



HOUSE OF LORDS

Revised transcript of evidence taken before

The Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment

Inquiry on

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Evidence Session No. 3

Heard in Public

Questions 29 - 40

WEDNESDAY 22 JULY 2015

10.30 am

Witnesses: Professor Peter Bishop and Max Farrell

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)
 Baroness Andrews
 Lord Clement-Jones
 Baroness Finlay of Llandaff
 Lord Freeman
 Earl of Lytton
 Baroness Parminter
 Baroness Rawlings
 Baroness Whitaker
 Lord Woolmer of Leeds

Examination of Witnesses

Professor Peter Bishop, Professor in Urban Design, The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL; Author, *The Bishop Review: The Future of Design in the Built Environment*, and **Max Farrell**, Partner, Farrells; Project Leader, *The Farrell Review of Architecture and the Built Environment*

Q29 The Chairman: Good morning and welcome to this evidence session of the Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment. It is very kind of you to give up your time, and I am sure we will have a very interesting discussion. We have certainly read all about the *Bishop Review* and the *Farrell Review*.

You have in front of you a list of the interests that have been declared by the Members of the Committee. A transcript of the meeting will be taken and published on the Committee website. You will have the opportunity to make corrections to that transcript where necessary. You cannot change the thing, but you can make just factual corrections. Could I begin by asking each of you to briefly introduce yourselves to the Committee, please? We will start, with Professor Bishop, alphabetically.

Professor Bishop: Peter Bishop, Professor of Urban Design at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London. I am also a director at Allies and Morrison Architects. I was previously deputy chief executive of the London Development Agency, Director of Design for London, and a planning director in a number of large inner-London authorities, and I am also the author of the *Bishop Review*.

Max Farrell: I am Max Farrell, a partner at Farrells architect planners practice internationally. Recently I was project leader for the *Farrell Review of Architecture and the Built Environment*.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. I am going to ask the first question. You have copies of the questions there. What has the response from the Government been to the recommendations of the *Farrell Review*? How engaged have Ministers and civil servants been in delivering its ideas? Is more action required? I am sure you will say yes to the last one. Obviously we are very interested in that, but we have read what the immediate reaction was and it seemed to be that the Government were going fairly slowly. Just what has happened since then?

Max Farrell: Thank you. The first thing I would like to say is what an excellent thing I think it is to have this Select Committee. We are all extremely pleased and very hopeful about the impact that it can make. One of the things that we set out to do with the review is to try to cut across all the different silos to do some joining up. The built environment is so complex with all the different organisations and institutions involved. Hopefully this can have the same sort of impact.

We published the review just over a year ago, and our initial response was one of slight disappointment that there had not been a formal response from the Government when it was a government-commissioned review, but also after all the extensive consultation that had taken place throughout the country over a long period of time. We also understood that the Minister, Ed Vaizey, who had commissioned the review—and who was personally extremely involved and still is—felt that a number of recommendations were aimed at departments other than his department, in particular at DCLG, where we talked a lot about the planning system and the relationship between planning and architecture. So at the time it did not seem entirely appropriate for him; I do not think he felt in a position to make a formal statement. Now that there has been a change and architecture is with a new Minister and a new department, it might be an opportune time for a statement about either the *Farrell Review* or the state of play with the built environment and place quality.

The final thing I would say in response to that question is it is great to see Matthew Carmona here. I only just discovered outside in the corridor that he has joined the group. We see the Place Alliance as an incredibly important organisation, or collective if you like, that will help carry on all the work that we initiated in the review, in the sense that it is a collaborative

enterprise that does not have its own particular agenda. It is more about, as I said at the beginning, joining up, sharing resources, sharing research, lobbying collectively, and taking collective responsibility for place quality and the built environment. So if the Government were to make a statement or give support for anything, I would almost prefer that to be for the Place Alliance as the body that will take this forward.

The Chairman: Of course, our specialist adviser is now the chairman of it, which is even better.

Max Farrell: That is excellent news, yes.

The Chairman: I can assure you that all of us are aware of the cross-cutting needed and that will come out through the evidence session, I am sure. Thank you very much. Professor Bishop?

Professor Bishop: There is not much I can add to that, really. I would not in any way play down the difficulties the Government will have in responding to something like the *Farrell Review*. One of the difficulties we had in carrying out the review was that there was no single point of focus. Design in the built environment is something that moves across most government departments. Effectively, for me the central point of it is how Government exercise leadership consistently to say that this is important: it is not just important at the moment, and not just next year; it is something that has continuity in policy over quite a long period of time to establish a firm platform of expectation as to how we promote high-quality design. It is not something that can be divorced from economic growth or housing or infrastructure or climate change. It has to be absolutely embedded in it.

I think that the key challenge for Government from reviews like the *Farrell Review* is how they respond collectively and consistently across departments. Having worked in government for a lot of my career, I know just how difficult that in fact is.

The Chairman: Yes. But, Professor Bishop, is there not another point? You also have to ensure that it works with the developers and all the other players. What is the response from the industry? Government, we know, have been slightly dilatory, but they have allowed us to go ahead with this Committee, do not forget. What has been the response from the other players? I hate using that word “stakeholders”. What actions could help to encourage developers to embrace the conclusions of the *Farrell Review* and your review also?

Professor Bishop: That is an extremely difficult question to answer. I suspect a theme from the session this morning will be that there is no single industry, first of all. There is a

significant difference between the commercial development industry and house building, for example, and engineering and infrastructure. Within those sectors there is a huge difference of response between certain organisations and others. Like any sector of the industry, there are good and bad organisations, and people who strive to produce something that is better than the average and people who are quite happy to make do. Through the course of the *Farrell Review* and through the course of the *Bishop Review* there was a general willingness to engage in that conversation. I think that is the key thing—a genuine willingness from most people to try to produce something good, if they could, if the circumstances were right. There are always rogue organisations who will probably just try to make do.

