Home Truths

3. Models for living: creating
homes that promote community,
safety and wellbeing

BARCLAYS

Models for living: creating homes that promote community, safety and wellbeing

In the third article in the Home Truths series we ask: is it possible to create homes that are not just safe and well-run, but actively promote community and wellbeing?

Housing and happiness go hand in hand. Fragmented communities and poor-quality homes typically make for lonely, unhappy societies with deep social problems. Conversely, well-designed environments and connected neighbourhoods lift the spirits.

Barclays' expert panellists see the potential for new models of housing to integrate citizens more effectively and restore a missing sense of community.

Housing and wellbeing

According to Shelter, over one fifth of adults in England say housing problems have had a negative impact on their mental health in the past five years.[1]

Struggling to afford rent or mortgage is the main pressure, the report found, experienced by 48% of those affected. For 38% there are pressures linked to the condition of their property, while 23% suffer mental health issues because of difficulty finding a home.

Other research has found that 5% of adults in England often or always feel lonely.[2] Alongside marital status, health and disability, the key factors found to have an impact on loneliness include 'feeling as though you belong to a neighbourhood', 'satisfaction with the local area as a place to live' and 'whether you chat to neighbours other than to say hello'.

The ONS research also reveals that community can have a big impact on adults' experience of loneliness. Those who feel a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood, it found, are most likely to report that they never or hardly ever feel lonely.

Getting the right mix

Johnny Caddick, Managing Director of Moda Living, says new schemes should reflect a new willingness among many people to live alongside neighbours of all ages. "Going back 10 or 15 years, young people just wanted to be with young people. That ageism seems to have disappeared for a lot of society. You want people in their 60s and 70s living on a floor with those in their 20s and 30s."

While cautioning that this type of mix needs to be a choice for owners and tenants, Alex Notay, Build to Rent Fund Director at PfP Capital, part of Places for People Group, agrees. "We have a Minister for Loneliness in this country, and endemic mental health issues across all generations. I think a lot of that is tied to the kind of poor quality of life people are experiencing in their housing."

