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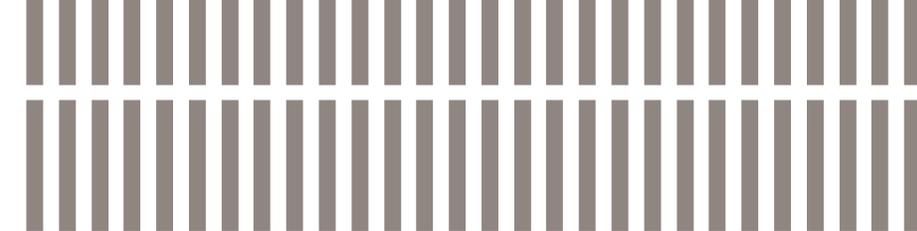
A collection of industry insight from leaders
in local authority development.

NHBC

Local authorities — looking to the future.

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Foreword



Andrew Milsom

**Sector Lead,
Local Authorities
NHBC**

Local authority housing is an important part of British social history, stretching back over 100 years. Sparked by the Addison Act of 1919, the social housing movement has since provided millions of homes across the UK and raised the living standards of countless people.

The sector is experiencing higher-than-ever demand for its services at a time of extreme economic pressure. With the budgets of council housing departments stretched, many must carefully balance the urgent requirement for new development with the essential maintenance of existing stock. Population growth, coupled with decades of under-supply, has created multiple stresses on the system.

English local authorities must be empowered to deliver more quality housing. The need for an increased housing supply is frequently reported in the media, but there's no single solution to enable this. From streamlining planning regulations to the wider adoption of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC), our contributors explore the different ways local authority development could be accelerated.

Outdated, clichéd perceptions of bland pebbledashed semis and brutalist post-war 'streets in the sky' have been firmly supplanted by countless beautiful, modern local authority developments, designed with comfort and efficiency in mind. This transformation of the image of local authority housing is thanks to the vision of those featured in this collection and their hard-working colleagues across the sector.

By bringing together local authority development and regeneration leaders to share information and understanding, we can all play a part in raising standards and help deliver high-quality homes fit for the 21st century. For many years, NHBC has played a pivotal role in working with local authorities and their partners to drive long-term asset protection through early-stage engagement.

We invited our contributors to share their career journey, their views on the market and their local authority priorities. We wanted a personal perspective on their work, with their unique insight.

I'd like to extend my warm thanks to all those who've contributed to this publication. Their collective knowledge and understanding of local authority housing is unrivalled, and their extensive experience of this vital, ever-changing sector is invaluable.

Local authority housing is part of the fabric of modern Britain and this collection of insights celebrates many of those who have contributed to its successes.

Introduction



Professor Janice Morphet

Visiting Professor

Bartlett School of Planning,
University College London

Good housing for all is the cornerstone of a successful society. The homes we live in contribute to our health and well-being, providing us with security and stability.

Demand for social housing is rising, but local authorities are experiencing a range of pressures which impact development. From rises in materials costs and nationwide skills shortages, to new planning requirements and inflation affecting borrowing, the obstacles are significant. Despite this, the level of housing delivery being undertaken by individual local authorities continues to increase. When all delivery methods are taken into consideration, 94% of local authorities are now actively providing housing, but the pace of new development does not match demand.

Local authorities are proving themselves adaptable and flexible in light of budget constraints. The profile of affordable housing provision is changing; increasingly, the homes being delivered by local authorities are in mixed-tenure sites and more homes are being acquired directly from volume house builders or housing associations. The use of councils' own land for housing delivery has increased significantly too, with 30% doing this. Making use of land or properties which are already in a local authority's portfolio makes sense, particularly in cities where land is at a premium.

We're seeing some local authorities adopting Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) as they look to build more efficiently. MMC uses materials and techniques that make the construction process greener and faster, reducing material waste and lowering the environmental impact on projects. This practice can also contribute to energy saving and more environmentally friendly homes, boosting a local authority's green credentials. Some 59% of local authorities report they're seeking to engage with housing in their climate action plans, and 15% are seeking to provide at least some housing with higher environmental standards. This is good news as the country works towards the government's net zero targets.

It's encouraging to see local authorities around England continue investing in social housing, recognising its value to society and the vital role it has played for generations. Despite local authority budgets being stretched more than ever, councils remain committed to providing quality homes and raising the standard of housing.

This collection of insights details the work of local authorities and the crucial role they play in keeping the nation's citizens housed in safe, secure homes. All those featured in this collection are leaders of the sector and should be proud of the important work they do despite this challenging economic environment.



Driving growth, unlocking land and getting more homes built



Shahi Islam
Director of Affordable Housing
Homes England

As a young child I was captivated by the idea of going into space, but with age I became more realistic in my career choice — I went to SOAS University of London and completed a BSc in Economics, then to King’s College London for an MSc in International Management. After graduating, I was torn between becoming an accountant or going into development and social policy — two very different career paths. Tradition led me towards an accountancy route and a Finance Officer role at the Housing Corporation caught my eye — it had potential to lead to an accountancy role but included a strong social impact aspect, so it appealed on both fronts.

The job was focused on the then-government’s housing ambitions and supported affordable and social housing. As I settled into the role, I became more drawn to the social housing aspect of my work, the awarding of grants to partners and progressing projects. That’s when I decided to remain in the public sector and develop my knowledge and experience in social policy. I’ve stayed in housing ever since, with policy and strategy my core interests.

A few years later I moved to the Greater London Authority (GLA) and worked in the housing strategy team under Boris Johnson. After that I went to the Homes & Communities Agency, leading on programme management and stayed, working my way up, as it transitioned to Homes England where I still work.

My background in economics and management, coupled with a keen interest in social policy, has definitely helped me in my career, giving me a broad understanding of the challenges we face in the sector. The housing market is complex and very varied across the UK, made up of many partners and contributors. It’s vulnerable to economic turbulence and, of course, very political — all these different parts need to be balanced and catered for to ensure we continue to grow the overall housing stock. Homes England exists to enable the delivery of new homes and housing-led, mixed-use regeneration and to support the creation of high-quality homes in thriving places.

I may not have ended up an accountant, but I still do a lot of number crunching. Part of my role sees me balance the budgets and make sure Homes England achieves its affordable housing targets across the country. There’s been some sort of formal government affordable housing programme since at least the 1960s, but what that looks



Bristol Temple Meads, courtesy of Bristol City Council

like has changed over time. While our strategic plans must flex with the times, we remain committed to supporting communities and improving housing quality.

We launched our new strategic plan in May 2023, which confirmed our role as the Government’s housing and regeneration agency and set out our mission and objectives for the next five years. Since launch, we’ve been on the road to talk about our strategic plan and our role in the industry — we want to make sure the sector understands how we can help it achieve its goals. Crucially, our strategic plan explains how we will work with places in a more joined-up way, providing wrap around support to local authorities to help them achieve their vision for their area. We’re already working closely with Sheffield City Council, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the West Midlands Combined Authority, to name just a few.

We’ve also enjoyed some very successful local authority partnerships in our development work, which is something we will be doing more of. Bristol Temple Quarter is a great example — one of the UK’s largest regeneration projects, it’s transforming over 130 hectares of brownfield land over the next 25 years into a series of mixed-use communities. That regeneration will deliver 10,000 new homes in a mix of types and tenures and new affordable homes. Another is York Central — it’s a project to deliver over £100m of vital infrastructure and is another of Britain’s largest regeneration



University of Bristol, Temple Quarter Campus.
Credit: FCB Studios and Secchi Smith

sites. This work will make further development possible which will provide up to 2,500 homes and over 1m sq. ft. of commercial space. It’s big-scale, major impact projects like these that are really making a difference to our towns and cities. Regeneration on this level is ambitious but the right thing to do to improve housing around the UK.

Not least, we have our Local Government Capacity Centre (LGCC), which provides more information and technical support to local authorities across the country, including factsheets and capacity analysis tools. As well as running its Learning Programme twice a year, the LGCC recently launched a new Housing Information Hub which provides direct access to over 300 sources of guidance, information and tools relating to homebuilding, placemaking and regeneration.

I’m very optimistic about our future and our work with local authorities. There’s a will and a drive for local authorities to deliver more affordable and social housing and we’ll continue to actively engage with them and support them in delivery.