I think the key thing is to try to pull the average up. You can always get exemplary design. As a nation, we do have some of the top design firms, not just in architecture but some top design firms in the world. It is how you get the average up. It is the average that affects most people's general lives, the communities and the environments that they live in.

The Chairman: It is the same in every industry, any group; Government likewise.

Professor Bishop: Absolutely.

Q30 Baroness Whitaker: Leading on to the other leg of implementation, the *Farrell Review* put forward quite a lot about the local authorities. What about the response in the town halls?

Professor Bishop: I think town halls are under a lot of pressure. That is not a particularly controversial thing to say. Most people will probably recognise that is the case. Certainly when I did my review four years ago—and I still feel quite strongly about this—local government has an absolutely critical role to play if we are going to get good design in the physical environment. It has three roles. It has a role as regulator, and that is very important. It might sound a bit unfashionable but regulation is quite important if it is applied correctly and sensitively in promoting good design. It has a role as client, and that is another area where there has been a significant loss of expertise at the local area. It has a proactive role in trying to carry out placemaking and producing good environments.

Over the course of my career, 40 years, I have seen a huge change to the way in which local government is structured. The one thing that is particularly damaging is that local government over the last 15 or 20 years has lost a lot of talented people. In the 1970s, remarkably, it was almost the career of choice for any bright graduate coming out of architectural school. That has largely disappeared. There are some local authorities, some of

the big metropolitans and the other cities and some of the London boroughs, who are still maintaining good design resources, good design expertise, and are producing extremely good results on the ground, both in terms of regulation and placemaking. But there has been an alarming stripping out of talent in design at the local level.

Secondly, there has always been the perennial problem of training local politicians up to a level where they understand the difference between design quality and personal taste, and how you can promote good design and have aspirations that are demanding and challenging for their local areas. I think there has been a steady loss across the board, and that is quite damaging. Through my own practice, we do a lot of work on training packages for local councils, and it is great when we do but it really is the tip of the iceberg.

Baroness Whitaker: Sorry, I should have clarified. I meant the response of the town halls to the *Farrell Review*.

Professor Bishop: I am sorry.

Baroness Whitaker: All the things you have said are extremely interesting. I am very glad to hear them and we shall find them useful, but I wondered, moving on, how the town halls have responded.

Max Farrell: I think it has been varied. Where there has been a positive response we have seen already that it has been making a difference. It is making a difference in that local authorities and local government are recognising that it is not entirely down to them and there are lots of other people involved who can make a difference. Initiatives like setting up urban rooms, for example, are now one of the great success stories of the review. We found out yesterday about another one near our office, which makes 18, I think, across the country. They have been set up through partnerships between local authorities, institutions like RIBA but also, and quite fundamentally important, the universities as well. We had very interesting conversations recently in Newcastle with the chief executive of the council, the vice-chancellor of the university and the head of RIBA Enterprises, which is based there, all about the idea of having an urban room so that the onus does not fall entirely on one or the other—that they can collectively do something that will make a difference.

The idea of the urban room is very closely linked to the idea of proactive planning. As Peter said, everyone is very aware of what the problems are and where the shortfalls are in resourcing and skills within local authorities. What we tried to do in the review was identify solutions to that. Part of the problem with the lack of proactive planning is the way that we

communicate planning and architecture to the wider public and how readily they can relate to it and get engaged with it. What a tremendous difference it makes when they do.

We have seen with neighbourhood planning that it can make an incredible difference to the way that people think about new development and new housing. If they are involved at the beginning and they can say, “If we have 50 houses, we could have a new library or new sports facilities”, it is a completely different way of looking at new development, rather than waiting for a planning application to be made and then preparing for a fight. It is choosing to say yes very early on, but yes with a number of conditions.

I think developers are supportive of that. They like the certainty, and they know that if they put their resources upfront as well, in terms of engaging with the community, having a wider master plan, thinking about the town and not just their site, then they do not have to spend the money and resources later on in having that fight, which tends to involve planning consultants, lawyers, going to inquiries and appeals and so on. It is just a different way of going about things, which I think is more of a culture change than a change to any particular policy.

The Chairman: So the default position is negative, but in fact what you are saying is that if there was trust, you could change the world.

Max Farrell: Yes, absolutely, or at least this country.

The Chairman: It is not just the built environment.

Q31 Baroness Andrews: Good morning. I have a couple of related questions. One starts with Peter and the reference that you made, Professor Bishop, to leadership and the need for consistency. Given there have been changes between DCMS and DCLG now and you have said how difficult you think Government will find it to implement a better system of placemaking, to use the shorthand, who do you think is the champion now in Government for you and for all this? Where does it sit, and where is the capacity within central government and the conviction to make this happen?

Following that and finally, given the spread of issues that you address, both in the *Farrell Report* and your own report, that are related to the curriculum, the skills agenda, the proactive planning—a very wide range of interrelated issues—what are you most worried is not going to be addressed? If you get a statement from Government, what will it mean? What will it not want to address?

Max Farrell: I think it goes back to one of the things that Peter was talking about earlier on. The built environment is so disaggregated and a number of different departments and agencies are involved, so it is difficult to have leadership in one particular individual, but I think there are key departments. We did a diagram in the review about where the built environment has sat and how it has been moved around and spliced and diced. At the moment I think it sits across five departments.

Obviously the Minister for Housing and Planning, and now the Architecture Minister, has an important role to play, but equally the Department for Transport. I think a lot of big decisions that have a huge impact on places are transport-related. They are about roads, rail and airports, and quite often urban planning or placemaking are not central to those debates at all. Quite often the rail operators do not think in that way, and it is more about delivering a station on time and on budget than what impact the station has on the city and how it can create a new place. We know from projects like Old Oak Common, now Euston, that having that dialogue and shared objective and putting placemaking at the forefront, rather than as an afterthought to argue about, is a hugely important thing.

