

PUBLIC PRACTICE

BETTER FUTURE HOMES: Discussion Transcript

A recorded panel discussion in Norwich in March 2025 between Kieran Majhail and Elaine Ambrose, chaired by Pooja Agrawal

INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC PRACTICE + NORWICH CONTEXT

Pooja Agrawal (PA)

For those who don't know about Public Practice, we're a not-for-profit organization and we build skills and capacity in local authorities. Through the work we've been doing, mainly through our Associate Programme—which is what we are best known for—and we have a number of Associates and Alum here, we often come across these incredible projects, and stories, and programmes that everyone is involved in with in their councils.

We have thought that over the years, these stories are often told from the private sector's perspective, and have thought that over the years, these stories are often told from sort of the private sector's point of view of things. Like, oh, this is the architect that worked on this project, and this was the consultant that worked on this project. And all the hard work and amazing work that happens behind the scenes from our officers can get left behind or get hidden.

So the idea that the magazine initially is about celebrating what happens behind the scenes with the collaborative work of the private, the public, the third sector, that is important to make these places a reality.

We're here in Norwich because I think it was about a year ago, Sarah from the Council and I met on a tour that we do for our Associates. We thought we should do a really deep-dive case study on one of the housing projects here at Goldsmith Street, which you can read more about and retweet it! And thought, actually part of what we do at Public Practice is to bring people from different parts of the country to different places. Not all of you may have been to Norwich before, so welcome. We would have hosted the event at the Town Hall, but it's under refurbishment, so we are here at Assembly House.

Which even though it looks quite fancy —someone joked that we're in *Bridgerton*—it has an interesting history with many layers. It's supported by a Trust that organizes

charitable, community, and cultural activities. So I think just outside the toilet downstairs, there's a big panel which tells you that the history of this place, which is really important to know more about.

INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC NOTICE, ISSUE 2

Nana Biamah-Ofosu

I just wanted to start by saying welcome and also it's been an absolute delight to work with Public Practice. Thank you so much, Pooja, Nikki Linsell (who's not here), and Nana Ama Owusu-Ansah. It's just been a real pleasure to produce the second issue of Public Notice and build upon the first one.

Before I start talking about what the magazine has in it in terms of content, I just want to thank my team from YAA Projects to Efua and Lois, who were absolutely incredible and helping put together this issue and shape the stories and the narrative. And Oliver long who did an excellent job building the kind of identity of the stories and telling them in a really compelling, visual way.

So, producing this issue has been a really collaborative project. It's not just involved the people I've mentioned, but also lots of collaborators across the country, and it's a real privilege to have some of you here with us today.

When we started, we talked about once in the second issue, to really expand on the first one, to build on the stories that had been told, but to also sort of bring more of a expand the content of other places in England, and capture more of what was happening across the country.

I think that the idea that this magazine is something that captures a sort of "Better Every Day" needed to be seen across how that's happening in every part of England. So it's a real privilege to be able to expand the selection of stories that you'll find in this magazine. So we have places, we tell stories from places in England and also Wales, and we hope that the next issue, we build on that continuously.

And also just really important that these stories are captured, as Pooja said, and really champion the public sector and the great work that you all do in local authorities that sometimes is not told fully in other sort of press coverage on the built environments.

I think the case studies, the conversations, the expert insights on this issue, really showcase strategies for delivering and fostering healthier, more inclusive built environments.

The magazine is structured around three themes: public housing, public places and public processes. And we wanted to highlight those three particular themes, because we believe that those are the essential things that we deliver a really interesting and healthy better everyday for everyone.

And it was also really important that those stories really highlighted and celebrated the local authorities who work to deliver these projects, places and processes.

As an architectural practice, YAA Projects is really interested in doing things differently. Having worked in architecture, traditionally, I set up a practice that wanted to do not just making buildings and telling the stories and processes of delivering buildings. So, the practice is interested in making architecture, speaking about architecture, and writing about architecture. So to do this has been a real privilege, to exercise some of those commitments that I set up in my practice.

