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Green social democracy: better homes in better places

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better homes in better places

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Green Alliance
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Foreword

Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP
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We are facing a cost of living crisis. Real wages have been squeezed as food prices have rocketed and energy bills, rents and house prices have risen.

Britain needs an economy that is more resilient, more genuinely competitive, more focused on the long term and one that people feel is fairer: an economy that works for ordinary people. Not only do we need growth, we need growth that is inclusive and made by the many. We also need a society that is rooted in the strength and ingenuity of our local communities.

This will mean a different type of politics and different solutions to tackling the big challenges we face. This collection of essays shows that those of us from the Labour and social democratic tradition are at the vanguard of defining a different type of politics: from community based approaches to deliver housing or energy efficiency at scale, to new ways of thinking about climate change through the lens of community or place. So I would like to thank everyone who has contributed, for shaping the debate and generating practical ideas. We will reflect on these suggestions as we set out our policies for the general election in the months ahead.

And a final word on the critical issue of climate change. This poses a big challenge to our politics because it is marked by a distance between the generation that needs to act and the generations that will feel the greatest benefit. But climate change is not going away as a political challenge. In fact, it's getting more important.

If we are going to rise to the challenge we need to build a coalition of business leaders from companies large and small, politicians, NGOs, social entrepreneurs, investors, employees, consumers, citizens and trade unions. Most importantly we need to involve our communities and gain their trust.

"We need growth that is inclusive and made by the many. We also need a society that is rooted in the strength and ingenuity of our local communities"

Such coalitions come along rarely in politics but, when they do, they make real change possible, driving out old orthodoxies and establishing new ways of conducting our lives together.

Housing, places and people: labour and the fifth wave of social environmentalism

Michael Jacobs

Visiting professor, Department of Political Science, University College London

The relationship between the Labour movement and the environment has not always been a comfortable one. For most of the 20th century the Labour Party and its trade union allies attached themselves to a form of industrialism which was careless of the natural environment at best, and deeply destructive of it at worst. In pursuit of jobs and higher material living standards for the working and, later, middle classes, Labour was generally content to tolerate the environmental costs which inevitably came with industrial and consumption growth. The pollution of air and water, the generation of toxic, including nuclear, waste, the contamination of land, the destruction of landscapes and natural habitats, the bulldozing of settled communities to make way for new housing and the global environmental damage consequent upon ever growing resource extraction: these were accepted as the price of prosperity. Environmentalists who complained were dismissed as wishing to hold back the living standards of the poor in defence of the luxuries, and property prices, of the already well off.

Yet there were always counter movements which challenged this anti-green stance. The first was the paternalism of 19th and early 20th century social reformers, who saw the appalling damage done to workers and their families and wanted to provide them with better conditions. The enlightened industrialists who built the new housing settlements of Saltaire in Yorkshire, Port Sunlight on the Wirral and Bournville in Birmingham wanted their workers to breathe clean air and have decent places to live. Octavia Hill pioneered the creation of urban parks and open spaces and founded the National

Trust. Ebenezer Howard designed garden cities to be new model communities.

At the same time working class clubs and associations began organising their own campaigns for access to, and protection of, the environment. Most famous was the mass trespass of Kinder Scout in the Peak District in 1932, a protest against aristocratic land ownership which subsequently led to the creation of national parks and the designation of public footpaths.

"Today, no Labour or trade union leader would deny the crucial role this green agenda must play in the left's strategy for economic recovery"

Then, in the second half of the 20th century, a more statist form of social environmentalism took hold, as Labour governments used administrative law to regulate the worst forms of environmental damage. Responding to civic protest campaigns and, by the end of the century, largely at the behest of the European Union, Labour governments began to clean up the worst forms of air and water pollution and constrained the impact of building development on natural habitats and landscapes. The green belt was a Labour invention, first proposed by Herbert Morrison for London County Council before the second world war and then enshrined in the landmark Town and Country Planning Act of 1947.

But important though all these counter movements were, none changed the fundamental suspicion of environmentalism within the Labour mainstream. As late as the second Blair government, it was commonplace to hear senior Labour and trade union figures dismiss the growing green movement as irrelevant to Labour's core mission and vote.

Then came climate change. Gradually, from around 2004, the left, like everyone else, came to understand that global warming posed an existential threat to both international and intergenerational justice which could not be ignored. In fact, it vindicated a social democratic view, since it could only be successfully tackled through government intervention in the market. And so was born a new kind of social environmentalism. Manifested most clearly in the 2008 Climate Change Act, which made stringent emissions reduction targets statutory and mandated the creation of a national low carbon transition plan, Labour in its final years in office acknowledged that tackling climate change had to be at the centre of its economic strategy. The goal was low carbon growth, the means a much more interventionist economic policy: directing energy markets, taxing carbon, regulating energy efficiency and establishing an industrial policy to provide direct support to the new green industries and the jobs they create. Today, no Labour or trade union leader would deny the crucial role this green agenda must play in the left's strategy for economic recovery.

But it's not enough. For the 'green economy' remains an almost entirely technocratic project. It must be directed by the state, through legal and fiscal

instruments, in pursuit of a more or less invisible environmental end: emissions reduction. It can be popular in the sense that green jobs will be welcome wherever they are created; but it will never be popular in the sense of belonging to the people.

But that is where the fifth wave of social environmentalism will now be found. For 'the environment' is not just about flows of resources and energy. It's not even just about ecology, habitats and endangered species. It's about the places we live in. And this is emphatically about people.

Today, more than ever, Labour needs to be the champion of places where people want to live. Whether in cities, towns or villages, the localities people live in matter to them. Places are the sites of community, the sources of identity and belonging. When neighbourhoods are full of character, when they are attractive, safe and green, they contribute greatly to our welfare; when they are ugly, when distinctiveness and green space have been stripped away, the air is polluted and the roads and pavements do not feel safe, they contribute to people's 'malfare'.