Professor Bishop: I would be very reluctant to advise on how Government should structure themselves on this, but I will have a go. I think that, first of all, there has to be a voice, and there has to be a strong voice. With a certain amount of trepidation, I think that probably has to be in Cabinet, because if you are looking at issues around infrastructure, airports, High Speed 2 and housing numbers, that is where the debate happens. Again, with a certain amount of trepidation, because I am not an expert in this at all, I suspect the voice of the Treasury is extremely strong in these kinds of debates and discussions. There needs to be a counter-voice to try to balance that—understanding the pressures, the expediency of money and timescales against producing something that is of quality, long lasting, durable and has extremely effective lifetime costs. Sometimes it can be beautiful as well, which would be quite a nice gain to have.

So I think there has to be a voice and that voice has to be backed up by a small resource. When I was at the London Development Agency, I had endless discussions about how many architects London needed, but we never had as many architects as we had people dealing with contract compliance and, therefore, it was always a matter of political choice. Design teams can be very small, very agile and very cost effective, but I think that to have an effective voice at Cabinet level that person would need a resource. Whether that sits in

DCLG or DCMS or anywhere else is less important, as long as you also have behind that a simple but clear structure to make sure that when key decisions are made, design is seriously considered and weighed up against all the other criteria the Government have to decide upon.

Baroness Andrews: I understand that there is no official now in DCLG with responsibility for design. So when you talk about resource, we are talking about a complete absence of resource within the key department that is now dealing with design and planning and housing. Am I correct in that?

Professor Bishop: As far as I am aware—well, Max?

Max Farrell: One of our recommendations was for the Government to appoint a chief architect. We said that there was a gap—that there is a chief planner at one end of the spectrum and a chief construction adviser at the other, but no champion for the part in the middle, about design, who is advising all the different departments and ensuring consistency in the way the Government approach these things.

What happened since was quite interesting, because one of the first things that Brandon Lewis suggested when he took up his new role was to have a design panel within Government and on that panel to have the institutions, but also for him to chair it and to have some private sector representatives as well. That panel initially looked at the starter homes and developed and designed templates for starter homes. I do not see any reason why that same model could not be applied to housing more widely, or even other types of government buildings, schools, hospitals, where it is about getting the best quality for the best value, rather than just all about cost.

The Chairman: Lord Freeman, you have explained to us previously what you feel about it.

Lord Freeman: There is a ministerial committee, I think headed by Greg Clark. That committee, which in theory should be looking at the built environment, is listed number 16. It is the last in terms of the entire list of ministerial committees. First of all, do you think that his department is the right department for us to question the Secretary of State on and, if not, who else?

Max Farrell: We met Greg Clark during the review process, before he took up his current role, and he was very supportive. One of the things we talked about in the review was the need for planning to be place-based and at city, town and village level, rather than perhaps

other scales. The move towards devolution and decentralisation is an important one in terms of planning and how we plan our towns and cities.

I also think local leadership is just as important as national leadership. In Bristol, for example, the mayor, who happens to be an architect, has made a huge difference because he has thought about placemaking and put that at the centre of a lot of his policymaking across a number of different areas, whether it is health or education. I would think Greg Clark, the Secretary of State at DCLG, is probably the right person, because integrating planning, housing, and architecture is a very important thing.

The Chairman: They have all been silos.

Q32 Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: I think some parts of my question may have already been answered, but it is really to Professor Bishop. When you recommended that the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment become part of the Design Council Cabi, you also recommended engagement with Government. We have already had bits about the hole that is there. We have also heard in evidence about a lack of policy evidence being available centrally anyway. Could you comment on the research that may be needed and whether the DCLG and BIS should be undertaking this, driving it, requesting it or commissioning it, and whether it is happening at all in practice?

Professor Bishop: With respect, I did not recommend the merger of CABI and the Design Council.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: I am sorry.

Professor Bishop: It happened, and I was brought in to try to come up with a way that it could work. I think one of the sad things that has happened since that merger has been the loss of CABI's function in terms of, first of all, being a conduit to import best practice, not just from the UK but from overseas, and to disseminate it, and to produce research and publications. The good news is that CABI still exists; that element of CABI's work has been lost.

There is a paucity of work in terms of research and design in the built environment. Unfortunately, a lot of it is anecdotal; a lot of it has to rest on case studies. The essential question that one always comes back to—how much does good design cost and what is the long-term value—is still largely unanswered. There have been various pieces of research, but it is a relatively thin field in terms of research, and I think it would be really quite important to carry out very focused research into that area. There is also the area of particular

typologies of housing and infrastructure, where there is a real shortage of long-term research on the performance of buildings. Similarly, there is a real shortage of data and information about how places are being put together. Certainly, working in practice, a lot of the work we access is purely off the top of our heads; it is anecdotal; it is case studies we know of.

With CABE having disappeared, what has been lost is, first, an organisation you can go to that either holds the information or can commission it, and secondly, an independent organisation that can either be asked by Government to carry out research or, possibly more importantly, to be the client on behalf of Government to carry out the research. Both of those are rather large gaps that I would advocate should be addressed.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: Has that gap been taken over by university departments at all? Are there any long-term registers of innovative design whereby other departments within the university have linked to look at the population effect as well as the duration of the actual project?

Professor Bishop: My colleague from UCL is sitting here. A lot of research is being carried out by university departments in planning and architecture in the built environment. I would say that it is not necessarily easy to access or focused, and it is not necessarily commissioned and driven by the key issues the Government need to address. A lot of it follows the research interests of the individuals and the particular departments they belong to.

