Four ideas to end the housing crisis

How can we build more of the kinds of homes we need in the right places, with the support of local communities? Here are the best ideas we have found so far.

1. Better Streets

Many low-rise suburbs have only one-fifth or one-tenth of the housing per acre of some of the best loved-places with mid-rise terraces and mansion blocks, like Bloomsbury, Bath or Edinburgh’s New Town.

In the suburbs, so long as the back gardens are long enough, adding a few floors mainly only affects the other people living on that street. We can help local communities lead the way on adding more housing while improving their streets:

- Allow residents of a single stretch of street to pick a design code and vote by a two-thirds majority to allow more building on their street, subject to the design code – either extending or replacing existing buildings, according to what the design code allows.
- In many places, that can double the value of the original homeowner’s property, while adding up to five times more housing on each site, and making the street look better.
- It is just a permission, not a requirement. Each homeowner can decide when to build, or team up with others or a small builder, or just sell to someone who wants to do the work.
- Listed building protection remains.
- Heights should be limited to five or six storeys, as can be found in many Georgian or Victorian buildings, with other rules to protect the neighbours, covering issues such as overshadowing and houses on street corners.
- Contributions could be taken from stamp duty on sales, or via other means, to pay to improve the street, for social housing contributions and for additional infrastructure.
- The growth is organic so the local authority has time to react.
- The street length is defined at each end by a crossroads or the end of the street.

2. Better Blocks

Building within one block in a city, bounded by four streets or more, mainly affects only the residents of that block.

- Allow residents of each single city block to vote by a two-thirds majority to set a design code to specify what additional housing should be allowed within their block, including requirements as to gardens, roof terraces and green roofs to ensure no net loss of green space.
- The front façades of the houses and the land in front of them must remain unchanged, so that residents living opposite on the street are unaffected.
● Any developer using the new permission is required to generously compensate a
neighbour on the block who would be negatively affected.
● Angled lines upwards from each street around the block, in a pyramid shape, define
the maximum height that can be reached, to protect residents on other blocks from
overshadowing.
● Contributions could be taken from stamp duty on sales, or via other means, to pay to
improve the street, for social housing contributions and for additional infrastructure.
The growth is organic so the local authority has time to react.
● Listed buildings remain protected.

3. Better Countryside

Many parishes would be happy to allow more well-designed high-quality housing to meet
local needs next to the village, but are prevented by policies of higher authorities.

● Allow each parish to select a design code and allocate land for housing adjacent to
the village.
● The parish may impose any conditions it wishes on that new development, including
a requirement to fund more social housing, to contribute to parish funds, and/or to
contribute to raise the energy efficiency of existing village homes, to help the
environment.
● Strict environmental standards should be imposed on the new homes built.
● Each new home must be at least 500 metres away from any other parish.
● Developers are required to generously compensate any resident who is affected.

4. Housing Innovation Unit

The Housing Ministry has the challenge of finding out what works, when there is constant
change of Ministers and political turmoil, with priorities changing all the time.

The NHS’s NICE is a world leader in using scientific trials (‘RCTs’) to test what works. The
Education Endowment Foundation is now a world leader in trials to see what works in
education. But the Housing Ministry has not conducted any randomised controlled trials in
housing since it was created.

We need a new Innovation Unit with the mission and the powers to experiment to see what
works, beyond short political horizons, in partnership with local authorities and using a
win-win approach. It should have power to:

● Agree trials with willing local authorities to ensure funding so that they benefit from,
rather than suffering net costs from, new developments in their area
● Change planning law within a local area, with the consent of that local authority.
● Conduct scientific randomised controlled trials, with the consent of each local
authority involved.