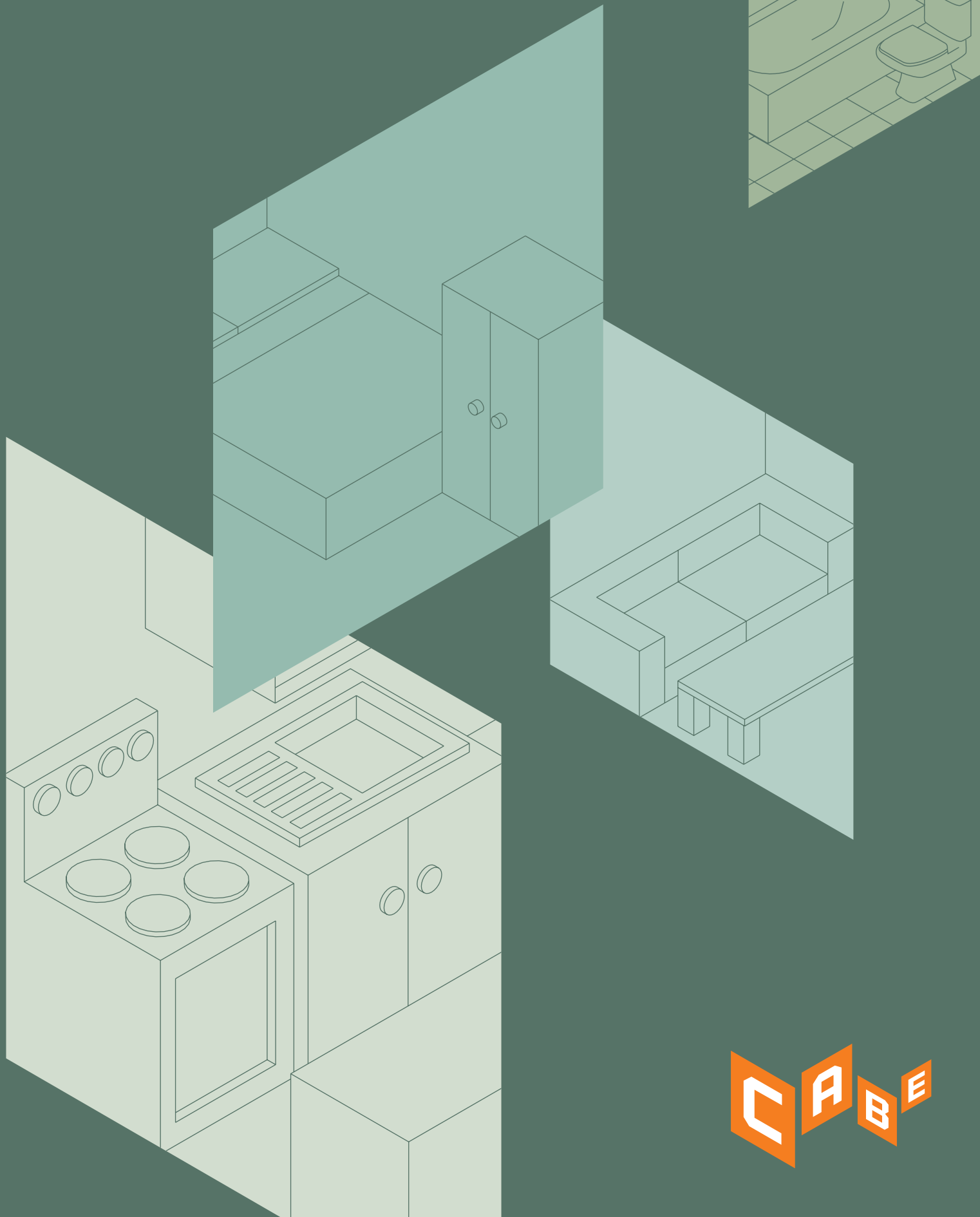


Summary

Space in new homes: what residents think



Introduction

This research summary addresses space standards in new private sector housing and seeks to establish whether residents have enough space to allow them to go about their everyday lives in comfort.

Adequate space is a pre-requisite for basic living. There should be enough room for residents to cook, eat, relax and socialise. There should be sufficient space for furniture and the storage of personal possessions. If homes are to have a long life, they must offer functional and adaptable spaces that meet the needs of families, children, older people and disabled residents.

