

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON PARK HOMES

The minutes of the inaugural meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes for the new Parliament which took place on Monday, 10 February 2020 in Room N, Portcullis House, Westminster, commencing at 17.00.

PRESENT: The Rt. Hon. Esther McVey MP, Minister of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Sir Christopher Chope MP (convenor and Chairman)
Peter Aldous MP
Alex Sobel MP
Anne Double, representing Steve Double MP
Ben Dugher, representing Lee Rowley MP
Simon Gibson, representing Michael Tomlinson MP
Grace Duffy, MHCLG
Emma Garrett, MHCLG
Jules Dufty, MHCLG
Matthew Cohen, BEIS Consumer Policy Team
Alicia Dunne, NCC
Brian Doick MBE, NAPHR
Richard Hand, LEASE
Ros Pritchard OBE, BH&HPA
Anne Webb, volunteer

APOLOGIES: Stephen Barclay MP
Sir Peter Bottomley MP
Cherilyn Mackrory MP
Lord Carter of Coles
Baroness Maddock
Lord Teverson
Anthony Essien, LEASE
Mervyn Kolher, AgeUK
Sonia McColl OBE, PHOJC
Lisa Osborn, North Somerset Council
Alan Savory MBE, IPHAS

1. Approval of Minutes

The meeting **APPROVED** the minutes of the previous meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes which took place on Monday, 1 July 2019, commencing at 17.00 in Room M, Portcullis House, Westminster.

2. APPG on Park Homes

The meeting **AGREED** that Sir Christopher Chope MP should return the Group's Registration Form to the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner to re-register the group as the 'All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes', with all arrangements as in the last Parliament, viz.:

- **Statement of Purpose** – 'Bring together parliamentarians, park home owners and industry representatives to discuss issues of common interest, including legislation and its enforcement to eliminate abuse and disadvantage.'

- **Members**
 - **Parliamentarians** - The Membership was kept up-to-date and all Parliamentarians who had attended meetings, requested membership and/or responded to the Group's calling notices of meetings were included.
 - **Stakeholders** - Requests received from individual park home owners and park owners to attend meetings of the APPG would each be 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 were IPHAS, NAPHR and the Park Home Owners' Justice Campaign; for park owners, these were BH&HPA and NCC.
- **Public Enquiry Point** - Mrs Pritchard to serve as the public enquiry point.
- **Website** - A dedicated webpage for the Group is published at www.parkhome.org.uk/APPG.
- **Secretariat** - Ms Webb to serve as minuting secretary for the Group.

Election of Officers

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

Chair	Sir Christopher Chope MP (Conservative)
Vice-Chair	Peter Aldous MP (Conservative)
Vice-Chair	Sir Peter Bottomley MP (Conservative)
Vice-Chair	Lord Carter of Coles (Labour)
Vice-Chair	Alex Sobel MP (Labour Co-op)

3. Income and expenditure statement from previous Parliament – Year to 13 September 2019

The meeting **APPROVED** the income and expenditure statement from the previous Parliament – Year to 13 September 2019. It was noted that the APPG on Park Homes had received no financial income, nor benefits in kind from a source which exceeded £1,500 and had incurred no expenditure in the year to 13 September 2019.

4. Update from The Rt Hon Esther McVey MP, Minister of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

The Chairman welcomed the Minister and said that it was important for the Group to ensure that the park owners who are 'behaving' and delivering good quality homes to residents were not undermined by the 'rogues' whose numbers seemed to be increasing. To that end, he had presented three Private Member's Bills to try to bring the 'rogues' into line:

- to differentiate between parks subject to business rates or where council tax applied
- to amend the Mobile Homes Act 1983 and to address the misuse of complex arrangements to limit homeowners' security
- to amend the 1960 Act to provide site licensing protections even where there was no planning consent.

The Chairman hoped for at least one of the Bills to have a second reading in June.

The meeting noted the Adjournment Debate of 1 October 2019 (see [Hansard](#)).

The Chairman introduced the Minister who commented that she was delighted to see such strong support from Parliamentarians. She said she had constituents and friends who moved to

park homes to free up capital and enjoy their retirement without worries, but that was not always the case, especially if they lived on a site run by one of the rogue park owners.

She said she saw park homes as an important part of the country's housing stock, adding that it was vital to close the loopholes that are used to exploit residents. Her Department appreciated that there were a large number of good park owners and it was important not to damage their businesses while attempting to stop the unlawful activities of the others.

