

Sycamore Gardens,
Ellesmere Port,
by Onward Homes

Falling short of target

Is emerging legislation needed to curb the UK's housing crisis?

Think, talk or write about the future of housing and you may well find yourself struggling to avoid the word 'flexibility'. Nowadays, reflections on exactly how we live and where are fast becoming an undisputed dominant force of day-to-day existence.

Just how substantial will technological advancements be in response to demographic, societal and climate changes? To what extent will the future family home adapt in line with the ever-evolving needs of society?

In the North West of England its public and private sectors – including all connected with the housing supply chain – have been responding to the greatest shock to business for a century: Covid-19. As a result, housing and the future of it has arguably never been higher on the agenda.

Fast forward a few weeks and Places for Everyone (PfE), the long-term plan of nine Greater Manchester districts for jobs, new homes and sustainable growth, will be submitted to the government. In a nutshell PfE needs to prove there is enough land available to deliver the homes and jobs people need up until 2037.

Should PfE go according to plan, Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Salford,

Rochdale, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan councils will begin adopting the strategy in 2023. Prior to 2023, however, the wider North West region is staring at the levelling-up agenda and wondering if and when there will be a rebalancing of housing delivery away from the South East.

Managing director of the Strategic Land Group (SLG) Paul Smith believes housing delivery in the North West isn't currently set up to meet the growing demand for homes in more rural areas. "It's the biggest trend in the housing market right now," says Smith.

"Working from home – at least for some of the week – looks set to become a permanent part of our lives, so people want more space and are prepared to accept a longer commute.

"The supply of homes is focused on urban areas with too few planned in villages. The result has been rapidly rising land values."

SLG works on projects across the North West, the rest of England and in Wales, including on brownfield former industrial sites, agricultural fields and greenbelt.

Smith adds: "We're not doing a great job of delivering the homes people want in the places they want to live. Places for

Everyone is a good example of that – of the 190,000 homes it plans to deliver, almost 60 per cent are intended to be apartments. Meanwhile, around 10 per cent are to be delivered on sites which are currently in the greenbelt – exactly the sort of countryside locations where people want to live.

"It's hard to escape the conclusion that they've simply got the balance wrong – which will result in ever-rising house prices. 'Places for Almost Everyone' might be a better name."

Another word forever intrinsic to housing and its future is planning. Austrian-born American management consultant Peter Drucker (1909–2005), arguably the most influential management philosopher of the modern era, once said that "unless commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes; but no plans".

Where do Drucker's words sit in relation to the Chancellor's autumn Budget which included £1.8bn to be spent on developing brownfield sites and £65m to digitise the English planning system?

Donna Barber is a director of Altrincham-based Eden Planning. During a two-year stint as associate at a property consultancy in Sydney, Barber witnessed ►

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: Collyhurst

One-and-a-half miles north-east of the city centre, Collyhurst is one of the most densely populated areas in Manchester. Since February 2020, Manchester City Council and Far East Consortium (FEC) have been developing plans for a first phase of 244 homes in Collyhurst Village – 100 of which will be classed as affordable – alongside the first phase of the new Collyhurst Village Park, and 30 homes in South Collyhurst. The homes planned as part of Phase One are expected to take between 18 months to two years to build and form part of the £4bn Victoria North project, which could deliver up to 15,000 homes over the next 15 years.

Victoria Hunter, development manager at FEC, says: "It's about creating a vibrant community for both current and future generations. One of the most visible benefits will be the 1.3 hectare New Collyhurst Village Park at the heart of the neighbourhood.

"Improving the lives of the immediate and surrounding communities is at the heart of this development and why Collyhurst is the first part of Victoria North to be delivered. We currently have a situation where residents have to travel on a bus to reach their nearest cashpoint, giving people no other option but to spend money to get money."

And as Hunter explains, the wider regeneration of Victoria North means Collyhurst can benefit from scaled investment that wouldn't have previously been viable. "Victoria North will also better-connect Collyhurst to the six new neighbourhoods we're developing within the city centre," says Hunter.



Victoria North project

Zero-carbon concept

Housebuilding giant Barratt Developments is working with the University of Salford to create the Z House, a zero-carbon home prototype. The property, located at the university, will be occupied and monitored to assess performance.

Last year Barratt announced that all of its new homes will be zero carbon by 2030 and this flagship concept house is the first step to achieving that.

Z House will be built using the latest modern methods of construction and will include an air source heat pump, electric vehicle charging points, solar panels and battery storage. Overhead infrared panels will provide instant zero-carbon heat, while air-powered showers can save hundreds of pounds per year in water and heating bills. And heated skirting boards will deliver 10 per cent more heat than traditional radiators while also saving space.

To ensure the house operates in the 'real world' it will be occupied by an academic from the University of Salford.

The project sees more than 40 industry partners from across the housebuilding, sustainability and technology sectors come together to broaden knowledge in zero-carbon living and share the lessons learned more widely across the construction industry.



Worden Gardens in Leyland, by Redrow

- the delivery of thousands of new homes within a year thanks to 'emergency' legislation. "If we're to curb the UK's housing crisis," she says, "we need to see an increase in housing delivery with this kind of immediate action in mind".

While Barber worries about environmental factors going amiss via any increase in the rate of building, she believes enacting emergency legislation will help streamline planning processes for existing allocations.

Redrow has two operating divisions building at more than 30 North West locations. Gary Crisp, regional chief executive, says unless more land is released for development or sites promoted more

efficiently through the planning process, the North West may fall short of its targets.

"We are also concerned that the introduction of the National Model Design Code and the potential for further changes to the system will further delay the number of homes being given planning permission," says Crisp, particularly in relation to the shift of homebuyers 'prioritising being close to green spaces'.

Onward Homes owns and manages 35,000 properties – a mix of social housing, affordable rent and shared ownership – across Liverpool, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cheshire.

Having secured £152m from the

Affordable Homes Programme (AHP), Onward will deliver 3,208 North West homes by 2026, providing the backbone of plans to build 5,000 homes by 2030.

Executive director of property Sandy Livingstone says tenures will be 38 per cent affordable rent, 12 per cent rent-to-buy, 40 per cent shared ownership and 10 per cent supported.

"What we need is a new sharper focus on regeneration and placemaking," says Livingstone.

"There are plenty of challenges such as the rise in construction costs and a backlog of planning applications. But, it is achievable." ■