



PlaceShapers

Together we help communities thrive



General Election

The role and impact of place-based housing associations

placeshapers.org



Introduction

PlaceShapers is a national network of place-based housing associations. We have around 100 members – ranging from providers with less than 1,000 homes to providers with over 30,000 homes.

As place-based housing associations, we do more than just provide homes- we build places. As communities are hit by the housing crisis, cost-of-living crisis, and withdrawal of public services, our role has become even more important. But like other sectors we face challenges and government policy can hamper what we do. With the right support from the next government, we can overcome these challenges and do more to help every part of the country thrive. We stand ready to work with the next government to deliver their ambitions on housing and place.

In this document we set out:

- What is a place-based housing association?
- What are the challenges we currently face?
- What can place-based housing associations do to help places thrive?
- How can the next government help us do more?
 - Introduce a long-term plan for housing
 - Support a diverse sector to flourish
 - Take a place-based approach to housing

A resident recently housed by **Progress** housing association in the North West said:

“As long as you’ve got a good home for your family, that’s everything you need. The change in my daughter has been amazing. She has her own space, she has started to eat better and enjoys being around me and her brother more. I feel very lucky and would not change it for the world.”

What is a place-based housing association?

- We are not for-profit, asset-based businesses. All the money we collect in rent goes into our homes and services. Our homes and investment are concentrated in specific communities, which means we are often the largest social housing provider in an area. Our staff live locally and many of them live in the homes we provide.

London-based **Poplar HARCA**, is leading a large-scale £2.5bn place-shaping programme in east London. One of several neighbouring regeneration schemes currently on site is Stroudley Walk, providing 274 new homes, with 51% affordable housing. It provides a mix of terraced family housing, and apartments ranging from studios to four bedroom homes. The vision is for a vibrant, safer neighbourhood and includes a new park, pedestrianised street, more shops and new community café. Design and public art will celebrate local heritage links to the Suffragettes and Grime music.



- We provide affordable homes for people from every walk of life, giving them the foundation for a healthy life. We provide services which build resilience and have a major impact on health, well-being, and cohesion, including tackling anti-social behaviour, providing financial support, and helping people into employment.

Coastline, a housing association in Cornwall, has supported 268 households in the last year through their Sustainability Fund. Customers have received help with food and energy vouchers, heating oil, white goods, carpets, mobile phones and school uniforms. Colleagues also use the fund to improve opportunities for customers, for example purchasing a bus pass for a customer which allowed them to start employment.

whg, based in Walsall, have a money advice team of accredited Welfare Rights and Debt Advisors. In 2023/24 they supported over 2,000 customers to obtain £4.5m in benefit entitlements. whg's Work4Health programme also helps customers secure roles in the NHS. Created in partnership with Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust, Walsall College and the DWP, the programme aims to overcome the barriers and obstacles felt by many jobseekers when looking for work. It was designed specifically around jobs available within the trust, and combines skills training, work experience, application form support, mock interview practice and a guaranteed job interview for roles at the hospital.

bpha, based in the area between Oxford and Cambridge, work with local authorities and partners to run a series of community hubs and family centres. They include facilities for children and parents, cafes, and act as a one stop shop for customers to access a wide range of support and advice, including free employability sessions and financial guidance on housing, council tax and benefits. This also allows them to have an 'on the ground presence' so they can discuss the issues that matter the most for residents. This has led to a proactive and resident centred approach to issues like anti-social behaviour.

- We build new homes that meet the needs of our communities and invest in upgrading and decarbonising our homes and regenerating our communities.

Soha Housing, in South Oxfordshire, has worked alongside Hook Norton Community Land Trust (CLT) to build eight new homes for local people priced out of the market in this wealthy, Cotswold village. Soha lending its expertise to the scheme attracted £450,000 grant from Homes England. This made the scheme financially viable and enabled the development of a multi-purpose building on the site to serve the whole community. The long lease agreement has ensured the homes will remain affordable housing in perpetuity. Tenants will benefit from comparably favourable rents and will be protected from future fuel poverty as the homes are net-zero carbon with storage for when the homes generate more energy than they consume. These schemes may be relatively small but they build capacity and represent the chance for Soha to increase its affordable housing in areas otherwise deprived of such opportunities.



