

We would stress the importance of considering the review holistically by examining all aspects past and present and analysing the effect of historic standards taking cognisance of both their successes and failures rather than dismissing them out of hand.

### **Improving Design Quality and Spatial Standards**

When gathering evidence to produce a strategy for improving Design Quality and Spatial Standards, one must first review previous standards and assess their success extracting those aspects that work rather than dismissing the whole of the standards.

Since the introduction of the Parker Morris in 1960's to the new Technical Housing Standards (published in March 2015) there have been a number of attempts to harmonise standards between government funded projects (most notably social housing) and the private sector.

Some examples of the most recent attempts to improve spatial standards can be seen below, with the success of the schemes being judged on a variety of parameters, not necessarily relating to one, either or both of the standards being discussed.

- Code for Sustainable Homes (2007 and revised in 2010, withdrawn March 2015 currently under review)
  - o guidance utilised almost exclusively for publically funded projects and where being stipulated by planning authorities for private developments, the level being requested was normally energy efficiency (ENE1 and ENE2) and not the enhanced living spaces (ENE7)
- London Housing Design Guide
  - o A quality design guide, in relation to spatial standards, however when assessing against the private sector, there is no control over the population densities that occupy these properties, the control (although limited) is levied by public bodies when assessing to social rent
- Lifetimes Homes Standard (2010)
  - o Again a quality special design guide which sets out idealistic space standards which although aspirational are achievable given the correct guidance at the design stage

In 2013, the government instigated the Housing Standards Review and as a result of that, the current "Nationally described standards" (published March 2015) have just come into force. It is too early to gauge whether these new standards will address the criticisms levied at the house building industry at large. However, these new standards should provide solutions to a number of the key concerns that the private house purchaser has, in that a return to mandatory minimum space and amenity standards is available and should be allowed to run its course for a period of time, say five years.

In assessing the evidentiary requirements for reinstating minimum special standards, research should be aimed not at the house building sector but more at the process of purchasing and financing these products and how they are valued. The level of borrowing and aspiration of new build purchasers to live in the right location are the main driving force that currently facilitates the development industry, "sizing" their product according to need and location, but more importantly allowing the development sector to maximise the profit.

Whilst this may not sit well, the evidence is clear as the removal of space standards in the

70's and 80's permitted the race to the bottom to start. It is only through robust and fair policy being applied throughout the country that this imbalance will be addressed.

In relation to design quality, the return to regional styles and removal of the 'pattern book' would go some way to reinvigorating local housing styles and encourage individual design. We do not believe that mandatory design guides will provide the design quality being looked for, but with local planning departments (adequately resourced) used with the Nationally Described Standards encouraging either the introduction or re-introduction of regional styles in conjunction with Local Development Plans would go some way to bringing individuality and style back to the regions.

### **Better Quality Workmanship**

Whilst anecdotal evidence could be given for this item, it is outwith the specific area of our members' expertise. However, if used in conjunction with recommendations above, the skillset of the local labour force would then become more familiar with the methods of construction used locally which could lead to a better understanding of the building product which should allow for a better quality product.

### **Effective Control and Implementation of regulations**

Since the introduction of various industry schemes (aka Robust Details Ltd and so forth), there has been a marked reduction in the number of breaches that we have become aware of. This does not mean that failures have been eradicated, it is implying that failures are no longer the norm and that when they do occur, they are much more visible.

In proposing an effective way of ensuring effective control, we would suggest that a national monitoring scheme, independent of the local authority building inspectors and independent inspectors be set up to randomly monitor and re-assess properties. One scheme that does exist is the DCLG random auditing process of Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) which are produced for every new dwelling in the UK. This could trigger an independent assessment to be carried out by a suitably qualified person to measure build quality and thermal performance together with re-checking certification. The most qualified people for this process would be On Construction Energy Assessors who are required to produce the EPC just prior to the first occupancy. There would be a cost involved. However, when spread out over a development, this could easily be absorbed.

### **Implementing Smart Housing**

Whilst anecdotal evidence could be given for this item, it is outwith the specific area of our members' expertise. However, the increase in the introduction of 'smart meters' tied in to the national rollout currently underway, means that this item should take care of itself. We would also encourage more communication with occupants in the correct use of technologies which are being introduced into new housing as a matter of course as this will then improve the performance of these dwellings.

### **Offsite Manufacturing 3D printing, BIM**

These are specialist items which would require detailed research before a full and comprehensive response could be issued. However, these are areas in which our members are expert, and are leaders in the field in terms of actual implementation. We would welcome the opportunity to carry out research and report back, given suitable timescales.

**Innovative Ideas for Design Quality Improvement**

There are a number of ideas which we would be happy to discuss, however it has not been possible to formulate a comprehensive response given the time available for this consultation.

**Cut operational and maintenance costs and improve the new home owner experience**

With the introduction of the new energy standards and the nationally described standards, the operational costs for new homes should be at a level which is acceptable. In addition, the new format EPC which came into effect in 2013 began to give householders quality information on the performance of their property. In relation to the new home owner experience, this item we would suggest should be directed at the house builders.

**Improved Customer Service**

Whilst anecdotal evidence could be given for this item, it is outwith the specific area of our members' expertise. However, we would suggest that using other industries as examples of dealing with customers, specifically the change in attitudes in the retail sector over the past 15 to 20 years would be a good starting point. Further, the concept of Soft Landings (BSRIA) whilst aimed at commercial projects could be adapted for domestic for pre and post construction to encourage our industry to gather information and use it to improve standards and communication. We would also recommend that this process is used to impart information on the use of the dwellings to the occupants.

We trust that you find our views of assistance we would reiterate that we would welcome further involvement as this progresses.

Yours sincerely,

**Francesca Berriman MBE HonDTech FRSA**

Chief Executive

Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists

397 City Road London EC1V 1NH