Housing Secretary delivers 'call to arms' to get Britain building

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The Housing Secretary's speech at the Home Builders Federation annual conference this week (Tuesday 24 March).

I’m delighted to be here today with so many people who are dedicating your lives to building a better future for our country.

And you know, as well as I do, that we face a housing crisis in this country.

Under the previous government, the number of people sleeping rough on the street doubled.

The number of families stuck in so-called temporary accommodation - but not so temporary, if it’s for years - that doubled as well.

Young people are routinely left living with their parents, well into their 30s or their 40s, because we haven’t built enough homes so they can find somewhere they can afford to rent.

That’s when they get that first foot on the housing ladder and buy a place of their own.

It’s not acceptable. The opportunities that were open to my generation, when we were younger, are closed off to them.

So I’m determined to get Britain building again, so we can put the key to their own front door in the hands of everyone in this country who needs one.

Now, our planning system too often favoured the blockers over the builders.

It tells young couples - no, you can’t have a place of your own to start a family, you’re going to be stuck renting for another year.

They’re saying to kids - no, your mum and dad can’t move into a bigger house with a garden to play out in, you’re going to carry on sharing a bedroom with your brother or your sister.

There’s a real detachment between those who campaign against decent homes and the real-life consequences of their actions.

My heart goes out to the many families stuck in temporary accommodation.

And I’ve met so many of them in my own constituency.

Kids with nowhere to eat, except perched on the end of their bed.

Nowhere to do their homework, apart from the kitchen floor.

Parents sleeping on the sofa, because there aren’t enough beds.

Cooking facilities so inadequate that a desperate mum is forced to feed her kids junk food she can’t afford, even though she knows it’s making them sick.

Everything we do to get this country building again, it’s for them.

And if we get this right - if we build one and a half million homes - the benefits won’t just be limited to those without a decent home.

The Office for Budget Responsibility have said that the planning reforms we’ve already announced will add £6.8 billion to the economy by 2029-30.

And that’s the single biggest growth effect for a policy that costs government nothing that the OBR has ever scored.

Our ambitious plan is for housing policies to recreate the economic boom built on mass house building and development in the 1940s.

When they built back then at scale, it acted like a shot of adrenaline into a recovering economy.

That economic growth sustained the healthcare and welfare systems Labour built almost from day dot.

It raised incomes and it created jobs, and it paid for a new generation of infrastructure, much of which we still rely on today.

That is the economic renewal we must recreate.

The consequences of Britain’s failure to build in recent decades have been disastrous. But the opportunities of putting it right now can be enormous.

So, in my first 200 days in this job, many of you told me that you need to feel more confidence before putting more applications in.

So we’ve been changing things. When a council intends to refuse a scheme over 150 homes, they now have to tell me first, and I will decide whether their decision is reasonable or not.

I’ve announced plans to simplify the buying process, which will increase demand. A complete transformation of the buying and selling process that is so stressful and uncertain for millions of families.

I brought forward emergency measures for London, to kickstart house building in the capital, by stripping out unnecessary cost, delays and requirements.

Then we announced a new National Planning Policy Framework with a yes-by-default rule for development around train stations.

That is part of a shift towards a more predictable, development-friendly planning system.

Next, we announced a package of support for small and medium-sized builders.

We’ve announced the final seven sites for our new towns programme just this week.

And we’ve opened bidding for £39 billion of investment that will lead to the biggest increase in social and affordable house building this country has seen in a generation.

This comes on top of a broader package, which includes rent convergence, and an effective and stable regulatory regime by confirming the minimum energy efficiency and decent homes standards.

Housing associations are a bedrock of the house building system, building one quarter of all new homes last year.

And next week, our new National Housing Bank will open in Leeds - an entirely new investment arm, offering low cost loans and investments.

It offers £16 billion of long-term, flexible capital, unlocking £53 billion in private funding.

And it comes in addition to the New Homes Accelerator, which will sherpa new schemes all the way through to completion.

On the 1st of April, we'll open the National Housing Delivery Fund for applications.

All parts of the next phase in our plan to get Britain building again.

Market house building must be a three-way partnership between central government, local government and developers.

Without each playing their part, we will never achieve our target.

And by and large, each of the three are pulling their weight, but let's be honest - we've not yet seen enough to meet the ambitions we set.

I see the same data that you do -I know that for each of the positive upticks, there is often another down.

I've told you already about the steps we've taken - but these will only feed through to more builds if more is done by councils and developers.

And I do want to pay credit to both for very encouraging signs-

Look at local authorities, for example, in the first year of this government, local authorities themselves built more homes than at any point since records began in 1991. Submissions of local plans increased, and many more are now on their way to adoption.

And the same goes for developers - outside of London, housing units in all application types surged by 60% in 2025 compared to 2024.

