

Housing and Sustainable Communities Policy

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Introduction

The design of our towns and cities affects how we live, work and play. With smarter urban planning and building practices we can improve the liveability of our communities for all New Zealanders.

Building location, design, processes and materials have a major impact on the environment, on our transport options, and on our health and quality of life.

Housing is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of individuals, whānau/families and communities. All people are entitled to secure tenure of sustainable and affordable housing. Housing decisions must help strengthen communities and enhance ecological sustainability.

Definitions

Homelessness - The Green Party accepts the definition of homelessness adopted by the NZ Coalition to End Homelessness.

Social Housing - Affordable (no more than 30% of income) rental or rent to buy housing provided by the state, local government, or the community (third) sector.

Third Sector Housing - Housing provided by non-governmental organisations, as separate from State sector and private sector housing.

Universal Design - Seeks to produce homes that are aesthetic, convenient, safe and functional for all people of all abilities, at any stage of life.

Sustainable Communities - Communities in which the social, cultural, environmental and economic operation of our settlements supports a sufficient quality of life for all residents, in perpetuity.

Vision

The Green Party envisions a New Zealand in which:

- Our built environment is designed and constructed according to principles of sustainability.
- Cities and towns have a strong and thriving heart linked to a web of community neighbourhoods each with their own identity.
- Everyone has access to affordable and secure housing, with low environmental impact, and which supports occupant wellbeing.
- Local communities actively and effectively engage in planning and consenting processes which shape the future of their city, town or community.
- Historic, cultural and natural heritage is cherished and protected.

Key Principles

1. Housing is a social good and a basic right; all people should have access to secure, affordable and good quality housing.
2. Developing sustainable and inclusive communities should be at the heart of urban and rural planning processes.
3. Iwi and hapū rights under Te Tiriti o Waitangi to undertake culturally appropriate development, including housing, must be supported.
4. Decisions on the overall location and design of urban development should include democratic input from communities of interest and meet the diverse needs of the community.
5. Housing in each locality should be able to accommodate a mix of ages, cultures, abilities and incomes. It should also be developed in conjunction with local employment, recreation and education opportunities so that people can realistically live, work and play locally.
6. Design, construction, maintenance, refurbishment and operation of the built environment should be undertaken to minimise lifecycle energy, emissions, water, resource use, and other environmental impacts.
7. Non-residential development (e.g. commercial, industrial, recreational) should be designed and constructed to be compatible with adjacent residential areas and enhance the sustainability of the community.
8. Risks from floods (including from sea level rise), storms and earthquakes should be mitigated as far as practicable through appropriate planning and construction techniques.

Specific Policy Points

1. Building sustainable cities and towns

How we plan for, design and carry out urban development has a major impact on the quality of our health, environment and social life.

The Green Party will:

1. Strengthen the role of the government to facilitate sustainable communities, including through:
 - a. Development of a National Policy Statement on sustainable urban design.
 - b. Provision of research, analysis, advice and reporting on the effects of central government policy on progress towards sustainable communities.
 - c. Provision of technical assistance to local authorities on the development of sustainable cities and towns.
 - d. Development of national standards on climate change adaptation, for use by local government when planning development (e.g. in floodplains and coastal areas).
2. Prioritise the development or refurbishment of previously developed land (maximising re-use and recycling of structures and materials) ahead of undeveloped land, and safeguard high quality horticultural and agricultural land, particularly that bordering urban areas, from intensive development.
3. Work collaboratively, including with community and disability organisations and the building industry, to revise the New Zealand Building Code to ensure inclusion of best practice accessibility and universal design standards for new buildings.

4. Ensure urban development minimises car use and increases opportunities for active modes and public transport (see [Transport](#) policy).
5. Work with Māori, local government, conservation organisations, and the community to protect, conserve and restore natural ecosystems in or near urban areas (see our [Conservation](#) policy).
6. Strengthen protection for historic heritage in urban areas and encourage greater awareness of the positive role of heritage in creating a durable urban identity. (see [Arts, Culture and Heritage](#) policy).
7. Within appropriate parameters of sustainability and attractiveness, encourage increased housing density in urban areas.

2. Ensuring community participation

Decisions about building and housing development ought to involve the meaningful participation of the local community. Community involvement can improve social cohesion, and ensure a commitment to sustainability.

