BUILT-ID **Ekkist**

Community Priorities for Healthy Homes

The survey was written and developed by Built-ID in collaboration with wellbeing design experts Ekkist, using Built-ID's digital engagement platform, Give My View.

**For more information contact marketing@built-id.com**

Overview

2020 and 2021 will go down in history as a time when we were forced to consider whether our homes were places in which we mostly play and relax, or more like places of sanctuary to hide from a virus outside.

This period also exposed a divide between wealthy homeowners living outside of cities with gardens and plenty of space in which to live and exercise, versus those living in small urban flats, Zooming out of bedrooms doubling up as office space, and struggling to find a time when local parks weren't with runners and walkers.

But are our homes as safe as we think? While awareness of the effect of diet and lifestyle on our health has given birth to an enormous wellbeing industry, have we ever considered whether our homes can also affect our mental and physical wellbeing?

Progressive developers with ESG at the forefront of their minds have committed to delivering sustainable housing that not only seeks to meet various net carbon targets, but also takes into consideration design features and materials that keep us healthy. While awareness of this is still low amongst some consumers, this felt like a good time to gauge what people think of the concept of a 'healthy home' in order to understand where the gaps are for developers and designers to address.
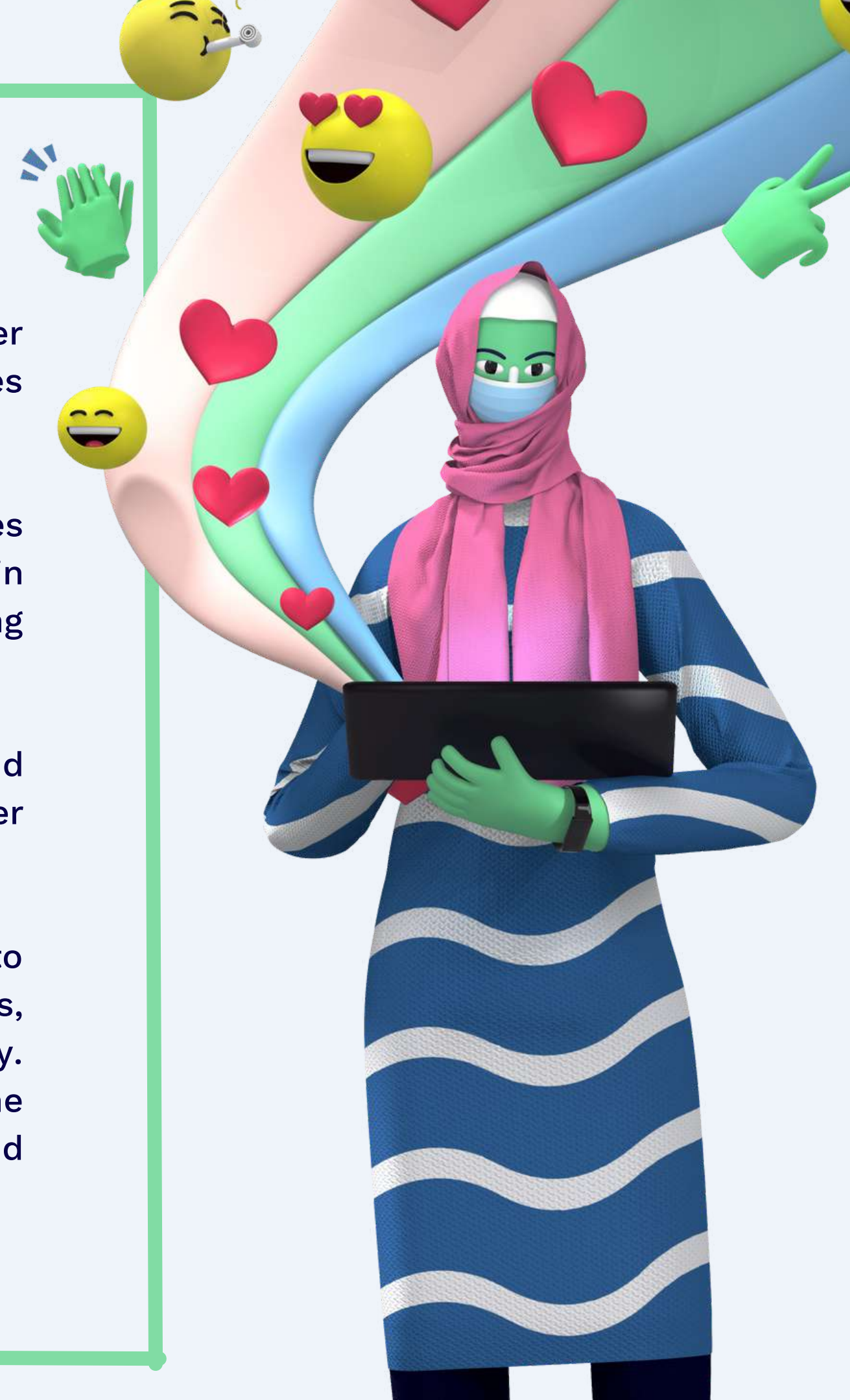
Results

