

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON PARK HOMES

The minutes of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes which took place on Monday, 17 May 2021, via Zoom, commencing at 10.00am.

PRESENT: Sir Christopher Chope MP (Chair)
Peter Aldous MP
Sir Peter Bottomley MP
Lord Carter of Coles
Anthony Mangnall MP
Heather Wheeler MP

Paul Honey, representing Ruth Edwards MP
Rebecca Hutchinson, representing John Stevenson MP
Sarah Pagan, representing John Stevenson MP
Tom Yeldon

Alicia Dunne, NCC
Brian Doick MBE, NAPHR
Anthony Essien, LEASE
Sonia McColl OBE, Park Home Owners Justice Campaign
Lisa Osborn, North Somerset Council
Ros Pritchard OBE, BH&HPA
Ian Pye, IPHAS
Anne Webb, volunteer

APOLOGIES: Apologies had been received from Lord Best OBE DL and John Stevenson MP.

Sir Christopher Chope MP welcomed all to the Group's Annual General Meeting and thanked Anne Webb for producing such comprehensive minutes of meetings.

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 via Zoom on Monday, 1 February 2021, commencing at 10.00am.

2. Annual General Meeting

a) Election of officers

It was proposed by Sir Peter Bottomley MP and unanimously **AGREED** that Sir Christopher Chope MP should continue to serve as Chair to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes.

Sir Christopher Chope MP thanked members for their vote of confidence and agreed to continue to serve as Chair.

Heather Wheeler MP was welcomed to the meeting and her nomination as Vice-Chair was gratefully received. The meeting heard that Peter Aldous MP, Sir Peter Bottomley MP, Lord Carter of Coles and Alex Sobel MP were each willing to continue to serve as Vice-Chairs.

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)
Vice-Chair	Heather Wheeler MP (Conservative)

Sir Peter Bottomley MP suggested that there could be merit in inviting a Scottish MP to join the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes.

b) Income and expenditure statement

The meeting **APPROVED** the income and expenditure statement for the year to 9 February 2021, noting 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.

It was **AGREED** that the Group's Registration Form be returned to the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner to re-register the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes.

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. Issues arising in the light of the content of the Queen's Speech

Sir Christopher Chope MP reported that Eddie Hughes MP, Minister for Housing, had been invited to meet with the APPG but unfortunately had other diary commitments.

He also reported that he had been trying to persuade Government to give a Hand-Out Bill to address areas of concern in the park homes sector. The meeting considered the effectiveness of a Private Member's Bill to address the issues which Government had said would be addressed when Parliamentary time allowed. The Chairman noted that the Private Member's Bill ballot would take place quite soon and wondered whether anyone successful in that ballot might be concerned enough with park home issues to be persuaded to take up the cause and put pressure on Government to prepare and present a Bill which would embrace issues on which the Government had already promised to legislate.

Sir Christopher Chope MP advised that park owners in England would need to apply for a Fit and Proper Person licence between July and September 2021 and that guidance for local authorities was anticipated shortly. The Chair also shared the news

that the University of Liverpool had been appointed to gather data regarding the likely impact of any changes in the 10% sales commission fee. Sonia McColl thanked Sir Christopher Chope MP for his work, adding that many park home residents were disappointed that legislation wasn't coming through. She hoped it would be possible to get a Private Member's Bill to take park home issues forward (in the same way that Peter Aldous MP had done with the Mobile Homes Act 2013).

Anthony Mangnall MP expressed his frustration that the findings of the Mobile Homes Act review were yet to be implemented and supported the proposal to write to Minister, Eddie Hughes MP inviting him to the next meeting of the APPG. He asked if the text of that letter could be sent to all the stakeholders. Anthony Mangnall MP also felt that guidance for Environmental Health Officers would be helpful.

Sir Peter Bottomley MP suggested that the Fire Safety Bill had taken precedence over other legislation and that more should be made of the fact that people living in park homes were often quite vulnerable, as were leaseholders. He said it would be good to get an hour and a half debate and to link vulnerable leaseholders with park home residents. He suggested that LEASE should be asked to provide a list of the most common problems they received. Ian Pye thought this was an excellent suggestion and agreed to liaise with LEASE and to find out whether the matters raised had been put to Government and a satisfactory response received. Sir Christopher Chope MP echoed Sir Peter Bottomley MP's thoughts about highlighting the vulnerability of homeowners on residential parks through a Backbench debate.

Sir Christopher Chope MP next addressed issues relating to park homes which had arisen in the light of the content of the Queen's Speech. One was the Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Bill. Brian Doick asked whether there was a possibility that this Bill could be broadened to encompass park homes, in the same way that in 2003 the then Housing Minister, Yvette Cooper MP, had allowed changes to the Housing Bill to include items relating to park homes, with the result that there were changes to the implied terms that came forward in the Act. With regard to the current problems being experienced with leases, he said that some of these dated back to 1982. Leases were being issued for any number of years, some as little as six. In some instances, park homes were sold with these short leases and residents were told that the lease could be extended on the payment of a sum of money. Brian Doick felt that the Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Bill should have a section relating to park homes. He added that residents were being held to ransom by park owners when leases run out.

Sir Christopher Chops responded that Brian Doick's comments were a useful reminder of history and, especially that the Minister was willing to co-operate and to incorporate the changes into a Bill back in 2003. He felt that the APPG should put pressure on the Minister that when this Leasehold Reform Bill was introduced it had the scope to cover the issues raised by Brian Doick, adding that he was sure that Sir Peter Bottomley MP would be trying to achieve this. Sir Peter Bottomley MP suggested that there would be merit in ensuring that the BBC's Housing and Parliamentary editors were kept up to date with this matter.

