

EDITION: UNITED KINGDOM

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Britain to build 17 towns and villages to ease housing squeeze



FILE PHOTO: A builder works on the roof of a new residential property development in north London, March 21, 2013. REUTERS/Neil Hall/File Photo

Britain's government announced plans on Monday to build 17 new towns and villages across the English countryside in a bid to ease a chronic housing shortage.

The new "garden" communities - from Cumbria in the north to Cornwall on England's southern-most tip - would be part of a scheme to build up to 200,000 new homes, housing and planning minister Gavin Barwell said in a statement.

That would still be a fraction of the million houses the government has said it wants to see built from 2015-2020 in an already densely populated nation.

Successive governments have promised to tackle a shortage that has seen house prices spiral in London and other major cities, out of the reach of many buyers.

But developers have complained about a lack of available land and strict planning laws that outlaw development on "greenbelt" land around existing towns and give local councils the power to block construction.

Britain asked local authorities last year to say if they were interested in having new garden developments - based on a 19th century idea of housing growing populations in self-contained towns surrounded by countryside.

Barwell announced the locations for the first time on Monday and said the state would loosen planning restrictions and give 7.4 million pounds (\$9.10 million) to help fund the building.

The three newly announced towns, with more than 10,000 homes each, will be built near Aylesbury, Taunton and Harlow, the government said.

The new garden villages, including Bailrigg in Lancaster, Long Marston in Stratford-on-Avon, Welborne in Hampshire and Culm in Devon, would each have 1,500-10,000 properties.

Together with seven other garden towns already announced, the new developments could provide almost 200,000 homes, Barwell said.

(Reporting by Kylie MacLellan; Editing by Andrew Heavens)