This consultation took place nationwide over the summer of 2021. Ads on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram directed people aged between 18 and 65 to answer the survey. 392 people answered the survey in total, and 51 pieces of written feedback were received. Built-ID and Ekkist donated money to three charities, Shelter, Mind and The Trussell Trust Food Bank to thank voters for contributing.

How important is it that your home benefits your health?

97% voted neutral to positively about this

😄 84%

1 The overwhelming majority of voters answered this question positively, which demonstrates that there is a market eager to know more about how their homes could benefit their health. This, therefore, becomes an opportunity for smart marketers to position new housing developments from an angle of wellbeing, in addition to the usual factors of location, price etc.
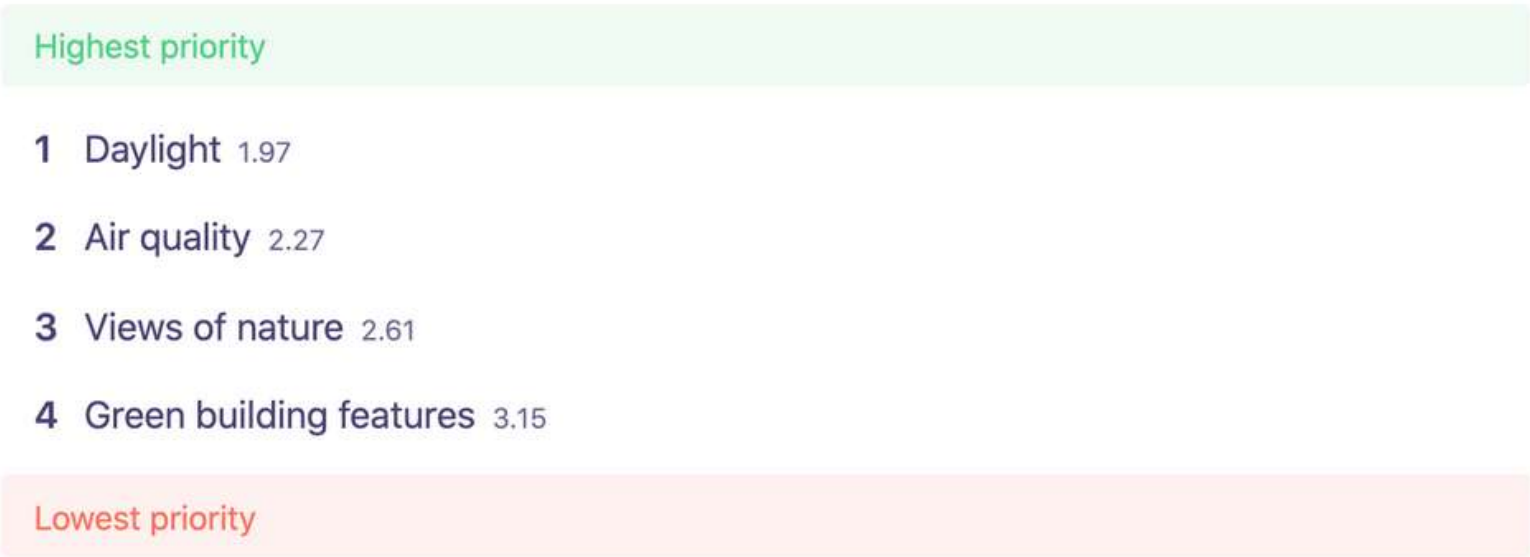
Would you pay more for a home that used healthy materials?

