

Insights**GENERAL ELECTION 2024: HOW DO THE PLANNING MANIFESTOS COMPARE?**

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SUMMARY

This Insight summarises the Planning aspirations of the Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrat manifestos for the UK's 2024 election. Their shared focus is on housing, energy infrastructure and battling climate change. The Conservatives remain committed to the Green Belt and maximising brownfield and densification. Labour proposes new towns and increased use of compulsory purchase, with release of 'grey' belt. The Lib Dems focus on more localised strategies. Labour and the Conservatives both propose increases in offshore wind, nuclear and carbon capture, use and storage. Both resist fracking. Labour proposes new Government energy investment institutions. The Conservatives remain wary of onshore wind. The Lib Dems support nature-based solutions to the energy crisis given the imperative to tackle global warming.

In 1848 the Communist Manifesto kicked off with how a spectre was haunting Europe – the spectre of communism, and that the powers of old Europe were trying to exorcise it. The spectres haunting the Planning manifestos of the parties contesting the UK's 2024 election will be tougher to exorcise: having to live with mum and dad till your forties, the lights going off and the rise of the oceans.

We offer a high-level glance at what the Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrat manifestos are proposing to do in Planning terms to address the issues.

HOUSING

The **Conservatives** promise 1.6 million homes in England in the next Parliament, **Labour** 1.5 million and the **Lib Dems** 1.9 million. Their respective plans to achieve this speak to different constituencies and core ideologies.

With a focus on de-regulation and maxing out existing conurbations, the **Conservatives** are proposing a fast-track for new homes on brownfield land in England's 20 largest cities. There would

be strong design codes to enable gentle densification of urban areas with new family homes and mansion blocks on tree-lined streets built in local character. Density levels in inner London would be raised to those of European cities, 'forcing' the (Labour) Mayor to plan for more homes on brownfield sites (the manifestos are all full of drive-by side swipes at one another). Major sites like Euston, Old Oak Common and Thamesmead would be regenerated. Locally led development corporations would be set up in partnership with the private sector to deliver new quarters in Leeds, Liverpool, York and Cambridge. S106 burdens will be reduced on smaller sites. Rules against adding harmful nutrients to surrounding ecosystems, which hold back new housing development, will be abolished. Developers would instead pay a one-off mitigation fee. There will be a focus on regenerating and improving housing estates.

Labour housing plans involve beefing up national and local policy and a more muscular approach to existing powers. There will be 'immediate' updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), including restoring mandatory housing targets, ensuring that local authorities have up-to-date local plans and strengthening the presumption in favour of sustainable development. There will be new spatial frameworks. Labour also proposes fast-track approvals on urban brownfield sites, and a brownfield first approach generally, but more ambitiously plans a wave of new towns. A list would be announced in the party's first year in office. Labour promises the 'biggest increase in social and affordable housing in a generation'. This will be achieved by making full use of intervention powers and strengthening planning obligations to ensure new developments provide more affordable homes. Nutrient neutrality rules are understood to be an issue but solutions will be explored without weakening environmental protections.

Ideas from the **Lib Dems** include trialling Community Land Auctions, encouraging rural exceptions sites, financial incentives to use existing brownfield sites and a new planning class to better control second homes and short term lets. Proposals focus on community-led (and presumably therefore quite low-key) development of cities and towns, with an expansion of Neighbourhood Planning across England.

GREEN BELT

With a firm eye on their perceived base, the **Conservatives** vow a continued 'cast-iron' commitment to retaining the Green Belt, plumping for brownfield and densification as the way forward. With a tentative eye on a differing base, **Labour** offers a nuanced 'strategic approach', releasing Green Belt to build new homes in 'the right places'. This would involve a sequential approach to development – prioritising the release of lower quality 'grey belt' land and 'golden rules' to ensure development benefits communities and nature. The Lib Dems are silent on the issue.

CPO

Labour and the **Lib Dems** recognise that unlocking increased use of compulsory purchase will necessitate reforming compensation rules - for specific types of development schemes Labour would allow landowners to receive 'fair compensation' rather than hope value. The Lib Dems would offer 'current use value'. In both cases, bold where an Englishman's home is his castle and current compensation rules allow him to seek its conceptually highest value as a possible Versailles if the state takes it.

DEVOLUTION

Labour promises to deepen devolution settlements for existing Combined Authorities and widen devolution to more areas, including new powers over housing and planning. Similarly, the **Conservatives** would offer every part of England a devolution deal by 2030. The **Lib Dems** want an end to top-down reorganisation and the 'imposition' of elected mayors.

LURA

The **Conservatives** are going ahead with the full implementation of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 but Labour have no intention of introducing the Infrastructure Levy under its powers.