And we really hope that you find common ground in this issue of the magazine, and that you feel that the experiences in local authorities and all the work they do are you championed and celebrated in this issue.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Pooja Agrawal (PA):

We're going to start off with the first panel discussion, talking about housing and homes, which is one of the three pillars in our magazine. I'm going to briefly introduce our two panellists;

We've got Elaine Ambrose from L&Q, who are one of our partners for Public Practice. And Elaine has over 25 years of experience, both in the private and social housing sectors. She has extensive knowledge in multiple areas of the industry, from housing management to development and sales, and also her experience spans regeneration, business development, estate management, and she's demonstrated innovation leadership and a commitment to high-quality housing and a positive community impact. So it's really great to have you here to talk about housing.

We also have Kieren Majhail from Karakusevic Carson Architects and Kieren is an Associate Director there. She leads and manages projects for the public sector, both in the UK and internationally as well. She has lots of experience and knowledge in housing design, but also residential-led Master Planning for government and regional authorities. Kieren is a Design Council expert and a member of the RIBA Journal Editorial Panel, and was recognized as the RIBA "Rising Star" in 2018 and received the RIBA Black, Asian Minority Ethnic award in 2019. So thank you both so much for being here.

So this conversation is going to explore some of the key themes that were raised in the housing section of the magazine, it highlights an exemplary project, but also there's a couple of different case studies that you will look at and read later, but it's sort of almost pinned on this idea of the kind of one point five million homes that we are consistently hearing from this government consistently hearing the one point five million homes. And yeah, lots of conversations happening with them behind the doors about what that means in practice. But this also sees local authorities in some places having to deliver a five-fold increase in their housing.

So I'm going to actually start with Kieran first. So Karakusevic Carson Architects, also known as KCA, they work extensively with local authorities, and actually increasingly, based on their work in London and the UK, are working internationally because they've seen a sort of best practice about how to work within the systems and deliver good housing. So in this magazine, there's a case study on Somer's Orchard with Portsmouth City Council, and it'd be really great to hear what your key

learnings were from delivering this project, and what you think this government could learn from your experience delivering it in difficult circumstances.

Kieren Majhail (KM):

Yeah, definitely. Well, thank you for choosing the project that we've put forward, because it's not often you get second-tier cities, like focused on in this way. So it's really good. And obviously doing amazing work everywhere. So that's brilliant.

But in terms of Somer's Orchard, there's a lot of detail in the actual magazine, so I'm not going to go into a huge amount of detail on what it is, but it's basically a council estate regeneration project on the edge of the centre, sorry, the city centre of Portsmouth, about three and a half hectares. And we worked with the council right from the beginning, like the early business case stage, to develop this project, which now is slowly taking little steps forward to delivery.

So, we tend to work on large scale projects, and so there's quite a few people here that know KCA, or I've worked at KCA, so you know all of this, but projects tend to be very slow and large scale, and we do a lot of community engagement, so you can't rush those things, so it takes time to do, to do those projects. And having, you know, very complex sites, you know, with residents in situ, and kind of working around all these kind of complex, kind of difficult areas, takes time. And I would say one of the, one of the things I hope to see in the future, which might make things like Somer's Orchard more kind of to speed up and to be delivered faster is that funding is more aligned to those types of timelines.

So like there's a lot of reliance on public housing to be funded by the likes of GLA or Homes England in this case, but the kind of periods of those funding timelines are very short. So it's like five years for this program. So the Somer's Orchard project - there's huge ambitions there, but it's taken slow pace because of not being able to access that funding, or not having the kind of confidence or commitment from a funding pot, because you have to build it within a certain period. So there's a lot of hope that in the next kind of round of funding, they'll be able to access it and actually deliver some of this project.

But I would like to see the timelines for those funding pots be extended, so instead of, like a five-year period to see them kind of be more like a ten-year period. So actually, these large projects that are going to have deliver a huge amount of housing have actual like impact on the one point five million homes, have the funding that confidence, the Council has the confidence then to actually commit to

the project and get tenders out and start building those projects, because that's what's really slowed down the project, is viability.

