bright blue

Centre Write

Autumn 2019

On the home front

David Lidington MP | Shaun Bailey AM | Lord O'Neill | Mary Dejevsky

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Bright Blue is an independent think tank and pressure group for liberal conservatism.

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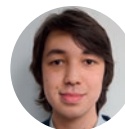Page 13 **Bob Blackman MP** explains how we can build upon the Homelessness Reduction Act

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Editor's letter

Anvar Sarygulov is a Researcher at Bright Blue and Editor of *Centre Write*

Housing is rising up the political agenda. Our recent polling analysis has found that making the cost of housing more affordable was seen as a policy which would help young adults most by 55% of the population. The decline in homeownership, particularly amongst millennials, has fuelled this concern. Considering that homeowners are some of the most reliable Conservative voters, the electoral implications of this development should be worrying for the centre-right. Meanwhile, other research has noted that one of the biggest swings has occurred amongst private renters, who abandoned the Conservative Party in droves in 2017. The Conservatives must do more for both homeownership and private renting.

Head of Policy at the Centre for Policy Studies, **Alex Morton** (p.9), highlights the successes of Right to Buy and suggests that the policy should not be gathering dust, but be deployed once more. Yet, as the director of Shelter, **Polly Neate** (p.10) argues, there are reasons why Conservatives should care about social housing. And, as **Bob Blackman MP** (p.13) notes, there is still much more to be done on homelessness.

Our attachment to the idea of a 'property-owning democracy' is challenged by writer **Mary Dejevsky**, (p.15) who argues that we should instead see renting as a worthy alternative path. Helpfully, the issues with the private renting sector, and how to alleviate them, are discussed by the director of Generation Rent, **Dan Wilson Craw** (p.17). And **Andrew Boff AM** (p.12) reminds us not to blindly pursue housebuilding targets, in his piece on the lack of appropriate family housing in London.

However, we do not simply inhabit our houses, but also the streets, neighbourhoods and towns in which they are placed. The decline of certain communities has clearly served as a major undercurrent of some of our biggest political debates today. **Lord O'Neill** (p.20), one of the architects of the Northern Powerhouse, argues that 'left-behind' places need to adapt to today's world by building on their strengths, while the Chief Executive of Power to Change, **Vidhya Alakeson** (p.22), presents one avenue that people can use to improve their communities: taking control of their high streets.

It is also important to consider the aesthetics of the places in which we live. **Nicholas Boys Smith** (p.19), the co-chair of Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, urges us to look to the past to find agreement on what makes our neighbourhoods beautiful, while **Nicola Yates OBE** (p.24), Chief Executive of Future Cities Catapult, looks to the future to identify how our cities need to change and adapt for the challenges ahead.

Turning towards the environment, **Professor Allister Scott** (p.26) makes a case for seeing our green belts as an asset that delivers meaningful and tangible benefits to the environment and the economy, while **Paul de Zylva** (p.27), the Chair of the National Park City Foundation, outlines suggestions for how we can make the cities themselves greener and more sustainable.

Finally, we have an exclusive interview with the Conservative candidate for London Mayor, **Shaun Bailey AM** (p.30), who touches upon all of these issues and discusses how Conservatives can overcome their electoral problems in London.

The all-consuming maelstrom that is Brexit makes it difficult to focus on anything else. But the importance of improving our housing, neighbourhood and town policy should not be ignored. I hope that this edition provides some insight into how this can be best achieved.

Director's note
After Brexit, there is another battle the Conservative Party will face

Ryan Shorthouse is the Founder and Chief Executive of Bright Blue

After Brexit – trust me, that glorious day must one day come – the centre-right will face another blistering battle. Between two camps fighting for their philosophy to be prevalent in the Conservative Party's domestic policymaking and public offer: freedom-fighting liberals versus socially-conscious communitarians.

This tension has been simmering for some time, especially since the 1990s when Conservative politicians and thinkers sought to challenge the caricature of Thatcherism, which had been adopted by opponents, even members, of the Conservative Party: of excessive individualism, of just leaving people and businesses to get on with it. They instead championed a civic conservatism, which David Cameron rebranded 'the Big Society', that sought to emphasise and nurture what lay between the individual and the state: family, charity, community.

> **"It echoes what used to be said, sometimes still is sadly, about mothers who go back to work. Just because you're ambitious professionally, doesn't mean you don't talk to and support your family and friends, even when they're miles away."**

The Cameron years managed to unite both camps. Deep fiscal retrenchment, necessitated by the financial crash of the late noughties, saw a shrinking of the state that appealed to the libertarians. But there was cuddlier conservatism too – think same-sex marriage, the increase in the minimum wage, the sugar tax, and the Troubled Families programme.

> **"People should have the freedom to find communities they'd like to join – which match their interests and outlook – rather than having to settle for only what they were born into."**

Then Theresa ended the truce, foolishly and unnecessarily picking a fight with both libertarians and liberals within the centre-right movement. Right at the start of her 2017 general election manifesto, she declared: "We must reject the ideological templates by…the libertarian right and embrace the mainstream view that recognises the good that government can do."

This was a political mistake. Instead of uniting the Right against a straightforwardly socialist threat, she and her coterie indulged in the stuff of student seminars and sought to settle scores. It's too early to tell which direction Boris will head on domestic policymaking. He's keen on a quirky but vague philosophy of 'boosterism'. And he's surrounded himself – both around the Cabinet table and in Number 10 – with folks in both camps.

He'd be wise to not pick sides, but instead draw on both traditions. Not just for political reasons, but philosophical ones too. The ideas of liberals and communitarians are not necessarily conflicting – in fact, they can be complementary.

Communitarians will often criticise modern liberalism for going too far, of prizing geographic and social mobility that has wrenched people from family and community life, which is good for their wellbeing. This is a peculiar argument. If people have been pushed into a life that is miserable, then it cannot really be said that they are free. It seems nonsensical to me to suggest that liberalism – a philosophy with individual decision-making at its heart – can force people into a way of living.

A lot of this is lifecycle stuff, to be honest. As people become older, settle down and have kids, familial and civic life understandably matters more. But when you do grow up, there's no need to be so guilty about your carefree, hedonistic youth. And suddenly sermonising to twentysomethings about their supposed narcissism makes you not only a tad hypocritical, but a needless killjoy.

Young people who leave the place they grew up in to chase their dreams and some fun, typically in London, should not be made to feel they have abandoned their families or communities. Such an argument, which has become increasingly commonplace, is rooted in envy. It is judgementalism fuelled by stereotypes not facts. It echoes what used to be said, sometimes still is sadly, about mothers who go back to work. Just because you're ambitious professionally, doesn't mean you don't talk to and support your family and friends, even when they're miles away. There are enough hours in

>> the day to do both. In fact, there's lots of evidence showing people in the UK today are managing to work more and spend more time with their families in a typical day than previous decades.

"Theresa ended the truce, foolishly and unnecessarily picking a fight with both libertarians and liberals within the centre-right movement."

This notion that there is a whole class of people – university-educated professionals living in big cities – that have no time for civil life and are rootless 'anywheres', as the thinker David Goodhart puts it, is baloney. Communitarians are right: nearly all of us are social animals, craving connections and community. But people should have the freedom to find communities they'd like to join – which match their interests and outlook – rather than having to settle for only what they were born into. And if communities are to survive and thrive, they need to be inviting of people from different backgrounds. These are foundational principles for a modern, ethnical and popular philosophy: liberal communitarianism.

The Conservative Party should stand for both the liberal stress on independence and the communitarian emphasis on interdependence. They need each other. The goals of liberalism—individual flourishing, power and respect—can only emerge through the support and guidance of others. Conversely, the interdependency communitarians care about most can only truly be realised if we respect the liberal insight that all and different individuals are equally worthy.

"But when you do grow up, there's no need to be so guilty about your carefree, hedonistic youth. And suddenly sermonising to twentysomethings about their supposed narcissism makes you not only a tad hypocritical, but a needless killjoy."

A 'One Nation' party needs to represent people all of ages, from young adults who want the freedom to spread their wings to those who seek stronger roots when they get older. 🔵
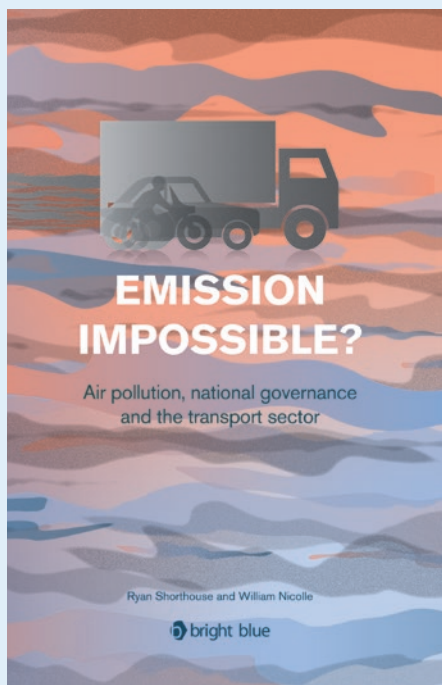
Latest report

Emission impossible?
Ryan Shorthouse and William Nicolle

August 2019

Stronger evidence has emerged in recent years about the detrimental impact of air pollution to human health, the economy and the environment. Consequently, there is growing public and political pressure for tougher action to reduce levels of air pollution in the UK. The report focuses on the sources of, impacts of, and attitudes towards air pollution across the whole of the UK.

The UK's departure from the EU means that there is an opportunity to raise air pollution standards in the UK. The report proposes new, ambitious legal limits, legal responsibilities and policies on air pollution.

Letters to the editor

Send your letters to anvar@brightblue.org.uk

Whilst I am glad to see more discussion surrounding Britain's imperial past, I found Dr Zareer Masani's article ('Guilty past pleasures?', Summer 2019) to be misleading and containing a number of half-truths. As someone with Indian and Burmese heritage, it was disappointing to read "the Raj left India with the world's largest rail network" without any mention of how they also left India in pieces, unrecognisable compared to what it once was.

The partition of India in 1947 caused the biggest migratory event in history, splitting up whole communities and aggravating religious violence across the entire subcontinent, which continues to stain India and Pakistan's relationship today. Britain's role in this was massive and it has been heavily documented that their haste to push the process through exacerbated these tensions.

Regina Haokip *Bright Blue member*

Ryan Shorthouse's editorial comment ('Director's note', Summer 2019), particularly that an election "is likely to come sooner than many people think", was very perceptive. As was the realisation that Labour would have to decide whether they stand for Remain or not.

Labour's red-on-red warfare is now in the open. Tom Watson wants Labour to back Remain. Jeremy Corbyn, who voted for an EU Referendum in 2011, wants a "credible leave option". Perhaps the most extraordinary realisation of Labour's ambiguity was Emily Thornberry's assertion that Labour would negotiate a deal, then campaign for Remain.

In Northern heartlands, voters are appalled by the chaos. Lifelong Labour voters may now choose Boris Johnson. At the same time, Conservative moderates are politically homeless.

If anything, Brexit has wreaked havoc on the political spectrum; British politics today appears to be defined neither by constitution nor ideology.

Adair Verey *Bright Blue member*

Helen Pluckrose's article ('Limited extremes', Summer 2019) encompasses what I think is most important about engaging critically with modern politics: realising that the extremes shouldn't seem as big as they do – they're just louder. We should think of far-right and alt-right factions as lesser and peripheral.

