

Housing Minister's speech at the Insider Midlands Residential Property Conference

Good morning and a very warm welcome to everyone attending today's Insider Midlands Residential Property Conference.

It is a real pleasure to be joining you, albeit remotely, which as we all know is the way of the world at the moment.

Can I begin by thanking you, the housing professionals, business owners and executives – those based in the Midlands, a part of the world well-known to me, and those of you further afield – for all of the resilience, perseverance and hard work that you have put in throughout this extraordinary period.

I think all of us today recognise the unique role which the housing sector plays in our economy, working in close partnership with the government. We've sought to do everything that we can to keep the sector running as smoothly as possible during this pandemic crisis.

From the Safe Working Charter launched with the Home Builders Federation back in May when the sector reopened, to the Business and Planning Act in July, we've worked to make sure the sector has remained open and has been able to work safely and effectively to keep our construction and housing economy on track.

Now with the Pfizer vaccine being rolled out, we have a post-Covid world in sight. We also have in sight the greatest economic comeback the country has ever known. The housing industry has been leading that charge and is pivotal in that process of reconstruction.

For the Midlands, that starts with meaningful investment in growth-spurring projects which support regeneration and new development.

That includes over £100 million of investment from our Land Fund for the West Midlands Combined Authority to deliver 8,000 homes across the region.

That is in addition to the significant funding package announced by the Prime Minister on a visit to Dudley earlier this year with Mayor Andy Street, which saw £84 million from the government's Brownfield Fund supporting the West Midlands Combined Authority to build thousands of new homes on former industrial land.

But this is not just about building new homes – important as we all know that is.

We are also investing in shovel-ready, job-creating infrastructure projects which will be key to helping businesses get back on their feet and for the Midlands Engine economy roar back into life.

Local Enterprise Partnerships across the Midlands are receiving in the region of £214 million from our Getting Building Fund to support innovative, growth-spurring projects.

Initiatives like the Warwickshire Green Recovery Project, which is rapidly expanding on-street charging points for electric vehicles, all the way through to a new Digital Advanced Manufacturing Centre in Chesterfield which is pushing the envelope in 3D prototyping and modular construction.

Of course, government cash, however useful and significant and however targeted, can only go so far in our national mission to build back better.

We need regulatory reform as well, and as many of you will know, the government has published its ambitious '[Planning for the Future](#)' White Paper with proposals for a reformed planning system to make it simpler, quicker and more accessible.

Local Plans still need to be prepared by local councils, but will be more map-based, more visual, and more digital – to that extent they will be much more easy to use.

Land will be put into one of three categories: areas for growth, for renewal, or for protection.

And to make sure we get the houses we need, we're proposing a new measure for calculating a housing requirement figure for each local planning authority, which will still be the building block for planning.

There will also be a new time limited statutory timetable for preparation, rather than the average 7 years it presently takes to adopt a plan.

If you look around the Midlands, something like 40% of local authorities have a plan which was adopted more than 5 years ago – our reforms will mandate everyone to have up-to-date local plans to benefit their communities.

Together, these reforms will inject much-needed agility into the planning system.

It is the greatest overhaul we have proposed in planning in over 70 years since the Town and Country Planning Act was introduced.

It is fair to say the proposals have conjured up some spirited debate. We have had 44,000 submissions to our [consultation](#), which is the beginning of the process of refining our proposals.

Although the consultation is now closed, I am very keen that we maintain connection with all the people and parties that have contributed to the consultation – that we continue to work with professionals across the sector to ensure we approach those reforms on a consensual basis and that we get them right.

Because we know that it is incumbent upon government to equip the housing industry with the right tools, the right regulations and the right resources

and funding to build the homes the country needs at pace and at scale.

That also means accelerating delivery of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC), including offsite and smart techniques, to encourage a more innovative, diverse, competitive market.

I think you will be hearing from a host of speakers later today about MMC – we certainly believe in government that MMC could be revolutionary for the industry in terms of improved productivity, build speed, and economies of scale.

That is why we are committed to tackling the barriers to increasing use of MMC – the most common one being a lack of standardisation in components and designs.

Those difficulties add unnecessary costs to the MMC process and hampers the sector from being able to compete with traditional methods of building.

We will shortly engage with industry on this very issue to drive efficiencies and create a more resilient MMC pipeline.

We know that Modern Methods of Construction are thriving in the Midlands too.

We are investing £30 million in a landmark deal between Sekisui House and Urban Splash to build thousands of homes using the latest modular construction techniques from Japan.

So I think MMC can be a tremendously powerful tool for us and can also help us build out those greener, more sustainable homes.

Industry research shows homes built using MMC techniques can have up to 80% fewer defects whilst reducing heating bills by up to 70 per cent.

That's not just important when it comes to fuel poverty, but is important when we consider that housing accounts for around 15% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions through their use of oil and gas for heating and hot water.

Making homes greener, cleaner and better insulated is integral to combatting climate change and is one of the reasons why we have introduced the Future Homes Standard, which by the middle of this decade will see new houses producing at least 75% fewer emissions.

