

HOUSING

THE ROAD TO 1.5 MILLION HOMES FIFTY HOUSING ACHIEVEMENTS IN YEAR 1

Excellent progress has already been made in setting a permanent path to delivering more homes.

That's despite the Housing Minister Matthew Pennycook admitting that the Government's flagship policy of building 1.5 million homes in this Parliament would be a 'stretch'.

Straight after the election, Labour addressed issues with individual major sites, reversing Tory minister's vetoes around Liverpool Docks (1), as well as establishing a **New Homes Accelerator** to take direct action (2).

A dedicated subsidiary of *Homes England*, the **National Housing Bank** was set-up to build half a million homes, equipped with capital of £16 billion and a further £53 billion of private investment (3).

A new **Planning and Infrastructure Bill** will enable the planning system to build homes more quickly. The **National Planning Policy Framework** has been updated and housing targets cut under Michael Gove have been restored (4).

Low-quality 'grey belt' land will also be reallocated for new homes (5) and local authorities have been provided with a 5-year land supply to support their local plans (6).

Local planning committees have been modernised by empowering councillors to delegate more straightforward decisions to officers (7) (8). Planning for **Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects** (NSIPs) has been streamlined to ensure that critical infrastructure for homes is ready in place (9).

Revised regulations will require developers to build more quickly rather than prioritise profits over homes (10).

A key shortage of capacity within local authorities has been tackled by the Government through the **recruitment of an additional 300 planning officers** (11).

Additionally, **Skills England** has been set up as a national body to address other skill shortages (15). A further £600 million has been set aside for construction sector skills (16) and a new **Construction Skills Mission Board** aims to recruit an additional 100,000 new building workers per year (17).

Small and medium sized (SME) builders are receiving more support through a new 'medium site' planning category with fewer planning rules (12).

Homes England is also setting aside more land for smaller builders (13) and establishing a **Small Sites Aggregator** to unlock small sites which would not otherwise be developed (14).

Despite early fears about the Government's long-term plans for New Towns, a **New Towns Taskforce** (18) has identified 100 suitable sites, enabling work to start at least 12 months before the next election (19).

Read more here about what the Government is doing about [Skill shortages](#) - [New Towns](#) - [Building safety](#) and [Temporary accommodation](#)

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A huge boost to social and affordable housing

Boosting overall housing supply is critical, but social and affordable homes are crucial for those in greatest housing need. The last Government allowed 120,000 homes to be sold through the *Right to Buy*, but Labour has curtailed this, not only by severely reducing discounts (20) but also by making new-build social homes exempt for 35 years. Social tenants will need to have lived in their home for 10 years before becoming eligible (21).



Not only has the Government cut the loss of social homes, they have also laid the groundwork to increase the building of more social homes by requiring **Homes England** to directly fund them (22). The new **Planning and Infrastructure Bill** reforms *Compulsory Purchase Orders*, allowing local authorities to buy land for social housing at existing use price rather than inflated 'hope value' (23).

Increased funding for social housing is not a one-off. The Autumn Budget added £500m to the *Affordable Homes Programme* (24), while the Spring Statement added £2 billion more (25). Labour also increased the Conservatives' spending on *Affordable Homes Programme* by 50% to £39 billion in the recent Spending Review (26).

The combined impact has been to increase social house-building sixfold, building 300,000 new social and affordable homes over the next decade, 60% of which will be at social rent.

Finally, housing associations and local authorities have been given greater financial stability, not only by being included in Government funding for cladding remediation (27), but also by providing greater certainty of social rent. A ten-year rent settlement will bring social rents back to 2015 levels in real terms and plans for social rent convergence will bring artificially reduced rents up to standard (28).

Improving the quality of existing homes

Although building new homes is vital, critical issues persist with existing housing stock, particularly in larger blocks and in social housing.

The Government has already taken direct action, implementing **Awaab's Law**¹ (29), and setting out plans for a new **Decent Homes Standard** for social and private rented homes (30), which will be supported by a first-ever **Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard** in social rented homes (31).



Labour has already established a plan to act on all 58 recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry (32), including the introduction of a single construction sector regulator.

