

Homes England ramps up development pipeline to support the housing market

- Homes England has acquired 19 sites in the last financial year worth £180 million.
- The land has the capacity for 5,000 new homes across the country.
- Several major acquisitions were completed in the lead up to financial year-end, demonstrating how the agency is taking a long-term view of housing demand in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Homes England, the government's housing agency, has revealed that it acquired 19 sites in the last financial year worth £180 million, with the land having the capacity for 5,000 new homes across the country.

Of these, several major acquisitions were completed in the lead up to financial year-end, demonstrating how the agency is taking a long-term view of housing demand in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and continuing to develop a strong pipeline of projects to support the recovery of the housebuilding sector.

In its role as a master developer, Homes England is able to acquire challenging or stalled sites which have been unable to progress without public sector intervention and use its resources and expertise to unlock them for development and bring them back to market, ultimately resulting in much-needed new homes.

The recently acquired sites include the 37-hectare Panshanger Aerodrome in Welwyn Garden City, which will bring forward one of the region's largest housing developments with the capacity for 815 homes. It is expected that 30% of the new homes will be affordable and the development will also include a new primary school, a community centre and self-build plots. Homes England will deliver the infrastructure on site before marketing the site to developers in parcels, accelerating the delivery of new homes.

In Birmingham, the agency has acquired a 2.5-hectare parcel of land in Digbeth from Birmingham City Council. The Montague Street site is the final acquisition the agency has made of four land parcels in the area, which will create one of the largest development sites in Birmingham city centre with the total capacity for 1,000 new homes and 25,000 square metres of employment space.

In Bristol, the 10-hectare Brislington Meadows has been brought into the agency's ownership from the local authority and private landowners, with the capacity for 300 much-needed new homes. Allocated in Bristol's Local Plan since 2014, the site had been stalled until Homes England's intervention to unlock development. The site is expected to deliver a minimum of 30% affordable housing.

Additionally, the acquisition of 81 hectares of land in Darlington will see

construction of 800 new homes as part of the Burtree Garden Village. Representing just under half of the total proposed Garden Village site, Homes England has entered into a collaboration agreement with lead developer Hellens Group and will work together with adjacent landowners on site-wide infrastructure to enable delivery of the entire scheme.

And, just south of Rugby, Warwickshire, the agency has acquired land totalling 65 hectares from Warwickshire County Council, which is expected to deliver over 900 homes. Delivery of infrastructure and a link road, which is crucial to the wider South West Rugby expansion, will accelerate the pace of construction of the new homes.

Simon Dudley, interim Homes England Chair, said:

“It is testament to the hard work and dedication of colleagues and our partners that we’ve met such a strong year-end at this challenging and unprecedented time.

“I want to reassure the sector that Homes England is very much open for business and investing in a long-term pipeline of development opportunities to support market recovery.

“The need for new housing will remain a priority, so we will continue to do business with partners across the sector to create opportunities for future development and support the government’s housebuilding objectives.”

Stephen Kinsella, Chief Land and Development Officer at Homes England, said:

“As a master developer, it’s crucial that we continue to create development opportunities and provide a pipeline of sites for housebuilders of all sizes, despite the challenging situation the industry is facing.

“In the long-term we will still have a housing shortage, so by continuing to acquire difficult sites and addressing the barriers which have previously stopped them moving into production, we’re making sure we can deliver on the agency’s mission to accelerate the construction of new homes while addressing the short-term disruption caused by the impact of coronavirus.”

ENDS