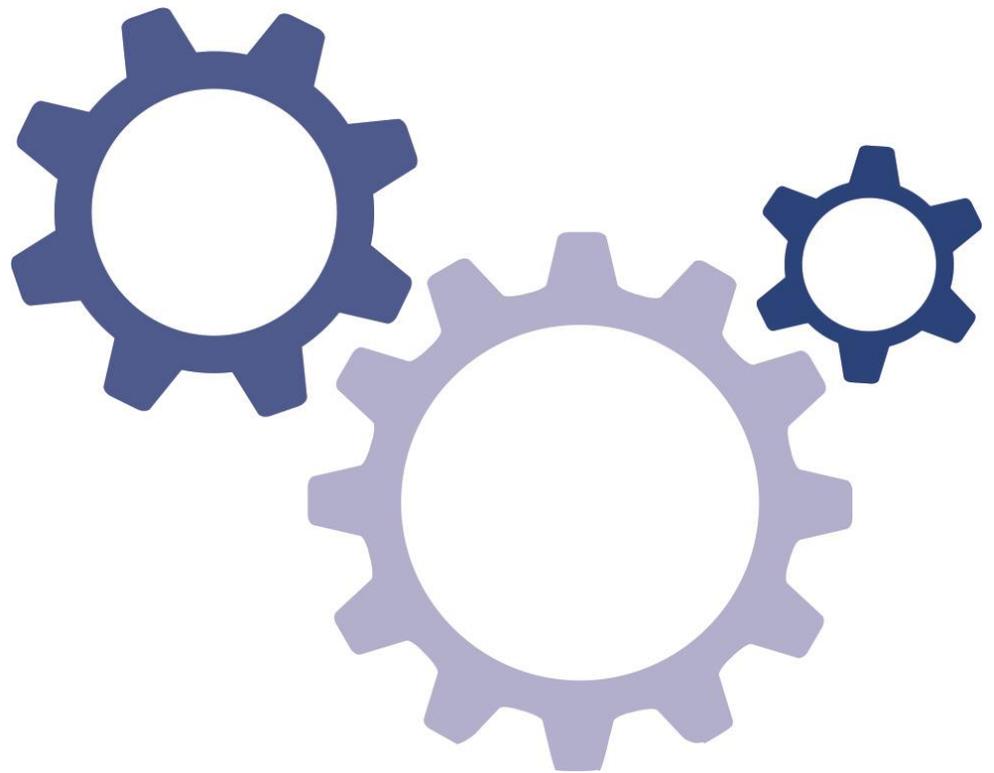


Priorities for Housing in the North

Actions for the Incoming Government



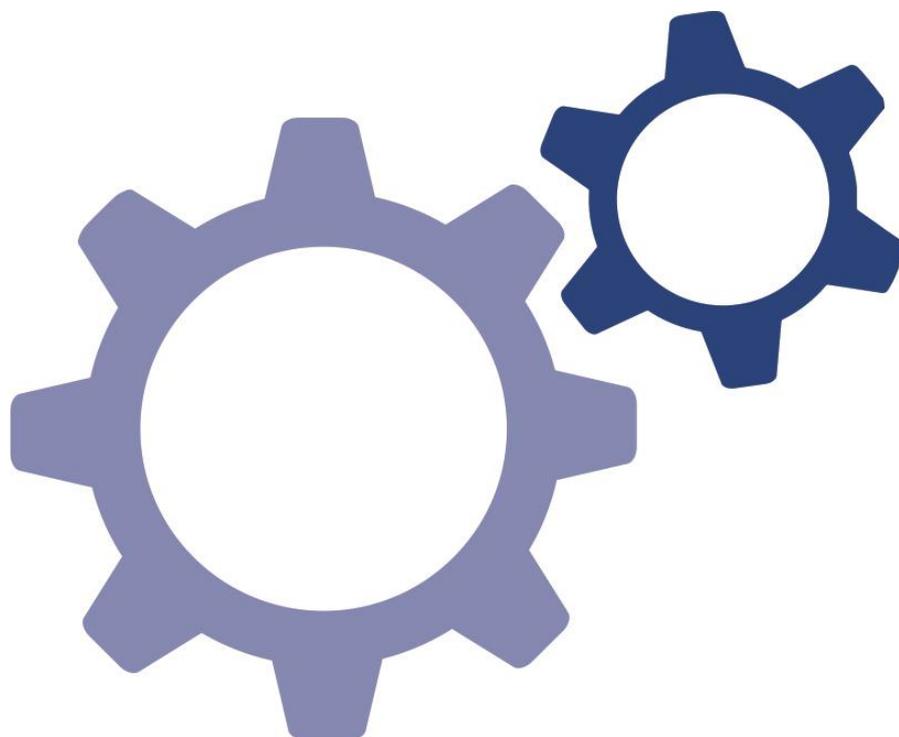
Priorities for Housing in the North

Actions for the Incoming Government

Executive Summary

The Northern Housing Consortium (NHC) is calling on prospective MPs and leading stakeholders to back our work in tackling the housing crisis in the North. We believe the solutions to this exist and, with the right commitment, are achievable.

We set out our four headline and interlinked housing priorities for the incoming Government below – support for local solutions, boosting capacity, regeneration and joined-up policy making. We encourage debate to make sure these are high on the incoming Government's agenda.



Introduction

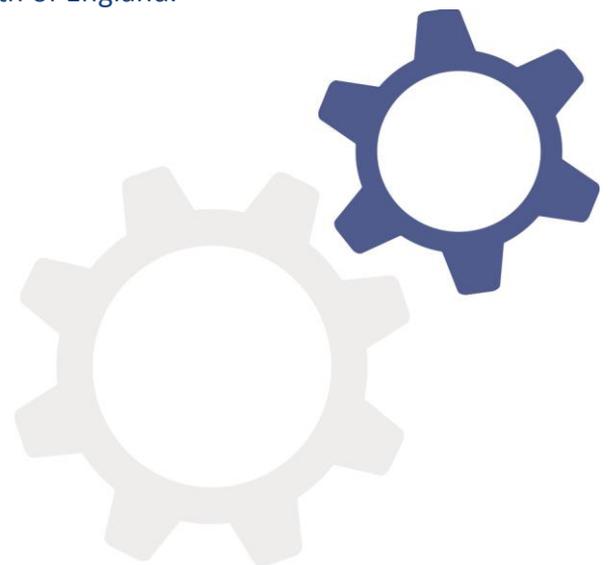
Housing markets across the North are not working for far too many people who are struggling to secure the kind of homes they really want and can afford. The NHC wants their voices to become a key part of the election debate and as a result to help ensure that no place or community is left behind. Good quality, accessible housing needs to be recognised as critical economic and social infrastructure that is central to the success of strategies to boost productivity and strengthen our economy. This simply has not been the case for too long.

We believe that, with a clear commitment and a shift in approach from the incoming Government, the solutions to this crisis are there and they are achievable. This paper sets out what we want to see as the priorities for the new Government to grow and strengthen housing supply and access across the North of England, drawing on the many untapped opportunities the regions present.

