

New affordable homes for health and wellbeing: What's possible?

A collaborative roundtable



**QUALITY
OF LIFE**
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Contents

4

Executive summary

6

Introduction

8

Key discussion themes

12

**Insights and recommendations
for action**

14

Conclusion

16

Appendices

Executive summary:

Building health into future homes



How can new affordable homes actively improve residents' health and wellbeing?

This question was the driving force behind a roundtable hosted by the Quality of Life Foundation, expertly chaired by David Orr (Chair, Clarion Housing Association), and generously sponsored by Saint-Gobain Interior Solutions. The event united 15 senior leaders and experts from across the housing sector, public health, and resident engagement, all committed to a shared vision.

The discussion underscored that housing is a fundamental determinant of health, providing far more than just shelter. Participants highlighted the opportunity to ensure future affordable homes are not just structures, but strategically designed environments that enhance quality of life, unlock long-term cost savings, and foster greater community resilience.

Key opportunities that emerged:

- **Preventative investment:** We recognised the huge potential to shift investment from tackling health issues caused by inadequate housing to proactive, preventative design. This means viewing housing as a powerful, long-term health intervention that can genuinely reduce healthcare burdens.

- **Transforming our housing stock:** With a staggering 2.4 million existing homes in England currently classified as hazardous, future affordable housing programmes offer a vital chance to fundamentally elevate living standards and health outcomes across the nation. This isn't just about building new homes; it's about building a healthier legacy and reducing an unnecessary burden on the NHS.
- **Resident-centred design:** A key theme was the necessity of genuinely engaging residents. Their lived experiences must be central to every stage of design and development, ensuring homes truly meet their health and wellbeing needs.
- **Holistic standards and collaboration:** The group discussed a desire to move beyond minimum regulatory standards to embrace health-centred planning, design and delivery principles. Achieving this requires a strengthened cross-sector collaboration between housing providers, public health bodies, pioneering industry innovators, and grassroots resident groups.

The event ignited a shared commitment to creating homes that truly nurture and inspire, demonstrating that financial and operational sustainability can – and must – go hand-in-hand with enhanced resident health and wellbeing.

Introduction:

Reimagining housing for a healthier future



In June 2025, the Quality of Life Foundation and Saint-Gobain Interior Solutions brought together leading minds for a strategic roundtable, delving into the intrinsic link between housing and health.

We drew inspiration from history: from 1919 to 1951 health and housing were fundamentally linked within the same government department - the Ministry of Health. This discussion aimed to rekindle that foundational understanding, exploring how new affordable homes can become powerful instruments for improving public health outcomes across the UK.

Chaired by David Orr, the roundtable convened a diverse and influential group of 15 experts, ensuring a rich spectrum of insights. Attendees included representatives from:

- **Amplius**
- **Anchor**
- **Clarion**
- **Curo**
- **Healthy Homes Hub**
- **Milton Keynes City Council**
- **Paradigm Housing**
- **Peabody**
- **Places for People**
- **Quality of Life Foundation**
- **Saint-Gobain Interior Solutions**
- **TCPA**
- **TPAS**

The atmosphere throughout was one of collaborative spirit, fostering practical insights and a shared commitment to driving meaningful, systemic change across the entire housing sector.

Key discussion themes: Unlocking health in our homes

The facilitated discussion delved into the critical aspects of embedding health and wellbeing into new affordable homes. The conversation organically coalesced around five interconnected themes, each offering unique insights and opportunities for action.

1. The strategic imperative: Why healthy new homes matter

Participants began by acknowledging the profound and systemic impact of poor housing on health across the UK. Rather than being framed as an insurmountable challenge, this was viewed as a significant opportunity for fundamental, transformative change in how we approach housing design and delivery.

The startling figure of 2.4 million households in England currently living in homes classified as hazardous underscored the urgent need for intervention, highlighting the immense opportunity within future affordable housing programmes to make a profound difference to national health outcomes. Participants recognised that proactively addressing these issues in new builds is paramount, understanding that as soon as a new home is completed, it effectively becomes a retrofit project. This reinforced the imperative to get it right in the first place by integrating health and wellbeing from the very outset, thereby preventing the creation of new 'hazardous' homes.

Crucially, the discussion emphasised the importance of deeply understanding and prioritising residents' actual health and wellbeing needs in the design process, moving beyond assumptions to direct, actionable insights about what truly makes a healthy home and neighbourhood from their daily lived experience.

2. Designing for wellbeing: Beyond compliance

The conversation then turned to the imperative for holistic housing standards that go beyond minimum regulatory requirements to actively promote and embed health and wellbeing at their core.

