

Beyond Shelter: Benchmarking UK New Builds for Health

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The UK's Healthy Building Specialists



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Executive Summary



The UK is facing a hidden public health crisis.

It is estimated by the BRE that unhealthy housing costs the NHS an astounding £1.4 billion annually.

While homes should be places of safety, comfort, and recovery, for millions of people across the country, the buildings they live in are making them mentally and physically unwell. Poor indoor air quality, overheating, damp, mould and toxic building materials are quietly damaging our health across all types of housing, with many not realising this until their health issues become chronic, severe or even life-threatening.

The majority of discussions on unhealthy housing have previously focused on social housing stock or poor-quality private rented homes, with a major shift being seen since the tragic case of Awaab Ishak's death due to living in a severely damp and mouldy home and the subsequent new legislation of Awaab's Law. However, the reality of unhealthy housing is much broader and more commonplace than many realise. Private developments, including new builds, often fall short of the standards required to support good health.

As the government calls for 1.5 million new homes to be built across the UK, there is a critical opportunity, and responsibility, for developers to deliver genuinely healthy homes that ordinary British households can afford to live and thrive in.

We shouldn't just be building 1.5 million new homes, but 1.5 million *healthy homes*.

This report makes the case that:

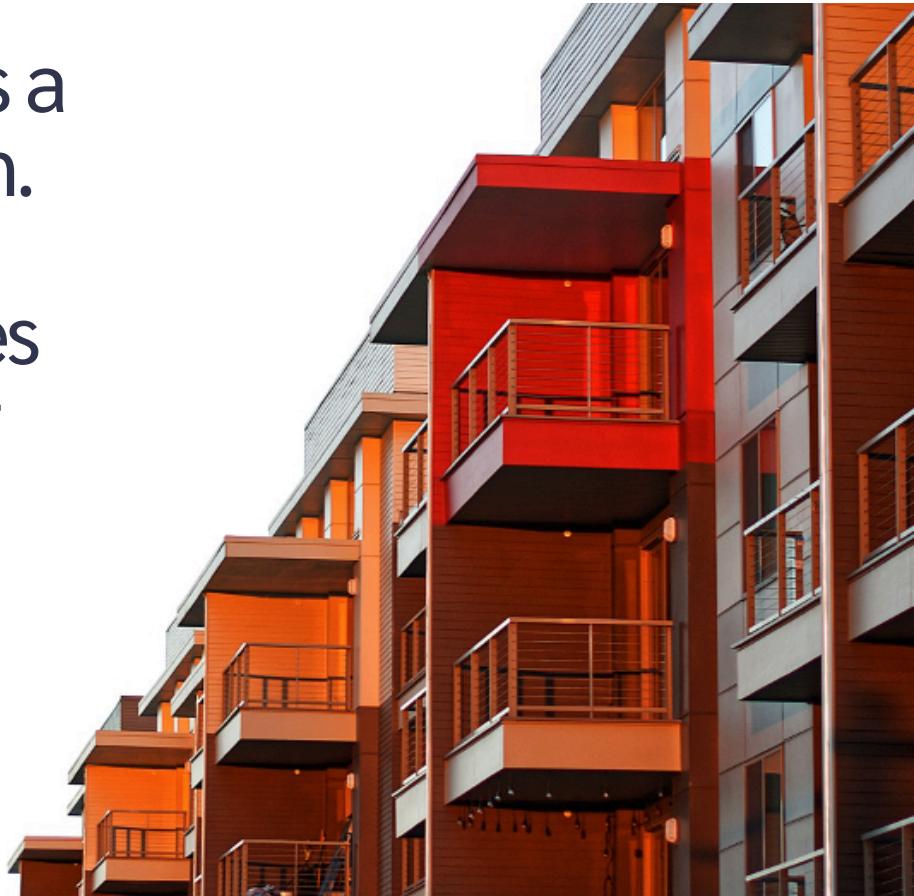
- 01 Health issues linked to housing quality are widespread, affecting new builds in many of the same ways as the rest of the housing sector.
- 02 Physical and mental health are deeply impacted by where and how we live, with serious consequences for public health and the economy.
- 03 The current regulatory framework does not go far enough to ensure healthy homes.
- 04 Government plans to quickly build a vast number of new homes could add to this insidious health problem if quality benchmarks are not raised across the board.
- 05 Developers can and should lead the way by adopting health-focused design principles and voluntary standards that focus on health and well-being to future-proof their assets, while regulation catches up.

We also introduce the Healthy Homes Checklist (HHC) tool and National Registry for Health in Housing as a potential solution to monitoring and delivering healthier housing in the UK. The HHC is a science-backed, practical assessment to benchmark and report on the health aspects and impacts of new build homes: like an EPC, but for health. By using this framework, developers can not only future-proof their projects, but also play a pivotal role in openly reporting on progress towards healthier, more equitable housing for everyone.

This report is a call to action.

Better homes mean better health.

The time to act is now.



