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Housing in manifestos: the good, the bad, and the implications

On Monday 22 May LSE London convened a round table of London policy experts, housing practitioners and LSE academics

for a Chatham House discussion of how the major political parties dealt with housing in their manifestos (see summary table below or click **here** for downloadable PDF version) for voters to consider on the 8 June 2017 General Election. What was good, what was bad, what was missing—and what were the implications for London?

The good, the bad, and the implications

We agreed it was difficult to compare the manifestos for this election, for two quite distinct reasons:

- The government already set out a major programme of reform in the White Paper published earlier this year. Consultation closed on the day Parliament was prorogued so all the Conservatives had to do was say this programme

- The other parties by contrast did have the opportunity to stake out new ground in their manifestos. However, they were taken by surprise when the election was called, and did not have time to do the normal detailed work on their manifestos. In terms of housing (and other issues not at the very top of the political priority list) the policies are therefore pretty broad brush and difficult to assess except in the most general terms.

In addition, the prospect of Brexit inevitably conditioned the contents of the manifestos. Brexit matters will have first call on MPs' time during much of this Parliament, so the Conservatives in particular will have steered away from promises that would require primary legislation.

Numbers

All the main parties are still playing the numbers game, setting quantitative targets for new homes. Labour is the most conservative (a million new homes), apart from the proportion of affordable homes; the Conservatives promise what they may not be able to deliver (a million new homes by end-2020 and 500,000 more by 2022), and the Lib Dems go for hope/aspiration over experience in terms of the numbers (300,000 per annum by 2020) but are commendably more specific about exactly how they will try to make it happen. (The Greens make promises only on affordable rented homes which are at the extreme of the aspirational end.)

The Lib Dems are also more specific on detailed planning issues (although remember the White Paper is full of detail), but probably the most important proposal across the parties is around CPO, with Labour promising to 'Update compulsory purchase powers to make them more effective as a tool to drive regeneration and unlock planned development.' But there is no detail and as is always said 'the devil is .....' if the system is not to be mired in legal controversy for years to come.

Importantly, apart from throwaway lines, there is very little recognition that housing market pressures vary enormously across the country. The crisis centres on London, and the ambitious numbers of new homes need to be built in London and the South–there are large geographical areas where the affordability and supply of housing are simply not major problems.

longer a regional body that could take a strategic view of where new settlements or urban extensions should be undertaken.

Green Belt

The two main parties both rule out building more housing in the Green Belt, even though over the last two years there have been growing calls from urbanists for a new approach. To extract maximum social value from large-scale new infrastructure investments such as Crossrail, they argue, we need to allow some development around stations. It should be possible to carry out Green Belt reviews that recognise these opportunities *and* protect access to the countryside, improve green spaces across the capital and enhance environmental quality. (The arguments, as laid out by Alan Mace, Fanny Blanc, Ian Gordon, and Kath Scanlon are summarised **here**.)

22% of the land within London's boundaries is Green Belt. Some recognition that flexibility might be needed would make it easier to achieve house building requirements.

Interaction with other policies

Many of the most difficult issues arise when housing interacts—often in unforeseen ways—with other policy areas: welfare policy, taxation, social care. For example, the Prime Minister's 'U-turn' last week about how people would pay for their end-of-life social care was fundamentally about attitudes to housing and housing wealth. However, the manifestos were mainly silent on these tricky issues.   Similarly there were major areas of housing policy (notably the private rented sector) that were hardly addressed by Labour and the Conservatives.

Local authorities as housing providers

Participants pointed to a subtle change in language across the manifestos—local government appeared not only as *enabler* of new housing but also as ***provider***. This is a significant change, especially from the Conservatives, and a welcome recognition that across the country councils are working in innovative ways, often in partnership with private developers, to build new housing. However,

Summary Table: Manifestos' Main Housing Points

(Click **here** for downloadable PDF version)

	Conservative	**Labour**	**Liberal Democrat**
Numbers	Meet the 2015 commitment to deliver a million homes by the end of 2020 and deliver half a million more by the end of 2022.	Invest to build over a million new homes.	Reaching a housebuilding target of 300,000 homes a year by 2022, including half a million affordable and energy-efficient homes, with direct government commissioning where the market fails to deliver.
	Build 160,000 houses on government land.	By the end of the next Parliament: build at least 100,000 council and housing association homes a year for genuinely affordable rent or sale.	
		Build thousands more low-cost homes reserved for first time buyers.	
Planning	Free up more land for new homes in the right places.	Create new generation of New Towns.	Create at least 10 new garden cities in England, providing tens of thousands of high-quality, zero-carbon homes, with gardens and shared green space, jobs, schools and public transport.

	protections on designated land like the Green Belt, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.	Prioritise Brownfield sites and protect Green Belt.	Plan new housing sustainably to ensure that excessive pressure is not placed on existing infrastructure.
	Rebalance house growth across the country in line with modern industrial strategy.	Make sure that local plans address older people's housing, make downsizing options available.	Scrap exemptions on smaller housing development schemes from their obligation to provide affordable homes, and strengthen the hand of local government to prevent large developers reneging on their commitments.
			Require local plans to take into account at least 15 years of future housing need – focusing on long-term development and community needs.
			Create a community right of appeal in cases where planning decisions go against the approved local plan.
Delivery	Speed up build-out by encouraging modern methods of construction	Insulate more homes.	Ensure that half a million affordable, energy-efficient homes are built by the end of the parliament.
	Diversify who builds homes in	New rules on minimum space	

	houses: high-quality, high-density housing like mansion blocks, mews houses and terraced streets.		
Tenure & Support measures	Build new fixed-term social houses which will be sold privately after ten to fifteen years with an automatic Right to Buy for tenants, the proceeds of which will be recycled into further homes.	Reinstate housing benefits for the 18-21 years old.	End the Voluntary Right to Buy pilots that sell off housing association homes and the associated high value asset levy.
	Support specialist housing where needed: multigenerational homes and housing for older people, including by helping housing associations increase their specialist housing stock.	National Transformation Fund with priority to build new homes (including council homes) in convergence with industrial and skills strategy for construction sector.	Lift the borrowing cap on local authorities and increase the borrowing capacity of housing associations so that they can build council and social housing.