		159
Yes, slightly more. Why not!		**58%**
Yes, definitely more		64
		24%
No, benefits aren't big enough		49
		18%

2 While a significant majority of respondents across both main segmentation groups said they would pay slightly more for a healthy home, it is sobering to think that nearly a fifth wouldn't, given that the benefits 'aren't big enough'. This is a challenge that developers will need to overcome, especially for high-cost housing; it's also a wider challenge that we universally face in regard to preventative wellbeing measures, in a society that is so conditioned to living within a curative model and mindset, where we wait until we get ill before changing our ways.

In your home, which natural elements are most important to you?

Highest priority

1 Daylight 1.97

2 Air quality 2.27

3 Views of nature 2.61

4 Green building features 3.15

Lowest priority

3

What's interesting to note here is that while many developers enthuse about sustainable materials, these are superseded by daylight, air quality and views of nature.

Access to daylight is most desirable and of course will lead to cheaper energy bills if lights don't need to be switched on all day, especially during the winter months, the desire for views of nature is consistent with anecdotal feedback during recent lockdowns, where many have been forced to live in cramped accommodation, and driven many miles to experience nature, often in defiance of official government advice.

Do you think that a home which supports an active lifestyle is a must-have?

🙂

68%

91% voted neutral to positively about this

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Some people agreed with this statement, but it's interesting to note that this percentage isn't higher; we suspect that people want to exercise more outdoors than indoors, and therefore any precious living space will still be coveted for more traditional purposes such as relaxing, eating, studying, TV, socialising etc.

Would you consider buying or renting a home with no private outdoor space?

No, I must have outdoor space

208
88%

Yes, don't care about it much

28
12%

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While the majority of voters insisted on access to private outdoor space, this increased for homeowners vs renters (96% vs 68%), which is unsurprising given the sacrifices that renters need to make vs those with capital to invest in homeownership. Access to private space, accentuated since COVID hit, has sometimes proven to be an issue for developers in the Build-to-Rent industry, where traditionally, communal spaces have been provided for tenants. Developers must now consider balconies and private gardens as part of their plans, for health-conscious tenants and potential residents.

Please order the following types of outdoor space by how much you like it.

Highest priority

1 Your own private garden 1.42

2 Your own private balcony 2.55

3 Nearby outdoor space e.g. park 2.91

4 Communal shared garden 3.12

Lowest priority

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The responses here follow on pertinently from the previous question and insights. It is interesting to note that people would rather have access to a local park vs a communal garden, and private gardens followed by private balconies are the favourite types of outdoor spaces. This also shows the importance of outdoor space size, as individuals may want to have a sense of freedom within their homes.