Some of the kind of successful bits of the project is having an amazing client, Portsmouth City Council has been amazing. It's great to work in places where they're kind of just starting off in terms of that kind of regeneration aspiration started setting up teams, new regeneration teams. This was one of the biggest projects in Portsmouth. It was a very strategic site, and it was one of their first major projects that they were leading themselves. So it was very important, and it meant they could kind of rewrite rules or look at things in a different way.

They wanted to find an architect to lead the process and to have a huge amount of community engagement experience, which is where we came in. So we helped the council, because they were so open-minded, we challenged things and pushed things away from the typical norm approach, we helped support them set up their own in-house kind of engagement team. Originally, it was one Comms guy who's amazing, a brilliant person, and they've slowly developed their kind of their own team now, and replicated what we've helped them do on other projects, which is amazing.

But I think the biggest thing is, working with the public sector, working with Portsmouth City Council, they have the right motives. So they've got that kind of long-term commitment, and long-term vision of a place, and really wanting to improve the experience of the residents, also the wider community. So, you know, that's obviously great. If you've got a great client and you've got a really good design team, it's just like a really good mix for potential success.

The other one was kind of links to that. So like intelligent thinking, having a good set of designers, good kind of architects, ideally leading this process. So the slightly different thing about the project we did in Portsmouth City Council was we, as the architects, were not just design leads, we were also project managers, which is quite nice. And as I said, we did a lot of work right from the beginning at the business case stage, helping support the council and very much involved in the viability aspect. So you know, we were looking to design "better homes", as you call them, really good, high-quality public realm, it's very much community landscape-led project, and we could drive that with the support of the kind of visionary council client. Whereas a lot of the times, if you're led by, say, a QS or someone with a different background, it tends to get kind of watered down a little bit, but we were able to kind of keep those kind of social environmental themes throughout the project, and ensure that the community were involved in that whole process as well.

So, you know, we were able to, you know, still develop budgets, design to budgets, and also develop homes and a whole new neighbourhood that was providing, maximizing benefits, optimizing design, and really focusing on viability, but not watering down all the really important things. So I think those, those three things, I think are maybe what is slightly different with Portsmouth.

PA:

Yeah, thank you. There's a lot there. And I'll come back to some of those around the complexity in funding and intelligent clienting but Elaine, I'll come to you.

Everyone's always complaining about the planning system at the moment, I feel like that's what I hear about, trying to make a difference here, but I it would be interesting to hear, from your point of view of the Housing Association, how you sort of work with local authorities and sort of interview and your experience of the planning system.

Elaine Ambrose (EA):

Yeah, no problem. I feel like I need to start with two apologies. One, I'm not planner sorry, because I know there's a lot of planners in the in the room, and two, having spoken to a number of you over lunch, I'm so used to being insular, like everything evolves around London, I appreciate that every number of you that are here aren't London based. So I'm giving my view from a London-based perspective, I'm afraid.

I think the fundamental point about all the challenges that we're facing at the moment is it's all about communication and maintaining really positive relationships with our local authorities. Stakeholder engagement isn't just about residents. It's not just about speaking to the Port if London Authority or Historic England. It's very much about keeping up a really good relationship with the local authority.

L&Q, working with the G15, we're really supportive of the planning changes that are coming in, but they're not quite enough. So we've got to try and do what we can that is within our power, to try and get the best out of it that we can.

Fundamentally, I think one of the biggest challenges is the number of people that are there in the local planning Authority to get through the backlog of all the planning applications that are sitting with everyone. That is a huge challenge for everyone. So it's very much about trying to make sure that we're keeping up a good relationship with the local authority while we do it. We're making sure we're actively responding

to the local plans that are coming out, and all the consultations with those so that we can try and influence as much as we possibly can to get the best out of those.

We also do a lot of reviewing with both existing consents that have been given and applications that have gone through the system to see what's worked before, what could work again. Or let's not even bother trying that here, because we know it's not going to work, and acknowledging that we do actually have to review our own consents that we've received before.

All of you will know, with the building safety regulation, some of us are literally having to rip up our planning applications and having to go back to the drawing board for second staircases or cladding or whatever it is, we've got applications in that aren't really worth the paper there isn't on anymore, so it's very much work with local authorities to see how much of it is going back to the drawing board and how much of it can be done through tweaks and through lesser consent requests.