Creating places that people want to live in must be Labour's new environmentalism. It is an ineradicably social project, for good places can only be created by strong communities. Governments and technocrats can help, by creating a planning system which gives voice to local people and by supporting civic organisation. But, only the local collaboration of empowered communities can turn an area into a neighbourhood.

For Labour, with its bureaucratic governing culture, this will be a particular challenge. And housing will be its front line. Labour wants to provide 100,000 new homes, a virtuous and necessary goal to ease a housing crisis now grossly out of control. But this cannot be done by plonking them top down in a field somewhere. It will require painstaking consultation with local communities, both around the brownfield sites where many homes must be built and many others restored, and in the greenfield sites which will also inevitably have to be found. This will not be consultation in the old directive style: it must be true local ownership of the planning process.

Building homes where people already live, or on land they cherish, will not be easy; it will require both central and local government to work incredibly closely with local people, and those who wish to move to the new places, to ensure that new housing creates communities rather than damages them. Huge effort must be made to incorporate green space and safe areas for children to play; to provide versatile community facilities; to maximise energy and water efficiency; to enable mobility through cycling, walking and public transport, reducing car dependence; and to enable people on all levels of income to live in them.

If the next Labour government can do this, it will complete a project 150 years in the making: the true greening of the left.

Meeting the housing challenge

Professor Anne Power
Head, LSE Housing and Communities

There are five current challenges in our built environment: the scale of urban sprawl; the need for more homes within existing built up areas; the character, age and decline of our existing stock of homes; the level of energy waste in our built environment, particularly homes; and, the fact that under occupation of housing has risen steeply in recent times.

There are also big challenges in the changing shape of households and social structures: single person households are increasing fast; the population is ageing and many elderly people live alone; and families form a minority of households and are increasingly squeezed.

We cannot meet one of these challenges without meeting them all. Yet the built environment changes slowly and is expensive to adapt or add to. So we need to understand the starting points, where we are now.

We live in a densely populated, highly urbanised and extremely built up country with over 250 years of industrialisation and intense environmental damage behind us. In Britain we have a large supply, around 26 million, of ageing homes, mainly houses. Only one in six of these homes, just over five million, are flats. Over half our homes were built before the 1960s and six million are Victorian terraced properties. However, we build about 130,000 new homes a year, adding a million new homes every decade, although this is far less than government targets suggest are necessary.

Less than one per cent of our total stock is added each year. In other words, over 99 per cent of all homes at any one time are already built. They are almost all located within 12,000 existing communities. Over 80 per cent are in or on the edge of towns and cities and the vast majority are in large cities.

"It is very hard to relax planning restrictions, and to build more homes, without causing major environmental damage"

We are an urban society and becoming more so. Our sprawling conurbations have been restricted by green belts because of the risk in the 20th century of them literally spreading into each other. Although it is true that most of our land is literally green, at least 75 per cent is under the impact of development of some kind: from transport, power lines, agriculture, warehousing and logistics, water supply and the treatment of waste.

Our environmental 'sinks', the land we need for our vital ecosystems to survive, are under intense pressure. The risk of flooding outside built up areas, due to the level of existing development, is now so severe that many areas of potential development will not be insurable, according to industry experts. We have no choice but to change track.

Land is finite: we are an island, surrounded by sea, and most of the remaining land is protected, spoken for or in a flood plain. Therefore, it is very hard to relax planning restrictions, and to build more homes, without causing major environmental damage. We now have major infrastructure blockages, such as water supply and treatment, the worst road congestion in Europe and citizen conflict around almost all major developments. It is impossible in a densely built up island to expand the supply of land without the risk of serious flooding, erosion, water and energy shortages, further unmanageable congestion and social fragmentation.

England's dense population continues to grow, thanks mainly to new immigration and higher birth rates among the younger, more recently arrived settlers. Yet the rate of household growth and, therefore, housing demand, far outstrips population growth. The number of single person and two person households has raced upwards to form 63 per cent of all households. This not only accelerates demand and pushes up house prices, it is also energy intensive and fuels demand for sprawl, building for families who are often pushed out of city homes due to high prices. Shrinking households have also helped to fuel the rapid growth in under occupation.

Over four million households have two or more spare bedrooms; the vast majority of them are owner occupiers and over half of all expensive homes coming onto the market in London go to foreign investors, who often keep them empty, a gross form of under occupation. We have a big problem of unequal access to housing because of wide income inequality and property speculation. This causes housing shortages at the bottom and a

large surplus of spare capacity higher up the housing ladder. So what can we do?

We have capacity within existing communities to create all the new homes we need. Small available sites of under two hectares within built up areas are rarely counted; but this means a lot of new homes. Micro-sites of half an acre or less, or one fifth of one hectare, are literally too numerous to count. Yet it is estimated that, even in inner London, where population density is highest and land is scarcest in the country, there are enough micro-sites to supply all the new homes we need for the next 25 years. In towns and villages throughout the country it is even more true. There is a constant flow of small sites and old buildings that potentially can meet all our foreseeable needs.

"We have capacity within existing communities to create all the new homes we need"

Buildings produce over half of all CO_2 emissions and generate traffic which uses another 25 per cent of energy. Each new home we build uses up as much energy as it takes to run all the heating and electricity in that home for forty years. Yet existing homes offer our biggest potential energy saver, using one tenth of the energy of new build to retrofit and more than halving energy use. By insulating roof spaces, walls, whether cavity or solid walls, windows, doors and floors, we can cut energy use in existing homes by 60-80 per cent. If we add solar water systems, heat exchangers, ground or air source heat pumps, more efficient heating and hot water systems and appliances, we can save up to 80 per cent of our energy in most existing homes. Along the way we can renew existing homes, restore neighbourhoods and make existing areas attractive enough to add homes in the millions of small sites that go unnoticed and uncounted because we undervalue existing areas.

