

Peter Freeman's speech to the Development Summit

Good morning everyone, it's a great pleasure to be here with you today at the start of what I'm sure will be three engrossing days of discussion, debate and learning.

While like many of you, I'd much prefer to be speaking to you all in person, the opportunity to come together, reflect on a year like no other and look to the future, is still an engaging proposition and I hope you are all able to take full advantage of the sessions over the next few days.

As Chair of Homes England and someone who has worked in the industry for many years, it's a matter of immense pride to me that despite the difficulties of the last year, the housing sector has continued to build the homes the country needs.

Across the country, thousands of people will have moved into new homes because of the work all of us do on a day-to-day basis.

We shouldn't underestimate the positive impact of that extra bedroom, new garden or bigger living room on people's wellbeing.

Thank you to all of you who have worked with us over this year. Homes England is only as successful as the strength of our partnerships.

Despite the pandemic, we're pleased to have been able to support over 37,000 starts on-site, nearly 35,000 completions and an 11% increase in the number of social rented homes built last year.

Behind every single one of those starts and completions there will be people taking their first step onto the ladder, jobs for the construction sector and benefits to the local economy.

It's easy to get lost in the numbers, but we should never forget that housing is vital to the nation's wellbeing and prosperity. In the same way as access to an effective health service or quality education has obvious and measurable impacts on opportunities and outcomes, access to good quality housing in well-designed communities has a hugely positive impact.

But we're aware of the important task ahead of us as we look to support the economic recovery, support the sector, and build the high-quality homes and places the country needs.

New site acquisitions

For that reason, I'm pleased to be able to announce that Homes England invested over £175m acquiring 17 new sites towards the end of the last financial year.

These new sites will support over 7,400 new homes across 400 hectares of land, bringing with them a range of green and social infrastructure, including schools, retail and community facilities.

By bringing these sites into our ownership we will use our resources to unblock them, get them shovel-ready and back on the market so that housebuilders and housing associations can build them out to the design quality standards we set.

Providing this steady pipeline of sites is one of many ways in which we are providing certainty to the industry, particularly the smaller end of the sector.

Affordable Homes Programme

But it's not just through our landholdings that we're supporting the market.

We recently opened bidding for the Government's new affordable housing fund.

The fact that ministers have been able to secure a £12.2bn Affordable Homes Programme outside of what was clearly a challenging Spending Review is very good news for the sector.

It is the first fund to have been designed and launched since Homes England was created. It represents a significant opportunity to explore new partnerships and drive affordable housing supply.

We are keen to see this programme as a fund that sits alongside all other capability and capacity that Homes England is building. Come and speak to us and see how we can use all of our capabilities to support you in meeting your housing objectives.

We know housing associations and other affordable housing providers are managing several critical and competing priorities, and trade-offs will have to be made between investing in existing homes and investing in new homes but we'd encourage people to come and speak to us and see how we can support them to balance both objectives.

We're particularly keen to hear from groups that we may have not worked with before. As part of our commitment to support new entrants to the market, we have opened up our affordable housing Strategic Partnerships to a broader audience, with for profit providers now also able to participate in the fund.

Our existing 23 Strategic Partnerships have seen over 40,000 additional homes built and we want to build on this strong foundation. Do come and talk to us and see what we can do together. Wherever possible we want to have conversations about how we can use this funding to align with your strategies and support new housing delivery.

Co-investment with institutions in affordable homes

Similarly, we are keen to hear from institutional investors considering investing in the affordable housing sector.

Matching public need and private enterprise around a set of principles that can deliver both public and commercial value represents a huge opportunity to positively increase affordable housing delivery in this country.

In recent months Homes England has supported two institutions to establish affordable housing funds.

We invested £20m in Man Group's new Community Housing Fund.

Our investment forms part of a wider equity raising exercise by Man Group to build a £400m fund to deliver 3,000 mixed tenure new homes by 2026.

We also invested £10m alongside many other investors in a shared ownership fund managed by M&G. Our combined investment will help accelerate the delivery of 2,000 affordable homes.

