

## LABOUR AMENDMENT:

### GOLDEN MOTION (GREEN PARTY): MAXIMISING THE SUPPLY OF HOUSING FROM EXISTING BUILDINGS AND COUNCIL LAND

#### Full Council notes that:

1. UK Government data released in March 2023 identified 1.2m families on housing waiting lists across England [1] Meanwhile the costs of providing temporary accommodation have increased by 62% in the last five years to £1.7bn. [2]

2. UK Government data released in October 2022 shows that over one million homes were classed as unoccupied in England, with over 300,000 of those reported as being long-term empty - vacant for six months or longer. [3]

3. Savills have identified that there is an oversupply of retail space nationally of approximately 150 million square feet. With the average UK flat being 625 square feet, this is enough floor space to provide up to 240,000 average size flats (including 96,000 in long term empty retail space). They forecast that the level of excess retail space will double by 2030 as the retail economy continues to evolve. While some vacant space may be valuable to diversify local centres and high streets with new uses, much could offer housing opportunities.

4. It is common for commercial letting agents to inflate quoted prices of empty properties beyond the rateable value, and/or gatekeep interested businesses from making offers, resulting in properties being empty for longer periods. This also results in areas not having the retail offering required to support sustainable communities.

5. In Bristol there are around 21,000 ~~households~~~~families are~~ on the housing waitlist and the cost of providing temporary accommodation remains a significant budget pressure. Shelter have recently estimated that on any given night in Bristol in 2023 there are approximately 3,224 people in some form of homelessness, the overwhelming majority of whom are in temporary accommodation. This is an increase of 639 compared to 2022. [4]

6. In Bristol, between 2022/23, ~~approximately 300 - 350~~~~most 400~~ council homes were empty at any one time, with over 800 brought back into use during this period. ~~whilst s~~

7. Some 400 private sector homes were brought back into occupation over the same period by the Council's Empty Homes Unit. [5] Live table 615 on vacant Local Authority dwelling stock- maintained by central government - show that on 3rd October 2023, 5,251 mostly privately owned dwellings in Bristol were shown as vacant, of which 1,881 were classified as long term vacant. [6]

8. There are currently 2,556 properties in use as AirBnB's in the city. Of these, 1,722 are wholly rented out. Both Scotland and Northern Ireland have brought in registration schemes to manage the number of AirBnB's and other short term / holiday lets, whilst England is yet to do so. [7]

9. There are significant challenges brought about through 'second homes'.

107. In Bristol, Savills have identified some 185,000 square feet of long-term retail voids (over half of which have been vacant for over three years) – equivalent to almost 300 average size flats. Cost pressures to retrofit existing retail space, coupled with increasing use of online retail, may well see additional floorspace become available for residential use. At present over 90% of Bristol City Centre retail stock is EPC rating C or worse – with cost estimates of up to £220m to reach EPC rating A as retail. As a result, many of these retail spaces may no longer be viable. Similarly, there is a general over supply of office space.

118. In Bristol in 2021 there were around 13,500 homes with planning permission – with around 3,000 under construction and some still due to begin construction or subject to s.106. This still leaves thousands of homes that are failing to be delivered, in many cases due to viability issues. [87]

129. Bristol City Council owns or controls considerable assets including buildings, land and property amounting to over one million square metres of floorspace and over 3,600 hectares of land. Many of these assets in areas defined as ‘areas of growth and regeneration’. Within this portfolio, that is essentially held in stewardship by Bristol City Council on behalf of the citizens of Bristol, brownfield sites that could be redeveloped should be subject to the highest levels of social value and social housing delivery. These assets are currently overseen through the Estates Strategy Board.

13. The work of Goram Homes, Bristol’s council-owned housing company, in bringing sites forward that that will see higher levels of social housing delivered with a focus on council homes, with a planned pipeline of over 3,000 homes. On One Lockleaze, over 55% of the homes will be council owned social rented homes and shared ownership.

14. The acceleration of council-owned homes being brought forward in the city. Council-owned homes built or acquired in the city maximise the ability of the Council to address housing pressures and improve the quality of life for residents. This includes the financial benefits through working to reduce temporary accommodation pressures as part of this.

