



**QUALITY
OF LIFE**
FOUNDATION

[The Quality of Life Framework]

Preface

The aim of the Quality of Life Foundation is to improve people's quality of life by making health and wellbeing central to the way we create and care for our homes and communities.

Quality of life describes a person's physical, social and psychological wellbeing. It draws attention to the accumulated impact of the day-to-day, which is the level to which individuals may feel their lives to be happy, active, sociable, interesting and meaningful. It encompasses a multiplicity of desirable conditions that are overlapping and have different scales, but which are partly influenced by the built environment – the buildings and neighbourhoods where people live. We believe that if we can improve this built environment then we can improve people's quality of life.

At the moment, the UK needs more and better-quality homes that improve, rather than diminish, people's health and wellbeing. An estimated 10 million people are living in 4.3 million poor-quality homes, resulting in poor health and a reduced quality of life, and the cost of non-decent homes in England to the NHS is around £1.4 billion per annum. Although many new homes are being delivered, too many are built without people's health and wellbeing in mind, resulting in developments that are of poor quality, badly designed or built in the wrong place.

We should be doing more as a country and society to ensure that no one has poor health just because of the house they live in, and that we create and care for our homes and communities in a way that improve people's quality of life. This framework explores how we can do that.

It is not a design guide (we already have plenty of those). Instead, it brings together all of the work we have done as a Foundation into six overriding themes. For each, it sets out the evidence and suggests what communities, developers and their designers, and local authorities might do to encourage better places to live. It has been designed to be practical and achievable and we also intend to update it over time.

Our hope is that it can become a useful tool - for communities in particular - to explore how they can improve their quality of life.

Professor Sadie Morgan OBE,
Chair, Quality of Life Foundation

This report has been prepared for the Quality of Life Foundation by URBED (Urbanism, Environment and Design).



What is Quality of Life?

Last year the Quality of Life Foundation commissioned a **literature review** to explore what we mean by quality of life and how it is affected by the built environment. The report by Publica concluded that there is broad agreement that quality of life is 'the level to which individuals may feel their lives to be happy, active, sociable, interesting and meaningful'. This can also be understood as a hierarchy of needs from shelter, food and safety up to belonging, self-esteem and self-actualisation.

The literature is also in agreement that the places where we live have a profound effect on our quality of life. The houses we inhabit, the neighbourhoods in which those houses sit, the communities that live in those neighbourhoods, and the facilities, services, transport and open spaces that plug into those neighbourhoods – all contribute to our health and wellbeing.

What is less clear from the literature is what we should do about this; how we should change the way we design and organise our built environment to improve our quality of life. Indeed Publica concludes that for all the proliferation of design guides, good practice and check lists, 'what is notable and alarming... is the overall lack of change in the homes being built'.

They call for a 'new way of thinking' and, while this is undoubtedly needed, we should not fall into the trap of thinking that nothing can be achieved until we change everything. This framework, therefore, seeks to draw on the literature review and the subsequent research done by Social Life

and Kaizen Partnership to explore the effect of the built environment on our quality of life and translate it into practical steps that we can take now to make a difference.

The starting point for the framework was to draw together all of the research and the views of stakeholders to create six themes, each divided into three sub themes giving 18 in total. This Framework is organised around these themes and is designed as both a printed and web-based document as described on the next page. For each theme we have included:

- A statement of intent describing why the theme is important.
- Background to each of the sub themes drawn from the literature review and other research.
- A set of actions that communities, developers/designers and councils might take.
- A link to a case study that illustrates each sub-theme.

Translating these themes into a framework badly is easy enough to do. It would be straightforward to produce a document that everyone agrees with, that describe what the good neighbourhood looks like but stops short of saying how this can be achieved. We have therefore tried to drill-down into what these themes mean in practice, what the evidence says and how conflicts can be resolved.

We realise that every community is different and that local capacity is often limited. We also understand that developers need to ensure that their schemes remain viable and that many councils have faced huge spending and staff cuts.

We have therefore tried to be realistic and practical about what can be achieved. The Quality of Life Foundation is keen for this to become a live web-based document so that new suggestions and case studies can be added over time. Our quality of life is the most precious gift we have and the hope is that this framework can become a collective resource for everyone seeking to improve our built environment.



The six themes

1

Control



4

Wonder



2

Health



5

Movement



3

Nature



6

Community



Using this guide

This guide has been designed to use as both a printed and a web based document. It is organised around the structure set out on the page opposite. Each of the 18 sub-themes has been assigned a symbol that helps navigate the report.

You are very welcome to read the whole of the report but it's not designed to be used in that way. Instead, if you click on any of the symbols to the right you will be taken to the relevant section. This will hopefully allow you to navigate to the issues most relevant to you.

Each of the Themes starts off with a statement of intent and then links to each of the three sub themes. Each of these pages then describes the sub issue with links to suggested action for communities, developers/designers and local authorities and to the case studies.

Each sub-theme has been allocated a case study (provided in a separate document). However, inevitably each case study covers more than just that theme. The case studies therefore include symbols for all of the issues that they are relevant to.



1 Control

| | | |
|-----------|--------|------------|
| | | |
| A | B | C |
| Influence | Safety | Permanence |

4 Wonder

| | | |
|---------|-----------------|-------------|
| | | |
| A | B | C |
| Culture | Distinctiveness | Playfulness |

2 Health

| | | |
|---------|-------------|------------|
| | | |
| A | B | C |
| Housing | Air Quality | Recreation |

5 Movement

| | | |
|-------------------|------------------|------|
| | | |
| A | B | C |
| Walking & Cycling | Public Transport | Cars |

3 Nature

| | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| | | |
| A | B | C |
| Green Space | Biodiversity | Environment |

6 Community

| | | |
|-----------|---------------|----------|
| | | |
| A | B | C |
| Diversity | Opportunities | Services |

Control



When problems occur, as they sometimes do, they are easier to deal with if we feel that we have a degree of control over our situation. This is as true of the home as it is of the neighbourhood. One of the biggest issues that disempowers us is feeling unsafe and vulnerable. A sense of wellbeing comes from believing that there is something that we and our neighbours can do to improve our area and address local problems. This is particularly important when major change is planned where we can be involved through participation and co-design of new development.



1A) INFLUENCE

Including co-production and participation in design, influence over local decisions and potentially involvement in management.



1B) SAFETY

Neighbourhoods where people can feel safe, inside and out and about, at all times of the day and night.



1C) PERMANENCE

Schemes that provide affordable long-term homes with security of tenure.



1A) Influence

At the scale of the neighbourhood, a sense of control can be achieved through community, tenants' and residents' groups, local councillors, neighbourhood watch groups, parish councils, community land trusts, neighbourhood plan groups and civic societies.

It can also include civil society groups such as churches and other places of worship, youth clubs, schools, sports clubs and allotment societies – any organisation that allows local communities to work together to improve the quality of our area and address local problems.

Research for the Quality of Life Foundation by Social Life and Kaizen Partnership has found that it is primarily through our local communities that we experience our quality of life. Furthermore, community ties have strengthened during lockdown, as we have got to know more of our neighbours and worked together to set up local support groups. There is real potential to build on these community links post lockdown.

Control and the neighbourhood

Neighbourhood engagement can take many forms. It is common for community groups to be consulted on issues such as policing, planning and other local government functions.

Sometimes these groups are given a degree of delegated decision-making or a local discretionary budget. This can be expanded into participatory budgeting, where a proportion of the council's budget is allocated by the community either through voting or a community council.

Community groups can also own or manage property. The 2011 Localism Act gives communities the right to bid to run local services and to take over empty public buildings. The Localism Act also allows communities to create their own Neighbourhood Plans that can be adopted as part of the planning system.

In some neighbourhoods, communities have taken on functions like looking after public spaces, using maintenance budgets and employing a local workforce. Communities can also own and run local energy companies generating renewable power and selling it to local people. They can even become developers, creating housing and workspace. All of these activities are linked to increased feelings of wellbeing locally.

Control and Development

It is particularly important to involve local communities when development and other physical works are planned. It is disheartening that research highlighted in the literature review suggests that residents who have recently been involved in consultation are the least likely to trust developers.

In 1969 Sherry Arnstein suggested a ladder of engagement to represent levels of community engagement which can apply to planning and many activities. The original ladder had eight rungs and ranged from 'manipulation' to 'citizen control'. Over the years it has been modified and the version below is the most commonly used.

The level of engagement will depend on what is planned and how it affects the community in question. People living near to a proposal should, at the very least, expect to be 'consulted' or 'involved'. On the other hand, where communities are directly affected, such as the redevelopment of their estates or low traffic neighbourhoods, the community should be treated as clients through 'involvement', 'co-creation' and 'empowerment'.

The Ladder of Participation



CASESTUDY 1A:

OLD TRAFFORD, MANCHESTER

- Manchester
- Mixed Tenure
- 1358 homes



The Carbon Co-op is working with groups in Liverpool to set up local energy networks. Photography: © Carbon Co-op



Designer Influence: St Raphael's Estate 'Neighbourhoods by Design' resident training workshop organised by The Glass-House Community Led Design. Photography: © The Glass-House, 2019



Community Influence: Ashley Vale Self Build Village, Bristol. Photography: © Academy of Urbanism, 2017



What You Can Do

Communities

A good start is to review or audit all of the activity already taking place locally, which is often more than you would think. Bringing these groups together for a structured visioning event can be useful in setting priorities and opening-up a dialogue with the local authority. This can lead to initial activities like litter picks or street parties. There are often small grants available from the council to fund these activities, which can be accessed through local councillors or neighbourhood officers. As confidence, trust and participation grows, more ambitious initiatives can be taken on – who knows where it will take you.

Where development is taking place, communities should demand to be involved. Developers are required to consult with communities before submitting a planning application. Where wider redevelopment is taking place the community should demand to be treated as a partner in the development. They may wish to undertake training to better understand the process and to give them the expertise to get involved.

Developers and Designers

Treat community engagement seriously. Develop a strategy at the outset to identify which communities will be affected by the development and the appropriate level of engagement. Organise workshops and charrettes where there can be a real dialogue with local people rather than just exhibitions and drop-in events.

Councils

Devote staff time and resources to supporting local communities in every ward. A network of community development officers with a small budget can support a wide range of community activities that will help to reduce pressure elsewhere in the council. Consider neighbourhood committees (if they don't already exist) and explore what decisions and spending can be delegated to them.



1B) Safety

One of the most empowering emotions is that of feeling safe and not having to worry about crime.

This unfortunately, is not always possible, even when perceived levels of crime are greater than the actual threat (as is often the case). Safe streets – for ourselves and our family – is central to our quality of life, giving us freedom, particularly after dark. However, many areas suffer from problems with gangs and drugs, with knife crime becoming a particular issue in recent years.

