

## NATIONAL HOUSING FEDERATION

### **Government policies killing off 1,300 planned new homes every day**

4 October 2010

The Government's decision to scrap the nation's planning infrastructure, without putting an alternative system in place, will lead to 300,000 planned homes being ditched by local authorities across the country, according to a campaign group.

The National Housing Federation said that the decision to axe regional housebuilding targets and other parts of the planning infrastructure has prompted councils across England to substantially reduce their plans for building new homes.

Ministers have pledged to build more homes than the previous administration, but with the equivalent of 1,300 planned homes being scrapped every day since May, the coalition already faces a tough challenge to meet its stated goal.

The dismantling of the planning system began shortly after the election, with ministers scrapping regional targets and regional spatial strategies.

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles formally revoked regional targets with immediate effect in July saying: 'They were a terrible, expensive, time-consuming way to impose house building.'

Ministers have also re-designated gardens as greenfield sites and scrapped the density directive, which ensured that developments had to deliver minimum numbers of homes.

#### **Plans dropped**

New research commissioned by the Federation, carried out by Tetlow King Planning, shows that the Government's decision to allow councils to ignore the regional targets has already resulted directly or indirectly in plans for around 160,000 homes being dropped.

Tetlow King expects that figure to increase to at least 280,000-300,000 homes by this time next year.

Such a slump in the planned number of new homes would be disastrous for the nation as the number of new homes being built is already rapidly falling, with only 113,000 homes built in 2009/10 – the lowest figure since 1923.

At the same time, housing waiting lists have hit record levels, whilst first time buyers have effectively been locked out of the market by the mortgage drought.

In the research commissioned by the Federation, Tetlow King said: 'We are now seeing an increasing number of local authorities announcing reductions to the housing targets as each week passes.'

'Looking forward to the next 12 months, we would expect at least 280,000 – 300,000 fewer homes being planned for...This is based on the large number of authorities we still expect to reduce their

housing targets.'

### **Work abandoned**

The Federation believes that local authorities are already abandoning work on local plans and using the rushed changes to the planning system to turn down applications for desperately needed new homes that might previously have been approved.

According to Tetlow King, the following councils are among those who have decided to reduce the number of homes they plan to build:

- Milton Keynes Central – by 13,360 homes
- Luton/Central Bedfordshire – 10,650 homes
- Horsham District Council – 6,888 homes
- Exeter City Council – 3,000 homes
- Bristol City Council – 9,560 homes
- Torbay Council – 5,000 homes
- Cotswold District Council – 900 homes
- North Somerset Council – 10,750 homes and
- North Hertfordshire Council and Stevenage Borough Council – have suspended plans for 9,200 homes.

In addition, the following councils have announced they will significantly reduce their targets by a yet to be specified number:

- Ashford Borough Council
- Northampton Borough Council, Daventry District Council and South Northamptonshire Council (with regard to the West Northamptonshire Growth Area)
- Leeds City Council and
- Aylesbury Vale.

Since the planning changes were announced, almost 70 councils have halted progress on development plans, reduced previously planned housing numbers or delayed planning enquiries at appeal.

The Federation believes that at this stage no planned homes will be reduced in London as a result of the scrapping of regional targets, as planning there is controlled by the London Mayor, for whom new housing remains a priority.

In recent weeks, the Government has re-announced plans to incentivise local authorities to build new homes and in certain cases allow communities to build new homes without planning permission.

However, it will still be some time before these measures take effect. However, the Federation believes ministers need to do far more to flesh out a planning system that will get local authorities planning for more, not fewer, homes.

### **Slew of changes**

Federation chief executive David Orr said: 'The Government has said that its housing policy should be judged by whether or not it delivers more homes than the last administration. As things stand the new approach to housing must be judged harshly.'

'Our new research shows it was a mistake to hastily dismantle the entire planning system without setting up an effective new system in its place.'

He adds: 'The slew of changes to the planning system has sent out a signal to local authorities that building new homes is no longer a priority – that building new homes is a nice-to-have, not a necessity.'

'But with 4.5m people on waiting lists and 2.5m people living in overcrowded conditions the building of new homes must be promoted as mission critical.'

'Ministers need to grasp the nettle and put in place a new planning system that helps us deliver the homes we so desperately need.'

'As the housing crisis intensifies it is critical that the Government stretches every sinew to help safeguard the provision of housing, including affordable homes.'

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