

POLICY
THUMBNAIL

Build Up Not Out

**Lots More Cheaper, Greener Homes To Rent
Or Buy, & Better-Looking Towns & Cities Too**



**FEBRUARY
2026**



THE PROBLEM

Housing costs (both rent and mortgage payments) have become unaffordable because we haven't built enough new homes for decades. For anyone under 40 the Conservative dream of a property-owning democracy is getting further away rather than closer. We're being unfair to an entire generation.

THE SOLUTION

The answer to rising prices is to increase supply by building a lot more homes. We will give property owners in towns and cities the legal right to 'Build Up, Not Out', extending their properties up to 4 or 5 stories tall (the equivalent of a Georgian townhouse, or tree-height) without needing planning permission, providing they follow the local Council's Design Code so the new homes match the style of the best existing local buildings in the area, and comply with building safety regulations and heritage protections in the usual way.

These changes will mean that centrally-imposed housebuilding targets & all other measures to force local Councils to accept unwanted developments will be unnecessary, so we will abolish them all.

THE BENEFITS

- It will nearly double the amount of approved space for homes at a stroke: the biggest single creation of new living space for generations.
- As the new homes are built, they will steadily reduce housing costs to rent or buy, cutting the cost of living and making home ownership affordable for people under 40 once again.
- It will be the biggest single act of wealth creation for generations, because most urban properties will suddenly get 'hope value' which they didn't have before.
- It will encourage more small local builders to become developers, by removing the planning delays, complexity, expense, uncertainty & risks which currently ensure a few big firms dominate the market, because they are the only ones with the scale and skills to cope with the system.
- It will give our towns and cityscapes back their distinctive local characters, because local Design Codes stop 'anywhere-ville' estates of identical houses and match the best of what's already there instead.
- It will attract much-needed new investment to regenerate and save tired or run-down town and city centres, making them 'alive after five' once more.



- It will be greener, by reducing commuting (because people will be able to closer to work if they wish); slashing urban sprawl by cutting the pressure from builders to concrete over green fields and green belts at the edge of towns & cities; and using carbon-intensive infrastructure like water pipes, power grids and roads more efficiently too
- It will breathe fresh life and power into local communities and local democracy, because deep-pocketed developers will no longer be able to win legal appeals to force development on greenfield sites which local people oppose, once local Council housebuilding targets have been scrapped.
- It will cut Government spending significantly, because the need for housing benefit will fall as rental prices decline over time.

THE SOUNDBITES

"We can nearly double the amount of potential space for homes at a stroke – the biggest single creation of new, available living space for generations – making home ownership affordable for everyone under 40 once again."

"We will make our towns and cities beautiful again, matching the best of what's already there to bring back distinctive local styles and end 'anywhere-ville' estates of identikit houses too"

"This would regenerate our town and city centres with new investment, making them 'alive after five' and greener too, because there'd be less urban sprawl and people could live nearer work too."

"Building Up Not Out would be the biggest single act of wealth creation for generations. On day one, properties would suddenly get 'hope value' which they didn't have before."



THE REBUTTALS

1. Won't this mean high-rise tower blocks sprouting everywhere?

Not at all. It will only allow urban buildings up to a maximum of 4 or 5 stories tall (the equivalent of a Georgian townhouse, or tree-height). Anything taller would still need planning permission in exactly the same way as now.

2. Won't this just lead to lots more shoddily-built, dangerous buildings? Haven't we learnt anything from Grenfell?

Yes we have & no it won't. The tougher post-Grenfell building safety regulations won't be changed by this at all, and nor should they be.

3. Aren't you riding roughshod over local democracy by cutting Councils and residents out of planning decisions?

This change will strengthen local democracy, not weaken it, in two important ways:

- a) Deep-pocketed developers won't be able to win legal appeals to build on greenfield sites when local communities oppose them, because the local Council housebuilding targets which encourage them will have

been scrapped.

- b) Every new home built under this new approach will have to comply with the local Council's Design Codes, so they will match the best existing buildings in each neighbourhood. They will give our towns and cityscapes back their distinctive local characters and stop 'anywhere-ville' estates of identikit houses too.

4. *Isn't allowing developers to demolish historic buildings to turn a profit just cultural vandalism?*

That isn't what this new 'Build Up Not Out' approach would do. The regulations which protect historic listed buildings and other heritage sites won't be changed by this at all, and nor should they be.

5. *How can you promise more affordable housing costs as well as higher house values at the same time? Isn't this just 'cakeism' to help rich developers while generation rent still suffers?*

Not at all. As an example of how this would work, replacing a single bungalow with a 4 story building that contains 4 new energy-efficient apartments would create lots more valuable living space on the same site, even if the cost of each individual apartment was more affordable to buy or rent than the bungalow that was there before.

6. *Isn't the Government already promising to do something like this? Why is this different?*

You're right the Government has announced some 'gentle density' reforms which move a little way in this direction, but they won't be nearly enough to fix the problem. Our proposals take the same approach, but on the much bigger scale which will be needed overall.

7. *Isn't the obvious answer just to build lots more Affordable Housing? Why won't the Tories ever consider good publicly-owned homes to solve the problem?*

You're right that Housing Associations play an important role in Affordable Housing, but they'd be dwarfed if they tried to take on the entire housing backlog. Excluding the rest of the housing industry isn't practical, and would put political ideology ahead of building decent homes at the scale and speed the country needs.

8. *The real housing problem in [a particular town / city / Council area] is that there aren't enough [starter homes / retirement flats / family houses / other types or tenures of housing]. Shouldn't local Councils be able to specify more of those to deal with the problem?*

Every home gets modified over generations to reflect changing needs. Some switch between being rented out or owner-occupied many times. Many get extended, built on to, divided up into flats, recombined into family homes and then divided up again. If planning rules stop this natural lifecycle they will prevent local housing from adapting to each community's changing needs, leaving them stuck in the past.

