

[Driving and your eyesight: staying safe on the road](#)

If you drive, it goes without saying that you know you need your eyes on the road at all times. What you might not know is that DVLA has minimum eyesight standards that all drivers need to demonstrate so they can be allowed to drive.

So how do we decide on the vision standards for driving? DVLA's Vision Panel Secretary Dr Gareth Rees tells us more about his role and these standards.



I've been a doctor for 41 years and have been DVLA's Vision Panel Secretary for 10 years. My main role is to liaise between DVLA and the [Honorary Medical Advisory Panel on Visual Disorders](#). The panel meets every 6 months and is made up of eyesight specialists, who provide DVLA with expert advice on how to apply and interpret the law when [assessing fitness to drive](#).

Think your eyesight's getting worse? Act now

We all have busy lives, and sometimes we might overlook the signs that our eyes are not as good as they were. You might be finding it harder to judge distances, you might be struggling to read the newspapers, or it's getting more difficult for you to drive at night. These are just a few signs that [your eyesight may be deteriorating](#).

In line with [advice from optometrists](#), our advice is that you should get your eyes tested at least every 2 years. But if you recognise any of the signs above, don't wait – go and get checked out straight away with your optician or doctor. If they advise you to tell DVLA about your eyesight, you can do this [online or by writing to us](#).

If you don't meet the eyesight standards, stop driving immediately and tell DVLA.

After you tell us about your condition

Don't worry – usually, most people who [tell us they've got a medical](#)

[condition](#) are still allowed to drive.

If you have a 'progressive' (worsening) condition but can still meet the eyesight standards for driving, you may get a short-term licence rather than a full-term one. This type of licence lasts for 1, 2, 3 or 5 years and when it's due for renewal, we let you know.

It's better to be safe than sorry. So if you're in doubt, get it checked out.

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[News story: Civil news: change to telephone number for Recovery Services](#)

You should use 0203 8144 366 if you wish to contact Recovery Services about the repayment of legal aid costs.

The new telephone number for Recovery Services is 0203 8144 366.

Callers to the new number will have the same options as before to have their call redirected to the right team for their enquiry.

Anyone calling the old number of 020 3334 6373 will hear a recorded message from 28 November 2017 asking them to redial using 0203 8144 366.

We will give notice before the recorded message is removed and the old number taken out of service.

Further information

RecoveryServices-Enquiries@Justice.gov.uk – for questions about this change

[Press release: Foreign Secretary statement on Chennai Six verdict](#)

Following the announcement of a verdict in the Chennai Six case, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

Since I became Foreign Secretary, this case has been a top priority for everybody at the Foreign Office and today's verdict is fantastic news.

The FCO has worked tirelessly behind the scenes to reunite these men with their families. The importance the UK government places on their case cannot be understated.

The men, their families and their supporters, who have campaigned unrelentingly, must be overjoyed. I share their delight and I hope they can return home as soon as possible.

Speech: Community-led housing

Introduction

Thank you, Sophie. [Sophie Long, BBC News correspondent and presenter (event host)]

The BBC folk seem to get the best gigs in town.

I am speaking at an event being compered by Mark Easton next.

[Easton [RESI conference](#) story]

I am absolutely delighted to be here at what is a landmark moment for community-led housing.

Today's event – the first ever conference to bring the sector together – is testament to just how far you have come.

With [half of the 225 plus Community Land Trusts](#) in England and Wales having been set up in the past 2 years, the momentum is clearly growing.

And I want you to know that I am behind you all the way.

Benefits

Because the strengths of community-led housing speak for themselves.

You know your local areas better than anyone.

And are better placed to make things happen.

To see the potential of small sites.

Difficult sites.

Sites that are off limits or of no interest to developers.

You are not waiting for someone else to step in and just take what you are offered.

You are designing and developing houses that you and your neighbours are proud to call home.

Homes that, from the word go, are an integral part of your communities.

Homes that are not just affordable now, but are affordable forever.

That are models of high quality design, energy efficiency and innovation.

And it's not just the people in those homes who benefit.

Because your work raises the bar for the entire housing market.

Pushing up expectations of design quality.

Powering the growth of modern methods of construction.

And, by supporting smaller-scale building companies making the house building industry more diverse and resilient.

But the benefits go further still.

By giving people a hand in the conversion or refurbishment of empty properties you are equipping them with new and highly transferrable construction skills.

You are sustaining local economies by giving young home-grown talent affordable places to live and a reason to stay.

You're not just building better homes.

You're building better communities.

Barriers

And I certainly don't underestimate what that takes.

