



HOUSE OF LORDS

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Inquiry on

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

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Witnesses: Gill Graham, Steve Quartermain, Ruth Stanier and Bob Ledsome

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Members present

Baroness O'Cathain (Chairman)
 Lord Clement-Jones
 Baroness Finlay of Llandaff
 Lord Freeman
 Lord Inglewood
 Earl of Lytton
 Baroness Rawlings
 Baroness Whitaker
 Lord Woolmer of Leeds
 Baroness Young of Old Scone

Examination of Witnesses

Gill Graham, Head of Heritage, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, **Steve Quartermain**, Chief Planner, Department for Communities and Local Government, **Ruth Stanier**, Director of Planning, Department for Communities and Local Government, and **Bob Ledsome**, Deputy Director, Building Regulations and Standards, Department for Communities and Local Government

Q13 The Chairman: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this evidence session of the Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment. You have in front of you a list of the interests that have been declared by the members of the Committee. The process is that a transcript of the meeting will be taken and published on the Committee website. You will have the opportunity to make corrections to the transcript where necessary. Could I begin by asking each of you to briefly introduce yourselves to the Committee, please, starting on your right, my left?

Gill Graham: My name is Gill Graham. I am head of heritage in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and I have been doing this job since the end of last year.

Bob Ledsome: Good morning. My name is Bob Ledsome and I head the building regulations and standards division at the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Steve Quartermain: Good morning. My name is Steve Quartermain and I am chief planner at the DCLG, a post I took up in 2008 after a career in local government.

Ruth Stanier: Good morning. I am Ruth Stanier. I am the director of planning at the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. You have had a complete list of the questions, and I am going to ask question number 1. What are the Government doing to prepare the country for the big challenges in built environment policy such as migration, ageing, climate change and growing resource demands and any others you can mention? There seems to be a huge menu. Who would like to start?

Ruth Stanier: I will take that question, thank you very much, my Lord Chairman. The work that we do in government is very much focused on seeking to promote high-quality built environments where people will want to live and work. In doing this work, we are acutely conscious of the need always to be forward looking in our approach. This is about getting things right for the years ahead.

My starting point on this is to talk about the planning reforms that have been put in place under the last Government and that we are continuing to take forward. As I am sure you will be aware, the last Government undertook a fundamental review of the planning system and put in place in 2012 the new National Planning Policy Framework. This sets out the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, the social and the environmental. It is very clear that these need to be considered together and that the role of the planning system is very much about looking for solutions that deliver gains across those three.

To turn to the specific themes that you raised in your question and to go through those briefly one by one, on migration and ageing the Framework is very clear that local planning authorities are required both to assess and critically—and this was the big innovation of the new Framework—to plan to meet the future housing and other infrastructure needs of all sections of the population, thinking very carefully about the different needs within the population, including those of ageing people. This work needs to involve looking at a range of evidence, looking at the future, household projections and, crucially, consulting very closely with local communities.

The Government is also very much focused on seeking to improve the housing offer for older people, to increase the supply and choice of housing of all types and to make sure that a range of attractive housing is available, particularly for those ageing people who want to downsize to more suitable accommodation.

Thinking now about the issue of resource demands, similarly the Framework sets out very clear requirements for councils, in drawing together their Local Plans, to look very carefully at the evidence on future requirements for things like water and energy. I also see from the

background evidence you have been looking at that the issue of food security has arisen, which again was an issue that we very much highlighted and specifically mentioned in putting together the new planning Framework, which includes strong protection for the best quality agricultural land in this country.

Finally and briefly on climate change, local planning authorities are similarly required, in their Local Plans, to plan proactively to mitigate and adapt to climate change. That really means avoiding new development in areas that will clearly be at increased vulnerability in the future, and managing risks in other areas that are not quite so exposed through adaptations such as green infrastructure, which again is very much promoted through the Framework. Building regulations also have an important role to play, and in the last Parliament energy efficiency requirements were improved by 30% for new buildings.

That is just a quick run through of the key issues. These are very significant challenges but ones that we are very mindful of in our work.

The Chairman: Can I ask a supplementary of my own? In your list, you put a lot of emphasis on ageing. Do you have a similar amount of emphasis on sole inhabitations: houses with solo people in them? The dynamics of the population are quite different than they were, say, 30 years ago, and we are looking at a timescale of 30 years hence. Many more people are living on their own or with two people, the fractured family syndrome. People are living much longer, which is the ageing issue.

How are the priorities, in your mind, between migration, making up the gap in the housing stock – we do not have enough houses for people – and what comes next? Is it dealing with the end of life issues or with the whole-lifetime issues of people starting off in maybe a flat, then having a three-bedroomed house, then having another flat, a second home or something? Where do you think the big number one priority should be?

Ruth Stanier: That is an extremely good question. Clearly across the whole range of the population there are many different needs. As you say, that is changing over time. In planning policy terms we are quite careful not to skew priorities. The way that the Framework is set out it's very much saying to local authorities that they are required to assess need right across their population and look at that in quite a variegated way to avoid a one-size-fits-all that just thinks about the overall numbers. Within that, the way we drafted the Framework was to be quite careful not to put particular emphasis anywhere. Having said that, ageing is such a big challenge, such a big change in the demographic, that Ministers

naturally pay particular attention to it, and we have supplementary housing initiatives to support areas like that.

The Chairman: Yes. Of course, all the other points that you made about energy conservation, for example, are very important too in terms of people's income and disposable income. Lord Lytton, you wanted to come in.

Earl of Lytton: Very quickly, my Lord Chairman. Are planning authorities possessed of the resources—and I mean that in the broadest terms—to do all this investigation and study within the sort of timescales that the Government are clearly looking at with regard to local plans and that sort of thing? Secondly, there is an awful lot of concentration on the new, what we are going to do now, which is all going to be compliant and singing and dancing and sustainable, but what is new is a relatively small proportion of what exists at present. I and many other members of this Committee are very interested in the 95% of the rest of the stuff that already exists and what happens there. Do you have any observations on that?

Ruth Stanier: I will take the first part of the question. One of my colleagues might want to come in on the second. Resourcing for local planning authorities is absolutely a matter that we keep under very careful review, conscious of the current constraints. In the last Parliament we uplifted planning fees, which was of some assistance.

Over the last few years, where local authorities have been keen to progress their local plan making sure they have put resources into that area and very good progress has been made, including going through all the evidence work to support that. We have now reached a point where 82% of councils have at least a published Local Plan and 64% now have an adopted plan in place, which is good progress but is clearly, as set out in last week's productivity plan, an area where we need to go further.

I do not know, Steve or Bob, whether you want to take up the second part of that question.

