

Housing & Ideology

A symposium examining the cultural impact on an obedient city

'Who designs the city for whom?'
[transcript]

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‘Who designs the city for whom?’

Panel Discussion Between Dr. Dáithí Downey, Head of Housing Policy, Research and Development for Dublin City Council and Ali Grehan, Dublin City Architect, chaired by Emmet Kirwan, Actor, Playwright, and Screenwriter.

15:00 24th February 2020, Dublin City Hall

Housing & Ideology Symposium

DD: Dáithí Downey

AG: Ali Grehan

EK: Emmet Kirwan

AK: Andrew Keogh

KG: Kerry Guinan

LC: Leona Cully

00:00.00

DD - Good afternoon everyone, my name is Dáithí Downey, I work with Dublin City Council, do research and strategy and housing policy stuff. Had a former life running other services, some of you may know me from that as well.

Last year the city collaborated with a number of interests, in particular the city of Vienna itself, [??] is the name of their housing agency, to curate an exhibition on their housing system called 'Vienna model housing for the 21st century.' We established four different venues across the city, from the Civic Offices, CHQ in Docklands, the Rediscovery Centre in Ballymun, and the Barracks in lands at Emmett Road formerly known as Saint Michaels. And we brought forward the exhibition which itself was an exhibition of ten dimensions to the city of Vienna's experience in housing. And around that programme we developed a number of different events including seminars, speeches, activities, we had some very successful different interventions in schools, and a number of different participatory engagements. And the whole idea behind this was to reintroduce a broader debate on housing, to widen the discourse, to use the term, away from the metrics of numbers and to challenge the narrative that had reduced questions of housing to matters of numbers only, to try widen a broader narrative towards considerations of places and people. And primarily the drive towards having a housing system that works for people, and that the places in which people live or places where they seek to live, and find living affordable as well as habitable.

Now the Viennese themselves are not [???] in telling you that it takes some time to get to where they are, so unfortunately there's no such thing as magic bullets, but I don't believe in magic when it comes to housing. I do believe in other things when it comes to housing. And it's not something supernatural or mystical. And that's why I think the Vienna model was such an important opportunity for us to reengage in a very material and realistic and detailed examination of the experience of another major city in Europe, which is very real and very successful – but not without its own challenges, every city has challenges of course. So one of the things it managed to do, I think, was to bring back a focus on the very substantive challenges, the nexus of interests that need to be understood in the daily contest of opportunity to make a place a place worth living in, a place that's attractive, a place that's inclusive, and a place that's not just affordable today, but affordable over the life cycle. The Viennese have one key statement they'll always tell you about their housing and it's a solitary point of departure for Dubliners to think about this I'd say. One thing they always said when we met them and they continued to say in their literature is that they are most proud about the fact that you won't tell anything about a Viennese based on where they live or their address. And that's a substantial claim for identity and inclusion, which means all of Vienna is Vienna, not just one part of it or some parts of it. Now, many, many things happened as a result of the Vienna exhibition itself, I think it was one of those happy accidents of timing that the debates started to become more expansive and were well underway actually, about other critiques of the challenges of post-austerity reconstruction and the reactivation of the public housing model within that context. So I'm happy to take any questions in relation to that later but we'll stop there.

00:04:15

EK - We'll come back to it. Just on a basic level, how is the Vienna model of social housing, public housing, how is it different from what we've done here in Dublin beforehand?

DD - Well there's quite a number of facets of the Dublin experience of public housing that's equivalent to Vienna. But the thing that's strikingly different today between Dublin and Vienna is the scale and the scope and the experience of housing in Vienna. So at scale, Dublin is still the largest landlord in the country, with about twenty-six, twenty seven thousand households who live with us and who are our responsibility as tenants etc. The city of Vienna has two hundred thousand.

EK - So do you guys, does Dublin City Council have a plan to increase the amount of public housing, increase the amount of tenants that you take on, or are we going to continue into this private-public partnership kind of situation that we've had over the last twenty years?

DD - The city has always provided public housing and I think the issue is how we continue to do that and in a better way. I don't think it's reducible to one or two periods of planning, I think it's a more fundamental series of issues that face us. We have to understand housing as a fundamental driver of equality. We have to understand housing as a fundamental driver of sustainable development. We have to understand housing as a fundamental role of the identity of place, civic and cultural identity. We can't reduce it to one single plan. So it's a higher end challenge, it's more complex, but we do tend to over complicate it by looking for a rapid resolution. So housing is a marathon, it's not a sprint, it takes time to get it right, it takes time to keep it right, and it takes even more resources to defend once you have that done. By which I mean is, it's that continuity and that determination to make, dare I say it, housing a pretty ordinary and every day thing that people can get on with the rest of their lives, because it's been resolved to a point of general satisfaction of most people. And this is what the Viennese have argued most vociferously about back into Europe, they've pointed out that they're economy is contingent on the moderating impacts of a broadly speaking general needs housing model which still continues to create wealth, which still maintains assets in terms of their values, and still supports the construction industry, the design industry, and allows for a whole series of secondary economic multipliers to accrue so that there aren't as many places left behind, in fact there's very few places left behind, and instead it finances the future proof vision of regeneration or redevelopment or those terms tend to be less than explicable the process of making and remaking a place, so that it moves further and further up the value chain, the process of making a place more greener, less energy heavy, less carbon dependent, the transition to a more inclusive, participatory space. The Viennese are really good at that, you know. And they have commitments to it that would challenge a number of people here. From a very early age in Vienna you are expected to saving for your housing. If you and I were working we'd be paying taxation locally for housing to the city. And you know there's a number of commitments in there that haven't really been properly ironed out or discussed that don't transfer to Dublin. So Dublin 's quite a long way away, in many ways, from the Vienna model and in other ways it's much closer.

00:08:00

EK - Is there a type of tax that we need to put on new sales, for example of houses-?

