Press release: New planning rules "to boost build out rate for large sites"

Sir Oliver Letwin's report said new rules would require developers to build a wider range of properties with different designs and tenures, to speed up build out rates.

In his interim report, he said he could not find "any evidence" that major developers are "holding land as a purely speculative activity" – and their business models instead rely on selling houses.

Instead, having too many identical properties on large sites – and the limits on how quickly these can be sold – is the fundamental reason behind the slow build out rate.

The government will now consider the report into the build out rate of large sites before deciding on next steps.

Last year over 217,000 new homes were delivered – the highest number on all but one of the last 30 years. Sir Oliver recommends that by adopting the measures in his report it will help government towards their target of delivering 300,000 homes a year.

In his final report, he calls for:

- new planning rules which require homebuilders to offer a range of different types of properties on big sites, so they can be completed more quickly without "flooding" the market with a large number of identical properties
- a new National Expert Committee to be set up to advise councils on the different types of properties that should be offered on large sites; they would also handle appeals where there is a dispute between developers and local authorities
- incentives for homebuilders to change plans for existing sites so they start offering a variety of property types immediately
- councils to be given a more muscular role in guiding major homebuilding projects – and the power to purchase undeveloped land for 10 times its existing use value; this would make it viable for more affordable housing to be built

Rt. Hon. Sir Oliver Letwin MP said:

> I found that the main reason developers are slow to complete building on large sites is that there is only a limited demand each year for the highly uniform properties they are building on those sites.
>
> My final report sets out some policy levers that government can use to increase the variety of homes on sites, so they can be built out more quickly.

The government has confirmed that Help to Buy equity loan funding will not be made conditional on large sites that already have planning permission adopting the proposed new diversity requirements. The government will honour any funding commitments made to sites with existing outline planning permission, regardless of any new planning policy on differentiation.

A full response to other aspects of the report will be made next year.

Secretary of State for Communities, Rt. Hon. James Brokenshire MP, said:

> There is no mission more urgent than making our housing market work, and building the homes our country needs.
>
> Sir Oliver has found that it takes 15 years to complete building on some of the largest sites, which is far too long.
>
> It is clear action is needed so developers work with us as partners to deliver 300,000 properties a year by the mid 2020s. We will consider the recommendations in Sir Oliver’s report to determine next steps to ensure we build the homes our country needs.

New planning rules for large sites

The government’s planning rulebook already encourages housing developments to have a mix of property types, and councils are encouraged to divide up large sites to speed up the delivery of homes.

Sir Oliver recommends the government goes further and adopts a new set of planning rules for large sites. This would require developers to offer a range of property types.

The changes could be brought in quickly through a written ministerial statement and secondary legislation, before a change to the law goes through Parliament.

A national expert committee would arbitrate where councils dispute whether developers are offering the right range of properties. They would also be able to offer expert advice, and councils would be expected to consult the committee before approving any large site application in an area of high housing demand.

Bigger role for councils

Councils should be given the power to designate particular sites as ones which can only be developed as “large sites” – so developers have to follow the new planning rules.

Sir Oliver says the result of his recommendations for more diversity will mean landowners receiving less for their land.

To encourage more building, Sir Oliver recommends councils are given new powers to set up development companies.

Changes to take effect quickly

Sir Oliver recommends that developers are given financial incentives to offer a range of property types quickly.

He suggests there are conditions put on government funding for house developers or purchasers, if they do not voluntarily follow the new planning rules after 2021.

Once master plans have been produced, the developer may choose to sell off all or part of the site to developers.

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Press release: Queen appoints new Lord-Lieutenant of the Isle of Wight

The Queen has been pleased to appoint Mrs Susan Sheldon DL as Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of the Isle of Wight to succeed Major General Sir Martin White KCVO CB CBE when he retires on 25 March 2019.

Press release: The 2018 Budget: what it means for Scotland

The Budget committed £1 billion in extra money for Scotland, maintained the freeze on whisky and fuel duty, and saw a £150 million investment in the Tay City Region Deal. The Chancellor also committed to progress growth deals in Ayrshire, Moray and Borderlands.

Today's announcements for Scotland include:

- An extra £950 million for the Scottish Government, meaning its budget will have grown in real terms to £32 billion by 2020.
- £150 million for a Tay Cities Deal to support growth and create new jobs.
- A boost to the Scotch Whisky industry, which already accounts for 20% of UK food and drink exports, as Spirits Duty is frozen for the second Budget in a row. This means the price of a typical bottle is 30p lower than if it had risen by inflation.
- A UK-wide £10 million Fisheries Technology Fund to help transform the industry and make fishermen in Scotland world leaders in safe, sustainable and productive fishing.
- Opening formal negotiations for a Moray Growth Deal and progressing talks for Ayrshire and Borderlands Growth Deals.
- Continuing support for the oil and gas sector, through maintaining our globally competitive position and further strengthening Scotland's role as a world leader in this area.

