

The way we live now:

What people need
and expect from
their homes

A research report for the Royal
Institute of British Architects



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Contents

	Summary	4
1.0	Introduction	7
2.0	How do people choose a home?	11
3.0	Socialising, meals and living space	17
4.0	Storage and utility needs	30
5.0	Comfort and wellbeing	39
6.0	Outdoor space	49
7.0	Evaluating the quality of homes	55
	Appendices: Groups discussion guide and Ethnographic discussion matrix	60

Summary

This research project has been commissioned from Ipsos MORI by the RIBA for the independent Future Homes Commission's investigation into how the UK can build enough of the right kind of homes for modern British households.

The research looks at the needs and expectations people have for their homes, how they use the space in their homes and how they choose a new property. A qualitative approach was selected in order to uncover in-depth insights and detail on the experiences of UK householders. Five ethnographic interviews were carried out with participants in a range of housing situations and four discussion groups were conducted with members of the general public who were all looking to buy an affordable new home in the next 12 months.

Key findings: consumer needs and demands for 21st-century housing

What people need and expect from their homes:

- **Large windows for natural light, large rooms and high ceilings, typically referred to as 'period features'**

Many participants were keen to have homes with 'period features' which, when prompted, they described as large rooms, large windows and high ceilings. Their expectations of a new home were often shaped by the homes which they had lived in previously; they perceived that newer homes did not offer period features and therefore preferred older properties. Most were keen to have a sense of space in their homes, which they typically felt was important for wellbeing – especially for those living in urban London – and older homes were also perceived to be more spacious.

- **Large main living area for eating and socialising, either with members of the household or for entertaining guests**

Social activities such as eating and entertaining were the foundation of the home and, for this reason, participants tended to have strong views about their main living space (which they would use for eating, relaxing, entertaining and sometimes cooking). Although households with members at different life stages reported very different requirements for this area, most participants stated that it was important to them to have a sense of space. Most preferred the area to have some element of an open plan layout to accommodate entertaining friends or family.

- **Layouts which take into account technology used within the home**

Participants had an expectation that new-build homes would include suitable storage for technology and layouts which reflected how they use technology. This meant they expected homes to have enough television and plug sockets for them to arrange rooms and furniture in different layouts, to support greater use of electronic devices. They also expected suitable provision for computers and telephones which, with wireless technologies, are now moved around the home.

- **Space for private time away from other members of the household**

Private space within the home made an important contribution to participants' wellbeing and was important to participants of all ages. This was especially marked in households where a number of different generations lived together, and where a member of the household was sick or convalescing. The reduction of noise both within and between households was essential for a sense of privacy.

- **Private space outside, particularly for families, or access to green public space in urban locations**

Open outdoor space – whether part of the home or a public area – was widely felt to be important for wellbeing. Private outdoor space was crucial for families, because it allowed parents to feel comfortable that their children had safe places to play while they completed other tasks. Outdoor space was also important for the wellbeing of children and parents: parents reported that children enjoyed being outdoors and the opportunity for messy play, and parents liked children to take noise and mess outside.

- **Long-term and short-term storage for functional items, and for personal possessions people have chosen to keep during their lives**

Most participants needed more short-term storage (for day-to-day access of items like food or outdoor clothing), and more long-term storage (for seasonal items and items which they stored nostalgically). These needs were typically only revealed on prompting in the discussion groups, or through observation in the ethnographic case studies. In particular, the need for long-term storage was widespread, but not one which participants gave consideration to when choosing their home. Privacy of storage space was also an important consideration: many participants felt that they had things they wanted to store yet access regularly, but which they wanted to keep private from visitors, such as clothing, bed linen and food. Participants felt that new-build homes would not offer them enough storage space for their clothes, food and other everyday items and also for longer-term storage.

- **Dedicated space for domestic utility tasks, such as, washing, drying and ironing clothes, as well as for storing vacuum cleaners, rubbish bins and recycling**

Vacuum cleaners, rubbish bins and areas for recycling proved difficult for many participants to accommodate in their homes. Participants preferred to have an outdoor area close to the home where they could keep recycling and certain types of rubbish. Having suitable space to wash, dry and iron clothing and bed linen was a widespread problem for participants in the groups, as were difficulties in storing washed clothing and linens. These needs were typically only revealed on prompting in the discussion groups, or through observation in the ethnographic case studies.

- **Options for different layouts, as no consensus was reached for a single standard layout which was preferred across all households and life stages**

No consensus was reached as to an ideal layout or single design layout that would cater for all households. Life stage was a major contributing factor, with families, people later in life and first-time buyers without children each prioritising different layouts and qualities that suited their differing lifestyles. Separate areas for working at home, space needed for children, and the potential for adaptations for older people were raised as preferences for different types of households. When considering more progressive design solutions attitudes varied according to participants' past experiences and the constraints they face in the housing market, with those who had seen or lived in homes with rooms with flexible design solutions (e.g. movable partition walls), and those who needed to use single rooms for a range of purposes being most receptive to progressive design. Nonetheless, some degree of flexibility across the main living area was important to most participants in the research, reflecting the fact that many activities took place simultaneously, such as eating and relaxing by watching television; entertaining and cooking; preparing meals and supervising children's homework. This suggested that more progressive home layouts may accommodate householders' needs more fully than most current designs.

How people choose a home

- **Emotional considerations can overrule practical considerations when people are choosing their new home**

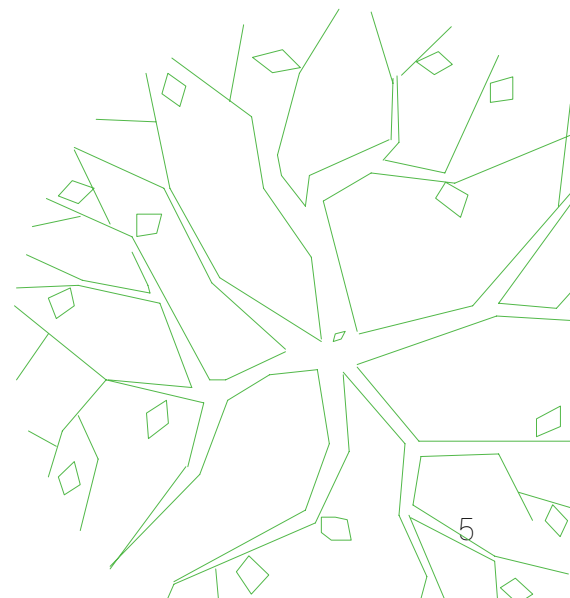
The 'feel' of a home, and the importance of getting on the housing ladder were foremost for many participants. As a result, they tended to give less consideration to their practical daily needs. Some participants stated that they were content to trade off practical concerns in return for a home which 'felt' right, or in order to be a homeowner rather than a tenant.

- **Most participants found it difficult to quantify and compare space in homes, but tended not to be aware of these difficulties – especially if they were first-time buyers**

Participants across many different types of household struggled to estimate how much space they would need for daily activities, storage and utility requirements, which sometimes led to problems when choosing a home. This was typically revealed only on prompting in the discussion groups, or through observation in the ethnographic case studies.

- **Locality was also highly important to most participants in the research.**

A sense of a strong community and good local amenities were important to participants across the research, regardless of whether they were renting or buying a home. The nature of individual concerns was typically linked to life stage. Most felt strongly that they preferred to live somewhere with a safe, community feel, and with transport links which were of a good quality and suited their needs.



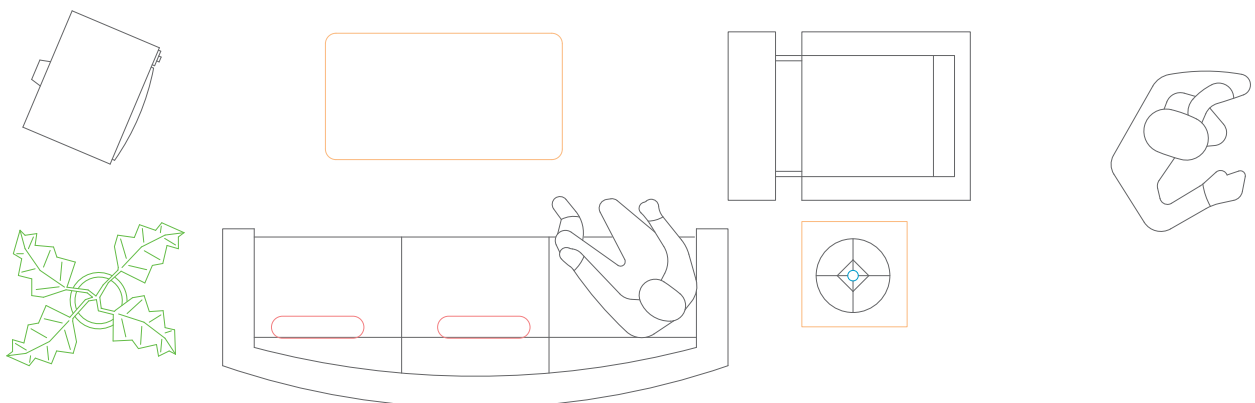
What people think should happen to improve their buying experience

- **An independent, cross-professional body should regulate the quality of, and provide free information about new-build homes**

When asked who should be responsible for the quality of new-build homes, participants tended to feel that a cross-industry body was best-placed to regulate housing quality and provide free information. The quality of new homes – which encompassed the quality of building materials, fixtures and fittings – was their biggest concern. The fabric of the home had implications for noise reduction and energy efficiency, but participants generally saw it in those terms only after prompting. Participants typically judged house size primarily by the number of bedrooms alone, but felt that many new homes had bedrooms which were too small. As such, participants wanted to see size regulation for rooms rather than for buildings as a whole because they felt that regulating overall space in homes would be very difficult to put into practice.

- **Free information should be available to benchmark aspects of quality such as space, noise insulation and energy efficiency**

Participants were in favour of better information to help them compare the less immediately quantifiable aspects of different homes, notably space, energy efficiency and noise insulation. They typically had difficulties in assessing levels of noise, light, safety and environmental performance. Evaluating energy efficiency was seen as a challenge, although they were most comfortable with seeing this set out in energy bills. Overall, there was a lack of trust in estate agents and home builders to provide accurate information, and this was seen to be a more appropriate job for an independent third party.



1. Introduction

In this section we set out the approach to the research, explaining the background to the research, the key objectives, and how the data was collected and is presented in the report.

1.1 Background and research objectives

This research project has been commissioned by the RIBA for the independent Future Homes Commission. The work is part of the Commission's investigation into how the UK can build enough of the right kind of homes that can deliver on the short-term need for numbers and growth, along with the longer-term economic and social impacts of good quality housing.

The Future Homes Commission was set up to explore how people live today, what they need and expect from their homes and whether the design and delivery of new homes is fit for purpose. For example, do we know how people living in the 21st Century use the space in their homes – do people still sit around a table to eat, and how do they socialise as a household? How much do energy and sustainability matter now and how much are they likely to matter in the future?

In order to answer these and other questions, it is important to understand more about how ordinary UK householders use their homes. For this reason, in September 2011 the RIBA asked Ipsos MORI to conduct research with the general public to explore in detail what people needed and expected from their homes, in order to inform the work of the Future Homes Commission.

1.2 Research methodology

The research aimed to understand both what a range of different people needed from their homes, and what the general public wanted from their homes. In order to achieve this, a two-stage approach was adopted, using, firstly, ethnographic filmed interviews to explore participants' needs in their homes, followed by discussion groups with the general public to explore participants' expectations of their homes. **In total we conducted five ethnographic interviews, and four discussion groups.**

In the following sections we set out our approach to both of these elements of the research in detail.

1.2.1 Ethnographic research

In order to explore the full range of people's needs from their homes, an ethnographic approach was chosen. Taking an ethnographic approach allowed us to observe people in their homes, which meant we could understand needs which they may not have perceived, or unexpected ways in which they responded to the design of their homes. The approach meant we were able to observe people in situ, seeing how their homes shaped their lives, and how their lives shaped their homes.

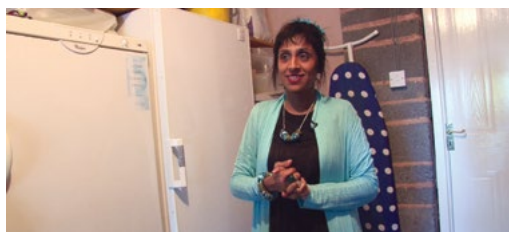
The key research questions of this element research of were:

- What do people do within their homes?
- What do people expect from their homes?
- What kind of environment do people need in their homes?

In choosing the participants for the ethnographic element of the research, Ipsos MORI worked closely with the RIBA to develop 'pen portraits' of the types of participants to be interviewed and observed. These portraits were developed specifically to sample households purposively – in other words, sampling according to certain specific criteria, so that we could explore the experiences of people who were representative of particular types of households in detail and depth. Participants were recruited face-to-face and interviewed in depth before they took part to ensure that they fitted the portraits and understood what the research involved.

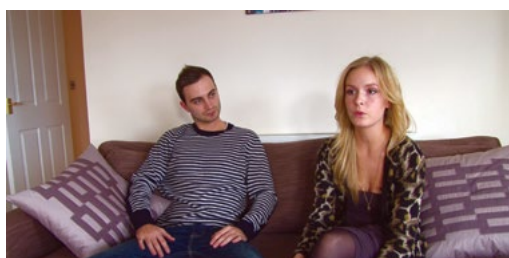
The following outlines describe the five households in our ethnographic study:

- **Darren and Deborah** live with their five children, aged between 7 and 16 years old. They are in their late thirties, and live in social housing in an urban area in Yorkshire. When we interviewed the family, Deborah was recovering from a serious illness, and Darren was her full-time carer.



- **Yasmin and Ilyas** have three children, two of whom are over twelve years old. They are in their forties, and are owner occupiers with a mortgage. They live in a suburban location in the South East of England. Yasmin takes care of the children but also works as a teaching assistant at a local school. Her husband works full-time and they are practising Muslims.

- **Janet and Rob** are a couple with an adult daughter who does not live with them. They are both aged over 65 and are owner-occupiers of their home. They live in a bungalow, built in the 1990s, in a suburban location in West Midlands. Janet has a disability and requires walking aids. She is retired, and although Rob still works part-time, he is also Janet's carer.



- **Matt and Miriam** are a young couple who have been living for two years in their first home which they own with a mortgage. They live in a suburban area of Liverpool in a two-bedroom newly built flat. Matt works full-time as well as running his own business and Miriam is still studying.

- **'D'** is a lone occupant who privately rents his home. He is in his late twenties and he works full-time in London. He lives in outer London in a two-bedroom flat. He preferred not to be identified by name in this study.

All participants, with the exception of 'D', signed a 'public domain' release form agreeing to use of the film footage and images in the public domain.

Research was conducted in October 2011. When conducting the interviews we spent a day (around six hours) with each of the five households we selected for interviews. It was important to spend this amount of time with each household to 'shadow' their daily activities effectively and understand how they lived. Interviews were conducted by a principal researcher, accompanied by an ethnographic 'shooter' who captured the full interview on film. Interviews were guided by a 'discussion matrix' – a detailed list of key topics for exploration with participants which was used in an informal way throughout the interviews. This discussion matrix is included in the appendix to this report.

During the ethnographic fieldwork interviewers made extensive notes. Once fieldwork was completed, findings were discussed in an analysis meeting and an edit plan based on these findings was drawn up. The full thirty hours of footage was then reviewed by an ethnographic film editor, and further key insights were extracted. Once distilled, the footage was reviewed a number of times to produce an hour-long film of key findings which was shared with the RIBA. These were reviewed collaboratively to produce final films of findings from the research. These films are available on the RIBA's website at www.behomewise.co.uk/videos.

1.2.2 Discussion groups

The four discussion groups aimed to understand what participants' expectations were when considering buying a home. These were conducted after the ethnographic research so that we could draw on the findings in the development of questions and exercises for the groups. A discussion group approach was selected because groups are a generative process, allowing participants to respond to the views and experiences of others and to develop and share a consensus of opinions.

The main research questions for this element of the research were as follows:

- What is most important to people when buying a home and why?
- What are participants' expectations around internal and external living spaces and why?
- What are participants' expectations around comfort, security, accessibility and environment performance within homes and why?
- What are participants' expectations from the local area and its amenities?
- What are participants' perceptions of new-build homes?
- What is the difference between the perceptions of first-time and experienced home-buyers?
- How do participants feel the current marketplace for home-buyers could be improved?

In considering sampling for the groups, we were keen to ensure that the groups included a range of the different types of people to whom the housing market needs to cater, with life stage being a particularly important factor. We therefore included a mix of the following different types of people within the groups:

- First-time buyers in average salaried households without children, who needed to access a home that is within their financial means;
- Young average salaried households without children or with one child under two years old who were choosing their second home;
- Young average salaried families with one or more children over three years old who were choosing their second home; and
- 'Empty nesters' looking for a home that better suits them later in life

Across these different groups, we also aimed to include a number of lone parents and single people without children in their household as their needs may be distinctly different from other households. To include a regional and urban/ suburban spread in the groups, two of the discussion groups were conducted in Manchester and two were conducted in London, with one in each area being conducted with participants looking for a home in an urban or suburban part of the country. Recruitment for the discussion groups was conducted face-to-face in local areas to ensure that as wide a range of people as possible was included in the research.

The discussion groups were conducted in February 2012. In order to ensure consistency of discussions across all of the groups, groups were conducted using a discussion guide, which is included in the appendix of the report. All groups were recorded and transcribed, and transcriptions of the discussions were used in the analysis for this report.

1.3 Presentation of data

Following this introduction, we bring together the findings from our ethnographic work and the discussions, integrating findings on the expectations and needs of participants and presenting the most important themes emerging from the research.

