

Future Homes 3: **Think Like A Child**



In each of the last ten years, fewer than 10,000 social rent homes have been built. Of the 522,335 'affordable homes' built in the last decade, only 76,925 (14%) were for social rent.¹ As a result, we have more overcrowded households and more families in temporary accommodation than ever before - and that number includes millions of children.

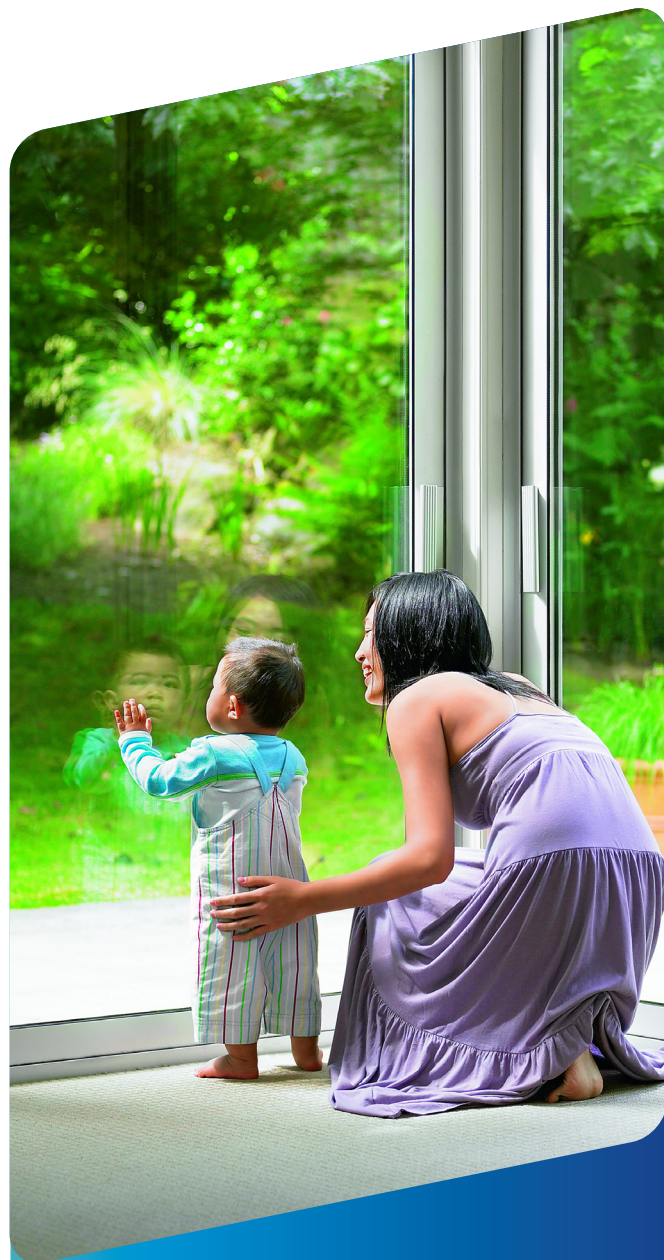
Children account for 19% of the population - but they make up 30% of people in need of social housing. With children disproportionately impacted by the UK's housing crisis, we looked at the challenges from their perspective.²

In this paper, we ask: what are we, as a country, teaching children about the importance of decent housing to create a safe, stable society for them to grow up in? And can designing social housing with children in mind help us build homes that work better for families today - and the tenants of tomorrow?

Almost two million children in England are living in overcrowded, unsuitable or unaffordable homes. Two thirds of them are in need of social housing.²

When you break down the numbers, you begin to understand the depth of the impact. 293,000 children live in homes that are unsuitable for their needs or health requirements. 283,000 share other families' homes, as their parents can't afford their own. 151,000 children are living in temporary accommodation⁴ - a figure that's risen 81% since 2012.

It's neglect on a national scale and, over time, its impact can be devastating.



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NO SPACE FOR GROWTH

Life in temporary accommodation is challenging at best and can hinder children's development and educational progress. In the first instance, it's common for families to be housed miles from their children's school or nursery. This makes regular attendance difficult and can mean that parents lose essential support from other family members. The lack of a fixed address also complicates processes like receiving mail or registering children with doctors or dentists.

