

Rethinking Housing Supply and Design

Feminist Green New Deal Policy Paper



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August 2021

Executive Summary

Housing is fundamental to life, security and wellbeing as well as tackling climate change and working towards a zero-carbon future. It also remains a key site of gender and intersectional inequality, with design that does not accommodate diverse needs or care responsibilities, with mortgages and rents out of reach, and a suburban ideal that requires a car for daily living and can isolate women and children in the home. Housing investment as a central part of a Green New Deal (GND) –with a commitment to full funding from central government to ensure costs are never passed on to residents or local communities– would open up an incredible opportunity to centre a new vision of equality and care capable of transforming both landscapes and lives. It would also acknowledge and begin to address the connections between climate crisis and housing crisis, reducing housing’s contribution to the UK’s carbon footprint even as it reverses the rise of homelessness and houses the estimated 8 million people are in housing need.¹

The built environment shapes the myriad lives within it in multiple ways, which is why an effective GND must address issues of equality and not simply focus on the usual technical fixes of new green building and retrofit strategies. Such a technical approach, centred in the very industries from which women and other groups have traditionally been marginalised, deepens inequality as it further solidifies the structures of profit and oppression that underpin the drivers of climate change itself.

Instead, housing policy could become a driver for increased social and gender equality as well as the reduction of carbon emissions at scale. This briefing presents and expands on seven key recommendations emerging from a systems’ view, arguing their transformational impact not just on our carbon footprint and environment, but on the social and physical aspects of inequality that structure our lives. They are:

1. Participatory planning for the future: centring women and others traditionally marginalised
2. Making internal form and design responsive to care work, gender and diversity
3. Improving the materials and fabric of our buildings
4. Developing gender-, community- and climate-responsive site design
5. Improving connection to town, city and region
6. Expanding who builds, installs and maintains housing to non-traditional workers
7. Implementing a right to safe, decent and affordable housing following the most recent UN guidelines, where housing as a home is prioritised over housing as an asset²

1 National Housing Federation (2020) *People in Housing Need: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Scale and Shape of Housing Need in England Today* <https://bit.ly/355NOWi>

2 Special Rapporteur (2020) Guidelines for the implementation of the right to adequate housing <https://bit.ly/3i8oeGj>

The Centrality of Housing to Self and Society

Housing shapes our lives and wellbeing on multiple levels. It is part of our sense of identity and shapes relationships to friends and family and our roles of care, as well as how we are able to collectively or individually fulfil them. It is also the place from which we relate to the wider social world. It can support or strip opportunity and often defines the power we have to act upon and change the environment around us.³ Feminists and disability activists have long explored solutions to the inequalities built into our homes and environment through the creation of flexible and adaptable spaces well-connected to various types of support and care networks.⁴ They provide a solid foundation for thinking about the scale of intervention needed to confront climate change driven by capitalist and patriarchal forms of development. True sustainability will require transformation of the housing market, processes of planning and designing homes, their physical fabric, how they relate to their surroundings and how we live in them.

The Centrality of Housing to a Post-Carbon Future

Greenhouse gas emissions for housing currently contribute 22% of the UK's carbon footprint, with 15% of that from heating and hot water.⁵ The construction industry more broadly contributes 49%.⁶ So, what kind of housing do we need, and what are we building now? We know that:

- Eight million people are estimated currently in housing need; of these, 3.8 million would be best served by social housing.⁷
- 3.4 million live in overcrowded conditions, and 1.9 million homes contain more than one household.⁸
- An estimated 100,000 'affordable' homes of 344,000 new homes in total per year are needed to begin to meet projections of housing need.⁹
- Only 5,716 homes for social rent were completed in England in 2019-20, 10% of the total affordable units. The rest have been built at various levels of affordability (defined as the London Affordable Rent or Affordable Rent set at 80% of market rate) or for shared ownership/home ownership.¹⁰
- Over 648,000 homes sit empty, with 225,000 of them classed as long-term empty—a number growing annually and often clustered in some of the most deprived areas.¹¹

3 Dovey (1985) 'Home and Homelessness: Introduction', *Home Environments. Human Behavior and Environment: Advances in Theory and Research*, 8

4 Matrix (2000) *Making Space: Women and the Man Made Environment* <https://bit.ly/3xh50JD>; Hayden (2000) *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities*; Hamraie (2017) *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability*.

5 LETI (2020) *Embedded Carbon Primer: Supplementary Guidance to Climate Emergency Design Guide* <https://bit.ly/3xaw0W1>

6 Ibid.

7 National Housing Federation <https://bit.ly/355NOWi>

8 Ibid.

9 Wilson (2021) *Tackling the Under-Supply of Housing in England* <https://bit.ly/3gn2YvQ>

10 MHCLG (2020) *Affordable Housing Supply: April 2019 to March 2020, England* <https://bit.ly/3woW0xf>

11 Wilson, Cromarty, and Barton (2020) *Empty Housing (England)* <https://bit.ly/3vcaheY>

With gendered inequality often obscured by such numbers, it's important to remember that women remain on the hard edge of the housing crisis due to the continuing gender pay gap and impacts of care responsibilities on career and job choice, compounded by welfare reform and diminishing social security.¹²

As all visions of the GND agree, a massive programme to bring empty homes into use, implement retrofit and build new housing where it is needed is central not just to achieving long-term sustainability and the target reductions in the UK's carbon footprint, but to respond to a growing and desperate need for healthy housing. This should be achieved in a way that prepares for the key climate risk factors of flooding, overheating and water scarcity to minimise displacement.¹³ It should also invest in employment and local economies, open up capacity for civic engagement and participation, improve health and reduce costs to the NHS and other services and tackle directly the many personal and financial costs of homelessness.