The findings of the research are presented in the following chapters:

- **2: How do people choose a home?:** Presents findings on some key background issues which shape the expectations of home buyers.
- **3: Socialising, meals and living space:** Presents findings on participants' needs and expectations of their main living space.
- **4: Storage and utility:** Presents findings on what participants felt their storage and utility needs were, the use of technology in the home, and the challenges they faced meeting their actual needs.
- **5: Comfort and wellbeing:** Presents findings on participants' views on light, warmth, security, accessibility, and the environmental performance of homes.
- **6: Outdoor space:** Presents findings on participants' needs and expectations of outdoor space.
- **7: Evaluating the quality of homes:** Presents findings on participants' views on the support they needed in understanding whether their homes were suitable for their needs

It is important to note that findings of this report are not statistically representative of the views and experiences of the general public. Qualitative research is designed to be illustrative providing robust and detailed insight into the perceptions, feelings and behaviours of participants rather than quantifiable conclusions. As far as possible we have tried to state the strength of feeling about a particular point, although in some cases it has not always been possible to provide a precise or useful indication of the prevalence of a view due to the small numbers of participants taking part in the research.

Verbatim comments have been used throughout this report to help illustrate and highlight key findings. Where verbatim quotes are used, they have been anonymised and attributed with relevant characteristics of gender, type of homebuyer, location, and the type of research they were involved with, as in the following example:

Female, First-time buyer, Manchester - urban, discussion group

In the ethnographic research we had permission to name participants, but for consistency, we refer to them in this report using similar attributes to those described in the discussion groups. Observations from the ethnographic research are included in the commentary with clear reference to which household they relate to, and some of these observations are also supported by images from the film.

The perceptions of participants make up a considerable proportion of the evidence in this study, and it is important to remember that although such perceptions may not always be factually accurate, they represent the truth to those who relate them.

1.4 Acknowledgments

The research questions and sampling were prepared by Ipsos MORI and Rebecca Roberts-Hughes from the RIBA, with the support of the RIBA Housing Group for the ethnographic case studies and the Future Homes Commission for the discussion groups. Ipsos MORI conducted all the fieldwork and would like to thank all the participants who took part in interviews and discussion groups, without whose valuable input the research would not have been possible.

1.5 Publication of data

As the RIBA has engaged Ipsos MORI to undertake an objective programme of research, it is important to protect the interests of both organisations by ensuring that it is accurately reflected in any press release or publication of findings. As part of our standard Terms and Conditions of Contract, the publication of these research findings have been approved by Ipsos MORI and should not be reproduced without permission. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

2.0 How do people choose a home?

KEY FINDINGS

- Emotional considerations can overrule practical considerations when people are choosing a home
- Most participants expressed a preference for large windows for natural light, large rooms and high ceilings, typically referred to as 'period features'
- Most participants found it difficult to quantify and compare space in homes, but tended not to be aware of these difficulties – especially if they were first-time buyers
- Locality was also highly important to most participants in the research

This chapter presents our findings about what shaped the expectations of participants in the research regarding homes. These broader issues cut across many of the main themes of this report, and underpin key insights of later chapters – hence they are presented in this introductory section. These are:

- Emotional considerations;
- The importance of past experiences of homes;
- The importance of life stage; and
- The importance of locality.

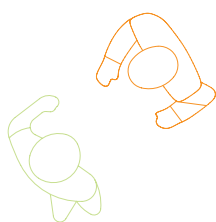
2.1 Emotional considerations

Most participants in the discussion groups discussed their expectations of their next homes in terms of two key emotional – rather than practical – considerations. These were the importance of the 'feel' of a place to live, rather than how it met their needs, and the importance for first-time buyers of taking a first step on to the 'property ladder', typically so that they could feel they were making progress financially and investing their money well. These more emotional rationales were typically the strongest motivations participants in the research stated for choosing their homes. Many spontaneously suggested that they would be happy to trade off more practical concerns if they were able to attain these 'emotional' requirements from a home. We explore both of these types of 'emotional' considerations in the sections below.

2.1.1 The 'feel' of a home rather than its functionality

The 'feel' of a home was more important to many participants in the discussion groups than its functionality: many reported that, aside from requirements regarding living space and number of bedrooms, the most important issue for them in choosing a home was finding somewhere they felt had 'character'. This typically meant a home with period features (we list these features as raised by participants in Section 2.2).

Finding a home with character, and that 'felt right', was important because finding a home participants felt they would be comfortable and happy in was more important to them than whether the home they were seeking actually met practical considerations. For most participants this was an unconscious trade-off, but some were explicit about the importance of this requirement.



"If I found a house that I really loved, it wouldn't really matter about the energy efficiency and things like that"

Female, First-time buyer, London – suburban, Discussion group

Equally important to many participants in the discussion groups – particularly those who were young or first-time buyers – was to have the opportunity available to personalise a property. Several participants who were looking to buy their first home across all the groups reported that they felt it was important that they could decorate or renovate their home as they pleased, and many felt that older properties allowed them more opportunities to do this.

"I think [there are] more things that you can do with a period property in terms of style and how you can make it into your own home"

Female, First-time buyer, London – urban, Discussion group

Overall, the sense of a property being comfortable or 'homely' was widely considered to be very important to participants. This feeling, coupled with difficulties most participants experienced in conceptualising their practical needs (as described later in Chapter 3.1.1) meant that some participants, especially first-time buyers, struggled to match their expectations of the "feel" of a home with a home which met their true practical requirements.

2.1.2 The importance of 'getting on the housing ladder' and 'buyer's regret'

The desire to 'get on the property ladder' was a powerful influence on participants' decisions to buy a home and the choices they made. This was sometimes driven by practical considerations – for example, the desire to stop living with ageing parents, or to cease renting as the cost of this option rose. But **most commonly, participants were keen to buy a home because it was widely considered a wise investment to make.**

"I'm currently renting a flat with a friend at the moment, managed to come into a bit of money and just thought buying a house would be a really good investment for me"

Female, First-time buyer, London – suburban, Discussion group

Tenure influenced what participants looked for in their next home: our ethnographic case studies suggested that **homeowners were more likely to take an active interest in whether their home suited their practical needs well than those who were renting.** For example, for our young renter in London, this was most apparent in his attitude to how much space he felt he needed, particularly outdoors.

"If I was buying then I would want to have a garden of a decent size as well. Because if you have a decent size garden, obviously it gives you flexibility ... but I would like to have open space, especially if you have got kids"

Male, Single and renting, London, Ethnographic interview

Nonetheless, in the discussion groups, some participants admitted that placing a disproportionate importance on getting a foot on the housing ladder led them to make errors of judgement in the suitability of homes they bought. This was particularly strongly felt among first homeowners in both urban and suburban London, often because participants regretted not having bought a home which would be large enough for young children.

"It's such a lot of money, renting, so we thought it would be better to buy, but it was just desperation at the time. Now I wouldn't do that"

Female, Homeowner with young children, London – urban, Discussion group

Such 'buyer's regret' was rarely articulated among first-time buyers – rather, we observed that regrets or reservations about homes were very hard for participants to admit to themselves. Participants showing us around their homes tended to report few problems – but after some time spent observing how they used their homes we were able to observe difficulties that we asked about in more detail and which, in some cases, they found embarrassing to discuss.

As an example, in our ethnographic research, our young first-time buyers in Liverpool initially felt they had bought a home which was ideal for their needs and were only able to see the deficiencies of their flat once they had lived there for some time. When they first viewed the apartment it appeared perfect, with an open plan entertainment space, modern décor and two bedrooms. However, after a while they noted a lack of storage for their possessions, so much so that they began to use a parent's home twenty minutes away to store many possessions.

"I don't think it is until you move somewhere that you really start to realise if you have got limited space which we have"

Male, First-time buyer, Liverpool, Ethnographic interview

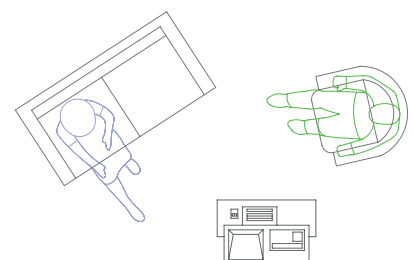
Regardless of these problems, this couple felt very pleased to own a property at all, and for them, the practical problems were a trade-off they were still willing to make in order to be homeowners. This sense of finding it difficult to admit problems with the home can be accounted for by the home being both a highly personal space as well as being an important and defining possession. For most participants who owned a property, their home was their most important – and certainly their largest – financial investment. This meant that it was difficult for participants to admit they had made mistakes with their choices, as well as meaning that they were typically very emotionally attached to a place which they felt was also a powerful expression of their personal identity.

2.2 The importance of past experience of homes

Expectations of homes were strongly defined by experiences of where participants had lived in the past for many participants across the research. Preferences were shaped by the local availability of certain types of housing stock – for example, across discussion groups in both Manchester and London many participants had lived in older (pre-1950s) housing stock and these participants reported period features such as large (sash) windows, fireplaces, large living rooms and high ceilings as aspects of homes which they would like to keep in the next home they were searching for. As people tended to have become used to these types of features, they were typically associated with being homely and familiar for many participants.

"My mum's got a massive [living room] ... I think it depends what you're used to when you're younger. It might be just reminiscing and you find [it] homely because you were there as a child"

Male, Homeowner with young children, Manchester - urban, Discussion group



Further to this, many participants in the discussion groups reported that the space they had become used to was important to replicate in the home they were expecting to buy – particularly where living space was concerned. This was even the case for participants who were downsizing, as well as those with young and growing families. The main reason for this was typically cited as the perceived requirements for participants' furniture and existing possessions.

"I've got a huge living room and a big settee at the moment, I don't want to compromise on that ... and everything I've got at the minute will have to fit in that house"

Female, Homeowner with young children, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

Only a few participants in the discussion groups had had experiences of living in more recently built homes. These participants typically felt strongly that rooms in newer homes were not large enough for their needs or built to high enough quality standards. Several felt that new-build homes required them to make trade-offs between a larger main living space and utility or functional rooms which would be useful to them, such as a downstairs toilet. Only very few participants – typically those who were downsizing once children had reached adulthood – were amenable to considering modern homes.

"We had feature fireplaces in both rooms, which were fitted with gas effect fires. It was nice when it was there, but having moved to something that was very modern I don't think, 'Oh God, I need a fireplace', because I didn't need it. "

Male, Downsizing, London – suburban, Discussion group

Views on the attraction of older homes varied by locality. Whereas participants in urban London tended to have strong preferences for older homes, many participants who had been used to living in suburban Manchester were keen to find newer homes with more open plan designs, which they preferred to the Victorian terraced homes with many smaller rooms which they were used to.

"[My current home] is a wee bit higgledy piggledy, so I'd rather just have something [where] you walk in and everything's there"

Female, Homeowner with young children, Manchester – urban, Discussion group

It was also evident that first-time buyers had fewer and more modest expectations of their homes than those who were already home owners. Past experience shaped understanding and ability to conceptualise what buyers would need from a home; first-time buyers lacked this more than most.

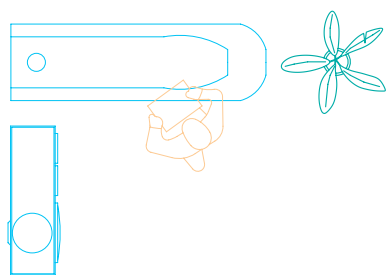
2.3 The importance of life stage

Participants' changing life stages were one of the most important triggers to seeking a new home and were an important influence on participants' needs and expectations. As might be expected, the number of children in the household and the age of those children had a strong bearing on the kind of main living space participants were looking for or felt they needed and the number of bedrooms they required. Nonetheless, many participants told us that in choosing their first home they had not considered what their needs would be in the future – and this was the case particularly where the needs of children who were currently very young were concerned. Many participants with young children in the discussion groups reported that they had not considered what kind of space they would need if they had a family when they first bought a home, and had put 'emotional' or other considerations first.

"I'd change living on the first floor, which I'd never really considered until I had a baby. Now, going up and down the stairs with a pram is really difficult. But that was actually something we chose first of all, to be on the first floor ... It was a security thing"

Female, Homeowner with children, London – suburban, Discussion group

Those participants who were looking to downsize once children had grown were also guided in their needs and expectations by their changed situations. As an example, a number of these participants had older or adult children – often in further education – and were typically keen to have a home which retained enough private space for their children when visiting or staying with them over a holiday period.



"The house that I'm in at the moment, the second bedroom's tiny. So I'd like a bigger second bedroom for my daughter ... if I have the main bathroom and then she's got the en suite in her bedroom and everything"

Female, Downsizing, Manchester – urban, Discussion group

Overall, life stage was highly important in shaping the needs and expectations of most participants in the research with regard to their homes. For this reason we present some themes within Chapters 3 and 4 of this report with reference to the needs and expectations of participants at specific life stages.

2.4 The importance of locality

A sense of a strong community and good local amenities were important to participants across the research, regardless of whether they were renting a home or buying. Several participants talked about this in terms of "community", suggesting that respectful neighbours who got on well and took collective responsibility for communal spaces were important to them.

"I know a lot of my neighbours, and a lot of them own [their homes], and it's a quite nice community feel, and that's something that we'd like to continue"

Female, First-time buyer, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

Renting a home rather than owning it had an impact on their requirements from the local community and the level of their involvement in it. Our young couple in Liverpool suggested that they had taken time to find out about how safe their local area was and how much green space there was locally because they were buying a home there. **Practicalities such as schools, car parking and transport links were important too.** In our case study in Banbury, Yasmin suggested that when she and her husband chose the home they lived in, they took time to investigate local transport links and the quality of local schools. In London, although renting, "D" told us that his main priority in choosing his home was the proximity to a train station for his daily commute, and free off-street parking. This was so important to him that he was willing to compromise on space in order to ensure his home had good transport links available,

"I know that [space] is at a premium in London especially if you are going to go somewhere which has decent transport links. So you ... have to make a bit of a sacrifice."

Male, Single and renting, London, Ethnographic interview

Schools were especially important for those in the discussion groups with young children – many such parents were keen that their next home was close to their children's existing schools. Alternatively, they needed their home to be close to a good primary or secondary school, depending on the age of their children.

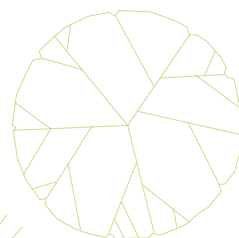
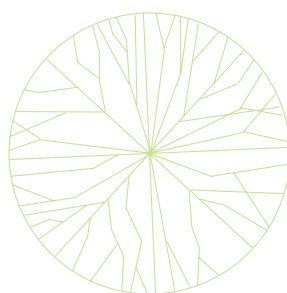
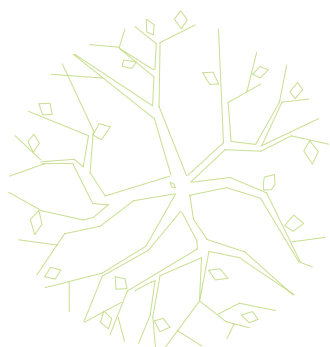
"If [my daughter] doesn't get into the grammar school which I'm hoping for her to get in I will have to move, because the school where I [live] now isn't suitable for her"

Female, Homeowner with children, Manchester – suburban, Discussion group

Overall, locality was highly important to most participants in the research, and although the nature of individual concerns was typically linked to the life stage of participants, most felt strongly that they preferred to live somewhere with a safe, community feel, and with transport links which were good quality and suited their needs.

Conclusion

Overall, participants' expectations of their next home were most powerfully shaped by the homes which they had lived in – which typically instilled a love of period features and large rooms – and the requirements for bedroom and living space which were dictated by the size of their household. Emotional considerations, such as the 'feel' of a home, were foremost, and participants tended to give relatively little consideration to their practical daily needs, such as for storage and utility. Life stage was also a major contributing factor, with families, people later in life and first time buyers without children each prioritising different layouts and qualities that suited their differing lifestyles. Locality, especially the quality of local services, was also a key consideration for participants, notable for those with children.



3.0 Socialising, meals and living space

KEY FINDINGS

- Participants across a range of life stages both needed and expected flexible and adaptable space for socialising, meals, relaxing and working
- A large main living area for eating and socialising, either with members of the household or for entertaining guests was important to most participants
- Options for different layouts were required, as no consensus was reached for a single standard layout which was preferred across all households and life stages
- When considering more progressive design solutions attitudes varied according to participants' past experiences and the constraints they face in the housing market.

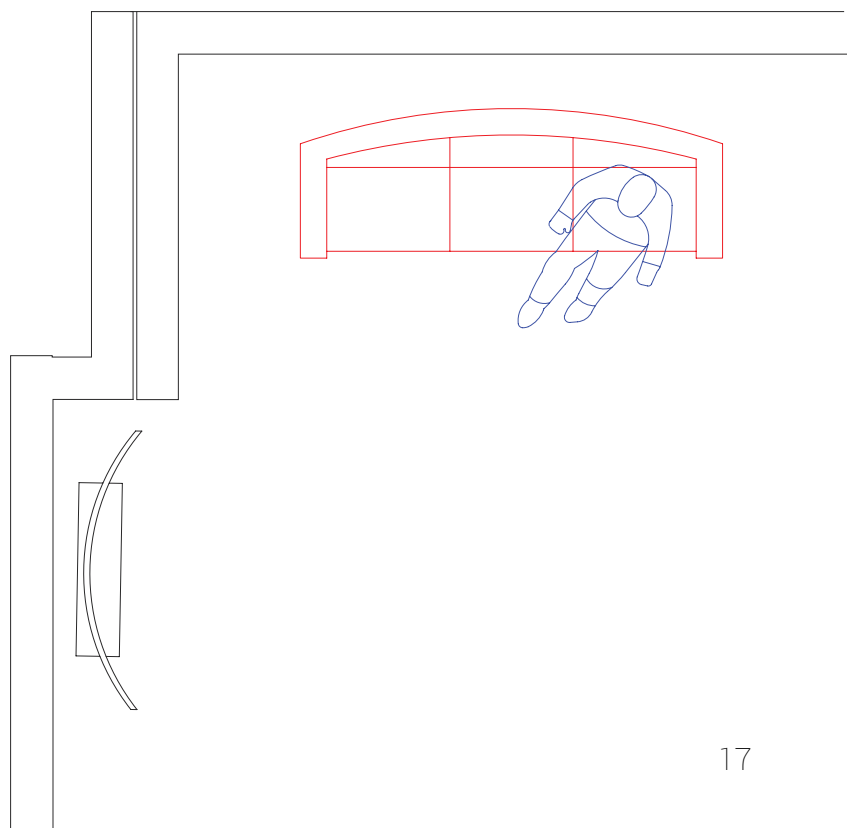
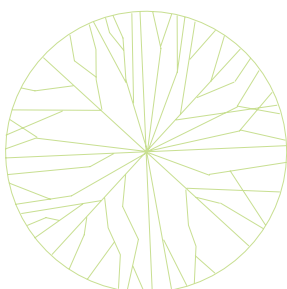
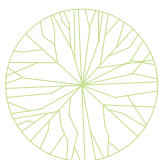
In this chapter we present our findings on participants' needs and expectations for their main living space. This will cover:

- Needs and expectations for main living spaces;
- Views on flexible and adaptable living space; and
- Life stage specific needs.

