

Beautiful homes should be the norm, not exception, says commission

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January 30,
2020



Well-designed, high-quality homes and tree-lined streets should be the 'norm – not the exception', according to a report by the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission

The Building Better Building Beautiful report is the latest step in the government's commitment to delivering one million well-designed, quality homes by the end of this parliament.

The report is the first of its kind led by the late Sir Roger Scruton and Nicolas Boys Smith and contains over 130 recommendations to support the creation of more beautiful communities.

The report recommends:

- Planting millions of trees over the next 5 years, as well as opening old canals and supporting every home to have its own or access to a fruit tree
- Speeding up the planning process for beautiful buildings through a new 'Fast Track for Beauty' rule for councils
- Increasing democracy and involving communities in local plans and planning applications, including using digital technology like virtual reality and 3D modelling to help locals shape their own areas.

Create well-designed buildings

Housing secretary Robert Jenrick, said: "I am interested in the proposal of a 'fast track for beauty'.

"Where individuals and developers have put in the time to create proposals for well-designed buildings, which use high-quality materials and take account of their local setting, it can't be right their planning applications are held up.

"The report is right that local authorities will need to play a leading role in this design revolution. We will need to ensure they have the right skills and leadership to fully carry out their role as place-makers.

"I am therefore determined to do all I can to help achieve the goal you've set in the report's conclusion – that we should aspire to pass on our heritage, the best of who we are and what we have, to our successors, not depleted but enhanced."

Serious about tackling the climate crisis

Speaking about the latest report, Dave Sheridan, executive chairman at [ilke Homes](#), said: "Given the enormity of the [climate change challenge](#), it is crucial that as an industry we make determined efforts to shift towards a far-more sustainable approach.

"By switching to offsite manufacturing, we can quickly deliver the [zero-carbon homes](#) of the future.

"Offsite manufacturing consumes considerably less energy than traditional construction methods and is the most efficient method of delivering high-quality and highly sustainable homes at speed.

"If we are to get serious about tackling the climate crisis, then [offsite manufacturing](#) will have to play a much bigger role. At present, far too many new builds are failing in terms of their energy-efficiency."

Slash VAT on renovations

The Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission has also recommended that VAT on repair and renovation work should be zero-rated or at least charged at 5%.

Dean Clifford, co-founder of Great Marlborough Estates, said: "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.

"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.

"The planning process overall should be more simplified and streamlined to reduce cost and uncertainty, with a rules-based approach to decision-making that include design codes that respect the local vernacular."

Chief executive of the Federation of Master Builders, Brian Berry added: "I am glad the Commission has highlighted the perverse situation where people are incentivised to demolish old buildings, rather than restoring them, due to our archaic VAT regime, which puts a zero-rating on new build but charges 20% for repair and maintenance.

"If we want to restore and maintain our beautiful heritage it is vital we correct this anomaly in the tax system."