Homes England's commitment to both funds is a strong signal that the Government sees significant opportunities for domestic and international institutional capital to support the delivery of new affordable housing.

We have the appetite to lend and invest alongside new market entrants delivering new homes at scale, and our grant programmes are available to address viability challenges in affordable housing.

Placemaking, communities & wellbeing

Who funds and builds new homes is just one side of the coin though.

As we start to recover from the pandemic and rebuild a more productive economy, we are learning that the "new normal" will be very different from the past.

We must make progress towards a zero-carbon society. We are realising that our children, and their children, will not thank us if we continue to build poorly designed homes and places. We are recognising that the way we develop neighbourhoods, towns and cities is key to our health and well-being.

As we look to the future, building the homes the country needs to unlock opportunity and growth will be crucial, but the pursuit of those ambitions can't be just a numbers game.

We are more likely to win the argument for new, extended and rejuvenated settlements across the country precisely by promoting well-designed, connected, vibrant places where people can prosper through the different stages of their lives.

For me personally, my outlook on shaping new communities is heavily

influenced by my work as Co-founder of Argent in its masterplanned, mixed-use developments at King's Cross and Brindleyplace in Birmingham.

Turning King's Cross from a rail terminus surrounded by dereliction to an enormously attractive destination in its own right was a massive undertaking, but the principles that underpinned our approach have shaped the design of vibrant places for centuries. We sought to work in partnership to create places for people to live, work, play, get educated and enjoy themselves in uplifting surroundings.

While King's Cross is one project, the principles of creating places that are useful, well-designed spaces for the community are ones we must fully embrace as we seek to learn the lessons of Covid-19.

The pandemic has brought clarity around the importance of place. It made us realise how much people treasure their space; the familiarity of their community, green spaces, and amenities to enjoy on their doorstep, not a train or car ride away.

It would be wrong to say that we are starting from scratch on this front. There are some fabulous examples of schemes that embody these principles being delivered today.

The urban extension of Newquay, known as Nansledan on land owned by the Duchy of Cornwall, is a fine example. New homes are being built, not in isolation, but alongside schools, high streets, and plenty of green space including allotments and playing fields.

Similarly, at Houlton in Rugby, the Wellcome Trust-owned master developer Urban & Civic are leading the construction of a new 6,000-home community. Their business model is based on a long-term commitment to placemaking, making the delivery of social infrastructure and schools an up-front commitment rather than a neglected afterthought.

While not all projects will be suited to this model, principles of mixed-use, green space, uplifting surroundings and social value can be applied to the many sites we need to build to meet demand locally and nationally. A proper range of sites, addressing local needs and opportunities will include brownfield and greenfield, in-fill, urban extension and new towns. No one size fits all. Local authorities, landowners, developers and central Government all need to work more co-operatively to allocate the right solutions and see they are delivered – and delivered well.

As co-chair of the Urban Centre Recovery Taskforce I heard many positive examples of these principles being put into practice.

Design

Emerging from the pandemic, Homes England is working to ensure we are embedding these principles in everything we do.

We have partnered with the Building Research Establishment (BRE) and the

Design Council to develop a strategic framework for the agency.

This framework and the partnership between the three industry-leading organisations will set an ambitious, long-term roadmap for Homes England to leverage its leadership and convening role in the housebuilding sector.

This work will build on the existing good practice already underway at Homes England, such as the agency's work with Design for Homes, NHS England, and NHS Improvement to produce the design quality assessment tool Building for a Healthy Life.

We are absolutely committed to using our influence and expertise to drive up the quality and pace of sustainable development.

Forward

Beyond our direct delivery efforts and work with partners the agency is entering a new phase.

As many of you will have read, we will soon be welcoming Peter Denton, currently CEO of Hyde Housing Association as our new CEO.

Peter's outstanding qualifications for the job more than make up for the likely confusion to be caused by having two Peter's at the helm of Homes England.

He has extensive experience of real estate banking and investment, including raising funds and managing portfolios across Europe.

