

Tackling Squalor: The pivotal role of social housing

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This comes from the [CLASS web site and refers to a new paper](#) by Duncan Bowie on social housing that I recommend. It's part of their series on Beveridge. I am on CLASS' advisory panel. In a couple of weeks they'll be publishing a paper I have co-written with Howard Reed in this series on tax reform.

Duncan Bowie's paper was commissioned as part of the [Social State series](#) to address the Giant Evil of 'squalor' and propose new policy priorities for housing in 2015 Britain.

Poor and insufficient homes were for Beveridge a source of squalor. Squalor today is homelessness, families in Bed and Breakfast, overcrowding and homes in public and private sectors below the fitness standard. Poor and insufficient housing produces a range of negative impacts. Providing more and better quality homes which are secure and affordable for those whose lives are subject to external challenges and disruption is one of the central cures for the ills of society.

The purpose of this paper is to review changes in attitudes to, and policy towards, social housing and social housing tenants since the Beveridge Report of 1942. In the last three decades, we have seen social housing being blamed for the concentration of disadvantage and the growth of a dependency culture. This fails to understand that in a numerically declining and increasingly residualised social housing sector, priority is given to households who cannot afford to access market housing and who have acute needs.

This paper argues that the best way to counter the residualisation of social housing and the spatial concentration of social housing tenants is to radically increase the supply of social housing. Social housing is a public asset which can be made available for future generations. Investing in bricks and mortar for long term use is a far more effective use of public resources than supporting unregulated private landlordism through ever increasing amounts of housing benefit.

As a nation we have become obsessed with home ownership. However, the recession

was a clear demonstration that the housing market was not stable and that depending on the market to meet housing demand was not a sustainable option. The private rented sector is in effect deregulated. There are no rent controls, no minimum security of tenure and statutory regulation of minimum standards is limited and largely ineffective. Yet with the home ownership sector shrinking and social housing stock continuing to decline, the private rented sector is booming, with the bottom end of the sector fuelled by housing benefit.

Government intervention is required both to counteract the impact of market failure and to effectively regulate the market to reduce the likelihood of market failure occurring. An aggregate of local initiatives will not deliver the homes we need. Current provision is only a third of what is needed. Government at national, and regional level where it still exists, has a shared responsibility for deciding where homes should go and for funding the infrastructure to support new communities.