Perceptions of Privacy and Density in Housing

Report on Research Findings
prepared for the Popular Housing Group

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Section I  Overview

- The most important problem identified in the research is sound transfer between adjoining properties: neighbours being subjected to noise from next door and feeling at risk of being overheard.

- Not having sufficient space was also a significant privacy problem for some housing sectors. Those most seriously affected were some families living in lower cost private housing and social housing. There were three problems: the rooms were simply not big enough, there was not enough separation of adult from child space and there was not enough storage.

- Perhaps surprisingly, there were few privacy problems caused by homes being overlooked. In most of the case histories, occupants felt well screened from the gaze of the general public and their neighbours. Large, floor to ceiling windows did however prove problematic in high density housing as did the surprisingly widespread practice of installing clear glass in new build bathroom windows.

- Privacy from being overlooked was a problem in some private gardens and communal outdoor spaces. Residents wanted good screening from head height walls, fences or landscaping so they could relax in private.

- The safety and security of people within their homes emerged as a core privacy issue. Break-ins were experience as an invasion of their physical and emotional space. Designing for privacy also implies designing out, not designing in, crime.

- Our research confirms that the English do value privacy in their homes and gardens. In higher density living, however, this privacy is necessarily underpinned by a strong sense of community responsibility. In every neighbourhood we researched a degree of community organisation and agreement on shared values was crucial in ensuring household privacy.
1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Objectives

1.1.1 The requirement of the research was to understand consumer perspectives on privacy in housing and how to achieve higher densities without undesirable effects. The Popular Housing Group was concerned that regulations on density are often based on assumptions of what is good practice rather than on empirical evidence from consumers.

1.1.2 The new policy planning guidelines on density of housing are having a considerable impact on the design of the new housing. There is concern, however, that developers may now be storing up problems for the future unless the planning regulations are tempered by feedback from owners and tenants. The research was designed to help in developing guidelines for truly sustainable housing that both meets density criteria and also the privacy requirements of residents.

1.1.3 The research set out to meet two objectives:

i) To understand which issues are significant in household and personal perceptions of privacy in housing.

These issues were examined across a representative range of social groups, family units and household locations and densities.

ii) To identify what design elements are effective in achieving privacy in higher density housing from different environments.

What features should be incorporated in the design of new housing to create desirable perceptions of privacy?

1.2 Research Method

1.2.1 Expert briefing

We undertook the study in two stages. First, we convened a focus group of seven experts in high density housing. They helped us draw up a balanced sample of housing and provided valuable insights into current thinking on higher density design and planning considerations. We have
also contacted this group about the implications of the research findings for future housing design. Our recommendations incorporate their views.

We are very grateful for the support and advice we have received from them throughout this project.

1.2.2 Qualitative fieldwork

We conducted a series of depth interviews and focus groups with people who lived in different types of housing. All the research was conducted in people’s own homes. This was helpful to the respondents in explaining the privacy issues they faced and also to the researchers in terms of understanding and interpreting the implications of the findings.

Within any one type of neighbourhood, we undertook one day’s fieldwork. This included depth interviews with individuals, couples and, where appropriate, entire households. We also organised in each area one neighbourhood focus group of representatives from a range of householders. The interviews lasted for about 45 minutes and the focus groups for one and a half hours. All the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

We kept a visual record of the homes and their context (digital photographs). These have been used to illustrate the report and assist in analysis.

1.3 Research Sample

1.3.1 The principle behind the sampling was to identify a wide cross-section of types of housing so that we could learn what were the patterns and consistencies across this variety. We concentrated on housing neighbourhood styles which incorporated some elements of higher density design, for example terracing, additional stories, apartments, use of shared outdoor space or limited private outdoor space. We also included as a control, some properties outside the 30+ dwellings per hectare range proposed by government: these were the suburban semi-detached housing in Cheam and the Wynyard green field consortium development.

The sample included ten different styles of development spread across five regions. It covered a spread of social class and age and ethnicity. There was a range of tenure from privately owned to rented properties and mixed use developments.
### 1.3.2 Sample by region

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2. Summary of Main Findings on Privacy and Density

2.1 An English Obsession with Privacy?

“A truly comparable word for ‘privacy’ simply does not exist in French or Italian, yet in England it is one of the country’s informing principles.”

Jeremy Paxman ‘The English’

“Born in a harsh and wet climate, which keeps him indoors when even he is at rest, domesticity is the tap root which enables the nation to branch wide and high. The motive and end to their trade is to guard the independence and privacy of their homes.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson ‘English Traits’

2.1.1 These quotations paint the English as a peculiarly private nation: curmudgeonly characters who prefer to skulk in their homes behind drawn net curtains rather than socialising with their local community in ‘continental style’ street life. Our research indicates that this is only a half truth. The English do value their privacy in their homes. In higher density living, however, this privacy is necessarily underpinned by a strong sense of community responsibility. The most successful developments in our research were those where the values of privacy and community were seen as complementary parts of a complete whole: the yin and yang of a harmonious neighbourhood.
2.1.2 Our case histories make it clear that ‘no man is an island’ when it comes to safeguarding privacy in the home. In every neighbourhood a degree of community organisation and agreement on shared values was crucial in ensuring individual household privacy. In order to elucidate this further, it will be necessary to understand first what privacy meant to our informants.

2.2 Understanding What Privacy Means in Housing

2.2.1 We found that privacy in housing is best understood in terms of a continuum of space, ranging from secret inner sanctums to busy public thoroughfares.

Within the home, some rooms are expected to be more private than others, for example bedrooms and bathrooms more so than hallways and lounges. Outside the home, private gardens border onto the realm of shared space within the immediate neighbourhood. Much of the housing we researched had access to communal space such as courtyards and garden squares where a moderate degree of privacy is expected. Outside this immediate neighbourhood, one is in the public realm where space has to be shared with all comers.
2.2.2 Privacy within the home and the immediate neighbourhood was defined in terms of freedoms and protection in four main areas:

![Diagram of privacy aspects: SOUND, SPACE, SIGHT, SECURITY]

The following sections explore how these aspects of privacy are experienced inside the home and in private and communal spaces.

2.3 Sound Inside the Home

2.3.1 The most common privacy issue

The evidence from our case histories suggests that sound transfer between adjoining properties is the most common privacy problem within the home. The main issue was with noise passing horizontally through party walls: neighbours being subjected to noise from next door and feeling at risk of being overheard.

2.3.2 Unacceptable levels of noise

In most of the properties we visited, the level of sound transfer was manageable. There were however examples, all of them relatively recently built homes, where the level of sound transfer had a serious impact on residents’ privacy. The examples of particularly poor sound insulation were from luxury, owner occupied town houses at Wynyard and small, terraced social housing at Poundbury and in Hulme.
In these examples the problem was that noise could be heard both within the home, from floor to floor, and from neighbouring homes as well. Those who lived in the end of terrace housing and had only one party wall saw themselves as very fortunate. One resident in Hulme described the experience as like “living in a cardboard box”. People felt that all aspects of their lives were being overheard: conversations held at normal pitch, lights being switched on and off, someone snoring in the bedroom next door. The problem was so acute in some homes that they could hear not only their next door neighbours, but those two doors away.

### 2.3.3 Tolerable levels of noise

The most common experience, however, was that some sounds could be heard but the level was such that they could be easily tolerated. People could hear extra loud or penetrating sounds from time to time. These might be the sounds of the telephone ringing or the fax beeping, babies crying, teenagers turning up their music too loud or enthusiastic cheers when the home team scored a goal on their TV. The levels of sound transmission were such that it was only an occasional annoyance. People did not feel completely isolated from outside sound but they were, from time to time, made aware of their neighbourhood’s daily lives going on.

In all the examples of this middle level of ‘tolerable noise’, residents actively cooperated to make sure that they disturbed the privacy of their neighbours as little as possible. They consciously moderated their own noise levels and would ask their neighbours to let them know immediately if they were making too much noise. Communications in these neighbourhoods were good and it was understood no offence would be taken.

In fact, this slight leakage of sound had some benefits for certain households: some people, especially those living on their own felt comforted to hear some evidence of life going on next door. It was seen as a form of security: if there were an accident or a break in, help could be summoned by banging on the wall.

Sometimes this system of mutual support and cooperation broke down. Certain dysfunctional households would not stick to the rules and did not care about infringing their neighbours’ privacy; there were reports of loud music playing at antisocial hours, sounds from arguments and fights and from children out of control. When there were problems with households such as these, the sound insulation was not adequate to preserve privacy. These occurrences were rare, but the only solution had been for the offending household to move out.
2.3.4 Peace and quiet

One star development emerged in terms of sound insulation. The Moat Housing Association development of terraced housing and live/work units at Greenwich Millennium Village was praised for its excellent sound insulation. Noise transfer from neighbouring houses was described as ‘virtually non existent’. Everyone was extremely satisfied with the peace and quiet of their surroundings. Not even a child’s persistent tantrums were enough to disrupt the privacy of the people next door.

The reason for this success seems to be a combination of effectively insulated walls and the design of the properties. Main living areas such as bedrooms and lounges did not abut directly on to the party walls; less sound sensitive spaces such as hallways and kitchens were used as barriers.

2.3.5 Two other buildings were given high marks for the quality of their sound proofing: the Edwardian Mansion block in Battersea and the Lancashire terraced houses built in the same era. In both, residents spoke favourably about the solid construction of their walls and the fact that they were not aware of a great deal of sound from neighbours. They did not, however, give the same degree of praise as the Greenwich Millennium Village residents.

2.4 Space inside the home

2.4.1 A privacy problem for families

Insufficiency of living space was a problem for families in some of the cheaper, private sector housing and some social housing. They tended to be the largest households but were housed in the most cramped accommodation. Particularly severe problems were encountered in the two storey terraced social housing in Poundbury and Hulme and the semi detached houses at Cheam.

There were three major problems: first, the rooms simply were not big enough, second, there was not enough separation of adult from child space and third, there was not enough storage. In all the properties above, the rooms were simply too small for the families to live comfortably. The living spaces: the kitchens, the bedrooms, the bathrooms, and the hallways were all too small. The children’s bedrooms were especially cramped, although children often had to share one room. The rooms were not big enough for the amount of furniture and equipment the households needed; in Poundbury for example, the kitchens did not have enough space for a washing machine.
In households with children it was important that the adults and children could have well demarcated, private space in which to get on with their own activities. The open plan designs of these small houses at Poundbury and Hulme did not give enough privacy to adults from children and vice versa.

The lack of storage space simply compounded these problems. There were not enough cupboards to store the huge amount of paraphernalia that small babies and children need. Adults lacked the space to keep their own possessions private. As a result, the overflow of possessions was often stored in the garage, even if it meant ousting the car.

The owner occupiers in Cheam had the flexibility to solve some of these problems by extending their homes outwards and upwards; the semi detached structure and large gardens made it possible to do this. There was, however, little scope for expansion in the higher density neighbourhoods of Hulme and Poundbury.

2.4.2 The advantages of vertical separation

The town house construction, with living space on several floors, achieved high approval ratings. Each level offered a separate, private zone for different members of the household and for different pursuits: they could be “granny flats”, children’s play areas, home offices or quiet relaxation areas. This structure also gave great flexibility to change how the rooms were used over time in order to meet the changing needs of the household.

The multiplicity of stairs was not seen as a problem by most residents, but rather as an opportunity to keep fit.

2.4.3 Space and light

There was an almost universal demand for spacious, light and airy rooms. In practice, however, there often had to be a trade off between aesthetics and practical consideration for the less well off households. Walls were knocked down, for example, between the dining room and lounge to make a bigger living space; this, however, entailed some loss of separate, private space.

The impression of light, airy space was also enhanced by high ceilings and large windows, and bay windows in particular. Again there were some practical downsides: rooms were more expensive to decorate and curtain and it was more difficult to change light bulbs. The poorest family households in our research were clear that practical considerations should be given priority. The rooms should have enough storage and be big enough for their furniture; they should be affordable and easy to maintain.
Once these minimum standards had been met, there was the opportunity to create life enhancing, enjoyable living space. The properties at Greenwich Millennium Village and the early 20th century terraces in Lancashire were examples of good use of space at the cheaper end of the market; the Edwardian Mansion flats, the Regency terraces at Clifton and the three storey town houses at Poundbury were excellent in the upper price range.

2.5 Looking out and looking in

2.5.1 In most of the neighbourhoods we researched there were no privacy problems caused by outsiders looking into the homes. There were, however, quite major privacy issues in two developments, those at Greenwich Millennium Village and Poundbury.

2.5.2 In Greenwich, there was what one respondent described as the “Goldfish Bowl effect” of living in houses with large, floor to ceiling windows which were overlooked from both sides. They were exposed to the gaze of their immediate community from the courtyard at the back and to the stares of strangers at the front. Most residents had put up blinds or net curtains to protect their privacy. At the front of their houses they kept them closed most of the time. The problems were accentuated because the houses faced directly onto the street with no garden space or fencing to act as a barrier. Residents found the fact that their bedrooms and bathrooms were overlooked particularly problematic.

2.5.3 In Poundbury the problems were not so acute because the windows were smaller. There was, however, the same combination of narrow streets and houses fronting directly onto them with their second level at the same level as the street. Some of the small terraced housing was so close to its opposite neighbour that occupants felt quite claustrophobic. They could be overlooked and even overheard, if their front windows were open, by the people across the road.

2.5.4 All the other types of housing that we looked at had better protection against being overlooked inside their homes. This protection took different forms:

- main living space on the first floor
- wider, clearly defined front gardens
- living space at different levels from the street e.g. basement/raised ground floor level
- front fencing and walls and wider roads
- quiet cul-de-sac and gated communities with few passers by.
2.5.5 A number of the new build properties did have privacy problems in bathrooms. This was because builders had installed clear glass rather than a harder to see through, opaque variety. Residents believed this was probably an economy measure rather than an oversight.

2.5.6 Overlooking less private space

The mansion flats in our sample had an internal courtyard within each block which served as a large stairwell to bring extra light into the flats. Windows faced one another across the courtyard but there were no privacy problems. This is because they were, in the main, kitchen windows where privacy was not of primary concern; also the neighbours were on friendly terms and unembarrassed to acknowledge one another.

There was also not a privacy issue with the ground floor work space in the live/work units at Greenwich. People did not mind being observed when they were working at their computers. Again, this kind of activity did not actually need a totally private environment.

2.6 Private Outdoor Space

2.6.1 High priority

Virtually everyone we spoke to put a high priority on having a small place in the sun even if it was only their own back yard or balcony. The space might be only a few metres square but it gave residents the chance to relax outdoors in privacy, to read a book, do a spot of gardening or have a barbeque. This private outdoor space was seen as vital in making high density living acceptable for a wide cross-section of different households.

2.6.2 High protection

Most of our sample wanted their private garden, patio or yard to be fully screened by high fencing or walls so that outsiders could not easily see in. They had often replaced or fortified existing barriers to ensure they were at least head height. Bushes and trees were also planted to give extra privacy.

2.6.3 Balconies

These principles of high protection also applied to balconies. They were most useful when they afforded a degree of privacy to the householders. Screening might be provided by walls, railings, canopies or strategically placed pot plants and shrubs. Balconies were also valued when they were
large enough to be used for relaxing outdoors and when they had a pleasant, sunny aspect.

2.6.4 Neighbourly contact

There was a minority of people, mainly located in the North, who did not want their garden or patio to be such a fortress. They liked the opportunity to chat across the garden fence and to be aware when their neighbours were in. They preferred to have a more open design of screening, using spaced wooden slats or trellising. Their territory was clearly marked but they felt in close contact with their neighbours.

2.6.5 Front gardens

Gardens at the front of the house were less private than those at the back, but nonetheless performed a useful role. They provided a buffer zone to protect the privacy of people inside the house. They also encouraged sociability on the street as passers by stopped to chat to people tending their gardens. Some people at Poundbury had found the streets rather sterile because they lacked this focus for neighbourly contact.

2.7 Communal Outdoor Space

2.7.1 Vitally important but many pitfalls

The previous section has made the point that having access to private outdoor space was highly valued by residents in the communities we researched. However higher density living necessitates some sacrifices of private outdoor space: some form of communal garden is often provided to compensate for necessary strictures on private garden space.

2.7.2 Successful examples

The garden square in our first case history on the Clifton terraces was successful. It was well used by the whole range of residents, both adults and children. It was well managed by a residents’ committee and used for both private events and public celebrations. The secret of its success was its situation in front of the terraces; it did not encroach upon the private space of the houses; it was sufficiently distanced by a quiet road that it did not disturb privacy at the front either. It was shielded by a hedge and trees so it felt private by those who used it. The square was a pleasant green space for adults but also not so precious as to exclude children’s ball games.
The village square at Wynyard (case history number 6) shared many of these features but in a lower density context. The space was well used by children and adults and it served as a focus for community activities. It was sufficiently distanced from the houses not to disturb their privacy. The square was in front of the houses and therefore more in the public, than the private, domain. It was sufficiently distanced from the houses by a quiet road, not to disturb their privacy. The square was regarded as a suitable, safe place for children to play because it was large and overlooked by houses and shops; also access to the development was restricted because it was an enclosed community with monitored access.

The Edwardian block of mansion flats in Battersea (case history number 3) was also very successful in its provision of communal outdoor space. The enclosed courtyards in the blocks were used for occasional celebrations by the residents of the surrounding flats, for example a summer drinks party or a fireworks display. Some residents nurtured small areas of garden within the courtyard; children were allowed to play there provided they kept to the strict rules about litter and noise levels imposed by the efficient and somewhat formidable resident porters. Potential sources of tension were well managed through an effective residents’ association. Communications were good and there was a strong sense of the need for mutual tolerance as they lived in such a close community.

However, the really significant factor in why this enclosed space was so successful was the wonderful presence of Battersea Park just across the road from the flats. This was virtually a large, private garden square where children could happily escape to and let off steam without disturbing their neighbours. It was a necessary safety valve to preserve peaceful harmony within the block.

The residents of the riverside town houses at Friars Quay (case history number 5) were also very happy with their communal space. This took the form of communal grassed courtyards below the rows of houses. No problems arose in the use of this space because they were largely a community of mature single people and couples; they were a cohesive group with shared values who were pleased there were no unruly younger people or children to shatter their peace.

The residents also had the advantage of plenty of public outdoor space to make up for the high density environment: river views and walks and a jetty for the annual barbeque.

2.7.3 Less successful examples

The communal spaces at the Old Hospital Conversion in Newcastle, Greenwich Millennium Village and Hulme were much less successful. There were several factors at work in this lack of success. First there was a
disparate mix of people living within these developments especially in terms of household composition: families with children, young adults and older people. These different groups had very different ideas of how the spaces should be used.

The major divide was between the families who saw the communal spaces as safe play zones for their children where activities such as skateboarding and enjoying bouncy castles should be allowed. The more mature singles and couples without children, on the other hand, wanted ‘quiet adult space’ where they would relax, perhaps sipping wine, reading their newspaper or quietly chatting. The young adults favoured noisier partying.

In these examples the residents’ associations had sometimes been unable to broker agreements that met with the approval of all the residents. Major disputes arose over what were seen as breaches of privacy from some groups and as restrictions of freedom by others.

In these examples there were also common design features. In each case the communal space was positioned at the back of the properties and enclosed by them. It was very much in the zone of private space at the back, as opposed to public, street facing space at the front. The communal space was close to the houses and any lively activity there risked infringing the privacy of the residents. There was also a lack of what was perceived as safe public open space close by for recreation. These were the three most recent developments from our case histories and they followed the current fashion of perimeter blocks.

2.7.4 Lack of provision for children

A key element in the success of communal space is whether proper provision is made for children to play. In the absence of large private gardens, they need a safe outdoor space. There is a risk that too many modern developments will not be seen as family friendly. The theory may be that children should play in the streets. We found that most parents are unwilling to countenance this because the streets were cluttered with cars and often invaded by heavy commercial vehicles. They were also not willing to let children go off unaccompanied to public parks some distance away because of the perceived risks to their safety.

