

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 at 4.30pm on Monday, 9 September 2024 in Room M, Portcullis House, Bridge Street, London SW1A 2LW

PRESENT: Sir Christopher Chope MP (convenor and Chairman)

Rachel Hopkins MP

James Naish MP

Ashley Fox MP

Sir John Wittingdale MP

Joshua Reynolds MP

Dr. Ben Spencer MP

Jess Brown-Fuller MP

Vikki Slade MP

Richard Tice MP

Barnaby Burrowes, representing Stuart Anderson MP

William Tandoh

MHCLG

Kevin Richards

LEASE

Richard Hand

LEASE

Nat Slade

Arun District Council

Debbie Walker

BH&HPA

Karl Hobley

BH&HPA

Alicia Dunne

NCC

Sonia McColl, OBE

PHOJC

David Iles

PHOJC

Brian Doick

NAPHR

Robert Baldwin

IPHAS

Anne Webb

minutes secretary

APOLOGIES

Sir Roger Gale MP

Charlotte Cane MP

Martin Wheeler 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, 22 April 2024 in Committee Room 17, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

Sonia McColl (PHOJC) informed the meeting she had requested a change to the minutes of the last meeting to include the Ministers remarks in response to her questions.

She further asked that, in future, draft minutes of the previous APPG meeting could be sent out to those involved prior to any subsequent meeting, so that any corrections could be made before those minutes were put into the public domain.

2. Inaugural meeting formalities

- a) Election of four officers. Sir Christopher explained that, as this was the inaugural meeting of the APPG for the new parliament, it was time to elect and/or confer in place its officers. It was proposed that Sir Christopher Chope should be chair and vice-chairs should be: Rachel Hopkins MP, Joshua Reynolds MP, Dr Ben Spencer MP. These appointments were agreed unanimously

Secretary's note: following the meeting, Rachel Hopkins MP has informed the Chair she is unable to serve as an APPG officer due to her appointment as a Parliamentary Private Secretary.

- b) 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.'*
- c) Proposed name: All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes
- d) The Public Enquiry Point will be Debbie Walker (BH&HPA), email: appg@bhHPA.org.uk

Sonia McColl registered an objection on behalf of park home residents that are members of PHOJC, to the industries representative, BH&HPA, providing the public enquiry point. Ms McColl stated that it was felt by park home residents that it should be an independent body that undertook this role. The Chairman noted this and asked if there were any other nominations for this role. There being none forthcoming, the meeting agreed that the BH&HPA Director General continue in this role.

- e) Income and expenditure statement.

Income: The APPG on Park Homes received no financial income in the year to 9 September 2024.

Expenditure: The APPG on Park Homes had no expenditure during the year.

3. Update on Park Home Sites in West Sussex

The chairman asked Nat Slade from Arun District Council to bring the meeting up-to-date regarding any progress that might have been made. Mr Slade said that, sadly, little had been achieved.

He explained that there are five sites in his district, which are home to some 200 households of mostly elderly and vulnerable people. Ownership is fragmented and there are various pitch agreements which have the effect of depriving residents of their security of tenure. Service charges, in addition to pitch fees, are also being levied. Residents seeking justice are fearful of doing so because they might face having to pay the site owner's legal charges. There was a call for evidence in 2017 and since then residents have been offered the opportunity to buy back their security of tenure, either in a lump sum or by instalments from a company which doesn't have any ownership interests in the sites. The issue is growing rather than going away. The owners of the sites in question are in the habit of siting new homes on the park in contravention of the site licence conditions. Along with NAPHR and PHOJC, Arun District Council submitted complaints to the local trading standards and these were escalated to national trading standards. Nothing was forthcoming. Since then local trading standards have obtained a small amount of funding for some scoping work to find out what had been happening and the results were expected shortly.

With regard to the 'fit and proper person' regime, two rounds of applications from the owners of these sites had been received. Two have been rejected and these have been appealed. One also has outstanding compliance notices and refuses to comply with conditions from their licence. Mr Slade said that there were currently 200 households which were at risk of losing their homes. Pitch agreements end in 2027. So, there were two asks that he had:-

- (1) that the primary legislation which was promised six years ago was introduced.
- (2) that the F&PP regime should be given teeth by (i) capping the number of F&PP applications which could be made
- (3) Introducing management order powers akin to HMO equivalents

There was also a need to get the funding National Trading Standards needs to deal with the pitch agreement issues.

Sir Christopher summed up by saying that no progress had been made with the complex agreements, despite it being agreed with the previous Government.

Sir Christopher called on William Tando (MHCLG) to update the meeting with the current position. Mr Tando explained that the new government had only been in place for two months and that ministers would be setting out their policies regarding park homes in due course and the Housing Minister would make an announcement 'at some point'.

Sir Christopher asked who would have responsibility for park homes and Mr Tando said it would be Matthew Pennycook. Sir Christopher suggested that he should be invited to a future APPG meeting.

Sir Christopher asked Mr Tando whether there was a vehicle in the legislative programme onto which park home reforms could be tagged. William Tando felt this would not be possible and that one of the best routes would be a Private Member's Bill.

Sir Christopher expressed the hope that Mr Tando's department could commission some work in preparing a hand-out Bill. Mr Tando said that he hoped the new Minister could set out his priorities quite soon.

Richard Tice MP asked whether the Government's plan to bring forward some protection for owners and renters could not apply to park homes.

Sir Christopher responded that it depended on the scope of the Bill but thought it would be too narrow to encompass park homes. The Bill was intended for rented buildings rather than park homes. He asked Mr Tando whether the scope of the Bill could be widened to include park homes.

Mr Tando replied that park homes would be outside the scope of the Renters Reform Bill because that would encompass only buildings rather than park homes.