By retrofitting and converting existing homes, upgrading and remodelling other empty buildings, and building cleverly on infill sites, we can produce all the homes we need while protecting the countryside, saving energy, reducing flood risk and helping social integration. Such an approach would allow us to restore existing communities, upgrade our homes and neighbourhoods and stop divisive sprawl. It may be our only way forward as a small, pressured island.

Making ‘predistribution’ real through energy efficiency

Will Straw

Associate director for climate change, energy and transport, IPPR

Britain’s communities are facing three big challenges: a living standards crisis, a jobs crisis and a climate crisis. Improving Britain’s homes to make them more energy efficient is a significant part of the answer to all three but the government’s market driven approach looks inadequate. Instead, greater shared responsibility between government, the market and civil society should be encouraged to address this triple crunch. So what does the British public think about these three problems and is there a solution for all three?

It is often asserted that the 2015 election will be the ‘living standards’ election. In May, earnings growth fell to its lowest level in four years. Inflation, currently at 2.8 per cent, is eroding disposable income and families’ purchasing power. Some prices stand out for consumers, with energy becoming the country’s number one concern. According to the Committee on Climate Change, nine out of ten households are now worried about rising energy bills.

It is not hard to understand why so many are concerned by energy prices when, from 2004 to 2011, dual fuel bills rose from £610 per year to £970. It should be noted that over 80 per cent of the rise was due to wholesale gas prices and supplier costs and profit, with just £70 due to low carbon policies. But the main point that should concern government is that bills are expected to continue rising, meaning that family budgets will be squeezed further. Energy efficiency, ie helping households to retain comfort levels while reducing heat and electricity usage, is therefore critical to tackling this challenge. It’s the easy win politicians are always hunting for.

Alongside concerns about family finances, MORI polling shows that one third of people see unemployment as one of the biggest issues facing the UK, now at one of the highest levels since the recession started in 2008. After falling for a number of months, unemployment rose and employment fell in the first quarter of this year. As of May 2013, there were still 2.56 million people out of work including 979,000 aged 16 to 24 and 900,000 who have been out of work for more than a year.

"The simple fact of the matter is that energy efficiency programmes are the most effective way of stimulating the economy"

The simple fact of the matter is that energy efficiency programmes are the most effective way of stimulating the economy. They are a labour-intensive form of infrastructure expansion. Indeed, energy efficiency beats Labour's preferred approach of cutting VAT, the Tories' favoured cuts to fuel duty, and road building projects beloved by industry groups. If you want to create jobs and growth, energy efficiency is the best way forward.

Although climate change is rarely cited as a major concern by the public, its consequences are already affecting Britain's communities. Rising food prices are contributing to squeezed living standards. Poor weather in 2012 led to a 14 per cent decrease in yields for both wheat and oilseed rape. In April, Channel 4 reported that the wheat harvest was set to be a third lower than normal after a wet winter and freezing start to the year.

Flooding is also a concern. In 2009, around one in six residential and commercial properties were at risk of flooding. Within that group, there are 490,000 properties which face a significant risk (defined as a one in 75 chance of flooding in a single year). Because of climate change, the Environment Agency expects that figure to rise by 350,000, or 71 per cent, by 2035. This is having a predictable impact on the price of home insurance.

Once again, energy efficiency is a significant part of the answer to these issues. To reduce harmful carbon emissions from our power sector we need both to replace dirty coal and gas with clean power and to reduce the amount of energy we use. Improving appliance efficiency can bring down the amount of demand for electricity at a fraction of the cost of trying to build renewables, nuclear or carbon capture and storage. The Department of Energy and Climate Change estimates that the right investment in energy efficiency by 2020 could prevent 22 new power stations being built.

But the government's policies are not hitting the mark. The flagship Green Deal programme, which provides loans for energy efficiency improvements, has only been taken up by a handful of households. A recent report by the energy and climate change select committee identified a number of reasons why progress had been so sluggish, including the

high cost of finance, the hassle of building works, and issues in the private rented sector, as tenants fail to gain consent from their landlords. IPPR has concluded that the Energy Company Obligation (ECO), which directly funds energy efficiency improvements for poor households, could result in higher than necessary costs and is woefully insufficient for tackling fuel poverty.

Guaranteeing the triple benefits of energy efficiency to living standards, jobs and the climate will not be easy, but there are a number of ideas that look ripe for adoption. First, to address problems in the private rented sector, mandatory standards for landlords should be brought forward from 2018. The least efficient properties are more than four times as common in the private rented sector. Families living in these properties, many of whom are in fuel poverty, could save £488 per year, if standards were raised from Band F or G to Band E. Giving landlords some advance warning makes sense but the current roll-out is taking far too long.

Second, the ECO can be improved through the piloting of a 'low income, low efficiency area' (LILEA) approach. Instead of targeting resources on a house by house basis, the LILEA approach targets groups of houses in geographical locations likely to have high levels of fuel poverty. Some more affluent households would receive support but the approach would save money and increase take-up overall. Doing whole streets at a time would introduce economies of scale by bringing down costs like scaffolding and remove the stigma associated with being the only house in an area to undertake efficiency measures. Local authorities should also be involved in the programme since they have better working knowledge of the best areas to target.

"Guaranteeing the triple benefits of energy efficiency to living standards, jobs and the climate will not be easy, but there are a number of ideas"

Finally, a Green New Deal should form the backbone of any jobs guarantee programme. IPPR has called for £2 billion to be used to subsidise the employment of young, long term unemployed people in the energy efficiency sector. Using Cambridge Econometrics' model, this could create around 54,000 jobs and save every treated household around £235.

By bringing together national regulation, local government, civil society and the private sector, a more ambitious programme is possible that will protect the poorest households from future costs while stimulating more activity: 'predistribution', if you will, without the wonkery.

