

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON PARK HOMES

The minutes of the meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes which took place at 2.00pm on 11 September 2023 in Committee Room 18, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

PRESENT: Sir Christopher Chope MP (convenor and Chairman)

Peter Aldous MP

Alex Sobel MP

Brian Doick MBE, NAPHR

Grace Duffy DLUHC

Alicia Dunne NCC

Anthony Essien, Leasehold Advisory Service

Karl Hobley BH&HPA

David Iles PHOJC

Sonia McColl OBE PHOJC

Jamie Richards DLUHC

Katherine Squires BH&HPA

William Tandoh DLUH

Anne Webb, volunteer

APOLOGIES

Ian Pye (IPHAS)

Sir Christopher Chope MP welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that Rachel Maclean MP, Minister of State (Housing and Planning) would be arriving shortly. In the meantime discussion around the table centered on the concern that so many park owning businesses were failing at this time, especially the large groups.

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 17 April.

2. Rachel Maclean MP, Minister of State (Housing and Planning)

Mrs Maclean thanked those present for their efforts on behalf of park home residents over the years, adding that she realised that many of her constituents lived in park homes. There was a need, she said, to keep working to improve the balance of power between residents and park owners.

She referred to 8 commitments, made in 2018, aimed at improving the day to day living of park home residents. Six had been implemented and the remaining two were in the pipeline.

One of the problems that was repeatedly raised by residents was the lack of visits to parks from local authority inspectors and this was one area where she hoped that the Government could act to improve matters.

1. Commission on the sale of park homes. There was a need to have a full understanding of the implications of this change and research had been commissioned to ascertain how this would affect the incomes of park owners. Were site owners' incomes to be drastically reduced, this could have an effect on standards on the park should maintenance not be carried out as previously and this, in turn, would impact on the residents.

Before the final report on this matter is published, Mrs Maclean said that it needed to be considered very carefully to ensure fairness to all. She hoped it would be available next year.

Peter Aldous, MP for Waveney, who took the 2013 Mobile Homes Act through Parliament, commented that, at that time, it was hoped it would be a panacea for all and although it was, and continues to be, going in the right direction, there are some matters he wanted to highlight.

- (a) 'Rogue' park owners do have the capacity to find their way around rules and systems, and he was quite alarmed about the number of parks currently in administration.
- (b) The fit and proper person test – full implementation was needed..

Mrs Maclean said that on the matter of the 'fit and proper person' regime, transparency was needed with regard to whether or not the local authorities were using the powers vested in them.

Alex Sobell MP mentioned local authority licensing of parks and queried how some 'criminals' were able to buy parks. William Tandoh (DLUHC) said that there is work to be done by his department to explain to local authorities how licensing works. The local authority has the power to refuse to accept a person applying for a licence to operate a park and once on the register they can be taken off if evidence comes to light of their unsuitability.

Grace Duffy (DLUHC) added that the local authority is within its rights to refuse a licence to someone who may not have had experience of running a park and that decision could be reviewed from time to time.

Sir Christopher Chope said that Mrs Maclean had mentioned that two of the Government's 2018 commitments which were still outstanding required legislation and wondered if that had been addressed. Mrs Maclean said that there weren't firm dates in place but hoped to do as much as possible through guidance to see whether the existing legislation could be made to work.

Sir Christopher said that last year, when the r.p.i. was changed to c.p.i for the purposes of calculating park home residents' pitch fee increases, that was achieved through a private member's bill, prepared by the DLUHC. He asked whether a similar arrangement could be devised if one of the APPG members was successful in the private members' ballot. He asked whether the DLUHC would be able to provide a Bill which would address the outstanding issues. In 2018 it was a hand-out Bill but he understood that the Department could help, even without legislation, if it was prepared to follow the request which specifically asked for funding to help research into ensuring there was a way of enforcing pitch fee agreements. Sir Christopher added that this had been going on for over three years and was referred to by Nat Slade (Arun District Council) at a previous meeting of the APPG. Mr Slade had led his local authority in carrying out an investigation and had been told by National Trading Standards that they had applied to the DLUHC for financial help.

William Tandoth said that National Trading Standards had approached his Department but there was no discussion or request for funding.

Mrs Maclean agreed to take a look at it to see what happened and would ask her team to provide advice on this.