And during his successful tenure at a major Housing Association, first as CFO and then as CEO, Peter has displayed a personal commitment to marrying financial discipline and social purpose.

I have no doubt that he will be an outstanding leader, with his unique skillset helping us build the homes the country needs.

As well as Peter joining us, we are fortunate enough to have two industry experts, Stephen Kinsella and Harry Swales, leading strong Land & Development and Investment teams. They are there to help meet your needs and combine a commercial understanding with a sense of mission to improve housing outcomes for the country.

With our top team established, we're well set to continue to work with partners across the sector and wider ecosystem and move beyond the challenges of this year and put all our focus on creating great places and putting keys in people's hands.

You'll hear more from us this year on the direction of the agency, with a new Strategic Plan set to be produced as we get ourselves in the best position possible to respond to the Government's housing objectives.

We have had thousands of conversations with partners this year and will continue to have engage proactively as we work towards the next stage of the

agency. Needless to say, events like this help us enormously to develop our thinking and keep our finger on the pulse of our partners.

I hope you enjoy these next few days and I look forward to seeing many of you in person in the months ahead.

[**UN Human Rights Council 47: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women**](#)

We use some essential cookies to make this website work.

We'd like to set additional cookies to understand how you use GOV.UK, remember your settings and improve government services.

We also use cookies set by other sites to help us deliver content from their services.

[**COP26 President visits Russia to set out the benefits of a net zero future**](#)

- Alok Sharma arrives in Russia to discuss cooperation on climate change ahead of the UK-hosted COP26 climate summit in November
- He will meet Russian ministers, business leaders, and civil society and encourage Russia to commit to net zero emissions by 2050
- COP26 President to welcome Russia's commitment to international climate cooperation at the Earth Day Leaders Summit on Climate in April

The COP26 President-Designate, Alok Sharma, is in Moscow to discuss Russia's role in international efforts to tackle climate change and strengthen support for a comprehensive negotiated outcome at the Glasgow conference later this year.

With less than five months to go before the critical UN climate change conference, Mr Sharma will meet with leaders from the Russian government, business and civil society to hear their priorities for COP26 and to explore areas of cooperation.

The UK is urging Russia, as a G20 economy, to join the movement to reach net

zero emissions by mid-century, which is critical to limiting global temperature rise to 1.5C.

The COP President will also discuss the importance of protecting nature, noting Russia is home to more than 20% of the world's forests, as well as climate finance and efforts to help the world adapt to respond to climate risks.

Mr Sharma will also discuss the Ministerial meeting that he is hosting in London next month to drive progress towards an ambitious outcome in Glasgow, which Russia has been invited to attend.

As a world leader on energy efficiency, renewables, and innovation, the UK was the first major economy to commit to becoming carbon neutral by 2050, and more than 70% of the world's economy is now covered by a net zero target – up from 30% when the UK took over as the incoming COP Presidency. Russia has the potential to play a leading role, as a major hydrocarbon producer and exporter, and as the world's fourth largest emitter.

Economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic presents a clear opportunity for clean, green investment, particularly in infrastructure. The low-carbon economy offers huge potential for growth in the coming decades, with opportunities for Russia in renewable energy sectors.

While in Moscow, Mr Sharma will host a reception to open the Russia-British Chamber of Commerce Annual Business Forum on the topic of 'COP26: Opportunities for UK-Russia ESG Engagement'. He will also meet Deputy Prime Minister Victoria Abramchenko, Presidential Adviser on Climate Change Ruslan Edelgeriyev, and Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin.

Ahead of the visit, Mr Sharma said:

Climate change is a real and urgent threat to our planet, and time is running out to address it. COP26 is our last best hope of keeping that critical 1.5C target alive, and building a greener, brighter future for us all.

By capitalising on the benefits offered by shifting to a cleaner, greener economy, Russia has an opportunity to show real leadership as the world continues on its journey to net zero emissions.

