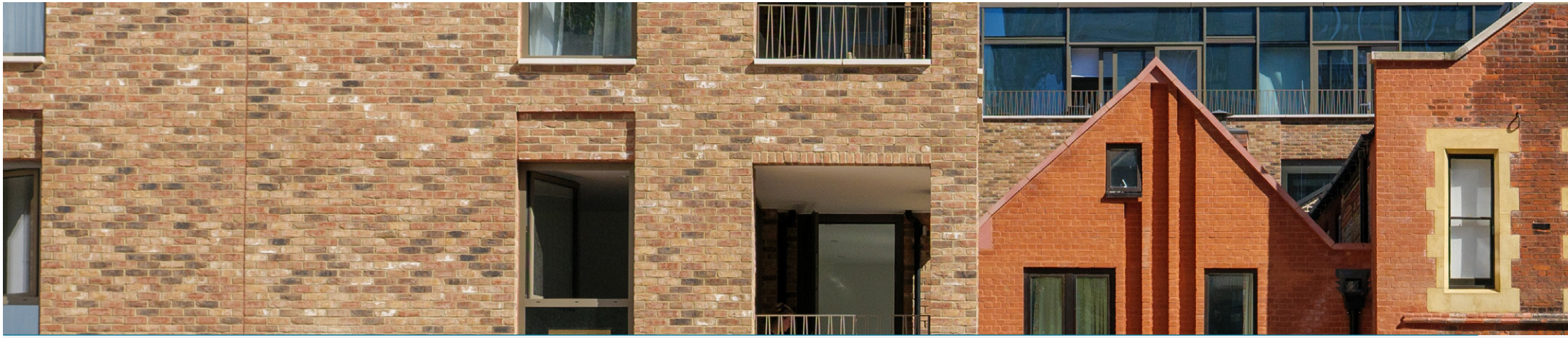
THE HOUSING FORUM

INTERACT
INFORM
INFLUENCE

Breaking Barriers: Collaborative Solutions to Housing Delivery

September 2025

A Housing Forum Futures Network Report



The Housing Forum

The Housing Forum is the cross-sector membership network for housing and construction committed to a 'Quality Home for All'.

The Housing Forum is the UK housing sector's membership organisation, with 120+ member organisations from across the housing sector and supply chain. Between them our members have over £24 billion turnover and share our determination to drive quality in design, construction and maintenance of UK homes and a commitment to partnership working.

Local authorities represent a third of our membership and are constituted as The Councils Network within The Housing Forum. The Councils Network enhances the voice of our local authority members and raises awareness of issues they face.

www.housingforum.org.uk

The Housing Forum Futures Network

The Housing Forum has set up The Futures Network for prospective future leaders from member organisations who are at an early and promising stage of their career development.

Joining the Futures Network involves engagement in regular membership and mentoring activities, and participation in research projects and evidence-based output delivery which both individuals and the housing industry need in order to widen diversity and build new and lasting professional networks.

For more information visit:
www.housingforum.org.uk/future-network/

Thank you to all members of the Futures Network who contributed to this report.

The 2024/25 Futures Network programme is supported by:

Authors

This report was developed and authored by The Housing Forum Futures Network 2024/25, building on the studies and findings of 'Route Map for New Home Delivery' developed by a previous Futures Network cohort.

It continues the ambition to improve industry and general public understanding of the full housing development process by identifying key barriers to delivering new homes and proposing solutions to overcome them.

The views in this report may not reflect the views of all individual contributors or their employers.

Contents

About the Breaking Barriers report

Through a combination of surveys, interviews, round tables and communications outreach, insight has been gathered from professionals working across the housing and construction sectors. The findings aim to support more informed decision-making, encourage collaboration and highlight practical steps to unlocking delivery of housing.

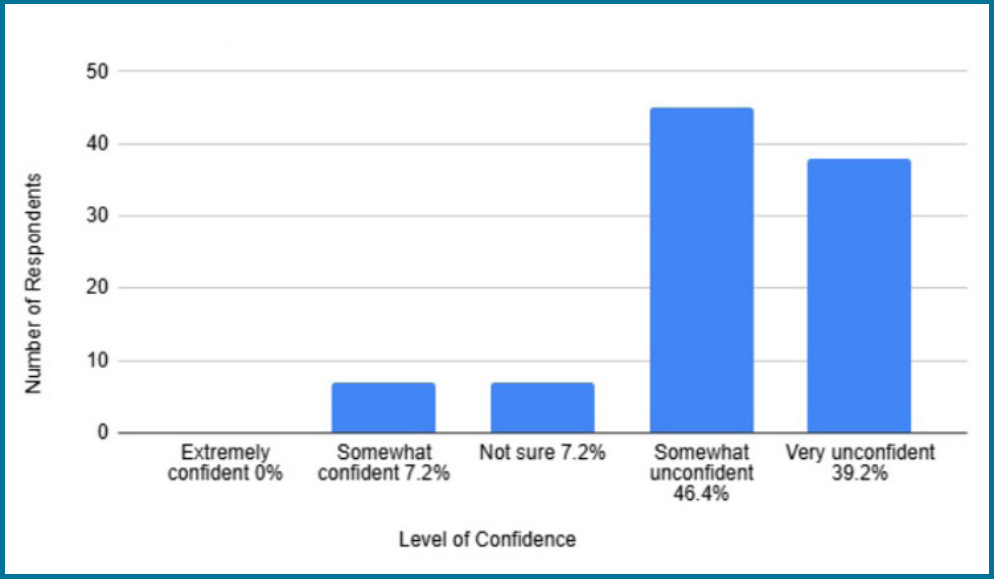
The objectives of the report are to:

- Identify the most pressing barriers hindering housing delivery at speed and at scale
- Identify and showcase successful cross-sector collaboration models and projects that have driven positive change
- Develop actionable recommendations and best practices to accelerate housing delivery toward the Government's target of delivering 1.5 million homes by 2029 and for the future

The scale of the challenge...

As part of this project we asked our members in a 2025 survey: "How confident are you in the construction industry's ability to meet the Government's target of producing 1.5 million homes?"

This is what they said:



Methodology

Introduction

The Futures Network 2024/25 cohort employed a mixed method approach, combining survey data, stakeholder interviews and round table discussions to explore barriers to housing delivery and identify practical solutions to break these barriers.

A questionnaire survey was developed to explore housing delivery challenges and to identify collaborative working practices across The Housing Forum's membership body. Distributed via The Housing Forum Futures Network's email channel, social media and professional networks, the survey combined multiple-choice and rating-scale questions to generate measurable, comparable data alongside open text questions to capture qualitative insights. There were 97 respondents to the survey from diverse market roles, organisational types and geographical location within the UK.

Drawing on overarching themes realised by the member survey, 31 interviews were subsequently conducted with professionals and stakeholders from across the construction and housing sectors, gathering qualitative insights and real-world project examples. These conversations revealed a range of barriers, both systemic and project-specific, that hinder housing delivery. Potential solutions to overcome these challenges were explored and discussed with interviewees, helping to inform a series of group conversations and round table discussions.

Round table sessions, held under Chatham House Rules to encourage open and candid discussion, offered the opportunity to explore strategic challenges, share innovations in AI and develop collaborative solutions. The sessions followed a structured format, combining expert context, facilitated dialogue and synthesis of key points.

Representatives from developers and contractors, local authorities, suppliers, and resident engagement specialists focused on these defined themes:

- Integrating AI and technology to address the upskilling needs in our industry
- Integrating AI and technology to enhance community engagement and social value in housing projects
- Innovating for sustainability by harnessing AI and technology to build the homes of tomorrow

Anonymised insights are captured and distilled within the appendices of this report.