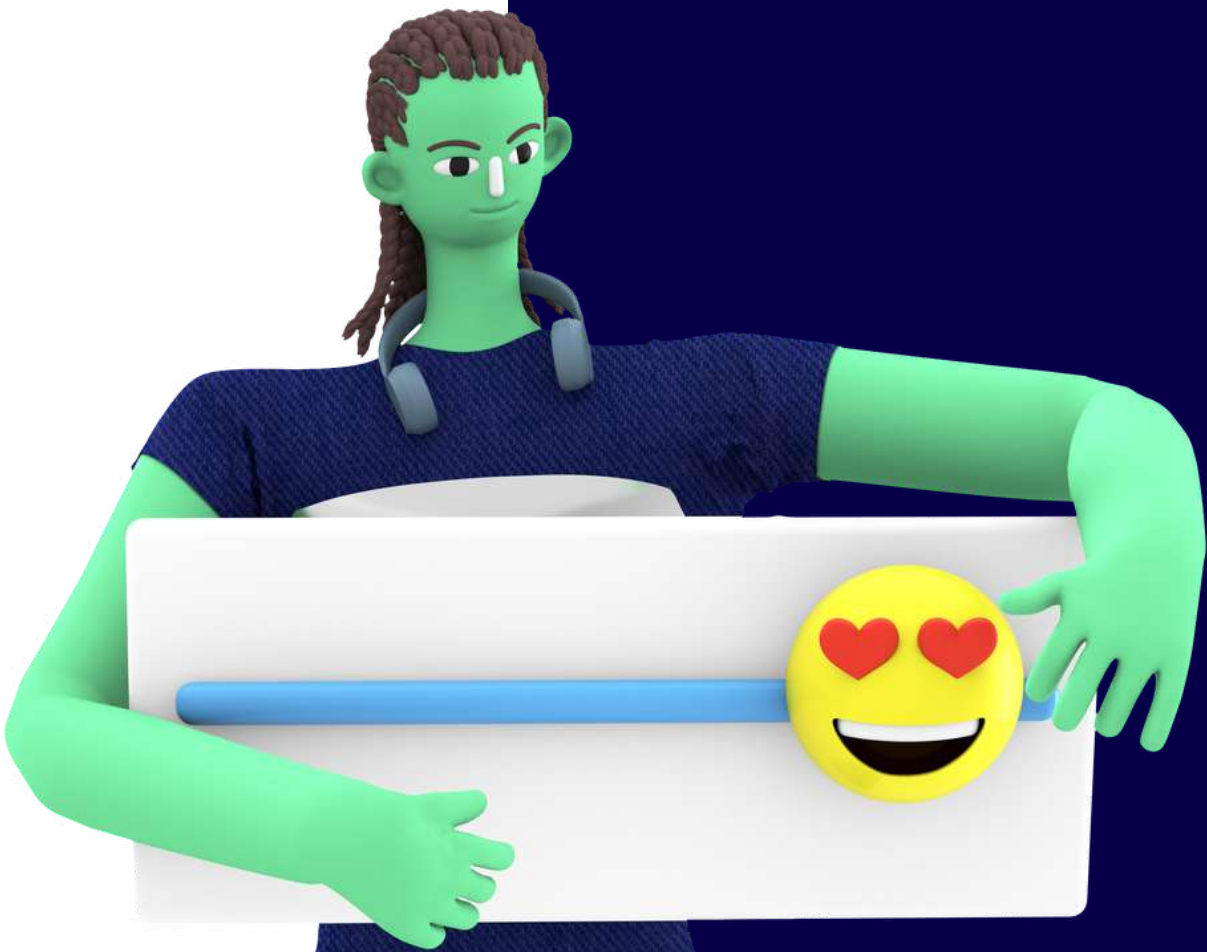## How much does natural light affect your mood?

100% voted neutral to positively about this

89%

A huge and unambivalent majority said that natural light affects their mood, and this provides a challenge for developers to respond to. While we undoubtedly need to provide higher density housing to address housing shortfalls and improve sustainability, this must not come at the price of natural light. This highlights the importance of appropriately sized glazing and double aspect homes.

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In a building, which of these materials make you feel relaxed?

Material	Votes	Percentage
Wood	152	70%
Glass	109	50%
Stone	104	48%
Brick	89	41%
Leaves	47	22%
Cement	16	7%
Mud	15	7%
Metals	13	6%

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The concrete structures of Brutalist architecture may evoke and excite a particular segment of society, but for voters in this survey there was a clear preference for wood, glass, stone and brick. These are materials which reflect and connect us to nature, and perhaps also with our more elemental selves. However, in the wake of fire safety disasters such as Grenfell, can policymakers find a place for timber in denser locations?

Which design look and feel do you find most calming?

Curved	145	70%
Straight lines	56	27%
Angular	5	2%

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Lovers of Gaudi's Barcelona masterpieces will be happy to see curved architecture coming out top in our survey. Curves suggest natural forms, feeling limitless and free when contrasted with the more authoritarian language of straight lines and rigid rectilinear forms. While they undoubtedly present challenges from a layout and usability perspective, could this be a design approach that improves occupants' mental wellbeing?

How important is it to you to be able to own a pet where you live?

😄 80%

90% voted neutral to positively about this

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There has been a boom in pet ownership, particularly small dogs that fit well with urban living and constrained spaces. Landlords have had to change their pet-keeping policies to keep up with this new trend in pet ownership; this will also create a challenge for developers to ensure that space is incorporated into developments for people to exercise their dogs. Getting rid of dog waste is conversely also a new challenge for developments in cities, with this public health hazard causing major problems for citizens. But owning pets that can be stroked is extremely good for our mental health due to its connection with the hormone and neurotransmitter oxytocin, and good ideas will be required to incorporate this into urban design.

What's more important to you in your neighbourhood?

Safety and privacy — 116 — **55%**

Openness and community — 95 — **45%**

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Carrying on with a theme noted earlier, voters showed a slight preference for safety and privacy over openness and community. However, this risks creating division within communities, as seen with many gated developments which actively close themselves off to local communities. The request for access to private developments comes up time and time again in our community consultations, so developers will need to work out how to keep their tenants safe and secure, whilst also keeping the local community on side.