1. Participatory Planning for the Future: Centring women and others traditionally marginalised

The first aspect to providing zero-carbon and future-proof housing is participatory engagement and planning. The process of adopting and adapting the right design solutions are always specific to the physical context and the needs of the particular community.¹⁴

Changes imposed on people, particularly in such personal spaces as the home and immediate neighbourhood, are unlikely to achieve their goals. It is well documented that top-down programmes are often poorly understood and/or resisted, and that efficiency savings can often result in the increased use of and expenditure on energy.¹⁵ This highlights the importance of investment in working with communities and individual households to co-create the most appropriate carbon reduction plans for their homes. This process needs to centre the voices of women and other groups traditionally marginalised from planning and design.

While there will always be a tension between participatory process and moving quickly and at scale to implement the GND, this can be mitigated in several ways: through a careful mapping of existing initiatives and organising that are ready to move quickly; through offering a spectrum of involvement options from advisory through to co-design; and above all through investment in local energy and community building expertise ensuring the skills to facilitate meaningful community involvement and decision making.

Transforming Housing Provision from the Inside Out

The home has long been the primary location of gendered unpaid work yet has rarely been designed by or with women to facilitate the burdens of housework and care that continue to fall disproportionately on women's shoulders.¹⁶

12 UKWBG (2018) *Housing and Gender Briefing* <https://bit.ly/3vaJCPY>

13 CCC (2019) *UK Housing: Fit for the Future?* <https://bit.ly/3xbTiLf>

14 Biddulph (2001) *Home Zones A Planning and Design Handbook*; Cooper Marcus and Sarkissian (2000) *Housing as If People Mattered: Site Design Guidelines for Medium-Density Family Housing*

15 *Energy Fables: Challenging Ideas in the Energy Sector* (2019) ed. Rinkinen, Shove, and Torriti

16 Blunt and Dowling (2006) *Home*; Matrix <https://bit.ly/3xh50JD>

One key issue continues to be the default definition of household as the nuclear family, with its implicit aspirational trajectory of upward mobility through a series of homes in the suburbs.¹⁷ Such sprawling suburban housing has been critiqued for the way it isolates women and others who are more homebound, for the static and inflexible nature of its home design, its role in promoting car use and in driving class and race segregation.¹⁸ A systems approach able to connect the rethinking of internal design with the broader facets of affordability, tenure, health, location, energy efficiency, and market frameworks would support both sustainable housing and housing services for an uncertain future.

2. Making internal form and design responsive to care, gender and diversity

Improving and innovating in home design is a central part of any long term zero carbon future, with a range of aspects that need to be collectively and participatively considered.

Embracing design for a diversity of households: The nuclear family is just one of many types of households. Housing needs to fit diverse and increasingly multigenerational households, while supporting care throughout the life course.¹⁹

Prioritising adaptability: The ability to easily change and adapt the home over time ensures internal structures best support the life and work of its inhabitants as they define their own roles. It allows for changing mobility needs and the ability to stay within the home longer as people grow old. It allows for future generations to adapt homes to their own changing needs.

Such design would see the wellbeing of residents paralleled by the wellbeing of the planet as it conserves labour, money and materials across the course of inevitable future home adaptations. This long-term perspective is central to a circular economy that adapts, reuses and recycles materials rather than relying on new mining, manufacturing or logging.

Examples of such adaptable architecture and design abound, and include loose-fit/flexible architecture.²⁰ The simple rowhouse, ubiquitous across the UK, has proven in many respects to be just such a form, both popular and endlessly adapted to a variety of needs and lifestyles.²¹

Making universal design universal: Adaptable design aligns with Universal Design, which rests on the belief that good design by default is that which is accessible and useful to the widest number of people and recognises the ability of people to innovatively adjust and improve.²² Wider doors and hallways, spacious bathrooms, thoughtful placement of stairs and storage are all aspects of such design.²³ The aesthetics of this approach are central, since the provision of beautiful and well-designed space has been more widely shown to support happiness, comfort and wellbeing.²⁴

17 Hayden (1980) 'What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work', *Signs*, 5.3, 170–87.

18 Kern (2019) *Feminist City: Claiming Space in a Man-Made World*; Lerch (2017) 'Community Resilience and the Built Environment', in *The Community Resilience Reader: Essential Resources for an Era of Upheaval*.

