



HOUSE OF LORDS

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The Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment

Inquiry on

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

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Questions 146 - 158

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11.30 am

Witnesses: Ruth Reed and David Henry

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
 Lord Inglewood
 Earl of Lytton
 Baroness Parminter
 Baroness Rawlings
 Baroness Whitaker
 Lord Woolmer of Leeds
 Baroness Young of Old Scone

Examination of Witnesses

Ruth Reed, former Past President, Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and **David Henry**, Planning Director, Savills, appearing on behalf of Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors

Q146 The Chairman: Mr Henry and Ms Reed, 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 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. Could I begin by asking each of you to briefly introduce yourselves to the Committee for the benefit of the record that we will be producing?

Ruth Reed: Good morning. I am Ruth Reed. I am past president of the Royal Institute of British Architects. I am an architect. I am also director of a planning and architecture consultancy. I have been a professor of professional practice. I no longer teach.

David Henry: Good morning. My name is David Henry. I am a town planner and chartered surveyor in private practice. I also chair the RICS planning policy panel. I am here representing the RICS.

The Chairman: Thank you. I saw you sitting in on the last session. I hope you found it interesting. We want to whip through this, but the problem is I am not a very good timekeeper.

The first question is mine. How would a chief built environment adviser—or other advisers with specific remits on built environment matters—help to deliver better outcomes at a national level?

Ruth Reed: The RIBA would welcome such a person, because we believe that they would not only co-ordinate policy across the policy-making departments—BIS, DCLG, DCMS—but co-ordinate a joined-up approach to procurement in the spending departments, leading the country by example in good practice in design and procurement and ensuring that policy was joined-up, that it did not repeat itself or contradict itself and, to take the good example of the National Planning Policy Framework, to ensure that you have a pared down, succinct approach to built environment matters across government. The built environment is so much more than buildings. I know it is odd for an architect to say this. It is about a co-ordinated response to the needs of the population, which I am sure you are very well aware of. It would be extremely helpful to have a single responsibility at the heart of government driving that approach and co-ordinating excellence across all matters to do with the built environment.

The Chairman: There was a suggestion for a chief architect, but that is slightly different from a planner. If that ever came to fruition, would you think there was a need for an equivalent chief planner as well?

Ruth Reed: We have had discussions with the fellow institutes on this matter. We recognise that each of us brings a different aspect of skills to the built environment. We are quite open to the idea that each of us could bring something to the role, should it fall to a member of one institute or another, and some of us—not me—hold skills across different disciplines. I do not think that the RIBA is continuing to say that only architecture should be pushing this; that could be too building-specific rather than to do with the broader environment. It would not be helpful to be that prescriptive about which discipline should take it on. It is a role that is much needed and we would not want to stand in the way.

The Chairman: Yes, but you do not want it to slip between two stools either, do you?

Ruth Reed: No. The chief planning officer has particular responsibilities for communication between DCLG and the planners. That may be in statute; forgive me if I am wrong. That might be somewhat different to subsume into this role.

David Henry: Picking up on that last point, first of all it is about acting as a focal point for experience. After all, very few issues to do with the built environment are singular. They are

not just architecture, just property or just anything else. There is a distinction. It is one of the reasons why there is recognition in the various professions of that overlapping-ness and the need to work together. They are part of a continuum, after all. That is the first point to grasp.

The second thing is that we look far beyond the immediacy of any particular issue. A chief adviser is there, to some extent, as the critical friend, as the prod for sometimes saying, "If you do this, it might also have a knock-on consequence to that, so you should take that into account beyond the immediate realms of the professional interest". The holistic consequences are very important as well.

The third reasoning is to act as a signpost. I listened to the session just now, and the point was made that we can look back 50 years but we should be looking forward another 50 or 100 years. Quite often there is a need to have that vision for a place, and to challenge, to identify opportunity, and look at how one might steer and guide decision-making within that context. The job description is the more important initial issue, beyond the who, what and where that applies to it.

Q147 The Chairman: Is there a usual channel of communication between architects and planners at the Royal Institute of British Architects level, or are they rather like the engineering field used to be, with 50 different institutions never speaking to each other? That is a slight exaggeration, but it was true, and that was why they put the Engineering Council together.

Ruth Reed: In recent consultation responses to the other House, we put forward a joint response with the other institutes calling on different areas of knowledge. I think you are already aware that the Landscape Institute has taken a particular lead on the flooding issue, where it might be more appropriate.