The Northern Housing Consortium established the Commission for Housing in the North 18 months ago to consider two basic questions: *“What is different about the housing requirements, problems and opportunities of the North?”* and *“What needs to be done differently in the North to address these?”*

The outcome of this work was the Commission Report, *“A New Framework for Housing”* published in December 2016. The Report’s key findings and recommendations were drawn from support and evidence from the widest possible range of Northern housing expertise – hands-on practitioners, developers and providers, leading local policy makers and politicians from all sides, major investors, senior academics and many others. These have been well received across the board and there has been welcome early progress made in implementing some of the report’s three main recommendations.

We now have to go further and to really step up the pace of implementation of the recommendations and, in particular, for there to be an urgent new conversation to spark the transformation of areas of economic weakness. To do this, NHC members are calling on those standing in the General Election to support our work and help us strengthen housing markets across the North of England.



Background

Housing markets across the North are extraordinarily diverse. With vibrant urban centres, affordable new developments and areas of outstanding natural countryside, England's three Northern Regions hold some of the most attractive housing stock and best growth potential in the country. This is now bringing strong, sustainable investment interest and a realisation of the economic and social benefits that living and working in the North provides.

Yet the North is still not building anywhere enough new homes in the right places and many people are struggling to access the type of housing they really want. Critical to addressing this is the ability of local places to develop local policies to meet local opportunities and demand.