Bob Ledsome: With regard to the existing stock, as members of the Committee may know the building regulations are primarily focused on new buildings, but there are some requirements in the building regulations that will affect retrofit activity to existing stock. If renovation work is being undertaken and the energy measures in the building are being upgraded, there are standards that would need to be applied through the building regulations.

Lord Clement-Jones: I get the impression that quite a lot of this is about inviting local authorities to respond to the here and now. What is the balance between being predictive about future trends, population movement and so on, and responding to the here and now?

Ruth Stanier: The National Planning Policy Framework approaches this by asking local authorities to plan for the next 15 years, and it is quite explicit about that. It is asking them to take into account household projections produced by the Office for National Statistics and to think about both current and future needs. I think that forward-looking aspect is covered in the strategic framework, but you are absolutely right: we need to keep focused on making sure that that is how the work plays out in reality.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: Just a short question. I was listening to you and wondering what mechanisms there are for getting feedback from the users of new building projects, whatever they are, both at local authority level and at government level. There may be some very important and constructive comments that, unless you elicit feedback, you may never discover, particularly from specific groups such as the elderly, those with disability needs, those with young children, where features in buildings might be a problem that could be easily remedied.

Ruth Stanier: It is a very good question, and one that we should probably reflect more on. In the department we are on the receiving end of a great deal of feedback from a very broad range of people on things that have not worked well or design that is causing concern. I know that elsewhere in the department the team that looks specifically at housing for older people has sought to ensure that it has the views of older people using different types of housing and that that is fed into policy development. I think it is a good question where we could do more.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: You may be missing out on good feedback.

Ruth Stanier: Yes, indeed.

Baroness Whitaker: Do you have any idea of how much retrofitting that from the point of view of sustainability ought to be done but has not been done?

Bob Ledsome: Energy efficiency in particular is primarily led by the Department of Energy & Climate Change. It has done a lot of work to assess what it would class as the technical potential for retrofit and improving energy efficiency, particularly with regard to the existing stock, and an assessment of the extent to which that technical potential will be realised through policy measures that are in place. That process underpins the work that the

Government do, led by DECC, on carbon budgets, taking account of the advice of the Committee on Climate Change.

At the strategic level, at the policy level, the Government probably have a reasonably good idea about what needs to be done, for example in terms of further retrofit activity, to achieve the climate change targets that are set in the Climate Change Act.

Baroness Whitaker: Perhaps you could send us some trend information for the past few years.

Bob Ledsome: We can certainly provide some further information, yes.

Baroness Whitaker: Thank you.

Q14 Baroness Young of Old Scone: Because I failed to do so at the last meeting, Lord Chairman, I will declare my interests. I am a vice-president of the RSPB, president of the Wildlife Trust for Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire, the former chief executive of the Environment Agency, and chancellor of Cranfield University, which has strong interests in the built environment. I wanted to explore with Ruth Stanier the 15-year horizon. Scotland has taken a 20 to 30-year horizon. Do you think we are being too close to our noses?

Ruth Stanier: Again, that is a very interesting question. From memory, the Framework does not say that it must be 15 years; it does allow flexibility. Where councils are looking to plan for an even longer time horizon that is something we would very much support. I think there is a trade-off between absolutely needing to be forward looking but not going so far into the future that it is practically not feasible to put a Local Plan in place that is going to be useful beyond a particular point. To some extent, we graduate that at the moment by seeking more detail in the first five years and less moving forward. But I think it is a point that we should keep under review.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Even though these built environments are going to last for 50, 60, 70, 150 years?

Ruth Stanier: Yes. I suppose the Local Plan primarily sets out where new development will be provided over that period, but I completely take your point that once it is built there is a much longer period of time thereafter.

The Chairman: This is just an observation. It is almost essential, is it not, for something as important as the environment, with so much finance tied up in it and every single person in the country worried about it and worried about where they are going to live and where they

are not going to live, that you take a long timescale? Otherwise, if it was shifting every five years, as it always used to do in earlier exercises in strategic planning, it is just impossible. You have to have a bit of imagination. Also, it encourages people with imagination to think of other ways of doing it and with other material and things. It encourages that, I am sure. It is just an observation.

Ruth Stanier: Thank you.

Q15 Lord Freeman: My question relates to how government co-ordinates different departments dealing with what is almost a housing crisis, the need for a substantial increase in the rate of house building, and meeting the criteria of a quality built environment. We know that architecture and design policy has recently moved to the Department for Communities and Local Government from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. What benefits do the Government hope to achieve from this, and what changes should we expect to see? More broadly, how is built environment policy co-ordinated across government? I note that the implementation task force that has been set up now includes a number of different departments and Ministers. Could perhaps both departments in particular comment on the advantages of better co-ordination?

Gill Graham: There are strong synergies between architecture, design and sound planning and housing policy. DCMS will, of course, retain a close interest in this, given our responsibilities for conservation, the historic environment and creative industries. I think CLG now has a clear role in delivering design quality, including the oversight of the architecture profession, but we will be working very closely together to ensure that heritage is considered at all stages.

Steve Quartermain: I would like to add to that from the DCLG's point of view. We welcome the opportunity to try to align good architectural practice and efficient, effective planning service, but also the outcomes, because planning is all about outcomes and getting things to happen. We see the decision to move it to DCLG as an answer to your question, which is recognising there needs to be co-ordination across the Government to implement good design and to look at the built environment and how it is being viewed in policy terms across government. I think that we stand well placed to lead on that. Indeed, Ministers have responded to the new brief by starting to talk to people who are involved in it. Only this week they met RIBA, they have agreed to meet the PLACE Alliance, they are talking with Farrells and have been to the Farrell reception. They are getting briefed on what more they

can do to try to co-ordinate the delivery of good architectural practice in all the government policies. I think that things such as the housing taskforce, the design advisory group that was established before the election, which they are looking to revisit and reinvigorate, are signs that we recognise the task and we think the department is fit for it.

Lord Freeman: Could I press you on that? I appreciate that different Ministers might ask different civil servants within departments to co-ordinate activity, but could it be and should it be a taskforce set up by the Cabinet Office with various Ministers meeting regularly to co-ordinate activity?

Steve Quartermain: I am not entirely sure that I am best placed to answer that question. I think that the importance of the task is recognised. Quite how it is delivered and how Ministers align behind the policy to make sure that it works is obviously for Ministers. I do think that we should recognise that the importance of it is embedded in what Ministers want to achieve. They want to achieve a quality outcome, which links back to some of the comments that Ruth made earlier. Our objectives and what we are trying to achieve are clearly set out: high-quality design and high-quality places. It is important to say that it is not just about what buildings look like; it is how places work. It is really important that that is recognised in all the stuff that we do. Whether we are delivering large-scale development on public sector land, trying to support garden cities or trying to support local planning authorities in producing their Local Plans, the bar is set high.

