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New Homes Debate: it's great up North!

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631 Views Isla MacFarlane / 7 days ago / News

"I think there will be more discussion about housing in this election than any for a long, long time," said Lord Hague at the opening of the WhatHouse? New Homes Debate, which took place for the first time in Manchester on 10 May.

However, the housing crisis goes beyond party politics. Everyone, regardless of which way they vote, needs somewhere to live.

"Politicians reach for solutions in line with their philosophies," said Hague. "The Tories look for market-based solutions – help to buy etc. Labour looks to interventionist policies, for example rent-to-own. I think it would be good if the industry, irrespective of party, was offered a solution that works."

Many such solutions were suggested during the course of the panel debates. More so, quipped Lord Hague, than in the average debate in parliament!

Among the ideas in the suggestion box were:

1. Relaxing space standards – Martin Skinner, Founder and CEO, Inspired Asset Management

"We're continuing to build homes on the same broken

model we've been using for 60 years. We need to deregulate; Permitted Development Rights (PDR) show what's possible when deregulation does occur; we need to reduce space standards. Fire and building regulations can still apply. You can reduce the costs significantly without compromising quality. You can build homes 30-50% smaller without them feeling smaller. Space standards have a direct impact on affordability."

2. Recruiting and retaining staff – Sally Toumi,
Executive Chairman, Stark Brooks

"I work across many business sectors, and people are critical. What I find interesting about this sector is that it hasn't moved forward on how people are recruited and treated. We've got an unprecedented level of vacancies for this sector. Right across the board, we are seeing a real shortage. It's the only industry I work with where I see cycles repeating themselves time and time again. In the good times salaries are wildly inflated, and in bad times people lose their jobs."

3. Retaining quality – Graham Sibley, Market
Development Manager, National House Building
Council

"The challenge we see is building the number of homes we need without degrading quality. Gavin Barlow said new homes cannot be delivered at the expense of quality. We want to see how modular construction could deliver homes to the same standard as traditional homes. We need to see the home owner protected. There is a balance between regulation and delivering quality."

4. Removing barriers for SMEs – Matthew Good,
Planning Manager (Northern), Home Builders
Federation

"If we are to build more homes more quickly we need to reduce the burden on SMEs. We need to provide diversified sites. We are in a planning-led system which investors confidence. Planning is the number one issue for SMEs. Two or three years ago, it was finance. The picture is different across the country. Different councils apply different regulations.

"We need to remove some of the risk housebuilders face. If we can remove some of that risk by looking at alternative methods of funding, that would be a game changer."

5. Invest in Build to Rent – Graham Bates, Chief
Executive, LIV Group

"Manchester has been leading the way. It's ahead of the game. PRS has been around for 100 years. The buy to let is a new market, only 20 years old. Now we have urbanisation. Young people want to live in a city and walk to work. Car ownership is falling. The market is growing around affordability. Unless you have the bank of mum and dad, it's increasingly difficult to buy. We now have people choosing to rent. This will grow the more people see the product."

6. Delivering quality rental stock – David Lawrence,
European Investment Director, AIG

“We plan carefully for the long term; what these families will require. It has to be a community if they stay there long-term. We don’t want a six month rolling contract. By providing this level of service they feel very much at home. This model means we can be more creative than the average housebuilder. Young people look at the value of what they get. They get more value from a PRS scheme than a purchase.

“We have provided an enormous amount of amenities including gyms, cinema rooms, laundries... we’re trying to create a community.”

7. Keeping competitive – Michael Howard, Managing
Director, urbanbubble

“What I think Build to Rent will do is force the development community to up its game, because they’re going to be competing with build to rent. We are seeing a mindset shift. A buyer or renter’s biggest bugbears include application fees and no Wi-Fi upon moving in; we can change these.”

8. Devolution: Balancing growth – Iwan Griffiths, North
West Regional Chairman, PwC and Chairman of
Marketing Manchester

“There needs to be a pro-growth strategy. There needs to be a mix of sites, which does include the greenbelt. There needs to be a perception change of what sort of accommodation we need. There is a need for family housing; that’s not going to be provided by city centre accommodation. That’s going to involve green belt release. The mayor needs to decide how he will deal with nimbyism.”

9. Beef up planning departments – Michael Watts,
Senior Director, Lichfields

“Online services are contracting town centres. This presents an opportunity for development – both residential and commercial. However, it is not the silver bullet. There are opportunities to be explored, but the focus needs to be wider. There is, at the moment, a dearth of skills across planning departments. Increasing planning fees to increase the planning officers would mean the development community’s needs would be better met.”

0. Home grow new talent – Mark Knight, Divisional
Managing Director for the North, Keepmoat Homes

“We’ve lost industries that were monumental to the UK over the last 40-50 years. Whether it’s in building or the supply chain. You need to protect the people you employ and grow, make sure your business is sustainable and know your market. Instead of chasing talent around the industry, grow new instead.”

Would you be interested in attending a WhatHouse? New Homes Debate in London in the future? Register your interest by emailing jc@whathouse.com today.

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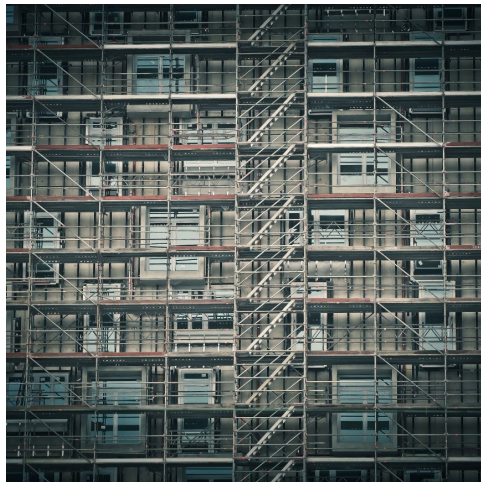
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