

Help to Buy scheme extended

Thousands of families can still benefit from the current Help to Buy scheme despite delays in building their new homes due to coronavirus, the government announced today (31 July 2020).

The deadline for the homes to have been finished in order to comply with the equity loan scheme has been extended to ensure customers do not miss out if there has been a delay in construction due to the pandemic.

Under the current scheme, new homes would needed to have been finished being built by the end of December – the extension will mean the deadline will now move to 28 February 2021, helping thousands of customers to get the keys to their new home. The deadline for the legal completion of the sale will remain the same – 31 March 2021.

The government is also announcing an extra measure to protect existing customers who have experienced severe delays as a result of coronavirus.

Homes England, the government's housing accelerator, will work with those who had a reservation in place before 30 June to assess their situation and look to provide an extension where necessary. In which case, they will have until 31 May 2021 to legally complete.

Separately, the government's new Help to Buy scheme, which will replace the current scheme, will come into place from 1 April 2021 and run until March 2023 as planned and there are no plans for further extensions. The new scheme introduces property price caps and is restricted to first-time buyers only, supporting people onto the housing ladder.

Building the homes the country needs is a priority for the government to ensure everyone can access a decent, secure place to call home, and to support our recovery from the impact of coronavirus.

That's why we're supporting smaller developers with an extra £450 million through the Home Building Fund, providing £400 million to build new homes on brownfield land and have introduced new laws to speed up delivery. The government continues to listen to Help to Buy customers and the property industry to understand the challenges and opportunities they face.

Housing Minister Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP said:

This government is committed to helping a new generation to realise their dream of home ownership, and since 2010 we've helped more than 640,000 families into home ownership through our support including Help to Buy and Right to Buy.

Today's announcement will help provide certainty and assurance for Help to Buy customers whose new homes have been delayed due to coronavirus and affirms the government's commitment to helping more

people to own their own home.

The Help to Buy equity loan scheme has helped more than a quarter of a million people to buy a home. Since the start of the scheme on 1 April 2013, 272,852 property sales have been completed.

Help to Buy equity loans provide a low-interest loan towards your deposit. Customers need a 5% deposit, and the government lends up to 20% of the value of the home (up to 40% of the value if you are purchasing in London).

This announcement applies to the scheme in England, which is administered by the UK Government, and not to similar schemes in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales.

[MP visits site of multi-million pound flood scheme](#)

Once complete, the scheme will improve protection to 509 properties and provide £46 million of economic benefits over the next 50 years.

During the visit, Mr Sunak was shown around areas of the town that will benefit from the scheme by representatives from the Environment Agency.

Earlier this month, the government unveiled its long-term plan to tackle the risks of flooding and coastal erosion, ensuring 336,000 properties in England are better protected from flooding by 2027 with a record £5.2 billion investment.

The Environment Agency also published its Flood and Coast Erosion Risk Management Strategy, a blueprint setting out how it will work with communities to deliver the government's plan.

Jamie Fletcher, Environment Agency, Area Operations Manager for the North East, said:

We were pleased to be given the opportunity to show Mr Sunak around the areas of Stokesley that will widely benefit from the new Flood Alleviation Scheme, and to demonstrate the level of investment, development and commitment the Environment Agency is delivering to the town.

The defence will be a vital asset for the local people, businesses and the environment around Stokesley – helping to protect them from the devastating effects of flooding.

MP Rishi Sunak with the Environment Agency's (L-R) Operations Manager Jamie Fletcher, Environment Manager Andrew Turner, and Project Manager Paul Eckersley.

Scheme will 'improve effectiveness'

Mr Sunak, said:

Stokesley's 1970s-built flood defences have served the town well over the years but this scheme will improve their effectiveness to maintain the level of protection they give residents. These improvements should provide protection for another 50 years.

The project will also have the additional benefit of helping to manage the flow of the River Leven through Stokesley creating a better habitat for wildlife.

A new river restoration project is also being planned in partnership with the Tees Rivers Trust which will significantly improve the quality of the river environment.

All contractors working on the site will be wearing appropriate PPE and adhering to any social distancing requirements.

The work will begin in autumn 2020 and aims to be completed by the end of spring 2021.

