HOUSE OF LORDS

Built Environment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Meeting the UK's housing demand

Tuesday 12 October 2021

10 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Neville-Rolfe (The Chair); Baroness Bakewell; Lord Berkeley; Lord Best; Lord Carrington of Fulham; Baroness Cohen of Pimlico; Lord Grocott; Lord Haselhurst; The Earl of Lytton; Lord Moylan; Lord Stunell; Baroness Thornhill.

Evidence Session No. 5 Heard in Public Questions 48 - 66

Witnesses

I: David Birkbeck, Chief Executive Officer, Design for Homes; Professor Ricky Burdett CBE, Professor of Urban Studies and Director of LSE Cities and Urban Age, London School of Economics and Political Science; David Orr CBE, Chair, the Good Home inquiry, Centre for Ageing Better.

Examination of witnesses

David Birkbeck, Professor Ricky Burdett CBE and David Orr CBE.

Q48 **The Chair:** Good morning, and welcome to the House of Lords Built Environment Committee's public evidence session to inform our inquiry into housing demand. The inquiry is investigating the demand for new housing and how barriers to meeting this demand can be overcome. It will consider the key factors shaping the type, tenure and quality of housing we need. It will also examine a range of challenges to meeting that demand, including skill shortages. We will then make recommendations to the Government later this year.

The session today is focusing on the important issue of housing quality and housing design. We have with us David Birkbeck, chief executive, Design for Homes, Professor Ricky Burdett CBE, professor of urban studies and director of LSE Cities and Urban Age at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and David Orr CBE, chair of the Good Home inquiry at the Centre for Ageing Better.

The session is being broadcast on Parliament Live TV. A full transcript is being taken and will be made available to our witnesses to make any corrections shortly after the session. Please can Members and witnesses keep their questions and responses brief, as we have a lot to cover? Do not feel that you must answer every question.

I will start with a general question. What should be done to improve the quality and design of new homes? Could we start with David Birkbeck?

David Birkbeck: We need a new highways Act. Most housing is spoilt by the engineering that the Highways Act 1980 insists on. If we could do something about that, we could make some huge steps.

The Chair: That sounds like a good suggestion. Do you want to comment more generally on some of the other things such as design codes that were on the agenda today?

Lord Moylan: What in particular is it about the Highways Act?

David Birkbeck: For example, you cannot convey a parking space in the highway with a property, and outside of London people will not buy homes unless they have what they consider to be a space that they own. All the car parking is taken off the highway and put on to the plot where the house goes, so effectively it competes with the house for the land and the house shrinks to accommodate the cars that would be on the road otherwise.

The Chair: Thank you for setting us off on that note. I have the same question for Professor Ricky Burdett.

Professor Ricky Burdett: I will elaborate on what I think you are getting at, David, which is the quality of the public realm. What happens outside the front door or behind the back door or in front of the garage, if there is one, is incredibly important to issues of quality. In that sense, slightly to reframe the question about the quality of homes to quality of

housing in the communities that are supported by the housing, that is missing in the legislation but also in the language that is used. In other words, there is the insistence on the home, the single object. Many of the drawings in these excellent guidelines focus on the individual home, while we want to live in areas where there is a sense of community, togetherness, and the public realm is fundamental to that.

The Chair: Does the local plan not provide for that?

Professor Ricky Burdett: Not at the level of quality that I think is necessary. We can come back to that. Even if the potential of the local plan is there, the skills available to local authorities are missing.

The Chair: Our evidence is showing certainly that we have a skills issue right across the piece.

David Orr: Over the last 18 months or two years, I have been involved in three very different housing-based inquiries. I have been a member of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Housing, Church and Community Commission, and I have been co-chair of a study called Housing 2030, which is about effective policies for affordable housing in the UNECE region, which we launched in Geneva last week. I have, as you said, been the chair of the Good Home inquiry.

The reason for telling you this is that these are three very different groups of people exploring housing issues in different parts of Europe, and more broadly than Europe. All three came to the same starting conclusion from very different perspectives, which is that the delivery of new homes works best if you have a proper, clear housing strategy—something that we have comprehensively lacked in this country for decades. Very often we are reacting to local circumstances, doing things piecemeal and trying to make a failing system work, rather than having a clear set of long-term objectives that everyone can get behind and work towards delivering. I know that people like me say this kind of thing all the time—that we need a housing strategy—and people say it is too hard, because the politics will not allow it. I do not agree. I think that if you have a clearer housing strategy with some room for manoeuvre, it gives you a starting point for people to make decisions about how things work effectively together.

Secondly, I agree strongly with both of the other opening comments. We need to think about housing in neighbourhoods, and housing in a place and not just as individual buildings. Here is some serendipity, since there is an online publication called *Housing Today* that has published an article by me today about a new housing development that I visited, not because it was a new housing development but because I know people who live there. I came away so frustrated at all the things that had not been done that ought to have been done but are not required by the planning authority.

The third thing is that we have obsessive discussions about changing the planning system or the planning process. I think we need a more fundamental challenge than that, which is to change the planning culture,

to move away from a planning culture that is still in its roots small scale and about development control rather than about long-term placemaking and thinking about what legacy we are passing on to future generations.

The Chair: Does the Office for Place help with this process? I take the point that you think we should have a more strategic approach, which is perhaps a little bit broader than today's discussion where we are trying to get into design and quality, but the Office for Place has been established. Does that help with your concerns?

David Orr: It is too early to say. I think in theory it has the potential to be able to do that. It is too early to be clear about how much influence or even power it might have, what kind of decision-making role it might have and who gets to make those decisions.

Professor Ricky Burdett: I cannot comment on the Office for Place, but I think one has to be very attentive—and this is a more general point that I want to make, which comes out of many of the documents. Having an institution on the government side, in the public sector, does not in any way automatically generate good things on the ground. This is simply because, going back to the skills issue, you need a good client, a good brief and a good designer to make a place that works. Having an office somewhere, whether it is in central or local government, will not guarantee that at all.

When we come to talking about some of the other issues, the process of design needs to be recognised, and it is not just a rubber-stamping checklist approach. The quality of designers is as important as the quality of the design.

David Birkbeck: I second the point about the concept of having a central unit that advises, and how effective that is. The issue I see a lot is that the guidance created in the centre by, say, the Department for Transport is not implemented at county level. You do not have the same kind of command structure between the Department for Transport and highways engineers as you have, say, between the Department for Levelling Up and planning officers, so there is no direct line of communication between them. The Department for Transport about 10 years ago issued a thing called *Manual for the Streets*, which essentially said that roads in residential layouts should be streets for living on and not vehicle movement corridors. That was the basic tenet. That was ignored at county level by a string of different county highways agencies, which make a point of introducing legislation that guarantees that they do not have to do anything that is in the centralised document. We see this so much in housing but, because local democracy is allowed to make its own decisions, much of the direction from the centre is just ignored when it is not attractive to that particular local community.