DD - No this is income tax, this isn't a transaction tax, because you know, transaction taxes are subject to booms and bust, this is income, this is a relationship that is worked out in Vienna that the labour market and the housing market are coterminous, because people want to live close to the place they work and their work needs to be close to the place they live, and indeed is part of the place they live. And people don't want to have incur, nor should they have to incur, extraordinary secondary costs whether it's through childcare, transport, or whatever it may be, in terms of energy consumption and so forth and distance and time, because their housing or their residential space is so far from their work. So that's a kind of a well agreed bipartisan position. Employers pay a taxation to the city, individual employees pay – it's on percent per contribution - but it's a very important contribution, but it's probably even more important in the signal it sends, that it is a housing for all argument at that point that the Vienneses make.

EK - And Ali you talked about that in one of your TED Talks about building houses in between the canals, I suppose is what you'd say, you know or kind of giving groups the ability to – am I misquoting you?

AG – No, no, my only TED talk

EK - Oh your only TED talk. Did I say one...?

AG - Yeah you did [laughter]

EK - But I think you were talking about Dominick Street and it was, you know, giving people... Building social housing and public housing on one side and then maybe getting groups of people together to design and make their own houses or how they would design their own houses for a city, you wouldn't get a disconnected, disenfranchised city.... You know, how far or how close are we to getting things like that, or is that going to happen?

AG - Well just to, I do want to just add to something Dáithí touched on. The affordable... the Vienna housing model exhibition did push along a particular project which we're working on because I suppose, I find myself very much in the engine room, which is fine, because the ship has to keep moving, and so in the engine room we're looking at putting together, we're about to appoint a full design team to design an affordable cost rental project for Emmet Road. And the, before we, before we kind of, because we know we ultimately have to produce homes.

EK – Yeah.

AG - And Dáithí is right, it takes time. It will take, it takes, it's a matter of years not months to produce homes. The, but, and this, I am getting back to your question, because I'm very conscious that we've never done an affordable cost rental model before. So as in build homes that can be rented out to people at a lower price and eventually the rent will pay, all you're looking for the rent to pay over decades is the

cost, and nobody's trying to make a profit out of it, it's just to keep the rent as low as possible. We actually did a design exercise where we employed an urban design expert and a quantity surveyor, so architect, urban designer, and quantity surveyor, to actually draw up a proof of concept. Quite a detailed plan actually, to say well can this work? Because there's no point in us commissioning a full design team to do, go through years work of getting in a planning application, doing tender documents or whatever. So let's see if we can do a proof of concept and let's try through doing that set out some important design principles. Because from my perspective I'm just completely passionate about trying to make sure that what we build is really good. Because it needs to be there for a long time and the people that live there have to have good homes. And it is always a dance, yeah, it's a dance, I mean when you're buying something, mostly the person who's selling it to you is thinking, from their perspective, how do we make as much profit as possible? Fair enough. And so our job is to make sure, is to make sure that we get the best deal for the public. And so, the so, that was to say we need to actually design a set of perimeters, need to test whether we can build these, and that they can be affordable cost rental, and we also need to set out some design principles. And that says things like where the public space should be, how the apartments should be west or east facing, that kind of thing, which can actually get dumbed down. The reason I mention this is, not just to pick up on what Dáithí said, because I think it's always important to kind of show people we're not just talking about stuff, we're actually trying to do it as well, and so we're trying to come up with new ways of doing things, we know there's no magic bullet, we know ultimately it boils down to just building the bloody homes and making sure they're designed well, but we do have to try out new things. Emmet Road is a big one. The project you're talking about up in Dominick Street, that was a project that was conceived in the complete depths of the recession, which was in, just as we were entering into the recession, so it was towards the end of 2009, and it was just an idea about going back to the opportunity to build small. The site on Dominick Street was picked more because it had been historically a Georgian Street and we had flats, we had sites, on both sides of the street. A development was planned for the East side on the street that had, the development deal had collapsed in the crash, but the west side of the street, you know, still accepting that we were going to have to build, we were intent on building public housing on this side of the street. If the opportunity that had been identified before the crash was to build private housing on the Westside and there were no big private developers, there didn't seem to be, what about if we broke the site up into plots, mimicking the Georgian plot and offered the opportunity to self build, for groups of people to come together and design and build their own apartments in the city etc. etc. etc. And it's done elsewhere, this is not original, it is done in Europe, it's done in Germany, it's done in Amsterdam, in Holland, it's done across Europe where people, groups, either single households or groups, small groups of households, come together to design and build their own home.

00:15:27

EK - And was this offered to people as an option?

AG - No. It was-

EK - It was an idea?

It was an idea for Dominick Street. We offered it to people on Fishambles street. This is tragic-

EK – Yeah yeah.

AG - It's really hard-

EK - Oh no I know I know-

AG - It's really hard to do stuff. We offered it to people as a pilot on Fishambles Street, one plot. Unfortunately that group, the group that was going to develop Fishambles Street withdrew. I'm not going to go into why, that's their private, you know, that's their private story. And then that just coincided with the just huge pressure to build social, public housing.

EK - Ok.

AG - So we, we would have re-launched it, we said well let's try find another group, but we just thought no, we need to pull back because we need to concentrate our efforts on public housing. And this was seen as – oh is that...? Because it's amazing how things turn. They just, one minute it's a good idea, you know, offering, because we didn't have any, there was no income limit or whatever, threshold. One minute it's a good idea to invite families to design and build their own apartments in the city centre, the next minute it's a bad idea because you're disposing of a small plot to private-

EK - Yeah.

AG - So it's, there's, I suppose there's so many actual changes in between that black and white, public and private, and I think that's where we need to, that's where the discourse is.