Poundbury is an example where some families felt their children were deprived of proper play areas: the private gardens were felt to be too small for children to play without disturbing the privacy of neighbours; the streets were considered unsafe. The public squares were cluttered with parked cars rather than being a focus for community life. At the time of the research, requests by residents for a new playground to be provided had not been met.
2.8 Privacy and Security

2.8.1 A core privacy issue

It became clear when we were undertaking the fieldwork for this project that the safety and security of people within their homes is a core privacy issue. This idea was crystallised when one mansion block resident described how a man crashed through her bedroom window in the dead of night, fleeing from a knife wielding assassin. Breakins to people’s homes mean an invasion of their physical and emotional space.

2.8.2 Security as a motivation to buy

Security was also an important motivation to choose to live in two of the developments featured in our case histories. There were the enclosed compounds of Wynyard near Sedgefield and the Old Hospital Conversion in Newcastle. Both had secure perimeter boundaries, controlled entrances and a panoply of other devices to protect residents.

2.8.3 Home security measures

Our study shows that most residents across the whole range of our case histories felt very safe in their houses, even when they lived in a high crime area. The latter group had, in the main, been proactive in protecting their homes with devices such as strong locks, security lighting, and alarms. Many were part of vigilant Neighbourhood Watch schemes.

Our mansion flat dwellers in Battersea were very conscious of high levels of violent street crime in the immediate area and frequent attempted incursions on their properties. All, however, felt very safe in their homes because they had the protection of their resident porters. The latter kept a watchful eye on the properties and reported suspicious incidents to the police and were regarded with wary respect by local miscreants.

There were some aspects of higher density living that were seen as advantageous to security. The closeness of living in terraced housing made it easier to summon help in an emergency, particularly as the degree of sound insulation often was poor. The fact that properties overlooked one another to a degree, and were often grouped around courtyards or squares made it easier to spot intruders.

2.8.4 Home security and urban regeneration

The regeneration and restoration of some, previously run down, urban areas has resulted in some communities feeling somewhat vulnerable.
They saw themselves as enclaves of relative prosperity bordering directly on areas of social deprivation and, as such, prime targets for crime.

This was a particular issue in Hulme. The residents who had known the old Hulme saw the regeneration as a huge improvement and felt very safe in their homes. The people we interviewed from the new intake of younger tenants and new owner occupiers were less sanguine. They were aware of violent crime within their immediate neighbourhood and felt unsafe in the area. They wanted to see much stronger security built into their homes and neighbourhood to protect their possessions and their personal safety. They reported that many owner occupiers were moving out of the area because of security concerns. They felt more needed to be done to protect the privacy and security of their homes.

On a more optimistic note, the Greenwich residents felt that their houses had been well secured against intruders and that the degree to which the houses overlooked one another, although a privacy problem, did help protect their safety and the security of their homes. They were aware the area beyond the redevelopment was dark and potentially dangerous. They did not want to live in a gated enclave but did appreciate the measures that had been taken.

2.9 Privacy and Community

2.9.1 The importance of good community cooperation

We asserted at the beginning of this summary that, in higher density living, a degree of community organisation and agreement on core, shared values is crucial in ensuring individual household privacy. Our research has confirmed the importance of having a strong spirit of community responsibility on a range of privacy issues.

In the most successful developments, people were very aware of the needs of their neighbours and adjusted their behaviour accordingly. This might involve for example:

- being considerate about keeping the noise levels in their household at a reasonable level
- being able to tell neighbours if they disturbed you without causing offence
- keeping a wary eye open for interlopers to protect the security of the neighbourhood
• coming to agreements on how communal space should be used and keeping to them
• working together to resolve conflicts of interest
• cooperating to ensure the development was kept in good order and to resist external threats to privacy and security

2.9.2 In the neighbourhoods where people came from similar backgrounds or were at the same stage of life, cooperation and agreement were relatively easy. The prosperous residents of the London mansion flats and the working class families in the old northern terraces each formed very cohesive communities with their own set of shared values about behaviour and priorities.

In recent developments there is a more diverse population within the immediate living environment, and more has to be done to establish the degree of cooperation required. We found that there were some major divisions about, for example, where children should be allowed to play and what levels of noise should be tolerated. We found there were serious rifts over such matters in Poundbury, the Old Hospital Conversion in Newcastle and at Hulme. There were also strong differences of opinion at Greenwich, but there the community spirit was strong and there was optimism that solutions would be found.
3. Research Implications and Recommendation

3.1 Privacy and Sound Transmission

3.1.1 The most common infringement of privacy was horizontal sound transmission through party walls. In the worst examples, residents believed their conversations and other relatively quiet sounds could be overheard, and they were also disturbed by noise from neighbours.

We are aware that building regulations recently have been updated to achieve higher sound insulation standards. This will raise standards of sound insulation between dwellings and improve enforcement. It will also set standards on sound insulation between the rooms within a dwelling for the first time.

We found, however, variations in the levels of sound transmissions that people actually experienced under the existing regulations. The advice we have received is that these differences may be accounted for by faulty construction, for example, leaving gaps so that there is air transmission of sound.

**Recommendation 1**

Government should continue to improve sound insulation measures for new developments, in particular in the bedroom and living room areas.

In order to check whether construction faults are undermining sound transmission standards, Government should encourage site testing of sound insulation within a dwelling house.

**Recommendation 2**

Consideration should be given to including a Certificate of Conformity to sound insulation standards in the House Sellers Pack.

**Recommendation 3**

Carefully planned design also helps to reduce privacy problems caused by sound transmission. When living rooms and bedrooms are shielded from the party wall by less sound sensitive spaces such as hallways, kitchens and cupboards, privacy is enhanced.
Architects should take into account the need to protect occupants from sound transmission from adjoining properties when planning the positioning of rooms.

**Recommendation 4**

The Moat Housing Association properties at Greenwich Millennium Village were the most highly rated properties for privacy from sound transmission. We suggest that the construction methods and practices used there and also the plans used for party walls should be advanced as a possible example of Best Practice.

### 3.2 Privacy and Space

#### 3.2.1

The most successful examples of higher density accommodation from our case histories all had plenty of internal space, both in terms of room size and ceiling height. This spaciousness of accommodation was seen as a vital ingredient in the success of the Edwardian mansion flats, the Regency and early 20th century terraces and, more recently, the Greenwich Millennium Village houses.

These were sustainable homes in the sense that they were big enough to accommodate the changing needs of the household over time.

There were however serious privacy problems for families living in some social housing and low cost private housing. These privacy troubles arose both through an absolute lack of space and also because there was not enough separation of space for different adult and child activities.

**Recommendation 5**

Government should investigate a quantifier that allows a trade off between density and volume of space, so that if you were building at higher density there would be more grant available for larger apartments and houses. This would encourage both higher volume of build and larger homes.

**Recommendation 6**

Accommodation designated for families should meet specific standards and guidelines for design.

a) The space standards for social housing provided for families should be increased throughout. The following examples are indicative of how the increased space could be used

- minor bedrooms, enlarged to allow space for a desk and chair for study/hobbies
• larger eating areas provided so that all the family can be accommodated comfortably around the table

• extend houses to the rear to gain extra space or raise them to three storeys rather than two.

b) Provide greater separation of child and adult living space, again as indicative examples:

• a designated “family room” for children to play in

• additional bathroom/toilet for children

c) Provide more storage space, for example:

• more kitchen cupboard space

• more household storage space e.g. broom cupboard under the stairs

• built in wardrobes

• boarded loft space

• secure garden shed or storage area in garage for outdoor toys, bikes, tools etc

• basements/cellars for storage

d) In small homes make best used of available space by ensuring all corners are at true right angles; this will help residents to put their furniture into tight spaces.

3.2.2 The vertical separation of space provided by homes built on three or more storeys also provided considerable flexibility for households without children. These benefits are, however, not widely appreciated by members of the public who live in low rise accommodation.

Recommendation 7

Encourage house builders to promote the benefits of town house style living in their publicity material and show homes. These benefits are often not well understood by potential purchasers and as a result the properties are not as popular as perhaps they should be.

• show examples of live/work units, with the work section on the public, ground floor level

• show use of ground floor or basement area as a separate, self contained flat for a relative or lodger
• explain the benefits of these houses as “lifetime” homes where the use of space can be easily altered over time as the household’s needs change

• promote the fitness benefit of stairs: a substitute for an exercise bike!

3.2.3 We appreciate that any move to encourage the building of town houses may require a review of current regulatory strictures on buildings above two stories. Clearly however, the advantages of vertical separation must not be achieved at the expense of standards of fire safety or wheelchair access. The design of town houses must also be particularly careful to avoid privacy problems through overlooking.

3.3 Privacy from being overlooked

3.3.1 In most of our case histories, being overlooked from the street or from neighbours at the rear was not a problem. In two of the recent developments surveyed, however there were some serious infringements of privacy. These resulted from particular deployments of ceiling to floor length windows, houses directly facing across narrow streets and bathrooms with clear glass windows.

Recommendation 8

Introduce guidelines about measures which can increase residents’ privacy from being overlooked inside their homes. The following are examples of steps that could be taken.

• for properties at the same level as the street, provide a buffer zone of a small set back, clearly demarcated by fencing, wall or railings of proportionate height. This set back can be as little as one or two metres deep and still give residents a feeling of privacy

• an additional benefit of providing this small front garden space is that it encourages sociability and a sense of neighbourhood identity as passers by stop and chat to people tending their gardens.

• when road widths are narrow, protect privacy by staggering the alignment of opposite windows, so that front windows do not directly overlook one another.

• position less private rooms such as kitchens, home offices and formal reception rooms at street level and more private space (main living areas, bedrooms) at the rear or above street level; however there is a need to safeguard against completely dead ground floor
frontages, dominated by garages or utility rooms which would reduce street surveillance

- alternatively, privacy for homes which front directly on to the street can be achieved with a change in level; basements and raised ground floors help protect residents from the direct gaze of passers by. The matter of wheelchair access would have to be addressed if this option is to be used

- avoid the “Goldfish bowl effect” by giving careful consideration to the privacy needs of residents when specifying floor to ceiling length windows. At street level these work well for home/work space, but other domestic uses require greater screening. We suggest the increase of sill heights and use of opaque or shaded glass at the bottom of windows to preserve privacy

3.3.2 The only occasions we have found when it would be possible to have windows facing more closely together than at present is when they belong to less private areas of the home, such as kitchens, workspace/studies or corridors. The provision of sills to waist height would help to protect privacy. If changes are to be made to regulations about the distance between windows facing, standards of fire safety must be maintained.

3.4 Private Outdoor Space

Having access to some private outdoor space was greatly valued by virtually everyone in our study; they wanted some access to the great outdoors where they could relax in privacy.

**Recommendation 9**

Aim to provide every higher density household with their own private outdoor space:

- the space can take a variety of forms, for example a back garden, yard or patio, a terrace, balcony or roof garden. It must, however, offer good privacy

- privacy can be achieved through effective screening; for ground level spaces they can be walls, fences, foliage or suitable landscaping to at least head height; for balconies and terraces screening can be achieved by canopies, waist height walls or railings, further protected by pot plants or shrubs

- aspect is important for all private outdoor spaces and for balconies in particular; the design should give good access to sunlight and
protection from noise and traffic fumes from the public realm beyond

- private outdoor space in higher density accommodation does not have to be large; just a few square metres will suffice provided the needs of privacy and light and a pleasant aspect have been met

3.5 Communal Outdoor Space

3.5.1 In higher density accommodation the provision of some outdoor space shared by the immediate neighbourhood is an important compensation for the necessary strictures on private outdoor space. A combination of skilful design and good management are necessary to ensure that the space meets the needs of different households and that harmony prevails.

Recommendation 10

The communal outdoor space should be designed so that it offers an amenity for all those sharing it without disrupting the privacy of residents in their homes. It should give scope for adults to enjoy quiet relaxation and for children to play games without causing annoyance to others. We suggest the following guidelines:

- the classic ‘garden square’ as seen in Chelsea and South Kensington and as exemplified in our Clifton case history provides an excellent model for preserving privacy and amenity
  - positioning the communal area in the front of the properties makes it more in the public realm than in the private space at the rear
  - a quiet road, used only for access, intervenes to create more distance from the communal space
  - planting trees and hedges around square gives some sense of privacy, but the square is still overlooked by houses for safety
  - putting in a clearly demarcated entrance that is gated, but not necessarily locked keeps the communal space for the exclusive use of that neighbourhood
- We found the perimeter block model of communal space, positioned at the back of properties created more problems of
privacy. Good screening is required to ensure that privacy and harmony are maintained

- the space should be sufficiently large so that there is room both for quiet adult space and for children to romp

- excellent screening should be provided between the private outdoor space at the rear of the properties and the communal space beyond; this can take the form of railings, fencing or raised landscaping plus trees and bushes to deflect sound and offer privacy from being overlooked

**Recommendation 11**

Neighbourhood sub committees of wider residents’ associations should be set up to monitor how the space is used; they should ensure that the interests of those with and without children are fairly met; they should communicate clearly about any planned communal or private special events to be held in the space.

### 3.6 Privacy and Security

**3.6.1** Consideration should be given to upgrading the security measures taken for affordable housing in both the private and social sectors. This is particularly important in inner city regeneration areas where residents can often feel at risk from crime from adjacent areas of deprivation. Housing is already designed to ensure that properties overlook one another in order to provide natural surveillance, but more is required to give occupants the confidence that their privacy will not be disrupted by break-ins.

**Recommendation 12**

Protect affordable homes with a better range of security measures. These should not be of the type to create a ‘fortress Britain’ style of housing, but simply sufficient to provide basic protection. These could include:

- extra strong windows and door locks
- reinforced doors including patio doors
- burglar alarms
- security lighting
• We suggest that gravel paths should not be employed as a security measure. Residents find them messy and difficult to negotiate for prams and wheelchairs

• For developments of flats resident porters should be considered to help preserve safety and security.

Developers should also seek to ensure that the design and layout of residential developments serve to design out, not design in, crime.

**Recommendation 13**

Careful consideration should be given before boundaried developments install electronic security gates. Unless they are operated by a guard they are often unreliable and difficult to operate. A defined, overlooked entrance way can be sufficient.

**Recommendation 14**

Consideration should also be exercised before planning access alleyways behind houses. They provide easy escape routes for troublemakers and residents often feel nervous about using them at night. Even in low crime areas they are a risk factor. If they are felt to be essential, they should be gated and have good surveillance from nearby housing.

### 3.6 Privacy and Community

High density housing is at its most successful when the privacy of residents is supported by a strong community spirit.

This can be encouraged by consulting prospective residents about the design of, and the facilities on, the development. Once the development is occupied it can be further encouraged by involving residents in how their immediate neighbourhood is run.

In terms of Sherry Arnstein’s concept of a ladder of participation, the involvement of prospective residents would be at level 4, (consultation). The setting up of neighbourhood off shoots of residents’ associations would be at level 6 on the ladder, (partnership).
**Recommendation 15**

Consult with future residents before finalising plans for housing developments. This consultation can help to give the new development a desirable specific identity. Support the setting up of residents’ associations with neighbourhood off shoots that help regulate the use of communal space.
Section II  Case Histories

1. Regency Terraces, Clifton, Bristol
2. Early 20th Century Terraces, Royton, Lancashire

3. Edwardian Mansion Block, Battersea, London
4. 1930s Suburban Semi-Detached, Cheam, Surrey

5. 1970s Riverside Town Houses, Friars Quay, Norwich
6. Out of Town Consortium, Nr. Sedgefield, Durham

7. Poundbury Urban Extension, Dorchester, Dorset
8. Old Hospital Conversion, Jesmond, Newcastle

9. Hulme Regeneration, Manchester
Case History Number 1
Regency Terraces: Clifton, Bristol

Houses overlooking Canynge Square

Garden Square at Clifton
Clifton, Bristol

- Highly rated accommodation, with great privacy for families with children, home workers and retired couples

- Vertical separation provided plenty of private space and great flexibility to shift room usage

- Sound insulation was generally very effective, except for one row of terraces where construction standards were much shoddier causing particular privacy issues

- Residents not overlooked in their homes even though they fronted directly on to the pavement because of change of level between the houses and the street

- Back gardens were very small but private because they were protected by very high walls

- Very successful garden square at the front of the houses served as a good supplement to the private gardens and as a focus for community life

- High density design of terraces overlooking a central square made it easier to spot potential trouble makers and provided residents with a sense of security within their home
1. Background to the Findings

1.1 The properties

The properties were built in the early to mid part of the nineteenth century in Clifton, an exclusive enclave, often known simply as ‘The Village’. They are sited close to a range of amenities: local shops, schools and public transport. The Clifton suspension bridge is nearby and there are many popular restaurants and bars which attract lots of visitors.

The houses have a basement and three or four further storeys; they front directly onto the street but many have access to communal garden squares. Their average density is 37 dwellings per hectare.

1.2 The people

The residents that we interviewed were mainly owner occupiers although a couple rented privately. They were, in the main, from professional backgrounds, including a university lecturer, a surveyor, an osteopath and a psychotherapist. The majority had lived in their homes for many years and their children had already moved out or would do soon. There were, however, some newcomers with young children.

1.3 Satisfaction with their homes

All the people we spoke to were enthusiastic about their homes. They liked them for their attractive exteriors, their connection with the past and their spacious, well proportioned interiors. They were seen as very suitable for raising children. Their immediate environment was very peaceful but close to a good range of village amenities, schools and good walks.

“They have a sense of history here.”

“I’ve always lived in Georgian houses.”

“They are essentially uncluttered, plenty of room, plenty of space.”
2. Privacy within the Home

We found no major privacy problems for residents of these historic terraces. The arrangement of space was highly satisfactory for different types of household; they were not overlooked and in the main, noise was not a problem. Although the design of the houses worked well, the strong sense of community amongst residents also contributed greatly to the success of this neighbourhood.

2.1 Spacious accommodation

2.1.1 There was no feeling of being overcrowded in these properties, even for larger families. The rooms were large, light and airy and there were plenty of them. Even in the households where the children had left home people appreciated the luxury of having ample space in which to live, and perhaps to work as well.

“I love the space, it’s wonderful and the light is fantastic. There’s something about the proportions, they get into the spirit after a while and it’s just lovely. It’s a lovely place to live and work.”

“It had to be spacious; we can’t stand being crammed into miserable, small spaces. We’ve got used to this and really we can’t live in anything smaller.”

Several of the properties were at very low levels of occupancy. Some couples had stayed on after the children had grown up because they loved the houses so much and they could afford to stay there. Although they were seen as ideal family houses, they were often occupied for the most part by just two people.

“I’ve got a house of five floors with effectively six bedrooms and there are two people who live here and I do feel guilty about that. If you were trying to find a model then possibly this wouldn’t be the model for the most economical use of resources.”

2.1.2 The tall, four or five storey structures were also rated highly for the degree of privacy they provided for different members of the household and for different household functions, for example:
• Children and parents could occupy separate floors

• Self-contained flats could be created for tenants or members of the extended family

• A floor could be used as an office

• There would be dedicated floors for storage, for example loft space or the basement area

“We like the fact that it’s on four floors because people can spread out. We’ve got four children and we can lose them in the basement playroom; they just go down there and you don’t hear the noise or anything.”

“We made the basement into a ‘granny flat’ for my mother”

“I work from home so I use the house as an office.”

2.1.3 The vertical separation of large rooms provided, not just privacy, but also offered great flexibility to change the way the house was used over time. The houses were described as “extremely flexible envelopes”, where a bedroom could easily be transformed into a luxury bathroom, a dining room or a study.

“You don’t have to make huge structural changes, all you’ve got to do is change the use of the room. It probably involves pipe work and a bit of cash!”