A Failing Framework: The Policy and Regulatory Gap

If housing is one of the most important public health interventions we can make, then the rules governing how we design and build homes must be fit for that purpose. Yet in the UK, the regulatory framework around housing and health remains outdated, fragmented, and reactive - designed primarily to avoid harm, not to actively promote well-being. It also lags far behind global health research.

At a time when air pollution, mental illness, and chronic disease are rising, the standards shaping our homes fail to reflect the full spectrum of health risks or the extensive evidence base advocating for healthy environments. While other countries have begun to embed health into building regulation, the UK remains focused on minimum thresholds and lagging indicators. The result is predictable - there are still thousands of homes being built each year that are compliant with building regulations (as well as many that are not), yet are demonstrably unhealthy to live in.

The current development model tends to prioritise financial return and visual appeal over measurable long-term health outcomes. And while there are many developers doing a great job, statistics show that less than 40% of developers undertake health impact assessments (HIAs) of their schemes as there is no national statutory requirement to conduct them and often it is left to local policymakers to mandate this - typically on larger schemes. The regulations that do exist are frequently viewed as compliance checkboxes rather than design imperatives with an overt focus on occupant health.

UK building regulations are siloed and piecemeal when it comes to health:

01 **Part F (Ventilation)**

Focuses narrowly on air-exchange rates and often permits mechanical systems without real-time air quality monitoring, filtration or consideration of occupant well-being.

02 **Part L (Conservation of Fuel and Power)**

Rightly pushes for energy efficiency, but often at the expense of ventilation and material safety - inadvertently encouraging the construction of airtight, pollution-trapping interiors.

03 **The Decent Homes Standard**

Originally designed for social housing, will soon apply to properties owned by both private and social landlords with the Renters Rights Bill coming into effect, but has not been meaningfully updated to reflect modern health science or the wide range of topics that should be considered under the umbrella of healthy housing issues.

There is no cohesive, cross-cutting framework in UK housing policy that unites thermal comfort, air quality, acoustic performance, daylight access, or material safety into a single health-promoting standard. Nor is there a requirement to assess the cumulative impact of these factors on human health.

A [2023 review by the Building Research Establishment \(BRE\)](#) found that current building standards fail to address key causes of respiratory illness, mental health deterioration, and sleep disruption - even when homes are "technically compliant." It is estimated that substandard housing costs the NHS up to £1.4 billion annually, much of which is due to respiratory conditions stemming from dampness and inadequate ventilation, showing that compliance doesn't always equate to health protection.

Internationally, a growing number of countries are integrating health into housing regulation. For example, [France's RE2020](#) mandates indoor air quality thresholds for CO₂, PM2.5, and VOCs, as well as summer overheating resilience. Meanwhile, Denmark applies principles that embed ventilation, overheating limitations, and daylight metrics into residential design codes. They even consider [internal air quality](#) to the point that there are limitations on gases like nitrogen oxide. By contrast, the [UK's Future Homes Standard](#) (due in early 2026) remains focused almost exclusively on carbon reduction and energy efficiency with the only heat-related adaptation focusing on limitations on overheating. There are no binding metrics on health-related indicators such as mould risk, air toxicity, or biophilic design. As the UK Green Building Council has already warned - [we are at risk of building zero-carbon homes that are not necessarily "zero-harm" homes](#).

Even where standards do exist, enforcement is often weak or inconsistent. Post-occupancy evaluations are infrequent, meaning homes may be built to spec but could still be delivering poor outcomes once inhabited. Planning approvals frequently reward density and visual aesthetics without scrutinising internal quality or health performance. This regulatory blind spot enables developments that meet legal requirements, but may be failing residents. There is no systematic mechanism in UK planning or housing policy to accurately measure, track, or report on the health impact of new homes. Meanwhile, a [2021 YouGov survey](#) showed that 39% of private UK renters – equivalent to 3.2m people – say they have been forced to live in dangerous or unhealthy conditions because they fear that complaining to their landlord will trigger a retaliatory eviction.

In November 2025, Homes England launched the [Healthy Homes Standard](#) as a design guidance document to be used by Homes England and its delivery partners on schemes funded under the Affordable Housing Programme. While it's a step in the right direction –

According to the BRE, it is estimated that **substandard housing costs the NHS** up to

£1.4 billion annually

generally aligning with existing statutory requirements and suggesting a number of enhancements - it's not a complete set of checks or mandatory practical guidelines to help developers deliver genuinely healthy homes across the board.

So, while regulation sets the floor, it must not be mistaken for the ceiling. What is needed now is a shift in mindset - from compliance to responsibility.

The science is already clear. We know what makes homes healthier, and we have methods to assess it. What we lack is the political will and industry expectation to require it - with thorough implementation - across all developments, rather than just the industry leaders.

The solution is not just more regulation, but better alignment - across health, planning, and housing policy. It also means creating the conditions for voluntary leadership, where developers, funders, and local authorities raise the bar ahead of statutory change.

