

Comments by Tony Baldry MP, Chair of the All Party Group on Excellence in the Built Environment, at the launch of the All Party Group, held at the Institute of Civil Engineers on Wednesday 7th July 2010, organised by the Construction Industry Council

I should like to thank the Minister, Mark Prisk, for making time to be with us here this evening.

Given the country's national indebtedness, the Government understandably is going to have concerns about affordability of building projects and clearly is going to want to look at what can be done to achieve best value for money.

The All Party Group on Excellence in the Built Environment is intending to establish a Commission on Excellence in the Built Environment which in addition to involving Members of Parliament, i.e. members of the House of Commons, and members of the House of Lords, it is also intended we will involve leading members of the professions, chartered bodies, and industry groups that make up the membership of the Construction Industry Council and a number of leading independent contributors who can challenge ideas, thinking and expectation from the outside – either the Parliamentary or Construction boxes – and it seems to me that how one the one hand we ensure good value for money, for public spending and public procurement in construction and on the other hand seek to achieve Excellence in the Built Environment, reconciling those competing objectives will be a useful and stimulating first topic for the Commission on the Built Environment to consider.

In the past Minister and officials have frequently asked the Construction Industry to speak with one voice.

I know, as a previous construction Minister, I have been there, I have done that.

Actually, it has been extremely difficult for the Construction Industry to speak with one voice for the simple reason that the construction industry isn't a single entity.

The Minister has more appropriately described the Construction Industry as needing to act as a choir, and it is hoped that the All Party Parliamentary Group can provide an over-arching view of the many professions and organisations within the Built Environment and give the Minister and the machinery of Government a suitable choir-like construction Hallelujah chorus

and it is obviously very helpful that the Construction Industry Council can bring together the necessary organisations in this way.

Notwithstanding the present economic challenges, there are many exciting opportunities for the Construction Industry.

For example, we need new homes.

With a growing population.

With an ageing population

We need more homes.

We need specialist homes.

And, importantly, we need homes and buildings that make the least possible contribution to our nation's carbon emissions.

In my own constituency, we are developing the Bicester Ecotown. This I am determined will be an exemplar of how one creates a sustainable community with good quality housing, that makes a real contribution to demonstrating that it is possible to build houses that are very low carbon emitting and in the process creates a new generation of green collar jobs.

Grant Shapps, the Housing Minister, has made it clear that the Government wants to support communities such as Cherwell in “ . . .their wish to adopt higher standards of sustainability and design” and the Minister quite rightly wants to see eco development and zero carbon homes at all levels – the home, the street, the village, and across the country, and we want to make sure that the Bicester project is an exemplar for such work.

I very much hope that CIC and its member organisations will be willing to get involved in this project.

It seems to me that for a new generation of eco community projects to be successful, innovative, and successful in actually taking us forward into the 21st century, they need on the one hand to engage the local community as much as possible to enable local people to help shape the character of such new communities, but on the other hand, to engage with the best of professional and industry advice so that between us what we can build are exemplar communities which will cause people from around the world, from Sweden to China, to come to the UK to see what we have achieved.

So as Chair of the All Party Group on Excellence in the Built Environment, I look forward to working with the CIC and importantly the component professional bodies that make up the membership of CIC, on these various

interesting projects to ensure that so far as is humanly possible, we do have Excellence in the Built Environment, that we have a vibrant Construction Industry, and that we building housing and structures that can be the envy of the world.

Tony Baldry