

## Note of last Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board meeting

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<b>Title:</b>	Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board
<b>Date:</b>	Wednesday 23 May 2018
<b>Venue:</b>	Westminster Room, 8th Floor, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

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### Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome, Apologies, Declarations of Interest</b>  Chairman Cllr Martin Tett welcomed the board members and updated them on the successful 'What next for our town centres?' event held at the LGA on the 14 May. The event was well attended and produced some interesting themes around town centre regeneration, particularly significant in the context of the decline of large retailers on the high street.  Cllr Tett offered the opportunity for members of the board to declare interests in the agenda items, but no declarations of interest were made.	
<b>2</b>	<b>Speeding-up the build out of sites with planning permission</b>  Cllr Martin Tett welcomed Oliver Letwin MP to present his review of the build out of large sites with planning permission behalf of Her Majesty's Government.  Oliver Letwin MP introduced the work that was being carried out in planning permission on larger sites. Oliver Letwin MP highlighted the scale of the review, what the scope of the review was and what was not being considered. An analytical report will be published in June 2018 on the current problems of large site planning permission.  Oliver Letwin MP considered why certain housing developments were being created and the labour constraints around housing developments, concluding that current trade levels are healthy and not a concern. Planning permission takes as long as it currently does, due to the rate it takes to sell the houses in the new housing developments.  Oliver Letwin MP highlighted that contractors will have a greater	

knowledge of planned developments than the local council due to contractors having greater staff dedicated to the developments as opposed to council staff who are doing several roles. In Northern European countries, this is the opposite as the government will take on developments themselves.

Oliver Letwin MP reported findings on the market, on what buyers are looking for, the level of demand for the market and how diversity in developments can speed up selling of developments. Oliver Letwin MP summarised that the planning system is still largely working for new housing sites but more can be done to speed up permissions.

Members asked the following questions and made the following comments

The rate of delivery of the larger sites sees councils being penalised due to the actions of contractors taking too long.

Will more powers devolved to local government allow greater control over the process?

Hitting projected numbers of new houses means councils will allow larger sites, which can cause delays.

Social housing is being affected by a range of elements, what are developers doing to ensure more are being built?

Quality of housing needs to be improved as we look to build houses quicker.

The business model of developers does not align with council local plans and resident needs, there feels like there is no local input into plans.

International partners can have a negative affect over absorption levels.

Oliver Letwin MP responded with

Knowledge of when a build out happens should be taken into account with planning permission, it should be included in the local council local plans.

Small sites can lead to quicker build outs, as opposed to larger sites which will have more barriers to delivery.

After the analytical report in June 2018 is published, solutions will be considered, including powers for local government.

Developers are concerned about maximising profits and more sites than they can handle would not engage them to build any faster.

There should be an increase in the amount of affordable housing being built on larger sites. Houses are sold at the rate the market has demand for them and social housing is built on the back of these houses being sold.

Changing the business model of site developments will not help as much as local government having more control over sites that are being developed

Housing sites need to consider residents rather than just numbers of

units

Diversity of housing sites can see greater interest from different markets.

### **3 Viability and developer contributions**

Joseph Ward, Development Viability Team Leader from London Borough of Tower Hamlets reported on viability from the experience of London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Joseph highlighted, making information accessible for the public, land value as an issue for viability, the balance of social housing as all being important elements to the team's work. Joseph stated that very few councils do viability in this way and London Borough of Tower Hamlets use a range of consultants and it helps with applications.

Members made the following comments

How has London Borough of Tower Hamlets developed the right skill sets for planning?

How does London Borough of Tower Hamlets resource viability appropriately?

Councils need to make developers fund viability to make staffing appropriate.

Joseph responded

Viability is a unique skill set, and recruiting is harder when the private sector offers more resources than local government can. There is a combination of funding sources, with London Borough of Tower Hamlets starting off in a better place than other councils. Funding needs to be made available to allow councils do viability work.

Developers will fund some viability, but councils need to scrutinise from their own reports.

