

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON PARK HOMES

The minutes of the inaugural meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes which took place in Room U, Portcullis House, Westminster on Wednesday 13 September 2017, commencing 9.30am.

PRESENT: Christopher Chope OBE, MP (convenor and Chairman)
Peter Aldous MP
Richard Benyon MP
Sir Peter Bottomley MP
Chris Davies MP
Lee Rowley MP
Martin Whitfield MP

The Lord Teverson

Helen Gilfedder, representing Stephen Barclay MP
Alex Denvir, representing Roberta Blackman-Woods MP

Connor Power, CLG
Robert Skeoch, CLG
William Tandoh, CLG

Victor Davey, Silver Lakes
Ibraheem Dulmeer, Lease
Richard Hand, Lease
Paul Holland, SODC&VWHDC
Mervyn Kohler, AgeUK
Ros Pritchard OBE, British Holiday & Home Parks Association (BH&HPA)
Anne Webb, volunteer

APOLOGIES: Steve Brine MP, Mark Menzies MP, Nick Thomas-Symonds MP, Michael Tomlinson MP, Baroness Scott of Needham

Alicia Dunne, Brian Doick, Lisa Osborn, Sonia McColl, Alan Savory

1. Approval of Minutes

The meeting **APPROVED** of the minutes of the last meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes which took place in Committee Room 12, Westminster on Monday, 13 March 2017, commencing at 16.30.

2. APPG on Park Homes

a) Name

The meeting **AGREED** to re-register the group with the name:
'All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes'.

b) Statement of Purpose

The meeting **AGREED** the statement of purpose of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes was to:

‘Bring together parliamentarians, park homeowners and industry representatives to discuss issues of common interest including legislation and its enforcement to eliminate abuse and disadvantage.’

c) Members

Parliamentarians

The meeting noted parliamentarians who had expressed interest in participation in the work of the group. Mrs Pritchard confirmed that the Membership List was kept up-to-date and that all Parliamentarians who had attended meetings, requested membership and/or responded to the Group’s calling notices of meetings were included.

Stakeholders

The meeting noted the policy that had been adopted in the previous Parliament in respect of requests received from individual park homeowners and park owners to attend meetings of the APPG. Each had been informed that individual stakeholders may be represented at meetings of the APPG by their constituency MP and/or through their national representative organisation. For homeowners, national representative organisations which were invited to attend meetings of the APPG included IPHAS, NAPHR and the Park Home Owners Justice Campaign; for park owners, these included BH&HPA and the NCC.

The meeting **AGREED** this policy should continue to apply.

Sir Peter Bottomley noted that it might be possible to organise an open meeting from time to time.

d) Election of Officers

The meeting **ELECTED** officers to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes as follows:

Chair - Christopher Chope OBE, MP (Conservative)

Vice-Chairs - Peter Aldous MP (Conservative)
Nick Thomas-Symonds MP (Labour)
Martin Whitfield (Labour)

Honorary Treasurers Sir Peter Bottomley MP (Conservative)
Chris Davies MP (Conservative)

e) Public Enquiry Point

The meeting **AGREED** that Mrs Pritchard should serve as the public enquiry point.

Secretary’s note: a specific email address for public enquiries to the group has been set up – APPG@bhHPA.org.uk

f) Website

The meeting considered concerns expressed by the Park Home Owners Justice Campaign that the Group's webpage should be hosted by an independent body. Mrs Pritchard reported that a dedicated webpage for the Group had been published at www.parkhome.org.uk/APPG following the request of Steve Brine MP at the inaugural meeting in the previous parliament. This provided the APPG's statement of purpose, contact details and elected officers and was used to publish minutes of the Group's meetings. She said there was no requirement for the Group to publish a webpage and offered to take it down since there were concerns.

However, the meeting applauded the transparency of publishing minutes of the Group's meetings online and **AGREED** that the webpage should continue as previously.

g) Secretariat

It was noted that Ms Webb had volunteered to serve as minuting secretary for the Group, a role she had also undertaken for previous APPGs following her retirement as Editor of 'Park Home Magazine'. The meeting expressed thanks to Ms Webb for her time and gratefully **AGREED** that she should continue in this voluntary work.

h) Re-registration

The meeting **AGREED** that Mr Chope MP should complete and return the Group's Registration Form to the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner.

3. **Update from the CLG Park Homes team**

Mr Skeoch reported that part 1 of the call for evidence had been published and responses were currently being considered, the results would be published shortly, along with Part 2 of the Call for Evidence which would be a general review of the Mobile Homes Act 2013. It was hoped that it would be published before the end of the calendar year.

The Chairman asked when the APPG would know whether the Minister would take on board a further review of commission. Mr Skeoch said that this was not in the scope of Part 2 of the review of the Mobile Homes Act 2013, but Ministers were aware that there was a call for a review of commission and that would be considered when reviewing the responses. If there was anything to be done on commission, there would be a separate consultation.

He noted commission had been looked at to see if it was reasonable and the DCLG Select Committee considered that it was. The Department understood the feelings of those who had to pay this fee but there was also the question of economic viability.

Mrs Pritchard said that the BH&HPA employed surveyors in Wales to calculate the maintenance costs that would be required for parks in the coming decade who found that, without commission, the small park businesses were likely to go to the wall. She noted that it would be inappropriate to have laws which differed by size of business.

Mr Skeoch said this is the challenge that the English government had to deal with. The Welsh government was now looking at it and finding the same problem – that it would have an impact on smaller businesses. There was also the concern that removing one source of income would necessitate a change to other sources.

Mr Davey commented that if no-one moved off a site, the owner did not get any commission money. Therefore, it was an incentive for the park owner to get people to move off the site.