Homes built to those new standards will be future-proofed, with low carbon heating and high levels of energy efficiency.

Crucially, they will be 'zero carbon ready' – so there will be no costly retrofits. MMC has a crucial role to play in the development of those homes and in the Future Homes Standard.

That, I think, is what lies ahead – a modern housing industry truly empowered to build cleaner, greener, more sustainable homes for the communities around the country and around the Midlands that need them – and build those homes faster than ever before.

And you are the integral players in making that vision a local reality.

The Midlands – I was born there, brought up there, have a constituency in the Midlands – was the cradle of the industrial revolution.

It's where the nail makers came together to "gi'it some 'ommer", as we used to say in Wolverhampton.

Now, with its unrivalled expertise, with its skills and its innovation, I think it is perfectly placed to lead Britain's green revolution – to be the new green workshop and tech chamber of the world.

It's a 'once in a generation' opportunity to grasp – to build back greener, to build back faster, and build back better from this pandemic.

And I know you in the Midlands will grasp it.

I hope you enjoy your conference. Thank you for listening.

[UK Government provides £31m for flooding and coal tip repairs](#)

Press release

Welsh Secretary Simon Hart and Chief Secretary to the Treasury Stephen Barclay agree funding for coal tip and flood damage remediation work across Wales.



The UK Government has confirmed that £31 million will be made available to repair damage caused by severe floods, including to coal tips, following storms across Wales earlier this year.

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart and Chief Secretary to the Treasury Stephen Barclay accepted the claim for funding from the Welsh Government, which will result in £22 million for local authority flood recovery costs and

£9 million to repair vulnerable coal tips across Wales.

Ever since parts of Wales were hit by devastating flooding in early 2020, the UK Government has worked with the Welsh Government and local authorities to assess how extra support and protection could be provided for the affected communities.

Although responsibility for flood defences and flood management is devolved, the UK Government agreed to provide funding from the UK Reserve for 2020-21 given the exceptional circumstances.

Following a meeting between the UK and Welsh Governments on Thursday 10 December £31 million funding was agreed and will be provided to the Welsh Government to carry out coal tip and flood damage remediation work.

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart said:

The devastation caused across Wales by the storms of early 2020 was heartbreaking, while the impact on coal tips in former mining areas was extremely worrying for the those communities.

Ever since, we have been working with Welsh Government, local authorities and others on how we can provide extra support for flood relief and protection for communities which were so badly affected. I'm pleased that this has now been agreed and this much-needed work can be carried out.

Chief Secretary to the Treasury Stephen Barclay said:

Storm Dennis caused devastating destruction across Wales and we've been working constructively with the Welsh Government since then to provide the much-needed support for the communities affected. The funding announced today showcases the strength of our Union and will mean vital repair and remediation work can be carried out.

We have also provided the Welsh Government with an additional £1.3 billion for next year at the recent Spending Review so they are well placed to continue this work.

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Plans for York flood storage area approved by planning chiefs

Plans to create a flood storage area on the River Foss north of Strensall have now been given the green light by two local authority planning committees.

Work is expected to start next spring on the new flood storage area to better protect 490 vulnerable homes between Strensall and The Groves area of York from flooding.

The scheme, which falls within the boundary of two councils, has been approved by Ryedale District Council's planners this week – and was given the go ahead by City of York Council last month (November).

Located in the rural area 2km north of Strensall, the scheme will also reduce flood risk to key transport routes and result in benefits to the environment including tree planting, wetland creation and improvements to river bank habitat.

The purpose of the storage area is to help reduce peak flows in the river, therefore reducing flooding downstream. During heavy rain, the structure fills with water, temporarily holding back flood water and reducing the flood risk to properties along the Foss Corridor, towards York city centre. Once the flood has passed the water in the storage area will subside.

For the vast majority of time the structure will not need to be used in this way which means that farming practices will be able to continue in the area.

Project manager Richard Lever, from the Environment Agency, said:

We are delighted that Ryedale District Council has approved our plans this week to create a Flood Storage Area on the River Foss which will reduce flood risk for 490 properties as part of the York Flood Alleviation Scheme.

In addition to flood risk benefits, the scheme will also have environmental benefits such as the growth of valuable wetland habitat, creating space for local wildlife and improving water quality downstream.

These areas are not like reservoirs and do not store water permanently. They are designed to be dry in normal weather conditions and only fill up for short periods during large flood events.

Unlike other physical flood defences, a flood storage area can be built at some distance from the communities they protect and therefore have less impact than building formal defences.

During a flood event, the level of the River Foss can rise rapidly exposing properties, roads and land to the risk of severe flooding. This is likely to increase with more extreme weather conditions predicted due to climate change. Currently there are no flood defences along the Foss Corridor and a flood storage area is the only viable option.

Out of all the projects included in the Yorks Flood Alleviation Scheme, this proposal will deliver the largest benefits in terms of numbers of properties protected.