Security and Design

These problems can be exacerbated by the way that neighbourhoods are designed. Large areas of badly-lit, semi-public space for which no one feels responsible breed both crime and fear of crime. By contrast, many traditional urban areas have a very clear distinction between public and private space, the former including streets, squares and parks that are well-lit and overlooked by surrounding buildings and feel safer.

Guidance on designing for crime is provided by the Police's **Secured by Design** initiative, which includes separate documents on housing, commercial space, schools, hospitals and sheltered accommodation. The key message is that security can be achieved through the design of the neighbourhood rather than CCTV, high fences and gated communities.

This should include a clear distinction between the public front of buildings and the private backs. A secure boundary between the two means that people without

the right to do so cannot gain access to private gardens and the rear of properties. The security of streets and other public spaces is ensured by 'passive surveillance', which means that people feel themselves being observed. This includes windows (eyes on the street) as well as passers-by.

There is sometimes a disagreement between Secured by Design practitioners and urban designers about connected streets. The former worry that too many connections lead to higher levels of crime. Urban designers, by contrast, see connected streets as important to generate activity and encourage walkability. Certainly, very quiet streets with no passers-by can feel unsafe in some urban areas but much less so in suburbs.

Cars can be a target for crime and the Secured by Design advice is that cars should be parked within the boundary of the dwelling. Where this is not possible, communal parking and on-street parking should be overlooked by surrounding property and well-lit. The advice also includes measures to protect homes and other premises from crime such as locks, window openings and other security measures.

Security and Community

Having 'eyes on the street' works even when there is no one behind the windows because potential criminals don't know if anyone is home. However, it works even better when people feel able and willing to intervene – something that relates back to a sense of community. This can include Neighbourhood Watch groups and cooperation between communities and the police community liaison officers. It can also include local wardens, concierges, youth workers, park keepers and police community support officers. Some of these roles have diminished or disappeared in recent years, but community management remains an effective tool at increasing safety.

What You Can Do

Communities

In badly affected neighbourhoods, crime and security can be a catalyst to bring community groups together. A good starting point is to look at local crime data that is available from the police, which can be used as the basis for discussion with local police liaison officers. This can be developed into projects targeted at crime hot spots, which might include improved lighting, the removal of bushes, cleaning litter and graffiti, changing streets, installing CCTV and setting up a neighbourhood watch group.

Developers and Designers

Consult the police when designing a new urban development and consider the level of crime locally. Make sure there is a very clear distinction between public and private spaces and ensure that the former are well-lit and overlooked.

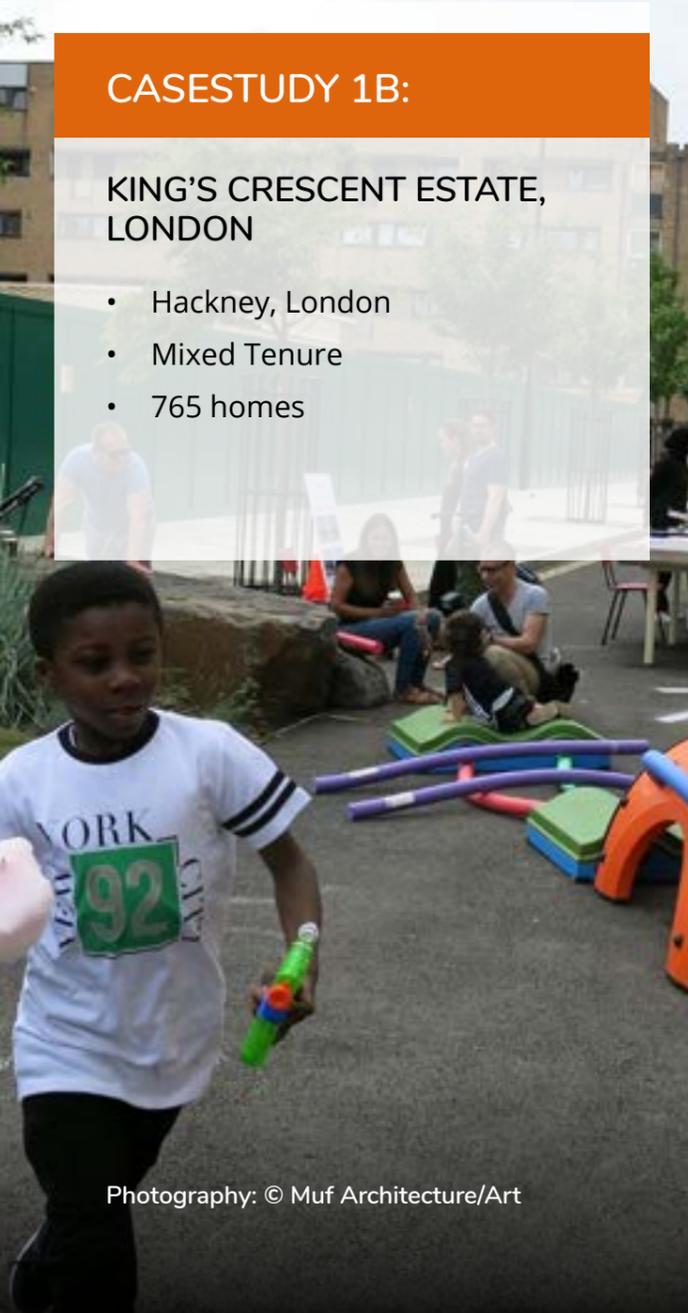
Councils

Build strong links with communities and the police and encourage the establishment of neighbourhood watch groups. Support, as far as budgets permit, the provision of local youth facilities and workers along with initiatives that address gangs and knife crime.

CASESTUDY 1B:

KING'S CRESCENT ESTATE, LONDON

- Hackney, London
- Mixed Tenure
- 765 homes





1C) Permanence

Feeling secure within our homes is vital to our wellbeing. This relates to the quality of housing (see Health section) but also to affordability, security and permanence. These are some of the attractions of home ownership, even though they can be illusory for a mortgage-dependent family struggling to meet their monthly payments. A sense of control can be even more of a challenge in rented housing, particularly in the private rented sector.

Management

Social landlords can do much to empower their tenants through consultation and engagement. This can also include Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) where the responsibility and budget for managing the block is devolved to an organisation controlled by elected tenants.

Despite the problems that have come to light as a result of the Grenfell disaster, TMOs can be a valuable tool in empowering tenants and ensuring that management regimes are more responsive to their needs. There is also great value in cooperatives, community housing associations and co-housing schemes where residents have even more control over the development and management of their housing.

In private blocks, residents' committees can be established. Some developers have provided financial support for early social activities to help new residents get to know each other. This can take place face-to-face and on social media through Facebook and WhatsApp forums. Some residents' groups in private blocks have used Leasehold Enfranchisement legislation to buy the freehold of their block, even going on to develop more accommodation.

Security

Nearly 40% of the UK population live in rented accommodation. Rising house prices make it difficult for young people to buy their first home, and the proportion of people aged 65 and over who are renting is on the rise. One way to improve the rental sector is to allow tenants to personalise property by painting walls, hanging pictures and selecting furnishings, all of which offer a degree of ownership over their living space and give a greater sense of permanence.

CASESTUDY 1C:

LILAC, LEEDS
(LOW IMPACT AFFORDABLE
LIVING COMMUNITY)

- Leeds
- Mutual Home Ownership
- 20 homes



Community Secureness: Marmalade Lane Co-Housing, Cambridge. Photography: © TOWN



What You Can Do

Communities

If the place where you live does not have any form of resident group, start by setting up a WhatsApp Group to get a discussion going. Contact your landlord and maybe organise an initial social event to gauge interest. This can develop as far as residents wish, maybe staying as a consultative forum but possibly taking on more responsibilities. At their most ambitious, this could include self-build initiatives, cohousing groups or housing cooperatives.

Developers and Designers

Invest a little time and resource into helping new residents get to know each other and to start to establish community structures. Work with your management company to ensure that there are opportunities for resident input.

Councils

Do what you can to build council houses. Since the borrowing cap on council house building was removed in 2018, some 20,000 council homes have been built using borrowing and reserves. While this is some way short of the 300,000 council homes a year built in the 1960s, it is an important intervention that provides affordable secure housing. Many councils have set up local housing companies developing housing for sale, market rent and social rent that provide cross subsidy as well as creating mixed communities.





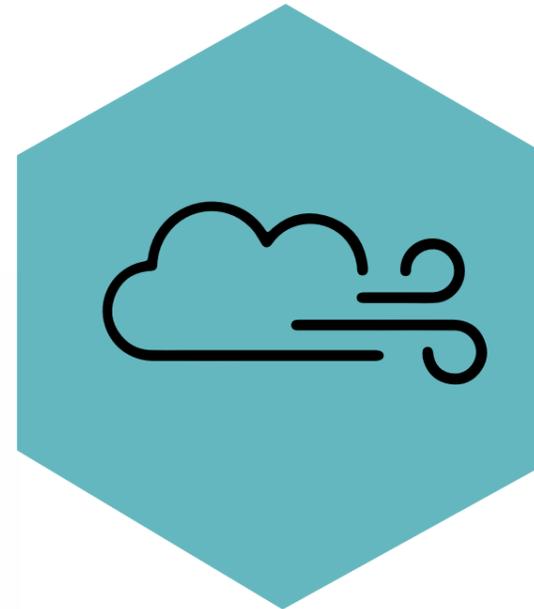
Health

Our health is crucial to our quality of life. The difference in life expectancy between affluent and deprived areas can be more than ten years, even for adjacent neighbourhoods. This health inequality is partly due to lifestyle, including smoking, diet, alcohol and exercise, but the quality of housing has a sizeable impact, as does the local environment, which might include opportunities for exercise, air quality and noise level. Looking forward, we want to help communities create neighbourhoods that allow people to pursue healthy lifestyles.



2A) HOUSING

Well-designed and built homes with adequate space, that can adapt to the changing needs of their occupants, for example to allow home working or changes in family circumstances.



2B) AIR QUALITY

Poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK. Healthy places where planting is abundant and where people can walk and cycle positively impacts air quality.



2C) RECREATION

Places nearby for exercise: cycling, walking and playing sport





2A) Housing

The quality of housing relates to the way it is designed, the amount and flexibility of space, levels of comfort (neither too hot nor too cold), indoor air quality, sound insulation, ventilation, daylight levels and external space.

This has been a particularly important issue in the Covid-19 lockdowns where people are forced to spend much more time in their homes as chronicled by the Social Life/ Kaizen Partnership survey. This is partly about having enough space, but it is also about the flexibility to use space in different ways and this does not necessarily mean open-plan spaces. Separate kitchens, living rooms and bedrooms can be used for different activities by various household members. There are also concerns with flats created using Permitted Development Rights, including flats with very small floor areas and even in a few cases no windows!

Space Standards

In 1961 the Parker Morris Committee detailed a set of housing standards in their report [Homes for Today and Tomorrow](#). This was based on an ergonomic study of how different households lived. The standards became Government guidance in England and Wales in 1963 and similar guidance was adopted in Scotland. While the council estates built to these standards have not always succeeded, the internal design of the homes has rarely been surpassed.