When I carried out the review—and I suspect it is probably still the case—there was a lack of a real focus from Government on the key issues where research would be very useful. There are issues around how we provide decent housing in quantity; in London there are issues around tall buildings and skyline; there are issues around the green belt; there are issues around sustainable energy in the countryside. You can continue to name the key points where really hard research would be extremely valuable, but I am not aware there is any process whereby that debate happens within Government and departments make decisions together about commissioning that.

The Chairman: Is there any chance that an application to the European Commission would yield fruit here? There is lots of money rushing around in Brussels for research and development. In fact, another Committee of this House looked at the idea of research and innovation and it covered everything from medicine to—but building and architecture was

not involved, as I recall. It may be that that it is an outlet. I am just suggesting that people should think about it.

Q33 Baroness Whitaker: You did touch on this, Professor Bishop, but just for the record: do you take it that it is important to have research on what design saves as well as what it costs? We have to look now at the long term as well as the short term. There is also the issue that the benefits of good design might well accrue to another aspect of public responsibility, that is to say crime reduction or better health. These things are not encapsulated in research stimulated by one government department, but they would all be long-term savings. Do you think that that is an important area? That is the main question, but also, what about the Building Research Establishment? Before it was privatised, it used to do some of this. Is there scope for it not to have to earn its living quite so much and to do this kind of thing?

Professor Bishop: The simple answer is, yes, there is a need for this and we do have organisations—the Building Research Establishment and obviously universities—that could carry out this type of research.

Something that did come up when I did my review, which I found quite extraordinary, was that speaking to house builders, I could not find anyone at all who ever went back and looked at their developments after two years of completion. Most never went back and looked at them. There are no data tracking the quality of the specification, the environmental or long-term running costs of those houses, or indeed the design quality, or on value. Therefore, you have a complete vacuum in which people are designing and commissioning volume house building, for a start.

On housing, again, anecdotally, I am afraid, because a lot of this is anecdotal, if you look around London you can see some of the housing built in the 1970s—Camden’s architectural department, Alexandra Road, for example, now listed; Lillington Gardens in Westminster; the Odhams building estate in Covent Garden—where we have done it well. These are buildings and houses with high values and that will probably still be here in 100 or 150 years’ time. We have since demolished an awful lot of the stuff we did badly. Therefore, anecdotally, it is rather clear that good design, if you look at lifetime costs, saves you a huge amount of money. Having some hard research to back up these anecdotes would make the debate a lot easier, especially in terms of persuading Government to put the resources—relatively small resources—and the focus into promoting good long-term design.

The Chairman: It is a case of commoditising, if there is such a word, housing like they used to do in the grocery sector: “pile it high and sell it cheap” and not think about the long-term implications.

Baroness Andrews: I have an example, in fact, Chair. In about 2008, DCLG looked at the cost of a lifetime home that was built to the highest standards, was fully flexible and could enable people to age in place. This, of course, turned out to be more expensive than the ordinary home, which you outlive because you cannot manoeuvre around it when you are older. There was a distinct cost to it. You referred to the Treasury; this is precisely the sort of argument you used with the Treasury. The house builders, of course, immediately said, “We will put up the price of housing”. You are talking in your reports about everyday housing, everyday planning and so on, and this is absolutely fundamental to everyday. To my knowledge, that research has never been followed up or applied. It is a precise example of the gap in the system that fails to follow through on that sort of information.

Baroness Rawlings: You were saying how they have stripped out the research department in various planning authorities and that CAGE was closed from the research point of view. Where did all those research people go, because they must still be around?

Max Farrell: I would like to pick up on that point in a sort of roundabout way. It goes back to the current state of research. It is important to point out that the idea of the Place Alliance is to collectively pool all the different research reports and initiatives that are going on. It is just as much about awareness of what research there is as it is about commissioning research. What we discovered during the review process was that there is quite a significant amount going on; it is just that there is no one central place where it is all easily accessible. To have the Place Alliance as a hub where you can go to access—there is research being done all the time by the institutions, by the TCPA.

Just to pick up on Lady Andrews’ point about housing and being able to understand why poor products are accepted and sold, there is a piece of research that was done recently on home performance labelling that we thought was very interesting. It was initiated by the Housing Forum, but it is not widely known about. The idea of it, as we talked about in the *Farrell Review*, was to influence consumers in terms of what they expect and for that to then have a greater impact on the house builders. It is interesting that Barratts are now supporting this home performance labelling. Essentially, it challenges our current system of valuing property, which is incredibly crude. We value houses by the number of bedrooms

and floor area, so design quality does not come into it. This is a website that can measure space, daylight, sunlight, storage and access to green space; it is a much more sophisticated way of valuing property. I think that that would have probably a bigger impact on house builders than this regulatory “carrot and stick” approach.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: Just to follow on with that, if you are being the repository for research that has happened and therefore generating new ideas, is anybody doing the equivalent of TripAdvisor for people who are buying these new homes and new construction? You assess your holidays; you are asked, when you go into healthcare, to assess your healthcare. The biggest expenditure you will make will be on your home, and yet where is the consumer able to feed back?

Max Farrell: Absolutely. That is a massive opportunity and something that is inevitable, I think. It is happening in the rental sector, where you now get feedback on landlords but also on tenants. That is becoming more widely accessible and making a difference.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: Should Place be doing that?

Max Farrell: The Place Alliance?

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: Yes, Place Alliance. Should you set it up? Should you start it?

Max Farrell: I do not see why not.

Q34 Earl of Lytton: Just a comment on that last exchange, which was particularly interesting because, of course, if you go on to some of these holiday home websites, UK holiday homes, you will find more qualitative information than you would get from a house builder.

