

Green Party: Housing Minister's plans a slap in the face for people who can't afford a home



7 February 2017

***Jonathan Bartley, co-leader: 'We must end our narrow obsession with home ownership and meet people where they are – by investing in social housing and improving the private rented sector'**

The Green Party has branded the Housing Minister's new housing strategy [1] a "slap in the face" for people struggling to afford the cost of their homes.

Jonathan Bartley, Green Party co-leader, said the Government should instead focus on:

- Setting up a Living Rent Commission to bring down rents
- Introducing a Land Value Tax to reduce property speculation
- Expand the use of community land trusts and co-operative home ownership
- End tax breaks for buy-to-let investors and use the money for social housing

Bartley said:

"The Housing Minister's plans are a slap in the face for the millions of people in this country desperate for bold plans to reduce rents and make their housing affordable.

"People are living in desperate insecurity and we need to end our narrow obsession with home ownership and meet people where they are – by investing in social housing and improving the private rented sector. Any plan to help renters which doesn't have at its heart a clear intention to reduce the amount tenants are paying is doomed to failure.

"It is scandalous that many people are paying up to two-thirds of their income on rent, and often living in sub-standard accommodation. The

Government should immediately set up a Living Rent Commission to work out what rent is truly affordable and take action to bring down costs for tenants.

“With Britain suffering such an acute housing crisis – and with property developers earning such huge sums for simply holding onto land – it’s also clear that idea such as a Land Value Tax should be explored. Such a tax could reduce property speculation, revitalise inner city areas and raise revenue – there’s no excuse for failing to investigate it as an option.

“We need to start talking seriously about expanding the use of community land trusts and co-operative home ownership. If the Government wants to take the heat out of the housing market it must end tax breaks for buy-to-let investors, and use the money to create a new generation of social housing.

“Housing should not be a speculative commodity and we must move beyond piecemeal tinkering with a broken market to ensure that everyone has a place they can call home.”

Notes:

1. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-38884601>

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[News story: Law change demands equal treatment for disabled taxi users](#)

Taxi drivers face a fine of up to £1,000 if they refuse to transport wheelchair users or attempt to charge them extra, in a change to the law announced today (7 February 2017) by Transport Minister Andrew Jones.

From 6 April taxi and private hire vehicle drivers will be obliged by law to:

- transport wheelchair users in their wheelchair
- provide passengers in wheelchairs with appropriate assistance
- charge wheelchair users the same as non-wheelchair users

Transport Minister Andrew Jones said:

We want to build a country that works for everyone, and part of that is ensuring disabled people have the same access to services

and opportunities as anyone else – including when it comes to travel. People who use wheelchairs are often heavily reliant on taxis and private hire vehicles and this change to the law will mean fair and equal treatment for all.

The new rules will apply in England, Wales and Scotland affecting vehicles that are designated as wheelchair accessible and will apply to both taxis and private hire vehicles. All taxis in London and a significant number in most major urban centres are wheelchair accessible.

In a change to the law, drivers found to be discriminating against wheelchair users face fines of up to £1,000 as part of provisions being enacted from the Equality Act. Drivers may also face having their taxi or private hire vehicle (PHV) licence suspended or revoked by their licencing authority. Drivers unable to provide assistance for medical reasons will be able to apply to their licensing authority for an exemption from the new requirements.

Robert Meadowcroft, Chief Executive of Muscular Dystrophy UK, said:

This is a victory for all people with disabilities who experience daily struggles with accessible transport.

Being able to get from A to B is usually very easy for most people, however we know that this can be a challenge that affects a disabled person's entire life, including their ability to have a job and play an active part in society. This is a positive and very welcome step in the right direction which we hope will not affect the number of accessible taxis being made available by companies because of the duties now being placed on to drivers.

[Muscular Dystrophy UK](#) and our Trailblazers have been campaigning on this issue for many years, and we commend the government for listening to the views of disabled people.

The new requirements, which will come into force from 6 April, complement those already in place to prevent discrimination against users of assistance dogs and underline the government's wide-ranging commitment to supporting transport networks which work for everyone. The government will be consulting on a draft 'Accessibility action plan' later this year, which will seek to address the barriers faced by disabled people in accessing all modes of public transport.

