

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.

[Action to detect, deter and disrupt](#)

the misuse of drones

The government will develop a new mobile counter-drone unit to be deployed to drone-related incidents and major events across the UK, as part of the government's ["Counter-Drone" Strategy](#) launched by Security Minister Brandon Lewis today.

The world-leading strategy will ensure individuals, businesses and emergency services in the UK can continue to harness the economic and social benefits of drones, while cracking down on misuse and disruption.

It includes plans to drive forward the establishment of international design standards for manufacturers to enable safety features to be designed in from the start and make drones safe to use in the UK. This will happen with input from a new industry action group to encourage collaboration with government, drive progress and stay ahead of malicious drone users.

A new mobile counter-drone unit will be created, containing detection and disruption equipment, which can be deployed by police and other emergency responders to protect major events and rapidly respond to drone incidents across the UK.

Security Minister Brandon Lewis said:

This government is proud of the UK's burgeoning drone industry and we will do all that we can to ensure that the UK firmly establishes itself as a world leader in this industry.

But to ensure the drone industry can thrive in this country we must be able to crack down effectively on those who would use drones to cause harm or disruption.

There is no silver bullet to help protect our infrastructure and our citizens from malicious or careless drone use. That's why this Strategy outlines a broad range of work to ensure we can effectively tackle the threat.

The use of unmanned aircraft has grown significantly in recent years and the industry is expected to contribute an extra £42 billion to the UK economy by 2030, with more than 76,000 commercial and public sector drones expected to be in use by this date.

However, this also increases the risks of malicious use. Latest statistics show there were 168 police recorded drone incidents in England and Wales in 2018, and 165 drones were recovered at prisons in 2016 and 2017.

Transport Minister Baroness Vere said:

Unmanned aircraft, including drones, could transform how we move people and goods, boost our economy and even save lives. Unfortunately, they can be, and have been, used recklessly at airports and in our skies.

The UK has been at the forefront in tackling the malicious use of unmanned aircraft. This strategy, alongside existing and planned legislation, will let us tap into the benefits of this technology while helping keep people safe both in the air and on the ground.

The strategy also includes:

- the Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Bill, announced in the Queen's Speech, which will give police increased powers to tackle illegal drone use
- a new national standard for police recording of illegal drone activity to help build a picture of the drone threat
- national guidance for police to assist them during malicious drone incidents
- the government's ongoing work with industry to research and test the latest counter drone equipment so that police across the country are able to respond to threats – building on the work already done across government
- over the next 3 years, the government will work with partners to compile a catalogue of approved counter-drone technology to assure police and the owners and operators of critical national infrastructure sites that they are investing in the most effective and appropriate technology
- a government communications campaign to educate the general public and continue to encourage safe drone use
- Earlier this year it was announced that from 30 November 2019, every operator of a drone weighing more than 250g will need to register with the Civil Aviation Authority and all remote pilots will have to have passed an online competency test

Like many emerging technologies, drones play an ever more important role in business and there are currently more than 5,000 commercial users currently registered in the UK. They also provide an increasingly vital tool to assist the work of our emergency services.

This strategy is underpinned by the government's desire to seize and develop the opportunities that the sector has to offer.

[Welcome new MHRA senior appointments](#)

Graeme Tunbridge has been appointed interim Director of Devices. Graeme is currently the Group Manager for Devices Regulatory Affairs at the MHRA, and

will take up his new post from 21 October 2019 following the retirement of John Wilkinson.

Graeme Tunbridge commented: "I am delighted to have been asked to take on this role. It is a time of unprecedented change and challenge for the regulation of medical devices, both in the UK and globally. During this time, I want to ensure that the MHRA continues to strive to improve outcomes for patients and the public by driving continuous improvements in the safety, effectiveness and usability of medical devices."

Dr Sarah Branch has been appointed interim Director of Vigilance and Risk Management of Medicines (VRMM). Sarah has been the Deputy Director and Head of Operations in VRMM for 6 years and took over as Director on 23 September 2019, following Dr June Raine's appointment as the Agency's interim Chief Executive.

Dr Sarah Branch commented: "I am honoured to take up this role at this important time. I am looking forward to working with Dr Raine and fellow Directors as the Agency adapts to its new environment, whilst keeping patient safety as a highest priority."

Graeme Tunbridge – biography and role

Biography

Graeme first joined the MHRA in 2011 and has spent much of his time negotiating, and now implementing, a package of measures to strengthen the regulation of medical devices.

Graeme has been a civil servant for 15 years and spent his early career working on healthcare policy. He has previously held Deputy Director roles at the Department of Health and spent 18 months as Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Health.

He has a Master's degree in biochemistry from the University of Oxford.