I welcome the support President Putin has shown for international cooperation on tackling climate change, and look forward to constructive discussions here in Moscow. As the world's fourth largest emitter, Russia is an essential player in the fight against climate change.

Ends .

Mobile connectivity revolution to boost the Union

- Scotland, Wales and North East England to benefit most from mobile coverage boost under new £1 billion Shared Rural Network
- More than 230,000 Welsh homes and businesses to get access to faster broadband through UK government's £5 billion Project Gigabit
- Nearly 1,000 public buildings and 150,000 homes and businesses in Northern Ireland to get full fibre connections

People in rural Scotland, Wales and the North East of England will enjoy huge improvements in their mobile coverage thanks to the UK government's world-first £1 billion mobile connectivity programme.

This scheme is a major part of the government's plan to level up all parts of the UK and will bring economic and social benefits for people no matter where they live.

Uplifts in 4G coverage will allow people to seize the benefits of technology to stay connected, shop online and stream entertainment on the go. It will also power economic growth, helping people set up and run businesses from anywhere in the UK.

The boost to 4G comes as the government reveals hundreds of thousands of properties in rural areas of Wales will be in scope to benefit from Project Gigabit – the £5 billion national broadband upgrade and biggest rollout in British history to bring the fastest possible internet connections to hard-to-reach areas.

The UK government has also allocated £24 million to level up regions across Northern Ireland and modernise public buildings with high-speed gigabit broadband.

The Shared Rural Network (SRN) was agreed between the government and the country's biggest mobile network operators (MNOs) and will see firms sharing their masts to boost people's mobile signals.

It will close out so-called 'partial not spots': areas where some but not all MNOs provide 4G coverage and which stop local people connecting unless they are signed up with a specific available provider.

[New maps and figures published today*](#) reveal how much mobile coverage will

increase in each region of the UK once the SRN is completed.

The Scottish Highlands and Islands, Mid and West Wales and the North East of England will see the largest increases in 4G signal.

Scotland will benefit the most of the four home nations with coverage from all four MNOs to be delivered to three quarters (74 per cent) of Scotland's landmass by the end of the programme. This is an increase of two thirds and up from 44 per cent currently.

Wales will see the next highest increases – with coverage from all four operators across its geographic areas increasing by more than one third, from 60 per cent to 80 per cent.

Northern Ireland will see 4G from all four MNOs rise to 85 per cent of its landmass, up from 79 per cent in 2020. The North East of England will see total 4G coverage jump from 68 per cent to 86 per cent.

Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

We're putting connecting people across the UK at the heart of our plan to build back better, through huge uplifts to mobile coverage in rural areas and the rapid rollout of gigabit broadband.

Today's announcements will improve the lives of millions of people in rural parts of Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland, giving them the connections they need to work, access services and keep in touch – both at home and on the go.

Mobile coverage

The SRN, [brokered by ministers in March last year](#), will see EE, O2, Three and Vodafone share a network of new and existing phone masts. It will bring an extra 280,000 premises and an additional 16,000 km of UK roads in range of a 4G signal – increasing total geographic 4G coverage to 95 per cent of the UK by the end of 2025.

Northern Ireland and England will both see a six per cent fall in partial not spots by the end of the scheme, with 4G coverage from at least one MNO reaching 98 per cent of their respective landmasses, with Wales hitting 95 per cent and Scotland 91 per cent.

The MNOs have already begun work as part of the deal to close the majority of partial not spots by mid-2024 and there have already been more than 700 sites announced so far this year to help close not spots across the UK.

This year the SRN programme has also kicked off work to end 'total not spots' – areas which have no coverage from any operator. It has begun searching for, acquiring and building publicly funded masts to be shared between all four MNOs.

The government has today launched a [consultation](#) with the telecoms industry to identify any existing infrastructure which can be utilised to end total not spots. It wants to reduce the need to build new phone masts and help make sure public funds are used effectively.

