

NEWS BRIEFING



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NEW BARKER REVIEW MAKES INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Twenty years after her landmark Review of Housing Supply in the UK, Dame Kate Barker has written a public memorandum to the incoming Housing Minister, Matthew Pennycook MP, setting out the initial recommendations of the Radix Big Tent Housing Commission of which she is chair.

Established with the aim of proposing fresh, practical solutions to the housing challenges in England, the Commission comprises fifteen experts from across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Her memo says that “Despite strong support for her original report, a recent review by the Home Builders Federation (HBF) found that only eleven of its 36 recommendations are currently in place.” It continues:

“Sadly, most indicators of housing market health are worse today than they were twenty years ago. In particular, there has been a failure to link new housing with infrastructure delivery and also, since the financial crisis, a further decline in the supply of new social rent homes.”

The memo goes on to make eighteen initial recommendations, covering planning, funding, and implementation.

Dame Barker recommends a two stage approach to housing reform, initially focusing on policies to end the ‘permacrisis’ by establishing a stable policy framework, so as to allow bolder choices in the latter part of the Government’s first term and lay a sound foundation for the following five years.

Amongst the Commission’s early recommendations are to:

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Implementation

- **Reinstate the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit (NHPAU) as soon as possible** to develop a more robust approach to mandatory housing targets at the strategic level
- **Establish a cross-departmental Implementation Unit at the Cabinet Office** to coordinate housing policy delivery across government and to engage with key stakeholders such as the Bank of England and financial and utility regulators.

Funding

- **Streamline existing funding pots and processes**, replacing wasteful and divisive short-term competitive funding model for small pots with longer-term, needs-based funding formulae.
- **Recognise the critical role of institutional investment into housing**, by creating a level playing field for tax, and clarity of vision about the delivery of future developments.
- **Reform the current system of developer contributions through Section 106 and CIL**, with a particular goal to deliver more affordable housing, instead of implementing the proposed Infrastructure Levy.

Planning

- **Restore a more effective mandatory approach to Strategic Planning** at the sub-regional/city region level to support the plan-led system and use planners for spatial planning rather than regulatory development management functions.
- **Establish a comprehensive network of spatial planning teams** across authorities to boost skills, capacity and resources across planning teams.
- **Significantly boost the supply of small and medium sites and delivery by SME and community-led developers** through specific amendments to the NPPF, for example, by supporting Permission in Principle.
- **Commission an independent review of the Metropolitan Green Belt** to identify strategic opportunities for growth, including new or expanded towns.
- **Rethink the role of Homes England as a master developer** potentially working with Development Corporations.

The Commission's final report is to be published in the Autumn.

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About Radix Big Tent

Radix Big Tent is a registered charity which seeks to provide a platform for radical ideas to deliver systemic change. Its board and fellows include former Health Secretary Lord Lansley, former Business Secretary, Sir Vince Cable and shadow Immigration Minister Stephen Kinnock. It was formed in 2022 from the merger of the Big Tent Foundation founded for George Freeman and Baroness Sally Morgan and the Radix think tank.

About the Housing Commission

The Radix Big Tent Housing Commission brings together experts from the public, private and voluntary sectors to develop recommendations to tackle England's housing shortage. It is focusing on four distinct, but connected issues: how to free up more land for development; the role of specialist housing, for example for students and older people; approaches to sustainability; and ensuring affordability.