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## New report champions high density suburbia

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Residents could enjoy the benefits of urban living in a suburban setting if housebuilders raised densities above 50 dwellings per hectare, according to a leading architectural practice.

MacCormac Jamieson Prichard published a report that claims high densities in suburban areas would slash infrastructure costs and improve access to amenities, but still allow individual privacy.

The report, *Redefining Suburbia*, was prompted by development in the Thames Gateway, where 200,000 homes are to be built. Richard MacCormac, a member of the London Development Agency's International Design Panel advising on design in the Gateway, believes housing there should be built at densities usually reserved for cities.

His intervention follows that of fellow panel member Terry Farrell who has developed a speculative masterplan limiting development to high-density areas in the Gateway and designating the rest of the land as a national park.

MacCormac said: "It's very tantalising because [the report] shows that you could have many of the advantages of urban communities with the amenity of the private house with the garden and the car parking space."

He added that in a community of 5,000 people at this density, everyone would be within 10 minutes' walking distance of public transport and a primary school.

The current planning guidance, PPG3, recommends and, in places enforces, 30 homes per hectare, which many people believe is too high. New housing in England is currently built at an average of 25 homes per hectare, although more than half of this is built at less 20.

But MacCormac Jamieson Prichard has said that far greater densities could be achieved while still allowing privacy and security. Its comments will be welcomed by the government, which has been pushing for higher densities in order to meet the housing shortage.

The practice's report added that the benefits of higher densities were "too high to be ignored", listing transport and walkability, lower infrastructure costs, extra land available for recreation and wildlife, and a better sense of community.

The report stated: "The high density suburb of the future should be tranquil, private and green; it should feel like home, as well as being dense enough to be walkable, and to support a richer diverse community."

Housing designer and critic of PPG3 Wayne Hemingway said: "[High densities] are only workable if people have access to wonderful, useable outdoor space."

"So, it works on the South Bank and in places next to great parks like in Kensington. But if it is applied by under-resourced urban planning authorities in many parts of our towns and cities then it becomes a recipe for disaster."

by Ellen Bennett  
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