

## FIRE SAFETY

### **NOWHERE NEAR GOOD ENOUGH!**

LHG members may well know someone hit by the Fire and Building Safety Scandal – whereby home owners risk getting unaffordable bills for major works to make their homes safe.

This scandal not only burdens individual leaseholders; unsellable homes have also created market uncertainty.

After the Grenfell Tower tragedy, building owners identified not only unsafe cladding but also other fire risks including unsafe balconies and inadequate fire blocking measures.

But the Government has consistently failed to devise a coherent policy on how to pay for the necessary safety works.

Last summer, Labour's Front Bench set out principles and policy to address the scandal, calling on the government to establish precisely what risks unsafe cladding poses.

Labour proposed to establish a **Building Works Agency** (BWA) – a team of experts that will examine blocks to assess risk and commission and fund necessary works.

**This would allow buildings to be signed-off as safe, so that people can go on with their lives.** It would have powers to recover costs from the firms that caused this crisis.

Labour has consistently made the case that the cost for this work should not fall on leaseholders or taxpayers, yet Michael Gove's recent, heavily trailed proposals bring nothing new to leaseholders facing huge bills to fix non-cladding defects.

His announcement offers insufficient detail on how and when leaseholders can expect their homes to be safe and seems to be just a call out to the industry to bring forward their proposals by April.

**Labour's Shadow Housing Minister Matthew Pennycook** said '*Any further measures that help resolve the building safety crisis are welcome but blameless leaseholders are being hit with bills right now.*

*If the Secretary of State is serious about doing the right thing, he needs to ensure leaseholders are fully protected in law from the costs of fixing all historic defects by amending the Government's Building Safety Bill.'*

Rachel Blake, LHG Executive

### **AGM 2022**

**Don't forget the LHG AGM on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> March, 10:30 to 13:00.**

This is when we agree key policies and elect our new Executive Committee for the following two years.

If you want to stand for the Executive, you will need to have been a member for a year by the date of the AGM.

# PROPAGANDA WATCH

Town planning is tricky for Tory politicians. Their traditionalist wing defends the right of Tory-voting places such as those in the upper Thames Valley to keep out unwanted developments, especially if they would “damage their character” (or reduce the price of their houses!).

In contrast, the friends of oligarchs and “businessmen” such as Richard Desmond, are keen to stop local politicians blocking development. So the White Paper *Planning for the Future*, published in August 2020, was a test of strength.

The traditionalists gave a kicking to ex-Secretary of State Robert Jenrick which his successor, Michael Gove is not keen to repeat. He needs allies or, at the least, to weaken or neutralise his opponents and get the bonfire of regulations on to the statute book.

Gove is a former journalist and demonstrated with the Education Act 2010 that he could sweet talk naïve, liberal columnists into seeing things his way. (Hence, we now have academies and nearly defunct local education authorities.)

Which is almost certainly why the The Guardian Magazine published an article on 15<sup>th</sup> January entitled “*Could fixing housing fix everything else, too?*” attributed to one ‘Sam Bowman’.

This piece touches on all sorts of vogue ideas that might appeal to that readership – that we build houses that are too small, devote more effort to roads than homes and, of course, that they are too expensive. Naturally he blames the “**Not In My Back Yard**” tendency for all this.

Curiously, the author is not identified as Sam Bowman-Fingleton, former Executive Director of the free market think-tank the *Adam Smith Institute*. Even stranger, the article vanished overnight from the newspaper’s online edition.

**No doubt we can expect more liberal “camouflage” for what are really libertarian policies intended to justify letting the free market rip.**

If you would like to make a contribution to LHG’s Housing Newsletter, please email the Editor at [pauljmartin@clara.co.uk](mailto:pauljmartin@clara.co.uk)



We are sad to report that Jack Dromey, Labour Member of Parliament for Birmingham Erdington has died.

Jack was a passionate advocate for more and better housing and often reflected on his housing experiences of being brought up in Kilburn.

Throughout his life he promoted radical housing policies and campaigned against homelessness. In the early 1970s, he was involved in the Centre Point occupation to highlight homelessness.