Whether that should be a Cabinet Office thing to be honest is probably not for me to say, but I recognise its importance and I think that Ministers recognise the importance of it too.

The Chairman: Sorry, can I just interject? I can see a new Minister for silos, an abolition of silos, because that is really what we are talking about. Everybody out there who is not in the Civil Service and doing all this great work in the departments is saying, "Why can we not have somebody who will be able to answer that question and do this?". It is really silo management, and it has crept into every activity in this country, every economic activity, in the last 10 years or so. I think you and I are starting from the same point and think, "Get rid of it, because it is a waste of time".

Steve Quartermain: Get rid of—?

The Chairman: Of the silo mentality.

Steve Quartermain: Absolutely, Lord Chairman, I could not agree more. But in doing away with silo mentality there is also the question of recognising that with power goes

responsibility. One of the things that we are trying to do is get people to recognise that the responsibility is not somebody else's and that you cannot turn around and say, "Can you give me the answer to that?"

The Chairman: Good point.

Steve Quartermain: They have to have responsibility for themselves.

The Chairman: You finish. I rudely interrupted. Lord Inglewood wants to come in.

Lord Inglewood: We know that in this country we have some of the best architects in the world and some of the most interesting and exciting contemporary buildings in the world. But if you look across the nation's record as a whole over the last 50, 70 years, you would, from the evidence of your eyes, be hard pressed to suppose that we had had a policy of promoting good architecture and design. As far as I know, it has never been government policy to promote bad architecture and design. Against that background, I put it to you that it is not a matter of co-ordination; it is not a matter of shifting responsibility from one department to another. I have to declare an interest in that I was the Minister responsible in the old Department for National Heritage for design and architecture.

Lord Clement-Jones: So you are the guilty party.

Lord Inglewood: The thing you have to do is fire people up to positively want to build good buildings. That is something that, whatever department it is in, it is very difficult for government to do. I put it to you that we are never going to have a great increase in good, well-designed buildings, well-designed places, unless and until the people who are responsible for the individual sites are fired up and buy in to wanting to do that and know what they are trying to set about to achieve.

Steve Quartermain: My Lord Chairman, I tend to agree. It is not only government that does not promote poor design. If you talk to any of the architects, they do not want to do it either. Every architect will say that they are trying to produce good design. I do think that there is a difference between what I might refer to as iconic sites and iconic buildings and big schemes. What we are trying to achieve is the volume house building, the environment that people live in day by day. It is great to walk into an iconic building and appreciate it—

Lord Inglewood: But some of the iconic buildings did not start out self-consciously to be that.

Steve Quartermain: Possibly not, but I do think that the challenge is getting public acceptance of good design. One of the things I know our Ministers are particularly keen on is

trying to change public perception and public views about good design. If people were more confident that the development that was going to take place in their vicinity was going to be of a high-quality design, they might be more accepting of the development in the first place. Our Ministers are very keen that we try to address that. One of the ways we have been doing that is through our neighbourhood plan process: trying to get people to get engaged with neighbourhood planning at a local level to direct and control what their neighbourhood looks like and have an opportunity to influence design at a local level—a bottom-up approach. We have seen that that has been working and that a lot of people have been involved with neighbourhood plans. That public acceptance of “good design where I live” is really quite important.

Lord Inglewood: How do you get house builders and such like to positively want to deliver that, rather than pile them high and sell them cheap?

Steve Quartermain: My Lord Chairman, I am sure you will have the opportunity to ask a volume house builder that in due course. I do think that we have seen, particularly with neighbourhood plans, that where people are confident that they can have some say over the design quality of the houses that are built, they have been prepared to allocate sites for houses and, indeed, more houses than they might have been expected to have allocated through the Local Plan process from the local authority.

They must have confidence that they can have a say and, to answer your question, if house builders are going to see opportunities to develop they must engage with neighbourhood planning, because that is where the allocations are going to come forward. If they want to build, they need to engage with the communities that are going to live in the houses that they are going to sell.

Lord Inglewood: Just to be clear, are you suggesting that there should be a direct correlation between whether or not a particular site is used for housing and the particularity of the design details that are proposed for it?

Steve Quartermain: I am saying that there are opportunities for that to occur through the neighbourhood planning process.

Lord Inglewood: But not necessarily on brownfield sites, from last week onwards, is that right? I am not trying to be difficult. I am just trying to—

Steve Quartermain: On brownfield sites there is the opportunity to set out very clearly what the expectations are for the development that takes place. Within brownfield sites you can

very clearly set out the scale, the size, the height, the numbers, the amount of public open space, the access, the transport. That can all be set out in advance: “If you are going to develop this brownfield site, this is what we expect to be on the site”. The powers are there to do that. It goes back to what I was saying earlier about giving people the power and the responsibility to do it. We believe that there are lots of tools in the toolbox that people can use already, to answer your question.

The Chairman: We hope that by the end of this inquiry we might find even more.

Steve Quartermain: Indeed.

Q16 Baroness Whitaker: Still with co-ordination and firing up enthusiasm, I would like to move on to a broader picture and ask you how land use is planned for at national level. We have had a look at the Scottish national spatial plan and it has paragraphs called “Vision”, a really interesting thing that I am not aware we have. Do we need a national spatial plan for England, or indeed for the UK as a whole? In your answer or answers, could you also touch on how big infrastructure is woven into our national planning, not just housing and the local communities?

Steve Quartermain: I will perhaps start and others can help if I go astray. The Government is absolutely committed to a bottom-up approach to planning, so they have not seen a national spatial strategy as appropriate for England. We know that the Scottish have one and so does Wales. In fact, the Scottish one won an RTPI prize only last week, so we know that they exist. From our point of view, we think that a bottom-up approach is more appropriate, with the duty to co-operate that we introduced in the Localism Act about trying to get people to deal with cross-boundary issues through dialogues that can exist, either through local economic partnerships or through the combined-authorities approach. Authorities should talk to each other, and again I come back to my earlier point about giving people responsibility and they should know what to do. The wider infrastructure issues can be dealt with through the LEPs, through communication with other authorities, and again I draw from my experience in local government. When I was a director of planning in environmental services of course I talked to my neighbours and to my fellow chief planners. Who would not? It would be nonsense not to.