PA:

And I feel like both of you have touched on the I guess, in our world, we are all working with complex stakeholders, and it'll be interesting to hear from both of your perspectives about your approach to community engagement.

EA:

Yeah, no problem. So, communities are the heart of what we do. Everything is about making sure that our communities are well-serviced, and that we're producing homes that people want to live in. We're doing quite a bit of work at the moment with local authorities to say, is there anything we can do so that we're not working in silos? And actually looking at the larger community, I was having this conversation at lunch about the fact that, couple of years ago, I was working on a regeneration site on the Isle of Dogs, which was beautiful, very biased, but it was a beautiful site, and we did it with a high satisfaction rate, because it was done with residents in situ, and they were involved in every single decision that was made, from instructing the contractor to how the site was going to look, how The final scheme was going to look public art. We had estate sign working groups. Everything looked absolutely wonderful, and it's something that I'm still very proud of. You turned 180 degrees from the front of our sites, and there was a site that was next door to it that looked hideous. And I'm not saying that to be horrible. I'm just saying that we were so busy focused on improving our sites that we didn't, that there was a another housing association that had a site literally next door that then it just showed that up to be very tired and in deep need of regeneration.

Now, in hindsight, and there's a lesson learned from that is very much about we should have done more place-making, in that sense, and done some more, joined-up thinking, working with the local authority, any other housing association that operates in the area, and look at a scheme to actually go it's not just our plot of land. How can we make this entire area better? And actually, if we'd have taken on this other estate as well, I think it could have been such a beautiful area without any compromise to anyone, but actually, but would just then benefit not just our residents, but their residents, and actually just the wider community.

So we were on the river Wall at the Isle of Dogs, which is used as a huge walking route for a number of people. If you're in Canary Wharf, you go for a walk around there. So it could have just made it just heightened and 10 times better. So now we're very much we've got, we have regular meetings with our local authorities about, how can we help them? How can they help us? And it is very much about, I know you're having this conversation with the Housing Association down the road and them over there, can we just have that open conversation and say we're open to any ideas to how we can make this very much more focused on the resident?

And obviously, it goes back the whole thing, communication. It's not just assuming what we think the residents would want. It's actually having those open conversations, and sometimes quite harsh, conversations that you need, things you don't want. You think you know what the residents want, but they don't.

We've also introduced a resident services board where we actually put our residents at the heart of all of our decision-making. So any core decisions we make as an organization, right from when we're designing a brand new scheme right through to we want to change our main maintenance contractor, like further on down the line, it's very much about saying, "what do the residents want this?", because they make up the community, and we want it to be something proud to live on. We don't want it to go that you say, Oh yeah, I live in an L&Q property. You want it to be, Oh, my God, you got L&Q you're well lucky.

KM:

Yeah, that's really promising to hear, actually about, particularly around the kind of idea of looking beyond the red line, yeah, because so many people are focused on the red line and what they can do, but actually expanding thought and just even collaborating with, you know, your with your neighbours, basically what they're doing, or the local authority is just benefits everyone doesn't know, yeah, or benefit you, or benefit the wider community.

I think working with councils, you have the opportunity to always think beyond just the residents, but also, what can you do for the wider community? And Somer's Orchard is a good example of that, because we had a red line, but we just kept expanding it. And that was all done through talking to the local community and asking them, where are the problems? You know, wait at the beginning we worked with the community to kind of set the brief and the priorities with the council. Yeah, where are the problem areas? We are wanting to do more, not just to create this new community, but to support the community already there as well. So I think it's promising to hear housing associations also kind of stepping up to that as well in doing that.

PA:

But on this point, I think it's really interesting to hear, I guess the ultimate view is the role of the local authority as a convener and a connector. I know a lot of people in this room would be making those connections and relationships, but we are also in that place, as you mentioned earlier, where there's so much pressure and firefighting going on with the backlogs that there's almost less ability for councils to be able to do some more of that proactive forward-thinking, like, let's, you know, connect these dots because of the huge amount of pressures. But, yeah, it'd be really nice to hear that a little bit more kind of, like practical and examples through the Somer's Orchard, how you, how you engage with different people, yeah.

