

# HOUSING

## WELCOME TO LABOUR'S NEW TEAM

LHG congratulates Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner on their election as Leader and Deputy Leader. We nominated both as candidates, following a ballot of our members.



**Keir Starmer** wrote to LHG during the Leadership election campaign saying that he had been proud the 2019 General Election manifesto included "*radical but deliverable housing policies*" that addressed the

housing crisis and were streets ahead of the Tories'.

**Angela Rayner** acknowledged the value of a council home, saying "*I was pregnant at 16, and needed a council house and social security to look after my son*". She said that investing in council housing makes simple economic sense:- "*A proper social safety net for when you're down on your luck just seems like a solid idea.*"



We look forward to working with them, knowing that both support the causes that we hold dear.

In his letter, Keir made clear his support for LHG, acknowledging the role we have to play in developing Labour's housing agenda, as well as the important role that **John Healey**, now moving on to be Shadow Secretary of State for Defence, has played over many years.

**We want to thank John most sincerely for all his work, and wish him all the best for the future.**

We're delighted to welcome **Thangam Debbonaire** as the new Shadow Secretary of State for Housing.

We look forward to working with her and to campaigning to elect Keir Starmer as our next PM.



**During the Leadership campaign we asked the candidates to answer a series of questions posed by LHG members.**

Keir's responses clearly identified the key areas:

- Stop viewing housing as a financial asset first and a decent, affordable and secure home second.
- Accept that there cannot be a solution without a new generation of council and social homes in every community.
- Promote and support high quality development as a source of renewal for our communities in all parts of the country.
- Give private renters the rights and powers they deserve, including indefinite tenancies and rent controls.
- Tackle the climate crisis and the housing crisis at the same time by insisting on zero carbon new builds and upgrading the existing stock.
- Insist on good quality, sustainable homes, not the slum housing that the Tories allow through 'permitted development' rights for office blocks.
- End the national shame of rough sleeping and homelessness, which is a direct result of Tory policies since 2010.

# LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA



Dear friends,

It is the honour and the privilege of my life to be elected as leader of the Labour Party. It comes at a moment like none other in our lifetime.

Coronavirus has brought normal life to a halt. We're reminded how precious life is, but also how fragile. It reminds us of what really matters, our family, our friends and the communities we serve.

We need to pull together like never before. As Socialist societies you are at the heart of our movement, campaigning across many different areas and in so many different communities. As we navigate our way through this crisis and beyond your campaigning, policy expertise and community activism will be invaluable.

I would like to pay tribute to Rebecca and Lisa for the way that they led their campaigns and for their warm camaraderie throughout. I am delighted that Angela Rayner has been elected Deputy Leader and am looking forward to working closely with her in the coming years. I would like to congratulate all the candidates for Deputy Leader on their campaigns. Dawn, Ian, Richard and Rosena know it's tough, relentless work on the campaign trail and they should all be proud of the campaigns they led.

In my acceptance speech I said we have to face the future with honesty and candour and vowed to tear out the poison of anti-semitism from our Party. That is why I used my first words as Leader to apologise to the Jewish community. It will take time to rebuild trust but with your support we can do it.

Over the decades Labour has become a home for feminists, environmentalists, campaigners for a fairer society for disabled people, LGBT+ movements, anti-racist campaigners, internationalists and many more. I am proud of our movement and I am committed to working with all affiliated groups towards our vision for a better society.

Although we can't be together in person for a while, I will be in touch in due course so we can further discuss what steps we need to take as a Party.

We've just lost four elections in a row, so be in no doubt that I understand the scale of the task we face. We've got a mountain to climb but if we pull together across our movement we can do it.

We must lead by example, showing our party, our movement and our country that we are united. We will have disagreements, but we must not let those divide us any longer. It is incumbent upon all of us to ensure we conduct our politics in a cordial, courteous and professional manner. My campaign centred on unity and it's vital that we sustain that message.

As Socialist societies you have a crucial role to play in showing our members and supporters that the party can unite in order to win. I want to thank you for everything you do and your commitment to progressing our socialist values. In these difficult times these values will be pivotal in holding our communities together.