There is, of course, the national infrastructure plan, which deals with the big stuff, and the Government made it very clear that they do need to understand that development will need infrastructure. The other thing that they did in the manifesto was make it clear that

communities need to understand when infrastructure is going to arrive so that they know that they are going to get the infrastructure that is required for the development. That again is an issue that we are taking forward.

The answer to your question is, no, the Government does not think it needs a national spatial strategy. They think that the planning vision can be delivered through Local Plans and communities, either through neighbourhood communities or district unitary authorities, and that the duty to co-operate and their mechanism for people to engage in dialogue on these things will be effective.

Baroness Whitaker: Is there not then a weakness that the bottom-up approach will produce inconsistency nationally and perhaps prejudice against very small groups such as nomadic travellers, gypsies, and that the duty to co-operate is not very easy to enforce? I do not know how much it happens. There have been some comments that it is not very widespread, but perhaps you can give us better information.

Steve Quartermain: There will always be a view, and people say to me, that there should be a national spatial strategy, and that is a legitimate view to hold. It is not the view that the Government holds. They would certainly not accept that the current approach would be prejudicial to any particular group. Any decision-maker has to have regard to the public sector equality duty, and that applies to local authorities too. People need to have regard to the needs and lifestyle of minority groups—you mentioned travellers—in their decision-making. They cannot shirk that. The bottom-up approach does not exclude that. In fact, I would argue that that fine-grain approach ensures that they are looked after.

The Chairman: Can I just intervene there for a moment? In your opening statement, Ms Stanier, you mentioned agriculture en passant. I would have thought that would fit very nicely into Lady Whitaker's question about a national spatial strategy. The more you think through the benefit of the British countryside to those who live in it, you realise that we are always concentrating on urban housing when we look at housing in the round but there is a huge other area of sub-urban—and I do not mean suburban—in between small market towns and smaller rural places that seems to get missed out. Is there an argument for national spatial planning where they could have a certain proportion of greenfield sites that are made over to allotments? You would then hit the food-for-our-own-resources type of thing, elderly people getting exercise, growing things, being involved and improving the quality of life. If they live in good surroundings where you can see trees and fields, it makes a

hell of a difference. That goes back to the national spatial plan. I would like a quick word from you on that, if possible.

Ruth Stanier: Very briefly, I can completely see the point you are making. The approach that the last Government and this Government is taking is very much, as we have been saying, set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and in national policies on those really quite small number of matters that are genuinely of national significance where clear national protection is required, including agricultural land, areas of outstanding natural beauty, national parks and so on. But as Steve has been saying, it is very firmly the view of this Government that you get the best planning outcomes where the power is with local communities to decide how they use the land in their area.

The Chairman: Yes. I am sorry, I should not have hogged that, but it was just eating away at me when I was hearing about the national spatial plan.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: I would like to ask for some information that may not be readily available, but it would be interesting to know how many countries of our approximate size and density, not Brazil and not Australia, do not have a national spatial plan.

Steve Quartermain: We can provide that.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: That would be extremely useful, thank you.

Steve Quartermain: Would a European comparison suffice?

Baroness Young of Old Scone: I would quite like to look at Japan as well if we could. We need to look at the densely packed countries, because that is where it is most germane. If you have acres of space like America you do not have to worry about plonking things down because you always have more space, but we do not.

Q17 Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: I wanted to ask you about the policy evidence, the evidence underpinning policymaking. Last week we heard from Professor Mark Tewdwr-Jones about a serious absence now of research projects that are evaluating the impact of policy. Could you tell us about the research capacity that exists within government departments on built environment policy issues, and, with that background, also whether there is indeed less capacity for research and evaluation of policy than there was previously?

Ruth Stanier: I will take this question. We do have, within the department, a very strong team of analysts who support us on the development, implementation and evaluation of policy relevant to the built environment. We also, as a department, have a research budget.

Obviously we need to be extremely careful in how we allocate that to secure the best possible value for money. However, we are proceeding with a number of relevant research projects. One that I would particularly cite is the research that we fairly recently led looking into the community infrastructure levy and how that is working, very much to inform the review of the levy that we are committed to undertaking this year. That is just one example of how we use research and evaluation to inform our ongoing policymaking.

We also have dedicated research funding for building regulations that I am sure Bob would tell you more about if you are particularly interested in that, and we fund research work by external bodies.

We increasingly seek to link up very closely with relevant academic institutions to make sure that we are helping to influence the work that they undertake. In the interests of not falling into silo thinking, we do very much work with other government departments. One specific example of that would be the work that we do with Defra and the Environment Agency in their significant research programme looking at flooding, coastal erosion and risk management. They have a £2.5 million budget for that annually, just to give one example. Clearly we are currently working in a relatively constrained fiscal environment, but to my mind we still have adequate analytical and research capacity. It is extremely important to us.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: I was interested in the comment about the power being with local communities in decision-making and where that falls down. This year one of the Bevan Prize awards went to a group in Hackney, London, who are looking after people with TB and have found that the most important thing was to get them into proper housing, and that all efforts to get the TB under control failed until they were in proper housing, partly so they were not coughing up TB over other people and were in an environment where they could also have a more ordered lifestyle to take medication and so on. I was wondering how much of that research is going on into both physical and mental well-being aspects of people in these different built environments, particularly in relation to Public Health England, or whether they are working quite separately.

Ruth Stanier: This is maybe an area where we could usefully provide some further information to the Committee. I would say that Public Health England is represented on the planning sounding board that I chair and make a very useful contribution. They have presented to us on health inequalities and we have discussed with partners how we can

make the links between the health agenda and the planning agenda, which has been very helpful.

I am also very conscious of the specific issue that you raised. A few years back I led work on homelessness policy and I know that there has been an ongoing programme of evidence collection in that area. But we should see whether there is further information that we can provide to the Committee on this.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: That would be very helpful. Thank you.

The Chairman: If any of the rest of you have similar information that would expand our knowledge, that would be very useful to us.

Bob Ledsome: I thought I might just mention a piece of work on the building regulation side that we have been funding with colleagues in Defra and DECC, and indeed the Environment Agency, in relation to another potential health issue: overheating. That is a potential future risk that is rapidly emerging and is an area where we have undertaken work and are continuing to undertake work.

The Chairman: That would be fascinating.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: Is there one point where research evidence is collated and available—a literature body of research in the built environment? Is there a kind of definitive group of publications, or are the publications of research within the silos of the original disciplines from which people have come?

Ruth Stanier: That is a very interesting question, and again we could probably usefully reflect on whether we can point the Committee towards the most useful source. In terms of support that we receive on analysis and evidence within the department, the team of analysts I was describing provide regular digests for us of relevant research across the piece. But I am sure that your Committee may well welcome further information on what is publicly available and how it is brigaded.

