



# King's Speech 2024: Housing, communities and local government

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**Date published:** 11 July 2024

This research briefing sets out the Labour Party's commitments covering housing, communities and local government drawing on its manifesto and other material in the public domain. It has been written in advance of the King's Speech to help members of the House of Lords prepare for the debate on the speech. It does not constitute official information about the government's intentions or provide a complete list of bills to be announced. Commitments relating to English devolution and local government are covered in a separate briefing, ['King's Speech 2024: Devolved affairs'](#).

## I. Housebuilding

In a speech at the Labour Party's annual conference in October 2023, the leader of the Labour Party, Keir Starmer, announced that it was "time to get Britain building again" and stated that a Labour government would build 1.5mn new homes across the country over the course of the next parliament.<sup>1</sup>

In April 2024, Labour published its housing plan.<sup>2</sup> Introducing the

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<sup>1</sup> Labour Party, ['Keir Starmer's speech at Labour conference'](#), 10 October 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Labour Party, ['Labour's housing plan: How we'll protect our natural spaces and free up grey belt land for building'](#), 19 April 2024, accessed 1 June 2024. The full commitments can no longer be found on the Labour Party webpage. Instead, they can be found at: Ed Molyneux, ['Our view on Labour's five golden rules for development on the 'grey belt''](#), CPRE, 25 April 2024.





plan, Labour said that previous Conservative governments had “saddled the country with a chronic shortage of homes”, with “the dream of home ownership pushed further out of reach”. Therefore, Labour stated its intention to “do things differently” by introducing a “better system, that builds homes local people can afford, delivers new infrastructure and improves green spaces”. This would be achieved through:

- **Brownfield-first policies:** Demonstrating a commitment to brownfield-first planning policies. A brownfield site refers to previously developed land.
- **Grey belt development:** Creating a new category called “grey belt”, which would prioritise development in “grey and ugly areas of the green belt”. Labour stated that “wastelands and old car parks located on the green belt” should not receive “the same protections in national policy as rolling hills and nature spots in the green belt”.
- **Affordable housing:** Outlining that any development on green belt land must include 50 percent affordable housing. The policy criticised green belt building under the previous government, whereby affordable housing rates were “as low as 10 percent with expensive executive homes local people can’t afford”.
- **Boosting public services and infrastructure:** Ensuring that public services and infrastructure growth accompanied the development of towns and cities. Labour stated that the release of green belt land for development must include new infrastructure such as general practitioner capacity,



school and nursery places. The exact delivery would be negotiated by local leaders “depending on the needs of their patch”.

- **Protecting green spaces:** Requiring that new housing developments in the green belt include plans to improve existing green spaces and create new accessible areas for local people. Labour also highlighted that lots of existing green belt space comprised “low-quality wasteland sat on by landowners that local people can’t use and enjoy”.

In June 2024, Labour published its manifesto and reaffirmed its commitment to building 1.5mn homes over the next parliament.<sup>3</sup> The manifesto outlined several proposals from its housing plan to achieve this target.<sup>4</sup> These included:

- taking a “brownfield first” approach, which would prioritise the development of previously developed land “wherever possible” and “fast-tracking approval of urban brownfield sites”
- taking a “more strategic” approach to the designation and release of green belt land to build “more homes in the right places”
- prioritising the release of “lower quality ‘grey belt’ land”, such as disused petrol stations, and establishing “golden rules” to ensure that development benefits communities and nature
- requiring all combined and mayoral authorities to

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<sup>3</sup> Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), 9 June 2024, p 36.

<sup>4</sup> As above, pp 37–9.