After the abolition of Parker Morris in 1980, the size of UK housing fell. A RIBA report [The Case for Space](#) written in 2011 showed that the average private new build home in the UK was only 92% of the recommended minimum in Parker Morris. The authors conclude we have the smallest homes in Europe and that this has real consequences on our health, family relationships and the educational attainment of children.

Since that time many councils have introduced minimum space housing standards. The most influential is the GLA's [London Housing Design Guide](#) published in 2010 that covers the overall size of homes, circulation, the size of different rooms, storage, home working and external space.

In 2015 the Government published [Nationally Described Space Standards](#). These apply to England and include minimum areas for new housing based on how many bedrooms, bed spaces and storeys the home has. These standards are the same as the London Guide and also include some guidance on minimum sizes for bedrooms and storage space. Local authorities are able to apply these standards through the planning system provided that they have considered viability and demonstrated 'local need'. Currently, there are no equivalent space standards in Wales and Scotland.

Accessibility

An important aspect of housing standards is accessibility, not simply so people can continue living in their homes if they become disabled, but also if they begin a family and need access for a double buggy or just want to move furniture and benefit from wider doorways and level access. Accessibility is currently covered by Building Regulations which are different in England and Scotland and Wales. Broadly there are three levels:

- **Visitable:** Homes that are visitable by people with disabilities, particularly wheelchair users. This requires that there is level access to the main living room and a WC on the entrance floor.
- **Lifetime Homes:** Homes that are 'accessible and adaptable', meaning that if the occupant becomes disabled the house can be converted to their needs (also sometimes known as the '[Lifetime Homes Standard](#)').
- **Accessible:** Homes that are either laid out to accommodate wheelchairs, but not yet fitted out, or are fully accessible for a wheelchair user.

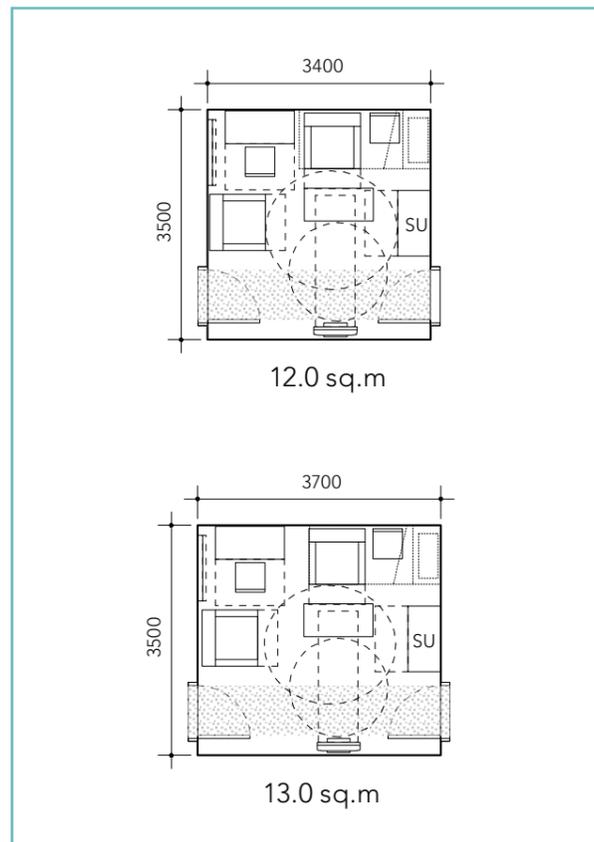
The English Building Regulations only require developers to build to the first of these levels but local planning policy can go further. The Scottish regulations go a little further but stop short of the second level.

Accessible homes should be adapted to the needs of the occupier so it wouldn't be sensible to apply to all housing. The debate is over Lifetime homes and many people argue that, because any of us could become disabled, all homes should be adaptable. This is something that communities may want to consider particularly where many local people are older. Given our ageing population, it is imperative that we plan for our future as well as current needs, so that all homes meet the needs of all ages.

CASESTUDY 2A:

DERWENTHORPE, YORK

- York
- Mixed Tenure
- 500+ homes



An extract from the London Housing Design Guide

Comfort

The environment inside the home has a huge impact on health. People need to be able to heat their homes in a way that is affordable (we return to this in the Nature section).

For energy efficient homes care also needs to be taken to avoid overheating. Poor ventilation can harm the internal air quality and lead to condensation and mould. Levels of daylight and sun have a huge impact on mental health and can be a particular problem on the lower floors of high-density schemes. Noise is also an important issue both between neighbouring properties and within the home between rooms.

These issues are dealt with through a combination of the Building Regulations and Planning. England, Scotland and Wales also have 'Decent' or 'Quality' Homes standards but these only apply to social housing, setting the minimum standards for energy efficiency, condition and warmth. Although these set minimum standards, communities may want to go further.



Full Scale modelling to test room sizes at Homebaked Bakery. Photography: © URBED

What You Can Do

Communities

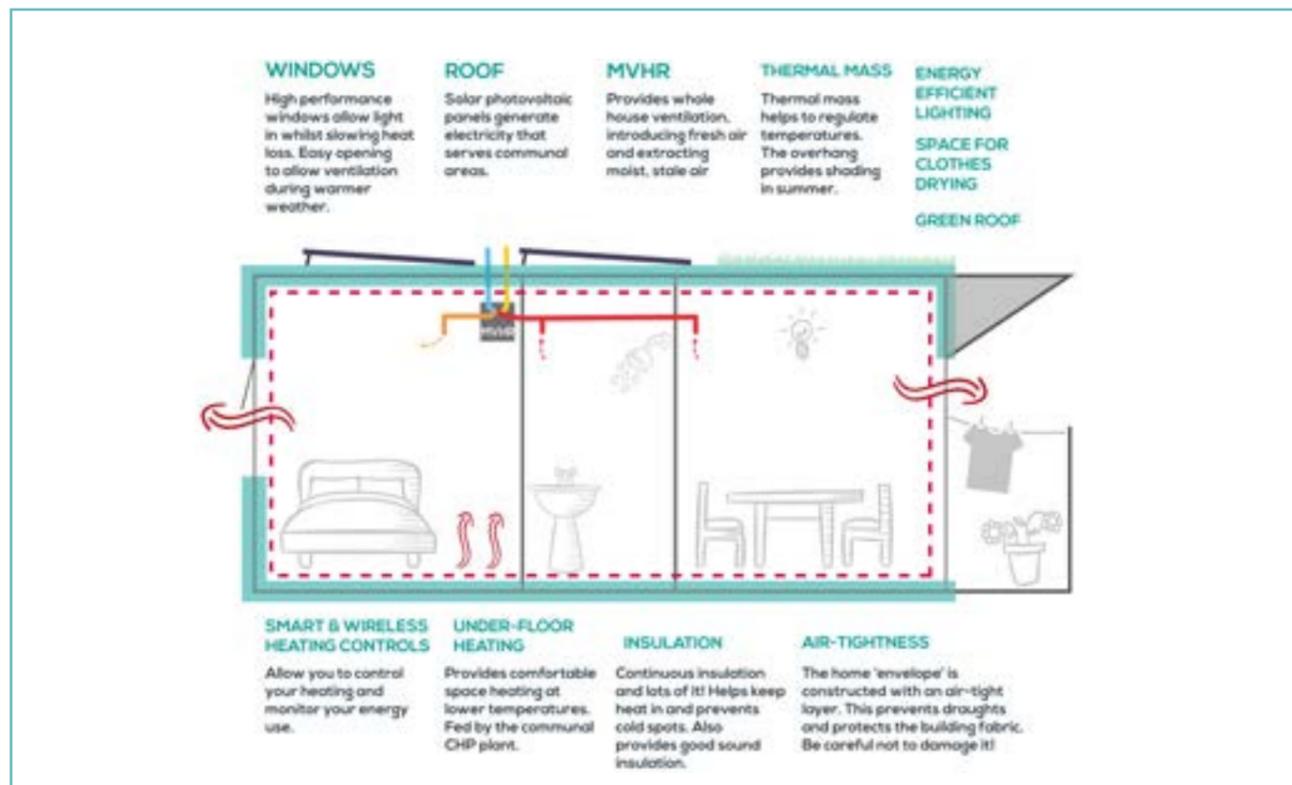
Pressure your local planning authority to include the Nationally Described Space Standards in local policy. Where groups are involved in developing new homes they should take an interest in the proposed house types and compare them to the London Housing Design Guide. It might even be possible to source some large sheets of cardboard and create full-scale models of the house interiors in a local community centre (see picture, left).

Developers and Designers

Include space standards in the brief for all new housing and consider whether it is appropriate to use Lifetime Homes. Undertake daylight and overshadowing studies, particularly in high-density schemes, considering both the development and existing accommodation in the surrounding area.

Councils

Include the Nationally Described Space Standards in local planning policy and consider the application of Lifetime Homes. Check the space standards of all planning applications and the implications of daylight and overshadowing.



Home User Guide for household comfort. Image: © URBED





2B) Air Quality

Poor air quality, both outdoors and indoors, is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK and therefore to our quality of life.

12% of the population have been diagnosed as asthmatic and long-term exposure to pollution causes cardiovascular and respiratory diseases as well as lung cancer. Even short-term exposure to pollution is linked to an increase in hospital admissions. [A Government report](#) in 2018 estimated that there are 28-36,000 annual deaths in England as a result of air pollution. This may be half the number of deaths due to Covid-19 but it happens every year.

Pollution has the greatest impact on the those in later life, pregnant women and children where it can have a long-term effect on birth weight and development. This is also linked to noise, which can also have a corrosive effect on health. In both cases, people got a taste of what neighbourhoods could be like during lockdown in 2020 where air pollution fell and people could once more hear the birds sing. However, as lockdown was lifted, large parts of our cities once more experienced poor air quality, which disproportionately affects poorer neighbourhoods and those next to main roads.

Pollution 'particulate matter', Nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, Ammonia Ozone, Carbon Monoxide and Volatile Organic Compounds; in the past, the main source of pollution was industry and domestic coal fires, particularly in the cities. Clean air legislation has improved emissions from these sources (with the exception of the recent popularity of wood burning stoves). The problem today is largely

related to transport; both emissions from vehicles (particularly diesels) and particles from tyre and brake wear.

Low Emissions Zones

Part of the solution to this lies in the hands of local government. London has led the way with Congestion Charging and Low Emissions Zones which charge vehicles to drive within the designated area. The recently introduced Ultra Low Emission Zone in London include daily charges that make it largely unviable to drive a polluting vehicle. These initiatives have already had a significant impact on pollution levels in London, reducing NOx emissions from transport by up to 45 per cent and roadside NO2 levels by 44 per cent. Schemes are being considered by the other large cities although they are often subject to significant opposition. Local communities might consider adding their support to councils who are introducing these schemes. At the local level, Low Traffic Neighbourhoods also have a potential role as described in the Movement section.

