

Part 4 (8 points, 1 point per item). You are going to read a newspaper article about the benefits of living in the city. For questions 43–50, complete the answers by inserting no more than **one** word from the text. There is an example (0).

Inner-city living makes for healthier and happier people

Contrary to popular belief, busy city centres beat suburban living when it comes to human well-being, as socialising and walking make for happier, healthier people. Downtown residents – packed together in tight row houses or apartment blocks – are more active and socially engaged than people who live in the suburbs, according to a report that aims to challenge popular beliefs about city life. Its authors said their findings should make politicians think again about their plans for built-up city living.

“If we can convince policy makers that this is a public health opportunity, we can build well-designed communities, and in the long term you have made a big difference in health outcomes,” its co-author Chinmoy Sarkar told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. “With evidence, we can plan multi-functional, attractive neighbourhoods that allow for physical activity and social interaction, and shield from pollution and crime.”

The study – by Oxford University and the University of Hong Kong (UHK) – showed that in 22 British cities people living in built-up residential areas had lower levels of obesity and exercised more than residents in scattered, suburban homes. “As cities get more and more compact, they become more walkable. In denser residential areas there are better designed and more attractive destinations. We are less dependent on our cars and use public transport more,” he said. Sarkar, assistant professor at UHK, said policies and planning needed to catch up with the data, rather than relying on urban myths about what makes cities work.

The study showed that suburbs with about 18 homes per hectare – such as neighbourhoods near motorways, where driving is the only option – had the greatest rates of obesity and lowest rates of exercise. Suburban areas with few homes – often privileged communities with big gardens – were healthier than this but lagged behind the most densely populated areas in inner cities.

Walking made the biggest difference, and social interaction and physical activity thrived best in compact communities. The study compared more than 400,000 residents of cities – including London, Glasgow and Cardiff – and found the best health came in areas with more than 32 homes per hectare, the average density for new building in Britain.

Sarkar called into question British policies – such as laws to restrict suburban houses from dividing their plots and filling in more homes in gardens – which have sought to preserve suburbia’s open and emptier spaces. In January the government announced it would build 17 new towns and villages across the countryside in a bid to ease a chronic housing shortage. But Sarkar said policy makers should think again before building on green fields.

Despite spiralling house prices and government targets to build a million homes by 2020, Britain’s restrictive planning system has prevented the development of densely populated areas due to fears that it would lead to high-rise, low-quality blocks of flats, according to a government paper released in February. London remains one of Europe’s most sparsely populated major cities compared to Madrid, Barcelona and Paris, and below the level of Milan, Berlin and Rome. The paper urged local authorities to reverse their long-standing opposition to built-up residential areas by highlighting London’s mansion blocks and terraced streets, all of which encourage a strong sense of neighbourhood.

0. A recent report shows that inner-city living may beat life in the suburbs in terms of conditions for physical and social well-being.
43. The report seems to _____ the ideas that many people have about life in cities.
44. Politicians need to understand that creating carefully thought-out and friendly neighbourhoods could lead to desirable _____ in terms of healthcare over a longer time period.
45. For example, the authors of the report suggest that well-planned urban areas could _____ their residents from unpleasant experiences.
46. Also, many popular recreational _____ in inner city areas, such as cinemas and sports centres, can be reached by public transport.
47. Using public transport, however, is not the best _____ if one lives out of town.
48. It turns out that the social and physical well-being of people within individual communities is directly related to the _____ of residential areas.
49. Bearing in mind the need to develop new residential districts, one of the researchers proposes a different way to deal with the _____ of places to live.
50. According to the report, life in densely populated areas will _____ better social relations among the residents.