RESOURCING

Labour would increase the non-resi surcharge on buying UK residential property by 1% so that it will be 3% more than the SDLT rate for UK buyers to raise funds for new planning officers. The Lib Dems propose local authorities setting their own planning application fees. The Conservatives moot youngsters interning in local planning departments as part of their National Service. Ok, we made that one up, and have no view on National Service one way or the other.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The **Conservatives** promise simplifying the planning system to make infrastructure easier to build and speed up the time it takes to consent from four years to one. National Policy Statements, key to the certainty of the Development Consent Order regime, will be regularly updated. There will be a delivery plan for Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2 will be completed between London Euston and the West Midlands.

Labour offers a 10-year Infrastructure Strategy to "guide investment plans and give the private sector certainty about the project pipeline", to be aligned with new Industrial Strategy and regional development priorities. Labour promises the 'slashing red tape' for consenting major projects. A new

National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority will bring together existing bodies and oversee design and delivery.

The **Lib Dems** would consider reviving some form of the northern leg of HS2 but slam a moratorium on net airport expansion until a national capacity and emissions management framework is in place. No to expansion of all London airports.

ENERGY

Labour proposes establishing the framework for energy and climate policies in a new Energy Independence Act. It supports meeting net zero and carbon budgets, with clean power by 2030 accelerating to net zero.

It proposes working with the private sector to double onshore wind, triple solar power and quadruple offshore wind by 2030. And investment in carbon capture, use and storage (CCUS) as well as hydrogen, marine energy and long-term energy storage. Labour would extend the lifetime of existing nuclear plants, getting Hinkley Point C over the line and new nuclear power stations, e.g. Sizewell C, and Small Modular Reactors. It would maintain a strategic reserve of gas power stations but not issue new North Sea licences or grant new coal licences. Fracking will be banned. Two new energy institutions are slated: Great British Energy with a budget of £8.3bn to drive clean energy investment and National Wealth Fund as a green tech investment vehicle for ports, hydrogen and industrial clusters. Labour will 'work with industry' to upgrade national transmission infrastructure and rewire Britain.

The **Conservatives** too remain committed to net zero - by 2050. There will be new gas power stations but also a tripling of offshore wind capacity and the first two CCUS clusters in North Wales plus Teesside and the Humber. They would progress a second tranche of projects in Aberdeenshire and Humber. They would be looking to scale up nuclear power, approving two new fleets of Small Modular Reactors in the first 100 days and halving the time it takes for new nuclear reactors to be approved. This would be by allowing regulators to assess projects while designs are being finalised, improving join-up with overseas regulators assessing the same technology and speeding up planning and environmental approvals. A new gigawatt power plant is to be approved at Wylfa in North Wales and existing projects at Hinkley Point and Sizewell would be delivered. Offshore cables would be used to help reduce the amount of onshore infrastructure, such as substations. The Conservatives would review alternative network technologies to overhead pylons and potentially move to a presumption in favour of undergrounding where cost competitive. The views of local communities would remain being balanced against energy security for onshore wind, with an updated NPPF to ensure that local areas hosting onshore wind directly benefit. Reiterating recent NPPF changes already introduced, solar will be supported in the 'right places', not on best agricultural land. The moratorium on fracking will remain.

The **Lib Dems** would be working towards 90% of the UK's electricity being generated from renewables by 2030. Tackling climate change would be at the heart of a new industrial strategy, ensuring nature-based solutions. Other proposals include a Chief Secretary for Sustainability in the Treasury to ensure that the economy is sustainable, resource-efficient and zero-carbon. A new Net Zero Delivery Authority would be established.

POST-ELECTION: WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

More than ever, the election promises of past governments have been quickly knocked aside by global economic and geo-political blows. Whoever forms the next Government will be doing well to implement their aspirations. Exorcising the spectres of the housing, energy security and climate crises will be the work of a generation. These cans have all been kicked down the road for years. We are running out of road. Even so, planning reform will feature highly on any incoming Government's agenda given its central role in economic strategy.

But details of the changes are unknown. This could delay ambitious timelines promised pre-election. Many changes will be reliant on amendments to the NPPF, with consequential consultation requirements, or in the case of the green belt subject to a strategic review. That said, publication of a written ministerial statement and changes to planning practice guidance could be achieved more quickly, without consultation, to emphasise the direction of travel and steer decision making whilst the new Government finds its feet.

RELATED PRACTICE AREAS

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MEET THE TEAM



Sheridan Treger

London

sheridan.treger@bclplaw.com

[+44 \(0\) 20 3400 3642](tel:+442034003642)



Clare Eccles

London

clare.eccles@bclplaw.com

[+44 \(0\) 20 3400 4267](tel:+442034004267)

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