

‘Devolution key to housing crisis’

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DEVOLUTION FOR the regions is going to be a key driver for helping cities to boost their house building rates, according to the country's newest – and Yorkshire's only – metro mayor.

Dan Jarvis, Sheffield City Region mayor, said: “Devolving power and funding to the right tier of local, regional and national Government means that decisions can be taken at the right level.”

He said the current formula for calculating housing need “favours London and the South-East as it prioritises schemes where homes will be sold for higher prices.”

“Instead, funds should be allo-

cated based on need, rather than straightforward financial gain,” he said.

“This would help to rebalance the North-South divide and give communities within the Sheffield City Region a fairer deal.”

Mr Jarvis was speaking as new analysis of official Government data revealed huge discrepancies in housing supply across some of Yorkshire's cities and rural districts.

While large metropolitan centres like Leeds and Sheffield limp towards achieving housing supply rates at the same pace as they were before the recession, some outlying areas are exceeding tar-



gets by huge numbers. However areas with longer standing devolution deals are already reaping some benefits – like the West Midlands, which received a pledge of £350m to help boost house building in the spring budget.

Meanwhile, the housing picture across some of Yorkshire's more rural areas is also a mixed one.

Richmondshire – which only needs to build 14 homes a year according to Government estimates in the BBC data – is managing to build 11 times that many homes on average, giving it the highest performance in the country for net additions to its stock.

However there are often large differences between Government and council figures.

York Central MP Rachael Maskell, inset, said a politically-driven reluctance to build on the green belt – and instead focus on “little scraps of brownfield space” and on luxury apartments rather than family homes – were major factors in individual areas’ building successes and failures.

“We need to make sure we build the right kind of homes,” she said.

“We have a site with 1,000 homes, the British Sugar site, which has just three per cent social housing, when we have got real social housing need.

“Developers are using and abusing the freedoms they have got in order to achieve the profits

they want. (We should be) turning it on its head, saying ‘what is the local housing need?’ – which clearly these figures are supposed to show – and then to build on that.”

Ms Maskell added: “Clearly policy isn't working because there are areas like York which are shamefully behind where they should be.

“But some authorities are turn-

ing a blind eye and are more concerned with addressing other agendas than actually saying we have a housing need.

“The way that it is showing itself is that we cannot recruit the skills that we need for our cities – care workers, nurses – because they can't afford to live here.

“So it's having a massive impact on services.”

Ms Maskell also worried about other negative impacts. “Not getting this equation right puts the economy in a negative spiral.

“None of us know what Brexit is going to do to any of that, but we absolutely need to think long-term planning.

“We need policy to be future proofed to make sure we are building for the future.”

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‘Massive failure to build in cities’

ANTHONY BREACH, analyst and housing lead at the Centre for Cities think tank, believes the housing crisis is really a crisis for our economically booming cities.

“There's been a massive failure to build enough housing in the cities where demand has been highest over the past 25 or 30 years, so building our way out of the crisis is the only option,” he said. “The housing crisis only really makes sense if you understand it from a city perspective.

“The number of people who want to live in these cities and experience that growth is very high but supply of housing has completely failed to keep up with that. The challenge is... How do you supply enough housing to support economic growth?”



Seaside resort building at twice the annual need

SCARBOROUGH

SCARBOROUGH IS building at twice the Government's assessment of its annual need, placing the seaside town third in the country in a list topped by another North Yorkshire area, Richmondshire.

The council's own local plan annual target – as defined in the source data for the latest analysis – was initially given as a range between 175 and 579, with even the lower end being higher than the Government's estimate. The authority has since updated its own target to 450 homes a year.

A spokesperson for the authority said success in house building was “dependent on more than just local planning”, adding that

the council's own projections “reflect the potential level of economic growth in our borough in coming years”.

Referring to the big discrepancy between the Government's and the local authority's evaluation of new homes needed, the council's spokesperson said: “We consider the aspirations that have shaped our Local Plan better reflect the housing pressures and demands faced.”

The new Potash mine for Sirius Minerals Plc and Scarborough Sports Village are all key developments, and affordable rural housing initiatives are central to housebuilding efforts, with an aim to “give more families with a local connection the opportunity to stay within their community”.



Political row over target to build 70,000 homes in city

LEEDS

IN LEEDS, the housing crisis has been defined in recent years by a political row over an initial council target to build 70,000 new homes by 2028.

The new analysis showed the city has been building around 2,230 new dwellings a year over the past decade, 84 per cent of current government annual estimates to 2026.

