

Connectivity: an integrated approach to housing and infrastructure

The Northern Position

Homes need infrastructure; new infrastructure needs homes to support growth. It works both ways. Yet in a study of twelve of England's fastest growing city regions, the RTPI has recently reported that over half of new homes are still being built in locations that are further than an easy walk or cycle ride from a railway/metro station¹.

As well as aligning housing policies to Local Industrial Strategies to promote growth, housing and infrastructure investment should be planned in conjunction with each other. We're not alone in making the case for improved connectivity: The National Infrastructure Commission has called for better co-ordination of infrastructure and planning to support growth. The publication of Transport for the North's 30-year Strategic Transport Plan is imminent, and while solutions for localities will inevitably differ, it is now time for a similar long term pan-regional strategy to be drawn up around housing.

Our Ask

The establishment of a powerful pan-northern body as a united voice for the North, charged with ensuring that housing and infrastructure are planned together over the long term and over a wider spatial area. The new cross-sector advisory body would bring together: Transport for the North, Homes England, local authorities, LEPs and housing associations with powers to scrutinise existing plans, issue guidance and make recommendations to Metro Mayors, local authority leaders and Ministers across a range of departments, to ensure that the potential for growth is maximised across the North.

Potential impact

A pan-Northern body advocating for the needs of the North across Government departments will ensure the North's potential is recognised as a whole, whilst providing a framework for localities to plan to meet the specific needs of their communities.

It would also be in a position to influence Government priorities over the allocation of investment, to support the delivery of the North's economic growth targets. For example it could highlight the negative impact of the recent Government announcement regarding the geographical targeting of five Homes England funding streams. This will see 80% of available investment allocated to areas of 'highest affordability pressure', defined by the ratio of house prices to household incomes. This backward looking measure will allocate investment on the basis of the historic imbalance between supply and demand, rather than strategic planning for growth informed by the Industrial Strategy. Initial analysis carried out by Key Cities finds that this will skew investment, with only 4 out of 72 Northern Local Authorities able to access the 80% of funding, the rest attempting to access the remaining 20%². This could undermine the delivery of ambitious transport strategies for the North, such as the Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2, as well as Local Industrial Strategies for LEP areas.

¹ RTPI (2018) 'Location of Development'

² Key Cities (2018) 'The Geographical Spread of Recent Homes England Grants'