

Consultation Response

Consultation:	Homes for the Future: more affordable, more sustainable – Housing Green Paper
Consulting body:	Department for Communities and Local Government
Date:	15 October 2007
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About the National Heart Forum

The National Heart Forum (NHF) is the alliance of more than 50 organisations working to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease in the UK. Member organisations represent the medical and health services, professional bodies, consumer groups and voluntary organisations. Members also include many individual experts in cardiovascular research. Government departments have observer status. The views expressed in this submission do not necessarily reflect the opinions of individual members of the alliance.

General Remarks

The National Heart Forum welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) consultation on *Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable - Housing Green Paper*. Health is a critical part of sustainable development. Growing rates of obesity and other avoidable chronic diseases, such as coronary heart disease and diabetes, are over-burdening the National Health Service and generating huge social costs, including reduced quality of life and reduced healthy life expectancy.

Lack of physical activity is a key risk factor for these and other chronic diseases. However, the majority of Britons do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity. In 2004 the Department of Health estimated the cost of inactivity in England to be £8.2 billion a year.

There is growing evidence to show that the environment can have a strong influence on levels of participation in physical activity. This is not only about access to the countryside and green space, but includes issues such as provision for pedestrians and cyclists and the design of buildings. Many transport and planning policies unintentionally build barriers to physical activity – such as prioritising cars before pedestrians and cyclists, and locating housing, shops, services and places where people work in areas virtually inaccessible without a car.

Key Recommendations

Improving health and wellbeing should be central to planning, and DCLG's housing strategy must consider how its recommendations will impact physical activity. The National Heart Forum is pleased to see the focus on play areas for children and green space. Although the green paper does not directly mention the health benefits of green space, urban parks provide important opportunities for physical activity.

The National Heart Forum partnered with CABI and Living Streets to produce *Building Health: Creating and enhancing places for healthy, active lives: What needs to be done?*. *Building Health* provides a blueprint of practical policy recommendations for national and local policymakers, as well as planners, architects and transport professionals to design towns, cities and buildings that make physical activity the easy and attractive choice. Many of these recommendations, particularly those related to active travel, will also be important in addressing climate change and are an important part of sustainable development. Key recommendations include:

- Applying a 'health check' (or health impact assessment) on every investment programme, which include assessing the impact on levels of physical activity.
- Strengthening guidelines for key strategic planning documents such as Community Strategies, Local Transport Plans, Regional and Sub-Regional Spatial Strategies, Local Development Frameworks and Sustainability Appraisals to make health and physical activity a key goal alongside sustainable development.
- DCLG should develop and implement planning guidance prioritising walking and cycling.
- DCLG Planning Policy Statements should give greater support to medium-density, mixed-use development with access to high quality public transport within a 1km walk.

Ensuring that new housing developments foster walking and cycling, and provide adequate green space for play and other activities, can be an important step toward increasing the rates of physical activity in England.

We hope you will consider the recommendations in *Building Health* as you move forward with the effort to provide more affordable and sustainable housing.

For further information, *Building Health* can be downloaded from this address: http://www.heartforum.org.uk/Publications_NHFreports_Pub_BuildHealth.aspx.