As Leader I will represent and listen to all our affiliates, members and supporters. I will lead this great party into a new era, with confidence and hope. So that when the time comes, we can all serve our country again in government.

Yours Sincerely,

Keir Starmer MP

Leader of the Labour Party

# SCRUTINISING GRENFELL

Three years after the Grenfell Tower fire much remains to be done in response to the tragedy, both to prevent a repetition and deliver justice for those affected. It is vital that the Labour Party scrutinises the government closely.

Two key areas require scrutiny.

1. Ensuring the good quality of remedial work on other potentially dangerous buildings and
2. Making sure that lessons are learned from the mistakes that led to the tragedy.

Regarding the remedial work, the government has successfully identified those buildings taller than 18m clad with the 'aluminium composite material' (ACM) used on Grenfell but is making very slow progress towards remediating them.

Almost everything else is a problem. A count of the buildings with other forms of dangerous cladding was due in March, but the data-gathering exercise led by councils was under-funded and woefully toothless and has not yet produced any meaningful data.

Despite huge fires in Bolton and Barking last year, nothing has been done to identify dangerous buildings below 18m in height.

**The net result is that we still do not know the precise size of the problem** as the government remains focused on ACM, which was always just the tip of the iceberg.

There is also the problem of leaseholders in dangerous buildings being forced to pay. The announcement of £1bn to pay for remediation was a major step forward, but it has serious limitations.

It will do nothing for the escalating costs of 'waking watches' and insurance, nothing for

those in buildings below 18m and nothing for those in buildings with problems other than cladding.

It also will not help people currently unable to sell and facing financial ruin as the result of a crisis they did not create.

As regards accountability for the fire, like almost everything else, the Grenfell Tower Inquiry has been put on hold by coronavirus.

The government must not be allowed to hide behind the corporate failings - however obscene - exposed by the enquiry.

The broader context in which they took place was the commitment to deregulation and austerity which prevented ministers acting on clear warnings of imminent disaster.

The government must be made to explain why, after the Lakanal House fire, it did not revise the guidance in *Approved Document B* and fit sprinklers in

social housing high rises.

The findings may prove uncomfortable since it was a Labour government which failed to act on the clearest official warning over cladding fires revealed in 1999 by a Select Committee investigation.

Labour encouraged the use of combustible insulation and relaxed the rules banning it on high rises in the mid-2000s. Lakanal House happened on Labour's watch and it did little in response.

The truth is that Grenfell was a failure of the British state as a whole which applies equally to Labour as well as the Conservative Party. Both parties must now face those mistakes honestly and take the necessary steps to ensure such a tragedy never happens again.

*Peter Apps*



# LABOUR MUST COURT LEASEHOLDERS

If Labour is ever to win another general election, the party must address the housing needs of owner-occupiers who form the largest housing group in the country. There are at least 4 million leasehold properties in England and Wales. The Government does not know the exact number.

"In 2016-17, there were an estimated 4.3 million leasehold dwellings in England. This equates to 18% of the English housing stock.

Of these, 2.3 million dwellings (54%) were in the owner occupied sector and 1.7 million (40%) were privately owned and let in the private rented sector.

The remaining 244,000 (6%) were dwellings owned by social landlords and let in the social rented sector."

(Source: MHCLG: Housing Statistical Release 25/10/2018)

The top 20 parliamentary constituencies with the most leaseholders are in London. 20 of these seats are held by Labour. The other two are Cities of London and Westminster, and Kensington and Chelsea.

Most leasehold properties are flats. Approximately 30 % are houses, the majority of which are in the north of England. Out of the top 20 parliamentary seats with leasehold houses 10 are held by Labour. The other 10 are seats lost by Labour to the Conservatives in the last two elections.

Leasehold reform is moving up the political agenda:

- The Competition and Markets Authority is about to take enforcement proceedings against developers over the mis-selling of leasehold houses. This is unprecedented.
- The Law Commission has been asked by the Government to look at key areas of reform such as the Right to Manage, reviving commonhold, and enfranchisement.
- Other issues include high service charges, the lack of appropriate legal remedies and unresponsive freeholders.

