

Statement to Parliament: Housing white paper: statement

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and with your permission I would like to make a statement on the government's [Housing white paper: Fixing our broken housing market](#), copies of which I have placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

I had hoped this white paper would dominate the headlines this morning, but it seems someone else beat me to it!

Our housing market is broken.

Since 1970, house price inflation in Britain has far outstripped the rest of the OECD.

The idea of owning or renting a safe, secure place of your own is, for many, a distant dream.

Over the past 7 years the government has done much to help.

We've taken action on both supply and demand.

And the results have been positive.

Last year saw a record number of planning permissions granted, and the highest level of housing completions since the recession.

Between 1997 and 2010 the ratio of average house price to average income more than doubled, from 3.5 to 7.

But in the 5 years to 2015 it crept up only a little, to just over 7.5.

But still, Mr Speaker, heading in the wrong direction.

And behind the statistics are millions of ordinary working people.

I'm talking about the first-time buyer who's saving hard but won't have enough for a deposit for almost a quarter of a century.

Or the couple in the private rented sector handing half their combined income straight to their landlord.

The symptoms of this broken market are being felt by real people in every community.

It's one of the biggest barriers to social progress this country faces.

But its root cause is simple.

For far too long, we have not built enough houses.

Relative to population size, Britain has had Western Europe's lowest rate of house-building for 3 decades.

The situation reached its nadir under the last Labour government, when in one year work began on only 95,000 homes – the lowest peacetime level since the 1920s.

Thanks to the concerted efforts of central and local government, last year 190,000 new homes were completed.

But that's still not enough.

To meet demand, we have to deliver between 225,000 and 275,000 homes every year.

In short, we have to build more of the right houses in the right places.

And we have to start right now.

Today's white paper sets out how we will go about doing so.

But house building doesn't just happen.

Meeting the unique needs of different people and different places requires a co-ordinated effort across the public and private sector.

This means there's no one single magic bullet that can fix the problem.

Rather, we need action on many fronts simultaneously.

First, we need to plan properly so we get the right homes built in the right places.

To make that happen, we are going to introduce a new way of assessing housing need.

Many councils work tirelessly to engage their communities on the number, design and mix of new housing in their area.

But some of them duck the difficult decisions and fail to produce plans that actually meet their housing need.

It is important that all authorities play by the same rules.

We need to have a proper conversation about housing need, and we need to ensure that every local area produces a realistic plan which they review at least every five years.

Once we know how many homes are needed where, we need sites on which to build them.

So the white paper contains measures that will help us identify appropriate sites for development.

Not simply empty spaces, but usable, practical sites where new homes are actually required.

Let me reassure the House that this will not entail recklessly ripping up our countryside.

In 2015 we promised the British people that the green belt was safe in our hands.

And that is still the case.

This white paper does not remove any of its protections.

Government shouldn't be in the business of land-banking, so we will free up more public sector land more quickly.

We will increase transparency around land ownership, so everyone knows if someone is unfairly sitting on a site that could be better used.

And people need a say in the homes that are built in their area.

So everywhere must have a plan in place and ensure communities are comfortable with the design and the appearance of new homes.

The second area of focus is all about speeding up the rate of build-out.

At the moment we're simply not building quickly enough.

Whether it's caused by unacceptable land-banking or slow construction, we will no longer tolerate such unjustified delays.

We will speed up and simplify the completion notice process.

We will make the planning system more open and accessible.

We will improve the co-ordination of public investment in infrastructure and support timely connections to utilities.

And we will tackle unnecessary delays caused by everything from planning conditions to great crested newts.

We'll be giving developers a lot of help to get building.

And we'll give local authorities the tools to hold developers to account if they fail to do so.

Local authorities also have a vital role to play in getting homes built quickly and I am therefore looking again at how they can use compulsory purchase powers.

We will also introduce a new Housing Delivery Test to hold them to account for house-building across their local area.

Finally, the white paper explains how we will diversify the housing market.

At present, around 60% of new homes are built by just 10 companies.

Small independent builders can find it almost impossible to enter the market.

This lack of competition means a lack of innovation, which in turn leads to sluggish productivity growth.

So we will make it easier for small and medium-sized builders to compete.

We will support efficient, innovative and under-used methods of construction, such as off-site factory builds.

We will also support housing associations to build more, and explore options to encourage local authorities to build again, including through accelerated construction schemes on public sector land.

We will encourage institutional investment in the private rented sector.

And we will make life easier for custom builders who want to create their own home.

Together, these measures will make a significant and lasting difference to our housing supply.

But, Mr Speaker, it will take time.

And ordinary working people need help right now.

We have already promised to ban letting agents' fees, and this white paper goes further.