KM:

Yeah. So Somer's Orchard is a really good project, because Portsmouth City Council, even before we started, really committed in trying to get as many people's voices, they really wanted to do the right thing. So they had done a load of engagement before we even started, and then they brought us on board because of our experience.

And then, as I said, the team was one person then, and they slowly expanded that, and this project will also use this one of the pilot projects, the National Design, Design Code pilot projects. And the title of it was something around, kind of how you do a state regen, kind of a guide to a state regen. And it was all about how you kind of manage that process, but really embed community engagement through the whole process. So I think one of the main things is kind of that early, kind of grassroots engagement.

So the work they had already done was good, and historically, there's always been this kind of like distrust between that community and the council. There'd been previous proposals, not just in that particular location, but in other areas in the city

centre that never, never, kind of the way it was, never delivered, the kind of proposal fell away and so there was this kind of resistance.

So part of our role, and kind of what we tried to do, is try to mend those kind of those issues. And that the main thing is, if you start early on, and people actually really have an opportunity to influence things. So whether it's the kind of original priorities in the brief they you know, they start to understand the difficulties as well.

So having a client that's committed to that is for the first step as well, and then having a team. So we do it all in-house, so we have a huge amount of experience in community engagement, and we do a lot of that, so we've done it before, and they really wanted to learn from what we had done elsewhere, and kind of apply it and then also use it on other projects. So that's amazing. And then taking a multi-layered approach is really important. Like you said, it's not just kind of the residents themselves, it's wider stakeholders, it's people within the Council of the neighbouring kind of sites like, you kind of need to do all of it, because if you just do one bit, you're just listening to a particular voice, and it's, you know, it's always going to be skewed to a certain way.

So, like on Somer's Orchard, we did kind of huge events where the council basically felt like 1000s of people attending these events and close up roads. Like we did kind of pilot play streets, and we got youth groups and schools and local businesses and all the kind of like Active Travel and the kind of Wildlife Trust and all these people were, like involved in this like space, like we need to like a huge party, but then at the same time, it gave us the opportunity to kind of show people, if you close this bit of road, which people didn't want to do, you have this huge benefit of being able to kind of use this space, you know, we had the chance to talk to so many people because they were there for the kind of face painting, or whatever it is, and, you know, all the kind of cultural dance shows and whatever. Then we got chance to speak to so many people and show them kind of right from the beginning of the project, where it was kind of like just developing the early, kind of overall strategy for the the area.

And then on top of that, we did kind of more specific focus workshops, so with harder to reach groups. So, like, youth groups, there were two different age youth groups, and we work with them and did workshops with them. We also worked with a disability group, and that was so, like insightful, because basically, we had a model at one point, so we had a couple of workshops with them over the kind of few years, and there were people that are blind or autistic, neurodiverse, people that were in wheelchairs, and there was one lady, we had a model, and she's never been able to

engage in anything like this, and she was feeling the model, and she really got a good idea of what was happening, and she gave us her experiences. And we really got, like, a huge insight from that.

And again, with the youth group, you know, there's a lot of perceptions around like youth and their views, but actually, there was really interesting nuggets of information that we got from that, and a lot of them were worried about safety and things like that. So, you know, it helped us to kind of build in a lot more kind of specific things to the site.

And then we also set up, or helped the council set up a residence and community panel. So it had people that used to live in the old towers. It had people that lived in the maisonettes. It had kind of schools, local businesses and like counselors and things involved in that. So again, it's trying to get as many different voices. And we met with them monthly, and that was really helpful, because they had a real kind of huge influence on the project, to the extent that they also helped set up a community, a meanwhile, community garden, as well as a kind of pilot project for the kind of the main project when that gets delivered.

So I think, like they've never been involved in something like this, so part of it was upskilling them and helping them to understand how to go, you know, how to actually understand the drawings and plans, but also giving them the chance to really kind of be involved in, kind of like, what things they like, what they would like, to see, the priorities, and then eventually, like, do materials and understanding, kind of like, you know, the whole process.

