# Conservatives plan bold overhaul of London’s planning policy to accelerate brownfield development



The Conservative Party has pledged to rewrite London’s planning strategy if their candidate is elected mayor, aiming to unlock tens of thousands of new homes across the capital. According to the Conservatives, this overhaul of the London Plan—a development blueprint crafted by the mayor that guides housing, workplaces, transport, and open space policies—would clear the way for significant new housing development on brownfield land, potentially opening 16,800 acres for building.

The Conservatives argue that the current Labour mayor, Sadiq Khan, has failed to meet housebuilding targets, contributing to soaring property prices and reduced affordability for Londoners. In a speech at the Conservative Party Conference, shadow housing secretary Sir James Cleverly emphasised the need for a Tory mayor to "get a grip" on the housing crisis by prioritising brownfield sites near transport links, job opportunities, and economic hubs, citing successful precedents like Canary Wharf and the Olympic Park. He called for cutting through what he described as excessive regulation and for adopting a more permissive approach to housing that balances delivery with aesthetics, rejecting the notion that new homes must be low-rise sprawl or unpopular tower blocks.

However, the broader context of London’s housing policy reveals significant challenges beyond party lines. The London Assembly, in early 2025, urged the mayor not to compromise the Green Belt to meet housing targets, noting that an ambitious annual target approaching 88,000 new homes might require looking beyond brownfield sites alone. The assembly recommended shifting from blunt unit-based targets to more nuanced housing-type targets that better address social and affordable housing needs while calling for incentives to speed up the construction of approved projects.

Complicating matters, Mayor Sadiq Khan announced plans in May 2025 to build on some parts of the Green Belt, a move signaling a break from traditional protections around these areas. Khan framed this policy shift as a necessary response to London’s unprecedented housing demand, potentially requiring up to a million new homes over the next decade. His approach involves the selective release of lower-quality or less accessible Green Belt land near transport infrastructure to facilitate new affordable housing projects. While this plan has garnered support from some housing experts and politicians as a pragmatic step, it has also drawn criticism from environmental campaigners and London Conservatives, with the latter branding it a "complete betrayal" of prior commitments to preserve the Green Belt.

This evolving debate echoes the national government's 2024 announcement of a wide-ranging reform of the planning system aimed at building 1.5 million new homes in five years. The reforms emphasise prioritising brownfield development but also require local authorities to review Green Belt boundaries when necessary, backed by financial support and ministerial oversight to enforce compliance.

Khan's strategy builds on an earlier significant overhaul he introduced in 2017, which removed outdated density limits and set a 50% affordable housing target for new developments, simultaneously promoting growth for smaller builders and protecting green spaces. Despite these measures, the ongoing pressure to reconcile housing targets, affordability, and environmental preservation ensures London's planning strategy remains a contentious and politically charged issue ahead of the forthcoming mayoral election.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/conservatives-pledge-to-rewrite-londons-planning-strategy-if-tory-mayor-elected/a782099918.html), [[4]](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-rips-up-old-planning-rules)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/conservatives-pledge-to-rewrite-londons-planning-strategy-if-tory-mayor-elected/a782099918.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/london-assembly-press-releases/mayor-london-urged-not-use-green-belt-meet-housing-targets)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/09/sadiq-khan-to-announce-plans-to-build-houses-on-london-green-belt), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwy73n9kxyjo)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-announces-planning-overhaul-help-meet-15-million-new-homes-target-2024-12-12/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-rips-up-old-planning-rules), [[1]](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/conservatives-pledge-to-rewrite-londons-planning-strategy-if-tory-mayor-elected/a782099918.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/conservatives-pledge-to-rewrite-londons-planning-strategy-if-tory-mayor-elected/a782099918.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/london-assembly-press-releases/mayor-london-urged-not-use-green-belt-meet-housing-targets> - In February 2025, the London Assembly urged the Mayor of London to collaborate with the government to ensure that London's Green Belt is not compromised to meet new housing targets. The Assembly expressed concerns that the target of 87,992 new homes per year might not be achievable solely on brownfield sites and noted that the Greater London Authority had indicated that releasing Green Belt land appeared unavoidable given changes to national policy. The motion called for the Mayor to lobby the government to ensure housing targets are deliverable on brownfield land and to replace blanket unit-based targets with housing-type targets, such as habitable room targets. Additionally, the Assembly advocated for measures to incentivise and expedite the construction of schemes with planning permission, including social, accessible, and affordable housing projects.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/09/sadiq-khan-to-announce-plans-to-build-houses-on-london-green-belt> - In May 2025, Mayor Sadiq Khan announced plans to build on parts of London's Green Belt, marking a significant shift in housing policy aimed at addressing the capital's housing crisis. Khan stated that the scale of the challenge, which could require about 1 million new homes in the next decade, necessitated breaking longstanding taboos. The proposal involved strategically releasing low-quality or inaccessible Green Belt land near transport links to provide hundreds of thousands of new affordable homes. While the plan received support from some political and housing sector figures, it also faced criticism from nature campaigners concerned about the potential loss of parks and green spaces.
4. <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-rips-up-old-planning-rules> - In November 2017, Mayor Sadiq Khan announced a major overhaul of London's planning rules to boost the number of homes built near town centres and transport hubs. The new draft London Plan removed outdated density limits, encouraging developers to maximise housing density on sites near public transport. The plan also introduced a 50% affordable housing target for all new developments and aimed to make a stronger contribution to ambitious housing targets while protecting the Green Belt. The strategy emphasised good design and aimed to stimulate growth for small and medium-sized builders in the capital.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-announces-planning-overhaul-help-meet-15-million-new-homes-target-2024-12-12/> - In December 2024, the UK government announced a major overhaul of its planning system to achieve a target of building 1.5 million new homes in the next five years. Prime Minister Keir Starmer emphasised the need to address the housing crisis, citing the current planning system as a barrier to growth. The new reforms prioritised building on previously developed 'brownfield' sites, and councils were required to review Green Belt boundaries to meet housing targets. Local authorities had 12 weeks to provide housebuilding plans or face ministerial intervention. The government allocated £100 million to support councils, especially in high housing demand areas.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwy73n9kxyjo> - In May 2025, Mayor Sadiq Khan announced plans to 'actively explore' building on parts of London's Green Belt to address the capital's housing crisis. Khan stated that current rules prohibiting development on Green Belt land were 'wrong, out-of-date and simply unsustainable' given the increasing demand for housing. The proposal involved considering the release of some stretches of Green Belt land if conditions on affordable housing, energy efficiency, transport links, and access to green spaces were met. The plan faced criticism from the London Conservatives, who described it as a 'complete betrayal' of the mayor's previous pledges to protect the Green Belt.