



## Small mercies SME builders eye boost from sites proposal

Small builders have been boosted by proposed consultation on planning reforms that would free up pockets of brownfield land for construction of hundreds of thousands of homes.

The government has said it will look at proposals that would support development of smaller sites after Andrew Lewer, a Conservative backbench MP, sought to insert a “small sites clause” into the levelling-up bill. It would have required councils to “support opportunities to bring forward sites and apply a presumption in favour of development”, provided at least 60 per cent of homes proposed were affordable.

He said he had not sought a vote on the amendment because ministers had offered “assurance it will be part of the government’s future thinking”.

Almost 30 developers, including the

top housebuilder Barratt and smaller groups such as affordable housing business Pocket Living, have thrown their weight behind the proposal.

Marc Vlessing, chief executive of Pocket, said a small-sites clause would bolster the stock of affordable housing and revive SME developers, which have all but vanished. According to the Home Builders Federation, SMEs account for only about 10 per cent of new homes, compared with 40 per cent in 1988.

“We are in a housing economy where only the very, very biggest and the very, very smallest [developers] can survive. The biggest because they have the fat, the smallest because they are so focused,” said Vlessing. *George Hammond and Jim Pickard*