This is accompanied by a *Remediation Acceleration Plan* which will fast-track the vital works needed to fix the safety defects of high rise buildings (33).

Lastly, the Government has set aside £13.2bn for a *Warm Homes Plan* which will to bring 300,000 more homes up to the required *Energy Performance Certificate*, level "C" (34).

¹ A two year-old who died in December 2020 as a result of a severe respiratory condition which the coroner ruled was caused by prolonged exposure to black mould.

Ending insecurity, giving control

The 4.7 million private renters and 5.3 million leaseholders in England and Wales know well that the arcane rules governing their own homes are in stark need of reform. The Labour Government has responded with a bold programme to fix these tenures.

For the private rented sector, Labour's **Renters' Rights Bill** is about to become law. **Not only will this outlaw 'no-fault' Section 21 evictions** (35), it will also ban rental 'bidding wars' (36).

To monitor this, a new mandatory private rental sector database (37) **will track landlords and properties.**

The Bill offers other improvements for residents, from capping rent advances at one month (38), or establishing rent tribunals for tenants charged unreasonable increases (39), to the right to request a pet (40).

Labour has set out plans to fix the Tories' rushed *Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act* (41). Among the reforms to the *Right to Manage*, are commitments to require mandatory qualifications for managing agents (42), while leaseholders will be able to hire and fire their managing agents with greater ease (43).

The Government has also published a *Commonhold White Paper* (44) and will publish a full *Leasehold and Commonhold Bill* later this year (45).

Tackling homelessness head-on

Homelessness and rough sleeping are the most immediate signs of the housing crisis, with 126,400 families in temporary accommodation under the Tories.

Labour's Deputy Prime Minister, Angela Rayner, now chairs a *Cross-Government Taskforce on Homelessness* (46) with a £1 billion boost to funding added at the Autumn Budget (47).

Meanwhile, 20 local authorities with the highest usage of bed and breakfasts are now running **Emergency Accommodation Reduction Pilot** schemes to address the use of temporary accommodation (48).

Crucial steps have already been taken without waiting for the final recommendations of this taskforce. These include preventing homelessness by exempting *care leavers* and *survivors of domestic abuse* from punitive 'local connection tests' to qualify for local authority housing (49).

Labour will also repeal the cruel and outdated *Vagrancy Act* to finally decriminalise rough sleeping (50).

[Check out more on tackling temporary accommodation from Naushabah Khan MP](#)



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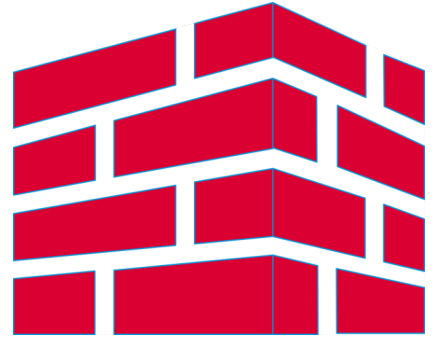


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This is an excerpt from a longer article by Alex Toal which you can find at our sister publication [RedBrickBlog](#).



Looking ahead to 2026

Despite good progress, the Government still has work to do because the number of households in temporary accommodation is on the rise, private sector rents continue to increase and fewer new homes are being started on site.

While the first year of a new Government inevitably consist of plans, targets and goal-setting, tracking their progress to final outcomes becomes key.

Local authorities and regulators, tribunals and courts will need additional resources to be able to handle the increased caseload related to new rights in leasehold and the private rental sector.

Any gaps or loopholes will need to be carefully monitored.

Obstacles to delivering new homes – particularly social and affordable ones – need to be reviewed and overcome.

Meeting the Government's housing ambitions may require reforms to registered providers to enable faster delivery of homes.

Concerns raised with the *Building Safety Regulator* may need attention, as may the viability rules and other blocks to the delivery of social homes on brownfield sites.

Finally, while the Government has undoubtedly done a great deal of work to fix the housing crisis, the political case still needs making that these changes will actually improve voters' lives.

Labour's emphasis on "*show don't tell*" regarding progress towards its housing goals is admirable, but the Government must make the connection clear in the minds of the public – not something easily achieved in such a challenging and competitive multi-party system.

