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Gove planning reforms would be ditched on day one of Labour government

By [Daniel Gayne](#) 20 December 2023

Party outline stance as industry gives its verdict on housing secretary's revised NPPF

Labour would reverse planned changes to the national planning policy framework (NPPF) on its first day in government. *Housing Today* understands that if [councils use the reforms announced by Michael Gove yesterday](#) to reduce their housebuilding targets, they run the risk of having to make their plans anew. According to the party's local housing recovery plan, housing targets would be made mandatory, with strengthened mechanisms to enforce it. Labour has also said that, if elected, it would write to chief planning officers explaining that they expect councils to look for reasons to approve applications in areas without an up-to-date plan where

development has stalled. The housing secretary [confirmed yesterday that he was watering down housing delivery targets for local authorities](#), while introducing league tables to encourage better performance from planning authorities.

Addressing the revised NPPF in the House of Commons yesterday, shadow housing minister Matthew Pennycook said that despite “minor tweaks”, the policy was largely what had been expected. “The changes being made are those the government, in their weakness, promised the so-called planning concern group of Tory backbenchers that they would enact back in December last year to stave off a rebellion on the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill,” he said. “That is precisely why members of that group are so pleased with the ‘compromise’ they have secured today.” Pennycook also said suggestions of an intervention in the London Plan were “punitive and nakedly political”.

It comes as industry bodies from across the built environment delivered their verdict on Michael Gove’s speech yesterday.

The Royal Town Planning Institute’s chief executive Victoria Hills said its members had expressed concerns that local plans “could lead to undersupply of houses due to Green Belt and other considerations under this framework”. “This means that proactive planning tools the Secretary of State mentioned today will become much more important for the delivery of much needed homes,” she said.

Jack Pringle, chair of the RIBA board, who gave opening remarks before welcoming the housing secretary onto the stage in the RIBA Gallery, “applauded” the focus on building new homes said he was “looking forward to seeing further detail”

“Our planning system is an impediment to badly needed development at local, national and infrastructure levels,” he said. “We need to move to a simpler, faster planning system with more predictable outcomes.”

Victoria Du Croz, partner and head of the planning team at law firm Forsters, said it was “telling” that Gove said in his speech that he had listened to elected representatives. “This really is all about politics,” she said. “He’s also been listening to local authorities but that’s only half the sector. Developers’ responses to the NPPF consultation came from a place of being involved in the sector day in and

day out and wanting to shape genuine reform.” Du Croz added that Gove had not “addressed the fundamental concern that his reforms won’t deliver additional housing”.

Ian Fletcher, policy director of the British Property Federation, accused the government of “watering down” its own targets and “creating more obstacles and delays” to delivery. “What is often overlooked is that if less land is allocated for housing, less land is likely to also be allocated for the commercial developments we need to create jobs and drive the economy,” he said. “These changes could have far-reaching consequences and undermine the Government’s growth agenda.” Fletcher encouraged the government to “use the carrot as well as the stick” by providing more resources for planning departments. However, he noted that plans to review statutory consultees showed that the government “does recognise the need to speed up the process”.

Cllr Darren Rodwell, the Labour leader of Barking & Dagenham council and housing spokesperson for the Local Government Association welcomed the decision to make housing targets an advisory starting point. He added that the “reality is that planning is not a barrier to house building”, pointing out that nine in 10 applications are approved “despite significant resourcing and capacity issues across the country”. “In order to help increase the speed of local plan-making and housing delivery, we urge the Government to bring forward consultations on a revised National Planning Policy Framework and National Development Management Policies which will form the backbone of a new style of plan-making due in Autumn 2024,” said Rodwell.

Regarding the secretary of state’s [criticism of housing delivery in the capital](#), Muniya Barua, deputy chief executive of BusinessLDN, the business advocacy group formerly known as London First, said it was “right to focus on measures to boost supply”. Barua warned that Gove should “tread carefully” to avoid undermining London’s devolution settlement and said unlocking home supply in the capital would “require collaboration at all levels of London government”. She urged central government to issue guidance on second staircases in tall residential buildings, lack of clarity on which is “currently the biggest blocker of construction in London”, she said.