To find out if you are living in a flood risk area and for information on how to sign up for flood alerts please visit the [Environment Agency website](#)

Questions about the scheme should be sent to stokesleyfloodscheme@environment-agency.gov.uk

Illegal nets recovered from North East river

Press release

The Environment Agency has recovered two illegal fishing nets from the River Wear in Sunderland.



The two nets recovered from the River Wear

On the evening of Thursday 30 July Fisheries Enforcement Officers on patrol on the banks of the River Wear spotted one illegal net set in the river and a second hidden close by.

Both of the illegal gill nets measured 10 metres long by 2 metres wide.

It's suspected the nets were being used to take salmon and sea trout as well as any other sea fish. The Environment Agency is investigating.

Fisheries Enforcement Officers are actively patrolling the North East rivers and coastline and responding to reports of illegal fishing.

Significant damaging impact

North East Fisheries Enforcement Officer David Shears, from the Environment Agency, said:

The tidal reaches of the River Wear are frequented by large numbers of salmon and particularly sea trout making their way up river to spawn.

A net of this size is capable of taking significant numbers of these fish and can have a significant damaging impact on future fish stocks.

As well as putting fish stocks in jeopardy, such nets are indiscriminate in nature in that any fish, mammal or bird can be trapped and killed.

This recovery follows an illegal net which was recovered from the River Wear at Washington on Monday afternoon (27 July), measuring 12 metres by 3 metres.

David added:

Fisheries is very carefully managed to protect the future of the industry and ensure fish can get to their breeding grounds to

spawn. I'd urge people to report information about illegal fishing activity to us so we can take action.

Those who operate unlicensed nets risk prosecution, with unlimited fines and possible prison sentences available to the courts, and Environment Agency officers can seize equipment and vehicles.

Information about illegal fishing can be reported to the Environment Agency's 24-hour incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

Environment Agency officers out on patrol are wearing the appropriate protective equipment and adhering to social distancing measures.

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Lord Nash appointed as Government's Lead Non-Executive Director

News story

Lord Nash has been appointed by the Prime Minister as the Government's Lead Non-Executive Director (NED).



He will work closely with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Cabinet Secretary, the Civil Service Chief Operating Officer, and other senior civil servants across Government. Lord Nash takes over from Sir Ian Cheshire, who had held the post since 2015.

NEDs are drawn from outside Government including from business, academia, think tanks and the voluntary sector, to sit on departmental boards. Their role is to support ministers and officials to strengthen the governance of departments, by bringing a commercial or independent perspective. They help provide constructive scrutiny and internal challenge to the work of

Government.

The lead Non-Executive will bring non executives from different departments together to ensure shared issues and concerns are being pursued across Government. Lord Nash will play a key role in building leadership and management skills in departments, recruiting new non executive directors and supporting the Cabinet Office and departments to transform the way public services are delivered.

Lord Nash has had a varied career, with extensive experience in both the public and private sector. He served for over four years as the Academies and Free Schools Minister and spearheaded the Academy Ambassador programme, which has now recruited over 1,500 volunteers with business backgrounds to improve the governance and financial controls of academy schools. He worked in venture capital for 30 years before stepping into education, having created his own firm, Sovereign Capital, in 1988.

Chief Operating Officer for the Civil Service and Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office Alex Chisholm said:

Our Non-Executive Directors provide valuable external insight to help the Government achieve its objectives and deliver for UK citizens.

Lord Nash brings a wealth of experience from business and Government to the role, and I look forward to working with him on the Government's top priorities.

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Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 31 July 2020

Good afternoon,

Two weeks ago, I updated you from this podium on the progress we had made as a country against coronavirus. And in many ways that progress continues.

The number of patients admitted to hospitals is still falling, and now stands at just over 100 each day. In April there were more than 3,000 coronavirus patients in mechanical ventilation beds, but now the latest figure is 87.

The number of deaths continues to fall. That is obviously encouraging

But I have also consistently warned that this virus could come back and that we would not hesitate to take swift and decisive action as required.

I am afraid that in parts of Asia and Latin America the virus is now gathering pace. And our European friends are also struggling to keep the virus under control.

As we see these rises around the world, we cannot fool ourselves that we are exempt. We must be willing to react to the first signs of trouble.

Today, the weekly survey by the Office for National Statistics reports that the prevalence of the virus in the community in England is likely to be rising for the first time since May.