Bob Ledsome: Research reports that the department undertakes are published. That is part of the process, but I think there is a broader issue about how effectively that knowledge is disseminated as opposed to documents just being published.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: Yes, dissemination, because otherwise they just gather dust and people do not know about them. But where advances are happening, if they are not disseminated they will not get put into practice.

Q18 Earl of Lytton: I have a question for Mr Ledsome. Quality is obviously important in looking forward, yet many of the quality controls in new building are effectively self-certified schemes of one sort of another and they come under various types of construction warranty, of which probably NHBC is the best known. It has certainly come to my attention that there are increasing concerns about the quality that is produced under these schemes. Are you able to comment on that? In particular, how are you monitoring outturns in that respect?

Bob Ledsome: Perhaps if I could digress I will explain very briefly how the building control system operates. A building inspection can be undertaken either by local authorities or by what we call private sector approved inspectors, which would include the NHBC. When an organisation such as the NHBC, the National House Building Council, is undertaking that function it will be inspecting as a third party; it will not be self-certification. There are some types of building work where self-certification arrangements apply but the relevant installer firm undertaking that sort of work has to be a member of what we call a competent persons scheme and will have to have passed various tests to be eligible to join that scheme. We receive correspondence within the department with issues around quality, so no one would deny that there are not problems.

The way the system operates is that there are the building control arrangements that can range in the first instance from developers putting plans into the local authorities and local authorities having the opportunity to check that plans are compliant with the relevant requirements. Local authorities will inspect the work, as will the private sector approved inspectors. Alongside the work that is done on building regulations, which are obviously constrained by the scope of the building regulations, there are other mechanisms in place such as the warranty arrangements. The NHBC issues warranties and covers about 80% of the market, which provides protection for homeowners if there are problems that they discover after they have moved in. There are a range of mechanisms in place. Clearly the Government look very carefully at issues that arise, and if we need to make changes to the building control arrangements and the building control system, that is something that Ministers would want to consider.

Q19 Baroness Whitaker: How does the building regulation regime fit into the idea of place making? The success of either new housing or commercial development is not just the building; it is how it relates to the whole place—to the transport, to the facilities, to all sorts of other things. How do the building regulations latch on to place making?

Bob Ledsome: The building regulations are very much focused on the building, so the first part of the process is what the Local Plan says about the development in that particular area. Then there is the planning application that goes into the local authority for determination of the configuration of the development and how it is going to fit into the location. The building regulations come in once planning permission has been granted and say, “These are the building standards to which that building needs to be built”.

I should say that the building regulations start from the basic premise that this is about the safety and health of people in buildings or who are affected by buildings. Over time the scope of the building regulations has extended into sustainability issues, for example, but the building regulations do not regulate the aesthetics. Some of the design considerations that are obviously very important in new development are not regulated by the building regulations per se, although they are matters that would be taken into account by the local authority when it considers the relevant planning application against the Local Plan.

The Chairman: And some of the heritage issues.

Bob Ledsome: Indeed, if it is a heritage building, a listed building or conservation area.

Baroness Whitaker: Do you then consider that the design aesthetics are an extra, an add-on, and not part of the function of a building?

Bob Ledsome: No, I did not want to give that impression. If I did, I apologise. I was trying to make the point that issues around design aesthetics are matters that are considered through the planning system, not through the building regulations. They are considered but through the planning system rather than the building regulation system.

Q20 Lord Clement-Jones: We have already touched on this to a degree in the questions on how the regulations and so on operate, but the Farrell review—we are still on quality here—raised some very interesting qualitative criteria. The question is whether there is a government view about some of the issues that Farrell raised. For instance, do they have a view about the quality of new housing and commercial developments in general? Going beyond the details of regulations, are they satisfied that they are sufficiently sustainable, resilient and lasting? Are we doing well enough, not just in terms of how the regulations operate but in terms of a government view about place making, which of course is very much the Farrell phrase?

Steve Quartermain: Perhaps I can assist a little further. This slightly links back to Lord Inglewood’s comment earlier that some people have built schemes that may not be seen to

be high design but have met building regulations because they have been built. Building regulation is not going to be the thing that necessarily drives the high-quality design but it can do, and there is a relationship between the two. For example, the way in which drainage is dealt with and sustainable urban drainage schemes is an integral part of a design in the way a place works. Place making is not necessarily understood by everybody. As Ruth said at the very beginning, it is about creating places where people like to live, work and relax.

Lord Clement-Jones: So it is not a very useful concept in that case?

Steve Quartermain: No, I do think it is a useful concept, but I think that the challenge is trying to ensure that people recognise that there is no utopian place. What matters is the place where people live and it is very much an individual thing. It is about local issues. That is why, linking back to my earlier answer, the Government think that a bottom-up approach to planning will capture that feeling about place: "What does my place feel like? How should it grow?". I would argue that the Government are very clear on what they expect to be delivered through place making. The National Planning Policy Framework says very clearly that we are looking to secure high-quality design. There is a whole section, paragraphs 56 to 68, that talks about design. It is one of the core planning principles in the NPPF that local authorities should do and it is a plan-led system. That is the vision thing; that is where you get that vision about what a place should be like. We would argue that we have a very clear and coherent policy position on how people should be addressing the creation of place, the way in which places should grow and the quality that we expect to be delivered through the planning framework.

Lord Clement-Jones: That is the framework. Do you think you have kicked the tyres enough at other levels in terms of regulations and so on to ensure that that is implemented?

Steve Quartermain: I would never sit back and say that we can be complacent and that we have done everything that we need to do. We have set the bar high, and in order to drive the achievement of that we need to work across the place, which again links to why we are pleased that the architectural policy has come to us, because we think we can make those links into place-making delivery, the building regulations, how developers interact with the planning system. There is always more that we can do, and the challenge, having set the bar high and having asked local authorities and set a duty on them to deliver this through their plans, we are talking to the architects, the developers and the house builders, is to try to ensure that it is implemented. In fairness, in many areas it is, and it would give entirely the

wrong impression to say that the new build is all poor, because it is not. There is a lot of really good building out there. We are in award season now, with a lot of awards—there was one earlier this week, there were the RTPI awards last week—and they are recognising that this can be delivered.

Lord Inglewood: To what extent do you think design and a sense of place are subjective, and how much do you think they are objective factors? For example, if you were going to build a new Parliament building and somebody put in an application for a building like this, how would it meet those criteria?

The Chairman: I am afraid that is off piste, really.

Lord Inglewood: No, but this is the objective/subjective thing.