Indoor Air Quality

Understanding and controlling pollutants is also important for indoor air quality. Poor ventilation and high humidity often lead to a build-up of moisture and mould, which produces allergens, irritants and, sometimes, toxic substances leading to asthma. Poor indoor airflow can also make occupants drowsy and less able to concentrate.

Natural ventilation from opening windows can be enhanced with mechanical systems, particularly in wet rooms such as bathrooms and kitchens. Many modern building materials – including adhesives, treated timber, paints, plastics, furnishings and fabrics – contain toxic chemicals. Low allergen design should be encouraged, aiming to avoid these products and wherever possible use green specification materials.

What You Can Do

Communities

Voice your support for your local council if they are proposing low emissions zones and engage in the debate to try and balance the needs of car users with the benefits to the wider community. Communities might also experiment locally with trial road closures, maybe for a street party or a play street, just to get local people used to the idea.

Developers and Designers

Consider air quality and noise in the design of schemes both in terms of not adding to the problem and avoiding placing housing and other vulnerable uses such as schools in parts of the site that have high noise levels or poor air quality.

Councils:

Monitor and publish air quality data and consider introducing low emissions zones.

CASESTUDY 2B:

HACKNEY AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN

- Population of Hackney: 281100 people
- 50 schools involved
- 17 school streets planned





2C) Recreation

Exercise encompasses everything from going for a walk to jogging and cycling, children's play and organised sports. Opportunities for all of these activities close to home are a vital part of a healthy neighbourhood and space standards are an important way of assessing the level of local provision.

The recommended amount of open space locally can be measured in two ways and the starting point will be to see how your neighbourhood fares. The most commonly used is the Fields in Trust or FIT standard (what used to be known as the National Playing Field Association Standard). This suggests that there should be the following areas of open space per thousand people:

- 1.6 ha of sports pitches
- 0.55ha of play space
- 0.8ha of parks and gardens,
- 0.6ha of amenity green space,
- 1.80ha of natural green space per 1000 people.

The result is a potential 5.35ha of open space per 1,000 people which is great but may be unrealistic, especially in urban areas. It would, for example, account for a third of the land in a typical suburban housing scheme of 40 dwellings/ha and half the land in an apartment scheme of 120 dwellings/ha, squeezing the land available for

development. The standard does, however, include existing open space. So the starting point is to add up all of the existing open spaces in your neighbourhood and see how close you are to the above standards.

An alternative approach is to use 'accessibility standards'. These set out the maximum distances that people should have to travel to different types of open space. This allows residential densities to be increased without increasing the requirement for open space. The table below shows the Fields in Trust and Natural England Accessibility Standards. The latter are in the process of being incorporated into national policy in England.

Everyone should be within...

| Fields in Trust | Natural England |
|---|--|
| 3.2km of a country park | 10km of an area of green space of at least 500ha |
| 1200m of sports pitches | 5km of an area of green space of at least 100ha |
| 1000m of a Neighbourhood Equipped Area of Play (NEAP) | 2km of an area of green space of at least 20ha |
| 720m of a natural green space | |
| 710m of a public park | |
| 700m of a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) | |
| 480m of Amenity green space | 300m of an area of at least 2ha |
| 400m of a Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAP) | |
| 100m of a Local Area of Play (LAP) | |

CASESTUDY 2C:

CONSWATER, BELFAST

- Greenway serving 40,000 residents



What You Can Do

Communities

The starting point is to understand the current provision in your neighbourhood. How much recreational space of different kinds are there compared to the FIT Standard? The next step is to draw circles around these spaces based on the table above to see which areas are accessible to these green spaces. The result will provide an understanding of the level of local provision. This can be used to lobby developers to provide more open space as part of a new development and perhaps to get better access to existing provision such as school playing fields.

It is also important to look at the quality of spaces, the levels of lighting and maintenance. Councils are often very open to working with communities as partners in managing spaces. The community is also important in running sports clubs and organised recreation like Park Runs and Sunday morning football.

Developers and Designers

Consider an open space strategy for new development. How much open space is available locally and how will the scheme add to demand for this. The initial brief for the scheme should therefore include a land use budget setting out how much open space of different kinds is to be included in the scheme.

Councils

Develop an open space and recreation policy if one does not already exist applying these standards to each neighbourhood and identifying areas of deficiency.





Nature

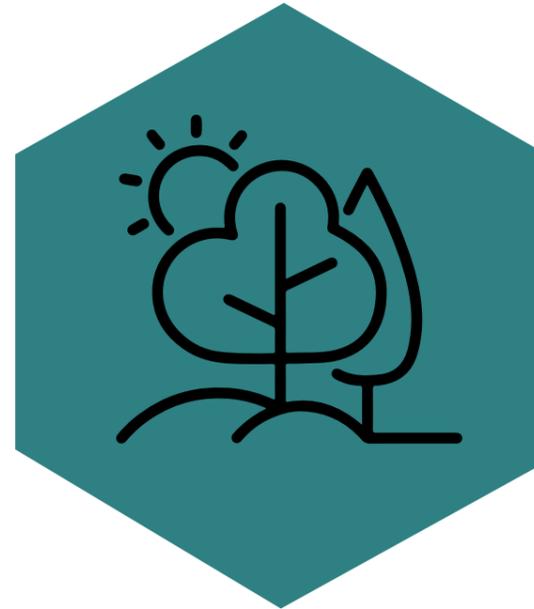


Contact with nature on a day-to-day, hour-by-hour and minute-by-minute basis is central to our wellbeing as humans. Many studies have shown that contact with nature, even just a green view from our window, is good for our mood and aids our recovery when we are ill. We need to green our towns and cities at every level, from our window boxes to the great parks, and maintain access in the countryside. We also need to respect the environment in the way we construct our homes to minimise carbon use and reduce the use of toxic materials.



3A) GREEN SPACE

Access to outdoor space both public and private, including parks and green spaces near at hand.



3B) BIODIVERSITY

The extensive incorporation of trees, planting and biodiversity to offer everyone daily interaction with nature.



3C) GREEN HOMES

Developments and homes that minimise whole-life carbon in construction and materials, and energy demand in use, and that avoid toxic materials.





3A) Green Space

Most of the country is covered in green space. More than 90% of the UK consists of pasture, arable land, forests, moors, wetland, natural spaces and the green spaces within our towns and cities.

This green space can be brought into cities as green fingers along river valleys, canals and former railway lines. It can form a network linking natural spaces within urban areas along with parks and formal green spaces such as school grounds, sports pitches and cemeteries. This in turn can link to local spaces like village greens, pocket parks, play areas, community gardens, allotments and urban farms. All of these spaces can be linked by streets with verges, trees and planters. There are also private gardens and courtyards which can have the richest biodiversity of all. Even within buildings, there are balconies and window boxes, green roofs and walls.

While greenery is good for our wellbeing this does not mean that the more green space there is in cities, the better. In the past, the architect Le Corbusier went as far as lifting his blocks on piloti (columns) so that everywhere could be grass. However, you can have too much of a good thing if it means that there is so much green space that there aren't enough people to support shops, facilities and public transport. Towns and cities can be greened without grassing every piece of space.

Garden sizes

One of the lessons of lockdown is the importance of outdoor private space in the form of gardens and balconies. The London Housing Design Guide includes minimum sizes of 5m² of external space for a 1- to 2-person property with an additional 1m² per additional person. Outside London, you might expect gardens to be a lot bigger than this. The London guide also suggests that balconies should be at least 1.5m by 1.5m to allow them to be used for dining.

Communal space is also important, especially for flats. This can include courtyards and roof gardens which can be used for recreation, children's play, barbecues and food growing. It can also include the street that can be turned into a home zone or play street, creating space where the community can come together.



Shared communal gardens in Hyndland, Glasgow.
Photography: © URBED

What You Can Do

Communities

Do an audit or review of your green spaces – not just the recreational space mentioned in 2c, but all green spaces from parks to private gardens. How much space is there? How many trees? How much is publicly accessible? Google Earth photos can be useful in doing this. Is there space that needs to be improved? Or that could be taken over by the community?

Developers and Designers

Develop an open space strategy for schemes and work with a landscape architect to make the most of this space for recreation, wildlife and amenity. Provide all homes with private external space, including balconies that are big enough to have a meal on and gardens large enough to host a children's party.

Councils

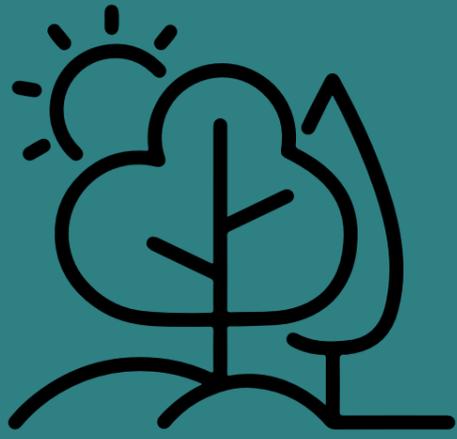
Ensure that the open space policy includes all types of green space, including habitats and nature areas. Audit council-owned open space and management regimes to ensure that it is used more efficiently. Use [Building with Nature](#) to deliver high-quality green infrastructure and show what good looks like at each stage of the development process.

CASESTUDY 3A:

PORT LOOP BIRMINGHAM

- Birmingham
- Market Sale/ Shared Ownership
- 1150 homes





3B) Biodiversity

Green spaces are an opportunity for so much more than grass and a few trees. There is no reason why every view within an urban area should not be full of vegetation, why every patch of land, street verge, wall and roof shouldn't be planted with native species providing havens for wildlife and biodiversity.

