

Social Homes for Manchester **Now!**

We are a coalition of community associations, charities, think tanks, academics, and social justice organisations focused on accelerating the number of social homes that are created in Manchester by 2030 and ensuring this is done in an environmentally sustainable way.

Manchester City Council is writing a new five-year development strategy for the City called the Local Plan which will include targets on affordable housing. We are calling on Manchester City Council to commit to enacting six key proposals in conjunction with the new Local Plan to ensure a long-term commitment to addressing the housing crisis.

1. At least 30% social homes included in all new developments of over 10 units to be enacted in local policy and enforced through the setting and enforcement of section 106 obligations.
2. Stronger public accountability and scrutiny for the setting and enforcement of developer obligations to build new social housing.
3. Establish a Commission on Social Housing for the City of Manchester.
4. Create specific policy for the promotion of Community Led Housing.
5. Develop a practical strategy for the renovation/transfer of empty homes into homes for social rent.
6. Ensure all new developments are climate and nature friendly.

Get involved!

Here are some of the things you can do to support these asks:

1. Sign up to the 'Social Homes for Manchester' mailing list by emailing socialhomes4mcr@gmail.com writing 'sign me up' in the subject line.
2. Organise a meeting with your local councillors to discuss these asks and how to represent them.
 - * You can find out who your councillor is here:
<https://democracy.manchester.gov.uk/mgFindMember.aspx>
 - * You can use this booklet to help you prepare for your meeting.
 - * Need some support with this? Email socialhomes4mcr@gmail.com and write 'help me meet my councillor' in the subject line.
3. If you are part of a local community group or tenants/residents organisation you could invite us to come and run a briefing event in your local community. Email socialhomes4mcr@gmail.com and write 'help me organise a community meeting' in the subject line.
4. Write to your local councillors stating your support for these asks, ask them what they are doing to advocate for more social housing in your Ward. Ask them to advocate with the council team who are writing the Local Plan for the inclusion of some of the asks in this briefing.
5. Write to your MP about the Local Plan for Manchester and ask them what they are doing at parliamentary level to ask for increased investment in social housing in Manchester and across the UK.
 - * You can find out who your MP is here:
<https://members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP>
 - * You can use this booklet to help you write your letter or prepare for a meeting if you decide to ask to meet them in person.
6. Join our organising committee. Email socialhomes4mcr@gmail.com and write 'Skills to offer Social Homes 4 Mcr' in the subject line.

1. At least 30% social homes in all new developments of over 10 units to be enacted in local policy and enforced through the setting and enforcement of section 106 obligations.

Manchester has a housing crisis. Up to 2,775 households in the city were trapped in temporary accommodation in 2023, while 6,422 people were found by Manchester City Council to need homelessness relief.¹ There were 14,912 households on the social housing waiting list in Manchester in 2022² and this figure is now likely to be significantly higher. While temporary accommodation figures are down on previous years, they are still high, with eviction from a private tenancy still the most common reason for a family or individual being owed a homeless duty.³ National charities such as Crisis warn that the most serious forms of homelessness are likely to rise in the near future, with increased evictions, high rents and a lack of social housing driving acute destitution and piling pressure onto the cost of living crisis.⁴

The terminology of “affordable housing” is highly misleading and is not the same as housing for social rent. “Affordable housing” means either ‘affordable rents’ (approximately 80% of market rent) or ‘shared ownership’ and is not affordable for the majority of people on the social housing waiting list.

The evidence of need for social housing is overwhelming. But Manchester’s track record has been poor. **Only 506 out of 23,364 homes built in Manchester from 2012-2022 were social housing** according to government figures⁵, alongside 2,706 other types of affordable homes like shared ownership or affordable rent. Developers on large schemes in Manchester city centre routinely avoid paying “section 106” contributions for new homes, with only 17 social homes in the city financed by s106 in the past 10 years. Moreover, over 5,000 council homes have been lost to the Right to Buy since 2012, with few if any built to replace them.⁶ For Manchester to meet its affordable housebuilding targets, it needs to double its current affordable housing supply from 500 to 1,000 each year up to 2032.⁷ Building homes at the scale we need requires central government support. But **Manchester can do more.** Shelter research has criticised the city’s current Local Plan for containing several “get out” clauses that developers can use to evade paying towards social housing, and many schemes using public land have focused on private development. **To build more social housing, we are asking Manchester City Council to remove clauses in the new Local Plan that allow developers to avoid these contributions.**