EK - And this is the thing, just even on a, on a basic, because you guys are... Just even to explain to the public at large. There's a housing crisis. There's lots of reasons given as to why there's a housing crisis. There's lots of solutions given. Where are the blockages? So for example with things like O'Devany Gardens or Emmett Road, who's going to build it, is this going to be a private-public partnership again, or are we ever, as a city, or as any local government, ever going to get back to building the thing itself? Because every time private industry seems to come into it, they seem to only want to just extract as much, maximum profit as they can. And the situation with O'Devaney Gardens is we gave them the land at a cut down price and they're going to sell some of the apartments back and they're going to put the full value of the land onto those apartments, so it seems to be a transfer of public money into private hands, and what do we get out of it? Only a small fraction of public or social housing. Why, I don't understand how, that to me doesn't make, this is just me as a citizen of this city, that doesn't make any sense to me.

00:18:08

DD - Yeah I can understand why a lot of people find it distasteful...

EK - It's not just distasteful. I just don't, I just don't get it-

Ali - It doesn't make sense.

DD - Distasteful...

EK - It doesn't make sense... Whatever about, whatever about the morality or the ethics of it, it just doesn't even make any business sense?

[cheering and clapping]

EK - No, no, no-

AG - No no no no, no clapping. Do you think that's all were doing Emmet?

EK - No I don't think-

AG - No but do you think that's all we're doing?

EK - No I understand, but it's the question, genuinely-

DD - So maybe I need to speak a bit faster because I was saying I can understand it why people may [get??] disgraceful and indigestible, just a second, just to stick with the analogy of consuming something... So there's a lot in that question, so let's just go back to the basic starting point here. The city isn't financed to act as an independent developer of housing.

EK - This is what I'm wondering about-

DD- That's number one.

EK - This is interesting, yeah...

DD- That's number one, ok? That's a big difference between us and Vienna. The city's development programme for public housing is funded directly through government policy and exchequer grant funding, and the city usually requires an additional developmental attribution, which is the development levies that are placed on the development process. And at times it can [??] the assets through different arrangements on small parts of land that might sometimes be known as a ransom strip or somebody owns a piece of land that they're holding onto and so forth, in other words that they're blocking a development, or holding up a development, and time is money in the development process, no matter what regime you're under. So there's a number of challenges that the city has in getting from the design into the reality of making a place.

EK - Yeah.

DD - But the biggest one is that we don't have a financial model that allows us to develop independently, you might suggest.

EK - Is that because... and this is [??], for people just to understand, is that because power has been centralised towards central government and you guys don't have the power to do these things anymore, like the town councils for example-

AG - Well I mean generally, I mean generally in Ireland, somebody explained this to me who is, would be expert in local government, just pointed out to me, because I was looking to do, I was looking to do comparative studies of a city in Denmark and Dublin and he said 'there's no point in comparing Dublin to a city in Denmark, because in a country like Denmark as much power as possible is vested in the local authority.' That's just the way they see things. So the, I think the, I think the city in question employs twenty thousand people in the local authority. Whereas in Ireland the way we are, this is the way it is. It's not anybody's... We, the, the trust is to actually maybe centralise control as much as possible and to vest less control in individual local authorities.

21:06

EK - That is, that is something, just to explain, in 2014 the local government act got rid of all town councils, they amalgamated county councils into [31??]. So we are, I think at council level, we're the least represented in all of Europe. There's fifteen thousand citizens for every council. So we've the least representation at local government level to actually get things done. So there has been a centralisation, so I'm wondering, what I'm trying to get to is, where is the blockage? You know what I mean. Is it the fact that you guys don't have enough power?

DD - I could. Yeah you're getting very close to a very fundamental point here. In comparative terms, local authorities in Ireland are infantile in their strength, scope, size - in comparative terms. But they're long in their history and their legacy. So there's a peculiarity to, to our experience. But frankly speaking we don't yet have an agreement broadly speaking in society to finance local government in a way that allows a greater accountability through that financial model, taxation representation, and that sees the kind of hypothecation of local tax bases coming back into investment in the local area. You talk to any of the councillors in this room or later on this evening about the net distribution of local property taxes for example-

EK - Right..

DD - And you know Dublin city's local property tax, in the main, doesn't come back to the city. About 80% of it actually.

EK - Really?

DD - Yeah. We go right back throughout the, the, the period of the most recent twenty five years, you might have to go back to about 1995, 96, the rainbow coalition's plan for local government at that point first argued for the restitution of a local government finance development fund. So it's been on an agenda, but it's been in abeyance as a way of a, as a political decision, for a long time. I... I once had

someone say to me that Dublin City Council reflects the city, in the main. You know it's a mirror of the city. And so as many people who would vote for public housing or who would vote to support public housing, or who would vote for taxation to support public housing, there would be another that would not.

Ek – Yeah.

DD - So in many ways Dublin has the luck or the opportunity to be the capital city coterminous to the national parliament, in where most of the debate on housing is taking place. But we have to bear in mind that other cities have a different approach and within the same constraints have achieved greater success outside of Dublin and have demanded greater attention to their collaboration and cooperation on this. We haven't, frankly speaking, been honest enough in our debates so far. Like there's a, every now and again there's a little bit of a discussion about some aspect of fiscal policy that might improve local government's position. But we really have to get very real about the fact that, if you're living in the city and you're, you're contributing to the city as a, as a citizen, and that's the first contribution, then we have a relationship to that place, which will involve at some point a matter of taxation. It's not just income though, there are other forms of participation and collaboration that don't require monetary resources. But what is often the case is that people are looking to the very highest forms of authority for decisions when I would argue that we need a more decentralised and a more cooperative and collaborative approach at the local level.

EK – How do we get to that?

DD - And that, if I may, means not opposing public housing proposals. In the first instance.

EK – You, you're referencing people coming together, like let's say they go 'we're going to build public housing here' and then a local group or a politician might take up the mantle and go-

DD - There's no might about it. It's one of the most predictable things, like day will follow night.

EK - Yeah yeah yeah.

AG – Are you, sorry are you saying that, sorry I'm not sure you actually heard each other correctly, you're, Dáithí is talking about politicians-

DD – Nimbyism is almost like a-

EK – No that's, sorry, that's why-

DD – A national sport nearly-

EK – Sorry Dáithí you wouldn't mind just talking into the mic a bit more?