Voluntary tools like the Healthy Homes Checklist can help fill the void, offering a coherent, tangible and evidence-based framework for what health-positive design actually looks like. But the impact is entirely dependent on uptake and collective understanding.

If we want housing to be part of the solution to the UK's health crisis, our policy framework must catch up with the evidence. A healthy home should not be a premium product. It should be the standard we all expect - and demand.



Barratt London's Bollo Lane Development was one of the first to be assessed using the Healthy Homes Checklist

Where New Homes are Still Falling Short

There is now a wealth of evidence linking poor quality housing to a wide range of physical and mental health outcomes. Public narratives about unhealthy housing in Britain have tended to focus on the most shocking examples: severe damp, structural failures and dangerous neglect in social housing. Yet we must remember that approximately 83% of the UK's housing stock is privately held and while the social housing failures deserve the attention they receive, the framing obscures a wider and more systemic truth.

The UK's housing and health crisis is not limited to older, low-cost or poorly managed stock. Increasingly, it extends into the very homes being built today - homes that are marketed as modern, efficient, and high quality, but which too often still fall short of providing healthy living conditions. Many of us have firsthand experience of homes affected by issues such as leaks, mould, inadequate insulation, and noise pollution. Despite a national narrative of improvement, large swathes of the population remain exposed to environmental hazards and stressors with well-documented health risks.

From high-rise towers to suburban estates of speculative new homes, evidence now shows that even new builds are not automatically healthy. Many introduce new forms of risk arising from poor design choices, construction practices, toxic materials or the pursuit of density and efficiency at the expense of well-being. Health is not inherently "built in" by virtue of modernity: it must be designed, commissioned, and verified, and too often, this doesn't happen.

These are some of the most prevalent issues arising in newer homes:



1. Ventilation Gaps, VOCs and Hidden Moisture is Affecting Indoor Air Quality

Poor indoor air quality (IAQ), driven by insufficient ventilation and the off-gassing of building materials, contributes to several respiratory problems. The UK Health Security Agency has identified airborne toxins such as formaldehyde and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), often found in newer building materials and finishes, as key drivers of asthma and lung infections. Children are particularly vulnerable with research showing that they are more at risk of developing and worsening asthma due to exposure to domestic VOCs with the highest odds ratios for benzene followed by ethylbenzene and toluene.

IAQ in new homes is shaped by increasingly airtight construction but also by how mechanical ventilation is designed, installed, and used. A 2024 Buildings & Cities study of London new builds found that even when installed correctly (per Approved Document F), mechanical extract ventilation (MEV) and trickle vents often deliver insufficient actual airflow.

Furthermore, residents are often unclear about how systems work and regularly override or ignore them, thus risking poor air quality.

We know that new build developments – particularly those with poor ventilation – can quickly become filled with toxic indoor air chemicals from the construction process, finishes and furnishings. A review study from 2022 analysed indoor VOCs in European and UK residences found that construction and furnishing materials are major indoor sources of harmful VOCs, including benzene and toluene, some at levels with potential carcinogenic effects, including associations with higher cancer risks. The NHBC Foundation's study with the BRE Trust on zero-carbon homes found that MVHR systems are frequently mis-specified or poorly commissioned, resulting in suboptimal air change rates and persistently high indoor pollutant levels. This research highlighted particularly elevated levels of VOCs (including formaldehyde) post-construction, based on the number of chemical-rich materials in new builds, with a slow decline over time. These exposures are associated with increased risk of asthma, allergies, and eye and skin irritation - and long-term exposure can exacerbate respiratory and cardiovascular conditions.

When considering air quality, it's also important to highlight that newer homes are not immune from damp and mould problems. Damp in the home, often stemming from condensation or leaks, quickly leads to toxic mould growth which has been associated with systemic health risks and 3.5 times the normal risk of asthma in children, as well as increased risk of respiratory conditions and asthma attacks in adults. In one social housing study visible mould or the smell of damp in the home increased the odds of doctor-diagnosed asthma in over-50s by 140%, with women being more at risk.

In new builds, hidden moisture pathways - such as minor leaks behind panels or in between floors, condensation from kitchens and bathrooms, insufficient extraction, as well as materials getting wet in the construction process and failing to dry out completely - can generate mould risks, particularly where ventilation is inadequate. While comprehensive national statistics on new-build mould pathways are limited, the pattern is consistent across investigations: moisture management failures in modern homes often occur within the building fabric, making mould harder to detect – and therefore often harder to resolve. These issues may be considered less dramatic than in older stock but are no less harmful as low-level, persistent mould exposure contributes to respiratory irritation and increased risk for vulnerable individuals.



“At Damp Detectives we see many new build homes that are affected by mould and damp. This is due primarily by the design and construction which does not allow the actual building to release moisture pressure and "breathe" whilst concentrating on thermal efficiency. This is not the same thing as ventilation for lifestyle, but until the designers understand this, new builds will continue to be plagued by mould.”