“I’m very optimistic about our future and our work with local authorities.”

Motivated by doing good



Ben Binns

**Assistant Director, Development
Cambridge City Council**

I had no big dreams for my career when I was a child, beyond playing football for England perhaps. I was always a bit envious of people who had a vocation from an early age, like those who wanted to be a doctor from the age of 10.

As such, I've had a varied path. I haven't been in development for all my working life — I was in education originally and left that to start an organic foods business. What began my journey towards affordable housing was completing a Strategic Carbon Management MBA at the University of East Anglia. It was a really interesting mix of studying business management and climate change and it led to me working in sustainability consultancy, mostly in the housing sector.

I consulted for a lot of local authorities including the London Borough of Waltham Forest, Braintree District Council and Norwich City Council. This is what drew me into working

directly for a local authority housing team, as I understood the challenges local government faces in this area and the aims for housing provision.

It's not been easy to deliver sustainable housing, particularly affordable sustainable housing, since around 2008. Things have become even harder in the past few years — pressures from the labour market, borrowing costs and the skills gap are all working against us. There's a political driver for reducing climate change, but it comes at a cost — and while budgets are so stretched, it's a tough sell.

To so many people in the outside world, Cambridge is just the chapels and King's College, the river and punting. In reality though it's an incredibly dynamic global city, with a huge biotech sector, two major universities and many highly paid professionals. This means there's a wide spectrum of people and it's actually one of the most unequal cities in the country. It's very similar to many London boroughs in that respect.

The average house price in Cambridge is about half a million, so even a junior doctor, let alone a nurse or a cleaner, will struggle to get on the property ladder. There's a very clear political steer: One Cambridge — Fair for All. As a result, affordable housing is high on our agenda.

An *Inside Housing* article ranked Cambridge City Council the second-largest council house builder in the country, which is a phenomenal achievement and testament to our team and delivery vehicle: Cambridge Investment Partnership (CIP) — a partnership with the contractor Hill Group. We're primarily looking at estate regeneration because there's very little available land within the Cambridge city boundary, but this poses some major challenges — ensuring existing residents are part of the journey and feel invested in what we want to achieve. Through CIP, we have the right partner that can help us deliver the best outcome.

Our challenge is understanding the housing dynamic — how do we use the financial envelope to deliver more affordable housing? Does it mean more private housing, more mixed-tenure estates to fund the social housing or other routes?

An example where we've achieved this is our Mill Road Depot project. It's a mixed-tenure development delivered by CIP, with



Timber Works, Cromwell Road



Ironworks, Mill Road Depot



Timber Works, Cromwell Road



Timber Works, Cromwell Road

50% market and 50% local authority housing. With over 200 dwellings it's a considerable development with fantastic open spaces and has revitalised an old industrial area of the city. It has an equitable feel which I really like — you can't tell the difference between the council-owned rented properties and the private homes. It has some great sustainability credentials too, with combined heat and power and we delivered that project successfully despite some big technical challenges — we had to dig down some 18 metres for underground car

parking, for example. The Environment Agency uses that aspect of the build as a case study now, as it demonstrates good practice for underground construction while negotiating the water table. Importantly, Mill Road Depot ticks the boxes on viability and finance too — in these uncertain times we have to proceed with care and ensure all investment in new homes makes economic sense.

Ultimately, I'm motivated by doing good — that means many different things to many different people, but for me it's about sustainability and social value. While my working life has been varied and included different careers, I see those two drivers as the underlying consistencies and they're still motivating me in my current role. Cambridge is a city of opposites and I see my job as helping to redress the balance and ensure everyone has a home they can be proud of. We still have some way to go and we recognise that, but we're on the right path, delivering quality housing for our residents.

“Our challenge is understanding the housing dynamic — how do we use the financial envelope to deliver more affordable housing?”

Aiming to be an agent of positive change



Adam Brannen
Head of Regeneration
Leeds City Council

If I'm honest, like a lot of people, I had no grand plan as a young person in terms of my career. It was only something I began to seriously consider in my early 20s when I was at the University of Hull studying geography.

I think geography is a great subject to give you a sound grounding in how the world works in lots of different ways: economically, sociologically, and so on. From there I went on to do a Master's in town planning at Newcastle.

I was always interested in the world around me: how it worked, why it worked and, importantly, why sometimes it didn't! I was always fascinated with the built environment — particularly towns and buildings — but I never felt I had the artistic flair to be an architect or designer, so planning seemed a good route, encompassing my interests and talents.

I entered the local authority sector after completing my Master's degree; my first role was at Suffolk County Council, then I moved to Southampton City Council. That job saw me jumping straight into the Single Regeneration Budget and delivering urban regeneration projects.

I always say if you're going to work in regeneration, you should get involved in a couple of property grant schemes. I can't stress enough how valuable it is getting to know how small businesses think and work, and dealing with people face-to-face. Understanding the finer details of property, markets and the economy was incredibly helpful to me early on in my career.

These kinds of hands-on projects sparked my enthusiasm for being the type of planner that could have a really direct impact on making good places and having a constructive impact on the future — I aim to be an agent of positive change. It's how I became so engaged with regeneration — it was a recognition that town planning is seen as a traditional and very defined role, but I think it's a very broad church, and I wanted to be on the implementation side of that, without losing everything I'd learned and all the benefits of a planning discipline.

During my time at Southampton City Council, I gained an excellent understanding of how the property sector works and the relationships involved. After about five years though, I realised I wanted to move back north to a large urban authority. I could see that from an urban regeneration perspective it was in the north where the action was happening and where the real challenges were.

As such, when I got offered an opportunity in Leeds I jumped at the chance. I've been here for 20 years now and have worked my way up to Head of Regeneration. I have a team of about 25 people reporting to me and I think my team, like others across the council, is very keen on that sense of the 'golden thread', by which I mean the connection between us and the policy ambitions of the council, and how we can all pull together to make them real. I admire the council's political and senior leadership as I've seen first-hand the way they have engaged with other sectors, partners and their own team to put forward their vision and successfully



Leeds regeneration

involve everyone in their ambitions for Leeds.

We're currently delivering about 3,500 mixed-tenure homes a year on average in the city, which is on target for our local plan, but we do have a big deficit around our affordable housing supply and growth. We need about 1,200 new affordable homes every year; last year was our best for 10 years but we always want to do more and the need is growing.

Increasingly we're seeing more challenges arising from the temporary housing situation as people are becoming homeless or at risk of homelessness. This is putting pressure on the emergency housing supply as well. I worry there's another perfect storm gathering in terms of how we're going to meet housing needs against the backdrop of the cost-of-living crisis and all the other economic challenges ahead. The big numbers suggest that we're building a lot of housing in Leeds, but will it be enough?

I think one of the all-consuming things for us at the moment is our financial situation. Like many other councils, we've had to deal with over 13 years of balancing tight budgets, with some more of the same ahead. It means we must make difficult decisions but ultimately everyone's motivation at the council is to make things better with the resources we have. That's what motivates me and keeps me invested in regeneration as a career.

I see myself as 'in' the property world, but not entirely 'of' it; to me it is only a part of what I think successful regeneration should be about. You won't create an inclusive and better city just by bricks and mortar alone, you need a holistic approach. If you think about people, place and productivity as three parts of the same whole, I believe you can achieve something far greater and more meaningful than these individual elements.



Leeds regeneration



Points Cross, Leeds

The built environment — a fundamental foundation to better outcomes



Tom Bridgman
Executive Director
of Development
Oxford City Council



Barton Park, Oxford. Credit: Hill Group

I've always been fascinated by cities and the way they work, even as a child. I read politics with sociology at University of Exeter as an undergraduate, and studied social policy as a postgraduate, before qualifying as a town planner. While not the same as the standard human geography route of many of my peers, I've found it all to be a good grounding for someone involved in the challenges of placemaking.

I started out working in socio-economic regeneration, focused on employment, skills, health, and community cohesion. This stood me in good stead for my later career in regeneration and development. I quickly realised how a good-quality built environment is an essential prerequisite to healthier, happier lives and better outcomes, which is why I eventually moved into the sector.