A complementary podcast series has been developed alongside the mixed methods approach, with topics informed by the results of the survey, interviews and round-table discussions. The purpose of the podcasts is to add depth and context to the data already collected in an accessible and engaging format.

The episodes present first-hand experience of barriers to affordable housing delivery, and their associated real-world solutions. The intention is to spark ongoing conversations beyond the initial research phase, and foster future cross-sector collaboration to achieve our collective end goal of providing a quality home for all.

Discover the podcast series using the link below:
https://housingforum.org.uk/futures-network/

Key findings

Through a combination of survey data, stakeholder interviews and round table discussions, this project has highlighted a series of recurring barriers that continue to slow or prevent the delivery of new homes at scale. Solutions and potential improvements noted by respondents and participants have been collated and presented, aligned against the barriers identified.

Barriers were identified at all stages of housing delivery,* reflecting the complexity and interdependence of processes across the sector.

Five key themes emerged consistently across all data sources:

- Financial constraints
- Planning complexities
- Regulatory pressures
- Workforce capacity
- Efficiency of working practices

The findings presented in this report reflect the collective insight of professionals across the housing and construction sector and suggest the changes needed to support faster, more sustainable delivery of homes.

*Stages as identified in 'Route Map for New Home Delivery' by The Housing Forum Futures Network (July 2023).

Theme 1: Resources – financial, funding and procurement

Barriers identified

- Shortfall and instability in funding for affordable and social housing
- Rising costs of borrowing, materials and disrupted supply chains
- Inefficient and resource-heavy procurement processes
- High land values and speculative practices pricing out SMEs and community-led schemes
- Short-term policy cycles undermining long-term planning and delivery confidence

Improvements and solutions

Sector-wide

- Introduce 10 –15-year funding settlements for affordable housing
- Recalibrate grant levels to reflect current market conditions
- Streamline procurement frameworks and reduce duplication
- Support innovation through funding for sustainable technologies and digital tools

Individual

- Advocate for realistic programme expectations and respond to policy consultations
- Engage early with funding routes and procurement requirements
- Align and standardise documentation across projects to reduce resource waste

Theme 2: The planning system

Barriers identified

- Chronic under-resourcing and increased demands upon planning departments
- Prolonged pre-application stages and excessive documentation requirements
- Local opposition and political intervention delaying approvals
- Inconsistent application of policy and outdated local plans
- Limited adoption of technology to support planning processes

Improvements and solutions

Sector-wide

- Increase resourcing and reduce demands for in-house expertise within planning departments
- Shift towards a rules-based or zoning system to reduce discretion
- Standardise Section 106 negotiations and enforce statutory decision timeframes
- Expand use of digital planning platforms and AI-assisted compliance tools

Individual

- Front-load high quality, proportionate information in applications
- Advocate for early and consistent engagement with planning officers and consultees to build trust and clarify expectations
- Use digital tools to check compliance and anticipate conflicts early on

Theme 3: Policy and regulation

Barriers identified

- Overlapping and reactive regulatory frameworks causing delays
- Unclear Gateways application requirements and high rejection rates
- Rising costs linked to compliance with new safety and environmental regulations
- Lack of consistency and predictability in policy implementation
- Limited public sector capacity to adopt and apply new technologies

Improvements and solutions

Sector-wide

- Develop a long-term national housing strategy for policy stability
- Improve communication and guidance from professional bodies
- Support housing associations with remediation and rent settlement measures
- Invest in AI tools to simplify and interpret complex regulations

Individual

- Engage early with emerging policies and attend industry events
- Review relevant guidance at project outset with project team to ensure consistency
- Take personal responsibility for understanding and applying regulations correctly

Theme 4: Upskilling – communities and the industry

Barriers identified

- Ageing workforce and insufficient influx of new talent
- Lack of structured career pathways and outdated advice in education
- Labour shortages impacting build times and project viability
- Limited community understanding of housing needs and development benefits
- Fragmented and short-term approaches to community engagement

Improvements and solutions

Sector-wide

- Invest in skills hubs and long-term training infrastructure
- Align skills programmes with housing delivery pipelines
- Empower combined authorities and housing task forces to coordinate efforts
- Empower community champions and relations representatives at every stage of housing delivery

Individual

- Promote construction careers through school visits and mentoring and by sharing real-world project stories
- Champion training and skills seminars and knowledge-sharing workshops to enhance skillsets
- Advocate for meaningful consultation and conversations to empower communities and change attitudes towards new housing

Theme 5: Efficiencies through AI

Barriers identified

- Lack of high-quality and standardised data limits AI's accuracy and usefulness
- Skills gaps and low confidence in using AI tools across the sector
- AI struggles to account for site-specific conditions and lived experience, and content lacks emotion and imagination
- Regulatory frameworks are not yet adapted for AI-enabled workflows
- Concerns around trust, liability and over-reliance on automated decision-making

Improvements and solutions

Sector-wide

- Embed AI and modern methods of construction (MMC) into policy frameworks with clear standards and guidance
- Invest in digital infrastructure and workforce training to build confidence and capability
- Pilot AI-enabled planning and compliance tools with local authorities to streamline processes
- Use AI to enhance engagement and feedback mechanisms so as to focus energy onto providing direct community outreach and engagement, including during use (post-occupancy and management)

Individual

- Build AI literacy to better input mechanisms, interpret outputs responsibly and balance them with professional judgement
- Share case studies and lessons learned about AI use among networks so as to build trust and transparency

Theme 1: Resources – financial, funding and procurement

The delivery of housing at speed and scale depends on **the effective mobilisation of financial resources**, **the availability of funding** and **the efficiency of procurement processes**. These three factors underpin the viability of developments and the sector's ability to respond to housing needs.

Without clear, sufficient, and accessible funding routes, alongside procurement practices that enable rather than delay progress, the industry will struggle to meet demand, particularly for genuinely affordable homes.

Identifying barriers

Across interviews, surveys and round table sessions, participants identified a range of barriers that constrain the sector's financial capacity and slow down delivery.

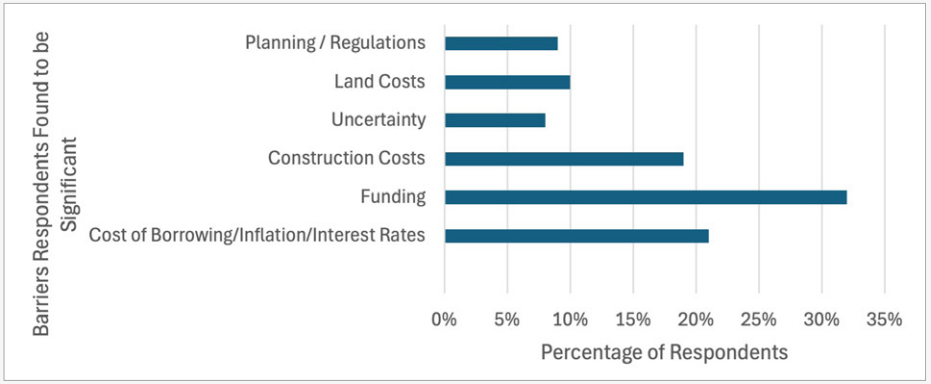
A persistent concern was **the shortfall and instability in funding for affordable and social housing**. Current grant levels fail to reflect the significant increases in construction, land and compliance costs, and funding programmes are often short-term and subject to policy change. This instability undermines long-term planning and delivery confidence.

