

BUILDING ENOUGH HOMES FOR SCOTLAND

Activity Report 2015

improving living in scotland



HOMES FOR SCOTLAND

With November heralding both the launch of our manifesto for next year's Scottish Parliament election and the publication of a major new report demonstrating the wide-ranging economic and social benefits which home building offers, Homes for Scotland (HFS) has made two important moves in entrenching home building at the top of the public policy agenda in Scotland.

These two key documents bring into crystal clear focus the moves that we are making to re-establish the importance of housing to Scotland's future success and have the rationale for all of that recognised and understood by all political parties.

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Chairman's Message

Although housing is a devolved matter, the momentum began to build with the UK general election, during which it was a big talking point south of the border. We were quick to build on that development. Now augmenting recent progress, we will not allow any facile sense of optimism to eclipse the stark reality that our country remains firmly in the grip of a housing crisis, with just 15,562 homes built in 2014 – a 40% drop on 2007 levels – as need continues to grow.

In order to counter this decline and ensure that we provide this and future generations with **enough homes of all tenures in the right locations**, we believe that politicians in Scotland must act **now** to convert this aspiration into a reality: especially if we are to see a return to pre-recession levels of activity by the end of the next Scottish Parliament, which is the key call in our manifesto.

Our manifesto details the measures required to achieve that outcome, including the critical need to structure the successor scheme for Help to Buy (Scotland) so that it delivers the biggest possible market impact and helps to meet the home ownership aspirations of the majority of Scots.

The performance of Scotland's planning system also remains a major area of focus, with the time taken to decide major housing developments now taking longer than ever at over 64 weeks. Consequently, we wholeheartedly welcomed the September announcement that an independent panel had been tasked with undertaking a "root and branch" review.

We not only hope that this will finally result in the changes that are necessary to deliver an efficient and responsive system that encourages and facilitates development, but we are also gathering member insight and encouraging active involvement to help inform the panel and to make sure it addresses our concerns and suggested solutions.

In closing this message, and recognising all that I have learned in my first of a three-year tenure as Chair of HFS, I wish to extend my gratitude and personal thanks to Chief Executive Philip Hogg, who will be leaving the organisation over the coming months to take up a senior role within the home building industry. His guidance and commitment to raising the industry's profile means we are in a strong position as we move forward into a new chapter. He leaves a sound legacy, a very able and well-motivated team and a grateful chairman.

As for the future, your full support and involvement will continue to be vital to ensuring that home building is given the fulsome prominence it deserves, so that Scotland's people have access to a full range of quality housing options which meet their diverse needs and aspirations.

Jim Mather
Chairman
December 2015



Planning

Since the arrival of new Director of Planning Nicola Barclay in May, the team has worked hard to develop a fresh perspective on the planning function of HFS.

We have deliberately changed the conversation that we're having with local and national government. This includes talking about the art of the possible and getting engaged earlier in the process to shape better outcomes. A number of workstreams have developed which go above and beyond the day-to-day responses to Development Plan consultations and housing land audits.

We are working closely with the Scottish Government's housing team on their Joint Housing Delivery Plan and are also an instrumental part of the Land and Planning sub-group.

In addition, the planning team has highlighted the emerging challenges relating to Land Reform to HFS members and set up subsequent workshops and discussion forums to enable direct engagement with the Scottish Government on this important topic. We continue to feed into this process as it takes shape.

We have also been involved in the Planning Advice workshops set up by the Scottish Government. These are designed to consider how the current system can better link the delivery of infrastructure to that of housing and we will continue to evaluate progress when the draft Planning Advice emerges in January.

With the review of Scotland's planning system now underway, a Short Term Working Party has been set up to lead the HFS response. Workshops have fed into the drafting of our written response and oral evidence will be given in January.

The team has taken every opportunity to open up discussion around the benefits of home building in Scotland, speaking at numerous conferences, being interviewed on radio and in the press and sitting on various panels.

With a completely new team now in place since this time last year, we have seized the opportunity to create a fresh, energised focus for change. This has been welcomed by our members and those stakeholders with whom we regularly engage.