I've been fortunate to work in the social enterprise, private, and public sectors — I feel it's given me a real breadth of understanding and experience. I started out working for a social enterprise called Renaisi, delivering area-based regeneration programmes for Hackney Council. Later I moved to AECOM where I led the development of masterplans economic development strategies, infrastructure plans and housing renewal work for clients across the UK. While there, I also spent a year on the planning for the London 2012 Olympics, and although I was only a small cog in a very big machine, it was fascinating being part of it.

If I'm honest, in the end, I got fed up writing plans for other people to deliver — or not. I wanted to be more involved in the delivery of development projects. It led me to moving to Lambeth Council, where I ran a team delivering regeneration in places like Brixton and Loughborough Junction. I was there six years and had a lot of fun. I loved having a patch again, one where I could really get to know the people and places — especially one as vibrant and diverse as Lambeth. When I moved to Oxford City Council, it was a big step up, but the

breadth of the role really appealed. I found leaving London a wrench, but I've not regretted it.

We have various challenges to overcome in Oxford — we have huge demand for housing and commercial space, but it's also a city with important townscape and heritage assets, as well as significant floodplains and green belt — all of which constrain development. The politics around growth across the wider Oxfordshire system is contested, which means strategic planning across our functional economic area is a challenge. So, with lots of development pressure and limited land supply in the city, we must make difficult choices and plan very carefully. We urgently need more housing, but we need to balance this with ensuring we evolve and grow our economy too.

Attracting and retaining talent is one of our biggest challenges, so I'm incredibly proud of the team we now have at the council. It's tough to compete with the private sector in terms of salaries, but the public sector has lots of advantages in terms of the nature of the work and other benefits — we just need to be better at selling it. We need more diversity in the built environment profession, and I think embracing the apprenticeship model seems like our best long-term plan to achieve that.

Local government is ideally placed to lead the delivery of the new homes and places the UK so desperately needs. We're fortunate at Oxford City Council that we're still able to deliver a development programme through our own housing

company OX Place, but profit levels are clearly reducing, and the risks are increasing. Despite this, it remains successful and continues to deliver new homes and meet its purpose. We've now built 385 homes, with 375 on site, 293 in planning, and 1,085 in the pipeline. However, the need for more new homes, and to retrofit or regenerate our existing stock in the city, remains huge.

We also like to work in partnership. As we reach the final stages of our award-winning partnership with Grosvenor on our Barton Park scheme, we've now submitted planning for a new mixed-use city centre quarter at Oxpens, as part of our joint venture with Nuffield College. Our regeneration project at Blackbird Leys, in partnership with Peabody, is also now

breaking ground. Moving forward, similar schemes, in lower-value areas, are going to become very challenging. We need the grant rate to go up, with more support for estate regeneration to continue delivering homes. We also need increased funding for the infrastructure that unlocks housing and employment — not least the reopening of the Cowley Branch Line, which would provide two new train stations and expedite at least 6,000 new homes in and around the city.

I'm proud we continue to deliver for our residents. Local authorities are critical to delivering the housing and regeneration we need. Despite all the challenges we must not lose sight of this priority.



Oxpens, Oxford

Always striving to improve the local environment



Joanne Drew
Strategic Director of Housing & Regeneration
Enfield Council

I started off in local government doing policy and committee work, developing a strong understanding of how councils work on a governance level. That first job covered various local matters but one day a particular project really sparked my interest — it was the transfer of council homes to a housing association.

It might not sound like an exciting undertaking, but what made it interesting for me was having to think differently about how we were going to deliver homes and housing services to residents following the transfer. It was the prospect of creating a new future and delivering something better than before that appealed to me and led to working in housing permanently.

My first housing leadership role was at a newly created housing association where I was lucky enough to work directly with the chief executive. It was quite a small housing association but I had lots of development opportunities which gave me great leadership experience. I ended up running most parts of the organisation and helping to shape its future direction. As a result, I joined a government task force focused on the delivery of decent homes — the government wanted to put a lot more money into improving housing conditions at that time.

In my role on the taskforce I travelled the country supporting councils to access funding by creating housing associations or through private finance. It gave me a thorough overview of

the housing environment across the country, which is hugely varied. It taught me how an area's geography and the local housing market has a massive impact on housing services and the typologies of accommodation required. It was a great experience and gave me invaluable knowledge I could only have gained in that role, working with so many different councils across different areas.

I worked for a social justice charity for a time too, concentrating on social justice for supported housing across the country. The thing I've loved about all these roles is the freedom to work strategically and drive real change and improvement. My interest in property has always been around transformation of lives and living conditions.

My role at Enfield Council is very broad but focuses on providing good services for our residents. It appealed to me because it's all about helping people transform their lives, if that's what they want to do, and making sure we eliminate social justice issues for our residents and people who are homeless. We work to improve life chances and the quality of homes, making them fit for different groups. Whether it's through standards on green infrastructure, community facilities, public amenities or housing, we're always striving to improve the local environment. This placemaking aspect is really interesting and inspiring — the way in which you can transform the future prospects of communities through regeneration, creating places that are uplifting.

London has high levels of overcrowding, an ageing housing stock and a lot of flatted blocks — some built in the 60s with a limited life which brings management challenges. We have a strong focus on the refurbishment and retrofitting of existing stock, as well as an ambitious programme of new development, but bringing older buildings up to standard is

“We work to improve life chances and the quality of homes, making them fit for other groups.”



Meridian Water, Edmonton



Meridian Water, Edmonton



Meridian Water, Edmonton

expensive. Careful investment is required and a strong commitment to making them as good as their modern equivalents in terms of build quality and energy efficiency is key. Sometimes a comprehensive retrofit will do that — and additional funding is desperately needed to tackle the conditions of existing stock — and other times, a new build will be required.

I'm particularly proud of our Joyce Avenue and Snell's Park regeneration scheme at Angel Edmonton because it's both improving the quality of existing homes, as well as providing new supply. It's badly needed by our residents and well supported — it's really going to make a very positive difference to the south of the borough on the borders of Haringey. We've secured over £100m of funding from the Greater London Authority to support it. Some changes in planning rules have delayed things a bit but we know this scheme is really going to deliver and massively improve the area, covering 2,000 homes.

We have larger schemes too, like Meridian Water, which is 10,000 homes with the first two phases being delivered with Countryside Partnerships. It's a huge, phased, transformative project encompassing more than just homes but infrastructure, leisure facilities and green spaces. It's the very definition of placemaking and one of London's largest regeneration programmes offering a wide variety of partnership opportunities.

The current economic environment is a real challenge and now requires a response from Government — the situation is particularly urgent for those homeless and in temporary accommodation. We're seeing unprecedented pressures caused by changes completely outside our control and at a scale and pace which are overwhelming. Bold leadership and a long-term vision are required if we're going to get a handle on accessible affordable housing. Local authorities work hard for their residents, but a national approach should be prioritised to ensure those most vulnerable have access to quality housing.



The opportunity to change places for the better



Neil Guthrie
Development Director (Residential)
Sunderland City Council

When I was younger I was always interested in the practical side of things, and construction was a draw. I studied quantity surveying at university, which gave me a good understanding of construction technology, building practice and the legal aspects of development. I started out in residential development and it remains my passion.

Residential development appeals to me because it provides all sorts of opportunities to drive improvement, facilitate growth and change places for the better. My job gives me the ability to make meaningful interventions that'll have long-lasting effects for our residents, which I love.

Over the course of my career, I've worked in lots of different areas; bid management, design management and commercial management to name but a few, all of which have given me a valuable, broad overview of the development process. The economy has always been driven to some degree by housing and development, which makes it an exciting area in which to work. New homes are a constant requirement so there's always something going on, even when there are pressures in the market, like we're experiencing at the moment. There's a huge demand for affordable housing countrywide which we can only expect to grow in the coming years.

Riverside, Sunderland

Sheepfolds, Riverside, Sunderland

Keel Square, Riverside, Sunderland

My first role was in affordable housing and I was lucky enough to work on some exciting, innovative schemes with private house building companies. Later, I moved into more strategic development and regeneration, working on projects like the Walker Riverside regeneration scheme in Newcastle and some other large-scale projects in the South. As I progressed through my career, I became involved in more complex schemes: public/private partnerships and longer-term delivery models.