And then the other thing I think you touched about the kind of like difficult conversations. You know, we don't shy away from those with the process that we take is always kind of an open, honest process, so it means having those difficult conversations, and it's always around parking, or density or height. But you know, the sooner you talk about those this, the more time you have to get people to go on that journey to understand, like, the trade-offs and the benefits and the wider benefits that you can achieve through, for example, in Somer's Orchard, having a taller building and being able to open up a space for a public garden. So when we first started on the project, everybody wanted two-story homes on this like, very like strategic site, and, you know, two car park spaces. And what we unanimously got approved, with the full support of the community panel, was a 32-story building with a nice public green space, so there was, like, density allowed us to create this open space, which was completely car-free, and then there's a limited kind of parking so it was a local car development. So, we only managed to do that by getting people on

board and then being able to go through the whole process and understand it, and constantly then going back perhaps wider community and specific groups to kind of go through that process. But it takes a long time. It's a long process.

EA:

And actually, you hit the nail on the head. You're talking to so many different groups that have got so many different many different opinions and so many different priorities. And actually it's taking that time to kind of upskill them, to help them to understand the implications of them saying, Well, I want, I want to live in a house with my own driveway of my parking and what have you, and it's like, but that means we can only help so many residents, or whatever. And actually it's having that difficult conversation, but also bringing them on the journey with you. So if you can understand the implication of us making a decision here, what that has as a knock-on effect.

KM:

I think they appreciate the honesty as well don't they, So they start understanding that actually is quite difficult.

PA:

Ultimately, policy experiences are very different in different places. And I think our next panel, we're going to hear from Janet from Citizens House, the main group, which is probably the other way around, where they were bringing the council and kind of different people along the journey, what is possible? So I think is sometimes almost a problem with the kind of us and them that we end up, sort of ending up with. So looking forward to hearing a bit more about that in the next panel discussion.

I wanted to touch on a little bit more on, I suppose, this kind of one point five million homes target. All of that, I suppose, is new homes. So that's where the focus is at the moment. So how do you, as a Housing Association that has so many homes in their portfolios as well, manage that balance of thinking about sustainability and retrofitting, and you know, working with the existing stock along with this idea of, okay, what comes next?

EA:

So obviously, since the whole issue with Awaab Ishak and Awaab's law, none of us want to be that Housing Association or that RP that is the organization where an issue like that happens in one of their homes. So actually, from a development

perspective, a lot of our funding, our internal financial capacity, has been redirected from our development and sales teams into our existing stock.

We currently have one of the largest major works investment programs in the industry at the moment of committing to spend three billion pounds over the next 15 years and improving our existing stock.

There is a lot of emphasis on making sure that we haven't issues with damp and mould we have got people with decent kitchens, decent bathrooms, fire safety, repairs, things like that. So that is a number one priority at the moment.

But we do still balance that as well.

So whilst we haven't got the capacity, financial capacity, at the moment, to go out and buy a nice, shiny new site that we can build on, at the same time, we can use that time to be looking at regeneration sites, to be looking more long term, because obviously you don't identify a regen site, and you're on-site within two years. That's much longer term. But at the same time, there's a lot of work going on at the moment to work out which is best, whether it's retrofit or whether it's regeneration for each of our sites.

So we can go into a into a scheme, into an estate and look at it and go, do you know they're not doing too bad. They just need some new windows. And you can kind of go, let's just do that.

There are other sites like, oh my god, they need a lot, and that means that we would potentially need to move those residents out. There's obviously costs incurred with that. So it's the cost of doing the repairs, the cost of moving out, the compensation we have paid to the resident for the disturbance that happens during that period. And so for that, we have to kind of go, let's be sensible about this as to which is... and also, residents are going, what is it? You can't make a silk purse out of a sows ear or something like that. So they're going, it doesn't matter how many like you can put your windows in, you can put in you can put your kitchen in, but we constantly have problems with the drains backing up because the sewage system that runs underneath this scheme is not fit for purpose anymore.