Why we haven't bothered with energy efficiency and how to change that

John Alker
Director of policy and communications,
UK Green Building Council

Energy bills have become the single most worrying expense for many households, more so than mortgage payments or rent, council tax or even food. But only in George Osborne's wildest dreams will shale gas be the answer. The best protection for households from escalating energy costs would be an ambitious national programme of energy efficiency.

Not only would such a programme help to tackle rising bills, it would also address one of the UK's main sources of carbon emissions: our homes. There are health benefits too, with cold homes responsible for 24,000 excess winter deaths every year, according to the ONS.

As if all that wasn't enough, retrofitting the UK's 26 million homes would represent one of the largest construction projects, and sources of work, since the industrial revolution. And the jobs are local: you can't move a house offshore.

So far, so obvious, but it's not happening quickly enough. Why not?

Part of the problem is that energy efficiency just isn't on most people's radar. Perhaps we need what Tony Blair would have called a Big Conversation. The government, its agencies, industry, local authorities and community groups, all need a more co-ordinated message, with reliable information. We have seen this work at a council level, with one good example being Birmingham Energy Savers.

Beyond public awareness, for those who do want to carry out work themselves, finance has been a

stumbling block, This is why the Green Deal was introduced. It has been much maligned, but the principle is sound: energy efficiency measures paid for from the cost savings they provide. The scheme has cross-party pedigree: it was Labour which introduced the concept when it was in government, with Pay As You Save pilots in 2009.

"The best protection for households from escalating energy costs would be an ambitious national programme of energy efficiency"

Unfortunately, the Green Deal has yet to really take off. The scheme's high interest rates limit the measures which qualify for finance, while also representing a psychological barrier. Even if it is fixed for two decades, it just doesn't feel like a good deal when the base rate is so low. But there are ways to tackle this, including government underwriting the cost of finance, as it has done with mortgages for new homes.

Green Deal finance may not be for everyone. People could use savings, regular low cost personal loans or extend their mortgage. The Nationwide Building Society now offers a mortgage extension for retrofit work and surely more will follow, particularly given developments in the US. There, the new SAVE Act will ensure mortgage companies take into account energy efficiency when determining mortgage eligibility, recognising that a more energy efficient home is more bankable.

Of course, having low cost finance options available, Green Deal or otherwise, is no good if you can't access them. For those with poor credit scores, on low incomes and in fuel poverty, extra help is needed. There is scepticism about whether the current Energy Company Obligation (ECO), will deliver at the scale necessary. The Energy Bill Revolution campaign makes a compelling case for additional public spending on this vulnerable group, using carbon tax receipts. If HS2 is good enough for public money, why isn't retrofit?

Giving people access to finance is essential, either through the market or through government support, but on its own it won't precipitate the tidal wave of action we need to see. Once the finance options are in place, the government needs to nudge, incentivise and regulate to encourage people to actually take them up.

The rather arcane sounding 'consequential improvements' proposals should be dusted off as soon as possible. This would require people building extensions to also improve their home's overall energy efficiency, which would provide a boost to the tune of 2.2 million extra Green Deals. Ministers of different political persuasions have always been nervous about telling people what to do, but householders building extensions are familiar with building regulations making certain requirements, so why not include one which actually saves them money in the long run?

To create a step change in the energy efficiency market, we need to embed long term structural

incentives into the tax system. We have seen from other sectors that, when done well, this can have a remarkably positive effect. The Landfill Tax has revolutionised the way the construction sector deals with waste; while Vehicle Excise Duty has helped to make fuel efficiency a mainstream issue.

"To create a step change in the energy efficiency market, we need to embed long term structural incentives into the tax system"

The two most obvious and persuasive ways to do this in housing are through changes to council tax and stamp duty. In both cases, the principle is simple: the more energy efficient the property, the less the householder pays. The government could make this fiscally neutral should it wish to, with the discounts for energy efficient properties balanced out by higher rates for energy guzzling ones.

The obvious challenge is "is this fair?" But, if help is available, as suggested, for the most vulnerable and those on low incomes, why shouldn't those who choose not to reduce their energy use pay a little more?

Perhaps one of most important consequences of this type of fiscal incentive would be the impact on the house buying process. Almost overnight, energy efficiency would become part of the conversation between buyers, sellers and estate agents. It would feed through into value, and become an important purchasing, or indeed renting, decision.

A recent UK Green Building Council report, *Retrofit incentives* (July 2013), suggests the effect of these incentives would be enormous, with variable stamp duty leading to 270,000 extra retrofits per year, and variable council tax potentially adding almost 1.5 million. As well as carbon savings of up to two million tonnes annually, one of the biggest attractions of either policy is the impact on GDP. The economic benefit to UK plc would range between £400 million and £4.4 billion annually, depending on the exact design of the policy.

With benefits as great as this, the question we should be asking is not "can we afford this?", but "can we afford not to do it?" Could we one day hear the government proclaim its priority is "insulation, insulation, insulation"? I'd like to think so.

A model for change: energy for the public, not the market

Rebecca Willis
Independent researcher and Green Alliance associate

It's a sunny spring afternoon in the Lake District, but residents of the small village of Coniston have headed to the indoor gloom of the village hall. They're gathered round a beautiful architect's model of an English town, complete with little foam trees and tiny bicycles. Look closer, and you'll see that the model also shows every sort of renewable energy technology: heat pumps on houses, solar panels on roofs and a wind turbine on the skyline. The model, created by the Centre for Sustainable Energy, is designed as a prompt to help communities talk about energy options.

A man wanders in, and begins with a gruff comment to the facilitator. He doesn't like wind farms, he says, and thinks they ruin the landscape. He doesn't think climate change is anything to worry about either. But his eye is drawn to the model, and within seconds he's looking at the tiny hydro plant and talking to other locals about ways that they could work together to build a lifesize version on the beck that runs through the village.