I helped establish a housing development business when I was at Balfour Beatty, which became Balfour Beatty Homes. It was focused on delivering high-quality family housing in the Midlands and I really enjoyed making that happen, but I wanted to return home. When my current role at Sunderland City Council presented itself, it appealed on many fronts – as well as being familiar with the city, I could see the problems the city had to overcome and wanted to be part of the solution.

We have large areas of post-industrial land, contaminated brownfield sites for which there's historically been limited market appetite and needs public intervention to make development happen. The cost to bring the land back into use makes it unattractive commercially, even if the site itself is well located in an urban area. We're currently building 1,000 new homes and a million square feet of employment space at Riverside Sunderland, set within 30 hectares of public space and amenities. We're billing it as 'the most ambitious city centre regeneration project in the UK' and it really is – with amazing views across the city, of the river and the bridges, and out to sea, incorporating greenspaces, woodlands and cliffs, it's truly unique.

Good housing drives social growth – it encourages people to remain in the area, attracts retailers and in turn boosts economic growth. We want to bring people back into our city centre. We have an ageing population in Sunderland and

migration from the area – we need to reverse this trend by making Sunderland a more attractive prospect for all demographics. A further challenge we have is the property market generally is suppressed and has been for a long time in the North East. I think some government funding mechanisms and grant programmes are weighted to development in the South where the investment metrics are a lot more attractive and it's easier to demonstrate a clear return. It's the same with a lot of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) providers – we see many of them preferring to locate in the South or the Midlands because that's where they make better returns.

There are increasing pressures on local authority budgets and affordable housing and local regeneration must be balanced against other competing priorities. One big housing cost we're having to shoulder comes from finding accommodation for homeless people and those seeking asylum – it's something many local authorities around the country are finding increasingly expensive to manage. There are no quick fixes to these concerns but they must be factored in to our planning when looking at our wider housing strategy.

We're always looking to the long term and work hard to ensure the private sector knows we're committed to the journey. A siloed project-by-project approach doesn't work – we need private developers to see we're serious about long-term investment in housing, facilities and infrastructure across the city to encourage their investment too.

We're reinventing Sunderland for the better. I believe it's a wonderful city in which to live and work, and it gives me great pride helping regenerate its industrial heartlands. We still have a way to go, but we're on the right path and are already seeing the benefits of our efforts.

A clear social purpose



Caroline Harper
Deputy Managing Director
Be First on behalf of Barking
& Dagenham Council

I didn't have a grand plan when I set out on my career path — it was a series of fortunate events that led me to where I am today. I did my undergraduate degree in geography at Queen Mary University of London, and later was fortunate enough to secure a scholarship to study for a Master's in the same at Syracuse University in America. Soon after, I was granted a Commonwealth Scholarship to do a PhD in geography, and I went to Vancouver to study. I was never truly convinced about being a professor though, partly I think because I love seeing the delivery side of things, so I quit and returned to the UK.

After studying I wasn't sure what I wanted to do and ended up temping for a property recruitment consultancy. It wasn't especially stimulating, so I started doing extra work and one of the partners noticed. He was great — he set me up with interviews and, thanks to him, I got a job with CBRE in the planning department. I did a further Master's in development planning at Reading alongside working at CBRE. I then went to JLL as I wanted a more London-focused workload, and there I climbed the ladder, ultimately becoming its first female Planning Director in London.

I was very happy at JLL, but when I was approached to join Be First as Chief Planning Director, I knew I'd be crazy to refuse. Be First is the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham's urban regeneration agency. We have big ambitions — we aim to ensure 50,000 new homes are built, and 20,000 new jobs created by 2037. We want to build thriving communities in attractive, safe, sustainable neighbourhoods that are healthy, vibrant and fun. Something I love about Be First is it straddles the public and private sector, and the work we do is for a defined public good. We've got a clear social purpose, but an important part of my job is to develop new business ventures and to drive inclusive growth as part of our work.



Thames Road, Barking



Thames Road, Barking



Industria, Barking

I've been at Be First six years now, having been made Deputy Managing Director last summer. My job has a broad remit — I oversee Place and Design, which is a multidisciplinary team, and I have responsibility for the various statutory services we undertake on the council's behalf, as well as consultancy teams in planning and design.

The council, through Be First, is very proactive in terms of its portfolio. It has made targeted investments with the intention of unlocking housing delivery, job creation and placemaking for working Londoners. Thames Road is one such example. This is one of the borough's transformation areas, which means it is one of its most significant allocated development sites and a location where extensive growth and development is expected. The council owns 40% of the land. It will deliver a new, densified neighbourhood of some 3,500 homes alongside modern industrial and commercial uses, and we're working with the Greater London Authority (GLA) to better utilise the strategic industrial land around Thames Road for both residential and commercial purposes. Housing affordability is an issue all around the country, and in London the problems are acute. That's why we're developing fit-for-purpose modern industrial space alongside the residential — providing employment close to homes and helping grow the local economy. The demographic of the borough is quite young and we don't want to see younger generations pushed out of the capital.

Be First and the Council have led on the flagship schemes already delivered at Thames Road in the first phase of its regeneration. There's Industria, an innovative, multi-storey industrial scheme which offers 45 units in a range of sizes with flexible lease terms available to allow businesses to adapt and grow. This completed in September, and it's a good example of the benefits of densification. Whereas the typical single-storey industrial development provides 45% usable space, at Industria it's 135% which translates into 300 jobs.

There's also 12 Thames Road, which will complete in the summer. This is co-located industrial and residential, and

illustrative of that push on Thames Road to provide both new homes and economic opportunity in one neighbourhood, but a neighbourhood located close to other very sizeable and significant regeneration projects, including Barking Riverside, Thames Freeport, the relocation of the City of London's wholesale markets and Barking town centre.

“Barking & Dagenham is a fantastic borough, and the work we're doing is cementing its bright future.”

Delivering a good development is far harder than it should be. There's lots of talk about planning reform, but we only ever see more complications, more additions. I know many in the development sector feel similarly and would welcome a simplified system — I personally think this could be truly transformative for development and regeneration in the country.

Barking & Dagenham is a fantastic borough, and the work we're doing is cementing its bright future. Be First has achieved so much already, but our ambitious outlook will see us deliver so much more. Ensuring the people who call the borough home can take pride in the area and, importantly, can stay living here with affordable homes and plentiful employment is key for us.

Placemaking — back in vogue



Victoria Hills
Chief Executive
Royal Town Planning Institute



King's Cross regeneration. Credit: Getty Images

Following completion of my undergraduate degree in geography back in the late 90s, I knew I wanted to be in the business of 'placemaking' — a term that's come back into vogue some 25 years later. Everyone's talking about placemaking again and it's a good term — the process of creating great places for people to live, to work and to enjoy. I think it should be the basis of all developments and it's what I'm passionate about.

When I started out, the economy was booming and I was fortunate to have choices when it came to jobs and career opportunities. I was offered corporate roles in areas totally unrelated to my degree but I was motivated, even then, to follow a path that included planning, development and human geography. After taking a year out, I undertook a Master's degree in town planning and felt I'd found my vocation.

I'd realised I was most interested in how developments came about more than anything and transport is a big part of that — it's the basis of development; if no one can get there what's the point in building there? It led to my first job at Wycombe District Council, in transport planning and me specialising in that area.

After a brief spell in the private sector, I moved to the Greater London Authority (GLA) and stayed there for 16 years under three different mayors. My time at the GLA covered the London 2012 Olympics — a huge highlight in my career with tremendous planning and placemaking challenges to overcome in a relatively short timescale. London 2012 was a huge success for Britain and I'm still proud to have contributed to that.

My current role sees me helping maintain and improve international professional planning standards. Using our expertise and research we bring evidence and thought leadership to shape planning policies and thinking, putting the profession at the heart of society's big debates. We champion the power of planning in creating prosperous places and vibrant communities too — I truly believe good planning is at the heart of every successful development.

Unfortunately, the UK has seen decades of almost continual changes in policy and regulation, and a failure, in my view, to support planning. Provision for affordable housing, whether that be from local authorities, housing associations or other providers is patchy, with national demand rising daily.

The number one challenge facing local authorities is probably access to funding. Viable finance is the bedrock of any development but we all know rates have gone up and appetite for risk has gone down. We've seen large, established councils go under, declaring bankruptcy having overstretched themselves, and this has led to much greater caution on all fronts, including local development. It's particularly frustrating because this is the time when local authorities need to be playing a bigger role in house building.