Mrs Pritchard responded by saying that calculations have been made averaging over a 10-year period and these showed that commission was a necessary income stream. Mr Davey said that there were three homes for sale on his park and when these are sold the park owner will have received £45,000 for doing nothing.

The Chairman commented that the enthusiasm with which Mr Davey put over his point was reflected in the fact that many people had signed the Justice Campaign's petition calling for a review of the commission rate. He added that one of the reasons for commission amounts being so high was that the value of park homes had increased. Under current legislation, the 10% was a maximum but it was the figure that was invariably used. So, whether the businesses were large or small, they were maximising their income on the disposal of a park home. That was why residents were asking for the commission rate to be looked at again.

The Chairman said there was some evidence that the larger site-owning organisations were picking off the smaller ones and sometimes the owners of those large companies were not very desirable.

Mr Skeoch said that Ministers would be looking at this issue to see if they needed to have another review, adding that it would not be part of the proposed Call for Evidence. He noted that the Housing Minister had a tremendous workload but hoped that he would come to address an APPG meeting at some future stage. The matter was important for residents and the industry and there was a need to get it right. He added that the other factor which had to be considered was that pitch fees were regulated. They could only go up or down by inflation. If a decision was taken to do away with commission, there might have to be different regulation of pitch fees which could lead to situations where residents could not afford to pay them and remain on the park. It would be important to ensure that if one income stream was lost there wasn't abuse elsewhere.

The Chairman said that there might be scope for Mr Davey's point to be looked at again and not merely to respond by saying that it had been dealt with in the past. Mr Skeoch said it was looked at during the previous consultation in 2007. The industry wanted no change. Residents were divided: some felt theirs was a home for life so weren't concerned about the 10%; others said it was important to remove it but they didn't want to pay more in pitch fees.

Mr Skeoch said he realised this was a current issue but it would not be part of the Call for Evidence. He said that if there was to be research into the economics of the industry he would be recommending that it should be undertaken by an independent body, but that would be a decision for the Minister.

Mr Davies MP commented that the commission issue would not go away. Park homes that were once selling for £100,000 were now £220,000 and this has had a knock-on effect on the commission paid to the site owner. He asked how much notice the Department would take of the research being carried out in Wales. Mr Skeoch replied that his Department would look at it but what the Welsh Government decided would be only for Wales.

Mr Davey said that his home was worth £150,000. It was in Chichester where property prices were high. Should the time come when he wanted to sell his home, he would have trouble finding alternative accommodation at a price he could afford and the £15,000 he had paid in commission to the park owner could make a lot of difference to where he could live. He added that if, for example, he had owned a leasehold flat, he wouldn't have had to pay the leaseholder a fee when he left that property.

The Chairman responded, saying that the law was as it was at the moment. The consequences of making a change to commission could result in changes elsewhere. For example, he asked whether the law would be changed retrospectively.

Mr Davey said that he had written to the Prime Minister about the 10% commission and received a response from the then Housing Minister that stated that when moving to a park home residents signed contracts saying that they would pay commission when they disposed of their homes.

4. Any Other Business

Responding to a question on energy efficiency in park homes, Mr Tandoh said that the Department worked with BEIS. The Chairman said that they had tried without success to get the Minister for Energy to attend a meeting of the APPG. It was noted that it was vital to ensure that all park homes were properly heated and energy efficient. Mr Skeoch added that the new Housing Minister was very aware of the park homes industry and had some park homes in his own constituency. He was committed to stopping abuses in the sector.

The Chairman asked the DCLG representatives when they thought the Minister might be persuaded to attend an APPG meeting. Mr Skeoch said that if the Minister received an invitation he would certainly recommend that he should attend.

Considering harassment, Mr Benyon MP noted that at the last APPG meeting the then Housing Minister, Gavin Barwell had said that he was interested to know whether the failure of the local authorities to take action was due to lack of will or lack of resources. He thought it was a combination of both. He asked if there was any plan to improve resource allocation to local authorities so that they could take action, adding that there was a great deal of harassment on parks. Mr Skeoch confirmed the issue was being considered in the round across all housing sectors. He noted that harassment came down to the fact that the park home law was complicated and difficult to enforce.

Mr Holland said that in South Oxfordshire people reported harassment issues but getting evidence was very difficult as residents would not come forward. Mr Skeoch added that local authorities could not take enforcement action without witnesses, noting the need for evidence and that lack of it was often due to residents being threatened and scared.

Mr Tandoh commented that enforcement of the mobile homes legislation was not simply about housing. It was also about health and safety on sites and those issues would be addressed in Part 2. Problems of enforcement would also be addressed in the Call for Evidence.

Mr Skeoch said there was also the matter of what constitutes harassment. Some residents regarded reminder letters about paying pitch fees as harassment. There were degrees of what constituted harassment and the law defined it effectively in the 1968 Act.

Returning to the 10% commission fee, Mr Davey asked if it would take an Act of Parliament to change the rate. The chairman said that although a park home owner may enter into a contract with the site owner under which a maximum 10% was payable on the sale of that park home, it was still a matter of private contract between the parties concerning the rate of commission to be paid. All Parliament had done was set a maximum on the commission rate.

The Chairman concluded by saying that residents wanted the law changed, the Government was currently considering housing legislation and park homes might come up within this. His message to residents was not to give up.

5. **Date and venue of next meeting**

It was **AGREED** that the Chairman would write to the Minister of State for Housing and Planning, asking that he join a meeting of the APPG following Government's publication of Part 2 of the review of the Mobile Homes Act 2013.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 10.30am.