

## Javid is right to call out Nimby councils

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Middle England's cornflakes will have tasted rather bitter last weekend with newspaper headlines declaring war against Nimby councils. While chatter about the prime minister's future continues, it would seem that communities secretary Sajid Javid, once George Osborne's heir apparent, could be set to stake his political future on the much-promised housebuilding revolution, *writes Dean Clifford, co-founder of Great Marlborough Estates.*

Comments from one of Javid's officials – calling out councils for lying about local housing need – are quite startling. One adviser was reported as saying: “From now on these council leaders, who include many Conservatives who should know better, are going to have to start telling the truth.”

Many in the property industry have long raised concerns around the creation of local plans, which many councils still don't have – a decade after localism shuffled into being.

Cynics would say that we have heard this all before, and we have. But things could be different this time for several reasons.

Firstly, housing inequality is now at the centre of the public mood. The Grenfell tragedy has unleashed decades of pent up fury around the lack of good quality council housing and the unaffordability of property. Secondly, the youth vote now appears to have been awakened. This could particularly unsettle previously safe Conservative majorities in the kinds of places alluded to as “lying” by Javid.

Third and most obviously, is the risk of Labour using the Nimby attitudes of wealthy market towns and the Home Counties to exacerbate the growing class divide.

In reality, while housing was set out as a key election promise by all the main political parties, it hardly came up at all during the election. This is likely to change, and the Corbyn sing-songs witnessed at Glastonbury and lefty-rhetoric swilling through people's Facebook feeds is not about to evaporate any time soon.

That many of the nouveau-left rallying against capitalism are products of the middle classes is beside the point. The main issue is that the masses are aggrieved at the growing generational divide and there is no easier target than wealth accrued through property ownership.

Whether or not it is economically sensible or viable to persist with promoting home ownership is debatable. As the population both ages and grows, we have the perfect storm of people living in their homes for longer, wage growth stagnating and property prices increasing while not enough homes are being built.

Irrespective of these bigger questions, our population continues to grow and demographics continue to change. More divorcees, city centre families, single-person

households and students laden with massive debt all pose different requirements for housing.

Numbers alone won't solve the issue – something we would do well to remember. But with councils like the prime minister's own constituency of Maidenhead holding huge swathes of land, it is totally correct that these places should have the rug of political self-interest pulled from beneath them.