

# Heritage speech by the Housing Secretary

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, it's a real pleasure to be here today.

When I walk into my office at the Ministry of Housing each morning, there is a wall of portraits of some of the great reforming ministers who've held my office in the post-war era. From Harold McMillan, Sir Keith Joseph to Michael Heseltine.

I think that some of them have set out to build more homes, some to reform our undoubtedly complex and convoluted housing and planning system and some have used this office to breath new life into communities. Whether that's London's Docklands or inner city Liverpool.

I take inspiration in different ways from each of them and many of their different achievements. And if I am given time to do so – which is not a given in this job, as their do seem to be quite a lot of housing secretaries – I'll seek to carry forward in different ways those different torches that they've brought forward themselves.

Another of my predecessors, John Prescott, in a classic of the genre that he created of inadvertent phrases, he said when he was addressing a Labour Party Conference as Housing Secretary that the green belt was a great post-war achievement, and I intend to build on it.

That isn't one of my priorities, Number 10 will be pleased to hear if they're listening to this speech. But I do want to build upon some of the great things some of my predecessors have achieved when they've really tried to reform the housing market.

But today I want to make an argument that I would suggest has not exercised the considerable talents and imagination of my predecessors nearly as much as one might have wished.

Not, how many homes? Not, where do we build the homes? Or even, for whom are we building homes? Although, it's not unrelated to those very important questions. But, what do those houses actually look like? How do they relate to each other? How are those houses homes? And how do we collectively create places where people can actually build good lives?

And I'd like to thank Policy Exchange and Create Streets for giving me the platform to do so today. Policy Exchange, under Dean's formidable leadership and Create Streets under Nicholas Boyd-Smith's very prescient guidance, has developed an argument, which you are now very familiar with; to coin a phrase, for a "kinder and gentler", a more humane, more beautiful architecture. And above all an argument that appears to be winning.

It's an argument which appears to be turning the tide on the post-war vision of housing.

When I was first appointed just a few months ago I was sent a letter by the Prime Minister congratulating me and he pointed out a phrase in Kenneth Clark (not the MP for Rushcliffe, you won't be surprised to hear), but the author of that seminal series from my childhood, *Civilisation*.

A phrase that he said that:

"If I had to say which was telling the truth about society, a speech by a Minister of Housing or the actual buildings put up in his time, I would believe the buildings."

And I think that was a challenge to me, not to just make fine speeches, but to be judged on the types of buildings that are built whilst we're lucky enough to be in office.

And that's the challenge that I'm going to take up today.

## **RIBA Stirling Prize**

Earlier this month, I was at the RIBA Awards to help announce the winners of the Stirling Prize for the building that has made the greatest contribution to the evolution of architecture in the past year.

As I'm sure some of you will know who follow these things, the winner was Goldsmith Street in Norwich and that became the first-ever social housing scheme to win the Stirling Prize.

These are very beautifully designed homes and they meet the exacting Passivhaus standard for energy efficiency with state-of-the-art insulation, triple-glazed windows, and high-tech fans blowing fresh air in and stale air out.

They come with high ceilings, spacious bedrooms, fibre-optic broadband, garden lawns, parking, communal greens with flowers, plants, benches and safe play areas for children.

It really is a superb development that is deserving of the award.

But I was struck by how, what was actually being celebrated, was remarkably simple. It was even ordinary.

There was even a moment where the architect who presented the award said, "isn't it wonderful that these houses have front doors."

They were terraced houses with doors on streets lined with trees. Things which most people in this country will consider to be pretty straightforward, ordinary features that have existed for hundreds of years.

And, it made me realise that over the last few years many developers, many architects, and, yes, most governments, have suffered from what can only be described as collective amnesia.

We've forgotten what it means to build beautiful homes and create beautiful

places.

We've forgotten the basics of building attractive homes which people can actually take pride in and care for.