Baroness Andrews: I apologise if this sounds rather cynical. As you have been speaking about the prospect of a chief officer for the built environment, I have become more persuaded. The problem is that I am looking for an analogy across government, and it could be the Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government. The problem with having somebody for the built environment is that there are huge vested interests at play across the built environment, and there are now huge stakes in policy-making on housing and infrastructure. It is slightly different in science. With respect, you would have no power to speak of if you were the chief built environment officer, so how could you exert influence, given that your

main opponent would be the Treasury and you would cover practically every department in government?

Ruth Reed: It is fair to say that the complexity of it and the lack of a joined-up approach to the built environment is the very reason why you might want somebody to attempt this gargantuan task of pulling it all together. I would not want to think that nobody ever tried to make it work. There are great examples across government, including a forward consultation on procurement that could easily be brought, with Treasury backing, to the spending departments, as the requirement on the way in which government procurement and delivery in the built environment are delivered. I would not want to say that it was not possible. Any role has to be given a mandate and support, and the Treasury is a very powerful place to begin.

Q148 Lord Inglewood: We have had a lot of evidence, and people have told us different things, but I think there has been agreement from all our witnesses that we do need some kind of joined-up or holistic national strategy for the built environment—not that I terribly like the word “joined-up”—and certainly nobody has told us that we do not need it. That being the case, how would you set about doing that in order to deliver high-quality new homes, meet housing and other development requirements and conserve what is good? To declare an interest, I am a member of the RICS myself.

David Henry: I am glad to hear it. It is a big question. A simple place to start is vision as to what we are seeking to achieve out of this. I was interested to hear in the session before about spatial planning, regional plans, local plans and the like. Certainly I think those have a strong role to play in there somewhere; at what level is for discussion. To have vision of place is a good starting point, because otherwise the inputs become rather dislocated and self-interest starts to kick in. The second thing is sharing understanding and knowledge of what is going on out there in the built environment as a whole. In our submissions, for example, we talk about sharing a database to look at what knowledge is already there and making sure that people are aware of that so that it informs the decisions in a more objective and better way. These are all important ingredients to that mix.

Staying on the spatial planning point, I was struck in the previous session by some of the comments. As far as I am aware, England is the only part of the UK that does not have some form of spatial planning in its planning system. That tells me something—you can tell by my accent, perhaps, that I have an interest in this. It tells me that they cannot all be wrong.

Therefore, that requires a little bit of exploration about whether the frameworks are correct to allow the drive and the vision to be expressed and delivered through, however those mechanisms fit in.

Ruth Reed: I am slightly conscious that we follow on from the planners, who will have facts that are not at my disposal. There is a danger that we are underplaying the strategic level of decision-making that is needed to deliver the things that will support the new housing and economic development arising from a growing population. At the moment, we have no mechanism for forward planning for the health, education and transportation provision to support the housing that is so needed. We are already behind with the housing. We have not even begun with the other support mechanisms that build a holistic society. There is a danger that in devolving to a very local level, we have lost that ability to see the whole picture across the country, which essentially is what spatial planning is. There is a considerable reluctance to centralise planning. There is a feeling that the local population should have a say in what happens, but there are some big decisions to be made about where everybody is going to live and how communities will be built.

The Chairman: It would work, would it not, if there was an umbrella of national planning and people really bought into it bottom-up, whereas the other would be top-down?

Ruth Reed: Yes.

The Chairman: I can envisage that happening. When we were in Birmingham we could physically see what they did in that area around the station. It is possible, I am sure.

Q149 Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: You spoke about the demographic change in the health and infrastructure needs of the population, and one could perhaps use the word well-being for the people who use it. What powers do you feel would be needed for such a role to function, and function well? I could see the danger in it having a liaison role and a forward-looking role but not having any levers to make changes either happen or not.

Ruth Reed: I assume that the role would come with sufficient power to oblige central government to identify how it was going to support growing communities and for strategic development—whether it be a town extension, a new town, whatever form it took—to oblige health and education to explain how they would support this rather than for everything to be reactive to the imposition of new housing and new development.

David Henry: If I can build on that a little, it is about making sure that the different factors are recognised, taken into account and given due weight in the decision-making. There is a

great tendency to have fragmentation of the different inputs without joining them together in a balanced decision. If the role is to have that duty, it would be to ensure that all the relevant factors are properly taken into account. It is almost like a wicket-keeper type of role, so that the health inputs, the utilities, the infrastructure investments are properly factored into the decision-making and planning making at whatever level that is, whether very localised or national. Many of the complaints that one sees and hears come from, “Oh, you didn’t listen to me and now we’ve got a consequence”.