DD – Oh sorry.

EK - Just pushing it towards you. That's what I mean you know a local politician will, whatever you want to call it, nimbyism or something, will get together with them and go-

AG – Well sorry well, I don't know about, you asked where the blockages are so I'm just going to take a little bit left here. Do you know the Ó Cualann model? Everybody loves the Ó Cualann model. They keep mentioning, I love the Ó Cualann model. I think what they've done is terrific. We've done it too.

DD- Yeah.

AG- We've built 237 homes for the same, that if we were selling them, we could sell them for the same price. We've done it. And the, but nobody mentions those homes. And they're not sold, they're-

DD – Rented

AG - They're public they're rented, they're social housing rented. But the point about them was, those particular sites were given every green light. So the, they were built on, so very similar to what Ó Cua- Hugh Brennan has managed to achieve, and he has managed to achieve something incredibly significant. But similar to the Ó Cualann development. Yes we built them on sites that were serviced, that were ready to go. We gave them, we focussed on them, they were, every obstacle was taken out of the way because it was important that we build them. They're called the rapid build, it's not a very flattering title but they're they are two storey terraced housing. Very well built, a rated etc. etc., people live in there very happily and they were extremely affordable. So yes we can do it but unfortunately we can't do that all the time because we don't have, our other sites aren't serviced, so they need enabling works, they need roads built, you know they need drains or whatever-

EK – An ecosystem around them-

AG - They need other things to happen so that means our other sites are more expensive to build on. We also need to build apartments because unfortunately two storey terraced housing tends to be lower density. We need to build more homes on the sites we have. So we're doing the same type of approach again but unfortunately we don't have, we're, we have fewer more obstacles in our way, but were doing the same construction approach but to apartments. But they're a bit more expensive.

EK - And the idea is, some people were saying about removing developers from the situation altogether. Would that improve-

DD- No, no-

AG- No, why would it?

DD – Hang on a second-

AG- No, why would it?

DD – You don't remove. You include-

AG – [laughing] what?

EK – No, no the reason this is, this one of the conversations-

00:28:10

AG – But people also say that, people say like this is public housing deliver it entirely publicly, we still employ contractors to build the fecking things. They are, they are private businesses.

EK - I'm asking you here genuinely, these are just all these question that have been asked today so when people ask them, I would just love to know what it means, that's just, I'm literally here as a person who is interested housing, these are just questions that you know-

DD – Here's another lesson from abroad-

[remark from the floor, inaudible]

DD – Ok.

EK – My apologies Madam.

DD - Yeah yeah. So if-

EK - My apologies Madam.

DD - Thank you Councillor. Afternoon.

AG - The, the acoustics would be much better if we sat in the middle.

EK – Yeah, probably.

DD – Too late for that.

AG – [laughter]

DD – So just on the development arguments. So you know, one of the things that is notable is the, the way that the Irish development sector in its recovery is absent from, has an absence of small and medium size enterprises working on developing new approaches and new designs or bringing new technology or old technologies in craft and so forth to bear in housing. And one of the lessons again from Vienna is to ensure the capacity of the construction centre in its totality, design development and delivery and management and maintenance to ensure that that is maintained as a stable, educated, and increasingly sustainable place to work and live. It's not something we've achieved yet, ok, and we need to think how would we use investment in public housing in order to bring that forward-

EK – Yeah.

DD – I mean if you look back, it doesn't take too far, and you will find a really, really good example of the highest quality public housing in the city was delivered in the public housing model in the first instance. There are very few historians who will disagree with the fact that the public housing provision of certain cities drove standards, it didn't follow standards, it set standards-

AK – No and we're still driving, we're still doing that.

DD – Yeah.

00:30:11

AK – We are still doing that.

DD – So just to come back to our rapid build programme very briefly. The Ó Cualann development is coterminous, collocated right beside Baile Na **[Laoichra??]**, which is the first twenty two units of the rapid build programme. That, opening up that side for our public housing rapid build as it was, allowed the Ó Cualann development to get going.

EK- Ok.

DD – We built ours first because we used a building methodology that was quicker. Ok. And that was the single reason why this programme was called rapid. It wasn't because it was on the Northside, that was just a poor joke somebody made. The idea was that the construction methodology would be reduced to half the time that normally would take place. And that is what happened. The difficulty is that the two stages, two or three stages either side of that build, have taken just as long, getting the finance and getting the agreement and establishing the land and the sites and then at the end of it ensuring that the, the build and the allocations is appropriate to the local community needs. Those things have also taken longer. But the bit in the middle has worked. So we should scale it. We really should scale it. And that brings us back to the importance of having long supply-side logistics built into the construction and development and education and training opportunities for people to work in the design, the delivery, the management, the maintenance of housing and all of the aspects of place making that tie into that. So it is a singular lesson to learn from the Viennese. They put housing as part of their economy, as part of their political economy, in the way the city works. It's not a market over there for a certain section or a failed market for another section, or a dysfunctional market etc. etc., it is part of the stabilising growth strategy that they have for the city.

EK – And in terms of like public consultation, well like, the cycle tracks on either side of the city and stuff like that, you know, it gets put out for public consultation, there's a number of things put forward, but we're still like six or seven years down the line and we don't have those cycle- things like cycle tracks. I don't know if this is in your remit. Again, what is the delay with things like, why, like if these great ideas are going to be great for the city and are going to help the city, why is it taking- what's holding it up like?

AG – See, you’re right, the, we need to do a much better job of engagement, empowering, participatory planning, collaborative planning, whatever you want to call it, design thinking, whatever, whatever you want to call it-

DD – All of those things.

AG - They’re all the same thing, they... We absolutely need to do a better job of that. And that requires, that’s actually quite a time consuming exercise so I’d really like to think that we, we would actually be able to step back and say we know there’s this, this housing challenge is beyond urgent. It’s just it’s critical-

EK – Yeah.

