

Beyond the front door

How shared spaces help
people and places thrive

Introduction

Thriving communities depend on more than good homes alone. The spaces between and around homes also matter. They shape health, connection, family life and the practical experiences of everyday life.

These spaces and places also influence how easy or difficult it is to manage everyday pressures, from the cost of living to getting around and finding time and space for rest, play and social connection.

Housing associations and social landlords can't solve every challenge residents face, but they do influence some of the conditions that make life easier and healthier. This creates an important opportunity to see neighbourhood space not as leftover land, but as part of what helps everyday life work.

Practical role for housing associations and social landlords

Social housing providers play a key role in local areas as both anchor organisations and place shapers. This guide aims to support social landlords to consider how they might support community wellbeing outside the front door. We recognise that this will vary depending on the type and number of homes they manage, and how partnerships work with other local agencies. It's intended to help landlords consider the wider place shaping role they have and how to use all levers to support their residents and communities to live well in good places and decent homes.

As landlords, asset managers, neighbourhood stewards, community anchors and partners, social landlords can shape homes and some of the wider surrounding spaces directly, while influencing others through partnership, management or advocacy. These spaces can include shared spaces, verges, thresholds, edges, courts, paths and routes. The extent of that influence will vary, but too often such spaces are treated as secondary or leftover. Yet they can still shape how easy it is to manage everyday costs, support health and wellbeing, support children and family life, and build connection, pride and belonging.

This guide uses a simple four-part framework to explore that opportunity. It looks at how the spaces between and around homes can help people:

- manage everyday costs
- support health and wellbeing
- support children and family life, and
- build social connection, pride and belonging.

The themes overlap in practice, but together they offer a practical way to think about how neighbourhood space can better support everyday life and thriving communities.

From leftover space to useful space: what residents need around their homes

For residents, the spaces between and around homes are an integral part of everyday life. They can either add to daily pressures or help make life easier, healthier and more connected.

Too often, however, these spaces are treated as secondary, leftover after decisions have been made about buildings, parking, access, bins and other estate functions. A useful starting point for social landlords is therefore to consider what people need from these spaces, and how they can be used to support thriving communities in practical ways.



Helping people manage everyday costs

The spaces around home can play a practical role in financial resilience by helping households reduce routine costs, access shared resources and make lower-cost everyday choices. This includes not only what people can do at home, but how neighbourhood space can support activities and arrangements that make daily life more affordable.

Supporting health and wellbeing

Residents need outdoor spaces and routes that feel easy to use, well cared for and comfortable to spend time in. The spaces around home can either support or discourage healthy daily habits, including walking, rest, time outdoors, play and contact with nature. They also shape whether people feel safe, welcome and able to use neighbourhood space with confidence.

Supporting children and family life

Neighbourhood spaces should reflect the realities of family life, including opportunities for play close to home, routes that work for buggies and scooters, and streets and shared spaces that support everyday care and supervision. The spaces around home can make family routines easier or harder, and they play an important role in children's development, independence and everyday wellbeing.

Building social connection, pride and belonging

Shared spaces can help make community life more visible and accessible, supporting informal contact, reducing isolation and creating more welcoming ways for people to take part in local activity or reach support. People are also more likely to value and care for neighbourhood spaces when those spaces feel welcoming, lived-in and useful, helping to strengthen pride, belonging and longer-term stewardship.



Thamesmead case study

As owners of two-thirds of the land in Thamesmead, Peabody is leading the long-term regeneration of the town.

Improving people's health and wellbeing is central to our plan to improve, grow and look after Thamesmead. We're investing in places that bring people together, spaces that encourage people to spend time in nature, culture that helps people love where they live, and community support that enables people to thrive.

We support hundreds of community-led projects across the town, from small-scale activities to the award-winning Thamesmead Festival which attracts around 8,000 visitors each year. Initiatives range from crafting to community gardening, tree-planting to open-water swimming, advice hubs to holiday clubs.

Find out more here:
www.thamesmeadnow.org.uk

Using space differently

opportunities for supporting the everyday lives of residents and communities

Small but meaningful changes to the spaces around homes can support ordinary life.

For social landlords, these spaces represent practical assets that can support thriving communities when they are designed, managed and used around people's everyday lives.