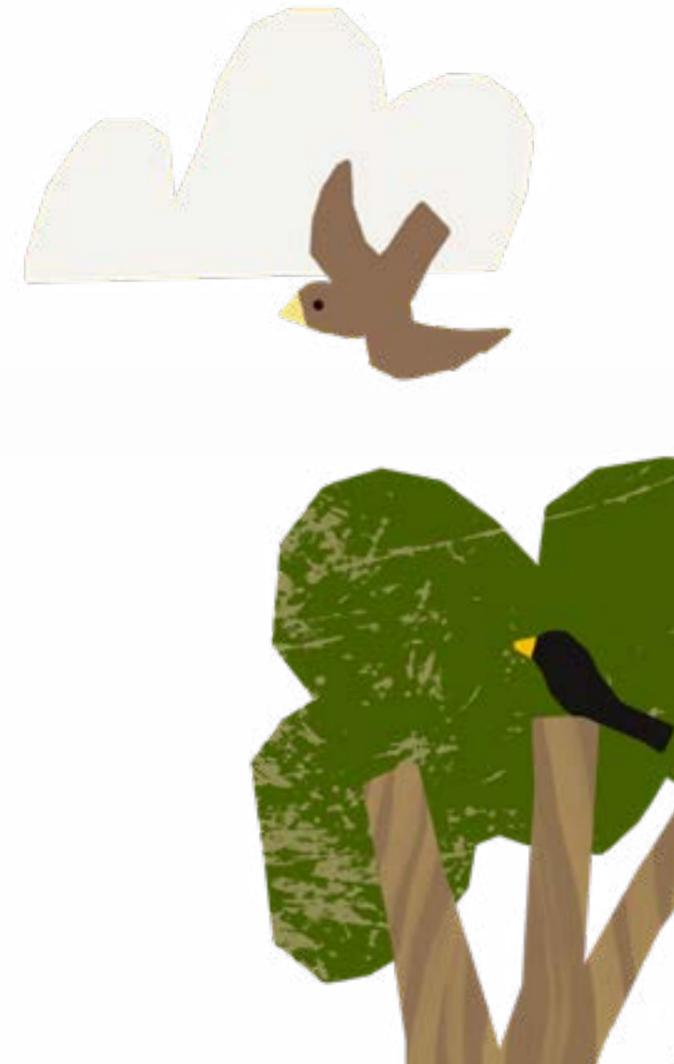
This is good not just for the natural world but for so much more. The theory of Biophilia suggests that we have an innate tendency to seek connection with nature and that looking at greenery is good for our mental health. Having a green view from a window even speeds up our recovery in hospital. Vegetation also helps improve air quality, provides shading and cooling and can reduce noise pollution.

There may be local people willing to take on a patch of green space as a community garden or allotments; even growing food on public land inspired by Incredible Edible in Todmorden. Initiatives can include community orchards and food growing areas, where residents can come together to plant, harvest, share and maintain food production. There may be scope to create planters on the high street and in school grounds, place hanging baskets on lamp posts and window boxes for residents to personalise.

Public parks, gardens and play spaces also provide great opportunities for supporting positive mental health and wellbeing by connecting with nature, engaging the senses, meeting with others and engaging in physical exercise.

All of these spaces should be designed to support wildlife; using indigenous species and those that provide food for pollinating insects and habitats for native wildlife such as nesting sites for birds and ponds for aquatic animals. These can be integrated into Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems using features such as rain gardens and swales to combine practical drainage with habitat creation.

Communities have also stopped councils spraying herbicides and brought about change to management regimes to leave some grassed areas uncut to plant wildflower meadows. Even in the most urban areas, there are many opportunities for planting and greening, and the community can be a catalyst for making this happen.



CASESTUDY 3B:

BARTON PARK OXFORD

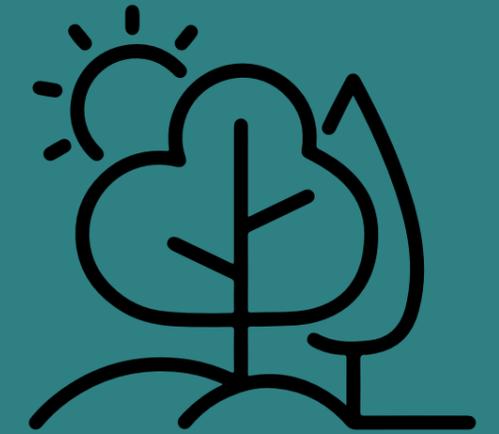
- Oxford
- Mixed Tenure
- 855 homes



The Whalley Rangers in Manchester have taken over weeding pavements as part of the 'Streets without Herbicides' project. Photography: © H el ene Rudlin



Incredible Edible community growing in Todmorden have planted up grass verges and public spaces for food growing. Photography: © URBED



What You Can Do

Communities

When auditing local green space, count the species of plants and trees as well as birds, insects and mammals. Maybe you could do a moth night to survey the local population. Identify spaces where the community could do planting and seek agreement to take on the land for a temporary period if possible. Work with councils and other landowners to change maintenance regimes, leave grass uncut and plant wild flower meadows.

Developers and Designers

Consider the design and management of all new open spaces to maximise their amenity impact and habitat value. Consider including bird and bat boxes in new buildings, as well as opportunities for green roofs and walls and plant trees on all new streets.

Councils

Develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy as set out in the forthcoming Environment Bill to map and plan for the enhancement of habitats and wildlife. Consider Council Adoption Policy for streets and open spaces to ensure that it does not deter the planting of street trees and the creation of naturalised habitats.



3C) Environment

The impact that our buildings, and in particular our homes, have on the environment is also an important factor to consider. This includes energy efficiency and carbon emissions associated with the use of the building, along with the energy used in construction, toxic materials and measures to reduce water use and recycle waste. These are vital for the health of the planet, which of course will impact everyone's quality of life.

Energy Efficient Homes

The English and Scottish governments are introducing phased energy efficiency standards for new homes. The Future Homes Standard in England is phasing in standards that will phase out fossil fuel heating by 2025 and seek a 75-80% reduction in energy use, allowing homes to become zero carbon once the electricity grid is decarbonised. Scotland has similar measures to be implemented by 2024.

This will be included in the Building Regulations. Communities can press for higher standards to address the climate emergency and to improve the comfort and affordability of individual dwellings. One of the most widely used is **Passive House** which uses a combination of

insulation, renewable energy, airtightness and ventilation to reduce energy demands by 90% compared to a typical dwelling.

Neighbourhood Energy Strategies

Energy use can also be addressed at the neighbourhood scale, and Scotland is currently introducing legislation to promote local heat networks. Local energy master plans include the 'retrofit' of existing properties to make them more energy efficient either through landlords or assistance to individual householders. They can also include renewable energy such as air, water and ground source heat pumps, photovoltaic panels, wind and even low-speed hydroelectric power (if you have a suitable watercourse). These can be combined to create decentralised low-carbon energy systems providing local heat and power, balancing supply and demand at the local level, managed by communities using IT infrastructure.

Sustainable Construction

It is important to think about the environmental impact of construction. Embodied energy refers to the energy used in the construction, maintenance, refurbishment and demolition of buildings. It accounts for 40% of a building's total carbon emissions rising to 70% in ultra-low energy buildings. Advice by **LETI** suggests we should be targeting a reduction of 40% in embodied energy rising to 65% by 2030. We can do this by reducing energy used in construction, reusing materials and designing for disassembly so that the carbon locked in the building can be reused in future.

It is also important to consider the impacts of extraction, pollution, ozone, water use and waste disposal. This can be done through the **Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment System (BREEAM)** which rates buildings as 'Pass', 'Good', 'Very Good', 'Excellent' and

'Outstanding'. There is also a **Home Quality Mark** for new homes and a **Civil Engineering Environmental Quality Assessment** for infrastructure and public realm schemes.

Water

Parts of the country are in areas of 'water stress' and it is important that buildings minimise their water use. Measures include action to reduce leaks, water metering, efficient appliances and taps, rainwater harvesting and grey water recycling systems.

A good target is 105 litres per person, per day, plus 5 litres for external use. However, some schemes might aim for 'Water Neutrality', which is defined by the Environment Agency as: 'For every new development, total water use across the wider area after the development must be equal to or less than total water use across the wider area before development.'

CASESTUDY 3C:

LAMMAS ECO-VILLAGE, SWANSEA

- Swansea
- Social Housing
- 30 homes

Photography: © Lammas.org.uk



Goldsmith Street, Norwich, the largest Passivhaus scheme in the UK. Photography: © Mikhail Riches



What You Can Do

Communities:

Where communities are commissioning or refurbishing buildings or developing new houses, it is important to agree on the environmental specification at the outset. This should include specific targets rather than general aspirations and should be monitored throughout the design and construction process, and post occupancy. Where communities are commenting on development they should ensure that developers do the same. Communities might also want to develop a community energy scheme for their area, looking at opportunities for renewable energy and retrofit. This could develop into a local energy network controlled by local people.

Developers and Designers:

Stop making vague statements of your commitment to the highest environmental standards and then trying to retrofit measures into schemes that have already been designed. Set clear environmental targets at the outset and make meeting these a requirement for all members of the design team.

Councils:

Consider going beyond the Future Homes Standard or bringing forward the target dates in local planning policy. Consider introducing measures on BREEAM performance, embodied energy and water use in local plan policy where legislation allows this.



Wonder



Quality of life is about more than our health and comfort, more than just our feeling of control and belonging, important as all those things are. Quality of life also includes a sense of wonder, delight and fun – all of the things that bring us happiness and make us human. This includes creativity and cultural expression, museums and libraries, as well as the design of the places where we live and work, and the opportunity to enjoy ourselves.



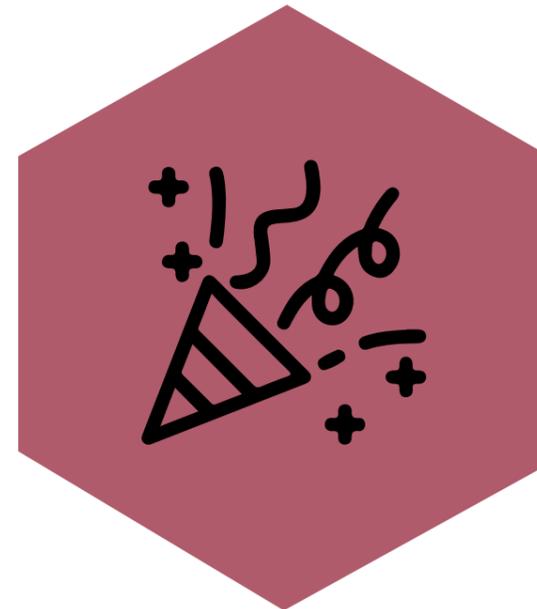
4A) CULTURE

Places that provide opportunities for imaginative, cultural and physical expression that go beyond public art.