Around 1 in 1,500 now have the virus, compared to 1 in 1,800 on 15 July and 1 in 2,000 on 2 July. The ONS also estimate there are now 4,900 new infections every day, up from around 3,000 per day on 14 July and 2,000 per day at the end of June

We can't afford to ignore this evidence.

It's vital to stress that we are in a far better position to keep the virus under control now than we were at the start of the pandemic – because we know so much more about the virus and have so many more tools at our disposal to deal with it.

Our testing capacity has increased 100-fold.

We have a contact tracing system up and running which has led to over 184,000 people isolating who may otherwise have spread the virus and is capable of tracing thousands of contacts every day.

We have secured supplies of billions of items of PPE to withstand new demands on hospitals and care homes.

And of course we have new treatments, like dexamethasone and remdesivir, to shorten recovery times and reduce mortality rates.

But as I say, we cannot be complacent. I cannot – I won't stand by and allow the virus to cause more pain and heartache in this country.

Last night the Health Secretary announced new restrictions on household contact in the North West – specifically Greater Manchester, and parts of East Lancashire and West Yorkshire.

These are targeted measures on social contact between households, which the data tells us is driving the current increase in cases. Businesses and workplaces should continue as before in those areas. I know how it is hard to have restrictions like this imposed on seeing your family and your friends. But we have to act rapidly in order to protect those we love.

And we know this sort of intervention works – measures taken in Leicester and Luton have suppressed the virus, allowing us to relax measures.

Even as we act locally, it is also my responsibility to look again at the measures we have in place nationally in light of the data we are seeing about incidence.

At every point I have said our plan to reopen society and the economy is conditional – that it relies on continued progress against the virus, and that we would not hesitate to put on the brakes if required.

With those numbers creeping up, our assessment is that we should now squeeze that brake pedal in order to keep the virus under control.

On Saturday 1 August, you'll remember, we had hoped to reopen in England a number of higher risk settings that had remained closed. Today, I am afraid we are postponing these changes for at least a fortnight.

That means that, until 15 August at the earliest:

Casinos, bowling alleys, skating rinks and remaining close contact services must remain closed. Indoor performances will not resume.

Pilots of larger crowds in sports venues and conference centres will not take place.

Wedding receptions of up to 30 people will not be permitted, but ceremonies can continue to take place, in line with COVID-Secure guidelines.

I know that the steps we are taking will be a heavy blow to many people – to everyone whose wedding plans have been disrupted, or who now cannot celebrate Eid in the way they would wish, I am really, really sorry about that. But we simply cannot take the risk.

We will of course study the data carefully and move forward with our intention to open up as soon as we possibly can.

Two weeks ago, I also said that from tomorrow the government would give employers more discretion over how employees can work safely – whether by continuing to work from home or attending a Covid Secure workplace. We know that employers have gone to huge lengths to make workplaces safe, so that guidance remains unchanged. We also said we would pause shielding nationally from 1 August – based on clinical advice, that national pause will proceed as planned, and our medical experts will be explaining more about that decision later and about shielding later today.

Most people in this country are following the rules and doing their bit to control the virus. But we must keep our discipline, we must be focused and we cannot be complacent.

I have asked the Home Secretary to work with the police and others to ensure the rules which are already in place are properly enforced.

That means local authorities acting to close down premises and cancel events which are not following Covid Secure guidance.

And it means a greater police presence to ensure face coverings are being worn where this is required by law. We will also extend the requirement to wear a face covering to other indoor settings where you are likely to come into contact with people you do not normally meet, such as museums, galleries, cinemas and places of worship. We now recommend face coverings are worn in these settings, and this will become enforceable in law from 8 August.

At this stage, we are not changing the rules on social contact nationally. I don't want to tell people to spend less time with their friends. But unless people follow the rules and behave safely, we may need to go further. Two weeks ago, I said we would hope for the best but plan for the worst.

And of course we continue to hope for the best. The way to get there and to achieve that optimum outcome is if we all follow the rules, wash our hands, cover our faces, keep our distance – and get a test if we have symptoms, so that NHS Test and Trace can keep the virus under control.

This is how we will avoid a return to full national lockdown.

We've made huge progress together.

I know we are going to succeed and I know we are going to beat this – if each and every one of us plays our part.