- Before the current emergency, flat owners reported difficulties in selling their properties as lenders were asking for written fire safety reports.
- The National Leasehold Campaign Facebook page has reached 17,000 followers in just over 3 years. The All-Parliamentary Group on leasehold reform has over 150 members.
- The most pressing issue for leaseholders is the cladding scandal. Since the Grenfell fire tragedy, blocks throughout the country still have dangerous cladding.

There are around 600,000 people living in blocks with dangerous cladding or with other fire problems. Following a successful lobby of Parliament by angry leaseholders, the budget promised a £1 billion fund to address the problem.

Dermott McKibbin

*Dermott would like to hear from other LHG members who are interested in leasehold reform at [dermot@dermotmckibbin.com](mailto:dermot@dermotmckibbin.com).*



Our three published **Labour Housing Group Briefings** aimed at a wide readership on current topics, namely *Rough Sleeping*, *Affordable Housing* and the *Private Renting Sector* are about to be joined by two more on **Rural Housing** and **Leasehold Reform**. They can be found at: <https://labourhousing.org/resources/lhg-briefings/>

We plan to publish more of these short, readable guides on topics such as *Right to Buy*, *Homelessness*, *Sustainable homes*, *Co-operative* and *Mutual Housing*.

If you would like to contribute, please email our Policy Officer, Paul Martin at [pauljmartin@clara.co.uk](mailto:pauljmartin@clara.co.uk).



## FISHING FOR A LIVING

The BBC TV series *"Cornwall: This Fishing Life"* has shown a vivid picture of the hard life of Cornish fisherfolk, especially those based around Mevagissey.

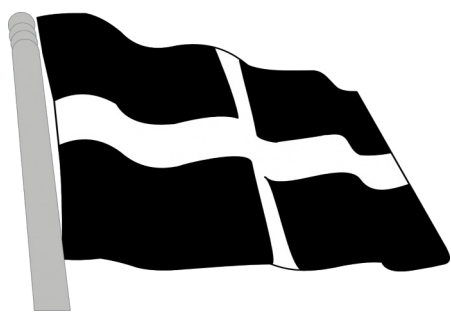
Of particular interest to LHG members are the comments of the families that still fish on the impact of "second homes" on local housing prices and the knock-on effect on the make-up of what were once fishing villages but now depend very largely on tourism.



It's one of those occupations where the nearness of your home to your workplace is critical, so the issue is not only the quantity of affordable housing but also its location.

Brexit is an underlying theme, with most of the fishermen expressing support. This will be one of the first communities to find out what gap may exist between hopes and reality.

Perhaps a more salient point, is the underlying viability of this way of life, in particular, the amount of fish that can sustainably be caught in future.



## LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN CORNWALL

Cornwall Council, a unitary authority, came into being on 1 April 2009 and replaced six district councils and Cornwall County Council. Elections were held on 4 June 2009 and 123 members were elected, replacing the previous 82 councillors on Cornwall County Council and the 249 on the six district councils. The next elections fall on 6th May 2021.

In July 2015, a Cornwall Devolution Deal was agreed with the Government for devolution to Cornwall from London, which gives Cornwall greater powers over public sector funding. Cornwall was the first authority to agree a devolution deal with the Government.

The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 was intended to devolve some powers to Cornwall Council, helping to bring social and care services together, and giving control over bus services and local investment.



## A ST IVES STORY

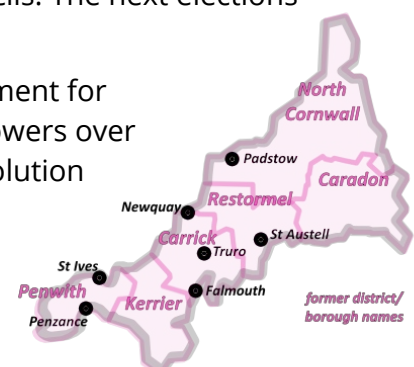
This seaside town, first incorporated by Royal Charter in 1639, is well-known as tourist attraction, particularly for its artists, as the fishing industry has declined.