Baroness Andrews: I seem to remember that when the big housing numbers were put forward in 2005-06, when Kate Barker gave evidence to us, there was more or less a national debate that was more reactive than proactive. It was about how we build infrastructure. Water became a big issue, because we were in periods of drought in the mid-2000s. That sort of dialogue seems to have disappeared. Do you think the National Infrastructure Commission should take responsibility for that? Do you think there is a danger that, having created it, we may have more of a division in the debate on where and how much housing and infrastructure, or that it can be more easily integrated now?

David Henry: It follows from what I have been saying, I hope, that the challenge is certainly there for it to become that animal. I have had quite a lot of experience within the water industry and of the dislocation that has occurred there between spatial planning and the asset management plans—the AMPs, as they are called—and trying to anticipate exactly where growth is going to be. It is the same in other sectors. The National Infrastructure Commission has the opportunity, perhaps, to step into that realm. My point about growth and where it goes is that it is not just about the direction of travel but how you support it, and making sure that those factors are properly encompassed within that.

Q150 Lord Woolmer of Leeds: I will, if I may, address this question first to Mr Henry, but it would be very helpful to have another view on it. What are the issues raised for the built environment by the existing system of viability assessments? What problems do you see emerging in practice? Do you think that policy changes are needed at national level?

David Henry: The first thing is to look at what the question asks. Many people become rather scared of this issue of viability. What is it? Essentially, it is a simple financial equation. There are many ways of approaching that equation. There is a disposal price, a sale price, a cost of construction, a total development cost, and a residual sum—a land value or whatever it is. Viability comes into this discussion when changes in the total development cost impact

on one or other of those outriggers, whether it is the sale price or the residual land value; something gives somewhere in the equation. The art, of course, is to look at striking the right balance and for mechanisms to ensure that one does not unduly adversely prejudice the other, because otherwise the whole thing becomes fraught with challenge and difficulty. So the first thing is that it has to be looked at in terms of that overarching equation and it has to be understood.

The response is to make sure that people are not frightened by the concept of viability, that they understand where to look for advice on viability, which comes into the policy realm, that there are good practice guidelines, including through our own institution, on looking at what the rules of the road are before one engages in the debate. Having done that, where might policy change take place or be improved? First of all, it is about the signposting that I touched on. Where does one look for advice on the issue? Where does one go if one cannot resolve any debates on viability? Independent mediation, arbitration, whichever one feels ought to be pursued. Also, are the changes in built-environment cost and complexity properly acknowledged as material considerations in that decision? Quite often, it is almost the Cinderella in planning decisions: the cost of something is somewhere in there, but we are never quite sure what it is and how it impacts. Does it have a knock-on consequence to other equally worthy aspects of making a decision, whether it is schools, hospitals, affordable housing? Understanding that mechanism is key to it. The response in policy terms is to direct people on how to find out about it, what the rules of the road are, and how to arbitrate or mediate on the issue should there still be a dispute.

Lord Woolmer of Leeds: I would like to hear from Ms Reed and then I will come back.

Ruth Reed: The Growth and Infrastructure Act brought in the concept of challenging the viability of providing full Section 106 provisions on affordable housing as holding back development during a period of economic downturn, if not recession. It enabled developers to renegotiate. At the moment, that situation has not changed. Where we are now experiencing growth, we are still seeing developers able to renegotiate their Section 106 terms. It is not always perceived—I do not have any knowledge either way—as the most open and transparent process.

The consequence for society as a whole is that less affordable provision is coming through from the private developers, which in the long term is a disaster for those who are not in a position to purchase their own home. I imagine that the situation with regard to

renegotiating Section 106s will change with time, because, particularly in the south-east, economic conditions are looking up. From a personal perspective—this is not an RIBA view—it all goes back to the value of land at the base of it. There is a fundamental problem about relying on the private sector operating in an open market to deliver affordable social housing through the provision of an obligation on any development. There will always be a pressure from those who quite rightly want to make money out of their day job to resist the need to provide social provision. In the long term the whole provision needs looking at. That is a personal opinion, and I happily accept there are others who have greater knowledge of that than I do. At the moment, viability in planning is not as transparent as it should be, and that is an observation from my daily practice.

The Chairman: I sense that there are changing attitudes in social housing versus rented housing, even in local authorities that are building houses for purchase. A lot of people—not just us—are looking at this in the round at the moment. It is probably quite a good time to sow seeds to bring this out into the open. Certainly it was very interesting in Birmingham; the housing development that we went to had social housing of one or two bedrooms—five bedrooms in one case—cheek by jowl with housing owned by the council that they were going to sell. A lot of the barriers seem to be coming down and reality is coming up, we hope. Lord Woolmer wants to come in on this one again.

