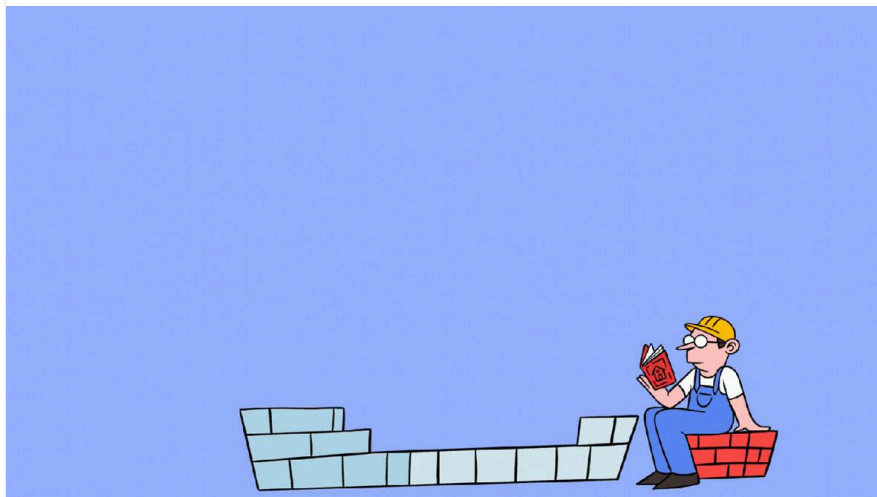


'Seismic' planning reforms could lead to 21,500 self-build homes a year

NEW

Thousands of self-builders and rural landowners are set to benefit from a rewrite of national policy that will free up small sites on village edges

**Martina Lees**

Thursday September 24 2026, 12.00pm, The Times

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Would you like to build your own home? Or do you have land to sell where another family could build theirs? Now you are much more likely to succeed, thanks to new planning reforms that make it easier to win permission for homes on small sites.

"It's pretty seismic. It doesn't really feel like people have properly woken up to it yet," says Charlie de Bono of LivedIn, a

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Last month, the government published the biggest rewrite of England's planning policy since 2012. It was a "start-again-with-a-blank-page, once-in-a-generation kind of rewrite" of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), according to Zack Simons, a planning barrister.

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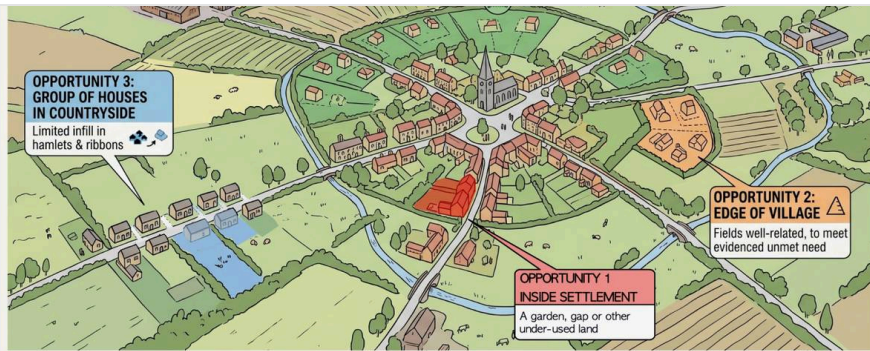
Media coverage focused on a "default yes" for new homes near railway stations, and a [victory for the Duke of Westminster](#) that will make it easier to insulate the nation's crumbling listed buildings — yet the changes go much further.

The new NPPF also makes it more likely for self-builders and landowners to get planning permission for homes on small sites. This particularly suits villages and smaller towns, which can grow gently by "one or a handful of homes at a time", De Bono says. It is how rural Britain has grown for centuries, rather than by big developers plonking hundreds of homes in the countryside.

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The types of sites where planning reforms will make it easier to build a self-build home

Nationally, it adds up to a big difference. England has about 5,500 smaller built-up areas with populations between 100 and 7,000, which LivedIn grouped by size using 2021 census data from the Office for National Statistics.



LivedIn developed 12 custom self-build homes on the edge of Ingoldisthorpe, Norfolk

“The assumptions are deliberately modest,” De Bono says. “If the new rules generate, on average, just one additional plot a year in a small village, three in an ordinary village and ten in a larger village or small town, that would produce about 21,500 plots a year.”