Helping people manage everyday costs



Intervention	Why this matters	Primary impact	Who benefits
Shared, covered or semi-private outdoor drying space	Outdoor drying can help reduce reliance on tumble dryers and indoor drying, which may lower household energy use and help avoid added moisture indoors. Drying space is more likely to be used where it is close to home, convenient, and feels safe and usable. In the context of financial hardship, small changes that reduce routine household costs and support everyday routines can make a meaningful difference.	Financial resilience; healthy homes; everyday usability	Low-income households, families, older people, disabled residents, time-poor households, residents without private gardens
Growing beds in gardens and near homes with water access and storage	Productive growing space can support healthier diets, food skills and modest savings on food budgets, but only where it is practical to use. Water access, storage and proximity matter if food growing is to be realistic rather than symbolic. Gardening can also support physical activity, routine, stress reduction and mental wellbeing, while creating opportunities for social connection and shared activity.	Food resilience; health; community resilience	Families, older people, lower-income households, residents interested in growing
Edible landscaping, community orchards and shared food-growing spaces	Using shared planting areas for fruit, herbs, edible species or small orchards can make neighbourhood space feel more useful and generous, rather than purely ornamental. These spaces can support healthier diets, local food resilience, practical learning and intergenerational activity, while also creating opportunities for collective stewardship. They may be particularly effective where they are linked to resident-led ownership and 'friends of' groups or other light-touch stewardship activities, helping to build confidence, community pride and longer-term care for shared spaces.	Food resilience; stewardship; community building; neighbourhood value	Whole community, particularly families, older people, schools, community groups and households facing cost pressures
Secure and convenient cycle storage	Storage that is secure, covered, accessible and close to home can make wheeling and cycling a more realistic option for local journeys, reducing transport costs and supporting everyday movement.	Financial resilience; active travel	Working-age adults, young people, families
Micro-spaces for 'Libraries of things', swap points, repair stations or sharing shelves	Small, shared spaces for reuse, exchange and repair can provide low-cost ways for residents to access goods, share skills and reduce waste. They also support a practical form of neighbourhood resilience.	Low-cost living; community resilience	Whole community, especially lower-income households



Biggleswade Community Gardens, Northfields

At Northfields in Biggleswade, Amplius supports Biggleswade Community Gardens who have turned underused land into a thriving community asset.

The gardens provide local people with opportunities to grow fresh fruit and vegetables, learn new skills, connect with neighbours and spend time outdoors in a welcoming environment.

The project helps residents improve their health and wellbeing through gardening, physical activity and access to nature. By bringing people together around a

shared purpose, the gardens have helped to build pride, belonging in the neighbourhood.

Alongside the gardens, there is also a wellbeing community hub on a Wednesday supported by Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity and volunteers. This is open to Amplius residents and the wider community.

The initiative demonstrates how land around homes can be used creatively to support everyday life, strengthen communities and deliver lasting social value for residents and the wider area.

Supporting health and wellbeing



Intervention	Why this matters	Primary impact	Who benefits
Connected, well- maintained walking routes that support everyday movement	Routes that are direct, comfortable, overlooked and easy to navigate can help make walking part of everyday life. Where neighbourhoods support connected journeys to shops, schools, play spaces, public transport and other local destinations, they can help residents build routine physical activity into daily patterns rather than relying only on planned exercise. Good maintenance, clear layouts and natural overlooking also help people feel more confident using these routes regularly.	Physical activity; wellbeing; inclusive access	Whole community, particularly children, older people, disabled residents and people less likely to be physically active
Shaded seating placed for social contact	Seating is most useful where it is placed around real patterns of movement and everyday life, not simply for visual effect. Shaded, comfortable places to pause can support rest, social contact and outdoor use in warmer weather.	Wellbeing; social connection; climate comfort	Older people, carers, parents, residents at risk of isolation
Small-scale natural play features	Informal and natural play opportunities can support children's activity and imaginative play without requiring large, formal play areas. They can also make shared space more sociable and attractive.	Play; wellbeing; everyday activity	Young children, families
Flexible lawn or hardstanding for informal use	Multi-use spaces can support informal exercise, sitting out, play and occasional gatherings, helping limited land work harder for residents' health and wellbeing.	Physical activity; wellbeing; flexible use	Whole community
Rain gardens, planted drainage features and other climate-resilient landscape measures	Features such as rain gardens, swales and planted drainage areas can help manage surface water, reduce flood risk and support climate resilience, while also making neighbourhoods greener, cooler and more pleasant to use. Where designed well, they can turn hard or underused space into something more attractive, biodiverse and usable in everyday life.	Climate resilience; environmental quality; wellbeing	Whole community, especially on hard-landscaped or flood-prone estates
Trees, canopy cover and cooling landscapes	Trees and other cooling features can make outdoor space more usable in hot weather and reduce heat stress, especially for those who are more vulnerable to extreme temperatures.	Climate adaptation; comfort; health	Children, older people, people with health conditions
Bin storage and servicing arrangements that support clean, usable shared space	Operational decisions about bin storage, servicing and collection routes can have a significant effect on whether neighbourhood space feels clean, comfortable and well cared for. Thoughtful placement and design can help avoid clutter, barriers and dead space, while protecting access and the quality and dignity of shared areas.	Neighbourhood quality; everyday usability; dignity	Whole community



