

Briefing Note - Housing Policy and the Party Conferences

The Conservative Party

Although both Robert Jenrick and Esther McVey were careful to emphasise that “we need to be building more of all kinds of houses – council, social and private” there were no references to building for social rent and policy announcements seemed to confirm the shift in policy back to home ownership.

Specific announcements were as follows:

The Future Homes Standard

This consultation document was launched at the Party Conference. It sets out proposals for a new green standard for all new build homes that would require carbon emissions to be cut by one third by 2020 and by 80% by 2025.

Measures proposed include the banning of gas boilers and fossil fuel heating systems by 2025 and their replacement with the latest generation of clean technology e.g. solar panels and air source heat pumps.

Overhaul of planning system

A Green Paper setting out proposals to speed up the planning system will be published in November 2019. This will include:

- New tiered planning system with simplification of planning guidance for smaller developers
- An ambition to reduce planning conditions by one third
- Proposals for fees to be refunded if councils take too long to decide on specific planning applications
- Review of fees to ensure planning departments are properly resourced
- Plans to allow new homes to be built above existing properties,

Design Quality

There was a focus at the conference on the need to encourage developers to build beautiful, well designed homes that enhance the environment. This follows on from the publication of the interim report of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission ‘Creating Space for beauty’ earlier in the summer. By addressing design issues and quality it is hoped to make new development more acceptable to communities.

A new National Design Guide was launched at the Conference along with the announcement that a National Model Design Code will be published in the New Year. The new design code will set a template for tailored local authority design guides specific to the local area.

Extending Shared Ownership

The Minister outlined proposals to give housing association tenants of new properties the right to shared ownership. The scheme will enable tenants to buy an initial share, which could be as low as 10%, with scope to purchase further shares over time. Housing Associations have responded with concern because of the implications for their loan agreements and the likelihood that the policy will further reduce the availability of social housing.

The Labour Party

Delegates at the Labour Party Conference voted unanimously in favour of three key proposals drawn from Shelter's Report "A Vision for Social Housing":

- Building 155,000 social rent homes per year, with at least 100,000 of these being council owned social rent homes.
- £10 billion housing capital grant per year, ring-fenced to build social housing (based on an estimated cost of £100,000 per home).
- An end to Right-to-Buy.

Other housing related policies discussed at the conference included:

- Giving councils "the powers and resources to take housing associations under direct control".
- A commitment to scrap Universal Credit.
- Plans for an English Sovereign Land Trust, a new body with powers to acquire land without having to pay the large uplifts that typically follow the granting of planning permission.

Whilst the Conference shows the mood of the Party, conference votes are not automatically adopted as Labour policy. Decisions on what will feature in the next manifesto will be made later by the Party's National Policy Forum.

Liberal Democrat Party

Liberal Democrat policy proposals were set out in the document 'A fairer share for all' considered at the conference. Proposals include:

- Support for the assessment that there is a need for 300,000 new homes per year in England – and that 100,000 of these should be for social rent.
- Reform of the Land Compensation Act – landowners to be paid a reasonable price for their land rather than the inflated price that might be achieved with planning permission.
- Maintain social housing as a national asset - Replace social housing sold in the future and continue to invest in repairs and maintenance.
- Expand the powers available to local authorities – by giving them the first right to purchase public land.
- Set up a new arms-length governmental body – to acquire land for housing through compulsory acquisition at current use value. Also advocate the development of 10 new garden cities throughout the UK.
- Introduce a Rent to Own model for social tenants alongside a new Help to Rent scheme to provide government-backed loans for deposits for first time renters.
- Increase the provision of extra care and adapted housing – as part of a wider approach to alleviate some of the pressures faced in health and social care.

- Set up a new regulator for the private rented sector – to enforce regulations according to clearer standards with a requirement that all private landlords with more than 25 homes must register.
- Homelessness – Commitment to ending rough sleeping within 5 years and providing local authorities the means to deliver the Homelessness Reduction Act.