

Speech: Housing Market Intelligence conference 2018

Thank you Steve. You are quite right I am this Housing Minister this week.

You are probably wonder who is this guy? You are quite right, I was appointed Housing Minister 12 weeks ago.

Plucked from obscurity from the Department for Work and Pensions where I had been responsible for housing benefit and introduced to the dynamics of social housing.

Before that I developed commercial property in the 1990s and later became the finance director of a small boutique development firm.

When the Prime Minister asked me to take on this job, she was clear about my task. These are now 3 words I live by: more, better, faster.

So today I'd like to talk a little more about that mission statement – more, better, faster – and how we can get there.

More

Starting with more. Back in 2010 we were getting 134,000 net additional homes a year. You are have all done very well and today that's up 55% to 217,000.

My first note to you is thank you! On behalf of government and the hundreds of thousands of people who now have a home.

But moving forward to our target is 300,000 – we're a government in delivery mode. But that needs a bold and radical approach.

Anyone that wants to be building houses should be enabled to do that.

The last time Britain was building enough homes, local councils were making a huge contribution.

And again today, councils want to step up and play their part. But they need to borrow more to build more.

So, as the [Prime Minister announced](#) in her conference speech, we're scrapping the cap on how much councils can borrow against their Housing Revenue Account – entirely.

We've empowered them to build the next generation of council houses – homes that will help make the housing market work for everyone.

As well as enabling local authorities to deliver as many as 10,000 homes a year, it will help diversify our building market, with councils able to take on projects and sites private developers might consider too small.

Homes England – our new national housing agency – is buying and assembling land and building the infrastructure we need. They're ironing out those market failures that all too often hold us back.

And we're freeing up surplus public land for development – from the likes of the NHS and the Ministry of Defence – enabling thousands of homes to be built and helping us to reinvest in vital public services.

But as everyone here knows, to build more homes we've got to move beyond that conventional wisdom of supply and demand.

We need to recognise that this is not just a housebuilding industry, but a finance industry. When I was involved it was much about our finance structure, than our supply numbers.

I'm reminded of that great moment in the film *The Founder*, where Ray Croc – the guy who expanded McDonald's and made it what it is today – was getting schooled by his financial advisor.

He told him: "You don't seem to realise what business you're in. You're not in the burger business. You're in the real estate business".

Like them, we recognise that land and finance are at the heart of growth.

And since the crash of 2007-08, these have been 2 particularly tough challenges.

It's why we in government are taking a more assertive approach on both – intervening in the market where it isn't working.

But there are other clever things we can do, like our recent deal with Barclays: we've put in £125 million targeted at housebuilding with a tilt to SMEs, and they've topped it up to a billion pounds.

Or the Build to Rent market, which hardly existed 5 years ago, but because of our support we've now got more than 125,000 Build to Rent homes delivered or in the pipeline.

It's only these kinds of bold and innovative steps that can get us to our 300,000 targets, and we are keen to do more of this.

Lastly, we need to send long term capacity signals.

Ambitious developers need to know their commitment is being matched by the government, which is shown with our £44 billion of total investment.

Better

But building more doesn't mean we can't build better – we've got to quash that myth for good.

In fact, the more we build, the more important it is we get it right.

Those of you who follow politics may have heard of Lynton Crosby, who famously said “you have to look at the qual over the quad mate”.

Design matters on all sets of levels, for planning and acceptability.

It’s perfectly possible for modern, efficient, technology driven design to echo our history and reflect the local area without becoming pastiche.

And when it comes to design, no matter what you do, there are always people who won’t be happy. It’s a bit like being a politician!

But we know what those places should feel like.

Places that not only make you happy but keep you well.

Places that can move you from fear and anxiety to hope and happiness.

Places that welcome you, inspire you and smash stigma.

Because no matter where you’re coming from on this, our first obligation must be to the people we serve.

And I believe there is a role for government here, to ensure people get what they need.

The new revised [National Planning Policy Framework](#) – our new planning rulebook – gives communities a greater voice on the look and feel of developments.

Because in decades to come, we want to look back on this new golden age of house building, not through the windscreen of a bulldozer, but with the view to treasure, preserve and invest in it.

