

# Neighbourhood and Communal Spaces Policy



## Introduction

This policy describes Great Places approach to effectively managing the neighbourhoods and communal areas around our homes and schemes, recognising that whether we manage just a few homes in a particular area or are a significant landlord in a neighbourhood, we have a contribution to offer locally.

The policy supports and underpins the commitments within our corporate plan to ensure we help to create safe, vibrant and sustainable communities where people want to make their home.

It compliments both our Neighbourhood and Independence and Wellbeing Service Delivery Frameworks which defines our approach to creating successful neighbourhoods and working together with our customers and partners to take collective responsibility for looking after the local neighbourhood. Great Places takes a proactive approach to managing our schemes and neighbourhoods and we have developed a patch based model that ensures we have a visible presence at schemes and in neighbourhoods. This includes: meeting customers, identifying issues and making sure we maintain our high standards. Our relationship with our customers is a two-way one with responsibilities on both sides. We expect customers to take responsibility, with our support if needed, to look after and respect their homes, their communal areas and the neighbourhoods in which they live.

## Context

Great Places is a regional housing association with over 26,000 homes across 37 local authorities in the North of England. Our stock profile is equally broad ranging from individual houses on a multi-tenure street, new build development sites, large scale housing estates, small blocks of flats and large city apartment blocks. This complexity in geography and stock profile requires Great Places to adopt a flexible and balanced approach to managing neighbourhood issues and communal spaces and how we influence and support local stakeholders.

Our Neighbourhood and Communal Spaces Policy responds to the specific regulatory requirement set out in the Neighbourhood and Community Standard, to consult with our customers in developing a published policy for maintaining and improving the communal areas and neighbourhoods associated with their homes.

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The policy also adheres to all applicable statutory and legal requirements in relation to the local neighbourhood environment, including:

- Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978
- The Removal, Storage and Disposal of Vehicles (Prescribed Sums and Charges) Regulations 2008
- Law of Torts (Interference with Goods) Act 1977
- Public Health Act 1936.
- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- Occupier's Liability Act (1957, Revised 1984)
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (1974)
- Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
- Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002

## Aims and objectives

This policy aims to set out our pro-active approach and commitment to managing neighbourhoods and communal spaces, ensuring that these are safe, attractive and vibrant.

The policy objectives are:

- To manage and maintain our schemes and neighbourhoods in partnership with our customers ensuring we both meet our responsibilities
- To work alongside key local services (e.g. refuse collection, highways, street scene, local authorities, Police)
- To ensure the grounds and communal facilities we own and manage are safe and well maintained
- To provide high quality services that enhance our schemes and neighbourhoods that represent value-for-money to our customers
- To put customers at the heart of their neighbourhood by encouraging active customer involvement and consultation on all aspects of neighbourhood management

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## Shared Responsibilities

Our relationship with our customers is a two-way one with responsibilities on both sides. Ensuring that they are understood and accepted, we can deliver effective neighbourhood and communal space management:

Our responsibilities as landlords include:

- Providing quality services that keep communal and external areas in a good state of repair and cleanliness, safe and free from hazards for customers and visitors.
- Ensuring that there are no health, safety and fire risks to customers and visitors in our neighbourhoods and communal spaces
- Making neighbourhood and communal space improvements, where appropriate we will consult with customers
- Giving customers a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in how neighbourhood services are delivered, how performance is monitored and how satisfaction is assessed in accordance with the Regulators ‘Tenant Satisfaction Measures’ which are publicised quarterly.
- Listening and acting on concerns raised by customers with regard to their neighbourhoods and communal spaces and having a clear, simple and accessible approach to complaints to ensure they are resolved promptly.
- Partnership working with key local services to deal effectively with customer concerns or issues.

Customers’ responsibilities include:

- Making sure that homes, gardens and driveways are well maintained and in good condition in line with their tenancy or lease agreement.
- Promptly reporting any repairs which we are responsible for.
- Helping us meet our health, safety and fire responsibilities by ensuring that communal areas are clear, safe and free from personal belongings. This includes communal cupboards and loft spaces where applicable.
- Being a responsible pet owner by not allowing them to cause a nuisance. ‘Nuisance’ includes allowing them to roam off a lead in internal and external communal areas, incessant barking, fouling and causing disturbance on land owned by Great Places. Nuisance will be treated as Tenancy Management. Great Places will take the appropriate action to remedy the behaviour promptly.

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- Not engaging in anti-social behaviour, nuisance or annoyance to neighbours and reporting any concerns.
- To not hoard items, or anything at the premises.
- Take out an appropriate contents insurance policy (Great Places can provide details of our partner provider on request)

## Scheme & Neighbourhood Inspections

Alongside feedback from customers, regular inspections of our schemes internal and external communal areas and neighbourhoods are one of main ways that we can ensure that schemes and local neighbourhoods are being looked after, and to identify problems that need to be addressed. These inspections will also focus on ensuring that our contractors are delivering high quality and value for money services.