In 2016, the average property price in St Ives was around £323,000, according to the estate agents Hamptons, just under 14 times the median annual earnings in Cornwall.

Following a referendum, the town council has introduced a restriction on the sale of new homes unless they are the owners' "primary residence". New-build developments must first be offered to local people, but there is no policy on the sale of existing second homes.

The Council Tax discount for empty properties has been reduced to one month in Cornwall.

However, the increased income has been channelled to the Council's General Fund in the absence of a policy to re-invest, for instance, in housing for local people on low incomes. St Ives is a conspicuous case, but more than 60 of the county's coastal towns have high rates of second home ownership.



**Cornwall Unitary Authority**

# HOUSING AS A HUMAN RIGHT

*"We have to start treating housing as a fundamental human right."* Keir Starmer, December 2019

While Britain's housing and homelessness crisis was clearly evident before Covid-19 came knocking on our door, the virus has brought key questions into ever sharper focus.

How do you 'stay home' if you have no home to go to, how do you self-isolate in a crowded flat, and why did it take a global pandemic for many rough sleepers to finally be given a roof over their head?

These questions will not – and must not – go away once the virus has been brought under control, and we cannot simply return to 'business as usual'. We must instead outline a new vision in which decent housing is not something to be given or taken away, but a legally enshrined human right to which we are always entitled.

Talking about housing as a human right is not new. During the leadership campaign, Keir Starmer said "we have to start treating housing as a fundamental human right", while similar language was prominent in the 2019 election manifesto.

Outside the Labour Party, it is supported by groups including the Equality and Human Rights Commission. But what would it mean if Labour went beyond this rhetoric, and committed to introducing a human right to housing into domestic law?

First, enshrining a human right to housing into law could ensure our homes meet international standards such as being safe, affordable, habitable and providing security of tenure.

Following the model of the Human Rights Act, it could require that all new legislation, policies and budgets were evaluated against these standards. Such an evaluation could warn, for

example, if a benefit reform or planning policy was likely to increase homelessness, or fail to do enough to tackle chronic housing shortages. The government could choose to act, or risk a challenge if it does not.

Second, as well as participating in the development of policies affecting them, people could also seek remedy through the courts if their rights were violated. If the right to housing had been enshrined in law before 2010, regressive policies such as the bedroom tax could clearly have been challenged in court, as could the existence of section 21 'no-fault evictions', and much else.

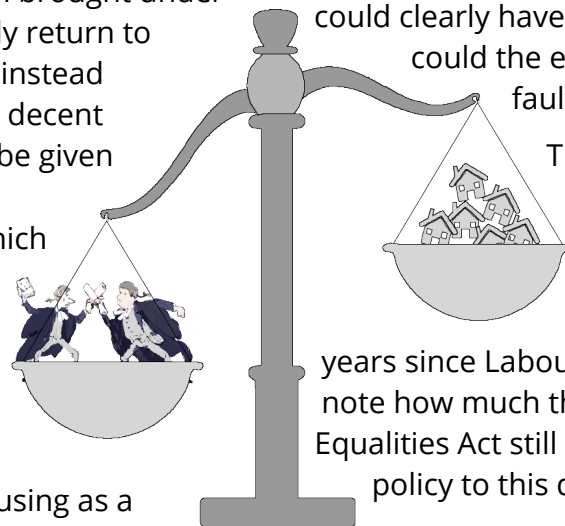
Third, a human right to housing would apply no matter who was in power, offering the tools to protect progressive reforms. Ten years since Labour left office, it is striking to note how much the Human Rights Act and the Equalities Act still shape many areas of law and policy to this day.

It is equally striking, however, that because these Acts do not cover rights such as housing or health, they were powerless to prevent the austerity measures that caused homelessness to surge.

Ensuring decent homes and protecting a life of dignity for each and every one of us has never been more important. The Labour Housing Group could add its voice in calling for the next Labour government to make the human right to housing a reality for all.