The Green Party will:

1. Support the formation of regional building and housing forums with representatives from community based, housing, and disability organisations, local government, private sector, building industry, consumer groups, and tenants' groups as a means of jointly developing, implementing and monitoring building policy at the local level.
2. Provide for community consultation in planning and building of new housing developments.

3. Recognising Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Tangata whenua should have the right to live in their ancestral districts. Rural housing remains inadequate and substandard in many parts of New Zealand, and multiple land ownership still presents a major barrier to home ownership. Due to reduced availability of government finance the numbers of houses being built on Maori land has in many areas decreased in recent times. Moreover, the Green Party recognises that under Te Tiriti o Waitangi the Crown has committed to work in partnership with Maori to uphold rangatiratanga by finding solutions to Maori housing needs. Recent Waitangi Tribunal reports have found that in some respects the Government has been failing to meet this commitment.

The Green Party will:

1. Provide resources to enable hapū, iwi and pan-iwi bodies to play a key role in decision-making and facilitate the development of housing on communally owned land.
2. Support papakainga and local iwi and hapū third sector housing, including provision of finance for housing on Maori land, and extend Housing New Zealand Corporation's urban renewal project aimed at improving housing and neighbourhood quality.
3. Support the provision and maintenance of rural housing in areas of special need.

4. Sustainable building

The Green Party believes it is vital for the Government to play a role in setting standards and promoting sustainable building design and construction.

The Green Party will:

1. Develop a sustainable building strategy, which provides guidance and sets standards for building materials and performance based on life cycle analysis.

2. Update the New Zealand Building Code to improve sustainability and energy performance standards for new buildings, and ensure NZ building inspectors are trained to apply these standards.
3. Provide education on and promotion of sustainable building practices, including training for architects and builders, demonstration projects, and information targeted at home buyers.
4. Ensure building work carried out by central and local government sets a high standard of sustainability for others to follow.
5. Support the development of community design centres to provide design and engineering advice.
6. Support and expand programmes to make existing buildings more energy and water efficient, including extension of funding and eligibility for the Warm Up New Zealand insulation/clean heat scheme, and partnerships with mortgage providers to establish a facility for low interest loans.
7. Encourage the installation of solar power (see [Energy](#) policy).
8. Work collaboratively with local government and industry stakeholders to reverse the trend towards larger homes, and to ensure that covenants do not preclude the building of small or prefabricated homes, or use of low impact construction methods.

5. Providing secure and affordable social housing

The Green Party believes that central and local government must ensure that all New Zealanders have adequate housing. Social housing, which includes state housing, local government housing, and community sector housing, can provide affordable rental accommodation to large numbers of people. The level of social housing falls far short of meeting the current need.

The Green Party will:

1. Ensure that the Housing New Zealand Corporation has resources to increase its rate of acquisition and building of state houses, as well as maintaining and upgrading existing houses.
2. Ensure that new state housing is designed in collaboration with local communities, uses universal design principles and sustainable building practices, and is integrated sensitively within the community near facilities and services that meet the needs of whānau/families.
3. Cap rents at 25% of income for low income Housing New Zealand Corporation tenants and community housing tenants.
4. Establish 'community houses' in larger Housing New Zealand Corporation and social housing developments to provide a facility for community and social services.
5. Require Housing New Zealand Corporation to fulfil its responsibilities as a landlord to both its tenants and their neighbours.
6. Manage local authority land holdings to maintain an adequate supply of land for government, local government and third sector housing.
7. Give priority for social housing to people who are living in extremely substandard or overcrowded accommodation.

6. Expanding the third sector

Community-based housing can provide flexibility and mix of housing options to better meet the needs of our diverse society. Third sector organisations act in a way that benefits the physical environment and helps to build stronger communities.

The Green Party will:

1. Create a legislative and regulatory environment that actively encourages third sector involvement in the provision of diverse, secure and affordable housing, particularly in areas of high need.
2. Provide funding to assist third sector housing organisations.
3. Ensure that community based housing organisations that obtain government funding are subject to scrutiny of their allocation criteria and procedures, housing quality (including environmental and social sustainability), and rental and affordability policies.
4. Ensure urban planning provides for not-for-profit retirement villages and rest homes within reach of public spaces and facilities (including community gardens and natural areas), to provide alternatives to the 'branded' rest homes.
5. Remove legal and institutional barriers to the development of a range of affordable and appropriate housing tenures and styles, e.g., community land trusts, co-operative housing, eco-villages, self-built, sweat equity housing, shared ownership, and papakainga housing.