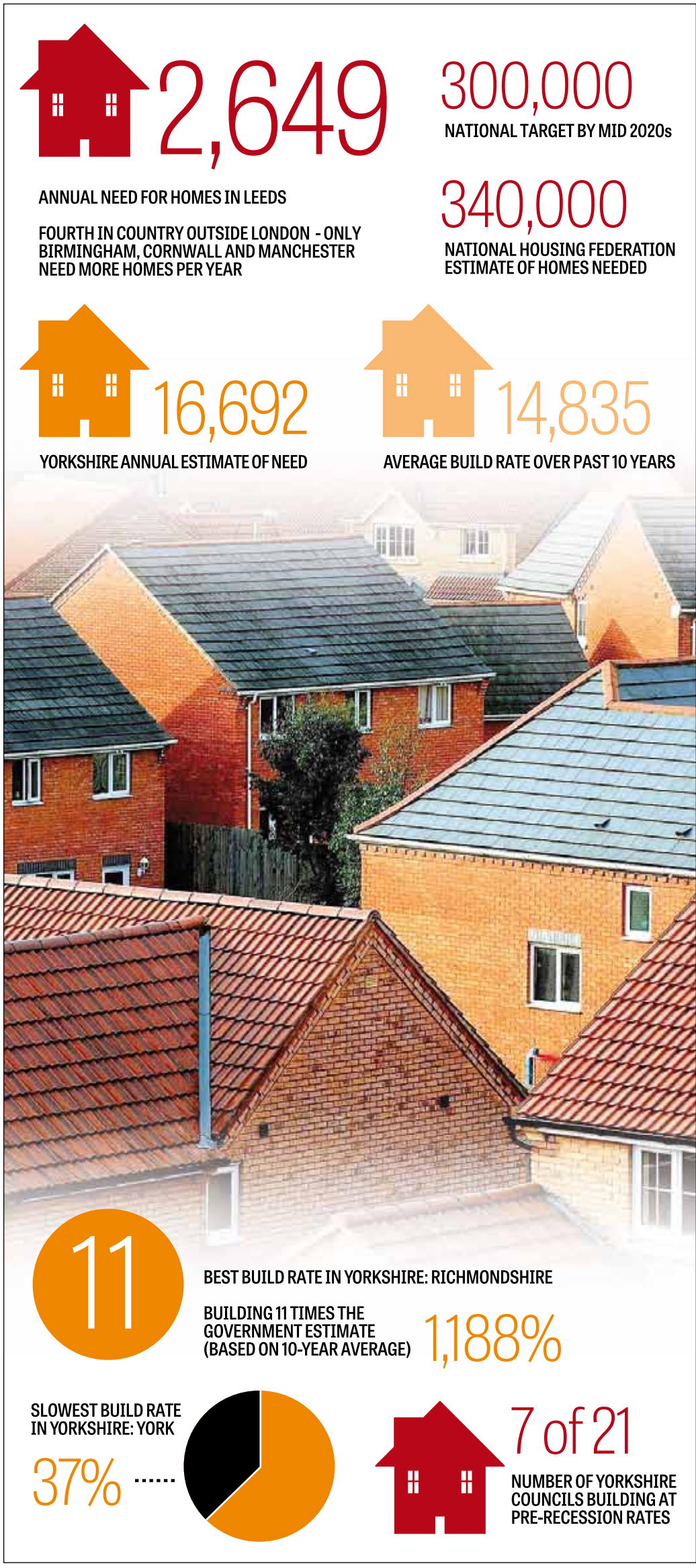
In pure numbers, Leeds is building the third highest number of houses per year in the country outside London.

Despite this, the city still has the fourth highest long term annual need outside London according to Government estimates, and the second highest

need in the whole country according to the city council's own assessments. The discrepancy between the two numbers (1,011) is also one of the biggest in the country.

Councillor Richard Lewis, cabinet member for regeneration, transport and planning, believes the current planning system itself – and our “fetishisation” and “politicisation” of the green belt – are the biggest problems.

“I think we need to sweep away the current planning system and come up with something that is radically different that enables people to have a democratic input,” he says. “Secondly, take away the cap on local authorities’ borrowing. Enable them to build.”



Authority challenges 37 per cent of estimate figures

YORK

THE BBC investigation found that York was building at 37 per cent of its Government estimate, a figure the local council has challenged.

York also has the highest overall percentage of green belt, heritage or otherwise protected land which is restricted for development, 82 per cent.

York Central Labour MP Rachael Maskell said she was “not surprised” by the findings, adding that social housing build rates in particular are lagging.

Official data shows that in 2007/08, York created 602 new homes. That number slumped in the post recession years in line with other areas, but hit an all time

low of just 69 homes in 2013/14, when other areas were beginning to recover. Build rates rose again in 2015/16 but then dropped again dramatically in 2016/17.

Councillor Helen Douglas, City of York Council executive member for housing, said build rates had actually risen dramatically over the last five years.

