

# Involving People with Experience

*Sir Peter Bottomley MP*

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If you have the chance, hear Peggy Seeger and Calum MacColl sing her First Farewell songs. On YouTube, watch her sing the Invisible Woman, the gently defiant claim for the elderly to be seen, heard and respected.

Petula Clark has been performing in public for over 70 years, now singing Feed the Birds in Mary Poppins. She was in the group recording Give Peace a Chance in the Yoko Ono and John Lennon Montreal hotel suite. The elderly can give us all a sense of perspective. They can also give inspiration to the young.

This week, listening to a student of music and drama, I commended recordings of Peggy Seeger, Victor Borge, Donald Swan and Michael Flanders. Good clean fun, with friendly professionalism.

The Tuesday BBC radio Four Positive Thinking discussion was whether only people with direct experience of lack of opportunity could remedy it. Pick your answer. People in and around government do not have all the answers all the time. It is crazy to exclude all who manage to succeed. It is also clear those who are service users with experience of problems can contribute much.

In past days I talked with the activist founders of CARFE, Conservatives Against Racism, For Equality. They were interested in the declaration by the national treasure Dr Richard Stone, Jewish human rights campaigner. I came to respect him as adviser to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. Speaking on racial fairness in housing, he declared that too often the victims of discrimination or unfairness were expected to be responsible for ending it. He declared white middle class men held most power and influence: they – people like me – have the responsibility to use it.

Amongst my local heroes is Terry Woodjetts, chair of the West Durrington Residents. With neighbours, he tries to help and to require developers including Vistry/Bovis and managing agents Chamonix/FirstPort to complete their tasks. Four years to fulfil commitments? Three years too long?

Faults developers should avoid: inability to list defects in writing; delaying remediation, hoping issues are forgotten; blaming contractors; and even trying to blame residents themselves.

Terry's experience is the positive four step approach: formally agree the defects; agree with the client the approach and timescales to resolve the defects; supervise dealing with the problems in the way agreed; and then asking for formal acceptance by the client that the defects have been put right.

Pioneers of social and political reform may be forgotten. If you are fifteen years or more ahead of parliamentary battles, and if you live long enough to observe, see later campaigners gain attention from national media and government. Even then, quiet persistent MPs and their advisers can be less known than demonstrators and window breakers.

Lobbyists can overcome rational argument, making lesser options displace better ones. Decades ago, when serving as a transport minister, I was persuaded by environmental scientists that while the internal combustion engine maintained its role in road vehicles, emerging lean burn technology was preferable to relying on catalytic converters. The EU went the other way.

Massive change is coming as our lives and economies adjust to decarbonising the economy. Financing and risks to industrial firms that are slow to adjust will be large. I will support Caroline Lucas MP and others in asking the Bank of England and the government to unleash green investment and to monitor financial institutions as they support the fair green transformation.

Some things cannot just be left to the victims of change. Parliament can hold policy makers to account for green job creation and emission reductions.