How widespread do you both consider the design review process to be at present? What is it dependent on? Is it factor of scale, is it individuals, or is it to do with investor input or lack of input, as the case may be? What are the outcomes from these reviews on the development process and its quality? In other words, is it effective?

Professor Bishop: Perhaps if go first on that. I am a big fan of design review. Design review engages in a broad conversation and a challenge. It is also a very cheap process. There has been a lot of discussion about how much it costs, but a design review will cost between £3,000 and £5,000. That is less than 1% of the consultant fees you will pay in bringing a reasonably sized development up to planning. In percentage terms, it is very small. It is non-binding and, therefore, it is purely there for advice. When you have good local authorities and good developers, they do value it. They value it because it allows a challenge and a discussion to happen that allows a scheme to develop at the right time.

Since CABA became part of the Design Council and effectively lost its unique and privileged role as the principal adviser to Government, design review has, first, grown—I believe there is more design review happening across the country, which is good— and, secondly, it has devolved, which is good. However, it has become very patchy and it is voluntary. Therefore, if a local authority is powerful enough and prepared to insist that a scheme go to design review, it probably will. Poor developers will almost certainly resist that; good developers will be very happy for that as part of a constructive process. The design review, being patchy, has also become quite competitive. You have a set of organisations, including CABA, competing for a very constrained and constricted market. Finally, whereas most design review panels that have been set up locally are extremely good and are doing an extremely good job, I do not believe the quality is as good as the far larger and more professional ones that were run by CABA in the first place.

In my own experience, a project that goes to design review almost certainly raises questions and comes out better. I would advocate that there are times when there should almost be a call-in: the schemes are so important that they should be almost required to go to design review. In the *Bishop Review*, I did say that there should be a presumption that anything that is procured through public contract using public money should go through design review to set the example and the conditions for it.

Max Farrell: I agree with Peter. I think design review is a very successful and valuable process. I would argue that it is not applied widely enough and it is quite limited in its scope, because the current state of affairs is that the majority of design review takes place for new buildings that are coming through the planning process. In this country 80% of the built environment that we will have in the year 2050 already exists, so only 20% of it will be new. Of that 20%, only a very small percentage will go through the planning process. In the public realm, changes to high streets and parks do not go through the planning process.

I would argue that we need what we call place reviews of existing places, not just new buildings, which in a way are easy to focus on. Who is looking at housing estates? Who is looking at mega hospitals? I would argue that these places have a much bigger impact on a much greater number of people's lives than a new museum or a new office building. The good thing about design review or place review, whatever you want to call it, is that professionals are happy to give up their time, either at cost or for no money, to do it. It is a

good way of public and private working together for the greater good for a low cost, and I would say it should be applied more widely.

Q35 Lord Freeman: This is a follow-up question and I suspect I know how you are going to answer it, but let us see. Does there need to be a greater emphasis in the national planning policy framework on design generally but also on design reviews?

Max Farrell: It would be great if there was support for or reference to the idea of place reviews, because it is a different concept. I do not think they would necessarily need to replace design reviews because design reviews play an important role and are very valuable for individual developments. Looking more widely, I notice that CABE does have what they are calling a place review panel to look at Oxford and what its needs are, what the transport problems are, and thinking about those things at the very early stages, which will then help inform developers who are bringing forward applications for individual sites. If there was some support for it within the national planning policy, that would be a good thing in my view.

Professor Bishop: Could I just come in on the back of that question? First of all, I think the National Planning Policy Framework is a really good document. What it has done, which I think is remarkable, is invited planning to come back into the debate about design quality in the built environment. I absolutely applaud it for doing that. It has some powerful statements suggesting that planning authorities can turn down applications on design and can use exceptional design to override some other considerations. That is absolutely wonderful. I think what has happened is you have had a very positive drift in the policy framework, which has moved completely away from the funding of the infrastructure to support it. To me, that is the crux of the problem we are facing.

Baroness Whitaker: I share your view, Professor Bishop, about the merits of the NPPF. My question is: have you any confidence that it is read across or translated down? I have in front of me the national networks national policy statement, which I would say is inadequate about design. It talks about aesthetics being a desirable consideration; there is no idea in it that good design is integral to the good functioning of a highway or similar. Do you have experience of this? Am I right that it is not read across?

Professor Bishop: I would share your view on this. There is a gap between the lead given in national policy and the application on the ground, both in terms of national infrastructure projects and how it is applied locally. Partly, the stripping out of expertise, capability and

capacity at local level has been very serious. I think an awful lot of local authorities, which in theory have considerable power to intervene to promote good design, have become extremely timid even in wishing to enter that kind of debate and lack the expertise in doing so.

Q36 Baroness Whitaker: Thank you. If we could move on to the subject that Professor Bishop touched on, both the *Bishop Review* and the *Farrell Review* identify a shortfall in skills among key decision-makers in the planning process. That is not just officials; it is also the elected politicians. Those who have been around development have also noticed it. What impact has this shortfall had on the built environment and, more importantly perhaps, do you have the impression that Government realise that there is this big gap, and what ought to be done to bring back the visionary planners? You mentioned the 1970s; I am thinking more of the 1940s and the 1950s. Where are those people? How can we get them back, or their replacements or their descendants?

Max Farrell: You are absolutely right. That is a critical part of it and the solution to this is not a silver bullet; it is multi-faceted. Design literacy and design awareness within local councils are key for elected councillors but also for highway engineers, for example, who make very important decisions that have a profound impact on our urban environment. I would point you to papers written by people following the review, whom we called champions of particular issues. There was one written by Sue Vincent, a councillor at Camden who was the deputy leader there, on ways in which we can introduce design literacy and training to elected councillors in the same way that they receive training on financial and legal matters, because it is so important and because the decisions they make have a legacy that lasts for decades.

