

Full article can be found here: <https://www.house-builder.co.uk/news/doubt-cast-300000-homes-target/>

Doubt cast on 300,000 homes target

Housing secretary Michael Gove has said the government will “do everything it can” to build 300,000 homes a year by the middle of the decade, as promised in the Conservative election manifesto.

But in an interview with Radio 4’s *Today* programme, Gove said the government would not be “tied to a procrustean bed” – an arbitrary target – and that it would be “no kind of success to simply hit a target if the homes that are built are shoddy, in the wrong place, don’t have the infrastructure required and are not contributing to beautiful communities.”

It follows the confirmation in the Queen’s Speech yesterday that the government has dropped plans for a new and separate bill to reform planning rules in England. Instead changes will be part of the new Levelling up and Regeneration Bill.

The government says its new proposals will give communities a “louder voice, making sure developments are beautiful, green and accompanied by new infrastructure and affordable housing.”

The new bill is set to replace section 106 agreements “with a locally set, non-negotiable levy to deliver the infrastructure that communities need.”

Gove confirmed at the weekend that the bill would include design codes and street votes giving communities a say on development. The government says the bill will improve “outcomes for our natural environment by introducing a new approach to environmental assessment in our planning system.” It would also simplify the local plan process “so that they are produced more quickly and are easier for communities to influence.”

Ben Woolman, director at SME developer Woolbro Group, said: “While scrapping the government’s 300,000 homes a year target may well appease anti-development constituents in Tory heartlands today, this latest U-turn is unlikely to resonate well with voters in the future.

“Alongside rising building costs and the fast-approaching end of the Help to Buy scheme, Britain’s disastrous planning system means the Tories’ emphasis on home ownership for young, first-time buyers is becoming a pipe dream.

“Yet, despite the main obstacle to new homes being delivered in this country being the UK’s over politicised planning system, the government has chosen to inject even more politics into the equation by enabling residents to veto local plans.

“Planning and housebuilding in Britain should be depoliticised once and for all. This is easily achievable via the creation of a new, independent body of planning experts who can set housing targets and review planning applications objectively and without bias.”

Paul Smith, managing director of The Strategic Land Group (SLG), said of the introduction of design codes and street votes: "Focussing on 'beauty' as a way of reducing opposition isn't the panacea the government imagines - while we should absolutely be looking for ways to improve the design quality of new schemes, that isn't why local residents object. At root, their objections stem from a very human fear of change - no number of design codes will make a difference to that.

"Street votes are certainly worth considering - there's no reason why development shouldn't be allowed if local residents are in favour of it - but it seems unlikely to have a transformative impact on the number of new homes being delivered.

"Ultimately, the only way you build more homes is to plan to build more. There is far more that can be done to improve the operation of the planning system - and must be done if we are to get anywhere close to solving the housing crisis."

Gavin Jefferies, director of communications and strategy at housing provider Abri, said: "The introduction of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which promises to provide local leaders with the powers they need to revitalise communities, is a welcome priority. Housing providers will play a crucial part in the government's 'levelling up' agenda, creating communities where people want to live. We believe that through strong local partnerships and a focus on delivering empowerment activities, we can build thriving and sustainable communities with more opportunity for all.

"We'll closely monitor plans to replace section 106 regulations with a build levy for local authorities. Our hope is that this money is used to build more social housing. If true reform of the planning system is achieved and social housebuilding is incentivised then we think this proposal could be a really positive change for our sector."

Simon Cox, managing director at land agent Walter Cooper, hit out at the lack of a planning bill: "Planning reforms have been left out of the Queen's Speech. Once again this is a missed opportunity for the government and DLUHC to 'actually level up'.

"Nobody likes a person or government who talks the talk but doesn't walk the walk and I don't see any walking from the government here."