

HUSING



MAKING HOUSING A HUMAN RIGHT

In 1948, the post-war Labour Government signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which set out, for the first time, the “equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family”. It was a landmark moment in the global struggle to protect and enhance human rights.

In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly created the post of High Commissioner for Human Rights, responding to the case made by the World Conference on Human Rights.

The Secretary-General of that conference, Ibrahima Fall, said that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provided the international community with a new “framework of planning, dialogue and cooperation” that would promote human rights and involve actors at all levels - international, national and local.

Labour governments have reaffirmed their commitment to human rights, culminating in the Human Rights Act 1998, which “brought rights home” by defining moral principles in a framework of law. This was backed-up by the Equality Act 2010 which tackled discriminatory behaviour.

Despite this, readers may be surprised to learn that there is still no legal right to housing in England, although the devolved administrations of Scotland and Wales have taken steps to implement one.

The continuing relevance of human rights to housing is painfully clear to anyone with experience of our country’s housing crisis.



The *Labour Housing Group*, working closely with the *Labour Campaign for Housing as a Human Right*, pressed for this reform at Labour Party Conference in September 2021 where it was overwhelmingly agreed.

LHG is committed to making housing more than a theoretical right by pressing for the legal and financial changes that will be needed to support this initiative. This month marks the launch of our “Housing is a Human Right” report, jointly with the Labour Campaign for Human Rights.

You can download our campaign document now from <https://bit.ly/38kkGPZ>.

Please give it your full support.



AGM REPORT



LHG's 2022 Annual General Meeting took place on Zoom on Saturday 12th March and was attended by over 40 members.

Keynote speaker

Matthew Pennycook MP (Shadow Minister for Housing and Planning) was the keynote speaker. He explained how important the brief was to him and how keen he is to ensure that we have a joined-up policy response.

Matthew noted that, in Michael Gove, we were facing the first Secretary of State in a long time who was serious about housing.

Labour's priorities between now and the General Election would be based on existing policies developed by his predecessors. These included:

- Planning to stem the loss of public rented homes and building genuinely affordable homes which prioritised a large number of council homes
- Developing a joint approach to homelessness with Labour's other shadow teams
- Raising standards in all rented homes and reform of the Private Rented Sector
- Support for home-ownership
- Renewing the planning system, putting people at its heart
- Decarbonisation

The Shadow Minister for Housing and Planning emphasised that policies must be underpinned by a large scale programme of building public housing. He was keen to work with LHG and hoped he had our support for working on a major programme to enable the development of good housing policies.

Work of the Executive

In addition to the written report previously sent to members, the Secretary noted:-

- The establishment of a Parliamentary LHG Group
- The publication of a revised version of LHG's "doorstep guide" to Labour's housing policies in time for the forthcoming local elections.
- Approaches to other Socialist Societies about sustainable housing policies
- Coverage in the LHG Newsletter of key issues such as cladding and fire safety,

climate change, and the need for more public sector homes.

Reports

The AGM agreed reports from the Membership Officer, Policy Officer, Newsletter Editor, and Speaker organiser, as well as receiving a finance report and approving the accounts.

The Branches Liaison Officer reported that we now have 5 branches, with a Scottish branch on its way, and that networks for women and Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority members were in development, as well as a network for members in rural areas.

Amendment of LHG Constitution

A "tidying-up" draft was submitted by the Executive and approved nem con.

The New Executive

Ten candidates were elected in a ballot in which 59 members voted. The successful candidates were Rachel Blake, Sheila Spencer, Ross Houston, Heather Johnson, Amanda Pinnock, Janet Berry, John Cotton, Paul Martin, Chris Worrall and Ed Derrick.

It was agreed that LHG's five current patrons should continue, namely, Karen Buck, Lord Roy Kennedy, James Murray, Roberta Blackman-Woods, and Nicky Gavron.

CLlr John Bevan and CLlr Heather Johnson were re-appointed as auditors.

Resolutions

A motion calling for guidance on the means of escape for disabled people in the event of a fire in a block of flats was agreed unanimously.

A motion on Declaring a Housing Emergency was supported with 11 votes for, 2 against and 2 abstentions.

