**Million to one shot**

You know when there’s a General Election on the horizon – January 2025 at the latest – because the Government starts pulling promissory rabbits out of hats to assuage a vexed population that they’re still their best bet electorally.

Of course, when a Government – any government, regardless of persuasion – has been in power for 13 years, all its and our problems have either not been solved or made worse by it, or are of its own creation. The idea that it has somehow miraculously stumbled across the solutions to these problems in the last throes of its term is laughable, as is the idea that somehow we won’t notice all these ‘treats’ being conjured up for us at the end.

Most recently, these include rethinks on fossil-fuelled car use, oil boilers, Net Zero, tax and housing. Not policies mind – there’s nothing more tangible to be had other than utterances – just statements of intent.

The one which caught our attention, and no doubt all of our readers, was the claim that the Government would meet its 2019 manifesto housing pledge by building 1 million homes by the end of this parliament. At the time of Sunak’s speech in July, that was, at best, 18 months – or six quarters – away.

The 2019 manifesto set a housing target of 300,000 homes (for England) *per annum* “by the mid-2020s”. The best year recently was 2021-2022 was 232,280 net extra dwellings; while the average over the past 10 years has been 178,228 *p.a.*

So not exactly 300,000 per year yet then.

And what does it need to deliver/ facilitate to hit this magical 1 million number?

67,500 per quarter for six quarters, or 405,000 homes.

That’s an annual target of 270,000 when the industry’s recent best has been 230,000 and at a time when country’s post-Covid economic woes are severely impacting the sector.

How is the Government, through its housing emissary on earth, Michael Gove, going to do this? By unblocking the “the bottlenecks in the planning system that are choking and slowing down development and stopping growth and investment” by launching a £24 million Planning Skills Delivery Fund to “clear backlogs and get the right skills in place”; by “setting up a new ‘super-squad’ team of leading planners and other experts charged with working across the planning system to unblock major housing developments” and asking developers to “contribute more through fees, to help support a higher quality more efficient planning service”.

There were also some vague noises about cutting red tape and making it easier to convert shops into homes; plus also making it (even) easier to “enable barn conversions and the repurposing [of] agricultural buildings and disused warehouses”. No mention that flats over the shop was a programme that was tried, and failed, in the 1990s; and Class Q permitted development has been in place since 2014.

All this in 18 months. Getting those reforms in place, and operational, in time to kick start a building programme that – if it had started on the day of Gove and Sunak’s July speeches – will deliver 67,500 homes per quarter, over 20,000 per quarter more than the average for the past 10 years; by the GE in January 2025.

Some rabbit, some hat.