
Quality of Life Foundation's asks for the next UK government

Having a decent, affordable home in a safe, well-designed neighbourhood is the foundation of a happy, healthy life.

But there is a big problem with the way most homes are planned for and built in the UK: there are systemic and structural barriers that prevent the homes and neighbourhoods we build from delivering for our health and wellbeing. This has led to too many people having to live in poor quality, unaffordable homes often in disconnected places, with knock-on effects on both their mental and physical health.

This situation is not inevitable. And to improve the health of the country, the next government must take the opportunity to change it.

The Quality of Life Foundation is calling on all political parties to commit to policies that will change the way the country creates and cares for homes and neighbourhoods - putting health and wellbeing at their very heart.

ASK 1: Commit to reducing health inequalities through interventions in the built environment

The places that we live have a profound impact on both the length and the quality of our lives. Research shows that the unequal distribution of high-quality built environments and access to nature contributes to health inequalities¹.

Men in the most deprived areas of England on average have **18** fewer years in 'good' general health than men living in the least deprived areas, while for women this is **20** years².

746,000 families in England live in overcrowded homes. **70%** of overcrowded families report experiencing both poor mental and physical health as a direct result of overcrowding³.

The next government must act to ensure that the built environment works to reduce health inequalities.

This means committing to policies and legislation that will ensure planning decisions prioritise people's health. It is also essential that improvements benefit areas that evidence shows most need them.

ASK 2: Ensure new homes are built in the right places, with the amenities and infrastructure that enable positive outcomes for health and wellbeing

Too often the planning system focuses on the short term, assessing individual sites as they come forward for development rather than treating an area as a whole. This has led to a hodgepodge of development, which is often poorly located and does not take true account of local needs.

¹ <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on>

²

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthinequalities/bulletins/healthstatelifeexpectanciesbyindexofmultipledeprivationimd/2017to2019>

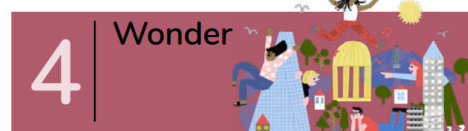
³ <https://www.housing.org.uk/resources/overcrowding-in-england-2023/>

Of 142 recent developments in England, **64%** had **poor** or **mediocre** access to green space⁴

Only **16%** of local planning authorities surveyed in England have rejected new developments based on them being too far from local amenities, despite many being further than the 800m from key facilities it is evidenced that people will walk⁵

The evidence-based [Quality of Life Framework](#) sets out the ingredients that are vital for creating neighbourhoods that deliver for people's health and wellbeing.

The Quality of Life Framework themes:



Political parties should commit to policies that will ensure that these ingredients are not only planned for but *delivered* in new developments and retro-fitted where appropriate in existing communities.

To deliver this, we need a return to strategic spatial planning, where the whole of an area is appraised holistically, considering the best use of land overall for the delivery of homes, amenities and green and social infrastructure.

Further, local communities must be engaged meaningfully so that planning and development decisions can be based on evidence of local needs. All political parties must commit to policies that will ensure this happens.

⁴ <https://placealliance.org.uk/research/national-housing-audit/>

⁵ <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/10520/walkable-neighbourhoods-report.pdf>

ASK 3: Ensure that housing developers deliver social value, rather than focusing only on the number of homes built

Local authorities in England are required to consider social value in service contracts above a certain threshold⁶. But there is no legal requirement for developers - the companies that build our homes and places - to deliver social outcomes. Such a requirement would make it much easier for local authorities to deliver successful places that contribute to people's health and wellbeing and reduce inequality.

“Social value is created when buildings, places and infrastructure support and enhance environmental, economic and social wellbeing – through this improving residents’ quality of life”⁷

76% of the British public believes that investing in social infrastructure should be as much a priority for the government as investing in physical infrastructure⁸

All political parties should commit to policies and legislation that would ensure developers deliver social value, with the benefits of developments felt by local communities - old and new. They should also ensure that the health and wellbeing impacts of development are systematically measured and learned from.

About the Quality of Life Foundation

The Quality of Life Foundation is a charity that helps local communities, professionals and policy makers to plan, design, create and care for homes and neighbourhoods in ways that will benefit people's health and wellbeing in the long term.

We carry out independent research, engage communities, share evidence, and support organisations to implement best practice in their work. We do this because having a decent, affordable home in a safe, well-designed neighbourhood is the foundation of a happy, healthy life.

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-value-act-information-and-resources/social-value-act-information-and-resources>

⁷ <https://www.ukgbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Social-Value.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/research/building-our-social-infrastructure/>