That conversation in Coniston shows how we should be thinking about energy. Not arguing over bills or the aesthetics of wind farms, but rolling up our sleeves, thinking local, and working out what energy we need to power our lives. Coniston is one of a growing number of communities which is taking energy into its own hands. Many now own their own renewables, from small schemes like the co-operatively owned solar panels on the roof of Nayland School in Suffolk, to large ones like the four turbines of the Neilston Community Wind Farm near Glasgow. Meanwhile, the phenomenal success

of Brixton Energy Co-operative in one of the most deprived areas of London shows that this is not just a hobby for wealthy country folk. In Brixton, an apprenticeship scheme means that young people get valuable work experience with the co-operative, fitting solar panels and home insulation.

"If we put the individual at the centre of energy policy, we could start to tackle the real issues"

These schemes turn the conventional politics of energy on their head. Politicians assume that energy markets are about providing as much energy as people need, at a price they can afford. But that's a very one-sided view. It assumes a passive consumer, whose only role is to flick the switch and pay the bills. But as both costs and carbon emissions rise, we can no longer make these assumptions. If we put the individual at the centre of energy policy, we could start to tackle the real issues: how to make the most of a scarce resource, how to focus as much on energy demand as on supply, and how to build a resilient, networked energy system.

This isn't just a pipe dream (with community-owned pipes). Hop over the North Sea and you can see it actually works. In Denmark, you're not allowed to burn fossil fuels to generate electricity unless you capture and use the waste heat. Heat can't travel far. So rather than remote, centralised plant, each Danish town has its own power station, often owned by the municipality or a local co-operative, producing electricity and heat for residents. This model has proved remarkably adaptable: many of these plants were using fossil fuels, but now they have diversified into wind or wood fuel. And, if a commercial company wants to build a wind farm, they have to offer part-ownership to local people. A clear, predictable framework with an emphasis on local supply and community control has led to a robust, adaptable energy system.

In the UK, by contrast, the privatisation of electricity and gas in the 1980s and 1990s led to a centralised, commercialised energy system, which doesn't provide the best starting point. That is why we need a clear three-point battle plan to bring energy back to the people.

The first would be to see land use planning and energy policy as one and the same thing. Planning should focus on creating carbon efficient settlements, with localised heat supply and electricity generation.

The second would be to mandate community ownership. Much opposition to wind farms is caused because local people see them as a commercial imposition on a much loved local asset. Change the ownership structures, and perceptions change too. All generation schemes should be owned in part by local people, and it should be much easier for communities themselves to initiate schemes.

The third would be to put as much emphasis on energy demand as on supply. We need to stop

assuming that our energy dilemmas will be solved by expert technical interventions. Instead, we should ask the fundamental questions about what we need energy for and how we could use less of it. In policy terms, this would translate into clear, long term incentives for demand reduction, in households and businesses, as well as transport.

“The government needs to play a role in shaping energy outcomes, in the same way that it shapes education and health outcomes”

Above all, we need to see energy not as a commercial commodity, but as a public good. The government needs to play a role in shaping energy outcomes, in the same way that it shapes education and health outcomes. This means policies and incentives to shape the way that people use energy, and to encourage communities to see themselves as active participants in the energy system. It only takes an afternoon in a village hall with an architect’s model to see the potential of people-powered energy. But bringing that model to life requires a very different sort of energy politics to the one we’ve grown accustomed to.

The importance of place and the state

Ed Wallis
Head of editorial, Fabian Society

What do we mean when we talk about the environment? Under the New Labour governments, the language of environmentalism was a jargon for technocrats: supranational legislative frameworks, carbon emissions targets and encouraging behaviour change through appeals to rational economic self interest.

This vernacular shouldn't be sniffed at: it achieved results and the 2008 Climate Change Act stands as one of Labour's greatest achievements in office.

But where are we now? Pointing out the hollowness of David Cameron's pledge to lead the "greenest government ever" has moved past acerbic insight into shuddering cliché. Instead of talking about keeping average global temperature rises to two degrees, we discuss how to manage a world of four or even six degree rises. And, at a once in a generation revisionist moment for social democrats, the environment has been on the periphery, at best, in the Labour Party's intellectual debate in opposition. Why?

Since 2010, there has been growing acceptance of a critique that says Labour's approach to governing was often too bureaucratic, too managerial and too remote. It's a charge that can also be levelled at the environmental movement, with campaigning focused on elite level engagement which, despite securing significant policy 'wins', has failed to embed the concepts of sustainability and conservation in people's lives and build a broader sense of environmental citizenship.

By relying on the rationalism of climate science and the agency of top down legislation, environmentalism can leave people with a sense of disempowerment. People don't live their lives in abstract terms and, as such, find emissions targets difficult to care about, and exhortations to make small lifestyle changes difficult to reconcile with the reported scale of the climate threat. Coupled with the clear impression given by politicians from all parties that environmentalism is all very well in the good times, but you can't be green in a recession, there is a growing sense that the environmental movement is losing the battle for hearts and minds.

"People have a resonant bond with where they live and wish the environment they see around them to be conserved"

But the furore which greeted the government's attempt to sell off England's forests pointed, perhaps, to another avenue from which to approach the idea of a popular environmentalism in the UK: that people have a resonant bond with where they live and wish the environment they see around them to be conserved.

So, when the left talks about the environment, it needs to talk about place. As Ruth Davis of Greenpeace wrote recently in the *Fabian Review*: "Place is central to identity; and hence, protecting the places we love from appropriation or short-sighted damage for private profit is at the heart of popular environmentalism." People do have a strong ethos of care for their communities, their neighbourhoods and their locality: harnessing this democratic spirit for a shared common life could provide environmentalists with a much more productive route to securing a more sustainable future and a more resonant environmental politics.

