



East of England
All Party Parliamentary Group

Co-Chairs Peter Aldous MP and Daniel Zeichner MP

Vice-Chairs Baroness Janet Cohen, Jonathan Djanogly MP, Matt Hancock MP, Lord Alan Haselhurst, Rachel Hopkins MP, Lord Stewart Jackson, Gagan Mohindra MP, Priti Patel MP, Andrew Rosindell MP, Giles Watling MP

Secretary Clive Lewis MP

Treasurer Dr Dan Poulter MP

LEVELLING UP HOUSING IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND

LETTER TO MINISTER FOR HOUSING FELICITY BUCHAN MP

SENT BY EMAIL 12.06.23

Dear Felicity

The East of England APPG addressed the issue of levelling up housing in the East of England at its meeting at the end of last month and heard from a range of excellent speakers:

- James Francis, Chair, Build East – presentation [here](#)
- Sam Stafford, Planning Director, Home Builders Federation – presentation [here](#)
- Cllr Graham Butland, Chair, East of England LGA Infrastructure And Growth Panel
- Hannah Stanley James, Head of Sustainable Growth, Anglian Water – presentation [here](#)
- Abigail Jones, Leader “Housing Tribes” Project For Cambridge Ahead’s Young Advisory Committee – presentation [here](#)

It also benefitted from an address by Shona Johnstone, Head of Markets, Places and Partners at Homes England, who outlined their new Strategic Plan and how they work to deliver new housing supply nationally and in the region, working with your department.

Discussion focussed on the Government’s priorities for levelling up housing – increasing first time buyers and reducing non-decent homes – for which the APPG had found in its recent report [Levelling Up the East of England](#) low confidence that the White Paper’s targets would be met. There was also attention given to the two other issues that have been identified as region-wide priorities: more affordable homes to rent and a reduction in homelessness.

The meeting was informed by a background briefing – [here](#) – and the speakers made a number of interesting presentations which are available as highlighted above. There is also a recording of the Zoom meeting available [here](#).

The APPG has come to the following six key conclusions, which we would like to draw to your attention and seek a response in writing or by way of a meeting:

1. **Clarify and improve national planning policy: make planning easier and better funded**

Evidence was presented that the East of England like the rest of the country is not building enough housing and therefore failing to keep pace with housing need. In particular it seems very unlikely that without reform at the national level to make planning easier and better funded the East of England will not increase its current new build from 27,500 dwellings per year to the required amount of 35,500 dwellings per year. Planning departments in the region are currently suffering from a lack of planners and funding, which is making it harder for planning authorities to develop robust local plans and deliver the planning services needed to enable high quality developments.

There is therefore a downward trend in the number of homes securing housing permissions, and only 40% of local Planning Authorities have an up-to-date local plan. With the right resources, local authorities will be able to oversee the development of all kinds of tenures – from developer led housing and affordable homes, to homes for social rent. This variety would boost the overall delivery rate and lead to more new homes overall.

2. Councils require powers to tackle unsound privately rented accommodation.

It was stressed at the meeting that there is a housing crisis in the East of England, and it is therefore important to build more affordable homes at varied tenures – as well as increasing the number of decent homes within the private rented sector - to counter this. Local authorities as well as housing associations are willing and able partners, and with the right resourcing, could do great good for the East of England’s housing market. However, evidence was presented that showed that per capita the East of England receives the least funding from Homes England of any region in the UK. This will need to be adjusted upwards if levelling up housing is to be achieved.

3. Housing Associations are looking for stability of social rents, clarity about future housing policy and available grant, and a long-term plan for housing.

Housing Associations play a crucial and growing role in building and providing quality affordable homes and BuildEast is making an important contribution to levelling up housing in the East of England. Strategies underway within its member housing associations to generate positive outcomes include:

- Preventing homelessness by increasing the sustainability of tenancies and the number of lettings to people who were previously homeless
- Improving the quality, and cost of living in, homes by investing in existing and new homes.
- Working with councils to re-purpose existing homes to meet need for temporary social housing.

4. Understanding better the needs of young people can boost housing diversity and supply

Research from the Cambridge Ahead Young Advisory Committee shows there is a need to take a broad view of the range of housing types and tenures that provide for the needs of younger people, especially in high housing-cost market areas. This includes supporting provision of relatively more nascent housing types, such as build to rent and co-living, alongside discounted rental and affordable homeownership. These housing types inevitably benefit from efficient use of sites and reinforce the need for high quality density in certain markets. Homes England should consider this within the developments that it is supporting. Local leaders are best placed to understand their housing market and the opportunities which exist in their area. Homes England should establish long term partnerships with devolved authorities to ensure they have a tailored package of support and funding to overcome viability challenges.

5. The scale of housing growth in the East of England means collaborative action is needed to tackle the associated water and environmental challenges

The Government should consider widening the scope of the Levelling Up Bill around nutrient neutrality to allow water companies to work with others and use nature-based solutions as part of the response to this challenge. Doing so would open up a wider range of options to unlock house building and will enable the use of solutions which provide greater benefits for the environment. There is also a need for DLUHC to work more closely with DEFRA on commencement of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 including how SuDS approval will dovetail with adoption guidance.

6. Homelessness is a persistent and prevalent issue in the East and requires more analysis and action

It was stressed at the meeting that there have not been any major reports on homelessness in the East of England despite the fact that it is a widespread and persistent issue. It is understood, however, that DLUHC were going to commission a large-scale evaluation of homelessness services/rough sleeping interventions in the East of England but this hasn't started yet. There are undoubtedly specific initiatives in the East of England that are working to tackle rough sleeping/address homelessness and from which learning could be captured and shared across the region. An update from DLUHC on the status of the research was requested. There was also reference to the important role that Community Land Trusts can play in meeting housing need. It was pointed out that funding for land purchase should be made eligible for Homes England grants towards low-cost housing, and we would welcome confirmation that this is, or will be, the case.

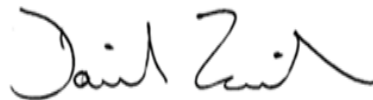
In conclusion, there was a strong feeling at the meeting that the next generation should benefit from opportunities that housing can bring but currently this is not happening: many young people are trapped in the private rented sector where 24% of premises are not-decent; the planning system is not working in a way that ensures enough new homes are being built; the East of England lacks the resources from Homes England to build homes at affordable and social rent levels; and the largely hidden problem of homelessness remains real and prevalent.

We would be delighted if you were to respond to the points above and/or meet with ourselves to discuss these important issues in more detail and to further explore how partners in the region could work with central Government to find solutions so that housing is indeed levelled up in the East of England.

Yours sincerely



Peter Aldous MP
Co-Chair
East of England APPG



Daniel Zeichner MP
Co-Chair
East of England APPG

Sent by email by Steve Barwick – Director, East of England APPG Secretariat

The East of England APPG is kindly supported by British Sugar, London Stansted Airport, the East of England LGA, AstraZeneca, Anglian Water, Cadent, Transport East, the UK Innovation Corridor, Freeport East, England's Economic Heartland and CityFibre.



The academic partners of the East of England APPG are the Centre for Public and Policy Engagement at the University of Essex, The University of Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin University and the University of East Anglia.