When he was Deputy General Secretary of T&GWU/Unite, he always argued for more council housing, even when it was unpopular to do so in Labour circles.

As Ed Miliband’s Shadow Minister for Housing (2010 until 2013), he worked closely with Labour Housing Group to move policy in a more radical direction.

He was also an active member of the LHG Executive.

The progressive housing movement has lost a great friend.

# NEW APPROACH TO HOMES FOR THE HOMELESS

From January 2022, Oscott Gardens in north Birmingham which was once home to hundreds of university students, will house up to 300 families in self-contained flats with support centres to help families to access council services.



Oscott Gardens homes

Birmingham needs 4,000 new homes a year over the next decade to meet demand, but average supply has been only 900 since 2010.

The waiting list for social housing has risen to 19,500, up from about 14,000 last year.



Cllr Sharon Thompson

*"Birmingham city council is the biggest council house builder in the country, and we still can't meet our demand."*

Across the city, about 3,800 households are currently in temporary housing, and 580 of those are in bed and breakfast accommodation where families are often have no access to cooking or washing facilities.

**Sharon Thompson**, Birmingham City Council's Cabinet Member for Vulnerable Children, Families and Homelessness said

*"We have built on as much council land as we can. It's estimated by 2031 we'll have an additional 158,000 people living in the city, which equates to nearly 90,000 properties. Now we're starting to look outside the city boundary."*

Birmingham council's housing stock has fallen from more than 120,000 units in the 1980s to about 60,000, largely as a result of schemes such as right to buy. In 2019, the city council launched a 10-year housing plan committing to building 2,708 new homes but admits the scale of the problem is huge.

*With thanks to Jessica Murray and The Guardian*

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# FRONT-BENCH UPDATE



We are delighted to announce that our new Front Bench contact in Westminster is [Matthew Pennycook, MP](#) for Greenwich and Woolwich.

Matthew joined the Labour Party at age nineteen and was a Labour councillor for Greenwich West from 2010 to 2015.

From 2015 he served as Parliamentary Private Secretary to John Healey, then Shadow Minister of State for Housing.

In 2021 he became **Shadow Minister for Housing and Planning**.

# PLANNING RURAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Rural housing is one of the most pressing and contentious issues facing this country. If Labour is to stage a rural revival then we must confront it head on.

In my home constituency of North East Somerset and across rural England, there is distrust around the idea of house building. It is common for residents to feel they have little say over where new housing is built and that housing developers are unaccountable.

These concerns are not misplaced. For too long, we have seen new housing developments simply bolted on to towns and villages with little thought about the impact.

When housing developments are built without infrastructure such as shops, restaurants and healthcare facilities, it puts pressure on the existing infrastructure in a town, particularly road infrastructure. Most towns and villages in North East Somerset are simply not equipped to deal with increases in traffic, often due to road size and layout.

A lack of nearby shops or healthcare provision in new developments is damaging to old and new residents as it makes it harder to forge a community spirit.

**The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated clearly the dangers of isolation and it is incumbent on the Labour Party that our housing strategy acknowledges this.**

Rural communities have seen much of their infrastructure disappear as a consequence of Tory Austerity, with police stations, fire stations and GP surgeries being closed in small towns and villages.

This has increased the distrust around housing developments for many people, **but it also contributes to the poor conditions of new housing.**

As a parish councillor who sits on the planning committee I have seen many examples of buildings converted into flats or new flats built, without an appropriate number of parking spaces, which further weakens the road infrastructure.

*If you live in a small town with roads designed in the late 19th and early 20th century and there are cars parked on the road due to a lack of*

*parking spaces, it can become very difficult to drive around.*

We must also face up to the climate crisis. It is not possible, or desirable, to continually build on every field. **Our green spaces must be protected, not just for the good of the environment and biodiversity, but also for the mental health benefits these spaces provide to the people who live near them.**

When we do build it must be with a long-term plan in mind, rather than the short term financial interests of housing developers. This means building homes that can last for 100 years and envisaging what the community – including its green spaces – will then look like.