If we don't have to demolish and rebuild, we won't. If there's still a lot of life left in our properties, we won't. But we have to just make that judgment call and weigh up the impact on our residents compared with how we can legitimately maintain our homes as an asset going forward.

PA:

And I think in our magazine, The Goldsmith Street is from in the city here, is one of the sort of deep dives we're looking at Passivhaus, which I know you have experienced up as well, and there's definitely in this country, it's, you know, it's still quite exemplar when we're doing Passivhaus. And I think, it'd be nice to hear a kind of twofold thing. One is around justifying the extra upfront cost, which is, you know, these sort of discussing this piece, but also how, as a culture, we understand how to manage Passivhaus and get that being more of a norm than rather discipline / exemplar?

KM:

but first of all, I agree with Elaine on all those other points, because it is, it's very tricky and complex, and you do need to look at it on a case-by-case basis and see what. So in terms of Passivhaus so Somers Orchard project is a Passivhaus project, and it's a Constant battle to try to keep that into the project, because it's the easiest thing in people's minds. It's the easiest thing to pull out or take out, and you save millions of pounds. And a lot of there's not a huge amount of experience in terms of, like, there's not many contractors, apart from me, the tier one contractors that have the experience or the supply chain to deliver it so they will instantly increase their cost massively.

So obviously, councils are struggling at the moment, it's tricky, but you've got to think about why you're doing it in the first place. And this is the thing that we've reminded kind of the council a number of times. And luckily, we had some really good people in the council that have already been doing Passivhaus retrofit projects, so they already saw the benefits from the kind of the data that they've been collecting. So it was not so much of a battle for us in Somers orchard, initially, to suggest that it would be Passivhaus, but it is in many other projects, and it is difficult when you don't know much about Passivhaus.

But I think the key thing as designers or architects is to try to I think, well, actually, you struggle a lot when you're taking a project that wasn't designed to passive house and then having to try to make it passive house. And that's where the massive costs come because you're having to do it backwards. But what we did with some orchard is look at it right from the beginning, so embedding Passive House principles into the project. So looking at the orientation, looking at form factor, making sure that you're doing the basic things like looking at windows and overheating and how you can mitigate some of that, just through the window sizes and the shading of the windows, so not heavily reliant on the very expensive MEP.

So I think if you, you then start chipping and reducing that cost of Passivhaus And we have to do a lot of work on cost, understanding the cost of Passivhaus, and a lot of that if you embed into the fabric, embed, you know, improve the performance of the building. That way, it's not that much difference. It's only like 3% different. So it's not huge. But then actually going through the certification process, that's when the contractors put, you know, another, you know, five to 10% on it and it's because they don't, they don't know the kind of haven't had that experience, and they're worried about the kind of implications of it.

So we're at the point on Somer's Orchard where we we have it as it's, it's Passivhaus and we're looking at trying to now deliver it as a Passivhaus Project. So we'll see how you know whether the contractors are on board and price it correctly, and see what happens with that. But yeah, it's massively important, particularly for councils, because it looks at helping improve the fuel poverty issues. So it's that longer term, like it's that longer-term thing, and if you're holding that scope for long term. And it makes sense if you're passing those benefits onto residents. It makes a huge amount of sense, but it does cost more initially, but if you look at it in the long whole lot.

PA:

Absolutely, that's one of the reasons we really wanted to look at Goldsmith Street was to try and learn more about their kind of procurement and financial justification that was made, but obviously this has improved where we are now in terms of inflation and wars and all of that stuff. But hopefully that's useful for other councils and other consult like in our sector, to take that back

KM:

Pooja on the retrofit, that's a really interesting topic, because if we look at it in the context of the 1.5 million homes, yes, it's very tricky to actually be seen as net new homes. So it's not really going to make a huge dent on that target. Obviously, it's an important thing, and it's more of a maybe carbon discussion and kind of, but in reality, a lot of the projects we work on, the public housing projects, you have residents in situ, or you have to decant temporarily and bring them back. And in that way, you're having to spend a lot of work to do something to prolong the lifespan of a building that's already gone past its lifespan. So you might get 30 to 40 extra years out of it and spend a lot of money on it, but it's not going to be classed as net new homes. So exactly, it's not going to have any dent on that time.