Infrastructure funding, where it exists, is also slow to materialise, delaying essential enabling works and, in turn, the housing schemes that rely on them.

The rising cost of borrowing, coupled with volatile material prices and disrupted supply chains, has reduced investment appetite among both developers and buyers. This is particularly acute for SMEs, housing associations and local authorities, who have fewer resources to absorb such pressures.

Q12 – The Housing Forum Futures Network Survey.

In your experience, what are the most significant financial barriers to housing projects?



In parallel, private developers are commercially incentivised to prioritise market-rate homes over affordable housing, creating a structural imbalance that current funding mechanisms do little to address.

Procurement processes were widely described as inefficient and resource-heavy. Consultant and supplier frameworks often act as a barrier to smaller practices, with repeated bidding cycles (particularly between RIBA stages) causing costly duplication and loss of project momentum. In some cases, the resource demands are substantial: for one 400-home scheme, the tender process alone engaged around 150 consultants purely in bid preparation. This was seen as a waste of both time and capacity on all sides.

High land values and speculative practices continue to price out SMEs and community-led developments, while the loss of existing stock through Right to Buy further erodes the pool of affordable homes.

Participants also stressed that the upfront costs of delivering low-carbon, net-zero housing and adopting new technologies remain prohibitive for many. Community groups and smaller organisations are especially constrained, with limited resources to embed new systems or approaches.

Underpinning all these issues is **a tendency towards short-term thinking.** Policy shifts, changing rent settlement rules and inconsistent funding criteria disrupt timelines and investment planning.

As one participant noted,
"Momentum is the biggest driver within a project."
The current system too often dissipates it.

Relevant Housing Forum publications

'The Cost of Building a House', September 2024
'Better Procurement for Better Homes', October 2021

THE HOUSING FORUM
INTERACT
INFORM
INFLUENCE

Improvements and solutions

Sector-wide

Participants were clear that the current funding and procurement systems are too complex, under-resourced and ill-suited for the delivery of affordable housing at the scale required. Suggestions for reform included **the establishment of 10–15-year funding settlements for affordable and social housing** to enable sustained delivery and allow providers to plan with certainty. Many argued for **grant levels to be recalibrated in line with current market realities**, reflecting higher construction, land and compliance costs, and for infrastructure finance to be released earlier to avoid bottlenecks.

Procurement reform was seen as essential. Participants called for **a reduction in duplication by streamlining framework processes** and allowing continuity of consultant teams between project stages, alongside proportional requirements for smaller schemes to ease the burden on SMEs.

Access to affordable land was another recurring concern, with recommendations for discounted or de-risked land allocations to meet local housing needs, as well as fiscal levers such as land value tax or restrictions on land banking to prioritise timely delivery.

Support for innovation was also identified as a priority, particularly **funding for sustainable housing technologies and digital tools that improve compliance, cost management, and delivery efficiency.** Examples raised included budget allocation tools driven by AI, Buildbot, digital twins and heat network diagnostic AI. Public–private investment partnerships, built on long-term, committed pipelines were also proposed to secure greater stability in delivery.

Individuals

At an individual and organisational level, participants emphasised the importance of **early and active engagement with funding and procurement processes. Project teams should familiarise themselves with available funding routes, grant guidance and procurement requirements at the outset** to avoid delays later in the project lifecycle. Several contributors urged professionals, particularly those in housing associations and SMEs, to take a more active role in influencing funding policy by responding to consultations and participating in sector forums.

Efficiency in working practices was another recurring theme. Consultants and developers were encouraged to **identify opportunities to align bids, designs and procurement documentation across multiple projects to reduce wasted resources.** Many also championed the exploration of innovative finance models, such as repayable grants, discounted borrowing for schemes meeting local needs and staged funding releases tailored to project realities.

Participants stressed the need to build resilience within delivery teams, particularly given the widespread professional capacity constraints in the sector. Individuals are advised to plan workloads with short timelines in mind, while also advocating for realistic programme expectations from clients and funders

As one survey respondent put it:
"Long-term, cross-sector housing and funding policy – one that can't be changed for 10+ years – is the only way we'll get sustained delivery."

Without this stability, and without reforming how funding is accessed, and procurement is managed, the sector risks continuing cycles of delay, inefficiency and missed housing targets.

Theme 2: The planning system

The planning system plays a pivotal role in shaping housing delivery across the UK, both at speed and scale. Housing supply can become more assured and streamlined through creating clearer routes for sustainable housing development, pre-planning, during the application process and once initial consent has been achieved.

Identifying barriers

The planning system is widely regarded as one of the most significant barriers to housing delivery in the UK. **Chronic under-resourcing, staff shortages and inconsistent local authority capacity** cause delays to both major and minor applications during pre-planning engagement, through the determination period and during discharge of conditions. Delays and complications at these stages can push financial and political risks too far and prevent consented housing from being built out.

Upfront requirements to achieve planning consent are seen to fall disproportionately on smaller developers and development sites, with extensive consultation periods and the many specialist assessments and technical reports required proving a particular burden.

Local opposition, particularly identified in affluent or rural areas, frequently obstructs approvals. NIMBY sentiment and green belt protections continue to restrict development in high-demand locations. That said, it was accepted that demand should not be a driver to enable inappropriate development. This is emphasised by a lack of any process to provide voice from those on the housing waiting list, who clearly require the new housing. Even when proposals align with planning policy, outcomes can be uncertain due to political intervention, subjective judgements and last-minute negotiations. Section 106 agreements regularly prolong the process, while opaque viability assessments undermine public trust.

The process of engagement and application is described as overly complex, bureaucratic and politicised. Many see merit in shifting towards a more technical, rules-based, or zoning-style system to increase certainty and accelerate decision-making. Calls for reform often focus on **reducing excessive documentation requirements, particularly when planning officers lack the capacity or expertise to assess them.** Ensuring all local authorities maintain up-to-date, enforceable local plans was also seen as essential.

Technology offers clear opportunities for improvement. AI and digital tools could automate compliance checks, flag up policy conflicts and provide data-driven support. **However, adoption in the public sector remains slow**, and there are concerns that removing the human element from decisions could erode empathy, creativity and contextual judgement. Most agree that technology should augment, not replace, human oversight.

Without fundamental reform, including better resourcing, process simplification, de-politicisation and consistent application of policy, housing supply will continue to fall short of government targets, especially for affordable and mixed-use schemes. The sector widely agrees that planning must be restructured to provide speed, certainty and fairness if housing needs are to be met across all tenures.

As one participant noted,
"Places to live, not just somewhere to sleep".

Improvements and solutions

Sector-wide

Several participants recommended "streamlining the planning process" and "wholesale planning reform" to simplify decision-making and accelerate delivery. Recommended solutions include reducing the number and length of technical studies required at submission stage, accelerating Section 106 negotiations through standardised contribution formulas and introducing enforceable statutory time limits for decisions. Industry bodies also advocate for every local authority to maintain a current, evidence-based local plan, with central government oversight to ensure compliance.

Technology is seen as a critical enabler. The wider adoption of digital planning platforms and AI-assisted compliance tools could speed up application validation, standardise decision-making and improve monitoring of delivery. There is consensus that automation should augment human judgement to preserve creativity, empathy and contextual decision-making.

Improving resourcing within planning authorities was consistently noted as a priority action, both in numbers and in breadth of expertise, ensuring that planning departments can draw on in-house specialists in ecology, heritage, transport and design.