15. That since 2016, the Labour administration has overseen the delivery of over 12,500 new homes, including over 2,000 affordable homes. In 2021-22, this saw 2,563 homes built including 474 affordable homes, the most in over a decade in a single year.

160. The work of the Labour administration to drive forward more innovative community-led housing in the city. This has included a project by We Can Make receiving national coverage through effective use of council-owned land to provide homes for people on the housing waiting list. An estimated 278,000 homes nationwide could be delivered via Community Land Trusts, directly involving and empowering local communities in the delivery of housing that meets their needs. 80% of these homes would be additional – they would not be built without Community Land Trusts. [98]

17. The work of the Labour administration to make more effective use of underutilised car parks in the city to provide homes. The award-winning Hope Rise scheme, supporting young people at risk of homelessness is one example of this. The recently opened scheme at Derby Street car park will also provide move on accommodation for those at risk of rough sleeping.

**Full Council believes that:**

1. The recently submitted Local Plan focuses on sites for the delivery of new homes. But, to reduce pressure on communities and valued green space, there is a clear need to identify the potential to bring existing empty homes into use, to convert and reuse existing buildings, and to ensure homes already with planning permission are being delivered.

24. Further powers and resources are needed from central government to develop the

~~approach to addressing empty homes on an increased scale in the private sector. This would have economic benefits with increased numbers of properties brought back into use. It needs to develop its understanding, approach and prioritisation of the wider definitions surrounding empty homes, free from the boundaries that council tax definitions currently provide. Second homes for example, may be a crucial area of focus.~~

~~3. Council assets should be used strategically to ensure communities are provided with the resources and facilities required to create sustainable communities. This includes ensuring there is sufficient infrastructure in place or being developed to support increased populations in parts of the city.~~

~~42. In Bristol, a combination of potential sources of new homes which is not just reliant on new planning permission is required in order to make the most efficient and effective use of the limited land the city has available.~~

~~5. Building new homes will remain the primary driver of addressing the housing crisis. We must remain steadfastly committed to this aim.~~

~~63. There needs to be a clear understanding of how council assets can be best utilised for the benefit of the city and its residents. This includes ensuring that council owned land and buildings are only developed with the highest levels of social value provision, with a commitment to provide social housing at policy compliant levels and above. Where a developer partner is unable to achieve policy compliant levels of affordable housing, alternative options should be pursued, including through consideration of Goram Homes.~~

~~7. The existing council-owned commercial estate delivers significant revenue that is invested to the provision of council services.~~

~~Council assets should be used strategically to ensure communities are provided with the resources and facilities required to create sustainable communities.~~

~~87. Goram Homes is well placed to play a key role in addressing the housing crisis and utilise existing buildings and council land to do so.~~

~~98. That the primary way to address the housing crisis is by building more homes, focusing in on maximising council-owned homes and social housing wherever possible. Council housing should be the priority on council owned land, including from schemes being built by the Council's own housing company, Goram Homes.~~

~~109. Not all assets will be suitable for conversion into housing, with known issues nationally and locally with some office block conversions that have taken place under permitted development rights.~~

~~1194. The existing Empty Homes team has already performed well, being identified as an example of best practice by the Local Government Association. [10]~~

~~1205. Whilst aAdditional enforcement measures will undoubtedly add to the available options for an authority when encouraging empty homeowners to return their properties to use, increasing the vast majority number of empty homes brought back into use will be~~

down to the intervention, engagement and encouragement initiated by an Empty Home, or other relevant, officer. By increasing officer capacity within the team or by increasing headcount, greater exposure of the issue locally will also allow for sustained and targeted work, often required to see some of the most challenging cases successfully resolved.

[131. That more powers are needed to be devolved to address the issues brought by the rise of AirBnB's and Second Homes.](#)

[142. In the importance of continuing to invest in community led housing in the city.](#)

**Full Council Resolves to:**

1) Recognise the work being done to tackle empty properties in the city and request the mayor to consider with officers expanding the remit and responsibilities of the Empty Homes team. This should include looking to other examples of best practice, and benchmarking to councils where numbers of empty homes across all categories are similar.