The Chair: Thank you for raising that point. This committee is a bit unusual in that we cover both the Department for Transport and the new Levelling Up Department, so to some extent that should make the conversation a little bit easier, at least in this House.

Q49 **The Earl of Lytton:** The design of new homes is one thing. The quality partly depends on the outturn and how it is delivered by the construction methodologies and the oversight there. Do you as witnesses think there is adequate built-in design for future ongoing maintenance of what we create for ageing and deterioration and particularly attrition of the energy performance of the buildings as they age?

The problems that Mr Birkbeck was referring to, and which I have come across, is conflict in the layout, so that the bin store does not provide enough space for owner X to park their vehicle properly, or it is in conflict with another adjacent parking space. In other words, somebody has done something in setting it out that, while in accordance with the plan, does not accord with the user characteristics that you would expect. There are other things such as the failure to construct in accordance with adequate standards. I am thinking of acoustic standards in particular, but thermal is another one. Would the three of you like to comment on where the blocks are in dealing with that? We know we have problems here. How might we address those and deal with them?

David Birkbeck: The acoustic issue is important. I did a piece of research that was paid for by government in about 2003 on the question of how people felt privacy was protected in the home. I thought it was all going to be about people looking through windows; in fact, virtually nobody commented on that, because we have that mostly under control. What we do not have under control is acoustic issues, so people's privacy is affected mostly by the fact that what they are doing and what their neighbours are doing cannot be separated acoustically. That is about everything from windows being too close to each other in an apartment to construction techniques.

We have been through the process of trying to improve the acoustic performance of what we build. It is quite a lot better than when I did the research in 2003, but it is nowhere as good as it is in Germany, where they will deliberately lay several layers of plasterboard on whatever floor they build on to thicken it up as much as they can. I think it will remain a problem. I have probably 500 emails on my phone now from people complaining about acoustic privacy being invaded where they live. It is a national issue and an issue to the construction quality in this country. I do not have an answer. It seems that every time we tighten up the building regulations we only get halfway to where it needs to be.

Professor Ricky Burdett: I think that this is probably an area outside my expertise.

David Orr: The short answer to your question is that good design does not necessarily deliver good quality of homes, neighbourhoods and communities, and insufficient care is taken to ensure that what is designed and agreed is what is delivered. There has been a significant reduction of on-site inspection by clerks of works. The Institute of Clerks of Works is about one-sixth the size that it used to be#, and those who are still around tend to be in their 50s and 60s. We need to re-establish that.

External inspection is neither comprehensive nor sufficient. I do not know if this is the best place to make this point, but if you look at architectural awards, I have often asked our architects, "What are you designing for? What is the most important thing?" The answer is always the same. It is always, "We want them to be really liveable. We want this to be a place that people enjoy living in". Why do we give the architectural award before anyone has moved in, rather than waiting for five years to ask? I think that doing some proper evaluation of the quality of the homes after people have been living in them for a few years would be an important check on whether what we expect to happen has in fact happened.

The Earl of Lytton: A post-occupancy evaluation?

David Orr: Indeed.

David Birkbeck: That is what the Housing Design Awards do. They were set up in 1947 to investigate new forms of housing and how good or bad they are and these schemes are visited. Even in the pandemic last spring I visited 60 developments with a crew of people who are psychologists and engineers, looking at and asking questions about the properties. There is an effective way of analysing this already. It has been obscured slightly over the last decade or so.

Professor Ricky Burdett: A very small point is that the last two years has meant that many of these issues have been exacerbated by being stuck at home because of Covid. Issues of sound, overheating, lack of ventilation and lack of daylight have become even more under pressure than before.

Q50 **The Earl of Lytton:** Do any of you think that having some other form of thoroughgoing oversight would help—for instance, an architect who understands the design and is part of the development team in the rollout? Would that help? I know of instances where this has been done quite successfully, but I have no knowledge of whether that would be any sort of panacea.

David Birkbeck: I think the question is how good is the architect? In some cases, somebody who has time-served on site and done a lot of post-occupancy research knows where all the defects are likely to be and could be very useful in doing that, but they are not common and we certainly do not have enough to inspect 300,000 homes a year.

David Orr: The evidence is from over 20 years, and it is about having more of a focus on design. The CABE report in 2006 said that three-quarters of new buildings were of a poor design, and the most recent report 13 years on from that said that three-quarters of new homes are still poor. We have had the mechanisms, but in the end it depends on the builder and developer wanting to do it, or it being mandated by planning and required and delivered. If you just leave it as an optional extra the evidence is, for 20 years now, that we do not get it.

The Chair: We will move on—but implementation and follow-through is key, as in so many parts of the public service.

Q51 **Lord Stunell:** Thank you very much and it has been very interesting so far. I think to some extent you have covered my point around what is the most common problem in the quality and design of new homes. I will pull that forward a little bit. Professor Burdett commented on the changes produced by the last couple of years. We know that people are now trying to move to bigger homes with different characteristics, probably to solve the problems you have identified in some ways. To what extent should the design standards and the quality that we are looking for reflect the changes that are coming in people's expectations of housing?

Professor Ricky Burdett: They must and they do not—that is my immediate response. In looking at what is an excellent document, you can see an implied sense that the typical family of two children will be there for ever. There is an implied sense that people leave the house to work and that at some point you might change where you live, move to a larger house. That is not happening in society. In the last two years, more people have been working at home, so the notion of flexibility and resilience within the household needs to be considered far more than it is at the moment. Elbow room, having the ability to do more in the house than you would otherwise have, requires a construction flexibility that probably many of these units do not have.

I go back to my earlier point, which is that the current experience of living in homes has made us recognise that what is outside our homes is even more important—the quality of the street, the quality of the pavement. Is there a pavement, is there a street? I think that is missing in the vision-setting processes that the private sector is tasked to do, and that is another question for this group to consider. Let us say that some of your propositions are locked into the public sector's decision-making process. How much of the housing is built by private contractors, and where in that process is the need for a good designer who has the right qualities, as you say, to make the right decision—and where is a good brief written? Where is that vision statement coming from? I think it needs more work.

Lord Stunell: Do you think it would improve matters if there was a national space standard, something like Parker Morris was all those years ago?

Professor Ricky Burdett: It would be better than not having one.

Q52 **Baroness Thornhill:** With my background in local government, my main concern is bringing the public along with us and public expectations. I have never known a planning officer who does not want to "build beautiful", or whatever cliché you want to use. In their hearts they want to place-shape and all the rest of it, but something is happening massively within the process to erode their power to do that.