Q151 Lord Woolmer of Leeds: One view expressed to us by, I think, Islington Borough was that in practice the viability test leads to the developers who make the most bullish assumptions about growth minimising their costs, what they are going to do in social housing, and what they need to contribute to wider development and social development over 30 or 40 years. Those who make the weakest assumptions about what they need to contribute will always be able to outbid others. Is not one of the problems that in practice those bidders secure the land and then minimise what they contribute to the rest of society? In reality, is that not a consequence of the marketplace, whether it is good or bad?

David Henry: The reality depends on how you perceive it. It is an open market. Some people have deeper pockets than others, so of course there will be people who will bid more than others. It depends on their perception of risk, when they will get their reward from it, and so forth. It is not necessarily a simple linear discussion of the sort, “They will always win”. People have different appetites for investment in different parts of the market or, indeed, the geography of a place. First of all, there is a need to understand how markets function.

However, your point does rather chime with what I was saying: that this is about understanding how those debates, negotiations and rules of the road are applied. In my practical experience, the ability to understand the equation, as I put it, is not very strong in some places, so the negotiating position is weaker for some people and some authorities to understand exactly the scope of a negotiation and approaching things in more innovative ways. We had the example of Birmingham just now. Are there different elements of the equation that can be brought in to deliver goods to the benefit of the broader community? If you have somebody who is vastly experienced and somebody who has little experience having that conversation, it is one-way traffic, and that may be the sort of discussion that you are referring to. This goes back to my point about signposting: where do you go for best advice, how do you apply that best advice, how do you feel that you have a rational, balanced decision out of these issues?

Lord Woolmer of Leeds: Many local authorities, through no fault of their own, have inadequate numbers of planners and architects. They have inexperience, and some of them have a rapid turnover of agency planners. Is it not inevitable that in many local authorities the experience and ability to compete on equal terms in the marketplace with perfectly reasonably hard-headed developers is a bit of a one-sided market? Is that not the reality?

David Henry: I sympathise with that point. I just said that. You have taken it a step further. There is a degree of truth in what you say. The resourcing, the skill sets, the understanding of mechanisms can be one-sided, so where does one look for support and experience to find more confidence to have a dialogue around these issues?

Lord Woolmer of Leeds: So what is your advice to local authorities?

David Henry: First of all, I would say prioritisation and whether the built environment is seen as a key service. With all due respect, we have put a lot of investment as a nation into our health and education. We have just talked about the longevity of our built environment. Is it not as much a key service at some level as anything else? Therefore, the resourcing to address the under provision would be an important element to that. In the short run, as I said, there is a need for signposting: where to go to find the right advice, whether independently from district valuers, the Planning Inspectorate, RICS, RIBA, whoever it is, to look at that. Thirdly, there is also a need to look at deploying those resources as effectively as possible through the sharing and pooling of resources, particularly cross-boundary—this goes back to the devolution discussion—and whether one needs more national-level

resourcing brought to the fore again so that in effect one has flying squads of expertise to bring into particular areas to call on.

Ruth Reed: It is symptomatic of a loss of skills within local authorities. It does not just apply to viability. We have addressed this in our written responses to your questions.

Q152 Earl of Lytton: I have a particular interest to declare, because I am also a chartered surveyor. I chair one of the other panels that deals with party walls, right to light and other esoteric matters.

I am very interested in this business of what I used to know as a development appraisal, but it gets retrofitted and turned around in different ways. Often we deal with valuation of non-market principles, on which I know the RICS has done a lot of work in the past. We used to laugh about the old business of whether you are buying or selling, because people come to the issue with completely different sets of objectives. Then you have the question of issues that cost money today versus value tomorrow; I am thinking in particular of long-term management, use and enjoyment—the downstream things that build communities, societies, a sense of place. You have touched, first, on making the process more transparent: in other words, the Excel spreadsheet of your development appraisal.

David Henry: Yes.

Earl of Lytton: Do you think that there is value in making more explicit some of the consequences of asking for a certain level of affordable housing, for instance, on the entire scheme and future management project, and in connection with that the costs that might be imposed on a particular developer of doing something that applies to the wider community? In other words, the tariff should not be attached to the particular developer but in some way equalised out. Is there a more explicit process that we can create? Sorry, that is rather a long question.