- “strategically plan for housing growth” in their areas further reforming compulsory purchase compensation rules to “improve land assembly, speed up site delivery, and deliver housing, infrastructure, amenity, and transport benefits in the public interest”

Several housebuilding organisations welcomed Labour’s proposals in this policy area. The chief executive of the National Housing Federation, Kate Henderson, stated that “building on brownfield land alone will not deliver enough homes to solve this crisis, so it’s right to consider how our approach to the green belt can better serve our country and our communities”.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the chief executive of the National Federation of Builders, Richard Beresford, said that the proposals would “ensure greenspace loss is mitigated” and that it was a “win for all parties”.<sup>6</sup>

However, the decision to prioritise building on brownfield sites also faced criticism. In an article in the Guardian in June 2024, the chair of the London Centre for the Humanities, Richard Sennett, argued that building on brownfield sites meant “erecting tower blocks set in open spaces”, which had “proved a social nightmare”.<sup>7</sup> He noted that houses built on such sites resulted in “elderly people suffer[ing] from isolation, the middle-aged spend[ing] long hours commuting to work, and adolescents [being] more prone to the ills of drug use, depression and lack of exercise than in inner-city neighbourhoods”.

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<sup>5</sup> Liam Geraghty, ‘[Labour unveils plan for new housing on ‘ugly grey belt land’. But is Starmer going far enough?](#)’, Big Issue, 19 April 2024.

<sup>6</sup> As above.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Sennett, ‘[Labour’s housing policies have already been tried—and have failed. Here is the radical solution](#)’, Guardian, 3 July 2024.



## 2. Creation of new towns and housing affordability

Following the second world war, the then Labour government introduced several New Towns Acts, such as in 1946, which established urban development programmes to resolve overcrowding in London and other cities.<sup>8</sup> Towns created included Basildon, Hemel Hempstead and Telford.<sup>9</sup>

In May 2024, the then deputy leader of the Labour Party and shadow secretary of state for levelling up, housing and communities, Angela Rayner, announced that a Labour government would create new towns as part of its commitment to build 1.5mn houses.<sup>10</sup> Ms Rayner stated that the party aimed to create a New Towns Commission within six months of a Labour government being in place, with a list of potential sites to be determined within a year. Under the policy, developers would be required to meet a “new towns code”, which would include ensuring that 40 percent of houses in these new towns would be classed as affordable homes.

However, the Labour Party did not mention the affordable housing target in its manifesto. Instead, it included a commitment to deliver the “biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation”.<sup>11</sup> To achieve this, Labour said it would strengthen planning obligations on developers to ensure that new developments

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<sup>8</sup> Jennifer McKiernan and Harry Farley, [‘Labour to select new town sites by end of first year’](#), BBC News, 21 May 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Jen Siebrits and Louise Wyman, [‘Politics of renewal: Labour’s vision for ‘new towns’](#)’, CBRE, 27 June 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer McKiernan and Harry Farley, [‘Labour to select new town sites by end of first year’](#), BBC News, 21 May 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), 9 June 2024, p 39.



provide more affordable homes. In addition, it stated that it would make changes to the affordable homes programme.<sup>12</sup> The programme provides grant funding to support the capital costs of developing affordable housing in England, to ensure it delivers more homes from existing funding. Labour also proposed supporting councils and housing associations to “build their capacity and make a greater contribution to affordable housing supply”.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the manifesto outlined that the party would prioritise building new social rented homes and “better protect” existing stock by reviewing the increased right-to-buy discounts introduced in 2012 and by increasing protections on newly built social housing.

The manifesto also included commitments to support first-time buyers. It proposed introducing a permanent, comprehensive mortgage guarantee scheme, aimed at providing lower mortgage costs. Additionally, Labour noted that it would work with local authorities to enable first-time buyers to purchase homes and “end the farce of entire developments being sold off to international investors before houses are even built”.<sup>14</sup>

Many of the proposals relating to affordable housing were welcomed by various housing stakeholders. The chief executive of Shelter, Polly Neate, praised Labour’s commitment to building more social rented homes, describing it as “bold and desperately needed”.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the chief executive of Crisis, Matt Downie, stated that “this level of aspiration to rebuild our depleted housing stock, with a priority on social housing [...] is a game changer in our mission to tackle one of

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<sup>12</sup> Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, ‘[Apply for affordable housing funding](#)’, updated 30 April 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, 9 June 2024, p 39.