Local authorities need to spend with care, utilising existing opportunities and resources as much as possible. Building where infrastructure already exists, on council and other publicly owned land should be the first choice every time. Brownfield development is frequently viewed as commercially unattractive and while steps have been taken to encourage brownfield development, such as the Brownfield Regeneration Fund, I believe more incentives are needed. Brownfield sites are often in urban areas, with good communications and have dormant potential to contribute to the local economy. Reinvigoration of redundant spaces should always be a priority.

Having worked for the GLA for so many years, London development, redevelopment and regeneration are close to my heart. The revival of the King's Cross area is a fantastic example of an unloved area being rejuvenated and revitalised and made to work for residents, visitors and workers. A massive project consisting of streets, squares, parks, shops, offices and homes, it really proves how solid planning can deliver great places. It took many years to complete and required considerable investment and a strong vision to bring King's Cross to fruition — that's the kind of ambition we need in planning and development across the UK.

I also firmly believe those who plan and design homes and communities need to reflect those who will live in them. It's a

diversity point — we're more aware now than years ago of the importance of broad representation but there's still a way to go. Diversity, and attitudes towards it, have improved in our sector since I joined it and I also think women refuse to put up with some of the micro-aggressions and macho posturing we used to endure. Back then, women didn't have the industry dialogue or the back-up to protest, but now women starting their careers in planning, development and construction expect better. I look back now and realise some of the behaviours I was subjected to were outrageous. If you transported 22-year-old Victoria to 2024, she would be amazed how far we've come and probably be satisfied with the status quo — present-day Victoria still wants it to improve further!



King's Cross regeneration. Credit: Getty Images

Working in the public interest



Alice Lester MBE
Corporate Director
for Communities &
Regeneration (interim)
Brent Council



Grand Union development, Alperton

I'm interested in the built (and unbuilt) environment, but am a planner, through and through. My interest started at school with the study of urban geography and it developed from there. I went to university and studied geography with psychology, which also fuelled my interest in how people behave in their environments. Later I did a postgraduate degree in town planning in London and I've stayed in the capital ever since.

I've always wanted to work in the public sector. For me, it's always been about working in the public interest rather than a client or corporation. My first professional role was at Westminster City Council as a Development Management Planning Officer, and since then I've worked at several other big authorities in various roles as I've progressed through my career. I was at Camden Council for 10 years, Islington Council for five years and then I worked for the Local Government Association, managing the Planning Advisory Service.

That role was particularly interesting as I wasn't employed by a council but I was still working closely with local authorities. It took me all over the country, meeting with different councils helping them resolve problems. It was a fantastic job, giving me a great breadth of experience, helping so many different local authorities. I left the Local Government Association in the end as I wanted to go back to working directly for a council – to be more central to the delivery process and able to make more impactful decisions myself. I joined Brent Council as Head of Planning in 2016 and have stayed ever since. I was recently appointed Interim Corporate Director for Communities & Regeneration, a really exciting role for me.

We're facing various challenges from a service delivery perspective – both on a national and local level. Cost of

borrowing is an obvious one; with increased interest rates some projects just aren't viable or need to be scaled back. Recruitment is more difficult than before too, particularly around planning and building control services – attracting and retaining talent is always a concern as it's a very competitive market out there. Large-scale brownfield redevelopment can also present technical and legal difficulties – there can be hundreds of leaseholders and owners spread across even a relatively small geographic area. Developers say that getting contractors remains an ongoing challenge.

I've lived in Brent for 30 years, so feel personally invested in the borough. I'm fortunate working for this local authority, as the value of planning and what good planning can do are recognised and appreciated. I have a very supportive Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet member, and our local politicians are keen on quality development; they trust and empower us.

One of the projects I'm proud of is the Grand Union development in Alperton, which is redeveloping a large brownfield site, the former Northfields Industrial Estate.

It's a 15-year build out scheme, delivering 3,330 new homes of which more than 1,000 are affordable homes, including 115 council homes in a block we bought from the developers. It's a partnership project with St. George and is going really well. New open spaces will be created as well as a new community centre. We've worked with residents to inform the direction of this redevelopment and the concept is based around the creation of a series of landscaped spaces flowing through the site. A new canal-side piazza will offer a vibrant space with shops, cafés, restaurants and new leisure facilities. It really is a dynamic development which our residents can feel proud of.

I think some people make the mistake of thinking there's a template or blueprint for a successful regeneration project,

but this just isn't the case. Every area and every community is different with varying needs and priorities. I come to every project with a fresh perspective and assess them individually – we can always learn lessons from past projects but we can't just replicate them.

Everyone in the sector is under pressure at the moment, with budgets stretched and demand rising, and I don't think we're going to see the overall picture improving much in the next couple of years. Regeneration is going to be harder in the future, as the easier and more attractive brownfield sites are redeveloped and we're left with the more challenging ones. The work we're doing now is more important than ever before and local authorities must not lose focus on affordable housing.



Grand Union development, Alperton



Grand Union development, Alperton

Prosperity must be equitable and inclusive



Jonathan Martin

Director of Inward Investment & Higher Education Academic Relationships
London Borough of Waltham Forest

I didn't begin with a set career path in mind. I did know however, I wanted a role that would allow me to work both in and out of an office – variety really appealed, as opposed to being stuck behind a desk day in day out.

My dad was a plasterer – going on site with him as a kid significantly influenced me and sparked an interest in development and construction. I started out my career in quantity surveying, working my way up from an assistant to a fully qualified surveyor at Lambeth Council. While I worked, I gained a degree in surveying as I worked from London South Bank University which gave me the opportunity to branch out. That background in quantity surveying has provided a valuable grounding for my later roles; that knowledge around construction, particularly its costs and challenges, makes it so much easier when working with developers, evaluating the viability of schemes and understanding local impact.

I've had seven key roles in my career, which has spanned both the public and private sectors. From local authorities to non-government departmental bodies and private consultancy, it's been varied. I'm thankful for the variety, which allows me to assess problems from different angles.

My current role is also very varied; however, it focuses on inward investment, including strategic regeneration, business growth, employment and skills. I work to improve the economic prosperity of the borough, working with public and private sector partners to unlock opportunities for regeneration and growth, and provide better quality lives for our residents.

Waltham Forest is a desirable place to live, and we've seen property prices rise sharply in recent years, by over 50%. In terms of house price growth, we've outstripped every London borough since 2015 – that presents huge challenges around affordability for our residents. We've taken on board a lot from our Affordable Housing Commission and are adopting 28 recommendations for our updated housing strategy, which is currently going through our governance process. We're always looking at the long term and have plans for 27,000 new homes and thousands of new jobs, and climate action, amongst many key ambitions in our local plan, which takes us up to about 2039. It's an ambitious target but we're confident we can deliver through a mix of public and private investment.

Many local authorities are feeling the pinch and housing delivery certainly isn't immune to budget constraints. Construction costs have massively increased in recent years and inflation has made large-scale borrowing less viable. We're fortunate to have had a lot of support from the Greater London Authority (GLA) in that regard – where we've had financing challenges, we've been able to secure grants to ensure the viability of some schemes.



Skyline, Juniper House, Waltham Forest

We strive to keep pace with the demand for affordable housing by working with our development partners as we can't do everything via direct delivery. Maintaining all development delivery streams is important to us – I regularly organise investor events and briefings that get investors and our private developers into a room to talk. That relationship management is an important part of my job, allowing us to discuss issues around delivery, availability of support and what we can do to get things moving.

“ We're deeply invested in the well-being of all the residents of Waltham Forest, and we strive to do everything we can to improve the prosperity of the area.”

Sixty Bricks, the council's own development arm, works to improve the supply of affordable new homes in the area. It aims to build socially inclusive and cohesive communities that thrive and inspire future generations. Approximately 300 high-quality new homes were built during the first programmed phase.

A scheme recently completed with Hill Group is Juniper House (now called Skyline) which has been redeveloped from former council offices into a flagship residential-led development for the borough. The newly completed development comprises 91 high-quality homes, 50% of which are affordable, including larger family homes for local families. A new nursery, providing much needed childcare, will also be provided. In addition,

commercial space on the ground floor will welcome the University of Portsmouth, acting as the launch pad for the borough's first higher education offer. The Juniper House campus will open in summer 2024, allowing the first cohort of students to enrol, commencing long-term plans to create a higher education campus for over 4,000 students in the borough.

