the value of good quality street design
- Value of public spaces for quality of life and levels of physical activity



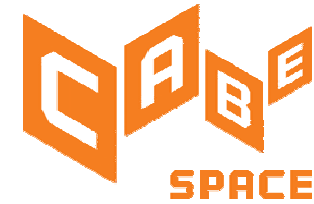
## Relevant research



- **Research on links between quality public space and physical activity (2005)**
- **Scoping the links between quality of life issues and quality of public space (2007 onwards)**

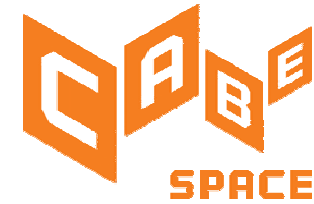
## Assessing the relationship between quality of urban green space and levels of physical activity

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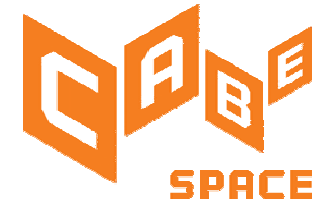
- 1) A review of the literature assessing the relationship between green space and physical activity.**
- 2) An evaluation of local park user's perceptions of what makes a high quality green space/park to inform the development of an audit tool.**
- 3) The development of an audit tool to assess the quality of urban green space in 61 spaces in Norwich.**
- 4) Analysis examining the relationship between the quality of urban green space and level of physical activity.**

## Findings



- **No evidence of clear relationships between any of the three measures of activity and access to green spaces.**
- **Respondents with better access to greenspace were increasingly likely to report that they were an ‘active’ commuter.**
  - **No relationship was observed after weighting for both size and quality**
- **Access to urban greenspaces does not appear to be associated with levels of recreational physical activity in our sample, but there is evidence that good accessibility may encourage active travel to work.**

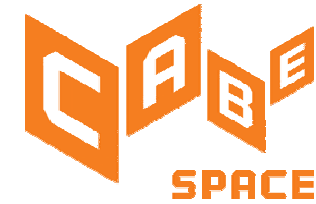
However....



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- **Natural England research, Bristol**
  - **Is perceived or measured access to public open green space associated with green space use, levels of physical activity and obesity?**
  - **Refined methodology**
  - **Benefits of capturing data, over time in a consistent manner**

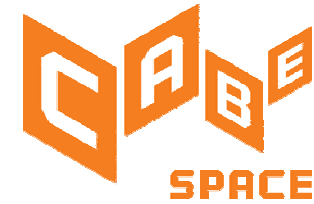
# Linking quality of public space and quality of life: Making the most of existing data

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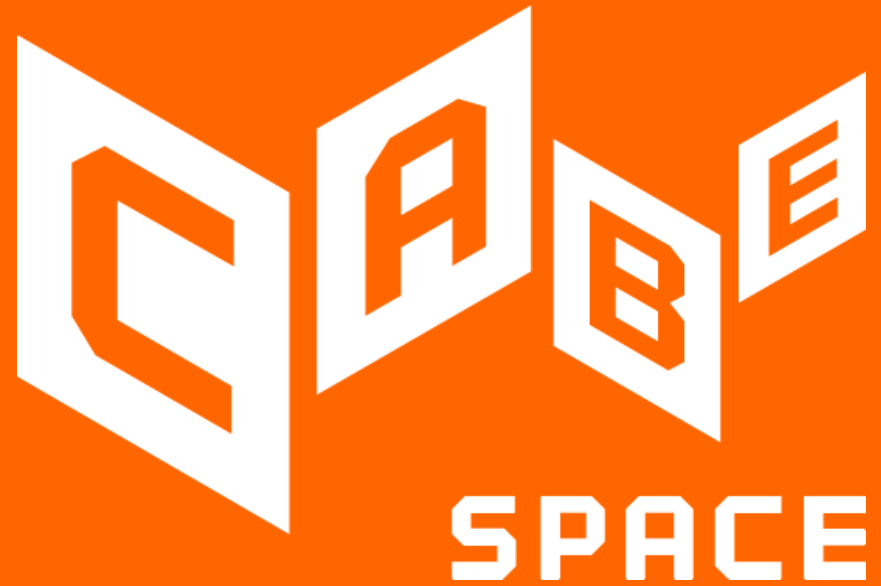


- Initial scoping study
- ‘Not so Green and Pleasant’ research project:
  1. Creating a baseline of evidence of the current state of England’s urban green space
  2. Mapping and understanding the links between deprivation, race and ethnicity and quality of urban green space

## Conclusions



- **Growing the evidence pool: Why don't we have the evidence that we need if we think public space quality is influential to well-being? Why spend money collecting the 'wrong' data?**
- **Moving from housing only to wider neighbourhood approaches**
- **Linking into local and national policy to argue convincingly of value**
- **Public spaces are the one public service everybody uses on a daily basis.**



Thank you.

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