<sup>14</sup> As above.

<sup>15</sup> Liam Geraghty, ‘[Labour manifesto: What we learned about Keir Starmer’s plan to end the UK’s housing crisis](#)’, Big Issue, 13 June 2024.



the greatest injustices of our time”.<sup>16</sup>

However, the new towns policy also faced criticism. Writing for City AM in May 2024, Ben Hopkinson, a researcher at the organisation Britain Remade, warned that if Labour were to pursue its policy of building 1.5mn homes then “experience shows us that they should focus on their urban extension plans, instead of relying on new towns, which often under-deliver”.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the party faced criticism for not including in its manifesto the target in its new towns code for developers to ensure that 40 percent of new homes were for affordable tenures. Adam Peggs, a senior press and digital communications officer at the think tank Common Wealth, stated that the absence of the target was a “significant concern”.<sup>18</sup> He further argued that for Labour’s new towns plan to succeed, “high levels of genuinely affordable housing” were “a necessity”.

### 3. Planning

The manifesto also made several commitments relating to planning.<sup>19</sup> These included:

- **Updating the ‘National planning policy framework’ (NPPF) “immediately”.** This

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<sup>16</sup> Liam Geraghty, ‘[Labour manifesto: What we learned about Keir Starmer’s plan to end the UK’s housing crisis](#)’, Big Issue, 13 June 2024.

<sup>17</sup> Ben Hopkinson, ‘[Labour’s new towns plan is not the answer to the housing crisis](#)’, City AM, 22 May 2024.

<sup>18</sup> Chloe Chaplain and Jane Merrick, ‘[Labour accused of watering down key housing pledges](#)’, inews.co.uk, 16 June 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, 9 June 2024, pp 36–8.



included restoring mandatory housing targets.<sup>20</sup> The NPPF sets out the government’s planning policies for England and details how these are expected to be applied.<sup>21</sup>

- **Supporting local authorities by funding additional planning officers.** The manifesto stated that a Labour government would plan to fund this by increasing the rate of the stamp duty surcharge paid by non-UK residents. At present, the rates are 2 percentage points higher than those that apply to purchases made by UK residents.<sup>22</sup>
- **Taking “tough action” to ensure that planning authorities have up-to-date local plans.** These plans, prepared by a local authority in consultation with its community, provide a framework for the future development of an area.<sup>23</sup>
- **Introducing “effective new mechanisms for cross-boundary strategic planning”.** The manifesto noted that a Labour government would require all combined and mayoral authorities to strategically plan for housing growth in their areas.
- **Giving combined authorities new planning powers and freedoms.** Labour stated that this

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<sup>20</sup> In December 2023, the targets were removed from a revised NPPF. Speaking at the Royal Institute of British Architects, the then secretary of state for levelling up, housing and communities, Michael Gove, stated that the targets would be “advisory” for local authorities (Joshua Oliver, [‘Michael Gove insists he has not ‘abandoned’ local housing targets’](#), Financial Times (£), 19 December 2023).

<sup>21</sup> Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, [‘National planning policy framework’](#), updated 20 December 2023.

<sup>22</sup> HM Revenue and Customs, [‘Rates of stamp duty land tax for non-UK residents’](#), updated 30 May 2024.

<sup>23</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, [‘Neighbourhood planning bill: Factsheet—local plans \(clauses 6 to 11\)’](#), 11 January 2017, p 1.





would “make better use” of grant funding.