We're deeply invested in the well-being of all the residents of Waltham Forest, and we strive to do everything we can to improve the prosperity of the area. Prosperity must be equitable and inclusive though, so we take a pan-borough approach, investing for the benefit of residents and businesses alike as each helps the other thrive and improves quality of life. There's no doubt the environment in which we're operating is far more challenging than a few years ago, but we will continue to deliver great services and beautiful affordable homes for the people that live here.



The Jazz Yard, Waltham Forest

Not a cookie-cutter approach to development



Sean McClean
Director of Regeneration
& Development
Sheffield City Council

I've been in my current role for just over a year now, but I've worked for Sheffield City Council for over 20 years in various development and regeneration roles, working my way up. Now I work within the council's City Futures portfolio, which was only set up around 18 months ago. It was created to drive the growth agenda across the city, and I have responsibility for three areas: the council's in-house delivery team, which delivers our capital build programme, the regeneration and property team which covers all regeneration activity and the management of all council property assets, and finally the housing growth team, which supports and facilitates delivery of the council's new homes development commitments.

At the risk of sounding clichéd, there's something very satisfying about delivering great schemes in your home city. Equivalent roles in the private sector may be better rewarded financially, but it's not the same; you're not giving something back to your community. An example of that personal satisfaction is one of my first school projects in the Woodthorpe area of Sheffield, set in a council estate with significant challenges. We replaced a former Victorian secondary school building with a new purpose-built primary school building. Seeing the kids' faces was fantastic – it was such an improvement. You really can't put a price on the pleasure and pride you feel driving past developments and schemes like that, which you helped bring to fruition.

Like many cities in the UK, Sheffield has a shortage of housing. The demand for affordable housing is unprecedented, and we recognise the council can't bridge the shortfall alone. It's why we set up the Sheffield Together Partnership, a housing growth board chaired by our Chief Executive, and made up of the council, Sheffield Property Association, the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, key local housing associations and Homes England. It means we've now got strategic long-term place-based relationships that oversee and accelerate the delivery of new homes in Sheffield. It's been active for over 18 months and this collaborative approach is paying real dividends. We're working effectively together to support the development of more new homes, and progressing the delivery of a joint housing pipeline of sites.

What we don't want in Sheffield is a cookie-cutter approach to development. We're committed to quality builds, and to creating long-lasting communities and neighbourhoods, places people want to live. Mass repeat, high-density housing is not what we're about – we treat each area and development individually and look at what's needed and what we can achieve well. It's important to remain conscious of the city's history too – we look to retain landmark architecture and preserve our heritage where we can, even when major regeneration of an area is needed.

A good example of that consideration are the plans we have for the Moorfoot Building in the centre of Sheffield – it's a huge red brick building, of stepped pyramid construction. In its former life it was the Manpower Services Commission base, first opened in the early 80s but in recent years it's been home to various council services. Following the adoption of hybrid working since the pandemic, the council needs less office space, so we're proposing to convert a large part of it to residential accommodation, subject to further feasibility testing, as part of a wider masterplan for the area. Whatever you think of its aesthetic, it's a prominent local landmark and an important, recognisable part of the city.

Another project I'm very proud of is Burgess House in the centre of Sheffield. It is part of the council's Heart of the City regeneration scheme, one of the UK's largest schemes of its kind. Heart of the City is a massive undertaking costing around £370m, which is transforming and reinvigorating the city centre. Consisting of

420 homes, 500,000 square feet of office space, 250,000 square feet of retail and leisure space, 30,000 square feet of cultural space and eight acres of outdoor space it's an ambitious undertaking. Burgess House is an important part of this: a high-quality, beautifully finished 52-apartment scheme. The council acted as a private developer for Burgess House and took the apartments to the open market, but we put an owner-occupier restriction on them, to help foster a sense of long-term community and avoid them becoming private rented accommodation. The success of Burgess House has spurred private developers to follow suit, which is great as we're keen to attract commercial investment and construction to the city, as well as developing properties ourselves.

Sheffield is a wonderful place to live and work, with a vibrant, eclectic mix of residents. While we're facing increasing financial pressures and the impact of more stringent building regulations, we have ambitious, exciting plans in place to help us meet the challenges. I've always had pride in the work we do to change the city for the better, but I think the coming years will prove even more rewarding.

“We have ambitious, exciting plans in place to help us meet the challenges.”



Burgess House, Sheffield city centre



Pound's Park, Sheffield city centre



Kangaroo Works, Sheffield city centre

The foundation for a good quality of life



Setareh Neshati
Head of Development
Westminster City Council

My journey into development started with me studying architectural engineering at the University of Leeds. After I'd completed my degree I had a hunger to continue learning and wanted to do more than simply design, I wanted to bring developments to life. I realised I'd need further skills and knowledge to understand how architectural designs are actually implemented so, to that end, I studied for a Master's degree in town planning at Leeds Beckett University. It's one of the strongest universities in the country for town planning and I learned how towns work and how good planning benefits urban environments. I was very lucky as those teaching me were true experts in their field and it was a great experience.

I started my career with designers and town planning teams in architectural firms and planning consultancies. I was so fortunate to work with people who were willing to help me learn and gain experience – those early on-the-job experiences gave me a very comprehensive understanding of development. Several of my bosses early in my career played a major role in my professional development, acting as mentors and guiding me as I trained.

I soon realised, that for all the technical knowledge I'd gained and the qualifications in town planning I'd achieved, you need to understand the reality of what's happening on site; it's very different from all those fluffy computer-generated images and artist impressions we so love in development. So, after a few years of working, I decided to undertake a PhD at University College London in Modern Methods of Construction (MMC). I wanted to understand the hot topic that was, and still is, MMC and how it compared with the traditional practices of the building industry.

I didn't set out with a plan to work for a local authority, but my path led here. Like many local councils, Westminster City Council had stopped developing its own housing for a good few decades. To increase supply and establish a new building programme, it created CityWest Homes, its own development arm for delivering affordable housing, which I joined. Within just a few months of joining in 2018, CityWest was brought in-house, and I've been with Westminster City Council for over five years now.

We have a huge amount of wealth and opportunity in Westminster, but conversely also some of the most deprived estates in London. A significant project we're working hard to deliver is the Church Street Regeneration. The area is at the very heart of Westminster and among our more disadvantaged



Ebury Bridge Estate, London



Ebury Bridge Estate, London



Church Street regeneration

wards, with a life expectancy 15 years lower than that of the better-off areas of the borough. The Church Street Regeneration project is made up of various smaller schemes with the aim of improving the quality of life of everyone who lives and works there; it'll bring around 1,750 high-quality new homes, more green spaces, better pedestrianisation, improved community facilities and dedicated sport areas. It's an ambitious long-term project and we're heavily invested in its outcome – we've worked closely with residents to ensure it reflects their wants and needs and overall feedback has been

very positive. Affordable housing is a huge driver for us and we aim for it to represent 50% of homes in a development, where the wider market usually sits at around 30%. Obviously, development is more expensive for us in the capital than for many of our counterparts in other areas of the country. Land is at an acute premium for a start and contractor costs in London are higher. We operate a cross-subsidy model to help offset these elevated costs and take advantage of Greater London Authority (GLA) grants, which are typically £100,000 to £200,000 per unit. We also have an affordable housing fund that we utilise, which is funded from Section 106 payments from developers and helps to bridge the financing gap further.

The practical aspects of developing here are challenging too – every inch of land is accounted for, bringing in cranes and lorries to heavily built-up areas is a logistical nightmare, traffic may have to be rerouted and large-scale and disruptive development may be taking place right on the doorsteps of hundreds of residents. Whenever a development is proposed we have to examine every element and assess the viability of moving forwards as well as considering how to minimise the significant impact it will have on the locality.

I believe housing is a key foundation for a good quality of life and well-being; it's not the complete solution but certainly one of the fundamentals. Westminster is a great place to live and work, but we recognise there are some inequalities in our borough we must overcome. We're working hard to deliver our ambitious, exciting vision for the city and I'm so proud to be a part of it.

