



CHAPTER FOUR

MEETING LOCAL HOUSING NEEDS

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OUR HOUSING SYSTEM IS FAILING.

Rising property prices and mounting debt are pushing home ownership beyond the means of many people. The gap is being filled by an unregulated private rental sector, with insecure tenancies, high costs and varying conditions. We need a programme of council house building locally and nationally to reverse this trend.

We will use the powers available to Wiltshire Council to make a difference to the availability of affordable, environmentally friendly and energy efficient housing, and extend support to people renting in the private sector.

LABOUR WILL

- Require all new housing developments to deliver a 40% minimum level of social housing.
- Build new council homes, delivering at least 500 new homes per annum within four years.
- Increase resourcing to support tenants through advice and enforcement in the private rental sector, with a Private Tenants' Charter and a Register of Approved Landlords.
- Deliver new sites for housing through the planning system to keep up with local demand.
- Ensure that all new housing developments make a fair contribution to improving the infrastructure of the community.
- Require all new homes to be zero net carbon to address the climate emergency and help lift people out of fuel poverty.
- Ensure sufficient supported accommodation is available to provide pathways out of rough sleeping and implement best practice homelessness prevention in the county.
- Ensure Gypsy, Traveller, Roma and Boat-dweller communities have their needs for safe and adequate living conditions met.

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TACKLING UNAFFORDABILITY

Home ownership is beyond the means of many people as property values and debt continue to soar. The Government's own definition of "affordable housing" falls short of the reality for many people as it is linked to market value, not income.

In addition, the housing element of Universal Credit is capped at a value significantly lower than market rents, making the private sector unaffordable for people on benefits.

Labour will tackle this by:

- Working with partners to ensure that new housing developments include a minimum of 40% social rental housing, including new council homes.
- Building new council homes, delivering at least 500 new homes per annum within four years.
- Using Wiltshire Council powers to compulsory purchase long-term empty properties for conversion to social rented homes.
- Opening up the Housing Waiting List to lower income households as the supply of social homes increases. We will review the waiting list criteria to ensure that it doesn't unfairly exclude returning ex-military personnel and their families.
- Lobbying national government to provide a social benefits system that reflects reality.
- Helping local people to get a foot on the housing ladder through promoting low-cost home ownership schemes.
- Working in partnership with charities and other not-for-profit organisations to provide housing choices for disabled people wishing to live independently or wishing to live within more community and support based provision.

ADDRESSING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

In 2015, the Conservatives ditched legislation made in 2006 by the last Labour Government which would have required all new homes to be net zero carbon by 2016.

We will counter this decision by:

- Requiring all new homes to be zero net carbon to address the climate emergency and help lift people out of fuel poverty.
- Campaigning for a national programme to bring all existing homes up to the same standard by 2035.

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REVITALISING PLANNING POLICY

Supply has not kept up with demand and market pressures have made homes unaffordable for local people. Wiltshire's "Local Housing Need Assessment" has placed challenging targets on the council to facilitate new developments.

It is currently failing to meet the requirement for a five-year housing land supply, increasing the ability of developers to challenge local plans. In addition, the piecemeal approach to developing housing on the edges of towns has put new pressures on local services.

We will address this by:

- Delivering sufficient new sites for housing through the planning system to meet the 5-year housing land supply requirement and keep up with the "Local Housing Need Assessment".
- Developing at least one new garden village development, incorporating local employment and services, sustainable transport links and a mix of housing types, reflecting the best in modern design.
- Ensuring that all new housing developments make a real contribution to improving the infrastructure of the community, including schooling, health and community facilities, and ensuring that developers comply with commitments made.
- Undertaking a strategic review of the Community Infrastructure Levy applied by Wiltshire Council to new developments to ensure that it is sufficient to meet the needs of each community, especially in towns such as Calne, Melksham, Trowbridge, Westbury, Warminster, Mere and Tidworth, where the levy is currently 25-35% lower than the rest of the county.
- Campaigning for councils to have compulsory purchase powers for sites with approved planning not built upon within 5 years (to ensure these are released into the community and are not land-banked by developers).



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SUPPORTING TENANTS

The availability of good quality, secure social housing has been eroded for decades, with adequate housing being treated as a commodity rather than a basic right or force for social good. This has pushed many to enter private rentals, a sector characterised by high costs, varying conditions and insecure tenancies. The private rental sector accounts for 20% of all households nationally and continues to grow in Wiltshire.

Labour will deliver change by:

- Increasing support for private tenants through advice and enforcement in the private rental sector.
- Establishing a Private Tenants' Charter and a Register of Approved Landlords.
- Providing advice and support for forces personnel and their families living in sub-standard MoD accommodation.

If the MoD progresses beyond the trial phase with its Future Accommodation Model, we will provide dedicated support to forces personnel placed in private rented accommodation.

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PROVIDING PATHWAYS OUT OF ROUGH SLEEPING

Although the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act placed a duty of prevention on local authorities, rough sleeping is on the rise in Wiltshire and vulnerable groups face huge difficulties getting on the housing ladder.

We will work to banish rough sleeping by:

- Providing sufficient supported accommodation is available to provide pathways out of rough sleeping in each of the four former districts of the Wiltshire Council area.
- Ensuring that a coordinated approach is taken to get the necessary support in place to prepare rough sleepers for moving into permanent accommodation through the “Housing First” model.
- Implementing best practice homelessness prevention in the county based on a framework of early identification, pre-crisis intervention and actions to prevent recurring homelessness.

SUPPORTING GYPSY, TRAVELLER, ROMA AND BOAT-DWELLER COMMUNITIES

Local authorities have a legal requirement to ensure basic provision for nomadic communities in terms of suitable sites and facilities to support their right to safe and adequate living conditions.

We will work deliver this by:

- Working in partnership with Gypsy, Traveller and Roma community representatives and landowners to identify suitable sites with access to water and sanitation, education, and healthcare.
- Working in partnership with canal boat-dweller community representatives and the Canal & River Trust to ensure arrangements are in place that reflect and respect nomadic lifestyles and ensure access to employment, education and healthcare.