You face significant barriers, such as access to pre-development grants, loans or mortgages and a lack of understanding or resources at a local policy level.

But the biggest barriers are almost certainly cultural.

It is a simple idea: if you need a home, why not build it?

Yet most people in our country never even consider it seriously.

And, if they do, they might think of either Grand Designs or some kind of flat-pack nightmare on an epic scale.

I know, from living and working in Europe that homes built by local

communities are a normal part of the landscape in countries like Germany and Sweden.

People there may be somewhat surprised that we need to have a conference about it at all.

Yet here in Britain, the term “community-led housing” is likely to be met with blank looks.

Well, outside this room anyway!

And, even when explained, it’s seen as a heroic endeavour that is only for the most extraordinary and adventurous of individuals.

Of course you are extraordinary people. And I don’t normally like to single out individuals from a sea of excellence.

But on this occasion I must.

There’s Maria Brenton, who for 18 years and counting has committed herself to the Older Women’s Cohousing project in Barnet.

There’s Geoff Pook, from the Beer CLT, who formed a group, secured funding, secured Registered Provider status and built 7 homes – and did it all in just 2 years.

Two years!

I’ve had flat-pack furniture in garage still not assembled after 5 years!

And let’s not forget one of the first innovators, David Brown, who has just stood down as Chair of High Bickington Community Property Trust after almost 2 decades.

Maria, Geoff and David are truly inspirational, and I take my hat off to them, and indeed to all of you.

But I want community-led housing to be a realistic option not just for exceptional people but for all people.

Even politicians!

Realising the sector’s potential

This is vital if we are to realise the true potential of this sector.

To empower more communities.

To, ultimately, see community-led housing playing a much bigger role in delivering the houses our country desperately needs.

Delivering these houses is an overriding priority for this government.

Recent figures showed that the number of homes in England increased by more

than 217,000 last year – the highest level of net additions since the depths of the recession.

But you saw in February's [housing white paper](#), and again in last week's ambitious [Budget](#), that we want to go further still.

That we want to build more of the right homes, in the right places, at the right prices.

And I believe that community-led housing has a huge role to play in helping us to do just that.

Announcement

A year ago we backed the sector with the launch of the Community Housing Fund.

Since then, we've awarded £60 million in grants to help 148 local authorities support more community-led projects

The grants, which ranged in size, were paid to authorities that had the least affordable homes or the highest density of second homes.

Alongside the money, we gave advice on how to spend it in order to deliver the best results.

And we wanted the grants to help build capacity and support local projects, now and into the future.

Some fantastic work has been happening as a result .

Many councils – such as in Sussex, Hampshire and London – have pooled these resources to provide an information and support hub for community groups.

Others – such as Cornwall and West Dorset – have already used the money directly to help get the projects off the ground.

In short, this funding has been a success.

So today I can today announce that we will launch a new programme of funding to help build thousands more homes.

Worth £60 million in the first year alone, it will provide both capital and revenue funding, with flexibility to meet demand.

A significant element of the funding will also go towards developing an advisory network that supports community groups to bring forward projects.

We will shortly publish a prospectus setting out criteria for bids.

And, from January, we will invite applications from community groups, registered providers and any other appropriate organisations.

Bids will be assessed by the experts at Homes England, our new national housing agency.

And we hope to announce the first allocations as soon as Easter.

It is vitally important to me that we continue to work closely with the sector in delivering this programme, just as we have done in the design phase.

Many of you have had a hand in shaping this new programme of work. And I hope you will reap the rewards.

And I also hope you will come together to share your vast experience and expertise.

I want to ensure that our investment in the sector makes a real difference and your contribution will be invaluable in helping us achieve this.

That's why I will be setting up an advisory group to steer the Department of Communities and Local Government on the delivery of the programme.

Conclusion

Some will say this just small fry.

That community-led housing currently accounts for just a few hundred units a year – under half a per cent of total housing output in England.

That the scale of the challenge before us – building 300,000 homes a year – dwarfs the capacity of the community-led sector.

But when the community-led movement began it was producing just a handful of homes each year.

First that grew to a few dozen, then to a few hundred.

Now, with government on your side, there is no reason why those hundreds cannot become thousands.

No single measure will fix our broken housing market.

But with action on many fronts, with the dedication of many people, we can get there.

It will take time.

But I know that we can do it.

And community-led housing has a serious contribution to make.

There are few sectors that boast the combination of talent and passion that we have here today.

People who are totally committed to making their communities better places to

live.

