

Planning rules could be relaxed for small sites in boost to SME developers

Ministers will consult on changes that could unlock 110,000 new homes in England



A Pocket Living scheme in Southwark

What Government will review planning rules for small sites

Why Andrew Lewer MP and 28 developers say it could help build thousands of affordable homes

What next Delayed levelling up going through parliament

Ministers will consult on planning reforms to unlock small brownfield sites in UK cities and build thousands of homes.

The government said it would review its policy on the development of small sites after Andrew Lewer, a Conservative backbench MP, put forward an amendment to the levelling up and regeneration bill going through parliament.

Lewer was seeking to insert a “small sites clause” into the bill that would require councils to “support opportunities to bring forward sites and apply a presumption in favour of development”, provided at least 60% of homes proposed were affordable.

He said: “We all know the scale of the crisis we’re facing. In 2003, 59% of households led by someone aged 25 to 34 were homeowners and by 2020 this had fallen to 47%.”

The government said in a statement: “We will consult on what more we can do to support development on small sites, particularly in respect to affordable housing.”

28 developers, including the UK’s biggest housebuilder Barratt, the National Housing Federation and London-focused affordable housing company Pocket Living, have been campaigning for the “small sites” proposal.

A study by Pocket Living found that small brownfield sites across 10 of England’s major urban areas could provide 110,000 new homes. However, less than a quarter of small brownfield sites suitable for housing are coming forward and half of councils have allocated fewer than 15% of their small brownfield sites.

SMEs “cannot deliver” same requirements as larger ones

[Marc Vlessing](#), chief executive at Pocket Living, said: “Suitable small sites take too long to go through planning, and planners call for the same levels of policy requirements as large sites, which small developers just cannot deliver on. As a result, supply doesn’t match demand and a whole generation is left bitterly disappointed.”

Exempting small sites that will be developed into cheap homes from any infrastructure levy could result in an additional 30,000 affordable homes being delivered each year, Vlessing added.

Earlier this month, the government was pressured by backbench MPs into amending the levelling up bill to [scrap mandatory housebuilding targets](#) for councils.

Nick Whitten, head of EMEA and UK living research at JLL, said: “Solutions to the housing crisis lie in increasing supply and improving affordability through finding innovative ways to enable new opportunities, particularly for SME housebuilders. JLL wholeheartedly supports the proposed small sites planning policy as it aligns perfectly with this goal.”

Andrew Boyd, partner and head of residential at Allsop LLP, said: “There is a lot to be said for this policy. The SME sector has contracted so much and will do again next year with the financial backdrop. With housebuilders focused on larger sites it is key that support is given to the smaller end of the market.”

However, Stuart Andrews, head of planning at Eversheds Sutherland, said: “It isn’t the solution to the housing crisis and it really shouldn’t be seen as a silver bullet.”