19 Burgess et al (2017) *Multigenerational Living: An Opportunity for UK House Builders?* <https://bit.ly/3v9E7kn>; Rachael Docking (2018) *Homes That Help: A Personal and Professional Perspective on Home Adaptations* <https://bit.ly/3cxndpi>

20 Bird (2010) *Local Sustainable Homes: How to Make Them Happen in Your Community*; Lifschutz (2017) *Loose-Fit Architecture: Designing Buildings for Change*; Till, 'Architecture and Contingency'; LETI <https://bit.ly/3xaw0W1>

21 Simon Sturgis (2017) 'Adaptability: A Low Carbon Strategy', in *Loose-Fit Architecture: Designing Buildings for Change*; Matrix <https://bit.ly/3xh50JD>

22 Hamraie; *Universal Design Handbook* (2011) ed. Preiser and Smith

23 Elaine Ostroff, 'Universal Design: An Evolving Paradigm', in *Universal Design Handbook*, ed. Preiser and Smith; Clarkson and Coleman (2015) 'History of Inclusive Design in the UK', *Applied Ergonomics*, 46, 235–47

24 Hamraie; Blunt and Dowling.

Moving forward, inclusive and adaptable design is a vital component of housing standards, given that only an estimated 7% of housing in the UK offers minimal accessibility features, and the current targets for accessibility in new build are not being met. This has left many disabled people in housing not fit for purpose to the detriment of their health, social networks, ability to maintain employment, sense of self and wellbeing.²⁵

Ensuring the same standards for all forms of housing: Universal design is applicable to shelters, hostels and various other forms of temporary accommodation. The crisis in supply of social housing has led to a severe crisis in access to long-term secure housing, forcing many households to spend long periods of time in emergency and temporary accommodation.²⁶ Until enough housing has been built or repurposed to accommodate move-on needs, mitigation measures around some of the worst aspects of temporary accommodation should be included in the broader roll out of repair and retrofit.

Quality emergency and supportive housing will be required to support those fleeing domestic abuse, a majority of whom are women and children, as well as those recently released from an institutional setting or recovering from various kinds of crisis. Specialist shelters are needed to provide accessible and safe spaces for the wide diversity of those experiencing violence or homelessness including youth, migrant and LGBT+ communities. Shelters for BAME survivors, particularly migrant women, have experienced some of the deepest cuts since 2010, and the restoration of a strong network of refuges and ongoing support should be a priority.²⁷

The importance of the design and aesthetics of women's shelters, homeless shelters and recovery spaces to healing is often seen as secondary. However, safety, privacy and resident control over their space to create a sense of home, beauty, green space and attention to design rather than an institutional feel are particularly important in shelters to support the healing process and should be fully funded.²⁸

3. Improving the materials and the fabric of our buildings

Achieving the twin goals of developing and adapting the number of homes needed and meeting the UK's statutory carbon reduction targets should prioritise retrofit and bringing empty homes into use, but will also require new build targeted where need is high.²⁹ This should be funded centrally at the level needed to meet high minimum standards for both green building/retrofit and genuine affordability, but with power devolved to plan and build schemes locally.

Understanding the cost of our current housing stock: Poorly insulated and damp homes can cause immense physical and mental harm. The cost is highest for the most vulnerable tenants, who tend to spend the most time at home: older people, disabled people, children and caregivers (still usually women).³⁰ There are clear connections between poor health, poor insulation and old fittings, unaffordable heating costs and high carbon emissions.³¹

25 EHRC (2018) *Housing and Disabled People: Britain's Hidden Crisis* <https://bit.ly/355nxYv>

26 UKWBG (2018) *Housing and Gender Briefing* <https://bit.ly/3vaJCPY>

27 Imkaan (2020) *The Impact of the Two Pandemics: VAWG and COVID-19 on Black and Minoritised Women and Girls* <https://bit.ly/2SsQjzg>; Lopes Heimer (2019) *A Roof Not a Home: The Housing Experiences of Black and Minoritised Women Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in London* <https://bit.ly/3v9RjWr>

28 Berens (2017) *A Review of Research: Designing the Built Environment for Recovery from Homelessness* <https://bit.ly/3gsvNHd>; Joshi (2017) 'Understanding the Built Environment of Shelter Homes for Survivors of Domestic Violence' <https://bit.ly/3zbx6mt>

29 Mulheim (2019) *Tackling the UK Housing Crisis: Is Supply the Answer?* With responses from Bramley (2019) and Meen (2019) <https://bit.ly/3xKNcCk>

30 Boardman (2010) *Fixing Fuel Poverty: Challenges and Solutions*

31 McCormack (1993) 'From the Fourth to the Third World - A Common Vision of Health', *Community Development Journal*, 28.3 206-17

Prioritising Retrofit: Demolition and new build have often been suggested as the better choice for reducing carbon. Short-term costs can be higher for retrofitting, and the highest energy standards difficult to reach. However, calculating carbon imprint over a building's lifetime shows retrofit is almost always the better solution.³²

It is expected that the New Decent Homes Standard will require all new build homes to be net zero by 2025. This is both necessary and belated, given that the nearly 2 million homes built since the 2008 passage of the Climate Change Act setting carbon reduction goals will themselves likely require expensive retrofit.³³ Current government policy to meet net zero carbon goals is primarily through the promotion of retrofit through heat pumps and heat networks, and the focus is on changing energy provision and exploring new technologies such as hydrogen.³⁴ Yet a recent IPPR report found that less than 2% of fuel pumps and 37% of the heat networks needed are being installed yearly, and the ability to scale up hydrogen as an energy source is still some years away.³⁵