David, you talked about what is agreed and what is delivered. I would ask what is in your local plan. It seems to me that massive compromises have been made at local level. How do we equate quality and how do we define beauty—that is probably another debate—when you have housing targets, viability, and affordable housing, climate change mitigation and

all these other things? It seems to me that stuff in reality gets passed as a result of these masses of compromises on things that are expected, but somewhere along the line we do not get it—and why? What do you think is the main reason for that? Residents say, "But it is in the local plan" and the planner says, "Ah, but—". So how have we reached the "ah but" of CABE saying three-quarters of homes are poorly designed? I regret the demise of CABE. That is what I want to get to the nub of.

David Birkbeck: The biggest issue we face is the way land is sold. It is sold at the highest price. The way you create the highest price is to build the lowest quality. A lot of the stuff that Lord Stunell has just referred to is also affected by that. It is not just about the public realm and the size of units; it is just about everything. The most successful developments in Britain tend to be those that either have a legacy landowner or go through a mechanism whereby there are standards attached to the sale of land. This is a process that Homes England introduced in its corporate plan in 2018, and parcels of land are now sold with a number of design standards and a brief attached to them. That is not onerous or impossible to achieve, but it certainly makes it very difficult for some of the villains of house building to get anywhere near the land values they would need to create to get those parcels. I think it is beginning to happen.

It is rather unfortunate that the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission referred back to the previous practices of Homes England and not the current ones, despite, I understand, being given the chance to correct the report. That is beginning to happen. If you compare the way that Homes England sells land, where it builds in particular standards, with TfL, which does not, and you then look at the quality of what gets built on TfL sites compared with what Homes England builds, you can see the gap beginning to separate. One is essentially taking the highest value and building as high as possible, literally, and the other is thinking of place, what it would be like over 25 years, the carbon footprint and a load of other things.

We have a process for getting it right, but it is only now being applied to a certain number of public sector land sales. I think the DIO is very effective in trying to maximise the quality of what it gets when it sells its land, but NHS estates are terrible; they have deliberately sold to the highest bidder, knowing that the scheme that will be built on NHS land will give them the biggest build in care over the next 35 to 50 years.

Baroness Thornhill: How do you incentivise that not to happen when they would say they want the maximum money to build their new hospital, provide new facilities and so on?

David Birkbeck: That is the question. I do not have an answer for that, but I know that by attaching a certain level of design requirement to a land sale you can completely change what is built. The problem at the moment is that if a company buys a piece of land and it expects to sell 18,000 square feet of housing per acre and it has worked out that it will build all that housing at about £60 per square foot, it is in a legal contract essentially to hand over a sum of money that will deliver those two

things. When the planning officer says, "I want 17,000 square feet. I do not want 18,000 square feet and I want you to build it at £100 per square foot" the developer cannot do it, because that is essentially shooting themselves in the foot. They pretend that they will do it, and they go to planning pretending that they will do it, and then when they get on site they go back to what they wanted to build.

There is no enforcement action at any scale in Britain. Even the most brilliant planning authority in Britain, Cambridge County Council and Cambridge City Council, do not take enforcement action against the people who build stuff that really is not good enough. I live next door to half a dozen houses in Uttlesford that the builder does not have planning approval for.

Q53 **Lord Grocott:** It is extremely interesting listening to this, and thanks for your evidence. It is also a bit depressing. I suppose it is easy enough to identify all the things that are going wrong, but the tricky thing is to point to the villains—I think that was the word used by David Birkbeck. Can you give us some more colour for our report about the particularly horrific examples of poor design that you have come across? That would add to our report, I am sure.

David Birkbeck: It would be easier, surely, for me to supply those as images with a commentary. I am anticipating it would be quite difficult for me to somehow conjure up what the individual problems are. The issue is there is a thing they call zero-plotting, whereby you work out how to build the maximum number of units with absolutely nothing except for the minimum depth of garden allowed, which is 10 metres, and enough space for two parking bays on plot to the front of the property. You end up with a strip that is essentially about 5 metres wide where it meets the carriageway, roughly 5.5 metres of parking and then the house, which is typically about 7 metres deep, and then the 10-metre garden behind it. Those houses were originally being built at 12,000 square feet to the acre. They are now being built at 17,000 square feet to the acre by removing everything else in the street: where the trees would have gone and the verge, where the landscape would have gone alongside the car parking, perhaps bigger gardens. Everything else is gone to get down to what they call zero-plotting, which maximises the land value you can then bid.

The business model of several of our biggest plcs—not all of them; I think it is very important to know that they do not all do this—is essentially to strip out everything that is not zero-plotting so they can maximise their land bid, then build as cheaply as they dare to maximise their land bid.

Lord Grocott: Can any others add to that? I am trying to get a list of guilty men or women or whoever. Who is responsible for all of these horrors?

David Orr: Some things that are written into the system encourage poor behaviour. The viability assessments have encouraged poor behaviour, for example. They have given developers the opportunity to say, "Well,

we cannot afford to do that good thing or that good thing" or, "We cannot afford to provide that much affordable housing because we have to pay so much money for the land". That creates an absolutely absurd position whereby some developers have a vested interest in the land price being high so that they can avoid doing things on the development that they do not want to do. They use the viability assessment as a means of arguing that case. There is a hugely differential power relationship and financial imbalance between the very big developers and the legal teams that they can afford and small, overworked, underresourced, cash-strapped local authority planning departments that do not have the capacity, even if they have the will, to take on those big challenges.

I think it goes further than that. Obviously, not everyone is out there trying to be villainous—I do not want you to think that—but for the developer the only matter of concern is the point of first sale. You build the homes that you think will sell in that particular place on the day that they are available for release and you build and sell according to a programme that maximises the income that you are going to deliver. Fine, I understand that—it is a perfectly fair business model; but we are building homes now that will have to last for 100 years or more. It will not just be the first occupants who live in those homes, so where are we doing the thinking about all of the people who might live in them over the course of 100 years? We have an obsession with the number of bedrooms instead of the amount of habitable space per person; that is where space standards should start from, not what size a third bedroom is.

I think we need to find some way—I am not quite sure how we do it because, as you said, there are huge challenges—of thinking differently about the future and what we are delivering for people who will live there in 10, 20, 50, 100 years rather than just those at the first point of entry. The Good Home inquiry was commissioned by the Centre for Ageing Better. We have the view that as people get older they will go into residential care, and what we need to do is to think about specific extra care retirement villages or whatever for older people. About 5% of us will do that, 95% of us will not, so we need to be thinking about, when we are building new places, how they will be adaptable. We need to be much more flexible than we are now.

I am sorry, I feel like I am making a bit of a speech—but if you ask people what they want in their home they say the same thing: "We want it to be spacious and light". As we grow older, the thing we are most likely to change in our homes is the amount of light that we have. We want them to be flexible, adaptable and hospitable and have a good relationship with the local area, and that is not what gets delivered.