This is not to say there won't be an important role for legislation and the central state. The Fabian Society's work for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has shown that a key barrier to people living more sustainably is a sense of powerlessness, that anything they could personally do is dwarfed by the scale of the challenge and, anyway, what about China? But the role of the state needs to be participatory and enabling: we expect government to negotiate on our behalf and to produce a robust international framework for managing carbon emissions; only then will people feel able to participate in what must be a shared endeavour. We need what Tim Bale calls the "politics of/and": in this instance, the politics of the global conference and the green space.

For social democrats, recognising the importance of place introduces a number of philosophical as well as policy challenges. First is that localism and devolving power logically entails local difference: not all communities will want the same things, nor will they all be equally successful in realising them. This is conceptually troubling for many on the left, who fear nothing more than the emergence of postcode lotteries. But, as Jon Wilson wrote in *Letting go: how Labour can learn to stop worrying and trust the people*, "we each have the capacity to do very

different things. Equality doesn't level out these differences. It's about each of us being treated as someone distinctive, each able to order the world around us in our own way." States are good at making things the same, less so at encouraging local flourishing. A genuine commitment to place will require the Labour movement to make the shift from the language of the postcode lottery to recognising the opportunities of postcode democracy.

"A more place-focused and communitarian approach may be slower and more difficult, but it will root both politics and environmental protection in real life"

A second challenge relates to another emotive piece of language: nimbyism, because a commitment to place does require giving people a genuine say over what happens in their own backyard. People can't always get what they want and there are trade-offs embedded deep in the nature of democratic politics. But people understand they won't always win; they often just want to be listened to. People have to be given a genuine stake, a powerful voice and a real sense of agency, whether this is in response to the forces of global capital or the whims of central government, and not have their instinct to preserve the landscape they grew up with derided as narrow minded nimbyism. Democracy has to be the starting point for a conversation about place.

The era of the central manager is over. Labour's top down measures, from tax credits in social security policy or targets in public services, often made significant early gains before hitting the buffers, unable to develop beyond middling levels of success. Labour found the limits of Whitehall's levers; this, coupled with an incredibly challenging fiscal climate, requires social democrats to think creatively and, most importantly, democratically. There has been a widespread collapse in societal trust, spreading from bankers to MPs to journalists to the police. We know how staggeringly complex the world is and we no longer believe that policy administered by politicians holds the answers. A more place-focused and communitarian approach may be slower and more difficult, but it will root both politics and environmental protection in real life. This will help to create a more abiding and resilient sense of democratic consent than could be hoped for through the policy gains of managerialism which, from the environment to child poverty, have been easily stripped away by the coalition.

"Labour and environmentalists need to become a movement again, and become one together. The way to do that is to meet people where they live"

Way back in 1984, before New Labour, let alone Blue Labour, Tony Wright wrote in a Fabian Society pamphlet: "Labour was uniquely a party formed not

in the Westminster corridors of power but out of the array of self-governing institutions developed by working people in the interstices of British society… Reasonably enough, Labour set its sights on the capture of the central state and sought to use it for its own purposes…However, this also carried with it some undesirable consequences and the loss of some valuable traditions. The centralist focus changed the terms of the relationship between movement and party in the direction of an instrumental electoralism."

Labour and environmentalists need to become a movement again, and become one together. The way to do that is to meet people where they live.

Garden cities for the 21st century

Hugh Ellis
Chief planner, Town and Country Planning Association

There's no shortage of evidence as to the extent of the housing crisis and its impact on the lives of those most affected. Neither is there any doubt about the acute economic and environmental crisis which the next government will have to face. The current national response to these complex challenges is unlikely to secure the lasting progress we need. Benefit reform is driving a whole new set of housing needs and new patterns of migration, as well as increasing inequality and social division. A deregulated planning system, which no longer has strategic teeth, is at one of its lowest ebbs since the war and the ideologies of nudge theory and neo liberalism, although practically ineffective, remain the dominant zeitgeist.

So how do we offer both hope and practical solutions to build the kind of sustainable places we need for the future? Perhaps we should first be clear that we can only meet the sustainable development test by delivering high quality zero carbon places which are socially inclusive for all parts of society. The riots in Sweden illustrate what happens when utopias are created only for the elite. We should open our eyes to the possibilities which the creation of new, and the regeneration of existing, communities can bring to our society in terms of skills and work, health and well-being.

Our first problem is one of framing the possibility of change. It is a powerful myth that we can't achieve social justice, environmental improvement and economic efficiency at the same time. In fact, we can and we have, which is why there is currently so much interest in re-imagining the garden city

principles. It is all too easy to forget the fantastic places we have delivered in our past when we have seen so much, particularly high rise social housing, which has failed. The UK has an unprecedented record in building garden cities and new towns. Indeed, our garden cities provide some of the most desirable places to live in the country.

"The radical nature of the garden city movement's ideals remain of critical relevance to the 21st century"

The radical nature of the garden city movement's ideals remain of critical relevance to the 21st century, providing a foundation for high quality inclusive places, the creation of new jobs and truly sustainable lifestyles. Taking a collaborative and co-operative approach, it had a strong vision to create beautiful places where "the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and delight of the country, may be secured in perfect combination," as Ebernezer Howard wrote in 1898. Ultimately, they were the physical expression of aspiration of a just and fair society.

New communities offer a powerful opportunity to deliver much needed housing in a holistic and comprehensively planned way, rather than through piecemeal development. Not only can they deliver more housing with potentially less environmental impact, they also present a significant opportunity to embed community governance structures, create jobs, and promote low carbon living in high quality, sustainable and inclusive places. What is vital is that, in the long term, these places can pay for themselves by the capture and reinvestment of rising land and asset values. This requires the use of powerful development corporations which secure assets for the long term benefit of the community.

The significant backing of the government for new towns in the past allowed a record level of development, but left open questions about democratic accountability and the voice of local people in the future of their communities. What is clear is that we must learn from these past experiences and find new models which place communities and councils at the heart of the process.