Steve Quartermain: I think it is a combination of the two. Design is not just appearance; design is about functionality. A lot of architects will argue that you need to design a building from the inside. How a building is going to work is absolutely crucial. But I would argue that you can look at other buildings that have been built for public service purposes that are functioning extremely well and look good from the outside too. You can combine the subjectivity, the aesthetics, the appearance, with good functionality. I do not believe that is an unattainable goal. I definitely think we can do it.

Lord Clement-Jones: But generally, just to underline this, you are satisfied that the criteria are laid out sufficiently, that people know what they are meant to be doing, that the Farrell criteria are laid down sufficiently clearly so that judgments can be made about new build?

Steve Quartermain: The evidence I would use to answer that question is the fact that we can point to places where this has happened. If it can be achieved through the planning system, and the viability and economics of it means that great places are being delivered, the answer is yes.

The Chairman: Would it be inappropriate of us to ask you to be able to give us a list of places that you consider manage to do that? I am a bit worried about this, because I do not think we would want to publish it unless you have given an endorsement to these places.

Steve Quartermain: I always avoid trying to endorse or indeed directly criticise any particular scheme, which is why I pointed to the award season. Other people are judging these things at the moment and there are a lot of awards—

The Chairman: Yes, but is there something that we could look at? We are probably going to go on a couple of visits, and it would be good if you could direct us into something that

would match the criteria that Lord Clement-Jones mentioned. We will visit everything, even if it is a sweet shop.

Steve Quartermain: We can give you a list of people who have been considered for the awards and then you can choose which one you want.

The Chairman: It would encourage lateral thinking.

Q21 Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: You have portrayed a view of having confidence that concepts of place are being put in and rolled out, but what levers do you have in areas where that is not happening, where planning committees are not giving due consideration to issues not only around the shorter parts of the acronym PLACE but around the broader concepts of place and the effect on the people who live and work there? What levers do planning departments have if people constructing buildings then alter what they put up after they have their planning permission through?

Steve Quartermain: There are two elements to that question. Local planning authorities are empowered, and indeed the NPPF empowers them to refuse obviously poor design. They can do that. At an appeal, if the evidence is there that a decision can be defended, we can expect that decision to be upheld. In fact, the Secretary of State himself has refused a scheme entirely on design grounds. It was just a poor design and the Secretary of State refused it. So the powers are there but the evidence needs to be there to support why that decision has been taken.

On the ability to control schemes after they have been approved, clearly there are permitted development rights for particular housing schemes that go with new houses, and people are entitled to extend their house—it is a national right. If a local authority feels that the concept and the design of the whole place does not warrant that and that it would be a bad thing, they can remove those permitted development rights by condition.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: I just wonder what levers it has if permission has been given to construct one thing and then what is done is completely different.

Steve Quartermain: The permission is usually conditioned; they need to build what they got approved. If they want to vary it, they can go back and ask for variations to the condition. If they build something that is entirely different, they can enforce. There are breach-of-condition notices and a number of other tools in the toolbox with which they can take action. If someone has built something that is different from what they got approved, there are tools in the toolbox and action can be taken, broadly, in enforcement terms.

Q22 Lord Woolmer of Leeds: You have touched, in answer to earlier questions, on some of the Farrell issues, but what are the Government doing in response to the recommendations of the Farrell review?

Gill Graham: Obviously this is now a CLG lead. However, the Committee will be aware that following the publication of Sir Terry's report, Ed Vaizey challenged the sector to prioritise those recommendations as the ones that it wishes to take forward and to take a key leadership role in the implementation. Subsequently, a number of industry leaders, panellists and experts have agreed to act as champions for certain themes and recommendations within the review. These champions have either developed or are in the process of developing papers and positions. We are looking forward to hearing how our colleagues in CLG will work with them when they report back, and to understanding from that how government can take forward actions from those.

Lord Woolmer of Leeds: What is your preliminary assessment of the recommendations in the review? In other words, do you feel that some of the recommendations have some real merit in them and are worth exploring in more detail and taking forward, or have you simply said to other people, "Have a look at it."? Have you formed a first sift of your view of the recommendations?

Steve Quartermain: We welcomed the Farrell report. It was a valuable contribution to the debate. We are working with the champions and, as Gill said, we are looking forward to seeing what they do. The sector has been challenged and they have risen to that challenge. We are talking to people such as the PLACE Alliance, which is taking forward quite a bit of the Farrell challenge, and our Ministers are talking to them. From our Minister's point of view, as I said earlier we are in the place where we are gathering information and talking to these players to help inform what our next step is. As I said, the Minister went to the Farrell reception last week and I know that he has meetings lined up to talk to them. For us, we are at the beginning of a sort of new approach and we will be looking at the Farrell review as part of that approach.

Lord Woolmer of Leeds: Do you have a timeline that we could look forward to in order to know when we can expect to see clear outcomes?

Steve Quartermain: I was always told to try to keep my answer succinct, so no.

The Chairman: That speaks volumes.

Lord Woolmer of Leeds: Finally, do you anticipate the need for any further research into important issues that are raised, or are you leaving it to external parties to discuss and come up with further responses?

Steve Quartermain: I think that will come out of the dialogue that we are having. It will depend on what comes back. We are clearly open to that challenge, and if we need to do more work we will do so. The appetite for Ministers to engage positively in this is very clear.

The Chairman: It seems to be top of the pops at the moment. You cannot open a newspaper any day—or maybe it is just because I am involved in it—and not see something about housing, the environment, place making and things like that. That is good, because it means that the great British public are going to get energised eventually.

Q23 Baroness Young of Old Scone: This is quite a significant report and very thoughtful. Are the Government planning to give an account of which of the recommendations they do not agree with, or are we just going to see it massaged out of the script?

Steve Quartermain: I am not sure that we are going to see anything massaged out. The Government have given a response already and I do not think there is any anticipation that there will be a further response. Where we sit at the moment is taking forward the recommendations that are in it in a meaningful way. That is not necessarily us producing another paper telling people what we think of it; it is engaging with the sector and trying to take forward the things that are in the Farrell report that can be taken forward. We are action, not words.

Lord Clement-Jones: Is the proof of the pudding the buildings that will emerge in the next few years?

Steve Quartermain: Indeed.

Q24 Baroness Rawlings: We have in front of us a rather depressing graph of how house building has been declining quite badly since the 1960s. What is your view for this consistent failure for the targets in recent decades, and do you think current policy can buck the trend? I will, if I may, add my supplementary at this stage so that it can work with the main question. If you buck the trend, how will enough energy be provided for all these new houses that we desire when we had quite a big announcement this week that there is going to be a severe shortage of energy and possible cuts this winter? Cuts such as these are far more serious than in the past, because so much is now driven by electricity—you cannot

even make a landline telephone call without electricity, and there are lifts and all the other things—and this affects the elderly especially.

