

HOUSING

DECISION TIME!



NEWS. NEWS. NEWS. NEWS. NEWS. NEWS. NEWS.

- ★ The General Election has been called for December 12th and housing will be one of the key campaign issues on the doorstep.
- ★ Speaking about Labour's "**Warm Homes for All**" policy, Jeremy Corbyn said "*We cannot go on polluting our planet. We cannot go on standing by while climate warming increases.*" Climate change will be a major part of the party's election campaign. Labour has pledged to fund £60bn of energy-saving upgrades, such as loft insulation, enhanced double glazing and new heating systems, by 2030. Low-income households will receive a grant to carry out the work on their homes, while wealthier households will receive interest-free loans for enhancements.
- ★ Grenfell Tower - the report now out that MPs explicit warnings to ministers about the dangers of cladding were ignored on at least seven occasions.

LHG ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2020

LHG's AGM for 2020 will be held on

Saturday 21st March

10am-3pm at

Crowndale Centre, 218 Eversholt Street, London NW1 1BD

A further notice seeking resolutions and nominations for the Executive will come out in January.

If you are wondering whether to put yourself forward for the Executive and have any questions, do feel free to contact the Secretary on info@labourhousing.org or 0191 435 5774.

If you thought the 2017 Manifesto was good, then you have even more good news to share following the publication of **Housing for the Many** and Annual Conference 2019 decisions.

*The trouble is that, in our experience, most ordinary Labour Party members don't know the detail of what is in the Party's Manifesto. To help doorstep canvassers get the message across, LHG is writing a quick guide to the key issues to inspire them to vote Labour. Our "**Housing Crib Sheet**" will be sent to all LHG members and will be available from our website. Please send it to all the canvassers in your branch and CLP when you get it. We also hope to have it printed and distributed to all CLPs.*

Editorial

Welcome to the second edition of LHG's e-Newsletter! As the Newsletter is a 'work in progress' we will welcome your comments on its style and format. But please, not before your efforts have been put into getting a Labour Government elected on December 12th. Housing has never in recent years been such a hot political issue, and only Labour's raft of policies begins to address the real crises affecting millions of our countrymen and women: thousands are homeless, millions are stuck in overpriced privately rented flats, millions face insecurity at home, aspiring home owners are priced out of their hopes, leaseholders are being fleeced for essential works such as cladding renewal - and so on.

Disgracefully, the list is almost endless, and responsibility for these crises lies firmly with the Tory Party and its Governments of fundamentalist free market cranks over the past nine years.

One of the fundamental problems affecting us all is the power of property ownership - something that the Labour Land Campaign addresses in an article in this newsletter.

LHG is developing a series of briefings to help you and others in your campaigning over the next few weeks - see the box on Page 5 for details

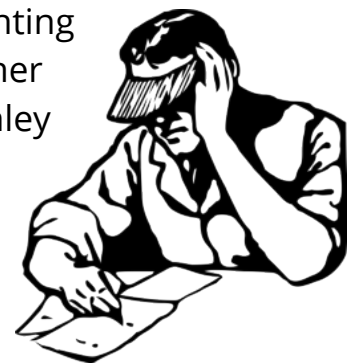
This Newsletter also includes a report of Labour Housing Group's successful joint fringe meeting at Conference this year, and advance notice of the 2020 Annual General Meeting in March.

There is a report from London LHG, and links to enable you to contact local groups in the North-East and North-West, who hosted LHG's national policy day in September in Liverpool.

As this newsletter is being published before the December General Election, it is hopefully the last one for a long time in which Labour Housing Group will be seeking to influence opinion and policy in opposition.

So, the very best of luck to everyone in their Campaigning efforts, and a special wish of good luck to our Treasurer Ross Houston, who is fighting the one-time Thatcher stronghold of Finchley and Golders Green.

Ed Derrick
(Editor)



Labour Housing Group supports the call for radical housing policies to go into the 2019 Manifesto.

We were excited by the policy pledges made in 2017, and believe the additional points made in this year's Annual Conference composites make our housing policies even more attractive.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE REPORT 2019

Inspiring, nail-biting - and humdrum

The atmosphere at Labour Party Conference this year was a mix of inspiring, nail-biting, and humdrum.

Inspiring elements came from some of the Front Bench speakers, teenagers talking about climate change, and several very brave delegates talking about their personal experiences of mental health problems.

We had seemingly endless reference-backs from Brighton Pavilion CLP, and long sessions of voting for Rule Book changes. And of course we were waiting for the Supreme Court ruling on Johnson's prorogation of Parliament.

Sadly, the Housing and Homelessness composites came on the very last day, and were somewhat overshadowed by the Supreme Court announcement and the recall of MPs to Parliament on the last day of Conference.