We will improve safeguards in the private rented sector, do more to prevent homelessness and help households who are currently priced out of the market.

We will tackle the scourge of unfair leasehold terms, which are too often forced onto hard-pressed homebuyers.

And we will be working with the rental sector to promote 3-year tenancy agreements, giving families the security they need to put down roots in their community.

Mr Speaker, in the past few years, we have seen almost 300,000 affordable home units built in England.

We have seen housing starts increase sharply.

And we have seen more people getting on the property ladder thanks to schemes such as Help to Buy.

Now we need to go further, much further, and meet our obligation to build many more houses, of the type people want to live in, and the places they want to live.

That's what exactly what this white paper will deliver.

It will help the tenants of today, facing rising rents, unfair fees and insecure tenancies.

It will help the home owners of tomorrow, getting more of the right homes built in the right places.

And it will help our children and our children's children by halting decades of decline and fixing our broken housing market.

It's a bold, radical vision for housing in this country, and I commend it to the House.

New online safety zone for Welsh learners launched

Safer Internet Day is a global awareness day to promote good practice in online safety and gives advice and guidance on the risks posed by new technologies such as social media and how to stay safe while using them.

Kirsty Williams, who today hosted an event with schools from across Wales in the Senedd celebrating Safer Internet Day, also said countries around the world were now looking at Wales with envy for our work on digital learning and online safety.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

"Modern technologies, like social media, are now more prevalent than ever in our lives and can play an important role in informing and educating our young people. It is vital that we continue to promote the safe and positive use of these technologies to our children and Safer Internet Day offers an excellent opportunity to raise awareness to do this.

"I have been hugely encouraged to learn about the large numbers of teachers and pupils across Wales downloading the online safety resources we have made available on Hwb, our national digital learning platform.

"There they can access a range of classroom resources, create and share lesson plans, start discussion forums and access their own school's virtual learning platform.

"Today we are launching another new exciting initiative on Hwb; the Online Safety Zone. This dedicated area, which has been developed

for, and with the sector, will host news, articles and a range of resources on various safety issues to help keep learners safe online. It will also help direct those dealing with the effects of online bullying or any online safety issues towards appropriate support services.

“The success of Hwb is drawing attention from organisations around the world. At the recent BETT education technology show in London, our stand welcomed more than 400 visitors to hear about our distinctive national approach to digital learning”

We recently held a competition to design a logo for the new Online Safety Zone and received over 125 entries from all over Wales. Finalists were invited to attend the Safer Internet Day Keeping Learners Safe Online event in the Senedd today, where all the entries will be exhibited.

✖ The Cabinet Secretary announced the winning entry was by Isabel Bate, a year seven pupil, from Bryn Celynnog Comprehensive School, Rhondda Cynon Taff .

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[Press release: Separated parents working together on child maintenance arrangements](#)

The parents of more than 15,900 children have set up ‘family-based arrangements’ for paying child maintenance after receiving information and support from Child Maintenance Options, which was set up in 2008 to help separated parents work together in the best interests of their children.

Child Maintenance Options provides free, impartial support to help parents come to their own arrangements. Then, if that is not possible, they can turn to the Child Maintenance Service (CMS). The CMS supports parents to manage payments between themselves where they can, and helps those in difficult or vulnerable situations.

Minister for Welfare Delivery Caroline Nokes said:

We know children grow up to have better health, emotional well-being and educational attainment if their parents – whether together or separated – have a positive relationship. All children deserve the best start in life and that's why, through Child Maintenance Options, we encourage separated couples to work together in the best interests of their children.

But we also understand a minority of separated parents, especially those in difficult or vulnerable circumstances, won't be able to come to their own arrangements and our staff can give them that extra help.

Of the family based arrangements made by parents, for 87%, payments were regularly being made and a parent said it was working well.

The CMS is replacing the old Child Support Agency, which failed families because it was overly complex and did not encourage collaboration, plus did not provide value for taxpayers' money.

Child Maintenance Options is there to help parents work things out. [Child Maintenance Options](#) is a free service that provides impartial information and support to help separated parents make decisions about their child maintenance arrangements.

Talking about child maintenance might feel like the last thing you want to do, especially if your relationship with the other parent is strained. But, in the long run, having this conversation as early as possible could mean you end up working together as parents rather than against each other.

DWP Child Maintenance Options Service Manager Ian Wilkins said:

It can be tough when a family separates, but we know it is better for children if their parents can work together to reach an agreement on caring for them, including decisions about financial arrangements. Our staff are highly trained in providing support to separated, and separating, parents and have vast experience of dealing with a wide range of separation issues. If you require any information or support, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us.