3.1 Needs and expectations for main living spaces

For most participants in the research, their "main living space" meant the space they used for preparing food, eating and their main living area – in other words kitchen, living room and dining room. As not all participants had needed or wanted each of these individual rooms, the collective function of these rooms was discussed in terms of the main living space altogether. Where this space was concerned, many participants in our ethnographic case studies and first-time buyers in the discussion groups struggled to evaluate how much main living space they would need for their household. In this section we cover:

- Difficulties evaluating living space required;
- Expectations of large, open living space;
- The importance of space to socialise.



3.1.1 Difficulties evaluating living space required

Participants in the discussion groups were typically comfortable and articulate in discussing how they expected to feel about the home they hoped to buy (see section 2.1.1), but were much more likely to struggle in describing and quantifying their practical requirements from a home. Most participants reported difficulties in quantifying how much space they would need in their home – both in homes they had lived in in the past, and homes they were looking to live in in the future. This is important to explain upfront as participants' expectations of homes tended to be shaped by perceptions of their needs which did not take into account all the relevant practical considerations.

In the discussion groups, participants' discussions of their requirements regarding space tended to focus mainly on space needed for eating, relaxing, socialising and the number of bedrooms. Participants had **rarely made efforts to quantify how much space they needed beyond the number of bedrooms they required and their needs regarding living and kitchen space, and outdoor space**. A few participants referred to the size of their main living room and reported that they hoped to have a main living space which was a similar size or larger. They were far less concerned with whether they had suitable space for daily domestic tasks, and for utility and storage, which we discuss in Chapter 4.

"I'd look at the number of bedrooms. That's the first thing I'd look for after location"

Female, Homeowner with young children, London – suburban, Discussion group

For less experienced buyers, a lack of skill in assessing the amount of space needed for every day domestic activities led to finding ways to manage which were sometimes inconvenient.



Matt & Miriam's
entrance hall

In our ethnographic interviews, Matt and Miriam, who were first-time buyers living in Liverpool, had developed a routine for moving around each other within their flat that appeared almost choreographed. One example of a daily compromise we observed occurred when the participants were entering and leaving the house. As there was not enough room for them both to put on coats and shoes in the hallway, one did so inside the hallway and the other outside the flat. When prompted they were able to explain that this was something they did regularly.

Interviewer: 'Do you often come out here to put your shoes on?'

Participant: "Yeah because there is more space out here. We try to not wear shoes in the apartment. There is more space as well."

Male, First-time buyer, Liverpool, Ethnographic interview

Having lived in the flat at least a year, they were no longer consciously affected by the compromises they were making and were unable to articulate them. Typically, it was only with the benefit of past experience that participants were better able to assess their own needs for their main living space.

3.1.2 Expectations of large, open living space

Participants in the discussion groups typically reported they wanted as much main living space as possible within their homes given what was possible within their budget constraints. This was even the case with some participants who were looking to downsize, who tended to want to maintain a large main living space as they had become accustomed to this, even if they were keen to reduce the actual floor size of their home.

"We want to keep the large rooms ... because that's what we're used to now"

Male, Downsizing, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

First-time buyers tended to be more modest in their aspirations, and in London, these participants also had the tightest budgets to manage. Aspirations were typically grounded in realistic and often modest expectations, such as the desire to have enough space to allow guests to stay over if required.

"If there's a certain amount of space I can compromise on a lot of other things for that space and work around other things that I might not want, for the space ... a living room large enough to have a sofa bed in it to pull out for people to stay, or to have a second small bedroom"

Male, First-time buyer, London - Urban, Discussion group

However, it was not simply space itself, but the impression or feeling of space in the home that was highly important to these participants, and indeed more widely across the research. For a few first-time buyers, the feeling of space was important enough for them to consider trading this off against the attraction of period features were they to come across a suitably-designed newly built home.

"I think it's the perception of size, perhaps more open planning ... if you get a newer build, you'd expect it's going to be smaller, but perhaps if it feels bigger that's a compromise that can be made"

Male, First-time buyer, London - suburban, Discussion group

But overall, new-build homes were not considered spacious, as we explain in more detail in Chapter 7. There was a **strong perception across all the discussion groups that newly built homes** were not as spacious as older homes, and that the participants' expectations for as much space as possible in bedrooms and the main living rooms within their budget was more likely to be compromised in a new-build home.

"They're too small ... if you're going to gain on size of one room, you lose on another"

Male, Homeowner with older children, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

3.1.3 The importance of space to socialise

Across the discussion groups participants expressed a strong preference for homes with a flexible living space which allowed them to socialise with family and friends in a range of ways, and to different levels of privacy. Many felt that they wanted this space to be suitable both for family meals and entertainment, and for larger gatherings, such as parties. Several participants in the groups suggested they wanted more space at home to socialise because socialising outside the home was no longer as affordable.

"It's too expensive to go out, really, these days, isn't it, so we have a lot of friends round all the time"

Male, Homeowner with older children, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

Entertaining was the most commonly cited reason for expecting a large flexible living space. Some participants preferred that this space incorporated a kitchen area, while others preferred an entertaining space which would open out to an outdoor space. Many participants reported that they liked to be able to socialise while preparing food, and also to use outside space for socialising, especially if they had children. Entertaining was also the reason cited by many for wanting to buy a home with a downstairs bathroom, so that the main (or family) bathroom could remain private when friends visited. A few first-time buyers suggested that they wanted the main living space to be flexible enough not only to entertain, but also to have guests staying over if they were unable to afford a second bedroom.

"For me it's the sociability as well. I'd design a house so that I can fold the bed away and stuff so that I can have a party and have people over to eat, although it's a box"

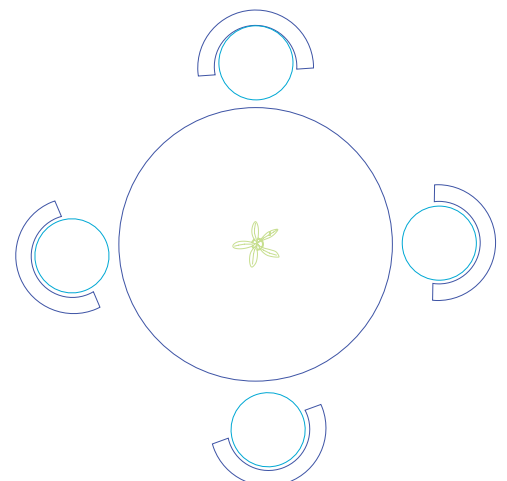
Female, Single homeowner, London - urban, Discussion group

Overall, the desire to share the home sociably with friends and family was a strong influence on expectations of homes, and meant that many participants were interested in considering a certain degree of open plan and flexibly designed space in their homes.

3.2 Views on flexible living space

Most of the participants in the discussion groups reported that they wanted some level of flexibility in their main living space, so that this could be adapted to suit their needs. However, views varied as to what levels of flexibility and adaptability were acceptable. In this section we present findings on the difficulties experienced by many participants in understanding how more progressive options for flexible design could be relevant to them, and the range of views in the research. This section covers:

- General difficulties conceptualising progressive design;
- Participants who wanted a highly flexible living space with progressive design;
- Participants who wanted open plan living space;
- Participants who preferred separate kitchen, dining and living rooms; and
- Meal times and preferences for eating areas.



3.2.1 General difficulties conceptualising progressive design

Only a very few participants in the discussion groups had lived in modern homes outside the UK. These participants, who tended to have lived in Germany or Scandinavia previously, were the most enthusiastic about the possibility of using space innovatively and about progressive approaches to the design of homes, such as using movable partition walls in homes. In contrast, most participants in the groups had lived in older housing stock for at least part of their lives, and as a result it was **challenging for participants to understand how more progressive design solutions could be useful to them, or how it would feel to live in such a home in practice.**

"I've never seen anything like that. That's the thing. I've never been to a house and seen it, so I think I need to see it to appreciate it"

Female, Homeowner with children, London – suburban, Discussion group

For a few participants, a room became multi-purpose not through its design or layout, but simply through the things they did there, **which they adapted to the space available.** For example, many participants in the groups reported using the kitchen as an entertaining space while cooking and wanted to keep a kitchen where they were able to do this.

"The hub of the house ... Personally I spend a lot of time in there [the kitchen] cooking or baking, or if I have someone over you spend most of your time in the kitchen"

Female, First-time buyer, London - urban, Discussion group

For some participants, design was not perceived to support the flexible use of rooms, rather participants adapted their behaviour so that rooms could be used in a number of ways. In our ethnographic interviews, Yasmin, the mother of the household in Banbury, explained how she and her husband used rooms flexibly in her home. Though practicing Muslims, they did not have a prayer room, rather they ensured that shoes were not worn indoors at all so that any part of the house could be a space for prayer when required.

"I do have a prayer mat out but the children just walk right through it...So that's why they don't wear their shoes in the house. So if they want to pray in whatever room is free, they can do...But there isn't enough room to have just one room dedicated to your prayers"

Female, Homeowner with older children, Banbury, Ethnographic interview

All of the ethnographic participants used rooms for activities other than those they were designed for; Yasmin used the hallway and garage for storage; Janet and Rob changed a dining room into a flexible second living room and Deborah's illness meant that she and Darren had a downstairs dining room converted into a bedroom. These examples suggest that people already adapt their rooms to suit their needs.

Nonetheless, almost all discussion group participants found it hard to understand how more progressive takes on flexible rooms might work for them, typically because they had never experienced such a home personally. However, for several participants, when prompted, there was an appreciation for the possibilities more flexible designs might raise.

"If you've got old houses, it's a room, you open a door, you go in, so you come out, you go down the hall, you go in another room ... I like [something] bit quirkier, maybe a few angled walls here and there ... quirky areas to put people in and you can sit, and two of you can sit and have a chat or you can have ten or fifteen in"

Male, Homeowner with young family, Manchester – urban, Discussion group

The views of a few participants also suggested that if homeowners were offered the option of more progressive flexible design within homes, this would be appealing to those participants who were most likely to need to change the arrangements of their main living space regularly, or within a few years.

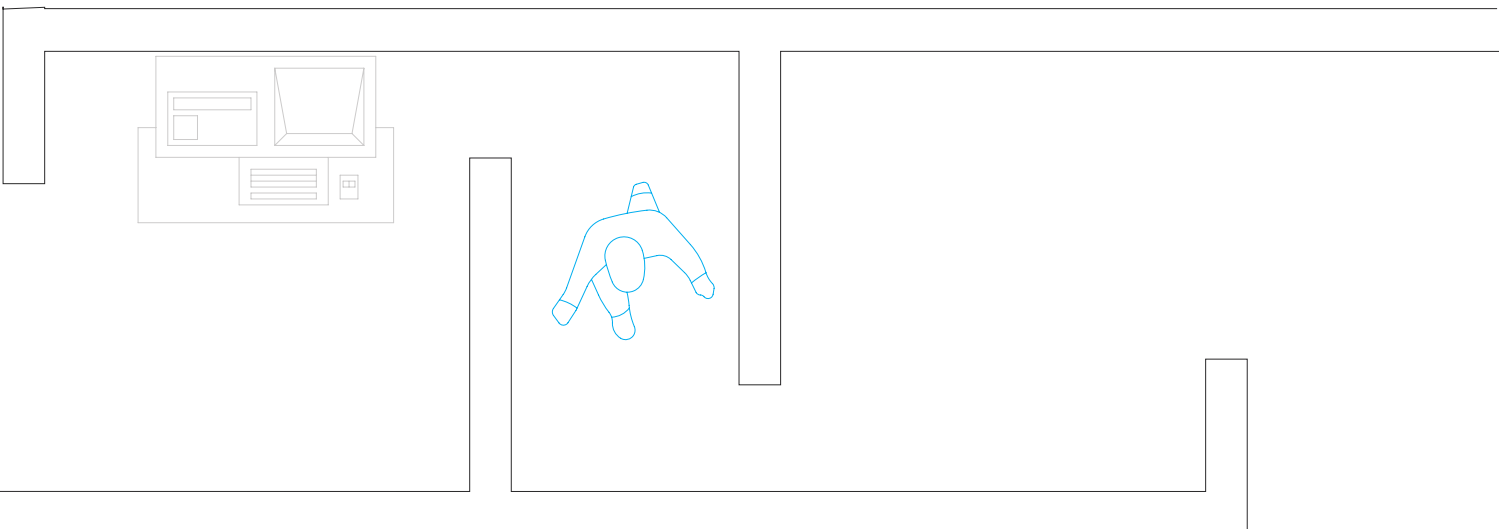
"If you're buying a new home as a young family you'd want to be able to evolve with that space and not think, oh my youngest is now going to high school, they're going to need more room ... I don't quite know how it would work ... If I could get a house that could adapt ... that would be ideal because then I could ... then allow the house to grow with me"

Female, First-time buyer, London - urban, Discussion group

Overall, the research suggested that more progressive home layouts may accommodate householder's needs more fully than most current designs, but that the public needed to experience or see these layouts themselves in order to understand their potential.

3.2.2 Participants who wanted a flexible living space with progressive design

Whereas open plan living space allowed no division between different rooms in the main living space, flexible living space allowed participants to open out and close up different areas depending on the way in which they wanted to use the area. A few younger participants in the groups were very receptive to this idea, and their enthusiasm was to some extent dependent on their awareness of progressive design, but also on their life stage and requirements. **Those who were most receptive to a living space which incorporated flexible rooms and design tended to be those who needed a limited living space to be able to adapt to a wide range of needs:** for private space to relax, for entertaining, for cooking and for working. These participants were often first-time buyers.



"I think I've accepted, where I buy, it's going to be quite small, but I want to dictate those rooms myself and how I use them and how big they should be ... instead of having open plan, perhaps have doors that fold back, so you have the choice between open plan and closing off an area"

Male, First-time buyer, London - suburban, Discussion group

Others who saw the merits of flexibly designed walls and areas were also those who needed their home to meet a number of very different needs, but had limited capacity to purchase a large home. Unsurprisingly, given the high cost of housing in the capital, these participants were more typical in London than in Manchester, where people felt more able to buy the space they felt they required. The following comment illustrates how one Londoner responded to the idea of a flexible layout with movable partitions, in order to accommodate the needs of an adult daughter who visited sporadically.

"I would then be thinking should I buy one of those that you can convert a ... double [room], change from a kitchen into a bedroom or something. So I've got ideas at the moment but I've got to work out ... the budget, because the second bedroom is for when my daughter comes to stay."

Female, Downsizing, London - Urban, Discussion group

Overall, positive attitudes to flexible layouts were most evident in the participants' views on how their main living space and kitchen should be arranged, with participants who held this view having strong views that their living space should be adaptable to a number of purposes.

3.2.3 Participants who wanted an open plan living space

For most other households, **flexibility was less about the design of the walls and partitions between rooms than having an open plan layout for the main living space**. Among those who had not lived on the continent but who appreciated open plan design were those who had lived in large homes and were looking to downsize. These few participants were keen to maintain this sense of a large flexible living space where kitchen and living room were open and interconnected.

"It's got a big reception area, and then you walk into the lounge and the dining room, and there's a walkway through to the kitchen, but you can move around the place ... that's the bit we enjoy most ... when people do come round, you're not all scrunched up together, you can move around a bit"

Male, Downsizing, Manchester – urban, Discussion group

Other participants who were keen on this kind of design were those who preferred the "modern" open plan style of newly built city-centre apartments to the smaller rooms of the Victorian terraces in which they lived. The desire for open plan design reflected the fact that, in practice, many participants carried out activities concurrently which would once have been carried out independently – such as cooking and entertaining or supervising homework.

Our ethnographic case studies suggested that for a few people open plan designs which incorporated both kitchen and main living area had some constraints which became disagreeable over time. In our ethnographic case studies, Matt and Miriam, our first-time buyers from Liverpool, although initially happy with their open plan kitchen and living area, found that, over time, they preferred more private storage areas. This was an issue which they had not initially considered when they bought their home.

"If you are going to have the kitchen in the living room area, it is important to keep everything hidden."

Female, First-time buyer, Liverpool, Ethnographic interview

Similar concerns were also expressed by participants in the discussion groups. Overall in the research, open plan designs were popular with some discussion group participants, primarily those without children, but the ethnographic case studies suggested that in some respects they did not suit all the requirements of homeowners.

3.2.4 Participants who preferred separate kitchen, dining and living rooms

For some participants, an open plan design for the main living space meant a trade-off with privacy which they preferred not to make.

This was a particular concern for some families where kitchens were concerned – some preferred kitchens to be separate so that cooking smells would not permeate the main living area.

"I prefer an open space between the kitchen and the living room for entertaining purposes, but at the same time, if it's just me there and I'm cooking, I'd rather partition that space off and keep the smells and everything within the kitchen"

Female, Homeowner with older children, London - urban, Discussion group

For a few more traditional participants, flexible space was not at all appealing. These, typically older, participants preferred to have separate rooms for cooking, eating and for the main living and entertaining space. This view tended to be rationalised by a preference for more old-fashioned layouts in the home.

"I prefer to have a separate dining room and have a separate kitchen... the Victorians got it right... they gave it lots of thought, so in terms of smells etc. coming in from the kitchen, once you've gone into the dining room, you close the door, it's another world."

Male, Downsizing, London - suburban, Discussion group

Others who found the idea of open plan main living space less appealing tended to feel that it was more important for living space in the home to be private than for the space to be sociable or for multiple purposes. This was important for some because they needed a quiet and private room in their home, and for others so that members of their family could entertain friends separately, as the following comments illustrate.