Everyone we spoke to had made significant changes to their homes. Some had upgraded their properties from a run down state; others had knocked down internal walls to make rooms lighter and more airy or had changed the use of rooms. In all cases the changes had been made to enhance and personalise the space rather than to increase the amount of room available.

2.1.4 Our respondents were aware that visitors to their homes found the number of stairs connecting the various floors somewhat daunting. For them, however, the stairs had soon become an accepted part of life.
They were seen as having the advantage of helping them keep fit, particularly once they were past the first flush of youth.

“Certainly the doctor said you don’t want to move out to a flat, the stairs are extremely good for you!”

They did recognise that the stairs were not ideal for everyone: those with tiny children had to install stairgates and older people with infirmities would find them too much of a challenge.

2.2 Not overlooked

2.2.1 Although the houses front directly on to the pavement, no one experienced any invasion of privacy through people looking in. This was mainly because of the change of level between the houses and the street: the ground floor entrance and windows are raised up above eye level and the basements are below. In neither case was it easy for people to look in.

Passers by are not able to observer residents in their private space

2.2.2 The residents of one neighbourhood which fronted on to a garden square felt they had particular privacy from prying eyes. Their houses were effectively in a cul-de-sac and few people, apart from their immediate neighbours, needed to go past. They were also on good terms with their neighbours and would acknowledge one another in friendly fashion, but they would refrain from staring.
2.3 Tolerable noise levels

2.3.1 The houses were very well insulated for vertical transference of sound. Members of the same household were rarely disturbed by sound from the floors above and below. There would, in fact, sometimes be problems in getting people on other floors to respond when they were called.

“That is a real disadvantage when you’re shouting to the teenage daughter to come down and answer the bloody phone or come for a meal or get in the car to go to school.”

“The sound doesn’t travel downwards as much as it travels out it seems. When our daughter was at the height of her noise production – sixteen through to eighteen - she was at the top of the house and we were at the bottom and so couldn’t hear her at all.”

2.3.2 Horizontal noise transference was, however, more noticeable. People reported hearing some sounds from their next door neighbours occasionally: music playing, children squealing, or the murmur of conversation. These sounds were well tolerated as the inevitable consequence of living in close proximity to others. Some even enjoyed being aware of life going on around them.

“We get a certain amount of really nice music through the walls.”

“You don’t ever feel lonely in these big houses because you can always hear dogs, or pianos being played or people talking. If you put your ear to the wall, you can actually hear every word that’s said.”
The latter quotation comes from a resident in a run of houses that were much less soundly constructed than the majority of our sample who lived around the square. Although these particular houses look very fine to modern eyes, residents believed that they had originally been built as holiday homes for the well to do of the nineteenth century who came to visit the Clifton Gorge. They were believed to have been built very cheaply from lathe and plaster with rubble infill, and sound was easily heard from the next door house.

Even here, people were not unduly worried about the level of sound; they made efforts to moderate their own sound levels in order not to offend their neighbours. However, if some neighbours did not keep to this accepted mode of conduct, the results could be unpleasant; fortunately this had rarely happened.

“They were intrusive really...they had these parties that were noisy...they were a troubled family and they could invade your life.”

2.3.3 In the summer particularly, residents were sometimes aware of noise coming from parties in the square or from weekend visitors to the sights of Clifton. This was seen as a minor annoyance rather than as a major invasion of their privacy. They accepted this slight degree of disturbance as a price worth paying for living in such an attractive and convenient location.

“You don’t go and live in a square like this if you don’t view some noise as a good thing. Some people think living this close, because everyone does know each other, is a bad thing, but to me it’s a good thing.”

3. Privacy Outside the House

3.1 Private gardens

Most of the properties had very small private back gardens. Although they were tiny, typically something like 12 x 14 feet, they were greatly valued. They were seen as extremely private in spite of the towering edifices surrounding them, because they were each enclosed by walls ten to twelve feet high. Residents felt confident they were not overlooked.
“Without exaggeration you can lie out there stark naked and be seen by nobody. It’s remarkable because we’re talking here about high density urban living.”

As with inside the houses, some sounds could be heard in the gardens, but they troubled nobody.

“I wouldn’t say it was a really big annoyance. It comes with urban living.”

3.2 Balconies

Residents also valued their balconies which gave them an additional private outdoor seating area. They were large enough to be useful and well placed to sunbathe and admire the view.

“We’ve got balconies that we use all the time, just to lay in the sun or just sit out. We’re got lovely views.”

4. Privacy and Communal Outdoor Space

4.1 A successful garden square

4.1.1 Many of the Clifton tenants had access to a communal square like the one we researched. The latter was seen as a very successful, much used space. People had willingly accepted a very small amount of private garden in exchange for this square. It was not an anonymous public space but rather a very private space that was shared by a particular neighbourhood community.

4.1.2 The elements that contributed to this aura of privacy were as follows:

- The square was not locked, but it was understood that is was for the use of the immediate properties that overlooked it; others went there by invitation only.

- It was separated from the public domain by railings and substantial hedges and trees. People felt relaxed about going there because they did not feel they were overlooked.
“It’s like a secret garden...you don’t feel self-conscious.”

- It could be used for private gatherings of individual households, and neighbours respected their right to take it over for a particular occasion. If a party might cause some disturbance it was accepted that, as a courtesy, one had to give the other residents prior warning. If this were done then higher noise levels would be accepted.

“If you knew in advance, you’d sort of think ‘oh it’s that, OK!’”

Views of Canygne Square

4.1.3 The square was very popular with the neighbourhood children; they could play in a space much bigger than a typical garden. They played ball games and met their friends there. There was no play ground apparatus, just greenery, but the children nevertheless seemed very content.

“When my children were younger this square was very attractive to small children, because you had this central garden which was a natural sort of play area.”

“It’s ideal for teenagers . . . we’ve got teenagers in the family and in the square there are the teenage families and they’ve grown up together.”
4.2 Fostering a sense of community

4.2.1 Having access to this shared space helped foster a sense of community. A garden committee organised social events and oversaw the maintenance of the gardens. The residents enjoyed attending social gatherings and getting to know one another.

“It’s a lovely community. It’s brilliant. People walk here and they chat and everybody knows each other.”

“It’s very like a village in a city. It’s got that kind of atmosphere.”

“We have regular functions, a midsummer breakfast, bonfire party, and carol singing at Christmas in the square.”

4.2.2 This social contact helped to build a sense of mutual understanding and tolerance in the community. This helped smooth the way when any difficulties of living in such a densely packed community were encountered.

“We have found the square has got a higher proportion of people who care about others than we would normally notice.”

“This square is fairly well policed, in the sense that people recognise that they’ve living in a community and they have to abide by the community rules.”

5. Privacy and Security

5.1 The residents of these terraces were aware that the security of their property was at risk. There had, in the past, been major problems with burglary and car crime. However, they were now diligent about protecting their houses and their cars; they had, for example, installed devices such as security locks and burglar alarms. They also used the existing strong community links to help maintain their security. People
adopted the “nosy neighbour” approach and were on the alert for potential threats; there was a proactive Neighbourhood Watch.

5.2 The design of the terraces overlooking a central **square**, contributed greatly to their sense of security. It was easy for people to look down on the square and spy strangers; it was effectually a cul-de-sac with no through traffic, where visitors were soon noticed.

“I feel much more secure if I can park my car in the square . . . in the square there are a lot of eyes, a lot of windows.”

“If you were going to do something to a car, you wouldn’t choose to be overlooked by fifty houses.”

5.3 There was strong awareness in the neighbourhood that having outsiders attempt to break into their homes or cars was at the very least a fundamental assault on their personal privacy. Some individuals had confronted potential **wrong doers**, and tackled them directly. They simply were not prepared to put up with this invasion of their space and threat to their possessions.

“My husband’s keen on combating crime and he will tackle people. He took on a drunken criminal who tried to steal next door’s car. He stopped him and the neighbours called the police.”

“I caught a burglar in the basement last summer... We’d rung 999 and done all the right things, but by the time these policemen got here, the bloke had scarpered.”

5.4 As a result of this neighbourhood vigilance, fear of crime had not taken a grip on their community. Everyone still felt entirely safe in their houses, and confident that their privacy was well protected.

“I feel totally safe here, totally safe.”

“We do feel safe in this house and that this bloke we caught was a complete idiot. I quite understand people want to come and steal from people like us, it’s life.”
Case History Number 2
Early 20th Century Terraces: Royton, Lancashire

Rochdale Road terraces

Plan of 560 – 580 Rochdale Road, Royton
Headlines from Early 20th Century Terraces

Royton, Lancashire

- Very good value for money and well located for amenities
- All age groups enjoyed the friendly neighbourhood and tended to stay there long term
- Terraces were deceptively spacious, even with many high density features, they were still suitable for residents with children
- Solidly built houses with few noise issues
- Residents not overlooked: small walled front garden, wide road and enclosed backyards
- Child friendly neighbourhood, children not viewed as a disturbance because they were all well known to the residents
- Unofficial ‘Neighbourhood Watch’ created a sense of security and everyone felt obliged to look out for suspicious behaviour
- Privacy is protected by physical boundaries and by neighbourhood co-operation
1. Background to the Findings

1.1 The properties

The terraced houses that we researched were built in the early nineteen hundreds in Royton, a small town near Rochdale in Lancashire. We had originally planned to go to stereotypical ‘Coronation Street’ style dwellings in the centre of a large urban area like Manchester. We found, however, that these tended to have very transient populations and were especially popular with students. In order to get a view of what they were like for longer term habitation, we chose this terrace in the small town of Royton.

The properties were all owner occupied. They had very small front gardens, a back yard and an alleyway behind; they also had two storeys and two to three bedrooms. They faced onto a busy main road. The housing density was approximately fifty dwellings per hectare.

1.2 The people

We held our focus group discussion with residents of the row of terraces. They ranged in age from couples in their twenties to others approaching retirement. Two families had children living at home, but those of the remainder had grown up and left home. The occupations of respondents were skilled manual and clerical.

2. Overall Satisfaction with their Home

2.1 All the residents were very content with their homes and most had lived there for a considerable period of time. The longest established had been there for forty nine and twenty eight years respectively; the most recent arrival had lived there for five years.

2.2 The desire to buy one of these properties had been based on their location and their price. Royton was seen as a good place to bring up children: there was a well rated school nearby, the area was considered safe and there were open spaces nearby in which children could play and dogs could be exercised. Royton was seen as a relatively peaceful retreat which was easily accessible to the bright lights and bustle of nearby Manchester.
“It’s just nice to come home and you can relax. If you want to find nightlife and buzz, buzz, buzz, you can, it’s not far away. But at the same time you’re far enough away to relax.”

2.3 Everyone agreed that the low purchase price of the properties had been an important factor in their decision to buy. For some it had been their affordable starter home which was also cheap to run and maintain. Price was also a factor in their decision to remain in the properties: the surrounding area was very desirable and it would be difficult to upgrade to a different type of property nearby.

2.4 People had also stayed on in the properties because they liked the friendliness of the neighbourhood. They knew their neighbours well and enjoyed their company.

“Living in a terraced property is friendly. You get to know your neighbours and make friends.”

“I like the community. It’s a nice place to live and bring your kids up….I don’t see me moving to a different house. I just like it.”

3. Privacy inside the Home

3.1 In spite of the proximity to their neighbours in this terraced housing, no one reported any privacy issues of great concern. They had enough space for their families and did not feel overlooked; noise did, however, impinge on their privacy a little.

3.2 Deceptively spacious

3.2.1 Respondents were very satisfied with the amount of space in their homes. The narrow frontages concealed an interior that was unexpectedly roomy. The ceilings were higher than in a typical modern property and the room sizes were judged quite large. Although their properties were terraced, residents felt they compared favourably with the more prestigious, semi-detached housing in terms of internal space.

“They’re a lot more expensive, a semi, but this house is a lot bigger. They’ve bigger rooms, higher ceilings, more airiness and just generally bigger.”
3.2.2 These homes were seen as quite big enough to rear a family without any loss of privacy for parents or children. The three bedroomed properties had proportionately bigger living space than those with two bedrooms. This meant there was ample room for different family members to get on with their lives, and not get in one another’s way. The provision of a separate lounge and dining room allowed parents and children each to have their own space for relaxation, study or play.

The ‘front parlour’ was no longer kept as the traditionally little used space, solely for entertaining visitors.

“I’ve got three children and I’ve got a really big dining room, a big lounge and a massive bedroom.”

3.2.3 The two bedroomed house also suited the needs of couples without children very well. They had ample space but still found the properties economical to run. The properties were easily heated and kept warm.

“For a couple, like we are, this is ideal.”

3.3 Tolerable noise levels

3.3.1 Because terraced housing typically has two party walls with neighbours, sound transfer between houses is potentially a problem. This was not the case with these properties. The residents felt that their properties had been soundly constructed and, as a result, there was little disturbance to their privacy.

“The age of the properties, they’re all double bricks, the walls between each house, so you don’t really hear the next door neighbours.”

3.3.2 Some sounds did penetrate the walls occasionally: the ringing of a telephone or beep of an answering machine. Sometimes children would be overheard, for example, singing along to the radio or turning up the bass too high on their music system. Neighbours were very aware of the need to be considerate to one another because they lived so close together. If their privacy was unduly disturbed, they would let the neighbour know straight away and no offence would be taken.

“Between us, we’ve said, ‘if ever it’s too loud just go and knock on the wall.’…we’re not bothered about people saying anything. You’d rather they said it than let it fester and then they start shouting at you.”
Social controls thus helped to compensate for any deficiencies in the sound proofing of the properties.

3.3.3 Noise and vibration from speeding cars and buses were sometimes a problem. Residents had installed heavy curtains because they believed they would help muffle the sound; they had also become used to the background sounds of traffic passing by. Occasionally, however, their privacy was disturbed.

“It does annoy you when something important comes on telly and a bus goes past and you miss it.”

3.4 Not overlooked

3.4.1 The resident did not feel they were overlooked inside their homes. There were small gardens and a low wall in front of the terraced houses; these acted as a barrier, protecting their privacy. These front gardens were much appreciated and encouraged local sociability: people stopped to chat when they saw neighbours in their gardens.

Small front garden acting as a barrier to the road.

3.4.2 The properties opposite were a sufficient distance away across the main road and low enough not to present privacy problems. Because many people entered and exited their properties by the back door, they saw little of the opposite neighbours.

“They’re not too high….they don’t overshadow us.”

“Once that door is shut, you’re in your own little domain aren’t you, and that’s it.”
4. Privacy Outside the Home

4.1. The houses all had a backyard and some had a small private garden beyond that; the latter had been sold to them by a local farmer when the land he owned had been developed into a housing estate. Those with gardens appreciated them very much; they were quite private as they were protected by high fences.

4.2. The households that had a garden tended to use their backyards simply for storage. Sometimes the former outside toilets and coal houses were now used to store gardening equipment and household appliances.

Those without a garden had made the backyard an area for relaxation, putting in plant pots and garden chairs. These were now known as ‘patios’. They felt the space allowed them to have their privacy or to be sociable according to how they felt. The walls of the backyard protected them from being unduly overlooked and if they wanted to encourage callers, they left open the back gates to the alleyway beyond.

“You’ve got a back gate, so if you want to be private, you just shut your gate and you can sit out in the backyard. In the summer time you usually leave your gate open.”

View of back patios with low dividing walls

5. Privacy and Security

“I feel safe here. I don’t go to bed and worry.”

5.1. Residents were not unduly concerned that their privacy and security could be threatened by break-ins. They all said they felt safe in their homes.
Nevertheless, they were aware that burglaries had taken place in their row of terraced houses, they knew they had to take care to protect their properties.

One resident who was away a great deal had installed security lights at the back and front of his home. Others relied on an unofficial ‘Neighbourhood Watch’ system where everyone felt obliged to look out for any suspicious behaviour.

“If you’re at home, you tend to watch other people’s houses as well.”

“You do tend to notice a strange face.”

5.2 They were aware that the alleyway running at the back of the houses was a potential security risk and they kept a particularly careful eye on people using it.

“I’ve stood out many a time and watched lads going down the back and I’ve stood there, watching, until they’ve gone.”

“I just turn the light on at the back and let them know ‘we can see you.’”

Mostly people felt safe walking in the back alleyway because there were often neighbours walking along there. Some would not, however, risk venturing out there after dark.

5.3 Whatever the risks of the back alleyway, some residents claimed to feel safer living in a terrace than they would in a detached house: They felt the strong community spirit of a long established neighbourhood was a protection. Help was always close at hand; neighbours could be quickly summoned by a call for assistance or a bang on the wall if necessary.
6. Privacy and Community

6.1 It was clear that the strong neighbourhood ties in this terraced housing played an important role in ensuring people’s privacy was not unduly disturbed, and helping to keep their homes and property secure. People knew one another well and were very tolerant of their children playing in the alleyway at the back of the houses; they did not see them as a threat to their peace and quiet.

“They’re not really like gangs of kids, playing at the back. It’s just kids, isn’t it, playing together.”

6.2 Sometimes this emphasis on neighbourhood friendliness could be simply too much of a good thing. It could actually undermine one’s privacy if not properly controlled.

“You’ve got to keep certain people at arm’s length because certain people would never be out of your house, which would drive me up the wall.”

Nevertheless the benefits of being close were felt to outweigh any negatives. It was believed that many modern developments had lost these strong ties of community and mutual obligation: this was a cause for regret.

“I’ll say this much about terraced property: we watch out for one another you know. And also, if there’s bereavement in the row, you show your respects, and you go to that person’s funeral and send sympathy cards. I don’t think you get that in a modern estate. You don’t get that closeness.”
Case History Number 3
Edwardian Mansion Block: Battersea, London

Edwardian Mansion flats overlooking Battersea Park

Plan of York Mansions demonstrating positions of internal courtyards
Headlines from Edwardian Mansion Block

Battersea, London

- Excellent homes, conveniently located near central London and Battersea Park
- Different shapes and sizes of apartments to suit the needs of everyone from young singles, to families, to the retired
- Excellent management by residential porters protected the privacy of the occupants and ensured good community atmosphere. They were essential element in the security of the block which was in a high crime area
- Mansion blocks are the highest density researched but no privacy problems through lack of space: large rooms and high ceilings
- No major problems of vertical or horizontal transfer of sound
- Being overlooked by neighbours across an internal courtyard was not felt to be an invasion of privacy because only less private rooms such as kitchens were on view. There were good community relations and occupants felt at ease with their neighbours
- The block was very child friendly. They were allowed to play in communal areas under the watchful eye of the resident porters. They had access to the super sized “garden square” of Battersea Park immediately across the road
1. Background to the Findings

1.1 The properties

This case history is based on interviews with residents in one of a series of imposing blocks of Edwardian Mansion flats in Prince of Wales Drive, Battersea. This is a high density, five story development of 176 dwellings per hectare. The flats are spacious, with between three and five bedrooms, built round central courtyards. There are porters in residence in each block.

Mansion flats of this type were built just after the turn of the 20th Century, in response to overcrowding in London; the intention was to ease the shortage of suitable housing for the prosperous middle class citizenry. The rumour amongst present day residents was that the Battersea flats had often been used as discreet homes for senior servants and the mistresses of those that lived in the very grand houses just across the river.

1.2 The people

Most of the residents we spoke to owned their flats and were middle aged and from upper middle class backgrounds. One younger respondent rented her one bedroom flat; there was also a mix of households with children and single people.

2. Satisfaction with their homes

2.1 The consensus was that these were excellent homes. Many residents had lived there for a long time and some were serial mansion flat occupiers. The flats on this road had a long established reputation as good places to live.

"The fact that every one has been here so long shows we are really, really, happy here."