Relevant Housing Forum publications
'Streamlining Planning to Build More Homes', November 2023

THE HOUSING FORUM
INTERACT
INFORM
INFLUENCE

Improved efficiencies within minor applications and stronger resource allocation through government funding could create greater capacity to focus upon major applications and larger scale opportunities. There is strong support for moving towards a rules-based or zoning approach to reduce discretion, limit political interference and give communities and developers greater certainty over outcomes.

Stakeholders advocate for consistent early engagement with communities throughout plan-making such as formation of local plans and supplementary planning documents (SPDs) to ensure development proposals are grounded within the community and to improve local knowledge base and awareness.

More targeted and alternative methods of consultation at these early stages offer the chance to fold the housing narrative into a highly attractive offer to introduce investments, to regenerate town centres and to bring local communities along the whole journey, reducing pushbacks at later stages.

Encouraging and facilitating open conversation between neighbouring authorities will seek to better strategise green belt policy, while retaining decision making within the regional context. One interviewee suggested permitting ***"pre-agreed pattern book mid-density design... with a set tax for infrastructure and affordable housing per home."***
It was widely agreed that unlocking development in proximity to existing infrastructure networks, especially transport, is fundamental to promoting a sustainable narrative and reducing adverse landscape impacts and loss of rural character.

Policy shifts that focus on designing for the best places rather than the optimum densities would assist in creating future pipeline certainty. Use of landscape-led, mixed-use masterplans to create highly desirable "places to live, not just somewhere to sleep", will encourage sustainable growth within urban extensions and within the new town programme. Special strategic consideration should be given to industrial requirements within housing developments, alongside education, retail and commercial use, to create rounded neighbourhoods and foster a sense of place.

To promote and encourage sustainable development of housing, authority-wide design codes should be reviewed to identify where targeted relaxation of some rules within appropriate locations would be appropriate. Through encouragement of neighbourhood and regional supplementary planning documents (SPDs), opportunities to increase densification could be realised. This could be done, for example, through reduced parking standards close to urban centres, or reduction of garden size requirements and encouragement of communal green assets. Authorities should identify locations for alternative housing models such as inter-generational housing, co-living and extra-care to unlock other sites and to encourage placemaking principles.

Individuals

While systemic change is essential, individual professionals also have scope to improve planning outcomes. Several participants emphasise the importance of professional integrity and resisting political pressure: "Remove political interference in the planning process," said one. Others highlight the value of keeping a consistent project team throughout a scheme's life cycle to avoid delays caused by personnel changes.

On a practical level, planners, architects, and consultants can actively reduce bottlenecks by front-loading high-quality, proportionate information, anticipating likely points of contention and seeking early agreement on key issues with all relevant officers and consultees. Proactive communication is noted as a simple but effective way to avoid rework: ***"Urban communities tend to support brownfield development, especially when engagement is strong,"*** said another participant.

Some advocate for personal upskilling in specialist areas such as heritage, biodiversity and transport to reduce dependence on over-stretched external consultants. Others point to the need for individuals to embrace digital tools, using AI to check compliance and identify conflicts before submission, while retaining a clear role in interpreting and contextualising outputs.

Above all, participants stress the importance of professional integrity and transparency in negotiations. Avoiding "last-minute bargaining" and being upfront about viability, design compromises and policy constraints are seen as ways to build trust, reduce risk and ultimately improve the pace and quality of delivery.

Theme 3: Policy and regulation

The necessity of regulation to ensure that housing is safe and fit for purpose in order to increase sustainability, reduce energy consumption and better the quality of life for residents is widely accepted. Changes to policy and increased complexity of regulatory requirements can cause confusion and increase financial and legal risk, slowing delivery of housing.

Identifying barriers

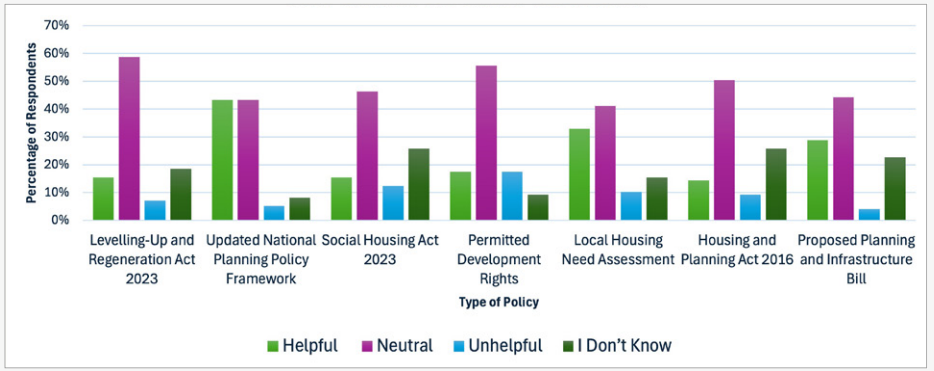
The necessity for regulation to ensure that housing is safe and fit for purpose was reiterated by many, but it was queried as to how far several forms of regulation would go in improving the delivery of housing at speed and scale, given greater complexities in design. Several contributors stressed the need for better alignment between national ambition and local delivery.

Participants identified issues across several specific areas of regulation which lead to delays, added costs and increased complications to the delivery of development schemes. The overriding view was that regulation and its frequently changing requirements increase risk and reduce deliveries. Geo-political factors at the national and global scale were identified for their impact upon regulations and the scale and speed at which housing can be delivered.

Over recent years, the housing industry has seen the introduction of several key pieces of legislation and regulation, most notably the Building Safety Act 2022, which has changed the landscape of housing delivery. Ancillary requirements to the Building Safety Act, such as updated fire safety regulations introduced by the Fire Safety Act 2021 and the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 and the so-called second staircase requirement, have significantly changed the design, planning, build and management of high-rise buildings.

Q10 – The Housing Forum Futures Network Survey.

How would you rate the effectiveness of implemented / proposed policies and regulations in supporting housing delivery?



Biodiversity net gain, net neutrality and the UK's net-zero commitments add several layers of requirements, in addition to existing policies and regulations. Participants acknowledged the importance of these policies and regulations but questioned the approach to risk adversity, with one participant suggesting that the current breadth and depth of policy and regulation has the potential to stifle delivery.

A lack of clarity in some areas as to how the obligations and requirements placed on the industry are to be satisfied causes uncertainty and reduces the speed of delivery. Recent statistics suggest that between 1 October 2023 and 16 September 2024, just over 1,000 Gateway 2 applications for higher-risk buildings were submitted to the Building Safety Regulator and only 146 of these were approved. **Rising costs of schemes are also commonly reported as a side effect** of the significant delay in decisions on applications being issued by the Regulator.

Concerns with the application process seem to be shared by those submitting them and the Regulator alike; **participants described complicated, lengthy and unclear requirements for applications** and, at the time of this report, the Regulator has advised that around 20% of applications are rejected as invalid.

Other participants observed developers changing the design of buildings by reducing storeys to avoid the higher-risk building regime and the second staircase requirement, reducing densification and driving both short and longer term cost decreases for delivery.

Participants in the survey stressed the need for consistency and predictability in housing policy, regulations and design codes. It was acknowledged that regulations are vital but that proper implementation of such policies is key, as **too many contradicting policies or regulations increase the difficulty of reaching the Government's delivery targets** and offering affordable homes to the market.

THE HOUSING FORUM
INTERACT
INFORM
INFLUENCE

Improvements and solutions

Sector-wide

Participants called for a clear, long-term national housing strategy to provide certainty and stability, aiming towards increased investment across all areas of the industry.

