



Leasehold Reform

House of Commons, May 23, 2023

Speech by James Murray MP (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)

For nearly a decade before I was elected as the MP for Ealing North, I had the honour of serving in local and city-wide government in the capital, working every day to tackle the housing crisis. If my memory serves me correctly, when I was working for the Mayor of London, as his deputy mayor for housing, he responded to a Government consultation back in 2017 entitled “Tackling unfair practices in the leasehold market”. I looked at that consultation document this morning and noticed that its introduction cited the right hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, as having said:

“I don’t see how we can look the other way while these practically feudal practices persist”.

Two years later, following more consultation, the 2019 Conservative manifesto included a commitment to continue reform of the leasehold system. Three years after that, the latest Housing Secretary said that he would:

“end the absurd, feudal system of leasehold, which restricts people’s rights”.

The current Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government seemed finally to be on course to do something at the start of this year, confirming that the Government would “absolutely” abolish the feudal system of leasehold and bring forward legislation shortly. Yet here we are, in May 2023, with the Conservatives apparently abandoning their promises to leaseholders. That is why, today, we will be voting to make the Secretary of State keep his promise.

I know the impact that the current system of leasehold can have on people, both as a former leaseholder myself and, crucially, from the experiences of the people I represent. Since I was first elected in 2019, I have been contacted by email, phone, in my advice surgery and on the street by leaseholders from all parts of my constituency to talk about the challenges they face. Let me mention just a few of my constituents here today. I draw the Minister’s attention to leaseholders at Oaklands on Argyle Road. They are facing the prospect of the freeholder adding another storey to their building without

any meaningful consultation and despite issues of subsidence in the block.

Meanwhile, leaseholders at Chartwell Close in Greenford have reported great difficulties, costs and a lack of information from the freeholder when trying to exercise their right to manage. Leaseholders at Bridgepoint House, right opposite my constituency office, continue to face a very challenging time with all those involved in owning, building and managing their block as they try to remedy fire safety concerns.

Those are just a few examples of the many people I represent who live in private leasehold flats, and who far too often lack control over, or even a say in, what happens to the place in which they live. That is why I will be glad to vote for our motion today, to press the Government to end the sale of new private leasehold houses, to introduce a workable system to replace private leasehold flats with commonhold, and to enact the Law Commission’s recommendations on enfranchisement, commonhold and the right to manage in full.

The truth is that having security in our own home is a fundamental need for people and families in whatever tenure they live. The impact of leasehold means that, even when people are able to buy a home, which should bring that security, that basic desire for real security is often stymied by a feudal system of ownership. We might have thought—as, indeed, leaseholders across the country might have thought—that when Conservative Ministers said that they did not see how “we can look the other way while these practically feudal practices persist”, change was coming. We might have thought that change was coming when Conservative Ministers said that we should, “end the absurd, feudal system of leasehold, which restricts people’s rights”. But after years of opportunities to act, they have proven themselves simply unable to tackle the long-term challenges we face.

The truth is that the Conservatives in Government cannot tackle the long-term challenges we face; they have become a long-term challenge themselves. It is time to do the right thing, to follow Labour’s lead and to give people the security that they need and deserve.