**A housing strategy that combats climate-change must also include retrofitting old houses,** as we've seen championed by West of England Metro Mayor, Labour's Dan Norris.

Despite this, there is a need for more housing in North East Somerset. In the towns and villages of my constituency there has long been a strong community spirit. However many people are concerned that children and young people are unable to afford housing in the communities they grew up in – and are forced to move to Bristol or Bath – never to return.

The only way to combat this loss of community, is to build more housing in these areas. But this house building must be part of a strategy to assist people in renting and buying at reasonable rates. *Otherwise, the dream of living in the town they grew up in will remain unattainable for many people.*

**I am sure that there is public support for building the houses we need, but I also believe that more work must be done to gain the full confidence of people that Labour's housing policy will benefit everyone.**

*By Jonathan Wallcroft, who is a parish councillor in North East Somerset as well as the Secretary of the South West Branch of the Labour Housing Group and a steering group member of Labour Coast & Country.*

*You can also read his post "How we won the West of England" [here](#).*

This article was originally published in [Red-BrickBlog](#).





# CLIMATE CHANGE CREDIBILITY CHASM

## The scale of the task

In June 2019, Parliament enshrined in law the net zero target, thereby committing the UK to reduce emissions to “at least” 100 per cent below 1990 levels by 2050. Nearly 11% of carbon emissions are from domestic buildings, making this a vital objective, but the Government has struggled to move forward.

The two most important actions are to:

- **Ensure homes are insulated to at least a “C-rating”** as measured by Energy Performance Certificates. Currently, Government data indicates that two thirds of the English homes and nearly 19 million homes across the UK, have EPC ratings of D or worse.
- **Reduce carbon emissions from domestic gas boilers** which currently heat 86% of homes.

## Obstacles to progress

The *National Infrastructure Commission* has advised that retrofitting energy efficiency measures is particularly difficult in the UK because it has one of the oldest and least efficient housing stocks.

(The *Climate Change Committee* has said that the most challenging and expensive properties to insulate were those built before 1919, as they had solid walls as opposed to cavity walls.)

The *International Energy Agency* (IEA) has recommended that no new fossil fuel-



guzzling boilers should be sold from 2025.

Yet, despite this advice, the UK Government announced in its October 2021 *Heat and Buildings Strategy* that they're not aiming to phase out gas boilers in UK homes until 2035.

## What will a replacement cost?

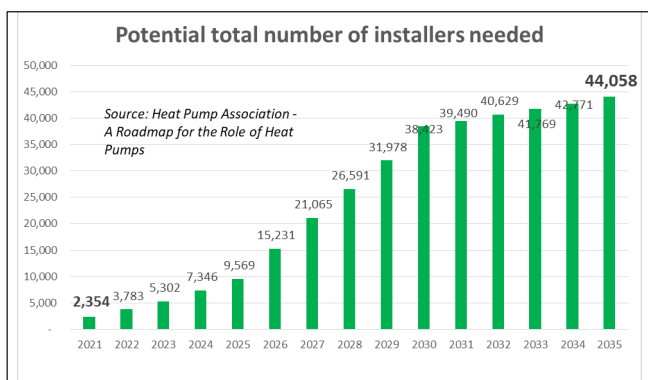
A frequently-touted solution to the problem of gas (and oil) boilers is heat pumps. The *Energy Saving Trust* estimates that installing an *air source heat pump* will cost around £7,000-£13,000.

*Ground source heat pumps* are more efficient but require a garden that can be accessed by digging machinery and will cost between £10,000 and £18,000 to fit.)

## What about “Green Jobs”?

Unfortunately, the *Heat Pumps Association* (HPA) is very concerned about the lack of trained installers. They forecast that nearly 45,000 technicians will be needed to meet the Government’s 2035 target - that’s an almost twenty-fold increase!