"[I want] a room that you could just shut off, it is just a living room"

Female, Homeowner with older children, London - suburban, Discussion group

"[I'd] probably [prefer] the living room and the dining room separate, so that when my daughter brings her friends round I can be in one room and she can be in the other"

Female, Downsizing, Manchester - suburban, Discussion group

3.2.5 Meal times and preferences for eating areas

Generally, participants who preferred open plan layouts were happy to eat meals in their open plan area, regardless of whether this included a kitchen area or not, but most had a strong preference for eating around a table rather than on a sofa. Across all the discussion groups, participants admitted that they sometimes – or often – ate evening meals in front of the television, but typically did not see this as desirable. In our ethnographic research, those participants who did not have a table to eat meals from, such as 'D' reported that they aspired to a change in this situation.

Participants who favoured an open plan design tended to expect homes where the main living space flowed into the kitchen or dining area, and possibly also for some into outside space.

"It would be nice to have a dining space sometimes, when you're hosting a party and what have you, you want it to be social. But during the main churn of life, it's not probably going to be used so it would be dead space. So being able to open it out and maybe have it open to the living room and go out into the garden"

Female, Single homeowner, London - urban, Discussion group

Many participants also felt that it was important to link areas dedicated to eating with areas used for other activities, such as entertaining, cooking or supervising children. There were a range of views on how this kind of flexibility would play out in the home they hoped for. For some, a dining room which could be used for other purposes was preferred, whereas for others, especially those with children, a larger kitchen with a dining area to share breakfast with children and for homework to be supervised was preferred.

"If a kitchen had a decent-sized breakfast bar ... I'll compromise on a dining room because it's a waste of space"

Female, Homeowner with older children, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

A few participants saw drawbacks to a large, open plan living space, and suggested that they would prefer a main living space which helped them break perceived bad habits, such as eating in front of the television. In particular, for parents, time out away from the television was also an important driver for moving meals away from the sofa and the living room.

"I'd probably start using it, yeah, if I had a dining room, because it's not practical, is it, really, sitting in front of telly every night with [food], and it's a bit antisocial, isn't it?"

Male, Homeowner with older children, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

Participants with children also discussed using the kitchen as an eating area (see Section 3.3.1).

3.3 Life stage-specific needs for main living space

Many participants' requirements for the main living space were strongly related to life stage. Having discussed the universal needs for living space and the preferences for three broad design layouts discussed by participants, in this section we address the specific needs of families, young households without children, and older households without children.

The following diagram summarises some of the key findings relating to life stage and the needs of households, distinguishing between those needs which were near-universal across the research, and those which were specific to households at particular stages.

In the following sections we address the requirements of the following household types in turn:

- Households with children;
- Households without children; and
- Older residents.

Living space requirements vary by life stage

Households with children

- Safe, unsupervised play areas
- Homework area
- Able to supervise children from the kitchen
- Able to use the kitchen for family meals
- Separate work space for parents – closed off from children
- Some private space for retreat

Universal needs

- Flexible entertaining and private space
- Space to entertain friends and socialise

Households without children

- Space to work at home
- Private areas for older adult children to stay or entertain friends

Older residents

- Adaptations to reflect changing health requirements

3.3.1 Households with children

Families with younger children tended to report that it was important to have somewhere in their main living space for their children to **play unsupervised**, with enough space to make a mess which could be separated from the main living space – or quickly concealed. For some families, the layout of older properties meant this was difficult, as illustrated below.

"It's all a bit cramped. I've got a dining table, but then we've got toys everywhere, as well, so it's just really the lack of space. With having that table there, it's taking up space that can be used, yeah"

Female, Homeowner with young children, Manchester - suburban, Discussion group

It was important for families to ensure children had space to complete homework, and in many cases participants reported that they were keen to be involved and oversee their children's studies, particularly where younger children were concerned

"My sister has a breakfast bar but it never gets used as a breakfast bar, it's used as a homework bar."

Female, First-time buyer, London - urban, Discussion group

Like many parents in our discussion groups, in our ethnographic interview with a family in Banbury, the mother, Yasmin, arranged life around the kitchen, and explained in detail that she did so in order to supervise her children while she prepared food.

"I like to have [homework] here because obviously I can't stop and start just to watch. You know when they are supposed to be independent. It's sometimes nice just to put a little bit of input to guide them"

Female, Homeowner with older children, Banbury, Ethnographic interview

However, children of different ages had different needs. We observed that this arrangement worked well for younger children, but was distracting for the eldest daughter who felt she needed to concentrate more. In this interview, as with a further ethnographic interview with a family in Leeds, older children required a private space – usually a bedroom – in which to work and found it hard to study in communal areas.

Kitchens were also vital in other ways for families. **Several parents in the groups noted that the kitchen was not only where they preferred to prepare food, but where they preferred to eat as well so that the family could be together.** This was a widespread sentiment across the groups, and was linked for many participants with the desire for an open plan living space.

"In this day and age, breakfast is about the only meal you can guarantee all being in the house together for. And it's nice to not have to take that into a different room, rather than having a dining room, and a kitchen and then having to transfer everything from one to the other"

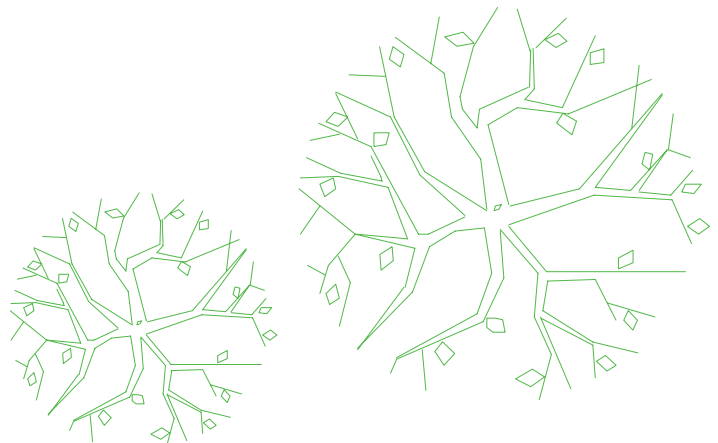
Male, Homeowner with young children, London - Urban, Discussion group

Parents also had strong views on having space to work. Several parents in the discussion groups reported that they regularly worked at home, and felt that in order to do so effectively they needed a separate room which **they could close off from young children.**

"It would be nice to have somewhere that we could ... differentiate between family and kids' space, so I get the option of working from home quite regularly but it's tricky in an open plan house with kids, I think"

Male, Homeowner with young children, London - Urban, Discussion group

Overall, a fully open plan design in the home was not considered ideal by many parents, who preferred to have some separate, private 'adult' space in the home, and by older children, who needed privacy, especially to study.



3.3.2 Households without children

Among participants belonging to households without children, the main concerns were **having space to entertain friends and socialise** (addressed in detail in section 3.1.2) and **having suitable space to work at home**. In our ethnographic interviews, both 'D' and Matt and Miriam who we interviewed in Liverpool discussed the importance of having enough space to work from home – both for business and for further education. As they showed us around their respective flats they pointed out the limitations they currently faced when trying to work or study, for example having to mix entertaining space with work space, and not having enough quiet space. Matt's work includes inviting clients into his home, which leads Miriam to want a separate working area away from the rest of the home.

"Matt does work from home once or twice a week so it would be nice to just have somewhere ... separate. Like if we had a two-storey house he could have an office upstairs or something ... then he would sort of be upstairs and have clients and I would do work and stuff downstairs without having interference"

Female, First-time buyer, Liverpool, Ethnographic interview

Our ethnographic participant in London told us that he never worked at home – although sometimes he would prefer to – as he felt that he was too easily distracted and would need an area away from the television. For participants who did not have children, private space to work in their main living area was nonetheless important.

"I probably would work from home ... but it is not something that at the moment I am particularly disciplined on ... if I was doing that then I would probably have a proper area set out to do that in."

Male, Renting, London, Ethnographic interview

3.3.3 Older people

Older participants in the research felt that their main living space **needed to be adapted to reflect their changing health requirements**.



The 'lip' on a doorframe in Janet's bungalow.

In our ethnographic interview in Birmingham, our participants Janet and Rob had already made adaptations to their home in order to accommodate Janet's ill health by moving to their current home, which was a bungalow. However, they were both aware that her condition would deteriorate in the next few years and she may well be in a wheelchair. This would mean having to adapt their home further, since currently certain parts of the house – notably the bedroom and the bathroom – would be inaccessible with a wheelchair.

Janet demonstrated to us how these rooms would not be accessible in a wheelchair with the walker support on wheels she currently uses. This was a problem for them even though they lived in a bungalow, a type of home which is popular with those who are aiming at a more accessible home.

3.4 Conclusion

Participants' expectations and experiences of the main living spaces in their homes – their living room, dining area and kitchens – were very important because they were key influences in determining how they chose a home. Participants tended to have strong views about these issues because having space and a suitable area for entertaining and eating activities was typically very important.

Most participants felt it was important to them to have a sense of space in this main area, and most preferred the area to have some element of an open plan layout to accommodate entertaining friends or family on a small or a large scale as required. Where a truly flexible design was concerned, however, only a very few participants reported that that they would be comfortable with rooms which could be used for a range of purposes, despite the fact that some households already used rooms for a range of activities simultaneously. This was accounted for by the fact that participants could not imagine how progressive design solutions would work, although for some, it was also because they felt it was important to retain private space in the home.

Overall, no consensus was reached as to an ideal lay out or single design typology that would cater for all households and it was evident that households at different life stages had very different needs and expectations from the home.

4. Storage and utility needs

KEY FINDINGS

- Participants needed long-term and short-term storage for functional items, and for personal possessions people have chosen to keep during their lives
- Privacy of storage space was also an important consideration. Dedicated space for domestic utility tasks, such as washing, drying and ironing clothes, as well as for storing vacuum cleaners, rubbish bins and recycling was needed by participants but rarely available in homes
- Participants wanted layouts which take into account technology used within the home

In this section we present findings on storage and utility needs. We present these together as participants tended to think about these issues in a similar way. Typically, these were not issues which were given much consideration by participants when they looked for somewhere to live or considered how well their living space suited their needs. This lack of consideration meant that some participants chose homes that failed to meet their needs.

In this chapter we will cover:

- Difficulties conceptualising practical needs;
- Expectations of storage and utility areas; and
- Adapting for technology

As in the previous chapter, we will present findings separating universal themes, and those which were life stage specific.

4.1 Difficulties conceptualising practical needs

Whereas participants in the discussion groups were typically very comfortable in discussing how they expected to feel about the home they hoped to buy, they were much more likely to struggle in describing and quantifying their practical requirements from a home.

Few participants in the discussion groups or ethnographic research were satisfied with the amount of space they had for storage when prompted, although most had not considered this as an important issue when they chose their homes.

On consideration of the issue, most participants in the discussion groups felt that they needed additional space for storage of personal items, and several with experience of buying a home admitted that evaluating the storage space they required was not something they had considered. In the ethnographic research, the difficulties experienced by participants in storing personal items were evident in all the interviews. The experienced tenants and home owners in our ethnographic interviews drew upon the understanding they had gained over time to help assess their storage needs. The difference was illustrated by the contrast between semi-retired participants Janet and Rob choosing to buy a home with three lofts for storage, and first-time buyers Matt and Miriam using their spare bedroom as a storage closet rather than a guest room.

A few participants in the discussion groups were aware that they were not well-equipped to evaluate how much space for storage was available in their home. These participants felt it was helpful to have built-in storage – for example, fitted wardrobes and shelving in bedrooms. They explained that if storage was already built in, it would help them evaluate how much space they had available for living in key rooms such as the main living space, kitchen and bathrooms.

“[I want] clever storage. It doesn't have to be huge amounts of it, but it's already there. I'd rather it be there than the space is given to you to decide what you want to do with it”

Male, Homeowner with young children, London – suburban, Discussion group

Having utility space in which to conduct practical regular domestic tasks was considered to be important – but, typically, only when suggested to participants in the groups. There was interest in having space to conduct unavoidable regular domestic activities, such as washing and drying clothes, recycling and having space for a rubbish bin. However, these were rarely primary considerations for participants when selecting a home.

"I would like a utility room. It doesn't have to be big but it would have, perhaps a separate sink, somewhere to hang the clothes on as you're ironing them or something."

Male, Homeowner with young children, London - suburban, Discussion group

The typical difficulties that we observed in ethnographic interviews – and that were also reported by a few discussion group participants – in assessing requirements for storage, utility and some every day domestic activities meant that participants tended to choose homes that did not entirely suit their actual needs. They did this because they were compromising the need for storage and utility areas of which they had not fully understood the importance.

4.2 Expectations of storage and utility

In the discussion groups, the need for additional storage space and utility space was rarely raised spontaneously by participants. Instead, they tended to admit that these were issues which they did not prioritise when choosing a home. Nonetheless participants in fact had many concerns related to these issues, which were revealed when prompted in the discussion groups, and typically through observation in the ethnographic interviews. In this section we set out participants' expectations for:

- Long and short-term storage space;
- Private storage and utility space; and
- Adapting for technology.

4.2.1 Short and long term storage space

Where these actual needs were concerned, a number of themes emerged. First of all, **it was important for participants to have storage space for both short-term and long-term access**. Storage was required for occasional access to rarely used items, which included seasonal items such as holiday equipment and decorations. These items were often larger and were used more infrequently, and participants reported expecting to use loft-space primarily for storage of this kind of item.

However, **storage space which was hard to access was not suitable for items that needed to be used more regularly or stored on a short-term basis, such as vacuum cleaners, children's toys and sports equipment**. Short-term storage was important to all participants where everyday items were concerned. For this kind of storage, participants tended to expect to use a garage or utility room as somewhere to leave large items so that they could access them quickly and easily.

"We would like a utility area, just for extra storage space, apart from the washer, it'd be a good dumping ground"

Female, Homeowner with young children, London - Suburban, Discussion group

Participants had strong views on how well new-build homes would accommodate their needs regarding both storage and utility requirements. Across all the discussion groups, although particularly in Manchester, **participants felt that new-build homes would not offer them enough storage space** for their clothes, food, other everyday items and also for storing any items for the longer term.

"I've lived in a couple of city centre apartments, and they just don't tend to have storage space. You have your fitted wardrobe, I've got a cupboard under the stairs, and everything else is basically on show, so I've got to keep it tidy. I don't even have anywhere to put my towels"

Female, First-time buyer, Manchester - Urban, Discussion group

Once the issue was considered more deeply, participants widely reported that they preferred older homes as there was greater potential for adding storage space where they required it. A few participants also suggested that storage space in new homes could be better designed to accommodate the actual needs of householders.

Short term storage: food and perishables

Storage in kitchens was a concern for participants, but one they only raised when prompted in both the discussion groups and ethnographic interviews. In both elements of the research, participants with children had made efforts to choose a kitchen with sufficient storage for their needs – as an example, one participant in a discussion group reported that she would be happy to trade off window space in a kitchen for cupboard space so that she would have enough storage for her needs. For some participants, cooking was an important part of their social life, so they needed a lot of storage in the kitchen.

"Storage is really important in the kitchen because I do a lot of baking and cooking"

Female, Homeowner with older children, London - suburban, Discussion group

Shopping habits also affected the type and amount of food storage a household needed. Some participants bought food items as and when they needed them, but others wanted to stock up weekly, or monthly. Storing food over time could be problematic: participants found it hard to store bulky items. In our ethnographic interviews, Matt and Miriam stored food items in the boot of their car, and sometimes went down to get things in their pyjamas when they ran out of a particular item.

"I buy like lots of stuff in Tesco and we bought some stuff and if it's buy one get one free crisps, then we just leave it in the car."

Female, First-time buyer, Liverpool, Ethnographic interview

In our interview with a family in Banbury, Yasmin used space in their garage to store extra dry goods and items bought on special offer.

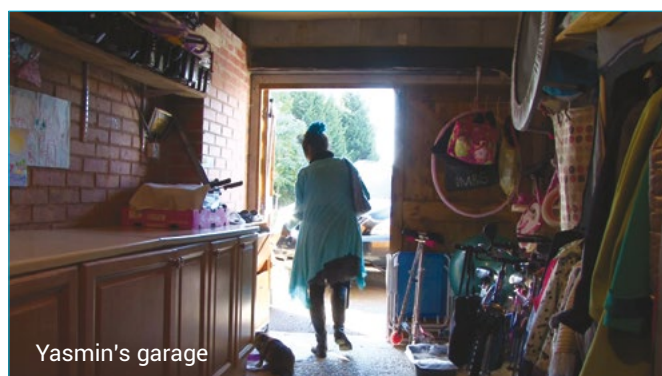
Short term storage: outdoor clothing and items

Many participants in the research had outdoor items which they wanted to store. These included outdoor shoes, clothes and hats, sports gear and bicycles. Parents in the groups typically wanted extra space for storage of outdoor toys and clothes for children, and a number of participants mentioned that **this was what they hoped to use garage space for, rather than for housing their cars.**

"I am purely looking for a garage because the kids' toys can all go in there. The large outdoor toys, like the slide ...It might, I might not fit the car in"

Female, Homeowner with young children, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

This preference was evident in our ethnographic interviews: in Banbury Yasmin had adapted her garage into an 'outdoor room' storing all coats, hats and bulky clothes in there alongside kid's toys such as scooters, bikes and gym bags.



This preference for a garage as a storage area was also expressed by participants without children in the discussion groups. Many participants across all the groups wanted a storage area for outdoor items in which they could keep valuable items, such as sports equipment, safely and access them quickly.

"I'd like a garage or something that's easily accessible, so if I put something away I know I can go and get to it, whereas everything's in my loft and then I tend not to go and get up there"

Female, Homeowner with older children, London - suburban, Discussion group

Long term storage: seasonal items

Seasonality was important for many participants where storage was concerned. When prompted, many participants in the discussion groups reported that they had items they used rarely, such as suitcases, festive items or travel equipment, or periodically, such as summer and winter clothing, which they wanted to be able to access easily.

"I've got a Christmas tree that that takes up most of the cupboard under the stairs. It'd be nice to have somewhere to just put everything away.