¹ Source: Detailed local authority level tables: financial year 2022-23 Tables on homelessness - gov.uk (<https://tinyurl.com/ycx3sdfa>)

² Source: Live tables on rents, lettings and tenancies, Table 600: numbers of households on local authorities' housing waiting lists, found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-rents-lettings-and-tenancies>

³ Source: Detailed local authority level tables: financial year 2022-23 Tables on homelessness - gov.uk (<https://tinyurl.com/ycx3sdfa>)

⁴ Source: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2023/>

⁵ Source: Table 1011C (which is based on completions not new starts) in Live tables on affordable housing supply <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply>

⁶ Source: <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/calls-right-buy-policy-suspended-15154742>

⁷ Source: https://www.manchester.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/28615/manchester_housing_strategy_2022-2032.pdf

We further urge Manchester City Council to bring its planning policies into line with national policy. The national threshold for planning obligations to build affordable housing is 10 units, but Manchester has based its requirements on developments of 14 units and above to date. **This threshold should be reduced to 10 units in the new Local Plan.**

In 2008, the Housing Needs Assessment for Manchester indicated that 30% of all new build housing should be affordable, yet Manchester City Council set the target for affordable homes at only 20%⁸. We are decades behind in building the social homes that are needed with over 15,000 households on the social housing waiting list. **We are calling on Manchester City Council to commit to ensuring that 30% of all new housing development is homes for social rent.**

2. Stronger public scrutiny and accountability for the setting and enforcement of developer obligations for new social housing.

Planning obligations are legally enforceable obligations made under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act.

Local planning authorities have the power to negotiate with developers over the provision of affordable housing and/or public infrastructure.

In negotiating planning agreements, developers can submit a viability assessment that set out commercial data over whether they can deliver a scheme in a way that is financially viable. Since 2012, changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) have allowed developer contributions to be modified or disregarded subject to viability, leading to widespread allegations that developers can manipulate complex assessments to evade “s106” contributions.

Reforms to the NPPF since 2018 have made the process more transparent. These include the expectation that viability assessments will be made publicly available, that developers should benchmark land against its existing use (plus a premium) rather than its market value, and that the price paid for land should not be an excuse for a development not meeting Local Plan policies. However, it is important that local councils have the power and political will to enforce these rules, and that affordable housing policies are set properly at the Local Plan stage.

We are therefore calling on Manchester City Council to:

- **Establish a dedicated officer team which can bring additional capacity and expertise to the task of scrutinising developments to ensure they do not evade developer contributions, in line with other local authorities such as Tower Hamlets.**

⁸ Source: 'Providing for Housing Choice - Supplementary Planning Document and Planning Guidance', Manchester City Council, Adopted 2nd September 2008

- Work with us to establish a citizen-led scrutiny committee made up of planning experts and representatives of local citizens organisations to provide transparency over the setting and enforcement of developer obligations.
- Create a new affordable housing section on their website which tracks progress on new build social housing and lists all new planning applications for housing developments of over 10 units and their associated financial viability assessments.

3. Establish a Commission on Social Housing for Manchester.

We are asking Manchester City Council to work with us to establish a Commission on Social Housing for the City of Manchester involving universities, think tanks, citizens organisations and charities.

Manchester City Council’s Housing Strategy 2022-2032 starts with a commitment to building the homes that residents “want and need” and a consideration of “the role of housing in the context of the Our Manchester Strategy”, “economic recovery”, and “ambitions towards zero-carbon”. At the same time, the Council is negotiating significant challenges, not least major cuts to local government funding since 2010.

This Commission can bring additional knowledge and capacity to assist the Council to navigate these challenges and achieve their ambitions.

