

Roundtable - Delivering Homes Beyond Electoral Cycles

with Kevin Hollinrake MP, Shadow
Secretary of State for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Chaired by Lord Banner KC
15 Great College St & Online via zoom



Kevin Hollinrake MP

Introduction

This roundtable brought together parliamentarians, industry leaders, and policy experts to discuss the future of housing delivery and planning reform with Kevin Hollinrake MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities.

Amid rising costs, planning delays, and concerns about home ownership affordability, the Shadow Secretary outlined the Opposition's thinking on key housing challenges. Discussions explored opportunities to simplify planning, support SME builders, improve mortgage access, and unlock both brownfield and greenfield land for sustainable growth. Participants highlighted key pressures in housing delivery and raised ideas for policy reform to support young buyers, accelerate development, and foster a more positive planning culture.

Key Takeaways

- The Shadow Secretary of State acknowledged the decades of instability in housing policy and called for a more consistent, long-term strategy to unlock supply and rebuild public confidence. This inconsistency has discouraged long-term investment, destabilised delivery pipelines, and made it difficult for local authorities, developers, and housing associations to plan effectively. Attendees agreed that a cross-cycle strategy, with consistent commitments to housing targets, funding streams, and planning reforms, is essential to restore trust and enable delivery at scale.
- While there was broad support for prioritising brownfield regeneration, participants noted that these sites alone will not be sufficient to meet housing need. Issues of land contamination, infrastructure, and viability often limit the scope of brownfield delivery.
- From Biodiversity Net Gain to Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), attendees argued that the layering of obligations is undermining viability, particularly in areas with marginal land values. This is especially acute for SME builders. Participants called for a more consolidated and transparent contributions framework that allows for predictable costs, encourages delivery, and ensures that community infrastructure is still provided effectively.
- SMEs were once responsible for delivering around 40% of new homes but they now contribute less than 10%. The decline is driven by planning complexity, financial risk, and limited access to land and finance. Attendees stressed the importance of reviving SME participation, not only for delivery volumes but for local employment, skills development, and innovation. Suggestions included simplified planning processes, access to small-site registers, and tailored funding or guarantee schemes to de-risk smaller projects.
- Despite growing demand among first-time buyers and downsizers, attendees noted a significant shortfall in the delivery of smaller properties, particularly one- and two-bedroom homes. Some shared data showing that fewer than 5% of pipeline homes in certain areas meet this profile. This mismatch was seen as a systemic failure of the planning and delivery system, and attendees called for clearer requirements and incentives to ensure that housing pipelines reflect local demographic and affordability needs.
- Participants welcomed efforts to digitise the planning system, including proposals for open data standards and software integration to reduce administrative burdens. The potential for artificial intelligence to process simple or householder applications was highlighted as a way to free up officer time. On construction, Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) were seen as promising for improving build speed and quality. However, it was acknowledged that MMC does not automatically reduce cost and needs to be supported by planning, procurement, and regulatory reform to reach its potential.

Issues raised

- Many local authorities face chronic understaffing in planning and legal departments. Experienced officers are often poached by the private sector or forced out by limited pay and progression routes. Councils are increasingly reliant on costly consultants, reducing in-house capacity and institutional memory. Some are unable to handle planning applications or legal agreements (such as Section 106) within acceptable timeframes. There was widespread agreement that resolving the planning capacity crisis is a national priority.
- Even where developments receive a resolution to grant permission, attendees reported delays of six months or more while Section 106 agreements are finalised. These delays are often due to under-resourced legal departments and inconsistent negotiation processes. Developers stressed that this uncertainty adds to holding costs and undermines delivery timelines. Suggestions included the creation of specialist S106 teams within planning authorities and the development of standardised, nationally-endorsed agreement templates.
- The average deposit required for a first home has grown significantly, even in lower-cost regions. Many attendees emphasised that while monthly mortgage repayments remain affordable relative to rent, saving for a deposit has become the main barrier. Existing interventions such as Help to Buy have been withdrawn, and there is little regulatory pressure on lenders to offer more flexible or higher loan-to-value (LTV) products. There was strong support for policy interventions to improve mortgage access, particularly through regulatory reform of affordability tests and capital requirements.
- Beyond structural issues, several contributors argued that the prevailing culture within some local planning authorities is a barrier to delivery. Officers and members were said to approach planning from a defensive standpoint, seeking to prevent poor development rather than enable good development. This mindset was seen as limiting creativity and responsiveness. Proposals included clearer design codes, positive incentives for proactive planning, and improved training to rebuild public trust in planning as an enabler of better places.

We would like to thank the members of our Advisory Board for their contributions and continuing support.



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