Promising approaches highlighted included the adoption of Passivhaus principles, the integration of community facilities within developments,

and the creation of flexible living spaces that can adapt to residents' evolving needs throughout their lives. Strong emphasis was also placed on crucial elements like enhanced indoor air quality, abundant natural light, and designs that actively foster mental health and social connection.

To make a truly compelling case for investment, robust evidence is essential; this includes not only rigorous technical data on building performance but also compelling resident feedback and rich qualitative lived experience data.

3. Balancing pressures: Affordability, delivery, and resident needs

Participants engaged in an honest exploration of the persistent financial, regulatory, and supply chain constraints that often impact the delivery of health-focused housing. Simultaneously, the discussion reinforced the indispensable role of residents themselves in shaping these solutions.

A significant tension identified was the delicate balance between meeting urgent housing delivery targets and the long-term goal of ensuring homes truly support residents' quality of life. This requires avoiding compromises on health for the sake of speed or initial cost savings. The group directly addressed how to ensure that affordability considerations do not inadvertently compromise the essential health and wellbeing needs of residents, openly exploring the difficult trade-offs from a resident's perspective and discussing ethical approaches to navigate them.

A strong consensus emerged around the transformative power of involving residents directly; successful strategies shared included early and meaningful consultation, facilitating collaborative design workshops, and truly empowering residents as co-creators of their living spaces. Inspiring international examples underscored how deep community participation consistently leads to more responsive and healthier living environments.

4. Corporate courage: Choosing quality and purpose

A cross-cutting theme from the discussion was the imperative for corporate courage. Housing associations have a unique and vital opportunity to

lead systemic change through principled decision-making. The roundtable highlighted the need to move far beyond incremental improvements to making bold, values-driven choices.

“We’re doing it because it’s the right thing to do, and we’re not going to do the wrong thing any longer,” was a clear and resonant message from the discussion, directly challenging the sector to prioritise long-term resident wellbeing and the inherent quality of homes over short-term financial expediency.

This approach of corporate courage means being willing to set new, higher standards, even when they challenge existing norms or perceived limitations. Examples shared during the discussion – such as proactively stopping gas boiler installations in new developments and intentionally reducing one-bedroom flat construction to encourage more family-friendly homes – vividly demonstrated how organisations can bravely and proactively shape better housing outcomes.

5. Collaborative action: Innovation and influence for systemic change

The final thematic area focused on translating insights into concrete action, examining how industry, policymakers, and communities can collaborate to drive widespread, systemic change.

A point of consensus emerged: the immense strength in numbers that the housing association sector possesses. By working together to demonstrate unified demand for healthier homes, the sector has the potential to significantly drive change across industry, influence the supply chain, and shape future policy decisions.

It was also recognised that the aspiration must be to move beyond isolated, successful exemplar projects. Instead, the goal is for health and wellbeing to become standard business practice within all programmes of work, becoming embedded and expected.

Innovation areas included investing in skills development for sustainable and healthy construction, exploring new funding models that recognise the holistic value of health outcomes, and leveraging cutting-edge technology and material innovations to proactively enhance wellbeing features.

The discussion stressed the vital importance of cross-sector collaboration, which ensures that health considerations are not an afterthought but are woven into every stage of the housing ecosystem, from initial policy formulation to on-the-ground delivery.

“

We’re doing it because it’s the right thing to do, and we’re not going to do the wrong thing any longer

”

“

Poor housing is a social injustice and public health crisis, and it’s also an economic disaster.

”




SAINT-GOBAIN

ON THE ROAD

Meeting Room 3

THISTLETOP
DURAFINISH

Proven hard-wearing floor standard plaster
- 100% more impact resistant, keeping
the walls looking smooth and clean
in busy areas
- Resists coffee, scratches and
grouting stains



Insights and recommendations for action

Building upon the rich discussions and shared perspectives, the group developed a series of actionable recommendations designed to truly advance health-supportive housing across the entire sector.

1. Organisational strategies for housing providers

Individual housing associations are urged to:

- **Embed health as a primary development objective:** This means developing comprehensive health and wellbeing specifications for all new developments. It also involves creating impactful internal training programmes on health-centred delivery and establishing dedicated cross-departmental teams to ensure health considerations are integrated from a project's very inception.
- **Enhance resident engagement:** This means implementing robust co-production processes from a project's earliest stages. It also involves developing detailed post-occupancy evaluation mechanisms that specifically capture and analyse health impacts, alongside creating accessible platforms for ongoing resident feedback and genuine participation.
- **Lead with corporate courage and purpose:** Make bold, values-driven decisions that consistently prioritise resident wellbeing and long-term quality over short-term financial expediency. This includes being willing to set and adhere to higher standards and challenge existing norms, even when faced with perceived limitations.

