

EARN £45,000 IF YOU WANT ACCESS TO BEAUTIFUL AND GREEN SURROUNDINGS

EMBARGOED: 00:01 Thursday July 23th

Households with incomes higher than £45, 000 a year (1) are the most able to access beautiful places and green spaces, according to a new report from the independent think tank ResPublica.

The striking new finding is published in ‘A Community Right to Beauty’ which polled 2, 164 people on their access to beautiful surroundings.

Authors say the law must be changed to end this injustice.

Caroline Julian, report co-author and Deputy Director of ResPublica, says being surrounded by beauty should be a right for all not just for the privileged.

“Our public poll is damning. It shows we are singularly failing the poor. A staggeringly high household income, more than £10, 000 above the national average (2), gives you better access to beautiful surroundings.”

“This inequality has a significant impact on health and wellbeing as well as the way people behave within communities. Those who are surrounded by beauty are more likely to take care of it, become more involved in their communities. Uglier places see higher levels of anti-social behaviour, crime and more litter. We have to create a system by which we all have a Right to Beauty.”

Kevin McCloud MBE, designer, writer and presenter of Channel 4’s ‘Grand Designs’, commented:

“We all of us instinctively recognise when someone, something or somewhere is beautiful. And we all have a right to it. Admittedly we’re all a little clumsy in our use of the language of beauty in the 21st century, but if we are to preserve such beauty as we have in our natural and built environments and if we are to see yet more of it in those places (and by the same token, see less ugliness) then we must clamorously shout out for it.”

“We should demand more beauty in our parks, streets and housing because it is

good for our souls and good for our health and our well-being. This landmark report sets out how we can achieve that: by tidying up what we have, by democratising the Right to Beauty, safeguarding the cherished and valued of the everyday and by demanding that the word Beauty, and all that it magically means, are equitably woven through our planning system, our architecture and our built world."

The report also found that less than half of those living in social rented housing, 45%, felt they had the same access to beauty.

Less litter was most commonly mentioned as the most important factor in making an area beautiful (36%). Less crime, vandalism and graffiti was mentioned by 35% and 23% said fewer vacant and run-down buildings was the most important factor in making their local area more beautiful.

To remedy inequalities, authors make a series of recommendations including:

Power to the people:

* The public should have the power to choose their preferred design and developer. Communities should be consulted on proposed new developments, a range of options should be subject to a local vote.

*Citizens' Juries would oversee problematic developments. Residents supported by experts working within a public budget would make decisions that the local authority would be bound by.

*A Community Right to Reclaim land should be extended to buildings and other local assets to enable the public to challenge authorities to improve derelict or unsightly developments.

Financial incentives:

*To incentivise visual improvements that communities want there should be Capital Gains Tax relief for developers.

*VAT relief on refurbishment costs, where a community calls for or takes a lead on improvement to a building. For buildings listed as 'Local Beauty Assets' (see below) the relief should be greater.

*A system similar to Business Rates Retention, which helps economic growth, should be used to recognise the value a beautiful development adds to an area.

New areas of beauty:

*Areas of Outstanding Urban Beauty: Similar to Conservation Areas these would recognise beauty that isn't just historic or green.

*Buildings, areas and spaces with local importance should be labelled 'Local Beauty Assets' and preserved and maintained.

*Areas without much visual appeal should be designated Community Improvement Districts. In these areas communities would be empowered to demand policies to tackle problems such as Litter Abatement Orders where litter is an issue.

Supporters Comments:

Dame Fiona Reynolds, former Director General of the National Trust, said:

"We all need beauty, and ResPublica's proposals for a community right to beauty hit the spot at a time when we risk losing engagement in the changes happening around us."

Beccy Speight, Woodland Trust Chief Executive, said:

"Beautiful places matter and, as this report shows, policy needs to catch up with the evidence. A much needed increase in opportunities to access nature and green space would make a huge difference to many peoples' lives and is vital for the health and prosperity of the nation."

Oliver Letwin MP, Minister for Government Policy said:

"I very much welcome this seminal report. The exponential growth of neighbourhood planning is creating a vast new opportunity. Up and down the country, communities can make decisions about their own surroundings; and they can bring beauty back into the debates that gave rise to those decisions. Now is the time to make a fuss about beauty - and this paper will help that to happen."