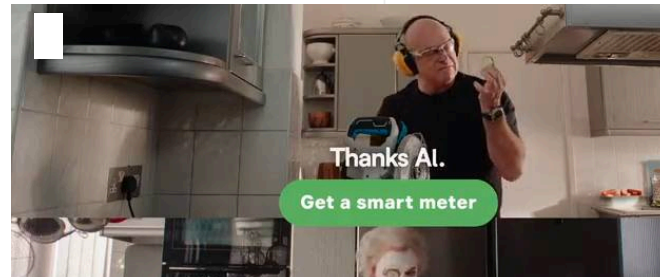
On average, it means these settlements would add one new home a year for every 175 existing ones.

So how do the changes work?

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Village edge plots

For self-builders and rural landowners, a new “default yes” for plots immediately outside villages, towns and cities is the reform that “is going to make the biggest difference”, De Bono says.

In the past it was very difficult to build on a field just outside a settlement boundary. Local councils usually drew a line around a built-up area and treated it as a hard divide, with homes beyond it heavily restricted.

Amy and Derek Hopkins are exhausted from a seven-year planning battle for three self-build homes directly outside the boundary of a large Hampshire village. They wanted to build a home where they could raise their two young daughters, and fund it by selling the other two plots to like-minded self-builders. Last year the family won on appeal but have since decided to sell all three plots. “Had the approval come sooner, we would have stayed and seen it through, but how long it’s all taken actually tainted it for us,” Derek, 42, says.

Under the new NPPF, “the line on the map is no longer necessarily decisive”, De Bono says. There is now a “presumption in favour of sustainable development” outside the village or town boundary. It tells councils that new homes “should be approved” as long as sites are “physically well-related” to the settlement.

The homes must also be genuinely needed. This is the case if the local council delivered less than 75 per cent of its target for new homes, or if it lacks a five-year supply of housing land.

Likewise, the decision is tipped in your favour if the council failed to permit enough self-build plots. More than [half of councils broke a law](#) requiring them to keep a register of people who want to commission their own home, and permit enough self-build plots to meet that demand within three years.

Most councils are failing their self-build duty

Over half of councils did not permit enough plots within three years to meet demand from their register of people who want to build their own home

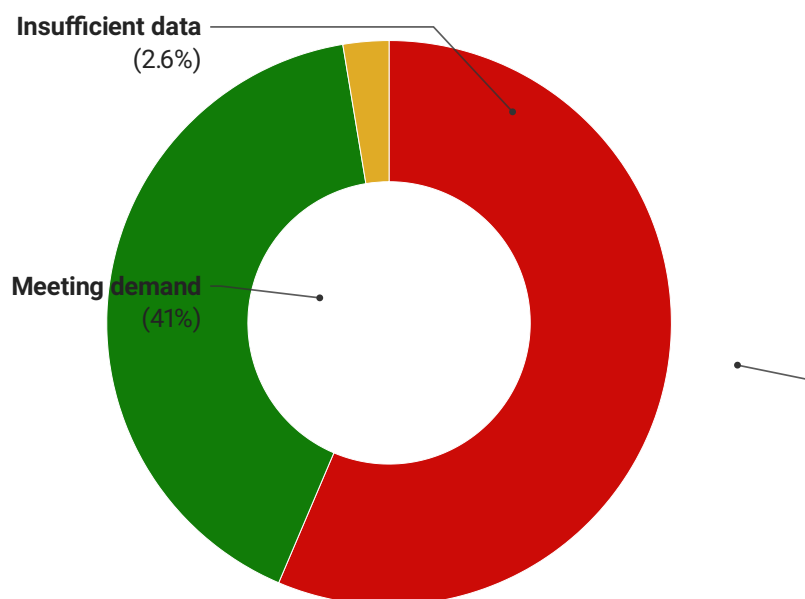


Chart: The Times and The Sunday Times • Source: MHCLG

These changes will open up more small sites like the one in Wiltshire where Rob Elkins, 44, created three homes in 2022: for his own young family, his parents and his business partner. “My

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Rob Elkins with his family during the construction of his three self-builds

The land straddled the boundary of Chippenham. They bought it from a big developer who “had angered every planning officer and local resident by forcing through” a consent for six homes, Elkins says. The site came saddled with a long list of planning conditions that made the houses unprofitable to build, plus “a badger, knotweed and a huge, very beautiful old tree on its last legs”. But because the principle was established that homes could be built there, they had a “much higher degree of certainty” that they would win and pressed ahead.



