

Press release

NFB CONGRATULATES NEW HOUSING MINISTER, GRANT SHAPPS

Julia Evans, Chief Executive of the National Federation of Builders said:

“We congratulate Grant on his appointment to the role and are delighted to continue the working relationship that we began during his tenure as shadow minister. Grant has a very deep understanding of the sector’s many issues which will mean he can get to work immediately to sort out some pressing challenges. The housing industry is facing some serious barriers to growth and the Government needs to act urgently on several fronts. Above all the NFB believes that the new ministerial teams must work together and with us, to tackle the targets for low-carbon homes, bring fairness and affordability to housing and create strong communities.”

The NFB has several issues on the agenda:

First, the burden of regulation is currently a major obstacle to housebuilding output and is damaging the viability of many sites. As a result, homes are not being built and GDP is reduced, as is local employment. We hope therefore that Grant will give strong support to a serious programme for reducing regulatory burdens on the housebuilding industry.

Second, the industry desperately needs simplification and clarification of the consultations and policy proposals surrounding the low carbon homes programme. The complex manner in which this has been progressed in the last three years has left all but a few large firms unable to plan any kind of rational, commercial, response to these requirements. Policies must be simple, clear, implementable and, above all, affordable. There must also be better co-ordination between the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Energy and Climate Change Department, where a number of important initiatives lie, e.g. RHIs and FITs.

Third, the system for making planning applications has become progressively slower and much more expensive. This was investigated by the Killian-Prety Review, which made recommendations in 19 key areas. The response by the previous government was weak and dilatory, despite claiming to have accepted these recommendations. We urge that the new government reviews and strengthens all the responses to Killian-Prety, with a clear determination to achieve dramatic and measurable improvements in the efficiency of the system and reductions in the cost of making planning applications.

Fourth, with major cuts in public spending, higher taxes and the risk of higher interest rates on the horizon, house prices at the current level will remain unaffordable. There needs to be a completely new approach to the idea of home ownership versus renting. If pension funds had the right incentives to fund large-scale developments to rent, this would help the millions of people who are unable to buy but earn too much for social housing. A new renting model would enable us to offer affordable, quality housing for all.

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