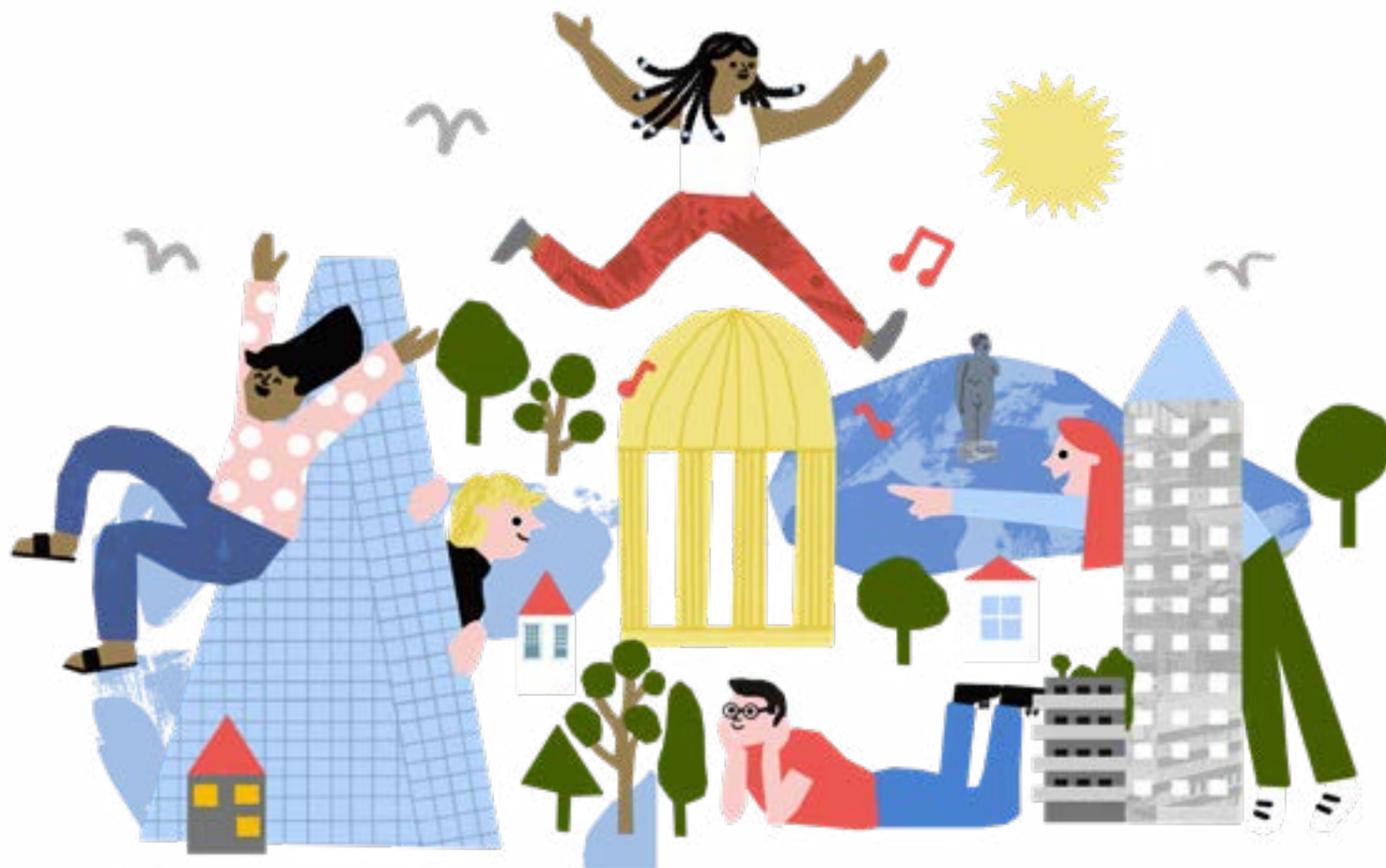
4B) DISTINCTIVENESS

Places that are well-designed, have a strong sense of place and are special.



4C) PLAYFULNESS

Places where all residents, of all ages, are free to move around, to have fun, to explore and have a sense of independence.





4A) Culture

Creativity has always been part of the community life of our villages, towns and cities.

It ranges from the great concert halls, libraries and art galleries of our cities to grass roots venues where new talent is given opportunities and audiences are introduced to new ideas. It also encompasses opportunities for expression in local neighbourhoods in terms of public art, performance, music and literature.

Community Art

Community art hasn't always had a good reputation. However if done well, it can engage lots of people, tap their creativity and express their identity. There are broad approaches:

- Communities commission artists to produce work. The community is the client but the work is entirely the artist's.
- Artists collaborate with communities to jointly produce work, often through performance.
- Communities produce artwork themselves with or without the input of an artist.

These approaches can be used for all types of art.

Communities can use this creativity to express their identity. It can include physical artwork or an artist's input to street furniture, railings, signs and playgrounds. It can include celebrations, festivals and fêtes, music and performance. Communities might want to identify a space where events can happen like a village green or a local park.

Venues

Space for creativity and expression is vital and in recent years the closure of local libraries has been a blow to many communities. There are many examples of libraries and other local facilities that have been taken on by communities using volunteers and local trusts.

Pop-up uses

Developers can also play their part. Sites and buildings can be given over on a temporary basis for use by artists, craftspeople and musicians. Vacant spaces can host community festivals, arts or performance events. This not only establishes the site as part of the cultural life of the town or city, it generates activities and businesses that can be used to populate the site once the development takes place, making it feel like somewhere special.

The Spode site in Stoke on Trent is a good example of how creativity and culture has been used to bring a site back into use that fell vacant just as the financial crash hit in 2008. Artists were encouraged to occupy some of the vacant spaces that have grown into thriving business space. The Ceramic's Biennial took over the large factory space, a temporary theatre was created and now a hotel and restaurant have been developed.

However, the process also works in strong markets where promoting art and creativity through the development process can build links with the surrounding community and make the development distinctive. A good example is U+I's development of the Mayfield Depot in Manchester where they have provided space for the Manchester Festival, the city's Pride event and for a range of creative, cultural and food-related activities.

What You Can Do

Communities

Suggest an annual celebration event and use it to celebrate the identity of the community. This can include carnivals and melas, village fetes and community festivals. Local groups and schools can get involved in creating costumes and decorating floats and events. Communities can also explore other ways of incorporating creativity into their neighbourhood, identifying local artists and working with schools and community groups to find opportunities to use artworks locally.

Developers and Designers

Look to use sites and buildings prior to development to house arts activities that start to create an identity for the site. Create pop-up opportunities using local designers and generate activities with events and performances that open the site up to the public on a controlled basis. Then once the activities are established find a way to incorporate them into the completed scheme.

Councils

Make small grants available to communities to develop their own events and artworks. Ensure that council-backed venues and festivals are required to run community outreach programmes and to take work out of the venue and into the community.

CASESTUDY 4A:

GLASGOW WEST END

- Population: 24,500





4B) Distinctiveness

Many of our places are, quite frankly, ugly. New housing estates, out-of-town shops, road junctions and business parks are not designed to lift the soul or to enhance our quality of life. There is no reason why this should be. There are lots of places that we find attractive; the places we visit or go on holiday to. Good design need not cost more so there is no reason we can't improve our quality of life by designing better places.

People tend to like old places, be they historic cities or winding village streets, with their human scale, variety, activity and distinctiveness. Some might conclude that this means that all new development should be designed to look like an old place, with traditional architecture. But this is not necessarily true. Modern buildings and contemporary architecture can create places that are loved. The trick is to distinguish between the urban form of a place and the way its buildings are designed.

CASESTUDY 4B:

KELHAM ISLAND, SHEFFIELD

- Sheffield
- Market sale
- 5000+ population

Photography: © Academy of Urbanism, 2019

Urban form

Urban form means creating human-scaled, walkable neighbourhoods based on streets that link to other streets and are fronted by buildings. These urban design principles apply to villages, suburbs, urban neighbourhoods and cities. As places become more urban, their densities rise, as does the height of their buildings, the mix of uses and activity on the streets. However, all places should be able to support local shops and facilities. These principles of urban design create the shape of neighbourhoods and the character of public spaces where we feel comfortable.

Background buildings

The design of the buildings adds another layer of richness. While many great places are made up of fairly plain buildings, these background buildings follow basic principles of scale and proportion, often using local materials and detailing. They can do this whether they are traditional or contemporary in design.

Star buildings

Then there are the special buildings. In the past they would have been churches and town halls but today might be an arts or leisure centre, a school or even a quite modest public building like a pavilion or a shelter. These are the buildings that we photograph as visitors, that appear on postcards and make a place feel different to everywhere else.



Motcomb Street, London. Active frontage and walkable street contribute to distinctive urban form
Photography: © Grosvenor



Goldsmith Street, Norwich.
Photography: © Mikhail Riches



What You Can Do

Communities

Get involved in the planning of your area. Engage with the planning department and ask to be a consultee on local planning applications. Undertake a survey of your area, explore places that people feel positively about and those that they don't like and ask why. Consider undertaking a Neighbourhood Plan using powers under the 2011 Localism Act. It may also be possible to apply for funding to resource the process and to engage external consultants. If the community is involved in commissioning a building, directly or in partnership with the council, suggest an architectural competition, perhaps specifying that it is only open to smaller architectural practices. Put the entries on display and ask people what they think but make a decision based on the practice that you think you will best be able to work with.

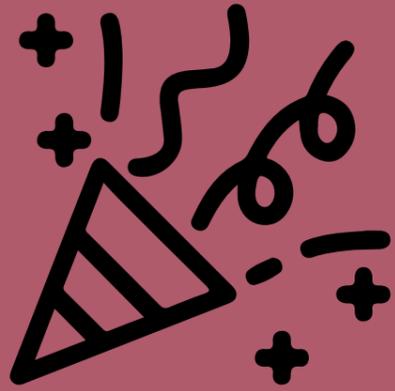
Developers and Designers

Use good architects and urban designers on larger sites. Write a brief that responds to the character of the local area but seek to create distinctive, sustainable buildings. If you need to use standard house types, adjust them to the local area and use a variety. On larger sites, produce design codes that fix the parameters of the scheme and use a range of architects or even different developers to create local distinctiveness.

Councils

Employ at least one urban design officer or buy in/share expertise with other councils and make sure that design advice is provided on all significant developments. Set up a Design Panel or use one of the existing regional design panels and make it a requirement that all larger schemes are put to the panel. Prepare a Local Design Code using the guidance in the National Model Design Code in consultation with local communities. For council-commissioned buildings, consider using architectural competitions.





4C) Playfulness

Quality of life is not just about work and rest but also play! The playful city is the child-friendly city, but play is not just for kids. It is what we all do when we meet friends for a drink, when we play sport, go to the cinema or bowling alley (or bowling green), walk in the park or ramble in the countryside. Play is what we do with our leisure time and should be woven into the fabric of our towns and cities.

Children

An important part of this is child-friendly cities. As the author **Tim Gill** suggests, playful cities are not those that provide playgrounds, important as this is, but those where children have the freedom to move around and socialise with their peers rather than being hindered by busy roads or the fears of their parents. **The Guardian** quoted the mayor of Bogotá, **Enrique Peñalosa** saying: 'Children are a kind of indicator species. If we can build a successful city for children, we will have a successful city for everyone.'

So the discussion of traffic-free routes in the Movement section, the provision of recreation space in the Health section and of natural green spaces in the Nature section are all important for the playful city.

There needs to be space for play, from back gardens to pocket parks and greens, municipal parks and wild areas where people can get wet and dirty. The park is central to this for children and adults. It provides opportunities for play and welcomes all people from toddlers to dog walkers, Sunday morning footballers to Tai Chiers. In addition to playgrounds and sports pitches, they provide informal space that can be used for a huge range of leisure activities. This has been particularly important during lockdown where people have been able to meet in parks in a safe, socially distanced way.

