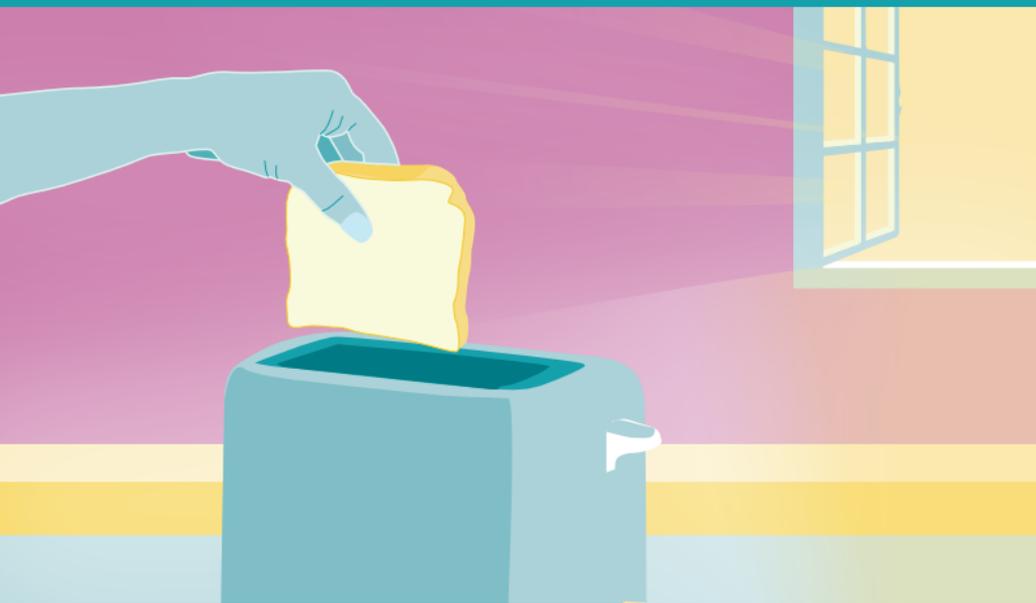


# PRINCIPLES FOR A JUST HOUSING POLICY



QUAKER HOUSING TRUST

# QUAKER HOUSING TRUST: SPARKS OF VISION & ENERGY

YEARLY MEETING IN BRITAIN'S OWN HOUSING CHARITY, FUNDED BY DONATIONS, LOANS AND LEGACIES FROM FRIENDS.

A UNIQUE NATIONAL CHANNEL FOR PRACTICAL QUAKER WITNESS IN SOCIAL HOUSING SINCE 1967.

HARNESSING FRIENDS' LOVE, ENERGY AND VISION TO MEET UNMET HOUSING NEEDS BY SUPPORTING LOCAL PROJECTS THROUGH ADVICE, LOANS AND GRANTS.

WE ARE A QUAKER BODY GIVING QUAKER MONEY, ON BEHALF OF QUAKERS, TO SOCIAL HOUSING PROJECTS WE BELIEVE FRIENDS WOULD WANT TO SUPPORT.

HOW WE WORK IS AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT WE DO BECAUSE BOTH REFLECT THE REASON WE EXIST.

## FORWARD FROM QUAKER HOUSING TRUST

Quaker Housing Trust is reissuing *Principles for a Just Housing Policy* and *Housing: Our Spiritual Concern* in 2015 at a time when inequality in housing in Britain is widening and housing options are narrowing.

A key message for Quakers is the importance of housing as a **home** – providing a secure, affordable place in which to thrive – not merely an individual financial investment, but vital to an inclusive and healthy society. Today, more and more people in Britain are finding it hard to get and keep a home, and the lower your income the harder this is, regardless of whether you are in paid employment.

We, as Quakers and as citizens, have a collective responsibility for housing our population, our neighbours. Making a difference is an active process and one that Friends have long engaged with as part of our historic witness to social justice.

There is a strong sense of the need for radical change in the housing situation. *Principles for a Just Housing Policy* offers a way of describing what that change might look like. *Housing: Our Spiritual Concern* offers a way of exploring for ourselves how we might contribute to that change.

Quaker Housing Trust, January 2015

## INTRODUCTION

Fundamental to our actions as Quakers is our belief in the empowerment of people: a secure home with adequate space and amenities is an essential foundation upon which individuals and households may base their lives. Those who are denied a home, or who are inadequately housed, lack not only shelter but also that secure place in which to grow. Such a deprivation is a social injustice.