Following the general election, on 8 July 2024, Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves made a speech outlining the Labour government’s plans to “rebuild Britain”.<sup>24</sup> This included several commitments on planning:

- Reforming the NPPF and consulting on a “new growth-focused approach” to the planning system before the end of the month. This included restoring mandatory housing targets. Additionally, the chancellor confirmed that the government was putting onshore wind on the same footing as other forms of energy development in the revised NPPF. This is outlined in more detail in the House of Lords Library briefing [‘King’s speech 2024: Energy security, net zero, environment and agriculture’](#).
- Creating a new taskforce to “accelerate stalled housing sites” in England. The chancellor announced that this would begin with Liverpool Central Docks, Worcester Parkway, Northstowe and Langley Sutton Coldfield, and represented “more than 14,000 homes”.
- Supporting local authorities by appointing an additional 300 planning officers across the country.
- Ministers using their powers for direct intervention on planning. This included reviewing planning applications “where the potential gain for the regional and national economies warrant[s] it”. Ms

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<sup>24</sup> HM Treasury, [‘Chancellor Rachel Reeves is taking immediate action to fix the foundations of our economy’](#), 8 July 2024.



Reeves stated that the deputy prime minister had reviewed and recovered two planning appeals for data centres to be built in Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire. In a recovered appeal, an inspector recommends a decision on a planning appeal to the secretary of state, who then makes the final decision.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the deputy prime minister would be writing to local authorities, alongside consulting on the NPPF, “making clear what will now be expected of them”.

Labour’s planning commitments were welcomed by several housing and planning organisations. The chief executive of the Berkeley Group, Rob Perrins, stated that he was “hugely encouraged to see the clear priority and focus on housing delivery”.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the chief executive of the Royal Town Planning Institute, Victoria Hills, stated that Labour had made planning reform “a central focus of its manifesto pledges” demonstrating how planning “can be a solution, not an obstacle to economic growth”.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, she warned that “fast progress” would “need to include restoring funding for planning services, kick-starting stalled local plans, and giving strategic direction at a mayoral level from day one”.

However, there were calls for Labour to go further. James Dunne, head of operational real estate at the asset management company Abrdn, said that the government “needs to go beyond the planning system and work in partnership and financially support the private

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<sup>25</sup> Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, ‘[Planning applications: Called-in decisions and recovered appeals](#)’, updated 14 May 2024.

<sup>26</sup> Alex Daniel, ‘[What are Labour’s plans for housebuilding, and how will they work?](#)’, Standard, 8 July 2024.

<sup>27</sup> Royal Town Planning Institute, ‘[RTPI reflects on Labour manifesto](#)’, 13 June 2024.

sector to deliver significant volumes of housing across all tenures”.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the director of residential research at Savills, Emily Williams, warned that large scale development would need to be supported by “infrastructure investment”.<sup>29</sup>

## 4. Private rented sector

The findings of the English Housing Survey, published in July 2023, revealed that the private rented sector was the second-largest housing tenure in England, with approximately 4.6mn households, representing 19 percent of households.<sup>30</sup>

Labour’s manifesto stated that a Labour government would legislate to overhaul the regulation of the private rented sector.<sup>31</sup> It proposed immediately abolishing section 21 “no-fault” evictions to prevent private renters from being “exploited and discriminated against” and to empower them to challenge “unreasonable” rent increases. The party also pledged to take steps to raise rented housing standards in private rented housing, including extending ‘Awaab’s Law’ to the sector. The law, which can be found in provisions in the [Social Housing \(Regulation\) Act 2023](#), was named after Awaab Ishak, a toddler who died in 2020 due to a respiratory condition caused by prolonged exposure to damp and mould in his housing association home in Rochdale. It imposes “strict” time limits for landlords to

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<sup>28</sup> Alex Daniel, [‘What are Labour’s plans for housebuilding, and how will they work?’](#), Standard, 8 July 2024.

<sup>29</sup> Emily Williams, [‘Labour’s housing plans are a ‘step in the right direction’](#), FT Adviser, 10 July 2024.

<sup>30</sup> Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, [‘English Housing Survey 2021 to 2022: Private rented sector’](#), 13 July 2023.