I love waking up here in the mornings,” he says. “It makes us all so happy.”

Not just buyers

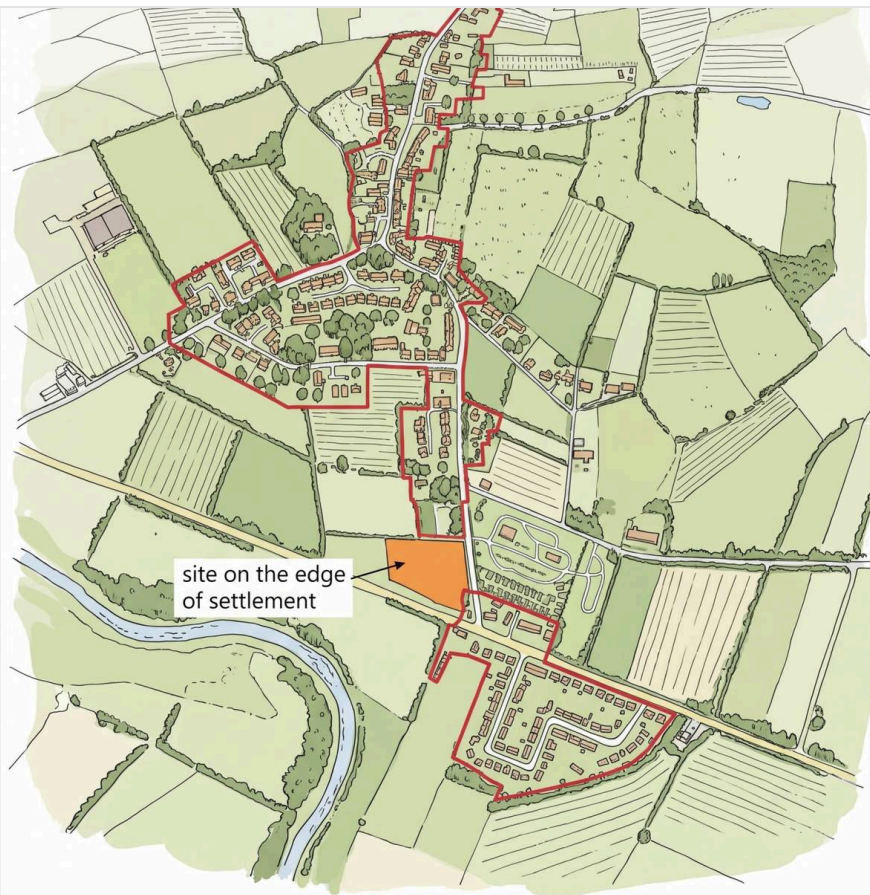
Landowners can benefit, too. Kevin Hird and his wife, Alison, live with their 16-year-old daughter in a converted Victorian pub on the edge of the village of Scotton, near Knaresborough, North Yorkshire. They wondered what to do with 3.5 acres of paddock at the bottom of their garden, but did not want it to become another one “of these large cookie-cutter housing estates”, says Hird, 54, a commercial lighting designer.

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Kevin Hird and his wife, Alison, who are selling their land in Scotton, North Yorkshire, to self-builders