Alexander Roman *Bright Blue member*

Righting homeownership

The success of Right to Buy is being forgotten, writes **Alex Morton**

Alex Morton is the Head of Policy at the Centre for Policy Studies

A rare consensus in British politics today is that the UK is facing a housing crisis. The precise causes of this crisis are more controversial. One argument frequently – and increasingly volubly – made is that it is actually a social housing crisis. Some argue the fall in housebuilding since its post-war peak is directly down to a collapse in public-sector housebuilding.

> **"We have allowed a narrative to develop around Right to Buy which views it as part of the problem, not the solution."**

In this analysis, the introduction of the Right to Buy in the 1980s is often identified as something approaching a moment of original sin. By selling off our social housing stock, and failing to build replacements, Margaret Thatcher not only engaged in a bargain-basement transfer of the state's assets to private individuals, but laid the seeds of the current disaster.

The prescription, accordingly, is simple: for the state to get back into the housebuilding business at a large scale.

But this argument is flawed on its own terms.

The UK has an unusually high rate of social housing provision compared to other countries, and a very low rate of home ownership. Far from being a nation of homeowners, we come a feeble fifth from the bottom in a ranking of 34 developed countries by home ownership rate, while we have the second highest proportion

Steve Cadman

of housing which is let at subsidised or 'social' rents after only Slovenia.

These figures show that the UK's housing crisis cannot, by its very nature, be a crisis of social housing. It is home ownership and private housing that is missing, not social housing.

We can also observe this from the impact Right to Buy did (or did not) have on social housing waiting lists. Contrary to the popular story you will hear from John McDonnell and the political Left, Right to Buy did not increase waiting lists. Waiting list numbers actually declined in the Right to Buy heyday of 1981-1997, by around 200,000, despite 100,000 social homes being sold off each year on average and only 36,000 being built. This was because

private housing was more affordable, with house prices rising by only 8% in real terms. People want to be homeowners, and increasingly, even those on low and average incomes were moving into ownership.

> **"The Conservatives' promise in their 2015 manifesto to extend the Right to Buy to housing associations has been kicked into the longest of Whitehall grass."**

The rate of decline in the social housing stock slowed substantially from 1997 to 2009, so the supply of social homes

>> reduced much less, but social housing lists soared by 770,000. Why? Because real house prices rose by 108%. Waiting lists are primarily a function of private housing failure, which inflates the demand for social homes. Waiting lists track house prices, not stock levels. After all, selling a council house to the tenant means one less council house, but it also means one less household in need of social housing.

The problem with the UK is that the supply of housing has been inadequate, migration policy has added demand pressures, and on top of this, low interest rates combined with well-meaning but confused regulation has both increased prices and locked out people who do not have a large deposit. Nothing to do with Right to Buy.

Right to Buy was a positive because it increased the number of home owners in this country. Home ownership matters. People of all age groups and all tenures say it is by far their preferred tenure type. Polling shows people perceive benefits such as a greater sense of freedom and control over their own life, as well as feeling more settled – and that non-financial elements are actually more important than financial benefits. Owning is linked to greater wellbeing and life satisfaction, and academic research has consistently pointed to a positive link between home ownership and participation in community organisations, political engagement, and social capital in general.

"It is home ownership and private housing that is missing, not social housing."

The people who want and need social housing would rather be owners. If you help them to own, and do so just by moving properties and tenants out of the rented sector, this is a positive. In addition, if you move social housing properties into ownership, but this allows you to build more social homes to replace them, this is also a positive.

The introduction of the Right to Buy in the 1980s widened the circle of home ownership by offering council tenants the chance to own their own home – an offer that millions took up. However, in recent decades the take-up of Right to Buy has slowed to a crawl. The Conservatives' promise in their 2015 manifesto to extend the Right to Buy to housing associations – which now own the majority of Britain's social housing stock – has been kicked into the longest of Whitehall grass.

The public, of whatever age and background, still see owning a home as an essential part of living the good life. But increasingly, that ambition is being thwarted. The real crisis we face in our housing sector is a crisis of home ownership. At the Centre for Policy Studies, we set out ways in which the government should look to help private renters onto the housing ladder in a paper last year, 'From Rent to Own'. But the Government also needs to not renege on the Conservative 2015 pledge to expand Right to Buy to housing association tenants.

If not for policy reasons, then the Government should reflect that at a time when trust and respect for politicians is at an all time low, betraying the clear pledge to between 1.3 and 1.8 million households – that the Right to Buy would be extended to them might be a bad idea. If the West Midlands pilot is broadly accurate, and had been rolled out nationally, 180,000 would be engaged in the process of buying their home.

We have allowed a narrative to develop around Right to Buy which views it as part of the problem, not the solution. The Conservative Party should be proud of the Right to Buy revolution and the rising home ownership which was delivered in the 1980s and 1990s. We need much more than Right to Buy – but it should remain part of the policy future in this country. ▶

The social solution

Polly Neate is the Chief Executive of Shelter

Polly Neate outlines the conservative case for social housing

Conservatives have always understood that for families to thrive, secure foundations are essential. A sense of belonging, investment in your own community, a stable place to raise children – these are the foundations for families and for society. Only safe homes can build safe communities. A safe home is a fundamental human need.

Most people aspire to own their home. Yet home ownership is falling. And for those who cannot buy, there is simply no stable option at all.

In the three and a half decades after

>> the Second World War, Governments led by figures including Winston Churchill and Harold Macmillan played a vital role in delivering four million social homes, at an average rate of more than 126,000 per year. It was in this period that we last reached the level of home building that the current Government is committed to – only when social homes have been delivered in significant numbers has the current Government's target of 300,000 ever been reached.

"We spend more than £21 billion per year on Housing Benefit. A large part of this money goes straight into the pockets of private landlords – an issue that Churchill himself roared against when he was President of the Board of Trade."

Yet, over the past 40 years, social housing, and its value to society, has fallen out of our national conversation. As a result of this, last year fewer than 6,500 new social homes were delivered, while 1.1 million households face the uncertainty and hopelessness of council waiting lists.

This failure has come at a terrible time for our nation's housing situation. Homeownership is in decline, there are 124,000 homeless children in England, and millions of families are trapped in unstable and expensive private renting.

Today, 800,000 people renting privately can't even afford to save £10 per month. For many, saving for a deposit on a home of your own will forever remain out of reach, whatever interventions government might make to incentivise homeownership.

The sheer scale of the challenge we now face means no political party is able to ignore the need to take action. And a strong answer to the housing crisis will be required by voters of all parties at any general election.

Behind these statistics is also a human face of the housing emergency, the destructive despair, confusion and, frankly, destitution that Shelter's support services are all too familiar with.

The only way we can help those at the sharp end of the national emergency our housing crisis has become, the only way to rediscover the sense of opportunity and stability that has been core to our nation's concept of home, is to build high quality, affordable, social housing. I challenge the belief that building social housing is not the natural instinct of the Conservatives. Uncertain housing prevents too many people from developing their skills, exploring new ideas, reaching their potential. Poor housing forces a reliance on just about managing that restricts the dreams and aspirations of our society and limits the future of our children and young people.

As Lord O'Neill, one of the members of Shelter's social housing commission, said: "There needs to be a profound shift to see social housing as a national asset like any other infrastructure. A home is the foundation of individual success in life, and public housebuilding can be the foundation of national success. It is the only hope the Government has of hitting its 300,000 homes a year target."

The economic case is watertight. In fact, building more social housing offers an economic boon that should please the Chancellor.

Work by Capital Economics for Shelter's social housing commission showed that investment in housing delivers hugely positive impact for the economy when compared with other industries – with every pound spent resulting in an additional £1.84 of sector activity.

Currently, we spend more than £21 billion per year on Housing Benefit. An eyewatering sum that is only necessary because of our long-term failure to provide social housing. And a large part of this money goes straight into the pockets of private landlords – an issue that Churchill himself roared against when he was President of the Board of Trade.

"Only when social homes have been delivered in significant numbers has the current Government's target of 300,000 ever been reached."

Right now, we need to spend on both Housing Benefit and housebuilding. That's the price we are paying for decades of neglect of social housing. But over the long term, an investment in our social housing stock will reduce our reliance on the private rented sector and reduce our need to subsidise private rents with Housing Benefit.

By its nature, social housebuilding sits outside of the booms and busts of the private housebuilding market, and because of this it offers a level of stability and long-term security that private housebuilding never can. For example, the stable order book offered by a social housebuilding programme could give long-term certainty to small or medium-sized enterprises or to those looking to invest in the factories associated with new and exciting modern methods of construction.

I firmly believe that Conservatives are natural allies in Shelter's call for three million more social homes to be delivered over the next 20 years. This is the level of ambition that our commission on social housing identified as necessary to solve our national housing emergency. Whatever happens in Europe, the housing emergency is a fault line in the foundations of British society, a division that will not heal without significant change. The boldness to make that change will be rewarded with vast economic and moral benefits for the nation.

A familial place

Andrew Boff AM is the Deputy Chair of the Housing Committee in the Greater London Assembly

In pursuit of house building targets, families are being forgotten, argues **Andrew Boff AM**

Families come in all shapes and sizes. But all of them have one thing in common: they need a place to live. A place to grow, play, sleep and study. To do all the things that make families the bedrock of our society and the finest social institution that we have for progress, prosperity and social mobility.

> **"Family houses also have the advantage of being more popular with local communities, and are therefore likely to have an easier and quicker path through the planning system, compared to blocks of smaller flats."**

Yet so often the debate about housing, both in London and elsewhere, is simply a numbers game: one hundred units here, 2,000 units there. Yet in our rush to increase overall numbers of homes – important though that is – we fail to pay enough attention to the types of homes we are building, and who they are for.

By default, the planning system tends to be skewed towards smaller housing units of one or two bedrooms. These are easier and cheaper for developers to build and will often provide the greatest return. They also help the bureaucratic number-crunchers in public authorities demonstrate the maximum number of units being built towards their ever-increasing targets.

By contrast, the three- and four-bedroom homes that are suitable for families are generally much harder to

get through the system. Even more so when those in authority actively seek to discourage them, such as in London with Mayor Sadiq Khan.

Mayor Khan has set a target to build 65,000 homes a year through his new development plan, called the London Plan. He has also been given £4.8 billion by central government to build 116,000 affordable homes. Yet his policies are failing to support larger family homes and do everything possible to reduce the size of new homes. His housing strategy has abolished targets for affordable family homes, set by his predecessor, which means that there is no incentive for public housing funds to be invested in family-sized homes, nor for developers to deliver them.

Meanwhile, the London Plan actively encourages the demolition of existing family homes and their redevelopment as

blocks of small flats, through an invidious policy called 'Small Sites', and even setting targets for local authorities to approve such schemes.

But the real kick in the teeth is an obscure document called the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, which states that 55% of all new homes in London should have just one bedroom, and for social housing this goes up to 69%.

Prior to Sadiq Khan's election in 2016, the number of family homes built in London had been steadily increasing, reaching 25% of all new homes. Now, this trend is going into reverse as a result of the Mayor's policies. Last year the number of affordable homes of three bedrooms or more, funded by the Mayor, dropped by 30%.

All this flies in the face of the significant housing challenges facing London, particularly overcrowding. The latest figures

>> show that 360,000 children in London live in overcrowded homes. This is simply a scandal for any major city. Overcrowding can have a serious impact on health and wellbeing, especially for children. It can spread diseases more quickly, lead to sleep disturbance and cause additional stress and strain. Hence, family housing should not just be seen as a luxury but as an urgent priority.