Many of the survey respondents noted that updates to the National Planning Policy Framework and local housing need assessments were useful tools in supporting housing delivery.

A greater skills base across the trades and longer-term strategic planning for regeneration would increase sector resilience, providing increasing capacity for delivering new housing.

Rent settlement and rent convergence measures have historically helped to relieve financial stress faced by housing associations. The Government's 2025 Spending Review announced a rent settlement to enable housing associations to borrow and invest in new and existing homes.

To improve regulations for use by the industry, **increased communication from professional bodies** in sharing their commentary on government white papers and proposals may help the industry's interface with the regulations when brought into force.

Participants in the round table felt that **the public sector is presently somewhat behind the private sector in its uptake of the use of AI**, which can slow progress on projects such as modular and low-carbon housing. Tools like Buildbot, digital twins and heat network diagnostic AI have been identified as showing promise in aligning housing delivery with evolving regulatory standards but they do rely on investment in public sector capabilities and their adoption of these tools.

Individuals

On an individual level, **early engagement with emerging policies and regulations** may help to encourage greater knowledge and accuracy when interpreting and putting them into practice. Attendance at industry events and engagement with industry governing bodies may continue to foster the dialogue between individuals within the industry and policymakers and regulators.

As one participant pointed out, engagement with policy and regulation and ensuring one's own understanding of the same is a crucial part of the role of those working in the housing industry. **The onus should be on individuals to make themselves aware of policies and regulation which are relevant to their area of work** and to ensure that they are being applied correctly, to aid in common project goals.

Relevant Housing Forum publications

'Roadmap to 1.5 Million New Homes: One year In', July 2025

Theme 4: Upskilling – communities and the industry

Skills and knowledge across the housing sector are central to delivering homes more efficiently and at greater scale. Opportunities exist to strengthen training and education and build upon the existing skills base within the sector, particularly through engagement with schools, universities and new entrants to the sector. In parallel, attracting talent and transferable skillsets from other industries could aid local authorities, developers and contractors to manage larger and more complex applications with greater confidence and capability.

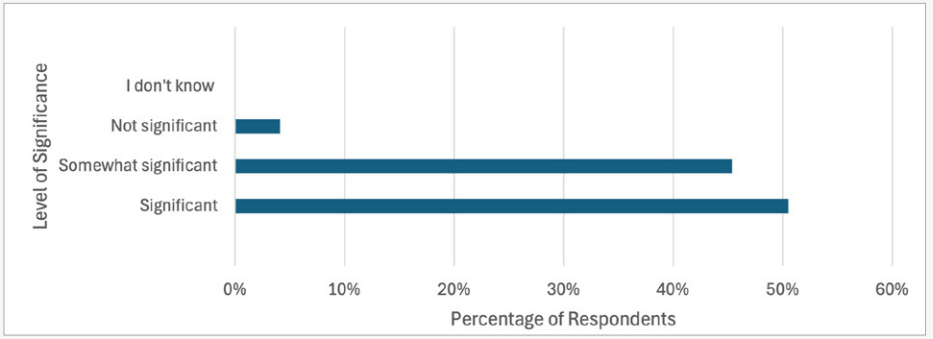
Communities can be given better information and become more actively involved in conversations around the need for new housing and the beneficial links to other aspects of everyday life. Increasing awareness of the housing crisis and encouraging community-driven action can change opinions on who housing is for and what it means for the wider community. Ensuring that communities are actively consulted with, listened to and kept updated along the process, from development of local plans to construction and handover, can increase opportunities for future housing growth and regeneration within an area, especially over the long term.

Identifying barriers

One of the most significant barriers identified by participants across the construction and housing sector is the persistent and growing skills shortage. This challenge is multifaceted, encompassing workforce demographics, education, training infrastructure and long-term industry planning. Interviewees expressed concern that **the exit of experienced workers is not being matched by a sufficient influx of new talent.** Without urgent action, this trend threatens to exacerbate existing delays and cost overruns across major residential developments.

Q8 – The Housing Forum Futures Network Survey.

How significant to housing delivery in the UK is the construction skills shortage?



The construction sector remains heavily reliant on an ageing workforce, with a large proportion of skilled tradespeople approaching retirement. This generational imbalance poses a critical risk to future housing delivery, particularly as the sector prepares to scale up production to meet the ambitious target of 1.5 million new homes by 2029. Across all areas of professional expertise, a lack of real-world project experience was identified among younger staff.

There is a widely acknowledged shortfall in young people entering the industry, particularly in key trades such as bricklaying, carpentry and groundworks. While construction continues to offer rewarding and secure career opportunities, it often struggles to compete with other sectors in attracting school and college leavers. As one participant noted, ***"Without a joined-up strategy linking housing targets to skills programmes, we risk missing both."***

The lack of visible, structured career pathways was a recurring theme throughout interviews. Participants noted that many students receive limited or outdated advice on construction careers, with a strong bias toward academic rather than vocational routes. As one respondent noted, ***"We need to inspire the next generation with real world examples and clear, supported pathways, not just once, but as part of a sustained, long-term effort."***

Labour shortages are having a tangible impact on delivery. Developers and contractors report difficulties in recruiting skilled workers, resulting in increased build times, reduced productivity and rising costs. These pressures create a knock-on effect throughout the supply chain, jeopardising the feasibility of large-scale housing programmes without targeted intervention.

A lack of understanding amongst the public of the need for new housing was identified across the country. Greater resistance to change was met in rural locations, perhaps due to the greater perception of community ownership across wider areas. It was notable that successful project examples were celebrated for their involvement of the community from early stages of master planning, giving confidence to local people as to the wider benefits of new housing.

"Skills must be seen as national infrastructure"

Improvements and solutions

Sector-wide

Participants consistently called for a long-term, coordinated approach to workforce planning; one that spans consultancy and construction sectors and is protected from short-term political cycles.

A sustainable delivery model for 1.5 million homes requires:

- Realistic and achievable workforce targets, underpinned by a funded training strategy
- Collaborative planning across industry, education and government
- Infrastructure to support learning and development at all levels of experience
- A national effort to raise the profile of construction careers, aligned with local delivery needs

One sector leader commented: ***"To meet the challenge, we need to plan for the future, not just the term of a government. Skills must be seen as national infrastructure."***

There is growing recognition of **the need for strategic investment in skills training to support housing delivery.** The Government's £600 million commitment aims to train up to 60,000 new workers through technical colleges, apprenticeships and bootcamps, alongside industry placements and partnerships. Within the sector, initiatives such as the CIH's 'Choose Housing', Skills for Transition, and the Green Skills Taskforce are helping to raise awareness and attract new talent. Programmes such as Build The Way and partnerships with the Social Mobility Foundation are supporting more inclusive pathways into construction careers.

Skills hubs allow for practical, trade-specific training in bricklaying, groundwork and carpentry, as well as upskilling the existing workforce. These hubs not only support the development of new entrants but also provide vital opportunities for further learning for current workers, ensuring quality and safety standards are upheld.

Combined authorities must provide strategic oversight across housing, skills and infrastructure at the regional scale, helping align funding and resources where they are most needed. Their ability to convene stakeholders from local councils and developers to colleges and training providers makes them a powerful enabler of place-based solutions.

Spatial development strategies should include celebrations of local heritage, culture, education and the promotion of natural assets to help drive investment and create meaningful places. Ensuring that communities are involved throughout will benefit wider community understanding of the need for housing.