AG –We deliver. But, say you were going to propose a, a large-scale development programme. I’d really like to think that we’d be given the time to say ok now before we actually just start drawing on every site and saying that’s what can happen, we actually do that, and there are well documented processes to follow here. You know identify everybody who’s got, I hate the word stakeholder, but just say everybody who’s invested in this. Without it spinning completely out of control. Bringing everybody together to speak in - to each other - in a courteous, open fashion. Don’t, don’t... Invite disagreement because we know people disagree. Invite that but, but have that discussion, try and see if there is a meeting of minds in the middle, because as Dáithí pointed out, for every project that is proposed there will obviously a group of people who think it’s a brilliant thing but there will be equally a group of people who are objecting to it. So bring people together to agree what are, what we want to achieve here, and then go after it.

00:34:26

EK – In terms of funding, the Dublin Inquirer did a number of articles about the fact that Dublin City Council has to sell off public land in order to pay for the other amenities, like a public park for example, just down near Thomas street, just in front of... on the side of where Robert Emmett Street-

DD – Bridgefoot Street.

EK – Yeah. So this has been delayed by two years for some reason but they were saying that they needed to sell off... It seems kind of counter intuitive to sell off what is a finite resource in order to build a public amenity somewhere else. So why is that, is it that centralised government isn’t giving you the money? What’s the reason for things like that?

DD - Well to keep coming back to this. Ok so we know we don’t have a finance model to allow us to build independently. And we have a pressing and acute and at times horrific housing crisis for certain people. So we have to act. I’m not an advocate for any type of fire sale arrangement here you know-

EK – Sorry Dáithí if you just put your mic to the...

DD- Sorry. But if there is an opportunity to develop a housing project ahead of an allotment project, I'm going for housing.

EK- Yeah.

DD- You know frankly I'm putting my interests forward. I want housing built first, not garden allotments.

EK – You can't hear? Sorry the sound quality is quite bad-

AG- No it's actually, it's actually this room-

EK – Were in the wrong place-

AG – We're in the wrong place, we should be in the middle.

DD- Can, can-

EK It's too late now.

AK - Can we open it out?

EK – There was one thing I was going to ask as well about short term lets, has been a problem all across Europe and it's not just, you know the major ones like Airbnb, it's people at the key collection and all of these kind of things. There's thousands of private residential properties... In my own building for example, it was turned, essentially, my own apartment building in Dublin was kind of like living in a hotel without a front desk. So the situation kind of got to such a stage where we got in to contact with the local council and we asked them to do something. Legislation has been put through but it doesn't seem to be doing what it s supposed to do. So now we have tens of thousands of properties, residential properties, that were designed for works and citizens to live between the canals, live close to their jobs, but they're being housed with stag parties.

AG – Mm.

EK – I don't understand how we can, I understand the local – I understand centralised government has brought in, we tried to get the Berlin licensing model in order to sort this out but they didn't go with that. To even get on the site. So what do you think, or what is the hopeful solution for that?

DD – Ok so well there's two really, really important pieces of evidence on this that are worth paying attention to. The first is the report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Planning, which made a series of recommendations to Government about the regulations required to establish a full registry of short term letting platform providers and everybody who uses them and a series of other recommendations flowing from that, cascading from that overall regulatory model, which were about standards, redress, consumer rights, equality and non-discrimination and so forth. Then there was also a set of recommendations made from an expert working group on short term rentals that was published by the department and led to that one enactment

that you've referred to, the planning and legislation code. But frankly Dublin is quite unique again in Europe in the sense that it doesn't have a formalised regulatory sector in short term lets. At the moment it's still reasonably permissible. The early evidence that we did have from about 2017 was that quite a number of people in this city were using the short term lets or AirBnB market as an income maintenance. In other words they were using it in order it to help pay their rent or sometimes pay their mortgage which was forbearance, But we also know that there are parts of the city where clustering and a kind of a centralisation of use and permitted use has created very significance incivilities at times for people. And we're in this in between place now where we're considering how we might go forward with arguments over regulation at a national level, while the city itself as the planning authority has a formal role in the adjudication of planning permissions for persons who wish to use their property for greater than ninety days in the short term letting market. And that's where we're at. Anybody who's using a short term let or offering a short term let has to register with the local authority. There'll be a report tomorrow to the Council which will confirm that's less than three hundred people out of an estimated fourteen or fifteen thousand.

EK- Wow.

DD – And the number of property owners who have to get planning permissions specific to use their property is even fewer again. So we have a regulatory system, it is effective, it's they type of regulatory system you'd need in order to ensure that you're insurance is going to maintain its liability in case of any harm or fowl to your property in terms of the permissible use of a property and whether you've got a leasehold arrangement, or something like that, to use it. But we're a long way off having any kind of active regulatory mechanism overall for short-term lets in the country. So at the moment the city will do and will maintain its statutory obligations under planning.

EK – So again centralised government has basically put it up to you guys, and you guys don't have the money-

DD- No I didn't say that-

EK- No, no, no I'm not saying... sorry I'm not trying to put words in your mouth-

DD - No I didn't say that-

EK - If they had of actually put in a licensing system you wouldn't have to do it?

00:40:00

DD - Well if there was a licensing system it would be more than just a license it would be fully regulated in the sense that if you want to set up a short term let you have to register and tell us who you are-

EK – Yeah.

DD - You have to oblige, you'd be obliged to maintain all compliance with all of the regulatory mechanisms and part of that would be a data exchange for example-

EK - Yeah?

DD - So that there was information about the scope and scale and depth and characteristics of your market.

EK – Yeah.

DD- And such as hotels for example have to do that, or approved, approved BnBs through the Failte Ireland and other forms of regulatory accreditation. We're at the beginning of the process of supporting people in the planning code. It's only one aspect of Airbnb or short term lets, actually.

EK – Yeah.

AK - Can we, can we let some other people in on it?