A great deal more than a change in energy source is needed to fully retrofit homes. At the top end is the Passivhaus standard, where insulation ensures that there is no need for conventional heating systems at all. While this can be achieved in retrofit, it is more expensive, but should become much more common in new buildings.³⁶

At minimum, retrofit efforts should ensure that all homes meet the current Decent Homes Standard – an estimated 4.3 million do not at present.³⁷ Improvement of and compliance with both retrofit and new build measures need to be monitored and enforced to ensure that current problems of poor quality and energy efficiency performance gaps between what is promised and what is delivered do not continue.³⁸ This will require an increased investment from government in local infrastructure and changes to how costs are recovered. The government's current flagship fuel poverty programme, the Energy Company Obligation, is partly based on a regressive funding mechanism for example, with costs coming out of increases to energy bills.³⁹ Cost mechanisms should eradicate rather than increase fuel poverty.

Building local economies through use of local materials: Both retrofit insulation schemes and new builds should aim to use local and traditional building materials where possible. The extraction of raw materials and metals make up the largest part of a building's carbon footprint, and sourcing them locally means a much lower carbon cost. It also supports a commitment to global justice, given that supply chains remain far from transparent, and currently rely on extraction practices that come at high costs to environment and life in the Global South. Disruptions to trade from Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic have only emphasised the costliness and fragility of such global supply chains, compounding the high carbon costs of manufacture and long-distance transportation.⁴⁰

32 Sturgis; RICS (2017) *Whole Life Carbon Assessment for the Built Environment* <https://bit.ly/3cxqncB>

33 CCC (2020) *2020 Progress Report to Parliament* <https://bit.ly/358aTbe>

34 CCC (2020) *Policies for the Sixth Carbon Budget and Net Zero* <https://bit.ly/3ivfHPJ>

35 Webb, Emden, and Murphy (2020) *All Hands to the Pump: A Home Improvement Plan for England* <https://bit.ly/3pDJzuG>

36 Mitchell and Natarajan (2020) 'UK Passivhaus and the Energy Performance Gap', *Energy and Buildings*, 224

37 Centre for Ageing Better (2020) *Home and Dry: The Need for Decent Homes in Later Life* <https://bit.ly/3wbSar1>

38 CCC (2019) *UK Housing: Fit for the Future?* <https://bit.ly/3xbTiLf>

39 Webb, Emden, and Murphy <https://bit.ly/3pDJzuG>

40 Tapper (2021) 'Building Crisis Looms as Dwindling Supplies Bring Sites Grinding to a Halt', *The Guardian* <https://bit.ly/2TYfESg>; Gensler (2020) *Climate & Resilience: Shaping the Future of Cities* <https://bit.ly/35c5orG>

At minimum, commitment to local materials should involve an increased reliance on timber frame construction rather than cement or steel,⁴¹ but additional vernacular building materials should also be promoted. Different regions of the UK have their own local vernacular such as cob and chalk; they are often highly insulating materials available at low cost and as such are experiencing a level of resurgence.⁴² Straw bale and hemp are building materials that actually sequester carbon in the walls of a building, while providing a cheap and highly efficient layer of insulation to lessen the amount of energy required for heating.⁴³ The GND could expand access to such building beyond its current niche, and planning regulations should be updated to facilitate rather than block innovation and expanded building in local materials.

A resurgence of local industries producing building materials would improve transparency in working conditions and environmental costs, reduce economic and carbon costs of transport and boost local economies. The resulting job and small business creation would be centred in more rural areas where such opportunities have long been lacking.

Developing a circular economy view - planning for end of life: A last consideration for all building is how to ensure that its materials can be reused and recycled at the end of its life. This application of the circular economy as promoted by the UK Green Building Council works to eliminate waste through the prioritisation of recyclable, non-toxic and locally sourced components.⁴⁴

4. Developing gender and climate-responsive site design

The ways that homes are situated within a larger site can be as important as the design of the home itself. This view focuses on the spaces between homes, their impact on quality of life and the impact of that life on the planet. These spaces range from familiar backyards, public courtyards, sidewalks and streetscapes to shared facilities that might include childcare, kitchens or vegetable gardens.⁴⁵

Creating collective facilities of care: Innovative shared facilities for lightening burdens by collectivising laundry, childcare and cooking have long formed the core of suggested apartment building and estate designs.⁴⁶ Co-housing, can integrate shared kitchens and eating areas with a rota for cooking meals, cooperatively run childcare centres, shared storage areas and shared allotments, encouraging democracy, conviviality and reduced consumption.⁴⁷

Creating new commons: There are also thousands of projects around the world working to develop various kinds of commons, centred in bottom-up place-based initiatives driven forward by local people in response to local strengths and challenges. These include maker spaces, public orchards, knitting circles, community dinners, man sheds and more. Flexible low-cost or free meeting, working and storage spaces are a principal requirement for such initiatives. Designing such spaces, along with a minimal investment to facilitate their care and curation