Quote from Robert Horne, Founder & Managing Director, Damp Detectives Ltd.

2. Overheating is a Common Health Risk

Thermal comfort is not guaranteed in new homes. Britain's government-led report "[Research into Overheating in New Homes](#)" ([Phase 1](#)) identified new flats - especially small, glazed, urban dwellings - as the highest risk for overheating, particularly in southern regions of the UK - even in relatively mild summers. Correspondingly, the [NHBC Foundation reporting](#) warns that many overheating incidents in new builds are due to inadequate ventilation. This highlights that airtightness, while key for energy efficiency, often comes without sufficient design integration for heat dissipation.



The '[Hot Homes Project](#)' in 2019 monitored 40 Southwark homes for 6 weeks and found that every single home exceeded the WHO's 25°C safe limit, with 85% rising above 27°C and some reaching 30°C - even on moderate summer days.

Daylight is also not covered in a holistic way in UK Building Regulations and often falls at the expense of design to reduce overheating. Consequently, when it comes to daylight and operable windows, many recent developments suffer from deep-plan single-aspect high rise flats with small windows and fixed shading devices that partially block views and daylight year-round rather than during peak heat times. Furthermore, [restricted window openings due to design or safety limitations](#) (e.g., tilt-and-turn limiting to 10 cm) become another key factor contributing to overheating.

Overheating isn't just a design point, it can negatively affect [cognitive performance, hydration, sleep, and even long-term respiratory, metabolic, cardiovascular and mental health](#). The problem is systemic, not incidental, and is expected to worsen with climate change.

3. Undersized Homes with Poorly Designed Play and Outdoor Space

According to the RIBA, the UK has some of the smallest homes in Western Europe. An [academic report from 2020](#) found that fewer than 1 in 4 new-build homes created through permitted development between 2013 and 2020 met nationally described space standards (NDSS). While these guidelines have since improved, it's important to highlight how many existing homes remain overcrowded and have a lack of access to outdoor space - posing yet another important risk to health. One peer-reviewed UK study that explored [Home Use and Experience during COVID-19 in London \(2020\)](#) found that approximately 31% of adults experienced mental or physical health issues due to their housing conditions during the first lockdown, with over 10% feeling depressed because of insufficient dwelling space.

While overcrowded households have higher infection rates, they are also correlated with increased psychological distress due to lack of personal space and privacy. A lack of indoor space is often combined with a lack of outdoor space, with [1 in 8 British households](#) having no access to private or shared gardens.



The benefits of access to blue and green space for improved mental, physical and emotional health has been well-researched, especially in deprived areas, and yet, the problem persists. These findings highlight that the health risks of poor housing are acute and long-term, both visible and invisible.

Access to high-quality play space is widely recognised as a determinant of child development, physical activity and community cohesion. Yet, audits of new housing developments frequently find this provision is lacking on site. The Place Alliance's National Housing Audit (2021), covering 142 large developments across England, found that public, open, and dedicated play spaces were often poorly designed or badly located, contributing to overall mediocre ratings for design quality and usability.



In London, Strategic Planning Guidance includes an expectation of 10 m² of dedicated play space per child, but many large schemes do not deliver age-appropriate or centrally located play areas with the correct types of age-appropriate equipment. Without any mandatory play-space requirements in many places outside of London, numerous developments fall short in both quantity and quality of play space provision. A 2025 UCL-led study (part of the PUSH project) confirms that planners and developers routinely treat play as an afterthought, despite strong evidence linking access to play with lower levels of childhood obesity, better mental

health, and stronger social bonds. The lack of post-occupancy evaluation for play usability further compounds the issue.

4. High Cost and Questionable Quality

According to the Home Builders Federation, approximately 1.78 million houses have been built in the UK in the last decade (net supply estimate). These schemes can often promise modern, well-designed homes, sometimes with additional amenities, marketed as premium products. Yet, despite the marketing and branding of these places as promoting well-being, design quality or even reducing loneliness, poor quality new build developments can suffer from the same health-related design issues found across the rest of the housing sector: single-aspect orientation, overlooking, a lack of privacy, proximity to busy roads (raising NO₂ and particulate exposure), overheating due to poor design, a lack of storage space, limited space to store food or cook nourishing meals and little or no private outdoor space.

Alongside the physical design issues within the home environment, additional stress is created by the extremely high cost of UK housing. Low-income private renters are now spending almost two thirds (63%) of their income on housing - up from 56% in 2019/20. According to evidence published by Shelter in 2024, social rents are 64% more affordable than private rents, with social tenants paying circa £828 less rent per month than private tenants.



The cost and quality issue is also compounded by a lack of accountability. There is little to no policy requirement for follow-up health data collection or post-occupancy evaluation related to well-being metrics. In other words, we are not simply seeing a "housing crisis", but rather something that could be considered a broader health failure in how we design and regulate homes across the UK. In fact, while social housing is slowly being brought up to standard under regulatory pressure and is naturally more affordable, there are still some private housing developments that continue to deliver costly homes that do not adequately address health equity.