From the late 1960s until 1980 the 'Parker Morris' standards set mandatory space requirements for all new town and local authority housing and were widely, although never completely, adopted by the private sector. They provided a source of information on space standards for designers and included dimensions for both the use and rearrangement of typical items of furniture. The 'Parker Morris' standards were withdrawn in 1980 and have not been replaced.

About the research

The research was jointly commissioned by CABE and English Partnerships, with RIBA, to explore residents' views on the adequacy of space in their homes. HATC Ltd commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct a self-completed postal survey, asking residents about the space available to them for performing everyday activities at home. A total of 11,500 questionnaires were sent out to homes built between 2003 and 2006 in London or within one hour's travel distance from London. 2,249 were returned (20 per cent).

This summary sets out the key findings and recommendations from this research and CABE's conclusions. The full report, containing the complete research data, can be obtained from the HATC website www.hatc.co.uk

However, space standards have by no means disappeared. Minimum space standards are still required for social housing and for development on publicly owned land. Both the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships, the two agencies that came together to form the Homes and Communities Agency, had set and enforced minimum requirements on all housing schemes that they funded. In the capital, the Greater London Authority is developing policies for minimum space standards in housing provision¹. A number of planning authorities in London and the South East have already adopted their own space standards for both social and private housing.

But there are no national minimum space standards, and neither building regulations nor the planning system specify minimum floor space for privately developed homes in England. The result has been private housing which does not consistently provide what CABE would consider to be adequate space.

Other countries commonly set space standards and research indicates that levels of space in the home in England are near the bottom of the range in comparison with other European countries². Compared with other EU member states, the UK has both the smallest newly built dwellings and smallest average room size³. The average size of a room in a newly built dwelling in France, for example, is 26.9 square metres and in the UK it is 15.8 square metres⁴. There is also some evidence to suggest that the differences between public and private provision are greater in the UK than elsewhere in Europe⁵.

This briefing suggests that private housing designs provide inadequate space for significant numbers of people. This leads CABE to question whether some recently built homes are fit for purpose.

1, 2 *Housing space standards*, HATC for the Greater London Authority, 2006

3, 4 *Unaffordable housing: fables and myths*, The Policy Exchange, 2005

5 *Housing space standards*, HATC for the Greater London Authority, 2006

Summary of findings

Is the market meeting demand?

The market does not appear to provide the space that residents require

Ninety four per cent of respondents say that the overall size of a property is either a very important or an important factor in their choice of where to live. Almost everyone thinks space is important in their home but many of those surveyed feel that they do not have enough space to go about their everyday lives and perform basic tasks comfortably.

This indicates a mismatch between the space needed by residents for everyday activities, and the space provided by the market.

Occupancy levels

The vast majority of responses came from people with a spare bedroom

This survey found that a high proportion (90 per cent) of new homes are not fully occupied, ie where the number of bed spaces matches the number of inhabitants aged 10 or over. A single bedroom counts as one bed space and a double as two.

Even when houses did have spare bedroom space, a significant proportion of residents still feel that the space available to them is inadequate. This suggests that the provision of extra bedrooms may not provide extra useable space.

Not surprisingly, the residents' assessment of the space in homes with no spare bedroom space is more critical, with further implications for flexibility, adaptability and social equity.

Social and economic equity

Lower-income households are more likely to be living in homes with insufficient space

Using council tax as an indicator of home value and therefore of household wealth, it appears that lower-income households suffer more from inadequate space than wealthier households.

This is partly explained by the finding that properties in lower council tax bands are more likely to be fully occupied. Council tax bands A-C account for 72 per cent of fully occupied properties, but only 39 per cent of all properties. This research consistently shows that the constraints placed on people through a lack of internal space are more acutely felt in fully occupied properties.

These two factors suggest that the link between social and economic inequity arising from poor space provision in new homes warrants further investigation. Those who can't afford to buy or move to larger homes have to live with the negative effects of space constraints, and it is important to understand why.