2.2 The attraction of the properties was a combination of location and good value for money. The location was within easy reach of the amenities of Chelsea and the West End of London. The position opposite Battersea Park was a particular attraction to families with children. The flats also offered a great deal of space for the capital outlay. Those who had
bought some years earlier before Battersea was perceived as fashionable, felt they had obtained a particular bargain.

“You got the size of a small house for a quarter of the price usually. Tremendous value for money!”

“I grew up in Sloane Square and they’re the nearest I could afford to Sloane Square.”

3. Privacy Inside the Flats

The evidence is that these mansion flats offer great privacy for their occupants in spite of their busy location and high density. They also achieved the demanding feat of being family friendly at the same time.

3.1 Ample space

3.1.1 Residents described their flats as spacious. There were no problems of overcrowding even when there were children in the household. Rooms were generously proportioned; the sense of space was enhanced by high ceilings and large windows which let in plenty of light. The corridors leading to the flats might sometimes be gloomy, but the flats themselves could be impressively light and airy.

“When I turned the corner from the corridor and went to the double reception room. I walked in and the sunshine in it was just fantastic.”

3.1.2 Owners had made changes to their properties but none of these were to increase the amount or sense of space. Changes had been made to modernise and make the layouts more suited to changing lifestyles and more valuable when eventually sold. The main changes were to install an extra bathroom: originally the flats had outside lavatories and hand wash basins only in the bedrooms. Current tastes demand at least two bathrooms to cater for children and visitors. The original kitchens were also judged as too small and some reception room space had often been co-opted to make a larger kitchen/informal dining area.

“At the turn of the century a lot of the bedrooms had a basin in and you only had a bath once a week. There was no need for more than one bathroom.”
3.1.3 The installation of an extra bathroom increased the sense of privacy in the flat, either for adults in relation to their children or residents vis-à-vis guests.

“We needed two bathrooms for a family of four. The children needed their own bathroom.”

The use of long corridors in many of the flats also enhanced the sense of privacy for each of the occupants. Typically the bedrooms were well separated from one another and so were the bathrooms.

“I shared but always felt I had my own space, your own domain. The bedrooms are at opposite ends of the flat. You were never on top of one another. There was always a feeling of space.”

3.2 Peace and quiet

“The walls are far thicker than any modern flat or even a semi-detached or a terraced house where you hear people. They are really well insulated actually.”

These mansion flats emerged as one of the quietest of the properties we researched. Every day sounds rarely penetrated from one flat to the next. Occasionally people reported hearing a neighbour’s dog barking or a child crying in the night. There were some events, such as a summer party when noise was more intrusive. For the most part, however, noise was not an issue.

“Occasionally there may be a party and you can hear the music rebounding in the courtyard in the summer, but it is really, really rare.”

Although the flats were perceived as solidly constructed, residents were still careful to regulate their behaviour so as not to risk disturbing everyone. For example, they were mindful of not playing music too loudly in the evening, especially when there were sleeping children near by. When, rarely, neighbours did not show this consideration for one another, noise could become an issue.

“We haven’t had it badly, but there were those weird people who moved out. They made so much noise it sounded like they were beating each other up.”
3.3 Being overlooked

3.3.1 One potential breach of privacy inside the flats was being overlooked across the internal courtyard. Serried ranks of windows faced one another across each of the four courtyard walls. No one in fact found this a problem. The windows facing one another were mainly those of the kitchens; these were seen as relatively public rooms where it did not matter if you were observed. People felt quite relaxed about seeing one another in this context.

“The woman that lives in that flat there, I’ve never spoken to her in my life. But she is there every day washing up and I’m looking for jobs on the internet and we wave to one another.”
3.3.2 There was a strong sense of neighbourly rapport within each of the mansion blocks. People were comfortable with a degree of exposure of their private lives because they felt they were all part of the same community.

“There are a couple that live above us who stare sometimes but you don’t usually mind as everyone is quite friendly.”

“I think, oh sod it, if they want to look they can!”

4. Privacy and Security

4.1 As we have shown, residents had great privacy in these mansion flats. They were, however, mindful of the risk to their property and to their personal security from invasion by hostile outside elements. They were very aware that although their immediate neighbourhood was very desirable, there was a high incidence of burglary and street crime; car break ins were rife.

“I’ve had numerous break ins to my car. I’ve given up now; I don’t even bother replacing CDs any more. I’m just sick of it.”

“There has been a catalogue of horrible little incidents and everybody has at least one. Car theft –
there was a murder two blocks down last year because they wanted his Audi.”

4.2 Everyone felt anxious about walking alone in the area at night; often they could not find a parking space near to the entrance of the mansion flats late in the evening and this made them feel particularly vulnerable. People took precautions such as walking in the middle of the road so they were in a pool of light from the street lights, talking care not to use mobiles in the street and having their keys ready to make a swift entry into the block.

“I am not too happy or comfortable with it at all.”

“Very often at night you can hear shouts of ‘My handbag! My handbag!’

4.3 There had been occasional breaches of security within the mansion flats themselves; mainly these were opportunistic attempts at break-ins through open windows. There were tales, however, of some dramatic invasions of privacy. One female resident recounted an alarming incident when a man crashed through her bedroom window, in the dead of night, fleeing from a knife wielding would-be assassin.

“I woke up to a car powering into a row of parked cars and then I heard voices in the garden…I had had secondary double glazing and I was just thinking there is no way you’re going to get through that window, when he did. He stood at the bottom of my bed saying, ‘Call the police! Call the police. Someone’s trying to kill me!’”

The matter was resolved safely, but the resident showed considerable sangfroid in the face of real danger. She still had sufficient faith in the mansion block as a place to live that, in response to the incident, she simply moved from her ground floor flat to one on a higher floor.

4.4 In spite of the real dangers to their security in their immediate neighbourhood, residents of the mansion flats said they felt very secure inside their own homes.

“I don’t feel unsafe here.”

The key to their feeling of security was the presence of the two porters, resident in the block. They were totally committed to preserving good
order in their domain. Each had a flat-office in the block and a porter was always on duty. They were well known in the neighbourhood and respected for their physical prowess.

“He always says, if you have any trouble, it doesn’t matter what time of night it is, call me and I’ve got a baseball bat by the bed and I am dying to use it.”

“The word is on the street that they are here.”

Porters ensure that communal areas such as the lift are in good working order

They kept an eye open for possible security breaches, such as open windows and reported any suspicious incidents to the police. They were supported in this by vigilant residents.

“They call me Miss Marple. I am always at the window. I am the perfect Neighbourhood Watch. I phone the police, they know me. I am always on the phone to them!”
5. **Privacy and Shared Space**

5.1 The porters were also a vital element in maintaining the common parts within the block in good order and ensuring that the privacy of residents was maintained. They kept an avuncular gaze on children and adolescents living in the flats and cautioned them if they overstepped the mark.

> “He would shout at me for leaving fag butts in his clean courtyard and playing my music too loudly.”

5.2 In fact the block was seen as very child friendly. Children were allowed to play in the corridors and courtyards and have plenty of fun, provided they did not create too much of a disturbance. There were plenty of families living in the block; it was a huge asset for them to have the delights of Battersea Park just across the road.

> “It is a great place to grow up. Just walking out and having a park there is amazing.”

> “The children used to play in the courtyard. I remember the fireworks”

> “The corridor just became an extension to the playroom.”

5.3 No major privacy crises emerged in relationship to shared space. When there were occasional problems, for example smells from rubbish not properly disposed of, the residents’ association would endeavour to sort them out. The managing agents for their property were also described as very efficient.

5.4 Relationships between residents were particularly harmonious. They had a strong sense of belonging to a community where cooperation and tolerance were the norm. They organised joint social events and these helped promote mutual understanding. Neighbours got to know one another and their children played together.

> “For the last few years we have had an annual drinks party as a way of getting all the residents together.”

> “I’ve made some really good friends from this block… we met when my boiler blew up!”
However, these friendships did not intrude upon people’s privacy in their own homes. Neighbours felt they could keep themselves to themselves when they required.

“If we see one another we don’t necessarily need to stop for a chat. We might just wave. We all understand one another.”
Case History Number 4
Suburban Semi-Detached: Cheam, Surrey

Semi-detached housing in suburban Cheam

Plan of Marlow Drive, Cheam
Headlines from Suburban Semi Detached

Cheam, Surrey

- Affordable housing with good resale value, but numerous privacy issues

- Lack of space for comfortable family life, but extensions possible in this lower density design with plenty of garden space at one side and the rear

- Party walls not well sound proofed

- Residents did not feel overlooked in their homes, but added high fencing or foliage to protect the privacy of their gardens

- Neighbours’ and visitors’ parking was an important issue; garages were needed for storage, and shared driveways were inconvenient; not enough space between dwellings for on road parking

- The housing was child friendly, with plenty of room for play in the back gardens, and noise from children not seen as disturbing to privacy from either inside or outside the home
1. Background to the Findings

1.1 The properties

The semi-detached properties that we researched were built in 1934 by the house builder Gleesons. Residents were rather proud that each house had had a sixpenny piece from the year of construction built into the window frame. The immediate neighbourhood was entirely residential, with long roads of semi-detached housing and some terraced properties, approximately 1 mile from the centre of Cheam. All had small front gardens and long, one hundred feet or so, back gardens plus a garage at the side or at the rear, with access from a back alleyway. The properties had three bedrooms. They were within a quarter of a mile of the local school.

1.2 The people

Our findings are based on a focus group with residents of two streets in this neighbourhood. All the residents had children living at home; in two instances the ‘children’ were adults in their twenties and thirties. The occupations of the group were mainly clerical and administrative plus one teacher.

2. Overall satisfaction with their homes

2.1 The relationship between our respondents and their properties was more a marriage of convenience than a love match. These were properties that were affordable and also available at times of high demand. They were seen as a safe option: properties that would always have a resale market because people knew what to expect of them.

“There was very little to choose, to be honest with you. We were being dictated to by the schools... so it was a question of what we could find in our budget.”

2.2 Nevertheless, the relationship between home owners and their homes strengthened over time as they made changes to adapt the accommodation to their families’ needs. They grew to appreciate the period charm of the alcoves, picture rails, fireplaces; the homes were cosy in winter, had large gardens and useful garages. The properties
were by no means perfect, but eventually acquired a comforting familiarity.

“These are nice solid houses, whatever the size, whatever’s wrong with it. People always want that”

“You don’t fall in love with a house for at least three or four years.”

3. Privacy Inside the Home.

3.1 Lack of space

3.1.1 The major privacy issue in these houses was lack of space. They had been bought as family homes, but there was simply not enough space for comfortable living. The living space, the kitchen, the bedrooms, the bathrooms, and the hallway were all seen as too cramped.

“We’d like a bigger every room!”

The owners felt that expectations had changed since the houses were built in the nineteen thirties. Kitchens now needed to be bigger to take modern appliances and to allow space for the family to eat there. Modern furniture was too large for the rooms; children expected to have their own bedroom as they approached their teens.

“We’ve got one of nine and one of ten, but they do need their own space now. We used to share, didn’t we... when I was young, I was one of six children and we had a three bedroomed house and we got on with it. But, I don’t know, now. You just feel that they expect more.”

“A tumble dryer and a washing machine, a dishwasher is a must.”

“The third bedroom wasn’t large enough to be classed as a bedroom, they classed it as a box room.”
“There’s barely room for a linen bin in the bathroom. You certainly couldn’t have a separate shower.”

3.1.2 The solution to this shortage of space was to extend the houses. Every household examined had extended, either at the back, or on the detached side, some had added a loft conversion as well. Typical changes were:

- enlarging the kitchen
- adding a dining area/breakfast room
- adding a downstairs toilet
- knocking down a wall to create a through lounge
- knocking out the chimney breast to widen usable space in living rooms/bedrooms

Lounge and dining room knocked through to become one living space

3.2 Noise levels tolerated.

“At the end of the day, if you really felt that fed up living next door to people, you’d move to a rural area.”

3.2.1 There was a certain amount of sound transmitted between the semi-detached party walls. However, the noise level was not seen as excessive. Examples of sound overheard included:

- kitchen noises
  - taps running
  - washing machines spinning
- Children crying in the quiet of the night
- Cheering when the home team wins on TV
3.2.2 All of our respondents had children, and they were very conscious that there must be a certain level of noise emanating from their own households as well. It was a question of mutual tolerance and not making a fuss unnecessarily. All the families had, from time to time, to exhort their children to turn down the television or to play more quietly in order not to disturb the neighbours.

“If ever I’d had a shouting match with my children I mentioned it to my neighbour, she says, ‘I didn’t hear you and I wouldn’t take any notice anyway. I’ve been through it and I know what it is like.’”

“The computer, my son puts it on sometimes and you can’t hear the TV. Quite often I say ‘shut that racket off, the kids next door are going to bed and they’ve got to get up for school in the morning.’ And, I have to say, he backs off.”

3.2.3 Being able to hear some noise from next door was also seen as a useful security measure. On one occasion a mother screamed when her baby fell down the stairs; her neighbour heard the scream and immediately rushed round to see if she could help.

3.3 Being overlooked

No one reported any problems of being overlooked inside their homes: the houses were set well back from the road at the front and had long back gardens which provided a privacy buffer zone. There were, however, privacy issues with gardens being overlooked.

4. Privacy Outside the Home

4.1 Gardens

4.1.1 There were some problems of privacy in the back garden of the semi-detached houses. Even when neighbours were good friends, they did not always want to chat or even to acknowledge one another. There were times when neighbours simply wanted to keep themselves to
themselves, and avoiding them on these occasions could be a strain. Other people’s children could also be a disturbance if they wanted just to sit in their garden and have some peace and quiet.

“My neighbours breed rabbits and are always outside cleaning out the cages. When I go outside for a smoke, there’s just too much eye contact.”

“Every time you go outside, you don’t always want to talk. It doesn’t matter how close you are.”

4.1.2 This was not an insurmountable problem. Neighbours fortified their garden with tall fencing (at least six feet high) and foliage (shrubs and trees). These measures created an effective barrier to being overlooked. However, there were some negative consequences. Sometimes the barriers blocked sunlight from their gardens; sometimes people felt so secure behind the screens that they forgot that sounds were not equally well screened out.

“You just stick a load of shrubs round so you can’t see. In fact it’s embarrassing because you don’t realise anyone’s next door and you can hear a conversation and get someone joining in from behind the fence!”

Trellises and fences used to ensure residents’ privacy
4.2 Car parking

4.2.1 Car parking was a privacy issue for those with shared driveways. These were a particular bone of contention; the sharers tended to feel aggrieved that the other party was unreasonable in its use of the driveway.

“They’ve just always got their car there and you’ve always got to knock on the door and say ‘can you move your car.’”

Tensions were generated when, for example, they wanted space to move out their dustbins for collection early in the morning or when they wanted to get their own car out. Sharing was not seen as a virtue in this context.

“It’s nice to have access to your own house whenever you want to come and go. You shouldn’t have to be beholden to someone else.”

4.2.2 Cars taking children to the local schools were also seen as an invasion of privacy. They were often parked across their driveways and traffic congestion prevented residents from turning into their own road.

4.2.3 Parking problems were compounded because garages were used for storage, not for parking. Their cars were left on their driveway or in their front garden. There was not enough space for visitor parking on the road because the spaces between driveways were too narrow.

The garages were seen as necessary additional storage to supplement the meagre amount of cupboard space within their homes.

“We’ve got bikes in there and all the tools and garden furniture. I keep my ironing board in there, brooms and all the stuff I need for the house, that I’ve got nowhere to put inside the house.”

“Decorating stuff, the lawnmower, netball things, outdoor toys, garden furniture.”

“My garage is a work store, it’s just full of tools”

4.3 Privacy and security

4.2.3 Security in the home was not an issue. There were very few burglaries in the area and people felt very safe living there.
Some had been concerned about whether the alleyways at the bottom of the back gardens would be a threat to their security. This had proved to be unfounded.

“I’ve never even locked the back door when I’ve been upstairs. I feel so safe here.”

“My husband works nights. I’ve never felt any security problems.”

4.3.2 There was, however, some anti-social behaviour in the wider community that impinged upon residents’ sense of security and privacy. Although there were no break ins, the children and young adults using the alleyways sometimes threw litter into their gardens and scrawled graffiti on the walls. Their presence was an annoyance and had begun to cast something of a shadow over the neighbourhood; beyond the privet hedges no longer felt as secure as it used to.

“I’ve got a public alley down the side of my house leading to the school, and we’ve got all the crisp packets and Coca Cola cans and beer cans at the weekend flying over my garden.”

“We get all the teenager yobs over the weekend hanging up the alleyway and graffiti everywhere.”

5. Children in Semi-Detached Properties

Semi-detached housing was seen, on balance, as pretty child friendly. The kids had plenty of space to play safely in their own back gardens. The neighbourhood was one where children predominated.

They were expected to make some noise in both the house and the garden. This noise was tolerated and also regulated by each household. The major problems were lack of space, but these were solved by extending the houses to meet current expectations and lifestyles. On the whole the privacy of adults and the needs of children were kept well in balance.
Large child friendly gardens allow freedom to play, space for storage and long family sized washing lines.
Case History Number 5

1970s Riverside Town Houses: Friars Quay, Norwich

Riverside town houses.

Plan of Friars Quay
Friars Quay, Norwich

- Popular riverside development in the heart of Norwich providing very private environment for retired couples and single people
- Residents enjoyed the privacy and flexibility provided by three, four or even five storey town houses
- The privacy of vertical separation meant mounting several flights of stairs, but residents got used to this and felt it kept them fit
- Homes felt spacious, but lofts and garages still converted to create even more living or storage space, and internal walls knocked through to create larger, lighter internal spaces
- First floor living aided privacy and security, allowing residents to overlook passers-by without being seen, and to leave upper floor windows open without risk
- Poor noise insulation both within and between the houses, but considerate behaviour of residents and their quiet lifestyles meant privacy was not affected
- Both private and shared outdoor space successful, with gardens and balconies small but private, and the development itself traffic free. In a more mixed community more privacy issues may have developed if children had played in the communal courtyard areas. Residents enjoyed the childfree peace and quiet
- Active residents’ association had ensured that issues like noise, litter and crime were dealt with by local council and nearby businesses, ensuring privacy and harmony within the development
1. Background to the Findings

1.1 The properties

Friars Quay is a much sought after development in the centre of Norwich. It comprises fifty dwellings, built in 1974 at a density of 54 dwellings per hectare. Most of the properties are three or four storey town houses, but in a few cases, the ground floor is a flat with town house accommodation above. One side of the development is bounded by the River Wensum and another by a small, well tended green. It is cheek by jowl with picturesque historic buildings and a host of small shops, pubs and restaurants.

1.2 The people

Our findings are based on a focus group discussion with a cross section of residents, held in one of the town houses. Six people attended; they were predominantly empty nesters or retired singles and couples from professional and managerial backgrounds. We understand that this is very representative of the development as a whole; no children currently live on the development, although grand children occasionally visit.

2. Satisfaction with their Homes

2.1 The residents of Friars Quay were very content with their homes and they had a sense of collective pride in the development. Most of them had been in residence for at least ten years and none had any intention of moving on.

“My wife says the only way she is going to leave Friars Quay is in a box.”

Any properties coming onto the market were quickly snapped up; some residents had put their names on a waiting list before buying.

2.2 Friars Quay was not, however, as popular when it was first built in the nineteen seventies. It was then seen as too avant garde in its architecture and too expensive for local tastes. At that time most buyers had been drawn from outside Norfolk. It had taken several years for these gaunt town houses to be accepted as desirable residences.
2.3 The appeal of Friars Quay lies in its combination of city centre convenience and peaceful riverside seclusion. It is a very private place despite its proximity to amenities and its relatively high density.

2.4 The layout of the development contributes to this privacy; there is only one road for car access and no through road; there are no fumes or noise from traffic. The tall homes are fortresses from which their owners observe trespassing outsiders; their gardens are kept secret by high walls.

