

Delivering homes through planning reform: A collaborative roadmap

March 2025



Introduction

In November 2024, Jayne Bryant MS, Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government, announced a taskforce led by Lee Waters MS to focus on the actions needed to unlock and advance housing development.

On 14 February, a collaboration of key stakeholders in the delivery of new homes – including representatives from the social housing sector, private developers, local authorities, and planning consultants – came together to discuss the urgent challenges facing housing delivery in Wales. With rising demand for affordable housing, increasing reliance on temporary accommodation, and pressures on the open market, set against the second lowest level of delivery of new homes last year, there is a clear need for practical, effective solutions that can be implemented at pace.

This document summarises key requests emerging from that discussion, directed to Lee Waters MS and the taskforce examining housing delivery. The proposals reflect a shared commitment to improving outcomes for all stakeholders by fostering stronger collaboration between the public and private sectors. By addressing barriers to delivery and identifying areas for reform, this document aims to support Welsh Government (WG) in developing solutions that are both workable and responsive to the needs of communities across Wales.

Organisations in attendance

- Asbri Planning
- Barratt Redrow
- Bridgend County Council
- Cadnant Planning
- Cardiff County Council
- Cardiff University
- Community Housing Cymru
- Davies Homes
- Federation of Master Builders
- Home Builders Federation
- Kew Planning
- Lichfields
- Llanmoor Homes
- Melin
- Monmouthshire County Council
- Persimmon Homes
- POBL
- RLH Architectural
- Royal Town Planning Institute
- Savills
- Trivallis
- United Welsh
- Vale of Glamorgan County Council
- WLGA



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Key solutions identified



Together, the organisations invited by Hugh James, worked to reach 16 key actions that would make a tangible difference in delivering much needed homes at pace.

Adopting a risk-based approach to planning applications

This could significantly speed up the delivery of new homes by focusing resources where they are most needed. Instead of applying a one-size-fits-all level of scrutiny to all applications, this approach would differentiate between high and low risk proposals, streamlining the process for developments that align with local development plans and adopted policies. For instance, greater levels of delegation for outline applications on allocated sites, and/or for reserved matters applications when a scheme has outline consent. This may also allow for fewer planning conditions too (and a review of pre-commencement conditions to adjust the trigger to a later stage where possible).

This would lead to faster decision-making, efficient use of resources of planning officers, greater certainty for developer, encourage sustainable development (by faster approvals rewards) and reduce bottlenecks in the system. This approach would require clear guidelines from WG (and a transparent framework for assessing risk levels) and lead the planning system to become more responsive, unlocking essential housing at a faster pace while maintaining vital safeguards.

Greater flexibility in funding timelines

Current funding structures (for social housing) often impose rigid deadlines that do not always align with the practicalities of the development process, leading to missed opportunities, project delays, and underutilisation of available funds. Flexible funding timelines would lead to improved project planning allowing developers to better align funding with construction schedules, reducing the risk of rushed decision-making and ensuring homes are built to high standards and the quality of places/placemaking remains a key focus. Aligning funding cycles with market conditions and the reality of site development would encourage stronger collaboration between the private sector and social housing providers.

Adaptable timelines would also reduce the risk of allocated funding going unused. By tailoring funding timelines to the dynamic nature of housing projects, Welsh Government can help ensure that financial support is both timely and effective, ultimately leading to funding gateways that provide a faster and more efficient delivery of homes to meet pressing housing needs.

Greater flexibility in the application of standards such as the Welsh Development Quality Requirements (WDQR) and Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS)

This could significantly enhance the delivery of new social homes and unlock opportunities to bring empty properties back into use. Rigid adherence to these standards can present challenges for both new-build developments and the acquisition of existing homes for social housing, leaving families in temporary accommodation with far inferior space standards lacking areas for children to do their homework and family meal preparation confined to a microwave in the corner of a room. Allowing a more pragmatic application of standards, particularly in the short term, would enable developers to bring forward homes more rapidly without being delayed by requirements that may not always be proportionate to specific sites or housing types. Many vacant properties, (like upper floors in town centres) which could provide a quicker alternative to temporary accommodation, do not fully meet WDQR or WHQS. A more flexible approach – especially for homes that are safe, habitable, and easily improvable over time – would allow local authorities and housing associations to acquire and repurpose properties more efficiently. This would provide families a more stable and cost-effective housing solution. A phased improvement approach to meeting standards could allow homes to be occupied sooner while ensuring the necessary upgrades are carried out over time.

Low Carbon requirement for social homes

This presents issues with existing stock and the funds/skilled workforce required. The same workforce is also now often involved in new build schemes as well further adding to the resource issues. The only real solution is to either ensure more people are trained, so maybe say greater collaboration between the development sector and the training institutions. Also, RSLs need reassurance that if they buy existing properties now using TACP funding, or convert upper floors in town centres etc, they will not be hit by a significant future bill for upgrades to meet current or new WHQS.