Heather Wheeler MP was delighted to be returning to the APPG on Park Homes and opined that the rules on changing the inflation index for the pitch fee review from RPI

to CPI would be suitable for a Hand-out Bill. Heather Wheeler MP welcomed the research into the 10% sales commission as this would provide an evidence-based approach and would hopefully avoid a potential Judicial Review. She added that the previous Housing Minister, Kelly Tolhurst MP had a Kent constituency with a large number of residential parks in the area whereas Eddie Hughes MP had a northern constituency with fewer parks. Although he knew a lot about social housing, as an inner-city MP, he had little experience of park homes.

Heather Wheeler MP acknowledged the excellent work that Kelly Tolhurst MP had done as Minister and looked forward to the opportunity to discuss park home issues with the incoming Minister, Eddie Hughes MP. Sir Christopher Chope MP proposed that the next meeting of the APPG on Park Homes be organised before the summer recess on a date when it would be convenient for the Minister to attend.

Sir Christopher Chope MP introduced Lisa Osborn, an officer of North Somerset Council which provided the primary authority residential park site licensing. Addressing the preparations for the introduction of Fit and Proper Person licensing, Lisa Osborn said that park owners would need to apply between July and September 2021. The APPG heard that legislation allowed for F&PP checks by the local authority to be self-financing, and a fee would be needed to cover the cost of the substantial administrative work involved. Lisa Osborn advised the APPG that as a Primary Authority, North Somerset Council would be able to share standard templates and processes with other local authorities, as well as giving advice, to help lessen the burden and keep costs to a minimum. She informed the APPG that a Site Licensing Officers' Forum to which 20 local authorities had membership, had been set up and that all Forum members were keen to ensure that improvements were made to the sector.

She said that her local authority was currently looking at a fee of £200 per applicant for the Fit and Proper Person licence. There were 29 sites in her district in North Somerset and they were looking to generate an income of £5,800 (£1,160 per year for five years) but even so that wouldn't be enough to employ an officer to do the job.

She said that her authority was committed to improving issues in the park homes sector and with that in mind had created a Primary Authority partnership with the BH&HPA. Her authority had sent out letters to park owners in the area alerting them to the fact that these checks were coming and inviting them to raise any questions. They were also being alerted to the fact that the local authority would need to review an up-to-date criminal records check (within six months of application) for all applicants.

Sonia McColl said that 7-8 years had now elapsed since the passing of the Mobile Homes Act 2013 and the input she received from her members indicated that they were disappointed. When they reported matters of concern to their local authorities, nothing happened. She said that there had been a promise that rogue park owners would be dealt with and made an example of. Local authorities were not addressing where homes were sited and whether they were covered by the planning permission. Park owners were running rings around the local authorities, she added.

Ian Pye commented that this was a widespread issue. He had been dealing with a number of parks in Lancashire where park owners had ignored planning consents, had taken steps to extend parks in different ways and local authorities had not acted. Local authority officers had made inspections and written reports in some cases, but nothing of consequence was usually resolved and the numerous complaints from homeowners had fallen on deaf ears. Lisa Osborn responded by saying that she had heard about such things but the problems were down to individual local authorities. She said that her authority had responded to complaints from homeowners on the day after receipt.

Ian Pye said that another matter of concern was that when a park owner accepted his Site Licence there was an assumption that he would abide by the terms and conditions therein but the sad fact was that there were many park owners coming into the industry and taking over large parks who were ignorant of their Site Licence conditions. There was no requirement for them to have, for example, knowledge of how the Model Standards worked, or knowledge of the scope of park home legislation. He had received a number of complaints from his members about park owners totally ignoring the legislation and hedging their bets that no-one would take action against them.

Sir Christopher Chope MP commented that he hoped that when Ian Pye drew up his list of the most common problems reported to him that he would include some of the examples he had mentioned. Anthony Essien (LEASE) said that his organisation already had a list of the most common problems on parks which were reported to them and would be glad to hear from residents' associations about any others.

Sir Christopher Chope MP asked Lisa Osborn whether there was any scope for a best practice guide for local authorities dealing with park homes. He also asked whether the Site Licensing Officers' Forum which she had mentioned was local government owned or organised by the Ministry. Lisa Osborn replied that it had been created by local authority officers. She added that there was a huge amount of guidance available on best practice. She hoped to advise local authorities on implementing Model Standards and to bring together other pieces of legislation to enable them to have easy access to the information they needed.

Sir Christopher Chope MP asked Lisa Osborn if there were any legislative changes that her group believed were necessary. She responded that it would be useful for the Site Officers' Licensing Forum to get the views of its members on that question. In relation to the proposed Fit and Proper Person licensing, they would not be able to comment until they had seen it in operation for a while – possibly a year.

Sir Christopher Chope MP advised that complex company structures would need to be addressed.

Brian Doick raised the matter of homeowners currently paying for their site owner's licence from the local authority. He took the view that if they are paying for it, they should have some input into its provisions. He added that there was also a suggestion that residents should also pay a fee for the introduction of Fit and Proper Person licensing. He asked why residents should have to pay to enable their park owner to run his business.

5. **Any other business**

There was no other business.

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

It was **AGREED** that the next meeting of the APPG on Park Homes be organised before the summer recess on a date when it would be convenient for the Minister to attend.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 10:45.