And today, I don’t think many people can honestly say they’re building the conservation areas of the future.

But the bottom line is this: build more beautifully, sell more houses.

Because you’re more likely to get permission and you’re more likely to find willing buyers if you do.

Today, 60% of people surveyed said they’d never live in a new-build. If people think that, clearly we’re not building the right types of new-build.

This has to be about design right? Any other industry with this response to their product would be in trouble.

I urge you to look at design.

Developments of 500 units or more are bigger than most villages, so we need to think in terms of those kinds of neighbourhoods.

Although they won’t necessarily need a world-class concert hall like here at the Barbican, our communities do need vital infrastructure like roads,

clinics and schools.

Get that right, and you will find yourself in that most rare and wonderful of situations – one where residents actually welcome new development.

When you as an industry have moved into your 90s and retired. Will you look back at what you build over your career with pride?

Have you built the conservation area of the future?

Faster

And the third area is faster. What can we do to power through to 300,000 homes a year.

While building better will get permissions up, we also need a faster and more flexible planning system to match.

That's what the new revised National Planning Policy Framework does.

We have had big regulation on planning and asking councils to be upfront on what they need for their 106 requirements.

We want to give you as an industry more certainty on how you can build, where you can build and what you can build.

So, the whole process is quicker.

We are also pressuring local authorities, to have a clear plan in place for their local need.

Both through the National Planning Policy Framework delivery test and political pressure.

But we also need to see a change on the side of developers.

If you took a builder Back to the Future in the DeLorean from 1985 to a present-day construction site, they would find that very little has actually changed.

Innovation is coming, and I urge you to grasp it.

We are starting to see it already with new modern methods of construction, offsite construction.

There's robot brick layers who can build a house 4 times faster than a human; push fit systems that are changing plumbing; and before long we'll have far-field charging transforming how electricians work.

The winds of change are coming and I don't want to see anyone become the Kodak of the housebuilding industry.

Obsolete because new technologies have taken over.

And that's not just about technology – it's also about talent.

Look at the financial industry, highly regulated and only 10 years ago dominated by a few small big players at the top.

Innovation has blown a hurricane through the finance industry, with talented members of those organisations have started their own thing.

We want to see small and medium sized builders, and even people who are half way down big organisations, to think they have the support to become the next Lawrie Barratt.

I want to see a vigorous and vibrant market, competing on design, on volume, on quality and on tenure.

We'll support you. Our [Home Building Fund](#) is giving SME builders the confidence to grow while promoting modern methods of construction and custom build.

So far, more than £120 million of loans have been agreed for projects using modern methods of construction, and we're working with the finance and insurance industries to make these properties more mortgageable.

Conclusion

So why are we doing this? What's this for? Let's make hay when the sun is shining. All the stars are aligning. Demand is there with more land becoming available.

Cheap rent is available, and the government is able to assist when it's not.

The ambitious is there, with our Ox-Cam-Milton Keynes corridor is going to deliver 1,000,000 homes by 2050, with little resistance from local authorities.

All the stars are aligned for industry to make hay.

We need to bear in mind that we don't operate on an island. That there is currently a breakdown in society in this sense of intergeneration fairness.

Young people have a growing sense of resentment to a housing industry they feel has failed them.

Owning a home is becoming a distant dream to people in their 20s and 30s.

They don't feel like the generations before them is giving them a fair deal.

We have a moral duty to the future generation.

The triple challenge – more, better, faster – is the key to to this country's happiness, health and prosperity.

If we get to 300,000 by the mid-2020s, I hope and believe future generations

will look back at us as a golden generation of housebuilding.

And I look forward to working with all of you, to build a housing market that works for everyone.

Thank you.

[Press release: Housing experts join forces to boost property agent standards](#)

- Housing Minister Heather Wheeler announces plans to raise standards across the property agent sector.
- Chaired by Lord Best, a new working group will make recommendations to better support homebuyers, sellers, landlords, leaseholders and tenants.
- The group will report their findings to government by summer 2019.

