

Minutes of the Roundtable between housing industry leaders & Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP, Minister for Housing

2pm, 17th March 2021 (online meeting)

Members

Ben Everitt MP (Chair) [BE]
Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP
Paul Howell MP
Gagan Mohindra MP

Guests

Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP [CP]
Places for People
Campbell Tickell
Boklok
Origin Housing
Built-ID
Aster
RPS Group
Homes for the SW
JLL
Stonewater
Karbon Homes
Sanctuary Group
Settle Group
Land Promoters & Developers Federation (LPDF)
Midland Heart
Home Builders Federation
APPG Secretariat

1. Opening presentation

- CP thanked the APPG for the recent report: “A Fair Housing Market for All” which is sure to make a useful contribution to the debate
- Housing completions are performing very well and were higher in January 2021 than in January 2020
- Challenges remain including supply of timber, steel and roof tiles, and the rules relating to social distancing on construction sites
- The government has provided £20bn for the National Housebuilding Fund, the Affordable Homes Programme (AHP) and other measures to ensure we have the capacity we need. This is the largest cash injection in 15 years for affordable homes, providing 180,000 new homes over 5 years, half for rent and half for shared ownership, including 32,000 for social rent. This is a key component of the “levelling up” agenda.
- In addition there is the “getting building fund” of £900m, and the £400m brownfield regeneration fund dispersed via mayoral combined authorities.
- The wider planning reforms are designed to speed things up and remove risk from the construction process. The infrastructure levy will help provide more funding up-front.
- Myself, the chancellor and the chief secretary are very committed to MMC. New MMC funding was included in the budget and we will be launching an MMC taskforce to improve the MMC

supply chain and progress the findings of the Farmer Report. There is a lot of opportunity for MMC and it is vital in order to get to 300k by the middle of the decade.

- The future home standard – by the middle of the decade we want all new homes to have 75% less carbon emission. We need supply chain and labour market improvements to achieve this and will be consulting on this in 2023 so that we can implement by 2025.

2. Discussion

- Local councillors have shared many concerns about PDRs, can you update us on changes to PDRs?
 - PDRs now have lighting standards, all habitable rooms must have natural light and space standards have also been introduced. PDRs are essential to allow urban densification, and to bring people back into town centres with affordable homes. In particular, PDRs are a good opportunity for SME builders.
- How joined up is government over building safety?
 - The fire safety bill comes under the home office. BEIS is responsible for improving the energy performance of existing buildings. DWP is responsible for housing benefit. All these departments through Stephen Greenhalgh are working together to develop the building safety bill which will we introduce in a couple of months. This will create a new regulator and a new service charge mechanism. Pre-legislative scrutiny by the select committee resulted in about 80 recommendations for change.
 - The Hackett report – we have put together a remediation package for high rise and also another package for low-rise. Several of the bigger builders are already doing the remediation works. RICS has produced revised guidance to help valuers decide when an EWS1 form should be required, taking 950k leaseholders from the scope of EWS1.
- What is the timetable for the progression of the planning white paper?
 - We are still working through 44k consultation responses. We will publish a response to these and then we will legislate later this year.
- Several LAs have abandoned the local plan process because of the white paper, what can be done about this?
 - I have written to LAs to encourage them to carry on with their plans. This will help protect them from speculative development.
- How can we help LAs to work together to deliver their targets?
 - Digitalisation will help the process
 - We are streamlining the planning process
 - The “duty to cooperate” does not work effectively, and we will be reforming it
 - We are looking at the five year land supplies with a view to reform
- How can we diversify our supply, including MMC and self-build?
 - We are committed to MMC, and the creation of simple templates. You will see more about self-build in the coming months. We are working with the treasury to encourage lenders to provide the right lending products so that self-build is more available.
 - Simplifying the planning process will allow SMEs to purchase smaller plots of land, which will increase supply as well as increasing competition and diversity of provision
- Is the white paper an opportunity to introduce more prescription into planning, which will help communities obtain the types of housing they need most?
 - The white paper doesn’t abolish the current system, it simply creates an additional fast track process in certain areas. This also allows local communities and LAs to be more prescriptive about buildings in those areas.

- Will lockdown change expectations about the access to green spaces and space standards?
 - The lockdown will change patterns of work and leisure. Emran Mian (a MHCLG director general) and Luke Hall MP are doing work on this. The new national design code includes new standards including tree-lined roads.
- Is urbanisation going to reverse? Will we see an exodus from the towns?
 - No one knows yet. Demand in certain more distant commuter areas (e.g. Hampshire and esp. Winchester) has risen considerably but prices in London have not fallen. People will still want to work in offices. Once the lockdown ends we will see a gradual migration back to offices. People who are dialling in will increasingly feel that they are missing out.
- Can we reform the land compensation act to replace “hope value” with fair value?
 - There are no plans to make any changes to this.
- How can we increase the level of consumer involvement in building safety?
 - Residents will get a voice through the social housing ombudsman. Eddie Hughes MP is working on this in the social housing white paper.
- How much flexibility will housing associations be given around tenure? Flexibility would allow them to commit to building more.
 - Bids will need to meet the shared ownership criteria we have laid out. I’m keen to hear from Housing Associations about the funding options they have for AHP21-26, and how we can help to expand the opportunities that they have.
- Will the energy company obligation (ECO) scheme continue?
 - The Green Homes Grant (run by BEIS) should improve 600k properties to get up to EPC-C.
 - The ECO scheme is also BEIS, I’m not aware of any changes to this.

BE thanked CP for his time. The meeting ended at 2:55pm