Loyd Grossman, Chairman Heritage Alliance, said:

"The language we use in our efforts to protect, promote and study our heritage too often lacks pleasure and emotion. Let's not restrict ourselves to just discussing the many economic and social benefits of our historic environment. I welcome the way in which this report boldly reintroduces 'beauty' into the vocabulary of the debate around heritage and I also welcome the emphasis it places on promoting local beauty as a way of enriching people's everyday lives."

Dame Tessa Jowell, former Olympics minister, said:

“Access to beautiful places isn’t just a ‘nice to have’- it’s essential for people’s wellbeing. Our cities should give everyone the opportunity to enjoy beauty in their surroundings. And good design does not cost more. I welcome this report’s contribution to the debate, and I hope it will spark some fresh thinking about the planning and design of the built environment.”

Andrew Boff AM, Conservative London Mayoral Candidate, said:

“For too long, Londoners have been forced to buy ugly, high-rise box-apartments that give little of value to neighbourhoods or residents. A new Right to Beauty would, for the first time, ensure that those just getting on the ladder have access to attractive and desirable homes. This report from ResPublica highlights the importance of beauty to communities, and illustrates why the local voice must be heard on housing issues.”

Julia Unwin CBE, Chief Executive, Joseph Rowntree Foundation said:

“Joseph Rowntree built housing in beautiful green surroundings because he knew how important the environment is for wellbeing. This is as important today as it was then. We know from previous JRF research that people on low incomes are keenly affected by the state of their neighbourhoods and intuit that an improved physical environment would yield social dividends. I strongly commend ResPublica for contributing to an important, but often neglected debate”

Richard Tracey, Atlantic Gateway Parklands, said:

"This is a landmark proposition which will help breathe life into the otherwise mundane and drive forward our notion of a landscape for prosperity by empowering creative and community champions to act in making developments in their own neighbourhoods beautiful"

Sir Terry Farrell, Chair of The Farrell Review of Architecture and the Built Environment, said:

“There needs to be a much greater emphasis on making the ordinary better, rather than concentrating on one off, exceptional buildings. For this reason I warmly welcome this excellent report and the contribution it makes to the debate on how best to involve communities in the appearance of their area, not only with respect to

major developments but with an equally valuable focus on the everyday."

Neil Sinden, director of policy and campaigns at the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), comments:

"Beauty improves wellbeing and encourages the prosperity of communities, nature and the environment. But it remains undervalued in political and policy debate, at national and local level. We hope this ground-breaking report will challenge policy makers and politicians to put beauty at the heart of decisions that shape the future of our environment and communities."

Richard Hebditch, External Affairs Director, National Trust, added:

"The National Trust has successfully protected places of beauty and historic interest since it was set up to do that task at the end of the nineteenth century. But now in the 21st century our country needs to create beautiful places in communities across the land and not just protect it isolated special places. ResPublica's report clearly shows the need for action to make beauty an everyday experience and the workable policies needed to do that."

Clare Pardy, Fine Art & Heritage Director, Ecclesiastical Insurance:

"There is complete synergy between what ResPublica is seeking to highlight and our own views that heritage is a key component of the fabric of our society. We feel it is vital to democratise communities to enable them to preserve and develop the beauty of their physical environment."

"As an insurer, we play a practical role in the preservation of our heritage, but we also feel that it is essential to play a part in raising national awareness of exactly why our heritage should be preserved. That is why we support moves to ensure that the UK Government is aware of the value of heritage to our social, cultural and economic well-being."

ENDS

Notes to the Editor:

*A Community Right to Beauty will be launched on July 23rd at 1630.

*The report is supported by the National Trust, Campaign to Protect Rural England, the Woodland Trust, Ecclesiastical Insurance, Atlantic Gateway Parklands, Hastoe Housing Association and Civic Voice.

*Report co-author Caroline Julian is Deputy Director of ResPublica.

*Report co-author Adrian Harvey is a writer and policy professional. He is a former Policy Adviser to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and was Head of Policy at the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment.

*Authors and supporters of the report are available for interviews.

Reference:

1) Ipsos MORI carried out the research surveying 2, 164 people aged between 16 and 75 living in the UK.

2) Average household income in the UK is just under £32, 000, according to the Office for National Statistics report 'The Effects of Taxes and Benefits on Household Income, Financial Year Ending 2014'.

For further details or to get an embargoed copy of the report please call Oruj on 07866 685130 or email her on oruj@sogold.co.uk