Brian Doick (NAPHR) said he had contacted Trading Standards to ask them to investigate problems on park home sites but had found that they 'wanted to know who was going to pay for them to make the inquiries. Park owners are getting richer while residents are getting poorer,' he said. He added that there was criminal activity and fraud on parks in West Sussex. People were being conned into buying leases (in some cases costing £40,000) and were frightened that they would be evicted if they didn't do so. In cases where the residents could not afford to pay the park owner was responding by saying

that he would withdraw their agreements and issue new ones which would involve paying a much higher pitch fee. The whole business was fraudulent.

Mr Tandoh said that everything Mr Doick had said was correct. There were two sides to it, however. Legislation would stop it, but the other side was an understanding by residents of their rights and responsibilities. There was work to be done on explaining the position to residents to stop them signing these new agreements which would not give them the security they were seeking.

Sir Christopher asked whether anything had been achieved in the last five years.

Nat Slade said that more people had signed up with pitch agreements they don't understand.

William Tandoh said it was vital to tell residents not to sign anything.

Nat Slade said that his Council had met with residents about this but legislation was needed plus criminal sanctions to stop this business model. Sir Christopher asked 'should a number of us be putting in for a Westminster Hall debate and then, with any luck, the Minister should respond? We need to make this a priority for the Government because the situation is getting worse.'

Sonia McColl agreed it was vital to tell residents about this and PHOJC had a manifesto in place for its members to get in touch with their own local MPs. So far, 79 had indicated that they had done so.

Richard Tice MP commented that apart from RPI to CPI, very little had been achieved. William Tandoh responded that there was a great deal to be done but he thought that when MPs wrote to the Minister he would set out his priorities.

Vikki Slade MP said she now understood how this could impinge on parks in other parts of the country. She added that she had more people talking about park homes at her first surgery than about any other matter.

Debbie Walker (BH&HPA) explained the role of her association which represented a wide number of holiday and residential parks. 'We have 1,000 residential parks in membership,' she said. 'The vast majority are operated by small companies, many family-owned. It is not a job, it's a vocation.' She went on to say that the BH&HPA is not a regulatory body. It is there to support the industry to raise standards and promote best practice.

Joshua Reynolds MP said he had one 600-home park in his constituency that was well run and another, under new ownership, which had lots of problems. It's all well and good for us to say that residents shouldn't, for example, sign up to new agreements, but what happens when an elderly resident is confronted by a knock on the door late at night and someone demanding a signature, he asked. He felt that a 'communication campaign' was not the answer. There should be Westminster backing.

Debbie Walker (BH&HPA) said that her organisation had produced a video setting out residents' rights and responsibilities and the need to ensure that the right documentation was provided and was in place. She said that the video is about two minutes long and when it is finished the viewer is pointed to the BH&HPA website for further information. She added that her organisation made the video to try to educate people buying a residential park home.

William Tandoz said that he agreed on the point of communication. The Mobile Homes Act set out all the residents' rights and responsibilities to help them to understand what they needed to do in particular situations. He was thinking particularly about harassment. Mr Tandoz added that LEASE had been set up to provide free and independent advice and that needed promoting. Should a resident need to go to a tribunal, LEASE could help with advice. Local authorities should also be able to help, but Mr Tandoz had received complaints about local authorities not taking enforcement action. Another message that needed to be put out was that if a resident goes to a local authority and their problem is not dealt with in a satisfactory manner, there was always recourse to the ombudsman.

Richard Hand (LEASE) said there was no sanction for failure of the 'fit and proper person' test. Trading standards didn't have the resources to deal with problems.

Brian Doick (NAPHR) commented that you 'can't get rid of the park owner. He owns the land.'

William Tandoz said that the 'fit and proper person' regime was aimed at ensuring that the person running the park was fit to do so. If a person was put on the register and new information came to light, the local authority could not take that person off the register. The challenge was to help local authorities to use fit and proper effectively.

One of the MPs present asked if someone failed the ‘fit and proper person test’ could someone else can take their place on the site, but he also thought that the person running the park should be charged as a criminal.

William Tandoh said the local authority could hold the person to account, using the Fraud Act and Consumer Protection Act.

Sir Christopher said that there was a need to work collectively to put this right. He added that Arun District Council had come up against a brick wall because of lack of support from various Government agencies. It was vital to convince the new Minister that this was a very real problem. Meanwhile lots of people were selling up their family homes and buying park homes without getting legal advice.

4. Park home sales commission

Sonia McColl (PHOJC) said that from 2014 residents have been campaigning for a change in the sales commission. Various MPs have spoken about this matter but are always told there is insufficient parliamentary time to tackle this matter. In 2023 she said that a round-table meeting before the end of September was promised and she was further promised that it would be ‘soon’. That never occurred and we have a new Government and I’m sure they don’t realise what commission is (paid to site owner when a sale takes place on site). It has been changed in the past from 15 to 10 per cent and we are hoping that the Government can change it again. When a park home is sold for £400,000, do residents want to give the site owner £40,000? What is the 10 per cent for?

Debbie Walker (BH&HPA) responded by saying that she supported Sonia in respect of the rogue park operators but not on the question of reducing the sales commission. Such a reduction could force responsible park owners out of business, she said. Those sites may then fall into the hands of rogue operators. The commission makes up one third of park operators’ funding – the purchase price of homes, pitch fees and commission on sale. Park homes are cheaper than traditional housing.

Sonia McColl (PHOJC) said that there was a change in 1983 when it was reduced from 15% to 10%.

At this point Sir Christopher declared that it was time to vacate the room which had been allocated to the APPG for one hour. He said that he would try to arrange a Westminster Hall meeting.

Sir Christopher closed the meeting at 5.30 p.m.