Back in 2011, I led a major review for the London Assembly called 'Crowded Houses.' Through this review we found that building a single family home could solve the problems of several households at the same time, due to the 'churn' effect of freeing up other homes further down the line. Not only would this approach help to tackle the scourge of overcrowding, it would have a transformative effect on the whole housing market, spreading home ownership more widely and across all generations. It means more homes available for younger first-time buyers, those with growing families, and older people who are perhaps looking to downsize.

Family houses also have the advantage of being more popular with local communities, and are therefore likely to have an easier and quicker path through the planning system, compared to blocks of smaller flats.

So how can we get more family homes built? To start with, housing policies need to be less about bean counting and more about common sense. If a development has a higher level of family-sized homes, even if it means fewer homes overall, that should be seen as a positive outcome rather than a negative one.

Where public funds are used for affordable housing, funding needs to be specifically targeted towards an appropriate number of family-sized homes. More can also be done to encourage downsizing through dedicated housing schemes, freeing up family homes that have become underused.

"In our rush to increase overall numbers of homes – important though that is – we fail to pay enough attention to the types of homes we are building, and who they are for."

And policymakers should pro-actively identify land that would be suitable for family homes, backed up by supportive planning policies. They could also make land available to families to self-build their own homes, cutting costs and getting homes built more quickly in the process.

If we truly want to be on the side of aspiration, prosperity and home ownership, and solve our biggest housing challenges in the process, a good place to start is through family-friendly homes. 🔗

Homeless no more…

Bob Blackman MP explains how we can build upon the landmark Homelessness Reduction Act

Bob Blackman MP is a member of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee

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At the heart of the Homelessness Reduction Act was the desire to intervene in cases as early as possible, to provide vulnerable people and families with consistent, solid advice wherever they seek help, and to ensure that standards are maintained nationwide.

As a long serving London politician, I have seen people and families stuck in a vicious cycle of vulnerability, homelessness and powerlessness. People become homeless for any combination of reasons: ill health, loss of employment, addiction and family breakdown to name but a few. Once they find themselves sleeping in their car, on a park bench or in a shop doorway – even once – the cycle starts, and they have an almighty battle to get off the streets and into safe accommodation.

"The National Housing Federation described the Act as 'the biggest change to homelessness legislation in 40 years'. But we can do more."

Aside from the obvious challenges, being homeless reduces life expectancy and leaves already vulnerable people exposed to abuse. Homeless people are attacked on the street on a sickeningly frequent basis and dehumanised by the day to day struggle of getting by and surviving.

Nationwide, there must be a gold standard for what advice people receive from local authorities. This was included within the Homelessness Reduction Act – so you can visit any Civic Centre or County Hall and receive the same guidance as if you were to approach a different local authority. It is important that vulnerable people do not

>> get caught up in a postcode lottery and that standards are enforced across local housing departments.

"Homeless people are attacked on the street on a sickeningly frequent basis and dehumanised by the day to day struggle of getting by and surviving."

I was careful not to create a Bill which could lead to rash interventions in the housing market as this, in turn, could have unintended consequences. The entire Homelessness Reduction Act was therefore built upon a solid research base with immeasurable scrutiny – by the government, the Housing, Communities and Local Government select committee, the Bill Committee and by stakeholders such as Crisis.

Besides extending the period 'threatened with homelessness' from 28 to 56 days, the Act places a duty on local authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need. It also introduces a new 'duty to refer' – which means that public services will need to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming so.

The National Housing Federation described the Act as "the biggest change to homelessness legislation in 40 years". But we can do more. Beyond the Act we must examine how to increase the supply of good quality housing stock, while not burdening local authorities or housing associations, and ensuring developers stick to promises and crack on with new build completions. I have a few suggestions. Something which worries me is how we manage land. The transfer of land from public to private ownership usually takes the form of highest bid wins: not looking at what the prospective owner wants to

do with the site, nor thinking of whether suitable and affordable housing will be placed there. Thus land in the immediate area spikes in price. This spike becomes the new norm and the cycle repeats. This is not a healthy or sustainable market.

This cycle affects the price of houses for prospective buyers and rental rates for new or existing tenants. Particularly in urban and suburban settings, as I see in Harrow East, people often struggle to make rent or mortgage payments as a result of land and property speculation. These pressures are particularly felt by those in private rented accommodation who hope to buy a property in the city.

My solution would be for planning permission to be sought before public land is sold for the type of residential development which the area requires, according to demand and factors such as the density of the local population. Local residents would be notified and consulted as part of the process. Then, once

permission is granted, Homes England would contract a developer to see to the plans. Taxpayers need assurances that a council will not squander millions on such a procurement process, hence why Homes England should take the lead.

An incentive for local authorities to identify the public land which they own and to go to these lengths would be for the Treasury to design and implement a compensation scheme. This would not be a case of the Treasury granting several millions which an authority might waste, but rather giving a sum of money equal to the value of land which must be invested in public services. This compensation could apply to government departments, especially the Department of Health and the Ministry of Defence.

After the development of new homes on previously public land, the time comes to set rental rates or the sale price. These figures should be pegged to costs incurred by construction – materials,

>> labour, and services – but in absolutely no way can the developer, or whomever leads this calculation, use land value when undertaking the task. It would be amoral given the nature of the proposed scheme and also lead to a significant price spike, denying many prospective buyers the chance to purchase a home.

I would insert a clause in rental agreements which would give any tenant who continuously occupies one of these properties on previously public land for ten years without break the right to buy at the market value at time of occupation. This new kind of rent to buy could be transformative and would certainly increase the supply of affordable housing.

> **"Once they find themselves sleeping in their car, on a park bench or in a shop doorway – even once – the cycle starts, and they have an almighty battle to get off the streets and into safe accommodation."**

Finally, Section 21 notices have a direct impact on tenants and landlords. Longer tenancy agreements should be available to tenants and must make clear how and when rents can or will be increased. However, we must remember that not all tenants want long-term tenancies. A pathway must remain open for landlords to evict tenants who consistently fail to pay rent or damage the property.

Housing and homelessness must be at the core of the new administration's domestic agenda and that is why I took heart when the new Housing Secretary said "let's build the homes our country needs and make home ownership a reality for this and future generations" – time is not on our side, and we must act swiftly. ◗

The property-renting democracy?

Mary Dejevsky is a columnist for *The Independent, The Guardian* and *Unherd*

Mary Dejevsky asks whether our attachment to the idea of a property-owning democracy is holding us back

The idea that the so-called 'property-owning democracy' is, if not dead, then dying, is now almost treated as established fact. Members of the self-styled 'generation rent' are especially vocal, claiming that they might as well spend their paltry earnings on short-term pleasures, as home-ownership will forever be out of reach. There is even a culprit: we baby boomers are accused of clinging to big homes that we bought for a supposed pittance, made a mint from, and now refuse to vacate gracefully, even as we extract equity to fund our luxury lifestyle.

Well, I am sorry, but this is a travesty – particularly the harnessing of housing to the popular, but pernicious, concept of a 'generation war'. If anyone is suffering from present financial realities it is the 'oldies' and upcoming 'oldies' who receive next to no return on the savings successive governments told them to accrue for their retirement, even as they must look forward to selling their homes to cover savagely means-tested care costs.

> **"Is it really so wrong that, at a time when people stay in education longer and start families later, they should also buy their first home later, too?"**

In fact, it would make sense, given all the competing pressures, for them to plunder their pension funds or release equity from their houses, less to repair the roof or cruise the world, than to help their grandchildren to buy a home. Hang on a moment, though, financial firms are worried that so many are already doing this that they could run out of money in their dotage. So, the supposed generational war in housing is nothing of the kind. It is the old war between those families that can and will help their offspring to buy somewhere, and those who cannot.

But the whole argument about the 'property-owning democracy' needs to go back to first principles. Was there ever such a thing, really, as a 'property-owning democracy' in the UK and, even if the term carries conviction , was it necessarily such a wonderful thing?

> **"The supposed generational war in housing is nothing of the kind. It is the old war between those families that can and will help their offspring to buy somewhere, and those who cannot."**

The millennials' grievance often seems to boil down to "Woe is us, that we cannot

>> buy our own home in our twenties". But the time when your average twentysomething could take out a mortgage and buy a home – the heyday of the 'property-owning democracy' – was limited to a single recent decade, when the lax credit that funded it helped precipitate the financial crash.

"If anyone is suffering it is the 'oldies' who receive next to no return on the savings successive governments told them to accrue for their retirement, even as they must look forward to selling their homes to cover savagely means-tested care costs."

Not only were those years an exception – we are now back closer to the norm – but is it really so wrong that, at a time when people stay in education longer and start families later, they should also buy their first home later, too?

Yes, there is a London and South-East problem, caused in part by the openness of our housing market to foreign money and the preference of developers for building £2 million two-bed flats for investors rather than family housing. But today's ultra-low mortgage rates need to be factored in, too. The £60,000 mortgage my husband and I were granted in the 1980s was proportionately more expensive to service than a £600,000 mortgage today. Is it any wonder house prices have risen in the places people want and need to live? The Government's 'Help to Buy' – 'help' mainly for those who do not need it in raising a deposit – has only made matters worse.

To my mind, the two biggest faults in the UK's housing market are the concept of the 'ladder' and buy-to-let. The first might be seen as the great enabler of the 'property-owning democracy'. But what it has actually done is to encourage the proliferation of poorly-built 'starter-homes', and reinforced the idea of a home as a money-machine. If interest rates start to rise and/or prices to fall, the 'ladder' will become a snake. Buy-to-let, for its part, is actually the idea of the 'property-owning democracy' run wild, thanks to tax inducements.

But it is the combination of the ambitions fostered by the 'ladder' and successive governments' misguided attachment to buy-to-let that has been lethal. The result is less that first-time buyers have faced competition from potential landlords, though that happens, than that the UK's middle earners have been deprived of something their counterparts in many European countries take for granted: a stable, sufficient and professionally-run rental sector they can afford. Instead of fixed rules and standards, they often have to deal with individuals who can throw them out on any pretext at minimal notice and who regard the property essentially as theirs.

The UK's property-owning fetish has at once fostered a condescending attitude to renting and militated against serious corporate investment in the rental sector. For our friends on the continent, such a sector at once offers a stepping stone to ownership, and a reliable alternative of decent quality. It is past time that we had the same choice. If the 1990s property bubble is regarded as the heyday of a 'property-owning democracy', to be exalted and repeated, then we have got something very wrong. ◗

Securing tenure

We must improve the private renting sector, argues **Dan Wilson Craw**

Dan Wilson Craw
is the Director of
Generation Rent

The private rental market is home to one fifth of the UK's population, after rapid growth over the past two decades. Long regarded – and often dismissed – as a tenure for students and young single people, private tenants are now more likely to be aged over 35, and one in three has children.

Two trends have led us to this scenario. First, the lack of social housing for tenants on lower incomes – a result of the failure, by successive Governments, to replace council houses sold off under Right to Buy. And second, house prices rising out of the reach of middle-income households, particularly in London and the South East.

Uniting these factors was the rise of buy-to-let as a popular investment – it led to a large proportion of former Right to Buy homes ending up on the rental market (40% in London), while the spending power of speculators chasing capital gains in the property market priced out people who simply wanted a home.

The collapse in home ownership has animated much of the political response to this trend, with measures such as Help to Buy and the Stamp Duty surcharge on landlords designed to bolster first-time buyers' position in the market. The number of people buying their first home is now nearly back at the pre-financial crisis level. But millions more, having paid expensive rents for years, have meagre savings as a result, with two thirds of private renters having none, meaning they face many more years in the same expensive tenure. Despite some efforts to address this, the Government still has a long way to go.