Launch of "Housing is a Human Right"
The AGM was paused for the launch of the publication of Housing is a Human Right with guest speakers Sheila Spencer (LHG), Steve Cockburn (Labour Campaign for Human Rights), Dr Koldo Casla (University of Essex) and Marianne Hood (LHG). (see video [here](#))

Date of next AGM: 11th March 2023

AGM MOTIONS - 1

Motion 1: Guidance on the means of escape for disabled people in the event of a fire in a block of flats

Moved by Georgie Hulme

Labour Housing Group resolves to:

1. Share information via social media or in other ways, to raise awareness of this issue, including statements/information made by Claddag and media articles.
2. To support Claddag's legal proceedings by writing to the Home Secretary to express LHG's concern for disabled people.
3. For any members who wish, to also share information via social media and to approach other relevant organisations/societies to do the same and/or write to the Home Secretary. Claddag will support in any way they can.
4. LHG supports the Claddag campaign for disability rights in fire safety and encourages others to do so.

Amendment to add (moved by Dermot Mckibbin / accepted by Georgie Hulme)

5. This meeting is very concerned that nearly 5 years after the Grenfell Fire tragedy that the Government is still allowing developers to submit planning applications for residential high rise developments that do not have more than one stairwell whereas if the development was commercial two stairwells would be required. There being only one stairwell will have implications for all residents especially those who are disabled.
6. This meeting asks LHG to work on fire safety issues across all tenures over the 12 months.

Rationale

The Home Office has issued a contract to a private company, C.S. Todd Associates Ltd, to write a national piece of guidance on the 'means of escape for disabled people' in the event of a fire. The company will be paid £210,000. That company have, for the last decade, expressly advocated against evacuation plans for disabled people living in blocks of flats because they say it is impractical and "unrealistic". This is despite over 40% of disabled residents in Grenfell Tower dying in the fire, with no evacuation plan. To award the contract to this company, with its track record (which the Managing Director did not retract as a witness in the Grenfell inquiry) is abhorrent.

You can see Claddag's short statement [here](#), including Baroness Grey-Thompson's powerful speech in the Lords. Due to the above, Claddag issued legal action against the Home Secretary on the 9th February 2022. We are a tiny group and have issued the claim in a personal capacity as a matter of public interest for all disabled people. Grenfell United have submitted a letter saying "Colin Todd should not be allowed anywhere near" this guidance. Other organisations including Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People, Social Housing Action Campaign and Disability Rights UK have also submitted letters raising concerns.

Considering the major importance of this issue, in not only impacting risk of injury and life to disabled and/or older people, as well as the inevitable stress and anxiety this is causing, it is also a matter of a human right for people to be as safe as possible in their home and that it meets their primary needs. This aligns with the LHG's core principles. Therefore, LHG would be a welcome inclusion in supporting these legal proceedings. This impacts those living in all housing tenures and also is a major concern for many close to those affected.

Additional Information: Disability Rights UK have agreed that their letter to the Home Office is shared for reference (attached). Last year, this blog was written and published on the SHA website, as part of the Government Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan consultation. The link is below for reference. There still has been no response to this consultation, although it was stated that there would be by October 2021: <https://www.sochealth.co.uk/2021/07/07/the-battle-for-personal-emergency-evacuationplans-peeps-in-residential-buildings-by-georgie-hulme-co-founder-claddagmember-of-sha-manchester/>

AGM MOTIONS - 2

Motion 2: Declaring a Housing Emergency

Moved by Ben Clay and Martin Wicks

The Labour Housing Group welcomes the initiative of the Labour Campaign for Council Housing on the theme of Declaring a Housing Emergency. Our Party nationally and locally needs to be campaigning now for sufficient funding of existing council homes and for new build.

We will encourage our members and supporters to move the model resolution in their CLPs and councillors to ask their Labour group to move a resolution at their full Council meeting, Declaring a Housing Emergency.

This is not a pious resolution but a spring-board for further campaigning.

We also welcome the Early Day Motion – *Housing Emergency* – and encourage our members to ask their MP to sign it.