David Henry: There is quite a lot in there. The last point is the hardest one to respond to. Let me pick up on a few of those points. First of all, it is a day-to-day occurrence in my realm to have exactly those conversations about the short term versus the long term. In fact, you can have whatever this good is, but there is a cost in doing so that is offset somewhere else. For example, if a local priority is the provision of a high level of affordable housing, it may in the overall equation of things—I accept there is a negotiation here—have the knock-on consequence that there is not so much of something else in there. That is for exploration,

but that is how it works. As I said at the beginning, this is the basic equation. Priorities and how you set those come into that.

The second thing is to look for where the added value comes in. There is some very interesting research—I know you are interested in looking at these things. For example, the Prince's Foundation did some great work a few years back on the added value of green space in development. How does property price increase if you have a view over the park, putting it at its simplest? That is very interesting, because that is another aspect of built-environment quality reflecting on the property value, hence the valuation—discounted cash flow, or whatever approach one is taking—and how one calculates the effect of that. Again, one of the aspects here is looking at how far ahead you go, what assumptions you build into this in relation to the increase in value of the land, property, whatever it is. A lot of investors of course are looking for those horizons: not just the immediacy of planning today but the investment value—the YP, if you want to put it in the jargon—of what is happening over 25 years, et cetera. I wonder if that helps.

The Chairman: I do not think it does.

David Henry: Sorry.

The Chairman: The reality is that you have a nice view over the bay or of the mountains, and then you have the house, and each of them is going to have a different value. They are not going to stay in the same relationship.

David Henry: No, they are not.

The Chairman: Unfortunately, the houses—the bricks and mortar—seem to be accelerating at a much greater rate. Interestingly, people I know who have bought over the river say that it will always be that amount, but it will not necessarily be; it depends what happens to the river.

David Henry: Objectively exploring those issues is quite helpful in trying to look at the overall value.

Q153 Lord Inglewood: Ms Reed, in your private capacity you gave us some thoughts about housing. Listening to you, I sensed that you had thought about it a bit further than that. I wonder whether in your private capacity you are prepared to share those thoughts with us. Do not feel that you have to.

Ruth Reed: My answer follows on from the response to the previous question, in that the provision of social housing and other social infrastructure through viability and the Section

106 and CIL process is forced to be reactive. This is essential social infrastructure, yet it depends entirely on the ability of a local authority, equipped or ill equipped, to negotiate to achieve sufficient money to support the housing that is being built now, with no real ability to plan forward from that. There is a very real prospect that we will marginalise areas that do not have the skills or where the developments are not producing sufficient income through contributions, because their level of social infrastructure, particularly social housing, will be diminished as a consequence of the inability to raise money through the private sector, which is effectively what it is. I am not proposing an alternative—it is way beyond my ability to be able to suggest how else this money may arise—but at the moment it is leading towards a very iniquitous situation, geographically and socially.

Lord Inglewood: In the background papers there was mention of your having a practice and experience based in Wales. I am a Cumbrian. Is it the same problem that we are facing in Cumbria that you are talking about in Wales?

Ruth Reed: To be fair, I ceased practice in Wales in 2006, so I do not have current knowledge. I cannot comment on how it works there any more, I am afraid. Sorry.

David Henry: Can I pick up on that, because it is quite an interesting perception? With the reduction of public sector expenditure, as a generality the public do not realise how many of the public goods, whether it is the primary school, the road, the park, are now provided out of private sector development, so the equation, as we put it, the dialogue, is a matter for that prioritisation. As I said in response just now, what comes first—the primary school, et cetera? It is those issues that are the immediate ones, balanced against the longer-term issues of added value and so forth that we have touched on.

Lord Inglewood: Let us talk about housing, for example. Where I live, housing is substantially less expensive than it is in, say, the south-east. The ability of the developer to deliver the school, which costs the same, more or less, wherever you are, is curiously severely diminished.

David Henry: Absolutely.

The Chairman: It skews it completely.

Baroness Whitaker: I just want to pick up on what Mr Henry said. Do you think the rules of the road should be changed in the public interest?

David Henry: May I ask for clarification?

Baroness Whitaker: You keep referring to the rules of the road, which is the system that produces the viability problems that we heard about. Do you think the rules should be changed?

David Henry: As I said in response—we have put this in our evidence—it is about pointing people to where they find those rules, if I can term it like that, and the processes by which valuation and negotiation take place. The National Planning Policy Framework and the planning policy guidelines take you to a certain point, but they do not take you further and tell you how you calculate where the good practice examples are, and where one looks for them.

Baroness Whitaker: Are you recommending a change in the guidance?

David Henry: Not a change in the guidance, but taking the guidance perhaps a step further.

Baroness Whitaker: Maybe we could ask for something in writing. It would be very helpful, if you do not mind setting that out.