EK – Can I just ask, just Ali, because I know you haven't, I just want to bring you back into the conversation and just as an architect, what's your hope for the city? What's your, what's your desire?

[laughter]

EK- What would you like to see happen?

AG – Oh I'd like to, I'd like a thriving city, I'd like, I live in the city I live in the, not too far from here... A lot of the things I see happening seem to me to be solvable. It's not a very big city you know, you can walk from, you can walk from Ballymun to Booterstown in about three hours. So that's the length of the city.

EK – Yeah.

AG –And that's not a very big city and so our problems are not insurmountable-

EK - Insurmountable, yeah/

AG - And, but they do require and I explained it really, really, really badly earlier, just a few minutes ago-

EK- Ah no I think you were pretty-

AG - No, no, the point is, we actually do, could, we really do need to get our heads around the fact that there are compromises required. I mean I'm interested, I'd be interested to see a show of hands. So for example, theoretically, there's a public housing estate in the city centre and the people who live there, no it's true, they don't have access to very high amenities, they'd love a park. And we've got a site for a park but we could also build public housing and a park. Now, do we, the people aren't, the people would just like the big park. Now what do we do? Do we build the... mostly park with public housing at one end of the park? Or do we just one park? And I'd even actually ask you, could ask you to put up your hands because that's a

compromise. And you kind of, we proposed, yeah we can build some housing and we can do a park. The people wanted just a big park because they needed, they needed high quality open space. So there is always a compromise and we've just got to try and negotiate the compromises. But yeah I would like to see people living... I, I would, I would love to see an end to the housing crisis. Absolutely.

AK – But Ali what you just commented on there if you ask me is like the inverted social mix, you know?

AG - Sorry?

AK – It's just, it's like the inverse of a social mix. We talk about other areas where there's like, you know, different incomes coming into an area. That's like the invert when you're talking about a park plus. You know? That's an element of that if you ask me, that's how I'd interpret-

AG – Sorry are you saying I shouldn't ask that question?

AK – No, no, I'm just, to my mind it, it was like a social mix, you know? It just doesn't seem to go the other direction if you ask me. That, that would be a challenge with the park, with building the social housing in that park.

AG- We're-

AK - There's an element of that, you know? I'd, just, just to remark on it.

AG – Listen we'll make it work, and we are going to build, and we are building housing on the site immediately beside the park and we will make it work. And we have to do, we have to do a project on the existing flat complex. I mean back to what Dáithí touched on very briefly there, we're in a new era now. We've got climate change, we're staring down the barrel of the gun of climate change. And we have to now start, we have to start rethinking. So, and to me what this means a basic response to climate change is you value the assets you have, including the buildings you have. The, a third of the, sorry to get all technical here, but a third of the emissions generated, the greenhouse gas emissions generated in construction are actually in the materials that go into the construction. So if you've got a building it's much more sustainable in terms of climate change to actually keep the building and fix it up

EK – Yeah.

AG – Rather than to demolish it and build a new building.

EK – Ok.

AG - And that's, and that's what we've got to, that's actually become a priority. It wasn't a priority five years ago, wasn't a priority three years ago. It's really just hitting us over the head now and that means we've kind of got to tailor our ambition to sit within that, that reality. So on how, I actually think it's quite a practical solution because it costs us eighty thousand euro to deep retrofit a local authority flat-

EK - Like Dolphin House?

AG - Yeah it would cost us eighty thousand euro to deep retrofit a flat or it'll cost us three hundred thousand to, more than three hundred thousand, to knock it down and build a new one. So the, that's, the...

EK - Ok-

AG - And that's a difficult issue because a lot of people who are living in flat complexes would say but I want a new one, I want a new one-

00:46:15

EK - Can I just, can I come back to something we said earlier and I will put it to you, what I meant earlier was there was a lot of conversations here about developers, and people seem to have a thing saying that if you can remove developers and build directly, you know-

AG - But I can't build, I don't know how to build a building-

EK - But we, we, but the, Dublin City Council used to have a building agency. This is the point that people are coming back to.

DD - Ok

EK - Why do we go into PPP?

DD - Ok.

EK - The private public partnership, why are we not just building-

AG - But that's different, you're mangling things here

EK - Alright, ok

AG - You're-

EK - Well just explain to me, for us to understand.

AG - In terms, in terms of construction we, we do partner with the private sector all the time because we often use, city architects design a lot of projects in house, we're architects for hundreds of homes that are on site at the moment, we've, you know, so things are happening. We also use private architects-

EK - Yeah.

AG - And we by and large have to use private contractors-

EK - This is, the reason why, this is-

AG - Building contractors.

EK – Asking for clarity is this seems to be, this is a theme that's come up all day and is coming up continually-

DD – Ok.

EK - So this is why I'm asking this question because I don't understand it myself.

DD – Ok so briefly, like this is very topical there's lot to talk about in this, but it's not a state secret that the developer-led model of construction development and finance is a busted flush. Ok?

EK - Yeah, this is the point, yeah.

DD - If we want to seriously redress the challenges of climate action, business as usual is not acceptable.

EK – Ok.

AG – Mm.

DD - We need a development management model that is sustainable and moderating in terms of the boom and bust slump. Ok? So we have to come back to some of the comments I was trying to make is that we have to take the longer term view. It's a marathon not a sprint. We have to build well and sensibly and at speed when we can in order to address acute need. And that means a number of efforts have to be co-joined. But we can't allow a simple finance-led, short-term, high profit stack 'em high, sell 'em cheap approach, to continuously dominate the market, because it has led to the chronic dysfunction that we are facing as a city, and not just this city, it's across other European capitals as well. Now, you could read that critique in the National Economic and Social Councils' reports, you can read that critique in the Department of Finance reports. So it is not a state secret to understand the dissatisfaction with an overly financialised housing system. We are past arguing that it's not working. We are not yet arguing coherently about what to do next.