Grown ups

As adults we also need to play and this also requires space where it can happen. Parks and other open spaces are vital, as are sporting activities and clubs. But we also need so-called 'third spaces'. These are neither public nor private but provide spaces for people to come together and socialise. The pub is one of the most important of these third spaces - not for everyone but in many communities it is the focus for community life. Other third spaces include cafes, community halls, places of worship and youth clubs.

The long-term trend of pub closures is worrying in this respect, particularly in villages and neighbourhoods where there are few other places to meet. In some places communities have come together to save their local pub, running it as a community business or cooperative.



'Wave' Light installation at Eccleston Yard.
Photography: © Grosvenor



27000 illuminated white roses, a temporary exhibition in Grosvenor Square.
Photography: © Grosvenor

CASESTUDY 4C:

MAYFIELD DEPOT, MANCHESTER

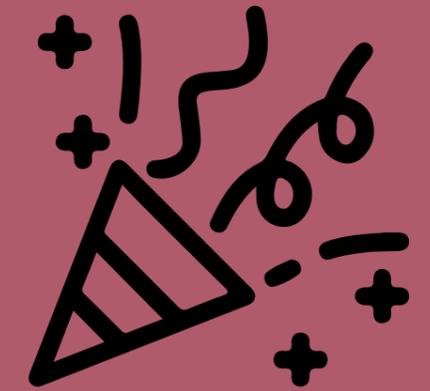
- Manchester
- Market sale
- 1500 homes



Carter Park North Playground, Kidbrooke Village, Berkeley
Photography: © Berkeley Group



A water feature at London Dock welcomes play
Photography: © Berkeley Group



What You Can Do

Communities

Take a fresh look at your neighbourhood from a child's perspective, from toddlers to teenagers. Where can they play? How do they get there? Is it safe? Lobby for traffic free streets and improved facilities. Organise sports clubs, youth groups, yoga sessions and rambling societies. Support your local pub and consider taking it on if it is in danger of being closed. Find time to play together.

Developers and Designers

Integrate children's play for all ages into new developments. Provide gardens and courtyards for young children, creative and challenging play areas for older children and facilities for teenagers. Create usable public spaces with seating that allows people to talk to each other. Incorporate third places into development, including cafes and pubs, and provide space for leisure uses where possible.

Councils

Work with communities to make the most of local parks and play areas. Require developers to make their schemes child-friendly and mixed-use. Work to create low traffic streets and places that are safe for play.

Movement



We should probably accept that having a car contributes to your quality of life. It allows you to get to places for work and leisure that would otherwise be hard to reach, particularly for those of us who don't have access to good public transport. The problem is that when everyone enjoys these freedoms our collective quality of life suffers. Roads become unsafe, congested, noisy and polluted. Parked cars clog our streets, and our health suffers as we walk and cycle less. We must therefore encourage more people to walk, cycle and use public transport. Initially, this may mean that the car is used less, but before long people will ask why we need two cars, or even a car at all. This will contribute to everyone's quality of life.



5A) WALKING & CYCLING

Places that encourage active travel through a design approach that makes it easy for most people to walk and cycle for their daily needs.



5B) PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Making it easy to get to frequent high quality public transport.



5C) CARS

Minimising car use by prioritising other modes of movement, and accommodating cars in a way that minimises their negative impact on the local environment.



5A) Walking & Cycling

We in the UK walk a similar amount to other European countries with just over 1 in 5 trips being on foot. However only 2% of trips in the UK are by bike compared with 18% in Denmark and 26% in the Netherlands. Transport data for the UK shows that 80% of trips of less than a mile are on foot, but this drops rapidly for trips of between 1 and 2 miles, with 60% being in a private motor vehicle rising to over 80% for longer trips.

People are therefore using their car for many local trips that could be done on foot or bike, such as going to the shops or the school run, and these trips accounts for most local traffic problems. We should therefore be designing neighbourhoods to encourage more people to walk and cycle for local trips. Much can be achieved by tipping the balance, making the car slightly less convenient and walking and cycling slightly easier.

CASESTUDY 5A:

STAITHS, SOUTH BANK, GATESHEAD

- Newcastle-Upon-Tyne
- Mixed Tenure
- 760 homes

Low Traffic Neighbourhoods

This has been achieved in parts of London through Low Traffic Networks or 'Mini-Hollands' as they are sometimes called. They have been implemented in parts of London like Hounslow by closing streets to traffic while keeping them open to pedestrians and cyclists. This means that, if you want to drive you generally have just one way in and out of your neighbourhood, often involving quite a diversion. The hope is that you will decide it is easier to walk or cycle. In parts of London this has increased cycling by 18% and walking by 13% in a year while reducing car use for local journeys.

Care however needs to be taken to ensure that the problems of congestion are not displaced to other areas. The principle of cul-de-sac layouts is that people don't mind a little extra distance once they are in the car, what they don't like is sitting in congestion. Some low traffic neighbourhoods may have been effective because the congestion in the surrounding area has made it more difficult to drive. In areas where 'rat running' is less of a problem similar benefits may be possible by reducing traffic speeds by introducing 20mph zones, reducing road widths, widening pavements etc.

Cycling

The key to encouraging more cycling is quite simply bike lanes. In Denmark and Holland road space has been reallocated from cars to bicycles, and cyclists are able to complete their entire journey on dedicated cycle lanes that are physically separated from traffic. As a result of Covid many councils have temporarily reallocated road space to cycling and where possible these changes need to be made permanent. This is particularly important at junctions where UK cycle lanes tend to disappear leaving no place for cyclists.

Walking

Encouraging walking involves a slightly different approach. There is much that can be done by widening pavements and redesigning junctions, removing the railings that force pedestrians to make long diversions. Surface crossings should also replace underpasses and bridges wherever possible with pedestrian phases introduced into traffic light junctions.

However research by [Jan Gehl](#) shows that the character of the urban environment is also important. Distances seem shorter if the walk is interesting with something new to look at every 10m, think of the difference between walking along a street of busy shops and walking through the car park of a supermarket. Safety is also important. Well lit and overlooked footpaths are more likely to be used after dark; by contrast off-street footpaths can feel dangerous.





What You Can Do

Community

Start a discussion locally about traffic and the measures that people are prepared to accept. Low-traffic neighbourhoods will be right for some places but not everywhere. A good start might be a partnership with the local primary school to persuade parents not to drive their kids to school, possibly leading to the introduction of a school street.

Developers and Designers

Create street networks that connect to the surrounding area, but consider carefully where traffic will be allowed. Incorporate cycle lanes and ensure that there are at least two cycle storage spaces for every new home, public bike racks and secure cycle storage for workspaces.

Councils:

Work in partnership with local communities to consider whether low traffic neighbourhoods or other measures are appropriate locally. Invest in cycle lanes on all primary streets and other off-street routes, including junctions. Ensure that planning policy requires cycle storage in all new developments.





5B) Public Transport

Public transport is important both for social equity and the environment. Those of us who live in cities might take it for granted but for many places the quality of public transport is poor and getting worse. This is crucial to the millions who don't have access to a car and for whom public transport is a lifeline, enabling access to jobs, shops, services and friends. And yet since buses were deregulated in 1987, ridership outside London has declined by 37%. In London by contrast where buses remain in public ownership usage has risen by a third over the same period.

CASESTUDY 5B:

NOTTINGHAM (THE MEADOWS)

- Nottingham
- Population: 9000

Photography: Graham Heywood, stock image from iStock

The British Travel Survey shows that pre-Covid only 6% of trips and 5% of kilometres travelled were by bus – 62% lower than it was in 1950. There were, however, some positives. Public transport use in London (pre-Covid) was growing for both buses and the tube. Light rail and tram use was growing elsewhere in the country, and the use of trains was also increasing.

All this has changed in 2020 and the extent to which travel pattern will return to these pre-covid levels remains unclear. However, on the assumption that it will never be possible to do everything within 10 or 15 minutes of home, it is important that public transport provides an alternative to the car.

This raises wider political issues about the way that public transport is controlled. Rail services are once more under public control and most of the tram systems built in recent years are in public ownership. Places like Greater Manchester are also lobbying to take back control of buses.

Locally, the issues relate to the location of public transport stops and the frequency of services. Generally planners consider that every home should be within 400m (5 minutes) of a bus stop or 800m (10 minutes) of a tram stop. Most existing towns and cities achieve this. The problems come in urban extensions and new settlements which are still being built without adequate public transport links.



Trams like this one in Nottingham are transforming the image and convenience of public transport but only in the larger cities.

Photography: Ed Webster, CC image from Flickr

What You Can Do

Community

Encourage people to use the bus! In areas with poor public transport links and particularly new development, lobby for the provision of a service.

Developers and Designers

Don't build unless all the property you are planning has access to a bus stop or other public transport service, unless you are prepared to invest in the provision of new services and routes. This should be done for a sufficient period of time to ensure that the service can become established.

Councils

Consider public transport accessibility as a central part of the land allocation process in the local plan. Set a public transport accessibility standard and insist that developers provide contributions to ensure that this is met. Lobby regionally to bring public transport back under public control.





CASESTUDY 5C:

ICON + HOUND-WOOD, STREET, SOMERSET

- Somerset
- Mixed Tenure
- 400 homes



Courtesy of Grant Associates,
photography Tim Crocker

5C) Cars

While having access to a car may be good for our quality of life, so is driving less. As described in Theme 5a, there is much that we can do to encourage walking and cycling as an alternative. Eventually this will lead to lower levels of car ownership, but as a starting point we should aim for lower car use, which still leaves us with the matter of parking.

Parking

The parking of cars can come to dominate housing areas, particularly in new development when the planners impose high parking requirements. The logic in the past has been; 'the occupants of this house could own X cars and so every house must have X dedicated car parking spaces'. Research by [URBED](#) looking at 400 largely suburban new housing schemes in Kent showed that the average number of parking spaces per unit was just over 2, while the average level of car ownership was just under 1.5 cars per household, and yet most of the residents surveyed on the estates still saw parking as their biggest problem. The suggested solution was to provide fewer spaces but to make them unallocated so that they could be used more flexibly.

The location of parking is also an important issue. The options are: on-plot (at the front or side of the house); on-street; or in a communal facility like a basement, a courtyard or 'parking barn'. In suburban layouts, it is easy enough to accommodate parking on-plot, although these spaces cannot be used flexibly and take up valuable garden space. For high-density housing, a communal provision such as basement parking can work well, provided it is secure.

It is mid-density, terraced housing where parking can be a real problem. Parking in the front garden means you have to squeeze past the car to get to your house. Communal parking courtyards can work but raise problems of security, particularly when there is no direct access from the back garden. So, while it is understandable to want to remove on-street parking to allow streets to be used for other activities such as play, sometimes the street is the most flexible parking option. However, on-street parking should always be in defined parking bays and can be mixed with street trees and cycle parking.



Fairfield Square, Droylsden, Manchester.
Photography: @ URBED

What You Can Do

Community

Work with the council to manage parking locally. Maybe take out spaces to provide a seating area or cycle store.