New Does Not Always Equal Healthy

While social housing failures dominate headlines, it's clear that the health risks of poor housing are distributed across all tenures. New housing is no exception even though quality in this sector - of course - varies. Modern construction methods, ambitious energy targets, and supply-chain issues can also contribute to new forms of risk unless health and well-being is specifically addressed as a requirement.

Residents of poor quality new-build developments frequently report:

- Overheating
- Poor ventilation
- Odours and VOCs
- Poor sound insulation
- Lack of daylight
- Insufficient indoor or outdoor space
- Moisture accumulation
- Inadequate extraction

Many of these problems are inadequately addressed in official compliance documents. Yet all can, and do, affect health.

The central message is this:

Improving health in UK housing is not merely a matter of fixing the poorest-quality stock. It is about raising standards across all new homes.

Without a widely-adopted health-led approach to design, specification and regulation, Britain risks building a new generation of homes that replicate old problems, with new consequences.



What a Healthy Home Looks and Feels Like

A healthy home isn't just one that provides shelter and avoids harm, it's one that actively supports the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of the people living in it. While many UK homes are still created only with efficiency, aesthetics, and profits in mind, rather than health explicitly, there are also a growing number of developers changing tact. These developers are demonstrating leadership and a genuine commitment to doing things differently to support the long-term health of residents.

Barratt Developments, for example, has recently announced a commitment to deliver a substantial number of Passivhaus homes, supporting high standards of indoor air quality, thermal comfort, energy efficiency and overall design quality. Meanwhile, Goldsmith Street in Norwich represents the UK's largest certified Passivhaus social housing development, comprising 105 homes delivered at just £1,825 per square metre. The scheme demonstrates that low fuel bills, excellent thermal comfort, daylight and award-winning architecture with high-quality public realm, tree-lined streets and pocket parks can be achieved even for typical or lower build costs. It stands as a compelling example of how healthy building principles can be delivered at scale and within typical developer construction cost budgets.

Progress is also being made in addressing harmful materials within the built environment. Several developers are now actively banning or reducing volatile organic compounds (VOCs) within their specifications and limiting the use of toxic plastics. Green Square Accord, for instance, has piloted 'plastic-free' homes across 12 affordable housing units, using alternatives such as wooden kitchen units, aluminium window frames, mineral-based cable insulation instead of plastic, and solar thermal heating systems to support low operational energy costs.



Example project: Goldsmith Street, Norwich, Mikhail Riches Architects

Collectively, these examples demonstrate that healthier homes do not need to be more expensive. There is clear evidence that the industry can deliver high-performing, healthy housing across all tenures and price points, providing valuable lessons for wider adoption.

So, what does a truly healthy home look and feel like? It's not defined by luxury or expense. Nor does it require radical design. Rather, it integrates a set of clear, evidence-based features that support comfort, safety, and well-being throughout daily life and across lifespan. Here we break down some of the key features of a healthy built environment.

Clean, Fresh Indoor Air

Air quality is one of the most critical factors for a healthy home. The average person spends over 90% of their time

indoors, yet indoor air is often more polluted than outdoor air due to VOCs from paints, finishes, and cleaning products, formaldehyde in manufactured wood, moisture from cooking and bathing, and carbon dioxide build-up in poorly ventilated spaces.

Healthy homes prioritise good ventilation: either through carefully designed natural cross-ventilation or controlled mechanical systems (e.g., MVHR). Low-emission materials, sealed joins, and humidity control all contribute to reducing pathogens, allergens and pollutants.

Due to all of the factors and chemicals that contribute to poor indoor air quality, it is associated with a wide range of health issues respiratory illness, fatigue, cognitive decline, and sleep disruption. Meanwhile, mould and mycotoxins that build up in damp environments can lead to toxicity across most organ systems, cancer-development and even death in immunocompromised individuals and children if exposure is chronic. Healthy homes address air first and foremost.

Access to Daylight and Good Lighting Design



Natural light doesn't just illuminate a space, it is critical for setting our 24-hour biological clocks. Daylight exposure regulates circadian rhythms, improves sleep quality, enhances mood, and boosts productivity.

Healthy homes maximise daylight in key living areas, bedrooms, kitchens, and workspaces, without causing overheating. Large windows with deep reveals, skylights, and thoughtful orientation improve light access. High quality lighting avoids glare or flicker to reduce eye strain and headache risk, and in the evenings, layered artificial lighting systems can be implemented to mimic natural wavelengths, avoiding melatonin-disrupting blue light.

Thermal Comfort All Year Round



A home that's too cold or too hot can cause stress to the body and mind. Cold homes are associated with increased risk of cardiovascular illness and respiratory infections, especially for older adults, babies, and those with pre-existing conditions. Overheating - increasingly common in modern homes - impairs sleep, worsens chronic conditions, and increases risk during heatwaves.