The Chairman: Is that paper available?

Max Farrell: It is, yes. On the *Farrell Review* website, on the home page, there are about 12 papers. There is the one that I have just mentioned by Sue Vincent, but there is another paper, which is very relevant to what Peter was talking about, about skills and talent within local authorities, which was written by Finn Williams who is currently at the GLA and was at Croydon. We pointed to Croydon as a good example of where placemaking is a central focus within the local authority, and I think that was partly due to the leadership of Jon Rouse, who was a member of the Urban Task Force. Finn has come up with an idea for a social enterprise that is a bit like Teach First. He has called it Plan First but also Public Service. The

idea is to attract the best talent into public sector planning departments, which do not have the same reputation or perception as the private sector. I think Finn himself is an exception to the rule. He could have gone to any leading architectural practice; he went to Croydon and now he has gone to the GLA. He is saying: why can we not fast track recruitment? Why can we not make it more exciting and show that it is not just about development control—that it is about visionary thinking, about placemaking—and attract the right kind of skills into local authorities?

Professor Bishop: Certainly in my own experience you can carry out training for elected councillors. I do not know if this is true—I was told this in China and I have not been able to check it—but apparently Chinese city leaders are required to attend Tongji University every year for a training course in how to be a city mayor. I was told that it was four weeks a year. Now, I have not checked that. It seems remarkable but it is almost believable.

The Chairman: It sounds a bit like the continuous professional development we have in this country for other things, but not for design and architecture. We could easily piggyback on that with CPD programmes.

Professor Bishop: Certainly having a centre of excellence that does provide training packages—it is about raising expectations and having a few core skills to ask the right questions. In my own experience, what tends to happen—and Max has mentioned the question of Croydon—is that you do get certain boroughs, metropolitan authorities and district authorities where you get the very good coincidence of a leader, a political leader or the chair of a committee, who is absolutely committed, with a chief officer or senior officer, and they work together. We have seen it in Westminster and in Southwark when the Tate Modern was produced, and when it happens you do raise the internal skill level of that authority. Attracting people either as full-time staff or as long-term advisers could be quite a powerful way of raising design standards at a local level.

The last point I would make is that longevity is very important. I am slightly concerned about using the case of Leeds but John Thorp, the civic architect of Leeds, was there for 25 years and he did a fantastic job in keeping the continuity of thinking about how that city could develop. You need those kinds of timescales in a city.

The Chairman: That is an interesting point. Thank you.

Q37 Baroness Rawlings: The *Farrell Review* emphasised the need to consider heritage of current buildings. I have to agree with you—and this has come out in your last answer, too—

about the necessity of a strong voice, resources and leadership, wherever it is. If you get really good leadership, it does not matter which field you are in, it should work well. What are your views of the new housing and commercial developments over the last, say, 30 years? What percentage of the designs today do you think have heritage values for the decades to come, having mentioned the importance of the longevity of the buildings?

Max Farrell: We have quite a mature and sophisticated approach to heritage in this country, which is often the envy of the world. The rest of the world looks at us as having got our act together when it comes to valuing heritage, but I think there is still more to be done. The value of heritage is not just for the more easily analysed areas like tourism, for example, or even placemaking, but also in terms of sustainability. The fact is that existing buildings are a resource. We have limited land and our building stock can and should be looked at to be adapted and refurbished as a first point of call. Quite often, that is not the case.

There are certain things that have a dramatic effect on that. For example, the VAT on refurbishment and retrofits, whereas there is no VAT on new build, completely flies in the face of encouraging refurbishment. There is also the lack of architectural training when it comes to skills for refurbishment and retrofitting. There are a number of different things that we talked about in the review that could move us even further forward in valuing and making the most of the value of heritage in this country.

Professor Bishop: I am sorry, I am going to give a slightly different view here. It is far more pessimistic, I am afraid. We do produce some extraordinary new buildings in this country. On the prime sites, under the spotlight, commercially in particular, our cultural buildings and some of our housing stands with the very best in the world. That is a very small percentage of what we are building. I fear that the default is normally mediocrity and I would advocate a simple test: that you stand almost anywhere in any town outside the centre of London or the major historic cities, turn slowly through 360 degrees and ask yourself if you can see anything that is not mediocre. Most of what you see—

The Chairman: Anything that is mediocre?

Professor Bishop: That is not mediocre. Most of what you will see has probably been built in the last 25 to 30 years.

Baroness Rawlings: You are talking about contemporary?

Professor Bishop: Yes, in effect.

Baroness Rawlings: The last 30 years? You are not talking about 300 years ago?

Professor Bishop: No. In a lot of the home counties, in particular provincial towns and the suburbs, what you see is largely 25 or 30 years old or less and, generally speaking, of quite extraordinarily poor quality, and uncoordinated as well. The question is: will we be listing what this generation is building? Yes, we will be listing some of the prime buildings but an awful lot of what we are building, unlike the Victorians and the Georgians, we will not be listing.

Baroness Rawlings: Would you put this down to cost-cutting, or just lack of talent in architects?

Professor Bishop: Not lack of talent. We have the talent in this country. Our schools are producing some of the best graduates in the world and we have some of the best practices in the world. That assumes that people are using architects, for a start, and an awful lot of developments now are not using architects, or start by using architects but do not end up using the architects.

A lot of it is down to short-term expediency and, I have to say, lack of will. Again, this might be slightly unfashionable, but having strong planning regulation that is capable and resourced to engage in a positive debate about design is going to address the people who are prepared to build it, sell on and never look at it again. That is what we are doing over a large amount of our new build, I am afraid.

Max Farrell: I am sorry, I think I misunderstood your question so I gave the wrong answer to it. I am sorry about that.