“It is one of the luxuries of this place that you can have your privacy.”

3. Privacy inside the Home

3.1 The advantages of vertical separation

3.1.1 The houses all rose to at least three and sometimes as many as four, or even five storeys, where the loft had been converted for living space. This tall structure allowed for useful vertical segregation of living space; for example floors for visiting guests, work space, relaxing and entertaining space. This contributed greatly to a sense of privacy within the home.

3.1.2 The potential downside of having to climb several flights of stairs was reframed as an advantage: stairs help you keep fit. Coping strategies were adopted to minimize the inconvenience:

- installing an answer phone
- keeping a mobile at hand.
- learning always to carry something when using the stairs

“I’m surprised how fit I am compared to workmen who come to the house. I leap up the stairs.”

“If I am on the top floor and some Jehovah’s Witnesses come to the door, I can snarl at them from the top floor.”

3.1.3 Most people had their main living accommodation – sitting and dining rooms – on the first floor; the balconies were also at this level. This contributed to a great sense of privacy and security: they could look down on passers by without being observed themselves.
“People are not intrusive. People don’t look up so they don’t even know you’re there.”

3.1.4 The residents also felt they were not at risk of being overlooked by their neighbours: there was plenty of space between each row of townhouses. Even if they could be seen, they were sure their neighbours would not be so rude as to stare.

“You wouldn’t walk around in the altogether…so you have to be careful in that respect. Not that there are people sitting there with binoculars”

3.2 Privacy and security

3.2.1 The relative seclusion of the development and the vigilance of its inhabitants were both helpful in maintaining security: suspicious characters are closely examined. Our researchers were subjected to this scrutiny when they arrived and took photographs of the houses: most of the residents had seen us before we met them!

3.2.2 Occupants were careful to protect their properties by keeping doors shut and ground floor windows closed. A bonus of living in three or four storey accommodation was that they felt they could leave windows on the upper floors open without any security risk.

“This is the joy of living first floor upwards as I do. I can leave my windows open.”

Despite their city centre location, there were few breaches of security.

3.3 Noise – tolerances and controls

3.3.1 The potential for noise invading people’s privacy in these homes was considerable. They were thought not to be well insulated for sound and the floors creaked.

“If you read the Architectural Review of 1975 there was a big article about Friars Quay and it admitted that some of it was spec building in a way, not built to a very high standard.”
3.3.2 However, noise was not a problem because the residents were all mindful of not disturbing their neighbours. They all valued having a quiet living environment and regulated their behaviour accordingly. They understood what the acceptable limits of noise were, and kept within them. If someone occasionally overstepped the mark, their neighbours felt free to tell them so without causing offence.

“I always make a point of saying ‘if ever I play my music too loud, tell me and I would be mortified if you didn’t tell me.’”

3.3.3 Noise was also not a problem because the great majority of residents were of mature years and were sober and responsible in their outlook; “We’re all boringly respectable”. Occasionally a younger resident (normally a renter) had caused a disturbance; they were given short shrift and encouraged to move on.

3.3.4 The absence of families with children from the development also contributed to the peaceful ambience. Occasional visits from grandchildren were tolerated, but otherwise the development was seen as unsuitable for young children: the river was an ever present danger and most importantly, children would undermine the privacy of the place.

“They are not the sort of houses young couples would come to, who are going to have children, thank God. I like the peace.”

It was part of the folk memory that the town houses had originally been designed for families with children. However, in practice the properties and the nature of the development had proved more suited to the childfree.

3.3.5 Nevertheless, residents welcomed having a few visitors to the development; it added interest to their lives. The only invasion of privacy was often that of the interlopers themselves!

“I can hear people walk past, I like that, it doesn’t annoy me. The trouble is not enough gossip or scandal goes on.”

“I heard someone proposing to his girlfriend on Christmas Eve. He was begging her and she was umming and ahhing. Mr. Ross opened his door and said, ‘for God’s sake say yes and then we can get some sleep!’
3.4 Privacy and internal space

3.4.1 There were no privacy problems caused by lack of space. The structures were quite generously proportioned and occupancy levels were low: typically only one or two inhabitants in a three or four storey dwelling. People, however, still took steps to enhance the impression of spaciousness in their homes further, for example knocking down the dividing wall between sitting and dining rooms to generate a larger open plan area. Others increased the size of the properties by converting the loft space into a further usable living area.

3.4.2 In spite of the size of the properties, extra space for storage was still required. The garage acted as an overflow storage area and utility area for many households.

“Ours has a freezer and a dryer. I keep an awful lot of stuff in the garage.”

“Electrical items.”

“Golf clubs.”

Even for the small households, there was always a need for more space.

4. Private Outdoor Space

4.1 Walled gardens

4.1.1 Most of the properties had a small patio garden at the back, screened by a high wall. Although the gardens were tiny, they were greatly valued. There was just enough space to eat outside, to relax in the sun or do a spot of gardening.

“The best thing in the summer is having breakfast in the garden. It faces south and is quieter than when I lived in the country.”

“The patios are big enough to be functional to a point. You can have a border round the side and grow some plants and enough room if you pave it in the middle for a full golf swing!”
“I have a Japanese orange tree, it has wonderful oranges, and a myrtle bush.”

4.1.2 The high walls meant that the gardens were hidden from passers by. Other residents could look down on them from their balconies, but this was not seen as a problem. They assumed neighbours would be too polite to gape at them from above.

“People are very considerate and discreet.”

“My neighbours wouldn’t dream to start gawping down at me.”

4.2 Balconies

4.2.1 Even those who did not have a garden had a balcony. These were also valued as private access to the outdoors. People did not feel overlooked. Some were screened by foliage from pot plants in the summer; for many the way the houses were staggered meant they were not overlooked.
“People have a lot of pots on their balconies. I have a vine growing up mine so I can’t see my neighbours when it is in full leaf.”

“The houses aren’t in a straight line, they are staggered.”

4.2.2 Most of the people were pleased no longer to have responsibility for tending a large garden; they felt they were getting too old for such demanding work.

5. Communal and Public Outdoor Space

5.1 The residents had plenty of public and some communal outdoor space to make up for their high density environment. There were river views and riverside walks, an adjoining green and, within the development, communal grassed courtyards. There were no problems with use of the communal areas within the development because it was such a cohesive responsible, mature, community; there were also no children around to shatter the peace.

“We’ve got the central green space and St. George’s Park and the river and in the summer that is absolutely lovely.”

“Between the two rows of houses there is a space with silver birch trees and a seat there. And a communal space at the head of the jetty where we hold our annual barbecue.”
6. Privacy and the Wider Community

6.1 Friars Quay is in a city centre location in a low crime area. However the residents were concerned about change that they saw as threatening their privacy and peace of mind. They worried that there would be increased crime, noise and litter from developments, such as a new needle exchange for drug users and 24 hour-licensing for local pubs. They feared that proposals for building new homes nearby with no public parking facilities would result in their own spaces being invaded by hordes of other cars.

6.2 The Friars Quay residents had in the past guaranteed the privacy of their community by banding together to form a very proactive residents’ association. They had lobbied the local council to preserve the nearby green as an open space and reminded them of their obligations to clean the drains, maintain the open spaces and keep them free from litter. They also put pressure on local businesses to reduce the disturbance caused by early morning collections and deliveries.

“There was one pub. I rang up the managing director of the Vaux Breweries and said we would object to the renewal of the licence and since then we’ve had no problems.”

“We show a combined face against any problems we may have.”

6.3 This strong sense of community responsibility was vital in achieving privacy and harmony within the development. The residents had great respect for one another and worked together to achieve common ends. They were very mindful, however, of not intruding on one another’s lives.

“Each year we have a ‘working weekend’ when we hire skips and clear our gardens and then help people who are not quite capable of clearing their own.”

“When I had a major operation my neighbours were wonderful.....I don’t worry so much about getting older now because people care.”
6.4 Trade off of space against central location.

Residents appreciated the convenience of living in the city centre. They would pop out on a daily basis to the shops, rather than doing a major, once a week shop. They also liked the fact they could walk to restaurants and pubs and not be concerned about taking the car.

However, the Friars Quay residents had not traded off space in their homes in return for their central location. They ate out a lot, but still made plenty of use of the kitchen. It was unthinkable that they could manage without a decent sized kitchen.

“One of my favourite hobbies is cooking. I love to cook….What an absolutely dreadful thought to have no kitchen!”

They pointed out that their homes, at 1400 or so square feet, plus a large loft were larger than the average. The only trade off of space for them was having a very small garden or no garden at all in return for having a central, riverside location.
Case History Number 6
Out of Town Consortium, Wynyard, Nr. Durham

Large detached houses on the Wynyard development

Plan of Wynyard
Headlines from Wynyard Out of Town Consortium

Near Sedgefield, Durham

- Higher density feel (large houses on small plots plus terraces and town houses) with the advantage of access to plenty of green open space within the development

- Quiet and secure environment with security patrols and CCTV cameras

- Town house residents suffered from noise transfer within and between the terraced houses which was deemed unacceptable

- All property owners were content with the amount of space but some complained of a lack of flexibility to expand their home

- Privacy inside the home was not compromised through being overlooked even for those with zero set backs: few people passed by and many properties faced on to the village green or other open space

- Small private gardens were not private enough – extra screening was needed

- Child friendly development: open green spaces, streets were felt to be safe to play in because of controlled access and banning of on street parking
1. Background to the Findings

1.1 The development

Wynyard is a gated out of town consortium development, built on a green field site, eight miles from Sedgefield. The first phase was completed in 1991 and development is ongoing. The developers involved are: Bellway Homes, Charles Church and Barratt Homes. The houses are located in two areas: Wynyard Village where the shop and pub are located and Wynyard Woods where the houses are incorporated into a woodland area.

Within the development there are some very exclusive ‘footballers’ wives’ homes which are very large detached houses with extra security. The rest of the development is a mixture of luxury detached on small plots, town houses, terraces and apartments. Additional facilities include an 18-hole golf course, duck pond and cricket ground.

The gross density of the part of the development we researched was 15 dwellings per hectare.

1.2 The people

We interviewed a good cross section of people living in terraces, town houses and large detached houses sited on small plots. They ranged in ages from people in their twenties, moving up the housing ladder, to the recently retired. Their occupations were clerical, professional and managerial. The majority had children living at home.

2. Overall Satisfaction with their Homes

2.1 Generally the Wynyard residents we spoke to were very happy with their homes, which were described as well designed and well equipped. Their owners particularly enjoyed having ultra modern kitchens and bathrooms.

The owners of the detached houses had few complaints about their homes, but those in the town houses did express irritation at some aspects of higher density living.

2.2 Everyone agreed that the houses on Wynyard were attractive and well integrated into the landscape. They had been designed to take advantage of the views of woodland, cricket pitch and duck pond and other scenic
features. There was a variety of different house designs which owners felt gave their own home or terrace a special feeling of distinctiveness.

“They’re nice designs, they’re not all square boxes and dormer type window.”

Town house owner

“Each house has something a little bit special about it. You get things like the bay windows or they’ve got a kind of conservatory area built on the back of them.”

Detached home owner

2.3 Nevertheless, some residents detected a whiff of childlike fantasy about the designs.

“Toy town. I have to admit I did laugh the first time I drove in; I thought it was a little bit too perfect.”

Detached home owner

“At Christmas I looked over at the duck pond and the houses and it was like one of those ceramic villages that you get…it really was so picturesque with the snow and everything.”

Detached home owner

“It’s a bit Disney World-ish, isn’t it...every house is nice and new and clean and tidy.”

Town house owner

3. Overall Satisfaction with the Development

3.1 People had chosen to live on the Wynyard development because it provided them with a secure and quiet environment. The development is gated and has CCTV and security patrols. It was seen as almost a place of refuge; somewhere to escape from the pressures of urban living.
“It’s just a delightful place. When I drive in through the gate, I think, ‘Oh, I’m here’ and it’s just a fantastic feeling.”

Town House Owner

3.2 People loved the countryside vistas. Many of them had chosen to live there because they saw it as a good place to bring up children: plenty of unpolluted air and great expanses of grass and woodland on which to play.

3.3 There were seen to be some downsides: some younger people who had not yet got children felt rather isolated from the amenities of town life. There is now a small range of facilities including well rated shops and a pub, but these had been slow to arrive. There was also regret that a once promised school had never been built; it was believed it would have been an ideal focal point in the community.

3.4 Nevertheless, our respondents felt that the plusses far outweighed the downsides. They enjoyed their secluded environment.

“Some people might live in huge mansion houses and some people live in a terraced house like myself. They’ve still got the same vision of what they want it to be.”

Town House Owner

4. Privacy inside the Home

People living in the town houses experienced more privacy problems than those in the large detached houses on Wynyard. The main issue inside the home was noise.

4.1 Noise – Town Houses

“The technology that’s available now, you’d think the sound proofing could have been substantially better.”

Town house owner

4.1.1 Our respondents rated highly the modern styling of their homes and the equipment in it. They did not, however, look as favourably upon the standard of sound proofing achieved. Noise transfer within their own property and between adjoining properties was deemed unacceptable.
The issue was not inconsiderate behaviour by neighbours or lack of tolerance of noise. The level of everyday sound that escaped through walls and floors was just too high.

“No matter how well you get on with your neighbours, you still don’t want to hear them and vice versa they don’t want to hear you. They really should have thought of it, shouldn’t they?”

Town house owner

4.1.2 The problems were particularly severe for those in the middle of the terraces with party walls on both sides. Those at the gable ends of the terraces saw themselves as fortunate. One respondent who had previously lived in a detached house found the transition quite a shock.

“I’ve never lived in a terrace before. I’m used to it now, but I still don’t particularly like it.”

Town house owner

4.1.3 Sound travelled all the way through the houses, even from the top floor through to rooms at the furthest point away on the second floor.

“I’d be upstairs and I’d hear my wife talking to the kids and I’d be looking around thinking she was in the next room. She wasn’t, she was in the kitchen, downstairs, at the opposite end of the house.”

Town house owner

When we conducted the focus group, some people were very embarrassed when they realised the extent to which their privacy had been breached. There was much laughter and pleas for no more to be said when some home truths were revealed.

“You can hear next door’s drawers going in and out. I could hear next door snoring a couple of nights ago!”

Town house owner

“You can hear everything can’t you!”

Town house owner
4.2 Noise – Detached houses.

4.2.1 The noise problems were less severe than for the town house dwellers because they had some distance from their neighbours. Our respondents did still suffer some loss of privacy because of poor sound insulation.

4.2.2 There were complaints that the walls were very thin. The modern “stud partitions” were seen as much less solid and effective at sound insulation than the more traditional, brick internal walls. The detached houses were often bought as family homes.

Some parents expressed concern that they might wake up their children when they undertook routine evening activities like unloading the dishwasher. Televisions had to be turned down so as not to disturb them.

“If you’re upstairs in the bedroom and the television is on, you may think it is in the same room because the sound goes up.”

Detached house owner

4.2.3 Both detached and town house owners were very pleased that they did not get disturbed by noise from the outside neighbourhood. Wynyard was felt to be a very quiet place, partly because of the security gates, but also because it was, effectively, a large cul-de-sac. It was not on a through route to anywhere.

4.3 Ample Space

4.3.1 There were no privacy problems caused by shortage of space in these homes. Everyone had been able to afford big enough homes for their household needs. The houses were not under occupied: all the large houses we visited were owned by families with children and so were the majority of the town houses.

4.3.2 The owners spoke with pride of their light, spacious rooms: the bedrooms were of a decent size and the hallways were wide. These were premium priced properties and people felt they had gained a good amount of space for their money. The builder of these particular homes was Bellway and they have long promoted their brand of homes as particularly spacious.
Home owners greatly appreciated having extra space, such as a utility room for appliances and a study for the computer.

Large, well proportioned kitchen: representative of the development

“It’s quite a large hallway but without making the other rooms feel small. There’s a study, a good sized room downstairs, which is useful so that you're not having to put a computer in your living room; they are quite ugly things”

Detached home owner

“The rooms are spacious. I’ve got a four bedroom end of terrace house but it’s nice. When you look at the size of this room, it’s a lovely big room, isn’t it? You go in some modern houses and they’re just so narrow and tiny.”

Town house owner

Owners felt that the design of their homes made the best use of available light. They particularly liked the bay windows which they saw as adding interest and making even small rooms feel bigger.

Large bay window allowing plenty of light in
4.3.3 One small gripe was that the small plots of land left no opportunity for further expansion. Some people would have liked to be able to put on a conservatory at a later date, but this was not possible. In this respect the higher density design lacked flexibility.

4.3.4 Some of the town house residents had a brick built storage unit, as a compensation for having open garage spaces without doors. These storage units were seen as very useful for safely keeping gardening equipment, sports equipment and so forth. These storage areas were seen as very useful and those that did not have them were quite envious: they would prefer this to having a lockable garage.

"It's just a brick built store with a locking door. It's quite a decent size – seven foot by about five foot... it's for gardening equipment, golf clubs, anything that doesn't really need to be in the garage."

Town house owner

4.4 No problem with being overlooked

4.4.1 Although the town houses fronted directly onto the pavement, none of the occupants felt that they were overlooked. The road was very wide and there were no houses directly opposite. They faced a large expanse of greenery which surrounded the local shops and the public house.

The pavement frontage was also not a problem because few people walked past apart from the immediate neighbours. There was little passing traffic because the development was not a through route to anywhere.

4.4.2 The detached houses were set well back from the road and had long drives. Some of them had magnificent views and were not at all overlooked.
Others felt they had recently lost some of their privacy when houses were built opposite. There was no risk of these people seeing into their homes; they did, however, now overlook a front garden that had previously been so private the owners had felt they could sunbathe on the patio at the front. Perceptions of what is an invasion of privacy are clearly very relative.

Generally people in the detached houses were happy with their privacy. Although the plots of land were not large, they did not feel too close to their neighbours.

“This house is quite good, we’re reasonably close, but we’re not right on top of one another. I do feel it’s reasonably private.”

Detached home owner

Large houses on small plot leaving little room for expansion

5. Privacy and Gardens

5.1 The town house residents felt that their back gardens were rather too small and some complained of lack of privacy from their neighbours.

“It’s all a bit cramped at the back, isn’t it?”

Town house owner

The gardens originally had fencing with open slats that you could see through. Many people had put up additional screening because they felt they were just too close to their neighbours.

“If we were sat on our patio, it was like we were having dinner with the next door neighbours”

Town house owner
Several people in the large detached houses had put up walls instead of the existing fences to make their back gardens more private. It was important to them that they were not overlooked.

“We’re not overlooked at the back. I think that’s probably one of the things that attracted us when we came and looked inside”

Detached home owner

5.2 However, there was an equally strong body of opinion in favour of retaining fences with some openings so that they could see their neighbours and talk with them when they wished. Some people liked the opportunities for sociability that the slatted fencing provided. They disliked solid barriers such as brick walls or high fences.

“That’s how you meet people. I think if you are closed off, then you never get to talk to people.”

Town house owner

It is clear from this disagreement that some flexibility is required in the way that fencing is provided.

6. Privacy and Security

6.1 How secure people feel in their homes is an important aspect of their privacy: a break into their property is a major violation of privacy. At Wynyard, security was an integral feature of the development and of high importance in attracting people to buy there. Our respondents expressed concern about what they saw as a deterioration of law and order in cities.

“The security aspect is quite important. The way the crime rate is going and the drugs... and that’s the reason we came here.”

Detached home owner

6.2 Wynyard is an enclosed development with two entrances, one of which closes after dark. There is a security guard at the main gatehouse, CCTV cameras throughout the estate and a patrol car. The main entrance is kept open but still forms a distinct deterrent to entry by
uninvited strangers. The CCTV cameras are a back up in case anyone slips through.

“Some people might say it’s like Big Brother but it gives me a sense of security.”