As well as being more expensive than other tenures, private rented homes are more likely to be unsafe, with 690,000 containing hazards such as leaks, faulty electrics and mould. While local councils have responsibility for enforcing safety standards, tenants are easily intimidated into not complaining in the first place by the threat of a no-fault eviction or rent hike.

Since 2015, local councils have been able to protect tenants in unsafe homes from retaliatory eviction, but budget cuts have limited their ability to make use of these powers. Generation Rent research estimates that only one in five such tenants get the protection to which they're entitled.

Recent legislation has also made it easier for local councils to fine, and for tenants to sue and claim rent back from negligent landlords. But until tenants no longer face the threat of losing their home for exercising their right to a decent home, private renting will continue to be a second-class tenure.

Under Section 21 of the 1988 Housing Act, landlords can evict tenants without needing a reason. Not only does this allow the worst landlords to bully their tenants, it enables others to churn their properties to take advantage of rising local rents, and amateurs to sell up with a vacant property and no obligation to help the tenant find a new home.

While the vast majority of landlords value their tenants and want them to stay long term, the lack of legal certainty for the tenant makes private renting fundamentally precarious. Private tenants are more likely to worry they will have to move home in the next year, so it often feels like there is little point in investing time in your home or your community. As a result, private tenants are less likely to feel happy with how their home looks or know many of their neighbours than homeowners and social tenants.

During her time as Prime Minister, Theresa May recognised this and pledged to abolish Section 21 so that landlords must need a valid reason to take their property back. A consultation is under way, and it must remain a priority under Boris Johnson's administration so that tenants and their children can enjoy a stable life that homeowners often take for granted.

But even with a stronger set of rights, private renters will still face high costs. A previous Conservative Government justified increasing private sector provision of housing by promising that Housing Benefit would "take the strain". This doctrine was scrapped under austerity and now tenants receiving Housing Benefit find it is no longer covering the rent, being paid late, and is causing them to be rejected when searching for a new home. This is creating more hardship, which is manifesting itself in the courts, health service and the schools system.

The Government must recognise that helping people keep a roof over their head is an investment in society as a whole – stable homes mean stronger communities, personal wellbeing and a safe environment for children to flourish. To ensure that everyone can afford a place to live in, the government must put money towards a functional benefits system, but also – to bring down rents across the board – a programme of housebuilding. This will not only take the pressure off families at the breadline, but also boost the savings power of aspiring homeowners.

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SPEAKERS

Kwasi Kwarteng MP
Minister of State for Business and Energy

Laura Sandys
Chair, Government Energy Data Taskforce

Nathalie Thomas
FT energy correspondent (Invited)

Carl Packman
Head of Corporate Engagement, Fair by Design

Guy Newey
Director, Catapult Energy Systems

Ryan Shorthouse
Director, Bright Blue (Chair)

FAIR BY DESIGN
Ending the extra costs of being poor

Everyday beauty

Nicholas Boys Smith notes that there is a strong consensus on the aesthetics of our neighbourhoods

Nicholas Boys Smith is the Director of Create Streets and co-chair of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission

Somewhere, somehow, over the last century we dropped beauty, mislaid it, and forgot that we needed to pick it up again. The great visionaries who created the National Trust, the Garden Cities movement and who took the first halting steps to what became the Town and Country Planning Act were not afraid of beauty. When Octavia Hill campaigned to save common land or to provide housing for the poor she sought to protect or provide "beauty… for the refreshment of our souls." When Clough Williams-Ellis penned his ground-breaking polemic against 1920s ribbon development, *England and the Octopus*, he wished that "a happy awareness of beauty about us should… be the everyday condition of us all."

"If local councils want to boost the wellbeing of a Brexit-perturbed populace the answer is staring them in the face. Ask what people find beautiful."

This confidence, this surety of everyday beauty as a worthwhile aim, not as the *only* thing that matters but as something critically over-arching and aspirational was not without legislative consequences. In Parliament, the 1909 Planning Act was defined as being "to secure the home healthy, the house beautiful, the town pleasant, the city dignified and the suburb salubrious."

But how do you measure beauty? How is beauty defined? Who's defining it? Difficult questions that architects, philosophers and poets have debated for millennia. But they have always been difficult. What has changed is our reaction to the challenge. Even if we cannot fully and always agree about what we find beautiful, the process of debating and discussing it can lift our collective sights and help us strive for better things. The problem is that we are not even trying any more. The former head of the National Trust, Fiona Reynolds has written: "Today to talk of beauty in policy circles risks embarrassment: it is felt both to be too vague a word, lacking precision and focus and, paradoxically given its appeal by contrast with official jargon, elitist. Yet in losing the word 'beauty' we have lost something special from our ability to shape our present and our future."

She is right. And we need to change this. The good news is that I think we can. First of all, the Government is now thinking about this. Earlier this year they set up the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission, which I am co-chairing alongside Sir Roger Scruton.

"People recoil from streets without colour, a sense of place, variety in pattern or a coherent complexity of windows and doors in a near symmetrical pattern."

Second, it is increasingly being recognised how pernicious is the old lie 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder.' Simple clichés are dangerous things. And this one has probably done more harm than most. In fact, polling, focus

>> group, psychological and pricing data is consistent and compelling on the types of homes, places and towns that most people want to live in and find attractive most of the time. The precise nuances and relative weightings vary from time to time and place to place. There may even be generational patterns. However, the types of place, even adjusting for wealth and health, which we aesthetically prefer, in which most of us feel happier and whose creation we are more likely to support, are remarkably consistent in most research. The social enterprise that I founded and run, Create Streets, exists to carry out this research and to support its practical application by neighbourhoods and landowners, councils and developers.

"The types of place that came out top were very consistent. Old fashioned squares and beautiful walkable streets with a rich diversity of uses. They had some greenery but also a sense of enclosure."

So what *do* we like? For our book, *Of Streets and Squares*, we've recently been using a uniquely wide data set to research the types of streets and squares that people actually like and the ones they actively avoid. We polled over two thousand people with carefully controlled images. And we 'dropped' a visual preference algorithm developed at the Turing Institute and trained by 1.5 million responses to over 200,000 images, into just under 19,000 streets and squares in six British cities. Could we find patterns in the types of places people like by comparing the scores of the algorithm with the 'big data' on our cities? You bet we could.

Take London, one of the six cities we investigated. The types of place that came out top were very consistent. Old fashioned squares and beautiful walkable streets with a rich diversity of uses. They had some greenery but also a sense of enclosure (buildings about as wide as the street was tall). They had 'gentle density' half-way between the extremes of tower block and extended suburbia. They also had what we call the 'narrow fronts, many doors' model. No long blank walls but frequent front doors and windows. Similar patterns emerged in our visual preference surveys with Ipsos MORI.

Urban designers often tell us that buildings don't matter, 'it's the space in between.' And volume housebuilders tell us that people aspire to the drive-to cul-de-sacs they churn out. They're both wrong. The least popular places and the lowest scoring images in our polling were defined by lakes of tarmac and sheer, grey, faceless buildings. Drive to cul-de-sac streets scored pretty badly too. People recoil from streets without colour, a sense of place, variety in pattern or a coherent complexity of windows and doors in a near symmetrical pattern.

"It is increasingly being recognised how pernicious is the old lie 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder.' Simple clichés are dangerous things. And this one has probably done more harm than most."

When, six years ago, Create Streets started making this case we were largely ridiculed by the design and planning professions. That is now changing. Rationality is breaking out. If local councils want to boost the wellbeing of a Brexit-perturbed populace the answer is staring them in the face. Ask what people find beautiful. You'll get remarkable agreement from rich to poor, from north to south. And then support that though planning policy, not walls of glass or repetitive ugliness. ⏻

Lost towns?

Lord O'Neill is the Vice Chair of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership

'Left-behind' places should either be closer to their city neighbours, or reinvent themselves, argues **Lord O'Neill**

I have spent a lot of time in the past six years thinking about the excessive dependence of the UK economy on the performance of London and the surrounding South East areas, originally being asked to chair an independent review into how to invigorate other major British cities. This Cities Growth Commission appeared to be a big influence on the then-Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, and our ideas played quite a role in the conception of the Northern Powerhouse, as well as the separate issue of devolving decision making away from Westminster to major urban areas.

In that Commission, and much of the subsequent focus of thinking of mine, the prime areas of attention were larger metropolitan areas of at least 500,000 residents. This was done, not because we didn't care about smaller cities, towns or

Matt from Oldham

>> rural areas, but simply because we were tasked with coming up with ideas that could boost national economic growth, and the evidence strongly suggested that if you could boost the economic performance of these 14 metro areas while not weakening that of London and the South East, indeed the overall trend growth performance of the UK could be improved.

"Feeling sorry for themselves because they have been on the wrong end of major global, and perhaps domestic, forces won't really succeed."

When thinking about smaller towns, villages and rural areas, it is the case that if all of them around all the UK could also see their general vibrancy uplifted, then this would also boost national economic performance, but there are thousands of these, and unless you can positively change a large majority of them, it likely wouldn't influence the overall national economy. This observation is often not something many wish to focus on, but in my view, it is a harsh reality. If accepted, it would allow a more rational discussion of

what to do about these smaller, so-called 'left-behind' places.

At the same time, what is similarly true, as evidenced by the 2016 EU referendum, is that even if you can't think of policies to help all these smaller places that would make as much difference as policies for 14 metro areas, it is rather dangerous to not think about them. While there remain endless discussions about what caused citizens to vote to leave the European Union, it is reasonably clear that it was not led by those living in London or other major metro areas. So it is definitely important for policymakers to think about new policies on place as it relates to less populated areas.

Hence, let me concentrate on towns, but to some extent, the ideas may be applicable to even smaller conurbations.

Let me also make a clear distinction between those towns that lie close to major metro areas from those that are more isolated, such as coastal towns, or other more remote locations. It is clear to me that policymakers should make this distinction when thinking about towns close to Greater London, or within the Northern Powerhouse, or even the so-called Midlands Engine.

In principle, towns that are commutable

to London, or geographically lie within the Northern Powerhouse or the Midlands Engine, should play a crucial, indeed, central role to the broader agglomeration theory that underpins the economic case for them. Indeed, as can be observed readily in towns not too geographically distant from London, for example Guildford, they have obvious benefits to many people that enjoy active working lives in the heart of London.

"The path of disappearing off to a university, then finding the first job in London, and then disappearing to London for the rest of one's active life, can be broken. Indeed, I detect the faintest of signs that this might be happening a bit, at least around the Manchester and Leeds areas."

The core of the Northern Powerhouse is the region that is bounded between the metro areas of Leeds, Sheffield to the east, Liverpool to the west, and Manchester, centrally. Including all the towns and villages in between as well

>> as those cities, this totals around eight million people. If policies can be done to allow this whole area to function as one economic unit, both as consumers and producers, then all the smaller towns would benefit immensely. Barnsley, Doncaster, Oldham, Warrington and so on, all stand to benefit just as much as Manchester itself, if done properly. This is why, of course, the Northern Powerhouse Rail is so central to the concept. And equally importantly is what we used to call the 'Noyster' at the Cities Commission: a system for allowing seamless and affordable travel around the Northern Powerhouse.