Plans to raise standards across the entire property agent sector so home buyers, sellers, tenants, landlords and leaseholders receive the best service possible have been announced today (12 October 2018) by Housing Minister Heather Wheeler MP.

A new working group, chaired by Lord Best, and made up of experts from across the property sector will consider options. This will include the case for regulation and the introduction of mandatory qualifications for all property agents so tenants, homebuyers and sellers can be confident they are getting a professional service and are being charged fairly.

At the moment, anyone can operate as a property agent without any qualifications or professional oversight. Many take a professional approach and sign up to standards of practice through membership of a professional body, but others do not.

The working group will consider the entire property agent sector to ensure any new framework, including any professional qualifications requirements, a Code of Practice, and a proposed independent regulator, is consistent across letting, managing and estate agents.

Speaking following the announcement, Housing Minister, Heather Wheeler MP said:

For too long, many people have faced incurring fees and bad service from a number of property agents. People should have confidence when buying, selling or renting a home.

Lord Best's wealth of knowledge will provide a valuable insight and help us make necessary changes to ensure consumers have confidence when buying, selling, letting or renting their home.

Lord Best will be joined by representatives of agents and consumers, as well as independent experts, with the group instructed to report back to government in summer 2019.

Lord Best said:

There have been calls for tighter, fairer regulation of property agents from those representing tenants, landlords and agents themselves.

I am delighted to work with government, industry and consumers to advise on how we can accomplish this in practice, and I look forward to our working group achieving real progress together.

Other members of the group include representatives from the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), the National Landlords Association, Citizens Advice, the Association of Residential Letting Agents (ARLA Propertymark) and the National Association of Estate Agents (NAEA Propertymark). This is to ensure the entire sector is represented and the needs of both businesses and consumers are considered.

Lord Best is an independent cross bencher and social housing leader. See his [full biography](#).

The principal aim of the Regulating Property Agents Working Group will be to advise the government on a new regulatory approach to letting, managing and estate agents, in line with the government's responses to its calls for evidence on:

- protecting consumers in the letting and managing agent market
- and improving the home buying and selling process

In particular, the Working Group will be responsible for advising on:

- a model for an independent property-agent regulator, including how it will operate and how it will enforce compliance
- a single, mandatory and legally-enforceable Code of Practice for letting and managing agents, and whether similar could be provided for estate agents

- a system of minimum entry requirements and continuing professional development for letting, managing and estate agents
- a standardised approach for presenting transparent service charges to leaseholders and freeholders
- an easier statutory-backed process for consumers to challenge unfair service charges
- whether other fees and charges which affect both leaseholders and freeholders are justified; should be capped or banned
- further measures to professionalise estate agency
- as well as additional matters which in its opinion support the aims above

Recommendations are of relevance to the whole of the UK. Lettings and managing agents powers are devolved, but estate agency powers are reserved.

A [recent survey](#) by Which? found that 85% of landlords who use an agent are satisfied with the service and 67% of tenants were satisfied with the way their agent repairs and maintains their home.

Press release: £3m Aspiration Fund to help boost sports in the Tokyo Games

Olympic and Paralympic sports outside the World Class Programme will be able to bid for additional investment to help more talented athletes compete at Tokyo 2020, Sports Minister Tracey Crouch announced today.

The £3 million Aspiration Fund will allow sports who do not currently receive full UK Sport funding to develop plans to help teams and athletes qualify.

Sports eligible to apply for the fund include all the unfunded summer Olympic and Paralympic sports, the new sports for the Tokyo Games and those currently in receipt of individual athlete medal support plan funding from UK Sport.

Alongside their qualification plan, sports seeking funding will be asked to submit details of how they will capitalise on the impact of competing at the Games and engage and inspire communities.

The plans will also need to align with the outcomes set out in the Government's Sporting Future strategy to redefine what success looks like in sport: physical well-being, mental well-being, individual development, social and community development and economic development.

Tracey Crouch, Minister for Sport and Civil Society, said:

"The Aspiration Fund will give more sports the chance to inspire the nation and shine at Tokyo 2020 and beyond. This £3 million bridges a gap between grassroots and elite funding, and will help sports grow and develop future champions."

