



Minutes of the Roundtable between parliamentarians, housing and regeneration leaders with John Hayes.

Monday 26th April 2022 at 11:30am (online meeting)

Members

Ben Everitt MP (BE) - Chair

In attendance

APPG Secretariat

Guests

RPS

Meeting Started at 11:30 am

1. Introduction

BE introduces JH

JH opening comments:

-The first thing is to recognise that the housing problem with supply and demand is not simply about how many houses we build, essentially what we have in this country is a mismatch between provision and need. Housing needs vary over a lifetime, most people start of living with their family, they then move out and they live in a student flat or they get their first flat or first small house, they then get married and have children and get a bigger house, they then what to move to a more convenient house, often a bungalow and they want to downsize when their children have grown up and moved away and they end up living in a sort of cared environment.

-We have an incredibly extended housing provision but we have lot of people who cannot get on the ladder, lots of old people stuck in four-bedroom houses, living in one room and never going upstairs, desperate for a bungalow (inaudible), and yet we have people who can't rent a house because they are occupied by people who are renting them all over so we have an incredible mismatch between housing provision and housing need.

-Most people aspire to own their own home, every survey finds that the vast majority of people want to own, it varies between 75 and 95 depending on the surveys but it is never smaller than 75.

-The figure for home ownership is 65% down from 69% in 2001, so a smaller proportion own their home than they did 20 years ago and yet more people want to or as many people want to as ever.

- This myth of people wanting to rent is exactly that, a myth. The vast majority of people do not want to rent, they want to own, but they can't own because they can't get access to capital for a deposit and they get trapped into paying rent which means they can never get a mortgage because once you start renting it is very hard to stop renting.

-It is true that a small proportion of people want to rent, or want to rent for some of their lives, housing needs change. At some point of your life you might need or want to rent. But that is a very small number of people and often not for their whole life.

-My father served in the war, my mother's house was bombed when he was away and she moved into a council house. They only got out of that council maisonette in which I was brought up, 14 years later when Margaret Thatcher introduced the right to buy. So once they got in the business of renting they were renting forever. Even though their original intention as young married couple was to own their own home which was bombed and they could never get back.

-We need to try and incentivise ownership for all kinds of good reasons and access to capital is really important, the right to borrow, the right to buy. The problem with policymakers on this, you own your own home, why do you want other people to rent? The people who make these policies, they are never living in a council estate are they? They are always living in a house, a posh house. All these advocates of social housing, they never live in social housing.

-Let's be really bold about our aspirations for home ownership. The houses we build, and this is at every level, for less well off people and for wealthy people, should be homes that we can be proud and they can be proud that our legacy to the future is the built environment and the natural environment, but for this conversation, the built environment that we leave generations to come, just like the built environment that we inherited.

- I was up in Newcastle, a day or two ago with my sons, and saw lovely victorian villas that are largely occupied by students, small houses that were built in large numbers to accommodate, largely, they would have been owned by the way, by the population of Newcastle, just lovely little streets, every city has them. But what is our legacy to the future, if that was the Victorian legacy to us? I think for large parts it is pretty pitiful. Much of what has been built in my lifetime would be demolished tomorrow. There are absolutely vile developments that have taken place over my lifetime and any town you go to in Britain, as you drive around it, it is usually the things that were built before the war, rather than after the war that are the places you'd like to live in.

-Now there are exceptions to this that is why I said much, not all, there are exceptional modern developments but they are not the norm. So the quality of the building, the beauty of the building, I am delighted with the former and the current secretary of state for bringing beauty back on to the agenda, partly as a direct result of my (?00: 08:23) partly because of my work with Roger Scruton and others on the Building's Beautiful Commission, partly now as a result of the Office for Place and the work that we are doing on that.



-What we build should be beautiful, it should be lovely, it should be elegant, it should fit within the existing built environment and the existing landscape, it should respect local vernacular style, it should use local materials, it something that generations to come will look upon and think what a good job was done there. As I say there are examples and models that we can use of things that are being built now.

-The other thing is where we build, making sure that the building, in scale as well as in character, is in tune with the place where it is built. We should build incrementally and on a scale and tune that preserves existing settlements.

-Cities and towns can take a lot more houses but they should by nature grow gently and incrementally and whenever possible, development should be regenerated. It is ludicrous that we build on the edge of settlements while we allow the centre of the settlements to be hollowed out.