2. Sector-wide recommendations

The sector as a whole should:

- **Collaborate to demonstrate demand:** By uniting their voice and showing a clear, collective demand for healthier homes, the housing association sector can significantly drive industry innovation, influence the supply chain towards healthier materials and solutions, and shape future policy decisions that embed health and wellbeing as standard.

- **Advocate for systemic change:** This involves lobbying for planning reforms that explicitly mandate health and wellbeing considerations, and collaborating to develop clear, measurable, and enforceable health and wellbeing standards for housing that significantly go beyond mere minimum compliance. Participants committed to actively supporting initiatives like the Healthy Homes Pledge.
- **Invest in skills and innovation:** The sector must proactively support apprenticeship programmes focused on sustainable and healthy construction methods. There is a clear need to invest in research on the long-term impacts of health-supportive design and to create dynamic, industry-wide knowledge-sharing platforms to effectively disseminate best practices.

3. Practical implementation and measurement

To deliver on these ambitions, it is crucial to:

- **Prioritise holistic approaches:** Focus on creating adaptable, flexible living spaces that can evolve with residents' needs. Integrate community facilities within housing developments to foster vital social connection, and prioritise fundamental elements such as superior indoor air quality, abundant natural light, and optimal thermal comfort.
- **Develop robust measurement and evaluation frameworks:** This involves creating standardised health impact assessment tools to rigorously evaluate proposed developments. It also means establishing long-term tracking of - and actions to improve - health outcomes and health equity in new developments and committing to sharing this evidence and learnings across the sector to build a collective evidence base.

“

Lived experience is not anecdotal. It is evidence. When tenants tell us what works and what doesn't, they are giving us insight no consultant's report can replicate.

”

Conclusion:
**Charting a course for
healthier communities**



At the New Affordable Homes for Health and Wellbeing Roundtable, what began as an honest discussion about systemic challenges in housing provision swiftly transformed into a powerful exploration of shared opportunity, deep collaboration, and necessary systemic innovation.

Key reflections from the day:

- Housing is not just about providing shelter; it is about supporting human potential and fostering thriving, resilient communities.
- Collaborative approaches, bringing back together the fields of housing and health, are absolutely essential to unlocking truly transformative solutions.
- Every organisation, regardless of its primary focus, has a vital and proactive role to play in creating healthier homes and communities across the UK.

The collective commitment and diverse expertise gathered unequivocally demonstrated that meaningful change is not only possible but urgently needed. By uniting with shared purpose, creativity, and a concrete commitment to action, we can confidently ensure that, as the final powerful thought from the day encapsulated, "The homes we design today will shape the health of communities tomorrow."

“

The homes we design today will shape the health of communities tomorrow.

”

Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant list:

- **Alex Baines**, Head of Building Better, Saint-Gobain Interior Solutions
- **Andrea Lampard**, Senior Strategic Partnership Manager, Anchor
- **Andy Cameron-Smith**, Communications Director, Healthy Homes Hub
- **Caritas Charles**, Policy and Insights Manager, TPAS
- **Dave Lakin**, Director of Development and Sales, Amplius
- **David Orr**, Chair, Clarion Housing Association (Chair of Roundtable)
- **Dinny Shaw**, Head of Planning, Development, Places for People
- **Elanor Warwick**, Head of Strategy, Policy and Research, Clarion
- **Elly Houlst**, Chief Operating Officer and Deputy Chief Executive, Peabody
- **Helen Hamilton**, Head of Sector Development - Residential, Saint-Gobain Interior Solutions
- **Liz Parsons**, Head of Public Health for Social Housing and the Built Environment, Milton Keynes City Council
- **Matthew Morgan**, Director, Quality of Life Foundation
- **Rosalie Callway**, Projects and Policy Manager, TCPA
- **Sarah Knight**, Assistant Director, Development Delivery, Paradigm
- **Sarah Maylor**, Development Director, Curo

Please note that while all individuals contributed valuable insights to the discussion, their presence does not imply a formal commitment by their organisation to undertake all the actions or recommendations outlined in this report.

Appendix 2: Useful resources

Below are some useful resources for anyone wanting to read more about this topic:

[The Quality of Life Framework](#) (Quality of Life Foundation)

[Healthy Homes campaign and pledge](#) (TCPA)

[Healthy Homes Hub](#)

[Health & Housing: Creating a blueprint for a new way of working](#) (HACT)

[Healthy Homes, Healthy Places](#) (CIH)

[Tackling Root Causes Upstream of Unhealthy Urban Development](#) (TRUUD)

[The Good Home Enquiry](#) (Centre for Ageing Better)

If you share our vision of a housing system that improves people's health and wellbeing over the long term, get in touch.

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Let's build quality of life together.