Statement to Parliament: PM statement on European Council: 6 February 2017

Mr Speaker, before I turn to the European Council, I am sure the whole House will want to join me in sending our congratulations to Her Majesty the Queen as she marks her Sapphire Jubilee today.

It is testament to Her Majesty's selfless devotion to the nation that she is not marking becoming our first Monarch to reign for sixty-five years with any special celebration, but instead by getting on with the job to which she has dedicated her life.

On behalf of the whole country, I am proud to offer Her Majesty our humble thanks for a lifetime of extraordinary service. Long may she continue to reign over us all.

Turning to last week's informal European Council in Malta, Britain is leaving the European Union but we are not leaving Europe – and a global Britain that stands tall in the world, will be a Britain that remains a good friend and ally to all our European partners.

So at this summit, we showed how Britain will continue to play a leading role in Europe long after we have left the EU.

In particular, through our contribution to the challenge of managing mass migration; through our Special Relationship with America – and through the new and equal partnership that we want to build between the EU and an independent, self-governing, global Britain.

Let me take each in turn.

Migration

First, on migration, the discussion focused in particular on the route from Libya across the central Mediterranean.

As I have argued, we need a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach – and that is exactly what this council agreed.

This includes working hard in support of an inclusive political settlement to stabilise Libya, which will not only help to tackle migration flows but also counter terrorism.

It means working to reduce the pull factors that encourage people to risk their lives, building the capacity of the Libyans to return migrants to their own shores, treat them with dignity and help them return home.

It means looking beyond Libya and moving further upstream, including by urgently implementing the EU's External Investment Plan to help create more

opportunities in migrants' home countries – and by helping genuine refugees to claim asylum in the first safe country they reach.

And it means better distinguishing between economic migrants and refugees, swiftly returning those who have no right to remain and thereby sending out a deterrence message to others thinking of embarking on perilous journeys.

And the council agreed action in all of these areas.

Britain is already playing a leading role in the region and at this summit I announced further steps including additional support for the Libyan coastguard and more than £30 million of new aid for the most vulnerable refugees across Greece, the Balkans, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Sudan and Libya.

Britain is also setting up an £8 million special protection fund to keep men, women and children in the Mediterranean region safe from trafficking, sexual violence and labour exploitation as part of our commitment to tackle modern slavery.

And the council agreed with my call that we should do everything possible to deter this horrific crime, including by introducing tough penalties for those who trade in human misery and by working together to secure the necessary evidence for prosecutions that can put these criminals behind bars where they belong.

America

Mr Speaker, turning to America, I opened a discussion on engaging the new administration and I was able to relay the conversation I had with President Trump at the White House about the important history of co-operation between the United States and the countries of Europe.

In particular, I confirmed that the President had declared his 100 per cent commitment to NATO as the cornerstone of our security in the West.

But I also made clear that every country needs to share the burden and play its full part, meeting the NATO target of spending 2 per cent on defence. Because, Mr Speaker, it is only by investing properly in our defence that we can ensure we are properly equipped to keep our people safe.

I was also able to relay my discussions with President Trump on the importance of maintaining the sanctions regime on Russia in response to its actions in Ukraine.

And I very much welcome the strong words last week from the new US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, in confirming America's continued support for these sanctions.

Mr Speaker, of course, there are some areas where we disagree with the approach of the new administration. And we should be clear about those disagreements and about the values that underpin our response to the global

challenges that we face.

But I also argued at this council that we should engage patiently and constructively with America as a friend and ally – an ally that has helped guarantee the longest period of peace that Europe has ever known.

For we should be clear, Mr Speaker, that the alternative of division and confrontation would only embolden those who would do us harm, wherever they may be.

Brexit

Finally turning to Brexit, European leaders welcomed the clarity of the objectives that we have set out for the negotiation ahead.

They warmly welcomed our ambition to build a new partnership between Britain and the European Union that is in the interests of both sides. They also welcomed the recognition that we in Britain want to see a strong and successful European Union, because that is in our interests and the interests of the whole world.

On the issue of acquired rights, the general view was that we should reach an agreement which applied equally to the other 27 member states and the UK, which is why we think a unilateral decision from the UK is not the right way forward.