A healthy home maintains stable indoor temperatures throughout the year, using proper insulation, airtightness balanced with ventilation, and solar shading where appropriate. Ideally, exterior shading is not fixed and can be deployed only in times when overheating risk is high, ensuring that daylight is not compromised unnecessarily. The use of radiant heating or cooling systems is now seen as best practice in health-supporting design or the use of standards such as Passivhaus, which create a comprehensive approach to comfortable and stable indoor temperatures.

Acoustic Comfort

According to the [World Health Organisation](#), noise pollution is considered the second biggest environmental health risk after poor air quality. [Exposure to persistent background noise](#) - from neighbours, roads, building systems, or even internal echoes - is associated with increased blood pressure, stress hormone levels, and reduced cognitive function.

A healthy home controls unwanted sound through good spatial layout (buffer zones, room separation), high-performance windows, and acoustic insulation in walls, floors, doors and ceilings. Major exterior noise sources are addressed with intelligent landscaping design and acoustic barriers where required, such as for housing close to major roads and railways.



Example project: Acoustic Panel System, Kvadrat Acoustics

Toxin-Free Materials and Finishes

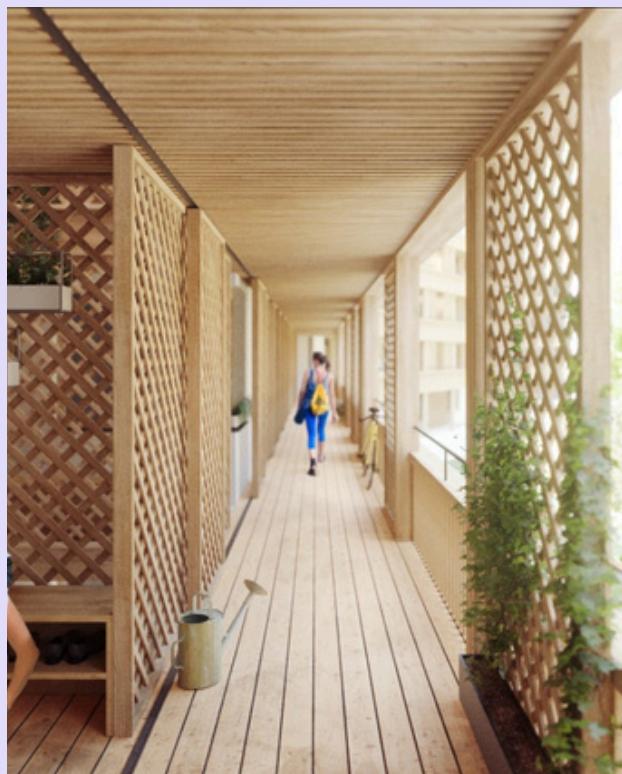
Building materials can off-gas harmful chemicals long after construction is complete. Formaldehyde, VOCs, phthalates, and flame retardants are just some of the compounds frequently found in common households, with links to [endocrine disruption](#) (hormonal imbalances) and [respiratory illnesses](#).

Healthy homes specify low- or zero-VOC wet applied products (paints, adhesives, sealants), FSC-certified wood products, formaldehyde-free MDF, and natural materials like cork, wool, and lime plaster where possible. Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) can be used to verify safe sourcing and low emissions.

Psychological Safety and Privacy

A healthy home supports emotional safety and control. Privacy, security, and autonomy are central to this. Homes should offer separation between noisy and quiet areas, flexibility in room function, and a layout that supports individual retreat as well as social connection.

They should also consider safety around entrances, exits, and provide adequate segregation from neighbours for privacy purposes, without creating a sense of isolation. Feeling "at home" is a psychological need - not a luxury.