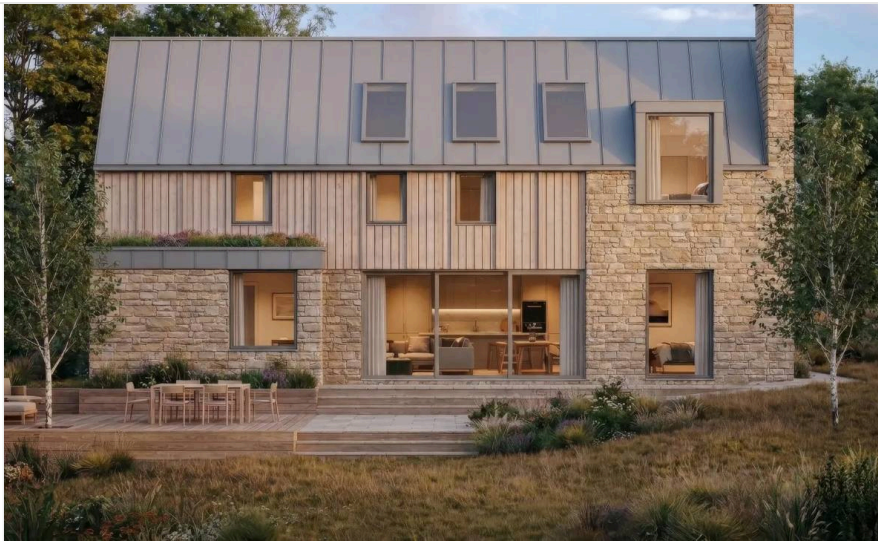
“There’s no point being coy about it — the reason anyone sells land is to make some money,” he adds. “But we wanted to do something that would be in keeping with our village.”



The site of the self-builds on the edge of Scotton

Planning for 23 affordable homes was refused in 2022. After reading about self-builds in *The Times*, Hird applied for permission in principle for five self-build homes with LivedIn's help — and won last year.

The grounds on which Hird won are “strikingly similar” to the new rules, De Bono says. Although the site falls just outside Scotton's boundary, it is right next to existing buildings. The council also fell short of both its housing land and self-build targets.



One of the proposed designs for five self-build plots on the edge of Scotton

Hird says small developments like this allow the village “to grow a little bit and have new families come in. Villages that just stagnate — it’s not really the best thing.”

On the edge of the picturesque Chiltern Hills, Spencer Chapman, 60, grew up on the stud farm where his parents bred racehorses, and carried on the family tradition. Now they have fewer horses, so Chapman tried to develop a field he no longer needed immediately outside the village. Proposals for ten homes, and then three homes, were both deemed too big. But he won permission in principle for something radically smaller: one self-build house with stables and paddocks, which he plans to sell to a self-builder.

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The paddock belonging to Spencer Chapman, which he plans to sell to a self-builder



A possible design for the self-build home to be built on the paddock

“I think the self-build way is a nice way forward because you’re getting more unique properties than the boilerplate of getting a developer to come in and build,” Chapman says.

Besides village edges, the reforms pave the way for self-build on four more types of land:

New self-build opportunities

- **Inside settlements** Before, the NPPF focused its default “yes” on previously developed brownfield land inside built-up areas. Now it applies to a garden, gap or underused land in a town or village too, as long as the benefits are not “substantially outweighed” by harmful effects.

start on the front foot.

- **Reusing existing buildings** This used to be encouraged only inside settlements; now you can improve or replace buildings in the countryside too.
- **Near stations** For the first time there is strong support for new homes within about 800m of well-connected railway stations — usually with at least two trains an hour in one direction to commuter areas. This applies even on small sites, and even in the green belt where many new buildings are banned.

[Livedin.co.uk](#) has an automated checker for initial assessments of self-build sites

Times readers can get free tickets to the Homebuilding & Renovating Show, Oct 30-Nov 1 at Harrogate Convention Centre, [homebuildingshow.co.uk/the-times](#)

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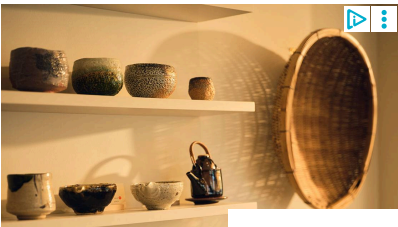
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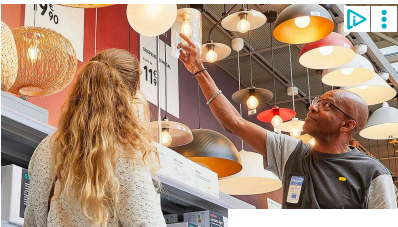
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S

S Coxon

2 HOURS AGO

Good. As the article says, this is how villages have evolved since year dot - and small number of homes designed and built by people who actually want to live in them, instead of a huge number of identikit Barratt shoe boxes.

