

Questions to Labour leadership and deputy leadership candidates:

Britain hasn't been building enough homes for decades. What specific measures will you take to increase house building?

The fact that housebuilding in Britain has slowed during the time that local authorities' powers to purchase land at reasonable rates and then build on it, is no coincidence. If we want to get serious about building the homes which our country needs then we must empower our councils to build again.

I would do this by first of all, giving all our local authorities across the country a fair funding settlement, direct from central government which would ensure they do not have to cut resources from housing budgets to fund other services. I would also abolish the local authority cap on borrowing to build houses. More council homes in an local authority area can be a valuable source of income for local authorities through rent at a time when they have extremely financial autonomy. I would also work to establish a new framework which sets the proportion of new homes being affordable.

To further embolden councils, I will work to reform the cost of land. Rising land values have helped drive up house prices and rents, reducing home ownership, and driven increases in wealth inequality. The value of land has directly contributed to the UK becoming the most regionally divided economy in Europe, with the total value of housing stock in London now greater than all of housing in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the North of England combined.

I believe that local authorities should be able to purchase land for public use (ie social housing) at a fair price, not based on prospective values following development as is the case now. This, coinciding with empowering local authorities to build social homes through lifting borrowing caps and by central government support, will help stabilise the housing/land market in regions.

I believe that access to good quality housing is a fundamental human right. As Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, I would ensure that this remains high on the policy agenda, as an effective system will result in a stabilised housing market offering affordable homes, better resourced local authorities and less regional wealth inequality.

How would you reform the private rented sector to make it more stable and affordable for tenants? Do you support:

a. a national register of landlords;

Yes. The number of people living in the PRS in England is now higher than those living in social housing. Landlords must have accountability for their properties in the ever-expanding sector and I believe a national register of landlords is a small step in offering tenants more protection by ensuring their landlords are fit to rent out a property.

I would implement the register through our local authorities across the country.

b. some form of rent control?

Yes. I am open to exploring various types of rent control. My preferred model would empower our local authorities and combined authorities across the country to enforce rent controls

relative to local rental values. This is done in countries and cities across the world and it is an effective tool to ensure that the cost of living is not continually rising faster than wage growth. This also allows local authorities to base the caps on local housing markets, ensuring they do not disrupt regional economies.

By combining this with indefinite tenancies, the PRS would offer far more security to tenants and would ensure that the sector would remain stable.

Do you support Labour's 2019 manifesto commitment that we should aim to build 100,000 homes a year for social rent?

I am fully committed to the 100,000 homes per year target. I recognise that it is ambitious, however I believe it is necessary to solve the ongoing housing crisis affecting every part of our country.

Year on year, the numbers of people living on the streets increases, the number of people on council waiting lists with no hope of obtaining a home increases, and more people are forced to sleep in temporary accommodation such as hostels and B&Bs. The fact that these figures are continuing to increase is a national scandal and I firmly believe that Labour in government must strive to deliver 100,000 homes at social rent.

The Greater London Authority and G15 group of housing associations estimate that London needs £4.9bn of funding for affordable house building every year between 2022 and 2032 in order to meet our housing need. Would you commit to fund this?

The housing market in London is one of the most volatile in Europe and there is a desperate need to ensure affordable housing is available. I am fully committed to working with the GLA and the G15 to make sure they are being properly funded by central government, supporting them to build affordable homes in the capital.

Labour in government must work extremely closely with devolved governments across the country to ensure that housing need is being met and there is adequate funding from central government to support this. I would also work to ensure that councils and authorities across England had the right economic levers to raise their own funds to support housebuilding.

Do you agree that estate regeneration schemes should involve no net reduction in supply of social rented homes, and that estate residents should be balloted when their homes face demolition?

For too long, Councils have been luxury property empires with a sideline in local Government. I strongly believe that estate regeneration schemes should result in no reduction of social homes. We are in desperate need for more social homes, not fewer. I also want to make clear that improving the quality of existing social housing stock should still remain a priority due to the poor condition of many homes in the social sector. Homes with poor energy efficiency ratings exacerbate issues such as fuel poverty. We must ensure that where estates are regenerated and there is mixed housing stock, that there are no 'poor doors' or facilities that are off-limit to social tenants, compared to private tenants.

I do believe that residents on estates should have the right to vote in a ballot if their home faces demolition. I believe this encourages councils and developers to really sell the project to the community rather than forcing through proposals based on profits.

Do you support Labour's manifesto pledge to end the Right to Buy? If not, what reforms would you make to it?

I believe that England must follow Scotland and Wales in scrapping the Right to Buy. Right to Buy has resulted in over 4 million social homes being sold off since the policy was introduced in 1980 with 40% of all homes bought under Right to Buy now being privately rented for much higher rents. Right to Buy must be scrapped. Let's ban it until councils can ensure that any home sold through the scheme is immediately replaced.

Do you agree that affordable housing definition should be based on households not spending more than 30% of net income on housing costs?