Karbon, a housing association in the North East, has carried out a retrofit project in The Brooms, Ouston, that has reduced residents' heating bills by almost a quarter, alongside providing them with 'free' electricity on top, which further reduces bills.

- Because of our long-standing commitment to places and communities, we invest in projects that can transform an area and develop partnerships that build supply chains and support local businesses.

Worthing Homes, a housing association in the South East, is developing SkyWaves, a scheme for homeless people in Worthing, in partnership with the local authority and homeless charity, that will provide the support and homes people need to begin their journey out of homelessness. It has taken years of hard work to get the scheme off the ground and is only possible because of the close partnership working and the collective commitment to the people of Worthing.

- We are accountable to residents, councillors, and local MPs. Our residents have formal ways to influence and challenge what we do through scrutiny panels and other arrangements.


Habinteg, a national housing association, has redefined tenant engagement through a new partnership of board members and tenants in a Joint Strategic Impact Group (JSIG). The group gives tenants a meaningful say in the priorities and decision-making of the organisation and is a mix of monitoring and strategic planning. JSIG shapes the agenda for issues that require deeper investigation, contributes to repairs and maintenance discussions, and leads on notable initiatives such as the tenant-led improvement budget, which empowers tenants to decide on the allocation of funds, on their scheme, for community-enhancing projects.

What are the challenges we currently face?

The housing crisis is well understood and evidenced. People are stuck in expensive or poor quality homes that don't meet their needs, and increasingly people, including children and families, are being housed in totally unsuitable temporary accommodation.

The chronic undersupply of social housing means only people in the most severe housing need, often coupled with other complex needs, get access to social housing. Unless we broaden out access to social housing, this will change the nature of who we house and our ambition to build truly diverse, mixed sustainable communities.

In South Oxfordshire, the people housed by **Soha Housing** has changed in recent years. In common with other areas, soaring local housing demand means increasingly only those in the highest need - from the higher bands on the housing registers - are being offered housing. Demand outstrips supply across every type of home. The figure for those entitled to apply for a one-bed flat currently outweighs the supply by between four and 13 times across our partners; for family homes the imbalance is between two and five times. The highest need often means not just for four clean, safe and secure walls but for additional support as well. In the short-term, Soha has increased what it can offer - usually one-to-one advice and practical assistance - when required. In the long-term, as a community mutual housing association, Soha believes that a route to secure affordable accommodation is needed for all who cannot afford a home in their area.



To tackle this we need more affordable homes across the county. Good quality housing will also support the growth of healthy, happy and integrated sustainable communities.

Our residents also face significant challenges with accessing health care, public services and benefits, which have been a traditional safety net for all. The combined impact of this, along with the cost-of-living crisis, means places and communities are becoming more brittle.

Significant funding for regeneration and rebuilding social housing has been lacking for over a decade, limiting our ability to transform places and communities and make them more socially and economically resilient.

Place-based housing associations also face a range of specific challenges that, without additional support from the government, mean they will have to make difficult decisions about trade-offs which will have negative and ongoing consequences for local people and communities. We are working hard to tackle these challenges, but some of them, particularly reaching net-zero carbon, are significant and long-term.

The need to invest in new homes, coupled with the higher cost of borrowing and building, means the current model of development is not sustainable.

For a small number of housing associations, these challenges pose a real risk to their viability because they are so acute and complex.

What can place-based housing associations do to help places thrive?

Despite these challenges, place-based associations remain committed to doing all they can to support their residents, communities and places – building new homes where they can and investing in their existing homes, communities and services to residents. But there is so much more they could do to help places, and the country, to thrive. With the right support they can:

1. Restore pride and belonging to places ‘left behind’ by leading regeneration that improves the quality of homes, the environment, public realm, and the health of local people.
2. Address the crisis in homelessness and temporary accommodation, improve provision, and save taxpayer’s money by building homes that meet local need.
3. Enable solutions to the climate crisis, reduce costs for residents, and help meet the country’s net-zero target by improving energy efficiency and decarbonising our existing homes.
4. Help ease entrenched poverty and long-term unemployment by providing the support residents need to weather the cost-of-living crisis and access training and employment opportunities.