The Government needs to tell a compelling housing story which links these 50 achievements, not only to sell it to voters but to create a long-term consensus for sustained housing action.

Labour's political legacy may well depend upon it.



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EXECUTIVE REPORT

The LHG Exec continues to work towards the Nicky Gavron Award, a new award which will honour the legacy of long-term LHG supporter Nicky Gavron. Nicky was the founder of London LHG and also one of our patrons.

A Working Group has been established that will formulate the details of the award, how it will be promoted and how nominations can be made, and we will continue to update on this.

We are also looking at reforming our external communications, including our website and influencing strategy, to look at how best to grow our network and ensure that more Labour Party members are aware of our work and are able to join if they wish to.

Like many in the Labour network, we will once again be at Labour Party Conference this year, and conference plans were at the core of our meeting discussion. We will be holding fringe events throughout 3 days of Conference in the Housing Zone.

We will be proposing a motion and holding events at Conference, which will be announced in due course, so do keep your eyes peeled for our events to add to your Conference agenda!

Of course, as a member-led network, we want to know what housing issues matter to you - so do look out for a poll coming your way so you can share your thoughts on what we should be focusing on as a group. And another Policy Day, where you can have your say in-person and virtually, is on the cards too.



By Sarina Kiayani

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CAPITAL LETTERS FIASCO

Capital Letters was officially launched in 2019 as a not-for-profit company providing housing for 180,000 or so homeless Londoners in temporary accommodation.

The agency's target was to hire 500 staff, mostly negotiators, to procure 17,000 properties by its third year of operations. In the three years ending March 2022, **fewer than 5,000 properties procured by Capital Letters had been let to homeless families** — barely a quarter of the 19,500 new homes it had promised to deliver by that point.

By the year ending March 2024, Capital Letters' 63 employees had offered just 257 homes to its London council members, an average of about four properties per employee.

Former staff have reported that negotiators would have almost nothing to do.

As one put it: "People in the office would talk about how they play Xbox all day".

In April 2024, Capital Letters asked its members to start paying to access its procurement services.

Given how few properties were now forthcoming, the move was met with incredulity. Councils started pulling out and council membership fell from 25 in 2022 to just ten.

Staff wondered why central government hadn't intervened in this taxpayer-funded organisation.

One former employee even blew their

whistle to their local MP, who was the prime minister at the time: Boris Johnson. Neither Johnson nor his then housing secretary, Robert Jenrick responded and nothing came of the complaint.

In six years of existence, Capital Letters was entrusted with £37m of taxpayer money but spent only £24m and only procured 5,000 homes.

Former staff believed the matter was urgent.

As one put it, "I prayed that someone at MHCLG would have two brain cells to rub together to call Capital Letters out, but it just never happened."

Labour MP Rachel Blake said "This is typical Tory waste, just as with protective gear for NHS staff in the pandemic.

Once again, they failed to ensure £millions of public money went to where they should be spent."



The Londoner

With thanks to The Londoner's Andrew Kersley. For the full story, see [The Londoner https://www.the-londoner.co.uk/capital-letters-collapse-london-homelessness/](https://www.the-londoner.co.uk/capital-letters-collapse-london-homelessness/)

LEASEHOLD: LANDLORDS' HIGH COURT CHALLENGE

It's difficult to imagine a more obvious example of "class war" than the sight of the country's wealthiest landowners, who own the freehold leases of thousands of flats, arguing that the last Conservative government's Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act (LAFRA) "contravenes their human rights".

There are six claimants representing a number of freeholders in the case.



Among them are the Cadogan Group, which is the main landlord in the west London districts of Chelsea and Knightsbridge and the neighbouring Duke of Westminster's Grosvenor Estate, covering Mayfair and Belgravia.

The High Court hearing is expected to take place as we go to press.

In January 2023, housing secretary Michael Gove said the government had plans to scrap leasehold

altogether by the end of the year.

This never happened and many of the best aspects of the proposals were abandoned.

Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner told MPs: "The High Court will be hearing challenges to some of the [2024] Act enfranchisement reforms, and we'll be robustly defending those challenges, and we'll await the court's judgement."