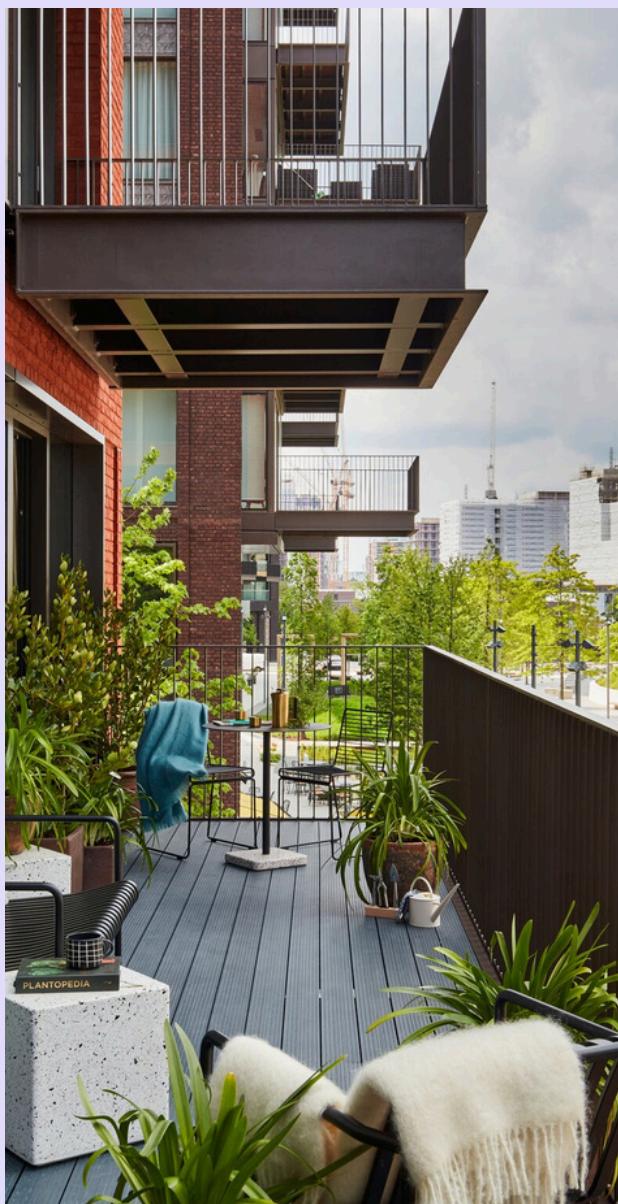


Example project: Neu-Ulm Housing Project, Germany, Schwarz Architekten

Connection to Nature and Outdoor Space

Biophilic design - incorporating natural materials, views, and greenery - has been shown to reduce stress, improve focus, and support immune function. Even a window overlooking trees or a balcony with planters can contribute to better moods, higher work output and improved overall well-being.

Healthy homes provide access to gardens, terraces, or balconies. Where private outdoor space isn't possible, shared courtyards, green roofs, or proximity to parks and trees are critical.



Example project: Embassy Gardens, London, Ballymore



Example project: Council House Renovation, London, VATRAA

Adaptability Over Time

As we change, and our health needs change over the course of our lifetimes, our homes need to be able to adapt accordingly. Whether accommodating a new baby, supporting home working, or ensuring accessibility in older age, flexibility is key.

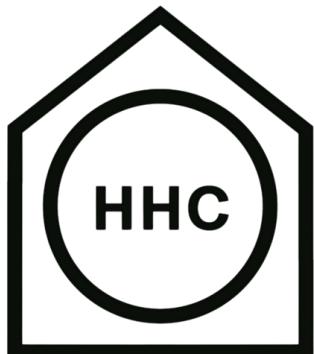
Level thresholds, wide doorways, sufficient storage, and even the ability to extend, all contribute to creating inclusive and future-proofed housing.

What Healthy Looks Like in Practice

Healthy homes are not always identifiable from the outside. They're not about premium materials or high-end tech but instead they're defined by how they perform - how they feel to live in, day after day.

They promote deep rest, recovery from illness, productive work, joyful living, and ageing in place. They reduce the need for NHS visits. They support mental health and strengthen community resilience. They are, quite simply, the foundation of a healthy society.

A New Solution: The Healthy Homes Checklist



The Healthy Homes Checklist (HHC) is not just a tool. It's a transformative blueprint that turns health objectives into actionable design outcomes, and enables new developments to become benchmarks for those that follow. Developed by the UK's Healthy Building specialists, Ekkist, in collaboration with leading experts across the industry, the HHC integrates 120 practical, evidence-based recommendations across all housing typologies—from single-family homes to large-scale build-to-rent schemes and co-living developments.



What makes the HHC Unique?

The HHC goes beyond minimum standards or tick-box compliance. It's a proactive assessment framework built to analyse and report on healthier, happier environments:

01 Science-backed & Expert-managed

Developed from peer-reviewed evidence and international best practice, each HHC is overseen by health and design professionals.

02 Comprehensive in Scope

120 health-based criteria are reviewed across the full design team, from architectural decisions to mechanical engineering, acoustics to construction, through to operation, and beyond, as well as being UK-specific.

03 User-friendly & Scalable

Fast to assess and easy to apply across all housing developments and multi-unit masterplans.

04 Registered & Credible

Successfully assessed homes will be able to opt in to be searchable on a nationwide registry for health in housing to showcase commitment and transparency.

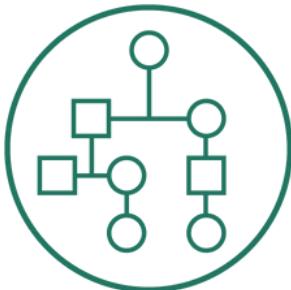
The Categories at a Glance

The HHC is built around twelve key categories, each targeting essential elements of healthy living environments:



Building Context

Embeds health considerations into strategic planning, organisational culture, and community culture.



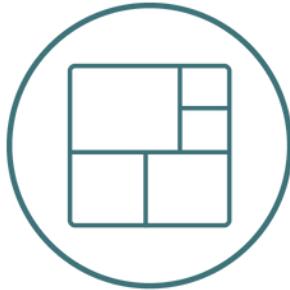
Building Layout

Ensures careful consideration of orientation, daylight levels, security, privacy and more.



