Planning & the Housing Crisis

The POETS group of local environmental planning and transport professionals has taken aim at government housing policy, and the effect it is having on planning and wider environmental issues. This matters in Oxfordshire because government is proposing a high-growth 'Ox-Cam Arc', and the Planning Bill, due this Autumn, threatens the ability of the planning system to take a co-ordinated approach to the Climate Emergency and Public Health crises.

The new POETS report, *Planning and the Housing Crisis*, shows that successive governments have sought to solve the housing crisis by blaming and weakening the planning system, increasing housing targets and hoping that the volume housebuilders will deliver. POETS argue that this policy, with its arbitrary targets, has not succeeded - and is indeed doomed to failure as housebuilders seek to maximise profit by drip-feeding supply. Since the 1980s, housing policies have failed to address the real need - which is for social or genuinely affordable housing; those of the current government are only serving to worsen the crisis.

POETS demonstrate that the government's relentless weakening of the planning system has led to <u>fewer, not more</u>, houses being built.

Accordingly, POETS are calling for a strengthening, not weakening, of the planning system.

The report takes an historical look at the origins of modern Town and Country Planning from the dark days of WW2, when a Coalition Government planned for future education, health, social and environmental reforms. For several decades following the War, Conservative and Labour governments competed to build houses – and up to around 300,000 annual completions were achieved; significantly, around half of these were built by the public sector. Since the 1980s, completions have generally been fewer than 200,000 a year – because the real problem is that Local Authorities and Housing Associations have not been allowed to provide much needed social housing.
POETS make several bold suggestions for how real needs can be addressed: not least that housing needs should be determined locally, and the public sector should be financed and empowered to start building again. They also argue that, by doing so, the current Climate and Health Crises can be tackled by the same sort of co-ordinated planning and commitment shown by governments in the decades after WW2.

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There are encouraging signs that the electorate is concerned about these issues, both nationally and locally, as recent election results show.
Author and retired Government Planning Inspector, Richard Tamplin, said 'If a wartime government could produce a planning system which delivered a full and wide spectrum of housing and a greener post-war environment, then surely today it is possible to devise sensible solutions to tackle the current crises. Our suggestions are eminently achievable.'

Former County Council Environmental Services Director, David Young added 'The electorate is right to be concerned; this is very much a crisis of democracy. We are calling on our local Councillors and MPs to shout it to government'.

Note for Editors.
The POETS paper can be found here
https://www.poetsplanningoxon.uk/poets-planning-and-the-housing-crisis-paper-180921.pdf

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