When choosing where you live, how important is the sense of community?

😄 74%

95% voted neutral to positively about this

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The majority of people want to live within a healthy, thriving community, but as earlier insights have shown, how exactly they want to interact is still up for discussion.

How would you rank the following in order of importance?

Highest priority

1 Cost of home 1.80

2 Healthy/sustainable materials 2.38

3 Your home's carbon footprint 2.91

4 Developer is fair & ethical 2.91

Lowest priority

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Whilst cost of home and healthy/sustainable materials are the most important consideration, there is a subtle but perhaps significant difference between homeowners and renters in regard to 'Developer is fair & ethical' and 'Your home's carbon footprint', with renters being more concerned with the former than the latter. With fixed energy bills, renters are less concerned about leaving the lights/heating on than more prudent homeowners, but this would require more investigation before drawing that conclusion.

Do you worry about the environmental impact of your home?

Yes, I worry about it a little
113
57%

No, not at all
47
24%

Yes, I worry about it a lot
38
19%

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While it is concerning that only a fifth of respondents 'worry a lot' about the environmental impact of their home, over 3/4 do consider it on some level, suggesting this is an important factor overall.

With sustainable materials such as timber generally being better for both health and planet, there is a strong case for developers to prioritise such materials in future projects.

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In this final question, we asked voters to upload their own ideas and comments, in response to the question: Thanks for your thoughts. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Some samples were....

‘Space and privacy are paramount. I spent the first years of my life in a 1950's Parker-Morris standard-built council house in South Liverpool. It met the critical needs of the family, albeit modestly. The 'incredible shrinking home' is a feature of our society and is bound to be the major cause of stress. We are building huge numbers of apartments with no balconies or even proper openable windows. This is disastrous. Human beings have to be the primary focus. The drive to sustainability is out of step with human needs and dignity'

‘Most ordinary people want a bit of space, light and a small garden - they are not going to sacrifice these for a green agenda that doesn't value them'

‘You can buy or rent the best possible choice as (defined) by your finances. You then set about doing as much as you can afford to maintain or improve the good features that your property possesses. For me this means using the garden to aid wildlife and to enable me to be partially self-sufficient. And to provide a beautiful and calming space for me to benefit from mentally'.

‘Homes should be built to have as little impact on nature as possible and should include nature in its outside developments'

‘Modern open plan homes are out of date. We all need another space to retreat to. Why do developers all use similar layouts. Why do developers ignore the style and finishes of houses in the local area. They might as well build blocks and stuff us in like prisoners'

‘The council are building new flats with balconies etc but reducing our standard of living and treating us like factory farm animals. Tower block living has become the norm...People feel trapped and hopeless!'

‘Outside space is very important even the sliver of balconies that have been a godsend enabling psychological survival during lockdown are being taken away. Building regs are being used to justify, but they are making things more dangerous, not better'

Feedback Insights

There were some clear themes to pull out of the varied open text feedback that we received, some of which are published above.

Firstly, income and personal financial circumstances are felt by many to be a discriminatory factor in regard to the perceived lottery of experiencing a healthy home. Councils in particular were criticised for how they treat their tenants, highlighting the importance of public consultation.

Secondly, there was fascinating feedback concerning environmental and green issues being prioritised at the expense of basic human dignities/rights in regard to access to private space, natural daylight and outdoor space. Perhaps developers need to think about social impact as much as environmental when they're drawing up their investor-friendly ESG plans.

Lastly, there was a perception amongst respondents that developers too often follow a cookie-cutter approach to design, and that people's experience of the last two years (namely the desire for private space) needs to be urgently incorporated into new designs for living.

Conclusion

The community clearly wants healthy homes, with basic fundamentals such as good access to daylight, outside space and natural, tactile materials. Developers need to ensure that these needs are balanced alongside environmental/green considerations; if not, they risk alienating those members of the community who already feel alienated from the 'liberal elite', whilst being forced to live in cramped housing - what we would call unhealthy homes.

Britain offers a free health service to all that does not discriminate on the grounds of class, gender or race; our developers need to ensure they are building healthy homes which aren't just the preserve of the wealthy, to better support the nation's mental and physical health and wellbeing.

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