<sup>31</sup> Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), 9 June 2024, pp 79–80.



investigate and address damp and mould in their rental properties.<sup>32</sup>

In the 2022–23 parliamentary session, the Conservative government introduced the Renters (Reform) Bill, which was carried over to the 2023–24 session. The legislation included a provision to abolish section 21 no-fault evictions. However, the bill did not complete all its stages before Parliament was dissolved for the general election.<sup>33</sup>

Labour’s provisions to support private renters were welcomed by some housing charities and organisations, although there were calls for Labour to take further action. The campaign manager of the Renters’ Reform Coalition, Tom Darling, welcomed Labour’s “continued commitment” to immediately abolishing no-fault evictions, which he described as a “crucial first step to rebalance renters’ rights”.<sup>34</sup> However, he highlighted that his organisation had “urged all parties that they need to go much further for private renters”. This included by preventing new eviction grounds from being used as no-fault evictions and limiting how much rent could be increased within a tenancy.

Additionally, Ben Twomey, the chief executive of Generation Rent, described Labour’s manifesto as “light on detail” on renting reform.<sup>35</sup> He also said that for the end of section 21 no-fault evictions to lead to “proper protections for renters”, they needed “longer notice periods whenever we face eviction, and clear mechanisms to prevent abuse”. Similarly, Labour’s commitments to the private rented sector were criticised by the London Renters Union, which stated

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<sup>32</sup> Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, ‘[Government to deliver Awaab’s Law](#)’, 9 February 2023.

<sup>33</sup> UK Parliament, ‘[Renters \(Reform\) Bill](#)’, accessed 8 July 2024.

<sup>34</sup> Liam Geraghty, ‘[Labour manifesto: What we learned about Keir Starmer’s plan to end the UK’s housing crisis](#)’, Big Issue, 13 June 2024.

<sup>35</sup> Chloe Chaplain and Jane Merrick, ‘[Labour accused of watering down key housing pledges](#)’, inews.co.uk, 16 June 2024.



that “none of Labour’s new measures would protect tenants facing inflation-busting rent hikes and outrageous asking prices”.<sup>36</sup>

## 5. Other proposals

Labour also made additional proposals relating to housing, communities and local government:

- **Building safety:** Labour pledged to take “decisive action” to improve building safety, including introducing regulations to “ensure we never again see a repeat of the Grenfell fire”. Its manifesto also outlined plans to review how leaseholders could be protected from the costs associated with safety improvements, accelerate “the pace of remediation” across the UK and put a “renewed focus” on ensuring those responsible for the “building safety crisis” would “pay to put it right”.<sup>37</sup>
- **Homelessness:** Labour criticised the impact of successive Conservative governments on homelessness, highlighting a “sharp rise in hidden homelessness”. Therefore, the manifesto committed to collaborating with mayors and councils to “put Britain back on track to ending homelessness”.<sup>38</sup>
- **Nutrient neutrality:** This policy mandates that new housing developments in certain areas must prove that they will not increase the amount of

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Booth, ‘[Labour under pressure to be more radical about reforming private renting](#)’, Guardian, 19 June 2024.

<sup>37</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, 9 June 2024, p 80.

<sup>38</sup> As above.



nutrient pollution in water catchments, particularly if they are located near protected habitats that are in an “unfavourable condition”.<sup>39</sup> Labour’s manifesto stated that it would implement solutions to build homes affected by nutrient neutrality “without weakening environmental protections”.<sup>40</sup>

- **Department change:** On 9 July 2024, the Labour government announced that it would be renaming the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.<sup>41</sup> A minister of state at the department, Jim McMahon, said that the move was a “reshaping of the department” and a “refocus”.

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<sup>39</sup> Natural England, [‘Strategic solutions: Nutrient neutrality’](#), 2 August 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), 9 June 2024, p 39.

<sup>41</sup> Henry Zeffman and Kate Whannel, [“‘Levelling up’ phrase to be erased, says minister’](#), BBC News, 9 July 2024.

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