*Steve Cockburn is a Board member of the [Labour Campaign for Human Rights](#). For more information about enshrining economic and social rights into law, see LCHR's policy paper.*

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# HOLES IN OUR POLICIES?

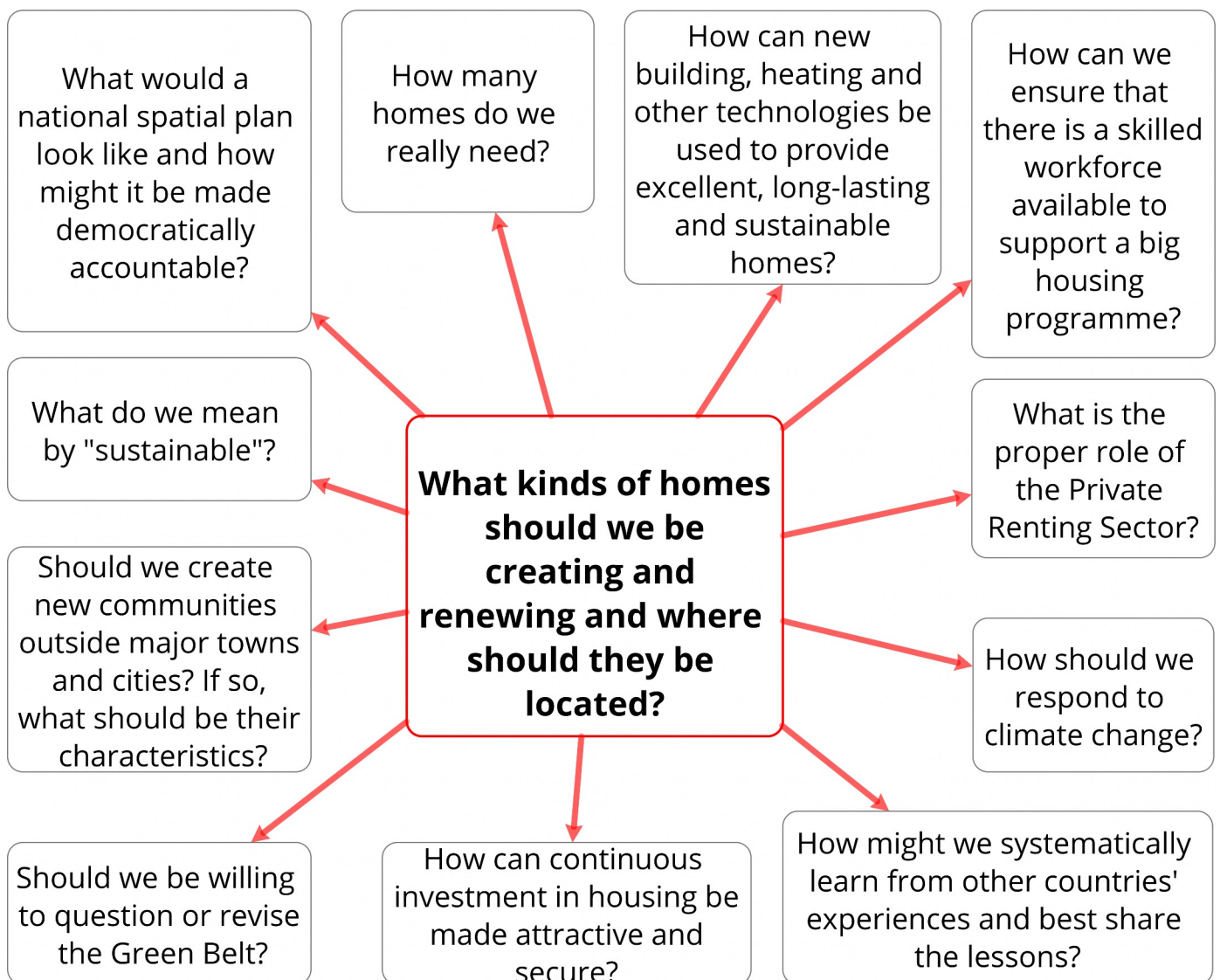
After I had put together a summary for the Executive of existing policies, I realised that the tricky bit was working out what policies you don't have but might need.