Strategic use of local materials and distinct design approaches can further reinforce identity and support regeneration, where it is seen to add to the quality of an area, further increasing community receptiveness to housing development.

Communities must be central to the development process. Better engagement through local plan creation, celebrating the role of design guardians, notices on community boards and active consultation beyond individual project requirements can help build trust and long-term support for housing growth. Uses of land and public spaces can be leveraged to demonstrate value and potential ahead of permanent development, offering back to the community and potentially generating revenue.

Education reform also presents a key opportunity. Proposals for a built environment GCSE and better integration of housing-related topics into the national curriculum could help young people engage with their environments from an early age.

The consensus is clear: success depends on a long-term plan that channels funding into high-impact areas, prioritises trades essential to the housing pipeline and holds all parties accountable for delivery. As one participant commented: ***"Get the leadership, skills and funding in sync and the results will follow."***

Individuals

Individuals across the housing and construction sectors can play a vital role in addressing labour shortages and bridging the skills gap. One key action is to get involved with mentoring and buddy systems, which help share knowledge across generations and ensure that younger professionals develop essential workplace and interpersonal skills. This is especially important in environments where remote working has reduced opportunities for informal learning and collaboration.

Professionals can also contribute by embracing continuous learning and treating upskilling as a core part of their role. This includes staying informed about evolving regulations, technologies and sustainability requirements. By investing time in proper training, individuals not only improve their own competency but also contribute to safer, more efficient housing delivery.

It was noted by many that the industry needs to get better at communicating with the public. Only by doing so can it improve public opinion towards housing developments and the positive impacts they can have within an area. As well as helping public understanding of housing needs, it will encourage broader support for sustainable models, such as 15-minute neighbourhoods and low-carbon transport options, thereby aiding in unlocking sites for regeneration and densification of housing.

Inviting professional networks to consultation events and site tours can increase awareness of alternative engagement methods, while increasing personal awareness of community groups and stakeholders for future outreach.

Outreach programmes in schools, even where not directly relating to construction, build positive associations with the sector and its social value. This can be done through providing reading support at school, donating PPE for walking buses or sponsoring school community events. **These smaller-scale initiatives can help to gain support from key community members for development programmes** and offer a forum for open discussions around housing and what it means to a local area.

Individuals can support upskilling by promoting diversity and inclusion within the sector. This includes encouraging young people to consider careers in construction through school outreach, supporting initiatives like the CIH's 'Choose Housing' campaign, and advocating for curriculum changes that better reflect the built environment.

Relevant Housing Forum publications

'Skills Shortage Report' The Housing Forum Futures Network, September 2024

Theme 5: Efficiencies through AI

Advances in AI technologies and digital tools are changing how housing is designed, planned and delivered. The ability to automate diagnostics, reporting, streamline compliance and optimise design offers significant opportunities to increase speed, quality and efficiency in house building and retrofit. When paired with MMC, AI can in some cases provide greater certainty around cost, delivery and quality control. Importantly, AI should be viewed as an accelerator for efficiency, supporting, rather than replacing, the contextual expertise of housing professionals.

The experienced human eye for detail remains essential, as real-world experiences and professional judgement capture nuances that AI often overlooks, such as site-specific quirks, community and cultural requirements, historic construction methods or subtle design implications. Without this layer of human oversight, projects risk misinterpreting data or introducing design flaws that undermine efficiency gains and compromise long-term outcomes.

Identifying barriers

AI and digital tools offer major opportunities for efficiency but several barriers limit their impact currently. **Participants identified data gaps, regulatory complexity and skills shortages that reduce reliability.** Overcoming these challenges is essential for confident and responsible adoption.

Without robust, standardised datasets, AI tools struggle to deliver accurate and context-sensitive outcomes. Participants highlighted that data quality can be an issue, with AI in some cases producing assumptions based on just the datasets available.

One suggestion was to produce open access to datasets that could support the speed to deliver high-quality homes. Furthermore, participants presented concerns around transparency, liability and responsibility for AI-led decisions, particularly surrounding policies and legal documentation.

Professionals need confidence in using AI platforms, and training is required to interpret outputs effectively. Participants highlighted that a number of their companies have policies in place governing the use of AI. Some companies have prohibited typical AI platforms such as ChatGPT altogether, whereas others embraced them, putting in place policies for brand protection and messaging tone of voice. Furthermore, many participants were eager to try new AI software as it supports the development, producing digital twins, adding health and safety protections and in some cases developing design and architecture.

Relying heavily on AI can overlook the value of human expertise, which is important for spotting contextual issues, making design judgements and understanding community needs. Without this, projects may appear efficient as models but fail in delivery. Examples presented were on contractual agreements, design flaws and in some cases, opportunities to innovate and produce something impactful for the community.

"Human feedback loops are an essential solution for AI efficiency success"

Improvements and solutions

Sector-wide

To unlock the full potential of efficiency gains, **the housing sector should embed both AI and MMC within policy frameworks**. This could provide regulatory clarity and the development of consistent standards that give certainty to developers, local authorities and supply chains.

Alongside this, the sector should encourage robust policies and data-sharing protocols between industry partners, ensuring that AI systems have access to reliable, high-quality inputs to deliver accurate outputs.

"Good developers and practices are increasingly sharing information and using AI to foster industry-wide collaboration. It's about making one plus one equal three."

Equally important is investment in digital infrastructure and skills training across the workforce. Building confidence and capability in the use of new technologies will ensure that professionals can effectively interpret AI-generated insights and apply them to real-world housing challenges.

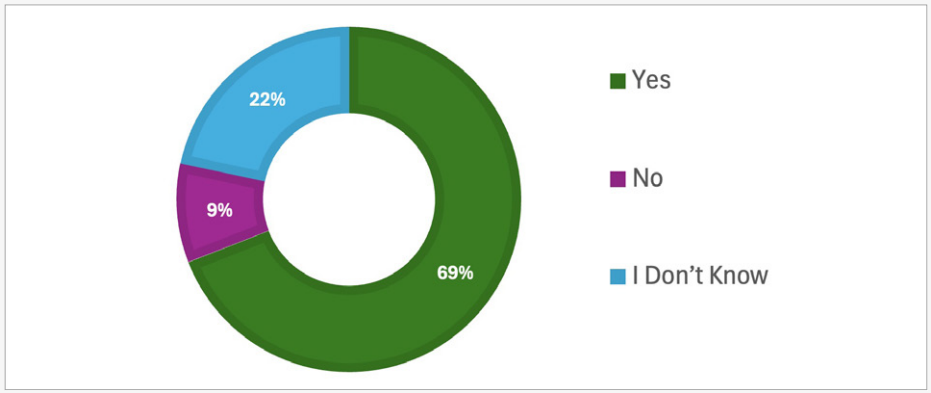
Finally, **piloting AI-enabled planning and compliance tools in collaboration with local authorities** could streamline administrative processes, reduce delays and accelerate decision-making, delivering measurable benefits for both public and private stakeholders.