We agree to write to the LGA Labour Group asking them to press the LGA (which has called for the government to fund 100,000 social rent homes a year) to campaign on this demand rather than just rely on private lobbying of Ministers, the Labour leadership and the Housing Team asking them to press the government to take the measures outlined in the 2021 Labour Party composite housing resolution, in order to begin to resolve the housing crisis.

GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

As the enquiry reaches its climax in the next few weeks, the body of witness evidence mounts as does the seniority of those called to answer the enquiry's questions.

Inevitably, that means not only the senior paid staff of the organisations involved, but also those with political responsibilities.

For spectators it is grim enough, but for the bereaved we can only hope it brings truth and justice.



GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

Witness Evidence Timetable - week 74

Monday 25 April

Bereaved, Survivors and Residents (BSRs): -
Nabil Choucair, Hanan Wahabi

Tuesday 26 April / Wednesday 27 April

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea: -
David Kerry

Thursday 28 April Royal Borough of
Kensington and Chelsea: - Stuart Priestley,
Rebecca Blackburn

GRENFELL

1. The man who wasn't there

Former Housing Minister **Eric Pickles** admitted to the Grenfell Tower inquiry that he did not know a policy of cutting red tape had prevented government officials tightening fire safety standards. *Government policy under David Cameron was that for every new regulation introduced, another had to be removed.*



Pickles claimed building standards regulations were exempt from this policy but was unable to cite any instances where this was the case.

Richard Millett QC for the Grenfell Inquiry asked if Pickles had been "*spectacularly out of touch*" with what was happening in his department.

The former minister argued that he had led "an enormous department. I am utterly reliant on receiving good intelligence from my permanent secretary and director generals."



2. The man who didn't seem to care

Brandon Lewis MP, now Northern Ireland Secretary, was responsible for fire safety in the years before Grenfell. He authorised the fire safety industry to regulate itself and was opposed to increasing the role of government. As he told the inquiry, "**Our entire ethos was about devolving power from central government rather than bringing it in**".

3. The man who was a "Single Point of Failure"

Brian Martin was the senior construction professional at the former *Department for Communities and Local Government* from 2008 to 2017 and still works for successor ministry the *Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities*.

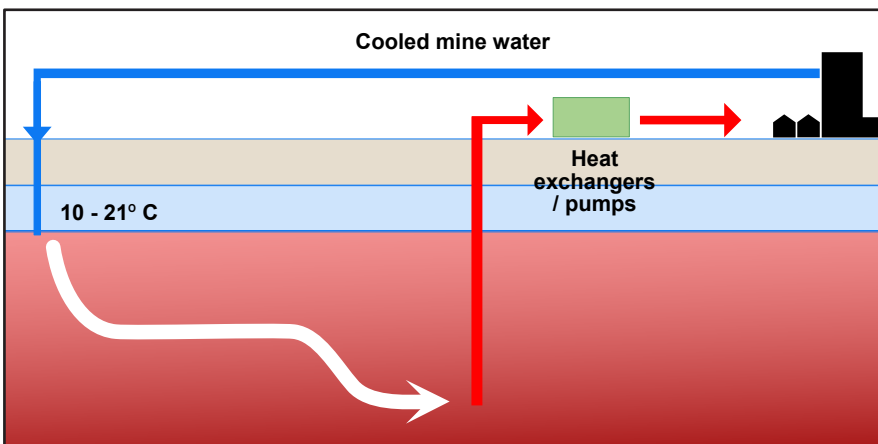
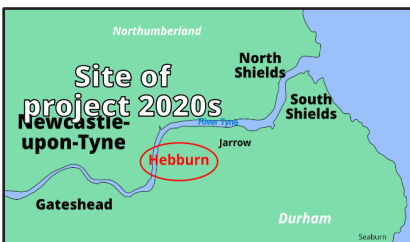
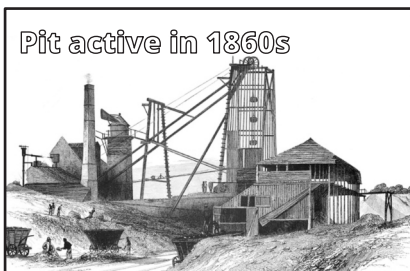
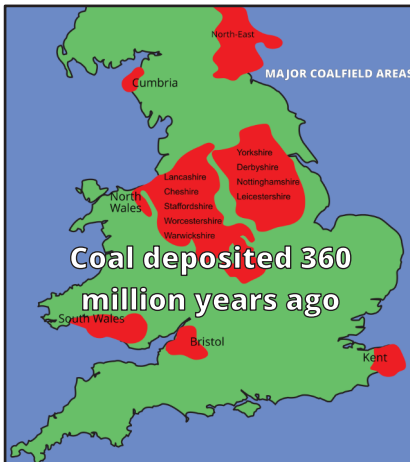