The upheaval of repeated displacement means that healthcare can be a major challenge for many families, with GPs removing children from their lists when they're moved out of their catchment area or discharging them from clinics for missing immunisations when they fail to attend appointments after reminders are sent to old addresses.⁶

Physical space is also crucial for children's physical development. The ability to engage in play helps build motor skills and social skills.

But cramped accommodation doesn't just mean a lack of space – it can mean a lack of contact. With visitor policies often not permitting children to invite their friends over, children living in temporary accommodation can feel isolated from their friends and have their development trajectories severely impacted.⁵

Play also stimulates physical development, personal agency and healthy conflict - all of which would prove useful for mitigating the negative impacts of isolation that come with living in temporary accommodation.

But for families in cramped spaces, play is neither a priority nor an option.⁵

THE COLD HARD FACTS

It's easy to see how children become collateral damage in the daily battle against poor housing and poverty. Imagine growing up in an environment where your parents are constantly stressed, and guilty that they can't provide more.

Imagine you're a child living in a home that's cold in winter because your parents can't afford to switch on the heating. A home without a fridge or basic cooking facilities. A home without a washing machine - and with long waits for a shared bathroom, so it's hard to keep clean. A home where family members are forced to share beds and there are no suitable sleeping arrangements for infants - which brings an increased risk of unexpected death (more than half (52%) of 124 unexplained deaths of sleeping infants occurred when their sleeping space was shared with an adult or older sibling).⁶

Because they are forced to live in such poor conditions in their early years, young children in overcrowded housing often go to school tired, dirty, or so poorly developed that they are not even ready to start reception.⁶

Given this, you'd have to believe that there's a better way to provide a decent home for every child.

THE VALUE OF SOCIAL HOUSING

Human beings have basic needs. To achieve anything in life, we all need stability: somewhere to root ourselves, somewhere to come home to, somewhere to sleep soundly, somewhere to wake up feeling safe: somewhere we belong.

Good quality social homes enable people to put down foundations and build their lives; homes that families can live in for the long term, that enable children to grow and flourish at school - that help improve their chances of getting ahead in life.

Commenting on the issue, Darren Rodwell, housing spokesperson for the Local Government Association, said: "Councils are under mounting pressure to find suitable homes for an ever-increasing number of people and are doing the best they can under current circumstances. A plethora of issues has meant that council budgets are being squeezed and the chronic shortage of suitable housing across the country means that councils are increasingly having to turn to alternative options for accommodation at a significant cost."



Councils need to be given the powers and resources to build enough social homes for their residents so they can create a more prosperous place to live, with healthier and happier communities.⁷

DESIGN FROM A CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE

If a child were to design a house incorporating elements that reflect their perspective, what would it include? We got in touch with our inner child and had some thoughts on this.

We think that a child-centric home would balance fun with functionality: a nurturing environment that's practical for daily family life, while still catering to the needs of children. A home that prioritises comfort, care and routine - making children feel safe, secure, and settled,

At its heart would be a family-friendly living space with room for playing, relaxing and hosting activities with friends and family. This would reinforce a sense of togetherness and stability.

There would also be a combination of open family spaces and small, enclosed spaces where children can retreat when they need a moment of reflection or downtime. Quiet corners for activities like reading, drawing, or listening to music, also give children a safe place to process their thoughts and emotions, which helps foster a sense of calm.

Our child-centric home might also include flexible, multi-functional spaces such as a playroom that doubles as a study area - which encourages both learning and recreation.

Outdoor space designed for socialising and learning is also important. The provision of shared outdoor space gives children a safe place to run around and gives families a place to come together - which helps everyone feel more connected.



ROUTINE AND CERTAINTY

Predictable routines help children feel safe - and mealtimes help build a familiar, comforting daily rhythm. A family dining area where meals are shared is important to promote bonding and a sense of stability. Our home would also have a child-friendly kitchen with easy-to-reach cabinets so that they can help with cooking or prepare snacks on their own, which promotes independence.

Children are sensitive to what happens around them, and the world of young children can be an uncertain place. Having a dedicated place for 'their things' helps give children a sense of control over their environment.

A comfortable bedroom - tailored to their personal needs - provides a safe personal haven that gives a sense of ownership and security and encourages restful sleep. Bedrooms could also include innovative, built-in storage for toys and books, so children know where their things belong. Elsewhere, smart storage built into stairs, under beds, and in hallways would make it easy to keep spaces tidy, while still keeping everything accessible.