'Those who can't afford to buy or move to larger homes have to live with the negative effects of space constraints'

Adaptable and sustainable homes

Inadequate space means that many homes are not adaptable, so will be unsustainable in future

This research suggests that the size of new homes is likely to affect the provision of flexible, adaptable spaces that can respond to the changing needs of occupants, future lifestyle changes and the needs of different communities.

The government recognises the need for adaptable homes and supports it through lifetime homes standards and the code for sustainable homes. All public sector funded homes will be built to lifetime homes standards from 2011 and private housing from 2013. The code for sustainable homes level three is a target for 2010.

People's individual needs change over the course of their lives. They may have children, become disabled or an elderly relative may join the family. A home should offer adaptable spaces to accommodate changing circumstances, especially for those households who don't want to move, or are unable to do so. It is, of course, more difficult to move house in a recession-hit housing market, and less wealthy families are particularly affected.

The need now to separate waste for recycling in the home is just one small example of behaviour for which space is now required. Seventy two per cent of all respondents say that there isn't enough space in their kitchen for three small recycling bins – a requirement in the code for sustainable homes.

The government's 2007 waste strategy for England includes a target for 40 per cent of household waste to be recycled by 2010, but targets may not be met if homes lack the space for basic recycling facilities.

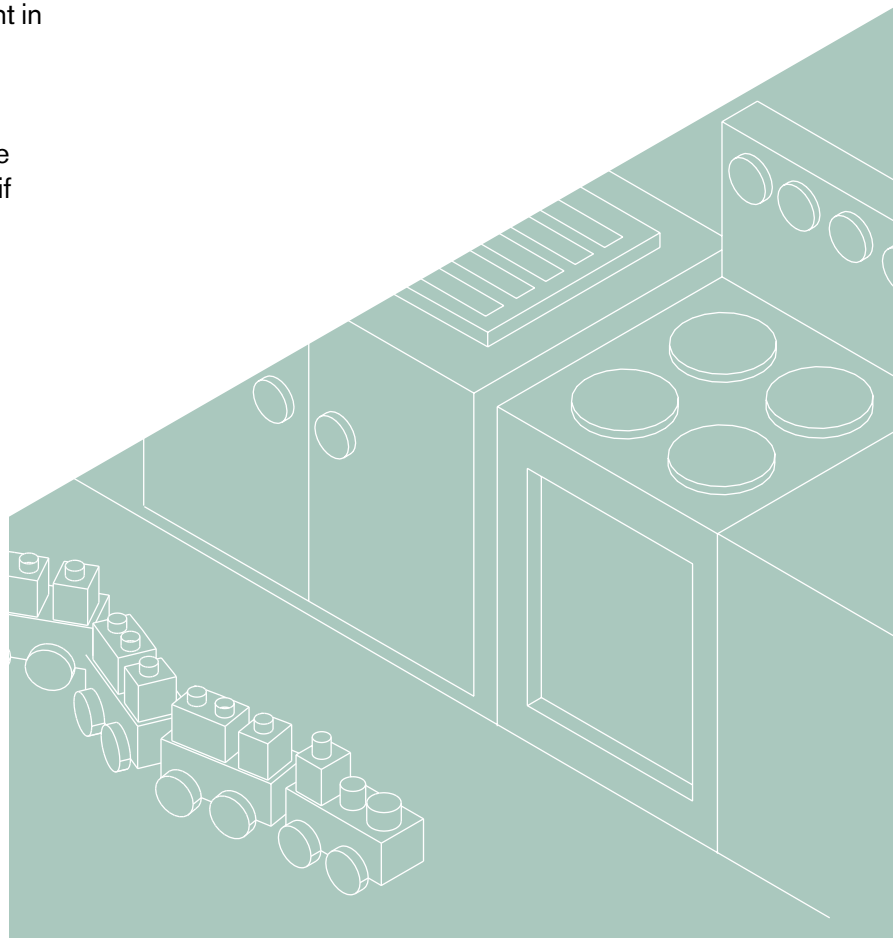
For housing stock to remain useful, it must be designed to change to meet future lifestyles and new technologies without prohibitively expensive alterations. Housing demolished before the end of its intended lifespan represents a serious financial and environmental waste.

