

HOW CAN WE BUILD THE 1.5 MILLION NEW HOMES THAT WE NEED?



John Sturrock



Rebekah Paczek
Director of Public
Affairs, Social Impact
and Community
Relations, Earls Court
Development Company

One-and-a-half million homes is an incredibly ambitious target; it needs an equally ambitious strategy. The headlines are all about planning but quiet on how you move from planning to delivery. Yes, we need to make planning a more attractive career, we need to give members more support and take the heat out of the process—proposed reforms would mean better, more consistent decision-making, undoubtedly benefiting the process overall.

But, planning it is not the only—or indeed, the main—problem. A scheme may have planning but if infrastructure funding isn't available, there are no RPs in the market to acquire the S106 units and the BSA lacks the clarity and capacity to process and commence development, then homes simply won't be delivered.

Without accompanied regulatory reform, clarity on the BSA (including investing in resource to avoid backlog) and genuine commitment from government to underpin its ambitious agenda by putting the financial skin in the game that indicates to domestic and international investment markets that the UK really is going for growth, it is one-dimensional. Growth and housing are two sides of the same coin; they need to be regarded as such in policy and political terms if government is serious about delivery.

A CGI showcasing
phase 1 of delivery
at Brent Cross Town



Matthew Carpen
Managing Director,
Barking Riverside

Like everyone in the industry, we are closely watching what measures central government will put forward to bring the housing target within reach. Honest conversations on the below will help developers approach this new figure with a sense of 'realistic optimism'.

Planning reform must play a central role: we need to create a planning environment where local authorities are given the tools to accelerate approvals. Here at Barking Riverside, we are extremely lucky to work with one of the highest-performing planning authorities in the UK—BeFirst, on behalf of LB Barking and Dagenham—but we do not take this for granted and recognise how much more challenging the delivery of Barking Riverside would be if this was not the case.

Investment in a skilled, local workforce is also a necessity. At Barking Riverside, we are partnering with NHBC and our home building partners L&Q and Bellway, to deliver one of the first multi-skilled training hubs in the UK, with the target of more than 150 apprentices per year to complete fast-tracked qualifications—a practical contribution to supporting and growing the next generation of homebuilders.

Another opportunity is to collaborate with local partners to streamline the funding process. In Barking, there are a number of master developers who are all targeting both local and central government regarding funding. It makes a degree of sense to create portfolios that can pool outputs on housing, employment, skills and infrastructure. South Barking is a good example of this, helping funders consider our requests more holistically. This is bringing strategic coordination to an area that ticks all the boxes for loans and grants that could accelerate delivery. LBB and BeFirst

have recently submitted a pitch for south Barking as a 'portfolio area' to MHCLG and the new towns taskforce, and we hope that central government will recognise this as a promising pilot scheme, which is not dissimilar to how opportunity areas are identified in the London Plan.

Finally, we cannot talk about housing without a spotlight on social infrastructure.

We recently announced a funding package of £124 million from Homes England for new infrastructure at Barking Riverside. This funding is essential to deliver the necessary roads, utilities, services and open spaces required for unlocking housing delivery. However, alongside the core infrastructure needed to build a home, residents need to see commitment to social infrastructure—which does not have funding options that are neatly packaged in quite the same way. Despite this, we have invested significantly in up-front community centres, schools, sports pitches, play parks and other convenience amenities, including coffee shops, and we are now focused on new healthcare provision to support our community. Without this commitment, existing communities will continue to have concerns around housing increases. By working side-by-side with our residents, we are constantly reminded of the importance of these tangible amenities, and we would back the establishment of central grants or funds that directly support this.