



15 February 2022

Sir

Robert Colvile pushes all the buttons that rally the 'build, build, build' brigade in *"Stuff the nimbys and build, build, build – the future of Britain (and the Tories) depends on it"*, February 13.

Mr Colvile seems somewhat more concerned with helping the Conservatives to remain in power than in finding ways to ensure that housing policy addresses the needs of all in society.

The rather desperate desire to create new home-owning voters misdirects Government policy. Schemes like Help to Buy, Shared Ownership and 95% mortgages are designed to give those people who are only a whisper below the housing ladder a leg up.

Conversely, the people who are really in need, and for whom a housing ladder is forever out of reach, are neglected. So-called 'affordable' housing is meaningless to them as it is only discounted 20% below inflated market prices.

This affordability problem is vast and growing. The Local Government Association has warned already that the housing waiting list will double to two million by the end of this year. Even if developers could, or wanted to, build 300,000 homes a year (the government's target), the homes they build will be out of reach to a great many. If prices start to drop, developers will slow their output. The status quo is not tenable. It is imperative that social housing is funded by Government.

The 300,000 homes a year target is highly questionable in itself. Population growth has been slowing dramatically for some years. Only 160,000 new households are forming each year. In fact, the ONS estimates that in 2020 there were 23.2 million households living in 24.7 million dwellings. That's right – over a million more dwellings than households.

Household sizes have remained consistent for around twenty years. That is not indicative of over-crowding, or of people trapped in so-called concealed households.

The data for young people living at home shows that in their late teens and very early twenties, the percentages are relatively high, as would be expected. After that, during their twenties the percentage of young people living at home drops rapidly, so that by age 34 only 6% are living with parents.



Meanwhile, 600,000 homes sit empty, foreign investors and holiday homes take much-needed homes off the market, and developers renege on their promises to build the aforementioned unaffordable 'affordable' housing.

Contrary to assertions by Mr Colvile that housebuilding is popular, a report released last June by the Parliamentary Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, *'The Future of the Planning System in England'*, found that when asked about housing needs in their local area, 53% said 'we do not need a greater number of houses or flats' and 36% said, 'we need a few more houses or flats'. Only 7% said 'we need lots more houses or flats'.

Further, the government housing target was felt to be too high by 52% of respondents.

Mr Colvile shows no interest in the environment, biodiversity or nature, and he claims that homes take up just 1.1% of the land in England. In fact, artificial surfaces in the UK made up 8.72% of our land cover in 2018, according to the Corine Land Cover inventory. That is double the European average. An area the size of Cornwall was lost to development between 1990 and 2015, according to the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology.

The only thing I agree with in Mr Colvile's column was that housing needs to be built at a higher density. It should be in compact, 'fifteen-minute'-walkable neighbourhoods, not the car-dependent, suburban sprawl that developers favour.

We need to use the housing stock we have. Government needs to create policies to protect the most vulnerable, and then fund them. And we need enhanced protections for the environment. Labeling those who wish to protect the environment and ensure all in society can afford a safe home as 'nimbys' is nothing more than name calling that prevents balanced, objective debate.

Yours faithfully

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Chairman

Community Planning Alliance

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