“I believe housing is a key foundation for a good quality of life and well-being; it's not the complete solution but certainly one of the fundamentals.”

Building affordable homes – an absolute priority



John Smith

**Executive Director
– Growth & Regeneration**
Bristol City Council

I didn't have a set path in mind for my career when I started out – I've taken advantage of opportunities as they've presented themselves, progressing into areas I feel passionate about. My background is in construction law – first working on major international project financing at Clifford Chance, and later becoming a partner at Burges Salmon in its major projects team.

I decided to move in a new direction in 2009 when an opportunity came my way through a client, Avon & Somerset Police Authority. I became Chief Executive there which was a fantastic experience. While this role might not be very construction or development focused on the surface, the authority in fact has a significant estate. During my time there, I facilitated some major Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) and was part of a scheme which saw prisoners help bring environmentally friendly modular homes to the South West.

Later I moved to Bristol City Council doing economic development and environmental work, looking after regeneration and planning. The role I'm in now is broader and includes responsibility for housing and most of the council's local services. It's undoubtedly been quite an unusual route to get where I am, but the broad experience I've gained along the way gives me a skillset in leadership, team building and relationship building.

In housing and development, relationships are key. Building homes, particularly affordable homes, is an absolute priority for us and we recognise we must work closely with our partners to achieve this. Registered Providers, developer partners and Homes England are just a few of the stakeholders we engage with to increase housing provision in the city and we're actively working to forge new relationships all the time to drive this further.

The Bristol Temple Quarter project is a great example of partnership development working really well. Homes England, Network Rail, West of England Combined Authority and Bristol City Council are collaborating to deliver a massive regeneration scheme, turning over 130 hectares of brownfield land into a series of mixed-use communities over the next 25 years. This huge multi-partner undertaking will deliver 10,000 new homes in a mix of types and tenures, including much-needed new affordable homes. The scheme also includes major new transport infrastructure and communications, green spaces and an Enterprise Zone. 22,000 new jobs will be created, bringing inclusive economic growth to the city and new opportunities for Bristolians, alongside £1.6bn annual income to the local economy. Our vision is for communities and businesses to co-exist and thrive, contributing to a fairer and more equitable Bristol. We want to improve the lives of existing citizens while encouraging new people to the city.



Entering such projects with a collaborative mindset and a placemaking approach is how we like to operate. Our relationship with Homes England is strong and more along the lines of a collaborative joint venture rather than a transactional agreement – we have a shared commitment and a shared goal. We're increasingly moving away from a grant-based way of working to a more collaborative place-based approach, which is paying dividends. It's also allowed us to navigate various challenges around capacity and planning for example, which is the kind of practical help we need to get schemes off the ground.

We're fortunate in that our local politicians are very committed to housing and affordable housing. We have around 20,000 households on our council housing list and around 1,300 families in temporary accommodation, so the need for new housing is acute. While we do in fact have

significant housing stock, much is in need of improvement and modernisation which of course is a major expense. We're conscious we can't just focus on new development but must invest in our existing portfolio too – we have a programme for this, but the scale of works required is huge, encompassing everything from tackling damp and mould to fire safety remediation. Inevitably there's tension there, evaluating what needs to be retrofitted or refurbished versus what needs to be redeveloped. We're strongly committed to building new homes and increasingly we're looking to third parties like Homes England and other finance partners to secure external capital to progress these plans.

All local authorities are feeling the strain at the moment when it comes to budgets. More clarity, certainty and financial support in the medium to long term would be a game-changer for us all. It's been so difficult for so long now, and increasingly we're having to do more with less. I admit, I do worry for the future of the sector as a whole unless we see some increases in funding. I understand the money simply isn't there in the current economic climate, but even a commitment for the future would give us some confidence and is something we could work with.

Despite the challenges we face, our council is undertaking some really exciting projects and changing Bristol for the better. Good-quality housing remains at the heart of our commitment to our citizens and we continue to work hard to deliver this in all parts of the city.

“Entering such projects with a collaborative mindset and a placemaking approach is how we like to operate.”

It's why I get up in the morning



Neil Stubbings
Strategic Director of Place
London Borough of Havering



New Green, Rainham

I've been in local government for over 40 years, starting off as a trainee Environmental Health Officer at the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham. I did a degree in environmental health with Thames Polytechnic, as it was then, learning on the job. Environmental health, as a subject, is incredibly varied — I undertook qualifications in food safety, had placements in slaughterhouses and even Billingsgate Fish Market, but I found I was really interested in the housing and construction side.

After joining the housing department at Hammersmith & Fulham, I progressed through the ranks in various roles. It had a big housing programme back then; general improvement projects, action plans and studies being undertaken around gentrification. This exposure to so many different areas of housing provision gave me a broad understanding of the issues the sector faces.

By 1997, local authorities' building remits were being curtailed and more restrictions put in place — they were passing over house building to housing associations, and less was being developed in-house. That's when I moved over to the London Borough of Hillingdon to be the Head of Private Sector Housing and the corporate lead on all housing matters. The post was responsible for all housing and housing benefit services, as well as housing strategy and development, so it was a good fit for my experience. Later I became the borough's Head of Housing, taking overall strategic lead for housing and the housing revenue account within the authority.

I've been at the London Borough of Havering for nine years now, having worked in various roles. I'm fortunate that our Chief Executive, Andrew Blake-Herbert, encourages different thinking — he wants us to push boundaries and explore new ideas for the borough. He was supportive of me when I set up joint ventures and I was given a free hand to get out there and build contacts to help us deliver our much-needed new homes.

The very first Right to Buy sale happened here in Havering. Margaret Thatcher herself handed the keys to the buyer who lived in Harold Hill, and the home passed from us to him. While Right to Buy has been brilliant for people who want to buy their own home, it's left local authorities with a constant need to replace sold homes. We're a typical example — since that

first transfer, we've lost 4,000 homes from a stock of 14,000 through Right to Buy.

To help combat the constant effect of Right to Buy, I led on a joint venture with a key partner, Wates Residential, which has delivered nearly 200 homes in Rainham, and we're about to complete on another 175 homes for older people. It's why I get up in the morning: to see new homes being built like that. I don't think anywhere else would have presented me with the kinds of opportunities to explore partnerships in the same way as I have at Havering.

We've had other joint ventures but have bought out, or are in the process of buying out, the partners because we take a longer-term view on projects than they do. Things are really challenging at the moment: we've had Brexit, we've had COVID, there's the war on Ukraine and we have a difficult domestic economic situation. This means we have to work in today's turbulent environment as well as looking to tomorrow's. Our partners must be aligned to this.

A project I'm particularly proud of is our New Green development. It's a three-building cluster site, consisting of 71 one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments available to buy through Shared Ownership and 127 homes for affordable rent. A gateway to Rainham Marshes, it focuses on residents' well-being through shared green spaces and biodiversity. It's thoughtfully designed, tastefully contemporary and a beautiful place to live. All housing should be like this and go beyond functional, creating places people can be proud of and love living in.

There may well be enough money in the system, but the problem we have in England with supported housing and residential care is big hedge funds are allowed to profit from it. I consider it a big problem, hedge funds buying up supported housing with profit margins of up to 40% — that's not the point,



New Green, Rainham

"I aspire to building sufficient affordable housing for those vulnerable and in genuine need."

for such developments to be moneymaking vehicles for investors. The amount of money they're making is equivalent to our overspend for the last four or five years. In Scotland they have a not-for-profit system where hedge funds and big financial institutions don't get involved because they wouldn't get sufficient returns — to my mind, it's a far better system. Housing shouldn't be an investment product to generate profits to anonymous fund holders, but a right.

I aspire to building sufficient affordable housing for those vulnerable and in genuine need. At London Borough of Havering we want to deliver good services and the support systems that allow our residents to thrive. We believe delivering those things will lead to better outcomes for everyone living here and, despite the challenges the whole sector is facing, we continue to do that.



Mainway estate, Lancaster

City, coast and countryside



Jo Wilkinson
Chief Officer — Housing and Property
Lancaster City Council

I've worked in housing for almost 20 years now, in a variety of different roles. It wasn't where I was expecting to end up — I studied criminology at university and assumed I'd forge a career in the prison service.