One of the problems with "policy" is that it means different things to different people. For some, it means broad ideas linked closely to values. For others, there must be lots of facts, figures and timescales. I would argue we always need both perspectives.

The Labour Party has chosen not to make housing policy a priority this year, which I think offers Labour Housing Group an excellent opportunity to think both widely and deeply about this subject. Like any other complex task, policy-making is best done when you are not under fierce pressure, so this is my attempt to get the ball rolling.

The diagram below aims to indicate some areas where I believe more thinking might usefully be done. Comments welcome.

Paul Martin (Policy Officer) [pauljmartin@clara.co.uk](mailto:pauljmartin@clara.co.uk)



# THE LABOUR HOUSING GROUP TEAM

## LHG EXECUTIVE 2020

**LHG's Executive was elected at the AGM 21<sup>st</sup> March for the two years to 2022.**

<b>Executive member</b>	<b>Constituency/role</b>
Andy Bates (co-opted)	<b>Speakers' organiser</b>
Janet Berry	<b>Membership Officer</b> ( <i>Winchester CLP</i> )
John Bevan	<b>Vice-chair</b> ( <i>Tottenham CLP</i> )
Rachel Blake	<b>Branches liaison</b> ( <i>Bethnal Green &amp; Bow CLP</i> )
Nick Bragger (co-opted)	<b>Fundraising</b> ( <i>Guildford CLP</i> )
John Cotton	<b>Chair</b> ( <i>Birmingham Perry Barr CLP</i> )
Ed Derrick	<b>Website link</b> ( <i>Newcastle Central CLP</i> )
Gerard Heffey (co-opted)	( <i>West Derby CLP</i> )
Ross Houston	<b>Treasurer</b> ( <i>Finchley &amp; Golders Green CLP</i> )
Heather Johnson	<b>Vice-chair &amp; Events Organiser</b> ( <i>Hampstead &amp; Kilburn CLP</i> )
Paul Martin	<b>Newsletter Editor and Policy Officer</b> ( <i>Poplar &amp; Limehouse CLP</i> )
Amanda Pinnock	<b>Social media</b> - ( <i>Huddersfield CLP</i> )
Sheila Spencer	<b>Secretary</b> ( <i>North Tyneside CLP</i> )
Christopher Worrall (co-opted)	<b>Blog lead</b> ( <i>Poplar &amp; Limehouse CLP</i> )

## SURVEY TIME

We'd like to find out more about LHG members' concerns and views and will be carrying out a survey in the near future.

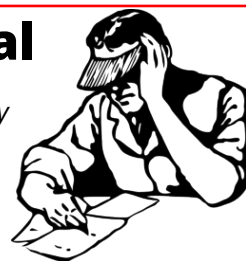
Meanwhile, if you'd like to make suggestions about our work in general (or even this newsletter), drop the Editor a line.

## Editorial

*I hope you enjoy this issue of the LHG Newsletter.*

*Ideas and articles welcome for next issue in May/June.*

*The Editor, Paul Martin  
pauljmartin@clara.co.uk*



## WHAT IS THE LABOUR HOUSING GROUP?

The Labour Housing Group is a lobbying group that is affiliated to the Labour Party and dedicated to the development of a socialist housing policy.

You can contact us at <http://labourhousing.org/#main-contact-form> and join us at <http://labourhousing.org/account/join>

Individuals must be members of the Labour Party and agree to be bound by Labour Party rules and the LHG constitution

## £ APPEAL £ APPEAL £ APPEAL £ APPEAL £

If you cannot spare time and energy, you can still help us in our work by making a donation by bank transfer to "Labour Housing Group", account number 50478080, sort code 08-90-06, Co-operative Bank, PO Box 1AN, Blandford Street, Newcastle, NE99 1AN.

Of course, you can also send a cheque made payable to "Labour Housing Group" c/o **The Treasurer, Flat 2, 8 Torrington Park, London N12 9SS**

PLEASE QUOTE "LHG2020 CAMPAIGN"