

Fast-track planning for beautiful buildings will do 'little' to tackle the housing crisis, claims London developer

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Sam Monk |



Fast-tracking planning for more beautiful buildings will do “little to tackle the housing crisis”, according to Dean Clifford, co-founder of developer Great Marlborough Estates.

This comment was made in response to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's recently published report 'Living with Beauty', which contained over 130 practical recommendations to support the creation of more attractive communities.

These suggestions included planting millions of trees over the next five years, opening old canals and supporting every home to have its own or access to a fruit tree.

Other recommendations included speeding up the planning process for beautiful buildings through a new 'fast track for beauty' rule for councils, and increasing the involvement of communities in local plans and planning applications.

"Few could argue that many of today's housing estates are soulless and uninspired, or that a lot of modern architecture grates against what most people consider 'beautiful', but there is a real danger here in having the government become an arbiter in what is beauty and what is not," explained Dean.

"The commission has some very solid proposals, such as slashing VAT on retrofitting buildings, but others, such as fast-tracking planning for 'beautiful' buildings, will do little to tackle the housing crisis, which is primarily one of affordability, not aesthetics."

Housing secretary Robert Jenrick stated that he would like to see zero-carbon homes being built as standard within five years.

As a broker or developer, do you believe that there are sufficient funding options available for commercial development?

Commenting on this, Dave Sheridan, executive chairman at off-site housebuilder ilke Homes, said that the industry should make a determined effort to move towards a "far more sustainable approach".

"By switching to off-site manufacturing, we can quickly deliver the zero-carbon homes of the future.

"If we are to get serious about tackling the climate crisis, then off-site manufacturing will have to play a much bigger role."

Richard Beresford, chief executive at the National Federation of Builders (NFB), claimed that many of its housebuilding members already build beautiful homes, but this often wasn't recognised by the government and local authority planning departments.

Despite this, he added that the NFB welcomed any policy which increased opportunities for the best practitioners to obtain more work and have sites allocated in local plans.

Brian Berry, chief executive at the Federation of Master Builders (FMB), was receptive to the report's recommendation for a VAT cut, but claimed that the recommendations didn't go far enough.

"The Treasury should cut VAT on all domestic repair and renovation, not just the areas listed in the report," he said.

"The upcoming Budget provides the perfect opportunity to do this, and to help make the UK a greener and more beautiful place."