I return to what Ms Stanier was saying earlier on about energy efficiency: that it is now at 30%, and that there is great improvement and we are getting to carbon budgets and climate change targets. In view of all this use of renewables rather than what we had before with coal, nuclear and future shale, is the price of all these carbon budgets and climate change targets going to work when we have these severe cuts and if we are going to be building all these new houses?

Ruth Stanier: I will do my best to try to answer those points. I will start with the question about how we deliver enough homes to meet the country's needs. Clearly this is a very significant challenge, which as you say has clearly proved difficult over recent decades. We are very clear about the framework that needs to be in place to deliver the homes that the country needs. To achieve that we first need there to be enough permissioned land in the system. We then need there to be enough supporting infrastructure. We then need a diversity of developers, both large and small, who together have the capacity, skills and bricks to put the housing up. Finally, we need enough demand to ensure that the market operates effectively.

The Government's approach is very much about seeking to get every part of that system operating in a way to get us to the housing ambitions that we have. There are a number of reasons why perhaps we can be at least somewhat optimistic. If we look at the trends in planning permissions, the latest published data showed that in 2014-15 261,000 new homes were granted planning permission. The trend has been very positive. That has in fact increased by over 60% since 2010 and we are now at a point that is higher than where we were before the economic issues some years back. So clearly permissions are at a level, even allowing for some kind of natural dropout, where we should be seeing new housing coming forward.

That is very positive indeed, and that is why in the productivity plan announcements last week we will now be looking to focus very much on ensuring, first, that up-to-date Local Plans are in place to support the continuation of that positive trend. We know that where Local Plans are in place, those plans provide at a level much closer to the projected need than in other areas, and we also see more housing delivery in those areas. The second area that we are focusing on is very much the end-to-end planning process, right from thinking of

schemes to enabling them to start on site. Even once you have permission, there is a problem in some areas about getting the condition sorted out quickly, and we are continuing to very much focus on addressing that.

In terms of ensuring that the right mix of developers are in place, the Government is continuing to pursue a number of initiatives, and indeed new initiatives, to promote home ownership and to support small builders in financing and in ensuring that unnecessary burdens are removed, as well as in supporting the private sector and building for rent.

In terms of the demand, the final part of the framework, Help to Buy, remains in place. We are absolutely seeking to tackle these issues head on.

The final point in relation to the first part of your question is to draw your attention to the really significant shift over recent years in local public attitudes to house building, which I think has been a really important constraint in the past. The latest research data shows that local support for house building has doubled in the last four years from 28% in 2010 to 56% now. We think that neighbourhood planning has contributed to that. I also think that we are all worried about where our children, and indeed grandchildren, will be living. So there is an important shift there that we think will be very helpful.

Clearly your point about energy is a very important one. We work closely with the Department of Energy & Climate Change on these issues. As I set out at the beginning, there are clear requirements in national planning policy that energy requirements of new housing must absolutely be considered as part of the local plan process. The recent announcements do raise concerns. My understanding is not that there will definitely be problems but that if we have a particularly cold winter and there are high energy requirements at particular times, there could be issues. But as I say, we work closely with DECC on these matters.

Baroness Rawlings: That is before all these houses are built, let alone other things.

Bob Ledsome: I would like to expand on that last point. When the Government set out the carbon budgets over the coming years, they clearly take account of the economic impacts of setting carbon targets at particular levels, both at the macroeconomic level but also thinking about what it might mean for energy prices and therefore energy bills, and therefore obviously the impact on homeowners and their fuel bills. Those matters are taken into account.

Steve Quartermain: I would just add that we talked earlier about infrastructure and a national infrastructure plan. There is a national policy statement on energy that very clearly

sets out, looking forward, the future energy needs for the country, which are linked to the major infrastructure regime. It identified the gap, which is taken into account in projections of the need, and that is why it sets out in that framework what energy requirements are expected to be delivered. There is recognition that as the growth takes place—particularly as some of the energy providers drop off, because not all of them are still going to be there—there will be a need for new investment in the future.

Baroness Rawlings: I am not an expert on that, but Lord Ezra, who is, was always asking questions in the House, inevitably about the fact that we do not have enough reserves and have enough only for a very short time if there is a heavy demand. That is why I wonder, with all this new demand, whether we will be able to cope. That is all.

Q25 Lord Woolmer of Leeds: Which government department is currently responsible for analysing the reasons for market failure in not building enough houses? Which government department is responsible for the research and producing evidence on which to take policy forward? Secondly, all the evidence that we have had to date shows that private building for private owner-occupiers has never reached the level that we are now saying we aim to achieve and that the level of house building that we want to achieve has always been achieved when it has by a significant contribution of social or local authority housing. I noted in your observations to us that you made little or no mention at all of that balance. My question is again: to what extent is housing policy going forward built on research and analysis? If so, what has that research and analysis shown to you about the need for contribution from social and local authority housing, for rent as well as for private occupation?

Ruth Stanier: The responsibility for housing policy research and analysis fits very squarely with our department, the Department for Communities and Local Government, and absolutely our analytical teams, with our policy teams, undertake analysis of this issue. To address your point about the contribution of affordable housing, I think you are quite right to pull me up on that. I should have mentioned it as part of my response. Clearly affordable housing is a very important part of the mix. The last Parliament made a significant contribution to the overall levels of housing delivery, so absolutely that needs to be part of the mix.

Lord Woolmer of Leeds: The department has undertaken research on this, has analysed it, and has drawn some conclusions about the next 15 years. It has taken a view based on

research and evidence of the contribution that you must expect to come from social housing?

Ruth Stanier: The analysis that has been undertaken is very much in the context of the framework I described right at the beginning of my answer: how all the different parts of the system, from permissioned land through to diversity of developers through to demand, need to work together in order to get housing built. I would not say that we have set out any single prediction as to what the precise mix should or could be going forward. There could be a range of potential mixes going forward, and we do a lot of work looking at the potential scenarios, the potential amounts that different providers may be able to bring forward, and what drivers we have to encourage that.

Lord Inglewood: Could I follow that quickly and say that you have indicated that you anticipate that for the future, because not everybody has enough money, there is a requirement for social housing and let accommodation? Have you any kind of back-of-an-envelope sense of roughly what percentage of the whole that might be, taking the country as a whole?

Ruth Stanier: Do you mean now or going forward?

Lord Inglewood: Well, both. In the landscape.

Ruth Stanier: I do not feel that is a question I can give a clear answer to today, but it is one that we can certainly take away and come back to you on.