41 CCC, *UK Housing: Fit for the Future?* <https://bit.ly/3xbTiLf>

42 Bird (2010) *Local Sustainable Homes: How to Make Them Happen in Your Community*

43 Bird (2010) *Local Sustainable Homes: How to Make Them Happen in Your Community*; UKGBC (2019) *Circular Economy Guidance for Construction Clients: How to Practically Apply Circular Economy Principles at the Project Brief Stage* <https://bit.ly/3cQ7VfN>; LETI <https://bit.ly/3xaw0W1>

44 Ibid.

45 Marcus and Sarkissian; Chatterton (2019) *Unlocking Sustainable Cities: A Manifesto for Real Change*

46 Hayden (2000)

47 Jarvis (2019) 'Sharing, Togetherness and Intentional Degrowth', *Progress in Human Geography*, 43.2, 256–75

by residents, could provide a less intensive way for people to become involved in community activities and networks demonstrated to improve health, resilience and community cohesion.⁴⁸

Interventions can start in a smaller way with spaces that already exist such as a shared courtyard. Particularly important for children and carers, such spaces benefit all residents, and can be thoughtfully constructed for new-builds or reclaimed through participatory design within existing estates.⁴⁹ The building of houses and flats in clusters is found to be one of the best layouts to provide such spaces.⁵⁰

This kind of space can also be created through work to transform streets, as demonstrated through creation of 'home zones', a number of which were developed in various forms across the UK in the early 2000s.⁵¹ Trees and gardens, special pavements, seating, traffic calming and redesign of parking are used to prioritise resident use over cars. This has been particularly beneficial to children and parents, the elderly, disabled people and anyone with temporary or long-term issues with mobility.⁵²

Wilding neighbourhoods: 'Green architecture' cannot be seen as merely a matter of energy ratings of individual homes, but rather as embedding homes in the wider interdependent ecosystem. Impacts on surrounding land, air and light, water, flood areas and wetlands, sewage and waste systems are important considerations, particularly in the siting and design of new build. Rain capture and conservation should be standard. Passive heating and cooling should be facilitated through siting and orientation, and infrastructure provided to allow buildings and developments to generate their own clean energy through solar and other technologies.⁵³ All such steps help mitigate known climate change risks.

Increasingly design is working to incorporate green spaces into the fabric of buildings themselves through living walls and roofs, but also to understand and provide design elements that support the wild ecologies of buildings.⁵⁴ The same design of clustered housing that allows for increased social cohesion are also some of the optimum building forms for wildlife, native plants and bees. Reducing the carbon footprint of housing also means reducing its footprint all together, as plants and trees contribute to carbon capture, and blue and green networks support the movement of wildlife as well as increased activity and sociability of people.⁵⁵

Taken all together, these kinds of neighbourhood transformations are needed to help to reimagine the nature of public and semi-public space as much as private space, and to develop new understandings of a shared commons. The daily connections, loose support networks and safely shared spaces emerging from such urban planning approaches may also help reduce the greatest risks of violence that women, children and disabled people in particular face: violence and abuse within the home.⁵⁶ The more rigid the separation of private and public

48 Civic Systems Lab (2015) *Designed to Scale* <https://bit.ly/3gdnfFk>; Participatory City Foundation (2020) *Tools to Act: Building a Participatory Ecosystem in Barking and Dagenham through the Every One Every Day Initiative* <https://bit.ly/3pE0QDW>

49 Cooper Marcus and Sarkissian (2000) *Housing as If People Mattered: Site Design Guidelines for Medium-Density Family Housing*

50 Cooper Marcus and Sarkissian (2000) *Housing as If People Mattered: Site Design Guidelines for Medium-Density Family Housing*; Chatterton (2013) 'Towards an Agenda for Post-Carbon Cities: Lessons from Lilac, the UK's First Ecological, Affordable Cohousing Community', *IJURR*, 37.5, 1654–74

51 Biddulph (2005) *Home Zones: Challenging the Future of Our Streets* <https://bit.ly/356gfn0>

52 Biddulph; Appleyard and Cox (2006) 'At Home in the Zone', *Planning*, 72.9 <https://bit.ly/3vhU3RS>

53 Yeang (1995) *Designing with Nature: The Ecological Basis for Architectural Design*

54 Beatley (2011) 'Toward Biophilic Cities: Strategies for Integrating Nature into Urban Design', in *Biophilic Design: The Theory, Science, and Practice of Bringing Buildings to Life*, ed. Kellert, Heerwagen, and Mador

55 Ibid.

56 EVAW (2021) *Violence Against Women and Girls: Snapshot Report 2020/21* <https://bit.ly/3x9Duc0>

spheres and the more unsafe, unwelcoming and inaccessible public spaces are, the more isolated, exposed and vulnerable people become to those they share private space with.⁵⁷

5. Improving connection to town, city and region

Part of designing resilience for the future means that each adaptable and energy efficient home also contributes to the resilience of the wider community and region – a resilience that in turn supports the resilience of the homes and residents within.⁵⁸ A massive programme of retrofit and new build could and should work to transform older patterns and negative impacts of uneven development.