2) Request the mayor to work with the existing Estates Strategy Board ~~establish a Redundant Buildings Task Force~~ alongside the Empty Homes team to work with Bristol retail and commercial offices providers and relevant organisations to bring forward opportunities to convert unviable retail and/or office floorspace into residential use where no longer suitable for their existing use. Long term empty retail units should be advertised in line with their rateable value to ascertain if they are truly unviable. Officers should explore the potential for retailers to part fund this task force and explore how empty units could be utilised for the benefit of the community, such as through use as a different usage classification as grocery retail, small business or creative use.

3) To lobby central government for additional resources to establish a Redundant Buildings Task Force via the Estates Strategy Board, to maximise opportunities in the city for small businesses and where sites are not commercially viable, pursue options for bring forward for housebuilding.

~~43)~~ Request that the Mayor ~~sets up a dedicated~~ works with the existing planning team to identify stalled sites with planning permission in order to increase the proportion of existing planning permissions being brought forward for delivery. This should include identifying additional sources of grant funding to ensure affordable homes continue to be delivered whilst recognising recent economic pressures in construction. The potential for part funding of this team by the development community should be considered.

~~54)~~ Protect council owned land and assets as public owned assets, ensuring that when council owned land and assets are made available for redevelopment, this is done with a commitment to retaining council ownership wherever possible, and to provide the highest possible levels of social value and social housing delivery.

6) To prioritise the council owned housing company, Goram Homes, in bringing forward homes on council owned land in the city. To agree that the existing proposed pipeline of sites for Goram Homes should continue to come forward with our council owned housing company, going through the appropriate planning process as part of this.

7) To withdraw from partnerships with private developers on council-owned land where those developers are failing to deliver / propose policy compliant levels of affordable housing.

8) Prioritise delivery of council housing in the city on council-owned land, through building homes and acquiring additional homes for the HRA to increase stock and help address the waiting list.

~~95)~~ As and when council owned land and/or property is considered for potential

development or disposal, those overseeing the process should consider if there is the potential to increase further the proportion of housing delivered via community led housing schemes – by involving communities in the provision of housing co-designed and/or co-delivered by the community including the potential transfer of long-term leaseholds on suitable council land to local communities.

10) Subject to the appropriate powers being devolved, back further measures to address the issues of second homes and short-term lets in the city, including through registration and/or licensing schemes.

11) Explore bringing forward more car parks for the provision of homes to help address the housing crisis the city faces, building on the examples of Hope Rise and Derby Street.

#### Notes

1. [https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.publishing.service.gov.uk%2Fmedia%2F6571b86933b7f20012b72038%2FLocal\\_Authority\\_Housing\\_Statistics\\_2022\\_23\\_SectionsACEFGHI\\_J.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.publishing.service.gov.uk%2Fmedia%2F6571b86933b7f20012b72038%2FLocal_Authority_Housing_Statistics_2022_23_SectionsACEFGHI_J.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)
2. <https://www.housingfestival.org.uk/blog/ta-anger-to-hope>
3. <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/practical-approach-councils-dealing-empty-homes>
4. [https://assets.ctfassets.net/6sxvmndnnp0s/18pRJpckz76jqH6Eruryj0/895745f92d5007dbeb177e92bc9cdc1f/Publishing\\_version\\_of\\_2023\\_Homelessness\\_in\\_England\\_report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/6sxvmndnnp0s/18pRJpckz76jqH6Eruryj0/895745f92d5007dbeb177e92bc9cdc1f/Publishing_version_of_2023_Homelessness_in_England_report_FINAL.pdf)
5. <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/1840-bristol-key-facts-2022/file>
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>
7. <http://insideairbnb.com/bristol>

87. <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/3235-bristol-housing-delivery-test-action-plan-2022/file>
98. <https://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/State-of-the-Sector-2023-PRESS-1.pdf>
10. <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/practical-approach-councils-dealing-empty-homes>

**Motion submitted by: Cllr Tony Dyer**  
**Date of submission: 20th December 2023**