Past generations of new communities had a powerful sense of idealism and enthusiasm. There are no better examples of the Big Society than the arts and leisure associations, as well as practical services, run by the early residents of the garden cities and new towns. Today, we can go further, placing local people at the heart of the process, to shape where our new communities are located and how they develop, providing their vision of where the shops, offices or homes should go and what green spaces should be created and enhanced. Local authority leaders will need to play a pivotal role in helping to develop the vision and ensure that community governance structures are established from the outset. If the government can give long term backing to developments that have local support, the certainty that this would offer could provide confidence for funding and delivery.

The lessons from garden cities and new towns are not new, but they need to be restated and brought together in the new and radically changed political context, in which there has been a fundamental shift from the central and regional level, to the local and neighbourhood level. Looking back to the past will help to ensure that lessons in how to plan attractive and resilient communities are not lost and the failures are not repeated.

"We must consider the desperate need for renewal of many communities in low demand areas. This can't just be about new communities in the south east"

A new generation of locally led, comprehensively planned communities may be overdue, but we must consider the desperate need for renewal of many communities in low demand areas. This can't just be about new communities in the south east. Garden city principles can be applied at a range of scales, including suburbs and inner city neighbourhoods, as well as to larger new communities. Creating new garden cities can provide the opportunity and the economies of scale necessary to truly fulfil the ambitions of sustainable development. This means creating healthy and vibrant communities with multiple benefits, including social housing, zero carbon design, low carbon energy networks, sustainable transport, local food sourcing and access to nature.

The garden cities arose from a sense of idealism and enthusiasm, pioneering new ways of living. It is this spirit of co-operation and innovation that should be re-captured. To enable it to happen, we need a radical culture change which helps communities, local authorities, developers and central government to work together to build villages, towns and cities for the future. We must forge a new relationship between people and planning and find ways to combine the best of what we have achieved in the past, to meet the modern challenge of creating sustainable, democratic communities which truly place local people at the centre.

Is self build the answer to more and better housing?

Chi Onwurah

MP for Newcastle upon Tyne Central and shadow Cabinet Office minister

In 2006 the Labour government introduced a ground breaking policy for all new homes to be zero carbon from 2016. Zero carbon homes attracted wide support from businesses and charities, unleashing a wave of innovation across the construction sector and beyond. Community self build has an even greater potential, because as well as generating innovation, it could also increase the supply of housing and deliver homes that are tailored to local and personal needs, as well as being high quality and green.

Britain is facing the biggest housing crisis in a generation. House building is down. Homelessness and rough sleeping are up. Week after week, housing is consistently the number one issue that constituents raise with me. Recent changes to benefits, like the bedroom tax, have caused further distress. Every time I am out on the doorstep, I meet someone who is having to pay the bedroom tax, although there are no smaller properties available for them. That is why I have been running a campaign for more access to affordable housing in Newcastle.

There are 4,000 people on the waiting list for housing in Newcastle. Yet, less than 400 new homes were built last year by the council, housing associations and private developers. The lack of affordable housing is why Labour has committed to invest in house building to tackle the crisis and kick start the economy. Across the country, Labour councils continue to build five times as many social homes as Conservative councils. The last Labour government did invest in building new social housing and improving existing public housing, but

the increase in demand has been too great. We need more affordable, good quality, sustainable homes.

We are now in a situation where we have a rapidly growing private rented sector, meaning people lack security and are having to pay record high rents all while suffering poor quality accommodation. Ed Miliband recently summed up what the response to this challenge must be: "today the welfare state, through housing benefit, bears the cost for our failure to build enough homes. We have to start investing in homes again, not paying for failure." However, we do not just have to follow traditional models for doing this.

"Custom built housing has the potential to change the way we build in the UK"

As the shadow cabinet office minister responsible for social enterprise, I see many parallels in the way both self build community projects and social enterprises are rooted in their communities, delivering bespoke services. Both are alternatives to the old ways of doing things in business and house building. This is vital when those old ways are not working for everyone. Too many house building projects are done against communities and to suit the developer, not the people who will call it home.

Custom built housing has the potential to change the way we build in the UK. Less than one in ten new homes built in the UK this year will be self built, and most of those are being built by architects, builders, or more affluent and older people, the stereotypical Grand Designs participant.

In Europe the picture is different. Thirty eight per cent of new homes in France are custom built, and the figure is more than half in Hungary. Encouraging more custom built projects, especially those by groups of residents, is an opportunity to promote more local choice, spur innovation and build sustainable communities.

It's not for everybody, but it has the potential to boost house building numbers. If ministers and local authorities can make it easier for communities to design their own housing projects, then they should. That's why Newcastle City Council is taking steps to promote a city wide awareness of self build in its many forms, as well as running workshops and bringing down barriers to self builders, including making 40 plots of land available in Gosforth.

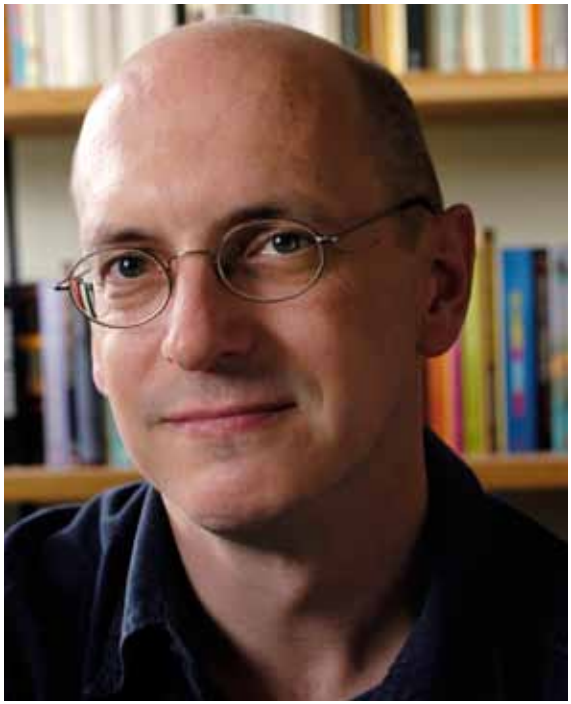
A few months ago I went to a self build workshop organised by the council. The challenges of self build and co-operative house building were not ignored. There are issues with funding, organisation and skills, but opportunities were also emphasised. It encouraged local people to think about self build as a housing option and to think differently about where they live. Council officials, architects and self build experts spoke about how ordinary people could group together in self build schemes.

