

Gordon Brown takes Labour back to a broken model for the UK

It was Gordon Brown who told us once devolution was granted to Scotland Scottish nationalism would melt away. As some of us feared, instead it gave the SNP a bigger platform and more resentments to work on. They proved masterful at governing badly whilst blaming the constitutional settlement and Whitehall for all their woes. Labour failed to put devolution in during the 1970s, used their big majority to do it after 1997, and later lost countless seats in Scotland as payment for their pains.

Gordon is back again setting Labour policy on this most vexatious of political insider questions. He wants more devolved powers for Scotland. He wishes to ignore England and make the devolution within our Union all the more lopsided. Just as the EU wiped England of their maps and tried to balkanise England into a set of unloved regions, so Gordon Brown wishes to do the same. He accepts that Labour lost the crucial referendum to set up an elected regional government in the North East and did not try again. So this time he wants to build regions up from so called partnerships between local Councils aggregating to a new region.

There is no strong regional identity in most parts of England. Exeter does not want to be governed from Bristol, Liverpool does not want to be managed by Manchester. Wokingham is variously bundled into the South East, Rest of the South East (x London), Wessex, Thames Valley, Berks, Bucks and Oxon. None of these regional groupings command our loyalty or consent. We would not vote for any of them to have governments.

People in my area belong to Wokingham Borough or to West Berks. We belong to the county of Berkshire in the country of England. We identify with Berkshire and with England without either having a government. Lop sided devolution has gone too far. Ignoring England's views and needs is wrong. Those who say they want power devolved should listen to people's own perceptions of their identities. The best devolution of power is not to new layers of government but to individuals and businesses to make more of our own decisions.

Further discussions with Minister Lucy Frazer about housing targets

I am having further discussions with Minister Lucy Frazer about the Levelling Up Bill and the housing targets.



[Housing numbers for Wokingham](#)

I am pleased to report the government has listened to the arguments I and other MPs put to allow more local decision taking on the crucial issue of how much housing development an area can accept and sustain. They have agreed to drop mandatory top down targets, leaving local Planning authorities including Wokingham Borough free to make decisions about how much housing to include in a proper effective local plan. The government will issue guidance of how much housing they think is needed, but accept that this may need modifying in the light of local circumstances, local opinion and environmental issues. They have also proposed ending the five year supply of land requirement where there is an up to date plan in place, and propose ways to encourage the build out of existing permissions instead of seeking more.

Below is the position as set out by the Secretary of State in a recent letter to me

THE LEVELLING UP AND REGENERATION BILL: PLANNING AND LOCAL CONTROL IN ENGLAND

Since returning to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities, I have listened

to the powerful representations made by colleagues about the ways the current planning system is not working and must be improved. I recognise that at the heart of concerns is a principled desire to make the system work better for our local communities and constituents. I fully agree and share this goal.

Whatever we do at a national level, politics is always local and there is no area that demonstrates this more than planning. Through reforms made by Conservative-led governments since 2010, we have a locally-led planning system – for instance, by scrapping policies like top-down regional targets that built nothing but resentment – and introducing neighbourhood planning.

COMMUNITY CONTROL

Too often I hear from communities that they are not getting a proper say in protecting the landscapes and natural environment they cherish, nor can they build the homes they want, in the places that are most suitable, with the right access to public services. To address these concerns, including those raised by members signing amendments NC21 and NC24 relating to housing targets, 5-year land supply, and the presumption in favour of sustainable development, I will consult on the following.

First, while I will retain a method for calculating local housing need figures, I will consult on changes. I recognise that there is no truly 'objective' way of calculating how many homes are needed in an area, but I do believe that the plan-making process for housing has to start with a number. This number should, however, be an advisory starting point, a guide that is not mandatory. It will be up to local authorities, working with their communities, to determine how many homes can actually be built, taking into account what should be protected in each area – be that our precious Green Belt or national parks, the character or an area, or heritage assets. It will also be up to them to increase the proportion of affordable housing if they wish.

My changes will instruct the Planning Inspectorate that they should no longer override sensible local decision making, which is sensitive to and reflects local constraints and concerns. Overall this amounts to a rebalancing of the relationship between local councils and the Planning Inspectorate, and will give local communities a greater say in what is built

in their

neighbourhood. For example, when assessing a local plan, the following will have to be taken into account:

- Genuine constraints: local planning authorities will be able to plan for fewer houses if building is constrained by important factors such as national parks, heritage restrictions, and areas of high flood risk.
- Green Belt: further clarifying our approach to date in the National Planning Policy Framework and the Localism Act, we will be clear that local planning authorities are not expected to review the Green Belt to deliver housing. This is in line with commitments made by the Prime Minister in the Summer.
- Character: local authorities will not be expected to build developments at densities that would be wholly out of character with existing areas or which would lead to a significant change of character, for example, new blocks of high-rise flats which are entirely inappropriate in a low-rise neighbourhood. While more homes are needed in many existing urban areas, we must pursue 'gentle densities' as championed by the Building Better,

As the Prime Minister committed in the Summer, I will also review how the 'soundness' test for reviewing plans at examination is operated by the Planning Inspectorate. I will ensure that plans no longer have to be 'justified', meaning that there will be a lower bar for assessment, and authorities will no longer have to provide disproportionate amounts of evidence to argue their case.