1 in 20 adults
in England often or always feel lonely
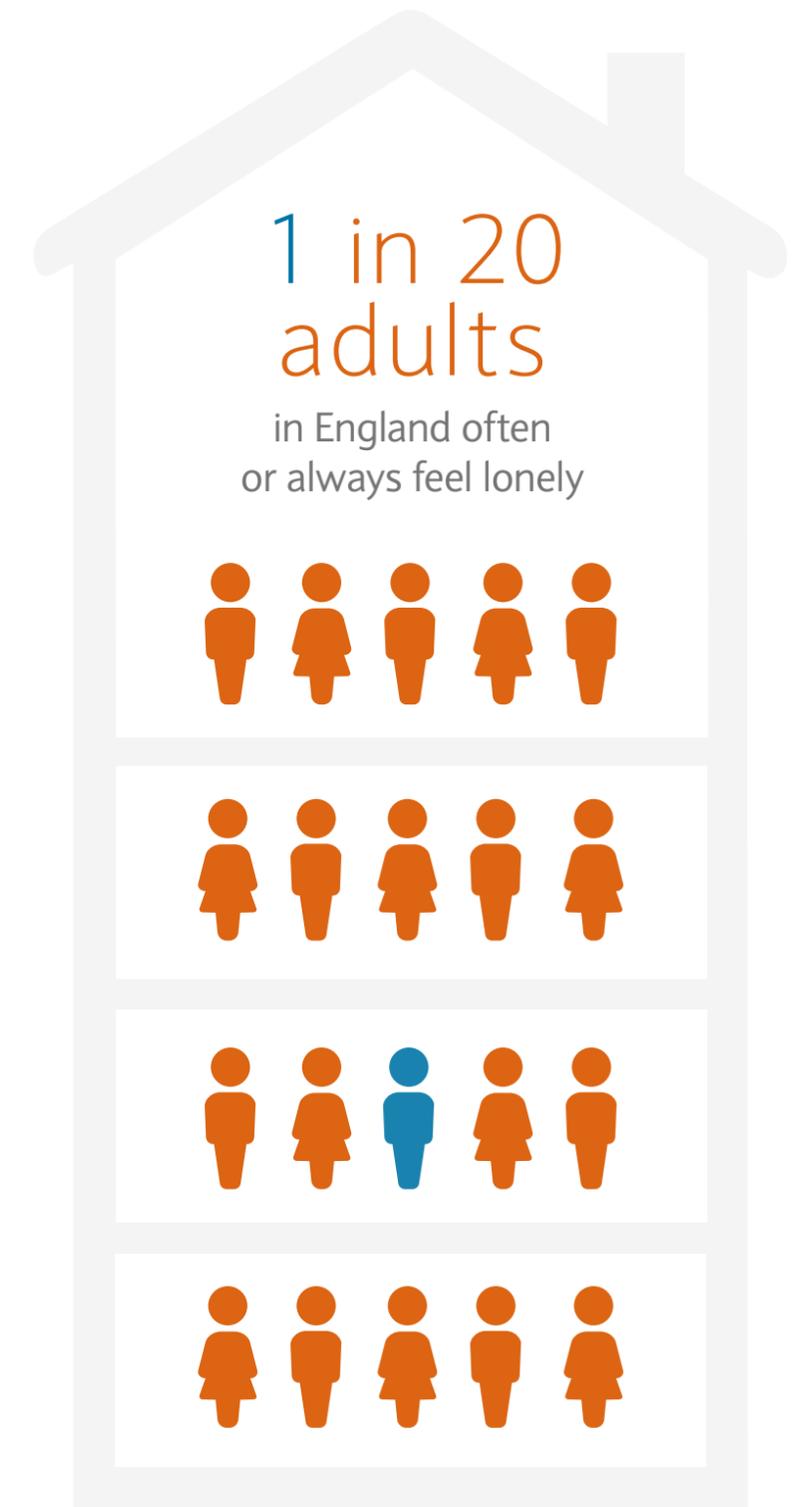
Source: UK Parliament

Places for People's has made it part of its mission to create places that work for everyone through broad placemaking expertise:

"We took a decision to build more than just core social housing, which is often on cheaper land and therefore further from transportation and employment opportunities. By buying more expensive land but building mixed income, mixed tenure communities, we can drive much more positive social impact for the long-term." Notay says.

Reviving regeneration

Regeneration must play a role in resolving the housing crisis. But the bitter dispute over Haringey Council's regeneration proposals for Tottenham shows the challenges faced by those who propose such schemes.

While acknowledging that regeneration is sometimes perceived as unwelcome gentrification, Savills' Lucian Cook believes that it can succeed, if done transparently and in partnership with communities. "I genuinely think the quality of the living environment can raise the aspiration of the people who live there," he says.

The £170m Transforming Construction Fund could make building:

50% faster

and 33% cheaper

Source: Innovate UK

To achieve that, providers need to remind themselves and others of their reason for existence: "There needs to be a better recognition of the social purpose of housing associations. They are not set up to make lots of money; they are set up to make people's lives better through housing provision."

Homes of the future

The aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy has focused attention on the need to provide homes for all, with materials that are safe as well as cost-effective.

Our panellists generally believe that developers are already following the high standards that will be required by any post-Grenfell regulation. However, there is little joined-up activity in the UK to produce innovative housebuilding materials and methods that will combine safety and efficiency.

The government is now trying to address this through a £170m Transforming Construction fund. The aim is to create new processes and techniques which, it says, will support the industry to build 50% faster and 33% cheaper than is currently possible.[3]

Last year's launch of the UK's first 'microhome' – a self-contained pod manufactured offsite, and designed as a transitional living space for formerly homeless people – points to possible solutions for a wider market.[4]

> "The quality of what we build, whether it's for sale, affordable rent or market rent, needs to be the same."