I fell into this line of work — I'd done a module on housing during my degree, focusing on housing law, but it also covered the social and economic side of housing and I'd really enjoyed it. As a result, when looking for work after graduating I signed up with a couple of housing temping agencies and secured various roles. Being a temp gave me the opportunity to move around and try out different aspects of the housing sector. I ended up getting a permanent job at Stockport Homes, which manages around 12,000 properties on behalf of Stockport Council. I was lucky to get the opportunity to work on different projects and manage different teams during my time there.

I wasn't looking around for a new role when the Head of Housing position at Lancaster City Council became available in 2019. If it had been anywhere else, I wouldn't have gone for it, but the chance to work for my local authority was too good an opportunity to pass up. I started out managing the Council Housing Service, the Home Improvement Agency and our Homelessness Service and I've stayed with the council ever since. I was promoted to Chief Officer for Housing and Property in April of last year, adding several new responsibilities to my remit. These include, among others, the private rented sector, the community health function and the council's corporate property portfolio, along with our civic and commercial buildings, so it's quite the mix!

Lancaster City Council covers a varied area comprising of city, coast and countryside environments. We manage around 3,800 properties all the way up to the South Lakes across the Yorkshire Dales and down to Preston. Lancaster itself is quite geographically isolated which presents its own challenges, but it's a beautiful place to live and I feel very fortunate to be here.

My job covers the maintenance and improvement of existing housing stock as well as the development of new homes. It can feel quite a conflict trying to balance that, especially when you have responsibility for a large, ageing portfolio and

a strong demand for more housing. Like many local authorities we have issues with mould and damp in some of our older properties and it's a priority to ensure we bring these up to standard. The council hasn't undertaken major housebuilding projects since the 1970s, so I've been developing the capacity and knowledge within our team to start tackling this.

I think local authority recruitment is an issue in pretty much all parts of the country, and we're no exception here in Lancaster; our location doesn't help — although well connected, we're quite remote as a city and attracting new talent is a challenge. The private sector can offer very attractive packages to promising graduates and understandably they often follow the money. Something I try and promote, however is the fantastic experience and chance for real career progression local authorities can offer — the sky's the limit for the skilled and motivated and it's a very rewarding area to work in.

A project I'm particularly proud to be working on is in Lancaster city centre, improving living conditions for hundreds of our residents. It's the regeneration of the Mainway estate, a classic 1960s 'homes in the sky' development which despite extensive refurbishment in the 1990s, is now at the end of its life. The Mainway estate comprises 257 households across high- and low-rise buildings on the river — a great location, but the buildings are no longer fit for purpose. In their place we're planning a modern, vibrant environment with efficient, attractive homes fit for the 21st century, incorporating open green spaces. From the beginning, we've been keen to work with the community to improve the area and have undertaken extensive local consultation. This told us that 70% of tenants wanted change. It's an exciting and ambitious project which will take time to complete, but I know the effort will be well worth it.

Until this job, I'd never lived and worked in the same place. I like it as I feel I have an almost vested interest in the success of my work and see evidence of my efforts all around me. Lancaster is a fantastic place to live and we have big ambitions for the future, despite the economic challenges the housing sector faces. The provision of good, affordable housing for all is something I'm passionate about and I love the opportunities my job gives me to help make that happen.



Mainway estate, Lancaster

“The provision of good, affordable housing for all is something I'm passionate about.”



Mainway estate, Lancaster

Making better places for people



Louise Wood
Service Director for
Planning & Housing
Cornwall Council



Langarth Garden Village, Truro

I have an undergraduate degree in fine art, so my academic background is probably a little different from many of my colleagues in the sector. I did spend a lot of my time sketching buildings and places during my studies though, which was an indicator of my passion for working to improve places and create homes. I was at university in Manchester but now am firmly settled back in Cornwall, where I was born.

After graduating, I fell into publishing, but it wasn't what I wanted to do forever. I was living in London by then and there was a shortage of local planners – I knew I was interested in how places are made and the development process, so it seemed a good career path for me. I did a postgraduate degree in town planning at the University of Westminster and have stayed in planning and housing ever since. I think the unconventional route into my career is an advantage and gives me a wider professional perspective.

I started out at Brentwood Borough Council and as my career progressed I worked at other local authorities and did a stint in the commercial sector. My last role before heading home was at Barnet Council and I remember when I left people telling me it would be a cul-de-sac as far as my career went, that I'd get no experience and all the opportunities were in London. I'm pleased to say that certainly hasn't been the case, and I've enjoyed a very fulfilling 15 years and counting in Cornwall.

Ultimately, what I'm interested in is making better places for people. During my time at Cornwall Council, I've had the opportunity to do that in so many different ways: I've worked on regeneration projects, affordable housing schemes, garden villages and everything in between. I love the variety working in planning offers as no two projects are the same.

All councils are constrained by budgets at the moment and Cornwall is no exception. Keeping up with our development

programme and achieving our new homes ambitions is a challenge as we're having to do more with less. We're also working hard to improve our existing social housing stock as we're aware some of it isn't of a good enough standard. This requires significant investment as we work towards net zero and achieve Energy Performance Certificate C by 2030.

Cornwall is a beautiful place, and we have a responsibility to keep it that way. All new development comes under close scrutiny from residents, which is completely understandable – sometimes there's a perception we're concreting over everything but only around 6% of Cornwall has actually been built upon. We must balance retaining Cornwall's beauty with the practical aspects of ensuring sufficient housing is available for all. Our residents are finding it really hard to get on the property ladder because we don't have enough affordable homes, we have a duty to do more and better.

It's easy to say the planning system is broken, and certainly it's a really difficult time. We're facing increasing complexity in a planning system that's never left alone long enough to stabilise; it's been subject to so many changes over the years it never gets to bed in. To make matters worse, nothing ever seems to be taken away from the planning framework, just more requirements and restrictions added. It's not fundamentally broken, just lacking consistency and woefully under-resourced.

Building and planning regulations can't solve all society's ills but there sometimes seems to be a train of thought that perhaps they can. Whether it's social inclusion or public health or a myriad of other national concerns, there's an expectation that putting a new development requirement in place will solve that. Good housing is the foundation for well-being and will go a long way to solving many social problems but it isn't a magic wand – it takes strong and consistent leadership to make a difference.

A development I'm really proud of, which encapsulates the kind of places we want to create in Cornwall, is one I'm still working on; a garden village called West Carclaze in St Austell. It's described as 'a 21st century lakeside community based on the best of traditional values, with health and sustainability at its core'. It's really beautiful, built around the unique and historical china clay landscape of St Austell, enjoying far-reaching views of the sea and Cornish coast. It's a big regeneration project on brownfield ex-industrial land that will transform into 350 acres of parkland and a community of low carbon homes as well as shops, a school, eating and drinking establishments, commercial space and more. It's a landscape-led scheme centring around the integration of private gardens, community green spaces and wider parks, resulting in the creation of a true village of gardens.

Cornwall is a great place to live and we're working hard to encourage people and businesses to move here. The county offers a wealth of opportunity and a wonderful way of life in a beautiful environment. I'm proud of the regeneration and development the council is leading and I can see how it's improving outcomes for those who live here.



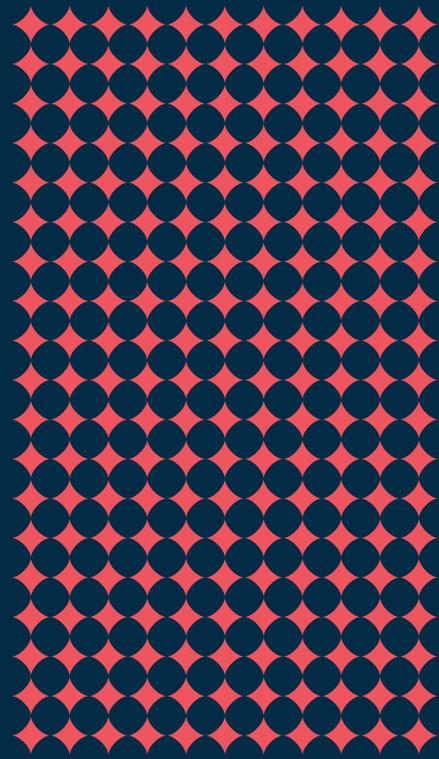
Chough House, Truro



West Carclaze Garden Village, St Austell

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