Relevant Housing Forum publications

'Unlocking the Potential of Modern Methods of Construction', May 2025

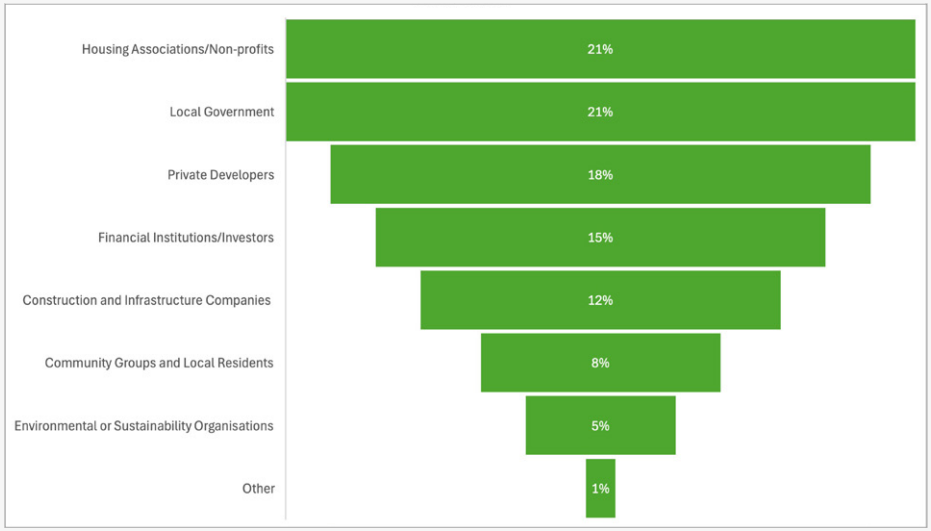
Q13 – The Housing Forum Futures Network Survey.

Have you / your organisation been involved in any successful cross-sector collaboration for housing delivery?



Q16 – The Housing Forum Futures Network Survey.

Which sectors are most crucial for successful collaboration in housing delivery?



Embracing AI and MMC must go hand in hand with strengthening resident engagement. Digital tools and data-driven insights can help capture feedback at scale. They can be used for tracking how homes perform, identifying emerging issues and shaping future design and retrofit strategies.

However, this technology should enhance, not replace, the direct conversations with residents that provide depth and context. By combining AI-enabled analysis with genuine, ongoing engagement, the sector can deliver housing that is efficient, responsive and aligned with the lived experience of communities.

Individuals

At an individual level, AI can be developed as a diagnostic accelerator, supporting professionals to quickly analyse thermal imaging, energy consumption and material conditions to identify high-impact retrofit interventions. This reduces guesswork and ensures that resources are directed to where they will have the greatest benefit. In the design process, professionals can also make use of generative design tools, which create multiple sustainable design alternatives rapidly, helping to reduce waste and improve overall efficiency.

Developing AI literacy is crucial to ensure that individuals can balance automated insights with their own contextual and on-site expertise. Professionals who understand the strengths and limitations of AI are better placed to make informed, responsible decisions. **Sharing case studies and lessons learned across networks will further build trust, transparency, and accountability,** while encouraging the adoption of best practices in AI-supported housing delivery.

Furthermore, this means recognising that engagement with residents must extend well beyond the move-in date. Ongoing feedback offers vital insights into how homes perform in practice, highlighting both successes and areas for improvement. By listening to lived experience and maintaining an open dialogue, housing professionals can ensure that design, construction and retrofit decisions continue to support comfort, efficiency and long-term satisfaction.

Examples of excellence

Seasalter Meadows – Whitstable

Hyde

In Whitstable, Hyde are building a new development of entirely affordable homes at Seasalter Meadows. The project, which will deliver 120 shared ownership and 100 social rented homes, will provide much-needed affordable housing for the area. This is an attractive prospect for the local authority, local residents and the wider industry. It may come as no surprise that Seasalter Meadows achieved reserved matters approval in a matter of months, which may also have been prompted by the project's focus on its environmental impact.

As well as affordable homes, Seasalter Meadows will deliver allotment plots, a four-hectare biodiversity area and green open spaces. The focus on biodiversity and green space gives the project strong environmental credentials and Hyde's collaboration with the smart grid operator SNRG to deliver a solar PV battery energy grid system is intended to save residents money on their bills and boost the energy efficiency of the homes.

Hyde's innovation has been utilised not only on the built aspects of this scheme. They have leveraged their strategic partnership with M&G as part of the project's funding structure, allowing M&G to acquire the shared ownership homes to be built. This is a good example of how institutional investment can be deployed in the affordable housing sector to support housing associations build at scale.

https://www.hydenewhomes.co.uk/development/seasalter-meadows

Wingspan Walk and Down Lane Park – Haringey

Wingspan Walk project team

Client: London Borough of Haringey
Architect: Levitt Bernstein
Landscape architect: Levitt Bernstein
Structural, civil and transport engineer: Civic
Contractor: Formation
M&E / Sustainability engineer: Max Fordham

Project information

Number of homes: 272
Tenure mix: 63% social rent and 37% open market sale
Status: Under construction
Completion: 2026
Location: LB Haringey

https://haringey.gov.uk

Down Lane Park project team

Client: London Borough of Haringey
Principal designer: Levitt Bernstein
Landscape architect: Levitt Bernstein
Architect: Levitt Bernstein
Co-design facilitator: Coherent Cities
Lighting consultant: Light Follows Behaviour

https://downlaneparkimprovement.commonplace.is

Wingspan Walk is a housing regeneration project providing 272 new affordable homes, in a mixture of apartments and maisonettes for Haringey Council. The project transforms a previously disused brownfield waste depot into a vibrant, green residential neighbourhood with new pedestrian links to Down Lane Park.

Designed to achieve Passivhaus certification, the homes feature exceptional energy efficiency, ensuring low running costs for residents and a comfortable environment.

Of the new homes, 92 will be larger, socially-rented family homes with three or four bedrooms. The overall masterplan for the site and landscape-led development strategy enable retention of substantial existing trees and create crucial new linkages from the existing neighbourhood to Down Lane Park, a well-loved green space at the heart of a rapidly changing community in Tottenham Hale. The masterplan for the park's renewal has evolved through a process of co-design.

Plans to improve Down Lane Park were created in partnership with the Community Design Group (CDG), a diverse group from the local community offering their lived experience. The completion of the first two phases was marked in 2024 with a new flagship play provision situated in the north of the park.

The Down Lane Park Improvement programme was relaunched by Haringey Council in January 2022 as a co-design project with the aim of developing new proposals and a 'vision' for Down Lane Park. By working collaboratively and transparently with the local community, the intention was for 'lived experiences' and the community's understanding of the local area to be woven into the masterplan proposals. The Glass-House charity helped to deliver the kick off session with the CDG in February 2022, after which Coherent Cities and Haringey Council continued to develop and establish a base line understanding of how the group would operate with a shared mission. As lead consultants, Levitt Bernstein led design / discussion sessions, while Coherent Cities facilitated and organised all sessions.

Seasalter Meadows – Whitstable

Wingspan Walk – Haringey

Melfield Gardens – Lewisham

Melfield Gardens – Lewisham

Project team

Client: Phoenix Community Housing
Architect: Levitt Bernstein
Landscape architect: Levitt Bernstein
Structural engineer: Price & Myers
Passivhaus consultant: Etude
M&E: Max Fordham
Planning consultant: BPTW
Quantity surveyor: Potter Raper

Project information

Number of homes: 32, including 30 independent living homes for people aged 55+ and two four-bed student homes
Tenure mix: 100% affordable housing
Status: Completed
Completion: June 2025
Location: Lewisham

Melfield Gardens is a fully affordable and sustainable inter-generational housing development mixing older people and students.

It provides 30 independent living homes for people aged 55+, and two four-bed homes for Goldsmiths University's postgraduate students. This symbiotic relationship incorporates student living at a reduced rate based on a 'good neighbour' agreement, which entails volunteering a small number of hours each month and helping older residents if needed. This pioneering approach to shared living aims to increase the sense of community amongst residents and reduce loneliness for older people by incorporating different age groups into a single development.