Furniture

There is often not enough space for the furniture residents want or need

Forty seven per cent of all respondents, and 58 per cent of those in fully occupied homes don't have enough space for all the furniture they own, or would like to have. Fifty one per cent of all respondents and 65 per cent of those in fully occupied homes say that the amount of space in their homes limited the choice of furniture layout in rooms. Thirty six per cent of respondents in fully occupied homes have difficulty moving furniture around the home because of limited space in corridors and stairways.

People moving into new homes expect to choose how they organise their space. Restricted space means that furniture layout options in many new homes are limited. This could have serious implications for those with changing needs or restricted movement, undermining the concept of lifetime homes.



Storage

Most residents don't have the storage space they need

Storage is a basic but essential function of a living space. Everyone needs a place to keep items such as clothes, ironing boards and boxes. Given the option, no-one would choose a home without adequate storage; but many have no choice.

Fifty seven per cent of all respondents and 69 per cent of fully occupied households don't have sufficient storage in their homes to accommodate everything they need to store. In fully occupied households 37 per cent of respondents don't have the storage space they require in the right places around their homes.

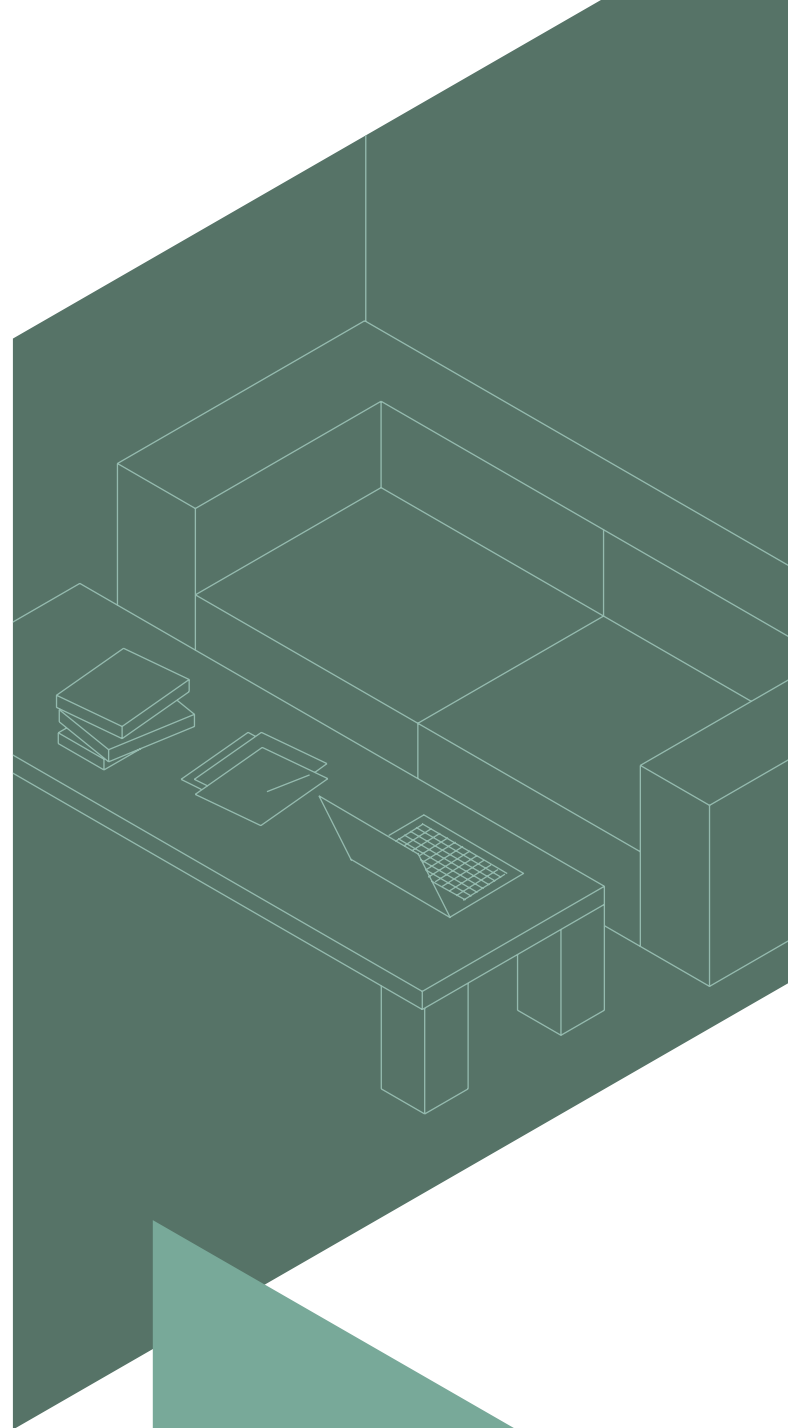
Food preparation

There often isn't enough space to prepare food easily

Forty three per cent of respondents living in fully occupied homes say that they don't have enough space for convenient food preparation. Thirty five per cent of all respondents say that they don't have enough kitchen space for the appliances that they want or need, such as toasters or microwaves.