The Chairman: Do you agree with Professor Bishop?

Max Farrell: I do, and I think it is very hit and miss. What we do not do is we do not learn from where things have worked well and we do not have a consistent approach to the way we plan towns and cities. Even within towns and cities, within London the political boundaries are not the same as the place boundaries. Very often, we have projects that are divided between two boroughs that have very different ideas about heights of buildings and affordable housing rates and so it is hard, under those circumstances, for the focus to be about design quality, because quite often the focus is about all the other things that are open to negotiation.

One of the key things that we called for in the *Farrell Review* was more proactive planning, to have a more consistent approach to things like affordable housing levels, shape, form and

even materials of buildings, so that people know and agree in advance that that is the right way to go.

Q38 Baroness Andrews: I am going to bundle this up into my proper question. It picks up on what you have both said and goes back to what you said, Professor Bishop, about the National Planning Policy Framework. I agree with you: I think it is an excellent document after a lot of hard work and a lot of negotiation with all the expertise available to the department. It was a good outcome. But in that department there is clearly a tension between protecting the historic environment, the natural environment, landscapes and so on, and the pressure for development, and since the NPPF was published, that pressure has intensified. Do you think that is making the situation better or worse? At the same time, we have lost our special planning capacities. My original question was: are we doing well enough at placemaking? But it seems to me the answer, if I may anticipate, is no, and these may be factors that make it more difficult now to do as well as we can in terms of placemaking.

Professor Bishop: I said earlier that one of the key judges of success of any organisation is how it does most of its work. How high is the average? Most organisations can do one or two brilliant things but good organisations do everything rather well. That is the kind of problem we are facing. As a nation, we do conservation rather well. We are one of the leading countries in the world in terms of conserving our built environment. We do that very well.

There is a rather strange thing underneath all of this, around the British planning system: it is a pretty unique way of dealing with planning. It is bespoke. We deal with every application on its merits and every application can potentially be negotiated, and that places a huge onus on the planner. There is little doubt that good planners normally are the ones with an awful lot of experience behind them. In the 25 years I did planning, I was probably better at the end than when I started. You learn and you amass that experience. That is very important for building a long-term capability.

As far as placemaking is concerned, I have to tell you it is not a phrase I particularly like. It implies something a bit like cooking, a bit like a recipe: you can follow a recipe and produce a good place. Good places are made by people who are passionate and engaged, and can broker broad agreements between stakeholders. There is one thing that local authorities have lost, and quite early in the process. From the 1980s and 1990s onwards, as local

authorities had to fall back on core business, plan-making and development control became the core business in planning departments. The really interesting stuff, the stuff that can make a fundamental difference to how you shape and mould a place over time, has been lost. The *Farrell Review* did come up with a whole series of ways in which that could be compensated for, but I think that underneath that you still need a point, a leader locally, who can rally the forces around a vision, have the stake to see it through over the long term and fight very hard to make it happen.

Baroness Andrews: If I may, I will follow that up briefly. You are both quoting isolated examples of where good things are happening. Bristol is obvious because George Ferguson is both charismatic and expert, but he is unique, I think. There are a handful of places where you seem to think that good placemaking is within capacity. What do we have to do in order to learn the lessons? Leadership is clearly key but we cannot replicate good leaders. We have to have something inside the systems that makes it more or less likely that this happens. It obviously is an issue of the curriculum of young planners, too. I take your point about placemaking, but it seems to me that placemaking is at least a more generous description than planning and is less likely to turn people off from the questions, challenges and possibilities.

Max Farrell: I would absolutely agree. I would even argue that it is important for the curriculum of school children just as much as it is for planners. In this country, it is incredible that we are not taught about the built environment when it affects so many different things. We looked at whether or not it should be a subject in its own right and we thought that that did not make sense because you could just as easily teach the built environment through maths, history, geography or physics, and it engages children. One of the most popular computer games is Minecraft, which is basically about placemaking. Making a connection to your house, your street and your neighbourhood and how that affects climate change would be incredibly powerful. I think that would then create more people who are interested in being civic champions, taking up a leadership role, asking why things are the way they are and so on. I think it starts much earlier.

Professor Bishop: If I could make a quick further comment on that, I want to go back to the role of Government. Government consistently saying that design is important, and putting that into practice in everything they do and commission over a long period, will shift the nature of the debate. Without wishing to be too blunt about it, the present debate around

housing is around numbers. You hear very few statements saying, “Yes, of course we need a lot more housing but that has to be of high, durable quality”. That bit is always missing. For as long as that is always missing, the message that comes down is that design is not that important. It is number 16 on the list of priorities in terms of committees.

Q39 Lord Clement-Jones: I think you have pretty much answered this, at least by implication, throughout the answers that you have given to the questions, but it would be quite useful to get it on the record, particularly in light of your views about what might be done. It is this whole question of the local plan value. As you know, we have had Ruth Stanier and Steve Quartermain here giving evidence to us and they said that they thought that local plans did have a positive impact and this led to an increased number of houses being approved. What is your view of the work of local authorities in developing and adopting local plans? I can see that it is coloured by the hollowing out of expertise point that you have made and so on. Do you think they are sufficiently able to address and promote design standards, given what you have said about the quality of our current housing and so on?

Professor Bishop: My view is quite personal on this. It may not be representative of other people in my field. I think local plan-making might have resulted in more housing being built. I would not question what Steve Quartermain said. I think that it is an incredibly cumbersome process to go through and not one that is likely to inspire many people to participate or get excited. The very nature of local plan-making, with its procedures and legal requirements, tends to make it a very cautious process, normally carried through by very cautious people, and at the end of the day what local plans quite often fail to say is: what can this place be? It misses the key point. Having been involved in very small local design exercises, I know that you can achieve an awful lot more in two or three weeks by getting people together around a table, having a debate and drawing and sketching and asking those kinds of questions, instead of the rather cumbersome processes of producing a local plan. If we could rethink how local plans are constructed, we could probably free up some resources to apply to the more creative process of asking the question: how do we create brilliant places in which we can live and work?

