



Decent homes need decent spaces

An action plan to improve open spaces in social housing areas



**NATIONAL
HOUSING
FEDERATION**

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The quality of open spaces has a profound impact on people's health and wellbeing. CABI research shows that people living in deprived areas are more likely to have a poorer-quality local environment with less access to attractive green space. Now is the time to turn this around. We should celebrate the work of social landlords, tenants and community groups that have come together to transform their neighbourhoods. And we should create further opportunities to improve the quality of people's local environment.

This action plan is about how social landlords can provide more opportunities for people of all ages to enjoy the space on their doorsteps, whether they want to relax in the sunshine, experience nature, grow vegetables, play, compete in sport, or simply chat with their neighbours in a safe and pleasant environment.

A plan for change

Led by CABI and the National Housing Federation, social landlords and associated organisations from across the country have come together to debate the challenges and opportunities in delivering open space improvements. As a result, a practical action plan that sets out 10 priorities for change has been developed. The Neighbourhoods Green partnership is working with social housing providers to take these actions forward. By promoting good practice and sharing expertise, the quality of open spaces within social housing areas can be improved. For further information on these actions, go to www.cabi.org.uk/social-landlords



1. Commit to quality

Make a commitment to good quality green and open spaces at the highest level possible within your organisation.

In promoting better-designed and managed spaces, a culture change can occur in the way organisations and neighbourhoods value and use their outdoor spaces. For example, a critical element of Peabody's long-term vision is creating high-quality public spaces for everyone to use – making the most of each courtyard, square and garden within their estates.

Abbey Orchard Estate, Westchester © Matthew Trith



2. Involve residents

Encourage local residents, of all ages, to play an active role in deciding what their open spaces should be like, how they could be used and how they should be looked after.

All improvements should be led by residents' needs and aspirations and it is important that they are involved at each stage of the process. Better and longer-term resident participation can be developed using techniques such as CABE's Spaceshaper tool for both adults and children.



3. Know the big picture

Take a strategic approach when planning and improving open spaces.

With a better understanding of who owns what and who is responsible for maintaining specific spaces, it will be easier to integrate changes into the wider neighbourhood. This may include children's play, sport, community gardens and food growing. Natural England is developing a mapping system to estimate social housing green space in a given area. And the Landscape Institute's *Green infrastructure: connected and multifunctional landscapes* demonstrate how spaces can meet a wide variety of needs.



© Christopher Hill, Photography/Alamy

4. Make the best use of funding

Secure and coordinate different sources of funding by making the most of partnerships.

Approaches to finance high-quality open spaces include public and private investment, income generation, grants, endowments and voluntary sector involvement. For example, through an active partnership, Places for People, Peabody and the Riverside Group received £15.6 million from the Big Lottery Fund's Changing Spaces programme to regenerate over 70 open spaces in social housing areas across England.



© Green Estate Ltd, Sheffield

5. Design for local people

Make neighbourhoods greener, improve the layout of streets and provide new facilities through better design procurement and project delivery.

This requires well-prepared project briefs, good delivery teams and creative designs that are informed by local opinion. It's also fundamental to address the needs of children. Children under 16 account for approximately 20 per cent of the population and on social housing estates the proportion can rise to over 50 per cent. *Design for Play*, guidance published by Play England, the Department for Education and DCMS, advocates a design-led, natural approach to creating play spaces. A space that is good for children will often be good for adults, too.



© Natural England/Doorstep Greens

6. Develop training and skills

Motivate residents and staff through open space training opportunities.

Creating high-quality open spaces requires landscape architects, horticulturalists, project managers and confident leaders. Social landlords employ over 10 per cent of staff in the green space sector. Yet 25 per cent report significant shortages of skilled gardeners and specialist staff. CABE web guidance shows how apprenticeships can address skill shortages.



© Jane Sebire

7. Maintain high standards

Ensure that the maintenance and long-term care of gardens and open spaces are treated as **essential**.

This means having a management plan for each estate and regularly reviewing the performance of maintenance contracts. Raising the standard can be encouraged through national award schemes, such as the Green Flag Award, supported by CLG. To bid for affordable housing grant funding or propose development on land provided by the Homes and Communities Agency, schemes must meet the Building for Life standard.



Lillington Gardens Estate, Westminster © Alison Weiler

8. Make places feel safe

Improve the character and design of places to change user behaviour and improve personal safety.

Evidence demonstrates that investing in the creation and care of high-quality public spaces is very effective. For example, work with residents by Groundwork in Manchester and Salford led to better design and management of local alleyways that used to be a magnet for anti-social behaviour. This has helped personalise communal space, reduce crime and deter nuisance behaviour.



Pepys Estate, London © David Millington

9. Promote healthy living

Encourage people to be more active by providing attractive, well-maintained open spaces. Walking, cycling and play can become part of everyday routines if people have easy access to an attractive network of parks, natural green space, and pedestrian-friendly streets. Research shows that it's the green spaces closest to where people live that bring the most health benefits. Natural England recommends that people should have an accessible natural green space within five minutes of their home.



Cumberland Market Estate, London © Jane Sebire

10. Prepare for climate change

Provide increased protection for residents against flooding and heatwaves through urban greening programmes.

This will help adapt to and mitigate against the effects of climate change, improve water management and reduce urban temperatures. The National Housing Federation's neighbourhood audit highlights work by the Family Housing Association (Birmingham) and the Summerfield Residents Association, which created an eco village to make their neighbourhood more eco-efficient.



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For more information about getting involved,
delivering the actions and to have your say visit:

www.cabe.org.uk/social-landlords

What is Neighbourhoods Green?

Neighbourhoods Green aims to highlight the importance of green spaces for residents of social housing, and to raise the quality of their design, management and safe use. The partnership is currently supported by CABE, the National Housing Federation, Natural England, Peabody, Green Flag Plus Partnership, Groundwork UK, Landscape Institute and the Wildlife Trusts.

Who's involved?

Affinity Sutton, Aster Group, Berneslai Homes, Bolton At Home, Brighton & Hove City Council, Bromford Group, Cheshire Peaks and Plains Housing Trust, CABE, Communities and Local Government, Department for Education, East Thames, Equity Housing Group, Great Places Housing Group, Green Flag Plus Partnership, Groundwork UK, Hackney Homes, Harvest Housing Group, Helena Partnerships, Homes and Communities Agency, Homes for Islington, Hyde Housing, Incommunities Group Ltd, Landscape Institute, London Borough of Hackney, National Housing Federation, Natural England, New Charter Homes Ltd, Notting Hill Housing Trust, Peabody, Places for People, Sanctuary Housing Association, Sheffield Homes, Stadium Housing Association, Thames Valley Housing Association, The Riverside Group, Tower Hamlets Community Housing, Tower Hamlets Homes, Wakefield and District Housing, Wildlife Trusts, Yorkshire Housing Association

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