Female, First-time buyer, London - suburban, Discussion group

In our ethnographic interviews, Rob in Birmingham showed us their home's three attics, utility room and two sheds, which were all packed with items they were storing. They continually reported that they hardly ever used the things which were stored but had accepted that they needed to store things as they did not plan to dispose of them. When they chose their home they had therefore looked for somewhere with suitable storage available.

"It is all stuff that you don't use. It's seasonal...If we're going away, ... I think it is useful ... if you've got it out of the way, then you know it is never going to get mixed up with anything else"

Male, Older homeowner, Birmingham, Ethnographic interview



Such a view was widely held by participants across the ethnographic interviews and discussion groups.

Long term storage: personal and sentimental items

Participants' storage requirements were not always merely functional. Many participants needed space to store items they had built up over their lives, which were important to them or reflected their identity, and to store things they felt others in their family may want in the future.

All the participants in the ethnographic research stored items for nostalgic reasons, but they did not necessarily take these needs into account when they chose their homes. For example, 'D' kept his eight-year-old daughter's shoes which she had outgrown to remind him of her.

"I have got a daughter. ...she comes and stays with me very occasionally. Those are her shoes...They were her shoes when she was four but not her present ones."

Male, Single and renting, London, Ethnographic interview

In another one of our ethnographic interviews, Yasmin stored her wedding dress hoping one of her daughters would wear it one day.

Overall, storage for nostalgic reasons was a widespread practice, but not one which participants gave consideration to when choosing their home.



4.2.2 Privacy of storage and utility space

Privacy of storage space was also an important consideration for participants in the research. Many participants felt that they had things they wanted to store but access on a regular basis which they wanted to keep private, such as clothing and general daily clutter. This view was particularly felt by parents of young children, although was widely held by participants at all life stages.

"It's nice to just leave [the room] in an absolute state and have your friends round and not have to worry that they're going to be going up and traipsing through whatever you've left there"

Male, Homeowner with young children, London - urban, Discussion group

Other participants felt that it was important to them to have a discrete utility space which was not on open view. This was important for the storage of core utility items, such as rubbish bins, recycling and vacuum cleaners. It was also important for regular, more private, domestic tasks such as washing and drying clothes.

"I can't hang anything out, and I have a maiden in my kitchen, so there's always washing on display, which isn't ideal if people are coming round"

Female, First-time buyer, Manchester - suburban, Discussion group

4.2.3 Storing large core utility items

Storing vacuum cleaners and rubbish bins was a problem for many households, illustrated most vividly in the ethnographic interviews. In Banbury, in a house which was relatively big, Yasmin showed that she kept her vacuum cleaner in the downstairs bathroom as there was no other practical place to put it.

"I don't have anywhere to put the Hoover. Don't know where to stick it so it stays there ... we don't use the bathroom toilet downstairs. It is mainly for guests and stuff. The Hoover stays in there."

Female, Homeowner with young children, Banbury, Ethnographic interview

In Liverpool, Miriam and Matt talked at length about the fact that they had nowhere to store a bin or a vacuum cleaner in their new build apartment. They were self-conscious about having a rubbish bin on show, so had bought an expensive "nice" bin which stood in the middle of the open plan kitchen.

"The bin just sits in the middle of the kitchen. It is ... a stainless steel bin, because we have got nowhere to store a big bin in the kitchen."

Male, First-time buyer, Liverpool, Ethnographic interview

For many months they also kept their vacuum cleaner at Matt's mother's house and would drive twenty minutes once a week to collect it, then return it once they had finished with it.



The bin in Matt and Miriam's kitchen

4.2.4 Recycling and rubbish

Modern recycling requirements needed dedicated areas in the home, as people needed a series of bins for different types of waste. Participants preferred to have an outdoor area close to the house where they could keep recycling and certain kinds of rubbish. In the ethnographic interviews participants showed us their recycling bins and talked about the space they needed for recycling. In Birmingham, Rob showed us the recycling process he goes through in the garage space they have. He felt that if he didn't have such suitable space he would struggle to recycle his rubbish appropriately.



"By the time the fortnight has come and especially when my daughter and son-in-law has been, there are usually plenty of wine bottles go in there ... So we just pile it in and that's it"

Male, Older homeowner, Birmingham, Ethnographic interview

Although most discussion group participants felt it was important to have a suitable outside space to keep rubbish until it is collected, families with young children reported certain kinds of problems in dealing with it. As the comment below illustrates, families with babies felt it was important to have an outdoor bin for nappies.

"We have a huge amount of nappies every day, we don't know where to put them. And I'm very conscious that I don't want a big bin in the kitchen, which starts smelling ... I'd rather have that in an outside space."

Female, First-time buyer, Manchester - Urban, Discussion group

4.2.5. Washing and drying clothes

Having suitable space to wash, dry and iron clothing and bed linen was a widespread problem for participants in the groups, but it was not one which had been given much consideration when thinking about their next home.

As noted earlier in this chapter, **having private space to dry washing was felt to be important** to several participants in the discussion groups, and was particularly raised by young participants living in urban areas as a concern. For many in the Manchester discussion groups, having private outdoor space was a solution to this problem, with several stating a preference for drying washing outdoors rather than in a tumble dryer to save energy and money.

Further to this, drying and ironing clothing also raised practical problems for some householders. A few participants across the discussion groups mentioned that they were concerned about condensation and damp in their homes, so drying clothing was difficult. Others mentioned that they had **difficulties finding somewhere to store washed clothing**, and although no participants mentioned that they would like an airing cupboard, a dedicated utility space was sometimes raised as a solution to this kind of problem.

"We've got a tumble dryer so it's not really the drying, it's where you put them when they're dry before you iron them. They're just in a big pile, so a utility room for me would be ideal"

Female, Homeowner with young children, London - suburban, Discussion group

4.3 Adapting for technology

Accommodating and covering wiring in homes was considered important to many participants. Most participants had lived in older properties with wires running throughout the house to connect telephone points, the internet and the television. They tended to feel this looked ugly and were keen for a home where these wires were already hidden in the walls of the property.

"It's a good idea of developers taking into account that people are going to be using technology and therefore the wires are hidden, whether in the walls or the ceiling"

Male, Homeowner with older children, London - suburban, Discussion group

The increase in usage of technology by all members of the family, and the use of screens - whether for watching television traditionally or for use with games consoles - meant that television points were, for some, no longer just required in the living room of a property. As an example, a few discussion group participants mentioned that they had had television points inserted into all of the rooms in their current property, and would expect to see this as standard in any new-build properties.

"One of the things, which applies to all rooms, is TV points in every room ... We've had that put in"

Male, Homeowner with no children, Manchester - suburban, Discussion group

However, television points had to be sensibly placed and adaptable for the different kinds of television that home owners will want to use them with. Our ethnographic case study, Matt and Miriam were unable to use their television point as it was and had to run cables through the walls, as their television was intended to hang on the wall and thus was not able to connect to the corner television point provided.

Changes in technology also made some set-ups redundant. Whereas computers once needed to be connected to the internet via a telephone point, wireless technology is now used from anywhere in the house, and often whilst doing other things. Although participants are using increasingly more technology, they want the space occupied by this to be minimal and they want to be able to tidy things away when they are not in use.

"We used to have a desk with a proper PC on it and when it went it was the best thing ever because we've got more space. I literally just have it on the back of the sofa now and then just put it on my lap when I need it"

Female, Homeowner with older children, London - suburban, Discussion group

Participants wanted to see a variety of plug sockets around each room so that they could arrange rooms as they wished without needing to use extension leads and additional cabling.

"You want sockets put in the right places, if they're only going to put one or two in. They might change where you put your bed if you want a bedside light or something"

Female, Homeowner with older children, Manchester - suburban, Discussion group

Most participants reported using many electronic devices in rooms throughout the house, often simultaneously, which meant that they had higher expectations of the provision of plug sockets. In the discussion groups, participants were clear that rooms needed to be provided with an adequate number of plug sockets, and expressed concern about sockets forcing the arrangement of furniture to avoid exposed wires. An example of this was where participants stated that one plug socket was included in the bedroom, meaning that that was the only place where a bedside lamp could be plugged in.

Participants were aware that their requirements where technology was concerned were changing, but that older homes may not be designed in such a way as to easily accommodate technological requirements. However, they expected that new-build properties would accommodate these needs.

“Those [technology] are the kind of things I would expect to be adapted for my lifestyle in a new build”

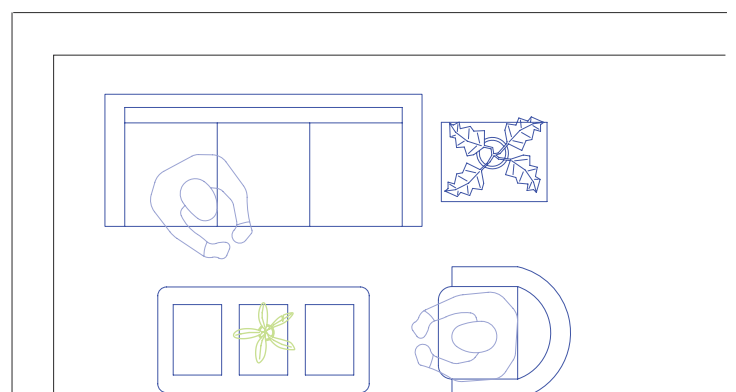
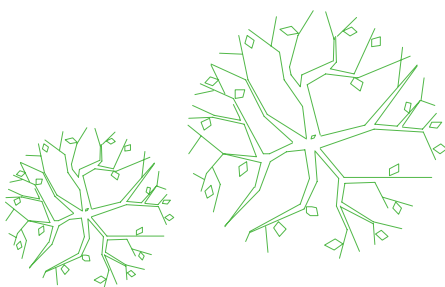
Male, First-time buyer, London - suburban, Discussion group

4.4 Conclusion

In general, participants did not prioritise storage and utility needs, unless they had experience in owning and living in their own home. Nonetheless, all needed long-term and short-term storage for functional items, personal possessions, and food, and most felt that they did not have enough suitable storage space in their homes.

Privacy of storage and utility space was also a consideration for most participants. Many felt they needed dedicated space for domestic utility tasks, such as washing, drying and ironing clothes, as well as for storing vacuum cleaners, rubbish bins and recycling. On prompting and exploring these issues in depth, it was widely felt that such suitable space was rarely available in homes.

Participants also wanted layouts in their homes which took into account the technology they used, and allowed them choice in where to use items which required a power supply.



5. Comfort and wellbeing

KEY FINDINGS

- Space for private time away from other members of the household was important to most participants
- Light, and the feeling of wellbeing related to it, was a key concern for participants, especially in urban areas.
- Noise was a concern for participants only once they had experienced the difficulties of living with it.
- Energy efficiency was typically perceived in terms of a trade-off between desirable period features and the high cost of heating and other bills.
- Security was an issue which participants tended to feel was their own responsibility rather than that of those designing, selling or developing homes.
- Accessibility was typically an issue only for older people, those facing illness or living with a disability, and those with very young children.

In this section we present findings on areas which participants felt to be more intangible when they considered buying or moving into a home. These were, for some people, the least important considerations when they chose a home, but were also ones which they tended to address later on with experience, for example when they considered buying their second home. In this chapter we present differences between participants according to life stage where relevant. In this section we will address the following issues:

- Windows and light;
- Noise;
- Privacy and wellbeing;
- Energy efficiency;
- Security; and
- Accessibility.

5.1 Windows and light

Many participants across the discussion groups felt that it was important to them to have as much light as possible in their homes. This was an issue which participants felt strongly about and tended to mention spontaneously, early on in the discussions. Views on this issue were, to some extent, driven by different levels of urbanity and the range of housing stock available in local area. For most participants living in London, light was crucial because the city felt dark and enclosed. A high level of light was associated with wellbeing for participants in the research, and an antidote to the stressful environment of the city.

"For me, living in London, everything is so enclosed that when you do stop, you don't want to still feel enclosed ... it's more relaxing rather than feeling you're in dark gloom".

Female, Homeowner with young children, London - urban, Discussion group

In our ethnographic interviews, our London participant "D" also related light to wellbeing, and was keen to avoid artificial light because he felt it did not have a positive effect when he was at home.

"Artificial light especially in day time can be depressing. It is good to have the option, like for instance today I can open up the windows and it's cool and airy and whatever and that's fairly pleasant."

Male, Renting, London, Ethnographic interview

For those to whom light was important, this also meant a strong preference for period properties. **Period properties were perceived to have larger windows and higher ceilings, which meant more light in the home.** However, views were divided on how important it was that the windows were also energy efficient. Older participants who had lived in period properties were more willing to make the trade-off of having a more modern home and lower fuel bills than younger participants, as the following contrasting comments illustrate.

"It's a large house, Victorian and lots of light. My other half just fell in love with the light that was pouring in, but that's at the expense of cold, and if you've got the original sash windows, we found that, come the winter, it was draughty and it was cold"

Male, Downsizing, London - suburban, Discussion group

"I know sash windows aren't very good for heating but I hate small windows"

Female, Homeowner with no children, London - urban, Discussion group

Light, and the feeling of wellbeing related to it, was a key concern for participants, especially in urban areas, and one for which several participants were willing to trade-off more practical considerations.

5.2 Noise

Poor noise reduction in homes was felt to reduce privacy as well as affecting how relaxed people felt. However, it was not an issue which participants reported spontaneously, rather it was one which was commented on as a problem typically only when prompted. Participants tended to describe it as a problem when it disrupted activities which required concentration such as study and work, but for some it also disturbed sleep and entertaining guests.

Some participants felt that noise was a problem which could be resolved by using a quieter area in the home, but for others the fabric of their home meant that noise was one of the sources of the problem. Participants in the discussion groups became aware of the issue when prompted, and suggested that they perceived noise to be more of a problem in new-build homes.

"General noise from neighbours, I think it's a trend at the moment that most people are focussing on that, especially with new builds"

Male, Downsizing, London - suburban, Discussion group

In the ethnographic interviews, the first-time buyers in Liverpool experienced a number of difficulties related to noise. The couple did not raise the problem themselves, but when researchers visiting them heard banging from outside the flat during the interview, the couple were asked if noise was a problem. They explained that every time someone in their shared corridor came in their front door, it was possible to hear the door slam closed.

Matt said he could also hear what goes on behind closed doors, including other toilets flushing, which he found 'annoying'. He attributed the noise to the fact that they live in apartments, indicating that in dense apartment blocks if noise travels too easily it can reduce the sense of personal space by reducing privacy between neighbours.

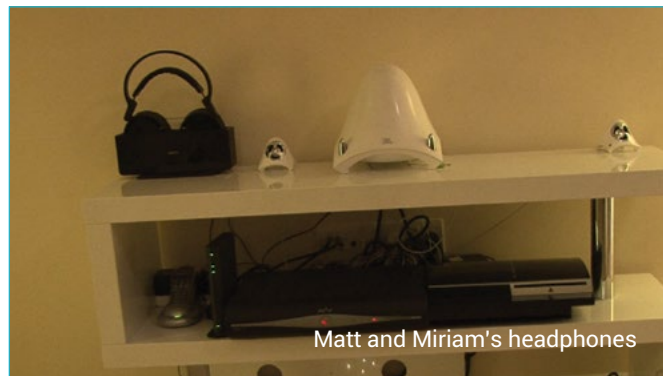
"You can hear quite a lot, people are quite noisy here. People going to the toilet, washing, coughing, talking. You can imagine. It's quite annoying. I think there are 17 apartments in this one block ... we are pretty surrounded by a lot of people."

Male, First-time buyer, Liverpool, Ethnographic interview

Since they were so aware of these problems, the couple used their television as quietly as possible so as not to disturb their neighbours. If it was late evening they would sometimes wear headphones so as not to disturb others.

"When we are watching TV in the evening, you feel ... guilty because you think well if they want to sleep then you can't really watch TV ... so you actually end up sitting watching TV with your headphones on."

Female, First-time buyer, Liverpool, Ethnographic interview



In our discussion groups, participants with children felt more concerned about their own noise disturbing others. They were aware that having children, and having a larger number of people in the household in general, would make more noise. Despite this, however, minimising noise through choosing a home which was designed or made suitable for their needs was not a consideration for such participants: rather they found ways to live with the limitations of their home, such as asking their children to play more quietly.

"I feel a bit more self-conscious about the noise that we make as opposed to the noise that we're hearing ... I just think we're obviously making more noise with the four of us than the two of them, so I find myself telling, constantly the older one, to be quiet"

Female, Homeowner with young children, London - suburban, Discussion group

Overall, noise was a concern for participants only once they had experienced the difficulties of living with it. Although important, it was not an issue around which participants had expectations of their homes, although in practice it was evident that high noise levels adversely affected levels of comfort and wellbeing.

5.4 Private space and wellbeing

Private space was important to participants for wellbeing, and for the wellbeing of individuals within families. For those living alone, a private space in the home was important after having lived in shared accommodation in the past. A personal space to retreat to within the home was important for first-time buyers who did not have children, and was, in some cases, one of the motivations for buying a home.

"I'd like more personal space. I share with four people, so [I'd like] just to share with maybe only one or just [be able to be] in alone"

Male, First-time buyer, London - urban, Discussion group

All of the households in the ethnographic research mentioned the need for private space and volunteered explanations as to its impact on their wellbeing. They identified places for this both inside and outside the home, and could, for example, add items like a television to existing rooms like their bedroom to help transform it into a personal place of relaxation.

"It's my chill out room really. It's lovely because at the end of the day, when the kids were a little bit younger, when you have had a full day with them, coming upstairs to my room to sit on my bed, you have got the phone next to you, you've got the TV, you've got your laptop and you think wow, this is chill time ... Got a kettle in here as well."

Female, Homeowner with young children, Banbury, Ethnographic interview

For families, private space was important because households comprised of several people of different generations sharing the same space. It was therefore important to parents that both they and their children had somewhere to go that was private.

"I like the spaciousness ... [for] the kids, I don't want to feel like everybody's on top of each other"

Female, Homeowner with young children, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

Ensuring enough private space for children became increasingly important to parents as their children grew older, and where relevant, parents expressed a preference for a separate room for young adult or adult children. As an example, a lone parent living in a two bedroom property with two children described how she felt the need to move to somewhere where both of her children could have their own private space, as it was difficult to stop them arguing with each other when there was nowhere that they could go where they would not have to be together.