7. Supported housing for those in need

Our society needs safe accommodation and support for its most vulnerable members, for instance those experiencing mental illness, disabled people, victims of domestic violence, and the homeless. People will at times need safe places to go to and may not be in a position to pay.

The Green Party will:

1. Work with local authorities, NGOs, social health and housing agencies, and community groups to provide specialised housing that meets particular needs, such as for people with physical and intellectual disabilities.
2. Provide matched funding for local authorities that take active measures to support social housing or low income retrofitting programmes.
3. Work with local authorities to require financial contributions for large developments to help build affordable housing for low income households.
4. Urgently address the current shortfall of secure, affordable and appropriate housing and support for those living with, and recovering from, mental illness and addictions.

8. No one should be left homeless

Homelessness in urban, provincial and rural New Zealand is a much larger problem than is commonly acknowledged. In most cases, affected people experience disconnection from their whānau, hapū and/or iwi (social supports, friends and family).

The Green Party will:

1. Regularly monitor and report on homelessness statistics, issues and trends.
2. Ensure that Government agencies adopt best practice in working with and supporting homeless people in New Zealand, including linking with relevant areas of the third sector.

9. Housing Affordability

The Green Party believes that all people should be able to live in appropriate and sustainable housing for a cost of no more than 30% of their income unless they freely choose otherwise. For a significant proportion of the population this is becoming very difficult, if not impossible.

Home ownership should be an affordable option for those who wish to do so.

A) Managing investor demand for housing

To make housing affordable the growing gap between incomes and house prices, and both the demand and the supply side of housing, must be addressed.

A capital gains tax on property (excluding the family home) will help to restrain house prices by limiting speculative investment in property.

The Green Party will:

1. Introduce a capital gains tax on all but the family home (see our [Economic](#) policy).
2. Limit residential land sales to New Zealand citizens and permanent residents (see [Trade and Foreign Investment](#) policy).

B) Reducing house construction costs

Building costs in New Zealand have increased markedly, due to increases in the price of materials, changes in building specifications, and increased compliance costs. The Green Party will:

1. Identify ways to lower the costs of house construction in New Zealand.
2. Work with the building industry to improve productivity in the building sector.

C) Making home ownership possible

In order to enable households to save a deposit, and to obtain and service a mortgage, the Green Party will:

1. Legislate to increase relevant rates of income for all low income New Zealanders including through annual adjustments in the minimum wage and a universal child payment (see [Industrial Relations](#) and [Children's](#) policies).
2. Change income support systems so that savings towards a deposit are not treated as assets for benefit abatement.
3. Increase the availability of low interest finance for households seeking home ownership, including through shared equity and supported savings.

D) Ensuring private renting is affordable & meets liveability standards

The Green Party believes that renters should have access to affordable and secure rental accommodation. The Green Party will:

1. Legislate and advocate for the development of secure and affordable long-term rental accommodation.
2. Provide more government support for tenants' advocacy groups.
3. Ensure legislation provides fairness and clear processes for both tenants and landlords.
4. Introduce a 'Warrant of Fitness' scheme for residential rental properties that includes insulation, clean heating, weather-tightness and basic service standards.

10. Housing as key infrastructure

As housing needs change over time, it is crucial that housing policy and provision is based on the latest and best possible information and is recognised as part of the nation's key infrastructure.

The Green Party will:

1. Make use of existing surveys based on census information and demographic statistics to establish and maintain an overview of housing need.
2. Carry out further research at the local and regional levels, including a national housing needs assessment for every district at least once every five years.
3. Include housing in the National Infrastructure Development Plan.

11. Strengthening the housing workforce

The Green Party will:

1. Ensure an adequate number and quality of trained builders and other trades and craftspeople in the building industry.
2. Develop on the job apprenticeships and training programmes within Housing New Zealand Corporation.
3. Link the expansion of Housing New Zealand Corporation's building and acquisition programme to local employment and apprenticeship schemes.

12. Addressing Home Building Defects

Over recent decades New Zealand has seen a significant increase in home building defects and, in particular, water tight problems. The Supreme Court, Law Commission and Local Government New Zealand have all recommended that this situation be addressed by a government backed insurance scheme covering latent defects in homes. To address this situation the Green Party will investigate:

1. Establishing a government home-building insurance scheme to provide cover for homeowners in instances where the builder fails to rectify defects.
2. Creating a statutory tribunal to hear and make decisions on building disputes.