

Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation: a model for the rest of the country?

According to i-paper journalist Victoria Spratt, the Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation's regeneration scheme "is understood to be a model Burnham's team are referring to in terms of how devolved planning and development might look by combining public and private funding to build around 8,000 homes."

When Greater Manchester Mayor, Andy Burnham said: "Stockport has been a genuine trailblazer for the Mayoral Development Corporation model. It is showing what can be achieved when you work together with partners and use innovative powers to drive forward transformative projects and revitalise a town centre."

"With backing from Parliament to expand the MDC, Stockport is continuing to break new ground for urban regeneration. This is a blueprint for towns up and down the country to follow – and it's why this model is being rolled out to other places across Greater Manchester as well, so more areas can benefit from new homes, jobs, investment, and good growth."

So what exactly is this organisation? Stockport MDC was set up in 2019 under the Tories. It's Chair is Lord Gavin Barwell, an ex-Tory Minister. It's Strategic Regeneration Framework document talks of a tenure mix - "home ownership, social and affordable rent and well managed private rented stock – though with no indication of the proportions of each. It suggests the whole scheme will take 15-20 years.

It's website explains:

"The MDC was established in 2019 to accelerate that vision by bringing forward 4,000 new homes, 1m sq ft of new employment space and 5,300 new jobs. Since then, it has played a central role in turning ambition into delivery, bringing forward thousands of new homes, Grade A office space and state of the art facilities and infrastructure.

Building on this success, in 2026 the MDC boundary was trebled to cover the whole town centre, alongside a renewed ambition to deliver 8,000 new homes. This reflects both the progress made so far and the scale of opportunity ahead.

As the first town centre MDC in the country and the first MDC to expand, Stockport has moved quickly from a pioneering model to a proven delivery vehicle."

In answering the question, "I'm a Stockport resident, are the new homes available to me?" it replies

"A wide mix of high-quality homes is being delivered across the town centre, including one, two and three-bedroom apartments and townhouses. These are available across a range of tenures, from affordable and private rent to homes for sale, providing more choice for people at every stage of life."

No mention of social rent on this occasion.

"Costing more than the average person can readily afford"

In August 2025 in a debate at a council meeting, reported by the Manchester Evening News, Christine Carrigan, leader of the borough's opposition Labour group¹, said:

"What we're proposing here is a series of flats that are approximately £1,400 a month give or take. What we're saying is 'we are building flats on that side of the viaduct that are going to cost more than the average person in Stockport can readily afford.'"²

1 Currently there are 34 Liberal Democrat councillors, with Labour on 14, 4 Greens, 4 Stockport Community Group, 3 Independent Ratepayers, 2 Reform, 1 Conservative and 1 Independent.

2 At the end of the financial year 2024/25 Stockport had 8,208 households on its waiting list.

In response to the absence of 'affordable housing' in the Stockport8 phase of the development the council's planning officer said the scheme did not include any affordable housing "because an assessment judged this was not viable".

Councillor Jon Byrne added:

"I'm sure we've all heard the leader of the council try and suggest that the current housing targets produce developer-led homes, this is council-owned land, council-led development. We can't guarantee social homes, we can't guarantee affordable homes, there's no wheelchair accessible homes, we're restricting the view of probably the most important landmark in our town, in my mind there's no real family homes."

Designs for plots two and three could see buildings up to 11 and 16 stories in height. The tallest tower would be up to 94m in height, higher than the 34m viaduct that is a famous part of Stockport's skyline. Objections to the development on heritage grounds were submitted by Historic England, the Victorian Society, the Stockport Heritage Trust, the council's own conservation officer and members of the public.

The letter from the Stockport Heritage Trust read: "If the council ever wished to totally mask and deny the existence of its largest and most impressive architectural feature (the entrepreneurial engineering reason why the town developed and thrived as a commercial industrial centre in the Victorian era), the proposed emasculation and concealment of the structure in the current application could not be bettered."

On Lancashire Hill

One of the complaints so far has been that poorer areas of the town, such as Lancashire Hill, the most deprived area in Greater Manchester, has been left out of the scheme. The estate is made up of apartment blocks and high rise towers, owned by the council but run by Stockport Homes, an ALMO (Arms Length Management Company) set up in 2005 (See Note).

Families on Lancashire Hill complained to the Local Democracy Reporter about issues of overcrowding and maintenance problems. The issue of this estate came up during a council meeting, in a resolution on inequality. Labour councillor Jon Byrne proposed a motion about closing the inequality gap in the borough. It called on the government "to fund Stockport adequately, to recognise the level of inequality we face, to grant trailblazer neighbourhood status³ and the funding that goes with it to Lancashire Hill and extend the recovery grant to our borough with immediate effect to help us support our deprived, non trailblazer neighbourhoods ..."