-I bet in your constituency Ben, and certainly in mine you can go to lots of places in the middle of towns where you have redundant sites, you have derelict sites, buildings that have been decaying for years, you have undeveloped sites and we need to work with developers to say we will work with you as a government to develop these sites. It is more costly to do so, there are challenges but we need to help developers in that respect, literally assisting them financially to develop these sites because they are generating value. Much more broadly, we should measure the effect of that in terms of how it affects the whole neighbourhood, not just that particular housing development.

-So in scale, in character and regenerating wherever possible, lets use existing housing more effectively and lets make ownership a core element of our housing ambitions.

2. Questions and discussion

BE:

-This is everything I am passionate about and it breaks my heart when we see it done wrong.

-You mentioned Milton Keynes, the urban sprawl approach to development that we are doing now, having taken what is a beautifully planned 55 year old town, which worked, with bolting on random bits of estates on the outside whilst leaving bits in the middle which need regenerating or are brownfield or are completely undeveloped it is absolutely scandalous and the net result is that I have two beautiful market towns that are about to become suburbs of Greater Milton Keynes and it kills the character.

-It doesn't build the homes that people need, it stuffs the infrastructure and it ignores all those massive opportunities to do densification of beauty which we know can be done in Milton Keynes where people want to be.

Contributor:



-I love your idea of how we can do provision vs need better and that incentivisation of moving people, it has to be done to not reincarnate what i call a poll tax type targeting it has to be incentive rather than penalising so something that can actually engender people to downscale, upscale because people do need to think about that lifestyle, that lifecycle journey of how they live.

-I don't wanna live in this house once my children leave, I want to look for something that is more sustainable to me and I think that what you just said, if the right product can be made available to allow those moves, maybe it is a relief of stamp duty or incentives which allows people to make those transitional moves at those points in their lives which make it more sustainable.

-There are little things like that which from a policy side might help encourage that. Interesting about the BTR because what is happening in this country is, we are being flooded with pension money from overseas with a real push on the BTR element and when you look at some of those rents that are being asked for, you may as well get a mortgage. But we have to be honest there is a market for it.

-BTR is a driving force which we need to measure in a very careful way and your point about people being out of access to capital and the help to buy was a really good way. It had some unintended consequences to the market and we need to learn a little bit from that.

-You talked about the issue of developments not being good enough, I had a bit of a debate with Peter Freeman about this yesterday, I think the reality of developments not being good enough this is linked to another point about where developments are built, so your point about city centres, it is an interesting point, it is one which I keep on raising.

-Take Wolverhampton city centre, actually where there is a link between Birmingham, London and Manchester, there is an old british steelworks in the canal side which is next to the train station. Very challenging site to get off the ground, why? No established land values in the city centre, investors on board are nervous to be the first to pull the trigger because they don't know what their return on investment is going to be and actually it is an easy fix.

- If the government were to provide some guarantees, some help on remediation and getting that site prepared for the city council to bring it forward and look for a return themselves in doing that. This is not mastermind work, but your point is there are these sites across many city centres and actually just need a package of measures that give people the right comfort and support to unlock them. We have got the agencies and the people who can do it, how do we crystalise that to working practice? There is a bit of that which allows the private sector to absolutely follow through.

-Your point on beauty and landscape, these are important things, there are some doing a good job and there are others just building crappy homes without any real consideration of quality and we need to stop that because it is our legacy. This is the challenge of environment vs environment friendly building so we are going through this modern methods of construction

regime where robots and more mechanical prefab things are coming forward so this worries me. About the point that you made about the local vernacular, while I am a supporter of finding environmentally friendly roots to construction that can bring it up at a pace. What we don't want to do is, at the cost of bringing quality homes, quality design, local vernacular linked in to those modern methods of construction that are coming out of the factories and that is a challenge that needs to be pushed back.

- I am going to be a bit controversial here, we are on the same side, broadly, but we have to think about the growth of our country. We are a country that must grow and to do that we must think about how we can grow in a sustainable fashion and that might mean extensions in some parts of our country but in a way which bolts on, not just larger estates that have inclusive employment jobs and creation that comes with it.

BE:

-I am so passionate that housing growth should be sustainable, affordable, proportionate and appropriate. Once you get all of those ducks in a row, people will welcome it and you won't have those big battles that we have and we will get houses that people want to move into, we will get the right size.

So as Sir John was saying, folk like my parents who are under-occupying a five-bedroom house can move somewhere where they want to spend the rest of their days. They can then open up that house to a family like mine or even younger and we don't have that problem where we are consistently building the wrong types of housing because there is nothing available so I am very pro-development but it is just about getting it right.

BE thanks JH and the guests for their time.

Meeting ends at 12:20.