

Keir Starmer attacks Rishi Sunak over housebuilding target

Labour says prime minister has bowed to pressure from backbenchers

Rishi Sunak refused to commit to the Conservative manifesto target of building 300,000 houses a year as Sir Keir Starmer accused him of “shattering” the dream of home ownership.

The prime minister said 2.2 million additional homes had been built by the Conservatives and added he was “proud to protect the greenbelt”.

But in a session of prime minister’s questions dominated by the issue of housing, Sunak refused to say whether the Conservatives stood by their manifesto target of building 300,000 homes a year. No 10 later clarified that the prime minister was still committed to the target after Starmer accused the Conservative Party of “giving up” on housebuilding.

Starmer said that the failure to build enough homes was “shattering” the hopes of younger generations trying to get on the housing ladder and said Labour was now “the party of home ownership”.

The Labour leader drew attention to Conservative Party attack ads that have appeared online in Uxbridge and South Ruislip ahead of a by-election triggered by the resignation of Boris Johnson.

The adverts accuse the Liberal Democrats of pledging to build 300,000 homes a year — even though the Conservatives had the same policy as a manifesto pledge in 2019. The ads also claim that the Tories will “protect our green belt” and appear to criticise the idea of a housing crisis.

Starmer said that Sunak had “crumbled” to pressure from Tory backbenchers campaigning against mandatory targets and said Sunak was the “only person in the country who thinks enough houses have been built in the last 13 years”.

Sunak said that the number of first-time buyers was at its highest level in 20 years. “That is twice the number that the Labour Party ever managed,” he said.

Asked by Starmer whether he was still committed to the 300,000 target, he said: “Can I just remind [him] of our record since being in office, 2.2 million additional homes, housing starts double the number we inherited from the Labour Party.

“More homes meeting the decent home standards, housing supply up 10 per cent in the last year that we have figures for and, in the last year we had figures for, we also saw a 20-year high in the number of first-time buyers — that’s a Conservative government delivering for this country.”

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