A Green Party councillor said the issues on the estate include filthy cladding, exterior walls covered in mould, windows that can't be cleaned because they no longer open, unreliable lifts, expensive and inefficient heating, and a building access and intercomm system which is no longer fit for purpose."

Questions have also been raised about how many of the 8,000 homes would be 'affordable'. Christine Carrigan, leader of the opposition Labour group said

"Although we support the MDC expansion, it's vital that its delivery focuses on genuinely affordable homes alongside homes for sale and private rent, so local people are not priced out of the communities they grew up in."

Unstoppable Stockport

"Unstoppable Stockport", a newspaper format issued by the MDC mentions these building projects:

- Platform by Great Places - just one minute from the railway station - offers 73 stylish apartments, complete with a rooftop terrace. Homes here are available through Rent to Buy, which reduces rent to 80% of the market rate for at least five years to help residents save for a deposit.
- Another Great Places development, Chestergate – on the corner of King Street West - will deliver 148 high-quality one-and two-bed apartments for social rent and Rent to Buy.
- Modern living is on offer at Stockport Interchange, where 196 high-spec rented apartments sit beside the two-acre rooftop Viaduct Park, exceptional transport links and town centre amenities.

³ 25 deprived neighbourhoods were given up to £20 million each by the government.

- Affordable housing developer The Guinness Partnership recently completed Hollingdrake Place on Edward Street, providing one-and two-bedroom homes, including 63 for affordable rent and 68 for social rent.

On the MDC website we also find the Weir Mill development, a converted Cotton Mill. It shows rents as £1,250 a month for one bed apartments, £1,600 for two bed ones. Rents in the new build part of Weir Mill are £1,100 for a one bed and £1,400 for a two bed.⁴

Not a model for the country?

These problems suggest that Stockport MDC *is not* a model which could be usefully followed across the country. It appears that social rent will be a minor element of the regeneration. The remark of the planning officer that there is no 'affordable housing' in the Stockport8 component of the scheme, because an assessment judged it not viable, is a message which people around the country are familiar with. This is no surprise, since regeneration is usually driven by developers who obviously want to maximise their returns.

Note: Stockport Homes

Stockport Homes is an Arms Length Management Organisation, set up in 2005. The New Labour government sought to transfer council housing to housing associations. The government set itself a target of transferring 200,000 council homes a year. But there was a legal requirement to ballot tenants over whether they agreed with the transfer. ALMOs were a means of avoiding a ballot.

In 2010 there were 69 ALMOs managing more than a million homes. However, most of them have been closed down and the homes managed in-house. There are currently 15 ALMOs managing 175,000 council homes, of which Stockport Homes is one. A Labour councillor informs us that the Labour Group on Stockport Council did raise the question of bringing the housing stock back in-house. However, a review recommended maintaining the ALMO.

"We are Stockport's largest landlord, managing over 12,000 properties on behalf of Stockport Council and Private Landlords, as well as our own growing portfolio of new build homes", says their website. The Stockport Homes Group includes 'Three Sixty', "an award-winning, profit-for-purpose construction, repairs and facilities management company based in the heart of Stockport and serving Greater Manchester." . Also in the Stockport Homes Group is 'Viaduct Housing Partnership'.

"Viaduct Housing Partnership is a development partnership between Stockport Homes Group and Stockport Council. It focuses on building more affordable homes in Stockport."

"Affordable housing", of course, can mean all manner of things. As an example of the work of VHP they give a recent completed development, Melford Rd. The 87 properties comprise of 12 homes for "affordable rent", 40 shared ownership houses, 28 shared ownership apartments and 7 homes for market sale. Not a single one is social rent. The Chimneys development comprised 16 shared ownership homes. Their accounts for the end of the financial year 2024/25 show 194 homes completed or under construction of which 15 will be social rent, 142 shared ownership and 36 market sale.

It should be said that Stockport Homes gained a C1 rating from the Regulator of Social Housing, indicating that it was "delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards". 93% of tenants who responded to their Customer Satisfaction Survey felt they were dealt with fairly and with respect, although the Regulator does not record what percentage of tenants responded to the survey.

At the end of the 2024/25 financial year Stockport Council owned 10,880 homes of which 10,537 were social rent and 268 'affordable rent'. 10 years ago it had 11,438 of which 11,179 were social rent and 213 'affordable rent'.

⁴ This compared with the average rent in Stockport of £795 for 1 bed and £1,024 for 2 beds (April 2026).