Early in their discussions, Britain Yearly Meeting Housing and Social Inclusion Group (BYM HSIG) members discerned the purpose of our action as being “to create positive change in policies and in ourselves by promoting specific issues, in order to make a society in which the causes of homelessness and exclusion, of bad housing and exclusion, no longer exist. Whatever we do must promote the concept and reality of ‘equality of access.’”

Quaker *Advices and Queries* speaks to the reader personally, with every question relating to one's own conduct and way of life. *Housing: Our Spiritual Concern* used that format to help Friends respond “not merely to the immediate situation but also see in it a prophetic challenge to the existing social order [so] that faith, lifestyle, practical action and work for a policy change are brought together in an interactive process”. Its key question was: **What do our own housing actions and housing choices reveal about our faith?**

*Principles for a Just Housing Policy* is designed to provide a kind of checklist against our basic Quaker principles for Friends to use for evaluating housing policy. We have outlined nine characteristics which we believe a just housing policy should demonstrate. Inevitably, and rightly, there is considerable overlap between these characteristics and it is not easy to judge any housing policy against this list. The details of policies will change with circumstance and conditions, but the desired characteristics remain the same.

Each characteristic is therefore accompanied by some questions which could be applied to the housing policy under consideration. The questions are deliberately broad so that they can be applied at many different levels of housing policy: national government; local government; housing associations; other registered social landlords; and/or other housing providers. They arise directly out of work done by the BYM HSIG in response to government proposals in 2000 and 2001, using the principles and characteristics.

In encouraging policy makers to take action to meet these principles, we must ourselves be prepared to live with the consequences. Thus, when applying the Principles, Characteristics and/or Questions it contains, we remember the challenge posed in *Housing: Our Spiritual Concern* and ask ourselves: **"What opportunity does this provide for me to promote equality of access to housing and social inclusion?"**

Britain Yearly Meeting Housing and Social Inclusion Group,  
March 2001

# THE PRINCIPLES FOR A JUST HOUSING POLICY

## 1. Individual well-being

As a religious body Quakers believe that each individual should have the opportunity to develop to their full potential. We consider that such self-realisation is one way in which the will of God is recognised and acted upon. Unless we provide the right conditions we are depriving people of the right to grow spiritually – to acknowledge the light of God within them – and to play a full role in community life.

## 2. Living in true community

We believe that humanity is, in a deep sense, a single religious community and that a necessary balance should be kept between the rights of individuals and community well-being. We believe that the well-being of individuals can only be pursued in relation to others; that spiritually we are one, sharing in the same God, and the true interests of individuals are co-related and are best worked out through living in community with others.

If we live in true community then there can be no gainers or losers. We are all accountable to, and responsible for, each other. We are all hurt by the harm done to one among us. Inequitable distribution of resources does as much damage, spiritually, to the rich as to the poor.

### **3. Peace and justice in society**

Quakers have a particular concern for peace and justice. We consider the two are interlinked. Truly peaceful communities can only come about when the causes of economic and social injustice are eliminated. The consequences of injustice are that the deprived are angry and oppressed and are pushed into crime and unrest. These are the symptoms of a sick society.

### **4. The right sharing of world resources**

We believe in the right sharing of world resources – personal, natural and financial. Globally and nationally we must look carefully at the way in which we use finite resources, both to ensure that they are not squandered on unsuitable ends and to ensure that others are not unfairly deprived.

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A JUST HOUSING POLICY

*The long term economic and social prosperity of a nation depends on social justice for all. Affordable, secure and appropriate housing is a basic human right and we must care for those who need our help. Our Quaker faith leads us to believe that a just housing policy should have certain characteristics.*

## **1. It should assess the inter-related needs of the population nationally and locally, recognising that housing is only one part of meeting people's social and physical needs.**

Housing and housing policy do not exist in a vacuum, but as one part of the social and economic life of the nation. The inter-dependency between housing, health, income, education, employment, physical safety, mobility and social needs cannot be ignored but needs to be addressed at all levels. Housing density should be sufficient to support services such as public transport, local shops, schools and child care, care for elderly people and health care. Local consultation and participation should be an integral part of the planning process for housing developments.

### **How does the housing policy:**

- build partnerships with and between the widest possible range of statutory and non-statutory agencies in seeking to assess and meet the housing needs of the whole community?
- ensure that the range of housing provision covers the particular needs of your local community?
- promote the right density of housing and/or mix of occupants to sustain the community?