He said that government policies that deregulated the industry had left him as "a single point of failure" in an under-staffed organisation. He told the public inquiry that he found it hard to express how sorry he was.

Although he was told in 2001 about fire tests on cladding that had caused a "raging inferno", he failed to realise the significance of the results. He said that "it just got missed".

In his closing statement, Martin told the inquiry that if he'd realised the scale of the problem: "*I would have escalated the issue and perhaps we'd have done something to prevent what happened to the people of Grenfell Tower.*"

HOT PROPERTIES!



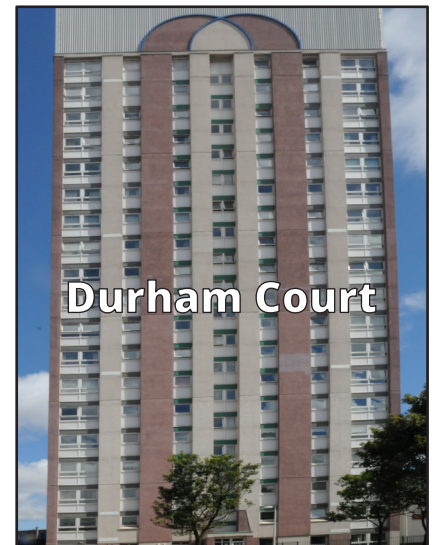
South Tyneside Council has one of the most interesting projects in Europe for using the energy from “drowned” mine-workings to heat nearby homes.

This project is well under way and may offer a model for sustainable housing in many parts of the country.

The body responsible for maintaining the former mines safely is the **UK Coal Authority** which spends £2 billion+ annually. It estimates that 25% of homes are built on coalfields, many of which are potential sources of energy.

Nine out of 10 of our largest urban centres are above areas of former coal mining activity.

The three main uses of mine water heating included in the **Hebburn Project** are **Durham Court**, an 18-storey block of 111 flats, **Lincoln Court** which serves vulnerable clients and **Hebburn Central**, a library and community resource.



How does it work?

Water from 300 metres below the surface is extracted via a bore hole to former mine workings where it is heated by geothermal energy.

“Heat-pump” technology, not unlike what is used in refrigerators and air-conditioning systems, is used to concentrate the energy which can be pumped to where it is needed using electricity from solar panels.

The water is hot enough to heat homes in winter and cool enough to keep them mild when temperatures rise.

The cooled water is injected back into the ground at a distance from the bore hole so that it can be warmed again by the earth.

The project is forecast by the UK Coal Authority to produce just 25% the carbon emissions of gas and be about 10% cheaper.

The scheme, which secured over £3.9million in funding from the **European Regional Development Fund**, has been developed in collaboration with the **UK Coal Authority** and **Durham University**.

THE EARTH MOVES ON HOUSING?

When even **The Guardian** newspaper's editorial leads with housing, you know that "something is going on". But what?

It correctly pointed out that the main beneficiaries of the pandemic are the rich who often choose to spend a big chunk of their cash on housing, causing house prices to rise by nearly 10% over past year.

Renters shared the misery as their rents rose only slightly less.

The leader article isn't sure whether the underlying problem is "a lack of homes" or "landlords" but seemed unwilling to accept that the answer is "**both**".

For around 2.5 million landlords, who accounted for nearly one in five property purchases in 2019, these are just investments, not homes.