"I can't send them up to their room because they're sharing, they'd just go and fight when they go up"

Female, Homeowner with older children, Manchester - suburban, Discussion group

Private space was also important to younger family members, in particular so that it could be personalised. One of the younger daughters in Leeds explained the impact of not having her own private area that she could control and present as she wanted to: she was unhappy as she wanted to choose where to put her own possessions and have curtains she liked.

Interviewer: "Do you like sharing with your two sisters?"

Participant: "No"

Interviewer: "Why not?"

Participant: "Because if I had my own room, I would have like curtains up, a wardrobe and my bed separate and all my toys in the corner."

Female (young child), Social housing, Leeds, Ethnographic interview



In Leeds we observed that **private space was important for people who were sick or convalescing**. Deborah, the mother, was undertaking treatment for cancer, and to accommodate her needs a downstairs dining room was converted into a bedroom. However, this meant that the household's living room was directly attached to the dining room, meaning that if members of the family wanted to watch television, or sit down to eat, they had to go through Deborah's bedroom to get there.

"So you've just got no privacy... if I were upstairs I could go into my bedroom and shut the door and nobody would probably bother, but because this is where they have to come in to watch TV, they are in and out all the time, your privacy ... is gone."

Female, Social housing, Leeds, Ethnographic interview

The same interview demonstrated that **carers and parents needed quiet areas and privacy** which were hard to create in a busy family home. Darren was a full-time carer for his wife Deborah, and the family of five children living at home with them. Darren went to his room upstairs for some alone time at home.

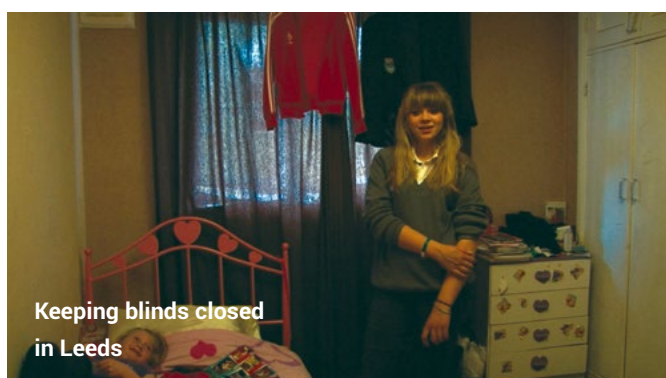
"Yeah, I do spend quite a bit of time up here... like after tea and stuff like that. I come up and watch TV... It is nice"

Male, Social housing, Leeds, Ethnographic interview

The ethnographic interviews illustrated that the design of homes affected how much privacy people had within their homes and gardens. The position of windows had a key role, as for some participants, windows were an opportunity for people outside to look in. In Leeds, one teenage daughter's windows overlooked other people's homes, which made her feel uncomfortable.

"I pull my blinds down [all the time] because there are ... people with windows behind ... [someone] is always at the window."

Female, Social housing, Leeds, Ethnographic interview



Overall, sufficient privacy within the home was a very important element contributing to participants' wellbeing at home. This was especially marked in households where a number of people of different generations lived together, and where a member of the household was sick or convalescing. Nonetheless, across the research, participants of all ages felt that privacy was important, and for younger first-time buyers, it was one of their key reasons for buying a home.

5.5 Energy efficiency

When asked about energy efficiency, both discussion group and ethnographic participants typically equated this with cost and how much money they could spend or save if a home was more energy efficient. **Environmental performance was a consideration for participants, and they tended to perceive this in the form of bills.** As an example, participants were able to produce relative comparisons of energy efficiency between houses they had lived in by quoting figures from utility bills, and the cost of energy was a concern.

"The gas bill last year was just phenomenal. I just couldn't believe it. ... £400 for our winter bill last year."

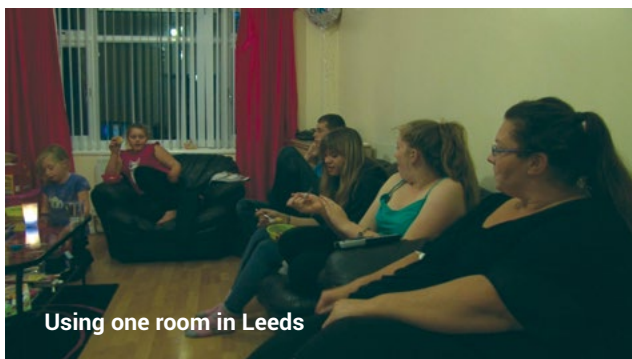
Female, Homeowner with young children, Banbury, Ethnographic interview

However, heating was not the only concern around energy efficiency. A few participants in the discussion groups also mentioned the cost of electricity to run appliances and the potential for saving energy through using more natural approaches to, for example, drying clothes.

"I'd love to be able to put my bedding out on the line, because I used to do it in a tumble dryer, and then I think, oh, God, of all the electricity that this is using"

Female, First-time buyer, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

For some participants **poor energy efficiency limited the way people used their homes:** in order to save money they only heated and used certain parts of the home. We observed that our Leeds family in the ethnographic interviews chose to wear extra clothing, or spend more time together in one room to conserve heat and money.



In a further ethnographic interview, 'D' cited the lack of double-glazing as a major reason for wanting to leave his rented flat – he found it both too cold to live there and very expensive

"When I moved in they said they were going to install double glazing and stuff like that ... It is like an icebox in here unless you have the gas on full-blast the whole time which doesn't feel comfortable."

Male, Renting, London, Ethnographic interview

But despite the fact that energy efficiency was a concern for participants across the research, **many in the discussion groups said they would find it very difficult to judge how energy efficient a home was.** They were aware that energy efficiency ratings were available for properties on the market, but rather than using these measures, which they found difficult to interpret, they based their judgement call on past experiences. Participants mentioned high ceilings, large windows, whether or not the property had double glazing, and in some cases the level of insulation as factors in reducing the energy efficiency of a property. As large windows and high ceilings were also valued features for many participants, they were aware that a trade-off needed to be made. In general in the groups older participants were more concerned about energy efficiency and younger participants were more concerned with creating the feeling of space and light, aware that this would potentially reduce the energy efficiency and make the house harder to heat.

"I've lived in lots of big properties that are high ceilinged, they're really hard to heat. You're always freezing, you spend the whole time in three jumpers freezing and I'd gladly sacrifice the space just to have something well insulated and warm"

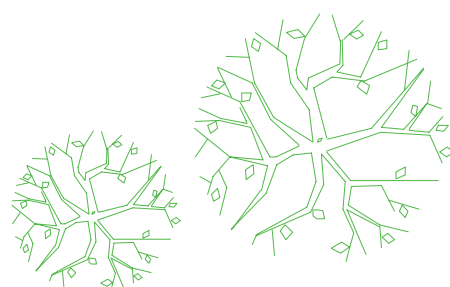
Female, Homeowner with young children, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

Given the association of period features with a lack of energy efficiency, there was a corresponding association of new builds being more energy efficient, and thus cheaper to maintain and more efficient to run.

"With some of the modern builds, they're cheaper, they're more efficient to run. They automatically [include security on] the windows, the doors, all those kinds of things, I would have less maintenance.

Male, Homeowner with no children, London - urban, Discussion group

Ultimately, energy efficiency was typically perceived by participants in terms of a trade-off between desirable period features in the home and the high cost of heating and other bills. For younger participants this was acceptable, whereas for older participants less so. Few considered energy efficiency as important for its own sake, but most were aware that it was an important and relevant issue.



5.6 Security

Security was a consideration for everyone in the ethnographic interviews. **Participants talked about security in terms of the design of their home and the type of local area they lived in.** Matt and his girlfriend told us that they chose an upper floor flat and paid more for it than for a ground floor flat – but they made this decision because they thought an upper floor flat would be more secure.

“We did consider [a ground floor apartment] because the apartment below us was free and it was cheaper as well, but we wouldn’t like to live on the ground floor because you just don’t feel as safe as you do upstairs.”

Female, First-time buyer, Liverpool, Ethnographic interview

Janet and Rob were also concerned about security, saying they watched cars coming in and that they use the cul-de-sac design and windows overlooking neighbours to their advantage, to check that when cars came in, they left again.

“During the evening, if a car comes up here, they don’t always know that it is a dead end, then go back again. If you see lights come up you just usually watch them to see, to make sure they go back out again.”

Female, Older homeowner, Birmingham, Ethnographic interview

Security was an issue which typically came up only on prompting in the discussion groups. Although **many participants across the groups did feel security was important, they also tended to feel it was more the responsibility of homeowners to ensure their homes were secure**, and many also linked the importance of security with ensuring that their home was in a good and suitable locality (see section 2.4). For a few participants, there were greater expectations that new-build homes were designed with security in mind.

“I think if you’re going into a new house, nowadays they have to be ... approved five mortice lock things and things like that. If you go to an old one, I’m expecting not to have the security. I’m expecting to pay for it over time to get it done.”

Male, Homeowner with young children, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

Overall, the security of a home was an important concern for participants, but one which they tended to feel was their own responsibility rather than that of those designing, selling or developing homes.

5.7 Accessibility

The adaptability of homes for wheelchair and other mobility and accessibility issues was important to households where occupants were aging, and where occupants were sick or had a disability. More widely in the research, participants in the group discussions typically did not feel it was an important issue.

In our ethnographic interviews, Janet's experience was an example of the importance of accessibility to older householders. Janet has mobility issues; despite having had an operation, she expects that the problems with her legs will continue to deteriorate. There were a range of small and avoidable problems Janet encountered despite spending time and money trying to adapt her home. For example, there was a small slope leading up to their front door, which was hardly noticeable to someone who was able bodied. However, to Janet, coming in to the house on crutches, this slope felt challenging to manage, and she was always concerned about tackling it.

"It's a very, very gentle slope isn't it but you try walking down there with crutches! I tell you, it is quite frightening, it really is. And yet it is not a steep slope at all"

Female, Older homeowner, Birmingham, Ethnographic interview

Another issue for her was the of lack accessibility for wheelchairs. Even where a ramp had been put on the back door specifically for wheelchair access, there was a plastic lip meaning that the wheelchair would have to be lifted over in order to get into the house.

"The door as you can see there is a ramp there but there is also a lip over the door.... So wheelchair access is not as easy as it looks and that is quite steep when you are trying to push a wheelchair up it. And then you have got this lip on the door."

Female, Older homeowner, Birmingham, Ethnographic interview

Accessibility was also an issue for those with younger children. One participant explained how she had deliberately moved into a first floor flat for safety and yet had found this difficult when she had her son and was unable to carry the buggy up and down the stairs.

"I live upstairs and getting my buggy up and down the stairs, when I first had my boy was just a nightmare. So I ended up leaving my buggy, for the most part, either in my car or in the downstairs porch. I'm not sure the downstairs neighbours appreciate that"

Female, Homeowner with young child, London - urban, Discussion group

Accessibility was typically an issue for a small segment among the participants in the research: older people, those facing illness or living with a disability, and those with very young children. However, despite the relative smallness of this group, the issue is important due to the degree to which it affected the lives of the relevant participants: for the sick and disabled especially, poor accessibility made day-to-day living in their homes physically onerous and generally difficult.

5.8 Conclusion

Space for private time away from other members of the household was important for participants of all ages to encourage and engender wellbeing. Participants also felt that wellbeing was encouraged by light, airy rooms, and through controlling the amount of noise within homes.

Regarding other aspects of comfort within the home, energy efficiency was typically perceived in terms of a trade-off between desirable period features and the high cost of heating and other bills, and older people were less likely to tolerate poor energy efficiency than the young. Security was an issue which participants tended to feel was their own responsibility rather than that of those designing, selling or developing homes. Accessibility was typically only an issue for older people, those facing illness or living with a disability, and those with very young children, who had not always considered their accessibility needs when choosing a home.

6.0 Outdoor space

KEY FINDINGS

- Private space outside, or access to green public space in urban locations, was important to most participants for wellbeing
- Private gardens were preferred to shared gardens, for entertaining and for domestic tasks as well as for relaxation and wellbeing
- Families valued gardens or private outdoor spaces in homes so that children could play safely unsupervised

Many participants reported and showed the importance to them of outdoor space, whether private (in the form of a garden or terrace), or public, in the form of community space. In this chapter we present findings on these issues. This chapter covers the following issues:

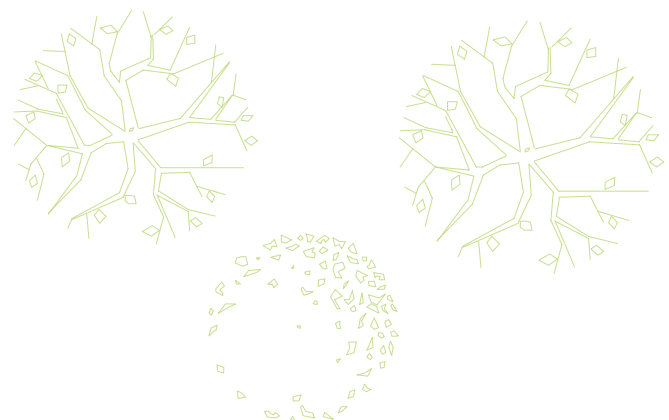
- Living space and wellbeing;
- Private outdoor space; and
- Families and outdoor space.

6.1 Living space and wellbeing

In the discussion groups, outdoor space was most important to those who did not currently have a garden or outdoor area in their property and lived in highly urbanised areas. For most of those who wanted outdoor space, the main reason was the desire for more light and a greater sense of space in the main living space of homes. The level of urbanity people lived in mattered, with those in the urban London most keen across all the groups to have some outside space in their new property.

"How they use the outside [could be better], how perhaps your living environment becomes more of the outside, perhaps bigger windows, perhaps interact with the space around you, rather than being shut in the traditional house"

Male, First-time buyer, London - suburban, Discussion group



This desire was also evident in the ethnographic research. In their apartment block in Liverpool, Matt and Miriam had a 'Juliet' balcony which they tried to use as if it were an external balcony because they liked the sense of space and openness that they felt a full balcony would have allowed them. The aspect of their apartment, situated on a corner, also had an impact on how they used the balcony.

"We try to pretend it is like a real balcony. When I come home sometimes Matthew is just sitting in the chair like that, soaking up the sun."

Female, First-time buyer, Liverpool, Ethnographic interview

As well as being seen as a private area, outside space was seen to be an important extension of the main social and living space of the house. Many participants across the groups reported that they wanted the option of extending their living and entertaining space into the outdoor area (as noted in section 3.1.3). For this reason participants wanted gardens or outdoor spaces that linked to main living area or kitchen through wide accessible doors and which would enlarge the main space.

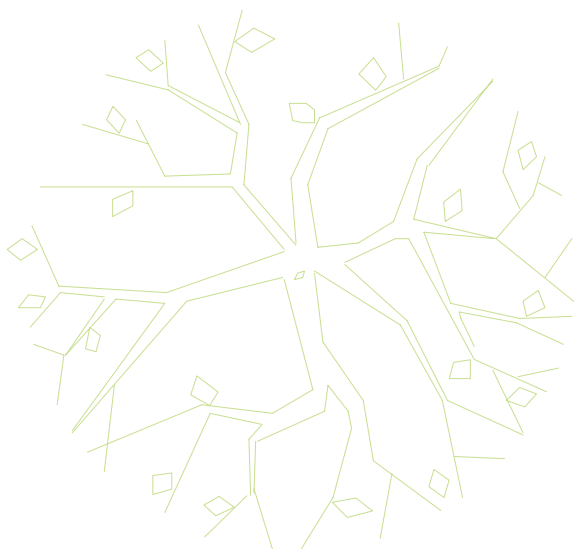
"A really nice outside decking area, a big balcony with nice plants on, just something like that ... [so that you can] sit out in the summer ... and socialise, have barbecues, things like that."

Female, Downsizing, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

For city-dwellers who did not have a garden, being close to public open space was important. This was exemplified in the ethnographic interviews, where some participants found they needed to be creative in how they accessed it. In Leeds, where the family we interviewed lived in crowded conditions, younger members of the family told us that seeing the horses in a field along the road every day was very important to them. We observed that the children in the household looked happy and exhilarated when outside with the horses, compared to when they were at home. One of the youngest explained to us:

"It takes all the stuff off my mind and it's nice to be with all the horses... At home it's like loud and here I can just brush the horses and do what I got to do with them."

Young Female, Social housing, Leeds, Ethnographic interview



In Liverpool and London our participants sought out green space when they didn't have direct access to it at home: we were taken to local parks by both of these participants. They also told us that open space was something they looked for in the local area to make up for a lack of outside space in their home environment.

"... you feel like it's nice if you have been to work all day and then you feel tired ... sitting in a stuffy office, you can just come out and have such great nature so close and it is like ... a breath of fresh air to working like a 9 to 5 job, so it's nice."

Female, First-time buyer, Liverpool, Ethnographic interview

Participants in discussion groups in urban Manchester were less concerned with having outdoor space in their homes: the city for them felt less oppressive and they felt more able than Londoners to be able to access public open spaces. Participants in Manchester tended to feel that it was possible to access green space and the countryside more easily than Londoners.

"No matter where you are in the city centre, from Manchester, you know that Heaton Park's ten minutes on the tram in that direction"

Male, First-time buyer, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

Most participants in the research, however, tended to feel that access to open space was important. Although it was more of a concern for Londoners overall, open outdoor space – whether a part of the home or a public area – was felt to be generally important for wellbeing.

6.2 Private outdoor space

For many participants across the groups and ethnographic research, outdoor space was important to them as a personal and private space. A private space was valuable to many people not just for wellbeing and relaxation, but also for private domestic tasks, such as drying clothes or keeping rubbish bins and recycling.

"Because I'm in the city centre, there isn't much outdoor space, so when it is a sunny day I can't hang my washing out or those sort of things you take for granted when you live in a house. And you can't sit out outside, I have to throw my head out the window ... you have a little park, but it's not the same as having your own garden"

Female, First-time buyer, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

Participants had varied views on different levels of privacy in their outdoor spaces. For first-time buyers, even a small private space was considered very valuable, whereas those who had owned a home in the past, and those with young children were keen to have a degree



of privacy which precluded other neighbours being able to see and hear them in their garden. This was evident in our ethnographic research, where the Banbury family were aware of their neighbours being in the garden and would sometimes go inside to give them some privacy, as explained below.