Town house owner

6.3 People felt very safe in their homes. They still took precautions such as locking their houses when they went out and, for those who had them, putting on their security alarms. However, they were not worried about their properties; they believed that although there had been some instances of petty theft from garages and sheds, no one’s home had been broken into.

“I back onto a field and I’ve never felt the vulnerability that you would normally associate with an open space”

Town house owner

“I do feel very secure here.”

Town house owner

7. Children at Wynyard

7.1 In many ways Wynyard was seen as a child friendly zone. Parents had been disappointed that a promised school had not been built. However, other aspects of the development were seen as ideal for children.

7.2 There was so much green open space that children could enjoy playing without disturbing neighbouring households. There was a cricket pitch and plenty of scope for ball games. There were lots of children in the development so there were good opportunities for children to make friends.

“The environment here is much nicer for them to be able to go out and play. It’s safe and there’s wooded areas for them to go off and explore”

Town house owner
7.3 Road safety was another important factor for parents of young children. There was not a great deal of traffic in the development because the roads were used mainly by local residents. It was not permitted for cars to be parked on the estate roads and this, it was felt, made it safer for children to play on the roads.

7.4 Families were trying to foster a sense of community within Wynyard. One outcome was the introduction of a group for mothers and babies.

“I’ve just joined the mother and baby toddlers group that’s been organised. There is a bit of a school community now.”

Town house owner
Case History Number 7
Poundbury Urban Extension: Dorchester, Dorset

A Poundbury street scene

Plan of Poundbury
Headlines for Poundbury Urban Extension

Dorchester, Dorset

- There was a big divide in satisfaction with homes between occupants of the large, luxurious four bedroom properties and those who lived in the more modest properties.

- Owners of larger properties experienced no privacy problems and respondents were delighted with their homes. They were generally occupied by retired couples most of whom enjoyed participating in local community life.

- Those in affordable terraced houses, both private and housing association, suffered significant invasions of their privacy. Their problems were exacerbated because these small properties were often occupied by families with small children:
  - rooms too cramped
  - adults and children needed greater privacy from each other
  - difficulty for wheelchair users
  - unacceptable noise levels
  - claustrophobic

- Problems with the privacy of gardens from being overlooked by tall surrounding buildings, especially in Phase II.

- Families felt that their children did not have decent enough place to play safely. Roads were seen as dangerous because of the volume of heavy traffic; public squares were cluttered with parked cars.

- Everyone felt secure in their homes and safe from break ins. The ‘security gravel’ which crunched as you walked was however found messy and difficult to navigate with buggies and wheelchairs.
1. Background to the Findings

1.1 Poundbury Urban Extension

The Poundbury development is an urban extension to Dorchester. Phase I was completed in 1993, Phase II in 2001 and Phase III is yet to be built. Eventually there will be 2000 houses in around 170 hectares of land. The net density is 30 dwellings per hectare.

The development is on Duchy of Cornwall land and the Prince of Wales has been very influential in shaping the vision of the community. The aim has been to take a holistic approach to the design, creating a self contained community with workplaces, leisure facilities, houses and flats, schools and other community buildings.

The properties are a mix of detached, semi-detached, terraces, mews and squares; they have individuality of design within an integrated whole. Their appearance is of traditionally crafted housing; there are no front gardens and the houses have direct access to the street. Twenty per cent of the properties are rented from a housing association. These are integrated with the privately owned housing.

The aim has been to put pedestrians first and strictly to control traffic: roads are narrow to give less scope for acceleration and rear parking courtyards are provided to make cars less obtrusive.

1.2 The people

Our findings are based on individual interviews and a focus group with residents from both housing association and privately owned properties. They represented a good cross-section of the community: prosperous retired couples and single people and families living on more modest incomes from manual and craft occupations.

2. Satisfaction with their Homes

2.1 Poundbury is a development of very different house styles and sizes and of mixed tenure so perhaps it is not surprising that there were divergent views on how satisfactory the housing was. Those in the larger, privately owned houses, were delighted with them. They felt they were soundly constructed and they had no major privacy problems. This group was predominantly retired single people and couples so occupation rates were low.
“I think it’s lovely and so does everybody who comes into it.”

Retired owner occupier

2.2 They had been attracted by the chance to buy a property that combined traditional exterior design with the convenience of modern new build. Their expectations had been met fully.

“Having had an old house, this is heaven. You wake up every day and instead of saying ‘what have we got to do?’ we say, ‘now what can we do?’ No, it’s lovely.”

Retired owner occupier

2.3 The people in the smaller terraces properties were much less content. They tended to be family groups from both owner occupied and rented housing. They too had been attracted by the prospect of a convenient to run modern home. They were however less than happy with the build quality and they all encountered significant problems with privacy.

“I wanted to live in a new house that’s easy to maintain. The house was a good price but it’s so claustrophobic.”

Family owner occupier

“They’re (social housing) not very well built. The workmanship is shoddy – door handles come off, there’s problems with the foundations and cracks in the walls and ceilings are not fixed!”

Family, Housing Association

3. Satisfaction with the Development

3.1 We also found two points of view on how satisfactory Poundbury was as a place to live. The affluent empty nesters and retired felt they were very much part of a community of like minded souls. Some participated in the residents’ association and they all took advantage of social and recreational opportunities available to them in the community: charity events, walking clubs, wine clubs, ‘pot luck’ suppers, keep fit classes and carol singing at Christmas.
3.2 The families that we interviewed and other residents of more modest means were less enchanted with community life in Poundbury. They felt the community was not particularly family friendly and lacked adequate leisure provision for children. They claimed the local shops and the newly opened pub were far too expensive and aimed more at visiting tourists then at local residents.

“Poundbury is not tolerant of children. It’s like a retirement village.”

Family owner occupier

4. Privacy Inside the Home - Large Town Houses and Terraces

4.1 Low occupation levels

4.1.1 The large two and three storey, four bedroomed town houses and terraces where we conducted interviews were occupied by prosperous, retired couples and single people. We understood that Poundbury is very popular with this section of the population. Their houses were under occupied for much of the time. They had bought large properties so they would have space for visiting relatives. They also tended to take regular trips away, sometime visiting holiday homes or relatives living abroad.

“We wanted a house where our children, and eventually our grandchildren, can stay, which is nicer than being squashed in”

Retired owner occupier couple

4.1.2 It is therefore unsurprising that there were no real privacy issues to do with lack of space.

“The size of the rooms is excellent. This house suits us beautifully.”

Retired owner occupier

4.1.3 One single retired person living in a four bedroomed terraced house described it as “cosy and comfortable”. She was very happy with her accommodation. However she had knocked down a wall between two of the bedrooms to make a bigger master bedroom for her own use. She used a further bedroom as a study and kept the fourth as a guest room. This
relatively spacious terraced house suited her needs as a single person admirably.

4.2 Tolerable noise

4.2.1 Noise was not a significant concern either for these home owners. They believed their houses were soundly constructed and they were not greatly bothered by either vertical or horizontal noise transfer.

“It’s very well sound proofed.”

“It’s excellent because you play music right at the top of the house and I can’t hear it.”

Retired owner occupiers

The households with separate kitchens, sitting rooms and dining rooms felt that this separation gave them greater privacy and sound proofing than the more open plan houses.

4.2.2 There were reports of neighbouring children occasionally invading their privacy with the sound of loud music and skateboarding outside. This was particularly a problem in the summer when windows and doors were open. On the whole the noise was tolerated with good humour and the offenders soon quietened down if asked.

“There are teenagers there and they are absolutely brilliant. But he just fancied himself as a DJ. Sometimes in the summer, you say, ‘will you shut up!’ and you live close enough to do that, and he does, so it’s OK.”

Retired owner occupier

4.2.3 Noise from traffic was not a problem at the moment.

“It’s incredibly, wonderfully quiet.”

Retired owner occupier couple

However, there was great concern that a plan to divert the main Bridport road past Poundbury would shatter the peace and cut the development in half.

There was also some noise from machinery in the Poundbury factories, but this was accepted as a normal part of living in the community.
“You get a lot of machinery noise, but we can live with all that. I’m on very good terms with the factory chaps, so no problem!”

Retired owner occupier couple

5. Privacy Inside the Home – Affordable Terraced Houses

5.1 Crammed housing

5.1.1 In strong contrast, families and people living on modest means, in smaller terraced accommodation, suffered from significant problems of privacy.

“The house is so claustrophobic.”

Family owner occupier

Families with children in the smaller terraced housing simply did not have enough space to live comfortably. Both private owners and those renting from their housing association felt that adults and children needed greater privacy from one another.

Their levels of occupation were much higher. In our sample two adults and three children lived in a three bedroom terraced house with one bathroom.

5.1.2 There were complaints that there simply was not enough storage space to keep everything tidy. One solution was to use the garages as an overflow storage area and park the car on the road. This practice was widespread and neighbours complained that cars parked in front of their houses and blocked their view and their access.

5.1.3 The open plan design of smaller terraces did not give parents and children enough separate space in which to live their lives harmoniously. Instead of the small open plan kitchen/living area, they would have preferred a more spacious, separate living area. This would allow the adults to shut off the noise of children at play or provide a more peaceful environment for the children to get on with their homework.

“The kitchen, dining room and living room are all connected. It’s impossible to have privacy in the house.”

Family, Housing Association
5.1.4 The kitchens in the rented housing association properties were too small to accommodate appliances such as washing machines, which were seen as an essential part of modern living.

“They did not leave any room for extra appliances. They assumed we wouldn’t be able to afford a washing machine.”

Family, Housing Association

5.1.5 Although these smaller properties had notionally three bedrooms, the third bedroom was far too tiny. It was described as a box room and not suitable for a sleeping area for a child and storage.

5.1.6 The small dimensions of these properties caused particular problems for people with motor disabilities. One of our respondents suffered from multiple sclerosis and could not climb the stairs; the stairs were too narrow for a chairlift and, as a result, she had to rely on her husband to carry her upstairs. She also complained that the first house she was offered had a hallway so tiny she could not manoeuvre her wheelchair in it.

“Middle Marsh is not suitable for people with disabilities.”

Couple, Housing Association

5.2 Unacceptable noise levels

5.2.1 People living in the smaller terraced houses were also unhappy about the amount of noise they could hear in their homes. The problems were with both vertical and horizontal sound transmission. Parents were disturbed by the stamping of feet and the cries of their children playing upstairs. Neighbours complained they could hear voices and music, not just from next door, but from two doors away.

“When you can hear the people two doors down, it’s just not acceptable!”

Family, Housing Association

5.2.2 The residents blamed poor standards of construction and design for these invasions of their privacy. They felt the social housing build quality was particularly shoddy and that sound easily leaked through walls and floors; there were also complaints that the design of the chimney flues joined between the houses exacerbated the noise along the terrace.
6. Privacy and Street Frontages

6.1 One of the key principles of the Poundbury development was that houses should not have front gardens, but rather should have direct access to the street. Our findings suggest that this is rather a mixed blessing. Some residents, particularly in the smaller terraced homes, believed that this arrangement seriously undermined their privacy. They felt overlooked, and if the windows were open, overheard.

“*The front to front layout is too close. If I am sitting in my living room with the windows open, I could have a conversation with the neighbour opposite in his living room without raising my voice.*”

*Family, private affordable housing*

Some people felt so overlooked that they drew the blinds in the front room even in the day time.

6.2 Those households that had the strip of earth in front of their properties, which was the maximum allowed, were grateful for this provision. It gave
them the opportunity to grow some flowers and provided a small buffer zone between the house and the street. Those who lived in the smaller houses that did not have the benefit of this “strip of mud” as they called it, rather envied those who did.

“Most people walk straight out of their front door on to the footpath, which I find a little bit off putting. But they have given us a twiddly little bit here so I can actually grow things in the front of the house.”

Retired owner occupier

“I do miss having a front garden.”

Housing Association tenant

6.3 People liked the traditional character of the houses fronting on to narrow streets. They did want, however, the extra degree of privacy bestowed by having a distinct front garden, however small. It would serve as a barrier to passers by, particularly the many tourists, who sometimes peered into windows. It would also increase the feeling of privacy from opposite neighbours. Some residents believed that having a little more front garden would also make the neighbourhoods more sociable: people would stop and chat when they saw you tending your front garden.

“You walk around Poundbury and you don’t see anybody. Basically it’s because we don’t have front gardens. There’s no one out of there working on them.’

Terraced owner

6.4 The pavements at Poundbury are made from gravel on the principle that it looks attractive and helps protect against crime (potential assailants would be heard approaching). However, they are thoroughly disliked by most of the residents that we spoke to: the noise of passers by crunching past their windows disturbed their peace and invaded their privacy; the surfaces were hard going for those trying to navigate pushchairs along them; the stones stuck to shoes and invaded flower beds and were generally thought to be very messy.

“The gravel is very noisy, it’s awful.”

“I loathe them, the damned things stick on the bottom of your shoes so you are liable to tread them though the house... they are dusty, dirty and unhygienic.”

Owner occupiers
6.5 The street lighting at Poundbury that is designed to deter crime was just too bright for some residents; they complained that it was so bright and so close that it shone through bedroom windows and kept people awake.

7. Privacy and Security

7.1 People felt very safe in their houses and not at risk of an invasion by burglars. They were aware that Dorset generally is a low crime area and that, in Poundbury, there was only a small amount of petty crime: car radios had been stolen and garages broken into. People felt that they had, in some cases, been negligent by, for example, leaving the car unlocked. Quite often they were pretty sure who the culprits were.

“You do feel very safe here.”

“After coming from London, I find it extremely safe.”

Retired owner occupiers

They were also confident that the community was so close knit it deterred crime. There was an active Neighbourhood Watch and any suspicious activity would be noticed.

“Poundbury is safe because of the sheer density.”

Housing Association tenant

7.2 There were dissenting voices about the safety of the alleyways after dark. One young woman felt very nervous walking back from work because the alleyways had dark corners; the anti-crime gravel which increased the sound of footsteps accentuated the “creepy feel” of her return route home.

8. Private Back Gardens

8.1 The people who lived in the first phase of Poundbury’s development were much more pleased with their back gardens than later arrivals. The former felt very private because they had high walls and care had also been taken in the way buildings were angled and windows placed to make sure that the gardens were not overlooked.

“A lot of the gardens here are very private because of the high walls which is a nice feature.”
Retired owner occupier couple

In the later stages of the development, however, a more haphazard approach was evident: the gardens lacked proper screening and were much smaller. In response, people put up their own trellising to improve their privacy, but they felt rather short changed.

“The early first phase were superb, but here I think they lost the plot!”

Retired owner occupier couple

8.2 The small size of these gardens and their lack of privacy presented some problems. Some were so overlooked they hardly got any sunlight and for others new buildings had obstructed previous good views.

“I used to have a good view but now it’s totally built up and I can no longer see Maiden Castle – one of the main attractions of living here.”

Retired owner occupier

The presence of relatively tall commercial buildings cheek by jowl with housing compounded these privacy problems. Some residents were overlooked by workers taking a cigarette break and on the prominent “Fred Astaire style” steps of a nearby office. They felt more care should have been taken in the positioning and design of the offices.

8.3 The back gardens were not ideal for children. Parents felt uneasy about allowing their children to play there in case they disturbed their neighbours.

“We have learnt not to use the garden. It is not suitable for children, it is far too small.”

Owner occupier

The high walls around these small gardens were sufficient to give adults a private outdoor space in which they could relax. However, it was felt that children really did not have adequate places to play safely in Poundbury.

9. Communal Outdoor Spaces

9.1 The communal spaces provided at present in Poundbury were not judged as at all family friendly. One of our respondents came from Barcelona
and she regretted what she saw as missed opportunities: in Spain the square would be an area for the community to gather, with outdoor cafés, fountains, and plenty of space for the children to play.

In Poundbury the open spaces were seen as two severe and car dominated. Residents wanted more greenery to soften the hard appearance of the outdoor space and the square to be freed up from parked cars so children could play there safely.

“Non-child friendly open spaces

“Its not safe to let our children play in the main square or under the town hall. There are always cars manoeuvring and you can’t tell where they might come from.”

“What could be a fantastic communal space is just a car park.”

Families, affordable housing

9.2 The original intention had been that children would play safely in the Poundbury streets. However, it was felt that the rising volume of traffic, and the incursion of articulated trucks supplying the factories and shops made that assumption unrealistic.

“It’s a domestic road but having to take 40 foot articulateds, which is dangerous as it’s a residential road. With children… you couldn’t possibly let them play in the street.”

Retired owner occupier

9.3 Some families had campaigned for a children’s playground but so far with no success.
“We need a proper playground with skateboard ramps so there is something both for the older and the younger children.”

Family owner occupier

This underlined their concerns that Poundbury was not felt to be family friendly.
Case History Number 8
Old Hospital Conversion, Jesmond, Newcastle

The original hospital front lends the development much appeal.

Plan of Princess Mary Court, showing the relationship between flats and the internal courtyard
Headlines for Old Hospital Conversion, Princess Mary Court

Jesmond, Newcastle

- Residents were proud of their historic development: the converted apartments and town houses were rated as both stylish and easy to manage

- Old hospital building residents were retired singles and couples who had exchanged space for ease of maintenance. In these converted apartments noise was not found to be intrusive only because most residents led quiet lives

- Vertical separation of space in town house provided separate child/adult space and inhibited noise transfer within the house

- Town house residents found noise transfer between party walls was a considerable privacy issue

- The development is very mixed in terms of age and household composition

- The use of communal space was a cause of tension between residents, e.g. issues such as parking, children playing, rubbish disposal

- An enclosed development with a good range of security features; residents felt safe from city beyond. The automatic security gates were unsatisfactory and difficult to use
1. **Background to the Findings**

1.1 **The properties**

Our research was conducted at Princess Mary Court, a city centre conversion of a local landmark: the Old Maternity Hospital. The two hospital buildings have been converted into eighteen apartments. In addition, thirty two new town houses have been built in a horseshoe shape development. The density of the development is 50 dwellings per hectare.

![Mixture of old and new buildings](image)

Princess Mary Court is in the Jesmond area of Newcastle and easily accessible to the amenities of the city centre.

1.2 **The people**

We conducted a focus group with residents of the town houses and interviews with the people in the conversion apartments. The town house representatives were families with teenage and young adult offspring, living at home. The apartment dwellers were retired. All the properties were privately owned. The socio-economic background of the home owners was professional and senior managerial.

2. **Overall satisfaction with their homes**

All the owners that we interviewed were very content with their homes. Both the retired people in the apartments and the families with children in the town houses had opted for smaller, more manageable properties. They found their new homes extremely convenient and stylish. The children, however, complained that the town houses did not have the same well worn, comfortable feeling that their previous larger, family homes had had.
“It’s neat and well thought out.”

Town house resident

“It feels a bit like a show house at times. There’s no sort of homely feel to it although it is home.”

Town house resident

3. Overall Satisfaction with the Development.

3.1 Everyone, both young and old, agreed that the location of the development was ideal. It was extremely central and therefore in easy travelling distance from work, school, shops and all the attractions of central Newcastle.

“I’m at work in fifteen minutes. It doesn’t matter if it’s awful weather or if the Metro is not working, or the bus is not coming, I can walk to work. That to me is total freedom.”

Town house resident

3.2 Although the development was near to these amenities, it was felt to be extremely private. It was described as very quiet and secure. It is a gated community, protected by CCTV cameras and an intercom system.

3.3 People really appreciated being part of such a special development. They loved the architecture and sense of heritage of living in or close to the Old Maternity Hospital.

“You’ve got the best of both worlds here. You’ve got new, but it’s tied in with old. You’ve got a bit of tradition.”