Professor Ricky Burdett: At the risk of sounding nearly optimistic in response to your question, in the last 10 years there have been very positive examples of good housing. It is important to stand back and some of it, a lot of it, comes from local authority housing. Therefore, it might be just as useful to flip your question around and say, "What has happened in the positive examples?" From a personal point of view—and

this is a one-off—I was involved with Lord Rothschild's estate in Waddesdon where he commissioned a project called Golden Mede. The land was put in, which of course changes the equation totally, but it is an interesting project with about 120 units of housing now lived in. A competition was run, and the quality of the housing is exactly as in everything you have said about light, flexibility and everything else.

There are examples of things to learn, and much of it is about infill housing—not the sort of housing shown here but infill housing on difficult sites, where the land footprint does not relate to the bigger issues you have been talking about. I urge the committee to look at those positive examples.

The Chair: Thank you for that. Please send us good examples as well as bad, including from the private sector, as extra evidence. I know that new financial services groups, for example, are going into this market and there may be scope for doing even more of this good stuff.

Professor Ricky Burdett: Can we do that after this submission?

The Chair: Yes, we are very happy to have follow-up from witnesses. That is always extremely helpful and can save time on the day.

David Birkbeck: Ireland is looking very hard at what Cambridge has been up to. The preferred model in most of western Europe is the direct street access home, whether that is a maisonette or a duplex or a house, as long as it has direct street access, because you do not pay management charges. In Ireland in particular management charges do not go down very well, so people all want to live in houses but they cannot build houses at a rate that creates the land value that will compete with the people building apartments. For a long time they have had an issue with this and they have not been able to work out what to do, because houses come in at 17,000 square feet to the acre and flats at 40,000.

Cambridge has developed new models over the last 10 years where the houses get rid of most of the aspects of the Tudor Walters report from 1919—remembering that it is 102 years old and it is probably time to move on. It starts to do things that we have probably never seen in the UK before, whereby houses do not have the traditional party wall on the side, but often on the back and the side. Gardens have gone from the ground and are now up on the roof, and the dwelling might be over three floors instead of two. Generally that creates a much higher level of coverage and a much higher land value, but it also creates a lot more big housing that will pay for all kinds of things.

I am sure it has something to do with the fact that Cambridge insists on having everything built to code level 4 of the old code for sustainable homes, and insists on 40%, so that people have had to invent an entirely new housing model, which the Irish currently call Jenga housing because it fits together in a way that is not traditional. I think it is something to look at and an interesting example of what we could be doing instead.

For some reason it has been completely ignored here, whereas other countries are looking at it as the answer for all kinds of things.

Q54 **Lord Best:** I am trying to look at the positives and opportunities. We need an awful lot of things that will cost more and reduce the margins that the oligopoly of major house builders can currently command.

We have in earlier sessions heard about the Letwin report and the potential opportunities for local authorities to set up their own companies and acquire the sites and then parcel them out under a master plan. Do we think that this is the way to achieve all the things that we desire for space, quality, affordability and all the rest of it? Is this capturing of the land the key to the things that we all want?

David Birkbeck: It is about doing anything other than just selling land to the highest bidder, because that just spoils everything from day one. It is about whatever technique you have, whatever you could possibly explore, other than selling land to the highest bidder.

David Orr: It would be a major step forward, for those reasons, because it creates a better opportunity to be in control of the delivery of the strategic plan. It is not exactly the same, but I can give you a very positive example. One of the organisations I am involved with is Clarion Housing Association. We have been building a new development called Graylingwell Park near Chichester. Local authorities and housing associations have a long-term interest in the place that they are developing because of their rented housing and the continuing obligations that they have, and it is always the case that local authorities and housing associations take a different view about investing in the future. It does not always work out, but this one was a derelict hospital site. It now has more than 750 homes on it. They are all built to code for sustainable homes level 6, so I think it is the largest net-zero carbon development in the country, with an on-site energy centre and integrated PV panels. The master plan was developed using collaborative place-making processes involving 350 local people and stakeholders. There was a huge amount of buy-in to it. The most recent 43 homes have just been handed over. We tripled the number of trees on the site and it incorporated bus routes.

The point about this is that it is of a scale where it can be a land-led, mixed tenure development by an organisation that has a long-term interest in the success of the place. The more that we can get to that point, the better—and I think the Letwin report created an alternative route to being able to do that kind of development.

Q55 **Lord Berkeley:** David Orr mentioned, quite rightly, the need to design houses for perhaps 100 years of living. Of course, during that time, and quite soon, we are supposed to be heading to net-zero carbon. David Birkbeck mentioned the problem of transport and parking and everything like that, and I believe from other evidence that fewer people will own cars or use cars if there is public transport—or maybe bicycle, scooters or whatever. What can we do to encourage that and make sure that the flexibility that is needed for this can be incorporated? David, you started

off with a right go at the Department for Transport, I think quite rightly. What is your view?

David Birkbeck: There is a scheme that has won a housing design award this year at project status, which means that it has just received planning—it is not built. It is in Bristol and is driven by the city council. The city council got a lot of affordable housing as part of the deal with a modular housing company that will put all the parking and the bike storage in places where you would normally not expect it. The parking goes on the road; everything on the road is connected with EV charging points. I think there is one for something like every four cars and every single property will have a place to put the bike, which will mean that the people living there do not have to drag it through the house, which is the historic problem. There is a separate access for your bike to go round to the back where it can be stored successfully, and then it is more attractive for the user. That is one example.

Nationwide Building Society is doing another one in Swindon. We are beginning to see these coming out of the ground. It is early days but they are happening. The problem is that they require innovation, and a significant chunk of the industry does not want to innovate. It takes about 10 years to learn how to build what it knows without defects, and it does not want a brand new model to start again tomorrow, so there will be some tension there.

Professor Ricky Burdett: Could I address this question and link it to Lord Best's comments a moment ago by standing back and zooming back a bit? Part of the answer to your question about carbon reduction goes way beyond the house unit itself and the key points you made and is to do with density. In the end, probably one of the biggest problems worldwide, let alone in England and the UK, is sprawl and everything that brings with it—the need to commute, the need to take services out. Of course, the legislation is pushing towards higher levels of density and, therefore, different modes of living. This necessitates—to go back to Lord Best's point—very intelligent and good master planning. If the whole is not conceived as a place where people can walk to a local shop, a local health centre and so on, and we think only about the unit itself, it is not going to work. Therefore, it is about having a local authority or a public entity owning the whole of the land for a longer period. I was a chief adviser on architecture and urbanism for the London Olympics, and also for the legacy company before it came into place. It is a great advantage to be able to release the land only when certain conditions are met, and I think the environmental conditions must be part of that.

