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Labour set to repeat Tory mistakes on housing warn planners

The Labour Government's proposed changes to the planning system will not solve the country's housing problems. That is the warning from POETS, an Oxfordshire group of planning and environmental experts, in their response to the Government's consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework and in a letter to Oxfordshire councillors. (*See* https://www.poetsplanningoxon.uk/poets-nppf-consultation-response-230924.pdf *for the full response).*

Two of the main obstacles to providing housing that people need are the inflated price of land and an over-reliance on developers to provide affordable housing. POETS' Katie Barrett said that the Government would struggle to meet its target of building 300,000 homes a year. "The only times when that figure has been reached since 1950 have been when roughly half of the houses were being built by the public sector".

"Investing in public housing could result in net savings to the taxpayer. Not only would billions of pounds currently spent on housing benefit be recouped, but there would be massive savings to the NHS. Poor housing is a major cause of ill health."

Compared with other European countries, new housing in England is cramped, often poor quality, and expensive. Much of the reason for its cost is the price of land, which leaps from a few thousand pounds an acre as farmland to several millions with planning permission for housing. This increase is due to the decisions of elected councils (or occasionally central government), yet the main beneficiaries are landowners and developers.

Chris Cousins, another member of POETS, pointed out that other countries do things differently. "By capturing more of the uplift in land values for public investment they are able to create both higher quality, more affordable housing and better places to live."

He added that it was an issue the Government had to grasp if it was to have any hope of meeting housing need. "Recent studies and reports - from MPs of all parties, to Shelter and the Town and Country Planning Association – agree that it's a major obstacle to providing decent housing. And Winston Churchill railed against what he termed 'the unearned increment' over a hundred years ago!"

ENDS.

Note for Editors:

The Government is consulting on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system. See https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system

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