Lord Clement-Jones: Can you do that in a context where you do not have a concrete proposal? I know you said that the problem is that every application is dealt with on its

merits, but can you have a discussion that is not quite theoretical but certainly looking to the future, where you have a hypothetical development taking place?

Professor Bishop: Yes, I think you can. At the end of the day you will have to back it up with something that carries material weight in the planning process, but I would still hold to my answer that when you look at local plan-making—and I know that DCLG has spent a lot of time trying to simplify and streamline it—it is a heavy-handed process that often misses the key points that local people want to engage in.

Lord Clement-Jones: Which bit of the process is the cumbersome part, compared with what you are suggesting?

Professor Bishop: It is taking it through the various stages through to adoption—as simple as that.

Lord Clement-Jones: Does that not have a danger involved in it? A few local people get involved and it is basically the voice of the most active. You push it through and you do not have to go through the process, and yet it is adopted as your design standard.

Professor Bishop: With all respect, that probably happens a lot under the present process.

Lord Clement-Jones: Yes. Do you have a different—

Max Farrell: I would just add that I think a local plan is probably not enough. It is symptomatic of the whole system being reactive. It is setting out a number of policies but then it is waiting for the private sector to bring forward an application, assess it on that basis, and then get into negotiations and quite often do something different or adapt accordingly. What it does not do is set out a vision and a master plan for an area that would facilitate that process and be much more proactive. That is what we have said there should be more of. The planning system has gone from one where, in the 1950s and 1960s, it was entirely the public sector doing all the planning. But I think people then lost faith with all the social housing and the motorways, and now it has swung completely the other way, whereby it is entirely waiting for the private sector to do the spatial planning. There needs to be a middle ground where the two work together.

Lord Clement-Jones: Just to coin your phrase, we need a proactive master plan as opposed to a reactive local plan?

Max Farrell: Yes.

Lord Clement-Jones: We have to work out how to get from A to B without much local expertise or the hollowing out of local expertise.

Max Farrell: I think you can do that with the private sector as well, with place review panels. They do that in other countries. They are getting together to talk and then test and then engage with the public about ideas, what their needs are and how they can be accommodated, without relying on landowners and developers to try to make those solutions for them.

I would just say one other thing, which is that the difference between a local plan and having a vision or a master plan is that they are communicated in completely different ways. Anyone who has gone on to a council website and tried to read a local plan knows it is very hard to get an understanding, especially for the layperson, of what it means for their town or their village. If you walk into an urban room and you have a model in front of you and you have some drawings, that is a completely different way of understanding. It is instant. You do not need reams and reams of planning—

Lord Clement-Jones: It has to be accessible as well?

Max Farrell: Absolutely.

Professor Bishop: If I could just comment very quickly on that. Local plans need to focus on what we want you to do, as opposed to what we do not want you to do. Planning is defensive because of precedent and because of the pressure it is under. If we can focus on what we want to happen, you are better off constructing a narrative and doing drawings. That is the difference—drawings and narratives that communicate. Then, planning has an absolutely key role: to broker between the local community and the stakeholders, put people together and to try to get the alignment so things can happen. That is a very different approach to planning. Some people are doing it, but that is quite different from the local planning processes that tend to work against it.

Lord Clement-Jones: We will have to try to capture that, clearly.

The Chairman: That is right. That is very interesting.

Q40 Baroness Parminter: Part of the process of visioning for the local plans, not from above but from below, is obviously the neighbourhood planning level, and you talked a little bit about that earlier. Is there any clear evidence that there are sufficient resources going into that process to make that deliverable? It can be done and it is being done quite well where you are getting local communities engaging with other relevant stakeholders. It feeds into the local plan and it is obviously on a statutory footing if it is accepted. There are places that are doing it well and there are other places where I have heard there is insufficient money to

make it a robust and, as you made quite clear, a visioning process that local people can engage with. Do you have any sense of whether there are sufficient resources; is it working; is it too soon to say?

Professor Bishop: Again, what is happening is patchy and there are some good examples where communities are coming together very powerfully. There is a quite important issue here about the nature of communities that are far more poorly resourced than others. There will always be communities, certainly in my experience in planning and development, that are extremely able, capable, well-resourced and have the right people, and who will always put up a fight. That is brilliant. When you work with those communities, it is fantastic. There is energy. It is incredibly challenging and sometimes quite daunting but you normally get a far better result.

Against that, you have a far greater number of areas where those resources do not exist, or are extremely unfocused when they do. Something that local planning or placemaking can do is to provide a focus to try to rally those other communities around becoming engaged. A lot of the work we did at Design for London in places like Barking, Dalston and other town centres, in Tottenham, was to try to provide a point where we could actually bring people together, put a small resource in to get that debate going and then hopefully leave behind us a community that felt more engaged, more capable and more able to sustain that, to put up their own fight, get their own point of view into the debate and try to get a better result out of placemaking or out of a particular development proposal. That is a very big gap. Unless we address it, we will have a polarisation whereby the nice areas will get nicer and the worse areas will get worse.

The Chairman: Those with the strongest voices.

Professor Bishop: Yes.

The Chairman: On that note we must end, unfortunately. We could go on for ever. I am sure you have a lot of ideas that you would like us to take on board as well. Would you be prepared to send us whatever ideas you have subsequently, by whatever method, email and so on? You will have all the details on the website. That would be very good. I have to say that it has been a brilliant session and thank you both very much for coming.