Q56 **Lord Haselhurst:** Taking that admonition straightaway, I feel that on the question of whether the new design codes are sufficient to increase the quality and design standards for new homes, we have had some fairly strong answers already. There is a picture of avaricious developers who stand in the way of doing things that a well-intentioned local authority may be aiming to do. On the other hand, you will find some jewels of examples where everything seems to have gone right. It is very difficult to get it right, is it not? First, there is subjectivity about these things.

Someone may look at a particular avenue with trees and say, "How beautiful" and someone else may say, "Well, who will clean up the leaves in the autumn?" We have some good examples, but I am not sure it is one of the main driving forces, even though it ought to be.

How do you get a standard that takes account of all the things that we are currently concerned about? Will it have space for growth so that people stay there? Will it have the fact that there may be four cars trying to park rather than just one or two? Will it have broadband or whatever may succeed broadband? Will it have mains drainage? There are an awful lot of houses that do not have mains drainage at the moment. Will it be able to live up to what we believe are the standards necessary to meet net zero? How can one comprehend all these factors into a design code, and will it make a difference?

David Birkbeck: I think the ambition of the design code is a good one. It is something I support as an idea. I am not 100% sure that it is good enough yet, and I think there are mistakes in it. I think there is one loophole in it that will prove disastrous, in paragraph 44, where it essentially says the local authority should create the design code and, if they cannot, the developer or landowner should. You are effectively inviting the people who cause all the abuse to set the rules so they can do more abuse. I just do not understand that.

I am also puzzled by why the original one makes reference to a thing called floor area ratio, which was Andrés Duany's way of coding a city. He thought that, if you set a target for what the volume of a building would be on the land, you could make sure that everything could be two storey, three storey or four storey, and you could make streets homogenous. He wrote that in 1996 in *Suburban Nation*. In 2005 he reissued *Suburban Nation* saying, "I got it badly wrong. We should go for coverage rates because that is also what developers do and then we are talking the same language". Our National Model Design Code came out referencing the original 1996 version of *Suburban Nation* and making exactly the same mistake that Andrés Duany subsequently corrected.

I am not sure that the National Model Design Code has covered all the ground it needs to yet, but I agree it is something that will work. I think that possibly will work in places where there already is ambition for design quality. We will see them being introduced in places where there are resources to pay for them and where there are people willing to take it on as a job, but I do not know how it would work, for example, in somewhere like Northumberland. You could not have a local authority design code for a county that has a 50-mile coastline and goes 30 miles in up the Tyne Valley, where there are pit villages around Ashington that look absolutely nothing like the farmsteads of the Tyne Valley or the ports of Berwick-upon-Tweed or Amble. You cannot have a single set of design rules for something so varied. There are some other significant questions about the National Model Design Code.

In the end, I genuinely think it is not as important as setting design targets for the sale of land in a developer agreement. The one thing that

works well in Britain is the law. If you build it into a contract, most people will respect that. I recommend that is the way stuff is improved rather than through documents that may or may not be used.

Professor Ricky Burdett: I think the one thing missing from the design codes is a recognition that design is an iterative process. You cannot just have a checklist and do these things. It says nothing about procurement of designers. There are many examples—we do not have time to go through them now—of a competitive process, having design advisers, experts, design juries and so on at the local authority level, but a lot of developers have done this very well. It is excluded from the design code and I think it is part of the process.

David Orr: One of the big challenges about design codes is that people think it is limited to the aesthetics and the visual appearance. It needs to be about much more than that, and possibly even less than that—but much more about what are the standards, what are the things that you want, how do you ensure that the new home is light, spacious, flexible, adaptable? These are the things that I think need to be in design codes and need to be enforced. The bottom line is that unless you want to do it, it will only happen if it is enforced.

Q57 **Lord Haselhurst:** When it comes to a larger development being planned, are there not also serious pitfalls, perhaps therefore a tendency to exaggerate what might be possible in what we currently think we want? I have seen situations where a commitment has been made to have medical services, for example, which really the NHS has never agreed to and would not. Will we find that medicine develops in such a way that it will be delivered to the home, much as now people are finding that we have wound the clock back and we can have groceries delivered to the home, so why do we need to go there? How does public transport then fit into it? Are the government of the day going to make a decision that is massive for industrial investment, completely changing the dynamics of an area when people thought they were living into a totally different type of environment?

Professor Ricky Burdett: Design codes by definition are retrospective, practically. They look backwards at what has happened. There is an enormous danger that you stifle innovation, and this country has been very good at inventing. I go back to the Georgian period in which the Georgian house was the greatest invention of all in its flexibility, simplicity of construction and making place all at the same time. I am worried that too much design code freezes the potential for innovation.

David Birkbeck: That is an important point. It is a real danger. If we were ever to move towards photo-type recognition systems being proposed as part of the planning reforms, you would end up with designs set in a particular period and you could not innovate for climate change. I think that is dangerous, far more dangerous than where we are at the moment.

Q58 **Lord Moylan:** I will say for the sake of transparency that Professor

Burdett and I have known each other for many years through our reciprocal work on architectural and urban design work.

Sticking with design codes for the moment, the original political impetus behind design codes was not to make the homes better for the occupants but to make them more attractive to potential planning objectors who lived in the area. The notion was that if the homes looked more beautiful there would be less objection. I do not think I am making anything up—I think that was what the argument was, that they would be less objected to if they were more contextualised and more beautiful. Do you think that there is any element of truth or value in that?

Perhaps related to that and picking up on something that Professor Burdett hinted at, in conjunction with design codes what role is there for design review, which has become very important in the last 20 years, and a very valuable design review of new schemes separate from an expert design review? How is that going to work with design codes?

David Birkbeck: Can I answer the first part of Lord Moylan's question? The idea of making things look more palatable to the local community and guaranteeing less resistance over planning is an interesting one. The RTPI did some research about 20 years ago where it discovered that it would effectively win over about one in 10 objectors, which does not do an awful lot for you. We know that there is something there, but it is not going to be big enough to move the dial.

The model that we keep being told the public would automatically support at planning committee level is a scheme on the edge of Newquay called Tregunnel Hill that had enormous resistance at planning stage to the point that it failed the first time round. It is endlessly wheeled out as an example of the type of scheme that every member of the public would support, when in fact it is a secret—very few people know that it failed at planning because it was considered to have no green spaces. The local community objected to it because it was all hard landscaping. That is currently the photo poster of this entire conviction that if we did something lovely and historical the world would vote for it.

David Orr: My least favourite sentence in housing is, "I would love to see more new homes here but—" and the "but" is all kinds of things. Often the truth is they do not want to see the new homes but they know they have to say that they do and then people will find all kinds of reasons for objecting. Poor quality design and places that do not look good give objectors quite a strong base for arguing their case. Anything that we can do that allows those of us who are in favour of building a whole lot of new homes gives us a stronger opportunity to do that and persuade people that there are new developments all over the country that have improved those places and have significantly made them look, feel and function better. We have lost the ability to argue the positive case. It is not said that we need to do this because too many people do not have homes so we will do the best we can.