Role

The Director of Devices leads the division in the Agency that is responsible for the operation of the regulatory framework that ensures the safety and performance of medical devices on the UK market. This includes:

- investigating reports of problems involving medical devices and taking action in response to these, such as advising healthcare professionals on the safe use of devices, working with manufacturers to improve device safety and, where needed, taking enforcement action
- reviewing proposals to undertake clinical investigations using medical devices on patients in the UK
- overseeing the UK notified bodies for medical devices, which are responsible for the pre-market assessment of higher-risk product
- ensuring the smooth operation of the regulatory framework, including the provision of regulatory advice

Dr Sarah Branch – biography and role

Biography

Sarah joined the Agency in 1994 after a career in academia. She brings a wealth of regulatory experience to the Director role having worked in both Licensing and Post-Licensing Divisions. In particular, Sarah has built a strong Paediatric Unit and over the last 10 years has helped deliver more authorised medicines for children.

Sarah is a Fellow of the Faculty of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry and Honorary Fellow of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians.

Role

The Director of Vigilance and Risk Management of Medicines has responsibility for pharmacovigilance of medicines, including the Yellow Card Scheme for reporting adverse drug reactions, benefit-risk assessment and updates to safety information.

VRMM Division is also responsible for renewal of authorisations, changes in legal classification and advertising of medicines, and for assessment of studies relating to the development of paediatric medicines.

[Approbation of the Lord Mayor Elect ceremony: Robert Buckland QC speech](#)

My Lord Mayor Elect, I am commanded by Her Majesty The Queen to convey Her Majesty's express approval of the choice of the citizens of London in electing you to be Lord Mayor for the coming year.

I am delighted to welcome you, your family and other distinguished guests to formally convey this message.

I'd like to thank the Recorder of London for his address and his outstanding contribution to our justice system. It is equally an honour for me to be the last Lord Chancellor to whom you will present a Lord Mayor before you take up your appointment as a High Court Judge. A much-deserved appointment in an already distinguished judicial career.

And I'd also like to take this opportunity to recognise the outgoing Lord Mayor who has helped to shape the City of tomorrow today. Thank you to him for his commitment and dedication to the City of London.

Lord Mayor Elect, with over 30 years in finance, you bring with you a wealth

of expertise and experience, from both here in London but also in New York and Hong Kong. You have had a distinguished career in finance, but also in supporting culture and community causes.

I welcome the theme of your year in office – ‘Global UK: trade, innovation, culture’. These are not separate goals, they are intertwined. They are the City’s – London’s and indeed this country’s biggest strengths. It’s this combination that make London an attractive place to not just ‘do business’, but to live and work.

I know you believe passionately in the role this country has on the world stage and the potential that exists to grow and deepen the stature and status of this.

Whilst I won’t go into details of trade today – I will say that I share your commitment to it, and look forward to working closely with you in my role as Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice to progress our many mutual shared goals.

I, like you, believe we are at our best when we are international and we should consolidate our position as a leader in Fintech and LawTech and lead the way on other areas of innovation like cybersecurity and green finance.

Innovation and trade are just one part of the overall package. Another is culture.

As an Alderman, your ward included the London Stock Exchange – that great and historic trading place. But as well as creating the mechanisms and environment for trade and commerce, London, with the City at its heart, has created a space for the exchange of culture as well as capital that has helped to make it the greatest city on Earth.

When you ask someone to think of the City, they don’t always think about the arts. But the fact is, it is home to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, the Barbican, the London Symphony Orchestra and the Museum of London. It is also the fourth largest funder of arts in the UK.

I know you personally have a passion for theatre and culture – and that acting is something very much in the family (his half-brother is Damian Lewis).

I sadly can’t lay claim to such illustrious connections but, being Welsh, I am proud of my home nation’s reliable production and pedigree of actors and performers.

I am also known, on occasion, to a performance or two myself. In my current role, that is often performing in State ceremonies in front of The Queen. A nerve-wracking and humbling experience. A more cathartic performance, at least for me, is a rendition of ‘Danny Boy’ to my constituents. I literally want to be music to their ears.

My Lord Mayor Elect, I know that by working together, and through your passion and determination in promoting trade, innovation and culture, over

the course of your year in office you will further cement the City's standing and position on the world stage. In turn, it will showcase what this country is about – attracting the brightest and the best to a vibrant, exciting and creative place to live and work.

Minister Pincher speech at the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly, 21 October 2019

Introduction

All politicians love to hear applause ahead of a speech, let alone at the end of one, so thank you for the warm welcome.

It is a pleasure to be with you, and very good of you to arrange an event on a Monday morning so close to my constituency in Tamworth. Though this Saturday happened to be a weekend I was in the Commons.