In the spirit of the Our Manchester strategy, this new commission would bring together a diverse mix of knowledge and learning to co-produce robust findings and pragmatic recommendations drawing on the voices of our city’s residents as well as looking at examples of best practice from across the UK and the world.

Findings and recommendations have the potential to engage with a wide range of issues including:

- Maximising the use of public land for social housing development;
- How to hold developers accountable for their public obligations without losing much needed investment;
- How to ensure that new social housing is integrated together with other services and infrastructure that can reduce socio-economic disadvantage across the city while securing our Zero Carbon future.

4. Support the development of Community-led Housing Projects, with the creation of a specific policy that promotes Community Led Housing.

Manchester City Council should re-affirm its 2018 commitment to donating land to three Community Led Housing schemes, with development underway by 2030.

Community Led Housing schemes that are backed by Manchester City Council should be projects based in communities most in need and should include social homes, with a focus on sustainable design.

Community Land Trusts and Housing Co-operatives are a unique way to provide permanently affordable housing for residents, as they are not subject to Right to Buy and are protected by a community asset lock.

Community Led Housing can increase choice by producing a wider range of housing options for people on the housing register, as well as those priced out of home ownership.

Community Led Housing projects are not restricted to new builds but can also include wider regeneration schemes by bringing empty homes back into use. These projects can also unlock small brownfield sites that are unattractive to mainstream developers.

Manchester City Council should commit to the following changes to policy to allow for easier development of new Community Led Housing schemes:

- The current policy states that community led groups should have a lead social provider on board in their business plan before they receive support from the local authority. So, this means that **before** they have any land, they should get a lead social provider on board. **This is a major obstacle as social providers will not generally become involved until a community led group has land.** We want to reverse this policy so that a social provider does not have to be found **until** a community group has obtained land.
- If in exceptional circumstances a developer pays a commuted sum rather than provide affordable housing, consideration should be given to use these commuted sums to help fund Community Led Housing. This can be done either by means of loans or grants, which may in turn lever in additional funding.
- The Council should identify and transfer small brownfield sites to community led groups through sale or asset transfer. This could also be done through granting a long lease at a peppercorn rent. This increases the Community Led Housing organisation's asset base, enabling it to borrow more resources for the project.

5. A new strategy for the renovation of empty homes into homes for social rent

1 in every 29 homes in Manchester are not in long-term residential use, meaning over 2,000 properties have been empty for at least 6 months.

We are calling on the council to tackle the problem of empty homes. This will improve how our neighbourhoods look and feel and will offer security to the thousands of homeless families on the waiting list for social housing.

Existing financial sanctions (e.g. the increase in the amount of Council Tax paid introduced in 2019), have not had the desired impact and the number of properties left vacant continues to rise.

We want Manchester City Council to learn from best practice around the UK and take a proactive approach to bringing empty homes back into use through the following steps:

- Employ a named Empty Homes Officer to liaise with communities about empty homes in their area and engage owners about bringing them back into use. This will allow the council to make more use of tools like Empty Dwelling Management Orders, forced sale and compulsory purchase orders for those owners who refuse to engage.
- Make funding available for community groups to turn empty homes into community-led housing. Charities and civic sector organisations are often best placed to provide supported housing for specific groups, and are embedded in their communities, allowing for a sense of ownership and the possibility for training around construction, housing management and customer service.
- In areas of significant social housing density, the council should seek to buy up empty homes, and those from private rented landlords wishing to exit the sector and incorporate them into their social housing stock. The Empty Homes Agency estimates that it costs an average of £20,000 to bring an empty home back into use, making it justifiable to procure homes and ensure their maintenance alongside existing properties.

6. All new build homes of any type or tenure to be zero carbon/zero carbon ready.

We are in the midst of a climate and nature emergency. Driven by the burning of fossil fuels, global temperatures are rising at an unprecedented rate, leading to more frequent and severe storms, heatwaves, and floods. Natural habitats are being decimated and growing numbers of species are under threat of extinction.

In 2020, Manchester City Council set a science-based target to halve the city's carbon emissions by 2025 and reach zero carbon by 2038.⁹ In 2021, the Manchester Climate Change Partnership developed a Roadmap to Net Zero Carbon Buildings, which advised that to meet these targets, all new buildings in the city from 2023 should be zero carbon.¹⁰

The Local Plan must therefore include a requirement that all new developments are zero carbon.

