
Royal Institute of British Architects response to the APPG Inquiry into the Quality of New Build Housing in England.

The Royal Institute of British Architects champions better buildings, communities and the environment through architecture and our 40,000 members. We provide the standards, training, support and recognition that put our members – in the UK and overseas – at the peak of their profession. With government and our partners, we work to improve the design quality of public buildings, new homes and new communities.

The RIBA welcomes this Inquiry looking into the Quality of New Build Housing in England. Tackling the housing crisis is one of the most pressing challenges facing politicians across the UK today. We welcome the prominence that increasing the number of new homes has achieved across the political spectrum, however, this focus on the numbers can't mean ignoring the need to build high quality, sustainable homes in healthy communities.

Much has been done to introduce a simplified system of national housing standards however they do not cover all the issues around quality and the new requirements are inconsistently applied. The lack of continuity from design stage to completion and procurement processes mitigate against quality in the delivery.

While there are an increasing number of great examples of high-quality new homes from a range of developers, we are concerned that many of the homes that are being built are not good enough. Too often, consumers tell us that new homes are too small, lack character and lack private outside space and our own research revealed that thousands of new homes across England fail to meet advised minimum floor areas.

Earlier this year the Government introduced a new national minimum space standard. However, the adoption process remains both voluntary and complex. While we welcome the announcement, it is clear that a more effective route would be to enshrine the new space standard in building regulations.

The 2015 RIBA National Awards included a number of very high quality housing schemes which demonstrated the value of good design and addressed the specific circumstances of the areas where they were built. We have highlighted a number of these on the next page and would be happy to provide additional details on request.

Darbishire Place, London

The use of materials and form allows the new building to complement its neighbours without mimicking them. Slightly projecting pre-cast reveals to the windows and balconies also give a depth to the modelling of the facades.



Laurieston Transformational Area, Glasgow

Reinterpreting the traditional Glasgow tenement, these blocks, fittingly urban in scale, provide high quality homes close to the heart of the city.



Parkside, Matlock

Parkside is an example of important civic architecture extending well beyond its footprint to become the missing link in the surrounding urban fabric. The new building provides commercial units at its base with three floors of residential accommodation above. The development has proved particularly effective at attracting older residents looking to downsize.



Bentford Lock West

The 45 unit canal-basin scheme occupies two five storey blocks above a half-storey podium containing parking and cycle storage. Each block has been articulated with cuts and projections that tune the warehouse-like massing to specific relationships and adjacencies.



Abode, Great Kneighton

This extremely well-considered scheme of 300 medium density residential dwellings is a testament to the successful working partnership between architects and developer. The partnership between the developer and architect was aided by a local council with strong design views and the ability to incentivise good design.



The design of homes has a big impact on people's lives. But whilst our lives have changed, our homes haven't changed with them. The housing market is failing to deliver both the right number of homes and the right type of home – particularly homes aimed at older buyers looking to downsize.

Consumers have little choice or power to influence the homes that get built, which too often results in poor quality, inappropriate development. Poor quality design and a lack of innovation in the housing sector is a symptom of a failing housing market. But local communities should not have to pay the price for failures within the housing industry. There is a clear need for Government intervention to address some of these failures in order to protect the public and ensure that a sustainable housing stock is delivered now and into the future.

Housing design standards play a crucial role in upholding housing quality and ensuring new homes are fit for purpose now and in the future. Government has made good progress on rationalising many of these overlapping standards through the technical Housing Standards Review.

Consolidating standards into regulations is only the first step towards a simple and coherent national approach to the design and detailing of homes and neighbourhoods. We should review the structure and format of Building Regulations and bring together planning and building regulations into a simple format that is easy to read and use, whether by the self-builder or the volume house-builder. The London Housing Design Guide provides a good example of such an approach and has provided clarity, certainty and a level playing field for those designing, planning and developing new housing in the city.

The RIBA has released several reports which detail ways in which the quality of new build housing in the UK can be improved:

Future Homes Commission

The [Future Homes Commission](#) builds a compelling case for future homes to provide more space, offer greater variety of layout and be more adaptable to changing need. To achieve this, design must be at the centre of housing development. Wellbeing should be a key consideration in housing design and construction, embracing aspects such as natural daylight and quiet which have a major influence on quality of life.

Case for Space

The [Case for Space](#) highlights why space is an important factor when people are choosing a home, but many feel that newly built homes aren't big enough. Existing research suggests that consumers are right to be worried. A lack of space has been shown to impact on the basic lifestyle needs that many people take for granted, such as having enough space to store possessions or even to entertain friends. In more extreme cases, lack of adequate space for a household has also been shown to have significant impacts on health, educational attainment and family relationships.

Good design - it all adds up

[Good design - it all adds up](#) summarises research assessing the value of good housing design; including case studies that provide the evidence of good practice; and show how clients and those who live and work in a building can get the most out of it when it is created together with an architect.

The way we live now

[The way we live now](#) looks at the needs and expectations people have for their homes, how they use the space in their homes and how they choose a new property. A qualitative approach was selected in order to uncover in-depth insights and detail on the experiences of UK householders. Five ethnographic interviews were carried out with participants in a range of housing situations and four discussion groups were conducted with members of the general public who were all looking to buy an affordable new home in the next 12 months.

Improving housing quality

[Improving housing quality](#) raises concerns about the recession leading to deterioration in housing quality. It also examines systemic problems which undermine standards and limit consumer choice and confidence in the new-build housing market. It

considers the impact on design quality caused by the economic crisis on falling land values and the associated pressure on housebuilders to retain their profit margins.