However, for us housing buffs, in between all of that were over 20 Fringe meetings covering housing and homelessness (more than any other subject –even Brexit and the NHS) and housing came top of the Priority Ballot for delegates to vote on which topics they want to see discussed at Conference.

A large number of motions had been submitted about both housing and homelessness. The [housing composite](#) contains the bulk of LHG's motion for Conference, other than an element about seeing housing investment as investing in assets rather than borrowing (which is referred to in Housing For the Many), but it covers a wide range of issues in addition.

Key proposals

Key amongst the proposals were pledges to:

- build an average of 155,000 social rented homes a year, with at least 100,000 of these social rented council homes;

- to start with immediate effect when in Government, to end rather than suspend the Right-to-Buy and Right-to-Acquire and
- to help private renters with an end to 'no fault' evictions, open-ended tenancies, caps and controls on rents linked to local income, new minimum standards and tougher enforcement.

Homelessness as national emergency

The [homelessness composite](#) suggested that homelessness should be treated as a national emergency, an idea recently gaining ground in the homeless sector which could make a significant difference to how homelessness is prevented, addressed, and resourced.

It also focused on the number of 'enforcement' measures which are having the effect of criminalising people for living in public spaces in some places. The rough sleeping picture in Brighton caused a great deal of concern amongst delegates - no-one can have failed to be dismayed by the large number of tents, people sleeping in doorways, and people begging that we passed every day on our way to and from the conference centre in Brighton.

LHG's Fringe meeting 1 - Time for Public Housing Revolution

The meeting heard from a series of speakers about why a revolution is needed, and the need for fundamental change to the housing system, along with a radical review of housing finance to support public housing.

Public housing in Britain, an incredible institution when done properly, will provide a payback of benefit to us all.

LHG's Fringe meeting 2 - A home shouldn't cost the earth

This meeting heard about how Labour can address the housing and climate crises, was held jointly with **SERA** (Labour's environmental

campaign group), **CPRE** (Campaign for the Protection of Rural England) and the Federation of Master Builders.

We heard about the need for incentives for retrofitting, for making the planning system fit for purpose so as to close the large gap between the ambition to eliminate carbon emissions from residential buildings by 2030 and the plans for making that a reality.

The benefits of modular (off-site) construction, capable of building new homes more rapidly, quietly, and efficiently, to meet energy efficiency targets were also discussed.

At both meetings, people were left in no doubt about the need for housing to be at the heart of our

campaigning. As John Healey said, we must get across that only Labour can put in place what is needed, and give people hope once more.

I left Brighton feeling that we had done a good job of outlining what we will do when we are in office – but a little dismayed that, despite our Leader and Deputy Leader being clear that we have to solve the housing crisis, **there is still a lot to do to bring housing to the top of Labour's collective campaigning mind.**

Report by LHG Secretary, Sheila Spencer

LAND FOR THE MANY: THE LID'S COMING OFF THE BOX

This year's Labour Party-commissioned *Land for the Many* report provides an eye-opening review of exactly how unfair, inefficient and wrong is "the way our fundamental asset is used, owned and governed".

Perhaps the most visible consequence of this corruption is the precariousness of so many citizens' housing situation. If anything is managed for the Few rather than the Many, it is land – and the Few sure do well out of it: after decades of rising land values, land now accounts for over 50% of UK net wealth and accommodation costs account for a greater proportion of the expenditure of regular households than ever before.

The report proposes a whole series of reforms to discourage the treatment of land as a speculative commodity that exists to enrich a tiny minority, and make of it a resource to meet social needs, enable the building of decent, affordable homes, enhance environmental quality, create cohesive communities and power a more stable and efficient economy.

The *Labour Land Campaign* (LLC) has long tried to draw attention to the importance of how land is managed vis-a-vis a nation's economic health and governance but landowning vested interests have succeeded in drawing a veil of silence over the whole issue for a long time in the United Kingdom.

They have managed to do this because, although they represent only a tiny minority of citizens, they wield disproportionate power through influence on the establishment, notably Westminster and the media. Publication of this report provides further evidence that at last, the lid is coming off the box.

Many of the ills of society could be addressed by reforming the fiscal system, switching the burden of taxation from economically productive activities such as work, trade, enterprise and investment, and onto sterile land wealth in the form of a Land Value Tax (LVT).

From the LLC perspective, repair of the dysfunctional land market and resolution of the most serious consequences of its dysfunctionality such as the housing crisis would essentially be collateral benefits – albeit very important ones – of a fiscal reform designed to minimise the economically destructive and socially pernicious effects of our current taxation regime.