Paines Mill – Younger Persons Supported Accommodation, St Neots

At Paines Mill in St Neots, Amplius is working with residents and support staff to improve the environment around the building's entrance through the creation of a new planted area.

The project aims to make the entrance more welcoming and attractive while supporting healthier behaviours among residents, particularly by discouraging smoking immediately outside the building and creating a more positive shared space.

The initiative forms part of a wider commitment to supporting residents' health and wellbeing. By improving the quality and

usability of shared outdoor space, the project is helping to foster pride in the environment, encourage positive social interaction and create welcoming surroundings.

Building on the healthy places and housing partnership in Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes, Amplius is working with the Cambridgeshire Public Health team to be able to offer tailored stop smoking support for residents. Together, these approaches demonstrate how small improvements beyond the front door can contribute to healthier homes, greater wellbeing and thriving communities.



Intervention	Why this matters	Primary impact	Who benefits
Doorstep play opportunities	Children and families benefit from being able to play, move and spend time outside close to home, without needing to travel to a formal destination. Doorstep play can support healthy development, getting around independently, keeping an eye on younger children and low-cost daily activity, while making neighbourhood space feel more welcoming for family life.	Children's wellbeing; physical activity; family-friendly neighbourhoods	Children, parents, carers
Small seating areas near play or key routes	Seating located near play space or everyday routes can support keeping an eye on younger children and make family routines easier. It can also encourage brief social contact between neighbours.	Family wellbeing; social infrastructure	Parents, carers, children, older people
Accessible routes for buggies, wheelchairs and mobility aids	Everyday routes need to work for a wide range of users if neighbourhood space is to be genuinely inclusive. Smooth surfaces, dropped kerbs, resting points, shade, shelter and sufficient width all support independent movement.	Accessibility; inclusion; equity	Disabled people, parents, carers, older people
Secure buggy and mobility aid storage	Storage for prams, scooters or mobility equipment can reduce friction in daily life and make it easier for residents to get out and about.	Accessibility; routine ease	Parents, carers, disabled residents, older people
Safer, overlooked paths to schools, play areas, transport stops, shops and other everyday destinations	The quality and perceived safety of everyday routes strongly shapes whether people feel able to walk, accompany children, or carry out routine tasks with confidence. This is particularly important on the routes families use regularly to access schools, play space, public transport and local services. Well-designed and well-overlooked paths, with lighting that supports visibility without excessive glare or intrusion, can help support walking, getting around independently and everyday confidence in the neighbourhood.	Safety; active travel; inclusion	Children, parents, women and girls, older people, disabled residents
Street and parking design that protects space for walking, play and everyday use	The design and management of parking can have a major effect on whether neighbourhood space feels safe, welcoming and usable. Pavement parking, oversized vehicles, work vans and parking that dominates shared space can obstruct walking and wheeling, reduce space for doorstep play and make streets feel less sociable. A more balanced approach to parking can help protect space for movement, planting and neighbour contact, and may create opportunities to reclaim some parking spaces for parklets, seating or other small-scale community uses.	Everyday usability; safety; inclusion; family-friendly neighbourhoods	Children, parents, carers, disabled residents, older people, wider community



Monkshill, Bedford

As part of bpha's priority neighbourhood programme, Monkshill in Bedford has seen public health colleagues work alongside the bpha team to undertake a mini Health Impact Assessment, using healthy place principles.

This has helped the partnership to explore how the setting could better support residents' health, wellbeing and quality of life. The assessment considered issues including access to green space, opportunities for physical activity, community safety, social connection and the overall usability of outdoor spaces.

The review identified opportunities to make better use of existing green spaces through planting, and environmental improvements that could encourage residents to spend more time outdoors,

be more active and connect with neighbours. The work also explored how improvements to walking routes, natural surveillance could help create a safer and more accessible neighbourhood.