How can the next government help us do more?

The next government has a real opportunity to build a new generation of social housing and kickstart a new programme of regeneration across the country. To do this they should:

1. Introduce a long-term plan for housing

We support the National Housing Federation's call for the next government to commit to a long-term plan for housing. This should include how they will fund a significant increase in new social rent housing. Social rent requires a higher grant rate to ensure it is viable for social housing providers to build, but provides significant ongoing savings for the government and the tax-payer through cheaper rents.

2. Support a diverse sector to flourish

Place-based housing associations face a range of challenges that mean they will have to make tough decisions and for some these challenges pose a real risk to their viability. The funding the sector receives is no longer sufficient to respond to the increasing challenges we, and our residents, face.

We urge the next government to review what support they offer to strengthen this diverse sector, to ensure we can continue to deliver significant impact nationally and locally.

This should include a sustainable long-term rent settlement and certainty on the long-term funding and support for the decarbonisation of our homes, and a plan for how we will reach net-zero carbon in line with the next government's ambitions.


3. Take a place-based approach to housing

The housing crisis looks different in different places. Viewing housing through the lens of place will ensure that decisions and funding are focussed on the solutions that will address the unique challenges of each area and help realise the potential of place-based housing associations.

In some places there is a need for significant regeneration – either large scale, for example at town level, or small scale, for example at an estate or street level. In other places there is a crisis in temporary accommodation and new homes are urgently required to meet escalating demand. We need a system that responds to these challenges rather than imposes a one-size fits all approach.

In the short-term, the new government should extend the flexibility recently introduced into the Affordable Homes Programme to allow money to be spent on regeneration programmes and other solutions to the housing crisis. It should also consider combining funding streams that are focused on new homes and regeneration and streamlining the way funding is administered to make it easier for housing associations and others to join up funding at a local level.

In the long-term, the new government should take an ambitious view of housing and place. They should look at mechanisms for encouraging and empowering places to develop strategies to solve the housing crisis within and across local authority boundaries. These mechanisms should include devolving funding for housing to local decision makers, with the support and input of housing associations rooted in that place.



Aspire Housing, based in North Staffordshire, has been proactively regenerating the Knutton and Cross Heath neighbourhood of Newcastle-under-Lyme for 20 years through redevelopment of primarily Aspire-owned social homes and a small number of private homes, developing new affordable and market sale homes, as well as providing new community and health facilities.

To date over 670 homes have been built or are on site, 265 homes demolished and the sites redeveloped, with a further 75 homes having recently received planning permission.

Many national and regional programmes and funding rounds have come and gone during this period- funding has been secured through Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder, private developer finance, PFI, HCA Kickstart, Town Deal, Homes England (and its forerunners) and Aspire's own funding arrangements.

Aspire and partners have navigated carefully and tactically to bring forward sites whenever possible. They have done this because of their long-standing commitment to Newcastle-under-Lyme. With a strategic commitment to long-term funding solutions, that enabled local stakeholders to work collectively to align and commit their own resources, the much needed regeneration of neighbourhoods like Knutton and Cross Heath could have accelerated economic growth, pride and resilience to these communities much more quickly and efficiently than has been possible through the piece meal funding streams that were released across the last 20 years.

Vivid, a housing association in the South, are working with Homes England and Portsmouth City Council to create a vibrant new waterfront community called Victory Quay, bringing much needed high-quality homes, green spaces and commercial, social and recreational facilities to the gateway of Portsmouth. They will transform an unused, derelict, brownfield site to create Victory Quay with 835 new homes, including shared ownership and affordable rent. The plans include enhancing the waterfront promenade for residents to enjoy, as well as improving the connectivity from the north of Portsmouth to the rest of the city, reducing the need for car use. New flood defences will protect Victory Quay and hundreds of other homes. The plans also involve extensive decontamination of the land and a strategy that once completed will be a haven for wildlife and impact on biodiversity mitigated.



Any questions or comments?

Please send them to
PlaceShapers Chief Executive
catherine.ryder@placeshapers.org.

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