Nature provides us with many benefits that we often take for granted. Trees, for example, help improve air quality and provide shade and shelter. Parks, gardens and green spaces help soak up rainwater and prevent flooding. Just being around nature can help reduce stress levels and improve people's health and wellbeing. The Manchester Biodiversity Strategy¹¹ focuses on the need to conserve, protect and enhance biodiversity in the City for current and future generations. The planning system has a key role to play in this, setting standards that developers must meet. Natural England suggests using Urban Greening Factor targets to ensure development promotes more nature-rich environments, particularly in dense urban areas.¹²

The Local Plan must therefore include ambitious Urban Greening Factor targets for all new developments.

⁹ Source: <https://www.manchesterclimate.com/targets>

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.manchesterclimate.com/content/net-zero-new-build>

¹¹ Source: https://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/7516/manchester_biodiversity_strategy_and_action_plan

¹² Source: <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/GIStandards.aspx>

Debunking common myths about building social homes

There are two very common justifications provided as to why we shouldn't be prioritising homes for social rent over shared ownership or homes for private rent or sale. Here is a short summary of why these arguments don't hold up to scrutiny:

The government doesn't have the money to build social homes.

In the long-run, social housing pays for itself. The rent paid by social / council tenants covers the management, upkeep, and maintenance charges, and helps to finance future social housebuilding.

Historically, council tenants have more than paid back the cost of building their homes: in 2009 the House of Commons Parliamentary Council Housing Group found that people living in council housing had paid £91 billion in rent while local authorities only received £60 billion in government "allowances".¹³

Not building social housing is a political choice.

Social housing saves the government money. From the Second World War up to 1980, we were building an average of around 126,000 social homes every year. Last year, there were only 7,528 new social homes¹⁴. Private housebuilding has not risen to plug the gap, and housing benefit spending has exploded to £22bn per year as of 2019 due to higher private rents and stagnant wages.¹⁵

To fund the up-front costs of housebuilding we need public investment from central government. However, local councils also have a big role to play as owners of public land that can be used to support genuine social housing, with the New Economics Foundation finding that only 6% of land sold off by the public sector has been used for homes for social rent.¹⁶

In Manchester, 36,000 new homes will be built by 2032 – 10,000 of these will be social and affordable homes. And 3,000 of the new affordable homes will be in the city centre. This is not enough. We need to work with the Council to try and increase the new homes that will be social and affordable.

¹³ Source: APPG on Council Housing 'Council Housing: Time to Invest (now, more than ever) – what we know', July 2023 (<https://thelabourcampaignforcouncilhousing.org/2023/07/14/time-to-invest-now-more-than-ever/>)

¹⁴ Source: https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/a_vision_for_social_housing

¹⁵ Source: <https://ifs.org.uk/articles/doubling-housing-benefit-bill-sign-something-deeply-wrong>

¹⁶ Source: <https://neweconomics.org/2020/02/sold-off-public-land-is-creating-minuscule-amounts-of-affordable-housing>

If we enforce too many Section 106 obligations on developers they will stop investing in Manchester and we will have even less housing.

Manchester's economy is in a much stronger position than in the 1990s. Private housebuilding has boomed in the city centre over the past 10 years, with Deloitte finding that nearly 20,000 apartments were built in central Manchester and Salford from 2016 to 2021, and that a further 10,000 are under construction.¹⁷

As the briefing for the GM Development Conference on 31st Oct 2023 states:

'Greater Manchester's property boom is showing no signs of abating with current development and construction activity at its highest in decades. The Greater Manchester Development Conference will showcase £20bn+ worth of projects from across the 10 boroughs- with ambitious targets in housing, commercial property and transport set to be boosted by the recent devolution deal announced in the budget.'

If the market is booming at a time of inflation and high interest rates, developers can afford to pay their fair share in shifting some of this growth towards affordable and social housing.

¹⁷ Source: <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/real-estate/articles/manchester-crane-survey-2022.html>



Steady State Manchester