There is also the topic of young people from towns that, understandably want to disappear off to universities. If the Northern Powerhouse develops credible traction, and young ambitious people feel they can develop a fulfilling and rewarding career, then some of these towns could become the Guildfords of the Northern Powerhouse in the future. Similarly, the path of disappearing off to a university,

then finding the first job in London, and then disappearing to London for the rest of one's active life, can be broken. Indeed, I detect the faintest of signs that this might be happening a bit, at least around the Manchester and Leeds areas.

"While there remain endless discussions about what caused citizens to vote to leave the European Union, it is reasonably clear that it was not led by those living in London or other major metro areas."

I often think, in this regard, the *N8* entity, that informally links the historically regarded best northern English universities, could play a much more dynamic and forceful role in pursuing some related goals for the success of the Northern Powerhouse, and indirectly and also directly, help more the towns located nearby.

It is undoubtedly tougher for towns

that are more remote, including those in the North. Many of these proud places, historically vibrant due to manufacturing industry or coastal tourism, need to take a good hard analytical look at themselves, and objectively articulate what is their modern 'edge'? Feeling sorry for themselves because they have been on the wrong end of major global, and perhaps domestic, forces won't really succeed.

Trying to position yourself in a different way is the right path. Carlisle I think, which is very isolated from the major urban centres of the north, has started to have some success. It has persuaded policymakers to think of it as being in the centre of the 'Borderlands' area and has managed to attract government funding for some new ideas that go with this. Most recently, Stockport, long a town felt bypassed by Manchester's success, has decided to become more ambitious and has some truly exciting ideas about recreating its central areas. I am sure there must be many others. ●

Power to the people

Empower communities to arrest the decline of our high streets, writes **Vidhya Alakeson**

Vidhya Alakeson is the founding Chief Executive of Power to Change

In recent years, a series of high-profile closures has put the decline of the high street firmly in the headlines. The travails of household names like Debenhams, House of Fraser, Toys R Us, Mothercare, and many more have sparked renewed interest in what can be done to turnaround fortunes on the high street, as one in ten shops remains vacant.

Much of the focus has been on the thorny issue of business rates, with more than 50 of Britain's largest retailers calling

for fundamental reform of the system this summer. Clearly, there are big problems with the way the business rates system works – not least the fact that increasingly cash-strapped local authorities now greatly rely on business rates income, meaning any reform would also have to address issues around local government financing. But more significantly, focusing on rates assumes that the problem we are trying to fix is retail.

We cannot unwind patterns of online

retail and consumer preferences for more locally grounded, independent services and experiences. We have to move to a new model in which high streets are places for us to congregate, to interact and to live our lives – places of entrepreneurialism, business and trading, yes – but also places of citizenship, not just commerce. Central to the emergence of this new model is a simple idea: that communities themselves are best placed to rebuild their high streets.

Our work at Power to Change in

Mtaylor848

>> support of community businesses has highlighted the raw economic value of communities taking the lead. Community businesses can grow the local economy from within, harnessing the entrepreneurial talents of local people to revitalise the high street. In areas of significant disadvantage and dereliction, a community-led approach can create a much needed economic turnaround in the absence of significant interest from private developers and commercial businesses. Our new research estimates that there are at least 6,300 community-owned buildings and green spaces, including a significant number on the high street. Together, they contribute £220 million to UK Gross Value Added. And by employing local people and using other local businesses in their supply chains, 56p of every £1 they spend stays in the local economy.

There are hundreds of examples of community businesses and other types of community organisation bringing new energy and vitality to high streets and town centres. In the White Rock area of Hastings, a group of community-led organisations have between them taken ownership of seven derelict properties over the last five years. One, Rock House, has already been successfully brought back into use as a vibrant and financially viable hub combining a community kitchen, work space, community meeting space and affordable housing. The rest will be reimagined over the next few years to meet the needs of local people, working in partnership with local independent businesses in the White Rock area to create mutual benefit.

And in Anfield, Homebaked – a community-led bakery and community land trust – now owns the entire derelict terrace on which the bakery is based and are redeveloping it as a mix of commercial space, affordable homes and workspaces. Down the same street, Kitty's Laundrette has recently opened, combining affordable, environmentally-friendly laundry facilities with a space for community activities.

Working together, Kitty's and Homebaked plan to regenerate the whole street which lies between them.

"Empowering communities is the most serious thing we can do in response to the decline of our high streets."

However, a number of barriers get in the way. Rents remain stubbornly high, even where there are large numbers of vacant units, locking out community businesses and other locally-minded organisations which might restore a sense of local pride and identity to a place. This would be less of a problem if communities were more often owners on the high street, but opaque and fragmented ownership, coupled with financial barriers, makes it a challenge for communities to shape their own high streets. Finally, current approaches to local economic priority setting means that community

>> organisations do not have an equal voice at the planning table. They are consulted but are not decision-makers with real influence to shape how the high street evolves.

"We have to move to a new model in which high streets are places for us to congregate, to interact and to live our lives – places of entrepreneurialism, business and trading, yes – but also places of citizenship, not just commerce."

To ensure that communities can play their part, we need to make it easier for communities to become owners and influencers on the high streets.

To begin with, there are a number of changes that could be made to local economic planning, such as including community representatives in the governance of Business Improvement Districts and ensuring technical support for neighbourhood planning extends to cover town centre vitality.

There is also a strong case for the extension of the Right to Bid under the Localism Act 2011 to a powerful new Community Right to Buy. This extension would give specifically defined communities priority rights to buy land in which they have registered an interest, and a generous window of opportunity to raise the funds necessary to meet the price of the land as determined by an independent valuation. In addition, the new Community Right to Buy should include the right for communities to force the sale of a building or land if it is in a state of significant disrepair or neglect and is contributing to the decline of a neighbourhood.

To tackle financial barriers to ownership, Government should earmark £300 million of the additional funding announced for the Stronger Towns Fund to support community-led organisations to take on buildings and land that matter to them in their town centres over the next five years. This funding should include initial feasibility funding, capital funding for building purchase and, critically, revenue funding to support the early running costs of the building. To support communities

to make best use of this fund, the new High Streets Task Force should provide access to capacity building for community organisations that successfully secure funding. An additional £10 million should be made available to the High Streets Task Force to provide this support.

"To ensure that communities can play their part, we need to make it easier for communities to become owners and influencers on the high streets."

For too long, not just in the high streets debate but across the broad sweep of economic regeneration policy, community empowerment has been seen as a nice thing to have in addition to the supposedly more serious business of tax reform, Whitehall-led industrial strategy and so on. In fact, empowering communities is the most serious thing we can do in response to the decline of our high streets. Because when people take real control over the places where they live, that is when genuinely transformative change can take place.

Cities of the future

The best way to future-proof our cities is to make them adaptable and responsive, argues **Nicola Yates OBE**

Nicola Yates OBE is the CEO of Connected Places Catapult

Cities are shaped by complex, often competing, local, national and global forces. That makes it hard for place leaders, both public and private, to accurately predict and plan for the forces that shape our streets, towns and cities – especially when trying to look further ahead than a few years. Successful future cities will therefore be characterised

by adaptability. Luckily, the very forces driving the transformation of our cities and towns also offer the tools needed to enable such adaptability.

From the winding pedestrian lanes of Brighton, conceived by people who never imagined the need to make space for 'horseless carriages', to the planners behind the likes of Swindon and Milton

Keynes, who could think of little else, developers and planning officers are often making decisions about tomorrow based on today's ideas. Of course, the best planners and developers do consider the future, but in doing so they face an uphill struggle. In a rapidly changing world, anyone making decisions about something as complex as a city must channel

>> their inner mystic when developing and evaluating plans – considering not just one set of trends, but a complex interplay of different possible futures that intersect and overlap.

At the Connected Places Catapult, the UK government-backed centre of excellence for innovation in mobility and the built environment, we see four key technology-enabled trends which are shaping towns and cities by redefining our collective relationship with the built environment, the economy and each other.

The first of these trends, 'Space-as-a-Service', has emerged from the recent shift in the way the commercial real estate industry provides products and services to tenants, transforming their role from rent collectors to service providers. In short, it is the change from accessing space through ownership or long-term rent, to a model where space is something we can access when and where we want. This trend can be seen across UK cities, from Box Park's 'meanwhile use' retail centres to WeWork's co-working spaces, The Collective's co-living spaces and peer-to-peer home sharing platforms like AirBnB. These businesses represent a distinct shift towards the agile optimisation of space and services within cities.

Moving on to the theme of augmented and navigable space, the emergence of services like Google Lens and Google Map Augmented Reality (AR) means our experience of the world around us is increasingly mediated through digital filters, adding a new layer of information to our everyday lives. With the rollout of 'smart street furniture' like BT's InLink UK pods, which serve advertisements and hyperlocal content tailored to individual passers-by, soon everyone will have a city experience unique to themselves. Just as we are using tech to find our way through the city, it is tracking our movement as well – generating valuable new data, but also raising questions about individual privacy and public trust.

Which brings us to predictable behaviour – a trend grounded in the ever-growing bank of data about how people, vehicles and goods move through cities, and the increasingly intelligent algorithms which can sift valuable insights from that data. Such analysis allows for complex urban modelling and more accurate insights into how cities function today and how they might work tomorrow. Since 2007, Google has provided live traffic information in its wayfinding apps to help users avoid congested areas of the city in real-time. This year, CrimeRadar launched in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, using machine-learning to predict where and when crime is likely to occur. Drawing on five years of crime data and 14 million crimes provided by the state police, every part of the city is now rated. Meanwhile, academics at University College London and the Centric Lab are looking at how cutting edge neuroscience data can be integrated to models to improve the fidelity of behavioural predictions still further.

Advances in data analysis and monitoring are not limited to things that move. They are also being applied to the built environment itself to create intelligent infrastructure. From sensors threaded throughout the London Underground which enable predictive maintenance and reduced management costs, to the proliferation of smart metres which will enable more dynamic energy networks ('smart grids'), infrastructure and the services they support are becoming more responsive and resilient.

For both city managers and private developers, staying ahead of the innovation curve is as essential as it is challenging. Places that plan for and harness innovative connected places technologies are likely to reap benefits in terms of economic productivity, prosperity and citizen satisfaction, while those which fail to adapt to the changing world may fall behind.

To ensure that more places enjoy the fruits of innovation, the Connected Places Catapult is working with place leaders and private firms across the UK to support local authorities engage the market with confidence, and with the private sector to help firms develop and demonstrate solutions to the pressing needs of buyers. In particular, we have been working with planning authorities and developers to catalyse an urgent upgrade in the UK's planning sector. This 'PlanTech' revolution has seen firms large and small applying data analysis, augmented reality, machine learning and a range of other digital technologies to bring land use and transport planning into the twenty-first century, reducing risk and therefore cost for developers, driving efficiency in planning services and delivering transparency for the public. With our help, many of these once futuristic products are on the market today to help place leaders make smarter choices that will stand the test of time.

"Just as we are using tech to find our way through the city, it is tracking our movement as well – generating valuable new data, but also raising questions about individual privacy and public trust."

Looking ahead, the next level of innovation will see whole infrastructure systems and the places they support reproduced in the form of 'digital twins' – incredibly sophisticated virtual models which can be used to test proposed changes before making costly interventions in the real world. Combining dynamic data about fixed assets like buildings, transport infrastructure and utilities networks with real time and modelled data about the movement of people and goods through the space, these digital twins will be an essential tool for city managers of the future.

Tightening our green belts

Professor Alister Scott outlines how the green belt can transform cities as well as protect them

Alister Scott is a Professor of Environmental Geography at Northumbria University

England's green belts are viewed by some as one of the great policy successes of the twentieth century. Established in 1955, in response to concerns at the scale of urban development in the interwar period, today's green belts represent about 13% of England.

