

Ashfords LLP host successful debate exploring solutions to the housing crisis in the South West

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Leading law firm, Ashfords LLP, recently hosted a panel debate with housing industry experts to explore challenges and potential solutions to delivering the required level of housing needed in the current economic climate.

Held at Plymouth University on 7 November, the debate attracted industry peers from across the planning, construction and housing sectors.

The evening's keynote speaker was Lord Taylor of Goss Moor, who was appointed to lead an independent review of the Government's planning practice guidance in 2012, and has had great involvement in the development of Garden Village proposals as a solution to deliver required levels of housing.

The other panel members were Paul Britton from Homes England, Russell Baldwinson of LiveWest, a large housing association, and Paul Barnard representing Plymouth City Council.

As a clear exponent of Garden Villages and Towns, Lord Taylor spoke in depth about the issues around current housing supply and how in his view, one potential solution was to look at a repositioning of our approach to housing more akin to a European model. This particular framework does not traditionally allocate land but sites are identified with a landowner and a master builder where a whole sustainable community is developed with a sense of place, rather than piecemeal development on an edge of centre or infill basis.

Paul Britton, Senior Development Manager at Homes England, outlined the approach of Homes England and their new 5 year strategy that had recently been published. He discussed strategic partnerships with housing providers and the funding available to drive increased supply of housing. He stressed the need for a diversification of the current range of affordable housing products to provide opportunity to those seeking their own home. He was keen to encourage custom build as an alternative means of housing delivery.

Russell Baldwinson, Executive Director of LiveWest, spoke about the challenges to be faced in his sector delivering the 100,000 affordable homes per annum target.

Registered Providers currently account for 45,000 - 65,000 new homes each year. However, in order to achieve the required delivery, Russell is exploring innovative new ways of delivering the required supply, by entering into a strategic partnership with the Government, as well as other initiatives with private sector partners.

Paul Barnard, Service Director for Strategic Planning, outlined a series of practical initiatives that Plymouth City Council had implemented to respond to the challenges being experienced in the local area. This approach included the release of land by the Council to expedite the delivery of housing in the city.

The common theme that emerged from the event was that to deliver 300,000 homes a year there needs to be a step change in approach to deliver larger sustainable developments, driven by a master builder who is charged with creating a sense of place, which will provide a diverse mix of housing tenures to meet the demands of potential purchasers.

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