The frequency of these inspections will be determined and reviewed regularly by the patch manager based on a range of factors, including:

- property type
- property location and local environment
- the type and complexity of services delivered
- feedback from customers
- an understanding of historical issues or any exceptional events such as flooding

Great Places will ensure that every scheme will have an asset management programme that ensures that key scheme components are maintained to a high standard and replaces them within appropriate timescales.

## Fire Safety

In schemes that have communal areas Great Places will ensure all relevant buildings have a valid Fire Risk Assessment. Customers must not keep any personal items (including bikes, pushchairs, mobility scooters, door mats, decorative items, shoes, etc.) within the internal communal areas. This includes communal cupboards and loft spaces where applicable.

## Communal Grounds Maintenance & Tree Management

Where Great Places owns communal areas that include grass, borders or shrubs we will provide a grounds maintenance service that ensures these areas are maintained to high standard during the different seasons and represents value-for-money to customers.

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Great Places values the important environmental and aesthetic impact trees have in our communities and we aim to maintain a healthy tree population where they are our responsibility to manage and maintain.

Where trees are situated within our customers' private gardens it is the responsibility of the customer to maintain, however we may inspect and undertake works where they pose a possible health and safety risk or are damaging the property. For further information on this, please refer to our Tree Management Policy.

## **Communal cleaning (including window cleaning)**

The quality and cleanliness of the internal and external communal areas of our blocks affects the health quality of life for our customers and as part of our two-way relationship we both have a role to play in ensuring they remain clean and safe.

Where appropriate Great Places will provide regular cleaning of communal areas to ensure they are maintained to a high standard and represent value-for-money to customers. Whilst cleaning requirements and frequency will vary significantly between different schemes, they will generally include keeping internal and external communal areas hoovered/swept, mopped and free from litter and graffiti. Where blocks and schemes have communal facilities such as a kitchen, laundry rooms and resident lounges we will ensure that these are also cleaned and well maintained.

### **Window Cleaning:**

Great Places will ensure that communal windows are cleaned on a frequency based upon the management requirements for each site. Great Places will only clean windows of individual customers properties where there is a contractual obligation to do so. Otherwise, this will be the responsibility of the customer as detailed in their tenancy/licence/leasehold agreement (where applicable).

## **Property Gardens**

Untidy and overgrown gardens can negatively impact upon the kerbside appeal of a neighbourhood and can often be an indicator of other tenancy and property related issues. It is the responsibility of the customer as per their tenancy agreement to maintain their property gardens. As part of our patch based service model, local Neighbourhood Services Managers will work with the customer to provide any appropriate advice or guidance. Tenancy enforcement will only be used as a last resort.

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## Play Areas

Where play areas are under Great Places ownership, we will ensure that they are safe to use, regularly inspected and risk assessed to ensure they are fit for purpose.

We will ensure that all play area equipment is maintained using a combination of planned preventive maintenance and responsive repairs. All play areas and equipment are subject to an independent annual audit by a ROSPA accredited inspector.

## Rubbish & Fly Tipping

Rubbish and fly tipping can have a significant negative impact on the appearance of schemes and neighbourhoods and have the potential to attract other types of anti-social behaviour and pests. Great Places will investigate all instances of fly tipping and misuse of bin stores on our land, and in the event that we establish the identity of a customer or person responsible, a request to remove the items within a reasonable timescale will be given. In the event that the request is not adhered to, offenders will be at risk of tenancy enforcement concerned for the cost of this service and potential prosecution.

## Car Parking & Bike Stores

A significant number of our schemes provide customers with parking areas and we will work with customers to reduce irresponsible parking, parking-related disputes and resolve access problems for emergency and service vehicles. Unless it is specifically stated in a customer's tenancy agreement, parking is provided on a first come basis. Where it is deemed appropriate, and in consultation with customers, some schemes may operate a secure car park with gates or barriers limiting access.

We will work with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) to identify owners of suspected abandoned vehicles on our land and arrange for the vehicle to be removed, stored and disposed of if the owner does not respond after giving the required notice. Persistent offenders will be at risk of enforcement and potential prosecution.

Our car park areas are not for the use of personal business such as vehicle repairs and all vehicles parked in our parking areas must be of road worthy condition including tax, insurance and MOT. We reserve the right to implement parking enforcement measures, where required.

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Some of our schemes also provide bike storage for use by customers. This storage is operated on a first come basis and customers are responsible for ensuring the security of their own bikes.