There are plenty of places in the country where there are small and large developments. I think of a place I went to in Swindon on the edge of a

roundabout, which had been a pub that was derelict and there was a whole lot of antisocial behaviour associated with it. There was a lot of objection to building new homes, because some of them were going to be social-rented homes. Five years later, there is a fantastic new development. It absolutely worked with the rest of the area and not a single person in the local area thought that it was poorer now than it had been when it was a derelict pub, but we do not tell those stories. I think it is important that we point to the good examples and say, "This makes everyone's life better".

Professor Ricky Burdett: What David is referring to is how important it is that any project is integrated into this context. I do not think a design code can solve that. It requires a bigger picture. There are some very good diagrams here that talk about figure ground plans and all that, which probably two people in this room have the faintest idea what that is, let alone how you then measure and evaluate whether the figure ground of your project and the roundabout fits in with the surroundings. This is getting at the skills issue. Just on the point about design review and codes, I have suggested already that the risk of a design code is that it is a checklist and that is all it is. You need human beings with sophisticated visual and analytical skills to discuss projects place by place.

As you rightly said, David, the coastal condition is very different from an inner-city part of any of our cities, whether it is Bristol or London. You were responsible in your previous role for putting together a design review in Kensington and Chelsea and it worked incredibly well, because some difficult sites and difficult projects ended up improving both the scheme and the neighbourhood as a result of that conversation. I think that space needs to be made in the advice that government gives as to how to interpret design codes, otherwise they become a dull and blunt instrument that will not necessarily improve the quality of what is done. Bringing people of talent in this field—of which there are many in this country and more so than there were 20 years ago—into the process, recognising that it is a dialogue, is very important.

The Chair: Professor Burdett, would you say the name of the document you have been referring to for our viewers?

Professor Ricky Burdett: I am sorry, this is the National Model Design Code.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Q59 **Baroness Bakewell:** Can I press you a bit further on what we have already culled from what you have contributed? We have had you name the guilty men. We have had you nominate fine examples, Cambridge for example, which perhaps would be worth visiting. Who in the end will take responsibility for the public realm? Are we going to trust planners, and do they sign up for this, or are we going to hope that developers will see the benefit of it? Who will take responsibility for the public realm? It belongs to the public. David, what do you think?

David Birkbeck: To start with, the highway does not belong to the public. It belongs to the Highways Authority, and most highways teams have gone from using quite a number of materials down to just two or three to save money. We are automatically beginning from a situation where five or 10 years ago you could have expected in a development built in a rustic area that you might have a conservation kerb—which is 100 millimetres, 4 inches instead of 6 inches, not concrete but looks like granite. That would have made quite a difference to the way the street felt, because it would not look like just any dual carriageway construction detail.

To save money, many county highways teams have completely stripped out anything that is not as cheap, basic and as durable as possible. We have gone towards a situation where most of the details that are drawn in planning applications will not be adopted by the highway authority after planning. It goes through the planning system, the committee votes for it and thinks, "We will get all these lovely things, like street trees" and then the highways team says, "No, you will not".

Baroness Bakewell: How do you change that?

David Birkbeck: Well, by a new Highways Act.

Professor Ricky Burdett: As you said before.

Baroness Bakewell: For example, Exhibition Road in London was pushed through as a design project, probably by Terry Farrell, was it not? It was Dixon Jones? Right—and that went through. How do we proliferate such initiatives as that?

David Birkbeck: That is TfL. Until quite recently TfL had the money to maintain and support that kind of design detailing. That is about the adopting authority. TfL and North Hampshire County Council are very much at opposite ends of the spectrum on what they will and will not accept.

Baroness Bakewell: Ricky, what do you think?

Professor Ricky Burdett: I think the public realm needs to remain in public hands, or certainly the division needs to be developed from there, whether it is local authority or other agencies that we were talking about before, delivery companies or development corporations. I am thinking of the London Legacy Development Corporation as an example, but it need not be that. There is the Old Oak Common as a second one in London.

I do not think one can discount, for example, some of the extraordinary contributions that have been made in private developments. I think of the King's Cross project, simply because we are not that far from it, where public realm of extraordinary quality is part of the London Borough of Camden, effectively. It has been procured and designed; it is maintained by the developer but with a very complex and rich agreement, which is exactly the sort of interface that I think should be recommended when it comes to the public realm.

Back to the skills question, some of the local authorities will literally not have the people in the room who can develop three-dimensional—and the

word "three-dimensional" is very important here when it comes to public realm. You tend to get the sort of cookie two-dimensional version of what a space should be like. Much of it is determined by traffic rather than the personal experience of what it is like to stand in a place or sit on a bench with beautiful material. I think that is what is behind your question.

Baroness Bakewell: You say it should be encouraged. What is the route by which you do that encouraging?

Professor Ricky Burdett: There are many examples where the local authorities have been able to work with developers. In the case of, say, King's Cross, they produced a booklet called *Principles for a Human City*, which is adhered to today, 20 years after it was agreed. Any decision about the nature of the public realm goes back to this document, which sets out some very clear notions about connectivity: make sure that you do not have dead ends and the landscaping is of high quality all the way through, independent of whether there is a gate or not.

Baroness Bakewell: David Orr, are there other examples that are getting copied? Are these fine examples that you cite out there to be copied, or are people seeking to avoid them?

David Orr: I think there are some seeking to avoid them and there are some at least trying to copy the principles of it. As others have said, I think that ownership of the public realm has to stay in the public domain. It has to be a partnership between local planning authorities that says, "This is what good looks like". That is what the plan should be—then working with developers to deliver against that. That is not to deny the responsibility that developers have; they do, since they are the people who are creating the places that we will be living in for the next 100 years. That is a big responsibility.

In the end, there has to be some kind of publicly mandated oversight. To do that, local authorities need to have properly resourced planning departments, which they very often do not. They need to be better at talking to each other as well about cross-border issues in how local plans operate.

Baroness Bakewell: "Publicly mandated" means what?

David Orr: I think it means that if you are going to take ownership for what the future looks like in your place, that has to be locally elected local authorities because that is the only means we have. I do not think this is a job for national government because local delivery is so specific to the place that it is in.

Q60 **The Chair:** Do you think the Dutch scheme would help? My understanding is that the planning authorities there come along ex post in a multi-skilled team. They not only look at space, light and transport but check up afterwards. It is a different approach, ex post as well as ex ante. Have any of you had any experience of that?

David Birkbeck: Yes, I think that happens quite a bit. Most planning authorities make a point of visiting stuff within their remits to see what it looks like and, in particular, by taking the members around so that they

can see what was built. Sometimes it is a very disappointing experience for them because I think there is often a big gap.