Arranged across two subtly splayed buildings from three to six storeys, the homes all face a pedestrian-friendly landscaped area with seating spaces, walking arches features, growing spaces and a swale to pick up rain runoff. The careful design of this central street encourages communal interaction, promotes safety by ensuring routes are well overlooked, prioritises pedestrian access and encourages slow vehicle movement.

A shared garden room sits at the foot of the western building, wrapping around into the protected garden to the rear for residents and their visitors. It provides a communal lounge area with a shared kitchen and services to hold events and neighbourly activities. The buildings were designed with the highest sustainable principles and set to achieve Passivhaus certification. Its fabric first approach, with very high levels of insulation and air tightness, will reduce energy consumption in the buildings to extremely low levels, reducing costs for residents and supporting sustainable living.

All homes are dual aspect, and provide an innovative flexible 'one bedroom plus' model. This incorporates an additional study / hobby room that can become part of the main living space or remain separate, as residents wish. It provides them with greater flexibility to tailor their homes to their own requirements as they get older, in line with HAPPI principles. The space could be used as additional living space or serve as a temporary area for a carer or relative to sleep in.

https://hdawards.org/scheme/melfield-gardens/

Lockside – Walsall (Phase 1)


Lockside – Walsall (Phase 2)

Lockside – Walsall

Regeneration through partnership and innovation

Lockside is a 324-home, mixed-tenure development in Walsall, delivered in two phases across long-derelict brownfield site the former Caparo steelworks and Metafin factory. Together, these sites had stood vacant for over a decade.

The scheme provides affordable rent, shared ownership, and homes for sale, alongside a 50-apartment wellbeing scheme for over-55s, creating a vibrant, multigenerational community.

https://newhomes.lovell.co.uk

Phase One – Caparo Steelworks

The 16.5-acre Caparo site was delivered by Anthem Lovell LLP, a joint venture between Lovell Partnerships and whg subsidiary Anthem Homes. This model enabled risk-sharing, combined expertise, and reinvestment of Anthem's profits into affordable housing. Unlocking the site required significant remediation, supported by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Housing Land Fund under its 'brownfield first' policy, with additional funding from Homes England and backing from Walsall Council.

From this phase, whg acquired 120 affordable homes ,22 Affordable Rent, 58 Shared Ownership, and 50 affordable Wellbeing apartments, with a further 132 homes delivered for open market sale.

Phase Two – Metafin Factory

On the adjacent Metafin site, 72 affordable rent homes were developed. These were whg's first all-electric, EPC-A-rated properties, representing a major step forward in energy efficiency and sustainability. Delivery was achieved in collaboration by Lovell Partnerships through flexible contracting, viability-led negotiations, and targeted grant investment.

The two schemes demonstrate how local authorities, housing associations, private developers, government agencies, and Homes England can collaborate to overcome complex financial and technical constraints. WMCA's direct intervention ensured that housing delivery was prioritised on brownfield land, protecting greenbelt and aligning with regional housing targets.

Beyond the physical regeneration, it has also created significant social value through apprenticeships, training opportunities, and local job creation during construction. The schemes illustrate how multi-sector partnerships, innovative funding models, and strong policy alignment can transform challenging sites into productive use delivering high quality, sustainable homes while driving wider economic and social renewal.

Appendices

The QR codes below link to where the Round table reports can be downloaded from The Housing Forum website.

Round table 1:
Integrating AI and technology to address the upskilling needs in our industry

Round table 2:
Integrating AI and technology to enhance community engagement and social value in housing projects

Round table 3:
Innovating for sustainability by harnessing AI and technology to build the homes of tomorrow

Acknowledgements

The Housing Forum wishes to thank all those who contributed to the research and findings of this report.

Report authors

The Housing Forum Futures Network 2024/25

The Housing Forum Futures Network is a development programme for housing sector professionals. Delegates of the Futures Network benefit from personal learning and development, mentoring, workstreams and events participation.

The programme was launched in July 2021 with the first cohort, and continues to actively support the growth of skills in partnership and collaborative working that both individuals and the housing industry need to widen diversity and to build new and lasting networks.

For more information on The Housing Forum Futures Network, please contact:
futures.network@housingforum.org.uk

Futures Network 2024/25 Cohort

Malachi Currie, Airey Miller
Kwame Munyangiri, Arcus Consulting
Sarah Wigley, Baily Garner
Phoebe Evans-Khan, Bugler Group
Sophie Jacobs, Foot Anstey
Katherine Duddy, HTA Design
Eden Carberry-Hughes, John Rowan & Partners
Bronwen Thomson, Latimer by Clarion Housing Group
Alex Light, Levitt Bernstein
Joe Evans, Martin Arnold
Charlie Ash, NHBC
Guinevere Dimock, Peabody
Alexander Firth, Platform Housing Group
Hollie White, Polypipe
Adrian Jacobs, Sovereign Network Group
Becca Stenson, Switch2
Lilian Robinson, Trowers & Hamlins LLP
Sigourney Fox, Wates Residential
Claire Burbridge, whg

The Futures Network Chair

Danielle Buckley, Wates Residential

The 2024/25 Futures Network programme is supported by:

THE HOUSING FORUM

INTERACT
INFORM
INFLUENCE

With thanks to additional contributors who wished to remain anonymous.

Peter Airey, Airey Miller
Ed Richards, Airey Miller
Mike Davies, AG Professional
Cliff Nay, Ark Build
Latisha Clark-Dhir, Avison Young
Helen Collins, Avison Young
Mash Halai, Bellrock
Anna Kadziolka, BPTW
Sarah Davey, CHIC
Arita Morris, Child Graddon Lewis
Tim Gaskell, CMA Planning
Charlie Moir, Commonplace
Sarah Bradshaw, Derek Evans Partnership
Daniel Neasham, Future Homes Hub
Phil Henry, Genuit Group
Gary Staines, GSQ Brickwork
Lawrence Wright, Helix
Jason Robinson, Hermitca Black
Victoria Anthony, Hill
Andrew Day, Hill
Michelle Johnson, Hill
Steve Kane, Hill
Rebecca Littler, Hill
Sian Rebourg, Hill
Rory Bergin, HTA
Lucy Smith, HTA
Mike Finch, Hyde Group
Toby Fox, Inner Circle
Spencer Wicks, Inner Circle
Adam White, Intelligent Membranes
Evette Prout, Kind & Co
James Parker, Latimer by Clarion
Jo McCafferty, Levitt Bernstein
Jamie Collins, Martin Arnold
Nick Price, Mulalley
Darryl Stewart, NHBC
Elly Hoult, Peabody
James McMylor, Peabody
Lipy Rahman, Peabody
David Stronge, Peabody
Jamie Ratcliff, Place Base
Sarah Eastman, PTEA
Roger Holdsworth, PTEA
Claire Flowers, Potter Raper
Gareth King, SNG
Cathy Olphin, Switch2
Amy Shaw, Trowers & Hamlins
Stephen Teagle, Vistry
Joe Arthur, Wates Residential
Hugh Jeffery, Wates Residential
Ria Morris, Wates Residential
John Bedford, WHG

The Housing Forum Futures Network Support

George Thompson-Dunne, Membership Manager, The Housing Forum

Anna Clarke, Director of Policy & Public Engagement, The Housing Forum

THE HOUSING FORUM

INTERACT
INFORM
INFLUENCE

The Housing Forum
6 Floor, 1 Minster Court
Mincing Lane, London EC3R 7AA

www.housingforum.org.uk