



# HEALTHIER HOMES, HEALTHIER PLANET

*with Catriona Brady,  
World Green Building Council*

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**AN INITIATIVE  
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**WorldGBC has been at the forefront at advocating for healthier, more comfortable and productive spaces for people who live, work and study indoors. Can you tell me more about the work done by WorldGBC network when it comes to the residential sector?**

The World Green Building Council has had a focus on the residential sector for a number of years, and recently released [a guide to healthy homes and a healthy planet](#) at COP24 in December 2018. This was a follow-up document to our [2016 report](#) providing a business case for healthy homes to developers, with a case study focus on the UK.

As a global membership organisation, we recognise the breadth of health and environmental risks presented by the residential buildings sector in terms of emissions released and the impact on climate change and human health and development. To cater for such a global audience, we focused on core features of sustainable housing that are relevant worldwide – air quality, thermal and acoustic comfort and light, and presented engaging and relevant research around each topic, as well as simple strategies for the homeowner to utilise. This document is now being translated into numerous languages, and the WorldGBC and our member GBCs continue to advocate for better quality housing worldwide.

**The recently released “[Guide to healthier homes and a healthier planet](#)” report outlines the impact of indoor parameters like light, noise, thermal comfort, etc. What are some of the key findings and how they can be used to**

**improve home environment?**

Within each of these headlines we tried to keep the messaging simple and effective. With air quality, we talked about both indoor and outdoor air quality – covering messages around outdoor pollution getting into homes, the contribution of fuels burnt in housing to generate pollution, and indoor pollutants caused by toxic materials or damp and mould build-up. With thermal and acoustic comfort we presented a range of energy efficient strategies for different climates around the world, with a vital awareness that there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to sustainable design. In terms of lighting, this section encompassed both electric lighting and natural light, and offered guidance around how to reduce energy expenditure on light as well as how to improve wellbeing through exposure to sun and daylight. Each of these topics is backed up by recent and relevant research – check out the [report](#) on our website, available as a free download, for more information!

**WorldGBC has been consistently using health messages to appeal to wider audiences. Can tell us more about the strategies you are employing and why?**

We believe that health is one of the core components of sustainability – and therefore is an integral feature of a sustainable, or green, building or city. Health is therefore an outcome that we aspire to ‘build into’ our urban environments, but we also recognise the power of human-centric messaging as an engagement tool. Human and planetary health are often go hand in hand, and guidance is aligned across the ma-



Catriona Brady is the Head of the Better Places for People global project at the World Green Building Council. Catriona leads the WorldGBC's largest global project, active in over 30 countries, focused on achieving a sustainable built environment – with a focus on aligning the human and environmental elements of green buildings and cities. Catriona has a background in environmental consultancy, and expertise in both healthy and environmental building certifications as well as sustainable master-planning, environmental design and health and wellbeing consultancy. Catriona is based in London and hails originally from the green hills of west Scotland, where a lifelong passion for environmentalism was founded.

jority of issues. In terms of engaging some of our target audiences – including policy makers – we understand that a message around human health can be much more engaging and understandable than a technical, environmental message. We have spent many years developing the co-benefits argument, to show that healthy and green buildings can work together to bring social and economic paybacks, and we intend to continue investing time and resource in this in future.

**As for the air quality, I know you are running a campaign focused on health benefits to boost environmental action. Please share with our readers some of the key messages.**

Air quality is a great example of an environmental issue that has huge impacts on human health – or vice versa! This makes the topic an excellent campaign element for the Better Places for People project at WorldGBC, and as a result we will be launching the first materials for the [‘Air Quality in the Built Environment’ campaign](#) around Earth Day 2019 – so keep

your eyes peeled for social media and website content! We are delighted to be working in partnership with the Climate and Clean Air Coalition for this campaign and bring a built environment focus to their fantastic work and research in this space.

The campaign is focused around four key headlines; reducing the sectoral contribution of the built environment on ambient, outdoor air pollution; mitigating sources of indoor air pollution (including both unhealthy materials and damp/mould from poor building quality); encouraging sustainable and energy-efficient operation of buildings, with conscious avoidance of the emissions multiplier effect, and increasing global awareness and action.

As part of that final target – increasing global awareness and action – we will be creating a new section on the WorldGBC website that is dedicated to sharing information about this campaign. The information we hope to share will feature contributions from global industry experts across the world who will contribute

thought leadership pieces presenting important lessons learned from their specific country or industry.

**Financing is often cited as one of the barriers to healthier, more comfortable and energy efficient homes. What financing tools can help us reach the policy goals and at the same time bring benefits to all Europeans?**

At the WorldGBC we actively support sustainable financing and micro-finance schemes across Europe and the rest of the world. Looking at Europe specifically, our European Regional Network participates in an Energy Efficient Mortgages programme, in which we have identified the citizen homeowner market as a huge potential area for low-cost and high-impact sustainability improvements. In Europe, the current rate of retrofit is as low as 2% per year, so what we can do to incentivise and increase this rate of building stock update is an important task to help achieve political target.

Through the EEMAP programme, beneficial financing opportunities are being offered to homeowners willing to engage in green building retrofits. Our research has shown that better quality homes offer improved thermal comfort, lower risk of damp and mould, and therefore a reduced risk of poor internal air quality as well

as accompanying economic and environmental benefits – lower energy use, and corresponding utility bills and emissions. Empowering the citizens with information that will allow them to choose a simple path to an energy efficient, healthy home is one of the most powerful strategies to achieving our goals, and we hope to see further success in this space in Europe and across the rest of the world.

**Thanks, Catriona. I couldn't agree more. Indeed, with the EuroPACE project we intend make home renovation simpler, faster and more affordable for all Europeans to improve people's lives and reach political goals.**