PA:

And that's my worry. It's that kind of conversation around sustainability retrofitting is sort of getting a little bit lost at the moment...

KM:

We need to keep remembering as well that like carbon is not the only thing that we should be focusing on, but actually the quality of people's lives, if you're if they're living in substandard housing, is it right to keep that housing, or should we look to create new housing that would last longer and apply to kind of like better quality of life to people?

EA:

So we have something that we're working on at the moment as part of the G 15 called Project 123, which is currently, it was one in 23 children living in London are living in temporary accommodation. Is now actually one in 21 children and combined, London local authority, London, London, sorry, London boroughs combined as spending 100 million pounds a month, a month on temporary accommodation, which is just shocking.

But not only is that crippling, every local authority that's then trying to pay for planners or for them to be able to build new homes or whatever, at the same time, you've also got children that are living in a travel Lodge, one bedroom where they're doing their GCSEs, trying to revise or to do their homework while their little brother or sister is literally playing over there, making a noise and distracting them or what have you. They're not getting access to having proper cooking facilities because they're not in suitable accommodation. So it is having that knock-on effect. So for us, as much as obviously, we don't want to disturb our residents a huge amount, we've also got to look at that regeneration. Now, if we have got sites that do have car parks, and they are in central London, that we can we've got great P Tail ratings that mean we don't need those giant car parks. We do need to look at those and say, Can we please densify those and optimize those sites? Because it's then helping...

KM:

That strategic infill is, I think, potentially, the way you can support the housing target and all the other kind of issues, though, like maybe a bit of refurb, maybe small amount of damage in order to enable maybe a higher density inflow project is probably the more intelligent way of looking at it

PA:

Yeah, absolutely, yeah. So I think, yeah, really interesting. I feel like we've touched on a lot of topics and longer-term funding needs. I think that's a really difficult

challenge with sort of the political cycles we have in this country around really working in a collaborative way, but also this tension between you and existing. So I'm going to put you both on the spot and say you have a lift journey with the Housing Minister Pennycook what is the one thing you would say to Matthew?

KM:

Don't be obsessed with housing targets, but think more about creating really good quality housing and intelligent, like looking at it intelligently and looking at both short-term and long term strategies, like New Towns the long term strategies might help in the short-term issues, but maybe focusing on areas that already have infrastructure in place and investing in funding to those places that are best foot-in, units like we're working in Basildon at the moment, those places that have everything there and the ingredients and they could potentially deliver huge amounts of powder in a shorter in a shorter period, you just need the funding to do that.

EA:

I was gonna say, did you bring your chequebook?

It sounds really awful, but that is the crux of it. And actually, we're in a really lucky position at the moment that most of London councils are Labour at the same time as the GLA is and the national government. So, it makes a huge difference. Because know what you're pushing on an open door from all those different tiers.

But it is, you were talking earlier about the five-year cycle. And you, what happens is, if we go to say, 10 years, what's going to happen is it's like, oh, we've got a grand brand new funding cycle, and then you'll get that, we've got some money to give out. And then they're like, oh, no, gotta hold on to that, because I don't we've got to make that last. And then you get to the end of the funding cycle, and then what happens is, they're like, Oh, we got it, which is great. So if you come in at the beginning or the end of that funding cycle, so if you make it longer, that's a much more drier spell in the middle. So that just worries me, but, yeah, I think it is a case of we need to and especially with regeneration, it's that whole thing about additionality is the only way you get any kind of grant funding attached to it. So it's just very much about whether you give it to us, give it to the planning authorities so they can afford to buy or train more planners or just get more apprentices into the built environment, everything.

KM:

Equalizing funding as well. Like at the moment, it's very much skewed to private sector, giving it more to public sector. So, like, very good councils, very good

housing associations, people that have, like, that kind of, kind of a longer-term investment into places, in the people...

EA:

And we know how to make the money go around a bit further as well, compared to the private sector.

PA:

The lift has reached its floor. Thank you both so much.