EK – Ok... What can we do next...? Is that the next, or is that just-

AG – Well I've got a seven-point plan but I'm-

EK – Do you actually, but know I'm serious-

[EK and AG laughing]

EK – Look we'll open it up to some questions

DD – Yeah.

AG – I do have-

EK – We'll open it up to some questions-

AK – Ok, so, I just have one and then I'll pass the mic.

EK – Yeah, absolutely.

AK – Thanks for coming along guys.

EK – Yeah, thank you guys.

AK – I know that was really difficult, to get you sitting there like, because I'm the one who arranged it, you know, and I know how difficult it was in terms of asking you to come here, you know, to do this. But from experience with making the documentary I worked with fourteen different departments in D.C.C. so I know how big, how nuanced, but mostly how bureaucratic it is in a lot of ways, you know, it's very, very difficult to get a straight answer from something that you don't know who it lands with. Ahead of you we did ask Owen the city manager and Brendan Kenny to be here as well and there was just like instance responses from both of their offices like [ping tests ??], you know, no, we won't be here, you know? Which kind of makes me wonder because the way, the way we're after addressing things like how things are communicated, sustainable long-term futures and busted flushes and this whole idea of like if you have something, you know what you have, if you don't have it you don't know what you have, you know? That sort of, on a scientific level doesn't make a lot of sense then, and an economic level, Emmet touched on it, having a fire sale on public land, which is essentially how I interpreted the city manager looking at a hundred million sell off of that, what that does for your image, what that does for long term sustainability, what that does for all that consultation that you're trying to do. It's not even one area, be it Ballymun or whatever like that, but the scattered one that throughout the whole city, how does that make a lot of sense? And I'm just wondering in terms of the chain between you guys and, you know, we're looking for where the blockages are, is there, is there something institutionalised inside DCC that needs to be addressed there. If you've the city manager that's been there for forty years, sorry not the city manager the housing manager, being across all the different, be it Limerick, Ballymun, and in the city, whatever like that. Forty years and the amount of change and the dynamic of change that has gone on in this city. Is there an issues, is there, is that part of a blockage of just how this is all sort of made fluid, and all that good work, and all those assets, and all that design, and all that research that you have, you have it all, just to action that. You know is that an element in terms of blockage?

00:51: 25

DD - It is, it's a difficult set of questions. There's a phrase I used to enjoy talking about which is the will to power. You know? That's what you're talking about actually. You know? The will power is the fact that we are going to engage as citizens in the civic requirement of maintaining a good, fair, fine city to live in. It does require a robust, frank, and honest exchange. And it requires that we maintain our democratic approach. The one example you've given me about proposals to sell off land are subject to decisions by this elected Council. That's the process.

AK – But is that a little bit, like, they’ve no say in how the damn is constructed but as soon as it breaks everyone has to run and scatter and get [fresh ??] in to like, you know, figure it out-

DD – Actually I don’t see it, as that, as that linear, I see it as a much more multi-faceted thing. In fact every major, any minor, any space that’s subject to governance, urban governance in this particular case, is subject to the dynamic of what if, buts and maybes. And there is continuity in certain places, which is a very obvious moment when it’s so lacking in others. But no decision arrives without some merits and some assessment of its merit being pursued and framed by those who support and those who may oppose it. But ultimately it is that democratic function that you’re talking about. There’s no fire sale of land in Dublin City unless it’s approved through the elected body. There’s no fire sale. There can’t be. That’s the rule, they’re the rules.

00:52:58

AK – Would you, would you, you could take that that was an alarming statement to come out with, an alarming press release to be made-

DD- Look again there’s many things that alarm me, that are equally as alarming as a proposal to sell off land. The question is to what purpose and what form and for what function.

AG- Mm.

DD - That really is the question that needs to be asked first. Rather than not asked. But there are many, many alarming issues today that are not being given the same [presage??] in terms of what’s more important. We don’t have, I think, the luxury of sitting on our hands any longer when it comes to some of the most acute and challenging experiences of our fellow citizens who are most marginalised and who are horribly remote from decisions, you know? And we can no longer afford to continue with some kind of creeping re-institutionalisation of marginality in our city, which is what we are seeing occur by way of a shelter based response to housing exclusion. And we don’t have enough people arguing for housing as a response that is, in total, you know? There are very important elements of all of those things that require an understanding of what land can be used for and how high, and how finance works. And there is certainly limitations in what local government can achieve. But even within that we are still here to act as the housing authority and we will seek to achieve the best possible public value and highest housing standards in that act. That’s why I’m here.

EK Yeah, you

AK – Can we let anyone else into speak-

EK Open it up to the floor please yeah if there’s anyone there that wants to-

KG – Hi Dáithí and Ali, thanks for that. Sorry I had two questions there Andrew and I put my... Ok yeah my question was about, you mentioned earlier about the need to kind of consult people and to engage in collaborative processes of planning around

that and how sometimes when you have a plan in front of you, say to build public housing, you have people both for and against that plan, there is disagreement around that. But I suppose I'm kind of interested in, you know, the for and, the people who are arguing for public housing and opposing public housing, they are not the same type of person, and what I suppose I'm trying to put together in my head is that... Should the people who are more marginalised by the issue not have more of a say there, like if you're putting landlords' interests in, on equal footing with people who are homeless and urgently need that public housing, that doesn't seem like a very democratic way to do, to do this kind of participatory planning. So, I mean is that the way decisions are getting made where a bunch of people are demanding public housing out of a real urgent, social and personal need, but then you have to kind of weigh in on the landlords in a 50/50 basis? How does that work?