I agree broadly with this definition, however I would like the definition to include factors such as property size, number of rooms and a closer link between overall living costs and wages. People on lower-incomes paying 30% of their net income towards housing costs is relatively a lot higher than people on higher incomes. This is especially true for families on lower incomes.

Additionally, it does not fully take into consideration the suitability of homes for the people occupying them. A one bedroom flat at 30% of net income for a single person or couple would be affordable and most likely appropriate, whereas the same property for a young family may be technically affordable, but not suitable due to its size.

Due to this, I believe the definition could be finetuned slightly more to best reflect individuals and families' contextual circumstances. However, the 30% of net income threshold is perhaps the simplest and easiest way to understand affordable housing that is linked to income rather than local rental values, therefore it is an extremely useful and effective definition.

Would you relax restrictions on building on the Green Belt?

I believe the Green Belt policy has served England very well over the years. It has for the most part, slowed the over urbanisation of the country, ensuring that free market developers are not cheaply building sparse suburbs around cities and towns, attempting to piggyback on existing social infrastructure.

A reversal of the Green Belt could result in land-grab by developers, working to procure vast amounts of land around urban areas so they could build cheaply on it for a profit, without any long-term planning.

I do believe that alternatives should be considered, including requiring developers to focus on brownfield land, making town centres denser, and being more creative about developing the hundreds of small sites across the capital.

Would you reverse permitted development rights allowing offices, shops, and other employment spaces in dense urban areas to change asset class and be converted into flats without planning permission?

This country desperately needs new homes and thousands must be created as soon as possible if we are ever going to meet the need. However, this cannot be done by turning commercial spaces into residential ones without adhering to the same standards we would expect in purpose built accommodation.

The Conservatives' permitted development scheme serves to create poor quality homes free from any official standards or 'affordable' quotas. Some permitted development homes are as small as 13 square metres. They are rabbit hutches not fit for human habitation.

I do believe that local authorities should be able to take over empty spaces if they are not being used for commercial use, however any homes made from these sites absolutely must be held to official standards.

How would you secure more affordable housing contributions from private developers through the planning system? How would you change the current approach to viability?

I believe that the Government should set new guidelines for the minimum proportion of new housing developments that have to be genuinely affordable. Targets would be devolved to local and combined authorities across England where they could best determine what is most appropriate by taking into consideration local land values. If no local targets were set, the national minimum would be used.

I would also end the free-for-all selling off of public land immediately. Councils today have lost 40% of their land since the 1970s, mainly to private companies. Public land should be prioritised for the construction of genuinely affordable homes, either through public body building or through high quality private developments. When building on public land the updated guidelines would apply, ensuring that when private developments are built, there would be a much higher proportion of affordable housing within them.

Would you support devolution to the Greater London Authority and city regions of control over:

- a. private rented sector regulation;**
- b. Housing Association regulation;**
- c. Right to Buy?**

I believe that devolution works and local people are best placed to develop solutions to complex problems. The UK is the most divided economy in Europe, with too much power focused in Westminster and Whitehall. We must strive to shift power from parliament to all regions and nations across the UK, including the GLA.

I would support discussing further devolution of power to the GLA especially regarding housing. I would also like to see national policies regarding the PRS implemented, to ensure there is at least a base level of regulation while also empowering authorities to regulate further if they so require. The same goes for housing associations.

Regarding Right to Buy, I would prefer to see the policy scrapped at a national level. I would only like to see powers over Right to Buy devolved if councils build like-for-like replacement social homes beforehand.

The Greater London Authority estimates that £574m is needed over the next five years to end rough sleeping in London. Would you commit to fund this?

People sleeping without a roof over their heads in a country as wealthy as ours is disgraceful. I support what the Mayor and City Hall is doing to combat this, however I agree with his calls for further support from central government to tackle this issue.

I stand-by Labour's commitments in the 2019 manifesto regarding homelessness and the funds required to tackle this. I certainly support providing the funding required for the GLA to tackle homelessness, just as I am committed to properly funding all local authorities across the country to end rough sleeping once and for all.

Central government has a massive role to play in ending rough sleeping too and I am committed to tackling the root causes of rough sleeping by reforming welfare policy and ensuring more affordable homes are being built.

Will you commit to restoring the previous Labour Government's homelessness safety net for priority groups and to improving support for single homeless people?

The landmark legislation marked a watershed on attitudes towards homelessness. No longer can the government and policymakers remain idle while people sleep on the streets without a roof over their heads. It was a starting point which got lots of things right, however more must be done.

I would much rather have a safety net for all groups of people, including 'single homeless' people. It's no surprise that the vast majority of people living on the streets now and throughout the past 40 years have been 'single homeless' people. I would much rather see the priority need abolished, as it is in Scotland, with councils accepting a housing duty to all those who present themselves for housing.

I would also like to work with our official affiliates to ensure that Labour Groups across the country are understanding the unique needs of minority groups. For example, with 24% of Britain's youth homeless population identifying as LGBT+, we need to ensure that our local authorities are tackling the unique challenges facing the community - I have been proud to see that Lambeth Council is shining a light on this.