The irony is that the planning authority, say Uttlesford, is not the controlling authority of the public realm, which is Essex County Council. Therefore, a scheme that has a public urban square built into it will be built with a roundabout later. No developer wants to put houses around a roundabout. They cannot sell the houses around a roundabout. Those houses cannot have direct access on to the road because you are not allowed to drive off a house on to a roundabout. They wanted the open square and they cannot have the open square because of the county highways team. It just vetoes whatever the planning authority thought it was getting.

Q61 **Lord Moylan:** What do you say to the fact that in ownership and management of the public realm over the last 20 years virtually every scheme of any significant size, with any significant public realm publicly accessible space, has not been handed over to the public at all? It has been retained in private ownership under private management, with the support—and indeed enthusiasm—of the local authority?

David Orr: I do not advocate that these spaces should be handed over to the local authority. My suggestion is that whether it is a large housing association or a large developer doing a large-scale development, the nature of the public realm needs to be agreed with the local authority. I am absolutely not suggesting that all publicly used space should have to be handed over and owned by local authorities.

Professor Ricky Burdett: A reminder that we are sitting in a city where within a few hundred yards there are private family estates that have created some of the most beautiful and lasting public spaces in the public realm of any city. Some of them have gates around them—the Grosvenor Estate, say—but many of them are still among the most publicly accessible.

I think some level of dialogue is possible, and that is perhaps what was intimated there. It goes back to the skills. Who will have the resources and ability to come up with a three-dimensional plan for landscaping, seating and everything else? The London Legacy Development Corporation commissioned a Swiss landscape architect, who created one of the most beautiful sets of open spaces in London in the last 20 years. We can all walk through it and so can the residents.

Q62 **Lord Carrington:** In some ways this has been a very depressing evidence session but fascinating, nevertheless. The people who are missing from this, though, are the people who will buy or live in or rent the property. We are talking about planners, builders, people who may or may not get full value for their land by legislative action, but the people who are actually going to live in it seem somehow to be missing or to be represented by the local authority, which is historically very bad at representing individuals.

Professor Burdett mentioned the Georgian building. As I understand the Georgian building in London, or certainly the Victorian building in London,

it tended to be done by individual developers taking on a plot of land from a landowner and building three or four houses in a terrace to an overall design—perhaps as a terrace—but the design behind the house was determined by the builder, probably in conjunction with the person who it already had in mind to take on a lease of the property. Therefore, you ended up with a structure at the back. The elaborate estate in Notting Hill Gate was built very much on that basis.

Is there a way of getting back to individual choice rather than people being presented with, "These are the only houses being built in your area or the only flats being built in your area—you have to go and live in these because you have no choice"? Is there a way of bringing in input from the people who will be living in the property for the next 20 years perhaps?

David Birkbeck: Yes, there is but it is not quick. One of the impacts of doing more of that would be much higher quality, with much higher levels of satisfaction but much lower levels of production. I think it is a fantastic idea. I am working on several projects that will do that, but I am anticipating that it will probably kill me. It is not going to be something that creates a lot of housing very quickly.

David Orr: I think that is right: it does take longer. The more that we can expand the pattern of service delivery, the more we can use community land trusts or co-ownership housing or different approaches to how we live and who has some degree of influence over what gets built and what it looks like. I have always been enthusiastic about the idea of local authorities buying land, giving themselves planning consent, servicing it and then selling it off as individual plots. That seems to me to be quite economically sensible for the local authority as well as for the potential individual who buys and commissions what property actually gets put on it.

These are all things that will only ever happen in addition to the large-scale development. I think the really critical thing is how you ensure that the collective voice of people who will live in new developments is heard. At the moment, most community consultation does not take account of them. It only takes account of the people who are already there.

Q63 **Baroness Cohen of Pimlico:** I would like to get in evidence something about the much admired new build in Cambridge, the Eddington development.

David Birkbeck: Eddington is fantastic. It is one of the most impressive schemes you will see anywhere in Europe. It is on Cambridge University land.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: Yes, St John's land.

David Birkbeck: Is it? Okay. I cannot praise that scheme enough, but I do not know to what degree a lot of it is replicable, because you have somebody with an amazing vision for what they want. It is really not focused on the fact that as a plc, for example, it would have been fired for building that. That is one of the contradictions we have in the industry.

There are many others, though, in the immediate area. Great Kneighton is a scheme of 2,300 homes; 2,000 of them are probably the best I have ever been in, and 300 of them are terrible. They are by one of the villains of the industry. It comes with a primary school, a secondary school, a 140 acre water park and a sustainable transport system that will get you to the railway station in about 10 minutes on a gas-powered bus. It is an exceptional scheme and one that lots of local authorities are looking at and wondering how on earth they will get anywhere near that quality.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: I was going to ask whether they got near that quality fundamentally because the college was prepared to sacrifice quite a lot of the land value in the interests of the long term. St John's owns half of Cambridge and Trinity tends to own the other half. I am not sure that I would trust the smaller colleges, like Caius for instance, with that kind of development. I think I am asking whether the opportunities for building high quality, beautiful and sustainable new homes tend to lie with people who are already landowners.

David Birkbeck: Yes, and that is why it takes you back to Homes England because, in the end, we have a public sector landowner that is trying to do this kind of thing. A lot of its sites are not in high-value areas. Historically, they certainly were not but they were. For example, with Graylingwell Park I was part of the team that selected that bid on the grounds that it was a better bid rather than a bigger bid. It has been doing this for some time but it does it a bit more aggressively now. It also introduced things like a portion of the scheme has to be self-built. You were asking about this. There are several developments that are being built at the moment where a corner of it—maybe 5% or 10% of the entire development—is for people who want to build their own. Homes England's other job is to deliver a number of homes, so it could not commit 100% of the scheme to it—it has to balance the risk.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: Before we all go and get very excited about the opportunities provided by Cambridge, the plans for the north-eastern site, which has been vacated by Anglian Water, are utterly, utterly horrible.

David Birkbeck: Is that the one near Marshalls?

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: No, Marshalls may be all right. It has not vacated the site so one cannot quite tell, but the plans for the north-eastern site rely on Anglian Water moving out, which we believe is a done deal. What is left is some fairly dreadful legacy buildings, which are not going to be pulled down, and plans for endless "studio flats", which I think are probably the world's least durable and least reasonable to live in housing ever, although I would be glad of anybody's view on them.

David Birkbeck: I do not know that scheme but I—

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: How do you feel about studio flats?

David Birkbeck: They are probably a necessary evil, but you need a very small percentage of them, and we should never move to anything above 5%. Although they are extremely useful for some people—because they do not have more money or they only want a tiny place because it is

not really their principal home—they are very inflexible. They are not going to work for anybody other than the person who bought it, typically.

Q64 **The Chair:** We are about to move on to skills, which is our final area. Is Airbnb an important matter in the discussions about place?