At the same time, there are still too many places in the North where poor quality housing and environments are directly impacting on quality of life and economic well-being. In turn this is impacting on the viability of key brownfield sites which, if resolved, could help minimise call on the green belt and optimise existing infrastructure. It is essential at times of such great housing pressure that the new Government work with those delivering at the local level to develop new tools of regeneration to bring investment into these places and to make the absolute best use of our existing assets.

Our proposition

We all know that developing approaches to tackle our housing crisis is not straightforward – we would have made far greater inroads by now if it were. Diverse interaction between local economies, environments and politics will always make this a complex issue. In trying to find solutions, however, some bases have to be covered and we believe these have been overlooked or simply not modernised. We set out below four interlinked areas we want to see brought out in election debates. Fresh thinking or impetus will make a massive difference for all four. These are:

1. **Accelerate local decision making and the flexibility to support this** – there is now a very welcome national recognition that local places are in the best position to steer investment streams to meet their housing opportunities, needs and demands. Public sector investment is becoming more responsive to this issue – yet the approach needs to go further and its coverage wider. The NHC is looking to promote bespoke housing deals for all areas with further local autonomy in return for assurance on delivery.
2. **Boost local capacity** – we know there is massive investment potential to boost housing supply in the North. Realising this needs new partnerships, skills and, critically, more capacity. The recent Housing White Paper acknowledges that having access to the right capacity and skills – especially in the public sector – is essential to deliver growth in today's operating environment. A good example of this is the work carried out by Councils, such as Wakefield, where planning applications are followed up when they have not been built out. Clearly a non-statutory service and without direct revenue funding streams, such services can make an extraordinary difference to delivery without needing structural reform to the planning system.

Although the issue has been acknowledged, progress is uncertain and the NHC would like to see the strengthening of a Capacity Fund for Local Authorities to draw from where they can clearly show this will make a tangible difference to local housing supply.

- Support Regeneration** – we are looking for Government to work openly with local leaders to develop a new narrative and mechanisms to bring about the transformation of areas of market weakness or inappropriate supply that are becoming detached from the economic mainstream. At a time of such unmet housing demand and growing pressure on green belt, it is essential that we make the best use of our existing assets - both stock and land. We need make sure that housing supply meets modern needs and aspirations and find new ways to bring residential growth to help revitalise town centres. We need to make our brownfield land more attractive to house builders – finding mechanisms to enhance viability and to improve site assembly, including more effective use of CPOs. In short, we need to better connect places and communities to jobs, services and transport to make sure they are not left behind.

There are too many places across the North, including neighbourhoods within our major cities, where some or all of these things simply are not happening. Here low value or unpopular housing is a major contributor to these communities' detachment from the economic mainstream. New locally shaped and economically focused approaches are urgently needed to restructure these markets and make them places people from all walks of life actively choose to live in and are proud to do so.

We know from many powerful examples, such as Hulme, what an economic and social difference housing focused regeneration can make to growth - boosting the tax base of an area, reducing the welfare bill and in helping strengthen independence. We also know this needs clarity, new forms of long-term private and public investment and a degree of commitment that has not happened at scale for a number of years now and this needs to change.

- Ensure better national policy integration and housing impact assessments** – since the publication of the Commission for Housing in the North report and during consultation on the Housing White Paper we heard time and again of opportunities to boost supply but also of the unforeseen negative impacts of other areas of Government policy. A holistic Industrial Strategy, for example, could strengthen infrastructure that would encourage or enable a massive boost in construction and could much better complement direct housing investment. The potential for this needs to be explicit and impact assessed during investment appraisal.

Conversely there are areas of policy that can directly negatively impact on the need to build more homes or ensure that we make best use of the ones we have. Most recently the proposals around Local Housing Allowance and uncertainty over social rents, for example, are clearly undermining development confidence in the sector. We need to move away from such silo'd approaches and use wider impact assessments to inform sustainable policy decisions.

Conclusion

Housing remains a critical issue for people and places across the North – it is essential that this is not lost during the election. There have been welcome strides forward locally and nationally in meeting the recommendations of the Commission for Housing in the North – we are looking for prospective MPs and leading stakeholders working for our regions to support our agenda and to act as champions for the issues we raise.