This project has seen partners work together to use healthy places approaches and combine local knowledge, resident engagement and health impact thinking. bpha is helping to ensure future improvements at Monkshill support health equity, strengthen community wellbeing and create a neighbourhood that works better for the people who live there. This work is ongoing and bpha is working to continue and improve the area and community wellbeing by demonstrating a commitment to the area.

Building social connection, pride and belonging



Intervention	Why this matters	Primary impact	Who benefits
Welcoming front-of-home thresholds	Small threshold spaces, planting, personalisable frontages or semi-private areas can help create a stronger sense of ownership, pride and passive surveillance, contributing to how safe and cared-for a place feels. They can also help reduce stigma by making homes and streets feel more welcoming, ordinary and individual, rather than overly institutional or anonymous.	Belonging; stewardship; safety; stigma reduction	Residents living adjacent to shared areas, wider community indirectly
Micro-spaces for noticeboards and local information	Small, visible spaces for local information can help residents find out what is happening nearby, raise awareness of activities and services, and make community life more visible in everyday settings.	Community connection; local communication	Whole community
Meanwhile/interim uses and pilot projects in development projects and for underused neighbourhood space	Temporary uses and small-scale pilots can help registered providers test ideas before committing to permanent changes. This can be a practical way to learn what residents value, build confidence in new approaches, activate underused space and support low-cost experimentation. Meanwhile uses can also create opportunities for local activity, food growing, play, pop-ups or community events while longer-term plans are developed.	Testing and learning; community activation; flexible use	Whole community, resident groups, local partners
Simple facilities that support temporary community uses	Basic practical features such as power, water, storage, movable furniture, shelter, signage or suitable hardstanding can make it much easier to host temporary markets, advice sessions, swap events and other local activities without major capital works. These small enabling measures can help shared spaces support flexible community use over time.	Community activation; partnership working	Whole community, local groups, service partners
Resident-led activity rather than only provider-led programming	Residents are often more likely to value and sustain shared spaces when they are able to shape how they are used. Small grants, permissions and practical support can help build confidence, ownership and community capacity.	Empowerment; stewardship; community capacity	Resident groups, local leaders, wider community
Community hubs with spill-out outdoor space	Where indoor community or support space connects to usable outdoor space, this can create a more welcoming neighbourhood anchor, support informal social contact and make services feel less formal and easier to access.	Low-stigma support; social connection	Families, older people, residents needing support, people at risk of isolation
Support for mobile and visiting services	Suitable stopping points and simple practical support can help partners bring advice, health, food or community services closer to residents. This can reduce travel barriers and make support easier to access in familiar neighbourhood settings.	Partnership working; low-stigma access	Whole community, especially residents facing transport barriers



Project Vista, Bedford

As part of the Project Vista Regeneration programme in Bedford, bpha is working with public health to better understand the health needs, inequalities and lived experiences of local communities.

Through a health impact assessment style approach, the partnership is combining local health data, demographic insights and resident engagement to build a clearer picture of the factors that influence health and wellbeing.

Rather than focusing solely on housing development, the

work is helping to identify how investment in homes, neighbourhoods and community infrastructure can support healthier outcomes for residents. By understanding patterns of health inequality and listening to community voices, bpha is joining up insights for Project Vista around the issues that matter to residents and that affect health.

This demonstrates the value of closer collaboration between housing and public health, using evidence and resident insight to establish an approach that supports health, reduces inequalities and will help communities thrive.

Five questions to ask yourself

1

Are your spaces easy to use, welcoming and useful?

2

Do they reflect how people actually live?

3

Are you prioritising appearance over usefulness?

4

What everyday pressures could neighbourhood space help reduce?

5

Which residents are least well served by current spaces?

Links and resources

Play and child-friendly neighbourhoods

- [Making Space for Play | Studio Ludo](#)
- [Mix & Match Tools to design urban play | Van Leer Foundation](#)

Healthy streets, walking and everyday movement

- [Making streets healthy places for everyone | Healthy Streets](#)
- [Active Design | Sport England](#)

Food growing, edible landscapes and community stewardship

- [Incredible Edible Network](#)
- [Getting and keeping assets in community control | Local Trust](#)

Sharing, reuse and low-cost living

- [Borrow useful things for your home, projects and adventures | Library of Things](#)
- [Cost of living crisis | CIH](#)

Health, housing and partnership working

- [Public health and housing | LGA](#)
- [What builds good health? | The Health Foundation](#)

Healthy Place Making

- [Long-term stewardship in new communities | TCPA](#)



Healthy Places and Communities