"The back garden is really overlooked. We're not bothered. They're not bothered ... we just respect each other's wishes. If we feel they want time on their own, we just think we will go back in. Or if they have got family around."

Female, Homeowner with young children, Banbury, Ethnographic interview

However, **sharing private space did not always work well**. Despite attempts to make do with a Juliet balcony, the couple in our ethnographic case study in Liverpool, Matt and Miriam, used Matt's mum's garden to hold parties. Some participants in the discussion groups had experience of shared gardens, or having the grounds of a block of flats available to them. Although they appreciated that the properties were set in a natural area, they felt that this space was difficult to use as a personal outdoor area as sharing the area with others did not tend to work well.

"I hated that even more than not having any space because I found that you couldn't, you didn't even ever know when there was time, other people's stuff was in there"

Female, First-time buyer, London - urban, Discussion group

In our ethnographic case study, 'D' also highlighted some of the potential problems of shared areas. In particular, a communal garden could mean a lack of privacy, and could be uncomfortable for residents to use if relations with neighbours were strained.

"Because they live down there and because their back doors open on to the garden and stuff like that, you would never feel that you had the level of privacy that maybe you would want to have. I would use it more ... if there wasn't an issue"

Male, Renting, London, Ethnographic interview

Private outdoor space was desirable to participants because it increased wellbeing, so they tended to be loathe to reduce this benefit through the perceived disadvantages of sharing this space with others.

6.4 Families and outdoor space

Across all the research, outdoor space was most important to those with children. **Gardens were seen to offer a safe place to allow children to play, but it was important to participants that they were located suitably, to avoid roads in particular.**

"A garden's a big thing for my kids, because I live on a main road at the moment, so obviously it's not safe for them, so [we want] somewhere where they could just play in the back"

Male, Homeowner with young children, Manchester - urban, Discussion group

Parents also wanted gardens which were designed appropriately for their children to play in them. For parents whose gardens were downstairs from their flat or tiered, it was harder to supervise young children.

"I would like my living space to lead onto my garden. At the moment I'm upstairs and the garden's down. My son is a terror, he needs space to run but I don't always want to be out in the garden"

Male, Homeowner with young children, London - urban, Discussion group

Parents in the groups tended to be keen on outside space that included a patio area or decking as it allowed children to play outside regardless of the weather. This was well-liked as it increased the main living space available to families.

"When it's raining and the kids want to be outside, they can at least be outside and playing on the patio area rather than dragging mud in the house all the time"

Female, Homeowner with young children, Manchester - suburban, Discussion group

This was also evident in the ethnographic interviews. In Banbury the family made much use of their outside space. The patio area of their back garden was used as a kitchen and dining area in the summer, and the family tended to sit outside cooking and eating breakfast together regularly. It was also an area where the children in the household would play and come to do their homework using laptop computers.

"The kids come outside like normal...this is like their breakfast table. And everything is done here. They sit here, they eat here. We lie down here. We rest. We bring the electric into here because it is wireless computers. The internet is here ... everything is done out here"

Female, Homeowner with young children, Banbury, Ethnographic interview



Overall, outdoor space was crucial for families, particularly because it allowed parents to feel comfortable that their children had safe places to play. It was also important for the wellbeing of both children and parents: parents reported that children enjoyed being outdoors and the opportunity for messy play, and parents were also happy for children to take noise and mess outside. For these reasons, outdoor space and gardens were highly desirable to families.

6.3 Conclusion

Regardless of age, household type or location, private space outside, or access to green public space, was important to most participants. This was because it was considered essential for wellbeing. Private gardens were preferred to shared gardens because they were felt to be more suitable for entertaining, domestic tasks and for relaxation. Families also valued gardens or private outdoor spaces in homes highly because the additional outdoor space meant that children could play safely unsupervised by parents.

7.0 Evaluating the quality of homes

KEY FINDINGS

- Participants tended to feel that an independent, cross-professional body should regulate the quality of, and provide free information about new-build homes
- They wanted free information to benchmark aspects of quality such as space, noise insulation and energy efficiency

In the discussion groups we asked participants about their views on benchmarked quality standards for homes, and who should be responsible for ensuring new-build homes are of a good enough quality. In this chapter we draw on responses to these questions in the groups to illustrate views on how participants felt the housing marketplace should be improved.

In this chapter we will cover the following issues:

- Quantifying and comparing space in homes;
- Evaluating energy efficiency, noise and light in homes;
- Who should be responsible for information on homes; and
- Who should pay for information on homes.

7.1 Quantifying and comparing space in homes

As discussed in Chapter 3, many participants in the research experienced difficulties in assessing the space they would need in their new home – if not immediately, then later on when they were clearer about their actual needs. However, further to this, several participants in the groups reported that they found it difficult to compare the space available in different homes for sale. This was because they did not have a way of measuring the space which enabled a clear comparison between homes, and they tended to use the number of bedrooms or bathrooms in a home in order to make comparisons.

None of the participants in the discussion groups spontaneously mentioned the floor area (square feet or metres) as a means of describing the space available in a home, and only on prompting did participants understand that there could be an advantage to them in having access to information on the space which they could use to make comparisons between different properties.

“Changing the trend that we talk about square footage rather than it’s got three bathrooms and three bedrooms ... so you know you’re getting value for money. I would find that useful”

Female, Homeowner with children, Manchester – urban, Discussion group

Given their difficulties in making comparisons between homes, participants tended to rely on instincts when making decisions about buying a home, rather than using any tools to quantify the difference between homes beyond the number of bedrooms available. Some also felt that these difficulties in making comparisons between homes were exploited by developers, for example, to raise the price of homes through pricing a three-bedroom home at a higher price than a two-bedroom home, even though both had the same floor area, as suggested by the experience of one participant in suburban Manchester.

There were concerns around room size in new-build homes, notably a general concern across all groups that some bedrooms in new-build homes were too small to use.

"[My friend's] got ... two bedrooms and a box room that you can't do anything in ... it does fit a single bed in but then there's no room to do anything else in it, so it just seems like a completely pointless room"

Female, Homeowner with children, Manchester – urban, Discussion group

Several participants also felt that because extra bathrooms and garages were important to home-buyers, developers prioritised increasing the number of rooms or adding small garages to a home rather than ensuring the rooms were of adequate size in order to make homes more attractive to buyers.

M: "They try and wrap the price up by sticking an en suite in and a downstairs loo in an area that shouldn't be done"

F: "That's what I was going to say, new houses tend to have too many bathrooms, an en suite, a main bathroom and a downstairs loo, and you don't [need them]"

Male/ Female, Homeowners with children, Manchester – urban, Discussion group

A few participants went further, suggesting that developers exploited the difficulties people had in evaluating space to make rooms look larger, as illustrated in the comment below.

"When you go to the show houses, a lot of the furniture is three-quarter size"

Female, Homeowner with children, Manchester – urban, Discussion group

However, despite these concerns, participants struggled to articulate solutions to their difficulties in quantifying and comparing space in homes, or in ensuring that their requirements for space were adequately met. Across the groups, **participants typically felt that estimating space well was the buyer's responsibility**: that ensuring that homes met buyers' needs was a matter of making a good judgement.

When presented with the idea of benchmarked minimum space standards in homes, there was little acknowledgement that buyers were not necessarily well equipped to make judgements on estimating space, and as a result, many participants did not feel that having a minimum space standard would be relevant to them.

Interviewer: "Do people think there should be a minimum standard?"

F: "It's just your preference, isn't it? ... You can see what the space is so you can take it [or leave it]"

Female, First-time buyer, London – suburban, Discussion group

Participants were also concerned about the implications of a minimum space standard for their status as homeowners in the long-term. **Some felt that minimum space standards would mean that the prices of homes would increase overall.** Homes were also investments for many (as discussed in section 2.1.2) and some participants felt that a minimum space standard might have a detrimental impact on house prices for homeowners in older properties which did not meet such standards.

"It'll be harder to try and enforce that ... people who own a house now, whose bedrooms or living rooms didn't match up to the requirements, they would be stuck in a house they'll never be able to sell, so then what would they do?"

Female, Homeowner with children, London – suburban, Discussion group

Given this concern, **the size standard which participants tended to feel most strongly about was for bedrooms.** There was a strong feeling across all the groups that bedrooms in new homes often had inadequate space, and to ensure a minimum standard here would not affect the value of homes, rather it would ensure that buyers were better informed as to which rooms in a home could genuinely be classed as bedrooms and ensure better information about what homeowners were buying.

7.3 Evaluating noise and energy efficiency within homes

The discussion groups also elicited concerns among some participants **that it was difficult for them to assess and compare qualities of homes which they were unable to actually see.** In both Manchester and London, the groups generated discussions around the difficulties of assessing the levels of noise, light, safety and environmental performance. These were concerns which participants had typically given very little thought to previously – rather they were issues that surfaced on prompting from the research moderator or by other participants.

"I hadn't thought about it, but now everyone's said it I've thought about it. Because if you go on a viewing you don't necessarily know"

Female, Homeowner with children, London – suburban, Discussion group

For these areas, participants felt that **benchmarking and advice would be extremely useful,** as these were aspects of the home which they admitted they not only found difficult to measure, but were aware that they did not prioritise.

"I've had to have an EPC [Energy Performance Certification] done on the house ... I've just sold now. But I must say the houses that I've been looking at I haven't looked at it ... I've looked at how many rooms it's got and what the garden's like"

Male, Homeowner with children, London – suburban, Discussion group

For many the quality of the homes they bought was important to participants. When asked at the end of the discussion groups which single issue was most important to them for an independent body to address and offer information on, many participants across all groups felt that **the quality of new homes – which encompassed the quality of building materials, fixtures and fittings – was their biggest concern.** The fabric of the home had implications for noise reduction and energy efficiency, but participants did not always see it in those terms – for many it was a matter of the difference between a preference for homes made with bricks, which were perceived to be good quality, and those made with other materials, which were less favoured.

Overall, participants were keen on benchmarks to help them assess energy efficiency and noise in the homes because not only were they much more aware that they were unable to assess these matters themselves adequately, but were also concerned about the impact of poor levels of energy efficiency or high noise levels in their homes. They tended to feel these were important issues despite their neglect of them when searching for a home, and felt that advice and guidance from an independent body would be appropriate. There was considerable consensus in the groups that these benchmarks would be helpful to consumers once the issue had been raised and discussed.

7.3 Who should be responsible for information provision?

As illustrated in the previous sections, across the groups, it was only after considerable discussion of the issues that participants were able to understand the role an independent regulatory body might have to play in setting standards where space within homes, energy efficiency and other dimensions of the quality of homes were concerned. This tended to be because they were accustomed to seeing themselves as responsible for this element of buying a home, or saw this as the responsibility of solicitors or surveyors to offer this support and advice. They tended to feel strongly about this because this was advice and information which they had already paid for.

"That's what you're paying the solicitor to do. That's what part of their job is"

Male, Homeowner with children, London – suburban, Discussion group

When questioned about how an independent body could work, a few participants in the groups had strong feelings about who should be involved. Builders and developers were typically distrusted because they were felt to be more motivated by profit than by the desire to ensure that home-owners needs were met. Across the groups there was a preference for an independent body to set and assess standards across the industry.

"I don't trust house builders ... clearly they have a vested interest in you purchasing something. So it would need to be somebody who was deeply independent"

Male, Homeowner with children, London – urban, Discussion group

There was also the feeling from some participants that the regulating body should be a consortium of a range of relevant stakeholders because all of these groups would bring different perspectives.

"If it was comprised of different stakeholders, like the architects, the builders, designers, even the consumers, then there was a body that represented all of them then yes, maybe so. But I don't think one particular professional body, person, should be overriding"

Male, First-time buyer, London – urban, Discussion group

Where the type of information provision was concerned, participants expected to have access to information about the amount of space in the house and about energy efficiency, and they tended to expect this to be delivered by the vendors of the home or the estate agent.

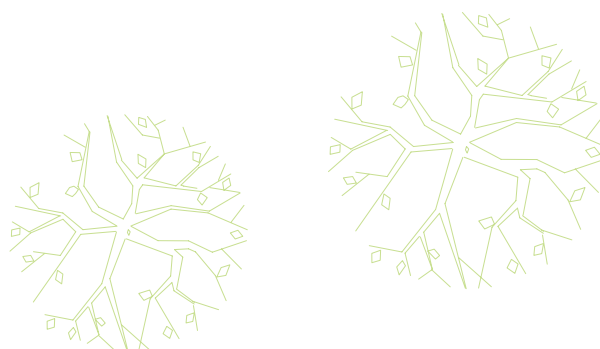
"You'd expect ... a plan of the house and the square footage and energy rating and so on, I'd expect that as your standard"

Male, Homeowner with children, Manchester – suburban, Discussion group

Estate agents were also the source of other pieces of key information which related to locality, particularly information on local transport links and schools. However, despite the general sense across the groups that they should be better informed about the homes they were considering buying, across the groups, **most participants were reticent about paying for information**. Even though, on discussion of the issues, many felt that there was a role to play for an independent body to offer advice and support to homebuyers, most felt that they would not pay for the information. This was because they felt that they already paid solicitors and surveyors for advice, and most of their key concerns would be covered by these services.

7.4 Conclusion

Initially many participants felt they did not need support in choosing a home and that they were fully equipped to make decisions and comparisons in the housing marketplace. However, our research revealed that participants did need and want advice where certain issues were concerned. Overall, participants tended to feel that an independent, cross-professional body should regulate the quality of, and provide free information about new-build homes. They also wanted free information should be available to benchmark aspects of quality such space, noise insulation and energy efficiency.



Groups discussion guide

1. Background and context of the research

This research project is part of the RIBA and the Future Homes Commission's investigation into how the UK can build enough of the right kind of homes that can deliver on the short-term need for numbers and growth with the longer-term economic and social impacts of good quality housing.

The ethnographic element of the research conducted by Ipsos MORI aimed to understand what a range of different people needed from their homes. The discussion groups aim to understand what the general public want from their homes.

The overall aim of the discussions is to understand what is most important to participants when considering their next home, asking them to try to disregard the constraints that they currently experience within the housing market and concentrate on what kind of home they would like to have for their household.

2. Research scope and objectives:

The research will therefore answer the following questions:

- What is most important to people when buying a new home and why?
- What are participants' expectations around internal and external living spaces and why?
- What are participants' expectations around comfort/ security/ accessibility/ environment performance within homes and why?
- What are participants' expectations from the local area and its amenities?
- What are participants' perceptions of new-build homes?
- What is the difference between the perceptions of first-time and experienced buyers of new homes?
- How would participants feel the current marketplace for homebuyers could be improved?

2. Research scope and objectives:

Topic area	Content of discussion	Guide timings
1. Introductions and background	This section of the discussion sets the scene, reassures participants about the discussion and explains confidentiality. Following introductions/ housekeeping, we will ask each participant to explain why they are looking to buy a home and what type of home they have been considering buying.	5 mins
2. Expectations of homes	This section will explore participants' expectations for their future home, and their views of new-build homes. We will use projective exercises to investigate deep-seated considerations.	20 mins
3. Rooms and space	This section will explore whether participants feel they have enough spaces of the right type or flexibility of rooms for daily activities in their current home, and what this means for the home they are looking for.	25 mins
4. Comfort *	This section will explore issues around comfort in more detail. It will cover noise, privacy, windows/ light and heating.	10 mins *
5. Security *	This section will explore issues around security in more detail. It will include a general discussion and cover: personal perceptions of safety, home security and expectations of security.	10 mins *

Topic area	Content of discussion	Guide timings
6. Accessibility *	This section will explore issues around accessibility in more detail. It will include a general discussion and cover difficulties getting into the home, difficulties moving around the home, difficulties faced by visitors.	10 mins *
7. Environmental Performance *	This section will explore issues around environmental performance in more detail. It will include a general discussion and cover recycling and energy efficiency.	10 mins *
8. Improving the marketplace for home-buyers	We will explore who should be responsible for making sure homes are adequate (government/ estate agents/ home builders?), and what kind of information do homebuyers need in order to make an informed decision about choosing their new home – and who should provide it? We will also test some solutions	10 mins
9. Conclusion	In the final 5 minutes we will ask participants to sum up what they feel were the most important issues raised in the discussion.	10 mins
Total		1.5hrs

* Due to time restrictions in the groups, we would cover two of each of the asterisked topics in each discussion in detail. These would be rotated across the four groups.

We use several conventions to explain to you how this guide will be used, described below.

Timings	Questions	Notes and prompts
5 mins	<p><u>Underlined</u> = Title: This provides a heading for a sub-section</p> <p>Bold = Question or read out statement: Questions that will be asked to the participant if relevant. Not all questions are asked during fieldwork based on the moderator's view of progress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullet = prompt: Prompts are not questions – they are there to provide guidance to the moderator if required. 	This area is used to summarise what we are discussing, provides informative notes, and some key prompts for the moderator
How long it takes	Typically, the researcher will ask questions and use the prompts to guide where necessary. Not all questions or prompts will necessarily be used in an interview	

Timings	1. Introduction & background	Notes and prompts
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5 mins

Introduce self, Ipsos MORI, and explain the aim of the discussion.

Explain that this research is for the RIBA's Future Homes Commission, but that we are an independent research agency.

Explain the purpose of the research: **The RIBA Future Homes Commission is conducting an inquiry into the quality of newly-built housing, with the aim of understanding how people live today, what they need and expect from their homes, and whether the delivery of new homes is fit for purpose.**

MODERATOR TO ASK PARTICIPANTS TO INTRODUCE THEMSELVES

Please could you introduce yourself to the group? Please tell us your name, and a little about:

- Your household or family – who shares your home with you?
- Your current home – where do you live and what kind of home is it?
- Why you're looking for somewhere new to live

This section of the discussion sets the scene, reassures participants about the discussion and explains confidentiality.

We will also start to explore participants' expectations with some background information. This will allow participants to warm up and start thinking about the subject of their home.

