



Delivering healthy homes and neighbourhoods through the Healthy Homes Principles: A briefing for councils by the TCPA

Every year thousands of new homes are built which damage the life chances and wellbeing of their residents. The consequences of this will be with us for decades. This briefing explains how councils across England can make a difference by adopting the Healthy Homes Principles.

The problem is vast and it affects all of us. A 2020 review by the Place Alliance of 142 developments across England built by volume housebuilders found that 75% of them were of mediocre or poor design.

This matters because where we live has profound effects on our health throughout our lives. We have known this for more than a century. Research has shown that substandard housing:

- Increases the likelihood of respiratory, cardiovascular and communicable diseases.
- Is associated with poor mental health.
- Is particularly harmful to children; who face up to a 25% higher risk of severe ill-health and disability during childhood and early adulthood if they live in such conditions.

Our wider neighbourhoods are also crucially important to our mental and physical wellbeing. Places which discourage walking and have poor cycling infrastructure can undermine

residents' mental wellbeing and increase the risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

Poor quality housing also has serious economic consequences. A 2016 report by BRE found that poor-quality homes cost the NHS £1.4bn a year. Covid-19 has made very clear the vital role that good-quality housing with access to gardens and public parks plays in ensuring that communities are healthy and resilient.

The human cost of permitted development rights

Perhaps the worst examples of poor-quality new housing result from the radical expansion of permitted development rights (PDR). Since 2015 these have allowed offices and warehouses to be converted into homes without planning permission, and from 2020 have also applied to two-storey extensions to existing houses; to shops; and to the demolition of commercial buildings and rebuilding as homes.

Government-commissioned research has highlighted many examples of office-to-residential PDR conversions which resulted in 'homes' that had very small or no windows and no access to private or communal outdoor spaces, playgrounds or greenspace. Some were located in the middle of busy industrial estates. Only 22% of the schemes examined in the research met the Nationally Described Space Standard, and research pointed to

the potential for the delivery of homes through PDR to produce particularly bad health outcomes.

The government has legislated for new homes delivered through PDR to meet Nationally Described Minimum Space Standards and provide access to natural light. But the former of these will come into place no sooner than April 2021, and neither measure will stop new homes being built in the middle of active industrial estates, as they are now.

PDR leads to such poor housing outcomes because it allows developments to bypass most local scrutiny by planning officers, communities and councillors - something which raises crucial questions about democracy and local decision making. We, as a nation, clearly need to radically change the way we regulate the quality of the built environment.

The Healthy Homes Principles

As a response to the creation of these 'slums of the future', the TCPA is leading a national campaign to develop and implement [Healthy Homes Principles](#). Supporting organisations include: the Association of Directors of Public Health; the Chartered Institute of Housing; CPRE the Countryside Charity; the National Housing Federation; 38 Degrees; and the Design Council.



The principles have been developed with expert policy and legal advice, and provide a simple framework for healthy place making. They lay out the fundamental principles all new homes and neighbourhoods should follow in order to secure their residents' health and wellbeing. The principles do this because so many of the homes currently fail to provide even this.

The TCPA is campaigning to have them adopted in national legislation through our [Healthy Homes Act campaign](#). The Healthy Homes Principles are set out in the suggested motion for councils below.

A local vision for homes and neighbourhoods

Local authorities are on the front line of creating successful places and have a proud tradition of building high-quality homes. Many of the powers and resources of local government have been stripped away and centralised. But there is still something that local councils can do to demonstrate their commitment to this agenda. They can demonstrate leadership by adopting the Healthy Homes Principles as the foundation of a local approach to place making.

The motion suggested on the following page is one route to formally endorsing the Principles. We strongly urge councils to adopt this approach as we emerge from the pandemic.

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You can find references for the reports and statistics used in this briefing in the Healthy Homes Act document [here](#).

Draft Motion to adopt the Healthy Homes principles

This council notes:

- The powerful evidence which demonstrates the link between people's homes and their health, wellbeing and life chances.
- That the COVID-19 emergency has reinforced the need for healthy environments which provide space for recreation, children's play and walkable streets.
- That well-designed homes that meet all our citizens' needs over their lifetimes can radically reduce costs to NHS and social care budgets.
- That people have a basic right to live in environments free from unacceptable pollution.
- That homes must be affordable to heat and built to zero carbon standards.
- That current government policy to deregulate planning is creating thousands of substandard homes through conversion of existing buildings into homes, without planning permission.
- That this council is determined to create the highest quality places for residents which will be a fitting legacy for future generations.

This council agrees (or to the extent that the below concern executive functions, recommends to the executive) to:

- Adopt the Healthy Homes Principles so that:
 - all new homes must be safe in relation to the risk of fire;
 - all new homes must have, as a minimum, the liveable space required to meet the needs of people over their whole lifetimes, including adequate internal and external storage space;
 - all main living areas and bedrooms of a new dwelling must have access to natural light;
 - all new homes and their surroundings must be designed to be inclusive, accessible, and adaptable to suit the needs of all;
 - all new homes should be built within places that prioritise and provide access to sustainable transport and walkable services, including green infrastructure and play space;
 - all new homes must secure radical reductions in carbon emissions in line with the provisions of the Climate Change Act 2008;

- all new homes must demonstrate how they will be resilient to a changing climate over their full lifetime;
- all new homes must be built to design out crime and be secure;
- all new homes must be free from unacceptable and intrusive noise and light pollution;
- all new homes must not contribute to unsafe or illegal levels of indoor or ambient air pollution and must be built to minimise, and where possible eliminate, the harmful impacts of air pollution on human health and the environment, and;
- all new homes must be designed to provide year-round thermal comfort for inhabitants.
- Review all policies, processes and procedures to ensure that new homes meet the requirements of the principles. Present an action plan by December 2021 detailing how the council will deliver on the requirements of the principles.
- Review the corporate plan to ensure the healthy homes principles are a priority.
- Make the principles an integral part of activity throughout the council, including all decision making on housing and planning.
- Investigate ways to ensure that future local plans ensure that all new development is in line with the Healthy Homes Principles at the earliest possible date.

Call on the government to:

- Return full powers of permitted development conversion of buildings to resident use to local councils
- Support the Healthy Homes Bill being promoted by Baron Nigel Crisp.

