



**Healthy Homes Act
Campaign**



www.tdag.org.uk

Supporting the TCPA's Campaign for a Healthy Homes Act

Why is the Trees and Design Action Group supporting the Town and Country Planning Association's Healthy Homes Act?

This is long overdue. The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) reminds us of a Building Research Establishment (BRE) report that found that poor-quality housing can create and exacerbate physical and mental health problems costing the NHS £1.4bn a year. The lockdowns and restrictions required to reduce the spread of Covid-19 have also exposed the impact of having inadequate internal space, which can be in both quantity and organisation, in many homes and inadequate access to open space either private or public. These factors in turn reduce the economic, social and physical resilience of communities.

But we are now in the 21st century and must have a 21st century mindset not only to our major climate and environmental responsibilities but to the quality of life of all our citizens. Not only must we improve the quality of existing homes but we must also ensure that the quality of new homes meets high standards of promoting health and wellbeing for all. This means that 'healthy homes' in 'healthy neighbourhoods' must be the guiding principles for all new developments.

What does this mean in practice? Let us consider what socially, economically and physically 'healthy neighbourhoods' could provide.

Firstly we need to ensure that developments are in the right place and not just where developers have identified land. The 'right place' would follow the guidelines of Transport for New Homes and ensure that we don't develop sprawling, car-dependent estates far from town centres and public transport links. (<https://www.transportfornewhomes.org.uk/homes-without-jams-join-the-campaign/>)

Of course, we will all need to travel less and so our healthy neighbourhoods will be more self-sufficient with supporting services for daily needs in line with the 15 Minute City approach. (<https://www.15minutecity.com/>)

To promote satisfaction with the 'local' our healthy neighbourhoods will support mental and physical health by the inclusion of the right amount of green space, trees, areas for children's play - whatever happened to adventure playgrounds or doorstep play and play streets which can encourage community cohesion? Neighbourhoods also need to work for all age groups and abilities. Do we consider the needs of older people, who may have reduced mobility, but could be encouraged to walk more if they had seats

and resting places? Do we make our walkways sufficient for wheelchair users or mothers with push-chairs? Of course, this will need a review of densities if housing developments are to provide the requirements of a healthy neighbourhood. The two need not be incompatible but will require investment in design.

We also need the design skills to provide the necessary access for utility and emergency vehicles and provide drop-off locations for deliveries while limiting access for other permitted vehicles.

Given that the non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, mental health issues, with mental health rising to the top are becoming a serious and additional strain on the health service, the role of the healthy neighbourhood to reduce the incidence of these becomes more vital and nature has a critical role to play here. Dr Kathleen Wolf, a social scientist at the University of Washington, has made this the focus on her work with special emphasis on the value of trees. ([Green Cities: Good Health](#) and [Human Dimensions of Urban Forestry and Urban Greening](#))

The Trees and Design Action Group's forthcoming *Trees, Planning and Development: A Guide for Delivery* also demonstrates the uplift in value (social, economic and environmental) that the presence of trees and greenspace can bring to new developments.

In *Planning for the Future*, the present planning white paper, the government proposes a National Model Design Code to supplement the National Design Code released by MHCLG in 2019. This 'model code' will "*supplement the guide, setting out more detailed parameters for development in different types of location: issues such as the arrangement and proportions of streets and urban blocks, positioning and hierarchy of public spaces, successful parking arrangements, placement of street trees, and high quality cycling and walking provision, in line with our wider vision for cycling and walking in England.*" All well and good but the reformed planning system must ensure that this is a reality.

Now, what about the 'healthy home' itself?

In his recent book, *Health is Made at Home, Hospitals are for Repairs: Building a Healthy and Health-Creating Society* (2020), Lord Nigel Crisp, former Chief Executive of the NHS, gives us all the responsibility for creating a healthy society. What better place to start than with our homes?

Let's start with the microclimate which is not sufficiently taken into account in many new developments where houses seems to have a mixture of orientations regardless of sun-paths or wind directions, over-shadowing and so on. So responding to these microclimate elements and being aware of the impact of 3-D built form in reducing or exacerbating climate based issues is vital. Again, trees have a role as they have the ability to improve the environmental performance of low rise buildings (4 storeys) reducing over-heating, wind impacts, improving summer shading and generally reducing both heating and cooling costs.

Stepping inside, we need to consider 'space standards' and Julia Park, Head of Housing Research at Levitt Bernstein Architects, has written extensively on this. (http://housingstandards.co.uk/assets/space-standards_onscreen.pdf). As mentioned above, Covid-19 has exacerbated the problem of the inadequacy in terms of space that many urban dwellers certainly are living in, but how much is adequate?

Do we know how to manage and maintain our homes to ensure that they are healthy? Do we know how to keep the internal air clean and healthy with adequate ventilation, cleaning filters and fans for mechanical systems, cooker hoods and so on? Do we avoid materials which exude undesirable chemicals either in carpets and furnishings or in our cleaning products? Do we understand why we should ensure that our houses have high standards of insulation now, not to meet so called targets set for 2050? Are we sufficiently critical of what we should expect and demand from a house?

Can we hold housebuilders to account to ensure that high standards of homes are delivered for all? A legal requirement is the first step and this bill offers government a way to achieve this and this is why TDAG is supporting it.

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For more information on the campaign, please visit:
<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/healthy-homes-act>

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