More information can be found at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c3vd23g29deo>



Cadogan motto: *He that envies is inferior.*

LANDLORDS IN THE DARK ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Landlords' poor understanding of energy efficiency regulations could hamper Government's ambition to make rentals greener.

Research by the Nationwide Building Society reveals that six out of ten landlords don't know that having an Energy Performance Certificate for their property is a legal requirement.

- Only a third of landlords know that the required rating is a "C" or when the new regulation comes into force in 2030. All rental properties in England and Wales have just five years to comply.
- Of those with properties rated "D" or

worse, 28% plan to sell-up. Fewer than half of landlords with a property rated D or lower aim to bring their properties up to an EPC-C rating by the government's deadline.

- Of those planning to stay in the market, almost two out of three are unsure of how much money would be needed to improve their property. Unsurprisingly, more than a third plan to raise their rents.
- Nearly one in five landlords say they will need to evict tenants to complete the works. They may be aware that, once Section 21 is abolished, refurbishment will remain as legal grounds for eviction.

WE NEED NEW AFFORDABLE AND SUSTAINABLE HOMES

Many people take for granted being able to afford a home in which you feel secure and comfortable because we are fortunate enough to be in that position.

Unfortunately, for millions of people in Britain this is not the case, and the situation has worsened over the past decade in areas like my constituency.

More than 5,000 cases have been processed by my team since being elected in July 2024 and housing is the largest and one of the most heartbreaking issues that constituents contact me about.

In the local authorities within my constituency – *Havering and Barking & Dagenham* – huge numbers of local families have been made homeless and are now in temporary accommodation.

Across London Councils, the cost of this is around £4 million a day and is one of the main factors driving Council Tax increases and pushing so many local authorities to the brink of collapse.

In England today there are over 350,000 people in all forms of temporary



Margaret Mullane, MP

accommodation, including 164,000 children. On top of that, recent research shows that children who have been in temporary accommodation get lower grades in their GCSEs than their classmates, potentially blighting their futures.

The lack of truly affordable homes has far-reaching implications that touch all our lives.

The teaching unions, Royal College of Nursing, police, firefighters and many other key workers testify to the depth of the housing crisis as organisations try to recruit and retain staff in these essential services.

It's not much use advertising jobs in your school or at the hospital if the person offered the post can't afford to buy or rent privately anywhere

within reasonable travelling distance to the school or hospital.

I say to people complaining about proposed developments in their area, think of the essential workers we need to provide services in our hospitals, schools, police or fire brigade, as well as the housing prospects of your children and grandchildren.

This mess is the result of the disastrous housing policies of recent years.

The answer is more council-built homes at social rent levels that are truly affordable for local people in modestly paid jobs..

Building homes is crucial, but there must be equal emphasis on creating sustainable, thriving communities where families choose to put down roots for their future.

Alongside the new homes must come the essential GP surgeries, school places, good quality public realm with green spaces and access to public transport services.

ENGAGING LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN DEVELOPMENT

The Local Plan is the key statutory planning document that sets out a local authority's vision and policies for land use, including planning and housing. These policies determine the number of homes, the housing mix, and who the homes are for.

Policies such as the one for affordable housing are directly linked to the Local Plan and are monitored through the development management process. Others, such as the Local Lettings Policy, are not, although they may provide up to 25% of housing allocations to local residents. As they are not monitored through the planning system they are less visible and accountable in practice.

Local residents often feel disconnected from new housing developments in their neighbourhoods. In addition to the disruption experienced during construction and the long-term impact of increased traffic, they may see no clear benefit for their communities.

Planning tools such as Section 106 agreements, the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and the Neighbourhood CIL (NCIL) are supposed to deliver community benefits but if they are applied inconsistently may reinforce negative perceptions.

A key issue is that, while the aim of these tools is to support inclusive growth, fund local services, and strengthen communities, they often don't align with how people participate in democracy.

For instance, residents often organise across official boundaries such as electoral wards or parliamentary constituencies used by these planning tools

As a result, it becomes harder for communities to organise effectively, advocate for change, or hold decision-makers accountable.