## **Partnership Working**

Great Places owns a significant number of homes in neighbourhoods where there is a mix of different social housing and private owners. Our customers and Great Places staff will identify local neighbourhood issues that are not our responsibility, including; highways, footpaths, alleyways, street lighting and other properties. We will work closely with Local Authorities, management companies, private landlords and other land owners to ensure that identified issues are addressed quickly and appropriately.

We will work collaboratively with other organisations, agencies and stakeholders, to influence those neighbourhood services delivered outside of our direct control to ensure they positively contribute to maintaining neighbourhoods that are clean, safe and attractive.

## **Customer & Community Engagement**

We encourage our customers and communities to engage with us at a local level and our local Neighbourhood Service Managers actively seek feedback, comments and views while managing their patch.

Where specific services are delivered by Great Places (e.g. Grounds Maintenance) we will actively survey customers on a regular basis as part of our contractor performance management and to influence future decisions regarding appropriate service levels and design specifications for new buildings and schemes.

## **Financial / value for money implications**

Delivering value for money through this Neighbourhood and Communal Spaces Policy and more generally our approach to scheme and neighbourhood management is about the right service delivered efficiently in a way that benefits our customers and maintains our assets.

## **Implications for customers**

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We know that our customers want an attractive and safe place to live, one that improves their wellbeing and makes them more likely to be happy in their home. We will offer opportunities to engage with us to create trust and understanding; customers will be able to have a direct influence on their local area and our service delivery.

Our ways of working creates a different relationship with customers. We expect them to proactively engage in the relationship and community and to respect their home and neighbours, but equally, we understand that they can hold us to account for our actions.

## **Equality and Diversity implications**

This policy applies to all our properties and customers as appropriate. This has no bearing on the profile of the tenant including age, race, gender. It does not target or disproportionately affect any group of people based on any of the protected characteristics.

## **How performance will be monitored**

There are a range of measures and performance indicators which enable Great Places to monitor the overall effectiveness of its approach to neighbourhood and communal spaces management and implementation of this policy.

Customer Satisfaction is a "Performance Indicator" for the business; it is monitored and regularly reported to the Board. We monitor Tenant Satisfaction Measures and this policy relates to Question 10 of these measures '*How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Great Places keeps communal areas clean, and well maintained?*' Benchmarking with other housing providers also sets our performance in context across the sector. We track impacts monthly, as well as having an to understand how customers feel about us as a landlord. Our Neighbourhood and Communal Spaces Policy will have a positive impact on this.

Measures to support this policy will include those around ASB, caretaking, repairs, grounds maintenance, customer satisfaction and complaints.

## **Links to related policies, strategies, and procedures**

### Tree Management Policy

We are committed to providing and maintaining a high quality environment for our residents. We want to ensure that this includes the provision of a healthy and abundant tree stock and ensure protected trees are maintained to a recognised industry standard. This



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policy sets out what customers can expect from us in relation to tree management in their gardens and communal areas

## Allocations Policy

We work closely with our local authority partners to develop fairness and transparency in the application and allocation processes for both our social and affordable tenancies, so that applicants are clearly aware of our expectations and their responsibilities when moving into a Great Places home.

## Anti-social Behaviour Policy

Working with our customers and alongside partner agencies to challenge and deal with neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour is a key part of our approach to neighbourhood and communal space management.

Working collaboratively with our customers and partnering with relevant stakeholders, we aim to provide effective support and guidance to improve their living conditions and overall wellbeing.

## Customer Experience Strategy

This strategy shapes the way we interact and provide services to our customers and outlines our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion.

## Social Impact Strategy

This strategy in part informs the level of resource we target towards supporting customers to improve their circumstances, sustain their tenancies and create sustainable communities.

## Fire Safety Policy

Within this policy, the term 'Fire Safety' is intended to refer to all activity necessary to minimise the risk to life and property in any property owned or managed by Great Places Housing Group from fire, including all buildings, public areas, grounds, and access roads.

## Resident Engagement Strategy: A Commitment to Building Safety

This strategy explains our responsibilities for communication and engagement with customers surrounding building safety. This is in addition to the approach set out in our Customer Experience strategy.

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| <b>Policy approval date:</b>  | 16/01/2025  |
| <b>Equality impact assessment date:</b>                                 | 09/01/2025  |
| <b>Reducing carbon impact assessment date:</b>                          | N/A   |
| <b>Safeguarding/Modern Slavery impact:</b>                              | N/A   |
| <b>Policy review date:</b>  | 09/01/2027  |
| <b>Lead team:</b>   | Neighbourhoods  |
| <b>Level of authorisation required:</b>                                 | Directors   |
| <b>Please record all authorisation meetings, with dates and details</b> | Directors Meeting for approval of the policy and EIA – 16/01/2025 |