David Birkbeck: I think it is in London and places where people want to visit as tourists. I am not sure it is particularly relevant on a lot of the house building developments I get to see outside the M25.

The Chair: Yes, it is more a stock issue than a new homes issue. Thank you.

Q65 **Lord Berkeley:** I think it has been fantastic. I have learnt a great deal in this evidence session. I thank very much all three witnesses.

What is missing from all this is around the shortage of skills in the design not just of the properties themselves but of the public realm around them. That covers transport, zero carbon and all the other things that may change in the next few decades. What can we do about that? Local authorities and others cannot afford to employ some of these people, but if they are not around you have a chicken and egg situation. Are there any solutions to this challenge? I think it is a challenge, but maybe you do not agree. Who wants to start?

David Birkbeck: I will give it a go. Essentially, when you are still using the subcontract labour route, which the majority of the housebuilders use, they are able to achieve build costs of about £60 a square foot. When you move away from that skills base, you go towards a factory-type model that jumps to £100 a square foot. You are seeing an almost impossible increase in construction costs by going down the MMC route that is preferred by most people who know about it, because it just does not work with the current land bids.

If you bought a site on the grounds that you think you will build 100 houses at £60 a square foot and you cannot find bricklayers, you do not then switch to buying from the factory at £100 a square foot because you would essentially destroy yourself. We are in the kind of limbo land at the moment, where lots of sites have been bought with the expectation that the build costs will be £60 a square foot, whereas we may not have the skills or the people to deliver at £60 a square foot, and the alternative to go to a factory build would effectively bankrupt the developer.

Lord Berkeley: That is interesting. Baroness Cohen was talking about how wonderful the big landowners were when they did not want to worry too much about the cost of land. I think she might have meant established landowners because—

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: Yes, of course I did.

Lord Berkeley: You did not say it, though.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: Sorry, of course. I meant people who have always owned that land, since the 13th century probably.

David Orr: Of course, all that David just said is right. We need to find ways of investing in skills and to get the right kinds of construction

courses available. We do not have the skills that we need, but I think there is a really significant role for factory-built offsite construction.

An example from Clarion is we are developing a 40-home scheme with Ilke Homes, which is one of the offsite manufacturers that is growing and becoming established. Some 60% of its production line are not from a construction background, because the skills that you need on a production line are not the same as the skills that you need on a building site. The evidence is that we are getting better quality from the production line.

I think that we need to do a pretty fundamental rethink of how we can commission and build homes in future, building more and more of them in high tech, production-line-based factories. In the end, it will be much more effective than continuing to build brick by brick on site.

Lord Berkeley: That is true from the point of view of factory building, but there are different skills on the site to make sure that the factory-built stuff actually fits together and works.

David Orr: None of it gets away from the fact that we need the skills, and we do not have them to the extent that we require them at the moment. There needs to be investment in that.

Professor Ricky Burdett: Could I focus the skills issue on not the construction but the planning side? That is just as urgent, because you have people who can build things but, let us say, the master plan or the quality or vision is lacking, so you build things that are not very successful for the people who live there.

There are a number of examples of trying to support local authorities or the public sector, such as a social enterprise called Public Practice, which you may have come across, whereby individuals are supported and funded to join local authorities in exactly these sorts of areas to supplement the staff. These tend to be people from an architectural and design background, and the effects in the few examples that I have experienced are incredibly positive. I know that narrows down your question to just the procurement side rather than the construction side.

Lord Berkeley: Where do you find these people, though? Sticking to the narrow element of design you mentioned, where do you find them?

Professor Ricky Burdett: In this case, it is a generation of architects in their mid-30s to mid-40s who have experience, understanding and knowledge of many of the things we are talking about—technology, the environment and much more—who have not been able to work in the public sector because the jobs are not there. This is subsidised externally, and I think the Mayor of London has been involved in supporting that as an initiative.

The Chair: Are there enough architects and designers coming up through the universities and the postgraduate route?

Professor Ricky Burdett: The number is not the issue.

Q66 **Lord Stunell:** I want to return to the modern methods of construction

point. Mr Birkbeck made the point—I think I understood him to say—that it is twice as expensive on the ground as doing it on site. The Government are obviously putting a lot of effort into cultivating the modern methods approach. Can we explore the point about the cost differential and is there any evidence that you would like to bring to us to support that?

David Birkbeck: I would love to provide the evidence, but I will get shot because this is super sensitive. This is their business. Essentially, that is how they win everything that they ever do. As a rule of thumb, on-site construction delivered in the old way by the big volume builders is about £60 a square foot and the stuff that gets built in factories is typically about £100 a square foot.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: Will this be so for ever?

David Birkbeck: No, I do not think it will be. I think as some of the factories get bigger and the orders get bigger, the differential will get smaller. There is quite a way to go at the moment.

The Chair: Is there any international experience that helps to inform the debate? I think they are further ahead on modular in France and Germany, or do you know if it is the same problem?

David Birkbeck: Again, I think it comes back to who owns the land and how is it sold. The sites that are using systems in Sweden or Denmark know that they will be building at that cost rather than expecting to be building at the cost they typically build at. The site is sold by the landowner, which is usually the local authority, with the expected requirement that the homes will be delivered in six months, because they do not want a construction job going on for five years. They will go down a particular route and get them all brought in on the back of lorries and the whole job is over by Christmas. That is all known at the time the money changes hands.

The Chair: Are there any final thoughts from Professor Burdett or David Orr before we close?

David Orr: On this particular point, I am happy to go back to Clarion—which is building using both modern and traditional methods—and ask if it could provide some additional evidence on the actual experience of the whole cost, if that would be helpful.

I have two other quick points. This will sound like a very small thing. The Government have been sitting for a year on a consultation about making new homes more accessible. It would be enormously helpful if they would make a decision about that, and particularly take a decision to make them more accessible. A quote from the Archbishop of Canterbury's commission is, "Good housing should be sustainable, safe, stable, sociable and satisfying". If we use those five S's as the background to all of our thinking about new homes, I think it could transform the approach that we took.

Professor Ricky Burdett: I note that in an hour and a half I do not think anyone has mentioned the word "beauty". We have to be careful

that the conversation does not get distorted by the concept of beauty, which is indefinable and unhelpful.

David Birkbeck: I second that. There are a lot of very good housing schemes being built, a lot more than when I first got interested in this subject. The problem is the industry is diverging. You have lots of people who are definitely getting very much better and lots of people who have decided that their business model is more successful if they quite happily deliver substandard housing.

The Chair: I think we have found that with all the evidence sessions we have had. Thank you very much indeed. As has been said already, it really has been an excellent session. We have learnt a lot and I would be very grateful if you could follow up on your promises of good and bad practice and the costings on modular. That would be extremely helpful to Dee Goddard, our clerk. Thank you very much indeed. That ends today's session.