So let's do everything we can to get even more people involved in community-led housing.

Together with you I want to make the idea of communities building the homes they need not a radical departure, but an everyday reality.

And for the sector to play its part in getting Britain building.

Thank you.

Press release: New Industrial Strategy to boost NI earning power and innovation

Business Secretary Greg Clark has today published the [UK government's modern Industrial Strategy](#), with a plan to boost productivity and the earning power of people and businesses throughout Northern Ireland and the whole of the UK.

The White Paper outlines a plan to drive growth across the whole of the UK, build on the strengths of places, boost skills, improve productivity, boost people's earning power and upgrade infrastructure.

The Strategy includes flagship Sector Deal agreements with a number of Northern Ireland's most important sectors – automotive, construction, Life Sciences and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Northern Ireland has a world-leading reputation in a number of key sectors including construction and automotive, as well as future industries such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and life sciences and the government has confirmed these sectors will be the first to benefit from these new strategic and long-term partnerships with government, backed by private sector co-investment. Work will continue with other sectors on transformative sector deals.

With a clear ambition of boosting productivity and economic growth, the Industrial Strategy contains a number of policy measures to benefit Northern Ireland:

- A new Strength in Places Fund to support innovation excellence that can demonstrate a strong impact on local growth, with Northern Ireland's innovators and communities perfectly-placed to benefit
- Increasing national research and development spending to 2.4 per cent of GDP by 2027, boosting Northern Ireland's research and innovation base,

and offering new opportunities for innovative companies to bid for funding through the Government's flagship science and research fund, the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund

- A commitment to work with partners in the devolved nations to consider how Local Industrial Strategies could deliver for places in Northern Ireland in future.
- Continuing to support advanced data and digital infrastructure across the United Kingdom, including the testing and deployment of 5G technologies
- Government will open negotiations for a Belfast City Deal as part of its commitment to a comprehensive and ambitious set of city deals across Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland James Brokenshire said:

"Championing the unique strengths of Northern Ireland, the new Industrial Strategy launched today clearly demonstrates the UK Government's commitment to boost earning power, drive growth and offer opportunities across the country. It is a further example of the UK Government building an economy that is fit for the future.

"Building on the extra £660 million set out for Northern Ireland in the Chancellor's budget, businesses, innovators, people and places throughout Northern Ireland will benefit from the Industrial Strategy's removal of barriers to innovation and growth, as well as from its preparation for the opportunities and grand challenges of the coming decades.

"Thanks to New Sector Deals and investment in R&D, we will support the industries of the future – such as life sciences, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cyber security – where Northern Ireland is at the cutting-edge and has the potential to lead the world.

"Over the coming weeks, as we look to restore the Executive, I will continue to explore how to maximise the positive impact this Strategy will have in Northern Ireland, to build a better, more productive and more prosperous UK economy."

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

"Our new, ambitious Industrial Strategy will build on the UK's strengths, boost productivity and earning power and will ensure we are one of the most competitive places in the world to start and grow a business.

"We recognise no two economies within the UK are the same – for Northern Ireland, strengths include construction, life sciences and emerging sectors like AI. But we also recognise that our Industrial Strategy is not something that is done to business, it is done with, and indeed, by business.

"This strategy is about firms from across the UK coming together and working with Government to build a better, more productive and more prosperous UK economy – fit for the future."

The Strategy outlines how the Government is allocating the second wave of the

Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, matching innovation excellence held by businesses and universities across the UK.

A number of the Challenge areas set to receive significant Government funding will offer significant opportunities for Northern Ireland's businesses and universities including:

- transforming construction – Part of the proposed fund is for a UK Active Building Centre, this will build significantly on this area of expertise Northern Ireland's companies in this sector
- healthcare – with an emerging cluster of connected health, assisted living and data analytic hubs, including The Connected Health Innovation Centre (CHIC) and companies such as Intelesens, Leckey Design, Data Analytics Labs, Brainwave Bank and Analytics Engine, Northern Ireland is well poised to become a leading location in the UK in this area
- services 4.0 – Belfast is ranked as the UK's number one destination for fintech and cybersecurity, and is home to first rate examples of industry and academia collaboration in the Capital Markets Collaborative Network (CMCN). Investment through the Services 4.0 challenge will help build on NI's position as a global centre of R&D excellence in Capital Markets technology
- energy revolution – Northern Ireland currently has significant research capability and expertise within its universities and colleges. Ulster University's Centre for Sustainable Technologies (CST) and The Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy (CASE) at Queen's University are prime examples of industry-led sustainable energy research centres that could benefit.