The effect of these changes will be to make absolutely clear that Local Housing Need should always be a starting point – but no more than that – and importantly, that areas will not be expected to meet this need where they are subject to genuine constraints.

Inspectors will therefore be required to take a more reasonable approach to authorities that have come forward with plans that take account of the concerns of the local community, by taking a more pragmatic approach at examination which fully reflects this updated policy.

LOCAL PLANS

I want to change the system on the rolling five-year land supply. We will end the obligation on

local authorities to maintain a rolling five-year supply of land for housing where their plans are up-to-date. Therefore for authorities with a local plan, or where authorities are benefitting from transitional arrangements, the presumption in favour of sustainable development and the 'tilted balance' will typically not apply in relation to issues affecting land supply. I also want to consult on dropping the requirement for a 20% buffer to be added for both plan making and decision making – which otherwise effectively means that local authorities need to identify six years of supply rather than five. In addition, I want to recognise that some areas have historically overdelivered on housing – but they are not rewarded for this. My plan will therefore allow local planning authorities to take this into account when preparing a new local plan, lowering the number of houses they need to plan for. Places with existing plans will benefit from the changes above, as they will be free of five-year land supply obligations provided that plan is up to date. Communities will therefore have a much more powerful incentive to get involved in drawing up local plans. Only four-in-ten local authorities have up to date local plans and I am determined to change this. They can protect the important landscapes they cherish, direct homes to the places they want, and adopt design codes to secure the houses they want to see. Once a plan is in place, these changes mean that they will no longer be exposed to speculative developments on which they have less of a say. To give further assurance to colleagues who have signed amendment NC27 on community appeals, I will increase community protections afforded by a neighbourhood plan against developer appeals – increasing those protections from two years to five years. The power of local and neighbourhood plans will be enhanced by the Bill; and this will be underpinned further through this commitment. Adopting a plan will be the best form of community action – and protection.

BUILD OUT

I strongly agree with the intent of amendments NC 28, 29, and 30 that seek to ensure developers build out the developments for which they already have planning permission. We need to hold developers to account so that desperately needed new homes are built, and I already have a

significant package of measures in the Bill to do this, including public reporting and declining new planning applications on a site if developers are failing to build out. I will consult on two further measures:

- i) on allowing local planning authorities to refuse planning applications from developers who have built slowly in the past; and
- ii) on making sure that local authorities who permission land are not punished under the housing delivery test when it is developers who are not building.

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[Coal mines, fracked gas and keeping the lights on](#)

The world currently relies on fossil fuels for 80% of its energy. All the time most UK people have a gas boiler, a diesel or petrol car, eat meat and rely on products that need plastics, steel, ceramics, cement and other components that need plenty of energy to produce we will help create CO₂. Our choice is do we use more of our own coal, oil and gas, or import more? If we import more that will entail more CO₂ being generated worldwide to fuel the transport of products. It will mean fewer well paid jobs in the UK and less tax revenue.

Importing more fossil fuel or fossil fuel using products is a kind of self harm, not a policy which saves the planet. Transition to a carbon free future will occur at the pace the public dictates by all our choices on what to eat, how to heat and how to travel. It is a strange argument that we should not allow onshore gas in the UK yet it is fine to import it from the USA to keep us warm. It is odd some think we can import coal to keep the lights on but should not produce specialist coal of our own.

[The Financial Secretary to the Treasury's Reply to my Written](#)

Parliamentary Question

I am concerned about the decline in self employment and have been an opponent of the IR 35 tax treatments as amended in 2017 and 2021. I have asked what impact there has been. The figures they refer to did not seem to enlighten the issue. I have seen other figures suggesting there has been a fall of 700,000 to 4.3m in the number self employed since 2020. I accept covid lockdowns will have had an impact on numbers, but this also includes a period of tightening of rules to discourage self employed status. It is worrying, yet the Treasury says some of these people are still doing the same jobs under different tax arrangements. It would be good to have more informed data and analysis as expanding self employment is an important part of building a flexible and faster growing economy.

Treasury has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (92045):

Question:

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many people have ceased to be self-employed since the introduction of the 2021 IR 35 rules. (92045)

Tabled on: 21 November 2022

Answer:

Victoria Atkins:

It is an anticipated outcome of the 2021 off-payroll working (IR35) reform that organisations and contractors will consider the best way for contractors to provide their services, while being compliant with tax legislation.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publish data on trends in employment. [Dataset A02 NSA](#) provides quarterly estimates of the number of self-employed individuals over the age of 16 for the period sought. On 6 September ONS officials gave evidence to the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee on changes in the number of individuals self-reporting as self-employed during the relevant period as a part of the committee's UK Labour Supply Inquiry. That evidence stated that some part of the change in individuals self-reporting as self-employed is due to changes in how people classify themselves, without having changed the way they work.

The answer was submitted on 29 Nov 2022 at 07:58.