



The latest views from Alistair McIntosh, Chief Executive, Housing Quality Network

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Rishi coughs up the cash but we're masking the truth about our governance

By Alistair McIntosh, Chief Executive, HQN

What a beautiful spring day the 11 March turned out to be. It felt so good to be alive, cycling through a sun-drenched central London.

As ever, the only fly in the ointment were those pesky pedestrians who seem to think they can do as they please. They strode in front of me and other road users displaying the reckless death wish synonymous with the breed. But on this occasion the jaywalkers were wearing face masks. While these offer a modicum of protection from coronavirus they are no help at all with the rampaging vans and taxis that are much more likely to kill them if they don't watch out. Good luck trying to get that lot to show any common sense in the face of the pandemic. We've got a mask, nothing can touch us now, seems to be the misguided attitude. We'll see much more of that.

Absentmindedly, I'd booked a few meetings so I missed the budget. Of course I caught up with it as soon as I could. When I did my jaw hit the floor. Who was that giving the speech? Was it a Soviet agent? Quick, send for James Bond to see off the red imposter. But no, this Rishi Sunak guy is for real! Any second now he will be bringing back free school milk, I thought.

The budget made the ambitions of the last Labour manifesto look quite modest. At the time many of us said it was just too long a set of promises to be believable. But Rishi simply cut and pasted it, added a few more commitments and off he went. Hey! Ho! Let's Go.

The internet will work in the darkest holes. Anyone that wants a house can have one. And Mr Toad will be able to charge around the new roads to his heart's content (as long as he does something about his emissions). There are other summaries available but this just about covers it.

It's good that long at last we are getting somewhere on cladding. That's just as well as near enough every day a new skyscraper gets the go-ahead. But where is the White Paper that will really protect residents? I'm told it's due any day now. Yes, I'll believe it when I see it. There's always something that comes along to knock it off course.



Will coronavirus overwhelm all of the Chancellor's plans? Is it the sort of sudden rupture that the Banque de France warns us to beware of? Is this an 'unknown unknown' or something we should have been thinking about?

Two years ago a book called 'Pandemic 1918' came out. It looked at the outbreak of Spanish Flu that killed 100 million people towards the end of the First World War. Sir Tony Robinson says on the front cover that it's "a coherent, well researched and sanitary reminder that another pandemic could be just around the corner." We didn't have a cunning plan. Turns out we had no plan at all.

Why is that? The warning was so clear that even Baldrick saw it coming. Maybe it's because too many of us were poring over covenants while ignoring everything else. It turns out cash isn't king after all. The blinkers we put on after the crunch stopped us from seeing what we needed to see. But we are certainly using enough cash to sort out fire safety and now a virus.

When we get through this, and most of us will thank God, our governance must change fundamentally. The current model has failed three times on the trot.

