

SIR KEIR STARMER

Keir Starmer: We will launch a golden era of building

The prime minister says ending the housing crisis is the key to improving the country's prosperity

Sir Keir Starmer
Thursday December 05 2024, 8.30pm, The Times

Britain is in the grip of the worst housing crisis in living memory. For too long, the country has been held to ransom by the blockers and bureaucrats who have stopped the country building, choked off growth and driven prices through the roof. They're suffocating the aspirations of working families and obscuring the future of our country.

Those days are over. Our manifesto was very clear — the only way to improve the nation's prosperity and the living standards of working people is sustained economic growth. We're determined to do this with stability, investment and reform.

Take our planning system — urgently in need of decisive reform after decades of becoming increasingly ruinous. House prices have gone through the roof as home-

Classification: Unrestricted

building has gone through the floor. Last year, the number of homes granted planning permission fell to the lowest for a decade, and the average home now costs eight times the annual earnings of an average worker.

It's no wonder home ownership for 19 to 29-year-olds has more than halved since 1990. And, disgustingly in 21st-century Britain, there are more than 150,000 children, the highest on record, in temporary accommodation, without a safe and permanent home. Since 2019, the number of our veterans that are homeless has increased by more than a quarter. This is a shame and a failure of our politics that my government will not tolerate.

It's not just housing — good homes need to be supported by good infrastructure. In the past 14 years, the Tories decided fewer than 60 infrastructure projects. We haven't built a reservoir in 30 years, not least because the time it takes to secure planning permission for major infrastructure projects has almost doubled in the past decade. Every road, pylon **and mast** — which connect people with opportunity — must jump through endless hoops, only to be opposed, dragged out, before eventually, if lucky, approved. That's how we ended up with the absurd spectacle of HS2 building a tunnel for bats that cost £100 million.

Generations before us built the infrastructure the entire nation was proud of — from civic buildings to train stations, hospitals to schools. So we will introduce a new golden era of building. That's why we're fast-tracking 150 planning decisions on major infrastructure by the end of parliament, more than double those decided in the previous parliament. We'll build the schools, the hospitals, the railways and roads, the towns and villages, that will shape our national landscape for years to come and fuel growth in every region and nation.

And we are reforming our planning system to fast-track more houses. We have set out a milestone to build 1.5 million safe and decent homes in England this

Classification: Unrestricted

parliament. And we will deliver the biggest wave of social homes in a generation. That's hugely ambitious — I won't pretend otherwise.

But this government's aim isn't to continue our path of managed decline, suggesting easy targets we know we can deliver to boast of our success while people continue to struggle. The entire point of this goal is to throw down a gauntlet — it's a challenge for the government, Whitehall, housebuilders, councils and everyone else to stretch ourselves to the max to meet the scale of the challenge we face.

Because I do worry that we've lost sight of this in our country. I know, with trust in politics so low, the public are sceptical of promises made by politicians. And who can blame them, after years of inaction by successive Tory governments. But that can't be an excuse for low expectations and easy ambitions, a culture that isn't brave enough to even try for fear of failure. I know some councils have come out this week to challenge our plans for housing reform. I always knew there would be resistance to our planning reform. Let me say this — I won't shy away from this argument. In fact, I welcome it.

Where there are blockers putting the brakes on, it's a sign you are delivering real change. And change is what the British people voted for this summer — a government that is willing to take on the obstacles and break down the barriers that prevent us from reaching our full potential. We have wasted no time in making important changes to put UK armed forces at the front of the queue for homes.

That is what our plan for change, which I announced yesterday, is all about. These are milestones that won't just set us a direction of travel, but push us hard to get there.

As well as 1.5 million new homes, we're committing to better living standards, to put more money in people's pockets. We'll end hospital backlogs, meeting the

Classification: Unrestricted

NHS standard of 92 per cent of patients in England waiting no longer than 18 weeks for elective treatment. We'll put police back on the beat, with 13,000 additional neighbourhood police. We'll give children the best start in life, with a record percentage of five-year-olds in England ready to learn when they start school. And finally, we'll secure home-grown energy, keeping bills down, improving energy independence and creating good jobs, with at least 95 per cent of low-carbon generation by 2030.

I expect the public to hold us accountable to these milestones. Our success won't just be in delivery, it will be in the change people can see and feel in your lives, restored trust in politics and hope for the future of our country.

We'll inject ambition back into Britain. Let's get on with building that better future.

Classification: Unrestricted