

Homes England backs a new “healthy housing” toolkit by Design for Homes

- New design toolkit commissioned by NHS England replace Building for Life 12 with a focus on healthier communities
- Homes England will specify the new Building for a Healthy Life guidance in land sale tenders
- Guidance encourages focus on active travel, carbon reduction and mixed tenure in communities

Homes England is backing new design guidance called Building for a Healthy Life, which encourages healthier lifestyles to be planned into new housing developments. The new guidelines are published by Design for Homes and Urban Design Doctor and were officially launched this week (21 July 2020).

The design toolkit covers the priorities for creating healthier communities, including improved walking, cycling and public transport links, with reduced carbon emissions and better air quality. Master plans should be based on an assessment of local health and care needs, with the creation of integrated neighbourhoods based on ‘tenure neutral’ housing and well-defined public spaces.

The new guidance was commissioned by NHS England and NHS Improvement to update the widely used Building for Life 12 (B4L12), which Homes England requires developers to commit to using as part of the tender process for purchasing land. Reserved matter planning applications must subsequently reflect the tender proposals.

The agency has committed to using the new guidance in a similar way and is currently carrying out a review of the impact on design quality of schemes that were procured under B4L12.

The new guidelines use the same 12-point structure as its predecessor, with examples of good practice that would add up to a green light and bad practice that would earn a red light. However the authors make clear the guidance is intended to prompt discussion rather than as a tick-box scoring system.

Many local authorities include reference to the B4L12 in their Local Plans, and the new guidance is designed to enable them to easily update their plans to link to the new guidance. The new guidelines are also consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Sadie Morgan, Director of architecture firm, dRMM, and a board member of Homes England, said:

“The new design guidance is a big step forward in supporting placemaking for healthier, more integrated communities where people want to live and spend time together. We know that the existing guidance has focused developers’ attention on high-quality design and these new guidelines will build on that

success.

“People’s homes and neighbourhoods have a huge impact on their wellbeing and Homes England is committing to using these new guidelines to ensure that new developments encourage and enable better health.”

David Birkbeck of Design for Homes said:

“Building for a Healthy Life works best as the starting point for getting developers, local authorities, communities and other stakeholders to agree on key aspects of a design, such as how new development will connect to existing communities and how people will be able move between the two.

“Its general focus has not changed significantly, other than to promote the idea of walking and cycling more short journeys. But the use of images helps explain the desired for outcomes and help everybody identify shared objectives.”

Dr Stefan Kruczkowski of Urban Design Doctor said:

“Building for a Healthy Life is full of photographs. Everyone can see what good looks like and also what type of things we need to avoid when designing new places”.

Good design case study

Inholm is a sustainable mixed-tenure neighbourhood of 406 homes by Urban Splash that sets pioneering townscape design principles for the wider new town of Northstowe near Cambridge. □ The new neighbourhood, which won a Housing Design Award in 2020, was master-planned by Proctor and Matthews and is one of the first schemes from Homes England to integrate the principles of Building for Life 12 into the tender. Initiated by Homes England, Northstowe is England’s most ambitious new town project since Milton Keynes and will eventually grow to a community of 10,000 homes.