Investing in areas of historic underinvestment: This means undertaking a holistic approach to housing and community-led recovery in the working class and BAME communities suffering from many decades of under-investment alongside the more recent destruction of services and community infrastructure under austerity.⁵⁹ This should also ensure higher levels of funding in the North to address historic patterns of underfunding,⁶⁰ as well as programmes targeted at providing the sensitively built, genuinely affordable housing in such great shortage in rural areas, where relatively small investments can have large positive effects within small communities.⁶¹

Reducing reliance on global extraction through building local economies: At a global level, a move away from fossil fuels and reduced reliance on existing global supply chains for construction materials will withdraw support from exploitative mineral extraction as well as the regimes maintaining their support to the detriment of environment, livelihoods and democracy throughout the Global South.

Designing compact and connected communities to promote walking, cycling and public transport: Where do these homes sit in relation to the people and places residents need to access? How well are they connected to pedestrian and bike paths and public transport systems that are well-lit, safe and accessible to all users? Recent research from the NHS shows people maximise access to local services such as shops, health and leisure centres when they are clustered and within 5-10 minutes walking distance.⁶² Homes need to be integrated into such local networks as well as the wider urban or rural fabric in ways that encourage walking, cycling and public transport.

Preserving biodiversity, and planning for climate change: The environment is a final key consideration at this level. The drive to build new homes should focus on density, ensuring that homes are not further expanding into rural and green belt areas, or reducing biodiversity. New build should also take account of rising sea levels and more extreme weather conditions, with flood zones and wetlands preserved to help mitigate their impacts.⁶³

57 Goldsack (1999) 'A Haven in a Heartless World?: Women and Domestic Violence', in *Ideal Homes?: Social Change and the Experience of the Home*, ed. Chapman and Hockey

58 Lerch

59 Gulliver (2016) *Forty Years of Struggle: A Window on Race and Housing, Disadvantage and Exclusion* <https://bit.ly/3w7aQbn>

60 The Northern Housing Consortium (2020) *Time to Level-Up: Local Authority Housing and Planning Capacity in the North of England* <https://bit.ly/3vd9Np9>

61 Rural Services Network (2021) *Revitalising Rural: Realising the vision* <https://bit.ly/357F1TT>

62 NHS England (2019) *Putting Health into Place* <https://bit.ly/3xKSPAs>

63 CCC, 2020 *Progress Report to Parliament* <https://bit.ly/358aTbe>; Lerch.

6. Expanding who builds, installs and maintains our housing

The large-scale investment needed to meet the UK's statutory requirement of zero-carbon by 2050 would create tens of thousands of jobs. One key concern in the Committee on Climate Change's recent report on housing was the construction skills gap in securing the provision of all recommended retrofit and newbuild measures. This gap exists primarily in the construction, engineering and energy industries, from building homes to installing heat pumps and other forms of retrofit to ensuring water efficiency, landscaping and property level flood resilience.⁶⁴ The GND would also open up a wealth of related occupations across the architecture, design, project management, engineering, and community development sectors.

Opening up jobs to non-traditional workers: A high level of government funding also opens up immense opportunity for transforming these industries, all documented as being heavily male, white and heterosexual, with a culture of discrimination and closure to women, BAME, LGBT+ and disabled people.⁶⁵ The proportion of women in professional construction trades has remained fairly constant over time at around 12 to 16%, while in the manual trades (carpenters, electricians, plumbers) they make up as little as 1%.⁶⁶ The deeply ingrained masculine culture is not only seen as a barrier to the entry of diverse workers, but to more ethical and responsive work practices that prioritise sustainability, training and stable employment over profit.⁶⁷

The organisation Women in Construction was established to support women into work in constructing the Olympic Park. For some years they have been successfully leveraging legislation on social value, influencing public procurement to include social benefit clauses in construction contracts that support the hiring of women and other underrepresented groups.⁶⁸ This model should be developed and expanded for all employment opportunities within the GND, with subsidy to support organisations like Women in Construction, expand apprenticeship opportunities and work in conjunction with unions to better understand and address the issues women and other groups face in the workplace.⁶⁹

Improving support for self-build: The different forms of flexible architecture along with the growing use of natural and local materials also open up much wider potential for self-build, which also means residents are better able to undertake repairs and adapt and expand their own homes. This has long been a strategy of autonomous and ecological movements (for example Walter Segal's self-build council homes). While this strategy alone cannot solve housing crisis or avert climate catastrophe, it can form a small but significant piece of the solution.⁷⁰

64 CCC, *UK Housing: Fit for the Future?* <https://bit.ly/3xbTiLf>

65 Powell and Sang (2013) 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Construction Industry', *Construction Management and Economics*, 31.8, 795–801; Craig and Oates (2014) 'Empowering Women in Construction', in *Building the Future: Women in Construction*, ed. Munn <https://bit.ly/3pJhlim>

66 Craig and Oates; Wright (2015) 'New Development: Can "Social Value" Requirements on Public Authorities Be Used in Procurement to Increase Women's Participation in the UK Construction Industry?', *Public Money & Management*, 35.2, 135–40