David Henry: I suspect it is there, but as a user of the system you get to the point where you think, “It’s all smoke and mirrors because I don’t know where to look to find out how those rules are applied”. It is there, but you need to be able to hunt it out. I suggest that the rules need to be clarified to that degree.

Q154 Baroness Young of Old Scone: If everybody else is declaring interests, I ought to declare that I am an honorary fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. It means that I get my subscription free, which is even better. I want to talk about sustainability and resilience. We have seen zero-carbon homes gone, the sustainable building code gone, and quite a few other things are going. What would you do to try and redress that? Do you think that in the current red in tooth and claw drive to get development to happen this is an unfortunate and necessary casualty of the process?

Ruth Reed: The RIBA’s position is very clear on this: we cannot rush for quantity and lose quality. That applies to performance as it does to any other aspect of the built environment. We cannot reach a point at which we are so keen to build houses that we accept that they put a greater load on this planet. As far as the institute is concerned, it is not an ethical position that can be sustained. Without making any political point, you have been talking about 30 to 50 years hence. This has to be part of the consideration: that buildings can continue to perform to the best of our current knowledge and technological ability. It would

be very wrong to lose sight of what we know about the impact of how much carbon is wasted through the built environment.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Can I take that one stage further? Are you saying that at the moment we are building buildings that in the future are not sufficiently sustainable, not just in a carbon sense but in other ways as well?

Ruth Reed: We know that we can build better. What we have lost at the moment is the regulatory and political drive to do that. It is regrettable. We need to go back to a point where we are constantly pushing the average to get better and the very best to innovate. I am very sorry that we appear to have lost that drive, particularly on carbon sustainability.

The Chairman: There is also the consideration of developments in building materials. We were quite struck by Quinlan Terry, who said that nobody has yet developed an effective seal between glass and steel; they all go eventually. He made me think. We have all these huge buildings using these seals and they are all coming unstuck in the building I live in now. It is a risky job.

Ruth Reed: We know that when mankind is pushed to innovate there is extraordinary capacity.

The Chairman: That is true.

Ruth Reed: We have removed the push at the moment.

Baroness Andrews: Could you give us a list of the deregulatory arrangements introduced over the past five years in order that we can evidence exactly what you have said about the loss of quality, and test that against what the developers have told us about what they would like to build and the viability test?

Ruth Reed: We can certainly provide that.

The Chairman: That would be very helpful. Thank you.

Q155 Baroness Whitaker: Ruth Reed referred to a lack of public sector skills shortages in the built environment professions. I would like to ask both of you how this might be remedied. What other changes are necessary to ensure that existing built environment skills and expertise are better co-ordinated, because you have also commented on the lack of that?

Ruth Reed: We suggested, particularly with reference to the historic environment but generally across the board, that there are skills out in the private sector that would be available to local authorities if they want them.

Baroness Whitaker: If they had the money to pay for them?

Ruth Reed: There is also the requirement for developers to pay for design review, so you could very rapidly get to a point at which you could invite the professional bodies and representatives of the various built environment professions to have a proactive input into the design of places and buildings.

Baroness Whitaker: By “proactive” you mean earlier on in the process?

Ruth Reed: Everything that we know about design review is that it is most effective very early on in the process. If you attempt to influence a building or development that has gone a long way down, it is counterproductive for all involved. There is help out there. Local authorities have been inconsistent in their take-up. There is not necessarily an understanding of the importance of good design.

Baroness Whitaker: How can their understanding be improved? Are we talking about courses for councillors?

Ruth Reed: You heard that in the previous session that I sat in on. I gather there is plenty going on.

The Chairman: Mr Henry, do you want to come in on this?

David Henry: Just to endorse what has been said from practical experience. I am based in Cambridge. I have taken a scheme three times back to the local design panel before it is even submitted as a planning application. Those initiatives are there and they work very successfully at building in the quality before the scheme gets to the decision-making point.

The Chairman: Can you give us a little background to that particular issue if it has gone back three times? Were the parameters not right?

David Henry: In the particular instance that I evidence, there are a number of subjective choices to be made in design. Therefore, it becomes a dialogue to get to a balance and think, “Okay, this is about right between various different factors”.

The Chairman: Are the public involved in this at all?

David Henry: Yes.

The Chairman: You poll them?

David Henry: Not within the immediate design conservation panel made up of the various professionals, but certainly as a factor into the design process through the consultations taking place as an input to that.

The Chairman: Do you think three times is the average?

David Henry: No. This is a very special case. It was to support the view that it is not a whim; these things do happen very effectively.