The research suggests that some people have insufficient space to prepare meals conveniently. Further investigation is needed to understand the effect of restricted kitchen space on people's ability to eat a healthy diet.

The results also show that the kitchen – an area where young children are likely to play under supervision while adults perform domestic tasks – was a particular problem. Forty four per cent of all households say there isn't enough space for small children to play safely in the kitchen.



**‘Given the option,
no-one would choose
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Socialising

There is often inadequate space for children and adults to socialise

Thirty seven per cent of all the respondents say that they or their children cannot entertain guests privately, away from others. In fully occupied homes this figure rose to 46 per cent. Some 34 per cent of fully occupied households say they don't have enough space to have friends over for dinner. 48 per cent don't have enough space to entertain visitors at all.

It is reasonable to expect to be able to socialise at home. It is particularly important that families are able to eat together at meal times, and that children can develop friendships in a safe environment.

An implication of this is that children with inadequate space to entertain friends privately at home may instead do so outside the home, beyond parental supervision.

Privacy

Many people can't find a quiet or private place to relax

Although only 28 per cent of all respondents feel that they can't get away from other people's noisy activities, the figure for fully occupied properties is 48 per cent.

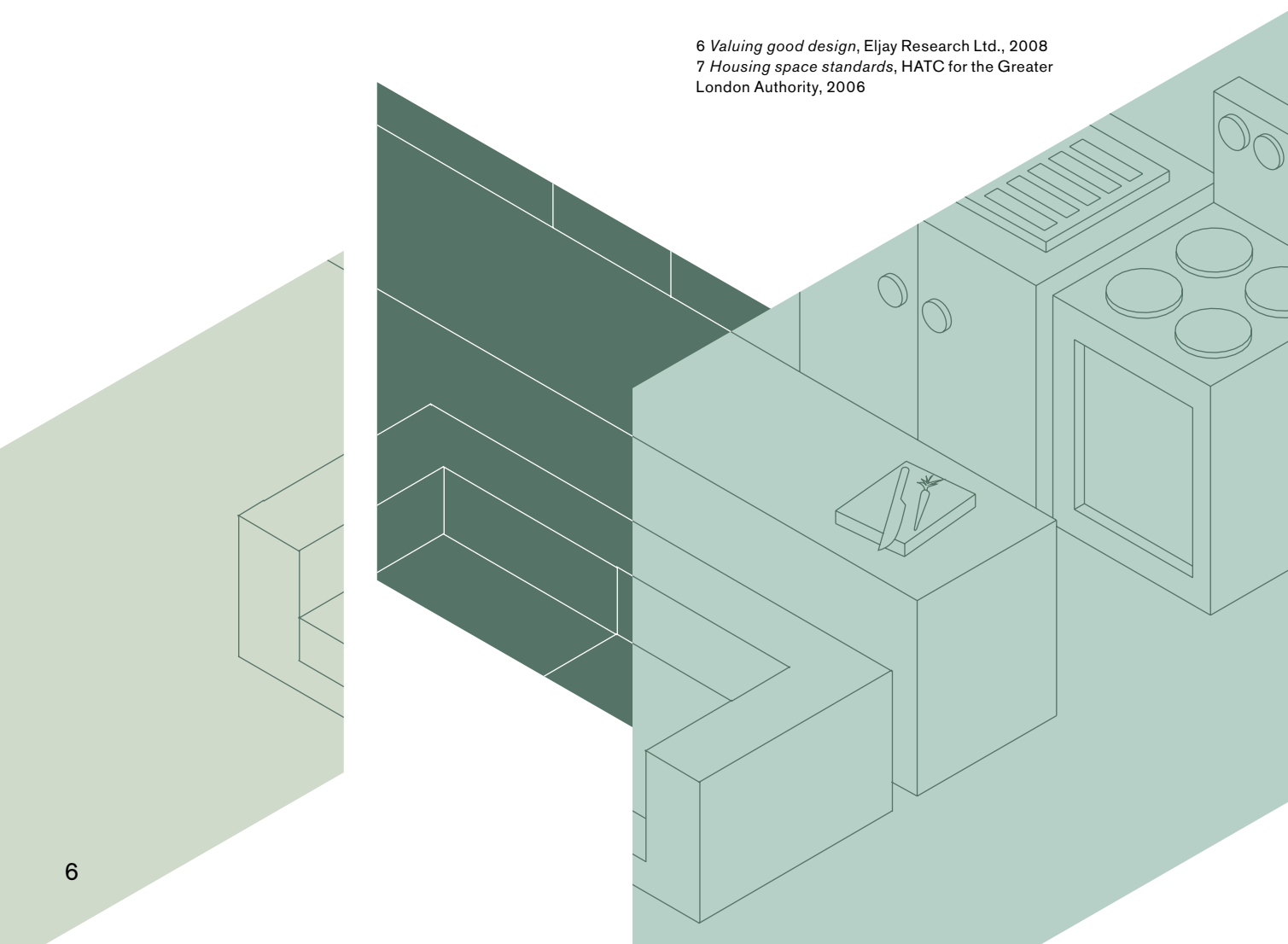
One quarter of all respondents and 43 per cent of fully occupied households say that the size and layout of their homes does not allow for enough privacy.