Brian Doick (NAPHR) commented that one of the most important things promised in 2018 was to address unfair contract terms and company structure. Mr Doick spoke about several fraudulent instances which affected residents badly. One park owner was trying to force people to buy leases at £40,000 so that they could continue to live in their own homes. There

were 220 homes involved, he said, so the amount received by the park owner was £1,000,000 less than the price he paid to buy all his parks. Worse still, that particular owner had bought six parks and was now selling new homes and issuing leases to new residents. Those leases were for six years – and the Land Registry requires leases to be registered if they are for seven years or more. Mr Doick stressed the seriousness of this fraudulent situation because it was likely to be copied by other park owners throughout the country. Mr Doick knew of one resident who was paying £750 a month to remain on the park. Mrs Maclean said that MPs would be looking into the question of leases in the next session of Parliament and would also include some of the practices within the park homes sector. Mr Tandoh commented that residents don't have leases. They are some sort of arrangement with a third party for managing the park. He added that the 1983 legislation included protection for residents buying a home. He stressed the importance of prospective residents studying the relevant legislation before committing to the purchase of a park home.

Mrs Maclean remarked that there was a lot that needed addressing and she intended to familiarise herself with the problems as soon as possible.

David Iles (PHOJC) told the meeting that he had put together some figures which he hoped would be considered alongside the report of the research undertaken by the Universities of Liverpool and Sheffield Hallam before a decision was made on the 10% commission charge.

Mr Tandoh confirmed that Mr Iles's figures would be considered in future discussions.

Sonia McColl (PHOJC) informed the meeting that her organisation would be holding a rally outside Downing Street on the following Monday (18 September). She asked the Minister if she would be able to spare a little time to seek the opinions of residents who were attending to get their views on the 10% commission charge. She said it was vital that this subject should have very careful consideration and that, should the commission rate be reduced, it should not result in increased pitch fees. Mrs McColl then mentioned the various problems that rogue park owners were creating for residents on their

parks. She didn't think that anyone who didn't live in a park home could understand not only the financial demands made on residents but also the threats of physical damage to them or their homes if they didn't comply.

Mrs McColl felt that residents needed some kind of intermediary (such as a park homes officer) in every local authority who could investigate and handle the complaints and problems put before him/her. At present, she said it was not possible to speak directly and privately to officials in local authorities about park home matters.

Mrs McColl then spoke about a questionnaire which had been sent out to all her members living in park homes. That questionnaire covered such items as local authorities, fit and proper person etc. She hoped to share the results with APPG members later in the year.

Katherine Squires (acting director-general of the BH&HPA) said that her organisation was rigorous in checking out park owners who applied for membership. Her organisation was also keen to ensure that potential home buyers were given as much information about the lifestyle as possible.

Mrs Maclean had to leave the meeting at this point but thanked everyone for their input. She had been particularly concerned to learn that the elderly and vulnerable were being preyed upon and she hoped that more progress could be made in future to protect them and their living conditions.

Sir Christopher thanked the Minister for attending and for her constructive comments about actions she planned to undertake. Miss Duffey (DLUHC) said that now that her Department had successfully engineered the change from r.p.i. to c.p.i. for use in the calculation of pitch fee increases, it was able to devote its attention to the 10% commission charge on the sale of park homes. She added that Mr Tandoh had prepared a discussion paper on this subject. The Department would have to reach an outcome which would help to improve lives and in the long term promote the viability of the sector. She said that Mrs McColl's survey results would be very helpful in that regard. She said that Jamie Richards had joined the Department and was going to work on 'fit and proper person' licensing. The

discussion paper would be sent out to the trade associations and residents' groups with a view to bringing everyone 'to the table'. She hoped that her Department would be able to come up with a conclusion early next year, adding that the discussion paper would go out to members in late autumn.

Mrs McColl said that the PHOJC had been approached by a national newspaper which would be investigating aspects of park home living.

Sir Christopher asked about the timetable for the 'round-table discussion'.

Mr Tandoh replied it would be before Christmas.

Sir Christopher asked whether there could be a role for the APPG and what the document would be called. Mr Tandoh replied that it would be called a discussion paper and the APPG would be involved.

Mr Aldous mentioned the Minister's desire to deal with the two outstanding issues and thought it was a good idea to have a document ready that could possibly be taken forward as a private member's bill.

Miss Duffey referred to complex management structures and said it would not be appropriate for a 'hand-out' bill.

On the question of clarifying the definition of a pitch fee, Miss Duffy thought this would be more appropriate for a hand out bill.

Mr Tandoh said that the next session starts in November and there wouldn't be enough time for these matters to be ironed out.

Miss Duffy commented that if time was spent providing hand out bills, her Department wouldn't be able to find time to tackle other important matters going on in the sector.

Mr Tandoh said that the private member's bill ballot would be taking place at the end of November and he and his Department would work on the two outstanding items mentioned by the Minister and keep APPG members up to date.

There being no further business, Sir Christopher closed the meeting at 3.15 p.m., adding that the time and date of the next meeting would be decided and participants informed.