- Appointing a dedicated manager from the British Business Bank in Scotland, for the first time, to help to reduce geographical imbalances in small businesses' access to finance.

Secretary of State for Scotland David Mundell said:

> Today's Budget is great news for people in Scotland.
>
> The Chancellor's decisions mean there will be an extra £1 billion to invest in public services in Scotland. I urge the Scottish Government to use this extra money to support the NHS in Scotland, fix the roads, boost Scotland's economy and reinvigorate Scotland's high streets.
>
> The freeze on spirits duty will be a boost to Scotland's whisky industry, maintaining the favourable tax climate for oil and gas will continue to help support the recovery of the sector, investing in fisheries technology will help support a key Scottish industry, and freezing beer duty will support large and small brewers across Scotland.
>
> I welcome the significant investment – £150 million – in the Tay Cities Deal. The Deal will drive economic growth in Tayside, boosting jobs and prosperity throughout the region. I also welcome the announcement that we are to open negotiations on a Moray Growth Deal, and we continue to make progress on Growth Deals for Borderlands and Ayrshire. In all, the UK Government is investing more than £1 billion in City Region Deals right across Scotland, helping to drive growth in Scotland's economy.
>
> On top of our extensive investment in Scotland's economy, individuals up and down Scotland will benefit from the ongoing freeze on fuel duty and the increase in personal allowance. Today's Budget demonstrates clearly how the UK Government is delivering for people in Scotland.

Press release: FCO Minister for Asia statement on Sri Lanka

Minister for Asia and the Pacific Mark Field said:

> I am concerned by ongoing political developments in Sri Lanka and am following this fast-moving situation closely. Once again, I call upon all parties to uphold the constitution and due political and

legal process.

I urge President Sirisena, in consultation with the Speaker, to reconvene the parliament immediately in order to give the democratically elected representatives of the Sri Lankan people their voice at this time.

The UK, as a friend of Sri Lanka, remains committed to working with international partners and alongside the Sri Lankan government and people to support democracy, human rights, and reconciliation.

Further information

- Follow Foreign Office Minister Mark Field @MarkFieldUK
- Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter @foreignoffice and Facebook
- Follow the Foreign Office on Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn

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Press release: More than half a billion for Wales in Chancellor's Budget

Wales will benefit from over half a billion pounds in additional funding for the Welsh Government, as well as £120 million for a North Wales Growth Deal, the Chancellor has announced in the Budget today.

This year's Budget is a result of the UK government's balanced approach to the country's finances, meaning the Welsh Government will have more spending power, while keeping taxes low and debt falling.

Today's announcements for Wales include:

- More than £550 million of extra money for the Welsh Government, meaning its budget will have grown to over £16.1 billion by 2020.
- £120 million for a North Wales Growth Deal, generating investment, jobs and prosperity in the region.
- Continuing to support a Mid Wales Growth Deal, working with the Welsh Government, businesses and local councillors to agree a deal.
- Supporting the delivery of the M4 relief road by reviewing the Welsh Government's borrowing powers.
- Giving Welsh councils the freedom to build more council homes by removing the borrowing cap on housing.
- Appointing a dedicated manager from the British Business Bank in Wales, for the first time, to help to reduce geographical imbalances in small businesses' access to finance.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, said:

> My Budget sends a clear message to the people of Wales – your hard work is paying off.
>
> Thanks to the UK government's careful stewardship of the economy, the public finances are in a much stronger position and national debt is falling.
>
> This means we have more money to invest in Wales's future – including £550m of extra funding for the Welsh Government and £120m for a North Wales Growth Deal.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

> Today's budget shows the scale of ambition the UK Government has for Wales.
>
> From the clear support for a North Wales Growth Deal, reviewing borrowing capacity to deliver critical infrastructure projects, and the additional half a billion of spending power, this is a Budget that clearly backs Wales's future prosperity.
>
> The wider package of announcements made today show that we are getting the important things right – backing hardworking people and unlocking key infrastructure. Taken together, these measures are proof positive of a UK Government that is building on a strong foundation for Wales's economic prospects as part of a stronger United Kingdom.

The Chancellor set out his Budget against a backdrop of positive economic news across Wales. Since 2010, 151,000 more people in Wales are in employment and in 2016 it had one of the highest productivity growth rates across the UK.

The people of Wales will also benefit from measures to tackle the cost of living:

- Fuel duty has been frozen for a ninth successive year. As a result of these nine years of freezes, by April 2020, the average car driver will have saved a cumulative £1,000 compared with the pre-2010 escalator.
- The National Living Wage will also rise next year to £8.21 per hour, with the current rate benefitting around 81,000 workers in Wales. An additional 20,000 people will also benefit from changes to the Minimum Wage, which will also increase to £7.70 per hour.
- The Personal Allowance will increase to £12,500 and the Higher Rate Threshold will also go up to £50,000, meaning people will keep more of what they earn.