67 Clarke and Dainty (2015) 'No More Softly, Softly': *Review of Women in the Construction Workforce* <https://bit.ly/3wiwaeg>

68 Wright; Women Into Construction (2018) *Changing the Face of Construction: Social Return on Investment Analysis for Women Into Construction* <https://bit.ly/3giVjyw>

69 Craig and Oates.

70 Bird; Chatterton (2020); Ward (1985) *When We Build Again, Let's Have Building That Works!*

7. Supporting security of housing tenure and housing as a home over housing as an asset

The homes needed are of high quality, generous space, adaptable and flexible and based on principles of inclusive design with security of tenure – it is clear that the private market has been unable to provide much if any of such housing, even for those of middle income. Given the centrality of home to survival as well as social reproduction, health, wellbeing and identity, housing that is safe, decent and affordable should be asserted as a right under current UN guidelines.⁷¹ Such a right is also guaranteed by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which the UK is a signatory.⁷² Asserting this right should be part of a wider effort of land reform to decommodify housing, ensuring that its use value as home and shelter is always prioritised over its value as asset or investment.⁷³ Strategies to accomplish this include the regulation of the housing market and private-rented homes as well as the removal of land from the private market altogether. This dampens speculation and rising land costs as well as prioritises land use for local needs rather than for generating profit. The following areas could all be part of a transformed housing and land provision for the housing we need:

Regulating the private-rented sector: security of tenure should be guaranteed as it is across much of Europe, with an end to no-fault evictions combined with a policy that controls rent increases. Housing conditions should also be rigorously monitored and enforced, with both support and sanctions for landlords to ensure housing provision that is safe and decent. Devolution means that tenant protections are increasingly different across the regions, but a basic level of protection should be guaranteed to all UK renters in the private sector.

Expanding municipal ownership: Councils have traditionally been the builders and managers of social housing and have on the whole done this quite well, often despite severe government cuts to housing budgets and policies pushing privatisation.⁷⁴ Municipal ownership also helps secure the ability for those services helping people move on from hostels, B&Bs, temporary accommodation and shelters into housing at social rents, something that often creates ongoing tension between councils and housing associations.⁷⁵ Municipal ownership could be facilitated by powers to take over slum and long-term empty properties. Existing public assets should also be preserved.

Expanding forms of collective ownership: The UK has a long tradition of mutual aid and cooperatives, as well as a growing number of land trusts and co-housing developments. These withdraw land from the speculative market to put control into community hands, supporting the development of community cohesion and mutual support. Some of the basic forms include:

Housing Co-operatives – although all are tenant owned and managed to some degree, these can include a wide range of hybrid forms where this ownership and management sits exclusively with residents, is shared with a council or social housing provider, or contracted out to a third party.

71 Special Rapporteur (2020) Guidelines for the implementation of the right to adequate housing <https://bit.ly/3i8oeGj>.

72 Hohmann (2016) *Protecting the Right to Housing in England: A Context of Crisis* <https://bit.ly/3xFhCWJ>

73 Special Rapporteur (2020) Guidelines for the implementation of the right to adequate housing <https://bit.ly/3i8oeGj>

74 John Boughton (2018) *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing*.

75 Ahmed et al (2018) *Post-Implementation Evaluation of Part 2 of the Housing Act (Wales) 2014: Final Report* <https://bit.ly/3pE6Yfq>

Co-housing – a model emerging from Scandinavia where 20-30 families come together to form an intentional community, living in private units but sharing some areas like a kitchen, workspace or gardens in common.

Community Land Trusts – a model emerging from the US, where land is owned by the Trust, with a board of directors most commonly divided between 1/3 current residents, 1/3 people in the surrounding community, and 1/3 individuals with professional expertise. Land is rented out on long-term lease and residents own the home on it. Removing the cost of land from housing ensures it remains affordable for future generations.⁷⁶

These more collective forms of ownership transform housing to increasingly become a part of a new commons. While an ongoing critique has been made of the sometimes exclusive nature of such developments, often cost-restrictive to middle-class, generally white communities, co-housing developments such as LILAC in Leeds and the London CLT have worked hard to ensure that it is accessible to people on relatively low incomes.⁷⁷ This could be supported through increased subsidy, particularly in making land available which is almost always the greatest cost, as well as improving planning regulations and financial structures. While not everyone would choose to live in such developments and a mix of housing should still be provided to allow for choice, support with land and the provision of community development expertise could make this a more attractive and rapid intervention than it stands at present.

Developing a housing budget that is an investment in a physical asset rather than a subsidy to a landlord: While some level of housing benefit paid to private or social landlords would need to be continued for many current private renters and those with the lowest incomes, housing budget should ideally return primarily to be investment in acquiring and building social housing,⁷⁸ with rents ideally set at levels that do not exceed 25-33% of household income or that of the lowest income quartile in an area,⁷⁹ protected for future generations through municipal or collective ownership. Potential benefits of such guaranteed full government funding into buildings rather than tied to occupants should also be explored for shelters, hostels and temporary accommodation. This would help ensure the availability of emergency shelter to anyone, including those with no recourse to public funds, and without penalising those in work.