This survey shows that 67 per cent of homes now have open plan living/dining areas; the figure is 87 per cent for fully occupied households. The combining of functional spaces reduces flexibility and the opportunity to segregate noisy from quiet activities. It can also hold implications for families who, for cultural reasons, may require separate social spaces for male and female⁶.

These results suggest that inadequate space in a home can make privacy difficult. Homes should be a place where people can retreat from the world and relax. Research suggests links between privacy and mental health and wellbeing⁷.

⁶ *Valuing good design*, Eljay Research Ltd., 2008

⁷ *Housing space standards*, HATC for the Greater London Authority, 2006



Conclusions

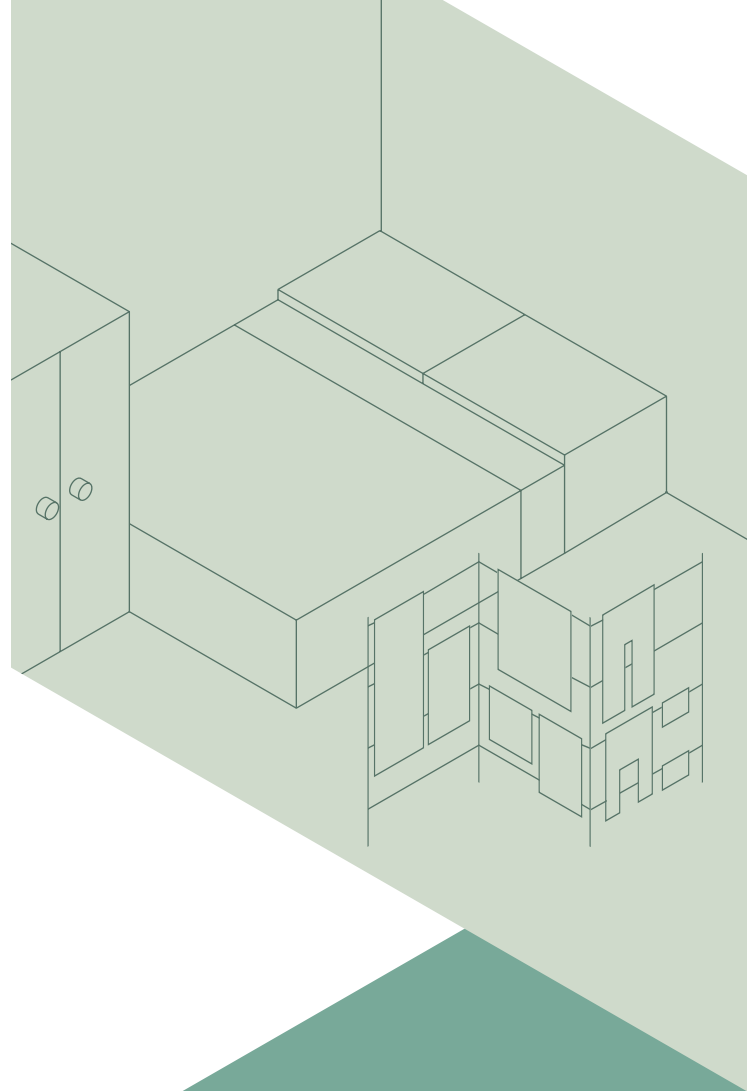
This research supports the case for more space in homes. Many residents in new private homes do not have sufficient space for basic daily activities and needs. Many households don't have the space for the furniture they need, to store personal possessions, to prepare food conveniently or to socialise with friends and family.