A LOW-CARBON FUTURE

Another thing that children worry about is climate change. A Lancet report on climate anxiety in children says that 59% are 'extremely worried' about climate change, and 84% were 'moderately worried'.⁸ With that in mind - in addition to being warm and comfortable - our child's home would be designed with low carbon performance in mind.

Incorporating energy-efficient and sustainable design principles into a family home would not only lower utility costs, but also contribute to a healthier, more environmentally-friendly living space.

The use of sustainable, energy-efficient materials would reduce cost and carbon impacts. Well-placed windows and skylights would maximise natural light, reducing the need for artificial lighting during the day, lowering electricity consumption. High quality insulation and carbon-reducing technology such as heat pumps, solar panels and A and B-rated appliances would combine to improve energy performance.

Not only would this encourage awareness of environmental sustainability, it would reduce the cost of running a family home which, in turn, would help make families better off. In addition, smart thermostats, and lighting controls make it easier for busy parents to manage the safety, comfort and running costs of their home.

BUILDING BETTER HOMES

With all of this in mind, construction using insulated panelised wall systems offers several advantages for building high-quality, family-friendly social housing that combines efficiency, sustainability, and flexibility. Here are seven reasons why Saint-Gobain believes that the use of off-site construction is perfect for creating better family homes.



1. Faster Homes

Homes are built with panelised wall systems are manufactured in purpose-built factories, then assembled on-site. Shorter construction time on-site reduces the uncertainty and disruption that comes with traditional building methods. Because the panels are pre-fabricated in quality-controlled environments, weather-related delays are minimised, making timelines more predictable - and quality control ensures a consistently high level of finish, which reduces on-site snagging. More importantly, it means that families can move into new homes faster, reducing the stress and uncertainty of living in temporary accommodation.



2. Energy Efficient Homes

Pre-manufactured panels include insulation designed to deliver excellent thermal performance. This helps you create energy-efficient homes that perform exactly as they were designed to. This not only reduces carbon, it also results in lower energy bills, which relieves the financial burden on families. At Saint-Gobain, we prioritise materials that contribute to thermal, acoustic and visual comfort and better indoor air quality for homes that feel

snug and inviting all year round. So children and parents alike can enjoy a cosy environment for sleeping, playing, and relaxing - without worrying about draughts, condensation or cold-spots.



3. Customisable Homes

One of the biggest advantages of panelised construction is its design flexibility. Built using standardised components, it is easy to customise layouts and design family-specific features - such as multi-functional spaces - while ensuring the building process remains efficient and cost-effective.



4. Sustainable Homes

Homes built using our panelised systems are inherently sustainable and reduce the environmental impact of the construction process. The panels also improve energy performance, which lowers the home's overall carbon footprint. Moreover, the factory-controlled manufacturing process minimises waste compared to traditional on-site construction. For providers of social housing, this method of construction aligns with their ESG goals, and delivers low-carbon buildings with true lifetime sustainability.



5. High-Quality Homes

Homes built with Saint-Gobain's panelised systems benefit from strict quality control processes. We ensure that every panel is produced to a consistent level of specification, minimising errors and ensuring that the overall structure is robust and durable. This means fewer repairs, with maintenance over time made easier by the consistency of materials, build and specification across properties.



6. Safer Homes

Insulated timber-frame panels are engineered to meet strict safety standards. Off-site construction provides a level of materials performance and ventilation that reduces issues like cold, condensation, damp and mould that can affect traditional builds - all of which contribute to a healthier living environment, which is particularly important for families with young children.



7. Cost-Effective Homes

Unlike traditional building methods, the controlled environment of a factory allows for precise budgeting, reducing the risk of unexpected expenses due to on-site delays, weather issues, or mistakes. Panels manufactured off-site and delivered to site for assembly causes less disruption to the surrounding area during the build - so other families living nearby won't experience prolonged construction noise, dust, or debris.

CONCLUSION

Today's children are the next generations of workers, decision-makers and tenants - and our actions will determine the people they will become. As such, they also carry forward the failures of our generation, and their lives - and this country's future - will be shaped by the environments our children grow up in.

We know that good social housing doesn't just give children a place to live. Well-designed homes provide families with their own safe space in which they can feel secure and settled.

Ultimately, we believe that you don't have to be an architect or academic to see the benefits of investing in better homes for children.

It's investing in a better future for all of us.

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