housing associations to increase their housing stock.	2027	developers advertising homes abroad before they have been advertised in the UK.
	Give first dibs for local people buying their new homes in their local area.	Increase Local Housing Allowance (LHA) in line with average rents in an area, ensuring that LHA is enough for a family to pay their housing costs no matter where they live.
		Help people who cannot afford a deposit by introducing a new Rent to Own model where rent payments give tenants an increasing stake in the property, owning it outright after 30 years.
		Improve renting by banning lettings fees for tenants, capping upfront deposits and increasing minimum standards in rented homes.
		Help young people into the rental market by establishing a new Help to Rent scheme to provide government-backed tenancy deposit loans for all first-time renters under 30.
		Give tenants first refusal to buy the home they are renting from a landlord who

			according to an independent valuation.
			Promote longer tenancies of three years or more with an inflation-linked annual rent increase built in, to give tenants security and limit rent hikes.
			Improve protections against rogue landlords through mandatory licensing and allow access for tenants to the database of rogue landlords and property agents.
			£5 billion of initial capital for a new British Housing and Infrastructure Development Bank, using public money to attract private investment for these priorities.
			Scrap the 'bedroom tax', while seeking to achieve the aim of making best use of the housing supply through incentivising local authorities to help tenants 'downsize'.
Homelessness & Rough sleeping	Implementation of Homelessness Reduction Act.	Set out a new national plan to end rough sleeping within the next Parliament: making available 4,000 additional homes reserved for	Increase support for homelessness prevention and adequately funding age-appropriate emergency accommodation and supported housing, while ensuring that all local

	Eliminate rough sleeping by 2027: set up a new homelessness reduction taskforce that will focus on prevention and affordable housing and pilot a Housing First approach to tackle rough sleeping.	Safeguarding homeless hostels and other supported housing.	model of provision for long-term, entrenched homeless people.
Taxation & regulation	Work with private and public sector house builders to capture the increase in land value created when they build to reinvest in local infrastructure, services and housing Reform Compulsory Purchase Orders to make them easier and less expensive for councils to use and to make it	Update compulsory purchase powers to make them more effective as a tool to drive regeneration and unlock planned development. Protect leaseholders from rises in ground rent from developers and management companies. End routine use of leasehold houses in new developments	

	true market value of sites.		
Governance/ Local powers	Give councils powers to intervene where developers do not act on their planning permissions.	Establish a new Department for Housing – objectives will be to improve the number, standard and affordability of homes.	Establish a government process to deliver greater devolution of financial responsibility to English local authorities and any new devolved bodies in England, building on the work of the Independent Commission on Local Government Finance. Any changes must balance the objectives of more local autonomy and fair equalisation between communities.
	Help councils to build high-quality, sustainable and integrated communities.	Overhaul Homes and Communities Agency to be Labour's housing delivery body.	
	New Council Housing Deals with ambitious, pro-development, local authorities to help them build more social housing.	Keep the Land Registry public and make ownership of land more transparent.	Meeting the needs of England with 'devolution on demand', letting local areas take control of the services that matter most to them.
	Help Local Authorities to develop more good homes and provide them with significant low-cost capital funding.	Give councils new powers to build homes needed.	Enable local authorities to:
			9 Levy up to 200% council tax on second homes and 'buy to leave empty' investments from overseas.
		Devolution: handing back power to communities. Devolve powers over economic development (with	9 Enforce housebuilding on unwanted public sector land.

		Properly resource planning and bolster planning authorities with fuller powers.	planning permission have failed to build after three years. End the Right to Buy if they choose.

Green party propositions from the Green Guarantee

- Introduce a living rent for all through rent controls

- Provide more secure tenancies for private renters, and introduce mandatory licensing for all landlords.

- Launch a major programme to build affordable homes including half a million new socially rented homes over five years and start action to bring empty homes back into use.

- Reinstate housing benefits for the under 21s and abolish the Bedroom tax.

- End mass council house sales and scrap Right to Buy at discounted prices.

- Action on empty homes to bring them back into use and a trial of a Land Value Tax to encourage the use of vacant land and reduce speculation.

- Stop declaring people as 'intentionally homeless' and give Local Authorities the same duties towards single people and childless couples as to families.

- Help first-time buyers by aiming for house price stability – axing buy-to-let tax breaks, and backing community-led approaches to building affordable homes.

- Significantly improve housing choice for D/deaf, disabled and older people by requiring all councils to appropriately plan for their housing needs and significantly increase the numbers of homes built to lifetime home and mobility standards over the next 5 years.

ADDENDUM (07/06/17)

Labour just published their mini housing manifesto: **Labour's New Deal on Housing**

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One Comment on "Housing in manifestos: the good, the bad, and the implications"

Melissa

May 31, 2017

Nice Summary- thanks!

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