

# Building Better Building Beautiful Commission report launch

Firstly, a warm welcome to today's event from myself.

And a big thanks to our hosts – here at the Garden Museum, which is in many respects a fittingly beautiful venue which speaks of the themes in the report being launched today. It's a historic building that has been put to new uses, it champions trees and gardens. Although there is a lack of Nicholas's orchards, that we are all now going to be planting alongside our homes.

There is an emphasis here on stewardship and on leaving a legacy to future generations.

Principles that, I know, resonated very deeply with our friend and former colleague, Sir Roger Scruton, whose absence today, as Nicholas has already said, I think we all keenly feel.

My thoughts are with Lady Scruton and their children, Sam and Lucy, and all of Sir Roger's friends and family.

And I want to pay tribute again to him, as you have already heard from Nicholas who knew him better than I did, Roger was one of the foremost public intellectuals and a very brave man.

Sir Roger rather diffidently described himself as a "token reactionary", but I think he was more than that.

There were few subjects that he did not turn his mind to – from wine to opera, Baroque architecture to Lebanese history, Kant to the Koran, to name a few.

And unlike politicians, who frequently speak on every subject, he did so with wit, with wisdom and with insight. And this his final work, the work that he did with the Commission and which he continued to work extremely hard on in the final weeks of his life. I hope will stand as part of his incredibly rich legacy.

I was pleased that Sir Roger agreed to return to work on the Commission following the New Statesman's article, and the decision to remove him from his post. This was clearly a deeply regrettable episode, and I'm profoundly sorry for the role that the government played in it.

I'm glad it ended well, with a correction from the journalists, and an apology from my Department, and with Sir Roger back in his rightful place, taking forward the work which he so passionate about.

His championing of beautiful homes rooted in real communities runs right through the very impressive report, that I hope you all will read.

It has been a major undertaking.

And I want to thank Nicholas, who I have got to know well the last six months while I have been Secretary of State, and I wasn't to thank all of your fellow Commissioners – Gail, Mary and Adrian – for your tremendous contribution to this alongside your very busy day jobs.

I'd like to give a special thanks to the advisers to the Commission and to Sir John Hayes, who has helped to rile Parliamentary interest as well.

I'm also very grateful to the many professionals and community representatives whose insight and expertise have helped shape the report and it's very good to see many of you here today.

The report you've produced is important, I think it might prove to be the most important report we have seen for many years. It is important for a number of reasons, not least because of the powerful argument it makes that a sense of place still matters – that people need places more than ever.

And arguably, in our fast-paced, globalised world, with the internet upending old industries and occupations, with the shift in power from east to west. With the prevalent sense of anxiety that creates and with identity politics increasingly sowing division rather than bringing people together. These things matter more than they have mattered at any time in our lifetime.

The report recognises that our identities, identities not just as individuals but as communities, go hand in hand with the places and neighbourhoods in which we live and we work.

And that most of us in the end want to live in strong communities where we can see their unique character, their heritage and culture reflected in the buildings, the playgrounds, the parks and the places that we pass in our daily lives.

These are the places that we can be proud of – where families want to raise their children and where people want to grow old together.

That's why beautiful, high-quality homes must become the norm in this country, not the exception.

And why, as your report says, the people who live in and live next door must again play a leading role in helping to raise the bar and setting the standard.

The three main aims that you've set out with great clarity and eloquence I think will help us get there.

Firstly, to demand beauty – not just for exceptional schemes that win awards, or which are the preserve of the wealthy, but for the places everyone lives in and the places we pass by every day.

Second: That we as a society, as individuals and we, as a Government, must have the confidence to say no to schemes which we know in our hearts are bad

for the people destined to live in them and the surrounding community.

In doing so, we have to nail the misconception that has grown in recent years that quality is the enemy of supply.

We know we must build more homes – and we are building more – last year we built over 240,000 new homes, more than we have built in any of the last thirty years and I don't want to leave you with the wrong impression – I want to be the most pro-development Secretary of State that this country has ever seen.

But there is plenty of evidence, that far from holding us back, championing quality helps us to go further and go faster.

We know that developments of the highest quality with the most attractive designs are approved more quickly, even with the current system for all its faults. That those homes sell faster and that they are enduringly popular.

So let's build more, but build better and in turning to the report's third aim, the need to promote the lost concept of stewardship – let's ensure that all those with a stake in this agenda take a longer-term, sustainable view of communities as communities that are places that must grow but must evolve, that must adapt but which can do so in a way that works for people.

There is therefore very much to welcome in your report – a bold and meaningful challenge to Government, to local councils and to the development industry.

Some elements reflect the work that's already underway, that was began by predecessors and the work that I have begun in the few months I have been Secretary of State.

I've developed a new National Model Design Code which will set out for the first time a clear model for promoting better design and the style of homes across the country, shaped by what local people actually want.

And we are going to be demanding every part of the country to accept our code or preferably create their own that works for them.

And on sustainability, I too want to see a return to planting more trees. I made it a manifesto commitment that we will expect all new streets to be lined with trees and are working to make this a reality. And I hope local councils and developers embrace that as a great new endeavour to make our streets, towns and our cities more beautiful and more healthy places to live.

We are also consulting on the Future Homes Standard, to ensure that developers embrace new technology and do their bit to tackle the threat of climate change. I want to see zero-carbon homes being built as the standard within five years as we learn again how to build and improve our natural environments that the two things can and will work in harmony.

But I can see that there's more that we need to do to ensure our planning system, with all its flaws and complexities and convolutions favours beauty

as the default rather than the exception, with more opportunities for smaller developers, for self-builders, for entrepreneurs, for visionaries for great stewards of their landscapes.

I will establish a "fast track for beauty" where individuals and developers, who have put in the time to create proposals for well-designed buildings, which use high quality-materials which take account of their local setting; that they can see their developments proceed at pace. It can't be right that those individuals, those people who should be held up as the best and the brightest, people who are setting out to create communities as shining cities on a hill. That those individuals to be held up by the planning system and to be treated like the rest. They should receive an expedited planning process or even be removed from the planning system altogether with new, more sophisticated planning freedoms. And that's what we are going to do. The planning system must reward good design.

So, I will be considering changes may be needed to incentivise developers to raise their standards. And to strive to create beauty.

We will, of course be responding in full to all of your recommendations in due course, and I will work with my cabinet colleagues to implement as much of the report as we can – in the knowledge that there has never been a time, certainly not in my lifetime, when this agenda – good quality homes, communities and places – has mattered more.

The late Kenneth Clark, said in his documentary Civilisation, that the test of a Housing Secretary is not the words spoken in a speech, but the buildings built in his or her time in office.

I am therefore determined, inspired by you, to do all I can to help achieve the goal you've set in the report's conclusion – that we should aspire to pass on our heritage, the best of who we are and what we have, to our successors, not depleted but enhanced. And to do that, to bring about a profound and lasting change in the buildings that we build.

To paraphrase Sir Christopher Wren, that in seeking our legacy, we will ask others to simply look around us.

It only remains for me to thank you, once again, for your all your efforts and to say how much I am truly looking forward to working with you in the weeks and months ahead.

Thank you all very much.