## **2. It should respect human dignity and the value of the individual.**

People must be valued for what they are, not by what kind of house they live in, and people without homes have equal rights within society. People who are homeless or in poor or inadequate housing should not be viewed as being the problem, but as individuals with problems. Insufficient resources can lead to undignified allocation processes which devalue the individuals administering them as well as the applicants.

### **How does the housing policy:**

- demonstrate respect for human dignity and the value of the individual?
- promote full and informed consultation with the people directly affected by it?
- ensure that application procedures for housing and related assistance are clear to everyone and transparent in their implementation?

### **3. It should promote equal opportunity for access to affordable, secure and appropriate housing and provide freedom of choice.**

A person should be able to afford their housing regardless of whether or not they are in receipt of housing benefit, and whatever their form of occupancy<sup>i</sup>. They should be secure in terms of financial affordability, security of tenure for those in rented accommodation, and physically safe from human threat or structural faults in the building. Their housing should be appropriate to their physical, cultural, familial and social needs. People should have as much opportunity as possible for their views to be taken into account when they are seeking a new home from social housing providers.

#### **How does the housing policy:**

- make equality of access to safe, secure housing which is appropriate to individual needs a reality for those who need it?
- improve and increase the range of good quality, well-designed, well-managed and affordable housing?
- provide maximum opportunity for the views of those seeking housing to be expressed and taken into account when accommodation is offered?

#### **4. It should encourage and exemplify social justice, social inclusion and community development.**

Many housing problems need solutions in addition to repairs and more new building; better links between housing and other aspects of social policy and improved joint working between government departments are required. Situations must be avoided in which social stigma is attached to certain kinds of housing, when slums and 'sink' estates are created, and negative discrimination flourishes. Where one lives should not dictate social status nor exclude one from the wider community. Housing is an essential part of making community, not a means to separate and isolate ourselves.

#### **How does the housing policy:**

- promote social justice, social inclusion and development for the whole community, ensuring that no group of people is disadvantaged by its implementation?
- create an effective method by which the local community can influence decisions made about housing and related provision?
- recognise the importance of providing funding for non-housing but associated facilities required by the community?<sup>ii</sup>

## **5. It should take account of, and offer protection to, the vulnerable people in our society.**

That is, not only those people already defined under law as 'homeless' or 'in priority need' but any one without a secure and appropriate place in which to live. Classing a household as "problem" and putting them into bad housing conditions or refusing to house them at all only compounds the problem, creating situations where vulnerable people are made more so. Other individuals may need support in order to live safely in the community as they cope with handicap, disability, illness, discharge from institutional life, or as part of a process of recovery and rehabilitation.

### **How does the housing policy:**

- cater for the housing needs of all vulnerable people, regardless of age, mental or physical health, citizenship, income or background?
- facilitate suitable provision for those who need support in order to live safely in the community as they cope with physical, mental, emotional or social difficulties?
- protect and improve housing provided to meet particular needs?<sup>iii</sup>

## **6. It should require every provider of housing to be directly accountable to the wider community for the quality of that provision.**

Because housing is a resource for the wider community, and responsibility must go with power, an element of accountability is required for those in a position to exercise control over this resource. Thus government (local and national) to electorate; landlords (in all sectors) to tenants; developers to the community (as well as to the financial investors); and builders to purchasers. Good housing design promotes real choice by meeting a range of physical and cultural needs (over and above those designated 'special needs').

### **How does the housing policy:**

- ensure full and transparent accountability of the housing provider to their clients?
- encourage full and informed consultation with the people it directly affects?
- promote high standards in the design, physical condition, and good management of housing?

## **7. It should ensure that the quality of new/refurbished housing takes the right use of natural and financial resources into account.**

Housing and the making of homes have considerable social and environmental consequences: housing is quite literally the society and economy set in concrete. All that is associated with it – land, manufacturing, finance, energy consumption – represents a large part of our economy. Housing development should take place with local consultation and an assessment of the community's needs (whether an existing housing scheme is being expanded or a new one created). House design should take account of the geographical, environmental and community context. New buildings should aspire to high, long-lasting standards of quality in design, construction and materials, avoiding wastage and promoting energy efficiency.

### **How does the housing policy:**

- demonstrate a right use of natural and financial resources?
- promote high, long-lasting standards of quality in design, construction and materials, avoiding wastage and promoting energy efficiency?
- take account of the geographical, environment and community context in which it will operate?

## **8. It should enable the provision of adequate resources for the building, maintenance and management of housing.**

One way to reduce the cost of buying or renting housing is to increase the supply and creative ways need to be explored for attracting funding from a variety of sources into housing at all levels – construction, conversion, rehabilitation, repair and maintenance. Good housing management is vital for the maintenance of the fabric and for the community. It encourages higher standards, greater participation by tenants in decisions, less fragmented communities and proper use and reuse of this limited resource.