The sorts of homes where people want to raise their children, to grow old together, can be good neighbours.

Places which are designed with communities where people can live and pay respect to the identity and heritage of their area.

So Goldsmith Street is not just living proof that new buildings can be attractive and environmentally friendly, important those objectives are and which I'll return to in a moment, it is I think a reconnection with common sense.

The research that my department has been doing shows very vividly, what you heard from Dean in his brief introduction, that unsurprisingly, people care about quality. They care about beauty, they care about a sense of place.

Almost 70% of people who believe new homes are well-built are more likely to support development in their local area.

And unsurprisingly, it's the same story when we talk about the design of places.

The research suggests that the vast majority of people now feel that new build houses must be well designed and if they are, they are far more likely to support new homes being built in their neighbourhood than those who feel that the new houses are likely to be ugly or not in keeping with their local environment.

So if we want to meet the challenge of the housing crisis, we have to make sure that the new homes we build are beautiful, good quality, safe and part of real, functioning communities.

So what are we actually going to do? How are we going to take up the mantle that has been provided to us by Create Streets and Policy Exchange and many others, some of which are represented in this room.

## **The NPPF, BBBC and National Design Guide**

It's now time for government to play its part. We are going to begin that process by creating the first National Design Code.

We've already made some important steps in this regard.

As you know, we've revised [National Planning Policy Framework](#), to make clear that creating high-quality buildings and places must be at the heart of the process.

The Framework expands on the fundamental principles of good design to define what is expected of local authorities and developers to support the creation

of beautiful places.

It also provides guidance for local authorities to explain how planning policies and decisions could facilitate this.

My predecessor, James Brokenshire, appointed the [Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission](#) under Nicholas's leadership along with the great Sir Roger Scruton, to advise the government on how best to promote and increase the use of high-quality design for new build homes and neighbourhoods.

Their [interim report](#), published in July this year, has set out over 30 propositions, including ones to encourage greater community involvement in shaping new homes...

...creating the kinds of places in which people genuinely want to live.

They'll be reporting back later this year and I'm confident that we will be taking forward their recommendations.

But I think we can go significantly further than that. And that's where I hope my new National Design Code will come in.

We're going to be using this to set out a very clear model for the first time for promoting good quality design and the style of homes and neighbourhoods that people actually want to see across the country, not set by edict in Whitehall but shaped by local people.

I want these local Design Guides, which every local authority will be asked to create, to actually become the product of listening to local groups, considering local tradition and embedding in these codes and then in turn embedding that in planning policy, making it a legal right for local people to demand these standards.

And I think these codes will turn out to be quite simple. They'll set for example, a presumption in favour of homes on streets; homes with front doors; homes with fronts and backs; homes with quality facades; roofs in line with local tradition; concerns for local vernacular and heritage. And a presumption, for the first time, in favour of tree-lined streets.

In the last month, we've also launched our [National Design Guide](#) introducing the national gold standard to which local authorities should adhere and use as an essential reference when designing their own tailored guides in due course.

The National Design Guide illustrates how well-designed places that are beautiful, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice.

I think there's a great deal more we can go beyond this and I think we only have to look to some of the great visionaries of the past, people who created beautiful towns and cities in the not too distant past.

People like Ebenezer Howard and Henrietta Barnett who created places people now love and cherish. We want to build upon this.

I want to see today's developers, architects and designers striving to be the Howards and Barnetts of our time – to create green neighbourhoods of the future with social wellbeing, belonging and community cohesion at their heart.

And leaving a green legacy that future generations will thank us for. So we have to set our sights high.

Alongside good quality design and placemaking, we also have to ensure that these new developments are actually gold standards for sustainable, environmentally friendly homes which, like our garden cities of the past, will actually stand the test of time.

## **Future Homes Standard**

In this regard, we are paving the way for our Future Homes Standard that I was able to announce just a few weeks ago.