Fortunately, Guardian readers were quick to point out the gaps in the newspaper's understanding:

- How could anyone on the minimum wage ever afford a mortgage?
- If mortgages must be repaid over 25 years, won't most people over the age of 40 be excluded?
- Why not acknowledge the damage done not just by Thatcher's right-to-buy but the ban on local authorities using sales receipts to build new homes?

As ever, the Guardian hedged its bets, saying that "*the Labour Party could be bolder in dealing with the property haves and have-nots.*"

LHG wrote back to remind readers that Labour's 2019 Manifesto pledge, supported unanimously at Labour Party conferences, was to build an average of 150,000 public rented homes each year, of which at least 100,000 would be council homes.

Perhaps even more important in the long-run is LHG's proposal that housing should be seen as a fundamental human right.

This was unanimously approved by Labour Party Conference in 2021 and we are now working on how to ensure that that principle is adopted into English law.

Andy Bates in Conversation with Miatta Fahnbulleh

Miatta Fahnbulleh is Chief Executive of the New Economics Foundation and was previously Director of Policy & Research at the Institute for Public Policy Research.

Prior to joining NEF, she was a political advisor to the Leader of the Opposition and led on the development of policies ranging from devolution to local economic growth, housing, energy and climate change and transport.



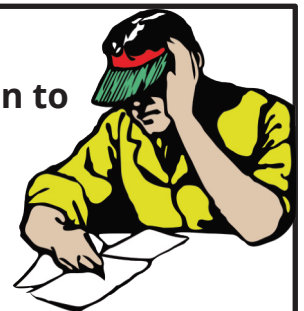
She was Head of the Cities Policy Unit at the Cabinet Office from 2011 to 2013 where she was responsible for the Government's economic devolution agenda in England.

Zoom meeting Tuesday 21st June at 7.30pm

https://link.edgepilot.com/s/099d1b3b/iYlxJx_X0Kp0uui7Bq0RA?u=https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87143287516?pwd=dDhuVmJlUTJsbmJSMUFLb2M2OUFuUT09

Meeting ID: 871 4328 7516 Passcode: LHG

If you would like to make a contribution to LHG's Housing Newsletter, please email the Editor at pauljmartin@clara.co.uk



LHG EXECUTIVE 2020-2022

LHG's Executive was elected at the AGM 12th March 2022 for the two years to 2024.

Andy Bates (co-opted)

Janet Berry

John Bevan (co-opted)

Rachel Blake

John Cotton

Ed Derrick

Gerard Heffey (co-opted)

Ross Houston

Heather Johnson

Paul Martin

Dermot McKibbin (co-opted)

Amanda Pinnock

Sheila Spencer

Christopher Worrall

LOCAL ELECTIONS 2022

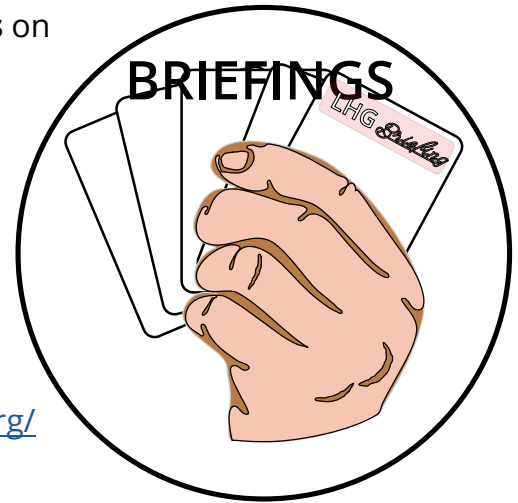
LHG is pleased to congratulate the following Executive members on being re-elected:-

John Bevan (LB Haringey), Rachel Blake (LB Tower Hamlets), John Cotton (Birmingham CC), Ross Houston (LB Barnet where he is now Deputy Leader and lead for Housing and Growth) and Heather Johnson (LB Camden).

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*.

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

SUPPORT LABOUR HOUSING GROUP

With a bank transfer to "Labour Housing Group", Account number 50478080, Sort code 08-90-06.

Or make a cheque payable to "Labour Housing Group" c/o

The Treasurer, Flat 2, 8 Torrington Park, London N12 9SS

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.