### **How does the housing policy:**

- attract funding from a variety of sources into housing at all levels – construction, conversion, rehabilitation, repair and maintenance?
- promote adequate investment in good quality management of the housing?
- enable tenants and residents to share in decision making about how the housing is managed?

## **9. It should actively promote steps to prevent homelessness and bad housing, for this generation and the next.**

Many people not defined as in “priority need” may nevertheless be both vulnerable and at risk of homelessness. Homelessness has many causes – financial or familial difficulties are just two, but common ones, which can be prevented by help and advice at an early stage. Partnerships should be forged between housing providers and people experiencing bad housing and homelessness to seek solutions together. The improvement of housing conditions for all plays an important part in the regeneration of our cities and villages, and is a vital element to prevent people being excluded from full participation in society.

### **How does the housing policy:**

- actively prevent homelessness?
- promote strategies for helping people experiencing homelessness or bad housing to be appropriately housed and integrated into the whole community?
- ensure that housing meets minimum standards of health and safety as well as suitability for the occupant?

## Notes:

1. The Britain Yearly Meeting Housing and Social Inclusion Group worked from 1999 to 2001. It was the successor to previous housing policy and action groups in BYM, and was set up to help Friends with their continuing action in pursuit of our spiritual concern for housing, following sessions at Yearly Meeting in 1993 and 1998. Membership was deliberately drawn from all the Quaker bodies actively concerned with the issues of housing and social inclusion: Quaker Housing Trust, Quaker Homeless Action, Quaker Social Action, Quaker Social Responsibility & Education and BYM's formal representative to Churches National Housing Coalition.
2. Quaker Homeless Action is an independent Quaker charity working across the country to alleviate the poverty and distress of street homeless single people: [www.qha.org.uk](http://www.qha.org.uk). Quaker Social Action is an independent Quaker charity based in east London, which supports people on a low income to find solutions to the issues affecting their lives: [www.quakersocialaction.com](http://www.quakersocialaction.com). Quaker Social Responsibility & Education was a predecessor to Quaker Peace & Social Witness, part of the centrally managed work of BYM: [www.quaker.org.uk](http://www.quaker.org.uk)

3. Churches National Housing Coalition was a unique coalition of churches, national charities, housing associations, local church groups, community and tenants groups and other individuals, who came together as an expression of concern about the poverty experienced in Britain especially through lack of affordable housing. It subsequently merged with CHAS (Catholic Housing Aid Society) to form Housing Justice, the national ecumenical campaigning voice on housing issues: [www.housingjustice.org.uk](http://www.housingjustice.org.uk)

## References:

- i. Owner-occupier, private rental tenants, social housing tenants (i.e. renting from a local authority, housing association or other provider registered with and regulated by the Housing Corporation or other government body), residents of sheltered/supported housing, care schemes or hostels.
- ii. For example, public transport, doctors' surgeries, shops, schools, community facilities.
- iii. Such as in rural areas, sheltered housing for elderly people, built or adapted for disabled children and adults, supported accommodation for those in the process of recovery or rehabilitation, safe housing for people fleeing domestic, racial or other harassment.

## Housing: Our Spiritual Concern

*Housing: Our Spiritual Concern* was first published in 1993 by the QSRE-CNHC Link Group to help Friends explore the concern in a more personal way. It has been reprinted by Quaker Housing Trust and is available from our Secretary, or our website: [www.qht.org.uk](http://www.qht.org.uk)

Social housing is an important option for secure housing in the choices available to everyone, regardless of income.

Yearly Meeting created Quaker Housing Trust in 1967 as a way of turning Friends' concern and money into help for social housing projects which transform people's lives by giving them a safe place in which to live.

This practical Quaker witness is needed now more than ever. You can be part of making a real difference to people in housing need by contributing directly through your own housing charity: Quaker Housing Trust  
[www.qht.org.uk](http://www.qht.org.uk)

## About QHT

Quaker Housing Trust is a committee of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. The QHT trustees are appointed by Meeting for Sufferings [Quaker Faith & Practice 8.15]. QHT is a separately registered charity [No. 254704] and a company limited by guarantee registered in England [No. 00924311].

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# THE INEQUALITY IN HOUSING IS WIDENING AND HOUSING OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE ARE NARROWING.

*Quaker Housing Trust report to Meeting for Sufferings, 2013*

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