Current punitive aspects of welfare reform should be repealed, particularly the end of the 'spare-room subsidy' or 'bedroom tax', that has led to high levels of hardship, debt and rent arrears and has the most damaging impact on women, BAME communities and the disabled.⁸⁰ The lifting of restrictions on accruing equity while on housing benefit should also be explored to support households wishing to join cooperative or co-housing schemes.

Creating more social housing through estate regeneration, not less: The desperate need for social housing also makes it imperative that any regeneration of existing estates should be required to add to the stock of units available at social rents rather than reduce that number, while also guaranteeing a right of return. The steady loss of social housing through current regeneration schemes, almost always in the face of tenant protest, is well documented and

76 Goulding (2018) *Housing Futures: What Can Community-Led Housing Achieve for Greater Manchester?* <https://bit.ly/3xacPvE>; Thompson (2020) 'From Co-Ops to Community Land Trusts: Tracing the Historical Evolution and Policy Mobilities of Collaborative Housing Movements', *Housing, Theory and Society*, 37.1 (2020); Chatterton (2020)

77 Moore et al (2018) *The Urban CLT Project Evaluation* <https://bit.ly/3giXUbK>

78 Shelter (2012) *Bricks or Benefits? Rebalancing Housing Investment* <https://bit.ly/3wpr5kp>

79 Affordable Housing Commission (2019) *Defining and Measuring Housing Affordability: An Alternative Approach* <https://bit.ly/3zbFiDf>

80 Gibb (2015) 'The multiple policy failures of the UK bedroom tax', *International Journal of Housing Policy*, 15.2, 148-166; UKWBG

should not be allowed to continue.⁸¹ All estates should be understood as public assets and preserved as such, with more work done to explore how other municipal buildings can be converted into quality social housing. Local councils have sold an estimated 12,000 public spaces to private developers between 2014/15 and 2019—many to be converted into luxury flats rather than much needed social housing—bringing in £9.1 billion used to plug gaps in austerity budgets.⁸² Instead of such a sell-off, services should be fully funded, and public land kept in public use.

Exploring land reform: additional policy to regulate housing markets, land and ownership:

The UN's rapporteur on housing has identified financialisation, where housing is treated purely as investment commodity, as central to speculative development, displacement and spiralling inequality.⁸³ It skews development priorities away from community need towards highest profit, and pushes up land costs. A step towards comprehensive land reform is needed to support housing as a right rather than a commodity. Tax structures, regulation and the National Planning and Policy Framework should be updated following UN guidelines.⁸⁴ At minimum, these need to ensure provision adequate to meet current needs for social housing as well as goals for zero-carbon building and retrofit. Helpful policies could include strengthening compulsory purchase powers of local authorities and the development of a National Land Bank, Common Ground Trust and/or Land Commissions; increasing transparency of ownership; tightening banking regulations and guidance on real estate investment; changing tax structures to discourage investment in land as an asset, particularly by non-resident owners; regulating Airbnb and other tourist uses; regulating student housing; and increasing transparency and the democratic ownership of and participation in planning processes.⁸⁵

81 Lees and White (2020) 'The Social Cleansing of London Council Estates: Everyday Experiences of "Accumulative Dispossession"', *Housing Studies*, 35.10, 1701–22

82 Davies et al, 'Revealed: The Thousands of Public Spaces Lost to the Council Funding Crisis' <https://bit.ly/3cwPmNw>

83 Special Rapporteur (2017) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing* <https://bit.ly/3wbPmtP>

84 Ibid.

85 Martin, Ryan-Collins, and Macfarlane (2017) *How to Fix the Housing Crisis: Take Land Seriously* <https://bit.ly/3wprOSF>; Grey et al (2020) *Land For the Many: Changing the Way Our Fundamental Asset Is Used, Owned and Governed* <https://bit.ly/3gjYNAO>

Conclusion

Housing affects our lives and wellbeing. Contributing to our sense of identity, it can shape our relationships to friends and family, our roles of care and how we relate to the wider social world.

An effective GND must address issues of equality alongside usual technical fixes of new green building and retrofit strategies. It must also reverse the underrepresentation of women and other marginalised groups in the construction and property sectors to avoid green housing strategies unintentionally contributing to the structures of profit and oppression that underpin the drivers of climate change itself.

The recommendations in this report form a solid foundation for thinking about the scale of intervention needed to confront climate change driven by capitalist and patriarchal forms of development. True sustainability will require transformation of the housing market, processes of planning and designing homes, their physical fabric, how they relate to their surroundings and how we live in them.

The Feminist Green New Deal is bringing a gendered and intersectional approach/ perspective to the Green economy/Green Recovery - ensuring that the voices of women, people of colour and other marginalised groups are heard during environmental and political debates.

Through a programme of nationwide grassroots workshops and policy roundtables a Feminist Green New Deal Manifesto will be created and launched at COP26 Glasgow Climate Talks.

This Project is a collaboration between Wen (Women's Environmental Network) and the Women's Budget Group (WBG).

August 2021



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