**It's not looking good right now for Boris - or the climate!**



# TAKING THE TEMPERATURE?

In 2014, the now disbanded PHE warned that *"The high prevalence of cold, damp, poorly energy efficient households in the UK is considered one of the main reasons why the UK continues to have around 25,000 excess winter deaths in England each year when compared with other European countries."*

Currently, GOV.UK advises that *"You should keep the temperature in the room you are in to at least 18°C as temperatures below this can affect your health, especially if you are 65 or older, or if you have a long-term health condition."*

**When gas-boilers are "outlawed" from 2035, there is good reason to be concerned about what heating standards will apply because the hot-water temperature supplied by heat pumps to radiators is significantly lower (40-55 degrees Celsius rather than 60-80 degree.) See diagram below.**

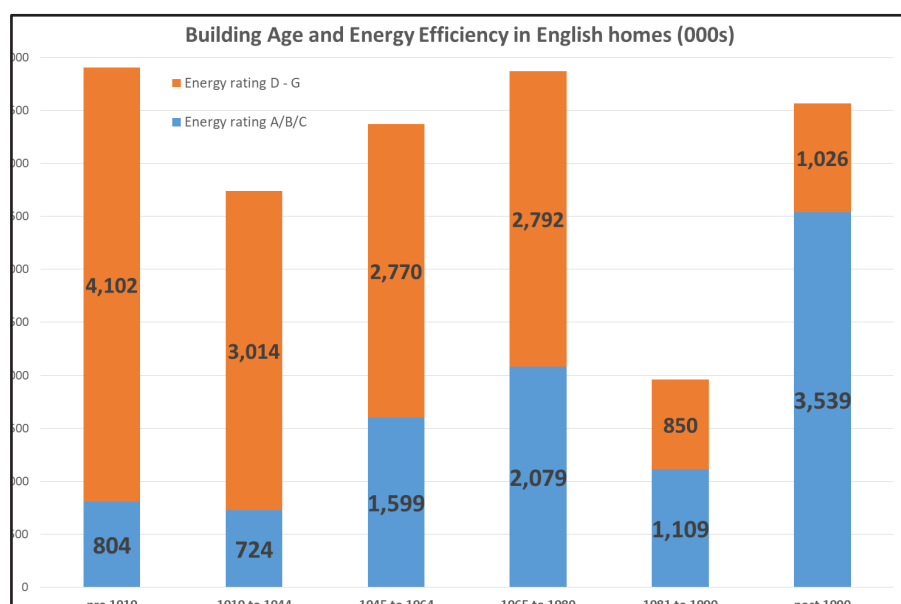
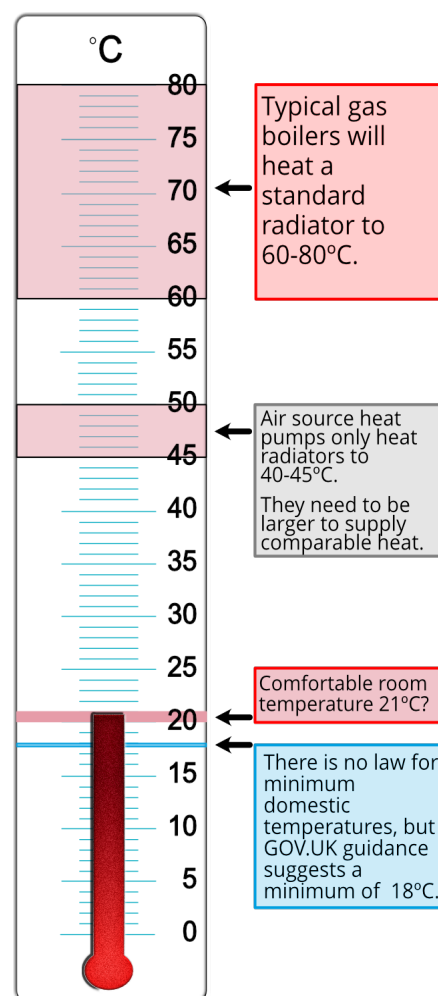
So, to reach a given temperature more and/or larger radiators will need to be fitted at considerable extra cost and greater disruption.