Bob Ledsome: It might be worth just recording that the Government had a manifesto commitment to build 275,000 affordable homes over this Parliament, so clearly that is an ambition that this Government have set for themselves that I think is relevant to the discussion that we have been having.

Lord Inglewood: The affordability comes in two forms: it is either afford to buy or afford not to buy and live in.

The Chairman: How would that be split? Would it be associated public authority, local authority buildings, private buildings or what?

Bob Ledsome: I am afraid that I cannot give you that split.

The Chairman: Good. Okay, thank you.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Could I ask for another piece of information, as we are getting some information, which is the percentage of planning approvals currently granted for housing that never get built, and whether that is increasing or reducing?

Ruth Stanier: I can briefly answer that. It is something that we have been looking at quite closely recently. Over recent years there has been quite a constant trend that shows that of all the permissions that are granted, roughly 20% of them will subsequently be re-permissioned when people decide that the scheme they originally applied for is not exactly the scheme they want to build. So there is some natural churn that is not necessarily problematic. In addition to that, our analysis suggests that some 10% to 20% of planning permissions seem to fall out and not reappear. We are doing some further internal work to try to understand more exactly why that happens.

The Chairman: Is there any one major reason why? Is it that people decide that they want to hang on to the land bank?

Ruth Stanier: We think that the possible reasons—although we do not yet have clear evidence for this—are, first, viability issues: a scheme where permission is sought and then subsequently it becomes clear that it is just not viable. Potentially some permissions are also sought primarily to secure book value, land value, uplift. We think there are a range of reasons.

Q26 Earl of Lytton: We have heard a lot about the Government's wish to procure the delivery through the local plan system. My question is: are the Government satisfied with the design and delivery of local plans as they are coming out at the moment? Put another way, with the benefit of being able to see the ones that have come out, is the national planning policy framework a sufficiently good tool of analysis for the purposes of local plan preparation as opposed to an undeniably beneficial list of aspirations, if I can put it that way? Would you care to comment on how things are happening with the local plan delivery at the moment?

Steve Quartermain: As Ruth Stanier said earlier, we know that there has been an improvement in the delivery of plans, so the system is working and over 80% are published and 64% adopted. But we recognise and people tell us that it can be a complex and lengthy process. It slightly links back to what I was saying earlier about communities: sometimes a plan can take so long to produce that by the time you have actually produced a plan and are making planning applications and decisions on it, the community has shifted and churned and you have different people living in the community when the plan and the decision were made, and they think, "What is all this about?". It is about trying to get plans delivered more quickly, trying to look at where the complexities are and seeing whether we can make them

simpler. Local planning authorities think that it is much more risky than perhaps it is in certain instances. They produce piles of evidence for things and we think, “Do you need all that evidence?”. Sometimes you do, but perhaps sometimes you do not. We are going to try to look at the process and see whether we can streamline it and make that plan-making process quicker.

You are absolutely right in that the NPPF sets out very clearly what a Local Plan should do. It sets out the core principles, and indeed what should be in a Local Plan. You could argue that it is very clear what people should be doing, and there are times when you think, “Why is it taking people so long?”. Even with over 80% of local planning authorities with plans published, there are still nearly 20% who have not published a plan since 2004. We need to try to ask why that is and what we can do to drive them to deliver a plan. If that means looking at the ways in which we can streamline it, then what we have committed to is doing just that.

Q27 Baroness Whitaker: Mr Quartermain, you encouraged public participation earlier, which was very welcome. What do you think is the earliest stage at which the public can come in on the local plan? You talked about changing public perception and all that kind of thing.

Steve Quartermain: Day one.

Baroness Whitaker: How do you hope they would do it?

Steve Quartermain: People would normally engage the public with an issues and options paper that tried to explain the issues that we are trying to address and the options that we have to address them. Most local authorities will engage in a public engagement process, and I think there is evidence that they are getting more imaginative about how they do it. It is not just a public exhibition or a notice in the paper. Certainly on neighbourhood planning, we have heard evidence of people holding discos and getting the young people involved. That is one of the biggest challenges. A lot of the stuff that we are looking to develop is for an ageing population, but it is also the young people who are going to be living in these houses by the time they are built in five years’ time. They are the ones who are in higher education or at school at the moment. Trying to capture their views is really important, and we have seen people be quite imaginative about how they do that.

Baroness Whitaker: If you know some good examples, could you let us have them?

Steve Quartermain: We will indeed.

Q28 The Chairman: Can I now have the last question? What would you like to see as the result of this inquiry that we are doing, a report into the future of the built environment? Are there glaring omissions that we have not mentioned today? If any one of you were in my position, what question would you be asking? I am asking each one of you to give me your question.

Ruth Stanier: I think you all asked some extremely pertinent questions. To my mind, one of the most useful outcomes of your work could be to give more prominence to, more of a push behind, this critical issue that you were rightly interrogating us about: how we get that really good quality design out there; what will it take. As I hope has come across, we are very passionate about it, but it is not something that government can do alone. Who are the key characters? How do we make it happen?

The Chairman: We are passionate too, by the way.

Steve Quartermain: From my point of view, I think it is the recognition of the importance of planning as a means of delivery, which you might expect from the chief planner. Planning is a delivery mechanism; it is the thing that makes things happen and changes people's lives. It is looking at the way in which we can embed that into the players, the people who use the planning system, because ultimately it is about outcomes and where people live. That is the challenge: how we stop the planning system being seen as a regulatory thing that you engage in when you want either an extension or to stop an extension next door and to see it instead as a vision thing that says, "This is about shaping where we live".

Bob Ledsome: My comment is also related to delivery but at a slightly different angle, which is the effectiveness and the ability of the industry to deliver what it wants to deliver, if I can put it like that. There will be good design, excellent designs, that we would all support, but for some reason or other that is not quite what happens in practice. I think there are some really interesting issues about why that is the case, not that people are wilfully ignoring good design but whether there are some constraints and factors in the system that sort of inhibit that. That would be quite an interesting area for study.

Gill Graham: From my perspective, from heritage and the historic environment, you have touched on some really important points. Today's fine architecture is tomorrow's heritage, and it is what we are going to be concerned about tomorrow. I would be interested in challenging us on how we consider the historic environment in terms of planning and how

that planning can reuse historic buildings and regenerate them, particularly in city centres. That is a challenge and it is one that I would encourage you to challenge with us.

The Chairman: On behalf of all the Committee I am sure I can say thank you very much indeed. Thank you for giving your time and answering some probably very plebby sorts of questions. On some you have made us think, and that is the purpose of them, so thank you. You will be getting a transcript, of course.