Developers and Designers

Don't provide more parking than you need to and ensure that as much as possible is unallocated. Design this parking to be as unobtrusive as possible, placing it for example towards the rear of commercial sites. Include on-street parking bays in new streets interspersed with street trees and other landscape features.

Councils

Consider your parking standards and guidelines: are they too high and how can they best be applied? Encourage more parking to be unallocated.





Community

Belonging to a community is a powerful need in humans and is central to our wellbeing. This is partly about community groups and events, but many of us feel a strong sense of belonging even if we don't have the time to go to a meeting or engage in community activities. It is about being part of a group and sharing an identity; about trust, cooperation and reciprocity. This is built by knowing our neighbours, chatting to fellow parents at the school gate or in the park, or even just nodding at our fellow dog walkers and exchanging pleasantries with local shopkeepers. This is all too often taken for granted and is hard to create, especially in new developments. However, there are things we can do with the mix of housing, the design of the neighbourhoods and the social infrastructure that can encourage this sense of community.



6A) DIVERSITY

Neighbourhoods that provide homes for people with a mix of incomes, ages and backgrounds, in a variety of tenures.



6B) OPPORTUNITIES

Places that encourage opportunities for social interaction and foster a sense of neighbourliness and mutual support.



6C) NEIGHBOURHOOD

A rich mix of uses, shops, parks, local services, schools and health facilities all within easy reach.



6A) Diversity

Which are the strongest communities - those where everyone is the same, or those where everyone is different? The view of planners and researchers like the **Joseph Rowntree Foundation** has tended to be that diverse communities are best. But there are strong communities, both working-class and middle-class, that can be quite homogeneous, where values are shared. There are also some communities that do not regard positively people who are different to them, however uncomfortable that may make us feel.

However, we believe that on balance having daily contact with a wide range of people is good for us. It makes life more interesting, broadens our outlook and makes us more tolerant.

By diversity we mean people from different ethnic, religious and cultural groups, of different ages, disabilities, income, gender and sexuality. Diversity makes life richer and also has practical advantages. It means that there are people around during the day so that the area feels safe. It means that local schools have a mix of kids raising educational attainment. And it also provides spending power to support a range of local shops and other facilities.

Housing mix

Creating mixed communities can be difficult. The main tool available to us, and it's a blunt one, is the mix of housing that we provide. This relates both to the tenure and the type of housing. The provision of social and affordable housing in a new private development will ensure a mix of people, as will the provision of private rented homes. The same is true of type. A mix of houses and apartments of different sizes along with supported housing, housing for older people, co-housing and student blocks, all contribute to a mix of people.

Maintaining a balanced community over time is even more difficult. When places decline, those who are able to do so move out, risking stigmatisation. On the other hand, gentrification pushes up values and rents and can squeeze out less well-off people. Currently, issues of gentrification are to the foreground in many of our larger cities and one of the main ways to counter this is to invest in social housing.

The design of housing is also important; there is no point putting all of the affordable housing together at the back of the site. Affordable housing should be mixed in with private housing. The term that is often used to describe this is 'pepper-potting'. This isn't always as easy as it sounds because housing associations need to group their properties together for management reasons. However, the key thing is to avoid crass mistakes like excluding the social housing tenants from the playground or having a plush lobby for the owners and a back door for the social tenants.

Housing cooperatives and co-housing groups are also a powerful tool to create communities. In some co-housing schemes, communities cook and eat together communally. There are even places where these ideas are being used to rethink housing for older people.



'Thank you' mural by Fiona Hunter. A rainbow held up by key workers displayed on a wall of Eccleston Yard. Photography: © Grosvenor



School children from Trumpinton Meadows School. Photography: © Grosvenor

CASESTUDY 6A:

PORTOBELLO, EDINBURGH

- Edinburgh
- Mixed Tenure
- Population: 32,000



What You Can Do

Communities

Reach out to all of the people in your area, not just those that come to meetings. Engage in activities and celebrations that celebrate the diversity of people and reach out to a wider range of people to involve them in all of the discussions you are having about the neighbourhood. Have meetings in different venues and at times when people can attend. Work through schools, community centres and places of worship to involve people who might not otherwise get involved. Use moderated social media to bring people together and keep things positive. When commenting on new developments, welcome new housing development that is well designed and which will add to the diversity of the local community.

Developers and Designers

Avoid creating a mono-community by using only a limited number of house types. Include a range of houses and apartments as well as older persons' housing. Embrace a diversity of tenures including housing for sale, shared equity private and social rented housing.

Councils

Use planning policy to ensure that new housing meets local needs and nourishes diverse communities. Make sure that policies on issues such as density, parking, gardens and privacy distances don't limit the range of housing that can be built. Ensure that there is scope for some housing even in high density areas and some apartments in suburban areas. Have a clear social housing policy and ensure that it is implemented through planning agreements to encourage a greater mix.





6B) Community

We should be building places where our social connections thrive and where people can do things that matter to them. There has long been debate amongst planners about the type of neighbourhood that encourages communities to develop. The answer is probably that design is not the most important factor compared to personal connections and networks.

The plans of the 1960s and 70s were often based on small groups of 20 or so homes around a cul-de-sac or a green space, on the basis that they would form a community. These did occasionally create communities but planners realised eventually that it was difficult to impose communities in this way. There is research that suggests that, as humans, we feel most comfortable in communities of around 150 people (known as **Dunbar's number**). The reason is that there are few enough people to be on nodding acquaintance and to recognise most people but enough to be able to choose who to engage with. This can be useful for example in designing blocks of flats.

CASESTUDY 6B:

THE MALINGS, NEWCASTLE

- Newcastle
- Market sale
- 76 homes

We need to create places that enable people to interact. We know for example that the number of neighbours that people know is much lower on busy streets. The 'public realm' (the shared space between buildings) is important because it is where interaction takes place. It needs to be safe and attractive and can take a number of forms:

Public spaces

These include streets, squares, pocket parks and public playgrounds. These are spaces that can be used by everyone, not just the local community and they need to be overlooked and safe. They are particularly important in neighbourhoods of individual houses where there are fewer communal facilities. Local streets can be turned into home zones or play streets to facilitate this and it is important to consider the width of pavements, potential sitting areas, space for community events and the dominance of parked cars.

Communal Gardens

Courtyards and communal gardens tend to be at the rear of properties and are largely for the use of residents. Apartment buildings should include communal gardens at ground and roof level. These should be accessible from stair cores and accommodate a range of uses such as play space for small children, sitting areas, communal barbecues and food growing. It is also possible to create communal space within housing blocks with a strip of back gardens giving onto a shared green space.

Shared facilities

Within apartments it is also possible to provide internal spaces to meet. This starts with small details like the width of corridors and the size of foyers. However, some private rented blocks include shared lounges, cinema rooms and gyms. Co-housing schemes can also include a community building (eg Marmalade Lane, below) with a community hall for eating and events and communal facilities such as a laundry and even guest bedrooms.



The communal lounge in the Marmalade Lane co-housing scheme © TOWN



What You Can Do

Communities

Think about where people come together and meet in your neighbourhood, whether on the street square or a communal garden. Is that space fit for purpose or is it clogged with cars, dominated with traffic or lacking in facilities? Ask people how they would like these spaces to be improved and pilot ideas by applying for temporary street closure orders, throwing a street party starting a community garden or finding temporary uses for small pieces of landscape or vacant sites.

Developers and Designers

Consult with local people and understand the local community: who it includes, where they meet and how it operates. Then build your scheme to be part of this community. Don't put up fences or walls but integrate with the existing street network and public spaces and make them better. Consider public, communal and shared facilities as part of masterplans.

Councils

Understand the communities of your area, map the network of local groups and neighbourhoods and develop them into a mutual support network. Support communities in facilitating local events and street closures where necessary and work with developers to encourage the development of new communities in a new development.





6C) Neighbourhood

Communities operate both locally and across whole neighbourhoods. The neighbourhood is the place where we live and probably has a name. It's far too big to know everyone, but it is home to a network of people we know, from close friends to passing acquaintances and neighbourhood regulars like the postman, lollypop lady, newsagent and GP. Our neighbourhood also includes our local high street, the school that our children attend, the park where they play, the pubs and cafes where we socialise, our clubs and societies and elected councillors.

The sociologist Robert Putnam calls the web of connections and relationships within our communities and neighbourhoods 'social capital' and it is vital to our wellbeing through the sense of identity, purpose and belonging that it provides. Social capital is something that develops over time but it needs help. It needs places, facilities and services that allow these community connections to thrive, something that is called 'social infrastructure'.

Many large modern housing estates lack this social infrastructure. Shopping involves a car trip to a supermarket and, with the exception of schools, there are often few local facilities or spaces for the community to come together. This makes it harder for people to interact with people other than their immediate neighbours, stifling the growth of social capital. New neighbourhoods therefore need to be designed with a full range of local facilities and these need to be available to everyone (there is no point if they are unaffordable to half the community). This is not easy. Very often these facilities are not viable, particularly as the neighbourhood is being built, which can take many years. There is also a need to retrofit existing mono-use estates so that they can develop social capital.



What You Can Do

Communities:

Support your local high street, shop locally and make use of local services. Involve local businesses, shop keepers and service providers in discussions; they are, after all, part of the community. Think about improvements that the community can make, such as high street clean up campaigns, planters and hanging baskets. Is there scope for community groups to take over empty shop units, the local library or even run a community pub or café.

Developers and Designers:

Build a mix of uses! Include workspace, shop units and space for schools, health and community facilities in new developments. For large schemes, build a new local high street rather than going for the easy option of a supermarket. Mix it all up and make sure everything is united by a walkable network of streets.

Councils:

Require a mix of uses in planning policy and ensure local policies don't restrict the development of local business space. Support local high streets and work with businesses and communities to develop improvement strategies. Consider the idea of Business Improvement Districts to bring companies together and fund improvements.

CASESTUDY 6C:

EDDINGTON, CAMBRIDGE

- Cambridge
- 50% Market sale/
50% affordable
- 3000 homes



Next Steps

This Framework has attempted to bring together all of the elements relating to the built environment that contribute to quality of life. It is intended that this will be a live document so that in addition to this printed version there will be an [on-line version](#) that is updated as other issues come to light, where advice changes or where research throws up new learning.

This document has drawn on a series of case studies that are written up in the appendix that follows. These too will be expanded and added to over time to create a treasure chest of good practice and inspiring examples.

This framework will serve the basis for a series of projects that we will be working on over the coming years:

- CCQOL, a new, digital model for community consultation being developed with the University of Reading and Commonplace;
- YourQOL, a resident-led quality of life survey to get feedback from residents;
- an annual People's Housing Audit to rate housebuilders based on these Quality of Life criteria;
- a leadership programme for communities and developers to champion the issues in the report.

For details on any of these initiatives, or if you are interested in becoming a partner or associate, then do please get in touch at mail@qolf.org.



With thanks to our partners



Founding Partner