Under current national planning policy guidance, there are five purposes for green belt land: to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; assist in safeguarding the countryside; preserve the special character of historic towns; and assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

"So in reframing the green belt, we need to keep the 'protect' function but add a new 'transform' function."

These purposes have been translated into a strong presumption against development within the recently revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Thus, changes to green belt boundaries are only allowed in exceptional circumstances and very special circumstances for individual planning applications.

Such a strong presumption against development in major cities across England has led to sustained criticism of green belt policy by leading housebuilders and think tanks. Many argue for selective green belt releases, primarily near railway stations to help deliver the 300,000 homes per year that Government estimates we now need.

"We need to move away from viewing green belt simply as a constraint to development and growth to viewing it as a green asset that delivers multiple benefits."

Meanwhile, environmental commentators, pointing to the need for actions to address environmental crises in climate change and biodiversity, argue that green belts could play a more positive role. Furthermore, they offer significant potential to deliver UN Sustainable Development Goals which the UK government has signed up to. However, current policy lacks any explicit mechanisms for such proactive land management.

Additionally, there is criticism from national and local campaign groups who see current protection for green belt as inadequate, with a continual 'nibbling' away at its boundaries.

Finally, there is a hidden problem related to the way the NPPF treats green belt policy separately from policy for green infrastructure. In the green belt chapter there is no reference to green infrastructure; yet, within the 12 English cities where green belt exists, it forms the majority of the green infrastructure network. The lack of explicit recognition of this dual role in national and, indeed, local policy reflects a wider problem of dis-integrated development in planning policy. This is significant as planning policy for green infrastructure is framed more positively as an environmental, social and economic asset in terms of the multiple benefits it can deliver.

With criticism of green belt evident from multiple interests, it is timely to rethink what and who the green belt is for and how it might be managed to become a more productive space.

Green belts typically surround the environs of a city to prevent sprawl. This imposes a one-size-fits-all solution, where the multiple benefits of green space, such as recreation, health and well-being, are most accessible to those who live nearby or can readily travel. Other countries such as Denmark have adopted a more inclusive 'green fingers' approach that enables more people to benefit from access to the green belt. These 'fingers' extend right into the heart of the city, thereby helping address lack of access to green space within the urban core which is a key problem in many of our UK cities, particularly in the most deprived areas.

Green belt boundaries, however, must respect local context, peoples' needs and priorities and whilst checking sprawl should remain a key function of green belt, other twenty-first century priorities need to be added. In particular, the climate emergency represents a key opportunity for a more explicit positive land management focus for delivery of multiple environmental benefits, transforming the green belt from a constraint to an asset for positive interventions.

Designing and delivering successful

>> places represents a key challenge as we tend to work in policy and sectoral silos most of the time. For example, current housing policy is often framed with meeting a target of 300,000 new homes built. But we need to build houses that have good community and environmental infrastructure to enable them to become 'homes' within sustainable communities. Green belts are core ingredients to help this transformation. Here, innovative standards frameworks, such as Building with Nature, help mediate these tensions within more holistic considerations of places, raising the standards of green infrastructure.

So in reframing the green belt, we need to keep the 'protect' function but add a new 'transform' function. This enables more innovation in addressing climate change and biodiversity crises, but as an integral part of city living. Using natural capital accounts, the value of green belt can be captured to challenge those interests who see green belt as redundant space. Indeed, there are no dedicated natural capital assessments of green belt to draw upon here which represents a key evidence gap.

Evidently, we need to change how our green belts are viewed and used in policy and practice and male them more productive spaces. But how can this be achieved?

First, a new statutory purpose for green belt needs to be added, reflecting its role as an opportunity space for climate change and wider environmental growth.

Second, the green belt needs to be reframed explicitly within guidance as green infrastructure. Integrating these two policy agendas is important to better realise the multiple benefits that green belts can and should provide.

Third, green belt needs to have dedicated delivery mechanisms to enable these changes to happen. For example, a dedicated green belt stewardship scheme could be designed. This could be along the lines of countryside stewardship, whereby grants are available for landowners to undertake positive conservation or access provisions that relate to green belt purposes. Additionally, better use of existing planning tools such as the Community Infrastructure Levy, tax incremental financing and Section 106 agreements could also help investment in these spaces.

"The multiple benefits of green space, such as recreation, health and well-being, are most accessible to those who live nearby or can readily travel."

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we need to move away from viewing green belt simply as a constraint to development and growth to viewing it as a green asset that delivers multiple benefits. Such an argument in the green belt debate will enable it to become a more radical and innovative place making tool that can become part of the solution to many of our key urban problems.

Greener, wilder, healthier

Paul de Zylva is the Chair of the National Park City Foundation

Paul De Zylva sets out how our cities can become more sustainable

Soon after London regained strategic government – the Greater London Authority with an elected Mayor – a report called *Making London Work* made the economic and social case for London having a better environment.

That 2001 report covered the usual urban topics – transport, waste and housing – and posed new thinking on fledgling eco-technologies and industries, urban food growing and even maintenance of the urban realm and the potential for commercial fisheries in the Thames Estuary.

"Too many town centres are characterised by trees stuck in concrete and amenity grass and planting of low nature value. Yes, these may be easy to maintain, but they do little or nothing to help nature."

Making London Work said London's environment could be a new economic driver and a force for better city living. Looking back, most of what was called for in the report has come to pass: well designed, higher density residences in mixed development in and around London's town centres; reduced need to travel by private car because of real choice for would-be walkers and bikers; investment in clean energy production and consumption with clean, safe renewable tech incorporated into regeneration and

>> construction projects; intensive recycling strategy with a focus on re-use and repair; making London a hub for eco-industries and entrepreneurs; and, integrating nature into spaces and places where people live and work.

Many UK cities have transformed since 2001 – including London – but many of the challenges remain the same – creating quality skilled work, dealing with waste, housing and getting to work on time. Now, with a majority of the world population being urban dwellers, cities can and must be a powerhouse for real progress, not just on those age-old challenges but on the big 'new' challenges we face: an unstable climate and an eroded natural world.

Even in the online era, cities are unique convenors of the professionals who can innovate and find solutions, and do so even in the absence of proper central government action and leadership, although it would help enormously.

The future will not be shaped by one person or profession; it requires the many minds inhabiting cities: the designers, architects, planners, surveyors, landscape architects, engineers, horticulturists and gardeners, and the skilled contractors who then manage and maintain the urban realm.

They can design, build and maintain the quality affordable housing and the multi-functional places and spaces we all need nearby. They can keep us safe from overheating, from extremes of drought and flooding, and they can make energy use clean and affordable. They can extend our choices about how to get about, including to access real nature, not artificial grass, in our streets and localities.

This is the new city challenge in a carbon constrained and nature deficient world. Currently, the greening of existing towns and cities can appear trendy and a superficial passing phase. Green walls and bee hives on the green roof can be great if done properly, but they can also be superficial while clients allow important energy standards and other 'must haves'

to fall off the spec for their latest grand project.

Superficiality aside, this may point to a greater desire to make places better and multi-functional. Just as people want more control over their workspace, they want to more say over the spaces and places where they live, work and pass through.

People value their green spaces and – if we needed to have it made plain for us – the evidence is that urban greening provides us with multiple benefits for free. The economists have figured that London's 'urban forest' provides annual benefits worth over £132 million. The next time you pass an urban tree and green space, say "thanks" for their help cleaning our air, preventing flooding, cooling the city, boosting health and recreation, and avoiding costs to the NHS.

For good measure, in its *City Health Check* report, the Royal Institute of British Architects examined how design can save lives and money and found numerous examples of health and well-being benefits of nature and good planning in urban areas. The report also linked the lack of quality green space to the rising prevalence of obesity and illness, including diabetes.

For now, too many town centres are characterised by trees stuck in concrete and amenity grass and planting of low nature value. Yes, these may be easy to maintain, but they do little or nothing to help nature and will do nothing to help cities curb climate change's worst effects.

Another characteristic is over-development, where schemes overreach to grab land for security or other reasons, like a castle with a moat. London's Docklands is a classic case of over-reach of concrete, glass, steel and hard surfacing over all other considerations. Those parcels of land could be better used for multifunctional open nature and play spaces – softening the urban landscape while building in resilience to urban threats such as excessive heat and flooding.

Some of the better developers,

designers, architects, planners and master planners are starting to get this. But they are few and far between and too many in the planning and construction sector are stuck doing the same things that perpetuates the same old problems, leading to 'business as usual'.

"Green walls and bee hives on the green roof can be great if done properly, but they can also be superficial while clients allow important energy standards and other 'must haves' to fall off the spec for their latest grand project."

As the world's first National Park City, London is opening up rich conversations about life in cities and how things can be if we started to view cities as living entities – cities for people and nature alike.

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Anvar Sarygulov and **Sam Robinson** sit down with the Conservative candidate for Mayor of London to discuss community, housing and conservatism

"We have an environment in London where people at the top have done so much of passing the buck. They haven't taken responsibility. They've made so many election pledges and broken them all. Of course people don't trust."

There's a big debate on the centre-right now about whether the priority should be strengthening community or championing freedom. Which do you think the Conservative Party should prioritise?

I don't think you need to do one or the other, you can definitely do two. There is no doubt that conservatism is about freedom. If there is a human right in the world, that's probably number one – to be free.

But it's more than just human rights. You can do more for your community if you are free, where community is understood in the broadest sense from your economic output to helping your mother. Freedom is directly linked to creativity, and it is creativity that solves the challenges of mankind, anything from who and how do you love to penicillin.

Freedom is important, but of course so is community, since we live and grow in communities. The wickedest thing you can do to a person is force them to be in isolation, so the single best thing you can do is put them in a community.

If you are talking about the difference between freedom and overbearing state, that's a different question to answer, but a community for me is freedom. Diversity, community – they are freedom."

"I'm desperate to have a multicultural identity for London that isn't based on guilt or a box-ticking exercise. That's actually based on acceptance, not just tolerance."

London seems to be full of ambitious, freedom-loving people – migrants from other parts of the UK and abroad. Does this undermine a sense of community in London?

When you talk about community there's a few things I'd say. Firstly, most if not all people are a member of more than one community. And that is a beneficial thing, so I'm a member of a professional community – mine happens to be people who work in youth work. I've been a member of that community for over 25 years. I'm a member of another community, those who physically live on my road.

The challenge is that we have always been a tale of two cities and it's getting worse. People who do not feel safe, and there are whole communities who are under the threat of violent crime. People who cannot afford their rent, people who travel such long distances to work and not through choice.

So the idea that it's a challenge between the haves and have-nots, the socially liberal and free, and the socially downtrodden and trapped, there is some truth in that. But I see the job of the London Mayor to deliver – and when you deliver on housing, on safety, on transport, you break down those barriers and truly make London open.

>> **Bright Blue research recently showed that the 10 local authorities with the lowest levels of neighborhood trust in England are all in London. Why do you think this is the case?**

The first thing I'd point out is that I bet that closely corresponds with the highest incidence of crime and antisocial behaviour. Let's be clear, if you are under attack from knife crime, burglary, robbery, rape, you don't trust easily.

The other thing, as well, is that we have an environment in London where people at the top have done so much of passing the buck. They haven't taken responsibility. They've made so many election pledges and broken them all. Of course people don't trust. That doesn't surprise me at all.

Some people claim that gentrification in London is a form of 'social cleansing', or at least that working class communities are being priced out of the area. Is gentrification a problem?