We look forward to building upon this momentum as we move forward and seek to address the challenges which 2016 will bring.



Provision of infrastructure
is a Scotland-wide issue.

Policy

It has been another busy year for the policy team, supported by the expert guidance of members across the various Technical & Environment Advisory Groups, Housing Policy and Customer Relations Task Group.

Harrison Gibson, a participant from the first year of the "Get into Home Building" pre-apprenticeship programme picked up the Young Achiever award at the Prince's Trust Scotland Celebrate Success Awards.



Help to Buy (Scotland) has again been a key focus, with extensive engagement with the Scottish Government on the management of the main scheme, launch of the Small Developers' scheme and arrangements for the three-year successor announced in September. We have set out the industry's aspirations for the future of the initiative and await further announcements following the outcome of the UK Spending Review.

Alongside this, we held a roundtable with Cabinet Secretary Alex Neil in May, exploring issues facing smaller home builders and have set out relevant asks in our manifesto.

We provided advice to members on the implications of the EU Mortgage Credit Directive and also ensured that the Scottish Government understands the implications of the Directive in terms of home builders' future ability to offer shared equity products.

Technical issues were also at the forefront of policy activity. We liaised with Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) software providers to stress the importance of the early availability of tools for the 2015 Standards and assisted with the delivery of a number of free SAP workshops to enable discussion on the various options available to meet the new regulations. We also continued our working relationship with Scottish Water, which is critical as we seek to address the challenges experienced by the industry on asset provision and adoption. And attention has also focused on the technical constraints hampering home building, with a "multi-utilities" survey undertaken to help build a comprehensive picture and highlight core issues.

The findings of our "Research into Mainstreaming Offsite Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) in House Building" were published in September, outlining the drivers, barriers and perceptions surrounding the use of offsite construction and detailing a number of recommendations which could help support the delivery of new homes.

On the skills and training front, as well as developing proposals for a site managers' training programme and introducing a student award intended to attract future talent to careers within the industry, our "Get into Home Building" pre-apprenticeship programme with The Prince's Trust was expanded with 24 young people securing an apprenticeship and others finding alternative training or employment opportunities.

Throughout the year we also supported the work of the PRS Champion, the PRS Working Group and its three sub-groups, including helping to shape responses to the second consultation on proposals for the Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Bill and the Bill itself.

Looking ahead, the HFS manifesto sets out our policy ambitions and will provide a framework for the year ahead, putting us on the front foot in seeking to shape the agenda and ensure we are building enough homes for Scotland.

Consultation responses during the year included:

- the impact of the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax
- the Consumer Code for Home Builders
- the Commission on Local Tax Reform
- the role of the Scottish Futures Trust in supporting innovation
- the Lobbying Transparency Bill
- the Scottish Government's draft Place Standard

Communications

As ever, our communications team played a crucial role in bringing the issues being addressed by our planning and policy teams to the attention of members, media and other stakeholders throughout the year, taking every opportunity to highlight the fundamental importance of housing to achieving the First Minister's goal of "improving opportunity for all" and the fairer society we all want to see.

With the performance of the planning system and the importance of continued support in the form of a successor Help to Buy (Scotland) scheme key to these ambitions, these themes have been a major focus over the last year.

In addition to over 35 news alerts, 40 press releases, numerous press interviews, various letters to editors and communications to politicians at all levels, we also delivered a record-breaking annual lunch attended by some 900 senior industry representatives and guests, and a highly successful annual conference in November attracting some 150 delegates.

With the conference acting as the launchpad for our "Building enough Homes for Scotland" manifesto, which will support our campaigning and lobbying work in the run-up to the Scottish Parliament elections in May 2016, the development and delivery of this important document has been a core communications project with members also being encouraged to get involved by way of their own activities.

The team is also keeping the pressure up on our politicians to make sure they fully understand the wide-ranging benefits of increasing home building levels across all tenures.



Conference delegates posed with pledge boards to show their support for our calls to end the country's housing crisis.

Homes for Scotland and our member organisations stand ready to work in partnership with government at all levels and of all persuasions to ensure our country has enough homes of the right types in the right locations to meet the diverse housing needs of our growing population.

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