Owner-occupiers will be free to specify the output of their new heating system, although those that live in pre-1919 houses will find them more difficult and expensive to insulate.

But private sector tenants are very unlikely to have the option to insist on adequate heating systems. It is not hard to imagine new heating systems being installed *which will still leave residents uncomfortably cool*, particularly if they are elderly and/or immobile and particularly if they have health conditions that require blood-thinning medication.



**Why you will probably need more and larger radiators, piping and pumps.**



# DON'T SAY YOU WEREN'T WARNED

Chinese property development giant **Evergrande** owns businesses ranging from making electric cars to food and drink but it also has liabilities exceeding £228bn.

Last month, it had been due to repay interest on about \$1.2bn of international loans, but failed to meet interest payments to international investors and was therefore declared in default. Investors who fear contagion across China's property and banking sectors have been spooked and Evergrande's share price tumbled by almost 90% over the last year.

Comparisons have been made with the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, but Chinese President Xi-Jinping started warning officials and businesses in 2019 about their responsibilities.

In his book, Nassim Nicholas Taleb popularised the term "*The Black Swan*", for major events that apparently nobody saw coming. This time, Canadian analyst Michele Wucker has coined the phrase "*grey rhino*" as a metaphor for the big, obvious thing that's coming at you!

Commentators believe the Chinese Government won't let Evergrande implode completely as it's probably "too big to fail", but it may dismember the company.

Already, companies specialising in mining (think "steel and cement") have felt the impact. If anything could send shockwaves throughout the construction industry worldwide - and therefore our housing sector - this might be it.

And - like the pandemic - we can't say we weren't warned.



## PARLIAMENTARY GROUP MEETING RESCHEDULED

The Group's inaugural meeting, originally planned for December, had to be rearranged due to Parliamentary business.

It is now set for Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> January.

## LABOUR HOUSING GROUP'S NEW PARLIAMENTARY GROUP





## LHG EXECUTIVE 2020-2022

*LHG's Executive was elected at the AGM 21st March 2020 for the two years to March 2022.*

### Executive members

Andy Bates (co-opted)

Janet Berry

John Bevan

Rachel Blake

Nick Bragger (co-opted)

John Cotton

Ed Derrick

Gerard Heffey (co-opted)

Ross Houston

Heather Johnson

Paul Martin

Amanda Pinnock

Sheila Spencer

Christopher Worrall  
(co-opted)

## 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/contact> and join us at <https://labourhousing.org/membership/>

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

# YOU CAN \$TILL HE£P

If you are too busy to give 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.

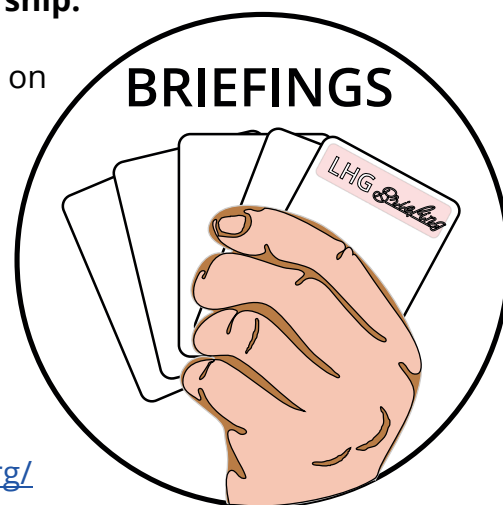
Of course, you can also send a cheque made payable to "Labour Housing Group" c/o **The Treasurer, Flat 2, 8 Torrington Park, London N12 9SS**

*Please quote "40th Anniversary"*

For readers new to housing policy issues, *Labour Housing Group* publishes a series of short guides aimed at a wide readership.

Our published **Briefings** on current topics include *Homelessness, Rough Sleeping, Affordable Housing, Private Renting Sector, Rural Housing* and *Leasehold Reform*.

They can be found at:  
<https://labourhousing.org/resources/lhg-briefings/>



**The latest edition covers *Council Homes*.**

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

*Opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of the Labour Housing Group.*