Q156 Baroness Rawlings: I had better declare an interest as a member of the Georgian Group in relation to the question I am about to ask. In your RIBA submission you take the view of the importance of heritage and how it is understood, which is dear to my heart. How do you feel the public sector gives better recognition to the importance of heritage assets, history, quality of life, and difficulties perhaps with listing? What challenges do your members face in handling conflicting demands of new and existing buildings?

Ruth Reed: There is a question of capacity in local authorities in heritage, as there is in all other aspects of both planning and managing development. The danger is there is a very safe route to saying no to intervention in the historic environment rather than a considered route that says, "How best can this environment be sustained into the future? How can buildings be readapted? How can places be made part of our living lives again rather than preserved?" There is capacity outside of the local authorities to assist with this. The RIBA has a conservation architecture accreditation, which is held in high regard by Historic England and is a prerequisite of their grants system. These are people who understand not only the sensitivities of the environment and the significance of the buildings they are dealing with but how they can be sensitively reused or enhanced and brought back. There is a danger that the heritage environment becomes a "them and us" between the local authorities and the agents outside. Architects and surveyors are extremely sensitive to the needs of those environments. They are the line between clients who may be pushing things a little too far and the local authorities. It is important that there is a mutual respect for what we all know, and perhaps there can be some degree of consultation about heritage matters with those of us working in the private sector. We are not pushing for major change. We know a great deal about how buildings can be managed well.

Baroness Andrews: You have talked about capacity and it is a real issue because of the loss of conservation officers. I declare an interest as an ex-chairman of English Heritage. Would you not agree that there is a perfect storm because of the loss of conservation officers and the potential loss of capacity from some of the agencies such as Historic England and English Heritage, which is making it much more difficult for local authorities to hold the line on the historic environment? I am not talking about monuments; I am talking about the everyday historic environment that we live within. Do you have views on that?

Ruth Reed: The RIBA is conscious of this and is currently doing some research into the responsible reuse of buildings and what a proportionate response is. We have a huge number of listed buildings and conservation areas in this country, which, if all ossified and prevented from change, would contribute to society's ills and lack of addressing the needs of climate change. We need to take a responsible and forward-looking attitude to that. We will work with Historic England to have that recognised by local authority planners as a matter of authority so that they can rely on that advice, because there is a lack of capacity. The institutes are trying to assist. The problem is that without a conservation officer, even the question of knowing where to go and how to approach the information that is being thrown at an authority has been lost as well.

The Chairman: Mr Henry, what do you think?

David Henry: I am going to make a connection between the two parts here. First of all, the heritage aspects of the historic environment are always evolving and changing, so it is a misconception to look at them as being somehow fixed. It is absolutely essential that we understand that process and where beneficial change can take place, and the added value—sorry to use that hackneyed phrase—from that change can be achieved without denigrating the underlying integrity of the asset. Between the institutions, there is quite a lot of research looking into those issues.

Picking up on the first point, again from practical experience, listed buildings tend to be described as the skeleton of the building, the bricks and mortar, but not the life of the building and its longevity. Understanding its cultural capital, as it were, its historic and economic interests, the well-being that it adds to place, are all aspects of added value that get lost in the smoke of discussion about simply the architecture, dare I say it. We should pick up on that and say, “No, there is a future, they can be dynamic and positive assets”. Unfortunately, that does lead back to viability and how one achieves that, but that may be a different aspect of the discussion.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. We come to our last question.

Q157 Earl of Lytton: I am looking at some of the criticisms encountered from the evidence that has come before us on the quality of new housing development and lack of good design in the built environment. We know some of the reasons for this: cost-cutting and not factoring in the long-term durability, because things can be sold at any price because of the demand. We know there is that element there. Could you share your views on how we can

support good design that fosters a long-term sense of place and the value that people attach to it in use? How might this be promoted through the national policy? Are there ways in which built-environment professionals can work together to support that element of better quality design that makes all the difference in the long term?

David Henry: Perhaps I will start on this one. First of all, you used the word “sharing”. You heard from both of us there is an increasing and strong element of that, perhaps coming from different aspects, but understanding and addressing common issues. We live in the era of what is called “big data”. There is a lot of information out there that we need to pool. Where is the cost benefit of this? How does the equation work between design and cost of construction in return? That is one aspect of it: the bricks, as it were, of getting to quality design. Having a good understanding is very important.

Secondly, research is very important—looking forward at these very diverse and multi-faceted issues. We just touched on the role of heritage, which has more to it than simply the framework of the building. How do we make sure that quality of design is understood, dynamic and multi-faceted in that respect? So research would be the second key thing that I would put in there.