However, such root-and-branch fiscal reform is politically dangerous when it comes to selling it to the 60-70% of ordinary owner-occupying households because the conversation is so effectively controlled by the Few: a very mild mention of LVT in the

LAND FOR THE MANY: THE LID'S COMING OFF THE BOX (continued)

2017 Labour Party manifesto elicited the hysterical, dishonest "Garden Tax" response from Conservative Party Central Office. This was dutifully disseminated by the usual suspects, as was encountered by many activists on the doorstep, especially in constituencies where land values have risen most obscenely.

One of the recommendations in *the Land for the Many* report is to replace Business Rates (BRs) with a LVT. From LLC's point of view, such a switch would provide an excellent chance to test transition to wealth taxation but a couple of tweaks could significantly expand its beneficial impact without affording vested interests an opportunity to mislead voters.

Firstly, a simple transfer would fail to remove the incentive to leave potentially useful land undeveloped which is, as the report emphasises, a major contributor to the housing crisis. LLC would recommend extending the new LVT regime to cover brownfield sites (undeveloped land with or eligible for planning permission).

Secondly, the tax base for BRs is small, covering only about 7% of overall UK land value. Some homes are owned to live in whereas some are owned to generate income, i.e. rental properties are businesses.

But these two very different types of property are subject to the same Council Tax, an illogical and unfair arrangement, especially since tenants pay rather than landowners. Years of erosion of the property component in this hybrid property/poll tax mean that it now closely resembles the hideously unpopular Community Charge it was hastily introduced to replace.

Bringing rental properties under the new LVT would not only be logical and fair, it would also triple the base for the new tax and thereby multiply all the economic benefits of replacing taxes on productive activity with a tax on unearned income.

Given the precariousness of many buy-to-let businesses, where rents just pay off the mortgage, any increase in expenses would undermine many landlords' business models:

these homes would come onto the market and local authorities could buy them up for council housing, especially if they came cheap with sitting tenants.

Finally, expansion of the base for the new LVT in this way would minimise the potential for the misinformation of voters because nobody loves a landlord.

The *Land for the Many* report sheds welcome light on an issue that has been dangerously (and perplexingly) neglected for too long, not least by the Labour Party.

Its recommendations would go a long way to repairing a seriously broken system but Labour Land Campaign would recommend a couple of tweaks – relatively minor but possibly game-changing – that would significantly expand the benefits of this fiscal reform without giving vested interests ammunition with which to frighten the horses.

By Anthony Molloy (Chair of the Labour Land Campaign)



We have now published three **Labour Housing Group Briefings** aimed at a wide readership on current topics, namely *Rough Sleeping*, *Affordable Housing* and the *Private Renting Sector*.

(See <https://labourhousing.org/resources/lhg-briefings/>)

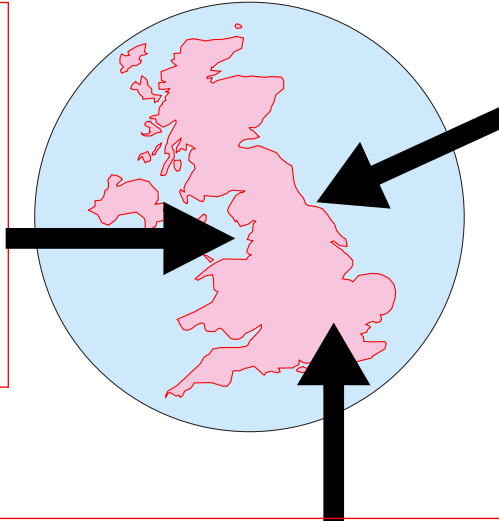
We want to publish more of these short, readable guides on topics such as *Right to Buy*, *Homelessness*, *Sustainable homes*, *Co-operative and Mutual Housing*. If you would like to contribute, please email our Policy Officer, Paul Martin at pauljmartin@clara.co.uk.

LABOUR HOUSING GROUP - BRANCH REPORTS

LHG North West was launched at a Policy Day held in Liverpool in October 2019.

Contact person: Gerard Heffey
gerardheffey@googlemail.com
or Ben Clay
ben.burnage.labour@gmail.com

(See also article on page 7)



LHG North East has not been active in the last few months but watch this space for events coming up in 2020.

Contact person:
sheila.spencer@phonecoop.coop

London LHG held a Policy Day in April 2019 to discuss future housing policy challenges for a Labour Government. The Exec Committee worked together to pull together a programme of key note speakers including the Shadow Minister for Housing and 2 London local Mayors, plenaries and workshops covering: taxation and funding new homes; environmental impact of homes; Housing Association governance and regulation; women and homelessness; private rented sector standards; community led housing. We welcomed over 60 London Labour Housing Group to the discussion between MPs, campaigners, London Assembly Members, policy experts and Councillors.