20 mins

First of all, I'd like to talk about your current homes. You're all thinking about moving home, and I'd like to know why that is so important to you thinking about where you live at the moment.

'Change one thing' exercise

You all have Post-it notes and pens on the tables in front of you.

I'd like you to write down the one thing you would change about your current home and one thing you would like to keep – in other words, that you'd like to see in your new home.

MODERATOR TO INDICATE FLIPCHART WITH 'CHANGE' AND 'KEEP' WRITTEN UP AS A PROMPT.

WHEN GROUP IS READY, MODERATOR TO DISCUSS EACH PARTICIPANT'S NOTES IN TURN, EXPLORING WHY THE ISSUES ARE IMPORTANT TO THEM

- **What would you like to keep?**
- **What would you like to change?**

PROBE FOR IMPACT ON QUALITY OF LIFE AND WHY THIS MATTERS TO PARTICIPANTS - USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IF REQUIRED:

Do you have enough storage space?

- Is storage space built-in or have you created your own storage?
- Where you keep ... recycling bins, vacuum cleaners, ironing boards, suitcases, outdoor clothing, children's toys?
- Are these stored in the house, garage, utility room, shed?

Where do you eat your meals?

- Is this comfortable for you?
- Would you like to do this differently? Why?

Is there enough room for you or your children to have guests?

- For your children to play and have friends around?
- For your children to study or for you to work from home?

TO THE WHOLE GROUP

Thinking about all of the issues we have just discussed, what do you wish you had known about your home before you first moved there?

- Was this something you considered when looking for your current home?
- Is this something you would bear in mind now?

This section of the discussion sets the scene, reassures participants about the discussion and explains confidentiality.

We will also start to explore participants' expectations with some background information. This will allow participants to warm up and start thinking about the subject of their home.

20 mins

Top 5' exercise

Thank you – this really helps us to start to understand what's important to you and what isn't. I'd now like to talk about what's important to you when you're looking for your new home.

Using your Post-it notes again, please could you write down what are the Top 5 things you are looking for in your new home – apart from price. This could be anything at all...

MODERATOR TO ASK PARTICIPANTS TO START WRITING.

AFTER A COUPLE OF MINUTES, MODERATOR TO REVEAL A FLIPCHART PAGE WITH SUGGESTIONS, INCLUDING NAMES OF ROOMS, AND ISSUES RELATING TO COMFORT, SECURITY, ACCESSIBILITY, ENVIRONMENT, LOCATION AND AMENITIES.

Here are some suggestions, if you need some ideas. Are any of these things important to you?

WHEN PARTICIPANTS ARE READY, ASK A FEW PARTICIPANTS TO TALK THROUGH THEIR TOP 5, EXPLAINING WHY THEY HAVE MADE THEIR CHOICES. GROUP POST-IT NOTES TOGETHER – OR ASK PARTICIPANTS TO DO THIS.

- **Did anyone get some of the same ideas? Why did you put them down?**
- **Did anyone get anything different? What did you have?**

TO WHOLE GROUP – BUT ENSURE EACH PERSON IS ASKED ABOUT THESE ISSUES

Given what we've been talking about, what kind of home does this mean you're looking for? Why?

- Does it mean you're looking for a house or a flat?
- A new-build or an older home?

What options have you been looking at? How do they fit the criteria you're hoping for?

What are you hoping to avoid? Why?

20 mins

Given all we've talked about so far, I'd like to talk about how you would expect the space in your new home to be different from your current home.

'Looking to the future' exercise

MODERATOR TO EXPLORE RESPONSES IN DEPTH, THEN ASK PARTICIPANTS TO FORM TRIADS/ PAIRS WITH THOSE WITH SIMILAR HOUSEHOLD TYPES, AND PROVIDE PARTICIPANTS WITH STIMULUS MATERIAL A (SIMPLE PLAN OF HOUSE WITH NAMES OF ROOMS MARKED)

In your groups/ pairs, I'd like you to think about the home you are hoping to find – and what each of those rooms would be like in this home.

Don't think too much about the layout of the house in front of you – it's just a prompt really (and it looks like a child's drawing!). I'd like you to think about each of the rooms – what are you expecting them to be like in your new home?

MODERATORS TO ALLOW PARTICIPANTS 5 MINUTES TO DISCUSS EACH ROOM IN TURN TOGETHER, THEN GATHER RESPONSES FROM THE MINI-GROUPS, PROBING IN DEPTH ON RESPONSES ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES:

- Where would you have your meals/ eat? What would the space be like?
- Where would you dress?
- What would the bathroom be like? Why?
- What kind of space would you need to work?
- What space would you like for children to play?
- ... And for them to study?
- What kind of storage space are you looking for?
- What about space for washing/ drying clothes, ironing?
- Would you need space for recycling?
- What kind of private space to relax would you expect?
- Would you expect space for entertaining? What kind?
- What about for parking the car/ other vehicles?
- Would you expect to have outdoor space? Why?

TO WHOLE GROUP:

- Of all of these things, which is your most important consideration when you're looking for new home? Why?

MODERATOR TO GO ROUND THE GROUP AND GATHER INDIVIDUAL ANSWERS, EXPLORING REASONS IN DEPTH

- Which room is the most used in your home? Why?
- What would you change about this (or any other) room to improve it?

MODERATOR NOTE: Take care here to focus participants on whether the area in the home is suitable for them/ the purpose being discussed, rather than whether they have enough space.

Timings

3. Rooms and space continued...

prompts

20 mins

- **What kinds of things do you to manage in rooms where you don't have the right kinds of space or areas for your needs??**
- **Is there anything you can't do because you don't have the right kinds of space or areas? PROBE FOR: the impact that this has on life in the home and family life.**
- **How could areas in your home be improved to make them more suitable for your needs?**
- **Thinking about the wider community, do you use space in the community more or less depending on the space that you have available at home? PROBE FOR: Outside space such as parks, play areas, allotments etc**

Timings

4. Comfort

Notes and prompts

20 mins

TO WHOLE GROUP

How comfortable would you say your home is, and what makes it comfortable?

- Is space for leisure important to you?
- What about entertaining?
- Are you looking for somewhere with a particular kind of private space for study or work?

What kind of expectations do you have where noise is concerned?

- Do you expect your home to be quiet? Which rooms?
- What would you be willing to compromise on where noise is concerned?

What do you expect your windows to be like?

- Is it important to you to have double glazing? Why?
- Do you need a lot of windows – or light? Why?
- What would you be willing to compromise where these issues are concerned?

What kind of heating system would you expect? Why is this important?

- Which rooms do you need to be warmest and why?
- Have you ever looked to see what kind of heating system a home you have looked at has?

This section will explore issues around comfort in more detail.

Timings

5. Security

Notes and prompts

10 mins

TO WHOLE GROUP

How important is feeling safe and secure in your home?

- What makes a home secure? PROBE for living on the ground floor vs. higher up, locks on doors, burglar alarms, immediate environment (street or estate) and what windows look onto
- What type of houses are the most secure?
- Should all houses have alarms?

This section will explore issues around security in more detail.

Timings	5. Security continued	Notes and prompts
10 mins	<p>Is it more important to you to have a secure home or to feel safe in your neighbourhood? Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does knowing your neighbours make a difference? 	This section will explore issues around security in more detail.
Timings	6. Accessibility	Notes and prompts
10 mins	<p>TO WHOLE GROUP</p> <p>Is accessibility important to any of you in looking for a new home? Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it important for you? Friends and family? Children? What would you need to ensure your new home is accessible? What are you looking for? <p>What about accessibility within the home? Are there any difficulties you or your family might face moving around your home?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it important for you? Friends and family? Children? Is it important in particular rooms – kitchen, bathroom, living room? What kinds of things are needed? What would you need to ensure your new home is accessible in this way? What are you looking for? 	This section will explore issues around security in more detail.
Timings	7. Environmental performance	Notes and prompts
10 mins	<p>TO WHOLE GROUP</p> <p>Is energy efficiency something that you would consider when looking for a new home? Why – or why not?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does energy efficiency mean to you or others in your household? How are you hoping your new home will be heated? Would you consider adding any modifications to your new home to improve energy efficiency? Why? PROBE FOR: solar panels, double glazing, additional insulation <p>What environmental activities would take place in your new home?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recycling waste? Washing clothes? Growing food? <p>Is it important to you that there is enough space for these activities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would they do more of this if they had enough space for them in your new home? 	This section will explore issues around environmental performance in more detail.

20 mins

I'd now like to talk about how what would help you get the quality of home you expect, and the information you need when you buy a home.

Who do you think should be responsible for making sure homes are suitable for your needs? PROBE:

- local government
- central government
- advice services
- estate agents
- home builders
- architects
- anyone else?

Do you think the government should set minimum criteria/ standards for homes built in the future? SUGGEST THE FOLLOWING TO THE GROUP AND EXPLORE RESPONSES:

- minimum space standards or storage requirements
- minimum standards about whether a home is accessible (for people with mobility issues such as wheelchairs) and secure
- minimum standards to ensure all homes are energy efficient

What kind of information do homebuyers need when choosing their new home? And what is most important to know? PROBE FULLY

- Size of home
- Price
- Location
- Schools
- Amenities
- Transport
- Employment
- council tax
- mortgage rates
- property condition
- energy efficiency
- energy bills prediction

Who should provide information about how this home compares to others? Should this be standardised? Who should do that?

- local government
- central government
- advice services
- estate agents
- home builders
- architects
- anyone else?

Timings

8. Improving the marketplace for home-buyers continued

Notes and prompts

10 mins

Would you pay for this information? SUGGEST THE FOLLOWING TO THE GROUP AND EXPLORE RESPONSES:

- Would you pay to receive it?
- If the government made these standards law, would you mind paying to receive the information?
- Would you pay to provide it when you are selling a home - like Home Information Packs?

This section will explore issues around security in more detail.

If you could research this information for free, would you do it?

SUGGEST THE FOLLOWING TO THE GROUP AND EXPLORE RESPONSES:

Do you make comparisons between properties when looking to move home, and how? What do you compare?

- Would you use an online tool or app that allowed people to benchmark the performance themselves?
- Do you use home or consumer advice websites or media? Which ones?

Timings

9. Conclusion and thanks

Notes and prompts

5 mins

Bearing in mind all the practical things we've discussed today, what do you think house builders, architects and policymakers should consider when developing homes for families and individuals today?

This section will explore issues around security in more detail.

PARTICIPANTS TO ASK FOR TOP 3 ISSUES/ SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FROM ALL PARTICIPANTS, COLLECT AND SUMMARISE. THANK AND CLOSE.

Ethnographic discussion matrix

In ethnographic interviews the discussion takes place in a much more organic fashion compared to discussion groups; please therefore note that a discussion matrix is different to a discussion guide. The questions/ areas of focus are embedded into the participant's everyday life and are therefore led by the participant's behaviour. Many of our observations are led by what they are discussing ("Can you show me...").

The aim of the research is to find out how people live today in terms of:

- What people do within their homes
- What people expect from their homes
- What kind of environment people need in their homes

Questions	Observations
Warm-up: general background and feelings about home	
Who lives in the home/ how long have you lived there? Why did you choose this home to buy or rent? PROBE: space, price, neighbourhood, age or type of home, proximity to friends/ family; transport.	
Which rooms do you use? How often, what for and for what duration?	Tour of the house – room to room. What is the size (floor area and number of bedrooms) of the home?
How much time do you spend at home? What role does being 'at home' play in your daily routine?	
Ask about family, social networks, relationship with partner - any children?	Observe interactions between couples / children / friends (if relevant)
How much time do you spend with the various people in your life? At home or out of the house? Why?	
What kind of work do you do? Any time working at home?	
How do you feel about your home? What does it mean to you – is it a 'sanctuary' or open to guests? Are you house-proud?	Look out for areas that are used for socialising in vs personal / household spaces. What everyday activities do people carry out within the home environment?
How long do you think you will live here for? Do you think you will make any changes to your home in that time?	

Space

Explore the spatial needs and expectations of the participants – room by room (as and when appropriate)

- BATHROOM
- BEDROOM/S
- LIVING ROOM
- DINING ROOM
- ANY OTHER ROOM
- KITCHEN
- GARDEN / COMMUNAL SPACE

Repeat below questions for each room listed above in turn

What is this room used for predominantly? More than one activity? How does this work (can you show us)?

Is there enough space to do what you need to do in this room? Would you say you need more space in here? What would you do with it?

What furniture do you have? Is it what you want or would you prefer something different, or more? Why don't you have something different or more?

Do you have storage needs in this room? Are they currently being met? What would you need more storage space for?

Could the room be improved? How? What difference would it make to you / others living in the house? Does this room function as it needs to?

Of everything we have discussed above, which needs are essential and which could be compromised on (more space vs functionality vs security)

Do children use the space in this room? How much space do they need? Is this restricted to one area in the house or spread out? Why? Do you have enough space for them? What would they use more space for?

How do you think the space you have in your home affects your life? Do you think it has a positive or negative impact?

Can you see yourself needing more or less space in the future? Why?

It will be important to observe the general day to day activities of peoples' lives for this section. Try to capture as much activity as possible – cooking, children playing, washing, watching television, entertaining guests and anything else that may be taking place.

What kind of 'workarounds' do people use when they do not have enough space and does the design/ layout of the home influence this?

Does the furniture look cosy, playful, child / adult friendly?

Look for computers/ Wii/ playstations at home – if you see them, when and where do they play?

Comfort

Where and how do you eat main meals? Why? Do you have enough space for eating?

Show us where you eat / try and capture a meal taking place – do they sit round a table or eat on laps?

What do you do to relax? Do you have any interests or hobbies? Do you do them at home?? Why / why not? How much leisure time do you spend at home, and what do you do with it?

Is it noisy here? What can you hear? Have you tried to do anything about it? Has anything stopped you from being able to do something about it?

Listen out for noises from surrounding area / internal/ external neighbours

Is it private enough for you here? Do your windows overlook neighbours? Where? How does this make you feel? Would you like to change this?

Do you have any other privacy issues with your home? (Shared access to front door? Communal areas etc?) Does this affect you? How? Would you change it if you could?

Where are their windows, how big are they, what do they face?

Is your home light enough? Which rooms are best? Any rooms which don't get enough sunlight? How does this affect you / others in your house? Would you change it if you could?

Is your home warm enough? What is it like in winter/ summer? ? How does this affect you? (positive / negative)? Would you change it if you could?

If heating cost an issue, ask to see heating bills

Do you have any other privacy issues with your home? (Shared access to front door? Communal areas etc?) Does this affect you? How? Would you change it if you could?

Security

Do you feel safe in your home? Why / why not?

What about in your neighbourhood? Any stories around safety? Was safety a factor in your decision to live here? Does your street/ estate feel safe to you? Why?

What kind of home security do you have? Do you feel safe? Is your security sufficient? Have you added to the security provisions of your home? if so, why? What did you add and how? Do you have a neighbourhood watch scheme, are you part of it?

Show us the security system and / or where or how your house is vulnerable.

What security measures do you expect in your home? What do you think should be the minimum? (This could range from quality of locks and windows, or refusal to live on a ground floor property.)

Look out of the windows – do windows in the neighbourhood overlook a shared area? E.g. is the immediate area and route to the front door open well lit, and are any areas overlooked by neighbours?

Accessibility - n.b. this section particularly relevant for mobility impaired recruit, older people, and those with young children

Do you have any difficulties getting into your home? When and why? How does this affect you? Would you like to change it? How possible is this?

Show us how you get into your home and any difficulty experienced

Are there any difficulties moving around inside your home? When and why? How does this affect you? Would you like to change it? How possible is this?

Show us how you get move around your home and any difficulty experienced

Do visitors ever experience difficulties getting into or moving around your home? When and why? How does this affect you? Would you like to change it? How possible is this?

Show us how visitors get into and move around your home and any difficulty experienced

Environmental performance

Are you concerned with environmental matters in your home? Do you do any of the following?

PROBE:

- Recycling
- Growing food
- Drying clothes by line not machine
- Anything else

Look for evidence of recycling, washing approach, growing food. Is there enough space for them and is it in the right places

For each of the above:

Tell us more about this. Is there enough space for you to carry out the above efficiently? Is the space you use to do this big enough? Can you do the above where you want to? Would you change anything about where / how you do the above if you could? What and why?

Are you concerned about the energy efficiency of your home? What does this mean to you? Are you aware of energy efficiency in your home? Are you satisfied with the energy efficiency of your home? Would you change anything? What / why? Is there anything stopping you from doing this?

How do you heat your home? Does your home get any natural heat? Would you like to change anything about how your home is heated? What & why?

Have you taken any steps to make your home more energy efficient??

Ask to see any active technologies such as solar panels

PROBE:

- Control the temperature of the property
- make conscious efforts at energy conservation
- added further measures like active technologies (such as solar panels for water or other heating)?

External space & place

Do you have a garden? Or any private space outside?? What do you use it for? Is it big enough? Would you change it if you could? Why/ why not?

Ask to see the garden / external space

Do you have shared or communal areas outside? Do you use them? What for? What do you think of the shared space? Would you change it if you could? Why? Do you experience any difficulties with your shared space (kept clean, neighbours etc)?

Ask to see communal external areas

How do you get in to your home? If it is through a communal area (such as in an apartment block) how is that for you? Have you had any problems with your shared space (kept clean, neighbours etc)?

Ask to see how property is accessed and any shared space

What is your neighbourhood? (open environment; estate, street). What do you like about it? Do you use it for anything? Anything you don't like about it? Would you change it if possible? Why & how?

Take us out on a short tour of the local area

How do you get to and from your home? Do you use local transport or a car? Or something else? Which the easiest way to travel and why?

Do you have access to a parking space? Is it private or on the street – is it visible from your property? Can visitors park? How important is parking to you? What difference does being able / not being able to park make?

Ask to see parking space / area

Overall thoughts

How happy are you with your home? How long do you think you will live here? What changes would you expect in that time?

Given everything we've talked about, would you like more space and if so, what would you use it for? Would you like more space inside your home? Or outside?

Thinking back to when you bought your home, what were you expecting from it? Has it delivered this? What could be better?

Given everything we've talked about today, what's the most important thing to you about your home? Why?