Gentrification has always been a problem for London in some senses, but of course it's also meant that huge parts of London have been repaired, modernised, made better. My response to gentrification is to make sure you defend any indigenous community but never stop people in the community having the ambition to move. They may want to move away. One of the important things about British life is that middle classes follow the jobs, they live where they want to live, they move across the country, and you must always have that as an option for people.

But my policy response for that is that in any redevelopment of social housing, you must give the residents the right to return. I would give the legal right, as far as I could give it as the Mayor, to return.

In the past, you have been sceptical of multiculturalism. Is this still the case?

What I was sceptical of is the multiculturalism that the political Left was trying to sell to us 10-15 years ago, which is about working on everybody's differences – so you're white, I'm black, he's Chinese, and we're not the same, and forcing us apart. I'm more interested in is how you get people together. I've done lots of community work over my time and I always start with what are the similarities we have. You don't need me to tell you that we are more similar than we are different, but our differences are very important to us and they're often played out in the wrong way that pushes apart.

That's why you've heard me challenge the idea. Is London really

open if you're keeping us separate? You can separate us in many ways, by race, class, gender, sexuality, and too much of that has played out in the last 15 years. I'm desperate to have a multicultural identity for London that isn't based on guilt or a box-ticking exercise. That's actually based on acceptance, not just tolerance.

> "The idea that it's a challenge between the haves and have-nots, the socially liberal and free, and the socially downtrodden and trapped, there is some truth in that."

What do you think is the main cause of the housing crisis in London?

It's just a failure to build over the years. In the last 10-20 years we've probably welcomed two million extra people to London and we've only built 200,000 dwellings. We simply have not kept up. London is booming now, but people forget that there was a point when London was emptying out. So people didn't foresee that it would fill back up at such a rate.

The real response now is to build appropriate development in the right places across London, link it with transport links as well. That's why I've proposed Housing for London to collate together all of the plans the Mayor currently has and spend the money he's been given by central government – a record amount I might add – to deliver. So what you're looking at is a Macmillan-esque, centralised, City Hall-backed housing provider with one focus only – to deliver housing at the scale that Londoners need. Where they need it, when they need it and in what form they need it.

What do you think is the role of social housing in addressing London's housing needs?

As someone who was born in social housing and lived in it all his life, I am testament to the importance of it. I would always build a lot of social housing, there's no doubt in anybody's mind that we need it. But there's a very large number of people who are not eligible for

>> social housing who also have a dire housing need. One of the chief mistakes that the current Mayor has made has been to remove the target for family housing. If you have any chance of starting a family in London, he's just made it significantly more expensive.

If you look at some people who work for the police force, say, or a nurse, who probably wouldn't be eligible for social housing, but still have a dire housing need. So I'd always build social housing first, but we have to build across the piece and not just in one sector. And, of course, the part of me that is conservative, and likes the idea of wealth creation and of passing wealth on, likes the idea of people owning. it isn't just me who likes that idea – if you survey Londoners, they like the idea as well.

Part of your housing pitch is to 'protect London's character' when building new homes. What is London's character?

What makes London's character is just how green it is. Of all the major cities in the world this is the greenest by far, so we need to protect our green belt, our public open spaces and our parks. I know we have enough brownfield sites to really make a dent in our housing problem, and that's why the Mayor's ban on building on brownfield sites to me is just amazing. What I would be doing is an audit of all strategic industrial land in London; which parts do we accelerate and make more, which parts do we do something else with.

London has always been interwoven with logistics and strategic places to do business and we need to maintain that. But we also need to protect our green belt. There's a temptation for councils to constantly put in planning permission to build on the green belt, and we want to defend London from that.

The other thing is about the London vernacular – what does it actually look like? London is going to need greater density. But you can disguise density, you can make it much more pleasant than by just building massive skyscrapers. Do you put 10% on the height of everything or 150% on the height of things in the wrong place, which is currently the case?

There's already been some action from the Conservative Government on helping private tenants: agency fees have been banned and there is an ongoing consultation on the abolition of Section 21. Do you think there is more to be done to help renters, especially as there are so many in London?

Ultimately the best thing you can do is get more properties to rent. The better the supply, the better the cost is. I think we need to look at supporting local authorities to find rogue landlords –

name, shame and blacklist them.

I'm also very up for doing something about longer tenancies. If you talk to the best landlords, they actually want people to have long tenancies. I also have a desire to figure out a 'London mortgage', because if you speak to people who pay rent, they pay rent at often above the level that the mortgage would cost. I think you should be able to use that as a record, a reference as to why you could afford a mortgage. I'm trying to do a study into that now. If an insurance company would underwrite it, is there any way City Hall could back it financially, if it is legally possible?

Other than Brexit, why do you think the Conservatives have struggled in London in recent years?

What's very interesting is when you campaign, people talk about a Conservative Party you just don't recognise. People talk about a party for the rich, people talk about selfishness. I'm having to say to them, we have an NHS that's worked because the Conservative Party put more money in it than the Labour Party ever have. Running the economy properly has meant we've been able to keep it going.

People talk about helping the poor. The single biggest help to the poor is employment. The Conservatives have consistently provided employment to the poorest parts of the country, including London, whereas Labour Governments have consistently left more unemployment than they found.

The other thing that conservatives need to be much bolder about is talking about other communities that they're not from: going to those communities, making friends, showing people that actually our values around freedom, dignity, family, religious freedom, all of those things, are important and ring home universally.

How can the Conservatives win a majority at the next election?

By being open, pragmatic, certain about what they believe, demonstrating to the country that we are not the Conservative Party that the Labour Party would have you believe. What we have to point out is that the Labour Party has become selfish and navel-gazing. It's an expression of the most selfish sort of individualism dressed up in cuddly warm clothes; it is not for poor people.

The reason the freedom and the community of the Conservative Party is important is because it's trying to give power to the individual and their communities. A big government run by Labour is deaf. It's just going to be horrific for the poorest people. 🔵

Why I'm a Bright Blue MP

The Rt Hon David Lidington MP was the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

Modern conservatism must embrace overlapping identities and champion respectful debate, writes the **Rt Hon David Lidington MP**

The philosopher Michael Oakeshott wrote that conservatism was not an ideology but an attitude: a sceptical disposition towards grand plans to remake society, coupled with respect for time-tested institutions and traditions. Today I would add that Conservatives understand that no slogan or sound bite can do justice to the complexity of lived human experience.

"A liberal conservative knows that you can disagree with someone, on Europe or anything else, without using terms like 'traitor' or 'betrayal'."

I've been a member of the Conservative Party for nearly 45 years. During that time, my views on particular issues have changed in light of my own experience and changes in our society. Overall though, the ten principles for which Bright Blue stands sum up pretty well my own approach to politics.

Today, I'd single out three reasons to explain why I describe myself as a liberal Conservative.

First, there is an urgent need to heal divisions within our country and in much of the western world. It's now commonplace to say that the 2016 EU referendum revealed how some towns and villages and some parts of society felt utterly alienated, not just from parliamentary and council politics, but from any sense that the country works for them.

This won't be easy. Nor are there instant answers. An effective response to the kind of social challenges which lie behind that public disaffection – drug and alcohol misuse, gang crime, educational underachievement, poor employment prospects – will require sustained effort over years and effective cooperation between different Whitehall departments. If we are to live up to our vision of the Conservative Party as the national party, we have to place social policy at the heart of our priorities.

Second, liberal conservatives respect and celebrate the fact that many people take pride in multiple identities.

Millions of our fellow citizens think of themselves as British while at the same time taking great pride in their Indian, Pakistani or Polish heritage. My constituents from those communities see no contradiction between those different identities and nor should any Conservative.

An understanding of and respect for overlapping identities is key to the successful integration of an increasingly diverse country.

Edmund Burke understood this more than 200 years ago. His famous passage about the importance of the 'little platoons' saw them as part of a bigger pattern of social institutions. In his words, they were "the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind."

The question of identity also lies at the heart of the Conservative Party's response to the challenge of separatism.

I believe that the survival of the Union will depend in large part on people feeling confident that they can be patriotically Scots or Welsh and yet also proud of being part of a United Kingdom in which those ancient national identities are respected and we are seen to be doing our utmost to make devolution work.

"Conservatives understand that no slogan or sound bite can do justice to the complexity of lived human experience."

Third, the most noxious trend in politics in the last few years has been the growth of intolerance towards people who hold different views. Social media has aggravated this trend in two ways. It is now easy to assemble a media schedule and a network of contacts composed exclusively of people who agree with you. Add to that the fact that there are sadly too many who online will employ vitriolic, aggressive language that they would never use in conversation or in an old-fashioned letter.

A liberal conservative knows that you can disagree with someone, on Europe or anything else, without using terms like "traitor" or "betrayal". Crude analogies between the European Union and the USSR or Nazi Germany insult democratic Europe and belittle the horror of those two twentieth century regimes.

Whether the controversy is about Europe or anything else, violent language and the bitter disparaging of opponents drives good people (of both left and right) out of politics and adds to public alienation from democratic institutions.

Being able to disagree vehemently with opponents in a spirit of mutual respect is a hallmark of a self-confident democracy. It's time for the Conservative Party and our country to relearn that lesson.

Research update

Sam Robinson updates us on Bright Blue's research programme

Sam Robinson is a Researcher at Bright Blue and Editor of *Centre Write*

The last few months in politics have been a rollercoaster, to say the least. With the drama in Westminster unfolding in spectacular fashion over the summer, pragmatic and workable policies are needed now more than ever.

"With a raft of intriguing projects lined up, Bright Blue will continue to contribute to the political world beyond Brexit through original and timely evidence-based policies."

The team at Bright Blue has continued to put forward influential research output with the publication of two new reports. In July, we published *Distant neighbours?*, which argued for a new approach to social integration. It recommended introducing a new definition and measure of social integration that takes into account levels of neighbourhood trust, ethnic diversity and residential segregation. The report also proposed several policies to strengthen social integration, including incentivising schools to participate in school linking programmes and boosting English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses.

Ahead of our annual conference in July, we also conducted polling to capture a snapshot of young adults' attitudes to public policy, the Conservatives and the overall state of Britain. The results showed that, like the majority of UK adults, young adults want to see Brexit resolved. But

it also revealed much deeper issues: young adults think Britain is divided, its politicians are terrible, and stress that they need help with affordable housing. These are fundamental, long-term challenges that will not go away once Brexit is done.

Our most recent report, *Emission impossible?* examined the sources of, impacts of and attitudes towards air pollution in the UK. As well as showing the enormous consequences of air pollution, the report suggested a range of measures to tackle it. These include ending the current fuel duty freeze, introducing a citizen-based reporting scheme to strengthen the enforcement of anti-idling measures, and exempting the purchasing of ultra-low emission vehicles from VAT. The report made twelve recommendations overall, and received extensive media coverage.

"Young adults think Britain is divided, its politicians are terrible, and stress that they need help with affordable housing. These are fundamental, long-term challenges that will not go away once Brexit is done."

Looking ahead, Bright Blue's key focus with regards to social policy will be working with the centre-left think tank, the Fabian Society, to examine the case for an independent pensions commission and what one could look like in practice. Previous Bright Blue research with the Fabian Society has found a great deal of

cross-party consensus on pensions policy, especially on auto-enrolment, reforms to pensions tax relief and ending the triple lock. This latest project will therefore ask whether this consensus provides fertile ground for creating an arms-length body on pensions.

"With the drama in Westminster unfolding in spectacular fashion over the summer, pragmatic and workable policies are needed now more than ever."

