

Sheffield Housing Estates

Presenter 1: Good morning, Wednesday morning and you're watching Breakfast on the BBC. When soldiers came back from the First World War they were promised homes fit for heroes. So one hundred years ago this month a nationwide network of council houses was announced.

Presenter2: And today we're looking at the impact that the revolutionary social housing scheme has had. Our reporter Dan Johnson is in Sheffield for us. Very good morning.

Reporter: Yes good morning. This is the Flower Estate on the edge of Sheffield and it's called that because of the road names here. This is Foxglove Road, there's Primrose Avenue and Clover Gardens, roads like that. Lovely and peaceful, quiet and sunny here this morning. Some of these houses are more than a hundred years old. These were built in 1907. That's because this was a kind of test bed for different council house designs. Sheffield was one of the councils that was pioneering council houses even before the 1919 Housing Act. But that Act really set the trend for council housing, social housing taking off right across the country. These are solid homes with proper facilities that replaced overcrowded Victorian slums.

John: I thought I'd moved into a palace. There was a bathroom .I didn't have to have tin bath in front of t'fire. I could have a bath.

Marion: How the children used to call their neighbours their aunties and uncles. It was easy to get to parks. So it was very nice, we loved it.

Voice-over: Sheffield is a typical front line city.

Presenter: Homes fit for heroes was the slogan when social housing originally sheltered those returning from the First World War.

Voice-over: The terraces of back to back houses are being cleared away to create a completely new landscape.

Presenter: Vast new neighbourhoods were laid out. Sheffield's Flower Estate, green and leafy, was an early experiment in council house design. Largely free of the antisocial behaviour that's dogged some other areas.

Lesley: It's lovely, I wouldn't live anywhere else. I even joke that if I'd win the lottery, I'd just build an extension.

Presenter: And lifelong residents still value its safety net.

Lesley: A lot of people do, you know, consider council houses a good house, a good home to have. Compared to some of the private landlords. You know, they can't afford to buy a house.

Presenter: So there's still a need for them?

Lesley: Definitely.

Presenter: So who are these estates supposed to be for? Who deserves to live in these homes? Should this be a mixed community, made up of people from a variety of backgrounds, or should council houses be reserved just for the most needy, the most vulnerable, people who can't afford anything else? This is the dilemma that's driven social housing policy in different directions.

Presenter: Tenants entitlement to buy their home, helped build up long waiting lists for what remains. Councils have struggled to build more, leaving over a million people dreaming of the sort of stable home Marion and John have enjoyed for 53 years, and counting.

This is the family resource centre on the estate here on the edge of Sheffield. Here let me take you inside. We've heard from the housing minister who's pointed out that the government is investing in affordable homes. But we know they've struggled to replace the council houses that've been sold off. Well, here this morning we've got Leslie, Marion and John with us again.

Lesley, do you think there's a housing crisis? There are huge waiting lists, aren't there, more than a million people across England waiting for a council house. Why do you think that is?

Lesley: Because everybody wants a decent home. You know and it's the responsibility of councils to provide decent homes, I strongly believe that. And being part of a housing estate, yes I have bought mine, but I think I enhance the area and it's good to have a mix of owner occupiers, and those that are renting, to build a community. Everybody wants, you know, somewhere to come when they need a helping hand.

Presenter: Guys, you've lived here for more than 50 years, why did you stay so long?

John: Because we like the estate. It's welcoming, it's nice community, nice environment. And it's, you know, I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

Presenter: Many people would say there is a housing crisis because there are so many people waiting that more homes need to be built. The government says it is investing millions in affordable homes. Okay, 3 people for us to talk to this morning, here on the Flower Estate. Steve Bush grew up not far away on the next estate. Melanie Rees is from the Chartered Institute of Housing. And Kate Faulkner is a property expert who's studied this stuff. Talk to us a bit about the waiting list Melanie, 'cause there are lots of people who want a council house and can't get one at the moment.

Melanie Rees: Absolutely.

Presenter: More than a million names, I think, across England.

Melanie Rees: That's right.

Presenter: How did we get to that?

Melanie Rees: A combination of factors I think. Not building enough of the most affordable homes, selling off those that we have: One point nine million since the right to buy came in. We need to bear in mind that one point one million figure is probably underreported as well, because many people aren't allowed on housing waiting lists. And that's why we're calling on government to really invest in the most affordable homes. We need about ninety thousand of those, a year, to be built. And we're calling on government in the comprehensive spending review to put some serious funding into that.

Presenter: The government says the funding has increased in recent years and they are building more homes across the country. Do you see signs of that. Have things improved?

Melanie Rees: Slightly. But we need to do more. In the last year of figures just about six thousand homes were at the lowest social rents which is miniscule when you think about the actual need. And affordable housing including council housing just gets twenty-one percent of the government's fifty-one billion budget. So we need a fairer slice of the cake.

Presenter: And council houses have been sold off and still are, Kate. How much of an issue is that?

Kate Faulkner: Well I think it's a big issue, wouldn't be a problem if they did with the money what they're supposed to do, which is build more council houses, of what people need in the areas, but that hasn't happened.

Presenter: Why not?

Kate Faulkner: So, I ..to be honest, I don't understand, why the policy has failed as badly as it has, and then why it was continued with such failed policy. And I think one of the issues is, we still see investment in housing as a bad thing. And building more homes isn't quite the celebration it should be, so from a council house perspective, I see that as a massive investment, that we will get our money back several times over. Not at cost. Because as soon as you can put a decent roof over somebody's head, you reduce all of the costs of them potentially being ill, so reduce medical costs, the NHS bill goes down. As well as when you are building those homes, it adds tremendous amounts into our economy and we have a growing population so we have to build at all levels. What we been quite doing is building at levels that people can afford, who've got the money. But we've been really rubbish, our heroes are nurses, teachers, policemen. And we really, really need to be building for them today.

Presenter: Okay thank you very much, all. Good to talk to you, we've got to leave it there, 'cause we're out of time. It's been an interesting morning here on the Flower Estate. Good to hear people's experience of growing up on council estates, and people hopeful that there'll be another hundred years of social housing provision to look forward to.