

Fast track for public services: new planning reforms to speed up delivery of schools and hospitals

- New schools and hospitals to be delivered quicker through a faster, simpler planning process
- New, simpler process for business premises to become new homes to boost town centres through brownfield development
- The measures build on last week's Spending Review, confirming nearly £20 billion of investment in new housing and a £4 billion Levelling Up Fund to boost local economies

Unprecedented reforms to speed up the delivery of schools, colleges, hospitals and other NHS buildings have been announced by Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP today (3 December 2020).

A new fast track for public service buildings including schools, colleges, universities, prisons and hospitals will be delivered more quickly through the planning system with a faster, more streamlined planning process.

Currently, these buildings can have small extensions without the need for a full planning application. Today's [proposals](#) help to deliver more classrooms and hospital space by enabling them to extend further, faster.

Where a full planning application remains required, such as to build entirely new schools and hospitals, the process will be streamlined to speed up local decision making so that work can continue at pace to deliver public services for the community.

Councils will need to make decisions on these important buildings as a priority and have a legal duty to decide major public service development applications within 10 weeks. Currently, some planning applications are left for many months without a decision.

Proposals will also help tackle the housing shortage by enabling commercial premises to be converted into new homes while giving high streets a new lease of life – removing eyesores and transforming unused and derelict buildings, while making the most of our brownfield land.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

The new fast track for public services makes it simpler and quicker to deliver the schools and hospitals we promised to build in our manifesto. We expect these vital buildings to be approved in weeks, not months and are reforming the planning system so it works for the NHS, our schools and other vital public services.

Like the rest of the planning reforms, these changes will also help to protect and create thousands of jobs in the construction industry.

The new homes will be delivered through a fast track planning process instead of a full planning application. These homes will still be subject to high standards, which have been raised in recent months to ensure they provide for adequate natural light and meet space standards.

The right to be converted to homes does not apply to certain buildings including pubs, theatres and live music venues, recognising the important role they play in communities and their contribution to local heritage.

Investing in new housing is key to delivering more affordable, secure and green homes for families across England and in driving the growth and regeneration of local areas. Official figures show that last year more than 243,000 new homes were delivered in England – the highest number since 1987.

Last week, the Spending Review confirmed nearly £20 billion of investment in new homes to help us go even further. This includes a National Home Building Fund investing £7.1 billion over 4 years alongside more than £12 billion being invested in affordable housing.

The Spending Review also included a new £4 billion Levelling Up Fund. This will invest in local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities and will support economic recovery.

Last August, the government published [Planning for the future](#) – its longer-term plans to overhaul England's outdated planning system to deliver the high-quality, sustainable homes communities need. The government is currently analysing the consultation responses and will respond in due course.

The government is [consulting](#) on the introduction of a new right to allow for the change of use from any use, or mix of uses, from the commercial, business and service use class (Class E) to residential use (Class C3).

This right will provide much needed new homes across the country, giving clarity and planning certainty, and attract footfall to high streets that new residents will bring. All new homes would be required to meet national space standards.

The existing right for extensions of schools, colleges, universities, and hospitals is subject to size limits, limiting extensions or additional buildings to no more than 25% of the gross floorspace of the original buildings with a maximum cap of 100 square metres, or 250 square metres in the case of schools. It also restricts the height of new buildings to 5 metres.

The consultation proposes to amend the right to allow such uses to expand their facilities by up to 25% of the footprint of the current buildings on the site at the time the legislation is brought into force, or up to 250 square metres, whichever is the greater. This would allow greater flexibility

for those sites that have enlarged or developed additional buildings over time and flexibility for those premises with a smaller footprint.

To provide further flexibility, it is also proposed that the height limit is raised from 5 metres to 6 metres, excluding plant on the roof, except where it is within 10 metres of the boundary or curtilage.

School playing fields will continue to be protected from development. The existing permitted development right to allow the erection, extensions and expansion of schools, colleges, universities and hospitals has a condition exempting development on land used as a playing field in the past 5 years from development. The proposals to expand this right would retain this condition, meaning that playing fields are and will continue to be exempt.