We were really happy to hear from Sarah Jones MP, Shadow Housing Minister on the Politics of Housing in the 21st and highlighted Labour's radical programme for housing. Karen Buck MP and Farah Hussain highlighted the devastating impact of the poor quality private rented sector and the appalling struggles faced by MPs and Councillors to improve those conditions.

Policy experts were able to join us for the workshop sessions, to explore in more detail the scale of the challenge with improving the environmental impact of homes, protecting women from homelessness and securing better regulation of the Housing Association sector.

The session closed with a key note speech from Rokhsana Fiaz, Mayor of Newham about the future for council home buildings – a positive end to a positive morning of discussion and debate. It was clear from the day that Labour has the ideas and energy for the housing challenges we face.

LLHG's AGM in July 2019 elected a new Executive Committee:

Tom Copley AM – Chair
Roz Spencer – Vice-chair
Cllr Rachel Blake – Secretary
Andy Bates
Cllr Ross Houston
Farah Hussain
Sem Moema
Dermot McKibbin
Cllr Mick O'Sullivan
Jacky Peacock
Leo Pollak
Sarah Sackman
Glyn Thomas
Pat Turnbull

Contact person: Rachel Blake
rachel.n.blake@gmail.com

NORTH-WEST POLICY DAY

The LHG Policy Day in Liverpool on October 12th was attended by around 60 people from across the North West and beyond, including a wide range of speakers from local authorities, universities, housing campaign groups, and the Labour Front Bench.

Paul Dennett (Mayor of Salford) summed up the current situation perfectly with his statement "*The national housing market is broken*".

From a North West perspective, it is broken due to supply issues: **an oversupply of units, and an undersupply of homes.**

- A 'unit' being an apartment in yet another high-rise city centre apartment block, usually funded by obscure fractional sales methods with promises of rental returns almost as high as the building itself. **This prices the existing community out of living in the area they live, work and socialise.**
- A 'unit' also being a House of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) which is not wanted by either the tenant or community but is very much wanted by the landlord who can triple the income from a standard three-bedroom family house into a three-person hellhole without needing planning permission.

Both of these unit types are in oversupply across the North West, especially in comparison to the undersupply of homes.

- *Homes* being a place for young people and families to put down roots for years to come, either as homeowners or on secure long-term tenancies with affordable or even social rent levels.
- *Homes* being large enough to cope with the demands of everyday family life, from children playing to teenagers studying and parents catching up on the TV. Places where they can be assured that the landlord isn't going to increase the rent

next week or that the ground rent on the leasehold won't double next year.

These are the homes which are in chronically short supply.

If Joe Anderson (Mayor of Liverpool) has his way then Liverpool City Council will soon start building council houses on a large scale.

This was backed up by Peter Dowd MP (Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury) when he confirmed that a Labour Government will devolve more responsibility and powers to local authorities on matters such as council housing and that sustainability will be a policy driver.



Liverpool City Region Metro Mayor Steve Rotheram, speaking at an event to launch his housing manifesto, echoed the need for more devolution to local authorities by setting a target of 20,000 new homes over 5 years across the Liverpool City Region.

He confirmed the Combined Authority won't be building the homes, but that he will be fighting for funding on behalf of the local authorities while also putting in place a Liverpool City Region decent home standard.

The Policy Day launched LHG's North West Branch. The discussion throughout the day certainly whetted the appetite ahead of the next event, likely to take place in the first quarter of 2020, which will be around how housing can have a positive impact on community wealth building.

WHO WE ARE – GETTING INVOLVED

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> You can 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

LHG Executive 2019-2020

LHG's Executive was elected at the AGM on June 16th 2018 for the two years to 2020.

There are 12 Executive members from around the country:

- Janet Berry – Winchester CLP (Membership Secretary)
- John Bevan – Tottenham CLP (Vice-chair)
- John Cotton – Birmingham Perry Bar CLP (Chair)
- Ed Derrick – Newcastle Central CLP (Newsletter Editor)
- Paul Eastwood – Hemel Hempstead CLP
- Ross Houston - Finchley & Golders Green CLP (Treasurer)
- Heather Johnson – Hampstead & Kilburn CLP (Vice-chair & Events Organiser)
- Paul Martin – Tower Hamlets CLP (Policy Officer)
- Amanda Pinnock – Huddersfield CLP
- Kerry Pollard – St Albans CLP
- Sheila Spencer – North Tyneside CLP (Secretary)

Key roles supporting LHG

Speaking about housing policies for LHG

We get regular requests for speakers, which is a great way to help LP members to campaign on housing issues in their local areas.

We will supply a template and notes so that you do not have to start from scratch.

Editing this newsletter

After 11 years of sterling service in this, we will be looking for someone to take over Ed Derrick's role as Editor of this newsletter.

If you are interested in doing this, please contact the Secretary at info@labourhousing.org.

The opinions expressed in articles in this Newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Labour Housing Group.