### **4 Housing affordability**

Nick Porter introduced the report on Housing affordability. The report explored the current affordability of housing, its impact, and the policy solutions. Nick reported on the challenges around affordability and what the report means about affordability. Nick highlighted the positive work that had already been carried out. The report made a series of recommendations for the LGA to continue advancing the case for ensuring the provision of affordable housing

Members commented

Work on Housing affordability needs to be local, household income is different across the England and Wales. There can be extreme differences from household income outside of London. LGA policy is seen as too London-centric.

London living rent does not mean affordable housing is accessible

for everyone. Young people under 25 are affected with fewer streams for access to affordable housing.

Members highlighted part of the report where the government in the 1980s invested 80 per cent in building new homes, 20 per cent on supporting families to meeting housing costs. Housing feels very far away from that spending now.

Councils can become a social landlord and drive up local standards. Currently holiday accommodation is being used for emergency housing, with housing benefit being spent on poor and unsuitable placements.

The link between the housing crisis and the economy should be highlighted in LGA housing policy.

## **5 The Future of Town Centres**

Kamal Panchal introduced the report on the future of town centres that highlighted the recent LGA work in this area and proposed further work to be led by this Board in support of councils' effort to revitalise their town centres.

Members made the following comments

Town centre heritage is important and highlighting cultural landmarks will bring residents to town centres.

Business rates are contentious and are not currently as flexible as needed.

High streets are seeing a reduction in shop retail, changing from the traditional high street trends. Out of town retail parks are also declining.

Town centres retail decline is negatively affecting young people and their initial employment opportunities.

Town centre regeneration needs to reflect where new housing developments should be placed. Housing above shops should be also looked into again.

Children's activities can bring residents to the town centre, empty retail units can be used to create educational pop up/short term attractions.

Businesses being within a town centre can bring employees to shop on working days and local councils can bring their council officers to town centres to increase staff footfall to local businesses

Local leadership at councils needs to have an active involvement into what their high street looks like and what is needed for residents

Kamal highlighted the following areas of interest for the committee  
Bradford City Council will be featuring in the Innovation Zone at the LGA annual conference this year, reporting on new and existing business growth and job opportunities in Bradford City Centre.  
The Grimsey Review, a report into the decline of the High Street.

Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee inquiry into  
High streets and town centres in 2030

**6 Waste and Recycling Update - impact of China's ban on imports of waste material**

**7 Grenfell Update: Review of Building Regulations**

Eamon Lally introduced a Supplementary report providing an update on the final report of the Independent Review of Building Regulations and fire safety. Eamon reported on the context of the Hackitt Report and the work the LGA has done since the report was published. Eamon highlighted that there will be a consultation of banning combustible cladding from Ministers since the report was published. Eamon reported the £4M in government funding for safety maintenance of buildings, work will be done to ensure this is new funding. Eamon mentioned the public enquiry that has opened and officers will update the committee as the Hackitt review continues.

Members commented

The report is a missed opportunity in a climate of greater sector and public interest in building safety

The private housing sector has a lot of buildings with cladding and the report needs to take this into scope so bills are not passed onto residents

Eamon responded with reporting that the LGA were successful in engagement with ministers to announce £4M in government funding for safety maintenance of buildings.

**8 Minutes of the previous meeting**

**Appendix A -Attendance**

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Martin Tett	Buckinghamshire County Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Judith Blake CBE	Leeds City Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Adele Morris	Southwark Council
	Cllr Rachel Eburne	Mid Suffolk District Council
Members	Cllr Alistair Auty	Wokingham Borough Council
	Cllr Simon Cooke	Bradford Metropolitan District Council
	Cllr Lynne Duffy	Wychavon District Council
	Cllr Blake Pain	Harborough District Council
	Cllr David Renard	Swindon Borough Council
	Cllr Mark Mills-Bishop	Broxbourne Borough Council
	Cllr Colin Davie	Lincolnshire County Council
	Cllr Tony Newman	Croydon Council

Cllr Helen Holland  
Cllr Ed Turner  
Cllr Rachel Blake  
Cllr Gillian Campbell  
Cllr Michael Mordey  
Cllr Peter Thornton  
Cllr Linda Gillham

Bristol City Council  
Oxford City Council  
Tower Hamlets Council  
Blackpool Council  
Sunderland City Council  
Cumbria County Council  
Runnymede Borough Council

Apologies

In Attendance

LGA Officers