But as I have said before, EU citizens living in the UK make a vital contribution to our economy and our society and without them we would be poorer and our public services weaker.

So we will make securing the reciprocal agreement that will guarantee their status a priority as soon as the negotiations begin, and I want to see this agreed as soon as possible because that is in everyone's interests.

Mr Speaker, our European partners now want to get on with the negotiations.

So do I.

And so does this House, which last week voted by a majority of 384 in support of the government triggering Article 50.

There are of course further stages for the Bill in Committee and in the other place. And it is right that this process should be completed properly.

But, Mr Speaker, the message is clear to all.

This House has spoken. And now is not the time to obstruct the democratically expressed wishes of the British people.

It is time to get on with leaving the European Union and building an independent, self-governing, global Britain.

And I commend this Statement to the House

News story: PM meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu: 6 February 2017

From:

First published:

6 February 2017

Part of:

Prime Minister Theresa May met with Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel and discussed free trade, security and Iran.

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

The Prime Minister hosted Prime Minister Netanyahu at Downing Street today for their first bilateral meeting and a working lunch.

In their discussions, the Prime Ministers committed to working together to build on our longstanding relationship and the strong ties that already exist between our 2 countries in a wide range of areas, from trade and investment, to innovation and technology, and defence and security.

They discussed their shared belief in free trade and agreed to establish a new UK-Israel Trade Working Group to continue the progress we have seen in our burgeoning trade and investment relationship, and to prepare the ground for a post-Brexit trade agreement. It was noted that Lord Price will visit Israel soon to take this forward. They also discussed opportunities to increase investment in research and development and technology, and strengthen partnerships in these areas between our governments, universities and businesses.

They talked about the important work we do together on intelligence-sharing and cyber-security, and committed to talk further about how we can deepen this co-operation, to help keep our people safe.

They also discussed a number of international issues. On Iran, the Prime Minister was clear that the nuclear deal is vital and must be properly enforced and policed, while recognising concerns about Iran's pattern of destabilising activity in the region. They also talked about the Middle East Peace Process and the UK's firm

commitment to a 2-state solution as the best way to bring stability and peace to the region. The Prime Minister reiterated the UK's opposition to settlement activity.

As we prepare to mark 100 years since the Balfour Declaration, the Prime Minister underlined that Britain remains a close and firm friend of Israel and reiterated our support for Jewish communities in the UK. She invited Prime Minister Netanyahu to attend events taking place in the UK to mark the anniversary in November, as a Guest of Government. He also invited her to visit him in Israel.

News story: Innovative uses of data for defence staff: apply for funding

From:

First published:

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Part of:

Organisations can apply for a share of £6 million to investigate new ways of using data to improve decision-making in defence.

The [Ministry of Defence](#) (MOD) has up to £3 million to invest in innovative new technologies, processes and ways of operating that improve the ability of defence staff to analyse and exploit data in decision-making.

A further £3 million could be invested to develop the best ideas in a second phase of the competition.

The MOD is seeking solutions in 3 challenge areas:

- rapid and automated integration of new sensors
- freeing up personnel by the innovative use of machine learning algorithms and artificial intelligence for military advantage
- effective use of operator cognitive capacity, particularly by human-machine teaming

The MoD is making more and more use of sensors. This means there is an increasingly large volume of complex data available to military operators and decision-makers.

It needs to increase its ability to analyse data and quickly use it to make informed and effective decisions.

This funding competition is part of [SBRI](#) (the Small Business Research Initiative). A first phase seeks initial ideas. Winners of phase 1 funding will compete in a second phase to develop the idea further.

The competition will also see projects split between a fast track and standard track approach. The aim is to achieve greater pace but also to allow smaller companies and low maturity solutions to take part.

- the competition is open, and the deadline for phase 1 proposals is midday on 21 March 2017
- SBRI is open to any organisation, and projects will attract 100% funded development contracts
- phase 1 fast track projects could attract up to £150,000 and are expected to last up to 3 months
- phase 1 standard track projects could attract up to £100,000 and are expected to last up to 6 months
- briefing events for potential applicants will be held on 23 February 2017 and 27 February 2017