

Housing minister calls for a digital revolution in the property sector

Housing Minister, Esther McVey, is today (21 October 2019) announcing plans to release data held by local bodies to enable the UK PropTech sector to thrive and for them to “bring about a digital revolution in the property sector.”

The Housing Minister will announce measures to:

- Open up Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) data for the first time in a transparency drive and enable PropTechs to obtain things like energy performance certificates and the square footage information of properties.
- Introduce a national index of all brownfield data, simplifying and improving the quality of Brownfield Land Registers to help developers to find brownfield land to build on.

Esther McVey will today host a roundtable discussion with some of the 700 PropTech firms in the UK who are helping house builders and communities all over the country.

The UK PropTech sector, a growing industry potentially worth £6 billion in the UK, is leading the world in the property building and buying market and the sector already receives 10% of global PropTech investment.

Roundtable participants include:

- Urban Intelligence – a tool that helps developers and landowners to locate development sites more easily
- The Future Fox – which is transforming community engagement in the planning process, enabling developers and local authorities to engage a much larger and more diverse range of voices in creating positive planning outcomes
- Wayhome – which aspires to make home ownership more realisable for many more people by co-investing in property with its customers

The Rt Hon Esther McVey MP said:

We’ve had revolutions in the way that financial services, online banking and transport are provided, turning once unimaginable possibilities into everyday realities. Now it’s the turn of the UK property market.

Whatever homebuyers prioritise, whether it’s the quality of local

schools, the probability of getting a seat on a train, or having easy access to leisure facilities, this technology could transform the way we find and purchase homes.

And new technology will link builders to brownfield sites more easily, enhance how developers engage with local communities, help builders deliver new homes and modernise the way we buy and sell land and houses, cutting the time it takes to get housing from the drawing board to families getting the keys.

The UK property sector is on the cusp of a digital revolution. It's time to harness new technology to unlock land and unleash the potential of housebuilders in all parts of the country and to revolutionise the way in which we buy homes.

In addition, new technologies could allow:

Communities to:

- see models and interactive maps of planned development rather than one or two pictures
- comment on planning applications online, on phones and on the go (in the same way that they use online banking services)

Prospective home buyers to:

- use commute time calculators when they are looking at properties
- explore financing options to help buyers afford their new home or enable gradual home ownership
- receive step-by-step assistance to help them navigate the buying process

Developers to:

- identify sites so that more houses are built more quickly
- quickly locate suitable brownfield sites suitable for development

SMEs don't often have the resources for dedicated teams to find sites, appraise them and craft planning applications, so access to tools that analyse multiple datasets to do this for them can save them valuable hours, and in turn help support the wider industry.

It has been reported by SME builders that "lack of available and viable land" was the most commonly cited barrier to increasing output (43% of respondents) for the fifth year in a row (FMB, 2019), despite there being capacity to build 1 million homes on brownfield council land.

Digital disruption in the property and development sector is happening globally. Spacemaker AI, a Norway-based start-up, secured \$25 million in Series A funding in June 2019, which included participation from UK real estate technology fund, Round Hill Ventures, who will attend the roundtable event today.

We will be opening up data about Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) to make this important process more transparent. When used appropriately, CPOs are a valuable tool for local planning authorities to use to deliver housing and regeneration and have been used successfully by local planning authorities across the country since 2004. For example, a large proportion of Birmingham's regeneration has been delivered via CPOs in the past 15 years.

Brownfield Land Registers aim to provide up-to-date and consistent information on potential brownfield sites that local authorities consider to be appropriate for residential development. We are simplifying and improving the quality of Brownfield Land Registers to help developers to find brownfield land to build on.

Creating a national index of all brownfield data will be of value to local authorities and housing developers. It will ensure local planning authorities publish brownfield land data in a standardised way nationally. New guidance has been written to support local planning authorities to implement the new standards and a number of tools have been built to help validate the data to meet the standards and make the process of publishing and collecting data easier.

We have recently completed research into which data can most easily be made available from local plans and existing planning systems. Currently, most Local Plan and planning application documentation is issued in a PDF format and specific policy detail is not easy to find and inconsistent across local authorities. A department initiative could deploy a natively digital product to make essential information accessible to policy makers, citizens and digital entrepreneurs in a consistent and standardised format.

The Geospatial Commission is a government commitment to maximise the value of geospatial data, with £80 million of allocated funding. It will also help the growth of the digital economy and consolidate the UK's position as the best place to start and grow a digital business. The commission will also demonstrate innovative solutions for identified strategic challenges, and accelerate delivery of economic, social and environmental benefits derived from geospatial data. More information can be found on the [Geospatial Commission website](#).

A Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) is a tool that can be used by certain bodies to authorise the acquisition of land and property. Its use can help make possible a wide range of development, regeneration and infrastructure projects, where there is a compelling case in the public interest.