The [consultation](#) we're running here, which will last until the beginning of next year, will have stronger building regulations to ensure that every new home that's built in this country from 2025 will have low or zero-carbon emissions and the highest levels of energy efficiency.

And we're clear that developers will now need to do their bit in tackling the threat of climate change, embracing new technologies, such as air source heat pumps and the latest generation of solar panels.

It's through these reforms that we can create the future-proof homes that people really need.

Because it's only by taking a longer-term view that we can begin to re-establish that integral link between people and places. Between community and identity.

Whatever one's view of the referendum, no one can deny that the country's decision to leave the European Union has also brought to the fore many of the underlying social and economic divisions that we always knew existed, but which successive governments have failed properly to address.

And it's those divisions which have, to some extent, been born out of people feeling disillusioned and disconnected from the decision-making that affects their day to day lives.

Now none of these problems can be solved overnight. Our increasingly polarised society won't be brought together in an instant.

But there are real practical steps we have taken to put local people at the forefront of decision-making and to give them a greater say in how their neighbourhoods develop so that it reflects the true identity of their communities.

More people than ever before now have a direct place-making role in their

local area, with over 2,600 different groups having started the neighbourhood planning process since 2012.

That means millions of people taking ownership of their neighbourhoods, defining what is important to them and making sure that actually happens.

And as Secretary of State I intend to take that forward, putting plan-making at the heart of our planning system and ensuring that those plans have quality of design and have the environment at their absolute heart.

This also brings me on to another area I want to take forward as Secretary of State.

## **Protecting our heritage**

It shows what we can achieve when we put power directly into people's hands.

But it also I think shows that to create real places, they have to have a sense of identity and that means protecting their past.

I want to encourage local communities and heritage groups to get far more involved in identifying the historic buildings in their area...

... so they can be at the heart of the process of recognising, defining and protecting the buildings they truly value.

Because we know that, where buildings are on local or national heritage lists, they are often shielded from development.

And that, again, builds consent for development and builds better communities.

Until now, this has mostly been the domain of our local planning authorities.

But only 50% of planning authorities even have these lists, and where they do, they are often out of date or incomplete.

This isn't good enough.

Protecting the historic environment must be a key function of the planning system.

All local planning authorities must play a far more proactive role in supporting local communities and heritage groups to identify and to protect more historic buildings.

In the 1980s, Michael Heseltine reinvigorated our national heritage lists. And now I want to complete that work and to do the same at the local level.

As a first step, I am announcing, what I think will be the most ambitious new [heritage preservation campaign](#) since Michael's work 40 years ago.

We will start with 10 English counties and support them to complete their

local lists and to bring forward more suggestions for the national statutory lists as well.

It will see local people coming forward to nominate the buildings and community assets they cherish – protecting them for future generations.

We're backing this programme with £500,000 of government investment – giving counties the tools, funding and expertise they need to shift their approach to heritage and conservation up a gear.

To help us do this, we will appoint a National Heritage Advisor to support this vital work and to make sure that Government is actually delivering. I want to thank Marcus Binney, Simon Jenkins and the SAVE team for their input and inspiration for this initiative.

We hope this will help boost conservation efforts in these counties, enabling fresh engagement with local communities and heritage groups.

But our work doesn't stop there.

We are also working with the Department for Culture and with Historic England on developing an entirely new heritage conservation programme. We are going to be supporting Historic England to develop a new process to enable faster community nominations of important heritage assets in the new Heritage Action Zones.

This builds on the [£95 million fund](#) government announced earlier this year to unlock the economic potential of 69 historic high streets. We're determined to ensure that these places can once again be refreshed and renewed and given new life.

At the heart of this will be local people as well as a new team of heritage activists, what we want to call the modern day Monument's men and women who will be working across England to find these buildings and get them listed, locally or nationally as soon as possible.

## **Heritage and sustainability**

Our new heritage preservation campaign also supports that wider shift we're seeing in society...