A number of our questions reveal that the majority are happy with the space available for specific activities. However, significant minorities feel they don't have enough space for the basics. Everyone has the right to a home that provides them with the space they need. It's not acceptable for design quality to fail what is in fact a large number of people. Even 30 per cent of our sample amounts to 675 new homes.

The fact that 90 per cent of new homes surveyed had spare bedroom space adds extra weight to the problems uncovered by this research. Even a spare room does not guarantee enough space to meet household needs. And the findings show the pressures of space impact disproportionately on those who are more economically disadvantaged. We need to ensure that well designed homes are the norm and that we don't ignore the needs of people whose choice is restricted by their economic circumstances.

The findings raise the question of whether many new homes are fit for purpose, and whether they are built to the standards required to meet the needs of the people living in them. To build housing that is tolerated only during a property-based economic boom is to build housing that does not stand the test of time. Replacing poorly designed housing is a costly process, not only in terms of money, but also in terms of resource use and community stability⁸.

This research questions the argument that the private market will meet the demands of consumers. This research shows that the current system is not working for many, and that consumers are not getting the internal space they require. In a booming market, consumers were forced to compromise space and function for other factors, such as location and getting a foot on the property ladder. The result has been a producer-led market in which consumers did not get what they wanted, but instead had to put up with what they could afford.



‘The fact that 90 per cent of new homes surveyed had spare bedroom space adds extra weight to the problems uncovered by this research. Even a spare room does not guarantee enough space to meet household needs’

⁸ *The cost of bad design*, CABE, 2006

Recommendations

For private housebuilders

Private housebuilders, until recently, provided two thirds of new homes and therefore set the standards in a competitive market.

This research suggests that residents are often unhappy with the amount of space in their homes.

Private housebuilders should:

1. Understand how better space standards can improve the saleability of their product, widen their customer base and gain market advantage.

In the tough economic climate it is imperative that private housebuilders re-consider their product range and think about how to improve the saleability of what they offer by ensuring it is appropriate to the market conditions.

2. Provide consumers with essential information about the size of the properties that they are building and selling by marketing properties by gross internal area and net internal area.

Space in homes is currently represented to buyers in terms of the number of bedrooms, a measure which does not allow accurate judgements to be made on the space actually available. Information about floor area would improve the transparency, and probably the efficiency, of the market.

‘Information about floor area would improve the transparency, and probably the efficiency, of the market’

For the Homes and Communities Agency

The Homes and Communities Agency has a statutory duty to champion diversity, sustainability and good design.

The Homes and Communities Agency should:

1. Continue the work of the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships by setting new, high aspirations for space standards in all its publicly funded schemes.
2. Influence privately funded housing by working with partners to examine the cost benefits of larger rooms within more sustainable designs of housing for sale.

For local authorities

Local authorities have the power and the remit to influence space standards, both as funders and through planning policy and development controls

Local authorities should:

1. Introduce or apply existing minimum space standards through their planning departments.
2. Recognise that adequate space in the home has an effect on health, diversity and community cohesion and that insufficient space provision in the local housing stock will impact local services.

Recommendations (contd)

For registered social landlords

Registered social landlords have a duty to deliver high quality housing and to meet the standards that will be defined by the Homes and Communities Agency.

