

# Parliamentary briefing: UCL report finds PDR converted housing harms resident health

## About this research

Since 2013, Permitted Development Rights (PDR) have allowed obsolete offices and commercial buildings to be converted into homes without full planning permission, preventing local authorities from considering health and wellbeing. New research led by Professor Ben Clifford at UCL has uncovered serious health impacts arising from PDR.

The team mapped hotspots of PDR housing, surveyed over 1,000 residents (including 100 in temporary accommodation), monitored indoor conditions in PDR flats, modelled the economic health costs, and consulted local authorities and professional bodies.

The TCPA has campaigned against the slum conditions created by PDR for over a decade, and welcomes the report's call for stronger housing standards.

## Key findings

**119,000+**

PDR units built since 2013.

**296,000+**

People live in PDR Housing across England.

**13,000+**

Temporary accommodation residents are in PDR housing.

### Overheating

**Nearly half** of PDR housing residents (45.6%) reported feeling overheated in the summer.

**Over 19,000 PDR addresses** are located in areas highly vulnerable to extreme heat, over 11,300 of them in London.

### Air pollution

**Nearly all PDR homes** monitored had average seasonal indoor PM2.5 concentrations above the WHO annual guideline value.

Elevated CO2 levels were found in **one-third of monitored homes** during the winter - indicating insufficient ventilation.

### Multiple problems

**Over half** of PDR residents (56%) report issues in two or more areas of their home, such as pollution, safety, and space.

**40% of PDR homes in London** are near industrial activities, waste sites, major roads.

### Health impacts

**49.5% increase** in primary care usage among PDR residents in Bradford.

**One in five** PDR residents surveyed have probable clinical depression.



The research found that PDR rules undermine local authorities' ability to protect residents at every stage of the conversion process – pre-planning, during approval, building control and in-use.

**In particular, PDR rules have:**

1. Produced a legacy of poor-quality PDR housing that will exacerbate health inequalities - especially for the most vulnerable residents in temporary accommodation
2. Undermined local placemaking and resources, by:
  - Constraining local powers to ensure housing standards
  - Reducing developer contributions (Section 106 agreements) for affordable housing and services
  - Increasing the planning and regulatory burden for overstretched authorities
3. Left regulatory gaps (e.g. in building regulations on structural safety, accessibility and overheating) and weakened enforcement putting residents at risk

## Recommendations

Based on the evidence of harm from poor quality and poorly located PDR housing, the overall recommendation is to **remove the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (GPDO 2015) allowing deregulated conversion to residential use entirely**. And replace it with a supportive policy on adaptive reuse (material change of use) to residential in the National Planning Policy Framework.

This option would achieve the greatest overall health and wellbeing benefit, and actually simplify the regulatory landscape. However, if central government were unwilling to adopt our main recommendation, two alternative options would be:

1. **Modify GPDO 2015 to set impact to promoting good health, preventing ill-health and/or reducing health inequalities as a prior approval consideration** for conversion to residential use in all use classes – following the NPPF and the Health and Care Act 2022. And amend the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 to include consents under PDR regarding the circumstances where planning obligations can be entered into.
2. **Modify GPDO 2015 to exclude schemes creating 10 or more units from Class MA** (Class E to Class C3 commercial, business and services to residential), requiring them to go through full planning permission. This option could reduce the likelihood of harm to health and wellbeing, minimise the population impacted by potential problems and resolve the current loophole around planning gain.

We further recommend that the government:

- **Address the gaps in Building Regulations** regarding the Material Change of Use to residential uses, in particular expanding Approved Document M on visitable and accessible buildings, and Approved Document O on overheating to include MCU housing.
- **Fund a full review and, where required, retrofitting programme** for existing PDR housing to ensure they are habitable and safe to live in.
- **Adopt the Building Control Independent Panel's recommendations**, including greater resourcing of public enforcement.



Read the full report at  
[tcpa.org.uk/resources/pdr-research](https://tcpa.org.uk/resources/pdr-research)  
or scan the QR code.