Mr Lever said:

As well as reducing flood risk, the storage area will also have environmental benefits. This scheme will facilitate the growth of valuable wetland habitat, create space for local wildlife and help improve water quality downstream.

Materials for building the embankment for the storage area will be taken from within the site, creating pits which fill with water and act as permanent shallow ponds.

Discussions about the proposals have been held at parish council meetings, public events and with landowners, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, the Foss Internal Drainage Board and Natural England.

Following the severe flooding in York in Dec 2015, where over 600 properties were flooded, central Government committed £45m to fund projects to better protect properties in the city.

Environment Agency flood schemes protected almost 130,000 properties during the winter 2019/20 flooding, even though water levels were higher in some places than the floods of 2007 when 55,000 properties flooded.

Since 2015, the Government has invested £496m flood defences in Yorkshire – more than any other region – better protecting more than 66,000 properties

For more information about York's Flood Alleviation Scheme [visit:](#)

Make sure you are prepared for a flood event and find out if you are at risk [visit:](#)

RFEA and TechVets are bridging the gap for veterans entering cyber and technology industry

News story

The Forces Employment Charity (RFEA) is launching a new partnership with TechVets, an organisation dedicated to building a bridge for veterans into cyber security and the technology sector.



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Advancements in technology and the evolving cyber threat landscape means that the global cyber security market is projected to reach £210-billion by 2026, creating vast job opportunities for veterans and service leavers.

The RFEA and TechVets partnership aims to combat underemployment and unemployment within the veteran community by creating extensive free upskilling and job opportunities for 'tech-curious' service leavers and veterans. Through its unique offering of networking, mentoring, signposting and training services, via the new TechVets Academy platform, the blended and flexible learning pathways enable the user to choose the pathway that is best for them.

Read more about [TechVets and the partnership with RFEA](#)

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Supporting countries on the frontline of climate change

Thank you very much and good afternoon everyone. And thank you particularly to His Excellency the Honourable Kausea Natano; Dame Meg Taylor; and the Pacific Island Forum Leaders, for inviting me to speak.

The message coming from regions like the Pacific on climate change has a moral urgency and the world cannot ignore it.

I hear what you say. That climate change is the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of your people. And I am committed to working with you, throughout my COP Presidency. To make sure that your voices are heard. To address the issues that matter most to you. And to find practical solutions.

I commend the leadership your region has shown on climate change. Which is reflected in the Kainaki II Declaration, the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific.

And despite contributing only a fraction of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, many of you are coming forward with updates to your NDCs.

You are setting a powerful example and encouraging countries around the world to raise their ambition. On mitigation, on adaptation and on finance.

Last week, the United Kingdom announced its NDC. Committing to cut our emissions by at least 68% by 2030, which keeps us on the pathway to our 2050 Net Zero commitment.

Soon we will be submitting our first Adaptation Communication.

And more leaders will announce commitments at the Climate Ambition Summit, which the UK is hosting tomorrow, with the UN and France and in partnership with Italy and Chile.

And the Summit builds on events that have taken place across the world.

From the CARICOM Moment of Ambition Roundtable that the UK is co-hosting with Caribbean partners today.

To this "Kainaki II to COP26" Roundtable.

I would like to thank all those of you who are making announcements at the Summit tomorrow.

And also those who have said they will announce new commitments in the coming months.

Such targets are absolutely vital. But alongside them, we must drive

practical solutions for reducing emissions. By working together, we can make progress faster.

So our COP26 campaigns are focusing attention on five critical areas: transport; energy; nature-based solutions; adaptation and resilience; and finance.

And we are highlighting adaptation as a priority and encouraging action. We've recently appointed a new international champion for adaptation and resilience, Anne-Marie Trevelyan.

Anne-Marie will help to lead our drive forward towards global ambition and action.

And it's by supporting countries on the frontline of climate change that we will be able to help the adaptation to its impacts and build resilience.

We're also working to increase public and private finance, urging donor countries to meet the \$100 billion commitment. And to go beyond it.

Leading by example, the UK is doubling its international climate finance commitment to £11.6 billion over the next five years.

We're also working to make public finance more accessible.

And to get more money for adaptation. We're working with multilateral development banks, investors, and others.

And I know that this approach is shared by Australia and New Zealand., and I'm committed to our working closely together.

I have heard this forum's call on averting, minimising and addressing loss and damage.

And over the next year I want to increase our understanding of all the issues that matter to you. And how they can be addressed.

And this includes listening to your views on how best the Kainaki II recommendations can be reflected in the outcomes of COP26.

So we will be increasing our engagement with the Pacific.

In the new year, we'll be holding events to discuss the issues that matter to vulnerable countries.

And we will also ensure that your priorities are heard at the G7 and the G20. And, of course, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting next year.

Because I am determined to amplify the voices of climate vulnerable countries and put them at the heart of the COP26 process.

So that together, we unleash the full potential of the Paris Agreement in Glasgow. And by doing so build a brighter and more sustainable future for us all.

Thank you.