...that focus on sustainability, and how we can protect communities and our planet.

Today, there is more recognition than ever that we must be building to last.

Research shows that the construction, demolition and excavation of old homes generates around three-fifths of total UK non-hazardous waste every year – which is a staggering figure.

For the country to cut its carbon footprint, drive sustainability and meet our net-zero targets, all of us – in industry and in government – have a responsibility to promote the re-use of existing buildings.

The ill-fated programme of demolition and destruction pursued by government's of the past resulted in thousands of well-built, pre-1919 terrace houses, for example, being needlessly destroyed.

In great cities like Liverpool, the Housing Market Renewal Initiative resulted in property prices sharply increasing while putting important historic buildings, like the birthplace of Ringo Starr, under threat.

Today, developers are rediscovering the value in the renovation and refurbishment of Victorian terraces.

Like the Welsh Streets of Liverpool, streets that were under serious and needless threat of being knocked down. These are now in a new wave of regeneration and renewal.

We also need to be ambitious, creative and imaginative in repurposing commercial and public buildings.

I think of examples like the redevelopment of the HMS Daedalus site in Lee-on-the-Solent.

After the Second World War, this naval site included several beautiful Victorian buildings. It was used as a technical training facility for the Royal Navy before falling into disrepair.

Demolition seemed the only viable option until developers came forward with proposals to uncover the base's rich history – converting the derelict buildings into new homes and apartments with all of the car parking and landscaping it needs.

I hope examples like this will be taken forward by developers across the country – bringing historic buildings back into life, making them useful for communities.

I will certainly be supporting initiatives like that, through the planning system and through my powers as Secretary of State. Bringing new purpose to brownfield land to historic buildings, to get people back to living in empty homes.

## **Housing supply**

I think these examples show us that we can reconcile two extensible posing challenges. How we can design beautiful, eye-catching homes whilst also building at scale, at pace and at low cost.

Critics would have us believe that these challenges cannot be solved simultaneously.

I think that cynicism is wrong and unfounded.

What we've seen in some of the country's largest and most successful recent developments, from Northstowe in Cambridgeshire to the Stonebridge homes of Yorkshire, to the wonderful redevelopment around King's Cross...



... is that design which speaks to an area's heritage, its history and its identity is universally popular.

In fact, it is only beautiful design, in-keeping with an area's existing aesthetic and sensitive to local concerns, which unlocks public consent for new development...

Which saves costly delays from legal challenges and frees up developers to get on and build the homes we need.

For too long there has been a misconception in the housebuilding industry that quality is the enemy of supply.

In fact, experience shows us that it is those developments of the highest quality and the most attractive designs which are approved faster, sell faster and which are the most enduringly popular.

The exciting technological innovation currently taking place across the sector through Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) makes it easier than ever before for architects, designers and builders to integrate beauty into their plans without compromising on delivery.

The great package of measures the government has introduced in the last 10 years to:

- simplify the planning process;
- bring forward brownfield regeneration; and
- set the housebuilding industry free

which I believe has to just be the first steps, has resulted in a record number of homes being built.

However, we know that we need to go further. This year likely it will be the year we build more homes than any year, bar-one, in my adult lifetime.

## **Conclusion**

But we must go much further and faster.

It means that even our target of building 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s may not be ambitious enough.

To do this, we have to embrace technology, the technology being brought forward for the digital age, to make homes built faster.

But I think we also need to renew our enthusiasm for quality design in the supply of homes so we can build a greener and a better Britain.

That's the challenge I will be taking forward as Secretary of State. Working with Policy Exchange, working with Create Streets, to build a Britain that is genuinely built to last...

...To create a society that has re-established powerful links between identity

and place, between history and the future, between community and purpose.

This, I hope is a country that rediscovers the truth, first espoused by John Ruskin when he said that, we must build and when we do let us think that we build forever.

For me, that will be guiding principle as we set out the future of the planning system.