The third is making sure that construction and design skills are supported and understood. Earlier you heard about training for decision-makers. Dare I say that that also applies to professionals, making sure that they understand the width of skill they require to get to good design? Beyond that, we do not have a monopoly on good ideas. There is good experience globally, never mind within the UK, that needs to be brought to bear on these issues to challenge poor design and to say, “Look, it can and should be done in a better way”.

Ruth Reed: I, too, have three points. The first is going back to earlier discussion, which is the promotion of excellence by example in the public sector. There is a real opportunity for the public sector to demonstrate what it requires of its built environment through its own work. The second is to put in place a requirement to review good practice to understand why that has benefited. You will be aware that a school won the Stirling prize again. That is a fantastic example of where good design has benefited a whole community. We do not always learn from what we do well. Frequently, we appear to learn from what we do not do well. It would be useful to have a review process to support that excellence agenda.

Baroness Whitaker: Are you talking post-occupancy?

Ruth Reed: Post-occupancy or some kind of holistic community review beyond building users. The implications of good design in public sector buildings go beyond the immediate users and benefit the community.

The third is regulatory change. You may or may not be aware that the RIBA began a campaign called HomeWise, which looked at the size of homes. That began in 2012. We found that new homes were some 7.5 square metres smaller than good homes standards would suggest, which is the size of a small bedroom. We have revisited those figures. The report is not ready yet. Unfortunately, from what we can see, it shows that these matters have not improved. The Government brought in discretionary home sizes through the planning system, but unfortunately with the construction of the planning system requiring evidence leading to policy change, leading to adoption only where a local authority is interested in bringing it in, that is going to be a very slow process. In a system that is underresourced, it will probably not happen, not for lack of will but for lack of time and money. How many more very small houses are going to be built before anything can be done about it?

The RIBA will be putting the idea of an amendment through to the Housing and Planning Bill suggesting that it should be moved to the building regulations. This would be a very simple, straightforward way of ensuring that an aspect of good design was brought about through regulation. It will change a lot of people's lives to live in larger homes—somewhere for the kids to do their homework and with proper storage—all the things that we have identified are missing from quite a lot of the developer housing on offer at the moment.

Q158 The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. I am sorry if I truncated some of the answers, but we started at 10 o'clock this morning. New subjects keep arising. We need a long breather to go back over the evidence. This has been very useful and the transcript will be very useful to us. I will reread your submission, it has been very helpful. If you were sitting where I am, what glaring questions do you think we have missed?

Ruth Reed: This is a personal response. At the moment, people who are directly affected by development are not necessarily the people making the decisions about whether it should happen or not.

The Chairman: I think that is coming through. There needs to be much more consultation about the needs of every human being. It is the biggest investment and part of their lives, yet they are not really consulted.

Baroness Whitaker: Not so much consultation as involvement in the process of working out what their place ought to be.

The Chairman: It is the same sort of thing, is it not, consulting what they want for the rest of their lives?

David Henry: If I can endorse that, it is about the dislocation of place and how that place changes. I touched on that in my example of how funding takes place in many of the facilities the whole community uses. It is about how that is done through engagement, whether it is through localism, plan-making, design, charrettes, whatever it might be. There are a multitude of ways of doing that. It would be very interesting to explore how one re-establishes that connection with place.

The Chairman: Have any surveys been done about that mismatch of the final product with what the local people really wanted?

Ruth Reed: My point was rather that it may not be the local people who eventually use the buildings.

The Chairman: Yes, it is the ones in 30 years' time.

Ruth Reed: It is also the people who move into the houses, who were not part of the democratic process that led to them being built. It is a wider problem, way beyond the scope of looking at the existing situation.

The Chairman: True. Do you think any country has mastered it?

Ruth Reed: I doubt it.

The Chairman: In one way, that is a relief.

Lord Inglewood: Can you suggest how you consult the people who are not yet born?

The Chairman: We are not going into eugenics. Thank you very much. I am sure I speak for the whole Committee when I say that we are delighted that you are here and you have stimulated us. It will make very interesting reading. If you think, "Gosh, why didn't I say that?", or "Do they really know the implications of X or Y?", could you jot it down or give us a call?

Ruth Reed: Of course.

The Chairman: This will all come together in January when we come back after Christmas, because we have to have this report ready by 23 March. That is going to be a really long haul. At the moment we are garnering all this very interesting evidence. We have already

had 147 written submissions. It seems like 400. That is not a complaint. Thank you very much.