DD – Well if I'm getting the thrust of it right, you know, at the heart of this is a choice that people are offered, if it's real or not. The most recent general election I have no idea how many homeless households were registered to vote, but it should have been an issue if it wasn't something that was not addressed through service providers. And we need to get organised and people are exercising their franchise. That was always something that we were trying to do in homeless services, was to make sure that every person was mandated to vote and we used to put huge numbers of people on the electoral register before votes. We actually had the, the significant result of boosting a certain number of votes in certain wards, which otherwise didn't have votes, because that's where the homeless facilities were located. It is difficult, people are looking for rights that haven't yet been fully articulated as socio-economic cultural rights through justiciable procedures. Again that's another matter for Irish society to take up in its new parliament, in the new programme for government. It's something we'd anticipate. That itself would bring another set of challenges: how to make real justiciable rights to housing. But it is, it is the case in my experience that there is a tendency to oversimplify the individual's housing needs to a matter of shelter. If they're marginal to the process of accessing a market based, only market based housing. And we've got a long way to go to make it less difficult. I mean a really long way to go. And we know that. So the more people we can include in a participatory process and the more we resource that inclusion and take account of that, the greater the challenge around the power and how that power is exercised. And it's about holding that power to account.

EK So any other questions from..? Just one more question yeah?

LC [without microphone, mostly inaudible] – Why are there so many empty Dublin City Council buildings? Why can't they be...[muffle]

LC [with microphone] - Why are there four thousand women, four thousand children and ten thousand women in homeless hubs? When there are so many empty units across the city. Are you not allowed do it? And do you agree with the policy what Dublin City Council does, where they actually are running it down, and I gave examples earlier of Dominick Street, Constitution Hill.

DD - So which question?

LC - I see sleepless, I see homeless men sleeping outside the flats. Where before there were units for single men where they could, they got, got housing, even if they were single. So it's like are you? I didn't hear you mention those homeless people in your planning, so I presume like you have a heart that you do care. And I know I'm emotional, you're not supposed to be emotional in these situations, but this is a crisis. It's horrific. And those children are growing up in horrific and horrendous conditions and I didn't hear you mention them.

DD - No I...

EK - Just to say, the guys are here, you know as representatives of Dublin City Council and-

DD - I, I can

EK - Ok yeah, go-

AG - Can I? Can I say one thing though?

DD - Go ahead

AG - I can introduce you. The, Leona I didn't understand that story. I, I. That story you told about Ballymun regeneration, I just didn't even recognise, it was like a foreign country to me, it was a foreign planet.

[audience mumbling]

AG - No, no, hang on-

EK - Hold on a second-

AG - No... I worked there and the, I just didn't, I didn't recognise that story you told about the, which was conjured up just malignant motives on all sides, and I just didn't, I couldn't square it with the people I knew who worked there, the efforts that went in. I don't see why two thousand three hundred social houses is a, is, is, is cast as a terrible disaster. You didn't say one good thing, one good thing. And, you see, that to me just is not conducive to any kind of constructive dialogue. If you cannot identify one good thing. You said we shut down the St Margaret's halting site, you didn't say-

LC - I said you tried to-

AG- No, no, no, you didn't say, but you didn't, you forgot the bit where we actually rehoused everybody around the corner. You didn't mention that bit. You seem to be drawing all your information from a report that was done in 2013 or 14.

LC - 2007

AG - Auditor General-

LC – Comptroller and Auditor General Report 2007.

AG – I just-

LC - I did my dissertation on this so are trying, are you actually?

AG - No I'm just saying-

LC - You can read up on all of-

EK - Sorry guys just one at a time, just one at a time-

01:00:55

AG - I'm just, I'm just saying I didn't recognise, it was just a different country, a different planet-

LC - To you.

AG- To my lived experience and isn't that what we're talking about here? About lived experience and, and I, I just think it's a pity. Because you've obviously thought so long and hard about it and you've so much to contribute. And I'm just wondering where do we meet in the middle, how do we meet in the middle? Because it's just not possible that things are that polarised when you've got people on every side who are desperately trying to do the right thing. Including our colleagues in Dublin City Council and including colleagues that yes you don't always agree with, you don't agree with every single thing they do, all the time, but you can see a lot of positive. I also agree with a lot of things they do. I agree with a lot of things that the Chief Executive is trying to do. I don't agree with everything but I agree with lots. You know, there is, we have to find a middle way because the solution isn't at the, at the, at the, on the outer edges. But anyway.

EK - The extremities of it-

AG - The extremities.

EK – Absolutely.

DD - I'm not sure which question I should really start with Leona in terms of your list of questions. But some of the language you're using is language I've already uttered since I've been sitting here. I'm not refuting any attempt at understanding. And certainly not any of the understanding you're bringing. But again we may ask the question about what happened and understand it better but I think we still need to put more emphasis on what we're going to do about it so that it's not as much what happened, it's about what we're doing about that becomes the process of reengagement here.

LC - But the problem is you always forget, I just did an example of the 1960s, thirty years later you just did the same thing, and now you're doing the same thing again. You keep selling off public land, you keep enabling profiteering, and you keep going

to the private market to solve the problems of our housing crisis which is now why we have so many homeless people. Because you and the government and the state collude together to hand over profits to private capital.

DD - Well then maybe you've misunderstood me. We are the people and the civic and the government and the state, ok? And I am not the decision maker in that space. It's a we. So the policies that you're highly critical of are policies affected through its own process of democratic government. The resolution of the housing crisis in Ireland, and particularly in Dublin, is going to take a more deliberative consideration than the one you're offering, I'm afraid.

EK - We're going to-

LC - I just want to say one thing, I respect the role of the public servant and I wish it would go back to a role where you actually do help people. So, I'm not trying to do a personal attack although Ali you did personally try to attack me using language.

EK - Ok. Just to say, I do think, you know, obviously this is a conversation that is impassioned, and I do think what you're trying get to, the point is that there's government level decisions and you guys are working as public servants, and I don't necessarily think there's any personal thing that we can say to you guys, I'd really like to say thank you for being here-

AK - Guys sorry we're like forty-five minutes over, we got to get back on track a bit ok, but thanks a million-

EK - Thank you very much for being here and thanks for giving us your time we really appreciate it.

AG Thank you, thank you.

[clapping]

AK - To be continued.