"UK Sport investment has transformed Britain into an Olympic and Paralympic powerhouse. But there are sports, not on UK Sport's world class programme, that do a huge amount of good in communities that we can help on their path to the podium."

Liz Nicholl, CEO of UK Sport said: "This new Aspiration Fund is a fantastic opportunity for some sports to get on track for the Tokyo Games.

"Many of the sports we are currently unable to support, while further away from reaching the podium, have great potential not only to inspire through their performances on the field of play but also to have a genuine social impact in communities across the UK.

"We'd like to thank the Government for their continued support for UK Sport's mission to inspire the nation through Olympic and Paralympic success."

The grants will run to the end of the Tokyo 2020 cycle.

Notes to Editors

Grant recipients are likely to be announced by UK Sport in December 2018. Grants from the Aspiration Fund will be capped at £500k for team sports and £275k for individual sports. Grants from the Aspiration Fund will run to the end of the Tokyo 2020 cycle.

Speech: Ensuring Free and Fair Elections in DRC

Thank you Mr President, and let me begin by thanking SRSZ Zerrougui both for her briefing and for the excellent assistance and advice that you gave the Council during our visit last week. I'd also like to thank Special Envoy Djinnit for his briefing and for the work that he's been doing in the region to support implementation of the 31 December Agreement.

Mr President, there are only 73 days left before elections in the DRC. These

elections will be crucial, both to the people of the DRC and for the prospect of peace and stability in the Great Lakes region. If successful, as the Ambassador from France has said, this will prove a historic turning point – the first peaceful, democratic transfer of power in the DRC's history, and it will serve as a foundation on which to build peace, stability and prosperity.

I believe it's important that we as a Council recognise the progress that has been made in the DRC. In particular, the publication of the list of candidates for presidential, provincial and parliamentary elections, and the fact that all parties so far have stuck to the electoral timetable that's been set out.

But if I personally took one thing away from the Council's visit to the DRC, it's that there is still much more work to be done. For elections to be credible, there needs to be an environment conducive to holding free and fair elections. But there remains distrust between opposition figures, civil society and the government, and many Congolese clearly feel that the conditions for credible elections do not currently exist.

There remain a number of unresolved issues:

First, the electronic voting machines. SRSG Zerrougui mentioned the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's study into these electronic voting machines and the recommendations they have put forward. We would urge CENI to implement those recommendations on how to improve the machines, and we would encourage CENI to undertake outreach with the opposition and with civil society on how the machines will work and how CENI is going about implementing those recommendations. We would also encourage the opposition to engage constructively with CENI when it comes to making the best of the electronic voting machines.

Second, there are questions around voter registration, and we urge CENI to implement the recommendations of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie.

And third, as the Ambassador of Kuwait has highlighted, the 31 December Agreement contained a number of confidence-building measures, especially with regard to freedom of assembly and expression. We very much welcome President Kabila's commitment to this Council that his government would allow peaceful rallies to take place in the run-up to the election.

And fourth, we believe that independent election observation would help build trust and confidence within the DRC, and we welcome President Kabila's commitment to facilitate observers from the region.

And fifth and finally, nobody I think underestimates the logistical challenges of organising three sets of elections on the same day. MONUSCO has offered its support to the government and we hope very much that the government will take MONUSCO up on this offer.

Madam President, MONUSCO continues to play a vital role in DRC, both in supporting elections and in protecting civilians. The UK is deeply concerned

about the deteriorating security situation in North Kivu, South Kivu, Kasai and Tanganyika and the impact this has on the civilian population. This is a very worrying trend and we support the Secretary-General's call for the authorities, with the support of MONUSCO, to take the necessary steps to protect civilians.

We are also concerned about the increase in reported human rights abuses and violations from July to August 2018 compared to the same period last year. As the Ambassador from Sweden said, it is particularly concerning that 59% of the violations across the country were perpetrated by State agents, and we do call on the DRC government to spare no effort in bringing those responsible for such abuses and violations to account.

Finally, we remain very concerned about the Ebola outbreak in eastern DRC. We welcome the leadership of the DRC Government, in cooperation with the WHO and MONUSCO, in responding swiftly to the Ebola outbreak and we remain ready to provide further support.