It is fitting to host BIPA here. As you may know, this region actually has a large Irish community of its own. Warwickshire has the most Gaelic Games Clubs in England, outside of London, though I am sorry to say we haven't beaten a club from Ireland at hurling since 2017. Having read up on that matter I am surprised we have beaten a club from Ireland at all.

May I first of all thank Co-Chairs Andrew Rosindell and Sean Crowe. Coming from quite different political traditions, I know they share a genuine commitment to strengthen links and mutual understanding, to explore solutions to shared challenges and to promote friendly relations, among the BIPA membership and beyond. They both deserve our appreciation for their tireless efforts. Thank you very much gentlemen.

BIPA and bilateral relations

It is my first time at this Assembly, but I already know how incredibly valuable it is to maintaining and enhancing relationships across our islands. I know that it is a body based on respect, dialogue, trust, friendship and a little patience. Patience especially if you are a government MP working with the Whips Office, a three line whip for Conservative MPs and a one line whip for Labour.

We have valued BIPA's huge contribution to those bonds of friendship for the 30 years since its foundation, and I am confident that, together, we will continue to deepen and strengthen them after the United Kingdom leaves the European Union.

Bilateral diplomacy is about strong personal relationships in service of two countries' mutual interests. The Assembly is the embodiment of that. If I can quote W B Yeats, "There are no strangers here; Only friends you haven't met." We may sometimes be rivals in sport, but our nations are bonded by history and family, culture and commerce. We are diverse, but our bonds run deep. Very deep.

EU Exit

All friendships go through testing times, and Brexit has certainly been one such test for the United Kingdom and Ireland. It has dominated the political landscape over the last three years. It has occupied several miles of column inches and sent the Twittersphere into the stratosphere.

You will have already seen the events at the weekend. All I will say now therefore is the United Kingdom is committed to the Belfast Agreement, the Common Travel Area, an open border, and the institutions of North-South Cooperation. Above all, we are committed to a close bilateral relationship with Ireland in the future, well beyond Brexit.

My great-grandmother was a Marney from Ireland. I am not sure that qualifies me to play for Ireland, or that Ireland would want me. But it is important for me to continue this family connection with Ireland.

We want a vibrant relationship that champions our mutual interests, grapples with shared challenges and seizes economic opportunities. Much of that collaboration is of course already happening.

Links and opportunities

Our people-to-people links are strong. Recent visits to Ireland by members of the Royal Family have been overwhelmingly well received. The British Council is promoting cultural and educational links – including British music at the Triskel Arts Centre in Cork- and our Embassy in Dublin is making connections between young people on either side of the Irish Sea. These links between the next generation which will help to safeguard the future of our relationship, and that's why we would like to do even more to engage diaspora groups.

Climate, energy and the environment is another area where we must work together. I understand that this was the focus of the last BIPA plenary and I note the motion that has been tabled for discussion tomorrow. The Foreign Secretary's Special Envoy for Climate Change visited Ireland in July and I know that our Embassy is keen to step up work on this, not least as we prepare to host COP26 in Glasgow next year, in partnership with Italy. There is some question about where the weather is better in Glasgow or Italy. I am sure we will find out in due course.

Our collaboration in bioscience, engineering and physical sciences is also strong. We have a Science Foundation Ireland and Wellcome Trust partnership, joint university appointments and Centres for Doctoral Training. There is plenty of scope for collaboration in artificial intelligence too, as well as fintech, medtech and proptech.

Civic development

Our Embassy in Dublin is also working hard to link up the south west of Ireland with similar areas in the United Kingdom – such as the Northern Powerhouse, and the Midland Engine region that we are standing in today. And it was nice to see Brian and David speak earlier. Their ‘Joining the Dots Campaign’ is making valuable connections and promoting inclusive growth. There are strong relationships with cities such as Birmingham and mayors such as Andy Street will be important too.

Our cooperation in other areas is also moving forward. There are excellent operational links between the Police Service Northern Ireland and the Garda. And earlier this year, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office hosted the first ever joint diplomatic training programme for British and Irish diplomats. The plan is for the programme to be reciprocated in Dublin next year. We also plan a joint visit by our Permanent Secretaries to Africa.

Conclusion

These are just a few examples where our cooperation is benefitting both our countries. They show that the British-Irish relationship and the work of the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly really matter. I am confident that, with your continued help and support, that relationship will continue to flourish in the future.

You will note that William Shakespeare is one of the West Midlands’ most famous sons, who wrote: “Words are easy, like the wind; faithful friends are hard to find.” I know as that great Ambassador for British-Irish relations, Feargal Sharkey once sang something very similar. But not in this room today. I don’t think friends will be hard to find, as Yeats said you just have to find them. I am very grateful to be here amongst friends. Thank you.