She outlined the package of different measures, such as 'fit and proper person' and explained the Ministry's ongoing work programme which included preparing Primary legislation, the Primary Authority and the Park Homes Working Group. She mentioned the difficulty in getting Parliamentary time and said she hoped that backbenchers would get involved and that perhaps, instead of having one large piece of legislation, the various problems could be tackled one by one. Residents had been raising problems about commission, pitch fees and service charges.

The Minister felt it was important for the worst cases to be publicised so that a message would go to the rogue park owners that they would not get away with their malpractices.

Mr Aldous MP commented that when he brought in the 2013 legislation as a Private Member's Bill, it included provision for consultation and review, with particular regard to fit and proper person. He said that in his view the Act had been helpful, but there were still loopholes. He had a park in his own constituency which had been well run until it was sold to a new owner when Mr Aldous started to receive complaints, something that had never happened under the previous ownership.

Mr Aldous MP questioned whether primary legislation was necessary to bring in the 'fit and proper person' test. The Minister said that it could be done through a Statutory Instrument, but she was unsure about timings, but it should be done sooner rather than later. Ms Garrett said she hoped it would be soon and said it had been drafted and was ready.

The Chairman questioned the benefit of the 'fit and proper person' test, as he did not think that 'fit and proper person' gave any more protection than the site licence currently provides.

The Minister stressed the need for enforcement and said local authorities should make examples of the worst offenders, to deter others. The meeting considered the detail of a particularly serious case where enforcement agencies appeared to be failing to support homeowners and discussed various steps to assist.

The Minister noted that one of the problems was the vulnerability of elderly residents who tend to believe what they are told by site owners, and then fell victim to the scams. The Minister said that there had to be a way to enable local authorities to take on one of the most serious cases.

Mr Doick said that local authorities were unwilling to deal with cases where harassment was reported, claiming that they are short of resources. The Minister said that local authorities are funded by licensing fees, business rates and council tax so there should be funds available. Mr Cohen explained that Trading Standards services decided which cases to pursue at local level, according to local priorities.

Mr Aldous said that either the legislation had no teeth or local authorities were failing to apply it. He asked if the APPG should contact the LGA about this.

Mr Hand agreed that local authorities didn't enforce, claiming that their budgets had been slashed over the last ten years. Park homes were not something they were obliged to address so they didn't get the finance or the attention they needed.

The Minister commented that local authorities have just received a very generous financial settlement.

Mr Sobel MP said that one park in his constituency was owned by a family who had been to prison for various crimes, including arson. This family had purchased homes at less than market value, and had been guilty of digging up residents' gardens and generally harassing them in the hope that they would sell up and take a low financial offer, just to 'escape'. Mr Sobel agreed to send further particulars of this case to the Minister.

The meeting noted that with reference to 'fit and proper person' there were problems with who 'that person' was as some rogue site owners would nominate a spouse or other family member, or their manager. Limitations as to how watertight the measure could be through a Statutory Instrument were also considered, noting sometimes primary legislation was needed. If the local authority was only able to revoke the licence and that wouldn't help protect residents. If the site owner failed the test, the local authority should be able to appoint a manager who is fit.

The Chairman asked whether the 'fit and proper person' draft had gone out for consultation and was told it was now in the final stages of legal checks. Ms Garrett said the Statutory Instrument was expected to be laid in the spring.

The Chairman commented that there was currently no statutory obligation on councils to do anything but if a statutory obligation was imposed on them, park homes would go up in their list of priorities.

Mrs Pritchard commented that local authorities were concerned about costs, particularly if they had to fight lengthy and complicated court cases. Mr Doick cited a number of cases where rogue park owners had operated parks without site licences so that residents had no protection under the law, and cases of harassment.

The Chairman asked what the Department was doing and whether it been in touch with Trading Standards. Ms Duffy said they had asked Trading Standards about their role. The Minister asked why they had never taken one of the cases forward.

The Minister proposed that there should be a meeting with the National Trading Standards Intelligence Unit to see what investigations they are making. It was noted that abuses which escaped enforcement were spreading to other parks.

The Chairman wound up stating that there was obviously a collective will to sort out the various problems that had been raised, and that enforcement was key to dealing with a lot of these.

5. Any other business

Time did not permit consideration of any other business.

6. Date and venue of next meeting

To be confirmed.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 18.00.