Architectural Design

Promotes architectural clarity, accessibility, and visual comfort through evidence-based form and façade strategies.



Internal Layout

Ensures thoughtful orientation, space flexibility, and functional zoning to minimise noise, maximise daylight, and support mental well-being.



Circulation Design

Promotes functional, well-connected internal and communal spaces to foster social interaction and community cohesion.



Building Envelope

Ensures thermal performance, airtightness and protection from the elements alongside wider factors that can influence health.



MEP Strategy

Considers technical design in relation to health, comfort, toxicology and climate resilience by way of factors such as heating, ventilation, indoor air quality monitoring, and lighting.



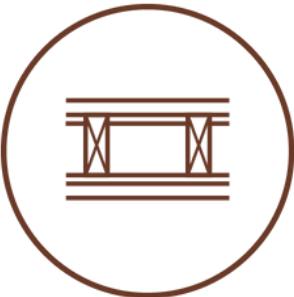
Amenity Provision

Considers amenities and services that elevate the occupant experience, making it more than just a home, and fostering connection with the local neighbourhood.



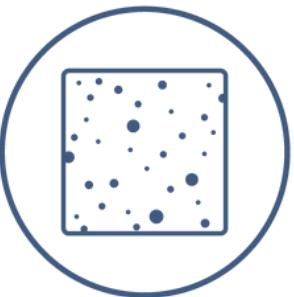
Landscape Design

Encourages opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and relaxation in thoughtfully outdoor spaces.



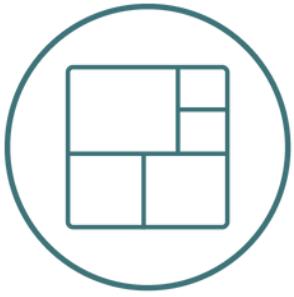
Internal Detailing

Taking specification further into the small details within homes that can have a big impact on health, from baths to blackout blinds and more.



Materials & Furniture

Specifies low-toxicity finishes, products and furnishings.



Post-Occupancy Evaluation

Tracks user satisfaction and health outcomes, feeding insights back into future design improvements.

Addressing a Gap in the Industry

The Healthy Homes Checklist was created in response to a lack of comprehensive, residential-focused 'best practice' guidance and reporting in the UK housing sector. As discussed, current Building Regulations fall short of ensuring optimal, healthy homes. And while many different frameworks exist, none address health in UK housing in such detail or provide a clear reporting tool that make sense to future occupants, clearly explaining the benefits of healthier homes.

The HHC is a cost-effective and practical tool addressing this issue, to rapidly assess and report on health and well-being across all housing types. Like an EPC, but specific to health, it reviews projects against key criteria via a streamlined method, focusing on the key health issues arising in UK homes. A total score and corresponding consumer report is then provided, outlining all of the health and well-being interventions that a home has implemented.

It can then be used to inform design briefs or ESG requirements, as a precursor or follow-up to building certifications such as WELL and Fitwel, or to report on completed schemes' health-focused USPs.

Why Use the HHC?

- Clearly evaluate how your development addresses key health and well-being criteria.
- Clearly communicate to planners, internal and external stakeholders and future residents how your development impacts health and well-being.
- Demonstrate value to future occupants through the relationship between their home and their health.
- Identify areas for improvement as an organisation to carry out immediately or in future.
- Celebrate and report on what is already being done well.
- Add value to your asset by demonstrating its health benefits and impact.

Conclusion: Building for a Healthy Future

The evidence is now overwhelming - the homes we build directly shape our physical and mental health. From the air we breathe to the light we're exposed to, from how we sleep to how we connect with others, housing is one of the most powerful public health tools we have.

And yet, in the UK, so many continue to treat housing as a market commodity first, and a health determinant second. Of those estimated 1.78 million homes built in the last decade, not enough have been built with health as a key priority, or with any mandatory means of collecting post-occupancy data on the health impacts of the environment. This has left people living in spaces that undermine their well-being, rather than support it. This has also contributed to widening health inequalities, rising healthcare costs, and missed opportunities to design for prevention rather than cure.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

We already have the knowledge, tools, and precedent to build differently. From international regulatory models to domestic voluntary frameworks like the

Healthy Homes Checklist, we know what works. We need HHCs as much as we need EPCs. What is now required is the resolve to make health a non-negotiable part of the development process and make sure the next 1.5 million homes are built differently.

This report is a call to action - not just for government, but for developers, investors, designers, and communities. It's clear that the responsibility for creating healthy homes lies with all of us. And the rewards - from reduced disease burden to stronger communities, to more resilient housing stock - are both substantial and enduring.

The next generation of homes should not just meet minimum standards. They should help people thrive.

We must stop building houses that make people sick and begin building homes that truly support people to live well.



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