Apartment owner

3.4 There were, however, some tensions created by young people living in close proximity to a community of the retired. Sometimes the latter felt their privacy had been invaded by rowdy youngsters; sometimes the younger generation felt their freedom to enjoy themselves had been curtailed.
4. Privacy in the Home – Conversion Apartments

4.1 Sufficient space

4.1.1 There were no privacy problems associated with lack of space in the apartments. The people we interviewed were retired couples and they found the two bedroomed apartments sufficient for their needs. They had twinges of regret that they could no longer put all the members of their extended family when they visited. This consideration was overshadowed, however, by the sheer convenience of having a more manageable living space.

The main reception room was described as spacious, although the owners would have preferred to have a separate dining room for entertaining. The bedrooms were thought to be rather small, but the high ceilings helped give an illusion of more space.

“If we had lower ceilings in the two bedrooms it would feel a bit claustrophobic.”

Apartment owner

4.1.2 The high ceilings did pose some practical problems when it came to changing light bulbs or decorating. Fortunately these were relatively well off retired people who could afford to pay others to undertake this work.

4.2 Tolerable noise levels

4.2.1 The residents were aware of certain levels of sound transmitted from other flats, particularly from above. However, the noise was not felt to be intrusive. They had expected to hear occasional sounds from other residents from time to time. There was also the belief that the original Old Maternity Hospital building was solidly built and that sound transfer was not as great as it would be in a modern block of flats.

“We do get noise from up above, but it’s not terribly intrusive.”

Apartment owner

4.2.2 Some residents welcomed the presence of background noise. They said it gave them a greater sense of security to be aware that others were on hand to help if required.
“We’ve got a lady on the bottom floor and I’ve heard her singing and a bit of music on. I quite enjoy that; you know that there are people around.”

Apartment owner

4.2.3 The residents of these converted apartments were, in the main, retired people who lived quietly and who did nothing that would disturb their neighbours greatly. They did tell tales of a former resident in the other conversion block who had held noisy parties and caused a great disturbance. The sound problems there had been exacerbated by the pillared structure of that block.

“They have cast iron pillars that go right through the building. If you tap on a radiator at this level, you can hear it down at the bottom.”

Apartment owner

4.2.4 The flat dwellers said they were seldom troubled by any noise from outside the building. There were few children living in the development and no through traffic.

“You feel that you’re living in a piece of history which is quite unique. The courtyard in there is absolutely silent. It’s quiet, it’s convenient, it’s got a bit of quality to it.”

Apartment owner

It was normally particularly quiet at night. There was only the occasional disturbance from activities such as a fireworks display down at the quayside. This was sufficiently far away not to be a major problem.

4.3 Overlooked but solutions found

4.3.1 The two converted hospital buildings stood at right angles to one another. People with flats on one side of the building we visited looked directly on to part of the other conversion. The flats had large picture windows placed at a distance of about twenty metres away. This was a particular problem in the bathroom where the builder had omitted to install frosted or opaque glass. The residents had responded by blocking the view with blinds so the potential breach of privacy was avoided.
“The people over there can look straight in and we can look straight in there....they have their blinds down like that all day and everyday. We pull our blinds down in winter that way.”

Apartment owner

4.3.2 It did appear that having large picture windows facing one another at such proximity was not ideal for privacy in the home.

5. Privacy in the Home – Modern Town Houses

5.1 Private space but a little cramped

5.1.1 The townhouse residents liked the convenience and modernity of their new homes. However, they would have liked a little more space. The houses were four storeys high but perhaps disproportionately narrow. For the people who had moved from traditional detached family houses their new properties did feel a little cramped.

“It doesn’t seem spacious. It’s very narrow but it goes right up.”

Town house owner

The living room was thought not quite big enough for a family gathering; two of the four bedrooms were described as “very small”. On the plus side, there were three bathrooms which was seen as an asset for families. The kitchen was described as large enough also to serve as an informal eating area; the bay window made it feel quite spacious. The loft provided excellent additional storage space.

5.1.2 The separate floors of the town houses did however give parents and their children a good degree of privacy. The children could have friends to visit on their separate floor and not disturb their parents.

“It’s quite pleasant having one room where perhaps my mum and dad will sit watching television and another room where my friends or my sister would relax in the evening.”

Town house occupant
5.2 Noise sometimes a problem

5.2.1 Privacy in the home was somewhat undermined by noise travelling between town houses. Families who had come from detached or semi-detached houses were particularly aware of this problem. Often the noise was not intrusive, but there was a risk that their own conversations could be overhead.

“A lot of the people have come from a family home, a detached house with land and it’s different being here... we are all squashed together.”

Apartment owner

“The noise impact as well was a bit worrying, you know, would we be able to hear other people because that is a big issue.”

Town house owner

5.2.2 Residents wished the builders had paid more attention to sound proofing. The families with children said they often received complaints that music was being played too loudly. They also claimed they could hear conversations from next door when their home was quiet at night.

“We hear everything that goes on next door.”

Town house owner

5.2.3 There had been more serious disturbances from ‘buy to let’ tenants who held noisy parties. Properties had often changed hands and this caused problems.

“Six students and the first thing they had was a rip roaring party each weekend.”

Town house owner

5.2.4 There was not a privacy issue however from noise within the house. Insulation between the floors was thought to be good; parents and children were well insulated from each other’s noise.

“I’m two floors above my mum and dad and they can’t hear anything.”

Town house occupant
Parents were sometimes irritated by the sound of their children’s feet thundering up and down the stair ways, but this was not a major problem.

5.3 **Not Overlooked**

The town house owners reported no problems of being overlooked inside their homes.

6. **Private Outdoor Space**

6.1 The town houses and some of the conversion apartments had small back gardens. This private outdoor space was particularly valued as a space where they could relax undisturbed by others. Several had put up higher fences to increase their privacy.

6.2 One of the apartment buildings had no space for private gardens. The people that we interviewed in the other block felt privileged that they had a garden.

> “We were fortunate to have been offered this. I know it’s a postage stamp sort of garden, but it is ours.”

    **Apartment owner**

6.3 The small private gardens were particularly valued because the communal gardens were little used.

7. **Communal Outdoor Space**

7.1 **Courtyard Garden**

7.1.1 At the centre of the horseshoe shape of the town house development is a courtyard garden; it has a central fountain surrounded by a paved area and raised flowerbeds. Everyone regarded it as an attractive feature that was well maintained. It had been important in influencing some of the town house owners to buy at the development.

> “I’ve not seen anything like this – the idea of a courtyard. It’s completely original… it’s been designed to be a mirror image of the front of the building.”

    **Town house owner**
7.1.2 However the garden was primarily an ornamental feature that was little used. Residents said they might occasionally sit on one of the benches in summer and perhaps sip a glass of wine. It was not used as a focus for community activities.

“I’ve been down twice; I think, with a cup of coffee and a newspaper.”

Apartment owner

There were restrictions on the activities that were allowed in the courtyard which meant that children seldom went there.

“They can’t cycle around the courtyard here, they can’t play ball games, they can’t go screaming around on their skateboards.”

Apartment owner

Communal courtyard gardens: mainly an ornamental feature

7.1.3 There had, in the past, been some tensions between the mainly retired apartment dwellers and the families living in the townhouses. The former wanted to protect their privacy and preserve the development as a quiet, peaceful place. The families on the other hand had been hoping to have access to a safe place for their children to play.

“If that’s where the kids play you can keep an eye on them from the kitchen. You know it’s OK.”

Town House Owner

Instead the children had to be taken to the local park to play. Over time, we were told, the number of children in the development had declined; most of those who remained were on the cusp of leaving home.
7.2 Privacy and parking

7.2.1 It was reported that there had been disputes over where cars parked in the communal space. People had been upset to find others parking in their own allocated space or in communal areas where no parking was allowed. The problem had been solved when the management company employed an outside contractor to make random inspections and put stickers on the offending cars. This solution, however, generated further bad feeling, especially from people who claimed they had to park illegally because their spaces had been taken by others.

“The chap used to come round and stick those horrible stickers on which are almost irremovable. It’s been much better since then... having been stickered they got the message eventually and decided to move.”

Apartment owner

8. Privacy and Security

8.1 People felt very safe living at Princess Mary Court. They believed there was little risk of the privacy of their homes being invaded by thieves or of their personal security being threatened. The site had a good range of security features:

- an enclosed development with no through roads
- well defined boundary walls
- 20 mph speed limit
- electronic gate with a code plus video phone system
- good outdoor lighting
- a further security code to enter the apartment blocks.

These features were important for many in their decision to buy at Princess Mary Court. Some had been worried that the areas they had lived in previously were becoming less safe.

“We were getting rather worried about living there. The hooliganism, this criminal damage, you know, was a development over comparatively recent years.”

Apartment owner
Some people felt so safe they had on occasion neglected the usual security precautions and went out leaving their doors and windows unlocked.

8.2 The security gates had helped to protect people’s privacy. Before the development was finished lots of strangers had wandered in to look at the properties, even when they were inhabited.

“In the first year there were so many people coming, first wandering around... they’d be like looking in your kitchen when you were eating your dinner.”

Town house owner

Nevertheless there was a strong tide of opinion that the security gates were more trouble then they were worth. They were inconvenient to use and often broke down. People delivering, for example, take away food or parcels were intimidated by them and often gave up the effort.

“Somebody decided to put the keypad, which is on a stalk, quite near the gate, which swings open. So you have to key in the number and reverse your car back. It felt like that Mr. Bean thing where he was trying to get out of the multi-storey car park.”

Town house owner

8.3 The video camera intercom system was not particularly successfully either. Often it did not work and even if it did, the householder had to be downstairs to take the call.

At other times the gates failed to deter access at all. Taxi drivers allegedly knew all the entry codes, the gates were left open on the occasions they were out of order and it was possible for pedestrians to slip through unnoticed.

8.4 Although good in theory, in practice the gates were problematic. Evidence from another case history suggests that it would be sufficient to have an enclosed development, with simply a defined entrance way, rather than an electronic gate. Together with the other security devices, this would be sufficient to ensure privacy and security.

9. Privacy and Community

9.1 It was evident from our research that there had been clashes over a number of issues within the development from, where children were
permitted to play, and from territorial disputes over parking, to contraventions of the rules for rubbish disposal. There was a residents’ association that dealt with these matters, but some felt that communications were not always dealt with skilfully.

9.2 Some of our respondents suggested that steps should be taken to develop a greater community spirit within the development in order to prevent further misunderstandings. They felt relationships would be better if more were done to integrate the different communities within the development, young and old, owners and renters.

“Nobody knows anybody else, so it’s a bit like the neighbour that you don’t know and it becomes very annoying because it’s an anonymous person.”

Town house owner

“I definitely think that more should be done to give people the opportunity to know one another.”

Town house occupant

“It makes everything a hell of a lot easier. When you have issues you can go and talk about them civilly.”

Apartment occupants
Case History Number 9

Urban Regeneration: Hulme, Manchester

‘Homes for Change’: Part of the regeneration programme in Hulme

Part of the regenerated area of Hulme
Headlines for Urban Regeneration

Hulme, Manchester

- Socially and ethnically diverse population, inhabiting flats, maisonettes and two/three storey terraces
- Regenerated Hulme was seen as a great improvement on the old decaying crescents and tower blocks, but homes still of unsatisfactory quality and residents suffered serious privacy issues
- Significant privacy problems for households with children through shortage of internal space
- Acute lack of storage space which disrupted their daily lives
- Poor sound insulation for all households except ‘Homes for Change’ cooperative
- ‘Homes for Change’ co operative residents were most satisfied with their homes and level of privacy – only intrusions from children peering in and people passing along the walkway
- Balconies used only when quiet and sunny, otherwise merely a decorative feature
- Original fencing around private gardens was not private enough – too low and slatted. Those who could afford it put up extra screening
- Children not always provided with suitable play areas: they tended to often be dominated by cars
- There was a great divide in perceptions of security between the original residents of Hulme and newcomers, especially those in privately owned housing. The former felt safe, but the latter felt their security was at risk from the area of deprivation surrounding them.
1. Background to the Findings

1.1 Urban Regeneration in Hulme

1.1.1 Hulme, just a mile south of Manchester city centre, has undergone major redevelopment since it was designated a City Challenge area in 1992. The ‘concrete jungles’ of tower blocks and the infamous, six storey Crescent flats have been swept away. In their place there is a mixed development of terraces and flats built in traditional street patterns and with rear courtyards. At the same time there has been substantial commercial development of offices and shops.

1.1.2 We undertook our research in four different types of properties:

- a flat and a maisonette in the distinctive, ship-shaped ‘Homes for Change’ co-operative
- two privately owned and two housing association rented, two storey terraces
- two town house properties built over three floors, for larger households; both were rented from a housing association
- two apartments in a five storey block of flats

1.2 The people

We interviewed a cross-section of people living in Hulme. In socio-economic terms, they ranged from a young doctor who had just bought his first home, to a single parent supported only by social security payments. Our respondents included single people in their twenties in ‘Homes for Change’ to a retired couple in owner occupied property. There was also ethnic diversity: African-Caribbean families; some of whom had lived in Hulme before the regeneration, and white residents.

2. Overall Satisfaction with their Homes

2.1 The people most happy with their properties were those from the ‘Homes for Change’ co-operative. They enjoyed working together to run their development and relished the freedom from being in the thrall of a landlord. They appreciated the unusual design of their building and were proud of their homes.
“I like the design of the place. If you look at it from above… it looks like the front end of a ship.”

Housing Association tenant

The fact that their rents were judged as quite low for the amount of space, helped contribute to their satisfaction.

2.2 The residents in the housing association and privately owned properties also enjoyed their up to date design and features, such as smart new kitchen and bathroom fittings.

“I like the way it is not just one bunch of monotonous houses in rows like some of the estates from the 1960’s have been… I like the different colours used.”

Housing Association tenant

The residents were not, however, pleased with the quality of materials or workmanship in their homes. They complained of “paper thin” walls which were not strong enough to bear pictures or shelves. They were unhappy about a range of problems including damp inside the houses, faulty wiring, poor plasterwork and lack of space.

“All these houses, it’s like they’ve been thrown up.”

Housing Association tenant

“I don’t think the design is the problem, it’s the materials. I would have used better materials, less plasterboard and cheap MDF stuff for floorboards… something a bit more robust. I just wonder if this house will still be stood in 50 years time.”

Housing Association tenant

2.3 Everyone did agree, however, that the houses were easy to keep warm. The heating insulation appeared to be very efficient.

“They are very warm compared to the old houses we used to have. It’s economical for the heating compared to where I lived previously.”

Housing Association tenant
3. Overall Satisfaction with the Regeneration Area

3.1 The new, regenerated Hulme was seen as a great improvement on the old one. It was a much more pleasant place to live: cleaner, neater and more modern. The cockroaches and the urban decay had been banished and a new type of community was being created.

“Of course we appreciate it, because it looks nice you know. It’s modernised and it looks beautiful.”

Housing Association tenant

3.2 The people we interviewed were very much aware that the character of the area had changed. There had been an influx of property owners, who had shifted the social profile more towards young professional and non-manual workers. There were perceived to be more singles and couples living in Hulme now and relatively fewer working class families.

3.3 Some of those who had lived in the old Hulme regretted this social change. The quality of their environment had improved but they felt there was now some loss of the old community spirit. Some former residents had been re-housed outside Hulme and could not return. The new residents were seen as civil, but relationships were not as close as before.

“It’s not a social place. It may be for younger people, but not for families.”

“You don’t really see people standing out as my mum used to do, with the neighbours talking... I don’t even know who lives in that block over there you know, whereas you did know everybody who lived on the old estate.”

Housing Association tenants

The regeneration of the area had, at least in the short run, disrupted some of the old social ties and networks. A new ‘youth culture’ had developed and the original inhabitants felt distanced from it. The character of the area had changed.
4. Privacy in the Home

Although people liked the modern styling of their new homes, most were beset by some serious privacy issues.

4.1 Not enough space for families

4.1.1 The families we spoke to were all unhappy with the amount of space they had in their homes. This applied to social renters and owner occupiers alike; even larger families who had been allocated three storey, six roomed town houses felt they did not have enough space. The result was that neither children nor adults had the privacy they needed to get on with their lives.

“They are making them smaller and smaller and sooner or later we’ll all be living in one bedroomed multi-functional habitats. I don’t agree with it.”

Owner occupier

4.1.2 The consensus was that all the rooms were too small: living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms. There was not enough space to house comfortably all the furniture they needed and there was little flexibility on how it could be positioned. Sometimes the walls were not at true right angles and this made it difficult to fit in furniture. There was also no flexibility to change it around.

“The design of the house is a nightmare. It’s not even square...so it’s a fight to have the bunk bed, a wardrobe and a chest of drawers in there.”

Terraced owner occupier

“We’re built funny like the bedroom down there you can’t change it round besides that one bloody stupid way.”

Terraced social renter

The children’s bedrooms were especially cramped and gave them no space to play in privacy away from the adults. Equally the parents felt that they had no quiet space.

4.1.3 The single people and couples without children were content with the amount of space they had. They said the space was limited but they could manage. There were no privacy issues for them in respect of the amount or configuration of space.
“There’s nothing I don’t like about it. I really like this house.”

Housing association tenant – couple

“The kitchen is a bit poky but I’m not Delia Smith, so it doesn’t bother me too much.”

Owner occupier – single man

4.1.4 The singles and couples in the ‘Homes for Change’ accommodation went further. They felt they had plenty of space for their household; they were particularly pleased that the rent was low in relation to the amount of space they had been allocated.

The respondents we spoke to occupied rooms that were conventionally shaped, with walls at right angles. They were pleased that they did not live in the part of the building where the “ship shape” resulted in irregularly angled rooms.

“People are welcome to live in those weird and wacky shaped flats, but I’m quite happy with a square one.”

‘Homes for Change’ tenant

4.1.5 Almost everyone we spoke to complained about lack of storage space throughout the house. This is not a core privacy issue, but it does disrupt people’s lives. They were unable to put their possessions, including ones that they wished to keep private, safely away.

There was not enough cupboard space in the kitchen, bedrooms or living space. People were reduced to putting some of their possession in storage boxes under the beds and stairs.

Some of those in properties with particularly high ceilings would have preferred that some of the extra space above them had been used for storage.

“Upstairs the ceilings are so high they could have dropped them and put in another storage space up there.”

Housing Association tenant
4.2 Problems with sound insulation

4.2.1 Everyone interviewed apart from the ‘Homes for Change’ respondents, complained about poor sound insulation. They said the walls were flimsy and that they could hear a great deal of what happened in their neighbours’ homes: lights being switched on and off, doors slamming and sometimes, conversations.

The degree to which the poor sound proofing was viewed as a significant invasion of privacy varied across different types of household. Some of the people in larger families were relaxed about hearing some additional noise or, indeed, about being overheard by their neighbours. Others, particularly those in smaller, quieter, households were more concerned about their loss of privacy; they felt uncomfortable that neighbours were so aware of their household activities.

“All not very private. My friends say to me, ‘Oh we can hear everything you do in your household’ and for me that’s not very nice. Sometimes I think somebody’s in the house when it’s (the sound) outside.”

Housing Association tenant

4.2.2 In some households the impact of noise transfer was lessened by the design of the houses. Where non living space, such as corridors, bathrooms and cupboards, abutted on the main areas of habitation, the problems were reduced.

“We rarely hear our neighbours. They don’t hear us either as our living accommodation, like the lounge, is all separated. Theirs is on the far corner, ours is on the far corner. We don’t have an issue”

Private Home Owner

People who lived in the accommodation at the ends of the terraces also suffered less from noise problems simply because they had only one party wall with neighbours.

4.2.3 The people in the ‘Homes for Change’ co operative said they were normally hardly aware of noise from their neighbours; there was virtually no transfer from the sides and a slight amount from above. The walk ways between different parts of the building were, however, sometimes a problem. Households were disturbed by the reverberation of people walking, running or cycling across them.
“When you’re in bed and people come home from the pubs and clubs, stumbling and falling all over the place, it kind of makes you rather annoyed.”

