

Planning in London – Issue 137, April–June 2026

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Key Themes & Highlights

London’s housing delivery crisis

The issue’s overarching theme is an industry in crisis. Tim Craine (Molior) reveals only 5,000 new homes are being built annually in London against a mayoral target of 88,000, with private housing starts down 84% and Build-to-Rent completions forecast to reach zero by 2029. Berkeley Homes has halted land acquisition, citing regulatory costs and market uncertainty. The editors, Paul Finch and Lee Mallett all argue that ‘viability’ – the system of charging development for affordable housing, infrastructure and environmental obligations – has collapsed in most of the capital, with only central London remaining marginally viable. Hugo Owen traces the root cause to the 1991 Planning Compensation Act, which began transferring state infrastructure responsibilities onto individual planning consents; every subsequent Act has added further weight without removing any earlier obligations.

Planning reform: the new NPPF

The new draft NPPF (December 2025 consultation) is the issue’s main policy focus. James Harris (Lichfields) describes it as the most coherent national planning policy in decades: local plans become shorter and more spatially focused (30-month delivery target); minimum density standards apply near stations (40–50 dph); a stronger presumption in favour of sustainable development; explicit ‘tripwire’ grounds for refusal including inefficient land use; and a clear separation between plan-making and decision-taking. However, speakers at the LP&DF conference were largely sceptical the reforms go far enough, questioning whether viability testing moved to plan stage will remain relevant in a volatile market, and noting that developers are not building primarily because of weak demand, not lack of permissions.

Suburban densification and new towns

Neil Deely (Metropolitan Workshop) presented the 'Homestead' model – compact clusters of homes around shared gardens at 50–55 dph – as a practical approach to delivering housing in suburbs without triggering Building Safety Act requirements. The RTPI-commissioned Futureproof New Towns report (Parham & Pritchard) draws on international examples from Almere, Freiburg, Curitiba and elsewhere to argue new towns must be flexible, mixed-use, transport-integrated and community-led – not the rigid, car-dependent monocultures of the post-war generation. Francis Truss (Carter Jonas) warns the government's new towns ambition will stall without specific loan and guarantee commitments of around £0.5bn per town channelled through the National Housing Bank.

Heritage, health and resilience

Three features address planning's wider social and environmental role. Grosvenor's 'Retrofit or Ruin' report (reviewed by Francis Maude) proposes a package of legislative and policy reforms to make sustainability retrofit of listed and historic buildings faster and cheaper, potentially saving 30% of the UK's Sixth Carbon Budget per annum from historic building stock. Beackon & Chang (NHS Property Services) find that Health Impact Assessments submitted with planning applications are consistently too superficial, too late, and poorly equipped to assess healthcare infrastructure demand. Ramboll's Rayman Bains argues that planning reform must embed climate resilience as a core economic infrastructure priority, not an environmental add-on.

Procedural changes to watch

From 1 April 2026 the expedited written representations appeal procedure extends to almost all planning appeals (94.7%), meaning appellants can no longer submit new evidence at appeal stage – applications must be 'appeal-ready' from the outset (Simon Ricketts). Gateway 3 approvals for high-rise buildings are running significantly over the statutory eight-week timetable, with over a third of 158 applications last year taking more than three months (Vijay Bange). Andy Rogers makes a case for the underused Permission in Principle procedure as a simpler, faster route to test principle before committing to costly technical reports.