Establish a data driven housing supply monitoring system

Principally, this would be to provide a continuous pipeline of land for homes while ensuring 'the right housing in the right place'. This could be a new housing monitoring indicator that identifies a persistent shortfall in housing delivery, a contingency mechanism should be triggered to allow alternative sites to come forward outside the LDP process that become drawn out and add to delay in the delivery of homes. This could include shortfall thresholds, a streamlined process for additional sites to be proposed by landowners and developers, a policy presumption in favour of sustainable development, well-located sites that can address shortfalls, temporary policy flexibility and can be monitored via annual performance reports. This is to ensure we come back to a plan-led approach rather than a plan-only approach. In the short term, an alternative way of delivering the 'right homes in the right place' needs to be promoted by WG and signed up to by the LPAs. Solutions need to be identified that find a way to speed up plan reviews and adoption. A Ministerial letter could be a way to achieve this quickly.

Standardised approach to section 106 agreements

Standardised agreements/clauses to speed up the process. This includes agreement from RSLs to standardised clauses relating to affordable homes and standardised clauses used by all Councils for other infrastructure delivery, which are agreed to by applicants. Greater resource within Council legal teams is required here.



An alternative approach is to outsource the work with costs of preparing the s106 agreements to be covered by the developer or encourage developers to submit draft s106 agreements at an early stage in the application process. Also, significant sums of collected money is unspent so Councils should look to ensure this is spent as quickly as possible.

Extension of PD rights for commercial to residential conversions

This would be based on the Class MA prior approval model that operates in England. Sufficient safeguards need to be in place to ensure only buildings in suitable locations are converted. Perhaps a system whereby Councils can opt-in within specified areas would be a solution here. Also, developer contributions would still need to be secured by appropriate planning obligations in the usual way.

Review of Green Infrastructure requirements

Consider revising the Planning Policy Wales approach on ecology and biodiversity to focus resource on schemes that have greatest impact. Agreement to standardised solutions on smaller schemes, with implementation controlled by planning conditions, may assist with freeing up capacity here, rather than requiring seasonal surveys on smaller projects which can cause significant delay.

Introduce and enforce thresholds and time limits on "Call-in" applications

This will prevent inordinate delay in the determination of housing applications that fall below a certain threshold in terms of the number of units proposed and provide greater certainty to stakeholders.

Work with developers, the RTPI, WLGA and Cardiff University to establish a career pipeline

The career pipeline will attract, train and employ planners of the future which blends hands-on experience with market and commercial awareness, legal frameworks and social and ecological concerns. The recent announcement of Pathways to Planning apprenticeships is a positive step but needs to be part of a wider vocational programme.

"Why aren't we targeting empty homes? The homes are already there, we can bring them up to decent standards...we need to focus on that."

Louise Attwood, Trivallis





A review of Public Sector land

This will enable additional land that could be brought forward quickly for temporary housing/additional homes to be identified. A more focused approach, identifying areas of most need or where there are limited sites allocated in the Local Plan, should be the first port of call.

Establish a Brownfield Register

In order to identify urban sites that could be brought forward for housing/redevelopment. This would increase housing supply in sustainable locations and provide evidence against which to respond to the current frequent objection that we don't need to release green fields because there are lots of (unidentified) brownfield options. This could be based on the work, including urban capacity studies, that some Councils carry out as part of the background evidence to their LDP reviews.

Dedicated planning officers

Funding could be made available for a pooled resource of planning officers that LPAs can draw on to help deliver major applications, perhaps on regional footprint. This pool could be funded via Planning Performance Agreements and/or additional application fee income arising from recent WG proposals.

Need for leadership from WG and Councils

There is a recognised housing emergency so decisions should reflect that. Within Councils, a multidisciplinary approach is needed with project management within the planning team, beyond just getting the application to Committee. CEOs need to get the message to all departments that housing is a priority. Party and Council leaders need to get that message to their Planning Committees.

Overall housing target

Wales should have an overall housing target based on policy objectives - the current focus is just on Affordable Homes.

SMEs

Need to enable SMEs to get more involved. One of the challenges here is the front-loading of LDPs makes it too expensive and risky for them to engage. Funding is usually not available until planning is secured. Greater reliance on larger site allocations reduced the land available to SMEs. WG and LPAs should work more closely with SMEs to understand their needs.

Final thoughts

"This document has been presented to Lee Waters MS as part of the agreed actions of the taskforce, driving short and long term strategies to deliver more homes.

"This unprecedented collaboration brings together key leaders and stakeholders from across sectors, creating a new forum for shared solutions within the wider real estate industry.

"At Hugh James, we are proud to support these solution-focused conversations, helping to shape practical strategies that tackle housing challenges and deliver real results."



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"For us it's about freeing up the planning system...we can deliver houses, we are experts at doing that...we're all ready to build."

Simon Grey
Llanmoor Homes