But what these data points do not fully explain is an inconsistency in approach.

Yes, many councils are approving more, but a small number are still failing on speed and on quality of their decisions.

And yes, many developers are getting more applications in, but some are still sitting on permissions for viable projects.

I will be frank - we need you to build out existing sites and bring forward more, more quickly.

Because for the next 200 days, the burning question is how we can ensure that each part of the three-way partnership contributes to the maximum.

And as I said, we've not yet seen what we need to meet our target.

Central governments support for house building will never be complete.

It’s a constant process of demanding more of ourselves.

So we will go further. Last week, the Chancellor outlined the government’s broader approach to the economy, recognising that economic growth relies on an active and strategic state. And that is a message which applies to house building too.

Between now and the summer, we will roll out the Planning and Infrastructure Act, and the National Planning Policy Framework.

We will get stuck in with delivery and provide record funding.

We will solve viability gaps, clear the BSR backlog, expand our New Homes Accelerator, and call in decisions which are not pro-growth.

Then we will publish our Long-Term Housing Strategy which will explain our vision for safe, secure, decent, and affordable homes for all, and detail how we intend to get there.

It will lay out how we are fixing the foundations by reforming the planning system and the land market.

And it will set out how we will transform and diversify the house building industry, so that you can provide the scale of different types of homes this country needs.

It will also include our plans to build more social and affordable homes, empower leaseholders and tenants, drive a transformational and lasting change in safety and quality, and ensure every family in this country has a safe, decent, and affordable home, with social homes going to those who need them the most.

Next come local authorities. We’ve set high expectations for councils, and most are now meeting them. Take Knowsley, for example - not a single major development has been successfully appealed. And we have so many examples too of local authorities supporting new homes, which are exemplars of good design.

Just look at Appleby Blue Almshouses in Southwark, which won last year’s RIBA Stirling Prize. But there are still a few councils who, at the other end of the spectrum, are letting their residents down.

The Housing Minister and I will use our powers to hold them to account. I will designate poor-performing local authorities based on the speed and the quality of their decisions. We have already called in unreasonable decisions and taken them ourselves.

In Stockport, South Tyneside, Buckinghamshire and Three Rivers, we have shown we stand ready to intervene.

But we also believe in a system that rewards councils who do get on and build. One of the public’s main concerns about new housing is that the necessary infrastructure doesn’t come with it.

We want to see areas rewarded - so that when they agree new housing, they also get new roads and schools and green spaces.

It’s not right that sometimes, places say no to new homes and get more infrastructure investment than those areas who say yes.

One of the key points of the Chancellor’s Mais Lecture last week was that places should be in charge

of their own destiny.

Which is why we are looking at giving regional leaders control of a share of national taxes.

This would create added incentives for Mayors to pursue pro-growth policies, such as housebuilding.

We want to support the established Mayoral Strategic Authorities to get Britain building - and we want to reward them when they do that.

Then there's you, the developers. I need you all to join us in this partnership.

(political content removed)

The world has moved on and the fiscal situation demands a different course. This time, we are relying mostly on private developers, like you, to get Britain building. This reflects the world we now live in.

Yes, we're investing more in affordable and social housing, and we need the sector to diversify and try new models. But the bulk must come from private market development. And I will level with you. There are voices who say it won't work. They say you'll never build enough, and they point to how slow build-out has been so far.

We are supporting you - we will work with you and we will give you the tools you need, but we need you to do your job too.

We live in changing times, with a world that feels less stable. And I know that instability makes all of your jobs harder. But what remains certain is that Britain needs more homes and we have to look at this for the long term.

That means investing through the cycle, investing in the workforce of the future. And living up to the House Builders Federation Pledge to get on and build more homes faster.

So treat this as a call to arms - get those applications in, get shovels in the ground, and together, we will build, baby build.

I want to finish with a quote from Harold Macmillan, who governed during the prosperity that followed the house building boom of the late 1940s.

"The luxuries of the rich," he said, "have become the necessities of the poor."

So, ask yourselves this - if we get this right, if private developers like you can get Britain building, like the state did back then, what luxuries of today could become the necessities of tomorrow?

The future we dream of as a country - of national renewal, stronger public services, pride in the places that we call home, the values we believe in - of everyone having enough to get by, and everywhere having the opportunities that they deserve…

These are only possible if we build homes and grow the economy. The same applies to the dreams of families up and down Britain.

Just remember that you are not just building homes, you're building hope. Hope of being able to move out of Mum and Dad's. Hope for a garden for the kids to play. Hope for a future without being moved on from one B&B to another.

It’s such a fantastic thing to dedicate your working life to achieving. So together, let’s do this, let’s get Britain building.

https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/housing-secretary-delivers-call-to-arms-to-get-britain-building