Ian's 5 steps to working together on a family-based arrangement for your children:

Step 1 – Find the right time

Sitting down to work out a child maintenance arrangement might seem a bit of a daunting task. But the quicker you can work out an arrangement, the clearer your child's future will seem and the more secure you'll feel.

Step 2 – Work out what your child needs

The next step is to work out what your child needs, and how much this will cost. All children need clothes, food, and a roof over their heads. You might also need to think about child care costs or other costs dependent upon the age of your child.

Step 3 – Decide how you will share the cost

How you share the cost of raising your child is for you and your ex-partner to decide. For example, you might agree to 'split the difference', or vary it according to how much money you each earn.

Step 4 – Write it down

This way you'll both have a record of what's been agreed, and will have made a joint commitment to sticking to it.

Step 5 – Do it and review it

Some parents decide to review their family-based arrangement every year, or when children reach milestones like birthdays or a change in schools.

Our website, www.cmoptions.org, contains a wealth of information about family-based arrangements, other ways of arranging child maintenance, as well as a library of tools, leaflets and information to help parents to calculate and talk about child maintenance, record a family-based arrangement and manage their finances.

To speak to someone at Child Maintenance Options call 0800 988 0988.

Media enquiries for this press release – 0203 267 5111

Follow DWP on:

[Press release: National roll-out of new approach to great crested newt licensing](#)

The new approach has been piloted in partnership with Woking borough council in Surrey. It has focused on bringing the greatest benefits to the amphibians while streamlining the licensing process for housing developers. The approach will now start to be introduced across the country after its roll-out was announced in the Department for Communities and Local Government's Housing White Paper today.

This new 3-year programme will survey areas where newts are most prevalent, map the potential impacts of development and propose local conservation strategies for the species in partnership. As part of the project, great crested newt habitat is enhanced or created prior to any development taking place, saving developers time and money, and making newt populations more healthy and resilient.

In May 2016, Woking borough council was awarded an organisational licence, allowing it to authorise operations that may affect great crested newts on development sites at the same time as planning permission, removing the need for expensive surveys prior to building works and individual licences to disturb newts if they are present. As part of the project, great crested newt habitat is enhanced or created prior to any development taking place, saving developers time and money, and making newt populations more healthy and resilient.

Natural England's Chairman, Andrew Sells, said:

We are grateful to DCLG for funding the national roll-out of this ambitious new approach to the licensing of great crested newts. It is a ringing endorsement of Natural England's work to modernise the licensing of protected species.

Populations of great crested newts can struggle when they become isolated. Creating connected habitats across the country is the single most positive thing we can do for their survival, by allowing them to spread naturally.

At the same time, the strategic approach to licensing helps developers to avoid costs and delays to their projects. This roll-out is key to helping us ensure that regulation better serves both the natural environment and the economy.

Housing and Planning Minister Gavin Barwell said:

We are taking decisive action to support developers to build out more quickly so that we can deliver the homes this country needs.

This new approach to managing great crested newts will not only ensure the continued protection of this rare species and its habitat, but will safeguard developers from the delays, costs and uncertainty which have so often restricted the job of building new homes.

Great crested newts are rare across Europe, although can be locally abundant in the UK. They are protected by law, meaning that disturbance or damage to the newts or their habitat requires a European protected species licence. Currently, licences for this striking amphibian are issued on a site-by-site basis. National implementation of the new approach will benefit newts at

population level across the landscape.

Dr Tony Gent, CEO of Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, said:

The regulations and planning processes that have been put in place to help conserve the great crested newt have too often failed to provide the long term conservation outcomes that they need to reverse the historic and continuing declines of its populations.

This new initiative provides an opportunity for real gains for great crested newts, by improving the way that regulations are applied. We are keen to work with Natural England on this initiative to ensure that real, sustainable benefits can be achieved for the species.

Stephen Trotter, Director, The Wildlife Trusts England, said:

I welcome the announcement of this funding – it's potentially great news for newts. Natural England has listened to concerns about how the new system will be rolled-out and this funding gives some reassurance that the Government's commitment to the conservation and recovery of this declining amphibian is genuine. The Wildlife Trusts support the aims and objectives of the new approach. We strongly agree that everyone's priority should be to create new, joined-up habitats which will help the population of this fantastic species to recover. The Wildlife Trusts will work closely with Natural England to ensure the roll-out of the new approach is a success.

President of the Country Land and Business Association, Ross Murray, said:

The licensing process is one of the most cited sources of frustration and cost for our members seeking to invest in building homes or business premises in the countryside. The harm is particularly felt by those pursuing small scale developments.

This initiative has the potential to transform habitat preservation for important species, while at the same time reducing costs and uncertainty for landowners considering development across England.

We welcome the proactive way that Natural England has sought to address this problem and to Ministers for having the confidence to provide the necessary investment to roll this out.

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