Reply · ☆ Recommend (12) · Share

P

Peter Chadwick

56 MINUTES AGO

No it isn't. Small villages of population 100 have not developed 3 houses a year every year. Otherwise they wouldn't still be small villages.

Reply · ☆ Recommend (3) · Share

1 reply

A

A Stevens

2 HOURS AGO

At last! I don't want to buy the overpriced dross thrown up by the contemptible volume housebuilders. But equally, I won't give up years of my life to go through the planning nightmare of a self-build in the current climate, even if I have the money. There has to be a better way!
(Edited)

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J

J Maxwell

44 MINUTES AGO

We had a planning application refused on grounds of isolation despite being just 1.2km from the town and with other houses within a stone's throw and no objections from any person or agency. Both council and planning inspectorate reasons for refusal were factually inaccurate and there is no right...**See more** (Edited)

Reply · ☆ Recommended (0) · Share

H

Howard Jones

2 HOURS AGO

That's all very well if it is as it is described. However it is totally undermined by another part of the NPPF which

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P Philip Iszatt ...

1 MINUTE AGO

With only 3% of the UK built on its hard to argue that there should be no reclassification from green to grey.

The hard-to-overcome part is that the net increase in household numbers mirrorss the breakdown of family life and the increase of single occupancy.

There are solutions to this in my view but...See more

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M M Jenkins ...

2 HOURS AGO

Get on with it People need houses

Reply • ☆ Recommend (7) • Share

M Michael Sharpe ...

2 HOURS AGO

This should be great news for the dinghy citizens! :)

Reply • ☆ Recommend (4) • Share

S S Webb ...

30 MINUTES AGO

You need help if you think that's a relevant comment to make on this article.

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villages and towns to grow organically.

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philip muldowney



29 MINUTES AGO

Never Ever underestimate the capacity of Local Councils and Planners to obfuscate, be obdurate, and totally uncooperative. They seem to view it as their duty to be negative about everything. As for this making things easier. Ho! Ho! Wait to see how they interpret the small print! They seemingly hav...

See more

[Reply](#) • [☆ Recommend \(1\)](#) • [Share](#)



A Brown



32 MINUTES AGO

Excellent! Will lead to more organic housing development, hopefully similar to how are villages and towns have grown over the centuries.

Local character will be preserved and we'll be spared the horrendous big developer sites that have done to win over NIMBYs.

[Reply](#) • [☆ Recommend \(1\)](#) • [Share](#)



matt hankins



1 HOUR AGO

iv been after pp for a single dwelling at the end of a stockport street for 2.4 years and counting.still on the hook for BNG at 17k even though its now dropped .planners basically.....

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Peter Chadwick



58 MINUTES AGO

Labour's plan to wreck the country continued unabated.

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Faye Waddle



1 HOUR AGO

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D Morris



1 HOUR AGO

I designed & built my own home in 1995. It was time consuming, expensive & the toughest thing I've ever undertaken.

(Edited)

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Clive Seale



41 MINUTES AGO

Small sites on the edge of villages make edges on their edges, then small site appear on their edges and eventually you have a town (with its own edges). Goodbye to a green and once pleasamt land.

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Leo Jones



16 MINUTES AGO

Good news: like France where every village has new self builds on the edges.

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Frank Kasa



1 HOUR AGO

Oh dear!! This will end in tears. They're not going to be grand designs , are they? It'll be Fred and his mate and a couple of big hammers!!

You want affordable housing then build flats like the rest of Europe and save ruining nice villages and back gardens!

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Christopher Bell



1 HOUR AGO

Why do you think that? Small builders exist, I could refer you to several where I live. Small landowners exist but historically it has been just too hard to fight the lanyard classes at the council.



Philip Iszatt



25 MINUTES AGO

This is great but with two reservations:

1 “Traditional” buildings made of traditional materials should not squash innovative building methods leading to much cheaper ownership or rental.

2 Exceptional architecture should encouraged if form and function coincide. No pastiches should be acceptable.

(Edited)

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David Marc



58 MINUTES AGO

This can only turn out badly. Homes are a big investment, code compliance is important especially for things buried underground or in walls like electricity and plumbing.

The urge to cut corners to either save time or money is enticing even when it could result in a house fire or a basement full of...**See more**

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