Ouseburn Trust spoke of their aim to work with local residents to use the site of a former canvas factory in the Ouseburn Valley in Newcastle for six self finish 'live-work' units. The hard, but ultimately successful, path to 22 self build houses in Bruntons Manor, Middlesbrough, was described in some detail by the architects Constructive Individuals.

"Housing development must meet the needs of the community and be of good quality. Self build projects meet the first criteria by definition and the second by design"

Housing development must meet the needs of the community and be of good quality. Self build projects meet the first criteria by definition and the second by design. Community self built homes tend to be built to very high standards, and meet custom needs. So why are we not doing more to support communities who want to go it alone?

How to unblock home building



Shaun Spiers
Chief executive, Campaign to Protect Rural England

Britain needs more houses. For years we have built too few new homes and converted too few existing buildings to housing, with the result that too many people are forced to live in housing conditions that shame a wealthy nation. We have a housing crisis.

But setting ambitious targets and imposing development on local communities will not solve the crisis. The last government tried that and the coalition is following a remarkably similar path, except that it calls it 'localism'. Top down imposition results in aggravation and poor development. Numbers come to trump location, design and environmental efficiency, but still too few homes get built.

Governments then blame planning (it is harder to blame democracy) and change the system. There were two major reforms of planning under Labour, and there has been one so far under the coalition. But planning is not the problem, nor is the availability of land. The problem is the assumption by governments since Margaret Thatcher's, in the face of all evidence, that the private sector, in particular large house builders, will build many more homes if only we make it easier for them.

It is politically unpalatable to all three main parties, but the fact is that when this country built enough houses, the state built over half of them; since state production has slumped, we have built too few.

For 30 years after the war, the public sector built at least 130,000 houses a year in England. Since 1979, relatively little public housing has been built and there has been no significant private sector growth

to compensate. Private sector output has been fairly consistent since the war, allowing for wider economic fluctuations, and there is no evidence that private companies are either able or willing to build the number of homes the country needs. Bashing the planning system and arm-twisting local authorities to release rural land for housing will not alter that.

I would like to set out how to resolve the housing crisis: how to build plenty of homes in well planned settlements that enhance people's lives while limiting environmental damage and protecting green space, not least the countryside. Unfortunately, there is not space here to do so, so I will limit myself to a few pointers.

First, we must spend more money. The percentage of public expenditure devoted to house building fell from 5.6 per cent in 1981 to just one per cent in 2000. It now stands at around 2.2 per cent. The last Labour government improved the social housing stock but built far too few new homes. Worse, it nodded at spiralling property prices, not only because it made property owning voters feel good, but because property taxes funded much of its spending.

Stamp duty receipts are predicted to rise from around £3 billion a year to £12 billion by 2018 and a significant part of this increase should be devoted to building houses. This would help those in housing need. It could also have the desirable effect of dampening house price inflation, if that is an aim, as it should be.

More can also be done to unlock pension funds to revive the private rental sector and promote mixed tenure housing, as proposed by the Royal Institute of British Architects' Future Homes Commission.

Serious state and institutional investment in housing can help return some sense of ambition to housing policy beyond numbers alone. Currently, if a developer says it can only afford to build sub-standard homes and create places with no sense of place, and that a decent development is 'unviable', the local authority is powerless to say no. This is happening now across England, and it is not good enough.

"Currently, if a developer says it can only afford to build sub-standard homes and create places with no sense of place, and that a decent development is unviable, the local authority is powerless to say no"

There is also scope for more self build housing, with individuals hiring small builders to build them a home. But self build should not be an unplanned free for all. We should allocate appropriate sites and master plan the settlements, as happens in Holland.

Politicians should articulate a clear vision for the sort of places they want to see created. Labour is acutely

aware of the failures of past visions, of planning disasters that demonstrate that the man in Whitehall, or the woman in the town hall, does not always know best, but there are plenty of good examples of thoughtful developments that work well. There are many more examples of developments that damage places and the people who have to live in them.

"If we are to build sustainably, socially as well as environmentally, and create settlements people want to live in and near to, we should favour proximity over dispersal"

A welcome commitment to respect local people and local circumstances should not prevent central government from promoting best practice and empowering local authorities to reject sub-standard developments. And, ultimately, we will only be able to get new housing on the scale we need if there is public consent. That means focusing on the quality and location of new development, not just the numbers.

We can build attractive family houses at densities of 30 to 50 dwellings per hectare, with plenty of green space and adequate parking. It just takes some thought and care. Denser communities support local services and public transport, cut carbon, protect green space, and enhance community. If we are to build sustainably, socially as well as environmentally, and create settlements people want to live in and near to, we should favour proximity over dispersal, place-making over mere numbers of houses.

We can resolve the housing crisis. We just need ministers who combine Harold Macmillan's commitment to numbers; Nye Bevan's belief in quality, space standards and mixed communities; and John Gummer's and John Prescott's drive to regenerate towns and cities by reusing previously developed land. That should not be too difficult.

"This collection of essays shows that those of us from the Labour and social democratic tradition are at the vanguard of defining a different type of politics: from community based approaches to deliver housing or energy efficiency at scale, to new ways of thinking about climate change through the lens of community or place"
Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, leader of the Labour Party

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