Hamish MacLeod, Director at Mobile UK, said:

The Shared Rural Network is a transformational project backed by a half a billion-pound investment from the mobile operators to extend coverage in rural areas across the country. Mobile operators have already started to deliver on this commitment, with new sites coming online in partial coverage areas. We are committed to providing a reliable 4G mobile signal to 95% of the UK's landmass and improving the experience for people living, working and travelling in rural areas.

Gigabit broadband

The UK government today announces next steps in its record £5 billion Project Gigabit scheme to build lightning-fast fixed broadband connections to homes and businesses in the most rural and remote parts of the United Kingdom.

Gigabit broadband enables download speeds of up to 1,000 megabits per second (mbps) – enough to download a HD movie in less than 30 seconds and lay the foundations for next-generation tech such as 8K-quality video streaming.

Up to 234,000 hard-to-reach Welsh homes and businesses are announced as in scope to receive gigabit broadband through the programme. This includes rural towns and villages in Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd, the Isle of Anglesey, Pembrokeshire and Powys.

The government will set out the timetable for the delivery of these connections once it has agreed the procurement process with the Welsh Government.

On top of this, the government is also announcing a further £24 million to fund the rollout of gigabit broadband in ten local authority areas in Northern Ireland as part of Project Gigabit.

The Full Fibre Northern Ireland (FFNI) scheme will see 969 hospitals, GP surgeries, ambulance and fire stations, community and leisure centres, council offices and other public buildings connected to gigabit-capable networks. This will help them operate more efficiently and deliver better quality public services.

Thanks to the investment Northern Ireland-based network provider Fibrus has announced plans to extend its network to an estimated 150,000 homes and businesses as part of its own £100 million package.

In a further boost to connectivity in Scotland, the Scottish Government has confirmed it can continue to provide up to £5,000 extra funding to top-up the

Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme. This is in addition to the £1,500 available to rural homes and £3,500 available to rural small to medium-sized businesses.

The UK Government continues to actively work with the Scottish Government on gigabit deployment through their Reaching 100% (R100) programme. The scope of the final R100 contract will be confirmed in the Summer.

The government will announce the next areas to be connected via Project Gigabit in the coming weeks as it pushes ahead with efforts to connect at least 85 per cent of the UK to gigabit-capable broadband by 2025.

ENDS

Notes to editors

*As a result of the Shared Rural Network, 4G in all four home nations of the UK coverage [will increase as follows](#).

Education Secretary launches call for evidence on behaviour in schools

The use of mobile phones in schools is one of a number of areas being looked at by the Government as part of a review of behaviour in schools.

The Education Secretary Gavin Williamson has today (29 June) launched a call for evidence asking teachers, parents and other staff for their views and policies on managing good behaviour, ahead of planned updates to Government guidance later this year on behaviour, discipline, suspensions and permanent exclusions.

The six-week consultation seeks views on how schools maintain calm classrooms, the use of removal rooms and creating mobile phone-free school days, among other measures.

This next step follows the department's £10 million behaviour hubs programme which partners heads and leaders from England's highest performing multi-academy trusts with schools struggling with poor behaviour and discipline.

The move follows the Education Secretary's speech to the Confederation of School Trusts earlier this year, where he set out the importance of good behaviour as part of the Government's continuing drive to raise standards and support young people to recover from the impact of the pandemic.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

No parent wants to send their child to a school where poor behaviour is rife. Every school should be a safe place that allows young people to thrive and teachers to excel.

Mobile phones are not just distracting, but when misused or overused, they can have a damaging effect on a pupil's mental health and wellbeing. I want to put an end to this, making the school day mobile-free.

In order for us to help pupils overcome the challenges from the pandemic and level up opportunity for all young people, we need to ensure they can benefit from calm classrooms which support them to thrive.

The call for evidence asks for information about schools' behaviour strategies and practices, including questions on practices or interventions that have been effective in addressing low level disruptive behaviour.

It will also gather responses from schools about how and when they might decide to transfer a pupil to another school in their best interest, known as managed moves. The survey asks how schools' behaviour policies and approaches have changed in response to the pandemic and what successful practices they intend to maintain.