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Members of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Housing, Church and Community joined other panellists at the Bristol Housing Festival for a discussion on the church's response to the housing crisis.

Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol, and a member of the Commission, writes below about how the festival is working in partnership with Bristol City Council to find solutions to the housing challenges faced by the city.

Lack of affordable, quality housing is one of the key challenges for Bristol, our wider city region and much of the UK. Within this we have several distinct challenges. Insufficient housing stock, increasing unaffordability and unstable private sector tenancies which has resulted in increased homelessness. This is both visible with rough sleepers on our streets, but also hidden – our council house waiting list, 500 families in temporary accommodation, people ‘sofa surfing’ or even living in cars.

Bristol’s above average population growth will contribute further but in addition to the complexity of our housing challenge we also face a climate emergency, nine years of austerity and increasing demands on public services. Despite these daunting odds we need courage to try new ideas with a focus on social justice to deliver inclusive growth to give hope to people within our cities.

Romans 5: 3-5

“we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

The Archbishop’s Commission provides an important opportunity to look at how the Church can lead on developing real solutions from the granular to systemic change. Their focus is rightly not just on housing but on enabling resilient and healthy communities to help all people flourish. I was pleased to accept the invitation to serve as a Commissioner and add my perspective.

Bristol City Council is working in partnership with the Bristol Housing Festival to unlock housing innovation. Over five years the Housing Festival is set to enable Bristol to trial housing solutions using new construction methods while focusing on how these buildings enable the residents to flourish. The first example of this is LaunchPad, officially opened on the 25th October making use of space in a car park in east Bristol. This 31-home development uses modular construction with shared community space to provide accommodation for a mix of young people including students, care leavers and key workers. It has been made possible by the collaboration between the University of Bristol Student’s Union, United Communities Housing Association, and the charity 1625 Independent People.

Where appropriate we are seeking to partner with the Church and their land to create homes and great places – focussing not just on the place-making but the stewardship of the land after the development is completed – ‘place-keeping’. The Commission is seeking to re-imagine housing policy, focusing on building better communities and homes, resilience, not just units. It looks at what actions can be taken in partnership to help tackle this crisis. This presents an opportunity to raise the debate, both inside and outside the Church, about the necessity of collaboration in order to see cities prosper for the benefit of all who live there.

-Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol

Archbishop of Canterbury - Most Rev Justin Welby

“To reimagine Britain we must reimagine housing. The first form of reimagining is to reclaim the purpose of housing. Housing exists as a basis for community and community exists for human flourishing. Building new housing without clear community values and aims will lead to the same problems being repeated again and again in the future.

“I am delighted that the Bristol Housing Festival has set out to work in collaboration across the city not only to innovate in new housing but critically to make the idea of healthy and resilient community the key foundation from which to build. This is an important initiative not only for Bristol but for the country as we learn together.”

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