In conclusion, I'd like to reiterate the importance of the next 73 days. We have come a long way, but there is still much to be done. This Council, together with the region, must remain engaged and supportive to ensure credible, transparent elections lead to a peaceful transfer of power.

Thank you.

[News story: Reformed Plug-In Car Grant extended into next decade](#)

The government has today (11 October 2018) announced changes to funding to support purchasing the next 35,000 of the cleanest vehicles.

For the last 7 years, the Plug-in Car Grant (PICG) has provided a discount to the price of over 160,000 new ultra-low emission vehicles.

These changes to financial incentives reflect the ongoing success of the PICG in increasing uptake of electric vehicles, a key part of the government's [Road to Zero strategy](#).

The PICG has helped the plug-in hybrid market become more established, and the government will now focus its support on zero emission models like pure electric and hydrogen fuel cell cars.

The changes to the grant announced today will mean that the grant rate for Category 1 vehicles will move from £4,500 to £3,500 and Category 2 and 3 vehicles will no longer be eligible for the grant.

The PICG was first introduced in 2011, designed to help stimulate the early market for ultra-low emission vehicles.

So far it has supported the purchase of over 160,000 new cars. With plug-in hybrid models like the Mitsubishi Outlander becoming popular among consumers the government is focussing its attention to zero emission models such as the Nissan Leaf and BMW i3.

Plug-in hybrid vehicles are among the cleanest on the road, and can deliver significant CO2 savings compared to petrol/diesel cars. These vehicles will continue to receive support through lower car tax rates, grants for charging infrastructure and local incentives (such as free parking).

Following the success of the PICG scheme the government has rolled out Plug-In Van, and Motorcycle grants, available to both private and business buyers across the UK.

Following the [Last Mile call for evidence](#), and in light of evidence from other countries, a £2 million fund is planned. This will contribute 20% of the purchase price of new e-cargo bikes, up to a threshold of £5,000. Funding will be conditional on individual businesses following a code of cycle safety good practice.

This new fund will help to cut congestion and improve air quality, encouraging companies to replace older, polluting vans with a zero emission alternative to create a cleaner, greener future. Money will be split between larger fleets and smaller operators to ensure benefits are available to and spread between all sizes of business.

Furthermore, the department has separately set aside £100,000 for capacity building in the industry, and will be reviewing opportunities and potential measures to encourage commercial leasing of e-cargo bikes in order to support widespread uptake over the longer term.

We are investing in the design, development and infrastructure needed to speed up the uptake of green vehicles. We are providing £1.5 billion for ultra-low emission vehicles by 2020, and creating a £400 million fund to invest in the roll-out of charging point infrastructure, in partnership with industry.

Since its introduction in 2011 the PICG has:

- supported the purchase of over 160,000 new cars. 100,000 of which are plug-in hybrids
- seen over half a billion pounds of investment in the cars of the future
- ultra-low emission vehicles are already placed into different categories on the basis of their CO2 emissions and their zero emission range:
 - Category 1 – CO₂ emissions of less than 50g/km and a zero emission range of at least 70 miles
 - Category 2 – CO₂ emissions of less than 50g/km and a zero emission range between 10 and 69 miles
 - Category 3 – CO₂ emissions of 50 to 75g/km and a zero emission

range of at least 20 miles

- the changes to the grant announced today will mean:
 - the grant rate for Category 1 vehicles will move from £4,500 to £3,500
 - Category 2 and 3 vehicles will no longer be eligible for the grant
- new grant rates will come into effect on Monday 12 November – if sales are higher than expected, we may reduce grant rates earlier than this date
- a new grant rate for category 1 vehicles will be set at £3,500 to reflect the recent reductions in the price of electric vehicles – Category 1 vehicles have CO₂ emissions of less than 50g/km and can travel at least 112 kilometres (70 miles) without any CO₂ emissions from the tailpipe at all

See [Low-emission vehicles eligible for a plug-in grant](#) for more details of what support is available via the PICG, and how we will implement the changes to the grant.