

“Freehold Estate Fees – in Westminster Hall at 5:41 pm on 22nd January 2019”

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 **Helen Goodman** Shadow Minister (Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs) 🌐
5:41 pm, 22nd January 2019

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(Citation: HC Deb, 22 January 2019, c120WH)

I beg to move,

*That this House
has considered freehold estate fees.*


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 **Catherine McKinnell** Labour, Newcastle upon Tyne North

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I congratulate my hon. Friend and north-east colleague on securing this important debate and on her Freehold Properties (Management Charges and Shared Facilities) Bill, which I am pleased to co-sponsor. I am also pleased to add my thanks for the work of my Great Park constituent Cathy Priestley, whom my hon. Friend rightly mentions. I commend Cathy, who has worked tirelessly to raise awareness of these issues. Does my hon. Friend agree with me and Cathy that one of the key concerns for private homeowners in such developments is the sheer lack of transparency about what they are paying for?

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 **Helen Goodman** Shadow Minister (Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs)


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My hon. Friend makes a very good point. We need more transparency and greater accountability, and I will come on to how we might secure those things. One of the things that homeowners have noted is their frustration that they do not have any control over who the managing agent is. The relationship between the big builders and their favourite management companies and the processes for acquiring these communal spaces are shrouded in mystery. The fees appear to be plucked from thin air. In some cases, a vague “administration” category accounts for up to 70% of the total bill.

What do homeowners get in exchange for their fee? Of the 200 people who completed my survey, only one indicated a very good standard of maintenance. That was perhaps an optimistic assessment. The person went on to explain that

“the grass is cut regularly, but...we were promised a play park and village green with a pond. None have materialised.”

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My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The lack of transparency is a significant problem across the country. I did a survey, which I thought would be for people in Bishop Auckland, but I got responses from Ulster to Plymouth, which shows what a massive problem this is.

If offered the choice between a leasehold property and a freehold property, most prospective homebuyers would opt for freehold. Who would not want the permanent and absolute tenure of their property, with all the freedom and security that promises? However, the large property developers—Barratt, Bellway, Persimmon and Taylor Wimpey—sell properties that are not free from hold but come with financial obligations and restrictive covenants administered by property management companies such as Greenbelt, Gateway, FirstPort and Trinity Estates, which take ownership of communal spaces once the developer has moved off the site.