Registered social landlords should:

1. Deliver enough space to provide adaptability and flexibility in the designs for new housing.

For CABE

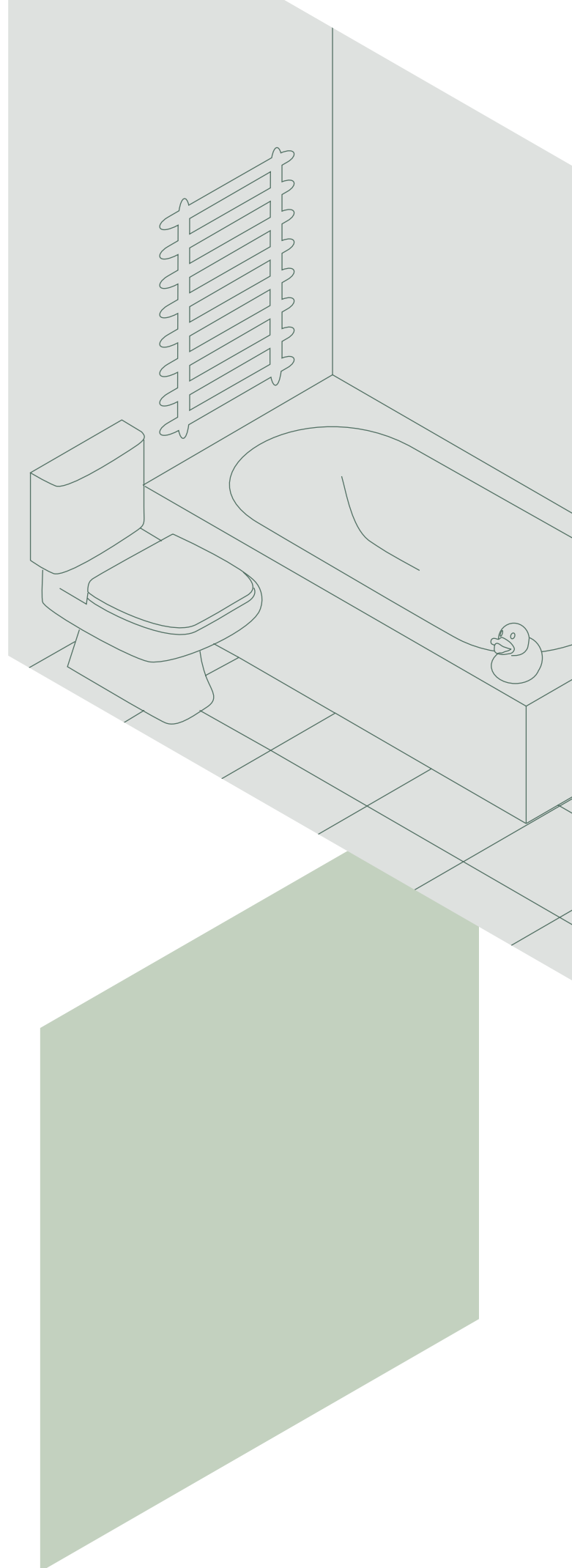
CABE promotes high quality design and raise aspirations across private and public sector housing developments.

CABE will:

1. Work with central government and the Homes and Communities Agency to develop the evidence base on space and the home.
2. Provide support and expertise to local authorities to help them to deliver high design standards.
3. Promote equal access to the highest standards of design including sufficient space in new homes.

CABE and RIBA will:

1. Work to understand best practice in the internal and external layout of homes to make best use of space available and minimise the cost impact of building larger homes
2. Explore successful continental examples of minimum space standards to understand how in practice they might work in England and the impact they might have economically, socially and environmentally.
3. Promote the provision of better information for consumers about the size of the homes they are buying.



This research summary supports the case for more space in private homes, to ensure that they are functional, flexible and fit for purpose. Drawing on detailed research, it shows that many residents do not believe that the space provided in their homes is sufficient for basic everyday activities. This has implications for storage of personal possessions, the arrangement of furniture, food preparation, recycling, socialising in the home, privacy, social equity and adaptability. The research summary will be of interest to housebuilders, registered social landlords, local authorities and The Homes and Communities Agency.

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Commission for Architecture
and the Built Environment

The government's advisor
on architecture, urban design
and public space

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