Whatever the future, the panellists are clear that building standards for social housing must match those for other tenures. "The quality of what we build – regardless of how we fit it out, regardless of whether it's for sale, for affordable rent or market rent – needs to be the same," insists Alex Notay.

Discover how three inspiring communities are tackling their local housing challenges.

Case studies

Case study 1
Creating community in Walworth

An inter-generational mix of homes, including units designed for people with extra care needs, is evolving as the first phase in the regeneration of a south London estate.[5]

Commissioned by Notting Hill Housing Trust, the Walworth block will include 50 extra-care units of mixed tenure accommodation, with a target of 40 rented and 10 in shared ownership. Further flats, maisonettes and a community centre complete the design, all arranged around a shared courtyard.

Recognising that much of London's housing lacks the space that older residents need, the scheme is designed to allow space for wheelchairs or those unsteady on their feet. Front doors are paired to create a sheltered space, with seats to promote interaction and a view over the shared courtyard. The block is the first element of the planned regeneration of the Aylesbury estate. At 3,500 homes, it is set to become one of Europe's largest social housing programmes.

Case study 2
Low carbon, high interaction

Residents at Forgebank in Lancaster live in one of 35 leasehold homes, but share a kitchen, dining room, laundry and other communal facilities.[6]

The award-winning, multi-generational 'eco co-housing community' was designed by residents with architects Eco Arc and local building firm Whittles Construction. It has been running since 2013.

Houses face onto a pedestrian-only street. The group operates a community car club, lift sharing and bicycle club. And commuting miles are further reduced because residents have discounted access to rentable workspace at neighbouring Halton Mill.

Heating and hot water come from a district heating system powered by a biomass boiler, run on local woodchip. Energy-efficient appliances and lighting reduces electricity use to about 30% that of average home.

Case study 3
Bringing life back to Granby

When repeated plans by developers and local authority came to nothing, residents joined forces to revive their derelict district of Liverpool.[7]

People living in the run-down Granby neighbourhood established one of the first Community Land Trusts and petitioned the council to support their own development ideas.

With support from a social investor, the trust bought 13 terraced homes from the council for £1 apiece. They are now in the process of turning 11 of them into affordable homes to people with neighbourhood connections. The other two properties are being turned into an indoor garden and community space.

The trust is focused as much on community as housing: it has also taken over the running of a street market set up by local residents. Wildly popular, the market has helped to breathe new life into Granby.

Delving deeper

Barclays' expert panel has helped to draw up a further [four articles](#) focusing on aspects of the housing crisis in detail, and offering potential solutions to break the current cycle. The articles cover:

- What we really mean when we talk about the housing crisis
- The impact of the recent Housing White Paper
- How different generations experience the housing crisis
- Inspiring lessons from other countries' experiences.

[1] https://england.shelter.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1364063/Housing_and_mental_health_-_detailed_report.pdf
[2] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/lonelinesswhatcharacteristicsandcircumstancesare associatedwithfeelinglonely/2018-04-10#which-factors-independently-affect-loneliness
[3] https://innovateuk.blog.gov.uk/2018/04/13/the-future-of-construction/
[4] https://www.homelessthf.org/ikozie-micro-home/
[5] https://www.nhhg.org.uk/building-homes/developments/aylesbury-estate-southwark/#moreinfo
[6] https://www.lancastercohousing.org.uk/
[7] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/14/community-liverpool-residents-granby

What are the solutions?

To achieve housing that promotes community, safety and wellbeing, we must:

Support developments that offer people the choice of joining **mixed communities**, suitable for people of different tenures, generations and needs

Foster innovation in building materials and techniques in the UK housebuilding industry

Restore and reinforce the **social purpose** of housing associations

Ensure **common standards** for all specifications of homebuilding.

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