If we want housing delivery to work effectively for local people, we need greater transparency, consistency, and alignment with democratic structures, so that community voices are not just heard but acted upon – no matter where they come from.

Dr Anwar Punekar

INVESTING DIRECTLY IN AFFORDABLE HOMES

According to the *Housebuilder Magazine*, journal of the Home Builders Federation; 'As at December 2024, least 17,432 Section 106 affordable housing units with detailed planning permission remained uncontracted and 139 housing sites delayed as a result'. This statistic reveals that the use of Section 106 agreements to deliver more affordable housing is unworkable.

Section 106 agreements have become the go to means for local authorities to claw back something from private house building. Section 106 is called on for affordable housing, roads, play facilities, school building, solar panels, open space and more.

Land owners and developers have become highly effective at using viability assessments to fight section 106 responsibilities.

The Government had hoped that by relaxing planning controls it could squeeze more affordable housing out of developers through Section 106 requirements, but it is clear that this strategy does not work:

- Section 106 relies upon a booming housing market to deliver more cross-subsidy; with a sluggish economy there is no chance this will happen
- Housing associations and local authorities are so cash-strapped they are not willing to enter into contracts for Section 106 homes
- Prolonged disputes over Section 106 and lack of demand for Section 106 units has slowed development rather than speeded it up

Direct Government investment in affordable housing rather than relying on cross-subsidy could avoid these delays and be much more cost effective because: -

- Land value would be captured by the public sector
- There would be less community opposition and fewer legal disputes
- Affordable housing would be taken out of the market and
- Affordable housing would be an asset on the Government balance sheet

It is time for Labour to abandon cross-subsidy and invest in direct development.

Bob Colenutt (Oxford West and Abingdon Labour Party)

ACCESSIBLE HOUSING: BUILDING WHAT'S WANTED

In 2024, we should no longer be asking why accessible housing matters – the evidence is overwhelming. With over 14 million disabled people in the UK, and a rapidly ageing population, the need for homes that are inclusive, adaptable and dignified is beyond question.

Yet despite clear demographic demand and repeated Government rhetoric about "levelling up," we are still falling short.

Accessible housing provision remains patchy, inconsistent and largely shaped without the input of those who live with disability.

Often, accessibility is treated as a box to tick rather than a fundamental design philosophy. What results are homes that meet minimum standards but fail to offer maximum independence or aspiration.

The current system relies heavily on reactive adaptation rather than proactive planning. Local authorities are stretched, and developers often cite cost or complexity as barriers. But what if the problem isn't the cost — it's the process?

This is where universal design and true collaboration come in. Universal design is about creating spaces usable by everyone — young or old, disabled or not — without needing later modifications.

It means designing from the outset with the broadest range of people in mind, which

benefits not just disabled residents but parents with prams, older people, and anyone facing temporary or permanent mobility challenges.

However, design alone won't solve the issue. We need culture change. We need to stop designing for disabled people and start building with them.

My podcast, *Accessible Housing Matters UK* brings together the disabled community, developers, architects, investors, and policymakers.

The goal is co-creation, involving disabled people as equal partners – not just service users or recipients of care – we unlock smarter, more human, and more effective housing solutions.

I'm speaking with people who've been forced to live in unsafe or unsuitable homes for years while waiting for adaptations.

We've interviewed designers creating stunning accessible interiors that prove inclusive design can be beautiful.

We've heard from developers who are beginning to realise that inclusive homes can also be commercially viable, especially as demand continues to grow.

But to make this the norm rather than the exception, we need political will and policy alignment.

Labour has a proud history of championing social justice, and that must include housing justice for disabled people.

That means:

- Mandating a higher baseline for accessibility in new builds
- Incentivising universal design through planning policy
- Funding co-production initiatives that give disabled people real influence
- Ensuring the voices of lived experience are not an afterthought but embedded from day one

Accessible housing is not a niche issue. If we want to create a society where everyone belongs, then our housing must reflect that from the foundations up.

As the housing crisis deepens, the opportunity to build differently – and better – is right in front of us. Let's not miss it.



Ruth Hunter podcast host
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