

# HBF Called for Industry Feedback on Priorities for the Next Government: We Joined the Conversation!



8th July 2024

Ahead of the recent General Election, the Home Builders Federation (HBF) issued a call for members views to establish the industry's top priorities for the next Government.

The HBF was keen to find out from members what changes the next Government can make to planning policy and the planning process to further support the industry. This includes views on national and local planning policy, development management, LPA funding, policies to support SMEs, and older persons' housing.

## **Below is a summary of the views we shared with the HBF:**

- We expressed that there is a need to revisit the outdated Green Belt designation. While the Green Belt serves a purpose, its current limitations hinder development. A possible solution is to exclude Previously Developed Land (PDL) from Green Belt restrictions. This wouldn't affect protected land uses or valued landscapes and aligns with the Brownfield First approach of utilising existing developed areas before expanding into undeveloped ones.
- We welcome the new Chancellor, Rachel Reeves' vow to 'get Britain Building again' and her commitment to develop on brownfield and so-called 'Grey Belt' land.
- On the broader question of a national spatial plan, we believe the answer can be found in a regional approach.

A more workable solution may be re-introducing regional strategies to address housing delivery and other issues of regional significance.

- The Infrastructure Levy is an unworkable system. Rather than reforming the Section 106 planning obligations (S106) a possible solution is to instead incentivise councils to directly build housing stock, particularly on land they already own. Housing developers are open to providing affordable housing, but viability in a market economy is key. S106's tendency for one-sided adjustments upwards creates an unacceptable risk for developers.

## **Local Planning Policy**

- The new Chancellor's pledge to restore mandatory housing targets in the NPPF is a much-needed change.
- We support the position previously suggested by the HBF that the Standard Method should be reformed so that it uses the existing housing stock of an area as a baseline, rather than household projections.
- We support the assertion that there should be a statutory requirement for LPAs to prepare a local plan and financial incentives could sit alongside this.

## **Development Management**

- Mac Mic Group supports HBF's suggestions for improving the development management process with a fixed national scheme of delegation (e.g. a higher threshold for reserved matters submissions to be determined by committee), a fast-track mediation service for minor planning disputes and the creation of a fast-tracked route for in-principle approval for applications that are in line with an adopted local plan. A development proposal that accords with an up-to-date development plan (which has been consulted on and examined) should be approved without delay, and certainly not be determined at committee level.
- Steps to reduce the political 'interference' across plan led planning applications are needed. There should be a requirement for all development plans to include a threshold for decisions under delegation.
- Mac Mic Group would find a revised focused list of national statutory consultees helpful.
- To speed up the planning process, consultation periods should be absolute - once the period has expired, a no response should be recorded as no objection, and applications should not be delayed.

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## Local Planning Authority Funding

- Mac Mic agrees there would be “material benefit” in the Government raising planning fees to a service led cost reflective level.
- Payments in PPAs should be staged, including bonuses for over-performance and penalties for under-performance.
- Statutory Planning Fees must be ringfenced for use in Planning Departments.

## Small & Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)

The following measures would be, in our opinion, helpful to SME developers:

- The introduction of a presumption in favour of development on small sites, up to 25 homes, on brownfield land within settlement boundaries;
- Amend the NPPF to require LPAs to demonstrate specifically the small and medium sized sites that will accommodate at least 10% of a housing requirement;
- Affordable contributions on sites of up to 25 dwellings should be made by way of financial contributions.

## Older Persons' Housing

- Every Local Planning Authority should be required to assess the demand for all forms and tenures of housing for older people and to include policies and a strategy, including land supply, for meeting this demand in its local plan.

## Conclusion

Mac Mic Group supports the areas for improvement in planning policy and processes highlighted by the HBF and are looking forward to seeing how the new Chancellor, Rachel Reeves will change the planning system for the better.

In a housing crisis, the outdated Green Belt designation requires an urgent review. There are fourteen areas of Green Belt across England. Local authorities have the power to designate these areas, following the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. Near London, some smaller areas have Green Belt status thanks to an even older law from 1938.

The Green Belt around the major conurbations has been criticised as one of the main protectionist bars to building housing in places we need them most.

Green Belt could be much less of an emotive issue, and perhaps people might be more accepting of development, if they fully understood the Green Belt's composition.

Mac Mic Group have been working with local authorities to identify “Grey Belt” areas that are potentially suitable for sustainable development.

We are keen to engage with the new Government to bring forward these ‘Grey Belt’ areas for development to assist with the

delivery of family housing of all tenures, employment land, active open space, while ensuring we obtain considerable Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and deliver housing with the associated infrastructure in areas we need it most!

Other key areas of focus for the new Government should include: the introduction of policy which allows for the speedy approval of development proposals which accord with an up-to-date development plan (which have been consulted on and examined) without the need for determination at committee level.

The housing crisis is more than just numbers. It's about people's lives being put on hold. Flawed policies, a lack of available homes, and limited options for both young buyers and downsizers are creating a situation where people cannot move forward.

It's now the responsibility of the new Government to address the housing crisis by implementing new policies and process which speed up development and increase efficiency in the planning sector.

From what we've heard in today's announcement, Labour are already taking steps in the right direction.