“We've granted planning permission for 8300 homes over the last 11 years, and our draft Local Plan provides space for another 20,000 across its lifetime – around 4,000 of which would be available as affordable to rent or buy,” she said.

“This is a complex national issue. We're taking significant action to overcome the really big challenges local authorities face.”



BBC's Shared Data Unit finds a mixed picture

SHEFFIELD

THE BBC Shared Data Unit's investigation found a mixed housing picture in Sheffield and its districts.

The city itself has the 12th highest annual housing need in the country in pure numbers, and its build rates have shot up in the last three years. However the data shows the city is still building at just 66 per cent of the Government annual assessment – although the picture is better in other parts of south Yorkshire, especially Doncaster.

“We're seeing real success stories across our region,” says Sheffield City Region mayor Dan Jarvis. “In Doncaster, an average of 1,133 new homes have been

built over the last three years, which is around double the Government's housing need calculation.

Targets for house-building were surpassed last year in Barnsley; in Rotherham numerous schemes are under development, and in Sheffield, 2,248 additional homes were delivered in 2016/17 – well above their target of 1,425. So while the housing shortage is a national crisis, it's a problem that, locally, we've been tackling well.

“Our housing figures are returning to the levels seen before the recession.

“But to do even better, our councils need to be given more powers, so decisions can be made at the right level.”

Experts say that overhaul of rules to meet needs is required

PLANNING

EXPERTS FROM across the housing policy and building sector agree that planning laws are in need of a major overhaul if the country is to bring housing supply in line with long term demand.

They also believe diversifying the market, taking the power out of the hands of the big developers and opening up the green belt could all be factors.

James Prestwich, head of policy, National Housing Federation, believes the Government is actually underestimating the numbers of homes the country needs long term.

“The research we have carried out suggests that there is a backlog of about four million homes in England alone, and in order to be

able to make up that backlog, we need to be building in the region of somewhere around 340,000 a year,” he said.

“It's been about 40 years or more since we last built enough homes to keep pace with demand.

“Housing Associations understand the scale of the issue – and they have an absolutely pivotal role in solving the housing crisis.”

For Andrew Dixon of the Federation of Master Builders, small sites and SME (small and medium enterprises) builders are crucial to solving the crisis – but he says the Brexit exodus of EU workers is already causing concern. He claims an outward flow of foreign workers

coupled with lack of skills at home could push the country towards a housing supply “cliff edge”.

And John Myers, inset, co-founder of the London YIMBY (Yes In My Back Yard) campaign, believes the answer lies in putting politics aside, empowering communities to build for themselves – and “pulling together as a nation to sort this mess”.

“This is a national emergency,” he said. “This should require a national effort on the scale of what we did after the Second World War.

“We just need to ramp things up and pull together as a nation because if we don't, this is just going to get worse and worse.”



Most of areas faring worst are in the capital

BUILDING RATES

NINE OF the 10 areas with the worst building rates – in terms of net additions of new homes – were in London.

Topping the table was Kingston Upon Thames, which is building just 16 per cent of the properties on average that it needs to meet long-term demand.

A spokesman for the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames said build rates had risen in the past three years, but also stressed the council had “never agreed” with current “artificial” ways of calculating housing need. The impact of Brexit on population growth was “not yet understood”, the authority added, claiming the Government's figures are “likely to be a significant overestimate”.

‘We are building housing market for the future’, Ministers claim

POLICY FRAMEWORK

MINISTERS TODAY reinforced their commitment to “building a housing market for the future”, insisting that recent build rates overall have actually hit a nine-year high.

In July, the Government published the latest revised version of its NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) – its planning rulebook – where new Housing and Communities Secretary James Brokenshire, inset, pledged to shift the focus onto building the right number of quality new homes in the right locations.

The plan also sets out a new way for councils to calculate the housing need of their local community.

Mr Brokenshire said at the time: “Fundamental to building

the homes our country needs is ensuring that our planning system is fit for the future.

“I am clear that quantity must never compromise the quality of what is built, and this is reflected in the new rules.”

Responding to the latest findings on varying regional build rates, a spokesman for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said: “This Government is committed to building a housing market fit for the future and 217,000 new homes were delivered in England last year.

“This is up 15 per cent on the previous year and the highest increase in nine years. We have also

set out an ambitious programme of reforms to boost housing supply – including planning reform and targeted investment to help us deliver an additional 300,000 properties a year by the mid-2020s.”

Under current policy, the UK Government does not set concrete house-building targets, but rather advises councils to set their own estimates based on their local plans.

However Mr Brokenshire's predecessor Sajid Javid had earlier threatened to start imposing strict targets on council areas which failed to deliver enough homes. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland set their own housing growth indicators.