‘Homes for Change’ co operative

“When kids have got their rollerskates and skateboards going on the walkway over our bedroom, it’s like going over a wash board. It feels as if someone’s trying to drill through the walkway.”

‘Homes for Change’ co operative

Some younger people in ‘Homes for Change’ emerged as particularly prone to throwing late night parties which disturbed the privacy of fellow co operative members. However, because they were such a close knit community, the residents were usually able to deter any anti-social behaviour by putting pressure on troublemakers to quieten down. On occasion, the threat of eviction had been necessary to make rowdy neighbours behave more responsibly.

4.3 Not overlooked

4.3.1 No one’s privacy was compromised by being overlooked. The terraces were set back behind small front gardens and the roads separated them sufficiently from opposite neighbours for there not to be a problem. The residents we spoke to had put up net curtains to make absolutely sure no one would see in.

4.3.2 The ‘Homes for Change’ co operative had large windows and the building was often the subject of curious stares. The people we interviewed felt very relaxed about this and were not concerned about being overlooked.

“You might get the odd kid walking past, trying to peer through, but it’s not a major problem.”

‘Homes for Change’ co operative

5. Privacy Outside the Home

5.1 Private outdoor space

5.1.1 All the terraced homes had small back gardens. These small patches of outdoor space were much appreciated by everyone. Some keen gardeners would have liked a bigger garden, but for most they were sufficient and easy to maintain. The gardens had, however, not been private enough for
the residents when they took possession of them: the fences provided were judged too low and it was easy to see through the open slatted structure. Residents had replaced them with solid fences which were high enough to stop people looking over.

“When I first moved in it was such a naff fence, it may as well not have been there. It was really just planks of wood nailed together by a joiner in five minutes. It was nothing other than a boundary; it wasn’t a fence.”

Owner Occupier

5.1.2 One family, in a housing association residence, had some garden space that was open to the central courtyard. They would have preferred a private, fully enclosed garden where the children’s garden toys could be left out undisturbed.

5.1.3 Some people had balconies either instead of, or in addition to, a garden. These were much appreciated when they had a quiet aspect, not for example, facing a busy road, and when they could catch the sun. If these conditions were not met, they were seen as merely decorative, rather than useful.

5.2 Communal outdoor space

5.2.1 The adults in Hulme were quite happy with the communal space to which they had access. They would sit outside on benches by the street or courtyards and socialise with their neighbours.

“She plays music from across the road.”

“People come out and sit on the bench and we sit out and have a drink and have a laugh!”
These communal areas were adequate compensation, in their eyes, for the limited private garden space that they had.

The adults from ‘Homes for Change’ had particularly good outdoor communal space: four roof gardens which were well used and enjoyed. They were a co-operative and there was a well established desire to live harmoniously.

5.2.2 The children were not as well served with usable outdoor space. There were not enough spaces where they could play safely without disturbing the privacy of the neighbourhood. We were told there were no suitable car free zones and that the courtyards were generally not large enough for ball games.

No suitable play areas in the immediate vicinity

“The kids need somewhere proper to play because there’s always cars around, aren’t there.”

“I would have preferred it if (the courtyard) was a bit larger... You need more space for them to play ball.”

Housing Association tenants

“They play football on the streets...they tend to play outside their houses and they get shoved off a lot.”

Owner Occupier

5.2.3 There were several comments that the communal spaces would be greatly improved if there were more grass and trees. This would make the area look less harsh and provide better places for the children to play.
“Greenery would be nice because it’s all gone because they’re throwing up these boxes.”

“Yes, It’s pure concrete.”

Housing Association tenants

5.2.4 The shortage of good places for the children to play was particularly noticed because the local park was rated as too dangerous for them to use.

6. Privacy and Security

6.1 Everyone interviewed was aware that their security might be disrupted by burglary or petty theft from gardens and garages. Many had installed alarms or security locks to protect their homes. There was a division of opinion over how great this threat was. The people who had lived in Hulme before the regeneration generally felt quite secure whereas the relative new comers were more concerned.

6.2 The social renters and members of the ‘Homes for Change’ co-operative, on the whole, felt secure in their homes. There were certain places they would not venture into at night but they generally felt that the privacy of their homes was secure. They knew the people in the neighbourhood well and they all kept a look out for potential trouble makers. There were risks, but they were seen as far less than in the bad old days of the tower blocks and the Crescents.

“Within the complex (security) is very, very good because the way it’s designed everybody is overlooking everybody so there’s not a major problem in that respect. Plus we do have our self-appointed guardian of security who wanders around the walkways.”

‘Homes for Change’ co-operative

“A lot of the teenagers now, we knew them as kids. We know their families, so I do feel safe.”

Housing Association tenant

These people believed there had been few breaches of the security of homes like theirs. Where there had, it had been because of contributory negligence, for example when people had left windows open.
6.3 The homeowners and one younger housing association tenant were not so sanguine. The latter had had a close brush with violent crime when intruders had assaulted her neighbour. She felt that there had been more break ins recently and was concerned about the security of her own home.

“Recently one of the neighbours over there has been attacked in her own home just over there. Three youths broke in and hit him severely with a crow bar.”

Housing Association tenant

For sale signs – a high turnover of ownership?

The home owners saw themselves as a particular target for crime and were anxious about their homes.

“It’s a nice little enclosed island in a very rough area and people in this area are preyed on I think.”

Owner Occupier

They were aware of muggings and robberies at gun point and were becoming fearful of their personal and home security. They were concerned that their window and door locks were not strong enough and the patio doors were also vulnerable to a determined attack; it was also felt that the pathways and gates to the back courtyards needed security cameras to make them more secure.

“You go to a similar development like this over in Cheadle where the houses are slightly bigger and you have security. So why do we need less security when we live in an area which is extremely high in crime rate?”
Both the homeowners we interviewed were not planning to stay in Hulme for very long. They had bought their homes because they were affordable and as a stepping stone to owning a better property. The apparently increasing risk to their privacy and safety was hastening their resolve to move out to a safer area, further out of Manchester.

“The ones who have bought their own homes, they are moving right out. They’ve bought their houses and they were in there for a couple of months. Then you see the ‘For Sale’ signs up again!”

Housing Association tenant

“I’m thinking of moving out to Charlton because I never feel safe in this area . . .”

Owner Occupier
Case History Number 10

Greenwich Millennium Village, London

The Greenwich Millennium Village

Plan of the mixed GMV development
Key Findings for Greenwich Millennium Village

Greenwich, London

- Highly popular designs but discontent with build quality
- Privacy was not at all compromised by lack of space even for households with children; light, spacious, airy homes
- Successful design of live/work units
- Excellent sound insulation, by far the most highly rated of all the case histories
- Large windows and high density layout created a ‘Gold Fish Bowl’ experience
- Gardens and communal space not private enough
- Children at play seen as disturbing the privacy of others using the courtyards
- Householders feel their homes are secure from break ins
- Strong spirit of community cooperation to solve problems
1. Background to the Findings

1.1 Greenwich Millennium Village

1.1.1 Greenwich Millennium Village is part of the regeneration of the Greenwich Peninsula, an area of neglected brown field land, fifteen miles from the centre of London. The village has been developed on principles of social and environmental sustainability and seeks to foster a sense of place and community.

The village will eventually comprise almost fourteen hundred dwellings, 80% of which will be flats and 20% houses. The development is privately owned, but a fifth of the homes are provided by housing associations. The average density is 81 dwellings per hectare.

1.1.2 We undertook our research in two types of accommodation:

- Privately owned live/work units: three storey terraced accommodation with workspace on the ground floor and two bedroom living accommodation above; the properties had private terraces on the top floor level, but no private or communal gardens.

- Housing association rented family accommodation: again, three storey terraces but with three or four bedrooms. The properties were arranged in an outward facing square with small private gardens at the rear leading to an enclosed communal area.

1.2 The people

We undertook a focus group with the housing association tenants. They all had children living at home. Their occupations were a mix of manual and clerical, and two of the respondents were unemployed. We undertook
depth interview with the people in the live/work units who were self-employed.

2. Overall Satisfaction with their Homes

2.1 Both the housing association tenants and the owner occupiers were delighted with the interior design and layout of their homes. They described them as light, spacious and modern.

“The criteria we had was space and light and this did the trick.”

Owner Occupier

“I would say we fell in love with this. It was big and roomy because we needed the space and the other places we’d seen were like little boxes.”

Housing Association Tenant

For everybody they were a great improvement on their previous properties. The social housing tenants had been re-housed from accommodation that had been damp and generally substandard: the houses were a fresh new start.

The owner occupiers had been attracted by the good value for money that the properties appeared to offer: they had got a lot of space for the price.

2.2 Most people were less smitten by the colourful, modern exteriors of the properties. They were described variously, as “Legoland”, “Mars Bar houses” and “like a Butlin’s Holiday Camp”. For most, the houses were liked in spite of their outside appearance.

“They are ugly, in a nice kind of way…they are an eyesore – 2003 pre-fabs ain’t they.”

Housing Association tenant
2.3 There was also disappointment with the build quality of the houses. Everyone described quite serious problems they had experienced. For example, “undulating floors” that had had to be replaced, doors and windows that were ill fitting and draughty, leaking roofs and exterior panelling that was swollen with damp and peeling off. These were not the ‘zero defect’ homes they had been led to expect.

“The concept was lovely, but now the reality is setting in. It’s hard for me as someone who rents but it would have broken my heart if I’d have bought.”

Housing Association tenant

3. Overall Satisfaction with the Development

3.1 The residents were, however, very positive about the development. They saw it as an exciting addition to Greenwich, with excellent facilities within close range of the houses: school, doctors, cinema and a supermarket nearby. They appreciated the Eco Park as a focal part of the development.

“I’ve got everything… if I don’t want to go anywhere else, I don’t have to.”

Housing Association tenant

3.2 Both the owner occupiers and social renters applauded the principles of sustainability that had helped shape the construction of the site. They were aware, however, that in practice, these had not always been met at this early stage of development.

“They sold it fairly idealistically in terms of environment and the design and the re-cycling and the energy and the zero defect building. I’ll say that
again (shouts) ZERO DEFECT BUILDING! Which actually hasn’t transpired to be true.”

Live/Work unit Owner

There had been some problems of communications about the Central Heat and Power (CHP) system; the costs were higher than some had anticipated, and other environmentally friendly measures such as recycling boxes had not yet been instituted. Nevertheless, there was a strong feeling of optimism and excitement about being part of such a dynamic venture.

“I watched the village go up. I was quite excited really. There were times when I’d walk round the Eco Park. It’s nice round there and it’s quite exciting.”

Housing Association tenant

4. Privacy in the Home

The Greenwich Millennium Village residents appeared to fare very well in terms of privacy within their homes. We found no significant problems about lack of space or intrusions of noise; the major concern was being overlooked through the huge picture windows in the properties.

4.1 A sense of space

4.1.1 Greenwich was unlike other affordable housing in our study in that privacy within the house was not compromised by lack of space. The properties in our sample were all of a three storey, town house design. These provided very acceptable space for families of up to three children, and for couples using their live/work units.

4.1.2 The houses were described as light, airy and roomy.

“There’s nothing pokey about the place at all. It’s the biggest place we’ve ever lived in.”

Live/Work unit Owner

“Sometimes I just sit here and look. I love my kitchen and I love my bedroom; that’s another part of my world. It’s absolutely huge, massive and I love it.”

Housing Association tenant
The master bedroom was described as spacious and there was plenty of storage about the house.

4.1.3 Interestingly, the open plan design worked as well for the families as for the couples without children. The reason was that first, in absolute terms, there was enough space for the parents and children not to get in one another’s way. The second reason was that the space was divided across three floors. Parents and children had the advantage of vertical separation of space in which they could have their own zones of activity.

“Our house, I like the design; our room is totally cut off to the kids. The houses are nice inside.”

Housing Association tenant

4.1.4 The live/work unit residents liked the fact that their work space was in a separate, more public zone on the ground floor. The three storey design gave them ample space to separate their work from their private life.

“The work space is more than big enough for the needs I have and to have colleagues round as well, which I do occasionally.”

Live/Work Unit, owner occupier

4.1.5 The only complaints were from the people with the four bedroom properties. They said all the bedrooms were just too small

4.2 Excellent sound insulation

4.2.1 The quality of sound insulation between neighbouring terraces emerged as excellent. Noise transfer was described as “virtually non existent.” The only disturbance to privacy was occasional vibration from a neighbour’s washing machine. The sound proofing was so good that even loud noises such as children screaming and babies crying did not disturb neighbours.

“It’s one thing that they’ve done really well. It is so quiet here when I go to bed and when I sit downstairs.”

“I have a 13 year old son who is a handful at the moment and he has tantrums, screams and shouts and I asked my neighbour and she says she can’t hear nothing.”
This state of nirvana had been achieved through a combination of carefully planned room layout and effective sound insulation. The main living areas of lounge and bedrooms were placed so that they did not directly abut onto a party wall. Instead, living space and rooms where peace and quiet was less important such as kitchens were used as barriers to sound.

There was some sound transfer vertically within the houses, but this was not perceived as a problem: noise emanating from one’s own household could more easily be controlled.

The only major breach of privacy that the Greenwich inhabitants suffered was being overlooked. The houses all have large, floor to ceiling windows which do much to create the light and airy qualities that are so well liked. There was, however, the downside of being overlooked both at the front and at the back of their homes.

The privacy problems were compounded by the high density layout where neighbours overlooked a rear central courtyard and where the front windows faced directly onto the street. There were also problems with toilet windows which were small, but they had been filled with clear glass. Colourful stories were told of the consequences of this design.

“There’s been a complaint put in by the woman across the road that she could see me undressing in"
my bedroom… so what, she shouldn’t have been looking!”

“I was on the toilet and I heard a workman shout, “Nice knickers darling!”

Housing Association tenants

4.3.3 Residents were not too concerned about being overlooked by their neighbours at the back in less private moments than these. They were all part of the same community and knew and accepted one another. They did, however, resent being the object of the gaze of the thousands of visitors who came to look at Greenwich Millennium Village. Being looked at by strangers had become uncomfortable.

“For a whole year we was like a goldfish in a bowl.”

Housing Association tenant

4.3.4 The majority of residents had put up either net curtains or blinds to protect their privacy. At the front of their homes, most people kept them closed virtually all the time because passers by were so close. The only people not concerned about being overlooked on the ground floor were those in the live/work units. Privacy was not so much an issue when they were engaged at their work.

“You can’t really have the blinds open… because there is virtually no pavement, and you can see all the mess people have under their bed if you wanted to look. So we tend to leave the blind shut all the time in the bedroom; it faces the front onto the road.”

Live/Work unit owner

“If you open the blind at the front during the day, everybody is watching you.”

Housing Association tenant
4.3.5 However, some respondents said they felt claustrophobic if they kept their blinds closed all the time. They were more inclined to risk their privacy by opening blinds at the back of the house because this was a communal rather than totally public space.

“You open the blinds because if I don’t open them every now and then, I feel like I’m suffocating.”

Housing Association tenant

5. Privacy outside the Home

5.1 Private outdoor space

Residents did have some private outdoor garden or terrace space immediately to the rear of their homes, but they were unhappy that this space was not as private as they would like. Generally neighbours had a good relationship with one another and there was a strong sense of the community working together to achieve common ends. However, they still wanted some privacy when they were out of doors and not to have to acknowledge their neighbours every time they went outside.

“Sometimes you must have privacy and in our garden there is no way to have total privacy unless you put a cube round yourself.”
“I’ve got neighbours looking down onto my garden, and the fences either side are only that big, so when you come out into your garden, bang, bang, bang they’re there, the neighbours. The only privacy you have is inside your house with the curtains shut.”

Housing Association tenants

Communal space

5.1.1 Some residents had responded by putting extra screening between their garden and the communal spaces beyond; this consisted of high fences and tree planting. These gave a greater degree of privacy but the space was still too overlooked for many of the neighbours. They were happy to have some communal space to share but needed more privacy immediately outside their own homes.

“I didn’t like it at first and I still don’t like it, but it’s a case of accepting it.”

“With the trees I’ve put in eventually I will get my privacy, but with my courtyard you don’t need privacy. I can go out there to be with the community, but once my gates are closed, I have my privacy.”

Housing Association tenants

5.2 Communal Garden Space

5.2.1 The housing association properties backed onto an internal courtyard beyond and their small private gardens. This was shared by the residents of that block. The courtyards are attractive open spaces with seating
areas, small grassed areas and sculpted features. One courtyard had been
dubbed the “Chardonnay Garden” because it was intended for quiet adult
pursuits such as relaxing outside with a glass of wine or reading. The
families sharing the courtyards where we conducted the interviews were,
however, rather scornful of this concept. It simply did not suit their needs.

“They came round with cameras, put people there,
and take pictures and say ‘this is 21st Century living!’
There is no thought of the families.”

Housing Association tenant

5.2.2 There had been tensions between the households with, and those without,
children over how the courtyards should be used. The former saw the
courtyards as ideal places where their children could play safely and under
supervision. The other residents perceived this as an invasion of their own
privacy. Restrictions had gradually been placed on the activities of
children in some of the courtyards.

“All of a sudden, there are all these rules. You can’t
play ball, you can’t use bikes, can’t use the
skateboards; they can just about breathe out there.”

“There was this big issue. Some of them in the flats
are quite snotty. They said, ‘we can’t sit out there
and read a book, why can’t you put your children in
the house and let them play there.”

Housing Association tenant

5.2.3 In one courtyard, there was such a large majority of families with children
in the block that their needs held sway. In practice, the space continued to
be used by the children and those who wanted to enjoy their peace and
quiet were disappointed.

“I’ve had a king sized bouncy castle in there,
barbecues and everyone’s been out there.”

Housing Association tenant

The households with children believed it was unrealistic to expect small
children either to play in the street or to go to the park on their own. Both
options were seen as too dangerous because of the traffic and fears of
‘stranger danger’. The parents wanted the right to decide for themselves
at what age it would be safe to allow their children to play outside the
security of their own home.
“It’s really naïve or stupid not to think what kids are going to do… you shouldn’t be told your six year old has to go out. You have to decide when to let them out yourself.”

Housing Association tenant

“Aesthetically they wanted everything to look beautiful… but I don’t think they have built any of this with children in mind whatsoever.”

Housing Association tenant

6. Privacy and Security

6.1 There were no serious concerns about the privacy of any of the households being invaded by burglars or other wrong doers. The fact that the properties were so overlooked proved a good deterrent to break ins.

“The privacy side is bad but it’s good if you get burgled. If they come round the back, there’s people there can see from all angles.”

“To get into the houses, you have to be a professional burglar. My home is secure. You couldn’t be more secure than my house.”

Housing Association tenants

6.2 The doors and windows of the houses were also believed to be very secure. It was reported that someone had tried to break into a nearby house, but had failed. The CCTV coverage of the neighbourhood and the effective street lighting also improved their feeling of security.

6.3 The only weak point was the car park. This was something of an Achilles heel where intruders could enter and then gain access from the upper floor to the terraces of some properties. There had been some vandalism in the car park; residents wanted security strengthened in this area.
7. Privacy and Community

7.1 Although there were some clashes over issues such as how communal space should be used, there was a strong sense of community cooperation in the Greenwich Millennium Village. There was an active residents’ association with various specialist sub-committees. They had been formed initially to present a united front when sorting out construction faults with the developers.

“All the neighbours are on email communication, mainly because we are plotting against the developers.”

Live/Work Unit owner

“We are trying to do things as a whole village. Last year we had a picnic in the park. That was good.”

Housing Association tenant

“We talk to the neighbours a lot; we do socialise on a daily basis with our neighbours.”

Live/Work Unit owner

7.2 Local areas within the development were closely integrated: people mixed in social activities, arranged by the various committees. As a result there was generally a spirit of neighbourliness abroad and the determination to solve problems together through good communications and compromise.