Bright Blue Scotland will also conduct analysis of original polling on attitudes to social security reform in Scotland, which will inform future policies north of the border.

Meanwhile, our energy and environment team are busy working on a new manifesto for conservation. The project will look at ways in which urban, rural, marine and international environments can be better protected and outline how this can be done through a series of credible centre-right policy recommendations.

Brexit still towers over British politics, and will continue to drown out other policy issues for the foreseeable future. But the need for thinking about other issues, from social cohesion to welfare to the environment, has not disappeared. With a raft of intriguing projects lined up, Bright Blue will continue to contribute to the political world beyond Brexit through original and timely evidence-based policies.

ARTS & BOOKS

Women of Westminster
By Rachel Reeves MP

Diane Banks is a Non-executive Director of Bright Blue and CEO of Northbank Talent Management

There have been 491 women elected to Parliament to date, but it wasn't until 2016 that the number of women ever elected equalled the number of male MPs in a single parliament. In *Women of Westminster*, Rachel Reeves – Labour MP for Leeds West and former Bank of England economist – has complied a comprehensive history and analysis of the diverse range of women who have served in Parliament over the last 100 years, from those who initially took over their seats from their husbands (Nancy Astor and the Duchess of Atholl) to pioneering working-class women such as Ellen Wilkinson and Alice Bacon, and professional women like Edith Summerskill.

From the outset, female MPs have rightly fought not to be seen as a subset, with Nancy Astor declaring that she "didn't believe in sexes or classes" and Ellen Wilkinson's retort that "I am not a lady – I am a Member of Parliament" when an attempt was made to prevent her from entering the smoking room in 1924. Nevertheless, most female MPs identified with the feminist cause and are mostly known for their advocating of issues pertaining to women and the family, from Eleanor Rathbone's family allowance in 1924, Margaret Wintringham and Nancy Astor's work on the guardianship of children in the 1920s, Edith Summerskill's campaign for clean milk and attempt to push a child maintenance bill in 1952 to Barbara Castle's 1970 Equal Pay Act, Margaret Beckett's Minimum Wage Bill and Harriet Harman's New Deal for Lone Parents (both 1997). Indeed, David Steel's 1967 Abortion Act is the only notable 'women's' legislation advocated by a man. It's unsettling to consider that it is primarily women who have pushed for social reform – issues that, naturally, should be of concern to everyone. Indeed, a key theme of the book is the extent to which women's issues have typically been cross-party: Nancy Astor and Ellen Wilkinson became lifelong friends, despite opposite backgrounds and parties, with Astor calling for a women's party as early as the 1920s, though interestingly this met resistance from working-class women who also identified strongly with class.

Women of Westminster is an important addition to an emerging canon of books which bring to light the virtual erasure of prominent women from history: Sonia Purnell's biography of Clementine Churchill, Anne de Courcy on Margot Asquith, Sophy Ridge's *The Women Who Shaped Politics*, various books about Ada Lovelace's contribution to science, and I would also add Mary Lovell's excellent 2005 biography of Bess of Hardwick, which showed us that Bess was one of the UK's most prominent entrepreneurs, not just the wife of various rich men. Reeves speculates that Edith Summerskill (a doctor, MP and housewife) was sidelined by Nye Bevan because he worried she would upstage her on the day of the introduction of the NHS, resulting in "the virtual erasure of (her) role from history." We forget that the war government included Jennie Adamson, Florence Horsburgh and Ellen Wilkinson; that Ellen Wilkinson was a co-author of Labour's 1945 manifesto and made the opening conference speech that year, and that Eleanor Rathbone's 1924 book *The Disinherited Family* heavily influenced the Beveridge Report.

It sometimes frustrates me that female writers of non-fiction tend only to write about female subjects and topics, as it plays into the assumption that that is what they are 'supposed' to do. However, it's clear that this works both ways: male writers are not giving prominence to these pivotal figures in history. I will look forward to seeing what Rachel Reeves tackles next, and to more books from writers of both sexes on representatives from the other half of the population who have been instrumental in shaping the world as we know it. ⓑ
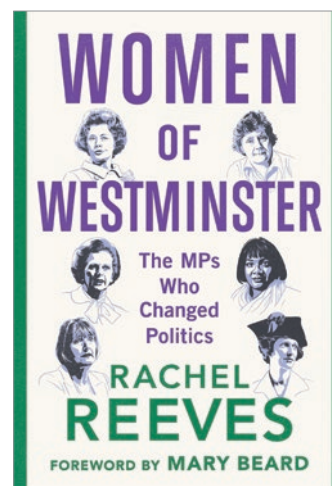
Women of Westminster,
Rachel Reeves;
I.B. Tauris;
320 pages (Hardcover).
Published 7 March 2019.

Dignity: Seeking respect in back row America
By Chris Arnade
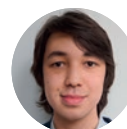
Anvar Sarygulov is a Researcher at Bright Blue and Editor of *Centre Write*

The seismic political events of recent years across the West have left many people confused and befuddled. In response, many have attempted to explain why these things have happened and far too often such explanations are simplistic and attempt to comfort the reader, rather than confront them with the realities of today. *Dignity*, without trying to, provides one of the most powerful insights into why things are going the way they are.

"It is first and foremost a window into a fragment of society from which people who read political books tend to be completely divorced."

Chris Arnade's journey to write the book is in itself revealing. A successful bond trader with a PhD in physics, he quit his job to photograph and wander the roughest parts of New York. There, he started to talk to the people who live there and recorded their experience without judgement and with a great degree of empathy.

The book, despite its brevity, is an arduous read. Each chapter documents a neighbourhood in America and the people who live there, through photographs of them and in verbatim re-telling of their stories. They are stories of hardship, of addiction, of desperation. Of places which have been declining for decades and forgotten by most. It is impossible not to emphasise with the dozens of people that Arnade has encountered along the way, not to gain at least some understanding of their thinking and their lives.

Arnade, as someone who was born in a declining town himself and escaped it by going to university, identifies education as the key dividing line. The 'front row' of America, who are mobile, metropolitan and have little time for faith, have little understanding of the importance of place, community and religion for those in the 'back row'. Yet, in the declining towns, where factories have closed, bright youngsters leave on their eighteenth birthday and deprivation dominates, they are the only things left to give people dignity.

Though the author only travels across the US, the insights gained do not only apply there. The rusting industrial towns of Midwest and the abandoned mining communities of West Virginia echo the North and the Valleys here in Britain. The opioid crisis that now engulfs the US is already starting to emerge in the UK, if one were to bother to look at our prescription statistics. And the divide between those who have degrees, and those who do not, resonates in our politics and society just as strongly.

It is important to note that despite the context, the book itself is not about Trump. Arnade travels to some communities which are predominantly African American or Latino, while others are mixed or have mostly white residents. The key political sentiment, across all of them, is apathy and hopelessness. Mentions of Obama and Trump are primarily coloured by their potential to disrupt the status quo.

Arnade's observations, though powerful, are not without issues. His analysis, where it is apparent, has a tendency to ignore the historical context. This is most apparent with his discussion of racism, where his linking of such attitudes only to the current context fails to take into account the long and complex history of race relations in US.

But this is not a book that tries to provide watertight analysis. It is first and foremost a window into a fragment of society from which people who read political books tend to be completely divorced. To make them pause and think about the divides of today not through clinical quantitative analysis, but through raw experience. In this goal, the book succeeds absolutely.
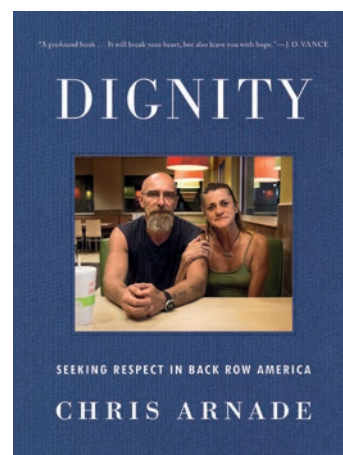
Learned optimism
By Professor Martin Seligman

Patrick Hall is a Researcher at Bright Blue

In Professor Seligman's 2006 book, he unearths why optimists lead happier, healthier, more successful lives than pessimists. Seligman explains how the two mindsets are learned attitudes, and what one can do to become an optimist.

Seligman draws upon decades of his research in the field of positive psychology to explain why some people go through life seemingly better than others, drawing the evidence-backed conclusion that they are indeed optimists.

> **"All I can suggest is that if you are curious about positive psychology and want to enrich your own life, pick up the book and read it."**

He states that optimism and pessimism are 'explanatory styles'; the way in which we explain negative events that happen to us. When experiencing a negative event, Seligman highlights the three ways in which optimists and pessimists differ.

First, optimists see negative events as temporary, pessimists as permanent. Second, optimists consider negative events as specific to a situation, pessimists consider them as part of a broader pattern. Third, optimists see negative events as having an external cause, whereas pessimists see themselves as the problem.

Seligman describes how your explanatory style is predominantly learnt from your parents and teachers at a young age. As both styles are learnt, they can be unlearnt and relearnt.

He also shows how pessimism is a likely cause of depression. At the crux of it is the idea that pessimists will believe that nothing they do will change anything.

The book touches on sports, showing that athletes and teams which were measured to be more optimistic performed better. He measures the optimism of Olympians and baseball teams, then highlights the connection between optimism and sporting success.

This same connection rings true for employee performance in the workplace. Seligman's study with insurance giant, Metropolitan, showed that optimism scores of sales employees were a more accurate indicator of employee success than skills-based testing. The more optimistic the employee was, the better they performed.
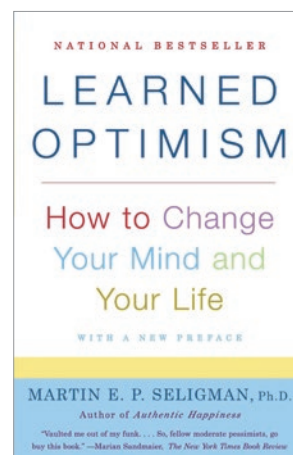
He does, however, recognise that not all professions would benefit from an optimistic explanatory style. In the cases of roles which involve a greater deal of risk with more serious consequences should something go wrong, such as a pilot, optimism is not the appropriate explanatory style.

Somewhat controversially, Seligman makes the claim that the more optimistic you are, the healthier you will be. He draws on studies which show that cell-mediated immunity was higher in individuals who were optimistic, when compared with pessimists, and even showed that cancer patients with a more optimistic explanatory style lived longer.

When hearing about this book and before reading it, I approached it with a fair degree of scepticism. Are Seligman's clinical experiments robust enough to 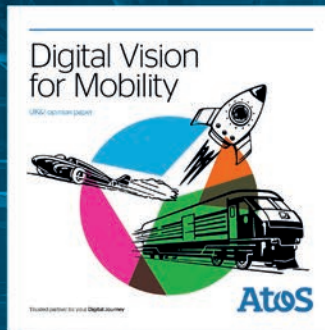reliably draw these conclusions? How can optimism be measured, and furthermore, how can it be measured in historical figures and those who have already deceased, such as politicians from the early 1900s? Is it optimism that contributes to success, or is it something else in which optimism is a contributing factor?

These were all questions which played on my mind. Having now read the book, I can confidently say that any doubts I had prior to reading it have been extinguished. It is difficult to make the case for Seligman's research methods and conclusions in a synopsis such as this. All I can suggest is that if you are curious about positive psychology and want to enrich your own life, pick up the book and read it. 🔖

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