



LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE – FRINGE EVENTS

EVENT: **The future of housing: How and where will we build the new homes?**

LOCATION: Central 5; Manchester Central; Manchester Central; Windmill Street; Manchester ; M2 3GX.

DATE & TIME: Sunday 21st Sept; 5.30pm

SPEAKERS:

- Emma Reynolds MP - *Shadow Housing Minister*
 - Councillor Clyde Loakes - *LGA Housing and Environment Board*
 - James Hulme - *Strategic Policy Advisor - National Federation of Builders (NFB)*
 - Lewis Sidnick - *Director of Corporate Affairs, National House Building Council (NHBC)*
 - Anne Ashworth - *Assistant Editor, The Times (chair)*
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PANEL DISCUSSION

Solutions to the UK's housing crisis were discussed at a packed fringe event at the Labour Party Conference last night, with Shadow Housing Minister Emma Reynolds discussing how new builders can be encouraged to enter the market.

A key question is how to get rid of 'nimbysism' in the housing market, said Anne Ashworth, Assistant Editor of the Times and Chair of the Labour conference fringe event; *"how are we going to get the housed to see the point of view of the unhoused?"*

Shadow Housing Minister Emma Reynolds said the housing question is often characterised in that way, as an insiders vs outsiders issue, even though there was often much crossover between these groups through friends or families.

A lack of housing is one of the key threats to the UK, said the Shadow Minister. She warned that there is no magic bullet to solve the UK's housing crisis, which has been "long in the making but has gotten even worse under the current government".

Reynolds stated plainly what she felt were the drivers of the issue; "land; the market; and the public sector."

There is a real need for new house builders to enter the market, she said, but the lack of banks lending to builders is also a real problem. "Government needs to step in and do something" about the current situation.

Giving local authorities much greater powers and responsibilities is extremely important, and is a key thrust that Labour would have in government, she said.

Reynolds argued that developers "get it right" when they consult locals early. The areas in the country where home building is working well, really needed to be looked at and emulated more widely, she said.

Additionally, said Reynolds, young people who were not on the housing ladder needed to have a voice, which they currently lacked.

The National House Building Council's (NHBC) director of corporate affairs, Lewis Sidnick, spoke about how the housing market was currently performing. There had been positive growth recently, but this growth had slowed down dramatically from where it needed to be, he explained.

Certainty in the market is desperately needed, he said, as builders needed to be able to anticipate the market environment in the weeks and months ahead.

Sidnick noted how so much was always heard about the negative side of new build homes, without the positives being communicated. He called for all parties and parts of the sector to unite behind the drive to promote the economic value and quality of new homes.

James Hulme, the strategic policy advisor at the National Federation of Builders (NFB), noted how the word 'planning' had not yet been mentioned.

He argued that the two key issues for smaller building organisations were their access to finance and the uneven playing field they faced in the planning system.

SME builders currently have to fight the same levels of complications to build a handful of homes that a major PLC builder had to deal with when it was building 500+ homes. He called for "a fundamental review of the nature of investment into house building."

Councillor Clyde Loakes, LGA Housing and Environment Board, urged a more strategic approach to house building.

She described how new towns such as Stevenage had been successful partly because of the infrastructure being planned with the town as a whole. "We need to build planned communities with the infrastructure people need with them" she said, whilst calling for the Right to Buy programme to be localised.

Question and answer session

Reynolds stressed the need for both early and continued investment and dialogue with communities, but noted that the next government would be inheriting a very difficult fiscal environment.

She explained how one of the things that more councils could be doing was to use their own public land more intelligently, unlocking it for wider use.

Sidnick said that despite the main problems, the industry was actually in a good place at the moment because no matter what the outcome is at the next general election; all three main parties were united in agreement about how serious the housing issue was.

Hulme explained how many of the issues being discussed were all connected to the main key question of investment. "Everything is running to the wire because of the nature of investment in the sector" he said.

Councillor Loakes emphasised how getting young people into social housing whilst they were waiting to get onto the housing ladder would be an improvement, with money going to the local authority rather than private landlords.

Asked what should come first by a member of the audience, Sidnick argued that infrastructure had to drive development rather than the other way around, and echoed Loakes' call for more strategic building.

Reynolds was less sure however, stressing that it really depended on the context of the development.

In a show of hands, the majority of the room remained optimistic about the ability for 200,000 homes to be built per year by an incoming Labour government.

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